

THE WEEKLY PRINT

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FEBRUARY 1, 2024

The White House knows Iran is behind the deadly attacks on its troops, but how will it respond?

Iran has emboldened its terror proxies in the region and now the U.S. faces a serious dilemma of whether to stay put and respond or pull out, a move some believe would be 'catastrophic.'

By Ruth Marks Eglash

Addressing the media on Tuesday, President Joe Biden said that the White House believed Iran was, at least in part, behind this week's deadly drone attack on U.S. troops stationed in Jordan, connecting at least some of the dots between the rising tensions threatening to destabilize the Middle East and the militant Islamist regime that sits in Tehran.

While the president – as well as National Security Council Communications Coordinator John Kirby, who briefed the press a day earlier – seemed to stop short of blaming Iran directly, the U.S. administration has made clear that it will respond to the attack in which three service members were killed, although when, where and how is still unclear.

What has become clear, however, is that Iran, which immediately denied any connection to the incident, has allowed small sectarian terror groups to become increasingly emboldened through funding, training and arming them. And, if such deadly attacks continue, the U.S. will face the thorny dilemma of whether to confront Iran directly or step back from the region to protect its troops.

"Iran can no longer hide behind its proxies," Yoel Guzansky, a senior fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies at Tel Aviv University, told *Jewish Insider*. "Everybody knows who is really behind these attacks and, in some ways, Iran is not even working to hide it any longer."

Iran's overarching goal, said Guzansky,

was to "become a hegemonic power in the region." The regime, he said, which follows the Shia branch of Islam, has proxies in almost every Shia community in the Middle East from Iraq to Bahrain and Yemen to Lebanon and Syria, as well as links to some non-Shia terror groups, such as Hamas, that might not share Iran's religious beliefs, but do share its fundamentalist ideology.

A research paper recently published by the Foundation for Defense of Democracies' *Long War Journal* found at least 19 separate terror organizations, including Hamas and Kataib Hezbollah, the Iraqi militia said to be behind the attack in Jordan, linked to Iran in some way.

Most of the terror groups listed in the report, which was penned by Joe Truzman,

a senior research fellow at the D.C.-based think tank, appear to be Palestinian, and many operate somewhere along Israel's border or inside Gaza and the West Bank territory it controls.

"I believe the White House understands the extent of Iran's involvement," Truzman told JI. "Nevertheless, they are hesitant to explicitly accuse Iran as it would then necessitate a potential military response from the U.S. whenever a significant incident occurs, and the White House has consistently conveyed its preference to avoid engaging in a war with Iran."

Indeed, when asked by reporters this week if a direct link between the attack in Jordan and Iran had been established, Biden replied: "We'll have that discussion." Additionally, when the president was questioned about how the U.S. might respond, he simply said: "We'll see." And on the threat of a wider war in the region, Biden replied: "I don't think we need a wider war in the Middle East. That's not what I'm looking for."

In Kirby's press briefing on Monday, he also played down the links between Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza and the U.S. military presence in the region, saying troops were stationed in Iraq, Jordan and Syria as part of a "counter-ISIS mission," and that it is "unrelated to our efforts to support Israel and to prevent a wider conflict in the region."

"Most of the organizations involved in attacking Israel and the United States have ties to Iran," said Joe Truzman, a senior research fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. "Iran is leveraging its proxy groups and supported organizations to exert pressure on Israel, the United States, and, to some degree, the global community."

"By refraining from directly implicating the regime in the attacks and instead stating that the groups it supports are responsible, affords the White House some flexibility in formulating its response to these attacks without potentially starting a war with Iran," noted Truzman, adding, however, that "Iran is deeply engaged in the current conflict, with its fingerprints evident as the regime's proxies and network of clients

play active roles in all the arenas presently involved in fighting."

He listed the major players in the Iran-led "Axis of Resistance" as Hamas, which Israel is actively engaged in fighting in Gaza following its Oct. 7 mass terror attack; Hezbollah, which continues to fire projectiles, missiles and armed drones from Lebanon into northern Israel; Iraqi militias, which have also tried to target Israel; and the Houthis in Yemen who – thanks to Iran's backing – have been able to disrupt global shipping routes and launch attacks on both Israeli and U.S. targets.

"Most of the organizations involved in attacking Israel and the United States have ties to Iran," Truzman stated. "Iran is leveraging its proxy groups and supported organizations to exert pressure on Israel, the United States, and, to some degree, the global community."

He said Iran's objective is "to create enough instability in the Middle East to force Israel into accepting a lasting cease-fire, ultimately safeguarding Hamas and other terrorist groups in the Gaza Strip."

But the White House's reluctance to engage in direct conflict with Iran could boomerang, warned Jason Brodsky, policy director at United Against Nuclear Iran (UANI).

He said that the administration's "constant pleas for deescalation have not been reciprocated by the 'Axis of Resistance.'"

"The Iranian leadership does not fear the Biden administration given its repeated insistence that it does not seek conflict," Brodsky said. "That invites the supreme leader and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps to push the envelope with mostly deniable operations, inviting the risk of a catastrophic success for Iran, which could result in mass casualties and make war more likely not less likely."

Brodsky added that it was "time for a decisive American response."

"Iran's regime operates via plausible deniability – that enables it to benefit from the violence of its proxies and partners but to disclaim responsibility and avoid costs," he continued.

Kirby, for his part, vowed a U.S. response to the weekend attack on its troops, telling reporters on Tuesday that the U.S. will

"respond on our own time, on our own schedule," later adding, "the first thing you see will not be the last thing."

"Iran's military doctrine focuses on asymmetric warfare to protect its leadership and to compensate for its lack of conventional military capabilities after years of sanctions," said Jason Brodsky, policy director at United Against Nuclear Iran (UANI).

Brodsky explained that while each of the individual terror proxies had their own "local agenda" and did not necessarily receive "orders" from Tehran, yet Iran's "continuing flow of funds, material, and training are effectively a green light for its Axis of Resistance to continue destabilizing various regional battlefields."

"Iran's military doctrine focuses on asymmetric warfare to protect its leadership and to compensate for its lack of conventional military capabilities after years of sanctions," he said.

"The U.S. and its allies must pierce that veil of deniability to deter the Iranian leadership," Brodsky added. "That requires a direct response to Iranian provocations on targets in Iran."

While it still seems as though most major players – Israel, the U.S. and even Iran – are looking to avoid a direct conflict, INSS' Guzansky said that "there may be a point when they [the West] say enough is enough, 'let Iran taste something.'"

"They are facing a real dilemma of how to respond and deliver a clear message without escalating the situation," he said, adding that perhaps action will be taken against Iranian targets outside of Iran, such as its intelligence-gathering ships that are working to help the Houthis or other Iranian sites.

"Iran also has an interest to lower volume or to maintain a medium flame," added Guzansky, warning that a U.S. pullout from the region would be "catastrophic." ♦

Jewish Insider's senior national correspondent Gabby Deutch contributed from Washington.

Qatar's two-faced approach to hostage diplomacy divides Israeli officials, American Jewish leaders

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's recent leaked criticism of Qatar has highlighted a delicate dynamic regarding Doha, Hamas' funder but also the channel for hostage negotiations

By Lahav Harkov

The conundrum over Qatar that the Israeli government, Israelis, the U.S. and American Jews find themselves in — exert maximum pressure on the Hamas benefactors to win the release of the hostages, treat them with kid gloves or a little of each — is so knotty that perhaps only metaphors can grasp the complexity of it.

A senior official at a major American Jewish organization reached for a metaphor from biology: Qatar and Hamas are locked in a “symbiotic relationship,” one feeding off the other, so to speak. “It would be foolish to minimize the benefits of this symbiotic relationship in this moment of crisis with the lives of the hostages hanging in the balance,” the official told *Jewish Insider*.

The executive director of the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington Ron Halber leaned on the psychological concept of “cognitive dissonance” when he addressed a “gathering” last week outside the Qatari Embassy in Washington, D.C. He said the event was meant “to thank the Qataris and at the same time to press them to push Hamas. Those two things are not in conflict: You’ve done a good job, you really need to do more of a good job.” Even calling the event a gathering — rather than a protest or demonstration — was a sign of the issue’s sensitivity: Qatar the bad guy, Qatar the potential good guy.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s recent leaked criticism of Qatar — albeit without the rhetorical flourish — has brought this delicate dynamic regarding Qatar to the fore.

In a leaked audio recording of Netanyahu in a meeting with hostages’ relatives, he

expressed criticism of the Gulf state shared by many Israelis and supporters. Yet many of the leading voices calling to release the 136 hostages held in Gaza — including Netanyahu himself until last week — have been hesitant to speak out against Qatar.

Netanyahu called Qatar “more problematic” as a mediator than the U.N. or Red Cross, and said he was “very angry” at the U.S. for squandering what he viewed as opportunities to up the pressure on Doha.

Though Netanyahu has “no illusions” about Qatar, he said he “can use any factor for now that will help me bring [the hostages] home.”

Netanyahu and his military secretary, Avi Gil, said they expect Qatar to provide proof that the hostages received the medication Israel sent via France in a Doha-mediated deal; a source in the Prime Minister’s Office confirmed to *Jewish Insider* on Tuesday that nearly two weeks after the medicine entered Gaza, they have not received that confirmation.

