

## THE WEEKLY PRINT

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OCTOBER 10, 2023

## Israel's intel failure: 'How did this happen?'

*Explanations beginning to emerge after worst terror attack in Israel's history*

By Lahav Harkov

**T**hey might as well have been sitting ducks.

They are the *tatzpitaniyot*, mostly female soldiers stationed on the IDF bases near the Gaza Strip, their eyes glued to security cameras and other feeds of the border. Last Saturday morning, the Hamas terrorists who entered some of those bases with hang gliders shot at cameras and jammed some communications systems. They shot at the combat soldiers who were stationed at those bases, as well as at the *tatzpitaniyot*.

"Yes, they surprised us, and we weren't ready for it," said a female soldier at one of the bases who shared her harrowing story on social media. "Half of the force was home for Sukkot...and we had no intelligence about this...I took care of the injured while terrorists walked around my base, my second home, and murdered my friends. I

prepared for this moment for two years, but nothing can prepare you for the moment of truth."

As Israel readies for a possible ground invasion of the Gaza Strip following the massive surprise attack last Saturday that killed some 900 Israelis and left the country reeling, Israelis are grappling with how the soldiers in the south were left so unprotected, and how the intelligence lapse — one that carries an eerie echo of the Yom Kippur War surprise attack almost 50 years ago to the day that Hamas brazenly struck southern Israel — was so glaring.

Some details of the initial cabinet meeting on Saturday night have leaked, and ministers were reportedly blindsided, having not been given any indication that an invasion or war was on the way in their weekly briefings with the prime minister's military secretary. Science and Technology

Minister Ofir Akunis asked flat-out in the meeting: "What happened to Israel's intelligence?"

The full picture will likely become clearer when the fog of war dissipates and a commission of inquiry investigates, as has become the custom in Israel after wars in the past 50 years. In the short term, as Israelis ask themselves, "How did this happen?" several possible explanations have already come to light.

### The Conceptzia

After the Yom Kippur War, one of the answers to how Israel was surprised by an attack from Egypt and Syria was the "*conceptzia*." The word literally translates to "preconception," and it refers to groupthink or an idea that captivated the whole cabinet, without consideration of the alternatives.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu combatted reports on Monday that the extent of the *conceptzia* was such that he did not heed a warning that war was coming. According to AP, Egypt had warned Israel that “something big” was coming from Gaza, but the IDF was too busy with terrorism in the West Bank. The Israeli Prime Minister’s Office said he had not received any warnings and had not spoken with Egyptian Intelligence Minister Abbas Kamel since returning to office this year.

“We were apparently dependent on a *conceptzia* that Hamas wanted money from Qatar and was deterred,” former IDF Military Intelligence Directorate head Maj-Gen. (res.) Amos Yadlin told JI. “For every surprise, the surprisers come up with a distraction, and that is what we saw.”

Israel built its defense plans “on the idea that Hamas was not interested in a war. They distracted us and kept us busy with other violations on the [border] fence,” Yadlin said.

“It’s clear that there was a tactical and conceptual surprise that led to a strategic failing — though it can be turned around,” he added.

Hamas “duped” Israel intentionally over the past two years, by pretending that economic incentives such as aid from Doha and increased permits for Gazans to work in Israel were working, *Reuters* reported. In the meantime, Hamas trained 1,000 terrorists for the invasion, reportedly without telling them exactly what they were preparing to do.

Former National Security Adviser Maj-Gen. (res.) Yaakov Amidror, a senior fellow at the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security, said in a briefing to reporters that Israel’s allies had claimed Hamas had “more responsibility,” and was busier managing the Gaza Strip than preparing to fight Israel.

“We stupidly began to believe that it was true, so we made a mistake,” Amidror said. “We won’t make this mistake again and we will destroy Hamas, slowly but surely.”

A senior defense official who left his post this year spoke on condition of anonymity because he only wanted to support the war effort on the record.

“At some point in recent months, Hamas changed their strategy from supporting stability and quiet, as it did in Operation

Shield and Arrow” — in May, when only Palestinian Islamic Jihad attacked Israel — “to an all-out war. They are giving their maximum,” he said.

The ex-official speculated that the “change in policy is connected to trying to destroy Israel’s ability to make peace with Saudi Arabia, which is a clear Iranian goal.”

While he said his former colleagues indicated to him this week that there was an inkling of Hamas’ plans, the official said the intelligence gap “disturbs me, because it goes deep.”

In addition, he argued that the IDF should have been able to defend the towns close to the Gaza border even if they were totally surprised.

“I don’t know why there were not enough soldiers in the towns. It could be that they were in the West Bank, but we should have been prepared regardless of the intelligence,” he said.

After an Egyptian police officer crossed into Israel and shot three IDF soldiers in June, “we should have known that our front positions were not working as they should.”

### Blinded lookouts

Another element of Hamas’ attack that delayed Israel’s ability to respond effectively was its targeting of bases in the south where *tatzpitaniyot*, who watch cameras and other feeds of the border, are stationed.

One *tatzpitanit* who finished her service earlier this year told JI that she was going back to her old base, because there was no one left who knew how to do the lookouts’ job.

Some of the *tatzpitaniyot* on bases attacked by Hamas told harrowing stories on social media.

“In my worst dreams, I could not have imagined something like this,” one wrote. “I woke up for a 4 a.m. shift that turned out to be a nightmare. I never thought I’d see something like this from my lookout point in my life. I did the best I can, until a sniper shot my camera.”

She described “crazy noise, blood everywhere,” while she spent “16 hours locked in a small war room with a lot of hope and prayers.” The *Hottest Place in Hell*, an Israeli independent investigative journalism site, published a message it received from

another *tatzpitanit*, who had only finished her training four days before the war began.

“We received a message that there was an invasion, that terrorists entered Israel... all along the line there were large numbers of terrorists and the forces weren’t making it in time to stop them, it was a psychotic number of terrorists. They started shooting at our cameras, until we weren’t able to look out. They told us the only thing to do is to run to the war room, while we heard rocket sirens and rockets fell by us. I ran like I had never run before,” she said.

All of the *tatzpitaniyot* were told to leave their positions and hide behind their large computer systems, as combat soldiers came to protect them.

“There was a Golani unit and they were all erased, very quickly, killed one after the other. They started bringing the injured to our war room. I started helping take care of them as much as possible because I was afraid to get out from behind the computer[.] I feared for my life.”

The soldiers, according to the accounts in *Hottest Place in Hell*, did not eat for 26 hours and did not have enough water, were in a hot room with no air conditioning because of the power outage and had to use cups and trash cans because there was no toilet.

At one point, the terrorists tried to light the building on fire, and the soldiers had to decide whether to stay in a building on fire or run out to where they would be shot or captured, but soldiers managed to put out the fire quickly. Terrorists shot at the doors, and the soldiers saw that they were stealing IDF uniforms.

“There were so many terrorists and so many killed and injured. No one knew what to do, and we were all crying and hysterical. I don’t know how I survived,” she said.

Eventually, they were evacuated under fire: “We saw corpses on the way to the bus,” she recalled.

### The retired officer who predicted it all

From the start of the war, an interview with Maj-Gen. (res.) Yitzhak Brick on an Israeli Jewish-interest cable news channel Hidabrut went viral. In the video from July, the former IDF ombudsman seemed to predict exactly what happened on Sunday.

Brick, 76, was an Israeli general who fought in the Six-Day War, Yom Kippur War and the First Lebanon War, officially retiring from the army in 1999. He then became the IDF ombudsman in 2008-2018, after which he began publicly criticizing the IDF for its lack of preparedness.

A series of newspaper op-eds, as well as a lengthy article in the journal *Hashiloach* that Brick wrote in 2020, drew significant attention in Israel for its warning that the IDF, especially its highest-ranking officers, has lost its fighting spirit.

In the last month, Brick wrote articles warning that Israel is not prepared. In *Haaretz*, he wrote: "Netanyahu, the next war is near. Declare a national state of emergency." In *Maariv*: "Though the political leadership abandoned our security, I will continue to fight without fear." In *Israel Hayom* the headline was: "Residents of the north, prepare to defend yourselves ahead of the next war: No one else will do it."

In the viral video, Brick chillingly describes the nightmare scenario that came true this week.

"A massacre can happen here and the State of Israel doesn't understand it," he said.

Hamas is preparing "to enter a number of towns on foot. The likelihood it will happen is very high, whether they come in the thousands or hundreds," he said.

"If you're a resident sitting in a shelter, they'll come to the shelter, throw a grenade and you're dead. Not just you, everyone, they'll sit there and be slaughtered," Brick warned.

He called on Israelis to prepare to defend their towns.

"No one else will be there," Brick continued in the video. "The army won't be there. The army is small today, and the things it wants to send won't arrive because of roadblocks...You have to be able to fight with your own body to defend your town, and in order to be able to do that you have to prepare the town to fight."

"The army won't be there for you in a war," he emphasized. "In the first hours, you will be in the shelters because of the rockets, but the moment that word gets out that [terrorists] are on the ground, get into position and fight for your lives."

Brick said that towns near the Gaza border should dig trenches and set up

positions, have backup water and medical supplies, and more.

He criticized the IDF for taking local security teams' weapons, a decision the military made two years ago because of theft. Brick said that "everyone under 70, most of whom were in the army and know how to shoot," should have access to a weapon and should be trained.

"No one is saying this, and we're in a lawless situation," Brick lamented. "[The security establishment] is just telling people 'hide,' but not what to do if a terrorist arrives. Who will stop the terrorists? The army can't do it today."

Brick is a controversial figure. Some of the responses to his video claim that he is attempting to deflect blame from Netanyahu, since Brick said the problems began when National Unity Party leader Benny Gantz and MK Gadi Eisencot, also of National Union, were IDF chiefs of staff.

