

From “Endemically Pro-Israel” to Unsympathetic: Australia’s Middle East Policy, 1967-1972

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The hardening of Australian Middle East policy toward Israel in the early 1970s is often attributed to the election of Gough Whitlam as Prime Minister. Whitlam’s December 1972 victory may well have opened a new, problematic chapter. But the evidence suggests that a deterioration in Australia-Israel relations occurred gradually in the aftermath of the 1967 Six Day War. This deterioration reflected changes in Australia’s political leadership and change at the top of the Department of External Affairs (renamed Foreign Affairs in 1970). Individual decision-makers such as Whitlam did play a significant role in determining Australian Middle East policy. As Prime Minister, Sir John Gorton was willing to put aside advice from External Affairs not to antagonise and risk disrupting trade relations with Arab states, and to offer heartfelt support for Israel. His successor Sir William McMahon vacillated under opposing influences of a department determined to secure Australia’s trade interests on the one hand, and Australian Jewish leaders and Israel’s envoys in Australia on the other. With the support of the Australian Jewish community, Israel sought to influence Australian political leaders — especially within the ALP — from turning away from Israel.

Australia’s official policy called for neutrality.¹ However, in the aftermath of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, political elites and the Australian public at large sided with Israel. Prime Minister Harold Holt, the Minister of External Affairs², Paul Hasluck, the Secretary of the Department of External Affairs, Sir James Plimsoll, and the Liberal Senator John Gorton (who would shortly become Prime Minister) all whole-heartedly supported Israel. The Leader of the Opposition, and of the Australian Labor Party, Gough Whitlam, urged the government to support Israel even further. The Democratic Labor Party expressed support and admiration for Israel and its Defence Force. The Governor-General, Lord Richard Casey, previously a long-standing External Affairs Minister in the Menzies Government, shared this pro-Israel sentiment.

The Australian Ambassador to Israel, William Landale, hailed the “excellent relations” between the two countries,³ and Israel’s Foreign Minister, Abba Eban,

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¹ John Knight, “Australia and the Middle East: A Note on the Historical Background, 1947-72” in John Knight and Gunter Patz, eds, *Australia and the Middle East: Papers and Documents* (Canberra, 1976), p. 10.

² In November 1970 the “Department of External Affairs” became the “Department of Foreign Affairs”, and its Minister became “Minister of State for Foreign Affairs”.

³ Chanan Reich, “Ethnic Identity and Political Participation: The Jewish And Greek Communities In Melbourne”, Ph.D. Thesis, Monash University, 1983, pp. 425-427. Chanan Reich, *Australia and*

gleefully described Australia as “endemically pro-Israel”.⁴ This pro-Israel sentiment amongst Australia’s political elite soon waned. Notably, by 1972, on the eve of his election as Prime Minister, Whitlam’s enthusiastic support for Israel had declined significantly,⁵ to the point where he questioned Israel’s very legitimacy.⁶ Likewise, newly-appointed Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs,⁷ Sir Keith Waller, in marked contrast with his predecessor, Plimsoll, argued that Australia’s interest in Israel was “little more than sentimental, and diminishing at that”.⁸

When I came to Australia in 1974, from Israel as a foreign PhD student at Monash University, I became very interested in Australia’s relations with my home country. I heard from colleagues, and from members of the Australian Jewish community in Melbourne, that relations between the two countries had been excellent, and that Australia’s External Affairs Minister, Dr. Herbert Evatt, numbered among the founders of the Jewish state. However they believed Whitlam’s election as Prime Minister had soured Australia-Israel relations. As a student of international politics, I wondered whether it could all have really been the “fault” of one man.

My research revealed that indeed the deterioration in Australia-Israel relations had occurred gradually after reaching their peak at the aftermath of the 1967 Six Day War. It came about because of several reasons, including the replacement during that period of several pro-Israel decision-makers by significantly less supportive ones; Australia’s growing trade with the Arab countries; Australia’s aviation interests in Egypt and Syria; Australia’s need for support at the UN of the Arab states and their sympathisers in Africa, and among other Moslem states, such as Pakistan, Indonesia and Malaysia, and the growing frustration among some decision-makers and sections in the Australian media with the stalemate in the Arab-Israeli conflict, which they attributed to Israel’s continuing occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and its refusal to commit itself in advance to total withdrawal. As a Foreign Affairs paper put it:

At first the triumphant Israeli conduct of the 1967 war against great numerical odds increased, if anything, the sympathy for Israel in Australia and similar countries. But, gradually, as it became clear that Israel’s very successes had caused a certain arrogance and intransigence, there was some change in at least some quarters in Australia. Israel began to appear to some observers as no longer the underdog, but as the unlawful occupant of territory seized by war and, by her apparent intransigence, the major obstacle to the establishment of a more peaceful and economically favourable context in the Middle East.⁹

Individual decision-makers played a significant role in determining Australian Middle East policy. At the conclusion of the 1967 War, Hasluck, an ardent supporter of Israel, rewrote the speech that had been drafted by Australia’s Permanent UN Delegation Head, Sir Laurence McIntyre, which was to be delivered at the United Nations General

Israel: An Ambiguous Relation (Melbourne, 2002), chap. 5. Pratt to Britain Section, (MABAR) Israel Department of Foreign Affairs (IDFA), 18 June 1967, Israel State Archives (Henceforth ISA): 3991/20. Pratt to Savir, 7 December 1967, ISA: 3991/18.

⁴ Abba Eban, *An Autobiography* (New York, 1977), pp. 440, 601.

⁵ Erell to *Asia-Pacific Section at IDFA* (henceforth *MASOK*), 25 September 1972, ISA: 5307/13.

⁶ Erell to *MASOK*, 22 September 1972, *ISA: 5306/21*.

⁷ Note that the Department of External Affairs was renamed the Department of Foreign Affairs on 6 November, 1970.

⁸ Waller to Johnston, 2 May 1972, National Archives of Australia (hereafter *NAA*): A1838/272 175/10/21.

⁹ Undated, “Australian Relations with Israel”, *NAA A1838 175/10/1 Part 12*.

Assembly. McIntyre held views closer to the Arab position, and his draft speech advocated an Israeli withdrawal from the territories it had occupied during the Six Day War, in return for an implied Arab recognition of Israel's right to exist in security. Hasluck rewrote McIntyre's draft, despite the latter's protest, to inject a more pro-Israel note and to emphasise that captured territories should only be exchanged for a genuine peace agreement; that withdrawal of Israeli forces should be subject to territorial adjustments in Israel's favour so as to ensure Israel's access to the sea through the straits of Tiran; that withdrawal be preceded by settlement of other issues in dispute; and that peace would be possible only through extensive and free negotiations between Israel and the Arab states.¹⁰ Also, on Hasluck's instruction, Australia joined Israel, the USA, UK and forty-two other countries, in defeating a Yugoslav draft resolution calling on Israel to withdraw unconditionally to positions it had held before the war. This pleased greatly Israel's Foreign Minister, Abba Eban.¹¹

This is not to say that foreign policy in general and Australia's in particular are exclusively determined by a handful of all-powerful decision-makers. Being a middle power, dependent on its major allies for its security, Australia's policy towards Israel during this period was also strongly influenced by the policies pursued by the USA and UK; Australia's long-term commercial and aviation interests in the Middle East; public opinion in Australia and overseas; and lobbying by the Australian Jewish community. In addition, External Affairs officials articulated and interpreted these perceptions and policies and made their relevant recommendations. However, when it came to decisions considered of great significance to Australia and or Israel, prominent individual decision-makers had the last word.

