Australia

National Affairs

Australia entered 2005 with a recently reelected Liberal-National coalition government heading into its ninth year, led by Prime Minister John Howard. The economy was in good health, a landmark free-trade agreement (FTA) with the U.S. coming into effect at the beginning of the year.

Australian military personnel were serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. For some six weeks the nation was gripped by the plight of an Australian civilian hostage in Baghdad, 63-year-old expatriate businessman Douglas Wood. The murderous fate that Wood surely faced at the hands of his captors was averted when Iraqi troops raided the compound where he was held, and Wood returned home a national hero.

The fight against terror closer to home continued, with enhanced security cooperation between Australia and its Southeast Asian neighbors. Yet Australia suffered further terror fatalities in 2005 when four vacationers were killed by suicide bombers in Bali on October 1. Also, one Australian died and another was seriously injured in the London suicide bombings in July (see above, p. 317).

The Australian government sent aid and police specialists to both London and Bali. After the London attacks there were proposals to tighten the counterterrorism laws in Australia. In November, as debate on the subject continued, authorities in Sydney and Melbourne arrested 16 men suspected of planning a terrorist act on the Lucas Heights nuclear reactor in Sydney.

Australian terror suspect David Hicks—captured in Afghanistan in late 2001 and held in detention at Guantanamo Bay ever since—remained in legal limbo pending his appeal of formal charges against him filed in 2004. Another Australian detainee, Mamdouh Habib, was released without charge and returned to Australia in February 2005.

Following the abrupt resignation of Mark Latham as leader of the opposition Australian Labor Party in January, Kim Beazley, a former party head, returned to lead it again. But he found it hard to make headway with a party still traumatized by the disastrous Latham leadership and
further weakened in the middle of the year when the government coalition assumed effective control of the Senate.

By year’s end Australia had passed the new antiterrorism measures, made sweeping changes in Australia’s industrial-relations laws, tightened the criteria for welfare eligibility by providing incentives to join the workforce, and made university student-union dues voluntary.

But it was not all good news for the government. For one thing, cases of wrongful detention and wrongful deportation of Australian citizens highlighted deficiencies in the Immigration Department, prompting an apology from the prime minister. Also, people of Middle Eastern appearance became targets of violence, and Middle Eastern (mainly Lebanese) gangs retaliated with attacks on Caucasians. The most serious incident of this kind occurred in Sydney on December 11, when violence ensued after thousands of people turned out for a rally to protest an alleged attack on two lifeguards by Middle Easterners at the popular Cronulla beach.

Israel and the Middle East

Australia remained among the countries friendliest to Israel. Prime Minister Howard told the National Parliament on March 7, “I am speaking as somebody who has always been a close and unapologetic supporter of the State of Israel.” Sharing this view was not only Foreign Minister Alexander Downer, who, like Howard, was a Liberal, but also Kim Beazley, the opposition leader, and Kevin Rudd, his foreign-affairs spokesperson. To be sure, criticism of Israel could be heard from some opposition backbenchers. One of them claimed, on September 13, that Israel’s policies amounted to “ethnic cleansing” and were turning Palestinian areas into “ghettos” and “concentration camps.” Faced with protests from both sides of the aisle, the speaker withdrew these particular words, although not the substance of her claim.

The highlight of Israel-Australia relations during 2005 was the visit of President Moshe Katzav—the first by an Israeli head of state since 1986—from February 28 through March 6. The visit, celebratory and symbolic rather than focused on any specific diplomatic objectives, was highly successful. After meeting with Prime Minister Howard, Katzav saluted him as “a good friend of the Jewish state” and thanked him for Australia’s role in the fight against international terrorism. Howard, for his part, praised Israel as a “model democracy in the Middle East.”
Katzav also met with the opposition Labor leaders and reported that Israel "has good friends on both sides of the aisle in Australian politics." In his interviews with the media, the Israeli president stressed the danger posed by Iran's nuclear program.

Another positive aspect of the visit was the overwhelming emotional response that Katzav elicited from Australian Jews. The president, in turn, lauded the Australian Jewish community as "an example to other [Jewish] communities around the world because of their high rates of Jewish education and comparatively low rates of assimilation."

