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Beth Sholom Grand Gala: ‘A Night to Feel Tremendous Pride in Who We are as Jews’



Gala Chair Samantha Alperin (second from right) with (starting at left) Parker, Rachel and Leeya Alperin and husband Lon Alperin at right.

Photos by Diane Reich

Demonstrating resiliency during troubling times, some 250 guests attended Beth Sholom Synagogue’s 2023 Grand Gala on Saturday evening, December 2. Guests dressed to the nines, danced, laughed, ate and cherished the joy of spending time with each other.

“Tonight is about celebrating Beth Sholom’s achievements, growth, and

blessings,” said President Naomi Katz in her remarks. “We are thrilled to see this room filled with people from throughout the Jewish community who care about the life and vitality of our wonderful shul.”

The evening kicked off with cocktails and hors d’oeuvres in the synagogue’s spacious community court. Then the doors opened to a festive social hall as



Rabbi Sarit Horwitz with Stanley and Dot Bilsky

the Memphis Soul Remedy band began its set of Memphis funk, soul and blues. The band, made up of moonlighting physicians, nurses and surgeons, played for two hours nonstop as guests crowded the dance floor.

“It was a fabulous evening,” said Rabbi Sarit Horwitz. “It was a night for us to feel tremendous pride in who we are as Jews and to celebrate all that we can accomplish when we come together

in a unified way.”

Still, Israel was not far from everyone’s thoughts. Guests were able to watch a video compilation of congregants’ expressions of solidarity and support for Israel. The video is available on Beth Sholom’s Facebook page.

Katz noted that the evening was made possible by an outpouring of sponsor-

(See Gala Page 5)

Chanukah Celebration at Baron Hirsch



On Thursday evening, December 14, Baron Hirsch Congregation hosted a beautiful dinner with 400 attendees celebrating Chanukah. The night was filled with families and friends connecting through prayer, dinner, laughter and Chesed Projects created by parents and children for our Israeli soldiers.

In welcoming talented comedians Andrew Tavin and Eli Lebowicz, the

evening relieved some much-needed tension from the ongoing war in Israel. “The self-effacing humor and ability to chuckle at our people’s idiosyncrasies and traditions struck an appropriate tone in allowing us to take ourselves a little less seriously than we had been for so many weeks,” remarked Rabbi Lichter. The message was clear that despite the terror and continued captivity of our

people, we can still laugh with one another even while having our Israeli brothers and sisters in mind.

The night began with the recitation of Tehillim on behalf of the soldiers and families in Israel. It is something that has been incorporated into every program Baron Hirsch has hosted since October 7. Lighting the full menorah on the eighth night followed by a delicious

dinner prepared by kitchen manager Zak Shayne and synagogue volunteers, attendees enjoyed themselves thoroughly, prior to being entertained by the hysterical show.

The Mitzvah Shuk, organized by beloved youth directors Dina and Eitan Selter, gave parents and children the

(See Baron Hirsch Page 2)

We Stand with Israel.

There is still so much to be done to help the Israeli people, and Federation is here to help shine a light, provide resources and foster hope. Donate using the QR code. You can also send a message to our brothers and sisters in Shoham, our Israeli sister city by emailing shoham@jcpmemphis.org, and visit our office to pick up campaign yard signs, yahrzeit candles, We Stand with Israel bracelets, and blue ribbons.



My Teen Israel Experience



Jacqueline and friends at the Dead Sea

By Jacqueline Beeber

Jacqueline Beeber, daughter of Mary Beth and Greg Beeber is a junior at Lausanne Collegiate School. Memphis Jewish Federation’s Lemsky Endowment Fund provided her with a Teen Israel Experience grant to offset the costs of her BBYO Israel Journey program. All rising juniors and seniors are eligible for grants of up to \$3,000 to attend a recognized teen summer or semester program in Israel. Teen Israel Experience applications for Summer 2024 are open and can be accessed at Lemsky Endowment Fund | Jewish Community Partners (jcpmemphis.org)

On my trip to Israel this summer, I experienced connections to many new friends, cultures, and places. Before the trip, I believed every person I would meet would be the same because we all have Judaism in common. Fortunately, this was not the case. While everyone in my program was Jewish, everyone was from different places across the globe such as Canada, New York, Chicago, California, and more. Because of the different people on my trip, I experienced new ideas and perspectives from my own and learned different meanings of being Jewish.

One of my best friends on the trip was a girl from Boston, named Raquel. While we became friends quickly, we also realized we had a lot of differences. Mostly in the way we talked, but also in what we believed it meant to be Jewish. For example, she believed Judaism meant she had to go to synagogue every Shabbat and participate in every Jewish holiday. However, I believed being Jewish meant being born Jewish and having Jewish values such as Tikkun Olam. Because I was able to experience the diverse perspectives of what being Jew-



Jacqueline and friends at the Western Wall

ish means through my new friends, this trip helped me create a new definition of what being Jewish means to me.

Additionally, the trip to Israel this summer impacted not only my Jewish beliefs, but also my mental health. When I was in Israel, I meditated in public at the Kotel, the Dead Sea, and Masada. Typically, I meditate in my own room because I believe meditating is a private event. However, meditating in spaces where everyone is praying for a better world improved my mental health significantly.

Another part of my trip was experiencing new cultures such as the Bedouin culture and Druze culture. One of my favorite nights was when my group stayed overnight in the middle of the desert at the Bedouin tents. We rode camels, learned about the Bedouin people’s customs, had a traditional Bedouin meal, and slept in tents under the stars. Part of the reason this was one of my favorite nights was the culture allowed me to take a step out of my daily routine and experience life in a different way.

Throughout my time in Israel, I learned about Israeli culture and how diverse it is. One of the bigger examples that really opened my eyes to the diversity in Israel, was seeing the nation’s capital, Jerusalem. Before the trip, I did not know there are four quarters, Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Armenian in the Old City of Jerusalem. After walking around the city and learning about the four quarters, I realized how diverse Israel was. From Jerusalem to Eilat or Haifa to Tel Aviv, every city we visited had its own unique diverse culture. The idea of many different cultures being connected to one idea or nation, allowed me to adapt to a different belief

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12/28/2023



Memphis Candlelighting Time

Erev Shabbat, Fri. Dec. 29, 2023 / 17 Tevet, 5784..... 4:38 p.m.
Havdalah, Sat. Dec. 30, 2023 / 18 Tevet, 5784..... 5:38 p.m.

Weekly Torah Portion: Vayechi

of what being Jewish meant to me. My new definition is, whether someone has similar beliefs to you or not, being Jewish means accepting they are owed the right to a place where they can worship their beliefs.

Thank you to Memphis Jewish Federation’s Lemsky Endowment Fund for helping make my BBYO Israel journey possible for me. HW

Baron Hirsch...
(Continued From Page 1)

chance to create various Chesed Projects representing a further opportunity to strengthen their connection to mitzvot through tzitzit tying, birkon holder decorating, and Shabbat candle decorating. Everyone who participated felt uplifted by engaging in an activity geared to help Israeli families and show them continued support and love. HW



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The MJCC Larisa and Ben Baer Senior Adult Club Happenings

Lunch is Monday–Friday at 11:30 a.m. All programs start at 12:15 p.m.
Monthly Luncheon is at noon.

Monday, January 1
The MJCC will be closed. Have a Happy, Healthy New Year!!

Wednesday, January 3
Big Monthly Luncheon at Baron Hirsch Synagogue
This is the first time the MJCC Seniors will join Baron Hirsch seniors for this event. Anyone wishing to go, please call the Baron Hirsch office and make your reservations. The MJCC seniors will take the Center bus to and from the luncheon. But reservations must be made by Wednesday December 27, in order for Baron Hirsch to have a count.

Monday January 8
Speaker: Rabbi Abe Schacter-Gampel
Topic: “How a Dead Language Came Back to Life!”
Rabbi Abe always gives terrific infor-

mation in a very enjoyable way. Please have lunch and join us.

Wednesday January 10
Speaker: Rabbi Yosef Bracha, Rosh Kollel, director of operations with Memphis Kollel.
Topic: “Jerusalem, Then and Now!”
The seniors always look forward to Rabbi Bracha. Questions and answers will follow his talk.

