

THE WEEKLY PRINT

Daniel Silva paints a new picture for Gabriel Allon; Walter Russell Mead on the 'insanity' that led him to write a new book on American support for Israel; Sean Patrick Maloney pursues the mainstream lane in matchup against Biaggi; Striking a balance at the Western Wall; Jason Kander joins 'Limited Liability Podcast'; Saudi art show examines the impact of change on the places people love; and An Israeli aid group is now working inside Ukraine's borders — in partnership with the first lady.

JULY 14, 2022

Daniel Silva paints a new picture for Gabriel Allon

The bestselling spy novelist talks to Jewish Insider about his writing process, chronicling current events and the controversy that comes with creating an Israeli protagonist

By Gabby Deutch

Israel's leading spy doesn't make it to the top of the Mossad without making a few enemies.

The same could be said for Daniel Silva, the New York Times bestselling author whose iconic protagonist, Israeli spy chief Gabriel Allon, will soon return to bookshelves.

Silva's 25th novel, *Portrait of an Unknown Woman*, features a recently retired Allon — for real this time, or so he says — who escapes a brush with death that involved a QAnon adherent in Washington, D.C. In the series' latest installment, Allon leans into his spy cover as an art restorer, traversing Europe to investigate and expose an art forgery ring. This time, he's a freelancer, and not an Israeli agent.

The latest release comes a year after Silva's previous novel, which featured a not-so-subtle Jan. 6-like attack on the U.S. Capitol and other similarities to American current events, sparking a wave of vicious online reviews from some political conservatives. But Silva said the vitriol comes with the territory.

"If your character is an Israeli intelligence officer, I mean, from the get-go you're controversial, and your character's controversial. His very existence offends a

subset of readers," Silva told *Jewish Insider*. "To be honest with you, I thought it was going to be worse than it actually was."

The original Gabriel Allon novel, *The Kill Artist*, which was published in 2000, also delved into current events — in that book, Allon was going after a Palestinian terrorist who was radicalized by the Oslo peace process — as has every book in between.

"The series has moved roughly in sync with real time, and real-world events formed the backdrop upon which these stories are set. And that includes changes in administration in Washington," said Silva, who lived in the nation's capital for decades. "For better or worse, the Gabriel Allon series has really chronicled these tumultuous first two decades of this century, of this millennium. It's been 9/11, the rise of jihadism, the rise and fall of ISIS, the rise of Putin and Putinism. It's been a tumultuous, chaotic period."

Earlier in his life, Silva documented some of these trends as a Cairo-based journalist who covered the Middle East and the Persian Gulf. He met his wife, Jamie Gangel, a CNN special correspondent who has lately been a fixture of the network's recent coverage of the congressional Jan. 6 hearings, while they were covering the Iran-

Iraq war in the 1980s.

He mostly covered Arab countries during his reporting days: "It was hard to go back and forth in those days," he said of why his Mideast coverage rarely took him to Israel. But, he added, "I was issued a second passport by the State Department that I could use to travel to Israel to keep the stamps out of the passport that I used in the Arab world, because if you had any Israeli entrance visas, you could get off a plane at a place and be turned around."

Silva, 62, was born in Michigan and raised in California's San Joaquin Valley. The high-stakes, often violent politics of the 1960s made an impression on him when he was young. "I remember as a child, waking up one morning and Martin Luther King was dead. And then a few weeks later, waking up and Robert Kennedy was dead and the city centers were burning, and the war in Vietnam," Silva said. "I just grew up in a house that was in tune with what was going on."

He grew up Catholic, but converted to Judaism after meeting Gangel. Being Jewish "is an important part of our life," Silva said, though he declined to share more — he told *Ji* his connection to religion is private.

Religion, and Judaism in particular, is

also a huge part of the Gabriel Allon novels. The long shadow of the Holocaust hangs over the spy and every mission he completes, as well as the work of the Mossad and Allon's Israeli colleagues. "I write about it with great sensitivity, and with great passion and with purpose, and I take it incredibly seriously," Silva said of his approach to the Holocaust. "Gabriel Allon stands at the intersection of a lot of my things that I'm passionate about: the Holocaust, the Second World War, the formation of the State of Israel, Middle East politics." Former President George W. Bush appointed Silva to the United States Holocaust Memorial Council, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum's governing body, a position he held for five years.

Silva writes about the venerable Israeli spy agency with awe and admiration. *Portrait of an Unknown Woman* begins with a brief tour of Allon's goodbye parties in Israel, including one that is attended by an Emirati diplomat — a hint to the regional

changes brought about by the Abraham Accords. Silva credits the Mossad with the real-world shift.

"I would say there would be no Abraham Accords if it wasn't for a lot of the security arrangements and long-standing ties that Mossad has fostered with these — both the frontline states, like Jordan and Egypt, and obviously, the Gulf states," he explained.

Now, he has many friends in the Mossad and among retired agents. But Silva did not talk to anyone in the Mossad before publishing his first Gabriel Allon novel, guessing that Israeli spies wouldn't be thrilled to talk to an American novelist. "Better than to come knock on the door of the Mossad and say, 'Hi there,'" he recalled, he read every book on the agency and spoke to journalists who covered espionage.

The research process for Silva is meticulous, he said, and usually involves schlepping his kids — less so during the pandemic and now that his twins are out of

the house — to far-flung destinations like Morocco or Russia. Like his protagonist, Silva doesn't do downtime well.

"I don't sleep much," he said. "Four hours is a biggie for me."

Portrait of an Unknown Woman features a newly relaxed Allon enjoying semi-retirement in Venice. Perhaps similarly, Silva and Gangel recently decamped from Washington to South Florida. But he doesn't plan to be a snowbird: Retirement is not on the horizon for Silva, and probably not for Allon, either, although Silva does have ideas for Allon-less books he might get to one day. (He never expected the Israeli spy he introduced in 2000 to be with him more than two decades later.)

"As I get older, each decision about what to write next is a little more prolonged," he noted. "But as I said, I settle on something and then I never look back. Never ever."

Silva is already a few pages into his next book. ♦

JULY 13, 2022

Walter Russell Mead on the 'insanity' that led him to write a new book on American support for Israel

Mead's book, The Arc of a Covenant, documents American attitudes towards Israel and Zionism over more than a century

By Jacob Miller

For a remote country with a relatively small — but growing — economy, Israel engenders surprisingly sharp feelings in America's national discourse. In a new book, foreign policy analyst Walter Russell Mead offers a comprehensive narrative about American support for Israel over the past two and a half centuries while assessing how Americans view Israel today.

