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IDF Destroys Underground Hamas Headquarters in Northern Gaza



Israeli troops operating in the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip, Dec. 25, 2023. Credit: IDF.

By Joshua Marks

(JNS) – The Israel Defense Forces announced last Sunday night the completion of a "large-scale operation to dismantle the northern underground headquarters of Hamas in Gaza."

Troops retrieved the bodies of five hostages earlier this month after discovering the subterranean tunnel network during activities in Jabalia, the largest of the Gaza Strip's eight refugee camps.

Israeli forces gained operational

control over the camp in recent weeks, where they engaged in intense battles, killing many terrorists and finding hundreds of weapons.

Subsequently, the soldiers uncovered the massive tunnel network serving as the underground headquarters of Hamas, which included two levels – the first nearly 33 feet deep and the second even deeper. The tunnel network included many branches and was used to manage combat and the passage of terrorists.

Weapons, infrastructure for the production of weapons and rooms for emergencies were found. The tunnel network was connected to a shaft that reached the house of Ahmed Ahandor, the commander of Hamas's northern division in the Gaza Strip, who was killed by the IDF last month after serving in the post for 18 years.

This network went under the grounds of a school and a hospital, using them as civilian shields, according to the IDF.

The bodies of five abductees brought to Gaza during the Oct. 7 massacre were found in a tunnel: Sgt. Ziv Dado, Sgt. Ron Sherman, Cpl. Nick Beiser, Eden Zacharias and Elia Toledano. They were transferred to Israel for proper burial.

"At the end of the mission, the forces destroyed the underground headquarters. The destruction of the headquarters in Jabalia is part of the effort to deal with Hamas's tunnel infrastructure and harm its senior commanders and strategic capabilities. This effort continues all the time and is now also being carried out in Khan Yunis and the south of the Gaza Strip," the IDF said.

Hundreds of weapons found at Gaza City school complex

Israeli forces killed terrorists hiding in an educational compound in the Gaza

City neighborhood of Sheikh Radwan, where they found hundreds of weapons, including grenades, RPG projectiles and explosives.

Dozens of terrorists captured in the raid on the schools, which are located adjacent to mosques and residential buildings, were transferred for further investigation.

"We raided a school where a large population was hiding," said Maj. (res.) R., deputy company commander of the elite Shayetet 13 commando unit. "After the evacuation of the population, many weapons were found in the compound that were hidden among the citizens' equipment."

He continued: "Among other things, we also found weapons, cartridges, grenade launchers, [explosive] charges and grenades with advanced and innovative operating mechanisms."

Combined forces continue to attack across the Strip

Israeli ground, naval and aerial forces continue to attack targets across the Gaza Strip, including terrorist squads and Hamas "military" posts, the IDF said last Monday morning.

In Beit Lahiya, in the northern Gaza Strip, many Hamas weapons were lo-

(See Underground Page 3)

Hamas Leader Sinwar Claims 'Occupation Army Suffering Heavy Losses'



Hamas senior leader in Gaza Yahya Sinwar attends a rally in Gaza City celebrating the Islamist movement's 31st anniversary, Dec. 16, 2018. Credit: Abed Rahim Khatib/Flash90.

(JNS) – Hamas terror leader in Gaza Yahya Sinwar last Monday delivered his first public message since the terror group's Oct. 7 massacre and the ensuing war

While admitting that the terror group is facing a "fierce, violent and unprecedented battle" against Israel, Sinwar claimed in the letter to the Hamas political bureau that "the occupation army is suffering heavy losses in life and equipment."

Sinwar claimed that the Izz ad-Din al-Kassam Brigades (the "military wing" of Hamas) had killed over a thousand Israeli soldiers. According to the Israel Defense Forces, 156 soldiers have been killed since the start of ground operations in Gaza on Oct. 27, and 489

military personnel in total have lost their lives since the war began on Oct. 7.

He also gave inflated numbers of Israeli soldiers wounded and military vehicles destroyed during the war.

The statement, on the 80th day of the war, comes amid recent reports that the IDF is hot on the heels of Sinwar, one of the masterminds of the Oct. 7 massacre, along with leader of Izz ad-Din al-Kassam, Mohammed Deif.

Sinwar is believed to be hiding in the Khan Yunis area of the southern Gaza Strip. He is thought to have escaped from the north by hiding in a humanitarian convoy.

(See Sinwar Page 3)

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Jewish Victim of NY Gang 'More than Satisfied' with Attacker's **Prison Sentence**



The antisemitic assault on Joseph Borgen in New York, May 21, 2021. Source: Screens

By Mike Wagenheim

(JNS) – A New York court sentenced Mohammed Othman, who brutally attacked Joseph Borgen on May 20, 2021, to five-and-a-half years in prison last Wednesday.

Othman assaulted and pepper-sprayed Borgen on Broadway near West 49th Street in the Diamond District while the latter was en route to a pro-Israel rally during the Israel-Gaza war ("Operation Pillar of Defense"). Othman pleaded guilty in October to second-degree assault as a hate crime.

Manhattan state Supreme Court Judge Felicia Mennin added five years of post-release supervision to Othman's sentence. Prosecutors had asked for five years of incarceration for Othman, who was the second defendant in the case whom Mennin sentenced beyond what prosecutors sought.

"I think it sends a strong message about what happened," Borgen told JNS of his attacker's punishment. "Considering what we see going on in the city these days in terms of other incidents and other crimes, I'm more than satisfied with the result we got."

Antisemitic slurs

Borgen was wearing a yarmulke when Othman and four other men ambushed him, shouting antisemitic slurs. Punched and kicked repeatedly and beaten with a crutch, Borgen suffered a concussion, wrist injury and black eye. His body was left bruised. He said he will require another wrist surgery and still deals with the incident's lingering physical effects.

Video evidence showed Othman pepper-spraying Borgen three times and spraying a bystander who tried to protect Borgen. Othman was also recorded throwing a firework at a Jewish woman, burning her, from the back of a pickup truck.

Othman, 26, of Staten Island, had six prior arrests, including domestic violence charges.

Borgen believes the sentence was based on the premeditated nature of the attack and Othman's repeated assaults.

"The judge went into great detail about the WhatsApp group that he was in, where they were sending messages leading up to the rally," Borgen said.

"She mentioned the fact that Othman was the one who shot the firework from that pickup truck, and she went into detail about how he kept coming back to pepper spray me, even though he had three opportunities to retreat and stop attacking," he added.

Three other attackers have been sentenced. Waseem Awawdeh, who beat Borgen with a crutch and reportedly said of the attack, "If I could do it again, I would," pleaded guilty to attempted assault as a hate crime and received 18 months in jail.

In November, Mahmoud Musa received seven years in prison for his role in the attack, when he maced, kicked, punched and beat Borgen with crutches. The sentence was six months beyond the prosecutor's recommendation.

Criminal proceedings are ongoing against a 14-year-old, whose name is being withheld due to his status as a minor.

Controversial plea deals

After an initial uproar against Alvin Bragg, the Manhattan district attorney, for offering light sentences in plea deals, protests and the attention they brought appeared to pressure Bragg to reverse course.

The sentences in the Borgen case are rare instances of significant prison time for antisemitic attacks in New York.

A 2022 study by Americans Against Antisemitism revealed that among all anti-Jewish bias crimes in New York City since 2018, there was only one case in which a suspect was convicted of a hate crime and sentenced to a significant prison term.

Fifteen took plea deals that didn't appear to involve jail time; hate crime or criminal charges were dropped for 23; 22 were pending; and "and 23 remain unknown, having totally disappeared from criminal court records," per the group, founded by Dov Hikind, a former N.Y. State Assembly member.

Borgen was complimentary of the way prosecutors handled the case and told JNS that he had "a direct line" to the assistant district attorney throughout the process.

"We could call one another to share information, and there was always an open



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line of dialogue," he said. "While initially it wasn't smooth sailing, I have to commend the efforts of the district attorney's office, because at the end of the day, we did get strong results in these cases."

Borgen doesn't like seeing anyone including his attackers - go to prison, but he said it is necessary for people's

"The alternative is that I don't pursue justice. I don't seek accountability. And it potentially motivates other individuals in the future to engage in the same behavior," he said. "I was never motivated by revenge or vengefulness." HW



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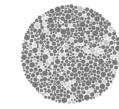
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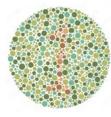
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Underground...

(Continued From Page 1) cated, including Kalashnikov rifles, ready-to-use charges with explosives and cartridges.

Additionally, soldiers in Khan Yunis in the south raided a building where weapons were found and later raided terror infrastructure inside the house of a Hamas terrorist before destroying it.

