

Three soldiers killed in Gaza; Trump envoy heading to Qatar

Yaniv Kubovich and Ofer Aderet

Three soldiers were killed in Gaza over the past two days, the Israel Defense Forces announced.

Staff Sgt. Ido Shamik, 20, from the central city of Ganei Tikva, was killed by gunfire Tuesday morning in northern Gaza's Beit Hanoun. The IDF said that the incident is under investigation.

Shamik, who served in a Nahal Brigade commando unit, is survived by his parents, Ofra and Uri, as well as his brothers, Itai, Adi and Omer.

The Chabad of Ganei Tikva said that "Ido was a modest, principled and pleasant young man. Full of love for the people of Israel and a hero of Israel. Ido would come to our Chabad house, where we were privileged to hear from him in detail about his actions and those of his dear friends who sacrificed their lives for the people of Israel in the war."

Shamik's funeral will take place on Wednesday at 12 P.M. at the Savyon Cemetery.

On Monday, two officers in 932nd Battalion of the Nahal Brigade were killed in combat by anti-tank missile fire in Beit Hanoun. Capt. Eitan Israel Shiknazi, 24, from the settlement of Eli, served as a deputy unit commander, and Maj. Dvir Zion Revah, 28, from Jerusalem, served as a unit commander in the battalion.

Two other soldiers were seriously wounded in the incident, while two other Nahal Brigade soldiers were seriously wounded in a different incident earlier that day.



Wife of soldier Capt. Eitan Israel Shiknazi, who was killed in Gaza, during his funeral in Hatzor Haglilit, on Tuesday.

Shir Toren/Reuters

Revah, the son of Avraham and Ashira, studied at the Tactical Command College, which trains officers for command roles in the ground forces. He was eulogized as "a hero of Israel who defended the country."

Shiknazi, who grew up in Hatzor Haglilit in the north,

and was educated on dedication and love for the people and the land, and this is how he lived and fell."

Michael Kabesa, the head of the Hatzor Haglilit local council, said: "Hatzor has lost one of its finest sons." He added that Shiknazi, a fourth-generation resident

of Hatzor Haglilit, "was a symbol of dedication, determination and courage."

Since the start of the war in Gaza, a total of 828 soldiers have been killed, according to the IDF. Since the start of the most recent ground operation in northern Gaza, which began on Octo-

ber 6, 2024, 42 soldiers have been killed in the area.

According to a military statement released Tuesday, the Kfir Brigade has concluded its operations in the northern Gaza Strip after 64 days.

See GAZA, Page 2

Watchdog: IDF disrupting Oct. 7 probe interviews

Yaniv Kubovich and Chen Maanit

State Comptroller Matanyahu Englman accused the Israeli army on Monday of hindering the state investigation of the October 7 events by intimidating witnesses, pressuring officers to withhold information and secretly recording meetings with his staff, after months-long discussions on the investigation's framework.

In a letter to IDF Chief of Staff Herzl Halevi, Englman also threatened to use his office's regulatory powers if the army continued to "damage and disrupt the investigative processes" by conveying a "message of de-

terrence and intimidation" toward officers and people of ranks in the field in contact with the state comptroller's staff.

The IDF said in response that it "always operates in accordance with the law and fully and transparently cooperates with the state comptroller." With regard to the complaints in Englman's letter, the army said it is studying them and will respond promptly.

Englman said that at every meeting with IDF officials, there is a representative of an IDF team tasked with 'coordinating contact' with the Comptroller's

See PROBE, Page 2

Herzog asks Shin Bet chief about BibiLeaks suspect, mulls pardon

Bar Peleg and Jonathan Lis

President Isaac Herzog spoke with Shin Bet security service chief Ronen Bar about the risk posed to national security by Ari Rosenfeld, the reserve army officer detained for leaking intelligence to the Prime Minister's Office.

The discussion comes as President Herzog weighs Rosenfeld's appeal for a pardon, despite the fact the trial is still ongoing, with lawyers arguing in court about Rosenfeld's danger to national security and remand conditions.

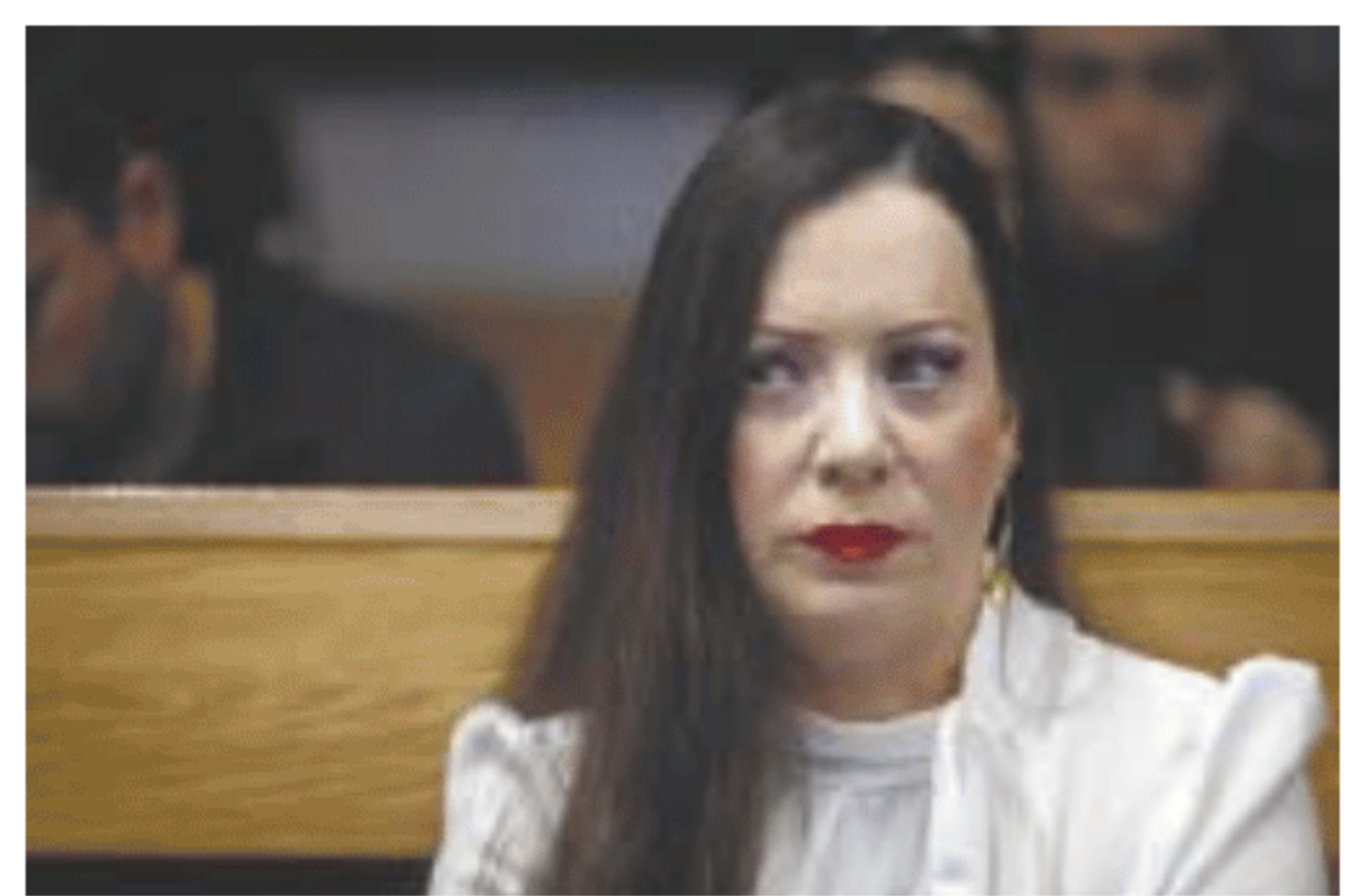
Rosenfeld is accused of passing top-secret material to Eli Feldstein, a

spokesman for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who leaked the information to foreign media. According to the indictment, Feldstein and Rosenfeld sought to get around the accepted protocols for transferring documents, and in the process, leaked classified information.

Prosecutors have sought to detain the two until the end of their trials, but the Supreme Court in early December ordered Feldstein to be released to house arrest. Rosenfeld was kept in custody.

As first reported on Tuesday by Israel Hayom, Herzog showed the Shin

See HERZOG, Page 2



MK Tally Gotliv

Hadas Parush

MK Gotliv refuses to attend police questioning, again

Josh Breiner

Likud MK Tally Gotliv has refused for the second time to appear for police questioning regarding an investigation into her alleged disclosure of a Shin Bet agent's identity, an offense she asserts is protected by her parliamentary immunity.

In a post on her X ac-

count, Gotliv wrote that she had advised the investigator "to refrain from contacting me, as I have no intention of appearing."

This marks the second time Gotliv has been summoned under the same allegation. On the previous occasion, she similarly declined to comply, citing her parliamentary immunity as grounds for not being com-

pelled to appear.

In January 2023, Gotliv posted that the partner of Shikma Bressler, a prominent leader of the protest movement against the judicial overhaul, is an agent of the Shin Bet security service.

She also propagated a false conspiracy theory linking cooperation between protest leaders and

senior security officials to the October 7 massacre.

Gotliv shared an article from the conspiracy site Edna Karnaval, which falsely claimed that U.S. intelligence agencies intercepted a conversation between Bressler's partner and Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar in Gaza.

Following Gotliv's posts, Shin Bet Director Ronen

Bar requested an investigation into her actions from Attorney General Gali Baharav-Miara. In his letter, Bar stated that Gotliv had "published the full details of the agent and his family members," in violation of the law. "As is known, Section 19 of the Shin Bet Service Law prohibits the publication of the identities of service employees, both past and present," he wrote.

Bar emphasized that Gotliv's actions not only represented a clear violation of the law, but also posed a direct threat to national security. "The exposure of the agent's identity was done knowingly and intentionally, endangering the safety and well-being of the service employee and

See GOTLIV, Page 2

Swan song on U.S.-Israel policy

Biden's last arms sale to Israel leaves an explosive legacy

Ben Samuels

WASHINGTON - With just two weeks left in his lame-duck administration, outgoing U.S. President Joe Biden has started his swan song on U.S.-Israel policy.

It could have been a punitive measure addressing Israel's far-right ministers; conditioned assistance on the improvement of Gaza's humanitarian crisis; promoting an international effort at curbing West Bank settlements; or creating momentum for a two-state solution.

Instead, the Biden administration informed Congress informally of its intention to undertake another major arms sale to Israel. This seems like a fitting end to four years of policy that seemed to please no one and antagonize anyone unhappy with the status quo.

Several people familiar with the matter said the proposed \$8 billion sale, first reported by Axios, isn't very different from the \$20 billion deal from several months ago. So even though it is taking place during Israel's increasingly scru-

tinized war in Gaza, the weapons included in the sale are seen by the administration as meant for long-term considerations and are not explicitly meant to aid the ongoing war in the Strip.

Still, they include high-explosive mortar rounds and joint direct attack munitions (JDAMs), missiles for attack helicopters and air-to-air missiles ostensibly meant to defend against airborne threats. The sale even includes 500-pound warheads - similar to the ones frozen in the lone arms shipment the Biden administration has publicly admitted it halted last spring.

Critics on both sides of the aisle will undoubtedly point to flaws with Biden's timing. For a steadily growing number of disillusioned Democrats, the arms sale will be a final bullet point on the 82-year-old's legacy where he blindly accepted Israel's alleged violations of U.S. law as a recipient of military assistance in the name of unfettered ties.

In the eyes of Republican critics, the sale is an attempt

to distract from what they see as the intentional and systematic slow-rolling of U.S. military assistance to Israel - all while the president continues his rhetoric of "ironclad commitments to Israel's security."

The State Department's informal notification about the sale is just the first step in a process with several milestones. However, the process the administration used to think of as rubber-stamping has evolved into something much more politically fraught since the start of the Gaza war 15 months ago.

Last year, both the Biden administration and pro-Israel advocates intensely lobbied the two Democratic lawmakers responsible for green-lighting the \$20-billion deal in order to allow the sale's approval process to formally begin.

Rep. Gregory Meeks, the ranking Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, did not permit the sale until the White House provided assurances about how the weapons would be used.

Even Meeks' former

HAARETZ Online now

Suspected role in alleged coup
Venezuela arrests Israeli citizen, 124 other foreigners

World according to Trump
Hellscape at home, hellscape abroad



Photos: Gage Skidmore; Russian GPO/Wikimedia; Alexyz3d/Shutterstock. Artwork: Anastasia Shub

haaretz.com

A far-right chancellor could be Austria's worst nightmare

Liam Hoare

VIENNA - Austrian President Alexander Van der Bellen shuffled wearily through the carpeted red door and into the grand Maria Theresa Room in Vienna's imperial Hofburg palace on Monday to make an important announcement.

"I did not take this decision lightly," he told the assembled media before a portrait of the former empress, justifying his decision to give the leader of the Freedom Party, Herbert Kickl, a mandate to try to form a government. The move has put Austria on the path to having its first far-right chancellor since World War II.

This was far from the outcome the centrist Van der Bellen wanted. At the end of September, the Freedom Party won the legislative election with 28.8 percent of the vote. However, exploratory discussions following the vote revealed that the far right had no one who wanted to share power with them. So, in late October, Van der Bellen gave current Chancellor Karl Nehammer of the conservative Austrian People's Party a shot at forming a ruling coalition,



Grandmothers Against the Right holding a banner that reads "Stand together against the right," during a protest outside Vienna's presidential office on Monday.

Heinz-Peter Bader/AP

pushing him into the arms of the center-left Social Democratic Party.

Nehammer began talks with the Social Democrats in mid-November, along with the liberal NEOS Party, about forming a three-party government. Negotiations were slow and painful - not only because of the ideological differences between the parties, but because of the bleak economic backdrop against which the talks took place. Austria must consoli-

date its budget in order to bring its budget deficit back below 3 percent of gross domestic product, as mandated by the European Union. Still, the expectation was that the three parties would come to an agreement by the end of January.

Then, in the middle of the Christmas holiday slumber when minds were focused on other things, everything blew up. Last Friday, the NEOS suddenly announced that it was withdrawing

from the coalition talks, arguing that the other parties were not amenable to the reforms it believed the country needed.

The People's Party and Social Democratic Party continued two-party talks for all of 24 hours, before the former unilaterally ended negotiations. On Saturday, Nehammer - who had staked his political career on opposing Kickl and making this

See AUSTRIA, Page 4

'To be or not to be': Jenin operation could seal the Palestinian Authority's fate

Analysis **Jack Khoury**

Palestinian Authority security forces have been operating in the Jenin refugee camp for nearly a month as tensions amid a rise in armed conflict with Palestinian militias in the West Bank.

As of Sunday, 11 people have been killed, six of them police and five of them civilians, including a journalist and a father and son killed over the past weekend. Witnesses say that among the civilians killed, only one was a militant, and that the rest were bystanders. The operation has also left many wounded.

Residents of the camp and the city of Jenin who spoke with Haaretz said they had no idea how long the operation would continue, and talks toward a deescalation agreement are not progressing.

In late December, PA security forces launched an operation in the Jenin refugee camp in the West Bank, with the stated purpose of restoring law and order in the refugee camp and defeating the armed groups operating in Jenin, like the so-called Jenin Brigades comprised of Hamas and Islamic Jihad militants.

The Jenin Brigades assert that the PA is cracking down on them to show Israel that it is in control of the areas it governs in the West Bank. A source close to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas says the operation is also related to discussions of its role in the Gaza Strip after the war. "If [Abbas] and the [Palestinian] Authority are unable to enforce order in a city like Jenin, how can you expect [them] to enforce order in the Gaza Strip and around the West Bank?" the source said.

When the security forces entered the camp, many feared that clashes with local gunmen would spill into other cities like Nablus and

Tubas. While the PA has so far succeeded in containing the violence, the impact of the operation is being felt across the West Bank.

"Jenin is in an important fight for the PA and its security branches – it's a matter of to be or not to be," one PA official told Haaretz.

Over the past two weeks, he said, the PA and its security forces have been encouraged by the operation's progress and have stepped up the pressure.

"Armed fighters in the camp have issued statements and calls for the Palestinian public to go out into the streets and support them, but the response has been very limited and modest," he said. "Those who have come out have mainly been the parents of those killed in clashes with armed men and to a lesser degree people who actually express support for them."

"But we're not talking about a popular protest that would put pressure on the security forces and the PA leadership – mainly Abu Mazen and his circle – to end the operations," the official said, referring to PA President Mahmoud Abbas.