Marring the Katzav visit somewhat was a strong media focus on the so-called "Latygate" affair, the expulsion in December 2004 of Amir Laty, a junior Israeli diplomat in Canberra, for reasons never publicly explained (see AJYB 2005, p. 519). Asked about this repeatedly during his time in the country, President Katzav denied any knowledge of the circumstances and claimed that the affair had not significantly affected Australia-Israel relations.

A further distraction was the reigniting of a conflict with New Zealand over two Israelis convicted of passport fraud in 2004. New Zealand alleged the two were Mossad agents and suspended ties with Israel, demanding a public apology (see AJYB 2005, p. 263). When Israel announced that President Katzav would come to Australia, New Zealand's prime minister, Helen Clark, publicly stated that he would not be welcome in New Zealand, even though no visit to that country was planned. While in Australia, Katzav issued several verbal apologies to New Zealand that were reported in the media, only to have them rejected as inadequate by Wellington. An official letter of apology from the Israeli Foreign Ministry was sent in June, and diplomatic relations between New Zealand and Israel were resumed in August.

On September 16, Prime Minister Howard met with Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon in New York, their first meeting as heads of government (the two had met previously, before Sharon became prime minister). Reflecting his government's support for Israel's disengagement from Gaza, Howard told Sharon, "I think you are very, very courageous and you deserve the respect of the world for having done it."

Knesset speaker Reuven "Ruby" Rivlin visited Australia in November. Beside his discussions with political leaders, Rivlin, like Katzav before him, met with the Jewish community.

Australia's voting record at the UN continued to reflect its understanding of Israel's legitimate concerns; only the U.S. and a few small Pacific islands surpassed Australia in supporting Israel at the UN. Australia
voted against funding both the “Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People” and the “Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat,” bodies that systematically pushed a pro-Palestinian and anti-Israel agenda. It was also reported that Foreign Minister Downer sought to convince other nations to vote likewise, and to support other reforms of the UN as well. As in past years, Australia voted against some of the more inflammatory resolutions concerning the Arab-Israeli conflict passed annually by the General Assembly, while abstaining on others.

Australia advocated firm action against Iran’s presumed nuclear-weapons program. When Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad made his infamous speech calling for Israel to be “wiped off the map,” the Iranian ambassador was called in for a diplomatic rebuke. And, speaking in the Federal Parliament on October 31, Foreign Minister Downer said, “This call from the leader of a significant nation state is one of the most appalling, dangerous and unacceptable views that we have heard for a long time.” A statement of “utmost condemnation” was issued in December, after Ahmadinejad denied that the Shoah had occurred. The opposition fully supported the government in both cases.

Iraq played a less prominent role in Australian political debates than it did in 2003 and 2004, though the war and Australia’s military commitments in the country remained subjects of discussion. Australia actually increased its troop presence in Iraq in 2005, as an additional contingent was sent to help provide security for Japanese engineers operating in the country’s south. This brought the number of Australian troops in Iraq up to approximately 1,370. Its budget for 2005–06 committed A$22.5 million for Iraqi reconstruction. The political opposition’s policy was to reduce the Australian troop presence in Iraq, in consultation with the Americans, but to increase civilian aid.

Foreign Minister Downer visited Iraq in December 2005 for talks with government ministers there. The visit followed the revelation by the UN’s inquiry into the Oil-for-Food scandal that the Australian Wheat Board (AWB) was one of the largest sources of kickbacks to the Iraqi regime: more than U.S.$200 million may have been paid in bogus transportation fees to the government of Saddam Hussein. AWB was, by law, the monopoly exporter of Australian wheat, and the revelations about the kickbacks damaged Australia’s prospects for the further sale of wheat to Iraq, a very important market for its large grain-growing sector. The new Iraqi government effectively ruled out additional sales through the AWB,
and Downer engaged in intensive diplomacy to attempt to alleviate the damage and preserve the trade relationship.

Australia continued to pursue its interests elsewhere in the Middle East, focusing on trade and political issues, including countering terrorism. In March, during a visit to Australia of Sheikha Lubna bint Khalid al-Qassim, the United Arab Emirates minister for economy and planning, the two countries agreed to negotiate a bilateral free-trade arrangement.

