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The Sydney Morning Herald
INDEPENDENT. ALWAYS.

THE AGE
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SYDNEY MORNING HERALD, 01AUG2017, <http://www.smh.com.au/national/public-service/unending-conflict-wipes-future-away-for-israelis-palestinians-20170720-gxeztt.html>

Unending conflict wipes future away for Israelis, Palestinians

Mark Thomas, Published: August 1 2017 - 12:01AM

The Israeli town of Beit She'an wastes no time on frills, fuss or flair. Beit She'an is situated below sea level, roughly halfway between the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee, where the Jezreel and Jordan Valleys meet.

Conquered by King David, it is now a way-station on a desert road uncomfortably close to hostile neighbours. The road in from the south runs between minefields, while that to the north is overlooked by the Golan Heights. Beit She'an's sole piece of not-strictly-functional urban architecture is a telephone pole. That pole doubles as a war memorial, commemorating Israeli soldiers who lived in the town and died after they left there to fight in the army. Each soldier's death is marked by a chair, just prosaic, painted wooden kitchen chairs hung by hooks up and down the pole.

For students of administration and governance, Beit She'an's telephone pole teaches a melancholy lesson. The pole already has a dozen or so chairs hanging from its hooks, but there is room for a few more. The locals plainly expect more fighting, more casualties, more bereavements.

When I lived in Israel, the naval memorial at the other end of the country, in Ashdod, revealed the same grim foresight. Blank granite tablets which could be inscribed with the names of future dead were stacked around

behind those commemorating sailors already dead. By contrast, our wars, however horrific, have been fixed, finite and finished.

Those chairs and slabs both denote a failure of belief in the future. Among Israelis and Palestinians, unending conflict has eroded and leached away the notion of a future better than the status quo. Trump and Brexit voters might sense that their futures have been constricted and compromised. In Israel and the West Bank, though, the future has been wiped away.

There, the past is insufferable, since that comprises two parallel, incompatible narratives about who has most claim to the land. The present is intolerable, because of the oppressive weight of security barriers, land seizures, terrorist attacks, threats from within and without, neuroses and paranoia. The future threatens nothing other than more of the same.

This syndrome is not new. When I lived in Israel three decades ago, I asked a senior servant of the state what his idea of the future involved. He told me that, as an observant Jew, he prayed each morning for the coming of the Messiah. As a loving parent, he added every day a prayer that his children might live in a land at peace, with itself and others. He added that he knew himself well enough to recognise that, if either peace or the Messiah did turn up, he would suspect them, question their integrity and help to destroy them. Other, less theatrical but equally bleak, Israeli friends used to dread the day their children would have to go to the army, sucked into the military machine for three years, obliged to go to war when necessary (as my friends had four times), and called on when needed for thirty more years. For their part, my Palestinian friends foresaw little more than an occupation without end, more dispossession of their family lands, further humiliation and uncontrollable radicalism among their children. They worried that Palestinians needed to be prepared to incur self-harm to attract international publicity.

I went back to Israel with the woman I love, three decades after having lived there. Time lapse photography, the disparity between my memories and our wanderings, was brutally sharp. In the 1980s settlements were a few shipping containers or trailers, with a watch tower thrown in, surrounded by barbed wire, perched on hilltops. Now the valleys between those hills have been filled with apartment blocks. The old road up to Jerusalem used to be littered with the destroyed hulks of trucks and armoured cars from the War of Independence. Now a modern highway is disfigured by the intrusion of a hideous security wall.

What has remained the same is the unending cottage industry of experts stating the obvious about the possible terms of an end to the Middle East dispute. As Henry Kissinger observed, everyone knows what a settlement would look like, but nobody has the courage to take the risks and accept the costs required to make a deal.

Students of governance might ponder the precarious balance between framework agreements and confidence-building measures, leadership and pandering, past and future. They might wonder how to find a leader combining bold vision with command of intricate detail. They could rail against the status quo while noting that it would be easy to imagine something worse. With Israel and the West Bank, the governance students would do well to recall the Egyptian joke about a scorpion and a frog crossing the Nile, and the difficulty in finding points of leverage – or, as Yasser Arafat reputedly put it, "the Achilles heel of the Trojan horse".