Two soldiers killed in Gaza

The IDF last Monday morning cleared for publication the names of two soldiers killed in battle in the north of the Gaza Strip: Master Sgt. (res.) Nitai Meisels, 30, from Rehovot; and Sgt. Rani Tamir, 20, from Ganei Am.

Their deaths bring the total number of soldiers killed since the start of Gaza ground operations to 156; overall, 489 military personnel have been killed since the start of the war on Oct. 7.

Netanyahu: "We will not stop until we achieve victory"

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in a statement last Sunday evening, reaffirmed the government's position that the war against Hamas will continue until the mission is accomplished.

"Citizens of Israel, we are intensifying the war in the Gaza Strip. We will continue to fight until absolute victory over Hamas [is achieved]. This is the only way to return our hostages, eliminate Hamas and ensure that Gaza will no longer be a threat to Israel," he said.

"This will take time, but we are united – the soldiers, the people and the government. We are united and determined to fight until the end," he added.

"The war has a price, a very heavy price in the lives of our heroic soldiers, and we will do everything to safeguard the lives of our soldiers. However, there is one thing we will not do: We will not stop until we achieve victory." **HW**

Sinwar...

(Continued From Page 1)

Israeli troops have twice managed to reach tunnels in which Sinwar was believed to be hiding, with the terror chief narrowly escaping, according to the IDF. Intelligence indicates that Sinwar is moving around constantly in an effort to avoid being killed or captured; Israeli forces have orders to eliminate the terror organization's top leadership.

During the manhunt, troops also uncovered a space in which Deif had previously hidden.

Sinwar's death is only a matter of time, a senior Biden administration official said on Dec. 14, pledging that "justice will be served."

Coinciding with a visit to the region by U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, the official, who spoke to reporters for 35 minutes from a car in Tel Aviv, said: "I think it's safe to say his days are numbered," of Sinwar. "He has American blood on his hands." HW

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J'lem Denies Biden Told Netanyahu to Abort Pre-Emptive Hezbollah Strike

(JNS) – Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu denied last Saturday a report that U.S. President Joe Biden had dissuaded him from a pre-emptive strike against the Lebanon-based Iranian-proxy Hezbollah.

Biden counseled Netanyahu "to stand down and think through the consequences of such an action," even as Israeli warplanes were in the air, according to "The Wall Street Journal" last Saturday.

Israel wanted to attack based on intelligence that Hezbollah terrorists were preparing to cross the northern border as part of a multifront assault. The White House judged the intelligence unreliable.

The event took place days after Hamas terrorists invaded the northwestern Negev on Oct. 7, the report said. The U.S. president urged the PM "to stand down" even as Israeli warplanes were in the air, the "WSJ" reported.

The report, though rejected as fabricated by Israel, went into a fair amount of detail about the events that supposedly took place on Oct. 11, when at 6:30 a.m. the White House received its first inkling that Israel was planning a strike.

Biden's top intelligence, military and national security officials held a meeting led by National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan to discuss Israel's plans, which concluded that U.S. intelligence didn't match up with Israel's, the report said.

Biden was briefed and then called Netanyahu and his War Cabinet, telling them to back off. But they remained unconvinced.

"After 45 minutes of discussion, Netanyahu ended the call saying he would discuss the matter with his cabinet, U.S. officials said," according to the "Journal."

Northern Israel went on alert at about the same time with warnings of Hezbollah terrorists about to attack. These warnings proved to be false alarms.

After "six hours of back-and-forth calls and meetings," Israel agreed to stand down, the report claimed.

The "Journal" said the conversation "set a pattern" of U.S. efforts to prevent the Hamas attack from sparking a wider regional war, a major concern of the White House.

The Biden administration is looking to diplomacy to resolve hostilities on Israel's northern front, where Israel and Hezbollah exchange fire daily, sending Amos Hochstein, deputy assistant to the president, to carry out shuttle diplomacy between Washington, Beirut and Jerusalem.

Similarly, when the Houthis began attacking Israel from Yemen, the U.S. stepped in to form a maritime alliance to deal with the problem. Notably, Israel was left out of the coalition. The explanation given for this omission both by Israel and the U.S. is that international shipping is a "global" problem, and therefore calls for a global solution. **HW**

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Gadi Haggai, 73, is First U.S. Citizen Confirmed Killed by Hamas as A Hostage

(JNS) – An Israeli-American is the first U.S. citizen taken hostage who has died in Hamas captivity in Gaza, a group representing the families of Hamas prisoners announced last Friday.

Gadi Haggai, 73, a U.S.-Israeli dual national, was on a walk with his wife, Judi Weinstein, 70, near Kibbutz Nir Oz when Hamas began its attack on the morning of Oct. 7. Weinstein was able to call a member of the kibbutz to tell them that she and her husband had been shot, and the two were presumed to be held hostage in Gaza.

The Hostages and Missing Persons Families Forum has now announced, however, that Haggai was killed on Oct. 7 and his body taken into Gaza. His wife, who is also a Canadian citizen, is thought to still be alive and a hostage of the terrorist group.

Haggai is the first American hostage to have been killed during the conflict.

"It remains unclear how officials were able to determine he had died in captivity, as Hamas officials do not comment on the death reports," per the "New York Post."

"Haggai, a retired chef and jazz musician, was a father of four and grand-father of seven," wrote the UJA Federation of Greater Toronto. "His wife, Canadian citizen Judith Weinstein, remains in captivity."

"Both Gadi and Judith considered themselves pacifists and were committed peace activists. Hamas of course couldn't care less. Those animals are still holding the body of Gadi and Judith as hostage," wrote Arsen Ostrovsky, CEO of the International Legal Forum.

"Instead of doing everything to demand Judith's release, Canada is too busy lecturing Israel, while receiving thanks by Hamas for voting for U.N. ceasefire resolutions that don't even mention the terror group," Ostrovsky

Will Ripley, senior international correspondent at CNN, got emotional reporting the news: "73-years-old. That's the same age as my parents," he said. "Can't imagine what the families have been going through."

The White House and U.S. State Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Neither put out a statement initially, nor did four accounts on X associated with U.S. President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Har-

The terror organization continues to hold Haggai's body, and his wife reportedly also remains a Hamas hostage.

ris, nor those of First Lady Jill Biden, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, the U.S. State Department and Matthew Miller, the department spokesman.

Some nine or 10 hours after the news was first reported, the White House released a statement from Biden.

"Jill and I are heartbroken by the news that American Gad Haggai is now believed to have been killed by Hamas on Oct. 7. We continue to pray for the well-being and safe return of his wife, Judy," the president said.

"Their daughter joined by phone my meeting with the families of hostages last week. Those families bravely shared with me the harrowing ordeal that they have endured over the past months as they await news of their loved ones. It's intolerable," Biden added. "Today, we are praying for their four children, seven grandchildren and other loved ones and are grieving this tragic news with them."

"I reaffirm the pledge we have made to all the families of those still held hostage: We will not stop working to bring them home," he added.

"It's been 76 days since Iran-backed Hamas terrorists took hundreds hostage, including Americans. And today, we learned of the heartbreaking death of 73-year-old Israeli-American hostage Gadi Haggai," wrote Sen. Rick Scott (R-Fla.). "We can't let this continue. We must bring them all home."

"Another American killed by the Hamas's Oct. 7 terrorist attack," added Rep. Don Bacon (R-Neb.).

"Gadi Haggai, 73, was murdered by Hamas while being held hostage. Haggai was a retired chef and jazz musician, the father of four and the grandfather of seven. He and his wife were kidnapped by Hamas on Oct. 7 while on their morning walk," wrote Ted Deutch, CEO of the American Jewish Committee.

"Murdering and kidnapping innocent elderly civilians. Hamas is an enemy of humanity," he said. "May Gadi Haggai's memory be a blessing." **HW**

A Historic Synagogue Creates Tension Between Egypt's Few Remaining Jews and Their Government



A man takes photos inside the Jewish Ben Ezra Synagogue after its restoration in Cairo, Sept. 1, 2023. Credit: Ahmed Gomaa/ Xinhua via Getty Images

By David I. Klein

(JTA) – In September, Egyptian authorities re-inaugurated Cairo's historic Ben Ezra synagogue, which had undergone a year-long renovation. Despite having maintained the synagogue for years, Egypt's few remaining Jews were conspicuously not invited.

In February, according to a Haaretz report, a genizah – a trove of once disregarded sacred texts – was discovered during excavations in a Cairo Jewish cemetery. But its contents were confiscated by officials despite protests from the Jewish community.

