

THE WEEKLY PRINT

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OCTOBER 26, 2023

Inside the kibbutz where Hamas massacred more than 100 Israelis

The Gaza periphery is known for the blooming red flowers that cover the landscape each spring, but this fall, the fields and communities surrounding the Palestinian enclave were covered in red blood

By Ruth Marks Eglash

It's been nearly three weeks since Hamas carried out its brutal terror attack on multiple army bases, more than 20 civilian communities and a music festival in Israel's south on Oct. 7. Since that day, I have been reporting extensively on the horrific events and their fallout as the Israeli military prepares for a broader invasion into Gaza with the aim of wiping out all terrorist threats in the enclave.

Over the past 20 days, I've listened to countless survivor testimonies and heard the painful cries of relatives of the more than 220 people — the elderly, women and children — horrifically kidnapped and now held captive by terrorist groups inside the

Palestinian enclave. I've also interviewed first responders, both civilian and military, as well as visited the army base where bodies of some of the more than 1,400 murdered people were brought for the gruesome task of identification.

Nearly a week later, the acrid smell of that place has stuck with me.

Yet nothing prepared me for a visit on Monday to the scene of one of the worst Hamas atrocities on that awful Saturday: Kibbutz Be'eri.

Known for the blooming red flowers that cover the landscape each spring, this fall, the fields and communities surrounding the Palestinian enclave were covered in red

blood.

I am no stranger to the Gaza periphery. My father was raised on one of the kibbutzim there and, as a child, we would often visit. That was before the intifadas or the disengagement from Gaza that enabled terrorists to take over the coastal strip. It was also long before their rocket fire, mortars and shells rained down every time there was tension with Israel.

As a longtime journalist, I returned to the area several times during various flare-ups in fighting. During the 2014 war, which Israelis refer to as Operation Protective Edge, I spent countless days visiting and interviewing residents of communities and

towns in the area. I recorded their close calls with the rocket fire and understood their fears that one day terrorists might somehow tunnel below the border fence and suddenly appear inside their homes.

From many of the people I met and spoke to, I also heard about their dreams of peace with the people in Gaza. They told me how they wanted to visit friends in the Strip and many said they still had fond memories, despite the current threats, of the old days when they could freely go into Palestinian towns and villages just a few miles away.

I also went to the area many times for army briefings about the security situation. On those tours, I was given details about Israel's advanced, high-tech border fence and given assurances that it reached down so deep it would block any Hamas tunnels that tried to snake underneath it.

During what Palestinians called the "Great March of Return" in 2018, the army even gave journalists a bird's-eye view of the mass – and often violent – protests, hoisting us up above that "secure" barrier in a cherry picker. Back then, the border seemed as impenetrable as the kibbutzim were beautiful.

The Be'eri that greeted me – and around 100 other journalists from all over the world – this past week was anything but idyllic.

The destruction and the smell of death, even two weeks later, were everywhere. Around the kibbutz's wire perimeter fence, which Hamas terrorists easily tore down, the army had erected mounds of dirt to stop any future infiltrations. On the day I was there, army tanks raced back and forth preparing for a likely ground invasion into Gaza. Soldiers, weapons ready, were everywhere.

In the homes, and on the once carefully manicured pathways in between, the bodies of dead kibbutz residents – and terrorists – had been removed and most of the blood stains washed away. Yet it was still traumatic wandering past the short row of houses that once contained happy families and wondering about their fate.

At the entrance to the last home in the row, the one closest to the perimeter fence and with a view of the kibbutz's orchards beyond, I found a clue; a nameplate belonging to a family I recognized as being among the hostages.

Inside their place, the devastation was

heartbreaking. A once-complete life, with all its cozy comforts – a smart fitted kitchen, dining area, living room – was charred black. Every window was smashed, and the door blown away by gunfire.

In each of the four other tiny houses along the same row, the destruction was similar; lives blown apart – books torn and trashed, photo albums with their contents spilling out, photographs of happy faces littering the floor. In the other rooms, closets were emptied of their contents, clothing scattered across the floor; shoes – mostly singles for some reason – lay in every corner.

In one of the homes, dirty, ripped-up mattresses lined the floor of what was once a neat living room, and I wondered with a chill what horrors might have taken place here during the long hours that these cruel Hamas terrorists moved back and forth between the kibbutz and Gaza on that fateful day. First responders have reported finding decapitated bodies, others with arms, legs and even genitals sliced off.

At the entrance to another home, among the broken flowerpots and charred bushes, the carcass of a tiny black dog still littered the yard. I opted not to go inside. It was too much.

Across the roadway, another once well-kept pathway was marked by homes with even greater destruction. This row had clearly been set alight, most of the structures, along with entire roofs, had totally collapsed in on themselves. Any walls still standing were riddled with bullet holes.

How will the kibbutz ever be able to rebuild after this? I thought with a shudder. Would they even want to?

As I made my way back to the group of foreign journalists, most of whom had flown in just to cover this story, I wondered if they realized the full context of what they were seeing. Most of these communities, which were part of the Jewish Agency's "11 points in the Negev plan" were established in the 1940s even before the State of Israel was created.

Some, like this kibbutz, were named to honor Israel's founding fathers – Be'eri was named after Berl Katznelson, one of the intellectual founders of Labor Zionism, whose nickname was Be'eri.

I also wondered if they realized that these tiny farming communities actually

form the backbone of Israel's agricultural sector and now, after the massacres of Oct. 7, the crops still growing in the fields all around us were about to die because the loving hands of those that once tended to them were either murdered, kidnapped or have been relocated to other parts of the country, their fields now part of a closed-off military zone.

According to estimates, some 20,000 residents from these border communities are now homeless, and Israel now faces a crisis of internal displacement it has not seen in its entire 75 years.

In this horrific attack, the people on this kibbutz – and the other communities around it – not only lost their lives and that of their loved ones here, but they also lost the entire contents of their lives, their homes, as well as their livelihoods.

And finally, I wanted to ask the thousands of foreign reporters and photographers who have flocked here for this conflict and will soon fly home if they realized that for Israel, the loss of these once-vibrant communities in a massacre so unfathomable has totally shattered its soul. ♦

DeSantis crackdown on pro-Hamas rallies could be model for elected officials

Several experts said while Florida's executive order against campus antisemitism will be contested, it will likely survive a First Amendment challenge

By Haley Cohen

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis' order banning the group Students for Justice in Palestine at state universities has touched off a debate over whether such a move will pass legal scrutiny.

But several legal scholars who spoke to JI said the DeSantis action was designed to pass constitutional muster, while a leader of a pro-Israel campus group said it could become a model for elected officials to use against terrorist-sympathizing groups on campus across the country.

Dozens of national Jewish groups and campus organizations have called on universities to withdraw their recognition and funding for groups affiliated with National Students for Justice in Palestine (NSJP). Most of the group's chapters, which commonly go by the name Students for Justice in Palestine but have other names on some campuses, have celebrated or defended Hamas' Oct. 7 terrorist attack against Israel.