On our travels, we saw not a two-state solution at work, between Israelis and Palestinians, but an at-least-two-societies solution within Israeli society. The most graphic cleavage was on a bus to the artists' colony-cum-kabbalistic centre of Tzfat in the Galilee, a town which sold Hot Orchid milk and boasted a Messianic Art Gallery. Half our fellow passengers were heavily armed, casually-dressed soldiers returning to their units after the Sabbath. The other half were primly dressed religious students, exempt from military service. They had nothing to say to each other. Each group seemed convinced they were essential to the future of their state, but the societies in which they lived would hardly intersect, once out the door of the bus.

Down on the coast, at Tel Aviv, hedonistic self-absorption reigned. Street stalls sold a bewildering variety of luscious fruit juices. Seafood restaurants flourished, the best poised on a cliff above the spot where Jonah was cast ashore by the whale and Andromache chained to the rocks. New gym equipment was being

installed on the beach, to hone the skills and tone the bodies of those already toughened up by army service. National monuments were hard to find and fastidiously modest. The house of Israel's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, was so little that we wondered where his wife and kids fitted in, the majority of habitable rooms having been colonised by bookshelves. Residents of Tel Aviv may rarely see a Palestinian in their city; for a younger generation, empathy and sympathy with the Palestinians may have to be learned, not assumed. Learning by osmosis will not do.

Up the hill, in the holy city of Jerusalem, society ran on a quite different track. The city was as wondrous as ever. Morning sun from the Mount of Olives lit and warmed the honey-coloured sandstone of the Old City. The remnants of three millenia and more of habitation, worship, war and reverence were still piled on top of each other. A bird watching station propped next to the parliament building. The Israel Museum was a tribute to artfulness in its displays.

Yet something felt wrong. Visiting the Dome of the Rock, surely the most remarkable religious site in the world, was virtually impossible, with entry for non-believers confined to one gate for one hour each day. Israeli T-shirts on sale awkwardly blended whimsy with arrogance. They declared, "Don't Worry America: Israel is Behind You", "Gods and Moses" or "Keep Calm: Mossad is Coming". Two observant Jews scattered Palestinians by riding pell-mell on a bike down the steeply tiered alleys leading to the Western Wall. Palestinian shopkeepers were ridiculously pleased when I used pidgin Arabic to buy pottery. Israelis and Palestinians seemed studiously to be ignoring, disdain, denying each other. The security wall was close, and all sorts of historical, emotional, ethnic and religious walls were everywhere. The one relaxed person we met was a pretty bartender who, I was sure, leaned over to ask me, "would you like a shit?" I enjoyed the free shot.

How can you tell the story of the much too promised land? Before I left Israel three decades ago, I asked the then-prime minister, Menachem Begin, what he planned to write in retirement. Begin had led a ruthless extremist group, suffered political ostracism and made peace with Egypt. Oddly, he also possessed conspicuous literary talent. Begin outlined a seven-volume history of the Jewish people, from Hitler's election onwards. Asked about a title, he mused drolly: "From crucifixion to resurrection". He noted Christians believed such a resurrection had been done before, and thought the Jewish people had done it again. Begin was teasing, but at least he was thinking of the future.

Mark Thomas is a Canberra-based writer.

This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/national/public-service/unending-conflict-wipes-future-away-for-israelis-palestinians-20170720-gxeztt.html>

SYDNEY MORNING HERALD, 31JUL2017, <http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/bob-carr-says-former-colleague-mark-dreyfus-tried-to-silence-him-over-israel-settlements-20170730-gxlr95.html>

Bob Carr says former colleague Mark Dreyfus tried to silence him over Israel settlements

Sean Nicholls, Published: July 31 2017 - 12:15AM

Former foreign minister Bob Carr has accused his erstwhile cabinet colleague Mark Dreyfus of an extraordinary attempt to "silence" him over his criticism of Israeli settlements on the West Bank.

