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'We're in Hashem's hands,' say Ukraine Jews

TALI FEINBERG

A man gets his wife and baby into their car at the crack of dawn while bombs fall around him. In a state of shock, he drives for 17 hours non-stop while the scenes around him unfold like a horror movie.

Another couple defiantly refuses to leave in spite of the bombs raining on their city, saying they need to help those who can't help themselves. These are just two of the many scenarios of the Jewish community in Ukraine.

In the days since the Russian bombardment of Ukraine began, people have witnessed the devastation of their country. Even the Babyn Yar Holocaust memorial in Ukraine's capital Kyiv was hit.

Ronnie Apteker lived in Johannesburg for most of his life, but has found a true sense of home in Kyiv. There, he got married, had a baby, and renovated a beautiful apartment. He felt at peace. All that was shattered the moment the Russians invaded on 24 February. He's now a refugee, leaving everything behind and embarking on a harrowing journey with just the clothes on his back. On the evening of 1 March, he managed to cross the border to Poland.

Rebbitzin Rochi Levitansky was born in Johannesburg. Now she's a Chabad *shlucha* (emissary) living in Sumy, Ukraine – just a half hour's drive from the Russian border. She and her husband refuse to leave their community. They're now sleeping in basements and searching for food.

Ilya Bezruchko was born in the small village of Konotop in the Sumy region,

and lives in Kyiv. His grandmother still lives in their village, and refuses to leave. "The town still has about 200 to 300 Jews. Most are Holocaust survivors. People there are lying down in bathrooms and basements. Fighting with Russians is happening face to face in guerrilla warfare," he says.

Meanwhile, Bezruchko has fled Kyiv. "When the Russians invaded, we woke up at 05:30 to a lit-up sky. We live on the 14th floor, so it was dangerous to stay. We went to our office basement. We were joined by about 50 friends, colleagues, and clients."

He organised food, water, and security for people who could hide in the basements of the buildings he owns across the city. "But the next day, I told my wife we needed to go West. We left on the morning of 25 February, aiming to get to Lviv, to the Israeli embassy, to try send my wife and kids to Israel."

"The whole city [Kyiv] was blocked with traffic jams. We took back roads, driving for 10 hours. There were Ukrainian jets flying 50m above us to avoid enemy radar scanning. There were many checkpoints organised by local self defence." They eventually reached Lviv.

Bezruchko is the Kyiv representative of the National Coalition Supporting Eurasian Jewry, and is working to aid Ukraine's Jews. "I'm also trying to arrange some kind of refugee camp for Jews, and I hope to work with the Israeli government on this," he says. He would like Israel to airlift more Jews out of the country. "We're working to create humanitarian corridors, and are ready to assist."

According to Israeli media, more



Bombs are falling on the Babyn Yar Memorial, the site of one of the worst massacres of Jews during World War II

than 5 000 Ukrainian Jews have already put in calls to a special Jewish Agency hotline to help those interested in leaving the country for Israel. Dozens of Ukrainian Jews arrived in Israel around 21 February.

Since Russian troops began amassing on Ukraine's border in November, a steep

rise in the price of daily essentials has forced tens of thousands of needy Jews to make a desperate choice between buying food or keeping warm through the freezing winter.

Jews who were already living in dire poverty – some on only \$2 (R31) a day – are now facing even more impossible

costs thanks to the war. Humanitarian organisation the Joint Distribution Committee is working around the clock to provide aid and support, and arrange transport and accommodation for displaced Jews in western Ukraine, Moldova, and across Europe.

Sana Nelina has remained in her hometown of Odessa. When the siren sounds, she hides in a corridor. "The Russians are really close, two hours from us. They are bombing civilians," she told the *SA Jewish Report* on 1 March. "It feels like we are in the waiting room, but we'll do all we can not to lose our beautiful city. The Jewish community is strong. Every day, Jewish organisations are helping people evacuate, or providing food and medicine." She has stayed to help.

Meanwhile, in Johannesburg, Alon Apteker says his brother, Ronnie, is "crushed and devastated". "They locked their place, gave the key to a friend, and fled. They headed to his wife's family in Lviv," he says. After driving for 17 hours without stopping, they made it there.

Apteker says that on the morning of 1 March, his brother got on a bus reserved for women, children, and foreign men. The family hoped to make it to Poland. For hours, they were out of contact. Finally, he heard that they had made it across.

Just before Shabbat on 25 February, Rabbi Levi Silman in Cape Town wrote on Facebook, "I just got off the phone with my older sister, Sora Levinson. I called to say, 'Good Shabbos'. It doesn't sound so extraordinary except that her country was invaded. She, along with

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“Victory” as Bongani Masuku says sorry

NICOLA MILTZ

Bongani Masuku, who was found guilty of hate speech by the Constitutional Court last month, has finally apologised to the Jewish community after many years of refusing to do so. “I’m delighted with this outcome,” said Wendy Kahn, the

national director of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD). “The SAJBD is committed to addressing antisemitism whenever it arises to ensure that South Africa continues to have low rates of antisemitism. We will do this irrespective of who the offending party is, whatever their political

motive is, or how long it takes to get a result. Antisemitism and all forms of hate have no place in South Africa.”

It brings to a close a seemingly never-ending legal saga, which began 13 years ago. A Constitutional Court judgment confirmed on Wednesday, 16 February, that Masuku, the former Congress of South

African Trade Unions (Cosatu) international relations secretary, must apologise for offensive and inflammatory remarks he made against the Jewish community in 2009 following violence on the Gaza border. On 6 February 2009, Masuku stated on the website supernatural.blogs.com: “Bongani says hi to you

all as we struggle to liberate Palestine from the racists, fascists, and zionists who belong to the era of their Friend Hitler! We must not apologise, every Zionist must be made to drink the bitter medicine they are feeding our brothers and sisters in Palestine. We must target them, expose them and doo all that (sic) is needed to subject them to perpetual suffering until

they withdraw from the land of others and stop their savage attacks on human dignity.” The Constitutional Court found this to be in contravention of Section 10 of the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 4 of 2000. In welcoming the judgment, the SAJBD said

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Torah Thought

Praying for Kiev

The distressing events unfolding in Ukraine have captured our hearts and minds. We have been praying for the innocent who have been under attack over the past week. Our extra concerns extend to the many Jewish communities dotted around that country. From the large cities to the smaller towns, there are tens of thousands of our brethren whose fate we're anxiously following.

As my surname implies, Kiev is in our family history. Not only in generations past, but today, we still have family serving the Ukrainian Jewish community. Ukrainians call their capital “Kyiv” (kee-yiv), the spelling, a transliteration of the Ukrainian Київ. The Russian version is “Kiev” (kee-yev). Either way, we are entrenched, and there are Jews residing in both countries bearing the brunt of this chaos.

There is solace in the thought that this world-shaking event is occurring during the week that we study the parsha of Pekudei. What's the overarching theme of this parsha? The Mishkan, a sanctuary that our ancestors built, a travelling Temple in the desert that was a physical place on earth where G-d's infinite light intersected the reality of the human being below.

A sanctuary is meant to offer protection from those who would cause you harm. It's an expression of our awareness of G-d's constant presence together with our trust in His compassionate protection.

The parsha describes the accounting Moses took of the donations towards the construction of the desert sanctuary. And the people gave. Some contributed materials, building supplies, luxury metals, and precious stones. Some contributed time, as builders and labourers. Others dedicated their talents as weavers and architects. Each gave of their unique wealth, in items or in expertise.

We read about how each donation was accounted for, and by extension, every single Jew

was included in one way or another. It's a concrete manifestation of the idea that for G-d's home to be built and magnificent, it requires each individual to give of their personal riches.

Today, G-d's home can be found everywhere – from Uganda to Ukraine. Sustaining Jewish communities and supporting our brethren wherever they are is how we continue Moses' legacy of ensuring that everyone is included and no detail overlooked. And again, such sustenance happens when each individual reviews their personal riches and sees what they can give – prayers, *tehillim*, letters, messages of hope and strength, *zeddakah*, financial support,

and so on. When the Sanctuary was completed, Moses authored a beautiful prayer (Psalm 91 of Tehillim) for the persistent safety and security that G-d provides. May the merit of building G-d a home in their communities stand by and protect our brothers and sisters in Ukraine, and may we see an immediate end to the conflict as the verse states, “They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation will not raise sword against nation, neither will they learn war anymore.”

Rabbi Ari Kievman,
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Israel haters deflect from war in Europe

NICOLA MILTZ

The South African government, the ruling party, and anti-Israel lobbyists have embarked on a campaign to keep the now upstaged pro-Palestinian narrative alive during one of the darkest times in European history this century.

While world leaders this week rushed to condemn Russia for its barbaric and terrifying invasion of Ukraine, the African National Congress (ANC) has organised a protest march to the Israel embassy in solidarity with the Palestinians on Thursday, 3 March.

Political heavyweights like ANC National Chairperson Gwede Mantashe, the minister of mineral resources, will be taking part, according to the ANC online advertisement.

word about solidarity with those currently suffering in Europe.

According to Peace Mabe, international relations convenor of the ANC Gauteng, the march on Thursday coincides with Human Rights Month in South Africa as well as Israel Apartheid Week later this month.

“The march is about human rights,” she told the *SA Jewish Report*. “We want to destroy the narrative that creates divisions and encourages prejudice of the people of Palestine and demonstrate our solidarity.”

She made no mention of the violations being perpetrated against Ukrainians, as a human-rights tragedy of enormous proportions unfolds this week in Eastern Europe. In fact, the ANC’s response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine has been muted.

There has been an uptick in anti-Israel rhetoric by lobby groups who have displayed a deafening silence to the Ukraine crisis, mainly critical of the mainstream media’s portrayal of the Ukrainians as heroes and the Russians as villains.

Rowan Polovin, the national chairperson of the South African Zionist Federation said, “Amidst Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and widespread international condemnation, the ANC and its coalition partners have chosen to march not to the Russian but the Israeli embassy. This move, which places the ruling party at odds with the entire democratic world alongside the values espoused in our Constitution, only highlights the ANC’s double-standards and hypocritical obsession with Israel.”

A long-winded anti-Israel opinion piece written by Alvin Botes, the deputy minister of the department of international affairs and cooperation (Dirco), appeared in *Daily Maverick* on Thursday, 24 February, the day of the Russian invasion.

Botes was commemorating the 1994 anniversary of the tragic massacre of 29 people in a Hebron mosque committed by religious extremist Baruch Goldstein. He used the opportunity to criticise Israel in a long-winded essay that was then posted on the Dirco website, further stamping it with the approval of government.

Meanwhile, Israel, which has strong diplomatic relations with Russia and Ukraine, has been helping to evacuate thousands of citizens from Ukraine including citizens from countries in a state of war with Israel.

According to *Haaretz*, the Israeli foreign ministry confirmed that Israeli diplomats have been assisting



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The president of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu), Zingiswa Losi, and the deputy general secretary of the South African Communist Party (SACP), Solly Mapaila, will join him as they march towards the embassy to hand over a memorandum. They will be accompanied by Palestinian Ambassador Hanan Jarrar.

Jarrar wrote an opinion piece in last week’s *Sunday Times* titled, “The African Union should not be rewarding an apartheid state”. In it, she said that granting Israel observer status was a “slap in the face” of the human-rights struggle. She hasn’t posted a

citizens from Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt to evacuate from Ukraine, transporting them alongside Israeli refugees.

The Jewish Agency has set up stations next to at least five Ukrainian border crossings to process migrants trying to escape the war.

Political commentator Daniel Silke told the *SA Jewish Report* that the anti-Israel lobby was trying to appear relevant. “The Russian invasion of Ukraine poses a problem for movements like Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) and other pro-Palestinian groups in that it distracts attention from their cause and redirects it obviously to matters in Eastern and central Europe.”

He said this meant BDS and its allies like the ANC, Cosatu, and the SACP were going to be called upon “to raise the profile” of the Israeli-Palestinian question “so that it’s not forgotten during this tumultuous time.”

“Finding a heavyweight in Mantashe may be part and parcel of upping the public-relations ante and getting some media attention,” he said.

“This is just an attempt to muscle back in during a time in which the Ukrainian question is really going

to take much of the world’s attention and also focus much of the popular protest movement on the ground away from the Middle East.”

South African Friends of Israel spokesperson Bafana Modise said the organisation was “disappointed” by the actions of the ANC in staging a protest march to the Israeli embassy.

“This shows the ANC has no interest in becoming a peace broker in the Middle East. Its agenda is to demonise Israel,” he said.

“Even in the middle of a world-war crisis, it still chooses Israel as a scapegoat, to be seen as relevant, as caring for human rights. If it did care about human rights, the party would have shown solidarity with Ukraine and condemned the actions of Russia, but evidently only Israel is worthy of all the condemnation because it’s a scapegoat.

“This is all about political relevance,” Modise said. “If this was about human rights, they’d be marching to the Russian embassy and the Chinese embassy, marching to many other countries which are guilty of human-rights abuses. This is a project to demonise Israel and to be seen as politically relevant.”

“Victory” as Bongani Masuku says sorry

>>>Continued from page 2

it respected the conclusion of the Constitutional Court that three other impugned statements by Masuku, while “inflammatory” and “seditious”, would on the balance of probability not be considered by a reasonable person to be aimed at Jews specifically, but rather at Israel and those who supported it.

In terms of the judgment handed down by the Constitutional Court, Masuku and Cosatu were required to apologise for the statement that the court ruled to be hate speech against the Jewish community. The apology was received on 23 February.

His apology read: “Mr Masuku and Cosatu hereby tender their unconditional apology to the Jewish community and regret the harm caused.”

The SAJBD has welcomed this apology.

“We are pleased that the courts have affirmed that there’s no place for statements that are harmful, that incite harm, and propagate hatred in our constitutional

democracy,” it said this week.

“This brings to a close a long-running dispute involving many years of litigation between the parties. We hope that henceforth, our two organisations, even when we disagree, will always engage with one other in a spirit of tolerance and mutual respect.”

Antisemitism expert Milton Shain, emeritus professor of historical studies at the University of Cape Town, said it was “an important victory for the Board in the fight for Jewish dignity and a victory for those seeking limitations on speech. The effort has been more than worthwhile. Indeed, the Constitutional Court has set a benchmark. On the other hand, the judgment allows anti-Zionists to insist that criticising Zionism now has a *hechsher* from the Constitutional Court. The reality is that Zionism has never been above criticism. It’s the fantasy and hate that informs much anti-Zionist discourse that offends. Anyone reading Masuku’s outrageous and hateful utterings will agree.”



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Israeli artists paint the town despite attempted boycott

TALI FEINBERG

The Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement in South Africa’s latest attempt to stifle freedom of expression has failed.