Please join us from Monday through Friday for a delicious Kosher lunch from the Kitchens at the Memphis Jewish Home & Rehab. The cost is only \$2 for seniors. Reservations are required the day before by 1 p.m. by contacting Adult Services Coordinator Steve Kaplan at 901-259-9220 or stevekaplan@jccmemphis.org, or call the front desk at 901-761-0810. **HW**

Bernstein Scholarship Fund

Wendy and Avron B. Fogelman Jewish Family Service (Fogelman JFS) at the Memphis Jewish Community Center is now accepting applications for the Bernstein Scholarship Fund.

In 2001, Nate and Minnie Bernstein set up the scholarship fund to assist Jewish students with educational expenses. Fogelman JFS has been administering the fund since its inception.

Once again there will be an open enrollment period beginning January 1 and ending March 31, 2024, during which time Fogelman JFS will be accepting applications for the fund.

If selected, recipients will be notified in May of the amount of their award,

and the awards will be paid to the applicant’s identified school.

To be eligible, applicants must be Jewish and must reside in the Memphis area. Also, the funds must be used for educational expenses, and recipients of other scholarship funds administered by Jewish Community Partners are ineligible for this fund.

All disbursement checks will be made out to the educational institution that the student will be attending.

For more information about the Bernstein Scholarship Fund contact Fogelman JFS at 901-767-8511 or find the application on the Fogelman JFS website jccmemphis.org/jfs/jfs/. **HW**

Israel and Hamas Set to Resume Indirect Talks as Fallout Continues from IDF Killing of 3 Hostages

By Ben Sales

(JTA) – Israel and Hamas appear set to restart indirect negotiations over releasing Israeli hostages, and a pause in the fighting in Gaza, days after Israeli troops mistakenly killed three hostages who were trying to escape the terror group.

Meanwhile, U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin is in Israel with an agenda that includes pressing the Israelis to slow the civilian death toll in Gaza.

David Barnea, the chief of Israel’s Mossad intelligence service, is due to travel to Europe this week for negotiations with the prime minister of Qatar, where Hamas’ leadership is based. The report of this trip comes days after he

canceled another trip to Qatar for negotiations. According to Reuters, Hamas has demanded authority over which hostages it will release in a future deal, a condition Israel accepted, though it has said it will need to view the list of names in advance.

The renewed momentum toward negotiations comes as leaders of Israel’s defense establishment apologized for the incident last Friday, in which soldiers fighting in a Gaza City-area neighborhood reportedly fired on the three men against protocol. The men, according to reports, were waving a white cloth and yelling in Hebrew, and a photograph from the area shows a wall graffitied in Hebrew with the message “Help, 3 hostages.”

The incident has spurred outrage in Israel, in particular from the family members of hostages, who have pressed their government to resume indirect negotiations toward the release of hostages. In November, Israel and Hamas paused the fighting for seven days in exchange for Hamas releasing more than 100 of the hostages it took captive in its invasion on Oct. 7, while Israel released hundreds of Palestinians security prisoners. More than 100 hostages are thought to remain in Gaza.

The families of hostages protested in the wake of the incident, and according to the “Times of Israel,” Avi Shamriz, the father of one of the killed hostages, told Israeli media, “The IDF abandoned my son on October 7, and the IDF murdered my son on December 14. That’s what happened.”

In remarks to troops last Sunday, IDF Chief of Staff Herzi Halevi told soldiers to wait before firing on people who have their hands up or are waving a white flag.

“You see two people, they’re not threatening you, they’re unarmed, their hands are up and they’re not wearing shirts – take two seconds,” Halevi said. “And I want to tell you something no less important: What if it’s two Gazans with a white flag who come out to surrender? What, do we shoot at them? Absolutely not. Absolutely not.”

In a video last Saturday night, Halevi said that as the head of the military, he was “responsible for what happened, and we will do everything to keep similar things from happening as the fighting continues.” He added that Israeli soldiers in Gaza had encountered Hamas fighters drawing them into traps, which may have led the soldiers to suspect that the hostages were combatants. **HW**

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By Ted Roberts

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‘Where Do You Think Israel is Going?’ Bill Maher Quips in Viral Eight-Minute Clip

(JNS) – The comedian Bill Maher, who has a reputation for non-conformist views, is drawing praise from pro-Israel fans and viewers for a Dec. 15 segment on his HBO “Real Time” show.

As part of a fact-laden, semi-satirical monologue during a segment at the end of this show called “New Rules,” Maher marshaled maps and other historical evidence to reveal the antisemitic threat implied in the slogan “from the river to the sea.”

In line with the Christmas season, Maher reminded viewers that Bethlehem – the cradle of Christianity – is now a majority-Muslim city under Palestinian control in Judea and Samaria. “That’s my point tonight, things change,” he said.

Empires have risen and fallen, territo-

ries have changed hands, and cities have been renamed. “Palestine was under the Ottoman empire for 400 years, but today, an Ottoman is something you put under your feet,” he quipped.

Maher noted that Turkish, Irish and Mexican people eventually came to live with being conquered. “Look at what Mexico used to own – all the way up to the top of California. But no Mexican is out there chanting, ‘From the Rio Grande to Portland, Ore.’”

Not so Palestinians, even 75 years later.

If they accept that the world changes, Maher said, they could have a state today, and it might “look more like Dubai than Gaza.”

He also noted that Jews, who of late are being called “colonizers,” have

been forced out of many of their homelands. “No one knows more about being pushed off land than the Jews,” he said. “Including being kicked out of almost every Arab country they once lived in.” He cited the end of “Fiddler on the Roof,” during which the Jewish characters decide that Anatevka wasn’t so great anyway.

“Come on,” he said. “Like other countries don’t have roofs you could fiddle on?”

“History is brutal, and humans are not good people,” he continued. “Nobody was a bigger colonizer than the Muslim army that swept out of the Arabian desert and took over much of the world in a single century.”

“They didn’t do it by asking,” he said. “There’s a reason Saudi Arabia’s flag is

a sword.”

To Palestinian leaders and their “useful idiots” on college campuses who chant “from the river to the sea,” Maher said: “Where do you think Israel is going? Spoiler alert, nowhere.”

He noted that Israel, which has the “world’s second-largest tech sector after Silicon Valley” and reportedly nuclear weapons, isn’t going to negotiate with an opponent whose bargaining position is “you all die and disappear.”

“Bill Maher, 22 years ago, I was unkind to you in the wake of 9/11. I will never be unkind to you again,” wrote John Podhoretz, editor of “Commentary” magazine.

“Bill Maher is a better school than Harvard,” wrote Joel Pollak, senior editor-at-large at “Breitbart News.” **HW**

7 Men, Some Members of Hamas, are Arrested as European Police Foil Plots Against Jews



Police officers leave a house with seized evidence in Berlin, Dec. 14, 2023. Credit: Paul Zinken/picture alliance via Getty Images

By Gabe Friedman

(JTA) – Police in three European countries arrested seven men they said were planning terror attacks against Jews and Jewish sites last Thursday.

Some of the men arrested were longtime Hamas members who began build-

ing a weapons cache in Berlin after Hamas’ Oct. 7 attack on Israel, according to German officials.

Three of the suspects were arrested in Germany, while one was arrested in Rotterdam, in the Netherlands. Police in

Denmark arrested three other men, with Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen saying the threat was “as serious as it gets.”

German officials described the suspects as “longstanding members of Hamas” who “have participated in Hamas operations abroad.” Hamas is considered a banned terror group across the European Union.

The men arrested by Germany were accused of building a weapons cache in Berlin, starting in October. “The Guardian” reported that the suspects have ties to Khalil Hamed al-Kharraz, the former second in command of Hamas’ military wing who was killed by Israeli bombing in Lebanon last month.

“It is of course – in relation to Israel and Gaza – completely unacceptable for someone to bring a conflict elsewhere in the world into Danish society,” Frederiksen said at an EU meeting in Brussels.

RELATED: As Europe’s Jews see a new era of antisemitism, governments struggle over how to respond

Danish police said they would increase security for the near future at Jewish sites.