"Based on the National SJP's support of terrorism, in consultation with Governor DeSantis, the student chapters must be deactivated," the state university system's chancellor, Ray Rodrigues, wrote in a memo on Tuesday to university leaders. The move marks the first time a state has outlawed SJP.

There are active SJP chapters at two Florida schools: the University of Florida and the University of South Florida, DeSantis' press secretary, Jeremy Redfern, told *Jewish Insider*.

"Governor DeSantis directed the Board of Governors to send notices to the [two schools] that their chapters are to be removed from campus immediately," Redfern said.

The letter explains that it is a "felony under Florida law to knowingly provide

material support ... to a designated foreign terrorist organization. These chapters exist under the headship of the National Students for Justice in Palestine, who distributed a toolkit identifying themselves as part of the Operation AlAqsa Flood [Hamas' name for their terrorist attacks on Israel]."

Alan Dershowitz, a Harvard University Law School professor emeritus who has represented high-profile clients such as O.J. Simpson, told JI the measure would likely survive a First Amendment challenge as long as the university does not "apply a double standard."

"A single standard must prevail on university campuses," Dershowitz continued. "Student groups that support Hamas should be treated the way a student group that supported the Ku Klux Klan or supported the rape of women, or the killing of gays should be treated."

Dershowitz added that his own view is that all such groups should be permitted on campus. "But, if a school would not permit the Klan, Nazis, sexists or homophobes to form groups, then the same rule should apply to supporters of Hamas' rapes, murders and kidnapping."

"But public universities cannot allow or disallow groups based on content," he said. "So if they are going to ban Nazis and the Klan they would have to ban Hamas supporters." He added that there should not be a distinction regarding students who are not U.S. citizens enjoying the rights and privileges of the First Amendment.

Dershowitz noted that he doesn't view SJP as "pro-Palestine." Rather, the groups' rallies are "pro-Hamas [and] anti-Israeli," he said. "If you're pro-Palestine, you're anti-Hamas. There hasn't been a single actual pro-Palestine demonstration. Has anybody seen a single sign at any campus favoring

a two-state solution? I have not. It's all 'Palestine will be free from the river to the sea.'"

A Harvard Law professor from 1964 until 2013, Dershowitz said he is not surprised by the large number of student organizations that quickly declared their support for Hamas, particularly at Harvard, where a group of 31 student organizations published a letter on social media claiming Israel is "entirely responsible" for Hamas terrorists' murder of Israelis.

"Harvard has a long history of student bigotry, starting with many student groups that supported the Nazis and Hitler in the 1930s," he said. "Students tend to support, often, the most radical extremes, whether they be positive or negative, right or left."

He added that he was not satisfied by Harvard President Claudine Gay's response. "I wanted President Gay to make the same response she would have made to groups that supported raping, beheading, Nazis and [homophobes]. She should have made the [same] response. I don't believe she made the same response."

Marc Stern, chief legal officer at the American Jewish Committee, expects there to be litigation around DeSantis' ban of SJP. "How the challenge comes out will very much depend on what [language] comes out. There are arguments, which are significant, that would allow colleges to say [statements like] 'kill the Jews' are disruptive and beyond the pale. With more political [statements] the courts will have a tougher time."

Stern noted that questions surrounding First Amendment rights are "interesting and not unimportant" but also can be "a distraction" to the issue of university administrations staying silent.

"University presidents are not prohibited by the First Amendment from speaking out

strongly against the 'kill the Jews' stuff we're seeing from SJP," Stern told JI.

"Imagine on our modern campuses somebody saying white men have the right to rape women of color. There would be outrage. Hamas does it and there's not a peep. Before getting lost in the First Amendment debate, the question is where has everybody been? Some [university] presidents called people out. Most have avoided doing so and that leads to a moral ambiguity that has no place on a college campus, and it leaves Jewish students vulnerable."

Stern said the argument that university administration that criticize conduct as antisemitic equates to denying Palestinians freedom of speech is "constitutional gibberish" and "nonsense that needs to be called out."

"The fact that a university official criticizes speech is entirely how we expect doctrines of freedom of speech to work. The answer to speech is more speech."

Hina Shamsi, director of the American Civil Liberties Union National Security Project, told JI that "the governor's actions are transparently unconstitutional."

On Oct. 12, "Day of Resistance" events to celebrate the attack on Israel were planned by local SJP chapters 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, described their events as vigils for the Palestinian "martyrs" killed during the raid on Israel.

The Florida university system said its SJP ban is based on a "toolkit," issued by the national organization to chapters ahead of the "Day of Resistance." JI obtained a copy of the "toolkit," which has since been removed from the internet.

The seven-page kit referred to Hamas' massacre of 1,400 Israelis on Oct. 7 as "the Palestinian resistance."

"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," it said. "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."

SJP, in conjunction with other groups, led more than a dozen "Walkout for Gaza" rallies on Wednesday, including at The Ohio State University, Columbia University and Howard University. At the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, hundreds of protesters walked out of class at 3:30 p.m. holding signs and chanting "From Palestine to Mexico, all the walls have got to go!" In Denver, the walkout ended with a protest at the Golda Meir House Museum. During the walkout at Cooper Union in New York, Jewish students were barricaded in the library as protestors pounded on the door.

Mark Rotenberg, vice president and general counsel of Hillel International, said public universities have different limitations to private institutions.

"We will see how those limitations are interpreted in this situation," he said. "We believe it is long overdue for universities to stand up and speak out against the type of incitement of violence that has been a hallmark of SJP. In too many instances SJP's behavior targeting Jewish students creates an unsafe environment."

Rotenberg said individual campuses "need to make a decision based on what their SJP has been doing" when deciding whether to emulate Florida's decision.

"There are a number of things academic universities have to do to fulfill their academic mission, inclusion for all students and to comply with U.S. civil rights laws," Rotenberg continued. "Those steps include protecting Jewish students and Jewish identifying facilities, preventing official units of departments of the university from bullying and marginalizing Jewish students, and students who identify with Israel, and to speak out about organizations who are glorifying Hamas' massacre. It needs to be remembered and called out that SJP called the slaughter of Jewish civilians 'a historic win.'"

Jacob Baime, CEO of Israel on Campus Coalition, said DeSantis' move should "absolutely" be a model for universities nationwide. "These were evil acts, and anyone who tries to justify them, including SJP, is complicit."

Baime applauded the ban in a tweet. "When students are indoctrinated to hate Israel and support ISIS-style terrorists, universities have failed," he wrote. "SJP's response to the massacre of Jewish families reveals a violent, genocidal ideology spreading on campus. Universities must act decisively to protect all students. Thank you, @RonDeSantis, for standing up."

Baime said SJP chapters openly supporting Hamas' attacks "cross the line from free speech to incitement and endorsing terrorism." He shared with JI a list compiled by ICC that detailed incidents with the group since Oct. 7.

Included in the list of seven incidents is an SJP protest at the University of North Carolina where a protester yelled "all of us are Hamas." During the Harvard Palestine Solidarity Committee's

"Die-in," an Israeli student at Harvard Business School reported being pushed and shoved as he attempted to film the protest, according to the list.

