

Our National Jewish Dialogue needs you

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and understand our problems. What we need is strong, courageous leadership that implements the change we require for a better South Africa.

At the *SA Jewish Report*, we believe that a genuine national dialogue is well overdue so long as it creates an impetus for real change that addresses the fundamental issues that affect our nation, be they rampant crime; the proliferation of a gangster state; government corruption; stagnant growth; civil service incompetence; lack of service delivery; unprecedented unemployment; failing education; lack of economic opportunity for ordinary South Africans; inequality; the scourge of gender based violence; or racism. The list is long.

We believe that as a community, we have much to add to this dialogue, and

We want to hear all legitimate constructive voices, some of which will be divergent views to the norm, and that's okay

let's face it, it's not as if our community lacks opinions, it's just that often, people in positions of authority are too deaf or arrogant to listen.

So, it is with great pride that we dovetail with the president's initiative, and announce the National Jewish Dialogue.

We want to hear from YOU, your opinions and views on matters that affect our community and our nation.

We want to hear from you about issues which affect you and your daily life; about the big national issues; about communal affairs; racism; antisemitism; our relationship to Israel; about the way we lead our community; about religious freedom; and our role and place in this

country.

We will be asking 100 key Jewish thought leaders for their opinions, and will publish them online and through our regular newsletters, asking people to address the issues that are important to them. But we also want to hear from you.

We ask you to please send your submissions to admin@sajewishreport.co.za.

A few guidelines for your submission:

- It can be as short or long as you want; but please make your points clearly;
- It should paint a vision of the country and/or community you want to live in;
- We want to know what should be bolstered, what should be scrapped, what should be innovated, and what should be decommissioned;
- It should not be intended to offend people and/or organisations;
- It should not be racist, sexist, or homophobic;
- It should deal with ideas, not people;
- It cannot deny the right of the Jewish people to national self-determination in their ancestral homeland, or be a grifter for those who seek to do damage rather than build our community;

- It should contain your name. If you fear backlash or victimisation, you may request that the editor withhold your name, as long as she knows who you are;
- It should be bold and visionary; and
- It should desire to build a better country and community for all of us.

The last thing we want to do in the National Jewish Dialogue is to create an echo chamber where we reaffirm our own positions and don't engage seriously with the fundamental issues which affect us all. We want to hear all legitimate constructive voices, some of which will be divergent views to the norm, and that's okay.

We recognise that we make progress through dialogue, some views may make us uncomfortable, and some may give us comfort, but all in all, we're looking for input which may open us to new possibilities and ideas in order to build a stronger more vibrant South African Jewish community.

Your opinion really does count. Please don't pass up this opportunity to build a stronger, better society.

Howard Sackstein
Chairperson *SA Jewish Report*

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Sportsmen or spectators?

Are you a spectator or a participant? Do you only watch your favourite soccer club, or do you sometimes kick a ball yourself?

A few years ago, it was decided to widen the seats at Wimbledon. Apparently, the problem was rather simple – obesity. It appears that fans that admire the tennis stars in action don't get much exercise. The chairperson of the British Sports Council was prompted to state, "If only the admirers of sport would practice it themselves."

The *parsha* this week is named after Korach, the cousin of Moses and a revolutionary who attempted to usurp the authority of Moses and Aaron. His ill-fated rebellion came to a bitter end when the earth opened and swallowed him and his followers, demonstrating to all that Moses and Aaron were truly chosen by G-d.

But why name a *parsha* of the Torah after a villain? Korach was a sinner, and is surely not a role model for us to emulate?

My saintly teacher and mentor, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, whose *yahrzeit* is observed next week, offered a novel approach. There's one area where Korach

can, indeed, be a good role model. What was Korach's burning desire in life? It was to be a *Kohen Gadol* (high priest). He coveted Aaron's position of honour.

Now, being a high priest meant much more than just fame and fortune, glory, or privilege. Many sacred responsibilities came with the job. It was no easy task to be a *Kohen Gadol*. There were numerous restrictions – where he could go; what kind of activities he could be involved in; whom he could marry, etc. Yet, Korach was single-minded in his aspiration to become the high priest.

Said the Rebbe, this is something we can all learn from Korach, namely the yearning to serve G-d in the holiest capacity, the craving to be a *Kohen Gadol*. Would it be that all of us shared similar aspirations to holiness! Wouldn't it be wonderful if each one of us longed for a life of sanctity dedicated to the service of G-d?

How often are we only too happy to allow others to handle the sacred stuff. "You can put on tefillin for me, rabbi." And your bobba can keep kosher for you; and the South African Jewish Board of Deputies can fight antisemitism for you; and Chabad will save

Torah Thought

Rabbi Yossy Goldman
Life Rabbi Emeritus
Sydenham Shul

the world for you. And what will you yourself do? Watch them?

It's interesting that in many parts of the world, much of the financial support for religious institutions comes from people who aren't themselves religious. These are fine people who really do believe in the truth of Judaism, but they haven't got sufficient commitment to practice it themselves. Nor do they believe their own children will do it. Who then will defend the faith and perpetuate Judaism and the Jewish people? So they sponsor a religious institution to do it for them.

South Africans are obsessed with sport, but we need to be more than spectators. It's wonderful to support the activists among us. But let's learn from Korach, who wanted so badly to be a high priest himself. Let's not be content with watching others. Let each of us participate in the Jewish idea. And let's do it personally.

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Editor Peta Krost – editor@sajewishreport.co.za • Sub-editor Julie Leibowitz
Junior Reporter Lee Tankle • Interns Lula Pencharz • Gilana Lab • Photographer Ilan Ossendryver
Proofreader Kim Hatchuel/A-Proofed – kim@a-proofed.co.za • Distribution Sandy Furman – admin@sajewishreport.co.za
Design and layout Bryan Maron/Design Bandits – bryan@designbandits.co.za • Advertising Britt Landsman: 082 292 9520 – britt@sajewishreport.co.za
Laura Kaufman – laura@sajewishreport.co.za • Dylan Berger – dylan@sajewishreport.co.za
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South Africans endure arduous journey from war-torn Israel

NICOLA MILTZ

When Israeli airspace suddenly shut down at the beginning of the Iran-Israel war on 13 June, hundreds of South Africans were stranded in a war zone with no obvious way out.

A frantic scramble followed, with travellers forking out exorbitant sums of cash and taking extraordinary risks. This included boarding taxis through Jordan, crossing deserts into Egypt, even fleeing by yacht to Cyprus. Sleepless nights, torturous border queues, language barriers, and decisions they would never normally contemplate became the price of getting home.

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) had earlier advised travellers about the risks involved in travelling through Israel's borders, advising them instead to wait for the skies to open officially. However, some couldn't wait.

Johannesburg mother of two Jade Factor, 34, had flown in for her sister's baby's birth and bris. Stuck in Tel Aviv, she said, "Nothing could stop me from reaching my children in Johannesburg."

At dawn on 23 June, she joined a rescue convoy organised by tour-guide-turned-fixer Rabbi Gary Rogoff and Community Circle founder Kim Kur. The drive from Tel Aviv to the Sheikh Hussein Bridge into Jordan was nerve wrecking but smooth. Once across, she and the group headed for Amman's airport. Her problems began mid-flight to Doha, when Iranian strikes on United States bases closed Qatari airspace and the aircraft diverted to Saudi Arabia. After an hour on the tarmac and a crush of stranded passengers, she frantically bought a new ticket online to dodge the queues in order to make her flight, only to face another servicing delay. Thirty-six hours, five countries, and roughly 14 000 kilometres after leaving Tel Aviv, she finally stepped through her front door. "My family is my home," she breathed. "I'm just so grateful."

Rogoff, who made aliya in 2018, and runs a tour company, said he watched his touring calendar evaporate overnight and become repurposed into an escape lifeline.

"I saw people who needed help," he said. "After my tours were cancelled, this felt like a call of duty." Each route was potentially fraught. There were three risk-laden options, all choices made out of desperation. People could go by boat to Cyprus from Ashdod, which took long

and came with dreaded and unsolvable visa complications. They could exit through Egypt at the Taba border crossing, or take the Jordan River route via Sheikh Hussein.

None were simple, and all involved multiple security checkpoints, long bus rides, sweltering heat, and cash in several currencies. This was against a backdrop of regional war threats and uncertainty. "If you weren't in a rush, I said, 'Sit tight.' If you had to move, I helped," Rogoff said.

Kur's Facebook group, with more than 30 000 members in more than 100 countries, became a crisis hotline. "My phone has been ringing off the hook for days from people desperately running away from the war and trauma. It has been manic," she said. "There were brides needing to get back in time for their wedding; panicked pregnant mothers; and elderly couples running out of chronic medication needing original scripts. Then, there were young girls finishing sem [seminary] having no place to go; single mothers running out of cash; the list goes on and on. The anxiety, fear, and uncertainty has been off the charts. All this while missiles are flying overhead, nights interrupted by siren alerts, and children anxiously huddling in shelters with strangers. Flights cancelled, postponed, rebooked, diverted mid-flight, consular services non-responsive, endless visa hiccups, you name it."

Among Rogoff's rescues was a South African couple in their late 60s living in Sydney. After a missile exploded 400m from their Tel Aviv hotel, destroying the coffee shop they frequented daily, they decided to leave.

