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Chicago rabbis attend funeral of murdered child

Before he paid his respects at the funeral of Wadea al-Fayoume, the six-year-old Palestinian-American boy stabbed to death in what police are calling a hate crime, Rabbi Ari Hart called the officiants of the funeral to make sure his presence would be welcome.

“I’m an Orthodox rabbi, I’m a Zionist rabbi, I need you to know that,” he recalled telling the Chicago-area Muslim religious leaders. “They said, ‘We understand. We would like you to come.’ That wasn’t easy for them. And it wasn’t easy for me.”

Al-Fayoume’s killing, reportedly connected to his assailant, landlord, Joseph Czuba’s, rage over the war between Israel and Hamas, has drawn condemnation from

government officials as well as religious groups. On Tuesday, 17 October, a broad coalition of Jewish organisations made a statement calling the murder “despicable”, and speaking out against anti-Muslim hate.

Hart and three other Chicago-area rabbis – Hody Nemes and Josh Feigelson, who are both Orthodox, and Lizzi Heydemann, who runs an independent synagogue – wanted to deliver those sentiments in person. They attended the funeral in the village of Bridgeview, Illinois, a community known as “Little Palestine”.

“This little boy was killed solely because of his religion and his identity. We need to try to build a world where it doesn’t happen to anyone,” Hart said.



16 October.

“I was overjoyed to see her alive,” Shem told journalists on Tuesday in Tel Aviv. “But I’m very worried about her. I know she needs medical care and I know about other health problems. Every moment is risking her life.”

The video, which Hamas titled “Taking care of one of the hostages”, features the 21-year-old Mia, who also holds French citizenship, receiving treatment for an injury to her arm before addressing the camera directly.

“I’m being cared for. I’m getting

medication. I’m only asking to be returned home immediately, to my family,” she said in the video.

The video is widely understood as psychological warfare at a time when Israel is preparing to invade Gaza. Hamas has reportedly offered to release “foreign” hostages if Israel stops the bombing in Gaza, according to NBC News. It wasn’t clear whether the offer, which Israel hasn’t indicated it’s considering, would apply to dual nationals such as Mia. There are also a number of foreign workers, including from Thailand and Nepal, known to have been taken hostage.

The video marked the first proof of life for any hostage since the day of the attack. But the *New York Times* reported that examination of the metadata suggested that some of the footage was captured at least six days prior.

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More precious than popularity

Rabbi Dr David Nossel

To say that we Jews aren’t popular is an understatement. All too often, we’re downright unpopular. And far worse.

Why is this? What is it about us that upsets our detractors so much?

Could it be because we associate ourselves with G-d, the almighty Creator, who we understand to be beneficent and merciful to every one of His creations? Unlikely. Why would that upset anyone?

Could it be because we “push” G-d onto others? Can’t be. Because we don’t. Everyone knows that Judaism isn’t into proselytising.

Could it be because we make people uncomfortable by negating the importance of the individual human being? Definitely not. A core teaching of Judaism is the importance of Adam and every one of his descendants.

Could it be because we negate the importance of non-Jewish nations? Nope, that can’t be the reason either. The Torah teaches us to “love your fellow as yourself” and the Sefer HaBris points out that “your fellow” refers to both Jew and non-Jew.

So what could it possibly be that disturbs our adversaries so much?

I’ve discovered an answer.

The reason why we’re unpopular is because we Jews don’t place any one of those values as the highest Jewish value. If we did, we should be no less popular than the various other religions and cultures that do prioritise those values.

As Jews, we certainly do recognise the importance of all those values. But we understand them to be means, not ends. The greatest importance is given to something that follows on from those values, that facilitates an even greater value, the highest value: taking care of G-d’s creation.

That’s not a popular message. People prefer to seek closeness to G-d, self-improvement, and solidarity with humankind. Those are popular values. Very popular.

I used to teach these messages. I can’t say I was top of the pops as a teacher, but at least I felt popular.

When I discovered that Judaism places its greatest priority on taking care of G-d’s creation, I began teaching that. It’s not a popular topic. It was then that it worried me that I wasn’t very popular!

But now I’m ok with that. Judaism, I realise, isn’t about seeking popularity. It’s about fulfilling a mission of channelling all the popular values into a higher value that supersedes all other values. Even popularity.

It’s a mission that those who seek popularity will find non-popular.

Unpopular. Uncomfortable. Unacceptable. And worse.

But it’s the mission that we few, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are entrusted with. It’s a mission that seeks not the receiving of popularity, but the bestowal of contribution.

It’s the mission that we will fulfil regardless of all the antagonism, the challenges, and the attacks. It’s the mission that we’re assured by the Creator Himself that we’ll be successful in fulfilling. It’s the mission of being co-creators with G-d.

In spite of its lack of popularity, it’s the greatest mission of all.

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Marathon gunfight takes life of kibbutz hero

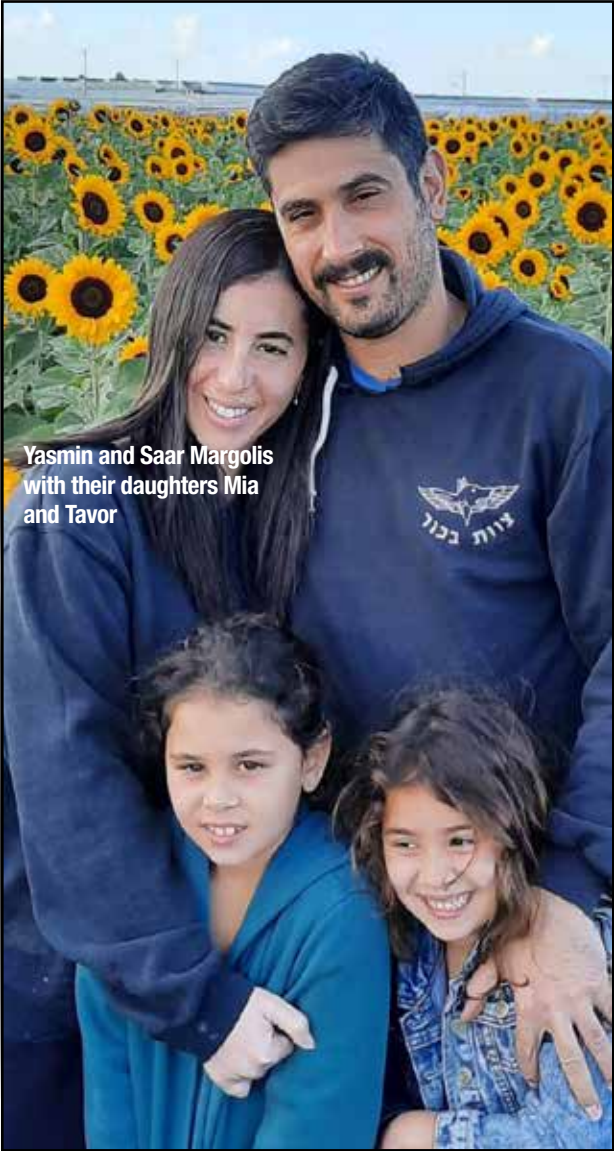
NICOLA MILTZ

Saar Margolis, 37, was a hero who died doing what he was born to do – saving lives and protecting others. He’s one of two South Africans listed as having been killed during the recent early morning surprise Hamas attacks in Israel. Tragically, the husband and father of two young daughters was shot by terrorists while protecting his family and the community of his cherished Kibbutz Kissufim, which is next to the Gaza Strip. This was after a marathon gunfight, lasting several hours, fought mostly on his own. Family and friends say that with unwavering courage, he fought relentlessly until his last breath, saving many residents’ lives.

According to his family, he was the former head of security of the kibbutz for 15 years, trained to protect and serve, before recently taking up a new position with the Israeli Defence Ministry. “We’re devastated,” said his sister, Beora Margolis, 54, who was born and raised in Johannesburg with her three siblings, Marcelle, 60; Lance, 56; and Carmel, 51. Saar is their half-brother, whom they adored. Their father, Selwyn, 86, originally from Cape Town, was the last person to see him alive.

The deplorable events that unfolded are all a haze, said Beora, who together with her family has been trying to piece together the last moments of their brother’s life. “Saar went to my dad at about 14:00 to make sure he was safe before rushing to homes close by. We believe he ran off to rescue a mother and her kids from a nearby shelter when he was confronted by terrorists soon after seeing my father,” said Beora. “The last time I was able to reach him to find out what was happening was at 08:04. He picked up the call, and said, ‘B, I can’t talk now.’ Those were his last words to me. The family’s agony of not knowing what was going on for hours, just waiting in fear, will haunt us,” she said. The family is sitting shiva at the Leonardo Plaza Hotel in the

Dead Sea after being evacuated with many others in the south to a place of safety. They are grieving among many others in a similar position. The hotel, which is usually home to happy holiday makers, is now a place of sadness and displacement. “Saar was the life and soul of Kissufim. He held the kibbutz together. He was a leader, and we don’t know how the kibbutz will survive without him,” said Beora. The attack has shattered the tranquillity of this peaceful haven they have called home for many years. According to those who knew him, Saar had a “big heart and a gorgeous smile, and helped everybody”. “We thought he was body proof, that nothing could ever happen to him, because he was always ready and prepared, a born soldier,” said Beora. According to her, he was nervous that an attack like this would happen one day, and put in many requests for extra soldiers and security. “He was raised in the fields like all the



Yasmin and Saar Margolis with their daughters Mia and Tavor

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children here, picking avocados and apples, and working on the farm among the cows and chickens. The family insisted he be buried there,” she said, even if it meant the funeral took place during ongoing missile threats with only five people in attendance surrounded by heavy security. “Kissufim was his life,” Beora said. On Saturday, 7 October, armed terrorists broke into the peaceful, sleepy farming collective and began their deadly rampage of slaughter and kidnappings. The kibbutz, so close to the Gaza border its residents can hear the call to prayer, was one of the hardest hit during the surprise attack. “Saar saved many lives on that day, and prevented many more from being taken hostage. Many people owe their life to him,” Beora said.

When he heard the early morning red-alert sirens, he immediately ushered his wife, Yasmin, and two daughters, Mia, nine, and Tavor, seven, and their dogs into the safe room, telling them that he’d return as soon as he could. “He told Yasmin he would never forgive himself if he didn’t leave the shelter to go out and protect the kibbutz. He never came back,” said Beora. They waited for him for 28 hours before they were able to emerge from the shelter. According to Beora, her brother “lived to protect”. “We held a memorial ceremony for him at the Beersheba Military Cemetery, and so many



people attended. He was loved by so many, a true leader and hero,” Beora said.

In a Facebook message, she wrote, “My beautiful, darling, loving, baby brother. Never in a trillion, billion years did I ever think I’d see your face on TV, especially at this time among so many that were cruelly murdered by cowards that hide behind masks and who sneaked in through doors at 06:30 on a Shabbat morning, knowing that people would still be sleeping. “As much as you loved to protect and help everyone, you did it quietly, with grace and pride. You never wanted to be on the front page, as you did it from your heart. You did everything from your heart. You fought for your country, your family, and for all families in Kibbutz Kissufim until your last breath. I know you wouldn’t have wanted to go any other way.”



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A mad dash for life-saving safety from Sderot

NICOLA MILTZ

“I feel like a refugee in my own country,” said ex-South African David Michalowsky, having fled for his life with his wife after spending more than 20 hours inside their Sderot safe room while unimaginable violence and chaos raged outside.

“Am I displaced? How do you define people forced out of their homes in a war?” asked Michalowsky from a relative’s home in Ra’anana. He knows they are lucky to be alive.

Michalowsky, originally from Port Elizabeth and his wife, Jenny, originally from Delmas, both in their sixties, have lived in Sderot, an Israeli city on the border with Gaza, for many years. They love it for its peaceful, pretty, small-town feel, comparing it to places like Oudtshoorn and Graaff-Reinet, with a deep sense of community. They don’t know if they will ever return after the city was ravaged by Hamas terrorists who infiltrated into Israel as the sun rose on 7 October on Shabbat and *yomtov*.

The Israeli Defence Ministry says about 100 000 Israelis may be internally displaced amid the ongoing war in the Gaza Strip and escalating skirmishes on the Lebanon border. This number is likely to rise.

Michalowsky’s story reads like many others. Sadly, over time, they had grown used to scrambling to their *mamad* or safe room as terrorists fired missiles from Gaza.

“However, this time, it was different,” he said, “There were gun shots, the terrorists were right outside.”

“It was about 06:45 when we heard the *tzeva adom* – the red-alert sirens signalling rocket fire. We’ve experienced rocket attacks before, which is usually followed by a lull, maybe more rockets, and then things get back to normal. This was a continuous barrage with explosions, lasting about 45 minutes,” he told the *SA Jewish Report*.

“The television reports were terrifying.

We could see a massive infiltration of terrorists, and they were in the town as well, driving around in bakkies with a machine gun mounted at the back and just killing everyone they saw, ordinary people doing their thing, massacred in cold blood. We were so scared. The police station was under siege.

“We were receiving live images and group WhatsApp messages of the carnage, dead people in the streets, running gun battles against the terrorists, and all of this happening less than 100m from our apartment. There were so many gun shots and frantic messages on TV to stay in the *mamad*, lock the doors, don’t let anyone in the building. We thought of cutting off electricity to the elevator and locking the fire doors in the stairwell, but no-one knew how to do this.”

Eventually, the couple decided to make a dash for it. “We packed a bag, called our son and daughter and told them we loved them, and left,” said Michalowsky.

“We sped out of the parking lot and what confronted us was like a scene from a zombie movie. There were burnt out cars, abandoned vehicles in the middle of the road, some with their windows shot out and bullet holes in the bodywork, crashed into traffic circles. We drove under rocket fire, knowing there were armed terrorists driving around the city killing people. We feared for our lives.