KC Johnson, a history professor at Brooklyn College and the Graduate Center of CUNY, opposed the ban, noting in a tweet that the "precedent could be used against Zionist students."

Johnson added that SJP should be allowed to continue because "there's no 1A hate speech exception" and "it's important for outsiders to see these protests to understand the campus environment."

It is not clear whether DeSantis, who is seeking the Republican Party's presidential nomination, consulted with members of the Jewish community before imposing the ban. A spokesperson for the Republican Jewish Coalition declined to comment on the matter. DeSantis said last week that if elected president, he would revoke the visas of any foreign students "out there praising Hamas." On Wednesday, presidential hopeful Sen. Tim Scott (R-SC) also called for deportation of foreign students attending American colleges who are "encouraging Jewish genocide."

Jewish Insider's Washington correspondent Gabby Deutch contributed reporting. ♦

Noam Peri's life-or-death mission to Washington

Her father is in Gaza. Noam Peri is in Washington, begging for help

By Gabby Deutch

Haim Peri is a man who defines his life by the land he lives on — arid land he has cultivated, farmed, controlled, marveled at and called home for more than five decades. It is the land of Kibbutz Nir Oz, a small Israeli community near Israel's border with Gaza that he helped found as a young man, inspired by Israel's pioneering socialist ethos.

A metalworker by profession, Peri is also an artist who makes large sculptures that he displays in the wide-open fields of his kibbutz. Over the years, he has also showcased works created by artists representing the diversity of Israeli society: Arabs, Bedouins, Jews. It's a characteristic move for a peace activist who for years drove sick Gazans across the border to Israeli hospitals.

Now, for more than two weeks, Peri has been separated from his land. He now stares not at the expanses of Nir Oz's farmland but, based on the accounts of released Israeli hostages, at the walls of tunnels underneath Gaza, where Peri, 79, is a captive of the terrorist group Hamas. His daughter Noam did not even know if he was alive or dead until Monday, when Yocheved Lifshitz, an elderly hostage who was released this week, shared that Peri was still alive.

"She was my teacher in kindergarten. She taught us how to swim," Noam, who grew up on the tight-knit kibbutz, said of Lifshitz, whose husband is still being held hostage by the terror group. "She was able to tell her son yesterday that she knows my father is alive. She was with him."

Noam spoke to *Jewish Insider* on Tuesday in a crowded cafeteria in the U.S. Capitol, where she had come to issue an urgent plea for Congress to do everything in its power to help free the more than 200 Israeli hostages who have been in captivity since Oct. 7. Dressed in a blazer and slacks, Noam, who works at Google in Tel Aviv

and no longer lives on the kibbutz, looked like any other activist on the Hill for official business — until she pulled out a stack of posters that bore the names and photos of hostages from Nir Oz and other nearby communities close to the Gaza border.

"We are asking them to be our voice here," Noam said of U.S. legislators, after a meeting with Sen. Raphael Warnock (D-GA). "There are many countries that Israel is not in contact with that the U.S. can help pressure, and this is what we need. We can't do it without the United States and the global leadership." Her three-day visit to Washington will also include meetings with senior State Department officials and Jewish leaders.

No one in Israel has been untouched by the Hamas terrorist attacks that took place on Oct. 7. But for the current and former residents of Nir Oz, the assault was more akin to a pogrom — a genocidal massacre that left a quarter of the kibbutz's 400 members either dead or taken hostage. Nir Oz's survivors have been uprooted and relocated to Eilat, several hours south; when many of them returned to the kibbutz last week for funerals, under the guard of a battalion of soldiers, they came under fire from Hamas fighters in Gaza.

"It's such a beautiful place and for hours, they just burned everything. They ruined everything," Noam said of the dozens of Hamas terrorists who entered Nir Oz on Oct. 7, gunning down Israeli civilians and burning people alive inside their homes. "They took 73 people of this community." Before the attack, colorful flowers bloomed on the trees. Bikes were left unattended without fear that they would be stolen. Everything was growing, alive, vibrant. Now, no one and nothing is left.

Noam hosted her parents and her siblings' families for a joyous Shabbat dinner to mark the end of Sukkot the night

before the attacks. Early the next morning, Noam and her four siblings received texts from their parents: the red-alert siren had gone off, and they quickly hurried to the safe room in their house. It's an unpleasant if often uneventful occurrence that they have gotten used to since Hamas took over the Gaza Strip in 2007. After the siren goes off, they have 15 seconds to reach the shelter.

"They thought it's the same thing, that they'll be in the safe room for a few minutes, and then they'll go out. They never imagined what was going to happen," said Noam.

Hamas terrorists breached the border of Nir Oz, where a security team was defenseless in the face of dozens of Hamas fighters. They shot up everything in sight, including electrical wiring, sending the village into darkness. Soon, terrorists entered the Peri home and broke through the door of the safe room.

Haim pushed the terrorists out of the room and tried to run away before they caught him.

"My father, I think he felt — I hope I would be able to ask him this one day, but I assume he felt like this is the only thing he could do," Noam said.

Speaking in English, the terrorists said they wouldn't hurt him and told him to follow them. And he went. Because what the terrorists did not know was that Haim's wife, Osnat, the chairwoman of the kibbutz, was hiding in a corner in the dark safe room. After the terrorists fled with Haim, Osnat ("my brave mother," said Noam) quickly and quietly texted her five children to tell them of Haim's abduction. Then, she turned off her phone and sat in fear in the pitch-black room for hours until Israel Defense Forces soldiers rescued her.

"We now know that in those hours, dozens of terrorists invaded, maybe even 100, and they just went from house to house, burning everything and shooting

everything, murdering people,” said Noam. “If they couldn’t unlock the safe room door, they burned the house.” The emerging stories were almost too painful for Noam to share; a close friend of her sister had been killed along with her husband and their three children.

“Each and every one in this list of kidnapped people, I know them. I have some kind of connection with them,” Noam said.

Now, Noam’s life has changed immeasurably. She has become an unofficial spokesperson for Nir Oz and for its dead and kidnapped. Last week, she wrote a letter to the Egyptian ambassador to Israel sharing that her father traveled to Alexandria two decades ago to help Egyptian farmers

develop the land.

“I had a very happy childhood in this place, and these are wonderful people. Honestly, all they ever wanted is to live peacefully with their neighbors,” Noam stated.

Until now, Noam has never been an activist. It’s a role she desperately does not want, and one she never would have chosen for herself. But she came to Washington armed with the stories of her friends and family members to tell anyone who will listen about Israel’s hostages.

Accompanied by Irwin Cotler, a human rights lawyer and the former attorney general of Canada, Peri has been pursuing multiple goals. One is getting the

International Committee of the Red Cross to write back to her, after she shared with them information on medication needed by the Nir Oz members now being held in Gaza. Another is pressuring Qatar, with its ties to Iran and Hamas, to give up those ties — or pressuring Washington to use its leverage with Qatar, a key U.S. ally in the Gulf, to press for action on the hostages.

