



PM ignored Shin Bet chief's warnings on Gaza five months before Oct. 7

Michael Hauser Tov

Five months before Hamas' October 7 invasion of communities and army bases on the Gaza border, Shin Bet chief Ronen Bar warned Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of a future military campaign in Gaza – an admonition that Netanyahu rejected, Haaretz has learned.

In their meeting on May 21, 2023, following the conclusion of the Israel Defense Forces' operation against the Islamic Jihad in the Strip, known as Operation Shield and Arrow, Bar told the prime minister that it was “the first round against the Shi’ite axis. Time will tell as far as the

deterrence goes. We should prepare for an opening blow, for a round of targeted assassinations. Hamas is the next challenge at our doorstep.” He added that a military operation in Gaza would be “unavoidable.”

Netanyahu disagreed and argued that Hamas was de-

terred, telling Bar that Israel had “a strong balance of fear with Hamas.”

Bar also referred to the tensions pervading the West Bank at the time – following a wave of terror attacks orchestrated by Hamas in Gaza – arguing that the ques- tion of launching a campaign

against Hamas “will confront us either as a result of a broad operation in Judea and Samaria [West Bank] or as a result of something else.”

Netanyahu replied that since the Gaza war in May 2021, which saw an outbreak of violence in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza, “Hamas

hasn't fired any rockets at Israel, whereas Islamic Jihad has posed a challenge.”

Netanyahu said that then-senior Hamas leader Saleh al-Arouri “realized during the operation [against the Islamic Jihad] that it was not worth continuing because our targeted killing policy was effective.”

The prime minister further argued that al-Arouri's

deterrence was evident in Hamas' decision not to join Islamic Jihad in firing rockets at Israel and in the decline of Hamas-directed attacks originating from the West Bank.

While Bar did not call on Netanyahu to take immediate action against Hamas, his arguments during the May 2023 meeting directly contradict the prime minister's claim on Tuesday that the

Shin Bet chief “failed to read the intelligence picture and was captive to the prevailing conception” that Hamas was deterred.

The Prime Minister's Office said in a statement: “Another fake news story. The truth is completely the opposite. In the discussed meeting, Shin Bet chief Ronen Bar

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Levin begins process to fire attorney general

Justice Min. issues no-confidence motion, says Baharav-Miara has fueled divisions

Chen Maanit

Justice Minister Yariv Levin has initiated proceedings to dismiss Attorney General Gali Baharav-Miara, following months of threats from ministers in Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition over her opposition to the government's judicial overhaul plan.

In a no-confidence motion sent to ministers, Levin wrote that the move was prompted by her “inappropriate conduct and the significant and prolonged disagreements between the government and the attorney general, which prevents effective cooperation.”

Levin added that Baharav-Miara had turned the Attorney General's Office into a “tyrannical political authority, at times even violent and oppressive.”

“The attorney general acts as an extension of the government's opponents and does not hesitate to use any means to thwart the will of the voters,” Levin claimed. “In Israel's history, nothing has contributed more to fueling divisions between factions than this disgraceful policy of discrimination by someone who is supposed to serve as a model of justice and equality.”

The attorney general's dismissal requires an appeal to the committee that originally recommended her appointment. The committee must determine whether the grounds for dismissal cited by Levin are valid.

The committee, however, is not currently fully staffed, and only once it is reconstituted can the government formally recommend Baharav-Miara be dismissed.

After receiving the committee's recommendation and consulting its members, the government will decide whether to proceed with removing her.

The rules for appointing and dismissing the attorney general were established in 2000 in the Shamgar Committee report, which followed the Bar-On-Hebron affair.

The report stipulates that the government may dismiss the Attorney General if “significant and prolonged disagreements between the government and the Attorney General prevent effective cooperation.” Levin seeks to invoke this clause to justify Baharav-Miara's dismissal.

The committee that selected Baharav-Miara included former Supreme Court President Asher

Grunis, Professor Ron Shapira, former Justice Minister Dan Meridor, former MK Tzvi Hauser, and attorney Tami Ulman.

However, Meridor and Hauser's membership expired with the change of government and Knesset. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has the authority to appoint their replacements, provided one is a former justice minister or attorney general and the other is an MK from the Constitution Committee.

In addition to these two appointments, the committee still includes Ron Shapira, a veteran law professor who has been considered a conservative candidate for the Supreme Court. In recent years, Shapira has publicly supported the government and the judicial overhaul and was appointed by Netanyahu in July as Israel's representative judge at the International Court of Justice in The Hague.

Even if the committee approves the dismissal, Netanyahu and his team will need to justify the decision before the Supreme Court, which will assess how reasonable it is. This stage is expected to be particularly complex, given

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Previous IDF Chief of Staff Herzl Halevi shaking hands with the new army chief, Eyal Zamir, during the ceremony on Wednesday.

IDF Spokesperson

Eyal Zamir sworn in as IDF chief of staff

At handover, outgoing chief Halevi accepts responsibility for his part in October 7 debacle

Bar Peleg and Yaniv Kubovich

Eyal Zamir was promoted to the rank of lieutenant general and installed as the 24th chief of staff of the Israel Defense Forces on Wednesday.

Zamir received his new rank from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the morning, before the official handover ceremony in the afternoon between Zamir and outgoing Chief of Staff

Herzl Halevi at IDF headquarters in Tel Aviv.

Halevi said in his farewell speech that he takes responsibility for the October 7 massacre. “This is my watch, and I take responsibility. In the name of responsibility, I am ending my role. Responsibility is a word often spoken, but its meaning is subjective. I see responsibility as a matter of values, not just legalities.”

Halevi also said, “It is not right for only the IDF to

investigate such an event; it is part of a national order. Establishing a state commission of inquiry is vital and critical, not to assign blame, but primarily to get to the root of the problems.”

Halevi addressed government officials' attacks on the IDF, saying, “The IDF has faced hostile treatment both before and during the war. This can erode trust between soldiers and their commanders and undermine parents' confidence in their children's service.”

He added, “One doesn't need to be a soldier to voice an opinion, but some of those complaining about a lack of courage have never felt the weight of a wounded comrade in enemy territory.”

In his speech as the incoming army commander, Zamir stated, “In the face of external threats, we must unite. The strength of the IDF lies in its unity, val-

ues, diversity and the equitable sharing of the burden. We will work to integrate all sectors of society into every unit of the military. The duty of defending the state must be shared equally. Let us remember that the Jewish people are not only a people of the book and Torah but also a people of action. I call on all segments of Israeli society to take part in the mitzvah of

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After rejecting Arab plan for Gaza

U.S., Hamas in direct talks over release of American hostages

Rawan Suleiman, Ben Samuels, Bar Peleg, Jack Khoury and Jonathan Lis

The Trump administration is in direct talks with Hamas on the release of American hostages and a broader deal to end the war, Hamas told Saudi Arabia's Al Arabiya channel on Wednesday.

Hamas said its leaders met with the U.S. special envoy for hostages, Adam Boehler, multiple times to discuss a long-term truce between Israel and Hamas. The U.S. has historically avoided direct negotiations with Hamas, which it considers a terrorist organization.

The group reportedly affirmed the existence of the talks to Al Arabiya, confirming earlier reports by Walla and Reuters. The White House and the Prime Minister's Office have not commented on the report.

One American hostage, 20-year-old Israel Defense Forces soldier Edan Alexander, is believed to be alive in Gaza, while four other U.S. citizens have been confirmed dead: 21-year-old IDF officer Omer Neutra, 19-year-old tank soldier Itay Chen, and Israeli American couple Gad



Protests to end the war. Itai Ron

Haggai and Judy Weinstein-Haggai, aged 70 and 73.

This is not the first time the U.S. has attempted to secure the release of American hostages from Gaza. In June, the Biden administration reportedly considered a separate deal with Hamas for American citizens if talks with Israel failed. At the time, Israel said it welcomed any effort to free its hostages. Those negotiations ultimately failed, and no American hostages were released.

Israeli officials told Haaretz earlier this week that Israel was willing to extend a cease-fire in Gaza under pressure from the Trump administration and mediating countries.

Israel, however, insisted negotiations be based on a framework proposed by U.S. President Donald Trump's Middle East envoy, Steve Witkoff. His plan called for releasing half of the hostages on the first day of its implementation, with the remainder to be freed after reaching agreements on a second phase.

On Wednesday, Israel said Witkoff had not provided any updates on his plans for further talks. He had postponed a visit to the region last week due to stalled negotiations.

According to Israeli sources, Hamas rejected Witkoff's proposal, and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that Witkoff likely believed there was no way to bridge the gap between Israel and Hamas on the second stage of the cease-fire without further discussions.

Although Israel has accused Hamas of obstructing negotiations, it has also failed to meet certain commitments, including starting talks on the second stage of the deal by the 16th day of the cease-fire and withdrawing from the Philadelphia corridor by this past Saturday.

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HAARETZ Online now

Teen dies of wounds
Last week's car rammng attack left 13 wounded

World Food Program
There are only 'two weeks' worth of supplies in Gaza



Hatem Khaled/Reuters

haaretz.com

Who was Gazan woman whose body was brought to Israel? Nobody cares

Sheren Falah Saeb

This is a short saga of the body of a Gazan woman that was brought to Israel two weeks ago, as part of the exchange of hostages, both living and deceased, for Palestinian prisoners. It was thought to be the body of Shiri Bibas, but forensic analysis conducted in Israel after discovered that the woman's body sent by Hamas was not Bibas – and there was no match with any other hostage. Nir Dvori and Yaron Avraham reported on the news site N12, “The National Center of Forensic Medicine was surprised to discover that the body transferred to Israel was not Shiri Bibas, but an anonymous Gazan woman.” Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said, “With indescribable cynicism, they did not return Shiri Bibas and put the body of a Gazan woman in the coffin.”

Before October 7, 2023, such a situation would have been considered surreal or fantastical, something that might appear in an action series in the style of “Fauda.” But it turns out that reality in the current war is stranger than fiction. After a lengthy and exhausting campaign to discover who the Gazan woman was and



Palestinian terrorists with casket holding remains of a hostage last month.

Hatem Khaled/Reuters

how she died, I learned that the body remained in Israel for a week. Where was she held? Were any attempts made to check her identity or find her family? The questions addressed to Israeli and Gazan officials have remained unanswered.

The saga of the unidentified woman reflects a dark, bottomless abyss. To die. To be buried. To be handed over as a corpse. But no one knows who she is, what her world

was like, or her name. Is it possible that Hamas knowingly used a Gazan woman's body as part of the psychological manipulations that have been going on for almost 18 months? Posts on Arabic social media provide an answer between the lines.

Mustafa Osfor, a Gazan software engineer, wrote on his X account, “The Hamas militia has not yet commented on handing over the Gazan woman.” He added that this

silence is “very suspicious. Murderers, criminals, where did you obtain the body of this Gazan woman? Did you rob her grave? What a crime!”

Another Gaza resident, Hussein Jamal, wrote: “The dead Palestinian woman unintentionally received a great honor. What is sad is that, until now, no one knows her name. This is value we give ourselves.”

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Mossad head pressed Foreign Ministry to shelve plan to discredit Qatar early in war

Gidi Weitz and Bar Peleg

In the early days of the Gaza war, the Foreign Ministry drew up a plan to malign Qatar's name and undermine the country's status. Sources who spoke to Haaretz on condition of anonymity say that then Foreign Minister Eli Cohen approved the plan but it was set aside after Mossad chief David Barnea warned against discrediting Doha, due to the emirate's role in the hostage negotiations.

Shortly after the war broke out, ministry director general Ronen Levi, who had previously worked in the Shin Bet security service and Israel's National Security Council, hired a former senior defense official to organize intelligence gathered by the ministry in order to present Qatar in a negative light.

The information would then be circulated on social media, given to mainstream media and provided to ambassadors. "The goal was to undermine Qatar's international-media legitimacy, revealing material on its support for terrorism," a source told Haaretz.

Among other things, the ministry planned to disclose Qatar's role in laundering charitable funds transferred to terrorist organizations. Officials also raised the idea of adopting a "divide and rule" approach between Qatar and Egypt, both of which were seeking to mediate in a hostage deal.



Mossad head David Barnea, left, and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Kobi Gideon / GPO

Another recommendation included in the plan was to declare the Qatari broadcaster Al Jazeera illegal in Israel with the aim of curbing its influence in Israel and abroad. People who were involved in preparing the plan told Haaretz that they believed from the start that it would never be implemented due to objections from the Prime Minister's Office and the Mossad.

In November, Haaretz reported that Yonatan Urlich,

an adviser to Benjamin Netanyahu, and Israel Einhorn, who advised the prime minister's Likud party and its ministers, prepared a campaign to improve Qatar's image ahead of its hosting of the 2022 World Cup. Last month, Channel 12 News revealed that Eli Feldstein, a Netanyahu spokesman, was working for Qatar during the war, with an American lobbyist serving as an intermediary.

Ulrich and Einhorn de-

nied working for Qatar. Oded Savoray, a lawyer representing Feldstein, denied the allegations against his client and said he acted solely on behalf of the prime minister.

Last week, Attorney General Gali Baharav-Miara announced that she was opening an investigation into the connections between the prime minister's staff and people connected to Qatar. The probe is being conducted jointly by the

Israel Police and the Shin Bet, presumably because of the national security issues involved.

The three suspects are also involved in the leak of classified information to the German newspaper Bild. According to the indictment filed in the case, Urlich put Feldstein in touch with Einhorn, who passed the information to the newspaper.

In recent years there has been a policy disagreement

among Israeli security agencies in regard to Qatar. Sources told Haaretz that the Shin Bet saw Doha as a supporter of terrorism and prefers that Israel rely on Egypt as a mediator in negotiations with Hamas. The Mossad believed that sending Qatari money to the Gaza Strip would help alleviate tensions there.

Israel's political leaders adopted the Mossad position, and Israel received assistance from Qatar starting in the early days of the Gaza war. After it helped win the release on October 20, 2023 of hostages Judith Raanan and her daughter Natalie Raanan, National Security Adviser Tzachi Hanegbi praised Qatar on social media. Doha has since played a role in the two hostage deals.

At the same time, the country continued to play host to senior Hamas figures, a practice that Netanyahu has publicly criticized. A Shin Bet investigation published Tuesday criticized the Qatari money transfers, which it asserted strengthened Hamas and facilitated the October 7 massacre.

In an uncanny statement, Doha responded by criticizing the Shin Bet and other Israeli security agencies, calling on them to "focus on saving the remaining hostages and finding a solution that ensures long-term regional security, rather than resorting to diversionary tactics."

IDF probe: Army arrived at Nahal Oz seven hours after attack began

Bar Peleg

The first significant Israeli infantry forces only began engaging Hamas forces at Kibbutz Nahal Oz on October 7, 2023, nearly seven hours after the onslaught there began, according to findings of the Israel Defense Forces investigation released Tuesday.

The probe found that the IDF had failed in its mission to protect the Gaza border community and that until reinforcements arrived shortly before 2 P.M., members of the kibbutz security squad, along with a few soldiers who were in the area, fought the terrorists alone. They managed to repel the first wave of the attack, but the kibbutz was overrun when the second wave arrived.

Thirteen kibbutz members were killed in the attack, including two members of the security squad, in addition to two foreign nationals. Eight civilians, including the body of one of the foreign nationals, were abducted and taken to Gaza.

On the morning of the massacre, 11 soldiers from the Border Police's undercover unit were stationed at the kibbutz to deal with disturbances along the Gaza border, the investigation found. They, along with the kibbutz security squad and soldiers from a Golani Brigade support company – who were stationed near the border fence next to two tanks – were the ones who managed to stop the first wave of the attack.

That morning, Golani soldiers moved toward the area where the terrorists had breached the border fence as part of Hamas' attack on a string of Gaza border communities. Shortly before 7 A.M., deputy battalion commander Nir Boimfalk ordered company commander Daniel Boni, who was with them, to protect the kibbutz.

"Go protect the community. Your mission is to defend the community. The terrorists are on their way to the community. I need you to go to the community and make sure no one infiltrates it. Do you understand?" Boimfalk was heard asking over a two-way radio. Boni then arrived at a position near the kibbutz where one of the tanks was stationed, to defend the community from there. After Boimfalk was wounded, Boni took command of the sector and made his way to the Nahal Oz army outpost, which had also been infiltrated by

terrorists.

Hamas' attack plan against the border outposts was to first pin down the soldiers in fortified shelters by launching a massive barrage of rockets. Due to Kibbutz Nahal Oz's proximity to the outpost, it was also targeted with an unusually high number of rockets. The terrorist infiltration into the kibbutz began at 7:05 A.M., with attackers arriving on motorcycles and on foot. Around 30 to 40 terrorists stormed two locations in the new Sadot neighborhood of the kibbutz.

At that point, the kibbutz security coordinator, Ilan Fiorentino, discovered that due to a power failure, he was unable to open the armory to distribute weapons to his security squad. As a result, he didn't call them into action. He informed the head of the emergency team on the kibbutz of the situation, but two minutes later was killed by terrorists near his home.