One former senior defense official who spoke with JI said "Brick says so much nonsense that sometimes some of it ends up being right."

Kobi Michael, a senior researcher at the Institute for National Security Studies at Tel Aviv University, said in a conversation with JI that, while Brick correctly predicted part of what happened, much of it still remains unexplained.

"The security in the towns is really problematic and not developed enough," he said. "In places with more guns and people who were better trained, they were able to kill terrorists. But the things Brick spoke about are more about the local level of supplies and fighting. It doesn't explain what happened here."

"All kinds of details are coming out about all of [Hamas'] preparations, distractions by holding demonstrations by the border fence, shooting at cameras, taking over the Southern Command base and disrupting its ability to command the whole area," Michael said, "but I still don't understand how an event like this can happen, how they can shut down the whole border fence and why it took three hours for more forces to arrive. I have no answers. So many senior officers were killed."

Michael and Yadlin both said that an investigation is likely.

"I think a lot of heads will roll," Michael

said.

Now, the government must set "totally different goals" to the fighting between Israel and Hamas since 2009, Michael said.

"The reaction will be totally different and the result must be totally different. It can be that some good can come out of all of this bad. We can create a reality where we improve the army. Now, we understand the army is too small and we need a bigger IDF for our missions, just like the Ukrainians understood in their war," he said.

Michaeli warned that Israel is "heading into a long campaign that will exact a price. There are no free lunches. We need a lot of patience and unity and wisdom from our leaders – military and political – and I want to believe that we will find it and in the end, from this whole mess, we can hope for something good." ♦

# Military preparing for next stage of war, says IDF spokesman

*Israeli intelligence is using the harrowing video footage from Saturday's terrorist attack, as well as captured terrorists, to identify and track down those responsible and destroy Hamas' infrastructure in Gaza*

By Ruth Marks Eglash

Israel's military is "preparing for the next stages" of its war in Gaza, even as it continues to defend its southern border and detect terrorist operatives who infiltrated its territory over the weekend, IDF spokesman Lt. Col. Richard Hecht said on Thursday.

"We have told all our units to prepare for an operative contingency plan from the air and from the sea and the army is now waiting to see what the political leadership decides about a ground operation – it has not been decided yet, but we are preparing for a ground maneuver if it is decided," Hecht told journalists in a briefing.

Israel's security cabinet, headed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, met on Wednesday night hours after forming a unity government with former IDF Chief of Staff Benny Gantz, a leader in the opposition.

Overnight Wednesday, IDF military jets continued to strike the Palestinian enclave, specifically targeting the infrastructure and individuals of Hamas's elite Nukhba force, which Hecht explained was behind Saturday's mass terrorist attack that killed more than 1,200 people – civilians and Israeli soldiers – as well as kidnapping an estimated 80 hostages, though the numbers are continuing to rise.

"The Nukhba elite forces consist of terrorists selected by senior Hamas operatives, designated to carry out terrorist attacks such as ambushes, raids, assaults, infiltration through terror tunnels, as well as firing anti-tank missiles, rockets and sniper fire," said the army in a statement on Thursday. "The Nukhba elite forces were one of the leading forces that infiltrated the State of Israel in order to carry out murderous acts of terror against its citizens."

Among those targeted and killed in airstrikes on Wednesday night was Hamas's senior Naval operative, Muhammad Abu Shamla. His residence, said the army, was used to store naval weapons.

Hecht also said that another senior Hamas operative, who had been part of the attack and had shared atrocious visuals from Saturday's attack on his social media platforms, was also targeted and killed.

"Our intelligence is focused on finding these people," the spokesman explained. "We plan to get to every one of them – all those guys who were sitting on the pick-up truck with the young German woman – we will get to all of them, and they will pay with their life."

He said that Israeli intelligence officers are combing social media, bodycams retrieved from some of the more than 1,500 dead terrorists and other visuals to identify individuals involved in the attack, locate them and kill them. Israel is also interrogating captured terrorists to glean information about Hamas' capabilities and infrastructure.

"We are focused on taking out the senior leadership, not only the military but also the government leadership all the way up to [Hamas leader Yahya] Sinwar," said Hecht. "They were directly involved in this."

IDF Spokesman Read Admiral Daniel Hagari told Israeli reporters on Thursday that there had been some "warning signs" the night before the surprise attack from Gaza that something might happen on the Gaza front, but those did not reach the higher levels of the intelligence establishment.

"It was a surprise attack, but now everyone is looking back at tweets and statements that came out from certain

people that might have indicated something was going on," explained Hecht. "It's too early at this stage to talk about the intelligence issues, this is something we will look into and talk about when this is finished."

Meanwhile, there were reports of additional terrorists attempting to infiltrate Israel via the sea and several points on Wednesday where terrorists remaining in southern Israel battled Israeli forces. Five terrorists were killed and two more were captured on Wednesday and there were also several large salvos of rocket fire over the south and through to the center of the country.

Along the border fence, which Hecht said was breached in multiple locations, the army has been working to bring back security, stationing more than 100 tanks along the line and providing cover for those repairing the fence from the air.

"Anyone who comes near the fence will be shot," said Hecht. "No one is going into Gaza, and no one is coming out."

Inside Gaza, officials said that its only power station stopped working on Wednesday after Israel declared a complete siege on the Strip, closing off access to electricity, food, fuel and water in response to Saturday's terror attack.

The Palestinian Ministry of Health said it was forced to cut back on its healthcare services, even as it reported that some 1,055 people had been killed so far in Israeli airstrikes and a further 5,000 injured.

Israel on Wednesday declared the entire area around Gaza as a closed military zone, emphasizing that entry for civilians is "strictly prohibited and constitutes a serious security risk, as well as a criminal offense."

In a statement, the army said that "IDF

soldiers are conducting combat activity in the area and entering [the area] endangers lives as well as harms the IDF's activities."

Hecht said the army was "ramping up" its readiness all over the country, including in the north and in the West bank "if this turns out to be a multi-arena event."

"We are on full alert and another vision

has been deployed to the northern border," he said.

On Wednesday evening, alerts were issued about an infiltration in the north, and civilians were ordered into safe rooms but a little while later the army issued a statement saying it was a false alarm. Hecht explained that people are jumpy and scared

and the mistake was human error. However, in another incident later on Wednesday night, Hezbollah fired anti-tank missiles into Israel.

In the West Bank, Hecht said the army was also bolstering its forces and arresting active Hamas terrorists in the area in order to ensure that it remains secure. ♦

OCTOBER 10, 2023

## Families of American hostages in Gaza plead for U.S. assistance

*'Please do not think about us only as a headline,' father pleads*

By Melissa Weiss

A nurse and midwife who has delivered more than 1,000 babies. A soldier who swapped weekend shifts so that he could attend his brother's bar mitzvah. A young man attending an outdoor rave with friends. A father awaiting the birth of his third child.

The families of four American citizens who believe their loved ones are being held by Hamas in Gaza gathered in Tel Aviv on Tuesday afternoon to deliver a public, emotion-laden plea to both the Israeli and American governments, neither of which, relatives say, have provided adequate support or information about their family members.

On Tuesday afternoon, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said that 20 or more Americans remain unaccounted for. A National Security Council spokesperson confirmed on Monday that at least 11 American citizens have been killed in the attacks.

On Tuesday afternoon, following a phone call with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Vice President Kamala Harris, President Joe Biden said he had "directed my team to share intelligence and deploy experts from across the United States Government to consult with and advise Israeli counterparts and hostage

recovery efforts. Because as president, I have no higher priority than the safety of Americans being held hostage around the world."

Rachel Polin-Goldberg, who grew up in Chicago and now lives in Jerusalem, last heard from her son, Hersh Goldberg-Polin, on Saturday morning. Goldberg had turned her phone off on Friday evening as the sunset ushered in Shabbat and Simchat Torah. After a siren alerted her to a rocket attack near Jerusalem on Saturday morning, she turned on her phone, concerned about Hersh, who was attending the Tribe of Nova music festival near Kibbutz Re'im.

"I turned my phone on, I believe, at 8:23 in the morning," Polin-Goldberg said. "And when I turned it on, there were two texts in a row from Hirsch at 8:11. The first one said, 'I love you' and immediately at 8:11 also it said, 'I'm sorry.' And so I knew immediately wherever he was, it was a terrible situation."

Polin-Goldberg identified her son, whom she has not heard from since, in a photo taken inside a bomb shelter. In collecting eyewitness accounts, she said, she learned that Hersh had been injured in a firefight.

"They were fish in a barrel sitting in this bomb shelter," Polin-Goldberg explained. "Terrorists came to the door, they were throwing grenades in, shooting machine

guns, and we know that Hirsch's arm from the elbow down was severed, was blown off, and that he tied a tourniquet around with his shirt." She has not received any further information about her son's whereabouts.

Polin-Goldberg was joined by the families of Itay Chen, Sagui Dekel-Chen (who is not related to Itay) and Adrienne Neta, whose son, Nahar Neta, issued a plea to President Joe Biden and Secretary of State Tony Blinken. The administration, Neta said, is "responsible to bring the U.S. citizens back home safe and sound. We expect nothing less from the U.S. administration and from President Biden and Secretary of State Blinken."

Adrienne Neta is a California-born nurse and midwife who moved to Israel in 1981. She lived for decades on Kibbutz Be'eri, one of the deadliest sites of Saturday's attack. When Hamas terrorists invaded the kibbutz, her children said, she was sitting on her patio on the phone. It was roughly 9:30 a.m. "Both my brother and my sister were on the call with her as the terrorist barged into her home, and we heard a little bit of screaming and that was our last contact with her," her son Nahar Neta said. "There was no shooting on the call."