“I’m asking their help in whatever they can,” said Noam, to “make sure the world is aware of this hostage situation, and who are those hostages, the fact that they’re elderly or kids, and that this is a humanitarian crisis, that needs the whole world to work together to solve.” ♦

OCTOBER 26, 2023

American Jewish leaders denounce Erdogan for defending Hamas

Turkish president claims that Hamas is not a terrorist organization but a liberation group waging a battle to protect its land and people

By Matthew Kassel

American Jewish leaders are forcefully denouncing Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan after he canceled a previously planned visit to Israel and claimed that Hamas is not a terrorist organization but a liberation group waging a battle to protect its land and people.

Speaking to members of his Justice and Development Party on Wednesday, the Turkish leader also called Israel’s counteroffensive in Gaza an “intentional massacre” and accused the Israeli government of taking advantage of his “good intentions” amid a recent renewal of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

“I shook the hand of this man named Netanyahu one time in my life,” Erdogan said of his first in-person meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu last month on the sidelines of the U.N. General

Assembly, where the two leaders agreed to coordinate mutual visits to Ankara and Jerusalem. “If he had continued with good intentions, our relations might have been different, but now, unfortunately, that will not happen.”

Erdogan’s comments — a sharp reversal from his recent, friendlier rhetoric toward Israel — sparked an immediate uproar among American Jewish leaders who had met separately with the Turkish president last month for an hour-long conversation that several participants had characterized as encouragingly cordial.

“When Erdogan embraces Hamas and criticizes Israel for defending itself, what we are seeing is the real Recep Erdogan,” William Daroff, the CEO of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, told *Jewish Insider* on Wednesday. “We now know that he is a charlatan who is much more interested in

promoting the murder of Jews than he is in being a man of peace who’s interested in engaging in a positive way in the Middle East.”

Abe Foxman, the former longtime national director of the Anti-Defamation League, who was one of several Jewish leaders to meet with the Turkish president last month, echoed that assessment, claiming it was “sad to see the old, hateful Erdogan surface again.”

“I have personally experienced the cynical up-and-down relations with Erdogan over the years — when he needed you he was your best friend, and in a moment would turn on you,” Foxman told *JL*. “Several weeks ago we talked about Netanyahu’s trip to Turkey and Erdogan’s to Israel in a tone of deep friendship and celebration. It seems he was never a real friend — but used his relationship cynically when it fit his personal political needs.”

During his meeting with more than two dozen American Jewish leaders last month in New York, Erdogan reiterated that he would make his first visit to Israel as soon as possible and affirmed his commitment to combating antisemitism, which he referred to as a “crime against humanity,” according to attendees.

But Jewish leaders who were cautiously encouraged by Erdogan’s engagement indicated that his new remarks — which drew rebukes from Israel and Italy, a NATO ally — had largely extinguished that goodwill.

“He was saying all the right things, all the right platitudes,” Malcolm Hoenlein, the vice chair and former CEO of the Conference of Presidents, said of the meeting with Erdogan in mid-September. “He has manipulated back and forth over time with his views, but it’s especially disappointing, given his recent comments toward Israel, that he would take such drastic action. The consequences of Erdogan’s decisions are very serious and should be taken as such.”

Turkey’s support for Hamas was a particularly memorable source of tension when Erdogan met with Jewish leaders during the UNGA in 2022, according to

Daroff, whose organization has long been involved in discussions with the Turkish leader. “We had a very touchy session where he denied that there was a Hamas presence in Turkey,” Daroff said, noting that when Erdogan was presented with evidence to counter his claims, “he pledged to look into it.”

Last month, meanwhile, Erdogan declared “there was no Hamas presence in Turkey,” according to Daroff. The Turkish president, he said, told the group of attendees that he had been working with Israeli intelligence and was looking forward to “a new chapter” in his relations with Israel and Jewish leaders.

Now, however, “Erdogan is reverting to his actual character and his true beliefs,” Daroff told JI.

Erdogan has frequently attacked Israel and made statements seen as antisemitic. In 2021, during the last major flare-up of violence between Israel and Hamas, he called Israelis “murderers to the point that they kill children who are five or six years old,” adding: “They only are satisfied by sucking their blood. It is in their nature.”

The State Department condemned Erdogan’s comments as antisemitic.

Rabbi Levi Shemtov, the executive vice president of American Friends of Lubavitch, said he found Erdogan’s new comments “severely troubling.”

“While, like many others, I was encouraged by his more recent efforts to reestablish and even strengthen his relationship with Israel and the Jewish community in America and beyond — and the prospects going forward were bright — the terminology of his most recent comments leads me to believe that a serious reconsideration of that relationship is in order,” Shemtov said in an interview with JI on Wednesday. “Such words are simply unacceptable. Terror is terror, and there simply are not two ways about it.”

Harley Lippman, a longtime AIPAC lay leader who was also among the attendees at last month’s meeting with Erdogan, said it was “not believable that” the Turkish president “could say Hamas is not a terrorist organization.”

“What does he call their own actions that they boasted about online?” Lippman told JI. “What would he call it? I’d like to ask him.” ♦

OCTOBER 24, 2023

Post-Oct. 7, Jewish life on campus requires extra security to keep students safe

Several of the top schools in the country now hire armed guards to protect Jewish spaces

By Haley Cohen

One Hillel at a Big Ten university used to employ armed guards only for “big” Shabbat dinners — the ones with hundreds of students. Since Oct. 7, the day of Hamas’ deadly rampage in southern Israel, which has resulted in rising antisemitism globally, armed security personnel now patrol the on-campus Hillel building for around five hours every day.

Similarly, University of Miami Hillel always hired armed security for Shabbat

dinners and holidays with more than 100 students. But last Shabbat, which had an attendance of about 60, was the first time the Hillel requested that university police guard a smaller event.

Armed guards were also present at some campus Chabads last Shabbat. At a university in the Northeast, a Chabad rebbetzin said that having the local police department, in addition to the regular unarmed security staff who check names,

was “something we never did before.”

“To be honest, it’s very costly,” she said. “We hope it isn’t the new normal, but I don’t know.”

In the two weeks since Hamas’ massacre, Jewish students at American universities have expressed frustration and sadness at official university statements viewed as weak — in addition to being fearful of pro-Palestine student groups and faculty, some of whom have outright celebrated Hamas’

attacks.

Now, as the war between Israel and Hamas appears poised to enter a new phase with Israel's likely ground incursion in Gaza, armed guards are becoming a new normal at some Jewish centers on college campuses around the country.

On Thursday, Hillel International's CEO, Adam Lehman, addressed the security situation in a webinar, saying that armed guards would be hired to protect students at Shabbat activities.

"It might seem unimaginable that students going to a simple service would have to walk through armed guards, but that is in some cases what we need on the campuses," Lehman said.

A Hillel spokesperson told *Jewish Insider* that emergency funds will support a wide range of efforts and that the group is still assessing what the needs of specific schools are to best decide how they will be implemented over the next few weeks.