The political and legal framework for negotiations regarding the Israeli-Arab conflict was established on 22 November 1967, when the UN Security Council adopted unanimously, and with Australia's support,¹² Resolution 242. It called for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East; the withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict; the termination of all claims by states of belligerency and "acknowledgment of the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political independence of every State in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognised boundaries free from threats or acts of force"; freedom of navigation through international waterways in the area; and a just settlement of the refugee problem.¹³

Resolution 242 fell short of calling on Israel to withdraw from all territories or requesting the Arabs to make "full peace" with Israel. While the Arab states and the

¹⁰ Minister to the Secretary, 8 June 1967, NAA: A1838/2 181/17/5 Pt 1. Current Notes on International Affairs (henceforth CNIA), Canberra, Volume 38, Number 6, 16 June 1967, p. 236. McIntyre to EA, 28 June 1967: NAA A1838/2181/17 Pt 6. William B. Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict Since 1967* (Berkeley, 1993), p. 54; J.L. Lavett, "Record of Conversation with Haggai Eylon", 1 July 1967, NAA: A1838/272 181/17/1/2 Pt 1; *Melbourne Herald*, 30 June 1967; Lawrey to EA, NAA: A1838/274 181/17/1 Pt 1. CNIA, Volume 38, Number 6, 16 June 1967, p. 236. McIntyre's lecture before the Diplomatic Corps in Australia in August 1967; Chagai Eylon to MBR, "Sir Laurence McIntyre" 3 August 1967, ISA: 3991/20. Reich, *Australia and Israel*, p. 114.

¹¹ Eban to Hasluck, 1 July 1967, NAA: A1838/272 181/17/1/2 Pt 1; Eban, *An Autobiography*, pp. 440, 601.

¹² Thomas Bruce Millar, *Australia in Peace and War, External Relations 1788-1977* (Canberra, 1978), p. 361.

¹³ *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, Volume No. XVI (1967-1968), p. 22473.

Soviet Union pressed for including “withdrawal from *all* the territories”, Israel, supported by the USA and UK, was only prepared to accept the vague phrase “withdrawal from territories”. Israel also insisted that any withdrawal should be preceded by direct negotiations between it and the relevant Arab nations. Palestinian organisations demanded the whole of Palestine and rejected the idea of living alongside Israel.¹⁴ The Arab states were divided over the Resolution: while the more radical states, Syria, Iraq and Algeria, rejected it outright, Egypt and Jordan accepted it while refusing to either negotiate with Israel directly or commit to peace with Israel once it withdrew from the territories.¹⁵

In his appearance before a Sub-Committee for Foreign Affairs and Defence of the Australian Parliament, in May 1968, Israel's Ambassador to Australia, Simchah Pratt, explained that under no circumstances would Israel return to the position of vulnerability of 4 June 1967 and that until the Arab States accepted direct negotiations, Israel would maintain the existing ceasefire borders. He assured the sub-committee that, in the context of peace negotiations, Israel was prepared to find a solution to all the problems pending. He insisted that the Arabs must depart from their policy of “no recognition of Israel, no negotiations with Israel and no peace with Israel”, as determined by the Khartoum summit conference in September 1967, and that Israel wanted the Suez Canal opened as soon as possible provided its own right to passage through it was assured. Pratt also assured the committee that while most Israelis were prepared to return the occupied territories within the limits of security and a peaceful settlement, Israel did not have to decide on its final position because nobody was prepared to negotiate with it and that after its bad experience in 1957 Israel did not have much faith in international arrangements.¹⁶

Australia's most senior leaders in 1968 — Prime Minister Gorton, External Affairs Minister Hasluck, and Leader of the Opposition Whitlam — continued to publicly express their support for Israel and the Jewish causes. Gorton and Hasluck shared Israel's insistence on direct peace negotiations with the Arab states and its deep concern at the recent mass public executions of Jews in Baghdad¹⁷; and Whitlam endorsed Israel's refusal to withdraw from the cease-fire lines without peace.¹⁸ The Australian government also supported Israel's campaign against anti-Semitism in the USSR and Poland, and opposed a hostile initiative at the UN to despatch a delegation to the territories.¹⁹ However, because of its economic interests in the Arab world and in maintaining good relations with France and Malaysia, and in line with its longstanding policy, Australia refused to collaborate with Israel in defence matters. Hence, in view of the French military boycott of Israel, Australia rejected Israel's repeated pleas to purchase from Australia Mirage aircraft and spare parts and to enter into production sharing arrangements. Likewise, External Affairs officials were in uproar when Gorton expressed in public his enthusiasm for the “Israel Army Reserve” and torpedoed a Royal Australian Air Force proposal for two of its officers to visit the Israeli Air Force.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Alan R. Taylor, *The Superpowers And The Middle East* (New York, 1991), p. 79.

¹⁶ Parliamentary Paper No. 62, 28 May 1969, Canberra, (henceforth, Report), p. 1. Pratt to Erell, 7 February 1969, ISA: 4168/25.

¹⁷ Pratt to IDFA, 17 December 1968, ISA: 4168/22. Speech by PM Gorton, 28 April 1968, ISA: 4168/24.

¹⁸ Pratt to IDFA, 15 November 1968, ISA: 4168/24.

¹⁹ Pratt to Comay, 17 December 1968, ISA: 4169/18.

Australia also rejected Israel's approaches for cooperation with the Israeli Defence Force's secret establishment and training of the Singapore Army.²⁰

Although the Australian Parliament was by and large pro-Israel it adopted a "hands off" approach and a degree of "responsible impartiality" towards the Arab-Israeli conflict. A Report of the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs on the Middle East situation, approved in 1968, held the Arab nations responsible for the continuation of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It also blamed Soviet sponsorship of the Arabs and the US support for Israel as the reason for the aggravation of the dispute. The Committee acknowledged Israel as the Jews' Promised Land in which Jews could hope to live a Jewish life on Jewish soil; their bastion against the persecution from which they had suffered for centuries; and their compensation for the hostility with which they had been treated in Europe.²¹ Their Report acknowledged Israel's vulnerability before the 1967 War due to its small size, long borders and threats to its free passage through the Straits of Tiran. It also highlighted the willingness of most of its "responsible leaders" to negotiate the final status of the occupied territories once the Arabs agreed to fully recognise Israel's existence. Regrettably, the Report maintained, the Arab world had refused to do so, or to negotiate until Israel withdrew to its pre-June 1967 boundaries.²²

The Committee's Report described Israel's military rule over the "administered" areas as inconspicuous and conciliatory, and praised its acceptance of trade from the West Bank to East Jordan, improving the living standard of the Arab population. It doubted, however, whether this could overcome years of hostile indoctrination of Arabs against Israel.²³ While acknowledging the aggravation of the Arab refugees' problem as a result of Israel's territorial gains in the 1967 War, it blamed the Arab High Command for their initial predicament in 1948 and denounced their continual use as "pawns in an international struggle". It hailed Israel's offer of financial compensation for the refugees; for granting Israeli citizenship and full citizen rights to those 170,000 Arabs who had remained in Israel in 1948, and reprimanded the Arab nations for refusing to discuss the question, their aim being repatriation, not compensation.²⁴

In regard to water shortage in the area, the Report censured the Arab League Council for having rejected in the 1950s the US plan for the allocation of water in the region. It recommended that all four countries dependent upon the waters generated by the rainfall and snowfall in the Lebanon Mountains should benefit in due proportion.²⁵

The Joint Committee also commended Israel for opening the Straits of Tiran to all shipping, including Jordanian²⁶ but blamed both Israel and Egypt for having failed to

²⁰ Cabinet Decision No. 379, 27 June 1967, NAA: A5840 379. Lourie to Memisrael Canberra, 20 June 1967, ISA: 4079/19. Pratt to IDFA, 20 May 1968, ISA: 4169/2. Pratt to IDFA, 10 January 1969, ISA: 4168/24. Braun to IDFA, 23 June 1969, ISA: 4168/27. EA to Australian Embassy Tel Aviv, 4 July 1969, 184, NAA: A1838/385 175/10/4 Pt 3. EA, "For The Minister", 7 May 1970, NAA: A1838/369 680/8/30 Pt 2. *Ha'aretz*, 16 July 2004. Moshe Yegar, *Hamasa Ha'aroch Le'Asia*, Haifa, p. 230.

