

## THE WEEKLY PRINT

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OCTOBER 2, 2023

## MBS' open talk signals advance toward peace with Israel

*Normalization talks between Riyadh and Jerusalem have increased momentum, but anyone hoping for a big Abraham Accords-style announcement may end up disappointed, analysts say*

By Lahav Harkov

The U.S., Israel and the United Arab Emirates announced the Abraham Accords in August 2020, after months of quiet diplomacy. Three years later, American and Israeli officials are again working toward a groundbreaking normalization agreement with an Arab country — Saudi Arabia — but this time, all parties have been more public about their efforts.

When asked about talks with the Saudis in recent months, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has paraphrased former U.S. President Woodrow Wilson's "open covenants of peace openly arrived at." Rather than conducting diplomacy "in the public view," as Wilson put it in his Fourteen Points more than a century ago, Netanyahu has repeatedly said he is seeking "open

covenants secretly, or at least discreetly, arrived at."

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman made his most open and optimistic comments to date about the prospects of establishing diplomatic relations with Israel, telling Fox News last month that "every day we get closer" to what would potentially be "the biggest historical deal since the end of the Cold War."

Less surprisingly, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said days later that he was "delighted" by MBS' remarks and at the United Nations General Assembly last month, said "we are at the cusp of...an historic peace with Saudi Arabia. Such a peace will go a long way to ending the Arab-Israeli conflict...Peace between Israel and Saudi Arabia will truly create a new Middle

East."

Another turning point came when Israeli Tourism Minister Haim Katz became the first member of the Jewish state's cabinet to openly visit Saudi Arabia last week, attending a United Nations World Tourism Organization conference. Israeli Communications Minister Shlomo Karhi and Knesset Economics Committee Chairman David Bitan traveled to Riyadh on Monday.

Katz's visit came only two weeks after Foreign Minister Eli Cohen and Education Minister Yoav Kisch were barred from attending a UNESCO conference in the kingdom, apparently marking a change in policy.

"I don't know the bottom line, why they approved me," Katz told Israel's Channel 14

on Tuesday. “We have been working on this for three weeks, and only a few days ago did we understand that it’s happening. We received official messages from the highest levels.”

IDF Brig.-Gen. (res.) Amir Avivi, founder and chairman of the largest Israeli NGO of national security veterans, the Israel Defense and Security Forum, and a Netanyahu ally, pointed out that the prime minister has been talking about the potential for normalization with Saudi Arabia for years and even, to some extent, campaigned on it before last year’s Knesset election, but was not able to make headway because of the Biden administration’s hesitation.

“I think there was a challenge on the American side to get over the problems of the past with Saudi Arabia, as we saw in the beginning of Biden’s term following [the killing of U.S.-based Saudi columnist Jamal] Khashoggi. It took the Americans a long time to get past it and understand the key to change is in this agreement. The minute they understood, that was the minute that Netanyahu, MBS and Biden tried to make this public,” he said.

Jonathan Schanzer, senior vice president for research at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, called that period “a massive blunder on the part of the Biden administration. They had the Saudis on the two-yard line back in the early days of this administration, but because of anti-Saudi animus and a total unwillingness to credit the Trump administration with any progress on any front, they postponed the entire thing.”

Only after Saudi Arabia entered a China-brokered agreement with Iran did the administration “decide it needs to prioritize what should have been a priority from the jump,” Schanzer said.

Now, the Biden administration is in a rush to complete a deal before entering a presidential election year, Schanzer explained, and the recent gain in momentum as indicated by MBS’ interview and Netanyahu’s speech to the U.N. could be connected to that timeline.

Professor Bernard Haykel, director of Princeton University’s Institute for Transregional Study of the Contemporary Middle East said that allowing Israeli cabinet ministers into Saudi Arabia is “a

sign of goodwill because they’re negotiating. I don’t think it’s much more than that,” he said.

“The reason it has become much more intense lately is because the Biden administration is determined to do this. That’s where the impetus is coming from,” he said.

That Katz was in Riyadh this week is “no coincidence,” Avivi posited. “There is a process of preparing Saudi public opinion and opinion in the Middle East broadly, ahead of the announcement.

“They are normalizing the public’s understanding,” he quipped.

Yoel Guzansky, a senior fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies in Israel and a former official in Israel’s National Security Council, similarly noted that Katz’s visit to Riyadh came after MBS spoke publicly about normalization talks, which “gave it legitimacy in the kingdom and abroad, making it easier for Saudis to go with it.”

Guzansky said that “there is really an indication that things are warming up.”

He contrasted the current process with the Abraham Accords, “where suddenly there was an agreement announced.”

“Here it’s being done more or less openly, though we don’t know what is happening in the talks,” he said.

Guzansky also warned that the openness of the Saudi-Israel normalization discussion can invite “spoilers,” whether within the kingdom, in Iran or even in Israel, with the political right arguing against possible concessions to the Palestinians and Opposition Leader Yair Lapid expressing concern about a Saudi nuclear program.

Avivi argued that the Biden administration wants Palestinian involvement more than the Saudis do, – a thesis supported by reports that the Saudis are willing to enter a deal for a defense pact with the U.S. even if Israel does not make many concessions for the Palestinians, and all the Biden administration is asking from Israel is that it keep a future two-state solution viable.

By speaking openly about the talks and allowing a minister to visit Israel, the kingdom is sending “a message to the Americans that they won’t let the Palestinians get in the way. The Saudis are

running forward because this is a strategic interest of the highest degree,” Avivi said.

Schanzer pointed out that contacts between Saudi Arabia and Israel in the areas of security, intelligence, technology and more have been known for years, so “it doesn’t really matter when an agreement is signed, so long as the process of normalization continues to grow, and I think it already is,” Schanzer said.

For Schanzer, advancing along a “road map,” as he said one Saudi interlocutor described it, is more important than a signing ceremony.

“Normalization is a process, not an event,” he emphasized.

In fact, Schanzer added, there may not be a formal agreement or a White House ceremony at all, because security guarantees or allowing Saudi Arabia to enrich uranium might not get the necessary approval in Congress, and the governing coalition in Israel may not be willing to make compromises on the Palestinian front.

Speaking from Riyadh, Haykel also posited that a peace agreement between Israel and Saudi Arabia will happen “phase by phase,” and not be implemented all at once like the Abraham Accords.

“We’re far from an agreement. I’m not sure an agreement will actually materialize,” he said.

Haykel also criticized Israel for its frequent open discussion of normalization talks with Saudi Arabia and other Arab states.

“Israelis have historically, with all Arabs, been incredibly embarrassing and deeply undiplomatic and insensitive to Arab sensibilities. They don’t care if they embarrass their negotiating partners,” he said.

While most Saudis would not oppose normalization with Israel, the leaders have concerns about security, Haykel said.

