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'We've run out of tears', says kidnapped couple's family

NICOLA MILTZ

It has been almost four excruciating weeks since South African born grandmother and nursery school teacher Aviva Siegel and her American-born husband, Keith, were kidnapped by Hamas terrorists and taken hostage into Gaza.

The loving couple were abducted from their home in Kibbutz Kfar Aza near the Gaza border following the most heinous massacre in Israel's history on 7 October.

as they and other neighbours were being kidnapped by terrorists.

"If you look on a map, they are close by. It's a terrible feeling to know that we cannot get in our car and go fetch them. They are so close yet so far," he told the *SA Jewish Report*.

"We try to remain positive and hopeful, that's all we can do, and we're doing everything in our power to bring them back. However, with every passing day, it becomes harder to remain hopeful, it becomes more dangerous, and their safety is compromised," he said.

Aviva, 62, was born Adrienne Kuritzky.

She grew up with her twin sister, Fiona Wax, and their younger sister, Sandy Feldman, in Randfontein on the West Rand. Their parents made aliya in 1970 choosing a simple, communal life on Kibbutz Tzora, where they forged ties with other recently emigrated South African families as well as Israelis and settled down. They led a simple, peaceful farming existence.

It was during those early years when Aviva met Sheli Siegel, also from Johannesburg. The two became close friends and married the Siegel brothers, Lee and Keith, who come from Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

"I know in my heart that Aviva is looking after those little children who have been taken hostage in Gaza," said Sheli Siegel, 64, who grew up in Northcliff.

"She will do this however difficult the circumstances. She has the biggest heart, and looking after children has been her life's work and passion for 40 years."

She described the situation as an "out-of-body experience".

"It's a horrible waiting game," she said.

Aviva's twin sister, Fiona, told the *SA Jewish Report* that if she could send a message to her sister, she would say, "Stay strong, look after yourself, we love you, and soon you will be united with your family."

"My sister is the warmest, most loving, kind person. She found life in Kibbutz Kfar Aza had become very

stressful because of the constant threats and missiles from Gaza. It troubled her," she said.

The Siegels raised their four children on the kibbutz, but most had left choosing safer neighbourhoods up north. According to the family, one of the children witnessed a neighbour across from them being killed by a rocket several years ago, which had been traumatic.

The Siegels were described this week as "salt of the earth, modest people" who relish the simple pleasures in life including visits to the ocean, spending time with family, and surrounding themselves in nature, often taking family camping trips around the country.

"Aviva has been a nursery school teacher for 40 years. She has helped educate hundreds of children, who love and adore her. We've had so many calls from the families of past pupils and children all waiting for her return," said Bar.

"Aviva and Keith do anything for their family. They drive cross country from the south to the north just to spend an hour with them. They encourage us to go on camping trips to be together as a family in nature. They live for their family."

He said the couple had visited South Africa together over the years and loved the Kruger National Park, the Garden Route, and Cape Town.

Kfar Aza was their special place, a sanctuary they'd helped establish over many years.

However, the peaceful haven had been plagued in recent years by frequent threat of attack from Hamas terrorists in Gaza.

"Even before the Holocaust of 7 October, they experienced regular rocket and missile attacks. One of their neighbours who lived across the street from them was killed by a missile attack. Living in that area comes with a price. However, nothing prepared them for this onslaught," said Bar.

Recalling the 7 October massacre, Bar said the family last heard from Aviva and Keith at about 10:30.

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In their sixties, the couple have four adult children and five grandchildren whose lives have been brought to a virtual standstill as they anxiously await news of their status. Each day is a relentless struggle to divert their minds from imagining the worst-case scenario, clinging to every thread of hope, said family members this week.

"We're in the dark. We don't even know if they are alive," said Yuval Bar, who is engaged to the couple's daughter. The Siegels were last seen by a neighbour

Standing his ground



Mayoral committee member for roads and transport, Kenny Kunene, made it clear that he stood with the Jewish community by donning a kippah and tallis at a Johannesburg city council meeting on 1 November.

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What can South Africans do for Israel?

LEE TANKLE

Hundreds of thousands have been displaced in Israel, many are dead and injured, and South Africans wonder how we can help.

The SA Jewish Report has the following suggestions:

WIZO (the Women's International Zionist Organisation) South Africa has set up an emergency fundraising campaign to send funds to Israel for the continued operation of its projects. WIZO South Africa has four centres countrywide – in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, and Gqeberha. Substantial funds have already been sent to Israel. WIZO has opened day care centres in hospitals in Israel so that medical professionals can leave their children there while they work. WIZO Youth Villages have taken in refugees, and emergency centres have been opened. Funds raised by WIZO South Africa will assist these projects.

WIZO Durban has assisted Durban-Israel Victims Of Terror Enterprises (DIVOTE) in packing care packages to send to Israel. And WIZO South Africa members countrywide are involved in a campaign to knit black beanies for soldiers in Israel.

To get involved, call +27 21 464 6700 or email wizosouthafrica@gmail.com

Elsabe Booyens helped start another campaign to knit for Israel in collaboration with the South African Zionist Federation and South African Friends of Israel (SAFI). She

had the pattern for an Israel Defense Forces-approved beanie, so she began knitting and spreading the word to anyone who could help. The Knit for Israel Project is a non-profit initiative that aims to provide warm beanies to those serving in Israel.

Knitters of all skill levels are welcome to share their talents with others. You can knit from home, join a local group, or start your own. Knit for Israel will provide the patterns, wool, and instructions how to drop off your items. You can also donate money or materials to support the cause. By knitting for Israel, you are creating something beautiful, as well as making a difference in someone's life.

To join the Knit for Israel Project, call SAFI on +27 11 645 2607, or email bafana@safisa.co.za or Elsabe on +27 76 406 2001. The pattern is available at <https://israelsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Knit-for-Israel.pdf>

So far, Knit for Israel has collected more than 170 beanies from the Chevrah Kadisha, and its community of knitters is growing.

Partners in Protection, an initiative created by the organisation Just One Thing, allows you to commit to 10 minutes of Torah learning a week in the merit of a soldier. The organisation believes that learning just 10 minutes a week can have a spiritual impact. Choose your schedule, pick a time that suits you, and the organisation will adapt to your availability. You'll be paired with an Israeli soldier

on the frontline "whose background, interests, and perspectives resonate with your own", the organisation says. "With each session, you'll discover commonalities, deepen discussions, and forge a lasting relationship built on mutual respect and shared heritage." To get involved, visit <https://www.sharejustonething.com/pit>

Candles4Israel is an initiative started by three Cape Town women, Karen Marsden, Carine Glass, and Leora Hassen, on 13 October, when Glass invited a group of moms from the shul to light candles with her. The initiative grew so quickly, in a week they were asked to host a big candle lighting session for which 400 women registered.


"We were lucky enough to have the Sefardi shul hall sponsor an event where more than 350 women came together to light Shabbat candles," said Glass. Following the success of this event, the women were asked if communities around the world could join the initiative.

"Carine has made it possible for people to implement this initiative in their own homes and communities," said Hassen. "We had a large community of candle lighting last week in which we had women from London, Canada, New York, Australia, Johannesburg, and Cape Town join in."

Candles4Israel has also been selling wristbands saying "Light for Israel", through which it has raised more than R50 000 for local and international charities.

To get involved, follow the Instagram page @candles4Israel, or email candlesforisrael@gmail.com

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Secret to our immortality



Rabbi Pini Hecht
Marais Road Shul

Revolutionary ideas are exciting. Those who act in accordance with these ideas are motivated and enthused, but when they lose their lustre, adherents fall away to their own detriment.

One of the most revolutionary Jewish ideas is the gift of Shabbat. This is poignantly expressed in the following Talmudic account, which tells the story of the first translation of the Torah into Greek, in the third century BCE. It says the translators, who were Jewish sages, made certain deliberate changes because they thought a literal translation wouldn't be understood by a universal audience. One alteration was made to the account of creation. The verse in Genesis reads, "On the seventh day, G-d finished His work of creation." They translated it as, "On the sixth day, G-d finished His work of creation."

They made this change because we would have expected the Torah to tell us that Hashem finished his work on the sixth day. Why indeed does the Torah say that Hashem finished his work on the seventh? Because, as our sages understood, there was an act of creation on the seventh day, but what G-d created wasn't material, it was rest, serenity, peace, holiness – the day of Shabbat. The sages realised that in a world that valued only incessant productivity, the Greeks wouldn't understand that the absence of physical work on the seventh day – sacred rest – was just as much a part of creation as tangible things like earth and oceans. Indeed, they branded Shabbat rest as laziness and a backward idea in which the Jew "wastes" one seventh of their lives. Ironically, for all the enduring achievements of the ancient Greeks, they eventually vanished from the world. Because civilizations, like individuals, will eventually collapse from fatigue.

The revolutionary gift of Shabbat is not only in the immediate spiritual, emotional, and mental benefits to us, our families, and our communities, but it's the single

biggest guarantee of our survival. As Ahad Ha'am, the secular Jewish philosopher, observed, "More than the Jews have kept the Shabbat, the Shabbat has kept the Jews."

In this week's parsha, we read how Avraham is chosen because he'll instruct his children in the ways of Hashem, and Rashi comments on the verse as follows, "We learn from this that whoever raises a righteous son is considered as though he does not die." Indeed, when our children live with the values and practices we impart, we achieve immortality.

I remember hearing from the American senator and vice-presidential candidate, Joe Lieberman, his motivation for Shabbat observance in spite of the immense challenges it placed on his chosen career.

He said that though faith and history prove Hashem's providence and assurance of Jewish survival, it remains a personal choice for each of us whether we and our families will be a part of that eternity. He was choosing to do what he could to ensure that his family remained a part of this eternal miracle story.

This Shabbat, we have a chance to unite with Jews around the globe in observing or enhancing our observance of Shabbat. It's an opportunity to reclaim the revolutionary spirit of Shabbat; emulate our father, Avraham, in sharing this gift with our children; and do our bit to remain a part of an eternal nation and achieve "immortality", an important and clear response to those who seek our destruction.

Torah Thought

Shabbat Times

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Never in the history of humanity has there been so much accessible information to see the truth, and never before have there been so many people refusing to see it!

Please note that clocks in Israel have moved

SA olah mourns death of son killed by Hamas

NICOLA MILTZ

Shoam Ben Harush, 20, had the world at his feet. He had one more year left of his compulsory military service in the Israel Defense Forces and was already planning a lengthy holiday with his friends upon completion. South Africa was one of the places on his wish list. He would travel to Cape Town to visit his 90-year-old grandmother, and show his friends all the wonderful sites where his mother, Martine (née Gordon), was born and raised.

Sadly, he was shot in the jaw on 7 October following an unprovoked attack by Hamas terrorists who infiltrated Kibbutz Kerem Shalom near the Gaza Strip where he was stationed. He died three weeks later from a fatal head wound after putting up a goliath battle in the Hadassah Ein Kerem Hospital in Jerusalem. His devoted family never left his side. He was visited by hundreds of people, from all walks of life, who travelled across the length and breadth of the country to pray for his recovery. Smiling photographs of him were displayed by his bedside allowing nurses and doctors to become familiar with him and treat him like family.

In life as in death, Shoam touched countless people, said friends and family this week. The agony of having to bury a son fatally wounded in battle is a sorrow no parent should ever endure.

“Our hearts are broken. We still cannot believe he’s gone,” said his devastated mother, Martine, 56, who attended Herzlia High School and studied zoology and marine biology at the University of Cape Town before making aliya in 1990. She visits her mother and close friends in Cape Town every year.

Shoam was described by family and friends as someone who loved being in nature, was a true friend and mensch, and someone who immediately drew people to him when he walked into a room. “My boy was beautiful inside and out,” Martine said.

During the week of shiva, the family received a steady stream of hundreds of visitors a day.