Shortly after Oct. 7, a Hamas official stirred global panic after urging action

in “cities everywhere.” But even as countries around the world have dealt with threats to Jewish institutions since Oct. 7, most arrests have been described as lone-wolf cases, such as last week’s arrest of an Austrian teenager plotting to attack a Vienna synagogue.

Watchdogs have reported that antisemitic incidents have surged more than 300% in Germany and more than 800% in the Netherlands since the start of the Israel-Hamas war.

Israel’s intelligence agencies, Mossad and Shin Bet, jointly commended Danish police for their work. Their statement said police in Denmark had apprehended seven suspects, suggesting that the investigation that netted the German and Dutch arrests might have originated in Denmark.

“The Hamas terrorist organization has been working relentlessly and exhaustively to expand its lethal operations to Europe, and thereby constitute a threat to the domestic security of these countries,” the agencies said. “The Mossad and the ISA will continue to combine forces and capabilities with their partners in the country and around the world in order to thwart Hamas’s intentions and eliminate its capabilities.” **HW**

Mum on Hamas Attacks on Jewish Women, Taylor Swift Attends Anti-Israel Benefit

(JNS) – The 2023 “Time” magazine “Person of the Year,” Taylor Swift, attended a comedy event earlier this month that benefited an anti-Israel nonprofit.

Proceeds from a Dec. 8 performance by stand-up comedian Ramy Youssef went to American Near East Refugee Aid, which NGO Monitor calls “biased” and “anti-Israeli.”

“Its publications erase the context of terrorism and promote the Palestinian narrative while falsely claiming to work with ‘all people living in impoverished communities,’” according to the watchdog group. “Such activity is inconsistent with ANERA’s proclaimed objectives.”

Swift attended the benefit with fellow pop music star Selena Gomez. Model and actress Cara Delevingne, actress Anya Taylor-Joy, and actress and singer Zoë Kravitz were also present.

Journalist Megyn Kelly said on her podcast that fans should boycott Swift, “who has been out there tweeting about her support for the LGBTQ community. You know what they do to that community in Gaza, Taylor – that you want to

now support? They’ll throw them off the top of a building. That’s what you’re contributing to.”

Kelly noted that Swift has “talked about her support for women” and “her opposition to certain Republican lawmakers, who don’t support women in the way Taylor sees fit.”

“You know what Hamas does to women? You think we have equal rights over there, Taylor? That’s what you’re supporting at your little fundraiser for Gaza,” Kelly said. “They’re taking the money that international forces are designating to help the suffering people of Gaza and Hamas is using it to create more weapons.”

“Has this benevolent woman said one word about the mass murders that happened on Oct. 7 of Jews? Has she said anything about rape and sexual violence being used against the Israeli women as a tool of war, which in any world is a war crime,” Kelly added. “Which maybe Taylor would know if she spent 30 seconds Googling before she decided which cause to support.” **HW**

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(Continued From Page 1)



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Roslyn Lit (left) and Illysa Wertheimer

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ca Landau, Carolyn Schrier, Rachel Feinman, Rachel Morrison and Lauren Tochner. **HW**

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Menorahs Across the U.S. are Vandalized as Jewish Communities Celebrate Hanukkah Amid a Spike in Antisemitism



Moshe Turk of the Chabad Jewish Center of Oakland looks at a damaged menorah at the Lake Merritt Amphitheater in Oakland, Calif., Dec. 13, 2023.
Credit: Jane Tyska/Digital First Media/East Bay Times via Getty Images

By Jacob Gurvis

(JTA) – In Oakland, California, an 11-foot-tall Hanukkah menorah was broken and thrown into a lake. In New Haven, Connecticut, a Palestinian flag was planted in a publicly displayed menorah. In Juno Beach, Florida, a menorah made of sand was destroyed.

As Jewish communities around the United States celebrated Hanukkah, numerous stories of vandalism and destruction circulated online as public menorahs – many of them sponsored by local outposts of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement – were targeted. Some of the incidents are being investigated as hate crimes.

The acts of vandalism come at a time when Jewish communities are on high alert as watchdogs say antisemitism has spiked around the globe since Oct. 7, when the Israel-Hamas war began. Many communities had planned gatherings explicitly drawing connections between the war and the Hanukkah

holiday. In response to the uptick in antisemitism and fear, one Jewish father launched an online campaign encouraging non-Jews to display menorahs in their windows out of solidarity.

For decades, public menorah lightings have been commonplace in many cities around the United States, especially in ceremonies led by local Chabad rabbis. The Hasidic movement organized an estimated 15,000 lightings annually in recent years, and this Hanukkah it puts the number at more than 10% higher – an increase Chabad spokesman Rabbi Motti Seligson attributed in part to the war in Israel and Gaza.

“Jews from across the spectrum of observance are celebrating Hanukkah more visibly this year than ever before,” Seligson said. “They feel they don’t have a choice. It’s in response to Oct. 7.”

Boruch Klar, who runs Menorah.net, which bills itself as the “world’s largest manufacturer of public display me-

norahs,” said his company’s sales have steadily increased every year, 2023 included. He noted that the company’s sales to municipal and state offices, mostly in the United States, have increased 150% this year.

“The numbers are so high that I can’t actually believe it,” said Klar, a Chabad rabbi who sells menorahs as tall as 12 feet to army bases, shopping malls, sports teams and beyond. He said he sells thousands of menorahs each year but declined to give exact sales numbers.

The prevalence and size of public menorahs makes them easy targets for people seeking to vandalize Jewish property or just cause mischief. Several incidents of vandalism and destruction of menorahs were reported around the country though not, Seligson said, at an appreciably higher rate than in the past.

“Hanukkah came as the perfect antidote to the adversity and the darkness,” Seligson said, noting that Chabad is not formally tracking vandalism incidents. “In the sum total, we’re seeing a lot more light.”

Still, the incidents of vandalism have been jarring to Jewish communities already on edge.

In Oakland, Chabad had assembled a 350-pound menorah that was displayed on a walking trail at the city’s Lake Merritt. Chabad hosted a candle lighting ceremony on the fourth night of the holiday, featuring remarks from Mayor Sheng Thao.

That Wednesday morning, Rabbi Dovid Labkowski received text messages saying the menorah had been destroyed. He called the mayor’s office and rushed to the scene, he told “J. The Jewish News of Northern California.”

Pieces of the menorah had been cut up and thrown across the sidewalk and into the lake. Antisemitic graffiti was scrawled onto the base, including “we’re gonna find you” and “you’re on alert.” “Free Palestine” was written in Arabic near where the menorah had stood. Oakland police are investigating

the incident as a hate crime.

“I felt outraged,” Labkowski told the “J.” “There’s crime in this city, but it just hit a new level of antisemitism. Together with the crime – it just makes you feel hopeless.”

That Wednesday, a large interfaith crowd gathered to light a new menorah and show support for the local Jewish community.

In New Haven, a pro-Palestinian protester climbed the city’s 30-foot menorah and planted a Palestinian flag between the candles. The menorah was not damaged, but local authorities are investigating the incident, which was caught on camera.

The Jewish Community Synagogue in North Palm Beach had commissioned an artist to create a menorah out of sand in Juno Beach – which was destroyed and defaced with a swastika. After the incident, which is under investigation, the local Jewish community gathered to rededicate the menorah, which was rebuilt.

Menorahs were also vandalized in the Washington, D.C. suburb of Olney, Maryland, the Chicago neighborhood of Lakeview and suburb of Northbrook, as well as in Brooklyn, where two public menorahs were damaged. The two Brooklyn incidents are being investigated as hate crimes, according to the NYPD.

Public menorahs have also been the scenes of dramatic incidents in Europe. In Poland, a far-right member of parliament shocked the chamber when he used a fire extinguisher to blow out the candles of a menorah in the government building. In the Dutch town of Enschede, the mayor refused to be seen with the Netherlands’ Israeli ambassador at a Hanukkah event. And a public menorah was found toppled in West Hempstead, London, with a “Free Palestine” sticker affixed to its base.

Rabbi Dovid Katz of the West Hempstead Chabad told the “Jewish Chronicle of London” that next year he would put up four at the same intersection. **HW**



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Beth Sholom Hanukkah



A record number of adults and children turned out for Beth Sholom Synagogue’s outdoor Hanukkia lighting at Beth Sholom Synagogue. The event took place on the eighth night of Hanukkah.