His mother, Neta added, tried to use the limited Arabic she had picked up as



a longtime nurse at Soroka Hospital to communicate with her captors.

A half-hour's drive from Neta's Kibbutz Be'eri sits Kibbutz Nahal Oz, which is where 35-year-old Sagui Dekel-Chen was taken hostage as he and other men on the kibbutz attempted to overpower the terrorists who had infiltrated the property. Dekel-Chen's wife is pregnant with the couple's third daughter.

Of the roughly 400 residents of the kibbutz, Sagui's father, Jonathan Dekel-Chen, said, more than half have been killed or taken hostage. The roughly 160 survivors, the elder Dekel-Chen said, "call this a pogrom."

"What happened to us, it's not a war," he said. "It's not a fair fight. It is a pogrom. Hundreds of heavily armed, well-organized terrorists walked, rode, ran over the border with one object in mind: and that was to kill, maim, to destroy civilian life along the

border."

"As such," he continued, "it seems to me that the United States, my original home, and still a very beloved place for me, always wants to be and must be on the side of good." He called on the "United States government, to the Congress, to do what they can on the side of good here. We're waiting for Sagui to come home."

Rubi Chen, whose son Itay was captured while on duty, said he has connected with about 10 other families who are missing a relative with American citizenship following Saturday's ambush.

Itay Chen had not been scheduled to be on duty the weekend of the attack. His younger brother's bar mitzvah was the following weekend, when he had been originally scheduled to report for duty. Itay had traded weekend shifts so that he could be a part of his family's celebrations.

Rubi Chen said the IDF had informed

the family that Itay was listed as missing in action.

"You would think it would be a good assumption to say that after 70 hours, if he's not in the State of Israel, he might be some other place. If that is the case, then he is by definition a POW." Chen called for his son to be treated as a POW according to international law.

Chen said he had been in contact with the State Department and the U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem, but that he has received few answers as to his son's whereabouts and any plans to rescue the hostages. There has "been no formal or concentrated attempt to talk to us as a group and update us about what they are doing in this matter," Chen said on Tuesday.

"Please do not think of us only as a headline," Rubi Chen pleaded. "We are more than that." ♦

OCTOBER 10, 2023

## Biden calls out Hamas' 'unadulterated evil,' vows 'swift, decisive' help for Israel

*White House announces 14 Americans now known to be dead, at least 20 still missing*

By Gabby Deutch

In a forceful and emotional address delivered on Tuesday in the White House State Dining Room, President Joe Biden detailed the atrocities committed by Hamas against innocent Israelis and vowed to help Israel avenge the vicious attacks.

"Our response will be swift, decisive and overwhelming," Biden said, describing a conversation he held earlier in the day with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. "There are moments in this life, and I mean this literally, when pure, unadulterated evil is unleashed in this world. The people of Israel lived through one such moment this weekend."

In a somber 10-minute address, Biden argued that it is a moral imperative for

Washington to come to Israel's aid at this moment. He connected the attacks — whose death toll passed 1,000 on Tuesday — to a millennia-old history of antisemitism, and vowed to stand by Israel's side as well as to expand protection at Jewish institutions in America.

"For 75 years, Israel has stood as the ultimate guarantor for the security of Jewish people around the world so that the atrocities of the past could never happen again," Biden said, flanked on one side by Vice President Kamala Harris and Secretary of State Tony Blinken on the other. "Let there be no doubt — the United States has Israel's back. We'll make sure the Jewish and democratic State of Israel can defend itself

today and tomorrow, as we always have." Blinken will travel to Israel on Wednesday to coordinate with Israeli leaders.

Fourteen American citizens are now known to have been killed in the attack, Biden said.

"There's still so many families desperately waiting to hear the fate of their loved ones, not knowing if they're alive or dead or hostages. Infants in the mother's arms, grandparents in wheelchairs, Holocaust survivors abducted and held hostage. Hostages who Hamas has now threatened to execute in violation of every code of human morality," Biden said. "This blood thirstiness brings to mind the worst — the worst — rampages of ISIS. This is

terrorism. But sadly for the Jewish people, it's not new."

National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan told reporters that 20 or more Americans are missing, and the U.S. has now confirmed that at least some of them are among those held hostage by Hamas in Gaza.

Biden said he had been in close touch with congressional leaders, asking Congress to take "urgent action to fund the national security requirements of our critical partners." Sullivan announced that the White House will make a funding request to Congress for "funding for support to Israel," including to support Israel's Iron Dome missile-defense system and provide ammunition.

When Biden spoke to Netanyahu on Tuesday, the Israeli premier thanked Biden for his "continued and unequivocal support and the work of your entire administration," specifically citing John Kirby, the National Security Council's strategic communications coordinator, who choked up when speaking about the atrocities committed against

Israelis, according to an Israeli description of the conversation.

The prime minister said the Hamas attack was one of "savagery we have not seen since the Holocaust" and compared the deadly rampage at the music festival in Israel's south to Babi Yar, the site of a Holocaust-era massacre of Jews in what is now Ukraine.

"We've never seen such savagery in the history of the State. They're even worse than ISIS and we need to treat them as such," Netanyahu said.

In his address, Biden did not specifically address the handful of Democratic members of Congress who have called for a cease-fire, rather than vowing to defend Israel, or comments made by Reps. Rashida Tlaib (D-MI) and Cori Bush (D-MO) equating Hamas' actions with previous actions taken by Israel. But White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre made clear where the White House stands on such comments.

"We believe they're wrong. We believe they're repugnant and we believe they're

disgraceful. Our our condemnation belongs squarely with terrorists who have brutally murdered, raped, kidnapped hundreds — hundreds — of Israelis. There can be no equivocation about that. There are not two sides here," said Jean-Pierre, although she did not mention any members of Congress by name.

In his speech, Biden did not mention Iran, which *The Wall Street Journal* reported had helped orchestrate the attack.

Sullivan said the U.S. does not yet know whether Iran ordered the attack, but said that Iran is "complicit in this attack in a broad sense because they have provided the lion's share of the funding for the military wing of Hamas. They have provided training, they have provided capabilities, they have provided support and they have had engagement and contact with Hamas over years and years."

*Jewish Insider senior political correspondent Lahav Harkov contributed reporting.* ♦

OCTOBER 12, 2023

## 'Angry,' hurt,' 'betrayed': Jewish students grapple with lack of support on campuses

*The Hamas terrorist attacks are testing universities' willingness to weigh in on matters related to Israel*

By Gabby Deutch, Haley Cohen

Within hours of the start of Hamas' terrorist attacks on Israel last Saturday, Jewish students at American universities began to look to fellow students and university administrators for words of comfort and support. But in the days since, many have expressed frustration at official university statements viewed as weak or halting — and anger and sadness at pro-Palestine student groups and faculty who have outright celebrated Hamas' attacks.

On Thursday, "Day of Resistance" events

to celebrate the attack on Israel are planned by local chapters of Students for Justice in Palestine at more than a dozen universities, including the University of Virginia, the University of Arizona and the University of California Los Angeles. Some of the groups, at schools including Georgetown University and University of California San Diego, are describing their events as vigils for the Palestinian "martyrs" killed during the raid on Israel.

A seven-page "Day of Resistance" toolkit written by National SJP states, "Today, we

witness a historic win for the Palestinian resistance: across land, air, and sea, our people have broken down the artificial barriers of the Zionist entity, taking with it the facade of an impenetrable settler colony and reminding each of us that total return and liberation to Palestine is near. As the Palestinian student movement, we have an unshakable responsibility to join the call for mass mobilization. National liberation is near- glory to our resistance, to our martyrs, and to our steadfast people."

Mark Yudof, the former president of the

University of California and a law professor emeritus at the University of California, Berkeley, said, "It is very widespread. It is not isolated incidents. And I would say, in my opinion, that this is the time for moral leadership from university presidents. They need to understand that Jewish students and faculty — that it tears at their feelings of belonging on campus."

A letter calling "for moral accountability and official punishment for SJP and its chapters for their campaign to glorify the Hamas attacks" received more than 150 signatures from organizations ranging from major national groups such as the Anti-Defamation League and the American Jewish Committee to local campus Hillel and Chabad houses and Jewish fraternities and sororities.

"University leaders need to do more than express sympathy. They need to condemn and confront anyone who glorifies or minimizes the deaths or celebrates Hamas," said Jacob Baime, CEO of the Israel on Campus Coalition, which organized the letter.

University administrators have faced pressure from Jewish students and alumni to condemn the atrocities overseas and to make clear that student groups who are expressing sympathy for Hamas do not speak for the university as a whole. Some universities at first offered more tepid statements before responding a day or two later with additional messages more directly focused on condemning terrorism.

On Tuesday, the dean of New York University School of Law sent an email to the campus community condemning terrorism after the president of the Student Bar Association wrote to law students that Israel bears responsibility for the attack. But even that follow-up has faced pushback for not going far enough; former Anti-Defamation League head Abe Foxman and his daughter Michelle, both NYU Law graduates, wrote to Dean Troy McKenzie that they "expected better from the dean of our beloved alma mater" and questioned why he did not reference Hamas.

"Unfortunately there are some universities that have failed to speak out clearly. They have fallen into the trap of references to cycles of violence and both sides-ism," said Adam Lehman, CEO of

Hillel International. "We have called on them to improve the way they are communicating on these issues and we will continue to call upon every university leader to speak clearly and forcefully around what there is really no excuse not to name, in terms of the evil that was perpetrated by terrorists in Israel over the weekend."

