

Seven soldiers killed in Gaza fighting, another killed on northern border

A just war, but a heavy price

Yaniv Kubovich, Adi Hashmonai, Jack Khoury, The Associated Press, Reuters and Haaretz

The military has named seven servicemen who were killed in combat in the Gaza Strip between Thursday and Saturday, as well as a service member who was killed near the border with Lebanon.

In a separate development, Hamas has claimed that it lost contact with a group holding five Israeli hostages after an Israeli bombardment. In a statement, the terrorist organization said it believes the group and the hostages were killed in an Israeli raid.

Master Sgts. (res.) Shay Termin, 26, of Rosh Pina and Alexander Shpits, 41, of Ashkelon and Capt. Oshri Moshe Butzhak, 22, of Haifa died in combat Saturday.

Staff Sgts. Nir Rafael Kananian, 20, of Kibbutz Beit Keshet and Birhanu Kassie, 22, of Beit Shemesh died Friday in an incident in which 10 soldiers were also injured, five of them seriously.

Sgt. Amit Hod Ziv, 19, of Rosh Ha'ayin, was killed near Israel's northern border Friday following rocket fire from Lebanon. He and another soldier who was



Israelis demonstrating for the release of the hostages in Tel Aviv over the weekend.

Itai Ron

The continuation of the Israeli army's broad offensive in the Gaza Strip now involves fierce fighting against Hamas' defensive positions. The Israel Defense Forces estimate that close to 8,000 armed Palestinians have been killed since the war began two and a half months ago. However, in locations that the army doesn't have fully under its control, there is very stiff resistance. In places that are totally controlled by the IDF, Hamas fighters are still attempting to snipe at Israel's forces.

When such large forces, amounting to no less than four divisions, are conducting offensive moves in Gaza, it entails a larger and more complex area of conflict with the enemy, in densely-built areas, large portions of which have been destroyed. Underground, despite the massive damage to thousands of shafts leading into and out of tunnels, Hamas' tunnel network remains operational. Most of the Hamas attacks are carried out guerilla-style, using small forces with the aim of obtaining cumulative results. The mode of operation includes sniper fire, firing rocket-propelled grenades and detonating explosive devices. Most of these attacks are foiled, but the ones that do succeed are exacting a daily price. The IDF is deploying its forces in improvised outposts protected by earth berms, and they move around in Hummer jeeps, two facts Hamas is trying to convert into vulnerabilities.

The weight of offensive operations is gradually moving from the northern Strip to the south. In the north, Palestinians are reporting some thinning of IDF forces in areas where Hamas resistance has weakened. In contrast, a battle is underway in the Daraj and Tuffah neighborhoods in the northeastern part of Gaza City, areas that Israel hasn't attended to yet in its ground operations. In addition, a reserve division is maintaining a "corridor" south of the city, meant to

See PRICE, Page 2

UN okays weakened Gaza aid resolution News Page 2 • Hostage families sue Red Cross, claiming dereliction of duty News Page 4

Combat in Khan Yunis more precise; hostages almost an afterthought

Yaniv Kubovich

The commander of the 36th Armored Division, Brig. Gen. David Bar Khalifa, announced Thursday that the Israeli military was in complete control of the northern Gaza neighborhood of Shujaiyeh. At the same time, his colleague from the 98th Division, Dan Goldfus, stood in a Khan

Yunis apartment building. Goldfus was telling reporters about fighting in Khan Yunis, thought to be Hamas' central stronghold after the fall of Gaza City.

He predicted the fighting there would be long and difficult. Securing the release of remaining hostages, one of the declared goals for the war in Gaza, went almost unmentioned in his briefing.

"We've had good results," Goldfus said in the second-floor living room, which looked like it had belonged to a relatively well-off family. The military says a building nearby was the home of Hamas' leader in Gaza, Yahya Sinwar - or one of them, at least. The sound of incessant gunfire could be heard in the background.

A clock above him had

stopped at four o'clock. "We're making good progress and hitting their battalions, but we need to keep working," he said. "I can't give an exact projection for [how long will be needed for] dismantling the Khan Yunis battalions." He believes the brigade made up of those battalions is Hamas' most formidable.

The trip to Khan Yu-

nis from the Gaza border takes 40 minutes. Unlike on our journey to northern Gaza, we could barely see the border communities on the Israeli side and their reminder of the first day of the war. We ride into an agricultural area inside Namer armored personnel carriers. The area is less dense than in the north.

When we reach the city,

we discover homes that are lower than those of the Al-Shifa Hospital complex or coastal road in Gaza City. These buildings are more reminiscent of cities in the West Bank.

The Namer's camera shows the path before us, showing how the destruction in the south is unlike the destruction the military caused in the war's

first phase. Nearly every building in Khan Yunis has been hit by some kind of fire, but with over 1.5 million Gazans in the area, no cities have been flattened, and no neighborhoods have been reduced to ruins.

Western nations, especially the United States, pressured Israel to minimize damage to the property of innocent civilians

- but the fighting here also reflects lessons learned from the earlier battles that commanding officers drew during the limited ceasefire a month ago.

Khan Yunis is not only where many Hamas' senior leaders reside, but also the center of its control over Gaza. When the fighting

See FIGHTING, Page 3

IDF reverses on trimming security squads in Lebanon border towns

Adi Hashmonai

The Front Command reversed its decision to drastically reduce the civilian security squads in 32 communities in the Upper Galilee, on the Lebanese border, and on Friday it informed local authority leaders that there is "no obligation" to do so.

"Following a reassessment," the Israel Defense Forces said in a statement, "it was decided that the reserve forces mobilized at the beginning of the war in these communities will continue to operate and carry weapons."

The decision to establish the community squads, most

of which did not exist before the outbreak of the war on October 7, was made by the military and police. Most of the squads were staffed with army reservists.

The Home Front's initial decision to "reduce the amount of forces in the security squads according to the situation's development and assessment" would have seen the squads be staffed by only one commander, and in larger communities, a few fighters.

The decision was met with anger by the communities' residents. "The government of Israel has become the failure of Israel. Behaving as if the war has ended could cost

lives. Not only has the war not concluded; it's intensifying. Just look at Thursday's events to understand this," stated the head of the Upper Galilee Regional Council, Giora Zaltz.

He added that he appealed to the chiefs of the IDF's Northern Command and Home Front Command as well as the defense minister to reconsider the matter.

"If they do such a thing, then the responsibility shifts to the army, and I expect them to deploy a unit of soldiers here," said Ilan Or, head of the Yesod HaMa'ala Local Council in northern Israel.

"After the massacre on October 7, the army and police

asked us to establish a security squad, so local reservists were called up," he added. "We've never prepared for the threat of infiltrating terrorists, and it can't be that precisely when there's an escalation of fighting in the north, they tell me to dismantle the squad. I don't understand - is the budget for the Home Front Command more important than the security of the residents?"

The IDF stated that there are no changes in the security squads of communities near the border fence, and that they will be "strengthened with additional weaponry, equipment, and training."

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A priest and a man lighting candles for Gaza victims in Bethlehem's Manger Square. Mahmoud Hleeni/AP

With Gaza in ruins, Christmas in Bethlehem will be somber affair

Jack Khoury

On Sunday night, Christmas Eve midnight mass will take place at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. In calmer times, the very idea of going anywhere close is fraught with challenges, involving purchasing tickets and securing a place in the church - a process that begins several months earlier, even as early as May. Finding a room in Bethlehem during this holiday season is usually quite difficult; everywhere is sold out.