“We drove past stores with shot up glass windows, with no-one in the streets apart from other residents scrambling to escape. I drove through red lights, overtook on solid white lines, and broke many traffic rules in our haste to leave. It was a mad dash to safety.”

According to Defence Ministry officials, the numbers of those internally displaced are broken down into two main categories: those who have been fully evacuated from their homes, and those who are eligible “to rest and refresh themselves” temporarily at state-subsidised guesthouses.

According to *The Times of Israel*, about 15 000 Israelis living in 25 communities up to 4km from the Gaza Strip were evacuated last week, and another 27 000 Israelis living in 28 towns up to 2km from the Lebanon border are expected to be evacuated in coming days.

The state will be responsible for these Israelis until the military allows them to return to what’s now a closed military zone near the Gaza border and a restricted area near Lebanon.

Additionally, infrastructure in southern communities will need to be repaired before people can return.

Separately, about 35 000 residents of Sderot and 23 000 Israelis living in 29 towns between 4km and 7km from Gaza are



David and Jenny Michalowsky

eligible to live for a week at state-subsidised guesthouses.

Ministry officials say not all of those living in those areas have taken the opportunity to leave at this stage.

The ministry is also looking at potentially providing the “rest and refresh” opportunity to some residents of the southern coastal city of Ashkelon, including those without adequate bomb shelters.

From the comfort of his sister’s home, Michalowsky said he and his wife would leave Sderot indefinitely if adequate security measures weren’t put in place. He said while Israel mourned and battled through this, the tragic events had united Israelis and Jews around the world.

“It’s such a pity that it took something so horrific to finally unite the Jewish people. Just last month, the whole nation was split in two. Now you see and sense the unity.”

Biden accepts Israel’s take on hospital blast

RON KAMPEAS – JTA

United States President Joe Biden arrived in Israel with a message of solidarity, saying that he accepted the Israeli assessment that a blast at a Gaza hospital was the fault of Palestinian militant groups.

Speaking to the press in Tel Aviv alongside Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Biden said the evidence Israeli officials presented him was persuasive. But he indicated it wasn’t likely to tamp down the eruption of angry protests across the Arab world.

“I was deeply saddened and outraged by the explosion of the hospital in Gaza yesterday, and based on what I’ve seen, it appears as though it was done by the other team, not you,” he said. “But there’s a lot of people out there not sure, so we’ve got to overcome a lot of things.”

The Israeli army posted what it said was intercepted audio of Palestinian terrorists, one of whom was explaining that he believed the blast at al-Ahli hospital in Gaza City was caused by a misfired rocket aimed at Israel. The blast reportedly killed hundreds, including those who had survived other blasts.

Israel says the rocket was fired by Palestinian Islamic Jihad, a smaller terrorist group that is at times at odds with the Hamas terror group. Hamas and the Palestinian Authority have both publicly blamed Israel.

Before Biden took off from Washington, the spokesperson for the US National Security Council, John Kirby, said he expected the president and Netanyahu to have difficult conversations.

“He’s going to get a sense from the Israelis about the situation on the ground and, more critically, their objectives, their plans, their intentions in the days and weeks ahead,” Kirby said. “He’ll be asking some tough questions.”

Photo: Avi Ohayon, Israel Government Press Office



US President Joe Biden and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu embrace on the tarmac at Ben Gurion Airport

major ground incursion aimed at destroying Hamas. But plans for Biden to meet in Amman, Jordan, with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, and Jordanian King Abdullah were scuttled when the Arab leaders pulled out amid anger at Israel over the hospital explosion.

Biden isn’t just meeting political leaders on his trip. Amir Tibon, a journalist with *Haaretz* whose family’s story of rescue on 7 October has captured international attention, posted a picture of six Israelis who have become local heroes since the attack, saying, “Israelis with an interesting story to tell are waiting for President Biden.”


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Cyril’s silence says a thousand words

TALI FEINBERG

When Jewish donors supported Cyril Ramaphosa in his bid for the presidency in 2017 and South African Jewry celebrated the appointment of a president who seemed to have common sense and decency, it’s unlikely that they imagined that one day, he wouldn’t utter a word of condemnation when 1 400 Jewish civilians in Israel, as well as people from many other nationalities, were slaughtered in cold blood by Hamas terrorists on 7 October 2023.

Johnny Copelyn, who backed Ramaphosa in his CR17 campaign for the presidency, told the *SA Jewish Report* that “The fact that Cyril sought to justify in some way the savagery of the Hamas attack on unarmed civilians in Israel and the kidnapping of 200 people including children and babies, is utterly atrocious, and will be remembered by all for the rest of his life.”

“A red line has been crossed,” says South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) National Director Wendy Kahn. “Our government’s bias on the conflict is bad enough. This is different. This was a systematic massacre. Any government with a modicum of humanity would have immediately issued unequivocal condemnation and sympathy for the victims of these heinous atrocities. Our government’s response was completely out of kilter with any decency and compassion. And its lack of concern for this traumatised community is a disgrace.”

Wearing the black clothing and keffiyeh of the very terrorists who committed some of the worst atrocities

mankind has ever seen, Ramaphosa stood up on 14 October surrounded by similarly dressed cadres waving Palestinian flags, and essentially blamed the Jewish state for the massacre of its own people.

“We have a full understanding of how the people of Palestine have taken up this issue,” he said. “They are people who have been under occupation for almost 75 years. They have been waiting and waging a war against a government that has been dubbed an apartheid state.”

In spite of a cordial and even warm relationship with Ramaphosa in the past, the SAJBD didn’t hold back in its scathing response to Ramaphosa and the African National Congress (ANC’s) cold lack of compassion for the murder, rape, abduction, immolation, and organised massacre of Jews.

In an audio statement, SAJBD National Chairperson Professor Karen Milner expressed the sense of betrayal at Ramaphosa’s silence. “You use political slogans to justify your position when this is about basic respect for Jewish life. The Jewish community of South Africa loves this country and its people, and we’ll do everything we can to see it thrive in spite of the enormity of the betrayal of our president,” she said.

This was followed by a full-page letter in the *Sunday Times*, in which the SAJBD said that in the wake of Hamas’ actions, the week was “doubly harrowing” for South African Jewry as it came to terms with what happened in Israel and the silence of its president and government. “This week, we felt like second-class citizens,” said Milner.

Ramaphosa made some attempt to condemn the 7 October massacre in his newsletter on 16 October, but continuously equivocated it with the suffering of the Palestinians.

As for what this mean for the SAJBD’s relationship

with the president, the ANC, and the government going forward, Kahn says, “They have let down South African Jewry and there cannot be business as usual. Serious issues need to be addressed going forward.

“I don’t blame anyone for having lost confidence in Ramaphosa and his current government,” she says. “What I can say is how impressed I have been with opposition parties who have unequivocally stepped up to support and stand up for South African Jewry. I’m grateful for the messages from the churches, some members of civil society, and the media. I believe that the majority of South Africans felt deeply for Israel and for us, and were horrified and embarrassed by the way our president and his government have behaved. Elections are near.”

“President Ramaphosa’s choice to wear a keffiyeh during his address about the situation in Israel and Gaza was a piece of political theatre clearly designed to show that his primary loyalty is to the Palestinians,” says political analyst Steven Gruzd. “What’s going to unfold in Gaza is something that the ANC will blame Israel for entirely.

“Ramaphosa has made some small shows of sympathy, but always equivocates and says that there are victims on both sides,” says Gruzd. “It’s a problematic way to look at what has happened over the past weeks in the Middle East.

“There were a lot of Jewish businessmen and women in this country that supported Ramaphosa heavily,” Gruzd says, “and this public display might turn some of those very wealthy donors away from Ramaphosa and his internal fights within the ANC.”

South Africa also maintains a warm relationship with Iran, and many have noted that the Hamas attack was possibly backed by Iran. “In addition, there are strong indications that Iranian money is partly financing anti-Israel and anti-Zionist movements in South Africa,” says Gruzd.

“There are certainly indications of strong Iranian support for Hamas. It has armed them, supported them politically, and I wouldn’t be surprised if evidence is found linking Iran directly to the attack on Israel.”

Political analyst Daniel Silke says, “The ANC has been erring on the side of a much more direct backing of the Palestinians as opposed to understanding any kind of insecurity that Israel feels. There’s no surprise that the ANC would come out on the side of the Palestinians while playing down the suffering of Israel over the past week or so.

“There’s no doubt that the ANC has certainly moved into a more non-Western positioning on a broad range of issues,” says Silke. “You’ve seen it in its very confused so-called ‘neutrality’ on Ukraine. It reflects being closer to a more non-aligned movement: China, Russia, and many of the rising and strong powers now in the Gulf, including Iran. South Africa’s diplomatic linkages with Iran are stronger now probably than they they’ve ever been.

“Ramaphosa knows it’s a winning issue for the ANC to be pro-Palestinian. There’s a domestic political imperative: the ANC is desperate to lock in support ahead of the election next year, to try and improve its position in the Western Cape, where you have a higher number of Muslims, who are more likely to be pro-Palestinian.

“This kind of reaction from South Africa is going to play out poorly in Western capitals, not that South Africa really cares anymore,” says Silke. “South Africa seems prepared to alienate the West. It also won’t play well with potential foreign investors. Ultimately, it will come back to bite South Africa in the future.”

Says South African Zionist Federation National Chairperson Rowan Polovin, “Ramaphosa and the ANC government have pledged their solidarity with those who deliberately murder, burn, and abduct innocent women, children, and babies. The ANC government continues to side with internationally-designated terrorists and despots.

“We find this morally abhorrent and a betrayal of the values of the South African Constitution. Ramaphosa and our government have chosen to side with evil. He ought to decide which side of history he wishes to be remembered: the side of morality and peace, or the side of hate and destruction.”



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Lest we forget

“Don’t take me, I’m too young!” This desperate plea keeps playing in my head. I went cold on hearing the mother of two children, aged 12 and 16, speaking about being on the phone with her children when she heard them being abducted and her younger son shouting those words. How do you survive, knowing that your children are in the hands of sadistic terrorists in Gaza? And that you can do nothing to help them?

Her children are just two of at least 199 people, mostly little children, young women, and the elderly, who were dragged across the Israeli border to Gaza on Saturday 7 October.

“Children aren’t supposed to be part of the war game,” this frightened mother said. “Children aren’t playing cards. Bring them home now.”

She said she was afraid that the hostages would “fall off the agenda slowly, but surely”, and she pleaded with the world to make sure that this didn’t happen.

I’m a mother, and I cannot imagine the anguish this woman is experiencing. I cannot imagine the excruciating emotional and psychological pain of every mother, father, sister, brother, and grandparent, who is waiting for word of family members taken last Saturday.

For this reason, we have put the faces of the people who have been abducted by Hamas terrorists and held hostage in Gaza on our front page. Lest we forget ...

We cannot bring back to life the 1 400 people who the terrorists butchered last weekend. We can mourn them, and we can keep their memories alive, but we can’t bring them back.

The 3 500 wounded in Israel are top priority for the country’s medical fraternity, and hopefully as many as possible will survive and resume their lives.

But the lives of those held captive in Gaza are on hold. We don’t know the conditions in which they are being held. We don’t know if they are being fed or given water. We don’t know how they are being treated. But we do know what their despicable captors are capable of – they made sure we got to witness that on 7 October.

The faces on our front page are haunting because each one belongs to a beautiful human being, someone who did nothing to deserve what they are experiencing right now. They are innocent people who were going about their early morning lives on Shabbat and Simchat Torah when they were forcibly driven into hell.

The Israeli government and army have promised to do everything in their power to get them back because to Israel, every life matters.

It was so poignant to hear that same mother whose two children are being held hostage talking about how she had always felt for Palestinian children and told her own kids that they needed to be grateful because they had more than the children in Gaza. She also said that when she heard about soldiers killing 14-year-old terrorists, she was heartbroken because, she said, “they are someone’s child”.

Another Israeli man this week told us how he, his wife, and daughter, had been taken hostage. En route to Gaza, they had an opportunity to escape and took it. His wife was holding the baby but was slower than him, so she told him to take the child and run and she would follow. He and the baby escaped, but she was caught and is now one of the hostages.

These human tragedies abound. You can only imagine with so many brutally murdered, raped, burnt alive, beheaded, and so many abducted.

To date, the *SA Jewish Report* has focused on stories that are connected to South Africa, but I believe that the more experiences we bring to all our readers, the more you can understand the depth of depravity of these terrorists. You can also understand why Israel is so determined to root out Hamas and make sure these terrorists are never able to do this or anything else to Israelis or anyone else again.

And it won’t be an easy war. You just have to look at how last night, a Palestinian Jihad missile aiming for Israel misfired and hit a hospital in Gaza and within minutes, the world was accepting the terrorists’ version that Israel was to blame. However, Israel had nothing to do with it, or the many lives that may have been lost in the blast. But for some strange reason, much of the media around the world is quick to believe the terrorists and not necessarily Israel. Israel is forced to prove its innocence.

Moving to South Africa, the bias is far worse. It almost feels as if we’re living on another planet, in which the general media seems to choose what it wants to portray about what happened in Israel. In fact, many have glossed over the massacre, the thousands wounded, and there’s no mention of the hostages at all. For the most part, the focus is on how savage Israel is being against innocent Palestinians.

South Africa’s minister of international relations and cooperation, Dr Naledi Pandor, however, has crossed a line that I don’t believe she can return from. In the aftermath of the massacre, she had a supportive conversation with a Hamas leader. Pandor, supporting Hamas is support for terrorism. Supporting Hamas is support for the wholesale slaughter of our people! What kind of person does this? How can such a person hold a position of power?

It was no surprise that afterwards, in a Radio 702 interview, Pandor concocted a scenario in which Israel was supposedly attacking humanitarian aid trucks and claimed Israel was preventing aid to Gazans.