At the University of Miami Hillel, Executive Director Briana Schwarz decided against taking a wait-and-see approach. Through the remainder of the school year, any Shabbat or event with more than 40 students will have armed security present, she told JI.

"Once everything started two weeks ago, we have been in daily communication with the university police department," Schwarz

continued, adding that "students don't seem to notice the guards. But I've gotten calls from parents who are happy we've taken the extra step."

Schwarz said the school is not aware of any direct threats to Hillel, but that a widely circulated statement from an official channel associated with Hamas leader Khaled Mashal calling on Muslims worldwide to engage in a "Day of Rage" on Oct. 13 was a wake-up call to stay vigilant.

Paying for police officers is "a significant new expense for our Hillel," Schwarz said.

"Hillel International has grants to help subsidize the cost. We applied last week. But typically we only paid for police when we knew we were having something huge. Now, we're classifying 40 students as large enough to necessitate a police officer," she said.

Lucy Levin, a senior at University of Miami who works at Hillel as a receptionist, said that having a security presence is comforting – especially for her parents.

"My parents were asking me a lot of questions which made me worried that they were worried," Levin, who is now responsible for checking identification of anyone who enters the building, something that was not done prior to Oct. 7, said. "Many parents have been calling the front desk asking questions about security."

Levin added that among her peers, she

doesn't know anyone avoiding campus Jewish events out of fear.

At Elon University Chabad in North Carolina, officers from the Town of Elon Police Department were present a couple of years ago for a few weeks following a string of antisemitic incidents at the school.

Last Shabbat, the guards returned. "We heard from concerned parents who are far away from their kids. Having armed guards puts their minds at ease," Rabbi Mendy Minkowitz told JI.

Minkowitz said Chabad on Campus offers partial grants, about 50%, to fund the officers.

He said every Chabad rabbi working on a college campus that he's spoken to is taking "some form of precaution."

"In terms of hiring armed guards, I've spoken to a few," Minkowitz said. There are 207 Chabad on Campus centers in the U.S. and Canada, according to Chabad-Lubavitch's national organization, headquartered in Brooklyn, N.Y.

The officers have been hired for the next five weeks and then Minkowitz said he will reevaluate. "The amount of time we need them is directly related to whatever happens in Israel. If [the war] is prolonged this will be included in our equation for the next little bit." ♦

OCTOBER 23, 2023

The error-prone Israeli government spokesman who wasn't

Hananya Naftali, who created social media content for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, tweeted falsehoods and doctored photos in recent days and implied he's working for the Israeli government – but no one is willing to claim him

By Lahav Harkov

As Israel pounds Hamas with airstrikes in Gaza and repels Hezbollah in the north, the digital war, rife with misinformation and raging

nonstop, is another kind of dangerous front line. Into this sensitive area of Israel's online messaging about the war now stands a controversial figure, Hananya Naftali, a

former member of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's communications staff.

More rogue social media influencer than

actual government spokesperson, Naftali has caused headaches for the government at a fraught moment. His erroneous and misleading recent online posts about the war, along with questions about his resume, have been cited to claim that Israel is peddling disinformation, or worse – that Israel is responsible for the explosion outside Gaza's Al Ahli Hospital.

Minutes after Hamas' Health Ministry in Gaza claimed that Israel bombed the hospital and killed 500 people, Naftali posted: "Israeli Air Force struck a Hamas terrorist base inside a hospital in Gaza. A multiple number of terrorists are dead. It's heartbreaking that Hamas is launching rockets from hospitals, mosques, schools and using civilians as human shields. #Hamas_Is_ISIS"

Israel has since said that the explosion came from a rocket misfired by Palestinian Islamic Jihad, a claim backed up by video taken by independent news outlets and supported by President Joe Biden and others. According to a U.S. intelligence community assessment, the blast was also much smaller than initially indicated, mostly impacting the parking lot and causing an estimated 100-300 casualties.

Naftali deleted the original post and posted a correction – but the damage was already done.

Palestinian Ambassador to the U.N. Riyadh Mansour said that Netanyahu's "digital spokesman tweeted that Israel did the hit thinking that there is around this hospital a base for Hamas, and then he deleted that tweet...Now, they changed the story to try to blame the Palestinians. It is a lie."

Naftali's comments were cited in an AFP Fact Check and an Al Jazeera article about the "Israeli narrative."

Naftali, meanwhile, has done little to dispel the notion that he speaks for the government of Israel or its prime minister.

Naftali became Netanyahu's deputy social media adviser in 2018, working under the prime minister's then-social media adviser Topaz Luk, now the Prime Minister's Office spokesman, who called Naftali a "superstar" at the time.

The adviser mainly courted controversy at the time due to accusations of proselytizing. While both of his parents

are Jewish, he has said he "made his own decision to follow Jesus." Videos in which he said he "read the Bible and shared Jesus" with IDF soldiers led some to say he was trying to convert soldiers to Christianity, which he denied.

When Naftali married his wife, India, in January 2023, Netanyahu spoke at his wedding and said "he works for me. That's not an easy thing to do. But he does it very well."

On Oct. 9, two days after Hamas massacred civilians in Israel's south, Naftali, 28, who had served in a tank unit that entered Gaza in 2014, said he was called up for reserve duty. He posted a photo of himself in IDF fatigues embracing his wife with the message: "I am drafted as well to serve and defend my country Israel. I said goodbye to my wife India, who sent me with blessings and protection of God. From now on she will be managing and posting on my behalf so be nice to her."

A few days later, India Naftali, a reporter for i24 News, tweeted a photo of herself from his account, saying that she had been posting for him.

However, an IDF spokesperson said on Sunday that Naftali was "not [serving in] the IDF at all," before adding: "Out of concern for personal information, the IDF doesn't disclose details of any individual's recruitment status."

That did not stop Naftali from tweeting a video of himself on Oct. 14, once again in IDF fatigues, claiming that he was "called up from the frontline to another front – the digital war."

"The prime minister has called me to join this task force that has been fighting around the clock to fight and defend Israel in the media," Naftali said. "This is a war between good and evil and Israel's battle is your battle as well. There is a lot of disinformation, hate, antisemitism, and lies. We all have to fight it together."

The Prime Minister's Office has put together a task force that includes some past staff, such as Netanyahu's former spokesman and diplomatic adviser, Mark Regev, and President Isaac Herzog's former spokesman, Eylon Levy, as well as new faces such as journalist Tal Heinrich, to help with wartime communications.

The social media influencer did an

interview later that day for Newsmax in his IDF fatigues while standing at a Prime Minister's Office lectern, something that spokespeople for Netanyahu or other civilian figures are not authorized to do, a source in the room told *Jewish Insider*. Naftali was told he should never do so again, and that he is not authorized to speak for the government.

A Prime Minister's Office official denied that Naftali works for the Israeli government or on the volunteer task force. The source who was in the room when Naftali filmed the video said that he was never introduced to the task force as a member. Someone who used to tweet for Netanyahu said it is unlikely that the prime minister would have personally called him, as Naftali claimed.

