

## THE WEEKLY PRINT

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MARCH 13, 2024

## Is Politico rebelling against Axel Springer's Israel policy?

*From publishing a virulently anti-Israel cartoon to relying on anti-Israel analysts, the news outlet has challenged its parent company's founding values*

By Matthew Kassel

The ongoing Israel-Hamas war is casting a spotlight on latent editorial tensions between *Politico* and its parent company, the German publishing giant Axel Springer, whose unique mission statement has long promoted unwavering support for the Jewish state.

In recent months, however, the tenor of *Politico*'s coverage has tacitly challenged that commitment, a review of stories published over the course of the war indicates.

The popular D.C. news and politics outlet has turned a distinctly critical eye on Israel as the conflict has unfolded, frequently giving special prominence to detractors of Israel over pro-Israel voices or even neutral foreign policy experts, for instance, while publishing columns suggesting Israel is

a human rights violator, among other contested claims.

Considered in aggregate, the emphasis on such framing underscores how *Politico* has increasingly clashed with one of its owner's most venerated principles, espousing unequivocal support for "the Jewish people and the right of existence of the State of Israel."

The most recent example of a disconnect between Berlin and the Beltway emerged in the form of a political cartoon by a longtime *Politico* cartoonist that drew backlash on Tuesday for suggesting that Jews are using "centuries of pogroms, antisemitism and the Holocaust" as an excuse for Israel's war in Gaza.

In an email statement to *Jewish Insider*,

Brad Dayspring, *Politico*'s executive vice president of global communications and brand, defended the political cartoon, which illustrated its point with a "Free Pass" card punched with holes, as "the opinion of the author." He stressed that "picking a single piece of opinion-based content" does not "provide an accurate assessment of the coverage in totality."

**"Editorial independence at Axel Springer and Politico is our first priority," said a spokesperson for Axel Springer "Independent, fair, critical journalism is not at odds with our essentials, which simply affirm the right of Israel to exist."**

Speaking more broadly, Dayspring insisted that *Politico*'s coverage of Israel and the politics around the war has not been in tension with the values held by its owner, known internally as the "essentials," which all employees are expected to uphold.

"Editorial independence is sacrosanct at *Politico* and at Axel Springer," Dayspring said. "We expect our journalists to cover the war in Gaza fairly, independently and without compromise. Reporting on the actions taken by the Israeli government — including critical reporting — is certainly not at odds with Axel Springer's essentials, which, among other principles, simply affirms the right of Israel to exist."

A spokesperson for Axel Springer echoed that view in a statement to JI. "Editorial independence at Axel Springer and *Politico* is our first priority," the spokesperson, who did not comment on the political cartoon, said on Tuesday. "Independent, fair, critical journalism is not at odds with our essentials, which simply affirm the right of Israel to exist."

Still, in routinely highlighting foreign policy voices that are critical of Israel, *Politico*'s editorial choices do not appear to have sought a balance that reflects the principles of its parent company.

Behind the scenes, the European conglomerate, which also owns *Business Insider*, has shown an acute sensitivity to how coverage from its U.S. properties aligns with the essentials. In January, according to *Semafor*, some company leaders privately voiced concerns that reporting on alleged plagiarism by Neri Oxman, an Israeli-born designer and former professor married to the billionaire hedge fund manager Bill Ackman, "could be construed as antisemitic and anti-Zionist."

Following a review completed in mid-January, Axel Springer announced it was satisfied with the stories and said it would "stand by *Business Insider* and its newsroom."

**"Seldom was the question of who began it all — namely, Hamas — been so easy to answer. Seldom was it more obvious who the perpetrators were and who the victims were — namely, Hamas as the attacker and Israel as the defender," Axel Springer CEO Mathias**

## **Döpfner wrote in an essay for *The Free Press* in December.**

The disconnect with *Politico*, its flagship U.S. property, further demonstrates the challenges that Axel Springer is now facing as it seeks to balance a commitment to upholding its values while recently mounting an aggressive push into global markets.

Even if it has remained unclear how Axel Springer's corporate ethos translates to the newsrooms under its purview, particularly outside Germany, support for Israel is widely interpreted as inviolable within the company, whose corporate values also promote a "united Europe" and the "trans-Atlantic alliance."

The company's CEO, Mathias Döpfner, a staunch backer of Israel who has raised alarms over rising antisemitism in Europe and beyond, has compared Axel Springer's essentials, enshrined in a mission statement devised by its eponymous founder more than 50 years ago, to a sort of "constitution," saying "they apply to every employee."

Döpfner, who has been called the "pro-Israel king of German media," has placed particular weight on the company's commitment to standing with Israel in recent years, saying in a company-wide town hall presentation in 2021 that he was doubling down on an effort to promote the essentials as "a common motivator."

"Particularly these days, where we have new waves of antisemitism and the military escalation in Israel, the second essential is very concrete and very meaningful, you could say, to a certain degree, even for some people controversial," he said at the time, stressing that the value "should be important for everybody."

On the evening of the Oct. 7 attacks, Axel Springer, which owns the largest classifieds website in Israel, said it had raised the Israeli flag outside its Berlin headquarters to show solidarity with the Jewish state.

Until recently, Axel Springer and *Politico*, whose focus on global issues has been expanding, seemed to have coexisted symbiotically, even if staffers at the Washington-based outlet reportedly expressed suspicion of its new owner's corporate values after the company was acquired nearly three years ago in a high-

profile deal valued at more than \$1 billion.

The purchase had raised questions over the extent to which Axel Springer would compel employees at *Politico* to uphold its core principles, which staffers in German markets are contractually required to follow.

Before the deal had been finalized, Axel Springer clarified that it would not make *Politico* staffers pledge support for the values in writing, even as it emphasized that the principles are part of its code of conduct.

The company-wide value has gained additional urgency in the wake of Hamas' terror attacks, as Döpfner indicated in a scathing essay for *The Free Press* in December, where he expressed shock over efforts to blame Israel for the invasion.

"Seldom was the question of who began it all — namely, Hamas — been so easy to answer," he wrote. "Seldom was it more obvious who the perpetrators were and who the victims were — namely, Hamas as the attacker and Israel as the defender."

While Döpfner criticized some mainstream outlets for alleged ethical breaches while covering the start of the war, he did not share an assessment of how Axel Springer's own media properties have aligned with his expectations.

Since Döpfner's essay, *Politico* has run stories at odds with his thinking, notably including a late February piece by Nahal Toosi, the news outlet's lone foreign affairs columnist, arguing President Joe Biden's support for Israel has demonstrated a lack of commitment to protecting human rights abroad — even while recognizing a "counterpoint that Hamas militants" had started the war in Gaza "by killing 1,200 people" and "taking more than 200 hostage."

