National Affairs

A USTRALIA ENTERED 2004 with Prime Minister John Howard facing an election later in the year, Australian military personnel in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the economy in vigorous health despite concerns over an overheating real estate market. The Federal Parliament approved a landmark free-trade agreement (FTA) with the U.S. during the year, which came into effect at the beginning of 2005.

Australia's involvement in Iraq, already controversial within the country, drew increasing criticism as the insurgency intensified and the search for weapons of mass destruction yielded inconclusive results. Fortunately, Australia suffered no military fatalities. In July, an independent report cleared the Howard government of the charge of pressuring Australia's intelligence agencies to support the case for war. But the report, by former diplomat and intelligence chief Philip Flood, found that intelligence on Iraq's suspected store of weapons had been inadequate.

The fight against terror closer to home continued, with enhanced security and intelligence cooperation between Australia and its Southeast Asian neighbors. An alarming reminder of the threat posed by the group Jemaah Islamiah came in September, when a car bomb exploded outside the Australian embassy in Jakarta, killing at least eight people and wounding more than 160. Australia secured its first conviction for terrorism when Jack Roche was sentenced to nine years in jail. Roche had conspired with Al Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiah to blow up the Israeli embassy in Canberra. Australian terror suspect David Hicks—captured in Afghanistan late in 2001 and held in detention at Guantanamo Bay since—was formally charged by U.S. authorities in June. Fellow Australian detainee Mamdouh Habib was later released without charge and returned to Australia in February 2005.

Although the Australian Labor Party's Mark Latham, recently installed as opposition leader, enjoyed a prolonged political honeymoon through early 2004, by midyear Prime Minister Howard had regained as-
The national election on October 9 delivered a decisive victory to Howard's Liberal-National coalition, with an increased majority in the Parliament and control of its upper house, the Senate, for the first time in decades. The Labor Party was left in turmoil after its fourth consecutive defeat, with Latham facing criticism over his handling of the campaign. He abruptly quit politics altogether in January 2005, citing ill health. Paradoxically, Labor retained control of all eight state and territorial governments.

Among the minor parties, the Greens did not make the electoral gains that some had predicted. Right-wing populist Pauline Hanson mounted another unsuccessful campaign for the Senate, this time as an independent, but garnered more publicity for her appearances on a celebrity dancing show than for any discernible political platform.

Israel and the Middle East

The war in Iraq was the major focus of Australian political debate about the Middle East. In the lead-up to the October 9 election, Labor—which, in 2003, had opposed armed intervention in Iraq in the absence of a UN Security Council resolution mandating such action—pledged to remove the modest number of Australian troops in Iraq “by Christmas.” The government criticized this as “cutting and running,” and Labor leader Latham clarified that, should his party come to power, some Australian troops would remain in order to protect Australian diplomatic and aid officials.

At the end of 2004, Australia had 850 troops in and around Iraq. These consisted of 85 troops providing security to Australian civilians and the Australian representative office; a contingent of 150 Royal Australian Air Force Hercules personnel providing airlift support; 80 air-traffic controllers at Baghdad International Airport; 53 army officers training the new Iraqi army; 12 people in a Navy training team; 270 people on the HMAS Melbourne conducting maritime interception operations in the northern Gulf; and 160 air force personnel. There were also around 30 Australian civilian and military experts assisting the provisional authority in the country until the end of its tenure in July. Australia committed $125 million in reconstruction assistance for Iraq in 2003–04.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict was not a prominent factor in the election campaign, as both major parties, in statements addressed to the Jewish community, pledged friendship with Israel and a commitment to peace. The reelected coalition government remained among Israel's clos-
est diplomatic allies, while also continuing to support the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel through President Bush’s “road map” strategy. The Labor opposition followed a largely similar approach.