The movement tried to stop Israeli artists from taking part in a local street festival in Cape Town, but the artists went ahead with painting murals under the theme “humanity”. Their work was part of the International Public Art Festival (IPAF) 2022 from 18 to 28 February.

The event is hosted by urban art organisation Baz-Art, and has been running for six years, with 133 murals across the city.

“This year, we’re going even bigger by adding multistorey massive public murals to the skyline of the Cape Town CBD, and continuing long-standing community art projects in the historical suburb of Salt River,” said the organisers, who are based in Cape Town.

“This will showcase the best talent in the street-art scene, locally and internationally – the epitome of creative expression for all Capetonians and visitors to enjoy. The murals will draw inspiration from the theme ‘humanity’ to educate and encourage debate while promoting the arts and our future talent.”

But the SA BDS Coalition and the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) felt that it was an affront to human rights. They demanded that the Israeli artists group, Broken Fingaz, leave the festival. They also demanded that Israeli embassy sponsorship of the group’s flights be dropped.

Because Broken Fingaz and Baz-Art wanted to prioritise the festival above all else, they chose to drop funding from the Israeli embassy. However, Baz-Art insisted on the Israeli artists’ right to be there, and even funded their trip out of its own pocket.

Dennis Molewa of Baz-Art told the *SA Jewish Report* that “after we dropped the embassy as a sponsor, the PSC hosted a protest in Canterbury Street demanding that we send the Israeli artists home. I politely and respectfully declined, as stated in the official press statement.

“I even attended the protest in person to explain why we declined their request to send the artists home. Some listened to me and understood. Others shouted at me, didn’t listen, and didn’t understand. And that’s okay. I listened, and went home. Nobody got hurt, and I had an opportunity to present my point.

“We firmly believe in artists’ freedom of expression as stated by UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation’s) bill of artist rights,”

he says. “What matters to us is the artist and their ability to create art that’s free from political pressure. Hence, we refused to send them home and have covered their costs out of our own pockets. At the same time, we respect the communities we paint in and their lived reality in a socio-economically divided post-apartheid South Africa. We consulted intensely with community organisations in Cape Town and evaluated every piece of feedback carefully before making the decision to discontinue sponsorship with the embassy.”

Baz-Art is a non-political organisation, he says. “However, we value human rights, artistic expression, and freedom of expression. Freedom of expression clearly wasn’t hindered as the artists decided to stay in South Africa and paint a piece that speaks about the shared experience in Israel and South Africa. So we are quite happy with the outcome and so are the artists as they got to paint.”

He says they have continued to engage

learning here. I attended the Palestinian protest in order to represent Baz-Art and defend our artists. I went because I wanted to tell the protesters why we wanted them to stay.

“Many I talked to understood our decision to allow Broken Fingaz to stay in Cape Town to paint. Others didn’t, and I agreed to disagree with them. We live in times of immense political polarisation, and I remember that only a few years ago, it was okay to disagree while sitting at one table. Nowadays people tend to leave uncomfortable debates. I reject cancel culture, and believe that we should respect all humans regardless of whether we agree or disagree with them. We should never stop talking to each other.”

A member of Broken Fingaz, who calls himself Unga, says he was “surprised” that there was a call for a boycott, “as we are used to painting all over the world”. Their goal was to paint at the festival, and giving up funding from the Israeli embassy was a small compromise. “They were just sponsoring

flights, but they had zero say about the art we were doing. For us, it was just a technical thing. We don’t represent the state of Israel. We are Israelis, and we don’t hide it. If anything, we’re happy to show a side of Israel that doesn’t support the occupation [of the West Bank] and is anti-war.

“Sadly, at the moment it doesn’t feel like change will come from the Israeli government, and we don’t think boycotting artists furthers the aim of ending the occupation. It usually leads to the right-wing reinforcing the rhetoric that ‘the world is against us’.

“It was disappointing that the people who were so against our mural in Cape Town didn’t look at our art, or they would have seen in one minute what we stand for. The PSC statement calling for the artists to be boycotted is ignorant, to say the least. They aren’t from our region but they say they understand the situation. We have lived in Israel all of our lives, through wars, and still don’t claim to understand the complexity of this crazy

region. So to present it in this black and white way doesn’t seem very genuine.”

He says the image they painted “explores the pervasive power of political narratives that are reinforced by governments, and the moments in history when the public – through actions like protest – forced cracks in this dominant story. Although it at first appears semi-abstract, the mural is based on archival documentary images from South Africa and Israel.”

On Facebook, one man wrote, “It’s rather simplistic to infer that public artists from any country support their government’s actions and ideologies. They are, by nature, free thinkers, critical of authority/power structures and non-conformists. That’s part of the public-art culture. I certainly wouldn’t think that if IPAF supported a Russian crew, for example, that they would be supportive of Putin and his Ukrainian incursion. Congratulations Baz-Art for being open-minded about this issue, and not blindly dogmatic.”



Israeli artist collective Broken Fingaz in the process of painting their mural on the streets of Cape Town

in constructive dialogue with communities about the decision to allow Broken Fingaz to stay and paint.

“The Israeli artist collective is receiving much support in spite of the fact that they have an Israeli passport. If you meet them and have a look at their art, you will notice that their passport is one of the most irrelevant things about them. We supported them in their endeavour to paint in South Africa, and they managed to paint a wonderful piece in the centre of Cape Town, which we are proud of. The fact that not everybody is happy about the wall is okay. It’s okay to have controversial art pieces now and then. Isn’t that part of art?”

Asked if the boycotters aren’t “shooting themselves in the foot” by boycotting artists that actually question Israel, Molewa says, “The question is probably more about how to engage with artists who are part of the peace process in Israel. As this is an incredibly complex process, everybody is

US authorities identify four ISIS ‘financial facilitators’ in SA

NICOLA MILTZ

Four men living in South Africa have been identified by the United States (US) as allegedly being involved in terrorist activities across the country and on the wider African continent.

The four have been sanctioned (blocked from doing business in the US) by the US government for their alleged links to recruitment, kidnapping, extortion, and robberies committed to assist terrorist organisations financially.

This week, the US treasury department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) identified these men as Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and ISIS-Mozambique (ISIS-M) “financial facilitators”.

They have been red flagged as using South Africa’s financial system to fundraise and facilitate funding for ISIS networks, according to OFAC.

ISIS members and associates in South Africa are “playing an increasingly central role” in facilitating the transfer of funds from the top of the ISIS hierarchy to branches across Africa, said OFAC on Tuesday, 1 March.

Professor Hussein Solomon of the department of political studies and governance at the University of the Free State said this was highly disturbing, but hardly surprising.

“This has been happening for some time. The South African government has turned a blind eye to this, and our security services are incompetent, politicised, and often hide criminal elements, according to numerous reports.”

The South Africa-based, ISIS-linked men have allegedly provided support for transfers or served as leaders of ISIS cells in South Africa, according to OFAC.

US Treasury Under Secretary Brian Nelson said on 1 March, “Treasury is taking this action to disrupt and expose key ISIS supporters who exploit South Africa’s financial system to facilitate funding for ISIS branches and networks across Africa.”

He said the US was working with its African partners, including South Africa, to dismantle ISIS financial-support networks.

OFAC claims ISIS has recently attempted to expand its influence in Africa through large-scale operations “in areas where government control is limited”.

“ISIS branches in Africa rely on local fundraising schemes such as theft, extortion of local populations, and kidnapping for ransom, as well as financial support from the ISIS hierarchy,” said a US Department of Treasury statement.

OFAC has identified four men: Farhad Hoomer, Siraj Miller, Abdella Hussein Abadigga, and Peter Charles Mbagu.

Continued on page 12>>





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BRICS face both ways on Ukraine invasion

OPINION

STEVEN GRUZD



As the unprovoked Russian invasion of Ukraine unfolds, Western countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, and the European Union bloc have imposed sanctions on Moscow, supplied weapons to Kyiv, and are talking tough.

The North Atlantic Treaty Alliance (NATO) has vociferously denounced Russia's actions, and warned Moscow against attacking its 30 members.

The BRICS – the bloc of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa – has had different reactions to the flagrant flouting of international law by one of its own. These countries have all exhibited squeamishness in criticising their ally, Russia.

The New Delhi Declaration of the 13th BRICS summit in September 2021, endorsed by all five BRICS leaders, said, "We ... underscore the inadmissibility of the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state ... We affirm our commitment to the principles of non-interference in the internal affairs of states and reiterate that all conflicts must be resolved by peaceful means and through diplomatic and political efforts in line with the international law."

The BRICS website says nothing about the invasion, unsurprisingly. The bloc is largely silent between summits.

South Africa is flip-flopping and out of step with its equivocating BRICS counterparts. A first department of international relations and cooperation (Dirco) statement on 23 February was headed, "South African government is concerned about the escalating tensions between Russia and Ukraine". It urged all sides to find a diplomatic solution, and said that the United Nations should play a key role. It was widely criticised as a vague and weak effort, unwilling to finger Russia. Russian tanks were already rolling into Ukraine.

The next day, as the invasion intensified, Dirco issued a

second, tougher statement. It said, "South Africa calls on Russia immediately to withdraw its forces from Ukraine in line with the United Nations Charter, which enjoins



Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) leaders: Xi-Jinping, Vladimir Putin, Jair Bolsonaro, Narendra Modi, and Cyril Ramaphosa

all member states to settle their international disputes by peaceful means ... South Africa emphasises respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states." It urged diplomacy again, and gave a nod to Russia's view of events: "... In light of the escalating conflict, we call on all parties to resume diplomatic efforts to find a solution to the concerns raised by Russia."

But then South Africa appeared to be firmly in the Russian camp. The defence minister and military top brass attended a Russian military function at the embassy after the invasion, and drank champagne. President Cyril Ramaphosa asserted that the second Dirco statement contradicted Pretoria's cozy relations with Moscow. Confusion reigns.

Brazil, under its right-of-centre President Jair Bolsonaro, isn't interested in BRICS. Brazil's ministry of foreign affairs published a tepid, fence-sitting statement.

Brazil's cabinet chief, Ciro Nogueira, said Brazil wouldn't adopt "the position of NATO, neither that of Russia, nor that of China, our position is that of Brazil, that is why it's not a position of neutrality, it's a position of balance", Bolsonaro publicly chided his vice-president for siding with Ukraine. Was this in deference to Russia or connected to Brazil's bid to join the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development?

What China says matters. Pictures of Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin smiling together at the recent Beijing Winter Olympic Games beamed around the world. A recently concluded China-Russia summit cemented ties.

"Putin held back the invasion until after the end of the Olympics, not to embarrass China," China expert Dr Cobus van Staden told the *SA Jewish Report*, "but Chinese diplomats were apparently not informed of the invasion either. So they were dismissing the possibility until right before it took place, which was embarrassing and indicates that there's more distance there than one might assume."

China, too, is hedging its bets. Foreign Minister Wang Yi said, "China respects each country's sovereignty and territorial integrity ... At the same time, we also see the Ukraine problem has a complex and particular historical state of affairs, and we understand Russia's reasonable concern on security issues." Wang stressed the need for diplomacy. China is also looking for clues to how the world might react to a possible invasion of Taiwan.

China abstained – with India and the United Arab Emirates – on a UN Security Council resolution deploring the invasion. Russia (surprise, surprise) vetoed it.

Van Staden said, "The choice by China not to veto also signals a lack of confidence in the Russian side. On the

one hand, the invasion is clearly a contravention of the Chinese principle of non-interference in states' domestic affairs. On the other, they have their own concerns about the successive waves of NATO enlargement, so they're tying themselves into pretzels trying to occupy both positions."

He said domestic issues are at play too. Hordes of ultra-nationalist young Chinese bloggers see the West and NATO as blocking China's rise, and ardently support Putin. Yet Chinese censors "haven't removed all criticism of the invasion from social media [a letter of protest from prominent academics was left up for a while, and less prominent protests are still online.] The latter fact may signal official ambivalence about the invasion."

Following silence for days, after a conversation with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed anguish at the violence, and offered for India to "contribute in any way towards peace efforts". India hasn't criticised Putin in public, to the West's chagrin.

On the UN vote, a top Indian diplomat told *The Indian Express*, "The resolution was dead on arrival ... so votes and statements were made to display our positions, principles, and interests. India took a call to abstain in view of its interests, while the statement underlined its principles."

India explained its decision to abstain. In spite of saying it was "deeply disturbed", it made no mention of Russia. It called for the cessation of violence and hostilities, and was worried about a reported 16 000 Indians (mostly students) in Ukraine. India also pressed for more diplomatic solutions.

The aggression of the invasion has forced the hand of some BRICS countries and sown confusion in others. History will judge the wisdom of the decisions made in Brasilia, Beijing, New Delhi, and Pretoria.

• *Steven Gruzd heads the Russia-Africa Project at the South African Institute of International Affairs in Johannesburg. He writes in his personal capacity.*



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There’s a brutal war going on in this world in which civilians – including children – are being murdered. At the last count, close to 300 Ukrainians have died, and more than 50 000 have been injured.

There are 1.5 million displaced people in Ukraine, and more than 660 000 have fled the country since the war began.

The Russian army has infiltrated towns and cities, killing people, and more are on their way. Bombs rain down, devastating cities.

Am I stating the obvious because you know all this? I am, but with good reason.

It seems that there are some in South Africa who simply refuse to see the brutality on the side of the Russians and their leader, Vladimir Putin. It seems some – including our ruling party and government – seem to think that it would be better to focus on Israel, which is nowhere near the war.

And so, instead of standing up to the violence and the horror of what is befalling the Ukrainian people and anyone who happens to be in Ukraine – including South Africans – they persist in keeping their ire focused on Israel.

Israel on the other hand is focused on sending supplies, doctors, rescue experts, and anyone who can help to assist those in Ukraine.

In fact, Israel has gone all out not just to rescue Israelis or Jews there, but to repatriate Arabs back to their homes in the Middle East.

Alas, those who choose not to see this maintain their blinkers, and are saying little about the ongoing war. Initially, the minister of international affairs and cooperation put her foot down against Russia’s brutality, but soon backtracked because it wasn’t South African policy to do this.

I think I get it. So, we’re a country in which human rights are paramount, considering our history of apartheid. We don’t believe violence is the answer, and we do believe in our Bill of Rights, which ensures the upholding of genuine human rights.

However, to most of us around the world, it’s obvious that the human rights of the Ukrainians aren’t being upheld by the Russian government or army. The brutality and violence makes me sick to my stomach, but somehow our leadership refuses to see how bad it is.

Or worse, they are seeing what’s happening, but ignoring it because they have close ties to Russia and Russia was so good to them during the apartheid years. Many of our Umkhonto we Sizwe comrades were trained in Russia.

And South Africa and the African National Congress (ANC) doesn’t forget a friend, as my wise colleague, Steven Gruzd, said, not even long after the honeymoon is over.