"They refused to wait until a rabbi would attend the excavation," said Sammy Ibrahim, vice president of the Jewish community's organization. "We complained but they did nothing. So [the documents] have gone to a store room to rot away."

The tensions have continued to build. Last Tuesday, the Jewish community made use of the synagogue for the first time since it was renovated and reopened for tourists by the Egyptian government. Community leaders toured around a group of professors and alumni donors from Princeton University.

"It's about showing them that we are still in control of this place," Ibrahim told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

As Ahmed Issa, Egypt's minister of tourism and antiquities, said in September, the 1,200-year-old synagogue "is one of the most important and oldest Jewish temples in Egypt." It is most famous for having housed the Cairo Genizah.

Ibrahim saw the lack of an invitation in September as a clear slight by the antiquities ministry, and now he's worried the ministry does not respect the community's ownership of the site.

When Ibrahim asked the ministry, which currently manages the synagogue, to close the site for tourists and allow the community's event to be private, they refused, according to Ibrahim.

The restoration of the synagogue was funded by Egypt's antiquities authority on the direct order of President Abed Fattah El-Sisi, who also tasked the authority to work on three other historic synagogues in Egypt. Those projects have not yet begun, but in 2020, the Eliyahu Hanavi synagogue in Alexandria was renovated by the Egyptian govern-

ment at the cost of about \$2.2 million.

In Egypt, the cost of such works would normally fall on the minority community associated with the site, but unlike Coptic Christians, who account for 10% of Egypt's population, Egypt's Jewish and no such funds. Today, Egypt's Jewish community numbers under a dozen members, most of whom are elderly.

Recognizing that they had no financial ability to fulfill the antiquities ministry's request, the community reached out directly to President Sisi, with whom they have maintained good ties, for support.

"We made a complaint to the president and he gave an order that the synagogue should be restored on the expenses of the antiquities [ministry]," Ibrahim said. "So [the ministry] didn't like this, that we stepped past them and went higher."

Egypt was once home to one of the largest and oldest Jewish communities in the Middle East. By the early 20th century, Egypt was still home to more than 80,000 Jews, including Sephardim, Karaites and an Ashkenazi refugee community which founded a burgeoning Yiddish Theatre scene.

The establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 brought an end to that world. Most Egyptian Jews emigrated during the following years, as Arab-Israeli tensions spilled over into antisemitic laws and riots in Egypt.

The Ben Ezra Synagogue's Cairo Genizah has continued to provide scholars with insights into Jewish life across the world and the ages for more than a century after it was first discovered. The Princeton visit was organized by Marina Rustow, one of the leading scholars on the famous genizah.

Despite the rocky history of the 20th century, and the shooting of two Israeli tourists in Alexandria by an Egyptian policeman after the start of the Israel-Hamas war in October, Ibrahim stressed that the remaining community feels both safe and comfortable in Egypt.

"We have no fear at all, no fear at all,"

The community's president, Magda Haroun, made similar points when speaking to the Princeton group last Tuesday.

"So this event was nice because we showed them a demonstration that this is our place," Ibrahim said. **HW**

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Jordan Intercepts Armed Drone Fired at Israel by Iran-Backed Iraqi Militia



A military vehicle on the Israeli border with the Gaza Strip on Dec. 21, 2023. Credit: Yossi Zamir/Flash90.

(JNS) – An Iranian-backed militia in Iraq reportedly fired an armed drone in the direction of Eilat, which Jordanian air defenses intercepted.

The Erbil-based, Kurdish news website "Rudaw" describes the Islamic Resistance in Iraq as "a network of shadow Iraqi militia groups" associated with the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

The group stated that "The Mujahideen of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq targeted a target in the occupied Umm al-Rashrash, Eilat with appropriate weapons," per "Rudaw." (Mujahideen means "holy fighters.")

Jordan's Ministry of Defense later said it shot the drone down, "Maariv" reported. A Hezbollah-affiliated channel on Telegram also released purported footage of the drone launch.

In recent months, the Iranian-backed

Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces has threatened the 2,500 U.S. forces stationed in the country. The group is a member of the Iranian-backed radical axis and cooperates with Hezbollah and Shi'ite militias in Syria.

Northern Israel

The Israel Defense Forces detected projectile launches in northern Israel, and Israeli artillery struck the sources of the fire last Friday.

Israeli Air Force fighter jets struck Hezbollah targets in Lebanon, including military sites where terrorists operated, and hit infrastructure, the IDF stated.

The IDF released footage last Friday of a drone that it intercepted over Lebanese waters before it crossed into Israeli territory. The interception, which occurred last week, involved a drone heading to Israeli economic waters. The

drone was likely aimed at the Karish offshore gas rig, "Kan News" reported.

Hezbollah said last Friday that it has lost 121 operatives since the start of the war, per "Walla," which reported that Israel struck about 20 Hezbollah targets in the past two days.

Gaza

Palestinian reports said that seven people were killed in an Israeli airstrike targeting a vehicle in Rafah, in the south of the Gaza Strip. It has yet to be established who was killed.

Israel's war effort is "moving forward and completing the objectives we set, the dismantling of Hamas's battalions and neutralizing underground capabilities," Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said last Friday, after a daily security assessment with military chiefs.

"We are working in Khan Yunis and southern Gaza, and we will work in additional places later on," he said.

The Hamas leader in Gaza, Yahaya Sinwar, "hears the IDF's bulldozers over him, the IAF's bombs and the IDF's activities," Gallant added. "He will meet our barrels soon."

The IDF stated last Friday that soldiers its 5th Brigade's combat team conducted operational activity in the Kasbah complex in Beit Hanoun in recent days.

"The soldiers of the combat team – together with aerial fire support, observation posts and combat engineering forces – cleared the area of the Kasbah, eliminated terrorists [and] struck dozens of terrorist targets and infrastructure," the military said.

"Among other things, the forces collected many weapons including Kalashnikov type weapons, grenades, cartridges and ammunition boxes, mortar bombs and vests – including IDF vests," the army stated.

"In addition, the forces located uniforms of the Hamas terrorist organization, including children's uniforms, Hamas documents and telephones and an IDF kitbag," it added. "The forces located several tunnel shafts in the homes of Hamas operatives, the largest of which was in a school. From these tunnels terrorists attacked the forces the day before the brigade's operation."

"The soldiers of the 5th Brigade's combat team completed the mission of protecting the communities and kibbutzim in southern Israel, in which the brigade participated in the effort to neutralize the area of terrorists since the beginning of the war," per the IDF.

The soldiers also secured the security fence and repaired observation posts. **HW**

IDF Soldier Dies after Being Infected by Fungus in Gaza



Israeli troops operating in the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip, Dec. 24, 2023. Credit: IDF.

(JNS) – An Israeli soldier has died after being infected by a dangerous type of fungus found in the soil of the Gaza Strip, "Kan" reported last Tuesday.

The soldier was transported to Assuta Ashdod Medical Center two weeks ago, suffering from serious limb wounds infected by the fungus. The medical staff attempted every treatment possible, including experimental treatments from abroad, and brought in experts, but the fungus proved resistant and eventually overtook his organs, resulting in his death.

There are around 10 other soldiers who have been infected with the deadly strain in Gaza, according to professor Galia Rahab, chairperson of the Infectious Diseases Association and former director of the Infectious Diseases Unit at Sheba Hospital.

Rabab told "Kan" that these fungi were not seen in previous wars in the Gaza Strip and that the source may have been soil contaminated by sewage. It is unknown whether there is a connection to Hamas's tunnel network, and the matter is under investigation.

The Infectious Diseases Association will hold an emergency discussion on the fungus along with Israel Defense Forces epidemiology experts. **HW**

Ten other soldiers have been infected by the deadly strain; the Infectious Diseases Association will hold an emergency meeting on the phenomenon.

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Netanyahu to Biden: 'We Will Fight Until Absolute Victory'



Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at a Cabinet meeting at the Kirya military headquarters in Tel Aviv, Dec. 24, 2023. Credit: Amos Ben-Gershom/GPO.

(JNS) – The Gaza war will continue for "however long it takes," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told U.S. President Joe Biden last Saturday night.

Speaking during a Cabinet meeting at IDF headquarters in Tel Aviv last Sunday, the premier said, "Last night, I spoke again with President Biden. I appreciate the steadfast U.S. position – which supports our war effort – in the U.N. Security Council. I told President Biden yesterday that we will fight until absolute victory – however long that takes. The U.S. understands this."