There were fewer debates in the Parliament during 2004 on Israeli-Palestinian affairs than in 2003. The death of Yasir Arafat in November provided the occasion for one such debate. A prominent new Liberal MP, Malcolm Turnbull, spoke of fresh opportunities for peace opened up by the removal of Arafat from the scene, and Labor MP Michael Danby—the only Jewish member—remarked that “the greatest obstacle to achieving a peace settlement was the obstructionism of the late Yasir Arafat.” But Julia Irwin, a backbench Labor MP, eulogized the Palestinian leader as a “remarkable man” who “represented more than anyone the hopes of the Palestinian people.” Decrying those who described him as an obstacle to peace, she blamed Israel for the failure of the Oslo peace process, saying that “not a single one of the withdrawal agreements was honored by the Israeli government.”

Parliament debated and unanimously passed a motion early in 2004 condemning the growth of international anti-Semitism in recent years, promising “to take all possible concrete actions at a national level to combat this threat to our peaceful and diverse nation,” and calling on Australia to use its diplomatic efforts abroad to counter such manifestations. In the course of debate on the motion, representatives of both major parties noted a relationship between anti-Semitism and certain extreme criticisms of Israel. Beside the action by the Federal Parliament, the state parliaments in Victoria and New South Wales also unanimously condemned international anti-Semitism.

Foreign Minister Alexander Downer made a three-day official visit to Israel on January 25–27. Known to be a warm personal supporter of Israel, he declared at an Australia-Israel Chamber of Commerce dinner, “I am delighted to be here in Israel again to give my support as the foreign minister of Australia. Australia will always stand by you, through thick and thin, and in recent years, there’s been more thin.” While somewhat critical of the routing of Israel’s West Bank antiterror fence, Downer opposed referral of the issue to the International Court of Justice in The Hague, saying, “political issues should not be referred to a judicial body. This current move sets a dangerous precedent.”

Much of the foreign minister’s stay was devoted to economic cooperation between the two countries. Downer urged that “mutual investments should be boosted in each other’s economics and business partnerships formed, especially in the high-tech IT sector where Australia excels.” Un-
fortunately, the visit was marred by controversy after the Israeli daily *Ma'ariv* incorrectly reported a remark by Downer about Australia's openness to tourism and immigration as an invitation for young Israelis to migrate to Australia, leading to public criticism of Downer by a number of Knesset members.

Downer issued repeated statements throughout the year condemning terror attacks on Israeli civilians and calling on the Palestinian leadership to take stronger action against them. He also issued a statement expressing “regret” in response to the International Court of Justice’s advisory decision condemning Israel’s security barrier, stating that Australia did not view the ICJ ruling as “appropriate, or helpful,” adding, “As I have so often said before, Israel has a right to defend itself from acts of terrorism and the security barrier has been demonstrably successful in protecting innocent Israeli lives from suicide/homicide bombers.”

A bipartisan Australian parliamentary delegation, led by Senator Sandy McDonald and Senator Kim Carr, which had visited Syria, Lebanon, and Israel in November 2003, issued a report in March 2004. After summarizing the opinions of the various parties with whom the group had contact during the visit, the report criticized Israel, stating, “It’s hard to see any justification for the destruction of buildings, equipment and infrastructure, other than to punish and demoralize.” Another parliamentary delegation consisting of six younger members went to Israel in February under the sponsorship of the Australia/Israel and Jewish Affairs Council’s Rambam Fellowship: Senators Stephen Conroy, Linda Kirk, and Ursula Stephens, and MPs Steven Ciobo, Sophie Panopoulos, and Andrew Southcott.

Australia voted against a UN General Assembly “emergency special session” resolution on July 20 demanding that Israel dismantle its West Bank security barrier in response to the advisory decision of the International Court of Justice. The opposition (Labor) foreign affairs spokesperson Kevin Rudd stated that it would have been “more appropriate” had Australia abstained. At the regularly scheduled General Assembly session in December, Australia cast its vote against the Israeli positions on “Jerusalem,” “the Golan,” “peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine” (a resolution apparently endorsing the Palestinian “right of return”), and the “special information program on Palestine of the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat.” But Australia once again voted against allocating funding to the “Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People,” and for the first time opposed a resolution authorizing funding for the “Division of
Palestinian Rights” in the Political Affairs Department of the UN Secretariat.

