

THE WEEKLY PRINT

Record crowd on National Mall demands release of hostages, condemns antisemitism; Jews, Bedouins unite in face of Hamas terror attacks on Israel; Labour pains for Keir Starmer over Gaza war; In Israel, every parent's worst nightmare is playing out in real life; Suspect arrested in death of Jewish man killed during Israel-Hamas war protests; Obama divides Democrats by reinserting himself in the debate over Israel; Tammy Murphy kicks off campaign for Senate in New Jersey; Jewish, Israeli Amazon workers say company tolerating antisemitism by employees; and Yearning for Israel, Jewish Agency emissaries find community in America.

NOVEMBER 15, 2023

Record crowd on National Mall demands release of hostages, condemns antisemitism

Lawmakers from both parties back Israel's war against Hamas before nearly 300,000 pro-Israel attendees in Washington, D.C.

By Haley Cohen, Gabby Deutch

Talia, a college student from Florida, traveled to Washington, D.C., to be “the voice” of both her 98-year-old grandmother, a Holocaust survivor, and her brother, who is currently fighting in the IDF. A sign she bore aloft featured photos of both of them.

Tamara Listenberg, an Israeli studying at American University, came to the National Mall to honor the life of her close friend Eliad Ohayon, who was killed along with his father on Oct. 7 in the city of Ofakim in southern Israel. She also held a sign, one that read simply, “I’m here for Eliad Ohayon.”

Alexander Rapaport, a Haredi Jew from Borough Park, Brooklyn, who runs a well-known soup kitchen, felt he had to be on hand in Washington during Israel’s hour of need, though many in his community don’t ordinarily attend such rallies. “I believe in the message of coming out and supporting

this cause,” he said.

These three attendees at Tuesday’s March for Israel — part of a pro-Israel crowd estimated to be nearly 300,000 — represent a cross-section of Israel supporters who packed the area from the West Front of the U.S. Capitol to the Reflecting Pool for what is being described as the largest such gathering in U.S. history.

Supporters of Israel waved Israeli and American flags by the thousands, and an equal number of signs signaled support for the Jewish state at a fraught moment and drew attention to the hundreds of hostages being held in Gaza.

Speakers, including congressional leaders, high-profile celebrities and the families of those being held hostage in Gaza, took to the stage to voice support for Israel’s right to defend itself after Hamas’ Oct. 7 terrorist attack, as well as to condemn the

subsequent rise of global antisemitism.

Israel supporters came from near and far to descend on Washington for the march, which was planned in just over a week by the Jewish Federations of North America and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. The organizers estimated that there were at least 290,000 attendees – a larger turnout than the two largest Jewish community rallies on the National Mall in D.C., during the Second Intifada in 2002 and in support of Soviet Jews in 1987, which drew 100,000 and 250,000, respectively. Conference of Presidents CEO William Daroff said that an additional 250,000 people watched the livestream of the rally online.

“[My brother is] fighting right now because we promised my grandmother and all of the survivors ‘never again’ and never again is right now. My brother does not

know I'm here right now because I haven't been able to talk to him for a few weeks. He's doing the physical fighting and I'm fighting for him right here," Talia, who did not provide her last name to protect her brother's security, told *Jewish Insider*.

Listenberger held the "I'm here for Eliad Ohayon" sign in memory of Eliad, 23, and his father, Moshe, who were murdered by Hamas terrorists on Oct. 7 in their home. Listenberger said Eliad was her close friend whom she met through volunteering.

"He was the most amazing person, always charitable to children with cancer, children with disabilities," she told JI. "That same Shabbat [before he was killed], him and his family hosted over 80 kids at their home. When the sirens started, he and his dad went to open up the shelters. They got everyone in but that wasn't enough for them so they left, while hearing gunshots, and went to fight the terrorists. They were brutally murdered by Hamas."

Listenberger said she was nearly too upset to come to the march. "Anytime I think of him, I'm not able to do anything. Last week, I turned 24 and thought about how he'll always stay 23 while I am growing up. But I was at his tombstone on Sunday and his best friend said, 'He would laugh at us if he saw us all crying.' He would be the person who does everything. We have to win this war for them – that's how I got the guts to come back to America and stand here and tell his story."

Listenberger's friend held a sign that quoted one of the last texts she received from Eliad. "If we spread love with all our strength, we will succeed in beating the hatred," the sign said.

Buses and plane loads carrying attendees to D.C. were organized by local Jewish federations, schools, synagogues and Jewish community centers, including an estimated 12,000 day school students from across the country, according to Prizmah, the network for Jewish day schools.

Prizmah CEO Paul Bernstein told JI: "The significant presence of Jewish day school students at the March for Israel demonstrates the connection of our schools to Israel and the dedication of school communities to standing united to combat antisemitism and call for a release of the hostages now. As we face the rising

tide of global antisemitism, day school communities provide safe spaces for students and families to show Jewish pride and nurture students' connection to Israel. The unity and strength expressed by school communities at today's rally have instilled within us a profound hope for a strong Jewish future for Am Yisrael and Eretz Yisrael."

Orna Neutra, the mother of hostage Omer Neutra; Alana Zeitchik, the cousin of six hostages; and Rachel Goldberg, the mother of hostage Hersch Goldberg-Polin, spoke on behalf of the some 240 individuals abducted from Israel.

Orna described Omer, a lone soldier in the IDF from New York, as "a 6-foot-2 big guy, always with a smile on his face." When she mentioned his former school, Schechter School of Long Island, loud cheers erupted from a group of students in the crowd, and they did again when she mentioned his involvement in the United Synagogue Youth movement. Omer turned 22 just weeks ago, in Hamas captivity, Orna said.

Moshe Emilio Lavi, who attended but did not speak at the rally, told JI that his brother-in-law, Omri, was taken hostage from Kibbutz Nahal Oz on Oct. 7. "As of last week, he was confirmed to be alive but this is a fluid situation and time is of the essence. Every second that hostages like Omri are spending in the Gaza Strip is a precious second," Lavi, whose sister and nieces survived the attack and were rescued by IDF officers, said.

Lavi, who now lives in New York, was born and raised in Sderot, a southern Israeli city that was also invaded during Hamas' massacre. While in D.C., Lavi plans to meet with "senators and congresspeople from all [parties]... with the hope that they will keep the issue of hostages on top of their agenda. Civilians should not be subject to such a horrendous attack and should not be held unjustly."

The State Department's antisemitism envoy, Ambassador Deborah Lipstadt, told the crowd that the Biden administration "stands shoulder to shoulder against Jew-hatred."

"Today in America we give antisemitism no sanction, no foothold, no tolerance, not on campus, not in our schools, not in our neighborhoods, not in our streets or the

streets of our cities. Not in our government. Nowhere. Not now, not ever," Lipstadt said.

"When protesters chant 'peace and glory to the martyrs,' that incites more hatred, more deaths," she continued. "It is a danger to the values and underpinning of the stability and decency of any society anywhere in the world. Hate is not a zero-sum game, hate and violence directed at any member of our society because of who they are is un-American and wrong."

Speaking virtually from the Western Wall, Israeli President Isaac Herzog praised the unity of the global Jewish community after the Oct. 7 terror attacks in Israel.

"Today we come together as a family, one big *mishpacha*, to march for Israel," said Herzog, "to march for the right of every Jew to live proudly and safely in America, in Israel and all around the world." Herzog's paean to the power of unity extended to the halls of power in Washington, down the street from where activists gathered on the National Mall.

"We, the people of Israel, are grateful to President Biden, his administration and so many members of Congress on both sides of the aisle," Herzog said to loud cheers. "The moral clarity and bold actions of our American allies demonstrate the depths of the U.S.-Israel alliance, which is stronger than ever before." Herzog condemned the rampant antisemitism that has erupted in the U.S. and abroad after the Hamas attack. "The hatred, the lies, the brutality, the disgraceful outbursts of ancient antisemitism are an embarrassment to all civilized people and nations. Jews in America must be safe," he said.

The event was scheduled around when Congress was in session and considering emergency supplemental aid to Israel, which Eric Fingerhut, CEO of JFNA, told JI was "an important element of this march."