While Israeli Muslim pilgrims will not have a problem visiting Mecca, Haykel said: “I don’t think Saudi Arabia will be open to Israeli tourists anytime soon...largely for their own protection. They don’t want an incident here with Israelis where someone gets hurt because of some lunatic.”

The Saudi leadership is also concerned about their own safety following normalization with Israel.

“Netanyahu won’t get a bullet in his head for making peace with Saudi Arabia, but the Saudi leadership is at risk because there are violent people here,” Haykel said.

MBS is still proceeding with the negotiations, because “it’s in [the Saudi] national interest,” Haykel added, noting that nationalism has played an increasingly large

role in Saudi Arabia’s foreign policy under MBS’ leadership. ♦

OCTOBER 3, 2023

## From New York to Ramle – modern art in an ancient setting puts Israeli city on the map

*For New York-based sculptor, artist and author Daniel Rothbart, the subterranean Pool of Arches was the perfect location for his latest art installation, ‘RamleAnthroposcene’*

By Ruth Marks Eglash

The mixed Jewish-Arab city of Ramle, which sits about halfway between the bustling metropolises of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, is not the most obvious place for an international art exhibition.

Yet for New York-based sculptor, artist and author Daniel Rothbart, whose multidisciplinary compositions aim to draw attention to the human role in the global environmental crisis, the city’s subterranean Pool of Arches was the perfect location for his latest installation.

Rothbart, who has installed his surreal, floating works of art in water sites around the world, including in the Hudson River, told *Jewish Insider* that he discovered the ancient underground reservoir quite by accident and knew immediately he had found a place for his artwork.

“It was COVID-19, and everything was shut down, who knew what was going on with the world — but in my mind, I wanted to go to Israel,” Rothbart, an author of three books, including *Jewish Metaphysics as Generative Principle in American Art*, told *JI* in an interview last month on the eve of the opening of his ‘RamleAnthroposcene’ exhibition.

“I remembered my first work trip to Israel in 2003 and how much I loved it,” continued the artist. “I thought it was a fascinating place to work and it was one of those places I always wanted to return to.”

Stuck at home, Rothbart began reaching out to people from the art world in Israel

whom he’d met on his previous trip to the country and was connected with Smadar Sheffi, a well-known curator. Rothbart Googled Sheffi and discovered that she was the founder and chief curator at the Contemporary Art Center in Ramle.

“I’d never heard of Ramle,” exclaimed Rothbart, adding that his research led him to a website depicting the Pool of Arches. “It was love at first sight, such a perfect venue for my floating sculptures, completely unique and unlike any other space, except for maybe in Istanbul, which has a similar [underground water] system.”

“I felt it was gorgeous,” he continued. “A kind of timeless environment with this medieval cistern that you traverse in a rowboat, and it just seemed ideal for my sculptures. I could see them framed under these Gothic arches and it just seemed perfect.”

Through a series of Zoom calls and messages, Rothbart quickly convinced Sheffi, who founded Ramle’s modern art center in 2019, that the 1,200-year-old pools, which today serve as a tourist site, should become his next canvas.

“At that stage, it was all aspiration,” recalled Rothbart. “We didn’t know if the world was going to get back to normal and we didn’t have any money either, so I wrote a grant proposal to the New York State Council on the Arts, and this is where it all gets pretty strange.”

Rothbart’s proposal was mysteriously accepted by the council, even though

projects outside of New York are not typically funded.

Fast-forward to late last month, when Rothbart arrived in Israel, along with several gigantic containers holding the carefully crafted metal pieces and glass rounds ready for installation inside the turquoise waters that form the underground pool.

Working in the water, beneath the 36 stone arches that lend the place its name, Rothbart assembled his sculptures, which are anchored with weights but move freely with the water’s light ripples. The contemporary shapes of his works, which are located in two corners of the underground reservoir and strung up from above, form a kind of mystical marriage with the historic style of the medieval site, which was built some 1,233 years ago by the region’s Muslim rulers.

Rothbart explained that his sculptures are about life and are meant to reflect the relationship of humans to the ecosystem.

“For me, the sculptures call to mind these ancient, prehistoric animals or sea creatures that might have existed when Israel was covered with ocean water millions of years ago, or insects or something that is not human,” he continued.

“So maybe it brings together something from the distant past and something that could tragically represent our future if we’re not very careful in terms of how we steward our precious water resources and our relationship with the environment,” Rothbart added.

Sheffi told JI that Rothbart's work was a perfect fit for Ramle, a city that was founded in the early eighth century during the Umayyad Caliphate and today has a modest population of about 76,000, three quarters of which is Jewish, one-quarter Arab.

"[Rothbart's work] is very good art, and we are a center for contemporary art with the highest standards," Sheffi, whose center also oversees the site-specific work at the Pool of Arches, told JI. "The way Daniel addresses the history and our current ecosystem in his 'Anthropocene' artwork offers visitors a very spiritual experience."

Rothbart's exhibition, which runs through Dec. 15 and also includes specially

composed poetry, as well as video images projected on the ancient walls of the underground site, will eventually make its way back to New York, where he will give a presentation both at the Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan on the Upper West Side and also at WhiteBox, a progressive contemporary arts space.

Asked his impressions of Ramle, an often rough city in middle Israel, after coming from New York, which is widely considered the art capital of the world, Rothbart, said the city's colorful population and rich history is inspiring.

"A walk on the street here is so colorful and fascinating, there are all these different

cultures," Rothbart, a Fulbright scholar who spent a few years working in Italy, said. "It's also a city where it seems like people generally get along even though it's a mixed city."

"I lived in Naples, Italy, in the early '90s, when it was a pretty rough-and-tumble city, and Ramle is even more exotic," he added. "There are Arabs and people from every corner of the Jewish world and then there are these wonderful sites – the White Mosque, which was once one of the most important mosques in the area, Smadar's museum and the Pool of the Arches." ♦

OCTOBER 3, 2023

## Two Jewish Dems seek to capitalize on Georgia's leftward tilt in 2024

*Susie Greenberg and Debra Shigley face tough odds in their respective Atlanta-area races. Their election would significantly increase Jewish representation in the Peach State's legislature*

By Gabby Deutch

In the last four years, Georgia has experienced a remarkable political evolution — from a Deep South state represented by two white Republicans in the U.S. Senate to a hotly contested political battleground now represented by two Democratic senators, one Black and one Jewish.

The diversity of the state's federal delegation is only just starting to trickle down to its state legislature, where there is only one Jewish lawmaker — despite the Atlanta metropolitan area boasting one of the largest Jewish communities in the country. Two Jewish Democrats hope to change that next year by challenging powerful Republicans in the state's General Assembly.

Both face long odds. But their decision to enter tough races in Atlanta's traditionally conservative suburbs — while proudly flaunting their Jewish identity at a time of rising antisemitism in the Peach State

— signals a change in the state's political trajectory.