Mead's latest book, *The Arc of a Covenant: The United States, Israel, and the Fate of the Jewish People*, joins a growing bookshelf of literature about the connection between the two nations. Yet unlike other books, Mead does not focus only on policy, Jewish attitudes or recent history; his goal is to dispel common myths about American support for Israel by chronicling Americans' attitudes about Zionism — and later about

the State of Israel — going back more than a century.

The impetus for Mead's book came during the George W. Bush administration, when the *Wall Street Journal* columnist became disgruntled with Bush critics insinuating that Jewish interests were running foreign policy and that "the neoconservatives were part of a Jewish cabal."

"It's insanity to blame a president who[m] the majority of Jews voted against and the majority of Jewish giving went against, and say he's carrying out the Jewish pro-Israel agenda because of the financial power of Jews," Mead told *Jewish Insider* in an interview on Tuesday. "This is literal insanity."

According to Mead, who is the James Clarke Chace Professor of Foreign Affairs and Humanities at Bard College and edited

The American Interest magazine, antisemitic stereotypes about Jewish control extend globally and pushed him to write the book.

"This persistent belief that 'the Jews' run America is actually incredibly widespread, not just in the Middle East, but surprisingly sophisticated people in Europe can think this way, [as do] people in Africa, [and] Latin America," he said.

By honestly grappling with historical evidence, Mead traces support for Israel back to strategic realities and political calculations concerning American political sentiment.

He explains how pluralistic ideals that grew out of the Protestant Reformation paved the way for Christian support of Zionism, and how later, in the early days of Israel's statehood, liberal concerns for Jewish refugees translated into left-wing

support for Israel.

Mead contends that Jewish support for Israel has not been the decisive factor driving America's close alliance with the Jewish state.

"The three presidents who have been most widely associated with the U.S.-Israel relationship — Richard Nixon, who basically formed the alliance back in the '70s; George W. Bush and the war on terror; and Donald Trump, most recently — were all bitterly unpopular among American Jews," he said.

"If your goal in life was to be a politician who raised money from American Jews for your campaigns, actually your best method would be to run around denouncing settlements in the West Bank and [former Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu, [and] calling for the United States to do more to pressure Israel," Mead added. "Most American Jews are actually to the left on most issues."

What started as a short explainer about the U.S.-Israel relationship evolved into a 585-page history book shedding light on the context for American perspectives on Israel.

"You can't understand the contemporary politics, I think, of our Israel policy without understanding the kind of cultural mindset that guides a lot of people in the United States whether or not they're even consciously aware of it," Mead, who is 70, explained.

In the book, Mead also examines the "cyclical" history of American antisemitism,

which was prominent during the Civil War, and then began rising again during the 1880s, peaking during World War II, and has again witnessed a revival over the past several years.

"At moments of national crisis, you do get these expressions of antisemitism," he explained.

When writing the book, Mead envisioned a large and diverse audience.

"People who are interested in American foreign policy, people who are interested in Israel, people who are interested generally in history, people who are interested about the Jewish experience in the United States — frankly, I hope everybody is an audience for the book," he said.

Mead's book was released days before President Joe Biden is set to travel to the Middle East for the first time during his presidency, in a trip that will include visits to both Israel and Saudi Arabia.

The trip, according to Mead, is a "reversal of Biden's earlier Middle East policy."

Breaking from the president's earlier approach, which focused on holding Saudi Arabia accountable for its human rights abuses and unsuccessfully cajoling Iran into compliance with the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, Biden is now reengaging America's Middle East allies, in part in the hopes of driving down energy prices, which have soared in recent months.

"His big problem is that the price of energy is killing him in the polls, and second

to that, the plan with Iran does not appear to be working," Mead explained.

The visit will also allow Biden to promote warming relations between Israel and the Gulf states.

"President Biden has a huge opportunity to build the kind of regional alignment that would have been the dream of every American president going back to the end of WWII — a Middle East partnership that's aligned with American core interests," Mead said, referencing reports that the U.S. is helping broker an air-defense alliance among Middle Eastern states opposed to Iran.

Mead expressed cautious optimism about future relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel, noting the mutual economic interests for both countries that would come with closer relations, but also acknowledged the "old Wahabi Saudi philosophy" that is antagonistic to Israel still remains.

Biden's trip to the region occurs against the backdrop of Israeli political turmoil, weeks after the governing coalition fractured, triggering a new round of elections, which will be held in November.

"I think it's fairly clear that the Biden administration would prefer a non-Likud government to win, and so this will likely make Biden look for all the ways he can support that side in the campaign," Mead said. "[He will try] to make it a good trip, reducing and eliminating any sense of pressure." ♦

JULY 14, 2022

Sean Patrick Maloney pursues the mainstream lane in matchup against Biaggi

The Hudson Valley congressman criticized Alessandra Biaggi for accepting the endorsements of pro-BDS officials

By Matthew Kassel

Facing a primary challenge from his left, Rep. Sean Patrick Maloney (D-NY), the chairman of the House Democratic campaign arm, is touting his "unwavering support for the Jewish community and for Israel" as he seeks reelection in a newly drawn Hudson Valley congressional district with a

sizable and politically active Jewish voting bloc.

"I'm not going to ask for support from anybody who doesn't support Israel, and I'm not going to play footsie with people who would support BDS or undermine the security of Israel," Maloney said in a recent interview with *Jewish Insider*, referring

to the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement targeting the Jewish state. "I never have. I never will."

The implication was that his Democratic opponent, state Sen. Alessandra Biaggi, has engaged in such maneuvering, owing in part to her connections with left-leaning Democrats in Albany who have backed

BDS. More recently, she has drawn support from some federal elected officials who have spoken out against Israel, most notably Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY), who endorsed Biaggi's campaign last month.

For her part, Biaggi has sought to clarify that she disagrees with Ocasio-Cortez on Middle East policy, even if they are otherwise largely aligned on domestic issues. "I have consistently said, and I will consistently say here, too, that I support Israel," the 36-year-old state senator said in an interview with JI in June. "I support it, not *despite* being a progressive, but *because* I am progressive."