There are a few different explanations for why this has happened. Opponents of the PA claim that the security forces, mainly the intelligence branch, have been exerting heavy public and media pressure on residents, going so far as to threaten those who express solidarity with the gunmen.

"The Palestinian Authority, especially the security forces, is still powerful. In many respects, it remains in control and has the means to repress protests," said a Jenin resident who did come out to protest the operation. "Therefore, many of those who express support [for the militants] have found them-



Palestinian Authority forces in Jenin, on Monday.

Raneen Sawaf/Reuters

selves under investigation or have been threatened."

He said the war with the gunmen was not just being waged in clashes on the streets but on social and conventional media, which constitute an important platform for the militants. As part of that campaign, the PA last week suspended Al Jazeera broadcasts in the West Bank.

At the same time, local and West Bank-wide Fatah leadership has been working to win over public opinion for the PA and its security forces.

In a meeting in Jenin, for example, Majed Faraj, the head of the Palestinian Authority's intelligence apparatus, said the gunmen had a private agenda that would bring harm to West Bank Palestinians.

"The Palestinian public has always supported resistance against the occupation, which gives them a horizon, and not with

showy performances that are mainly media-driven," said a veteran Fatah activist in Jenin who opposes the gunmen.

He told Haaretz that the gunmen have no political agenda or strategy – they simply shoot at Israeli troops when they enter the city or the refugee camp or hold parades of masked gunmen.

"That won't lead to any kind of diplomatic pressure. Israel is exploiting as much as possible and wreaking havoc in refugee camps, cities and villages without any response or consideration from the international community," he pointed out.

However, even inside Fatah there are those who have come out openly against the Jenin operation, asserting that the PA is working in support of Israeli and U.S. interests.

Over the past few days, Zakaria Zubeidi and Jamal Hawil, two Fatah officials

now imprisoned in Israel, issued a statement opposing the PA's move. In the past, Zubeidi and many other Tanzim activists had surrendered their weapons in an arrangement with the PA to give a chance for a negotiated agreement with Israel, but that hasn't happened.

"The real problem is the lack of hope and the absence of any political horizon under a right-wing Israeli government that has buried the Oslo Accords, violated all international laws and is planning annexation moves without the PA able to respond," Zubeidi and Hawil wrote.

They continued: "The problem is not with the resistance, but with those who were convinced that they would have a role after its elimination, and were convinced that the Americans and Israelis would grant them power and a state."

Another point concerns the widely held fear in Jenin

and the West Bank generally that the destruction in the Gaza Strip could happen in the West Bank. This view is held by many businesspeople and merchants, whose status in Palestinian society has grown, and with it, their influence over the PA.

This pressure is evident in Nablus, but the merchants also have a great deal of influence in areas like Hebron. This has prevented the protests from spreading and the gunmen from stepping up pressure in these cities.

Opponents of the Jenin operation claim that the PA is losing the last of its legitimacy and that internal Palestinian squabbling will lead to nothing but its collapse. But with the backing of the business community, the PA may be able to leverage its operation in Jenin into securing control of the West Bank and as a segue to regaining control of the Gaza Strip.

Alleged sexual assault victim of Eyal Golan speaks at Knesset

Noa Shpigel and Shira Naot

One of the complainants in the 2013 sex scandal allegedly involving Israeli pop star Eyal Golan sharply criticized police conduct during the investigation, testifying before a Knesset committee on Monday.

The Knesset Committee for the Advancement of the Status of Women convened under the title "Standing with Taisia Zamolutzky," after she publicly identified herself last week as a complainant in the case.

Speaking to the committee, Zamolutzky alleged that police mishandled the investigation. "The Israeli police claim the investigation was thorough and professional. Eyal Golan claims he was 'combed through with a fine-tooth comb' and that the case was closed twice for lack of evidence. I claim this was not a negligent investigation but a criminal one. It is time to expose the truth," she said.

Social Equality and Women's Advancement Minister May Golan did not attend the hearing. Zamolutzky, who was a minor at the time of the alleged abuse, recounted traumatic experiences with law enforcement. She described being handcuffed at her home and subjected to aggressive interrogation.

"There was an investigator named Shirley who screamed at me, 'Say now who you were with,' accusing me of prostitution and drug use. All of this was done while I was a minor, unaware and lacking judgment," she said.

"When I reviewed the visual evidence from the investigation, I realized how invisible, worthless, and powerless I was in the face of such a powerful man," Zamolutzky added.

She also alleged that police showed favoritism toward Golan during the investigation. "At the Tel Aviv police station, there was excitement. Everyone wanted selfies with the singer. In the interrogation rooms, he was served food, popcorn, and had conversations about soccer. His lawyer would call the head of the investigative team during questioning and assure Golan he could turn to him for help," she said.

Zamolutzky claimed that investigators and Golan searched for a hidden camera in the interrogation room and eventually located it. "From that point on, the head investigator blocked the camera with his back, passing messages to Golan. Golan was so pleased by this that he would hug and kiss them after each message," she said.

Zamolutzky also spoke about her exploitation as a minor for nearly a year, describing it as part of a systematic abuse under Golan's influence. "I was a vulner-

able teenager in a state institution, easy prey for exploiters and rapists. There were promises, sweet words: 'My dear, you'll go far, we'll travel, you'll be VIP.' At the time, I thought I was on top of the world, but I soon realized I was trapped," she said.

She added, "As a child with no support, I had no tools to escape. I said 'no' dozens of times – it didn't help me." Zamolutzky described the dismissive attitude of investigators, recalling being asked, "Either you wanted it, or you were high, or you were horny... They tried to build a case."

The session also included testimony from Nechama Te'ena, who has accused Rabbi Zvi Tau of sexual assault. Tau is the spiritual leader of the far-right, anti-LGBTQ Noam Party and a prominent Haredi-nationalist rabbi.

Te'ena alleged that Noam MK Avi Maoz tried to block her from entering the Knesset by appealing to the Knesset officer. "My family is being ostracized," Te'ena said. "I am calling on the prosecution: There are more victims. Issue a statement encouraging them to testify."

Maoz's office denied the allegations, calling them "completely false."

Since Zamolutzky's interview last week, dozens of municipal leaders have announced they will no longer invite Golan to perform at public events, and his scheduled appearance at the Women's Festival in Eilat next month has been canceled.

Golan was first investigated in 2013 in the "Social Games" case, which involved allegations of statutory rape and encouraging minors to use drugs. While the case against Golan was closed for lack of evidence, his father, Danny Biton, was sentenced to two years in prison as part of a plea deal for soliciting prostitution, exploiting minors, and evidence tampering. In 2022, Golan was investigated again following testimony from Zamolutzky and another complainant, but the case was closed in 2023 due to lack of evidence.

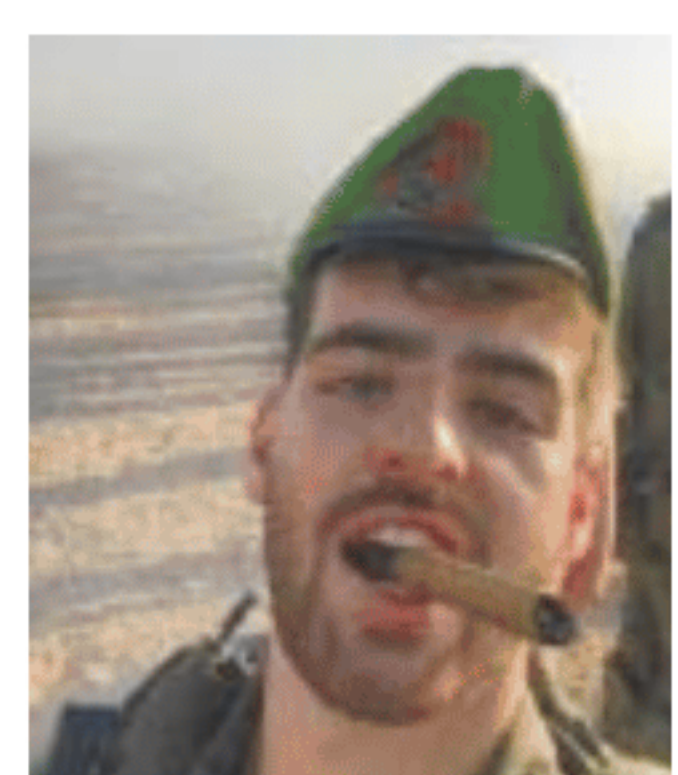
The Israel Police said in a statement that "A professional and thorough investigation was conducted covertly in 2013. During the investigation, the police carried out a wide range of investigative actions, including arrests [and] collecting testimonies. "Contrary to what has been claimed, we emphasize that the investigation was conducted sensitively, and all the complainants' rights were upheld. At the conclusion of the investigation, which was overseen by a supervising prosecutor, the case was submitted for review and the adoption of decisions by the prosecution, which filed a severe indictment against one of the individuals involved," the police added.

GAZA

Continued from page 1

The army clarified that the 162nd Division continues its activities in the area and emphasized that there is no intention to allow residents to return to their homes in northern Gaza until the political leadership decides on the matter.

U.S. President-elect Donald Trump's Envoy to the Middle East Steven Witkoff is due to leave for Qatar on Wednesday, where negotiations are taking place on a deal to bring back the hostages held in Gaza. "I don't want to say too much but we're making a lot of progress,"



Ido Shamik

Witkoff said, speaking at an event at Trump's Mar-a-Lago in Florida. "They're doing a really good job."

When asked about the negotiations, Trump replied: "I don't want to hurt the negotiation, but if they're not back by the time I get into office,



Dvir Zion Revav

all hell will break out in the Middle East."

President Isaac Herzog met on Tuesday with prisoners and missing persons coordinators from the United States, Canada, Germany, Austria and the United Kingdom, who are current-

ly visiting Israel.

Also on Tuesday, Israeli authorities released details from the interrogation of a Hamas militant arrested at the Kamal Adwan Hospital in northern Gaza. The operation led to the capture of more than 240 militants from Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. In a video of his interrogation, Hamas operative Anas Muhammad Faiz al-Sherif described how militants used the hospital as a strategic base, assuming it would not be directly targeted by the Israeli military. He says weapons were moved to and from the facility and used in ambushes and tunnels against Israeli forces.

With reporting by Ben Samuels and Michael Hausner.

GOTLIV

Continued from page 1

his family," Bar wrote.

Based on Bar's request and the recommendation of State Prosecutor Amit Aisman, Baharav-Miara authorized the investigation into Gotliv. In response, Gotliv stated that she would not appear for questioning. "As I have clarified to the unit representative, I am protected by immunity from criminal liability for any act or statement made within the scope of fulfilling my duties," Gotliv wrote on her X account.

"The disclosure of details regarding the partner of the dangerous Shikma Bressler was done in the context of my role and responsibilities." She added, "A Shin Bet employee whose partner leads civil disobedience, encourages insubordination, and opposes the government in a dangerous manner had an obligation to disclose this information."

Gotliv further criticized the attorney general, accusing her of trying to intimidate and silence her. "The summons for questioning is an abuse of power, aimed at silencing me," Gotliv said. "I will not allow the attorney general to silence or intimidate me. As is known, I cannot be compelled to appear."

HERZOG

Continued from page 1

Bet chief queries he had received from Knesset members and ordinary citizens about Rosenfeld.

The risk to national security is the key criterion for establishing prison conditions for a defendant, and as such Rosenfeld has been waging a campaign with the help of elected officials to have the Tel Aviv District Court release him to house arrest.

The court heard an appeal from him Tuesday morning on the matter, and heard the opinion of the IDF, but not the Shin Bet. Uri Corb, Rosenfeld's attorney, cited Supreme Court Justice Alex Stein's ruling that Rosenfeld should remain in custody because there was no way to ensure that he would not pass on other classified information.

But Corb noted that in prison, the defendant had been in contact with many individuals to whom he could have passed on classified information had he wanted to, including his cellmate, who was convicted of espionage; other detainees he meets when out of his cell, including security prisoners; and the coalition MKs who visited him.

"He has been allowed to meet unsupervised with

these people, not once, dozens of times," Corb said. "If the state believes its own argument, it wouldn't allow this to happen."

Corb submitted a letter to the court with the Knesset logo on it, claiming that security officials believe that Rosenfeld poses no risk to national security and that a risk would be posed if he remained in custody.

Adi Arad from the State Prosecutor's Office told the court that his level of risk had been determined even before the letter was submitted, based on the offenses he is accused of, statements he made saying he would continue committing these offenses and the army's position as submitted to the court.

She said the army's position regarding the risk Rosenfeld posed was due to the quality and timeliness of the information he had, as well as the fact that the country was at war. "Hence," she said, "we believe that the relevant position among those of the security agencies is that of the army."

The President's Office said Rosenfeld's request to Herzog for a presidential pardon had been under review since it was made last month. "The president has complete confidence in the justice system and the request will be examined like others [in the past]," the office said.

PROBE

Continued from page 1

Office. "The more sensitive the subject of the meeting or when the officeholder meeting with the Comptroller's Office's staff is more senior, the more senior is the representative of the [IDF's coordinating team] attending the meeting," Englman said.

In some cases, the IDF representative recorded what was said, he added. Englman alleged the representatives of the IDF team decided on their own to record the meetings with his office staff without his staff's knowledge. "If our representative hadn't noticed the recording device at the end of the meeting, it's possible that we wouldn't have known about it at all," he wrote, adding his staff's request to obtain the recordings was refused.

An IDF representative who was summoned to meet with staff from the State Comptroller's Office admitted that he was asked to sign a confidentiality agreement. According to Englman's understanding, this document limited the information that would be shared with his staff. Englman also wrote that another officer said that he had been briefed in preparation for his meeting with



Englman Naama Grynbaum

Englman's office. The Comptroller also complained that he had not yet been provided requested information from the army's own internal investigations that had already been presented to the defense minister regarding the October 7 attack.

In his letter, Englman claimed that the IDF's approach to the investigation is liable to dissuade members of the IDF from cooperating fully with his investigation and withholding the truth.

He mentioned that 10 days before sending his letter, his office staff had a meeting with the deputy chief of staff of the IDF and representatives of Halevi's office "in an attempt to address that conduct, but this dialogue didn't produce the required change."

"As long as these impediments are not removed by January 15, I will be forced to

make use of the investigative authority vested in me, including the authority to summon witnesses to the State Comptroller's Office to present documents and provide testimony," Englman wrote.

The IDF, he said, needs to cooperate in accordance with the plan that was agreed to "in a manner that enables the continuation of the combat for the benefit of the citizens of Israel and the defense of our country from all of our enemies, in addition to oversight procedures that get down to the root of the truth."

The Comptroller's Office launched its investigation into the failures of October 7 a year ago, prompting the IDF chief of staff to criticize its timing, arguing it was unprecedented and premature to conduct the probe before the war's conclusion.

In June, the High Court of Justice issued an order suspending the state comptroller's investigation following petitions filed with the court. In November, the State Comptroller's Office and the IDF informed the court that they had worked out a plan that would not interfere with the conduct of the war. The two sides agreed on 12 issues that Englman's office would investigate initially.

The two sides are expected to return to the court in March to report on the progress of the investigation.



Jewish Federations of North America congratulates our Chair of the Board of Trustees

Julie Beren Platt

and the other honorees on receiving the Presidential Medal of Honor, Israel's highest civilian award, from President Isaac Herzog.

We salute and admire Julie's decades of service to Israel and the Jewish People as we express our admiration and send our love.

Poll: Nearly half of northern Israel evacuees may not return home

Noa Shpigel
and Adi Hashmonai

Nearly half of all Israelis evacuated from the north have yet to decide whether they will return to their homes, while an additional 5 percent have already decided not to, according to newly published data presented on Monday at a conference in the Knesset. According to the survey, the main reason they have yet to return is concern for personal security. About half of those who said they didn't plan to return said they preferred to remain where they had been evacuated to.

Among residents of Metula, 47 percent of the respondents said they hadn't returned because their homes had not yet been rebuilt or repaired from war damage.

The poll was released at a conference taking place at the Knesset, which was attended by lawmakers, residents of northern Israel and local leaders.

Interior Minister Moshe Arbel told the conference that Einav Peretz, an accountant by profession and who heads the ministry's northern district, would be appointed interim head for northern Israel's recuperation. Peretz will keep her Interior Ministry post, replacing Eliezer Marom, the former commander of the Israel Navy, who stepped down in December. Most of the survey respondents expressed satisfaction with the solutions they were offered for their children's education at the time of the evacuation as well as housing, health and psychological support.