"We're beginning to see some integration and some diversity inside the Statehouse, just like we're seeing at the congressional level. It seems like we should be further along. But nonetheless, it's happening," said Adrienne Jones, a political science professor at Morehouse College in Atlanta.

A trial is currently underway in federal court in Georgia to determine whether Georgia Republicans illegally diluted the power of Black voters. If the legislature is tasked with redrawing the state's legislative maps, suburban Atlanta districts that had already started to shift leftward in recent years could become even more competitive for Democrats like Susie Greenberg and Debra Shigley.

Shigley, a former employment attorney, is challenging Rep. Jan Jones, the No. 2 Republican in the General Assembly who ran unopposed last year and in 2020 beat

a Democratic opponent by more than 20 points. That opponent — Anthia Carter — is also running in the Democratic primary, seeking a rematch against Jones in the 47th District, located north of Atlanta.

"Maybe this woman doesn't win against the longtime incumbent. But the run is still happening. Some other Jewish person is seeing her run and saying, 'Well, maybe I can,' and then another, and then another," said Morehouse's Jones.

Greenberg has a better shot at unseating state Rep. Deborah Silcox, who lost a 2020 reelection bid by fewer than 400 votes but narrowly won election to a different district last year. Greenberg, an activist who runs a college consulting business, decided to run for office after last year's *Dobbs* decision reversing *Roe v. Wade* led to Georgia's adoption of a ban on abortions after six weeks. (Silcox voted against the bill.)

"I've always been involved as a legislative advocate from, I guess, the onset of the 2016

presidential election, when it became very clear that women and reproductive rights were under assault,” Greenberg told *Jewish Insider* in an interview. After *Dobbs*, she said, “it got me thinking, ‘I have to do more. I’m fed up.’”

Both Greenberg and Shigley are leaning into their Jewish identity in the race.

“Our legislature should look like the state of Georgia,” Shigley told *JI* in a statement. “With more Jewish representation, the Jewish community in Georgia has a stronger voice in their own government.”

Shigley is active at her synagogue, The Temple, and Greenberg has served as a board member at Temple Sinai and recently earned a “Shero” award from the National Council of Jewish Women’s Atlanta chapter.

“I’m very excited that they’re running. It gets old saying I’m the only Jewish member,” said Georgia Rep. Esther Panitch, a Democrat who endorsed both Greenberg and Shigley. Panitch co-sponsored a bill that sought to define antisemitism in state policy to help educate policymakers and public officials, but the bill — which utilized the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism — was not taken up in the

state Senate after it passed the House.

“It became painfully obvious to me arguing the antisemitism bill that one Jewish voice is not enough,” said Panitch. Gov. Brian Kemp, a Republican, has not signaled whether he supports the bill, which was held up by a Republican lawmaker who disagreed with some of the IHRA definition’s examples of antisemitism. (Both Silcox and Jones voted for the bill in the House.)

Greenberg told *JI* she would support the bill, although she added that she is “just not familiar with the ins and outs of those conversations” about the definition. Shigley also pledged to support the bill.

Georgia has faced an uptick in antisemitism in recent months: Flyers targeting Jewish residents of communities like Sandy Springs were distributed several times this year, and in June, neo-Nazis targeted two synagogues on Shabbat.

“People talk about it everywhere,” said Greenberg. “It’s frightening. We have increased security at the synagogues and at the Jewish day schools.”

A key focus of Greenberg’s campaign, she explained, is what she’s calling “community safety” — a rebranding of gun control that includes proposals such as gun storage

requirements and mandatory background checks.

“I’m not sure that [voters] shifted more left. I think, though, the Republican Party has shifted more to the right,” said Panitch. “Issues like abortion and gun violence reduction affect and impact Republicans as they do Democrats.”

Greenberg is counting on some crossover Republican votes to win her race if she makes it to the general election. She already has the backing of several prominent Democrats, including Georgia House Minority Leader James Beverly.

Georgia “is changing from red to purple, hopefully blue,” said Greenberg. “I hope that the country is inspired by the fight that we’re leading here, and the way we are trying very hard to take back our rights, to take back the notion of liberty and justice for all.”

Silcox did not respond to a request for comment. In an email, Jan Jones said she looks “forward to a robust airing of the issues” and that “most residents here support the conservative policies that have led to north Fulton’s high quality of life and the state’s unparalleled reputation as a desirable place to live, work and raise a family.” ♦

OCTOBER 2, 2023

## Pressure mounts on Canadian government to bring Nazis in the country to justice

*Call to release full contents of WWII immigration report follows House of Commons recognition of Nazi collaborator; ‘There are wounds in this country,’ B’nai Brith official says*

By Matthew Kassel

The recent celebration of a Nazi collaborator in Canada’s House of Commons drew an international uproar that has forced the resignation of a top parliamentary official and elicited a public apology from Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who last week called the incident “a horrendous violation of the memory of the millions of people who died in the Holocaust.”

But leading Jewish advocacy groups in Canada insist that such measures remain largely inadequate as the fallout from the controversy reopens a fraught national debate over Canada’s record of bringing Nazi perpetrators to justice, which has long been criticized as unusually lenient.

“More than an apology needs to happen,” Richard Robertson, the manager of research and advocacy at B’nai Brith Canada, said

in an interview with *Jewish Insider* last week. “We need action, and the action the government can take is long overdue.”

Among other efforts spurred by the incident last month, B’nai Brith is now stepping up a long-standing campaign urging the Canadian government to release the full contents of a multipart report examining Canada’s approach to Nazi war criminals who entered the country after



World War II. The key findings of the so-called Deschênes Commission report, issued in 1986, have been redacted for decades, including the names of 20 alleged Nazi war criminals warranting “urgent attention” as well as 218 other suspected Nazi collaborators.

B’nai Brith is also calling for the publication, in its entirety, of a heavily censored accompanying report written by the Ottawa-based historian Alti Rodal, who has carefully documented Canada’s indifference and even outright resistance to pursuing legal action against Nazi perpetrators who were frequently admitted into the country with little screening by immigration officials.

“We really want these records to open up so we can understand Canada’s past and begin to heal from it,” Robertson said, citing Canada’s uniquely restrictive immigration policy toward Jewish refugees from Europe before, during and after the Holocaust. “There are wounds in this country, and we have a right to the information. Our main issue is to ensure that this never happens again.”

The Jewish human rights group isn’t alone in advocating for increased accountability after Canadian lawmakers unwittingly gave a standing ovation to a former Ukrainian Nazi, Yaroslav Hunka, who was invited to attend a joint session of Parliament during Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky’s recent visit to Ottawa.

The 98-year-old Nazi veteran served in the Waffen-SS Galician Division, where he swore a “holy oath” to Adolf Hitler before immigrating to Canada after the Nazis were defeated. In the packed chamber late last month, he was hailed simply as a “hero” who “fought for Ukrainian independence against the Russian aggressors,” drawing a raised fist from Zelensky, a Ukrainian-born Jew who lost family in the Holocaust.