It seems, they can forgive an oppressor, dictator, or any evil if they have a solid history with those responsible and that country or organisation sided with them during apartheid.

So, I guess it stands to reason that while the world is aghast at what’s happening in Ukraine at the hands of Russia, a number of South African leaders are deflecting the anger to little old Israel. I mean, why not? Israel isn’t going to fight them about it. In fact, Israel is too busy trying to help those hurt in Ukraine to worry about what’s being said about it in South Africa.

So, on Thursday, 3 March, a top-flight ANC march is scheduled to the Israeli embassy in Pretoria, where ANC National Chairperson Gwede Mantashe will be speaking. So too will Congress of South African Trade Unions President Zingiswa Losi, amongst other bigwigs. This has clearly been made into a priority march, considering who is speaking. Interestingly, even the poster that went out on social media doesn’t stipulate why they are marching to the embassy or what Israel is meant to have done this time.

Is it just smoke and mirrors? I think so, but then, I’m no politician. Scour the Israeli press as I do, it’s full of the war in Eastern Europe. As is the world media, but here, our ruling party seems to think Israel is the villain no matter what. And if there’s something they don’t want to deal with, it’s best to focus anger and hatred on Israel, and all will be forgiven.

Interestingly, much like Russia was so good to the ANC during the struggle for freedom in South Africa, so too were Palestinian leaders. Hence, this undying kinship between the ANC and Palestinian leaders and the Palestinian cause, no matter who’s wrong or right.

Could it be that much like the Russians, the Palestinians are forgiven for anything they do, no matter how bad it is? And their enemies will never be the good guys because South Africa always sides with its friends.

I do believe in loyalty and love. I do believe in not stabbing a friend in the back. I do believe that you do what you can to help those you care about. I think that is a wonderful trait ... up to a point.

If that dear, lifelong friend is a murderer and a despot, do you allow him or her to have free rein without any questions or censure?

I think not. I believe a friend deserves honesty, and it isn’t always helpful to support them when they need to be brought back to reality and stopped from doing wrong.

A true friend will stop you. A true friend will get help to stop you from continuing to commit crimes when they know it’s unacceptable.

Far be it for me to give lessons in friendship because I’m so far from perfect, but I do hope my friends will stop me before I do something wrong and, if I do, they will assist me in not perpetuating the evil I may have wrought.

Just a thought!

Shabbat Shalom!
Peta Krost Maunder
Editor



Don’t shoot the messenger

OPINION

PAULA SLIER



The pictures coming out of Ukraine are devastating, heartbreaking, and beyond justification. No-one supports war. At least I don’t. I’ve seen it up-close and in the eyes of a dying child that will haunt me forever.

For nearly two decades, I’ve reported on conflict. I should be in the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, reporting now – but I’m not. Instead, I’m writing this from Moscow, where the population is divided over Russian President Vladimir Putin’s decision to launch a military operation against his neighbour.

The reason I’m not there, though, is through no fault of my own. In 2018, I flew into Kyiv to participate in a conference about media freedom hosted by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). The authorities slapped a five-year ban on me before deporting me. The irony isn’t lost on me.

The charge was that I had reported on the Russia/Ukraine war four years earlier for a Russian television network – RT (Russia Today) – and hence I was a “propagandist” or “Putin information soldier”.

That charge was racked up again in the past few days after the European Union decided to ban Kremlin-backed media outlets as part of a wider package of sanctions against Moscow. Other countries have since followed suit, including digital platforms like Apple, TikTok, Netflix, and Facebook’s parent company, Meta.

Of them all, I commend Twitter’s response. It flagged my account as being part of “Russian state-affiliated media”. It’s true. Neither I nor RT have ever hidden the fact that the channel represents the Russian government’s point of view.

But Western powers have chosen to see that point of view as misleading and misinformative. Putin would beg to differ. And seeing that a sizeable part of the Russian population still supports him, I believe there’s value in hearing his justification for this war.

I’m not writing this to defend Putin’s actions in the Ukraine. Truthfully, I’m conflicted. Working for RT doesn’t mean I unequivocally support Putin and think Russia’s in the right in this conflict.

But are my views relevant? I would argue that they aren’t. I’ve always understood my duty as a journalist to report what I see and hear with integrity and to the best of my ability. My responsibility is to the people who entrusted me with their story, and to my readers and listeners. It’s for them that I uphold the values of my profession.

I’m writing this because I support the idea of media plurality. I believe it’s useful for Western audiences to understand what Russians are thinking, especially in their own language. For years, those of us who don’t speak Russian had to rely on a select few people chosen by the mainstream press to represent and/or dissect what was going on in Russia. This was Putin’s motivation for setting up RT 17 years ago. Until its banning this week, it broadcast in English, Arabic, Spanish, Russian, German (which was already banned in February this year), and French. He saw it as an opportunity for Western audiences to understand the Russian government – and I think that’s valuable. Especially at a time like this. If nothing else, to quote from the famous Chinese general and military strategist, Sun Tzu: know your enemy.

While it’s true that the Russian population is divided over this war, it would be unfair to merely cast those Russians who support it as misinformed and unintelligent. It’s insulting to them – and quite frankly to journalists like myself who work in state media. Many of us have worked in this profession for years and are seasoned, qualified correspondents by anyone’s standards.

There seems to be a trend of presenting media that are aligned with official adversaries as inherently propagandistic and deceitful, while the output of Western media is presumed to be objective, free from manipulation, and truthful. The charge of “propaganda” is the easiest way to delegitimise a channel. If stories that appear on RT were to appear on the BBC, would they still be regarded as propaganda? Who decides what’s propaganda anyway?

Banning pro-Kremlin channels doesn’t stop them broadcasting inside Russia. Every channel has a point of view; all media are subjective. At least RT is upfront and honest about it.

Unsurprisingly, I received my fair share of hate mail this week. I hope it ends there and doesn’t escalate into the kind of death threats I received during the last Russia-Ukraine war.

Then, Ukrainian blogger Denis Kazansky instigated an online campaign that spiralled from him blaming Ukrainian intelligence for letting me into his country, to people calling for me to be killed. Kazansky branded me the “scum of the earth”, and subsequent tweets by his followers called to “F*** her”; “take a knife and pull out all her Russian shit”; and “not just to catch her but kill her”.

Kazansky made no secret of the fact that he supported the Kiev government and hence took issue with my reports from eastern Ukraine where people support Russia. Though I respect his right to disagree with those I interviewed, it doesn’t mean I shouldn’t have interviewed them or given their views airtime, especially in light of the fact that they repeatedly told me they believed the Ukrainian media was lying.

By banning RT, Western governments are giving in to the Kazanskys of the world. I was frightened enough by his threats to leave Ukraine. I wrote at the time:

“What does Mr Kazansky achieve by getting me out of Kiev? He complains my stories show only one point of view but then denies me access to the other. It’s one thing for the crazies out there to make good on Mr Kazansky’s words; it’s quite another for him to taint our profession and use the very privileged position we have as journalists

to shed light on the many different narratives out there.”

MY RESPONSIBILITY IS TO THE PEOPLE WHO ENTRUSTED ME WITH THEIR STORY, AND TO MY READERS AND LISTENERS. IT’S FOR THEM THAT I UPHOLD THE VALUES OF MY PROFESSION.

Russian journalists aren’t given access to Ukraine and aren’t permitted to cross Ukrainian-controlled checkpoints, which means that even if my banning order was miraculously lifted, I would be putting my life in danger by going to Kyiv as a journalist for RT. To be fair, Western and Ukrainian journalists are also targeted if they try to enter the pro-Russian parts of Ukraine. Unfortunately, this means very few stories from this part of the Ukrainian population make it into the mainstream media – all the journalists are in and around Kyiv.

Over the years, the targeting of journalists has got so bad, the OSCE has held several workshops aimed at finding ways to protect our safety. After one such meeting, I approached a group of Ukrainian journalists and extended my hand in an offer to have a one-on-one with them, but they literally turned their backs on me. They, too, believe I’m a Russian stooge. If journalists cannot support each other to protect all our safety, how then can we expect others to? A dangerous precedent is being created that paves the way for others to intimidate, harass, and possibly even harm us while we do our jobs. The banning of pro-Kremlin networks merely fuels the problem.

Not only does it violate freedom of speech, it’s the start of a slippery slope that opens the door for future suppression. Wars will increasingly be fought online through the media. It’s already becoming a case of whose story wins rather than whose army wins. Banning the stories you don’t like seems an inadequate way to deal with the problem – or with one’s enemy.

• Paula Slier is the Middle East bureau chief of RT, the founder and chief executive of Newshound Media International, and the inaugural winner of the Europcar Women in Leadership Award of the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards.

Putin’s Russia will choke on Ukraine

OPINION

LUC ALBINSKI



The Odessa opera house was full of the great and the good on 24 August last year, when the Black Sea port, Ukraine’s third largest city, celebrated Ukrainian Independence Day.

Transported by the music and splendour of the neo-baroque building, the crème of Odessa society along with a few curious tourists – including two South Africans – thoroughly enjoyed the show including excerpts of Russian operas by Godunov, Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, and Glinka.

Russian culture runs deep in this city founded by Empress Catherine the Great on the remains of a centuries-old Ottoman fort after decades of Russian military campaigns against the Turks. The operas may have been in Russian, but the speeches were in Ukrainian as was the rousing rendition of the national anthem, *Ukraine is not yet lost*, which ended the evening’s proceedings.

The passion of the singers, most of whom were native Russian speakers, was unmistakable in a country that had just recently shaken off decades of authoritarianism and was pivoting unsteadily towards the norms of a European democracy. It’s context that would be easy for most South Africans to understand, bound together as we are by a commitment to a fragile and unsteady democratic project in a multicultural and multilingual society. Of course, such layered loyalties are as anathema to nationalistic ideologues in Moscow as they are to the red-bereted, ethno-nationalist loud-mouths here.

On Maidan Square in central Kiev, the site where blood was spilt by demonstrators who battled for weeks with snipers to save Ukraine’s soul in 2014, we marvelled at the parallels with South Africa, reflecting on our democratic near-death experience at the hands of a corrupt president. Like the children of Soweto 1976, thousands of Ukrainians on the “Maidan” braved the bullets, many dying on makeshift barricades, to prevent the capture of their country by Putin’s henchman. Six months ago, on the Maidan, we felt the change was irreversible. The forces of good had triumphed. All we were doing was commemorating the sacrifice of the democrats. But how tragically wrong we were!

I watched Vladimir Putin make his rambling, incoherent, lie-ridden speech from the safety of my living room, now adorned with light-blue painted flowers, a tourist trophy from my summer holiday in Ukraine. His incontinent lies, his century-old grievances laced with fury, his undisguised hatred of the Ukrainian democrats reminded me of another leader from another awful era. Like Hitler, Putin holds international law, the sovereignty of nations, but more fundamentally the whole concept of a civilized society of nations, in total contempt. Like Hitler, he now seems to be in an unrestrained death spiral, upping the ante regardless of the cost, a law unto himself, determined to take his whole nation of 144 million souls with him. The result of Hitler’s death spiral was World War II, the destruction of Germany, the murder of millions in the “bloodlands” of Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, and the Baltic States.

Timothy Snyder estimates that between Stalin’s man-made famines of the thirties, his purges, and Soviet massacres before and during the war, and Hitler’s murder of the Jews, the German “hunger plan”, and Nazi reprisals, 14 million people were killed in this region. Among the victims were my Polish-Jewish grandmother and my Polish-Catholic grandfather. A third grandparent suffered permanent exile in the Soviet Union. So, I wondered what the consequences of Putin’s spiral into destruction will be on Russia, the world, and on my children over the next decade.

But after witnessing the Ukrainian spirit in Odessa, Kiev, and Lviv, and the heroic last stand being taken by the country’s president and Kiev’s mayor, I believe the pacification of Ukraine, if successful, will be a drawn-out, bloody affair, costing the lives of thousands. Were these cities to be seized, democrats of every hue will be targeted for physical elimination, justified ludicrously by the

“denazification” of a government headed by a president with Jewish origins. But 30 years of Ukrainian independence won’t be easily forgotten.

Putin’s Russia will choke on Ukraine, a large, educated country of 44 million people, but perhaps not before he has attempted to further reconstruct the Soviet empire by invading little Moldova and Georgia, two terribly

vulnerable non-North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) countries which don’t benefit from NATO’s Article 5 “an attack against one is an attack against all” security blanket, that must be seeing their fates in the grimmest possible light.

And the death spiral may not end with them, the Baltics could be next, militarily indefensible. Putin may gamble on a short war with NATO which both sides will avoid escalating for fear of a nuclear Armageddon, a fear more real now that Russia has put its nuclear forces on a high state of alert.

Given the sheer irrationality of the Ukrainian invasion, which represents such a break from the carefully calibrated Russian operations of the past, it feels like Putin has passed the point of no return. And in one of the many ironies of history, it’s now Germany, the architect of Europe’s destruction in the forties, which bears a special responsibility in preventing another cataclysm. German purchases of Russian gas, above all other nations, are bankrolling Putin’s war machine. Tens of billions of dollars of cash will keep coming to Putin, sanctions or no sanctions, until Germany weans itself off Russia’s Gazprom. This is now a historically responsibility that Germany bears towards Europe and the world. It must act now. And it seems like Olaf Scholz, the new Chancellor of Germany, has grasped the mettle, at least for now.

• *Luc Albinski is the executive chairman of Vantage Capital, which recently has established an education investment vehicle targeting Central and Eastern Europe including Ukraine. Albinski is an active member of the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre.*



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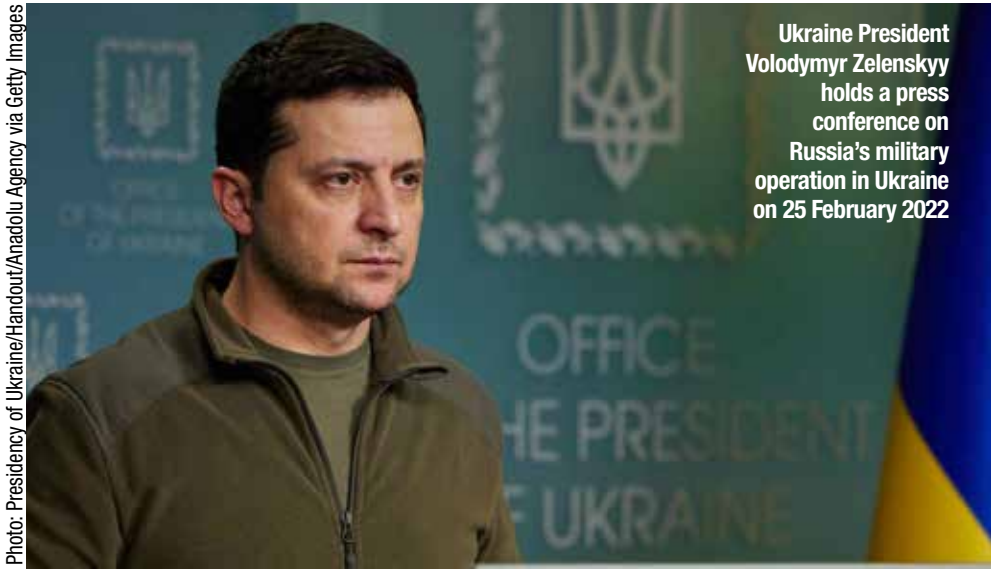
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Volodymyr Zelenskyy – from unlikely president to possible martyr



GABE FRIEDMAN – JTA

Four years ago, Volodymyr Zelenskyy was an actor on the humorous Ukrainian TV show *Servant of the People*, starring as an unlikely president of the Eastern European country.