Arrested Teen had ‘Detailed Plan’ to Attack Reform Temple in Canton, Ohio

(JNS) – A 13-year-old boy, who shared a “detailed plan” to attack Temple Israel, a Reform congregation in Canton, Ohio, has been arrested and charged with inducing panic and disorderly conduct. He is due in Stark County Family Court on Dec. 20.

The accused, whose name is redacted, created “a detailed plan to complete a mass shooting at the Temple Israel on the Discord platform,” per court documents viewed by the Cleveland television station WKYC.

The threat, which the minor allegedly made on the messaging application on Sept. 1, “was reported to law enforcement and required an immediate investigatory response and notification of public individuals and agencies, including

the school system, which caused significant public alarm within those agencies.”

Among the prominent statements on the synagogue’s website homepage is “We stand with Israel.”

“We’re horrified that a young teen has been arrested and accused of planning a mass shooting at a synagogue in Canton, Ohio. We thank law enforcement for its thorough investigation,” wrote the Cleveland regional office of the Anti-Defamation League, which serves Ohio, Kentucky, West Virginia and western Pennsylvania.

“For young people like this suspect, we hope this can be a teachable moment,” it added. “Hate and threats on social media, as in real life, cannot and will not be tolerated.” **HW**

Suspect Arrested in Antisemitic Attack Outside Washington, DC Synagogue



Keshet Israel, located on the northwest corner of 28th and N Streets, N.W., in the Georgetown neighborhood of Washington, D.C., December 10, 2009. Credit: AgnosticPreachersKid via Creative Commons

By Andrew Lapin

(JTA) – Police in Washington, D.C. have arrested a man in connection with an antisemitic attack outside a synagogue last Sunday morning in the district’s Georgetown neighborhood.

A statement from law enforcement says that Brent Wood, 33, is suspected of having sprayed an unknown substance on two people outside Keshet Israel Congregation, a prominent Modern Orthodox synagogue also known as The Georgetown Synagogue, “while shouting an anti-Semitic phrase.” The phrase, according to local news reports, was, “Gas the Jews.”

The attack came the same weekend as a new spate of bomb threats targeted hundreds of synagogues across the United States, heightening worries for American Jews as the Israel-Hamas war continues to stoke antisemitism globally. In recent weeks there were shots fired

at a synagogue and preschool in Albany, New York, and false bomb threats made at synagogues in Orange County, California, among other incidents.

Wood has been charged with simple assault and resisting arrest, and police said they are “investigating this offense as being motivated by hate or bias.” The suspect’s last known address was in Toledo, Ohio, police said.

The victims themselves were not injured, and it is unknown if they were congregants. Keshet Israel’s rabbi and president did not immediately return Jewish Telegraphic Agency requests for comment.

“There is simply no excuse for these antisemitic acts. None of this is normal and no one should think this is okay,” the Anti-Defamation League said in a statement to local news outlets condemning the attack. **HW**

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A kosher lunch will be provided. Please register by Wednesday, January 3, to ensure there is lunch for you.

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After a Surprising 2023, a Cautiously Optimistic Economic Outlook for 2024

Provided by Mike Stein, Managing Director - Investments, Wells Fargo Advisors
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Despite high interest rates and unsettling geopolitical conflict, the U.S. economy outperformed the expectations of most economists in 2023.¹ Inflation-adjusted gross domestic product (Real GDP) accelerated to an annualized rate of 5.2% in the third quarter, after growing 2.1% in Q2 and 2.2% in Q1. Inflation, as measured by the 12-month change in the price index for personal consumption expenditures (PCE), was 3.0% in October 2023, after beginning the year at 5.5%.² The labor market stayed strong in 2023, though it has cooled off a bit. The unemployment rate edged up from 3.4% in January to 3.9% in October, but is still quite low by historical standards.³

That is all good news considering that a majority of economists polled in January 2023 believed the United States would enter a recession by the end of the year.⁴ But whether you are an investor, a business owner, or an employee thinking about your career prospects, you may be more interested in what lies ahead for the economy in 2024.

Economic projections are essentially educated guesses. Economists in the public and private sectors are tasked with trying to predict the future based on a wide range of indicators, potential risks, and their overall impressions of market conditions. And so far, forecasts for 2024 seem to suggest the economy is kicking off the new year in a more stable position.⁵

Fed policies and official forecasts
Since March 2022, the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) of the U.S. Federal Reserve has raised the benchmark federal funds rate aggressively in an effort to control inflation, which had climbed to its highest levels in 40 years.⁶⁻⁷ Raising interest rates is meant to slow economic activity by making it more expensive for consumers and businesses to borrow money, which discourages spending.

In November 2023, the Fed paused its rate hikes for the second meeting in a row, leaving the federal funds rate in a range of 5.25% to 5.5% - a 22-year high.⁸

Economic projections released at the FOMC’s September meeting indicated that slower GDP growth is expected, with a median projection of 1.5% in 2024. This was an improvement from 1.1% in the previous forecast. The committee expected PCE inflation to continue declining and end the year at 2.5%, which would still be higher than the Fed’s 2.0% target, and that the unemployment rate would tick up to 4.1% (based on median projections).⁹

Polling the pros
In October 2023, The Wall Street Journal’s Economic Forecasting Survey found that a recession is no longer the consensus view of 65 top business and academic economists polled by the publication on a quarterly basis. On average, the group expects real GDP growth will slow to 1.0%, the unemployment rate will rise slightly to around 4.0%,

and inflation (measured by the consumer price index) will fall to 2.4% by the end of 2024.¹⁰

Nearly 60% of the economists believed the Fed was finished hiking interest rates, and roughly half thought that rate cuts would begin in the second quarter of 2024, in response to signs of weakening growth.¹¹

At the same time, some economists were still not convinced that the U.S. economy is out of the woods. As recently as November 2023, the Conference Board predicted that a very short and shallow recession will begin early in 2024.¹²

Global growth trends
According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s September forecast, the global economy is expected to grow 3.0% in 2023 before slowing to 2.7% in 2024. In China, the growth rate is forecast to weaken from 5.1% in 2023 to 4.6%, due to its struggling property market and reduced domestic demand. Growth in the Euro area is expected to improve from 0.6% in 2023 to 1.1% in 2024. Inflation is expected to decline gradually, but to remain above central bank objectives in most economies.¹³

The problem with projections
Forecasts such as these may be helpful in making some kinds of financial decisions, but it’s also important to consider their limitations and remember that it’s not unusual for economists to change their minds. Recent years have shown how difficult it can be for forecasters to account for the impact of unforeseen economic disruption. Wild cards that could test economists in 2024 include losses from severe weather, fluctuations in oil prices, political conflict in the United States, and expansion of the war in Israel, which could harm an already fragile global economy.

In fact, Fed Chair Jerome Powell called on Fed forecasters to remain flexible in his November 2023 press conference. “Of course, even with state-of-the-art models and even in relatively calm times, the economy frequently surprises us.” He continued, “Our economy is flexible and dynamic, and subject at times to unpredictable shocks, such as a global financial crisis or a pandemic. At those times, forecasters have to think outside the models.”¹⁴

The financial markets could continue

**“Of course, even with state-of-the-art models and even in relatively calm times, the economy frequently surprises us.”
~ Fed Chair Jerome Powell**

to react – and occasionally overreact – to economic news and policies announced by the Federal Reserve. But that doesn’t mean you should do the same. As always, it’s important to maintain a long-term perspective and invest strategically based on your financial goals, time horizon, and risk tolerance.

Forecasts are based on current conditions, are subject to change, and may not come to pass. All investments are subject to market fluctuation, risk, and loss of principal. When sold, investments may be worth more or less than their original cost.

- 1, 4–5, 10–11) The Wall Street Journal Economic Forecasting Survey, 2022–2023
- 2, 7) U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2023
- 3) U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023
- 6, 8–9) Federal Reserve, 2023
- 12) The Conference Board, 2023
- 13) Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2023
- 14) thehill.com, November 8, 2023

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‘I Will Kill You, Dirty Jew,’ Man with Knife Threatens Paris Nursery Director

(JNS) – A man remains at large after storming into a Paris nursery and threatening its Jewish director with a six-inch knife and antisemitic death threats.