Rogoff arranged a 06:00 pickup. By 07:30, they were waiting at the still-closed border. It opened at 08:30. A 120 shekel (R625) Israeli exit fee; a JD40 (R1 000) Jordanian visa; and a \$50 (R887.50) transfer charge later, they boarded a coach to Amman. "We had to keep our nerve," the woman said. "If we'd waited, we might never have got out." By 09:15, they were on their way, half the group stopping at an Amman hotel to rest, the rest heading straight for outbound flights. "Everything went smoothly," one participant noted. "No-one felt threatened or mistreated at any point."

Johannesburg anaesthetist Dr Kiki Marx had gone to Israel for a friend's wedding on 5 June, and found herself "trapped and vulnerable" when rockets rained down on 13 June. Cyprus required a visa she couldn't secure,

Jordan felt exposed, so she chose Egypt – "like the reverse of the Pesach seder", she joked.

With 10 other South Africans, four of them doctors, she braved the Taba border crossing: several bus transfers, sniffer dogs, luggage scans, exit fees, entry fees, and a scorching walk across no-man's-land with bags in tow.

Ryan Katz, 27, called it an "unforgettable, epic adventure" of sardine-packed taxis, endless fees, and "many lost-in-translation moments". Thirty-six hours after leaving Herzliya, he collapsed, safe but exhausted, in Klerksdorp. Marx said it was a team effort. "We all made the decision to do this risky trip into the unknown and supported each other."



South African travellers on their arduous journey home

Myriad smaller dramas played out along every route. Travellers counted out shekels, dollars, and dinars at roadside booths. Local travel agents managed multiple bookings, juggling a whirlwind of changing itineraries and

acting as a lifeline for those trying to get home.

"It has been absolutely insane," said Shana Chryslor of Emunah Travel. "Dozens either stuck here needing to get back to Israel or vice versa. The most frustrating thing being not having answers to people's questions. Asked when the next flight was scheduled, I responded by asking when the next siren was going to go off. I've lost my voice."

The skies have since reopened and El Al is flying again. However, at the time of going to print on Wednesday 25 June, other airlines were starting to resume flights out of Israel.

SAJBD National Director Wendy Kahn said, "We're

engaging with South African and Ethiopian Airlines and the Israeli authorities to get a slot as soon as possible to get our citizens home. We have more than 200 people waiting. It's a mammoth task."

Cape Jewish leader sues after life threatened

>>Continued from page 1

payment of "sentimental damages to be donated to a charitable organisation chosen by the applicant".

Krawitz's affidavit describes the escalating lies and defamation directed at him and Cape Union Mart, and the illegal actions of the protesters. Extremists continuously reference an award Krawitz was given by an Israeli humanitarian organisation in 2015 for raising funds for Israeli victims of terrorism, falsely claiming that this money funded the Gaza War a decade later.

The escalation led to a meeting with trade unions, because "the [protesters'] vitriol shocked me and Cape Union Mart employees alike", stated Krawitz, and employees asked for union support.

Cape Union Mart then issued a press release clarifying that the company has contributed only to humanitarian projects in South Africa, and hasn't donated funds outside of South Africa. It noted that Cape Union Mart has never donated funds to Israel, the Israeli army, or any other army, and neither has Krawitz. However, extremists continued their lies and illegal actions, leading to a physical altercation with a customer.

Even as protesters repeatedly accused Krawitz of "killing children", Cape Union Mart again met with them, which still made no difference to their rhetoric or actions. For example, the first respondent, Maghmuda Ockards, who is employed by the University of Cape Town, held a sign saying that Jews were part of "the synagogue of Satan", an "overt attempt to demonise Jews in general and me in particular", stated Krawitz. On 22 March 2025, protesters blocked the entrance to the store at the V&A Waterfront, and police had to remove them.

Protesters are also "subjecting clients of Cape Union Mart to hate symbols such as the swastika. Cape Union Mart is

continuously suffering unlawful reputational damage and economic losses through false claims of the protesters," stated Krawitz.

"The fact that the display of the swastika is directed at me because I am Jewish and the company is therefore perceived to be a 'Jewish company', is egregious and unacceptable in a democratic society," Krawitz said. He said his right to dignity and reputation continue to be infringed.

The affidavit expresses the urgency of the matter. "Given the credible threats to my and my family's safety, we didn't want to draw attention to the protests through litigation," Krawitz said. "However, the protesters are emboldened after the recent closure of a Cape Union Mart store in Johannesburg." The store closed on 30 April because the lease agreement ended, but extremists saw it as a victory.

The PSC said the case wasn't about "defamation or safety" but about trying to stop protesters from engaging in "legitimate protest actions". It said it and the other respondents would "be meeting urgently to pass a formal resolution on whether to defend against the application".

"The respondents cannot be prejudiced by being ordered to adhere to the laws of the country," Krawitz said. "The applicants, on the other hand, will continue to suffer harm if relief isn't granted." Krawitz told the *SA Jewish Report* that he deeply appreciates the community's unwavering support.

Said Jacobson, "The Cape SAJBD has already successfully pursued a case of hate speech in the Equality Court and won, and three further cases will be brought before the court in coming months. We reaffirm our commitment to upholding the rights of the Jewish community, and call on all South Africans to join us in standing against hatred, antisemitism, and intimidation."

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Stellenbosch University stands strong against anti-Israel pressure

TALI FEINBERG

Stellenbosch University (SU) continues to stand firm against repeated attempts by some members, staff, and students to pressure it into adopting resolutions against Israel and suspending collaboration with Israeli academics. Last week, SU again reiterated that it wouldn't be pushed into such stances or actions, prioritising academic freedom over politics.

In a statement on 19 June, SU Media Manager Martin Viljoen noted that "SU isn't the only university, locally or globally, that has refrained from an institutional stance on this issue to safeguard academic freedom."

"SU remains committed to providing an inclusive, equitable space for constructive and rigorous debate, free from political or ideological pressure. We support individuals' rights to express their views, and will uphold the principles of freedom of expression, including academic freedom, and institutional autonomy," Viljoen said.

He was commenting in response to a letter released in mid-June by "concerned members of the SU community", who called on SU to "commit itself to suspending all collaboration with Israeli universities where there is a risk of direct or indirect involvement in human rights violations in the occupied Palestinian territories".

The letter expresses support for South Africa's case against Israel at the International Court of Justice, quotes Hamas casualty figures in Gaza, and makes no mention of the hostages or the 7 October 2023 massacre. It also ignores the crimes Hamas inflicts on its own people, or the fact that Hamas is a terrorist organisation bent on Israel's obliteration.

Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies (Cape SAJBD) Executive Director Daniel Bloch says his organisation firmly upholds the principle of academic freedom and the right to express diverse viewpoints.

"However, no university should be coerced into endorsing a particular political stance, especially on an issue as complex and polarising as the ongoing war between Israel and Hamas. There are multiple perspectives on this conflict, and it's neither appropriate nor constructive to expect a single institution to represent only one side."

Bloch says the university's official response "rightfully recognises its responsibility to a diverse, multistakeholder community. We're encouraged by its ongoing commitment to creating and maintaining a safe, inclusive environment for all students, including the growing Jewish student population, who continue to thrive and participate fully in campus life."

A Jewish academic at the university, speaking anonymously for his own safety, lamented the fact that local media made it sound like all SU academics supported the letter.

"This is another attempt to force the university into a political position, even though it is an academic institution," he told the *SA Jewish Report*. "I can't remember the university being called on to address any other conflict, so it's a complete double standard."

The letter is not supported by all academics at SU, and students and staff are free to express themselves on campus."

Bloch commended the leadership of SU for "remaining principled in its approach and resisting pressure from so-called 'concerned members of the SU community' who appear more interested in advancing their own narrow political agenda than in safeguarding the integrity and well-being of the university, its students, and its academic mission."

"A notable statement made by this group is its call for the 'cessation of all violence against the Palestinian people'. What



about the violence against Israelis, and their Jewish and non-Jewish supporters?" says Bloch. "The Cape SAJBD believes all human life is sacred, and we condemn the loss of all lives."

About a year ago, Dr Cameron Joseph, who recently completed a Master of Philosophy degree in Applied Ethics at SU, wrote an article in the *South African Journal of Bioethics and Law* on why SU should stay neutral on the Gaza war. He told the *SA Jewish Report* he stood by his position today.

"It's precisely when university bodies adopt public stances on fraught socio-political issues that there's risk to free inquiry," Joseph wrote in the article. If the university took a stance, then "academics and students will inevitably self-censor their work if they feel that the university publicly holds a different position", he argued.

By maintaining neutrality, "the Senate [SU's highest decision-making body] leaves room for the debate to occur in the appropriate forum", and does not run the risk of "poisoning the well" of public debate at SU, Joseph said. By not taking a position, the Senate ensures that "no person who wishes to contribute to the debate will have to grapple with the burden of institutional overreach or the repercussions thereof".

In his statement, Viljoen said SU was a "multistakeholder

institution", and members of this "diverse community" will often have differing views. While SU as an institution "must safeguard this freedom", it strongly condemns "any form of violence where innocent lives are affected".

He said a resolution on the war was not accepted by a majority of the SU Senate at a special meeting on 30 April 2024. Eighty voted in favour, 101 against, and 18 abstained from the vote. However, "SU acknowledges that this is a humanitarian crisis, and has repeatedly expressed its sympathy for all those affected".

Viljoen said the university was committed to providing "a space that encourages constructive debate and academic freedom". To perform its role fully, the university "must maintain an environment of freedom of inquiry and expression". This is also the basis for "hosting and participating in conferences, webinars, and networks, and for maintaining collaborative partnerships across the globe".

For Joseph, the importance of institutional neutrality as a necessary condition for academic freedom at universities "cannot be overstated".