²¹ *Report*, pp. 20-25, 35.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7, 16.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8, 10.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 1969, p. 8.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-13.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

agree on reopening the Suez Canal.²⁷ It accused the Western Powers of having inadvertently furthered Soviet objectives by appearing to support Israel and by having refused to supply arms to the Arab states, which had made Nasser completely dependent on the Communist bloc.²⁸ The limited impact of the Arab oil embargo on the West following their defeat in 1967 led the Committee to conclude that oil would always flow from the Middle East, unless the USSR cut off supplies to the West.²⁹

The Report reprimanded the UN for having failed to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict and for withdrawing its forces at Nasser's insistence in May 1967. It also took exception to the UN regularly adopting condemnatory resolutions against Israel and for its paralysis due to Soviet veto. It concluded that little would come out of the UN efforts until the USA and the USSR reached their own understanding.³⁰ It suggested that the Middle East would be of progressively diminishing strategic importance for Australia: while its exports to the region had grown, they constituted only a small percentage of overall exports. In fact, since the closure of the Suez Canal, Australia's best trade prospects were with the oil-rich countries east of Suez. Likewise, Australia's dependence on Middle East oil was restricted to crude oil of the asphalt kind, supplied by countries in the Persian Gulf, outside the area of immediate direct Arab-Israeli confrontation. This made the Canal irrelevant to Australia's oil supplies.

However, the Joint Committee judged that, as a trading nation, Australia was best served when all sea and air routes were open, and that it should therefore support the reopening of the Canal and free passage for ships of all nations through the Suez Canal and the Gulf of Aqaba.³¹ Its Report recommended:

- (a) continuing Australia's policy of responsible impartiality;
- (b) supporting international guarantees of permanent boundaries once they had been agreed upon;
- (c) making a generous financial contribution in conjunction with other nations, to the refugees settlement, once the parties resolved the problem;
- (d) offering technical skills to Middle East nations in order to raise their living standards, and establishing a number of scholarships in technical and other fields related to productivity and living standards;
- (e) reducing tension between the superpowers.³²

Meanwhile in March 1968 Egypt initiated a war along the Suez Canal with the aim of forcing an Israeli withdrawal. Known in Israel as "The War of Attrition" it ended in a stalemate in August 1970. During this war the USSR implanted itself more firmly in the region by sending massive military supplies to Egypt, Iraq, and Syria. In this same period Israel also clashed with Jordan, Syria and the Lebanon, and with Palestinians in Gaza where a very large number of Israeli soldiers and Arab civilians were killed and wounded. In July 1968 Palestinian fighters hijacked an Israeli El Al airliner in flight from Rome to Israel and forced it to land in Algiers. In December a machine-gun attack was made on an El Al airliner at Athens airport in which one passenger was

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.15-28.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-28.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 30-36.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 33-36.

killed. Israel responded two days later with a raid in Beirut airport destroying a large number of Arab airlines aircraft.³³

While Australia acknowledged the dangers posed by hijackers to international air traffic, the UN Security Council condemned Israel. This led the Zionist Federation of Australia and New Zealand (ZFA) to deplore the Council's failure to censure "the despicable Arab terrorist attack". Likewise, Pratt chastised *The Sydney Morning Herald* for criticising Israel while remaining non-judgemental about the Palestinian attack. Similarly, following the PLO assault on an El-Al plane in Zurich airport in which the pilot and three passengers were killed, the First Assistant Secretary of the Department of External Affairs, Dr James Cumes, expressed privately to Pratt his condemnation and abhorrence at the attack. However he insisted that Israel should not retaliate because it would only lose a supportive public opinion without stopping such attacks.³⁴ Indeed public support for Israel in Australia in 1969 remained high. Opinion polls showed that 45 per cent of Australians sympathized with Israel while only 3.2 per cent supported the Arabs. Support for Israel was strongest among Liberal and Country Party voters. It was weaker among ALP voters who nonetheless showed little support for the Arabs: many had no sympathy for either side or were undecided.³⁵

Prime Minister Gorton maintained his profound support for Israel in 1969 despite the advice from External Affairs. Addressing a Jewish audience in Melbourne at Israel's Independence Day celebrations, Gorton set aside the Department's prepared speech. It was written to avoid antagonising Arab states with which Australia had far more extensive economic interests and did not express support for Israel, nor for direct Arab-Israeli negotiation. Instead, in very emotional terms, Gorton reiterated his government's continuing support for the Jewish state. He endorsed Israel's insistence on direct peace negotiations, indicated his government's willingness to absorb into Australia persecuted Jewish refugees from Arab countries, and expressed his personal great admiration for the Australian Jewish community. In the same vein, in July 1969 in a message to Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, Gorton expressed his hope to visit Israel, and informed her that, on his personal instruction, the Australian Ambassador to France had raised with the French Minister of the armies, Pierre Mesmer, the question of supply of spare parts to the Israeli Mirages.³⁶

It appears that while External Affairs officials adopted a more realistic and rational approach based on their cold-headed perception of Australia's interests, which lay in preserving good relations with the Arab and Muslim world, Gorton was guided by his profound emotional attachment to Israel and to the Jewish people, while the House of Representatives Speaker, Sir William Aston, whose electorate contained a sizeable Jewish community, was an equally devoted supporter of Israel. He endorsed direct negotiations between Israel and the Arab states as an essential ingredient for peace; insisted that Israel should not be forced to return to the pre-1967 war position; denounced acts of terrorism against Israel; and insisted in reference to the Rogers Plan, which *inter alia* called for an Israeli withdrawal from Egypt territory, that Israel must

³³ Yaacov Shimoni, *Medinot Arav*, (Hebrew), Tel Aviv, 1990, pp. 307-317. Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston, 1979), pp. 344-349.

³⁴ Pratt to IDFA, 22 February 1969, ISA: 4168/24.

³⁵ Morgan Gallup Poll, 203, 18 April 1969.

³⁶ Eitan to Lourie, 23 July 1969, 257, ISA: 4169/2.

not be subject to decisions of world powers.³⁷ Israel is likely to have welcomed too comments by the Liberal Senator George Branson who conveyed to Pratt both his confidence that Israel was winning its war with Egypt and his great admiration for Israel's military capability which he described as a formidable obstacle to Soviet expansionism.³⁸

On the Labor side some strains in the party's relations with Israel began to surface. A resolution introduced at its 1969 Federal Conference described the continuing confrontation in the Middle East as "a threat to world peace". This apparently innocent statement was regarded by Israel as a prelude for a call for unconditional withdrawal to the 1967 borders. As well, Whitlam warned Israel against repeating the type of operation that it had carried out in Beirut,³⁹ and ALP Senators, Lionel Murphy and John Wheeldon, conveyed their reservations about Israel's apparent bragging about its military achievements. Whitlam and Murphy highlighted a significant decline in international support for Israel and within the ALP. An ALP Jewish Member of the House of Representatives, Dr. Moses (Moss) Cass, expressed alarm at "the emergence of militarism on both sides of the Iron Curtain, including Israel". While conceding Israel's need for an army, he warned that "He who lives by the sword dies by the sword". Cass insisted that peace would come not through armies but by a negotiated settlement. The ALP Member for Capricornia, Dr. Douglas N. Everingham, objected to Meir's insistence on direct negotiations with the Arabs on the ground that nations were becoming increasingly outdated as units of communal interdependence. Instead, he proposed "an agreement to abide by a common higher level conciliation". These remarks were most likely met with bewilderment, if not scorn, by Israeli officials. Pratt certainly remained more concerned with Israel's immediate survival amidst bitter neighbouring enemies who were openly declaring their aim of destroying the Jewish state. He assured Everingham that once the Arab states recognised Israel's right to exist as a sovereign state, all outstanding issues could be resolved by direct negotiations, the normal process for settling international disputes.⁴⁰

