

# Hebrew Watchman

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### Israel Considers Opening the Gates of Hell to Bring Hostages Home



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu meets with U.S. President Donald Trump at the White House, March 5, 2018. Credit: Haim Zach/GPO.

### By Ariel Kahana

(Israel Hayom via JNS) – Beginning on Jan. 20, 2025, "it will be possible to take additional actions in Gaza," senior Israeli officials say.

The prevailing impression in Israel is that President-elect Donald Trump does not particularly care what measures Israel employs in the Gaza Strip. He has two clear objectives: the release of the hostages, and an Israeli victory to conclude the war. The methods to achieve these aims appear irrelevant to him.

In Jerusalem, as well as in the Kirya military headquarters in Tel Aviv, prepa-

rations for the Trump era are being kept under strict secrecy. When that moment arrives, if no deal has been reached by then, Israel is expected to reset the rules of engagement against Hamas.

Many of the tools restricted by Biden's administration, alongside specific demands on Israel, will no longer apply.

A senior Israeli official expressed hope that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Maj. Gen. (res.) Nitzan Alon—the head of the Missing and Captive Soldiers Section in the Military Intelligence Directorate—will seize the opportunity to operate "entirely out of the box."

The official emphasized the need to break away from the current pattern, where the terrorist organization sustains itself through hostages or uses terrorists released by Israel to replenish its ranks.

What actions could Israel take that are currently off the table?

According to the source, humanitarian aid that the Biden administration has insisted Israel deliver to Gaza will no longer matter to Trump. Reducing such aid, or taking full control over what enters the Strip, could worsen Hamas's situation and increase pressure on the organization to release the hostages.

Another critical aspect is armaments. Trump has pledged to release all the weapons shipments currently delayed under Biden on his first day in office. Once the delayed bombs and shells arrive, the IDF will have the means to significantly expand its operations.

Additionally, the official noted that population transfers—if deemed necessary by Israel for dismantling Hamas or securing the hostages—would likely face little opposition under Trump. Israeli officials believe that the new administration will not demand accountability, with the message being: "Do what you need to do. We won't dictate your actions."

From Jan. 20 onward, Netanyahu would no longer need to justify measures such as providing fuel and dual-use materials to Gaza under U.S. pressure. Instead, he would have Trump's support to halt these supplies entirely. Drastic measures from the war's early days, such as limiting electricity and water, could be reinstated.

If no agreement is reached in the coming weeks, Israel could intensify alternative approaches, such as offering financial rewards or exile deals. While the IDF and Shin Bet have so far pursued this strategy cautiously, posters have been distributed across Gaza, and messages dictated by Hamas in hostage videos suggest that the offer has reached them.

However, deeper and more sophisticated efforts in this direction remain possible.

Israeli officials believe Hamas understands what may happen on Jan. 20, and this recognition has influenced its recent willingness to negotiate. Nonetheless, the organization's recurring inflexibility may leave Jerusalem with no choice but to fulfill Trump's expectations, opening the gates of hell on Hamas to bring the hostages home.

Originally published by "Israel Hayom." **HW** 

### IDF Chief: Israel Ready to Strike 'Any Time, Any Place'



Wing Parade at the Israeli Air Force's Hatzerim base near Beersheva.

Halevi noted that the IAF is making "a very significant contribution to the IDF's achievements. For the first time, The general spoke amid ongoing attacks by the Houthis and other

IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Herzi Halevi holds a press conference at the Palmachim Airbase south of Tel Aviv on July 14, 2024. Credit: IDF.

(JNS) – The Jewish state is ready "to strike at any time and in any place," Israel Defense Forces Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Herzi Halevi warned Iran last Wednesday, speaking amid ongoing attacks by the Houthis and other Iranian proxies. "Iran should know, its proxies should know and the entire Middle East, anyone who tries to undermine the stability and security of the State of Israel, the IDF will stand firm against them, ready to strike at any time and in any place," Halevi warned in a speech at the 189th we stopped direct attacks from Iran and responded; we eliminated senior figures in the terror organizations; we undertook rescue operations under fire; and we destroyed many of the enemy's capabilities—with an emphasis on surface-to-air missile arrays surrounding us."

Yemen's Houthis—an Iranian proxy with advanced weapons including cruise and surface-to-surface missiles, as well as drones—have stepped up their attacks on the Jewish state in recent days, repeatedly sending millions of Israeli civilians running for shelter over the past week.

Defense Minister Israel Katz vowed last Tuesday that "just as we dealt with [Hamas leader Yahya] Sinwar in Gaza, [Hamas political leader Ismail] Haniyeh in Tehran and [Hezbollah chief Hassan] Nasrallah in Beirut, we will also deal with the heads of the Houthis in Sanaa and everywhere in Yemen."

### Iranian proxies.

Iran is worried about a direct attack by Israel against its strategic sites in the near future, Israel's Channel 12 News network reported last Sunday.

Tehran has reportedly reached this conclusion due to a series of events, including Jerusalem's agreement to a ceasefire with the Iranian-backed Hezbollah in Lebanon. The regime has interpreted the move as being intended to free up the IDF to focus on the Islamic Republic directly.

Also last Sunday, Israel's "Ynet" outlet reported that Mossad Director David Barnea is urging an IAF strike on Iran in response to the Houthi attacks. Officials familiar with recent high-level meetings were cited as saying that Barnea argued that Jerusalem should "go for the head, Iran." **HW** 

### Jewish Teens to Build Community at January Shabbat Shebang

Jewish teens from across Memphis who are looking to have fun, make friends and build Jewish community will have that opportunity at the Jewish Student Union (JSU) Shabbat Shebang, to be held January 10-12, 2025.

The event will feature a Friday night dinner and Shabbat lunch meal at the home of JSU Director Rabbi Noach Karp, as well as a fun Sunday activity at Monster Golf. The program is free of charge thanks to a generous sponsorship by Memphis Jewish Federation, and teens are welcome to participate in some or all the activities.

"Shabbat Shebang is a great opportunity for local Jewish teens to get to know one another, and to learn more about their Jewish heritage in a fun and

meaningful way with their peers," says Rabbi Karp.

Rabbi Karp, who currently runs JSU Jewish culture clubs at White Station and Lausanne high schools, says all Jewish teens, regardless of whether they attend JSU, are welcome to attend Shabbat Shebang.

Maya Weiser, a sophomore at Houston High School, attended last year's Shabbat Shebang.

"JSU gives me the opportunity to meet other Jewish teens," Maya says, "and our Shabbat dinners allow me to take a step back from the rest of the week and enjoy connecting with others."

For information or to RSVP, contact Rabbi Karp at 401-429-8244 or rabbinoach@memphisjx.org HW



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Memphis Candlelighting Time

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Erev Shabbat, Fri. Jan. 3, 2024 / 3 Tevet, 5785	4:42 p.m.
Havdalah, Sat. Jan. 4, 2024 / 4 Tevet, 5785	5:42 p.m.

Weekly Torah Portion: Vagigash

### A Second U.S. Navy Jet was Almost **Brought Down by Friendly Fire**

### **By JNS Staff**

(JNS) - U.S. forces nearly shot down a second Navy jet over the Red Sea last Saturday, missing it by a mere 100 feet, as reported by "The New York Post," citing military sources. The jet was forced to take evasive maneuvers, according to the report.

As reported earlier, the guided missile cruiser USS Gettysburg shot down one F/A-18 jet over the Red Sea while U.S. forces were conducting strikes on Houthi terrorists in Yemen last Saturday.

The jet had taken off from the USS Harry S. Truman, according to U.S. Central Command. Both pilots safely ejected, with one sustaining minor in-

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juries.