This is because, he said, institutional credibility is undermined when a university issues public statements on matters outside its area of institutional expertise. In addition, university leaders are "hired based on their ability to run a university, not their political views" and "should therefore practice self-restraint, and limit their activities to matters within their institutional realm of expertise and mandate".

Furthermore, if a university develops a precedent of issuing official statements on matters beyond its well-defined core functions, "inevitable pressure will arise for it to issue statements on nearly all current-affairs issues. This will distract time and energy from the university's core purpose."

In fact, to perform activities outside of its mandate, SU "might reasonably be construed as adopting powers and privileges it has no authority to wield", Joseph argued. "The protection of institutional neutrality on socio-political issues is the best strategy to ensure that the core functions of SU are achieved."

Bloch agrees that a university must remain a space for critical thought, rigorous debate, and respectful engagement. "We encourage students to ask difficult questions, challenge prevailing narratives, and exercise their constitutional rights." However, "this must be done responsibly – without incitement to hatred, discrimination, or violence. We stand in support of academic freedom, responsible dialogue, and the right of every student to feel safe and heard on campus."

Said Viljoen, "Our commitment to academic excellence and the well-being of our community is unwavering. We will continue to uphold these principles while navigating the complexities of this issue and other global challenges."

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First responders stay calm amidst the chaos

LEE TANKLE

While Israelis take cover in bomb shelters with Iranian ballistic missiles overhead, many courageous people leave the comfort of their shelters to rescue people from the rubble. “We have to leave even when the sirens are on,” said Terry Goodman, a South African-born paramedic with Magen David Adom (MDA), Israel’s national emergency medical, disaster, ambulance, and blood bank service, “We wait inside the shelter for two minutes instead of the ordered 10 after we hear the bangs of the explosions, and we then get suited up with our shrapnel vests and helmets and go out.” Goodman said that if she is driving in the ambulance on the way to get someone who is in distress and a siren goes off, they immediately stop the ambulance and leave it, and depending on where they are, they will either lie on the ground with their hands on their heads or try to find shelter. After she hears the bangs, she will get back in the ambulance and continue. But when there’s a patient in the ambulance, things get a bit trickier.



Terry Goodman

emergency services and blood services sprang into action. “There have been some hits close by, and obviously, we see what you see on TV, lots of destruction,” he said, “but because the general public has been obedient as far as the orders and guidelines from the civilian command are concerned, there have been fewer casualties than was initially expected.” MDA teams were called to provide medical treatment at many scenes, arriving in large forces of ambulances, intensive-care units, and drivers on MDA motorcycles. So far, there are 1 258 casualties including 24 deaths, 16 seriously injured, 27 moderately injured, and 712 lightly injured. There have been 213 panic victims, and 266 people were treated on the spot and didn’t require evacuation to a hospital.

Seeff said what he had seen on site wasn’t too different from what the ambulance drivers have seen, but there’s the addition of absolute chaos when boots hit the ground. “When there’s a hit in an area, you have all the emergency services arriving on scene, which means police, fire brigade, and emergency medical services along with the civilian command,” he said, “You have to wade your way through absolute chaos, and we practice co-ordinating everything as well as possible, but there’s always an element of chaos. People are in shock, people are hysterical, looking for family members, looking for pets. You have some that are wounded, and you have to be very careful because the protocol is safety first. “People are falling while running to the bomb shelters before the rockets come in, a lot of people faint, and some have heart attacks, all because of the pressure and shock



Laurence Seeff

of what is going on,” Goodman said. South African *olah* Dr Gila Nussbaum, who works in the emergency department at a hospital in the south, said that because of the war, the protocols within the hospitals have had to change to be in accordance with the Home Front Command. “The biggest challenge is that in active wartime, the rest of the hospital guidelines and parameters and capabilities change. For example, they’ve stopped doing all elective procedures and surgeries. And they closed down all of their outpatient clinic departments,” she said, “But the emergency department keeps running. And even though it’s war, a lot of people don’t stop having heart attacks and strokes and car accidents and falling off roofs, and things like that.” As a result of Soroka Medical Center in Be’er Sheva being hit by an Iranian missile on 19 June, many of its internal medicine patients have been transferred to Nussbaum’s hospital. “Some of the internal medicine wards in Soroka sent patients directly to us to continue their treatment,” she said. Goodman said that while it’s scary being out in the field dealing with emergencies, it’s almost as terrifying to leave her children alone while ballistic missiles are flying overhead. “There is a sense of helplessness that I’m not actually with my kids when these missiles are flying, the buildings are shaking, and I’m out helping other people, and can’t help my family, that’s been difficult for me,” she said, “I’ve been through so many wars, the sights I see don’t affect me, but you know, when my family is sitting in bomb shelters, I’m out there thinking that if something, if shrapnel lands and kills me, they will be alone.” Seeff said that though these sites are devastating, he goes in thinking that there’s a job to do. “What you are designated to do is difficult, it’s stressful, and it can be scary sometimes. Ambulance services and emergency medical services aren’t for everyone. I’ve been in the game for quite a while, so I’m a lot calmer than most people because, as a first responder, you never know what you’re going to come up against, what you’re going to see. You kind of get used to that at some stage, and just take things slowly and work according to protocol.”

Seven Israeli soldiers killed in Gaza, in grim reminder that one war’s end leaves another grinding on

PHILLISSA CRAMER – JTA

Seven Israeli soldiers were killed in a single incident on Tuesday, 24 June, in Gaza, marking one of the deadliest days for the Israeli army in its 21-month-old war against Hamas there. The incident came just after Israel struck a ceasefire with Iran, bringing to a close a different war that had subsumed attention for 12 days. The seven men killed were all combat soldiers between 19 and 21. They died after a bomb planted on their armoured vehicle exploded in Khan Younis, and efforts failed to extinguish the resulting blaze, the Israel Defense Forces announced on Wednesday, 25 June. Their deaths bring the Israeli military death toll in Gaza to 440 as the war there grinds on. Israeli leaders say a continued offensive is needed to rid the enclave of terror, but their many critics, including allied nations



Photo: Tsafir Abayov & Aladula via Getty Images

and the majority of Israelis, say the war should end for reasons including an unlikelihood of defeating Hamas; the high toll on Palestinian civilians; and the impediment fighting places to bringing home the 50 Israeli captives, living and dead, still held there. “The scene in Gaza is difficult, the battles are difficult, and the burden is unbearable,” Israeli President Isaac Herzog said after the latest deaths were announced. “We bow our heads and embrace with pain and tears the bereaved and grieving families. We are all with you, in grief, with hugs and tears.” The incident on Tuesday was one of the single deadliest for Israeli soldiers since the war’s start, with a death toll larger than all but a handful from the war’s fiercest period in the first half of 2024. The single highest daily death toll for Israeli troops, other than on 7 October 2023, when Hamas initiated the war by attacking Israel, came on 22 January 2024, when 19 soldiers were killed in a single incident, and another five died separately.

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Jewish Report

Extraordinary times, extraordinary measures

The human spirit is incredible, and it doesn’t take much for so-called ordinary people to do extraordinary things. Granted, being stuck in a country at war when you have responsibilities and obligations back home is a fairly unusual situation. Perhaps not so unusual for diaspora Jews though.

But when a tiny 67-year-old grandmother and her accountant husband felt the pressure to get home, they did something they would never normally do. They took their lives into their own hands, and crossed the border out of Israel, which was being bombarded by hundreds of ballistic missiles, into Jordan. From there, they had to get flights out to other countries before they could fly home. It was hair-raising for these people who are definitely not risktakers.

But war does that to people, as we have learnt through the bravery of the hostages who have survived to tell their unimaginable stories.

Read about our first responders, and their astounding bravery in setting aside the dangers of ballistic missiles to save lives. (See page 5.) They responded to at least 31 ballistic missile impact zones in populated civilian areas in Israel. During the 12 days of war, 28 people were killed by Iranian missiles, and 3 238 injured and evacuated to hospitals. Iran launched about 550 ballistic missiles and about 1 000 drones at Israel. It was horrendous, and so frightening for everyone in Israel.

It’s astonishing in light of the Iranian might and impact, how few civilians died. What a relief it is knowing that safe rooms and bomb shelters actually save lives. Seeing buildings and neighbourhoods decimated, and knowing that most people made it out alive is mindblowing.

This war has also shown the incredible resilience of our people. How they are able to make light of having to spend so many hours so often in those stuffy, small, safe spaces. (See page 8.)

Now that this war is over and the skies have reopened, I hope the war in Gaza follows suit. It’s truly enough! The morning after the ceasefire between Iran and Israel was agreed upon, seven Israeli soldiers – not one of whom was older than 21 – were killed in Gaza when their armoured vehicle was blown up by an explosive device.

When will it end? It’s enough! How much more must people take? There has been too much suffering! Too much loss! Too much anxiety and fear!

Coming home to South Africa, this war has clearly increased antisemitism. It’s shocking how antisemites now use the term “Zionist” – which in their vocabulary is a swear word for someone like us whom they despise – when in fact they mean “Jew”. For example, someone on social media was going on about the “Zionists”, who they claim were buying out Cape Town. The fact is, they had no idea whether there was a sentimental connection between those particular people they were referring to and Israel, other than the fact that they were Jewish. But for them, a Jew is a Zionist, and vice versa.

As for antisemitism, I don’t believe it gets much worse than the horrific threats to Philip Krawitz and his family’s lives. Krawitz is a top businessman and extraordinary philanthropist. He is known to be respected and admired by his employees, many of whom are Muslim. He is an exemplary employer who treats his 3 000 staff members with respect, or so I hear from reliable sources.

