Top Silicon Valley donor cites anti-Israel left in his shift from Biden to Trump in 2024

Tech adviser Jacob Helberg cites the growing influence of the anti-Israel left as a major factor in his political evolution

By Gabby Deutch

When Jacob Helberg decided in 2020 to start making major political contributions for the first time, it was a no-brainer for him to choose Democrats. A tech expert who was beginning to make a name for himself in Silicon Valley, Helberg donated hundreds of thousands of dollars to President Joe Biden’s 2020 general election campaign and that of scores of other Democratic candidates.

Four years later, he’s still shaping up to be a big donor in this year’s presidential race, but this time to former President Donald Trump’s campaign. It’s a change that Helberg said has less to do with a shift in his own thinking than a shift in the Democratic Party that he does not support.

“It became very clear that an organizing principle on the left increasingly became based on a divvying up of the world between oppressors and oppressed,” said Helberg, who serves as a senior policy adviser to Alex Karp, CEO of the technology firm Palantir. “It’s just an organizing principle that I fundamentally disagree with.”

Helberg has donated $1 million to Trump’s campaign so far this year, The Washington Post reported this week. He told Jewish Insider in an interview that much of the way he views politics comes down to his relationship with Judaism and the way he was raised: Helberg grew up in Paris, where his maternal grandparents moved after leaving Tunisia; his American father’s parents survived the Holocaust.

“I was struck by how America never had an awkward relationship toward religion or Jews, and I always found that to be such a breath of fresh air. I think everyone at the end of the day yearns to belong,” Helberg said.

But now, after Oct. 7, “for the first time in my lifetime, I feel like a lot of the thin crust of civilization that separates today’s world from the dark world of yesterday is going to unravel in some really scary ways,” he said. “You’re seeing that with these incredibly dark, antisemitic protests on university campuses, in the streets of Dearborn, Mich., and these slogans that are somehow gaining popular attraction.”

In Helberg’s view, it is the younger generation of Democrats that is rising up the ranks in the party that became “incredibly militant,” and he began to feel out of place. He has cited many of the culture war issues that have become hot-button topics for conservatives lately — affirmative action, “wokism,” “anti-Western ideology.”

“I realized that I had a choice. I could
either try to remain in the Democratic Party, to try to be a voice to bring it back to the center, or I could simply join a party that more closely aligned with my views," said Helberg. Growing up as a Jew in Europe, he watched Jewish family members develop "thick skins" and simply deal with antisemitism.

"I'm a big believer in the basic idea that life is always tough, and people shouldn't throw themselves pity parties. I think they should do something about it," he said, "which is ultimately why my basic approach has been, I'm not going to stay in the Democratic Party and whine all day that I'm completely out of step with everyone in my party."

Part of his rationale in switching his support to Trump has to do with Israel and antisemitism. Helberg tweeted last week that "American Jews who still support Biden should have their heads examined." But he acknowledges that part of it is economic, too — he doesn't support Biden's approach to taxation, particularly a proposal to raise the capital gains tax rate to 44%.

As a China hawk, Helberg has also found his views on that issue more in line with the Republican Party. But he still works with Democrats — Helberg was one of the major behind-the-scenes architects of the bill forcing the Chinese parent company of TikTok to sell the popular app or face it being banned in the U.S.

He thinks American Jews need to be much more concerned about China, and about TikTok.

"The CCP [Chinese Communist Party] is, in my view, philosophically antisemitic and politically anti-Israel. They are anti-religion, they philosophically despise the fact that Jews have been around longer than, arguably, Chinese civilization, definitely longer than the Chinese Communist Party. And politically, they view Israel as an American option in the Middle East," said Helberg, who added that TikTok, with its close ties to China's government, "directly promotes virulently antisemitic content."

Helberg said he never felt what he described as "Trump Derangement Syndrome," which he said he saw in many other Silicon Valley liberals. He didn't name any issues where he diverges from Trump, but rather said his biggest concern about deciding to support the former president was a fear of disapproval from his social circles. (Helberg, who worked on election integrity and misinformation at Google from 2016 to 2020, declined to say whether Trump's stance on the 2020 election was a concern for him.)

"My basic viewpoint is that many folks in academia and the media and in polite society don't like Trump's table manners and his style. But when you actually focus the discussion on his policies, you'll be hard-pressed to find a lot of people giving you pushback," said Helberg. "My biggest doubt was I was concerned about the backlash, I would say, and being the target of a lot of very militant folks on the left."

Helberg's husband, Keith Rabois, a prominent venture capitalist, is a longtime conservative, although Rabois didn't publicly support Biden or Trump in 2020. Some big Silicon Valley names have shifted to the right in recent years, most prominently Tesla founder Elon Musk.

MAY 16, 2024

Long-anticipated AIPAC blitz against Bowman begins with $2 million, one-week ad buy

The ads, airing on pricey New York City broadcast TV, hit Bowman for breaking with Biden and praise Latimer's record

By Marc Rod

The United Democracy Project, the AIPAC-affiliated super PAC, is launching an ad blitz on Thursday against Rep. Jamaal Bowman (D-NY) and in support of his primary opponent, Westchester County Executive George Latimer, beginning its long-anticipated campaign against the endangered Squad member.

UDP is making an initial buy of $2 million in the New York race — $1 million each for an anti-Bowman and a pro-Latimer ad. New York's primaries aren't until June 25, suggesting UDP is planning to spend a significant amount in the Bowman/Latimer race.

"Bowman is an anti-Israel extremist who traffics in conspiracy theories," UDP spokesperson Patrickorton told Jewish Insider. "He vehemently disagrees with President Biden on the U.S.-Israel relationship and refused to condemn Hamas on the House floor. It's clear that Bowman doesn't represent the views of his district."

The anti-Bowman ad focuses primarily on Bowman's voting record against bills backed by President Joe Biden, including the bipartisan infrastructure bill and the debt limit deal.

"Jamaal Bowman has his own agenda and refuses to compromise, even with President Biden," the ad's narrator intones. "He's hurting New York."

The ad accuses Bowman of opposing improvements to roads and bridges and replacing lead pipes, citing the infrastructure vote, and of endangering social security and the U.S. economy, citing the debt limit vote.

The ad supporting Latimer creates a direct contrast between Latimer and UDP's characterization of Bowman, stating that Latimer "is putting people ahead of personal
He claimed that AIPAC does not want poor and marginalized people to “have a seat at the table.”

