

THE WEEKLY PRINT

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JUNE 27, 2022

Meet Israel's next prime minister

Yair Lapid stands apart from Israel's previous leaders as he seeks to make this temporary position last beyond the looming election

By Ruth Marks Eglash

After a week of tumultuous politics, Israel will soon have a new prime minister: Yair Lapid.

A man who has long eyed the country's top job, Lapid will replace Naftali Bennett as the 14th prime minister of Israel when the Knesset is dissolved in the coming days. Although he will serve only as a caretaker until a general election that is likely to take place in the fall, Lapid will be in a prime position to showcase his talents and make the argument to Israelis that he is a leader worthy of their support.

Lapid's rise from a journalist and media personality — whose credits include a “Top Gun”-style commercial for an Israeli beer company — to Israel's most powerful political figure is unusual and, for many, unexpected. Unlike most of the country's previous leaders, he has no significant security or military background, holds no academic degrees and, although over the past decade has held positions such as foreign minister, finance minister and opposition leader, he does not have professional roots in politics.

“It is unusual that an Israeli person with no security background can become prime minister,” Aviv Bushinsky, former media advisor and chief of staff for former Prime

Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, told *Jewish Insider*.

While Ehud Olmert, who served as prime minister from 2006 to 2009, had a limited military background, Bushinsky continued, he was a longtime political player — a so-called “Likud prince” because he rose up through the ranks of the right-wing party — who took over the premiership after then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon suffered a stroke and was unable to carry out official duties.

Bushinsky also pointed out that Lapid, unlike his predecessors, did not complete higher education and holds no university degree.

“This is the first time in Israel that something like this has happened,” Bushinsky observed. “In Israeli society, you are respected if you are [an army] general, but if you don't have that and you don't have an academic background, it's awkward.”

“Israel is not like the U.S., it is not a country of endless possibilities,” he explained. “If you are not an army veteran or war hero, if you are not educated, then it's hard to become anything, and here we have someone who is known for living in the nightlife of Tel Aviv, known for his songs, for beer. This is not something that usually

happens in Israel.”

Professor Gideon Rahat, a senior fellow at the Israel Democracy Institute and a member of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem faculty, said he did not believe that Lapid's unusual-for-Israel background would work against him.

“I think that the status of the military in Israeli politics has declined,” Rahat told *JI*, adding that some people admire Lapid's more glamorous professional background.

Best known as a longtime anchor on Israeli television's highest-rated news show, Lapid was already a household name before entering politics a decade ago. The son of contentious journalist-turned-politician Yosef “Tommy” Lapid, founder and leader of the liberal secular Shinui (Change) party who served as justice minister and deputy prime minister from 2003 to 2004, and Shulamit Lapid, a novelist and journalist, Israel's next prime minister was born in Tel Aviv in 1963.

He spent his military service as a correspondent for the army's then-print magazine, *Bamachane*, before working as a journalist and eventually becoming a regular face on Israeli TV screens, hosting and starring in multiple shows, including the nightly news. In addition, his official

bio notes, the soon-to-be prime minister authored a popular weekly newspaper column, has written a dozen best-selling books and even penned several hit pop songs.

In 2012, he left the entertainment and news industry for politics, setting up the centrist Yesh Atid (There is a Future) party with the aim of promoting a liberal Zionist agenda that would better integrate Jewish and democratic values. Propelled by his fame, Lapid won some 19 Knesset seats in his first election in 2013, turning Yesh Atid into the second-largest party after Netanyahu's right-wing Likud faction.

Critics at the time dismissed him and his party as a political one-hit-wonder, predicting he would quickly fade from Israeli politics like others before him. Initially, his popularity waned after he joined Netanyahu's coalition and served in the often-challenging role of finance minister. In December 2014, Netanyahu fired him, breaking up a fraught coalition and taking the country to an early election in March 2015. Battered by his time in the government, Lapid lost nearly half of his electoral support, with Yesh Atid gaining only 11 Knesset seats in that vote.

He managed to remain on the scene, however, with his political tenacity coming to the fore throughout the four recent election cycles that have taken place over the past three and a half years. Through two of those votes, in 2019, Lapid allied with two former generals – current Defense Minister Benny Gantz and Gabi Ashkenazi – in an attempt to defeat Netanyahu. The alliance disbanded in 2020 after Gantz agreed to join one of Netanyahu's coalitions as alternate prime minister.

After the last election in March 2021, Lapid, alongside Bennett, again surprised analysts by strategically pulling together a broad coalition of eight ideologically conflicting parties from across the political spectrum, including for the first time an Arab-Israeli Islamist faction.

"When Lapid consulted me before he entered politics, I told him that he must join an existing party," said Rahat. "He did not want to do it and what he is doing now is against all odds."

Rahat pointed out that in the past parties led by a "personality" have only been

successful once or twice. After that, he said, "they disappear."

"He has managed to strengthen his support and his position as leader of the anti-Netanyahu camp, and he did so within 10 years, which is quite meteoric," he said of Lapid. "He has succeeded against all odds and he might continue to surprise us."

Serving as foreign minister and alternate prime minister over the past 12 months, Lapid has boosted his status both in and out of Israel. He has met with numerous world leaders, including Vice President Kamala Harris and other top Democrats. Most significantly, he headed the recent Negev Summit, which included representatives from Morocco, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Egypt and Secretary of State Tony Blinken.

Now as prime minister, albeit in an interim capacity, Lapid has the chance to showcase his political prowess from the prime minister's chair.

Last week, Lapid flew to Ankara, Turkey, to meet with his Turkish counterpart, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, to discuss recent credible Iranian terror threats against Israeli targets in the country. Next month, when President Joe Biden visits Israel, Lapid will be the one to greet him on the tarmac.

Such high-level meetings not only give the caretaker prime minister valuable photo ops, they also strengthen his ability to fend off his top opponent – Netanyahu, who has described himself as being, from a diplomatic perspective, in a "different league."