It is likely that senior ALP politicians appeared to the Israelis as a bunch of misguided and naïve idealists. To narrow these ideological differences in perceptions with the ALP, Israel established a fund in memory of the ALP Senator, Sam Cohen, to sponsor annual visits to Israel by Australian senior trade union leaders who would upon their return deliver memorial lectures in Australia.⁴¹ In March 1970 the Israel Labor Party hosted the ALP Parliamentary Secretary, Michael (Mick) Young, and in September 1970, ALP Member for Oxley, William (Bill) Hayden. The newly-

³⁷ Speech by Gorton, 22 April 1969 ISA: 4168/24. Hillel to IDFA, 27 May 1969, ISA: 4168/24. Pratt to IDFA, 25 April 1969, 23, ISA: 4169/18. Pratt to IDFA, 9 November 1969, ISA: 4168/2. Erell to the Ambassador, 18 January 1970, ISA: 4557/25. Quandt, *Peace Process*, p. 81.

³⁸ *Australian Jewish News (AJN)*, 31 July 1970. Pratt to IDFA, 30 January 1970, ISA: 4557/26. Pratt to Erell, 9 February 1970, ISA: 4557/25.

³⁹ SHAG to IDFA, 5 August 1969; Pratt to IDFA, 5 August 1969, ISA: 6625/2. Pratt to IDFA, 16 August 1969, ISA: 4168/26.

⁴⁰ Everingham to Israeli Ambassador, 15 January 1970, ISA: 4557/26. Pratt to Everingham, 27 January 1970, ISA: 4557/25.

⁴¹ Inbal to MASOK, 11 October 1969, ISA: 6625/2. Bahat to La'or, 26 December 1969, ISA: 4169/11.

Pratt to La'or, 9 February 1970, ISA:4557/34. Pratt to Erell, 9 February 1970, ISA: 4557/25. Charish to La'or, 13 February 1970, ISA: 4557/34.

appointed Israel Ambassador in Australia, Moshe Erell, met with ALP leaders, headed by Whitlam. However these meetings only deepened Erell's uneasiness. He concluded that ALP leaders were sincere in their progressive views, but lacked a degree of serious critical thinking: they measured Israel "with a ruler" to ensure there was no contradiction between its way of handling the conflict with the Arabs and their own conscience. Yet, Erell believed that if the ALP were to win office, the problem would not be so terrible as long as people like Whitlam led it. Erell also cultivated a closer rapport with the President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions, Robert (Bob) Hawke, and organised a visit to Israel by a "learning group" of young ALP activists. For all these efforts to build bridges with the ALP, Erell found the Liberal Party more well-disposed towards Israel, less ambivalent about the Communist world, and less inclined to closely scrutinise the details of Israel's policy.⁴²

During the period 1967 to 1970 disagreements also emerged between El Al and the Australian airline Qantas, over Qantas' refusal to have any bilateral links with Israel for fear of losing airport facilities in the Arab countries. Pratt consequently accused Qantas of lacking moral courage to stand up to Arab threats, and Israel Consul General, David Marmour, recommended mobilising Australian Jewish leaders to fight Qantas' "capitulation to the Arab boycott against Israel".⁴³ The seemingly bleak prospects of a PLO-Israeli agreement posed a further obstacle. While Israel refused to accept the establishment of a Palestinian state, the PLO Charter called for the elimination of the State of Israel. Indeed, 1970 saw an escalation in PLO violence, including causing a Swiss airline to crash near Zurich, with the loss of forty-seven passengers, together with seventeen Israelis. That same day PLO fighters killed seven elderly Jews in an old people's home in Munich. The PLO, armed and financed by Syria, Iraq, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, also established bases in Jordan from where they launched attacks on Israel.⁴⁴

In Australia, the "Inside Canberra" newsletter reported that Gorton, in disregard of advice from the newly renamed of Department Foreign Affairs and without consulting Cabinet, was persisting with a personal campaign to shift Australian policy "away from one of strict neutrality towards the Middle East conflict to one that would tend to favour Israel". Gorton's attitude was causing concern, particularly as Australia had the prospect of selling 3,000 tons of wheat to Egypt.⁴⁵ Israeli diplomats too had concerns of their own. After enjoying a whole-hearted support by External Affairs Minister Hasluck (1964-1969), the Israelis must have welcomed a statement in February 1970 by the newly-appointed External Affairs Minister, William McMahon,⁴⁶ in which he expressed support and admiration for Israel. McMahon criticised the Rogers Plan and the "exaggerated approval enjoyed by Arafat" in the West, and opposed the French-Libyan arms deal. Likewise, the departing Secretary of the Department of External

⁴² Embassy- Singapore, to MASOK, 18 March 1970; Erell to MASOK, 14 December 1970; Erell to MASOK, 24 December 1970, ISA: 4557/34. Erell to MASOK, 25 September 1970, ISA: 4557/26.

⁴³ Pratt to Lourie, 23 June 1967, ISA: 4079/20. Sharef to McEwen, 19 February 1968, ISA: 6625/6. Marmour to Erell, 24 March 1969, ISA: 4168/26. Ochert to Consul General of Israel, 30 June 1969, ISA: 4169/11. Pratt to MASOK, 30 January 1970, ISA: 4557/25.

⁴⁴ Martin Gilbert, *Challenge To Civilization: A History Of The Twentieth Century 1952-1999* (London, 1999), pp. 419-21. See also Shimoni, *Medinot Arav*, pp. 329-31.

⁴⁵ *Inside Canberra*, Vol. 24, 2 (21 January 1971), p. 3.

⁴⁶ McMahon served as Minister for External Affairs from 12 November 1969 to 10 March 1971; and as Prime Minister from 10 March 1971 to 5 December 1972.

Affairs, Sir James Plimsoll, had expressed satisfaction with Australia's relations with Israel. But, Israeli diplomats in Australia remained concerned with Australia's abstention at the UN on what they regarded as a pro-Arab resolution; the prolonged delay in the scheduled visit of an Australian military delegation to Israel; Australia's willingness to contribute to Egypt wheat valued at 40 million dollars; Israel's problem with Qantas; and increasing hostility towards Israel in the Australian press.⁴⁷ They were also troubled by information on the incoming Australian Ambassador to Israel, Marshall Johnston, reported to have harboured negative attitude towards Jews and Israel, and by the Minister for the Navy, James Killen's alleged anti-Semitism.⁴⁸ Erell and his predecessor Pratt were also uneasy about Plimsoll's successor, Sir Keith Waller's "aloof and unhelpful attitude",⁴⁹ and his opposition to an El Al air route to Australia. Erell thought this emanated from Qantas having established flights to Damascus, and a visit by an Australian delegation to several Arab countries.⁵⁰