The top leaders of the House and Senate pledged unequivocal bipartisan American support for Israel. After each spoke, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY), Sen. Joni Ernst (R-IA), House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA) and House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY) grabbed each others' hands and held them in the air while leading the crowd in a chant: "We stand with Israel." More than 100 additional members of Congress were at the rally on the National

Mall as attendees. “The minute I heard of what happened on [Oct.] 7, I knew I had to go to Israel,” said Schumer. As “the highest-ranking Jewish elected official in American history, I not only had a desire to go to Israel, I felt a special obligation to go.”

He continued, “I said to the Israeli people, ‘Israel, we in America have your back. America feels your pain. We ache with you. We stand with you. And we will not rest until you get all the assistance you need.’”

Johnson, who has been speaker for less than a month, said the U.S. “stands unequivocally” with Israel. Earlier on Tuesday, he joined hundreds of other members of Congress as they watched footage documenting atrocities committed by Hamas on Oct. 7.

“This morning, we watched the horrific film that was produced by Hamas, from their own cameras, as they committed the assault. It’s unspeakable,” said Johnson. “The auditorium was full of Republicans and Democrats in the House, and they wept as we watched the film together. Most couldn’t sit through it.”

The members of Congress pledged to continue to support Israel in its quest to defeat Hamas.

“Hamas brutally attacked Israel on October 7 because Hamas wants to wipe Israel off the face of the Earth, so let me be clear: We will never let that happen,” said Jeffries. “Congress will continue to support — in a bipartisan way — the State of Israel and Israel’s unequivocal right to exist as a Jewish and democratic state.”

Jeffries has faced pressure from his party’s left-most flank to call for a cease-fire, which he has declined to do. “The calls for a cease-fire are outrageous,” said Johnson, to loud cheers and chants of “No cease-fire” that erupted from the crowd.

Though each speech focused on the attack Israel suffered on Oct. 7, the congressional leaders also called attention to the antisemitism that has skyrocketed in the United States and around the world in the weeks since.

“We are here today as Republicans and as Democrats to assure you, we will not shrink back and shudder in fear as too many around the world already have. We will not sit quiet as antisemitism is being promulgated in campuses and classrooms

around the country,” said Ernst. “The brutal reality of Hamas cannot be diminished ... How anyone in America could sympathize with these terrorists is truly unfathomable.”

The leadership of the congressional Bipartisan Task Force for Combating Antisemitism offered a prayer for the hostages. Rep. Kathy Manning (D-NC), a former JFNA board chair, read first in Hebrew and then in English from Psalm 130. “Out of the depths have we called to you, oh Lord,” said Manning. “Hear our voices, be attentive to our supplications and let us say together: Amen.”

Actors including Debra Messing, Tovah Feldshuh and Michael Rapaport addressed the crowd. “This is madness. This is terrorism. But we will win. We always have,” Messing said.

Feldshuh, known for her portrayal of former Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, added some humor into an otherwise somber speech. “My Hebrew name is Tovah Feldshuh, and my Starbucks name is Tovah Feldshuh,” she said. “I’ve played big houses but ain’t never played anything like this.”

“Wow. I think Golda may be here today,” Feldshuh continued, as cheers erupted.

The march drew participants from a wide spectrum of the Jewish community, ranging from the Zionist Organization of America to Americans for Peace Now, in addition to representatives of the Orthodox Union, United Synagogue for Conservative Judaism and the Union for Reform Judaism. Agudath Israel of America, which three years ago reaffirmed its opposition to Zionism, encouraged people to attend, sharing the poster for the march on X.

No rabbis spoke at the event. Evangelical pastor John Hagee, the founder of Christians United for Israel, gave a forceful defense of the Jewish state towards the concluding part of the program, saying Israel alone should decide how to act against Hamas. The inclusion of Hagee, who once said that God sent Adolf Hitler to carry out the Holocaust (and later apologized for it), was criticized by more progressive participants in the march.

In addition to Hagee, Rochelle Ford, president of Dillard University, a historically Black college in New Orleans; and Anila Ali, a Pakistani American Muslim and women’s rights activist, also spoke during a session

called “Voices of Allies.”

Rapaport, CEO of Masbia Soup Kitchen Network and a Haredi Jew from Borough Park, told JI that while a few buses came from the heavily Hasidic neighborhood, many in his community chose to sit the rally out, despite supporting its cause.

“They are supportive but they are not used to being in these sort of groups,” Rapaport said. “It’s not like this was advertised as there will be an area sectioned off, men and women separate. But I came and I wouldn’t ask for that,” he said. Rapaport noted that the organizers did try to accommodate religious marchers: the four musical performances — Jewish American rapper Matisyahu, Israeli singers Omer Adam and Ishay Ribo and the a cappella group The Maccabeats — were all men; most Haredi Jews — and some Orthodox Jews — don’t listen to female singers.

“Personally, I’ve been exposed to these things. I go to a lot of things that I think are right that not everyone goes to,” Rapaport told JI. “I stood with our Yeminite neighbors when [Donald] Trump made the Muslim ban. Not everybody was there either but I try to express my opinion. I believe in the message of coming out and supporting this cause.”

The march also featured speeches from college students about the surge of antisemitism that has hit campuses since Oct. 7.

Noa Fay, a Columbia University student, referenced an open letter signed in late October by 144 members of Columbia’s faculty that called Israel an “apartheid” state while referring to Hamas’ terrorist attacks as a legitimate “military action.”

“I am a Black, Native American Jewish American woman and I will not be silenced.... I will continue to shout,” Fay said. “We are the Jews of the Diaspora, this is how we fight. We fight loudly and we fight peacefully. We are far from helpless, we are far from hopeless.”

Thousands of Jewish day school students as well as college students from across North America — including those participating in groups such as Hillel, BBYO, Young Judea — gathered for a pre-march rally in the same spot.

One of the student speakers was Talia Shelef, 17, a recent graduate of Charles E.

Smith Jewish Day School in Rockville, Md., who shared her experience as an Israeli teenager living in America on Oct. 7 – noting that her sister is currently serving as a lone soldier in the IDF.

“I’m a teen leader of Israeli scouts,” Shelef told JI. “I’m setting the stage for the rally.”

The march came amid a rise of violent antisemitic incidents since Oct. 7, including earlier this month in Los Angeles, when a 69-year-old Jewish man died after a physical confrontation with a pro-Palestinian protester.

Jonathan Oswaks, a resident of Thousand Oaks, Calif., told JI at the rally that he witnessed the incident. “I’m here today to speak to some senators about the murder of my friend Paul Kessler, a Jewish man like myself.”

During a demonstration last month,

Kessler got into an altercation with a pro-Palestinian protester. Medical examiners determined that Kessler was struck and fell backwards, hitting his head on the pavement and suffering a fatal head wound. He died a few days later. The examiners ruled his death a homicide, though police have said that this does not necessarily “translate to a prosecutable murder or manslaughter (gross, voluntary, or involuntary) case.” Police have identified the man who was involved in the altercation with Kessler but have not yet pressed charges as they are still gathering evidence to determine if he is criminally liable.

The Homeland Security Department designated Tuesday’s march a “Level 1” security event, the highest classification in its system and one usually used for the Super Bowl and other major events, according

to the *Associated Press*, which cited law enforcement. Security measures included snowplows as temporary roadblocks and military-style armored vehicles and according to one attendee’s Instagram post, security snipers on the roof of the Smithsonian’s Native American museum.

Ahead of the rally, Fingerhut told JI that “showing up is the best way to address the security concerns, because the more of us that are there, the more secure we are together.”

The historic turnout of nearly 300,000 would have been larger if not for a delegation of 900 people organized by the Jewish Federation of Detroit that was left stranded at Washington’s Dulles Airport after their bus drivers refused to take them to a pro-Israel event, Daroff said. ♦

NOVEMBER 14, 2023

Jews, Bedouins unite in face of Hamas terror attacks on Israel

Hundreds of Bedouin and Jewish volunteers in Rahat prepare aid parcels in a collaborative atmosphere, despite the war taking place just miles away

By Ruth Marks Eglash

The community center on the outskirts of this southern city looks like many others in Israel during these days of war: Hundreds of volunteers work double time to fill neat rows of white cardboard boxes with all manner of basic staples and fruit for distribution to thousands of families hardest hit by Hamas’ mass terror attack on Oct. 7.

Yet, Rahat, which sits less than 20 miles from the Gaza Strip, offers a slightly different perspective on a story that has already claimed thousands of victims and dragged Israel into a five-week war that shows no signs of slowing down.