Still, with those reassurances yet to be tested at the congressional level, Maloney, who has held office since 2013, suggested that his progressive rival is building a coalition that could ultimately prove untenable if she is elected to the House. "You're going to have to ask her how she's going to balance owing them her election because of their strong support, and then disagreeing with them on so many issues that she says she feels differently about," Maloney said. "I think there are tough questions for my opponent to answer."

On the other hand, Maloney claimed, his own record requires no similar level of scrutiny as he competes for a sixth term in New York's reconstituted 17th Congressional District, the voting population of which represents only about a quarter of his previous constituency. "People won't have to worry about me," he told JI.

Former Rep. Nita Lowey (D-NY), a pro-Israel stalwart who retired from the district last year after more than three decades in the House, backed up his assessment. In a statement to JI, she offered her enthusiastic endorsement of Maloney's campaign, describing the five-term congressman as "an invaluable partner" who "has been a leader on issues of national security and an unwavering supporter of our allies, including Israel."

The 55-year-old congressman "has been responsive on issues of concern to the Jewish community, including efforts to combat antisemitism in the Hudson Valley, across New York and around the world," Lowey added. "Sean is a powerful representative for the Hudson Valley and New York State, and we should keep him in Congress."

With just over a month remaining until

the Aug. 23 primary, the hotly contested Democratic matchup has emerged as one of the latest fronts in an ongoing proxy battle between the party's activist and establishment wings. But while several recent showdowns have featured sharp divisions over Israel, the Hudson Valley race is playing out along somewhat different lines.

On paper, at least, the two opponents both seem to share a mainstream Democratic lane on Israel, even if Maloney is the only candidate who has dealt directly with Middle East issues at the federal level.

Each supports continued U.S. military aid to Israel as well as additional funding for Israel's Iron Dome missile-defense system. They also back efforts to expand the Abraham Accords, which established diplomatic relations between Israel and several Arab nations. Both have opposed BDS. While Maloney has visited Israel a number of times as an elected official, Biaggi is now coordinating her first trip with a group of Jewish leaders in her state Senate district, though a spokesperson for her campaign could not confirm the exact date of the excursion, which has yet to be finalized.

Speaking with JI, however, Maloney went further than his opponent on at least one policy point. Not to be outdone, it seemed, he advocated for increasing the \$38 billion in U.S. aid to Israel that is guaranteed in a 10-year memorandum of understanding between the two countries signed during the Obama administration, offering a fairly unique policy position that he does not appear to have expressed publicly before. "I'm a member of the House Intelligence Committee," Maloney explained, "and I am laser-focused on the very real threats to Israel from the Iranian nuclear program and from terrorist groups."

Like most Democrats, Biaggi has said she will support continued security assistance to Israel, in contrast with some of her supporters in the House who have pressed for conditioning aid, such as Ocasio-Cortez and Rep. Jamaal Bowman (D-NY).

Even as Biaggi has endeavored to neutralize an awkward tension at the center of her Middle East policy platform, her affiliation with some activists who support policies that are critical of Israel

has remained difficult to shake. Earlier this week, one of her closest allies in the state legislature, Assemblywoman Yuh-Line Niou, came out in favor of BDS in an interview with JI, prompting a New York lawmaker to revoke his endorsement. Niou is currently running for Congress in a redrawn district covering parts of Manhattan and Brooklyn.

Not with standing such associations, Maloney alleged that his opponent has otherwise championed policies that are too extreme for the 17th District, which is rated "lean Democratic" by *The Cook Political Report*, a nonpartisan elections forecaster. The first-time House candidate is "a strong, capable, professional politician" who "comes from a political dynasty," Maloney said, alluding to her late grandfather, Mario, who was a longtime Bronx congressman. "She's very good at this, but her policies are ultra-left."

Past statements in which Biaggi has expressed support for defunding the police, a phrase the state senator says she has stopped using, will be "a tough sell," Maloney argued, in what he described as a "conservative" district. "My overriding focus is on holding the House of Representatives," he told JI. "As chair of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, I am working as hard as I know how to keep extreme and dangerous MAGA-style Republicans from controlling the House."

Michael Lawler, a state assemblyman in Rockland County, is expected to win the Republican primary nomination and advance to the general election in November.

While Maloney said he did "not fully understand" Biaggi's "motivations" for entering the race, he acknowledged that "she has every right to run, and I'm going to go out and make my case to the voters."

Biaggi, who represents portions of the Bronx and Westchester County, has often made her reasons clear. The state senator had initially entered the race for a House seat that will soon be vacated by outgoing Rep. Tom Suozzi (D-NY), until the finalization of New York's congressional map drew her out of the 3rd District, which had mostly covered Long Island.

In mid-May, Biaggi announced that she would instead try to unseat Maloney, motivated by his controversial decision to run in a neighboring district that had been

held by freshman Rep. Mondaire Jones (D-NY), who is now pursuing a second term in New York City. The maneuver, which had forced a potential primary battle with a fellow incumbent, drew intense backlash from a range of Democrats who believed that Maloney had ignored a higher mandate to protect his colleagues as the leader of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee.

Maloney, who previously represented the 18th District, has defended the move, noting that his home in Cold Springs sits within the boundaries where he is vying for the nomination. "From my point of view," he said in May, "I'm just running where I landed."

But Biaggi has rejected that logic. The Bronx legislator has called Maloney a "self-serving" corporate Democrat, while accusing him not only of enabling Republicans during his time in the House but opposing the advancement of signature Democratic achievements like the Affordable Care Act.

In the interview with JI, Maloney dismissed the criticism as "desperate nonsense from a failing campaign." Pointing to recent legislation in which he has advocated for lowering the cost of prescription drug prices and successfully banned oil barge anchorages on the Lower Hudson River, the congressman argued that he has frequently stood up for "practical progressive values in a very challenging political environment."

"I'm the first openly gay person ever elected to Congress from New York," he said. "I'm raising an interracial family in a Trump district. When I hear my opponent talking about standing up against entrenched forces and being bold, I feel like I've done that in my career. I don't need a lecture."

Ana Hall, Biaggi's campaign manager, returned additional fire in a statement to JI. "Sean Patrick Maloney can pretend he didn't vote repeatedly with Republicans to weaken the Affordable Care Act, or endorse far-right Republicans in the Hudson Valley, or recently help reelect the last remaining anti-choice Democrat in Congress," she said. "He can pretend he hasn't taken millions of dollars from Wall Street, Big Pharma and the fossil fuel industry. The truth, however, is a matter of public record."