Responding to Netanyahu’s leaked comments, Qatar’s Foreign Ministry accused Netanyahu of “undermining the mediation process for reasons that appear to serve his political career instead of prioritizing saving the lives of innocents, including Israeli hostages.” The thinly veiled threat to the hostages was the second time that week Qatar said airing criticism publicly could “potentially affect the sensitive and ongoing efforts to bring hostages back to their families.”

Still, in a press conference on Saturday night, Netanyahu said he does “not take back one word,” a message he reaffirmed in an interview on the U.K.’s Talk TV.

“I will not give up on even one lane

of pressure on Hamas or those who can pressure Hamas to bring back our hostages,” he said in the press conference. “Qatar hosts the heads of Hamas; it also funds Hamas; it has leverage on Hamas...They placed themselves as mediators — so start proving it and bring back our hostages and bring them the medicines.”

As Netanyahu’s “very angry” comment would indicate, he is at odds with the White House on the topic of Qatar. Secretary of State Tony Blinken “expressed gratitude for Qatar’s indispensable mediation efforts, especially since October 7,” in a readout following a meeting with Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, one in a long series of Biden administration statements thanking Doha.

His remarks are also at odds with his government’s approach. National Security Adviser Tzachi Hanegbi praised Qatar in October as “an essential party and stakeholder in the facilitation of humanitarian solutions,” drawing public and media ire.

Former Prime Minister Naftali Bennett responded that the government is making “a grave moral and practical error,” and that “Qatar is the enemy itself.” Yet New York-based restaurateur and former Qatar lobbyist Joey Allaham said that weeks later, Bennett told him that the Shin Bet asked him to stop publicly criticizing Qatar. Another attendee at the lunch in which Bennett made the remark confirmed what he said, but Bennett’s office declined to comment.

The president of the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), Yigal Carmon, who has been calling for greater pressure on Qatar in American and Israeli media for months, was unimpressed with

Netanyahu's recent outspokenness on Qatar. Carmon told JI that the prime minister and Doha "have been in criminal cooperation," referring to the billions of dollars Netanyahu allowed Qatar to funnel into Gaza over the past decade.

"And now he talks about pressure?" Carmon scoffed. "What is he doing in Gaza right now? He's letting Qatari money fund all the relief [for Gazans], which is stolen by Hamas. It's the same thing all over again. It sustains the terrorists and the tunnels used to kill Israeli soldiers...The blood is on Netanyahu's hands."

Carmon called Netanyahu's reported past statement that allowing Qatar to support Hamas will prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state a product of "degenerate narcissism, thinking that he can outmaneuver everyone. Don't create an alternative to a Palestinian state that's worse than a Palestinian state. It's utter stupidity."

He also noted that Netanyahu blocked Communication Minister Shlomo Karhi's move to close Qatar-owned Al Jazeera's offices in Israel, such that the prime minister is not allowing Israel to use its own lever of pressure — however minor — on Doha.

"Only when the Qataris understand that their existence is on the line will they pressure Hamas, and then the hostages will come back by the busload. Why would Hamas do that for Qatar? Because Qatar is their lifeline. If there's no Qatar, there's no Hamas...The answer to the hostage problem, the end of the war, global terrorism is to stop the Al-Thani family," Carmon said.

Netanyahu was not the only one to criticize Qatar more openly last week. The Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington held a "gathering," which they were cautious not to call a protest or demonstration, outside the Qatari embassy in Washington, featuring members of Congress among other speakers. JCRC Executive Director Ron Halber said the event was meant "to thank the Qataris and at the same time to press them to push Hamas. Those two things are not in conflict: You've done a good job, you really need to do more of a good job."

Two days later, however, about 40 Israelis living in the D.C. area gathered in front of the

embassy in a more explicit protest, chanting "Qatar is Hamas," with speakers saying the Gulf state is responsible for the Oct. 7 Hamas attack and noting its payments to the terrorist group and sponsorship of Al-Jazeera, which airs antisemitic and anti-Israel messages.

Alan Gross, a former U.S. government contractor imprisoned in Cuba for five years, spoke at the JCRC gathering outside the Qatari embassy and favored making sure Doha knows "that people are concerned about the role they've been playing with their client, Hamas."

"We've used enough diplomacy with Qatar," he told JI. "They have the leaders of Hamas in Doha in their billion-dollar estates."

The Qataris "need to exercise greater influence over their client so they can facilitate a hostage release on a humanitarian basis. It is in no one's interest to keep these people hostage, certainly not in Hamas's," Gross said.

Gross recounted that while he was imprisoned, the Jewish community held a weekly vigil across from the Cuban Embassy calling for his release.

"[Cuba] didn't like that at all," he said. "It brought attention to them that they didn't want to have. I can't imagine any embassy that would feel differently."

The JCRC in New York and the Jewish Federation of Ottawa plan to follow up with "gatherings" of their own at the Qatari diplomatic missions in their cities on Friday "to urge the Qatari government to use its considerable leverage over Hamas leaders to finalize and implement a [hostage] deal as quickly as possible."

Yet the Hostages Families' Forum and major Jewish organizations have shown reticence to turn their criticism towards Doha.

Hostages' relatives met with the Qatari prime minister in Washington on Monday, and the Families' Forum subsequently released a statement that they "extend our heartfelt thanks for the efforts of the State of Qatar to date."

"We expressed our sincere hope that Qatar will continue to lead the coordination of the new deal that will release all the remaining hostages. Qatar's continued commitment to resolving this humanitarian

challenge is crucial to end the suffering of all our families," the forum stated.

Emily Moatti, the leader of the forum's diplomatic team and a former Labor MK, told JI that the forum "thinks that the only way hostages will be released is through negotiations, and as unfortunate as it may be — we would prefer Egypt — Qatar is totally a partner in this."

Moatti said the public may want to turn its attention to Qatar because "they feel like they have to do something," but that "if the choices are to talk or to attack, I prefer to talk."

The former lawmaker also said that the issue of Qatar keeping Hamas afloat is a geopolitical issue that is "much bigger than the hostages."

Earlier this month, the Hostages' Families Forum and the American Jewish Committee held an invitation-only, closed to media briefing for Washington-area Jewish community officials that reflected the dynamic among the major organizations dealing with the hostages issue.

"Qatar, cannot simply be a messenger or a neutral mediator," said former Middle East envoy Dennis Ross. "Qatar has a relationship [with the U.S.] and if we want to show there's a benefit to having that relationship, it has to put pressure on Hamas...All those political leaders of Hamas that are in Qatar, they need to know they won't be able to stay...Qatar can apply pressure."

Former Middle East envoy Dennis Ross spoke in favor of pressure on Qatar, which he said brought about the release of 110 hostages in November. He said Qatar cannot be a major non-NATO U.S. ally while hosting Hamas, and that one hostage deal in what was 104 days at the time does not demonstrate benefits to that relationship.

"Maybe [Hamas] should understand that Qatar will break relations with Hamas if they don't prove it," Ross told attendees, referring to Hamas releasing the hostages. "I would like to see Qatar exercise more of its pressure on Hamas."

Ross also advocated for pressure on Qatar at a rally for the hostages in December. He said that "military pressure is one of the reasons that now Qatar is again talking about the possibility of a deal."

“Qatar,” Ross added, “cannot simply be a messenger or a neutral mediator. Qatar has a relationship [with the U.S.] and if we want to show there’s a benefit to having that relationship, it has to put pressure on Hamas...All those political leaders of Hamas that are in Qatar, they need to know they won’t be able to stay...Qatar can apply pressure.”

All the other speakers at the closed-door briefing, however, opposed pressure on Qatar. Roger Carstens, the Biden administration’s special presidential envoy for hostage affairs, said: “Maybe we can put more pressure on Qatar, but they are doing all that we are asking,” according to two attendees. One attendee told JI that he understood Carstens’ statement to mean that the U.S. has not asked Qatar to throw Hamas leaders out of Doha or stop funding the terrorist organization.

Mickey Bergman, the head of the Richardson Center, who has been advising hostages’ relatives, did not disclose in the briefing that he receives major funding from Qatar.

Bergman said that while pressure on Qatar would mean making Doha choose between Hamas and the U.S., realistically, the only way to get the hostages out fast is for Israel to give in to Hamas’ demands, which include ending the war and releasing all Palestinian terrorists from prison. In addition, attendees said that Bergman called the hostages an asset for the government, who say that extending the war will help bring them back, while he disagrees with that assertion.

When audience members asked how to help the hostages, AJC CEO Ted Deutch and Carstens called to raise awareness and Deutch suggested that all Jewish organizations put “Bring them home” on their websites. Bergman called to build a consensus for the Israeli government to release all Palestinian prisoners and pause the war as the primary way to get hostages back, according to attendees.

One attendee, who spoke on condition of anonymity because the briefing was supposed to be closed to media, felt that the speakers all agreed on pressuring the Israeli government, but not on pressuring Qatar or the U.S.: “The pressure is on Israel to end the war. That’s basically the Hamas position.”

He also took issue with the focus on raising awareness as opposed to further actions, saying that organizations have helped hostages’ families gain “access to the highest levels of the U.S. government...but they have no strategy. They just expect that telling their stories will move people to solve the problem, and that’s wrong.”

The AJC said that “it is unfortunate that a participant chose to comment publicly on what was discussed. But it must be noted that the families’ tireless advocacy in Washington and other capitals around the world has served as a constant and critical reminder to public officials that the release of all hostages remains a top priority. AJC is committed to and will do whatever it can to help the families realize that goal.”