With some 80,000 residents, Rahat is one of the largest Bedouin Arab cities in the entire Middle East and a central hub for hundreds of smaller, undocumented

Bedouin villages and tribal communities that dot Israel’s Negev region.

Its deeply religious and conservative population has also felt the impact of the war — as well as the horrors of Hamas’ brutal attack.

“It is not easy for us to talk about,” Daham Ziyadna, from the Ziyadna tribe near Rahat, told *Jewish Insider*. “We are talking about people who were murdered, we are talking about people who were kidnapped by Hamas.”

“Hamas came into Israel and attacked everyone, including people who were clearly Muslims, women wearing hijabs and speaking Arabic,” continued Ziyadna, whose cousin, Yusef, 53, and his three children, Hamza, 23, Bilal, 18, and Aisha, 17, were taken hostage by the Palestinian terrorists

from their workplaces on Kibbutz Holit.

According to Ziyadna, the Hamas terrorists either did not believe the Bedouins they encountered during their murderous rampage were Muslims or they did not care.

“They [Hamas] called us Jews and murdered us,” he said, highlighting that more than 20 Bedouins were shot and killed by Hamas terrorists, and that the community continues to face hardship. Many have lost their jobs in the chaos that followed Oct. 7 and there is a widespread lack of infrastructure, such as bomb shelters offering protection from Hamas rockets.

In total, nine Bedouins are still missing since Oct. 7, with at least six believed to be held hostage by Hamas or other terror groups in Gaza. For the past eight years, Hamas has also held captive another Bedouin Israeli

citizen, Hisham al-Sayed, who is believed to have entered Gaza by choice. A video of him hooked up to an oxygen machine was released by the group in 2022.

"We have suffered, and we continue to suffer," said Ziyadna, highlighting that the Bedouin community in southern Israel, where many of the roughly 200,000 Bedouins have direct or indirect family ties and connection to people in Gaza, often face discrimination inside Israel too, despite being full-fledged citizens, with some even volunteering to serve in the Israeli military.

"Our sons serve in the army, and some are inside Gaza fighting right now," he emphasized, adding, "Many families here have spilled their blood for Israel, and it is time we are viewed as equal citizens."

On Monday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited the IDF's Bedouin Desert Patrol Battalion commending the soldiers for standing shoulder-to-shoulder with their Jewish brothers.

"They have fought, and are now fighting, heroically," Netanyahu told the commanders of the Bedouin unit. "They are safeguarding our country in an exemplary manner and in full partnership."

In the community center in Rahat, which is now being used as an operations center to help families such as the Ziyadnas, as well as Jewish residents of nearby towns who have been impacted by the war, the goal of promoting coexistence and highlighting the Bedouin plight are clear.

The hundreds of volunteers preparing the food parcels are a mix of Bedouins and Jews and the atmosphere, despite the heaviness of war just a few miles away, is collaborative, even jovial.

Racheli Geffen, digital director and press officer of Have You Seen the Horizon Lately, one of several NGOs overseeing the war effort in Rahat, told JI that the city's operations center was established days after the Oct. 7 attack to push back against far right-wing activists that might use it as an excuse to further divide Israeli society or blame Israeli Arabs for what happened.

"We thought the best way to fight the darkness was to turn on the light of solidarity and coexistence," said Geffen, adding, "There is no war between Jews and Arabs in Israel, this is a war between

extremists and moderates."

The food packages and other resources being prepared here were delivered by both Jewish and Arab truck drivers to more than 2,000 Jewish and Arab families struggling since the war started. The organizations running the operation include Jewish and Bedouin NGOs, said Geffen, including Desert Stars, a young Bedouin leadership program; Alnashmiat, a leadership group for Bedouin women; and Itach Maaki, an association of female lawyers for social justice.

Hanan Alsanah, a lawyer working with Itach Maaki, said the operations center in Rahat was started by Bedouins almost immediately after the Oct. 7 massacre and Jews from further afield joined them a few days later.

Alsanah, a mother of four who lives in nearby Beersheva, said that in the first few hours of the Hamas' attack, the Bedouins – like many other Israelis – did not fully comprehend what was happening, but as soon as they did, they jumped into action. Doctors and nurses from the community rushed to area hospitals and some brave souls even headed out to the Israel-Gaza communities and the Nova music festival, just a few miles away, to save lives.

Tales of heroism have since emerged, of individuals who headed straight into the line of fire to rescue friends and strangers, even as terrorists rampaged near Rahat and other Bedouin towns.

Despite the outpouring of help, Alsanah said there is a concern that the attack – and now the war – will damage an already delicate relationship that exists here between Jews and Arabs.

"Only with partnership initiatives like this, can we rebuild and maintain that trust," she said, adding that "Hamas does not represent everyone in Gaza" and all Israelis need to push back against these extreme voices.

Among those volunteering at the center last week were two 19-year-old students from Rahat — Azhar and Manar — both of whom said they felt it was important to volunteer because what is happening right now "is not just against the Jews."

"This situation is hard for all of us, and we need to work hand in hand to get through this," said Azhar. "We need to work together if we want to move forward as a society."

Michal Geta, 44, a Jewish volunteer from the nearby community of Meitar, also said it was "important for our future for all citizens to join forces at this time."

"I believe that most people in Israel are in favor of coexistence between all citizens here – we all live here together and no one is going anywhere," she said. ♦

Labour pains for Keir Starmer over Gaza war

The Labour leader gets high marks for purging the party of antisemitism, but he's facing a revolt on his left over his support for Israel

By Lianne Kolirin

As Britain's Labour party has surged in public opinion polls, deep divisions are reemerging over the war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza.

Sir Keir Starmer, elected leader of the official opposition party in 2020, has fought hard to recover the confidence of Britain's Jewish community after inheriting the post from Jeremy Corbyn, the Labour leader who faced a landslide election defeat after leading a party awash in antisemitism.

But now, just three years later, Starmer finds himself at the center of a political storm over the war in Gaza, with some left-wing opponents in the party criticizing him for "siding with the Jews."

In staking out a position on the war similar to that of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and other political leaders, Starmer was unequivocal in his support for Israel following the brutal attacks by Hamas on Israel on Oct. 7.

He received a standing ovation at the Labour party conference, which kicked off in Liverpool that same weekend, when he forcefully condemned the attacks.

But in the weeks since then, Starmer has faced dissent in his party due to his refusal to call for a cease-fire, instead calling for humanitarian "pauses" to allow aid in and civilians out of Gaza.

In a recent speech delivered at the headquarters of international think tank Chatham House, Starmer laid out his approach, which aligns with that of the Conservative-led British government, the Biden administration and the European Union.

Lamenting the horrors on both sides, he said his position "has been driven by the need to respond to both these tragedies."

Though understanding of the desire for a cease-fire, Starmer laid out in detail why he does not believe it to be the right course of

action.

A cease-fire, he said, "always freezes any conflict in the state where it currently lies." It would allow Hamas to regroup, while the hostages would remain in captivity, Starmer argued.

At the same time, the focus must be on preserving lives and delivering aid, he said. He concluded: "This is an old conflict, but it is not and never has been an issue that will be solved by the black-and-white simplicity of unbending conviction."

"Rather, the color of peace – always in conflict resolution is gray. And in the coming days and months, we must do everything we can to fight for it."

Starmer's attempts to walk a tightrope between the two positions have caused friction within his party.

In a letter published on X, formerly Twitter, on Tuesday night, Imran Hussain, MP for Bradford East, became the first Labour frontbencher to quit over the issue when he announced his resignation as shadow minister for the New Deal for Working People.

Hussain said he had been "deeply troubled" by an interview that Starmer gave with radio station LBC on Oct. 11, in which he "appeared to endorse" Israel's decision to cut water, power and food to the Gaza Strip.

Hussain said he now plans to "press from the backbenches for a humanitarian cease-fire."

Other key Labour figures who have broken ranks with the official party line to call for a cease-fire include London Mayor Sadiq Khan, Scottish Labour leader Anas Sarwar and Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham. Many of the politicians who have been calling for a cease-fire are also ones who represent heavily Muslim constituencies.

Meanwhile, dissent within the shadow cabinet deepened last week when Jess

Phillips, the shadow minister for domestic violence and safeguarding, said Israel's military action will only end in "death and destruction."