“People, some total strangers, would say, ‘You don’t know me but ...’ and then the wonderful stories would be told of how he had touched their lives, all before he turned 21,” said Martine, who is a high school English teacher and studied a Masters of Arts in Holocaust Studies at Haifa University.

From the moment news of his shooting

reached far-flung communities, prayer groups were set up and dozens of tehillim groups created, all devoted to his speedy and full recovery.

Doctors told the family that his healthy organs including his heart, liver, lungs, and kidneys had been successfully donated.

All that his parents and five siblings have left is a lifetime of cherished memories created by this special *neshoma* who “shone a light so bright” that hundreds of people showed up for his funeral in spite of an official limit of 30 people for security reasons. A human chain spanning about 2km followed the funeral procession, in which hundreds of mourners draped in the Israeli flag ushered him from the shul to his final resting place in Hispin. The procession stopped traffic, whereupon



Shoam Ben Harush

drivers got out of their cars and joined in the chain to honour him. So many of Shoam’s friends, many serving in the army, couldn’t attend as they were protecting the country’s borders.

A father who had lost his son in battle the previous week spoke at the funeral. He said Shoam had earned the nickname “everyone’s lucky charm” due to his infectious smile and unwavering positive outlook on life.

Shoam’s siblings not only had to bury their

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brother and “best friend”, some were also mourning the loss of several friends slaughtered during the attack at the Supernova music festival.

Recounting the fateful day when he was shot, Martine said the family was still piecing together fragments and snippets of information.

The observant family were celebrating Simchat Torah in Hispin and hosting family friends from Cape Town who had joined them for the holiday.

“We were at shul when we started to hear news of a terrorist attack in the south. In Israel, we hear this often and usually it’s speedily dealt with, so we carried on with *yomtov*. We had no idea how serious things were.”

At about 14:00, someone came to the house and told Martine’s husband, Ilan, that there was a rumour that Shoam had been shot. He wanted to confirm the information before telling her. Hours passed before he was able to get further information. In the meantime, the couple’s oldest son, Bar, 30, was called up to the Lebanon border. He left before hearing of his younger brother’s condition.

Information about Shoam’s shooting eventually reached the rest of the family, who learnt he had been seriously injured, evacuated, and airlifted to hospital. The siblings rushed to the Soroka Medical Center in Beersheba to find out more information.

Martine and Ilan drove three and a half hours from their home in Hispin to the hospital, reaching it at about 22:30.

“It was a scene of chaos. There were bleeding patients everywhere, it was a mess. We went from bed to bed, from ward to ward to try to find Shoam. There were so many anonymous patients, bleeding victims, we stood outside operating theatres with a picture of Shoam, asking the surgeons if they had seen him. They were so busy, they didn’t know who they were operating on.”

Eventually, the family travelled one and a half hours to the Hadassah Ein Kerem Hospital in Jerusalem to try to find him. They reached there at about 03:30, and found him. He had already been operated on for about eight hours. Doctors had successfully removed the bullet and were hopeful that he would make a full recovery even though it would be a long and painful process.

“We had so much hope,” said Martine.

Sadly, Shoam didn’t wake up. He had suffered irreversible brain damage. Top neurosurgeons around the world were consulted for second opinions, all confirming the family’s worst fears. For days, the family prayed he would make a miraculous recovery, relishing every minute they spent with him. They moved into a nearby apartment and took shifts at Shoam’s bedside at all hours.

“He looked so peaceful, we couldn’t comprehend it. We still believed there was a chance. We still don’t get it,” she said.

The family spent Shabbat in his room never leaving his bedside. They sang *Shalom Aleichem* with nurses and doctors who knew the words, and were visited by well-known musicians and celebrities, rabbis and friends.

“After some time, we were told we needed to start saying goodbye. Even now, I haven’t managed to. I still cannot imagine a world without him,” said Martine.

He died three weeks later on 26 October. The family ends shiva this week.

“It has been the worst time of my life, but we’re overwhelmed by the support, generosity, and outpouring of love from everyone and everywhere. There’s no place like this, we’re totally enveloped with love,” said Martine.

Two of Martine’s closest friends, ex-South Africans from Cape Town, Susan Shaff and Shelley Norwitz, have felt their friend’s pain deeply.

“We were friends in Cape Town before making aliya and have become like family having watched our children growing up and attending all their *simchas*. Shoam was special,” said Shaff.

“With all the darkness spread by Hamas, the world needs Shoam’s light to spread goodness and heal the world. He loved, and was loved,” said Martine.

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Genocide, libel, criminal charges – Pandor’s sour relations

STEVEN GRUZD

As Israel’s war on Hamas intensified this week, so too did the one-sidedness of the South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation (Dirco) against Israel and the Jews.

This time, it called on Israel to be tried internationally for the crime of genocide. It called for an international force to protect Palestinians. It also got personal, accusing Zev Krengel, the vice-president of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD), of lying.

Dirco’s statement, issued on 30 October, said, “Mr Krengel has repeated discredited information related to the beheading of children in Israel. This disinformation is part of the arsenal of dehumanisation tactics used to justify a ‘by any means necessary’ approach to dealing with Hamas, which has resulted in the huge casualties we see today. He also misled the South African public about the nature and process of Minister Naledi Pandor’s call from Hamas, and of her official visit as an envoy to Iran.”

Krengel told the *SA Jewish Report*, “Pandor has been exposed for who she is. She takes instructions from Hamas and Iran. She doesn’t mention a word about the hostages, including the South Africans being held [by Hamas in Gaza].”

The SAJBD retorted, “Minister Pandor, the beheading of Jewish babies is confirmed. It was documented by Hamas itself. The grotesque footage is readily available. However, the accusation feels reminiscent of Holocaust deniers requiring that the Jewish community



SAJBD National Vice President Zev Krengel with President Cyril Ramaphosa in April 2022

provide proof that six million really did die during the Holocaust.”

Dirco’s statement on 30 October said, “Israel doesn’t have the ‘right to defend itself’ using military means as Israel is an occupying power. This is a fact, not an allegation. It has been confirmed by the International Court of Justice. As the occupying power, Israel can use tools applicable to the rule of law, including policing powers to deal with criminal actions. An occupying state cannot exercise control over territory it occupies and simultaneously militarily attack that territory on the claim that it is ‘foreign’ and poses an exogenous national security threat.”

Then the statement gets personal: “It’s in the light of these atrocities that the unethical way (sic) the deputy head (sic) of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, Mr Zev Krengel’s, commentary on South Africa’s stance on this matter should be condemned ... Given the potential libellous nature of his utterances, more commentary on this will be done at a later

stage. It’s important to raise it as Krengel and the organisation on whose behalf he represented these views are out of step with the views of most South Africans

and people across the world. This includes scores of Jewish people in South Africa and across the world who have called out the actions of Hamas and the government of Israel.”

In response, the SAJBD issued a hard-hitting statement on 31 October. “Minister Pandor lashes out at the SAJBD, threatening us and one of our leaders. Why? Because we dare to challenge her. Hamas, in addition to brutally murdering 1 400 Israelis in one day, is currently holding 239 hostages. Instead of campaigning for Hamas to release these hostages, something that could make a ceasefire possible, Minister Pandor has attacked the South African Jewish community, singling out our vice-president, Zev Krengel. She accuses him of lying. This is an age-old antisemitic trope implying that Jews cannot be trusted.

“Dirco is clearly out of touch. The free world, including countless ordinary South Africans, recognise Hamas as an ISIS style jihadist organisation that needs to release the hostages and be held accountable for its crimes.

“Minister Pandor refers to a tiny, fringe minority of Jews, who she alludes to as the ‘good Jews’, just as the apartheid South African government paraded a minority of black South Africans who supported its Bantustan system. If her attack on the Jewish community is intended to silence and intimidate us, it will not work. Her communication with Hamas and her visit

to Iran would be laughable if it didn’t have such serious international implications and consequences for our country. Dirco’s twisted statement is as indicative of its contempt for its own Jewish citizens as it is reinforcement of her inappropriate support for Hamas.”

Krengel said that it was most likely an interview he gave on eNCA that put him into Dirco’s sights.

“I have been quite vocal,” he said. “[Pandor] feels nothing for Jews. She’s fully captured by the Islamic Republic of Iran [which she visited before flying to New York for the United Nations General Assembly] and the terrorist organisation Hamas [whom she spoke to by phone]. It’s disgraceful in a constitutional democracy to be attacked for challenging the government. She has hated-filled, blatant antisemitism. She doesn’t like people talking truth to power when her government has messed up. She has tried to mask her true intentions. She has never shown any sympathy for Jews. The government has chosen her to represent us on the world stage. It’s sad.”

He did acknowledge that some elements of the African National Congress have tried to be more balanced in recent days.

Krengel isn’t personally worried about this attack. “I live in a constitutional democracy. Intimidation won’t work on me.”

Citing figures from Save the Children, the Dirco statement deplored the killing of children in this conflict. The statement said: “All of these children killed since 7 October are non-combatants and those responsible for their deaths must be held accountable for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and in the case of the scale of the deaths in Gaza and increasingly in the West Bank, the crime of genocide must also be investigated.”

The statement also said, “The ICC [International Criminal Court] has charged Russian President Vladimir Putin with unlawfully taking children out of Ukraine to Russia. Consequently, the wilful killing of children in Gaza surely requires the ICC prosecutor to use his independent powers to initiate prosecutions urgently. Failure to do so will serve to exacerbate the growing cynicism that international criminal law is applied selectively for political purposes.”

Introducing a new element, the Dirco statement said, “South Africa also calls on the United Nations to deploy a rapid protection force to protect the civilian population from further bombardment.” How this could happen is left unsaid.

‘We’ve run out of tears’, says kidnapped couple’s family

>>>Continued from page 1

“We all knew they were locked in their safe room from early that morning. They told us not to call, rather to WhatsApp as they had been warned to keep quiet. They also said their cellphone was low on battery,” he said.

“Aviva sent us messages on the family group every 15 minutes saying they were fine. When things went quiet, we thought that the phone battery had died.”

They later learnt that they had in fact been taken hostage. They haven’t heard from them since.

Bar said the family stayed together during this time of distress. “Only together are we able to get through this,” he said.

The grandchildren, aged between four and nine, are heartbroken.

“When we heard they had been taken, the family sat around in

a circle and held hands. We tried to explain to the children what happened, that bad people had taken their beloved grandparents out of their home. It’s every child’s worst nightmare to be stolen by a bad person.

“They are very sensitive and pick up on our anguish, but we’re trying not to increase their fear. They make colourful drawings which we put on the fridge, we send text messages to their grandparents, and tell them we’re waiting for them to come home.

“Every day is hard. We’re together and try keep ourselves busy to stop sinking into terrible thoughts, which are difficult to get away from. I may sound emotionless, but it’s because we’ve run out of tears. They are the heart of the family. There is a huge, gaping hole, and we cannot continue without them.”

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Nelson Mandela Bridge makes hostage missing link

STEVEN GRUZD

Johannesburg woke up last Friday, 27 October, to big red balloons waving across the Nelson Mandela Bridge, which links Braamfontein to Newtown, but it wasn't a marketing ploy or an elaborate wedding proposal. Each balloon was attached to a poster of one of the 221 hostages being held by Hamas in Gaza since the 7 October terrorist attack on Israel. This number has now increased to 240. This audacious display of solidarity was to bring public attention to the plight of the abductees and call for their safe release.

I set my alarm for 05:30, and made my

The mission was to walk onto the nearby Nelson Mandela Bridge, which stretches over railway sidings and tape one balloon to each picture of the 221 hostages captured by Hamas. Their posters had also been affixed to the bridge in two-metre intervals by volunteers who got up even earlier than I did.

We had to work quickly to avoid being stopped by the Johannesburg Metro Police Department – there was a squad car in the vicinity. One of the volunteers burst out crying as she looked at the faces of the hostages, ranging in age from a few months to people in their eighties. Infants, children, youth, mothers, father, sisters, brothers, grandparents.