"Here's the choice: I'm a mainstream,

practical guy who works with everybody to get things done," Maloney countered. "What I can tell you is, I don't want the support of people who are going to undermine Israel, who are anti-law enforcement or who are socialists," he said. "That's not my crowd."

Both candidates are now actively courting support from a significant new contingent of Jewish voters. The district, which spans several counties in the Hudson Valley, takes in Rockland, which is home to the largest Jewish population per capita of any county in the U.S. Richard Levin, who chairs the Community Relations Committee of the Jewish Federation of Rockland County, said Maloney and Biaggi have each held separate meetings with the organization in recent weeks.

"Each of the candidates expressed strong support for the State of Israel, stated their opposition to the BDS movement and expressed a desire to fight hate and antisemitism," said Levin, who was only present for the meeting with Biaggi. During the talk, he recalled, Biaggi "assured" those in attendance that "regardless of who may endorse her, she has always been and will always continue to be a strong supporter of Israel."

Levin said he had no reason to doubt her. "She appeared to be genuine," he told JI, "and we would hold her accountable as we would any other politician if they told us one thing and acted differently."

Elliot Forchheimer, the chief executive officer of the Westchester Jewish Council, offered a somewhat more guarded assessment of his own meeting with Biaggi, which took place, he said, when the state senator was running in the 3rd District. "She was very engaging, but we don't know her," he told JI last week, adding that he had not reconnected with Biaggi since she launched her new campaign. "She has never served our catchment area."

Biaggi, who assumed office after unseating a long-serving Democratic incumbent in 2018, has developed strong relationships with Jewish voters in her current legislative domain, which includes the heavily Jewish Bronx neighborhood of Riverdale. The new 17th District, however, does not overlap with her current constituency.

While Forchheimer emphasized that,

like Levin, he is prohibited from making political endorsements as a nonprofit official, he acknowledged that he is more familiar with Maloney because the congressman has attended Westchester Jewish Council events and supported its projects over the years. "In our eyes, he's done his job," Forchheimer noted. "We're very pleased with the relationship. I can certainly say that. He's been very responsive to the Jewish community."

Gedalye Szegedin, the village administrator of Kiryas Joel, a Hasidic enclave in Orange County that sat within Maloney's old district, said the congressman had been a "powerful advocate and ally" throughout his tenure in the House. "He has prioritized and provided exemplary constituent services and consistently advocated for investment in community development and local priorities."

Among his priorities, Maloney said, has been addressing what he characterized as a concerning rise in antisemitic incidents in the Hudson Valley. "I really want to work closely with the community on those issues," he said. "There are things we need to be doing in terms of security assistance and intelligence gathering and the kind of social media monitoring and proactive steps that will prevent violence."

Emphasizing that anti-Jewish prejudice "exists in the extremes of both parties," the congressman took particular aim at BDS, which he pinned as a "dangerous antisemitic movement" that typically emanates from the hard left. "We need to take it seriously."

Maloney said he planned to "compete hard" for support from the Jewish community, which could prove meaningful in a competitive late-summer primary where turnout is expected to be lower than usual.

Early polling from the Maloney campaign, conducted between May 26 and June 1, showed the congressman with a 30-point lead over his opponent. Biaggi came in at 15% among 385 likely Democratic primary voters. The congressman's support rose to 51%, with Biaggi trailing by 28 points, after voters "heard introductory paragraphs" about each candidate's "messaging," according to a polling memo provided by his campaign. About a fifth of respondents said they were undecided.

There is no other publicly available polling on the race, whose dynamics have shifted since the beginning of June. Biaggi, for example, has since notched a major endorsement from the progressive Working Families Party, which consequently pulled its support for Maloney. The group's backing could lend a pivotal boost to Biaggi's on-the-ground outreach efforts.

Last weekend, Maloney hosted a campaign kickoff rally, where he was joined by several Democratic committee leaders and local elected officials. On Monday, he announced an \$850,000 fundraising haul in the last three months, with approximately \$2.5 million on hand going into the final stretch of the race. He released his first ad the following day.

Biaggi's campaign declined to share updated fundraising totals ahead of Friday's filing deadline. The upstart legislator, who told JI last month that she had seen a significant grassroots fundraising bump shortly after Ocasio-Cortez endorsed her candidacy, had nearly \$326,000 in the bank as of March 31, according to the latest numbers from the Federal Election Commission.

Maloney had already consolidated a decent level of support from pro-Israel groups before he jumped districts. In March, he gained backing from the Jewish Democratic Council of America as well as a political action committee affiliated with the lobbying group AIPAC.

Alan Solomont, who chairs the national board of J Street and was the U.S. ambassador to Spain and Andorra from 2010 to 2013, also gave his "full support" to Maloney's campaign in a statement to JI.

"As a former ambassador and long-

time advocate for the Jewish community, I can say with complete confidence that Rep. Maloney is the kind of leader we need more of in Congress," said Solomont, who currently serves as dean of the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life at Tufts University. "He is an unabashed advocate for democracy, national security and U.S. interests abroad. Through his role in congressional leadership, he has been a consistent and important voice for the U.S.-Israel relationship."

In the interview with JI, Maloney said "the immediacy of the Iranian threat" has fueled his conviction that U.S. military assistance to Israel "should be increased and modernized." The Iranian nuclear program "has moved forward and is now far more dangerous than it was just a couple of years ago, and so the situation on the ground is changing, and not for the better," he explained. "Israel needs to, with our help, be able to defend herself and maintain a qualitative advantage relative to those threats."

He alluded specifically to some "military capabilities that the Israelis still lack," including "types of radiological and biological capabilities" as well as "attack aircraft" that can "go against facilities deep underground." Israel, Maloney said, "should be able to prepare for that with our help."

While Maloney supported the Iran nuclear deal in 2015, he believes the "likelihood" of reentering an agreement is "very low at this moment," even as he insisted that "we have to stay at the table" because diplomacy is "always" the best option. "But you've got to be clear-eyed about it, and we aren't where we were a few years ago," Maloney observed. "These other

issues we've been talking about to bolster and guarantee Israel's security become more urgent," he added. "It's a dangerous time."

The Abraham Accords, Maloney argued, are a major component of such efforts, which he characterized as multi-tiered in a detailed assessment of the geopolitical dynamics in the region. Bolstering ties between Israel and the Sunni Gulf kingdoms, he said, will help ensure that a "shared concern about the Iranian threat can produce a better strategic and economic relationship."