In a separate column published shortly after Biden's State of the Union address last week, meanwhile, Toosi also noted that "many people alarmed by Israel's military campaign in Gaza were not pleased" with his remarks on the war, while bypassing supporters of the administration who have been reassured by his positioning on the conflict.

The framing underscores a broader habit within *Politico* of opting to amplify anti-Israel critics that extends to its straight news coverage — in contrast with other properties in Axel Springer's portfolio.

On Sunday, for instance, *Politico*'s

European arm syndicated a newsy interview with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu conducted by a top editor at *Bild*, a widely read German tabloid also owned by Axel Springer.

The article, in which Netanyahu defied Biden by vowing that Israel still plans to move forward with an invasion of Rafah, the last Hamas stronghold in Gaza, was cited by several U.S. news outlets as a sign of growing divisions between the two leaders.

In its most prominent stateside treatment of the interview, Politico's flagship "Playbook" newsletter, crediting its "European cousins at Axel Springer," characterized the standoff as "just the latest episode in a long, dysfunctional (some might say abusive) relationship," adding that "Biden continues to lose support from key constituencies as his early hug of Bibi gives way to ... whatever this is."

The Monday newsletter also featured comments from Matt Duss, an outspoken critic of Israel and former top foreign policy adviser to Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT), whose thoughts on Oct. 7 and its aftermath have been closely examined by *Politico* to highlight the progressive left's view of the conflict. In his remarks to "Playbook" this week, which were representative of sentiments *Politico* has typically boosted,

Duss called Israel a "client state" while urging Biden to "stop sending" arms to Israel amid its war with Hamas.

While "Playbook" is written in a colloquial style and draws on a diverse range of experts to weigh in on any number of complex issues, its packaging of the story offered a split screen with the articles written by Paul Ronzheimer, the deputy editor-in-chief of *Bild*, who had spoken with Netanyahu in Tel Aviv.

In his German-language story drawing on extensive quotations from their discussion, Ronzheimer, who also serves as a senior journalist for Axel Springer, was more deferential in his characterization of the Israeli prime minister as well as Israel's campaign to defeat Hamas.

The English version, meanwhile, was relatively cautious in describing the Palestinian death toll circulated by the Hamas-controlled Gaza Health Ministry, noting that "exact casualty figures are disputed." The story also alluded to backlash over Biden's approach to the war, while acknowledging that "polling indicates Israel continues to enjoy widespread support among U.S. voters."

The caveat drew a subtle but noteworthy contrast with *Politico*, which has predominantly focused on Democratic

opposition to Israel as Biden begins his presidential campaign, dogged by young and Arab American voters who have voiced their discontent with his Middle East policy decisions, even as he has taken steps to appease them in recent weeks.

The coverage has been viewed critically by pro-Israel voices, who believe that *Politico* has, inadvertently or not, built a flawed narrative to suggest there is diminishing support for Israel.

In a sign of how *Politico*'s coverage has faced broader scrutiny in recent months, the White House has also been frustrated with the outlet's emphasis on such efforts as the "uncommitted" campaign to reject Biden in Michigan, rather than other top battleground states in which voters are more receptive to his overall support for Israel, according to a source familiar with the matter.

On Tuesday, meanwhile, a *Politico* newsletter covering intrigue in the West Wing featured a regular sponsorship from a group of leading NGOs and think tanks that represent some of the fiercest opponents of Israeli policy in the U.S., including the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft and Amnesty International USA, which has accused Israel of apartheid. ♦

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## Israeli communities devastated on Oct. 7 draw thousands seeking to bear witness, support victims

*Visits play key role in fundraising efforts to support Israelis and in showing solidarity*

By Tamara Zieve

A macabre type of tourism has defined the trips of many visitors to Israel since Oct. 7. While some struggle with the concept of visiting the sites of the Hamas massacres, wary of invading the privacy of the victims, especially when the grief is still so raw, the act of bearing witness, showing solidarity and support and fundraising are among the key reasons why thousands of people have visited the affected Gaza border communities since

security restrictions were lifted for civilians who wish to travel to the area.

Since Oct. 7, the Jewish Federations of North America and the individual federations have run at least 60 solidarity missions to Israel, bringing some 1,000 community leaders on brief visits, usually lasting about 48 hours, to show their support for the country and to bear witness to the atrocities committed during the massive Hamas terror attacks.

A JFNA spokesperson told *Jewish Insider* that these trips are part of the reason that the umbrella organization has managed to raise over \$783 million in emergency fund allocations for Israel, \$360 million of which has been allocated to supporting the affected communities, helping provide food, housing, mental health services and special needs. The money also goes toward supporting the Jewish Agency's fund for victims of terrorism, as well as funding

rebuilding plans and business loans.

"Those leaders are often significant donors... and also people whose job is to go back and tell their communities what they saw. So certainly people come and it inspires them to donate but also people go back home to their communities and they can say, 'I was in Be'eri, this is what it was like, this is the help that they need, this is where the money is going.' It makes such a difference for people to understand the specifics of it," the spokesperson explained.

Not all the solidarity missions have visited the massacre sites, especially in the immediate aftermath of the attack, both for security reasons and out of sensitivity to the devastated communities.

"Every single thing is coordinated with the communities, with residents of the communities, every tour," the spokesperson said. A community member is always with the tour group and instructs them on which houses are off-limits, which residents don't wish to talk with them, which areas are not to be photographed and which conversations cannot be recorded.

"And the groups are very receptive to it, but it's an ingrained part of the protocol," they added, noting that they had a similar situation in Ukraine where JFNA led missions after the war with Russia broke out.

Adele Raemer, a survivor of the Oct. 7 massacre and an evacuee of Kibbutz Nirim, where 11 people were killed and five kidnapped, grappled with the concept of "tragedy tourism." She ultimately decided that its importance outweighs any feelings of discomfort, and she has shown people around her own ravaged kibbutz as well as visiting neighboring communities.

In a blog post for *The Times of Israel*, Raemer wrote of her visit to Kfar Aza: "As we made our way through the surrounding devastation, I grappled with my own inner conflict. On the one hand, it was important and meaningful to me to go in order to bear witness to these sites. As a survivor, myself, of the massacre, I felt an obligation to learn more so as to be an even better witness. On the other hand, I felt somehow as if I was trespassing on holy land, in a community that needed respect and reverence, where so many people whom I knew personally were slaughtered. Was I performing a brave,

responsible deed or was I desecrating these places once again in what might be conceived as being a sort of gruesome 'tragedy tourism?'"

Referencing both South Africa's genocide accusations against Israel at the International Court of Justice, as well as the Holocaust-denial-level response that some have adopted in response to Oct. 7, Raemer concluded: "It is for this reason that we CANNOT just sit silent."