Each looking so full of life and love in their photographs. Each poster named and displayed a different hostage, gave his or her age, and said "On October 7th, more than 200 innocent civilians were abducted from Israel into the Gaza Strip. Their whereabouts remain unknown. More than 3 000 men, women, and children, ranging in age from three months to 85 years were wounded, murdered, beaten, raped, and brutally separated from their loved ones by Hamas. #BRINGTHEMHOME."

Setting up all the balloons took three trips from volunteers – in skirts, jeans, and sheitels – amid

photographers, videographers, and drones with cameras flying aloft. We had to avoid the balloon strings getting tangled. Pedestrians crossing the bridge saw the balloons and read the posters. One was so moved, she asked if she could assist in her lunch time.

Soon, 221 round red balloons were bobbing in the wind on the bridge. Johannesburg followed cities like Amsterdam and Melbourne that mounted similar displays to focus attention on the plight of these captives. This display came hot on the heels of the illumination of the well-known, roller-towel-shaped Ponte building in the Hillbrow skyline with the blue and white of Israel's flag a few weeks ago.

The balloons gave a lift to a despairing, embattled South African Jewish community, and demonstrated solidarity with the hundreds of families praying for the safe return of their loved ones from Gaza.

I asked Benji Shulman of the SAZF why it was important for him to be there. "It's now three weeks since the hostages were taken," he said. "The world wants to move on, and could forget that they are still being held. We have to remind the world that they are still captured. We have to remind the world that this issue still needs to be solved."

Of the choice of the site, Shulman said, "Nelson Mandela has frequently been appropriated to causes he didn't agree with. In his autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom*, he opposed terrorism. He would never have supported Hamas like this. Being at the Nelson Mandla Bridge symbolises that South Africans are opposed to extremism,

even if the African National Congress isn't."

Michael Kransdorff, the chairperson of the Jewish National Fund (JNF) of South Africa, was also sticking down balloons. "As the JNF, we're committed to support the people of southern Israel," he said, "and to bring attention to the fate of the hostages." He mentioned the empty Shabbat table with 221 places that would be laid out in front of KasherWorld supermarket in Glenhazel later that day. "We support all events that bring attention to the hostages, and call for their immediate and unconditional release," Kransdorff said.

Said Kahn, "Internationally, balloons have been flown to create awareness about the hostages being held by Hamas in Gaza. We wanted to find an iconic South African location for this campaign. It's also so meaningful to have the name Nelson Mandela attached to this South African

balloon memorial. This bridge is such a landmark in the city of Johannesburg.

"What has been moving has been the conversations with people walking by. You can feel the level of their empathy with this horror. We're hoping the campaign will go viral and bring greater awareness to this dire situation."

"Sticking up pictures of each victim made it very real for me," Kahn said. "There are very young children and very elderly people. I also have a dear personal friend, Vivian Silver, aged 74, who is one of the hostages."

The Nelson Mandela Bridge itself is in a parlous state – begrimed by graffiti, with several of its glass panels shattered, lying on the bridge, or entirely missing. It's a symptom of a slowly decaying, neglected inner city. It made a fitting site for the sadness surrounding the fate of the kidnappees.



Red balloons across the Nelson Mandela Bridge representing the hostages being held by Hamas in Gaza

bleary-eyed way to Beyachad on 27 October, where many Jewish communal organisations are housed, including the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) and the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF). A WhatsApp message marked "highly confidential" said secrecy was necessary as we had to handle this task as a "guerilla-style operation".

We set off into the early morning smog of the Johannesburg inner city in Ubers from Beyachad to Braamfontein. Once assembled, we were briefed by SAJBD National Director Wendy Kahn, a feisty, natural-born activist. A truck opened its loading bay. Each volunteer was handed two large red helium-filled balloons on a string tied to black weights.

Empty seats at Shabbat table bring horror home

LEE TANKLE

Few things could hit home the horror of the 240 hostages – mostly children, women, and the elderly – being held by Hamas in Gaza since 7 October as seeing baby feeding chairs at the empty Shabbat table in the heart of Glenhazel's shopping area last Friday.

Many came from far and wide to stand vigil for those captives who won't be enjoying a peaceful Shabbos meal with their families for the third week in a row. The crowds joined in as the haunting sound of Shmuli Brill rang out in singing *Lecha Dodi*; *Vehi Sheamda*; and *Shalom Aleinu*.

"On Friday nights, our Shabbat begins with a prayer of gratitude for peace, and we sit and enjoy our time together with those around us," said Howard Feldman. "When we look around, we see the number of people who aren't joining their families tonight. These tables are going to be empty."

Feldman read a tweet that he had received saying, "Hahaha. There were never any butchered babies. Palestinians are people of G-d. Israel stages photos and uses AI [artificial intelligence] to report fake news that the world has now caught up with. You are vile, you are pathetic, you are people of hell."

"I'm probably getting 20 to 30 tweets like this a day," Feldman said, "and what starts [online] ends with these empty tables. We're all shocked by the murder, the brutality, the kidnapping. What follows is hatred. We're shocked by the lack of support from our government and the people of South Africa."

"It's not just about fighting for the survival of the Jewish people, but the survival of peace, goodness in the world, and to bring back those who are missing," he said.

"One of the hostages, Ohad ben Kerem [Zechri], turned nine

last week. He was kidnapped from one of the kibbutzim around the Gaza envelope that the Jewish National Fund (JNF) visited a year ago to donate a bomb shelter to. There are nine cupcakes for him," said JNF Chairperson Michael Kransdorff.

South African Zionist Federation Chairperson Avrom Krengel said, "We look at table after table, chair after chair of our people who have been captured and can only be going through unimaginable hell. They have been captured by our enemies, the successors of the Nazis. They came across the border on one of our holiest days. They devastated our communities and mutilated our babies all in the name of hate and a desire to destroy the Jewish people."

"Our response is to show our love – our love for the sanctity of G-d, and our love for the state of Israel. Those who did what they did were allowed to do what they did for only one day because we have a state, we have an army, we have measures to protect ourselves," he said. "Today, Jewish life is no longer worthless."

Bishop Enoch Blaai of Shalom Tabernacle Orange Farm, representing the South African Friends of Israel, said, "We're crying for the lives lost, we're crying for the souls being

held against their will, and we're crying for the fighting that continues. We're asking G-d to intervene and bring peace to Jerusalem."



The empty Shabbos table set in Glenhazel for the known hostages being held by Hamas in Gaza

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver



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Friends and enemies

In Europe, people are painting blue Magen Davids on the walls of Jewish homes as a form of antisemitism.

A mob of hundreds in Dagestan, Russia, stormed an airport shortly after a flight from Tel Aviv arrived, looking for Jewish travellers. They were shouting antisemitic slogans and demanded to know which passengers were Jewish and which weren't. There were several injuries caused.

In Los Angeles, a man was reported to have been shouting "Death to Jews" while trying to break into someone's home.

In London, Jewish children were told to stay off the slide because they are "dirty Jews". Two Jewish schools had to be temporarily closed because of security risks, and Jews in the city are said to be nervous about being seen wearing Magen Davids and other Jewish symbols.

Over three weekends, there have been massive anti-Israel protests in London in which protesters called for a jihad and chanted, "From the river to the sea".

In Sydney, Australia, protesters called for Jews to be gassed. And there were similar chants at protests in the United States and Europe.

In Vienna, swastikas were daubed outside the Jewish cemetery.

The numbers of purely antisemitic incidents have skyrocketed around the world since the 7 October massacre in Israel. We're witnessing blatant antisemitism like nothing we have seen since the Holocaust.

It all stems from the day that more Jewish people were killed than any day since the Holocaust ended nearly 80 years ago. On 7 October, a day that will forever be imprinted in our collective memory, 1 400 innocent people were butchered by a Hamas killing squad, 5 350 people were wounded, and 240 Jews, mostly children, young women, and elderly people were captured and forced across the Gazan border as hostages where they are being held. In the attack, women were gang raped, babies butchered, and entire families were burnt alive. The depravity of Hamas knows no bounds in its determination to destroy as many Jews as possible, as is its well-known commitment.

You may wonder why I'm repeating what has been said in this newspaper for three weeks. Simple! There are people in power, journalists, the media, and leaders around the world who are questioning whether this really happened to our people in Israel. They dare to deny that it happened to us. Instead of condemning those who did this to our people, they accuse Israel of genocide and a Holocaust, using all the words that bring back the memories of what was done to our people within the past 100 years.

Right here in Johannesburg, at the Joburg City Council on Wednesday, 1 November, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) requested a moment's silence in honour of the Palestinians killed by Israel. The speaker of the house responded by saying that it should be in honour of all the innocents killed on both sides, Israeli and Palestinian. This seems fair enough, don't you think?

But the African National Congress and EFF representatives refused to rise for the moment of silence and, instead, chanted "Free Palestine".

However, Kenny Kunene, the deputy president of the Patriotic Alliance, had other ideas. To make his stand with Jews and Israel very clear, he went into the council meeting wearing a tallis and a yarmulke (as seen on page 1).

It's always good to know that while our enemies are out there, we do have friends. It's times like this that our friends become very evident, as do our enemies.

Even more important than counting friends is standing together in solidarity and making sure we're seen as and are a united front. It's vital that we work together and hold our own as a local Jewish community and a Jewish world.

This weekend is the 10th Shabbos Project, which it appears is going to be observed in about 100 countries around the world and 1 500 cities.

What an incredible way it would be to show solidarity for all of us to observe Shabbat together. I do understand that around the world, there are a large proportion of Jews who observe Shabbat every weekend, however there are many who don't. What could be more bonding than all of us – religious, secular, orthodox, progressive, young, old, haredi, and modern orthodox – dropping our barriers and committing to keeping Shabbos together? Not much, I don't think.

Being able to switch off our phones and find the peace and mindfulness of Shabbat can only help us deal with the stress and anxiety of what we're experiencing as Jews right now.

Instead of talking about war and the details of others hating us, we can discuss spiritual matters and uplifting issues. We can take our heads out of a war for 24 hours, which is probably the longest most of us will have managed since 7 October.

To be honest, we really need a hiatus from the storm. We really need to think of something that's not dire or devastating. We may assume that we're handling the trauma and that the Israelis are dealing with far worse. However, we dare not undermine our stress, fear, and anxiety. It's real and it's not healthy for us.

So much of what we're consuming on social media, in the mainstream media, isn't good for us, but being obsessive about it myself, I can totally appreciate that it's almost addictive.

One of my colleagues asked me how I felt about writing about the Jews who were killed and being held hostage when there were supposedly 8 000 innocent Palestinians killed by Israelis.

First, I don't trust any figures Hamas throws at us because it also said it was the Israelis who bombed the al-Ahli Arab hospital and killed 500 people. When it was proved wrong and shown that it was a missile that misfired, Hamas quickly changed it to a carpark and a few dozen people. Exactly.

Second, so much of the media is ignoring the plight of Jews and concentrating on the Palestinians, so our stories are important. I do, however, feel that any innocent lives lost is a tragedy, no matter who they are.

Am Yisrael Chai and Shabbat Shalom!

Peta Krost
Editor



Folly of viewing Israel-Palestine through SA eyes



OPINION

DR HUSSEIN SOLOMON

I've attempted to refrain from commenting on the Hamas-Israeli conflict, and failed.

As an older academic, I've learned to withhold my comments on fast-paced, ongoing developments since the full import of developments is unclear. The passing of time not only provides one with greater space for reflection, but with the fog of war clearing, one may also write without emotion and thereby arrive at a more objective assessment of the tragedy unfolding in the Middle East.