The remarks echo comments Bowman made at a debate earlier this week, when he repeatedly attacked Latimer over backing from AIPAC, calling him “in the pocket and bought for by AIPAC.” At the debate, Bowman also said that he doesn’t believe the slogan, “from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free” constitutes hate speech or a call for the eradication of Israel.

One local rabbi, Howard Goldsmith, who leads a synagogue in Westchester County, offered scathing feedback about Bowman's comments at the debate in a newsletter this week. Goldsmith said the remarks invoke classic antisemitic tropes dating back to The Protocols of the Elders of Zion. He said Bowman is using AIPAC as a “codeword” for Jews.

Jake Dilemani, a New York Democratic strategist, said that, especially with the escalating advertising in the district, the race is likely to pick up in the coming days and weeks.

“Everyone assumes this is going to be a tight race, which is why there’s so many resources being put into it,” Dilemani said. “As voters pay more and more attention to what’s going on — and people are going to start casting ballots as soon as within the next week or so — the race is going to crystallize more... The race is going to continue to be a very highly contested endeavor until the very end.”

Dilemani characterized Bowman’s recent comments as “in the same vein he’s always operated as a member of Congress” — “not particularly representative of the majority of his district” on a range of issues, including but not limited to Israel. The 16th Congressional District, which includes parts of the Bronx and much of southern Westchester County, has a sizable Jewish population.

While Dilemani acknowledged that Bowman’s “fiery rhetoric” hasn’t prevented him from winning his last two elections, he also argued Bowman hasn’t faced such strong competition in either race.

Dilemani added that Oct. 7, as well as the antisemitism that’s been growing over the past two years “lit a fire under people in a way that did not exist in 2022, which is why you’re seeing such strong, cohesive activism out of the Jewish community,” further exacerbating the existing rift with Bowman.

But he said that Latimer can’t, and likely will not, take anything for granted.

“I don’t think anyone thinks that this is an easy race,” Dilemani said. “It is tough to dislodge an incumbent no matter what. But if there is someone to do it, it’s going to be George.”

MAY 16, 2024

Speaking in Doha, Bridgewater’s Israeli-born CEO says Middle East ‘setting itself up for next tech wave’

Bridgewater CEO Nir Bar Dea sees increasingly large participation of region in world economy

By Tamara Zieve, Emily Jacobs

Bridgewater CEO Nir Bar Dea, a native of Israel, said the Middle East is “setting itself up for the next tech wave,” during a panel discussion with Dina Powell McCormick, vice chairman and president of Global Client Services and a partner of BDT-MSD, on Wednesday at the Qatar Economic Forum in Doha.

Participating in a panel titled “Geopolitics: Putting the Risks Into Business Context,” Bar Dea said it’s “great to be here and also meaningful for me personally to be here today.”

 Asked by Bloomberg Editor-In-Chief John Micklethwait, the panel’s moderator, if he sees the region “as a target for investment at the moment,” Bar Dea responded, “I always say that incredible people, shared values, audacious goals, lead to unbelievable outcomes.”

“I’m from the Middle East, a different part of the Middle East,” noted Bar Dea — who is from Even Yehuda, near Netanya, and became co-CEO of the world’s largest hedge fund in 2022 and last year became sole CEO — “and I’m truly in awe of what’s been happening in this region and of course I think everybody’s watching and seeing the innovation, the ability to build incredible things, and capital will soon follow because...
Marc Rowan: It’s time to ‘exact a price’ for antisemitism

Apollo Global Management CEO and UJA-Federation of N.Y. chair says campus protests are not about antisemitism but anti-Americanism, calls on Israel to take responsibility for mending ties with White House in recent interview for Israeli VC firm’s podcast

By Judah Ari Gross

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

Marc Rowan, the CEO of Apollo Global Management who has emerged as a leading voice of the donor-class against antisemitism on college campuses, described the anti-Israel protests at universities across the country as having less to do with Israel and the Jews than with “anti-Americanism.”

“It’s not antisemitism. It is anti-Americanism,” he said on the Aleph venture capital firm’s latest podcast, which aired yesterday. “We are in the middle of a takeover of our elite academic institutions by a dominant narrative that you can call post-colonial education: Oppressed versus oppressor, powerful or powerless,” said Rowan, who successfully led a group of alumni threatening to withhold donations unless the university removed its president, Liz Magill, and board of trustees chair, Scott Bok.

In the hour-long interview, which also focused on Rowan’s philanthropic interests, his views on Israel and its relationship with the United States and his investment ideologies, the CEO and chair of UJA-Federation of New York called for the Jewish community to “exact the price” for antisemitism.

“There’s been no price to pay for being an antisemite,” he said. “These kids who are marching [at anti-Israel demonstrations], they don’t think about it because there’s been no price to pay. But if you come to Apollo, I would not hire you if you were anti-Black. I wouldn’t hire if you were anti-gay. I wouldn’t hire you if you were anti-anything. Why would I hire an antisemite?”

Rowan called for the Jewish community to “call out the 20 worst universities, the 20 worst civic organizations and the 20 worst philanthropic institutions. We should make it embarrassing to serve as a director on these boards and trustees.”

“One positive side effect of [Oct. 7 attacks is that] the Jewish community in the U.S. is off the sidelines. They are engaged and now they just need to be directed,” he said.

Rowan, who has regularly criticized academics for focusing more on diversity than excellence, said university trustees must force the schools to change.

“The narrative is so dominant that it has squelched conservative voices or merit-oriented voices to the point where they’re just nonexistent,” he said. “So an outside force — trustees — I believe, need to come in and help re-center some of these institutions.”

Rowan said he was in Abu Dhabi when the Oct. 7 attacks took place. (He noted that the Emiratis are “by far the largest investors” in his company, with “north of $35 billion” under its management.)

Rowan was critical of both the U.S. and Israel for their conduct over the course of the conflict, beginning with feeling embarrassed that Hamas was able to carry out the Oct. 7 attacks in the first place.

“I was embarrassed, actually, to think that a failure of this scale could happen, particularly in the south where the people already feel neglected,” he said. “As a proud supporter of the State of Israel, as someone who looks to the IDF and to what Israel does, the notion that a group of amateurs could cause damage of the scale was embarrassing and then tragic.”

Without blaming anyone in particular, Rowan said that Israel quickly lost global sympathy and found itself accused of genocide and facing a large protest movement.

“The world was on Israel’s side,” he said. “Israel had carte blanche to come in and do
this, and [the fact that seven months] later we have lost the narrative is just insane.”

Rowan, who recently spoke at a fundraiser for Sen. Tim Scott (R-SC), who is seen as being on the short-list of potential Republican vice presidential candidates, said the upcoming election may hinge on Israel and whether its war against Hamas amounts to genocide.