"It is for this reason that it is our duty to bear witness any way we can, to every inch of proof, any way we can, in every place we can, and write, blog, vlog about what we have seen and experienced with our own eyes. It is for this reason that, as hard as it was for me, I needed to go to the sites of these atrocities, back to the region where I live, and my home, to bear witness and share that with the world," Raemer wrote.

Indeed, the JFNA spokesperson said that colleagues in Israel had shared "that the people that have come express an immense amount of gratitude, to be in Israel, to be with Israelis and to be able to bear witness. But on the flip side, they say that every time they meet with Israelis, the Israelis have expressed an immense amount of gratitude and support. As you know, Israelis are feeling pretty isolated right now. So people come in the middle of war, to show up and bear witness and give their solidarity and bring the support of their community has been something that they've expressed over and over is really important and that they really take to heart."

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul is among the leaders who have visited Israel on the solidarity missions, just weeks after the Hamas attack.

Mark Medin, executive vice president of UJA-Federation of New York, has led many of the trips. "I think bearing witness and understanding the scope of what happened and having people be able to serve as ambassadors to tell the story, I think is an essential component of diaspora Jewish responsibility right now," he told JI. "There are two wars going on. There's a physical war that, nine million Israelis are in the middle of and hundreds of thousands of Israeli young boys and girls, young men and women are fighting on the frontlines every day, and it's an information war for the Jewish world that

the diaspora Jewish community has to fight as well, in order to help support the physical war that's happening on the ground."

"This is not as not an Israel-only issue, this is an issue facing the Jewish world," he continued, pointing to an antisemitic attack that occurred the night before in his own town of Scarsdale — just outside New York City. "So, the rise of antisemitism, the need to support Israel, the sense of 'we're all in this together' I think is paramount."

"And in order for American Jews to fully understand and appreciate what happened on Oct. 7, the scope of the impact, the trauma that the country is feeling, the personal conflicts and mental health challenges that every Israeli is going through, I think you have to bear witness and, and understand that," Medin said.

"If you do, you're able to be a much stronger advocate; back in in America, you're able to talk to your family, to your professional colleagues, to your friends, to the media, to members of Congress to elected officials, with firsthand authenticity, about the barbarity of what happened on Oct. 7, about the struggle that the people of Israel are facing to bring the hostages home, about the struggle the people of Israel are facing in public safety and security, not only to the frontline communities, but to people that live in Modiin and Tel Aviv and Yerushalayim as well," Medin continued, noting that this was also important for philanthropy to Israel.

Medin also noted that large numbers of delegations have been traveling to Israel to volunteer and support the hard-hit agricultural sector, by picking, packing, sorting and cooking produce.

"The sense of appreciation and solidarity that we feel from Israel is beyond profound," Medin told JI. "The amounts of thanks that every Israeli that we meet with, every hostage family, every kibbutz survivor, every injured soldier, every bereaved mother, the sense of appreciation that they say for recognizing that they're not alone at this time, that people care enough to put themselves in harm's way to come into a war zone, to help volunteer, to bring solidarity, to bring support, is really, I think is a very important factor for the people of Israel. And I've just been stunned by the level of appreciation and the sense of gratitude that



the Israelis have shown towards us in every meeting we've had."

Yossi Hoffman, a ZAKA volunteer, together with other volunteers from the emergency response organization who were among the first responders to the Oct. 7 attack, has throughout the war been volunteering to support the soldiers, delivering equipment to them and providing them with barbecue dinners. The donations that had made these efforts possible began to dry up, so Hoffman and his colleagues put their heads together to think of a way to continue their morale-boosting efforts for the soldiers.

Hoffman subsequently began leading guided tours, predominantly for tourists, to Kibbutz Takuma, where cars burned on Oct. 7 are piled up; to the Nova music festival site at Kibbutz Re'im, where terrorists murdered some 360 people and kidnapped about 40; to Kibbutz Nir Oz, where about a quarter of its members were killed or kidnapped; and finally to the Magen army base where the group cooks a barbecue for hundreds of soldiers. "There is no greater joy than knowing that soldiers who are now going into Gaza or coming out of Gaza, fighting for us, are enjoying, eating well and getting strength to go and fight," Hoffman said.

The tour costs 1,000 NIS per person (some \$277) and the money goes towards the barbecues, the bus and donations toward the rehabilitation of Kibbutz Nir Oz. Tourists from Australia, the U.S., South Africa, New Zealand and Europe have participated in his tours, Hoffman told JI.

But some Israelis also wish to bear

witness. Lee Sefton, a British immigrant to Israel, joined one of Hoffman's tours together with a fellow British-Israeli friend.

Despite her apprehension about participating in the tour, she ultimately decided to go. "I felt it was important for as many people to see the devastation with their own eyes, to bear witness to the brutality that took place on Oct. 7 and to share it as widely as possible given the extent of the denial that I'd seen on social media," she said. "I also felt it was difficult to grasp the scale of the atrocities through the fragments you see on the news."

"It quickly becomes very clear, however, when you are confronted with what looks like a car junkyard, but is actually piles of hundreds of burnt-out cars stacked one on top of another scattered with bullets holes that had been removed from a road nearby; or after you've walked through a peacefully quiet kibbutz where half of the homes have been completely burnt out or destroyed and you hear the stories of how the people tried to escape or were killed by Gazans, who they believed to be their colleagues and friends; or when you're standing at the site of a massacre at a music festival where you see rows and rows of wooden posts dug into the ground, each one topped with a photo of a beautiful young person that was there to dance and had either been slaughtered or kidnapped," Sefton told JI. "Witnessing this brings it all into terrible clarity and it is overwhelming to process."

At the site of the Nova Festival, Sefton met a soldier who had been at the party with 12 of his friends; all of them managed to

escape. Within hours of reaching home, he was called up for reserve duty. "He was happy to share his experience of what happened on that fateful day, and I was blown away by his composure and how surprisingly upbeat and reassuringly positive he was," Sefton said of the soldier, who was on temporary release from the army when she met him.

The barbecue at the end of the day, she said, was uplifting and heartwarming, and she was struck by the volume of gratitude the soldiers expressed for the group.

"I found it incredibly humbling to speak to these young men who seemed fearless at the prospect of returning to Gaza to fight," Sefton reflected. "I wondered if they found the arriving tour buses to the base annoying or tiresome, but they were more than happy to share their experiences with us and were just as inquisitive to hear ours. They were so thankful to us for being there, which seemed so ridiculous. We had just come in to help for a day, we were the ones that were so grateful to them"

Sefton said she would urge anyone who has the opportunity to go on a tour of this kind to do so.