The United States and Israel have been launching coordinated attacks on Houthi strongholds and bases in Yemen in recent weeks. Houthi terrorists have launched over 200 missiles and 170 drones at the Jewish state in support of Hamas since the Gaza-based terror group's Oct. 7, 2023, invasion of southern Israel. HW

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### Adam Schiff Chose Mishneh Torah for Swearing in to the U.S. Senate



Senator Adam Schiff is sworn in to the U.S. Senate holding a Maimonides Mishneh Torah. Credit: C-SPAN

#### By Jacob Kornbluh

Adam Schiff, the Jewish Democrat who came to national prominence as the lead prosecutor in Donald Trump's first impeachment, was sworn in as a U.S. senator on Dec. 9, 2024, after his election in November. He succeeded Laphonza Butler, who was appointed to the Senate following the death of longtime Sen. Dianne Feinstein last year.

Schiff, 64, took the oath of office holding a Maimonides Mishneh Torah (Second Torah) printed in Italy in 1490. The selection of this text – a 14-volume code of Jewish law and practice written by Moses Maimonides, also known as the Rambam - sparked debate over its halachic permissibility for swearing an oath, as it is not the official Hebrew Bible.

#### Why Schiff chose the Mishneh Torah

Schiff, in a statement ahead of his swearing in, said the edition, published in the duchy of Milan, now in northern Italy, was "a monumental legal code and one of the most organized, comprehensive, and influential works of Jewish law."

A spokesperson for Schiff, until [that] week a U.S. Representative and a former federal prosecutor, said he chose the volume, held by the Library of Congress, in part because of his concerns about the state of the rule of law as President-elect Donald Trump returns to office.

The spokesperson said that Schiff was also attracted to the volume because of his intellectual curiosity. "It's simply his nerdy interest in how old this volume is and how comprehensive it is," she said.

Schiff was sworn in along with several other senators, including Andy Kim, a Democrat from New Jersey and the first Korean American senator in history. Kim succeeded George Helmy, a former chief of staff to Gov. Phil Murphy, who filled Sen. Bob Menendez's seat until the general election after Menendez was convicted of bribery charges. In a Senate floor speech before the ceremony, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said Schiff brings "an impressive record as a leading voice among House Democrats, where he was known for his piercing eloquence, his thoughtfulness, his unwavering support of democracy and his courage."

Born in Framingham, Mass., and raised in Arizona and California, the Schiff family belonged to Temple Sinai, a Reform congregation in the Southern California city of Glendale. However, in a recent interview, Schiff said as an adult he doesn't belong to a synagogue, but that Jewish ethics guide him, and he celebrates Jewish holidays.

On Election Day, Schiff carried his grandfather's watch as a symbol of that heritage. He said that his deepest regret is that his father, who passed away earlier this year at age 96, did not live to see him sworn into the Senate. "He loved to say, 'From the shtetl to Congress in three generations - only in America," Schiff recalled.

Schiff is one of six Democrats, includ-

ing two Jewish members of Congress, elected to the Senate in the November elections. Schiff was sworn in to complete Butler's interim term. His six-year term officially begins in January, when he will be sworn in again.

Schiff said he would carry on the legacy of Feinstein and former Sen. Barbara Boxer, who retired in 2017, both of whom shared his Jewish heritage and liberal values. "My father would talk often about his father and grandfather and standing on the shoulders of those who went before," Schiff said. "I think that ethic is very much the same as with Sens. Boxer and Feinstein."

JTA contributed to this report. HW

### 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 6

**Team Trivial Pursuit** 

General Trivia from the 50s and 60s is the theme for this week! Join a team and have fun. Prizes for winners and even for those that don't win.

#### Wednesday, January 8

Field Trip to Baron Hirsch Synagogue for their Monthly Luncheon.

We will leave the MJCC and go to Baron Hirsch and bring the group back to the MJCC following the luncheon. Baron Hirsch also has entertainment from Creative Aging and Bingo following the entertainment. Also pick up is available for those that need it that who live around the MJCC. Call Steve Kaplan for more information at the number below.

#### Monday, January 13

"Ask the Rabbi!" with Rabbi Yosef Braha, Rosh Kollel and Director of **Operations of the Memphis Kollel** 

Rabbi Braha's talks are always one of the highlights of the speaker series. Bring all your Jewish questions and queries that you have been wondering about, but maybe were afraid to ask. No questions too tough! Rabbi Braha always has a nice, and sometimes humorous answer. Have a nice lunch and an informative afternoon.



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Wednesday, January 15 **Speaker: Tim Flesner Topic: Avoiding Winter Health Risks!** 

Tim has talked to the group many times and usually leaves them with many great ideas to think about. Handouts are usually left so no one needs to take notes. Come learn some things you can find useful.

Please join us Monday through Friday for a delicious kosher lunch from the kitchens at Memphis Jewish Home & Rehab. The cost is only \$2 for seniors. Reservations are required the day before by 1 p.m. by contacting Steve Kaplan, Adult Services Coordinator, at 901-259-9220 or stevekaplan@jccmemphis. org or by calling the front desk at 901-761-0810. Steve works Monday thru Thursday 9:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. HW

### Your Health Wellness Trends For 2025: How are You Doing with Your New Year's Resolutions?

### By Cindy Katz, DNP

Happy New Year! As we close the chapter on 2024 and embrace 2025, it's the perfect time to reflect. Have you set personal goals or made any New Year's resolutions? Whether you're refining last year's efforts or starting fresh, now is the ideal moment to map out a plan for a healthier, more balanced year ahead.

#### **Focus on Healthy Eating**

Fuel your body with choices that promote long-term health:

• Incorporate heart-friendly foods such as fruits, vegetables, lean proteins and whole grains.

• Limit processed foods and added sugars for optimal well-being.

• Stay hydrated by drinking at least eight cups of water daily.

#### **Commit to Regular Exercise**

Physical activity is a cornerstone of wellness. Aim for:

• 150 minutes of moderate activity per week to boost cardiovascular health and overall fitness.

• Strength training exercises to build muscle and improve bone density.

#### **Prioritize Stress Relief**

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Managing stress is essential for both mental and physical health:

• Strengthen connections with loved ones by spending quality time with family

and friends who inspire and support you.

• Reduce screen time, especially before bedtime, to enhance mental clarity and improve sleep quality.

#### **Enhance Your Sleep**

Quality sleep is vital for rejuvenation. To achieve restorative rest:

• Establish a consistent bedtime and develop a relaxing nighttime routine.

• Aim for 7-9 hours of uninterrupted sleep each night.

• Utilize modern tools like sleep-tracking apps or smart beds to better understand your sleep cycles.

#### Strive for Balance and Fulfillment

To create a well-rounded, fulfilling life:

• Assess areas for growth or change that align with your personal goals.

• Explore the Essential Eight metrics by the American Heart Association to evaluate your overall health.

• Seek advice from healthcare professionals to stay informed and empowered.

As 2025 unfolds, make your health and well-being a top priority. Small, consistent steps can lead to lasting, meaningful change. Let's make this year your healthiest and happiest yet. **You've got this! HW** 

### Tree of Life Murderer is One of 3 Death Row Inmates Exempted from Biden's Commutation Order



The Tree of Life Synagogue seen in Pittsburgh, April 21, 2023. Credit: Jahi Chikwendiu/The Washington Post via Getty Images

#### **By Ron Kampeas**

(JTA) — WASHINGTON — The Pittsburgh synagogue shooter's federal death sentence remains intact, after President Joe Biden commuted 37 of the 40 sentences of prisoners on federal death row.

All of the three men still sentenced to death committed crimes that were motivated by hate or terrorism.

Biden's announcement early last Monday morning is among a number of measures he is taking to protect his policies and vision ahead of Donald Trump's Jan. 20 inauguration. Biden froze the use of the death penalty while in office and Trump has said he plans to resume executions for federal death row inmates.