Prime Minister Howard visited Turkey in April, and hosted a return visit from Turkish prime minister Recep Erdoğan in December. Some minor agreements of an economic nature resulted, and there was discussion of conservation and preservation of facilities at ANZAC cove in Turkey, the site of the World War I battle of Gallipoli, an important event in Australian history. Terrorism was also on the agenda, with Howard praising "the strong stand that the people of Turkey have taken against terrorism" and Erdoğan arguing that the invasion of Iraq had made that country "a training ground for terrorism."

Australia also sought improved relations with Pakistan, whose president, Pervez Musharraf, visited in June to discuss agricultural trade and measures against terrorism. The two nations signed a memorandum of understanding providing "a framework for bilateral counterterrorism cooperation" that encouraged "exchanges of information and intelligence, joint training activities and capacity building initiatives," according to the official media release. Howard returned the visit in November, and reportedly urged Musharraf to enlarge Pakistan's dialogue with Israel; whether or not because of this advice, Pakistan did upgrade relations with Israel, allowing the first ever ministerial-level meetings and accepting earthquake aid from the Jewish state. In December, Australia supported Pakistan's admission to the Cairns Group, which consisted of 18 major agricultural exporting nations and was chaired by Australia.

The Media

Throughout the year there tended to be a correlation, among left-leaning commentators, between criticism of Israel and opposition to Western policies generally. Thus many of the same voices that portrayed Israel's disengagement from Gaza as a cynical ploy to secure the West Bank also attacked the war in Iraq, suggested that the world should accept a nuclear Iran, blamed the July bombings in London on the West, and considered the Australian government's antiterror legislation anti-Muslim.
Overall, coverage of Israel by the Australian media in 2005 did not vary greatly from previous years, and was, perhaps, a bit better. The news services of both publicly owned television networks—the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), a multicultural station—showed improvement, although there were still instances of inaccuracies and lack of context. The ABC’s Israel correspondent, Matt Brown, usually filed objective reports, but the network’s radio correspondent, Mark Willacy, often showed pro-Palestinian bias, especially when the news cycle was a little slow. One continuing source of irritation with the ABC was its refusal to use the word “terrorists” to denote those who murdered Israeli civilians, even though the term was used for those who randomly killed civilians in London, Bali, and other places. SBS, which usually refrained from calling anyone a terrorist, used the word in connection with the Bali restaurant bombings in October. ABC and SBS public-affairs programs and documentaries were often critical of Israel, the Iraq war, and the Bush administration, although SBS did show an excellent French documentary exposing the tendentiousness of conspiracy theories about the September 11 attacks.

Among the print media, the greatest biases were found, once again, in the Fairfax broadsheets—The Age in Melbourne and the Sydney Morning Herald—as well as the Canberra Times, the only mainstream paper in Australia that carried opinion pieces by Robert Fisk and others from the British left-wing paper, The Independent. The Fairfax papers relied heavily on the The Guardian of London, almost as anti-Israel as The Independent, and their own Israel correspondent, Ed O’Loughlin, who tended to portray Israel in the worst possible light. The Age, in particular, continued its drift to the anti-Western left, dismissing its only conservative op-ed columnist, Gerard Henderson, whose column continued to appear in the Sydney Morning Herald. When the SBS aired a documentary exposing the myth of a “massacre” in Jenin, the television reviewer for The Age found it “flawed and deeply biased.”

The other major media chain was the Murdoch-owned News Ltd, whose flagship national paper, The Australian, provided comprehensive coverage of the Middle East that was far more even-handed than that of the Fairfax papers. The Australian established its own bureau in Israel in 2005, and reports from the current correspondent, Martin Chulov, were generally fair and informative, as were the columns of Greg Sheridan in the same paper. Other News Ltd publications also published columnists who reported objectively about Israel, such as Andrew Bolt in the Herald Sun (Melbourne) and Piers Akerman in the Daily Telegraph (Sydney).
Anti-Semitism and Extremism

Although the overall number of recorded anti-Semitic incidents in 2005 was significantly lower than the record set in 2002, it was still about 10 percent higher than the average annual total over the previous 15 years. The number of incidents categorized as “harassment,” where no physical attack took place, such as verbal abuse and threats, was 54 percent higher than the 15-year average.

Extremist and anti-Semitic groups in Australia varied greatly in their memberships, activities, and target audiences. Most of the better-known Australian groups maintained links with foreign extremists, such as militia movements in the U.S., Christian Identity churches, the Lyndon LaRouche organization, and others.

