

THE WEEKLY PRINT

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JULY 15, 2022

Ehud Bleiberg on the true story behind Netflix's 'Image of Victory'

The film, released to American audiences on Friday, tells the story of the Battle of Nitzanim during Israel's War of Independence, in which kibbutz residents were taken captive by Egypt

By Jacob Miller

As Arab forces waged war on the fledgling State of Israel in May 1948, mere days after David Ben-Gurion mounted a Tel Aviv platform to proclaim the establishment of the Jewish state, a mother kissed her 3-year-old son goodbye, handing him a note explaining, "I am giving up my child so that he will grow up in a safe place, to become a free person in his new country," as she abandoned her only child with fleeing kibbutzniks to defend her kibbutz — one of many fronts in the war that would shape Israel's future.

That woman — Mira Ben Ari — is the protagonist of Ehud Bleiberg's new feature film, "Image of Victory," released to American audiences on Netflix today, after enjoying success in Israel since its release in December. A feisty feminist who refused to evacuate the kibbutz along with other women and children, Ben Ari fought until the bitter end of the battle for Kibbutz Nitzanim in southern Israel, until being shot and killed by Egyptian forces.

Bleiberg, the CEO of Bleiberg Entertainment whose notable titles include "The Iceman" (2012) and "The Band's Visit"

(2007), has long planned a film about the Battle of Nitzanim owing to a very personal link — his father fought in the campaign and was taken captive by the Egyptians.

"This film just came to show what really happened — what you see in the film is what happened more or less," Bleiberg told *Jewish Insider* in an interview. "A group of great people — innocent, very naive people, happy people, 21, 23, 18, 19 [year-olds] — the sky became gray and everything [came] against them."

One of those people was Bleiberg's father, Yerah Bleiberg, who moved to Mandatory Palestine at the age of 14 in 1938, studying agriculture in the Ben Shemen youth village, where he roomed with future statesman Shimon Peres.

The elder Bleiberg moved to Nitzanim, which was founded along the Mediterranean coast in southern Israel in 1937 by a group of young pioneers of the Noar Hazoni youth movement, and worked as a dairy farmer on the kibbutz.

The movie's plot closely mirrors actual events during the 1948 battle. The Haganah paramilitary organization sent a platoon from its Givati brigade to shore

up Nitzanim's defenses, and helped the kibbutz wage a relentless defense against Egypt's unexpected attack, despite being undersupplied and outgunned. Ultimately, the kibbutz members and Givati forces surrendered the settlement and were taken captive by Egypt. A separate 33 Jews — 17 soldiers and 16 kibbutz members — were killed during the fighting.

After the defeat, Givati official Abba Kovner insinuated that the surrender of Nitzanim was not justified and castigated Nitzanim's residents for cowardice.

"Surrender, as long as there is breath in our body and a bullet in our gun, is a disgrace," he wrote in a memo. "To surrender is disgrace and death."

Eventually, the kibbutzniks were cleared of wrongdoing in a commission led by IDF Chief of Staff Yaakov Dori; Kovner, however, never apologized for his initial accusation.

For years, Yerah Bleiberg did not breathe a word of the harrowing humiliation he suffered at the hands of his fellow Israelis, and his son Ehud only learned about Kovner's letter when reading the newspaper as an 18-year-old.

"I was furious," he recalled, explaining

that he views his father's efforts as a heroic attempt at a doomed effort to save the kibbutz, which the Haganah did not adequately equip with defense materials.

Bleiberg explained the Haganah's decision not to heavily arm Nitzanim was rooted in a "stupidity of the strategic view of where the Egyptians will go when they invaded Israel," which assumed Egypt would not move along the coast, and also "because they care[d] less about the kibbutz, they took care of more of their own people first."

"They deserted them, from my point of view," Bleiberg said.

Eight years ago, when sitting shiva for his brother, Bleiberg turned to his sister and said, "If I'm not going to make this film right now, I'm not going to make it," echoing the rabbinic sage Hillel, who asked, "If not now, when?"

Bleiberg then embarked on what turned out to be a large-scale project, tapping Israeli director Avi Nesher for the production that was esteemed to be the most expensive film shot in Israel, costing about \$5 million.

The crew built a full-scale replica of the original kibbutz, and then blew up the set for the scene depicting Egypt's air strikes on the settlement.

Bleiberg called Ben Ari, whom he chose to spotlight in the film, an "amazing character. Before feminism was discussed, she was a feminist."

Ben Ari, an unconventional figure for her time, helped operate the radio system on the kibbutz, and insisted on fighting alongside her male peers. The film hints at a romantic involvement between Ben Ari, who was married, and Avraham Schwarzstein, the Givati commander tasked with defending Nitzanim.

Bleiberg and Nesher relied on Ben Ari's diary to tell her story, and obtained permission from her family to cast her as the story's main character.

At the climax of the battle, Egyptian fire hit Schwarzstein, and Ben Ari avenged his death, firing with her revolver at the Egyptian officer who killed Schwarzstein.

Nesher put his own stamp on the production, suggesting that the story follow an Egyptian wartime documentarian named Hassanin, who was recording the Egyptian assault.

The film opens with Hassanin enthralled with the look in Ben Ari's eyes as she shoots at the Egyptians, with him narrating, "It's crazy. Of all the men and women I met in my life, it's her I cannot forget."

The Egyptian filmmaker is another detail based on the actual events, and Egyptian footage depicts kibbutz members being marched by Egyptians with their arms held up in surrender.