Australia chaired the UN Human Rights Commission in 2004. It had pledged beforehand to continue its efforts, launched in 2000, to promote the reform of UN treaty bodies, including the UN Human Rights Commission. On March 24, Australia was one of the two countries to vote against the commission’s condemnation of Israel for killing Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin. While opposed to the killing, the Australian delegate said the resolution was one-sided.

In June, the American Jewish Committee awarded Prime Minister Howard its American Liberties Medallion at a ceremony in Washington. The award, the highest presented by the AJC, was bestowed “in recognition of [his] longstanding commitment, as a member of the Australian Parliament for more than 30 years, and as prime minister since 1996, to championing democracy and human rights, and his unequalled friendship toward the United States and support of Israel.”

A controversy broke out in February over remarks made by Sheikh Taj-el-Din al-Hilaly, the imam of Sydney’s Lakemba Mosque, during a visit to Lebanon. According to an Australian embassy translation of a published sermon he delivered during a meeting with Hezbollah at al-Quds Mosque in Sidon, Hilaly called for jihad against Israel and said that “September 11 is God’s work against oppressors.” Prime Minister Howard told Parliament on February 19 that if the reported statements were accurate, “what Sheikh Hilaly said deserves to be condemned in the strongest possible terms. Incitement to a jihad against the State of Israel is utterly unacceptable coming from the leader of any community in this country.”

In late December, Australia asked Amir Laty, a junior officer at the Israeli embassy in Canberra, to leave the country. The government attempted to keep the request private, but an Israeli source revealed it early in 2005, exciting media speculation about possible links to espionage. But the Australian government refused to explain, Israeli authorities claimed ignorance, and the reason for the decision remained unclear.

Elsewhere in the Middle East, Trade Minister Mark Vaile visited the United Arab Emirates in May 2003 and exploratory talks continued in 2004 on a free-trade agreement. Australia also continued its renormalization of relations with Libya, after diplomatic ties, severed for more than a decade, were renewed in 2002. Foreign Minister Downer visited Libya in May 2004, meeting with the prime minister, Dr. Shukri Ghanem, and Foreign Minister Avd al Rahman Shalgam. Downer pledged to establish an Australian diplomatic mission in Tripoli.
The Media

Australian media coverage of Israel remained unbalanced, but, overall, not as anti-Israel as in previous years. The worst of the mainstream newspapers was still the Canberra Times, the only daily in the nation’s capital. It regularly ran columns by anti-Israel polemists Gwynne Dyer and Robert Fisk, and reprinted pieces from Britain’s most anti-Israel mainstream paper, the Independent, as well as occasional submissions from members of the International Solidarity Movement. Other problematic papers were the Age and the Sydney Morning Herald, both published by the Fairfax organization. Ed O’Laughlin, the Israel correspondent for the Fairfax papers, often offered an anti-Israel slant. Columns by Tony Parkinson, foreign editor of the Age, generally showed a more balanced understanding of the issues. Other informative and fair columnists were Greg Sheridan of the Australian, Andrew Bolt of the Herald Sun, and Piers Akerman of the Daily Telegraph.

In the electronic media, the public broadcasters—ABC and SBS—continued to present problems in their coverage of Israel. An ABC internal memo came to light instructing staff not to refer to Hamas, Islamic Jihad, or Hezbollah as “terrorist” organizations because they were not so designated by the UN, ignoring the fact that these groups were deemed “terrorist” by the Australian government. Thus the ABC described attacks in Moscow, Beslan, Jakarta, and Iraq as “terrorist,” but not similar actions against Israel. SBS, for its part, refrained from referring to any attackers as terrorists.

