





# Government's silence on stranded citizens in Israel 'discriminatory'

LEE TANKLE, LULA PENCHARZ, GILANA LAB

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) criticised President Cyril Ramaphosa on Tuesday, 17 June, for ignoring South Africans stuck in Israel due to the war between Israel and Iran, and worrying only about South Africans in Iran.

This week, the South African government issued a statement reaching out to South Africans in the Islamic Republic of Iran, saying that they must be registered and in contact with the South African embassy in Tehran. However, the government didn't reach out to the many South Africans in Israel.

This is contrary to what Ramaphosa promised the Jewish community in December 2023, the SAJBD said.

"We chose to write a letter to Ramaphosa because in December 2023, Ramaphosa told the Board in a meeting that even though the embassy was being closed temporarily, South Africans in Israel would still be given fair access to consular services," Wendy Kahn, the national director of the SAJBD told the *SA Jewish Report*.

Offering consular assistance to South Africans in Iran and not in Israel demonstrates an abandonment of those in Israel in times of crisis, a case of the government completely failing its citizens, said Kahn.

"It's telling that Dirco [the Department of International Relations and Cooperation] reaches out with consular support only to South Africans in Iran, but shows disinterest and a complete lack of concern for the many South Africans stranded in Israel, including young Jewish people studying at universities and religious seminaries, families on holiday, and Christian people on pilgrimages," the SAJBD said. "This violates our government's constitutional obligations to its citizens."

Although some foreign nationals have left Israel through neighbouring countries, the Israeli government has advised against it as it comes with risks.

Rolene Marks, the spokesperson for the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF), said, "The SAZF condemns Dirco's shameful

double standard in abandoning South African citizens in Israel while rushing to support those in Iran. This selective concern exposes a government that has weaponised foreign policy against its own people.

"This isn't an oversight, this is discrimination. Dirco's silence sends a chilling message: the safety of South African Jewry travelling in Israel matters less than political theatre. When citizenship becomes conditional on the government's ideological preferences, we cease to be a nation that protects its people."

This comes after the South African government issued a statement on 13 June that expressed "profound concern regarding the attacks conducted by Israel on targets within Iran on 13 June 2025, including reported impacts on military areas, nuclear facilities, and civilian infrastructure. Reports of civilian casualties, alongside military personnel, are deeply troubling".

Democratic Alliance MP Emma Louise Powell responded to its statement on X, saying, "Astonishing that Dirco recalls selective resolutions of the IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency] General Conference to condemn Israeli actions, while completely ignoring the fact that just this week, the IAEA formally declared Iran non-compliant with its non-proliferation obligations: hiding undeclared nuclear sites; blocking inspections; and stockpiling enough enriched uranium to assemble at least nine nuclear warheads, while Khamenei chants, "Death to Israel, death to America!" from podiums in Tehran."

By Wednesday afternoon, 18 June, the SAJBD had received no response from the government to its letter.

The Board, meanwhile, made it clear that should any individual find the need for consular assistance, they should approach the SAJBD, and it would do its best to assist by working with its contacts in relevant ministries.

In the Dirco statement on 13 June, it said, "South Africa emphasises that under international humanitarian law, civilians and civilian infrastructure must never be considered legitimate targets."

However, according to the SAZF's Operation Rising Lion Fact Sheet released on 18 June, the operation was "a precision military operation targeting Iran's nuclear weapons programme and military infrastructure. This pre-emptive strike was executed as a last resort to neutralise an imminent existential threat to Israel." The operation aimed to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran while minimising civilian harm through precision-guided munitions and pre-strike evacuation warnings where feasible, it said. "All efforts were made to avoid civilian infrastructure and population centres," said the SAZF.

Since then, more than 400 ballistic missiles have been launched by Iran, and more than 40 impact sites have been identified in Israel. As many as 24 civilians in Israel have been killed, and another 804 injured after five days of bombing by Iran.

On 15 June, Dirco did, however, put out another statement saying that "South Africa expresses deep concern regarding the escalation of hostilities between the state of Israel and Islamic Republic of Iran. We extend our deepest condolences to the peoples of both nations suffering from the tragic loss of life."

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## The power of choice

In this week's Torah portion, Shelach, we encounter a subtle but powerful shift in the way G-d interacts with the Jewish people. When the people ask to send spies to explore the Land of Israel, G-d responds to Moshe/Moses, saying, "*Shelach lecha*." (Send for yourself) – "I'm not commanding you. If you want, you can send."

This moment is striking. Until now, the Jewish people had received clear commands from G-d. Now, the decision is left to human initiative. Moshe must choose. The people must decide. It's the first time we're given a moment of freedom of choice without direct instruction.

This isn't just a story about ancient spies. It reflects one of the deepest principles of our faith. As Maimonides famously writes, every person can choose to be as righteous as Moshe or, G-d forbid, the opposite. No-one is forced down a path. G-d gave us something no other creature has: free will.

There are two ways we use this gift. The first is in following G-d's explicit


commandments. We're told to keep Shabbos, to give *tzedakah* (charity), to eat kosher, and so on. Sometimes it's hard. Our habits and desires might pull us another way. But with effort, we choose what's right.

The second is more subtle. There are many areas of life where there's no clear *halacha* (Jewish law), no direct *mitzvah*. It's the realm of what's permitted. Here, too, we're meant to elevate ourselves, to shape our character and our conduct in a way that aligns with G-d's values. As the Ethics of our Fathers teaches, "Make His will your will." Not just when it's commanded, but when it's up to you.

This was the deeper idea behind the spies. Entering the land of Israel meant the end of the miraculous desert experience. No more manna from heaven or clouds of glory. Life would now require initiative. Fields had to be plowed. Food had to be earned. G-d would still be present, but not always obviously. The Jewish people had to learn to build a life in which the physical and spiritual would be one. A home for G-d in everyday life.

### Torah Thought

Rabbi Pini Pink  
Chabad of Greenstone



And yes, they made the wrong choice. The spies returned afraid. The people panicked. But failure is also part of free choice. That's where *teshuvah* (repentance) comes in. The power to return, to grow, even from mistakes. In fact, the rabbis tell us that a *baal teshuvah* can reach higher than someone who has never sinned. Because when the heart chooses deeply, it connects even more.

Each of us is on a mission. We're sent into this world not just to follow instructions, but to choose well, to elevate our surroundings, and to bring G-d into everything we do. We are, quite literally, G-d's *shluchim* (emissaries) in the world.

May we each carry out our mission with clarity, with heart, and with strength, and may it bring the coming of Moshiach.

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# Middle East conflict puts spotlight on MTN’s Iran ties

TALI FEINBERG

Just two days before Israel’s pre-emptive strike on Iran, a United States (US) congresswoman, Senator Elise Stefanik, wrote a letter claiming that “South Africa’s increasing alignment with Iran, an avowed sponsor of terrorism and antisemitism, poses profound ethical and geopolitical questions.”

In her letter to Robin Vince, the chief executive of the Bank of New York Mellon Corporation, known as BNY, she said, “The country’s diplomatic, ideological, and financial ties to Iran exacerbate these concerns.” Soon after the strike, the South African government condemned Israel’s attack on Iran.

Michael Walsh, visiting scholar at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of California, responded to Stefanik’s letter, saying, “The Trump administration has made it a strategic priority to pursue a new path toward lasting peace in the Middle East.” Therefore, he said, “the Trump administration is willing to take exceptional actions against independent states that undermine US national security and foreign policy interests.”

Stefanik’s letter, which the *SA Jewish Report* has a copy of, called on BNY to “review and disclose the full extent of its financial involvement with [South African telecommunications company] MTN Group and its Iranian affiliates”.

Stefanik wrote that she was “deeply troubled” by the bank’s sponsorship of MTN through its American Depository Receipts (ADR) programme because recent reports and ongoing litigation have “revealed MTN Group’s extensive ties to Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and the facilitation of funding and support for Iranian-sponsored terrorism”.

MTN Group’s independent non-executive chairperson is Mcebisi Jonas, who was recently appointed by President Cyril Ramaphosa to be South Africa’s special envoy to the United States. He has chosen to continue his MTN role alongside his envoy position, according to the South African government.

BNY’s ADR programme offers customers the chance to purchase stock in MTN Group. But Stefanik claimed that MTN Group owns 49% of Irancell, Iran’s largest mobile operator, which “US authorities and courts have linked directly to terrorist activities that resulted in injury

and death of American servicemembers and civilians”.