At Yale, the first message sent by a top administrator said that university leaders "deeply mourn the loss of life" in Israel and Gaza without mentioning the cause of that bloodshed. A day later, Yale President Peter Salovey followed up with an email decrying Hamas' "full-scale attack on Israel." A Change.org petition calling for the firing of Yale professor Zareena Grewal, who in a series of tweets offered justifications for Hamas' kidnapping of Israeli civilians, garnered more than 16,000 signatures. A Yale spokesperson pointed to Salovey's comments about Hamas and told JI that the university "is committed to freedom of expression, and the comments posted on Professor Grewal's personal accounts represent her own views."

University presidents at Harvard and the University of Virginia also sent out follow-up statements after their first comments on the war in Israel were deemed weak by Jewish students.

"Jewish students are afraid to go to class and sit next to peers who have been posting hateful things online," said Julia Jassey, CEO of Jewish on Campus, a student advocacy group. "A lot of Jewish students are starting to feel nervous coming to campus because of things like Thursday's National Day of Resistance."

Ella Messler, a junior at Brandeis and Jewish on Campus' social media manager, told JI, "As a Jew, I am scared for the future of the State of Israel, for the safety of my family and for the security of my people. But more than that I am angry. I am angry that my non-Jewish peers don't share my feelings, and don't understand my fear. I am angry that I have seen the murder of Jews be justified on social media and across campuses. And I am angry that as a Jew, I have to constantly explain myself for my peers to care."

Jewish students involved with progressive activism are particularly alarmed by the rhetoric from some whom

they believed to be allies. For students connected to J Street U, the student arm of the organization that advocates for a two-state solution, the onslaught of statements and online posts praising Hamas has been jarring.

"They're so hurt about what happened in Israel. They're just devastated and sad. And then they're also hurt by what they're seeing online from groups that they at certain points looked to as partners," said J Street U's director, Erin Beiner. "A lot of Jews are feeling very betrayed."

The *Stanford Daily*, the student newspaper at Stanford, published an op-ed on Tuesday written by the leader of the campus Students for Justice in Palestine chapter that called Hamas' actions "resistance" that is "legal under international law." That same day, Jewish students held a vigil for lives lost in Israel — and hours after it concluded, graffiti that said "Israel is dead" appeared at the spot where the vigil was held.

Following pressure from Jewish groups, on Wednesday night Stanford administration released a statement. "As a moral matter, we condemn all terrorism and mass atrocities. This includes the deliberate attack on civilians this weekend by Hamas," said the president and provost.

Lehman said Hillel has received reports about at least one of its buildings being vandalized with anti-Israel graffiti this week, at the University of Texas. "We've [also] already had many instances of Jewish students being subjected to harassment," he said.

Much of the reaction to the mounting war in Israel has taken place online, even as protests and vigils are planned for campus quads. Some students are watching people they considered friends re-share posts to their Instagram accounts that deem the terrorist attacks a reasonable response to Israel's treatment of Palestinians.

"However overwhelmed we all feel going onto social media, college students feel that tenfold," said Beiner. "It's so much more heightened too, because that is their world, that is their ecosystem and their reality. The shock of it is also really magnified because it's people that they are sitting in classes with and doing group projects with."

More than a dozen of the planned "Day



of Resistance” gatherings at universities are expected to take place on campus, including at University of Colorado Boulder, Arizona State University, University of Arizona, University of Louisville, University of Binghamton, University of Virginia, Bard College, Georgetown University, George Mason University, Purdue University, University of California San Diego, University of Massachusetts, Kent State University and the University of North Carolina. JI requested comment from administration at all of these schools. Only three responded.

A UC Boulder spokesperson told JI that despite being “horrificed and saddened by the Hamas terrorist attack on Israel that has sparked a war with the full breadth of consequences not yet known,” the institution “will continue to promote free, open and thoughtful dialogue and academic expertise on this decades-old conflict.”

A Purdue spokesperson said, “Thursday’s march [is] planned and registered with the proper university channels, with full consideration for the safety of those involved, and law enforcement is on alert against antisemitic threats, as observed in other cities. While the university refrains from extensive comments on sociopolitical matters as an institution so as to maximize freedom by individual members of the university to express their opinions, messages by student groups or by individuals associated with these groups do not represent the university.”

An ASU spokesperson said the university is “aware of a student-led demonstration planned for our Tempe campus on Thursday. Students have organized and promoted the event themselves. Arizona State University neither endorses nor restricts opinions voiced at campus demonstrations... the university wholeheartedly respects and protects the right to free speech – and free speech means everyone on all sides of an issue.”

Brooklyn College had a more hands-on response, demanding that an on-campus rally scheduled for Thursday be moved off-campus. “That rally has now been moved off-campus to the sidewalks of Bedford Ave., a public space that Brooklyn College does not control,” President Michelle Anderson wrote in a letter to students. Anderson said

no student will be penalized for making a decision not to come to campus on Thursday.

New York City Council Members Kalman Yeger and Inna Vernikov called on Brooklyn College and other City University of New York (CUNY) schools with planned rallies to close campuses for the remainder of the week “so students do not have to attend school under the threats of violence,” they wrote in a joint statement on Wednesday.

“The [CUNY] chancellor refused... The groups backing these rallies have been clear: they believe Hamas is justifiable. People with this line of thinking represent a clear and present danger to civilized people everywhere... CUNY is not safe for Jews,” the statement continued.

At other schools, rallies had been planned for off-campus locations from the start. This was the case at The Ohio State University, where SJP organized an off-campus event in partnership with the school’s Muslim Students Association. “The event in question is scheduled to occur off campus and is not a university-sponsored event,” an OSU spokesperson told JI.

Some universities have opted for strong pro-Israel statements, even in the wake of likely pushback.

Ben Sasse, the president of the University of Florida and a former GOP senator, directly addressed the responses by others in “elite academia”: “I will not tiptoe around this simple fact: What Hamas did is evil and there is no defense for terrorism. This shouldn’t be hard,” Sasse wrote.

The chancellor of CUNY, which garnered national headlines earlier this year after an antisemitic graduation speech at its law school, wrote that the university system “is devastated by the scope of death and destruction in Israel, still being assessed in the aftermath of Saturday’s violent attacks by Hamas militants.” The University of California’s leadership decried the “act of terrorism launched on a major Jewish holiday.”

“Fortunately,” said Hillel’s Lehman, “many have spoken up in clear ways, naming the terrorism and atrocities while also recognizing the impact of these events on Jewish students on campuses.”

A Department of Education spokesperson told JI that “the Biden-Harris Administration remains deeply concerned

about antisemitism and related forms of discrimination and hate at schools and on college campuses” but declined to comment on the experiences of Jewish students this week in the wake of the war in Israel.

The planned SJP rallies were raised at a Wednesday meeting of Jewish leaders at the White House, according to Sheila Katz, CEO of the National Council of Jewish Women.

“They seem very interested in learning more about how that’s landing and how college students are feeling,” Katz said of the White House officials in the meeting. “There was a lot of wanting to show what we’re seeing on the ground so they could be our allies in bringing these examples up and helping to call it out, and to shifting the narrative.”

Gabby Deutch is Jewish Insider’s Washington correspondent; Haley Cohen is a news reporter at eJewishPhilanthropy. ♦

# War of words: Marty Baron weighs in on media coverage of terrorism against Israel

*Former Washington Post editor: 'The best you can do is have a moral compass yourself, feel that you're covering the story from all the appropriate angles, and that's probably the best you can do.'*

By Matthew Kassel

**M**arty Baron, the former longtime editor of *The Washington Post* and the author of a new memoir about his tenure atop the paper, has a personal connection to the war between Israel and Hamas that is now dominating the international news cycle.

The 68-year-old veteran newspaperman, who left the *Post* in 2021 after a nearly decade-long run, is the son of Israeli immigrants and has several relatives living in the Jewish state, some of whom he has spoken with since Hamas' attack — which he characterized as an "unprovoked" act of "state terrorism."

"I feel a stronger connection than I think most people would," Baron, whose family members were not directly affected by the attack in southern Israel, said in an interview with *Jewish Insider* on Monday afternoon. "But over time, of course, I've been in the role of being a journalist, and I view that as being independent. I've always viewed it that way. So, do I have a higher level of interest given my family history? Almost certainly. But as a journalist, I always try to maintain journalistic independence."

Baron's fierce commitment to objectivity is prevalent throughout his recently published book, *Collision of Power: Trump, Bezos, and The Washington Post*, released last week. In a phone conversation with *JI* from Seattle, where he was promoting the memoir, Baron discussed the war in Israel and weighed in on some emerging journalistic debates surrounding mainstream media coverage of the conflict, among other issues he often faced as a top editor at several leading national newspapers.

*The interview has been edited and*

*condensed for clarity.*

**Jewish Insider:** *As a former longtime newspaper editor, how have you been watching the mainstream media's evolving coverage of the war in Israel, and how would you approach it if you were leading the Post newsroom now?*

**Martin Baron:** The major news organizations that I follow seem to be doing a very comprehensive and thorough job. They've clearly deployed a lot of resources to the story, as they should. It's hugely important. They have people on the ground. It seems that they have sent additional people into the region, people who have experience covering that region before. They're covering it, from what I can tell, from every angle, obviously what's happening on the ground being the most important, but covering its implications for the U.S. involvement in terms of deploying military resources to the region as well; the reaction within the Jewish community in the United States; the protests on one side or the other of the conflict, either pro-Israel or pro-Palestinian; the role of Europe; the implications for Israeli politics; the implications for normalization of formal diplomatic relations between Arab countries and Israel; the reaction from ordinary people and Arab countries. So I think the coverage has been quite good, quite comprehensive, and I don't have much to add beyond that. I think they've done a very good job.