"Whether we call it a cease-fire or whether we call it a pause... has become semantics, because it isn't happening," Phillips argued.

Elsewhere, the leader of Burnley Council, in northwest England, together with 10 local councillors, quit the Labour party over the issue and called for Starmer to resign.

Others stand firmly behind the Labor leader. On Sunday, a large crowd gathered outside the constituency office of Wes Streeting, the U.K.'s shadow health secretary, to protest his opposition to a cease-fire.

Responding on social media, Streeting backed Starmer's call for a "pause," then said: "I appreciate some colleagues have called for a cease-fire. I'd like to know how they envisage such a cease-fire coming about. In politics it is too easy to reach for slogans, especially to please the crowd, but it's our responsibility to reach for real solutions."

The relationship between Labour and the Jewish community is deep-rooted. During the 20th century it was long regarded as the traditional political home for Jewish voters — and was resolute in its calls for a Jewish homeland prior to independence and its support for Israel thereafter.

But that relationship disintegrated under Corbyn's leadership. Jewish voters deserted the party in droves, while some Jewish MPs quit the party over its handling of antisemitism complaints.

Starmer ultimately replaced Corbyn in 2020, immediately pledging to stamp out antisemitism within party ranks. His position was strengthened several months later when a long-awaited report from the Equality and Human Rights Commission found there had been a "breakdown of

trust” between Labour and the Jewish community, while also revealing evidence of “harassment and discrimination.”

Writing in *Labourlist*, a website dedicated to news about the party, Michael Rubin, director of the Labour Friends of Israel (LFI), wrote: “After the dark years of the previous leadership, Labor’s unwavering support for Israel and British Jews – and its unequivocal stand against terror and antisemitism – is hugely reassuring and welcome both to Jewish party members and the community as a whole.”

His colleague Steve McCabe, chair of LFI, wrote: “Proponents of a ceasefire present it as a choice between war and peace. They are wrong. A ceasefire which leaves Hamas in power, with its massive haul of armaments intact, is a recipe for endless war and terror for Israelis and Palestinians alike.”

The current situation does not amount to a return to the bad old days under Corbyn, says Mike Katz, national chair of the Jewish Labour Movement.

“There isn’t a sign that the party is wavering in its commitment to tackling antisemitism,” he told *Jewish Insider*.

“We were completely stifled and othered under Corbyn, and we are front and center of the efforts to make sure that candidates and councillors understand what is expected of them and the wider impact of antisemitism,” he said. “We continue to do this and obviously at this point in time it’s needed.”

Though his critics may be calling for him to step down, Katz believes Starmer has

shown strong leadership.

“It’s the right principled position to take, that you can’t allow a cease-fire to happen, especially when there are hostages, some of whom are British citizens. You can’t allow Hamas to regroup. What else would you expect someone who aspires to be prime minister to say?”

He added: “It’s not the issue or the time to try and find a dividing line.”

As in many countries around the world, including the U.S., Britain has recorded a huge spike in antisemitic incidents since Oct. 7. While the incidents have varied in nature, some clearly emanate from the left.

Katz, together with the LFI, has written to Labour councillors across the country to stress the importance of maintaining “community cohesion” at this difficult time. He told *JL*: “You can’t blame British Jews for the actions of the Israeli government, and you can’t blame British Muslims for the actions of Hamas.”

Nevertheless, people continue to do so.

“Labour is getting a reputation for only caring about the Jews,” Nicole Lampert, a freelance journalist and campaigner against antisemitism, told *JL*.

“They are saying that Starmer is only interested in antisemitism and not interested in other racism. He’s seen as siding with the Jews, so there’s a lot of antisemitism towards him and his wife.” Victoria Starmer is Jewish and the couple and their children are said to be members of a synagogue in London.

Though Starmer is “standing firm,” the

issue is proving to be a headache.

“He’s under a lot of pressure from not only the backbenchers but people in the cabinet and even centrists,” said Lampert. “The Labour antisemitism row had a huge Israel element to it, but I think there’s more to this. It unites Muslims from around the world, it doesn’t matter whether they are Shia or Sunni. The scenes we are seeing on our TV screens are obviously upsetting. Palestinians are dying and the Muslim community is naturally upset, as we are.”

That said, not everyone from the Muslim community is demanding a cease-fire.

“A friend who’s Muslim and a Labour councillor sees what Hamas did as appalling. He’s a centrist and says most of the people who have resigned are Corbynistas,” said Lampert.

“Most Labour centrists reckon it’s really important that they stand with Israel while also asking for humanitarian pauses.”

Meanwhile, some 300,000 people, many of whom vote Labour, turned out this weekend for another pro-Palestinian march in the capital. There were flags and banners and chants not only for a cease-fire, but to free Palestine “from the river to the sea.”

“All those people on the marches don’t understand what Hamas is. They can’t put two and two together or realize that it’s the same ideology behind the Manchester Arena bombing,” said Lampert, referencing the 2017 suicide bombing of an Ariana Grande concert at which 22 people died. ♦

NOVEMBER 10, 2023

In Israel, every parent’s worst nightmare is playing out in real life

Forty children are believed to be in captivity in Gaza, abducted by terrorists on Oct. 7

By Tamara Zieve

Four-year-old Uriah Brodutch loves to play with toy tractors in the mud. A soccer fan, he supports Paris Saint-

Germain. Until Oct. 7 — when he was taken hostage by Hamas — he still slept in his parents’ bed.

Now Uriah’s face can be seen smiling on an installation of large colorful flowers outside the Tel Aviv Museum of Art,

alongside his elder brother, Yuval, 8, and sister, Ofri, 10; on each flower hangs a picture of a missing child. Sweet and innocent faces from a happier time peer out beneath large white and red letters calling to “Bring him/her home now!”

The Brodutch siblings were kidnapped from their home in Kfar Aza along with their mother Hagar; their father Avichai was separated from them during the attack when he went out to help, and he remained in Israel. Their three-year-old neighbor, Avigail Idan, is also believed to be held in Gaza. She ran to the Brodutchs’ house and hid with the family after her parents, Roye and Smadar, were murdered. Seventeen people are believed to have been taken hostage from the kibbutz, and between 52 and 60 were killed.

Tuesday marked one month since 239 people were abducted from Israel, 40 of them children, according to the Hostages and Missing Families Forum. Numbers of missing and dead have fluctuated as Israeli authorities continued to identify the remains of victims. The square outside the museum has been named “The Hostages and Missing Square” and is where the families of the missing gather — and some even camp — campaigning for the return of their loved ones.

Kfir Bibas is the youngest of the hostages. The red-headed baby, now a familiar face in many households across Israel, was nine months old when he was kidnapped from his home in Kibbutz Nir Oz, along with his four-year-old brother Ariel, and their parents Shiri and Yarden. Their grandparents, Yossi and Margit Silberman, were initially also categorized as missing, later found to have been killed. The terrorists also killed the family’s dog. The massacre left a quarter of the kibbutz’s 400 members either dead or taken hostage.

Kfir only recently started eating solids, still heavily reliant on formula. Shiri’s cousin, Yifat Zailer, is concerned for his well-being. “I truly think that he probably is not receiving it there. So I hope he is being nourished enough. I don’t know,” Zailer tells *Jewish Insider* during an interview this week. She also wonders how his energetic four-year-old brother is holding up, and in what conditions.

Ariel loves tractors and nature. He is a

“show stopper,” Zailer says. And he can’t sit still for five minutes. “Every tree, every chair, every table he can climb on, he will be the first one to do it. Which you know, makes you think, ‘Now what’s going on with him?’”

Zailer has been tirelessly campaigning for the return of her family, who are dual Argentinian-Israeli citizens, since last she heard from her cousin at 7 a.m. on Oct. 7. Zailer texted Shiri immediately when rocket sirens awoke her family at 6:30 a.m. in their Tel Aviv home on that fateful Saturday. “Are you guys okay? Are you in the safe room? Lock your doors and come to Tel Aviv, we’ll do a slumber party,” Zailer wrote. Shiri sent back a heart emoji. In a video that has been publicized from that day, Shiri can be seen fearfully clutching her two children, a blanket wrapped around them, as they are taken away. “The look on her face is just something that doesn’t leave my mind,” Zailer told *JI*. “I haven’t slept in a month.” Shiri’s husband Yarden was seen in a different photo, being taken on a motorcycle with blood on his head and hands.

