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Man Charged with Setting Fire to Mississippi Synagogue Targeted It Due to Its 'Jewish Ties,' FBI Says



Extensive damage to the Beth Israel Congregation synagogue after an arson attack in Jackson, Mississippi, Jan. 10, 2026. Credit: Beth Israel Congregation

(JTA) – The suspect arrested for allegedly setting fire to a Mississippi synagogue on Saturday, Jan. 10 confessed to the FBI that he had targeted the congregation due to its “Jewish ties.”

Stephen Spencer Pittman was charged on Monday, Jan. 12 with maliciously damaging or destroying a building by means of fire or an explosive, according to an affidavit filed in U.S. District Court in Mississippi.

The blaze, which tore through the Beth Israel Congregation, the only synagogue in Jackson, Mississippi, early that Saturday morning, destroyed two of the synagogue’s Torahs as well as its library and offices. Several other Torahs belonging to the congregation were damaged, though no injuries were reported.

During an interview with the FBI and local law enforcement that Saturday, Pittman confessed that he had set fire to

the synagogue, which he referred to as a “synagogue of Satan,” according to the affidavit.

According to social media accounts that appeared to belong to Pittman, he is originally from Madison, Mississippi, and is a baseball player at Coahoma Community College. (A student athlete profile for Pittman has since been deleted from the school’s athletics page.)

An X account that appeared to belong to Pittman featured a link to a website that promotes “Scripture-backed fitness” as well as a Bible quote that read, “In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.”

Pittman told the FBI that he had stopped at a gas station on his way to the synagogue to purchase the gas used in the fire, removed his license plates, broken a window in the building with an ax to gain entry and used a torch light-



Text messages between the arson suspect Stephen Spencer Pittman and his father during the attack on Jan. 10, 2025. Credit: FBI

er to start the fire. The FBI discovered a cell phone and hand torch believed to belong to Pittman at the scene.

Zach Shemper, the president of Beth Israel Congregation, told CNN on Monday, Jan. 12 that he had been told by law enforcement that “the perpetrator had been posting antisemitic comments on social media.”

That Saturday, Pittman’s father reported his son’s alleged arson to police after his son texted him photos of the building along with messages including, “There’s a furnace in the back,” “Btw my plate is off,” “Hoodie is on,” and “And they have the best cameras.”

After Pittman’s father pleaded with him to return home, Pittman replied that he was due for “a home run” and “I did my research.” The following morning, Pittman allegedly laughed as he told his

father about the arson attack and said, “he finally got them,” according to the affidavit.

Surveillance footage obtained by the FBI from within the synagogue showed the suspect appearing to pour the contents of a gas container on its floor before setting the building ablaze, according to the affidavit.

Prior to the affidavit’s publication, several Jewish leaders and politicians were quick to label the arson attack as antisemitic.

“A historic synagogue was burned. Sacred Torahs destroyed. We are thankful no one was injured, but this wasn’t random vandalism — it was a deliberate, targeted attack on the Jewish community,” wrote Jonathan Greenblatt, the CEO of the Anti-Defamation League, in a post on X Sunday. “An attack on any synagogue is an attack on all Jews. We will not be intimidated. We will not be silent.”

Deborah Lipstadt, the U.S. special envoy to monitor and combat antisemitism under President Joe Biden, wrote in a post on X that the incident was a “major tragedy,” adding, “But it’s more than that. It’s an arson attack and another step in the globalization of the intifada.”

Other politicians and Jewish leaders who labeled the attack as antisemitic included New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani, former NYC mayor Eric Adams, New York Jewish Sen. Chuck Schumer, Florida Republican Sen. Rick Scott and Israeli Ambassador to the United Nation Danny Danon.

Pittman was scheduled to make an initial court appearance Monday afternoon. If convicted, he faces five to 20 years in federal prison. **HW**

The Holocaust Torah that Survived a Mississippi Synagogue Fire was Brought There by the State’s Only Survivor



Auschwitz survivor Gilbert Metz stands in front of the ark at Beth Israel Congregation in Jackson, Mississippi. Behind him is a Torah he helped rescue from the Holocaust. It has been on permanent display at the front of the building since 1992. Courtesy of Joseph Metz (left); Alanna Cooper (right)

By Benjamin Cohen

January 14, 2026 — *This originally appeared in Forward, reprinted with permission.*

When firefighters cleared Beth Israel Synagogue after an arson attack this month, the library floor was slick with water and ash. Prayer books lay swollen and blackened. Smoke clung to the sanctuary walls.

Two Torah scrolls burned. A third Torah did not.

That Torah, displayed for decades in a glass case near the front of the synagogue, survived unscathed. Its presence at Beth Israel was not incidental. It was brought to Mississippi by Gilbert Metz, the state’s only concentration camp survivor — a man who retrieved it from Europe and brought it to the American South. It, too, had survived the Nazis.

“The million-dollar question is: How in the hell did he get to Mississippi?” his grandson, Joseph Metz, recalled in an interview last Tuesday.

From Auschwitz to Jackson

Gilbert Metz was born in 1929 in Alsace-Lorraine, France. At 13, the family was forced into hiding. When people fled Nazi Germany, they often gathered silver or jewelry. Gilbert’s mom packed her prayer books and Rashi commentary instead. She had taught her son Hebrew and Talmud, and she refused to leave those books behind.

They snuck back and forth to their summer home in northeastern France but were eventually captured by the Nazis and sent to an internment camp. From

(See **Torah** Page 12)

Jewish Historical Society Partners with MJCC for "The Stamp Thief"

By Shoshana Cenker

The Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and the Mid-South is partnering with the Memphis Jewish Community Center (MJCC) to present a special screening of "The Stamp Thief" on Tuesday, Jan. 27, at 7 p.m. The showing is part of the 12th annual Morris and Mollye Fogelman International Jewish Film Festival in the MJCC's Belz Theater at the Orgel Family Performing Arts Center.

"The Stamp Thief" is a gripping documentary that blends detective story, historical investigation, and heist-film suspense to uncover a little-known chapter of Holocaust history. The film explores a World War II story, when a mysterious Nazi is believed to have stolen priceless stamp collections from Jews sent to concentration camps and hidden them in a small town in Poland.

Decades later, television producer Gary Gilbert — best known for his work on "Seinfeld" — sets out to uncover the truth and return the stolen stamps to their rightful owners. His audacious plan involves staging a fake movie production in Poland to gain access to key locations and individuals connected to the story.

What follows is an "Argo"-like real-life adventure filled with unexpected twists, moral complexity and emotional stakes.

As Gilbert digs deeper, he encounters layers of family secrets, historical trauma and cultural misunderstandings between American Jews and present-day Poles. Along the way, the film raises important questions about memory, justice and the lingering effects of the Holocaust more than 70 years later. Gilbert emerges as an unlikely but determined hero — a mensch driven by the belief that even small acts of restitution matter.

Running just over an hour and a half, "The Stamp Thief" is entertaining and deeply meaningful, offering audiences a fresh perspective on how the past continues to shape the present.

The Jewish Historical Society is proud to partner with the MJCC in bringing this important film to Memphis. The Morris and Mollye Fogelman International Jewish Film Festival has become a yearly highlight, showcasing powerful stories from around the world.

Tickets and additional festival information are available through the MJCC. jccmemphis.org **HW**

Israeli Teen Indicted for Planning ISIS-Inspired Terror Attack

Jan. 8, 2026 (JNS) – A 15-year-old from northern Israel was indicted on Thursday for planning to carry out Islamic State-inspired terrorist attack, police said.