"Being prime minister has a symbolic meaning," said Rahat. "However, the most important thing is setting the agenda, and as long as Lapid can control the agenda or a large part of it, then he has an important asset."

Rahat pointed out, however, that external factors, such as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and terrorism, could shape Lapid's agenda. In addition, he said, Israeli society remains starkly divided, with few floating voters and Netanyahu's supporters standing firmly behind him, leaving little that could significantly impact the outcome of the next election.

Polls conducted following Bennett's announcement that the coalition would disperse still show that no single party

or candidate will find it easy to form a government.

Bushinsky said that Lapid might be able to use his new position as prime minister to show that "a guy with no army experience, a former television star who managed to penetrate into politics, can do things on a security level."

"He will want to be seen on army bases and show that he understands and knows how to deal with these important security issues," Bushinsky said.

"People think he [Lapid] is shallow, so he will need to be seen as a serious prime minister, he will need to take photo ops behind the prime minister's desk and be seen hosting the president in the official residence," Bushinsky concluded. ♦

How the top U.S. Nazi hunter intends to bring Russian war criminals to justice

Eli Rosenbaum, the newly minted DOJ counselor for war crimes accountability, cemented his legal legacy by investigating Nazis in the decades after WWII

By Gabby Deutch

Eli Rosenbaum's long career has brought him face-to-face with the "inconceivable" — twice.

Four decades ago, fresh out of Harvard Law School, he joined the Department of Justice's famed Nazi-hunting unit, the Office of Special Investigations, which he would later go on to lead.

Now, the longtime prosecutor of atrocity crimes has been tapped by Attorney General Merrick Garland to lead Washington's efforts to investigate Russian war crimes in Ukraine.

"The inconceivable has happened," Rosenbaum said Tuesday at a U.S. Institute of Peace event about pursuing accountability for Russian war crimes. Russians and Ukrainians were both victims of the Nazis, Rosenbaum said in an emotional appeal. Russians and Ukrainians languished together in Nazi concentration camps.

"Two countries that were invaded by the Nazis, one is now attacking the other — and honestly, when I hear the president of the Russian Federation refer to Ukraine as Nazis, it's like fingers on the chalkboard for me, only a lot worse," he continued, speaking alongside Ukrainian ambassador to the U.S. Oksana Markarova and State Department's ambassador-at-large for global criminal justice Beth Van Schaack. "Everybody knows who's channeling the Nazis in waging an aggressive war and committing atrocities."

Rosenbaum achieved global celebrity in the world of international criminal justice for his inventive legal approaches to investigating and, later, prosecuting those who had committed crimes against humanity during World War II. He will bring that experience to his new role, former colleagues of Rosenbaum tell *Jewish Insider*.

"Americans are sending a signal. It's a very, very important step, and he's a highly

qualified professional. His dedication is really legendary," said Efraim Zuroff, chief Nazi hunter at the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

But Rosenbaum also brings a historical — and personal — understanding of this conflict and of war crimes.

His father served in the U.S. Army during World War II, and some of the detainees he questioned during the war were later tried at Nuremberg. "I don't know whether it led me to this work or not," Rosenbaum told *JI* in 2020. "It probably played a role." The two only once briefly discussed his father's experience in World War II, when Rosenbaum was 14: "We never did speak about that, actually. He lived for many, many, many more decades — and we certainly talked about my work — but that was just too close to home."

Rosenbaum, 67, first joined the Justice Department in 1980, in the brand-new OSI, an experimental Nazi-hunting unit. He has been at the department ever since, with the exception of four years in the 1980s, which he spent at a law firm and then at the World Jewish Congress. Most recently, he oversaw the department's human rights enforcement strategy and policy on other atrocity crimes in places like the former Yugoslavia.

"I did, of course, cut my teeth, so to speak, on the Nazi cases, but I and my colleagues have been working on cases involving post-war conflicts also now for decades," he said Tuesday.

At OSI, Rosenbaum devised unique approaches to finding evidence of Nazi war crimes, especially when much of the documentation was hidden behind the Iron Curtain.

"Most of the crimes of the Holocaust, almost all of the murders, were committed in Eastern Europe, which had come under Soviet control after the war," said Elizabeth White, now a historian at the U.S. Holocaust

Memorial Museum who worked with Rosenbaum for more than two decades at OSI. "Much of the documentation that had survived had been seized by the Red Army and was inaccessible in Soviet archives."

Historians and prosecutors working for the U.S. government created lines of communication with the Soviets, but the Communist government did not cooperate in the way Washington hoped.

"There was no free access to witnesses. They would produce the witnesses. And they chose people, of course, that fit their political interests," said Zuroff. Meanwhile, judges in the U.S. were "very loath to credit evidence and witnesses who came from Communist-controlled countries," said White, so investigators had to find corroborating evidence in Western archives. It was a roundabout and often frustrating process, but many of the prosecutions of Nazi war criminals who had escaped to the U.S. would not have been possible without Soviet cooperation.

Now, as counselor for war crimes accountability, Rosenbaum faces a potentially more difficult task: getting anyone in Russia to help the U.S. and its European allies as they investigate the country.

In his remarks on Tuesday, Rosenbaum urged Russians to consider their proud history of assisting the U.S. in its investigation of Nazi war criminals. (A DOJ spokesperson declined to make Rosenbaum available for an interview.)

"For anyone who might be watching in Russia, read the history. My colleagues and I were constantly criticized for collaborating with Moscow in these cases, but it was the right thing to do. We followed the evidentiary trail where it led," Rosenbaum said, resulting in justice for both Ukrainian and Russian victims of the Nazis.

The road ahead for Rosenbaum and Ukraine's allies in Europe will be long; investigations happen quietly, over months or years or even decades, as in the case of the Nazi prosecutions. Just last year, a Tennessee man was extradited from the U.S. to Germany after Rosenbaum and his team discovered evidence that the naturalized U.S. citizen had worked during the war as an armed guard in a Neuengamme subcamp.