Allaham, who has close experience with the Qataris as a former lobbyist who arranged meetings between top Qatari officials with influential Republicans and prominent American Jewish figures starting in 2017, including taking them on trips to Doha, favors pressure on the Gulf state to release the hostages.

“I know the Qataris well, and I would bet all the money in the world that part of their conditions for getting involved [in hostage negotiations] is not to badmouth [Qatar]. They care a lot about their reputation; that comes first for them,” Allaham said.

Allaham said that “Qatar wants to dance at every wedding” by supporting Hamas while being a major non-NATO ally of the U.S. and negotiating the hostage release, but that the Emir of Qatar’s family is very much on the side of Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood.

“If you’re stuck, you have to deal with the devil. I’m a father and I would exhaust every option to get my kids out, even if I had to tell the devil he looks like an angel,” said New York-based restaurateur and former Qatar lobbyist Joey Allaham.

“I see [Qatar-owned] Al Jazeera news in Arabic,” Allaham, who was born in Damascus, said. “It’s their mouthpiece. It’s Hamas news. It’s horrendous...They deny everything that happened on October 7.”

Allaham said he doubts the Qataris are mediating in good faith.

Still, he said, “if you’re stuck, you have to

deal with the devil. I’m a father and I would exhaust every option to get my kids out, even if I had to tell the devil he looks like an angel.”

Allaham agreed with Netanyahu that the U.S. government has to call Qatar out: “At the end of the day, the only thing they fear is the White House.”

Carmon said that hostages’ families should not believe that there is no alternative to Qatar. He said that the other conduits to Hamas for both humanitarian aid and hostage talks could be Egypt and Jordan.

“The difference between Egypt and Qatar, which is very meaningful, is that Egypt hates the Muslim Brotherhood and put Al Jazeera reporters in prison,” he said.

The MEMRI founder argued that Jewish organizations and the hostages’ families are not pressuring Qatar, because they take their cues from the Israeli government.

“The key to saving the hostages is pressuring Qatar in a massive way,” Carmon said, referring to political pressure, as well as economic pressure and cyberattacks. Specifically, Carmon said the U.S. should threaten to relocate CENTCOM, and that “even discussing it will scare the Qataris shitless.” He also suggested that private actors can undertake cyberattacks on Qatar – “like those who took revenge after World War II” – if the government doesn’t do it.

Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations CEO William Daroff told JI that American Jewish organizations are following the lead of the U.S. government.

“I think there’s a recognition that the American government’s opinion of Qatar is very important, and our ability to influence the American government, therefore, can have an impact on how Qatar acts,” Daroff said.

One executive at a Jewish advocacy organization said Jewish leaders “mostly want to squeeze Qatar to do the right thing.” But, the executive noted, “I think there is also a recognition that our piece of this is very small, and so the chance of success of us actually changing Qatari behavior is small, while the chances of us f***king up are potentially big in a way that would not be positive as it relates to the hostages, as it relates to bilateral relations, to trilateral relations.”

The situation with Qatar, the executive continued, is “complicated because they’re serving a useful purpose, which is being an escape valve and a conduit, but the fact that the right hand is stirring things up such that the left hand has business is outrageous.”

Another senior official at a major American Jewish organization acknowledged that “Qatar did not create, but it has fed and protected the monster of Islamist extremism for years,” but at the same time, Qatar “has the unique ability to negotiate with that monster” and must be dealt with.

The organizations are currently hesitant to call out Qatar because the Qataris “are the only ones who have the unique ability they created for themselves...to have high-level contact and any serious sway with a terrorist organization that is holding 136 hostages.”

“It would be foolish to minimize the benefits of this symbiotic relationship in this moment of crisis with the lives of the hostages hanging in the balance,” the official said.

If Qatar is the tool that can bring about the release of the hostages, he added, then that is the tool that should be used.

“Exposing the tool’s ugly history and other aspects of that tool’s behavior and focusing public attention on that at this moment would be counterproductive,” he said.

Asked if he thinks the Qataris are acting in good faith, the official said, “The U.S. and Israel are counting on them to be serious in trying to get the hostages out.” ♦

Senior national correspondent Gabby Deutch contributed reporting.

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Dept. of Ed. civil rights chief ‘astounded’ by antisemitic incidents at U.S. schools, universities

New FBI data indicates that 10% of all hate crimes in 2022 — before the Oct. 7 attacks — took place at schools or on college campuses

By Gabby Deutch

Catherine Lhamon, the top civil rights official at the U.S. Department of Education, said on Monday she is “astounded” by the antisemitic incidents she has seen since Oct. 7.

“I’m a longtime, lifelong civil rights attorney, and I and my staff know hate intimately because of what we do, and I am astounded by the kinds of allegations that we are seeing now in this country,” Lhamon, the department’s assistant secretary for civil rights, told *Jewish Insider* in an interview. “I’m devastated that it’s true, and devastated for the students who are experiencing those kinds of incidents.”

Lhamon oversees the department’s Office

of Civil Rights (OCR), which investigates schools and universities that are alleged to have violated students’ civil rights. A team of 600 civil rights lawyers investigates whether the alleged harassment or discriminatory conduct “limits or denies a student’s access to education, and if so, whether the school’s response was prompt and effective.”

In other words, her team is not just examining whether antisemitism or racism occurred — they are determining whether it impeded the student’s education, based in large part on the school’s handling of the incident.

Since Oct. 7, when Hamas attacked Israel and touched off a wave of antisemitism

worldwide, Lhamon’s team has opened a record number of investigations into discrimination at U.S. schools based on “shared ancestry.” This language comes from Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination based on people’s “actual or perceived shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics.” For two decades, the Education Department has interpreted this phrase to extend to religious minorities including Jews, Muslims and Sikhs.

The department’s civil rights office received 183 complaints of “shared ancestry” discrimination in the four months since the beginning of October. In the entire previous fiscal year, from Oct. 1, 2022, to Sept. 30,

2023, the office received just 62 complaints. More shared ancestry investigations — 58 in total — have been opened in the past four months than in the previous seven years combined, according to publicly available data. Two-thirds of the complaints received since October have been related to allegations of antisemitism, a department spokesperson said.

Antisemitism investigations are already underway at several universities including Harvard, the University of Pennsylvania and Northwestern University. (The figures also include K-12 schools.) New FBI data released on Monday found that 10% of all hate crimes in 2022, prior to the recent wave of antisemitism, occurred at schools or college campuses.

Lhamon declined to weigh in on whether particular statements or actions, such as anti-Israel protesters chanting the phrases “Globalize the Intifada” or “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free” that are viewed as antisemitic by many in the Jewish community, would rise to the level of a civil rights violation.

“The question for us is not so much whether one student is correct or not correct about how the student received the comment,” said Lhamon, when asked about those two phrases. “It’s, ‘Was the conduct so severe or pervasive that it limited or denied the students access to education? And was it based on shared ancestry? And then if so, did the school respond in a way

that mitigated the harm to the student and prevented its recurrence?’”

The Education Department reached an agreement this week with a school district in Delaware where a student had been harassed because she was Jewish. Classmates drew swastikas on her desk and raised their arms in a “Heil Hitler” salute near her. The settlement includes several steps the district must take, such as developing policies responding to harassment, auditing past instances of discrimination, training staff and compensating the student’s parents for counseling services related to the antisemitism they experienced.

“It’s targeted, it’s ugly, it’s old tropes, and that predated October 7,” said Lhamon. “We see allegations of those types since October 7. Also, we have seen allegations that students are surrounded, they’re prevented from going to class, they’re prevented from leaving a building. They can be barricaded, people could be banging on the walls. The volume of threat can be quite high, and the repetition of those allegations are shocking to me.”

OCR aims to complete investigations within six months, but Lhamon acknowledged that’s just a goal — and the department usually fails to meet.

“We actually resolved that in seven months, which I’m very delighted about,” she said of the Delaware case, which was opened in June 2023. “But that’s unusual for us, and it’s unusual because of the intensity

of the investigation that I was describing.” An allegation that a hostile environment existed for a student could involve interviews with the student, witnesses and administrators, as well as an intensive document review. The cases either end with an agreement with the schools to address the issue, or a statement explaining why OCR does not believe the law was violated.

The work is not made easier by the department’s inability to hire more attorneys. Congress has not yet passed a budget for the year. President Joe Biden has requested a 27% increase in OCR’s budget, Lhamon said — an increase that would allow her to hire 100 people to her investigative team.

“Until then, we’re throwing everything we have at these cases, with the resources that we have,” said Lhamon. “It is very challenging for us. Our staff are now carrying in excess of 50 cases a person, and that is an untenable caseload.”

Students or their parents who want to file a federal discrimination complaint with OCR must navigate an opaque process, laced with bureaucratic jargon, to do so.

“The choice about whether to come forward is always a deeply personal one, and I respect that,” said Lhamon. “I’m also very grateful that so many people have chosen to put their faith in OCR to resolve the concerns that they have.” ♦

Kirby discusses ‘productive’ hostage talks and his own ties to the Jewish community

The National Security Council spokesman traced his affinity for the Jewish community back to a little league coach fittingly named Dick Mensch

By Marc Rod

White House National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby spoke on Wednesday morning to a gathering of activists from the Jewish Federations of North America, providing an update on the status of hostage release negotiations, as well as elaborating on his own long-standing ties to the Jewish community.

The National Security Council spokesman said that hostage negotiations “have been productive.”