"Lots of what I witnessed on this tour will be etched in my mind forever, but my main takeaway from the day after everything that I'd seen and the people I'd spoken to is just how resilient this country and its people are and the hope they have for the future," Sefton said. ♦

# Ohio Senate primary a clash between two different GOP foreign policy visions

*Bernie Moreno is a Trump-endorsed challenger who opposes aid to Ukraine. Matt Dolan is a traditional Republican endorsed by the state's popular governor*

By Matthew Kassel

As the closely watched Republican Senate primary in Ohio determining the challenger to Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) enters its final stretch, two leading rivals who represent opposing ideological factions within the GOP are locked in an increasingly tight race for the nomination.

The election next Tuesday is expected to be a key early test of the traditional conservatism espoused by Matt Dolan, a state senator from Cleveland who has risen to the top of the polls in recent days, even as he has continued to express skepticism of former President Donald Trump.

In confronting the ascendant populism animating his party, Dolan, 59, is hoping to defy an outspoken MAGA enthusiast, Bernie Moreno, who successfully landed an endorsement from Trump in December.

Despite the nod, which last cycle helped propel Sen. J.D. Vance (R-OH) to first place in a crowded field, Moreno has failed to secure a decisive lead. One poll has shown that Dolan and Moreno are locked in a battle for first place, with Frank LaRose, the secretary of state who has walked a middle ground between his top rivals, lagging behind.

Trump, for his part, appears to have recognized the stakes, revealing on Monday that he will headline a Moreno rally near Dayton this weekend, in an effort to energize his base just days before the primary.

The race to challenge Brown, a vulnerable Democrat in a purple state that has trended red in recent years, could ultimately decide the balance of power in the Senate.

But it will also prove consequential in shaping the direction of the Republican Party, particularly on key foreign policy decisions, as several top GOP Senate recruits have embraced an uncompromising strain of neo-isolationism that has rejected aid

to Ukraine while stymying efforts to fund Israel as it battles Hamas in Gaza.

The Ohio primary has been a vivid showcase of an emerging intra-party debate between establishment figures like Dolan, who has vocally backed Ukraine in its war with Russia, and populist rivals such as Moreno, who has voiced “unequivocal” opposition to supporting the Ukrainians while also expressing resistance to furnishing Israel with additional aid.

Even as Moreno, 57, has cast himself as a staunch defender of the Jewish state, the Colombian-born Cleveland businessman has objected to providing increased funding to Israel amid its ongoing war, arguing instead that the U.S. should “expedite the weaponry that” Israel has “already paid for,” as he said days after the Oct. 7 terror assault. “We don’t need to give Israel more money.”

His remarks have faced attacks from Dolan and LaRose, who have both pledged to aid Israel, though a spokesperson for Moreno’s campaign suggested on Wednesday that his thinking has evolved.

“Bernie stands strongly with our greatest ally, Israel, and supports giving them the resources to fight the war with Hamas,” Reagan McCarthy, a communications director for Moreno’s campaign, said in a statement to *Jewish Insider*. “Israel can no longer coexist with the Hamas terrorists and they must be eliminated. America needs to give Israel the space to make that happen. Bernie has a long history of supporting Israel, including by investing in Israeli companies.”

McCarthy said that while Moreno opposed a \$95 billion foreign aid package to fund Israel, Ukraine and Taiwan, which passed the Senate last month with support from 22 Republicans, he “would have supported” a stand-alone Israel aid

bill introduced earlier by Vance, who has endorsed his campaign.

“Bernie believes that funding for Israel and Ukraine are two separate issues and that funding votes should happen accordingly,” McCarthy told *JL*.

Moreno, who had once embraced a more hawkish approach to international engagement, has leaned aggressively into his isolationist positions, while a super PAC aligned with his campaign has run ads hitting Dolan over his support for Ukraine.

But his approach has risked alienating key constituencies in Ohio, which is home to sizable populations of both Ukrainian and Jewish voters.

For instance, Moreno’s rhetoric has been viewed with skepticism by some pro-Israel leaders who say they have found Dolan’s positions more reassuring.

Brad Kastan, a prominent Republican donor in Columbus, said that he is backing Dolan because the state lawmaker “has really shown moral clarity in his support for Israel,” even as he added a caveat that Moreno and LaRose both have solid pro-Israel records and boast “good ties” with Jewish leaders in Ohio.

“But during this time,” Kastan clarified, “Matt has been much more vocal.”

Shortly after the Oct. 7 attacks, Dolan wrote in the *The Columbus Dispatch* that “unwavering support for Israel is not just a matter of policy but a moral and national security imperative,” while calling on Americans to “remain steadfast in our commitment to Israel’s security and stand by them in the face of unprovoked attacks.”

Dolan, who is backed by Gov. Mike DeWine, a Republican, and former Sen. Rob Portman (R-OH), has generally aligned with the establishment wing of his party.

But in a sign of how issues such as

border security have taken precedence in GOP campaigns, he broke with some conservative hawks in stressing that, like Moreno, he would have opposed the foreign aid package, albeit for different reasons.

"I have said repeatedly that any national security supplemental must include substantive policy reforms that seal the border," Dolan said in a statement shared with JI on Wednesday. "While the Senate bill does include some defense measures along with much-needed assistance for allies abroad such as Israel and Ukraine, it lacks far too many safeguards that would end the current crisis, prevent amnesty and protect taxpayer money."

Dolan added that the Senate "should immediately get to work with the House to incorporate elements of" a hardline border bill known as H.R. 2, which he said "will

seal the border, stem the flow of illegal immigrants and end the present crisis."

For his part, LaRose, who has struggled to make a name for himself in the race, would also have voted against the Senate bill, a campaign spokesperson, Ben Kindel, confirmed on Wednesday. LaRose, 44, opposed the package, Kindel said, because he has vowed not to send more funding to Ukraine until "we secure our U.S.-Mexican border."

"Frank thinks that America can lead with American strength," Kindel said of LaRose, a former Green Beret who led a NATO peacekeeping mission in Kosovo in the early 2000s. "But that doesn't mean you send unaccountable money."

A spokesperson for the Republican Jewish Coalition declined to weigh in on the race, citing a general policy of not taking

sides in contested primaries. Dolan and Moreno, both of whom ran for Senate last cycle, are listed on the group's online political portal, which allows members to donate to their campaigns, but the spokesperson said their inclusion does not imply official support. The RJC's national chairman, Norm Coleman, has endorsed Moreno.

Howie Beigelman, the executive director of Ohio Jewish Communities, which represents the state's eight Jewish federations, said the three candidates "agree on the need to support Israel and strengthen the U.S.-Israel alliance," adding that they have all "helped Israel in a material way."