"When President Biden came into office, his Administration imposed a moratorium on federal executions, and his actions today will prevent the next Administration from carrying out the execution sentences that would not be handed down under current policy and practice," the White House statement said.

The list named 37 people slated for commutation. Not on the list were Robert Bowers, sentenced to death last year for gunning down 11 worshipers at Pittsburgh's Tree of Life synagogue; Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, the pro-Chechnya terrorist who with his brother carried out the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, which killed three people; and Dylann Roof, the white supremacist who gunned down nine worshippers at a historic Black church in Charleston, South Carolina in 2015.

Biden's statement did not name those three, but explained why they were left off.

"He believes that America must stop the use of the death penalty at the federal level, except in cases of terrorism and hate-motivated mass murder – which is why today's actions apply to all but those cases," the statement said.

Pope Francis appealed to Biden, a practicing Roman Catholic, earlier this month to clear federal death row. **HW** 

### Palestinian Woman Charged with Selling Daughter, 13, to Israeli Bedouin for \$2,000

(JNS) – A Palestinian resident of Hebron has been indicted on human trafficking offenses in a Beersheva court after selling her 13-year-old daughter to a 40-year-old married Israeli Bedouin for 8,000 shekels (\$2,200) earlier this year, prosecutors announced last Tuesday.

According to the Israeli Southern District Attorney's Office, the suspect, identified as a 48-year-old woman, agreed with a resident of the Negev village of Hura that he would marry her daughter in return for the initial sum and additional monthly charges of 1,500 shekels (\$408). The minor was said to have been forced to sign a contract drawn up by the two. The wedding to the 40-year-old man, who was already married to two women and has 15 children, was held illegally. The mother accepted the payment and left her 13-year-old daughter behind in the man's home. The suspect stands accused of human trafficking, forging a document and staying in Israel illegally. "This is a very difficult case in which unacceptable phenomena-human trafficking and polygamy-came together, while exploiting a 13-year-old girl as a commodity," said attorney Dina Dominitz, who coordinates the National Anti-Trafficking Department within the

Israeli Justice Ministry.

The Israeli government recognized the Palestinian girl as a victim of human trafficking, and she is now staying in a shelter, said Dominitz.

Last week, the Israel Police and Israel Defense Forces rescued three Ukrainian-Palestinian boys, aged five to nine, from their abusive father in the city of Dura near Hebron. Their father, a 46-year-old Palestinian, was arrested by police on suspicion of committing sexual offenses, unlawful imprisonment, assault, abuse and preventing medical treatment. The suspect, who is married to a Ukrainian citizen and has five children with her, had allegedly been abusing her and their children in recent years. Two years ago, the woman and her two daughters managed to escape to pre-1967 Israel, while the three boys remained behind. Following the operation, the boys were reunited with their mother and sisters in coordination with Israeli welfare authorities, authorities said. Israel Police Cmdr. Niso Guetta, who heads the Judea District, stated, "This was a moral and humanitarian operation by the security forces and other agencies with the sole purpose of saving helpless minors." HW





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### JD Vance Appears to Defend Germany's Far-Right AfD Party



the Neo-Nazi AfD party that inspired him," Goldman said. "You know what's dangerous @JDVance? The antisemitism and Neo-Nazi ideology you're supporting."

Trump's selection of Vance as running mate unsettled some in the conservative Jewish foreign policy community because of his isolationist bent. Vance

Jacob Reses, second from the left, accompanies J.D. Vance to a meeting with Senate Republicans at the U.S. Capitol in Washington, DC. on Nov. 16, 2022. Credit: Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images has opposed continued U.S. backing for Ukraine in its efforts to repel the Russian invasion. He has said that Israel is an exception to his desire to pull America back from its involvement in foreign conflicts.

It's not clear yet what Trump's Ukraine plans are, other than a desire to quickly broker a peace. **HW** 

### By Ron Kampeas

(JTA) — WASHINGTON — Vice President-elect J.D. Vance joined Elon Musk in appearing to defend the policies of the far-right Alternative for Germany party, and also seemed to take aim at a pro-Israel Washington think tank whose staffer had criticized the party.

Vance was responding to a post on X last Friday by Ivana Stradner, a research fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies whose specialties include Russia and Ukraine. She said that Musk's praise of Alternative for Germany, known as AfD, was "SO dangerous" both for Europe and the United States.

Vance responded sarcastically, implying an endorsement [of] one of AfD's core policies — stricter limits on immigration.

"It's so dangerous for people to control their borders. So so dangerous. The dangerous level is off the charts," Vance tweeted last Saturday. "I wonder how much money this person's employer gets from the American taxpayer?"

AfD, which is known for its anti-immigrant and anti-European Union stances, and whose popularity has been on the rise in Germany, has unsettled the country's Jews. Some of its members have downplayed the Holocaust.

Last Friday Musk, one of the world's richest people and an influential adviser to President-elect Donald Trump, set off a torrent of concerned comment last Friday when he said on X, which he owns, that "Only the AfD can save Germany." Musk, who is poised to take a role in Trump's White House, doubled down last Saturday, tweeting "AfD is the only hope for Germany."

In addition to working at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, Stradner is also a correspondent for "KyivPost," which covers Ukraine. While neither organization receives U.S. government funding — though FDD, a nonprofit, gets certain tax benefits — Vance's jibe at Stradner's "employer" could rattle Jewish and pro-Israel for-



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eign policy mavens who otherwise have welcomed Trump's impending return to the White House.

FDD favors a more confrontational posture toward Iran, Russia's ally in the Middle East. It is independent and nonpartisan, but its leaders have made clear they believe Trump will be more robust than Biden in dealing with Iran in the region.

FDD and the Trump-Vance transition team did not return requests for comment.

Rep. Daniel Goldman, a New York Democrat who is Jewish, took aim at Vance for boosting the party on the weekend of a deadly car-ramming attack on a German Christmas market. The alleged attacker, a Saudi national, posted a range of sentiments online, including some that reportedly backed AfD.

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### **Caregiver Café Offers Support and Self-Care for Caretakers**

#### By Baylee Less-Eiseman

Caregiver Café is a monthly support group for caregivers in the area, jointly run by Memphis Jewish Home & Rehab and Temple Israel Cares. Meeting on Sundays at the Home, this small group setting has provided an open and accepting place for caregivers to receive support, advice, and camaraderie from both a licensed therapist and fellow people in similar shoes.

The group is open to the entire community, and both Jewish and non-Jewish caretakers take part. Some people attend every month, and others pop in for a session when they are available, but typically the group is between 4-10 people.

Sandy Schwartz, licensed therapist, facilitates the monthly conversations. When asked why this was an important opportunity for her to be a part of, she shared, "Not only am I a professional counselor who has volunteered my time facilitating various groups throughout my career, but I also have a very personal experience caring for my dad in my home until his passing. So I intimately understand both the extreme challenges and deep joy that goes into caring for a loved one."

The effort is co-led by Debbie Jackson and Peggy Goodman who are members of the Temple Israel Cares group. Both have histories as caregivers and know the highs and lows that come with this significant role.

"Caregiver Café launched in 2019 with sessions at Temple Israel led by Sarah Thomson. She was a caregiver herself and saw a huge need for caregiver support. A few months after March 2020, the group began to meet on Zoom. This group became a real family, and each member gave their insight into



caregiving. When Sarah moved away from Memphis, the group dissolved, but in 2024 it returned. We are thrilled to be in-person again and partnering with MJHR!" Debbie explained.

A list of the spring schedule can be

found listed above, but if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Memphis Jewish Home & Rehab or Temple Israel. **HW** 

### Hamas: Full List of Living Captives to be Given after Ceasefire



A Hamas terrorist releases Israeli hostages to the Red Cross in Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip, Nov. 28, 2023. Credit: Flash90.