**JI:** *There's an emerging meta-debate around the language that newsrooms have been using as the war has unfolded. With*

*this conflict, as in others, there's a question of whether or not the word 'terrorists' should be used over 'militants' or 'fighters,' for example, to describe Hamas. Do you have any thoughts on the language that news organizations should be using to characterize Hamas?*

**Baron:** I found myself in the middle of those controversies plenty of times and over a long period of time. I mean, the basic policy that we had at the *Post*, which I embrace, is we should talk about acts of terrorism rather than characterizing individuals, and so when it's a terrorist act we call it a terrorist act. We did tend to use the word 'militants.' I mean, Hamas is the government in Gaza. But clearly, at least in my mind, this was an act of terrorism, no question. There is such a thing as state terrorism, by the way, and in my view, this qualifies as state terrorism, so that would be my take on it.

**JI:** *So in terms of news writing, you would advocate for 'militants' to describe Hamas but would characterize the attack more broadly as state terrorism?*

**Baron:** I think the basic *Post* policy on this is as good as we're gonna get. I mean, I realize that people on all sides have different views about what ought to be used. People who are advocates for an independent state for Palestinians or people who've advocated for their perspective have said, 'Well, why don't we use other language to describe the Israelis when they engage in tactics that are objectionable?' There's just simply no way that people are going to agree on the language, and that's true of so many other circumstances, not just in Israel, by the way.

Inevitably, a government wants the

other side, if there are attacks, they want the acts to be described as terrorism; they want the individuals who committed the act to be described as terrorists; they use the word terrorists themselves; they want the media to use that word. I think what's really important is that we cover what really happened. We can show people what happened, we can show that there was an unprovoked attack and there were huge civilian casualties, enormous brutality, kidnappings, slaughter of people, innocent civilians. I think the really important thing is not to get obsessive about the language that's used, the terms that are used, but are reporters on the ground, are the reporters there showing what actually happened? And I think they are.

**JJ:** *This attack has been described as Israel's 9/11, its Pearl Harbor, more surprising than the Yom Kippur War. Would you agree with that assessment, and in your long tenure as a head editor, can you recall any commensurate sort of conflict?*

**Baron:** I don't know. It seems to be. I mean, I have relatives there, and that seems to be how they see it within Israel itself. And it seems like a fair analogy to me.

**JJ:** *Have you been in touch with your relatives in Israel?*

**Baron:** Some.

**JJ:** *Were they directly affected by this conflict?*

**Baron:** No, not the ones I've heard from.

**JJ:** *In addition to having relatives in Israel, you're also the son of Israeli immigrants. Do you feel like you have a more personal stake in this story?*

**Baron:** I do have a lot of relatives. I haven't been there in a long time, but I have been there a lot over the course of my life. And so, yeah, I feel a stronger connection than I think most people would. But over time, of course, I've been in the role of being a journalist, and I view that as being independent. I've always viewed it that way. So, do I have a higher level of interest

given my family history? Almost certainly. But as a journalist, I always try to maintain journalistic independence.

**JJ:** *Now that you're no longer leading a newspaper, what has your experience been watching major global news developments like this unfold, as an independent observer rather than a shaper of coverage?*

**Baron:** I was a top editor of three different news organizations over the course of 20 years. I was full-time in the business since 1976. I was involved in a huge number of really important stories, domestically and overseas. The time was right for me to retire, and I thought a lot about that and how much I would miss being in a newsroom. But the reality is that I was exhausted. I was ready to go. These jobs, as demonstrated by this story right now, are not just 24/7 jobs, they're 24/7 every minute in a digital era. Did I want to continue doing that? Did I want to continue working 24/7 every minute? No, I didn't. I felt I had done that. I was tired. I was ready to move on to something different with my life in a different way. So I don't look at what's happening now saying, 'Gee, I wish I were there.' I just was ready to go.

**JJ:** *How have you found the reception to your book since it was published last week?*

**Baron:** I've been very pleased with the reception so far. It seems like people are finding it pretty intriguing. It's rare that you get this kind of inside story on what happens in a newsroom, not just on one line of stories, like one investigation, but actually across a wide variety of stories, where you get insight into the transformation of a newsroom, where you get insight into its coverage of an unprecedented period in American history with the arrival of Donald Trump and our own confrontations with the president of the United States, and then insight into my own thinking about how we grapple with some of the issues that have emerged in our profession over this period of time. As people have correctly pointed out, it's really kind of three books in one.

**JJ:** *Your book offers a strong defense of journalistic objectivity. Do you think the debate around journalistic objectivity will*

*continue to be at the forefront in American newsrooms going forward?*

**Baron:** I think there's a substantial debate in the profession about objectivity. First of all, I think there's a lot of misunderstanding about what objectivity really means. A lot of people conflate that with false equivalence and things like that. That's not what objectivity originally meant, and it's not how I define it. I define it as being open-minded, rigorous, comprehensive, thorough, fair, trying to look at the facts as you discover them without being tainted, as much as possible, by your own preconceptions, and then telling the public what we found.

Part of fairness is not only being fair to the people we're covering, but being fair to the public, and not pretending that there is no objective reality. There is an objective reality. So we tell people what we found in an unflinching way. That is objectivity. That's what it's always meant. It's not the same as balance and it's or certainly not the same as false equivalence. And when the overwhelming evidence points in a certain direction, I think it's important that we make that clear to the public. I think the debate is largely because of a complete misunderstanding and complete mischaracterization of what objectivity really means.

Now, if people don't want to use the word but they actually abide by the principle of objectivity? I'm fine with that. If they want to say open-minded inquiry, whatever it is they want to say, as long as I believe that they're upholding the principles of objectivity as it was originally defined and I currently define it, I'm fine. So, is there a debate about that? Yes, I think there will continue to be a debate and we'll have to see how it gets resolved.

**JJ:** *The debate around objectivity would seem to touch directly on coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and accusations, from both sides, of false equivalence.*

**Baron:** Oh, sure. I mean, look, I've been involved in Middle East coverage for a long period of time. Wherever I was, we were constantly criticized. But I can tell you, I've been criticized both by supporters of Israel and supporters of Palestinians. I've been

criticized on the same stories from both ends. That's the nature of being in charge of that kind of coverage, and you have to expect that. The best you can do is have a moral compass yourself, feel that you're covering the story from all the appropriate angles, and that's probably the best you can do. As in most stories, you're never going to satisfy the people who are basically advocates, people who are activists on issues. That's just not going to happen. The Middle East is very complicated. There have been conflicts there for a very long period of time. There are different points of view. People have different life experiences there. It's the job of media organizations to try to reflect the totality of what's happening in the region, and I don't expect that that will make any activist or advocate happy.

**JJ:** *Is there any particular story you're*

*most proud of in your career?*

**Baron:** I'm most proud of the work we did [at *The Boston Globe*] on the Catholic Church. I'm particularly proud of that because it affected the lives of ordinary people, people who weren't sufficiently heard before we launched that investigation, people who were largely powerless and up against a very powerful institution. And so we exposed the extent of sexual abuse among priests in the church. But beyond that, we exposed that the church itself had been engaged in a policy and practice of covering up that abuse, thereby enabling that kind of abuse to continue. And so I'm most proud of that because it actually gave voice to people who hadn't had one before and because it brought accountability to a very powerful institution that had engaged in grave wrongdoing.

**JJ:** *And what about your time at the Post?*

**Baron:** I'm proud of our coverage of the presidency of Donald Trump. Obviously, we came in for a lot of criticism from Trump and his allies, but I think we understood what our mission is as a news organization. It's important to remember that the First Amendment was written with the idea of holding government to account. That's what James Madison talked about when he was the principal crafter of the First Amendment.

**JJ:** *What's next for you now that your book has been published?*

**Baron:** I have no idea. For the first time in my life, I don't know what I'm going to do next, and I'm fine with that. I'll figure it out. ♦

OCTOBER 11, 2023

## Jewish groups host dozens of vigils, events across North America for Israel, bringing out thousands of supporters

*Nearly every Jewish community on the continent has held an Israel solidarity event or is planning one*

By Haley Cohen, Tori Bergel

*The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.*

America stands with Israel; that's the message unequivocally expressed by city leaders, government officials and tens of thousands of North American Jews at dozens of rallies and vigils across the continent in the wake of last week's terror attacks carried out by Hamas in southern Israel.

At the Boston Common on Monday afternoon, thousands of Jews came together, waving banners and wrapping themselves in Israeli flags, for an emotion-laden event

dubbed "Gathering in Solidarity With Israel Under Fire." It was hosted by the Consulate General of Israel to New England as well as local chapters of the Jewish Community Relations Council, Israeli American Council and Combined Jewish Philanthropies.

"My heart is with those who lost their lives too early," Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) told the crowd. "With those who have lost loved ones, with those who have been wounded in body and spirit. I am here to grieve with you. I am here to stand in solidarity."

"But standing in solidarity does not mean standing still," she added. "Standing

in solidarity means action, it means shouldering the obligations of a strong and faithful ally," a sentiment others who spoke during the afternoon's event mirrored as well, including Massachusetts Gov. Maura Healey, State Treasurer Deborah Goldberg and Boston Mayor Michelle Wu.

Three-hundred miles away, Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro addressed a crowd in Philadelphia of some 1,000 members of the Jewish community and Israel supporters on Monday, touching on his identity as a Jewish governor.

"Demonstrators across the commonwealth and the nation send a strong



message that we stand against terror, and we stand with Israel,” Shapiro said at the event hosted by the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia. “For each of us, Israel means something special. Recognize what Israel represents: freedom, democracy and peace. Those are values that we as Americans, and we as Pennsylvanians hold dear.”