The framing device of the Egyptian documentarian necessitated telling the Egyptian version of the attack, a twist that adds to the film's complexity and upped the production costs.

Arab Israelis portray the film's Egyptian characters, and the Arab and non-Arab actors befriended each other during the shooting.

"The way that Avi [Nesher] portrayed [the Egyptians] and the way that Avi behaves with [the Arab Israeli actors] and the way the production behaves with them gave them the feeling that we are not trying to be superior to them," Bleiberg said. "On the other hand, we don't have to agree with their political view, but we are friends."

During the shooting, one of the Israeli actors who had served in the IDF's elite Sayeret Matkal unit showed the Arab Israeli actors how to use weapons.

The resulting film humanizes the enemy and underscores how both sides in the battle were comprised of regular people.

"The Egyptians are human beings too and we're human beings, but we never know who they are," Bleiberg explained, hoping that "Image of Victory" can tell a rich historical story with multiple perspectives.

Several messages shine through in the film, including Bleiberg's frustration with the accusations leveled against the Nitzanim residents and the cruel nature of war.

In the movie, an older Hassanin rails against the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, wondering about the futility of the fighting between countries that would ultimately sign a peace agreement three decades later.

Hassanin's fictional reaction differs from Bleiberg's father's response to the peace.

"When there was a peace treaty in Egypt, it was one of the most happy days of my father, and mine as well," said Bleiberg. "He never hated them."

While the film does not cast judgment on the Egyptians, it criticizes the accusations leveled at the kibbutzniks over their surrender. An infuriated Hassanin narrates that both Israeli and Egyptian captives during the war were treated poorly and ridiculed for their captivity.

"He who was not in that terrible war, shouldn't judge those young people," Hassanin says, sounding like the 18-year-old Bleiberg upon discovering Kovner's letter.

At the end of the film, Hassanin describes his footage as the "image of victory" that was sought by his patron, King Farouk of Egypt. But it is also Bleiberg's image of a brave group of valiant fighters who ferociously defended their kibbutz until surrendering — before more lives were lost. ♦

'People love Joe Biden here,' Nides says of the president's reception in Israel

U.S., Israel closer than ever on issues such as Iran, Palestinians, says ambassador

By Ruth Marks Eglash

Hailing President Joe Biden's trip to Israel last week as a huge success, U.S. Ambassador to Israel Tom Nides told *Jewish Insider* on Wednesday that the two allies are more aligned than ever on previous flash-point issues and said he believed that the visit had changed Israeli public opinion towards the U.S. president and the current administration.

"I think people love Joe Biden here," Nides said in a phone interview. "I think if you now ask the average Israeli, 'Do you believe that Joe Biden cares about Israel?' the answer would be 100%, yes."

While his two days in Israel passed with many encouraging platitudes and little controversy, some analysts reflected on the trip as underwhelming in comparison to visits by previous presidents and others pointed out that differences still remain between the U.S. and Israeli leadership on geopolitical matters such as curbing Iran's attempts to obtain nuclear weapons or finding possible solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Nides, who has been serving as America's top diplomat in Jerusalem since last December, told *Ji* that on thorny issues where the two allies have clashed in the past, the sides were "closer than ever in conversations," both in public statements and behind closed doors.

On Iran, he said that Biden was very clear that "he would like a diplomatic solution to the crisis."

"He's been clear about that from the day he ran for president," Nides said. "But he also said he is not going to compromise; he made it very clear he's not going to stand by and let the Iranians get a nuclear weapon."

"[Biden] has been unbelievably consistent on this – yes, we would like a diplomatic solution, we're not going to let the Iranians obtain a nuclear weapon and

certainly we will not tie Israel's hands," the ambassador explained. "We have Israel's back and everyone knows that."

At last Thursday's press conference, however, Israel's newly installed Prime Minister Yair Lapid emphasized that words and diplomacy alone would not prevent Iran from attaining nuclear capabilities. "The only thing that will stop Iran is knowing that if they continue to develop their nuclear program the free world will use force.... The only way to stop them is to put a credible military threat on the table," Lapid stated.

Regarding the decades-old intractable conflict with the Palestinians, Nides underscored points made by the president during his two-day trip, saying, "If you want to keep Israel a strong, democratic Jewish state, it is imperative that we keep a vision of a two-state solution alive."

After spending Thursday with Israel's leaders, Biden on Friday visited a Palestinian-run hospital in East Jerusalem and met with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas in Bethlehem, announcing a new multimillion-dollar U.S. aid package aimed at improving daily life and restoring ties with the Palestinians, which became strained during Trump's administration.

Nides said that the issue of forging peace with the Palestinians was raised multiple times with Israeli leaders, with an emphasis on keeping the vision for a two-state solution alive.

"Lapid reaffirmed his position on a two-state solution," Nides pointed out, saying that both Lapid's recent phone call to Abbas and a visit by Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz to the Palestinian leader a week before Biden's arrival were seen by the U.S. as a concerted effort by Israel to "set the table for Biden's trip."

"These were very important," he said, underscoring that despite the obstacles and

the difficulties, it was important "not to give up."

"We have our position to basically continue talking and articulating the importance of the two-state solution," said Nides, emphasizing that the financial aid to health, welfare and educational institutions for Palestinians and other small steps, such as enabling movement and providing access to 4G technology, were all important.

"We're not delusional [about peace], we're not sitting around and being dreamy," he continued. "But you have to take care of the things on the ground and that's what Joe Biden is doing, that is what I'm doing every day – trying to see how we make things just a little bit better for the Palestinian people."