The prime minister denied "erroneous reports" claiming the U.S. had prevented Israel from taking action against other hostile entities in the region. ("The Wall Street Journal" reported on Saturday that Biden blocked Israel from attacking Hezbollah on Oct. 11, four days after the Hamas attack on the northwestern Negev.)

"Our decisions in the war are based on our operational considerations, and I will not expand further. They are not dictated by external pressure. The decision on how to use our forces is an independent decision of the IDF and nobody else," the prime minister said.

Netanyahu referred to the 14 IDF troops killed in action this weekend, including 10 last Saturday: "This is a difficult morning, after a very difficult day of fighting in Gaza. On behalf of all members of the government and the entire people of Israel, I would like to send condolences to the families of our heroic soldiers."

He said IDF soldiers have killed "many thousands of terrorists" and will continue to grind away at the Hamas terrorist group until it is destroyed, the hostages are returned and Gaza "will never again constitute a threat to the State of Israel." HW

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New York Rep. Ocasio-Cortez Draws Fire for Christmas Message Comparing Jesus to Gazans

By Luke Tress

(New York Jewish Week) – Critics blasted New York Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez for a Christmas message comparing Jesus to the Palestinians, with at least one saying it invoked the historic charge that the Jews killed Jesus.

Drawing parallels between Jesus' persecutors and present-day Israel, Ocasio-Cortez wrote in an Instagram post last Sunday that Jesus was born in "modern-day Palestine" under a government carrying out "a massacre of innocents." According to the New Testament, Jesus was a Jew who lived within the modern borders of Israel and was killed by the Roman forces ruling the territory at the time

"He was part of a targeted population being indiscriminately killed to protect an unjust leader's power," Ocasio-Cortez wrote. "Thousands of years later, right-wing forces are violently occupying Bethlehem as similar stories unfold for today's Palestinians."

The New York lawmaker, a member of the so-called "Squad" of outspoken progressives in Congress, referred to Jesus' family as "Jewish Palestinians."

The text in the post was superimposed over an image of a baby doll in a pile of concrete rubble, a variation of the traditional nativity scene that became a motif for pro-Palestinian activists ahead of Christmas. Christian leaders in Bethlehem, traditionally seen as the birthplace of Jesus, called off Christmas celebrations this year to express solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza.

Ocasio-Cortez's post made no mention of Hamas, Israeli hostages in Gaza or the Oct. 7 atrocities that claimed the lives of 1,200 people in Israel, mostly civilians, and set off the war with the Hamas terrorist group. The Gaza Health Ministry, which is controlled by Hamas, says more than 20,000 people in Gaza have died during the war.

In a second Instagram post last Monday, Ocasio-Cortez posted a video of Rev. Munther Isaac, a Lutheran cleric in Bethlehem, delivering a sermon with a similar message. Ocasio-Cortez wrote in the post, "When we justify the

bombing of children, Jesus is under the rubble."

Former Anti-Defamation League leader Abraham Foxman called Ocasio-Cortez's initial post "hateful and dangerous," citing the historic libel claiming that Jews are collectively responsible for killing Christ, or deicide. The charge, refuted by the Catholic Church since the 1960s and rejected by some other Christian denominations, has fueled antisemitism in Christian communities for centuries.

"She invoked the charge that the Jews are again killing Jesus," Foxman wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter. Foxman served as the national director of the ADL from 1987 to 2015.

Former U.S. ambassador to Israel David Friedman called the post "a reinvention" of history.

U.S. Rep. Ritchie Torres, a New York Democrat and vocal advocate for Israel, criticized comparisons between Jesus and the Palestinians in a post that did not directly mention Ocasio-Cortez.

"It is antisemitic to compare Israelis to the Romans who murdered Jesus. Associating Jews with the murder of Jesus is antisemitism," Torres wrote on X.

Ocasio-Cortez's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Pro-Palestinian protesters repeatedly compared Jesus' plight to that of the Palestinians in the lead-up to Christmas. A leading New York activist group, Within Our Lifetime, vowed to "cancel" Christmas in a protest [last Monday] near midtown's Rockefeller Center Christmas tree, saying that celebrations were unacceptable during the war. During the protest, demonstrators carried a mannequin representing Jesus' mother, Mary, holding a child's body wrapped in white. Within Our Lifetime explicitly advocates for Israel's destruction and endorsed the Oct. 7 attacks. Activists with the group have been accused of committing violent hate crimes against Jews.

During the Christmas protest, demonstrators scuffled with police and at least six people were arrested. **HW**



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Attacks from Lebanon Wrecked Half of Homes in Northern Kibbutz



Smoke rises after a rocket fired from Lebanon hit a house in Ramot Naftali, northern Israel, Dec. 21, 2023. Credit: Ayal Margolin/Flash90.

JNS) - Hezbollah attacks from Lebanon have destroyed much of the Upper Galilee kibbutz of Manara.

"More than half of the houses in the kibbutz were destroyed by Hezbollah fire, 86 houses," said kibbutz member Roni Yafet, Channel 12 reported last Saturday.

"Kibbutz Manara was badly damaged. It will take time to renovate it even after they tell us we can return. On Oct. 7 [the date of the Hamas massacre in the south], we decided to leave. We thought it would be for three days - we didn't understand the magnitude of the disaster."

Since the Hamas attack and ensuing war in Gaza, Hezbollah has engaged in a low-level war of attrition, with the

Iranian terrorist proxy engaging in daily cross-border rocket, mortar and drone attacks.

These attacks can have deadly consequences, as was seen last Friday when the IDF announced that Sgt. Amit Hod Ziv, 19, from the 188th Armored Brigade's 71st Battalion and Rosh Ha'ayin, was killed and another soldier was seriously wounded in a Hezbollah rocket attack on the area of Moshav Shtula.

Two civilians were wounded in the Upper Galilee village of Moshav Dovev last Thursday by an anti-tank missile fired from Lebanon. Ziv Medical Center in Safed said that a man and a woman were admitted with light injuries.

Simultaneously, terrorists in Lebanon

fired an anti-tank missile at the northern community of Moshav Avivim, setting cars ablaze.

The roof of a house in Avivim last Sunday took a direct hit from an anti-tank missile, an example of how other northern Israeli communities have suffered damage to residential properties from the cross-border attacks.

Meanwhile, fears are mounting in northern Israel about a cross-border invasion similar to the one perpetrated by Hamas on Oct. 7, in which terrorists rampaged across the northwestern Negev, murdering at least 1,200 people, wounding thousands more and taking some 240 hostages back to Gaza.

Misgav Am

Ofer Moscowitz, a resident of Kibbutz Misgav Am, located near Kiryat Shmona and close to the Lebanese border, told Channel 12 last week about the concerns about tunnels being used for a major attack.

"One night, about a year ago, around 3 in the morning, I heard digging. Other people told me they heard it as well. Strange, incomprehensible noises, like some kind of air hammer. Knocking noise, something dull. It's stressful, it's scary. I notified the army. The army does not take these messages lightly, they usually check them. The army came, asked me questions, and interrogated me about it. They didn't offer too many conclusions; they don't tell us anything," Moscowitz said, as quoted in "The Jewish Press."

"They checked; I don't know what means they used. First, they asked what I heard, investigated, and then they said: 'If you hear it again, inform us and we will do our tests.' They may be checking closer to the fence. My house is 15 meters from the fence, maybe they check more in the direction of the border itself. I believe that they do their tests around the settlement, not inside it," he said.

In December 2018, Israel announced that it had uncovered several Hezbollah tunnels dug under the border. The United States, Germany and the United Kingdom confirmed the existence of these tunnels.

Moscowitz is one of the few residents of communities near the Lebanese border who has not evacuated during the war. He said that he has come under fire from Lebanon and that much of his property, including farmland, has been destroyed.

"Our house is in a very dangerous area called the 'Killing Zone.' They tell you: 'If you go near there, you know you're taking a risk.' My daughter was supposed to move to Misgav Am. I don't know if I want my grandchildren to grow up in a dangerous and scary area. If the IDF does nothing, I will be afraid.

"On the other hand, you hear about the price that is being paid, our best sons are being killed, so I say to myself: 'Wait, why do we need this headache?' The avocado orchard is just money, what's important is the safety of the people, who will continue to live properly," he said.

"I will return and live in Misgav Am, but I won't be angry if families with children say they are afraid to come back," Moscowitz said. HW

'Deeply Offensive,' Holocaust Museum Says of Now-Canceled **Protest**

(JNS) - The members of Doctors Against Genocide, which calls itself "a global health coalition committed to stopping genocide" and has some 3,100 combined followers on Instagram and X, may have taken their Hippocratic Oaths. But the group first did a good deal of harm.