“The US District Court for the Eastern District of New York recently affirmed claims against MTN under the Anti-Terrorism Act, marking a significant legal precedent confirming MTN’s complicity,” Stefanik wrote.

However, in a statement to the *SA Jewish Report* on 17 June, MTN Group said, “The New York court has not confirmed MTN Group’s complicity in anything, and no final ruling has been made.”



It said that since 2006, MTN Group had held a minority investment in Irancell, “which isn’t under MTN Group’s operational control. When US sanctions were re-imposed against Iran in May 2018, MTN Group ensured strict adherence to global sanctions regulations and maintained legal and ethical compliance across markets. We have not deployed any capital into the business, and have not extracted capital or dividends.”

Stefanik said that by allowing American investors to invest in MTN through its ADR programme, the bank “directly exposes the American public to financially propping up a company complicit in funding terrorism and antisemitic activities”.

But MTN said it is committed to “respecting and protecting human rights within the markets we serve and our broader sphere of influence. Our digital products and services play a critical role in advancing and protecting human rights. We strive to provide these products and services in a manner that does not impede or infringe on the rights of people.”

Stefanik called on BNY to cease sponsoring MTN Group’s ADR programme until a comprehensive investigation by US regulatory authorities is concluded; to co-operate fully with US government investigations into “MTN’s alleged violations of sanctions and support for terrorism”; and to implement enhanced due diligence and compliance measures to prevent

future sponsorship of “companies that pose risks to US national security interests”.

The MTN statement said that in 2020, MTN Group announced its intention to exit the Middle East. “Across all operations, MTN has enhanced due diligence processes and risk assessments to ensure compliance with international trade and sanctions regulations,” it said.

The escalation of conflict between Israel and Iran “changes the context for the MTN case”, Walsh said. “The Trump administration and members of Congress will want to aggressively target global partner ecosystems of Iranian government agencies and Iranian proxies. That will not only drain the power bases of the remaining Iranian hardlines and Iranian proxies, it will frustrate the rebuilding of their institutions. Ultimately, that will put an even bigger target on MTN.”

Relationships between Iranian hardliners and Iranian proxies and the African National Congress and the South African government “pose a serious risk to US-South Africa relations”, says Walsh.

This is because those relationships not only make South Africa an “obstacle” to peace in the Middle East, they also show that “the government of South Africa stands with the adversaries of the US and its allies”.

But MTN Group emphasised that “any suggestion that President Cyril Ramaphosa has improperly benefited from his time at MTN Group [which Stefanik suggested], is false and misleading. MTN Group’s business decisions are

separate from the South African government’s foreign policy.”

Walsh says the Trump administration cares only about “whether the current actions of the South African government are aligned with US national security and foreign policy interests. In the United States, there is strong bipartisan agreement that they are not.”

The Trump administration is therefore “committed to imposing harsh consequences on South Africa”, says Walsh. “The Trump administration is unlikely to back down until it believes that the South African government is no longer standing with the adversaries of the United States and its allies.”

The Stefanik letter shows that “any relationships between South African entities and the adversaries of the US and its allies pose a serious risk to Western multinational companies doing business in South Africa”, Walsh says. “Such high-profile political actions could lead Western multinational companies to decide that it’s not worth the reputational risk of doing business in South Africa. If that were to happen, it would have a huge negative impact on the South African economy.”

Walsh concludes by noting that the letter shows how “unwise” it was for Ramaphosa to appoint Jonas as special envoy to the US. “That action is what thrust MTN to the centre of the debate over US-South Africa relations.”

A BNY spokesperson told the *SA Jewish Report*: “We take these matters seriously and are reviewing Representative Stefanik’s inquiry carefully.”

## Dread of night: SA olim run for cover

>>Continued from page 1

given birth,” he said.

In Herzliya, Neil Meyerowitz, who made aliya in 2020, puts his sons, five and three, to sleep on mattresses on the floor in the apartment’s *mamad*. “Luckily we have one,” he said. “Two nights ago, I was sure we’d be hit. The interceptors were so close, the booms shook our apartment. My wife and I lay on the boys as they slept.”

In Beit Shemesh, Dr Stacey Leibowitz said her fear and uncertainty sitting in the *mamad* for hours, not knowing if they will be hit or when it’s safe to come out, is overwhelming. Watching explosions on the news adds to the stress. Sharing the space with her neighbours means there is little privacy, but it also brings a sense of camaraderie.

“Everyone’s plans are on hold,” she said.

“There’s a feeling of life being suspended, not too different from the COVID-19 pandemic. Knowing people who’ve been hit makes it much more real. You get to see the fireworks. It’s not an abstract danger.”

More than 3 800 people have been displaced. Dozens of buildings in major cities have been damaged. Iran has responded to Israel’s incursion with more than 400 missiles and hundreds of drones. Twenty-four people have been killed in Israel, more than 800 wounded.

South African caterer Lisa Starr finds strength in Israeli resilience. On Facebook she posted:

“Just as it was starting to get dark, I ventured out to one of the bigger supermarkets. Do you know that game show where contestants are given a shopping cart and can keep whatever they can grab within a tightly timed window? That’s exactly how it felt – rushing before the new-normal night-time sirens began.

“And now, we head to bed knowing we’ll likely gather, bleary-eyed, in the shelter at least once or twice in the hours ahead. And that’s OK. Because here, even amidst the chaos, life insists on being lived.”

For these South African *olim*, the missiles are more than weapons. They are a deafening reminder of how quickly life unravels, and how, somehow, it must go on.

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## Closed Israeli airspace a bittersweet blow for travellers

LEE TANKLE

While Johannesburg customer service consultant Paula Shevel was trying to collect her thoughts about what it felt

like to be stuck in Israel, an Iranian missile hit a building 15 minutes away from where she was in Herzliya.

"We felt strong vibrations while rushing downstairs. I was in shock and so, while people were davening around me, I started praying with them," Shevel said.

Her story is one of thousands of those who have been stranded miles away from home due to the Israeli transportation ministry closing airspace to all civilian traffic and grounding flights to and from Ben Gurion International Airport until further notice because of the Iranian strikes on Israel that began on 13 June.

Shevel was visiting her daughter, who made aliya 18 months ago, and was planning to return home, but her plans fell apart when Iran decided to retaliate against Israel, sending ballistic missiles to civilian areas.

"We were sleeping peacefully when we received an alert from the Home Front Command that drones and missiles from Iran were on their way," said Shevel. "There's a lot of tension around here. Nobody knows when this will end. I'm worried about my husband and son back home. Although it's lovely to be able to spend more time with Sarah, we have no idea when we'll be able to fly."

Similarly, beautician Lisa Karro and her daughter, Jade Factor, a digital marketing account manager, arrived in Israel to welcome Factor's sister's new child, and were making plans to come home when their plans unravelled as their flights were cancelled, leaving



Sarah and Paula Shevel in Jerusalem

them in Israel indefinitely.

Factor, whose young children aged two and four are in South Africa, says the hardest part for her hasn't been fear of the missiles, but having to sit in limbo, waiting to go back to her children and husband. "That feeling of just not knowing when I'm going to be able to get back to them is devastating and scary because we don't know how long this is going to last and when they're going to be able to get us home to them. Just that separation from them,

it's beyond awful."

"It's hard," said Karro, breaking down in tears, "because I want Jade, my daughter, to get home to her children, but for me as a mom, I don't want to leave my other daughter, son-in-law,



Gina and Janine De Abreu at Gina's graduation

and my new grandson here."

Mendy Grauman was visiting Israel to attend a Masa Israel conference, and was scheduled to come home on 19 June, when suddenly, he was notified that his flight back to South Africa was cancelled.

"I have a sense of trepidation," he said, "but I accept that it's okay to be here for this and I also have a sense of relief in having attacked Iran because I think we should have done this a long time ago."

Grauman said that though he wants to get back to South Africa, he wants to make the most out of the situation. "At first, I was just thinking about the practicalities of life, like where I was going to stay and handle work, and things like that. But because it's all so uncertain, I don't know. I could be going home in a week on repatriation flights. It could take a few weeks. And I don't want to get ahead of myself, so I'm just kind of taking it day by day."

Entrepreneur Janine De Abreu has been in Israel since 6 June to attend her daughter's graduation. She's relieved that her flight back to South Africa on 15 June was cancelled so that she can spend more time with her daughter and be a support system for her as she lives alone in Ramat Gan.