For the record, Israel is the only country in the Middle East that follows humanitarian rules of war and is working closely with aid workers in Gaza. It has called on all Gazans to move south as the Israel Defense Forces are going to root out Hamas in Gaza City. Can you imagine if Hamas had considered doing that before it attacked Israelis on Saturday morning? It wouldn’t happen, but that doesn’t stop the minister cosying up to Hamas.

As for our president in his keffiyeh, he also ignored what happened in Israel for more than a week, rubbing our noses in our devastation. Not until after the South African Jewish Board of Deputies pleaded with him, did the African National Congress national executive committee come out and condemn the brutal killings by Hamas.

And as Israel comes out in retaliation against Hamas and more people die, those who have supported the Jewish state may not necessarily continue to stand by us.

But the truth is, as long as Hamas and other terrorist organisations are around, nobody is safe. Terrorists don’t care about anyone but their cause, and that could be in the United Kingdom, Denmark, Chile, or wherever. Until Israel stops Hamas in its track, ordinary Palestinians will never be safe. Would that our government realise this about its friends!

Shabbat Shalom!
Peta Krost



Ramaphosa’s anti-Israel venom a watershed moment

OPINION

ROWAN POLOVIN



In 2017, the African National Congress (ANC) infamously resolved to downgrade South Africa’s embassy in Israel to a “liaison office”. At the same time, Cyril Ramaphosa was elected president of the ANC. While regurgitating the ANC’s partisan rhetoric on the Palestinian conflict, he seemed personally disengaged from the issue.

In 2019, he praised Israel at a Women in Business conference, stating that Israel was “leading by leaps and bounds, and they are actually innovative in a number of sectors of the economy, in agriculture, in maritime, and in a number of other areas”. He concluded that South Africa “can learn a lot from what they [Israel] does”.

In May 2021, Hamas fired more than 4 000 rockets at Israeli civilians and the Israel Defense Forces responded with “Operation Guardian of the Walls” to protect the population from this terror onslaught. It was then that the ANC, led by Ramaphosa, decided to defenestrate Israel and the Jews.

The president, who previously enjoyed good relations with the South African Jewish community, including long-standing friendships and business partnerships, donors to his presidential campaign, and warm receptions at Jewish functions, decided he no longer needed us. Or, put another way, he decided that the ANC’s interests and his personal agenda were better served by turning away from us.



Rabbi Asher Deren blessing President Cyril Ramaphosa in 2018

During the 2021 conflict, Ramaphosa repeated the libel that Israel is an apartheid state on French television. He repeated the same calumny in his weekly presidential letter to South Africa. This gave the opportunity to Dr Naledi Pandor, the minister of international relations and cooperation, already patently antagonistic towards Israel, to greatly amplify her anti-Israel pursuits. She sent a department of international relations and cooperation (Dirco) delegation, at South African taxpayer’s expense, to North Africa and the African Union in Addis Ababa to campaign against Israel being granted observer status – while, of course, having no problem with despots and dictators, friends of the ANC government, having observer status.

After some private discussion, Ramaphosa appeared to moderate his own approach while enabling the palpably partisan Pandor to pursue her obsession against Israel and Israel alone in the community of nations, demanding that Israel should be taken to the International Criminal Court, repeatedly attacking democratic Israel at every possible opportunity, but never finding a dictatorship or evil regime she didn’t like.

Fast forward to October this year, when the Hamas terrorist cult engaged in a pogrom of biblical proportions, murdering more than 1 400 Jews, maiming, and injuring thousands, abducting scores, slaughtering babies, and destroying families forever. One would expect any government having the slightest modicum of decency and humanity to condemn the deliberate murder of Jews at a level of barbarity not seen since the Holocaust. One would hope that Ramaphosa, who has benefitted from personal connections with many Jews during his career, would empathise with the horror and shock of his Jewish citizens.

Indeed, Ramaphosa and his government did

express solidarity and support:

they supported the Palestinian terrorist killers and condemned their Jewish victims, particularly when the victims fought back. They did so knowing the South African Jewish community’s unbreakable religious and spiritual ties to Israel; its immense and incalculable contribution to South Africa; the employment of millions of South Africans through Jewish entrepreneurship and innovation; and the disproportionate numbers of Jews who supported the ANC in its struggle against apartheid. All of this was cast aside in an instant by Ramaphosa and his national executive committee members, who gathered outside their meeting last Saturday garnishing Palestinian keffiyehs and pledging their unyielding solidarity with the Palestinians who produced the monsters that burnt babies, raped women, and massacred young festival goers.

This, indeed, marks a watershed moment in relations between the South African Jewish community and the ANC. Pandor, transparently hostile already, has now been entirely unleashed. She once spoke out against an academic boycott of Israel, but now officially adopts the position of the antisemitic BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) movement, calling for a boycott of Israeli products in South Africa. Other government ministers now participate at events and press conferences wearing keffiyehs. It should be obvious how divisive this

behaviour is to the social fabric of South Africa, destructive to the unifying theme of the “Rainbow Nation”, and damaging to the religious and cultural groupings in this country. It should be obvious, too, that it encourages antisemitic behaviour, and the ANC government will be held accountable for it. Ramaphosa should be told that he is the president of a country, not just a party or

sectarian group.

Let’s be aware that appeasement has never worked as a strategy for Jews, and we’ll not pander to the ANC. The Jewish community must send a roaring message to the president and his ruling party. We’ll not be intimidated by antics that generate hate and division, even though we’ve been hurt and betrayed by them. We’ll never change our Jewish identity. We’re proud South Africans, and proud Jews and Zionists who unequivocally support Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish state and defend herself against evil. We stand with Israel, not because it’s easy but because it’s right. We’re a community of peace loving people that has a vested interest in the success of South Africa and encourages warm relations with all other South Africans. We’re nation builders. We’re strong, and have a rightful and proud place in South Africa. We’ve earned it. We demand the same protection under the same laws and Constitution as all other South Africans.

We need to encourage our Christian friends to stand up, stand with us, and exercise their voice. The ANC’s hostility towards Israel doesn’t represent the views of the majority of South Africans, and this behaviour won’t win it votes at the ballot box. A political party that obsesses with hatred against Israel should be voted out of power. History shows that any ruler with an unhealthy obsession about Jews or the Jewish state has rot in their moral fibre. If the ANC government believes that it’s different to those who hate the Jews and eventually perish, it’s sorely mistaken.

The future of South Africa depends on the future of Jews in South Africa. As a community, we need to fight for the right to this future. That starts right here and now.

• *Rowan Polovin is the national chairperson of the South African Zionist Federation.*

Pandor’s pandering to Hamas aligns SA with terrorists

TALI FEINBERG

“Beware, South Africa,” warned the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) on 17 October, in one of the most stark statements it has ever made. “According to Hamas, Minister [Dr Naledi] Pandor expressed support for its surprise attack on Israel in which Hamas

targeted civilians and took hostages. Minister Pandor has engaged with an Islamic Jihadist organisation and in so doing, has dragged our country into very dangerous waters.”

For this, South African Jewish leaders are calling for her to be fired.

“For the sake of South Africa’s credibility on the international stage, we would think that was the only possible option,” said SAJBD National Director Wendy Kahn.

At first Pandor, South Africa’s minister of international relations and cooperation (Dirco), her department, and Presidential Spokesperson Vincent Magwenya denied that she had spoken to Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh. Then they admitted that she had. And though an official statement from Hamas said she had expressed support for the 7 October massacre, Pandor insisted the discussion was only about South Africa sending aid to the Palestinians.

“There has been a massive flurry in diplomatic circles in South Africa and around the world, as diplomats across the board have expressed their shock that Pandor engaged with Hamas,” Kahn says. “Pandor needs to be held accountable.”

“It’s a disgrace to learn that Pandor phoned Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh and pledged South Africa’s support to his antisemitic terrorist cult that recently murdered more than 1 400 Jews in cold blood, injured thousands, and abducted hundreds,” said South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) National Chairperson Rowan Polovin.

“No amount of backpedalling by the South African government can undo the shame that Pandor’s extremist antics have brought upon South Africa,” he said. “The SAZF calls on Pandor to resign immediately, and apologise to the South African Jewish community for the hurt and shame she has caused.

“South Africa is one of the few countries to confirm publicly that it has had talks with Hamas since the war began,” reported BBC News Africa after Pandor admitted it. News24 reported that “top diplomats wouldn’t speak on

the record, but more than one expressed disquiet at direct state-to-state communications between South Africa and Hamas, and predicted it would complicate South Africa’s relationship with the likes of the United States”.

The Institute of Race Relations’ (IRR) Sara Gon notes that Pandor trying to explain away her conversation about providing aid “is a form of virtue signalling, because Pandor knows that the unfolding disaster is the fault of the very Hamas that she and her government support”.

Pandor’s conversation with the Hamas leader follows her department’s weak and uninformed response to the 7 October massacre. While world leaders and governments condemned Hamas’ atrocities throughout the day on 7 October, it took South Africa’s Dirco until late that evening to release a statement, which made no mention of the atrocities

that had taken place.

Then, on 15 October, in a speech at the III International Dilemmas of Humanity Conference, Pandor didn’t acknowledge anything that had happened in Israel just more than a week earlier. Instead, she focused on how she was “horrified when in 2021, the African Union issued an invitation to Israel to become an AU observer.” Totally ignoring Hamas’ atrocities, she went on to criticise Israel.

On 17 October, speaking on 702, she described Israel’s existence as the problem. Though she expressed condolences to Israel for the loss of civilians and the abduction of hostages, she justified the Hamas massacre, saying, “We recognise the desperation that leads to actions of this nature. I don’t know whether we can condemn it [the Hamas atrocities]. I don’t have sufficient information on who the responsible parties are,” she said.

She also said there was “deafening silence on the part of the Jewish Board of Deputies on the Palestinian question” and “to them, Palestinians don’t exist”. She then falsely stated that “Israel is preventing any aid from getting through, and is actually attacking humanitarian aid transport.”

Gon said Pandor’s conversation with Hamas

meant that “Western governments will note it, adding it to Lady R and Agoa as reasons why South Africa isn’t fit for investment.”

Even before Pandor’s Hamas call, the IRR warned that the South African government and the ruling party weren’t acting in South Africa’s best interest by siding with Hamas.

“The shameful silence on the atrocities committed by Hamas is tantamount to an endorsement of this barbaric atrocity, which has, perhaps not unreasonably, been described as a pogrom,” said the IRR in a statement.

“The implications of the ANC’s support for Hamas extend beyond the Middle East. By embracing Hamas, the ANC has aligned itself ideologically with similar Islamist terror movements across Africa which are inspired by the same worldview as Hamas. These movements are responsible for numerous atrocities in Africa, ranging from the burning of African churches to the murder of many African Christians,” the statement read.

“The decision to back Hamas is also likely to harm South Africa’s direct interests. For example, having just expended great diplomatic effort to repair its diplomatic relationship with the United States, the South African government’s effective siding with Hamas threatens to break it all down again. South Africans must now expect the United States to exercise closer scrutiny of South Africa’s trade ties and financial flows and anticipate the risk, which had seemingly just been averted, of

Agoa being cancelled.

“Any person or group that has played a role in hosting, funding, endorsing, or advocating for Hamas – designated a ‘foreign terrorist

organisation’ by the United States department of state – stands to be investigated at a global level regarding its terrorism ties,” the statement read. “In South Africa, this could include financial institutions that facilitated payments to Hamas, religious and public organisations, and political parties.”

The statement said the IRR would write to President Cyril Ramaphosa, asking him to explain what impact the South African government’s support for Hamas would have on South Africa’s greylisting and trade relationships; what tangible benefits, if any,



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Propaganda war equally offensive – just ask Vietnam

OPINION

TERENCE CORRIGAN



Hamas’ attack on Israel has prompted comparisons with past events, particularly with the 1973 Yom Kippur War. An equally compelling comparison could be made with a piece of history some remove from Israel’s. This was the so-called Tet Offensive during the Vietnam War.

Those with a passing familiarity with the Vietnam conflict might identify “Tet” as an apocalyptic defeat for the United States (US) and its South Vietnamese allies, even if by sheer weight of resources the US held on a few years longer. For many, that’s how it has passed into history. The reality is different.

On 30 and 31 January 1968, the communist underground in South Vietnam, the Viet Cong, backed by their North Vietnamese allies – or patrons, according to taste – went on the offensive, hitting military and administrative targets across the country, especially in its urban centres. Eschewing the guerrilla warfare that had frustrated their adversaries, the communists tried for a knockout punch. Essentially conventional attacks involving about 85 000 combatants hoped to disable the south, collapse its military, and incite a popular uprising. A new regime would then expel the Americans and prepare for unification with the north.

The offensive had been a long time in the making. Diversionary actions over the preceding year had lured American and South Vietnamese forces away from those areas targeted during Tet. It was timed to exploit the truce at the Lunar New Year – hence the name “Tet”, a truncation of the relevant Vietnamese term, Tết Nguyên Đán – when their enemies were at their least alert.

The initial shock was profound. In the capital, Saigon, critical facilities were overrun – one team even breached the grounds of the US embassy. The American Commander, General William Westmoreland, was described as “stunned that the communists had been able to co-ordinate so many attacks in such secrecy”.



Yet, within hours, serious defects in the plan became clear. The South Vietnamese army, of variable quality and mixed reputation, didn’t roll over but put up stiff resistance. The communists also underestimated the US’ ability to redeploy its forces within the country. And no uprising followed.

Within days, the offensive had been blunted. By 20 March, it had effectively been defeated. Two further “phases” were launched later in the year, to limited effect.

Tet was actually a stinging military defeat for the communists. The infrastructure of the Viet Cong was severely degraded, shifting the prosecution of the war increasingly to the North Vietnamese (some southern communists resentfully felt this was their northern comrades’ intent).