Nides, who did not accompany the president on the second leg of his trip to Saudi Arabia, added that it was important "not to lose sight of the bigger picture of the political solution."

"You know, I give the former administration enormous credit for the Abraham Accords that has changed the equation in the Middle East," said the ambassador of the 2020 normalization agreements signed by Israel and four Arab countries. "There are always opportunities to change the equation."

Nides said that the image of a teary-eyed Biden kneeling down for more than 20 minutes beside two elderly Holocaust survivors at Yad Vashem World Holocaust Remembrance Center hours after his arrival in the country was one that would stay with Israelis for a long time.

"I mean, that was Joe Biden, that picture," said Nides. "Thirty years from now, we'll still be talking about what Joe Biden did – it was so not scripted, it was not scheduled, I had no idea he would stay there for that long."

"I think there is a sense that people want authenticity and Joe Biden is authentic, and he authentically loves Israel," the

ambassador continued. "I'm not a pollster, but I would be very hard-pressed to believe

that the people did not come away with an unbelievably positive impression of Joe

Biden after this trip." ♦

JULY 21, 2022

Learn from Israel's example, Aspen Security Forum speakers encourage

LinkedIn co-founder Reid Hoffman called for a digital ROTC modeled off Israel's 8200 unit

By Melissa Weiss

ASPEN, Colo. — Speaking at the Aspen Security Forum on Wednesday, LinkedIn co-founder Reid Hoffman pointed to Israel's elite 8200 unit — a highly skilled tech unit within the IDF's intelligence corps — as an example of how the U.S. could upgrade its military capabilities.

Hoffman spoke alongside Rear Adm. Lorin Selby, the Navy's chief of naval research, at a panel titled "Turning the Titanic: Is the U.S. Military Innovating Enough?" that looked at the military's ability to adapt to a changing technological and geopolitical environment.

"If I were focused on what we need, is we need like a digital ROTC, a West Point that's equivalent to [a] kind of digital and software," Hoffman said. "We need that

going into a service, whether it's modeled on, you know, Israeli 8200 unit or other kinds of things."

"The training and education needs to change," NPR's Mary Louise Kelly, the session's moderator, said.

"Yes," Hoffman responded. "The whole thing."

"[Israel is] somewhat isolated. You're in a challenging neighborhood," Selby told JI following the panel conversation. "And you guys have figured out how to kind of internally turn out an innovation ecosystem...[Israel has] also figured out how to do that in the military."

In response to a question about the U.S. ability to defend against hypersonic missiles that cited Israel's newly developed Iron Beam laser-defense system, Selby

highlighted the military's efforts to work more closely with foreign allies.

"There's a lot of appetite right now with particularly the United Kingdom and Australia for us to become interchangeable. OK? We've always talked about being interoperable. Interchangeable is like a step up. Interoperable, I can talk on the radio back and forth, might be able to give some tasking, but when I'm interchangeable, I can literally fly my quadcopter from [a] U.S. destroyer that goes out and does a mission. It goes in [and] lands on a British frigate. It can download all the data... I can read [a] task and recharge, it can fly off and do another mission and fly somewhere else that's interchangeable." ♦

JULY 21, 2022

Burns: U.S. will 'do everything we can' to encourage increased Israeli normalization in region

The CIA director also weighed in on Russian President Vladimir Putin's trip to Tehran this week

By Melissa Weiss

ASPEN, Colo. — CIA Director William Burns said on Wednesday that President Joe Biden is hopeful that his trip to the Middle East last week "will help to reinforce what is clearly a positive trend line" and that Washington will "do everything we can" to promote increased ties between Israel and countries in the region.

Burns made the comments at the Aspen

Security Forum, where he flew in for a brief three hours to address the gathering. He told NBC News' Andrea Mitchell that the Biden trip occurred against the backdrop of a "rare" moment in which "there are at least some modestly positive trend lines in a part of the world where I spend a lot of time and learned the hard way that modestly positive trend lines are exceedingly rare."

"So this is Gulf Arab states, for the time being anyway, working reasonably

well together, working well with Jordan, and Egypt and Iraq, moving steadily in a process, that hopefully can produce further normalization with Israel, sharing a concern about Iran, obviously a moment when the Gulf still matters to the global energy market," Burns explained. "And then also a moment when the temptation to hedge in the direction of Russia has been eroded a little bit, given [Russian President Vladimir] Putin's performance in Ukraine, and the

fact that, at least the early performance of the Russian military, its weapons system, hasn't been exactly a great advertisement for Russian arms sales, too."

Burns noted "more troubling" trend lines in Iran, where a senior official told Al Jazeera earlier this week that nuclear scientists had enriched uranium to 60% in a matter of days, well above the amount allowed under the 2015 nuclear agreement, from which the U.S. withdrew in 2018. Burns added that U.S. intelligence suggested that Iran had not resumed its efforts to build a nuclear weapon, which has been suspended since 2004. The senior Iranian official who spoke to *Al Jazeera* said on Sunday that Tehran had not decided whether it would build a weapon, but that it had the capability to do

so.

The CIA director also weighed in on the visit to Tehran this week by Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, during which time state-owned oil companies from each country inked a \$40 billion agreement that will see the development of Iranian gas fields and new pipelines to export the gas.

"Russians and Iranians need each other right now," Burns said, noting that both nations are under sanctions and each face political isolation.

CNN reported earlier this week that Russian officials have visited Tehran at least twice in recent weeks to examine Iranian drones that are able to carry precision-guided missiles. National Security Advisor

Jake Sullivan said last week that Moscow is seeking to purchase hundreds of drones from Iran to replenish its supply.