However, most were unhappy with the financial compensation they were given, which they said didn't fully reflect the losses they had sustained. Half of respondents said they feared their old communities had not remained united.



The site where a Hezbollah rocket hit a residential building in Kiryat Shmona, last year.

Ohad Zwigenberg/AP

Regarding education, 46 percent of respondents said they felt the solutions they were offered were complete, while 24 percent said they were only partial. In contrast, 9 percent deemed the solutions they were offered unsatisfactory, while 13 percent said they were offered no help at all. Some 46 percent of the evacuees said their ongoing needs were fully met, and 21 percent said only partially. Only 8 percent said they were only minimally met, and 18 percent said not at all met.

The level of satisfaction was highest in the towns of Metula (61 percent) and Shlomi (63 percent), while in Kiryat Shmona, only 36 percent of the evacuees felt their ongoing needs were fully met, compared to 26 percent who felt they were not at all.

"This survey is a wake-up call to the government," said lawmaker Meir Cohen

of Yesh Atid, who organized the conference. "The sense of security remains absent, compensation is insufficient and the dissolution of communities are all areas that require immediate attention," he said. "We cannot allow the north to fall behind... This is an opportunity to come up with real solutions."

MK Vladimir Beliak of Yesh Atid called the government to act, saying that "the plans for return and compensation have not yet been properly formulated and there's no budgetary source for them." Matan Davidyan, a resident of Shlomi and a member of the Fight4North nonprofit, highlighted that though there were discussions of long-term plans, residents facing urgent matters were being left behind.

"There are things that must happen here and now," he said. "Property tax [fund-

ing] is not coming in, in most cases they do not compensate for losses, and if they do decide to compensate you, that too takes a long time." Professor Rachel Amir, a dean of Tel-Hai Academic College, told the conference that "we're starting to return to our campus, which was evacuated at the start of the war."

"Tel-Hai is the biggest employer in the eastern Galilee and every year draws 5,000 students to the Galil," she said. "The students drive an entire economy and integrate into all educational and welfare institutions in the region."

The Adva Center, which has been conducting studies on the evacuees, issued policy recommendations for how to best rebuild and restore the communities. "The need for evacuees to have their voices heard and to be partners in planning policies...

must be met," they said.

The center said evacuees' unique vulnerability should entitle them to ongoing support in the form of a monthly allowance or other benefits. They suggested applying the same mechanisms used in the Hostilities Victims Law.

On Monday, the chief of Northern Command, Maj. Gen. Ori Gordin, met with residents of the Mevo'ot Hahermon Regional Council, where he told them that the army had a "new plan to upgrade the security components of the towns."

"We are in the process of strengthening security in educational institutions and also for individuals. The electric company is now fixing the damaged infrastructure in the communities. The government has determined that we will return on March 1, and that is where we are aiming," added Gordin.

Germany halts funding of aid org, cutting off Israeli rights groups

Rachel Fink

Germany has quietly cut funding to a prominent German aid organization, effectively halting its support of two left-leaning Israeli human rights groups under its sponsorship.

According to Deutsche Welle, the German news outlet that first reported the story, the decision is part of a larger pattern by the German government of defunding groups that are critical of Israel's government and its ongoing military campaign in Gaza.

After months of back-and-forth between German officials and human rights group KURVE Wustrow, in mid-December the government confirmed its decision to pull all of its funding for the aid organization, Deutsche Welle (DW) reported on Monday.

According to KURVE Wustrow's acting director, John Preuss, he was never given an official explanation for the defunding, which left KURVE Wustrow's two primary partnerships, the Israeli human rights groups Zochrot and New Profile, bereft of critical income streams.

New Profile told Haaretz that KURVE Wustrow was meant to be the organization's main source of funding in 2025. The human rights group Zochrot said the decision put them in a difficult financial position, cutting a quarter of their budget.

The organizations, both of which have received development aid through various German partners for nearly two decades, each submitted long statements to the German government hoping to dissuade them from cutting off access to badly needed financial resources, to no avail.

Since 2002, Zochrot has dedicated itself to exposing Jewish Israelis to the events of the Palestinian Nakba of

1948 and advocating for the Right of Return for Palestinian refugees.

In a statement published on Monday, Zochrot said that "during discussions with German officials in Tel Aviv and in Berlin... we were told repeatedly that while commemorating the Nakba is important, supporting the Palestinian right of return is unacceptable." Zochrot director Rachel Beitarie, who met with German officials before the decision was made final, told DW, "The German past, the Nazi regime was brought up again and again in these conversations."

German officials, she added, told her it was important for Germany to support Israel because of Germany's history. "The defunding definitely hurts us, but it will not stop us from doing this work," she said to DW.

New Profile focuses its humanitarian efforts on Israeli anti-militarization, offering support to conscientious objectors who risk imprisonment for refusing to fulfill compulsory military service. Nissi Peli, a New Profile activist, said that "the decision has put our work at risk."

"Already, we have had to reduce staff hours and other expenses," he said. "Which was probably also the government's intention."

DW investigation involving emails, classified documents, and dozens of sources from the development sector in Germany, Israel and the West Bank revealed that Germany's defunding of the two groups might not be an aberration.

"Findings indicate that the defunding of Zochrot and New Profile are part of a larger pattern of cutting federal funds for human rights organizations [that were critical of Israel]," the DW report stated. Since Hamas October 7 attacks and the resulting Israeli military campaign, Germany has pulled its financing of no less than six Palestinian organizations.

Additionally, in November, the German parliament passed a controversial resolution that included a commitment to protecting Jewish life in Germany, as well as a declaration supporting Israel's right to defend itself and measures against the BDS movement.

However, critics - including fifteen Israeli nongovernmental organizations such as the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, B'Tselem, and Peace Now - argued that the resolution would also silence those who speak out for Palestinian rights and oppose the occupation. According to sources in the development sector that spoke to DW, these moves appear to be motivated by Germany's desire to side with Israel's right-wing government, who itself is working to stifle dissent.

"It's a trend that began a decade and a half ago, but came to its peak with the current government, and especially after October 7," Israeli NGO lawyer Michael Sfarid explained to DW. "It is unbelievable how difficult it is in today's Israel to criticize the policy of the government."

In a written statement to DW, Germany's Federal Foreign Office rejected the accusations that Germany's decision to defund Zochrot and New Profile were made under pressure from the Israeli government, saying it continues to fund "numerous NGOs in Israel and the Palestinian territories critical of the Israeli occupation policy."

Regardless of the reasons, Peli said that New Profile refuses to let the German government derail its mission. "We operated for years as a volunteer organization," he said. "Even if we lose all of our funding, we will return to our volunteer structure."

"We will never stop opposing fascism, militarism, and genocide, certainly not because of a cowardly decision by any government," he declared.

The hard right is intensifying its attack on the Supreme Court

Dahlia Scheindlin

The known body count in Israel and Palestine over the last 24 hours includes 88 Palestinians killed by IDF action in Gaza, according to the Hamas-run Health Ministry there, and two more who were killed in the West Bank. Also in the West Bank, Palestinian attackers opened fire near the settlement of Kedumim, killing three Israelis.

The only Palestinians that most Jewish Israelis will recall are those who killed Israelis near Kedumim - but one organization knows who's really to blame for terror attacks like this. "The High Court of Justice endangers the security of Israel," bled Im Tirtzu - still hawking its crazy, after all these years.

Remember Im Tirtzu, those angry people from decades past? Right-wing activists who had fun intimidating anyone they considered dissidents, calling them foreign agents, and cultivating collaborators and informants to police correct thought and speech in Israel? This was the group that an Israeli district court ruled in 2013 could literally be labeled fascist, because the two movements have enough in common. The High Court later overruled that verdict, but only on a technicality.

The 2013 decision was surely tough for Im Tirtzu. Sadder still is that the group has tumbled from recollection or relevance in Israel. Saddest of all is that the once-maverick, proto-authoritarian gang has long since been superseded by worse.

Yet ImTi insists on sticking around. Over the last two weeks, a poster campaign sprouted around Tel Aviv declaring: "While the hostages are in Gaza, the High Court justices are worried about the Nukhba [Hamas terrorists who attacked Israelis on October 7, and are being

held in Israeli prisons]!" (Exclamation points are my translation of the spirit of the signs). "The Court is against Israel!!!"

Photos of four justices are splashed across the posters, and not in an admiring mien: "The time has come to show the Supreme [Court] justices what the people of Israel think of them!" ImTi could have just consulted the

signed by three justices on December 19, which "instructs the respondents [the national security minister, the prison service and the attorney general] to [justify] why it has not taken steps to ensure that security prisoners too are given sufficient nourishment for ... basic subsistence, as per the applicable law." Another justice, Ruth Ronen, recently visited the security prisoners herself to check on them.

No one is asking Israelis to like the Nukhba prison-



Likud lawmaker Galit Distel Atbaryan, right.

Olivier Fitoussi

Tortured logic or not, the message is clear: For Israel's hard right, the top court is just a notch below the Nukhba. And everyone knows how Israel treats its enemies.

2024 Israel Democracy Index published in December, which ranked Israel's Supreme Court as the second most trusted institution in the country (40 percent), 15 points higher than the government (25 percent) and close to four times higher than trust in political parties (11 percent).

More blaring: "After High Court justices visited terrorists and others issued a conditional order to improve the treatment of the Nukhba, we are mounting this sign campaign to show them what the people of Israel think of them. ... High Court justices stood with the Nukhbas!"

This refers to a decision

ers, the most ghoulish of the attackers on October 7. But ImTi, as usual, is so terribly confused.

First, judges don't "worry about" the "Nukhbas," as Israelis call them. They interpret "applicable law," which is their job.

Second, there is a good reason for that law. Israel has been holding hundreds of Palestinians captured on or since October 7 in prison - no trial, no end date, under abject conditions. There are thousands more Palestinian detainees in total. Media outlets and NGOs, including Haaretz, the New York Times and B'Tselem, have documented abhorrent patterns of abuse. One

man was raped and tortured so badly that Israeli military legal authorities intervened, sparking an infamous riot by an Israeli right-wing mob - including politicians - in defense of the suspects, against their own legal authorities. Preserving the basic rights even of sickening prisoners would have been better, and it's the right thing to do.

Third, it's curious to accuse the justices of neglecting Israeli hostages in Gaza. ImTirzu surely forgot that it's the country's far-right representatives in the government who have steadfastly opposed a hostage release deal this whole time.

And what exactly should the judges do: attend demonstrations demanding a hostage deal? If they did (or do), they'd be branded as subversive traitors, and the hostages still wouldn't be home. There's no actual logic here; just incitement against the judges. Only recently, ImTi was enthusiastically recruiting citizen-dirt-diggers to try to sabotage undesirable nominees for the position of president of the court, as yet unfilled despite a looming court order for the state to do so.

Finally, the accusation that the High Court is destroying Israeli security, which is an old charge, is now conveniently deployed to deflect blame away from the prime minister and the government, toward the army (which truly does carry tremendous blame) and the judiciary - which is bonkers.

That doesn't stop Likud lawmaker Galit Distel Atbaryan from declaring she is dead set against an investigative commission for October 7, while arguing that such a commission must investigate the Supreme Court itself.

Tortured logic or not, the message is clear: For Israel's hard right, the top court is just a notch below the Nukhba. And everyone knows how Israel treats its enemies.

Stories the world needs to know.

Unflinching global news coverage, paired with deep local reporting.



Subscribe to The New York Times International Edition and Haaretz and benefit from a special 4-month subscription offer. Includes unlimited access to haaretz.com, nytimes.com and Haaretz and New York Times apps.

Order today
+972 3 512 1750
nyti@haaretz.co.il

Offer is valid for new subscribers in Israel only. Early delivery to your door available in most areas throughout Israel. Smartphone and tablet apps are not supported on all devices.

Media storm over new Syrian ruler's refusal to shake German minister's hand

Naghm Zbeedat

The controversy surrounding women's roles and rights in Syria's new post-Assad political landscape took on an international dimension during a visit to Damascus by German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock and her French counterpart Jean-Noël Barrot over the weekend.

The two European officials, the first high-level European delegation to visit Syria since the toppling of Bashar Assad's regime last month, met with Syria's de-facto leader Ahmad al-Sharaa, also known as Abu Mohammed al-Golani, in Damascus. However, the meeting received media attention mostly for al-Golani avoiding shaking hands with Baerbock. Receiving his guests at the presidential palace, al-Golani extended his hand to the French foreign minister but placed his hand over his heart when greeted by Baerbock. Barrot, after initially mirroring the gesture, then shook hands with al-Golani.

The incident was met with mixed reactions, by Syrian politicians and public figures as well as international commentators, with some accusing the new regime of the de facto imposition of conservative Islamist values on post-Assad Syria. Others defended al-Golani's decision, arguing that it was a personal choice and not intended as disrespectful.

Baerbock addressed the handshake issue in a televised interview, saying "As I traveled here, it was clear to me that there would obviously be no ordinary handshakes. But it was also clear that not only I, but also the French foreign minister, did not share this view." She

added that the new Syrian government's relations with Germany and the European Union are "conditional," noting: "Women's rights are not just a separate issue, but rather a reflection of the level of freedom in any society."

Barrot, in a post on X, reinforced this sentiment, stating that both he and Baerbock had secured "assurances from the new Syrian authorities that there will be broad participation – particularly by women – in the political transition." The debate over al-Golani's gesture has further fueled ongoing tensions about the future role of women in the "new" Syria. While European diplomats and Syrian activists call for a more inclusive governance model, others remain skeptical of whether the new administration will encourage, or even accept, the participation of women in public life.

There are growing concerns among Syrian activists who worry that the rebels-turned-rulers are seeking to enforce a conservative Islamist identity on Syria, starting with the country's new political and educational systems, which will marginalize women.

Curriculum changes in Hayat Tahrir al-Sham-controlled areas reportedly reinforce conservative gender roles, further sidelining women. These concerns were intensified when, in mid-December, HTS spokesman Obeida Arnaou justified the exclusion of women from top government roles, including the judiciary and defense ministry, citing "biological and mental composition."

Al-Golani has appointed two women to senior roles: Maysaa Sabrin as governor of the Central Bank of Syria, the first woman to hold



Ahmad al-Sharaa shaking the hand of French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot, left, then avoids shaking hands with German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock, right.

this position, and Aisha al-Debs as head of women's affairs. Al-Debs' appointment drew controversy when she blamed women's empowerment organizations for Syria's rising divorce rates, stating, "I will not give room to those who disagree with my way of thinking."

Khaled al-Rowaihan, Yemen's former Minister of Culture and Tourism, took to his X account to condemn al-Golani, writing, "Had you shaken her hand, it would have been better for you and for the new Syria," asserting that such actions are "neither successful nor clever," and indicated that there should be no need to have to explain why al-Golani's behavior was wrong, "politically, religiously, and logically."

Meanwhile, al-Golani's actions won understanding, if not support, from commentators who contended that personal religious beliefs should be respected, including the conservative Islamic tradition prohibiting physical contact with members of the opposite sex outside close familial ties — as long as they do not infringe upon broader rights and freedoms. Others castigated what they characterized as the "cultural illiteracy" of al-Golani's critics.

Dareen Khalifa, a Syrian senior adviser for dialogue promotion at the International Crisis Group based in London, reposted a video of al-Golani avoiding the handshake, remarking, "Most conservative Muslims don't shake hands - jihadists or not." She added, "It's also very condescending to assume that the German Foreign Minister wouldn't know that or that she would be offended when faced with a different culture." Mariam al-Barghouti, a Palestinian journalist, posted on X in response to those claiming the incident was a "humiliation for Syria." Barghouti shared her own experience, writing, "While conducting interviews in areas with different belief systems, I have encountered men refusing to shake my hand." She added, "It never took away from how they viewed me as a person. I was still treated with respect and consideration."

She described the focus on the handshake-that-wasn't between al-Golani and Baerbock as "disgustingly Islamophobic, egocentric, and culturally ill-informed." Syrian journalist Qutaiba Yassen, who works for Syria Television, an opposition satellite channel based in Turkey supportive of al-Golani's HTS group, shared on X a video showing former Israeli ultra-Orthodox Health Minister Yaakov Litzman declining to shake hands with a woman. He captioned it, "The [former] Israeli Health Minister doesn't shake women's hands. Of course, this is considered a personal freedom by the Arab left," adding, "we don't need to dwell on it."

approach to the Middle East. "The problems in the Middle East by and large originate from Tehran, not from Tel Aviv. We're going to stand by and support our greatest ally in the Middle East. We're aligned from a national security, intelligence and values standpoint," he continued.