Yet Tet was a communist political victory. It established a narrative of communist Vietnamese resilience and American vulnerability, and that South Vietnam wasn’t worth fighting for – a photo of police general Nguyễn Ngọc Loan summarily executing a Viet Cong operative (himself, incidentally, accused of having murdered a family including a number of children) became a defining image of the war.

Atrocities perpetrated by the communists, though documented, received rather less coverage.

The resulting heightened American anti-war sentiment did much to destroy the presidency of Lyndon B. Johnson and had the US seeking an exit. South Vietnam ultimately ceased to exist in 1975.

Whatever may be said about Hamas’ atrocities, in purely military terms, it pulled off a complex operation with great competence. It succeeded in achieving surprise by creating the impression that it was focused on development and not on a confrontation, and breached the barriers around Gaza, before moving to the civilians beyond. Israel evidently didn’t see it coming.

But Hamas won’t prevail in any discernible military sense. Israel has steadily reasserted itself, and by the time this contribution is read, may have commenced ground operations inside Gaza. Israel will exist after the shooting stops, bloodied but intact.

The open question, mirroring the American experience at Tet, is the political cost. The Vietnamese sought a military victory but gained a political one, arguably a more enduring species. This is what Hamas has sought: demonstrating its own reach and prowess,

it seeks to sap Israeli morale.

Murdering and abducting civilians represents a part of this strategy. It brings little military advantage, but signals to Israel’s civilians their vulnerability and that conditions for life in the relatively successful country are compromised – expect this to be an issue in Israel’s politics. And the brazenness of its actions emboldens its supporters locally and, more importantly, internationally. Understand the value of the imagery from the attack in this light. A disabled Merkava tank and a Hamas commando paragliding into a music festival are evocative signifiers.

This in turn contributes to the Hamas narrative of valiant resistance to a militarily superior, but in its view, morally inferior oppressor. Add to this the collateral damage to Gaza, and Hamas may well draw a significant political dividend. In South Africa, this has been evident, from the response of the president down. The relentless invocation of terms like “settlers”, “colonialism”, “apartheid”, and “ethnic cleansing” are intended to frame interpretations, a tool arguably more powerful than guns and explosives. Indeed, the sight of crowds in countries generally friendly to Israel waving Hamas flags calls to mind demonstrators in the US and Europe in the 1960s with Viet Cong insignia.

Much will depend on which images and which narrative comes to define the conflict. It’s been said that the Vietnam War wasn’t lost in the jungles of Indochina but on the streets of Washington, with the spectre of Tet much in evidence. For Israel, the decisive front is less in Gaza than in the minds of people and policy makers remote from the fighting.

• *Terence Corrigan is Project and Publications Manager at the South African Institute of Race Relations, South Africa's oldest think tank, which aims to promote individual and societal freedom and prosperity.*

The nightmare of urban warfare

OPINION

DR DAVID BROCK KATZ



The prospect of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) conquering and occupying the territory of Gaza is daunting. Urban warfare is a costly, messy business at best, and can cause the ruin of an attacking army at worst.

Revisiting some of the city battles of the not-so-distant past helps one to understand the human and economic cost of such ventures. The German 6th Army ceased to exist when the Soviets surrounded and forced its surrender at Stalingrad in February 1943. The gruelling six-month street and building-to-building battles cost hundreds of thousands of casualties on both sides. Hand-to-hand encounters descended to barbarism, and an enormous cost in human lives was expended to gain a few metres of territory or recapture a building.

Recent history is littered with the bloody accounts of the desperate urban battles of Huế in Vietnam in 1968; Grozny in Chechnya from 1994 to 1995; Fallujah in Iraq in 2004; Mosul in Iraq from 2016 to 2017; and Mariupol in Ukraine in 2022. Most armies will avoid urban warfare whenever possible.

The IDF is no stranger to urban warfare, having battled in Jerusalem in the War of Independence and finally conquering east Jerusalem in 1967. The IDF also suffered a setback in the Yom Kippur War in 1973 when it attempted to occupy Suez city but was repulsed with heavy casualties. The IDF avoided all-out urban warfare in Beirut in 1982, when Palestinian Liberation Organisation fighters were deployed in the Palestinian refugee camps rather than the city itself.

In Operation Defensive Shield in 2002, the IDF temporarily captured most of the major cities in the West Bank. During the Second Lebanon War in 2006, Hezbollah effectively defended towns and large villages against the IDF for an extended period. The IDF was criticised in several quarters for having poor intelligence, being unprepared, ill-trained, and too reliant on air power.

Operation Cast Lead in 2008 was a 22-day IDF incursion into Gaza, in which only a small number of Hamas operatives were killed in an operation whose objectives were unclear. Further IDF operations into Gaza followed with Pillar of Defense in



2012 and Protective Edge in 2014, which relied heavily on air strikes while avoiding boots on the ground. Hamas has used its extensive underground tunnel system to avoid the worst of the Israeli air power.

The IDF, traditional manoeuvrists, possess a way of war that avoids needlessly expending lives in the pursuit of dubious victories. The receding prospect of conventional war since 1973 has resulted in the rise of asymmetrical warfare in the urban areas of Gaza, the West Bank, and Lebanon. Israel has had to become more adept at manning static defences and conducting a raiding strategy. These doctrinal changes are, in many ways, anathema to the Israeli way of war. However, the IDF hasn’t been idle on the doctrine side of urban warfare either. It built a 60-acre urban warfare training centre in southern Israel in 2005, accommodating an entire brigade at a time. It also came up with an extraordinary piece of what can only be described as post-modern military doctrine titled “Walking through walls” authored by an Israeli architect, Eyal Weizman.

“There’s no way of moving otherwise. If until now you were used to moving along roads and sidewalks, forget it! From now on, we all walk through walls,” it says.

The Israeli doctrine calls for the indirect approach of manoeuvring through buildings in the vertical and horizontal

plane by blasting through walls and floors and avoiding the booby-trapped streets and alleys where the enemy waits in well-prepared defensive positions ready to ambush an attacker. Therefore, one can be assured that the IDF has gained extensive combat experience and applied much intellectual thought to the doctrine of urban warfare.

What do the Israelis face in occupying Gaza and eliminating the Hamas leadership – their stated objective? Urban warfare is ambiguous and distinct from regular conventional war outside cities. It’s where civilians turn into combatants and back again, even several times daily. Unlike the attacker, those defending usually have the advantage of an intricate knowledge of the terrain they are defending. Unscrupulous defenders will use civilians as human shields and think nothing of expending civilian lives to gain a propaganda edge.

The battlefield is three-dimensional in its length, breadth, and depth. Combat develops underground, at ground level, and the heights of multi-storey buildings. Especially in asymmetrical warfare, urban combat overwhelmingly favours a relentless defender and levels the playing field. This is the preferred combat zone for the technologically challenged and less well-equipped, irregular force. The fog of war descends quickly in built-up areas, where rubble, booby traps, and ambushes await the attacker on every corner. Confusion rapidly breaks down command and control at operational level, making the co-ordination of isolated attacking units near impossible.

However, there’s the overlooked fact that Hamas may have lost up to 1 500 of

its elite militants in the initial attacks and mass murder of civilians on 7 October. If the numbers are correct, these would be the cream of the Hamas militia, specifically selected for their expertise and ruthlessness. The remaining Hamas defenders may not be as motivated to achieve martyrdom in the face of overwhelming Israeli firepower.

The civilian population of northern Gaza seems to have heeded Israeli warnings to evacuate the area. At the time of writing, about 60% of the civilian population is on the move. Hamas will be less effective if deprived of its human and hostage shields. But in any event, this won’t be an easy battle for the IDF or Gaza citizens caught in the crossfire. At the strategic level, time favours Hamas as every civilian death and each moment that passes in inactivity erodes the moral high ground that Israel momentarily occupies.

Does Israel possess the resolve to reoccupy Gaza in its entirety, and will it weather the storm of international criticism, coupled with internal challenges posed by the high casualty figures sure to result from this massive urban operation? More importantly, what’s the Israeli endgame? Permanent occupation isn’t possible, and Israel needs to provide a vision for a post-Hamas Gaza. The military will be able to buy enough time only for politicians to provide lasting solutions.

• *Dr David Brock Katz is a research fellow at Stellenbosch University in the faculty of military science. He has published three books and numerous academic articles dealing with aspects of South African military history and military doctrine.*

Is Hamas letter to SA a hoax?

STEVEN GRUZD

On 11 October, a letter purporting to be from Hamas to South Africa, started spreading like wildfire on WhatsApp, four days after the murderous Hamas attack on southern Israel from Gaza. Apparently issued by Hamas official Emad Saber from Doha, Qatar, it praised South Africans for their support of Hamas. The letter said, “Our glorious Palestinian people are showing remarkable courage in the face of hardship [sic] the merciless and genocidal attacks by the Zionist entity.”

I set out to discover whether this letter was legitimate or a fake.



The letter heaps congratulations on South Africans for their solidarity with the Palestinians. Here's a taste: “[To] know that South Africans, the people of Nelson Mandela, the people who have inspired us in our struggle, are on the streets expressing their support for our anti-colonial struggle inspires us and increases our determination.” It continued, “We ask that you, our South African brothers, [sic] and sisters, remain firm in your support, continue your solidarity as our situation gets more difficult, continue to protest, demonstrate, pray, and join your hearts with ours. And ensure that your ANC government too continues to support our struggle and champions our cause in the UN and other multilateral bodies.”

I sent the letter to Cayley Clifford, the deputy chief editor of the fact-checking service Africa Check. She said, “This is a tricky one. A typical dead giveaway is bad spelling and grammar. But the statement is well written. There aren't too many visual clues to go on. A reverse image search didn't reveal much and I can't find the statement elsewhere online ... All this is to say it looks like it could be legit, but I'm not 100% sure.”

Looking at the letter more closely, there is some sloppy punctuation. Clifford referred me to the Media Review Network, a notorious anti-Israel outfit. It has a different post by the elusive Mr Saber on its website, from 7 October, the very day of the Hamas attack. Titled “A Message from the Hamas office in South Africa”, this post uses copious religious language, mostly absent from the 11 October letter. For example, it said, “By Allah's grace, our brave fighters of the Al-Qassam Brigades, along with our Palestinian comrades, have taken action against the occupying Israeli Zionist forces in the sacred land of Palestine.”

The 7 October post said, “We're pleased to inform you that the resistance is working as a united force and has achieved significant successes on the ground.” It asks for support, prayers, and money from South African Muslims.

This post identifies Saber as “the official representative of Islamic resistance movement – Hamas South Africa”. There's little other trace of him online, except for some South African news sites that

quoted from the two letters – a self-fulfilling circle of legitimization.

Phillip de Wet at News24 wrote that “it appears to be fake”. He cited that the official website and Telegram channel of Hamas made no recent mention of South Africa, the last being a letter on 1 September expressing condolence for the large fire in Johannesburg's inner city, issued by Basem Naim, the head of Hamas' political and foreign relations department. De Wet also noted that the format and framing were atypical of previous Hamas statements.

Case closed. But in a webinar on 12 October, the vice-chairperson of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, Zev Krengel, publicly insisted the letter was real. When I asked why, he said, “If it was fake, the government should say so. They[ve] been quiet. Push our government to ask them if they have direct contact with Hamas.”

So, I asked Clayson Monyela, the head of public diplomacy at the department of international relations and cooperation (Dirco). “I wouldn't know,” he said. Here's the rest of the WhatsApp exchange:
Me: Any suggestions of who I could try?
CM: I have no idea.
Me: Is government likely to issue a confirmation or dismissal of this letter?
CM: Why?
Me: It's doing the rounds on social media and people want to know if it's genuine or not.
CM: That can't be our responsibility. We have no relationship with Hamas.
Me: The ANC has met and hosted Hamas in SA.
CM: I work for government.
Me: Isn't the ANC the ruling party?
CM: I'm done.

It's the old trick of the government saying its controversial positions are in fact held by the ANC when it suits it. An enquiry to ANC spokesperson Mahlengi Bhengu-Motsiri elicited no reply. Another contact at Dirco noted that there was no addressee on the letter, and it was found only on WhatsApp.

Unconvinced, I tried Suraya Dadoo, an activist in anti-Zionist circles. She promised to ask someone more in the know. The next day she replied, “I've found someone pretty credible to provide insight and verify that the Hamas letter is indeed authentic.” She sent me tweets from Na'eem Jeenah, the executive director of the Afro-Middle East Centre. He's hardly an Israel fan, or objective. Jeenah tweeted, “I spent some time making enquiries. I can confirm 100% that it's genuine. News24.com, interview Saber. To make sure he exists.”

De Wet confirmed he had contacted someone claiming to be Saber, who was unable to authenticate himself. Curiouser and curiouser, as they say in *Alice in Wonderland*.

Eventually, on 17 October, the president's spokesperson Vincent Magwenya tweeted: “Reports of the South African government offering support to Hamas are false. We do not have a bilateral relationship with Hamas ... Support for the Palestinian struggle against occupation does not equate to support for Hamas.”

When I shared my investigations with Clifford again, she said that in cases like these, Africa Check had an “unproven” verdict. “That is, publicly available information neither supports nor disproves the claim. When information hasn't been verified, it needs to be labelled as such.”

Why would both Krengel and Jeenah – on opposite poles on Israel – both insist the letter was legit? Because it serves both their purposes, to show closeness between South Africa and Hamas. It's sad that in South Africa, where our keffiyeh-clad president excuses Palestinian violence, such a letter could be quite plausible.

As the ancient Greek writer, Aeschylus, said, “In war, truth is the first casualty.”