Naftali did not respond to multiple phone calls and texts from JI asking where he works. His X (formerly Twitter) profile says only, "I'm that Israeli who talks to the camera about peace in the Middle East," and features a pinned post calling on people to send him money via the monetization platform Patreon.

Though Naftali was in army fatigues on TV and in X videos, the IDF denied that he is working with its spokesperson's unit, which controls its social media accounts. A Foreign Ministry spokesperson also said they are not working with him.

Netanyahu's personal spokesman, Jonatan Urlich, said that Naftali created social media content for the prime minister as a freelancer for the Likud party, hired on a project-by-project basis and was not currently in their employ. "We have no control over" Naftali's tweets, Urlich said.

A Likud insider explained that some of Netanyahu's aides are technically employed by the party, which is able to pay more than the government.

Asked about Naftali, another Likud insider responded: "What did he do this time?"

The tweet about the Gaza hospital was not Naftali's only misleading tweet since the start of the war on Oct. 7.

"Israel is striking terror targets in Gaza right now. More of that, less talking," Naftali tweeted the following day, along with a video labeled "Israel News on Telegram."

Kareem Rifai, a social media strategist for the American Enterprise Institute,

however, said the images in the video were of the Syrian town of Arihah.

On Friday, Naftali tweeted blurry photos of Hamas leader Khaled Mashal living in luxury in Doha, Qatar, leading many to accuse him of generating the photos with AI. The photos were real, but they had been “poorly upscaled” with AI, Forbes reported.

Ashley Perry, a former senior government adviser, who served under

then-Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, among other officials, said that “in the battle to fight the disinformation of Hamas and its supporters, it is vital that everything Israel and its supporters put out is verified and accurate.”

“There are those who are looking for any opening to delegitimize and discredit any pro-Israel content, so we should not give them cannon fodder,” Perry, who

specializes in strategic communications, added. “The world has finally been exposed to Hamas’ lies, so we have to be extra careful in providing content that has been checked and verified as much as possible.”

Judah Ari Gross contributed to this report. ♦

OCTOBER 24, 2023

Israeli antisemitism envoy calls on White House to strengthen position on IHRA, anti-Zionism

Former Knesset Member Michal Cotler-Wunsh called White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre’s comments on antisemitism ‘unbelievable and unfathomable.’

By Marc Rod

Michal Cotler-Wunsh, Israel’s special envoy for combating antisemitism, told *Jewish Insider* on Monday that comments by White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre denying that antisemitic incidents are on the rise and highlighting other forms of hate are “unbelievable and unfathomable.”

“There is a documented rise in antisemitism,” Cotler-Wunsh told *JI* in an interview in Washington, D.C. yesterday. The former member of the Knesset was in the U.S. capital for meetings with administration officials and lawmakers, after a stop in New York where she met with New York City Mayor Eric Adams, the chancellor of the City University of New York and high-level U.N. officials.

Despite her concerns about Jean-Pierre’s remarks, the Israeli envoy conveyed a “great appreciation” for “the clear messages of the president that recognize that antisemitism is the fuel for” Hamas’ actions.

In her meetings in the U.S., Cotler-Wunsh pressed her interlocutors — including Second Gentleman Doug Emhoff — to push the administration to unequivocally embrace and implement the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s working

definition of antisemitism and clearly state that anti-Zionism is antisemitism.

In its antisemitism strategy earlier this year, the administration offered praise for an alternative definition of antisemitism in addition to IHRA, and trod carefully in how it addressed anti-Zionism. Cotler-Wunsh said that the administration should come out more strongly on both points.

“I do think that a clarification is due, I do think that it would be a very important one. Cotler-Wunsh said. She said that Emhoff had conveyed “a great willingness” to consider such a step. “We would be remiss not to identify that the current strain [of antisemitism] — that is anti-Zionism — is the one that is running rampant.”

Cotler-Wunsh emphasized repeatedly that without the IHRA definition, “you can’t actually identify or combat antisemitism” because of its utility in identifying anti-Zionist rhetoric as antisemitic. She described the Oct. 7 attack as a clarifying moment that “pulls the mask off of the fact that anti-Zionism is antisemitism.”

“If you don’t identify that modern, mutated form of antisemitism and combat that, then you’re combating the older forms, the other strains of an ever-mutating virus,”

she said, “and you’re enabling the new strain to fester to permeate in the society in which you live, which we know historically collapses the society in which you live.”

She also stressed the need to push back on false equivalencies between Israel and Hamas and those that underlie defenses of Hamas’ atrocities in Israel, cast Israel as an aggressor or a villain and have been used to justify antisemitism and attacks on Jews around the world.

“It’s so Orwellian,” she continued. “It’s hard to imagine, that days later — not years later, or decades later, like with Holocaust denial — days after these brutal atrocities, we would have to deal with the possibility of their denial or anybody holding up a sign that says, ‘I am Hamas.’”

Cotler-Wunsh urged Jewish Americans and Jewish organizations to speak out against antisemitism and in support of Israel, including by pressing officials at every level of government to adopt the IHRA definition.

“All those that recognize this as an assault on our shared humanity, as an assault on civilization, as a war waged on our cherished values of life and liberty — they have a role in this war,” she said. “In war, we lose

friends. That means you have to speak up. That means you have to expose false moral equivalencies, whether it be on campus, whether it be in a workplace, whether it be in immediate circles of friends.”

Cotler-Wunsh said the response to Hamas’ attack has also highlighted hypocrisies at the core of cultural institutions and social movements, which, she said, have been hijacked by antisemitism.

She offered particular criticism for universities, which have emerged as particular hotbeds for anti-Israel and pro-Hamas sentiment. Some schools, she said, have been “infected... beyond repair.”

“If you truly cared about peace, if you truly cared about humanity, [if] in the name of human rights, you cannot condemn [Hamas’] atrocities, then something has gone very wrong,” she said. “And when you consider the mission statement of universities [is] to teach, how to think

critically — and instead of teaching people how to think what we see is an indoctrination of what to think — that is a failing of the university system. That is a sick, sick reality that academia is going to have to grapple with.”

She similarly argued that antisemitism has latched on to modern human rights discourse.

“That is bad news for anybody who advocates who believes in — like myself — who studies, who champions human rights, because the entire infrastructure collapses, when you weaponize it, to demonize to delegitimize and to apply double standards to any one single entity in the family of nations,” Cotler-Wunsh said.

She added that many Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) programs have been similarly affected.

“If you extend diversity, equity and inclusion to everyone except for [Jews

and Zionists], then your infrastructure for DEI is not worth the paper it’s written on,” she argued. “It’s meant to apply equally and consistently to all. Any principle that’s applied selectively, it ceases to exist.”

But, Cotler-Wunsh argued, there’s reason for optimism for Israel and the Jewish people.