The attacker used an unlocked door on Dec. 12 to enter Les Minis Kids nursery, per “Le Figaro.” The school, in the Créteil suburb of southeastern Paris, is home to a large Jewish community.

“I will rape you, filthy Zionist. I will kill you, dirty Jew, dirty Zionist. I will come back with others and treat you like in Gaza,” the man reportedly said.

Nine children were present at the school but were moved to a secure room and didn’t come in contact with the assailant, per reports.

The local prosecutor reportedly plans to bring charges that include “death

threats materialized due to race, ethnicity, nationality or religion.”

“Threatening a woman in a nursery with a knife. This is where antisemitism leads,” wrote Yonathan Arfi, president of the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions in France (CRIF) on social media in French.

He added that Hamas supporters in France “no longer hide their support for terrorism.”

From Oct. 7 until Nov. 14, France recorded more than 1,500 antisemitic incidents, per the country’s Interior Ministry. On Dec. 13, a 12-year-old French girl threatened her teacher with a knife. According to some reports, she made comments about a prior Islamist attack. [HW](#)

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The Pope Again Appears to Accuse Israel of Terrorism

(JNS) – Pope Francis has repeatedly called on Israel to lay down arms in its defensive war against Hamas, whose Oct. 7 terrorist attack was the bloodiest day for Jews since the Holocaust.

It’s “forbidden to respond to terror with terror,” the pontiff reportedly told Israeli President Isaac Herzog last month. Last Sunday, the pope said, “Some say, ‘This is terrorism and war.’ Yes, it is war. It is terrorism.”

The Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, which is based in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, stated on Dec. 16 that an Israeli sniper “murdered” two Christian women in a Gaza church. “No warning was given, no notification was provided,” it said. “They were shot in cold blood inside the premises of the parish, where there are no belligerents.”

On Oct. 7, the patriarchate blamed Israel for being a victim. “The cycle of violence that has killed numerous Palestinians and Israelis in the past months has exploded this morning, Saturday Oct. 7, 2023,” it posted. “The operation launched from Gaza and the reaction of the Israeli Army are bringing us back to

the worst periods of our recent history.”

It also called for “the international community” to “de-escalate” the situation and for a ceasefire and for negotiation of peace.

In some of the worst periods in less recent history than what the patriarchate referenced, the Catholic Church is accused of turning a blind eye to Nazi atrocities, and it murdered and oppressed Jews over many centuries.

“My conscience and moral duty require me to state clearly that what happened on Oct. 7 in southern Israel is in no way permissible, and we cannot but condemn it. There is no reason for such an atrocity,” Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the Latin patriarch of Jerusalem, wrote in an Oct. 24 letter to the diocese which now yields an error message.

“The same conscience, however, with a great burden on my heart, leads me to state with equal clarity today that this new cycle of violence has brought to Gaza over 5,000, including many women and children, tens of thousands of wounded, neighborhoods razed to the ground, lack of medicine, lack of water and of basic necessities for over 2

million people,” he added. “These are tragedies that cannot be understood and which we have a duty to denounce and condemn unreservedly.”

He added that “It is only by ending decades of occupation and its tragic consequences, as well as giving a clear and secure national perspective to the Palestinian people that a serious peace process can begin. Unless this problem is solved at its root, there will never be the stability we all hope for.” (He also referred to “the Queen of Palestine.”)

Warren Goldstein, chief rabbi of The Union of Orthodox Synagogues of South Africa, said that the pope’s recent comment that it is “forbidden to respond to terror with terror” compares “Israel’s just war of self-defense to the barbarism of Hamas.” In so doing, the pope “repeats the sins of Pope Pius the XII, from the Nazi era, of surreptitiously supporting the forces of evil who seek to annihilate the Jewish people,” Goldstein said.

“If Israel’s war is not just, then there has never been a just war,” he added. (He noted a Dec. 13 “Wall Street Journal” article, in which David Rivkin and

Peter Berkowitz note the pope’s “primitive pacifism,” and that the “Catholic Church developed just-war theory, but the pontiff doesn’t seem to understand it.”)

“It is a matter of public record that the IDF has done more in this war and previous wars to minimize civilian casualties than any other army in recorded history,” Goldstein said.

“International law accepts, unequivocally, that even a just war can, and inevitably will, result in civilian casualties.”

Pope Pius XII, prior to his papacy, was the Vatican ambassador to Nazi Germany and was “at the very least a passive bystander to the Holocaust, if not an active supporter,” Goldstein said.

“Pope Francis, I turn to you and say: ‘God has given you an historic opportunity to atone for the sins of Pope Pius XII and the Catholic Church, during the Holocaust,’” he added.

“Pope Francis, to repent on behalf of the Catholic Church, you must not stand by as a passive bystander like Pope Pius did during the first Holocaust, while Iran seeks to perpetrate a second one,” he said. **HW**

A Chilean-Jewish Artist Strives to Capture the Entire Torah in Massive Murals



One of Mauricio Avayu’s 40 murals depicting key moments in the Torah is displayed at the Jeffrey D. Schwartz & Na Tang Jewish Taiwan Cultural Association center in Taipei. Courtesy: Avayu By Jacob Kessler

(JTA) – As a child, Mauricio Avayu wasn’t allowed to pursue art – his father thought he should study something more practical, like math or engineering. Avayu grew up in the conservative Jewish community of Santiago, Chile, the capital city home to most of the country’s 18,000 Jews.

But by now, Avayu has seen his paintings – many of them Jewish-themed – shown in galleries around the globe, put on the walls in the homes of former presidents around the world and presented to Pope Francis.

Today he’s working on his most ambitious project yet: capturing the key moments of the Torah in 40 large murals.

“Forty is a sacred number in Judaism,” Avayu told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. “Forty years in the desert, 40 days and nights to receive the Torah.”

He has already finished the eight murals that comprise his depiction of Genesis, the Torah’s first book. The murals, two meters tall, were shipped two years ago to Taipei, where they will be permanently displayed at the Jeffrey D. Schwartz & Na Tang Jewish Taiwan Cultural Association.

Avayu, 55, explained that each book of the Torah takes him about two years to complete. So with four books to go, the project will be complete 8-10 years from now. He already has buyer interest for the entire set.

The majority of Chile’s Jews belong

to the Masorti movement, but Avayu didn’t always know that much about Judaism, let alone the Torah. Several years ago he wanted an artistic challenge, and his lack of knowledge intrigued him.

“When I paint now, I always paint with a kippah,” he said. “But even though I come from a home where everyone is Jewish, I didn’t come from a religious family.”

Rather than be intimidated by the vastness of the text, Avayu said he was drawn to its many “hidden messages” and the variety of commentary available for every passage.

And when he looked at past master painters’ depictions of biblical scenes, he was struck by the inaccuracy. For example, in the Sistine Chapel, Michelangelo famously painted God as giving life to Adam by touching his finger. However, the verse in Genesis says God created man through his breath: “And the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and He breathed into his nostrils the soul of life, and man became a living soul.”

Driven to be more accurate in his work, Avayu called the leader of Santiago’s Chabad-Lubavitch community and began intensively studying the Torah. He was drawn to Kabbalah too, and studied for about four years at a Kabbalah center in Chile.

“When we think we understand something about a certain passage of the To-

rah, it’s only at that level,” explained Avayu. “But then suddenly, at a different time, we are able to understand the same passage but at a completely different level.”

To illustrate this point, he gave the example of Moses at Mount Sinai. In Exodus 3:5, God tells Moses to take off his shoes because “the place upon which you stand is holy soil.”

Originally Avayu understood the passage to mean that the taking off of shoes symbolized leaving one’s current path, to pursue the path of God. But upon further study, he believed that taking off the shoes represents Moses leaving the physical body, which was necessary to do as, according to the Torah, Moses fasted for 40 days and nights. So in Avayu’s interpretation of the scene, Moses is barefoot and points towards the sky.

Before he sets out to paint a new work, Avayu not only consults his rabbi but also reads multiple biblical commentaries, from scholars such as Rashi and Maimonides, and chooses the one that resonates most deeply.