"This is not something that's going to happen in the short term. This is a long-term project," said White. She noted, for example, the recent conviction of a former Syrian regime intelligence officer in Germany for crimes he committed in Damascus in 2006.

"People travel. So for example, you're having some trials of Syrian regime perpetrators in Germany, because they're there, and then their victims are there, and so they've been able to bring prosecutions against them," said White. Rosenbaum will likely work to guarantee that when the people identified as Russian war criminals travel outside of Russia — which they will do, eventually — they face criminal consequences.

The German prosecution happened as a result of an unlikely coincidence: the victim of the Syrian officer recognized him at a refugee center in Berlin. With Russia, Rosenbaum will have to devote resources to talking to victims, but also to trying to figure out who within the Kremlin bears responsibility for the war crimes.

"You want to be able to prosecute the

people most responsible for the worst damage. But sometimes that's not as easy as it looks. It may not be the commander on the ground. It may be someone in Moscow, sitting in Moscow, who gave an order to carry out an attack in such a way that the collateral damage, even if he didn't mean to kill civilians, many civilians were killed," said Zuroff. "That person in Moscow bears the responsibility." Well, there's not going to be any cooperation from the Russians. So that's one of the difficulties he's going to face."

Rosenbaum acknowledged that the work will happen slowly, and under the radar — even if some of the recent actions of the U.S. and its partners have achieved worldwide attention.

"The recent seizures of superyachts through the work of the DOJ-led interagency Task Force KleptoCapture, work that we do alongside our global partners, understandably garners headlines," he said at the USIP event. "But there is much more, much more, going on behind the scenes as we continue to use all available resources and employ cutting-edge investigative techniques to hold accountable individuals whose criminal actions are enabling Russia's unjust and cruel war against Ukraine."

Ukraine has already begun to try Russian soldiers with war crimes. The first case landed a guilty verdict for a Russian soldier charged with killing a civilian, resulting in a life sentence.

Charging Russians with war crimes

in the American justice system is legally challenging because of jurisdictional issues, although Rosenbaum's team will surely assist Ukrainian prosecutors, too. But the U.S. can only prosecute a person for war crimes if the victim is an American citizen.

The cases that Rosenbaum brought against Nazis did not charge them with war crimes — instead, he worked to remove Nazis who moved to the U.S. after the war, or he assisted other countries on similar extradition matters.

"Eli Rosenbaum's experience is legend by now. I worked with him in the 1990s when I was ambassador-at-large for war crimes issues and helped him occasionally to bring Nazi perpetrators of atrocity crimes to justice, including one who had fled to Argentina and needed to be brought to justice in Croatia," said David Scheffer, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. "He is the consummate professional and his decades of experience hunting Nazi war criminals and ensuring they no longer live freely in the United States prepare him well for the challenge ahead."

The legal logistics and questions of process, investigation and documentation will be figured out in the months and years ahead. But Rosenbaum's goal, he said, is straightforward.

"We have a clear and simple message for anyone who would even consider participating in the commission of war crimes and other grave offenses in Ukraine," Rosenbaum said. "One word: Don't." ♦

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Bill de Blasio says he no longer supports AIPAC and wishes Nina Turner was in Congress

In an interview, de Blasio affirmed his pro-Israel views — including unconditional aid — while distancing himself from the group

By Matthew Kassel

Former New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio is facing scrutiny from local Jewish community leaders over recent comments in which he came out forcefully against AIPAC and said he no longer supports the pro-Israel lobbying group because of

its opposition to a friend and fellow progressive Democrat, Nina Turner, in a Cleveland-area House primary last month.

"They have changed in a way that is unacceptable to me because they have attacked people I believe in," de Blasio, who is

now running for an open seat in New York's redrawn 10th Congressional District, said last Wednesday during a virtual candidate forum hosted by Our Revolution and the New York Progressive Action Network.

The attacks against Turner from a new AIPAC-affiliated super PAC, United

Democracy Project, were “horribly unjustified” and “deprived our nation of someone who could have been a huge difference-maker in terms of our progressive movement,” de Blasio argued.

The ex-mayor’s remarks were a sharp turn away from previous instances in which he has defended AIPAC, made public appearances at AIPAC events and spoken at its policy conference, even as some Democrats have distanced themselves from the group in recent years. De Blasio has long identified as a staunch supporter of Israel and has maintained close ties to Jewish community members in New York City throughout his decades-long career in politics.

But his comments at the forum have raised concerns among Jewish community activists who are questioning whether his Middle East foreign policy views will remain consistent if he is elected to the House — or if he now aligns with Turner on such issues. The former Ohio state senator and presidential campaign surrogate for Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT) was defeated last month in a primary rematch against freshman Rep. Shontel Brown (D-OH) that drew more than a million dollars in outside spending from pro-Israel groups over Turner’s alignment with the Squad and her support for conditioning U.S. aid to Israel, among other things.

In an interview with *Jewish Insider* on Sunday afternoon, de Blasio stuck to his remarks but was otherwise quick to clarify that he remains a strong supporter of Israel and will continue to stand up for the Jewish state in Congress. “I have a tremendous sense of personal loyalty to the Jewish community. I have a tremendous sense of personal loyalty to the State of Israel and support for the State of Israel. But I also have real personal loyalty to Nina Turner as a friend,” he explained. “That doesn’t mean I agree with every statement that she’s made.”

“From my point of view, I know what I believe in,” de Blasio continued in a phone conversation. “I believe in supporting Israel and providing the defense support that Israel needs. From my understanding, Nina Turner thinks aid should be conditioned. I disagree with that. I think we have to protect Israel.”

De Blasio insisted that he “can

simultaneously be a very proud progressive and a very proud supporter of Israel and opponent of BDS,” using the abbreviation for the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement targeting the Jewish state. “I don’t see any contradiction.”