I have to admit that I learned this painfully first hand. In January 2006, I penned an article in *The Jerusalem Post*, embarrassingly titled "The death of Hamas". Writing in the aftermath of the elections for the Palestinian legislative council in which Hamas secured an impressive 76 out of 132 seats with a voter turnout of 77%, I naively wrote that Hamas would need to de-radicalise as it transitioned towards a governing party. It would need to revisit its 1988 covenant, which explicitly calls for the destruction of Israel. Politics, as opposed to resistance, is all about compromise, reciprocity, and flexibility. This, I argued, would entail the death of Hamas as a resistance movement as it attempted to govern.

I was wrong. Hamas didn't moderate. Neither did it really govern in the Gaza Strip. Reflecting on my failure, I realise that I approached the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through South African eyes. The African National Congress (ANC) as liberation movement was compelled to moderate its political and economic position as it transformed into a ruling and governing party. I expected the same of Hamas. But Hamas was never the same kind of organisation as the ANC. In fact, the ANC as a nationalist organisation, had more in common with the Palestine Liberation Organization, with Fatah, than with Hamas, which has its roots in the Muslim Brotherhood.

The announcement by Pretoria of its readiness to mediate prompted me to write this article since it was obvious that it was making the same error I made in 2006 when

initiated, the so-called peaceful solutions, and the international conferences to resolve the Palestinian problems, are all contrary to the beliefs of the Islamic resistance. There's no solution to the Palestinian problem except by jihad." How does the ANC reconcile its attempt to mediate or President Cyril Ramaphosa rushing off to Cairo for a peace summit, with Hamas' own stated positions? This effort to mediate is made worse by the likes of Israeli cabinet ministers like Itamar Ben Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, who hold racist and fundamentalist views. Any effort toward successful mediation is therefore dependent on the conflict parties' willingness to negotiate. There's no such willingness on either side.

There are other differences between the South African situation and Israel and Palestine. Consider here the regional context – specifically Iran and Hezbollah. Again, these aren't minor differences. The ignorance displayed by Pretoria's mandarins also highlights another important criterion for any potential mediator – intimate knowledge of the complexity of the conflict – something which the ANC clearly doesn't possess given its propensity to refer to the South African example. Another important criterion is the impartiality of the mediator. Given Pretoria's reluctance to be even-handed when approaching the conflict, it's hardly conceivable that Israel will accept Pretoria as an impartial interlocutor.

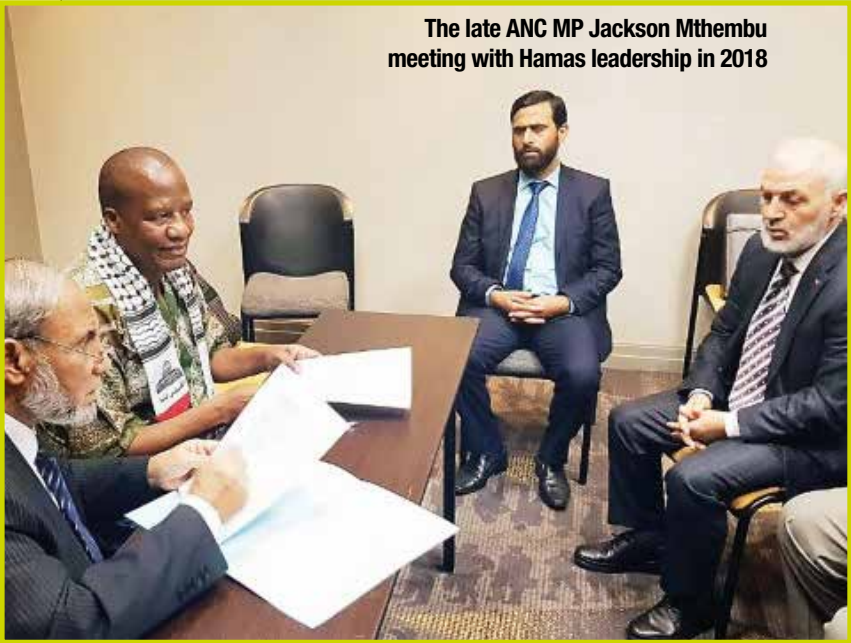
Perhaps more to the point, any potential mediator must have a proper understanding of its own capabilities and how it's perceived by antagonists and the wider international community. It's abundantly evident that Pretoria has an outsized opinion of itself. This is a government which cannot fix a pothole, keep the lights on, or get drinkable water into citizens' taps. This is a government which has gained infamy for its corruption and its inability to respond effectively to spiralling criminality. Such a government cannot project soft or hard power anywhere. Thucydides reminds us in his epic on the Peloponnesian

war 2 400 years ago that all states must adapt to their differing levels of power and capabilities. Failure to do so will result in ruin as the tiny island of Melos found in its dealings with the might of the Athenian naval fleet. As its failed peace efforts between Russia and Ukraine demonstrate, Pretoria's so-called peace efforts in the Middle East will be equally futile. I fear this effort on the part of Ramaphosa, like everything else he does, is entirely

performative. It doesn't really matter if any peace initiative takes off. He needs to be seen to be doing something.

Finally, there's the wisdom of Machiavelli, who 500 years ago reminded us that the primary responsibility of the ruler is to seek advantage and defend the interests of the state to ensure its survival. Frankly, I find South Africa's stance on Israel-Palestine as well as its foreign policy generally difficult to fathom from the perspective of national interest.

• Dr Hussein Solomon is senior professor at the Centre for Gender and Africa Studies, University of the Free State.




I wrote my original article. The difference between a religious organisation and a nationalist one isn't minor. While the ANC was committed to the 1955 Freedom Charter with a call for equality between all races and peaceful co-existence, the same isn't true of Hamas, whose Article 22 explicitly states that Jewish capital controls much of the world; that the Jews were behind the 1789 French Revolution; the 1917 Russian Revolution; as well as the two world wars. Moreover, the Freemasons, Rotary Clubs, and Lion Clubs serve as their spying agencies.

Article 13 of the Hamas covenant is an explicit rejection of negotiation, "Peace

A Shabbos moment to proclaim ‘Am Yisrael Chai!’

OPINION

CHIEF RABBI DR WARREN GOLDSTEIN



In the relentless, grim news we’ve been following every waking moment since 7 October, the only respite we’ve had, the only true moment of stillness, is Shabbos, a full 25 hours without compulsive doomscrolling and the stress of a world in turmoil.

It’s a day of connection to our Creator, to the most precious people in our lives, and to ourselves. We can actually hear ourselves think and truly feel our feelings without the intrusions of a noisy, demanding world.

It’s a day of experiencing the pleasures of real life, not its pale virtual facsimile. A day of walking, sleeping, singing, tasting, learning, praying, bonding, family, community. A day of loved ones around the Shabbos table with no-one running off to do errands, no-one distracted by a WhatsApp that must be answered, or a news flash that must be consumed.

As we all prepare to keep this Shabbos from sunset to stars out, I’m looking forward to the feeling of comfort and strength this divine day brings.

And yet, I think back to the Shabbos four weeks ago, when the serenity and sacredness of the day was shattered for the peaceful Jewish communities living on the Gaza border by terrorists filled with hate and savagery. It was surely no coincidence that they chose such a holy day to perpetrate their evil attack.

Because Shabbos is so much more than just a day of rest. It’s who we are. It’s the very soul of the Jewish people. The divine meaning of being a Jew. This war against Israel and the global surge of antisemitism it has unleashed isn’t about borders or politics. It’s about who we are and what we stand for, an ongoing attempt to uproot our eternal values and history, our divine mission.

With that in mind, this week’s Shabbos Project is an opportunity for us, the South African Jewish community, to proclaim to the world “*Am Yisrael Chai*” (the people of Israel live) by joining Jews in every corner of the globe to keep this Shabbos from sunset to stars out. A sublime moment of global Jewish unity. One people. One heart. One Shabbos. Keeping it together for Israel.

And while we do so, we think of and pray for the brave soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces, and all those involved in the war effort to destroy Hamas so that it can never again perpetrate the grotesque barbarism that shocked every civilised person in the world, and never again threaten the existence of the world’s only Jewish state.

Their Shabbos out on the battlefield, compelled by the primary Torah principle of *pikuach nefesh* – saving life – from keeping Shabbos in the usual way, is even holier than ours. In their gear, without the warmth of a family kiddush and meal, without the comfort of a restful sleep, without the joy of a table filled with laughter and singing, their bravery and self-sacrifice humbles us.

And so, as we enter the warm embrace of Shabbos this Friday at sunset together with Jews throughout the world, let’s pray for our brothers and sisters in Israel, and let’s take a moment to offer a

prayer of thanksgiving to our Creator for the precious gift of Shabbos, delivered to us with His love every week, as it sustains and holds us, comforts and inspires us, the way it has for all the generations of Jews before us. *Am Yisrael Chai! Shabbat Shalom!*

- *Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein is the chief rabbi of South Africa.*

Jews around the world keeping it together for Israel

SIMON APFEL

As South Africa gears up for this week’s Shabbat Project, with challah bakes in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban, and a raft of programming at shuls and schools, our community joins Jews in more than 1 500 cities worldwide preparing to “keep it together for Israel.”

“The barbaric attacks launched by Hamas weren’t about borders or political objectives, they target the very existence of the Jewish people,” said Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein. “It’s no coincidence that Hamas attacked on Shabbat. This year’s Shabbat Project is a call for every Jew in every corner of the globe to keep Shabbat. A sublime moment of global Jewish unity. One people. One heart. One Shabbat.”

Initially focused on celebrating the 10-year anniversary of the project, this year’s Shabbat Project is now devoted entirely towards strengthening and unifying the Jewish people in Israel and throughout the Jewish world.

In Israel itself, events are going ahead in spite of the war, with many taking place within the confines of bomb shelters.

community, and Nice, hosting more than a dozen city-wide events. Meanwhile, more than 6 000 Jews throughout the region will be participating in learning groups around Goldstein’s new book, *Shabbat: A Day to Create Yourself*.

In Latin America, organisers are anticipating record turnouts and reporting “unprecedented unity”, with challah bakes, Shabbat dinners, and havdalah concerts to be held under the banner “Stronger Together”. Panama has led the way, with families throughout the country paired for Shabbat meals, and countless Shabbat kits distributed.

In North America, the number of volunteer partners has swelled in recent weeks, with

hundreds of cities hosting events, among them Atlanta, where eight diverse shuls will set aside any differences and join together for a “unity Kiddush”; Boca Raton, where open-invitation Shabbat meals will be held in multiple apartment blocks; and San Diego, where innovative events including a Shabbat shuk and a Shabbat meditation workshop are expected to reach thousands of Jews across the political and religious spectrum.

Elsewhere, a community-wide Friday night dinner in Tokyo will be dedicating proceeds towards Israel, and, perhaps most remarkably, in Guadeloupe, an island territory in the Caribbean, the entire community has pledged to keep Shabbat in solidarity with Israel.



Jews around the world taking part in the Shabbos Project

NAVIGATING LITHUANIAN PROPERTY COMPENSATION

Insights from adv. Dainius Ambrazaitis

As someone deeply passionate about helping clients with Lithuanian-related matters, I often find myself discussing the Compensation for Immovable Private Property in Lithuania Program lately. This program is designed to provide compensation to Lithuanian Jews whose properties were nationalized or expropriated during the Holocaust and communist rule. Although my primary focus at IN JURE Law Firm is on *Lithuanian citizenship by descent*, I believe it's essential to share my insights on this topic to assist those seeking clarity and guidance.

Understanding the Compensation Program

The Compensation for Immovable Private Property in Lithuania Program is administered by the Good Will Foundation and holds significant importance for those seeking compensation for their lost properties. To help you gain a better understanding of this program, I would like to provide a brief overview and highlight its specific criteria.

1. Ownership of Property in Lithuania

To qualify for compensation, it is crucial that you, your parents, or your grandparents owned private property in Lithuania during the relevant historical periods. However, it's worth noting that land is not eligible for compensation under this program. You will need to

identify and provide detailed information about the property, including its exact location and any other pertinent details. Discovering such records from archives can be a challenging task, but it's a crucial step in the process.