First, the group announced a Dec. 28 gathering at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum at 11 a.m., followed by a 3 p.m. gathering outside the White House. "Urgent call to action," it announced. "Stop the genocide in Gaza."

The announcement urged attendees to get free tickets to the museum. "Don't ring in 2024 with an ongoing genocide," it said. "Action is open to all. We encourage healthcare workers to wear white coats/uniforms."

The Holocaust Museum website prohibits a list of things, including: "protest or demonstrate on museum property or display or carry placards, signs or banners."

"Our museum is the national memorial to the 6 million Jews killed by Nazi Germany and its collaborators. It is deeply offensive to survivors and the memory of the victims to exploit Holocaust history," the museum posted last Tuesday to its 437,000 followers on so-

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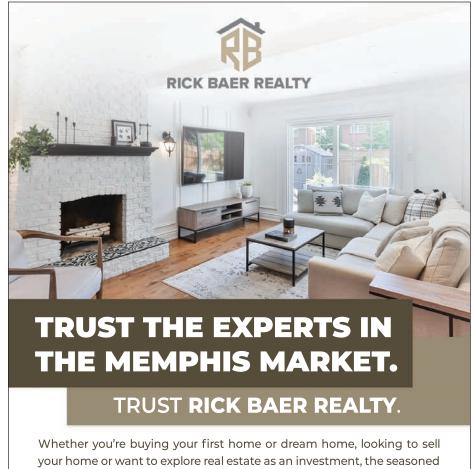
"Our long-standing policy against protests in our museum preserves this space for the solemn memory of victims, the reflections of survivors and its educational mission," it added.

Doctors Against Genocide posted that "We made a decision to cancel the event. We will be announcing future events with more detailed communication."

It also claimed that there were "misconceptions surrounding our Holocaust Museum event, which has been misrepresented as an antisemitic gathering." Instead, the group claimed, the goal was to visit the museum "to express our empathy for the horrors of that genocide. Additionally, we wanted to bring awareness to the ongoing genocide in Gaza."

"Our initial communication did not sufficiently convey this, leading to misinterpretations and unfounded accusations from parties with ill intentions," it said.

In a separate post, the group claimed the event was supposed to be a way "to learn from the museum's initiatives in genocide education and prevention to inform our own efforts as an organization dedicated to preventing war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide around the world." HW



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Breaking Down Clean Vehicle Tax Credits for Business Owners

Provided by Mike Stein, Managing Director Investments
Wells Fargo Advisors
Questions for Mike?
You can reach him at 901.761.8151
Michael.Stein@WellsFargoAdvisors.com

If you own a business, you might be able to use one of these two new federal tax credits to help offset your cost to purchase certain clean vehicles (including electric, plug-in hybrid, and fuel cell vehicles). Both credits are nonrefundable if they exceed your tax liability, but an unused general business tax credit can be carried forward to a later year.

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New clean vehicle tax credit

The new clean vehicle tax credit can be either a personal or a general business tax credit. If the vehicle is used 50% or more for business, the credit is treated as a general business tax credit; otherwise, the credit is allocated between personal and business use.

Up to \$7,500 is available (in two parts) for the purchase of a new clean vehicle assembled in North America that weighs less than 14,000 pounds: \$3,750 if a critical minerals requirement is met, and \$3,750 if a battery components requirement is met. Fuel cell vehicles should qualify for the full \$7,500 credit without regard to these two requirements.

The credit is not available for vehicles with a manufacturer's suggested retail price higher than \$80,000 for vans, sport utility vehicles, and pickups, or \$55,000 for other vehicles. You can find out which vehicles are eligible for the credit at fueleconomy.gov.

The credit is not available if the purchaser's modified adjusted gross income for the taxable year or the preceding taxable year (whichever is less) exceeds \$150,000 (\$300,000 for joint filers). In the case of a partnership or S corporation, the credit is allocated to the partners or shareholders, respectively, and the income limitation applies to those individuals. The income limitation does not apply to corporations subject to the corporate income tax.

Commercial clean vehicle credit

A general business tax credit of up to \$7,500 (\$40,000 for heavy vehicles weighing 14,000 or more pounds) is



The new clean vehicle tax credit can be either a personal or a general business tax credit.

available for the purchase of a qualified commercial clean vehicle, including some types of "mobile machinery."

The credit is equal to the lesser of (a) 15% of the tax basis (generally, the purchase price) of the vehicle (30% if the vehicle is not powered by a gasoline or diesel internal combustion engine), or (b) the incremental cost of the vehicle (the excess of the purchase price of the clean vehicle over the price of a comparable vehicle that is powered solely by a gasoline or diesel internal combustion engine).

For some business owners, this credit may be easier to take advantage of than the new clean vehicle credit, because it's not subject to the income limits or the vehicle pricing, component, and final assembly requirements.

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OBITUARIES



Bayla Goldberg Manis

With a heavy heart, we announce the passing of Bayla Goldberg Manis, 86, on November 29, 2023.

A beloved wife, mother, grandmother, sister, aunt, and friend, Bayla is survived by her daughter, Terri Manis Struminger (Scot); two granddaughters, Jodie (Michael Weisman) and Brittany Struminger; two brothers, Aubrey (Joanne) Goldberg of Las Vegas, Nev., and Don (Kay) Goldberg of Suffolk, Va.; two sisters-in-law, Shirley Manis and Marcia (Tom) Fisher, both of Memphis, Tenn.; a brother-in-law, John McDonald, of Wilmington, Del.; and numerous nieces and nephews.

She was preceded in death by her husband of 60 years, Arnold Asher Manis; her parents, Miriam and Meyer Goldberg; a daughter, Jennifer Lynn Manis (who passed away in 1987 on the same date); two sisters, Beth (Alvin) Lansky of Memphis, Tenn. and Edie McDonald of Wilmington, Del.; and a brother-inlaw, Irving Manis, of Memphis, Tenn.

Born October 23, 1937, in Newport News, Va., Bayla and her family later moved to Suffolk, Va., where she graduated from Suffolk High School. She later graduated from Mary Washington College, then the women's college of the University of Virginia, in Fredericksburg, Va. Upon graduation, Bayla returned to Suffolk and worked as a teacher until relocating to Memphis in August 1962 after getting married.

Bayla's life in Memphis was dedicated to taking care of her family, especially Jennifer when she became ill at a young age. After Jennifer passed away, Bayla became an avid participant in the Memphis Jewish Community Center fitness classes, attending three days per week for more than 30 years. Upon Arnold's retirement, she joined him at the fitness center a few additional days each week. She was also frequently seen there taking one or both grandchildren to ballet classes and attending dance recitals.

Bayla was an avid sports enthusiast, playing basketball in high school and attending University of Memphis (then Memphis State University) basketball games. After giving up season tickets when the Tigers changed venues from the Mid-South Coliseum, Bayla didn't miss a televised game. Watching them with her became a favorite family past time right up until her death, even from the hospital as she stayed warm under her Memphis Tiger fleece blanket.

Family members also enjoyed Bayla's knitting skills, continuing to use and cherish blankets she made for them.

A funeral took place on Friday, December 1, with burial in Baron Hirsch Cemetery. The family requests that donations be made to Baron Hirsch Synagogue, Temple Israel, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, or a charity of the donor's choice. **HW**

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Prominent LA Conservative Synagogue Relocates Shabbat Services Due to Planned Pro-Palestinian Protest



Temple Beth Am in Los Angeles. Credit: Wikimedia Commons

By Jacob Gurvis

LOS ANGELES (JTA) – Temple Beth Am, Los Angeles' third-oldest Conservative synagogue, told congregants it would be moving its Saturday afternoon Shabbat services last weekend due to safety concerns over a pro-Palestinian protest happening at a nearby park.

In an email sent to the community last Thursday, Rabbi Adam Kligfeld and temple president Mark Samuel said that "out of an abundance of caution," afternoon services would be moved to a private home. But they stressed that the synagogue did not make the decision lightly.

"I don't remember a more agonizing decision," Kligfeld wrote in the email, which was obtained by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. "On one hand, not that much is at stake. This was not Kol Nidre or a bar/bat mitzvah or even 'normal' Shabbat AM service, times during which hundreds of people are on our

campus happily and unselfconsciously and proudly doing Judaism. This was about 'only' the 12-16 people or so who normally show up for Shabbat afternoon services and learning. Not that momentous."

He continued: "On the other hand, it felt hugely momentous. In 2023? In the city of Los Angeles? A Jewish community even considering not holding religious services at their own synagogue because of a looming threat posed by a rally that has a very good chance of spilling from pro-Palestinian rhetoric to virulently anti-Zionist and dangerously antisemitic? It boggles the mind that that is where we are in modern America. But it is where we are."