Moreover, "it's very important that we continue to focus on the Palestinian issue," at risk of limiting Israel's ability to pursue diplomacy throughout the Middle East, he continued. "The long-term success of Israel depends on a strong security relationship with the West Bank and Gaza and a strong political system in each of those places with good partners and a growing economy," Maloney insisted. "That's a project that will take decades, but it's one we must continue to work on."

Maloney, who is now entering his second decade in the House, said his commitment to such issues is rooted in a "strong and passionate view" that America's long-standing relationship with Israel is a "critical" one, "and we should not be undermining it."

"I do not believe in this false moral equivalence that paints Israel as an evil country," he told JI. "It's not. It's a strong ally that shares our values, and we should be strongly supporting Israel. That's who I've been in Congress, that's who I'm going to be in Congress, and you don't have to wonder about that." ♦

JULY 11, 2022

Striking a balance at the Western Wall

Longtime Western Wall Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz is caught between warring factions as the egalitarian prayer deal at the Kotel hangs in limbo

By Ruth Marks Eglash

When Israel's government collapsed last month, sending the country to its fifth national election in less than four years, hopes for revitalizing and implementing a government-approved

plan to formally establish a pluralistic prayer space at the Western Wall in Jerusalem crumbled along with it.

Now, the so-called "Western Wall compromise," which also recommended

non-Orthodox Jewish representation on the council that manages Judaism's holiest place of worship, is off the table once again.

This is a welcome development for Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz, who has served

as rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy sites in Israel for some 25 years, who believes in maintaining the long-standing Orthodox customs at the sacred site. In an interview with *Jewish Insider* last week, he said it was important to “look at the whole picture” and not get caught up with “sensational headlines” on the matter. The plan, as Rabinowitz sees it, was never practical and there are “extremist groups stoking tempers and seeking to ignite the situation.”

Tempers have flared at the Western Wall in recent weeks, with divisions between different Jewish streams and how they view the holy site growing ever more visible in the absence of a viable and implementable solution.

Last month, non-Orthodox bar mitzvah services were interrupted by Haredi extremists calling worshipers – many of them visiting from the U.S. – “Nazis,” “Christians” and “animals.” They were filmed blowing whistles during the services and ripping apart prayer books, prompting Deborah Lipstadt, U.S. special envoy on antisemitism, to tweet that she was “deeply disturbed” and that the incident was akin to antisemitism. Jewish groups in the U.S. also expressed their outrage in a letter sent to new Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid and implored him to take immediate action.

On the same day, not far from where the bar mitzvah ceremonies were taking place, a group of women attempted to hold a non-Orthodox religious service at the women’s section of the Kotel plaza. The group was hassled and attacked as they read aloud from the Torah and donned prayer shawls, sacred traditions that Orthodox Jews believe should only be carried out by men.

Rabinowitz responded to the unrest, calling on all sides “to remove disputes and demonstrations from this sacred site and preserve the Western Wall as a holy and unifying site in the spirit of Jewish heritage and tradition.”

From his office inside the newly inaugurated Western Wall Heritage Center, the rabbi acknowledged the challenges of overseeing and managing the place he calls “the heart of the Jewish world.”

“We know that whenever there are two Jews, there are 10 opinions,” he told JI. “There are Ashkenazim, Sephardim, the more religious, the less religious and all

types of religious and non-religious views and practices and they all come here to the Kotel.”

“I need to manage this place on a very thin tightrope so that everyone feels like this is their home,” Rabinowitz continued, noting that “there are extremist groups stoking tempers and seeking to ignite the situation” from both sides.

For the most part, however, Rabinowitz contended that the area was calm despite tensions between Jewish groups and clashes between Muslim worshippers and Israeli security forces at the nearby Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, which does have an impact on the atmosphere at the Kotel.

“This is the biggest synagogue in the world,” he said. “Before corona[virus], 12 million people visited a year and out of those, nearly everyone, 99.9%, came here in peace.”

“This is the closest we can get to the Temple, it’s the place where people come and open their hearts – there’s a reason it’s called the Wailing Wall,” continued Rabinowitz.

“People should not be coming here to express their worldview,” he added, highlighting that he would not allow any Jewish group – non-Orthodox or Orthodox – to act this way. “This should be the place where all Jews find the things they have in common.”

For close to a decade, however, the Kotel and how it is managed has highlighted a deepening rift between Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jewish streams, as well as gaps between Diaspora communities, particularly the United States, where many adhere to more liberal practices, and Israel.

A 2016 plan initially supported by all Jewish groups, as well as the government of then-Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, recommended developing the southern section of the Wall leading to the Robinson’s Arch area for egalitarian prayer and families. That plan, however, was quickly shelved by Netanyahu following pressure from the ultra-Orthodox parties in his coalition.

More recently, members of the recently dissolved government expressed their support for reviving that plan, but the former prime minister, Naftali Bennett, also decided not to push the project forward out of fear such an emotionally charged matter might destroy his fragile coalition.

In the meantime, non-Orthodox groups are able to pray beside Robinson’s Arch, while the more familiar northern section of the Western Wall remains, under the authority of Rabinowitz, an Orthodox synagogue and is divided according to gender with modest dress required.

“I don’t get involved with how others behave in their own home,” said Rabinowitz when asked about the southern section. “There are synagogues that are more extreme than this place and there are communities that are much more devout; they complain about the Kotel not being segregated enough or about how modest dress is not adequately enforced. I need to find a way to navigate all these views.”

Rabinowitz used the analogy of a large family with 10 children who travel off to different corners of the globe. “In the end, each child adopts the traditions of the place in which they settle but when the father decides to bring all the family – children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren – back together for his birthday celebration, if they act according to their adopted traditions there will be an explosion,” he said. “When they are in the father’s house, they need to act according to the rules in their father’s house.”

“There was no dispute over how to act at the Kotel for 50 years, 100 years,” Rabinowitz added. “Women did not wear tefillin or read from the Torah, and no one argued what was right and what was wrong... At the Kotel, it can’t be that this group does this, and that group does that, and everyone just does whatever they want in opposition to one another.”

Yochi Rapoport, executive director of Women of the Wall, the group of women that regularly seeks to hold egalitarian services at the Kotel, told JI that her organization represented “Jews around the world from all streams of Judaism.”

“Hundreds of supporters travel to Israel to join our services, and thousands participate via our Facebook livestream,” she said, adding, “The Kotel agreement also has the support of the majority of Israelis.”