As the infiltration began, a Border Police undercover team identified terrorists near the kibbutz dairy farm and managed to kill two of them. At the same time, however, dozens of other terrorists were entering the kibbutz at a different point.

At 7:20 A.M., an undercover officer by the name of Yakov was killed by terrorist fire near the home of the Tibon family on the kibbutz. Fiorentino's wife, Sharon, wrote the following to the kibbutz WhatsApp messaging group: "There are terrorists in the new Sadot neighborhood. Anyone who has a weapon, we need you." The fighting in the neighborhood continued, and terrorists entered the home of Shoshi and Yonatan Brosh, killing her and wounding him.

At 7:30 A.M., Roy Revivo, a civilian and former police officer, barricaded himself in his home and fired at terrorists attempting to break in. The first wave of the attack ended around 8 A.M., with 11 terrorists killed and several others wounded. Two kibbutz residents and a soldier were also killed and a civilian and four undercover officers were wounded. At that point, the two tanks that had been stationed near the border fence and that had helped repel the attack left their position and headed toward the nearby Nahal Oz outpost. The Golani support company soldiers stationed there also abandoned the position.

At 10 A.M., the second wave of the terrorist attack

on the kibbutz began, with gunfire heard in the Keshet neighborhood. At 10:34 A.M., more terrorists infiltrated the kibbutz through the front gate, which was unstaffed. By 10:40 A.M., additional terrorists entered through the back gate. In total, roughly 150 attackers entered the kibbutz in the second wave. As of 1:15 P.M., only eight defenders had confronted them – two members of the kibbutz security squad in one vehicle and six Border Police undercover officers in another.

During that period, terrorists entered homes, murdering residents and abducting others. At 10:40 A.M., terrorists broke into the Arava family's home and began livestreaming the scene on Facebook. The military later admitted that no one was monitoring social media in real time to process the information and alert the security forces. The terrorists captured one member of the family, Tomer Arava, and took him with them. They forced the teen to call out to people hiding in their homes to open their doors, but he told the terrorists that the houses were empty.

His mother Dikla, and Ella and Dafna Elyakim, the daughters of her partner Noam, were loaded into a vehicle and driven to Gaza. Around 11:45 A.M., Dikla was killed by accident by IDF fire, while Ella and Dafna Elyakim were abducted to Gaza.

During that period, terrorists also reached the area of the kibbutz where foreign workers lived. Some Thai workers tried to resist and escape. One of them, Somkhun Pansa-Ard, was brutally murdered. The terrorists also stormed the dairy farm, killing a Tanzanian national Joshua Mollel and abducting his body.

At 10:48 A.M. and 10:52 A.M., an IDF attack helicopter fired at the kibbutz, but communications logs revealed that the pilot targeted the wrong location and was unaware of the situation on the ground.

At 12:05 P.M., the first reinforcement force arrived from outside the kibbutz – a handful of soldiers from the Maglan unit. But they were ambushed by terrorists, and three soldiers were killed. Fifteen minutes later, Maj. Gen. (res.) Noam Tibon, whose son and his family lived on the kibbutz, arrived with an improvised force that he had assembled and engaged in combat with the terrorists.

At 1:15 P.M., a larger force of about 70 Maglan soldiers arrived outside the kibbutz but didn't immediately engage in combat. By this time, Judith Raanan and her daughter Natalie, as well as Tsachi Idan and Omri Miran, were kidnapped and taken toward Gaza. The Maglan force only entered the kibbutz at 1:44 P.M.

Around 3 P.M., Ran Posluschni, who had barricaded himself on the upper floor of his home with a rifle, was mistakenly shot and killed by an improvised IDF unit that saw suspicious movement inside the house. Around 3:30 P.M., the final battle at the kibbutz took place near the dairy farm.

The IDF investigation concluded that the Northern Brigade had not prepared for the scenario of a surprise raid. According to the report's author, Col. (res.) Yoni Sitbon, if the tank force that had earlier fought at the border fence had remained in position, it could have significantly aided in defending the kibbutz and in repelling the second wave of the attack. It was also noted that the Golani support company soldiers stationed at the site of a breach in the border fence carried only light weapons, severely limiting their effectiveness in the battle.

The investigation found that there was insufficient preparation on the kibbutz for a terrorist infiltration, despite its proximity to the border fence. The kibbutz security squad wasn't mobilized due to a mistaken belief that a power outage at the kibbutz also affected access to the armory, the probe concluded. According to the investigation, if 15 more armed members of the squad had responded, they could have stopped the subsequent waves of attack.

The investigation concluded that even in a scenario of complete surprise, a well-trained and properly equipped force – even a small one – if it had responded quickly and effectively, could have won the battle.

Among the investigation's recommendations was that Gaza Division forces should be capable of defending their sector alone for at least three hours until reinforcements arrive. It was also suggested that a security buffer zone, both above and below ground, be established opposite the Shujaiyah neighborhood in Gaza due to Kibbutz Nahal Oz's proximity to the border fence.

Ohad Yahalomi, killed in Gaza captivity, laid to rest in Nir Oz

Eden Solomon

Hundreds of people attended the funeral of Ohad Yahalomi, who was killed in Hamas captivity in Gaza and whose body was returned to Israel last Thursday as part of the hostage deal. Yahalomi was 50 at the time of his death.

His funeral procession left from central Israel and ended in Kibbutz Nir Oz, near the Gaza border, where Yahalomi resided and was taken hostage on October 7.

The public was invited to accompany the family during the procession, which was led by patrol cars from the Israel Nature and Parks Authority, the agency Yahalomi worked for for years.

During the funeral, Yahalomi's wife, Batsheva, eulogized him, saying, after 16 years of "joy and light, the light has now gone out, and I walk in the shadows and cast about in the dark."

She added that throughout the past year, she and their children had held hope that Ohad would return from captivity. "We were sure that if anyone could survive the harsh captivity, it would be you, because no one is stronger than you in body and in spirit," she said.

She added, "we had even hoped that your captors would grow fond of you, because that's just who you are, someone who enters people's hearts, even those whose hearts are made of stone."

Ohad's sister, Efrat, also addressed her brother, saying, "My beloved brother, I still can't bring myself to speak of you in the past tense."

She recalled that just months before his abduction, Ohad had told her he had everything he needed in life and only wanted to enjoy time with his family. "Just when you could have finally enjoyed the fruits of your hard work, your life was taken – and it breaks my heart," she said.

"How could they take you – someone of peace, kindness, generosity, and love? They say

God takes the best, but it's not fair... I'm sorry your life ended this way. Sorry that after years of endless giving, the one time you needed help – no one came."

Kibbutz Nir Oz shared, "Ohad was a dedicated and loving family man. He leaves behind a wife, three young children, family and many friends. He was a sports enthusiast and a wanderer at heart, intimately familiar with every trail and dune in the desert he loved so much."

On the morning of October 7, Yahalomi was wounded in a gunfight with terrorists while protecting his wife and kids, who were hiding in a shelter.

"For years, he worked with the Nature and Parks Authority, dedicating his life to preserving nature. Driven by his deep love for the desert, he co-published a scorpion guidebook with partners and contributed to educational initiatives in the Bedouin community," the kibbutz said.

On the morning of October 7, Yahalomi was wounded in a gunfight with a terrorist as he tried to protect his family. He was taken hostage along with his son, Eitan, 12, who was held separately from him in captivity and released in the November 2023 hostage deal. The terrorists also tried to kidnap his wife and daughters, but they managed to escape before they were brought into Gaza.

In January 2024, Yahalomi was recorded in a video by al-Nasser Salah al-Din Brigades, the Popular Resistance Committees' military wing in the Gaza Strip, in which he appeared to be wounded, raising concerns for his safety.



The funeral procession for Ohad Yahalomi.

Tomer Appelbaum

TALKS

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Earlier on Wednesday, the Trump administration announced that it had rejected a proposal from Arab states to reconstruct Gaza.

The plan "does not address the reality that Gaza is currently uninhabitable and residents cannot humanely live in a territory covered in debris and unexploded ordnance," U.S. National Security Spokesperson Brian Hughes said.

Hughes added that "President Trump stands by his vision to rebuild Gaza free from Hamas" and that the U.S. looks "forward to further talks to bring peace and prosperity to the region."

On Tuesday, the Arab League held an emergency summit in Cairo in response to Trump's proposal to take over Gaza. Arab leaders from Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and other Arab states convened to form a unified stance against Trump's proposal to expel Palestinians from the Strip and develop an alternative plan for its future.

The Arab League adopted an Egyptian plan that proposed rebuilding Gaza at a cost of \$53 billion and called for the establishment of an international committee to raise funds for the reconstruction and discuss the implementation of the plan on the ground.

Part of the Egyptians' proposal was that a committee of Gazan professionals, under the auspices of the Pal-

estinian Authority, would manage the Strip for the next six months and operate Gaza's institutions for its reconstruction. After that, the Palestinian Authority would take over the management of Gaza.

The plan also calls for Palestinian elections within a year, subject to suitable conditions, and firmly opposes any displacement of Gaza's residents.

Trump officials have insisted that Gaza will not be habitable for at least 10 years, making Trump's plan allegedly humanitarian in nature, despite widespread reactions claiming it amounts to ethnic cleansing.

Also on Wednesday, six former hostages who will meet with senior Trump officials were photographed in Washington offices of the Hostages and Missing Families Forum with posters calling for their release.

The delegation, which headed to the U.S. at the initiative of the forum and the organization Hostage Aid, comprises Doron Steinbrecher, Eli Sharabi, Naama Levy, Iair Horn, Omer Shem Tov and Keith Siegel, who was also joined by his wife Aviva, who was released in the first hostage deal in November 2023.

The released hostages wrote messages on the posters: "I won, you gave me the strength to survive," wrote Siegel, while Steinbrecher wrote, "Back Home." Army spotter Levy wrote, "What a joy to be here, thank you all for your efforts," and Shem Tov wrote, "How good it is to simply be. Thank you for your prayers and hard work."



Bilal Maharik with the soldiers at his home.

Bilal Maharik

IDF won't probe troops who displaced W. Bank Palestinians

Hagar Shezaf

The Israel Defense Forces has decided not to launch a Military Police investigation into the actions of soldiers who expelled Palestinian families near the West Bank settlement of Beit Arye last week, instead opting to reprimand the troops and clarify procedures despite officials acknowledging that they breached protocol and acted on their own initiative.

Following threats from soldiers, five Palestinian families near the Beit Arye settlement were expelled from their homes over the week end; another family that owns a farm in the area remained in place.

The soldiers' actions were illegal since the expulsion was carried out without a warrant and on the initiative of soldiers who were not authorized to enforce such measures.

Roni Pelli, a lawyer with Yesh Din – Volunteers for Human Rights, told Haaretz, "Beyond the fact that expulsion is illegal under international law and could amount to a war crime, in this case it's also illegal under the military's regulations."

"Like any state authority, the army is only permitted to act within the law, or in this case, based on a warrant," she added. "The soldiers decided to expel the community without any legal basis and without any warrant being issued."

Regarding the IDF's decision not to open an investigation, Pelli said, "It's another testament to a culture of granting immunity to soldiers who harm Palestinians and their property and avoiding law enforcement against them."

The soldiers who expelled the Palestinian families are reservists serving in a battalion stationed near Beit

Arye. According to the families, the soldiers informed them last week that they had a week to leave, and then returned every few days to repeat the demand. On Thursday morning, the soldiers told the families they had four hours to depart, and some complied.

"We don't know where to go. We want to stay, but we're afraid that the soldiers will beat us," Bilal Maharik, a local resident who left his home, said.

In a statement the IDF Spokesperson's Unit said, "The preliminary investigation into the incident indicates that there was a breach of procedure, and it will be handled. In general, the enforcement of planning and building laws, including removing buildings in firing zones, is only carried out by authorized parties, based on an order, the law and the powers granted to the local authorities."

It added that these were "illegal buildings built in a firing zone."

The expelled families live in structures within an area designated by the military as a firing zone, although it is inactive. Aerial photographs show that the families have been residing there since at least 2007. In recent years, a settlement called Avichai Farm has been built nearby, also within the firing zone.

The Palestinian residents believe the attempt to expel them is connected to the settlement. The soldiers also tried to expel another Palestinian family whose farm is located in the area, despite it not being located within the firing zone.

The IDF Spokesperson's Unit declined to comment on the reasons behind the decision to refrain from opening a Military Police investigation.

Intelligence services admit their October 7 failures. But that’s not the whole story

The internal probes show they missed the signs. But there’s more blame to go around

Aluf Benn

The investigations into the failures of October 7 by Israel's Military Intelligence and its domestic security agency, the Shin Bet, describe both Hamas' preparations for war and Israel's blindness and obtuseness. They provide a rare glimpse into the work practices and flow of the intelligence community and expose critical internal disagreements on how to deal with Hamas. Military Intelligence demonstrated more complacency and self-confidence than the Shin Bet, which warned about Hamas' growing strength and suggested assassinating its leaders as a preventive measure.

However, despite the differences in their approaches, both intelligence organizations made the same mistake: they missed Hamas' decision to attack Israel from the Gaza Strip alone, without waiting for its partners in the so-called Axis of Resistance," primarily Hezbollah.

This was the decisive point for Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar on his path to war, and it completely escaped the notice of Military Intelligence and the Shin Bet. They failed both in the collection of intelligence, as they did not know what was happening in the enemy's leadership, and in analysis, as they could not imagine a completely surprise attack along the entire Israel-Gaza border, and they did not query the relative calm at the border, whether it reflected a strategic deception by Hamas intended to lull Israel to

sleep.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his short-lived replacements Naftali Bennett and Yair Lapid accepted the intelligence assessments that the Gaza situation was tolerable and did not challenge them. Netanyahu's staunch supporters present him as a unique strategic genius, pointing to his deep anxiety and excessive caution as national insurance policies. This is supposedly the basis for a key claim by Netanyahu that he uses both as self-defense and as offense: that if only he had been woken up during the night before the Hamas attack unfolded, he would have mobilized the entire Israel Defense Forces and prevented the Hamas massacre in the kibbutzim and IDF bases.

This story is not at all convincing. In the lead-up to October 7, during the hours, days and weeks when he was fully awake, Netanyahu did not demand that the intelligence agencies reassess their threat estimates. As far as is known, he did not ask them: "What if you are wrong, and the cunning Sinwar is misleading us by appearing to offer calm on the Israel-Gaza border, but is actually preparing to implement the Hamas Charter, and launch a war of extermination against Israel?"

Netanyahu has not yet presented the Israeli public with his full version of his role before and during October 7, and has sufficed with disclaiming responsibility for the disaster and blaming his subordinates. But it is easy to understand why he did not argue with the prewar intelligence assessments that downplayed the severity of the danger from Gaza, because they supported his policy, which viewed Hamas as an ally.

From Netanyahu's perspective, the main threat to Israel was and remains international coercion to establish a Palestinian state in the West Bank, and he was horrified by the international community's support for the Palestinian Authority under Mahmoud Abbas. That Hamas, a bitter rival of Abbas, controlled Gaza, seemed to Netanyahu as a diplomatic



Palestinian terrorists leave Kibbutz Kfar Aza following the massacre there on October 7, 2023.

Hassan Eslaiah/AP

bility for the disaster and blaming his subordinates. But it is easy to understand why he did not argue with the prewar intelligence assessments that downplayed the severity of the danger from Gaza, because they supported his policy, which viewed Hamas as an ally.

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shield against dividing the land between the river and the sea. And if the price was the occasional exchanges of blows, and a major Israeli investment in defensive systems, so be it.

Qatar's funding for Hamas allowed Netanyahu to continue this policy and send the bill to the wealthy Gulf emir. He brushed aside the warnings from the Shin Bet and the alerts from former Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman about how Hamas would use the suitcases full of Qatari cash to build up its military capabilities. Netanyahu also flatly rejected all proposals for an Israeli preemptive attack in Gaza, which he saw as an excessive risk.

He catered to Israeli public opinion, which appreciated the relative calm and quiet on the border and treated the Palestinians like "shrapnel in the butt," as Naftali Bennett once described them: unpleasant neighbors who are occasionally bothersome, but do not really interfere with the Start-Up Nation or real estate bonanzas in Tel Aviv or the right wing's judicial coup.

Thus, in the years before October 7, Israel wrapped itself in four protective walls that collapsed at the moment of truth. The intelligence community believed that a technological shield, constituted by sophisticated

means of collection, would provide them with ample warning. The IDF trusted the deep foundations of the Gaza wall, and the surveillance and open-fire systems above it, to scare the enemy and thwart any infiltration attempts. Netanyahu relied on the money from Qatar to buy him quiet. And at the bedrock of it all stood the psychological shield: Israelis simply did not imagine that the Palestinians were capable of planning and executing such a complex attack. Only Sinwar and his accomplices deciphered Israel's complacency and managed to breach all four walls, with no warning from the once-vaunted Israeli intelligence agencies.