The rally, billed as "Black and Palestinian Solidarity for a Ceasefire this Christmas," and was set to take place Saturday at 3 p.m. in La Cienega Park, which is just a few minutes' walk from

the synagogue located in L.A.'s heavily Jewish Pico-Robertson neighborhood.

In the email, Kligfeld referenced the recent slew of antisemitic incidents in the L.A. area, including the death of pro-Israel protestor Paul Kessler, who was fatally injured during an altercation during dueling pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian rallies in the suburb of Thousand Oaks in early November. A man has been charged with involuntary manslaughter in the case.

In addition to Kessler's death, there have been numerous other incidents since the Israel-Hamas war broke out on Oct. 7 that have rattled the L.A. Jewish community – including a hate crime against a Jewish man on his way to synagogue in Beverly Hills, a charter school housed at a synagogue teaching students that Israel was committing genocide and a break-in at a Jewish family's home that was also investigated as a hate crime.

Kligfeld also acknowledged that "during the conversation we had about this, many expressed discomfort with the notion of cowering, rather than representing." He encouraged his congregants to "respond to this moment ... by having a large and robust crowd."

The Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles said it is monitoring the situation. "We are disheartened and saddened that Jewish ritual observances have to be moved out of an abundance of caution. We continue to hope and pray for peace," the organization said in a statement to the "Jewish Journal."

Temple Beth Am is not the first synagogue to have its Shabbat services disrupted by pro-Palestinian protests. A Melbourne, Australia, synagogue was evacuated by police during Shabbat services last month after a violent turn at a major protest in an adjacent park. **HW**



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What I Like Best About Judaism



Editor's note: This story is being reprinted in memory of Ted Roberts in appreciation of his longtime service as a newspaper columnist.

Ted Roberts

How do I love Judaism? Let me count the ways.

I love that big, fat book that drives our ethics and our ethos. I mean the Total Book; Humash, prophets, and writing; our Tanach. I love its honesty. It is a soap opera of saints and sinners. The celestial spotlight reveals every blemish in the character of our ancestors. There's no cover up. It is bound in credibility and illustrated in truth. It is not a Neiman-Marcus brochure. Whether written by the finger of G-d or dictated by him to the heart, soul, and mind of a mortal mouthpiece, it speaks truth. A no-spin zone.

I love it that we don't have a Pope or a hierarchy of any sort. My city doesn't have a head rabbi, nor does my state. I don't even know the name of the head rabbi of Jerusalem. If I wanted to ask him how to improve my boss's ethical behavior, I'm sure I'd have trouble locating him – the head Rabbi, not my brother-in-law. We respect the teacher, the rabbi, but we know the way is not given to him alone.

I love the tenderness expressed toward the fragile creatures that share the male, warrior-centered culture of biblical times. Imagine. It's an age of might makes right. The World Wrestling Federation – vintage 2000 BCE – is in charge. Yet, here's this book of history, ethics, and poetry that says pile driving your opponent into a granite cliff is illegal – unless he's a pagan who thinks sticks and stones and clay figurines run the universe.

I love the tenderness in Deuteronomy that cares about the muzzled ox and forbids plucking the mother bird from its nest. Not to mention its regard for the weakest of the down-trodden; widows and orphans. You should allow them to harvest your orchards and "the corners of your field." A revolutionary concept: Such ethics in the Bronze Age are as

rare as pomegranate bushes in the Sinai Desert – not to be found in any of literature of the times; except in our Book. It is our idea, like monotheism, we should be proud. None of the ancient writings that skeptics claim colored our Book reflect tenderness, compassion, or a humane code of conduct.

Yes, other cultures of the day, the cynics remind us, are also abounding with creation myths and flood myths. Even heroic figures cast, as infants, upon the mercy of the river tide. (Sound familiar?)

True. But their pantheons were stocked with comic strip characters with all the warm-heartedness of Conan the Barbarian. Grotesquely sexual, grotesquely evil. The pagan myth-makers could not imagine a supernatural force that conjoined love and power. Why would a warrior king even glance at the powerless.

I love our no-in-between Thunderer who abominates the evil of pagan Canaan ("and you shall utterly destroy them") but gushes over widows, orphans, and strangers. And yes, the birds of the air and beasts of the field. Unsurprisingly, He is a spirit of moods like his creation, humanity. He said He made man in his image and that might imply a reciprocal relationship – a small measure of man in G-d, so it appears in our limited vision.

I love the mysticism of the Hasids and their like, who add a galactic dimension to the G-d of Sinai. With due reverence to tradition, they add their own story of the sparks that fuel the universe. Metaphorically, kin to the Big Bang Theory - an expanding light, a mist of matter flooding the infinite space that is the universe. Irreverent? No more than Ecclesiastes, no more than Micah, no more than the Talmudists who dared to boldly interpret the word of G-d and fabricate our Oral Law. Who says that Etz Chayim, our Tree of life, doesn't flourish in time and bend with the wind and grow with the rain? Truth, like the universe, is still expanding.

I love it that in our Book there's a chapter called Song of Songs, a love story that could have been penned by a 5th Century BCE Jacqueline Suzanne. And a skeptical philosophic chapter called Ecclesiastes. How did they make the cut? There's enough theological room in

Judaism for an army of kibitzers. They, too, may dwell in the Tent of Covenant.

I like the idea that the Prophets are critical of Temple worship. They deride the notion – as would most Rabbis of today – that the Almighty spirit that hung galaxies in infinity, invisible to us, is pleased by the aroma of barbecued beef or mutton. The cherished sacrifice, they say, is of the heart. They speak loudly of this – in our Book – even though over a hundred of the Mitzvahs command our attention to the Temple.

I like the idea that the Book of Judaism is big enough to give voice to Micah ("walk humbly with your G-d") as well as two fat chapters called Leviticus and Deuteronomy with hundreds of rules. And yet we honor Hillel, who said that it all boiled down to not poaching on your neighbor's fig tree unless you wanted him poaching on yours.

I like the idea that the history, narrative, and downright schmoozing of the Humash never neglects an opportunity to exercise the most blatant Loshen Hora. Truth is never subjugated to political correctness. Judah and David are castigated as skirt chasers. Solomon, too. And furthermore, he's an idolater. What do you expect from a man with a thousand pagan wives – curvy, uninhibited, acrobatic, who attend Friday night services on hilltop shrines. Our flawed ancestors are never deified. And the book doesn't hold its nose at biting criticism.

I like the fact that Judaism, with minor exception, waves a strong non-monastic banner. This planet, this day, is the challenge. Don't hang around the house or synagogue all day bending over Talmud – go fix something. The world cries for perfection. Deeds, not meditation. Abraham was a shepherd. Rashi was a vintner. The Rambam was a doctor like Jonas Salk. And David spent a large part of his day composing music and writing lyrics (like his kinsman, George Gershwin). Rebbe Menachim Schneerson was a physicist.

And most of all, I like the mystery of our survival: an ever-present conundrum of worldwide consequence; and then the linked curiosity that every nation that seriously devoted itself to our destruction has fallen, with immense suffering. Egypt, Spain, Germany and

Russia. Is the Arab world, seething with Jew hatred, next? I love the splendor of our holidays and their constant reminder that there is more than this time, this place. How our feasts and ceremonies light up our culture and history! At the Seder, brilliant with ceremony, who can forget our slavery days. Chanukah, Purim, even Tish B'uv awake our ancestral you might say tribal - memory. The house note is due, the boss thinks you're dumber than dirt, and the 12-year-old wallpaper in the dining room cries for replacement. But how trivial, compared to the travails of Esther and her people, our people. Had some Persian soldier plunged his sword into the heart of my progenitor a hundred generations ago, I would never have walked this cool, green earth. Bosses, dining rooms, a relative's pettiness, even a child's illness fade into another dimension like last year's shortlived TV sitcom. And somehow we survive - oh mystery of mysteries.

Judaism is a revolutionary creed. Our bible is studded with the "HE" and "WE" dialogue between the judge and the defendant. It's as though the U.S. Constitution began with the dictum that "We the people shall eternally question, debate, argue, and kibbitz with the concept and character of this constitution." Patriarchs, priests, prophets, and even commoners like Tevye the dairyman bedevil their creator, from Genesis to Malachi with criticism and comments. And this besieged creator, like the CEO at the shareholders meeting, is so busy answering complaints that you wonder how he has time to run his business ... the universe. The Creator, himself, with divine irritation repeatedly calls us a stiff-necked people. What a theology! Formally bound by a maze of laws - written and oral, implicit and explicit, carved in stone and whispered - yet the holiest of our books is one long debate of our covenant; flaring with discussion, disagreement, disobedience, and dissonance. A human/divine marriage in a bizarre divorce court, in which the Judge promises his love forever. And a happy kiss and make-up ending.