“I believe Israel is a progressive idea, because it is the expression of that core progressive value of stopping oppression, discrimination, bigotry and violence,” he added. “Israel is a response to two millennia of state-sponsored violence against the Jewish people in multiple continents, and so when you think about that history, and you say, ‘OK, now a homeland is created to address that history,’ that’s inherently progressive. That is, to me, as core to my values as anything I could imagine, and I would like people in that homeland to live in peace, which is why I believe there needs to be a structural solution with a two-state solution.”

De Blasio’s efforts to clarify his comments come as he seeks to shore up support from Jewish community leaders in Brooklyn, particularly in the heavily Orthodox Brooklyn neighborhood of Borough Park, which sits in the new 10th District. Last week, after meeting with Jewish leaders in Borough Park, de Blasio apologized for a 2020 tweet in which he had singled out the Jewish community for violating social distancing protocols at the beginning of the pandemic.

David Greenfield, a former New York City councilman who serves as the CEO of the Met Council, said in an interview with *JJ* that he was “surprised by” de Blasio’s comments at the candidate forum last Wednesday, not least because the ex-mayor “has a long history of being supportive of Israel.”

“That’s why I’m willing to give him the benefit of the doubt to clarify what it is that he meant,” Greenfield added. “I think that there are not a lot of federal issues that speak strongly to the Borough Park portion of this district, but there’s no doubt that any candidate’s support of Israel is going to be a litmus test for whether or not that candidate gets the support of the Borough Park Jewish community.”

De Blasio is among 15 candidates vying for the Democratic nomination in the Aug. 23 primary, including Rep. Mondaire Jones (D-

NY), state Assemblywomen Yuh-Line Niou and Jo Anne Simon, City Councilwoman Carlina Rivera and attorney Dan Goldman.

The former mayor said he has reached out to a number of Orthodox leaders in the district, which includes Lower Manhattan as well as such Brooklyn neighborhoods as Park Slope, Cobble Hill and Sunset Park. “I certainly am going to work hard to earn their support,” de Blasio told *JJ*. “I don’t presume. I don’t have a prediction for you. I just know that these are very long-standing relationships.”

“My support for Israel and opposition to BDS is something I feel profoundly, and it’s very personal,” de Blasio said. “It’s very personal based on relationships I’ve developed and stories I’ve heard and learned from people about their own families. If you spend time in Borough Park, you will spend time with many families who lost members during the Holocaust. I’ve met many, many Holocaust survivors, and it is part of why, to me, the resurgence of antisemitism around the world, I don’t take it idly. I see it as a profound threat, because when you spend time with people who are victims of it in our lifetime, in that recent history, it’s not abstract.”

As for his long-standing relationship with AIPAC, de Blasio reiterated that he had no interest in courting support from the bipartisan advocacy group, which recently launched a political action committee and a super PAC as part of its first foray into campaign politics.

“For many years, I had a good relationship with AIPAC, and I would like to see them go back to being a less partisan, more inclusive organization,” he said, criticizing the group’s recent involvement in a number of Democratic primaries where United Democracy Project has opposed progressive candidates who have been critical of Israel. “To see them get in the middle of primaries, I think, is counterproductive, and I think it doesn’t build more support, which I thought was the idea.”

De Blasio said “there is widespread support for Israel in the Democratic Party and the Republican Party,” and argued that “we should all work together to build that support.”

“What I would urge is, let’s look for more unity,” he added, noting that he had recently

taken a closer look at Turner's Middle East foreign policy positions and appreciated that she had expressed support for Israel and opposed BDS. "That's a really good starting point. Now, that doesn't mean you have to agree with her on everything else. That doesn't mean I don't have areas of disagreement with her, which I've spoken to her about. But I think my advice to AIPAC is, expand the tent, don't make it smaller."

Marshall Wittmann, a spokesperson for AIPAC, suggested in a statement to JI that de Blasio's comments were misguided.

"It is unfortunate that Bill de Blasio has not been consistent in his commitment to the pro-Israel cause and his past support for our work to strengthen the U.S.-Israel relationship," he said. "He has now reversed course and is taking the side of those who would weaken our alliance with Israel. We

will not be deterred in our efforts to support pro-Israel candidates – including scores of progressives and candidates of color – and oppose those who are detractors."

But de Blasio rejected such arguments. "What I know, which is morally grounded, is I'll fight for Israel every time," he told JI. "It's who I am, it's who I've been and I will continue to be." ♦

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Entrée's Eyal pushed start-ups to raise cash quickly, slash expenses

Israeli VC founder invests in the Gulf, sees use of artificial intelligence everywhere, expects little damage to tech from government's collapse

By Jonathan H. Ferziger

This article first appeared in The Circuit.

Avi Eyal, co-founder of Israel-based Entrée Capital, said he and his partners have spent the past year trying to prepare cash-burning startups for the economic slowdown that has hit technology businesses around the world.

The venture capital firm, one of the biggest operating in Israel, manages about \$1 billion in assets and has current investments in some 150 companies internationally. His message last year — the most lucrative ever for Israeli technology — was that they should accelerate fundraising efforts and determine where expenses could be reduced.

"We actually went to most of our portfolio companies, and in between June and December, we raised money for the bulk of them," Eyal said in an interview with *The Circuit*. "At the same time, we told all the companies to have a backup plan, have a simulation of how they would cut costs very quickly, and how they would use that money, not to achieve the same growth but to achieve a quarter of their profits or less," he said. "Some did, some didn't."

Born in Israel and raised from age 6 in South Africa, Eyal is an engineer and a serial founder of startups who opened Entrée in 2010 with internet entrepreneur Martin

Moshal, a childhood friend. The firm was an early investor in Monday.com, a maker of workplace management software that held its initial public offering on the Nasdaq a year ago, and fraud-detecting Riskified, which trades on the New York Stock Exchange. Tracking the markets, both have shrunk in value since their 2021 IPOs.