The ALP Member for Wills, Gordon Bryant, shared Israel's apprehension, and accused the Government of siding with the Arabs; of not having insisted on a USSR withdrawal of its troops from Egypt; and of surrendering to the Arab boycott, by permitting Qantas to land in Arab countries but not in Israel. In response, McMahon insisted that the manning of Surface to Air Missiles (or SAM) sites in Egypt was a matter between the governments of Egypt and the USSR and not one in which the Australian government should interfere. He also insisted on Australia's strict neutrality in the Arab-Israeli conflict, and while confirming the government's approval of Qantas' flights to Damascus at Syria's request, claimed ignorance regarding Israel's exact position.⁵¹ Pratt found McMahon's reply entirely unsatisfactory.⁵² The *Australian Jewish News* protested that while, in the past, both under ALP and Liberal-Country Party governments, Australia had preserved officially a neutral stand while openly sympathising with Israel, the existing government had adopted, for economic reasons, a line indicating a significant change. The paper concluded that Israel's only reliable friends in Australia were members of the Jewish community.⁵³

A Jewish Country Party Member of the New South Wales Legislative Council, Asher Joel, tried to allay Israel's apprehension, assuring Marmour that McMahon had confirmed to him personally his support for Israel, but insisted he could not go public about it. He also attributed McMahon's caution to his lack of self-confidence in foreign affairs; to the Liberal Party's reservation regarding alleged support in the Australian Jewish community for the ALP, and to the fact that all sitting Jewish federal parliamentarians belonged to the ALP. Joel and Marmour therefore agreed that the government be lobbied about the danger of Soviet penetration of the Indian Ocean through the Middle East. In June 1970, and in marked contrast with his previous statement in Parliament, McMahon addressed the Asian and Pacific Council and

⁴⁷ Pratt to Erell, 29 May 1970; Bitan to MASOK and Bar-On, 9 April 1970, ISA: 4557/25.

⁴⁸ Erell, 24 February 1970, ISA: 4558/4. Marmour to MASOK, 9 March 1970, ISA: 4557/23. Trigor to Erell, 19 April 1970, ISA: 4557/25.

⁴⁹ Pratt to Erell, 11 June 1970, ISA: 4557/25.

⁵⁰ Erell to Shneerson, 14 September 1970, ISA: 4557/23.

⁵¹ *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates* (henceforth *CPD*), *House of Representatives* (henceforth *House*), Canberra, 3 June 1970.

⁵² Pratt to Erell, 15 June 1970, ISA: 4557/25.

⁵³ *AJN*, 12 June 1970.

warned of Soviet ambitions in the Middle East. Nevertheless, Pratt concluded that Australia was not prepared to do anything about it.⁵⁴

The Liberal-Country Party government's Middle East policy came under criticism from within its own ranks. The Minister for Supply, Senator Kenneth McColl Anderson, was reported to have stated privately that the supply of wheat to Egypt was not a foreign policy matter, but "wheat policy". Similarly, Defence Minister Malcolm Fraser scorned McMahon's statement in Parliament: "[he] will fill the Australian Navy boats with wheat and thus will drive back the Soviet Navy from the Indian Ocean." Likewise, the Democratic Labor Party and Aston called upon the government to be more active on this matter.⁵⁵ Aston praised Gorton's clear position, and assured his Jewish audience that there was no change in the Australian government's attitude.⁵⁶ His statement was warmly welcomed in Israel, and at Erell's suggestion, the *Knesset* (Israeli Parliament) invited the Speaker to visit Israel officially.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, the Israeli daily newspaper *Ma'ariv* claimed Australia's support for Israel had weakened substantially as a result of McMahon's political ascent, Gorton's decline, the desire among certain quarters in Canberra to improve relations with the Soviets, the wheat sale agreement with Egypt, and a growing impatience in Australia with the Israeli-Arab conflict.⁵⁸ Likewise, the ALP Jewish Member for Robertson and Erell's close confidant, Barry Cohen, accused the federal government of trying to have "two bob each way" in its Middle East policy. McMahon, motivated mainly by commercial considerations, and hence keen to maintain good relations with the Arabs, insisted on Australia's neutrality, while Aston maintained there was no change in the Government's attitude.⁵⁹ The Deputy Head for Economic Affairs in the Department of External Affairs, Laurence Corkery, advised Pratt that, since Australia placed great value on its exports, Israel should increase its bilateral trade with Australia.⁶⁰

When McMahon learned from Aston that members of the Australian Jewish community judged his attitude toward Israel to be "chilly", he met with the President of the New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies,⁶¹ and thereafter, in sharp contrast with his previous insistence on "strict neutrality", said in Parliament: "We want peace in the Middle East and we particularly want peace in the interest of Israel [...] We should ensure that Israel should have the right to live free from aggression and with its own territorial integrity remaining intact."⁶² Then, in November 1970, at a rally in Sydney before the Senate elections, McMahon denounced "the continuous blatant breach of the Cease Fire Agreement along the Suez Canal" by Egypt and the USSR.⁶³ It seems that McMahon was indeed inexperienced in matters relating to international affairs and was open to pressure by Australian Jewish leaders.

⁵⁴ Marmour to Pratt, 17 June 1970; Pratt to Erell, 22 June 1970, ISA: 4557/25; *Age*, 19 June 1970.

⁵⁵ Marmour to Pratt, 26 June 1970, ISA: 6626/6.

⁵⁶ Marmour to MASOK, 29 June 1970, ISA: 4557/25; *AJN*, 3 July 1970.

⁵⁷ Erell to Barkat, 6 July 1970, ISA: 4557/25. Barkat to Aston, 9 July 1970, ISA: 4557/26.

⁵⁸ *Ma'ariv*, 10 August 1970.

⁵⁹ *Sydney Jewish News*, 17 July 1970. *AJN*, 21 July 1970.

⁶⁰ Pratt to Erell, 27 July 1970, ISA: 6625/3.

⁶¹ Marmour to MASOK, 2 September 1970, ISA: 4557/25.

⁶² 1 September 1970, *CPD*, (House), Vol. 69, p. 755. Marmour to MASOK, 2 September 1970, ISA:4557/25.

⁶³ Marmour to MASOK, 23 November 1970, ISA: 4557/25.

Meanwhile, to end the military confrontations along the Suez Canal and Soviet involvement in support of the Egyptians against Israel, the USA increased its efforts to reach a cease-fire, which succeeded on 7 August 1970 with a truce agreement.⁶⁴ On 6 September 1970, PLO hijackers seized four international civil airplanes, and flew three of them at gunpoint to a desert airstrip in Jordan where they held many of the passengers hostage until Britain, West Germany and Switzerland agreed to release convicted Palestinian fighters. The PLO then blew the planes up. This was part of its plan to overthrow King Hussein and establish a Palestinian government in Jordan. Consequently, the Jordanian army inflicted heavy casualties on the PLO driving them out of Jordan.⁶⁵ When Syrian tanks subsequently crossed the border into Jordan, King Hussein appealed to the USA. In turn the USA warned the USSR of a possible American or Israeli intervention in support of Jordan and Syria withdrew its forces from Jordan.⁶⁶ Against this background and following extensive lobbying by Israeli diplomats aided by Australian Jewish leaders, McMahon expressed in Parliament regret at the movement of Soviet-manned and operated Egyptian SAM missiles into the Canal Zone, and expressed support for Jews persecuted in the USSR. In return he asked for the assistance of Jewish leaders in his electorate.⁶⁷ In November 1970, at Eban's request and due to intervention from Prime Minister Gorton's office, McMahon personally instructed the Australian UN delegation to vote against a "non-aligned" resolution which was adopted by UNGA by 57-16 (Australia, Israel, NZ, US) and 39 abstentions, "because it favoured only the Arab side".⁶⁸ Similarly, in December 1970, in response to Meir's plea, Gorton called on the USSR not to carry out death sentences passed on two Jewish Soviet citizens, accused of attempting to hi-jack a plane in an endeavour to escape. Gorton maintained that had the USSR permitted Jewish people to freely emigrate from the USSR, this incident would never have occurred.⁶⁹

Gorton's deep public affection for Israel and the Jewish people and these consequent actions were met with disapproval by some sections of the media. The *Canberra Times* journalist, David Solomon, consequently argued that a gap had been created between Australia's unchanged official policy and its actual increasing support for Israel. He warned against putting at risk Australia's relations with its Muslim neighbours without a compensating advantage, and took exception to the government's protest against anti-Jewish atrocities in Syria and the Leningrad Trials.⁷⁰ Similarly, Michael Richardson complained in *The Age* that Australia had been favouring the Israelis in order to appease widespread public sympathy for Israel and mollify the influential Jewish

⁶⁴ Shimoni, *Medinot Arav*, p. 312. G. Meir, *My Life* (London, 1975), p. 333, Gilbert, *Challenge To Civilization*, p. 419.