These days, however, Bethlehem and the entire Holy Land are in a state of grief and deep sadness; no other description will do. The city is blocked off,

whether by roadblocks or berms erected by the Israeli army. One solitary opening allows residents to enter and leave the city, after obtaining a permit. Anyone still wishing to visit the empty city will find most hotels closed. There's no problem with attending the midnight mass: There are no tickets, no stress and no worshippers.

The city is in mourning, says Fadi Kattan, a prominent tour operator in the city. "Since the coronavirus epidemic ended, we've been preparing for this season. We expected tens of thousands of tourists in the city, but everything collapsed suddenly. I don't know when business will

resume, perhaps in the coming months or maybe in the coming year. Between 5,000 and 6,000 people in Bethlehem work in the tourism industry directly, as well as thousands of others who depend on it, such as butchers, greengrocers, dry cleaners as well as souvenir sellers. Everything has ground to a halt," says Kattan.

He clarifies that it's "not just the business aspect. It's also about what people are feeling in their souls. What's happening in Gaza is a massacre. Christmas is a festival of joy. How can you be joyous when you see such sights? We have friends and relatives there; we are

See BETHLEHEM, Page 3

'We all want to protect ourselves': Israeli women rushing to get guns after October 7



Tamar Amishav with the gun she got recently. Naama Grynbaum

Linda Dayan

Since the October 7 Hamas attack on Gaza border communities, many Israelis have been coping with a shattered sense of security, particularly after the government's sluggish response to the massacres in the south. One way some have been reclaiming their personal safety is through applying for private firearm licenses: over 256,000 have applied for personal gun licenses since the war began, according to National Security Ministry data from the

end of November.

Before the war, the ministry saw about 850 new applications each week. Since October 7, it now receives about 1,000 a day. It has issued 26,000 new licenses and 44,000 conditional approvals - which applicants receive after successfully passing the interview, and before undergoing practical training and paying the necessary fees.

Although this phenomenon is well-documented, a rising demographic is often

See GUNS, Page 4

UN approves weakened Gaza aid resolution; U.S. and Russia abstain

Reuters and Haaretz

The United Nations Security Council adopted a resolution Friday to boost humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip that stopped short of a call for a ceasefire after a week of vote delays and intense negotiations to avoid a United States veto.

The resolution "calls for urgent steps to immediately allow safe, unhindered, and expanded humanitarian access and to create the conditions for a sustainable cessation of hostilities."

Amid global outrage over a rising Gaza death toll in 11 weeks of war between Israel and Hamas and a worsening humanitarian crisis in the Palestinian enclave, the United States abstained to allow the 15-member council to adopt a resolution drafted by the United Arab Emirates.

The remaining council members voted for the resolution except for Russia which also abstained.

Responding to the resolution's approval, Foreign Minister Eli Cohen said the vote underscores the need to ensure that the United Nations becomes more efficient in transferring the humanitarian aid and to make sure that it reaches its destination and does not end up in the hands of Hamas. He added that Israel will "continue the war until the release of all hostages and the elimination of Hamas in the Gaza Strip."

Israel's UN Ambassador Gilad Erdan welcomed the



Representatives voting during the Security Council meeting at United Nations headquarters on Friday.

Yuki Iwamura/AP

resolution, saying that it "maintains Israel's security authority to monitor and inspect aid entering Gaza." He thanked U.S. President Joe Biden for "standing firm on Israel's side throughout the negotiations and maintaining the defined red lines."

He also noted, however, that "the UN's focus on aid mechanisms to Gaza is unnecessary and disconnected from reality."

Following high-level negotiations to win over Washington, the resolution no longer dilutes Israel's control over all aid deliveries to

2.3 million people in Gaza. Israel monitors the limited aid deliveries to Gaza via the Rafah crossing from Egypt and the Israeli-controlled Kerem Shalom crossing.

But a weakening of language on a cessation of hostilities frustrated several council members - including veto power Russia and Arab and Organization of Islamic Cooperation states, some of which, diplomats said, view it as approval for Israel to further act against Hamas for the deadly October 7 attack.

The initial draft of the resolution had called for

"an urgent and sustainable cessation of hostilities" to allow aid access.

"By signing off on this, the council would essentially be giving the Israeli armed forces complete freedom of movement for further clearing of the Gaza Strip," Russia's UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia told the council before the vote.

Russia proposed the draft be amended to revert to the initial text calling for "an urgent and sustainable cessation of hostilities." The amendment was vetoed by the United States. It received

10 votes in favor, while four members abstained.

Earlier this month the 193-member UN General Assembly demanded a humanitarian cease-fire, with 153 states voting in favor of the move that had been vetoed by the United States in the Security Council days earlier.

The United States and Israel oppose a cease-fire, believing that it would only benefit Hamas. Washington instead supports pauses in fighting to protect civilians and to free hostages taken by Hamas.

Iran threatens Mediterranean closure over 'crimes' in Gaza

Reuters

An Iranian Revolutionary Guards commander said the Mediterranean Sea could be closed if the United States and its allies continued to commit "crimes" in Gaza, Iranian media reported on Saturday, without explaining how that would happen.

"They shall soon await the closure of the Mediterranean Sea, [the Strait of] Gibraltar and other waterways," Tasnim quoted Brig. Gen. Mohammad Reza Naqdi, coordinating commander of the Guards, as saying on Saturday.

Iran has no direct access to the Mediterranean and it was not clear how the Guards could attempt to close it off, although Naqdi talked of "the birth of new powers of resistance and the closure of other waterways."

"Yesterday, the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hor-



A satellite image of the Galaxy Leader off the coast of Yemen. AP

muz became a nightmare for them, and today they are trapped ... in the Red Sea," Naqdi was quoted as saying.

Earlier Saturday, British maritime security firm Ambrey said that an Israel-affiliated merchant vessel off India's west coast was struck by a drone.

The incident follows

drone and missile attacks in the Red Sea by Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen, who say they are supporting Palestinians under siege by Israel in the Gaza Strip, on commercial shipping, forcing shippers to change course and take longer routes around the southern tip of Africa.

Israel-affiliated merchant ship hit by drone off west Indian coast

Reuters and Haaretz

An Israel-affiliated merchant vessel off India's west coast was struck by a drone, causing a fire, British maritime security firm Ambrey said on Saturday.

The fire on the Liberian-flagged chemical products tanker was extinguished without crew casualties in the incident 200 kilometers (120 miles) southwest of Veraval, India, it said.

"Some structural damage was also reported and

some water was taken onboard. The vessel was Israel-affiliated," the firm said on its website, adding that it was "destined for India at the time."

It said the Indian navy was responding. The navy did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment.

The incident follows drone and missile attacks in the Red Sea by Iran-backed Houthis, who say they are supporting Palestinians under siege by Israel in the

Gaza Strip, on commercial shipping, forcing shippers to change course and take longer routes around the southern tip of Africa.

The United States has been trying in recent weeks to assemble an international naval reaction force to deal with the threat, but the effort is proceeding slowly for the time being and the main partners that would be expected to participate - Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates - have still not assented to the plan.

NYT investigation: Israel used one-ton bombs in south Gaza 'safe zones'

Haaretz

An investigation by The New York Times published Thursday found that Israel has used one of its most destructive and largest bombs over 200 times in areas in the southern Gaza Strip it designated as safe for civilians over the course of its war against Hamas.