AG to Katz: Urgent gov’t action needed to up Haredi enlistment

Chen Maanit

Attorney General Gali Baharav-Miara sent a letter to Defense Minister Israel Katz on Tuesday saying that the rate of Haredi enlistment for the current year is far from meeting the army's needs or the principle of equality.

The figures, which were presented a couple of days ago at a meeting to track the implementation of Haredi call-up orders as per the High Court of Justice ruling, do not meet the targets set by the court.

Baharav-Miara also said that the consensus of all the relevant professionals is that increasing individual enforcement measures, including denying benefits to draft-dodgers and expanding economic and administrative sanctions, is necessary to increase the number of recruits. Several of the enforcement measures may be advanced immediately if a decision to do so is taken by the political leadership, without the need for legislation, she said.

She added that the security bodies have made it clear that the Gaza war requires increasing the number of people who enlist in compulsory service, and that drafting Haredim is a vital security need, especially at a time when the government is pursuing measures that would intensify rather than relieve the burden on those who already serve.

In June, the High Court ruled that the state can no longer exempt Haredim from Israel Defense Forces enlistment, and that it can no longer fund yeshivas and kollels (yeshivas for married men) whose students didn't receive a draft exemption.

An expanded panel of nine justices unanimously

accepted the appeals on the matter.

In their ruling, they harshly criticized the government, saying that its conduct since the expiration of the Security Service law, which gave a blanket exemption from the draft to Haredim, went counter to the law.

The appeals were filed by Brothers and Sisters in Arms, the Movement for Quality Government in Israel and 240 individual petitioners.

"In the midst of a difficult war, the inequality in sharing the burden is worse than ever and requires a sustainable solution," the justices wrote. "Discrimination in regard to the most precious thing of all – life itself – is the most serious kind of discrimination. A person is prepared to give his life for his country's security. He does not expect any benefit from this. He only expects that others will do the same."

After the ruling, Baharav-Miara instructed the defense establishment to immediately begin drafting 3,000 yeshiva students, in addition to the average number of Haredi enlistees from recent years.

In a letter she sent to the legal advisors of the defense establishment and the finance and education ministries, she instructed them "to refrain from any transfer of monies, directly or indirectly, that in any way supports the activity of those who avoid the draft, or that in any way aims to circumvent the court's ruling."

This also came in wake of the court's ruling that the state can no longer fund yeshivas and kollels whose students have not received a draft exemption, or whose service was not legally deferred.

Arab plan for Gaza offers hope for hostages, but threatens Netanyahu

Amir Tibon

Several Arab countries published a joint plan for the future of Gaza on Tuesday, the result of a month-long diplomatic effort to create an off-ramp that would end the war in the Palestinian enclave and let reconstruction begin there. The plan contains hundreds of pages and appendices, yet the Trump administration seemed to have killed it with a single paragraph.

"The current proposal does not address the reality that Gaza is currently uninhabitable and residents cannot humanely live in a territory covered in debris and unexploded ordnance," said a spokesman for the National Security Council, adding that President Donald Trump remains committed to his plan to forcibly evacuate the entire population of Gaza and claim the territory for the United States – an idea that has not received the support or cooperation of any government in the world except for Benjamin Netanyahu's.

A senior Arab diplomat who was involved in crafting the new plan told Haaretz that the Trump administration's immediate rejection of it was frustrating, but shouldn't be viewed as the end point of the Arab countries' efforts. "There's going to be a lengthy negotiation over this plan," the diplomat said. "We're just at the beginning of this

process."

The diplomat referred to Trump's handling of the rare-earth minerals agreement with Ukraine as an example of how foreign policy issues get resolved under the current administration. "Last week, everyone thought the agreement with Ukraine was dead after that White House meeting. But now it's back on the agenda."

The countries behind the plan – including Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates – believe they will be able to sway the U.S. president and his team to see the advantages of their detailed blueprint.

Trump's quick rejection, however, must be viewed in the context of Israel's reaction to the plan. The administration seems to be in close coordination with the

Netanyahu government, which dismissed the Arab document shortly before the United States did likewise. For Netanyahu, any plan that offers an end to the war in Gaza is a non-starter, because it will hasten the collapse of his governing coalition. His fanatic coalition partners dream of renewing the war, expelling the Palestinians and building Jewish settlements in Gaza.

The Arab plan, meanwhile, offers a diplomatic solution that includes Hamas giving up power, a technocratic government supported by the most influential Arab governments taking over Gaza, and a reconstruction plan that will be closely monitored by the United States.

Israel could have responded to this plan by calling it a basis for negotiations, and demanding stronger guarantees that it will include a clear, detailed

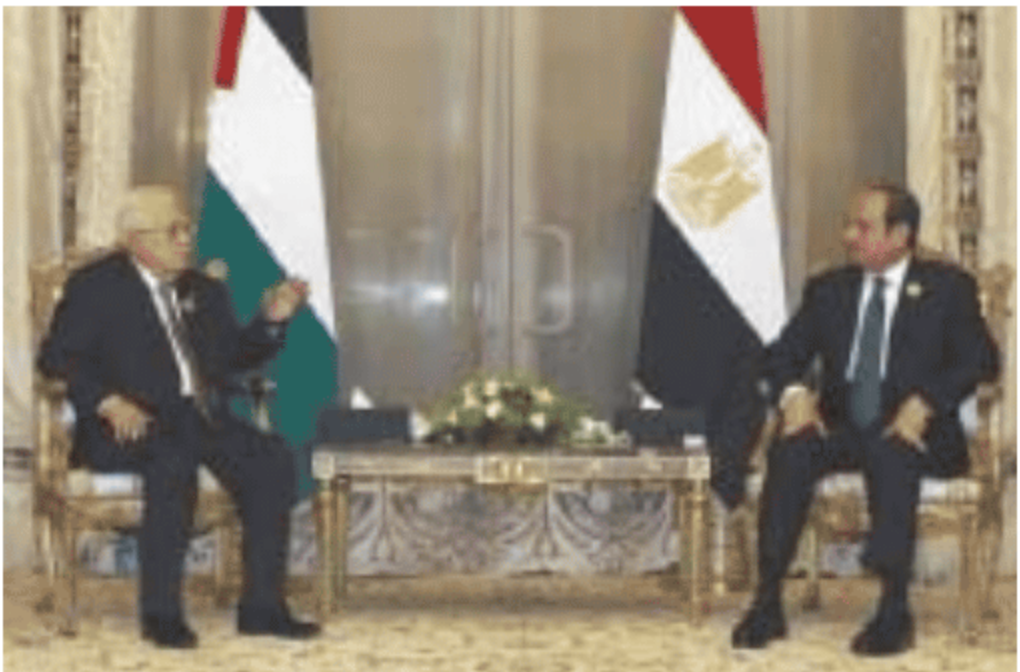
mechanism for dismantling Hamas' military wing and demilitarizing Gaza. Instead, it simply said no, without any real explanation.

In the middle of these grand strategic discussions are the Israeli hostages in Gaza, and their families. Renewing the war at this point in time will be a death sentence to many of the 20-plus living hostages, and could lead to the disappearance of some of the deceased hostages, whose remains would never be found.

For the hostages and their families, the Arab plan is a source of hope as it presents a path to complete the task of removing Hamas from power, without endangering their loved ones.

The response of the Netanyahu government – outright rejection of the plan, while not even considering its impact on the ability to complete the existing hostage release deal – is not surprising. This government has shown nothing but contempt and scorn toward the hostages and their families.

But the response of the Trump administration should cause alarm. The administration keeps saying it is committed to bringing back all of the hostages and removing Hamas from power. Renewing the war could perhaps achieve the second goal, but at the price of giving up on the first one. The Arab plan is the only realistic option at the moment to do both.



Palestinian President Abbas, left, with Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah al-Sissi in Cairo, this week.

PPO/AFP

LEVIN

Continued from page 1

Netanyahu's significant conflict of interest and his prior commitment not to be involved in matters concerning the attorney general, who also oversees the criminal cases that are against him.

Previous attempt

In December, the opposition toppled a coalition bill to hold a debate to oust Baharav-Miara. Before the vote, Justice Minister Levin called to oust her on the supposed grounds that she is preventing the government from carrying out its policies on a number of issues.

"It must be said as clearly as possible – the replacement

ment or ouster is a move of last resort, when all hope has failed," said Levin. "It's always best to find a way to avoid it - but unfortunately, I greatly regret that with the current conditions, all hope is lost and it's impossible to continue working like this." He called on more ministers to join his ouster bid.

In late November, Communications Minister Shlomo Karhi said he had

collected the signatures of 13 ministers on a document calling for her ouster.

"I think the attorney general is a political adviser who is not worthy of her position and is constantly trying to hem in the government's moves," Karhi said, accusing Baharav-Miara of putting up legal roadblocks. "Every week, she comes up with something new in order to thwart the government's policy."

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Qatar bashes Shin Bet probe, denies Hamas funding accusations

Jonathan Lis

Qatar said Wednesday that Israel should focus on returning the hostages, “rather than resorting to diversionary tactics such as scapegoating Qatar for political longevity,” following the Shin Bet security service probe of the events of October 7, 2023.

“At this critical juncture, the Shin Bet and other Israeli security agencies should focus on saving the remaining hostages and finding a solution that ensures long-term regional security,” said the International Media Office of the State of Qatar.

According to the findings of the Shin Bet investigation, the transfer of Qatari funds to Hamas’ military wing was among the main factors that enabled Hamas to prepare for the October 7 attack.

However, Qatar denied that any aid was delivered to Hamas’ political or military wings. It said all money transferred to the Gaza Strip was spent on humanitarian endeavors, coordinated with the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. Additionally, funds for assisting families were transferred via the World Food Programme.

“The State of Qatar is



The emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, in Iran last month.

Majid Asgaripour/West Asia News Agency via Reuters

a strong supporter of the Palestinian people and has provided humanitarian support to families in Gaza over many years,” the office said. It added that aid to Gaza was “transferred with the full knowledge, support, and supervision of the current and previous Israeli admin-

istrations and their security agencies – including the Shin Bet” and “The list of every Gazan family that received aid was coordinated with the Israeli government.”

On Tuesday, the Shin Bet published its investigation into the organization’s conduct during and in the

period leading up to the October 7 attack. It found that the policy of maintaining “quiet” in Gaza, as well as the transfer of Qatari funds that built up Hamas’ military wing, were key factors that allowed for the attack. In addition, the investigation also found that “distur-

bances on [the Old City of Jerusalem] Temple Mount, the treatment of Palestinian prisoners and the perception that Israeli society had weakened due to the erosion of social cohesion [in the wake of the judicial overhaul]” contributed to Hamas’ growing strength.

Protests over Bennett’s meeting with Jewish Columbia students

Etan Nechin

NEW YORK – Former Prime Minister Naftali Bennett made a surprise visit to New York’s Columbia University on Tuesday evening, meeting with a selected group of Israeli and Jewish American students to discuss the war and public affairs in Israel.

Columbia/Barnard Hillel and the School for International and Public Affairs organized the closed-door meeting. Though the press was barred, sources who attended the event shared a recording with Haaretz.

In the meeting, Bennett credited U.S. President Donald Trump for the hostage deal and said his leadership style “creates a meaningful level of deterrence in the Middle East: People are afraid, and that’s not necessarily a bad thing.”

Regarding the October 7 attack, Bennett described the previous year as the “worst year in Israel’s history” and blamed the domestic rift over the judicial overhaul for the vulnerabilities Hamas exploited. “Had we had a unified country, we wouldn’t have been distracted,” he said.

Bennett accused the Netanyahu government of prioritizing self-preservation over critical decision-making, undermining trust and governance in Israel. He also attacked Netanyahu for funneling money to Hamas and claimed that he ended the practice during his tenure as prime minister.

When asked about the large number of civilian casualties in Gaza, Bennett said Israel “never deliber-

ately targets civilian locations” and accused Hamas of committing “self-genocide” by embedding itself within civilian populations.

Bennett said the country needs a “Zionist government” to build trust and that any future government he leads will not include an Arab party. This comes after his 2021 government made history by including the United Arab List – the first time an Arab party was part of a ruling coalition in Israel.



Bennett

Olivier Fitoussi

Bennett called to “bomb the heck” out of Iran’s nuclear program. “Not a one-off. Call it two, three weeks until we destroy the lion’s share of Iran’s nuclear program. That’s what I would do,” he said. “They won’t be defenseless forever. Right now, they are. But I don’t know if they will be in six months. We must act now,” he added.

The gathering was meant to remain confidential, but news of Bennett’s visit leaked early Tuesday, sparking reactions on social media and within campus circles.

The protest, attended by

more than 100 pro-Palestinian activists, was organized by the Columbia chapter of Jewish Voice for Peace and Columbia Palestine Solidarity Coalition. Columbia University Apartheid Divest also participated in the rally.

Left-leaning student groups like CU Jews for Ceasefire as well as Yoni Kurtz, a former president of Columbia/Barnard Hillel’s student board, condemned the secretive nature of the meeting. They claimed that C/B Hillel staff instructed students to “minimize discussing this event with others” in an apparent effort to avoid debate regarding Bennett’s right-wing settler agenda.

The groups said in a statement, “While CBHillel claims to be committed to building a diverse Jewish community, it has nonetheless deprived the vast majority of the student body of an opportunity to engage in critical discourse with an elected official who holds real political power.”

Columbia has been at the center of anti-Israel protests since last year and has recently faced drastic backlash from the Trump administration.

The university administration has faced growing pressure to respond to student disruption, including a recent protest at Barnard, where pro-Palestinian demonstrators occupied the dean’s office. That incident resulted in at least one employee being hospitalized and led to threats from the Trump White House to freeze funding for universities.

“There are no details about the body or where it was buried,” said M., a journalist from central Gaza who had tried to find the information himself and approached several Gazan officials.

“All information about her is kept secret by Hamas, since the place where she was killed was near a place where Israeli hostages were kept, and Hamas does not divulge such secret information. It is their decision if and when to release her name and details.”

“There’s a theory among Gazans that the woman was killed along with her family when they were in a building – but we don’t know who she was,” said my friend N., a Deir al-Balah resident. A second hypothesis, she says, is that “they didn’t find the right body and they dug up the grave of a Gazan woman,

SHIN BET

Continued from page 1

repeatedly emphasized that Hamas was deterred and seeking to maintain stability in the Gaza Strip, while focusing its pressure on Israel in the West Bank.”

According to the statement, Bar “recommended ‘doing nothing’ or, at most, reducing the number of workers entering Israel. The prime minister, on the other hand, ordered preparations to impose a heavy price on Hamas, stressing that the component of targeted assassinations of terror leaders – proved during Operation Shield and Arrow – is at the heart of Israeli deterrence, and that preparations should continue to target senior Hamas figures, from [Hamas military wing head Mohammed] Deif to [Hamas leader in Gaza Yahya] Sinwar.”

The Shin Bet stated that the security service does not comment on discussions with government officials.

The Shin Bet probe into the failures that led to the October 7 catastrophe details numerous instances in which the heads of the security service advised Netanyahu – and also the Bennett-Lapid government – to assassinate top Hamas figures, but the prime ministers never authorized these actions.

In February, Channel 12 News reported that just days before the Hamas attack, Bar recommended assassinating Sinwar during a meeting that included the prime minister.

In August, Yedioth Ahronoth reported that Bar warned Netanyahu in July 2023 that a “war was imminent.”

The Shin Bet’s internal investigation into the failures

that led to October 7 stated, “2023 was marked by a series of warnings issued by the Shin Bet regarding our enemies’ intent to attack Israel... right up until the days preceding the massacre.”

The investigation also found that since 2021, Hamas had stepped up its efforts to direct terror attacks out of the West Bank, prompting the Shin Bet to recommend eliminating those orchestrating this terror campaign from Gaza.

After the findings of the Shin Bet investigation were published on Tuesday, Netanyahu attacked Bar, claiming that “in the ongoing intelligence assessments, including just a few days before the massacre, the main thesis in the Shin Bet was that Hamas wanted to maintain the quiet and would not start a war.”

The prime minister also asserted that in early October 2023, “the Shin Bet chief recommended granting civilian benefits to Hamas in return for buying quiet. Bar also said that assassinations should be avoided in Gaza and Lebanon in order to avoid another round of fighting in Gaza.”

However, the result of the Shin Bet investigation says that the security service advised the political leadership to initiate action against Hamas and avoid being dragged into rounds of fighting.

The investigation also found that the Shin Bet failed for years to identify Hamas’ plan for the invasion, even after it came into possession of a document titled Jericho Wall detailing such a plan.

According to the report, this persistent failure affected the agency’s intelligence-gathering capability and its decision-making ability on the night before the Hamas attack.