The syndicated humor of Ted, the Scribbler on the roof, has appeared in newspapers around the U.S., on National Public Radio, and numerous websites. **HW**

ISRAEL INSIGHTS International Front or Irritant?

December 26, 8:30 p.m. in Israel. i24 News reports: "IDF fighter jet intercepts hostile aerial target in the Red Sea." Reuters: "Yemen's Houthis carry out attacks on Israeli city of Eilat and cargo ship in Red Sea."

While the war to eliminate Hamas rages in Gaza, while the IDF also actively defends our northern border, fighting Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthi rebels – read terrorists – of Yemen have fired numerous missiles and drones into the Red Sea, attacking both Israel and international shipping within international waters. Most of these projectiles have been shot down or allowed to fall without injury or damage.

However, it is much more serious. Numerous ships of multiple countries have been hit causing injury and damage. Shipping lines of numerous countries on their way to many destinations have been rerouted around the southern tip of Africa, at tremendous cost to commerce and ultimately consumers.

Look at a map of the Red Sea. It is a critical waterway not only to Israel, but to Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt and beyond. The Suez Canal brings major revenue to Egypt as ships travel through the

Mediterranean Sea to Europe and beyond. At the foot of that waterway is Yemen.

We in Israel most often think of Yemen as having been a home to some 50,000 Jews for over 2000 years, with a lovely Mizrachi Jewish tradition, sometimes their being referred to as "the most Jewish of Jews." Infamously, in 1949 the State of Israel airlifted 45,000 Jews from Yemen on Operation Magic Carpet, on 380 flights. Today there are no Jews in Yemen; some say there may be one.

Looking again at the map, one sees that Yemen is not far from Iran, just across the Arabian Peninsula. The Houthis have been an Iranian tool in attacks against Saudi Arabia and Gulf states, particularly the UAE. And Iran of course is the common denominator between Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis. All three are proxy terrorist organizations funded, equipped, and weaponized by Iran in its war of jihad aimed at Israel and the west.

The Wilson Center published in July 2022 a paper titled "Who are Yemen's Houthis? It states: "In February 2022, U.S. Central Command implicated Iran in providing advanced weaponry to the Houthis after they fired ballistic missiles

at Abu Dhabi. Medium range ballistic missiles that were fired from Yemen and entered UAE were not invented, built, designed in Yemen," General Kenneth McKenzie told reporters. "All that happened somewhere else. So I think we certainly see the Iranian connection to this."

That Iranian connection is again self-evident as both Hezbollah and the Houthis are funded and aided militarily to support Hamas by distracting Israel and the IDF in its war in Gaza.

So much so that Salem Alketbi, an Emirati political analyst, published an op ed in "Israel Hayom," on December 26, titled: "Will the conflict expand?" He wrote: "There is no doubt that the failure of the Houthi missiles directed at Israel... to force Israel to stop its pursuit of the terrorist Hamas movement in the Gaza Strip played a vital role... by targeting Israeli ships and then expanding the circle... as part of an Iranian deterrence strategy aimed at resolving the strategic conflict in the Middle East to its advantage."

Alketbi indicates that the Iranians may have overplayed their hand by expanding their target internationally. Indeed, they have done so.

On December 18, CNN reported that

U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin announced the establishment of Operation Prosperity Guardian, an important new multinational security initiative, which focuses on security in the Red Sea. "Countries must come together to tackle the challenge posed by this non-state actor launching ballistic missiles and aerial vehicles (UAVs) at merchant vessels from many nations lawfully transiting international waters."

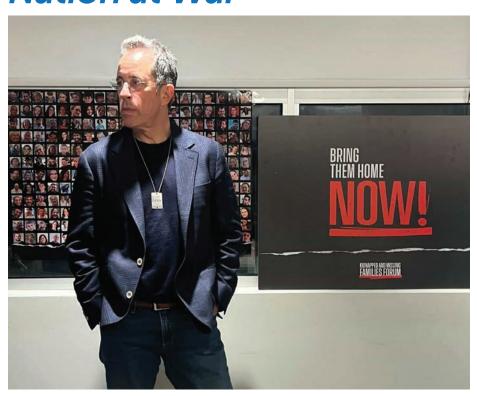
The multinational operation includes the U.S., the U.K., Bahrain, Canada, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Seychelles, and Spain.

Hopefully Austin's initiative will see the Houthis and their Iranian sponsors as more than irritants and take action accordingly. Time will tell.

Howard Weisband served as Assistant Executive Director (1975-77) and Executive Director (1977-84) of the Memphis Jewish Federation. Following Aliyah with his family in 1986, he served as Secretary General of the Jewish Agency for Israel through 1997, and then in other senior professional positions in Israel. Now retired, he and Kayla live in Jerusalem. He can be reached at hweisband@gmail.com HW

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Celebrities Visit Israel to Show Their Support to the Nation at War



American comedian Jerry Seinfeld. Credit: Hostages and Missing Persons Families Forum.

By Amelie Botbol

(JNS) – Since Hamas's Oct. 7 massacre, celebrities, influencers and supporters have paid solidarity visits to the Jewish state even as its war against the terrorist group rages on.

This week, American actress Debra Messing, best known for her starring role in "Will & Grace," toured Kibbutz Kfar Aza, visited Israel Defense Forces soldiers on the frontlines, walked through a Hamas tunnel and met with Israeli President Isaac Herzog.

In November, Messing addressed the "March for Israel" gathering in Washington, D.C., where she called for the release of all the hostages being held captive in the Gaza Strip. She also called for "the safety of the 2.2 million Gazans also held hostage by Hamas."

Messing made waves on social media when she joined Broadway community

members in singing a rendition of "Bring Him Home" from "Les Misérables," which garnered over 400,000 views on YouTube.

Since landing in Israel on Dec. 12, American actor Michael Rapaport, best known for playing Gary in "Friends," appeared in a skit on the satirical show "Eretz Nehederet" that mocked U.S. university administrators for their failure to confront antisemitism on campus.

Rapaport visited Kibbutz Be'eri and Kibbutz Kfar Aza, both of which were devastated during Hamas's Oct. 7 invasion, and met with IDF soldiers.

Last week, Rapaport, who has emerged as a major pro-Israel voice, spoke at rally at Tel Aviv's "Hostage Square."

"There is no excuse for what happened on Oct. 7. There is no rationalizing what happened on Oct. 7, 129

hostages [still held in Gaza] need to be freed by any means necessary. Let my people go," Rapaport told the crowd.

On Dec. 18, comedian Jerry Seinfeld and his family also arrived in Israel.

The global icon visited the headquarters of the Hostages and Missing Persons Families Forum in Tel Aviv, toured ransacked Kibbutz Be'eri along the Gaza border and met with survivors of Hamas's slaughter.

In the immediate aftermath of the massacre, Seinfeld had expressed support for the Jewish state, while noting he had worked on a kibbutz as a teen.

"My heart is breaking from these attacks and atrocities," wrote Seinfeld on Instagram. "But we are also a very strong people in our hearts and minds. We believe in justice, freedom and equality. We survive and flourish no matter what. I will always stand with Israel and the Jewish people."

Ivanka Trump, daughter of former U.S. President Donald Trump, and her husband, Jarred Kushner, also converged on Israel, touring Kibbutz Kfar Aza while accompanied by Knesset Speaker Amir Ohana.

The couple met with survivors of the Oct. 7 terror attacks, soldiers and first responders. Trump and Kushner also met with Herzog and representatives of the families of hostages.

Lead character in the Netflix series "My Unorthodox Life" Julia Haart was also recently photographed touring Kibbutz Be'eri with her son, Shlomo, and her daughter, Miriam.

During her trip, Haart met with Yarden Tzemach, whose brother, Shachar, was killed on Oct. 7. She also met Ella Ben Ami, whose parents were both kidnapped by Hamas into Gaza and whose father, Ohad, remains a captive.

Haart also visited with the family of Omer Wenkert, who was taken hostage at the Supernova Music Festival on Oct. 7.

Last week, singer and social media influencer Montana Tucker also landed in Israel. She visited Kfar Aza, where 56 people were massacred by Hamas and some 20 others taken captive to Gaza.

Tucker participated in a flash mob with Noam Ben David, one of the survivors of the Supernova Music Festival, who was forced to play dead for hours among bodies before being rescued.