2. Proving Nationalization

The second key criterion for eligibility is the need to prove that the property was nationalized by either the Germans or the Soviets during the Holocaust or communist rule, and it was never returned to your family. Establishing this proof can be a complex and time-consuming process, often requiring meticulous research of historical documents and records.

It's important to manage expectations regarding the compensation itself. This program offers symbolic compensation and should not be seen as a means to recover the full value of the lost property. The allocated budget for the program is relatively limited, ranging from 5 to 10 million Euros. This budget will be distributed among eligible applications, meaning that the compensation amount per applicant will depend on the total number of submissions. For instance, if there are 1,000 applications, the maximum compensation an applicant could anticipate would range between 5,000 to 10,000 Euros.

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Adv. Dainius Ambrazaitis
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In conclusion, when it comes to the Compensation for Immovable Private Property in Lithuania Program, it is vital to seek the assistance from Good Will Foundation. IN JURE Law Firm specializes in *Lithuanian citizenship by descent* and does not handle these compensation applications.

Israel’s five impossible options for post-war Gaza

OPINION

HARRY JOFFE



Though Israel’s leadership is focused on winning a war and ensuring that Hamas isn’t able to threaten Israel again, it’s important to start considering what Israel’s options will be in Gaza after the war is won.

Already, both President Joe Biden and Secretary of State Antony Blinken have been raising this issue in their talks with the Israeli war cabinet, and the last thing Israel wants is to win the war in Gaza but “lose the peace”. What are Israel’s options after the war is successfully concluded?

1. Re-occupy Gaza

This isn’t an option being seriously considered by anyone senior in the Israeli leadership but is simply being discussed for completeness. Israel cannot re-occupy Gaza for multiple reasons. First, having troops stationed permanently in Gaza would be a logistical nightmare. It would mean they would be permanently exposed, and casualties would be constant. Second, it would set back Israel’s burgeoning relations with the Gulf states and probably end the chances of normalisation with Saudi Arabia. Finally, if Israel were to occupy Gaza, it would be responsible for the territory. It would have to supply services – although it already does supply electricity – and govern the territory, which would be hugely expensive. Israel’s economy, already struggling badly from the effects of the war and having to fund reconstruction and probably stimulus of many small businesses after the war ends, would battle to cope with the extra expense of governing Gaza.

2. Leave Gaza to its own devices

This is the other extreme – Israel simply withdraws again after the war is concluded, without any structured solution. This also isn’t a serious option. It’s generally the case that the Middle East abhors a power vacuum, and



There will be administrative changes in Gaza once the war is over

if Israel were to topple the current leadership in Gaza and simply leave, it could be sure that a worse and more dangerous actor would take over Gaza. A good example here is what happened with the United States (US) in Iraq. Having overthrown the Iraqi government, the US eventually got tired of the costs incurred in money and lives, and simply withdrew the bulk of its forces. Before long, Iraq’s second biggest city, Mosul, was taken over by ISIS (Islamic State). Israel cannot allow something similar to happen in Gaza, and needs to ensure that stable leadership is put in place after it withdraws.

3. Allow a United Nations (UN) force to run Gaza

This also isn’t a viable option. First, the UN force has proven to be totally unsuccessful in policing and securing the Lebanese border with Israel. Second, not many UN

countries would be happy to send their troops into the area. Finally, it would take too long to create a UN force to do the job even if the will was there. A case in point is how long it has taken the UN to send a force to Haiti, which is a far less divisive issue at the UN than Gaza. After a year of debating, the UN has finally agreed to send a force to Haiti, which appears to be further delayed by local opposition in some of the countries, like Kenya, that are providing the bulk of the force.

4. Let a regional force rule Gaza

This is unlikely to happen. No country in the region, even those who have diplomatic relations with Israel, will want to go into a war zone, with a hostile population, and do Israel’s police work for it. None of the countries in the region want to be responsible for Gaza, and for them even to consider it, there would have to be some credible and stable administration in place first for them to support.

5. Bring in the Palestinian Authority (PA)

This, although not ideal, appears to be the only viable solution. It unfortunately also comes with a host of problems. First, the PA have said many times it won’t be brought in to rule Gaza “on the back of an Israeli tank”. It would leave it with no legitimacy at all in the eyes of the local population. Second, it’s not clear that it’s capable of running Gaza, even if it wanted to. The PA is widely

seen as corrupt, incompetent, and sclerotic, and is barely able to run the major cities in the West Bank, an area which is far more advanced and better off than Gaza will be after the war. In fact, without the support of the Israeli army, it’s likely that the whole PA administration in the West Bank would have collapsed already. Running Gaza after the war is over won’t be an easy task for anyone, and the PA is unlikely to want to or be up to the task of doing so.

This isn’t a problem with a simple solution, which is one of the main reasons why successive Israeli governments have been so reluctant to go into Gaza and remove Hamas as the ruling force in the past, no matter what the provocations were. This time is obviously different, and Israel has been left with no choice, but it will still need to have some viable plan for post-war administration of Gaza.

It will have to make option five work, as there’s simply no other credible alternative, but this will entail some deal and concessions to the PA. It will also have to work hard to try bring in some regional Arab force and money to support a PA administration once it’s in place. If enough funding can be brought in to support the rebuilding of Gaza and a regional force deployed to assist in maintaining security, it could smooth the way forward, but no-one should be under any illusions that this is going to be an easy task.

• Harry Joffe is a Johannesburg tax and trust attorney.

Victim shaming in vacuum of condemnation

OPINION

GILAD STERN



In the battle for public opinion, us Jews do so much better when we are dead or dying, slaughtered, mutilated, beheaded, kidnapped, and humiliated. So, with such grievous losses on 7 October, Israelis and Jews had a brief moment of international sympathy.

Condemnation of the brutality and inhumane treatment of Israelis at the hands of Hamas poured in from all over the world. There was virtually nobody in public life on earth who didn’t express sympathy with the Jews, condemnation of Hamas, and solidarity with young people slaughtered at a peace festival, and convey their abhorrence of civilians being butchered in their beds, and babies burned alive.

Actually, that’s nonsense. There were plenty who didn’t say a word of condemnation. Top of that list would be the appalling scene of the president of the African National Congress (ANC) and the top body of the party donning Arab regalia and holding Palestinian flags in a gesture of solidarity with the Palestinians.

The unspoken message was, You people – Israelis, Jews, Zionists – have brought this attack on yourselves because of the way you have behaved. Talk about victim shaming and gaslighting! If the president of the ANC and South Africa had been even-handed and had condemned both sides for attacking civilians, I could have easily lived with that. More than lived with that – I would affirm and embrace that formulation. But it was not to be. One side had to be castigated and blamed. And that was us.

Lots of other groups and sectors in this country haven’t said a word of condemnation about Israel’s grievous loss of civilian life. I won’t write a list of those who are silent, but think about it yourself – where are our civic and religious leaders at a time like this?

They are absent, and will probably remain absent until there are sufficient civilian casualties in Gaza to allow them to make statements condemning Israel, with a nod to even-handedness thrown in for good measure.

Zapiro, the brilliant cartoonist, was at a loss in the first week after the massacre, showing a blank canvas with a cartoonist’s supposed dilemma of who to condemn. I could live with the supposed even-handedness of not taking a stand. But by 20 October, Zapiro had found a villain – the prime minister of Israel appears in the cartoon, flying a warplane emblazoned with a Star of David, dropping a Star of David decorated bomb on Gaza civilians with a maniacal smirk on his face. Oh, and if you’re wondering where and when the cartoon appeared with an ironic depiction of Hamas atrocities against Jews – it didn’t!

One of the most jarring things for me was reading an article on 22 October by the deputy editor of the *Sunday Times*, Makhudu Sefara, who wrote an article castigating Israel. The content was pretty standard stuff: overwhelmingly anti-Israel, victim blaming and shaming. But there was this nugget of even-handedness:

“The killing of Israeli civilians was brutal, unnecessary, and is deserving of all the condemnation it has received. The perpetrators should be found and made to face consequences for their actions.”

It’s a sentiment we can all agree with. But how exactly does he suggest that “the perpetrators should be found and made to face consequences”? Who will find them? Who will make them “face consequences”? The words are so gratuitously vacuous, that one can merely shake one’s head in disbelief.

As to the endless bleating of those virtue signallers who keep reminding Israel and all of us that they are against Israel incurring civilian casualties in Gaza, do they imagine that we need their pious reminders? Do they think that there’s anyone significant in Israel’s defence establishment who doesn’t want exactly the same thing: a way to stop the missiles and secure the release of more than 200 hostages, while at the same time doing everything possible not to injure non-combatants? We all want precisely that.

Israel isn’t vaguely the country that some depict it to be: bloodthirsty and keen to cause Palestinian civilian deaths. That’s for two reasons. One is that it’s a dastardly and immoral thing to do – to kill or hurt non-combatants. But second, it’s not in Israel’s strategic self-interest. It inevitably brings bad public opinion.

The depiction of Israel as bloodthirsty is actually a racist trope. People are people, and most sane people in the world abhor violence and oppression. The idea that one nation or ethnic group loves violence and delights in civilian casualties is as unthinking as it’s racist. Israelis and Palestinians are not inherently evil, violent, or warlike. Violent people on both sides are the reprehensible ones. We should condemn warlike people, not entire nations and ethnic groups.

So here we are, Israelis were slaughtered on 7 October, and then Israelis are repeatedly condemned for causing their own slaughter and then further condemned for attempting to defend themselves. For many Jews in South Africa, it’s totally perplexing.

• Gilad Stern is a management consultant and a mountaineer. He lives in Cape Town.

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As the war between Israel and Hamas rages on, the SA Jewish Report asked South African olim in Israel to give their personal stories about how their lives have changed in the past couple of weeks.

Our nightmarish new normal

PERSONAL STORY

ILANIT LIBERMAN



How do you put into words the atrocities we've witnessed as a nation, a people, a country over the past three weeks? There simply are no words. On 7 October 2023, my country, my home changed forever.

When the news broke, we were in South Africa for Sukkot, visiting family, and usually we don't check our phones if we're staying with family who are keeping two days of the *chag*. For some reason, both my husband and I were compelled to do so this time as South African Jewry celebrated Simchat Torah. We had no idea what we were about discover.

I remember saying to my husband jokingly as my phone turned on, "Let's see if the world is still standing, shall we?"

Our world was shattered. Hand over mouth, I stood in disbelief as I saw the images and read the horrific and barbaric stories filtering through. The depraved monsters of Hamas had done the unspeakable, the unthinkable. My husband held me in his arms as the non-stop tears flowed. What were we reading? How could this have happened? So many dead! We said, "Never again" after the Holocaust, but "Never again" just happened on our own soil. The blood of our brothers and sisters soaking the holy ground of Israel.

Disbelief, shock, tears, anger. This was now our nightmarish reality. And yet, somehow, we made it to my sister for dinner that night. We tried to hold it together. I hugged my nephews tighter than usual. More tears.

The next morning, my husband woke me gently. "I got a call up. I have to go home. I need to ask you something though: I know you want to come back, but I need you to stay here, with your family, your support system. They're sending me to the frontline, and you can't go back to Beersheva alone. There are still terrorists [in the Negev], and the rockets are non-stop. For me, please, I need you to stay here so I can have the *menuchat nefesh* [calmness]

that you're safe, far away from all this, while I do what I need to protect our country. Please do it for me."

My heart shattered again. The tears started again. It was the hardest decision we'd ever had to make. He made plans, got on the plane, and went back to fight for our Israel. I remained behind riddled with guilt that I wasn't going back to be with my people. But I kept getting the same response from so many people as I questioned the decision, "You're where you need to be right now."