The suspect, who had pledged allegiance to ISIS, was arrested a few weeks ago, according to a police statement.

In a joint operation by the Israel Security Agency (Shin Bet) and the Israel Police Northern District, detailed instructions on how to assemble an explosive belt were found in the minor's possession, it continued.

During questioning, investigators learned that the suspect had established connections with ISIS personnel abroad and begun preparations to carry out an attack.

It was further revealed that the suspect praised past attacks against the State of Israel and expressed his desire for its destruction, police said.

This was not the first time a teenager in Israel inspired by ISIS was detained by authorities.

In November, Israeli security forces arrested an 18-year-old Negev resident

accused of planning a suicide bombing targeting soldiers at a Beersheva bus station, the Shin Bet and Israel Police announced the following month.

The suspect was inspired by Islamic State's extremist ideology.

According to the investigation, the teen took steps to manufacture explosive devices and was found in possession of bomb-making instructions. **HW**

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Memphis Candlelighting Time

Erev Shabbat, Fri. Jan. 23, 2026 / 5 Shevat, 5786.....5:01 p.m.
Havdalah, Sat. Jan. 24, 2026 / 6 Shevat, 5786 6:00 p.m.

Weekly Torah Portion: Bo

Classes Restarting at the MJCC!

The MJCC is excited to announce that two popular game classes are restarting with new beginning dates. Whether you're looking to sharpen your mind, meet new friends, or learn a classic game, these classes are a perfect fit.

Beginning Bridge Lessons with Debbie Jackson
January 22 through February 19
Thursdays, 10:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

Beginning Bridge lessons taught by Debbie Jackson are back with a new start date. Learn to play the world's greatest card game in a fun and welcoming environment. This class will teach all the basics needed to start playing Bridge with confidence. Bring your friends and learn a new game together.

Cost: \$72 for MJCC members and \$80 for non-members.

Beginning Mah Jongg Lessons with Melanie Mann
January 29 through February 26
Thursdays, 6:00 p.m.–8:00 p.m.

Beginning Mah Jongg lessons will be taught by Melanie Mann, a longtime and popular instructor at the MJCC and throughout the community. This class is perfect for beginners looking to learn the rules, strategy, and enjoyment of this classic game. Bring your friends and join the fun.

Cost: \$72 for MJCC members and \$80 for non-members.

To register for either class, please contact the MJCC front desk at 901-761-0810. **HW**



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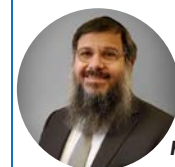


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The MJCC Larisa and Ben Baer Senior Adult Club Programs

Offering engaging, informative and fun programs for the community. Join us for a delicious kosher lunch and stay for our outstanding speakers and activities.

Monday, January 19, 2026

Sherry Harbur will be our speaker, presenting on the topic "Scams Targeting Seniors."

Sherry has spoken to the group several times, and her previous talk on real estate scams was extremely popular. This presentation will focus on new and emerging scams that are currently harming members of the senior community. Join us to learn more about this important issue and how to protect yourself and your loved ones.

Wednesday, January 21, 2026

This will be our first Big Monthly Lunch of the year, featuring the entertaining musical duo Elmo and Lester.

January's luncheon is sponsored by The Avaline; entertainment is provided in partnership with Creative Aging.

Formed in 2017 by two former Overton High School classmates, Elmo and Lester have enjoyed a successful run throughout the Mid-South. The duo held a residency at the Graceland Guesthouse and has performed at restaurants, wineries, private parties and senior communities across the region. Their show is a high-energy journey through many musical styles and eras, including selections from the American Songbook, 50s & 60s rock & roll, country, blues, jazz, rhythm & blues, and more. Elmo and Lester are sure to get the room moving and smiling!

"Elmo" Lee Thomas is a Memphis native best known as the leader of the iconic band Elmo and the Shades. He is recognized as one of the area's top har-



Musical duo Elmo and Lester.

monica talents and is equally skilled at lighting up the stage with his roots-inspired guitar approach. Elmo has performed on NPR's Beale Street Caravan, appeared in Bud Light's "Spotlight on Memphis" commercial, and sang two songs in the 2013 motion picture Crack-erjack, produced by Jeff Foxworthy.

Bruce Lester is widely regarded as one of the finest guitarists in the region. He first gained prominence in the 1980s as a member of the critically acclaimed Beat Cowboys and has since played with numerous local groups. Recently, he has been working as an accomplished studio musician. Mr. Lester's ability to perform all genres with skill and taste has been a key reason for his lasting success in the Memphis music scene.

Monday, January 26, 2026

Jason Goldstein, attorney, will be our featured speaker. His topic is "The Difference Between Wills and Trusts."

Mr. Goldstein is president and managing partner of Harkavy McDaniel Kaplan & Salomon P.C. Jason focuses his practice on civil litigation, business and corporate law, HOA representation and collections, landlord-tenant matters, real estate law, estate planning and probate. He received his B.A. in Political Science from George Washington University and his Juris Doctorate from the University of Miami School of Law in Coral Gables, Florida. This talk will highlight the technical differences between wills and trusts for those engaged in estate planning and deciding which option best fits their needs. A Q&A session will follow the presentation.

Wednesday, January 28, 2026
Team Trivial Pursuit Returns

One of our most popular events is back! The room will be divided into two teams for a lively and friendly competition. Questions will fly, excitement will build and participants may be surprised by just how much they know. Often, those who least expect it provide the winning answers. Special prizes will be awarded! Bring your friends, enjoy a great lunch, and get ready for a fun-filled afternoon of laughs and learning.

Please join us Monday through Friday for a delicious kosher lunch prepared by the kitchens at the Memphis Jewish Home. The cost is only \$2 for seniors. Reservations are required by 1 p.m. the day before attendance.

To make a reservation, contact:

Steve Kaplan, Adult Services Coordinator

• 901-259-9220

• stevekaplan@jccmemphis.org

Steve's hours are Monday–Thursday, 9:30 am–2:30 pm

Reservations may also be made through the MJCC front desk at 901-761-0810. HW

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Rubble of Pasadena Synagogue Destroyed in Wildfire is Vandalized with Anti-Zionist Graffiti



The remains of the Pasadena Jewish Temple and Center following the Eaton Fire in Jan. 2025. Credit: Josh Edelson/AFP via Getty Images

By Jackie Hajdenberg

(JTA) – The remains of a synagogue in southern California destroyed in last January’s Eaton wildfire were vandalized last weekend with anti-Zionist messages.

The rabbi of the Pasadena Jewish Temple and Center and the Anti-Defamation League decried the vandalism as antisemitic.

“The vandalism of the Pasadena Jewish Temple and Center is antisemitism — full stop,” ADL Los Angeles Senior Regional Director David Englin said in a statement. “This was a deliberate act of hate meant to intimidate a Jewish community already rebuilding after last year’s fire, and it comes at a time when antisemitism is already at unprecedented levels in California and nationwide. Targeting a synagogue is simply unacceptable and represents an attack on our

entire community.”

Photographs of the graffiti showed that it was scrawled in black spray paint on an exterior wall fence and read “RIP Renee” followed by “F— Zionizm” [sic].

The first words appeared to be a likely reference to Renee Good, the 37-year-old unarmed Minneapolis resident shot whose killing by Immigration and Customs Enforcement is igniting a nationwide spate of anti-ICE activism.