"It was terrifying, and I was super anxious, but I'm with my daughter. I'm happy that I'm with her and that she's not alone," she said. "If I had been at home, I would have been far more stressed. So, at least I'm here and we're a team."

Nineteen-year-old Na'ama Galnik was planning to come home after spending

just less than a year at the Nishmat seminary in Jerusalem. She said that though she would have loved to have been back in South Africa already, it's more important for her to be in Israel. "Weirdly, I'm glad I'm here for this," she said. "I feel like I'm part of something bigger. I'm able to help with things like meeting moms, wives, and the kids running around the building. I feel like I'm able to contribute to *Am Yisrael*."

Similarly, South African *olim* travelling abroad including in South

Africa have been stranded without a way of getting home.

"It's kind of surreal. It's a bit bizarre and it's worrying having my family there while I'm here," said Leanne Bernstein, who was in South Africa to attend her mother's funeral. "I just want to be with my family and in the same situation with them. I don't want to be separated."

Researcher Adele Shapiro, who has been living in Israel for nearly 20 years, was on her way back to Israel from

Canada through Greece when her flight to Israel was cancelled, and now she's stranded in Greece. Her flatmate in Haifa told her that it was better that she wasn't at home because a missile struck a street away from her flat. "I'm stuck in Greece," Shapiro said. "You know, it's a lovely place to be stuck, but I'm not in any mood to do anything. I just lie in bed every day and cry."

Similarly, both housewife Miriam Holuber and travel agent Brett Duveen were on their way back to Israel via

Addis Ababa when their flight to Israel was suddenly redirected to Cairo and then back to Addis Ababa. Holuber and the family that was with her returned to South Africa, while Duveen is waiting it out in London.

"The uncertainty is starting to become a big concern, a really big concern," said Duveen. "We have no idea how long we're going to be here. We don't even know if we're going to be repatriated from London."

"I feel unsettled," said Holuber. "We feel like refugees because we can't go home."

## SAJR webinar on Iran war interrupted by incoming missiles

LULA PENCHARZ

The title of the *SA Jewish Report's* webinar, "Israel & Iran WTF!" on Monday, 16 June, proved apt when the live interview was abruptly cut short by its Israeli guests having to head to bomb shelters as sirens warned of an imminent attack from Iranian missiles.

Colonel Miri Eisin, the former deputy head of the Israel Defense Forces combat intelligence, and Dr Michael Barak of the Institute for Counter-Terrorism at Reichman University had to shut down their Zoom interviews not even half an hour into the webinar. *SA Jewish Report* Chairperson Howard Sackstein warned at the beginning of the webinar that circumstances in Israel might compromise the full session, and it did.

However, Eisin was able to explain that prior to the Iranian revolution in 1979, Iran and Israel were "really good friends".

"The revolution of the Islamic regime in Iran brought Islamic ideology into play. A cardinal element of the ideology influencing Israel and Iran's relationship is Quds Day." Quds Day was added to the Muslim anniversary calendar in 1980, and is observed on the last Friday of Ramadan.

"This is significant as it symbolises the liberation of Jerusalem, the liberation of Palestine, and the destruction of Israel by viewing [Israel] through religious eyes as not being able to exist and viewing us as Western colonisers," Eisin said. "[Iran Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali] Khamenei always said that they view themselves as being the oppressed against the oppressor."

She said these terms, honed for the past 46 years, have caused a dramatic change in the relationship between Israel and Iran. She also reminded the audience not to go down the path of believing that Iran was a free democracy before the revolution, and that the Shah, the Iranian monarch, was good.

Sackstein asked whether it was high up on Iran's practical and ideological agenda to destroy Israel. "Ideologically absolutely," Eisin answered. "When it comes to ideology, it's at a point where the Islamic regime – but I don't think the people of Iran – views the existence of the Zionist entity as the cancer of the world."

Proof, Eisin said, is in the Islamic regime's top decision makers, including Khamenei; the president of Iran; and the commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, "call(ing) for [Israel's] annihilation and destruction as a cancer in the world".

"Ideologically it's a rallying point," she said. "On the practical side, since the 1990s, Iran's agenda has been furthered with different types and capabilities of a state. In practical terms, the Islamic regime has established units and armed proxies. By connecting to other terror organisations and entities that want to destroy Israel by supplying them with weapons, Iran has ensured that the ideology and practicalities connect. Iran has armed its proxies with weapons that have been used against [Israel], not just on 7 October, but through connections with organisations such as Hezbollah and the Houthis."

Barak said that what we are witnessing right now in the Middle East is the result of a long-term strategy of Iran building influence in weak, unstable states across the region.

"We witnessed several historical events in the Middle East including the Arab Spring in 2011, and in 2003, the American invasion of Iraq. This was a golden opportunity for Iran to base its establishments in the region, particularly in Iraq and

Lebanon in the 1980s," he said.

"Iran was building extensive infrastructure in those states. Iran was also increasing its influence in the region to deter Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, as well as the United States and Israel from interfering in its internal affairs."



Colonel Miri Eisin, Howard Sackstein, Michael Kransdorff, and Dr Michael Barak, in the webinar just as the the siren sounded

Said Barak, "Israel isn't willing, and it's not its job, to interfere in the internal politics and affairs of its neighbouring states. There are global mechanisms which are meant to ensure that there aren't any terrorist establishments in these areas. But Israel wasn't sleeping and was doing things below the radar." He said Israel took a serious approach to Iran attempting to establish power in Syria to have a closer base to attack Israel.

"Israel took measures against Iran building these extensive proxies on Israel's borders. Iran isn't interested in sending its own troops against Israel. Iran sacrifices cheap meat to them by using the Houthis and the pro-Iranian Shia militias in Syria. Iran uses its proxies to do the dirty work, but there was under-the-radar action by Israel, other Western states, and Gulf states to foil the Iranian agenda of establishing this wide network," Barak said.

When asked about claims of Iran's nuclear status and its denial of such claims, Eisin said, "The International Atomic Energy Agency, not Israel, has for the past 20 years said that Iran is trying to go down an illegal nuclear-weapon path."

Iran is a signatory to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and is under supervision when it comes to the prediction of nuclear weapons, she said. Inspectors in Iran have said multiple times that Iran is deviating from the path of civil nuclear capabilities. Over the past 20 years, negotiation tactics were used in Libya by the international community to quietly halt nuclear capabilities, as well as the tactic used by Israel to attack nuclear facilities "before they become hot", Eisin said. Prior to Israel's attack on Iran, Israel attacked the Iraqi nuclear facility in 1981, and the North Korean-built Syrian nuclear facility two months before it went "hot" in 2007, she said.

"There are many paths to nuclear fusion," Eisin said, "and just a few grams are used for medical and scientific research. However, Iran was enriching uranium to a degree that could only be heading in the direction of military grade nuclear weapons."

"In the agreement that was signed in 2015, it required supervision only of some of the sights in Iran. Iran has always denied everything at every stage along the way. If it complied and shut down some facilities, it would have taken a different path and tried another way to arrive at nuclear-fusion material with its very advanced technological capabilities," Eisin said.



# Aftermath of Iranian attack



SA Jewish Report photojournalist **Ilan Ossendryver** went to Israel's ground zero to capture the true picture of the devastation wrought by the Iranian missile attack on the civilian population in central Israel this week.

## THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL NEED US NOW

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## Reminiscent of COVID-19 and 7 October

While people in Israel may have a sense of déjà vu to the COVID-19 pandemic when they were forced to stay in their homes, we in South Africa have a sense of a prolonged 7 October. What do I mean by this?

People in Israel this week felt far more frightened when they got an alert than they have felt before. However, sitting indoors for so many hours has brought on that sense of the pandemic. While they are putting on a brave face, knowing that apartment blocks are being destroyed in central Israel and so far more than 24 people are dead because of Iranian strikes, Israelis are genuinely afraid for themselves and their loved ones. By Wednesday morning, more than 804 people had been injured.

As many as 3 800 people have had to be evacuated from their homes because of these Iranian missile strikes, and close to 20 000 are having to claim damages because of the harm done to their homes, businesses, vehicles, and other belongings. Whether anyone wants to be or not, people are afraid. And Israelis generally don’t do afraid very well or often.