“To call our peaceful prayer services ‘provocative’ is not only inaccurate but offensive to all Jews who do not adhere to strict ultra-Orthodox doctrine,” Rapoport continued. “Our ultimate goal is to hold our

prayers in the egalitarian section, once the proper renovations have been done and it is no longer under the management of the Kotel rabbi.”

She said that recent events at the site show “that the egalitarian section is unsafe at the moment.”

“Until the egalitarian section is made into a respectable and secure location for prayer, we will continue to pray in the women’s section, as is our right,” added Rappeport.

American historian Gil Troy, who has written extensively on the issue, said the “challenge would be solved if the [Kotel] plan was put into place.”

Not only would it give the egalitarian prayer space “a higher profile,” it would also “allow Jews to acknowledge the complexities of our people,” said Troy, who co-authored *Never Alone: Prison, Politics and My People* with former Jewish Agency for Israel Chairman Natan Sharansky, the chief architect of the Kotel plan.

Troy said that goodwill needed to be shown by both sides and whoever cares about “keeping the peace at the Kotel and maintaining the holiness of the place should be pressuring the government into making this plan work.”

From his office overlooking the Wall and

the bustling plaza beneath it, Rabinowitz acknowledged it was “a stormy period” and said it was important to look at the substance of the place and emphasized the importance it holds for the Jewish people in the past and in the future.

“Every Jew, from every place in the world, is connected to this place,” he said. “The Kotel needs to be a place for every Jew.” ♦

JULY 12, 2022

Jason Kander joins ‘Limited Liability Podcast’

Former rising Democratic star details his struggles with PTSD in new book

By Sam Zieve Cohen

At the height of his fame, Jason Kander was considered a rising star in the Democratic Party and a lock for higher office — maybe even the White House. After an oh-so-close defeat in the 2016 Missouri Senate race to incumbent Republican Roy Blunt, Kander spent the next few years fueling 2020 presidential primary speculation with trips to Iowa and New Hampshire.

His voter advocacy organization, Let America Vote — born from an initiative he led as Missouri’s secretary of state — became the talk of the Democratic Party. An Army veteran of Afghanistan, Kander’s combination of charisma, diction and personal story impressed voters and donors across the country. He garnered comparisons to a pre-2008 Barack Obama, including, reportedly, from the former president himself.

But just as quickly as it began, the dream faded.

First, Kander declined to run for president, announcing in June 2018, instead, a campaign for mayor of Kansas City. Less than four months later, Kander unexpectedly ended his campaign, announcing a need to address symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and depression.

The next day he checked into a Veterans

Affairs hospital, where he was placed on suicide watch.

“That day felt just like utter defeat. I had been building something for a decade and I knew what the rest of the world didn’t know,” Kander recalled during a recent interview on *Jewish Insider’s* “Limited Liability Podcast.”

“I just remember feeling like a failure, and scared because I didn’t know what my future held, not just from a career perspective, but from a personal perspective,” he said. “I had no idea if I could get better. I knew that I was trading in the only thing in my life that was going well, my career, for the chance at getting better, having no idea if I could.”

Kander’s pathway to Army service — where he served as an intelligence officer from 2003 to 2011 — followed a timeworn route for his family.

“Like a lot of people, my grandfather, my great-grandfather, my great-uncle, they had all served in World War II or World War I, but we weren’t a military family,” Kander, who grew up as a Reform Jew in Kansas City, explained. “It always made sense to me that there was a war and they were in their early 20s, so they signed up, served in the military, fought in the war, and then went back to their lives. That just made sense to me, that’s what you do.”

For years this seeming normality of his

experience kept Kander from recognizing the trauma he faced.

“I spent 10 years trying to rank my trauma out of existence, trying to gain perspective by thinking, ‘Oh, well, I’ve got friends who had to take lives or friends who saw their friends killed right next to them.’ And I thought that was helping me see that what I had gone through wasn’t that bad, but all it was really doing was delaying my opportunity to get better and to get treatment by trying to tell myself that I didn’t need it, that this couldn’t be real,” said Kander, who details his struggles in a new book, *Invisible Storm: A Soldier’s Memoir of Politics and PTSD*.

“I was an intelligence officer who took meetings with people who we suspected of being bad guys pretending to be good guys and I thought, ‘That’s not war, I just went to meetings,’” he explained, adding that he believed his lack of live-fire experience meant he “didn’t earn PTSD.”

“Now, cut to 11 years later, somebody at the VA sits me down and says, ‘OK, let me get this straight: You were in the most dangerous place on the planet, you were practically by yourself, just you and a translator, you were vulnerable as all as all heck for hours at a time. And you were in meetings with people who might want to

kill you and nobody knew where you were, so nobody was coming to save you.' And I'm like, 'yeah' and they're like, 'Yeah, that's combat and it's really traumatic.'"

Since the end of his tour in the Army Reserves in 2007, Kander has rebuilt his life with an eye toward his past experience. He currently serves as president for national expansion at Veterans Community Project, a Kansas City-based nonprofit that supports homeless veterans by providing housing, social and health services.

"We have an 85% success rate of getting people from homelessness to being successfully housed and staying there, which is about twice of what is considered

really good for the world of transitional housing out of homelessness," Kander added, proudly.

Despite his struggles, Kander still speaks highly of the experience of national service. "This is the longest we've ever gone as a nation without some form of mandatory service. And I'm not saying it has to be military, but when people don't have anything invested in their country, and more importantly, when they don't have a part of their youth that requires them to be around people who are not like them, they can go their entire lives... only being around people like them. And that makes anybody who's not like you totally foreign," he argued.

"Take my experience, for example: I was motivated to go into politics, whether I'd served in the military or not, that was what I was into. Well, I think I would have been a very different person in the political sphere if I hadn't [served]," Kander admitted. "Being in the service, I met a ton of people who were not like me, and I lived with those people and I spent time with those people. As a result, whether you're talking about somebody who's liberal or conservative, who's Black or white, whatever, I know, people like that. So when there's an issue that's going to negatively affect a certain type of people, I feel that I have a connection to those folks." ♦

JULY 10, 2022

Saudi art show examines the impact of change on the places people love

Prayer-filled walls, a lone tree in Baghdad, watercolors from Gaza stand out in works from 28 artists at the Ithra Center

By Rebecca Anne Proctor

The article first appeared in The Circuit.