However, Krawitz is Jewish, and has never tried to hide this fact. Why on earth would he or should he? But, because he’s Jewish and a leader in business, he has been the butt of the worst kind of antisemitic bullying and intimidation that I have seen. These haters have made up the most ridiculous lies about Krawitz for no reason other than that he is a Jew.

Do any one of those people protesting outside his retail outlets actually know what his political standpoint is, whether in South Africa or Israel?

Have they ever asked him, or done any research on the man? Do they know how he feels about Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the war?

Not a chance. It’s easy to threaten, denigrate and defame someone – why would they need to ask him anything?

I feel sickened by the disgusting treatment of this man I admire, and who has the admiration of so many in this country. He is a man who is personally responsible for the livelihoods of many South Africans. He is someone who takes that responsibility seriously. He wants to grow the economy of this country, and ensure that all people have jobs. And in truth, the only philanthropy he is involved in is specifically for South Africa and South Africans.

And so, instead of encouraging this, why not take a stand against this man because he is a Jew, and call him whatever you want because you think you can and will get away with it?

Well, not so fast! I’m pleased that Krawitz isn’t taking this lying down and is taking them on for threats and defamation. I’m glad he is going to haul these people over the coals, and make sure they and so many others realise that it’s not okay to do this to anyone. Antisemitism is unacceptable on any level, and too many of our haters think they can get away with it. Also, they need to be clear that just using the term “Zionist” doesn’t make it acceptable.

I know how tough it is to witness this ongoing onslaught on Israel and Jews, but we need to be clear that though Israel or particular Israelis aren’t always right in everything they do, it’s definitely not a country that is genocidal or evil. I would only hope that the rest of the world saw Israel as a country like any other, that they set the same standards for the Jewish state as they do for any other country, and treat it as such.

Shabbat shalom!
Peta Krost
Editor



Too close for comfort: 12 days under fire in Be’er Sheva

OPINION

ILANIT LIBERMAN



It was like 7 October meets COVID-19. That’s how the “12 Day War”, otherwise known as Operation Am Kalavi played out. Another war, folded into the more than-600-day conflict Israel has been fighting on multiple fronts since Simchat Torah 2023.

In the early hours of Friday, 13 June, we were woken by the piercing wail of the missile-alert siren.

There had been talk for days about strikes on Iran, but no-one was sure, and it seemed too good to be true.

So, when those sirens wailed at 03:00, and we scrambled out of bed, down several flights of stairs, and waited in a stairwell for the boom that usually comes after Hamas, Hezbollah, or the country we thought was shooting a ballistic missile at the time – Yemen – attacks us, and nothing came, something felt off.

Suddenly, our phones were taken over by the Home Front Command warning system that lets out a frightening scream of its own. The warning made it clear that Israel had just attacked Iran, and the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) was rousing everyone to get their backpacks, water, and other items ready for possibly long stays in the bomb shelter.

The long-awaited war with Iran – the snake that had wrapped its coils around several countries surrounding Israel – had begun.

I live in Be’er Sheva, in southern Israel. The capital of the south. I love this city. The people, the diversity, the hot-hot summers, and Johannesburg-like winters. It’s a city filled with character, and it perfectly busts the “apartheid” myth so often used to mischaracterise Israel.

As the sun rose on that Friday morning, we were told to wait near shelters, that about 600 ballistic missiles were expected to hit Israel in the first Iranian retaliation. Thank G-d, it never came.

For the umpteenth time since 7 October 2023, my husband received a call-up, so he packed his army things and donned his uniform, and I packed a bag to go sleep at friends for Shabbat who live in the neighbourhood over from us. They have a *mamad* (safe room) in their home, and it would save me running to the shelter alone in the dark while my husband served the country valiantly.

We hugged, and headed out to our different destinations.



and the non-stop messages started flowing in. “Are you okay?”; “Are you safe?”; “Is there damage?”; “Do you need anything?”. Fear started creeping in – is everyone okay, were there any injuries? How badly damaged is the hospital? Wait, we live right there, what about my apartment? Are our windows blown out from the blast radius?

Everyone was shaken. The entire city. It hit close to home, and hard. A little later in the day, I made it home. My husband was coming home for Shabbat. We checked everything. Aside from some minor damage to a window frame, everything was intact. Our neighbours below us had windows blown and a glass door blown off. We were lucky. We looked out our window and could clearly see the damage to Soroka. Too close for comfort.

We slept at home that night. I slept for the first time in days. It was finally a missile-free night until 05:30, when *Groundhog Day* once again reared its ugly head, and we were dashing down the stairs, down the road, and into the local bomb shelter. We chatted to neighbours – Jews, Ethiopians, Bedouins, Muslims, Christians – a real melting pot. And then as the siren wailed, another massive boom. In surreal slow motion, I watched dust fall from the ceiling and a chocolate wrapper get blown off the floor by the force of the blast, fluttering in the fake wind.

Again. Another hit. Four blocks to the other side of us. A six-minute walk. We could see the smoke rising, the damage in the distance as we exited the bomb shelter. It seemed the Iranian regime was going after Be’er Sheva. Several apartment blocks were badly damaged, but thank G-d again, no serious injuries. The next three days passed in a haze, the sound of the pre-alerts ringing in my ears even when all was quiet. My husband had returned to the army. The missiles continued, less frequent now, but the nights were still restless. Our bodies had been trained to wake every two to three hours, like we were caring for a newborn.

On the final day of the war, Tuesday, 24 June, just after 05:00, we were woken again by urgent pre-alerts. We did our usual ritual. Met friends again in the shelter, but the siren didn’t come in its usual 10-minute time frame. People left thinking it was a false alarm. Meir had come home again in the early hours of the morning. We decided to wait because the Home Front Command hadn’t told us it was safe to exit the shelter. And then out of nowhere, the siren screeched, people came flooding in a little panicked, caught off guard. During the screech, a massive, earthshattering boom sounded. You could feel it in the walls and the ground. Dust fell again from the ceiling. And the entire room took a collective breath. We knew. It felt different.

We emerged, but were told to stay close to the shelter. We ran back and forth to the shelter three or four times in the space of 90 minutes. During that time, the news broke. A building had sustained a direct hit. Four people were murdered, scores injured. And it was just five minutes away. Killed as the ceasefire was about to take effect. Killed because they were Jews and the Iranian regime had to have the last word.

The messages poured in from all corners of the globe. Family, friends, and colleagues frantic with worry. A few friends messaged asking, “Are you alive? Are you okay? Please tell me you’re safe.” We were gutted. One of the worst attacks in this “short” war, and it was in my beloved Be’er Sheva. My city. I didn’t even notice I’d been shaking for more than an hour until my husband mentioned it. It was too close to home. Again, too close for comfort. And I, together with so many others, kept saying in those minutes afterwards, “Oh my gosh. That could have been us! That could have been us!”

Despite the shock, pain, and sorrow, somehow, we found it in ourselves to carry on, shouldering the anguish of devastation and loss. We dusted ourselves off, and by 09:30, I was already at my computer working, while my husband sipped his coffee on a Zoom meeting.

That’s the beauty of the Israeli people.

Despite it all, nearly two years of war, relentless missile barrages from every corner of the Middle East, endless army call-ups, we keep going. We’re resilient. We find strength. Because we have to. Because we must.

They try to break us. But we don’t break.

As the song goes, “I get knocked down, but I get up again.” Because we are: *Am Yisrael Chai*.

- Ilanit Liberman worked as a reporter for nine years. She now works at an international communications and public relations company.

The lawyer standing up for Jewish civil rights

LEE TANKLE

“History has taught us that when Jews are unified, when Jews mobilise, when they stand up for themselves, that truth is on our side, that law is on our side, that we have powers and civil rights, and we can achieve miracles”.

So said legal powerhouse Brooke Goldstein, who was brought out to South Africa by the South African Zionist Federation, talking about the importance of standing together against antisemitism.

Goldstein is a Miami-based human rights attorney, author, award-winning filmmaker, and regular TV commentator. She is also the founder and executive director of The Lawfare Project, and the founder of the #EndJewHatred movement.

The granddaughter of two Holocaust survivors, Goldstein grew up in Toronto, and experienced the effects of Jew hatred on a society through the stories of her grandparents. So, when she was studying law and in her subsequent career, she made it a priority to help the Jewish community in any way she could.

“I grew up on the stories and teachings of what happens when you don’t keep Jew hatred at bay,” she said, “And so, I’ve dedicated myself, especially with the #EndJewHatred movement, to mobilise the Jewish community to ensure that there are consequences for Jew hatred, meaningful consequences. Just like there are consequences for anti-gay discrimination, or anti-Muslim discrimination, or discrimination against women.”

Goldstein started her legal career in the entertainment space, and while studying, she took a class which discussed children’s human rights and felt it was missing an important element – the recruitment of child soldiers and indoctrination of Jew hatred in the Palestinian territories. This led her to create the award-winning film *Making of a Martyr*, which, through speaking to the children involved, uncovers the illegal state-sponsored indoctrination and recruitment of Palestinian children for suicide bombing attacks.

After creating the film, she became aware of how those who spoke out against radical Islam would be sued, and wanted to start a fund to help these people with their legal defence. This is how The Lawfare Project began, a legal fund and public-interest law firm dedicated to protecting the civil and human rights of the Jewish people via strategic legal actions.