Even so, there was considerable mobility among such groups, as individuals moved between advocating policies to disadvantage Indigenous Australians, anti-Semitism, neo-Nazism, ultranationalism, populism, and pseudo-militia posturing. Even the polarities of extreme right and left lost their distinctiveness as opposition to “globalization” attracted adherents from both, and Islamic and Arab hostility toward Jews drew sustenance, ironically, from the same sources as white supremacist anti-Semitism.

Among the most extreme anti-Jewish groups was the Adelaide Institute, which gave allegiance to Frederick Toben, a self-styled “Holocaust revisionist,” who, for example, opened his newsletter for the year with this heading: “27 January 2005—Holocaust Memorial Day—welcome to Jewdayism.” Over the course of the year, the institute’s newsletter, publications, and Web site issued unstinting denunciations of Jews and Israel, and consistently denied the facts of the Holocaust. This material was also posted on neo-Nazi Internet bulletin boards, and, according to the Jerusalem Post, Toben himself was interviewed at length by Mehr, the official Iranian news agency, promoting Holocaust denial.

The Australian League of Rights, whose roots were in the moribund Social Credit movement of the 1930s and 1940s, was 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.” Its elderly membership continued to hold meetings, conduct action campaigns, and seek publicity for its anti-Semitic assessments of domestic and international affairs. Under the leadership of its director, Betty Luks, it maintained a Web site and published the weekly On Target and On Target Bulletin, the monthly magazines Intelligence Service, New Times, and Social Creditor.
and a quarterly journal, *Heritage*. It also distributed anti-Semitic books, cassettes, and videos.

The Citizens Electoral Councils (CEC), reflecting the views of Lyndon LaRouche, made available large quantities of extremist literature seeking to prove that Jewish and antiracist organizations were conspiring to control Australia and the world. The LaRouche organization had, over the years, spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on electoral campaigns, including the 2004 election, but with meager results, averaging around 0.06 percent of the vote. Its one success in 2005 was in convincing a number of prominent Australians to join Islamic, Arab, and far-right extremists to sign a petition, published in mainstream newspapers, railing against Australia's new 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 best known figure, sat on the editorial advisory committee of the *Journal of Historical Review*, published by the notorious Institute for Historical Review in California.

Small groups of racist skinheads operated in cities and towns across Australia and were believed to be responsible for harassment and even violence against Asian students and members of left-wing groups. The Australian media reported that three former members of an elite army unit had been members of a neo-Nazi gang while serving in the military. While most of the skinhead groups were little more than gangs, one, Australian National Action, had the trappings of an organization, and staged rallies and published materials that maligned Jews and immigrants.

A newcomer to the extremist scene was the Australian chapter of the Church of the Creator. Although it had no more than three identifiable supporters, its presence on the Internet and participation in online newsgroups and in the Queensland regional media made a mark. The World Church of the Creator Australia referred, on its Internet homepage, to "the parasitic Jews," and urged "creators" to take action to "re-take" Australia from Jews and "non-whites."

**JEWISH COMMUNITY**

**Demography**

The latest census figures, for 2001, indicated 84,000 Jews in Australia, about 0.44 percent of the entire population. But since religion was an
optional question on the census form, estimates of the actual number of Jews ranged as high as 120,000. Australia was one of the few countries outside Israel where the Jewish community was not in demographic decline. Melbourne was the city with the largest Jewish population, followed by Sydney. Most recent Jewish immigrants came from South Africa.

**Communal Affairs**

There were no significant changes in the leadership of the major Australian Jewish organizations in 2005. Graeme Leonard continued as president of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ), the official Jewish communal representative body; Ron Weiser remained president of the Zionist Federation of Australia; Mark Leibler was still national chairman of the Australia/Israel and Jewish Affairs Council (AIJAC); and Dr. Colin Rubenstein continued as AIJAC’s executive director. AIJAC maintained its close association with the American Jewish Committee. Stanley Roth was federal president of the United Israel Appeal, and Michael Naphtali headed 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 of locating 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.