In New York City, home to the largest population of Jews outside of Israel, thousands of New Yorkers of all backgrounds gathered at the U.N. Plaza on Tuesday night, where the parents of Omer, an IDF soldier being held hostage in Gaza, spoke. “We love you very much and know you are alive,” they said.

The “New York Stands with Israel” vigil was joined by Gov. Kathy Hochul, Mayor Eric Adams and other elected officials. It was hosted by UJA-Federation of New York, Jewish Community Relations Council of New York, Anti Defamation League -NY, American Jewish Committee-NY, the American Zionist Movement, the Association of Reform Zionists of America and Council of Jewish Émigré Community Organizations.

Hochul reiterated the Empire State’s support for Israel. “We will defeat antisemitism wherever it rears its ugly head. We will defeat evil right here in New York. Let’s win this, everyone,” she said.

Israeli Ambassador to the U.N. Gilad Erdan addressed the crowd, saying, “In Israel, we don’t flee the battle, we run towards it. We run towards it because we are a people of heroes,” Erdan said to an eruption of cheers from the crowd.

Dalia Handelman, a UJA-Federation development associate, told eJP that “powerful doesn’t even begin to describe the scene tonight at the UJA/JCRC rally in support of Israel.”

“We showed the world the strength of the Jewish people and will continue to do so until Israel is safe once again. My sincerest hope from tonight’s rally, aside from raising as much support as possible for aid to Israel, is that it shows our brothers and sisters in Israel we are here for them and will do everything in our power to fight for them,” Handelman continued. “No amount of terror will ever take away the soul, pride, and hope of the Jewish people and we will defend our homeland forever.”

Among other vigils and rallies slated to happen in New York on Wednesday include the American Jewish Committee’s demonstration alongside U.N. diplomats. Separately, Park East Synagogue will have a service titled “Community Unity in Support of Israel.”

Rabbi Arthur Schneier, who leads Park East Synagogue, said in a statement, “now more than ever we must come forward united on behalf of Israel.”

In Miami, an estimated 2,500 Israel supporters gathered at the Holocaust Memorial Miami Beach on Tuesday where Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL) and Florida Lt. Gov. Jeanette Núñez were among the speakers.

Jessica Katz told the crowd in Miami that the attack on Israel was “an attack on America, on Western values and on democracy.”

Washington, D.C.-area synagogues including Washington Hebrew hosted a joint vigil Tuesday night at Adas Israel Congregation.

On the West Coast, hundreds of demonstrators lined Santa Monica Boulevard in Los Angeles, home to a sizable Israeli population, on Monday carrying signs and Israeli flags. Many of their relatives were among the hundreds of thousands of reservists called up by the Israel Defense Forces.

Former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) led a Jewish community gathering on Sunday to support Israel at Congregation Sherith Israel in San Francisco.

Other U.S. elected officials who have spoken at pro-Israel events this week, organized through Jewish Federations of North America, include Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) in New Haven, Rep. Debbie Dingell (D-MI) in Ann Arbor, Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin in Richmond and Rep. Tom Kean Jr. (R-NJ) in Millburn.

Eighteen of the solidarity rallies nationwide were planned by the Israeli-American Council (IAC), including ones Monday and Tuesday in Austin, Texas; Boston; Houston, Los Angeles; Orlando, Fla; Portland, Ore; the San Francisco Bay Area; Seattle, Atlanta; Orange County, Calif; Philadelphia; San Diego and the state of New Jersey. Other rallies are being scheduled in Chicago; Colorado; New York City; Rochester, N.Y.; and South Florida.

IAC CEO Elan Carr, who is the former U.S. special envoy to combat antisemitism, said in a statement, “We stand arm in arm and shoulder to shoulder with our brothers and sisters in Israel in total solidarity and unwavering support. Like any sovereign country that has suffered such a brutal and inhuman attack, Israel has the inalienable right to defend itself fully, completely, and decisively and to eliminate the threats facing its citizens.”

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At the same time that Jewish community members across the country gathered, pro-Palestinian rallies and counter-protests appeared in cities throughout the U.S. and around the world.

Notably in New York, one day after the Hamas attack, the Democratic Socialists of America hosted a rally on Sunday in Times Square, which the organization said was “in solidarity with the Palestinian people and their right to resist 75 years of occupation and apartheid.”

Hundreds of pro-Palestinian protesters carried signs demanding a “Free Palestine” while chanting “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free,” as well as “Globalize the intifada,” and “Smash the settler Zionist state,” according to *The Times of Israel*. Images and videos from the rally show individuals brandishing swastika images and celebrating “the glorious victory of the resistance.”

Hochul condemned the event in a statement as “abhorrent and morally repugnant,” with multiple members of Congress doing the same, and calling out the DSA for setting up the event. A smaller gathering of pro-Israel supporters came out in counter protest, with multiple altercations reported between the two groups.

In Boston, a few hours after Monday’s gathering for Israel, the Palestinian Youth Movement held a rally and march for Palestine in Cambridge. Earlier in the day, Levin, the Northeastern student, told eJP that he and some of his friends would be traveling to the area to counter demonstrate in support of Israel, where they hoped to “educate the individuals there.” Other Israel supporters were also on-site, with tensions high on both sides.



One of the most widespread and widely criticized rally videos was from Australia, where a large group who had gathered for a pro-Palestinian march through Sydney were

seen crowded around the Sydney Opera House chanting “gas the Jews” as they waved Palestinian flags. The country’s prime minister, Anthony Albanese, criticized the

slurs, Reuters reported, and area police are investigating the incident. ♦

OCTOBER 10, 2023

## Harvard administration slammed by lawmakers, alums for response to pro-Hamas student letter

*Rep. Seth Moulton, a Harvard graduate: ‘I cannot recall a moment when I’ve been more embarrassed by my alma mater’*

By Haley Cohen, Gabby Deutch

One day after 31 student organizations at Harvard University published a letter on social media claiming Israel is “entirely responsible” for Hamas terrorists’ murder of 900 Israelis, Jewish student leaders and alumni condemned the university’s handling of the incident and called for a stronger response from Harvard’s administration.

Harvard President Claudine Gay and other university leaders said in a Monday night statement that the school is “heartbroken by the death and destruction unleashed by the attack by Hamas.” But Jacob Miller, the president of the student board at Harvard Hillel and a former editorial fellow at *Jewish Insider*, called Harvard’s response a “weak statement [that] fails to capture the gravity of the moment.” He called for the university to “unequivocally condemn these terror attacks, a step they have been unwilling to take thus far.”

“It’s completely wrong to blame Israel for these types of attacks,” Miller told JI on Monday afternoon. “Clearly Israel is not responsible for attacks against its own civilians and it’s also deeply offensive to the Jewish community. I would say it’s antisemitic to blame Israel.”

Two letters from Harvard students and alumni directly call on the university’s leadership to condemn the anti-Israel statement released by the student organizations, who called themselves the

Harvard Palestine Solidarity Groups (PSG).

One, organized by Harvard Hillel and Harvard Chabad, was signed by more than 2,000 people as of Monday night. “The statement signed by the Palestine Solidarity Committee and dozens of other student groups blaming Israel for the aforementioned attacks is completely wrong and deeply offensive,” the letter states. “There are no justifications for acts of terror as we have seen in the past days. We call on all the student groups who co-signed the statement to retract their signatures from the offensive letter.”

Signatories include former NBC Universal President Noah Oppenheim, businessman and philanthropist George Rohr, former Harvard Law professor Alan Dershowitz, former U.S. solicitor general Seth Waxman, Rep. Ritchie Torres (D-NY), Hadar President Ethan Tucker and novelists Dara Horn and Allegra Goodman.

The Harvard chapter of alumni group Alums for Campus Fairness (ACF), is demanding in a letter set to be released today that the school’s leadership directly condemn the anti-Israel statement released by the student organizations.

“It’s time for the administration to step up and make a statement,” Naomi Steinberg, a 1988 Harvard graduate who spearheaded the counter letter through ACF, told JI. “Our strategy is completely alum-based to put pressure on the administration.”

Steinberg’s daughter, Alana, who graduated from Harvard in 2018, added, “The silence is deafening. In not saying anything they are making a statement.”

The alumni letter, which is addressed to President Gay, states that “ACF-Harvard holds Hamas and Iran fully responsible for this premeditated day of savagery, which will live in infamy. More Jews were murdered on October 7, 2023, than on any single day since the Holocaust. Hamas has killed and kidnapped babies, raped women, and paraded mutilated bodies of Israelis through the streets of Gaza, often accompanied by celebrations.”

The letter, a copy of which was obtained by JI, goes on to call the joint statement from Harvard student groups “shameful and replete with lies and should be rejected by fair-minded and informed people.” A Harvard spokesperson did not respond to a request for comment on Monday.

“As pro-Israel alumni, ACF stands with Jewish students and faculty on Harvard’s campus during this difficult time. We call on President Gay, the Board of Overseers, and all Harvard administration and faculty to unequivocally support the Jewish and Israeli members of the Harvard community during the difficult days ahead.”

“We believe that now is the time for the university to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism, which would

place the Harvard Palestine Solidarity Groups' statement well within the definition of antisemitism, and would give the university even more grounds for condemnation," the statement concludes.

The statement from Harvard's administration, which came after pressure from several prominent alumni, including members of the U.S. House and Senate, did not condemn or mention the letter from the student groups.

The student letter, titled "Joint Statement by Harvard Palestine Solidarity Groups on the Situation in Palestine," was signed by 31 student organizations, including the Ivy League's affiliate of Amnesty International. It condemned Israel, claiming Hamas' attack "did not happen in a vacuum," and that the Israeli government has forced Palestinians to live in an "open-air prison for over two decades."