After Jewish groups spoke out against the event, Anthony Rota, the former speaker of the House of Commons, apologized for having invited Hunka, a constituent in northeastern Ontario, and said he had been unaware of his Nazi background. Rota stepped down days later amid mounting calls for his resignation.

Trudeau, who has also faced scrutiny for his participation in the event last

month, described the incident as “deeply embarrassing to the Parliament of Canada and by extension to all Canadians.”

The episode underscored what critics have characterized as an increasingly glaring need for the Canadian government to publicly reckon with its own policies toward Nazi collaborators and war criminals.

“This clearly shows that Canada should release more information about Nazi immigration to Canada and bring war criminals to justice,” Günther Jikeli, the associate director of the Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism at Indiana University, told JI. “It’s beyond me why Canada hasn’t fully opened its archives at this point.”

For her part, Rodal, whose historical assessment remains largely censored, emphasized that it is “high time for the Canadian government to release an unredacted version of” the auxiliary report she prepared for the Deschênes Commission nearly four decades ago. Doing so, she argued, would be in keeping with guidance from Justice Jules Deschênes, the retired Superior Court judge who led the commission. In his own report, Rodal recalled, Deschênes had praised her analysis as an “outstanding contribution” that should be “widely distributed.”

“However, bureaucrats in the Privy Council Office decided to comb through it and excise many sections,” she explained in an email to JI. Rodal, who is now the founder and co-director of the Ukrainian Jewish Encounter, speculated that politics had contributed to the redaction of her report. “I think that it was largely to protect their own reputations because of the role they played in blocking action on this issue.”

The prime minister’s office last week referred a request for comment to the Privy Council Office, which forwarded questions to Canada’s Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship. The Canadian government “is aware of requests for the release of the full report of” the Deschênes Commission, a department spokesperson said in a statement to JI on Saturday, “and will look to see if any additional information can be released, subject to requirements of the Privacy Act and related to national security.”

“What happened in Canada’s House

of Commons was unacceptable,” the spokesperson said. “It was a horrendous violation of the memory of the millions of people who died in the Holocaust and Canadians who fought to liberate Europe from the Nazis, and it was deeply painful for Jewish people, Polish people, Roma people, 2SLGBTQI+ people, people with disabilities, racialized people, and the many millions who were targeted by the Nazi genocide. It is vital that we ensure that this tragic chapter in world history is never forgotten.”

While scholars and activists are eager to see the reports released in full, Ivan Katchanovski, a political scientist at the University of Ottawa who specializes in Ukrainian studies, suggested that the establishment of what he called a Canadian “truth commission” could also provide additional transparency that “would be helpful not only for academic research by historians but also for promoting justice.”

It remains unclear how many Nazis entered Canada after the war, when monitoring such perpetrators was not widely recognized as a high priority amid mounting concerns over the spread of communism, among other considerations that likely contributed to a more permissive vetting process.

On the other hand, Holocaust experts have estimated that some 2,000 former members of the Galician Division alone were admitted into Canada after the war. In a decision that continues to stir controversy, the Deschênes Commission would later conclude that Hunka and members of his unit were not war criminals and “should not be indicted as a group,” even as the Nuremberg Trial had ruled otherwise.

Janice Rosen, the archives director at the Alex Dworkin Canadian Jewish Archives, told JI that an in-house search did not turn up any mentions of Hunka, who recalled in a 2011 post for a Ukrainian-language blog run by SS Galicia veterans that he had enlisted with the unit when it was created in 1943.

“I think the fact that he was very young at the time and that he started his SS service in Ukraine at a period after most of the Jews had already been sent away or massacred,” Rosen said in an email last week, “meant that whatever he did in the war was not directly documented by Jewish survivors.”

In the blog post, Hunka said he had

joined the Nazis to protect his homeland but did not include details of his wartime service. He said he was held in a prisoner-of-war camp in Italy after the war. Later, he lived in England before settling in Canada in 1954, according to an obituary for his wife, Margaret, who died in 2018.

The Galician Division is known to have committed a number of atrocities but destroyed all of its records around the end of the war, according to John-Paul Himka, a professor emeritus at the University of Alberta who specializes in Ukrainian nationalism and the Holocaust. “So we don’t have a clear idea of what it did,” he explained.

Doris Bergen, a Holocaust historian at the University of Toronto, said the voluntary unit in which Hunka served “was definitely involved in mass killing of Jews,” even if “individual members are not automatically considered war criminals in Canada.”

Still, she posited that such thinking is “a bit beside the point” in the aftermath of last month’s incident in Parliament, betraying a sort of historical amnesia among Canadian officials on basic facts about the war. “No one had to vet Hunka to know that if he ‘fought the Russians’ in the 1940s, he was fighting on the side of Nazi Germany,” she told JI.

Efraim Zuroff, the chief Nazi hunter at the Simon Wiesenthal Center who lives in Jerusalem, said he was not surprised by the recent episode involving Hunka. “It’s not shocking at all to me, to be perfectly honest,” he said in an interview with JI. “If there’s any place that something like this could

happen, it’s certainly in Canada. They have a shameful record about every single issue when it comes to the Holocaust.”

Zuroff estimated that dozens of Nazis are now living in Canada under their own names, though there are currently no active court cases.

Until a couple of years ago, Canadian prosecutors had for decades been unsuccessfully seeking to deport Helmut Oberlander, a Nazi who served in a killing squad of the infamous Einsatzgruppen before settling in Canada. He died in 2021 at his home in Waterloo, Ontario, marking the conclusion of the last existing case involving a Nazi war criminal in the Western Hemisphere, according to Zuroff.

Last Tuesday, a Polish government minister indicated that he had “taken steps” toward the possible extradition of Hunka, describing him in a social media post as “a member of the criminal Nazi SS Galician formation.”

Meanwhile, Richard Marceau, the vice president of external affairs and general counsel at the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs, an advocacy arm of the Jewish Federations of Canada, said he is now lobbying for the Canadian government to adopt what he described as a more urgent approach to investigating Nazi war criminals in Canada who have potentially eluded scrutiny.

“We don’t have a lot of time,” Marceau told JI in a recent interview, alluding to the actuarial probability that Nazi perpetrators won’t be alive for much longer. “A mandate

should be given to the war crimes unit to look into this in an expeditious manner.”

A spokesperson for Canada’s Department of Justice said in a statement to JI last Thursday that the Canadian government has “taken action in 27 World War II-related Nazi war crimes cases” since the 1980s, when its war crimes program was first developed, including “criminal prosecutions, extraditions, citizenship revocation actions” and “deportation proceedings.”

By contrast, the U.S. Justice Department unit tasked with investigating Nazi war criminals has won at least 109 of 133 cases over more than four decades.