“Nobody was organising a legal offence. There were so many people coming to me for help, and I wanted to help them. Students are discriminated against on campus. Professors are being targeted. Members of the workforce are being discriminated against. Israeli companies are being illegally boycotted. Jewish doctors are being kicked out of their practices. Jewish journalists are being blocked and fired from publications. It’s rampant discrimination.”

One of her early clients was Geert Wilders, a member of the House of Representatives in the Netherlands, who was sued by an imam when he made a film about the treatment of women under Islam. Said Goldstein, “He was sued by the radical imam himself, and it was ironic because it’s not like he made any commentary in his film. The imam, by suing, saying the film was Islamophobic, was admitting that what he was saying was outrageous and ridiculous.”

For Goldstein, starting The Lawfare Project was a no-brainer because every other minority community that had a civil-rights movement had engaged in litigation. “You make a change in the court system. That’s how we got rid of affirmative action. That’s how we got rid of segregation in our schools. That’s why women have the right in some states to an abortion – because they filed lawsuits to protect themselves. The Jewish community had never strategically organised or set up a legal offence.”

Since its inception, The Lawfare Project has recruited more than 1 000 lawyers who have dedicated themselves to working pro bono and have filed almost 100 cases in about 17 or 18 different jurisdictions around the world.

The #EndJewHatred movement is a grassroots civil-rights movement that works through peaceful direct action, mobilisation, and education. It was founded by Goldstein in 2020 after giving birth to her third son, and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement after the murder of George Floyd.

She said a lot of Jewish people stood with the Black Lives Matter movement, but those same people wouldn’t

post anything in support of Israel because they were scared of a backlash. It made Goldstein think about creating a movement that was about Jews advocating for Jewish rights.

“I funded a study asking the question: what makes for a successful civil-rights movement? We studied the black civil-rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s, the MeToo movement, and the so called Palestinian movement, which is just a movement for the genocidal destruction of Israel,” she said, “and asked: what are the tactics and strategies, the messaging, how are they organised, how

are they funded? From this study, we birthed the EndJewHatred movement, which has a basic premise that if we use the same strategies and tactics as other civil-rights movements, we’ll also be able to succeed in the West.” Though the movement may not be able to end Jew hatred, just like the MeToo movement didn’t end sexual harassment and misogyny in the workplace, the work the movement does can help change the culture around antisemitism, she said. “The MeToo movement didn’t get rid of male misogyny. And the Black Lives Matter movement didn’t

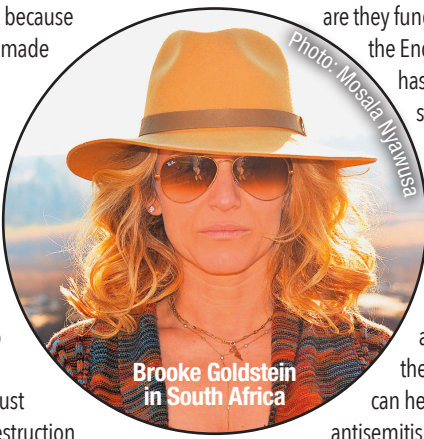


Photo: Mosala Nyavusa

Brooke Goldstein in South Africa

get rid of anti-black racism, but what it did is impose social consequences,” she said, “We make change through a combination not just of impact litigation, you have to change the culture, you have to mobilise the Jewish community to stand up for itself. When you impose consequences for the behaviour you don’t want to see, the Jew hatred that comes into fashion over time can be suppressed.” “There’s nothing to fear but fear itself,” Goldstein said. “If you don’t have a gun to your head, it’s not, ‘Shush, still put your head down, and this too shall pass.’ Shame on us if we continue this ideology of just being quiet and putting our heads down. Jews are unified when Jews step into their power. And we need to learn from other minority rights movements and groups. We have to demand and work on allyship.”

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Trauma doctor trained in SA caught in missile strike

NICOLA MILTZ

An Israeli trauma specialist who spent time working in South African public hospitals earlier this year was on duty last week when an Iranian missile struck Soroka Medical Center in Be'er Sheva, causing serious injuries and widespread damage.

Dr Guy Barsky, 44, who completed a trauma fellowship through Sheba Medical Center's Africa Fellowship Programme earlier this year, was inside Soroka Medical Center, Israel's main southern hospital, when the building was rocked by the blast on Thursday, 19 June, amid a full-scale Iranian missile assault targeting Israel.

"Soroka was badly damaged," Barsky told the *SA Jewish Report* from Be'er Sheva. "The ground shook, the windows shattered. We were working in a protected area of the hospital, but it was scary."

As Iran launched hundreds of missiles and drones targeting cities across central and northern Israel, hospitals across the country transitioned into full emergency mode. In Be'er Sheva, Soroka began evacuating patients from upper floors, which were less protected, well before the strike.

"Days before the attack, we had already started evacuating some floors," Barsky said. "It was part of our hospital's emergency preparedness plan. That decision likely saved lives."

After the strike, Soroka moved most of its remaining patients to other hospitals, operating at minimal capacity for several days. On Tuesday, 24 June, it resumed broader care services.

Hospitals in Israel underwent intensive preparedness work to maintain patient care in wartime conditions, including converting protected areas and in some hospitals underground sections into operational medical zones. Like other facilities across Israel, Soroka revamped its internal mass casualty event protocols, including emergency evacuation procedures, to respond to the growing threat of Iranian aggression.

Barsky, who specialises in trauma and emergency medicine, described the moment the missile hit. "I was

in a meeting with staff when the sirens went off. We immediately followed protocol and moved into a highly protected area. That's the best part about working in Israel – we're all trained for these extreme scenarios."

One of his colleagues was in the middle of surgery when the hospital took a direct hit. "He was in a highly protected operating theatre," Barsky said. "He felt the impact, but the lights didn't even flicker. That's how well these zones are reinforced."

Meanwhile, in the centre of the country, Israel's flagship Sheba Medical Center near Tel Aviv transitioned within 48 hours into full emergency mode as Iranian missiles targeted the region. Seventeen departments were relocated to underground facilities, ensuring that critical treatment, from intensive care to neonatal services, continued uninterrupted.

Barsky, who lives in Be'er Sheva, was also on duty on Tuesday, 24 June, when another missile struck a residential building in the city, killing four and injuring many others. "I've worked through missile strikes on my hospital and helped treat victims from missile strikes on my city. It's the reality we're living in," he said.

That reality has been shaped not only by years of training in Israeli trauma medicine, but also by his recent fellowship in Gauteng, where he trained alongside some of South Africa's most experienced emergency doctors. Earlier this year, Barsky spent several months in South Africa, rotating through high-pressure public hospitals as part of the Africa Fellowship Programme, a collaborative initiative aimed at cross-training medical professionals across the continent.

"The trauma surgeons in Johannesburg are some of the most impressive I've ever seen," he said. "Nothing

phases them. Weekends are like war zones – stabbings, shootings, crashes. The numbers are war numbers."

Though Israel's medical infrastructure is geared for military conflict, South African trauma doctors operate with immense skill and resilience despite limited resources, Barsky said.

"In South Africa, you have war injuries during peace time. In Israel, we see that kind of injury during our actual wars."

His experience in South Africa prepared him for some of the scenarios he has recently faced.

"The trauma teams in South Africa do incredible work. I learned a lot, especially about thinking quickly, staying calm, and making tough calls."

Barsky said that despite Israel's highly developed medical system, what truly distinguishes its response in wartime is preparation and co-ordination. That training was tested for him on 7 October 2023, when Hamas launched its brutal invasion from Gaza.

"I was on call that day and for weeks afterwards. It was very hard," he said.

He said when a crisis hits, hospital protocol kicks in, wards are evacuated, surgical teams mobilised, and hospitals reinforced.

The Iran-Israel confrontation that erupted in June 2025 once again tested the system. Yet Barsky said the combination of preparedness, teamwork, and collaboration helped Israel's hospitals to continue to save lives under fire.

"We're trained for this. The fact that we're prepared for these scenarios helped prevent even worse outcomes," he said.

He said his South African experience added depth to his professional capabilities. "The trauma I saw in South Africa, the resilience, the commitment, the medical brilliance in tough conditions – it's something I'll remember and lean on during tense times."

With tensions still high and Israel remaining in a state of readiness, Barsky and his colleagues continue their work on the frontline – not of combat, but care.

"Whether you're in Johannesburg or Be'er Sheva, when people are hurt, doctors respond. We do what we've been trained to do even when missiles are flying," he said.



Dr Guy Barsky

Midnight coffee in a bunker – miklatot shape Israeli culture

LEE TANKLE

A new subculture has blossomed in Israel over the past couple of weeks – in its bomb shelters.

Civilians spent much of their time in these spaces while Iran was bombarding them with ballistic missiles, but Israelis have a knack for finding the positive in negative situations. In this case, it's about getting to know their neighbours all too well and in a new way of being.

Protocols have emerged to make the experience of going to the *miklat* (bomb shelter) more comfortable for everyone, and the dread of the potential missile damage less poignant.

South African-born Dean Cohen, who lives in Ra'anana, describes his experience as "Miklatot and Coffee". Cohen told the *SA Jewish Report*, "We meet at irregular times for a get-together lasting anywhere from 30-60 minutes for an intimate catch-up in a very informal setting."

He says since there's little cellphone signal in the *miklat*, people have been forced to socialise with each other without being distracted by their phones, and no subject seems to be off limits in the *miklat*. "Kids, babies, and dogs are always welcome. The furniture is eclectic, and some bring blankets and puff cushions to set the environment. We will all try different cool hotspots, but hey, we are creatures of habit," he said.

