

**ISRAEL NEWS**

*A collection of the week's news from Israel
From the Bet El Twinning / Israel Action Committee of
Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation*

Emboldened by the old sheriff's posse being back in town, each has been testing Washington's limits. So far, there don't seem to be too many.

In fact, the Biden administration's allocation of \$90 million in aid to the P.A.

(\$15 million in "coronavirus relief" and another \$75 million for the Palestinians to regain "trust" in the United States) comes weeks after Abbas rejected Blinken's telephone overture. Talk about a return to Obama's proud "leadership from behind."

Whether Abbas and his governing Fatah faction survive the fast-approaching elections—slated for the Palestinian Legislative Council on May 22, for the P.A. presidency on July 31 and for the Palestinian National Council on Aug. 31—remains to be seen. Still, what's already clear to him and any potential successor is the path to Uncle Sam's purse and heart strings. (JNS Apr 6)

Commentary...**Abbas's Snubs Work Like a Charm on Biden** By Ruthie Blum

Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas may be facing serious challenges to his reign in Ramallah, but he's having no trouble playing the powers-that-be in Washington. After four years of being called to task by the administration of former President Donald Trump, Abu Mazen (as he is familiarly known in the Middle East) is once again enjoying the upper hand.

Recent moves by the White House and State Department to "reset" relations with the P.A. by reversing decisions made by Trump haven't come as a surprise. Prior to and upon his election, U.S. President Joe Biden announced that he would be cozying up to the Palestinians.

Using more diplomatic language, members of his team have reiterated America's intention to "restore" relations with the Palestinians in a number of concrete ways. These include reopening the PLO office in Washington and a restoration of massive amounts of financial aid to the P.A. and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Yet, just as no "goodwill gesture" aimed at reversing Trump's policies vis-à-vis the Palestinians has been unexpected, neither has Abbas's typically ungracious attitude. Unlike Trump's people, however—who made it clear from the outset that the aging despot's delusions of grandeur and posturing wouldn't work on them—Biden's are kissing up to him.

An incident that took place a few weeks ago is illustrative.

In mid-February, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken personally phoned Abbas, undoubtedly to discuss all the goodies that the P.A. could anticipate from Biden & Co, and perhaps to wish him well in the upcoming elections. But rather than bask in the attention that he was receiving from America's top diplomat, Abbas refused to take the call.

Yes, the head of the tiny terrorism-supporting entity was deeply offended that someone of Blinken's "inferior" stature was on the line. Abbas, after all, had demanded that Biden himself initiate the conversation, "president to president."

Instead of warning Abbas not to overestimate his standing in the world relative to that of the secretary of state, Blinken accepted the snub. According to a report on Thursday by Israel's Kan 11 Radio, which was picked up by the Ma'ariv newspaper, sources in Ramallah and Washington are now discussing the option of Blinken's holding the chat with P.A. Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh or senior P.A. official Hussein al-Sheikh.

Palestinian affairs expert Khaled Abu Toameh confirmed the veracity of the report, informing JNS that Abbas had instructed his aides to tell Blinken to talk to P.A. Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki, the secretary of state's "counterpart."

Abbas's gall is not new and has served the P.A. ruler well with the international community, which has elevated him to ill-deserved heights. This is due to an unfounded, knee-jerk opposition to Israel, not to the way in which he rules his own people, who view him with disdain and outrage.

Nor is American appeasement of petty tyrants a novelty; certainly not among those, like Biden and many of his appointees, who served under former President Barack Obama. Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif's verbal abuse of former U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry during nuclear negotiations—so loud and disrespectful that even Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei ordered him to tone it down—comes to mind in this context.

Trump put a temporary stop to such supplication. Ramallah, like Tehran, responded by spewing rhetoric, but feared suffering the consequences of Washington's wrath. One key basis for the trepidation was financial.

True, sanctions didn't stop the P.A. from paying terrorists' hefty salaries or prevent Iran from keeping its centrifuges spinning. The withholding of cash has, however, made life more difficult for both regimes.