59 hostages, 517 days in captivity

‘I don’t understand why the whole country isn’t shutting down’

Adi Hashmonai

Late Saturday night, a few hours after Hamas released the first video footage of Eitan Horn, who is being held hostage in Gaza, his friend Alan Hatmaliansky returned home to Kfar Sava after attending another demonstration at so-called Hostage Square in Tel Aviv. Even long after the video was published, Hatmaliansky struggled to calm down.

“I’ve known Eitan for 20 years, and in the video I saw a different person,” he said. “His body has changed. This isn’t the Eitan I’m used to seeing with his hair and beard. I’ve never seen him this thin.”

But what worries Hatmaliansky even more than his friend’s physical condition is his mental state. “That really scares me,” he said.

Like Hatmaliansky, Horn also lives in Kfar Sava, but on October 7, 2023, he was staying at his brother Iair’s apartment in the Gaza border kibbutz of Nir Oz, from where both were taken hostage.

The video footage published by Hamas captured the moment Horn bid farewell to Iair before the latter was released last month as part of the first stage of the hostage deal. The footage was released amid reports about the potential collapse of the deal’s second stage.

In the video, Horn addressed Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, saying, “My brother is being released and saved, and I am to remain here? And I also hear that you don’t



Alan Hatmaliansky, last week.

Tomer Appelbaum

want to move forward with the second stage [of the deal]. Have you lost your mind? How many more people do you want to kill? Sure, sometimes I eat, sometimes I drink. I’m okay... [But] no, I’m not okay here [he said while pointing to his head], I’m not okay!”

Horn’s words haunt Hatmaliansky. “I’ve known Eitan since 2005. He’s a strong person who doesn’t break easily. He’s not some spoiled kid. He knows how to handle himself,” he said, adding that he believes Horn is “doing everything he can to survive.”

“But in that video, I saw a different man,” he continued. “I saw how he spoke. The vein in his forehead [is popping out], I’ve never seen him so full of anger and rage,” he added.

According to Hatmaliansky, “People see these hostage videos and assume the hostages are well physically. But no, they aren’t. Every day, every minute they spend there, is hell.”

He added that Horn suffers from severe skin conditions, which he believes

have worsened in captivity due to the lack of hygiene and the absence of the creams and medication he requires.

Following statements by government officials casting doubt on the possibility that the second stage of the cease-fire deal will be implemented, Hatmaliansky is calling on the public to take to the streets en masse.

“This can’t go on,” he said. “I don’t understand why the whole country isn’t shutting down. It’s inconceivable.”

“Fine, you were elected, but listen to the voices of the majority of the citizens. I don’t know what more needs to happen for you to understand that the hostages are running out of time,” he said, addressing the government.

“They should have been released yesterday,” he added. “What do you want? More funerals for dead hostages like the ones we’ve seen recently? What kind of legacy are you leaving for future generations? We must bring them all home now.”

IDF

Continued from page 1

defending the homeland. This is a shared responsibility.”

Netanyahu said that the history of the Jewish people can be divided into two parts: before and after the establishment of the State of Israel and the IDF. “This does not mean that our enemies are incapable of attacking us,” Netanyahu remarked, referring to the deadly October 7 massacre.

“But what has changed is that now we have the option to fight back.”

Netanyahu also thanked Halevi for his leadership, especially after October 7: “Thank you, Herzl, for your role in the aftermath

of October 7. At this critical moment, you mobilized the forces to recover from the heavy blow.”

Before the ceremony, the outgoing and incoming army chiefs will visit the Western Wall in Jerusalem. Afterwards, they are scheduled to meet with President Isaac Herzog and visit the National Military Cemetery at Mount Herzl, where they will lay a wreath in memory of fallen Israeli soldiers.

Following the ceremony, Zamir and Defense Minister Israel Katz will meet with top IDF officers.

Before the appointment

Last month, the Prime Minister’s Office announced that Netanyahu and Katz had agreed on Zamir’s appointment as the



Halevi in Gaza

Sraya Diamant/IDF Spokesperson

the prime minister,” said a source familiar with their relationship when Zamir served as Netanyahu’s military secretary from 2012 to 2015.

“Bibi trusted Eyal completely and wasn’t afraid to express opinions that didn’t always align with Bibi’s views. You could see the dynamic between them. They’d exchange a word privately when others weren’t looking, and it was clear there was something more there. [Zamir] was very direct.”

Zamir has served as the Director-General of the Defense Ministry since 2023, having retired from the military after losing the IDF chief position to Halevi. He served as deputy chief of staff until 2021 and was previously the commander of Southern Command and Netanyahu’s military secretary.

In November, following Katz’s appointment as defense minister, Zamir requested to retire, but he remained in his position at Katz’s request until a new Director-General was appointed.

During his tenure as head of the Southern Command, Zamir believed that restoring calm to the Gaza border communities and completing the security barrier project around the Gaza Strip justified restraint in avoiding a large-scale confrontation with Hamas.

Zamir consistently presented this view in security discussions – that Hamas did not seek conflict with Israel, and that the protests were an attempt by Hamas to mitigate the hardship in Gaza.

He believes that now the time is ripe for an expansive agreement with Hamas in Gaza, a move that could possibly bring respite to Israel’s south for an extended period of time.

GAZAN

Continued from page 1

Syrian journalist Yaman Amour wrote on X: “They sent the body of a Palestinian woman instead of an Israeli woman? The very idea of abducting a mother and her children is shameful and a violation of the moral values of all divine [religious] laws.”

The body of the Gazan woman was returned to Gaza on Thursday. This happened quietly, far from TV screens and curious eyes, with no ceremony and with no audience to watch it being delivered.

“Nobody was waiting there, except for two Red Crescent workers who received the body from the Red Cross. There were no relatives or other people there. The body was

wrapped in a white bag, and was taken for burial – with no details given about where in Gaza the burial took place,” said a source in Gaza. Arab media devoted no special broadcast to the return of the woman’s body, mentioning it only briefly. “The Red Cross received the body of the Palestinian woman who was handed over [to Israel] in place of the body of Israeli Shiri Bibas,” the Palestinian news agency Sama stated.

It turns out that from over there, things don’t look the same. A different story emerged from conversations I had with Gazan men and women in an attempt to find a lead: one of power relations and male control over women during wartime. As it is everywhere else, in the Strip there are also mechanisms of repression that work according to a system of so-

cial rules. “There are no details about the body or where it was buried,” said M., a journalist from central Gaza who had tried to find the information himself and approached several Gazan officials.

“All information about her is kept secret by Hamas, since the place where she was killed was near a place where Israeli hostages were kept, and Hamas does not divulge such secret information. It is their decision if and when to release her name and details.”

“There’s a theory among Gazans that the woman was killed along with her family when they were in a building – but we don’t know who she was,” said my friend N., a Deir al-Balah resident. A second hypothesis, she says, is that “they didn’t find the right body and they dug up the grave of a Gazan woman,

and some people tend to believe that this was intentional rather than a mistake.” She added that the story sparked anger in the Strip because it’s a matter of “dishonoring the dead woman and her family.”

N. and other Gazans stressed that Hamas is not interested in revealing the woman’s identity, as this will cause tension and strife between her family and the group that transferred her body to Israel. “This is an outrage,” she says. “It’s sad to say, but in the end, people in Gaza are like Hamas property, whether they’re living or dead – like the body of this poor woman.”

This story appears to be one link in the chain of repression that Gazan women have experienced in wartime. In May 2024 Lebanese journalist Nour Hoteit published an exposé in a culture magazine

about how the clan mechanism and Hamas rule are two distinct social and political systems that work for one common goal: the repression of women. In it, she presents examples of women who were victims of domestic violence and attempted to use the war to escape their situation via the Rafah border crossing, only to be returned to their families by Hamas gunmen.

Hoteit mentions that in 2021, the Hamas-controlled supreme council of the judiciary released a ruling limiting women’s travel through border crossings; in order to travel, they needed the approval of a male authority in charge of them (father, husband or brother). In wake of the ruling, women were angry. She writes that due to this ruling, “women who have faced abuse were prevented from escaping

Gaza, and women’s mobility was restricted in general, despite an increase in violence against them in light of the war, and in light of murders and sexual assaults perpetrated against them.”

The silence maintained by both sides, Israeli and Palestinian, regarding the fate of the anonymous woman from Gaza raises quite a few moral questions regarding the attitude toward women in areas of conflict.

It’s easy to dismiss the incident as an error or an anomaly or as one more body, like thousands of other unidentified bodies buried underground.

But the anonymous Gazan woman reflects a deeper story about the deletion of the female subjects in wartime in the name of male honor and the need to maintain power and control.

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Eyal Zamir’s choice

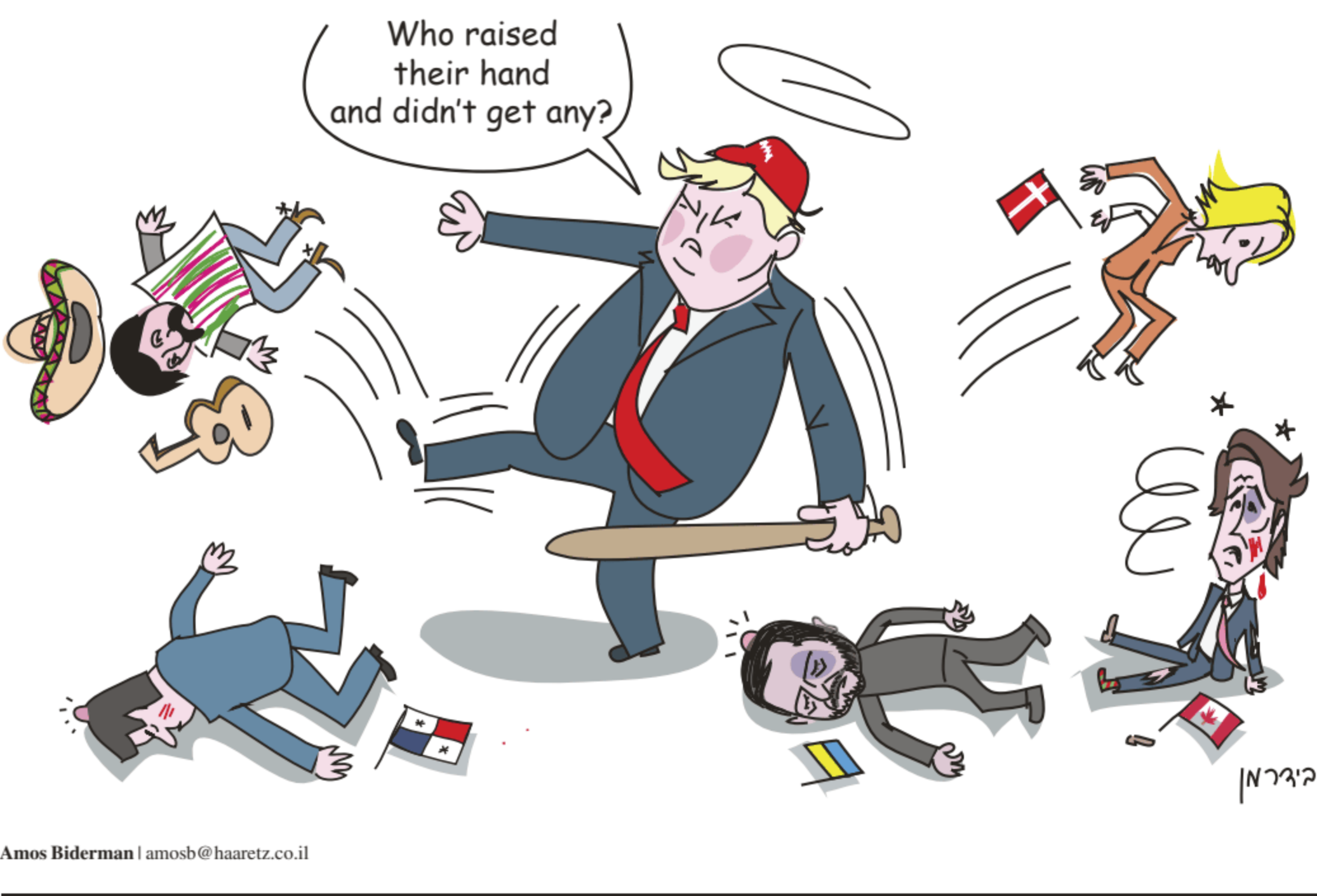
The somber atmosphere of Wednesday’s installation ceremony of the new Israel Defense Forces chief of staff speaks for itself. Amid a cease-fire, with 59 Israeli hostages still held by Hamas in Gaza, the war’s resumption a real possibility and the political leadership assailing the military leadership and trying to portray it as the sole culprit in the failures of October 7, Eyal Zamir was promoted to the rank of lieutenant general and became Israel’s 24th chief of staff.

“This is my watch, and I take responsibility. In the name of responsibility, I am ending my role.” With these words, outgoing Chief of Staff Herzl Halevi ended his term. This statement emphasized the profound difference between the person who headed the military on October 7 and has acted in the name of responsibility since then and the person who heads the government and has fled from responsibility. It is no accident that Halevi reiterated the need for a state commission of inquiry, while Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu continues to block it. Halevi was right to exploit the occasion to address the politicians’ attack on the IDF.

The debate over responsibility is important not only in regard to what has happened but mainly in regard to what will happen. Zamir assumes command of the military when Netanyahu is busy trying to blow up the hostage deal with Hamas so as to resume high-intensity warfare. There is dangerous talk of opening the gates of hell, including by Defense Minister Israel Katz, who was parachuted into his job with the goal of undermining the independence of the military and politicizing its ranks.

This is a dangerous moment in the war and in the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: Israel has begun preventing humanitarian aid to Gaza and has plans that include population transfer (the “Generals’ Plan”). All this, as the president of the United States is voicing support for the expulsion of 2 million Gazans and has released the few brakes that had restrained the Jewish messianic energy. Zamir may find the political leadership asking him to implement a military plan with a black flag flying over it. It is no less important to realize that resuming the war means sacrificing the hostages who are still alive.

Zamir said during the handover that Israel “faces a constant, fundamental, existential threat. We are surrounded by cruel, brutal and murderous enemies who seek to destroy us.” He said that the IDF must “strive to nip lethal and existential threats in the bud.” But he must also maintain the purity of arms, curb dangerous developments in the military and the erosion of its values. In addition, he will have to face a political leadership that seeks to advance military measures – which would mean abandoning the hostages – due to domestic political interests, chief among them the preservation of the governing coalition.



Amos Biderman | amosb@haaretz.co.il

Uri Misgav

We have to hold out until he falls

Showing respect for Benjamin Netanyahu while harboring anxiety over his actions are both overblown. He has declared war on this country and on most of its citizens, and he will lose. He is indeed a bitter enemy, desperate and unbridled, and that’s how he should be treated. A coalition dispatching Knesset guard thugs to beat up bereaved parents and hostages’ family members will not be elected here again.

The situation in Israel is worrisome and dispiriting, sometimes depressing, but it’s still not in such a bad shape. Netanyahu, his eyes sparkling, speaks of “a war on seven fronts” that will reshape the Middle East. It seems that he’s fallen in love with this idea on the internal front as well. He and his government have launched battles against the Israel Defense Forces’ General Staff, the Shin Bet security service, the Mossad, the Supreme Court, the attorney general, the State Prosecutor’s Office and the media.

To defeat so many enemies and institutions, one needs prodigious power, but Netanyahu and his acolytes don’t have that. This week, he couldn’t even get Likud candidate Eli Zafrani

elected as mayor of Kiryat Shmona. Netanyahu personally intervened in this campaign, including posting a video and issuing calls to voters. For this he had time. The result: Zafrani was trounced in the second round of voting. The Bibiist/ultra-Orthodox/messianic/Kahanist electorate remains, but has shrunk in size. Opinion polls consistently show that with Naftali Bennett’s party possibly joining the centrist parties, the current coalition has 45 Knesset seats. It doesn’t have forces on the ground. Demonstrations against the judicial system and against a hostage deal are only attended by a handful of fanatics. You don’t vanquish a country through despicable attempts at car-ramming anti-government protesters on Tel Aviv’s Begin Street.

Shin Bet chief Ronen Bar, who knows a thing or two about analyzing enemies and mapping threats, drew clear lines of engagement. Yes to returning the hostages and to a state commission of inquiry, no to giving up positions of power and influence. What happened with the police has been studied well. This was a clear message to Netanyahu and the public. I assume there will be articles mocking the liberal-

democratic camp and its new hero, the chief of the security service that failed on October 7, who is also responsible for the horrors of the occupation. We’ll get over it. You can’t please everyone, certainly not the opponents of Zionism and the supporters of one state between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean, a state which will obviously be a thriving liberal democracy, equitable and respectful of minorities and individual rights.