“They’ve been moving in the right direction, and we have some basic understandings of what this could look like, the parameters of it,” even if all parties have not signed off, Kirby said.

He said that the U.S. is “closely” watching the United Nations’ investigation of UNRWA employees’ involvement in the Oct. 7 attack and that the administration supports “making appropriate changes” to the organization based on those findings.

“Now what that looks like — we’re not in a position to dictate terms to them, but we do believe this is probably a propitious moment for UNRWA to take a hard look at itself and make appropriate changes going forward,” Kirby says. “We’re going to stay focused on this.”

At the same time, Kirby emphasized that UNRWA is doing “important work” in Gaza to address the humanitarian crisis.

Kirby acknowledged the rising antisemitism and accompanying feelings of insecurity the Jewish community in the

U.S. have faced since Oct. 7, and said that both the administration and the Jewish community need to “keep the pressure on,” even after the war in the Middle East is over.

He urged Jewish community members to keep sharing their experiences with antisemitism, referencing a conversation he’d had with Jewish students who had felt unsafe on their college campuses.

“Every single person in this room has a story,” he said, “and I guarantee you that some of the stories, if not most, are pretty compelling. So I would encourage you to also make sure you’re finding a way to tell your story out there, certainly to people well beyond the Jewish community, so that people understand these are real lives that we’re talking about.”

As scrutiny from congressional Democrats of Israel’s conduct in Gaza continues to grow, Kirby said that there have “just been too many...innocent lives taken” in Gaza, adding that the “right number of civilian casualties is zero.” But, he continued, Israel has “been receptive” to U.S. advice on avoiding such casualties and is implementing it.

Kirby has emerged as a popular figure in the Jewish community and in Israel since Oct. 7 for his strong defenses of Israel and its right to wage war on Hamas from the White House briefing room lectern.

“I have great respect for the contributions of the Jewish community to this country, to the world,” Kirby said. “And I have, and always will have, an abiding deep respect for

the state of Israel... I will always feel that way, always be passionate about the importance, the rightness of the State of Israel.”

He traced his affinity back to a little league coach named — fittingly — Dick Mensch, whom he described as a “terrific” mentor.

“He was constantly checking on me, even after little league was over and I went off to high school, even college, I would hear from him from time to time,” Kirby said. “He meant a lot to our family, and through him, I began to see what the Jewish community was like.”

Kirby first visited Israel while serving in the Navy, and described the experience — as a Catholic — of visiting Jerusalem as deeply meaningful.

“The story of humanity all began there, and it’s just incredible,” he said. “So that shaped a lot of my thinking too.”

In more senior roles, he said he had the opportunity to meet with Israeli leaders and learn more about the precarious security situation Israel faces.

“When you go to Israel, you feel it, you see it, you see how important security is and why they have to take it so seriously,” he explained.

He said that seeing the images from Oct. 7 impacted him on a deeply personal level.

“I’m a grandfather, I’ve got a little six-year-old granddaughter, four-year-old grandson... and all I could think about was the moms and dads and grandparents and those children,” he explained. ♦

Squad under fire: Two anti-Israel lawmakers facing career-threatening scandals

Reps. Jamaal Bowman and Cori Bush are taking heat as they brace for tough primary fights

By Matthew Kassel

Two of the most high-profile left-wing lawmakers are facing existential political threats in their home districts — fueled by major new controversies that have further imperiled their chances for reelection.

Reps. Jamaal Bowman (D-NY) and Cori Bush (D-MO), leading members of the far-left Squad, independently came under intense scrutiny this week amid twin scandals that underscored their increased vulnerability as each braces for a tough primary fight against a well-funded challenger.

“These two folks were vulnerable before these stories came out,” said Mark Mellman, a veteran Democratic strategist who leads Democratic Majority for Israel’s super PAC. “They’re likely even more vulnerable today.”

For his part, Bowman, who is seeking a third term, drew renewed backlash on Monday over previously unreported online comments in which he promoted 9/11 conspiracy theories on a now-deleted personal blog that he maintained before his election to the House.

The ensuing uproar over his years-old writings, which Bowman has said he regrets, was just the latest setback in a cascade of problems that have plagued the increasingly embattled lawmaker, beginning last fall when he set off a House fire alarm, resulting in a misdemeanor charge as well as a GOP-led censure resolution.

More recently, Bowman, who has emerged as one of the most outspoken critics of Israel amid its war in Gaza, has taken heat for praising a controversial anti-Israel scholar who celebrated Hamas’ Oct. 7 attacks — leading a key backer, the progressive Israel advocacy group J Street, to revoke its endorsement last week, even after he apologized for his remarks.

As his troubles have mounted in recent months, Bowman has found himself on the defensive in a key primary battle against a formidable opponent, George Latimer, the Westchester County executive endorsed by AIPAC, which now sees his bid as its best shot to unseat a Squad member this election cycle. Earlier this week, Latimer announced that he had raised nearly \$1.4 million in less than a month, a significant sum in a primary campaign against a sitting lawmaker.

Bowman has yet to disclose his fundraising numbers for the final quarter of 2023, which are due today, but his campaign had been struggling financially before he drew a credible challenger, entering October with only around \$182,000 on hand, according to the most recent federal filings.

The congressman’s repeated errors have given ammunition to Latimer, who has sought to cast his opponent as a showman focused on performative stunts rather than serving his constituents. But Latimer has generally preferred to let Bowman’s gaffes speak for themselves. A spokesperson for his campaign declined to comment on Tuesday when asked to respond to Bowman’s 9/11 writings, which amplified several falsehoods about the attacks.

“Jamaal is making George’s case for him,” a senior Democratic operative in New York told *Jewish Insider* on Tuesday. “These types of statements, which seem to pop up every other day, make it abundantly clear that Jamaal isn’t just extreme on Israel. He’s extreme, period. It’s getting harder and harder for Jamaal supporters to cover their ears and pretend nothing is wrong when he keeps putting them in these uncomfortable positions.”

While Bowman’s hostile views toward Israel have alienated Jewish voters in his

current district in the northern suburbs of New York City, which could be redrawn in the coming months, the political toxicity of his newly unearthed 9/11 posts could prove just as damaging.

Despite Bowman’s apology, a Democratic leader in Westchester County, speaking anonymously to address a sensitive issue, expressed shock that the legislator had once espoused such conspiracy theories while serving as a middle school principal in the Bronx.

“It’s quite unbelievable to those of us who personally witnessed the planes that day,” the Democratic leader said. “Like me, many people in the district watched and were directly impacted by the attack on the World Trade Center and will not be comforted to hear about these since-deleted thoughts.”

Thomas von Essen, the former New York City fire commissioner who retired shortly after the World Trade Center attacks, said he was equally troubled to find that the comments had come from a future congressman. “When I first saw it I said, ‘Is this the guy who pulled the fire alarm?’” he told *JI*. “The fact that he’s obviously making such bad choices, that to me is the surprising part. You’ve got to wonder why we would elect people like this.”

“His comments were reckless, harmful and downright disrespectful,” John Feal, an advocate for 9/11 first responders, said in an interview with *JI* on Tuesday, emphasizing that he did not accept Bowman’s apology. “Congressman Bowman doesn’t regret his comments — he regrets he got caught.”

For all of Bowman’s political problems, Bush may have emerged Tuesday as the Squad member most vulnerable this year, owing to new revelations that the Justice Department is conducting a criminal probe

into alleged issues surrounding her handling of federal security funding.

Bush's campaign has drawn scrutiny for private security expenses, which have totaled more than \$750,000 since she was elected in 2020. In 2022, Bush's campaign paid \$60,000 for private security services to her future husband, Cortney Merritts, even as he did not have a private security license, which is required in St. Louis. Her campaign has also paid an unlicensed private security guard, Nathaniel Davis, who has promoted antisemitic conspiracy theories and is reportedly a close friend of Bush.

Bush confirmed she was under investigation in a statement shared on Tuesday. "I hold myself, my campaign and my position to the highest levels of integrity," she said, stressing that she was "fully cooperating" with the Justice Department as it reviews her "campaign's spending on security services."

The two-term lawmaker is facing a robust primary challenge from Wesley Bell, a prominent St. Louis County prosecutor who played a leading role in the aftermath of protests over the fatal police shooting of Michael Brown.

In a statement to JI on Tuesday, Bell described the investigation into his opponent's "potential misuse of public funds" as "a serious matter," adding that Bush "is entitled to due process."

"It is my hope that Rep. Bush will cooperate fully with the investigation and be transparent with the public in responding to the legitimate concerns they are likely to

have," Bell said. "I entered this race because I believe the people of this district deserve a representative they can trust who will show up and get results for them. I feel more strongly about that than ever."

Bell announced on Monday that he had pulled in nearly \$500,000 in the final three months of 2023, a major fundraising haul. Bush, who raised only \$120,000 between July and September last year, has not yet revealed her fourth-quarter figures.

At her campaign launch on Saturday, Bush cast herself as an "underdog" with a "calling," telling supporters, "I need money."

Bush is among two Squad members facing the prospect of outside spending from Mainstream Democrats PAC, a moderate group that has backed pro-Israel candidates in previous cycles. Dmitri Mehlhorn, a political advisor to the billionaire entrepreneur Reid Hoffman, who largely funds the PAC, has signaled in recent months that top donors are eager to fund credible challengers to Bush and Rep. Rashida Tlaib (D-MI), who has yet to draw primary competition.