The Jerusalem Declaration's Bogus Definition of Anti-Semitism

By Gerald M. Steinberg and Asaf Romirowsky

In 2016, following major attacks targeting Jewish and Israeli targets around the world, and based on earlier text adopted by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, the government-based International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) published a two-page working definition of anti-Semitism. This initiative was designed to fill the vacuum that fostered ineffective policies and willful blindness in countering the sources of hate crimes directed specifically at Jews.

The authors included a number of examples, some of which relate to Israel and the "new" anti-Zionist form of anti-Semitism, which, along with traditional sources, uses the hate-inducing language and images of the Soviet era. These include "denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination," applying double standards not "demanded of any other democratic nation," using symbols "associated with classic anti-Semitism...to characterize Israel or Israelis" or comparing "contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis."

Since 2016, this document has been formally adopted by thirty governments, mainly in Europe, North America, and Australia, as well as by international institutions. In addition, a number of parliaments and municipalities have endorsed the text, and, in many cases, universities and other important frameworks use the definition in the form of guidelines for assessing antisemitic behavior.

But for some ideological activists—particularly Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) supporters—the Israel-related examples of anti-Semitism are unacceptable and are portrayed, or distorted, as attempts to "silence criticism" of Israeli policies, or even as "threats to democracy." Under the banner of "progressive values," influential groups that frequently critique Israel—including J-Street, the New Israel Fund, and American Friends of Peace Now—pushed the claim that the "codification of the IHRA working definition," specifically its "contemporary examples," create the potential for misuse to "suppress legitimate free speech" and prevent "criticism of Israeli government actions."

And in Germany, of all places, a group of self-described "cultural leaders" associated with the far Left launched a highly publicized effort to rescind the Bundestag resolution that adopted the working definition and referred to BDS as a form of anti-Semitism. This group includes Stefanie Schüler-Springorum, who uses her position as head of the Center for Research on Antisemitism in Berlin to promote demonization of Israel, As Professor Jeffrey Herf has written, her center strictly avoids dealing with virulent anti-Zionism of the Soviet and East German regimes, as well as the Islamist contribution.

Reinforcing these efforts, and overlapping in a number of areas, another professionally promoted public relations campaign to undermine the IHRA consensus was launched under the heading of the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism (JDA). Falsely claiming support from "leading scholars of antisemitism," the funding source is carefully hidden, and the website—created at the last minute, with anonymous ownership—is registered in Iceland. (As is often the case, the progressive democratic values claimed by this group do not extend to funding transparency.) Ostensibly developed under the

auspices of the highly ideological Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem, three of the eight “coordinators” including Schüler-Springorum, as well as a number of signatories, were also leaders of the German campaign. It is not surprising that the JDA manifesto repeats much of the language in the other attacks. It is also possible that they arranged the funding.

Copying the structure of the IHRA document, the JDA includes five examples related to Israel and the conflict that “on the face of it, are antisemitic,” as well as five (for balance, of course) that, according to their manifesto, “on the face of it, are not antisemitic.”

In the first examples, some follow the language in the original (IHRA) version, but others are notably absent—the labeling of double standards as anti-Semitic or “drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis.” Both aspects are part of the BDS movement—by removing them from the definition of anti-Semitism, the JDA group seeks to give itself space for this form of anti-Israel discrimination. And in comparison to the IHRA’s clear statement that “Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor” is anti-Semitism, the JDA version stands out as Orwellian doublespeak—“Denying the right of Jews in the State of Israel to exist and flourish, collectively and individually, as Jews, in accordance with the principle of equality.”

The second supposedly “non-antisemitic” examples proceed to develop the core anti-Zionist and pro-BDS objectives, as notoriously embraced by some of the better-known signatories, including Richard Falk. These include “supporting the Palestinian demand for justice and the full grant of their ... rights” (often a euphemism for replacing Israel); promoting alternatives to a Jewish state (i.e., various “arrangements for Jews and Palestinians in the area between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean”; “criticism of Israel as a state...its institutions and founding principles...” In addition, they claim that “it is not antisemitic, in and of itself, to compare Israel with other historical cases, including settler-colonialism or apartheid”; and—the core sleight-of-hand behind the manifesto, “Boycott, divestment and sanctions are commonplace, non-violent forms of political protest against states. In the Israeli case they are not, in and of themselves, antisemitic.”