Haaretz editor Aluf Benn thinks differently. He disdains what he calls the “anyone-but-Bibi camp, mocking the hopes pinned on toppling Netanyahu with the help of Bennett, determining that “The tragedy of the left and the center is the absence of candidates who will return to the ideological foundation of Israeli liberalism: dividing the land into two states as the basis for regional peace” (Haaretz, February 25). It’s hard to argue with these ideas, certainly not from an emotional perspective. But we are in a post-traumatic Israel, burned by the horror of the invasion of our land. It will take time to recover and to revive the vision of peace and coexistence. My grandfather, who was trained as a Palmach

fighter and was a Mapainik in his soul, taught me pragmatism and realpolitik: you move by one dunam and one goat at a time, forging alliances with anyone who can help with the urgent and main goal. Is there any dispute over the fact that this is now the removal of this government of destruction?

On Sunday, Channel 12 commentator Amit Segal claimed determinately that “95 percent of the public supports the resumption of the war in Gaza.” The next morning, a survey published on by Kan public television showed the real numbers: 9 percent. Segal is his editors’ and employers’ problem, but the figure itself is encouraging. Netanyahu has worn out his credit among the wider public, and it’s doubtful that he will be able to impose a renewal of the war and the sacrifice of more hostages.

In his latest horror shows at the Knesset and in court, he reminds one of rulers from the past who went off the rails as their end drew near, moving imaginary divisions from side to side while claiming that treasonous all-embracing (deep state) plots were being concocted behind their backs. The heart burns with anticipation. It will take time, but we are fated to hold out.

Gideon Levy

Manhunt in a mall

A great catastrophe was averted this week. At the new Big Fashion Giliot, the largest shopping mall in Israel and the crowning glory of recent national achievements, 10 Palestinians who were in Israel without entry permits were discovered. Imagine, 10 undocumented Palestinians at a “leisure and shopping” complex. Idols in the Israeli holy temple.

The 150,000 shopping-hungry Israelis who stormed the mall over the weekend had been exposed to a danger they didn’t know existed. Appoint a commission of inquiry immediately. Survivors of the disaster that didn’t happen were interviewed everywhere and said they never imagined there would be unauthorized Palestinians in their new mall. After all, they want to feel safe when they go to eat a hamburger or buy a pair of sneakers. One undocumented cleaner was discovered at Zara store, and it appears there was another at the Delta store.

The quarry were led away, handcuffed, in full view. Border Policemen, Israeli heroes, captured them with characteristic courage and determination. The store chains’ PR people are focusing on damage control and reassuring the public: There will be no more “illegals” at Big. Everyone is invited back to a mall that has been cleansed.

As their status suggests, “illegal” Palestinians are not human beings. They have no names or faces, dreams or personal crises. It is enough to know that they are in Israel without a permit. They are suspicious objects. Soon, tools will be developed to locate and eliminate them without any human contact. When they say “there are no innocents in Gaza,” they also mean the West Bank Palestinians who are in Israel without authorization. They are ticking bombs, unless proven otherwise. Bold Israeli journalists are quick to report them to the authorities; then they feel they have fulfilled a journalistic mission.

One of the manhunters, Yossi Eli from Channel 13 News, has long been obsessed with tormenting Palestinians. His eyes lit up when he presented an embarrassing report on the abuse of detainees from Hamas’ Nukhba Forces. He stood transfixed by the scandalous display the guards put on in his honor, humiliating the detainees in front of the cameras. Perhaps he thought he was doing his duty as a journalist. In 2025 Israel, showing Palestinians being abused is PR; once it was a cause of shame.

Eli is sure the hunt at Big was prompted by his future story on the “swarms of unauthorized [Palestinians] flooding Israel.” On X he boasted of joining a “civilian initiative” to expel the “illegals,” who, he says, are not “being dealt with.” He, too, tells the story of Israeli media.

The Palestinians who are in Israel without permits are indeed human beings. Desperate people, deprived of their livelihood by Israel in an arbitrary act of collective punishment. For a year and a half they have been denied entry, leaving hundreds of thousands of them destitute. Despair in the West Bank is growing, as is the poverty. Some resort to violence; others try to sneak into Israel to work. They sneak into Israel just as Jews sneaked out of the ghettos to obtain food. They too were illegals.

They know what will happen if they are caught, but their children at home are hungry. Israel prohibits them from working within its borders, but surprisingly allows them to work in the settlements. There they are not “illegals.” The greed of the settlers – most are “operators,” some exploit cheap Palestinian labor – outweighs everything. After all, someone has to clean the settlers’ streets and build their homes. What is dangerous in Big is not dangerous in Halamish.

Above all, the lines of racism and dehumanization, wrapped in the cellophane of security that permits everything, including collective punishment, humiliation and starvation. But it is not at all clear what is more dangerous for Israel – closing its borders, which leads to hunger and despair, or their controlled opening.

In the meantime, generations of Israelis are being raised here who come to the mall on Shabbat and see Palestinians hunted like animals. It’s shocking when it’s an unfortunate animal, but no less shocking when it’s an unfortunate worker, one of thousands who built this country and paved its roads.

Help, there’s an illegal here. Call the Border Police, or Yossi Eli.

Larry Garber

Starving Gaza doesn’t serve Israel

In an effort to pressure Hamas, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced the closure of all entry points to Gaza on a Sunday television broadcast in English. The consequences in the Gaza Strip were immediate. Prices in markets doubled and those with means began hoarding supplies in anticipation of a potentially lengthy period of no or limited access. Without expectations for reopening, trucks waiting at the Kerem Shalom crossing turned around before perishable foodstuff spoiled. Meanwhile, goods shipped by humanitarian organizations now have to pay steep demurrage fees while the goods sit in Ashdod or other ports.

The first stage of the January 15 cease-fire agreement between Israel and Hamas achieved most of its objectives. Thirty hostages returned to Israel, more than 2,000 Palestinians were released from Israeli prisons and the catastrophic humanitarian conditions in Gaza significantly improved with an average of 600 trucks per day entering Gaza during the six-week period. However, stage one also required the parties negotiate stages two and three of the agreement. They did not.

The Trump administration has effectively given Israel the freedom to proceed as it chooses. Providing such carte blanche will have grave consequences for Gazans, will further degrade Israel’s standing within the international community and will delay the post-October 7 physical and psychological repair that is critical for both Israeli and Palestinian societies.

Netanyahu explained the closure as necessary to prevent Hamas from stealing food and other goods entering Gaza. This is but a pretext: With ample food and other goods in the market since January 19, the siphoning of assistance by Hamas and other criminal elements for personal use or for resale dramatically decreased.

Leaving aside legal and moral considerations, the blockade strategy will only work if the population in Gaza is actually capable of exerting influence on Hamas.

Netanyahu may think that, after a period of calm, Palestinians in Gaza will forcefully object to allowing the humanitarian crisis to resume. Indeed, he appears ready to ratchet up the pressure by cutting off electricity and the remaining water supplies and, if necessary, resume a full-scale war. However, what Netanyahu has not done, other than repeatedly state a “no Hamas/no Abbas” policy, is to present an Israeli plan for a post-conflict Gaza.

The most elaborate articulation of current Israeli thinking regarding Gaza was outlined last week by Israel’s Coordinator for Government Affairs in the Territories, which is responsible for civil-

ian affairs in the Palestinian territories. In meetings with representatives of the United Nations and other organizations operating in Gaza, COGAT presented a post-cease-fire plan that assumes the Palestinian population will remain in Gaza and will be supported through “humanitarian hubs.”

Building on the experience at the Netzarim corridor during the cease-fire period, the hubs will be secured by private contractors with the Israel Defense Forces providing whatever backup is needed. The only access to Gaza will be through the Kerem Shalom crossing, and only organizations authorized by Israel would be allowed to operate in Gaza. The role of the UNRWA refugee agency as the primary deliverer of services to the population living in Gaza would be eliminated.

As currently formulated, the COGAT plan has little chance of being endorsed by the Palestinians or other major players, including potential Arab and European countries whose financial support will be critical for rebuilding Gaza. Although COGAT claims it has briefed U.S. officials, the Trump administration has not referenced the plan in its public statements.

Aside from President Donald Trump’s Gaza Riviera fantasy, the U.S. administration has yet to formulate even a short-term policy for addressing the situation

in Gaza. To the surprise of many, the administration authorized waivers for several USAID-funded humanitarian and health projects in Gaza, while terminating 90 percent of U.S. foreign assistance programs across the globe. Whether these waivers are sustained for an extended period remains to be seen.

The absence of a principled U.S. government voice on issues of humanitarian access to Gaza will weaken efforts to convince Israel to operate within the framework of international humanitarian law and to avoid further international opprobrium.

Israeli interests are not served by allowing catastrophic humanitarian conditions to return to Gaza. Nor are Israel’s interests served if the United States simply walks away from the negotiations or severs diplomatic interactions with and programmatic support for the Palestinians. For now, all eyes turn to the plan that emerges from the aftermath of the Cairo summit with a hope that it can serve as the basis for constructive negotiations. Only then will the release of the remaining Israeli hostages and an agreed upon vision for the rebuilding of Gaza become a reality.

Larry Garber, a senior USAID policy official during the Clinton and Obama administrations, served as USAID mission director to the West Bank and Gaza and as an election observer to Palestinian presidential, legislative and municipal elections.

Avraham Spraragen

Israel must leave Syria right now

Just hours after the downfall of Syrian dictator Bashar Assad in December, Israel invaded the demilitarized zone between Syria and the occupied Golan Heights. In response to UN condemnation, the Israeli army claimed that its violation of Syrian sovereignty was necessary for security, “limited and temporary.”

However, more than two months later, Israel maintains a presence within and beyond the demilitarized zone, which Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu confirmed last month will be “indefinite.” Israel must back off Syria immediately, or squander the opportunity for a post-Assad detente.

The Israeli military incursion was initially framed as a short-term measure to address legitimate security concerns surrounding the new Syrian leadership and lingering Iranian influences in Syria. Since then, Syria’s interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa, first known internationally by the nom de guerre Abu Mohammed al-Golani, has recommitted to the 1974 agreement with Israel.

Despite his jihadist origins, Sharaa has said that Syria does “not want any conflict” with Israel and that his country will not serve as a “launchpad for attacks” by Iran. Further demonstrating the positive transformation of Sharaa’s Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the new governor of Damascus, Maher Marwan

boldly proclaimed that “we want peace.”

Rather than seizing the opportunity presented by these overtures, Israel is developing a pretext for permanent occupation: Netanyahu instructed the military to “prepare to defend” the city of Jaramana outside Damascus, sparking protests within the Syrian Druze community. Any such protracted stay would blatantly violate the 1974 Agreement on Disengagement and foment increased anti-Israel sentiment among the Syrian population. It would also undermine Sharaa’s domestic credibility and with it his post-Assad reform process, creating a power vacuum that Iran would eagerly fill to revive its Axis of Resistance.

The 1974 Israel-Syria agreement established a demilitarized zone between Syria and the Golan Heights, occupied by Israel in the 1967 Six-Day War. Following the 1973 Yom Kippur War, the UN Disengagement Observer Force was stationed in the demilitarized zone to monitor the cease-fire and lay the groundwork for a “just and durable peace.” For the first time since the 1973 war and despite continued UNDOF deployment, Israel has breached the de facto border with Syria, known as the “Purple Line.”

In the months since Assad’s fall, Israel has constructed outposts along the Syrian border, taking over villages, erecting check-

points, closing roads, raiding homes, conducting night patrols, displacing residents and firing on those protesting Israeli troop presence. Satellite imagery obtained by Haaretz reveals that the IDF has established at least seven new bases from Syrian Mount Hermon in the north to Tel Kudna in the south. Furthermore, the opportunity presented by Assad’s toppling has been used by Israel to escalate airstrikes on Damascus, which have reached an “all-time high.”

Netanyahu’s violations of Syrian sovereignty are endangering a potentially historic post-Assad detente with a new government in Damascus.

Netanyahu must immediately withdraw IDF troops from Syria and suspend airstrikes that violate Syrian sovereignty. Additional UNDOF peacekeeping forces should be deployed to the demilitarized zone to ensure mutual border security, enabling both parties to recommit to the 1974 agreement as the basis for future negotiations. Detente would position Israel and Syria to resolve the

more intractable issues, such as the final status of the Golan Heights, through an eventual peace treaty.

U.S. President Donald Trump also has a role to play in forging this brighter future, one that can build on the 2020 Abraham Accords. His predecessor already lifted the \$10 million bounty on Sharaa, after sending U.S. diplomats to Damascus for the first time since 2012. If Syria demonstrates further progress on counterterrorism and domestic reforms, Trump should consider removing the formerly Al Qaeda-linked Hayat Tahrir al-Sham from the list of U.S. terror organizations.

Trump should also consider lifting sanctions against the new Syrian regime and providing it with economic assistance for post-Assad rebuilding, while gradually reducing the American military footprint in Syria (maintaining some to ensure that Islamic State prisons remain secure). To verify Sharaa’s progress and coordinate next steps, Trump should promptly send his Middle East team to the Syrian capital.

The historic opportunity for a post-Assad detente between Israel and Syria is waiting to be seized. With careful orchestration by the two parties and diligent U.S. oversight, the region may not have to wait much longer.

Avraham Spraragen, a law student at Georgetown Law, is a graduate of Cornell and the London School of Economics.

As Netanyahu's billionaire circle shrinks, one buddy remains loyal

The prime minister has always cultivated wealthy Jewish backers. British property baron Zak Gertler is keeping the faith on his own now

Anat Georgy

In the ancient Tower of David, nestled between the stone walls and offering breathtaking views of Jerusalem, several prestigious event spaces opened a few years ago. They can accommodate up to 700 guests, who can marvel at the 3,000-year-old ruins at the citadel.

Last year, Jewish-British real estate magnate Zak Gertler expressed interest in hosting an event there in honor of the marriage of Avner Netanyahu, the younger son of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and Amit Yardeni. Avner even visited the venue and was impressed. The wedding, scheduled for November, was postponed, and the Tower of David even will not be held, presumably.

It wasn't the first time Gertler's name had been linked to events for the Netanyahus, with whom, like many other Jewish billionaires, he had developed a close friendship over the years.

In October 2019, Netanyahu arrived late to a large party in his honor at Gertler's home in Tel Aviv. Figures from the worlds of business, media and politics arrived one after another, including David Friedman, then U.S. ambassador to Israel; Ron Dermer, then the Israeli ambassador to the U.S. and now strategic affairs minister and former Jewish Agency chair Natan Sharansky.

"Zak worships Netanyahu," says a source who knows

Gertler well. "He believes he is second to none. He will stand by him through thick and thin, there for whatever he needs. They are that close." How close? In October 2023, shortly after the outbreak of war, Uri Misgav reported in Haaretz that the prime minister wife, Sara Netanyahu, stayed at Gertler's home for four days before moving to billionaire Simon Falic's residence in Jerusalem. Sara, also visited Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson's grave in New York last September, with Zak's wife, Candida. The Gertlers were even invited to attend Netanyahu's speech to the U.S. Congress in July. In March 2023, Sara Netanyahu attended the wedding of Gertler's son Raphael in London together with Avner's brother, Yair.

In recent decades, the Gertlers have been major donors to Netanyahu. According to reports to the state comptroller, in 2012 Gertler donated 42,000 shekels (about \$11,000) to Netanyahu for the Likud primaries and in 2013, he donated 43,000 shekels. He also donated to Moshe Ya'alon, who was running for a place on the Likud election slate: 22,000 shekels in 2012 and 11,000 shekels in 2014. Ya'alon commented last month that Gertler is a Zionist Jew and supporter of Israel and beyond that, their acquaintance is only superficial.

The largest known donation from the Gertlers to Netanyahu came in 2019, when Netanyahu was running in the Likud primary

against Gideon Sa'ar. He raised 200,000 shekels from nine donors, mostly from the Gertlers. Zak donated 42,000 shekels, as did his daughter Natasha, his son Raphael and his sister, Idessa Trink. Another donor was Yossi Navi, CEO of the Carlton Hotel in Tel Aviv, who is close to Gertler and who contributed 40,000 shekels to Netanyahu.

‘You could say that Zak and Candida are among the few who remain loyal to Netanyahu, while other billionaires have begun to turn their backs on him.’

Since entering politics in the late 1980s, Netanyahu has surrounded himself with a circle of Jewish billionaires who have promoted him, supported him, hosted him and often showered him and Sara with gifts. Among the most notable were Sheldon and Miriam Adelson, the owners of the newspaper Israel Hayom, which for years served as a propaganda tool for Netanyahu, and producer Arnon Milchan, who frequently gave jewelry, champagne and cigars to the Netanyahus.

Gertler also earned a place of honor on this list. However, Netanyahu's relationship with Milchan became central to one of the

corruption cases against the prime minister, with Milchan testifying that his friendship with Netanyahu had ruined his life. Meanwhile, Miriam Adelson has distanced herself from Netanyahu in recent years, especially after Sheldon's death in 2021, and redirected Israel Hayom. Just this week, as part of her efforts to secure the release of hostages, including pressuring U.S. President Donald Trump, she used Israel Hayom to devote significant attention to the issue, criticizing Netanyahu on the front page. "This is no time for an unnecessary pampering weekend at a luxury hotel," read the headline, something the editors would never have even considered in the past.