The investigation used artificial-intelligence-based analysis of satellite imagery and drone footage of southern Gaza to identify craters "measuring 40 feet across or larger," which according to munitions experts cited by the Times "typically only 2,000-pound bombs form." According to the article, 208 such craters

have been located.

"Because of limited satellite imagery and variations in a bomb's effects, there are likely to have been many cases that were not captured," The Times noted, before concluding that the findings "reveal that 2,000-pound bombs posed a pervasive threat to civilians seeking safety

across south Gaza."

Bombs weighing about a ton are utilized by several Western armies, including the U.S. military. However, according to experts, the U.S. tends to refrain from currently using them in densely populated areas.

In a statement issued in response to the findings, an Israeli military spokesman

was quoted in the Times as saying that "questions of this kind will be looked into at a later stage," and that the IDF "takes feasible precautions to mitigate civilian harm." He also emphasized that Israel's priority is on destroying Hamas.

The U.S. pressed Israel to do more to minimize the number of civilians killed

in the war in the Gaza Strip. The Pentagon also increased its arms shipments to Israel, including smaller bombs that are considered more suitable for use in densely populated and urban environments like the Gaza Strip.

However, the Times' report also highlighted the Biden administration's

steadfast support of Israel in the war, noting that the U.S. supplied Israel with "more than 5,000 MK-84 munitions - a type of 2,000-pound bomb," since October.

A recent opinion poll published in the Times showed that President Joe Biden's handling of the Gaza war has been met

with solid disapproval among Americans, particularly younger Democrats. The poll reported that 57 percent of voters exhibited dissatisfaction with Biden's approach, and 33 percent supported it, while among younger voters, almost three-quarters expressed dissatisfaction with Biden's approach to the war.

PRICE: Hamas exploiting weaknesses

Continued from page 1

preserve a buffer area between the northern and southern parts of the Strip, thereby preventing the return of terrorists and civilians to the north.

The greatest conflict is in the south. In the area of Khan Yunis, the 98th Division is conducting a special operation which, according to official IDF announcements, is focused on hitting senior Hamas leaders, who are assumed to be sheltering in tunnels under this city. The IDF reported four fatalities from these battles on Friday. Two were from the Givati reconnaissance unit and two were from the reservists' 55th Paratroopers Brigade. There are signs that the IDF is starting to operate in the refugee camps in the central part of the Gaza Strip. The army dispersed leaflets in the area over the weekend, calling on residents to leave. Only the agricultural area of Moassi, near the ruins of the Israeli settlements that made up the Katif Bloc, and the Rafah area to its south, seem safe from an Israeli incursion so far.

Visits to bereaved families that have lost their sons in the fighting illustrate the great loss they have suffered, along with a strong belief in the justness of the cause. Conscript and reserve soldiers who went into combat in October did so with a strong sense that there was no other choice. According to many of them, Hamas had to be dealt a powerful blow, including an extensive ground operation in Gaza, in order to somewhat minimize the terrible damage wrought by the October 7 terror attack, to improve the security situation in southern Israel and to create the conditions for the return of the hostages.

later, the just cause of this war remains. But over time, the public will find it hard to ignore the heavy price paid, as well as the suspicion that the aims that were loudly heralded are still far from being attained, and that Hamas is showing no signs of capitulating in the near future. In the background, the question of whether to switch to phase three of the war will become more urgent.

Two and a half months later, the just cause of this war remains. But over time, the public will find it hard to ignore the heavy price paid, as well as the suspicion that the aims that were loudly heralded are still far from being attained.

This will entail a redeployment along the border, with some reduction of forces, and a focus on brigade-size raids inside the Gaza Strip. Southern Command still believes it has some urgent missions to complete in the near future, before making changes to the nature of operations, but it is growing clearer that such a change is required.

Tough bargain

Recent days have produced a range of reports, in Israel and overseas, regarding possible progress in negotiations over a new deal for releasing the hostages.

In practice, despite the growing military pressure on Hamas, the organization is broadcasting a tough stand. Senior Hamas leaders outside Gaza repeated over the weekend that the next phase of such a deal has to be "all for all" and include a full Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, a long-term cease-fire and an extensive release of Palestinian security prisoners, including major terrorists.

A further difficulty in achieving a deal is connected to the timetable. As we enter the Christmas holidays period, and attention in Washington and Europe will diminish for almost two weeks. This doesn't mean that the Biden administration is indifferent to events here, but the ability to promote complex moves that are contingent on multiple details will be restricted in the coming weeks. There is no reason to cast doubt on the sincerity of U.S. President Joe Biden's attempts to find a humanitarian solution to the hostage problem. And yet, it's time for the Americans to consider putting more pressure on another major player in this affair: Qatar.

Doha, the main mediator between Israel and Hamas, is still playing a double game. On one hand, it is communicating that it means business. On the other hand, there is evidence of a great Qatari effort to maintain Hamas's rule in the Gaza Strip as an asset of the royal family, which has invested billions of dollars in Gaza over the last decade. The Americans may have to take off their gloves in facing Qatar, demanding that they increase their pressure on Hamas's leader in Gaza, Yahya Sinwar. The effort to release the remaining hostages continues slowly, while more of them keep dying in Hamas captivity.



Oshri Moshe Butzhak



Alexander Shpits



Shay Termin



Birhanu Kassie



Nir Rafael Kananian



Tal Shua



Amit Hod Ziv



Shai Ayeli

GAZA: Eight soldiers killed over weekend

Continued from page 1

seriously wounded were evacuated to hospital in Haifa, where he was pronounced dead.

Sgt. 1st Class (res.) Tal Shua, 31, of Be'er Sheva, and 1st Lt. Shai Ayeli, 21, of Ashkelon, were killed in combat in the Gaza Strip Thursday. Three soldiers were also seriously wounded Thursday.

The deaths bring the total number of Israeli service members killed in the war since October 7 to 472.

Since the beginning of the war, eight Israeli soldiers and four civilians were killed on Israel's border with Lebanon.

U.S. President Joe Biden spoke with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu Saturday to discuss the situation in Israel and the Gaza Strip, the White House said. Biden persuaded Netanyahu to halt a planned pre-

emptive strike on Hezbollah four days after Hamas' October 7 terror attack, The Wall Street Journal reported Saturday.

Israel had intelligence that the Iranian proxy group was "preparing to cross the border as part of a multi-pronged attack," the report cited officials as saying. The United States considered Israel's intelligence unreliable, the newspaper said.

According to the report, Biden warned Netanyahu - while warplanes were in the air awaiting orders - that such a move could start a wider war in the region.

Netanyahu's office denied the report, saying, "already on the first day of the war, Prime Minister Netanyahu decided that Israel would first work to achieve a crushing victory in the south while deterring an attack in the north," adding that "the cabinet adopted this policy."

The Hamas-run Health Ministry in the Gaza Strip said 600 people were killed and 368 were injured in the past day. Over 90 Palestinians, including dozens from one extended family, died in Israeli airstrikes on two buildings in the Gaza Strip, rescuers and hospital officials said Saturday.

Continued Israeli attacks were reported in several locations across the Gaza Strip, from Jabalya in the north to Rafah in the south.

Intense exchanges of fire accompanied by heavy artillery fire were reported in the eastern neighborhoods and several locations in Jabalya.

Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad said they were engaging in combat with the IDF. Twenty reported killed in the Nuseirat camp and Deir al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip in attacks carried out overnight into Saturday, medical

sources in Gaza reported.

Gazan rescue teams and local journalists reported numerous bodies left in the streets and on roads, primarily in neighborhoods and areas where the IDF operated in the past week.