The PAC has not indicated if it will officially back Bell, who has said he entered the race in part because of Bush's equivocal response to the Oct. 7 attacks, even though Mehlhorn says he has been personally raising money for Bell's campaign. "In general a Justice Department investigation is not a great campaign brand," he suggested in an email to JI on Tuesday. "If it turns out she misused official funds, that would be consistent with the critique that she has not

prioritized her constituents."

Brian Goldsmith, a Democratic consultant who often works with Mainstream Democrats and Democratic Majority for Israel, a like-minded group, said that Bush's legal troubles are likely to fuel concerns among Democratic leaders who are eager for a scandal-free election cycle as they seek to take back the House majority. Former President Trump "has raised the salience of candidates under federal investigation," he said. "Democrats aren't going to like this."

Democratic Caucus Chair Pete Aguilar (D-CA) declined to comment on the Bush investigation while speaking at a press conference on Tuesday, saying that he did not know anything about the situation beyond what had been made public.

"Representative Cori Bush has indicated that she is fully cooperating with the Department of Justice in connection with the ongoing investigation," said Christie Stephenson, a spokesperson for House House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY), who has stressed that he will continue to support Squad incumbents facing challenges this cycle. "Like any other American, she is entitled to the presumption of innocence. It is our expectation that the investigation will follow the facts, apply the law and be conducted in a professional manner." ♦

Additional reporting contributed by JI's Capitol Hill reporter Marc Rod

TikTok's top government affairs staffer in Israel quits over antisemitism on platform

Former Naftali Bennett adviser Barak Herscowitz told TikTok management they were allowing 'hostile propaganda against Israel and Jews' to proliferate on the platform

By Lahav Harkov

Barak Herscowitz, TikTok's leading government relations figure in Israel, resigned amid criticism of the Chinese-owned video app for allowing anti-Israel and antisemitic content to proliferate on its platform.

Herscowitz, a former adviser to then-Prime Minister Naftali Bennett whose title at TikTok was vertical lead in the government and public sector, was behind an internal memo highlighting the platform's discrimination against Israelis last year, according to a source at TikTok.

"I resigned from TikTok," he wrote, announcing his resignation via X (formerly Twitter) on Monday. "We are living in a time in which our existence as Jews and Israelis is under attack and in danger."

"In such an unstable era, people's priorities become sharper. Am Yisrael Chai," he added, with an Israeli flag and flexing muscle emojis.

Asked on X if he could have stayed to try to influence TikTok from the inside, Herscowitz responded: "I did my best as long as I was there. There are wonderful people at TikTok Israel who are doing their best."

Herscowitz declined to comment further to *Jewish Insider* at this time.

A TikTok source said that Herscowitz was the senior employee in Israel who wrote a memo to higher management highlighting discrimination against Israeli hostages. TikTok declined to allow the families of the

hostages to advertise on the platform, calling their videos "too political," while allowing pro-Palestinian groups to advertise.

"Labeling kidnapped babies, women, children, and elderly citizens who were taken from their beds by Hamas-ISIS as a 'political issue' is, at the very least, one-sided," Herscowitz wrote. "This way, American users are BOMBARDED with paid ads that present the misery of children in Gaza (not mentioning, of course, the massive humanitarian aid entering Gaza and stolen by Hamas as indicated by the U.N.), some with a high budget (according to our own company's top ads creative center) while ads that show the humanitarian tragedy of Israeli hostages cannot be presented to these audiences."

In addition, Herscowitz wrote at the time that the company has a biased approach to violent content and anti-Israel incitement that violates the company's community guidelines. He highlighted content moderators in TikTok's Trust and Safety Unit who expressed "support for terrorism or endorsed extremist movements...[which] very likely influences the amount of hostile propaganda against Israel and Jews and harmful misinformation on our platform, both in the USA and Europe."

Michael Eisenberg, general partner at the venture capital fund Aleph, wrote that "my man Barak resigned from TikTok because his conscience could not let him work there anymore...TikTok is an existential risk to

Israel and the USA."

Eisenberg also called on workers on TikTok to "follow Barak's lead and resign."

Research by Generation Lab indicates that people who use TikTok for 30 minutes or more are 17% more likely to have antisemitic or anti-Israel views. In addition, 11 pro-Palestinian hashtags were viewed more – in some cases, several times more – than the top pro-Israel hashtag, #standwithisrael.

The Network Contagion Research Institute found that hashtags that go against the Chinese Communist Party's positions, such as those supporting Israel since Oct. 7, are viewed far less than they are on other platforms, indicating "a strong possibility that content on TikTok is either amplified or suppressed based on its alignment with the interests of the Chinese Government."

Jewish employees showed JI screenshots indicating that TikTok is allowing hatred of Jews and anti-Israel disinformation violating the platform's guidelines to remain, and that moderators even celebrated and shared violent pro-Palestinian content.

TikTok told JI earlier this month that its "community guidelines apply equally to all content on TikTok and we invest heavily in training our moderators to apply our policies consistently...We regularly report on our actions to counter hate, and of the content we removed for hate speech and hateful behavior, nine times out of ten we remove it before it's reported." ♦

The horseshoe theory of politics: Isolationist and anti-war lawmakers urge restraint against Iran

Bipartisan coalition emerging against the foreign policy mainstream

By Marc Rod

As the Biden administration mulls plans to retaliate for the Iranian proxy strike that killed three U.S. service members in Jordan on Sunday, a coalition of right-wing isolationists and anti-war progressives is emerging to oppose sweeping U.S. retaliation.

It's a reminder that on foreign policy, the typical ideological divisions aren't neatly split along partisan lines. President Joe Biden's stalwart pro-Israel backing is creating defections among his party's left wing, while the GOP's traditional support for a muscular foreign policy is facing attacks from a growing cadre of neo-isolationists, who favor a restrained American role in the world.

While more hawkish Senate Republicans have been calling for a U.S. strike on Iran, Republicans on the isolationist right are emerging as vocal opponents of an aggressive response.

"Do we really trust the Biden administration to possibly launch a war with Iran at the same time where we have no idea how many terrorists are on United States soil?" Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA) told reporters on Monday. "I think that cool heads need to prevail and wise decisions need to be made."

She separately called the supporters of strikes on Iran "absolutely psychotic."

Greene and others also argue that a strike on Iran would be illegal without congressional authorization.

"If we're going to war, Congress must declare it," Sen. Mike Lee (R-UT) said in response to his colleagues calling for a strike on Iran.

Across the aisle, progressives are joining the calls for restraint.

"We can't allow the deaths of U.S. service members to go unanswered – but we also can't give in to the war hawks who look for any reason to go to war with Iran," Rep. Sara Jacobs (D-CA) said in a statement. "Direct confrontation with Iran will certainly lead to the deaths of more U.S. service members and could easily expand into a regional conflict."

She said the administration should "proceed thoughtfully and carefully with a strategic, proportional response that avoids unnecessary escalation." And she urged the administration to seek a permanent cease-fire between Israel and Hamas, which would "end the war that's emboldening Iran."

Other progressives similarly argue that a cease-fire in Gaza would halt the Iranian proxy strikes throughout the region. It's not clear that's the case, given that Iran's proxies attacked U.S. forces dozens of times prior to Oct. 7.

A similar "horseshoe" dynamic has emerged around the Biden administration's strikes on the Houthis in Yemen.

Progressive Reps. Ro Khanna (R-CA), Pramila Jayapal (D-WA) and Val Hoyle (D-OR) joined with conservative Republican Reps. Andy Biggs (R-AZ) and Warren Davidson (R-OH) last week to lead a letter arguing that the administration lacks the authority to carry out its ongoing strikes against the Houthis in Yemen without explicit congressional authorization.

Meanwhile, many more hawkish lawmakers in the House — both Democrats and Republicans — have urged a forceful response to the attack, but most have stopped short of openly calling on the U.S. to strike Iran.

Rep. Greg Landsman (D-OH), who said Monday that "the world must put an end to Iran's chaos & terror" did not say if striking

Iran is the path to doing so, focusing on the need for a united front with international partners.

"Iran responds to strength. And the president knows that. The international community knows that, Arab League nations know that," Landsman told *Jewish Insider*. "That's what everyone is going to have to do in the coming days and weeks is to show that kind of strength, so this chaos and terrorism that they have pursued and funded."

Landsman added that he believes "the administration is taking this seriously."

Rep. Brad Sherman (D-CA) told *JI* that he doesn't have all the information necessary to make a firm determination on how the U.S. should respond, but said his "gut reaction is that we should take action against Iran." He added that there are both lethal and non-lethal actions for doing so, including intercepting Iran's international shipping operations.

Such a move would "let Iran know that its use of international commerce is put at risk by their arming of the Houthis and that, furthermore, we are taking this seriously because they've killed three of our servicemen," Sherman said.

"Obviously this is an Iranian influenced, financed, supported organization," Sherman added, "so I would need to get the classified briefing before I could make a determination" on striking Iran and Iran's direct involvement in the attack in Jordan.

Rep. Brad Schneider (D-IL) said that the U.S. needs to "send a clear and strong message, at the time of our choosing, in the place of our choosing."

"We've got to be thoughtful and strategic about it, but Iran has to understand that they cannot attack the U.S. or U.S. interests,

and we are going to defend them,” Schneider said. He said he’d “leave it up to the military planners” to decide where those strikes should take place.

Other Republicans in the House have also sounded reticent to join their Senate counterparts in calling for strikes on Iran.