As I thought back on the situation, I remembered how for weeks, I'd had a bad feeling. I kept telling my husband, "There's something wrong, something in the air." As a former reporter who'd covered the flare-ups with Israel and Hamas numerous times, the random riots that suddenly started before the *chaggim* on the Gaza border made no sense to me, and Hezbollah's "thorn-in-our side" actions over the past few months made no sense either. I told my husband that I felt like something bad was about to happen. He attributed it to the fact that we'd just watched the *Golda* movie, and I was on edge from that.

Among the fear and worry for my husband and the country, I haven't stopped thinking about the Gaza border communities. The many wonderful people I'd met there over my almost five years as journalist in Israel. How they would open their arms up warmly to invite me into their homes when there were flare-ups or terror kites/balloons



and rocket attacks. Kfar Aza, Kissufim, Kerem Shalom, Netiv Ha'asara, Nahal Oz, and once, a short visit to Beerli. All beautiful, all "slices of heaven". On good days, the calm, which residents would say "is most of the time", was something special. Now so many of these families are broken and destroyed, murdered in their sanctuaries. Peace and tranquillity in these communities reigns no more. I once asked a resident of Kerem, "What keeps you here, especially when things get so tough?"

Her response was, "If we don't stay here, who will? We're the buffer zone between Hamas and Israel. It's not always easy, but this is our normal, and we love it."

The past few weeks have been anything but simple. For many of us, we're living through a nightmarish daze. Just trying to get from one day to the next without completely falling apart. Sleep continues to evade me as I worry non-stop about my husband. Just the other day, he called from the frontlines and in

the middle of the conversation, I heard a massive explosion, then rocket sirens, and the call just ended. I panicked. I ran to my mom and sat with her, devouring an entire slab of chocolate to calm my nerves. About 10 minutes later, my phone buzzed again – "I'm okay. We just had an incident, and I needed to get to cover. I'm sorry for scaring you."

He called back soon after that message. He wasn't able to say what had happened for security reasons, but I found out later in the news. And the reality set in that this was going to be my world, our world, for who knows how long. I know that I'm not the only one going through this. So many are in the same boat.

But one thing's for certain. I know wholeheartedly that G-d is with our soldiers, our people, and our nation. We may never understand why this happened, but we'll continue to fight against Hamas, a despicable enemy. It won't break us. We'll win and we'll prevail. I say with a whole and strong heart: *Am Yisrael Chai* – the nation of Israel lives.

- *Ilanit Liberman worked as a reporter for nine years, both before she made aliya and thereafter. She now works at an international communications and public relations company.*

The day the world changed

PERSONAL STORY

GEORGIA DANIEL



We were winding down after a week's vacation in Berlin over Sukkot, returning on Friday, 6 October, starting to get back into the work frame of mind to tackle all the projects we had mostly ignored over the *chaggim*. The following day, the world as we know it changed for good.

Early Saturday morning, on 7 October, we heard there were sirens in the south – nothing we would normally get too worried about. After an hour, I turned on Channel 12 to see it was broadcasting from the news studio – a really bad sign for a Saturday morning!

People from the kibbutzim around the Gaza border were calling into the station saying they were trapped in their homes and there were terrorists outside shooting. They phoned the TV station because they were getting no response from the police or army. Later, we learned that the army was repelling terrorists at its base, and the police were dealing with an attack on the station in Sderot.

The news anchors were beside themselves, and tried their best to calm the callers, who were calling from safe rooms and whispering on the phone, all while trying to keep themselves together. No-one had any real idea of the devastation that was unfolding.

By 08:30, I woke my kids up. My son was home from the navy for the vacation. He checked his phone to find that he was called back to base immediately. My husband had to drive him back to Haifa from Jerusalem.

As the day progressed, absolute horror began to unfold. It took about two days to get a clearer picture, and the initial fog of shock began to wear off.

The horror was something we would never have believed imaginable. "Never again" had happened again!

I won't go into all the details of the atrocities committed by the monstrous terrorist-jihadists. We've all seen and continue to see the nightmarish evidence.

I'll tell you how it touched us personally. Israel is a small country, therefore everyone knows someone who was killed/harmed in the attack. Three boys from my daughter's primary school class – they are now all in their early 20s – were murdered at the Supernova music festival. My daughter's first funeral was a double funeral to bury two of her old classmates – how does she process that?

My friends and family all have children who are either in the army or are reservists, so we parents, wives, children wait in anxious limbo to see how this awful situation will progress.

Our children are on the frontline preparing for whatever comes next. This doesn't mean that we just sit and wait at home. What's amazing in times of war in Israel is how the country unites behind our soldiers and

does absolutely everything it can in whatever way possible to help. From bringing food and toiletries to soldiers on the border, to doing their laundry; collecting everything needed for the residents evacuated from villages on the frontlines and moved into hotels and homes in the centre of the country.

Donating blood; volunteering in factories and farms to replace workers who have been called up. Entertaining kids and spending time with senior citizens. This amazing volunteer home-front army shows the true face of this special country.

What we've learned over this time is that there really is such a thing as good and evil in this world. Some people hate for no other reason than total indoctrination. Our job is to lead on the side of all good people.

Western countries have a hard time comprehending this because it's hard to believe that there are people in this world who don't think like us. There are people who want simply to kill Jews – note not only Israelis. This battle isn't a battle over land, colonisation, or poverty,



Funeral at Kibbutz Be'eri for three members of the Sharabi family

Photo: Chaim-Goldberg Flash90

2023 Franz Auerbach Interfaith Memorial Lecture

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Tali Nates, founder and director of the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre, lectures internationally on Holocaust and genocide education, memory, reconciliation, and human rights. Born to a family of Holocaust

survivors, her father was saved by Oskar Schindler. Tali has been involved in the creation of dozens of documentary films, exhibitions, articles and books. Her work is widely recognised abroad and she has received many international awards.

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‘We locked our door for the first time since leaving SA’

PERSONAL STORY

MICHAEL FINE

We are a family of five who moved from Johannesburg to Israel in December 2020 due to uncertainty about the COVID-19 pandemic and the high crime rate in South Africa. We have been living in Haifa in northern Israel for nearly three years.

It has been three weeks since the massacre on the border with Gaza, and since then, we have been on an emotional rollercoaster.

We felt shock when awakened by alerts on our phones, immediately viewing real-time images and videos of the atrocities happening down south.



Food kitchens and collections for soldiers have sprung up across Israel

Then came disappointment, as we wondered, “How could they let this happen? How does this happen?” We had no idea what was going on, and it seemed like the government was equally uninformed at the time.

Fear and anxiety gripped us, as we remained uncertain about what was happening or what might happen next.

However, we also experienced pride in witnessing the entire country unite. People came together quickly, with many organising shelters for families from the south. Food kitchens and collections for the army sprung up all over the place. We witnessed the call-up of 360 000 reservists, who dropped everything to fulfil their duty. These brave individuals include husbands, sons, daughters, and work colleagues. We’re immensely grateful to them.

We now hear the constant hum of drones and jets in the sky, day and night. It has provided us

with some comfort, knowing that we’re being protected.

After the events on Saturday, we locked and latched our front door for the first time since leaving South Africa.

Haifa has been relatively quiet, except for one siren scare, which was traumatic for our children since it was their first experience. Our kids have been engaged in online learning, which has been frustrating for them, but we hope they’ll be able to return to classes in-person soon. I’ve been fortunate enough to work from home and help set up the kids for their lessons. It serves as a stark reminder of the COVID-19 lockdown.

We had to remove social media from our children’s phones due to the rapid sharing of gruesome videos among their school WhatsApp groups.

We’re aware that many of our fellow *olim* are grappling with the same emotions, and some have contemplated leaving temporarily until the situation stabilises. However, it’s not an easy decision to make. We’re constantly messaging friends from all over the country when we hear there are rocket

sirens where they live to find out if they are okay.

In spite of all this, when we drive to the shops, we find the roads packed, and people continue to jog, walk their dogs, and go about their daily lives. This resilience is a testament to the enduring spirit of the Israelis, who have weathered many years of conflict.

A work colleague asked me the other day if I regretted moving to Israel. After some contemplation, I responded, “No.”

At least, by being here, I know we have protection. I sometimes fear for my family in South Africa, as it seems the government has neglected their well-being, leaving them to fend for themselves if, G-d forbid, something terrible happens there.

Am Yisrael Chai!

• Michael Fine works for a hi tech company in Israel as a technical support engineer.



Life goes on, except we’re united

PERSONAL STORY

NOAH GREENHILL

I arrived in Israel in March, exhilarated to be in a country that not only was home to my children, but home to my heart. Realistically, I should have made aliya years ago. For reasons not relevant for discussion here, I didn’t, but I was now home.

I arrived in a country divided by political turmoil. Extreme views aired publicly. If you were on the right, the left didn’t understand, and if you were on the left, the right didn’t understand. When I proudly announced to anyone that I was an *oleh chadash* (new immigrant) they would hesitate for a moment, ask why, and then tell me that I had arrived at a very interesting juncture in Israel’s political history.

It sometimes bothered me because I didn’t care. I was in Israel, the most amazing place on earth. I’m not naive in thinking that it’s a bed of roses. Aliya does come with its complexity – the Israeli bureaucracy for one – although I seemed to wade through it quite seamlessly; and the Israeli temperament, which to be honest I’m still getting used to but at the same time have the utmost respect for.

The circumstances of 7/10 is the glue that makes Israel, Israel. It’s tense, but life goes on. The buses run, the trains run, the restaurants are open, and the kids are running around. What’s different is the

sense of unity. It’s palpable. WhatsApp groups which were once asking about a good seafood restaurant are now asking for food, water, socks or something else required by a soldier or a displaced family from the south, and the response is always overwhelming!

It seems no-one cares anymore what your political persuasion is, the reality is we’re all together, we’re Israel! I cannot speak for what life is like for those displaced families, but I know that everyone realises that we’re all at risk and those families are our families. They are staying in hotels, apartments, in rooms in people’s houses in the centre of Israel, and being fed and the kids entertained. It’s a miracle how fast the support infrastructure has been activated.

I went with my daughter to buy socks and t-shirts for her friends on the frontline, and there was a queue to pay. The normal impatience was replaced with patience, love, and understanding, albeit deeply sad. Would I change where I have chosen to live? I don’t question my decision for a second.

• Noah Greenhill is a 55-year-old Johannesburg-born businessman and father of two who made aliya in March.



World Jewish Restitution Organization

WJRO

לשכת פיקוד ומטה

Announcement by the

World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO)

regarding

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Pastoral bliss amidst the blasts

PERSONAL STORY

GUY LIEBERMAN

Right now, we are without doubt in the most fortunate position of anyone in the country, and certainly the broader region. Our relatively small coastal town is too far north of Gaza and, so we hope, too far south of Lebanon to warrant any substantial missile attacks.

Even the West Bank towns that are simmering on the brink of an uprising are still buffered by enough Israeli territory before anyone might attempt to reach us here. We haven't yet experienced one siren warning us to head to our bomb shelters. Still, we're advised to be within 90 seconds of it, and this without having to run. In the event of an attack, our home bomb shelter or *mamad*, also the guest room, has a double bed, a table, closet, a pack of drinking water, and a super charged battery for our phones.

My sense is that we're minimally prepared, still in some level of denial that the war will actually come to the house. However, in Israel it's impossible to forget where you live, no matter how far from the cities you choose to settle.

Any upheaval our kids have experienced is minimal – an extended Sukkot holiday, and a spontaneous nine-day refugee-like visit by their cousins and aunt and uncle, who live near Gaza. For that time, besides all our boys, we had three pre-teen girls in the house, all in one room, going to bed at 03:00, night after night. The cousins' agitation after arriving here from being holed up in the south converted into a nervous form of fun, and more than once, I was up begging them to go the hell to sleep already. Thank you, Hamas, you really have taken this to another level, I'd mumble to myself.