"It's true that the Russians are reaching out to the Iranians to try to acquire drones, UAVs," Burns said. "It's important, I think, for us to remember or to remind ourselves, when we look at that prospect, that the purpose of those drones is to kill Ukrainian civilians in a brutal and unprovoked war of aggression."

Prompted by Mitchell, who asked about Erdogan's presence at the Tehran summit, Burns noted, "Turkey and President Erdogan are always very good, very adept, and have a lot of practice at juggling a lot of apparently contradictory relationships." ♦

JULY 20, 2022

Space Force provides a deterrent for traditional ground conflict, chief of space operations says

Gen. John Raymond also warned that China's space efforts have 'gone from zero to 60 very quickly'

By Melissa Weiss

The U.S. Space Force is a valuable deterrence against global conflict, the head of the newly created branch of the U.S. Armed Forces said on Tuesday at the Aspen Security Forum.

"I think space provides a great opportunity," Gen. John W. "Jay" Raymond told NPR's Mary Louise Kelly at the forum's opening session. "It provides an opportunity to have one more fabric, if you will, of a means to change the deterrence calculus, impose cost, deny benefits and to deter conflict from the beginning or extending into space, which we feel would deter conflict from spilling over onto the land. It's deterrence."

Space, Raymond noted, "may be the first place where [a] conflict starts."

"If we can protect our capabilities, we can assure our axis and freedom to maneuver in the domain, because they are both vitally important," Raymond added.

The chief of space operations, who joined the Space Force in 2019 upon its creation as

a branch of the Armed Forces, warned about the looming threat posed by China.

"China has gone from zero to 60 very quickly. And they are clearly our pacing challenge," he said. "They're moving at speed, they have the economy to support the development. Now they're really doing two things. The first thing that they're doing is they're building space capabilities for their own use. So just like we've enjoyed space capabilities that we've been able to integrate, China has built a space program to do the same thing. That provides them [an] advantage and that provides risks to our forces. The other thing they're doing is seeing the advantages that space provides us as we've integrated space and cyber and multi-domain operations, and to be honest, they don't like what they see."

He noted that China and Russia have both detonated satellites, sending thousands of pieces of debris hurtling through space — and in some cases, risking collision with other still-functioning satellites.

A Pentagon report issued in April

warned that Moscow and Beijing were both developing the technology and capability to attack U.S. satellites.

To counter aggression from global powers, Raymond said, the U.S. is "trying to develop norms of behavior for what's safe and professional." ♦

JULY 17, 2022

Israel's SolarEdge Emerges With Saudi Deal After Biden Trip

Renewable energy company with offices in Israel and California was among 13 businesses that signed agreements during U.S. leader's visit to kingdom

By Jonathan H. Ferziger

This article first appeared in The Circuit.

TEL AVIV – SolarEdge Technologies, one of the biggest Israeli-American companies trading on Wall Street, became an early beneficiary of President Joe Biden's Middle East trip when it signed an agreement with Saudi investment company Ajlan & Bros., *The Circuit* has learned.

SolarEdge, which is based in Herzliya, Israel, and has a North American headquarters in Milpitas, Calif., was among 13 companies from the U.S. that emerged with new agreements after Biden's July 15-16 visit to Saudi Arabia, the Saudi Ministry of Investment said in a statement. The ministry did not refer to SolarEdge's Israeli roots.

The company, led by Chief Executive Officer Zvi Lando, produces solar inverters, which manage photovoltaic cells to make renewable energy more efficient. Its shares on Nasdaq have tripled since 2020, giving the company a market value of \$14.7 billion.

It last traded at \$265.85 a share and has declined 5.9 percent since the end of last year.

Ali Al-Hazmi, chief executive officer of Ajlan and its Abilitii investment unit, said in a statement that the deal with SolarEdge was one of three agreements his company concluded with American businesses that are "compatible with the kingdom's economic and development orientations" and are connected to the environment and to sustainable, clean energy.

A person familiar with the SolarEdge agreement said the ministry statement was accurate. The company declined to describe the details, citing regulatory rules as a publicly traded company. More than 90 Israeli companies trade on Nasdaq, the most of any foreign country except China.

The Saudi investment ministry said agreements were signed in Jeddah during Biden's visit covering a range of sectors, including energy, aerospace, healthcare, defense, textiles, manufacturing, education and tourism. One of the agreements was with Boeing, the world's largest aerospace

company.

Israel and Saudi Arabia do not have diplomatic relations and their citizens are generally barred from each other's territory unless they have second passports issued by other countries. The conditions are similar to those in the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain before the two Gulf states signed the U.S.-brokered Abraham Accords, establishing formal ties with Israel. Several Israeli companies have managed to operate in Saudi Arabia through subsidiaries registered in other countries.

Biden had said his trip would push forward the process of normalizing relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia, citing an agreement enabling Israeli flights to overfly the vast desert kingdom, saving time and costs to destinations in Asia. Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan described the flight decision as a gesture unconnected to normalization and said at a news conference in Jeddah on Saturday that closer ties require agreement on a two-state solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. ♦

JULY 14, 2022

AnD Ventures grooms start-ups as cash gets tougher to find

Edge Gaming, Onebeat among Israeli companies that raised money with young VC firm, which is building partnerships in New York and Japan

By Jonathan H. Ferziger

This article first appeared in The Circuit.

When Lee Moser and Roy Geva Glasberg, co-founders of AnD Ventures, went scouting for promising start-ups, they invited

students from a small college north of Tel Aviv to come to them with business ideas.