When he painted the tree in the Garden of Eden, for example, he consciously did not do what many other famous artists have done: depict the “forbidden fruit” as an apple. Some commentators posit that the fruit is an etrog, others a grape; Avayu prefers the interpretation that it was a fig.

“There’s not only one truth,” he said. “There are a lot of true interpretations.”

Upon seeing Avayu’s art for the first time, Gabriel Goldstein, chief curator at the Yeshiva University Museum, was reminded of the work of Archie Rand – a Jewish artist from Brooklyn who has also painted biblical murals in synagogues across the United States. Goldstein also places Avayu’s artwork in the historic tradition of artists painting “exhaustive series” of the bible.

“There have been for centuries illustrations done for biblical text,” Goldstein told JTA. “Both from very early periods in illumination to much later... in the 19th and 20th centuries.”

When asked if being from Chile has influenced his art, Avayu said that being a Jewish artist who paints Jewish themes from a small country like Chile made

his career more difficult, seeing as there isn’t much of a market for his artwork in his native country. But Goldstein found aspects of Avayu’s art that he believes are influenced by his country of origin.

“At the museum, we’ve worked with Latin American artists frequently and have them in our collection,” Goldstein said. “I think that it’s a vibrant community with a vibrant artistic and cultural life. In [Latin American-Jewish art], there is a flavoring that comes from the local culture...as well as from traditional Jewish culture. And I think you can see that in his work – there’s a certain kind of vividness and palette and exuberance that may be more frequently found, but not exclusively found, in Latin American art.”

Since around 2012, Avayu has completed more than 120 paintings and has at least 30 more in the works. Not all of his art involves the Torah: He has also painted ketubahs, Jewish marriage certificates, and he has produced fantastical interpretations of mythological creatures, like the Greek Pegasus. Chilean businessman Tomas Munzer recently gave one of Avayu’s works to Argentina’s ambassador to the Holy See, who presented it to the pope.

Avayu doesn’t have a favorite painting – he calls each his “son” and described the pain he feels when he has to part with one of his children. But now Avayu is creating a different kind of “child,” by opening a studio in Florida where he now teaches aspiring painters. At the Mauricio Avayu Gallery and Fine Art Academy in Aventura, his classes incorporate lessons from the Torah and Kabbalah. And his students – mostly from the United States, but also from Russia, Argentina and Chile – don’t mind the mixing of Judaism and fine art, as almost all of them are Jewish.

“Regardless of my daily goal to be a better artist, to be as perfectionist as possible, I am never satisfied with a painting. I always try to see how I can make it a little better next time. The same always happens with the study of Kabbalah, where you learn something on a related topic, and over time, you realize you’ve learned a deeper level of that same topic,” he said. **HW**

Hezbollah ‘Dragging Lebanon into War,’ IDF Warns



Smoke rises during an exchange of fire between the IDF and Hezbollah on the border between Israel and Lebanon, Dec. 18, 2023. Credit: Ayal Margolin/Flash90.

By Yaakov Lappin

(JNS) – The Iranian-backed Hezbollah terrorist army in Lebanon “is dangerously dragging Lebanon into an unnecessary war,” Israel Defense Forces Spokesman Lt. Col. Jonathan Conricus warned last Monday.

He noted that since Oct. 8, a day after Hamas’s mass murder attack on the northwestern Negev, Hezbollah has fired more than 1,000 rounds of ammunition of different types, including rockets, missiles, drones and mortar shells, towards Israel, causing civilian and military casualties.

Five Israeli civilians and nine military personnel have been killed by enemy fire. More than a hundred Hezbollah members have been killed by Israeli retaliatory strikes, according to estimates.

“The situation along the northern border along the [U.N.-delineated] Blue Line is not one that we can tolerate, and we are looking for safety for Israeli civilians living behind our internationally established and recognized borders,” said Conricus.

“We as the IDF will welcome any diplomatic solution that will be found to the presence of Hezbollah in Southern Lebanon and their systemic violation of [U.N. Security Council Resolution] 1701 and their continued acts of aggression towards Israel. If a diplomatic solution will be found, that would be very good if it is a sustainable and solid solution. If not, the IDF is prepared and will use the tools at its disposal in order to defend its civilians and allow them to return safely to their homes and contin-

ue living their lives,” he cautioned.

“We’re talking about more than 80,000 Israeli civilians that have been evacuated from their homes as a preventive measure now for more than 70 days,” Conricus said.

“And just as Israel didn’t start and didn’t ask for the war that started on the 7th of October by Hamas attack against Israel, we have not started the fighting with Hezbollah, Hezbollah is entirely the aggressor. And we will of course defend ourselves, defend our sovereignty and defend our civilians,” he said.

Hezbollah has fired across the Blue Line from Rosh Hanikra in the west to Mount Dov in the east with assorted weapons, according to IDF data.

Hezbollah’s attacks since Oct. 8 have triggered air-raid sirens as far south as Haifa’s bayside suburbs.

“We’re talking about 60- and 80-millimeter mortar shells, which are typically shorter range and more tactical weapons. We’re talking about 120mm mortars, different Grad rockets, Grad 20, hundreds of those, and other short and medium range rockets that have been aimed at both military and civilian targets,” the military spokesman said. “They have also fired dozens, and I cannot be more accurate than that, dozens of anti-air missiles towards obviously Israeli aircraft and other aerial targets.”

Consequences for Lebanon

Hezbollah has been increasing attacks against Israel and targeting both civilians and military, he added.

“We have been responding by striking Hezbollah targets, military targets in Lebanon, of course, south of the Litani [River] specifically, and we have been striking Hezbollah targets at various locations. Hezbollah, who as everybody knows, is a proxy of Iran, is dangerously dragging Lebanon into an unnecessary war that could have potential devastating consequences for the state of Lebanon and for the people of Lebanon,” said Conricus.

“And as we said before, we understand that Israeli civilians cannot go back to the situation that existed along our borders, not around Gaza, the ‘Gaza envelope,’ and not along the Blue Line with Lebanon, before the security situation changes significantly,” he said.

“Today, Israelis are not safe, and it is our top priority to return safety to Israeli civilians, and we see it as an existential threat to Israeli civilians who live close to the border,” he continued.

“We see Hezbollah’s continued violation of U.N. Security Resolution 1701 as very severe. Frankly, 1701 has been rendered effectively null and void,” he stated. “There is not one single component of 1701 that is relevant and active today, and that has of course international and regional consequences,” Conricus said.

Israel is not rushing towards a military or kinetic solution to the problem, he stressed.

He drew attention to a reoccurring pattern by Hezbollah from the first days of fighting, whereby it deliberately fires from very close to Lebanese Armed Forces and UNIFIL positions, “most likely with the intention of causing our retaliatory fire towards them to injure or kill Lebanese Armed Forces and UNIFIL [personnel].

“We of course take extra precautions,” said Conricus. “We do everything we can in order to focus our fire and to strike only the military targets that endanger our civilians or troops according to the laws of arms conflict, contrary to the activity and behavior of our enemies.”

In the north last Monday, an Israeli Air Force attack struck the area from which launches were fired from Lebanon earlier in the day.

Terrorists fired anti-tank missiles towards the area of Moshav Avivim in the Eastern Galilee.

In response, IDF artillery struck in Lebanese territory.

Earlier, following air-raid sirens that sounded in northern Israel, the IDF Ae-

rial Defense Array intercepted a suspicious aerial target that crossed from Lebanon into Israeli territory. A siren indicating rocket fire sounded as a result of shrapnel from the interception.

Furthermore, launches from Lebanon toward the area of Moshav Ya’ara in the Western Galilee were identified last Monday morning.

IDF artillery struck in Lebanese territory. In addition, IDF soldiers and aircraft attacked an anti-tank missile terrorist cell in Lebanon.

Furthermore, following the sirens that sounded in northern Israel warning of the infiltration of a hostile aircraft in the afternoon, it was determined that the sirens were activated due to rockets fired from Lebanon. IDF artillery struck the sources of the launches.

IAF fighter jets attacked a series of Hezbollah terror targets, including infrastructure, a launch post and a “military” site.