Mr Carr says early in the 2016 federal election campaign, Mr Dreyfus, a former attorney-general and member for the Victorian seat of Isaacs, along with the member for Melbourne Ports, Michael Danby, sought a meeting with wealthy businessman Huang Xiangmo.

Mr Carr had left politics and was director of the Australia-China Relationships Institute, at the time funded by Mr Huang.

According to Mr Carr, the purpose of the visit "was to protest that I had the audacity to occasionally criticise Israel for spreading settlements on the West Bank", he told journalist and former Middle East correspondent John Lyons for his memoir *Balcony Over Jerusalem*.

"As it happened, I simply restated the policy of the Labor government that Dreyfus and I had been a part of and I used language little different from that used by the Obama administration."

"The implication of the Dreyfus-Danby meeting with Huang was that he should use his position as financial supporter of the think tank that employed me to press me to cease expressing my opinion about Israel."

Mr Carr says the meeting was "without any doubt, an attempt to pull levers to silence me from making points I'd made, on behalf of the last Labor government of which Dreyfus and I were part".

In response, Mr Dreyfus told Lyons: "Bob Carr is not speaking on behalf of the former Labor government, and should not pretend to do so. The meeting to which Mr Carr refers was private."

Mr Carr told Fairfax Media: "I just saw it as another manifestation of the bullying that the Israel lobby resorts to."

Mr Carr's disclosure comes as the NSW Labor conference at Sydney Town Hall on Sunday passed a motion moved by him that "urges the next Labor government to recognise Palestine".

The proposal sparked opposition from some pro-Israeli members of the ALP right faction, prompting a meeting last week between Mr Carr, general secretary Kaila Murnain and others, including former NSW union chief Michael Easson.

Following discussions, the motion was extended to support "the recognition and right of Israel and Palestine to exist within secure and recognised borders".

Fairfax Media understands that Mr Easson at one stage proposed that the motion not be spoken to at the conference, but simply tabled without debate.

The Australia Israel Labor Dialogue (AILD) described the amended motion as "a major setback" for Mr Carr.

"Two states for two people living side by side in peace and security with negotiated borders is the only way forward to break this intractable conflict," said the AILD executive director, Greg Holland.

"Unilateral declarations one way or the other do nothing to advance peace."

But Mr Carr told Fairfax Media: "This is an historic shift."

"It would have been hard to imagine this happening three years ago, but it's driven by the growth of settlements and the resistance of most of [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu's cabinet to the very concept of a Palestinian state," he said.

NSW upper house Labor MP Shaoquett Moselmane, who has been instrumental in pushing for the change, said it was "a historic win for the Palestinian people; a win for the ALP standing up for justice for a long oppressed people."

NSW Jewish Board of Deputies chief executive Vic Alhadeff said: "This is a better outcome than what was originally proposed in the conference booklet, and we applaud the efforts by many within the Labor Party who worked hard to achieve a more balanced resolution."

This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/bob-carr-says-former-colleague-mark-dreyfus-tried-to-silence-him-over-israel-settlements-20170730-gxlr95.html>

THE AUSTRALIAN, 31JUL2017, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/foreign-affairs/mark-dreyfus-lashes-out-at-bob-carr-over-israel/news-story/b49e470ca47359e5e4b686720d4dde38>

Mark Dreyfus lashes out at Bob Carr over Israel

The Australian, 1:44PM July 31, 2017,

PRIMROSE RIORDAN, Political reporter, Canberra

Shadow Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus has lashed out Bob Carr and other supporters of a motion for Labor to immediately recognise Palestine, saying foreign policy is set federally.

The former foreign minister has said a motion which passed a NSW Labor conference would mean the state supports no conditions to the recognition of Palestine.

Others have said that the further inclusion of moderating paragraph means the motion did not go as far as previously thought.

The motion included a paragraph saying that the NSW ALP “supports the recognition and right of Israel and Palestine to exist within secure and recognised borders”.

Proponents of the motion hope it will push the federal party to change its position which is currently just to have “discussions” on Palestinian recognition with like-minded nations, with no set timetable.

[The Australian reported that Mr Dreyfus and another Labor MP Michael Danby met with Mr Carr’s](#) associate Huang Xiangmo, which Mr Carr said was aimed at pressuring him over his position on Israel.