Anti-Zionist graffiti has been painted on synagogues around the country over the last two years amid a spike in anti-Israel sentiment during the war in Gaza.

The vandalism came days after congregants from the Conservative synagogue gathered at the burnt site of their spiritual home to commemorate one year since the wildfire tore through

their synagogue. Dozens of members also lost their homes or were forced to evacuate due to last year’s fire, which was the second-deadliest in the state’s history.

The vandalism also came a day after an arson attack at a Mississippi synagogue that had been bombed by the Ku Klux Klan in 1967 in retaliation for the rabbi’s involvement with civil rights activism. The man charged with the crime said he targeted that synagogue due to its “Jewish ties.”

No suspect has yet been named in the Pasadena vandalism, which the Altadena station of the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department first received a call about last Sunday at 9 a.m.

“Acts of antisemitism and hate have no place in our diverse communities,” Altadena Station Captain Ethan Marquez said in a statement. “Crimes motivated by bias impact far more than a single victim, they harm the sense of safety and unity of our entire community. The Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department takes all hate-motivated incidents seriously and is committed to thoroughly investigating these acts and holding individuals accountable. The community of Altadena has endured significant hardship over the past year, and acts of hateful vandalism will not be tolerated.”

Detectives with the department’s Major Crimes Bureau will be taking over the investigation, the Altadena station said in a statement.

During the fire recovery process, PJTC, a century-old congregation, welcomed a new senior rabbi, Joshua Ratner, a former lawyer who became the

synagogue’s permanent religious leader in August.

A representative from the synagogue did not respond to a request for comment. But in an email to congregants, Ratner described the vandalism as “hateful and antisemitic.”

“It was devastating in many ways,” Ratner said about the graffiti to The New York Times. He also told the newspaper that in his prayer for the dead over the weekend’s services, he had included Renee Good’s name.

Local political figures joined in condemning the vandalism.

“I am horrified by the vandalism of the Pasadena Jewish Temple and Center, especially coming just days after we marked the one-year anniversary of the Eaton Fire that tragically destroyed its entire campus,” Rep. Judy Chu, a Democrat who represents the district in Congress, shared on X. “For over a century, the Pasadena Jewish Temple and Center has been a beloved community institution and safe haven for our Jewish neighbors and loved ones. I stand with the congregation and the Jewish community as we await the results of the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department’s investigation. Hate has no place in the San Gabriel Valley.”

The Jan. 5 commemoration was the first time most congregants had been back to their synagogue building since last the fire. For the past year, services have been held in a neighboring church; Hebrew school services have also been held offsite. PJTC is home to about 450 member families, mostly from Pasadena and neighboring Altadena. **HW**

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JK Rowling Speaks Up for Iranian Protesters, Calls Out Jew-Hatred

By JNS Staff

(JNS) – “Harry Potter” author J.K. Rowling voiced support for Iranian protesters and condemned antisemitism in a widely shared post on social media on Jan. 11.

“If you claim to support human rights yet can’t bring yourself to show solidarity with those fighting for their liberty in Iran, you’ve revealed yourself,” Rowling stated.

“You don’t give a damn about people being oppressed and brutalized so long as it’s being done by the enemies of your enemies,” she added.

In response to someone who called

her a “shill for Jewish supremacy,” Rowling said that “Iranian citizens braver than you could dream of being are sacrificing their lives in the fight for their own liberation, and all you can find to say is ‘it’s the Jews’ fault.’”

“You’re beyond parody,” she said.

The author, who has 13.8 million followers on X and has used her platform to speak out against Jew-hatred after Oct. 7, has been sharing her support for the protesters in Iran.

“The bravery of these people is astounding,” she wrote. “They’re light in what lately has felt like a very dark world.” **HW**

Bernstein Scholarship Fund Applications Now Open

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

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

Once again there will be an open enrollment period beginning January 1 and ending March 31, 2026, during which time Fogelman JFS will be accepting applications for the fund.

If selected, recipients will be notified

in May of the amount of their award and the awards will be paid to the applicant’s identified school. To be eligible, applicants must be Jewish and must reside in the Memphis area. Also, the funds must be used for educational expenses, and recipients of other scholarship funds administered by Jewish Community Partners are ineligible for this fund.

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

For more information about the Bernstein Scholarship Fund, please contact Fogelman JFS at 901-767-8511. **HW**

Trump Comments Directly on Antisemites in the Republican Party: 'I Think We Don't Like Them'



President Donald Trump speaks in the Oval Office Aug. 22, 2025, in Washington, DC. Credit: Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images

By Grace Gilson

(JTA) – As tensions have risen in the Republican Party over antisemitism within the party, one voice has been notably absent.

Now, President Donald Trump, the party's leader, has weighed in, indicating to The New York Times that he does not approve of antisemites in the party.

"No, I don't. I think we don't need them. I think we don't like them," replied Trump when asked by a reporter whether there was room within the Republican coalition for antisemitic figures.

Trump's commentary on antisemitism within the GOP comes as many top Republican leaders, including Vice President JD Vance, have so far dismissed calls to draw a line against the mainstreaming of antisemitic figures, including Nick Fuentes, in the party.

When asked whether he condemned those with antisemitic views in the wide-ranging interview with the Times published last Sunday, Trump replied, "Certainly." The interview took place last week.

"Look, if you talk about the antisemitic views, there's been nobody better for us. As an example, I just got the Israel award, which is the biggest award they give. It was just given to me. First time it was ever given to anybody outside of Israel," continued Trump, referring to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's recent announcement that he was nominated for the top Israeli civilian honor.

Trump then continued to say that there was "no better president in the history of the world" who has been "stronger or better and less antisemitic"

than himself. (A May survey of Jewish American voters found that half believe that Trump is antisemitic.)

"I have been the best president of the United States in the history of this country toward Israel. And that's, by the way, acknowledged by everybody, including the fact that we have peace in the Middle East, and that's going to hold," continued Trump.

Later in the interview, Trump was asked whether he would condemn Fuentes, whose interview with conservative commentator Tucker Carlson in October set off a firestorm within the party. After initially claiming that he didn't know the antisemitic streamer, Trump acknowledged that he had had dinner with him alongside Kanye West in 2022.

"I had dinner with him, one time, where he came as a guest of Kanye West. I didn't know who he was bringing," Trump said. "He said, 'Do you mind if I bring a friend?' I said, 'I don't care.' And it was Nick Fuentes? I don't know Nick Fuentes."

When asked whether he condemns Paul Ingrassia, a Trump administration official who was pulled from consideration to lead the Office of Special Counsel in October after texts surfaced in which he proclaimed he had a "Nazi

Streak," Trump replied, "I don't know that. It's possible. I have thousands of people working here."

But when asked whether he thinks that Republican leaders should "condemn figures who espouse antisemitism," Trump replied, "Absolutely."

"Well, I'll tell you what. From my own personal standpoint, absolutely, because I condemn," said Trump. "I have a daughter who's married to a Jewish person. My daughter happens to be Jewish, beautiful, three grandchildren are Jewish. I'm very proud of them. I'm very proud of the whole, that whole family. I am the least antisemitic person probably there is anywhere in the world."

Trump also refuted a question by a Times reporter that his campaign against affirmative action and antisemitism on college campuses, which included multi-million-dollar federal funding cuts, was invoked "to force change."