Among the budding Israeli entrepreneurs they met through the school, the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya, now

known as Reichman University, were Asaf and Omri Granit. The two brothers needed funding for an e-sports company that helped players analyze their performance on the screen and send their favorite moves to friends. Over the next six months, Moser

and Glasberg said they provided the Granit brothers with office space to develop the company, Edge Gaming, and worked with the duo on business fundamentals.

Since then, Edge has raised \$42 million, built a team of 35 employees and opened offices in Israel, New York and Los Angeles. The company collected \$30 million of that amount this month in a funding round led by Palo Alto, Calif.-based Corner Ventures. AnD, which invested in the initial seed round, also participated this time, along with Stardom Ventures and gaming heavyweight Playtika in Israel.

"These brothers were just amazing," Glasberg said. "This is a company that jumped from a \$4.2 million valuation to more than \$105 million within a year and two months from when they started."

It's that kind of Cinderella story that propelled Moser and Glasberg to mold their firm into an incubator for early stage startups, providing guidance on hiring senior executives, business development and promotion to founders who have a promising concept.

In their portfolio are companies that include Onebeat, which develops logistics software for retailers; Connected Insurance, which provides coverage for e-scooters and other unconventional markets; and Ovio, a virtual currency exchange for gaming. AnD's new headquarters in Herzliya, one of the main hubs for Israel's tech industry on the Mediterranean shore, provides office space in its "Studio" area for companies while they mature.

"We bring companies here before they're ready for VC investment," Glasberg told *The Circuit* in an interview with Moser at the office. "They sit here with us, they work with us, we help them do the technical integration. We help them get the first customer, do the validation, all this stuff that VCs want in order to check the boxes. We do it with them hand-in-hand. And then we get to the point where, as a fund, we can choose to invest or not."

Moser and Glasberg teamed up to form AnD Ventures (which stands for Advance and Develop) after previous careers in government and investing, respectively. Moser, 37, who grew up in Jerusalem, was chief of staff at the Israeli Embassy in Washington to former Ambassador Michael Oren. She later worked at iAngels, a Tel Aviv venture fund led by women, before joining Glasberg, who was her husband's college friend at IDC Herzliya.

Glasberg, 46, who grew up in Ramat Gan, Israel, has degrees in law, business and software development, and held positions at Deloitte and Microsoft before moving to Google. There, he helped found and manage Google for Start-Ups and a variety of other accelerator programs, both in Israel and internationally.

Among AnD's investors are Gary Ginsberg, who held senior communications jobs at Time Warner, News Corp. and SoftBank; Josh Fidler, a founding partner of Colorado-based Boulder Ventures; and Jay Rosensweig, a Canadian entrepreneur, corporate consultant and human rights

activist.

Part of their challenge now is to help the young companies in their investment portfolio ride out the current financial slowdown that has pinched investment and forced many companies to start chopping expenses.

We're trying to make sure they've got enough fuel to run longer than expected," Glasberg said. "They need a backup plan for whatever happens, but on the flip side, there's a lot of opportunities in the market." Adds Moser, "There's been a huge hype in the past two years, and maybe we will come back more to reality, valuation-wise."

A key priority for the firm is preparing Israeli startup founders for the task of raising money internationally, particularly in the U.S. To that end, AnD Ventures announced a partnership last month with 25Madison, a venture capital firm in New York, to help groom its companies for making their cases to U.S. investors. AnD has a similar arrangement with Tokyo-based Ignition, providing startups in Israel and Japan with support in both countries.

Like other Israeli venture firms, Moser and Glasberg have been looking into potential opportunities in the United Arab Emirates and other Arab countries.

"We came in just to get to know people and see if there's a long-term relationship we can build," Moser said of their experience in the UAE. "It's taking longer, but when and if it's built, it will actually be built as something sustainable." ♦

JULY 21, 2022

'Someone has to pay for it': Aid workers and organizers on the burdens and benefits of American Jewish missions to the Ukrainian border

A sometimes chaotic flood of American Jewish mission trips came to the Ukrainian border to witness efforts on the ground, fundraise for aid and, in some cases, to volunteer alongside aid workers

By Lev Gringauz

This article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy

Sergei Schwartz felt fully qualified to help Ukrainian Jewish refugees in Poland. A cantor at

Temple Sinai of Roslyn, N.Y., a Reform congregation on Long Island, Schwartz is a Ukrainian Jew who speaks fluent Russian and Ukrainian and has long-standing connections with Ukrainian

and Polish Jewish communities.

But in March, when he inquired about volunteering in Poland with a major Jewish organization, he never heard back. So in April, he arranged his own trip. He

booked plane tickets and a hotel room, and arranged transport via Uber. His activities were also independently planned: Schwartz performed songs for Ukrainian Jewish refugees in Warsaw, provided them with pastoral care and counseling and spoke about his immigration experience to give them hope while acclimating to a new country.

When he spoke with volunteers at a Jewish refugee aid center there, he understood the challenge that accompanied the stream of requests from American Jews who wanted to help.

"They were very negative about it," Schwartz told *eJewishPhilanthropy*. The volunteers "were afraid that all the missions [would] come, [and] they need to provide guides, they need to provide translators, they need to assign time" to meet with the trips, Schwartz said. "They were already exhausted by all this."