The frequent use of weasel words such as “on the face of it” and “in and of itself/themselves” is also significant, as noted by Prof. Matthias Küntzel. Ideological warfare is rarely one-dimensional, and arguments made to conform to legitimate and widely accepted norms are then interpreted and twisted far beyond the range of the simple language “on the face of it.” A careful reading of the JDA text and context shows that while pretending to be neutral on the legitimacy of Israel and Zionism, their primary goal is delegitimation.

Of particular note is that by investing major resources in delegitimizing the IHRA definition, they marginalize the core issues of anti-Semitism and the escalating attacks against Jews and Jewish institutions. According to the JDA, “anti-Semitism has certain distinctive features,” but these are minor, while, in the spirit of progressive values and intersectionality, “the fight against it is inseparable from the overall fight against all forms of racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, and gender discrimination.” In other words, any definition of anti-Semitism is unnecessary, particularly when it hampers “free speech” necessary for singling out Israelis and justifying hatred.

In contrast, the IHRA working definition is the most effective means of countering the poisonous incitement that leads to assaults. By politicizing and undermining this consensus, the JDA and the wider counter-IHRA campaigns are opening the door for even more violence targeting Israeli and Jewish institutions. (National Interest Apr 4)

Has Biden Already Betrayed the Trust of Pro-Israel Democrats?

By Jonathan S. Tobin

It’s only been 11 weeks since Joe Biden was sworn in as president of the United States. With the president preoccupied with domestic politics and waging rhetorical warfare on his Republican opponents, it’s clear that foreign policy is a low priority for the new administration. And with Biden diving headfirst into partisan scrums—accusing Republicans of being racists with brazenly false accusations about a Georgia voting law and promoting an infrastructure bill that is more of a liberal project wish list than it is

about rebuilding bridges and highways—there seems to be little space or oxygen left for a debate about his intentions abroad.

It’s also true that the pro-Israel community is determined to avoid any unnecessary battles with Biden. Though some supporters of Israel have registered justified complaints about many of Biden’s appointees, including both Obama administration alumni and those with more radical connections and beliefs, for the most part, the organized Jewish world is prepared to work with the president’s team. They know that while Obama’s staffers are far less sympathetic to Israel than their counterparts in the Trump administration, they believe that cooperation will yield better results than open opposition.

That makes perfect sense. It’s also true that of all the possible 2020 Democratic contenders, Biden was the friendliest to Israel. Though that was a low bar, it’s nonetheless true that his longstanding ties to the pro-Israel community mark him as more likely to treat the Jewish state as an ally, which is more than his old boss President Barack Obama generally did.

All that adds up to a general willingness to give Biden a chance. And with Israel’s government still paralyzed by a two-year-old political stalemate, relations between the two nations are also seemingly on hold.

But that doesn’t mean that Biden and his handlers haven’t already tipped their hand.

A number of key moves by Biden on both the Palestinian and Iranian fronts have already undermined confidence not only in his judgment but in his intentions.

With respect to the Palestinians, it was to be expected that Biden would walk back many of Trump’s historically pro-Israel policies. While Biden begged off on any attempt to move the U.S. embassy back to Tel Aviv from Jerusalem, which would both violate U.S. law and spark a battle that would be a huge and unnecessary distraction from his domestic priorities, the new administration has made it clear that the kind of closeness between the two nations that existed prior to Jan. 20 isn’t in the cards.

The least of it was the State Department’s overruling of the Trump-era declaration that the West Bank was disputed rather than “occupied” territory. This will encourage unrealistic Palestinian hopes that the Jewish state will cede territory in the heart of the Jewish homeland that a broad consensus of Israeli voters have consistently labeled as not so much ill-advised as insane. This lip service to the theoretical possibility of a two-state solution that the Palestinians have repeatedly shown no interest in reasserts policies that have failed time and again.