“That’s not a great thing for the president and that pushes the president to be tough on Israel, which actually undermines Israel’s leverage with hostage negotiations. It undermines its leverage with Hezbollah. It undermines its potential discussions with Saudi [Arabia],” Rowan said.

Yet when asked by Aleph co-founder Michael Eisenberg who should do more to resolve tensions between Israel and the U.S., Rowan indicated the former.

“The onus right now is on the Israeli government to take steps, to not tell Biden ‘no’ at every turn. [Israel should] appreciate the position that [Biden] is in, which is a political position, and do that which is necessary to garner support for what needs to be done,” he said, clarifying that was destroying Hamas.

Rowan expressed the closeness that American Jews felt toward Israel, noting that in a normal year the UJA-Federation of N.Y. raises roughly $250 million, but this year — in response to the Oct. 7 attacks — it will likely raise $450 million.

“What’s the importance of the Jewish state? We find it every day. It’s our refuge,” he said.

♦

MAY 15, 2024

Universities make concessions to anti-Israel campus activists

Many campus leaders are now conceding it is easier to give in to protesters than to stand firm against their rule-breaking

By Gabby Deutch

I
t’s spring in Cambridge, Mass. — graduation season — which means that large white tents have started to appear on the leafy quads throughout Harvard Square.

Until Tuesday, a different kind of tent was still visible in Harvard Yard: small camping tents housing the stragglers who remained in Harvard’s anti-Israel encampment even after final exams wrapped up several days ago. Last week, Harvard suspended student protesters who refused to abide by campus administrators’ orders to disband the encampment, blocking access to their dorms.

But now, just a week from the start of official university commencement festivities, Harvard has backtracked on its disciplinary action, ahead of the arrival next week of thousands of graduates’ family members, alumni and honorary degree recipients to the Ivy League university. University officials seemed to be saying that Harvard cannot get ready for commencement if Harvard Yard is still gated and locked, accessible only to university affiliates and the handful of people still camped out in protest of Harvard’s alleged “complicity in genocide.”

In making a deal with the protesters, Harvard interim President Alan Garber joined a growing number of leaders at elite universities who are incorporating protesters’ voices into major university investment decisions and allowing student activists to get off with few, if any, repercussions after weeks of disciplinary violations. Harvard’s dean of the faculty of arts and sciences wrote in a Tuesday email that the outcome “deepened” the university’s “commitment to dialogue and to strengthening the bonds that pull us together as a community.”

The path Garber took is now a well-trodden one — remove the threat of disciplinary consequences and allow protesters to meet with university trustees or other senior leaders to pitch them on divesting their schools’ endowments from Israeli businesses, a concession that before last month would have been unthinkable at America’s top universities.

In a matter of days it has become commonplace. Just two years ago, Harvard’s then-president, Lawrence Bacow, responded to the campus newspaper’s endorsement of a boycott of Israel by saying that “any suggestion of targeting or boycotting a particular group because of disagreements over the policies pursued by their governments is antithetical to what we stand for as a university.”

Northwestern University set the tone two weeks ago when President Michael Schill reached an agreement with anti-Israel protesters in exchange for them ending their encampment. Jewish leaders on campus found the agreement so problematic that the seven Jewish members of the university’s antisemitism committee — including Northwestern’s Hillel director, several faculty members and a student — stepped down in protest. Lily Cohen, a Northwestern senior who resigned from the committee, summed up their concerns: “It appears as though breaking the rules gets you somewhere, and trying to do things respectfully and by the books does not.”
Her observation has proven prescient as universities negotiate with anti-Israel protesters who break campus rules while they slow-walk reforms long sought by Jewish students — or even avoid meeting with Jewish community members altogether.

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Chancellor Mark Mone signed onto a far-reaching agreement with protesters this week that calls for a cease-fire in the war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, condemns “genocide” and denounces “scholasticide” in Gaza and cuts off ties between a university-affiliated environmental NGO and two government-owned Israeli water companies. Meanwhile, Hillel Milwaukee said in a statement that Mone has refused to meet with Jewish students since Oct. 7. Where universities fumbled over statements addressing the Oct. 7 attacks last fall in failed bids to satisfy everyone, many campus leaders have now conceded it is easier to give in to protesters than to stand firm against their rule-breaking. (The president of the University of Wisconsin system said he is “disappointed” by UWM’s actions.)

Princeton University and Johns Hopkins University made concessions to encampment leaders this week. At Johns Hopkins, the school pledged to undertake a “timely review” of the matter of divestment, and to conclude student conduct proceedings related to the encampment. Hopkins Justice Collective, the group that organized the protests, characterized the agreement as “a step towards Johns Hopkins’ commitment to divest from the settler colonial state of Israel.”

In a campus-wide email on Monday, Princeton President Christopher Eisgruber said all students must vacate the campus quad where they had organized an anti-Israel encampment. He offered the campus protest leaders an audience with the body that reviews petitions for divestment. Other student groups can also petition for a meeting, he wrote.

Students who were arrested during the course of the protests may have a chance to take part in a so-called “restorative justice” process, whereby the university “would work to minimize the impact of the arrest on the participating students.” If protesters take responsibility for their actions, Eisgruber wrote, the school will conclude all disciplinary processes and allow the protesters to graduate this month.

At many more universities, top administrators — including university presidents — have met with demonstrators, giving them a chance to air their concerns even when they didn’t reach an agreement.

By promising meetings with university investment committees, the administrators are almost certainly guaranteeing that campus angst over the war in Gaza will not die down. Brown University President Christina Paxson pledged that protest leaders can meet with the university’s governing body to discuss divestment from companies that operate in Israel — in October, a year after the Hamas attacks that killed more than 1,200 people and ignited the ongoing bloodshed in the Middle East.

On the surface, Brook Parker-Bello has little in common with the hostages kidnapped from Israel and held in Gaza since Oct. 7.

She is an actor, author and activist from Los Angeles who was awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Obama White House for her work fighting sex trafficking.

But Parker-Bello felt a deep connection with those who experienced the Oct. 7 terror attacks firsthand. As a teenager, she was kidnapped and trafficked for years between Nevada, California and New York until a police sting ended her abuse.

“I know what it’s like to be in mental anguish and psychologically distraught, dealing with PTSD, depression, anxiety and challenges that are really hard to
understand, and that sometimes rear their heads later,” Parker-Bello told JI in an interview following her recent visit to Israel.

Now, she is working on a documentary, with Rova Media, set to be released later this year that captures the essence of her trip set in the context of her own life experiences.