The spokesperson for the Canadian Justice Department said it “cannot comment on the existence of war crimes files relating to a specific individual unless made public by the court,” adding that the war crimes program “is exploring avenues for modernization with a view to improving Canada’s ability to combat impunity for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.”

“Every allegation concerning the presence of war criminals in Canada is examined,” the spokesperson vowed.

Marceau, however, suggested that the department had more work to do after years of alleged government neglect. “The fact that there are still Nazis who are living in our neighborhoods comfortably,” he said, “is unacceptable.” ♦

OCTOBER 6, 2023

## Omakase obsession: kosher sushi gets an upgrade

*A look inside the newest kosher food trend*

By **Tori Bergel**

For a people that loves to eat — there’s a reason the adage “They tried to kill us, we survived, let’s eat!” is used to describe many a Jewish holiday — the early kosher food scene in the U.S. was dismal. For a time, matzah ball soup and corned beef sandwiches at the local deli

accounted for the entire market (Sephardic-owned restaurants added a sprinkling of Spanish and Middle Eastern alternatives to the mix, but options, overall, were limited). These days, however, the kosher market has become a melting pot of nearly endless choices; observant foodies can enjoy

authentic Indian *tikka masala* as easily as they can their mother’s homemade brisket. Yet, one dish has altered kosher dining more than any other: sushi.

Once introduced in the late ‘90s, sushi fever spread rapidly throughout the Jewish community, turning fast-casual kosher

eateries into catch-all pizzerias serving spicy tuna and California rolls alongside pasta entrées and bagel sandwiches.

"Within a few years you started seeing sushi everywhere, in every restaurant," Dani Klein, who runs the *YeahThatsKosher* blog, told *Jewish Insider* in a recent interview. "You would see sushi at every Jewish affair, be it a bar mitzvah, a wedding and even like a regular Shabbat *kiddush*."

Recently, another shift has taken place. Instead of maki rolls and sashimi platters perfect for working customers during their lunch break or families enjoying a night out, kosher restaurateurs are turning their focus toward fine dining and premium-quality Omakase experiences that rival their non-kosher competitors.

Klein, 41, who founded *YeahThatsKosher* in 2008 as a resource for observant travelers to stay informed about changes within the global kosher landscape, sees the shift as part of a larger trend, which has seen the upscaling of kosher restaurants as a whole within the last 10 to 15 years.

"More steak houses, more expensive eateries, etc... that's really ramped up in the last like three years, where almost all of the restaurants that are opening up, if they're not a fast food-type place, they're going to be upscale," Klein explained. "There's almost nothing in the middle, and I bring this up because if we're seeing the upscaling of all these other types of places, it was only a matter of time before we saw an upscaling of sushi, which has become so popular in the last 20-plus years."

Omakase, which translates to "I'll leave it up to you," is a style of Japanese cuisine in which the customer gives control of their meal over to the chef — trusting them to serve pieces that are both unique and of high quality. It's a popular, and generally pricey, dining experience consisting of a number of courses, which the chef prepares in front of the waiting party.

Where salmon, tuna and yellowtail are staples of typical sushi, omakase takes those building blocks and enhances them. Customers might be presented with toro and fluke, barracuda or golden eye snapper, among other varieties of fish, all in various stages of preparation. Masuda Omakase, which opened its first brick-and-mortar restaurant near Bryant Park in Manhattan

in July, offers a nigiri piece that includes a quail egg with truffle oil on top.

"It was always my dream to open a sushi restaurant. I was always obsessed with sushi. I went to Japan for my honeymoon, that's how much I love it. I went to culinary school for a few years, so that's where I get my knowledge of cooking," Masuda Omakase owner and founder Abraham Chetrit told JI. "I knew what kind of high-quality sushi was being served out there in the rest of the world and wanted to bring that to the Jewish community. A lot of the non-kosher restaurants know what kosher is and advertise that they do 'kosher style,' so I said to myself, why not make that actually kosher."

In New York City alone, the last three years have seen a boom in kosher omakase. Akimori, which opened its flagship Brooklyn storefront in 2021, now has four locations and a fifth space on the way.

"Everything I just kept on hearing was, 'We need good kosher sushi. Like non-kosher sushi, but kosher.' I went to yeshiva, so I know what makes things kosher and what makes things not kosher, and essentially, everything about non-kosher sushi is kosher other than the shellfish," Teddy Khafif, Akimori's founder and co-owner, told JI. "So it's really just understanding the Japanese culture and how they do it, and then once you know that, then I was able to apply that into the kosher world."

Khafif, who was formerly the *chef de partie* at Masa, took what he learned from nearly a decade working under a number of famed chefs, including three-time Michelin-starred chef Masa Takayama, and used those experiences as the basis for Akimori.

"We just want to serve really good sushi, omakase-style," Khafif said. "We want you to have a nice drink, we want you to eat the best pieces, and just walk out saying, 'Wow, that was the best sushi I ever had.'"

What makes the New York kosher omakase scene so unique is the way in which it first started. Rather than opening traditional brick-and-mortar businesses, many of the restaurants that were founded in 2020, such as Akimori and Masuda Omakase, began by launching as specialized, at-home omakase experiences, where they catered directly to their customers — a move that Klein attributes largely to COVID.

"When you think about what COVID did, is it forced businesses, whether existing or new entrepreneurial-style businesses, to come up with new concepts...In the first year of COVID there wasn't a lot of going out... And it forced businesses to figure out a way to still bring experiences, especially high-end experiences, ones that you are going to be willing to pay extra dollars for, to your home," Klein explained. "This omakase experience, where you're getting higher quality fish, higher quality product and flavors and potentially things that you've never had before brought directly to you, was something new and it was something that was innovative to the kosher community in particular."

Like omakase itself, these catered experiences aimed to elevate how their kosher clientele consumed sushi by providing not only the food, but the tableware and ambiance as well.

"Our team would come approximately 30 minutes before the event started. They would set the dining room table with our place settings, then they would set up our chef's station (which could be on a kitchen counter or table nearby) with all of the ingredients and appliances," Chetrit told JI in an email. "When the host is ready for dinner, we start serving the meal course by course. We start off with an appetizer, then serve the sushi pieces and then the hand roll."

For many restaurants, kosher omakase is also a way to connect with other businesses in the community. Two of Akimori's locations are in-house partnerships — one with Salt Steakhouse in Deal, N.J., and the other with Bonito in Manhattan. FinBar, which had its soft opening in June before opening fully at the end of July, operates out of Patis Bakery, a popular kosher French cafe chain around New York City.

FinBar's co-owner Asher Ragimov, who also co-owns Brooklyn-based kosher omakase restaurant Koma with a different group of partners, did not grow up with a religious background, but after becoming more observant, wanted to bring his favorite style of dining to kosher audiences.

"I felt like the kosher market was lacking. And that's the reason that we decided to go with OMA currency rather than regular sushi," he told JI. "Regular sushi is something



that anybody can really do. Omakase, you need a specialized chef, somebody that has to have experience. All our chefs have a minimum of 15 years' experience in just omakase sushi."