Having said that, I have yet to come across an Israeli or *oleh* who believes that Israel shouldn’t have attacked Iran’s nuclear might. I’m talking about people to the left, right, and centre. Israel is united on this, and Israelis appreciate that it’s better to endure what they are going through now than have the country destroyed by an Iranian nuclear attack.

However, Israelis aren’t great at being forced to stay home, nor do they enjoy having to rush to shelters this often. They didn’t much like this during the pandemic either, but this sense of *Groundhog Day* is making people feel uncomfortable.

Here, in South Africa, our sense – or can I say my sense because I can’t really speak for everyone – is that we’re worried, afraid, and wanting to save our brethren in Israel, but can do absolutely nothing to help.

When I wake up every morning, and sometimes in the middle of the night, I grab my phone to see what has happened in Israel. Have there been any direct hits and where did they take place? The fact that Israel has stopped informing where the hits have taken place is understandable because we certainly wouldn’t want to help our enemies know where their missiles landed. However, I desperately want to know that the hits occurred nowhere near my family and loved ones. Not knowing adds to our anxiety and fear.

Every morning, all I want to do is call all my family and loved ones to check that they are all alright. I also feel guilty that they are experiencing such extreme stress and anxiety with repeated red alerts and rushing to their safe rooms while I can sleep soundly in safety.

I’ve realised that when I reach out to my family and friends every morning to check in on them and tell them how worried I am, I’m not making them feel any better. In fact, I’m distressing them when they have enough on their plate.

The problem is, if I don’t know that they are okay, how can I get on with my day? I’m worried. I’m afraid. But I can’t very well keep harassing them in Israel because of my issues, can I?

When I say that these past few days have been like 7 October for us in the diaspora, I’m referring to fear for those we love. I’m also referring to the horror on seeing the footage of the devastation wrought in cities we know and love. The horror of seeing once beautiful apartment blocks bombed, knowing those blocks were homes to so many peace-loving, innocent, civilian families. The horror of knowing that this is happening to our people.

The difference, however, between 7 October and this situation is that 7 October was one day, and this seems to be going on and on. Every day, we wake up with more bad news. Obviously, there’s nothing as horrifying as the 7 October massacre, but in this case, the fear is constant.

Also, like 7 October, while Jews everywhere are horrified and shocked, the rest of the world can only see the bad that Jews and Israel do, not the harm done to Israel. So, while we sweat and worry, others demean Israel and its people for attacking poor, innocent Iran.

This is totally illogical. I can understand why people are devastated about Gazans being caught in the crossfire between Israel and Hamas. There’s no question that many innocent people have died in that war. However, to call a strategic attack on the nuclear power of Iran devastating isn’t logical in any way.

Let’s be honest, the Islamic Republic of Iran leaders have for many years made it clear they are determined to eradicate Israel. They have many proxies, including Hamas, Hezbollah, and the like who are doing their work. It’s clear that Iran was close to having the power to create nuclear bombs, which it had no qualms about using against Israel or the Western world.

Iran has one of the world’s worst human rights records. It systemically discriminates against and is violent towards women, girls, LGBTI people, and ethnic and religious minorities. Thousands of Iranians are arbitrarily detained, interrogated, harassed, and unjustly prosecuted for exercising their human rights. Enforced disappearances and torture and other ill-treatment is widespread and systemic. This is according to Amnesty International.

I appreciate that peace-loving people believe that violence begets violence, and they aren’t wrong. But should Israel and the West wait for Iran to eradicate Israel with nuclear weapons?

Once the button is pressed for nuclear war, there’s no turning back. So, while I certainly wish the war in Gaza was long over and the remaining hostages were all home, I find this particular attack on Iran easier to understand.

The worry for those I love in Israel, however, is far from over. May the days of Israel at war come to an end, and peace between Israel and its neighbours begin.

Shabbat shalom!  
Peta Krost  
Editor



## Iran containment or regime change – possibilities roar

OPINION

PROFESSOR GLEN SEGELL



Ending wars is more challenging than initiating them. This is particularly true in the Middle East, where the fundamental reasons for the conflicts are often irreconcilable. Key factors include religion, tribal blood feuds, and vital resources, primarily oil and water. It remains too soon to predict accurately the potential outcomes of the ongoing conflict between Israel and Iran.

In the past, Israel and Iran had no reasons to engage in warfare. However, the Shia Islamic Revolution of 1979 introduced a new regime that identified Israel as a target for conflict. As a Jewish state, Israel, along with its ally, the United States, was viewed by the Shia leader, the Ayatollah, as a primary adversary. His vision is for the world to embrace a singular religion, Islam, and a singular interpretation of it, Shia.

Gradually, Iran grew more powerful and assertive, partly due to the decline of other rivals like Iraq. It established alliances with global powers that provided military support and expertise, notably Russia and China. Both Russia and North Korea were prepared to aid Iran in its efforts to enrich uranium and develop a missile programme. At its core, money plays a vital role in these dynamics, and Iran has successfully responded by providing drones to Russia for deployment against Ukraine.

The Ayatollah remained focused on their goal. For decades, threats of Israel’s complete annihilation were accompanied by tangible actions. Iran sought to advance its interpretation of Shia Islam on an international level and participated in regional interventions, either directly or via proxy groups like Hezbollah in Lebanon and in support of Hamas in Gaza.

The assault on Israel from Gaza on 7 October 2023, received backing from Iran. Moreover, there was proof of direct military involvement, including Iran supplying Hezbollah with rockets to target Israel from Lebanon, as well as offering intelligence and missiles to the Houthis for assaults from Yemen. In addition, drone and missile strikes were launched directly from Iran in April and October 2024.

Multiple global efforts aimed at confirming that Iran’s uranium enrichment activities weren’t intended for military purposes ultimately proved ineffective. In May and early June 2025, the reality of the situation was brought to light. The board of governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the international nuclear oversight body, officially stated that Iran was in violation of its non-proliferation commitments. Additionally, it raised the alarm over Iran’s accumulation of enriched uranium, which could potentially be used in the production of nuclear weapons.

On Saturday, 31 May, the Israeli Prime Minister’s Office released a statement on the IAEA report. The report was the catalyst, the smoking gun. The statement implicitly indicated that a pre-emptive and preventive reaction was imminent. On the morning of 13 June, various Israeli security, defence, and intelligence agencies launched attacks on uranium enrichment sites, ballistic missile launchers, and arms manufacturing facilities. In accordance with policy, individuals involved in the massacre and atrocities committed during the 7 October invasion of Israel were also specifically targeted and assassinated. Named Operation Rising Lion, the military

operation against Iran is part of the Iron Swords War. The implications are clear. Israel has its limits, and is addressing only the symptoms rather than the root causes. It is effectively severing the head of the serpent by dismantling the ability to enrich uranium and launch missiles. Regime change in Tehran may be necessary to tackle the underlying issues. There is hope that the Iranian people will rise up like a lion to overthrow the current regime.

The past 48 years in the history of Israel, which recently celebrated its 77th Independence Day, evoke a feeling of hope. Before this era, it was hard to believe that peace treaties could be forged with Egypt and Jordan, countries that once aimed to destroy it. Certainly, the Abraham Accords would have appeared to be a plot from a science fiction novel.

As a result, Israelis facing missile and drone attacks from Iran are probably contemplating when change will happen in Iran rather than if it will. It’s reasonable to assume that Iranians are also weary of being oppressed and having their economy exploited for ideological purposes by a small group of radicals in power.

It’s still unclear how or when this situation will unfold or when Israel’s operation will come to an end. In fact, historical data indicates that the full consequences of Israel’s preventive and pre-emptive strike on Iran may take years to become apparent. For instance, a weakened Shia regime or a change in regime could potentially heighten Shia-Sunni tensions globally. Furthermore, in the absence of a regime change, will the Ayatollah’s resolve to obtain a nuclear bomb be stronger than ever?



Nonetheless, it’s not premature to investigate strategies for de-escalation. Leading the way is global diplomacy focused on containment to discourage others from participating and to prevent escalation. Debates have occurred within the United Nations, and world leaders have expressed their opinions. They don’t feel an immediate need to send large forces to the region, as Israel and Iran don’t have a shared border, indicating that no territory has been invaded and no vital resources have been expropriated. The casualty figures are less than those usually observed in significant urban traffic incidents over a weekend in a large Western city.

In reality, there appears to be a subtle sense of contentment regarding the setbacks for Iran’s uranium and missile programmes due to Israel’s military operation. However, the Middle East continues to be an area where unforeseen occurrences can arise at any moment. The resolution of the Israel and Iran war might manifest as an event or process that has never happened before and is beyond what one can envision.