⁶⁵ Gilbert, *Challenge To Civilization*, pp. 419-21. See also Shimoni, *Medinot Arav*, p. 329-31.

⁶⁶ Shimoni, *Medinot Arav*, p. 331-2.

⁶⁷ CPD (House), 13 October 1970, Vol. 70, pp. 1998-1999. Record of Conversation Erell-McMahon, 28 October 1970, NAA: A1838/369 680/8/30 Pt 2. Erell to MASOK, 27 November 1970, ISA: 4557/20.

⁶⁸ Eastman to Erell, 5 November 1970, ISA: 4557/25. "For The Minister", Sydney, 224, From Cumes, Canberra, 13 December 1971, NAA: A1838/272 181/17/1/1 Pt 4. Erell to Lourie, 9 November 1970, ISA: 4557/25. Erell to MAUM 2 Director, 24 November 1970, ISA: 4557/25. MASOK to Canberra, 20 December 1970, ISA: 4557/25.

⁶⁹ Meir to Gorton, 26 December 1970, ISA: 6625/3. Press Release No. 123/19/3, 27 December 1970, ISA: 6625/3.

⁷⁰ *Canberra Times*, 6, 7 January 1971, *Shagrir* to MASOK, 6 January 1971, ISA: 4557/25.

community. He warned of commercial repercussions by the Arab states that had much larger trade with Australia than Israel.⁷¹ The Prime Minister's Department promptly retorted that the government, while being neutral, supported Israel's right to exist in peace like any other small nation, and would support Israel in the UN when it believed it was right. At the same time Australia assured Egypt of no change in its policy.⁷²

Israel continued to enjoy the support of the House Speaker Aston who, while on an official visit to Israel, reiterated his endorsement of his hosts' insistence on direct Arab-Israeli talks, and the free emigration of Jews from the USSR to Israel. *The Jerusalem Post* consequently described Aston as "one of Israel's most faithful and devoted friends in Australia", and praised Australia's long-standing friendship with the Jewish state.⁷³ However, in sharp contrast with the PM and Aston, and relying on Australia's officially stated policy of neutrality, and forewarning of possible harm to its relations with the Arabs, the First Assistant Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs, Colin Troup Moodie, rejected outright Erell's request that Australia encourage Egypt to negotiate with Israel directly.⁷⁴ *The Age* described Israel's tough stand against withdrawal from all the territories as a major obstacle for a negotiated settlement.⁷⁵ These were clearly warning signs for Israel that not all was well in its relations with Australia. Indeed, in April 1971, the Permanent Head of the Prime Minister's office, Sir Lenox Hewitt, warned Erell that with McMahon replacing Gorton as prime minister, Israel could expect much less support from Australia, particularly at the UN.⁷⁶ Israeli diplomats were also troubled by a visit to Australia by three Lebanese Parliamentarians and by the "well known propagandist", Klovis Maksoud, who was received by the Minister and the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs. They were also somewhat troubled by an Egyptian trade delegation visiting Australia, and a visit to Cairo by a senior Australian Foreign Affairs official.⁷⁷ The new Minister for Foreign Affairs, Leslie Bury,⁷⁸ acknowledged in Parliament the growing commercial significance of the Middle East to Australia, and, while insisting that Australia enjoyed friendly relations with both Israel and the Arab countries, it was not committed to either. He repeated Australia's support for a settlement ensuring the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of all states in the area, including Israel, within agreed borders and a just settlement of the refugee problem; guaranteed freedom of navigation through the international waterways of the region and the protection of areas of deep concern to the three world's great religions.⁷⁹ Interestingly, he was however more sympathetic and expressive towards Israel in his appearance before the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Liberal Party, where he warned that Soviet military

⁷¹ Michael Richardson, "Australia does a double-think", *Age*, 8 January 1971.

⁷² *Shagrir* to MASOK, 6 January 1971, ISA: 4557/25. *Canberra Times*, 8 January 1971.

⁷³ *Ma'ariv*, 5 January 1971. *Jerusalem Post*, 3, 5, 26 January 1971. *Canberra Times*, 8 January 1971.

⁷⁴ Draft For Moodie, "Middle East : Possible Australian Initiative", undated (~ February 1971), NAA: A1838/272 181/17/1/1 Pt 4. "Draft for The Minister, Cabinet Decision: Australian Policy on the Middle East", undated (~ February 1971), NAA: A1838/272 181/17/1/1 Pt 4. C.T; Moodie, "Middle East Situation", 3 March 1971, NAA: A1838/272 181/17/1/1 Pt 4.

⁷⁵ *Age*, 3 March 1971.

⁷⁶ Erell to MASOK Director, 23 April 1971, ISA: 4557/25.

⁷⁷ Erell to MASOK, 2 April 1971; Chasin to MASOK, 16 April 1971; Kariv to the Embassy, 22 April 1971, ISA: 4557/31.

⁷⁸ Bury served as Minister of Foreign Affairs from 22 March 1971 to 2 August 1971.

⁷⁹ CPD (House), Vol. 72, p. 1495, 6 April 1971.

activities in the Middle East could endanger the security of Israel and the entire Western world. Hence, he insisted, Western nations should help Israel defend itself.⁸⁰

Some officials at Foreign Affairs were, however, less sympathetic, and distanced themselves from Israel and the Australian Jewish community, arguing in April-May 1971 that Israel clearly had a greater interest in cultivating closer relations with Australia than vice-versa, and hailed Australia's neutrality as having enabled it to retain sufficient Arab goodwill to protect its commercial and civil aviation interests. Furthermore, the drafts expressed resentment of the strong pressure by the Australian Jewish community, arguing it impaired the government's ability to maintain a balanced Middle East policy. In May 1971, in contrast with earlier Departmental advice, the Commonwealth Parliament extended an invitation to the Knesset to send an official delegation to Australia.⁸¹ However the Department of Foreign Affairs continued to recommend that Australia should discourage any Israeli initiatives that could be misinterpreted by the Arabs to Australia's disadvantage, including a proposed Australian Defence mission to visit Israel, and accrediting a Military Attaché in Australia. Likewise the Department of Trade and Industry advised against a visit to Israel by any Australia Minister,⁸² and the Australian Ambassador to Israel, Marshall Johnston, advised that Australia should not seek actively to improve its relations with Israel. Some Foreign Affairs officials justified their unsympathetic view of Israel on the ground that Israel was less flexible than Egypt and consequently enjoyed less understanding internationally.⁸³ At the end of 1971 Erell and the Director of MASOK (the Asia-Pacific Section at Israel's Department of Foreign Affairs) Mordekai Shneerson, attributed Australia's more cautious, reserved and neutral attitude towards the Arab-Israel conflict to McMahon's appointment as Minister for Foreign Affairs instead of Israel's "most esteemed friend", Hasluck; to the large scale sale of Australian wheat to Egypt; to Australia's problems at the UN regarding PNG; and to Australia's links with Indonesia and Malaysia.⁸⁴

Israel's envoys in Australia remained concerned with relations with the ALP, particularly with the ALP 1971 Conference call upon the Arab nations and Israel to reach, through the UN and otherwise, a permanent settlement in the area. This ALP stance fell short of Israel's position that peace could only be achieved through direct negotiations. Whitlam's support for the Rogers Plan which had been rejected by Israel also caused some concern. Erell and Marmour consequently recommended utilising pro-Israel ALP personalities, including Hawke, South Australia Premier Don Dunstan, the Victorian Leader of the Opposition Clyde Holding, Hayden, and Jewish parliamentarians such as Joseph (Joe) Berinson.⁸⁵ As bilateral relations cooled, Israeli officials must have taken solace in Hawke's very successful visit to Israel. Hawke took

⁸⁰ Marmour to MASOK, 24 May 1971, ISA: 4557/25.