House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA) said on Sunday that the U.S. “must send a

crystal clear message across the globe that attacks on our troops will not be tolerated,” without specifically endorsing a strike on Iran, a view that other Republicans echoed on Monday evening.

Rep. Byron Donalds (R-FL) told reporters there “has to be a very strong and definitive response from the United States government” that will make it “incredibly

uncomfortable for the Iranians to conduct operations through their proxy fighter groups.”

But he declined to say if the U.S. should strike Iran, explaining that he hadn’t seen the intelligence necessary to make such a determination. ♦

FEBRUARY 1, 2024

Transferring kids to nearby districts, parents decry systemic antisemitism in Oakland

At least 30 Jewish families are moving their children to neighboring schools as the Department of Education opens a probe into alleged discrimination

By Haley Cohen

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

Shira and her husband settled in Oakland, Calif. a few years ago, expecting the San Francisco Bay Area would, unlike their previous home in Florida, would provide an inclusive educational atmosphere in which to raise their son. Instead, Oakland’s K-12 school district has become a center of anti-Israel sentiment, and is now the target of a Title VI investigation by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights.

“We left Florida because I could see the tide turning there, I could see what was happening in the school boards there in trying to erase historical narratives, and I didn’t want my son to grow up around that,” Shira, who requested her last name be withheld to discuss a sensitive matter, told *Jewish Insider*.

The family decamped to Oakland

“because of its inclusivity. It does not rewrite history.” Then Oct. 7 happened.

Shira’s idealistic view of the city first changed in early fall when her son entered seventh grade in the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD). Now, Shira and her husband are among at least 30 Jewish families transferring their children out of OUSD in the wake of the DOE investigation into Oakland and San Francisco’s school districts about whether an unauthorized teach-in for Gaza by educators last month amounted to discrimination against students on the basis of their shared Jewish ancestry.

Since Hamas attacked Israel on Oct. 7, antisemitism has increased dramatically in the Bay Area, with 61% of local Jewish residents now reporting they feel less safe in their day-to-day lives. But Shira said the situation was fraught even before the attacks.

“When registering my son there is an ethnicity survey and nowhere to put Jewish

or Israel as country of origin. But there is Palestine,” Shira, who is Israeli, recalled.

When Shira attended back-to-school night, she noticed her son’s English teacher hung “from the river to the sea Palestine will be free” posters around the classroom. Soon after, he came home with assignments that Shira calls “political in nature and made him uncomfortable.”

One such assignment, according to Shira, involved “looking at pictures of a pro-Palestinian and anti-Israel rally where people were carrying pictures that said, ‘Stop the genocide.’ They were given multiple choice options as to what would be a good vocabulary word to describe the photos. Options included ‘bravery.’ My son chose the word ‘incite’ because he felt it incited violence or hate towards Israel and Jewish people. He failed that assignment.”

“I asked the teacher about it and he ignored me. His reaction was to add more posters. I started communicating with the

administration about getting the posters taken down. The teacher was spoken to, but it was handled pretty loosely,” Shira said. (The teacher has been placed on administrative leave pending an investigation).

“The administration decided it was best for my son to not go to that English class anymore, but there was no other English class for him to go to so he ended up sitting in the office for over a month,” she continued.

In the wake of Oct. 7, “the problems magnified,” she said, pointing to an unauthorized teach-in at Oakland public schools on Dec. 6, which featured dozens of teachers incorporating the conflict in Gaza into their curricula.

The school board condemned the teach-in, with OUSD Superintendent Dr. Kyla Johnson-Trammell writing in a letter to the community on Dec. 4, “I want to make clear that the District does not authorize this action... From our initial communication on October 11 to subsequent messages, we have remained unwavering in our stance against antisemitic, anti-Israeli, Islamophobic, or anti-Palestinian prejudice or discrimination within our District. We are aware of some recent incidents that may have cast doubt on the District’s commitment to this fundamental expectation, and I want to be clear – we are taking immediate and decisive action within our authority to address these issues.”

Johnson-Trammell did not immediately respond to eJP’s request for comment about the flood of Jewish families leaving the district.

The representative council of the Oakland Education Association (OEA), the local teachers’ union, meanwhile, endorsed the teach-in.

In since-deleted Instagram posts, which eJP obtained screenshots of, the OEA wrote that it expresses “unequivocal support for Palestinian liberation and self-determination and “we condemn the genocidal and apartheid state of Israel.”

The council also voted, in November, to call for a cease-fire. In December, OUSD

canceled a planned school board meeting, where the body would have considered a cease-fire resolution, at the last minute, apparently out of safety concerns.

California is one of 18 states to mandate some form of ethnic studies education in public schools, and the process of establishing a curriculum, which began long before Oct. 7, has been mired in controversy, according to Jewish leaders.

When the state was first considering making a semester of ethnic studies a mandatory graduation requirement, the original draft curriculum faced strong pushback from California’s Jewish community for its hostility toward Israel and support of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement. It also did not include education about antisemitism. A coalition of Jewish activists then worked with legislators to draft a model curriculum that was more inclusive, and which was signed into law by Gov. Gavin Newsom, a Democrat.

Tyler Gregory, CEO of the Jewish Community Relations Council Bay Area, told eJP that “the hatred we have witnessed in Oakland — notably perpetuated by public school administrators and educators — is unprecedented.”

“As Jews across the region were reeling from the horrors of Oct. 7, they looked to their neighbors for support,” Gregory continued. “Instead of being met with empathy and compassion, they faced a flood of intolerance, discrimination and hostility that continues today. Over the past four months, there have been few safe non-Jewish spaces in Oakland for our community. Unfortunately, this includes OUSD public school classrooms for even the youngest students.”

Gregory called on Oakland’s teachers’ union and school board members “to show the country it is taking its antisemitism problem seriously and is making the changes to ensure our shared spaces — especially our schools — are safe for everyone.”

Shira, who plans to apply in the spring for a school district transfer to enroll her son

in the neighboring Piedmont Unified School District, citing safety concerns, said she is “baffled, disappointed and in shock about what’s happening now here.”

Having heard about the experiences of other families in her Oakland community, Elaine, who requested to be identified only by her middle name, said she was gripped by fear about the situation in the schools. Although her 10-year-old son had not personally dealt with antisemitism in his OUSD school, Elaine, an Oakland resident for more than two decades, said she didn’t see any reason to stick around and wait. She made the decision ahead of winter break to transfer her son to an elementary school in Piedmont.

Elaine said the final straw for her was the union’s consideration of a cease-fire resolution. “We had awareness that there was sentiment among teachers at his school that not only was that OK but also that it was representative of their views, and so from that point on my health took a downfall, my blood pressure was through the roof.”

She said that her family “has suffered blowback,” including comments from neighbors, because of their decision to pull out of OUSD.

Shira’s decision to leave the district has been more complicated. At her son’s request she and her husband will allow him to finish the school year at OUSD. “Middle school is hard enough, he has a great group of friends and doesn’t want to leave but also doesn’t want to stay in a school where they are going to teach students to hate him.”

She continued, “I live in Oakland, this is where I pay my taxes, I should be able to send my son to public school here. We’re supposed to be a very diverse community and it seems those protections are not offered to Jewish people.” ♦

Jewish Insider’s senior national correspondent Gabby Deutch contributed reporting.

ICJ ruling is a 'headache' for Israel, but impact on Gaza war is likely small

While Jerusalem rails against the decision from The Hague and pro-Israel voices on the Hill view it as a minor victory, analysts say Israel will fight the war in mostly the same way

By Lahav Harkov, Marc Rod

The International Court of Justice's orders that Israel report back on its efforts to prevent genocide and take great efforts to minimize civilian harm are unlikely to change much in the way Israel continues the war in Gaza, experts told *Jewish Insider* following Friday's decision.

The Israeli government railed against the decision as libelous against its right to defend itself against terrorism. And in the United States, pro-Israel lawmakers generally concluded that, despite their disagreements with the ruling and the credibility of the court, South Africa failed in its goal of tagging Israel with a genocide charge.

The court was responding to South Africa's petition for the issuance of a provisional measure ordering an immediate cease-fire, as part of Pretoria's broader case against Israel, which it accused of perpetrating genocide in Gaza.

While the court said it was not ruling on the merits of South Africa's genocide claim, 15 of 17 of the judges said there was "plausibility" to them and called on Israel to "take all measures within its power" to prevent genocide, including avoiding killing or wounding Gazans, and required Israel to report back on its efforts in a month.

Israeli judge Aharon Barak joined the justices ruling in its order that Israel punish those who incite genocide against the Palestinians and take further steps to increase humanitarian aid to Gazans. The court also called on Hamas to release the remaining hostages in Gaza. The only judge to rule in Israel's favor on all counts was Justice Julia Sebutinde of Uganda, a position Kampala has distanced itself from.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Friday that the court's decision came in response to a "vile" attempt to deny Israel the right to defend itself, and that the "charge of genocide leveled against Israel is not only false, it's outrageous."

"Our war is against Hamas terrorists, not against Palestinian civilians," Netanyahu added. "We will continue to facilitate humanitarian assistance and to do our utmost to keep civilians out of harm's way, even as Hamas uses civilians as human shields. We will continue to do what is necessary to defend our country and defend our people."

Defense Minister Yoav Gallant accused the court of going "above and beyond when it granted South Africa's antisemitic request to discuss the claim of genocide in Gaza, and now refuses to reject the petition outright."