Tucker met with 17-year-old Mia Leimberg, a captive who was released along with her dog, Bella, as part of last month's ceasefire-for-hostages deal between Israel and Hamas.

After Oct. 7, Tucker attended the United Nations Special Session on Sexual Violence Against Israelis, at which she sang the Jewish state's national anthem, "Hatikva," and also delivered a speech at the D.C. mega-rally.

"These lies are spreading again. The violence is rising again. The threat is real again," said Tucker at the mass demonstration. "They can stay silent. They can let the lies spread. They can let it all happen again. Or they can stand up and together on behalf of Jews in Israel and around the world who no longer feel safe at school, at work and especially online," she added.

Music executive Scooter Braun, known for managing Ariana Grande, Justin Bieber, Demi Lovato, Kanye West and Taylor Swift, arrived in Israel on Dec. 18, on the same flight as Seinfeld.

Braun also met with the families of the hostages, toured Kibbutz Be'eri and spoke at a rally in Tel Aviv last Saturday night.

"I had to come to Israel. I had to come to stand with my people," said Braun. "When I got here, I did not find a country that was filled with hate or anger. I found a nation of lions filled with hope and courage and kindness, and it let me know that the hostages will come home. And they need to come home now," he said. HW

Erdoğan Proclaims Netanyahu 'No Different' Than Hitler



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his wife, Emine, at a rally in Istanbul in support of the Palestinians, Oct. 28, 2023. Source: Facebook/Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

(JNS) – Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said last Wednesday that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is "no different" than Adolf Hitler due to Israel's prosecution of the war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

"We watched Israel's Nazi camps. What kind of job is this?" asked Erdoğan during a speech, according to a Channel 12 translation. "They talk about Hitler in a strange way. What is the difference between them and Hitler? They will make us miss Hitler even more," he continued.

"The voice that stands with the oppressed is the voice of the Muslim Turks," added Erdoğan.

In a statement shared by Israel's Prime Minister's Office, Netanyahu slammed the Turkish leader for his support of "Hamas-ISIS, which committed crimes against humanity.

"Erdoğan, who is committing genocide against the Kurds, who holds a world record for imprisoning journalists who oppose his rule, is the last person who can preach morality to us," stated the premier.

"The IDF is the most moral army in the world, which is fighting and destroying the most abhorrent terrorist organization in the world," added Netanyahu.

During the 2014 Israel-Hamas war ("Operation Protective Edge"), Erdoğan also compared the Jewish state to Nazi Germany, saying Jerusalem was "keeping Hitler's spirit alive."

'And your end is near'

Earlier this month, the Turkish president threatened that Netanyahu would be tried as a war criminal.

"Netanyahu, who is the butcher of Gaza right now, will be tried as the butcher of Gaza," Erdoğan said in a speech to an Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) committee meeting in Istanbul.

Since the Oct. 7 Hamas massacre, he has sided with the terrorist group and railed against Israel's response to the mass slaughter of its citizens.

Erdoğan told his country's parliament last month that Israel would soon be destroyed.

"Right now, I am openly saying with a clear conscience that Israel is a terrorist state," he said.

While this comment was widely reported, his subsequent remarks went largely unnoticed.

"Hey Israel: You have an atomic bomb, a nuclear bomb. And you are making threats with this. We know this. And your end is near," said Erdoğan.

"You can have as many nuclear

bombs as you want, but you're on your way out," he added.

Days earlier, Erdoğan said at a mass rally in Istanbul that "Hamas is not a terrorist organization" but rather "a liberation group fighting to protect its lands." He previously argued that Gaza's rulers constituted "a group of mujahideen ['jihadists'] defending their lands and peonle"

Last month, Netanyahu slammed Erdoğan for supporting Hamas and bombing Turkish villages, in a likely reference to Ankara's violent oppression of its Kurdish minority.

"So, we're not going to take any lectures from them," said Netanyahu.

After a long diplomatic cold spell, prior to Oct. 7 ties between Ankara and Jerusalem had been warming.

On Sept. 20, during a meeting on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly in New York, Netanyahu told Erdoğan that "our ties are improving," and the two leaders agreed to continue advancing bilateral relations.

Netanyahu was expected to visit Turkey before December, becoming the first Israeli premier to do so since 2008. Erdoğan planned to visit the Jewish state in return, his office announced in late September.

However, he recently told lawmakers that he had dropped his planned trip to Jerusalem. "We had a project to go to Israel, but it was canceled; we will not go," he said. **HW**

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Hezbollah Missiles Hit Galilee Church, Wound 10, Day after Christmas



St. Mary's Greek Orthodox Church in Iqrit, northern Israel. Credit: Dr. Avishai Teicher/Wikimedia Commons.

(JNS) – Israeli forces were involved in a heavy exchange of fire with Hezbollah last Tuesday after anti-tank missiles fired from Lebanon struck a church in the village of Iqrit in the Western Galilee, wounding at least 10 Israelis, including a soldier reportedly in "serious" condition.

The wounded included an Israeli civilian in his 80s and nine Israel Defense Forces soldiers, per local media. The troops were reportedly hurt while evacuating the wounded civilian under missile fire.

IDF and Magen David Adom emergency medical service teams treated some of the injured at the scene, according to Israeli media reports.

The IDF said that Hezbollah anti-tank missiles hit the St. Mary's Greek Orthodox Church in Iqrit.

"This attack is not only a clear vio-

lation of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1701, but also a violation of the freedom of worship," the IDF stated.

Terrorists in Lebanon also targeted Moshav Dovev in the Upper Galilee last Tuesday, as well as Kibbutz Yiftah and Mount Dov near the border with Lebanon.

The IDF responded by shelling the source of the attacks with tank and artillery fire.

The Iranian-backed Hezbollah terror army has been waging a low-intensity conflict against Israel since Hamas's Oct. 7 massacre of 1,200 people in the Jewish state.

In his Christmas message to Christians worldwide, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the Jewish state confronts "monsters, who murdered children in front of their parents and parents in front of their children, who raped and be-

headed women, who burned babies alive, who took babies hostages."

"This is a battle not only of Israel against these barbarians, it's a battle of civilization against barbarism," he added. "I know in this that we have your support."

Heavy bombardments in Lebanon

Israeli Air Force fighter jets struck Hezbollah terror assets extensively in Southern Lebanon last Tuesday morning near border towns Aita al-Shaab, Ramyeh and Meiss ej-Jabal, per Lebanese media.

Prior to the strikes, Israeli reconnaissance drones flew over several Lebanese towns near the frontier, according to the reports.

The IDF said one of its tanks shelled a terror target to remove a threat from Lebanon

The strikes came after terrorists in Lebanon fired several rockets towards the Mount Dov region.

The previous day, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant held a situation assessment at the IDF's Northern Command, where he was briefed on operational activities along the border.

Gallant emphasized that the conflict in the north would continue until the security situation is improves, so some 80,000 evacuated residents can return home.

"Fire was opened on Israel's north without any Israeli provocation, and as a result of Hezbollah's decision," Gallant said. "We will not allow a return to the previous situation we were in until Oct. 6."

The minister added that Israel is hitting the terror group "very hard," and Hazbollah has lost about 150 terrorists.

"They have infrastructure that has been damaged, they have been pushed far in from the fence line and the air force flies freely over Lebanon," he said. "We will expand our efforts."

"Hezbollah looks at what is happening in Gaza and it understands very well – what we did in Gaza can also be done in Beirut," he added. "We do not want this scenario." He added that residents of Israel's north will not be left "without protection, and we will return them to their homes."

Overnight last Monday, terrorists in Lebanon fired several rockets towards the northern town of Manara.

There were no reports of injuries in the town, which has been largely evacuated due to repeated Hezbollah anti-tank missile attacks.

Earlier last Monday, terrorists in Lebanese territory launched a surface-to-air missile at an Israeli aircraft.

The missile did not strike the aircraft, which completed its mission successfully, according to the military.

Also last Monday, the IDF began closing communities and roads along the Lebanese border following a military assessment. These closures impact the Upper Galilee, Mevo'ot HaHermon and Mateh Asher regional councils.

There was a series of incidents at the northern border last Monday afternoon, including an anti-tank missile fired at Kibbutz Misgav Am from Lebanese territory. There were no reports of injuries and the IDF responded by firing at the source of the launch.

Two anti-tank missiles were fired at Moshav Beit Hillel, also in the Galilee, with no reports of casualties.

Last Sunday, the IAF completed an extensive wave of attacks on Hezbollah terrorist infrastructure in Lebanon. **HW**



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