"No, I cut funding to people and universities like Columbia, like Harvard," said Trump. "We're in the midst of that and others, as you know – you write about very well – where there's tremendous discrimination against people that happen to be Jewish. We have – the antisemitism in this country is shocking." **HW**

Stop Arguing About Definitions of Jew-Hatred, Jewish Dem Lawmaker Says



Rep. Greg Landsman (D-Ohio) speaks at the Jewish Democratic Council of America's 2024 Leadership Summit, in Washington, D.C., May 21, 2024. Credit: Jewish Democratic Council of America.

By JNS Staff

(JNS) – In a statement about the arson attack on Beth Israel Congregation in Jackson, Miss., Rep. Greg Landsman (D-Ohio), who is Jewish, urged Americans to stop debating definitions of antisemitism.

Many countries, international organizations and others have adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's working definition of Jew-hatred. Although the definition recognizes legitimate criticism of the Israeli government, some critics say the definition curbs free speech.

In one of his first actions as mayor of New York City, Zohran Mamdani, who has said he would have the Israeli prime minister arrested in the city, repealed his predecessor's executive order adopting the IHRA definition.

"Know that Jews have always been the target of hate. That hate is surging," Landsman stated. "Unfortunately, this is our history. It repeats itself, over and over and over. It stops when everyone stops arguing over what is and isn't antisemitism—and rejects all of it, no matter what. Please." **HW**

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7:00 pm**

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Chabad of Memphis Presents an Evening of Film and Live Music

Chabad of Memphis invites the Jewish community to a unique and uplifting evening of film and live music titled “**This World Is My Garden**,” featuring a live musical performance by the Memphis String Quartet. The event will take place on Sunday, February 15 at 7 p.m. at the Chabad Center for Jewish Life, 2570 Kirby Parkway, Memphis, TN 38119.

Blending stunning visuals, soulful storytelling, and the haunting beauty of live string music, “**This World Is My Garden**” is a groundbreaking artistic production inspired by a 300-year-old Chassidic vision: seeing the world through divine eyes—as G-d’s garden.

“Prepare to be captivated by this breathtaking fusion of art, music, and meaning,” says Rabbi Levi Klein, director of Chabad of Memphis. “This production invites us to pause, reflect and rediscover the beauty and purpose embedded in everyday life.”

At the heart of the performance is the moving story of a Chassidic farmer who lovingly tends to his small patch of earth. As the story unfolds across generations, it becomes a powerful metaphor for hope, perseverance, and humanity’s enduring connection to a higher purpose.

The program features seven evoca-

tive short films, each exploring a central theme from the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s inaugural Chassidic discourse, an illuminating vision of the world as a sacred garden. Each film transitions seamlessly into a traditional Chabad Niggun, representing one of the seven Rebbes of the Chabad dynasty.

“These melodies are not just music; they are vessels of Jewish history, faith and soul,” Rabbi Klein explains. “Hearing them performed live by a string quartet creates an emotional experience that is both deeply traditional and strikingly contemporary.”

The Niggunim were specially arranged for this program by Maestro Israel Edelson and will be performed live by the Memphis String Quartet, whose rich and expressive sound brings centuries of tradition into vivid, modern resonance.

“This World Is My Garden is more than a performance,” Rabbi Klein adds. “It is an invitation – to see the world differently, to feel its depth and to experience its sacred beauty.”

Tickets are \$25 and include a wine, cheese and dessert buffet.

For tickets, visit www.JewishMemphis.com/music.

For more information, contact Chabad of Memphis at 901-754-0404. **HW**



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Khamenei Says Trump ‘Too Will Fall’ Amid US Support of Iranian Protesters



Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei visits the exhibition of achievements of the IRGC Aerospace Force in Tehran, Iran, Nov. 19, 2023. Credit: khamenei.ir via Wikimedia Commons.

“The rioters have put their hopes in him,” Ayatollah Ali Khamenei stated. “If he’s so capable, he should manage his own country.”

peaceful protesters, which is their custom, the United States of America will come to their rescue,” Trump wrote. “We are locked and loaded and ready to go.”

In a second social media post the same day, Khamenei accused Trump of attempting to interfere in Iran’s internal affairs.

“The U.S. President has said that if the Iranian government does such-and-such, I’ll take the side of the rioters,” he wrote.

“The rioters have put their hopes in him,” Khamenei added. “If he’s so capable, he should manage his own country.”

Demonstrations have spread in multiple Iranian cities, fueled by public anger over the economy, corruption and restrictions on religious and political freedoms. Videos emerging from Iran show security forces responding with arrests and force.

Iranian Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi, the son of the last shah of Iran, called for Trump’s “immediate” attention, stating that protesters were “facing down live bullets” amid “a total communications blackout.”

“You have proven and I know you are a man of peace and a man of your word,” Pahlavi wrote, urging the president to “be prepared to intervene to help the people of Iran.” **HW**

By JNS Staff

(JNS) – Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei accused President Donald Trump of “arrogantly” judging the world in a series of social media posts, as protests continue across Iran.

“The U.S. president who judges arrogantly about the whole world should know that tyrants and arrogant rulers of the world, such as Pharaoh, Nimrod, Mohammad Reza (Pahlavi) and other such rulers saw their downfall when they were at the peak of their hubris,” Khamenei wrote on Jan. 9.

“He too will fall,” the ayatollah wrote.

Khamenei’s remarks came a week after Trump stated that the United States would intervene if Iranian authorities used lethal force against demonstrators.

“If Iran shoots and violently kills

100 STORIES for 100 YEARS

A special project by
Memphis Jewish HOME & REHAB

Meet Yolanda Holley



Yolanda Holley, Director of Rehab, in the rehab gym at MJHR.

By Baylee Less

In 2027, Memphis Jewish Home & Rehab (MJHR) will celebrate 100 years of serving patients. In honor of this accomplishment and all the people who made it possible, we are telling 100 of their stories.

Over the next two years, we will publish 100 Stories for 100 Years – a weekly column spotlighting resident, staff and lay leader stories with the Home from throughout our history. This week, we are sharing words from our Director of Rehab, Yolanda Holley-Whitmore.



Yolanda coaches a patient during their rehab therapy.

MJHR: Tell us about yourself.

I'm originally from Hampton, Virginia, but I've lived in Memphis for over 30 years. I became an occupational therapist when I moved to Memphis and have been for 23 years. I'm a mother of 5 and a grandmother of 3. My husband and I have a wonderful relationship and wonderful kids. I love crafting, event planning and throwing parties. Making people smile and feel special is one of my favorite things.

MJHR: How did you become connected to MJHR?

I've worked at Memphis Jewish Home & Rehab for 12 years and was recruited by our Executive Director, Bobby Meadows, to come direct the rehab department. Bobby and I worked at another facility together and that's how we met.

MJHR: Share your favorite MJHR story.

I can't choose a favorite story, per se, but I can choose a favorite story line. I love to see the patients who really thought they would never walk again, that the life they imagined was "over" in a sense, succeed and walk out of here.

"Our job here is to care for people, to truly care, and the memories I have when I know people felt taken care of shine the brightest."

MJHR: What do you wish for the future 100 years of the organization?

The healthcare world is really challenged right now, but I hope that MJHR holds on to our core values and our foundation, which is caring for patients, families and our community. We can't lose that. I want us to continue to expand our opportunities but expand in order to share our gift – for no other reason. Don't let the business run away with it.