"Those who seek justice will not find it on the leather chairs of the court chambers in The Hague," he said.

The provisional measure will have minimal impact on how the war is fought, Ambassador Alan Baker of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, the former legal adviser to Israel's Foreign Ministry and ambassador to Canada, said because "Israel is fighting the war with what it considers to be strict observance of international humanitarian law and the laws of armed conflict. It has solid evidence and proof behind this."

The former ambassador, who served as a lawyer in the IDF, noted that there is a legal adviser embedded in every division of the IDF who tells commanders whether their targets are legitimate under the rules of engagement.

Shuki Friedman, vice president of the Jewish People Policy Institute and a law lecturer at the Peres Academic Center, said that "when it comes to our actions in Gaza, Israel always says — and it's true — that Israel acts according to the law."

However, Friedman said that Israel should take greater action against incitement.

"If I were the attorney general and there was a clear statement from someone who is not a [lawmaker] and doesn't have immunity, I would investigate. It's the right thing to do, legally and internationally. It's the law and there's no reason not to enforce it," he said.

Friedman said reporting to the ICJ is mostly "a headache," that will require Israel to emphasize and highlight its adherence to the law and to continue to be cautious.

"There's nothing new here, quite frankly," Baker said of the court's ruling. "I didn't fall off my chair."

However, Raphael Bitton, an expert on international law at the Misgav Institute for Zionist Strategy and National Security who is reported to be one of Justice Minister Yariv Levin's candidates for the Supreme Court, said that "contrary to the apparent satisfaction in Israel, the court's decision is bad for human justice, bad for human history and bad for Israel."

Bitton argued that the demand for a report in a month was the most detrimental part of the ruling.

"Over time, South Africa can make claims and new requests and say the situation got worse or that Israel's reports were wrong," he wrote soon after the ruling. "The potential created with this system of

constant reporting and discussion is that the court took on the war to be under its supervision...[which inflicts] mortal harm to the Israeli interest. Such supervision can exhaust Israel with hearings.

"Just knowing this will restrain the way Israel manages the war and will take away the security cabinet and the IDF's freedom of action," Bitton argued.

Friedman said the decision is "the least worst option" and that Israel was right to be concerned that there would be an injunction against continuing the war.

"Having said that, the decision still is not easy or pleasant for Israel. There is talk about actions by Israel that they imply are borderline genocide and the call for action, to report back and act against incitement, is a yellow card for Israel," Friedman said, referring to a referee's warning in soccer.

Regardless of the actual impact on the war, the ruling is damaging, Baker said, because there is so much attention called to the litigation of whether Israel is committing genocide.

"Israel is fighting a very important, essential fight against an organization intent on basically destroying Israel," Baker said. "Anyone who reads the Hamas and PLO charters will see that... If anything is genocidal, then that is."

The case is part of continuing "lawfare" by Israel's enemies, Friedman said, that comes together with cases against Israel at the International Criminal Court and cases against Israeli officials in countries with universal jurisdiction.

Friedman and Baker both said that Iran was behind South Africa's case at the ICJ.

Baker pointed to speculation in South Africa that Iran may have paid for Pretoria to file the case at The Hague and even paid off the ruling party African National Congress' debt of over 100 million rand (\$5.3 million), which was recently settled but whose source of funding remains unreported.

Looking to the future, Baker said it could take two to three years for the ICJ to make a final determination as to whether Israel committed genocide in Gaza.

That 14 of the 15 permanent judges at the ICJ ruled in agreement "does not bode well for the further investigation of this far-fetched and unjust claim," Bitton said.

Bitton argued that Israel "unloaded

its main weapon...of delegitimization" by taking part in the proceedings and appointing Barak to the court.

"There is no legitimacy for such a biased decision formulated with such a one-dimensional view," Bitton wrote, but the fact that Barak was on the court and even voted with the majority on two points "gives legitimacy to this document, which has no basis in facts or justice."

Bitton called on Israel to refuse to report to the court and not end its cooperation with it.

"The longer [Israel] delays saying this, the more it will deepen the legitimacy of the procedure and it will turn into a path from which there is no return," he said.

Friedman, however, said that Israel does not have reasonable grounds to withdraw from the proceedings. Israel's argument against the International Criminal Court is that it is not a party to the Rome Statute and therefore the ICC has no jurisdiction, but Israel was one of the first to sign the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

He also argued that "the decision to appear [before the ICJ] was a form of risk management. If Barak wasn't there, it would have been worse."

Israel's appointment to the court of Barak, whom Friedman referred to as a "genius," had a positive influence on the decision, he argued: "He seems to have negotiated and convinced [the other judges] not to make a harsher decision."

In his ruling on the matter, Barak wrote of his experience surviving the Holocaust after the Nazis invaded Lithuania when he was 5 years old. Arguing against the genocide accusation, Barak defined it in part as "calculated destruction, and human behavior at its worst...This is the most serious accusation possible, and it is woven into the experience of my personal life."

Baker explained that the 15 permanent judges of the court represent geographic areas of the world, and that many of them do not come from democratic countries.

"Half or more of the judges receive instructions from their governments and don't act purely according to the principles of justice," Baker said in a briefing for reporters on Friday.

Friedman similarly said that the court is

"half political."

Baker also noted that "none of the judges are experts in the laws of armed conflict," and therefore "they didn't really go into the issues of armed conflict."

Bitton said that, in its ruling, the court "assumed that there is the possibility of the crime of genocide being committed in Gaza. Otherwise, an urgent order to prevent this possibility would not have been necessary."

In addition, Bitton called the decision "terribly one-sided," featuring "a description that does not truly express the horrors that Israel experienced or the existential risks that it is fighting off."

Friedman and Baker both used the phrase "lip service" to describe the court's brief mention of Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on Israel, killing 1,200 and taking nearly 250 hostages.

Baker said that "the whole presentation by the president of the court [American Judge Joan E. Donoghue] was based on U.N. documentation, which is highly biased against Israel, using data and information provided by Hamas. They hardly mentioned any of the materials that Israel presented to them."

"Nobody would expect anything else from a U.N. body, especially a panel of judges where two-thirds [of their countries] maintain positions hostile to Israel," he said.

According to Friedman, the court "looks at proportionality in international law as the parameter... It's true that Hamas did terrible things, but in the eyes of the world, we still killed over 25,000 Gazans...emphasizing the severity with which they saw Israel's actions."

The White House addressed the court's decision hours after it was issued, with the National Security Council's John Kirby telling reporters on Friday that the ruling was "consistent" with "much of the approach that we've taken with Israel."

U.S. lawmakers also weighed in on the International Court of Justice's decision, generally denouncing the case as a whole, even as the court's decision disappointed many anti-Israel forces. Some framed the fact that the court did not order Israel to stop the war as a victory for Israel.

Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ) told JI that the case was "both false and dangerous," adding that the U.S. and its allies "must continue to

uphold Israel's right to exist against those who demand the absolute destruction of the Jewish state and encourage our allies to support Israel against these ongoing attempts to delegitimize and demonize our great ally."

Rep. Brad Sherman (D-CA) said that South Africa's claim was "absurd."

"Genocide accusations against Israel are a vile perversion of the memory of real genocides."

Rep. Kathy Manning (D-NC), who co-led a letter on the subject last week with Smith, told JI the ICJ "should have dismissed South Africa's groundless case."

"Today's ruling does little to change the facts: Israel is a democracy which has the right to defend itself and takes important steps to protect civilians, unlike the terrorist

group Hamas," she continued. "I will continue to stand strong against efforts to unfairly single out Israel."

House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Michael McCaul (R-TX) blasted the court for not striking down all of South Africa's claims, which he called "meritless." He called on Pretoria to withdraw its complaint "and focus on upholding democratic values."

He suggested that South Africa's case is "politically motivated" by its ties with Hamas, Iran, Russia and China. Shortly after the Oct. 7 terror attacks, South Africa's foreign minister traveled to Tehran for meetings with top Iranian officials, including President Ebrahim Raisi.

Critics of Israel on the Hill have been mostly mum in the wake of the international

tribunal's decision. Reps. Rashida Tlaib (D-MI) and Cori Bush (D-MO) sought to frame the ruling as a vindication of their positions, arguing that the court "recognizes the risk that the Israeli government could be committing genocide and believes immediate action is necessary" and that the court had "signaled an end to impunity for the Israeli government."

Although the international court did not call for a cease-fire, Tlaib and Bush claimed that a cease-fire and the release of hostages "and those arbitrarily detained" is "the only way to implement the Court's orders." They also claimed that the U.S. must suspend aid to Israel to comply with federal and international law. ♦

Catching up with Ashish Koshy, the M42 executive leading the UAE's push for personalized medicine

The Group COO reflects on the merger between Mubadala Health and G42 Healthcare and what he is eyeing for acquisitions and talent

By Kelsey Warner

The article first appeared in The Circuit.

M42 Health is overseeing the Emirati Genome Program, which has mapped the genetic code of more than 500,000 people in the UAE, representing one of the largest initiatives of its kind in the world.

Abu Dhabi Department of Health Chairman Mansoor Ibrahim Al Mansoori has called the project “a contribution to Arabs and to the world,” a key to improving health outcomes, tailoring personalized medicine and preventing disease. To date, only 1% of the world's genomes that have been mapped are of Arab descent. The resulting reference genome in the M42 project is aimed at more personalized and preventive healthcare for the UAE's citizens and a greater understanding of rare genetic disorders and new treatments.