Parker-Bello, founder and CEO of More Than Life, an organization that advocates and supports victims of human trafficking and sexual violence, told JI that only by visiting Israel in person, can “you begin to understand what is really taking place there and you see stuff that you might not hear or see in the media.”

“When you’re meeting individuals face-to-face, you can also encourage them,” said the author and entrepreneur, who is also creating an online mental health support platform for victims of human trafficking and sexual violence, explaining the impetus for her trip to Israel.

Parker-Bello, who refers to Israel as a “small-big nation,” told JI that she had spent a lot of time in the Jewish state previously and that she was not only “in tears” following the brutal Oct. 7 terror attack, but was also confused and frustrated by the reaction of organizations and activists who usually stand up for women’s rights.

“I was uncertain why people were reacting like that; it was sort of a conflict within a conflict and even early on people were beginning to take sides and not try to support or understand the victims,” she said.

“I thought maybe it was because they didn’t understand the violence that had happened to children and girls and women of all ages, as well as others,” Parker-Bello recalled. “I thought that they were afraid of the polarization because this conflict is so political, and they were putting that before the fight against violence and terror.”

But, she added, “anywhere in the world where we see gender-based violence, we must fight against it.”

“As someone who supports the nation of Israel, I also hate the victimization of victims and am concerned about what happens to them regardless of where they’re from,” Parker-Bello continued.

In Israel, the Miami-based activist met with families of the hostages and survivors of the Nova Music Festival, who described to her seeing their friends attacked, raped and murdered. Parker-Bello also met with some of Israel’s top female leaders, including First Lady Michal Herzog and Lihi Lapid, a journalist and author – and the wife of former Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid.

But it was her time at Hostages Square in Tel Aviv, where she met and interviewed relatives of those who are still being held captive in Gaza, that moved her most profoundly.

“I know what it’s like to be in mental anguish and psychologically distraught, dealing with PTSD, depression, anxiety and challenges that are really hard to understand, and that sometimes rear their heads later,” Parker-Bello, herself a survivor of rape and sexual abuse, told JI.

“I was there to listen, just to listen,” Parker-Bello added, describing an “extraordinary” meeting with Yarden Gonen, sister of Romi Gonen, who was taken hostage from the music festival and is still being held by Hamas.

“During the interview, she said to me, ‘Dr. Brooke, you’re being here gives me strength – hearing about your survival from human trafficking and just the fact that you came here from the United States,’” Parker-Bello said. “She told me that she felt a force from me and that she did not know how things would manifest day to day but that I had given her an influx of hope in a way that she had not experienced during other interviews.”

In her trademark soothing voice, Parker-Bello told JI that she, in turn, was uplifted by the feedback that her visit might have helped Gonen and her family in some way.

“I have some extraordinary women in my own life who have been there for me,” she continued. “I really wanted to be there in that sense as well and that gave me confirmation.”

Parker-Bello said it “was the same with everyone I met in Israel.”

Asked why she believed that some women’s rights groups and individuals usually active in speaking out against gender-based violence had cast doubt on the suffering of Israeli women and girls on Oct. 7, Parker-Bello cited the words of assassinated Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin: “There is the quote that says ‘we must fight terrorism as if there is no peace process and work to achieve peace as if there is no terror.’”

“This means that we have to fight terrorism together,” she said, adding that for many people they want to draw some balance between Israelis and Palestinians.

“I also say if there are victims of this type of violence in Palestine, I don’t want to see any woman or girl go through this either,” she said, adding, “I think one thing has nothing to do with the other.”

“You can fight absolutely against the rapes, the torture, the violence, which was profoundly sick, but neutrality can never win conflicts and war,” Parker-Bello observed. “Neutrality, or anything that is watered down, is not going to gain credence in the natural sense or the spiritual sense — that is why I have been unabashed and unafraid to say how I feel about it, and to be loud and proud about it.”

She noted that “eventually the U.N. and UN Women and other organizations began to hear of the stories, but the politicization of things is why they didn’t speak out — it was the fear of rubbing someone the wrong way, the fear of losing funding and the fear of someone somewhere no longer supporting their organization that made them want to stay somewhat neutral.”

Following her trip to Israel and the stories she heard here — including some very disturbing accounts of the violence that happened on Oct. 7 – Parker Bello said she planned to make her newly developed mental health technology, which includes a digital system that offers support for victims of violence, available in Israel.

She also said she would meet with leaders in the U.S. to share what she saw and heard in Israel, with a focus on how to handle future terror attacks anywhere.

“Israel is close to my heart, and I have a deep connection to the place and the people there,” she said, adding, “Israel has given me some of the most extraordinary experiences that have catapulted my life forward as a former victim of torture, human trafficking and rape.”
AIPAC launches ad blitz against Brandon Herrera, challenger to Rep. Tony Gonzales

The UDP ad accuses Herrera, who opposes U.S. foreign aid, says that Herrera ‘glorifies Nazis and mocks the Holocaust’

By Marc Rod

Making its second intervention into a contested GOP primary, the AIPAC-linked United Democracy Project super PAC is starting an ad campaign against Brandon Herrera, the social media influencer challenging moderate Republican Rep. Tony Gonzales (R-TX) in a Republican primary runoff.

The campaign against Herrera, a $1 million, two-week ad buy, is reflective of UDP’s increasing involvement against GOP candidates it views as potentially damaging to the U.S.-Israel relationship. Herrera is the third Republican candidate UDP has targeted in recent weeks.

UDP’s anti-Herrera ad condemns a joke that Herrera made on a podcast appearance about veteran suicide, and states that he “glorifies Nazis and mocks the Holocaust,” highlighting a video first reported by JI.

“If I told a joke that would be on all of us,” the ad’s narrator says, over the sound of laughter from the podcast appearance. “That joke would be on all of us.”

Herrera has posted videos replete with Nazi and Holocaust imagery, songs and jokes — as well as other controversial content. He also said he would have voted against supplemental aid to Israel and other U.S. allies.

“I would absolutely vote AGAINST the new proposed spending package for $95+ billion for foreign conflicts, while spending $0 on our southern border,” Herrera said in one recent post on X. “Any Republican who claims to be America first CANNOT vote for America last legislation. Why is it the US’ responsibility to pay?”

Asked by another user whether he would pledge to end foreign aid, including to Israel, Herrera reiterated that position.

“We can’t claim to be ‘America First’ while pushing spending bills like the most recent foreign aid package that gave almost $100 billion to every country except the US,” he said. “We have massive problems here we HAVE to address before we spend another dime trying to fix the world.”