Both the print and electronic media tended to present Israeli actions in a negative light. For example, Australians were told that Ariel Sharon’s intention to evacuate Gaza was not a step toward peace but evidence of an intention to keep the West Bank; that Israel’s security barrier was a “wall”; and that the killings of Hamas leaders Sheikh Yassin and Abdel Aziz Rantissi would only lead to more bloodshed, with no mention of the two men’s responsibility for terror attacks. Many of the obituaries of Yasir Arafat underplayed his terrorist record, some even lauding him.

Hostility toward Israeli policies, opposition to the war in Iraq, and exaggerated notions of Jewish influence sometimes led media commentators to credit classical anti-Semitic stereotypes. Thus Margo Kingston, editor of the Sydney Morning Herald Web site, wrote that “the fundamentalist Zionist lobby controls politics and the media in the U.S. and Australia,” while Sunday Age columnist Terry Lane opined, “the Zionist
lobby in this country is malicious, implacable, mendacious and dangerous.” To be sure, such outbursts by mainstream journalists were rare.

**Anti-Semitism and Extremism**

There were 425 incidents of anti-Semitism reported in 2004, a decline in comparison to the two previous years, but still the third highest annual amount ever recorded. The pattern over a 15-year period indicated an alarming trend: 469 incidents in 1990–92; 679 in 1993–95; 899 in 1996–98; 953 in 1999–2001; and 1,553 in 2002–04.

Of the 2004 total, 25 were reports of assault and property damage; 47 of face-to-face harassment; 14 telephone threats; 33 examples of threatening and/or abusive hate-mail; 45 graffiti attacks; and 261 other incidents that included offensive e-mail, posters, leaflets, and stickers that qualified as “racist violence” under the definition of Australia’s Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.

Extremist groups in Australia varied greatly in their memberships, activities, and target audiences. Some of these organizations were not centrally focused on Jews, but rather appealed to populist and xenophobic emotions to propagandize against the rights of all “outsiders,” primarily scapegoating indigenous Australians and immigrants. Examples were One Nation, the AUSI Freedom Scouts, the Australian National Socialist Movement, and the Australia First Movement.

The Adelaide Institute, a loose conglomeration of individuals around self-styled Holocaust revisionist Fredrick Toben, was surely the most malicious anti-Jewish Australian group. Its published materials and Web site promoted the fiction of a Jewish conspiracy that controlled governments around the world in the interests of Zionism, using the “hoax” of the Holocaust to displace the Palestinian people from their land.

The Australian League of Rights was once described by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission as “undoubtedly the most influential and effective, as well as the best organized and most substantially financed, racist organization in Australia.” With a now elderly membership that still drew inspiration from the moribund Social Credit movement of the 1930s and 1940s, it held meetings, conducted action campaigns, and sought publicity for its anti-Semitic assessment of domestic and international affairs. Under its director, Betty Luks, the league published a weekly newsletter, a monthly magazine, and a quarterly journal, and maintained a Web site.
The Citizens Electoral Council (CEC) continued to distribute large quantities of literature reflecting the views of the American extremist Lyndon LaRouche, including charges of conspiratorial activity by Jewish and antiracist organizations in Australia. It spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on Australian electoral campaigns, much of it raised from donations of more than $1,500 each, but won very few votes, averaging 0.06 percent over the past decade. CEC ran ads in the press, radio, and on television, and was particularly active in handing out literature on college campuses and at outside venues hosting Jewish community functions. Its one partial success in 2004 was convincing a number of prominent Australians to join Islamic, Arab, and far-right extremists in signing a petition against Australia’s antiterrorism legislation.

The deceptively named Australian Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) continued to advocate Holocaust denial, with most of the group’s public announcements aimed at protecting the “rights” of Holocaust deniers and other extremists. John Bennett, the group’s motivating force, is on the editorial advisory committee of the Journal of Historical Review published by the notorious Institute for Historical Review in California.