According to the ministry, 20,258 people have been killed and 58,688 wounded since the start of the war.

The Palestinian Red Crescent said it took delivery of 70 trucks carrying humanitarian aid from the Egyptian Red Crescent Friday, according to CNN. The report added that 78 trucks entered the Gaza Strip Thursday, compared to around 500 trucks on the day before the outbreak of the war on October 7.

Air raid sirens sounded in southern and northern Israel throughout the weekend. Rockets reportedly fell near the town of Shlomi, in the Western Galilee near the Lebanese border.

The IDF and Shin Bet security service said an Israeli fighter jet killed Hassan Atrash in the southern Gaza Strip Friday.

The IDF said Atrash was involved in smuggling weapons from numerous countries into the Gaza Strip and played a role in smuggling arms into the West Bank.

The IDF and Shin Bet reported coordinated operations resulted in the arrests of hundreds of terror suspects in the Gaza Strip within the last week, of which over 200 Hamas and Islamic Jihad operatives were taken for further interrogation in Israel.

The report also stated that since the beginning of the war, more than 700 operatives from the terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip have been taken for questioning.

The IDF spokesperson reported that it struck Hezbollah targets overnight Friday, including operational infrastructures and compounds.

A reporter for Hezbollah's Al-Manar news network recorded an attack near Deir Mimas, about 12 kilometers (7.4 miles) from the northern Israeli city of Metula. Also overnight, Lebanese media reported that the IDF attacked the village of Kafr Kela in southern Lebanon.

The IDF spokesman announced that during an operation in the Bakshi neighborhood of Gaza City, a cache of weapons was found in a kindergarten hidden in toy boxes. The unit said dozens of mortar shells, warheads and anti-tank missiles were seized.

The report also stated that Israeli air and ground forces killed dozens of terrorists in the Issa neighborhood in the southern part of Gaza City.

In the Shati refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip, the Israeli Air Force killed three terrorists, the report added.

There's no way that Gideon Sa'ar will return to Bibistan

The leak was false. Politicians who consider themselves decent steer clear of Benjamin Netanyahu's evil cult

Analysis Yossi Verter

On Monday evening, Gideon Sa'ar arrived for a meeting of the security cabinet. Phones were left outside the room. At around 9 P.M., a news item was broadcast about a "plan" that Benjamin Netanyahu's people were preparing to bring Sa'ar and other lawmakers from his New Hope party back to Likud.

The meeting ended at 1 A.M., and only then, as Sa'ar left this underground debate at defense headquarters in Tel Aviv, did he turn his phone on and learn about the drama.

A leak during a security cabinet meeting is a classic Netanyahu maneuver that Sa'ar more than anyone knows about. He immediately tweeted: "It's not in any way on the agenda. I haven't changed my views" on why he left Likud to begin with.

"The current situation only proves how right I was. ... When the war is over, the time will come for a change for the better in Israeli society and politics."

Three days before, Sa'ar had posted a similar message; he was staying in the emergency government but had no intention of saving Netanyahu.

By coincidence, Monday's leak came hours after the latest threat by Itamar Ben-Gvir: "Netanyahu will soon have to choose between me and Gantz." Sa'ar's associates say the leak was a product of the pressure on the Prime Minister's Office. So it leaked its own threat, with Ben-Gvir the target: "Want to quit? Quit, the government isn't going to fall. Gideon is coming back."

But he isn't, don't worry. He'd never return to today's Likud, to Bibi-stan. If you're a politician and you consider yourself a decent human being, you have to steer clear of this evil cult. You have to bring it down, not save it.

This is the change for the better that Sa'ar talks and writes about. He left Likud in December 2020 and justified his move on the grounds that the party had become "a tool in the service of its leader," a personality cult.

In mid-2021 as the "government of change" was about to be announced under Naftali Bennett and Yair Lapid, Sa'ar refused an offer from Netanyahu to become prime minister in a rotation agreement. In the Bennett-Lapid cabinet, Sa'ar played a critical role.

Over the past three years, Likud and its leader have undergone their own change – for the worse. At the beginning of the year that's now ending – the Jewish people's most horrible year since the Holocaust – Netanyahu tried to change Israel's system of government through a series of laws with a fascist touch. He incited and divided while damaging the economy, Israel's international standing and its national security.

These are the reasons that got Sa'ar packing in 2020. But on October 7 they were suddenly dwarfed by the deaths of 1,200 Israelis. Netanyahu didn't accept responsibility for the failure, he didn't bow his head – on the contrary. Sa'ar had to act.

He says that quitting in the middle of a war, when soldiers are being killed ev-



Gideon Sa'ar during the Knesset's vote on the state budget last week.

Oren Ben Hakoon

ery day, tens of thousands have been evacuated from their homes and 129 hostages are still in Gaza, would weaken Israel both at home and abroad. Chili Tropper, the politician who is closest to Benny Gantz and a member of the emergency government, speaks in a similar vein.

Still, both realize that to stay for long would give legitimacy to a failing government, a criminal government that long ago should have found its place on the ash heap of history.

"We didn't form an emergency government to save Netanyahu, and we have no intention of doing so," Sa'ar

said. For now, the dispute between him and Gantz on the timing for leaving the cabinet is theoretical. Gantz doesn't plan to quit in the foreseeable future either.

When it happens, Sa'ar will have to decide whether his New Hope faction will leave the coalition too. Sa'ar says he'll do what's good for the country – strengthening Bibi-ist Likud isn't a factor.

The sands of time

"I assume that in the coming months we'll leave," Tropper told me last week. "Of course we won't stay until the very end of the war, which will be with us

for many more months, even years, in one form or another. I assume that as long as it's being fought intensely, we'll be there. In the coming weeks, we certainly have no plans to quit."

When the time comes, this is how it will happen: Gantz (and probably also Gadi Eisenkot) will call a news conference to say there's no reason to continue the partnership. They'll surely have something to say about Netanyahu's devious behavior.

Gantz will call for a general election. He'll say there's no reason Israel can't go to the polls during a war and will announce his candidacy for prime minister for almost the whole center, right and left – from Mansour Abbas to Naftali Bennett to Yossi Cohen.

But we're not there yet. For now, Gantz is holding

his nose while sitting next to the man who's inciting against him.

Gantz is tired of news conferences with Netanyahu. The last one almost broke him. He didn't want to go, but a show of "unity" was mandatory. He sees them as a circus while a war rages outside. Most of the time he and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant are mere extras alongside the main actor who doesn't skimp on tricks, lies and spin.

Back to Tropper. We talked about the attack on army chief Herzl Halevi, which was led by defense whizzes Ben-Gvir and Miri Regev at last week's cabinet meeting. "The only ones who came to Herzl's defense were us," Tropper said about the ministers from Gantz's National Unity Party. "When we leave, nobody will have his back.

That's also a factor."

Well, that shouldn't really be a factor. Halevi has been through enough in life and can smack down the brats in the cabinet. But as his famous restraint that was violated in that cabinet meeting shows, he understands the disturbing meaning beyond the bullying.

Presumably, Netanyahu's silence throughout the ugly ambush (joined by judicial putschist Yariv Levin) bothered him a little more. But he wasn't surprised; after all, we're talking about Netanyahu.

"Okay, we understand, we got answers, let's move forward," Netanyahu hissed after they finished crucifying Halevi – with the depraved thug Ben-Gvir warning the chief of staff not to dare suspend the soldiers who proclaimed "Hear, O Israel" in a mosque.