Cohen says though the setting of this "coffee shop" is rather minimalist as it's really only a concrete room, it will soon be very on-trend. However, "the only thing that irks me a bit is sometimes we get a real lack of enthusiasm from

patrons acting all tired and stuff, and that can be a real bummer. Also, the outside management tends to be a bit dictatorial, but you know, it takes time to build an underground culture."

Many people across Israel have found



Making the most of life in the safe zone

humour in their situation, perhaps to distract themselves from having interrupted sleep for many nights in a row.

Israeli TikToker Alex Porcelain, or @porcedawg, posted a video on TikTok on 15 June saying, "I have a new dating concept app for Jews in Israel. It's called 'Miklaty hottie'. Find your match while seeking shelter."

Unfortunately, the app is available only to those who are in Israel or the United States, so those in the rest of the world looking for their Israeli husband or wife won't be successful.

Jess Lurie, 24, who moved from Johannesburg to Jerusalem in November 2024, says that though she and everyone

on her ulpan campus were in their *miklat* for long periods, with some taking the opportunity to get some sleep, it was anything but a scene of doom and gloom.

"Every time we went down during a siren, we would all group together and sing songs showing our strength as a Jewish nation as well as our faith," she says. "We even completed Kabbalat Shabbat in the *miklat* as we were interrupted by sirens. Our *miklat* became a place of unity and comfort during these times, a place where no matter how scared we were, we didn't feel alone."

Lurie says one of the most important things she always makes sure to bring with her when a siren goes off, other than her phone charger and laptop, is a large number of snacks so that she and everyone else in the *miklat* don't go hungry.

"I always have a bag packed with biscuits and chocolates," she said, "There's nothing better than sharing midnight snacks with all your friends."

However, the experience hasn't been as joyous for others. *Olah* and social media influencer Michal Greenspan said in a video posted on 16 June, "There's nothing I'm more grateful for than the fact that I don't have to go to a *miklat* where people are playing instruments."

And in the comment of that video, she said, "If your *miklat* has an amateur drummer and guitarist – I'm so sorry."

One South African *oleh*, who asked not to be named, lives in the Tel Aviv

neighbourhood in Florentin, which is known as an artsy area full of young people who occupy the area's bars, clubs, and overpriced coffee shops. He says he has seen some interesting and disturbing things in the *miklat*, including a poop in the corner – not sure if it was dog or human; a guy with wheels on his shoes; a pet snake in a cat carrier; a man with two bearded dragons on his shoulders; and a homeless guy begging for money while they were walking in during a siren.

"Walking in the shelter and I see a crap on the floor, I pretty much had the same reaction as everyone else, like OK, there's shit in the corner, it's Florentin, like whatever," he says.

"In my *miklat*, they don't bring instruments, it's not a community one, there are a lot of foreign workers who live and work in the area. It's not one of the romantic ones."

Though he tries to bring everything recommended, like phones and chargers, irreplaceable documents, keys to all vehicles, wallet, and prescription medications needed for the next 24 hours, it can be hard to remember it all when you are being woken up at 03:00.

"I should take all my documents and laptop, but at 03:00, you don't tend to focus too much," he says.

"Although this all sounds terrible, the Israeli spirit goes from strength to strength, with people stepping up to help wherever they can by clearing rubble, assisting the elderly, donating blood, and checking in on friends and family," he says.

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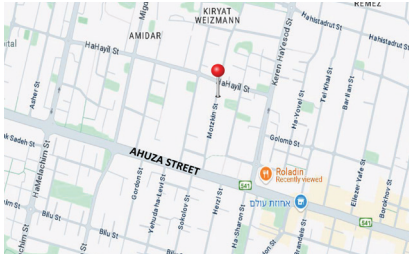
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The one thing that could change men’s mental health

OPINION

RABBI LEVI AVTZON



I usually find out once the dust has already settled. When the marriage is over. When the business has gone under. When the friends quietly mention that he hasn’t been the same lately. Sometimes, heartbreakingly, when it’s already too late.

Then come the questions: “Did you know?”; “Did he ever say anything?”; and “Was there a sign?” And behind those questions is a quiet grief – the heartbreak of hindsight, when words unspoken echo loudest.

Most times, the answer is no. Not because he didn’t suffer. But because he never said a word.

In public, he was charming. Polite. Positive. The quintessential South African guy – friendly at the shul door, polite at the braai, asking how you are, never hinting that his world was cracking underneath. And then, one day, you find out it had all come apart – silently.

Here’s what I’ve learned as a rabbi, and here’s what I need every man reading this to know: saying, “I need help” can be life changing. It can be life saving.

I’m not talking about dramatic confessions. I’m talking about looking someone you trust in the eye and saying, “I’m not coping. Help me.” Not to fish for pity. Not to collapse in blame. But to take the first step toward getting your life back.



That’s not weakness. That’s integrity. It’s strength of the highest order. And if more men did it, our communities – and our statistics – would look very different.

The truth is, most men don’t reach out. They don’t call. They don’t come in. They don’t raise their hand. They suffer in silence. They wait until it’s unsalvageable, until the damage has been done. And when it finally comes out – if it comes out – it’s because a friend pieced things together, or a wife begged him to open up, or the family

sat *shiva* and tried to make sense of what happened.

It’s not because they’re bad. It’s because they were taught to be strong. To handle it. To “man up”. To keep going. And slowly, that strength becomes a prison. The price? Their joy. Their marriage. Sometimes their life.

But here’s a truth most men never hear: bravery isn’t always a stiff upper lip. Sometimes bravery is walking into a room and saying, “I can’t do this alone.” Not with tears and hashtags. Just real. Just honest.

And let’s be clear, we’re not asking anyone to be soft. Heaven forbid. No-one’s telling a South African man to sit in a circle and cry.

We’re saying: be honest. Because honesty isn’t just about business deals. Honesty isn’t just not lying to others. It’s not lying to yourself.

If you’re taking strain, stop pretending you’re not. The Torah says not to lie. That includes to your own reflection in the mirror.

If more men said five words: “I need help. Help me,” we’d change lives. We’d save lives.

And it’s not about broadcasting your pain. It’s about choosing one person. A rabbi. A friend. A mentor. Someone you can say it to. And mean it. With honesty. With the intent to work. To heal. To grow.

You don’t need to be a philosopher. You don’t need the perfect words. Just the courage to be real for one minute. To let someone in before it all crashes. To admit that being human means needing others.

There’s a quote from *Ethics of Our Fathers* that should be tattooed into the emotional framework of every man: “*Aseh lecha rav, u’kneh lecha chaver.*” (Make for yourself a mentor. Acquire for yourself a friend.) Not wait for one. Not hope someone shows up. Make one. Acquire one.

It’s a spiritual obligation not to do life alone. Not because you’re weak, but because you’re wise.

Not all friendships are created equal. I often say there

are two kinds of friends: There’s the “comma” friend. That’s the friend you text, “I’m really struggling ... but it’s fine. I’ll be okay.” There’s always a follow-up clause. “Don’t worry about me.” “It’s nothing.” “Anyway, enough about me.”

It’s not a real opening, it’s a half-confession with a built-in escape route. A comma at the end of a sentence.

Then there’s the other kind – the full stop. The period. The friend you speak to and say, “I’m not okay.” Full stop. “I need help.” Full stop. No sugar-coating. No disclaimers. No, “But I’m managing.” That’s where real conversations begin. That’s where change begins.

Find your full stop friend. Or be that friend. The one who doesn’t flinch when things get real. The one who knows how to sit in the silence and simply say, “I’m here.” That’s where the work starts.

If we can normalise that, if we can teach our sons and our friends that real strength includes asking for help, that being a husband, a father, a colleague, or a friend doesn’t mean you must be unbreakable, then maybe fewer men will fall apart in silence.

And if you’re reading this and something inside you is saying, “This might be me,” pick up the phone. Today. Book the coffee. Say the sentence. Because silence isn’t strength. It’s risk. And too many good men have gone to the grave with their pain still sealed behind polite smiles and unfinished sentences. We tell boys to be honest. We preach character, courage, and faith. But how many men grow up thinking that honesty applies only to how you do your taxes, not how you face your inner world?

Let’s speak less about pretending to cope, and more about finding the courage to ask for help, before it’s too late. And let’s start by creating the kind of community where those conversations can happen. Where a man at shul doesn’t always need to be “on”. Where a catch-up over coffee can go deeper than headlines and humour.

Because we’re not meant to carry it all. And we were never meant to carry it alone.

• Rabbi Levi Avtzon is the rabbi at Linksfield Shul.

Book shatters silence on mental health crisis

Marion Scher recently released a book titled *Men & Mental Health, Shattering the Silence*. The *SA Jewish Report* speaks to her about it.

What drew you to writing a book about men’s mental health?

Over the past 30 years writing books on mental health, including *Surfacing*, which looked at 11 different people’s mental health issues, and *Big Bully*, which is about the fact that bullying is often the root of mental health issues, as well as *Men & Mental Health – Shattering the Silence*, it became apparent that this is a major issue in South Africa.

Why do you believe it’s important to highlight these issues now?

We live in a difficult world with stress and anxiety levels hitting all-time highs. We’re seeing suicide rates, particularly in the case of men, noticeably increasing, so this is a vital message to get out there.

What’s essential for men to know about their mental health?

Perhaps the greatest message is: when is it more than just a bad day? We all have stresses and bad days in our lives, but to understand when you need to get external help or even just someone to talk to is really important. If you have days when you just want to stay in bed or even worse, think that your family and friends would be better off without you around, those are real red flags that you need help.