Now, he is at the centre of the continent's most significant conflict since World War II, framing himself as a possible martyr on the world stage.

"This might be the last time you see me alive," he reportedly told European Union leaders on a call about steps the bloc was considering to try to stop Russia's advances throughout Ukraine.

On 25 February, he was equally blunt about his situation as Russian troops attacked the capital Kyiv: "the enemy has identified me as the number-one target", he said in a video message, and his family is the number-two target.

But a video of Zelenskyy and his team defiantly announcing they are staying in Kyiv circulated widely that day, as supporters around the world characterised him as a beacon of honour in an age of leaders only interested in preserving their own status.

"We are here. We are in Kyiv. We are defending Ukraine," Zelenskyy said. He later batted down an evacuation offer from the United States.

Over the course of a few years, Zelenskyy – who is the first-ever Jewish president of Ukraine, a country with a long and complicated Jewish history – has quickly become one of the most consequential and prominent Jewish world leaders in recent decades. And given his non-political roots, one of the unlikeliest.

Furthermore, questions about his Jewishness have exploded into the international consciousness: Has his Jewish background put him – or his fellow Ukrainian Jews – in more danger? Has it contributed to the conflict in any way? And why is Russian Vladimir Putin suggesting that he's a Nazi?

Zelenskyy was born in a Russian-speaking area of eastern Ukraine to Jewish parents, a mother who was an engineer and a father who is a computer scientist. His father's father, Semyon, served in the Soviet Red Army during World War II; Semyon's father and brothers were all murdered in the Holocaust.

"He survived World War II, contributing to the victory over Nazism and hateful ideology. Two years after the war, his son was born. And his grandson was born 31 years afterwards. Forty years later, his grandson became president. And today he stands before you," Zelenskyy said in a speech during a January 2020 presidential trip to Israel, where he appeared with then-Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

After high school, Zelenskyy earned a scholarship to study in Israel on the strength of his English scores but turned it down because his father didn't want him to go, according to an interview he gave in 2018. Instead, he studied law, but ultimately became a successful comedian, joining a popular comedy group that performed across the former Soviet Union. Along the way, he married a high-school classmate, with whom he has two children, a 17-year-old daughter and a nine-year-old son.

By the time Zelenskyy joined the *Servant of the People* series in 2015, he was one of Ukraine's most famous pop-culture figures.

Zelenskyy hasn't elaborated on the details of his Jewish upbringing or his religiosity, but he also hasn't

shied away from expressing an occasional message of Jewish pride and a strong sense of solidarity with Israel. That identity has been seized upon by enemies and celebrated by Jewish supporters.

Ukraine is "one of the few countries that elected a Jewish president", Oksana Markarova, the Ukraine ambassador to the US, told the National Coalition Supporting Eurasian Jewry in a webinar. "I mean, he's Ukrainian in all of his heart, but he's also Jewish."

In 2019, several Ukrainian Jews told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency that they were proud that their country – after its history of anti-Jewish pogroms and Soviet-era persecution – had elected a Jewish president.

But many were also worried that if he failed to follow through on the many ambitious promises that boosted him to a sweeping electoral victory – reforming a corrupt political system, standing up to Russia, restoring general confidence in government – angry citizens could blame his Jewishness.

"When Zelenskyy fails, they will think of him as the Jew and take revenge against the Jews," Yevgeniy Romanovich, a Kyiv resident, said at the time.

This fear from local Jews has persisted into the early days of the Russian invasion. The senior researcher at the Museum of the Holocaust in Odessa, a city that was over a third Jewish in the 19th century, told *The New York Times* he was worried that antisemitism would be "unleashed by the chaos of war".

In a bizarre complication to the narrative, Putin has repeatedly said that his military operation is an attempt to "de-Nazify" Ukraine.

"How can I be a Nazi?" Zelenskyy asked on 24 February, without specifically mentioning his Jewishness. "Explain it to my grandfather, who went through the entire war in the infantry of the Soviet army and died a colonel in an independent Ukraine."

In a letter to the United Nations last weekend, the US ambassador to the UN wrote that intelligence suggests Russia could target "religious and ethnic minorities" along with anti-Putin activists and other groups in the aftermath of an invasion. That prompted some to speculate whether that could include Ukrainian Jews.

Other historical figures whose Jewishness featured large in their national leadership include Benjamin Disraeli, the 19th-century British prime minister who faced unrelenting antisemitism. So did Leon Blum, who faced antisemitic animus in his pre-World War II stints as French prime minister, and whose brief term post-war was seen as a step forward for France's coming to terms with its Nazi collaborationism.

Lila Corwin Berman, a professor of Jewish history at Temple University in Philadelphia, said questions of loyalty can assail Jewish leaders in times of crisis. She recalled Henry Kissinger, President Richard Nixon's secretary of state, who faced pressure from some Republicans who wondered if he could be impartial during the 1973 Yom Kippur War, and from some American Jews who feared Kissinger was distancing himself from Israel because of those pressures.

"He came under pressure for essentially not showing the right kind of reverence or respect for Israel," Berman said.

It was typical of the same tensions, she said, that a decade or so earlier had assailed John F Kennedy, the first Roman Catholic president. The question of loyalty, she said, "gets asked of leaders who are marked as belonging to a group that's somehow not quite the

centre of whatever the country is".

That topic is acutely relevant in Ukraine, a post-Soviet republic with a large population of hypernationalists. Zelenskyy has toed a line between projecting a strong patriotic front against Russia, and working to stand up delicately to the nationalists who seek to honour former Nazi collaborationists.

It may have proven too difficult to pull off. After winning the 2019 election with more than 70% of the vote, his approval rating had plummeted to close to 30%.

The current war isn't Zelenskyy's first experience as the centre of international attention. Not long after being elected, he found himself ensnared in former President Donald Trump's first impeachment scandal thanks to an infamous White House phone call.

Jonathan Sarna, a professor at Brandeis University and one of the foremost historians on Jewish history, said that whatever the outcome, Zelenskyy could end up in a pretty singular place in the history books.

• Ron Kampeas contributed to the reporting.

What Putin's talking about when he talks about 'denazification'

ANDREW SILOW-CARROLL – JTA

In launching his war on Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin declared his goal was the "denazification" of the country – referring specifically to his allegations that Ukraine is responsible for or planning a "genocide" of Russian-speakers in Ukraine's eastern provinces.

Much of the world scoffed at Putin's justifications for what some are calling the biggest test for the West in the 77 years since Nazi Germany surrendered. Yale philosopher Jason Stanley, in a tweet that went viral, wrote, "The president of Ukraine [Volodymyr Zelenskyy] is Jewish, and has many family members who died in the Holocaust. Putin's claim that he is invading to 'de-Nazify Ukraine' should shock the world."

Stanley is the author of *How Propaganda Works* and *How Fascism Works*, two books that couldn't be more relevant to the present moment, with Russian forces engaged in a multipronged attack on a democratic neighbour after months – really years – of agitation by Putin.

I spoke to Stanley about the ways Putin has flipped the narrative about fascism and Nazism; how his brand of Christian nationalism plays on what Stanley considers antisemitic tropes; and how Stanley's work was inspired by the experiences of his parents, both Holocaust survivors.

ASC: Putin's claim that the war is intended to "denazify" Ukraine seemed to most observers outside of Russia as absurd on its face, but he must have thought it would be an effective message, certainly at home. What makes propaganda effective?

Jason Stanley: It's an example of "undermining propaganda". That's when you use an ideal to undermine itself. If there's any far-right, ultra-nationalist, imperialist regime that's similar to national socialism in that part of the world, it's Putin's regime. And if there's any democratic regime surrounding Russia, it's Ukraine, right? So what de-Nazification means is that he's going to go into Ukraine, kill or imprison the democratic leaders of Ukraine and all who support them, and replace them with a puppet he can control.

The reason he does this is because he can. He can lean

on the history of Russia and the history of World War II, in which the Germans are always the enemies, and he's the one representing the West and democracy against the fascists and the Nazis.

When does propaganda like that work? Is it a slow, steady process of nationalist brainwashing? Or are there times of crisis where people rally around what are demonstrably false messages?

I don't think this propaganda did work. Enough people in Russia and certainly the West are fully aware of the facts, that the far-right in Ukraine gains 2% or less of the vote. Or that Zelenskyy is Jewish, that much of his family was wiped out in the Holocaust, and that Ukraine is the only country other than Israel ever to simultaneously have both a prime minister and president who were Jewish (Zelenskyy and former prime minister Vlodymyr Groysman), other than Israel. So I don't think that propaganda will work. Russia is going to be seen just as a violent aggressor.

Do fascists tend to believe their own propaganda?

It depends. A lot of people use fascist tactics for power, and it just doesn't matter. I mean, Hitler was a committed genocidal antisemite. But, he also clearly states in *Mein Kampf* that you should use the Allies' propaganda against them. You should reverse it. Even in the most extreme cases, it's often knowingly cynical, because fascists don't care about the truth, they just care about power.

You've written how propaganda is effective when it makes the dominant group feel like a victim. That's certainly at play with Putin.

That's right. What's not acceptable – and here I get emotional because I'm the child of Holocaust survivors – is the trivialisation of the Holocaust by claiming that there's a genocide in eastern Ukraine. I mean, Putin's regime is a Christian nationalist regime, and Christian nationalism is a threat to Jews everywhere. I don't think he's trying to convince anyone. I think he's trying to mock the language of the Holocaust. It's Eastern European antisemitism. Eastern European antisemitism takes the form of saying that we Jews stole the victimhood narrative.

He's mocking Jews. He saying, "The real victims are Christian Russians in eastern Ukraine. Those are the victims of genocide, not the child of a Holocaust survivor, descended of Holocaust survivors, the Jewish leader of Ukraine." And that's where I see the appeal: Christian nationalism is antisemitic to its core.

When does propaganda fail? Is it a matter of overreach – when a message or an action becomes so preposterous that even your followers can't get on board?

Sometimes the point of propaganda is to demonstrate power by the preposterousness of it. Putin is a master at that. Putin is always lying, like Trump, who imitated this. If you lie openly and obviously, in this mocking, sneering, condescending way – like, "How would anyone think we're going to invade Ukraine? It's a Western conspiracy theory!" – what you do is show you can get away with it and that, to supporters, comes off as strength.

You write that cultivating loyalty is a key part of what creates fascism.

Cultivating fascism requires ethnic loyalty ties. Fascism at its weakest is just nationalism, but in this German form of national socialism or white nationalism in America or Russian nationalism, loyalty is formed by a bond of identity. I see Putin appealing to Eastern Orthodox Christian nationalism. He's trying to re-establish something like the Soviet Union or the pride of Russia. That's why there's an unrecognised element of antisemitism, an appeal to Russian Christian nationalism.

Although at the same time, some insist Putin is a philosemite, with good ties to parts of the Jewish establishment in Russia and fairly good – or at least tolerable – relations with Israel.

Because of nationalism. What you have now is different ultra-nationalist groups in different countries, and they're all saying, "this country is mine". That's going to link Putin with nationalists in Poland and in Israel. But they're going to have competing interests, as was the case with Poland and Israel, because their national histories clash. So when the Polish government starts denying Polish complicity in the Holocaust, that's going to sit poorly with people in Israel who otherwise share their nationalist sentiments.

Continued on page 13>>

CNAAN LIPSHIZ – JTA

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She served in the Russian army, and died with Russia at war

PETA KROST MAUNDER
AND JORDAN MOSHE

In the midst of the Ukraine-Russian war in Eastern Europe this week, an elderly Ukrainian-born woman who served as a doctor in the Red Army died on Monday, 28 February, at Sandringham Gardens in Johannesburg. “She was unforgettable,” said South African Board of Deputies National Director, Wendy Kahn. “I remember seeing her whenever there was an event at the Russian embassy. She would arrive with her hair coiffed, and she always wore her uniform with her many medals. “Dr Boudnitski was at the liberation of Auschwitz as a doctor with the Red Army,” she said. This Jewish doctor had been brought in to care for the survivors of the camps. Kahn first heard this when Boudnitski spoke at the 70th commemoration of the liberation of Auschwitz in 2015. There, she described the horrific scenes that greeted her and her comrades when they entered the newly-liberated death camps and the subsequent struggle to save the lives of the sick and malnourished survivors.



Dr Tsipra Boudnitski

Everyone at the Jewish aged home knew of Boudnitski’s experiences as a doctor in the Russian military during World War II and its aftermath because she would speak about it and she had 15 medals from the Russian government for her brave and selfless work. When she passed away at 98, she left behind her 15 medals that adorned a red shirt she kept on display in her room at Sandringham Gardens. Other than her medals, she was repeatedly recognised as a top-rate doctor, professor, radiology consultant, and teacher. Boudnitski was born in 1923 in Ukraine, where being Jewish wasn’t something you publicised. She studied medicine, during which she volunteered to be one of 12 students that Moscow University would send to work in hospitals as members of the Red Army. In an interview with the *SA Jewish Report* in 2018, she said, “When they told us they needed students to work, I put my hand up. When I came to my parents and told them, they argued with me. They told me, ‘You have a brain! Why did you choose to do this?’ But I couldn’t say I wouldn’t do it. I had to.” Later, in 1941, she worked in a hospital in Alma Ata, Kazakhstan,

where she helped treat wounded soldiers, many of whom couldn’t be rehabilitated. “There were about 75 of them,” she told the *SA Jewish Report*. “I worked with doctors and other students to look after them. It was hard, and I worked even at night.” Although she gave her all to her five-year Red Army service, she didn’t enjoy it. “The time in the army wasn’t good,” she said. “So many people were hurt, sick, and dying. There was sometimes nothing we could do for them. So many suffered. So many.” She remained in Kazakhstan, working and studying, until shortly before the end of the war, when she contracted malaria. She was told to return to Moscow. “I went back to my parents, and I finished my studies in four months.” She qualified as a physician the year the war ended, and shortly thereafter as a radiologist. As a qualified doctor, she went on to help Russians who had been impacted by the Nazi invasion of Russia, and the famine which gripped the country following the war. She focused on treating survivors of war. She witnessed the horrific scenes of the newly-liberated death camps as the Russian forces rooted out remaining Nazi forces.