• Glen Segell is a professor at the University of Cambridge.







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# A nation of lions

OPINION

ROLENE MARKS



If you want to see the best of Israel, go to the supermarket. In behaviour that some would say is out of character, it's as Israeli as it gets. Since 7 October 2023, we have been able to communicate with each other without saying a word. We don't need to. We know what we're going through. So, in a trip to the overcrowded supermarket on Sunday, 15 June, as we all stood patiently in lines – okay, that's out of character – we were a little kinder. Sure, I'll watch your baby as you run to get something you forgot. Here, let me help you with that. May we be able to have a little bit of sleep sometime in the day. A little bit of sleep before the terror that ruptures the eerie calm.

The nights are horrendous – the loud warning from the phone telling everyone to get to shelters, then the inevitable drone of sirens, followed by massive booms. Most are interceptions; some are direct impacts that are very close. It shakes our buildings as we try to remain calm until we get the all-clear to leave the shelter from the Israel Defense Forces Home Front Command.

It's important to know that this is unlike anything we have endured. This isn't a barrage of rockets from Hamas, Hezbollah, or even the Houthis, that requires some time in the shelter and then life is pretty much normal. This is different. An enemy more evil, more insidious than any other. An enemy sworn to our annihilation, with a nuclear programme to make that threat a reality.

Israel has launched Operation Rising Lion with the intention of disabling Iran's nuclear programme. Israelis are united behind this operation. This isn't a partisan issue, this is our fight for survival. We are the vanguard in the clash of civilisations. We don't

expect anyone to fight this fight for us, we ask that you support us.

We knew the price would be high, and as bone tired as we all are, we know this is the right decision. Israelis, along with the brave people of Iran, have lived under the jackboot of the Iranian regime's tyranny through its proxies like Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis, and others. Iranians have been oppressed for decades. Women have been beaten and even killed for not wearing the hijab properly, members of the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning) community executed, some as young as 13, and any dissidents arrested, tortured, and executed.

It's time to end the Iranian stranglehold over the region and the world.

We have never had our resilience muscles tested so hard. Israelis are still deep in the trauma of 7 October, and cannot even begin to heal until the remaining 53 of our captive brothers and sisters are returned to us. With the focus on Operation Rising Lion, we haven't lost sight of our hostages.

We're all exhausted from lack of sleep and hyper-vigilant, waiting for the alerts to get to our shelters and anticipate what's incoming. The country is in a state of emergency, so only essential services are operating, and parents are at home trying to balance work commitments and frightened children.

It's an extremely challenging time for all of us.

I have never been more proud of or loved my fellow Israeli as I do now. This nation has risen like a lion – fierce, proud, and magnificent.

To our Iranian brothers and sisters, we stand with you.

This is your moment.

Our noble people go back millennia, and we, too, dream of a day where we reunite our ancient bonds and bind them with the Cyrus Accords in a pact of peace.

To our enemies and those who seek to destroy us, don't test the resolve of the lions of Zion. We may have taken painful knocks, but

our resolve is strong. We're tempered in Swords of Iron. You awoke the lion of Judah, and as he has done throughout history, he will devour his enemies. Your hatred is no match for our love, and fight for survival.

This nation has risen like lions. Now if we could only get some sleep.

- *Rolene Marks is a Middle East commentator often heard on radio and TV and is the co-founder of Lay of the Land and the SA-Israel Policy Forum.*



## Israel's scapegoating undermines global governance

OPINION

NKATEKO MULOIWA



The international community's response to conflicts and human rights violations reveals a troubling pattern of selective moral outrage, where actions by certain states, Israel in particular, receive vastly different treatment to comparable or even more severe actions by others.

Recent events, particularly the India-Pakistan escalation of 2025 and ongoing restrictions on media access in various conflicts, demonstrates how Israel faces disproportionate scrutiny and condemnation compared to other nations engaging in similar military operations, civilian casualties, and restrictions on press freedom. International institutions, civil society organisations, and media outlets apply fundamentally different standards when evaluating Israeli actions versus those of other states, undermining both the credibility of global-justice mechanisms and the principles of equal treatment under international law.

The escalation of conflict between India and Pakistan offers a stark illustration. In May 2025, following a terrorist attack in Kashmir that killed 26 people, India launched "Operation Sindoor", firing missiles into Pakistani territory and killing at least 26 civilians, including women and children. Pakistan reported that India had struck six locations, with civilian buildings being targeted, and at least eight people confirmed dead including a three-year-old child. This represents what Pakistan's prime minister characterised an "act of war".

The international response to these civilian casualties has been notably muted. While the United Nations Security Council held closed consultations at Pakistan's request, no emergency session was convened, no resolutions were passed, and no significant condemnation emerged from the international community. The United States, rather than threatening sanctions or aid cuts, actually approved \$131 million (R2.3 billion) in military assistance to India during this period of escalation. US President Donald Trump's response was limited to calling the situation "a shame", and expressing hope it would "end very quickly".

This restrained response contrasts sharply with the way similar Israeli actions are received. When Israel conducts military operations that result in civilian casualties, the international community responds with immediate emergency UN Security Council sessions, widespread condemnation, and calls for investigation. The UN General Assembly's tenth emergency special session on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been ongoing since 1997, and has convened more than 30 meetings, making it the most frequently reconvened emergency session in UN history. Recent Israeli military action in Gaza has prompted immediate emergency sessions, with UN Secretary-General António Guterres denouncing "mass destruction" and "heartbreaking" civilian casualties.

The numerical disparity in casualties doesn't explain this differential treatment. The Gaza conflict has resulted in more than 25 000 Palestinian deaths according to Gaza's health ministry, compared to 1 200 Israelis killed in the 7 October 2023 Hamas attack. However, the India-Pakistan escalation, involving comparable civilian casualties relative to the scale of the attacks, has received minimal international attention despite occurring between nuclear-armed powers.

Another area revealing stark double standards is restrictions on media access



and press freedom during conflicts. India implemented significant media restrictions during its tensions with Pakistan, including blocking Pakistani YouTube channels and news organisations; instructing media to rely solely on official briefings; and pressuring international media to adopt government-preferred terminology. India also blocked Kashmiri media outlets, with *The Kashmir Walla* website and social media accounts made unreachable within India, while its founder editor remains incarcerated on charges including "seditious" and "anti-India" articles.

These restrictions on the press during active conflict have received minimal international criticism compared to similar measures involving Israel. Though the Foreign Press Association has criticised Israel for preventing foreign journalists from entering Gaza independently since October 2023, similar restrictions by other nations during conflicts don't generate equivalent international pressure or media attention.

The contrast becomes more pronounced when considering that Israel faces sustained international pressure over media-access restrictions during wartime, while other nations implementing similar or more severe restrictions during their conflicts receive comparatively little scrutiny.

The application of sanctions and economic pressure reveals perhaps the most glaring double standard in international response. Despite India's military strikes and its restrictions on media freedom, no major Western nation has threatened sanctions or economic isolation.

In contrast, Israel faces constant threats of sanctions and economic pressure from multiple Western nations. France's president, Emmanuel Macron, has warned that his country could apply sanctions against Israelis over the humanitarian situation in Gaza. The United Kingdom (UK) is actively considering sanctions against two Israeli cabinet ministers. More than 800 lawyers and judges have called for UK sanctions on Israel, demanding concrete action to halt what they characterise as "serious violations of international law".

The US has also threatened to cut military aid to Israel if humanitarian conditions in Gaza don't improve, with secretary of state and defence officials sending a formal letter warning of potential aid reductions within 30 days.

The cultural and academic boycott movement represents another dimension where Israel faces unique international pressure. The Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement has successfully convinced "tens of thousands of artists across the world and a rapidly growing number of arts organisations" to endorse publicly the cultural boycott of Israel. International venues and festivals are pressured to reject funding and sponsorship from Israeli institutions, with cultural boycotts explicitly modelled on the anti-apartheid movement against South Africa.

Consumer boycotts targeting Israeli goods are actively promoted in multiple countries. These systematic economic and cultural boycotts targeting an entire nation's cultural and economic output have no parallel in contemporary international relations, even for countries engaging in conflicts with comparable or higher civilian casualties.