When Russia invaded Ukraine in late February, and millions of Ukrainians — including at least 50,000 Jews — fled to neighboring countries, European Jews mobilized to help the wave of refugees. In Polish cities including Warsaw and Krakow, Hillels and Jewish Community Centers worked together with organizations such as the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) to open hotline call centers, organize shelters, provide food and operate daycares for Jewish and non-Jewish families alike.

But Ukrainian refugees weren't the only group that Polish Jews found themselves having to assist. Soon came a sometimes chaotic flood of American Jewish mission trips to witness efforts on the ground, fundraise for aid efforts and, in some cases, to volunteer alongside aid workers. Mission trips have been criticized by some aid workers and rabbis for taking up resources like housing, transportation and aid workers' attention that would have otherwise gone to refugees.

For many aid workers, it was challenging to see "whole delegations with no relevant skills, no language, they are a burden on the system, they just stand there and look at people in the train station, they can't help them with anything!" read a recent survey on the Jewish organizational response in Ukraine by the Jewish global justice

network Olam, quoting an interviewee. The report added that "many interviewees found it challenging to witness and manage the involvement of unqualified volunteers."

American Jews were showing up "via some rabbis in Warsaw...coming via different organizations," said one Polish Jewish refugee aid volunteer, who requested anonymity so as not to jeopardize Jewish inter-organizational relationships. "There were people who were coming because they contacted someone who contacted someone."

Jewish leaders in the U.S. consider the fundraising-focused mission trips to be a resounding success. Since the beginning of Russia's invasion, The Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA) alone has raised roughly \$70 million for aid to Ukraine and refugee assistance. Aid workers and federation leaders alike attribute the ability to raise so much money to the chance donors and rabbis have to get a front-row seat to the refugee crisis in Poland.

"These visits gave Jewish leaders from around the world the insight and direct contact with the work being done here," Magda Dorosz, director of Hillel Warsaw, told *eJP*. The trips "enhanced their ability to motivate others to get involved and to be supportive and incredibly generous for this cause."

Polish Jewish aid workers told *eJP* it's true they struggled in the deluge of the first two months of the war to help refugees while hosting American Jews. But trips focused solely on fundraising, they say, were well worth the resources spent as they resulted in additional much-needed financial support. Still, they added, successful fundraising in a refugee crisis always comes at the expense of aid workers' attention.

"It's worth sacrificing the time" for fundraising mission trips, said one Polish Jew who coordinates international aid for Ukrainian refugees, who requested anonymity to speak openly about the trips. But the trips also carry a cost, the aid coordinator added, and "someone has to pay for it."

Instead, it was individual people seeking to volunteer who were most often the problem, aid workers say. They described well-meaning American Jews who came without knowing Russian or Ukrainian,

had little experience with refugee work and relied on the Polish Jewish community to facilitate their volunteering. American volunteers "were expecting us to organize accommodations for them, organize transport for them," the Polish Jewish volunteer said. "It was really demanding."

In one extreme case, the volunteer recalled some American volunteers who were put up in a hotel by aid workers, and then complained that their rooms were too small and asked to be rebooked in larger rooms. During that time, there were barely enough hotel rooms for Ukrainian refugees in Poland.

In mid-March, Rabbi Rachel Timoner left Congregation Beth Elohim, her Reform synagogue in Brooklyn, to go on a UJA-Federation of New York mission trip to Poland with a group of 18 other rabbis. Traveling to observe the refugee crisis and fundraise for aid work when back in the U.S., the rabbis also brought duffel bags full of medical and humanitarian aid.

At the time, through social media and in conversations with other rabbis, Timoner had heard criticism of the trips. "I was alert to that issue," she said. "I think that our particular trip was very well-designed in that we were only there for two nights, so that our use of lodging and food was minimized."

She feels the trip helped both UJA and her congregation raise money for Ukraine. After she returned, Timoner gave sermons about what she saw in Poland, emailed links to her congregants to donate to aid organizations and spoke at a fundraising event held by a synagogue lay leader. She said congregants told her they donated because of her descriptions of the mission trip, though she didn't say how much the synagogue raised.

But if offered a chance to go again, Timoner said she would refuse. "The trip I went on, on balance, gave more than it took," she said. "But that doesn't mean that I think that all such trips would, and I think we need to be very careful about how we engage in all forms of philanthropy."

Well before Russia's invasion, Polish Jews were used to hosting missions from abroad. As the site of centuries of Jewish history, as well as Nazi concentration camps, Poland has for decades been a regular destination

for Jews from around the world.

"This is part of our reality," said Marta Saracyn, the interim CEO of JCC Warsaw, which is running a daycare program for refugee children. "Having people who fund these programs being interested in [seeing] what they fund, it's also not news to us, because this is how we operate."

Saracyn has met with some participants of mission trips since February, and also with individual volunteers who visited on their own. In her experience, American Jewish volunteers are well-intentioned but can sometimes be overzealous.

"They get so excited that they can help and buy toys, and their expectation is that they will be able to deliver toys to the children, which wasn't necessarily the case," she said. "They just don't realize that there are more people like them wanting to help, but then we will end up with kids visiting strangers every day, and this is not what the daycare is. The daycare is running around, singing and playing."

Saracyn also said that, to her knowledge, mission trips have not taken up local resources that would otherwise have gone to refugees, and have been essential in building support for the JCC's work.

"We wouldn't have daycare if it wasn't for the refugee crisis," Saracyn said. "Obviously, we are able to offer that because of additional funds. And yes, some people who have been responsible for sending these additional funds have visited."

On the whole, American Jewish donors "somehow understood the situation way better than many others," said the international aid coordinator regarding American Jewish support for Polish relief work. "Without the help of American Jews, we wouldn't be" able to offer as much support to refugees.