After that, she met and married Joseph Boudnitski, an eminent scientist and academic who was involved in the development of classified technology and engineering projects, including the Kosmos rocket. They had two children. Boudnitski practised as a medical doctor, radiologist, and professor of medicine until she was pensioned at the age of 60. Her husband continued his work until the age of 71.

Boudnitski told the *SA Jewish Report* that her son, Vladimir, then suggested that her parents move to South Africa, a country he has grown to love after being sent there while working for Microsoft. “He said that Johannesburg was very nice,” Boudnitski said, “and that we should come here because it’s beautiful and better than the difficult life in Russia.” She and her husband submitted applications for the necessary visas, and though hers was approved within a month, it took five years for her husband to receive approval. In the late 1990s, the Bodnitskis arrived in South Africa to live, neither speaking much English. Not being proficient in English or Afrikaans, she was unable to get her medical licence to practise in South Africa. “Russia, I don’t miss,” she said back in 2018. “It’s very hard there. The *tzorres* there is too much, and there was always hunger, poverty, and sickness. That’s what Russia was to me.” She moved into Sandringham Gardens in 1993 after her husband passed away. There she was able to help out using her medical training, checking the blood pressure of staff and fellow residents regularly and voluntarily.

Smoky Simon, a man who grabbed life by the wings

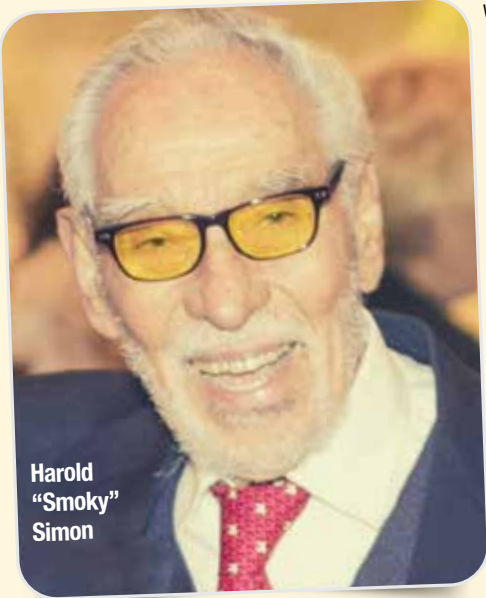


DAVE BLOOM

Harold “Smoky” Simon passed away this week in Herzliya just short of his 102nd birthday. He left a significant legacy as one of the founders and architects of the Israeli Air Force (IAF), as chairperson of World Machal for many years, a successful Israeli businessman, and a beloved husband, father, grandfather, and great-grandfather. Smoky and his wife, Myra, volunteered in 1948 to help support the fledgling state of Israel. With Smoky’s experience as a navigator in World War II, he became the first chief of operations for the IAF. Myra had served as a meteorologist in the South African Air Force, and she contributed her skills to the IAF in its early days. They arrived and enlisted just days before the outbreak of the War of Independence.

Smoky often recalled one of the first flights he made when the war broke out in May that year when he was tasked with flying a reconnaissance/ bombing mission near the Syrian border. He held a 20 pound (9kg) bomb on his lap, and literally chucked it out of the two-man cockpit of the rickety Czechoslovakian-made Avia S-199 Messerschmidt.

Another story he loved to relate was how many of the first pilots in the air force were South African, and because there was no voice encryption in those early days, to hide communication between pilots and control towers from the enemy, they spoke in Afrikaans. Smoky was born in Johannesburg and at the age of six months, his family moved to Bultfontein in what was then the Orange Free State. His high school days were spent in Winberg because his parents wanted him to be in a larger Jewish community. After matriculating, he moved to Johannesburg, where he studied for a Bachelor of Commerce and was articled to an accounting firm. After he wrote his final exams and qualified as an accountant, World War II was raging, so he volunteered for the South African Air Force, and was trained locally and in Kenya. Later, he was seconded to the British Air Force in North Africa. He flew several missions as a navigator/bombardier, and ended his first tour of duty in Sicily after the Germans retreated. He returned on leave to South Africa, where met his future wife, Myra. He later served



Harold “Smoky” Simon

in other bomber squadrons based in Scotland and Ireland before moving back to an air force base in Durban, which is where the war ended for him in August 1945. He was demobilised later that year. After the war, Smoky set up a small accounting firm in Johannesburg, and one of his first customers was his very good friend, Leon Zimmerman, who had set up an aviation company called Commercial Airlines (Comair). Smoky recalled that there was tremendous camaraderie amongst Jewish ex-servicemen in Johannesburg and when war clouds loomed over Palestine, he and Myra – they had recently married – plus more than 800 South Africans volunteered to help the about-to-be established Jewish state of Israel. They were known as *machalnikim* – overseas volunteers in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) – and they brought tremendous military experience to the many units they joined. “South Africa contributed the highest number of *machal* volunteers per capita of the many Jewish communities who assisted in the War of Independence,” he would proudly say. These were men and women who had fought and survived five years fighting the Germans, yet they were willing to risk their lives again to support Israel. “We felt obligated to help our brethren,” Smoky was quoted as saying. His role in defending the nascent state of Israel in the skies was featured in Nancy Spielberg’s 2014 film titled *Above and Beyond*. He and Myra returned to South Africa to “build up some financial assets” so that they could make aliya, which they later did in the mid-1960s with their four children, Saul, Dan, Philippa, and Aliza. They built their home in Herzliya Pituach just north of Tel Aviv. Their two sons also became fighter pilots in the IAF, following their father’s example. Smoky built a successful insurance business in Israel, and was always involved in community affairs including as chairperson of World Machal, which preserved the story and legacy of *machal*. He was often the guest of the IDF new-soldier intake programme and other organisations like Telfed, where he would relay stories about *machal* in great detail and with an amazing recall even in his late nineties. A book titled *South Africa’s 800* was published, a large digital archive created online (www.machal.org.il), and an annual service is held at the *machal* memorial in Latrun. Above all Smoky was a gentleman and a mensch, and as his children wrote, “The huge hole created by the loss and sorrow is also filled with admiration, respect, and gratitude towards him, the man who was as gracious, thankful, and selfless in his last few days, just as he was throughout his entire life.” יהי זכרו ברוך

- Dave Bloom is a personal and community historian and is chief executive of World Machal. He is a former chairperson of Telfed, and was a management executive at Reuters for 25 years.

‘We’re in Hashem’s hands,’ say Ukraine Jews

>>>Continued from page 1 her husband, Rabbi Chaim Eli, moved to Kharkov in the late 90s as Chabad *shluchim* to serve the local Jewish community. “They have chosen to stay. It has been pointed out that the 150 Chabad *shluchim* families in the Ukraine all have foreign passports and could easily have jumped ship. But none of them did.” Adam Kuleshov, who is from Ukraine but now lives in Israel, says Kharkov has been hit by missiles, and 70% of the city is in ruins. Friends there aren’t answering phone calls. He fears for their safety. Silman hasn’t heard from his sister for about three days (as of 2 March), but knows she’s safe and says there have been no Jewish casualties in the city. In fact, some Jewish men have joined the army. Meanwhile, “Just two hours ago, my 30-year-old son crossed the border to Moldova,” said Kuleshov on 2 March. “He waited in a queue for 24 hours, where there was lots of panic and uncertainty. Russia is using propaganda to spread fear.” Speaking on a webinar with the South African Jewish community, Rebbetzin Levitansky says, “People here believe that *tehillim* from around the world are keeping them safe.” Her husband, Rabbi Yechiel Levitansky, says, “Thursday morning felt like doomsday. Many don’t have a way out, and we’ll never leave them. They say that if you [the Levitanskys] are here, we feel safe.” Thanks to their networks, the Levitanskys can provide food, supplies, and medicine, but supplies are running low. There has been rationing, and stores are becoming emptier. “Every penny [of donations] counts,” says the rabbi. He says when he heard the sirens, “I thought it was the shofar of the Moshiah.” Though that day didn’t come, “We know that G-d is watching over the doors of the Jewish people. We feel your spiritual support on the ground. We’re in Hashem’s hands.”

Priceless, brilliant Eddie leaves the board

ROBYN SASSEN

A brilliant strategist, champion of chess, scientist, and devastating squash player, Eddie Price was deeply loved. He died on 28 February after a long illness. He was 83.

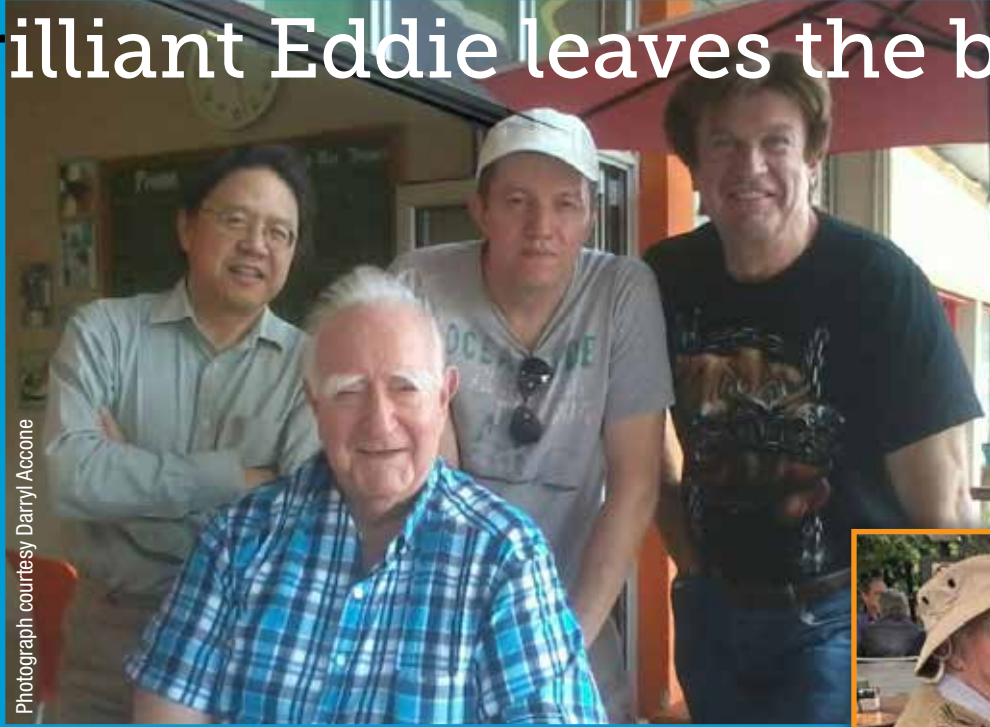
A fierce believer in chess’s transformative power and a humble man who played the game in cafés, Price felt passionately about the eradication of homelessness in society and was deeply, outspokenly political. He was also a *mensch* with impeccable integrity.

Born in Johannesburg on 26 January 1939 to an ordinary couple from Oudtshoorn and Johannesburg respectively in a context where education wasn’t considered necessary after the age of 16 – even for a boy – Price’s life changed for good when he was 11. His head teacher at Kenilworth Junior School recognised his brilliance, and persuaded his parents to allow him not only to matriculate but even consider university.

At the age of 13, Price encountered chess. Within a year, he made astounded news headlines when he won a simultaneous competition featuring chess grandmaster and world champion, Max Euwe.

After matriculating at Forest High School, he attained a BSc Honours in physics at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), and won the Elsie Ballot Scholarship for study at Cambridge University, where he read for his MPhil at St John’s College.

A Wits lecturing post brought him back to Johannesburg, where he grew his family.



Eddie Price (centre front), with Darryl Accone, Mark Rubery, and Patrick Foley at Trieste Café in Greenside in 2016

His life was also rich in bridge, puns, puzzles, and deep long friendships which Price tended steadfastly. Not to forget squash: as youngsters, his daughters were convinced squash was his real job as he seemed to be more on the courts than in the labs.

Darryl Accone, a friend of his, recalls, “Despite his size, Eddie was a demon squash player who would have younger, slimmer, fitter opponents rushing from one end of the court to the other, out of breath, trying to chase down his exquisitely positioned shots.”

Price represented South Africa in the Maccabi Games and two World Chess Olympiads. He contributed widely to

the South African Chess Federation, serving often as president, but never afraid to roll up his sleeves for other tasks. He represented South Africa on the International Chess Federation’s arbitration committee which sets the world rules of chess.

Alongside Arthur Kobesi, Price was dedicated to introducing chess to Sowetan children. He persuaded international grandmasters to visit to strengthen the game locally. His daughters recalled a braai at the Price residence in the early 1990s, where guests were astonished to find the world

champion, Anatoly Karpov, hanging out, eating boerewors.

Until the outbreak of COVID-19, Price played weekly five-minutes-per-player blitz chess in a Greenside café; lookers-on had no idea that most of the players were former national champions.

Only weeks before his death, he still played chess regularly online with his grandson in London. When the video technology failed, the entire game would be played, from Eddie’s side, in his head. The absence of a board was no impediment to his extraordinary chess brain.

He was funny and wise, kind and honest. He was a man who lived every day true to himself. In the 1970s, Price and his wife, Joan, who died 40 years ago, used to host a game called Diplomacy. To win, you need to negotiate with other players and may need to switch allegiances; every deal must be treated with suspicion; you always must cover your back. Except, said his friend, Arnold Witkin, “when you did a deal with Eddie. You knew it was more solid than the Bank of England.”

Born Harold Edwin Price, Eddie leaves his daughters Vicki, Debbie, and Toni, grandson Joshua, loving carers, Lucy, Dora, Fenki, Godfrey, and Sam, and his chess players.



Eddie Price





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Stifling uniformity: debating school wear

TALI FEINBERG

School uniforms are something our institutions inherited from this country's British colonial past, but are they helping or hindering students and their parents? The *SA Jewish Report* recently put this hot topic to Jewish parents on Facebook, and opinions rained forth.



Most felt that uniforms were needed to prevent the bullying of those who came from less affluent backgrounds. However, a majority felt that the uniforms at our current Jewish schools don't fit the needs of students today.

Many complained that they were expensive, uncomfortable, and inappropriate for growing bodies and extreme weather. They said girls especially were disadvantaged by current uniforms.

A number of parents pointed out that using uniforms to stop bullying is like putting a "plaster" on a much bigger problem. "If kids are competitive, it will happen whether they wear uniforms or not," said one mother. "If we want competition to end, the whole system has to change. School uniforms are stifling, and children have different shapes and needs and may be self-conscious about certain things that a uniform highlights. For me as someone with SPD [sensory processing disorder], uniforms were a nightmare and an obstacle to learning."