World Jewish Restitution Organization

WJRO

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Perez family defies despair with wartime wedding

NICOLA MILTZ

It was a wedding ceremony like no other, at a time like never before. For a moment, all pain and anguish were set aside as a Jewish couple came together in unity amidst the turmoil of a war-torn nation.

The head of World Mizrachi, Johannesburg born and raised Rabbi Doron Perez and his wife, Shelley, cried tears of joy and sorrow during the moving marriage ceremony of their oldest son, Yonatan Tzvi, to Galya Landau in Israel this week.

Yonatan is still recovering from a gunshot wound to his leg sustained during battle against Hamas terrorists. His younger brother, Daniel, 22, is missing in action near Gaza and the family hasn’t had any word from him since he went missing on Shabbat on 7 October.

Daniel’s absence was felt deeply by everyone during the moving ceremony, which was livestreamed to hundreds of people far and wide as joy and happiness came together in a time of pain and distress.

There wasn’t a dry eye during the emotional performance of *Vehi Sheamda*, sang by none other than Yonatan Razel, the world renowned, New York-born Israeli musician. The song is a traditional Hebrew song sung on Passover about the survival of the Jewish people against all odds.

Reservists and close friends of the groom dressed in casual attire with their rifles draped across their bodies swayed to the

music and later danced the horas with vigour and *simcha*. Speeches during the ceremony were all delivered in Hebrew to the largely Israeli crowd. Addressing the couple, one attendee said, “We’re in the abyss. No-one can digest what we’ve been through over the past few days. We know that G-d’s spirit hovers over the surface of the water, that in this abyss, there’s someone who takes care of everything. What heroes! Tonight, we’re founding a new family, and that’s the biggest revenge of all.”



Galya Landau, Yonatan Perez, and Rabbi Doron Perez

Speaking as if Daniel were present, he said, “Daniel, dearly beloved, who knows that today is the wedding, we all know that he cannot be here today. *Bezrat Hashem* he will return to celebrate a huge party together with the bride and groom. I’m certain that wherever he is, he’s happy together with us.”

Another spoke about how the nation was busy creating a new holiday, “a holiday month of heroism, a month of unity, a month of bravery and co-operation”.

The wedding was a poignant moment of solace as guests temporarily set aside their grief and anguish to celebrate the union of the young and beautiful couple. This bittersweet respite came in the wake of agonising days following the harrowing terrorist attacks that has ravaged the holy land.

As the country held its collective breath, anxiously awaiting

news of missing loved ones amidst the backdrop of death, destruction, hostage situations, kidnapping, and chaos, the joy and hope that radiated from this extraordinary wedding was nothing short of breathtaking.

In the face of adversity, this courageous young couple bound themselves together for life, defying the darkness that enveloped their nation. While the country mourned and struggled to find solace, their love and commitment stood as a testament to the indomitable spirit of humanity. In a time of despair, they symbolised the enduring power of love and resilience.

As alumni of Yeshiva College, a letter was sent out earlier this week inviting the community to share in the celebrations.

“This *simcha* is close to all our hearts,” the letter read. “As a son of our community and alumnus of Yeshiva College, Yonatan is a shining example of everything we strive for. Sharing in the *simcha* is an opportunity for a much-needed moment of joy and light in the face of the current darkness. It’s an opportunity for us all to show our love and support to the Perez family.”

Earlier this week, Perez messaged the community, “Words cannot express how appreciative we all are for the outpouring of love, support, care, *tefillot*, and *mitzvot* you are all doing in the name of all of the wounded, the missing, and our precious Daniel. The WhatsApp messages mean so much, even though we don’t always open and reply, we scroll down and see your name, and it’s like a huge hug. So please keep them coming.

“Please keep the photos, clips, messages etc of all the *chesed* and *mitzvot* going because when Daniel comes home along with each and every hostage, we want him to know what *am Yisrael* did to get him and all the hostages home.

“We want you all to continue to celebrate your birthdays, anniversaries, Batmitzvahs, Barmitzvahs, *britot*, engagements and weddings with enormous *simcha*.”

‘Shame on you! Shame on you!’

NICOLA MILTZ

Criticising the South African government and ruling African National Congress (ANC), a deeply betrayed head of the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) cried out last Sunday, 15 October, “Shame on you! Shame on you!”

The words of SAZF National Chairperson Rowan Polovin echoed the profound disappointment and heartache of a well-attended Johannesburg solidarity rally following the heinous Hamas terrorist attack on Israel less than two weeks ago.

“From Haman to Hamas. From the death camps of Hitler to the dark tunnels of Hamas. The relentless drum of history continues to beat the raw, destructive hatred of the Jews,” said Polovin.

Describing the massacre as “a pogrom of biblical proportions”, he said, “The Hamas charter is the modern sequel to Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*. And like Hitler, it did exactly what it said it would do, given half the chance, to express its genocidal ambitions.

“I say this to those who have been trying to justify these heinous crimes, who rationalise that the slaughtering and abduction of innocent women and children in their homes is a legitimate reaction to some alleged policy of the Jewish state or her government. I say this to President Ramaphosa and the ANC leaders, garnishing Palestinian scarves and as they did, pledging solidarity to the Palestinians who murder Jews: ‘Shame on you!’”

What should have been the SAZF’s 50th national conference and a celebration of 125 years of active citizenry in South Africa was instead a vigil and coming together of a bruised South African Jewish community in the wake of the worst terrorist attack ever in Israel’s history.

Polovin said the ANC government continued to take sides with terrorists, dictators, and despots around the world, and against democracies.

“It doesn’t represent the majority of peace-loving South Africans, who support and sympathise with the holy land,” he said, thanking political parties who chose “values

over votes”, churches, civil society groups, and others who unequivocally condemned the unprovoked acts of terror and stood with the community and Israel.

“I want to tell the president and the ANC: you aren’t South Africa,” said Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein. “You don’t own this



country. It doesn’t belong to you. It belongs to the people of this great nation – 60 million South Africans – people of faith, dignity, compassion, morality. We reject the comments of this government. They are not in our name, and not in the name of its citizens.”

The day marked an historical turning point for South African Jewry, forsaken by the ruling party and government following images of death and destruction in the wake of the unprovoked 7 October massacre and an unrelenting barrage of rockets being fired from the Gaza Strip.

Goldstein said the government hadn’t found a tyranny in the world it didn’t support. In light of this, he said, “Your support for the state of Israel would be an embarrassment to us.”

He encouraged the community to be proud

and confident, protected by our democracy, the Bill of Rights, the Constitution, independent judiciary, and free press, without needing the endorsement of the government or the ANC.

“This is a battle between good and evil, between darkness and light, and the forces of democracy, freedom, and human dignity. Israel



must triumph, not only for Israel, but for every human being on this planet.”

The Israeli ambassador to South Africa, Eli Belotsercovsky, said Israel didn’t choose to go to war, it was imposed on the country.

“This war isn’t about revenge or retribution. It’s not retaliation, and not directed at Gaza civilians. It’s a war against terror, a continuation of the war against ISIS [Islamic State],” Belotsercovsky said. “Hamas can easily stop the suffering of the population of Gaza. It can free the hostages, it can stop the missile attacks on Israel, it can punish the perpetrators of the barbaric onslaughts, and invest in peaceful coexistence side by side with Israel. But Hamas isn’t interested in this. It openly and clearly declares that its aim is the destruction of the Jewish state.”

A tearful Rabbi Doron Perez, the head of

World Mizrachi, whose son, Daniel, is missing and whose older son, Yonatan, was shot in combat, addressed the crowd from Israel. Both sons were students at Yeshiva College where the gathering took pace. He described the South African Jewish community as “the pearl in the Jewish world” for its Yiddishkeit and connection to Israel.

In a pre-recorded address, Rabbi Leo Dee, whose wife and two daughters were killed by Palestinian terrorists earlier this year, spoke about how the recent attacks had galvanised Jewish solidarity across the world.

Dee, who was meant to be guest speaker at the event, said it was expected that only 60% of reservists called up would show up for active duty but in the end, 100% of reservists showed up and a further 20% arrived without even being asked to. “We’re starting a new world,” he said.

“What has been done to the people of Israel, particularly the children, is evil in its worst form,” said Patriotic Alliance leader Gayton McKenzie. “Hamas is a terrorist organisation. Hamas is the sister of Al Qaeda, of ISIS.”

He said it was “unspeakable” to stand with Hamas, who posted pictures of its savagery online. “I grew up in apartheid, and I can tell you Israel isn’t an apartheid state,” McKenzie said.

Representing Progressive Jewry, Michelle Campbell, an Israeli and the mother of three soldiers, two of whom are serving in the Israel Defense Forces, said, “We Jews have been here before. We have faced those who wanted to kill us, get rid of us, wipe us from the earth. And we’re still here. When Hamas attacked Israel, it didn’t ask who was Reform, who was Orthodox, who was Christian, who was a Jew, who was a Muslim. It didn’t ask who was a foreign worker, a soldier. It didn’t care.”

“Our strength is in working together,” she said. “We will mourn, remember, and then we’ll fight.”

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Mayor of Sderot, Alon Davidi said: "A ruthless and devastating wave of terrorist attacks have struck at the heart of our community, causing widespread destruction, injuries, and loss of life. Families have been torn apart, homes reduced to rubble, and our sense of security shattered. The scars of this horrific incident will be etched into our collective memory forever.

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Photos by Michael Huri, KKL-JNF Photo Archive.



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YEARS OF ISRAEL
JNFSA

Chief rabbi removes government from prayer for SA

STEVEN GRUZD

If you're in an Orthodox shul on Shabbat morning, you may notice that the prayer for South Africa sounds different. It has been rewritten by Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein in response to the South African government's public support for Hamas.

Now, Jews will pray for the people of South Africa, not the government. Goldstein spoke exclusively to the *SA Jewish Report* to explain the change.

The current prayer for the Republic of South Africa was composed by the late Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris in 1994. It reflected the country's transition to democracy, and beseeched G-d to protect and guide the president, the deputy president, and the ministers of South Africa with wisdom. It's recited before returning the Torah scrolls to the Aron Kodesh (holy ark).

This prayer has been changed once before, Goldstein said. "At the height of the state-capture years, [in the mid-2000s] and with very serious allegations against President Jacob Zuma, we adapted the prayer.

"It would be inappropriate to change an official prayer for the government just because you disagree with a particular policy," he said. "It happened in the [latter] Jacob Zuma years. We're still feeling the effects of the suffering inflicted on millions and millions of people – the entire population – through mass-scale corruption. It was something so deeply

immoral, that to continue to pray for a president like that would be a basic breach of personal integrity.

"And so, too, is it deeply immoral to pray for this government. The government gives Hamas support, verbal and moral, allowing it to operate an office within South Africa. It's just so immoral, the support provided to this murderous terrorist organisation that perpetrated the biggest killing spree of Jews in a pogrom since the Holocaust. How can anyone with any form of integrity pray for such a government under these conditions?"

"The open support for Hamas has been led by President Cyril Ramaphosa himself," Goldstein said. "It's untenable to pray for G-d's blessings for him. We can't pray for a government that supports Hamas, which in its charter and actions wants to murder Jews. We'll instead pray for prosperity and blessings for the people of South Africa. We want everyone in the country to thrive and do well."

Last Sunday, the chief rabbi addressed thousands – Jews and those of other religions – who had gathered in Johannesburg to



demonstrate their support for Israel. In his address, he made the important distinction between the government and the country, stressing that the current government had forgotten that it worked for the people of this country and that it was supposed to be there to serve them.

"In my speech on Sunday, I told it like it is," Goldstein said. "We're living in a democracy, and we don't depend on the goodwill of the government.

"[Changing the prayer] isn't a political gesture," he insists. "It's an action of principle because prayers require deep integrity and respect for values. Our siddur [prayer book] is so precious, it's a reflection of what Jews long for. To stand before G-d and pray, you really need to mean it. This isn't about political point-scoring; it's about right and wrong."

"We're not hiding the changes," Goldstein said. "It's a matter of integrity, dignity,

and honesty. An appropriate response in a democracy is the forceful articulation of ideas. It's not about whether we upset or don't upset the government. I've received so much positive feedback on my speech from South Africans of all faiths, colours, and backgrounds."

For Goldstein, the issue is more than Minister Dr Naledi Pandor calling Hamas this week; it's about the long-term support that South Africa has given to a body designated as a terrorist organisation by the entire Western world.

"We want this brought out into the open," Goldstein said, noting that the South African government has gone to bat for undemocratic regimes in Iran, Russia, and Zimbabwe, among others. "Our international relations are based on the support of tyranny. Hamas is the government's ideological brother in arms. It's like Islamic State, Al Shabaab, and Boko Haram. These organisations burn churches and murder Christians across Africa.

"South African Jews don't need to feel embattled. We need to be proud and stand up. We must be confident in ourselves," he said. "We need to appreciate that, even now, we're suffering from less antisemitism than our counterparts in other countries. There's tolerance and respect for diversity from the population of South Africa, if not the government. Our hearts are sore for the pain that happened in Israel. We must, however, be aware of increased security risks for Jews across the world."

When Jacob Zuma was eventually forced out of office in February 2018, the prayer reverted to Harris's original text.

On Wednesday, 18 October, the chief rabbi met online with Orthodox rabbis across the country to explain the changes to the prayer and the rationale behind them.

Supporters make a Ponte with Israeli flag installation

HANNA RESNICK

On Monday evening, 16 October, Ponte was illuminated in blue and white with the Israeli flag. It was short lived, not much more than 10 minutes, but it was long enough for many to take photographs and videos and post them all over social media.

It was one week after the massacre of 1 400 Israelis, the wounding of 3 500, and the kidnapping of more than 199 people, and South African Jews were still reeling from the shock. So the vision of the Israeli flag gave solace to many – if they believed it was real.