In most cities, small groups of neo-Nazis, sometimes including violent skinheads, operated. They were suspected of racist violence against Asian students and harassment of members of left-wing groups. Many of these extremists were unaffiliated with any formal organization, but one group, Australian National Action, engaged in public activities of this sort. Its leader, Michael Brander, claimed on his Web site that he was being persecuted “because he states that he does not think that the plan to exterminate Europe’s Jews in the Second World War is proven.” Brander sued a journalist for defamation for calling him a racist, but the Adelaide magistrate ruled against him, noting that “denial of the Holocaust and failure to condemn the principles espoused by Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party” were proof of racism.

**Jewish Community**

**Demography**

As of 2001, the year of the most recent census, Australia’s Jewish community numbered about 84,000, or 0.44 percent of the country’s total population of 20 million. This was 4,000 higher than in 1996. The actual number of Jews was surely even more, as religion was an optional ques-
tion on the census form. An estimated quarter of the population preferred not to answer the religion question (Jewish community leaders believed that many of the Jews not answering were Holocaust survivors fearful of "registering" as Jews). The actual number of Jews was thus probably 120,000.

Melbourne had the largest Jewish community in the country, followed by Sydney. The census showed that most Jewish newcomers to Australia were from South Africa, and that Hebrew was the primary language at home for 6,000 Australians.

**Communal Affairs**

Graeme Leonard succeeded Jeremy Jones in December as president of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ), the representative Jewish communal body, while Ron Weiser continued as president of the Zionist Federation of Australia. Mark Leibler remained national chairman of the Australia/Israel and Jewish Affairs Council (AIJAC), and Dr. Colin Rubenstein continued as its executive director. AIJAC maintained its close association with the American Jewish Committee. Stanley Roth continued as federal president of the United Israel Appeal, and Michael Naphtali as head of the Jewish National Fund.

**Education**

More than half of all Jewish children aged 4–18—including almost 70 percent of those aged 4–12—received full-time Jewish education in the 19 Jewish day schools in Australia. Spanning the religious spectrum, these schools continued to rank at the highest level for academic achievement, reflecting the community’s major investment in the schools as a means of preserving Jewish continuity. Day-school enrollments continued to grow despite ongoing concerns over high costs and the challenge to the community to find new sources of funding.

There was an increased emphasis on adult education, largely under the influence of the Melton Program, which had nearly 500 students in Sydney and Melbourne. Short-term courses utilizing guest lecturers also proved popular. Top priorities for the future, according to Australian Jewish educators, were expanded Jewish studies on the university level and teacher education to provide quality faculty for the day schools.

On the university level, the Australasian Union of Jewish Students (AUJS) continued to play an active and effective role on campus, partic-
ularly in combating anti-Zionist and racist manifestations and promoting exchange programs for Australian Jewish students and their Israeli counterparts.

**Interfaith Dialogue**

Continuing cooperation between the different religious communities in Australia was evident in 2004 with a number of joint actions aimed at building interfaith harmony and cooperation. The Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ), the National Council of Churches in Australia, and the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils repeated their joint calls for tolerance, and together coordinated the groundbreaking “Journey of Promise,” in which ten Jewish, Muslim, and Christian participants, aged 18–25, spent a week living and learning together. In Adelaide, the Jewish and Muslim communities initiated a “Children of Abraham” project of seminars, lectures, and dialogues. These activities received support from the Federal Government, which also co-hosted an international interfaith conference, together with the government of Indonesia, in December, at which a Hanukkah celebration was attended by representatives of ten Asian and Pacific governments, and prominent Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu leaders. This took place in the Muslim nation of Indonesia.

Churches were also important proponents of diversity and tolerance, often in concert with the Jewish community. The Uniting Church in Australia continued to explore ways of taking joint action with the Jewish community to combat prejudice, the two groups holding their National Dialogue twice each year. The Catholic Church also was a partner of the Jewish community in promoting interreligious and multifaith understanding, as the ECAJ and the Catholic Bishops’ Committee continued to hold their Annual Conversation. The mainstream Christian bodies maintained their policies of prohibiting the use of their premises by racist and anti-Jewish groups, and advising their representatives not to share platforms with known extremists. When Mel Gibson’s controversial film, *The Passion of the Christ*, appeared in Australian theaters, a number of Christian leaders publicly warned against interpreting its message in an anti-Semitic fashion.