Another mother agreed, saying, "If it's the uniform that's controlling the nasty competition, then we have a bigger problem than the uniform one."

A single mother said she would prefer

her kids not to wear uniforms. "I can barely make school fees, and uniforms are so expensive and really outdated. As for bullying and uniforms being an equaliser, the kids that make remarks do so anyway. The children that operate from kindness and inclusion do so anyway. A uniform doesn't change human behaviour. It's a complete myth.

"I'm not sure that full civvies are an option," she said. "However, standard blue jeans would be great with a t-shirt. At least we could get affordable clothing and they could be used for casual wear."

Many parents, especially those of boys, feel that white shirts and light colours are impractical as they get dirty easily.

Parents of young girls feel that uniforms hinder their children.

"Girls and boys should be able to wear exactly the same thing, and make it simple, comfy shorts and a t-shirt for summer, long sleeve t-shirt and track pants with a sweater for warmth for winter, and trainers. Current uniforms are impractical and expensive. My seven-year-old loves (and needs) to do handstands (a lot), but she doesn't dare do them at school in her skirt," a parent said.

One father said, "In primary school, girls feel unable to play freely because skirts come up and boys tease them. This is even worse in high school. Boys play rugby and soccer at break and girls are expected to sit quietly with their legs together because running around the field in skirts is too revealing. Even at 15, my daughter complained about how boring break was because of their uniforms."

Another mother pointed out that children endure "see-through shirts for girls who are heading toward puberty, slits at the back of primary school skirts, and badly-fitted, unflattering cuts across the board. Skorts make more sense for younger girls climbing, running and jumping – as they should."

Mothers in other countries shared their experiences. "My kids are high schoolers in America. They wore uniforms at middle and elementary school, but not high school. The high schools have dress codes so you can't just wear anything. My kids (boy and girl) don't stress about what to wear. They have school clothes. It's awesome in that it allows kids to express their individuality and they're treated

more like adults. Dressing like adults and being treated like adults makes the kids behave more like adults. I must say I was worried about it, but it's worked out well. The kids love it, and we would have bought these clothes to wear outside school anyway."

In Israel, a mother who recently made aliya said, "The local school has a badge and kids can wear any colour t-shirts with the school badge printed on it. Shorts, pants, and skirts, it can be anything. Also sweatshirts or jackets can be printed with the school badge, but this isn't compulsory. The shops seem to run specials to get five t-shirts for 85 shekels, and can print the badge on it there, included in the price. It's much more affordable than uniforms in South Africa."

Educator Joseph Gerassi supports the idea of standardised school uniforms, but believes it's time to move towards a unisex uniform that includes loose and

breathable fabrics. The uniforms should be available at a variety of stores, ensure the best fit, and incorporate a capsule-style wardrobe comprising a number of options so students have some form of freedom of expression.

A grandmother in the community said, "Uniforms make children feel special when they start school and thereafter. It creates a sense of belonging. I clearly remember a friend who emigrated to America and then returned to Cape Town after a year or so. She said at the time the 'worst' thing about her daughter's morning school routine in America was the fight she had with her about what to wear. She also expressed what a relief it was when she returned to Cape Town and her daughter knew exactly what she would wear every morning. So don't throw the baby out with the bath water just yet."

A former teacher pointed out, "Most adults aren't required to wear a

uniform to work. They dress to suit their comfort levels according to the weather. Kids deserve to regulate their body temperature, and uniforms can have a range of choices." She believes "season-based uniforms" are outdated, especially with climate change. "Pockets are helpful for students, especially for girls who need to carry sanitary items to bathrooms. The most important item in my opinion is a choice of hat for all students. It should protect the ears and the back of the neck.

"Gender and identity issues abound in society today," she said. "Give choice to students who are 'seeking' [their identities] and feel more comfortable in pants. Talk to students – what would they like to wear? Do they feel that a uniform is the only way to represent a school? What do parents want? Most would probably like something comfortable, presentable, and convenient to wash and dry, plus something affordable."

US authorities identify four ISIS 'financial facilitators' in SA

>>Continued from page 4

Jevon Greenblatt of the Community Services Organisation (CSO) also said the news came as no surprise. "The CSO has been warning about and preparing for the growing influence and mobilisation of ISIS in Africa and South Africa for a number of years.

"This evidence started emerging from before the arrest of the Thulsie Twins, and includes the numerous and often highly publicised incidents of foiled and successful attacks and criminal activity carried out by these cells within our borders.

"There's also more than enough chatter and anecdotal evidence pointing to a strong link between cells in South Africa and the insurgency in Mozambique and elsewhere," Greenblatt said.

"Remember, ISIS warned South Africa not to get involved in Mozambique. We don't believe that this was an idle threat, but rather based on its confidence in the local sleeper infrastructure that exists and can be called upon to act when the time is right."

Since the early 2000s, South Africa has been seen as a safe haven and financing hub for these extremist groups, Greenblatt said.

Hoomer, a South African citizen, was among those allegedly involved in the 2018 Shia mosque attack in Verulam, in which one person was killed and two others injured. He's also linked to attempted bombings around Durban.

According to information provided by the US, Hoomer allegedly helped to start the operations of a Durban-based ISIS cell. Hoomer has allegedly provided some of his known residences and vehicles registered in his name to sponsor the cell's meetings and operational activities.

In his role, OFAC claimed that Hoomer had recruited and trained cell members, and was in contact with members of ISIS-Democratic Republic of the Congo (ISIS-DRC) and ISIS supporters throughout South Africa.

According to OFAC, Hoomer raised funds through kidnap-for-ransom operations and the extortion of major businesses, which provided more than R1 million for his cell.

In 2018, South African authorities arrested Hoomer along with his associates for their involvement in a plan to deploy improvised incendiary devices near a mosque and commercial and retail buildings.

The legal case against Hoomer and 11 others was struck off the role for lack of evidence. The *SA Jewish Report* at the time described this as "a defining moment that could give the go ahead for terrorism in South Africa".

According to OFAC, Miller, from Mitchells Plain, leads a Cape Town-based group of ISIS supporters. He has allegedly provided financial assistance to ISIS by training members to conduct robberies to raise funds. "In 2018, Miller also aided in acquiring temporary safe houses for ISIS," said OFAC.

Abadigga from Ethiopia, thought to be based in Gauteng, allegedly recruited young men in South Africa and sent them to a weapons training camp. Abadigga, who controlled two mosques in South Africa, allegedly used his position to extort money from members of the mosques. He sent these funds to ISIS supporters elsewhere in Africa, OFAC maintains.

Peter Charles Mbaga allegedly sought to provide support to ISIS-M by helping the group procure equipment from South Africa. Mbaga also sought to procure weapons from Mozambique, according to OFAC.

President Cyril Ramaphosa "needs to do some serious house cleaning", said Solomon.

If the South African safety and security status continues, he said, "South Africa will be in serious trouble. The rot has gone too far. We need the help of friendly outside players to clean shop, but this won't happen until the African National Congress leadership contest is settled later this year."

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Anti-Israel lobby heap praise on Amnesty International report

SAUL KAMIONSKY

The new Amnesty International (AI) report calling Israel an apartheid state has been heavily criticised around the world, but a small group of South Africans think it's marvellous.

So much so, they officially launched the report at the Senate Hall at the University of Pretoria on 24 February where the special advisor to the South African minister of international relations, Zane Dangor, told the approximately 40 people in the audience, "As a government, we welcome the Amnesty report."

He described the report as "groundbreaking", saying, "It complements many other reports over the past few decades - reports from Al-Haq and several other Palestine NGOs [nongovernmental organisations]."

Said Dangor, "All of the reports make a compelling case that the situation in Palestine is in breach of the convention of suppression and punishment of the crime of apartheid."

He said he believed South Africa and other states should shift from "political solidarity to legal duty under international law".

Self-described "human-rights activist" Saleh Hijazi, and former anti-apartheid activist Ronnie Kasrils spoke glowingly about the AI report during the launch.

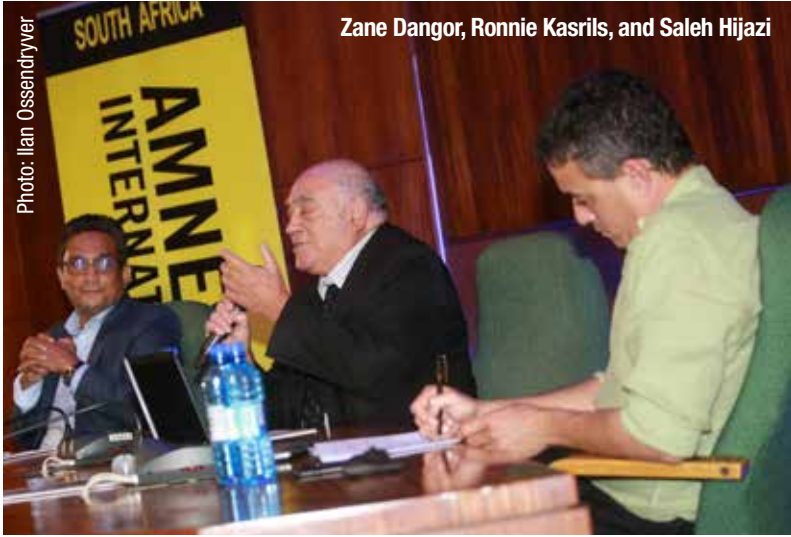
Kasrils, the former minister of intelligence services who is known for his anti-Israel stance, dubbed the report "an absolutely outstanding, significant milestone of a document". He said he believed it should be distributed far and wide, and translated into South Africa's indigenous languages.

Sara Gon of the Institute for Race Relations commented on the report, saying, "Categorising Israel as 'committing the crime of apartheid' creates the presumption that AI is trying to assist the United Nations to haul Israel to the International Criminal Court."

While Hijazi believes this report was the impetus for countries to now "dismantle apartheid against Palestinians and bring those responsible to justice", others believed the report was only good enough to be binned.

The International Legal Forum called on people to throw the report into "the dustbin of antisemitic history". This pro-Israel group believes the report is "tantamount to a blood libel against the Jewish state".

Israel's diaspora affairs minister, Dr Nachman Shai, said, "To say that the state of Israel is



an apartheid state is detached from reality and antisemitic in every respect."

Moreover, Mansour Abbas, the leader of the United Arab List, an Arab political party which is part of the coalition of parties that forms the current cabinet

of Israel, said he wouldn't use the word "apartheid" to describe relations between Jews and Arabs within the country. "I prefer to describe the reality in objective ways," he said.

Kasrils claimed Israel was "one of the

most racist states in the world, and racist in the apartheid sense of legislation and law".

"It's reinforced by legislation, by law, by the Law of Return keeping refugees away, and the passing of the law that Israel is the state of Jewish people and not the citizens who live there."

Kasrils, who wants "Palestine to be safe for all its people without discrimination", claimed Israel has been an apartheid state since 1948.

Gon said taking account of history only since that year, as the report does, amounts to "blatant one-sidedness". "It's astonishing that the history as revealed is literally only good Palestinian victims and aggressive, cruel Jews," she said. "There's no context about the period preceding 1948, and no mention at all of Britain and mandate Palestine."

NGO Monitor, a globally recognised research institute promoting democratic values and good governance, and the South African Friends of Israel (SAFI) said South Africans who had suffered under and fought against apartheid South Africa should be insulted by those who compare that era to life in Israel today.

Jews, Arabs in Israel, and anyone who visits the country know that "Israel's democracy is the absolute antithesis to apartheid", said Pamela Ngubane, SAFI general manager. "The rule of law in Israel is sacred and universal, it's justly and fairly applied, and doesn't rest upon racial lines."

To Kasril's mind, massacres of Palestinians occur "over and over again". Conversely, World Jewish Congress President Ronald Lauder said the Palestinian acts of terrorism and Israel's obligation to defend its citizens couldn't be ignored, as the AI report does.

What Putin's talking about when he talks about 'denazification'

>>>Continued from page 8

In your book on fascism, I got the sense you were somewhat optimistic about the ability - at least in the United States - of democratic systems to push back against the worst impulses of fascists. But in a case like Ukraine, obviously the worst-case scenario, is there an antidote beyond just total war?

I have to say that question goes beyond what I can comment on. I have hope and optimism because there's no other choice. Ukraine was a moment of hope: the Maidan revolution, the genuine fledgling democracy. Insofar as there was a far-right movement, it was suppressed. And so, that was a moment of hope. But, you know, maybe we can see the terrible violence that greets it as a recognition of the power of hope.

I've heard you talk about your late father, sociologist Manfred Stanley, and his library, which was pretty heavy on books about Germany and the Holocaust, and its influence on you.

My father spent his academic career thinking about what led to fascism. I remember asking a colleague at Yale, "Why did my father, a Holocaust survivor, write his dissertation on British imperialism in East Africa?" "Because, Jason," he said, "part two of Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* is called *Imperialism*." My father started out studying imperialism and what leads to it, and that's what we're seeing in Russia right now.

What would your father have made of the current moment?

My work is reimagining or sketching what I think my father would make of the current moment.

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Return of the relatives – families reunite after years of separation

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

With ever-changing COVID-19 travel regulations, family reunions have been repeatedly delayed. Now that most international borders have reopened, many are finally getting the chance to see their loved ones after years of being apart.

They say the three most stressful events in life are the death of a loved one, divorce, and moving. “I’d say COVID-19 travel should be placed above moving – it’s extremely stressful,” says Kim Kur. Kur is the founder of Community Circle Home SA, a Facebook group that assists people from many countries to navigate the rollercoaster of rules around travel to and from South Africa during the pandemic.

“You still can’t fly into South Africa without a negative PCR test unless you get a special exemption,” she says. “What people go through when they have to travel – the anxiety, the tears, this still hasn’t stopped.”

This is especially true for those longing to see their families after a lengthy separation, or to reunite for a special occasion. “A lady living in Scotland, phoned me two weeks ago asking how to get into South Africa for her mom’s surprise 85th birthday party,” says Kur. The whole family was coming from around the country and her arrival was going to be a surprise.

But then she tested positive for COVID-19, even though she felt fine and had recently recovered from the virus. Kur realised that the woman was still testing positive from a previous infection – a PCR or antigen test can be positive for up to three months after an infection. Kur referred her to a South African doctor who wrote her a letter stating that she didn’t have symptoms and had met the isolation requirements. She was granted an exemption to travel, and made the trip.

“When I told her I could help, she burst into tears and was barely able to speak,” recalls Kur. “I asked what was wrong and she asked, ‘Why are you being so nice to me?’

I said, ‘I’m not being nice, I’m just helping you’, and she said, ‘Nobody helps anybody’. That’s not true, and I had to show her that. That’s the beauty of the group, I watch strangers helping each other all the time.” Kur herself has dedicated much of her already busy schedule to voluntarily helping travellers. Why? “If I stop doing what I’m doing, you don’t get here,” she states.