The latter post came in response to a question posed by a follower of white supremacist influencer Nick Fuentes. Recent posts and re-posts by the user are almost exclusively by and about Fuentes.

“This is a race between an incumbent with a strong record on Israel and Brandon Herrera, who has clearly out-of-the-mainstream views on the U.S.-Israel relationship,” UDP spokesperson Patrick Dorton told Jewish Insider.

Gonzales, a moderate Republican and military veteran, has been a strong supporter of Israel.”

Druze Israelis remain on Lebanon border: ‘We’ll die defending our land if we have to’

Not long after the war began, the head of Israel’s Druze community, Sheikh Mowafaq Tarif, said the Druze people would not leave their homes in northern Israel but would stay and prepare to defend themselves in any way

By Lahav Harkov, Ruth Marks Eglash

HURFEISH, Israel – There was a constant flow of traffic on Route 89, the central road running through the Druze village of Hurfeish in northern Israel, and all the tables inside Sambousak HaErez, one of the most popular local eateries, were full of diners on a sunny weekday lunch hour last week.

Hurfeish’s northernmost point is less than a mile from Israel’s border with Lebanon, where the Iranian-backed Islamist Shiite group Hezbollah has been firing mortars, rockets and killer drones into Israel almost daily since Hamas’ Oct. 7 terror attack, yet in this village, unlike other communities nearby, there were few signs of the shadow of this war. It was a day like any other.

Children disembarked from a school bus outside Sambousak HaErez, lugging backpacks as they headed home. A muscle-
bound father in a shirt with the name of his IDF unit sat with his two young children at one table, four men in their 20s and 30s smoked at another table outside; and two middle-aged men held a meeting with a laptop between them. Iyad (who did not want to give his last name) pushed pitas into a traditional Druze taboon oven and then scooped labneh yogurt spread, drizzled with olive oil and sprinkled with za'atar spice mix, into bowls.

The lively scene in Hurfeish sharply contrasted with every other kibbutz and moshav in the area, all of which were evacuated in the chaotic days following Oct. 7 and remain empty seven months later. Members of Israel's Druze community decided to remain in their homes.

The Druze — a monotheistic religion that incorporates elements of all Abrahamic religions and several other philosophies — live in villages dotting northern Israel, from the Mediterranean coast across the Galilee Valley and up to the Golan Heights, according to Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics. They have had a presence in the region for a thousand years, and related communities are also found in Lebanon, Syria and parts of Jordan.

According to their religious dictates, Druze swear allegiance to the country in which they reside. While they make up just 1.5% of Israel's total population, an overwhelming 83% of Druze men enlist in the army, Druze account for roughly 5% of the IDF's soldiers, as well as 20% of its prison guards and 6.5% of its police officers.

In Hurfeish, about 10% of the residents have been on IDF reserve duty since the war started, in addition to the large numbers of career officers who serve permanently in the IDF, the Israeli Police, the Internal Intelligence Agency and other security branches.

“Our religion says we have to defend our land,” Osama, 31, one of the men smoking outside, said. “Parents with children in the army can't sleep, can't eat. My parents and grandparents watch the news all day; there's bad energy in the home.”

“We see [missiles] over our heads, but none have fallen in the village,” he added, showing a photo on his phone of his cousin's factory abutting Hurfeish, destroyed by an anti-tank missile launched from Lebanon.

Even on that peaceful May afternoon, as diners ate their savory pastries and pitas, news outlets and the Red Alert app flashed the names of a nearby kibbutz and one village after another within range of Hezbollah’s anti-tank missile and rocket fire.

In the not-so-far distance there was a sudden muffled boom.

“That's an exit,” Osama said, meaning Israel was shooting down Hezbollah's projectiles.

In the Second Lebanon War in 2006, over 100 missiles fell in Hurfeish. Residents of the village, which abuts Mount Addir, a natural barrier between Hurfeish and Hezbollah's anti-tank missiles, also reported hearing the sounds of digging. Osama recounted, pointing out that the IDF blew up several cross-border tunnels dug by Hezbollah in 2019.

Now, Osama said, “the situation isn't so dangerous.”

But if it gets worse, “women, children and the elderly will evacuate,” he said.

"In war, no one wins,” Osama mused. “One side just loses more than the other. Israel doesn't want war. But you can't live in fear all the time... Life is mostly normal.”

But there are some signs of war in Hurfeish, which in peace times is heavily reliant on tourists. For the past seven months, outsiders have mostly stayed away.

"On Saturdays, there used to be a line out the door and a wait for over an hour,” Osama said of life pre-Oct. 7.

Iyad, busy baking pitas and manning the cash register, confirmed that before the war there had been long lines on the weekends. Now, he said, “people are traumatized.”

“When it's quiet, we have customers, but if there's a siren, no one comes here for two or three days,” he said.

Still, Iyad said: “We lived through 2006, and we'll get through this too.”

“The money will come back,” Osama concurred. “But there were already two soldiers from our village who were killed.”

Up the hill from the sambousak joint, through Hurfeish's labyrinthine roads, is Shakib Shanan's home. Shanan served two brief stints as a member of Knesset for the Labor party and in then-Defense Minister Ehud Barak’s breakaway party.

He lives in an old stone house with looming archways, to which new, modern wings were added. In one of the oldest sections in the house is the “Kamil Shanan Center for Values,” in memory of his son, Kamil, a police officer shot by a Palestinian terrorist while on duty on the Temple Mount in 2017. The walls are covered with photographs of Kamil, and a glass cabinet displays his uniform, badge and other gear, as well as awards he received. Shanan gives lectures on patriotism and Druze contributions to Israel to Jewish groups of soldiers and police officers.

“We believe that Israel is the best place in the world today to be Druze,” he said, contrasting his community's situation to their coreligionists in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan.

In addition, Shanan said, “Israel is also the best place in the world to be a Jew. Not even America is the best place.”

“We have a partnership of coexistence,” he continued. “It is not just an alliance of blood, as some say, Israel is my country. It is the country of my son of blessed memory, and of my living son and of my parents and grandchildren.”

On Oct. 7, Shanan said, initially there was “panic” in Hurfeish, and a concern that Hezbollah would cross the border.

“I know people who slept with their gun under their pillow, and even knives in case something happened,” he said.

When the IDF’s Home Front Command began evacuating towns on the border with Lebanon, Shanan recounted, “the village elders said we absolutely will not leave our homes. We will stay and fight if we need to... We will defend our land, and if necessary, we will die for it.”

“We didn't consider leaving,” he added. “We won't leave; let's be real.”