Grow Responsibly

While terming layoffs unfortunate, Eyal noted Israel's shortage of engineers and demand for technology workers, suggesting that the industry is "rightsizing" after getting overextended. "It's not nice to say something is good when people are getting fired and don't have jobs, but it's kind of good on a macro basis. You've got to find the middle ground that's comfortable with people so businesses can grow responsibly."

Recently, Entrée has been investing in the Gulf, deepening relationships with Mubadala, the \$284 billion Abu Dhabi sovereign wealth fund, and other Emirati businesses, after starting quietly before the September 2020 Abraham Accords normalized ties with Israel. Among them are Hala, a UAE insurance tech startup whose early funding round was led by Entrée, and Tarabut Gateway, an open banking platform based in Bahrain.

"We were one of those spearheading the tech investments in the Emirates," Eyal said,

speaking at his office in the startup hub of Herzliya, near the beach north of Tel Aviv. "It gave us exposure into what they were seeing (from the Gulf), and started creating relationships, which kind of really worked for us right at the beginning."

Governments come and go

As the collapse of Israel's coalition government sets up the fifth national election in three years, Eyal, 51, said the political instability holds much less of a threat to technology companies than the prospect of recession in the U.S., where many seek to raise money.

"Governments come and go, and I don't think it has any impact on the technology space," he said. "In the long term, the fact that we have unstable governments and the fact that we have extreme governments that are not inclusive, I think that affects the country from a perspective of education and long-term investments, because, you know, every government comes and changes what the previous government did."

Among current investments, Eyal points to the way that artificial intelligence has permeated startup culture and produced innovative products. Darrow.ai, for example, scans publicly available data to detect hidden legal violations. It produces the paperwork to present a case in court and gives lawyers specialized information and

tools.

Bria.ai, another Entrée investment, generates realistic images of people, landscapes and locations that can be used without paying licensing fees to a photo agency. Sensi.ai puts devices in homes to monitor people with illnesses or the elderly who are often helpless when alone. The

device monitors sounds from doors, toilets, showers and other elements to recognize patterns and send alerts when irregularities are detected.

Maybe a Glimmer

Eyal said the fact that Emirati investors are circulating in Tel Aviv and that Saudi

Arabia is investing in funds that finance Israeli startups is fundamentally changing the Middle East, both commercially and politically.

"I think the world is smaller and opening up, and with all the troubles that everyone else has around the world," he said, "maybe there's a glimmer of hope." ♦

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An Emirati 'majlis' spreads out on the National Mall in Washington

This year's Smithsonian Folklife Festival spotlights the culture of the UAE through Mideastern song, colorful tapestries and a falcon on the wrist

By Gabby Deutch

This article first appeared in The Circuit.

On a scorching summer afternoon, tourists from around the world came to relax in the shade of the makeshift wooden *majlis*, Arabic for a sitting room, on the National Mall. The Washington Monument towered in the background.

Children picked up brushes to paint watercolor pictures of flowers, and women sampled natural perfumes from the other side of the world. An Emirati girl who was not yet a teenager held a falcon on her wrist, demonstrating the Bedouin discipline of handling the predatory bird.

The dozens of interactive demonstrations and events were part of this year's Smithsonian Folklife Festival, an annual event that honors "contemporary living cultural traditions and celebrates those who practice and sustain them," according to Smithsonian's website. The 55-year-old event has featured dozens of countries and all 50 U.S. states.

This year's festival, which was originally set to take place in 2020, spotlights the culture of the United Arab Emirates, and more than 90 participants flew in from the UAE to showcase the nation's vibrant, diverse culture. (No special plane was needed for the falconry participants; travelers on Etihad Airways can bring a caged bird with them on the plane.) The festival runs from June 22-27 and again from June 30-July 4.

To the extent that foreigners are familiar with the Persian Gulf nation, home to 10 million people, they probably know about the towering skyscrapers of Dubai, the country's thriving global business hub. But the booths, stages and *majlis* on the Mall aim to showcase something different: the unique, diverse culture of the coastal desert nation in which almost 90% of the inhabitants are expatriates belonging to more than 200 nationalities.

"When [festivalgoers] read about the UAE, they will remember meeting these people, and seeing that they have a warm and relatable experience, and that they will be curious to go to the UAE," said Michele Bambling, the co-curator of the festival and a professor at New York University's campus in Abu Dhabi. "They'll read about the UAE with a sense of this place, of its creativity and its history, of their sense of belonging."

Bambling, an American art historian who has lived in the UAE for 14 years, was tapped for her role after creating an initiative called "Lest We Forget," which collects photographs and oral histories from older Emiratis to document the country's Bedouin past, before it became the modern economic and cultural powerhouse it is today.

"Rather than looking always at the West, why don't you look into your own culture for your art making and to enrich yourselves?" Bambling asked.

The center of the festival is the wooden *majlis*, which is a house-like structure that

contains several comfortable sitting rooms for visitors to walk through and learn about different aspects of UAE culture. In one room, decades-old Arabic music plays on a vintage record player. In the next, a man weaves a detailed, ornate woven tapestry.

Mona Haddad, a young woman mixing scents to create perfumes, learned the craft from her mother. "She learned from *her* mother. Her mother learned from her mother. It's like something that goes through family," Haddad told *The Circuit*.

She used natural ingredients like amber, sandalwood, saffron, rosewood and oud. Haddad dabbed a bit of oil on her fingers and rubbed it behind one visitor's ears, telling her the fresh scent would last for three days.

In storytelling and poetry sessions, participants praised Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, known as the UAE's founding father, who united the seven emirates — distinct territories with separate rules — into a single nation, marking the country's birth in 1971. Sheikh Zayed's son Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan became the third president of the UAE in May.