Waltz added that "because of the leadership of Prime Minister Netanyahu and the courage of the Israeli people, we now have a decimated Hezbollah and a nearly destroyed Hamas and Iran in the weakest position it's been in since 1979."

"We're going to align with our ally Israel, we're going to realign the common interests of the Gulf Arab states with Israel in opposing Iran's aggression, we're going to reinstate maximum pressure, we're going to stop them from selling their illegal oil that has been funding terrorism," he continued, outlining Trump's foreign policy goals.

"Once we get the Abraham Accords back on track and put the next steps of peace and prosperity in place, we can start talking bigger deals," he continued, highlighting potential collaborations on railways, data centers, energy, pipelines and fiber optics.

"That's ultimately what gets President Trump so excited and that's what makes all of these historic disagreements that have perpetuated for decades, if not centuries, smaller," Waltz further lamented that the U.S. military is "getting worn out shooting missile after missile from this ragtag bunch of Houthis. We're going to get that under control."

Incoming U.S. nat'l security advisor talks Mideast approach

Ben Samuels

WASHINGTON – Incoming U.S. National Security Advisor Mike Waltz accused terror organizations like Hamas of "infiltrating our borders," saying "they didn't get the memo that the Biden administration decided the war on terror was over."

Waltz told Fox News' Mark Levin that the U.S. doesn't have a full picture on how many cells are present or how operative they are, though he is nevertheless echoing what has become a key Republican talking point: linking the southern border to foreign "radical Islamic extremism."

He added that following immediate border actions, the Trump administration will "start making sure we have the right posture abroad from a [national security] standpoint."

After that, as part of a "medium-term, broader effort," Waltz said, there will be a cross-governmental effort to combat "radicalization," where the U.S. government will "look at mosques, individuals, universities, professors – you name it – that pose a threat to the United States and are radicalizing individuals to harm the United States."

He specifically flagged people "here on a student visa, with the privilege to study in our universities – you don't get to protest and radicalize. You're going to go back home real fast."

Waltz's latter points have been among Trump's most highly telegraphed plans to combat the pro-Palestinian movement across the U.S.

Waltz added that the Trump administration will institute a "complete philosophical, wholesale national security shift" in Trump's

First same-sex couple in Israel legally adopts child as family

Gal Gabai

Two same-sex parents legally adopted a child together on Monday, marking a historic first in Israel.

The adoption follows a December 2023 High Court of Justice ruling that allowed same-sex couples to adopt as a family unit. Previously, such couples could adopt children individually but not as a unified household.

The parents, Shay Gurtler and Shahar Globberman, officially adopted their 3-year-old son, Shai-Shana, who joins their daughter Tanya, adopted in the United States.

Speaking to Haaretz after completing the process,

Gurtler said this was more than a legal milestone. "It's very significant because until now, the connection was reversible. Now that the adoption is final, it's a huge relief," he said.

"This event has both legal significance and real-life impact. Not because of any specific fear, but when the adoption isn't final, you live with a sense of uncertainty," Gurtler said.

The couple had been foster parents to their son for two and a half years. Gurtler added that Tanya was also delighted: "She's thrilled – now he's ours forever."

Before the court's landmark ruling, same-sex cou-



Gurtler and Globberman with their children.

ples could only adopt each other's biological children.

For non-biological children, state policy prioritized heterosexual couples, allowing same-sex couples to adopt only in rare cases where no other adoptive parents were available.

Even then, adoptions were granted to LGBTQ individuals as single parents, not as couples or family units.

This discriminatory pol-

icy was rooted in the recommendations of the Gross Committee, established to examine Israel's adoption laws. It argued that adopting children shouldn't face additional "exceptional" circumstances, including having same-sex parents. It claimed that the best interest of the child required placement with families not considered "exceptional" in Israeli society.

Egypt next? Anti-Sissi campaign builds online

Naghm Zbeedat

A wave of unrest is brewing online as the hashtag "It's your turn, Dictator," targeting Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sissi, trends across Arabic social media.

The slogan calls to end al-Sissi's rule and echoes "It's your turn, Doctor," the graffiti that became the rallying cry against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad during the early days of Syria's civil war in 2011.

The anti-Sissi campaign on X started with Ahmad Al-Mansour's posts. An Egyptian fighter with the Syrian rebel group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, which led the recent Syrian coup d'état, he called for al-Sissi's resignation, urging the Egyptian people to rise against oppression.

"The state of terror that al-

Sissi is living in now requires our initiative to reignite the revolution," he posted.

Following the trend, Egyptian politician and human rights activist Osama Rushdi called al-Sissi a "criminal tyrant who seized power through a coup, conspiracy, betrayal, and treachery."

Former Minister of Parliamentary Affairs Mohammed Mahsoob addressed people cautioning against the fall of Egypt amid calls for an uprising. "Those who warn against the collapse of the state should stop undermining its pillars," he wrote, emphasizing "the state exists to protect its people, not to oppress them, to improve their conditions, not to exploit them."

As the hashtag campaign gathered momentum, Egypt's Minister of Interior convened with senior securi-

ty officials to raise the country's security alert to the highest level, reported Rasse News Network, an Egyptian opposition news outlet.

Yemeni journalist Anes Mansoor, of Arabi21News, an independent news outlet based in London, tweeted that Egypt is "on the verge of exploding." "The regime is anxious, the army is on high alert, security forces are deployed, and something is brewing behind the scenes," Mansoor wrote, urging the president to "step down with dignity to prevent bloodshed."

Days after the fall of the Assad regime, al-Sissi seemed concerned that the Syrian revolution would inspire the opposition in Egypt. "My hands are not stained with anyone's blood, nor have I stolen anyone's money," he

said, avoiding direct comments on the Syrian uprising.

Since al-Sissi rose to power following the 2013 military coup that ousted former president Mohammed Morsi, human rights groups reported multiple violations, including ongoing reports of torture, forced disappearances and crackdowns on dissent.

In 2024, the Egyptian government introduced austerity measures, cutting subsidies and increasing tax rates. These steps had significant impacts on the population, with reports indicating that Egypt's middle class is cutting costs even on basic necessities, which resulted in public anti-government campaigns. Last year, such precedents included hacked billboards and posters labeling al-Sissi a "traitor" and a "Zionist."

AUSTRIA

Continued from page 1

coalition work – resigned as chancellor and party leader.

Austrian journalist Christian Nusser offered a fascinating account of the negotiations' denouement. On Saturday, after the Social Democrats tabled the idea of a levy on banks' profits as a way of creating a more balanced budget, the People's Party's representatives suggested taking a break.

When the Social Democrat team returned to the negotiating room, they reportedly found that everything – glassware, drinks, snacks – had been completely cleared away. Wrote Nusser: "The negotiations between the People's Party and Social Democratic Party were ended by a cleaning crew."

"From the start of the negotiations" back in October, "some from the NEOS Party and many in the Social Democratic Party quickly gained the impression that the People's Party's representatives from industry and business were not really negotiating in good faith, but instead wanted to blow up the talks," Nusser stated.

That economic and industrial interests in a German-speaking country might ul-

timately enable a far-right chancellor because it might be beneficial for business has disturbing historical parallels.

Those interests may soon get their wish – one that may end up being Austria's nightmare.

The morning after the night before, People's Party bigwigs gathered in Vienna to anoint Christian Stocker as Nehammer's interim replacement.

The 64-year-old party stalwart was among Kickl's most vociferous critics during the election campaign, labeling the Freedom Party leader a Russian Trojan horse and a threat to national security with whom it would be impossible to govern.

For Stocker to announce his party's change of heart was, then, an act of political defenestration. The People's Party, he said on Sunday, would be willing to partake in coalition negotiations with the Freedom Party after all. The way for a far-right chancellor in Austria was now clear.

The People's Party had already crossed one red line back in 2000 when it brought the Freedom Party into government as a junior partner – something it repeated in 2017. To act as the far-right's handmaiden would be to step over another.

The People's Party has

long viewed itself as *statustragende Partei* – a traditional party of state and government. With its decision to potentially make Kickl chancellor, the party seemingly chose to end that historic role in Austrian politics, abandoning its responsibilities to the constitution, Austria's liberal democratic order, and the country's place in European and global affairs.

Humiliated and devoid of any leverage, Austria's center-right has not only rolled out the red carpet for a far-right chancellor, but an empowered one at that. In the course of future coalition negotiations, it will have little wiggle room to tamper down the Freedom Party's most extreme demands: an effective end to the right to asylum in Austria; limited health care access for asylum recipients; an end to Austrian support for Ukraine, including sanctions against Russia; withdrawal from Sky Shield, the common European air defense initiative; reforms that would undermine the independence of the public broadcaster; and a reevaluation of all of Austria's international agreements.

Kickl, the man who would be chancellor, is even more determined, dogmatic and extreme than his predecessors in the Freedom Party (Heinz-Christian Strache and the flamboyant provo-

cateur Jörg Haider).

As Andreas Peham, who researches right-wing extremism, racism and antisemitism at Vienna's Documentation Center of Austrian Resistance, told Haaretz before September's election, the Freedom Party is far closer to extremist extra-parliamentary forces like the ideationalist movement – which backs the "remigration" or mass deportation of millions of foreigners from Europe – than ever before.

It "remains, at its programmatic-historical core, an antisemitic party," he warned.

The 95-year-old Austrian-Jewish journalist Paul Lendvai has spent his esteemed working life observing and writing about Austrian politics. "Have no illusions: Kickl as chancellor represents a turning point in Austria," he wrote in the liberal Standard newspaper on Monday. Austria under Kickl will become "a fortress dominated by far-right politicians, including members of greater German nationalist fraternities."

He added that it will "be part of a club of the EU's destroyers along with [Hungarian Prime Minister] Viktor Orbán and [Slovakian Prime Minister] Robert Fico."

People would be wise to listen to him.

ARMS

Continued from page 1

Democratic counterpart on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Sen. Ben Cardin – one of Israel's most ardent defenders in U.S. history – showed signs of hesitancy. His replacement as the committee's ranking Democratic member, Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, was among the 19 Democrats who effectively voted to block U.S. arms sales to Israel following Sen. Bernie Sanders' joint resolutions of disapproval.

At this time, the administration would likely not have begun the informal notification process unless it had indications that it had the support of the relevant ranking members of the Senate and House committees. GOP Sen. Jim Risch and Rep. Brian Mast are among the most vocal proponents of increased and expedited U.S. military aid to Israel. Their support is a given – assuming they are not more motivated by depriving Biden of this last sale.

Once the four ranking members approve the sale and the formal notification is delivered, all lawmakers have 30 days to block the sale via a joint resolution of disapproval. This would have to be passed by both the House and Senate in order to be successful.

Under Senate rules, any member can force a vote for consideration – unlike the House, which would be forced to go through committee. Sanders used this stipulation to hold the effectively symbolic disapproval vote in November.

Given the timeline of the sale's prospective path through Congress and the manufacturing of the relevant weapons, which officials say would take "upwards of a year to several years to deliver," it goes without saying that the sale will be relevant long after Biden concludes his time in the White House.

As far as his legacy on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict goes, the proposed arms sale is yet another wrinkle after a series of missed opportunities to press the Israeli government as hostages remain captive and Gaza's humanitarian crisis worsens.

Over the weekend, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken explicitly acknowledged that Biden's failure to publicly criticize Israel was often a strategic choice.

During his exit interview with The New York Times, he said: "There are times when what we say in private to Israel where we have a disagreement is one thing, and what we're doing or saying in public may be another. But that's in no small measure because with this daylight, the prospects of getting the hostage and cease-fire deal over

the finish line become more distant." This strategic decision will most likely cause Biden to leave office with the state of the conflict at a stagnated low point, while some of his top advisers attempt to frame the status quo as a step forward in the greater sense.

Given Sanders' attempt to block U.S. arms sales to Israel, and the subsequent support he received from Senate Democrats, what is clear is that the issue is not about do disappear. "The Biden team bet on Israel, despite howls of protest at home and abroad – and significant political cost to Democrats in the 2024 election." The Washington Post's David Ignatius wrote in his profile-cum-exit interview with outgoing U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan last week.

"Backed by a huge commitment of U.S. military power, Israel began to run the table against Iran and its



Biden Susan Walsh/AP

proxies – in Gaza, then Lebanon, Syria and inside Iran itself. The result has been a transformed Middle East," he added. All sides can agree on the fact that Biden's term ends with a "transformed Middle East," but what exactly that means – and just how destructive or transformative the weight of U.S. military power in the hands of Israel will be – is yet to be determined.

Death notices in Haaretz English Edition/NYTI

Please contact the advertising department on 050-6313812

HAARETZ

HAARETZ

Editor in Chief: Aluf Benn

English Edition
 Editor in Chief: Esther Solomon
 Print Editor: Liz Steinberg
 Managing Director, Haaretz Group
 Rami Guez
 Managing Director, English Edition
 Aviva Bronstein

Haaretz Daily Newspaper Ltd.
 21 Schocken St., Tel Aviv 61350 Israel.
 Customer Service: Tel: 03-5121750. E-mail: nyti@haaretz.co.il.
 Advertising: (050) 666-0932. 03-5121112
 E-mail: ad-english@haaretz.co.il
 Letters to the editor: LTE@haaretz.co.il

Turning West Bank into Gaza

It turns out that some people believe “we are living in an era of miracles” regarding not only to Gaza, but also the West Bank. While most Israelis view October 7 as the greatest disaster in the country’s history, some on the right see in it an opportunity and even the beginning of the redemption.

On Tuesday, the day after a deadly terror attack near the settlement of Kedumim, Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich met with the chair of the Yesha Council of settlements, Israel Ganz, Yesha Council CEO Omer Rahamim and the heads of the local West Bank settlements councils. He told them that at his request, the meeting of the security cabinet scheduled for later that day would address measures to eradicate terrorism in the territories. “In Judea and Samaria, as in other arenas, we must move from defense to offense and launch extensive operations inside the terrorism nests until the weapons and the terrorists are completely destroyed,” Smotrich told them. He added that after the attack, he drafted a plan that would make the Palestinian towns of “Al-Funduq, Nablus and Jenin look like Jabalya,” in northern Gaza, “so that Kfar Sava [a few miles from the West Bank] doesn’t become Kfar Azza,” the Gaza-border kibbutz that was devastated in the October 7 massacre.

Defense Minister Israel Katz visited the scene of the attack, where settlers told him a new front should be opened in the war. The head of the Kedumim Local Council, Ozel Vatik, told Katz: “The Israeli government must immediately declare a state of war in Judea and Samaria as well, and allow the IDF to crush terror anywhere and at any time without mercy.”

The settlers in the West Bank see what’s happening in Gaza, and are envious. They demand the government and the army do there what they did in the Strip. “We saw what a war on terror looks like in Gaza and southern Lebanon,” said Ganz, who also serves as the head of the Binyamin Regional Council. “We saw what villages look like after terror is uprooted. Here, they settle for silk gloves and a doctrine that doesn’t align with the risks.”

“I call on the IDF and the Israeli government to have a profound change of perception,” said Ariel Mayor Yair Shtebon – that is, a massive military operation in the West Bank like the one in 2002, “that destroys the refugee camps in Judea and Samaria, in Tul Karm, in Jenin, in Nablus and wherever there is a threat to residents of Israel.” Likud lawmakers are expressing similar sentiments. MK Avichay Buaron, for example, called in a radio interview Tuesday to “disarm” the Palestinian authority “of its weapons and its political capabilities.”

While the Netanyahu government is advancing a permanent military and perhaps civilian presence in Gaza, the settlement enterprise and its arms in the military and the government are working to obscure the differences between the West Bank and Gaza, with the goal of reversing the 2005 disengagement and the Oslo Accords. To them, “uprooting terrorism” means expelling residents and demolishing homes and infrastructure. The goal: to impose Greater Israel apartheid in the occupied territories. If they succeed, they will put an end to any future possibility of a two-state solution and sustainable life in the region.



Eran Wolkowski | eranwol@haaretz.co.il

Zvi Bar'el

Held hostage by Hamas and the PM

The release of the list of hostages that Hamas is purportedly prepared to free in a “humanitarian” deal is already prompting a major storm and a dreadful dispute on two hair-raising issues. The first involves deliberations over whether to agree to a partial deal through which 34 hostages would be released – or instead to insist on a complete deal through which all the hostages would be freed. The second relates to terms that Israel is setting for Hamas, under which it would agree to a short, week-long ceasefire to enable Hamas to investigate who among the hostages is still alive – but Israel would only do so in exchange for the release of a small number of hostages, as a sort of “good faith” payment.