DHAHRAN, Saudi Arabia – Brick fragments and pieces of coral, stone and wood are held loosely together to form a wall. Slips of paper containing prayers and Islamic texts sprout from the cracks.

Created out of construction rubble from Jeddah's historic district of Al-Balad, the work by Saudi artist Asma Bahmim titled "Wandering Walls" is an ode to her birthplace. As the port city's streets are being torn up in a \$20 billion government-financed urban facelift, Bahmim's piece recalls growing up there with an aunt who filled their home with her scribbled supplications.

Bahmim's work is part of "Amakin," an exhibition featuring works by 28 artists from Saudi Arabia and around the world, taking inspiration from the idea of "place," or *makan*, in Arabic. Organized by Venetia Porter, curator of Islamic and Contemporary Middle Eastern art at the British Museum, the exhibition runs through Sept. 30 at Ithra, the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture, which was built by the state-owned

oil company Saudi Aramco in the eastern city of Dhahran.

The works on display, which range from paintings and collages to sculptures and film, document places from a variety of locations that carry emotional connections for each artist.

"They interface between art and documentation," Porter told *The Circuit* during a visit to Ithra. "There's a strong Iraqi-Saudi connection in the show, but then I also wanted to bring in the work of Pakistani artists Imran Kurashi and Aisha Khalid — their *makan* is further away but connected."

Nostalgia for Baghdad

Porter says nostalgia is particularly pronounced in the Iraqi works, pointing out artist Sadik Kwaish Alfraji's "The Tree I Love at Abu Nuwas Street." In a set of 40 abstract drawings, Alfraji, who now lives in the Netherlands, illustrates his enduring connection to Baghdad. His 2015 animated film, "Ali's Boat," plays next to the drawings.

Another group of Iraqi artists demonstrates the fervent attachment to their

hometown they felt amid the international sanctions that crippled the economy in the 1990s after Iraqi strongman Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. Called "*Dafatir*," or "notebook," these vivid, colorful works by artists Dia al-Azzawi, Ghassan Ghaib and Nazar Yahya document a time when basic art supplies were almost impossible to obtain.

Porter said she was inspired to produce the show by Saudi singer Mohamed Abdo, who wrote, "*Al-amakin kullaha mushtaqah lak*," or, "All the places long for you." As in the song, she asked the artists to "take us to your *makan* — a place you love, somewhere real or in your imagination."

She began work during the COVID-19 pandemic and spent hours talking to the artists on Zoom and arranging for works that were either newly commissioned and on loan for the show. The curatorial process and the works themselves, she said, constituted an escape from isolation, a way to contemplate the places the artists held dear even as they underwent periods of change.

The Ithra show was originally presented

in March at the annual “21,39 Jeddah Arts” festival and staged by the Saudi Arts Council, which is led by Princess Jawaher Bint Majed Bin Abdulazziz, a pioneer in the Saudi art world for promoting the involvement of women.

The Amakin exhibition, which focuses on contemporary and modern Saudi artists, is linked to themes of memory and heritage, as well as to the subject of climate change. The intricate paintings and works on paper of Saudi artist Safeya Binzagr, for example, depict the daily traditions, rituals, landscapes and people she met as she traveled around the kingdom. She seeks to document through her art what she believed was a heritage under threat.

A Woman's View

Binzagr is in a rare club with her contemporary, Mounirah Mosely, whose art offers a woman's view of the ancient Saudi past. In the show, her works are displayed near the intricate surrealist works of Abdulrahman Al-Soliman, who says his art constitutes “diaries and facts in my life.”

In the earlier Jeddah show, Porter says there was a black wall filled with names, phrases and drawings, where the public was invited to express their own *makan* with white chalk.

“People wanted to write about their place and why it was important to them, and this engagement was important to bring out,” Porter said. “It’s very important in an exhibition to find ways to make that connection between you as the visitor and the artwork,” she adds.

That’s missing in the Ithra show, but she says the sheer number of emotive works offers visitors to the current exhibition a powerful entry point into each artist’s interpretation of *makan*.

Works by contemporary Saudi artists are found in a variety of media, including film, installation, photography and painting. These include Bader Ali’s “Entropy,” a series of expressionist drawings featuring a multitude of sketchy, squiggly lines on paper that reflects his connection to *makan*, even as he’s lived in Berlin, Paris, London and now Jeddah.

Emy Kat’s “Blue” focuses on the color found on many doors, street walls and shops

in Al-Balad, the old city he remembers from his childhood in Jeddah. Kat’s abstract composition displays the many cracks, holes and disarray that give character to the historic seaside neighborhood.

“North Khobar: The City’s Alive” by Saudi writer and photographer Bader Awwad AlBalawi, is a haunting poetic study through images documenting the shifting lives of the eastern city’s inhabitants due to demographic and urban change.

In the whimsical “Impossible Selves,” Jeddah-born Obadah AlJefri presents cartoon-like figures in scenes he recalls from childhood memories.

Exile From Gaza

From the Gaza Strip comes Taysir Batniji’s “Home Away from Home,” an intimate series of framed watercolor and pencil drawings charting the artist’s personal experience of exile and displacement. He explores the idea of “home” from the perspective of a Palestinian family now split between continents.

There’s also “The Digger,” a powerful film by Lebanon’s Ali Cherri, who recently won the Silver Lion at the Venice Biennale. It tells of Sultan Zeib Khan presiding for 20 years over the ruined Neolithic necropolis in the Sharjah desert of the United Arab Emirates, where the film was shot. Cherri explores the idea of one man’s ability to help heal a landscape that overwhelms him yet desperately needs his help.

Pakistani artist Aisha Khalid focuses on Islamic iconography in “The Garden of Love is Without Limits.” Khalid engages with the cube-like form of the holy Kaaba shrine in Mecca, coloring it gold and black and situating it in the heart of a rich green, black and blue geometric patterned carpet.

One of the most powerful works in the “Amakin” show is “The Infinite Now” (2022) by Saudi artist Sara Abdu, who was born of Yemeni parents in Jeddah where she lives and works. Her installation, made of abstract forms, sound and poetry examines ideas of the self, memory and home. For Abdu, the *makan* is a world created by lovers — it is a meditative act that invites the viewer “to experience the world temporarily outside of time through meditative acts.” Her installation is made of a series of scrolls

that together reflect the curved structure of the *mihrab*, the niche placed in the wall of a mosque or religious school in the direction of Mecca, which Muslims face when they pray.