The illumination joined many around the world last week. Buildings and monuments around the world lit up in blue and white, as well as projections of the Israeli flag. Sydney's Opera House; the Eiffel Tower; the British parliament; the Italian prime minister's office; the White House; the Empire State Building; Berlin's Brandenburg Gate; the Bulgarian parliament building; and more displayed their solidarity with Israel.

However, mystery surrounds whoever was behind this illumination. Some claimed it was the SAJBD, others said it was youth movements or individual technology experts. At the end of the

day, it made people in the community feel good, and gave them something uplifting to discuss.

"Once again, our community has experienced an outpouring of support from so many sectors of South African society," said Kahn. "In spite of our government's appalling silence

at the loss of innocent Israeli lives, most South Africans were shocked by the brutality and callous actions of Hamas, and feel deep sympathy for the trauma of the Jewish state.

"South Africans from across civil society, the interfaith sector, political parties, and businesses have approached the SAJBD to express their shock and outrage at the massacre in Israel, and have sent their condolences to those who have lost loved ones. The Johannesburg skyline reflected the love and care we experienced from these people."



Many insisted it was photoshopped or fake news because there's obviously a lot of that around and, try as they might, they could no longer see it. But it was confirmed to be real.

"It was heartwarming to see the Johannesburg skyline lit up in support of Israel, a display affirming our understanding that the people of South Africa stand by the people of Israel, especially at this horrific time," said Wendy Kahn, the national director of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD).



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Cape Town Jews doubly victimised as antisemitism rages

TALI FEINBERG

Many Capetonian Jews woke up on the morning of Saturday, 14 October, grieving the atrocities committed by Hamas terrorists exactly a week earlier. On Shabbat, and at the very time that they were commemorating one week since the attack, they were greeted with heinous antisemitic graffiti in Sea Point, a suburb where many Jews live.

The Western Cape has experienced increasing extremism from the anti-Israel lobby since the beginning of 2023, ranging from the burning of Israeli flags to calling for the deaths of Zionists; protests outside a Jewish community centre that includes a shul; and openly expressing support for Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah and proudly displaying their symbols. A building in the Bo-Kaap area of Cape Town called BDS:Hamas on Google Maps, is flying a Hamas flag and has the words: "Hamas: From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be Free." The building is less than a kilometre from the Cape Town Jewish community's main campus.

As soon as Hamas unleashed its bloodbath on 7 October, this extremism flared in the Mother City. But such blatantly antisemitic graffiti hasn't been seen before. The graffiti lined up with the vandalising of a kosher store in London and the marking of homes of Jews in Berlin with Magen David stars, all in the wake of Hamas' terrorism which gave the "green light" for other acts of antisemitism.

"This morning was the Cape Town Marathon 10km race, and on our route, this is what we were greeted with," wrote

one community member on Facebook, sharing a photo of the word "Holocaust Oct '23" in red spray paint on a white wall. "The run was the '10km peace run', and sadly this is what we encountered on our peace run. Truly frightening." Another community member wrote, "How can this be happening now? This is taunting. This is terrorism. This is hate."

Two Israeli flags were painted on the seafront wall, one with the words, "I stand with genocide," and another saying, "Israel Est. Never" (Israel: established: never).

"Regardless of your views and beliefs, there's no justification for this kind of hatred, antisemitism, and acts inciting violence," said the Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies (Cape Board) in a statement. "We call on all South Africans to unite against hate, and work towards peace for each and every one of us."

Daniel Bloch, the executive director of the Cape Board, told the *SA Jewish Report*, "On Saturday morning, our antisemitism hotline was sent a variety of pictures. We appreciate the community sharing the information. We would advise everyone to message the hotline as a first port of call. Please don't post and share on social media, as all you're doing is giving the vandals more air time.

"We have a good relationship with the City of Cape Town. Graffiti is illegal. So, whether it's antisemitic or illegal graffiti, we report it to the City of Cape Town, to the various ward councillors in the areas, and their graffiti departments go in quickly and remove the graffiti.

"This was done on Saturday. We put the call out, and it was quickly painted over. Our thanks to the City of Cape Town for swiftly removing it. We'll continue to monitor the situation.

Unfortunately, we don't know who did the graffiti but we're looking to see what cameras are available in the various areas so we can examine the CCTV footage. If we're able to identify the culprits, we'll take appropriate action against them."

Ward Councillor Nicola Jowell said, "It cannot be that city infrastructure and public spaces used by all South Africans are defaced in this way." She said no arrests had been made.

In addition, extremists in Cape Town hosted a protest outside the main Jewish community centre in Cape Town on Wednesday, 11 October, shouting, "One Zionist, one bullet!" The campus includes a shul, a Holocaust museum, the South African Jewish Museum, a kosher restaurant, and a Jewish library. The protest was clearly designed to intimidate the Jewish community at a site that had nothing to do with Israel. Advertising for the event said it was at the "Israeli consular office". However, no such office exists there.

"The BDS [Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions] movement is again covering its real intent, which is antisemitism, discrimination, and hatred against the Jewish community by stating that it was coming to the Israeli consulate," says Bloch. "Because by doing so, they're trying to say that this is an anti-Israel rally, not one against Jews, but because there's no Israeli

consulate or embassy in Cape Town, they just renamed the building the Israeli consulate."

A much larger march to Parliament took place on Friday, 13 October, where some protesters wore Hamas T-shirts, waved Hamas flags, and arrived on motorbikes, imitating



Antisemitic graffiti in Cape Town

the Hamas terrorists who committed the massacre. Speakers, including Mandela Mandela, called for South Africa to end sports, cultural, academic, and other links with "apartheid Israel and corporations complicit in Israeli apartheid", and "declare the Israeli ambassador in Pretoria persona non grata and sever diplomatic relations".

"The apartheid state of Israel's embassy is no longer welcome in South Africa," said Mandela. He called on the transport minister to cancel the rights of Israel's national airline, El Al, to fly into the country, and called on Ramaphosa to support Hamas and "the Palestinian resistance".

Mandela told the assembly that "as long as the land of the Palestinians remains occupied, for as long as their rights are ignored and their dignity denied, [such] peace will remain elusive".

"We stand with you [the Palestinians] as we face the axis of evil, supported by the imperialist regimes and all those who support apartheid Israel and its war crimes, crimes against humanity, its ethnic cleansing in Gaza, and all over occupied Palestine," he said.

"Since last Saturday, there's been a number of rallies," Bloch says. "There has been quite a lot of SAPS [South African Police Service] and law enforcement in the area to make sure that everything remained peaceful. We work with the relevant authorities and security to make sure that people are protected.

"We also organised a peaceful community rally attended by more than 2 500 members, not just of the Jewish community, but friends of the Jewish community and friends of Israel. There were consulates, embassies, interfaith groups, religious groups, there were political parties, all coming to show solidarity with our community and Israel. That's just what our community does. We get together in times of need, we come together to pray, to comfort each other."

Bloch expects there to be more anti-Israel rallies in the Cape in the weeks ahead. "They will be all over. Please don't engage with them. We all have this need to express ourselves, to stand with Israel and speak out against terrorism, but we'll have more chances to come together as a community. For now, stay away [from anti-Israel protests], and we'll continue to update the community as much as possible.

"We are continuously monitoring and investigating acts of antisemitism, and encourage members of the community to report incidents of antisemitism to our hotline: WhatsApp 079 994 5573. You should also report any suspicious activity or potential threats to the Jewish community or communal facilities to the 24-hour Community Security Organisation control room on 086 18 911 18."

It's war at UCT, but Jewish students rally

TALI FEINBERG

The University of Cape Town (UCT) has allowed the UCT Palestinian Solidarity Forum (UCT PSF) to express its support openly for terrorist organisations Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), and Hezbollah since the beginning of this year.

And early in the morning of 7 October, UCT PSF wrote "the time has come" on its Instagram stories, fully endorsing Hamas' atrocities committed that day.

Since then, the university hasn't said one word as the UCT PSF has continuously backed Hamas, both on its social media and on campus. Its Instagram stories continuously express support for Hamas, while at the same time denying its atrocities as fake news.

UCT PSF members have paraded and displayed Hamas and Hezbollah flags on campus, and one video showed them handing out what appeared to be stickers with the Hamas icon to students on campus.

Chabad on Campus Rabbi Nissen Goldman says he went past a UCT PSF gathering on 17 October and asked as many people as he could to denounce Hamas. "None of them said they did. They said, 'Resistance by all means.' I'm not sure why anyone is surprised. We should believe people when they talk.

"However, what's maybe surprising – and you could even say unprecedented – is the way Jewish students have been coming together over the past week," says Goldman. "It's been the most beautiful thing to witness. In my seven years of Chabad on Campus, I've never seen Jewish students so proud, so strong, and so united as in the past week."

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report* in between printing posters of Israelis held hostage by Hamas to stick up on campus, South African Union of Jewish Students (SAUJS) Western Cape Chairperson Erin Dodo says, "It's been an absolute battle on campus. UCT PSF is incredibly radical, so it's difficult for students to feel safe when they know people are actively supporting Hamas." She says a couple of days after the Hamas attack, UCT PSF handed out doughnuts and sweets to students. "We were quite shocked as it was as if they were celebrating the atrocities."

She says every time SAUJS posts on social media in support of Israelis, it's trolled by extremists, saying things like, "You don't know if babies were beheaded", fighting what we know to be true.

UCT PSF also did this in its social media, sharing graphics that denied or made excuses for Hamas atrocities. One graphic showed Israeli soldiers with nappies on, with the

words, "Western media: Hamas terrorist slaughter and behead 40 babies!" and then "The babies are here" with an arrow pointing to the soldiers.

"It's been a grim time on campus," says Dodo. "A lot of



UCT Palestinian Solidarity Forum hosted a talk between students and Hezbollah representatives in September 2023

people haven't been going to campus because it's been such a dark and difficult time. But we're not afraid."

Throughout the year, the university has ignored the fact that UCT PSF was hosting terrorist guest speakers and displaying terrorist flags on campus. And, since 7 October, it has allowed the group's support of terrorism to continue to fester.

"I'm not surprised," says Dodo. "They have allowed UCT PSF to host talks, getting direct communication from these people, and allowed UCT to be a breeding area for this rhetoric. The university doesn't care. What we have been trying to show it the whole year has come to fruition. There's a real risk of people getting hurt, and it isn't doing anything about it."

She says SAUJS is "keeping everyone as safe as they can, ensuring that they feel like their voices are being heard" on all campuses. "At the moment, there's only one narrative, and we'll counter that."

She doesn't think people should be afraid about coming onto campus. "We can't bend to their intimidation. This is as much our campus as anyone else's. We need to have a strong and united front. I refuse to let our Jewish voices to be silenced. And if people rip down those posters of kidnapped hostages, I will put up five more."

Professor Adam Mendelsohn, the director of the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies at UCT, says, "Before 7 October, it was possible – at a stretch – to interpret the presence of Hamas flags at PSF events as misguided foolishness. Some students, after all, are drawn to militant causes. They could conceivably be ignorant of Hamas' appalling past. In an age of radicalism, doing so allowed them to play-act as resistance fighters. It need not be said that no such excuses

can be made any more for anyone who carries a Hamas flag or supports its messaging.

"In reality, as the PSF has radicalised, it has become a marginal presence on campus," he says. "Attendance at its events has been paltry. Many of the staff and students who previously orbited the group have drifted away. That might change in the next few weeks when Israel enters Gaza. UCT will need to think carefully about how to respond. There is a precedent – the notorious Flemming Rose episode [when the university chose to disinvite Rose because of fears that students could engage in violent protests against him] – for deciding that safety trumps free speech on campus."

Daniel Bloch, the executive director of the Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD), says "The Cape SAJBD is disgusted and shocked at the way in which the UCT PSF has openly lauded and celebrated Hamas' heinous, murderous attacks on innocent civilians. We're calling on UCT to condemn these terrorist attacks and stop the UCT PSF from openly celebrating and showcasing the work of terrorist organisations."

He says the Cape SAJBD engages continuously with the university. "We've sent emails, we've had meetings throughout the year, we've been talking to them about the display of terrorist flags, and have explained how the Hamas, Hezbollah, and PIJ flags are synonymous with or comparable to the Nazi flags, and how Jewish students in particular feel uneasy when they see these flags openly displayed."

To Jewish students and parents, he says, "Voice your concerns. You have the right to go to UCT, to go to the very top, and voice your disgust. If any student feels unsafe, they can report anything to SAUJS or the Cape SAJBD antisemitism hotline. We can also assist students to get mental-health support."

Meanwhile, Goldman says Jewish students have never been more proud of their Judaism. For example, "A student asked if we could say *tehillim*, so I put it in the group and 30 kids showed up. And then when we were finished, they were like, 'Same time tomorrow?' and I said 'Wow, okay.' And they haven't stopped coming, every single day. The boys want to wrap *tefillin*, the girls are asking for Shabbos candles. Students are putting up *mezuzot*. We're really seeing Jewish pride.

"Solidarity with Israel is skyrocketing," he says. "I've never seen it in my life before. We had an incredible solidarity Shabbos." He shared messages from numerous students expressing their gratitude that they could come together for Shabbat after such a difficult week. "And at Stellenbosch University, more than 40 Jewish students came together for a prayer service. They were lining up to give to charity, to do a *mitzvah*, to fight this war on the spiritual front. These kids are on the frontline, and they're showing up for duty."