"Jewish Republicans in Ohio are seeing three candidates they like," he told JI on Wednesday. "In different electoral lanes, each one answers different needs." ♦

MARCH 13, 2024

## Food airdrops, pier construction can't overcome chaos in Gaza aid distribution, say officials

*Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu discussed building a pier to facilitate flow of aid into Gaza with Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides last November*

By Ruth Marks Eglash, Lahav Harkov

A ship containing some 200 metric tons of food is set to arrive in Gaza on Thursday — even though there is no pier in place to receive it and the capacity of international aid agencies for distributing the food to those most in need is questionable, both Israeli and U.N. officials told *Jewish Insider*.

The ship, which set sail from the Cypriot port of Larnaca early on Tuesday, is part of a World Central Kitchen initiative aimed at providing meals to those trapped in the war-torn Gaza Strip. The operation, which

will supplement airdrops of international aid that started earlier this month, has been framed by world leaders, including President Joe Biden, who mentioned the construction of a Gaza pier in his State of the Union address, as a way to circumvent Israeli restrictions on aid going into the Palestinian enclave.

Israel, however, has maintained that there are no restrictions on the amount of aid that can enter Gaza. Instead, they've said that the barriers to delivering food and other essential items to more than 2 million

civilians are because of limitations with the distribution network facilitated by foreign aid agencies, which are facing serious challenges in reaching those in need.

At the start of this month, Biden announced that the U.S. would join the UAE, Egypt, Jordan and France in air dropping aid into Gaza, and since then the Department of Defense has carried out at least four airborne operations delivering more than 200 bundles containing over 100,000 meals, a White House official told the press in a briefing last week.

"We're not waiting on the Israelis," the official said. "This is a moment for American leadership, and we are building a coalition of countries to address this urgent need."

Biden announced in his State of the Union address that he had directed "the U.S. military to lead an emergency mission to establish a temporary pier in the Mediterranean on the coast of Gaza that can receive large shipments carrying food, water, medicine, and temporary shelters...A temporary pier will enable a massive increase in the amount of humanitarian assistance getting into Gaza every day."

**"In terms of what is standing in the way of getting more aid to the people of Gaza, it's an issue of distribution, not inspection," Shimon Freedman, international media spokesperson for COGAT, the Israeli military unit that coordinates between Israel and the Palestinian territories, told JI.**

Contrary to the Biden administration's portrayal of the initiative as a way to bypass Israel, *Jewish Insider* heard Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu tout the idea in a press briefing – off the record at the time – on Nov. 5, 2023. Netanyahu said at the time, less than a month into the war, that he had already discussed the idea with Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides.

Israeli officials told JI this week that it is not only involved in the additional aid efforts but that it welcomes all such initiatives.

"In terms of what is standing in the way of getting more aid to the people of Gaza, it's an issue of distribution, not inspection," Shimon Freedman, international media spokesperson for COGAT, the Israeli military unit that coordinates between Israel and the Palestinian territories, told JI.

He said that while in the initial stages of the war the amount of aid going into Gaza was slow, "we now have the capacity."

"We started off with one inspection point at Nitsana, then we added another one in Kerem Shalom. We've also taken several steps within both of these checking points to increase our capability of inspection – so increasing the manpower, longer working hours, additional scanning equipment," Freedman said, adding, "We've reached a point today that we can now inspect 44

trucks an hour at those crossings, so the issue is not one of inspection.

**"The biggest problem is distribution," Freedman continued, describing how there were times over the past few months that some 200 or 300 trucks worth of aid waited at the crossings to be picked up by the international organizations that operate in Gaza.**

"Because of the intermittent supply of food going into Gaza, people are very desperate and because they are desperate, when they see trucks going past they try to stop them and take something for themselves and their families," Jamie McGoldrick, U.N. humanitarian coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory, said. "Growing needs and an insufficient supply, limited access roads and then insecurity of distribution – all of those things together, make this a challenging environment."

Freedman said that Israel was hopeful that air and sea initiatives would provide more aid to Gazans, particularly to those in the northern part of the territory where a collapse of civil order has made distribution difficult. Two weeks ago, more than 100 people were killed, including some by Israeli military fire, when an aid convoy heading north was overwhelmed by Gazans looking for food.

On Tuesday, Israel allowed six trucks filled with aid to enter Gaza from a newly opened crossing in the northern part of the Strip as part of a pilot project. A statement by the World Food Program confirmed that enough food for 25,000 people had reached Gaza City for the first time since Feb. 20.

Jamie McGoldrick, U.N. humanitarian coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory, told JI that the looting of aid trucks, especially in the north where supplies of food were scarce, was due to severe food insecurity and desperation.

"Because of the intermittent supply of food going into Gaza, people are very desperate and because they are desperate, when they see trucks going past they try to stop them and take something for themselves and their families," he said. "Growing needs and an insufficient supply, limited access roads and then insecurity of distribution – all of those things together,

make this a challenging environment."

McGoldrick said that while he welcomed "any food that comes into the north via whatever means," making it cost effective and efficient was also important. Delivering aid in truckloads is far cheaper than the airdrops, which he said did not always reach those who really needed it.

"On the maritime initiative, I think it's great that World Central Kitchen is doing this; they do some important work setting up kitchens for people to get meals in different parts of Gaza," he continued. "My understanding is that this boat coming in will try to resupply the kitchens they have in the north."

But, McGoldrick noted that there was still an issue of distribution.

**"[The airdrops] are a rapid way to quickly provide food and sustenance needs that are desperately and urgently required, particularly over the isolated north," said Ahmed Fouad Alkhatib, an American political analyst originally from Gaza. "They are not meant to be a permanent or long-term solution as they are expensive and only provide a fraction of the needed aid quantities but in the absence of a cease-fire agreement or a resolution to land-based delivery issues, airdrops remain vital to saving lives and preventing famine-like conditions."**

"You have to recognize that as soon as you land with the boats – and it will be difficult enough to land without a pier or a harbor – how do you get the aid into the back of a truck?" he said, adding that "you still need roads and those areas are prone to insecurity, looting and ransacking, so what's to stop that truck from being looted as well?"

World Central Kitchen did not answer a query from JI about how it plans to distribute the aid.

Ahmed Fouad Alkhatib, an American political analyst originally from Gaza, emphasized that providing aid in whatever way possible is "immensely critical," but that they could not be sustained over a long period of time.

"[The airdrops] are a rapid way to quickly provide food and sustenance needs



that are desperately and urgently required, particularly over the isolated north,” he said. “They are not meant to be a permanent or long-term solution as they are expensive and only provide a fraction of the needed aid quantities but in the absence of a cease-fire agreement or a resolution to land-based delivery issues, airdrops remain vital to saving lives and preventing famine-like conditions.”

Former Israeli Ambassador to the U.S.

Michael Oren also said that the pier project posed a problem and predicted to JI that it was not beyond Hamas to fire rockets at the pier in an attempt to destroy it.