So many men were brought up to believe that “cowboys don’t cry”, and that psychologists are for sissies. What’s wrong with this belief, and what impact has it had on South African men?

This is at the heart of the problem. Being “*manne*”. This came up again and again in the book, particularly with the Springbok rugby players I spoke to. From fear of never being chosen for a game, to employees frightened that their bosses or coworkers will think them weak if they know that they have a mental health issue. It’s a stigma we have to work hard to eradicate.

Why is it important for men to speak out about their mental health issues?

I’ve used celebrities to talk about their mental health issues simply because when “normal” South African men see these names, I hope they’ll think that if they can talk about it, why can’t I?

What types of mental health issues are dominant in South African men, and how can they be helped to overcome them?

Depression and anxiety and stress-related illnesses are particularly high on the list. Depending on the severity of the condition, these can be easily treated either with antidepressants or therapy or both. Only a mental health professional can decide this.

Suicide has become a massive and growing problem in South African men. Why?

Again, if depression and anxiety are left untreated, the symptoms will increase to the point where that person

will start having suicidal thoughts. With only 10% of the people psychologists and psychiatrists see being men, it creates the problem where men would rather take their own life than see a mental health professional. The other issue is that although many women try to take their own lives, men use more brutal methods such as guns or hanging to do this – and succeed.

How does your book approach this issue, and who is its target audience?

I use real case studies, letting these people plus, of course, mental health professionals, give what I hope will be advice and answers to questions men were afraid to ask. My target audience is men, pure and simple.

Are you going to look at women’s mental health? If so, why?

Yes, I’m already researching it for my next book. There are many areas specific to women that are rarely talked about and need more understanding. These include PMS (pre-menstrual stress); PMDD (pre-menstrual dysmorphic disorder); perinatal and postnatal depression; menopause; hormonal issues; and more.

What are the glaring differences between men’s and women’s mental health issues?

One of the biggest differences is that women are far more likely to discuss it with family members or friends and seek professional help. At the same time, men and family members will often ignore their situation or think they are “just acting up”.

How can we prevent boys from developing issues before they become men?

This is an important topic because that’s when little boys are told to “suck it up”; “be a man”; or “give back what you get”. Boys need to understand that it’s okay to show emotion, that there are people who will listen to you without judging. And that it’s better to talk about these things than bottle them up. They need to see that there’s support when they need it.

What advice can you give wives, friends, girlfriends, and children trying to help men whom they believe have mental health issues?

Whenever I do a book such as this, my hope is that it starts conversations on the topic. Today, with so much information available online, even suggesting links they could look at would help. That way, they can do this in their own time without feeling judged. It’s all about acknowledging and sharing stories, and knowing it’s ok not to be ok!



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Railway Children’s classic themes reach new generation

GILANA LAB

Acclaimed South African theatre director Alan Swerdlow jumped at the chance to direct *The Railway Children* for the National Children’s Theatre (NCT) because it was a story he loved as a child.

“I read this book when I was younger,” said Swerdlow, “so when the NCT approached me to direct this play, I read it, liked it, and instantly said yes.”

Having directed for more than 30 years, he has enjoyed working on this fan favourite, on at the NCT in Parktown, Johannesburg, until 5 July.

The Railway Children, a classic children’s novel written by Edith Nesbit and published originally in 1906, tells of the adventures of three siblings, Roberta (Bobbie); Peter; and Phyllis, who move with their mother from London to a cottage in the country near a railway line after their father is wrongfully imprisoned. The tale involves the children, their time spent along the railway line, and the friends they make there.

Swerdlow said that although the story is about children and performed at the children’s theatre, “I’m not actually working with children in this production. Since it’s a fully professional show, we’re working with trained adult actors. The adaptation we’re using based on the original novel was written with the expectation that adults would play the roles of the children.”

He is working with adults, he said, “largely because the emotional journeys the three young characters go through are quite complex. To portray that depth convincingly, we need performers with the skill and life experience to bring it to life.”

Although the original story is set in the United Kingdom with the family from London,



From a performance of *The Railway Children*

the location in the NCT rendition is unspecific. “They don’t talk about London, they talk about the city.” Because of this, Swerdlow said, “I asked the entire company to use the accents that they find easiest. One of the actors is playing his characters with a Nigerian accent. Other people are using their local South African accents, so it’s non-specific.”

Swerdlow said he was a fan of this play particularly because of the lessons and narratives it portrays.

“A lot of her [Nesbit’s] ideas are about things like equality for women. There’s a strong message in the play that women are on the same level as men, and nobody should even begin to dispute that. Her themes are extraordinarily pertinent to today.”

Swerdlow said he was happy to be working at the NCT because he believed it was such an important part of the cultural life of

Johannesburg. “It’s vital for building future audiences and enriching young people’s lives by offering them the joy and experience of theatre, helping them to understand the world, and find a means of expression.”

He believes that because youth are future audiences and actors, creating this theatre

demographic will ultimately improve theatre in the future. “Every city should have a youth theatre to provide these crucial benefits and lessons learned from good books, plays, and movies,” Swerdlow said.

Even though the actors are adults, this play still caters to a younger audience. “Our target age group is between eight and 14, but it can be enjoyed by everyone,” Swerdlow said. The play has just completed a short season at RedFest at Redhill School in Sandton. “The adult response was fantastic,” he said. “I was surprised by how many adults came because they loved the book when they were children, so it truly is a family show.”

Swerdlow said that except for one of the actors, the cast is made up of people he has never worked with before. Casting was done through open audition. “I didn’t cast people beforehand whom I knew would be suitable.

I saw the actors we selected for the first time when they came to audition, and I thought they were impressive and right for the roles that they were auditioning for.”

• The *Railway Children* is at the *National Children’s Theatre* from 18 June to 5 July.

Broken ribs don’t stop Gliksman from riding glory

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Johannesburg horse rider Tamar Gliksman, 44, broke her ribs on the morning of the 2025 Toyota International Federation for Equestrian Sports World Cup Qualifier in Midrand, Gauteng, last month, but still managed to win with her horse, Farnham’s Capital Kronos.

It was Gliksman’s first ever victory in a World Cup-like international standard-track tournament. She won in the 1.5m class, a top level of show jumping that Gliksman has dreamed of competing in all her life.

“I’ve wanted to win a competition like this since I was 10 years old, so it was a cool feeling,” said Gliksman, who won her first South African title during the South African Indoor Grand Prix with Kronos in Mooi River in January.

Having now won the first out of six World Cup qualifiers, her aim is to win the competition overall. “The overall winner on the points system goes on to ride in the World Cup final overseas,” she said. The riders competing in the final of the Equestrian World Cup, which began with show jumping in 1978, will have finished first in the qualifying leagues for their respective equestrian disciplines around the world.

Gliksman broke her ribs on another horse. “Initially, we weren’t sure if they were broken,” she said. “I really wanted to ride, so I rode in World Cup qualifier one and then spent my evening in the emergency room at Sunninghill Hospital. It was daunting to be mentally fit to go in and ride, knowing that I wasn’t feeling my best, but I also knew I had such an amazing horse that he would look after me.”

She competed against all the top South African show jumpers from different provinces. “The riders came from Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg, and Polokwane. We compete together over these six qualifiers. The youngest rider was 24, and the oldest in his late 50s.”

Thirty-three riders started the first qualifier. “An overseas course builder called Frank Rothenberger built the track,” Gliksman said. “You’ve got to jump clear, and then the top 25% go through to a second round. My horse went clear, and recorded the fastest time, which is why I won the competition.”

Gliksman’s horse, Kronos, was bred in Belgium and brought as a foal into South Africa by Capital Stud, founded by Henning Pretorius. “Kronos is 15 years old. He was owned by Capital Stud and produced by Nicole Horwood, an unbelievable rider. I bought him last year in April, and we’ve developed the most beautiful partnership.”

In March, Gliksman won the President’s Cup Grand Prix class with Kronos on the last day of the show.

“Kronos has now won three really big competitions, which is amazing. You have to be so grateful to have a horse like that because you can’t do this without your horse. You can be the best rider in the world, but you need to have the tools.”

Gliksman and Kronos now lead the standings for the 2025 South African Show Jumping adult show jumper of the year.

Recalling how she took up horse riding, Gliksman said, “A friend took me when I was 10 years old to a birthday party, and I just loved it. I was hooked. I landed up pursuing a career in horse riding after school.”

She runs a big riding school, Farnham Riding School, in Kyalami “where we teach kids of all ages and all levels. I have about 74 horses. We look after horses for people, we give riding lessons, and we teach competitive riders.”



Tamar Gliksman riding Kronos

Gliksman, who keeps Kronos at the riding school, has earned her stripes as a riding coach. “I did an equine science behavioural course, South African coach qualifications, and FEI [International Federation for Equestrian Sports] qualifications. I started my little riding school, and it just grew. We’ve got about 200 pupils. The school is popular in Johannesburg.”

Gliksman described horse riding as a sport in which you never stop learning.

“You can always be better,” she said. “Every horse is a different challenge and teaches you a new skill. Horse riding is the most unbelievable sport. You never get bored. You can do it in your late 60s. It’s a lifestyle more than a sport. You need to ride and look after horses 24 hours a day.”

Gliksman aspires to compete in the World Cup qualifier overseas. “Depending on how that goes, I would love to take part in more competitions overseas.