"I've taken the quote of Sheikh Zayed, 'He who has no past has no present or future,' and I translated it as a mission for my work, to connect people to the past through the medium itself," said Azza Al Qubaisi, an Emirati artist who makes jewelry, sculptures and furniture. At the festival, she had taken thick slices of fiber from a date palm, which children were painting with bright colors.

"The palm used to be our homes. It used to be the fiber of life. That's how we survived in the desert," Al Qubaisi explained. "Today, we're so far away from that old way of living. I still wanted people to appreciate the beauty of the material itself."

Visitors to the festival appeared eager to engage with the crafts and events. At a cooking demonstration, visitors asked detailed questions about how they might cook the preserved fish-and-rice dish at home: "Can we substitute butter for ghee?"

(Yes, but it wouldn't taste as good.) "What if you can't find dried limes?" (Regular limes might work, but specialty grocery stores will probably have what you need.)

At Al Qubaisi's table, it wasn't just the kids who wanted to paint. "It's so interesting to see the parents wanting to jump on the table before the kids," she noted.

Al Qubaisi lives in Abu Dhabi, but she has also lived in Fujairah, a more mountainous city on the Gulf of Oman. She brought her husband, who is Syrian, with her to the

festival.

"I think what we're trying to showcase at this festival is, yes, we're a young country, 50 years old, but our cultural scene is very rich, vibrant and diverse," said Hessa AlShuwaihi, head of communications at the UAE embassy in Washington. "We have UAE residents who are, for example, American, people from the Gulf, people from the Middle East region, but they call the UAE home. And then they came to D.C. to represent the UAE." ♦

JUNE 27, 2022

Second annual Holocaust Survivor Day aims to show appreciation for a dwindling population

Holocaust Survivor Day is meant specifically to celebrate the Jews who survived and to raise awareness for their needs as they age and their numbers dwindle.

By Jay Deitcher

This article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

When she was 5 years old, in 1941, Ella Kagan was forced to leave her home in Moscow and flee east with her family across the Ural Mountains as the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union. Many years later, as she led a tour of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, she overheard teenagers denying it had ever happened.

"Oh, this is probably fake," she heard the teenagers say. "It's impossible. It didn't exist. It is fake. It's an American fake. It's a Jewish fake."

Kagan, now 86, is the founder of the Shalom Education Center, a Russian-Jewish educational center in Rockville, Md. She is sometimes still haunted by nightmares of bombing, sirens and death. The experience of hearing teenagers deny the Holocaust, she said, drove home the conviction that traditional educational curricula teaching about the genocide are insufficient.

"The young generation, not only children, young adults, they are kind of educated, but it's different," she told *eJewishPhilanthropy*. "They know 6 million Jewish people were killed. OK, this is numbers.... They need to

talk to real survivors. We have to share our memories."

Kagan hopes that a series of events held yesterday, June 26, the second annual Holocaust Survivor Day, were a step forward in that effort. Sunday's events saw more than 1,000 survivors participate in ceremonies in Israel, Poland, Australia and several across the United States. Some events will also take place on Monday. As surveys show that large percentages of the millennial and Gen Z generations are unaware of the basic facts of the Holocaust, Kagan hopes the day provided people with the chance to listen to survivors' stories so they could learn a basic lesson: "Do not kill," she said. "Do not kill somebody Jewish. Do not kill Ukrainians or Russians. Do not kill."

In contrast to International Holocaust Remembrance Day in January and Israel's Holocaust Remembrance Day in the spring, Holocaust Survivor Day is meant specifically to celebrate the Jews who survived and to raise awareness for their needs as they age and their numbers dwindle. While 400,000 Holocaust survivors were estimated to be alive in 2019, according to the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, that figure is decreasing. In Israel, for example, where precise records are kept, there are some 161,400 survivors, a decline

of more than 15,500 since last year, and their average age is 85.

"We're really at the end of the rope here with survivors, you know," Mary Jane Rein, the executive director of the Strassler Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Clark University, told *eJP*. "The war ended so many years ago. Anyone we're talking about who is still living today, essentially, were child survivors or teenage survivors.... We say in the Jewish faith, may they live 'till 120. We have a little ways to go if we're going to have survivors live to 120." She feels people need to have a "sense of urgency that if we're going to do something we need to do it now."

Rein feels Holocaust Survivor Day is akin to Mother's Day. Just as mothers should be appreciated every day of the year, she said, so should survivors. But the day of commemoration places a special focus on them. "I don't think anyone would disagree that we should be thinking of aging survivors on a regular basis and doing all that we can as a community to ensure that they are cared for and that they can live out their last years in dignity."

Whether that goal is being met is a different story. According to Israeli reports, roughly a quarter of Israeli survivors live in poverty, while the number rises to a third in the United States, according to the Blue

Card, a group that aids survivors in need. Rein believes people need to do whatever they can to raise awareness about the needs of survivors around the world. She recommended “making certain that their most basic needs, food and medicine, is being provided, and, in addition to that, just [paying] attention to the problem of loneliness.”

Holocaust Survivor Day is a grassroots initiative first launched in 2021 by the Jewish Community Center in Krakow, Poland, which chose June 26 because it's the birthday of Marian Turski, a prominent Polish Holocaust survivor who is now 96. The JCC has since partnered with the World Zionist Organization, Seed the Dream Foundation, The Jewish Federations of North America and more than 60 other international partners. While last year's inaugural event was mostly online, this year's included many in-person events, including a marquee event Sunday at the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum in northern Israel, and another being held on Monday morning at Habima Theater in Tel Aviv that will feature Israeli President Isaac Herzog and Diaspora Affairs Minister Nachman

Shai. The Tel Aviv event will also feature a play titled “The Avengers: a Love Story,” based on the Jewish brigade that enlisted in the British military to hunt Nazis and their collaborators, and which fought in Italy in 1945.