But the issues are bogus. They make our blood boil, since they’re masquerading as moral arguments but are based on a deliberate deception that follows previous bluffs. It can clearly be stated at this point that anyone who believes that just a little more pressure on Hamas, the flattening and destruction of a few hundred more homes in Gaza and the starvation of 2.25 million human beings will bring about the hostages’ release hasn’t seen or heard what Gaza

looks like at the moment.

That also goes for anyone who’s still fantasizing that a daring military operation will lead to their release. It must be said that more hostages have been killed due to Israeli army operations than have been rescued by them. The release of all of the hostages in a single stage, or what has been called an “everyone for everyone” deal,

Anyone who thinks more pressure on Hamas, more destruction and more starvation in Gaza would be enough to release the hostages, is living under a rock.

which requires an end to the war, the Israel Defense Forces’ withdrawal from the Strip and the release of hundreds if not thousands of Palestinian terrorists, is in fact a dream deal, but the danger is that it will remain just that – a dream.

Anyone demanding this also needs to believe with all their heart that the Israeli government is headed by an honest, courageous and sensitive person who loves his fellow human beings and for whom the lives of the hostages are top priority. In other words, someone who would be prepared to sacrifice his own position and the survival

of his government to get back the 100 hostages, more than half of whom are probably already dead.

Anyone who still attributes such personal qualities to Benjamin Netanyahu apparently hasn’t been living in Israel for the past 15 months, doesn’t know the ruler’s character and isn’t aware of the composition of his cabinet, which maintains that it would

pretext for an additional round of talks, why not?

Time is a valuable asset, not only for the hostages and their families, but also for the government, to the point that it now appears that the hostages not only have to be freed from Hamas, but also from the hands of the Israeli government, which has made them hostage to the government’s own survival.

Opponents of a partial deal are justifiably fearful that there will be no subsequent deals and that dozens of hostages will remain in Hamas captivity, as a kind of “insurance policy,” for an unknown period of time. Yet rejecting a partial deal and waiting for a complete one certainly means that even those who are still alive might die in captivity, whether due to their medical condition or because they would be killed by their captors or accidentally in an IDF bombing.

At least a partial deal would save some of the living hostages. Rejecting it would mean telling the relatives of the hostages who will die that they died on the altar of Netanyahu’s promise to achieve a complete deal – but that unfortunately, he didn’t agree to pay the price, and therefore all of them would remain and die in captivity. Heaven knows he certainly wouldn’t be guilty that they believed his promise.

Tamer Nafar

Did you wonder where you were?

I’ve never asked where God was during the Holocaust, or during slavery, or in Syria’s prisons, or in the Nakba, or when my friends were murdered or when my dad died. I didn’t understand why I needed to have expectations from a being that is responsible for a considerable number of massacres (according to the stories of those who themselves believe in it and glorify it). After all, this being brought a flood upon the world and didn’t leave a thing other than a couple people and pairs of animals and that’s just one of the being’s blockbusters.

But I’ve always wondered where the common person was during historic catastrophes. They always show the dead, the statistics, how they were killed and stories of the families. But the people who lived then – the common person, the simple citizen – where are they in the story? History books usually summarize entire catastrophes through a single face: This is the man who did all that, the criminal poster boy who led the people.

But I’m not talking just about those who literally voted for a leader who in his speeches spoke about plans for genocide. I’m talking about those who didn’t vote for him and also didn’t vote about the genocide that their people committed. Yes, yes, in their names too.

And again, I ask myself where the ordinary, simple person was, the one who at the end of the film says “I didn’t know” or “I didn’t know that it was that bad.” And goodness, here history is being written right in front of me, a Palestinian. My history and the history of my people is being written before my eyes. We have all the technological means at our disposal and the most colorful documents at the highest resolution. A genuine Cinema City in our pockets and the most effective antibiotic of them all against the virus called “I didn’t know.”

And here before my eyes is footage of the simple, non-threatening citizen. And he doesn’t look like someone who would twirl his mustache and emit an evil laugh. He doesn’t have a fearsome tattoo, and he doesn’t stare into the camera like a lawman

in “Rambo.” He looks simple, ordinary and even like me. He, the simple citizen, bragged about the incredible military capability to drop a bomb in the middle of Beirut that penetrated seven floors underground and reached Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah. But he wasn’t ashamed of himself that they haven’t yet invented the word or sign or article – or picture of a toddler who died of the cold in Gaza – that could penetrate into the depths of his conscience.

Sometimes this person sparkles or shines with an innocent smile and speaks with an angelic voice. This person is holding a black umbrella with a cute dog at their side, like the picture

I learned where the common man is. He’s all over. There are very few innocents vis-à-vis the horrors happening in Gaza.

of singer Avraham Tal in his interview with the Ynet news site. This person is also a romantic proposing to their loved one in their pajamas, holds a guitar and sings about spirituality. Sometimes this person dances on TikTok. He looks great, has a voice and charisma, a real mama’s boy, if you ignore his imitation of the crying Palestinian boy pounding on the door of the refrigerator that contains the body of his mother.

I learned where the person is. He’s all over the place. There are very few innocents vis-à-vis the horrors happening in Gaza. This person, who reacts with total apathy to a heartbreaking video, as if nothing happened, and the randomness of forwarding the video of dozens of naked and bound Gazans in the cold. As I see it, this doesn’t involve a “small cog.” They’re the grease and the fuel enabling the atrocity.

If I were in your place, I wouldn’t ask where God was in the Holocaust, so it isn’t turned around at you, asking where were you?

Nava Ben-Or

I broke down on the way to a military funeral. I can’t bear this evil anymore

It was the funeral of Yuval Shoham. Yuval – the son of Oshrat, one of my colleagues in the State Prosecutor’s Office, a prosecutor with an enormous heart, entirely dedicated to the wise and sensitive protection of the rights of victims of crimes, especially sexual offenses, and of Effie, my son’s beloved teacher at Himmelfarb High School. He was the 10th Himmelfarb graduate to be killed since the October 7 massacre. One of them, Rabbi Avi Goldberg, was also a teacher at the school.

Yuval grew up in a family of kindness and humanity. I don’t want us to be worthy of his death, as the cliché goes. We must be worthy of his life. And to be honest, in the hours before the funeral, I broke down.

I was broken by the accumulation of heartlessness, of the lack of compassion, of the disregard, at best, and the encouragement, at worst, of acts of revenge by this terrible government, which is focused only on amassing boundless power and trampling on the dignity of anyone who stands in its way. This is in contrast to the good and beautiful faces of the many fallen and injured service members; the humility of the hostages and their families; the benevolence of tens of

thousands of volunteers from civil society who are doing everything a government that recognizes that its role is to serve the citizens – all citizens – should do. The weight of this accumulation increases, until the strength to endure fails.

One can compare elected officials’ malice and indifference toward us, the citizens, to the citizens’ miraculous mobilization to save the country’s soul.

1. Wild, violent, inflammatory discourse: Nothing is more important to the prime minister and the cabinet than ousting the attorney general, even when there are 100 hostages in Gaza. After all, “The legal problem harms Israel’s security,” as Heritage Minister Amichai Eliyahu said in an interview with Army Radio. “The triangle we are fighting against” is the top military brass, the judiciary and the media. “Let them dream that we’ll let them appoint a state commission of inquiry,” MK Galit Distel Atbaryan said in the Knesset. “Networks of poison and panic,” Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called channels 11, 12 and 13 in a four-minute video that he found time to share while Israel Air Force planes were making their dangerous journey to Yemen and on the day that two Israel Defense

Forces officers were killed; one of them left behind four young children.

Listen, on the other hand, to Oded Mazor, the congregational rabbi of Jerusalem’s Kehilat Kol HaNeshama, speaking on December 21 at the weekly Saturday evening demonstration in the city’s Paris Square. Mazor began his remarks with the Bible verse: “For my brethren and companions’ sakes,

One can compare elected officials’ malice and indifference toward us, the citizens, to the citizens’ miraculous mobilization to save the country’s soul.

I will now say: ‘Peace be within thee’ and continued: “Our brothers and sisters we seek. Who will tell us where they are and how they are. ... We, dreamers that we are, continue to dream of peace. The peace, the welfare, of the hostages is bound tightly to the insistence on the dream of peace. Every day that we do not redeem them from there, we abandon them anew.”

2. Ignoring and even encouraging acts of revenge by soldiers: According to an article published last month in Haaretz, based on videos filmed by soldiers in Gaza

that were obtained by The Washington Post, soldiers set fire to and blew up buildings without military justification, ridiculed Palestinian detainees and called for the establishment of settlements in the Strip. Some took selfies next to bodies or recorded themselves calling for the expulsion and killing of Palestinians. In some cases, soldiers said they were following direct orders.

One can compare elected officials’ malice and indifference toward us, the citizens, to the citizens’ miraculous mobilization to save the country’s soul.

And once again, our elected representatives set such a bad example that it’s not surprising that actions such as the ones described above take place. Eliyahu, for example, said that dropping an atom bomb on Gaza was an option. When his interviewer noted that such a move would endanger the hostages (at the time there were more than 250 in the Strip), he replied, “In war, you pay a price,” adding that he prayed for their return. Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich said at a Milmouna celebration of Garin Torani, a religious Zionist

movement that sets up communities in underdeveloped areas, in the southern town of Ofakim last year: “There are no half measures. Rafah, Deir al-Balah, Nuseirat – total annihilation.”

Contrast this with a passage from an opinion that a reservist published anonymously in Haaretz on November 28: “Where’s the line between understanding the ‘complexity’ and blind obedience? When have you earned the right to refuse to take part in a war crime? That’s less of interest. What’s more of interest is when will the Israeli mainstream wake up, when will a leader arise who’ll explain to the citizens what a terrible mess we’re in, and who will be the first kippah-wearer to call me a traitor. Because before The Hague, before the American universities, before the condemnation in the Security Council, this is first and foremost an internal matter for us. And for 2 million Palestinians.”

3. The government’s disregard for the needs of its citizens. It took the government nine months to appoint a coordinator for the reconstruction of the north. Let us recall: Tens of thousands of Israelis were displaced from this region shortly after October 7. Their homes are destroyed, their businesses are failing, their children



The funeral of Yuval Shoham, last week.

Naama Grynbaum

are cut off from the educational frameworks they are familiar with. Initially, the director general of the Diaspora Affairs Ministry, Avi Cohen-Scali – presumably a suitable candidate – was tapped. But according to press reports, his appointment was canceled before he even began his duties due to “pressure from Likud members.” The former commander of the Israel Navy, Rear Adm. (ret.) Eliezer Marom was hired instead. It bears noting that Marom quit after five months.

On the other hand, take an example from a project that began operating a few months ago in Gaza-border communities and is slated to expand to the north: volunteer opportunities for retirees whose professions are in demand in these areas, such as teachers, social workers, doctors and nurses; they come for a year of ser-

vice and the local governments provide housing. The project, whose founders include Rina Cohen, a former teacher, and Tamar Oged, a former school principal, is operated by the Jewish-Israeli Beit Midrash Elul. (Full disclosure: I am an Elul board member.)

And despite it all, hope. There are many beautiful people in this land, people who are guided by the principles of mutual responsibility and social solidarity. Who pursue peace and are attuned to the pain of others. Wholehearted participants in the struggle to bring back the hostages, out of an understanding that as long as they do not return, we will not return to who we once were. They do not accept revenge as a plan of action, and they see also the suffering of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian civilians in Gaza and elsewhere.

They are fighting for our right to live here, in an independent, Jewish and democratic state, with the understanding that moral values are not suspended in wartime. These are people who long for compassionate leaders who aren’t preoccupied with themselves and with consolidating their power; who are attentive to the public and serve them, not themselves. These are people who yearn for visionary leaders, not those driven by destructive impulses who will leave nothing and no one behind.

Indeed, I broke down. But like many others, from the broken place I will continue the fight for the character of the state. We have no other country.

Nava Ben-Or is a retired Jerusalem District Court judge and a former deputy attorney general for criminal matters.

The foundation making IDF soldiers fear arrest abroad

Milan Czerny / Shomrim

All through the war in Gaza, Israeli soldiers have been leaving behind not only their physical footprints but also digital fingerprints, with many of them posting videos and photos of themselves online – and sometimes recording improper conduct and potential war crimes. This of course breaches regulations, but it has also happened in Lebanon and Syria – and some soldiers are now paying for it.

For many anti-Israel organizations seeking to bring Israeli soldiers to trial, these videos and photos are a digital treasure trove with potential evidence of war crimes in the Gaza Strip. The activists are often able to figure out soldiers' precise geographic location, or even draw up detailed maps of events. For some, the next stage is to post soldiers' personal details online, leaving them to the mercy of online groups that harass and threaten them.

The Belgium-based Hind Rajab Foundation is once such organization. It says that in recent months it has sent the names of more than 1,000 Israeli soldiers to the International Criminal Court in The Hague, seeking to get them tried for war crimes or charges of genocide, including Israelis with dual citizenship. It's one of the largest cases ever at the ICC.

Hind Rajab is also trying to get soldiers arrested when they go abroad. Whether it's Instagram, Telegram or Facebook, its activists notice when soldiers on leave post pictures of themselves on a

Thai or Sri Lankan beach, or on a trip to a European capital. On a social media account, such snapshots might shortly follow videos of events in Gaza.

Armed with these posts, Hind Rajab makes highly-publicized calls for arrests and trials by the host country. Officials at Israel's Foreign Ministry – which along with the Justice Ministry did not comment for this article – are left without a plan, urging the soldiers to quickly leave the country before they could be arrested. News organizations have reported about this happening in Cyprus and Sri Lanka, but it has also happened elsewhere. Soldiers and their families receive urgent calls from the Israeli authorities urging them to come back home. The Israel Defense Forces has reportedly warned around 30 soldiers and officers who have fought in Gaza against traveling abroad.

It's the fruit of the work of the anti-Israel activists behind the Hind Rajab Foundation, which is named after a 6-year-old girl who was killed in Gaza early last year, most likely by Israeli fire, as The Washington Post has reported. (The IDF has not taken responsibility for the incident.)

A history of scandals and hatred of Israel

The Hind Rajab Foundation was established this past September. According to documents obtained by Shomrim, it is linked to the March 30 Movement, which locates Israeli soldiers around the world. This group is named after the day

in 1976, now known as Land Day, when Israeli security forces shot dead six Arab Israelis who were protesting the expropriation of Arab-owned land in the north.

The two organizations are led by Dyab Abou Jahjah and Karim Hassoun, who both live in Belgium. Abou Jahjah was born in 1971 in the Lebanese village of Bint Jbeil, while Hassoun was born in 1979 in the Belgian town of Rumst.

Both are Islamic extremists who have expressed sup-

'It's very important to me that people learn from my case, that they realize posting pictures from the army isn't helping us around the world.'

port for Hezbollah and have been put on a U.S. list of people required to undergo special security checks before flights, or are prevented from boarding flights to the United States or flights over it – a subset of the U.S. list of terror suspects.

Abou Jahjah, who heads the Hind Rajab Foundation, has a history of provocations. He was banned from entering Britain on allegations that he was an extremist, and he was also investigated in Belgium, mainly on allegations that he incited ethnic riots.

He has described 9/11 as "sweet revenge" and celebrated Palestinian resistance "at all costs" after an

attack that killed Israelis.

He once told The New York Times that in the early 2000s he received military training from Hezbollah, but he recently denied being a member of that group. Still, he expresses sympathy for Hezbollah's military wing, adding that some of its leaders are his "friends."

Before the establishment of the Hind Rajab Foundation, Abou Jahjah and Hassoun were already working for the Arab European League, which made headlines when it set up a small group that patrolled Antwerp on the lookout for "racist behavior" by the police. City prosecutors sought to investigate this initiative on suspicion that the Arab European League was a private militia.

The organization was also fined for publishing a caricature claiming that the Jews made up the Holocaust. Former members such as Fouad Belkacem from the Belgian-Muslim organization Sharia4Belgium later recruited hundreds of Belgian youths to jihadi groups in Syria.

Hassoun is also infamous for a raft of statements and gestures in the past. After the 2015 death of Hezbollah's Samir Kuntar, who murdered a family in northern Israel in 1979, Hassoun replaced his Facebook profile picture with a photo of Kuntar. In 2004, Hassoun arrived with a coffin wrapped in Islamic flags at the Mechelen memorial site – the transit camp from which tens of thousands of Jews were sent to death camps during the Holocaust.

Hassoun is currently an activist in the town of Wil-



Israeli soldiers posing for a photo near the Gaza Strip border last year.