Still, even as the fundraising missions came, rejecting American Jewish volunteers became regular practice in the Polish Jewish community after it dealt with an influx of well-meaning but unhelpful visitors.

"This was the dark side, because we are a very small community, we have no resources, and instead of working with the [refugees] who needed help, some of us needed to accompany people to the border and basically lose time," said the international aid coordinator. American

Jewish volunteers "wanted to help, but it was a burden to us."

In some cases, even knowing Russian or Ukrainian was not enough to make a volunteer helpful, the aid coordinator said. "You will never have time to train anyone [in aid work] when you have a tsunami" of refugees, they said.

Schwartz later returned to Poland with his wife Elena, also a Ukrainian Jewish cantor at Temple Sinai, to continue volunteering.

"Unless you speak the language, you really don't understand the pain" refugees carry, Schwartz said. "But people want to share their stories. Once they open up and they talk to you, it brings relief to them."

And in time, aid workers started trusting him. "The first time I had to convince them, 'Please take me, I can help you,'" he said. "Now...they're asking us to find more people because we cannot spend [all our time] there."

Eric Fingerhut, JFNA's CEO, said that mission trips were organized to avoid getting in the way of aid work in Poland or taking up resources that would have otherwise gone to refugees. His organization's trips were usually three days long and coordinated with the JDC and The Jewish Agency for Israel, both longtime JFNA grantees. Federation professionals planned the trips, rather than Polish Jewish community members, to avoid unnecessarily taking up aid workers' attention, he said.

"This is not something new that we just jumped to and said, 'Oh gee, let's go to Poland and let's see if we can help,'" Fingerhut said. "This is our core business...I feel gratified that the people who may not have actually understood how the relief agencies work now understand it, are able to describe it, and are motivated to keep up the effort to raise the necessary funds."

JFNA also sends groups of volunteers to Poland, organized through a volunteer hub that requires participants to be Russian- or Ukrainian-speaking professionals with relevant experience in mental health care and social work.

"We absolutely do not support people who just go and show up to volunteer," Fingerhut said, adding that such people "can often get in the way of essential work."

To avoid overwhelming Polish Jews,

JDC worked with a group of American fundraising and travel professionals who helped guide mission trips near the border with Ukraine, JDC CEO Ariel Zwang said in a statement to eJP.

"We understood that the large influx of refugees and ever-increasing pace of need meant that we could not divert...aid professionals from their responsibilities," the statement said.

Zwang added that trip meetings with refugees were ethically organized by the JDC. "We ensure that all organized interactions with refugees are highly curated, [and] that refugees provide their full consent and participate only if they want to," her statement said.

In recent weeks, aid workers say fewer mission trips are visiting Poland and that the flow of Ukrainian refugees has slowed, putting a stopper in most of these issues. Instead, aid workers and American Jewish leaders are concerned with a new problem: But while in the first weeks of the Ukrainian refugee crisis the Polish Jewish community was inundated with attention from American Jews, now that attention is dwindling as needs continue to increase.

"It's easy when a crisis goes on this long to slow down or to get discouraged, and we can't afford to do that," Fingerhut said. "The long-term humanitarian crisis and danger to Jews, not just in Ukraine but in the surrounding countries, is growing, and I fully expect that this next year is going to see a need for very significant relief by the Jewish community."

JFNA estimates it will require an additional \$30 million in aid for Ukraine, on top of what it has already raised. Meanwhile, aid workers say the needs are shifting from helping refugees cross the Polish-Ukrainian border to supporting them over the long term as they settle into their new homes. Some Jewish aid work is also refocusing on Ukraine itself, as approximately seven million Ukrainians are displaced inside the country.

That longer-term work has gotten less media and community focus, but "it's super needed," said the Polish Jewish aid volunteer. "It's essential for those people to be able to integrate into the society in Poland."

The international aid coordinator added,

"It's a nightmare at the moment, because there are [refugees] who stay here, and we have to help them to find flats, to find work, to help them with kids at school, and I think many people do not understand that it's not the end."

For Schwartz, there's a fine line when

it comes to asking for more help while criticizing mission trips and American Jewish volunteers in Poland. He worries that well-intentioned American Jews will disconnect from contributing to Ukraine aid if they're made to feel that they did something wrong by trying to help.

"The message is yes, that help is needed. Yes, please come," he said. But "don't expect the [aid workers] to provide for you any assistance. If you're self-sufficient, come and help. If you need any kind of assistance — wire money." ♦

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Miriam Anzovin, TikTok Daf Yomi star, to join Moishe House

Anzovin uses her own authentic, informal millennial sensibility — grounded in her eclectic Jewish journey — to analyze pages of Talmud in viral social media videos.

By Esther D. Kustanowitz

Miriam Anzovin, a writer, visual artist and creator of the wildly popular "Daf Reactions" series on TikTok, says she exists "at the intersection of Sefaria and Sephora" — the online library of Jewish texts and the cosmetics company, respectively.

Anzovin uses her own authentic, informal millennial sensibility — grounded in her eclectic Jewish journey from being a self-described "formerly Orthodox person" to a secular atheist — to analyze pages of Talmud in viral social media videos. On July 18, Moishe House announced that Anzovin will be the organization's first artist-in-residence, news that the "Jewish learning influencer" shared in a video post with her community of more than 17,000 followers on TikTok who devour and react to her 21st-century approach to Daf Yomi, the practice of learning a two-sided page of Talmud daily. She started that announcement video, as she does all her videos, with her now-classic opening line, "Shalom, friends."