"We, the undersigned student organizations, hold the Israeli regime entirely responsible for all unfolding violence," the letter reads. "The apartheid regime is the only one to blame."

The letter continued, "Today, the Palestinian ordeal enters into uncharted territory. The coming days will require a firm stand against retaliation. We call on the Harvard community to take action to stop the ongoing annihilation of Palestinians."

Signatories to the letter include the African American Resistance Organization, the Harvard Islamic Society and Harvard Jews for Liberation.

The statement from Harvard's administration, which came more than 24 hours after the student letter, said the university has "heard an interest from many in understanding more clearly what has been happening in Israel and Gaza."

It also said the school has "no illusion that Harvard alone can readily bridge the widely different views of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but we are hopeful that, as a community devoted to learning, we can take steps that will draw on our common humanity and shared values in order to modulate rather than amplify the deep-seated divisions and animosities so distressingly evident in the wider world."

Naomi Steinberg told JI that "ACF-Harvard rejects the equivocating statement made by the Harvard administration, which

attempts to draw a moral equivalency between Hamas terrorism and Israel's defensive operations. The statement blatantly ignores and fails to condemn simple facts, among which are: that Hamas has slaughtered, raped, and taken innocent civilians hostage and is using them as pawns on the international stage."

"The administration must clearly and unequivocally condemn Hamas as an antisemitic terrorist organization in order to protect Harvard's Jewish and pro-Israel students, as well as denounce the statement made by PSG," Steinberg said.

On Sunday night, more than 100 students gathered at Harvard Hillel to mourn Israeli victims.

A vigil for "all civilian lives lost and in solidarity with Palestine" is planned for Tuesday night at the university.

The letter from the student groups sparked almost immediate scrutiny, including from Lawrence Summers, who served as Harvard president from 2001-2006. "In nearly 50 years of @Harvard affiliation, I have never been as disillusioned and alienated as I am today," Summers wrote on X on Monday.

Summers, who was the Treasury secretary under President Bill Clinton and advised former President Barack Obama, wrote, "The silence from Harvard's leadership, so far, coupled with a vocal and widely reported student groups' statement blaming Israel solely, has allowed Harvard to appear at best neutral towards acts of terror against the Jewish state of Israel."

"Instead, Harvard is being defined by the morally unconscionable statement apparently coming from two dozen student groups blaming all the violence on Israel," he wrote, adding, "I am sickened."

Lawmakers who attended Harvard also expressed disappointment in the school's lack of response.

Immediately after the Harvard administration released its statement, Rep. Jake Auchincloss (D-MA) tweeted, "Harvard's leadership has failed. The president and deans refuse to denounce the antisemitism of Harvard student groups. Instead of moral clarity and courage, they offer word salad approved by committee. I am ashamed of my alma mater."

Rep. Seth Moulton (D-MA) wrote on X,

"Terrorism is never justified nor someone else's fault. As hundreds of Israelis and others, including several Americans, remain kidnapped, injured, or dead, the 31 Harvard organizations that signed a letter holding Israel 'entirely responsible' for Hamas' barbarous terrorism should be condemned, as should Harvard leadership for whom silence is complicity." He added, "I cannot recall a moment when I've been more embarrassed by my alma mater."

Republican Conference Chair Rep. Elise Stefanik (R-NY), who graduated from Harvard in 2006, also condemned the letter and called on Harvard to respond.

"It is abhorrent and heinous that Harvard student groups are blaming Israel for Hamas' barbaric terrorist attacks that have killed over 700 Israelis," Stefanik tweeted. "Any voice that excuses the slaughter of innocent women and children has chosen the side of evil and terrorism."

"I am calling on the leadership of Harvard to immediately publicly condemn these vile anti-Semitic statements."

Jason Furman, head of the U.S. National Economic Council under the Obama administration, wrote on X that the letter is "getting global attention and the sentiments it expresses are egregious."

"Blaming the victims for the slaughter of hundreds of civilians," Furman continued. "Absolving the perpetrators of any agency. This is morally ignorant and painful for other members of the community."

Political scientist Ian Bremmer posted on X that he "can't imagine who would want to identify with such a group." "Harvard parents — talk to your educated kids about this."

Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX), who attended Harvard Law School, wrote, "What the hell is wrong with Harvard?"

At a Monday pro-Israel rally on the Boston Common, former Harvard Hillel director Rabbi Jonah Steinberg called out his former workplace. "We do not want to see crimson in this city become blood on the hands of those student groups who have signed on to such a despicable letter," said Steinebrg, who is now the regional director of the Anti-Defamation League in New England.

At universities around the U.S., Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) chapters

released statements similar to the Harvard student group letter, but with far fewer student groups signing on. National SJP called for a Day of Resistance on Thursday at colleges including Penn State, New

York University and University of Virginia. The group also praised Hamas' "surprise operation against the Zionist enemy which disrupted the very foundation of Zionist settler society."

*Jewish Insider's Capitol Hill reporter Marc Rod contributed reporting.* ♦

OCTOBER 12, 2023

## Bipartisan momentum grows for re-freezing \$6 billion in Iranian funds

*Democrats in competitive Senate races are joining Republicans in calling for tougher measures against Iran, in response to the country's backing of Hamas*

By Marc Rod

A growing bipartisan consensus in Congress is uniting behind an effort to freeze the \$6 billion in Iranian funds released to Qatar under the administration's recent hostage deal, in response to Iran's longtime backing of Hamas and recent reports indicating that it had a direct hand in last weekend's massive terrorist attack.

Several Democratic senators and 2024 Senate candidates in competitive races announced their support for freezing the aid on Wednesday, expanding the bipartisan coalition supporting the move. Republicans are broadly in favor of the freeze; Sens. Jon Tester (D-MT), Joe Manchin (D-WV) and Jacky Rosen (D-NV) announced their support on Tuesday.

Sen. Bob Casey (D-PA), in a statement to *Jewish Insider*, blasted Republicans for "intentionally misleading the American people about this matter," highlighting that the funds have not been transferred and arguing that the rhetoric "only bolsters our enemies." But, he said, "these funds should remain frozen until we can determine whether Iran played a role in the attack and what the appropriate U.S. response should be."

Sen. Kyrsten Sinema (I-AZ) told *JI* she would "work with colleagues on both sides of the aisle to get this done and cut off funding to terrorist organizations including

Hamas and their supporters."

Rep. Colin Allred (D-TX), who is mounting a Senate campaign in Texas, told *JI*, "the United States must explore all options available to hold Hamas and their Iranian backers accountable. While Hamas deserves the lion's share of the blame, Iran cannot go unpunished for its role."

Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH), the chairman of the Senate Banking Committee, pressed the White House to freeze the funds and said he plans to examine the role that cryptocurrency reportedly played in financing Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

Sen. Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) said the funds should remain frozen "until I have full confidence that Iran did not play a role in these barbaric terrorist attacks on the Israeli people."

Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV) and Reps. Ruben Gallego (D-AZ) and Elissa Slotkin (D-MI) also joined the push on Wednesday.

Gallego said, "As we learn more about Iran's role in these horrific terrorist attacks against Israel, one thing is clear: we should immediately freeze the \$6 billion in assets and use available tools to discourage Iran's illicit conduct. Our ally Israel is at war, and while the conflict continues, we must stand united."

Slotkin, a former CIA analyst, specifically

referenced the information conveyed during Tuesday's classified briefing to lawmakers in her call to freeze the funds. Following the briefing, lawmakers indicated that administration officials had not formally linked Iran to the attack.

Opponents of re-freezing the funds argue that violating the hostage deal could make it harder for the U.S. to secure the release of U.S. citizens being held hostage by Hamas.

Republicans are moving ahead with legislation relating to freezing the \$6 billion. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) and Sen. Tom Cotton (R-AR) are seeking to fast-track legislation freezing the funds, while Banking Committee Ranking Member Tim Scott (R-SC) is working on his own bill and called for a committee hearing.

In the House, Rep. David Schweikert (R-AZ) introduced a bill to redirect the money, and other seized Iranian assets, to fund Israel's defense.

Republicans are also ramping up oversight efforts related to suspended Iran envoy Rob Malley and the alleged Iranian influence efforts that enmeshed senior administration advisors.

House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Michael McCaul (R-TX), Senate Foreign Relations Committee Ranking Member Jim Risch (R-ID), Sen. Bill Hagerty (R-TN) and Rep. Brian Mast (R-FL) wrote to the administration requesting further

information on the details of Malley's suspension and investigative efforts into the influence network.

House Oversight Committee Chair James

Comer (R-KY) and Rep. Glenn Grothman (R-WI) requested documents and information from the administration relating to Malley, the hostage deal, a senior official implicated

in the influence operation and potential evasion of regulations providing for congressional review of nuclear agreements with Iran. ♦

OCTOBER 12, 2023

## Does the IDF need donations of equipment? It's complicated

*The military is unequivocal that there are no major shortages, so why are units still asking for gear?*

By Judah Ari Gross

*The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.*

Over 360,000 people have been called up to reserve duty in the Israel Defense Forces since the outbreak of war on Saturday, the largest enlistment in 50 years.

Almost immediately, those reservists began putting out calls for donations for equipment: from food to socks to kneepads to ceramic armor to medical equipment. The spouses of reservists have organized fundraising drives to raise money for the equipment; communities in the United States have "adopted" units in order to provide them with gear; and volunteers across Israel have transported supplies to military bases on the northern and southern borders.

The military, however, has been adamant that there are no significant equipment shortages.

For Israelis, these requests for donations and reports of insufficient equipment call to mind one of the major failures of the 2006 Second Lebanon War, when reservists indeed opened emergency equipment caches, known by the Hebrew acronym *Yamachim*, only to find them empty or containing woefully inadequate gear.