MJHR: What does service mean to you?

Service comes from the heart. I tell my therapists not to talk about productivity in front of our patients, they don't care about that. We are here to take care of other people's needs, emotional, physical, mental, whatever the needs may be. You have to know who you're taking care of and why, if you don't know that, then you will never be able to serve.

Memphis Jewish Home & Rehab is a not-for-profit nursing home, Jewish in character and environment, dedicated to providing the highest level of care possible with dignity, compassion, and professionalism. Only through the help of generous donors is the organization able to care for those in need. Find more information at www.memphisjewishhome.org/giving. **HW**

Majority of US Voters Say Washington Should Stay Out of Iran, Quinnipiac Poll Suggests

By JNS Staff

(JNS) – Seven in 10 U.S. voters, including a majority of Republicans, say the United States should not take military action against Iran despite the regime's ongoing attacks on peaceful protesters.

U.S. President Donald Trump has told the demonstrators to "keep protesting," and that "help is on its way," but respondents in a Quinnipiac University poll released last Wednesday said Washington should stay out of it.

By 70% to 18%, voters opposed military action against Iran, even as reports say the Iranian regime has killed as many as 12,000 protesters. That includes 80% of independents, 79% of Democrats and 53% of Republicans, per the poll.

In addition, by 70% to 24%, voters said the U.S. president should first get congressional approval before attacking another country. That included 95% of Democrats and 78% of independents. Republicans disagreed, by 54% to 34%.

"Talk of the U.S. military potentially intervening in Iran's internal chaos gets a vigorous thumbs down, while voters signal congressional approval should be a backstop against military involvement in any foreign crisis," Quinnipiac polling analyst Tim Malloy stated.

Overall, 56% disapproved of the way Trump was handling foreign policy, with 41% approving, and 53% disapproved of his job as commander in chief of the U.S. military, with 43% in support.

The president's overall job approval rating was 54% negative and 40% positive, unchanged from last month.

U.S. Vice President JD Vance was also in negative territory, with 49% disapproving and 41% approving of his performance in office.

The survey of 1,133 self-identified registered voters was conducted Jan. 8-12 and had a margin of error of plus-or-minus 3.7 percentage points. **HW**

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For more information or questions, please contact Carolyn Pruitt at cpruit@jcpmemphis.org or (901)-767-7100.

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- Clear Access Banking⁴

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The minimum amount to open each of these accounts is \$25.

Prime Checking account has a \$25 monthly service fee.

Everyday Checking has a \$15 monthly service fee.

Clear Access Banking has a \$5 monthly service fee.

See important information below for ways to avoid the monthly service fee.^{2,3,4}

\$2,500 cash bonus offer⁵

Receive a \$2,500 cash bonus offer when you open a Wells Fargo Premier Checking account, offered through Wells Fargo Bank, N.A., by March 31, 2026 and bring \$250,000 or more into qualifying linked accounts. See below for ways to avoid the \$35 monthly service fee.⁶

How to receive your cash bonus

1. Bring \$250,000 or more in new assets into qualifying linked accounts by day 45.
2. Maintain at least a \$250,000 balance in linked accounts through day 90 after account opening.

After the 90-day qualification period, if you have met all requirements, Wells Fargo Bank will deposit the bonus into your new checking account within 30 days after eligibility and qualifications have been met.

To earn your \$2,500 bonus, new deposits can be made into your existing Wells Fargo accounts and linked to your Premier Checking account.

See important information below.^{5,6}

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Contact me today to discuss Wells Fargo Premier Checking and the entire range of deposit options that may be available to you.

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See reverse side for important information.

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After the 90-day qualification period, if you have met all requirements, we will deposit the bonus into your new account within 30 calendar days. Your new account must stay open through the time we attempt to deposit the bonus. We may close accounts with a zero balance without prior notice. You are responsible for any taxes due on the bonus. We will report the bonus as income to tax authorities, as required by applicable law. If you are subject to backup withholding at the time of payment, we may withhold the required amount and remit to tax authorities. (See **Wells Fargo** Page 9)



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IDF Kills Three Terrorists Gathering Intelligence on Troop Movements in Gaza

(JNS) – The Israel Defense Forces last Monday eliminated three armed terrorists who had crossed the ceasefire line in southern Gaza to gather intelligence on troop movements, the military announced last Monday evening.

Troops of the 188th Armored Brigade “identified four armed terrorists in the Yellow Line area who approached the soldiers in a manner that posed an immediate threat,” according to the IDF statement.

The Israeli Air Force “eliminated three terrorists and neutralized one additional terrorist in order to remove the threat.”

During searches of the terrorists’ remains, troops discovered weapons, as well as “military equipment intended for intelligence gathering on IDF soldiers’ activity in the area,” the military added.

The IDF remains deployed in the Strip in accordance with the U.S.-brokered truce deal “and will continue to operate to remove any immediate threat,” the statement concluded.

The Yellow Line is a boundary established by the Israel Defense Forces as part of the first phase of the U.S.-brokered ceasefire deal with the Hamas terrorist organization that went into effect in October.

Concrete barriers topped with a yellow-painted post mark the area to which the Israeli military has withdrawn under the agreement. The Yellow line leaves the IDF in control of some 53% of the enclave.

Last Sunday, the Israeli Air Force “struck and eliminated” a terrorist who had crossed the Yellow Line in the southern Gaza Strip, threatening soldiers stationed there, according to the IDF.

The day prior, the military eliminated three terrorists in three separate incidents in the southern and northern part of the Strip, it said in a statement over the weekend.

The truce plan brokered by the Trump administration has hit an impasse as Hamas continues to refuse to give up its weapons.

Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal on Dec. 6 repeated calls for Israel’s destruction, rejecting U.S.- and U.N.-backed demands to disarm the Iranian-supported terrorist group and demilitarize the Gaza Strip.

“The resistance and its weapons are the honor and pride of the ummah [the Islamic nation],” Mashaal told an anti-Israel summit in Turkey. “A thousand statements are not worth a single projectile of iron.”

The terrorist leader also dismissed “all forms of guardianship, mandate and re-occupation of the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and all of Palestine,” rejecting another key part of President Donald Trump’s plan, which received unanimous support of the U.N. Security Council on Nov. 17.

An Israeli official told JNS last Saturday that “Hamas has no choice but to disarm, and it will happen either the easy way or the hard way,” adding, “The terror group committed to President Trump’s plan, which includes laying down their weapons. The policy is clear: The terror group will be disarmed one way or another.”

Following a failed terrorist projec-

Wells Fargo... (Continued From Page 8)

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Other Terms: The Premier Checking account is an interest-bearing account. The Annual Percentage Yield (APY) is 0.01% if the balance is \$0 or more and is accurate as of August 1, 2025. Rates are variable and subject to change without notice. Fees could reduce earnings on this account.

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tile launch from the Gaza City area last Thursday, the IDF carried out strikes across the coastal enclave, killing at least six terrorists and destroying military infrastructure.

The attacks led to a “significant degradation of Hamas’s and additional terrorist organizations’ operational capabilities and abilities to execute terror attacks against Israeli civilians and IDF troops,” the IDF stated.