"I don't call myself a teacher of Talmud, by any means," Anzovin, 37, told *eJewishPhilanthropy* on Monday. "I react to what I'm learning and I share those reactions. I can teach people how to do what I do: discover an authentic personal reaction and pull that out as they're going through the learning. But it requires a great deal more learning and experience and knowledge than I currently possess to say that I'm a teacher of Talmud...I am shocked to discover

I inspire people to learn. I'm happy to have them along on this journey. It's a part of my learning journey. But this response is a form of art."

Moishe House started as an effort to create Jewish community for 20- and 30-somethings, providing spaces around the world — known as Moishe Houses — for young Jewish adults to create their own spaces of meaning for themselves and local peers through community and programming. Its network currently includes significantly more than 100 Moishe Houses across 27 countries.

While Moishe House's international staff does have a cadre of Jewish educators on staff who bring text, wisdom and Jewish events to the young leaders of Moishe House, bringing Anzovin on board as artist-in-residence is part of Moishe House's commitment to research and development, as well as their overall plan, founder and CEO David Cygielman said, "to bring Judaism to life."

"This is a way of combining the arts with social media with young leaders, and so it's an exploration," Cygielman said. "We want to support her in creating more content because it serves the population we aim to serve, and we want her to influence and teach the Moishe House residents, staff [and] board what can be transmitted through social media that can lead to more Jewish learning content engagement."

Any benchmarks that exist for Anzovin's role are around getting more people to watch

and engage with her content, Cygielman said. He called Anzovin "an amazingly talented young artist, who's found a way to bring content in a way that hasn't been brought to this number of people in this way before."

"Sharing my learning and having all of you along for the ride has been the most meaningful and important Jewish experience of my life," she said in her announcement video. "And I've had a lot of Jewish experiences."

Brian Barasch, Moishe House's vice president for global marketing and communications, told *eJP* that he sees Anzovin as a role model. "Miriam is helping to demonstrate to those in our community that this is a way to interact with text, and she is demonstrating that as a role model in this space, in a way that's relatable to the people who are in our orbit," he said.

Cygielman added that Moishe House aims to devote at least 5% of its \$15 million budget to "trying different things," which includes the artist-in-residence position. This funding is an allocation from the organization's general operating budget, he said.

The arrangement is both formal and informal, with perks most creatives only dream about: Anzovin is not an employee, but receives a stipend and health care from the partnership, and she produces whatever she wants and owns any content she produces.

"The vast majority of Miriam's work

will be creating her content that she creates and owns and builds out because we know it's reaching young adults, and we'll reach more young adults, if she can focus on it, rather than having to do it in addition to a traditional nine to five," Cygielman said, adding that "one of the hardest things for artists is being able to ensure that they have proper health and dental and vision insurance and are cared for in that way."

Anzovin appreciates the support. "Just to hear someone say that they believe in what I'm doing and see the benefits and go so far as to decide to help, support and be a partner to me so I can focus on the expansion of [my work] had me choked up," Anzovin said. "Even though I'm an artist, even though I'm a writer, I never in a million years thought I would be an artist-in-residence anywhere. And to have it come out of Daf Reactions, something that I love so deeply and [that] has sort of reformed my identity in a very significant way over the past few months, is so moving. It really makes me feel so hopeful for the work and for what we can do."

Daf Reactions was born from Anzovin's interest in the current cycle of Daf Yomi — a 7.5-year journey of daily Talmud study — which began in January of 2020. She embarked on the videos as a way of clearly and publicly identifying as a member of the Jewish community following a spate of

antisemitic attacks in the preceding months in the New York area, she said.

"I needed to stand with my people," she said, calling the work of Daf Yomi "a seven-year 'f-you' to the antisemites... Every single day for seven and a half years, I will learn a page of the Babylonian Talmud, I will be more invested in Jewish learning than ever. And this is my spite to them. And also it's the joy and the oy, the oy with the joy in the learning itself."

The work has also led her to engage with TikTok commenters who she refers to as "my online friends," adding that she and they both get something from their online connection.

"This is a community and you can't have a community if you don't engage with them," she said. "That's what we're doing together. Interacting with people online is absolutely a part of this work. It's to give affirmation to people who have felt like they are not welcome to express their feelings and thoughts about Jewish learning," and to provide a safe space for any "questions, confusion or internal conflict that they have about their Jewish identity."

Teenage and young adult women are among Anzovin's most frequent commenters. They send messages saying that no one had previously welcomed them to learn Talmud or speak about it in their

own voices.

"Truly I could not ask for something more powerful in my entire life," she said. "It's an honor and a privilege to get to talk about Jewish ideas and my Jewish learning journey and have that somehow be inspirational and encouraging to other people."

The Moishe House opportunity came at the perfect time for Anzovin, right after she had decided to leave her job as a content creator at Combined Jewish Philanthropies, Boston's Jewish federation, after more than five years to pursue her online work. Her last day at CJP was also the day of her first conversation with Cygielman about this opportunity.

"There was no net to catch me," Anzovin recalled. "But I knew I had to do it because this is the work that deserves full attention," and balancing it with her Jewish communal work was difficult.

"It was a scary moment and then I had this conversation with David," she said. "And from there, I felt such an immense sense of relief. As I've said, I'm an atheist. And yet, in my former life, I would have said, 'This is *hashgacha pratis*, divine providence.' This is such an incredibly-timed meeting of the minds. It was almost like a miracle that this happened. And I truly feel blessed." ♦