The 252nd “Sinai” Division

Turning to the south, the IDF said last Monday that in recent weeks, the reservists of the 252nd “Sinai” Division fought in the Beit Hanun area in the northern Gaza Strip, adding that it has now taken control of the area.

“The infantry, armored, engineering and fire support forces of the division decisively defeated the [Hamas] Beit Hanun Battalion, taking control of command and control centers and Hamas terrorist outposts, including schools and public buildings where tunnel shafts and numerous combat means were located,” the military said.

“The division’s forces eliminated many terrorists, destroying weapon caches, missile launch sites aimed towards Israel and underground command centers used by the terror organization. The underground infrastructure of Hamas in the Beit Hanun area was significantly damaged, with the tunnels being dealt with along with their main tunnel routes,” it added.

As part of the operation, forces of the division’s 10th “Harel” Armored Brigade, in cooperation with special forces, exposed the main terror tunnel route of Hamas’s Beit Hanun battalion, which was located in the heart of the eponymous urban center, between city hall, a mosque, a soccer field and a kindergarten.

In the same area, a Hamas combat training compound was uncovered, which included laser shooting training equipment, the IDF said. **HW**

BP Suspends Red Sea Operations Amid Houthi Attacks



The oil and chemical tanker “Atlantic Prince” at the BP Oil Refinery Jetty, Kwinana, Western Australia, November 2023. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

(JNS) – British energy giant BP last Monday became the latest company to announce a halt to shipping via the Red Sea amid an escalation in attacks from Houthi-controlled Yemen.

“The safety and security of our people and those working on our behalf is BP’s priority,” the company said in a statement.

“In light of the deteriorating security situation for shipping in the Red Sea, BP has decided to temporarily pause all transits through the Red Sea. We will keep this precautionary pause under ongoing review, subject to circumstances as they evolve in the region,” the statement continued.

BP joins a list of shipping companies that have stopped sending vessels through the Suez Canal-Red Sea-Bab el-Mandeb chokepoint route, including Evergreen, Maersk, Mediterranean Shipping Company (MSC), Hapag-Lloyd and CMA-CGM.

Taiwanese container shipping line Evergreen announced last Monday its decision to stop accepting Israel-bound cargo, saying that ships in the Red Sea will be instructed to sail to safer waters nearby and wait for further notification, while container ships scheduled to pass through the Red Sea will instead be routed around the Cape of Good Hope in southern Africa.

The Iran-backed Houthi rebels have been launching daily attacks at Israel and threatening commercial shipping channels since they declared their support for Hamas terrorists in their fight against Israel in Gaza.

Last Monday, the Yemeni group said that it attacked two “Israeli-linked” ves-

sels – an oil and chemical tanker, and a container ship.

“The Yemeni Armed Forces carried out a ... military operation against two ships linked to the Zionist entity” using seaplanes, the statement said. It identified the ships as Norway’s Swan Atlantic, sailing under the Cayman Islands flag, and the Panamanian-registered MSC Clara.

Earlier, the U.S. said that the Swan Atlantic was attacked in the southern Red Sea with missiles fired from Houthi-controlled territory in Yemen and that the USS Carney destroyer responded to the tanker’s distress call by moving towards the ship.

“The Guardian” reported last Sunday that during his Middle East visit, U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin will announce the launch of a maritime protection force with the participation of Arab states to counter the Houthi threat. It will be provisionally called “Operation Prosperity Guardian.” **HW**

U.S. Leaves Open Possibility of Hamas Retaining Power

By Akiva Van Koningsveld

(JNS) – The U.S. State Department refused to rule out the possibility of the Hamas terrorist organization retaining power or joining a Palestinian Authority-led governing body for the Gaza Strip, Judea and Samaria.

“We have been clear about our position on Hamas, which the United States designated as a foreign terrorist organization in 1997 due to its premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets,” a U.S. government spokesperson told JNS on Dec. 15.

However, “Palestinians’ voices and aspirations must be at the center of post-crisis governance in Gaza, unified with the West Bank under the P.A.,” the spokesperson said, adding, “Ultimately, the future of Palestinian leadership is a question for the Palestinian people.

“We remain committed to working with the P.A. and Palestinian leadership on the critical work of strengthening Palestinian institutions ... and reinforcing commitments to nonviolence and countering terrorism,” concluded the official.

On Nov. 8, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that Gaza must be handed over to the P.A. once Israel’s operation there ends. The solution “must include Palestinian-led governance and Gaza unified with the West Bank under the P.A.,” stated Blinken.

U.S. National Security Council spokesman John Kirby added that Washington seeks to back an authority that “has the support of all Palestinians so that they can effectively help with post-conflict governance, particularly in Gaza.”

According to a survey released last month, 89% of Palestinians support establishing a government that includes or is led by Hamas. Only around 8.5% said they favor an authority controlled exclusively by P.A. leader Mahmoud Abbas’s Fatah faction.

Hamas most deserving

A separate poll published on Dec. 13 by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research found that a majority of Palestinians believe that Hamas is “the most deserving of representing and leading the Palestinian people today.”

When asked which entity should rule the Gaza Strip after the Israeli military operation ends, 60% of the respondents selected the Iran-backed terrorist group; 88% of Palestinians said Abbas needs to resign.

In a presidential runoff between Abbas and Ismail Haniyeh, the Hamas leader would receive 78% of the vote, with 51% of Palestinians saying they would vote for Hamas candidates if Abbas called a general election today.

In addition, two-thirds expressed opposition to the participation of the P.A. in meetings with the United States. Only 1% of those surveyed said they were satisfied with the role Washington has played in the conflict.

Speaking with “Al Monitor” in Doha, senior Hamas official Mousa Abu Marzouk said that the Islamist terrorist organization is “seeking to be a part of the PLO,” Abbas’s Palestine Liberation Organization, which controls the P.A.

On Dec. 14, Abu Marzouk clarified that “Hamas does not recognize the legitimacy of the Israeli occupation and does not concede any of the rights of our Palestinian people. We confirm that the resistance will continue to liberation and return.”

The remarks came as Haniyeh said

“Palestinians’ voices and aspirations must be at the center of post-crisis governance in Gaza,” a U.S. government spokesperson told JNS.

he was open to discussing “a ‘Palestinian home’ in the West Bank and Gaza Strip,” leading to a “political path that secures the right of the Palestinian people to their independent state with Jerusalem as its capital.”

P.A. Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh said on Dec. 8 that his preferred outcome of the war against Hamas would be for the terrorist organization to join a P.A.-led governing body as a junior partner.

“If they are ready to come to an agreement, and really accept the political platform of the PLO, accept the tools of struggle, ... there will be room for talks,” he told “Bloomberg,” adding that “Palestinians should not be divided.”

Hamas is an “essential part of the Palestinian political mosaic” and Israel’s goal of eliminating the terrorist group is “unacceptable” to the Western-backed P.A., Shtayyeh declared last week.

The Palestinian leader has consistently refused to condemn Hamas’s Oct. 7 attacks, claiming the conflict didn’t begin on that date and Israeli officials have failed to speak out against “things done by their citizens.”

Hamas terrorists murdered at least 1,200 people in a massive terror attack launched from Gaza on Oct. 7, which included the firing of thousands of rockets, the infiltration of the Jewish state by terrorist forces and the abduction of some 240 hostages.

The Oslo Accords, signed between Israel and the PLO in the 1990s, state: “The nomination of any candidates, parties, or coalitions will be refused ... if such candidates, parties, or coalitions: commit or advocate racism or pursue the implementation of their aims by unlawful or non-democratic means.”

During a stormy discussion in Israel’s parliament last week, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said there is no way the P.A. will be allowed to rule Gaza in a post-Hamas reality.

“The difference between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority is only that Hamas wants to destroy us here and now, and the P.A. wants to do it in stages,” the premier said. [HW](#)

Trump Denies Plagiarizing Hitler with ‘Poisoning Blood’ Phrase: ‘I Never Read ‘Mein Kampf’



Republican presidential candidate and former U.S. President Donald Trump speaks at a campaign event in Waterloo, Iowa, Dec. 19, 2023. Credit: Scott Olson/Getty Images

By Ron Kampeas

(JTA) – Speaking at an Iowa presidential rally last Tuesday, Donald Trump denied lifting a phrase describing immigrants as “poisoning the blood of our country” from Adolf Hitler’s manifesto.