Against this backdrop, the stable relationship with the Gertlers stands out. "You could say that Zak and Candida are among the few who remain loyal to Netanyahu, while other billionaires have begun to turn their backs on him," suggests a source familiar with the Gertlers, "perhaps because in this case, the relationship transcends ideology."

It's unclear how Netanyahu and Gertler first met. Some believe they met 30 years ago when Netanyahu came to London to give a lecture. According to Haaretz journalist Benny Ziffer, a personal friend of the prime minister who has met the Gertlers at various events and even hosted them at his home, they are part of a group that has surrounded Netanyahu for many years, attending functions and me-

morials. "They are modest, European, unassuming people," he says. "You won't hear them praising him in public, as others do. They are more distant, but the relationship is close and affectionate."

"Like many wealthy Jews in Netanyahu's circle, Gertler is deeply Zionist and firmly right-wing," says a source familiar with him. "Perhaps this is why he donated to Ya'alon at the time, when Ya'alon was still perceived as extreme right-wing."

Zacharias "Zak" Gertler, once described by the British newspaper the Evening Standard as one of London's "secret rich," lives in the prestigious London neighborhood of St. John's Wood and owns several apartments in Israel. He visits Israel quite frequently. Candida is an art collector and a co-founder and partner in the Outset Contemporary Art Fund, which also supports Israeli art. The couple has two children: Raphael, who served as a lone soldier in the IDF Spokesperson's Unit, is married to an Israeli and lives in Israel, and Natasha.

The family empire, specializing in residential, commercial and hotel real estate in Europe and Israel, was founded by father Moritz Gertler, a Holocaust survivor from Germany, when he purchased old buildings in Frankfurt's Westend quarter with other survivors in the 1950s. Moritz, who became a successful businessman, avoided publicity and according to the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung,



Zak Gertler and Candida Gertler in London, in 2015.

Nick Harvey / REX / Shutterstock

"spoke to friends about his suffering under the Nazi extermination machine." In the early 1970s, Moritz established Gertler Estates, through which he expanded the family business. The company now owns numerous residential and commercial properties in Germany.

Like many wealthy Jews, Moritz began investing in Israeli real estate in the 1970s, particularly in hotels. Moritz died in 2003, leaving his fortune to his children and wife Miriam, who died in 2019.

Zak, born in Frankfurt, joined the family business in the late 1970s and expanded investments to London in the '90s, later relocating there, as well as to Paris. According to a source familiar with the family's business ventures, they are exceptional entrepreneurs who recognize and develop opportunities. "Their investment in Israel is relatively minor and stems from Zionism," he adds.

Beyond their business interests in Israel, the Gertlers frequently donate to Jewish and Israeli organizations. Among other contributions, they have donated to Yad Vashem and Tel Aviv University's school of music where a string quartet founded by Moritz was named after his brother, who died in the Holocaust. Zak also donated to the Adi Negev rehabilitation village for disabled people and helped fund the first rehabilitation hospital in southern Israel.

The Gertlers, particularly Candida, support Israeli art, regularly purchasing works by Israeli artists. Candida, as mentioned earlier, co-founded the Outset Fund in 2003 and is a partner in Urban Vitamin, an initiative supporting artistic ventures. In December, Candida resigned from her public roles at the fund and London's Tate Modern Museum, following a protest by 1,200 European art-

tists who urged the museum to sever ties with the fund due to its financial connections with Israel, calling for a stance against "art-washing."

One source we spoke to analyzed the relationship between Netanyahu and Jewish capitalists in this way: "The billionaires supporting Netanyahu are right-wing, and to them, he has long been the leader of the right. As long as he remains in office, it naturally strengthens their support for him. This doesn't mean they like everything he or his family does." Will the relationship between the Gertlers and the Netanyahus survive political issues and persist even when Netanyahu leaves office, as their associates claim, or will it, as in other cases, falter? Time will tell.

The Gertler family declined to provide a comment for this article. Netanyahu's office did not respond to a request for comment.

Thursday 6.3

CHANNEL KAN 11

(Y11/H11)

06.00 This Morning - with Illi Shachar **08.00** Elor Levy & Tamar Almog **10.00** Roni Kuban & Omri Assenheim - Current affairs **12.00** What's the Big Deal? **12.25** Nature's Ultimate Survivors **13.25** Out of the Box **13.40** The Brain **14.00** News Flash **14.05** The Brain (cont.) **14.15** Come Dine With Me - A group of strangers compete for the title of ultimate dinner party host **14.40** The Chase - Game Show (s.8) **15.00** News Flash **15.05** The Chase (cont.) **15.45** On the Other Hand - with Guy Zohar **16.00** Pocket Games - Economic magazine **16.55** The World Today - World News **18.00** Six O'Clock - with Maya Rachlin **18.55** Seven O'Clock - with Ayala Hasson **19.50** The Evening News **21.30** Zehu Zei - Satire **22.10** Whatever You Say - Satire (s.4) **22.55** On the Other Hand - with Guy Zohar **22.55** News **23.25** Bosch - Drama series (s.2) **00.15** The Unimportant - On events that at first glance seem unimportant, but from a distance over the years, tell a bigger story about all of us

KESHEET

(Y12/H12)

06.00 News Flash **06.10** Today's Headlines **07.00** News Flash **07.05** The Morning Show - with Nesli Barda **09.30** News Flash **09.35** Special news broadcast - with Yoav Limor **11.00** Baking with Keren Agam **11.25** The 12th Floor - Real Estate magazine **12.00** Special news broadcast - with Almaz Mangiasho **15.00** Today's Edition - with Ofir Hadad & Amalia Druk **16.55** Five O'Clock - with Rafi Reshet **17.55** Six O'Clock - with Oded Ben-Ami **19.00** The Early Edition - with Keren Marciano **19.55** The News **21.30** Fact - with Ilana Dayan **23.10** Status Report - with Einav Galili & Yaron Avraham **00.05** The 12th Floor - Real Estate magazine **00.40** Auto Road Test

RESHET

(Y13/H13)

06.00 The Morning Show - with Omer Yardeni **09.30** News Flash **09.35** Starting the Day - with Elad & Yarden **10.00** News Flash **10.05** Starting the Day (cont.) **11.00** News Flash **11.05** Starting the Day (cont.) **12.00** News Flash **12.05** Stethoscope - Health magazine **12.50** Trend Time - All the hot trends in social networks **13.00** News Flash **13.05** Trend Time (cont.) **13.30** Survivor - Reality **14.00** News Flash **14.05** Survivor (cont.) **15.00** Today's News **16.55** Talk of the Day - with Lucy Aharish **17.55** Six O'Clock News **18.55** Israel at War - with Raviv Drucker **19.50** The News **21.30** Target: AMIA - Israeli action series **22.45** The Tube - with Guy Lerer **23.15** The Day That Was - with Tal Berman **23.50** Graphology - with Eilon Ben Yosef **00.25** Night Talk - with Muli Ari

HOT 3

(H3)

08.10 The Irrational (s.2) **08.55** A Million Little Things (s.3) **09.40** Shababnikim (s.2) **10.25** Offspring (s.4) **11.15** The Irrational (s.2) **11.55** Suits (s.4) **12.40** Offspring (s.4) **13.30** A Million Little Things (s.3) **14.15** Shababnikim (s.2) **15.00** Days of Our Lives **15.35** The Young and the Restless **16.15** The Bold and the Beautiful (2 eps) **16.55** Days of Our Lives **17.35** The Young and the Restless **18.10** Suits (s.4) **18.55** The Irrational (s.2) **19.35** Offspring (s.4) **20.20** The Sex Lives of College Girls (s.3, 2 eps) **21.20** Suits (s.4) **22.05** Sholimi (s.6) **22.40** Bay of Fires **23.45** The Sex Lives of College Girls (s.3, 2 eps) **00.45** A Million Little Things (s.3) **01.35** Sholimi (s.6) **02.15** Bay of Fires

HOT HBO

(H4)

11.10 Fleishman Is in Trouble **11.55** Blinded **12.45** Tulsa King (s.2) **13.25** Fallen **14.10** Curb Your Enthusiasm (s.10) **14.50** Fleishman Is in Trouble **15.40** Blinded **16.30** Tulsa King (s.2) **17.05** Fallen **17.50** Curb Your Enthusiasm (s.10) **18.35** Tulsa King (s.2) **19.10** Fallen **19.55** Curb Your Enthusiasm (s.10) **20.30** Fleishman Is in Trouble **21.15** Blinded **22.00** Landman **22.55** Winning Time **23.55** Insecure **00.25** Mrs. Fletcher **00.55**



"I Want You Back," HOT Cinema 3, 20.05.

Amazon Content Services LLC

HOT ZONE

(H5)

06.30 S.W.A.T. (s.7) **07.15** NCIS: Los Angeles (s.14) **08.00** FBI (s.5) **08.35** Chicago P.D. (s.9) **09.20** Law & Order: Special Victims Unit (s.26) **10.05** CSI: Vegas (s.3) **10.45** S.W.A.T. (s.7) **11.25** FBI (s.5) **12.10** NCIS (s.21) **12.50** NCIS: Los Angeles (s.14) **13.30** Law & Order: Special Victims Unit (s.26) **14.15** Chicago P.D. (s.9) **14.55** Blue Bloods (s.13) **15.40** FBI (s.5) **16.20** NCIS (s.21) **17.05** CSI: Vegas (s.3) **17.45** NCIS: Los Angeles (s.14) **18.30** Chicago P.D. (s.9) **19.10** Blue Bloods (s.13) **19.50** Law & Order: Special Victims Unit (s.26) **20.35** S.W.A.T. (s.7) **21.15** FBI (s.5) **22.00** Chicago P.D. (s.9) **22.40** FBI: Most Wanted (s.6) **23.20** NCIS: Los Angeles (s.14) **00.05** Law & Order (s.24) **00.45** Blue Bloods (s.13) **01.25** Chicago P.D. (s.9) **02.10** FBI: Most Wanted (s.6)

HOT CHANNEL 8

(H8)

06.00 Kingdom Uncovered: Inside Saudi Arabia **07.10** The Syringe Killer **08.00** Seffi **09.00** Nicole Kidman, Eyes Wide Open **09.55** Havana Syndrome **10.55** My Dad the Sex Tourist **12.00** Kingdom Uncovered: Inside Saudi Arabia **13.10** Seffi **14.10** Nicole Kidman, Eyes Wide Open **15.05** Havana Syndrome **16.05** Kingdom Uncovered: Inside Saudi Arabia **17.15** Nicole Kidman, Eyes Wide Open **18.10** Havana Syndrome **19.10** My Dad the Sex Tourist **20.15** Seffi **22.05** This Is Joan Collins **23.50** Sharon Stone: Survival Instinct **01.35** This Is Joan Collins

YES DOCU

(Y8)

08.30 38 at the Garden **09.10** At the Heart of Gold: Inside the USA Gymnastics Scandal **10.40** My Dad the Sex Tourist **11.30** Small Town News: KPVM Pahump **12.00** Warning: This Drug May Kill You **13.00** 38 at the Garden **13.40** The Telemarketers **14.45** At the Heart of Gold: Inside the USA Gymnastics Scandal **16.15** My Dad the Sex Tourist **17.05** Small Town News: KPVM Pahump **18.05** The Epidemic Diaries - The Movie **19.55** Wild **21.00** The Governor **22.15** Blue Box **23.40** The Governor **00.55** Wild **02.00** Blue Box

HISTORY

(Y44/H43)

05.25 American Pickers **06.10** Storage Wars **06.30** The Curse of Oak Island (s.11) **08.00** History's Greatest Mysteries (s.5) **08.40** Pawn Stars **09.20** American Pickers **10.05** The Toys That Built the World (s.3) **10.50** Ancient Aliens **11.35** The Bermuda Triangle: Into Cursed Waters (s.2) **12.15** The UnXplained (s.3) **12.55** American Godfathers: The Five Families **14.20** Pawn Stars **15.05** American Pickers **15.50** The Toys That Built the World (s.3) **16.35** Bureau **06.17.35** American Godfathers: The Five Families **19.00** Ancient Aliens **19.40** History's Greatest Mysteries (s.4) **20.20** The UnXplained (s.3) **21.05** Pawn Stars **21.45** The Food That Built America (s.5) **22.30** The Mega Brands That Built America (s.2) **23.10** How Disney Built America

YES TV DRAMA

(Y5)

06.10 Accused (s.2) **06.55** Suits (s.3) **07.35** The Conductor **08.20** Castaways **09.15** Accused (s.2) **10.00** The Bold and the Beautiful **10.25** The Young and the Restless **11.10** Cheaters (s.2) **11.40** Suits (s.3) **12.20** The Conductor **13.05** Castaways **14.00** Accused (s.2) **14.45** Suits (s.3) **15.30** The Conductor **16.20** The Bold and the Beautiful **16.45** The Young and the Restless **17.30** Castaways **18.30** The Conductor **19.20** Cheaters (s.2) **19.55** The Bold and the Beautiful **20.20** The Young and the Restless **21.00** Wolf Hall: The Mirror and the Light **22.00** Based on a True Story (s.2) **22.30** In Our Blood **23.20** Billions (s.5) **00.20** Outlander (s.7) **01.20** The White Lotus (s.3) **01.45** In Our Blood

YES TV ACTION

(Y6)

06.00 9-1-1 (s.4, 2 eps) **07.30** Trigger Point (s.2) **08.20** Law & Order: Special Victims Unit (s.24, 2 eps) **09.50** The Equalizer (s.3) **10.35** S.W.A.T. (s.8) **11.20** 9-1-1 (s.4, 2 eps) **12.50** FBI: International (s.3) **13.35** Law & Order: Special Victims Unit (s.24, 2 eps) **15.05** Trigger Point (s.2, 2 eps) **16.45** Astrid & Lilly Save the World (s.2) **18.15** The Equalizer (s.3) **19.00** S.W.A.T. (s.8) **19.45** FBI: International (s.3) **20.30** Law & Order: Special Victims Unit (s.24, 2 eps) **22.00** Chicago Fire (s.13) **22.45** Fire Country (s.3) **23.30** True Detective **00.30** True Blood Season (2 eps) **02.15** House of the Dragon

YES TV COMEDY

(Y7)

06.05 Grown-ish (s.6, 2 eps) **06.55** Hot in Cleveland (s.4, 2 eps) **07.45** Avenue 5 (2 eps) **08.50** Kid Sister (s.2, 2 eps) **09.50** The Office (s.5, 2 eps) **10.40** The Nanny (s.4, 2 eps) **11.30** Married with Children (s.8, 2 eps) **12.20** Avenue 5 (2 eps) **13.30** Grown-ish (s.6, 2 eps) **14.20** Hot in Cleveland (s.6, 2 eps) **15.10** Kid Sister (s.2, 2 eps) **16.05** The Office (s.5, 2 eps) **16.55** The Nanny (s.4, 2 eps) **17.45** Married with Children (s.8, 2 eps) **18.40** Avenue 5 (2 eps) **19.50** Laid (2 eps) **21.00** The Office (s.5, 2 eps) **21.50** The Nanny (s.4, 2 eps) **22.40** Married with Children (s.8, 2 eps) **23.30** Curb Your Enthusiasm (s.6, 2 eps) **00.30** Entourage (s.7, 2 eps) **01.30** Grown-ish (s.6, 2 eps) **02.20** Hot in Cleveland (s.6, 2 eps)

EUROSPORT

(Y61/H59)

06.30 Ski Jumping - World Cup in Hinzenbach, Austria **07.00** Snooker - World Open in Yushan, China: Round 3 **08.00** Snooker - World Open in Yushan, China: Quarterfinals **11.00** Cross Country Skiing - World Championship in Trondheim, Norway **12.45** Ski Jumping - World Cup in Hinzenbach, Austria **13.15** Cross Country Skiing - World Championship in Trondheim, Norway **15.30** Olympic Games - The Power of the Olympics

15.45 Nordic Combined Skiing - World Championship in Trondheim, Norway **16.55** Cross Country Skiing - World Championship in Trondheim, Norway **17.45** Nordic Combined Skiing - World Championship in Trondheim, Norway **18.45** Cross Country Skiing - World Championship in Trondheim, Norway **20.00** Snooker - World Open in Yushan, China: Quarterfinals **21.15** Ski Jumping - World Championship in Trondheim, Norway **22.45** Cross Country Skiing - World Championship in Trondheim, Norway **23.30** Snooker - World Open in Yushan, China: Quarterfinals **01.00** Nordic Combined Skiing - World Championship in Trondheim, Norway **02.30** Snooker - World Open in Yushan, China: Quarterfinals

MOVIE CHANNELS

HOT CINEMA 1

(H16)

07.15 Lethal Weapon (USA, 1987). Action. Dir: Richard Donner. With Mel Gibson, Danny Glover. **09.05** Any Given Sunday (USA, 1999). Sports drama. Dir: Oliver Stone. With Al Pacino, Cameron Diaz, Dennis Quaid, James Woods, Jamie Foxx, LL Cool J. **11.45** The Bank Job (UK, 2008). Crime. Dir: Roger Donaldson. With Jason Statham, Saffron Burrows. **13.35** Pelé: Birth of a Legend (USA, 2016). Biographical. Dirs: Jeff Zimbalist, Michael Zimbalist. With Kevin de Paula, Leonardo Lima Carvalho, Seu Jorge. **15.20** Executive Decision (USA, 1996). Action. Dir: Stuart Baird. With Kurt Russell, Steven Seagal, Halle Berry. **17.35** Man of Steel (USA/Canada/UK, 2013). Action. Dir: Zack Snyder. With Henry Cavill, Amy Adams, Michael Shannon. **19.55** Notting Hill (USA, 1999). Romantic comedy. Dir: Roger Michell. With Julia Roberts, Hugh Grant, Rhys Ifans. **22.00** American Made (USA/Japan, 2017). Biography. Dir: Doug Liman. With Tom Cruise, Domhnall Gleeson, Sarah Wright. **23.50** Mad Max: Fury Road (Australia/USA, 2015). Action. Dir: George Miller. With Tom Hardy, Charlize Theron, Nicholas Hoult. **01.50** Dead Man Down (USA, 2013). Action. Dir: Niels Arden Oplev. With Colin Farrell, Naomi Rapace, Dominic Cooper.