⁸¹ *CPD* (House), Vol. 72, 22 April 1971, pp. 1929-1930. Record of Conversation with Raphael, 30 April 1971, NAA: A1838/385 175/10/4 Pt 3. McMullen and Aston to Barkat, 13 May 1971, ISA: 4557/8.

⁸² "Draft Brief for Heads of Mission Meeting", undated (~ 7 April 1971), NAA: A1838/272 181/17/1/1 Pt 4.

⁸³ Burns to Secretary EA, 21 July 1971, NAA: A1838/272 175/10 21.

⁸⁴ Shneerson to *Mankal*, 7 February 1972, ISA: 5306/21. "Australia", undated, ISA: 5307/3. Erell to MASOK Director, 20 December 1971, ISA: 4557/25. Shneerson to *Mankal*, 7 February 1972, ISA: 5306/21.

⁸⁵ Marmour to Erell, 5 July 1971; Erell to Marmour, 7 July 1971, ISA: 4557/34.

a very unusual diplomatic step when, at the request of the Israeli Government, he proceeded from Israel to Moscow to explain Israel's position.⁸⁶ On his return to Melbourne he delivered the "Sam Cohen Memorial Lecture" and a lecture at Sydney University which proved to be good public relations for Israel.⁸⁷ In December 1971, he visited Israel again, where he discussed with *Histadrut* officials his plan to establish economic enterprises in Australia by the ACTU.⁸⁸ Erell believed economic cooperation between the ACTU and Israel would lead to a long-lasting common interest between Australia and Israel.⁸⁹ He also regarded Hawke as a future candidate for the prime ministership of Australia and encouraged him to pursue it more vigorously.⁹⁰

In April 1972, at Hawke's invitation, a delegation of *Chevrat Ha'ovdim* — the business sector of the *Histadrut* — visited Australia where they were received by Whitlam and part of his Shadow Cabinet, Don Dunstan, and Foreign Affairs Minister, Nigel Bowen.⁹¹ Hawke attributed the decline in support for Israel in Australia to ignorance about the reasons for its reluctance to withdraw from the territories, and consequently advised that Israel educate the public on this matter.⁹² Whitlam, who also visited Israel in December 1971, was lectured by Meir who severely criticised socialist governments for ignoring the ideals of socialism.⁹³ Israel also tried to establish closer defence ties with Australia. However, while the Australian Defence establishment was keen to set up such links, the Department of Foreign Affairs, fearing Arab retaliation, rejected Israel's approaches. Australia also maintained its opposition to civil aviation links with Israel fearing it could risk its landing rights in Damascus and Cairo.⁹⁴ Indeed the Department's Secretary, Sir Keith Waller, insisted there was little scope for developing real substance in Australia's relations with Israel.⁹⁵ Erell was, however, successful in December 1971, in persuading Australia to abstain on a proposed resolution condemning Israel regarding the fate of the Palestine refugees.⁹⁶

Australia's policy regarding the humanitarian issue of persecuted Jews in Arab countries was also markedly influenced by the particular individuals making the decisions — by their values, roles and interests. Thus, in 1969, under Gorton's premiership, Australia protested against public executions of Jews in Baghdad. But, two years later, under the premiership of McMahon, Foreign Affairs insisted in regard

⁸⁶ *JP*, 1, 5, 21, 22 July 1971.

⁸⁷ Erell to MASOK, 8 October 1971, ISA: 4557/25. *Ma'ariv*, 16 November 1971.

⁸⁸ Bergner to Yavor, 19 December 1971, ISA: 4557/33.

⁸⁹ Erell to Yavor, 30 December 1971, ISA: 4557/35. Shneerson to Erell, 16 January 1972, ISA: 5307/13.

⁹⁰ Interview with Erell, Jerusalem, May 2005.

⁹¹ MASOK to Canberra, 11 April 1972; Erell to MASOK Director and to Yavor, 26 April 1972; Rechter to Shneerson, 20 June 1972, ISA: 5307/8.

⁹² *Ma'ariv*, 12 December 1971.

⁹³ Shneerson to Erell, 26 December 1971, ISA: 4557/25.

⁹⁴ Henderson, 5 November 1970, NAA: A1838/369 680/8/30 Pt 2. "Israeli Military Attaché and Defence Mission", 26 August 1971, NAA: A1838/385 175/10/4 Pt 3. Moodie, 10 September 1971, NAA: A1838/272 181/17/1/1 Pt 4. Blakeney to the Secretary, 27 October 1972, NAA: A1838/385 175/10/4 Pt 3. Waller to Johnston, 2 May 1972, NAA: A1838/272 175/10/21. "Proposed Sale of TAA Viscounts to Israel", 3 November 1970, NAA: A1838/369 680/8/30 Pt 2.

⁹⁵ Post Review 1970/1971, 9 June 1971, 241, NAA: A1838/272 175/10/21. Johnston to Waller, Directive, 14 June 1972, NAA: A1838/272 175/10/1 Pt 11.

⁹⁶ For The Minister, from Cumes, 224, 13 December 1971, NAA: A1838/272, 181/17/1/1 Pt 4. EA to Australian UN Mission, 13 December 1971, NAA: A1838/272 181/17/1/1 Pt 4.

to persecuted Jews in Syria, that the Australian Government's primary responsibility was to its own citizens and the protection of Australia's interests overseas.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, in view of the approaching 1972 federal election, Prime Minister McMahon became more forthcoming. Assisted by Edmund Fox, the Liberal Member for Henty, an electorate with a significant proportion of Jewish voters, McMahon went to great length to voice in Parliament his wholehearted support for Syrian Jews. Earlier, in January 1972, Deputy Secretary of the Prime Minister's Department, Allen Griffith, had intimated to Erell that McMahon was as pro-Israel as Gorton and blamed Foreign Affairs officials for Australia's voting pattern at the UN.⁹⁸

Foreign Affairs officials on their part acknowledged begrudgingly some commitment to Israel's right to exist, but reiterated that Australia's trade and civil aviation interests in the area were largely confined to the Arab world. Furthermore, they blamed Israel for the impasse in the Arab-Israeli conflict, and maintained that, as a UN Security Council member, Australia would be required to make moral judgements on the dispute, and would, "of course", be influenced by "Australia's material and strategic interests [which] overwhelmingly favoured co-operation with the Arabs". The Department therefore repeatedly recommended observing neutrality scrupulously, and concluded that Australia's interest in Israel was "little more than sentimental, and diminishing at that". Waller himself fully accepted his junior's advice and criticised Israel for creating "facts" in the occupied territories, particularly in Jerusalem, instead of actively seeking a solution to their conflict with the Arabs.⁹⁹

Frederick Truelove, the acting head of the Middle East Section of the Department of Foreign Affairs, went further. He advised against ministerial and other official visits to Israel, against trade and cultural relations and in favour of obstructing efforts by the Israelis and the Australian Jewish community in support of closer links between the two countries. Rather, he counselled promoting visits by Arab dignitaries to Australia.¹⁰⁰ However, McMahon ignored this advice, and in an April 1972 address to members of the Melbourne Jewish community to mark Israel's twenty-fourth anniversary, he praised Israel as a miracle and "a heaven for the oppressed and unfortunate" and highlighted the many links which closely bound Australia and Israel. He also promised that Australia was ready to support "any constructive effort designed to further a negotiated settlement".¹⁰¹ Nevertheless in May 1972 when three Japanese gunmen working for Palestinian terrorists opened fire at Lod airport in Israel, killing twenty-seven passengers,¹⁰² McMahon expressed his government's deep shock at "the indiscriminate murder [...] of innocent men, women and children" and grave concern,

⁹⁷ *CNIA*, Vol. 40, No.2, February 1969, p. 55. Jacobson to Waller, 3 November 1971, NAA: A1838/353 175/10/8 Pt 2. Shann to Jacobson, 15 November 1971, NAA: A1838/353 175/10/8 Pt 2. "Status of Jews In Arab Countries", undated, ~ November 1971, NAA: A1838/353 175/10/8 Pt 2.