Given the price tag for a night of omakase dining — both non-kosher and kosher omakase can range from around \$40 to over \$500, depending on the restaurant and number of courses — most restaurants also offer one-off rolls or cheaper lunch items before dinner hours set in. In Masuda Omakase's case, the restaurant touts a hand roll bar, which *YeahThatsKosher* deemed "the World's First" for kosher diners.

But despite the similarities between restaurants, no two omakase experiences are the same. Manhattan's Sen Sakana, which opened in 2017, and is helmed by executive chef and "Chopped" champion

Mina Newman, showcases Newman's Peruvian background through Nikkei cuisine — a fusion between Japanese and Peruvian cuisines that was created during the Japanese diaspora when a slew of Japanese immigrants who had settled in Peru used the ingredients available to them in their cooking.

"I always use the example of the New York Jewish bagel," Newman told JI. "It was the Eastern European Jews that made that. They made do with what they had around them, right? Very similarly to what we know with Nikkei."

Newman's is a slight exception to the rule, as Sen Sakana originally started out non-kosher before converting over after coming back from the pandemic — the restaurant's owner is the son of a Holocaust survivor and wanted to make the switch —

but it still fits within the overall trend.

While the kosher omakase boom has stayed largely in the New York area and parts of South Florida — popular Florida spot Naamah Sushi has locations in both Boca Raton and Fort Lauderdale — Klein sees potential for the trend's expansion into other cities and high-end destinations such as Los Angeles, the Bahamas, Playa del Carmen and Cancún, in Mexico, or even Israel, Paris and London.

"The popularity of sushi in general has not waned," Klein said. "To have options of a regular sushi and then an upscale, fancy, high-end version of sushi, which is essentially what omakase is, I think very much complements what is already an offering within the kosher market." ♦

OCTOBER 5, 2023

## BDS resolutions on college campuses have almost disappeared. What comes next?

*A decade ago, there were dozens of efforts to get universities to divest from Israel; this past year, there were three*

By Haley Cohen

*The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.*

Over the last decade, supporters of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement targeting Israel have focused their campaign in the U.S. primarily on college campuses. But the once-thriving effort to push BDS-related legislation through student governments has significantly lost momentum over the last academic year, a sharp contrast from its peak in the 2014-2015 school year when U.S. campuses saw 44 BDS votes.

The resolutions rose briefly in the wake of the 2021 conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza but have since plummeted again. Last year, there were three.

But Jewish groups who monitor college campuses caution that the falloff does not

signal that all is well for Jewish students on campus.

The drop in BDS resolutions on college campuses comes amid rising antisemitism and anti-Zionism in other forms, including anti-Israel activity on college campuses, which has nearly doubled over the previous year, according to a September report by the Anti-Defamation League.

The ADL, which releases an annual audit of anti-Israel activism on college campuses as part of its regular reporting about nationwide antisemitism, found that during the 2022-2023 school year, there were a total of 665 anti-Israel incidents, up from 359 in the previous school year. The findings include nine instances of anti-Israel vandalism and no instances of physical assault. The ADL, which released the report as it faces scrutiny from both the left and

the right over whether it deviates too much from its mission of tracking and responding to antisemitism, did not speculate why BDS resolutions dropped.

Mark Rotenberg, vice president of Hillel International, emphasized in an interview with *eJewishPhilanthropy* that antisemitism on campuses is still just as concerning, despite taking forms other than BDS.

"Bullying, intimidation and exclusion of Jewish students has morphed," Rotenberg told eJP in August while attending the Israel Campus Coalition (ICC) conference in Washington, D.C. "The tactics have changed. The reason classic BDS is no longer the preferred tool is because Jewish students and organizations attacked that challenge in a very direct way, and we now have administrators who understand the unlawfulness of this kind of boycott activity,

who appreciate that a fundamental value, academic freedom, is at stake. Boycotts are fundamentally inconsistent with basic principles that govern universities.”

Rotenberg said the Jewish community has effectively shut down BDS through “persistent and dogged efforts.” He noted that while three schools – Case Western Reserve University (CWRU), Grinnell College and University of Texas at Dallas — saw BDS campaigns last year, “there are really no examples of actual BDS resolutions of any substantial context on American universities today.”

Many of the resolutions try to force universities to divest from companies that do business with Israel. At CWRU, the USG General Assembly voted decisively on Nov. 8 in support of a resolution that calls on CWRU administration “to investigate whether any of its financial assets are invested in companies that support violence against Palestinians, and divest from them if they are found to do so.” The resolution names specific targets for divestment, including U.S. technology companies Raytheon, which co-manufactures Israel’s Iron Dome missile defense system, and Lockheed Martin, which produces F-35 fighter jets and other weapons, in addition to various companies that “facilitate the building, maintenance, or economic development of illegal Israeli settlements, outposts, and settler-only roads and transportation systems on occupied Palestinian territory.”

Although the resolutions aren’t binding or likely to change university policy, support for the initiatives can lead to a divisive atmosphere on campus.

A medical student at CWRU who requested to remain anonymous told eJP she “would receive hate for speaking about this issue.”

“I brought it up in the lab once and the Muslim undergrad got upset,” the student, who also attended CWRU for her bachelor’s degree, said. “Case [Western Reserve University] is very anti-Israel. I used to be afraid of saying I’m Israeli in undergrad because there were anti- Israel posters everywhere from the Palestine club.”

Rotenberg said that detractors and adversaries have morphed their tactics. “We now see more direct attacks on Jewish and Zionist-identified students,” he

told eJP. “For example, instead of asking the administration to divest stock from Caterpillar Inc., [a construction company that has been the target of boycotts for supplying bulldozers to the Israel Defense Forces for use in Palestinian home demolitions and military activities], we see student orgs demanding that their membership condemns Zionism. That’s an attack on the students’ identity. In many ways, Jewish students are now the focus because they’re a softer target than a committee on a board of trustees.”

Rotenberg pointed to Hillel programming such as the Campus Climate Initiative (CCI), which launched in 2020 to address antisemitism on more than 50 college campuses, for contributing to the decrease in BDS resolutions.

“We have developed a curriculum for Jewish students, as well as other students, to help them understand how antisemitism presents in 2023,” he said. “Our students have reacted in diverse ways, there is an increase in activism and standing up for who you are, learning about Zionism.”

Rotenberg added that Hillel has also turned its focus to university administrators “to make sure they understand their legal and moral obligation consistent with our mission of diversity, equity and justice for all students. Most administrators already want to provide an equal educational opportunity for Jewish students but they are challenged because their DEI [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion] offices invariably were not initially created with a mission that included Jewish students. Getting the administration to understand how antisemitism has warped and is targeting students now and encouraging them in many different ways, political, legal, educational, to include Jewish students within their DEI mission is another approach that we’re working on as part of our CCI program.”