Mr Dreyfus slammed any attempt to change Labor’s position on Monday.

“As Penny Wong, our foreign affairs spokesman, Tanya Plibersek as our deputy leader and Bill Shorten as our leader has made clear foreign policy for a Labor government is a federal matter and it will be set federally by decisions made by the federal shadow cabinet by the federal caucus.”

He then said Mr Carr’s motion contravened international law.

“The suggestion that’s been made by some people that it might be time for unilateral recognition is something that flies in the face of international law, flies in the face of any circumstances that could actually assist the parties to this long running conflict in the Middle East,” Mr Dreyfus said.

Mr Shorten suggested there would not be a major change to Labor’s position.

“Labor, and I hold this view quite strongly have had a long held view that this should be a two state solution in the Middle East in terms of Israel and Palestine I for one certainly support the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people to their own state but I also support the legitimate aspirations of Israel to live within secure borders,” he said.

“This is our policy and our conference certainly debated this but it debated a range of other issues.”

THE AUSTRALIAN, 31JUL2017

ALP calling time on Michael Danby as election threat looms

ALP stalwart Michael Danby is facing pressure to bow out of contention for the federal seat of Melbourne Ports next election, ending a near-20-year stranglehold.

The veteran MP and ardent Israel supporter is the subject of an internal push at state and federal levels not to recontest the marginal seat, which has a large Jewish community, as the Liberals and the Greens sharpen their view on a fierce three-way contest.

Changing demographics and an influx of young professionals in the inner-city area that neighbours the Greens-held seat of Melbourne have put Labor's 3.6 per cent margin under unprecedented threat, prompting some insiders to demand a fresh candidate.

Ari Suss, a Linfox executive and former staffer to ex-Victorian premier Steve Bracks, has been widely named as a potential successor, but Mr Danby said he still backed his chances to win. "I've made no decision. I've won Melbourne Ports seven times. Understandably the Liberals and Greens fear my ongoing presence. That's good," he told The Australian.

The ALP scraped over the line at the last, scoring 51.4 per cent of the two-party-preferred vote, with Mr Danby secured 27 per cent and Greens candidate Steph Hodgins-May secured 23.8 per cent.

Liberal Owen Guest nabbed 42 per cent of the primary vote, and 48.6 per cent on a two-party-preferred basis.

A senior state Labor member said the margin was too close for comfort. "He's just too divisive," the member said of Mr Danby. "We came so close to losing the seat last time. I don't think there are too many people in the party prepared to run that risk again."

Mr Suss, a prominent figure at Labor Party functions, said he was yet to decide whether to seek preselection. But inside the party, there is disquiet at the chances of winning a campaign with Mr Danby in place, after the Greens preselected Ms Hodgins-May for the second time.

Ms Hodgins-May, a former government lawyer, sparked controversy and a deep rift with Mr Danby during the last election after pulling out of a debate organised by Zionism Victoria. At the time, she told Australian Jewish News she did not "believe it is appropriate and right to speak at an event co-organised by a politically active organisation".

The incident drove a stake through the Greens-Labor preference deal for the seat and saw Mr Danby hand out how-to-vote cards putting the Greens last.

Liberals also were disappointed by Ms Hodgins-May's preselection, even if they believe it played to their advantage.

"The people of Melbourne Ports deserve a representative who strongly supports the Jewish community and Israel's right to exist, not a candidate who refuses to share a stage with supporters of Israel," senator James Paterson told The Australian. "It would be a travesty for Melbourne's largest Jewish community to be represented by an anti-Israel MP."

Liberal preselection is scheduled for early next year, with Mr Guest having widespread support to run again. Private practice lawyer and former senior state government lawyer Kate Ashmor is also believed to be in contention.

Last week Ms Hodgins-May told The Australian her views last year had been "mischaracterised". She says she supports the broader Greens platform, which endorses a negotiated two-state solution and, contrary to the NSW Greens, does not support the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaign.