HOT CINEMA 2

(H17)

07.10 Man of Tai Chi (USA/China/Hong Kong, 2013). Action drama. Dir: Keanu Reeves. With Tiger Hu Chen, Keanu Reeves, Karen Mok. **08.55** The Expendables 2 (USA, 2012). Action adventure thriller. Dir: Simon West. With Sylvester Stallone, Jean-Claude Van Damme. **10.35** The Mummy (China/Japan/USA, 2017). Adventure. Dir: Alex Kurtzman. With Tom Cruise, Sofia Boutella, Annabelle Wallis. **12.40** Free State of Jones (USA, 2016). Action drama. Dir: Gary Ross. With Matthew McConaughey, Gugu Mbatha-Raw, Mahershala Ali. **14.55** Enemy at the Gates (USA/Germany/UK/Ireland, 2001). WWII suspense drama. Dir: Jean-Jacques Annaud. With Joseph Fiennes, Jude Law, Rachel Weisz, Bob Hoskins, Ed Harris. **17.05** Carbone (France, 2017). Thriller. Dir: Olivier Marchal. With Benoit Magimel, Gerard Depardieu. **18.45** The Titan (UK/Spain/USA/Germany, 2018). Drama. Dir: Lennart Ruff. With Sam Worthington, Taylor Schilling, Tom Wilkinson. **20.20** Wrong Place (USA, 2022). Action. Dir: Mike Burns. With Ashley, Bruce Willis, Michael Sirow. **22.00** Pay the Ghost (Canada, 2015). Drama. Dir: Uli Edel. With Nicholas Cage, Sarah Wayne Callies. **23.30** Samaritan (USA, 2022). Action. Dir: Julius Avery. With Sylvester Stallone, Javon 'Wanna' Walton, Pilou Asbaek. **01.10** The Departed (USA/Hong Kong, 2006). Crime. Dir: Martin Scorsese. With Leonardo DiCaprio, Matt Damon, Jack Nicholson, Mark Wahlberg.

HOT CINEMA 3

(H18)

06.50 Meet the Fockers (USA, 2004). Comedy. Dir: Jay Roach. With Robert De Niro, Ben Stiller, Dustin Hoffman,

Barbra Streisand. **08.40** Rock the Kasbah (USA, 2015). Comedy. Dir: Barry Levinson. With Bruce Willis, Bill Murray, Kate Hudson, Zoey Deschanel. **10.25** The Speech (France/Belgium, 2020). Dir: Laurent Tirard. With Benjamin Lavernhe, Sara Giraudeau, Julia Platon. **11.55** Gringo (Australia/USA, 2018). Action comedy. Dir: Nash Edgerton. With Joel Edgerton, Charlize Theron, David Oyelowo. **13.45** Two Many Chefs (Spain, 2022). Comedy. Dir: Joaquin Mazón. With Karra Elejalde, Enric Auquer. **15.15** The Guard (Ireland, 2011). Comedy. Dir: John Michael McDonagh. With Brendan Gleeson, Don Cheadle. **16.50** Legally Blonde (USA, 2001). Comedy. Dir: Robert Luketic. With Reese Witherspoon, Luke Wilson. **18.25** Maggie Moore(s) (USA, 2023). Comedy crime. Dir: John Slattery. With Jon Hamm, Tina Fey, Christopher Denham. **20.05** I Want You Back (USA, 2022). Romantic comedy. Dir: Jason Orley. With Charlie Day, Jenny Slate, Scott Eastwood. **22.00** Killers (USA, 2010). Action. Dir: Robert Luketic. With Ashton Kutcher, Katherine Heigl. **23.40** Can You Keep a Secret? (USA, 2019). Romantic comedy. Dir: Elise Duran. With Alexandra Daddario, Sunita Mani, Tyler Hoechlin. **01.15** My Big Fat Greek Wedding 3 (USA, 2023). Romantic comedy. Directed by and starring Nia Vardalos. With John Corbett, Louis Mandylor.

HOT CINEMA 4

(H19)

06.05 Just to Be Sure (France/Belgium, 2017). Comedy. Dir: Carine Tardieu. With Francois Damiens, Cecile de France, Guy Marchand. **07.50** The Good Boss El buen patron (Spain, 2021). Comedy drama. Dir: Fernando León de Aranoa. With Javier Bardem, Manolo Solo. **09.45** The Bling Ring (USA/UK/France, 2013). Drama. Dir: Sofia Coppola. With Emma Watson, Taissa Farmiga, Leslie Mann. **11.20** Remember (Canada/South Africa/Mexico/Germany, 2015). Thriller. Dir: Atom Egoyan. With Christopher Plummer, Kim Roberts, Amanda Smith.

Nagham Zbeedat

Some five weeks into the Israeli military operation in the West Bank, the Israel Defense Forces has displaced 40,000 Palestinian residents from the Jenin, Tul Karm and Nur Shams refugee camps and destroyed civilian infrastructure. Defense Minister Israel Katz has said that IDF forces will remain in the area for at least a year.

On the ground, Palestinians are sharing first-hand accounts of displacement and terror as the military presence intensifies. Online, social media users launched the campaign #AllEyesOnTheWestBank to draw attention to the escalating offensive.

The situation in the West Bank has become increasingly dire, affecting daily life, education and employment, says Hala, 21, a third-year undergraduate student of English literature and international affairs at Birzeit University, from Tul Karm. Hala is a pseudonym; all the interviewees cited their personal security as the reason not to be referenced by their real names.

“Going in and out of the city can be dangerous,” Hala told Haaretz, describing the impact of Israeli military checkpoints. “Traffic and inspections can hold you for hours; sometimes, you’re sent back home, wasting an entire work or school day for nothing.”

Activists abroad lead an online campaign, but Palestinians call for something ‘more powerful than a hashtag or angry post.’

The constant army raids have also forced many families to evacuate their homes without essential belongings. “They leave with nothing – no money, no clothes and, often, nowhere to go,” she said. “The Israeli army establishes military bases in residential areas, keeping us in a state of constant fear. Every day feels the same but with renewed fears.”

Those displaced often seek shelter in mosques, schools or, for the fortunate few, overcrowded apartments. “It’s cramped, but



A Palestinian woman and her triplets, displaced by the IDF operation, at a shelter in Jenin, in January; smoke billowing after an airstrike in Jenin.



Raneen Sawaf/AFP/Reuters; Mohammad Mansour/AFP

Fearing Gaza redux, Palestinian activists call for #AllEyesOnTheWestBank

As the IDF intensifies its operation in the West Bank, the specter of Gaza is ever-present: ‘Each day feels like we’re waiting for something terrible to happen,’ one woman says

at least it’s a roof over their heads,” she added.

Hala is concerned about what she described as the looming threat of ethnic cleansing. “We fear we’re next. The horrors that people in refugee camps are enduring could soon extend to us.”

While online campaigns sought to draw attention to the West Bank, she expressed both determination and frustration. “Exposing crimes and assaults against us is crucial. But Gaza did that, and it didn’t stop the killing and destruction,” she said. “Something more powerful than a hashtag or an angry post needs to be done.”

Faraj, 27, is from the city of Jenin and works in sales and marketing. He says he fears that the West Bank is on the brink of collapse. “Everything is out of control and that is terrifying,” he says. Once politically active, he now avoids public criticism, wary of the Palestinian Authority’s crackdown on dissent and Israel’s widespread use of administrative detention.

Amid escalating Israeli military raids and settler attacks, many Palestinians feel abandoned. “The Palestinian Authority talks about security, but who protects us from the army and settlers?” Faraj asks. He draws com-



Soldiers at Tul Karm camp; children and journalists fleeing as tanks enter Jenin camp, February.



Zain Jaafar/AFP; Jaafar Ashtiyeh/AFP

parisons to Gaza’s chaos, warning that lack of international intervention could push the West Bank toward the same fate.

His frustration is evident: “We are under an occupation that controls every aspect of our lives.” For many, the dream of an independent Palestine feels increasingly out of reach. “If I had the chance, I’d leave. No one expects a solution anymore,” he admits, reflecting the despair of a generation trapped in uncertainty.

Arin, a 29-year-old stay-at-home mother from Jenin, spends her days caring for her three young sons, a 6-year-old and 4-year-old twins. But between bedtime and bedtime stories, there’s

an ever-present fear that she cannot escape: the growing threat of Israeli annexation of territory in the West Bank and what that would mean for her family. “It’s scary to think that we’re nearing a war the Israeli government has always promised to start. Each day feels like we’re waiting for something terrible to happen.”

For Arin, the news from the Gaza Strip is more than just a distant tragedy, it’s a haunting glimpse into a future she dreads. “I watch the children in Gaza, barefoot, hungry and tired. And I can’t stop thinking about my children – if they’re going to be on the news one day living through the same horrors,” Arin added, “It ter-

rifies me because it doesn’t feel far away. It feels like it’s coming closer.”

Her greatest fear is personified in the images of Gazan mothers searching for their children among the rubble. “When I see mothers in Gaza digging through ruins, calling out for their kids, I see myself.” She continues, “I see my hands in the dust, my voice breaking. That thought never leaves me.”

Arin describes how fear shapes even the smallest moments of their day. “My eldest’s birthday was two weeks ago. We threw him a small party at home, but we couldn’t invite my sister and her kids because they live in a village near Nablus.” Nablus is an hour’s drive from

Jenin, but with the closure of some streets and the unpredictable checkpoints, the trip can take hours, Arin says. “He’s the eldest but he’s still too young to understand the occupation’s role in our lives.”

As the world’s gaze remains fixed on Gaza, Arin feels her family’s struggles are invisible. “Sometimes it feels like no one sees us here. Like our lives don’t matter. But we’re here.” Despite everything, Arin holds onto a simple wish for her children, one that feels increasingly out of reach. “All I want is for my boys to have a normal childhood. It shouldn’t be too much to ask.”

At 31, Sari, a nurse from Ya’bad, a town in the north-

ern West Bank, has already lived through more uncertainty than many. Married with two young children, a boy and a girl, he once worked as a construction worker in Israel, a job that provided for his family but came with its own disadvantages – not seeing his family for months, cramped in a room with other workers and lacking basic working rights. When the war began, his work permit was revoked, forcing him to rethink his future. Now, he works at a local nursing home, practicing the profession he trained for.

“Losing my job in Israel was hard, but what scared me more was the thought of being stuck there when the violence escalated. The fear of being separated from my family was always there, at the back of my mind.”

For years, Sari crossed checkpoints and spent long hours away from his family to provide for them. But after seeing what displacement has meant for so many, he’s made a firm decision: even if the opportunity to work in Israel returns, he won’t take it. “I won’t go back. I’ve seen what happens to families torn apart by war. My children need their father. My wife needs her husband.”

Sari also reflects on how his story is just one among thousands and stresses the importance of international attention and support. “People talk about war, about politics, but they forget the stories of ordinary families – people like us, just trying to live. International support gives us hope.” He added, “We need the world to keep speaking for us, not just for headlines but for real change.”

Online campaign

Pro-Palestinian activists and politicians have launched a social media campaign to shift focus to the West Bank. Some of the most popular hashtags are #AllEyesonJenin, #AllEyesonTheWestBank and #TulKarm.

Jewish Voice for Peace, a U.S.-based anti-Zionist organization, posted an image on X of the Jenin refugee camp after Israeli airstrikes, with the caption “All Eyes on Jenin.” In posts, Jewish Voice for Peace says the IDF is “escalating its assault on Jenin” and “using the same tactics it used in Gaza.” The group writes that over 70 Palestinians have been killed in Jenin, Tul Karm and Tubas within a month, urging the public to hold the American and Israeli governments accountable and to “put an end to their complicity and war crimes. Stop Arming Israel.”

Wear The Peace, a U.S. based, Palestinian-owned clothing brand, shared a similar message on Instagram alongside an image captioned “All Eyes on The West Bank.” In its post, the brand says, “The occupation is upping its ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in the West Bank as it deploys tanks and announces that the 40,000 Palestinians they’ve forcibly displaced in the last month will not be able to return to their homes.”

Jonathan Cook, a British author and freelance journalist formerly based in Nazareth, works for the United Arab Emirates’ state-owned English-language daily The National and for Middle East Eye, a U.K. based media website. He wrote on X about the “little noise” regarding the escalating violence in the West Bank. Yanis Varoufakis, a left-wing Greek economist and politician, wrote on X that there is “a real and present danger that these [refugee] camps will be erased” and called the IDF operation a “genocide” that “must be stopped. By us all. Now!”

The bacteria that cause gum disease may also lead to Alzheimer’s

Hebrew University scientists show mechanism that allows a certain microbe to evade immune cells, giving hope for treatment of various grave diseases

Ido Efrati

Porphyromonas gingivalis might not ring a bell for most people, but behind the nine syllables lies a sophisticated bacteria responsible for the severe, chronic inflammation of the gums known as periodontitis.

This microbe uses the immune system to thrive in inflamed oral tissue, from where it may spread elsewhere in the body. Studies have linked it to conditions such as vascular disease,

heart disease, cancer and Alzheimer’s.

A new study led by Prof. Gabriel Nussbaum of Hebrew University’s Faculty of Dental Medicine sheds light on the way this microbe fools the immune system so it can thrive in inflammation, where immune cells lurk.

Feeding on proteins and iron

“Porphyromonas gingivalis is found mainly in the oral cavity. It’s present in

many of us, but in limited quantities, and belongs to a group of bacteria known as inflammophilic; that is, ‘fond of inflammations,’” says Nussbaum, an immunology researcher.

“Unlike many other bacteria, it doesn’t live on sugars but on proteins, and on the iron in red blood cells. Because an inflammatory environment is rich in proteins and blood, [Porphyromonas gingivalis] has all the nutrition it needs. And it doesn’t want immune cells to kill it off ... so it has de-

veloped a unique pathway that allows it to thrive in an inflammatory environment.”

The microbe therefore multiplies in inflammations, causing periodontitis, the leading cause of tooth loss in the West.

“The disease starts with the gums and gets worse until it causes the loss of the teeth’s connective tissue and they fall out. This disease severely harms quality of life for a lot of people, but it doesn’t stop with the gums,” Nussbaum says.

“This combination of the bacterial element and the immune system’s response is dramatic, giving the microbe traits that allow it to survive and harm other systems in the body. Studies over the years, including by us, have tied Porphyromonas gingivalis to diseases such as cancer, vascular disease and even Alzheimer’s.”

The lab that Nussbaum heads focuses on the link of oral bacteria to various types of cancer. Here the most obvious connection is to oral cancer, but Porphyromonas gingivalis has also been linked to cancers such as pancreatic cancer.

“And a major part of our work in the lab is devoted to pancreatic cancer, for which there is only very limited medical treatment,” Nussbaum says.

This link triggered the researchers’ key question: Why does Porphyromonas gingivalis thrive in such a high presence of immune cells?

The protein connection

The mechanism that the researchers uncovered is complex but has its origins in a hypothesis linking the bacteria’s stealthiness to cancer cells’ capacity to evade the immune system. At issue here are two proteins that act as so-called cell surface receptors. One protein, called TLR2, is found in immune cells.

“Already in 2006 we showed that this is one of the receptors used by the bacteria, and by blocking it

we showed that the system can fight the microbe better,” Nussbaum says.

The other receptor is called CD47 and is tied to integrins, proteins that help connect a cell to its environment. CD47 is known for transmitting a “don’t eat me” signal and is activated by cancer cells so they can evade the immune system.