“Historically, we’ve never been — as crazy as this sounds, when we’ve been faced with such atrocities — we’ve never been in such a good place. We have independence. We have a nation state, to which we returned, after millennia of exile and persecution. We have an army that can defend us,” she said. “And... the other half of us, those of us in North America, have the capability to speak up, have to be willing to step up with the same action and courage, have to be willing to be the boots on the ground in the unconventional war for public opinion.” ♦

OCTOBER 23, 2023

Andy Kim touts support for Israel — and his national security experience — in Senate challenge to Menendez

In 2021, Kim joined progressives calling for an Israeli ceasefire against Hamas, but now says he fully backs Israel striking back

By Matthew Kassel

Rep. Andy Kim (D-NJ) is touting his national security credentials and support for Israel in its ongoing war with Hamas as he mounts a new challenge to embattled Sen. Bob Menendez (D-NJ), a hawkish pro-Israel Democrat recently charged with conspiring to act as an agent of the Egyptian government.

“This is a place where I can really lean in and engage,” Kim, 41, pledged in an interview with *Jewish Insider* last week. “Not just from a legislative background, but actually having served in the executive branch and worked out there in the Middle East.”

The three-term Democrat, a former

State Department official who served as a national security adviser in the Obama administration, said that Middle East policy has been a “top priority” during his time in the House, noting that Israel is “the only country” he has “visited twice” as a member of Congress.

Hamas’ brutal terrorist attack was “something well beyond anything I was capable of processing,” he said, calling the atrocities “immensely personal” to his congressional district. “I was there at Temple Beth Shalom in Cherry Hill, right across the street from the high school that I graduated from,” Kim told *JL*. “I wanted to make sure

that people know I’m there standing with them through these terrible times.”

“We’ve got to make sure that those who perpetrated that horrific terrorist attack are held accountable, and that they are going to be defeated in a way that can ensure Israel’s security going forward,” Kim vowed, even as he expressed concern that the conflict could ignite a broader regional war that draws in Hezbollah or Iran. “That keeps me up at night.”

Under normal circumstances, Kim would likely have a hard time selling his record on Middle East issues to pro-Israel activists who have long viewed Menendez

as one of the strongest supporters of Israel in the Senate.

But Kim argued that Menendez, who recently stepped down from his perch atop the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, had lost the privilege of being trusted by his constituents after a federal indictment last month alleged a brazen scheme in which he and his wife, Nadine, accepted hundreds of thousands of dollars in bribes in exchange for political influence.

“That sense of public trust is so important,” said Kim, who sits on the House Foreign Affairs Committee. “Especially when it comes to national security.”

The congressman voiced reservations that Menendez continues to serve on the Foreign Relations Committee, where he has “access to classified information” even after a new indictment charged that he had secretly acted as an agent of Egypt. The senator, who has denied the allegations while refusing to resign, did not attend a classified briefing on the situation in Israel last week, amid renewed scrutiny over his legal challenges.

“He’ll have his day in court, but his ability to do his job right now, with the confidence of the people, I don’t feel that,” Kim, who has called for Menendez to be expelled, told JI. “He’s my senator still, he’s my family’s senator, and I don’t feel that confidence right now.”

A spokesperson for Menendez did not respond to a request for comment.

While the majority of Senate Democrats have urged Menendez to resign, leading pro-Israel groups, including AIPAC and Democratic Majority for Israel, have continued to stand by the senator, claiming that he is entitled to the presumption of innocence. Still, public polling strongly indicates that Menendez’s political career is all but finished, even as he has vowed that he will be exonerated.

Last cycle, Kim — who flipped a GOP-held swing seat in 2018 — won backing from DMFI’s political arm as well as the Jewish Democratic Council of America and J Street, the progressive Israel advocacy group.

He launched his campaign to challenge Menendez just a day after the initial indictment a month ago and has since outraised the long-serving senator, pulling in more than \$1 million in just over a week.

“This is not something I planned to do,” Kim said. “But I think right now, more than ever, people are losing trust in their government and are really hoping that we can find a way to restore that sense of integrity in our politics. That’s very much what’s driving me and pushing me right now.”

Dan Cassino, a political scientist and pollster at Fairleigh Dickinson University, called Kim “a strong contender” for the nomination, even as he predicted that “a lot more people” will jump into the primary. “I’d be very surprised if this didn’t turn into a very competitive race,” Cassino told JI. “There are a lot of potential claimants here who want that seat.”

Among those rumored to be weighing bids are Tammy Murphy, the first lady of New Jersey, and several members of the state’s congressional delegation, including Reps. Josh Gottheimer (D-NJ), Frank Pallone (D-NJ) and Donald Norcross (D-NJ), who is “seriously considering entering the race,” according to a source recently informed of his thinking.

A spokesperson for Norcross said in a statement to JI last Thursday that the congressman “has been enormously flattered by people encouraging him to consider a run, but at the moment, he is laser focused on ensuring that Israel gets the support it needs” and “how to stop the dysfunction we are seeing in the House that’s slowing down that aid.”

In the coming months, Norcross, who visited Israel two weeks ago on a bipartisan House delegation shortly after the attacks, “will consider whether a Senate run is the right decision for him, his family and the citizens of New Jersey,” his spokesperson said.

Former Rep. Tom Malinowski (D-NJ), who was unseated last cycle, also didn’t rule out a bid in response to an email inquiry from JI last Thursday. “Right now, my political focus is on helping school board candidates who oppose banning books in our upcoming November elections,” he said. “I haven’t made any decisions about my own future and won’t until after that’s done.”

Even as he has largely embraced a mainstream Democratic approach to the Middle East, Kim doesn’t have the same fan base in the pro-Israel community as

Gottheimer, an Iran hawk who is among the most outspoken supporters of Israel in the House. The congressman was included in an inaugural slate of House and Senate endorsements released by AIPAC’s political action committee last March.

The group also backed Pallone and Norcross, as well as Menendez — potentially complicating the Senate primary.

While he called for an “immediate ceasefire” during the last major conflict between Israel and Hamas in May 2021, Kim said he now disagrees with left-wing House members who have urged de-escalation in the wake of the recent incursion, where more than 1,400 Israelis were murdered and some 200 hostages were taken into Gaza. “This conflict, the magnitude, the tragedy of the terror attack is so significant,” he told JI, “that we absolutely need to make sure that this is responded to and that Israel has the ability to defend itself.”

“In the past, I think those were situations where there were rocket attacks and Israel was defending itself — and I certainly respected it and believed that they had the right to defend themselves at that time,” Kim clarified. “The question there was, how do you try to figure out an ability to prevent that from going into a more regional war? And it felt like there were opportunities that both the Israelis and others were open to, at that time, to be able to have a way to prevent this from just cycling out of control.”

His concerns over the flare-up of violence in 2021 “were very specific to the moment,” he said, adding that “a diplomatic off-ramp” isn’t an option in every conflict. “As someone trained in diplomacy, I always want to see if there’s an opportunity,” Kim explained. “But oftentimes, especially when it’s a major terrorist attack, there needs to be an understanding of just what that means at that time.”

He commended President Joe Biden for urging Israel to show restraint as he continues to stand in solidarity with the Jewish state.

“I want to make sure that the United States and Israel and others are able to talk to each other about where we see this kind of conflict heading,” Kim said. “We have prepared for some of those types of consequences that can continue to arrive, like a broader regional war or an even

larger humanitarian crisis we're seeing, so we just want to make sure we're thinking strategically."