THE AUSTRALIAN BUSINESS REVIEW, 31JUL2017,

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/media/objectivity-doesnt-come-easy-when-reporting-on-israel/news-story/3d7faf04fa1ff54a5d8c0daddab50c8f?nk=47cfc3bb1011b922b96cb01a40999030-1501540616>

Objectivity doesn't come easy when reporting on Israel

The Australian, 12:00AM July 31, 2017, John Lyons

Leading international journalists have talked about the extraordinary pressures they face when reporting from Israel.

The former *New York Times* bureau chief in Jerusalem Jodi Rudoren has admitted to “defensive writing” after several “Twitter campaigns” against her.

Rudoren says this was “to protect myself and keep me focused on the essence of what I’m trying to do instead of these distractions but you could totally get out of hand with this”. She says there is not a healthy debate in the US about Israel because of the power of pro-Israel lobby group AIPAC.

The interviews are contained in *Balcony Over Jerusalem*, in which journalists tell how they come under attack from pro-Israel groups if they report what they see in Israel and the West Bank.

Reuters has a special rule book on what wording must be used while German’s largest newspaper group, owned by Axel Springer, makes journalists sign that they agree to “support the vital rights of the people of Israel”.

As *The Australian’s* Middle East correspondent for six years, I also encountered repeated pressure from the privately funded, Melbourne-based lobby group the Australia/Israel and Jewish Affairs Council. After one attack, the then editor of *The Australian*, Clive Mathieson, wrote to the head of AIJAC, Colin Rubenstein, to say that repeated attacks on AIJAC’s website for one story — for something the story did not say — “border on the malicious”.

The book also reveals what occurred three weeks after Foreign Minister Julie Bishop said East Jerusalem was not “occupied”. “Occupied East Jerusalem” is accepted under international law and Israel’s Supreme Court stated in 2004 that Israel holds the West Bank in “belligerent occupation”.

But SBS issued new guidelines that went even further than what the far-right in Israel demands: they pressure journalists to describe the Palestinian Territories as “disputed” rather than “occupied”. “We should avoid describing settlements as on Palestinian land or on disputed land, or occupied territories,” SBS told staff on June 19, 2014.

Former editor-in-chief of *The Australian* Chris Mitchell says he refused to take calls from Rubenstein — who he described as a “bully” — after Rubenstein called one of Mitchell’s reporters, Elisabeth Wynhausen, “a self-loathing Jew”.

Rubenstein has confirmed that he did complain about Wynhausen but cannot recall calling her a self-loathing Jew.

The New York Times’ Rudoren says that because the occupation of the Palestinians has gone on for so long — 50 years — it has started to look “a lot like apartheid”.

While Rudoren was talking about the situation for Palestinians in the West Bank, she also addressed the plight of Palestinians in Israel — the so-called Arab Israelis.

She says: “I actually think the issue of apartheid is more relevant to how Arab Israelis are treated within the framework of the country (Israel).”

Veteran *New York Times* journalist Clyde Haberman — himself Jewish, like Rudoren — said every *NYT* Jerusalem correspondent has been subjected to “non-stop assault” and therefore few want the posting.

“We’ve had decades of correspondents that, no matter how talented they are or how many Pulitzer Prizes they have to their name, always end up being accused of being either anti-Semites or self-hating Jews; at some point, this seeps into the DNA of the newspaper. This is what you can expect if you go there — to have your integrity hurled back in your face every single day,” Haberman says.

In the book, leading Israeli journalist Akiva Eldar has a blunt message for AIJAC. “I’m willing to be on (the) record and tell the AIJAC people and the Australian government that they are playing with my future, that they don’t give a shit about my children, it’s about their arses,” Eldar says.

“Australia should understand that in the US, Israel is a domestic political issue. Australia has to look at its relationship with Israel independently, because the US is not innocently looking at it.

“I tell my Australian friends and family that you live in Australia and even if you tell your government not to interfere, to take a step back and say nothing, this plays into the hands of the Likud (the political party of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu), because this is exactly what Netanyahu wants you to do.

“He wants business as usual. There is a clear distinction between supporting Israel and supporting the Israeli government and Israeli policy.