The last message Brodutch received from his wife was a text saying, “Somebody is coming in.” Other Kfar Aza residents told him they saw his wife and children being led away by terrorists. The family’s car is missing, and Brodutch believes the terrorists may have driven his family to Gaza in it.

In the days following their kidnapping, Brodutch set up shop outside the Defense Ministry’s headquarters in Tel Aviv, sitting on a daily basis on a white plastic chair holding a sign reading “my family is in Gaza.” His father filled that seat for him on the day *JI* interviewed Brodutch.

Brodutch also traveled to Washington two weeks ago, where he met with Red Cross officials, congressmen, senators and Qatari Ambassador to the U.S. Meshal bin Hamad al Thani. he describes a positive meeting with the ambassador, whom he said conveyed to him the message that “all nations don’t support this — taking children captive. And it gave me a lot of hope.”

“I’m really grateful that he accepted me, because, you know, some people from the Israeli government don’t talk to me. I tried talking to the minister of defense [Yoav Gallant] — and he’s the minister of defense so he’s responsible for my defense. And he failed miserably with that responsibility and

he didn’t talk to me until now.” Brodutch said a senior aide from the ministry called him instead, and other ministers and military officials have also spoken to him, but he is determined to speak to the defense minister.

In a statement to the press last night, Gallant addressed the children held in Gaza. “I will repeat this again tonight — there will be no ceasefire without the return of hostages. We will take any action necessary for this,” he said. “Right now, there are [Israeli] children in the Gaza Strip. Some of them saw their own parents die in front of their eyes. Savages have kidnapped them and are holding them hostage. We will not stop fighting until we bring our children home. As a father, I wish to ask the whole world — what kind of father would stop searching for his children? I see these children as my own. I will not stop fighting and I will not stop searching for them, until I reach them.”

Like Zailer, Brodutch talks a lot to the media — defeating his previous fear of public speaking — and fields multiple calls during his interview with *JI* at the Shefayim Hotel, where many evacuees from Kfar Aza are staying.

Every time his phone rings, a childish voice can be heard saying “Ofri, you’re stupid.” It’s a recording of his youngest son teasing his older sister. “He’s funny, mischievous,” Brodutch says, laughing when asked about his ringtone. “His sister Ofri really loves him. So he can do anything he wants. She still loves him.” Uriah is the boss of the house and tends to get what he wants.

Yuval is the middle child, a sensitive soul who looks out for his brother and sister. He likes to play Minecraft, and spends hours building with Minecraft Lego — constructions that Uriah often knocks down. He also plays soccer, center-back position. Ofri, the eldest, frequently tries out new hobbies, the latest being a guitar that she got for her birthday — Avichai had been teaching her to play.

“So now I’m teaching myself,” he says. Ofri loves music and has posters of the likes of Queen, Elton John, The Beatles and David Bowie plastering her walls.

Zailer, herself a mother to a baby and a toddler, is aware of the milestones that Kfir should be hitting now. “Babies between nine months and 10 months are supposed

to learn how to clap and recognize faces and see when there's light and when there's dark and such..." Zailer notes, her voice trailing off before she takes a pause to collect herself, her head buried in her hands.

"It's a lot, and every day that goes by, I feel like I'm not doing enough," she says, apologizing. Zailer has been active on social media, trying to get the family's message out to the world.

"But then I see people ripping out the signs of the kidnapped children, saying it's fake news," she says. "This is my family. This is my blood. Those are real children that I haven't seen in a month and I don't know how long it's going to take. It took five years to bring back Gilad [Shalit]. Kfir is going to have his first birthday in captivity in two months."

"As a family member of someone who is being kept captive, it's breaking my heart to hear all the voices saying it was justified," Zailer says.

Zailer also expresses deep disappointment in international aid organizations for their lack of intervention — the Red Cross, for instance, has not gained access to the hostages, even just to check on their conditions, a demand made by the Israeli government.

"For me, it's a feeling like being an Israeli citizen, it doesn't really matter. My life doesn't have a value anymore," she said.

It's not only external forces letting down Zailer and her family. She feels her family has been neglected by the Israeli government too.

"I feel like there's a lot of internal interests that are conflicting with our interests to get my family back here now," Zailer says. "They should have been here four days after everything started. We had the leverage to put pressure on the world who saw the atrocities that happened.

"And now with the ground invasion, we're the bad guys again," Zailer continues. "Because you see the horrors. You see how much the IDF is trying, but Hamas is hiding among the population there and it's really hard. And we are all human, and we don't want to see anyone suffer and I'm in my darkest times and I can say that with confidence. So I feel like Hamas is still controlling the situation. For them, it was the best way to clear their name and say, OK, we did what we did, but look what's happening now."

"I can't really imagine how a ground invasion can save the lives of 240 people that are probably spread around and not kept together," she adds. "I believe that a deal and negotiation, someone who can mediate this, Qatar, the United States, they could have put the pressure on Hamas to release those people, those innocent civilians that were not armed are not part of this. Their only fault is being Jewish and being raised in Israel. A 10-months-old baby is not an occupier. It's crazy. It's crazy."

Broducth expresses a similar sentiment.

The Israeli government, he says, must "do everything they can to release the hostages, keep my family safe... which obviously, they failed miserably, keeping my family safe.

And now they have to do everything they can to correct this miserable thing that they haven't done."

"It's been over 30 days, I think it's 34 days today. I lost count. And it doesn't make any sense that the Jewish government in Israel made us suffer a second Holocaust inside Israel. And it seems like they're not doing anything to correct it. Thirty-four days, kids are being held hostage away from their families. It seems like the Israeli government has got its priorities wrong," he continues.

Like Zailer, Broducth is skeptical that the ground invasion will achieve its goals. "For years and years they went into Gaza and came out again and told us it was safe, that now Israel is safe because they did such a good job....I'd like them to do something different. Because obviously the same thing that they've done up to now got us to where we are."

Asked how he envisions his reunion with his family, Broducth thinks more of the practical than emotional details. "Because I try not to get emotional," he explains, an effort made clear throughout the interview, during which he maintains a strong and even cheerful front.

"I don't want anyone to touch them. You know, I just want them to come over here and just be with me. No media, no nothing... Just cross the border by themselves, come over to me and that's it. And I want to be locked inside a room with them and no one around. Just see what they want, not what I want. And then see how it goes." ♦

NOVEMBER 16, 2023

Suspect arrested in death of Jewish man killed during Israel-Hamas war protests

Paul Kessler, 69, died after a physical confrontation with an anti-Israel protester

By Haley Cohen

A pro-Palestinian college professor was arrested and charged with involuntary manslaughter on Thursday in connection with the death of a 69-year-old Jewish man at dueling pro-

Israel and pro-Palestinian rallies in Los Angeles last week, the Ventura County Sheriff's office announced.

Officials named Loay Abdelfattah Alnaji, 50, as the suspect involved in Paul

Kessler's death. The two men reportedly got into an altercation at the Nov. 5 protests. Photos show Kessler waving an Israeli flag moments before the violence began. Medical examiners determined

that Kessler was struck with a megaphone and fell backwards, hitting his head on the pavement and suffering a head wound. He died the next day.

The examiners ruled Kessler's death a homicide, with blunt force head injury as the cause.

Alnaji was booked at the Ventura County Pretrial Detention Facility for involuntary manslaughter and his bail was set at \$1,000,000, according to the sheriff's office.

The Jewish Federation of Greater Los

Angeles said in a statement on Thursday that the "arrest shows that violence towards our Jewish community will not be tolerated."

"We are grateful for the swift work of the Ventura County Sheriff's Department in response to the tragic death of Mr. Paul Kessler...We will continue to monitor the case to help ensure justice is served. Our heartfelt condolences continue to be with the family of Paul Kessler and may his memory forever be a blessing," the statement continued.

At the March for Israel rally in

Washington, D.C. on Tuesday, Jonathan Oswaks, a resident of Thousand Oaks, Calif., told *Jewish Insider* that he witnessed the incident and was frustrated that an arrest hadn't been made more than a week after Kessler's death.