In a separate incident last Thursday, IDF troops operating in the Jabalia area located a launcher with two loaded rockets that were ready to be fired toward the territory of the State of Israel, the military stated. **HW**

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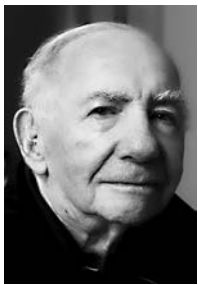
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Begeg Ka'as – His Coat of Anger



*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

(6/13/12) I had an interesting challenge the other day. One of my favorite editors of a Midwest Jewish newspaper, knowing my reputation as a connoisseur of Midrashim, said: “OK, Ted, what about Begeg Ka’as.” I clearly answered, “Oh yeah, Begeg Ka’as.” Sure Begeg Ka’as, which wasn’t a lie, was it, since I had no idea what Begeg Ka’as meant, except it could be Hebrew. “Well,” said the anonymous editor, “why don’t you write a story about it?” Definitely a challenge to my aging imagination.

Why didn’t I write a story about Esau’s marriage to Ishmael’s daughter? Because I wasn’t there and knew nothing about it – and usually misspelled Ishmael. But aided by my super computer, I Googled it. Turns out that it means “Coat of Anger,” invented by a famous Chasid who thought anger was bad for

your soul and blood pressure. The idea being that when your wife undercooked the chicken so badly that it cackled when you tried to cut it – you ran for your Begeg Ka’as and by the time you found it, buttoned it up, and adjusted the belt, your anger had cooled. “Dear, this bloody raw chicken is delicious.” (“Cock-a-doodle-do,” said the slightly warm bird.)

It reminds me of the famous Chasid (all Chasids are famous) who dearly loved the fig tree by his door and his lovely wife. He regularly, every morning, stood at his front door and said the blessing: Blessed art thou oh G-d who bestowed upon us fig trees. He would pop a few honeyed figs in his mouth and look forward to a fig dessert for lunch. Suffice it to say he loved that fig tree. Those jealous of his learning said – yeah, almost as much as his wife. UNTIL one dark, gloomy day his wife had a Hadassah meeting. What to serve as cocktail snacks? Oh, she thought, how about those plum-sized, purple figs that adorned her husband’s second love, that magnificent fig tree by the door. And so she did. Picked it clean, she did. There weren’t three figs left, hidden among those big, green leaves.

Now it’s 5:30 – our Chasid comes

home from his studies at the synagogue. As he approaches his front door he hears the musical chatter of female voices. He also notices that the plump, purple fruit no longer is sprinkled among the green leaves of his second love. Being a Chasid, a student of Torah and Talmud, he was no fool. He immediately understood the combination of NO FIGS and female voices.

His wife – she was the one – his blood boiled. But being a man of heart as well as intellect, he rushed through the door to find his Begeg Ka’as. He must muffle this terrible rage to squeeze his beloved wife’s neck till her eyes looked like two near ripe figs. But where was it? It was not in its usual spot. As he rushed around the house, from closet to closet, his rage grew. He must find his mystical coat. He tried on three other coats, buttoned to the chin. But the desire to throttle his greedy fig-eating wife, who also misfiled coats, did not decline. As he tried on the fourth coat, his Chasidic face flushed with irritation and temper. He thought, I should have married plain Miriam, the Rebbe’s daughter who probably hated figs and who was renowned as a housekeeper and . . . but then his wife entered the room bearing a bowl of figs so beautiful that Cezzane would

SCRIBBLER ON THE ROOF

By Ted Roberts

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have leapt from his grave to paint them in subtle shades of purple and crimson. Yeaker the Chasid stopped buttoning his fifth coat of the evening.

How lucky he was to have such a wife and a fig tree that would replenish itself in a few weeks. When he finally found his Begeg Ka’as he would give it to a fellow Chasid with an ugly, stingy wife who lacked a fig tree. He would need it.

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

Former FBI Official Bongino Defends Support for Israel



Podcaster Dan Bongino speaks with attendees at the 2021 Student Action Summit hosted by Turning Point USA at the Tampa Convention Center in Tampa, Fla., July 17, 2021. Credit: Gage Skidmore via Creative Commons.

The podcaster, who is not Jewish, said antisemitism is behind accusations that he took \$6 million from AIPAC.

When one exposes the liberal agenda, the “demon savages” scream back about the Jews, he wrote.

“Of course, none of what’s included below in this pile of human waste’s post is even remotely true,” he said. “Demon savages are so moronic they don’t realize campaign finance records are public.” **HW**

ISRAEL INSIGHTS Searching for Resolution

By Howard Weisband

As I write on January 14 two major events are unfolding in the Middle East. The first and most impactful is that the revolution of the people of Iran seems well underway, with the political support of the United States, Europe, and the countries of the Abraham Accords including Israel of course.

The second event, closer to home in Israel, and perhaps timed with the first, is that proclaimed on this date by Steve Witkoff, U.S. Special Envoy: “Today, on behalf of President Trump, we are announcing the launch of Phase Two of the President’s 20-Point Plan to End the Gaza Conflict, moving from cease-fire to demilitarization, technocratic governance and reconstruction. Phase II establishes a transitional technocratic Palestinian administration in Gaza, the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza (NCAG), and begins the full demilitarization and reconstruction of Gaza, primarily the disarmament of all unauthorized personnel.”

Why is the back-to-back timing of these two events perhaps important? It seems that the U.S. believes, better expects, that the immediate, direct involvement of the Arab states committed to the Abraham Accords, all of whom desire regime change in Iran, will bring increased pressure to bear on Hamas in

Gaza to return the body of the last Israeli hostage and additionally to lay down their weapons as is demanded by both Israel and the U.S.

The major question at the moment is whether the United States, and maybe Israel as well, will launch a coordinated military strike within Iran. If that happens, Iran has threatened forceful retaliation, most likely in the form of the launching of missiles still in their arsenal. In anticipation of such reprisal, the U.S. has withdrawn its service personnel and diplomats stationed in key military bases and posts in countries near Iran, especially Qatar.

We in Israel are told to be ready and be close to our safe rooms, and the IDF is on high alert, ready to respond as may be necessary.

When this column is published and read, we will know if a military intervention in Iran and retaliation have occurred. Perhaps targeted assassinations will take place as has happened with the leadership of Hamas and Hezbollah. Perhaps the Russians will provide sanctuary to the Ayatollah as they did with Assad in Syria. Actual regime change may take longer.

Writing in The Times of Israel today, January 14, David Horovitz perceptively stated: “This is not Israel’s war,

but Israel has an existential interest in its outcome. It also has a fervent desire for a relationship with a different Iran, much of whose public may not have fallen for the regime’s decades of anti-Israel indoctrination.”

He closed with: “The Iranian people are, one more time, spearheading an effort to be freed from a decades-long nightmare. The U.S. president is avowedly committed to their freedom, and promising assistance. And the world waits, knowing that the last thing he would want is to be perceived, Obama-style, as a president who missed the moment to help liberate Iran.”

Closer to Israel, Phase Two of the President’s 20-Point Plan to End the Gaza Conflict includes the establishment of a Gaza Board of Peace. An Axios report on January 7, by Barak Ravid, states: “President Trump is expected to announce the Gaza Board of Peace next week as part of the second phase of the ceasefire agreement.... The board, which will be chaired by Trump and include around 15 world leaders, will supervise a still-to-be-formed Palestinian technocratic government and oversee the reconstruction process.”

Ravid additionally writes: “Among the countries expected to join the board are the U.K., Germany, France, Italy,

Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt and Turkey.”