So what gives?

The answer is somewhat more complex and nuanced than it may immediately seem.

To a large extent, the widespread requests for equipment by military units and the IDF's insistence that there are no serious shortages do not conflict with one another.

The IDF's Technological and Logistics Directorate has clear designations of what equipment is needed for different units based on the missions that they will perform: An elite reconnaissance unit being sent into enemy territory is expected to require different equipment than a unit that is guarding a military outpost. For instance, ceramic armor plates are considered a must-have for units going into known combat zones, but not for others.

"The *Yamachim* were ready. Does everyone get our best equipment like the recon units? No, we didn't intend for that," Maj. Gen. Michel Yanko, head of the IDF Technology and Logistics Directorate, told journalists this week. "The equipment is in accordance with the type of mission, and that's what we plan for. We did not intend to give all 300,000 [reserve] soldiers ceramic vests. Everyone who will be in combat has a ceramic vest."

However, the fact that the military does not consider ceramic armor a must-have for some units, does not mean that it would not be useful for them or preferable to other heavier armored vests that they may receive. For that reason, units are looking to obtain this type of gear and for good reason — it will offer them better protection and allow

them to fight more effectively.

In his briefing to journalists, Yanko acknowledged that while that is generally the case, there have been some instances of bottlenecks and shortages. "There are places that we have not supplied. Everyone in the Gaza Division — it is our job to ensure that they get a ceramic vest," he said.

Yanko indicated that some of the shortages were caused not by a lack of equipment but by a surplus of reservists. As a general rule, the military calls up more reservists than it strictly needs, under the assumption that not everyone will turn up for duty. That has not been the case during this war.

"Some of the places where we have had shortages are because there are far higher rates of people reporting [for duty] than we thought — up to 140%," Yanko said.

With all that said, should people still donate equipment to military units and what is the best way to do so?

A major area of concern for the IDF is ensuring that the equipment being purchased for soldiers is indeed military-grade. There have also already been cases of fraud where people seek to purchase equipment from factories abroad that do not actually exist.

In addition, the military looks to avoid instances of certain units — particularly those with larger bases of support, like the Paratroopers Brigade or elite commando

units — from getting masses of equipment while lesser-known units do not receive the same level of support. Looking forward, there are also instances of mass surpluses of military-grade equipment finding their way onto the black market, which can be a major issue for law enforcement.

Separately, there are pieces of equipment that the military does not necessarily provide, but that soldiers do indeed require or could use such as duct tape, paracord and multi-tools, which are all regularly used by soldiers. These too are being donated widely by civilians, as are non-combat related supplies like soap, towels, cigarettes, underwear and socks. In the coming days

and weeks, there will be mass donations of these types of goods from Israel and abroad, resulting in large surpluses (as occurred during the 2014 Gaza war).

Therefore, while the IDF is emphatic that there are no serious shortages, it has recognized that people intend to make donations anyway and is working to facilitate that effort in order to allow it to occur in the best way possible.

“Despite the IDF’s clarifications that there is not a shortage of personal protective gear for soldiers, many people in Israel and in the world are reaching out since the outbreak of war and asking to donate equipment to soldiers,” the IDF, the Israeli

Defense Ministry and the Association for the Wellbeing of Israel’s Soldiers said in a joint statement on Thursday.

On the military side, the IDF has opened a dedicated phone number for units to report any shortages. And the military is reaching out to the public to describe the best ways to coordinate donations.

The organizations called for people who have already collected “large amounts of personal protection equipment” to bring it to the Defense Ministry to be checked to ensure that it meets the relevant standards.

The military has also directed all offers of donations from the United States to the Friends of the IDF. ♦

OCTOBER 11, 2023

## ‘We can’t just show sympathy, we actually have to show support,’ Democratic congressman Panetta says after visit to Israel

*A congressional delegation originally in the region for meetings about normalization spoke today with Israeli officials and the families of hostages in Israel*

By Marc Rod, Lahav Harkov

Following meetings in Israel on Tuesday with a range of Israeli officials, as well as the family members of an Israeli being held hostage by Hamas, Rep. Jimmy Panetta (D-CA) emphasized that Israel will need tangible, long-term support from the U.S. and Congress as its efforts to respond to Hamas’ massive terrorist attack move forward.

“There’s a number of ways in which we can show our support. It starts with our solidarity. That solidarity is going to be strengthened when people continue to hear about this bloodthirsty assault on Israel,” Panetta told *Jewish Insider* in an interview from Jordan. “But then moving forward, we can’t just show sympathy, we actually have to show support. And it’s got to be through legitimate actions, like funding supplemental packages.”

Panetta was part of a delegation that was in Saudi Arabia when the assault on Israel began. The delegation included Sen. Joni Ernst (R-IA) and Reps. Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-FL), Rep. Donald Norcross (D-NJ), Mariannette Miller-Meeks (R-IA) and Darrell Issa (R-CA). They were initially meant to discuss regional normalization, and met with Saudi Crown Prince Mohamed Bin Salman the day before the attack.

The group ultimately continued on to Bahrain and Jordan, traveling into Israel by car when flights in and out of Israel were canceled. Miller-Meeks and Issa ultimately were unable to continue on to Jordan and Israel.

The lawmakers met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Minister of Strategic Affairs Ron Dermer, Foreign Minister Eli Cohen and Opposition Leader

Yair Lapid. Cohen brought Noam and Lior Peri to the meeting. Their father, Chaim Peri, was abducted from his home on Kibbutz Nir Oz. Lawmakers also met with American citizens in Israel.

“The terrorists tried to break into my parents’ home,” Noam told them. “My father pushed one of the terrorists away with his hands, which allowed my mother to run away and hide for hours and be saved. The terrorists kidnapped my father from the house.”

Panetta said that hearing directly from the Israeli civilians and government officials and fully understanding the scope of the tragedy will help drive support for Israel in the coming conflict.

“It’s this type of understanding of what took place here that I do believe allows us to continue to come together, be unified in our



support for Israel,” he said. “The magnitude of the devastation and depravity that we heard about, ultimately, will lead to our strength going forward.”

The California lawmaker, who sits on the House Armed Services Committee, said that the lawmakers had “pushed very, very hard to get into Israel,” despite pushback from the U.S. government, “to make sure that our support was shown.”

“Us being there, in-country, on the ground — that’s exactly the type of support they wanted to see and feel,” Panetta said.

Wasserman Schultz added in an interview on CNN on Tuesday, “There’s a long road ahead here. We wanted to make sure we came to Israel and didn’t go home, so we could stand in solidarity with Israel — and not just talk about our support for Israel, but demonstrate it.”

Norcross said in a statement to JI that it was important for the legislators to make the trip “to show the strength of the U.S.-Israel relationship and our unwavering bipartisan, bicameral unity for Israel and the Jewish people. Israel is our closest and most important ally in the Middle East, and they need our support now more than ever.”

Panetta and Wasserman Schultz said that the administration’s decision to move a carrier group into the Eastern Mediterranean was a key show of support for Israel as well as a deterrent to Iran and Hezbollah.

Going forward, Panetta said that it will be important for Congress to pass a widely supported bipartisan resolution expressing support for Israel, “but ultimately it’s going to come down to a supplemental funding package.” Israel has a particular need, he continued, for additional precision guided missiles and Iron Dome interceptors.

In order to advance that, however, Panetta emphasized that Republicans must choose and seat a new speaker. Asked about the potential of a compromise speaker, to ensure pro-Israel measures can begin to move forward, if Republicans’ leadership deadlock continues, Panetta said it’s incumbent on Republicans to make overtures to Democrats and present “reasonable offers.” He said they have not done so.

Panetta also pushed back on the growing speculation that the strong support for Israel seen in recent days could be fleeting,

especially among progressive Democrats otherwise skeptical of Israel.

He noted that, despite critical rhetoric from some Democrats, lawmakers have voted overwhelmingly in favor of Israel, highlighting the vote in favor of supplemental Iron Dome funding in 2021 “when there wasn’t serious conflict like we’re seeing now.”

“Is it going to be easy? No. But at the same time, we have to realize and appreciate what Israel has gone through, and what Israel will continue to go through, if they do not act to deter any sort of future attacks like this,” he said. “The will that we felt today is something that I believe will allow them to win this war. But ultimately, we also understand that it’s going to take the United States to continue to support Israel.”

Panetta also pushed back on emerging calls for de-escalation and restraint by Israel, which he said has “the ultimate right to defend itself” and “destroy Hamas, to eviscerate them and exact a huge price.”

“Yes, there is going to be escalation because of this bloodthirsty assault that was perpetuated upon the people of Israel,” Panetta said. “And people need to understand that it is going to be a difficult path ahead.”

But he emphasized that the group received “assurances” that Israel will abide by the laws of war and international law, “especially when it comes to distinction and proportionality.”

The lawmakers also said that, despite the attacks, normalization efforts in the region are alive and well. Panetta said that he is still “hopeful” because Israeli leaders said they are having conversations with Arab leaders about the attack, and receiving “moral support.”

Wasserman Schultz said that the group heard directly from Saudi leaders and civil society members, as well as Bahraini leaders, following the Hamas attack that they were committed to continuing with the normalization process.

“Universally, they believed and remained committed to continuing and not allowing Hamas to do what their intention was... to execute the peace process,” Wasserman Schultz said.

While some Arab states, particularly Saudi Arabia, have put out public

statements condemning Israel and avoiding criticism of Hamas, Panetta suggested that those statements aren’t reflective of the sentiments being expressed privately.

“There are official messages, statements that have to be put out depending on the politics of each country,” he said. “However, I think there are relationships behind those statements between Israel and these Arab countries that I believe will go a long way.” ♦