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Burgers on the braai: SA *olim* rally to help

TALI FEINBERG

South African *olah* Lili Kovler, who lives in Jerusalem, felt paralysed with fear and sadness when in the wake of the 7 October massacre, her Israeli husband was called up to serve in the war. Kovler was 30 weeks pregnant, now 32 weeks, and she and her husband hoped he could wait until after their baby was born, but in the end, he had no choice but to join his unit. At first, Kovler didn't know what to do with herself and was in shock about the massacre and her husband having to leave her. But then she took a tiny step that changed everything and helped her to function: she decided to help others. It started with her husband saying that his unit needed more water. Kovler and her father-in-law put a plan into action to help them. That snowballed quickly into a massive effort to get food, gear, and essential items to soldiers. Kovler even joined forces with other *olim* to bake gluten-free goods for soldiers suffering from Celiac disease who had been unable to eat the food provided on the base. "I'm crowdsourcing and funding donations for all the needs of the soldiers," she says. "We work directly with the commanders and provide exactly what they ask us for. This can range from dry goods to first aid, toiletries, and basic tools. It's important to note that everything needs to be army approved, and we aim not to waste anything if it hasn't been specifically requested and approved. My father-in-law drives up and down the country all day to make the deliveries personally, and we have a network of young guys donating time to help us with deliveries." "It's hard to explain how I'm doing – this all seems so unreal and so sad," she says. But she's grateful to be able to do something to help, along with family, friends, and strangers. Kovler is one of thousands of South African *olim* reaching out to their fellow Israelis, and for many of them, it has been their greatest coping mechanism amidst the devastation and darkness the country has endured. "I'm an ex-South African living in Otef Aza [the Gaza-surrounding area] on moshav Talmei Yosef," says Sarah Fleisch. "Our moshav wasn't infiltrated, but they came within a few hundred meters of our gate. I came on aliya many years ago. We spent the first day of the Hamas attacks in our safe room with our four daughters and nine grandchildren, and my 89-year-old mother. On Sunday afternoon [8 October] all our children and

grandchildren and my mother evacuated on their own [without support from the government or army] and at their own expense, and they haven't been back since.



"My husband, who is ex-Zimbabwean, and I are still at home. People ask me why I haven't left. It's simple: here I can find things to do to help, like making food for the soldiers sitting in the moshav or doing their laundry – a minimum of four loads a day – or anything that keeps me active. If I leave, where would I go, what would I do? I'd be worried and anxious all the time, feeling helpless and useless."

Oleh Mathew Cohen, who lives in Tel Aviv, says, "On the first two days, I donated money and food to a restaurant in Tel Aviv where the staff decided to cook for soldiers. Afterwards, I found out about a shul in my area that was looking for volunteers. We've been helping to pack supplies for mothers and babies living in Sderot as well as equipment, food, clothing, and toiletries for soldiers going south. "It feels fulfilling to do something like this, especially after the depression and anxiety that followed Saturday's horrific attack," says Cohen. "Helping out felt necessary as we look to uplift our nation." "We're making 500 burgers a day, feeding the guys who aren't in base but in the fields," says *olah* Nicci Raz. She has joined forces with other South African *olim* in the Ra'anana area, drawing on their South African Jewish heritage of helping others at the toughest of times as well as their love of a good braai. "We got a call on Sunday morning [8 October] from one of the guys in the field saying that they hadn't eaten and asking if we could organise 500 burgers to be ready and delivered by 11:00," says Raz. "So we organised the patties and then a few South African families just took out their braais and started braaiing the burgers and packed them." Soldiers do get fed, she says, but "they are trying to keep up with the influx of volunteers and reservists. When you have an injection of 300 000 people to the front lines, it takes time to set up logistics. People all over Israel are supplementing with delicious food, cakes, and personal supplies. "Almost the entire country has galvanised a civilian effort to support both soldiers and those families affected. We're under direct rocket attack both from the south and the north, so while we're in the midst of this trauma we're also in the midst of this war. Our war is a war with Hamas. We're attacking it with a scope, intensity, and scale that has never been done before." Not only did Hamas massacre entire Israeli communities, it's waging war on its own civilians, deliberately putting the people of Gaza in the line of fire, Wahlhaus said. "All of its military operations and infrastructure is under the civilian environment. It's in homes, under mosques, at schools. They're firing from United Nations shelters and from hospitals – all well-documented Hamas practice." Instead of investing in its people and territory, Hamas puts all the resources it receives to developing terror, said Wahlhaus. The IDF is working to mitigate civilian harm in Gaza, yet these efforts are being thwarted by Hamas, which tries to prevent evacuations, calling on people to ignore IDF calls to move, putting up roadblocks, and potentially detonating explosives along evacuation routes. Israel has decided it can no longer have a threat like Hamas on its doorstep. It cannot exist, Wahlhaus said. "Imagine a week after 9/11, Americans wake up and Al-Qaeda is sitting a couple of hundred metres away in their backyard?" Yael and Oren Zeevi, survivors of the Supernova music festival, where 260 partygoers were massacred and many taken hostage, shared their story. A loving party set in nature, Supernova counts the sunrise as a festival highlight. "It's supposed to feel like a fairytale," Yael said. Yet, on 7 October, the fairytale turned into a nightmare when the music suddenly stopped. "Ours isn't a heroic story," she said. "We didn't come to protect our land or to save lives, we came to celebrate our holiday. We didn't understand what we were about to live." It took time to realise the gravity of the situation, that they were surrounded by terrorists in their own land. "They were all gunned up and we had nothing on us, all we had were

That's where communities are rallying." After their first round of burgers, they thought, "This is going to be a long-term thing, and everyone is trying to do what they can. Why don't we see if we can raise money and confirm that we can do 500 burgers for whoever needs them every single day? "That's what we did. Because they had to be kosher, we organised a restaurant in Ra'anana to give us their premises, and some volunteers came every day to help pack. We've raised enough money to do this for the next week, and we'll be doing it every single day. We hope to continue in the weeks ahead," Raz says. The mayor of Ra'anana, Chaim Broyde, even took time to join the initiative, now called "Burgers for the Frontline". Everyone pitched in, with children applying tomato sauce in the shape of Magen Davids. Kids also wrote letters of support to the soldiers, and Raz shared pictures of soldiers receiving the letters and enjoying their burgers in the field. "Every bit counts!" was the response from one soldier. Raz emphasises that this is just one initiative among many. "It's not only us, there are so many people doing incredible work. This is just one story. Every person I know is involved in something – no-one is sitting at home. They are either calling families to offer emotional or financial support, or they are collecting and buying the items needed. For example, my friend is a hairdresser. She went to a hotel to help ladies there that had fled their homes. It's incredible, I could go on all day. I thought I understood Zionism before, but the way the Jewish world has come to protect our home right now is astounding." 30 policemen with weapons," said Yael. "This Hamas army encircled us and got us running from place to place while they drove and slaughtered, also looking for people who were hiding and shooting them." It's only by chance that she and Oren survived, she said. "We're just really lucky to come back to our kids and tell our story from here and not sit in Gaza being photographed by terrorists." It came down to timing, not being surprised in front and not being kidnapped in the back. "I didn't look at anything," she continued. "I just trusted my husband to run and me to keep up." The couple ran within a crowd and hid in a tunnel, where they were shot at. "We have small injuries to our bodies but terrible injuries to our hearts," Yael said. After hours of fear and running and feeling that no-one would save them, the couple escaped in a car driven by a civilian. "It was pure evil, you could feel it. You don't have to see it in order to feel what evil is when it walks next to you," she said. Reflecting on what sparked such atrocities, Avi Mayer, the editor-in-chief of *The Jerusalem Post*, said that before 7 October, Israel had largely underestimated Hamas. "We all knew that Hamas had a genocidal charter that stated explicitly that its goal was the destruction of Israel and the murder of all Jews. Yet, for many years, people thought of Hamas as a terrorist organisation but one that could be reasoned with, one that really cared about the welfare of its people." After their horrific wake-up call on 7 October, Mayer said Israel was no longer under any illusions about Hamas being a terror organisation, one worse than ISIS (Islamic State) in many respects. "This was the worst massacre of Jews since the Holocaust, and the fact that it took place within Israel proper, that they were able to go relatively easily, compounds the shock and horror," he said, pointing out that there are clear indications that Iran wasn't just involved in planning this attack, but also in greenlighting it. Speaking of the potential long-term impact on Israel's government, Mayer said Benjamin Netanyahu's continued leadership was in massive doubt, with a vast number of Israelis holding him personally responsible. "Yet, no matter how difficult the challenges may be, we always emerge stronger than we were beforehand," he said. "It may be a changed, scarred, and traumatised society, but it will be a stronger society."

Biased SA government ‘insignificant in Middle East’

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

South Africa urgently needs to re-examine its response to the Hamas atrocities against Israelis, said panellists in the *SA Jewish Report* webinar, "Slaughter of the Innocents: Israel at War" on Sunday, 15 October. With updates from the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), survivor testimonies, and perspectives from key media and political figures, the webinar was a sobering reflection on the trauma Israelis continue to navigate. Arthur Lenk, the former Israeli ambassador to South Africa, said that he lived the deep connection between the Jewish community in South Africa and Israel during his four years in the country. Yet speaking of the immense support Israel has received from a massive number of countries including the United States (US), United Kingdom, and even Norway, he said that the South African government was a "stark exception in the international community." Speaking of the South African government's unequivocal support for the Palestinian people and lack of sympathy for its Jewish community, Lenk said he was disappointed but not surprised. "South Africa doesn't matter," he said, speaking of the role it potentially could have played in terms of brokering peace in the Middle East and sharing lessons of *ubuntu* and transformation. "Its relationship with the US, Europe, and with much of the world is problematic, and it's voice here in the Middle East doesn't exist." Yet our community shouldn't throw up its hands, he said, but engage with the government and South Africans at all levels. "We need to get out of our neighbourhoods and show up at ANC [African National Congress] meetings. Ask questions, write to newspapers, write editorials, and lobby for the things that are most important to us as Jews, whether it's Israel or anything else." IDF spokesperson Ben Wahlhaus said Israelis were seeing support from communities around the world. Israeli society itself, he said, was largely unified and resolute that the army must do whatever needs to be done. More than a week after the 7 October massacre, its full impact is yet to be determined, Wahlhaus said. "Every day, our soldiers are going through each of the towns where Hamas terrorists invaded and finding more bodies, some mutilated." In a country of nine million people, to have so many killed and kidnapped, each Israeli almost certainly knows someone who was directly affected, Wahlhaus said. The entire country was going through trauma and was now also impacted by the war, with 300 000 reserve troops called up in addition to the standing army.



Oren and Yael Zeevi

South Africa a safe haven for anxious olim

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

South African *olim* and their families are taking refuge in South Africa amid the turmoil of war. It's a difficult choice as they're grateful to have a place of safety, but torn about leaving the land they love.

"I never felt pressure to get out of Israel during any previous attacks, but this time the thought was there immediately," says Simon* a South African *oleh* who lives in Herzliya with his Israeli wife and their children. As they learned more about the massacre in the south, Simon decided that he had to get his family out. "My wife, Gita*, didn't want to leave her family, friends, and the country she's so connected to. We went back and forth, and eventually I decided to book for the following morning."

Though he'd booked a flight, Simon was almost certain it wouldn't happen. "Throughout the rest of the day, my feelings of helplessness grew," he says. "If anyone had to get to us, I had no way to protect us, nowhere to hide. Texts were pouring in from South African friends and family urging me to leave, my wife couldn't function, and my children didn't know why we weren't going out to play."

Though Simon was anxious about the drive to the airport the next day, the roads seemed normal, and their flight left as planned. "I feel guilty for running," he admits. "It's nothing compared to how my wife feels. She was raised in Israel, and served in the army. She didn't want to tell her friends. She was and still is too ashamed. She feels like she has let everyone and her country down. For the sake of my children, I didn't give her the choice. I was going to take them whether she joined me or not."

The couple is devastated to hear first-hand accounts of atrocities from Gita's brother in the army. "We cry together all the time, wondering what will happen to everyone and what will become of our home, but we're relieved that



we're safe and our children are happy," says Simon. "We don't know when we'll be able to return. South Africa has always been my home, and we're lucky that we have a support system here that we could come to."

Together with their three children, South African born Sarah* and her Israeli husband travelled from Israel to South Africa on 1 October for a family *simcha*. Though they were due to return to their Ra'anana home this week, they're now unsure when to fly back and are staying in Johannesburg. "I feel terrible that I'm here and not there," says Sarah.

"We have absolutely no idea what our plan is. We're in limbo. Is it going to get better? Is it going to get worse? Are they going to enter Gaza properly? Who is going to get involved? We just don't know. I would like to go back as soon as possible, but my friends in Israel keep saying

we'd be crazy to come back now." Her oldest daughter is in Grade 3 and is doing online classes. Most of her friends' families have gone to Europe to wait things out. "It's a mess. Everyone is trying to use Zoom to catch up on school work. It's like corona[virus] times four," says Sarah. "It's awful for all our friends like us who have young kids who had just returned to school from the holidays."

Yet, taking her kids back to Israel at the moment doesn't seem feasible. "My oldest daughter is terrified of the rockets," Sarah says. "About a year ago, when a barrage of rockets came, it was traumatising for the kids and we had to sleep in a bomb shelter." With his family living in unsafe areas, Sarah says her husband is a wreck. "I feel like I could do so much more. We both feel so guilty, and are constantly questioning whether we're doing the right thing. It's for our kids, but it's our home."

Though Sarah loves and is grateful to have South Africa, she says she's encountered antisemitism online and in person during her time here. "You don't feel it so badly until something like this happens. It just feels different here, I was wearing a Magen David necklace one day, and I got these looks, and then I realised why." Such incidents reinforce the need for Israel, she says. "It's one home for the Jews."

Having lived in the north of Israel for just more than two years, Gabi* and her two children, aged 11 and 13, arrived in South Africa on Monday, 16 October, for three weeks with a flexible return ticket.

"My Israeli husband is still there. He lived in South Africa for 20 years, but having grown up in Israel, he's more used to sirens." Though he booked tickets for his wife and children, Gabi's husband has remained in Israel to help his elderly parents. He's sad and anxious, but he

wants to stay, says Gabi. Yet, he was grateful to have the option of sending his family to stay with his in-laws in South Africa.