Regev the provocateur aligned with Ben-Gvir's Otzma Yehudit party, and not for the first time. The two think that denigrating religious symbols should be an integral part of the army's goals. Then the snarky Regev continued to troll the chief of staff with infantile humiliations. Their rudeness was allowed by Netanyahu as part of the master plan to tar the army's good name in the eyes of his base.

The wicked Levin, who still dreams of completing his abominable "judicial reform," asked Halevi why he brought up the issue of the buffer zones in Gaza after their size had already been decided on. One might have thought that this was his first cabinet meeting and he didn't realize that the prime minister sets the agenda, not the army chief.

It was merely repulsive bullying. An indifferent Netanyahu had to intervene: "Look at me, not him," he said. This is the level of debate in the fo-

rum that's supposed to be making critical decisions. Why hasn't Hamas been destroyed, these stupid ministers ask, as if nothing has happened in Gaza over the last 11 weeks, as if the IDF pampers terrorists in the enclave's alleyways. Halevi had to explain to them that it would take time – a long time.

I asked Tropper if he and his colleagues feared that Netanyahu would seek to artificially prolong the war to preserve the emergency government as long as possible.

Tropper doesn't think the PM will prolong the war to preserve his government. 'The chief of staff won't allow it, the defense minister, the media.'

"Netanyahu can't do this," he said. "There's an IDF chief of staff who won't allow it. There's a defense minister. There are the Americans, there's the media. Netanyahu can't order the army to carry out needless operations."

Another cabinet member with whom I discussed this scenario, which comes up a lot these days, also played it down. To this day, he said, Netanyahu is the one who restrains people, rejects proposals and prevents actions that would significantly expand the war. This also applies to other fronts.

It was the army, with Gallant's support, that wanted to expand the operation – and Netanyahu objected. Bibi, the cabinet member told me, "was always cautious and hesitant about using force, and he remains so even today."



A soldier in the Gaza Strip, this week.

IDF Spokesman's Unit

the hostages were fourth in line. He stated that the operation was meant to create better circumstances for negotiating their release. After the question, it seemed the commander realized he should have mentioned them earlier.

He appeared straightforward and honest when talking about the challenging personal and professional feelings being confronted after the October 7 Hamas attack, but it was not difficult to notice that returning the 129 hostages held in Gaza wasn't the top priority given to the troops he commands.

"The maneuver enables results regarding the hostages, too," Goldfus replied to Menashe, using the military's preferred term to describe the ground operation. "It's significant pressure on the enemy, which will also put pressure on it to release them. The belief is that there are hostages in the south, so we operate in areas that require precision and focus, as well as in areas that require force and aggressiveness."

emy, but we have tools to reach the goals we set and dismantle its battalions," Goldfus said. "It won't be up to the final terrorist or the final tunnel shaft, but we will reach the desired result."

Goldfus said Israel had killed some 1,300 terrorists in the area, found over 150 tunnel shafts, and seized numerous weapons and pieces

of intelligence. The hostage issue first came up some 20 minutes into the discussion when reporter Carmela Menashe asked how the aggressive campaign – waged from land, air, and sea – can be reconciled with the presumption that most of the hostages are in the south.

When the commander outlined the division's goals at the start of the conference,

FIGHTING

Continued from page 1

started, military officials expected that Hamas' leadership would flee to Khan Yunis from Gaza City, whose fate was sealed, to manage the fighting from there.

"Hamas is a serious en-

BETHLEHEM

Continued from page 1

Palestinians, we're the same nation. If we speak a human language, how can we remain indifferent? I am 46 years old. I haven't experienced a Nakba, but what is happening now in Gaza is a Nakba, as is what we are experiencing in the West Bank, with roadblocks and attacks by settlers."

"This is not a religious war, it's an occupation, with all its implications. We, as the most ancient Christian community in the world, have lived alongside Muslims and Jews and there was never a war of religion here," says Kattan.

Samir Hazboun, the head of the Bethlehem Chamber of Commerce and Industry, says that Bethlehem currently has 78 hotels with 5,000 rooms. The people now visiting the city are using barely 100 of those rooms, and they are mainly journalists and their teams, as well as a handful of pilgrims, no more than that. "In addition to everyday tourism, Bethlehem relies heavily on Christmas tourists who are Israeli Arabs, who usually occupy 30 percent of available hotel rooms. But these tourists are also absent this

year, not just because of the roadblocks, but because of the pain and mourning over what is happening. How can you talk about joy when the city is blockaded and closed?" says Hazboun.

A widely-circulated picture shows an installation that reflects this year's Christmas holiday: the Nativity scene, built from construction rubble, symbolizing the destruction in the Gaza Strip. Leading the initiative was Reverend Munther Isaac, who heads the city's Lutheran Christmas Church. In a message he posted on the website of the council of Lutheran churches in the Middle East, he wrote that "the world is looking at what is happening but remains indifferent to the killing and annihilation taking place in Gaza. Christmas is a festival of joy, but this year it's a festival of pain and sadness, in which babies and children, as well as entire families, are being killed or are suffering from hunger. We therefore decided to present the Nativity scene with construction rubble, to send the world a message that we are in pain, enough to destruction and death; we want to live in dignity."

The atmosphere in Bethlehem and Nazareth conveys emotional heaviness and an

economic crisis, but for the Christian community remaining in Gaza, the situation is a true catastrophe. There are 900 adult Christians in the Gaza Strip, most of them living in the Rimal and Tel al-Hawa neighborhoods of Gaza City, which were once considered prestigious. When war broke out, they all evacuated their homes and congregated in churches or on church property in the city. Some left for the southern Gaza Strip, to stay with friends. People with foreign nationalities managed to leave through the Rafah border crossing. Some had planned to go on vacation in the West Bank, as they do every year, to visit Bethlehem and Jerusalem. Now they are fighting for their lives.

Two weeks ago, a mother and her daughter were killed in an attack near the Holy Family Latin Church. Several community members were killed in different buildings, while others died in an attack on Al-Ahli Arab Hospital. The incident made headlines all over the world and involved arguments over who was responsible for the strike that killed people taking refuge there. The Israeli army and Human Rights Watch both assessed that a Palestinian rocket caused the explosion. Due to the war, Christian

leaders had already announced in mid-November that celebrations would not be held this year, neither in the West Bank, nor in Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon or Syria. All that had been planned were prayers and masses. Christmas trees have been decorated in several locations across the Holy Land, but anyone traveling through the West Bank or in Nazareth, Haifa or other Galilee communities with sizable Christian populations will not see celebrations and expressions of joy.

Many houses limited their decorations to one tree, and many people didn't set up festive lights outside their homes, like they usually do at this time of year. Christmas markets and other festivities were canceled, and in some churches, concerts were restricted to prayer services. "The decision to limit activities to religious ceremonies was self-evident, since people are walking around with a sense of heaviness and pain; one cannot ignore what is happening," says one Nazareth resident who owns a souvenir shop. "A few years ago, it was the coronavirus that stopped us, but we understood that it was a pandemic. But now, it's war and destruction caused by leaders; the global powers must put a stop to it."

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Hostage families sue Red Cross, claiming dereliction of duty

Yael Freidson
and Haaretz

Four freed Israeli hostages and the families of two hostages who are still being held by Hamas have sued the International Committee of the Red Cross for 10 million shekels (\$2.8 million), arguing that it neglected its obligations under humanitarian law by failing to visit hostages held in the Gaza Strip.

Their lawsuit says the Red Cross should be ordered to visit all the hostages, update their family members on their condition, and give them medicine.