Therein lies the danger. I point you to a January 12 detailed analysis in the Gatestone Institute by Khaled Abu Toameh. “How to Ensure the Success of Gaza’s ‘Board of Peace:’ This Dog Won’t Hunt.” Utilizing findings by named, former prominent Mossad operatives, he cautions: With members such as Qatar and Turkey, it is difficult to see how Trump’s “Board of Peace” will be able to achieve even an impersonation of peace, security, and stability in the Gaza Strip.”

Abu Toameh’s conclusion is even more striking: From the look of the countries reportedly involved, Trump’s Board of Peace seems more like an army of Israel’s enemies being giddily planted on its border....”

Needless to say, we are still searching for resolution.

*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***

Trump Weighs Iran Options, as Death Toll Heads into Thousands



Members of the Iranian Jewish community light photos of Ali Khamenei during a Free Iran rally in Holon, Israel, Jan. 14, 2026. Credit: Matt Kaminsky/JNS. | Matt Kaminsky/JNS

By JNS Staff

(JNS) – U.S. President Donald Trump was reportedly considering military action [last Wednesday] to support the Iranian protest movement, the largest demonstrations against the Islamic Republic in decades, with foreign governments removing staff from their embassies in Tehran.

JNS spoke with Janatan Sayeh, a research analyst at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, and Annika Ganzeveld, Middle East portfolio manager for the Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute, about what is happening in Iran, how the regime has responded and what the Trump administration might do to support the protesters.

“The scale is unprecedented,” Sayeh said. “The momentum is unprecedented. This is not like anything we’ve seen before.”

The number of protesters that the regime has killed in recent days is unclear. Iranian officials have told the New York Times and other outlets that some 3,000 Iranians have been killed, a figure that comports with the assessments of independent rights groups operating outside Iran, like the Oslo-based nonprofit Iran Human Rights.

The true figure may be as high as 20,000 killed, CBS reported last Wednesday, based on sources inside and outside Iran.

Ganzeveld told JNS that the ferocity of the reprisals reflects how seriously the Islamic Republic takes the protest movement.

“The regime perceives these protests as an existential threat, and it’s willing to use any tools it has at its disposal to get rid of this threat to its survival,” she said. “That means violence, killing scores of protesters, using brutality across the board.”

Across its “axis of resistance,” Iran has previously endorsed unlimited reprisals against civilians to prop up its proxies. The Assad regime in Syria,

with Iranian backing, killed hundreds of thousands of civilians in its failed, decade-long attempt to hold onto power.

Sayeh and Ganzeveld agreed that the Islamic republic is unlikely to have any limitations on its willingness to kill Iranians to preserve its own regime.

“As long as they think it will keep them in power, I think they’ll continue killing,” Sayeh said.

“The regime doesn’t appear to be setting any limit for itself, and it appears willing to use all means and all violence necessary to contain these protests in order to ensure that the regime survives,” Ganzeveld said.

The Iranian government has successfully quelled recent protest movements, like the 2022-23 “Woman, Life, Freedom” movement, using mass violence, arrests and subsequent executions.

Trump has promised the Iranian protesters that “help is on its way” and that the United States will “take very strong action” if the government begins hanging dissidents.

Based on his conversations with people in Iran, Sayeh said that support from the United States is both hoped for and necessary for the anti-government movement to succeed.

“If there were to be no international response, whether Israel or America, which are the only two possible options, then it would realistically die out,” Sayeh said, of the protests. “It would be crushed, and in that scenario, the situation would be much more dire than we’ve ever seen.”

Trump has reportedly been briefed on a range of options to support the protests. That support could come in the form of military strikes on key Iranian officials, including Iran’s supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, or on Iran’s command and control apparatus.

Information about the protests has been fed to the outside world amid a regime-imposed internet blackout thanks

in large part to the Starlink satellite broadband network. The United States could also support Iranians’ access to Starlink in a non-military response.

One form of external support for the protests has also come from Reza Pahlavi, the son of the former shah of Iran who was deposed in the 1979 Islamic Revolution, who lives in exile in the United States.

Pahlavi has long been a divisive figure inside Iran and among Iranian dissidents in exile given the repressive nature of his father’s government, but videos from within Iran after he called for further protests last Thursday seem to indicate that he has a significant amount of support.

“Up until Thursday, the chants were all about, ‘Death to the dictator,’ or ‘This is the final year of Khamenei,’ and things of that nature,” Sayeh told JNS. “Once we saw that call, the numbers that were occupying Tehran were visibly greater. But more importantly, there was a sense of unity, meaning the chants of ‘Long live the king,’ or ‘This is the final battle, Pahlavi will return’—you heard it everywhere.”

“You heard it in cities that I had to double check the pronunciation of, and I’m from the country. This is how widespread it was,” Sayeh said. “It was the only moment in the Islamic Republic’s history that one leader, one opposition, was able to bring people out.”

Pahlavi has since called for the Iranian army to defect from the regime’s wider security apparatus, which also includes more ideological elements like the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the Basij militia and foreign groups committed to the Islamic revolution that have deployed within Iran including Iraqi popular mobilization forces and Lebanese Hezbollah.

“You are the national military of Iran, not the military of the Islamic Republic,” Pahlavi wrote last Tuesday. “You have a duty to protect the lives of your compatriots. You do not have much time. Join them as soon as possible.”

So far, no such defections have occurred, and Iranian officials who previously acknowledged the legitimate demands of protesters have fallen in line with the hardline stance that all demonstrations are the work of rioters and terrorists.

“Right now, if you’re an IRGC member, Basij member, opening fire on people, you don’t fear for your life, but the protester does,” Sayeh told JNS. “The game changer is, if that armed personnel who’s on the ground, if he fears for his life as much as the protester does, that’s when we would see defections happening.”

“I think you would start seeing defections after leadership decapitation for the mid-level officials to then assess whether there is a future for this regime or whether they want to defect,” he added.

Ganzeveld told JNS that any such defections would begin to whittle away at the legitimacy and stability of the regime.

“If you start seeing discontent among Iranian security forces, defections from Iranian security forces, defections from the regime, from political officials, that would crumble the foundation of the regime,” Ganzeveld said. “We haven’t seen any of those kinds of divisions yet.”

She added that one of the protest chants that have been observed refers to the regime’s uniformed police.

“It shows protesters trying to get the support from the law enforcement command, from these police officers, and to bring them onto their side to create divisions within the regime in its response to the protests,” Ganzeveld said.

Though the contexts of the two countries are different, the recent U.S. raid to capture Venezuelan dictator Nicolás Maduro shows one kind of response that the United States could take towards Iran, with a high-level kill-or-capture strike against leadership followed by negotiations with the still-intact remnants of the regime.

Sayeh thinks that model couldn’t work with Iran, where the protest movement no longer believes that the government holds legitimacy and the regime is unwilling to compromise on its support for terrorism and its nuclear and ballistic missile programs.

“Those are the three main things that are getting them sanctioned,” Sayeh said. “They’re not going to do that. An Islamic Republic that doesn’t believe in those three ideals is no longer an Islamic Republic.”

“The idea that you’re going to get a little bit of an Islamic Republic doesn’t make sense,” Sayeh said. “The thing about Khamenei is that even if you get rid of him, you have the IRGC, you have the Ministry of Intelligence, you have the military—there are all the parallel institutions that form the regime as a whole.”

“The idea that if you remove one person, somehow something’s going to be different is not plausible,” he said.