(JNS) - A senior Hamas official has denied reports that the Gaza-based terrorist group is refusing to provide a full list of the living hostages, according to Qatar's "Al-Araby Al-Jadeed" news outlet.

The official explained that Hamas has already provided a partial list but is facing difficulties in contacting other terrorist groups responsible for holding the captives.

Israeli estimates indicate there are 100 hostages in Gaza, 64 of whom are believed to be alive.

The official rejected earlier Israeli reports claiming that Mohammed Sinwar, the de facto leader of Hamas's "military wing" in Gaza and brother of the slain leader Yahya Sinwar, is being inflexible and unwilling to provide a complete list

of the living hostages.

"Hamas has engaged in talks with the other factions holding the hostages, but due to the situation in Gaza, it is impossible to contact all the organizations. Hamas has confirmed that it will provide a full list of the living hostages once the situation stabilizes and after a ceasefire," the official stated, as translated by "Ynet."

The senior Hamas official claimed that the "military" wing operates in full coordination with its political leadership, with complete alignment between the two. He added that the "military" wing has authorized Khalil al-Hayya, acting chairman of the Hamas political bureau, to lead the negotiating delegation, granting him the power to make decisions as he sees fit. HW



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### **Thessaloniki Breaks Ground on New Holocaust Museum**

### **By Larry Luxner**

(JTA) - For half a millennium untilthe Holocaust, the cosmopolitan city of Thessaloniki, Greece, had a unique claim to fame: it was Europe's only major city with a Jewish majority.

But the golden age of Thessaloniki's mostly Sephardic Ladino-speaking Jewish community came to a sudden end with the Nazi occupation of Greece in 1941 and turned cataclysmic with the deportation two years later to Auschwitz of nearly all the city's Jews. By the end of World War II, some 65,000 Greek Jews - 87% of the total and 96% of those from Thessaloniki - had been killed, leaving barely 2,000 survivors in Thessaloniki (also known as Salonika).

Among them were the parents of Dr. Albert Bourla, a veterinarian who would go on to become the chairman and CEO of Pfizer, one of the world's largest pharmaceutical companies.

In 2022, Bourla won the Genesis Prize - often described as the Jewish Nobel - for having led the development of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine. Stan Polovets, co-founder and chairman of the Genesis Prize Foundation, said in announcing the reward, "Millions of people are alive and healthy because of what Dr. Bourla and his team at Pfizer have accomplished."

Now, with global antisemitism at its worst levels since World War II, Bourla is about to realize another milestone: the long-awaited opening of a Holocaust Museum of Greece.

Bourla donated the \$1 million Genesis Prize money toward construction of the museum. The museum is also being funded by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, and the governments of Greece

and Germany. The management of the museum is currently trying to raise an additional \$10 million.

"Those who know me know that in addition to being very proud of my Jewish heritage, I am equally proud of being Greek," Bourla said in an emotional June 2022 speech in Jerusalem accepting the Genesis Prize. "My mother's courage and optimism came from her experience of narrowly escaping death at the hands of the Nazis. In fact, both of my parents turned their experience surviving the Holocaust into something positive and life-affirming. This clearly shaped my worldview."

The 9,000-square-foot museum occupying eight floors in an octagon-shaped structure will be located at the site of Thessaloniki's Old Railway Station, where the first Nazi train carrying Jews to Auschwitz departed on March 15, 1943.

But the museum, slated to open in 2026, won't be just about the tragedy of the Holocaust. Exhibits and artifacts will tell the story of more than 2,300 years of Greek Jewish history in Thessaloniki and 38 other communities, beginning with the ancient Romaniote Jews who settled in Greece during the reign of Alexander the Great.

At an Oct. 29 groundbreaking ceremony in Thessaloniki, Polovets was joined by German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Greek President Katerina Sakellaropoulou, and local dignitaries and Holocaust survivors.

"I was honored to participate and was moved by the ceremony, during which President Steinmeier said he 'felt shame' and that the memory of what was done to the Jewish people on this site 'cannot be erased.' That is why this museum is so important," Polovets said. "The memory of this once-vibrant Greek Jewish community and its near destruction by the Nazis - especially during the current wave of rising global antisemitism - must never be erased."

Only about 5,000 Jews remain in Greece: About 4,000 live in Athens, and the remainder live in Thessaloniki, Ioannina, Rhodes, Corfu and other communities. Meanwhile, Greece has not been immune to the wave of antisemitism sweeping Europe. Vandalism of Jewish cemeteries and Holocaust memorials is fairly commonplace.

A 2014 global survey of antisemitism by the Anti-Defamation League found that 69% of Greeks harbor antisemitic views — the highest percentage of any country in the world outside the Middle East. While those findings are sometimes disputed, Greece continues to struggle with antisemitism.

However, physical violence against Greek Jews is extremely rare, and the current Greek government, as well as the one that preceded it, are considered among the most pro-Israel in Europe. Greece observes International Holocaust Remembrance Day, and in 2014 the parliament outlawed Holocaust denial.

A big push for the Holocaust museum came from Thessaloniki's former mayor, 82-year-old Yiannis Boutaris, who died on Nov. 4, less than a week after the Holocaust museum's groundbreaking ceremony. Boutaris announced that his city would build the museum at a 2017 event attended by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other dignitaries.

"It will symbolize our shame," Boutaris said at the time, "for what happened, for what we did, and mostly for what we could not or did not wish to do... during and after the war."

In addition to Bourla, other famous Jews with roots in Thessaloniki include actor Hank Azaria, Israeli businessman and philanthropist Leon Recanati, his sister the philanthropist Jude Recanati, actress Lea Michele, former Nevada congresswoman Shelley Berkley and Belgian-born American fashion designer Diane von Fürstenberg.

Polovets said Bourla's donation aligns with the Genesis Prize Foundation's values and mission of inspiring Jewish pride.

"With the rise of global antisemitism, education will be at the center of the museum's activities, hosting permanent and temporary exhibitions and archives that will highlight the value of preserving the remembrance of the Holocaust, acceptance and respect for diversity, human rights, and freedom," he said.

Polovets said he hopes the museum will inspire visitors to fight hatred from spreading today.

"Hatred in any form leads to denial, disrespect and destruction," he said. "Democracy and respect for others are values that can never be taken for granted, and each of us has a responsibility to stand up to all forms of hatred."

This article was sponsored by and produced in partnership with The Genesis Prize Foundation, which aims to foster Jewish identity, inspire Jewish pride and strengthen the bond between Israel and the Diaspora. This article was produced by JTA's native content team. HW





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### **Do You Know Your Medicare Coverage Options?**

Provided by Mike Stein, Managing Director - Investments, Wells Fargo Advisors Questions for Mike? You can reach him at 901.761.8151 or Michael.Stein@WellsFargoAdvisors.com • fa.wellsfargoadvisors.com/michael-stein

There are two ways to obtain Medicare coverage: (1) Original Medicare (Part A hospital insurance and Part B medical insurance), often combined with a Medigap supplementary policy and a Part D prescription drug plan; and (2) Medicare Advantage (Part C), which replaces Original Medicare and often includes prescription drug coverage as well as features similar to those provided by a Medigap policy.

New beneficiaries can choose among these options when they enroll, while current beneficiaries can make changes during the annual Open Enrollment Period from October 15 to December 7 (see chart). Some changes can also be made at other times of the year.

### Original Medicare with Medigap and Part D

Original Medicare is administered directly by the federal government and includes standardized premiums, deductibles, copays, and coinsurance payments. While these out-of-pocket costs are relatively moderate for doctor visits, laboratory tests, short hospital stays, and other medical services, there is no out-of-pocket maximum, so a serious illness or extended hospital stay could be financially devastating.