Now two of our three kids are back at school

for most of the week. Like much of the country, our eldest's school is closed due to its proximity to Haifa, yet another target of Israel's enemies to the north. Besides some chatter among their friends, there are no obvious signs of fear or trauma – yet. Like normal, the kids are riding freely around the hood on their bikes with their buddies, classic Israel style. While fighter jets consistently cut through the skies above us on their way to or from some Syrian sortie, I'm spending focused time with them, teaching the little one to ride a bigger bike and reading *Lord of the Rings* to my elder boy. My wife is home, tutoring music, and because we have a *mamad*, her toddler students will come here for their classes. "Stomp stomp, ring-a-ding, don't forget to dance and sing."

And so, in this moment and in comparison, life in this semi-pastoral town is, dare I say, lovely. Hundreds of families have decamped here, refugees from towns and villages in the south and north. Russians, Ethiopians, Moroccans, others. They are shaken, ill at ease, anxious. Our community has galvanised, with hotels opening their gates and families opening their doors, taking these shell-shocked visitors into our homes. Our local park, a breezy, treed, and grassy area, loved by the locals, is packed every day with a run of volunteers of all ages

making sure that our guests, especially the kids, have a good time. Music ensembles, bubble tubs sending large, rolling diaphanous orbs up towards the sky chased by packs of screaming kids, spontaneous rope obstacle courses strung up between the tall pines, young teen girls teaching toddlers how to dance to their favourite songs. The place is a-buzz. Our "war effort" out here is simple: ensure that our guests are somehow able to enjoy these days with their kids. In the context of this national emergency, especially the heartbreaking hostage crisis, this serves as a primal call to action in its own right. However, because of this very localised and surface-level constellation, and my inherent happy-go-lucky naiveté, I enthusiastically call our town a "sweet spot". When I mentioned this to my Israeli friend, a psychologist, as we sat in his garden sipping coffee and looking out over the sea, he gazed at me curiously for a few moments. Then he said, "Yes, Guy, at the moment we perhaps feel that our town is this 'sweet spot', as you put it. But don't misunderstand, internally, for many adults here, not only our guests from the peripheries, there's a deep sense of disquiet, of fear. The existential crisis that Hamas and Iran and its multiple proxies have promised Israel is becoming real for us. We're afraid for our

families and for our country in ways none of us have ever been before."

I left his home feeling markedly different about our predicament. Where am I, the Sandton boy who holidayed in Plett all his young life, going to land if the brave and fearless Israelis are starting to dread for their families? That night, a Shabbat, I was awoken at 01:00 by distant booms shaking the windows of our house. These were loud enough to wake me, but no sirens sounded. All clear. I understood they were distant, but they were big. I wandered outside, 01:00, no special light shows to match the booms on any horizon. I fell back into a fitful sleep, and the following morning, I heard that my wife had been up at 02:00 and then again at 04:00, awoken by the same shuddering booms. No-one could tell me where they were and what they were hitting.

On Shabbat morning, all the kids came to our bed. I experienced a lucid moment of eye-watering gratitude, as I allowed myself to consider the shattered families just a couple hundred kilometres to the south. My youngest is ginger, and whenever I see that image of the weeping mother carrying her two ginger kids in a blanket, shoved along by those Hamas demons, I reach down and kiss my boy's ginger crop, imagining that I'm somehow comforting those babies of ours still held in Gaza.

• *Guy Lieberman is a cultural activist, writer, filmmaker and, very recently, a podcaster. He lives in Zichron Yaakov, Israel. His podcast, 'The Hadedá', can be found on Spotify.*



War shouldn't be the reason for national unity

PERSONAL STORY

KAYLA GLICKMAN

When my husband and I moved down south to the young dati-leumi community of Carmei Gat, 20 minutes from Ashkelon, we were told repeatedly that there were simply never sirens in the area in spite of our proximity to Gaza.

So, when the first sirens began at 06:30 on Simchat Torah morning and continued until 14:00 that afternoon, we knew something terrible had happened. It was only after Shabbat ended that we truly realised the scale of devastation and that we were at war. I felt helpless and broken.

The next day, I logged onto a Zoom meeting with my colleagues from the public relations agency I work for. The first thing that my boss, a veteran journalist and public relations expert said was, "What can we do with the skills we have to help those desperate to have their stories told?"

We immediately pivoted to setting up a system where international press could send in their requests and members of the public could submit their stories or offers for commentary. Within 24 hours of the war starting, more than a quarter of the men in our shul community (Carmei Zion) were called up for reserve duty, leaving 60 women, the majority of whom have young children, at home alone.

Our community leaders didn't skip a beat, and immediately formed a task force to give support to all the single mothers and their husbands called away. My husband began giving free dog therapy sessions to dozens of children in the community as the schools and community centres that he usually works in closed overnight.

This tragedy made me realise that war shouldn't be the reason we come together as a nation. It should serve only as a reminder as to why it's so important to be united. I do know one thing for sure, there's nowhere else in the world I would rather be right now.

Four days before the start of the current war, my husband and I went to see the newly released film *Golda*, starring Helen Mirren. The film chronicles how the stateswoman responded to the most pivotal period in her political career – the Yom Kippur War.

There's a scene in *Golda* in which the prime minister is on the phone with United States Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and says, "When I was a child in Ukraine, at Christmas time, my father would board up the windows of our house to protect us from Cossacks who would get drunk and attack Jews. My father would hide us in the cellar. And we'd stay silent, hoping the killers would pass us by. I'm not that little girl hiding in the cellar anymore!"

We're no longer that "little girl" anymore.

• *Kayla Glickman made aliya from South Africa two years ago and married a South African Israeli eight months ago. She works as a junior associate in a public relations company.*



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Israeli police woman on frontline on ‘bloody Saturday’

ROLENE MARKS

Major Moran Etedgi and her two young children woke up in her home in Ofakim, a city in southern Israel, on Saturday, 7 October, to the sounds of sirens and quickly rushed down to their protected shelter to avoid rocket fire. Little did this mother of two consider how the day would end – with her as a hero, having faced terrorists in the line of fire, saving many lives in their small town.

to strengthen the station and alert off duty officers that they were under terrorist attack. Then, hearing on the Ofakim police walkie talkie about various encounters with terrorists in her city, she said, “I made an instinctive decision to put on my uniform to protect myself and go out. On my way, I picked up another police officer from my station, and we went to the scene.” She arrived to find that three police officers had already been murdered by terrorists and many others injured. She was

about what was happening. She was then called to go to another house nearby, the home of one of the officer’s friends, in which there were three terrorists. She became aware that the terrorists were hiding in the backyard of a house. “During this chaos and in the middle of a battle, I had to stop and call my children to tell them that I loved them and that their mom was taking care of herself. We initially surrounded the house from two directions, and saw a body lying lifeless through a hole in the window.” They managed to get some of the family members out of the house to safety before Etedgi gave instruction to fire and try and draw out the terrorists

an officer was injured. The grenade that the terrorists launched at us injured several more police officers,” Etedgi said. “A grenade fragment hit me in the face, but I knew that I must keep calm and I gave a directive to retreat and reorganise.” Etedgi called for the help of a helicopter to get a better picture of the situation, and to make sure that all civilians in the vicinity stayed inside their homes. Etedgi and her team circled the house, as about 50 Israel Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers arrived to help, and she did all she could to ensure they worked with her and the police. “Command and control was always my first thought and action items, even under fire,” she said. “I screamed orders so that everyone heard the instructions clearly.” During their firefight, she and her team hit two terrorists. “Another officer was on the roof and started shouting at the last terrorist to surrender. He wouldn’t, and after a short confrontation, the terrorist became visible, and I give instructions to shoot him.” Once they were able to send their bomb squad into the home, they discovered “several booby traps and other means to kill us”, she said. Once she was able to, she went back to the previous scene under attack. “At this point, I assumed command of the entire city of Ofakim under the direction of the commander of the area. Together with other forces, we responded to dozens of events that happened throughout the city in what can only be described as a bloody Saturday,” she said. “I went to do a situation assessment with the mayor and the commander of the IDF officer’s school, and we divided the city into

combat and reaction sectors. “Starting Saturday, 7 October, from about 07:30, I worked at the battles of Ofakim until Tuesday, 10 October, when I returned to my police station. These were certainly the longest days of my life.” Etedgi was one of the valiant southern Israeli police members who were the first to receive calls from terrified residents in kibbutzim and small communities which came under brutal attack by Hamas terrorists. They responded as quickly and forcefully as they possibly could with the limited firepower they had at the time, and many paid with their lives. Hamas murdered at least 58 police officers – and that number is expected to rise. Brave women and men fought with all their might to eliminate the enormous threat. As the days go on and we learn more details about that horrific day when Israeli civilians were murdered, tortured, raped, and kidnapped in the most barbaric and depraved way, we’re also starting to hear the stories of those like Etedgi, who were first on site. They were the first responders alongside local community security personnel who witnessed the carnage and fought it with all their might. In Israel’s war with Hamas, the police are on the frontlines not only of classic policing but dealing with a daily existential terror threat. Many police officers have been called up for reserve duty in the army. It’s the women of the Israeli police that are on the frontline of protection in our cities and communities across the country as most of their male counterparts move from cities and communities to the borders.



Major Moran Etedgi

Etedgi, who is in charge of operations at the Aror police station in the Negev, said, “After a few minutes, the alarms were heard again and again and again, and at this point, I understood something unusual was happening. I realised that the rockets being launched were far in excess of what we were accustomed to.” She got word that there were dead and injured in the predominantly Bedouin Aror community, and began giving instructions

told that there were four terrorists in a house with civilian hostages. Shocked, she took command and within seconds, the terrorists were firing at her with a barrage of automatic weapons that included grenades and rocket-propelled grenades. During what felt like a never-ending battle, another two officers were injured and rescued under fire before things went quiet for a while. At this point, the area’s senior commander arrived and Etedgi briefed him

hiding and waiting to surprise them. “The incendiary fire helped. The terrorists started shooting in our direction. We fired a second time and were hit by fire in which

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The Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies at the University of Cape Town invites applications for an annual fellowship intended to advance the Jewish community’s engagement with social justice and equity.

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The Mauerberger Foundation Fund’s support for this fellowship arises from the fundamental principle that the **Jewish community is an integral part of the wider South African society**. The fellowship is intended to encourage and **advance social cohesion**: evidence of strong collaboration with the wider community is an essential element of such work.

Projects may, inter alia, conduct research and fieldwork, identify and promote best practice, evaluate the impact of existing initiatives, explore the application of lessons from Africa and elsewhere to the South African context, offer workshops and other forms of programming, and provide thought leadership on issues central to social justice in South Africa. The fellowship is open to NGOs, postgraduate students, and academics.

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Running towards a crisis

“Abby,” I said as patiently as I was able to, “Maybe you should think about coming home?” “Why?” was her immediate and impatient response, “There’s nothing to do there. Seriously. It’s fine here, dad.”

At 18, our daughter, who is currently on her gap year in Israel, had chosen to stay in an active war zone rather than come back to South Africa. More than happy to opt for rockets, bomb shelters, limited movement, and ongoing conflict.

Comfortable to choose Hamas over us. I’ve no idea what it means, but it seems that either we’re very good parents, or very bad ones. Probably both.

With two sons, a daughter-in-law, and a daughter in Israel, most days involve a variation of the following WhatsApp text messages.

“Just saw a red alert for a rocket in your area. All ok?”

“Yep. All good. In shelter.” Or, “Not home. Nothing where we are.”

Some days are more worrying. This past Sunday, there was a direct hit reported in Ramat Gan where my son and daughter-in-law live. We managed to get hold of him. He was at work, and it took him a few unbearable minutes to reach his wife who was at home. It turned out to be a false report, but our anxiety took no notice of that.

The next day, following three weeks of this ongoing stress, I saw an alert that Jerusalem was under attack. “Abby,” I messaged “All ok?” “Ya,” She answered, “We were in the *beit midrash* [lecture hall] when the sirens went. We’re all in the shelter now. Bit hectic and stressful. But fine.”