“They don’t like it when I said that,” the former and hopeful president said. “And I never read ‘Mein Kampf.’ They said, ‘Oh, Hitler said that’ – in a much different way.”

The comments come as President Joe Biden’s reelection campaign focuses on Trump’s authoritarian rhetoric, most recently honing in on an interview [the previous] week in which Trump used a phrase that Biden and others said echoed Hitler’s rhetoric.

“It is a very sad thing for our country,” Trump told The National Pulse, a conservative webcast, after being asked about immigrants on the southern border. “It’s poisoning the blood of our country. It’s so bad, and people are coming in with every possible thing that you could have.”

“The New York Times” and other news sites identified similar phrases in “Mein Kampf,” the autobiography Hitler published before his rise to power. “All the great civilizations of the past became decadent because the originally

creative race died out, as a result of contamination of the blood,” was one such passage, the “Times” said. A number of media outlets noted that Trump’s late first wife, Ivana Trump, once reported that he kept a book of Hitler’s speeches by his bedside.

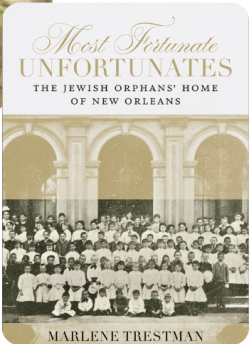
The Biden campaign seized on the statement to depict Trump as posing a threat to democracy.

“Donald Trump is parroting autocrats like Hitler and Mussolini, claiming that immigrants are ‘poisoning the blood of our country’ and calling his political enemies ‘vermin,’” it said in a release last Tuesday.

Trump’s spokesmen have said the phrase is normal and not racist.

The Anti-Defamation League did not draw an analogy to Hitler but said the phrase was dangerous, tying it to two recent deadly attacks spurred in part by antisemitic conspiracy theories.

“Saying that immigrants are ‘poisoning the blood of our country’ echoes nativist talking points and has the potential to cause real danger and violence,” the ADL said on X, the platform formerly known as Twitter. “We have seen this kind of toxic rhetoric inspire real-world violence before in places like Pittsburgh and El Paso.” [HW](#)



Most Fortunate Unfortunates: The Jewish Orphans’ Home of New Orleans and Its Tennessee Ties

Sunday, January 14th
1 pm CT
Memphis Jewish Community Center

Join author and lawyer Marlene Trestman as she discusses the remarkable history of the Jewish Orphans’ Home of New Orleans. Founded in 1855 in the aftermath of a yellow fever epidemic, the Home was the first purpose-built Jewish orphanage in the nation. By the time the Jewish Orphans’ Home closed in 1946, it had sheltered more than sixteen hundred parentless children and two dozen widows from New Orleans and other areas of Louisiana and the mid-South.

At L.A. Gala, Oct. 7 Survivor Testimony, Muslim Zionism – and Some Laughs

By David Swindle

(JNS) – Elon Gold, a Jewish comedian, looked out on the 1,000 attendees at a StandWithUs gala on Dec. 10 in Los Angeles. “Look at this beautiful crowd – 12,500 people, according to the Gaza Health Ministry,” he said, opening his act. “That’s right. We’re gonna laugh now,” he said. “We’re gonna take a break from the hard and the hell.”

Prior to Gold’s performance towards the end of the nonprofit’s “Festival of Lights” gala, a much more somber tone prevailed. Attendees heard earlier from survivors of Hamas’s Oct. 7 terror attack and from a hero who put himself at risk that day to save lives.

By the time Gold had control of the microphone, many attendees had filed out of the room to get a headstart on the dessert buffet, which included a chocolate fountain. “I hope dessert’s funnier than this stuff,” the comedian quipped.

In addition to the comic relief, the gala included a silent auction; holiday food, including timely latke stations; musical performances; and an electric menorah “lighting.” (The hotel wouldn’t permit candles.)

“During this very difficult time for the Jewish people, the annual StandWithUs gathering became more important than ever,” Roz Rothstein, co-founder and CEO of SWU, told JNS. “Over 1,000 people were there to support one another, to stand up for Israel and to stand firmly against antisemitism.”

‘I was going to die’

Swell Ariel Or, an Israeli actress who stars in Netflix’s “Beauty Queen of Je-

rusalem,” introduced Karen Haddad and Ela Shani, both of whom survived the Oct. 7 terror attacks.

Haddad told the audience that she arrived at the Supernova Music Festival at 1 a.m. on Oct. 7 and danced with friends from 3-6:15 a.m. Fifteen minutes later, she “saw the death and destruction by Hamas,” Haddad said. She ran, believing “I was going to die,” Haddad said. While driving away, she encountered a woman covered in blood in the road, who “screamed at us to turn around.”

“That’s what we did. We took a different turn,” she said.

Shani survived the Hamas terror attack on Kibbutz Be’eri, where she told the crowd that her father was “brutally murdered.” Her cousin, who was kidnapped, thankfully was released the prior week, she said, to applause.

“We’ve seen many horrific stabbings. ... Israelis were burned. Their body parts were cut off. They’re covered with blood,” Shani said. “Some of them are my friends.”

On social media, Shani has been called a liar, she said. “People said sick things, like ‘She should have died with her father,’ ‘She should have had it worse,’ ‘Her dad must be dancing in hell,’ ‘Can she stop lying already,’” she said.

Retired Maj. Gen. Yair Golan recounted his effort to save as many people as he could on Oct. 7. “I put on my old uniform, took a rifle and drove my car straight away to the south,” he said in a video introduction. “Just stay at home and do nothing? This is not an option.”

Golan, who with the two survivors received “Guardian of Israel” awards, told attendees that Israel won’t take revenge but intends to build hope and security.

On campus

Gabi Schiller, a recent graduate of Hunter College – part of the City University of New York –who is StandWithUs’s New England high school regional manager, and Nate Neustadt, a high schooler who spoke at the Nov. 14 “March for Israel” in Washington D.C., also received awards.

Yael Lerman, who directs the nonprofit’s legal department, told attendees that StandWithUs is supporting students through its legal activism. “We don’t need new laws,” she said. “We need the existing laws to be applied equally to Jews.”

Gold’s comedic spiel also touched on education. “I am the new president of UPenn,” he said. “Apparently to get the job you just have to be able to use the word ‘yes’ in a sentence.”

Peacemakers

The gala’s closing act was a panel discussion, which Rothstein moderated, with the Saudi Zionist influencer Loay Alshareef and Enes Kanter Freedom, the professional basketball star-turned-human rights activist. (The latter announced his plans to create an Abrahamic faith basketball school.)

The two Muslim men discussed their experiences growing up in antisemitic cultures, and both said that warm experiences with Jews exposed the falsehoods that had misinformed their beliefs.

The antisemitism of his culture melt-

ed away “when I learned more about Judaism,” and saw “how deeply connected the Jewish faith [is] with the Muslim faith, especially when it comes to the prophets and the history of the prophets and their stories,” Alshareef told JNS. “We have the same stories.”

Alshareef cited the biblical prophets Elijah, David and Solomon as examples of shared Jewish and Muslim figures, and he said he learned biblical Hebrew to read the Torah.

“We need to find peacemakers,” Freedom told JNS. “There are not many peacemakers who want to stand up for truth.”

“Whatever we do in this life, we have to make this world a better place – tik-kun olam,” Alshareef said, using the Hebrew for “repairing the world.” He also said he hopes “there will be a major, big breakthrough between Saudi Arabia and Israel.”

Freedom said that Hamas’s terror attacks on Oct. 7 do not represent “not true Islam.” The Muslim prophet says that “if you kill a person, it’s equal to killing humanity, and if you save a person, it’s equal to saving humanity,” Freedom said. The Muslim prophet also expressly forbade killing babies and women during war.

The former Boston Celtics player told JNS he can spend two-thirds of his time on the road, speaking often to student groups.

“When you see you put a smile on the kid’s face and you put a question in their head, that’s priceless,” he said. [HW](#)



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