Yahya Sinwar, Hamas’ leader in Gaza, “has an interest in having Palestinians starve,” so that the U.S. pressures Israel to end the war, Oren said.

“Hamas built 450 miles of tunnels,” he continued. “During Israeli airstrikes, the tunnels could have housed the entire

population of Gaza and they would have been safe, but no one ever makes that case.”

“It was as if Britain cut off the Underground during the Blitz. Sinwar wants people to die,” Oren said.

As such, Oren said, he disagreed with “people who think [Israel] shouldn’t let aid in, because it’s the only leverage we have over Hamas. Aiding Palestinians actually hurts Hamas.” ♦

MARCH 14, 2024

## Israel’s moderate right wakes up, with Sa’ar breaking off from Gantz’s party

*Sa’ar demands membership in war cabinet; polling over the last year consistently shows a center-right party could make it into the Knesset*

By Lahav Harkov

**A**s new polling reveals that Israel’s voters are increasingly seeking a more pragmatic center-right choice for prime minister, politicians on the right are jockeying for position.

In the boldest move yet, security cabinet Minister Gideon Sa’ar has broken off from war cabinet Minister Benny Gantz’s National Union faction and is making a bid to join the three-man war cabinet. The maneuvering suggests an ongoing debate over what it means to be “right wing” in Israel as the war in Gaza grinds on and domestic issues such as Haredi conscription in the IDF reemerge.

Sa’ar’s call to join Gantz, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant in the war cabinet, which Sa’ar argued is insufficiently hawkish, immediately brought the same demand from National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, leader of the far-right Otzma Yehudit party.

Sa’ar, who has served in several cabinet posts, was once one of the most popular figures in Likud, viewed as Netanyahu’s likely successor. He left the Likud in 2020 to establish his own party, after losing a Likud leadership primary against Netanyahu. In light of lackluster polling, he merged his list with Gantz’s ahead of the 2022 election.

Sa’ar announced the split from Gantz after months of rumors of discord within the National Union and reports that he was in talks with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. (This iteration of Sa’ar’s party is so new that it does not have an English name yet; its Hebrew name roughly translates to “the statesmanlike right,” but native English speakers working with Sa’ar are still using “New Hope,” the previous name, until an official name is determined.)

Gantz admitted to being blindsided by the move and opposed adding Sa’ar to the war cabinet, saying: “This isn’t the time for politics. If it’s not broken, why fix it?”

One Knesset insider argued that Netanyahu “wants Sa’ar in the war cabinet. He’s right-wing, and,” the source added, drawing a contrast with Ben-Gvir, “level-headed and experienced.”

A longtime political operative on the right said he’s “quite sure” Netanyahu and Sa’ar coordinated the move. He also said Likud was prepared to support Sa’ar if Gantz attempted to block him from breaking off from the National Union in order to prevent Sa’ar and the MKs in his party from taking campaign funds that parties receive from the government in proportion to the number of seats they have in the Knesset.

At the same time, serving in the war cabinet would only bolster Sa’ar’s political stature, causing a headache for Netanyahu in the next election, when the former Likud minister, once seen as the prime minister’s likely successor, would capitalize on that national security experience. It could also help paper over the decade-long feud between Sa’ar and Netanyahu in the eyes of the pro-Netanyahu right.

Former cabinet minister Ze’ev Elkin, once Netanyahu’s right-hand man in Likud and now No. 2 in Sa’ar’s party, told Israel’s 103FM that they offered to fully merge with Gantz’s National Union party if there were primaries, but Gantz declined.

The reason for the breakup this week was that “there were increasing disagreements on ideological matters,” Elkin said.

“We had criticism of the way the war is run in terms of the pace and intensity,” he added. “We have said for two months already that we have to start the maneuver in Rafah. They didn’t listen to us, and look where we are now.”

Elkin said that “there is a large population in Israel whose opinions are on the right and they are not pro-Bibi and not pro-Ben-Gvir, they are looking for the liberal right. Those are views that, unfortunately,

are not expressed when [Sa'ar and Gantz] are together."

Sa'ar's move also comes amid reports that former Prime Minister Naftali Bennett is looking into making a comeback.

Israel's Channel 12 reported that Bennett met with outgoing Bet Shemesh Mayor Aliza Bloch, who lost the runoff election in her city this week, about forming a possible Knesset slate. However, a source close to Bennett told *Jewish Insider* that Bloch's husband is an old army friend of Bennett's and the meeting was not political.

Still, the source said that Bennett wants to return to politics, and is weighing whether to return for the next election, or to wait until Netanyahu is out of politics.

Sa'ar and Bennett are trying to capitalize on the sense that, as the source close to Bennett put it, "most of the public today is to the right of Gantz and left of Likud, and right now the only one in that spot is [Avigdor] Liberman."

"Left of Likud" does not refer to matters of national security or the Palestinians. Sa'ar said he wants to join the war cabinet because he opposes the lower intensity of the war in Gaza in recent weeks. He and Bennett oppose a Palestinian state and support settlements. The "moderate right" in Israel broadly refers to free market economics and conservative, but not populist, social views.

Research by Menachem Lazar, a veteran Israeli pollster, shows there is a sizable group of voters looking for a center-right choice – though not necessarily led by Sa'ar.

Some Israelis sought a pragmatic conservative party between Likud and National Union on the political spectrum even before the war started.

Last year Lazar found in two polls conducted five months apart that about one-quarter of Israeli voters would support a "new right-wing liberal party established in light of the right in society regarding judicial reform." That would translate into about 10

or 11 Knesset seats, if the results held.

A poll conducted in November 2023 found that a party led by Bennett and former Communications Minister Yoaz Hendel — who is currently out of politics but writes a column for *Israel Hayom* and frequently appears on TV espousing center-right views — would get 18 seats, eclipsing Likud to be the second-largest party in the Knesset. In that poll, Sa'ar was still listed as part of Gantz's list, which got the most seats.

Two polls taken in December checked the viability of a party representing IDF reservists led by Hendel, once a Naval commando, found that he would get eight or nine seats in the Knesset.

Earlier this month, a poll Lazar conducted for *The Jerusalem Post* found that a reservists' party led by Hendel would get nine mandates.

Sa'ar, polled separately from Gantz, only received 1.8% of the vote, below the 3.25% electoral threshold. ♦

MARCH 12, 2024

## Next season of 'Fauda' will take on Oct. 7 attacks, show creators say

*Season 5 will be "totally different," creators of 'Fauda' say during panel discussion*

By Haley Cohen

The day after an antisemitic mob at the University of California, Berkeley, forced the evacuation of Jewish students from Season 5 of "Fauda" will be "totally different" from previous seasons as the acclaimed show takes on the Oct. 7 Hamas terror attacks and their aftermath, the show's creators said on Monday evening at the Capitol Visitor Center in Washington, D.C.