I was staring at my phone when a work colleague walked past. Noting my discomfort, he asked what was going on. I explained that my daughter was currently in a bomb shelter at her seminary. “Are you not bringing her home?” he asked, perplexed. I explained that as Jews, we generally don’t

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



leave Israel at a time like this, and then added that besides which, I believe in building my kids’ resilience. “Resilience!” He looked at me as though I had lost it. “Howard, resilience at 18 is dealing with loadshedding and not getting into the course at varsity that you want to get into. It’s not having rockets explode over your head while you hide in a shelter.”

Which is why that night, I broached the subject of her returning early to South Africa. And it’s when we learned that given the choice, she would choose Hamas rather than come to us.

Some years ago, when we were visiting Israel, we found ourselves having coffee a few meters from a terror attack. On hearing the gunshots, my son and I, along with several people, ran towards the event to see if there was anything we could do to assist. To this day, I have no idea why I thought a sharply worded email or article would have been helpful – pretty much all I could add in terms of value – but I realised then that running towards a crisis, not away from it, is coded into us as Jews. Just as Israel and her people are coded into our DNA.

Along with Jews around the world, we’ve hardly slept a full night in the nearly four weeks since the horrendous attacks in Israel. It might be because we have three children and a daughter-in-law in the country. It might be the stress of the antisemitism that we’re all experiencing. And how vulnerable we feel as Jews. What’s more likely, however, is that it’s because we’ve stayed where we are. Having our coffee.

And haven’t run towards the attack.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Tale of two protests

On Shabbat on 28 October, anti-Israel protesters descended on Jewish residential areas, waving Hamas flags and chanting inflammatory slogans. That they chose Shabbat for this demonstration was no doubt deliberate, but in the end self-defeating, since when they arrived at the Beyachad community centre, they could only stand outside an empty building, venting their spleen to the wind. They did, however, have one small “victory”. On the outer walls of the building were posters showing some of the Gaza hostages, including babies, and these they triumphantly tore down. I personally witnessed these Jew-haters do their best in an effort to bait and intimidate our Jewish community, only for their efforts to fall flat. The Community Security Organisation was fully prepared for any eventuality, ensuring that no-one was in danger of injury. We thank the Joburg member of the mayoral committee for transport, Kenny Kunene, who was there in person and was emphatic in his determination to protect our community, as well as the South African Police Service and Johannesburg Metropolitan Police Department for their assistance in ensuring that no-one was harmed.

Solidarity with our captives at iconic Johannesburg site

The contrast between what happened outside Beyachad and another demonstration taking place the previous day at the iconic Nelson Mandela Bridge in Braamfontein couldn’t have been more pronounced. The demonstration was organised by the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) to draw attention to the plight of the more than 220 hostages and call for their release. Posters showed images of all the hostages, with a red balloon displayed above each one of them. We anticipated that there would be hostility from passers-by. Instead, we were overwhelmed by the empathy and solidarity displayed by ordinary South Africans walking to and from work, people who stopped to look at the faces of the captives, express their heartfelt



ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner

sympathy, and even kneel down and pray. The display was meant to be up for only an hour, but in the end, it was up all day and during that time, not a single poster was removed or vandalised. This, not the hate-filled protests in our suburbs, represents the true face of the South African people.

Dirco gets down and dirty

As we well know, the humanity and fundamental decency shown by so many of our fellow citizens during these difficult times has been all but entirely absent with regard to our government, in particular the department of international relations and cooperation (Dirco). While the country was celebrating the Springboks’ history-making World Cup triumph, Dirco was preparing yet another anti-Israel diatribe, this time directly attacking the SAJBD and specifically National Vice-President Zev Krengel. It was issued in the name of Minister Naledi Pandor, who during these past weeks made a personal call to Hamas and met the president of Iran, which arms and funds Hamas and helped plan the 7 October massacre, but has yet to reach out to the Israeli ambassador. In our response, we drew comparisons between Dirco’s attempted atrocity denialism and how Holocaust deniers deny the crimes of the Nazis, acting as if these are something for which proof still needs to be brought. We further noted that instead of calling for Hamas to release the hostages, a *sine qua non* for any progress to be made towards peace, not once in her statement had the minister even mentioned the issue. I was subsequently interviewed by SABC News. We won’t be silenced, even by vicious attacks like this, and our responses continue to be picked up regularly by all the main media outlets.

• 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

Former Joburg caterer cooks up happiness in Israel

Ido Sirton, well known as a former owner of Stan & Pete Caterers, emigrated to Israel a number of years ago where he has built up a reputation as a caterer.

Since the war began on 7 October, Sirton has opened his home to about 50 volunteers, mostly pensioners, who spend every morning cooking. Raw products, vegetables, meat, even cakes are donated fresh daily by the residents of his neighbourhood around Tsur Yigal who cook up a storm before the next load of volunteers arrive to deliver about 500 meals to soldiers each afternoon.



Ido Sirton

Meals are delivered from the north to the south, and greatly appreciated.

Sirton says his greatest happiness is not only to give soldiers a warm, tasty meal when they are on the front fighting and protecting the country, but also to give them a small escape from this horrible situation. Also about 40 volunteers from the age of 12 to 85 have had the opportunity every single day since 8 October to cut, chop, cook, and have companions to talk to. Seeing them smiling and active gives him the strength to continue. As long as the war continues, so will he.

Israel-apartheid narrative ‘insulting to black South Africans’

TANIA SHALOM MICHAELIAN

South African activist Olga Meshoe Washington was on her way to Israel to attend *The Jerusalem Post’s* Top 25 Young ViZionaries awards ceremony, when she landed in Ben Gurion Airport on 7 October to a country at war. Instead of turning back, the chief executive of Defend Embrace Invest (in), Support Israel (DEISI) and a powerful advocate for Israel, decided to roll up her sleeves and get to work.

In a recent interview with Jewish National Fund-USA’s IsraelCast podcast, hosted by Steven Shalowitz, Olga spoke about her first air-raid siren. With the support of Jewish National Fund-USA Chief Executive Russell Robinson and his wife, Marcie, she participated in a number of initiatives such as packing supplies and working out of the

organisation’s situation room, before flying back home to the United States.

“My experiences only strengthened my resolve to tell the truth, to be an ally to Israel and encourage others to be an ally to the Jewish people,” she said, predicting that Israel would emerge victorious, and the people would continue to be resilient.

Meshoe Washington has dedicated her life’s work to taking a stand for Israel against a hostile world, especially in the wake of immense anti-Jewish propaganda following the recent Hamas massacre. Born in South Africa, her eyes were opened to the double standards of anti-Israel groups such as Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) by her Christian pastor father, Reverend Kenneth Meshoe. She considers DEISI to be a bulwark against BDS, constantly challenging its messages. Meshoe Washington says one of the biggest lies used by the anti-Israel movement is to call Israel an “apartheid state” and, as a black South African woman, she’s especially irate about this comparison.



Olga Meshoe Washington

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Boks fans light up city of love

SAUL KAMIONSKY

The Springboks were crowned world champions at the 2023 Rugby World Cup, but the team's fans are also the best in the world, says South African Leonard Rovetti, who attended the showpiece in France.

"[Paris] was full of green and gold. Wherever you walked, there were Boks fans," says Rovetti, the joint chief executive of t3 Plastic Packaging, who witnessed the Springboks triumph 12-11 against New Zealand in the final at the Stade de France in Paris on 28 October. "Boks supporters bring a lot of *gees* to the stadium. The atmosphere was unreal."

Marc Lubner, the group chief executive of Afrika Tikkun, says rain didn't dampen "the unbelievable South African spirit in the crowd", for which there was a full capacity turnout of more than 80 000.

For Lubner, "sharing the experience of the World Cup was a life moment that I wasn't going to miss".

Having been in London for his cousin's wedding, he decided to go to France for the Springboks' semi-final against England. It meant that he missed the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards on 22 October.

"The awards were critical for our community at this trying time, and I wanted to be a part of this community coming together," Lubner says. Though it was a tough call to not be there, being at the World Cup was also "a great opportunity to share a meaningful time with my son who lives in London".

Similarly, attorney Ian Levitt's main reason for going to France for the final was "to spend quality time with my son and brother-in-law. We're all very close and love watching sport, especially the Springboks. It was a terrific experience to be with my family at such a historic match."

He described the final as "mind-blowing but terribly tense".

"We thought it would be a walkover for South Africa," Lubner says,

"but it turned out to be a nail-biter. We sat alongside Marco Van Embden and the Cape Town crew, which added spice and expert input on how the Boks should play."

"The game was another display of sheer guts and determination by two teams who gave their all," Lubner says. "The Boks came out at the start tackling like demons and were clearly dominant. They were a team to be proud of, and the crowd was equally dynamic in constant roars of 'Bokke! Bokke! Bokke!'"

"The second half was less easy, as the All Blacks found their form and flair, winning most lineouts and even heeling against the head a few times. Their flair when the ball moved down the line was scary for us and if not for Pieter-Steph du Toit, we could have had a lot more challenges as he stopped that play with ferocious tackles."

After the game, "a large group of South African fans celebrated at a bar next to the stadium until 02:00 or 03:00", Grant Friedman, the director of Africrest Properties, recalls.

By winning the World Cup, the Springboks became only the second team to defend the title and the first to win it four times. Friedman points out that in this year's tournament, the Springboks played the other top six teams in the latest World Rugby rankings, meaning the side had arguably a tougher run compared to the 2019 triumph in Japan.

There were loads of South Africans and expats at the World Cup. "The support is truly remarkable," says Rovetti, who was part of a group of 35 South Africans spectating the semi-final and final. "We stand in unity for our beautiful country."

Besides the rugby, Friedman enjoyed going to various restaurants in France and walking down the Champs-Élysées.

Rovetti enjoyed the French culture. "A World Cup element brings a lot of energy to the city and is an amazing experience," he says.

Auctioneer Ariella Kuper, who recently became the first SA20 female auctioneer, and her husband joined her close friend, 1995 Springbok World Cup-winning Captain Francois Pienaar, and several other friends from the start of this year's tournament. Kuper went to the Chabad in the Marais and Tournelles Synagogue on Shabbat mornings.

"The Tournelles Synagogue is the most spectacular shul I've ever been to," she says. "In spite of fear about antisemitism given current world events, there was a Barmitzvah with 200 people this past Shabbat."

Other Cape Town friends went to the Friday service at Chabad Champs-Élysées. We all made an effort to stand up proudly and attend shul to daven for Israel – and perhaps partially also for South African rugby!"

While in France, Kuper also enjoyed the exhibition at Art Basel Paris; seeing artwork by late Jewish American artist Mark Rothko; and exploring the Louvre, Musee D'Orsay, Commerce de Bourse, and the Seine on a Bateaux Parisien cruise. "Paris really is the city of lights, art, culture, and cuisine," she says.

Comparing the 2007 World Cup – also in France – to this year's edition, Levitt says the latter was better organised "with a lot of security personnel which made people feel safe". Rovetti hasn't missed a World Cup final since the New Zealand edition in 2011. "Tokyo and Paris were really incredible, as we won both back-to-back," he says.

"Japan as hosts were phenomenal in their humility and support of South Africa once they were out themselves," Kuper says, "even giving tickets to true Boks fans who had saved up and flown over. France exhibited less of this energy as host but the atmosphere from global fans was spectacular. We even improvised some stellar choral lyrics on every train or metro ride, ensuring a true sense of *ubuntu*. I guess sport does unite, as Francois Pienaar said so aptly in 1995."

"From a security aspect, there were gendarme and police all over given the 7 October horror and subsequent events. As a Jew, you certainly were aware. That said, none of us experienced any evidence of antisemitism. Friends even shared photos of their sons laying tefillin in the streets."



Ariella Kuper, Francois Pienaar, and Frank Kilbourn



Grant Friedman holding the Israeli flag during the quarterfinal between France and South Africa

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Africa Soul

Janice Leibowitz – Theatre reviewer

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