Tsafrir Abayov / AP

broek, Belgium, where the very fact that he was on a party's election slate for the city council helped block the forming of a municipal coalition.

'Everybody was posting pictures'

Israel, meanwhile, is relying on legal experts around the world to assess the risk of whether Israeli soldiers and officials might have to stand trial abroad. The IDF and the Foreign Ministry have even created a special department to handle such cases.

One Israeli soldier tracked by Hind Rajab told Shomrim how he had to flee a foreign country after allegations were made against him online. The consulate there and Israel's Foreign Ministry urgently contacted him and his family.

He says his parents were worried, and he himself quickly realized the risk, so he left. The soldier admits he was indiscreet in posting photos of himself in Gaza, but he says that "everybody

posted pictures" and that the army gave no briefing on the possible consequences.

"It's very important to me that people learn from my case, that they realize that posting pictures from the army isn't helping us around the world," he says.

But the root of the problem, actually, is the lack of enforcement by Israeli authorities and Israel's crisis of confidence with countries around the world, as noted by Prof. Vaio Koutroulis, an international law expert at Université libre de Bruxelles.

As he puts it, when Israel has relations of good faith with another country, the two can negotiate any given case and determine whether a soldier with dual citizenship should be investigated in Israel or the other country.

Now, he adds, countries see a discrepancy between Israel's number of violations and the number of investigations it has opened, so it is difficult to convince other countries that Israel is conducting thorough investiga-

tions that make foreign involvement unnecessary.

For example, in November, Haaretz reported that the IDF had indicted only 15 soldiers during the war in Gaza. Almost all of these cases involved theft, and none were about the causing of detainees' deaths, for example.

For her part, the military advocate general has said that when it is made impossible to investigate possible war crimes in Gaza, all Israeli soldiers are put at risk.

Attorney David Benjamin, an international law expert and former senior officer at the military advocate general's office, says the IDF's best defense against legal procedures abroad is for the IDF itself to handle the issue "by actually investigating and, when necessary, by taking legal action here at home." This would make it clear that any wrongdoings do not reflect IDF policy.

But right-wing organizations and individuals, including senior members of the governing coalition,

complain bitterly when Israeli soldiers are accused of anything illegal, as they did, for example, in the case of the Sde Teiman army base, where soldiers are suspected of abusing detainees from Gaza. Far-right activists and some Israeli lawmakers stormed two army bases in protest.

The right-wingers undermine the judiciary's legitimacy to conduct independent inquiries that are vital for preserving the rule of law, even during wartime, and even more so on the international stage.

According to Koutroulis of the Université libre de Bruxelles, the Israeli government's actions surely aren't improving the chances of Israel's investigations being taken seriously abroad. He notes that urging soldiers to flee trial may contradict Israel's commitments to international agreements like the Geneva Conventions.

Israel will have to deal with this issue rather than escape it by urging its citizens to flee countries around the world.

Wednesday 8.1

CHANNEL KAN 11

(Y11/H11)

06.00 This Morning - with Arieh Golan **08.00** Kalmann-Lieberman - Live Reshet Bet radio show **10.00** Today's Agenda - with Kerem Neubach **12.00** Ocean Wonders - with biologist Tom Hird **12.25** Special delivery - Six hosts undertake special deliveries to help remote communities across Asia **13.00** The Hitchhikers - Yair Agmon travels all over the country and picks up a diverse mosaic of Israeli characters **13.25** We'll Meet Again - Docu-reality series (s.3) **14.00** Come Dine With Me - A group of strangers compete for the title of ultimate dinner party host (s.7) **14.45** The Chase - Game Show **14.15** (s.7) **15.00** News Flash **15.05** The Chase (cont.) **15.45** On the Other Hand - with Guy Zohar **16.00** Pocket Games - Economic magazine **16.55** The World Today - World News **18.00** Six O'Clock - with Maya Rachlin **18.55** Seven O'Clock - with Ayala Hasson **19.50** The Evening News **21.30** The Chase - Game Show (s.8) **22.30** On the Other Hand - with Guy Zohar **22.40** News **23.10** The Jews Are Coming - Satire (s.5) **22.40** HPF - French-Belgian crime-comedy series (s.3)

KESHET

(Y12/H12)

06.00 News Flash **06.10** Today's Headlines **07.00** News Flash **07.05** The Morning Show - with Nir Raskin **09.30** News Flash **09.35** Special news broadcast - with Neshi Barda & Yoav Limor **11.00** Baking with Or Shpitz & Miki Shemo **11.45** Guy Pines **12.00** Special news broadcast **15.00** Today's Edition - with Ofer Hadad & Anayla Dued **16.55** Five O'Clock - with Rafi Reshet **17.55** Six O'Clock - with Oded Ben-Ami **19.00** The Early Edition - with Kerem Marciano **19.55** The News **21.30** What a Wonderful Country - Satire **22.55** Guy Pines **23.30** Intimate Talk - Rafi Reshet interviews RuslanaRodina **00.20** While You Were Working - with Danny Peled and Dr. Grolberman

RESHET

(Y13/H13)

06.00 The Morning Show - with Omer Yardeni & Rotem Israel **09.30** News Flash **09.35** Starting the Day - with Elad & Yarden **10.00** News Flash **10.05** Starting the Day (cont.) **11.00** News Flash **11.05** Starting the Day (cont.) **12.00** News Flash **12.05** The Legal Parade - Law magazine **12.40** Real Estate During Wartime **13.00** News Flash **13.05** Real Estate During Wartime (cont.) **13.15** Showcase - Culture & Lifestyle **13.40** Survivor - Reality **14.00** News Flash **14.05** The Day Report - with Kobi Mahat **15.00** Today's News **15.55** Talk of the Day - with Lucy Aharish **17.55** Six O'Clock News **18.55** Israel at War - with Ravi Drucker **19.50** The News **21.15** Survivor - Reality **22.50** The Tube - with Guy Lerner **23.20** The Day That Was - with Tal Berman **00.00** Naor's Friends - Israeli comedy series (s.3)

HOT 3

(H3)

09.00 Wild Cards **09.45** A Million Little Things **10.30** The Day of the Jackal **11.25** New Amsterdam (s.5) **12.05** Wild Cards **12.50** Suits **13.35** New Amsterdam (s.5) **14.15** A Million Little Things **15.00** Days of Our Lives **15.35** The Young and the Restless **16.15** The Bold and the Beautiful (2 eps) **17.00** Days of Our Lives **17.35** The Young and the Restless **18.15** Suits **18.55** Wild Cards **19.40** New Amsterdam (s.5) **20.20** Ludwig **21.15** Suits (s.2) **22.05** Zaguri **22.55** Joan **23.45** Ludwig **00.45** A Million Little Things **01.30** Zaguri **02.20** Joan

HOT HBO

(H4)

10.05 Mad Men (s.5) **10.55** Somebody Somewhere (s.2) **11.25** Rematch **12.20** Dune: Prophecy **13.45** Curb Your Enthusiasm (s.6) **14.20** Mad Men (s.5) **15.05** Somebody Somewhere (s.2) **15.35** Rematch **16.30** Dune: Prophecy **17.55** Curb Your Enthusiasm (s.6) **18.25** Somebody Somewhere (s.2) **18.50** Rematch **19.45** Get Millie Black **20.35** Curb Your Enthusiasm (s.6) **21.10** Mad Men (s.6) **22.00** Families Like Ours **22.55**

Tulsa King (s.2) **23.35** The White Lotus (s.2) **00.40** The Righteous Gemstones (s.2) **01.20** Families Like Ours **02.15** The White Lotus (s.2)

HOT ZONE

(H5)

06.30 FBI (s.5) **07.10** The Rookie (s.7) **07.55** NCIS: Los Angeles (s.14) **08.35** Chicago Fire (s.12) **09.15** Law & Order (s.24) **10.00** Law & Order: Organized Crime (s.4) **10.40** FBI (s.5) **11.25** NCIS: Los Angeles (s.14) **12.05** CSI: Vegas (s.3) **12.50** The Rookie (s.7) **13.30** Law & Order (s.24) **14.15** Chicago Fire (s.12) **14.55** S.W.A.T. (s.7) **15.40** NCIS: Los Angeles (s.14) **16.20** CSI: Vegas (s.3) **17.05** Law & Order: Organized Crime (s.4) **17.45** The Rookie (s.7) **18.30** Chicago Fire (s.12) **19.10** Chicago Med (s.7) **19.50** Law & Order (s.24) **20.35** FBI (s.5) **21.15** NCIS: Los Angeles (s.14) **22.00** Chicago Fire (s.12) **22.40** Law & Order: Special Victims Unit (s.2) **23.20** The Rookie (s.7) **00.05** S.W.A.T. (s.7) **00.50** Chicago Med (s.7) **01.30** Chicago Fire (s.12) **02.10** Law & Order: Special Victims Unit (s.26)

HOT CHANNEL 8

(H8)

06.00 We Need to Talk About Cosby **07.00** The Human Factor **07.55** Strangest Things (s.2) **08.40** Hitler's Handmaids **09.25** Life in Color **10.10** Designer Shit **11.20** We Need to Talk About Cosby **12.20** Strangest Things (s.2) **13.05** Hitler's Handmaids **13.50** Life in Color **14.35** Designer Shit **15.45** We Need to Talk About Cosby **16.45** Life in Color **17.30** Strangest Things (s.2) **18.15** Designer Shit **19.30** We Need to Talk About Cosby **20.30** Hitler's Handmaids **21.15** Jew in America **00.05** Marry Me However **01.10** We Need to Talk About Cosby **02.15** Jew in America

YES DOCU

(Y8)

08.25 Halston **10.10** Spector **11.00** The Jim (s.2) **12.00** The Synanon Fix **13.00** Icons Unearthed: The Simpsons **13.45** Shakespeare: Rise of a Genius **15.45** American Oz **16.45** The Crown Shyness **18.25** Spector **19.20** The Synanon Fix **20.20** Icons Unearthed: The Simpsons **21.05** The Platypus Guardian **22.00** The Walk: Climbing for Gold **23.40** The Jim (s.2) **00.30** Surviving R. Kelly Part III: The Final Chapter **01.20** The Walk: Climbing for Gold

HISTORY

(Y44/H43)

05.50 Military History One-Off Programs - Operation Oiva **06.35** The Proof is Out There (s.4, 2 eps) **08.00** Laugh or Cry **08.30** American Pickers **09.10** The Food That Built America (s.4) **09.55** The Secret of Skinwalker Ranch (s.5) **10.35** Holy Marvels with Dennis Quaid **11.20** The Unexplained (s.5) **12.00** History's Greatest Mysteries (s.5) **12.45** History's Greatest Mysteries (s.4) **13.25** The Curse of Oak Island (s.12) **14.05** Pawn Stars Do America **15.25** American Pickers **16.10** The Food That Built America (s.4) **16.55** History's Greatest Mysteries (s.4) **17.35** The Curse of Oak Island (s.12) **18.20** History's Greatest Mysteries (s.5) **19.00** The Secret of Skinwalker Ranch (s.5) **19.40** The Unexplained (s.5) **20.25** Pawn Stars Do America **21.45** Gangland Chronicles **22.05** Prison Chronicles **22.30** Great Escapes with Morgan Freeman (s.2) **23.10** History's Greatest Heists **23.55** History's Greatest Mysteries (s.5) **00.35** The Unexplained (s.5) **01.15** Holy Marvels with Dennis Quaid **02.00** Gangland Chronicles **02.20** Prison Chronicles

YES TV DRAMA

(Y5)

06.00 My Brilliant Friend (s.3) **06.55** Sullivan's Crossing (s.2) **07.40** Spencer Sisters **08.20** Nancy Drew (s.4) **09.05** My Brilliant Friend (s.3) **10.00** The Bold and the Beautiful **10.20** The Young and the Restless **11.10** The Way Home (s.2) **11.50** The Funny Woman (s.2) **12.45** Sullivan's Crossing (s.2) **13.35** Spencer Sisters **14.25** Nancy Drew (s.4) **15.15** My Brilliant Friend (s.3) **16.20** The Bold and the Beautiful **16.45** The Young and the Restless **17.30** Nancy Drew (s.4) **18.10** The Way Home (s.2) **19.00** The Funny Woman (s.2) **19.55** The Bold and the Beautiful **20.20** The Young and the Restless **21.00** Ludwig **22.00** Hotel Cocaine **22.50** The Gilded Age **23.45** This is Going to Hurt **00.30** Gaslit **01.30** The Gilded Age **02.20** This is Going to Hurt

YES TV ACTION

(Y6)

06.00 Chicago Fire (s.7, 2 eps) **07.30** NCIS: Los Angeles



"The Taste of Things," HOT Cinema 4, 19.45.

Stephanie Branchu

(s.12) **08.15** My Life is Murder (2 eps) **09.45** Law & Order (s.24) **10.30** Law & Order: Special Victims Unit (s.26) **11.15** Chicago Fire (s.7, 2 eps) **12.45** FBI: International **13.30** My Life is Murder (2 eps) **15.05** NCIS: Los Angeles (s.12, 2 eps) **16.35** Chicago Fire (s.7, 2 eps) **18.05** Law & Order (s.24) **18.50** Law & Order: Special Victims Unit (s.26) **19.35** FBI: International **20.20** My Life is Murder (2 eps) **22.00** The Equalizer (s.5) **22.45** S.W.A.T. (s.8) **23.25** Better Call Saul (s.6) **00.15** The Wire (s.2, 2 eps) **02.15** Game of Thrones (s.5)

YES TV COMEDY

(Y7)

06.30 Hot in Cleveland (s.3, 2 eps) **07.20** The Nanny (2 eps) **08.10** Ghosts UK (s.4) **08.40** Ghosts UK (s.5) **09.10** Silicon Valley (2 eps) **10.10** Hot in Cleveland (s.3, 2 eps) **11.00** Frasier (s.2, 2 eps) **11.55** Married with Children (s.4, 2 eps) **12.45** The Office (s.2, 2 eps) **13.35** The Nanny (2 eps) **14.25** Silicon Valley (2 eps) **15.25** Ghosts UK (s.4) **15.55** Ghosts UK (s.5) **16.25** Frasier (s.2, 2 eps) **17.20** Married with Children (s.4, 2 eps) **18.10** The Office (s.2, 2 eps) **19.00** Silicon Valley (2 eps) **20.00** The Nanny (2 eps) **20.40** Ghosts UK (s.5, 2 eps) **21.40** Frasier (s.2, 2 eps) **22.30** Married with Children (s.5, 2 eps) **23.20** The Office (s.2, 2 eps) **00.10** It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia (s.16, 2 eps) **01.00** Entourage (2 eps) **01.50** Silicon Valley (2 eps)

EUROSPORT

(Y61/H59)

08.00 Cross Country Skiing - World Cup in Toblach, Italy **08.30** Ski Jumping - World Cup: Four Hills Tournament in Garmisch Partenkirchen, Germany **09.30** Cross Country Skiing - World Cup in Toblach, Italy **12.30** Ski Jumping - World Cup: Four Hills Tournament in Garmisch Partenkirchen, Germany **13.15** Cross Country Skiing - World Cup in Toblach, Italy **14.30** Ski Jumping - World Cup: Four Hills Tournament in Garmisch Partenkirchen, Germany **17.10** Ski Jumping - World Cup: Four Hills Tournament in Oberstdorf, Germany **18.45** Snooker - Northern Ireland Open: Final **22.00** Cross Country Skiing - World Cup in Toblach, Italy **00.00** Ski Jumping - World Cup: Four Hills Tournament in Garmisch Partenkirchen, Germany **01.00** Cross Country Skiing - World Cup in Toblach, Italy **02.30** Ski Jumping - World Cup: Four Hills Tournament in Garmisch Partenkirchen, Germany

MOVIE CHANNELS

HOT CINEMA 1

(H16)

07.40 Mary Queen of Scots (UK/USA, 2018). Biography drama. Dir: Josie Rourke. With Saoirse Ronan, Margot Robbie, Jack Lowden. **09.41** The Cold Light of Day (USA/Spain, 2012). Action. Dir: Mabrouk El Mechri. With Sigourney Weaver, Bruce Willis, Henry Cavill. **11.15** We Own the Night (USA, 2007). Crime. Dir: James

HOT CINEMA 3

(H18)

06.20 No Reservations (USA, 2007). Comedy. Dir: Scott Hicks. With Catherine Zeta-Jones, Aaron Eckhart. **08.00** About a Boy (UK/USA/France/Germany, 2002).