The former hostages who are party to the suit are Raz Ben Ami, Judith and Natalie Raanan and Amit Sousanna.

They filed the suit in Jerusalem District Court Thursday, a week after Ha-dassah, The Women's Zionist Organization of America, sent a strongly worded letter to Red Cross President Mirjana Spoljaric, criticizing the organization's failure to visit and treat the hostages.

The civil complaint, which was filed on behalf of the former hostages and relatives by attorney Nitsana Darshan-Leitner, the president of Shurat Hadin-Israel Law Center, further states that the Red Cross ignored the appeals of the Ben Ami family and that the representative of the organization in Germany



A sign criticizing the Red Cross at a rally in support of the hostages' release.

Eyal Tsoref

wished the families "good luck in making contact with their loved one."

The Red Cross said in response to a request for comment that it is "a neutral humanitarian organization that operates subject to the consent of the parties to the conflict. As such, we welcome the fact that we were able to assist in the release of 109 hostages, and we will continue to do everything

we can to see more families reunited and gain access to their children."

Reports from released hostages of hunger, non-existent medical care and torture have led to anger toward the Red Cross among many Israelis.

Sarah Elizabeth Davies, an ICRC spokesperson based in Jerusalem, told the Haaretz Weekly podcast earlier this month that

the boundaries of the Red Cross mandate need to be clarified: "They can only act with the consent of warring parties. 'We cannot force our way in; we don't have weapons, and we don't have political power,'" she said. "We stay neutral, so that we can be trusted. And this is not something that is always easily understood, particularly in the emotional reality of a conflict."

Davies added that officials at the ICRC "absolutely understand the frustration, the anger, the fury, the heartbreak" since the hostages were taken on October 7, but stated that Israelis misunderstand the role of the Red Cross as a "neutral intermediary, an impartial, independent organization."

Ido Efrati contributed to this report.

Israeli-U.S. man listed as a hostage died in massacre; his body was taken to Gaza Strip

Nir Hasson
and Ofer Aderet

Gadi Haggai, 73, who was thought to have been kidnapped by Hamas terrorists, was killed during the October 7 massacre in southern Israel. His body was taken to the Gaza Strip, where it is still held by Hamas.

Haggai's death was announced by Kibbutz Nir Oz, where he and his wife, Judi Weinstein Haggai – both of them Israeli and U.S. citizens – lived. Both of them disappeared while taking their morning walk around the kibbutz October 7.

Judi managed to call one of the kibbutz members in a cry for help. She said that she had been shot in the arm and was also wounded in the face, and that Gadi had been shot in his head. There had been no signs of life of them



Gadi Haggai and his wife, Judi.

סוקרטוס

ever since, and they were assumed to be held hostage in the Gaza Strip.

They are survived by four children and seven grandchildren. Gadi was a cook in the kibbutz dining hall, while Judi was an English teacher and mindfulness coach.

Gadi was born in Kibbutz Ein Hashofet, in northern

Israel, in 1950. He played music from an early age. He played the recorder and the flute, among other instruments, leading to his army service with the Israel Defense Forces Orchestra.

After the army, he flew to the United States, became acquainted with jazz, and started playing

saxophone. He returned to Israel after several years, met Judi, a young American who was volunteering at Ein Hashofet, and the two got married.

Gadi played in a kibbutz jazz ensemble called Brit Hajazz. In the late 1970s, the couple left the kibbutz. In 1985, their daughter Iris was born. Their son Al, was born three years later, followed by another son, Re'em, and another daughter, Zohar. In 1994, the couple and their children moved to Kibbutz Nir Oz, where Gadi switched professions to cooking and continued performing, mainly on holidays.

The family released the following statement after learning that Gadi had been murdered by Hamas: "We are filled with great sorrow by the murder of Gad Haggai, an American-

Israeli citizen. He was a father of four, a grandfather of seven, and a member of his beloved kibbutz – Kibbutz Nir Oz. He will be remembered as a gifted man, with sharp intellect and a love for wind instruments – which he played since he was a young child. He was a talented chef, and alongside his wife, Judi, he lived a healthy, active lifestyle. We mourn the loss of our father and grandfather, and we continue to hope and pray that his body will be returned to us and that Judi is still alive and we will be reunited soon.

"We continue to urge our leaders to do everything they can to bring our parents home to us. This latest news of Gad's death only reaffirms the urgency with which we need to bring all of the hostages home," the family's statement said.

NYT interview

Freed hostage, 16, recounts her fear of Israeli airstrikes

Haaretz

Freed Israeli hostage Sahar Kalderon, a 16-year-old whose father remains in Hamas captivity, often felt that she might die in an Israeli airstrike, she told The New York Times in an interview published Friday.

"Many times I told myself that, in the end, I will die from Israel's missiles and not from Hamas," she told the Times.

Kalderon was abducted along with her father, 53-year-old Ofer, and her 12-year-old brother, Erez, from the kibbutz of Nir Oz – where survivors described a systematic attempt at massacring as many people as possible. As she hid in a bush, Kalderon watched as crowds of Gazans burned houses and fired their weapons. She hid for two hours, but she and her brother and father were seen. She was separated from them and encountered what the newspaper described as "a group of 10 armed adults wearing civilian clothes and two children."

According to the Times, she couldn't believe her eyes as she was being driven into Gaza and saw what she said

was "thousands of terrorists, people, Gazan citizens." She said saw "many small children and mothers from Gaza." She was petrified when they entered Gaza, she told the newspaper. "I was scared to death."

She was unaware that her grandmother and cousin had been killed, or of what had happened to her brother and father. She said she recalled feeling as though she had been forgotten, and that she had no idea how many hostages there were. Over the 52 days of captivity without daylight, she lost her sense of time. She described feeling "complete helplessness."

Kalderon told the newspaper that serious hunger marked her captivity. She didn't know she would be released, along with Erez, until an hour beforehand. The kibbutz announced the death of another resident thought to have been taken hostage, 73-year-old Gadi Haggai, on Friday. (See Story, this page.) On Monday, Hamas released a video showing three hostages from Nir Oz, and another two on Wednesday. Earlier this month, Israel announced the deaths in captivity of five Nir Oz residents.



Protesters holding a sign calling for the release of Hersh Goldberg-Polin, Saturday.

Itai Ron

Thousands of Israelis brave rain to demand election, PM's ouster

Bar Peleg,
Adi Hashmonai,
Liza Rozovsky and dpa

Thousands of Israelis demonstrated on Saturday night at Habima Square in central Tel Aviv, calling for "an election now." Rachel Goldberg, mother of Israeli American Hersh Goldberg-Polin, who is held captive in Gaza, addressed the crowd. "Like millions of mothers in the Middle East, I want my son to live," she said.

"I think about the most vulnerable and how there is no time left," she added. American record executive Scooter Braun told the crowd that "A week ago I decided to come to Israel to be with my people. ... There should be no conversation that begins without calling

on the hostages to come home now... I will not stop using my voice."

"We will scream at the top of our lungs: Bring the hostages home," he added.

Hundreds of people also protested in Caesarea, near Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's private home, calling for his ouster.

Roni Neumann, the uncle of Rotem Neumann, who was murdered at the Nova music festival near Re'im, said at the demonstration that "a large majority think that this despicable man who sends soldiers to war but is afraid to attend their funerals should go home."

Neumann said that if the release of his niece's killer helps to return the hostages being held in Gaza, then he supports his immediate

release.