The same is true of the message that Secretary of State Antony Blinken delivered to Israeli Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi last week when he spoke of the need to deliver the same “equal rights” to the Palestinians that Israelis enjoy. The main obstacle to those rights remains Palestinian intransigence rather than any actions on Israel’s part. Yet Blinken’s trolling disguised as human-rights advocacy will only do more to annoy Israelis than to endanger them. Nor will it do much to help the Palestinians persist in their century-old war on Zionism to which they are hopelessly addicted.

Far more troubling are the signals that show that Biden is prepared to ignore the Taylor Force Act signed into law by former President Donald Trump into law in 2018. The act forbade U.S. aid to the Palestinian Authority so long as they were, as they have continued to do, funding terrorism via pensions and salaries to those who shed Israeli and American blood.

The administration first said it just wished to give the Palestinians \$15 million to help the P.A. fight the coronavirus pandemic. But now it turns out that it may have allocated up to \$100 million in aid to Mahmoud Abbas’s terror-backing kleptocracy, with most of this kept from the public.

Biden is giving Abbas \$75 million in economic aid to Abbas as a “confidence-building” measure. Supposedly Blinken wants to give the P.A. a chance to prove itself trustworthy in spite of the fact that for the 27 years of its existence, it has consistently shown the opposite. More to the point, handing over U.S. taxpayer cash to Abbas’s Fatah thieves and thugs is a flagrant violation of law since it helps the P.A. continue its terrorist funding. But the same media that cried foul at what they claimed was Trump’s running roughshod over the law have no problem with Biden treating open violations of it as a thing of no consequence.

Equally troubling is the way Blinken’s State Department is reverting to neutrality, if not hostility, towards Israel when it comes

to international organizations that engage in anti-Semitic targeting of Israel.

Biden has restored funding to UNRWA, the U.N. refugee agency that has not only helped keep the 1948 Palestinian refugees and their descendants homeless but is dedicated to keeping their war against Israel going, doing far more harm than good. And the new administration has not only rejoined the viciously anti-Israel U.N. Human Rights Council that Trump had rightly boycotted but also embraced the toxic organization's endorsement of the Durban Conference, a historic anti-Semitic hate-fest.

Most ominous is the administration's moves towards a new round of appeasement towards Iran. We knew that Biden wanted to revive Obama's dangerously weak Iran nuclear deal, though he and Blinken have rightly spoken of the need to strengthen it—a foreign-policy imperative that Trump made a priority by pulling out of the old pact and reimposing sanctions. Biden's approach to Iran has been much like that of Obama's terrible negotiating strategy. Iran has refused to put itself back into compliance with the original deal, and Biden and Blinken appear ready to start making concessions merely to get Tehran back to the negotiating table.

But the worst is the supine attitude Biden has taken to what may well be the most dangerous foreign-policy event in recent years: the agreement Iran struck with China that will effectively circumvent sanctions on the Islamist republic. The United States has the power to force China to abandon its attempt to buy oil from Tehran and to make other investments there, as well as institute military cooperation. All Biden needs to do to spike this potential game-changer is to tell the Chinese they must choose between doing business with Iran or the United States. But a week-and-a-half has passed since the announcement, and Washington has contented itself with nothing but mealy-mouthed expressions of a desire for all these countries to have good relations.

If this is allowed to stand, it's a signal that Biden hasn't the courage or the will to stick to his promises on stopping Iran from getting nuclear weapons. More to the point, it may show that his foreign-policy team thinks that, like Obama's negotiators, such a development is not a big deal.

All of this means that it's not too early for the pro-Israel community to start speaking up loudly and angrily about the implications of all these moves, especially the indifference to the Iran-China deal.

It's one thing for the organized Jewish community to be slow to anger and to pick their fights with the new administration carefully. It's quite another to sleepwalk through Biden's first year in office only to eventually wake up and realize that the danger is already here, and it's too late to do anything about it. (JNS Apr 5)

Meghan McCain vs. the ADL By Kenneth Levin

On the March 17 broadcast of "The View," co-host Meghan McCain, tearing up as she spoke, said, "... my concern is, for some reason, anti-Semitism is something we let people forgive a lot easier than other forms of bigotry and racism. ... And I think that's something we really need to examine as a society. ... I think that anti-Semitism is still sort of the last form of passable bigotry in America. ... It's why we, as Americans, seem to find more forgiveness in our heart for anti-Semitism than we do racism of any other kind."