"I'm here today to speak to some senators about the murder of my friend Paul Kessler, a Jewish man like myself," Oswaks told *JI* on Tuesday. ♦

NOVEMBER 15, 2023

Obama divides Democrats by reinserting himself in the debate over Israel

Before Obama's presidency, Democrats were largely unified in support of the Jewish state. His Iran policy created the first rift that continues to this day

By Matthew Kassel

In recent weeks, former President Barack Obama has reemerged as a high-profile critic of the war between Israel and Hamas, issuing a series of increasingly pointed statements that have drawn scrutiny from pro-Israel leaders and other officials in Washington.

As he continues to speak out amid mounting Democratic divisions over Israel, Obama's new comments are a reminder of how the tensions now roiling the party began to escalate during his time in the Oval Office — when the Iran nuclear deal became one of the most polarizing issues on Capitol Hill.

While Obama strongly condemned Hamas' Oct. 7 terror attack in a social media post two days after the massacre, he has since expressed growing skepticism of Israel's actions in Gaza, warning in a lengthy Medium essay that "any Israeli military strategy that ignores the human costs could ultimately backfire."

His statement, published weeks after the attack, also shared a list of suggested articles on the conflict, including a piece by his former national security adviser, Ben Rhodes, who is among a handful of former staffers publicly questioning President Joe

Biden's approach to the war.

In his most striking remarks to date, meanwhile, Obama said during a podcast interview with former White House staffers earlier this month in Chicago that the U.S. was "complicit" in perpetuating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. "If you want to solve the problem, then you have to take in the whole truth," he claimed. "And you then have to admit nobody's hands are clean, that all of us are complicit to some degree."

Obama's comments, which even Hillary Clinton, his former secretary of state, refrained from endorsing in a recent TV appearance, indicate that he is now seeking to reinsert himself into a conversation he has largely avoided since leaving office. In an email interview with *Jewish Insider* two years ago, for instance, Obama shied away from every question on Israel and the Middle East that had been posed to him.

It is unclear why Obama, whose office did not respond to a request for comment, has now chosen to weigh in on an issue that frequently bedeviled him and his administration. He has rarely spoken out on politically sensitive topics in the years after his presidency.

"My sense is that he's horrified by the

loss of life, under pressure from Democrats as more progressive elements in the party press the administration to end the violence, and freer now to express views he couldn't as president," said Aaron David Miller, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "The thought experiment is this: If Obama were president, would his policy be as preternaturally pro-Israel as Biden's?"

During his tenure, Middle East policy was a particularly fraught issue for Obama, who maintained a strained relationship with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Obama's effort to broker a nuclear agreement with Iran, a longtime backer of Hamas, was strenuously opposed by pro-Israel groups as well as leading Democratic lawmakers. In 2015, AIPAC launched a separate group, Citizens for a Nuclear Free Iran, to lobby exclusively against the "dangers" of the deal.

Obama maintained a hot-and-cold rapport with pro-Israel leaders who questioned his commitment to the Jewish state — even as he secured funding for Israel's missile-defense system and signed an agreement guaranteeing \$38 billion in military assistance over 10 years. "On Election Day, I'd end up getting more than 70

percent of the Jewish vote,” Obama wrote in his 2021 memoir, “but as far as many AIPAC board members were concerned, I remained suspect, a man of divided loyalties.”

In a controversial sign-off at the end of his presidency, the Obama administration abstained from voting on a U.N. Security Council resolution condemning Israeli settlement expansion in the West Bank that also referred to parts of Jerusalem, including the Western Wall, as “occupied Palestinian territory.”

Biden, on the other hand, has enjoyed warmer relations with the pro-Israel community as well as Netanyahu, while facing backlash from the left over his unwavering support for Israel following Hamas’ attack.

Hussein Ibish, a senior resident scholar at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, speculated that Obama — whose recent essay was reportedly vetted by White House aides before publication — might be engaging in a strategic effort to assist Biden as his administration urges caution amid Israel’s invasion of Gaza.

“I’m not sure why he would want to rush into this topic again, unless it’s to try to help

Biden,” Ibish said in an email to JI, noting that Obama could be trying to push Biden “a little bit from the left to give him some cover as he moves the needle slightly on pressuring Israel.”

But former Obama administration staffers who are not wholly aligned with Biden’s positions may be driven by different motivations, said Brian Katulis, a senior fellow and vice president of policy at the Middle East Institute.

“Some of these former staffers believed that they were at the vanguard of some new way of thinking about U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East and saw the 2015 Iran nuclear deal as the pathway to creating a new equilibrium in the region and getting some of the countries to ‘share’ the region with Iran,” Katulis told JI. “What has transpired recently shows that those ideas were more delusional than realistic.”

On some level, he added, “this faction realizes that it failed to achieve some of its key goals on the Israeli-Palestinian front much in the same way that it failed to mount an effective U.S. policy response to other issues in the Middle East like Syria’s civil war, which claimed hundreds of thousands

of innocent civilians.”

Speaking to former staffers in Chicago a couple of weeks ago, Obama voiced regret for his failure to resolve tensions between Israelis and Palestinians. “I look at this, and I think back, ‘What could I have done during my presidency to move this forward, as hard as I tried?’” he said. “But there’s a part of me that’s still saying, ‘Well, was there something else I could have done?’”

A pro-Israel strategist, who asked to remain anonymous to speak candidly, said that Obama’s approach to Israel suffered from a fundamental misunderstanding that ultimately undercut his efforts to make progress toward resolving the conflict.

“Creating distance between the United States and Israel serves the right in Israel and empowers the right in Israel — and the right uses that to win elections,” the strategist told JI. “President Obama didn’t understand that. I think President Biden does understand that. That’s why he’s been so publicly supportive of Israel and has gotten a lot more from the Israelis than President Obama ever did.” ♦

NOVEMBER 16, 2023

Tammy Murphy kicks off campaign for Senate in New Jersey

Pro-Israel advocates in the Garden State vouch for Murphy’s longstanding commitment to the Jewish state

By Matthew Kassel

Tammy Murphy, the first lady of New Jersey, launched her campaign to replace embattled Sen. Bob Menendez (D-NJ) on Wednesday, setting the stage for a competitive primary that now includes two formidable challengers.

Murphy, a first-time candidate whose bid had been widely expected, enters the race as a frontrunner, thanks to her statewide profile, fundraising prowess and relationships with Democratic Party leaders in New Jersey whose endorsements could influence favorable ballot placement in next

year’s election.

“I am so proud of everything we’ve accomplished, but I know there’s a lot more to do,” Murphy, 58, said in a campaign kickoff video, touting her signature policy initiatives as first lady, such as addressing maternal mortality and combating climate change. “Right now, Washington is filled with too many people more interested in getting rich or getting on camera than getting things done for you.”

Murphy’s campaign team is likely to include close allies of her husband, two-

term Gov. Phil Murphy, according to a Democratic source in New Jersey who requested anonymity to discuss the race. Dan Bryan, a former senior adviser to the governor who leads two political advocacy groups with ties to the administration, is among the consultants expected to join the campaign, the source said.

A person connected to Tammy Murphy’s campaign, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to share private deliberations, said she is still in the process of finalizing her team, which she will announce next

week.

Murphy's chief primary rival, Rep. Andy Kim (D-NJ), who announced his candidacy shortly after Menendez was indicted on federal bribery charges in September, was ready for the competition on Wednesday, circulating an internal poll that placed him 19 points ahead of his new opponent.

"Today's poll shows that New Jersey voters want someone who is battle tested and proven so we don't let Washington Republicans take back the Senate," Kim, who officially launched his campaign on Friday, said in a statement shared with *Jewish Insider* on Wednesday. "My message of integrity and changing our broken politics is connecting all across the state."

The 41-year-old Democrat from South Jersey, a former national security adviser in the Obama administration, raised more than \$1 million last quarter and entered October with nearly \$2 million on hand — notably outpacing Menendez, who pulled in just over \$900,000 over the same period.

While he has refused to resign, Menendez, whose popularity has plummeted following charges that he accepted hundreds of thousands of dollars in bribes and sought political favors as an alleged agent of Egypt, has not revealed whether he will seek reelection. But the longtime senior senator immediately went on the offensive after Murphy's announcement, testing a line of attack that could be recycled by other candidates as the race progresses.

"While Tammy Murphy was a card-carrying Republican for years," Menendez, 69, said in a statement on Wednesday, "I was working to elect Democrats up and down the ballot and fighting in Washington to deliver for hardworking families in New Jersey."