Of Netanyahu, Neumann said, "Time after time, when his personal interests collided with the good of the state, he chose personal interest," adding, "If you want to ensure that he does not choose his personal interest at the expense of our soldiers, he must go now."

Hundreds protested in London and Berlin on Saturday calling for an end to the war in the Gaza Strip.

In Berlin, demonstrators marched on the Kreuzberg district of the German capital to the Brandenburg Gate in the city center under the slogan "Solidarity with Palestine."

Protesters in London urged Christmas shoppers to boycott "Israeli-linked" brands.

GUNS

Continued from page 1

overlooked: women. When women are included in the discourse on private gun ownership, they are most often mentioned as victims. Justifiably so: According to a study in the Journal of Law, Medicine and Ethics, firearms are used in more than half of domestic violence related to murders of women in the United States. Furthermore, the authors note that a victim or survivor of intimate partner violence is five times more likely to die when an abusive partner has access to a gun. A Gallup poll found that in 2021-2022, twice as many American men owned firearms as women, and women were more likely to prefer stricter gun control laws.

In Israel, the image of the armed woman has long been the soldier: the national symbol of a girl in uniform with an M16 dangling off her hip. Last year, Ayala Ben-Gvir, the settler wife of far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, introduced Israel to a new paradigm when she appeared at a meeting of governing coalition wives with a pistol conspicuously tucked into the waistband of her skirt.

She has been a vociferous proponent of women bearing arms, though few followed suit.

After Hamas terrorists overran tranquil kibbutzim, though, some Israeli women are starting to change their minds.

"Well, I think it started on October 7, as soon as we started hearing rumors," says Tamar Amishav, a 45-year-old PhD student researching depression at the Hebrew University. "I'm religious, so I really didn't see the news, but I have a son who's a paratrooper and he was at home for Shabbat. He was called back to his base, so we kind of knew things were pretty bad. Once I heard the news after Shabbat, it was a definite decision."

She now keeps a gun holstered on the waistband of her jeans, concealed by her jacket.

"There wasn't even a second thought at that point – it's the feeling of 'I need a gun for self-defense, and I want to protect myself and my family,'" she recounts. "The feeling was that no one is going to come help. I don't think that's my feeling anymore, but our feelings were much more acute then."

Amishav says that before October 7, she had considered buying a gun but it was never "something I felt I needed." But as a resident of the West Bank settlement of Efrat, she lives in an area that the National Security Ministry deems dangerous: even people who did not serve in the Israeli military may apply for a license if they can prove they live or work somewhere that necessitates gun ownership.

The whole process, from start to finish, took her about a month and a half. It also included a visit to a range for her first shooting lesson.

"It was terrifying," she says. "I got there and just couldn't believe that I was in a position where I felt I needed a gun. It was very, very male-dominated."

She recalls checking the different weapons to see what was in stock before she started the training, and hurt her finger on the loading mechanism. "I don't usually feel like an insecure woman, but I was very much feeling that there. [It felt like], 'This is not a place for you.'"

A woman friend of hers who had just gotten approval to carry a gun called that day and asked if they could go together to the range the next morning – "because we knew that if you're a woman and you show up, you're usually the only one there." Amishav says she actually felt welcomed by the staff during the training session, "but if you go into a very male-dominated place, then you feel that."

She is far from helpless. A powerlifter, she can deadlift 190 kilograms (nearly 420 pounds). "It had a very big impact on my decision to be armed," she says of the sport. Until she felt confident in her strength,

there was a concern that an attacker could try to take her gun and hurt her. "So at this point I feel like I'm also strong enough physically to have a weapon."

"As a Jewish nation, we won't go like a lamb to the slaughter," she adds. "Will someone surprise me and start shooting at me and, God forbid, kill me? Maybe. But will I be able to be able to protect myself in that process? Yes, hopefully."

'It would have to be me'

"A lot of women are applying for guns now, and it's mostly because of the fear," says Hila, 61, who lives in a large West Bank settlement. "October 7 was in the south, obviously, and you know that there's been a threat of the same thing happening in Hebron and Judea in the West Bank. We all want to protect ourselves."

"The whole 'wanting to get guns' thing did not exist, as far as I know, before October 7," she adds.

Hila, a pseudonym, is in the midst of obtaining a gun license. She asked that her real name not be used as her application is pending because of medical reasons. She had never considered owning a weapon before Black Saturday.

"My son is in the army and it's just myself and my husband, and my husband is disabled – he wouldn't be able to protect us. It would have to be me."

She qualifies: "I mean, I don't want to carry a gun to shoot in case there's a terrorist attack if I get to a bus stop. Me personally, I'm not the kind to jump out of a car and start shooting people. ... I'm more worried about someone breaking into my house and trying to kill me and my family. Most of the people [getting licenses] are like that. They're like your homemakers, not young people."

Hila is a member of two WhatsApp groups that started after October 7. One discusses the bureaucracy and minutiae of gun permits and ownership; the other is much the same but restricted to women.

What are the main subjects being discussed? "How do you do it? How long is it supposed to take? Where's the best place to get a gun? What types of guns to get for women – because they're heavy and it's difficult to pull the trigger, it's difficult to load them."

The group's ages range from women in their 20s to 70s. There's a lot of talk about clothes – particularly for women from the religious Zionist community who adhere to particular standards of modesty: "How do you carry the [guns]? Because right-wing women wear them under their skirts, and the skirts are long. The holsters are on your thigh or on your ankles, so how do you lift your skirt so that people don't see it? Can you put it in a case around your neck? Can you put it in your purse? But then if you do that, you can't draw the gun quickly enough – that kind of thing. Those are the kinds of questions people ask."

To get a license, Hila explains, she had to submit a residency form to show that she, like Amishav, lives in an area that qualifies. She submitted a health declaration that was signed by a doctor. She had an interview, conducted over the phone. "That wasn't a problem. Then they got back to me and asked me for more information, which I submitted right away, and I'm still waiting."

Usually, she says, "once you get the interview, they send you the approval right away" – as was the case with one of her colleagues at the hospital where she works. When and if she gets her approval, she will keep her

gun in a safe, or in a holster on her ankle. "I don't really need it [in my daily life]," she says. "Like when you see those things that happen where people stab you in the back while you're walking down the street – I wouldn't have the peace of mind to turn around and shoot somebody. I'm more interested in keeping my family safe in the house."

Hila moved to Israel from the United States decades ago, but stresses that she was no proponent of U.S. gun culture.

"I was never very supportive of it. I didn't really think people should have guns and all that – a lot of bad things happen [because of them]," she says. "I didn't really approve of the NRA ... I don't think private people should own a gun."

Even so, seeing that the men in her synagogue were armed has eased her mind.

A relaxed policy

The phenomenon of women seeking to arm themselves is not restricted to Israel's West Bank settlements – although applicants outside of them may have a harder time getting licenses.

Kenizsa Wang, who immigrated with her family from the Philippines at age 12, grew up surrounded by weapons. "We always had a gun somewhere in the house or in the car," she says of her childhood in Southeast Asia. "We all knew how to disarm or put the gun together, depending on the type of gun."

She says she witnessed acts of terrorism growing up in Jerusalem, and also this spring during the shooting attack on Tel Aviv's Dizengoff Street for which Hamas claimed responsibility. But the 28-year-old Tel Aviv resident says she has applied thrice for a gun license – most recently after October 7 – and each time been denied because she does not live in a qualifying area.