Luckily, there are people and organisations around the world that show similar commitment. One such organisation is Yad L’Olim, an Israeli *olim* advocacy organisation that’s been fighting for the rights of *olim* to reconnect with their families during the COVID-19 crisis. It was with its help that Justine Montrose and her family were able to make it to South Africa in time for her brother’s January wedding.

“For about two months before the wedding, my husband, Yossi, and I had gone back and forth so many times about whether to book tickets or to wait,” she says. “It was mentally exhausting. We were so determined to get there, but with South Africa being on the red list, it wasn’t looking good at all.”

They eventually resigned themselves to the fact that they wouldn’t make the *simcha*. “Then I got an email from Dov Lipman, the founder and chief executive of Yad L’Olim, saying that South Africa would be taken off the red list on 9 January,” says Montrose. “So, we made the last-minute decision to take a chance. We booked our flights on 7 January and arrived in South Africa on the 11th, a few days before the wedding. It was surreal because a week before we landed, we had no hope of actually going and I was feeling so heartbroken that I was going to miss my only sibling’s special day.”

Aside from their joy at being able to attend the

wedding, the couple were also thrilled to be able to reunite their two young sons with all their grandparents. “We’d last seen our families when we said goodbye to them at the airport in September 2019, the day we made aliya,” recalls Montrose. “We moved when our youngest was only 14 months, so our families knew him only as a baby. They missed watching him grow up, take his first steps, and get to watch him become the child

of us. My in-laws and parents stood there in complete disbelief that we actually made it, and they were so excited and overwhelmed to see their grandchildren and get to know them properly.”

The family also spent time in the Pilanesberg, one of the Montrose’s favourite places. They saw friends and even reunited with their beloved dog, who they had rehomed before emigrating. COVID-19 challenges struck again when Yossi tested positive just before they were due to fly back to Israel. In spite of his lack of symptoms, they were unable to return in line with Emirates Airline’s COVID-19 policies, and could get a flight only two weeks later. “We made the decision to embrace the situation and extend our trip.”

For Trevor Levy, finally seeing his Australian-based sister, Wendy Yudelman, after six years was an amazing experience. Though the separation was hard on Levy and all his siblings, it was their parents who felt the distance most acutely. “Neither of my parents had seen my sister for two or three years and if not for COVID-19, my mom and possibly my dad would have gone to visit her,” he says. “She has three children and before COVID-19, neither of my parents had gone so long without visiting their grandchildren.”

The lifting of travel restrictions finally gave Yudelman the chance to reunite with her entire family. She also brought her eldest child along. The lengthy separation – exacerbated by COVID-19 restrictions – has spurred her decision to visit more frequently. “She said she wants to come more often – every year, if possible,” says Levy.

“It felt great to spend time with my sister again. It was quite emotional really, especially saying goodbye. I would say that the most special part was the four of us – my sister, my two brothers, and myself – spending time together for the first time in six years. Hopefully, the next time will be much sooner.”



Justine and Yossi Montrose with their children and their dog Trixie
he is today.”
Though they did their best to schedule video calls and include their parents in birthday parties over Zoom, there’s no replacing that in-person contact. “That’s why arriving back in South Africa was so emotional for all

The Ki to a healthier society through affordable therapy

TALI FEINBERG

The rate of suicide, divorce, addiction, and depression has accelerated in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, and community members are in dire need of support.

A group of Jewish mental-health professionals have responded by creating The Ki, which offers affordable and accessible therapy to the Johannesburg Jewish community.

“Ki is an acronym of *kochav yam*, which means starfish in Hebrew,” says The Ki director and psychotherapist, Maria Beider. “It’s a nod towards the starfish story, which is a family legacy of mine. My uncle, Professor David Baum [the head of the Royal College of Paediatrics in the United Kingdom] used to tell it. It evokes hope and the belief that although we can’t change the whole world, we can make a difference one person at a time.”



“At The Ki, we believe that we take turns at being starfish, and our aim is to empower individuals so that they can, in turn, make a difference to their families and community.”

The classic starfish story tells how an old man walked the beach at dawn and noticed a young boy picking up starfish and putting them into the sea. He asked the boy why he was doing this. The boy answered that the stranded starfish would die if left until the morning sun.

“But the beach goes on for miles and there are thousands of starfish,” countered the old man. “How can your efforts make any difference?”

The young boy looked at the starfish in his hand, and

placed it safely into the waves. “It makes a difference to this one,” he said.

The organisation was founded by Beider. “It was my vision and dream to make an impact in promoting mental health. I founded it together with two amazing colleagues, Lara Noik and Tova Goldstein, who are experienced social workers in the community,” she says.

In terms of financing, “We have some very generous individuals who have helped us to fund it so far. It’s an ongoing process of raising funds as we grow and our name becomes more established. We’re also looking at a long-term model, incorporating self-generating funds,” says Beider. “We have had an overwhelming response in our first three months which has been validating and has indicated the real need for this service.”

All three recognise the gap that needs to be filled. “We each saw in our private practices and our everyday lives that people weren’t coping, whether they were feeling anxious or depressed or had marital issues and couldn’t always afford to invest in their own therapy. People see therapy as a luxury or not necessary. We see it as a basic need for self-care, the same way we would go to the doctor if we broke our leg. Therapy gives us a space to process and heal, and plays an important part in helping to build healthy individuals, families, and a healthy community,” says Beider.

“Most people need to invest in therapy at some point in their lives,” she says. “This isn’t true just for the Johannesburg Jewish community, but we’re here, this is our community, and we see people suffering on a daily basis. The COVID-19 pandemic has, of course, exacerbated problems for people. There’s a lot of financial stress, plus we’re living in South Africa with the backdrop of poverty, crime, and violence.”

Furthermore, “Research and anecdotal evidence indicate a substantial rise in mental-health challenges over the past few years, here in South Africa and worldwide,” says Beider. “We’re certainly seeing this trend in the Jewish community. Recently, Discovery Health revealed that psychology visits per 1 000 lives were 16.2% higher than they were in 2019. And that’s obviously for people who can afford a medical aid. A lot of people have only a hospital plan, which doesn’t cover

therapy.

“Though we see therapy as a preventative measure, we don’t want people necessarily coming to us only to prevent family disintegration or a mental-health crisis,” she says. “It’s a shift in our understanding of therapy. Rather, come to us in the hope that with the right intervention, we can help individuals, couples, and families to actualise their innate resilience and live their best possible lives. Our goal isn’t to prevent disaster, but rather to help grow healthy individuals, couples, and families.”

“Most people need to invest in therapy at some point in their lives.”

The Ki has more than 20 esteemed therapists on board including social workers, psychologists, and counsellors. They offer a wide array of different modalities and specialties, such as trauma, play therapy, parental guidance, couple’s counselling, self-harm, eating disorders, and grief work.”

It’s specifically aimed at “what we call the middle-market niche of people who want to heal and make changes in their lives but can’t necessarily afford therapy at market costs,” says Beider. “They are often the ones who fall through the cracks because they are neither in need of social services nor have access to the funds necessary to access therapeutic services.”

The organisation works with other communal bodies. “We’re already partnering with organisations like the Shoshana Foundation, Ohrsom, Ohr Somayach, Koleinu SA, and Natan, amongst others. The Ki offers these organisations a referral source [for therapy] as well as the potential for psycho-educational intervention, training, and therapeutic groups, which we hope to bring into fruition this year.”

It’s ultimate goal is early intervention and prevention. “To make it more of a habit for people to seek therapy and get help early, before their unhealthy patterns become entrenched and start to affect marriages and children,” says Beider. “A lot has to do with psycho-education and understanding trauma.”

To the community, Beider says, “We want to partner with you. We want to create an emotionally healthy society. Please contact us on our discreet WhatsApp line, 082 660 1666. Or support us by giving us a donation. See more information on our website, www.theki.co.za”.

SARS determined to squeeze emigrating taxpayers further

OPINION

MICHAEL KRANSDORFF AND LAURA SASSOON



Large numbers of South Africans continue to seek greener pastures abroad. According to research from RMB, more than 100 000 South Africans emigrated over the past five years. This trend is even more pronounced among high-net-worth individuals.

The latest research from New World Wealth shows that 10% of South Africa's dollar millionaires (more than 4 200) emigrated from South Africa over the past decade.

Financial and tax considerations are often cited as one of the major reasons for leaving. Recognising this threat to the South African tax base, the government has become increasingly focused on squeezing all the tax revenue it can from these departing taxpayers.

This was highlighted again in last week's National Budget by Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana, in which he reaffirmed, in spite of the legal obstacles, his commitment to imposing a "exit charge" on retirement savings when ceasing to be a South African tax resident.

Current retirement tax loophole

There is a major loophole in the taxation of retirement savings on emigration. South Africa, in a handful of important tax treaties including one with Israel, has forfeited its rights to tax South African generated retirement savings once a taxpayer ceases to be a South African tax resident.

For people making aliya, formal retirement savings constitute a major component of their wealth. This loophole provides a significant tax saving for those emigrating to Israel.

Early withdrawals from retirement savings before retirement age (under 55) are generally subject to a punitive tax rate. As an example, if one has a R5 million pension and is younger than 55, early withdrawal would generally be subject to tax at an average rate of 33% or R1 647 000. However, If one ceases to be a South African tax resident and takes advantage of the tax treaty with Israel, one could effectively structure a tax free pay-out.

An additional benefit of emigration is that it allows for the full lump-sum withdrawal of retirement savings. As of last year, the government has, in most cases other than emigration, limited lump-sum withdrawals on retirement to only one third of total savings and requires an annuity to be taken out on the bulk.

To counter the loss to the fiscus in these cases, the government proposed already in 2021 to impose a tax on the value of a taxpayer's retirement funds on the day before that taxpayer ceases to be a South African tax resident, effectively imposing an additional exit charge. This proposal was met with fierce opposition.

The government was begrudgingly forced to withdraw this proposed additional tax last year as it was at odds with some of South Africa's international tax treaty obligations.

In spite of this setback, the government is still determined to close this loophole. In its 2022 Budget Review last week, the finance minister reaffirmed his commitment to imposing this additional tax as soon as possible, and announced that in order to facilitate it, he would take the unprecedented step of renegotiating the relevant international tax treaties.

What should people do?

International research has shown that a surprisingly large number of former South Africans haven't cashed out their retirement savings.

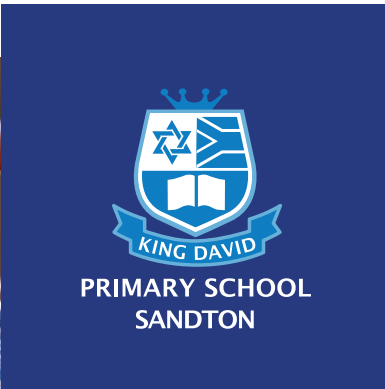
It's advisable that those ex-South African in jurisdictions with favourable tax treaties such as Israel should withdraw their retirement savings as soon as possible before any changes come into effect. This can be a complicated process and requires, amongst other things, that your tax residency status has been formally changed to non-resident with the South African Revenue Service (SARS).

For people considering making aliya, it's important to understand how to take advantage of the loophole. They should obtain professional advice before withdrawing their funds.



The type of retirement savings vehicle, your age, and when you emigrate, all play a role and can have a material effect on the outcome. Too often, those looking to emigrate make hasty decisions without proper advice and structuring and lose out on this tax saving.

• Michael Kransdorff is a Harvard educated international tax practitioner, and Laura Sassoon is a chartered accountant and former senior lecturer at the University of the Witwatersrand. They run the Institute for International Tax and Finance.



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Fourteen-year-old fisherman makes a splash in Eastern Province

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Nathan Barris has been selected to fish for Eastern Province, making him the first special-needs person ever to make a provincial deep-sea fishing side in South Africa.

The 14-year-old Barris, who has Down Syndrome and is in Grade 7 at a Montessori school in Gqeberha, is also the first third-generation provincial angler in the Eastern Province.



Nathan Barris fishing

Many years ago, his paternal grandfather captained South Africa in deep-sea fishing. “I also represented South Africa,” says Barris’s father, Colin. “My dad and I won national colours. My son is the next generation to follow suit. It’s a lovely story.”

Barris’ paternal grandfather started fishing as a young kid. “The bug bit him,” says Colin. “It has gone from generation to generation. It’s been a good road.”

After developing a passion for angling while fishing with his dad, Colin went on to fish at the 2017 World Championship Big Game Fishing tournament in Mexico, before being selected as one of the top three anglers in South Africa to compete in the 28th edition, hosted by KwaZulu-Natal two years later.

Barris and Colin go deep-sea fishing almost every weekend, weather

depending. They fish as the Port Elizabeth Deep Sea Angling Club.

“Over the past few years, Nathan has been excelling at the club, winning some of the competitions and doing very well,” says his dad. “When they start looking for who can represent the province, you make a CV of what you

have caught and on what line classes you caught them on. You can identify skills from there.”

The CV belonging to Barris includes five Eastern Province junior records for fishing. “He caught five different species of fish,” says his dad. “In the junior records, no one has caught fish the size he has. He has caught many species. The yellowtail was a record. It’s one of the better fishes ever caught.”

That’s saying something, especially in an angler’s paradise such as South Africa. The country borders two oceans, the Indian and Atlantic, increasing anglers’ chances of hooking monster offshore species. In addition, we have numerous bays and coral reefs spanning the almost 3 000km coast, many mountain streams boasting trophy-sized trout, and a range of rivers and reservoirs that are stocked full of prize fish.

While Gqeberha’s consistently mild climate means fishing in the province is usually fruitful, Barris has something else going for him – he could fish before he could walk.

“He started fishing as soon as he sort of held a rod,” says his dad. “The first time he went on a boat, he was six weeks old. He would come on the boat in nappies when we used to go fishing.”

This year, Barris is looking forward to competing in a national event at St Francis Bay, just over an hour’s drive from Gqeberha. “He also has a special-needs fishing competition in Durban,” says his father. “It is a development thing we are doing through the South African Deep Sea Angling Association. It’s about awareness of special needs. This whole thing was inspired by Nathan.”

Movies are made about accomplishments comparable to what Barris has achieved, says his dad. “He’s a kid with Down Syndrome who is competing against typical people his own age, in no special category, and he’s excelling.”

Barris’s condition limits him in one or two ways, says his father. “It just takes longer for him to, for example, tie his knots on a rod and cut the bait. However, as for the actual angling and the fighting of the fish, he competes. He does better than most kids his age.



Nathan Barris with a yellowtail

He’s dedicated. He’s passionate.”

Barris has inspired a lot of people, his dad says. “He’s the advert. This stuff is going viral in South Africa. It’s a huge accomplishment. You know, when kids are born, you worry if they can talk and walk. Then they accomplish things like this. I just can’t express how powerful this is. It’s emotional. It’s absolutely fantastic.”