The village of Hurfeish has existed for nearly a millennium, and has been Druze for centuries. Shanan said he can name ancestors who lived in the village going back eight generations.

“It's not just a saying that we are willing to die for our land,” the former politician said. “I say this as a bereaved father who lost his son seven years ago on the Temple Mount.”

Not long after the war began, the head of Israel's Druze community, Sheikh Mowafiq Tarif, said the Druze people would not leave their homes in northern Israel but would
Fred Guttenberg warns of creeping antisemitism among Democratic activists

Guttenberg says he’s alarmed by dominant anti-Israel activism in the March for Our Lives gun control group he once championed

By Marc Rod

Fred Guttenberg, who became a nationally known gun control activist in the wake of his daughter’s death in the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in 2018, warned in a recent interview with Jewish Insider that he’s concerned rising antisemitic and anti-Israel sentiment in activist circles could, if not addressed, overtake the Democratic Party.

“I believe this party as a whole does not stand for hate, does not stand for antisemitism. But there is a minority of this party that does,” Guttenberg said. “And what worries me is we can look back on the Republican Party from years ago, when there was a minority of the party who stood for autocracy, and now it’s the platform of the party. They stood for hate against a lot of people, it’s now the platform of that party."

“I don’t want that to happen to the Democrats,” he continued, “and right now is the moment in time where we can ensure that it doesn’t.”

Guttenberg has been outspoken since Oct. 7 about his support for Israel and his concerns about rising antisemitism in left-wing spaces since the Hamas terror attack.

Reflecting on conversations with Republicans who oppose former President Donald Trump, Guttenberg said he thinks that Democrats need to have serious, private conversations, and that he’s hopeful that the Democratic Party can find the way forward.
Most Jewish college students say anti-Israel protests disrupted their classes, a quarter say they faced physical or verbal assault

A fifth of the respondents to a new Hillel poll said they were blocked from attending class; 11% said they were considering transferring to a different school because of the demonstrations

By Judah Ari Gross

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

Anti-Israel campus protests and encampments have made it harder for most Jewish college students to “learn, study or concentrate,” according to a new survey by Hillel International, with some 30% saying the demonstrations have made them scared to attend classes or be on campus.

Roughly half of Jewish students — 51% — said the demonstrations disrupted their ability to attend class, including 20% who said that they were physically blocked from attending a class, according to the study. The rest said classes were canceled, interrupted or moved to Zoom.

A majority of respondents, 61%, said there has been antisemitic, threatening or derogatory language directed toward Jewish people during protests at their school. Nearly a quarter of the respondents from schools with encampment protests said that they personally were either physically assaulted (7%) or verbally assaulted (17%).

Since Oct. 7, Hillel has said that it has recorded nearly 1,600 incidents of antisemitism on campus. The protests have triggered vigorous debates across the country and around the world over antisemitism, free speech, academic freedom and the roles of universities. Donors, particularly Jewish ones, have increasingly begun pausing their donations to certain universities over their administrations’ responses to the encampments.

Forty percent of total respondents said they felt a need to hide their Jewish identity, and 32% said they were “scared” to attend Jewish-related activities on campus. A quarter said professors had said something antisemitic or anti-Israel to them, and 17%
said they believed faculty treated them differently “because I am Jewish or because of how I feel about Israel.” Eleven percent said they were considering transferring to another university because of the situation on their campus.

“Our findings demonstrate that a majority of Jewish students surveyed have experienced bias and discrimination in their classroom and academic experiences based on faculty and staff abusing their authority in support of the rule-breaking and unlawful anti-Israel encampments and protests,” Adam Lehman, president and CEO of Hillel International, said in a statement.

“Jewish students, and all students, deserve to pursue their education and celebrate their graduations free from disruption, antisemitism, and hate,” Lehman said. “University leaders are legally required to address these hostile and discriminatory conditions, and we will continue to insist that they do so for the benefit of Jewish students and all students.”

The survey — 15-minute interviews with 310 Jewish students — was conducted for Hillel International by Benenson Strategy Group over three days earlier this month. The survey has a margin of error of 5%.

MAY 13, 2024

First-of-its-kind exhibit chronicles Oct. 7 atrocities, highlighting women’s voices, hostages’ plight

Exhibition at the Museum of Tolerance in Jerusalem features photographs from the attacks as well as 25 video testimonies of women who were injured, fought terrorists, saved lives, taken hostage, lost loved ones or had a family member taken captive by Hamas

By Judith Sudilovsky

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

Almost two months ago, when Shelly Shem Tov agreed to record her story as part of an exhibit featuring the personal testimonies of 25 women about their experiences on Oct. 7, she fully expected to be at the opening at the Museum of Tolerance Jerusalem (MOTJ) with her son Omer, 21 — who was kidnapped from the Nova music festival and taken captive into Gaza by Hamas — by her side.

Instead, she was standing alone, at the Jerusalem exhibit curated by her partner, Malki Shem Tov, watching her life-size image on a video screen relate how their son was captured at the festival after her Oct. 6 birthday celebration in which she silently thanked God for all the good in her life. The next day her unending nightmare began, and she has become one of the well-known figures in the hostage families’ struggle to bring home the hostages, who have now been in captivity for over 215 days.

“We called Omer. He was scared and frightened. He promised he would come home,” she said in her recorded testimony. “As time went by we understood that would not happen, that he had been kidnapped. The ground opened beneath our feet. We have been in this nightmare for 215 days. Two hundred and fifteen days that I wake up every morning, and it is daylight outside and I’m thinking about my Omer, who hasn’t seen the light of day in so much time.”

The museum exhibit, “06:29 From Darkness to Light,” premiered last Thursday afternoon in an opening for diplomats and journalists in the presence of Israeli President Isaac Herzog and Jerusalem Mayor Moshe Lion. The exhibit will open to the public on May 20.

“We called Omer. He was scared and frightened. He promised he would come home,” she said in her recorded testimony. “As time went by we understood that would not happen, that he had been kidnapped. The ground opened beneath our feet. We have been in this nightmare for 215 days. Two hundred and fifteen days that I wake up every morning, and it is daylight outside and I’m thinking about my Omer, who hasn’t seen the light of day in so much time.”

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The museum exhibit, “06:29 From Darkness to Light,” premiered last Thursday afternoon in an opening for diplomats and journalists in the presence of Israeli President Isaac Herzog and Jerusalem Mayor Moshe Lion. The exhibit will open to the public on May 20.