A 2021 study from the ADL and Hillel found that a substantial number of college students say they have experienced or witnessed antisemitism, sometimes because of their real or perceived support for Israel.

Rotenberg added that antisemitism is more politically divisive than ever.

“Antisemitism from the right is more easily understood by students because many

students see antisemitism from the right, [such as a] swastika or white nationalist rhetoric as kooky, crazy and inconsistent with the values of their institution,” he said. “Antisemitism from the left, however, is much more challenging for many students because it’s not perceived as some outside kooky source?? — it emanates from faculty, from students orgs on campus and that’s a bigger challenge for our students. That’s why we emphasize the multifaceted nature of antisemitism in 2023.”

Jacob Baime, CEO of ICC, told eJP that the drop in BDS resolutions is “not an accident,” but rather is due to “a deliberate effort” to educate students.

“The reason, in my view, that the number dropped is that [national campus organizations] renewed our commitment to civic engagement,” Baime said.

“What we have to understand and appreciate is that the anti-Israel activists and organizations are investing very heavily in recruiting and training anti-Israel student activists to take over their student governments and to exploit those positions for propaganda,” Baime explained.

“We started very seriously doing the same. That’s why a lot of the campus work happening is about equipping students to understand the importance of civic engagement and making sure they have the tools, especially on higher-risk campuses where we expect problems, to run for student government office. It’s been a deliberate effort and it doesn’t end.” ♦

# An antisemitism encyclopedia for the masses

*A new anthology shows how antisemitism has morphed and moved across borders over time*

By Gabby Deutch

A new book on antisemitism has something for everyone — or at least that's the hope of the editors of the new anthology that delves into the history of the world's oldest hatred across millennia, on every continent and in all fields of study and culture.

With 40 short essays on antisemitism on topics ranging from Argentina to anti-Zionism to art, the volume attempts to offer the final, irrefutable word on a problem that has become deeply segmented and politicized. It's as if they're saying, *You can't argue this evidence. Now take antisemitism seriously.*

"There are multiple inroads into the subject," said the Shoah Foundation's executive director, Robert Williams, who co-edited the *Routledge History of Antisemitism* with Hampshire College history professor James Wald and Mark Weitzman, the chief operating officer of the World Jewish Restitution Organization. "People can take a selective approach to analyzing antisemitism, particularly in a highly, highly politicized age, and antisemitism knows no political bounds."

The editors' hope is that their new book, with its easily digestible stand-alone chapters, can serve as something of a reference book, like an encyclopedia of antisemitism. Contributors include a who's who of historians of Judaism and antisemitism, among them Brandeis' Jonathan Sarna, Dartmouth's Susannah Heschel, Brown's Holly Case, McGill's Gil Troy and Yale's Maurice Samuels.

The book lands at a time of renewed and highly visible antisemitism in the United States. Elon Musk recently attacked the Anti-Defamation League and blamed the Jewish organization for causing antisemitism; in September, days before a controversial Palestinian cultural festival that brought several prominent antisemites

to the University of Pennsylvania, a person ran into the school's Hillel and shouted "F\*\*\* the Jews."

The ideal audience for the book, which clocks in at just over 400 pages, is people "that care about the subject but need to know more about it," said Williams. He said it could also be used as a resource for policymakers and as an educational tool for college students who have never considered how antisemitism might manifest in their own lives. Instead, many young people mainly learn about antisemitism in the context of the Holocaust, which leaves out its myriad other manifestations in America and around the world.

"A lot of us grew up with the myth of what we call American exceptionalism, which is that the United States had a relationship to the Jews that was totally exceptional to everyplace else in Europe," said Weitzman. "That myth did not allow for the presence of antisemitism in the American historical narrative or political narrative."

Antisemitism in America "never reached the horrible ends that it did in Europe," added Williams. But "the overreliance of the focus on the Holocaust," he said, leaves out important and disturbing American cases of antisemitism, such as the lynching of Leo Frank or the bombing of synagogues in the South by the Ku Klux Klan.

The idea for the book came about more than five years ago, when antisemitism "was becoming a highly political topic," said Weitzman. "We needed something that would be both accessible and authoritative at the same time."

In the years since, the politicization of antisemitism has only gotten worse. At the same time, people are more likely to point it out only when antisemitism is espoused by a political opponent.

"If you can say, 'I'm on the right and antisemitism is only on the left,' or 'I'm a

Christian and antisemitism is only in Islam,'" Weitzman said, "it becomes easier to just put it in a box, wrap it up and put it on the side, and say, 'That's it. It's not applicable.'"

What the book aims to show is that "this is the one thing that will unite people who would otherwise have nothing to do with one another," Weitzman added.

Weitzman and Williams are both closely connected to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism, which has been adopted by dozens of countries and scores of state and municipal governments as a tool to guide public officials whose work touches on antisemitism or bias. The IHRA definition has faced some pushback from activists on the left who disagree with its assertion that some forms of anti-Zionism are antisemitic, and who argue that it stifles free speech.

In the book's foreword, its editors acknowledge "that there are different definitions and other approaches." But they still assert that in a policy context — the purpose for which the IHRA definition was written — IHRA "is the best thing that we have, and I would endorse it and keep pushing it." The debate over how antisemitism is defined should be constrained to the academic realm, while just one widely adopted definition should be advanced in the policy realm.

"Debates over definitions are a luxury of a time of peace. But with rising antisemitism in the United States and abroad, we don't have the luxury of debate," said Williams.

This debate reached the West Wing earlier this year as the White House put together a national strategy to counter antisemitism, a wide-ranging plan that praised the IHRA definition while also welcoming a progressive alternative.

"The action plan is, on the surface, a start. It's a good start," said Weitzman, who

offered suggestions and feedback to the White House as they drafted the document. “But so far, it hasn’t really been put into action yet. So we have to wait and see what happens with that.”

More action is needed by the states, Weitzman argued, and not just the federal government. Williams called for a greater antisemitism focus at the domestic policy level.

“We need to build off of the action plan in order to ensure that just as we have a special envoy for antisemitism in the State Department, we have a coordinator dealing with domestic antisemitism within parts of the U.S. government that deal with domestic issues, equivalent to what you see in most European countries,” said Williams.

The book’s study of antisemitism reaches deep into the 21st century: One

chapter examines antisemitism on social media, and another looks at the antisemitic conspiracy theories that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“The only regret I think that we have is that it couldn’t have gotten out a year or two earlier,” said Weitzman, “as things were heating up even more.” ♦

OCTOBER 2, 2023

## Congress averts government shutdown as Dems warn of consequences for Middle East and antisemitism

*House Democrats lambasted Republicans for voting for a failed stopgap bill that would have enacted 30% cuts to many areas of the federal government*

By Marc Rod

Congress voted on a bipartisan basis on Saturday to keep the government open through late November, capping off a week of uncertainty with last-minute bipartisan votes in the House and Senate, hours before funding was set to expire.