There has obviously been, in recent years, a dramatic increase in anti-Semitic attacks in America, entailing verbal assaults and defamation, desecration of property and physical attacks, including the murder of Jews in Pittsburgh, Poway, Jersey City and Monsey. And the attacks have come from all those segments of American society that target Jews: white supremacists and neo-Nazis, black supremacists, Islamists and elements of the far-left socialist/progressive camp.

White supremacists have been responsible for most of the murders and many other acts that figure in the recent proliferation of anti-Semitism in the United States, but they are not the perpetrators who receive the forgiveness of which McCain was speaking and about which she is rightly concerned. For while they are certainly dangerous and growing more so, they have not penetrated as widely into mainstream American society as the other promoters of Jew-hatred, and they remain broadly condemned in America.

No, it is the other purveyors of anti-Semitism—those spurred by black supremacism, Islamism, and far-left/progressive orthodoxy who

are blithely forgiven by people who would forgive no other bigotry, and it is they who have established themselves widely on the American scene. Both perpetrators and forgivers can be found in academia—the major institutional source of anti-Semitism in America—and, of late, in Congress, the Biden administration, entertainment, professional sports, and the mass media and social media. Cheerleaders and apologists for Louis Farrakhan, the anti-Semite with the largest following in America, include notables from virtually all of these groups.

It was the forgiveness extended to a media personality by colleagues and others in the wake of his spewing anti-Semitic invective that prompted McCain's March 17 comments. McCain responded similarly, and with similar emotion, on "The View" in March 2019 to the anti-Semitic, anti-Israel outpourings of Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-Minn.), an indulgence in bigotry that likewise elicited much forgiveness from colleagues and others on the left. The Democrat congressional delegation refused to condemn her anti-Semitism or even name it, but instead voted for a bland condemnation of all bigotry. In the 2020 congressional primaries, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi endorsed both Omar and her fellow spewer of anti-Jewish tropes, Rep. Rashida Tlaib (D-Mich.), over Democrat challengers not given to their bigotry.

At the Democrat convention in August 2020, places of honor were accorded to Jew-baiters and acolytes of Nation of Islam's Farrakhan Linda Sarsour and Tamika Mallory. Farrakhan promoter Pastor Frederick Haynes was featured at the convention's "Our Values" Black Caucus event. Imam Noman Hussain, notorious for inciting hatred of non-believers, particularly Jews, was similarly given a place of honor at the convention's "Interfaith Welcome Service."

Tamika Mallory was recently featured at the 2021 Grammy Awards, once again illustrating the penetration of non-white supremacist anti-Semites into mainstream culture.

President Joe Biden's pick for senior director for Intelligence in the National Security Council, Maher Bitar, has called for Israel's dissolution and has worked with groups supporting anti-Israel terror. Hady Amr, Biden's choice for deputy assistant secretary of state for Israel-Palestine, has repeatedly urged an American rapprochement with the terrorist group Hamas, despite Hamas's explicit dedication not only to the murder of all Israelis but of all Jews worldwide.

And that brings us to the Anti-Defamation League. The ADL has for decades been largely silent, or forgiving, vis-à-vis anti-Semitism coming from sources other than the far-right—a pattern that has become even more blatant with the 2015 ascent of national director and CEO Jonathan Greenblatt, a former official in the Obama White House, to head of the organization.

Beyond its silence in the face of anti-Semitism emanating from groups and individuals not associated with white supremacy, the ADL has on various occasions lent its support to such groups and individuals. The Black Lives Matter organization has trafficked for years in anti-Semitism, whether calling for Israel's annihilation or targeting synagogues and Jewish businesses during last year's riots in Los Angeles and elsewhere.