“To actually come here and confront [the day] quietly, only as a place of listening is important. So it is important for the government to listen and connect to the personal story and pain of everyone. To come and feel, and not put things aside. This place tells the story of so many women. I want to tell the government to take an example from the Israeli people who have been so united, and to go to the mat — both the coalition and the opposition — to bring the hostages home.”

The exhibit begins with a stark wall flashing the large digital numbers “06:29,” the time Hamas launched its attack on Israel. Then the visitor is confronted with photos from the devastated southern communities taken by photojournalist Ziv Koren shortly after the Hamas attack. Next, the exhibit moves to a short film narrated by 15-year-old Ella Shani, from Kibbutz Be’eri, whose father was murdered, grandparents injured
Avi Shalev’s new book chronicles his time as the only Jew at an Arab Islamic college

Shalev’s two years studying at Al-Qasemi Academic College form the basis of his book, ‘The Only Jew in the Room’

By Lianne Kolirin

On the surface, a new website titled Women Warriors, is a heartbreaking tribute to the 52 young Israeli women – soldiers, police officers, IDF paramedics, and one Shin Bet agent – killed while serving their country over the last seven months of war.

But the creators of the first-of-its-kind site, which was launched ahead of the country’s annual Memorial Day on Monday and features a history of Israeli women’s contribution to the security establishment, are hopeful that it will also stand as testament to the changing roles of women and their abilities in a field – and an institution – largely dominated by men.

They also believe that by documenting the stories of these brave soldiers and security personnel, the site will pave the way for other women to serve in more meaningful and influential positions in Israel’s security forces, particularly the military.

“Our goal was to create a website that provides all the information about women who have fallen [in service to the country],” Col. (res.) Maya Heller, chairperson of Forum Dvorah, a nonprofit that promotes

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the equal representation of women in key decision-making positions in the fields of national security and foreign policy – and the mastermind behind the project – told Jewish Insider.

“There are some very heroic stories from Oct. 7, and we felt that we had to tell them,” Heller said of the website, which will soon be translated into English.

“Not all the female soldiers killed on Oct. 7 were in combat roles, but even so, we heard many brave stories of these soldiers, who fought without guns or any kind of combat training,” she said, adding, “They simply understood the need to defend the country... and they paid the ultimate price.”

According to the army’s official statistics, 620 soldiers – both male and female – have been killed since Oct. 7 (roughly half on that day), when thousands of terrorists led by Hamas’ elite Nukhba force infiltrated southern Israel attacking army bases, civilians’ communities and a mass music festival. In total, 1,200 people were killed and another 250 were taken hostage, including many soldiers who are still being held by Hamas. Fifteen of the female soldiers killed on Oct. 7 served as ‘spotters’ on the border, the first line of Israel's defense, and at least five female soldiers kidnapped by Hamas remain in captivity.

The army updates the public almost daily with further details of those killed in battle, including in northern Israel as it grapples with the fundamental Shiite movement Hezbollah in Lebanon and also in the West Bank, where tensions have been high since the war in Gaza started. Yet there is no special emphasis on female soldiers, who have been increasingly engaged in fighting alongside their male counterparts behind enemy lines in roles that were previously off limits.

Israel is one of a handful of countries where women are mandated by law to serve in the military, yet over the past three decades some female recruits have been forced to take legal action in order to gain access to more meaningful roles. Beginning with a 1994 landmark court case to enable women to train as pilots, female soldiers have been edging their way into combat roles and more recently have joined tank commands and elite units.

Last December, two months after Israel began its ground operation in Gaza, the army reported a massive spike in female conscripts seeking to join such units, the Times of Israel reported.

Miri Eisen, a retired IDF colonel and director of the International Institute for Counterterrorism at Reichman University near Tel Aviv, told JI that past efforts are finally taking shape in this war.

However, she said the increased number of women in combat roles – ranging from infantry units to tanks commands to vital communication positions, including in the reserves – has also meant an increase in “fallen women soldiers.”

Eisen, who is among the founders of the Dvorah Forum, said that it was now important to highlight their progress and their contribution, beyond the official memorial ceremonies, because “we are at a real changing point” in Israel's military history.

“This is the first war where we are seeing women at all different levels and their heroism needs to be celebrated,” she said, adding that it was especially important given dissenting voices in Israeli society that still believe women should remain excluded from certain military roles or left out of the army entirely.

“There are many voices who openly say that women should not be in the military and in combat, so we wanted to highlight and to celebrate the amazing things that they have achieved in this war, and to inspire the next generation,” Eisen said.

One of the inspiring stories highlighted on the Women Warriors website belongs to Sgt. Eden Alon Levy, 19, who was killed in hand-to-hand combat with Hamas terrorists on her army base of Zikim, on Oct. 7.

According to accounts by other soldiers who were present, Eden, a commander for new recruits in the army's search and rescue unit, instructed the younger soldiers to seek shelter while she faced dozens of invading terrorists.

“I was not surprised that she acted this way,” her mother, Inbar Alon Levy, told JI. “I could not imagine her doing anything else – there was no way she would have waited for someone else to rescue her, especially when she knew that her soldiers were hiding in the shelter behind her, expecting her to protect them.”

“The minute you choose this path, to be a fighter, then you understand that it’s your duty to do whatever you can to protect your soldiers,” Alon Levy, a retired police officer, continued. “Eden wasn’t just a soldier; she was a commander, and she knew her duty. I feel real pride that she stood there and fought back.”

Alon Levy was intimately involved in creating the content on the website pertaining to her daughter, as were many of the other parents and relatives of the fallen female soldiers who also contributed content about their loved ones.

“I think these stories and this website give power, strength and drive to women who want to serve [in the army], even in the roles where some say they are less suited to serve,” she said. “I think we can all learn a great deal from Eden’s story and those of the other heroines killed that day.”

Heller highlighted that while the website features only those killed in the current war, it will soon be updated to include information and data on female soldiers who fell during previous wars and events.

In total, she said, some 1,130 female security personnel have been killed in the line of duty since Israel’s founding in 1948.

“It’s far higher than the public realizes,” she said, adding that her hope is that the site, which was created with help from Israeli digital marketing company Dialogue, would eventually be used as a resource by schools and educational institutions to teach future generations about the role and contributions of women in the security establishment.

“It is important that our society understands that women can take on any role in the army according to her ability and her choice,” Heller emphasized. “Women have proved themselves and are continuing to prove themselves in this war and because of this, the army and the public is beginning to change their perspectives on the issue.”
At less than 100 words, the foreword to Avi Shalev’s book, *The Only Jew in the Room*, a chronicle of his two years studying at an Islamic college near the Green Line, is quite brief.