Continued on page 9>>



# East London Jewry settles prolonged dispute with rabbi

TALI FEINBERG

The tiny East London Jewish community can finally breathe a sigh of relief as the rabbi it employed but then fell into a dispute with finally moved out of the community-owned rabbinical house this week. This means that the community will, at long last, be able to bring *rabbonim* out for Shabbat and *yom tavim*, and move out of the limbo imposed by the dispute with the Rabbi Chanoch Galperin.

“I feel relieved that we are finally getting our community house back, but this experience has left our community traumatised,” says a community member, speaking anonymously. “Now, we will pick up the pieces.”

The East London Jewish community has essentially halved over the past ten years, with many members passing away or leaving. The dispute with the rabbi and his illegal occupation of the house meant that it was “hanging on by a thread”, but it still hopes to keep going. “We will do it in our own way,” says the anonymous community member.

The community hopes to one day turn part of the house into a small shul, while selling the original community shul. With only 25 people left, it doesn’t need a bigger facility, and selling the shul will bring in much-needed funds. However, it still needs to recover the costs owed to it, some legal details need to be finalised, and the impact of the dispute will reverberate for years to come.

It all began in 2018, when the community accused Galperin of forging the will of a community member, the late Israel Bayer, and diverting funds meant for the East London Chevrah Kadisha (ELCK) to himself. This dispute was first seen before the South African Beth Din in September 2019. The Beth Din initially found Galperin innocent, but then formally withdrew and set aside this ruling.

The rabbi then admitted that his wife wrote out a



The East London Shul

new will for Bayer, in which the third allocated to the ELCK would go to him. However, in South African law, a wife writing a will automatically disqualifies her husband from benefitting from it.

The ELCK has now reached a settlement with Galperin in which each party would receive half of the third allegedly allocated to the rabbi. The other two-thirds will go to the Chevrah Kadisha Johannesburg and Arcadia Children’s Home, as was recorded in Bayer’s last will dated 18 October 2017.

The advocate representing the ELCK and the East London Hebrew Congregation, Stanley Pincus, says “This has been one of the most fascinating cases in my 40-plus years at the Bar, but probably the most frustrating, as it took us five years to reach this point [of the rabbi agreeing to leave the house], even though we had court orders in our favour.”

The community fired the rabbi in 2020 in the wake of the will dispute and after a disciplinary hearing. However, Galperin and his wife continued to live in the community’s rabbinical home in defiance of his employment contract, which instructed him to vacate the home upon its termination.

The couple “refused to vacate the home, and didn’t pay one cent towards its unlawful occupation for approximately five years”, says Pincus. “They paid only for electricity and water so as to not get cut off by authorities.

“The rabbi essentially delayed vacating the house

by exhausting all legal remedies, even going right up to the Constitutional Court with the matter and losing the case there,” he says. “That set back the process for at least another three years.”

The community’s contract with the rabbi would have ended in May 2024, so even if the couple had stayed until the end of their original employment period, they have been squatting in the house for a year. A judge

eventually ordered their eviction, which they at first appealed. They eventually put the appeal aside and agreed to a settlement, vacating the property on 15 June 2025.

Pincus was born in East London and grew up there, which means the case had a personal impact on him. “I’m relieved that community organisations can now continue to do their good work and the community can move forward,” he says.

As for the man at the start of the story, Israel Bayer – whose legacy was profoundly impacted – the community will ensure that he isn’t forgotten.

The *SA Jewish Report* reached out to the Beth Din, Rabbi Galperin, and his legal team for comment, but hadn’t received a response by the time of publication.

## Israel’s scapegoating undermines global governance

>> Continued from page 8

No similar systematic boycott movements have emerged targeting India despite its recent military actions, media restrictions, and civilian casualties in Pakistan.

International legal frameworks further demonstrate these double standards. The International Court of Justice has issued orders regarding Israeli actions in Gaza, with the European Union explicitly calling for their full implementation. And the UN General Assembly’s regular emergency sessions on Israel represent an unprecedented level of sustained international pressure.

Meanwhile, the UN Security Council’s closed consultations on India-Pakistan tensions concluded without any formal statements or resolutions, despite Pakistan’s characterisation of India’s actions as an “act of war”.

This selective moral outrage undermines the credibility of international institutions and the principles of equal treatment under international law. It may also perpetuate cycles of conflict by creating

perceptions of bias that undermine diplomatic solutions and the peaceful resolution of disputes.

While legitimate concern about Israeli actions and policies deserves attention, the application of different standards based on the identity of the actors rather than the nature of their actions represents a failure of international justice. The international community must recognise and address these inconsistencies to maintain the integrity and effectiveness of global governance systems designed to protect human rights and maintain peace and security.

• *Nkateko Muloiwa is a political researcher with an interest in international and local affairs. He provides political commentary on issues ranging from the Middle East to rural South Africa. He recently completed his Masters in Political Studies and is pursuing an MSc in Science Communication at the University of the Witwatersrand. He also has interests in the geopolitical significance of Israel in the Middle East.*

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# Matilda – a ‘dream role’ for lead actress

GILANA LAB

“Sometimes you have to be a little bit naughty” to survive, says 10-year-old Yeshiva College student, Amira Nathan, who is playing the lead role of Matilda in *Matilda Jr.* at the People’s Theatre in Johannesburg from 10 June to 27 July.

“I love *Matilda*. I’ve read and watched the movie more than 80 times. It’s one of my all-time favourites,” Nathan told the *SA Jewish Report*. She and two other young actresses are alternating in the lead role, which she says is a dream come true for her.

*Matilda*, a beloved children’s novel by Roald Dahl, was adapted into a hit stage musical and several film versions. At its heart, *Matilda* is the story of an extraordinary little girl with a brilliant mind and a strong sense of justice who dares to stand up against the cruelty and unfairness around her.

*Matilda* celebrates the power of intelligence, resilience, and kindness. It encourages children to think for themselves, believe in their inner strength, and never underestimate the impact of standing up for what’s right.

Nathan says she relates to Matilda, which is why it’s her favourite musical. “The way Matilda stands up for herself and is so strong really resonates with me,” she says. This isn’t Nathan’s stage debut. In December 2024, she was a part of the *Aladdin Jr.* production put on by

the same theatre company. Acting is Nathan’s passion. “Everyone says I could sing before I could speak, and that I’ve been performing since the day I was born,” she says.

The audition process was long and gruelling, she says. “More than 250 girls auditioned, which was an overwhelming number to hear,”

Every day for three weeks, Nathan would leave school at 13:30, an hour before school usually ends. “My rehearsal schedule lasted three weeks. I was at the theatre from 14:00 until 17:30. As well as missing school, I also missed all my extra murals and stuff like that.

“My teachers and friends have

activities because of the play.”

Nathan also battled with the rehearsals scheduled on Shabbat. “I keep Shabbat, so for the past four weeks, my mom and I have had to stay at a hotel near the theatre and walk every Saturday to rehearsals,” she says. Since the play is taking place in the winter season, walking

early in the morning to get to rehearsals on time has been difficult for them. “Waking in the morning with this cold and having to walk from the hotel in the middle of Braamfontein has been an interesting experience,” she says.

Since three girls are alternating in the role of Matilda, Nathan hasn’t had to perform in the Saturday shows. “Since I did *Aladdin Jr.* last year, they knew I kept Shabbat, and they organised the shows around me,” she says.

Having “other Matildas” has also helped reduce stress for Nathan. “The days I’m not playing Matilda, I get to relax, and it gives me time to catch up on everything I have missed,” she says.

Nathan has taken one of her favourite lines in the play as her motto for overcoming any challenges. “If you sit around and let them get on top, you won’t change a thing,” is the line in the song, *Naughty*. “It offers a life lesson in that if challenges come your way and you do nothing to overcome them, nothing is going to happen to improve the situation,” she says.



Amira Nathan as Matilda in *Matilda Jr.*

Nathan says. Nathan got a call back a few weeks after the initial audition to say she had been selected along with 80 others to continue with the audition process. Finally, after many callbacks and script readings, she received the call to say she had been chosen to play Matilda. “We were actually on holiday when I got the call. I was so excited. I was finally able to play my favourite character of all time.”

been supportive,” says this Grade 5 student. “They helped me catch up my work and stay up to date with everything. I’ve been told many times that I panicked too much about my work.” Having this support system made the experience a lot easier.