Ganzeveld said that if the protest movement fails, there is likewise no reason to think that the Islamic Republic will change course or institute the kinds of reforms that would alleviate the economic and environmental conditions that prompted the protests in the first place.

“If these protests die out, the regime will likely further securitize society, further crack down on Iranians’ rights, and it will continue to do what it’s been doing, which is trying to build up its ballistic missile program, support the axis of resistance, but not actually making fundamental political or economic reforms that are needed to remove the underlying grievances that protesters have,” she said. **HW**

US to ‘Pause’ Immigrant Visas from 75 Countries

(JNS) – The U.S. State Department said on Wednesday that it will “pause” immigrant visa processing from 75 countries, including Iran and Somalia, “whose migrants take welfare from the American people at unacceptable rates.”

“The pause impacts dozens of countries—including Somalia, Haiti, Iran and Eritrea—whose immigrants often become public charges on the United States upon arrival,” it stated. “We are working to ensure the generosity of the American

people will no longer be abused.”

A State Department spokesman referred JNS to the department’s post on social media. The change goes into place on Jan. 21, Fox News reported. (The White House shared the Fox News article on social media.)

The channel published a full list of the countries: Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Antigua and Barbuda, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belarus, Belize, Bhutan, Bosnia,

Brazil, Burma, Cambodia, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Colombia, Cote d’Ivoire, Cuba, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Dominica, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Fiji, Gambia, Georgia, Ghana, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Haiti, Iran, Iraq, Jamaica, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Macedonia, Moldova, Mongolia, Montenegro, Morocco, Nepal, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Pakistan, Republic of the Congo, Russia, Rwanda,

Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Tanzania, Thailand, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Uruguay, Uzbekistan and Yemen.

“I am so curious to understand how Kuwait, an oil-rich country where the average citizen income exceeds \$60k a year, ended up on this list,” wrote Vivian Nereim, the Riyadh, Saudi Arabia-based New York Times gulf bureau chief. **HW**

Torah...

(Continued From Page 1)

there, a 14-year-old Metz and his family were sent to Auschwitz. His mother and 10-year-old sister were murdered in the gas chambers shortly after their arrival. His father later met the same fate.

Metz survived multiple concentration camps, including Auschwitz and Dachau, and was liberated by American troops in April 1945. He was eventually bar mitzvahed after the Holocaust at 16, a delayed rite marking a childhood interrupted and then resumed.

Relatives who had settled in Mississippi sponsored Metz to come to the United States. He finished high school in Natchez, attended Tulane University, and served in the U.S. Army during the Korean War — at one point having to reapply for citizenship after being deployed overseas.

He eventually moved to Jackson, where he raised a family and became a traveling salesperson before co-founding Metz Industries, a wholesale lingerie business that sold brassieres, hosiery and feather boas to stores across the region — the work of an ordinary American life rebuilt mile by mile. He and his wife, Louise, were married for more than 50 years.

Bringing the Torah to Mississippi

In 1992, Robert Berman, a longtime congregant and former Beth Israel president, heard about an international effort to restore and redistribute scrolls damaged, desecrated or orphaned during the Holocaust. He and his sisters, Joan and Brenda, along with their families, donated the funds to acquire one. Shul leaders decided there was only one person who should retrieve it.

Metz and his son, Lawson, traveled to London to bring the Torah back to Jackson. At a restoration warehouse, he was

shown piles of scrolls — some burned, some torn, some riddled with bullet holes — many painstakingly pieced together from fragments. They chose a Torah rescued from Prague and took turns carrying it on their laps during the international flight.

Other Torahs rescued from the Holocaust made similar southern journeys, to congregations in Alabama, Louisiana and Tennessee. Joseph Metz said his grandfather felt honored to be the one chosen from Beth Israel to collect the Torah, and that bringing it to Mississippi was closure for him — a full-circle moment.

A welcoming committee from the shul — including Berman, the rabbi and others — greeted the Metz and the Torah at Jackson's airport. "They sang prayers," recalled Berman, now 94.

Beth Israel held a dedication ceremony at the synagogue, and the Torah was installed in a glass case near the front doors, where it remained for decades. The words "Memory sustains humanity" is etched across the top of the case. Next to it hangs a photograph of Metz as an adult wearing the yellow star he was forced to wear under Nazi rule.

The scroll is displayed unfurled to a chapter in Exodus that comes after the Red Sea has closed behind the fleeing Israelites and before the Ten Commandments are given — a narrow span of time when survival has been achieved but meaning has not yet arrived. The scroll has remained that way for years, suspended between catastrophe and covenant.

"The congregation understood exactly whose story that Torah represented," said Stuart Rockoff, a historian and longtime member of the 165-year-old Beth Israel. "This was a synagogue with one Holocaust survivor."

Behind its building, Beth Israel also maintains a Holocaust memorial garden, dedicated to Metz and to Gus Waterman Herrman, a U.S. Army officer from Mississippi who fought in Europe during World War II and later became a philanthropist. The garden, which features stained-glass sculptures and is used for Yom HaShoah commemorations, was not damaged in the fire.

Berman's daughter, Deborah Silver, had her bat mitzvah and wedding at the synagogue. She's now a jazz singer, nominated for a Grammy this year, and plans to perform charity concerts in New York City and Jackson to benefit the shul. "We will be back," she said, "and we will recover."

Surviving another act of antisemitism

Saturday's fire at Beth Israel is being investigated by federal authorities as a possible hate crime. A local teen, Stephen Spencer Pittman, confessed to igniting the blaze.

The bulk of the damage was concentrated in the library and administrative offices, which are also home to the Institute of Southern Jewish Life. It's the same part of the building targeted in a 1967 Ku Klux Klan bombing.

After the fire, the congregation moved the Torahs to the nearby Northminster Baptist Church, which offered its space. There, five Torah scrolls from the sanctuary were carefully unfurled and laid out across long tables, allowing soot and smoke to dissipate.

On the advice of a sofer, a ritual scribe, the Holocaust Torah was not unrolled.

"It's extremely delicate," said Sarah Thomas, Beth Israel's vice president. She said it appeared to have no visible damage and is now wrapped and stored

for safekeeping until the congregation is able to move back into the building.

The Torah's survival can be explained without invoking a miracle: it was protected by its glass case and by where it stood. Still, for those who know its history, the moment carried weight.

What survives

Gilbert Metz spent decades speaking publicly about his Holocaust experience. His oral testimony is preserved in Holocaust archives, and his story has been taught in schools across Mississippi.

That inheritance was also ritual: For decades at Beth Israel, the shofar on the High Holidays was blown by Metz's son, Lawson, and later by his grandson, Joseph.

Joseph Metz — now the president of the Jewish federation in Mobile, Alabama — has written a book about his grandfather's survival, *Behind the Silent Doors* — a phrase Gilbert used to describe the gas chambers. Joseph regularly appears at Holocaust remembrance events and in classrooms. When he does, he pins his grandfather's yellow star to his jacket before he speaks — the same object that once marked Gilbert for death now marking the story as one that refuses to disappear.

Metz, who died at 78 in 2007, bore the tattooed number the Nazis assigned him at Auschwitz for the rest of his life: 184203. Joseph and his sister, Caroline, each later chose to replicate the number on a tattoo of their own, as an inheritance. He said his grandfather survived so the story would not end with him, but be carried forward.

The Torah Metz carried across an ocean — and across a lifetime — remains.

To donate to the building fund, visit <https://www.bethisraelms.org> [HW](#)



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