For this reason, beneficiaries often purchase a Medigap policy offered by private insurers, which pays nearly all or a percentage of Medicare out-ofpocket costs, and for some services not covered by Medicare such as emergency medical care outside the United States. In most states, Medigap policies are labeled by letter (for example, Plan A). Benefits for each plan are standardized, but premiums vary by insurance company, location, gender, tobacco use, and marital status.

The best time to buy a Medigap policy is when you first enroll in Medicare Part B. You then have a six-month period during which you can buy any Medigap policy in your state for the same premium the insurance company charges to healthy enrollees, even if you have health problems. If you miss this opportunity, a company can charge you more for coverage or refuse coverage altogether, depending on your health.

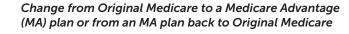
Part D prescription drug plans are offered by private insurers under Medicare supervision. Monthly premiums, deductibles, and out-of-pocket costs vary by plan.

#### Medicare Advantage

Medicare Advantage (MA) is offered by private insurers but mostly funded by Medicare. These "all-in-one" plans are generally more cost-effective than the combined costs of Original Medicare, Medigap, and Part D. All MA plans have out-of-pocket maximums and may offer additional benefits such as dental care and eyeglasses. In return for lower costs, MA plans strongly encourage or require the use of network providers and may deny claims that would be paid by Original Medicare.

#### **Annual Open Enrollment**

Medicare beneficiaries can make the following changes during annual Open Enrollment from October 15 to December 7, with changes effective January 1.



Switch from one MA plan to another MA plan

Join a Medicare Part D prescription drug plan, switch from one Part D plan to another, or drop Medicare prescription drug coverage completely

In addition, you can change from MA to Original Medicare or switch MA plans during the Medicare Advantage Open Enrollment Period from January 1 to March 31. You may also be able to make changes during other special enrollment periods.

#### **Personalized comparisons**

The best place to start exploring optional plans is at medicare.gov/plan-compare. After entering your zip code, you will have a choice to find a Medicare Advantage Plan, a Medicare Part D drug plan, or a Medigap policy. If you are already a Medicare beneficiary, you can save time by logging in to your online account or create a new account. When exploring MA plans, be sure that your preferred providers are included in the plan's network. Recently, an increasing number of providers have left MA networks due to claim denials and stringent preauthorization requirements.<sup>1</sup>

Open Enrollment offers the opportunity to change MA plans or return to Original Medicare. Keep in mind, however, that when you change from an MA plan to Original Medicare, you may pay a higher premium for a Medigap policy, or be unable to obtain a policy, depending on your health.

When exploring Part D drug plans, be sure to accurately enter the name, dosage, and frequency of your prescription drugs. Slight differences, such as a tablet vs. a capsule or generic vs. brand, can make a big difference in the cost of the medication. Note that Medicare Part D out-of-pocket costs will be capped at \$2,000 starting in 2025.<sup>2</sup>

1) KFF Health News, November 29, 2023

2) The Part D cap will be adjusted annually based on the change in Medicare Part D per capita spending (i.e., the amount that Medicare spends on each Part D beneficiary).

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Woman Critically Hurt in Tel Aviv

**During Houthi Missile Attack** 

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Israelis take cover inside a bomb shelter as siren alerts are sounded in Tel Aviv, Dec. 16, 2024. Credit:Avshalom Sassonif/ Flash90.

wrote on X after the attack: "We will not stop until the aggression against our people in Gaza ceases, and [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu will realize that the dreams of the new Middle East are nothing but a curse upon him and his imported entity."

The terror leader wrote in another post that "there will be a new Middle East, healthy and clean from the 'Israel' cancerous gland."

Houthi terrorists have launched over 200 missiles and 170 drones at Israel in support of Hamas since the terrorist attacks in southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023. The vast majority were intercepted outside of Israeli territory by Israel or the United States, but the terror group has escalated its attacks against Tel Aviv recently. Multiple Houthi missiles have hit Israel's densely populated central region in recent days, including a strike in Jaffa overnight last Friday that lightly hurt 16 people, prompting Netanyahu to promise the Israeli public that the terror group will be dealt with. "Just as we have acted forcefully against the terror arms of Iran's axis of evil, so too will we act against the Houthis," Netanyahu said last Sunday. Last Monday, Defense Minister Israel Katz warned that "we defeated Hamas and Hezbollah, we blinded Iran's defense systems and damaged the [missile] production systems, we collapsed the Assad regime in Syria, we have dealt heavy blows to the' axis of evil' and we will also severely strike the Houthi terror organization in Yemen, which remains the last one standing." HW

### Mike Stein

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Wells Fargo Advisors is a trade name used by Wells Fargo Clearing Services, LLC, Member SIPC, a registered broker-dealer and non-bank affiliate of Wells Fargo & Company. © 2020 Wells Fargo Clearing Services, LLC. All rights reserved. CAR-0720-04236 (JNS) – A woman in her 60s was critically injured overnight last Monday while rushing to a shelter in Tel Aviv during sirens triggered by a ballistic missile launched by Iran-backed Houthi terrorists in Yemen.

She fell on her way to a protected area and was evacuated to Ichilov Hospital, according to the Magen David Adom emergency medical service.

MDA paramedics treated 25 people who were lightly hurt running to shelters or who suffered anxiety attacks.

According to the military, the Israeli Air Force's long-range Arrow defense system intercepted the missile before it crossed into Israeli territory shortly before 2 a.m. local time. The Israel Defense Forces added that the sirens, which were sounded in central Israel and the southern Negev, followed the possibility of falling shrapnel from the interception.

Houthi terror leader Hazam Al-Asad

### **GOP-Led Congressional Report on Campus** Antisemitism Recommends Cutting Funds to Universities that Boycott Israel



#### By Ron Kampeas

(JTA) – WASHINGTON – A report on campus antisemitism by the Republican-led U.S. House of Representatives recommended cutting government funding to universities that boycott Israel.

The report released on Dec. 19, detailed the findings of seven congressional committees and painted a dire picture of antisemitism in the United States while specifying that it concerned "antisemitism on college campuses and in government."

"Across the nation, Jewish Americans have been harassed, assaulted, intimidated, and subjected to hostile environments — violations that stand in stark contrast to America's fundamental values, including a foundational commitment to religious freedom for all," the report said.

"The Committees' findings are alarming," it said. "For instance, some of our most prominent American universities refused to crack down on antisemitism."

The Education Committee, chaired by North Carolina Rep. Virginia Foxx, has gained attention over the past yearplus for a series of hearings on campus antisemitism — one of which led to the resignation of the leaders of two Ivy League schools. The committee recommended that Congress pass a law to cut federal financial aid for students, under Title IV of the 1965 Higher Education Act, at universities that boycott Israel.

"A significant amount of campus unrest resulted from anti-Israel radicals' efforts to coerce institutions to divest from and boycott Israel," said the report. "Congress can help stop this madness by passing legislation so any institution of higher education that contravenes U.S. foreign policy by boycotting or divesting from Israel will become ineligible for federal student aid under Title IV."

The report focused on a handful of universities where reports of pro-Palestinian protesters harassing and intimidating Jewish and Israeli students have been most prominent, among them Harvard University, the University of Pennsylvania, the University of California, Los Angeles, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Northwestern University and Columbia University.

Tensions spiked at colleges, especially Columbia University, as anti-Israel groups increasingly targeted Jewish students. After a rally on campus, anti-Israel activists blocked Jewish students from walking down a street next to campus, Feb. 2, 2024. Credit: Luke Tress

#### concessions."

The tax-writing Ways and Means Committee recommended removing the tax-exempt status of nonprofit groups that, it said, abet terrorism. The Commerce Committee, which oversees the Department of Health and Human Services, recommended that the department more closely scrutinize whether educational institutions receiving its National Institutes of Health research grants are protecting Jewish students.