The national program is shaping practically everything at healthtech behemoth M42 Health, created less than two years ago when Abu Dhabi's Mubadala Health and G42 Healthcare merged, bringing labs, technology, hospitals and clinics under one brand.

Similar efforts are underway in Saudi Arabia and Qatar to map the local population's genetic code. But Mansoori says the UAE is ahead.

This week, M42 announced a new research partnership with Microsoft, Harvard University and MIT. The collaboration, announced in Dubai during the Arab Health conference, will give research teams access to M42 data in a secure environment, its developers say, to advance

clinical research and drug discovery.

To talk about the business and how M42 is building on these partnerships, *The Circuit* caught up with Group Chief Operating Officer Ashish Koshy on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos, Switzerland, earlier this month. This interview has been edited for brevity and clarity.

The Circuit: More than a year after the merger of Mubadala Health and G42 Healthcare, you are out and about. Here at Davos, you have had a large presence and later this month at Arab Health. What is on your agenda and what are you hoping to get by being, pardon the phrase, on the circuit?

Ashish Koshy: The year 2023 has been a significant year for integration. M42 was created with the merger between Mubadala Health and G42 Healthcare. G42 Healthcare brings the digital tech and genomics, and Mubadala Health having the state of the art facilities.

It's been a wonderful year of integration and yet we were able to launch some cutting-edge initiatives. One is Med42 which was launched in October as the world's first open access, clinical large language model to pass the U.S. Medical Licensing Exam. To date, to my knowledge – and in spite of AI changing by the minute – there's nothing yet that has crossed that benchmark, which showcases the power and the mandate that was created with this merger.

Second, one of the largest products we launched is the pharmacogenomics initiative. You've heard of the Emirati Genome Program: a large population-scale genetic sequencing program. The question

is, okay, what's next? We are now returning to patients [that shared their DNA sample], and telling them what pharmaceutical drugs work for them based on their genetic makeup. This is a national initiative. We want to work with partners here in the AI space specifically on strengthening our roadmap. We're saying we're here and we're open for business.

TC: The last time I talked to you, when you were CEO of G42 Healthcare, you were Mr. Personalized Medicine. But your portfolio has changed with the Mubadala Health merger. Can you dig into what your remit is now?

AK: Personalized medicine is still on the agenda! It's on the agenda. M42 is one of the largest integrated healthtech companies in the world. We have 450 facilities, business operations in 26 different countries and an employee size of 20,000. What has changed since the last time we spoke is our portfolio has the Omics Center of Excellence, which is running DNA sequencing at scale. We have IROS which is running clinical trials. We have an environmental science business, which is running programs specifically testing wastewater samples and proactively understanding risks to the environment.

TC: That was an interesting COVID learning...

AK: Absolutely. And it's still working and right now it's supporting multiple initiatives in public health. We have a digital health pillar, one of the key products is called Malaffi which is the health information exchange. So we've created a platform, and irrespective of which hospital you are in, the data is centralized [in the UAE]. So that's the

G42 Health universe.

On the Mubadala Health side, you have Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi, Imperial College, we have HealthPlus, we've got IVF facilities and a recent acquisition called Diaverum, which is the third-largest dialysis network in the world. It's currently running large dialysis programs, including in Saudi Arabia. In a nutshell, our portfolio includes state-of-the-art facilities to digital health.

TC: Speaking of that deal, M42 bought Diaverum in April 2023, it reportedly valued this Swedish company at \$2.5 billion. Are you looking at further acquisitions? Are you looking for technology vendors? The word 'partner' is thrown around a lot. Can you drill down what partnerships mean in an M42 context?

AK: Our mandate set by the board and our shareholders is to bring in tech-enabled solutions that will improve patient outcomes, go on that journey for personalized medicine and also ensure we improve the operational workflow and improve margins within the business. Now, if there are tech solutions, if there are companies or partners that are ahead of the curve currently and we can plug and play into the ecosystem that I just described, 100% it's part of the mandate. There's no one-size-fits-all all in terms of the acquisition approach, but if it fits into our synergistic goals, and also long-term vision, then yes.

TC: Do you have geographies that you're interested in or particular technologies?

AK: I think we are agnostic on geographies. I think it's based on what the partner or the company provides, even if it's healthcare in a different part of the continent or world but fits into the metrics that we just described, it's definitely open for discussion.

TC: I'm curious about the futuristic vision the UAE has for healthcare, particularly for its citizens. It wants to map the genome of every Emirati citizen, and one day invite expat residents, of which we are many, to participate and for personalized medicine to be the norm.

AK: You can participate! Just don't expect the government to fund it for now. You can walk into a facility and say hey, here is my signature on the consent form, I want to be part of this initiative. And you can get that done.

TC: How much will it cost?

AK: I think roughly around I need to double-check on that but roughly 1000 dirhams, ballpark figure. Don't quote me on that.

TC: From the resulting genomic profile you get, how does M42 plug that into the UAE's broader healthcare goals?

AK: I think the UAE is well in advance of other countries across the globe in building this national initiative. Be it a Malaffi initiative, which is a national centralized platform, connecting all the hospitals together. Some countries or governments say, Why do we do it? But the UAE had that before COVID and see how Abu Dhabi managed COVID. We launched this genomics initiative pre-COVID. And that's when, eventually when COVID came you wanted sequencing partners to run large-scale COVID variant sequencing. So absolutely I think in terms of future vision, the foundation has already been laid by the UAE. I'm talking even beyond M42. Be it on the data infrastructure, be it on sequencing, be it on biobanking. I think it's open for business for life science companies to come and invest into Brand Abu Dhabi and

partner with companies like M42.

TC: These are highly technical areas that require a lot of skill, a lot of graduate degrees in one room. How are you hiring? What jobs are open?

AK: Our doors are always open for the right talent. And the fact that M42 offers everything even beyond a physician or a nurse portfolio all the way to cloud ops. So the range of opportunities that M42 offers is a lot and we're constantly on the lookout for global talent. From the top of my head, specifically on AI, we were doing a lot on initiatives around Med42 and building an AI system. We've got an active collaboration with Microsoft which is a strong strategic partner for us. We've got active hiring specifically on the environmental science business, because there's a huge thing now post-COP28, a huge focus on climate change. These are three main pillars, but in hospital operations, always we are looking for talent.

TC: You're an expat. You decided to make the move to Abu Dhabi. The question always is, do you plan to stay?

AK: I came here in 2016, 2017, on a six-month stint, like the typical consultant, and never left. I was talking to some of my colleagues here. The UAE offers a wonderful ecosystem compared to some of the other countries around the neighborhood. It's inclusive, it's tolerant. It offers business opportunities. So yeah, I don't want to leave at all and now the fact that we are bringing and rewarding talent with Golden Visas, we see a huge influx of people that want to come in, which makes our job easier to hire the right talent. The UAE is home for me and I don't intend to leave. ♦

Live2Tell: New Holocaust remembrance project gives voice to survivors

Photographer Gillian Laub projected the portraits of survivors, along with a message from them, on New York City landmarks

By Haley Cohen

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

When Rabbi Aliza Erber is asked what her first language is, her response is “mute.” Erber’s statement invokes her harrowing history — as a baby she had her mouth taped shut while hiding from the Nazis in a forest in the Netherlands.

But Erber, 80, had a voice on International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

A portrait of the rabbinic pastor and retired podiatrist’s face was projected onto the base of the Brooklyn Bridge on Saturday night, along with her words, “It was not okay then, it’s not okay now.”

The image of Erber was part of the launch of Live2Tell, a project started as a result of the rise in antisemitism in the U.S. and globally in the wake of the Oct. 7 terrorist attack in Israel.

Through photography, video and first-person interviews by New York-based photographer Gillian Laub and her team, Live2Tell documented the testimony of the last living Holocaust survivors and projected them onto more than 25 New

York City public landmarks including the Williamsburg Bridge, Whitney Museum, West Side Highway and Midtown Ferry Terminal.

Another projected image read: “‘Every person saved is a whole world,’ said Faye Holand, 83, Holocaust Survivor.”

The initiative, funded through Reboot and Laub’s network, was a one-night-only project as it did not receive permits from the city.

Laub is an acclaimed photojournalist whose first book, “*Testimony*,” explored the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through portraits of its victims. Her subsequent major project, “Southern Rites,” centered on racism in a Georgia town and became an HBO documentary.

The 48-year-old told *eJewishPhilanthropy* on Sunday that the idea to photograph Holocaust survivors, and display their pictures in such a striking way, was a response to increasing antisemitism. “I just felt like this was urgent,” she said, pointing to a recent poll that found 20% of 18-29-year-olds believe the Holocaust is a myth.

Initially approached by the Auschwitz

Jewish Center Foundation in the fall, Laub was asked to photograph a group of survivors.

Laub recalled being so moved by the stories she heard throughout the three months of shooting the portraits that she expanded the archive and launched Live2Tell, which is expected to move to Israel later this year.

As Holocaust survivors age, the project could be one of the last of its kind.

A report from the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany (more commonly known as the Claims Conference), released last week, found that 20% of the Holocaust survivors still alive are over 90. Their median age is 86, the youngest being 77 and the oldest being 112.

“I want to continue to photograph more because I think their stories are so important right now to record and to share,” Laub said, adding that while International Holocaust Remembrance Day was picked as the day to make the project public, “it’s really just the beginning for me.” ♦