“If Australia voted in favour of a Palestinian state along 1967 lines, it would be very difficult for the Israeli government to smear them and say they are anti-Semites, because you have a very clean record.”

John Lyons is The Australian’s Associate Editor (Digital Content) and the author of Balcony Over Jerusalem



THE GUARDIAN AUSTRALIA, 31JUL2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/jul/31/children-swim-sewage-floods-gaza-beach>

'The worst it's been': children continue to swim as raw sewage floods Gaza beach

For most of the 2 million people in this overcrowded strip of land – largely cut off from the outside world – the beach and sea are the only affordable form of recreation. The only option now is to swim and even fish in filthy water

Peter Beaumont, Monday 31 July 2017 16.15 AEST

It is high summer on [Gaza](#) City’s beach. A horse and cart patrols the shore selling brightly coloured swimming rings. A small boat is giving joy rides out to sea. Families sit on chairs while a few children play in the water.

Normally, in the midst of the school holidays, the beach would be crowded. Particularly this year, as an electricity crisis makes many homes unbearable during the heat. But these days many parents are keeping their children away.

The first hint is the smell: the sulphurous odour of raw sewage.

Where children are swimming the water is a murky brown, with a fine suspension of faecal matter visible to the naked eye. Small fish at the water’s edge, scooped out by the giggling children, are dead.

While pollution of Gaza’s 25 miles of beaches is not new, what is different is the degree. These days, according to the last environmental survey, 73% of Gaza’s coastline is dangerously polluted with sewage amid an energy crisis that is now also affecting Israel across the border wall, sharply up from 40-50% a year ago.

The reason is simple. After 10 years of an Israeli-led blockade that has seen Gaza's impoverished urban infrastructure decay, the current decision by the Palestinian Authority under president Mahmoud Abbas to cut electricity to the coastal strip has impacted Gaza's rudimentary sewage treatment.

Without electricity to power its lagoons, treatment works and sewage pumps, Gaza's waste managers have been forced to make a choice, permit the cities to flood – or allow raw sewage to escape the overflows into the sea.

It is a new level of contamination that is not only having an environmental effect, but a profound social one too. In an overcrowded strip of land home to two million people, and largely cut off from the outside world, for many the beach and sea are the only affordable – and accessible – form of recreation.

Sitting in his wooden lifeguard's tower, Khalid Farahat, who is employed by the local municipality, says he has seen the number of beach-goers drop by almost 50% since the electricity and sewage crisis began in April.

Today he is accompanied by his 12-year-old son who won't go in the water when it is so dirty. "It is much less crowded than it was," he explains.

"It is so polluted at the moment. There is a sewage pumping line less than a kilometre from here. When the wind blows in this direction the water is filthy. When there is electricity to power my loudspeaker I warn people to stay out of the water.

"I remember when we had electricity 24/7 people would still come here to escape the heat. But no beach and no electricity – that is a disaster for Gaza."

The escalation of Gaza's sewage problem is most obvious in two locations: in Wadi Gaza, at the centre of the strip, where an open river of almost pure effluent flows into the sea, and a second stream in Gaza's north where sewage has been flowing via a wadi beneath the border wall into Israel and down into the sea around Zikkim beach.

At Gaza's Coastal Municipalities Water and Utilities office, Omar Shatet, the head of operations, explains the growing problem.

"This is worst it has ever been. We rely on electricity to drive our systems. And with 20 hours a day without electricity we can't pump sewage.

"We have five waste water treatment plants, but most of them were built originally as temporary, until we completed new sludge works. They were planned 15 years ago and only one is nearing completion."

The catch 22 – as Shatet concedes – is that it will need power to operate. "We have 70 sewage lifting stations across Gaza," he adds. "But the main priority right now is to stop flooding in cities when the pumps are working. That means that 15,000 metric tonnes of raw sewage is going into the sea as well as 110,000 tonnes that are partially treated.

"The result is that the last testing of beach water that was carried out showed 73% has a level of contamination that prohibits swimming which leaves only 27% available spread all over strip."

Shatet himself has not swum in the sea himself in the last few years and would only consider swimming from a boat 200m beyond the coastline, where the pollution diminishes.