The report said that protections extended to Jewish students must apply when Zionists are named as the targets of exclusion or harassment. NYU changed its by-laws to outlaw discrimination against "Zionists" this summer.

"Universities should make clear that discrimination against Zionists is an unacceptable violation of their conduct policies and must prevent hostile environments created by discrimination against 'Zionists,'" it said. "Campus Jewish communities are often targeted through antisemitic discrimination and harassment on the purported basis of being 'Zionists.' While criticism of Israel is not inherently antisemitic, hatred against 'Zionists' is."

When House Speaker Mike Johnson, a Louisiana Republican, launched the multi-pronged investigation in April, he made clear that its sole focus would be universities and groups often identified with the left that have backed the pro-Palestinian protests. The report barely mentioned right-wing antisemitism and comes amid reports that the incoming Trump administration plans on shutting down the Department of Homeland Security's efforts to track farright extremists.

The only allusion to right-wing antisemitism was when the report cited Claudine Gay, the former Harvard University president for "disparaging" New York Rep. Elise Stefanik as a "purveyor of hate" and "supporter of proudboys."

Stefanik, President-elect Donald Trump's nominee to be ambassador to the United Nations, has echoed a version of "Replacement Theory," a baseless claim whose original form says Jews are orchestrating the mass immigration of people of color to replace whites. Stefanik's campaign said in 2021 that

Democrats want to "overthrow our current electorate" via undocumented immigration to the United States.

She has also used the term "hostages" to refer to people prosecuted for their involvement in the pro-Trump Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol riot, which sought to overturn the 2020 election. A number of those defendants are members of the Proud Boys, a far-right group.

Stefanik's questioning of Gay in Congress, in which Gay equivocated about whether she would penalize calls for the genocide of Jews at Harvard, led to Gay's stepping down.

The Jewish Federations of North America welcomed the report.

"We applaud House leadership for publishing this report, which sheds light on this critical issue," said its vice president of government relations, Karen Paikin Barall. "To put a halt to this hatred, bipartisan collaboration along with public and private sector partners is essential. We look forward to working in the next Congress to confront this critical challenge." HW

### **OBITUARIES**

#### **Robert Henry Schwarz**

Robert Henry Schwarz passed away December 18, 2024, at age 83. Robert was the long-time spouse of Dr. Steve Katz.

A linguistic scholar, Robert spoke 13 languages including such diverse tongues as Yiddish, Hebrew, Mandarin and Cherokee. In his career, he taught Latin, English, French, Spanish and German.

Robert leaves a sister, Leila Preuss (Fred); sisters- and brother-in law Reva and Paul Roberts and Estaline Katz; 10 nieces and nephews; and two generations of grands.

Memorials to Bob may be made to Beth Sholom Synagogue. HW

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It said efforts by the administrators of those universities to address antisemitism on campus were inadequate or nonexistent. It singled out Northwestern and Columbia for not clearing out pro-Palestinian encampments last spring that, the report said, intimidated Jewish students. Northwestern's Jewish president took flak this year for the agreement the school struck with encampment protesters and defended the deal in a contentious congressional hearing.

"These encampments frequently generated substantial harassment - and in some cases physical assaults – of Jewish students, created hostile environments, and disrupted campus operations," the report said. "In a dereliction of their responsibilities, many school officials failed to clear these encampments in a timely manner, often negotiating with encampment participants, and in some cases appeasing them with appalling



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### Post Chanukah Blues



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

#### By Ted Roberts

I've got them post-Chanukah, endof-the-year blues. Somebody ought to write a song, "Them Post Chanukah Blues." What's to look forward to besides Tu B'Shevat, a holiday that celebrates no victories, brings no gifts, and inspires no parties? It doesn't even have a signature food, unless you like acorns dipped in chocolate.

I guess I ought to be grateful that Chanukah's over and we can still pay the house note, considering my wife's tendency to ship bulky presents to our far-flung family.

"Listen," I tell her, "Why don't you send a small, folded up check to our grandchild in Seattle instead of that 'adorable Queen Ann dining room table with four chairs?' Or if you frown on the gift of money, how 'bout a sparkling pair of antique diamond earrings that fit in a two-inch square box?"

I would even send one of my famous certificates of authenticity, testifying that they were worn by Rivkah, the wife of Judah Maccabee to a party in Jerusalem, June 5, 212 BCE. I'm famous for my handcrafted certificates on brown parchment-like paper.

I've always been a firm believer in imaginative gift giving. And bulky items shipped halfway across the continent are not imaginative.

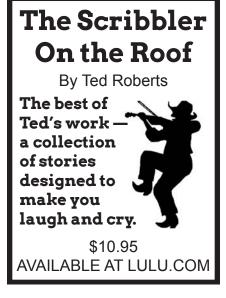
"Think small," I tell my generous wife. If it fits in the palm of your hand and it's not sticky (we never descend to candy), it's a candidate. We have children, grandchildren, and friends sprinkled around G-d's green world – including Israel.

Of course, there's another option – only slightly immoral to the gift conundrum – but it does involve an inconsequential fib (not a blatant lie, but a flimsy fib). You send some small token of Chanukah cheer. Maybe a pair of socks or a nice king-size candy bar. You attach a note or email the recipient that you originally bought them a crystal chandelier from Venice. But some hopes are doomed to disappointment because the ship, the USS Chanukah, struck the Newfoundland reef and went down with all its cargo - but just wanted you to know I was thinking about you. There are satanic variations on this theme. Like you inform the victim of your purchase and follow up with him/ her its progress across the unruly ocean and then - SPLASH - down she goes. And of course one is not bound to location. Airplanes crash, trains go off the track, UPS trucks slide into ditches. The whole world of disasters is open to you. And you get credit for whatever magnificent gift you chose to describe.

Somehow these natural, unpredictable disasters have tarnished my image as a big-hearted Chanukah, birthday, anniversary celebrant.

"Ted, please don't stretch yourself with exquisite gifts from far-flung lands. The mall down the street has great selections."

I look down, dejected. "But I really wanted to get you and Vicki a 12-piece set of Bacharat crystal from London!!"



My potential recipient reminds me of my luck with ships, trucks and airplanes. "Yeah, I guess you're right," I mournfully utter.

But now what's to look forward to but Tu B'Shevat? Maybe somebody will give me a money tree to compensate for Chanukah.

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** 

### Walmart Removes T-Shirts Glorifying Slain Terror Leaders Sinwar, Nasralla

#### By Roni Shkedy

(Israel Hayom via JNS) — Walmart, the world's largest retail corporation, last week removed several T-shirts from its online shop glorifying Yahya Sinwar and Hassan Nasrallah, the slain leaders of Hamas and Hezbollah, respectively.

One of the shirts was described as the "Yayha Sinwar We Will Win Or Die Shirt."

Walmart shoppers were horrified to

find shirts glorifying Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar while online shopping. @ Walmart, are you aware you're selling apparel celebrating terrorism and violence against Jews?

Following the removal of at least four shirts glorifying terror, the retail giant continues to stock other politically controversial merchandise.

The company's current inventory includes antisemitic books discussing

the "Zionist lobby," which the texts claim pushed for Israel's establishment through what they characterize as "flagrant violations of international law" and "denial of Palestinian rights."

Another available title, "Decolonizing Palestine," examines what its summary presents as a liberation struggle against what it terms a "colonial settler state." The book's description states, "Despite expert predictions, Hamas continued armed resistance to Israeli colonial settler rule."

"Becoming Pro-Palestinian" is another title found on their website. A fourth book, "Soldiering Under Occupation," attempts to demonstrate how various "numbing processes" allegedly affected Israeli soldiers' moral conduct.