Colin and Nathan Barris

Asked what Barris would like to achieve in fishing, his father says, “Basically, he wants to do what his dad has done. I think he would like to do the best he can, and go as far as he can in angling. We would love to see him represent South Africa one day.”

Gary Klein, the seasoned professional angler who co-founded Major League Fishing, has some wise words for anglers like Barris. “The best advice I can give is to remain focused, have a good time, and most importantly, always listen to what the fish and conditions are telling you,” the Northern California-born Bass Fishing Hall of Fame inductee said in 2015.

For young influencers, fame is just a TikTok away

DANI SACK

Becoming a household name these days can take just a few clicks of a button on social media. With that, almost anybody can rise to international fame and millionaire status.

It doesn’t take much – just a cell phone and/or laptop can do the trick. Many people in our community have excelled in doing it.

Twenty-three-year-old Jenna Berkowitz, better known as “Jenna Babez” on TikTok and Instagram, has amassed 35 000 followers on TikTok, with views on her videos skyrocketing into the 100 000s.

During lockdown, many young adults laughed at her hilarious and often scarily accurate parodies of “Joburg Jewish Mommies” and their reaction to major events.

She says being an influencer began as a joke while she was on her gap year in the United Kingdom. “I decided to start a ‘Finsta’ – a fake Instagram account – where I would just post whatever I was doing that day and share my antics with my friends,” she said.

Stories and posts of Berkowitz just being herself and sharing her stories and shopping hauls started gaining traction, and by the time the COVID-19 pandemic began and Berkowitz had to return home to South Africa, she had gained a significant following.

It was during lockdown that she began posting on TikTok – “Because, why not?”

Soon afterwards, TikTok South Africa asked her to join its Creators Fund – a programme that pays TikTok influencers based on video views and engagement.

But, she says, she was never in it for the money. “I never thought it would amount to what it did. I’ve always loved making videos and filming. The ‘drive’ [behind the page] is because I love it and the people that follow me love it too.”

She believes the reason her content thrives is because “a lot of the content we consume on Instagram is so curated and staged, and people post their ‘most perfect’ self on Instagram, whereas I do the opposite.”

Twenty-eight-year-old Chad Nathan, also known as “@Gingerwithagopro” on Instagram, expressed a similar sentiment.

Nathan, a travel and adventure photographer, also began his content-creation journey following his gap year in 2012. Travelling the world and backpacking through Europe, Nathan carried around a point-and-shoot camera from his mother, and documented his international adventures.

His iconic username was inspired by a GoPro wearing Spaniard during a tomato-throwing festival in Valencia, Spain. “I was starstruck [by the GoPro], I felt like I needed it.” And so, upon his return to South Africa in 2013, Nathan bought himself a GoPro, and the rest is history.

“People follow my page because I’m just me in my authentic, natural self. I don’t put on any facades. It’s just me being me, doing me, and people appreciate that type of stuff

and that type of content,” Nathan says.

His 37 700 followers on Instagram are exposed to hidden gems and places you wouldn’t usually visit such as Zanzibar and luxury game lodges around Africa.

Nathan describes his photography as “meaningful storytelling” and an opportunity to “raise awareness and help as many people as possible”.

During lockdown in 2020, he launched the Raising Hope campaign, in which he went out into the streets and documented the poverty-stricken lives of those without basic necessities like food and shelter. The campaign raised more than R750 000 over the past two years through countless Instagram posts of emotive photographs that tug at our heartstrings and wow us with their incredible quality.

Nathan spends up to three hours every day developing his business, reaching out to brands, creating content, and replying to the online community – none of which would be possible had he not joined Instagram during its early days in the 2010s. “[Instagram] drove me to go out on more adventures, to travel, and create more. It inspired me every day to become better [and] was a way of finding my passion for photography and filmmaking.”

Ten years down the line, Nathan gets around about 200 to 300 direct messages a day, all of which he tries to respond to in some way because ultimately, “it’s about the community”. His latest project is a collection of prints of arial photographs of beaches around Cape Town titled “Ants on a Beach”, which is available on his Instagram profile.

Comedy and photography are but two of several niches in the content-creation field. Twenty-six-year-old Helena Kahanovitz Unterslak, known on Instagram as @HKModstyle, noticed a gap in the influencer arena in 2016 when she started her modest fashion page.

“Modest fashion often gets a bad rap. People didn’t understand how I was dressing modestly and yet could look trendy and fashionable at the same time.” Their comments inspired Unterslak to create her page, which promotes modesty and modest fashion.

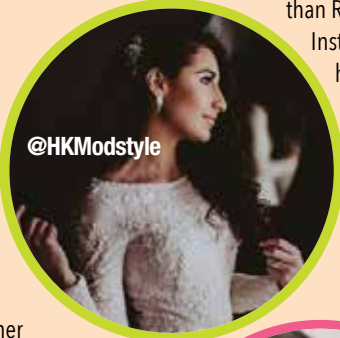
Her aim is to show that you can look and feel great about your clothing while still dressing in a *tzniut* (modest) manner. She has about 1 500 followers, and has recently started a modest fashion line called Helena The Label.

“There’s no reason why girls can’t feel great about themselves and look fabulous even when a bit more covered up,” Unterslak says. “I hope my page inspires girls to see that modesty and fashion are not mutually exclusive, and we can purchase and wear stunning clothes from ‘regular’ stores.”

Unterslak isn’t able to spend as much time on her page as she would like to because she has a full-time job. In spite of this, her profile is full of beautiful, modest outfits that she shares for all occasions – *chagggim*, celebrations, and everyday casual wear.

She hopes that through her “small contribution”, she’s able to inspire Jewish women to be modest and fashionable.

These are just three of many Jewish South African influencers, and it doesn’t take much. It’s never too late to join a social-media platform and start inspiring, telling stories, or making people laugh. As we can see from Berkowitz, Nathan, and Unterslak, you never know how influential you could be.



Shabbaton at long last for Torah Academy

top financial institutions, local and international universities and colleges, aviation, hotel and hospitality, advertising, fashion and design, health and fitness, beauty, design schools, and gap-year programmes.

"We invite the Grade 11s and 12s from all Jewish schools because we feel it's an important opportunity to expose all kids in the Jewish community to many of the professions and tertiary institutions available after school," says Rabbi Ricky Seeff, the general director of the SABJE (King David Schools).



The students were excited as they prepared for the getaway. The Shabbatons were filled with energy, hikes, team building, learning, entertaining programmes, and much more. Friendships were formed and memories made. It was a special weekend away, and well worth the wait.



The funds raised in WIZO's charity drive will assist children at risk in Israel, and go towards the partnership with Israeli nongovernmental organisation Wheelchairs of Hope to bring specially designed, all-terrain wheelchairs to many South Africans in need.

WIZO thanks its organisers, volunteers, and generous donors, without whom none of this would have been possible.

The first-ever delegation from South Africa joined 4 000 other teen leaders for the conference. Their 12-day trip included tours of famous landmarks in Washington, visits to the Holocaust and Smithsonian museums, participating in leadership laboratories, Ted Talks, and National Aeronautics and Space Administration experiences. They were welcomed with messages from politicians including Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, and speeches from Marvel movie stars, White House representatives, musician Mike Posner, famous TikTokers, and many more inspirational speakers. Every night, they were treated to concerts by world renowned DJs and bands.

For information on how your teen could get involved, email southafrica@bbyo.org.

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We can't all be heroes



INNER VOICE
Howard Feldman

We're drawn to stories, and we're drawn to heroes. Every compelling book or movie that has a hero follows a similar pattern. The tale often begins with the would-be hero living his life in relative complacency when an event shatters the calm. There's often an existential threat, and there's almost always an internal struggle. There's a guide, and there's the force of evil that threatens to consume. Think of Moses, living his life in the palace of Pharaoh when he's confronted by a scene that shakes him to the core. Think of Jonah who doesn't want to take on G-d's mission, or of Queen Esther, who is forced into the position of her nation's saviour. The existential threat is real, but so too is the internal one. Will she be successful, is she worthy, and what will her future look like? Heroes are seldom ready for their mission, which is what makes them so endearing. Volodymyr Zelenskyy is someone who donned the cape. From unremarkable

approval ratings of less than 40% for his handling of the COVID-19 pandemic to more than 91% for his role in the fight against Russia, he has become the darling of the free world. He leads his people by standing amongst them. He talks to them and not at them like the Russian propaganda machine, and as a consequence, has established a very high credibility factor. Around the world, everyone adores him. And acknowledge it or not, everyone has a bit of a crush on him. Women want to marry him, and men want to be him. He has made being short sexy and being Jewish cool. He understands the value of the soundbite, is quick with the costume changes, and although many of his photo opportunities are staged for impact, he understands not to overplay his hand. He comes across as real, authentic, and relatable. So much so that if my wife told me he was at us for dinner just before COVID-19 began, I wouldn't argue. I might even remember the night if I tried hard enough. It really was a lovely evening. Heroes don't just fight wars and save nations. What defines them isn't the magnitude of their actions but that they stand up when the need arises. It was during the pandemic that we witnessed another breed of hero. Our own community revealed many

a hero, from organisations to first responders, to professors, specialists, general practitioners, physios, psychologists, nurses, teachers, parents, and cemetery workers. Ordinary people who did extraordinary things. Because they could. Some gestures were grand. Others weren't. But all were heroic. It's not possible for us all to be Zelenskyy. Most of us

are thankfully not asked to face an oncoming Russian army. Most of us won't be asked to face a pandemic on the front lines and deal with all that follows. But each day, in a small, perhaps quiet way, we're given the opportunity to be a hero. We might never be as Jewish or as short as Zelenskyy, but that doesn't mean we can't make a difference.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Babyn Yar bombing has particular resonance

Over the past week, we have all watched in dismay and horror at the events unfolding in Ukraine. The destruction, suffering, and loss of life has been heart-breaking. While loss of life is by far the greatest tragedy of this invasion, the bombing of Babyn Yar has particular resonance for Jews. This is sacred ground. Babyn Yar was the site of one of the largest mass shootings during the Holocaust, and the desecration of these mass graves serve to remind the world once again that we have to heed the lessons of the past. It remains to be seen whether the international community will be able to respond effectively to this crisis. What we can say at this stage is that our own country is unlikely to contribute anything useful to the process. The African National Congress and its alliance partners are planning a march to Pretoria on Thursday 3 March – not to seek peace as Europe burns, but to the Israeli embassy. This obsessive focus on Israel at the expense of so much else is concerning for all South Africans. The South African Jewish Board of Deputies has communicated with the Jewish community in Ukraine to express our community's support at this difficult time. Those wishing to assist can make a donation to the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), which is providing humanitarian relief on the ground. We have worked with the JDC for many years, and can attest to its experience and effectiveness in dealing with these types of crises. For details, see our Facebook page.

Chapter closed with Masuku apology
It took an investigation by the South African Human Rights Commission, three major court cases, and innumerable meetings and communication between the parties, but this week, Bongani Masuku and the Congress of South African Trade Unions finally provided an unequivocal apology to the Jewish community

ABOVE BOARD
Karen Milner



for antisemitic hate speech by Masuku more than a decade ago. The relevant part of their letter reads, "Mr Masuku and Cosatu hereby tender their unconditional apology to the Jewish community, and regret the harm caused." In our statement, we confirmed that we were satisfied with and accepted the apology, and expressed the hope that henceforth, our two organisations, even when we disagreed, would engage with one other in a spirit of tolerance and mutual respect. Indeed, this is all that we ask when it comes to how we interact with our fellow South Africans and they with us.

The global Jewish stage
While all eyes were on the growing crisis on the Russia-Ukraine border, National Director Wendy Kahn was attending the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organisations mission in Israel. The programme included meetings with the prime minister, president, and senior cabinet ministers. Among the topics discussed were global Jewish security, the Iranian threat, and the Abraham Accords. It was the first opportunity post-COVID-19 to re-engage in person with such organisations as the Anti-Defamation League, American Jewish Committee, World Jewish Congress, and many more. The sound working relationships we have with global Jewry have been invaluable to us in terms of fulfilling our core mandate, while also enabling our community to play a meaningful part in furthering the Jewish cause on the international stage. At this very worrying and uncertain time, these relationships have never been more important. • Listen to Charisse Zeifert on Jewish Board Talk, 101.9 ChaiFM, every Friday from 12:00 to 13:00.

This column is paid for by the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Letters

'HUMANITARIANS' MISSING IN ACTION
They were here so very recently. Just last year, they were signing petitions against civilian casualties and condemning the use of military force. Just a few months ago, they were buying up metres of newspaper space to contain their signatures condemning Israel for human-rights violations. So very recently, they were dripping dollops of make-believe blood from their bleeding hearts all over the public space. Where have all the humanitarians gone?

Allow me to explain. When Israel was in conflict with forces in Gaza, quite a number of deeply-caring South Africans vented their fury against Israel. Notice my careful language: "When Israel was in conflict" is a neutral phrase, not allocating blame or responsibility to one side or in fact, to either. Or both. I understand that conflict is complex, and war is awful. Yet those self-same persons who rushed to condemn Israel unilaterally are now missing in action while Russia is bombarding kindergarteners and supermarkets in Ukraine. Day by day, I wait for those people who leapt into action to condemn Israel to say a word or two about Russia. Nothing. Nada. Nyet. It's so puzzling. Don't they care when powerful countries attack weak neighbours, and civilian casualties ensue?

So, where are the missing persons of the petition brigade?
I'm starting to get worried. Here's why: for a shocking moment, I'm having to consider that these human-rights supporters worry only about humans who are Palestinians. And that they care only about aggression if they can point a finger at Israel. Now that's okay, I suppose, if they don't mind making fools of themselves for such selective humanitarian concerns. I mean, such a strange cherry-picking of human tragedy is puzzling. Such one-sided paroxysms of selective empathy can make one dizzy. But maybe I'm being hasty. Maybe the anti-Israel brigade is circulating a petition against Russian aggression as I write. Maybe I'll open the *Sunday Times* or *Daily Maverick* in a day or two, and find those familiar names have pulled together a petition and are condemning Russia's bombardment of Ukrainian cities. Meanwhile, I'll keep looking for those missing persons, so brave and active on the barricades of petition-writing, so fearless when it comes to criticising Israel, so caring when it comes to embracing Gazans. Where on earth are they hiding while people are suffering in Ukraine?
– Gilad Stern, Cape Town

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Please email your CV to l.gavin@yeshivacollege.co.za by 30 March 2022

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- Have a good understanding and acceptance of the Yeshiva College ethos
- Previous teaching experience
- Reliable, Committed, and good work ethic
- Adequate technological skills
- Team player
- Excellent communication skills
- Must be SACE registered

Please email your CV to l.gavin@yeshivacollege.co.za by 30 March 2022

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