“Holocaust Survivor Day is a day to recognize these survivors for doing exactly what they're doing: for living, for surviving, for persisting, for teaching us the example of what it means to live a life of love, what it means to overcome hate,” said Shelley Rood Wernick, managing director for the Center on Holocaust Survivor Care and Institute on Aging and Trauma at The Jewish Federations of North America. “We have learned about many Holocaust survivors who have made absolutely incredible contributions to humanity... and I just want to highlight and celebrate them and also their peers who maybe don't have the famous names, who are Holocaust educators, who are volunteers, and continue to painstakingly tell their stories, so that the world may learn and history not repeat itself.”

Rein worries that the world is not learning the Holocaust's lesson — and that

fear is backed up by data. A 2020 survey by the Claims Conference found that one in 10 Americans younger than 40 thought Jews caused the Holocaust, and only 37% knew 6 million Jews were killed.

“I hate to say this as someone who works for an educational institution,” she said, “but in response to rising levels of education, we also have rising levels of intolerance and denial.” She struggles with the idea that the growing number of Holocaust educational initiatives also lead to pushback from extremists.

“Is more awareness helping or is it hurting?” she asked. “I feel very pessimistic about the future unfortunately. And you think about it from the perspective of survivors; it must be so frustrating.”

But she sees hope in Holocaust Survivor Day. “Maybe just helping someone to get a good square meal and to have a conversation is the best that we can do,” she said. “Call a survivor or hug a survivor. Tell them that you're thinking about them. And do that more than just on Holocaust Survivors Day. Do it on a regular basis.” ♦

JUNE 29, 2022

As cost of living rises, Israel's latest tent protests fizzle out amid political chaos

The tents that heralded a widespread social justice movement in 2011 failed to gain traction even as Israelis still struggle to make ends meet

By Melanie Lidman

This article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

For Sigal Cohen, last week in Tel Aviv was a blast from the past: colorful tents lining each side of the leafy Rothschild Boulevard, strangers dropping off all manner of free food — from plums to Deep River Zesty Jalapeno potato chips — idealistic activists typing furiously into cell phones to organize an upcoming protest.

It felt just like a miniature version of the massive demonstrations, popularly

known as the social justice protests, that swept the country in 2011, even though the tents themselves stayed on Rothschild for just a week. The set of young activists was different, but after 11 years, the same frustration over Israel's high cost of living remained.

“Your income will never match your rent here,” said Cohen, a mother of four from Eilat who traveled north to Tel Aviv last week to pitch her tent on Rothschild last week, one of the city's central thoroughfares and a prime hangout spot for the city's youthful denizens, lined with street cafes, grassy banks and restaurants.

Cohen was active in the 2011 tent protests and a number of demonstrations for housing and disability rights in the intervening years. “Everything is so expensive,” she told *eJewishPhilanthropy*. “But we are here to speak the truth, and no one can squash us.”

In 2011, tents stretched along the entire length of Rothschild, which became a temporary urban encampment with rules and norms, puppet shows, nightly lectures and even a dating service. The seven-week protest saw thousands of tents occupied at dozens of sites around the country, filled with people angry at the stressful economic situation. It culminated with the largest

demonstration ever seen in Israel, in which almost half a million people took to the streets in a single night, demanding more affordable housing, better childcare options and more social services.

Eleven years later, economic indicators show that in some ways, things have only gotten worse: inflation is at 4%, part of global inflationary pressures and the highest in Israel since 2011. Housing prices have increased by 16% in the past year. Even fresh vegetables, a staple of the Israeli diet and identity, are up by 5.5%. In Tel Aviv, the average rent has increased by 10% just since the beginning of the year.

But while the tent protests in 2011 made demands of a relatively stable government led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who would go on to serve for nearly another decade, this year the protests have to contend with a perpetually chaotic political system. Days after the first tents went up, Israel's government announced that it would dissolve after one year, leading to the fifth round of elections since 2019. So if the protests continue, it's unclear who exactly they will be protesting against.

At least one major organization that was active in the 2011 protests, the Histadrut, Israel's General Federation of Labor, is waiting to see what will happen with the political uncertainty.

"We're going to take our time and work smartly to make sure we can make a difference," Histadrut spokesman Yaniv Levy told eJP. "It's hard now because a lot of the things we work on are all about budgets, and when there's no government, there's no budget, and it's hard to take care of these things."

Levy said he doesn't expect the current tent protests to grow much larger because the social and political situation is different this time around. "In 2011, we didn't have this political chaos that we've been in for years," he said. "But if the candidates, and it doesn't matter which party they're from, don't take enough action on the cost of living issue, we will go back out into the streets."

Not everyone takes that view. Yonatan Freeman, a political science lecturer at Hebrew University, thinks the elections, which are expected to take place in the fall, could provide a platform for the activists to inspire real change.

"One of the goals for the organizers of these initiatives is to try to make these issues a main part of the election season," said Freeman. Israel's four recent rounds of elections were dominated by personality politics rather than issues, he said.

"It was, 'vote for me because I'm not him,' or 'it's either Netanyahu, or those against him,'" he said. Freeman's hope is that during the impending election season, parties will run on substance.

"If more parties will be talking about 'vote for me and I'll do something about it,' the discussion is more issue-based, more based upon what's affecting daily life," he said. Freeman also pointed out that inflation is not a problem unique to Israel. Instead of saying, "What's happening is that there must be someone to blame and we have to think about who it is," Freeman said, protesters should "focus on, how does Israel prepare for this continuing storm? What can we do?"

The high cost of living is an issue that affects everyone across party lines, a rare point that unites a deeply divided Israeli public. Before the government collapsed, protest tents popped up in a number of Israeli cities, including Beersheva, Holon and Pardes Hana, as residents tired of ballooning costs gave voice to their frustration.

Although activists in Tel Aviv packed up the tents after a week due to pressure from the municipality and their inability to secure a permit from the courts, they are continuing to organize. More than 20,000 people have expressed interest on Facebook for a protest planned for July 2 in Tel Aviv against the high cost of housing.