Nevertheless, the ADL was the most prominent signer of a full-page Jewish ad in *The New York Times* in August 2020, backing BLM, with Greenblatt tweeting his pride in an earlier iteration of the pro-BLM statement. The ADL, in contorted defenses of BLM, has claimed that the group is loosely organized, and that anti-Jewish acts and statements are the work of peripheral figures. But, in fact, figures among the founders and current leaders of BLM have both voiced anti-Semitic vitriol and played a role in anti-Jewish acts.

New York Rev. Al Sharpton has repeatedly in the past engaged in anti-Semitic diatribes and instigated assaults on Jews, including an attack on a Jewish-owned business that ended in multiple deaths. Yet the ADL apparently had no qualms about partnering with Sharpton in his organizing a march last summer on Washington. While offering little in the way of calling out politicians on the left given to anti-Semitism, including Ilhan Omar, Greenblatt was quick to praise Omar for her partial distancing herself from one of her numerous anti-Jewish statements.

Certainly, the ADL has not been alone among Jewish groups in giving a pass to many of those purveying anti-Semitism in America. The list of organizations doing so—both mainstream bodies and those more marginal groups who make common cause with non-Jewish bodies that advocate Israel's destruction and defame the

American Jewish community—is long indeed. The Jewish pro-BLM ad in The New York Times had more than 600 institutional signers along with the ADL.

However, it is the ADL that the American Jewish community long looked to for leadership in the fight against anti-Semitism from whatever source, and it is therefore the ADL's failure to provide that leadership that is most damaging to the community. At this time of increased anti-Semitism, American Jews desperately need leaders not given to gradations of response based on the perpetrator's political affiliations. Our failed leadership in the ADL and beyond is an indulgence—a luxury the community can no longer afford. Rather, it requires, at the very least, figures capable of the centeredness, decency and moral outrage in the face of anti-Semitism exhibited by Meghan McCain. (JNS Apr 5)

Netanyahu's Latest Mandate is Trial By Fire By Alex Traiman

After the Likud secured a stunning 13-seat electoral margin over the second-largest party, Yesh Atid, an embattled Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has received the official mandate to form a new government, following the fourth election in less than two years. Yet similar to the first three contests, his ability to forge a parliamentary majority coalition remains in doubt.

On Monday, representatives from each of the 13 parties that entered Knesset met with President Reuven Rivlin to recommend their preferred candidate for prime minister. Netanyahu received 52 recommendations from his committed right-wing and religious partners. The current head of the opposition, Yair Lapid of Yesh Atid, received 45 recommendations from each of the country's center-left and far-left parties.

Naftali Bennett received seven recommendations—all from his own right-wing Yamina Party. The right-wing New Hope Party led by former Netanyahu ally Gideon Sa'ar, as well as two Arab parties, which have never joined any coalition government right or left, opted not to recommend any candidate.

Also on Monday, just as livestreamed consultations at the president's office were underway, Netanyahu was pictured sitting for a brief period in the back of a courtroom, ahead of the first day of testimony in one of three cases in which he is charged with bribery and breach of trust. (He was only required to attend the opening statement.)

The side-by-side events—rabid media coverage of Netanyahu's trial, plus a fourth rapid-fire election with no clear path towards a 61-Knesset member majority—represent both a surreal and a low moment in Israeli political history.

Hourly news reports alternated the scorecard of the various recommendations by party representatives, followed by snippets of testimony from Ilan Yeshua, former CEO of the Walla! news site. Yeshua's testimony detailed how Netanyahu and his advisers repeatedly strong-armed the nature of Walla! news coverage about himself and his family members, as well as that of his political rivals. In return, Netanyahu advanced regulations that directly benefited Walla! owner Shaul Elovitch, another defendant in the case.

The testimony isn't pretty and the media is seizing the opportunity to broadcast the negative soundbites. Yet that doesn't necessarily make any of the actions illegal.

A legal memorandum authored by famed U.S. attorney Nathan Lewin, signed by a team of lawyers including Alan Dershowitz, and submitted to Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit ahead of his decision to indict Netanyahu, warned: "If the police and prosecutors are empowered to probe the mixed motives of journalists and politicians, they can exercise arbitrary control over essential institutions of democracy."