The event, hosted by *Jewish Insider* and America Abroad Media, featured a panel discussion with Lior Raz and Avi Issacharoff, moderated by Aaron Lobel, the founder and president of America Abroad Media. Raz and Issacharoff told the roughly 50 attendees that the next season is expected to premiere in 2025 — and provided insight

into the impact Oct. 7 will have on the show.

"We try to give faces to the other side and feel compassion for the other side," Raz said of the taut political drama. "Now I assume it's going to be very hard to do that, after we saw what they did to our people and our country. I don't think it will be possible to show Hamas as humans, but we have to bring a good story... It will be totally different than what we've done until now because there is a lot of rage."

The event was co-chaired by Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC) and Thomas Kaplan, chair of Justice for Kurds.

"This show puts a face on what it takes to be free and the toll it takes on the characters — that's true in real life," Graham said in opening remarks. "This show is about

sacrifice, endurance and when you think you can't do it, you keep doing it. That's what Israel is about."

Rep. Kathy Manning (D-NC), in her remarks, said that despite the show being in Hebrew, "everyone watches 'Fauda'" in her North Carolina district.

Manning, who sits on the House Foreign Affairs and Education and Workforce committees, said that "every hearing, we have people protesting [Israel's war with Hamas] and they have no idea what they're talking about... ['Fauda'] presents a show to the world that allows those who are interested in understanding what the real story is." ♦

# Study: Jewish college students feel they must hide support for Israel; their non-Jewish peers agree

*New study by Tufts University political scientist Eitan Hersh, College Pulse and the Jim Joseph Foundation finds that Jewish students are also getting closer to organized Jewish community*

By Haley Cohen

*The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.*

More than a third of Jewish college students report hiding their identity since Oct. 7, such as no longer wearing jewelry with the Star of David, in order to fit in — double the number of university students who said they did so before the Israel-Hamas war, according to new research.

The study, conducted by Tufts University political scientist Eitan Hersh in partnership with College Pulse and funded by the Jim Joseph Foundation, found that more than three-quarters of Jewish students (77%) have noticed a social stigma around supporting Israel's right to exist. Non-Jewish students surveyed also agree that there's a social stigma associated with supporting Israel — with the highest agreement (50%) coming from those on the far left or who identify as socialist.

For the study, Hersh surveyed students nationally pre- and post-Oct. 7. Since the earlier study, conducted in 2022, the number of students who expressed that they feel judged on campus for being openly Jewish rose dramatically, from 24% to 42%. The number of students who felt they must hide being Jewish on campus to fit in today climbed from 20% to 36%.

"The typical Jewish college student didn't grow up with a Jewish education, doesn't necessarily attend Hillel, maybe has one Jewish parent and one non-Jewish parent. Even in that broad population,

you see a huge number of the students saying that they had to hide their Jewish identity and personally had to pay a social cost to attend a Jewish event," Hersh told *eJewishPhilanthropy*. "The vast majority of them say they would feel social pressure just from taking the basic stance that Israel as a Jewish country should exist."

The data confirms that political ideology plays a role in campus antisemitism. Students on the left are more likely to exhibit extreme negative attitudes about Israel, whereas students on the right are more likely to endorse prejudicial statements about Jews.

"What the data shows," Hersh continued, "is that this is not about one or two isolated incidents or just a few kids... also that it's not just in the head of some Jewish students — we actually saw a higher rate of non-Jewish students saying they don't want to be friends with someone who supports the existence of Israel as the Jewish state."

"The social stigma is felt by the Jewish students," Hersh said, "and it makes sense they feel that way because the non-Jewish students are saying they endorse that social stigma."

At the same time, the survey found that Hersh's depiction of the "typical Jewish college student" — someone who isn't involved with the organized Jewish community — could be changing. In the wake of Oct. 7, Jewish students polled reported feeling a heightened sense of Jewish identity. Thirty-five percent said they feel very close to a Jewish community,

double the amount who did in 2022.

The findings represent a midpoint in the research, with another survey expected to be conducted in the spring and a full report slated for summer.

The 2022 survey polled approximately 2,000 Jewish students and 1,000 non-Jewish students across the U.S. who were attending four-year colleges. Soon after the Oct. 7 attacks, a second survey was fielded between Nov. 16 and Dec. 21. This survey was completed by about 1,000 Jewish students and 1,500 non-Jewish students on 21 diverse public and private campuses, all with sizable Jewish populations (the 2022 study didn't focus on schools with substantial Jewish student bodies). The Jewish students include those who consider themselves ethnically or culturally Jewish even if not Jewish by religion. Of the Jewish students surveyed in 2023, 155 were among the students who were surveyed in 2022. In the first survey, they were freshmen and sophomores. Now, they're juniors and seniors.

The data shows "both immense challenges and opportunities," among college students, Stacie Cherner, director of research and learning at the Jim Joseph Foundation, said in a statement.

"Both in scale and depth, the research goes beyond anecdotal stories many of us have heard," Cherner said. "Jewish students feel more isolated and ostracized, and they feel this from peers of all political perspectives."♦

# Nuvo, a maker of remote fetal monitors, prepares for Wall Street debut

*Addressing 'maternity care deserts,' Israeli startup seeks to raise \$30 million on stock exchange through SPAC merger*

By Jonathan H. Ferziger

*The article first appeared in The Circuit.*

Across the U.S., doctors and healthcare companies are trying to address the spread of “maternity care deserts,” large swaths of the country suffering from a shortage of obstetricians and nursing staff.

Two years ago, health technology giant Philips teamed up with a small Israeli startup called Nuvo Group to judge whether its remote fetal monitoring platform could help. The pilot program conducted with women in rural parts of Colorado whose pregnancies were termed high-risk ultimately persuaded Philips to strike a distribution agreement with Nuvo.

The ability of Nuvo's device to provide accurate information, assisted by artificial intelligence, is also propelling the company to its debut in the next two months on the Nasdaq stock market. Going public in a SPAC merger – the Wall Street maneuver that enables companies to sell shares through a shell entity already registered on an exchange – Nuvo hopes to raise at least \$30 million, CEO Rice Powell told *The Circuit*.

Investors “want to see if the Philips relationship is really working,” said Powell, 68, former chairman and CEO of Fresenius Medical Care, one of the world's largest makers of kidney dialysis machines. “It's incumbent on us to work with physicians and get [the device] in front of them.”

Nuvo is in the final stages of merging with a special purpose acquisition company (SPAC) created by Los Angeles Media Ventures, an investment company co-founded by entrepreneur Jeffrey Soros whose uncle is billionaire George Soros. Earlier efforts to mount an initial public offering were dropped two years ago because of global economic conditions that

dried up the IPO market, Rice said.