Kim indicated that he is eager to

demonstrate his experience assessing such crises as he reaches out to voters in the coming months.

"I hope people see my track record,"

he told JI. "National security has been my entire career." ♦

OCTOBER 24, 2023

Captured Hamas terrorists reveal being offered \$10,000, apartment for kidnapping Israelis

Nurit Cooper, 79, and Yocheved Lifshitz, 85 were released by Hamas on Monday night and are now recovering in a Tel Aviv hospital

By Ruth Marks Eglash

Hamas terrorists were offered some \$10,000 and an apartment in Gaza if they returned to the Palestinian enclave after their mass terrorist attack on Oct. 7 with Israeli civilians, especially women and children, footage from the interrogations of captured Hamas fighters shared by the Shin Bet, Israel's security agency, and the Israeli Police revealed on Monday.

In the 12-minute video, several individuals from the Palestinian terror group are asked about their actions and motives for carrying out the attack on southern Israel, which included infiltrations by thousands of terrorists from the Gaza Strip into more than 20 kibbutzim, two cities and a large music festival taking place in the area.

All those questioned spoke in Arabic and identified themselves as members of Hamas' various combat units. They all attested to being ordered to kill and kidnap as many people as possible, soldiers as well as civilians. And they revealed jarring details about the depth of knowledge of the Israeli communities they were sent to attack and shared the names of several senior Hamas commanders, whom they said stayed behind in Gaza while the attack was carried out.

"Our mission was to go to Kfar Aza Kibbutz to kill and to kidnap anyone we could," said one of the terrorists who gave his name as Ahmad Majad Ahmad Abu Hamid

from the Alderaj neighborhood in Gaza.

He and the others described going into kibbutzim such as Kfar Aza, Nir Oz and Be'eri – some of the worst-hit communities – and shooting men and women wearing civilian clothes, some still in their underwear. Some of the terrorists said they moved back and forth between Gaza and the Israeli communities multiple times and spoke about the kidnappings of the elderly and children.

"When we went back, they took out a young girl about 15 or 16," said Shadi Mohammad Almajdalai, a terrorist involved in the assault on Kibbutz Be'eri. "The young girl stood, and they took a selfie with her. Some of them said to shoot her, others said: 'Don't shoot her, kidnap her.' They took pictures with her, someone took a selfie with her and put her on his motorcycle."

Almajdalai also said that the terrorists were told by their commanders that "whoever brings the kidnapped or captured gets a stipend... an apartment and ten thousand dollars" – for each person they took.

IDF Spokesman Daniel Hagari updated to 220 the number of people who are believed held hostage inside Gaza, with around 100 people still unaccounted for since the assault two and a half weeks ago. More than 1,400 people, mostly civilians, were murdered by Hamas and other terrorist factions. On Tuesday, Israel's Health Ministry said that 278 injured individuals

were still hospitalized, 40 of them in critical condition.

On Monday night, two of the hostages – Nurit Cooper, 79, and Yocheved Lifshitz, 85 – were released by Hamas to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which took them to the Rafah crossing. The two women, both from Kibbutz Nir Oz, were greeted by Israeli officials and taken to the Sourasky Medical Center in Tel Aviv for treatment before being reunited with their families.

Speaking to press from the hospital on Tuesday, Lifshitz described her ordeal saying it was "hell." She recounted how she was thrown over a motorcycle and taken to Gaza.

"At first they held me in the town of Abasan al-Kabira, which is close to [Kibbutz] Be'eri. After that, I don't know where I was taken," she said. "Eventually, we went underground and walked for kilometers in wet tunnels, for 2 or 3 hours in a spider web of tunnels. We reached a large hall. We were a group of 25 people, and they separated us according to which kibbutz we were from."

Lifshitz said that a guard was assigned to each of the groups and a doctor examined them every other day. She said they were given medicine and the Hamas doctors took care of the wounded.

As part of its efforts to free the hostages, the IDF on Tuesday issued an appeal via multiple channels to the residents of Gaza to come forward with information about those

being held. The army also offered protection and compensation for anyone who might help in locating and returning them.

In a veiled attempt at compassion, Hamas released a video of the women prior to their release receiving food and water from two balaclava-clad, gun-toting militants. In his daily briefing, Hagari said the clip was “part of the psychological war” being waged by Hamas and an attempt to “try and show the world they are a humanitarian organization.”

“Hamas is a murderous terrorist group that went into a kibbutz and took women, the elderly and mothers, and left their children at home without parents. They also took children and babies,” he said. “We will not forget what happened there and we will keep reminding the world that it happened too.”

Hagari thanked Egypt’s involvement in securing the release of the two women but emphasized that their husbands and an additional 220 people were still being held in Gaza. He said that the army would continue its efforts to release those in captivity, while also preparing for a full-scale military operation inside Gaza.

The spokesman said the army was fully ready for a ground operation, which is aimed at removing Hamas, its leaders and infrastructure, from the Palestinian enclave.

“Our forces in the south are amassed and ready,” he stated. “We are continuing with our training and assessing all the necessary information.”

Hagari added: “We will launch our operation when it is suitable for us. There are still some strategic and operational considerations, and we are looking at all the elements in Gaza and on the political level.”

There were reports on Monday that the White House was pressuring Israel to hold back from a ground incursion into Gaza, but Hagari said that while Israel respected America’s experience in fighting wars in the Middle East, “we are facing an enemy on our border.... And we have to make sure that the day after this war there is no threat on our border like there was on Oct. 7.”

Speaking to forces in the south on Monday, IDF Chief of the General Staff Herzi Halevi said: “We want to completely dismantle Hamas – its leaders, its military branch and its working mechanisms. That is why we are striking and eliminating high-ranking commanders and members, destroying infrastructure, and acting with great determination.”

An army statement on Tuesday said that in the past 24 hours, Israeli military jets had struck more than 400 targets in the Gaza neighborhoods of Shuja’iyya, Shati, Jabalia, Daraj Tuffah and Zaytun, destroying

Hamas’ infrastructure and killing several Hamas commanders, as well as numerous lower-level operatives preparing attacks against Israel.

In Gaza, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), citing the Hamas-run Ministry of Health, said Tuesday that 436 Palestinians were killed in the past 24 hours and that the death toll in the Strip had surpassed 5,000, more than half women and children. The agency said that an estimated 1.4 million people were now internally displaced inside Gaza.

Meanwhile, for the third consecutive day, convoys of humanitarian aid continued to arrive via the Rafah crossing from Egypt. Some 20 trucks carrying food, water, and medical supplies reached the Palestinian enclave on Monday, OCHA said.

On Israel’s northern border, tensions continued through Tuesday, with an army statement reporting that artillery fire, anti-tank missiles and rockets fired by members of the Iranian-backed Shiite group Hezbollah were ongoing. Throughout the day Monday and overnight on Tuesday, the army said it was responding by striking Hezbollah targets, including a military compound, a military post, and an observation post used by Hezbollah. ♦