At the offices of Unicef, which runs a desalination plant, the UN organisation's water and sanitation specialist, Mohanlal Peiris, gives an equally bleak account.

"It is very bad. I mean, it *was* already bad. Now it is worse. There is really no proper treatment works. And what's been happening in the past has now been exacerbated because there is no power. And when there is no power in the lagoons there is no aeration for the treatment process.

"The treatment authority is facing a pretty hopeless choice in which Gaza getting flooded with sewage would be even more catastrophic. If that happens the sewage would get into a water table that is already getting

brackish because infiltration of infiltration by sewage, fertilisers and sea water intrusion as the aquifers have become depleted.”

Gaza, as Peiris explains, also has unique challenges. Because it is flat stabilisation ponds for sewage cannot use gravity to separate the sludge, relying on electricity. The Israeli-led blockade means difficulties not only in sourcing generators but any hope of extending marine sewage outfalls from the water’s edge out to sea, as is the case in the UK where outfalls are often a mile long.

It is not only bathers who fear what is happening to the sea. Peiris’s colleague at Unicef, Milina Shahin, lives by the beach and is concerned about the impact of the odours on her own children.

“I live by the beach. It is supposed to be a privilege. But the smells give me a headache. Now I am concerned about my own children. But I can’t say don’t go to balcony. It’s supposed to be a nice thing – to see the sea. I paid money for the view but now it is a disaster,” she says.

And while for richer residents there are other options – including private pools and chalets that can be rented for 12 hours for around £80 – it represents roughly half the monthly salary of a lifeguard like Khalid, making it unavailable for most in Gaza.

A second option is to travel north to the mile-and-a-half of beach in Gaza’s north, immediately bordering Israel, where the water is regarded as the cleanest in the strip.

But, for most, the only option is to swim and even fish in the filthy water.

On the day the Guardian visits Gaza beach, Tayeb Quneitra, a hairdresser, is sitting by the water’s edge with his wife watching his children aged three to nine years old playing in the shallows.

He says he last came three weeks ago. “I heard on the news that it is not safe to swim because of the sewage. But the kids need to swim,” he says. “I am not a swimmer myself but I have friends who refuse to come.

“But this is the only place where you can come to escape the tedium of Gaza. And you get used to the smell. Last time we came was much worse than it is today,” he adds. “Then the water was completely green.”

THE GUARDIAN, 29JUL2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2017/jul/29/pro-israel-advocates-in-australia-targeted-three-journalists-new-book-claims>

Pro-Israel advocates in Australia targeted three journalists, new book claims

John Lyons says he was put under constant pressure when covering the Middle East for the Australian, and so were ABC reporters Sophie McNeill and Peter Cave

Amanda Meade, Saturday 29 July 2017 08.01 AES

Pro-Israel advocacy groups in Australia targeted the Middle East correspondent of the Australian newspaper and two ABC reporters, a new book claims.

John Lyons says he was subjected to consistent pressure from the [Australia/Israel and Jewish Affairs Council \(AIJAC\)](#) while based in Jerusalem for the Australian for six years, as were the ABC’s Sophie McNeill and the veteran ABC correspondent Peter Cave.

In his Middle East memoir *Balcony Over Jerusalem*, Lyons says Cave told him another group prepared dossiers on Cave and other ABC reporters “and sent them to like-minded journalists and members of parliament”.

Lyons says pressure also came from inside his own paper. He says the former editor of the Weekend Australian Nick Cater refused to publish his work and the pro-Israel lobby bombarded editors with criticism of his reports.

“I phoned Cater and he confirmed that he’d asked for my work to no longer appear in Inquirer [the Australian’s Saturday opinion section],” Lyons writes.

“I let [editor-in-chief Chris] Mitchell know that, from my point of view, the exclusion from Inquirer was just the latest in a long series of disagreements with Nick Cater ... he intervened and told Cater that excluding me from Inquirer was not acceptable.”

Lyons writes that an Israeli embassy official was invited by Cater to the Australian’s head office in Sydney, and told editors that the embassy was not happy with him. “To me the idea of an officer of a foreign government wandering the floor of my newsroom criticising me was outrageous.”