Murphy would be the first woman elected to represent New Jersey in the Senate. The primary also includes Larry Hamm, a progressive activist who announced his campaign in September.

The race could ultimately coalesce around Murphy and Kim, who flipped a GOP-held swing seat in 2018. The three-term congressman saw his profile rise when a viral photo captured him cleaning up debris from the floor of the Capitol building after the Jan. 6 attack nearly three years ago.

Even as she has been actively engaged as first lady, Murphy, a former financial

analyst who until 2014 regularly voted in Republican primaries, remains something of a cipher on a host of key policy issues. Her campaign site does not include an issues page.

But Jewish and pro-Israel activists in the Garden State say Murphy has a strong command of foreign policy and would be an outspoken supporter of Israel if she is elected, pointing to her multiple trips to the Jewish state and frequent engagement with Jewish communal leaders during her five years as first lady.

Most recently, Murphy, whose father, Edward Snyder, was Jewish, gave remarks at a community event organized by Chabad of the Shore in Long Branch, just days after Hamas' Oct. 7 terror attack in southern Israel. "We have all seen the horrific videos recorded by the perpetrators themselves and we've heard the harrowing first-hand accounts," Murphy told the crowd. "Hamas must cease to exist."

"As the daughter of a man who was proudly Jewish and deeply loved Israel, my heart breaks with you," Murphy continued, recalling that her father's "last wish," in 2018, had been that she and her husband continue on a trade mission to Israel "rather than rush back to be by his side" before his death. "I say this because that is how much Israel and the bonds between our two nations meant to my father, and I am proud to carry on his legacy."

Karen Elkis, a co-chair of the New Jersey-Israel Commission, said that Murphy "definitely holds Israel near and dear" and has long been a champion of Jewish causes. "If she wins, she will be such a powerful force for the Jewish community," Elkis said in an interview with *JL* on Wednesday. "It's very personal to her."

A Jewish community leader in New Jersey who is close to the Murphy administration said the first lady is "very proud of her Jewish background" and often "talks about it" in public as well as private settings. "I've always found her to be very sincere in her feelings and connections to the Jewish people," the community leader, who requested anonymity to discuss the first lady, told *JL*. "She's an advocate."

"I'm very happy to tell you that I have no reservations at all about the relationship that Tammy Murphy has with our community,"

said Avi Schnall, the former director of Agudath Israel of America's New Jersey office and a Democratic assemblyman-elect from the heavily Orthodox city of Lakewood. "Her engagement is solid, her support is solid, and what I'm saying now is exactly what I would have said six months ago before any thought of her running for Senate."

Murphy, who grew up in Virginia, first visited Israel with her father when she was about 8, and she has since made several trips back to the Jewish state, where she has met with a range of Israeli officials including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Isaac Herzog. While in Berlin during Phil Murphy's tenure as U.S. ambassador to Germany in the Obama administration, the Murphys also built a close relationship with Israel's then-ambassador there, Yoram Ben Zeev, who served as an IDF lieutenant in the 1967 Six-Day War.

Murphy's Jewish supporters believe that her history of personal engagement with Israeli leaders will serve her well at a particularly fraught moment for the U.S.-Israel relationship. "I think that gives her a deep understanding, more than most, of Israeli foreign policy," said the Jewish community leader. "She has experience working with Israeli officials."

Even before the attack, Middle East policy was expected to be a salient issue for Jewish and pro-Israel voters who have long viewed Menendez, until recently the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, as a stalwart ally of Israel. Pro-Israel groups — including AIPAC, Democratic Majority for Israel and NORPAC — have indicated that they will continue to stand behind Menendez as he faces trial.

Previously, Kim has won backing from DMFI's political action committee, the Jewish Democratic Council of America and J Street, the progressive Israel advocacy group. He has visited Israel twice as a congressman and is now seeking to burnish his national security credentials and record on Israel, recently leading a House letter expressing support for supplemental military funding to Israel.

Elkis, a former adviser to several New Jersey senators, said that Murphy has "made sure" to keep Israel "at the forefront"

of her advocacy as first lady. “She was one of the first people who texted me Saturday

morning when everything was happening in Israel,” Elkis said of Hamas’ attack last

month. “She was on it right away, lending her support.” ♦

NOVEMBER 15, 2023

Jewish, Israeli Amazon workers say company tolerating antisemitism by employees

Pro-Israel employees lament management doing less for Israel and antisemitism than for other favored causes like BLM

By Lahav Harkov

Amazon employees in three different countries expressed dissatisfaction with the company’s response since the start of Israel’s war with Hamas, accusing the company of turning a blind eye to messages in internal channels in recent weeks that the employees felt incited violence or denied Oct. 7 atrocities.

Three days after Hamas massacred and kidnapped Israelis, Amazon CEO Andy Jassy posted: “The attacks against civilians in Israel are shocking and painful to watch. I have been in touch with our teammates there to make sure we do everything we can to help support their families and their safety, and to assist however we can in this very difficult time. We’re also in close contact with our humanitarian relief partners on the ground and will be supporting their efforts. Hoping that peace arrives as soon as possible.”

Some Amazon employees who spoke with *Jewish Insider* on condition of anonymity to discuss internal company matters contrasted the response with Amazon’s millions of dollars in donations to causes like Black Lives Matter, Stop Asian Hate and Ukraine, while Jassy’s post about Israel did “not condemn anything,” and the idea seemed to be “as ambiguous as they can [be], the better,” one source in the company lamented.

Jewish and Israeli Amazon employees also pointed to messages on internal communications channels that they viewed as threatening or offensive.

One community in “phonetool,” an internal messaging app, is called “I stand

with Palestine!” with the description being “from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free,” regarded by many as a call for the elimination of Israel and genocide of the Jews living there.

Elevators in Amazon offices in New York and Seattle were vandalized with the phrase in English and Arabic, and employees notified security.

An employee posted a graphic, later removed, of a bleeding map of Israel wrapped in a *keffiyeh* and traditional Arab embroidery, with the text: “The land that was killed and sold before the Mandate, the land that is still being killed and sold at this moment, the land that will not die will remain in our hearts. We will plant our hatred in our children. It will plant its love in our grandchildren.”

Meanwhile, in screenshots from the “Arabs at Amazon” Slack channel, first reported by Yanir Kuzin of Israel’s Army Radio and verified for JI by Amazon employees, group members approvingly called Palestinian terrorist groups “the resistance” in Arabic.

Another said he “never trusted” the reports of a massacre by Hamas – of which there is extensive evidence – wondering “how the same group of people can decapitate [sic] 40 babies, then rape and so on (as they claim) then at the same time be humane to some people as some testimonies indicated.”

The group spread conspiracy theories from the extremist website Grayzone that Israel was to blame for the mass casualties on Oct. 7.

In another internal channel, an employee wrote: “As people call Hamas terrorists, I find it upsetting that the actions of Israel are not considered terrorism.”

These examples and more were raised in complaints about inappropriate behavior via the appropriate internal channels, with little response, according to screenshots viewed by JI.

“Most of the [complaints] we have opened have not been resolved or dealt with,” a source in the company said.

Amazon has over 1,000 employees in Israel. Those who requested it were provided with up to NIS 10,000 (\$2,600) in financial assistance, a doubled meal budget for the first month of the war and emotional support sessions, sources at the company confirmed, though Amazon has not made a public statement about the matter beyond Jassy’s post.

Members of the Arab employee resource group have been frustrated with a lack of response from Amazon to Israeli strikes on Gaza, according to *The Washington Post*, and noted that Jassy did not send any message to Palestinian or Arab employees affected by the war.

They told the Post that they are “dealing with harassment” and “scared to speak out,” and that petitions circulated on Slack calling for a cease-fire or to drop Amazon’s contract with the Israeli government, called Project Nimbus, were removed, while fundraising for the Palestinian Children’s Relief Fund was permitted.

A letter from pro-Palestinian employees called for Amazon to “protect and that call

anti-Zionism antisemitism, to “acknowledge the continued assault upon Palestinians’ basic human rights under an illegal occupation” and to create a relief fund for Palestinians.

Amazon customers have also complained about the company, with Shira Goldman of Madison, Wisc., sharing photos on social media of a copy of Noa Tishby’s book *Israel: A Simple Guide to the Most Misunderstood Country on Earth* with stickers on pages throughout the book with the misspelled message “Free Palastine” on them.