“The late nights after rehearsal were difficult – and still going to school the next day,” she says, recalling the tougher aspects of the production for her. “And I missed out on school

## Does the Let Them theory work for Jews?

BOOKS

BATYA BRICKER



It seems like absolutely everyone is talking about the Let Them theory by Mel Robbins. As the lady in Freshfellas elbows you for the last horseradish root, you mutter “Let her” and serenely reach for the bottled kind; as the taxi cuts in front of your car, you “let him” and drive on, unfazed and unruffled.

Robbins’ theory is all about setting yourself free from trying to control what you can’t – other people’s views and actions that offend or impede on your own. And by doing so, you also let go of frustration, overwhelm and, often, self-constructed hurt.

Robbins is an Ivy League-educated criminal defence attorney and entrepreneur, whose quick wit and insight has made her a global phenomenon – in publishing and beyond. Reading a book by her feels like you’re debriefing with a good friend and a glass of wine.

Using the same no-nonsense, science-backed approach that’s made *The Mel Robbins Podcast* such a global sensation, Robbins explains why the Let Them theory is already loved by millions and how you can apply it in eight key areas of your life. Within a few pages, you’ll realise how much energy and time you’ve been wasting trying to control the wrong things – at work, in relationships, and in pursuing your goals – and how this is keeping you from happiness and success.

Concept sounding familiar? Philosophers like the Stoics – and countless others – have articulated this idea for centuries: personal peace comes from accepting what is, controlling what you can, and letting go of the rest.

For me, what makes all the difference in Robbins’ version is the three words “and let me” that she bolts onto the “Let them” starter phrase. That changes everything.

Why I have found Robbins’ five-word mantra “Let them and let me” so effective is because, in one pithy phrase, it shifts you from perseverating to ideating, from counter-productive inward thoughts that swirl endlessly like a rinse cycle in your head, to something more expansive and constructive. At its best, it then moves you to positive action: what am I going to do, practically, right now, to create the best version of myself, regardless? What do I want to make happen? What is my next step towards making a dream come true? It grants you agency.

And that’s actually a very Jewish thing to do. Pirkei Avot 1:17 says, “Study is not the primary thing but action [is].” The Torah instructs us in G-d’s will and Divine values, but words alone are not enough. For wisdom to endure, application and practice are paramount.

It got me thinking. Do we Jews living in the 21st century, with a backdrop of Israel

at war and worldwide antisemitism as virulent as ever, have the luxury of applying the Let Them theory to the world around us? While this theory has proved to be exceptionally useful to me and millions of others on an individual basis, can we, on a group scale, use “Let them and let me” wisdom to guide us as we navigate such challenging times?

Do we have an option of letting antisemitic rhetoric go unchallenged? Is not defending the right of Israel to exist a choice? It would be far less painful and exhausting to simply “let them think whatever they think” and let us get on with how we want to live our lives.

The problem is that silence is complicity, and allowing hateful thoughts and hate speech to run riot has very real and scary consequences for the physical survival and quality of life for us, our fellow Jews, and our children after us.

A Jew’s identity exists on both a personal and national level. As partners with G-d in creating, crafting, and correcting the world – *tikkun olam* – opting out of the national bit of that agency doesn’t really align. Self-mastery in isolation is not a Jewish ideal. “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing” weighs heavily on our (shrugging let them) shoulders.

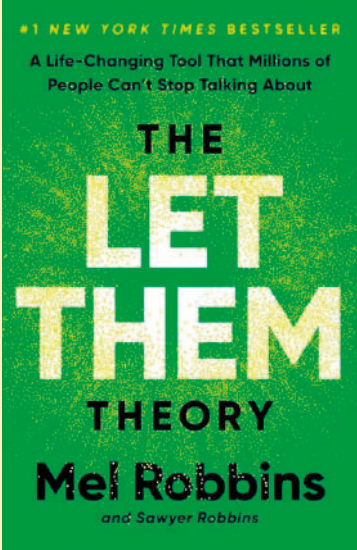
If the raison d’être of the Jewish people is to change the world for good, Paul McCartney’s ‘Let it be’ is simply not an option.

It’s also not constructive in finding a way forward. “Let them” is a kind of giving up on dialogue and compromise, because it acknowledges that it is a zero-sum game – a game that cannot be won. That’s not helpful in finding middle ground.

The more religious version of “Let them and let me” might be “Let go and let G-d”, which points to radical acceptance of G-d’s will and omnipotence. Indeed, a valuable reminder of the Divine greater plan, but perhaps too docile a voice for a people faced with physical, emotional, and spiritual danger.

Perhaps the Jewish answer would be something like: Don’t let them, but let me. In other words, do both – speak up, protest, feel the pain, but then swiftly move to action and engagement. And don’t rest until the two battles – the inner and outer, the personal and the national – align.

• *Word-nerd, spiritual seeker, and storyteller, Batya Bricker publishes books, writes, teaches, and learns, constantly looking for new ways to uncover the power of a story.*



### Letters

#### FEWER NUMBERS, BIGGER DECISIONS: RETHINKING OUR INSTITUTIONS

The Johannesburg Jewish community is steadily shrinking. When I matriculated at King David Linksfield, more than 200 students graduated alongside me. Last year, Linksfield’s matric class comprised just 147 students. The decline is even more evident in the early grades, with the current Grade 1 class at Linksfield numbering about 65 students. My son’s Grade 3 year isn’t much larger. Anecdotal reports suggest that King David Sandton and King David Victory Park are facing even greater challenges, with some early grades having student numbers in the teens.

This raises important questions about the future of our schools. Take the high school as an example. A campus that once accommodated more than 1 000 students may, within five years, have fewer than 500. Yet, the costs of maintaining its vast infrastructure will continue to rise, placing a heavier financial burden on a shrinking parent base, many of whom are already grappling with escalating living costs, particularly the high price of kosher food. At the same time, ensuring that teachers receive competitive salaries is essential to retaining quality educators, but with fewer students per teacher, the cost per child will inevitably increase.

Additionally, it is quite likely that King David Linksfield parents are, in effect, subsidising the King David Victory Park and King David Sandton campuses, which are facing even greater enrolment challenges. As student numbers dwindle across these campuses, the financial strain on the entire network of schools intensifies. This further underscores the need for strategic consolidation and careful resource allocation to ensure the long-term sustainability of Jewish education in Johannesburg.

These challenges extend beyond schools and into our broader community institutions, including shuls. Historically, large synagogues have closed only when financial pressure and dwindling congregations made it impossible to sustain them, often when they could no longer gather a *minyan*. The recent merger of the Victory Park and Emmarentia shuls is a case in point. Perhaps it’s time to consider a more proactive approach, particularly within the “ghetto”, where multiple shuls, many of which are struggling to maintain their congregations, operate within just a 1km radius of one another. Instead of sustaining multiple underutilised facilities, a more unified approach could help ensure that shuls remain financially viable while continuing to serve as vibrant centres of Jewish life.

These realities demand thoughtful discussion and proactive planning. How do we ensure that our community institutions remain financially stable while continuing to meet the needs of Jewish families in Johannesburg? Perhaps it’s time to embrace consolidation, rethinking how we allocate resources to build a more sustainable future for both our children’s education and our broader community infrastructure. In some cases, sentimentality may need to give way to difficult but necessary decisions, prioritising the long-term resilience of our community over short-term emotional attachments.

– Adam Marcus, Johannesburg



# Wandering fools’ modern exodus without the miracles

In the spirit of the biblical Israelites, a small band of well-intentioned, khaki-clad South Africans and assorted internationals recently embarked on a symbolic walk to Gaza. You read that correctly: a walk. To Gaza. On foot. As a means of “breaking the siege”.

If that sentence feels like it belongs in a Monty Python sketch, you’re not alone.

To be fair, the original Israelites also took a desert detour. Forty years wandering for what should have been a two-week trip. But here’s the difference: they had direction. A cloud by day, fire by night. Manna. Leadership. A divine GPS system, if you will.

This group? Not so much.

They began their pilgrimage not with faith, but with hashtags. Instead of tablets of stone, they carried laminated placards. Instead of Moses, they had a yoga instructor from Bryanston who once ran a juice cleanse in support of free-range kale. Their “Red Sea” moment? Being ignored by the N12 highway patrol outside Klerksdorp. (I made that part up.)

What, exactly, was the goal? To arrive in Gaza on foot and ... then what? Break the camel blockade with blistered feet and a handwritten letter to Hamas? One wonders if, like the generation of the desert, their children will have to finish what they started, assuming their sunscreen holds out.