Originally published by Israel Hayom. HW

### **ISRAEL INSIGHTS** Shifting Middle East Geopolitical Realities

#### **By Howard Weisband**

Readers of this column are aware that, although I am not an expert nor researcher on the geopolitics of the Middle East and their impact on Israel, I try to stay current by reading and listening to the opinions and insights of highly qualified commentators and researchers.

I will quickly review several geopolitical changes that have occurred, while mentioning the unknowns that still exist.

It's been almost 15 months since Oc-

are to lead to the return of the remaining 100 hostages. We do not yet know precisely how and when their return ultimately will be accomplished.

The second unknown is what is commonly referred to as "the day after;" who and what will govern Gaza so that Israel can be assured of security on its southern border, while the cities in Gaza can be reconstructed and the people can be assured of a quality of life free from terrorists managing themselves without concern for the people and the society. Over the years, Hamas successfully infiltrated the Arab cities within the West Bank, overrunning the police of the Palestinian Authority (PA). The IDF and the Israeli security services have had to take control of this "terror from within," creating another "front" since the PA, itself corrupt and inept, simply cannot do it. A backlash has been an eruption of Jewish vigilante groups, especially from the younger generation, from Jewish communities in the region. This serious problem threatens both the Arab and Jewish societies in the area, and even the situation in neighboring Jordan.

model? Can the international community, which seems to desire that, move beyond rhetoric to become both convener and mentor while simultaneously assuring Israel's security.

Looking at Israel's northern border, impactful changes have taken place in both Lebanon and more recently in Syria.

From October 8, 1923, Hizballah began firing thousands of Iranian produced defeated. Israel created a de facto buffer zone even as a ceasefire went into effect and remains in place.

The loss of Hizballah, Iran's most important proxy in the Middle East, is a serious blow to the Iranian regime and its desire for hegemony in the Middle East. Moreover, unlike Gaza, which is a territory, Lebanon is a state, albeit a failed state. The unknown, of obvious concern to Israel: what will be the future

tober 7, 2023, when Hamas, an Iranian proxy, viciously and tragically attacked Israeli communities just across the Gaza border, murdering, raping, burning, destroying, and taking over 200 hostages, both alive and dead. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) immediately went to war on October 8, involving very complex operations in the air and on the ground, targeting Hamas in schools, mosques, and UN facilities, and underground in the massive system of tunnels that Hamas had built.

Hamas has been defeated militarily, operationally, and politically even as remnants remain. Painfully and inevitably, we lost hundreds of soldiers, and many who were seriously injured.

The defeat of Hamas was a blow to Iran, even though Hamas was not its most important proxy. Still there are two critical unknowns, each of which demands Israel's direct attention. The first are the current negotiations, which

The unknowns: can the PA, which desires to play the key role in governing both Gaza and the West Bank, be fundamentally reformed in order to become a more effective and positive governance rockets into Israel. Sitting on Israel's border, above ground and underground, they were in violation of UN accords, which had required them to be further north beyond the Litani River.

The situation required the evacuation of northern Israeli cities and communities, just as was done in the south. People have been living for over a year in hotels, funded by the Government, and for the lucky ones, near relatives or friends in safer areas of the country. Many of their homes have been destroyed or seriously damaged. An IDF goal is to bring these people back to their communities and homes.

Following the highly strategic and successful "pager attack" in September on Hizballah operatives, as IDF soldiers were readied, the IDF entered Lebanon, extending retaliation into full scale war. At what some have called lightning speed, Hizballah leadership was eliminated, and the terror organization was

#### of Lebanon?

Writing for the Jerusalem Center for Foreign and Security Affairs, special analyst Col. (ret.) Dr. Jacques Neriah states: "No doubt that the whole Lebanese political system is in turmoil. The Shiite community is trying to cope with the weakness of Hizballah following its poor campaign against Israel.... Hizballah is trying to survive as a military force and a central political player in Lebanon."

To be continued: Syria, Yemen, Iran. 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** 

## Polish Police Murdered Jews During the Holocaust with Gusto and Even without Nazi Orders, New Book Claims



Polish and German police officers inspect the papers of a Jewish pedestrian, Warsaw, 1941. Credit: Yad Vashem Photo Archive

#### By Zev Stub

(JTA) — Writing a comprehensive history of Polish citizens during the Holocaust is a hefty task. A Polish law that criminalizes any mention of Polish responsibility for or complicity in Nazi crimes makes it even harder.

That makes the groundbreaking research conducted by acclaimed Holocaust historian Jan Grabowski for his new book, "On Duty: The Polish Blue & Criminal Police in the Holocaust" all the more remarkable.

Relying on meticulous documentation, the book argues that while these institutions were German-sponsored, they were comprised mostly of Poles who were more than willing to assist the Nazis in their extermination campaign, and often led the way through their own initiatives. Grabowski, a professor at the University of Ottawa, spent more than 10 years conducting the research, including years in Poland going through Polish archives, private diaries and records from more than 100 small towns where Jews lived in high concentrations.

"I read horrifying things in the diaries of Polish policemen describing how many Jews they killed each day," said Grabowski, 61. "There were anecdotes about a cop asking for a glass of vodka before shooting a Jew, or using hot water to clean the blood off their hands. They killed friends and schoolmates without remorse, even in places where no Germans ever came to check up on them."

Much of the evidence Grabowski uncovered had never been seen before.

"It's not easy to write a book like this when you have opposition from massive Polish organizations with teams of PhDs whose job is to go after people like myself," said Grabowski, who began his research for the book before Poland passed the controversial 2018 Act on the Institute of National Remembrance. "But thorough and independent historical research is necessary to make sure that a nation can't rewrite its history into a happy story of righteous Poles saving Jews."

In particular, the book focuses on the actions of Poland's Blue Police, officially known as the Polish Police of the Generalgouvernement, established shortly after the German occupation of Poland in 1939 and consisting mainly of prewar Polish police officers.

"We are talking about a police force of 20,000 people that previously was in charge of enforcing mundane civilian laws like making sure that horses walking on the street had horseshoes," Grabowski said. "What fascinates me is how quickly these normal ordinary cops were transformed into ruthless killers."

Grabowski's 496-page book is now available on Yad Vashem's website.

Grabowski has written numerous books and articles focusing on the Holocaust in Poland. His book "Hunt for the Jews: Betrayal and Murder in German-Occupied Poland" won the Yad Vashem International Book Prize in 2013.

On the eve of World War II, Poland's 3.3 million Jews formed a vibrant and diverse society, noted Havi Dreifuss, director of the Center for Research on the Holocaust in Poland at Yad Vashem and professor of Jewish history at Tel Aviv University.

"Many were engaged in Jewish and

Polish causes or active in political movements such as the Bund, Zionist, and Orthodox groups. While most lived in cities, these were often small, alongside villages that reflected the richness of Polish Jewish life."

This last point is a critical issue for Holocaust scholarship, Dreifuss said.

"Research often focuses on large ghettos like Warsaw and Lodz, each housing hundreds of thousands of Jews. But over 340 ghettos existed in the Generalgouvernement, 83% of them with fewer than 5,000 Jews," she said. "These smaller ghettos, representing the majority of Polish Jewish communities, remain understudied, despite their significant role in understanding Polish Jewry during the Holocaust."

Chronologically, Polish persecution of the Jews progressed in three stages, according to Grabowski.

After Germany invaded Poland in 1939, the Third Reich entrusted Polish police forces to introduce and enforce new restrictions on the Jews.

"The first phase was the beginning of the inhuman ghettoization of the Jews," Grabowski said. "The Germans created laws designed to break down the Jews, limiting where they could go and what they could do or own. Yet until now, virtually no historians have examined how the large Polish police force suddenly became so deeply involved with Jewish affairs, effectively condemning them to starvation."