Lyons interviewed Mitchell and others for the book, but Cater declined.

In 2015, AIJAC sent a file on McNeill to Jewish members of the ABC board, including the then chairman James Spigelman, and this file claimed among other things that she was unsuitable because she had said “one of the saddest things I’ve seen in my whole life is spending time filming in a children’s cancer ward in Gaza”.

The then ABC managing director Mark Scott ordered a detailed response from corporate affairs, which he took to the board.

“I will not cower to the AIJAC,” Scott said, according to Lyons.

Scott was also forced to defend McNeill from attacks at Senate estimates after the dossier was sent to key parliamentarians.

“Before this reporter set foot in the Middle East, there was a campaign against her personally taking up that role,” he said [in response to a question from senator Eric Abetz](#).

“I am saying that she is a highly recognised and acclaimed reporter ... she deserved that appointment and she needs to be judged on her work.”

In a letter to the board, Scott wrote: “The article [by AIJAC] demonstrates to Sophie McNeill and the ABC that her every word will be watched closely by AIJAC and she starts on the ground with this key interest group sceptical. We are all aware she will be under even closer scrutiny now. As they seek to influence our coverage, this is a pre-emptive ‘shot across the bows’.

“The pre-emptive attack on McNeill is similar to the approach employed by lobby groups internationally. The US reporter Jodi Rudoren was targeted when she was appointed Jerusalem bureau chief for the New York Times in 2012 and accused of being biased against [Israel](#) and unsuitable for the post ... The New York Times refused to bow to the pressure and Rudoren remained in the position.”

Lyons writes that AIJAC director Colin Rubenstein had unprecedented access to the Australian, speaking regularly to editors and even suggesting articles the paper should run.

After criticising Lyons’s reporting, Rubenstein emailed an alternative article to Cater.

Mitchell, who was supportive of Lyons, later told him that Rubenstein would go behind his back and call Cater if he refused to take his call, Lyons writes. “I got upset with Colin when he rang me and attacked [Australian reporter] Elisabeth Wynhausen as ‘a self-loathing Jew’. I thought it was inappropriate for him to be making that kind of comment about one of my staff. For some time after that I stopped taking his calls.”

Lyons argues that Australian journalists should not accept the [trips to Israel](#) organised by the lobby. “During my time in Israel I would come to believe that Australia’s uncritical support of Israel is both illogical and unhealthy,” he writes.

“For more than 20 years, Australians have read and heard pro-Israel positions from journalists, editors, politicians, trade union leaders, academics and students who have returned from the all-expenses-paid Israel lobby trips. In my opinion, no editors, journalist or others should take those trips: they grotesquely distort the reality and are dangerous in the sense that they allow people with a very small amount of knowledge to pollute Australian public opinion.”

Rubenstein told the Guardian he had spoken to editors over the years, including Cater. “I find it hard to see in what way this is nefarious or improper.”

He added: “I certainly did speak to Chris Mitchell about Elisabeth Wynhausen in 2006, and specifically about a piece which read like a ‘hit job’ on both AIJAC and myself, while evoking all too familiar caricatures. I felt entitled to some right of reply - which I received in the form of a letter.

“I do not recall ever calling her a ‘self-loathing Jew’ and that does not sound like the kind of terminology I would use. As for Chris Mitchell’s claim about ceasing to take my calls, I must say I was not aware he felt that way at the time – which shows how infrequently I actually spoke to him.

“We did put together a public document explaining why we thought Sophie McNeill ... was an inappropriate choice for Middle East correspondent for the taxpayer funded ABC, with its statutory obligations of impartiality.

“Everything we do - critiquing media stories; contacting editors, politicians and journalists and explaining our point of view to them; writing our our letters and op/eds; making complaints – are absolutely normal elements of deliberation and debate in a democratic society.

“I would call on those who oppose our views, including Mr Lyons, to engage with different views in a democratic, tolerant and constructive spirit, rather than demand, as he appears to be doing, that those who disagree with him be silenced or suppressed.”

The Guardian approached Cater but he declined to comment.