Steven Phillips, a former Amazon employee from London, started a group for Jewish “Amazonians” in 2018. At first, he told JI, the idea was “to try to arrange drinks and maybe an event.” When a Jewish employee told Phillips he felt targeted for being Jewish during a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) session in 2019, Phillips attempted to get formal recognition as an affinity group.

“I worked with some colleagues in the U.S. and Israel and began, through 2020, to create a formal group, having taken a mandatory nearly two-hour training course on [DEI] following George Floyd[’s killing by police] and [Black Lives Matter] which contained zero Jews and zero reference to Jews,” Phillips recounted.

Phillips followed the DEI department’s

guidance, and submitted a paper identifying the group as “culturally, ethnically, spiritually and religiously” Jewish.

As he and his colleagues waited for two years for recognition, they acted to have antisemitic products removed from Amazon, organized events like Hanukkah candle lighting, as well as kosher meals and daily prayers at a company conference. They could not, however, take part in diversity recruitment activities or be included in DEI forums as long as they were not recognized.

Two years later, the application was rejected on grounds of Jews being a religious group, though Phillips noted he described himself as “an atheist Jew.” He was told that Jews could be an “unfounded interest group...like folk who went to the University of Michigan or people who like to drink coffee.”

There are 13 affinity groups at Amazon, including ones for protected classes like Black, Asian, LGBT or disabled workers, but also affinity groups for employees with families, and “body positive peers.”

“Given all of the above, I am totally unsurprised by the way things have been [handled] during this war,” Phillips said. “Amazon made it clear that they don’t care about Jews, even though the CEO and the CEO of [Amazon Web Services] are both Jewish.”

“Whatever statement Amazon would

make, they would be crucified by one side or the other, but by making such a meek and generic statement, they have managed to...anger both their Arab and Muslim employees and their Jewish and Israeli employees,” a source in the company said.

Brad Glasser, an Amazon spokesperson, said in response to the employees’ allegations: “We don’t tolerate discrimination or harassment of any kind in the workplace. We investigate all reported incidents of such behavior and take appropriate action against any employee who is found to have violated our policies, up to and including termination.”

As for the book with the “Free Palastine” stickers in it, Glasser said that Amazon takes the incident “very seriously,” apologizing to Goldman and Tishby and firing the person who defaced the book.

“We immediately launched an investigation into the defaced book, identified the person responsible, and that person no longer works at Amazon,” Glasser said. “Customers who received a defaced item can contact our customer service team to receive a full refund or replacement.”

A source at Amazon Web Services said, in response to the calls to cut ties with the Israeli government, that “AWS is focused on making the benefits of our world-leading cloud technology available to all our customers, wherever they are located.” ♦

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Yearning for Israel, Jewish Agency emissaries find community in America

Shlichim say being away from home is challenging and emotionally fraught, but are convinced of the need to serve as a bridge between U.S. Jewish communities and the Jewish state

By Jay Deitcher

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

When Aya, a Jewish Agency for Israel emissary, moved from a kibbutz near the Gaza border to a city in the American South with her

husband and three children in August to help tell Israel’s story, she knew she was facing a heavy lift.

Then Oct. 7 happened.

“I spoke to myself and tried to prepare myself for an event like this,” Aya told eJP, knowing that she might face unfair criticism

of her home country as well as antisemitism. “But this is my worst nightmare times a million. I did not, I could not imagine something like this.”

The job of a Jewish Agency emissary, or *shaliach*, a kind-of Israeli cultural ambassador in Jewish communities around

the world, is challenging at any time. But last month's Hamas massacre has added a new, and emotionally fraught, element to the job.

"This is not what they signed up for," Neta Katz Epstein, chief program officer of the Jewish Agency's North American delegation, told *eJewishPhilanthropy*. "Among all 363 [American] *shlichim*, everyone knows someone who was either murdered, kidnapped or injured."

But even as they mourn, the role of these emissaries — the face of Israel in schools, synagogues, JCCs, federations, camps and colleges — has changed drastically. In the wake of Oct. 7, they are bridges to a wounded, struggling country at war. Many said they gained a new sense of community, comforting and guiding American Jews at a delicate moment and also being themselves supported by those American Jewish communities.

Like many *shlichim*, Aya says she carries guilt. Prior to her service, she lived and worked as a teacher in Kibbutz Nir Yitzhak, which was infiltrated by Hamas terrorists. She personally knows 10 people who were murdered and 30 who are being held hostage, one of which is an 11-year-old former student of hers. (Aya and all of the other emissaries interviewed for this article asked to be identified only by their first names.)

Days after the massacre, Aya was on TV and at vigils, holding back tears, speaking about the brutality inflicted on her kibbutz. She told one TV station, sobbing, "I'm so sorry I'm not there. I'm so sorry there's nothing I can do. I'm sorry for being grateful that my kids are OK."

But she acknowledges that being in America also gives her the opportunity to help her community back home. "It's been very challenging, but also very humbling," she said. "And it's given me opportunities to convey a message and tell a story that I could absolutely not be able to tell if I was in Israel right now."

Since Oct. 7 and the ensuing war with Hamas, *shlichim* have been expected to educate their communities and help them grieve, a difficult task when you are in mourning yourself. To support the emissaries, the Jewish Agency provides them with curriculum tailored to their communities, access to experts to teach

them and their community and increased mental health services, offering Hebrew-speaking social workers and psychologists to provide them with individual and group therapy.

But one of the best ways *shlichim* have been supporting each other is by attending informal gatherings, such as hiking, bowling or volunteering together, said Katz Epstein. "[They] sing together, cry together, laugh together, pray together, learn from each other, and this is what we know that they need right now, more than ever."

Although a handful of *shlichim* were called up for reserve duty, most have not returned to Israel since the attacks. Even those who went home for funerals came back soon after.

"I'm a captain in the reserves and when October 7 happened, my first inclination was to take the first flight back to Israel," Or, a 30-year-old campus fellow serving on the West Coast, told eJP. "But my commander knows what I'm doing here, and he told me, 'Listen, Or, we need you on campus.'"

Or's journey to become a *shaliach* began with that same commander. In Tel Aviv, Or was a lawyer who owned a company that teaches public speaking skills. His commander recognized these skills could benefit American college students who are faced with increasing antisemitism and criticism of Israel.

Since the massacre, students have told Or, "It's the first time in our lives that we feel scared like we don't know what to do." He helped them find their voice.

College fellows, like Or, have been teaching students how to stay safe while being proudly Jewish and pro-Israel. Emissaries teach students how to formally file complaints if they witness antisemitism.

"A lot of students want to take action want to do something, and the fellow is the one helping them take that motivation and turn it into action," Nati Szczupak, the Jewish Agency's central *shlicha* to Hillel International and director of the Israel Fellows Program, told eJP. "It could be making plans to volunteer for different causes in Israel during winter break or summer break. It can be fundraising for different causes in Israel. It can be writing letters of support to Israeli children who are displaced."

Last week, Or witnessed 160 students speak before his school's student government about the importance of passing a resolution against antisemitism. "To see them speak up against the evil," he said. "I'm so proud of them."

Much of what emissaries are doing is simply allowing their communities to mourn. It's comforting for the *shlichim* to realize that American Jews are in this together with Israelis, especially after years of feeling increasingly distanced from American Jewry.

"There's something about feeling the same thing together that shows the strength of the Jewish people," Szczupak said. "People in Israel are suffering, and tears are shed all over the world for them in Jewish communities, and I think that's really powerful."

Today, Israelis and American Jews are "connecting and finding the common ground," Katz Epstein said. "*Shlichim* [are] the bridge."

The Israel that the *shlichim* left behind is not the Israel they will return to. "Where I live is a warzone," Aya, whose community was evacuated, said. "It's sealed off. We can't go back there. And no one is going to be able to go back there for probably at least a year. So, at the moment, my home is physically there, but it's unapproachable."

She misses her friends and family, but knows she is doing what she can for them.

"They need me to make sure that people don't forget. They need me to make sure that people understand what happened. They need me to make sure people understand Kibbutz Nir Yitzhak is not just a name, it's a community of almost 700 people who are going through hell, no less," she said.

"I definitely want to be with my people. I really do. But I also have another new people. I'm a part of a community, an amazing community that has been supporting me and my family through all this... As much as it's hard and it's painful, I think that it's a true honor and blessing to be doing this." ♦