And then, the highlight: Nelson Mandela’s grandson, “Mandla” Mandela, was reportedly arrested along the way. Naturally. Because what symbolic walk would be complete without symbolic martyrdom? Except this wasn’t exactly *The Long Walk to Freedom*. More like “The Short Stroll to the Nearest PR Opportunity”. It wasn’t a 27-year incarceration but 27 lines of performative outrage. One wonders what granddad would have thought of his legacy being lent to a terrorist-sympathising

**INNER VOICE**  
*Howard Feldman*



cosplay trek through the Sinai. And the symbolism! Wrapped in keffiyehs and righteous indignation, they marched like prophets, tweeting every step as all true prophets do, naturally. There was talk of solidarity, liberation, and resistance. But curiously absent was any mention of Hamas. Not a word. Not a whisper. Not even a Google search.

It’s as though the blockade floated down from the heavens like divine punishment, with no architects, no cause. No mention of 7 October. No mention of tunnels, rockets, or child hostages. Just Israel cast as Pharaoh, the Amalekites, and maybe Babylon too, depending on the day.

But this isn’t the exodus. The Israelites weren’t walking in support of tyranny, they were fleeing it. They weren’t marching toward a regime that executes dissent, jails journalists, and uses its own citizens as shields. They were heading for a land of promise. These modern marchers are walking straight into a public-relations trap, blindfolded, singing freedom songs for those who silence their own people.

It would be funny if it weren’t so tragic. Or maybe it is funny. It’s hard to tell anymore.

So yes, walk, march, or wander. But understand this: just because your sandals are dusty and your cause has a hashtag doesn’t make it holy. And sometimes, walking in circles is just that: circles.

And in the unlikely event that they do reach Gaza, they need to remember to bring snacks. And lots of liquids. Because the manna’s been discontinued, and I can’t imagine they will find almond milk at the border.

# Government ignores plight of South Africans in Israel

The past week has brought rapid and unsettling developments in the conflict in Israel, with Israel launching strikes against Iranian military and key strategic targets. We earnestly hope that Israel can achieve the stated objectives of this conflict, paving the way for a future free from the existential threat posed by an enemy state intent on its destruction. Our history as Jews, including the tragic events of 7 October 2023 have starkly reminded us that when an adversary openly declares its intent to annihilate you, you should take them at their word.

Predictably, the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (Dirco) issued an initial statement expressing “profound concern” over Israel’s military actions against Iran, highlighting specific worries about risks to nuclear safety and security due to strikes near nuclear facilities. The statement extended condolences to Iran and the families of its victims, yet conspicuously omitted any mention of Iranian aggression, Israeli civilian casualties, Iran’s deliberate targeting of civilian areas, or the reason that Israel was targeting nuclear facilities.

In response, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies issued a clear and unequivocal statement, condemning Dirco’s one-sided stance. We noted that South Africa’s government has a troubling history of aligning with authoritarian regimes known for oppressing their own people and exporting terror. We further criticised Dirco for failing to provide any context for Israel’s actions, placing all blame squarely on Israel, and for its disregard for Jewish lives.

Dirco responded on 15 June, in which it extended “deepest condolences to the peoples of both nations suffering from the tragic loss of life”. It further emphasised that “under international humanitarian law, civilians and civilian infrastructure must never be considered legitimate targets”. While we welcome this shift in tone, it was quickly overshadowed by the government’s subsequent actions. On the same day, Dirco issued a travel advisory urging

**ABOVE BOARD**  
*Karen Milner*



South African citizens in Iran to exercise caution and register with the South African embassy in Tehran. Reprehensibly, the statement doesn’t offer similar advice or services to its citizens in Israel.

Given this lack of empathy and concern, the Board has stepped in wherever possible and provided assistance and support to various South Africans unable to return home and caught in this most frightening and precarious situation.

We do, however, wish to register our condemnation of this hypocrisy shown again by Dirco, and have released an open letter to President Cyril Ramaphosa. The letter highlights the government’s selective consular support, which extends only to South Africans in Iran, while showing disinterest and a complete lack of concern for the many South Africans, be they Christian, Jewish, or Muslim who are stranded in Israel. We understand this to be a violation of the president’s constitutional obligations to citizens, whom he appears to be willing to abandon for his own political agenda. The government’s stance on this situation confirms once again its lack of empathy, not only for the citizens of Israel, but for its own citizens in Israel.

The Board previously raised concerns about lack of consular support for South Africans in Israel at a meeting with Ramaphosa in December 2023, where we were assured that our citizens in Israel would receive the necessary services. Dirco’s latest statement validates our concern that, in times of crisis, South Africans visiting Israel have no access to consular support.

Our thoughts and prayers are with the victims of this conflict, and we hope to see a swift and decisive end to this war that will cement a more peaceful existence for all the people of Israel and the Middle East.

• *Listen to Charisse Zeifert on Jewish Board Talk, 101.9 ChaiFM, every Friday from 12:00 to 13:00.*

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





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# Sundelson conquers St Andrews in competitive golf series

SAUL KAMIONSKY

South African golfer Judd Sundelson played some of the best golf of his life to win the prestigious European Order of Merit at St Andrews, Scotland, for the first time, in April this year.

The 23-year-old University of St Andrews Masters student describes the achievement as “the biggest thing I’ve won. I felt relieved and special.

“The victory felt like a culmination of so much hard work throughout my golfing life,” he said. The merit was part of the 2024 to 2025 R&A Student Tour Series, Europe’s premier university golf circuit.

Sundelson moved to England after matriculating from King David Victory Park in 2020. He had a scholarship to the University of Nottingham to do his undergraduate degree, and then moved to St Andrews, where he is doing a Masters in banking and finance.

Sundelson, who had led the Order of Merit in 2023 before injuring his wrist, is the first University of St Andrews student to win the men’s Order of Merit. Fellow University of St Andrews student Judy Joo also made history by being the university’s first winner of the women’s Order of Merit.

The Student Tour Series is contested by golfers



Judd Sundelson playing in the Student Tour Series

aged 19 to 27 from all over Europe, Sundelson said. “I was leading most of the way,” he said. “I started off in third place in Sweden, fourth place in Ireland, fifth place in Spain, and tied first in Portugal.

“These were all world-class golf courses

where they hosted great tournaments. The final accumulated at the Home of Golf, St Andrews, which is an iconic venue, so it meant a lot to win there. St Andrews is also where I’m studying, so it meant a lot to me, and it was great to be around friends, all my teammates, and my coach. Everyone in the town supported me.

“The nerves got to me a little bit in the final at St Andrews, where the scoring was very good and I finished in 18th place,” he said.

“I don’t play my best in the finals, but I made two big birdies on the stretch in the 14th and 15th holes that were playing really tough. That was absolutely crucial. It was amazing to win with one of the best six rounds of my life. Into the 15th hole, it took about five feet [1.5m] to make birdie. The 14th was into the wind, and off the back, I hit an amazing drive, an amazing three-wood, about 25 feet, and made a birdie.”

Sundelson led the series from the second event, and had a commanding lead going into the finals. “I was ahead by quite a lot, and I was always the one to catch,” he says, “so I didn’t have it easy from my playing partners. I just stuck to myself, blocked all the noise, and played within myself.”

Sundelson’s family is proud of his Order of Merit win, says his dad, Barry, who played professional golf. “Winning the Order of Merit is a brilliant

and unique achievement for Judd,” he says. “The standard is high, and the environment demanding. It’s great to see him enjoying his golf and [for him] to keep getting better and better each year.”

Sundelson enjoyed travelling around Europe during the series, however, he said the tour “came with a lot of challenges too. Tough competition, hostile environments, so I had to keep my head down and just back myself.”

Sundelson’s prior golfing highlights included playing for Gauteng; winning junior tournaments; winning [two golds] in the Maccabi Games; being selected for the golf South Africa squad; and being in the South African team to compete in a major event in Great Britain this summer.

Sundelson comes from a family with a rich golfing history. Barry, and his uncle, Dean, have won medals for golf at the Maccabi Games. His grandfather, Neville, was also an amateur golfer.

Sundelson practises at St Andrews, known as the Home of Golf, every day in Scotland, and frequents the Houghton Golf Club when he is in South Africa.

“I’m playing all the major events in the United Kingdom this year: the Brabazon, in which my grandfather was the first international winner; St Andrews Links; the Scottish Open; and I’m doing the British Amateur [Championship] with the South African team,” he said.

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