Care for high-risk pregnancies in the U.S. costs an estimated \$58 billion a year, according to the medical journal JAMA. The country is short at least 9,000 obstetricians – rising to a forecast 22,000 by 2050.

Nuvo's INVU monitoring device is the only product that has received approval from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for both self-administered remote tracking of maternal and fetal heart rates as well as for remote non-stress tests. The exam assesses the well-being of a fetus by measuring whether its movements in the womb affect its heart rate.

Patients strap the INVU sensors on their abdomen with a band that generates data and transfers it to a mobile phone app. The digitized results are then sent for analysis to the patient's doctor.

Many patients with high-risk pregnancies are seen at the hospital or clinic multiple times a week for monitoring by a Doppler ultrasound device, which provides the clearest view of the fetus's condition. Medical authorities have discouraged use of home Doppler devices because the procedure generates a slight level of heat that may be harmful to fetal tissue if used too frequently. INVU's development of a passive technology for monitoring uterine activity enabled it to get a green light from the FDA.

“Where this is really groundbreaking is moving it from the hospital or clinic where they're doing the non-stress tests and the mom is there in person, to moving it remotely,” said Kelly Londy, Nuvo's former CEO who now serves on the company's strategic advisory board. The challenge is “proving... the same degree of accuracy.”

Londy, a former executive at Philips, cultivated the relationship with the Netherlands-based healthcare company

while she led Nuvo for nearly three years until Powell replaced her last month. Plans call for selling the INVU system first in the U.S., Europe and Israel. Pursuing markets in Asia, the Gulf and Africa would come later, Powell said.

Nuvo's competitors include Sense4Baby, Pregnabit and Heramed.

More than 60% of pregnancies in the U.S. are termed high-risk because of factors that include diabetes, high blood pressure, cancer and drug use. Pregnant patients under 17 and over 35 are also often classified as high-risk.

Getting the \$19 billion Dutch company on board was key to clinching the deal with Soros and LAME, “which ascribed value to the Philips [agreement] with respect to it serving as validation of Nuvo's technology,” according to the 374-page prospectus filed with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission.

Soros's firm, Los Angeles Media Ventures, which produces films, plays and entertainment programming – including the 2022 Hulu TV docuseries “Legacy: The True Story of the LA Lakers” – also invests in technology.

Use of telemedicine has been growing for years, from monitoring blood pressure and respiratory function to meeting with a psychiatrist. According to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), there was a 63-fold increase in the use of Medicare visits through telehealth from 2019 to 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Nuvo device was found to be especially useful late last year at Sheba Hospital near Tel Aviv when safety concerns over rocket fire from Gaza prompted a precautionary reduction in available beds during the war with Hamas. Doctors sent many expectant patients home for monitoring through INVU.



"Instead of just telling women to go home without following up with them, the ability to sustain the standard of care at home was amazing," said Dr. Avi Tsur, an obstetrician and director of the Women's Health Innovation Center at Sheba. "What we wanted to do, even before the war, was to allow them on the one hand, to receive treatment. But on the other hand, to continue their careers and continue their family life."

While the FDA approvals for the heart monitoring and non-stress test applications paved the way for Nuvo's partnerships with Philips and LAME, the device can collect massive amounts of data and tailor it to doctors' needs. This is what makes the technology most attractive to investors, Rice said. Among the conditions that can be assessed with the equipment if regulatory approval is obtained are hypertension, diabetes and maternal mood disorder, with

the prospect of reducing the chances of preterm birth and unnecessary C-sections.

Tsur said the potential for getting better medical insight from the data through AI-based predictive analytics is an important reason Sheba chose to use the INVU technology.

"We see it as part of our vision for the future of health," he said. ♦

MARCH 13, 2024

## Saudi scientists produce sustainable oudh, aroma of the Arab world

*Researchers at KAUST use engineered algae to make the fragrance as an alternative to the expensive and overharvested agarwood tree*

By Louise Burke

*The article first appeared in The Circuit.*

**T**he distinctive woody scent of oudh has been prized in the Middle East for thousands of years as a base for the perfumes and incense that are deeply entwined with cultural identity and grooming rituals.

As anyone who has walked through the malls of Abu Dhabi or Riyadh could attest, it is also the most heavily sold ingredient for the multibillion-dollar Gulf perfume market.

But while many products are marketed as oudh in the largely unregulated industry, the authentic scent derived from the fragrant resin of agarwood is a dwindling resource – increasingly rare and expensive. The highest quality agarwood can fetch up to \$100,000 per kilogram.

With some species of the tree now at risk of extinction from overharvesting and deforestation, agarwood products have been banned in several countries, presenting an additional challenge for perfumers who wish to use it in their collections.

Scientists at King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) in Saudi Arabia have developed a sustainable alternative to wild agarwood, using metabolically engineered algae to produce a synthetic version of the oudh scent.

The Sustainable & Synthetic Group at

KAUST, led by Assistant Professor Kyle Lauersen, examined 58 samples of agarwood to understand its chemical structure.

"The chemical complexity of oudh is actually very high," Lauersen told *The Circuit*. "And what we found was that across the samples that we tested, each oudh was unique, but it had on average about 300 chemicals that were shared."

From those chemicals, the team was able to determine nine base chemicals that could be reproduced by engineered algae and manipulated to produce the complex scent structures of oudh.

They then collaborated with Professor Gyorgy Szekely's team at KAUST's Advanced Membranes & Porous Materials Center to concentrate the scent using an energy-efficient nanofiltration step, with the solvents used during the process re-introduced to the algae in a circular process.

While Lauersen says the resulting product may be less variable and complex than oudh sourced from wild agarwood, it is more consistent and contains less unknown chemicals than many fragrance products on the market.

"What we can offer is controllability, consistency, and knowing what's going into your perfume... In a way, it's more like harnessing what's good in nature without all of the unknowns and all of the bad stuff

as well."

He said the goal was not to replace the traditional oudh used in high-end perfumes, which could be sourced from sustainable agarwood operations, but to stop illegal harvesting of wild wood by reducing unnecessary demand.

"It's just the illegal harvesting in the rainforest we want to avoid and so for things like shampoos and detergents, those shouldn't be using extracts from the wood," Lauersen said. "We should make (the extracts) and then use them in consumer products so that they can have the essence of oudh without having the environmental impact."

Lauersen said the next step was to research how to scale the process to make synthetic fragrance in quantities that could be used by perfumers, which would likely take several years.

He said it would be important to work with industry to ensure synthetic oudh was well received as a sustainable alternative, but he was hopeful that it would appeal to consumers.

"The allure of the Middle East is always talked about as an olfactory response. I think there is a wonderful potential here for it to be well received with that next generation of consumers." ♦

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