"I didn't feel scared for my life over there. We have a safe room in our apartment, so could go there if the sirens went off," says Gabi. "Yet, because we live quite close to an army base and there were helicopters flying around all

the time picking up soldiers and supplies, it was very tense."

In their area, the family have, in fact, experienced only one siren so far. It went off by mistake, but it frightened the children, who were scared to go out of their apartment. "They're quite calm usually, but this is the first time that they've had to deal with something like this," Gabi says.

"They were quite anxious." Her daughter's friend also lost a cousin who attended the Supernova music festival. "When you know people who know people, it makes the terrorist attacks scarier and more real. Two of our nephews have also been called up, so for my sister-in-law, it's traumatic having her sons going into dangerous places."

Gabi says it's been amazing seeing South Africans and Israelis coming together at this time. "I do feel a sense of relief being in South Africa, but I'm sad to leave my husband and worried about him. I also feel a bit guilty about not being there and getting involved, but I've got to do what's best for my children."

*not their real names



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Making aliya into a war

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Soon after touching down at Ben Gurion Airport in Israel on 15 October, 73-year-old South African *olah* Andrea Goldblatt experienced a traumatic moment when a siren sounded, warning of a nearby missile attack.

“I had to run from the immigration office to the stairwell, and take shelter. I stood there until the siren went off and it was all clear,” says the Cape Town-born Goldblatt, who had lived in South Africa her whole life until making aliya this week.

Goldblatt made aliya because she has no family in South Africa and her daughter, son-in-law, and two grandchildren live in Israel. “I’ve been deciding to do it for a while,” she says. “I finally realised that I do need to go sooner rather than later because I’m going to be 74 this month. What precipitated the decision to make aliya now was that I sold my house in Club Terrace [in Linksfield, Johannesburg]. If I hadn’t sold it, I would never have come now. You can’t leave a property and go.”

She felt sad getting on the plane, knowing she was heading to a country at war. “It wasn’t the elation that I should have felt. I was anxious about rockets possibly hitting the plane.”

Telfed Chief Executive Dorron Kline, says Goldblatt and another South African *olah*, who didn’t want to be interviewed or named, are the only South Africans who have made aliya since the war in Israel started. Goldblatt’s son-in-law and his friend welcomed her at the airport’s arrival hall alongside Kline and a volunteer, Paul Weinberg. The latter two had travelled to the airport from Ra’anana with fear of rockets overhead. They presented Goldblatt with a welcome pack, which included essential first-step information.

The other South African *olah* had stepped into the arrival hall of Ben Gurion Airport when the siren sounded. “We lay on the airport floor as I explained the absorption process to her,” Kline says. “A few minutes after the Iron Dome intercepted the missile, we stood up, took a welcome photograph, and continued our conversation.”

I HAD TO RUN FROM THE IMMIGRATION OFFICE TO THE STAIRWELL, AND TAKE SHELTER. I STOOD THERE UNTIL THE SIREN WENT OFF AND IT WAS ALL CLEAR.

Kline says Goldblatt was thankful that Telfed staff and volunteers came to greet her at the airport. “She was the first *olah* to receive an Israeli ID book at the airport since the COVID-19 pandemic. The absorption ministry is aware government offices aren’t fully functioning at this time, so it saved her a visit to the Ministry of Interior and presented her with an ID book at the airport. Both new *olim* are coming to stay with their families, so the excitement of family reunification is greater than

worry or fear.”

Goldblatt says it was incredible that a Telfed representative named Abraham – who ironically also met her children when they made aliya seven years ago – welcomed her upon her arrival at the airport. “I didn’t know what to do or where to go, but he whisked me through, took me straight to the office and did everything. At the office, I was given my *te’udat oleh* (immigrant’s certificate) and signed up for medical aid. I received my Israeli ID, a generous amount of money, and an Israeli SIM card. I was offered a taxi voucher to get home, but my son-in-law and a friend were coming to the airport.”

Goldblatt says everybody in Israel has been incredibly welcoming. Her daughter, son-in-law, grandson, and granddaughter were “terribly excited” about her joining them in Ra’anana. “They knew already a few months ago. They’ve been asking me to come. I wasn’t ready, but I’ve been to Israel twice every year since they made aliya.”

She feels relieved to be settled in Israel. “Now that I’m with them, it’s better than phoning every day to see what’s happening. I feel more relaxed. I don’t think it’s as bad in Ra’anana as in Tel Aviv or lots of other places. A siren hasn’t sounded since I got here, but we’ve heard them in Tel Aviv.”

She’s staying with her family for now, but will go to the Beth Protea retirement home as soon as it has space for her.

On Monday, she went with her family



Avraham Remeni, Paul Weinberg, Dorron Kline, Andrea Goldblatt, and Brett Stonefield

to a pharmacy. “There were people in the pharmacy, but nobody walking in the streets. I think people were a little tense.”

“We were proud of the Zionist Jews



making aliya during such a challenging time, and concerned that their absorption process would be much more complicated than usual,” Kline says.

Telfed will be there to help the *olim* adjust to life in Israel, especially given the ongoing war. “Telfed offices are open and functioning, although some staff members with young children work from home. The Telfed klita advisor is now in contact with the new *olim*, guiding them step-by-step with their absorption process.”

Asked if he would advise more people to make aliya while Israel is at war, Kline says, “If single people are coming to strong family support in Israel, then one can make aliya now. Otherwise, I recommend delaying aliya until the situation calms down and government offices reopen with regular visiting hours. Families with young children should consider delaying their aliya, as the school system isn’t yet fully functional, and warning sirens are very unsettling.”

Jewish jurists appointed acting judges of Constitutional Court

LEE TANKLE

Esteemed lawyers David Bilchitz and Matthew Chaskalson have been appointed acting judges in the Constitutional Court in 2024.

Bilchitz is professor of fundamental rights and constitutional law at the University of Johannesburg, and the director of the South African Institute for Advanced Constitutional, Public, Human Rights and International Law (SAIFAC). He has been appointed to serve as an acting judge in February and March of 2024. Chaskalson, the son of the late former Chief Justice Arthur Chaskalson, has been appointed alongside Bilchitz.

“I’m deeply honoured to have been appointed, and to be able to serve our country in that capacity. I hope to live up to the significant responsibility and faith placed in me,” Bilchitz told the *SA Jewish Report*.

The appointments cover for vacancies or for permanent judges who are on leave.

President Cyril Ramaphosa appoints acting judges on the recommendation of the justice minister, in consultation with the chief



David Bilchitz

justice and leaders of parties in the National Assembly.

The process begins with the Judicial Service Commission (JSC) preparing a list of nominees, with three names more than the number of appointments to be made, which is submitted to the president, who then makes appointments from the list and must advise the JSC, with reasons, if any of the nominees are unacceptable and any appointment remains to be made.

Should there be a shortfall if the president isn’t happy with the proposed candidates, the JSC must supplement the list with further nominees for the president to choose from.

It was through this process that Bilchitz and Chaskalson were appointed.

Bilchitz will be acting as a judge of the Constitutional Court alongside 10 other judges.

Since the Constitutional Court is the

highest court in South Africa, Bilchitz and his colleagues will decide constitutional matters and cases where there is an arguable point of law of general public importance.

The appointments have been criticised by the Pan African Bar Association of South Africa (PABASA), which congratulated the three appointed judges – Bilchitz, Chaskalson, and Advocate Alan Christopher Dodson, but said, “The appointment of three white males all at once sends a chilling and unfortunate message about gender and race issues in our judiciary and our country.”

The appointments suggests that the president, the minister, and the chief justice couldn’t find “even one able female and black senior practitioner to form part of the three significant acting appointments at the Constitutional Court”, PABASA said.

“The legal profession comprises some of the best black legal practitioners, including the most African senior counsel that argued in the certification [of the Constitution] case of 1996, the first African woman to be awarded the status of senior counsel in South Africa,” PABASA said.

“These otherwise excellent appointments may be tainted by the unfortunate implication about those who aren’t white. In fact, this act may have the effect of reinforcing sad historical stereotypes about women and Africans,” PABASA said. “We hope this was a genuine act or oversight or [due to the] unavailability of black and female professionals and academics rather than a cynical act from a deep-rooted inferiority complex.”

Time to raise your head above the parapet

If my parents were alive today, I would be in serious trouble. It wouldn't be for a phone call, but they would ask me when a good time would be to "pop past" to discuss something. I would be given no sense of the subject.

They would uncharacteristically arrive on time, and like the well-oiled machine they never were in life, would have my mother act as the diversion so that I would find myself alone with my father.

"Mom and I are worried." He would start. "I think you need to stop being involved in all this nonsense." He wouldn't have to clarify that it wasn't drugs, alcohol, or gambling. That it wasn't that I was cavorting with inappropriate women or neglecting my family. It was that I was drawing attention to myself. And as a Jew, that wasn't a good idea.

"You shouldn't be looking for trouble. I agree with what you're saying," he would say, and then would add some choice words in an array of languages just to show how much he agreed, but make it clear that I shouldn't be saying these things publicly.

As a Jew in a foreign land, I shouldn't be raising my head above the parapet.

The conversation would be like the one we had when I went to study at Wits (University of the Witwatersrand) when the struggle against apartheid was at an intense phase. They might have detested the racist system, but that didn't mean that I should put myself at risk.

Because Jews are a target. Always have been, and always will be. Just ask my murdered great-grandparents.

My late parents would be right. Just as they would be wrong. In the past 10 days, I have raised my visibility. I have defended Israel, I have called out blatant antisemitism, and I have called out politicians, media personalities, and so-called

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



human rights activists. And in return, I have faced online abuse that I have never faced as a Jew in South Africa.

Today, I reached an all-time Twitter (X) low when Carl Niehaus, the former spokesperson of the African National Congress, messaged me to ask if I believed all the "propaganda crap" that I repeat. Aside from thinking he was dead, being called out by the likes of Carl is something that I will have to live with for the rest of my days.

To date, although I engaged in Israel discourse, I tried to protect it from being my "brand". I didn't want to be the "Israel guy", and chose to write on it only when I felt it was important to do so. This changed following the 7 October massacre and the appalling reaction by many in South Africa.

My view is that the war that Israel is waging is one that has many fronts. It's not only in the north, the south, and the West Bank, but is being fought on a cyber front as well as on social media. I've never been a soldier given my flat feet, asthma, and fear of pain, but I can take up a sword in the form of a pen.

These are difficult times. They are scary, infuriating, and devastating. But they also provide an opportunity for each of us to stand up for each other, do what we're able to, and make a difference in any way we can.

Even if it means raising our heads above the parapet. And even if it means upsetting the living Carl Niehaus or our departed late parents. May their memories be for a blessing.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Missing moral backbone

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies has frequently criticised the South African government for its palpable anti-Israel bias, but the recent shocking response, not just by government spokespeople and the ruling African National Congress but President Cyril Ramaphosa himself, went beyond mere bias to all but justify the murderous actions of Hamas.

For a full week, our community waited in vain for our country's leader to condemn the barbaric murder of more than 1 400 Jews and convey his sympathy to our community at this time of great grief and trauma. Instead, there was a stream of statements from him, his government, and his party doubling down on their condemnation of the Jewish state and expressing unqualified support for the Palestinians.

The culminating insult took place on Shabbat, exactly a week after the worst mass atrocities against the Jewish people since the Holocaust, when Ramaphosa, pointedly wearing a keffiyeh, attended and spoke at a Gaza solidarity rally. International Relations Minister Dr Naledi Pandor, meanwhile, has gone even further, including calling for a boycott of Israeli products. Her cosy call to Hamas earlier this week truly crossed the bounds of all decency, and has shown the world the ugly truth of South Africa's hypocritical foreign policy in the Middle East.

It has required a change in response from us. In this week's *Sunday Times*, we took the unprecedented step of publishing a full-page open letter to Ramaphosa to convey the hurt, outrage, and overwhelming sense of betrayal our community is feeling at this time. Our letter pulled no punches, declaring that the stunning silence from the Union Buildings and the hostility of Ramaphosa's party, with its proud history of liberation from the repressive apartheid regime, amounted in this instance to complicity. In a filmed voice note that has since reverberated internationally, I reiterated the letter's essential themes, concluding, "Mr President, today you have joined a long list of people throughout history who

ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner



have justified the wholesale murder of Jews. As your citizens, we feel betrayed."

Since then, we have witnessed something of a shift from government. There has been at least some level of condemnation expressed for Hamas' hideous atrocities, however disgracefully late, qualified, and "balanced" by ritual denouncements of Israel it might have been. Our community can take some comfort from the fact that we live in a constitutional democracy where it remains possible to speak out in such strong terms against our government and at least receive some level of acknowledgement from it as to how we are feeling.

We remain very much in the trenches, fighting the fight alongside our allies in the South African Zionist Federation, South African Union of Jewish Students, and other organisations. In stark contrast to the government's reaction, we have been overwhelmed by the depth and breadth of the compassion and kindness shown by so many ordinary South Africans, who have reached out to their Jewish brothers and sisters in solidarity. They have helped to strengthen and energise us in our fight for truth and justice, a fight we know will be a long and bitter one as the tragic events in the Middle East play out in the weeks and perhaps months to come.

In the same way that we provide social, security, educational, and health services when our government fails us, so we will provide a moral backbone in the face of the government's shameful failure to stand by the democratic, humanitarian principles for which its predecessors fought. Our call now is for the world at large, South Africa included, to join us in calling for the release of the hostages. Let our people go!

• 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

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Photo: Facebook

Sadly, Mumbai's small Jewish community is currently in mourning after two Jewish brothers, Alan and Israel Vasker, who played for India at the Maccabi Games, drowned in a river in August.

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