“I had a good horse about 10 years ago called Toko, and he won a competition in which he jumped 1.78 metres. That was a highlight. He was also placed in World Cup qualifiers, and the outdoor Grand Prix, but I have never won anything like I have with Kronos. This horse has helped me achieve goals I only dreamed of.”

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Shock, sympathy, antipathy – why narrative sours on Israel

OPINION

PAULA SLIER



When Israel bombed Iranian sites in the early hours of Friday, 13 June, the international media coverage was, for a brief moment, sympathetic. Against the backdrop of Iran's drone and missile attacks a week earlier and its longstanding threats to wipe Israel off the map, there was understanding. But the moment didn't last. As headlines quickly shifted focus from Israel's perceived right to defend itself to fears of regional escalation and mounting Iranian deaths, one couldn't help but feel a sense of *déjà vu*.



Rewind to 7 October 2023, when Hamas unleashed an unprecedented, massive attack on southern Israel. The world looked on in horror as more than 1 200 Israelis were slaughtered. Entire families were killed, children kidnapped, women raped, and communities erased. There was shock. There was sympathy. But, once again, that window of solidarity closed abruptly. Within a day or two, as Israel began bombing Gaza in response, the narrative flipped. Gone were the front-page stories about Israeli civilians. In their place: major headlines highlighting Palestinian suffering, rising casualty numbers, and the destruction of Gaza. What links these two cases – Gaza and Iran – is the brevity of global support for Israel. The pattern is now familiar. Coverage in outlets like *The New York Times*, *BBC*, and *Al Jazeera* turns quickly. Several overlapping reasons help to explain this shift. First, news outlets naturally gravitate towards content that is most likely to grab attention, often at the expense of balanced or deeper explanation. What's more, Palestinian and Iranian casualty numbers were higher, especially from strikes in densely populated civilian areas. Gaza images, in particular, always feed the narrative. A bloodied child, a collapsed building, a wailing parent – these are emotionally resonant and visually striking. Second, Israel is seen, fairly or not, as a regional superpower. It has a professional army, advanced technology, and a functioning government. Palestinians are stateless. Iran is portrayed as isolated and under siege. The imbalance in military capability and diplomatic power matters. Because Israel is viewed by much of the world as part of the West – wealthy, stable, and strong – it is held to a different moral standard. It is expected to exercise restraint, act with precision, and to adhere to liberal democratic norms in a region where few others do. And because of that, it is often judged more harshly when things go wrong. The nuance of who struck first is lost in the noise. There is an asymmetry that defines the Israel-Gaza conflict. Israel's advanced military and statehood are contrasted with Palestinian statelessness and visible civilian toll, resulting in a moral imbalance. This framing is deep-rooted in media traditions, and has evolved over decades. It persists regardless of the circumstances of a particular conflict. A similar dynamic applied to Iran. Many media initially acknowledged Israel's strike as a restrained response to Tehran's ongoing pursuit of nuclear capabilities beyond what is acceptable to the international community. But that frame eroded quickly. Third, narrative framing plays a powerful role. Global audiences, and by extension, editors and journalists, have become accustomed to the idea of Palestinians as perennial victims. The storylines are already well-formed: Israel is powerful; the Palestinians are suffering. Every new round of conflict is slotted into this template. In Gaza, the same headlines recur with each war, the same images are reused, and the same moral arguments are repackaged. The conversation is already primed to flip. In a state-to-state conflict like Iran, Israel is seen more as a rational actor within the framework of global diplomacy and strategic defence. This framing initially benefits Israel, but can turn quickly if escalation risks grow. Meanwhile, visual imagery in Gaza makes Israel's actions highly emotive and relatable to global audiences, especially when images of children and rubble circulate. In contrast, the abstract framing of Iran – nuclear sites, policy decisions – distances audiences from immediate emotional reaction. For Israel, this means its response to Gaza must include a strong humanitarian communication layer, while with Iran, its geopolitical messaging must pre-empt concerns about destabilisation and international norms. None of this is to argue that the media is consciously anti-Israel. But it is to suggest that the media landscape is structured in a way that tends to amplify certain narratives over others. Israel's challenge isn't just on the battlefield or in the diplomatic arena, it's also in the newsroom, where perception becomes reality and headlines shape history.

• Paula Slieber is an international journalist, media trainer, and public speaker. She founded Newshound Media International and Newshound Academy, and has reported from conflict zones for more than 30 years. She currently hosts the afternoon show on ChaiFM radio.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Helping South Africans stranded in Israel

We're all watching and holding our collective breath as the ceasefire between Iran and Israel appears to be holding. We mourn the dead, and pray for the speedy recovery of all those injured as well as the swift reconstruction of damaged and destroyed property, including homes, a hospital, and a mosque. The South African Jewish Board of Deputies has been working to support fellow South Africans stranded in Israel, and to assist them to reach home as soon as the skies reopen safely for flights. To date, we have registered 220 citizens for repatriation flights, and are co-ordinating logistics with the extraordinary support of Ethiopian Airlines. Ethiopian Airlines was an incredible support to our community during the darkest days of the COVID-19 pandemic. We cannot overstate our gratitude to it for its availability and commitment to aid us through this latest crisis. Our team works closely with Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other communities in the planning of these flights. We believe that the past weeks have again exposed the implications of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO's) knee-jerk closure of our embassy/consulate in Israel. There's no doubt that as citizens of South Africa, we should be offered

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ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner



consular support in the same way offered to South African citizens in Iran. The glaring inconsistency in our government's approach is deeply troubling. We continue to call for accountability, urging DIRCO to uphold its duty to all South Africans, irrespective of where they find themselves. Amidst this turmoil, we are also once again profoundly moved to learn of the recovery of the bodies of former hostages Yonatan Samerano, Ofra Keidar, and Shay Levinson in a perilous and daring operation. The successful recovery gave closure to the families, though it serves as a stark reminder of the ongoing challenges of the hostage crisis. We continue to pray for the immediate release of the remaining 50 hostages, even as the war in Iran dominates global headlines. We are, indeed, living in extraordinary times. While we continue to criticise the government for its failures in this regard and its hypocrisy regarding human rights and liberal values, especially as it pertains to Iran and its regime, we nevertheless are steadfast in upholding our mandate to protect the rights, safety, and liberties of our community members, wherever they may be.

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CAPE TOWN

The kibbitzers of the 12-Day War

If there's one thing the Jewish world has perfected over centuries besides anxiety and survival, it's *kibbitzing*. And during the recent 12-Day War between Israel and Iran, the global gallery of armchair generals, moral philosophers, and highly photogenic European heads of state came out in full force to offer their unsolicited advice, mild gasps, and expertly timed sighs.

Yes, while bombs dropped, leadership was decapitated, and nuclear ambitions vapourised – with a little help from the Americans and their B-2s – the real battle was playing out at podiums, press conferences, and in “deeply concerned” tweets. The *kibbitzers* had entered the chat.

Emmanuel Macron, French president and *kibitzer*-in-chief, known for his impeccable tailoring and ability to furrow his brow on command, was positively *horri  * that Israel dared bomb a prison. Never mind that said prison was a torture centre housing dissidents and was being used by the Islamic

Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) to detain Western nationals.

Apparently, in Macron's world, prisons are sacred, unless they're in Iran, in which case, *c'est compliqu  *.

The United Nations Permanent Member of the Peanut Gallery issued its usual calls for restraint, which is its diplomatic way of saying, “We weren't watching when Iran tried to fast-track a nuclear warhead, but now that Israel has responded effectively, we suddenly remembered that we have a voice.”

BBC analysts, masters of the passive voice, with phrases like “a prison was struck”; “missiles landed”; and “explosions rocked Tehran”, floated about like ghostly euphemisms, mysteriously avoiding who did what and why. It's like covering World War II with headlines like “Germany experiences fire in Dresden.”

Then there's Candace Owens, the self-appointed spokesperson for the Middle East. Never one to miss an opportunity to say something



confidently wrong – or antisemitic – Owens emerged from her geopolitical sabbatical to declare that Israel's actions were part of a “globalist Zionist plot”. It's a term she deploys whenever she's run out of actual arguments but still has access to WiFi. With the kind of conviction normally reserved for late-night infomercials and flat-earth theorists, she took to social media to offer her

unsolicited expertise, which, as always, was heavy on volume and light on facts.

Tucker Carlson, the Puzzled Patriot, has also emerged as a confident *kibbitzer*. With his trademark confused golden-retriever expression, he took a break from blaming everything on the deep state to ask why Israel was being so aggressive when “Iran hadn't even nuked anyone yet”. He lamented the destruction of Iranian nuclear facilities with all the sorrow of someone who just found out his favourite artisanal cheese shop was out of stock.

Last only because he's arguably the most stupid and the least entertaining, is “comic” Dave Smith: Libertarian Logic Meets Missile Warfare. He took to social media to explain, at great, boring, and uninterruptible length, that *actually*, the real problem is that governments exist at all. According to Dave, if we simply abolished the state, borders, and possibly gravity, there wouldn't

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



be any wars, just well-armed free individuals peacefully negotiating property rights in the desert.

While Israel conducted one of the most surgical and successful military operations in modern history, setting back Iran's nuclear and ballistic capabilities, dismantling the IRGC leadership, and humbling a regime that's been playing regional puppet master for decades, the real battle raged in the international commentariat.

There, in the great global *kibbitz* lounge, where everyone has an opinion but no skin in the game, voices rose in synchronised sanctimony. They *tsk-tsked*. They hand-wrung. They spoke with the courage of those who never had to run to a shelter. And while they commented, Israel acted, their voices drowned out by the sound of sirens.

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