Drama. Dir: Chris Weitz, Paul Weitz. With Hugh Grant, Toni Collette, Nicholas Hoult, Rachel Weisz. **09.40** The Break-Up (USA, 2006). Comedy. Dir: Peyton Reed. With Vince Vaughn, Jennifer Aniston. **11.25** Last Christmas (UK/USA, 2019). Romantic comedy. Dir: Paul King. With Madison Ingoldsby, Emma Thompson, Boris Isakovic. **13.05** Valentine's Day (USA, 2010). Romantic comedy. Dir: Garry Marshall. With Julia Roberts, Jamie Foxx, Anne Hathaway. **15.05** Ocean's Eight (USA, 2018). Action. Dir: Gary Ross. With Sandra Bullock, Kate Blanchett, Anne Hathaway. **16.55** The Laverne (USA, 2017). Comedy. Dir: William H. Macy. With Kate Upton, Alexandra Daddario, Matt Barr. **18.25** My Old Lady (USA/UK/France, 2014). Comedy romance. Dir: Israel Horowitz. With Kevin Kline, Kristin Scott Thomas, Maggie Smith. **20.10** Sam & Kate (USA, 2022). Romantic comedy. Dir: Darren Le Gallo. With Jake Hoffman, Schuyler Fisk, Dustin Hoffman, Sissy Spacek. **22.00** Marry Me (Japan/USA/China, 2022). Romantic comedy. Dir: Kat Coiro. With Jennifer Lopez, Owen Wilson, Maluma. **23.50** Darling Companion (USA, 2012). Drama. Dir: Lawrence Kasdan. With Diane Keaton, Kevin Kline, Dianne Wiest. **01.35** Sex and the City (USA, 2008). Comedy. Dir: Michael Patrick King. With Sarah Jessica Parker, Kim Cattrall, Chris Noth.

HOT CINEMA 4

(H19)

07.35 Let Him Go (USA, 2020). Crime drama. Dir: Thomas Bezucha. With Diane Lane, Kevin Costner, Kayli Darter. **09.30** My Happy Ending (UK/Israel/USA, 2023). Comedy drama. Dir: Tal Granit, Sharon Maymon. With Andie MacDowell, Sally Phillips, Miriam Margolyes. **11.00** The Hollars (USA, 2016). Romantic comedy. Dir: John Krasinski. With Sharto Copley, Charlie Day, Richard Jenkins. **12.30** Equals (USA, 2015). Drama. Dir: Drake Doremus. With Nicholas Hoult, Kristen Stewart, Verena Etzegebe. **14.10** White Bird (USA, 2023). Biography drama. Dir: Marc Foster. With Ariella Glaser, Orlando Schwerdt, Gillian Anderson. **16.10** The Kings Speech (UK, 2010). Biography. Dir: Tom Hooper. With Colin Firth, Geoffrey Rush. **18.10** After Everything (USA, 2023). Romantic drama. Dir: Castille Landon. With Hero Fiennes Tiffin, Josephine Langford, Mimi Keene. **19.45** The Taste of Things *La passion de Dodin Bouffan* (France/Belgium, 2023). Romantic period drama. Dir: Anh Hung Tran. With Juliette Binoche, Benoit Magimel, Emmanuel Salinger. **22.00** The Blind Side (USA, 2009). Drama. Dir: John Lee Hancock. With Sandra Bullock, Quinton Aaron. **00.05** A Little Chaos (UK, 2014). Drama. Directed

No hostage deal until all sides agree on how to control Gaza

The Egyptian plan includes an independent committee to oversee reconstruction, faces objections from Israel and the PA

Zvi Bar'el

Suspense over the prospect of a deal for the return of the hostages in Gaza, along with vague, conflicting reports about negotiations and, most importantly, about which of the hostages are set to be released, is increasing. It has overshadowed other issues involved in the deal: How many Palestinian prisoners will be released? Who will they be? What will the cease-fire look like? How long will it hold?

Then there's the question of if and when another phase of the deal which would return the remaining hostages and the bodies of those who were murdered will happen, and what other conditions would be involved in it. These would include the extent of the Israeli army's withdrawal from Gaza, the status of the Philadelpi corridor and the Rafah border crossing, whether the army would permit the return of Gazans to the northern portion of the Strip, and how aid distribution to civilians would be handled.

The issue of aid and the administration of the Gaza Strip has become critical in recent weeks as the scope of the theft and the incompetence of aid organizations in transferring the goods accumulating in warehouses to residents has become apparent. So has the total control of local gangs and Hamas over channels of distribution.

Gangs have demanded thousands of dollars per truck, the price of staple foods has soared astronomically, and all of it is happening under the watchful eye of the Israeli army, which still hasn't provided a plan for how Gaza will be run, or even found reasonable distribution arrangements that would enable some 2.25 million residents there to survive.

After long months in which Egypt negotiated with Israel, representatives of the Palestinian Authority and Hamas over control of the Strip, the parties seem to have come up with an initial plan in October.

At the beginning of December, a draft plan known as the Egyptian plan was released which suggested establishing a "social support committee" in Gaza with 10 to 15 members, each of whom would be responsible for a professional field in accordance with their abilities and experience.

The committee will operate under a presidential order from Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and according to the customary laws in the Palestinian Authority and with its oversight.

In addition to the committee, a public authority composed of public figures, tribal leaders, journalists, physicians and businesspeople would be established to provide public support for the social support committee and assist it in solving problems that arise in its work.

According to the draft, the Rafah border crossing between Gaza and Egypt would be reopened in accordance with a 2005 agreement.

Hamas, Islamic Jihad and other organizations wouldn't have representation on the support committee and wouldn't be authorized to take part in its activities. The hope is that the committee would deal with every civilian aspect of life in Gaza, including education, health, social welfare, the clearing of rubble and the enclave's reconstruction. The committee would continue to function "as long as the circumstances and conditions for its operations require it" or until there are new elections. A reconstruction

fund would be established, whose members would consist of donor countries along with a Palestinian Authority representative.

But since the draft of the plan was released, several amendments have been made to it, relating primarily to the committee's standing vis-à-vis the Palestinian Authority. The changes were aimed at addressing Israel's opposition to granting the organization any standing, and on the other hand, avoiding the establishment of a parallel Palestinian Authority in Gaza that would in practice sever the Gaza Strip from the West Bank.

On Monday, a Palestinian delegation headed by the chairman of the Palestinian National Committee, Rawhi Fattouh, (who was appointed acting Palestinian president in the event that Abbas cannot fill the role) arrived in Cairo, along with two members of the Palestine Liberation Organization's executive committee, Azam al-Ahmad and Ahmed Majdalawi. Apparently, they have Abbas' agreement, in principle, to the draft document, but with a demand for further polishing that would strengthen the connection between Gaza and the West Bank, emphasizing that they are "inseparable parts of Palestine." Such wording would ratify the Palestinian government's powers in Gaza and those of the Palestinian Authority there in general.

We still need to wait to see whether the "minor" amendments that Abbas is demanding delay or even scuttle the plan, since during the entire period of negotiations, the Palestinian president and his supporters opposed the idea of a support committee. That was both as a matter of principle – that the Palestinian Authority should control both parts of Palestine – and that any other administrative entity established in Gaza might harm the status of the



A picture taken from Sderot showing smoke rising from Gaza after Israeli strikes on Sunday.

Menahem Kahana/AFP

PA and "Palestinian unity." Along with this, the PA believes that at a time when Hamas has lost its power and status, an opportunity has arisen to restore the PLO in general and Fatah in particular and control both territories. There's no reason to grant Hamas status in the establishment of a separate committee.

However, in the discussions over the wording of the proposal, Egypt made clear to PLO officials that they are engaged in theoretical discussion with no connection to reality.

A Palestinian source in the Fatah leadership told Haaretz that Cairo "explained in plain English that Israel will never agree to the

PA's direct involvement in the administration of Gaza and that the only way to circumvent that barrier is by the establishment of a committee that won't be seen as a branch of the PA and that its opposition to establishing the committee only plays into Israel's hands." The sources didn't know whether Egypt had gotten Israel's consent to form the committee, but said "members of the delegation to Egypt got the impression that things were coordinated with Jerusalem."

Israel has tried to establish an administrative body to take upon itself the responsibility for some humanitarian aid and respond to the immediate needs of the population in Gaza several times. It pro-

posed, for example, to several of the biggest hamula ("clan," in English) leaders that they assume responsibility, only to be met with a determined refusal from an association of tribal and clan heads, a body that was established in the days of Yasser Arafat to coordinate between the PA and Gaza residents.

Several hamula chiefs, like that of the Doghmush, Helles, al-Masri clans, some of whom engaged in violent clashes with Hamas before being defeated and disarmed, later switched sides and became Hamas allies. Days ago, they warned that any delay in establishing the committee would mean "disavowing the Palestinian people and giving the occupation

an opportunity to enact its plans of extermination and forced transfer" of Palestinians. The association, headed by Akef al-Masri, said it supports the committee on the condition that it preserves Palestinian unity and operates under the authority of the PA and not in place of it.

The names of the committee members have not yet been made public, although Hamas told Cairo that it had submitted a list of figures acceptable to it. It's not clear whether this list is also acceptable to the PA or Israel. However, the establishment of the committee is now essential to allow the reopening of the Rafah crossing, as part of the hostage deal.

Since Israel seized control

of it last May, the crossing has remained closed due to Egypt's refusal to operate its side without a Palestinian presence on the Gaza side. This is also the position of the European Union, whose officials must also be present there to restore previous arrangements.

Beyond the issue of Palestinian representation on the committee and its subordination to the PA, the central question concerns the security of the committee members, protection against criminal gangs and military control of the areas from which the Israeli army will withdraw.

It is widely believed that an agreement to establish a committee to administer in the Gaza Strip would allow the arrival of a multinational and even Arab force that could assume partial security responsibility for the Gaza Strip. Last May, the United Arab Emirates said that it would be willing to participate in administering Gaza and even send troops on the condition that a Palestinian state be established. Two months later, the country moderated its stance, with Envoy of the Foreign Minister Lana Nusseibeh clarifying that "the Emirati state will not participate in a multinational force unless the PA, which undergoes reforms or is headed by a prime minister with powers, invites us" and that "the U.S. is the one that needs to lead this initiative for it to succeed."

Assuming that Israel strongly opposes giving the PA any security authority, it may agree to the presence of international forces in the Strip, as it has already hinted at in the past. However, this assumption is currently only theoretical and in the realm of wishful thinking given Israel's undisguised intention to remain in Gaza "as long as necessary" and the plans of some government ministers and citizens to establish settlements there.

100 hostages, 460 days in captivity

'After all Hamas has done, it's our own gov't that makes us despair'

Adi Hashmonai

Shortly before Saturday night's demonstrations began, amid reports of a possible deal to bring the hostages home, Hamas released another video. This one, of army field spotter Liri Elbag, greatly upset her parents.

At the subsequent demonstrations throughout the country, many relatives of hostages spoke, including Yoav Zalmanovich, who learned through a video released by Hamas in November 2023 that his father Arye had died. In his speech, he recalled a moment etched in his memory.

A few months after the October 7 massacre, he finally mustered the strength to take his daughters to his 85-year-old father's home in Kibbutz Nir Oz. The innocence of his 16-year-old daughter Avigail when she



Yoav Zalmanovich, whose father was taken hostage, with his daughter Avigail.

Yoav Zalmanovich

asked a seemingly simple question caused an emotional storm that hasn't abated to this day.

"When I took my daughters to their grandfather's home, I had to cover the congealed blood with cloth to keep that difficult sight from them," he said in his

speech at Karkur Junction. "Avigail asked naively, 'There's a road sign for Nir Oz on the road. How was the army unable to find the kibbutz? Really, how?'"

Fifteen months have passed since his father was kidnapped, and ever since, Yoav has circulated from

one demonstration to the next, unloading what is in his heart from their stages.

The last time Arye Zalmanovich spoke with his family was on the morning of October 7. At 9:20 A.M., he called his eldest son, Boaz, and said there were terrorists in the kibbutz. What happened to him after that we know from the video Hamas published, which showed him being kidnapped alive, and from the testimony of other hostages who have returned from captivity.

"My father was kidnapped from his home with cruel violence," Yoav Zalmanovich said. "The terrorists hit him on the head and put him on a motorcycle at gunpoint, then drove off with him to Khan Yunis."

"From the testimony of those who have returned from captivity, we know that my father survived for more than a month in captivity. Ac-

ording to this testimony, he ate and drank only cookies and tea. How can an 85-year-old man with chronic diseases and inbuilt frailty of age survive? He apparently stopped eating fairly quickly and then slowly declined until his body couldn't take it anymore."

One of the hostages who was with him was Kaid Farhan al-Qadi, who was rescued from captivity in August. Following his return, Al-Qadi spoke about the relationship that had developed between him and Arye.

Zalmanovich told him about the kibbutz, his friends and his family, Al-Qadi said. He recalled that he would "sit beside him every day and he would tell me stories," and that he "had a granddaughter

he loved very much.

"I know that he had two sons, every opportunity he had, he would talk about them. He told me that he dreamed that they would release us."

But after 40 days in captivity, he died. Later, Hamas released footage of his decline and death. He was declared dead on the strength of this evidence, but his body remains in the Gaza Strip.

Arye Zalmanovich was born Haifa, his parents' only child, and as a boy he joined the Hashomer Hatzair youth group. Together with his friends, he set out to build a unique community in the northern Negev, to develop high-quality modern agriculture under difficult

conditions right across from Khan Yunis, which was murdered even back then.

"Together with his friends, he set out to realize the nation's dream, to exercise its sovereignty. But my father ended his life in a cruel, alien place, far from his family and friends, without a comforting hand. Not in peace, surrounded by the fields he loved, but in fear, surrounded by hatred and evil."

Since his father was kidnapped, 460 days have passed. And now, Yoav said, he too, like his 16-year-old daughter, is asking naive questions. "I'm 53 years old. I've learned a thing or two about the world. But I'm looking at what is happening in astonishment and asking

the questions of a child.

"How is it that people kidnapped from their homes 460 days ago still haven't come home? How is that a year after the massacre and the abandonment, the government and all the heads of the security establishment are still in their roles? Enough! Accept responsibility and get out of our lives."

"How is the Jewish state capable of perpetrating indiscriminate death and destruction in the name of vengeance? Us! How, in the face of the abandonment, are we continuing to fan the fires of polarization? And how is that even though Hamas murdered, torched, raped and destroyed, it's our own government that makes us despair?"

PLANTS

Continued from page 8

"If you sum up all the different behaviors they displayed, it looks like you are visiting a village of present-day hunter gatherers," she tells Haaretz in a phone interview. "Everybody asks me what is the difference between modern humans and these people, and, as far as the archaeological evidence is concerned, I cannot answer."