In higher education, the Australasian Union of Jewish Students (AUJS) continued to play an active and effective role on campus, particularly in combating anti-Zionist and racist manifestations and in promoting exchange programs with Israel for Jewish students.
Interfaith Activities

Relations between the different religious communities were harmonious in 2005, and there were several cooperative actions aimed at building even greater interfaith understanding. The ECAJ, the National Council of Churches in Australia, and the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils repeated their earlier joint calls for tolerance. A number of Christian groups and representatives of the Baha’i faith condemned anti-Semitic attacks, and Jewish groups joined others in condemning vilification of Australian Arabs and Muslims.

Joint activities with Christian groups continued. The ECAJ once again held its Annual Conversation with the Catholic Bishops’ Conference and its biannual National Dialogue with the Uniting Church in Australia. There were also signs of better relations with the Anglican Church, which had been highly critical of Israeli policies. The Christian groups continued their policy of refusing to allow racist and anti-Jewish groups to hire their premises, and barring their own representatives from sharing platforms with known extremists.

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 these world-class institutions maintained extensive permanent collections of Judaica and Holocaust memorabilia, as well as 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.adelaidej-museum.org). The annual Jewish film festival, which consistently 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 exchange of culture between the two countries. Its activities in 2005 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 2005, the Australian government conferred Australia Day Honors on a number of prominent members of the Jewish community.
Mark Leibler, AIJAC chairman, was made a Companion of the Order of Australia (AC) for his services to the Jewish community, contributions to Aboriginal reconciliation, and accomplishments in business, the law, and tax reform. Lady Mary Fairfax was also awarded the AC, in recognition of her extensive community service and generous support for a range of organizations, including the Sydney Jewish Museum.

Australian Jews appointed as Members of the Order of Australia (AM) included Prof. Douglas Joshua, for his services to medicine; Dr. Helen Light, director of the Jewish Museum of Australia since 1991; the Hon. Kenneth Marks QC, in recognition of his services to the judiciary and law; Henry Mendelson, chair of the Australian Council of Christians and Jews; Harvey Cooper, for his services to the judiciary and work in rehabilitation programs for lawbreakers; and Louis Challis, for his work in developing standards of building design to deal with environmental noise. The Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) was received by Kenneth Arkwright, for service to the Perth Jewish community; Dr. Louis Bernstein, who passed away in May 2004, for service to medicine; Sandra Fleischman, for her work in devising and providing a special religious service for women; Dr. Leonard Green, for raising funds for the Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind People and the New South Wales Spastic Centre; Kathy Hilton, for service to young people through programs and support services; Robyn Lenn, president of the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW); Peter Lenny and Rachel Lenny, of Perth, for many years of service to the Jewish community; George Keen, for his service to Sydney’s Central Synagogue; Samuel Kurtner, for his volunteer work for people with physical disabilities; Graham Segal, founding member and president of the New South Wales Society of Jewish Jurists and Lawyers; and Tom York, for service to Australian basketball and handball, and over 40 years of involvement with the Maccabi movement.

The Queen’s Birthday Honors in June 2005 recognized the contributions of several prominent members of the Jewish community. These included Jeremy Jones, AIJAC director of international and community affairs and immediate past president of the ECAJ, given an Order of Australia (AM) for his work in multiculturalism, interfaith dialogue, and enhancing Australia’s reputation internationally, and Jillian Segal, a vice president of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies, for her work in business law and for the community through a range of organizations. Those named Officers of the Order of Australia (AO) included Justice Alan Goldberg, former deputy president of the ECAJ; Geoffrey Levy, for his services to establish the Rugby World Cup in 1987; and Allan Moss, for
his services to the investment banking industry. The Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) was awarded to Sydney Benjamin, for his services to the community, particularly through public speaking programs and Jewish communal organizations; Helen Bersten, for work with the Australian Jewish Historical Society; Rabbi David Freilich, for services to the Council of Christian and Jews in Western Australia and the Rabbinical Association of Australia and New Zealand; and professor Ron Sekel, for his development of a hip-replacement prosthesis.

In 2005, the Jewish community mourned the passing of Lloyd Davies, a renowned literary scholar and a key figure in the successful Australian bid to host the World Shakespeare Congress in 2006; Phillip Geoffrey (Gidon) Druery, a much respected teacher at Mt. Moriah College, Sydney's largest Jewish day school; the Hon. Kenneth Marks, a former judge of the Supreme Court of Victoria and a pioneer of mediation in the Dispute Resolution Centre; and Cara Walker, cofounder of the Women's International Zionist Organisation (WIZO) Australia.