In the foreword, Shalev, who retired from the IDF as a lieutenant colonel after 24 years, explains that the English translation of his book had been ready for publication in the first week of October 2023. “Then the horrific events of October 7 unfolded.”

Dedicating the book to the victims of Hamas’ deadly assault on Israel, Shalev writes: “Israel is a country and a people forever changed, as are our hopes for a peaceful coexistence.”

Such hopes form the basis of Shalev’s first book, whose subtitle is “Searching for Understanding in an Arab Islamic College.” It is a heartbreaking introduction to a book that seeks to navigate the cultural differences between the region’s Jewish and Muslim residents — and bridge the gaps between them.

After retiring from the IDF in 2017, Shalev enrolled in the Al-Qasemi Academic College, an institute of Sharia and Islamic Studies in the Israeli-Arab town of Baqa el-Gharbia in the so-called “Triangle” region of Israel, home to many Arab Israelis. In doing so he became the only Jew ever to register and study there.

It was a move that shocked his friends and family, who questioned his decision and begged him to reconsider. Yet Shalev, 52, who had spent his career working in military intelligence, as well as serving in civil administration in the West Bank and Gaza, was steadfast.

Once he embarked on his unusual journey, everyone wanted to hear about it — which is why he started writing a diary, which formed the basis of his book.

“I spent 24 years trying to understand Palestinians and trying to present their narrative and their understanding and their point of view to the Israeli side,” he told *Jewish Insider*.

His fascination with Arabic began when he traveled to Egypt for his bar mitzvah. Soon afterwards, he began learning Arabic. His interest grew during his years in intelligence, and he went on to obtain a master’s in Islamic studies from Berlin University.

But still, Shalev’s curiosity persisted. “Even in Berlin, I was taught by European or American scholars. They were great scholars, outstanding figures, but none of them were Arabs or Muslims. The understanding was that we keep on learning about them but not with them — and not in their environment,” he said.

“Al-Qasemi was really the only academic college that somebody like me could attend, and so I went there because of this keen interest.”

Teaching took place on Fridays and Saturdays as most of the other students had to squeeze lessons in between full-time jobs and busy family lives. For Shalev, who describes his Judaism as “traditional,” this meant trading in synagogue services for Arabic classes.

He spent two years studying for an education diploma at Al-Qasemi, which he followed up with two years of teaching in an Arab college in east Jerusalem.

The experience was “outstanding,” he said, though it took time to settle in. Staff and students initially viewed him with suspicion, fearing he had been sent by security services to spy on them.

In the book, he writes: “In Israel everyone thinks that my interest in Arabic is due to either the conflict or a hidden desire to convert to Islam. It’s as if no one can fathom the possibility that someone might actually be eager to learn about the art, science, literature, philosophy and language of a culture that was once the epicenter of the enlightened world and today is under scrutiny mostly by historians and institutions that research terrorism.”

The experience was not just about studying the language and culture, but getting to meet Israeli Muslims on their turf. Still, barriers remained.

“A lot of friends asked me if I made friends and went out to have a beer. I didn’t go to an American college,” laughed Shalev.

“I studied with mainly younger Muslim women from very religious backgrounds,” he said, explaining that the education sector is overwhelmingly female and many of his fellow students were Bedouins.

“The idea of having a friendship with one of them was just not really possible,” he said. “But we had a lot of conversations and a lot of time together, and they helped me a lot.”

These conversations and interactions are woven through the book, covering everything from linguistics and Arabic poetry to gender roles and sexual harassment.

“The two years I spent at Al-Qasemi were eye-opening,” he said. “I experienced so many different anecdotes and moments of ‘wow’ that I started writing this diary.”

The experience underscored something he had long been aware of — the deep chasm between Jews and Muslims.

“Israelis have great difficulty understanding Palestinians, just as Palestinians have a huge difficulty understanding Israelis,” he said. “Despite the fact that we live so close by, we are a world apart.”

Many Israelis blame the government and IDF for being unprepared for Hamas’ attack on Oct. 7. This gulf in understanding is in part to blame, Shalev believes.

“We have a great intelligence service and are technologically very advanced, but all
the technology we have doesn't really help us know the other," he said.

"In order to really understand the mindset of Palestinians you have to speak their language, you have to know their religion, their history, their culture. And the nature of their society, which is essentially tribal and is so different to Israel's modern Western society.

"I think part of the reason we've experienced this epic failure is because we're not Palestinian and we obviously haven't made enough of an effort to step into their shoes and understand their mindset. I don't mean we should accept it or favor it or accept their narrative — I'm talking about understanding the narrative."

That narrative, he believes, was on full display just months before Hamas brutally attacked Israel, killing more than 1,200 people and wounding and kidnapping many hundreds more.

He is referring to a popular television show called “Fist of the Free,” which aired in Gaza over Ramadan in 2022.

"After the seventh of October we discovered that it described, over 30 episodes, the preparedness of the Gazans to attack Israel."

Hamas official Yahya Sinwar, who is believed to be the mastermind of the Oct. 7 attacks, spoke and honored the team behind the show at an awards ceremony soon after it aired.

The series ended with the occupation of the IDF Gaza division headquarters, near the location that hosted the Nova music festival, according to Shalev.

"The Palestinian hero takes down the Israeli flag and replaces it with the Palestinian flag,” an eerily prescient foreshadowing of what was to come.

With hindsight, the scene he describes is utterly shocking.

Of Hamas and the filmmakers, Shalev said: "Do you think this is how it's going to end? Do you not understand Israel at all? Just as we missed it, they watched the series and missed what this would lead to."

The IDF has focused on technology and overlooked important aspects of cultural life that might have provided crucial insight, Shalev believes.

"Israel had a lot of information that flowed theirway and some of it was indicative that a very big attack was planned, but they brushed it away because they had this idea that the Hamas leadership was committed to long-term stability," said Shalev. "This was wrong. There was a lot of information that indicated otherwise."

Does he have any hope for the future?

"I think we are going through a very difficult process," he said. "There's a lot of reasons for why and it can and will get worse."

He added: "I don't see how you can reason with jihad, but not all Gazaans are jihadists so it's really a question of when will both sides be able to sit down and look each other in the eyes and have a serious talk about what's going on."

Shalev is still hoping to make a difference.

He said: "In the last two years I have actively supported the Al-Qasemi group in its efforts to receive formal recognition from the Israeli council for Higher Education for a third fully academic college in the town of Baqa el-Gharbia. The new college aspires to be the first fully accredited Israeli academic institution in an Arab town in the country — a significant milestone in achieving equality for Arab students in Israel." ♦