The House vote, which split Republicans and required Democratic support, will reverberate into this week. Rep. Matt Gaetz (R-FL) announced plans to attempt to unseat House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-CA). Republicans are also pursuing measures — potentially expulsion or censure — to punish Rep. Jamaal Bowman (D-NY) for pulling a fire alarm in a House office building leading up to the vote; Bowman claims he was trying to open a locked door to get to the Capitol building.

The finalized stopgap funding measure includes neither additional funding for Ukraine nor the steep cuts to many federal agencies that House Republicans had been pursuing. On Friday, 198 Republicans voted for a stopgap funding bill that would have cut around 30% from a number of federal agencies; the bill that ultimately passed on Saturday largely continues current spending levels for the next month and a half. Republican and Democratic Senate leaders

have plans to bring forward a separate Ukraine aid measure, and House Democrats are pressuring McCarthy to do the same.

Both before and after Saturday’s votes, some Democrats blasted Republican leadership for failing to provide aid to Ukraine, a concession to a growing isolationist wing of the party.

“The Republicans like to talk the long game about being pro-national security, but what we’ve seen... is that they’re willing to cave to the extremist MAGA Republicans and give in on issues [of which] they are supposed to be so strongly supportive,” Rep. Kathy Manning (D-NC) said at a press conference on Friday.

Rep. Brad Sherman (D-CA) argued that supporters of Israel should be “worried” about the “isolationist wing of the Republican Party,” which waylaid various spending efforts last week in opposition to Ukraine aid. “Those who have fought for aid to Israel for the last 40, 50 years have always known that you can’t be an isolationist except for Israel,” Sherman said.

At the Friday press conference, a group of ten House Democrats, all but one of them Jewish, lambasted their Republican colleagues for voting for the Friday stopgap bill that would have significantly cut funding

to the State Department, Department of Justice and other federal agencies.

“If you are deeply cutting the State Department, how are they going to have the personnel in place, coming to work every day to make sure that we can stand up for our agreements, make sure that we can be there with our allies?” Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-FL) said. “The Abraham Accords, the concerns that we have around the entire world — with a 30% cut, that is going to completely disable our ability to be there for our allies.”

Wasserman Schultz added that the bill would have “all but ensur[ed] that we fall short of our commitments to key regional partners who help guarantee Israel’s continued security and safeguard our interests in the Middle East and North Africa,” as well as impair the State Department’s ability to enforce sanctions on Iran.

“How is our State Department supposed to enforce consequences for Iran after losing a third of its resources and personnel?” she questioned.

Wasserman Schultz added that the GOP’s proposed cuts would have also kneecapped efforts to fight antisemitism, support Holocaust education and pursue



hate crimes and domestic terrorism through the FBI.

"In order to accomplish the ambitious goals to combat the world's most ancient hatred," she said, referring to the administration's national strategy on antisemitism, "you need more resources, not less."

McCarthy did not respond to a request

for comment.

The Democrats also argued that bringing the government so close to a shutdown hampered critical work.

"Every agency in [the] government right now, their preoccupation now is getting ready for a shutdown. They're not even focused on this work, they're focused on who can actually work, who is essential,"

Rep. Lois Frankel (D-FL) said Friday.

Reps. Dean Phillips (D-MN), Greg Landsman (D-OH), Jared Moskowitz (D-FL), Brad Schneider (D-IL), Adriano Espaillat (D-NY) and Jake Auchincloss (D-MA) also appeared at the press conference. Rep. Pat Ryan (D-NY) also warned of the GOP bill's consequences for Israel aid in a statement to *JL*. ♦

OCTOBER 2, 2023

## Saudi Arabia's \$800 billion tourism plan starts to take shape

*With a target of 200 hotels at its mega-project Neom and a new hospitality school, the kingdom is charting its path to 70 million visitors a year*

By Rebecca Anne Proctor, Kelsey Warner

*The article first appeared in The Circuit.*

Four years after opening up to international tourists for the first time, Saudi Arabia marked progress on its massive \$800 billion investment drive to lure travelers as it played host to the United Nations' World Tourism Day.

Riyadh welcomed over 500 government officials, investors, international press and U.N. delegates from 120 countries last week to underscore the importance of the global tourism industry. The occasion was also an opportunity for Saudi Arabia to set out more bold plans for its young tourism sector as it seeks to diversify its economy beyond oil revenues.

"If you want to introduce your country to the world, then tourism is the best way to do it," Zurab Pololikashvili, secretary-general of the U.N. World Tourism Organization, said during a roundtable discussion.

Neom has signed around 18 hotel deals – including with luxury brands like JW Marriott, The W and German boutique concept 25Hours – and has a target of 200 total, most of them to be built on The Line, a spokesperson for Neom Hotel Development told *The Circuit*.

First unveiled by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in 2017, Neom is a

\$500 billion mega-project in the northwest of the country along the Red Sea coast, with construction underway on a variety of zones such as a mountain ski resort, an island getaway, a major port and a city-of-the-future concept known as The Line, where the majority of the hotels will be built.

The flurry of deals in Neom marks a shift for the kingdom, which has always catered to Muslim pilgrimage tourists. The majority of hotels currently open in Saudi Arabia are centralized in Medina adjacent to the holy site of Mecca.

Saudi Arabia's Minister of Tourism Ahmed Al-Khateeb announced the creation of the Riyadh School for Tourism and Hospitality to build a pipeline of talent to staff the fast-growing industry. Set to open in 2027, it will cost more than \$1 billion to build and be located in the capital's entertainment and tourism project known as Qiddiyah.

Pololikashvili also announced the creation of a center for the study of sustainability — of which the UNWTO was working closely with officials in the kingdom to accomplish. The program is due to be launched in September and will offer a bachelor's degree program with students spending time pursuing studies in Madrid, Spain and the Swiss city of Lucerne.

Al-Khateeb said the kingdom will invest

\$800 billion to develop tourism over the next decade as the contribution of travel and tourism to the nation's economy begins to pick up pace. The goal is for the sector to contribute up to 10% of gross domestic product by 2030, up from a current 4.5%.

The kingdom has also raised its tourism targets, setting a goal of attracting 70 million international visitors annually by 2030, up from 50 million, *Bloomberg* reported.

Among the various delegates in attendance at World Tourism Day was Israel's Tourism Minister Haim Katz, who arrived in the kingdom on Tuesday, becoming the first Israeli minister to lead a delegation to Saudi Arabia. The visit comes at a time when Israel and the kingdom are moving closer towards a U.S.-brokered normalization deal.

Pololikashvili said Saudi Arabia was obliged to admit the Israeli minister for the U.N. event even though the two countries don't have diplomatic relations. "All our member states are invited to take part in our events – independently of where they are held," Pololikashvili told *The Circuit*. ♦