⁹⁸ Cooper, Record of telephone conversation with Hutchens, 25 May 1972, NAA: A1838/272 175/10/1 Pt 11. *CPD* (House), 18 April 1972, Vol. 77, pp. 1683. EA to Australian Consulate General, 22 April, NAA: A1838/272 181/17/1/1 Pt 4. Erell to MASOK, 14 January 1972, ISA: 5306/21.

⁹⁹ Truelove, "Israel – Annual Review 1971/72", 30 March 1972, NAA: A1838/272 175/10 21. "Call by the Egyptian Ambassador on the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade and Industry", 10 February, 1972, NAA: A1838/272 181/17/1/1 Pt 4. C.H. Stuart, "Annual Review: Israel", 29 March 1972, NAA: A1838/272 175/10/21. Waller to Johnston, 2 May 1972, NAA: A1838/272 175/10/21.

¹⁰⁰ Truelove, "Israel – Annual Review 1971/72", 30 March 1972, NAA: A1838/272 175/10 21.

¹⁰¹ Speech by McMahon, 23 April 1972, ISA: 5307/19.

¹⁰² Gilbert, *Challenge To Civilization*, p. 447.

but refrained from blaming anyone specifically.¹⁰³ Similarly in September 1972, when PLO gunmen killed eleven Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympic Games in Munich,¹⁰⁴ McMahon — as did Whitlam and Opposition Leader in the Senate, Lionel Murphy — condemned the killings but failed to attribute responsibility to the PLO.

In Parliament the ALP's Joe Berinson criticised the government for failing to identify clearly and unequivocally Arab terrorism as responsible for the Munich massacre.¹⁰⁵ But his party leader Whitlam responded to the Munich massacre by urging the resolution of “those problems of borders and dispossession which are increasingly aggravating relations in the Middle East”; and Senator Murphy strongly denounced the retaliatory bombing by the Israeli Air Force in Syria and Lebanon, describing it as “the slaughter by the State of Israel of innocent women and children”.¹⁰⁶ Erell consequently protested to Murphy.¹⁰⁷ When Erell subsequently met with Whitlam, Murphy, and other ALP Senators, he discovered that Israel's “problem with Whitlam” ran much deeper than he had previously thought. He reported: “Whitlam's doubts whether the establishment of Israel could be morally justified.” The others, according to Erell, “[had] their heads in the clouds [and] under the spell of theoretical doctrines”.¹⁰⁸

In his meeting with the President of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, Whitlam seemed burdened by the feeling that a great injustice had been perpetrated against the Palestinians. He stated that he would support Israel unequivocally and wholeheartedly only when this injustice was rectified but did concede that it would be unrealistic for Israel to admit the mass of Arab refugees and he acknowledged Israel's need for security, including the need for the demilitarisation of the Sinai. Erell consequently concluded that Whitlam was “lost in the Middle East labyrinth” but remained convinced that a Labor government in Australia would not be very different in its attitude to Israel from the existing Liberal-Country Party coalition Government.¹⁰⁹

Erell was only partly right in his analysis. Both Government and Opposition had to take into account Australia's interests in the Arab world. The Department of Foreign Affairs' increasing hostility towards Israel must have had some impact on McMahon who seemed to be vacillating under opposing influences — that of the department on the one hand and Australian Jewish leaders and Israel's envoys in Australia on the other. At the same time the Liberal-Country Party government was still the lesser of two evils from Israel's point of view. From his report one gets the sense that Erell did not fully appreciate the change in Foreign Affairs and in Whitlam's own attitude towards Israel. He would of course become more fully aware when Whitlam became Prime Minister in December 1972.

According to Knight, the Middle East was hardly mentioned during the 1972 Australian election campaign. It was far from the minds of most politicians and Australians generally. Neither the Prime Minister nor the Opposition Leader mentioned

¹⁰³ Canberra to IDFA, 3 June 1972, 11a, ISA: 5306/21.

¹⁰⁴ Gilbert, *Challenge To Civilization*, p. 447.

¹⁰⁵ CPD (House), 13 September 1972, Vol. 80, pp. 1362-1364.

¹⁰⁶ Embassy to IDFA, 6 September 1972, 15 September 1972, 22, ISA: 5306/21. CPD (Senate), 12 September 1972, Vol. 53, P. 672-5.

¹⁰⁷ Erell to Murphy, 13 September 1972, ISA: 5307/1.

¹⁰⁸ Erell to MASOK, 22 September 1972, ISA: 5306/21.

¹⁰⁹ Erell to MASOK: 25 September 1972, ISA: 5307/1; 22 September 1972, ISA: 5306/21.

the Middle East in their election policy speeches.¹¹⁰ But the Department of Foreign Affairs in Jerusalem took the forthcoming election seriously and claimed in a background paper that Australian officials had no qualms in referring to influence by Israel and “attempts by Zionism” to exert pressure on the parties in Australia and on people holding central positions. The paper asserted:

It is no secret, that Jewish influence is exercised through money invested in industries, the press, radio and TV stations. It is no secret that Israel has begun a while ago to sway ALP members, the party expected to win the next election. It is no secret, that the head of the workers association, [Hawke] who is a very powerful person, had visited Israel twice. His daughter is working in an Israeli kibbutz [...].

It assumed that after the election, whether formed by the ALP or the Liberal-Country Party coalition, the next Australian government would be significantly open to Egyptian and Arab influence, and that the existence of Egyptian, Lebanese and Palestinian communities in Australia could also benefit the Arab governments. At the same time, the paper argued that the Middle East was not a sensitive problem for Australia, even though the Suez Canal constituted a vital issue for Australia's trade to Europe.¹¹¹

On its part, the ALP used quite cleverly Whitlam's previously close relations with Israel and its Labor Government. Despite his moral reservations regarding Israel's legitimacy, an ALP election advertisement in the Jewish press included a photograph of Whitlam in the company of Meir; a reference to Evatt's support for the establishment of Israel; and a pledge that an ALP government would support Israel's right to exist within defensible borders and a lasting peace through face-to-face negotiations. It also expressed unequivocal opposition to terrorism.¹¹² But, despite Erell's relentless optimism, the coming to power of an ALP Government under Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, in the December 1972 election, opened a new very problematic chapter in Australia-Israel relationships.

¹¹⁰ John Knight, “Australia And the Middle East: A Note on the Historical Background, 1947-72”, Knight and Patz, eds, *Australia and the Middle*, pp. 11-12.

¹¹¹ “Australia”, undated, ISA: 5307/3.

¹¹² Erell to MASOK, 17 November 1972, ISA: 5307/1.