To be sure, not all Christian clergy were sympathetic to Jewish sensibilities. At a May 1 demonstration against Israel at that country’s embassy in Canberra, Bishop George Browning of the Anglican Church accused the Jewish state of “systematic slaughter of the Palestinian people,”
claimed to understand suicide bombing as a natural reaction to Israeli oppression, and described Israel’s erection of the security barrier as “spitting in the face of God.”

Relations with the organized Australian Muslim community were correct, if not cordial. Its leaders disassociated themselves from anti-Jewish acts that occurred during the year, such as the publication in Salam, the magazine of the Federation of Australian Muslim Students and Youth, of anti-Semitic remarks, the sale of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion at an Islamic bookstore in Sydney, and statements hostile to Jews expressed by extremist Muslims in Sydney and Melbourne as part of a fund-raising campaign for a new mosque.

Culture

Notable among the many Jewish cultural organizations operating in Australia were the Melbourne-based Jewish Museum of Australia and the Sydney Jewish Museum. Both were world-class institutions that maintained extensive permanent collections of Judaica and Holocaust memorabilia, and mounted special exhibitions from time to time. They also hosted numerous cultural events, including literary evenings, book launches, and musical and dramatic presentations. Adelaide’s Jewish community maintained a virtual museum, the Adelaide Jewish Museum (www.adelaidejmuseum.org).

The annual Jewish film festival, which regularly attracted large and enthusiastic audiences, continued to be held in Sydney and Melbourne.

The Australia Israel Cultural Exchange (AICE), founded in 2002 and headed by Albert Dadon, made a significant contribution to the cultural life of both countries. Its activities in 2004 included an exhibition of Australian Aboriginal art and an Australian film festival in Israel, and Israeli film and documentary festivals in Australia.

Personalia

In January 2004, the Australian government conferred Australia Day honors on a number of prominent Jews. Former ECAJ president Nina Bassat was appointed a Member in the Order of Australia (AM) for her services to the Jewish community and her promotion of greater inter-group understanding. Rodney Rosenblum received an AM for his work with both Austcare and Jewish Care, while Raymond Joseph’s AM was for services to the Jewish community of Victoria. In addition, Dr. Ernst
Ehrmann and Rysia Rozen both received medals in the General Division (OAM)—Dr. Ehrmann for his work in dentistry as well as in the Jewish community, and Ms. Rozen for her contribution to the Jewish community of Victoria, particularly the National Council of Jewish Women.

The annual Queen's Birthday Honors awarded in June 2004 recognized the contributions of several members of the Jewish community. Rabbi Raymond Apple, Mrs. Eva Besen, and Prof. Fredrick Mendelsohn were made Officers of the Order of Australia (AO), while Brian Sherman and Marcus Schoenheimer received AMs. Rabbi Apple was honored for service to the community through promoting interfaith dialogue and harmony, and by raising awareness of social justice, ethical, and spiritual issues; Mrs. Besen for her contribution to the arts; Prof. Mendelsohn for his contribution to medicine, especially neuroscience and biomedical research; and Mr. Schoenheimer for service to manufacturing and industry, as well as to the Jewish community. Mr. Sherman, a board member of AIJAC and founding chairman of its Rambam Fellowship program, received his AM for services to the community as a philanthropist and benefactor to a wide range of arts, education, business, and commerce. Several members of the Jewish community received Medals in the Order of Australia (OAM). These included Eric Cohen, Dr. Hilton Immerman, Thomas Keleman, Henry Lippman, Mahla Pearlman, Phillip Samuell, and Harvey Teller.

The Australian Jewish community mourned the passing in 2004 of Tony Blashki, who played a role in the establishment of Mt. Scopus College; Judith Epstein, entertainer and author; and Isador Magid, co-founder of AIJAC and former chairman of the United Israel Appeal.

COLIN L. RUBENSTEIN