But the activists on Rothschild said they were completely unwilling to cooperate with any politicians, whom they blame for getting them into the current situation in the first place.

"There's been no change from 2011 and it's only gotten worse," said a protester named Rafi, who declined to give his last name and said he has been struggling with homelessness off and on for eight years. Rafi moved into the Rothschild protest camp last week. "It's really a catastrophe, things are getting much more expensive," he added. "But the change won't come from the government, it will only come from the people."

Yochai Yaoz, a protester who was also

active in the 2011 demonstrations as a high school student, said current activists are worried about people hijacking their message for personal political gain. He cited Itzik Shmuli and Stav Shaffir, two central voices in the 2011 protests who went on to become members of Knesset for the Labor party, a phenomenon the activists want to avoid this time around.

"Something needs to change in the conversation, but we don't want any support from any organizations or politicians. We want this change to come from the bottom," he said. "We don't want anyone taking advantage of our message, taking advantage of this wave of support for their own gain."

Any time someone in their WhatsApp organizing group is identified as a party activist, they are immediately removed, Yaoz said, no matter what party they're from. He said some activists met briefly with Daphni Leef, the instigator of the 2011 protest, when she came to visit on their first day on Rothschild. But they don't want to work with any other organizations or activists from 2011.

"A lot of people are skeptical that we'll be able to do anything because of [such high hopes from] 2011," said Yaoz. "There's a lot of exhaustion. But things are starting to explode."

The feeling appears to be mutual: Organizations that were active in 2011, like the Histadrut, aren't running to embrace the new tent protest and are taking a more cautious approach.

The National Union of Israeli Students (NUIS) was another one of the central organizations in the 2011 protest, and university students were leaders in most of the local tent encampments across the country. Since 2011, NUIS has worked in close connection with lawmakers, parliamentary finance committees and activists on several initiatives to make higher education more attainable and increase affordable housing for students. The union has pushed forward initiatives to build more dorms, increase scholarships for students in need and a unique initiative called "We Live Here," matching students who need housing with elderly people who want to stay in their homes but need support.

"We are really looking at how we can contribute to the day-to-day conversation of

what is needed, how we can help students who are on the brink,” said a spokesperson for the NUIS.

The organization is currently in talks with partners and local leaders to figure out the best way to advocate for students during the current situation, with both the elections and the tent protests. “It’s certainly an opportunity to bring issues to

the forefront that are relevant for students,” the spokesperson added.

The activists living in the tents on Rothschild aren’t banking on the election to give them the momentum to ignite the same kind of movement that swept the country 11 years ago. They’re hoping that anger is enough to get people out into the streets.

“At first, I was skeptical about [these

protests],” said Cohen. “But I hear this buzz is happening. It’s already happening in so many cities.”

She added, “And it’s a good thing I’m here. I’m teaching the young kids how to protest. The other day I did a demonstration to show them how to stop traffic. You know, someone has to show them how to do this.” ♦

JUNE 29, 2022

Aspen Ideas Festival convenes again, with philanthropy on the agenda

The themes of the festival this year are heat, power, connection, trust, money, and beauty

By Ben Sales

This article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

It’s summer, which means that a broad spectrum of prominent voices on anything from politics to economics to healthcare to philanthropy have gathered in Colorado for the Aspen Ideas Festival. The festival, which is fully in person at the eponymous ski resort town for the first time since before the pandemic, began on Saturday and runs for the whole week.

The themes of the festival this year are heat, power, connection, trust, money, and beauty, and programming is interspersed with offerings such as hikes through the mountains or bird-watching. A range of A-list names will be discussing those topics — from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky (virtually), former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Sens. Rob Portman (R-OH) and Michael Bennet (D-CO) to former Google CEO Eric Schmidt and former Disney CEO Michael Eisner.

Prominent Jewish names in attendance, in addition to Eisner and Bennet, include Colorado Gov. Jared Polis, Atlantic editor-in-chief Jeffrey Goldberg, Politico executive editor Dafna Linzer and Anti-Defamation League CEO Jonathan Greenblatt. But while Goldberg will be speaking, the Atlantic is no longer a sponsor of the festival, as it had been in previous years. Instead, the media

sponsor is NBCU News Group.

The festival’s panels discuss topics ranging from climate change to COVID-19 to the future of democracy, but one of its emphases is the way money operates in the present day. Just at the beginning of the week alone, there have been sessions on trust in private business, the reliability (or lack thereof) of cryptocurrency and the role of business in protecting democracy.

At a panel on Monday called “Philanthropy’s Role in Systems Change,” three leaders of philanthropic foundations discussed how philanthropy can shape the world and how it must respond to inequalities. Jen Ford Reedy, president of the Minnesota-based Bush Foundation, pointed out that the recent Supreme Court decision on abortion is an indirect product of a philanthropic grant given decades ago to launch the conservative Federalist Society.

“Foundations are changing the world and changing our lives around us, and we don’t always see it,” she said. “In a week like we just had where we had really really big national developments, Supreme Court decisions, it’s an opportunity to actually see what difference does philanthropy make and how are foundations affecting our direction as a country.”

Rodney Foxworth, the CEO of Common Future, which aims to make the economy more inclusive, said that part of changing systems involves empowering marginalized

people to make funding decisions. “These are individuals that are most proximate, that have the most impact, that have developed expertise because of their lived experiences. So how do we actually make sure that they have power, how do we give up power, how do we share power?”

The third panelist, Walton Family Foundation Executive Director Caryl Stern, said philanthropy’s greatest strength is its ability to bring people together, which she said exhibited itself in the way foundations responded to COVID-19. “The power that we bring to the table that is exceptional for the foundation world is that we can be the conveners,” she said, “There’s an opportunity to bring like-minded organizations together very easily, but there’s also the opportunity to bring unlike together. We have to stop thinking of work exclusively within our sector.” ♦