Feed the brain

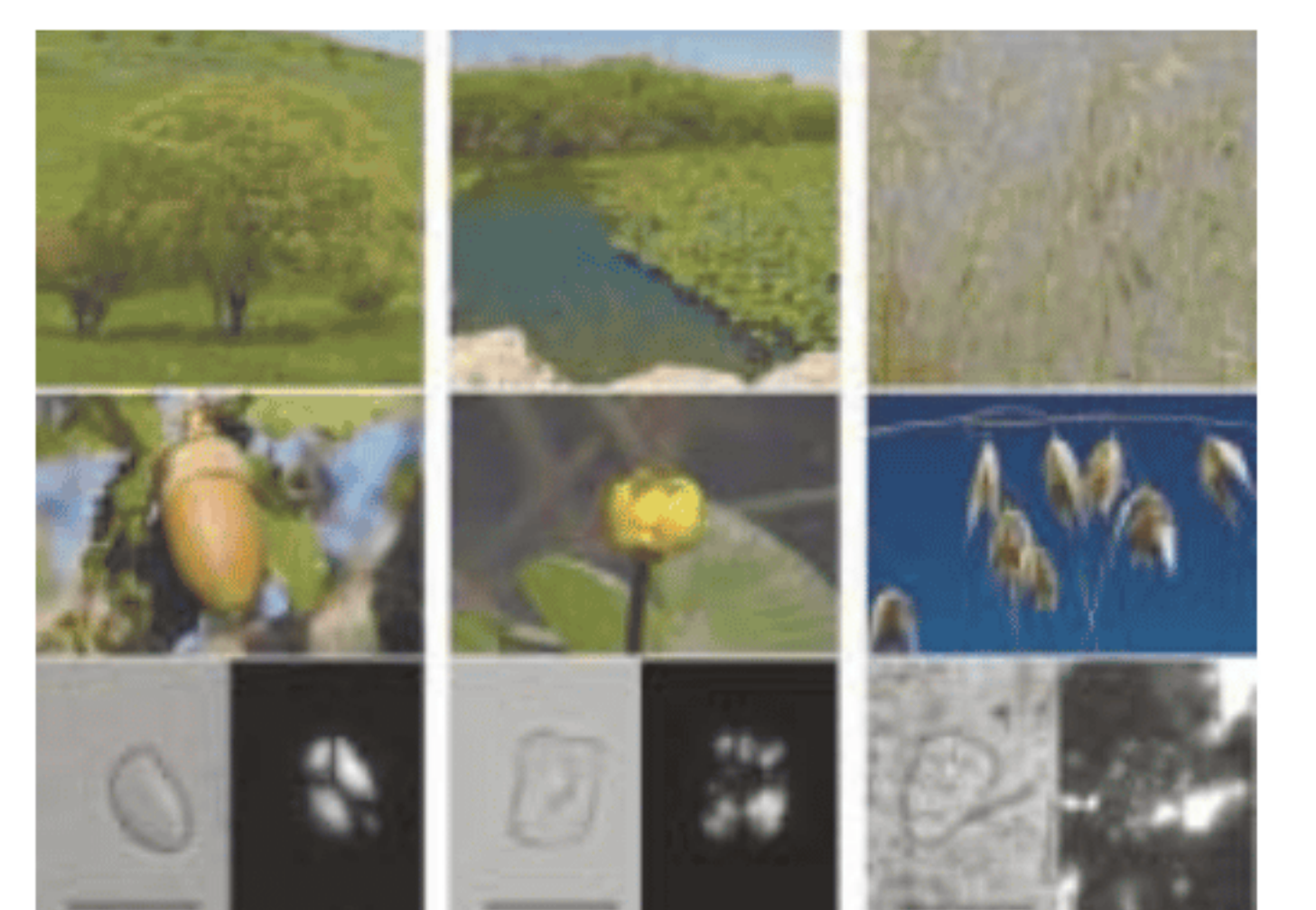
The theory that prehistoric hominins survived on meat alone is largely a result of research bias, stemming from the fact that animal bones are much easier to find in archaeological digs than perishable traces of plants, as well as from the idea of "man the hunter" – a fanciful image of our ancestors as masculine predators solely dedicated to killing their next prey, says Alpers-Afil. This myth has now evolved into fad diets such as Keto or the Paleo diet, which

call upon this imaginary past to emphasize proteins and treat carbs as anathema.

In reality, prehistoric hominins were too smart to rely on a single resource, which could potentially become scarce or disappear (perhaps out of our own overhunting), Goren-Inbar says. Instead, they learned to eat anything that moved – or didn't move, in the case of plants.

Starches would have been particularly important for Homo erectus, whose brain grew during its long evolutionary history. Early erectus started with a brain size around 900 cubic centimeters but over hundreds of thousands of years the average noggin grew to around 1,200 cc.

This is not far from the lower range for modern humans, who have an average volume of 1,400 cc. "Carbohydrates could support the evolutionary needs of these people, supporting the increased metabolic demands of a larger brain," Alpers-Afil says. "I crave carbs, they really make me happy, and it was probably the same for them."



Some of the plants recovered from Geshert Benot Ya'akov percussive tools. From left to right: oak, yellow water lily and common oat.

Hadar Ahtuv and Yoel Melamed



Excavating at Geshert Benot Ya'akov.

GBY team

sudoku

© Puzzles by Pappocom

The game board is divided into 81 squares, with nine horizontal rows and nine vertical columns. A few numbers already appear in some of the squares. The aim is to fill in numerals 1 to 9 in each of the empty squares, so that every row and column and every box (a group of nine squares outlined in boldface) contains all of the numerals 1 to 9. None of the numerals may recur in the same row, column or box.

3	8	4	6	1	5	7	2	9
2	5	7	8	9	3	4	1	6
9	6	1	4	7	2	5	3	8
8	3	5	1	2	9	6	4	7
4	9	6	3	8	7	1	5	2
1	7	2	5	4	6	9	8	3
5	4	3	9	6	8	2	7	1
6	2	8	7	5	1	3	9	4
7	1	9	2	3	4	8	6	5

Tips and a computerized version of Sudoku can be found at www.sudoku.com

6		9		2				7
		4	9		7		5	
			5		6		4	
3			6		1		7	
	4			8			3	9
						8		2
	2				3	6		
		8					2	
9	6						8	5

Difficulty: Medium

GALLERY גלריה

Adrian Hennigan

As the soul-destroying wars of 2024 – Israel and Hamas, Russia and Ukraine, Blake Lively and Justin Baldoni – continue into 2025, is it wrong to feel optimism about what lies ahead in film and television?

After all, this will be the first year since 2019 in which both industries are operating at full strength since the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and Hollywood talent strikes.

A look through the slates of the major players shows a wealth of films that look extremely promising – from two separate sports movies by the Safdie brothers (Benny's "The Smashing Machine" and Josh's "Marty Supreme"), to new films by the likes of Paul Thomas Anderson, Luca Guadagnino, Noah Baumbach, Céline Song, Chloé Zhao and Ari Aster.

Television, meanwhile, will unveil adaptations of "The Lord of the Flies" and "The Elephant Man," new seasons of "Severance," "The White Lotus" and "Andor," some very high-profile Hollywood names crossing over into television (Robert De Niro's waiting...) and another "Game of Thrones" prequel, "A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms."

So, without further ado, please allow Nostradumbass – as my friends call me – to guide you through the stories you may be reading about in 2025...

The Gadot dilemma

As a film enthusiast, is there anything more depressing than the sight of Disney continuing to shamelessly pillage its back catalog of classic cartoons for anyone live adaptations? We've already had the likes of "Dumbo," "The Lion King," "Mulan" and "The Little Mermaid," while "Moana" and "Lilo & Stitch" are on the way. (My 20-year-old daughter is particularly offended by the latter, as the original is one of the few films she actually loves.)

And then there's "Snow White." While I would normally be loath to judge any film on a trailer alone, I am tempted to make an exception in this case. Indeed, given the presence of Israeli favorite Gal Gadot as the evil queen, I am sure it is only a matter of time before Ireland reports Disney to the International Court of Justice. In this instance, it may actually have my support.

Gadot's starring role will present all the nations that normally ban her movies from their theaters with a genuine dilemma: ban "Snow White" because, shock, horror, there's a Zionist on the poster; or allow it to play and

Jewish superheroes? Boycotting Gadot? Film and TV stories to look out for in 2025

From a Jewish actor playing Superman to Gal Gadot as the evil queen in 'Snow White' to a new series about King David, these are the dramas you will be reading about this year



Clockwise from top left: Seth Rogen, Ebon Moss-Bachrach, Gal Gadot and a scene from the Israeli series "Bad Boy."

Jordan Strauss/Invision/AP; Chris Pizzello/AP; Matt Winkelmeyer/Getty Images via AFP; HOT/Sipar

let the public boo and hiss at one of cinema's biggest villains (the character, that is, not the actress).

When the latest Gadot controversy erupts in March, don't be surprised if some moron tweets that "the Jews" have been poisoning the world's apples ever since the Garden of Eden anyway.

Better call Saul?

Expect social media to similarly become awash with self-anointed experts on Middle Eastern history and biblical figures when Prime Video debuts "House of David" at the end of February. Sadly, it's not a "Curb Your Enthusiasm" spin-off, but a would-be epic set in the 11th-10th century B.C.E.

"House of David" tells the story of the ascent of the biblical figure, David, who eventually becomes the most renowned and celebrated king of Israel. The series follows the once-mighty King Saul as he falls victim to his own pride, trumpets the press release, for this show created by an American Christian called Jon Erwin.

His previous faith-based works include a 2017 film called "I Can Only Imagine" – and I can only imagine he knows the slingshots his show is likely to receive from the usual suspects. An argument is doubtless already breaking out online that the ancient king of Israel was in fact a Palestinian.

October 7 revisited

If 2024 saw the events of October 7, 2023, and subsequent war captured primarily

in documentary form – from Nova music festival film "We Will Dance Again" to the collection of Gazan short stories in Oscar-shortlisted "From Ground Zero" – 2025 will be the start of attempts to recount the story in fictional form.

There probably isn't an Israeli or Palestinian artist alive who isn't attempting to tell the story of the war right now. Quite how much the world will want to watch, though, is another matter.

The main work to be commissioned thus far is "Red Alert." This five-part Keshet series is co-produced by Lawrence "Pulp Fiction" Bender and aims to recreate some of the horrors of the Hamas attack from the perspective of five people trapped in life-or-death situations. You can already

feel the panic among British daily The Guardian's television critics over who might have to cover it, given last year's fiasco over its review of the October 7 documentary "One Day in October."

Festival blues

An ongoing drama for Israeli film and television last year was the battle to land slots at international festivals. To say Israeli works have been frozen out wouldn't quite be true – Tom Neshet's "Come Closer" and Nir Bergman's "Pink Lady" both won international awards last year. Still, right now there's more chance of Gal Gadot being invited for tea with the ayatollahs than there is of an Israeli film being chosen for a major U.S. festival like Sundance.

Given the presence of Gal Gadot as the evil queen in 'Snow White,' I am sure it is only a matter of time before Ireland reports Disney to the ICJ.

Israeli television had always been very well represented (and rewarded) at the Series Mania and Canneseries television festivals in France – until last year. For a barometer of where Israeli shows stand in the world, check out this year's lineups in March and April to see if Keshet, the Kan

public broadcasters and other are shut out or welcomed back into the fold.

It's not like most of the Israeli arts community won't be thinking similar thoughts to their peers overseas about the war in Gaza; why they should be penalized is beyond my understanding. If a show like "Bad Boy" by prominent government critic Ron Leshem is not deemed worthy of an international platform, then Hod Hasharon, we have a problem.

No more superheroes?

I wrote recently about how Roman numerals saved the day for Hollywood last year, with 17 of the top 20 movies being either sequels or prequels. That's unlikely to change in 2025, with the likes

of "Mission: Impossible," "Wicked," "Jurassic World," "Avatar" and – lord help us – "The Passion of the Christ" having sequels incoming.

Several Hollywood studios, meanwhile, will be hoping their superheroes actually live up to their billing at the box office this year, following a washout with the likes of "Madame Web" and "Kraven the Hunter." The only thing these films attracted was ridicule.

While Marvel is pinning its hopes on audiences finally turning out for a "Fantastic Four" movie and a revamped "Captain America," Warner Bros and DC will be praying movie critics aren't their own personal kryptonite when James Gunn's "Superman" lands in July.

The Jewniverse will be watching these films with particular interest: First, will Shira Haas' Sabra live up to her name in "Captain America: Brave New World"? Second, how will David Corenswet fare as the world's first Jewish Superman (sorry Likudniks, Bibi definitely doesn't count)? And third, will it be apparent why director Matt Shakman insisted that a Jewish actor (Ebon Moss-Bachrach) be cast to play Ben Grimm in "The Fantastic Four"? The first clue might be if they become the Fantastic Three every Shabbat.

Stars and gripes

Which big names will be gracing the small screen with their presence this year? Well, there are none bigger than Robert De Niro, who at the age of 81 has recognized that Netflix's money is just as good as Hollywood's. That's why he'll be starring in the thriller "Zero Day" on the streaming giant in February. If that sounds unlikely, wait till you hear about his character: a U.S. president who actually left office before he was 80.

At this point, Tom Cruise is probably the last man standing when it comes to avoiding the small screen. Seth Rogen, in contrast, seems to be spending more time on Apple+ these days than in movie theaters. Ironically, his next Apple series sees him play a Hollywood head honcho ("The Studio," out at the end of March). As for women stars, I'm just waiting to have it confirmed that one of Nicole Kidman, Reese Witherspoon or Kathryn Hahn must be in every high-profile show being made on television.

In an age when even the pairing of George Clooney and Brad Pitt can't help an Apple TV movie leave any kind of mark on pop culture, we may have to accept that the bona fide movie star has finally gone the way of the dinosaur – and even "Jurassic Park" may not be enough to bring them back.

780,000-year-old proof of plant processing found in north

Tools used by hominins show earliest known evidence of plant processing, chipping away at theory that our ancestors relied mainly on meat

Ariel David

Microscopic starch granules embedded in prehistoric tools at least 780,000 years ago carry evidence of the earliest known processing of plants, showing that our hominin ancestors were not as meat-centric as we thought, researchers say.

Hominins living at Geshert Benot Ya'akov, a marshy site in today's northern Israel, knew how to exploit the plants growing in the region, collecting and processing wild grains, nuts, legumes and tubers, an international team of archaeologists has concluded.

We knew that prehistoric hominins ate some plants. But the new evidence shows that our distant hunter-gatherer ancestors didn't just grab a handful of berries and pop them in their mouths while they trailed deer or elephants, say the researchers involved in the study published January 6 in the journal PNAS.

These as-yet-unnamed hominins had cognitive capabilities comparable to those of modern humans, allowing them to execute complex multi-stage tasks, say the researchers, led by Hadar Ahituv, a researcher at Bar-Ilan University and Haifa University.

Located on the eastern

bank of the Jordan River today and back then on the shore of the once large Hula paleo-lake, Geshert Benot Ya'akov (Daughters of Jacob Bridge) offers waterlogged, oxygen-free layers of sediment that magnificently preserved the tools and food refuse of the hominins who lived there for almost a million years.

Previous research already showed that the locals had a very varied diet, which included elephants, deer and other land animals, but also a lot of fish and plants. The site has also returned the earliest firm evidence that hominins there could control combustion to cook food.

For the new study, the team that excavated Geshert focused on the basalt hammer-and-anvil tools that were found at the site. Most of these stones exhibited pits that were likely created by repeated percussive action. But what were they hitting?

Microscopy analysis showed that deeply embedded in these stones, particularly in the pits, there were minute starch granules, Ahituv and colleagues report. The researchers also tested the surrounding sediments, finding very little evidence of starches, to confirm their findings were not the result of outside contamination of



Geshert Benot Yaakov

Gil Eliahu

the tools. In just four percussors and four anvils, the researchers found more than 650 starch granules. Many were unidentifiable because they were pretty smashed, as one would expect from repeated percussive or grinding action. But about 500 of the granules could be assigned to different plant species. There were acorns; wild grasses, such as wheat, barley and rye; oats; aquatic plants including waterlily root and water chestnut; pulses from the family that

includes fava beans, lentils and peas.

Remains of additional plants – including almonds, pistachio and prickly waterlily – were found in the living areas but not in the microscopy analysis, probably because they contain little or no starches.

Some of these plants would have been available only in specific seasons, showing the local hominins possibly had some understanding of seasonality, and environments: the waterlilies could be gathered

in the adjacent lake waters but the grasses and acorns would require trips to the surrounding highlands.

Og, eat your veggies

Since no human remains have been found at Geshert, we don't have a name for the hominins who lived there. The best bet is Homo erectus, or one of its local variations. Erectus was the first hominin to master fire and leave Africa, just under two million years ago, to spread across Eurasia.

Whoever lived at Geshert, we already knew that their diet included plants, alongside meat and fish, but the new study opens a window into the level of complexity that these hominins could deal with to process their food, says Naama Goren-Inbar, emerita professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the archaeologist who headed the dig at the site.

Previous evidence of plant consumption has come from the teeth of Neanderthals in Europe and Iraq, who lived hundreds of thousands of years after the Geshert hominins. Starches have also been found in the teeth of hominins who lived in Qesem cave, in central Israel, some 400,000 years ago.

But it's one thing to find starches in teeth, and another to be able to associate a food group to specific tools and show evidence of the processing techniques that were used, says Prof. Nira Alpers-Afil, an archaeologist from Bar-Ilan who also took part in the study.

Beyond the direct use of tools to grind grains or crack nuts open, the starches found at Geshert indirectly point to other cognitive and technological skills that would have been required so that certain species could be brought from plant to plate, she says. For example, acorns need

to be soaked in water or roasted to reduce their tannin content. The prickly waterlily requires diving skills to be collected. Gathering it, as well as the acorns and wild grasses, only makes sense if one has a container, which suggests the locals may have known how to weave baskets, Goren-Inbar says. Most likely, these people would have had a language, because it seems impossible to learn and coordinate all these multi-step processes by only using gestures, she adds.

The more we study the Geshert hominins, the more we realize their cognitive abilities are close to those of modern Homo sapiens, which didn't appear until around 300,000 years ago, Goren-Inbar contends.

See PLANTS, Page 7

Weather

Warmer

Wednesday will be warm for the season. Thursday and Friday will be hazy, with rain starting Friday evening from the north through the northern Negev. Saturday will be cooler with local showers.