“We realized there had to be an explanation for the pathway that allows bacteria to evade the immune system and also has a link to cancer,” Nussbaum says. “We did one plus one and decided to look into the connection between these proteins. Until now, nobody realized they were working in tandem.”

The researchers discovered that Porphyromonas gingivalis uses the CD47

protein to disrupt the body’s immune response, playing a major role in protecting the microbe from immune cells in much the same way as cancer cells operate.

The scientists also discovered that Porphyromonas gingivalis encourages the production of a protein called thrombospondin-1, TSP-1 which helps repress

Porphyromonas gingivalis uses the CD47 protein to protect the microbe from immune cells in much the same way as cancer cells operate.



A 3D illustration of the bacteria.

Kateryna Kon / Shutterstock.com

the immune system, mainly the clearing of microbes by neutrophil white blood cells.

A strategy for managing infections

“Our findings suggest that Porphyromonas gingivalis uses CD47 to take over immune pathways, inhibiting the body’s ability to fight an infection,” Nussbaum says. “This mechanism explains how the bacteria manage to thrive in inflammatory environments, which leads to periodontitis ... and could contribute to other systemic diseases.”

In experiments with both cell cultures and lab animals, the researchers showed that blocking CD47 or TSP-1 significantly increased the immune system’s ability to clear the bacteria. Mice lacking CD47 showed a higher capacity to clear the bacteria, suggesting that a focus on this pathway might be a promising strategy for gum disease.

“Existing treatments for periodontitis focus on reducing the bacterial load mechanically; that is, scratching and cleaning the microbial plaque by a doctor or a hygienist,” Nussbaum says.

“But an understanding of how bacteria evade the immune system opens up new possibilities for treatment. Adjusting the CD47-TLR2 immune pathway or blocking TSP-1 may be a novel approach for managing chronic infections affecting oral health and the health of the entire body.”

sudoku

© Puzzles by Pappocom

The game board is divided into 81 squares, with nine horizontal rows and nine vertical columns. A few numbers already appear in some of the squares. The aim is to fill in numerals 1 to 9 in each of the empty squares, so that every row and column and every box (a group of nine squares outlined in boldface) contains all of the numerals 1 to 9. None of the numerals may recur in the same row, column or box.

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4 | 6 | 8 | 2 | 5 | 7 | 9 | 3 | 1 |
| 9 | 3 | 5 | 8 | 6 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 7 |
| 7 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 9 | 3 | 6 | 5 | 8 |
| 3 | 9 | 2 | 7 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 8 | 6 |
| 5 | 8 | 6 | 9 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 7 | 4 |
| 1 | 4 | 7 | 3 | 8 | 6 | 2 | 9 | 5 |
| 8 | 5 | 9 | 6 | 2 | 4 | 7 | 1 | 3 |
| 2 | 7 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 8 | 5 | 6 | 9 |
| 6 | 1 | 3 | 5 | 7 | 9 | 8 | 4 | 2 |

Tips and a computerized version of Sudoku can be found at www.sudoku.com

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | | 5 | 3 | | | 8 | 7 | |
| | 9 | | | | | | 3 | 4 |
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| | | | 4 | | | 9 | | 7 |
| | 1 | | | 5 | | | 6 | 2 |
| | 2 | | | 7 | 5 | | 4 | |
| 9 | | | 1 | 8 | | | | |
| 6 | 5 | | 9 | | 4 | | | |

Difficulty: Medium

‘Trauma stays with you until you die’: Horrors of Haredi schooling

In documentary ‘No Child Spared,’ Meni Philip uncovers physical and emotional abuse young children experience at hands of rabbis, teachers

Ido David Cohen

Belt. Hammer. Plastic hose. Cane. Ruler. Whatever comes to hand – it seems like almost any item can be used as a tool of “punishment” in the ultra-Orthodox Talmud Torah education system in which little children are taught. So long, first grade; hello, house of horror.

Director-producer Meni Philip can’t exactly remember the violent acts he suffered in the non-Hasidic Haredi school he attended in Petah Tikva in the 1970s. Today, though, he is fully aware of the scars that abuse left on his soul.

“I was pretty much the weakest boy in class,” he recalls. “I understood the material we were being taught, but school bored me so I would daydream constantly. In recess, I wouldn’t play; instead, I would stay in class. I would receive lots-lots-lots of beatings and humiliation. I have an eight-year blackout with just flashes of memories here and there.”

By opening the gates to Haredi schools in his latest documentary “No Child Spared,” Philip delivers a harsh indictment of systemic violence in ultra-Orthodox society. Along the way, he undergoes a private reckoning regarding the way the violence he experienced at school has shaped and disrupted his life, even as a secular adult.

Helping him make his case in the film are 11 victims with better memories than he has. They provide a voice to the many children who have been silenced over the decades. The interviewees, including former members of Haredi society, plus religious and ultra-Orthodox men, describe personal experiences that create a larger picture in which cruel abuse is a daily occurrence.

“There was a boy who’d had his hands cable-tied, stuck on a chair and left there for the entire recess,” recounts Nathan Kolberg, 11, who used to attend a Hasidic cheder (a traditional Jewish ultra-orthodox school) in Beit Shemesh. His 16-year-old-brother Maor, meanwhile, remembers one teacher “who would put a chili pepper in your mouth and duct-tape your hands behind your back, as well as your mouth, so you wouldn’t be able to spit.” Moshe Chayim, 25, who attended a Sephardi cheder in Bnei Brak, says that throughout fifth grade, he suffered pains in his neck due to beatings by the rabbi. “But there’s no escape,” he says. “You have suicidal thoughts and you don’t know who to turn to.”

Philip notes that “the beatings, abuse and humiliation completely destroy a

child’s independence. The only way for a 4- or 5-year-old to handle such things when they happen is ‘not to be there.’ I cannot say which beating I took caused me to shut down, but there’s a moment when that happens. This fear, this emotional withdrawal, became the greatest suffering of my life. The violent trauma made me feel terribly lonesome, and this lonesomeness is indescribable suffering. I’m not a person who underwent trauma. I am the trauma.”

The idea for the film, which screened at this year’s Haifa Film Festival and is on HOT 8 in Israel, was born of a post written by one of Philip’s brothers on the Bokharim Mekhadash (Choosing Anew) Facebook group intended for formerly religious people. The brother, who named himself “Nasich Katan” (“Little Prince” in Hebrew) on the group (of which they are both administrators), revealed in a 2018 post: “When they beat me, I would keep a straight face in order to be brave. Mainly, though, I didn’t want to give them the pleasure. It usually made them beat me twice as hard – sometimes until I broke down and cried out because of the pain.”

Meni Philip: ‘The abuse destroys one’s ability to feel the other’s pain. You can love, and you want to feel, but you just don’t know how.’

The confession was hashtagged #ZoYalduty (#My_Childhood) and it opened a Pandora’s box, leading to a wave of shares and testimonies.

When it’s put to him that, in effect, the film’s interviewees sought him out, Philip answers with a smile, “Kind of.” Stories began getting posted on ultra-Orthodox Facebook groups and the director said to himself, “Okay, you must document this.”

Another of his siblings, Oded, features in the film, but he is probably the interviewee who suffered the fewest beatings. This did not save him from memories that still haunt him to this day, such as a former teacher who broke a broom on the body of his friends.

“I used to greatly envy Oded, but in the cheder it was as if we lived in two separate worlds,” says the director, who is the second of 11 siblings. “Oded is two years younger than me, and



A still from the short film “Sinner,” left, which won Best European Short Film at the Venice Film Festival in 2009; Director Meni Philip in California, where he lives.

always had the talent to be very funny, likable and sociable. Today, in hindsight, he realizes that this was his way of coping with it.”

Giving up on the dream

Meni Philip was a successful Hasidic singer, until ultra-Orthodox society expelled him. In 2007, he co-created with director Noam Reuveni the documentary film “Let There Be Light,” in which he recorded his challenging transition from the Haredi to the secular world, his decision to divorce his wife after having five children together, and the alienation from both his former partner and his parents.

A year later, upon completing film school at Minshar School of Art, he released the short film “Sinner,” about a 13-year-old boy who is being sexually abused by one of the faculty at the yeshiva he attends. The film won the Best European Short Film Award at the 2009 Venice Film Festival. “Some of the things in ‘Sinner’ happened to me when I attended yeshiva, so I knew how to recount them,” he says. “Following this success, I got funding to write a long feature film. I worked on it for five years, but shelved it because I couldn’t get to a script that I liked. I gave up.”

In the past decade, Philip, 57, has been living in Santa Barbara and is speaking to me from his California home. “I found work here in a company that restores old Hollywood films and rereleases them to the market. My cinematic know-how is helpful in the role, though this is more a technical than a creative job. At least it’s in my field, though, and I can make a living off of it.”

Shooting on “No Child Spared” actually began after Philip had already given up on his cinematic dream. But after the flood of testimonies on social media, he decided to devote a film to

the issue. Filming began in 2018, but the production wasn’t smooth sailing.

He originally planned for his film to also include women who had been hurt at Haredi girls’ schools. However, “a few months after filming, I got a message from an interviewee who said: ‘I don’t want you to use my interview.’ I was shocked,” he recalls. “I told her, ‘Let’s talk, tell me what happened.’ There had been no physical violence in her story.

“She said to me on the phone, ‘I told you about my worse traumas, but I felt there was no empathy in the room, that you were only looking for more painful stories. It’s true that I wasn’t beaten, but I was locked up for an entire day without food. Isn’t that enough? I feel you’re only looking for blood and sensationalism.’ That made me despair.”

The words shook him. “All I’m doing in life is trying to learn how to feel, to be empathic, and I prepared for this filming. What she said to me was so extreme that I realized that whatever I was doing – it wasn’t coming through.”

But this was just one interviewee.

“That’s true, but I knew it wasn’t just her. I watched the rushes again – and I was mainly watching myself. I saw how I was constantly interrupting and missing the stories I was hearing. In a segment that didn’t make it into the final film, there was a child who told me his rabbi had pushed his head into a wall and he bled. And I asked him, ‘Okay, how did it feel?’ Already in real time I understood: What kind of question is this? I realized I was rushing from question to question, and this realization opened up something huge to me. A few weeks later, all the pennies dropped: I understood that my lack of attentiveness had to do with my inability to feel. For the first



Social activist Daniel Amram.

time, I realized that I did not emerge unscathed myself” from the school system.

Philip took 18 months to process these insights. He eventually resumed work on “No Child Spared” with the help of Penina Adler, a Jewish-American woman who grew up in an ultra-Orthodox community in Cleveland. They’d met during the pandemic, and she became his partner in writing and editing the film.

“I realized that the film is not a story I am telling about how much ultra-Orthodox people hurt children. It became this telling of a personal journey that transformed my life and identity. I always saw myself as a good father, a good person, dealing with hardships that other people pose. I suddenly realized that I was not seeing my children in many ways, and that I hurt people without realizing it.”

Philip’s five children are all over 30 now, with four of them ultra-Orthodox. Aspart of his soul-searching, he included in the film old recordings of phone calls in which he demanded that the rabbi and principal of a cheder stop using violence against his 5-year-old son. Despite the objections of the rabbi, who insisted that he was relying on a widespread halakhic tradition, Philip got his superior to agree, in principle, not to beat the child.



Addie Reiss, Ziv Sade

stood that there was no one to turn to.”

Philip admits that he chose not to open his childhood traumas in regard to his parents, preferring instead to focus on positive experiences from recent years. “My relationship with them changed; I suddenly managed to see them as people rather than as vague figures.”

During our conversation, he recalls an incident from his childhood that gets him rethinking the emotional blindness he associates with himself. “When I was 7, I saw a little boy playing in the sandbox in the playground. I asked him to come with me. He gave me his hand and we went to a shelter. I told him I was leaving and that his mother and father wouldn’t find him. I felt that I wanted to cause him pain. He scrunched his face getting ready to cry, and it was like a lightning bolt. I couldn’t go on. I smiled at him and told him I was just joking. The need to cause pain to somebody never came back.”

How do you feel about that incident now?

“It means there’s hope for me; that the inability to feel is not some disability I was born with. It means that if I manage to regain deep attentiveness, things will seep in.”

One disturbing matter the film highlights is how many of the children who are exposed to violence become enthusiastic accomplices to the horrors, with the encouragement of the school, losing sensitivity and compassion even between themselves.

“The abuse destroys one’s ability to feel the other’s pain,” Philip says. “You can love, and you want to feel, but you just don’t know how.”

The film also reveals a sadly unsurprising tendency in Ashkenazi schools to abuse Sephardi children.

Philip says there are some stories he chose not to include in the final film simply because of their terrible violence – for instance, a rabbi who broke a child’s

fingers. “These are horror stories that you cannot include, because you want people to be able to watch the film without running away screaming after five minutes.

“Even when people file a complaint with the police, most cases are closed – whether because of rabbis pressuring the plaintiffs, or because the police themselves close the case due to a ‘lack of public interest.’”

Sexual violence is not part of the film, though it too exists within the schools system.

“This was a dilemma,” the director admits. “I was afraid that if I put it in, it would provide an excuse to ignore the systemic physical violence. The system says ‘beat the child; it doesn’t say ‘sexually abuse them.’ However, once you destroy a child’s facility for refusal, sexual abuse is a direct result of physical abuse. My concern was that they would say there are just a few ‘bad apples’ that need to be punished. Whoever thinks that is part of the problem.”

Philip believes the collective ultra-Orthodox cheder experience shapes an entire society, whose members are unable to see the other because they are still in that traumatized place.

“I’m reminded of former Health Minister Yaakov Litzman, who defended Malka Leifer [who sexually abused some of her students at her religious school in Australia]. As far as he’s concerned, he should not shift one iota, lest his life be ruined. This does not go away even after 60 years.”

And minister Yitzchak Goldknopf, who asks, “Who has it bad here?” Or MK Moshe Gafni, who has been insulting hostage families? Or MK Yitzhak Pindrus, who says the LGBTQ community is worse than Hezbollah, Hamas and ISIS?

“The cheder child simply grew a beard. The trauma stays with you until you die. This is the blindness I’m talking about.”

The finest feathered fliers, captured on camera



A Northern Lapwing, left; a Little Curlew and a Common Ringed Plover; and a Common Snipe.

Moshe Gilad

For 48 intense hours, birdwatchers and photographers raced against time to capture the perfect shot of the autumn migration season. Now, the best of their work is on display at the Jerusalem Theater in the concluding exhibition of the seventh Tzaparton, the Jewish Na-

tional Fund’s bird photography marathon.

As in previous years, participants had 48 hours to take their competition photos. The exhibition, titled Emerging into the Light, is now open to the public.

Participants competed in several categories: professionals, amateurs, audience favorite, children and youth, and a mobile photog-



raphy category for images captured on smartphones. A panel of nature photography experts reviewed hundreds of submissions, ultimately selecting 28 standout images, now on display at the Jerusalem Theater.

In the professional category, photographer Daniel Katz won with an image of a Northern Lapwing spread-

ing its wings beside a pool in Kibbutz Gan Shmuel in central Israel. This species, part of the plover family, typically nests in Scandinavia and migrates to Israel for the winter.

Other standout photographs in the professional category include Boaz Amidor’s image of a Grey Heron holding a red fish in its beak in Emek Hama’ayanot



Daniel Katz; Omer Eshet; Yossi Chen

in northern Israel, as well as Nissim Levy’s photograph of a pair of Pied Kingfishers in the Judean Lowlands.

The audience favorite in the professional category was a photo by Yagel Yamin, capturing a Montagu’s Harrier, a daytime raptor from the hawk family.

In the amateur category, Omar Eshet won first

place with a photograph of a Little Curlew and a Common Ringed Plover at Tel Tanninim, near Ma’agan Michael in northern Israel.

The winning image in the children and youth category captured a Spotted Flycatcher and was taken by Dror Israel Harel.

The exhibition will be on display until the end of April.

Weather

Local rain, risk of flooding

Thursday will be partly cloudy with some local showers and isolated thunderstorms. There will be a serious risk of flooding in the east and south of the country. The rain will ease by Friday evening. On Saturday temperatures will rise slightly, and Sunday will be similar.

Friday

Saturday

Sunday

low

medium

high

very high

Jerusalem

Tel Aviv

Haifa

Be'er Sheva

Karmiel

Afula

Modi'in

pollution forecast for this morning:

medium

The Mediterranean Sea

20-40 KPH

Safed 8-15

Katztzin 11-18

Haifa 13-21

Tiberias 15-24

Taibeh 12-22

Tel Aviv 13-21

Ariel 10-17

Ashkelon 13-19

Jerusalem 9-16

Amman 8-15

Be'er Sheva 11-21

Dead Sea 17-22

Mitzpe Ramon 8-15

Cairo 13-21

Eilat 14-22

Eilat Bay 24-44 KPH

Ramadan

Fast ends: 17:47

Fast starts: 04:37*