By 1941, Polish forces began working on the second phase, liquidating hundreds of ghettos. As trainloads of Jews were sent to concentration camps like Auschwitz-Birkenau and Treblinka in 1942 and 1943, Polish police participated in the Nazi evacuations of these ghettos, rounding Jews up, killing anyone who resisted and sometimes even conducting the evacuations themselves.

"It is important to understand that it wasn't the Germans coercing the Poles to shoot; it was the Polish execution squads making these decisions themselves," Grabowski said. "In November 1941, Polish police were shooting Jews on a regular basis, much earlier than in Nazi-occupied countries in Western Europe."

Perhaps the Poles were just acting to avoid facing punishment from the Nazis?

"The interesting thing is that there is no record of any penalty given to someone who refused to kill a Jew, except maybe some sneers by your colleagues," Grabowski said. "If you didn't want to do it, there was always someone else who would be happy to."

After the ghettos were liquidated, Polish forces continued their killing sprees through the third phase, searching throughout the country for Jews who may have escaped, according to Grabowski.

"At this point, they are murdering with gusto, without any German involvement," according to Grabowski. "They are working with locals, with their neighbors, and they don't even inform the Germans about what they are doing."

As the Holocaust progressed, Polish police acted on their own to kill Jews without coordinating with Germany, Grabowski said.

"They knew that if they reported their activities to the Nazis they would have been forced to share the money and property they stole," he said. "They might also incriminate their neighbors who were actively sheltering Jews. And they didn't want that."

Poland's Foreign Ministry declined to respond to the claims in Grabowski's books, saying, "The Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not comment on the scientific activities of individual people, considering scientific sphere and activity exempt from political assessment."

While writing "On Duty," Grabowski faced a powerful barrage of opposition from the Polish government and was slapped with a number of lawsuits, two of which are still pending.

"It has not been good for my psychological well-being," Grabowski said. "When you study for a PhD, no one trains you in how to handle attacks from the state for slandering the good name of the nation."

But exposing the truth is exactly why Grabowski believes his work is important.

"The Holocaust has become a universal benchmark of evil, but even after decades of Holocaust education, you have governments bending history out of shape to conform with their own needs," he said. "This is a very dangerous precedent, and we have a responsibility to prevent it to preserve our future."

This article is sponsored by and produced in collaboration with Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center. This story was produced by JTA's native content team. **HW** 

### Katz Confirms Israel Carried Out July 31 Assassination of

### Haniyeh



Ismail Haniyeh, head of the Hamas terrorist movement's political bureau. Credit: Wikimedia Commons.

(JNS) – Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz confirmed for the first time last Monday night that Jerusalem was behind the assassination of Hamas "political" leader Ismail Haniyeh in Iran five months ago. "In these days, when the Houthi terror group is firing missiles at Israel, I want to convey to them a clear message," Katz stated in his speech at an event honoring community heads of security and their families.

"We defeated Hamas and Hezbollah, we blinded Iran's defense systems and damaged the [missile] production systems, we collapsed the Assad regime in Syria, we have dealt heavy blows to the 'axis of evil' and we will also severely strike the Houthi terror organization in Yemen, which remains the last one standing," the Israeli defense minister threatened.

Until now, Jerusalem has not taken responsibility for the July 31 killing of the Palestinian terror group's "political" leader and his bodyguard.

Iran and Hamas accused Israel of the

assassination of Haniyeh, who traveled to Tehran for the inauguration of the country's president.

According to a "New York Times" report, Haniyeh was killed by a remote-controlled explosive device that was planted roughly two months earlier in the guesthouse where he was accustomed to stay when in Tehran.

Meanwhile, the Lebanese Al-Mayadeen network, which is affiliated with Hezbollah, claimed that the assassination was "carried out by means of a missile launched from country to country, not from within Iran."

When asked about the report during a press briefing on Aug. 1, Israel Defense Forces Spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari said that "there was no additional aerial attack—not a missile and not an Israeli drone—in the Middle East that night,

and I won't say anything beyond that."

Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei ordered a direct attack on the Jewish state following the assassination. On Oct. 1, Iran launched 180 ballistic missiles at Israel in its second-ever direct strike on the country. While most were intercepted, an Israeli Air Force base suffered damage.

In response, IAF jets hit 20 sites in Iran in multiple waves on Oct. 26, reportedly knocking out its air defenses and significantly setting back its missile production industry. The Israeli strikes reportedly also destroyed radar systems required to guide the Islamic Republic's ballistic missiles.

Jerusalem has pledged a strong response should the Iranian regime choose to launch a direct attack on the Jewish state for the third time. **HW** 

### **Record Number of Religious Women Enlist in IDF's** Shlav Bet



A soldier teaches a woman how to wear and use a gasmask during the Second Intifada, Oct. 30, 2001. Credit: Flash90.

(JNS) – Over the [last weekend in November], more than 120 Orthodox women aged 26-50 enlisted in the Israel Defense Forces as part of the Shlav Bet ("Phase 2") program track for religious women over the usual recruitment age.

This third and largest cohort of previously exempt religious women arrived at the Bakum recruitment center at Tel Hashomer in Ramat Gan, ready to serve their country.

The majority of these women will undergo a two-week basic training before being assigned to roles that align with their professional backgrounds, including nursing, social work and programming. Some recruits will be immediately integrated into units awaiting their expertise, bypassing basic training. These direct placements include as media representatives for the IDF Spokesperson's Unit, emotional support specialists for IDF Resilience Centers, and a podiatrist to care for soldiers returning from Gaza.

Yehudit Yeres-Weinstein from Otniel, who championed the project, expressed enthusiasm for the program's success. Yiska Dekel, enlisting as a casualties intelligence officer after her brother Sgt. Maj. (res.) Yishai Greenbaum was mortally wounded in Southern Lebanon in October, embodies the spirit of determination among the recruits.

The integration of religious women into the IDF has been gaining momentum. In 2019, the Supreme Court ruled that the Education Ministry must create pre-army programs for national-religious girls, paving the way for increased participation. In 2022, the IDF launched a company for women soldiers only, to cater to female religious women who wish to serve. In August 2023, Ohr Torah Stone launched an initiative called Maaminot BeMadim ("Believers in Uniform") to provide Torah-observant women with spiritual, halachic and practical support during their service in the Israel Defense Forces.

Hila Gonen, who manages a Resilience Center in Sderot and is enlisting to provide therapeutic interventions and rebuild resiliency for those suffering from trauma, highlighted the importance of their contributions.

"Today, I'm actualizing a dream. I'm enlisting in the IDF, albeit 30 years too late, but I have the excitement of an 18-year-old. When people teach the history of the Iron Swords war, they will also talk about the fact that we were here, and we enlisted. Us women, some with four children at home, or six, or eight, some who are pregnant, others who are nursing, we all came, and we all took part. We are here."

Dekel is a teacher from the Golan

Heights. Originally, she wasn't going to be allowed to enlist because the army didn't have a job for her. She fought for her position and asked what was needed until she received the answer that there was a need to fill positions as soldiers who notify family members of casualties.

She responded, "Wherever there is a need, I will serve," and that is what she will be doing for her service.

"My friends thought that I was crazy and told me that there is no way they would ever do that job," she told the "Srugim" news site.

"I will be doing this holy work with as much passion and compassion as humanly possible. I feel that it is my mission to serve, we all do. We look like a high school trip as everyone is so excited, but no one here knows anyone else. Not yet. But we are now a part of history and that is exciting," she said.

The Shlav Bet program isn't the only program bringing in religious women to serve in the IDF. Many who are younger are enlisting on their own or in smaller groups. An administrator from the Aish Seminary program, a Jerusalem-based religious women's seminary catering to students and young professionals, reported that several students and alumnae from the seminary's Aspire program have enlisted in the military over the past year, while some current students are seriously considering doing so in the future. **HW** 



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