The Lewin memo extensively cites a 2012 report by the United Kingdom's Lord Justice Leveson, titled "Inquiry Into the Culture, Practices and Ethics of the Press," which details numerous historical interactions between some of the world's most influential media moguls, including Rupert Murdoch, William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer; and political counterparts, including British Prime Ministers Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair, Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke and others. The memo noted that "media empires ... routinely exchange favorable coverage for beneficial acts," yet contended that "there has never been a single case in the democratic world in which a public figure was prosecuted, let alone convicted, of the 'crime' of receiving a requested 'bribe' of favorable publicity."

Were Netanyahu to be convicted, he would be the first such politician in any democratic country to be found guilty of practices that are standard in the relationships between state leaders and media owners since the advent of politics and a free press.

The details of Yeshua's testimony are furthering souring those voters who have had enough of Netanyahu, as well as political rivals who are intent on replacing Israel's longest-serving prime minister. Much of the country believe that Netanyahu has overstayed his welcome after 12 consecutive years on Balfour Street.

Still, Netanyahu's considerable number of supporters remains committed. Immediately following the first day of testimony, Netanyahu asserted in a televised address that the unprecedented charges represent an attempted coup by the prosecution and the media, and that the means of the investigation were illegal.

"It's a witch hunt. They didn't investigate a crime, they didn't look for a crime; they hunted for a man, they hunted me," he said.

Israeli law explicitly states that a prime minister may continue to serve in his role while under trial and even following a guilty verdict until all appeals have been exhausted. Until then, it is only the voters that can remove a prime minister from office.

Throughout the successive election campaigns, sealed evidence was continuously leaked to the press, while announcements from prosecutors were timed repeatedly to influence voters ahead of polls. The current witness testimony may ultimately factor into Netanyahu's ability to form a government.

Yet four times in a row, the voters have spoken. Among a divided electorate, the largest block by far has consecutively sent the message that Netanyahu remains the most fitting candidate to serve as prime minister. Right-wing parties which are ideologically aligned with Likud total 65 seats. And while more than 61 Knesset members across the spectrum would like to see Netanyahu replaced, opponents have been repeatedly unable to form a government due to their own disparate ideological and political agendas.

Following the consultations with party leaders, Rivlin stated his belief that no candidate would be likely to form a coalition, then reluctantly and unceremoniously passed the mandate to Netanyahu via a messenger.

Now, the heads of the 11 small parties—each between six and nine seats apiece—believe that they hold the mandate of "kingmaker," or at least be the ones who will ultimately determine who will emerge as prime minister. In particular, Naftali Bennett is angling to become prime minister, as part of a rotation with Netanyahu—or with opposition leader Lapid—in return for his support. Yet no one kingmaker, including Bennett, holds all the cards.

Netanyahu now has the task of convincing multiple kingmakers to crown him once again. Should he convince Bennett, a former ally who has not ruled out sitting under Netanyahu, to join a right-wing government, he will be just two seats short and will try to recruit defectors from other parties. Sa'ar, another former ally who broke off from Likud with several colleagues to form New Hope, could together with Bennett give Netanyahu 65 seats and a stable right-wing government.

Members of the left are simultaneously trying to recruit Bennett and Sa'ar to form a "government of change." Lapid, whose left-wing Yesh Atid received 17 seats, is believed to have offered Bennett the first seat in a prime-ministerial rotation arrangement should he break ranks with the right. Meanwhile, Bennett has pledged not to sit in a government led by Lapid.

Simultaneously, some members of the opposition are hoping that they may be able to work together even without a formal coalition to advance legislation that would retroactively invalidate Netanyahu from forming a government.

Following the third election, Netanyahu fought off a similar parliamentary putsch attempt and ultimately cracked his opposition, forming a unity alignment with then-challenger Benny Gantz and half of his Blue and White Party.

Despite a parliament, a justice system, and most media that all want his tenure to end, Netanyahu remains the strongest player in the field. His party is the largest by far—his block of supporters is larger than any other, and the mandate to form a government is officially his. Whether he will succeed is anyone's guess. Should he fail, a fifth election may be on the horizon.

Throughout it all, for the fourth time in two years, it's only the voters who want Netanyahu in the top job. (JNS Apr 7)