Hypnotic Film

The Ithra exhibition ends with Saudi filmmaker Mohammed Hammed’s “Yallah, Yallah Beenah!” which is filled with joyful images that stem from his fragmented recollections of growing up in Jeddah.

“The film is a fantastical tale of how I look at Jeddah after living most of my life abroad,” he said. “Many of the nostalgic cues from my childhood visits are fading away with the rapid developments of the city’s infrastructure.”

The film’s hypnotic soundtrack and visual language easily grip the viewer into a similar state of nostalgic introspection amid Hammed’s dreamy scenes that pendulate between fiction and reality.

In one, a boy is initiated into manhood by an older woman who places a sword on his shoulder. Her eyes light up through her *niqab* veil shortly after as she says to him: “I leave you with the riches you once possessed.”

It’s a statement that echoes the desires of all artists in the show: to retrieve the various riches from different times and places – *makans* – that may soon be no more. ♦

An Israeli aid group is now working inside Ukraine's borders — in partnership with the first lady

A rapid expansion of IsraAid's work inside the borders of Ukraine is underway, focusing on mental health access and aid distribution

By Lev Gringauz

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

In early July, when Yotam Polizer visited Bucha, the Ukrainian city where Russian soldiers massacred civilians four months earlier, he expected to lay the groundwork for a future project to train Ukrainians to manage war trauma. His hosts, however, had no interest in waiting.

"We didn't think we would be able to provide any support," Polizer, CEO of the Israeli humanitarian organization IsraAid, told *eJewishPhilanthropy*. But after mentioning to officials in Bucha that he was traveling with a team that included a trauma specialist, they told him to come back the next day to run a session.

On short notice, an eclectic mix of Ukrainian social workers and soldiers gathered to learn breathing and physical exercises, which are designed to reduce post-traumatic stress, from the IsraAid specialist. Polizer wasn't sure how the workshop would go, given that the specialist didn't speak Ukrainian or Russian, but his trepidation quickly disappeared.

"We had a translator, but even with that, people were so immersed in this experience," he said. "Many of them said... that it was the first time they could breathe [and] relieve their stress."

Since the start of Russia's invasion in late February, IsraAid has sent \$30 million worth of medical and humanitarian aid to Ukraine from a coordination center in Romania, while also operating shelters for Ukrainian refugees in Moldova. Now, the post-trauma program accidentally piloted in Bucha's marks the start to a rapid expansion of IsraAid's work inside the borders of Ukraine itself, focusing on mental health access, aid distribution, and bringing clean water to the

southern Ukrainian city of Mykolaiv, which has suffered heavy Russian attacks.

Those initiatives have grown out of a concern that Ukrainians in the country are being left behind by aid efforts. "The challenges and the humanitarian needs inside Ukraine are so big and are just getting bigger," Polizer said. "And unfortunately, the world's attention is shifting away." To cement aid plans and meet with government officials, Polizer and an IsraAid team traveled to Ukraine from July 5 to 8, visiting Kyiv, Bucha, and the southern port city of Odesa.

When IsraAid first contacted the Ukrainian government in early June to coordinate its new aid efforts, it was a natural fit: Ukrainian First Lady Olena Zelenska has been making Ukrainian access to mental health care a national priority, telling *Time* magazine that "there could be enormous consequences for the country... if we end up with post-traumatic stress that goes untreated after the war."

Meanwhile, IsraAid has gained widespread expertise in trauma counseling, using methods developed in Israeli cities like Sderot and Kiryat Shmona, where residents have PTSD from years spent under rocket fire from Palestinian and Lebanese terrorist groups. IsraAid has also trained aid workers to help Syrian and Afghan refugees manage trauma.

Now partnering with Zelenska's national mental health initiative, IsraAid will send teams of Israeli trauma specialists to Ukraine for several weeks at a time, while also stationing 10 to 15 aid workers in the country full-time. There, they'll train Ukrainian health care professionals in ways to help children and injured soldiers – two groups the first lady's office specifically asked IsraAid to focus on. At the moment, one IsraAid team is already deployed in

Odesa.

Polizer was surprised by the Ukrainian government's prioritization of trauma response. "It's probably the first time – and I've been doing this work for 15 years – that I've seen high-level government officials prioritizing psychological support and mental health," he said.

It wasn't the only surprise Polizer would encounter in Ukraine. While meeting with officials and aid workers, including from Jewish communities in Kyiv and Odesa, he was struck by a national sense of camaraderie that felt familiar from his own country's history. "You kind of feel like what Israel was like in the 50s, in a sense that... everyone is kind of giving their life to the country and to the cause," he said. "It's just very inspiring, and gave me a lot of hope."

In Odesa, Polizer finalized a plan to open a new IsraAid distribution center to make it easier to facilitate aid. It's more sustainable to operate humanitarian aid locally than continuing to ship supplies in from Romania, Polizer said. "If some of the stuff, whether it's food or medical supplies, is available in Ukraine, we will always prefer procuring in the country," he said, noting that it's both faster and "support[s] the local economy, which is crucial at this point in time."

In Mykolaiv, many residents may soon have clean water for the first time in months. IsraAid is working with municipal officials to bring industrial water filtration systems to the city and has hired a local water engineer to coordinate with Israeli specialists to operate and maintain the systems.

To fund these new aid efforts in Ukraine, which will likely last several years, Polizer predicts IsraAid will need more than \$10 million – in addition to the \$10 million the group has already raised since the start of Russia's invasion. And although some

of its most significant donors are from the American Jewish community, he said there's been an unexpected showing from Israeli donors.

IsraAid has received more support from Israelis over the past five months than at any previous time in the history of the organization, Polizer said, attributing the rise to a broader trend of increased Israeli giving.

"The culture is changing," he said. "It's

not just because it's Ukraine. There is more awareness about philanthropy in Israel now than before."

Many Israelis have strong ties to Ukraine, either through the Ukrainian-Israeli community or through the business connections cultivated in Israel's tech industry. Some giving to IsraAid has been driven by Israeli companies with offices in Ukraine, or companies that feel a responsibility to be involved

philanthropically after going public with an IPO, Polizer said.

"They understand the need to have global impact, and sometimes it's through donations, or sometimes it's through giving their technologies and expertise," Polizer said. "Then they realize that IsraAid could be a good partner for them, because we have been working in the humanitarian space for about 20 years in many different countries and contexts." ♦