Ben-Gvir, a major proponent of arming Jewish-Israeli civilians, has relaxed gun laws since taking office, even establishing a "war room" within the Knesset to speed up the application process since October 7. This week, Knesset Speaker Amir Ohana stopped that initiative amid concerns that people who were not qualified to do such work – including teenage girls performing national service – were issuing the gun licenses.

Limor Arzani, head of the Firearms Licensing Department in the National Security Ministry, said at a Knesset hearing this week that in order to shorten the process, some face-to-face interviews of applicants had been replaced with telephone interviews; the department interviewed all the women in this article by telephone.

Earlier this month, Yisrael Avisar, the previous head of the Firearms Licensing Department, resigned. Although he had green-lit many of the minister's policies, he urged Ben-Gvir to tighten the reigns on the gun control policy before it was too late.

Despite behind-the-scenes tensions at the licensing division, the women interviewed said the process compared favorably to their frame of reference: U.S. gun policy.

"I see how easy it is there, and that they're walking around with a bullet in the chamber, which is not allowed in Israel," Amishav says. "I am so grateful for all the laws that go into the process – you can't just impulsively buy a gun at Walmart. It's a three-step, four-step, five-step process until you can actually acquire a gun. It's something you actually have to put thought into, not something you can just go and wear. I'm very grateful that I live in a country where you don't walk around with a bullet in the chamber."

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Stop the mass killing

The number of Palestinians killed in the Gaza Strip since the war began on October 7 now stands at around 20,000, according to data released by the Gaza Health Ministry (which is controlled by Hamas) Thursday. This amounts to roughly 1 percent of Gaza's population. And that number doesn't include the numerous people who are missing and are thought to be buried under the rubble of destroyed buildings (Haaretz, December 21).

According to the Gaza Health Ministry, more than two-thirds of the fatalities are women and children. Even if these figures are imprecise, Israel hasn't presented any contrary figures. The defense establishment estimates that around one-third of the fatalities are Hamas members. This represents unprecedented harm to uninvolved civilians.

An investigative report by The New York Times last month found that civilian deaths in Gaza during the current war are rising faster than they did during the American wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria. And a new report by that paper said that during the first six weeks of the war, Israel dropped one-ton bombs on southern Gaza at least 200 times, even though the Israel Defense Forces and the Israeli government had declared southern Gaza to be a safe space for civilians. The IDF took pains to urge Gazans to move southward. "Go south," IDF Spokesman Daniel Hagari told them repeatedly. But The New York Times report shows that the south wasn't actually safe.

The IDF – which is now also conducting ground maneuvers in southern Gaza, where there was no mass evacuation of the population – has an obligation to make the adjustments needed to reduce harm to uninvolved civilians. It must also take the humanitarian situation in Gaza into account – the hunger; the diseases; the shortages of water, food and medicine; the fact that people have no homes to return to; and the destroyed infrastructure. A sharper distinction must be made between hitting Hamas terrorists and harming uninvolved civilians, and especially given the fact that 129 Israeli hostages are being held in Gaza.

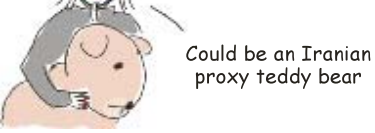
At the same time, Israel must move forward on a deal for the hostages' release and be prepared to pay in the currency of both additional days of ceasefire and the release of Palestinian prisoners. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant have repeatedly said that military pressure on Hamas would make the organization soften its demands and lead to the hostages' return, but reality hasn't fallen in line with their expectations. So far, the ongoing massive offensive hasn't produced any results with regard to the hostages; it has only led to talks on their release being halted. Bringing the hostages home is one of the war's supreme goals. The government has no mandate to abandon the hostages, either explicitly or implicitly.

As gov't seeks name for war
Apparently Eli Cohen already promised Likud activist it would be named after him



The Itzik Zarka War: Day 86

Teddy bear Adva Dadon found in the ruins of Sinwar's house not cooperating with interrogators



Moran Sharir

As Gideon Sa'ar grows closer to Likud
Ayala Hasson reveals that he paid for toilets with own money



Military Intelligence estimates
Mohammed Deif continues to grow limbs



Gideon Levy

When Israel abuses the hostages that it holds

Every Sunday and Tuesday, guards enter Palestinian prisoners' cells, handcuff them and beat them with batons. That's their weekly party, according to released prisoners (Hagar Shezaf, Haaretz, December 9). Four prisoners have died since the war began on October 7, almost certainly from beatings. Nineteen guards who participated in these sick parties are under investigation, suspected of causing one prisoner's death.

Hundreds of Palestinians who were detained in the Gaza Strip have been kept bound and blindfolded 24 hours a day, and they have also been brutally beaten. Some, perhaps even most, have no connection to Hamas. Some of them – no one has even bothered reporting how many – have died in captivity at the Sde Teiman base.

Some 4,000 Gazan workers who were arrested in Israel on October 7 despite having done nothing wrong are also being held in inhumane conditions. At least two of them have died. And more than enough has already been written about the detainees being stripped and the humiliating photographs.

In this terrible competition over the magnitude of evil, there are no winners, only losers. But it's impossible to talk day and night about Hamas' atrocities – writers vie with each other over who can coin the most derogatory terms for the organization – while completely ignoring Israel's evil.

There are also no winners, only losers, in the competition over how much blood is shed and the way it is shed. But it's impossible to ignore the horrific quantity of blood that has been spilled in the Gaza Strip. This weekend, some 400 people were killed in two days, the majority of them children. On Saturday, I saw the weekend's pictures from Al-Bureij and Nuseirat, including children dying on the floor of Al-Aqsa Hospital in Deir al-Balah, and they are horrifying.

Israel's refusal to increase the amount of humanitarian aid allowed into Gaza, in defiance of a UN Security Council decision, similarly attests to a policy of evil.

And as if all this weren't enough, the voices of evil within Israel have raised the bar on satanic proposals. Journalist Zvi Yezekeli favors killing 100,000 Gazans in a first strike. Maj. Gen. (res.) Giora Eil-

and switched from proposing that we spread disease in Gaza to proposing that we starve its residents.

Even the left's new Prince Charming, Yair Golan, who is currently winning 12 Knesset seats in the polls from people who see themselves as the beautiful Israelis, told Gazans in an interview with the daily Yedioth Ahronoth that "as far as we're concerned, you can starve to death. That's completely legitimate."

Yet after all this, we consider Hamas the only monster in the area, its leader the only psychotic and only the way it holds Israelis hostage as inhumane. It's impossible not to be horrified by the thought of our hostages' fate, particularly the sick and the elderly among them. But it's also impossible not to be horrified by the fate of the Palestinians whom we have kept bound and blindfolded for weeks and months.

Israel has no right to set standards for evil when its hands are also stained with wickedness. Forget about the killing, the starvation and the mass displacement. Our treatment of Palestinian prisoners should have particularly upset Israelis, if only because of the dan-

ger to the Israelis held by Hamas. What will a Hamas member who holds an Israeli hostage think when he hears that his comrades are being restrained and beaten incessantly?

We can cautiously conclude that at least some of the Israelis held by Hamas are being treated better than the Palestinians held by Israel. When freed hostages Chen and Agam Goldstein told Channel 12 News on Friday night about their treatment by Hamas and how their captors protected them with their own bodies during Israeli airstrikes, they were attacked vociferously on social media. How dare they tell the truth?

Hamas perpetrated a barbaric attack on October 7. It killed and kidnapped indiscriminately. There are no words to describe its brutality, including in holding dozens of senior citizens, sick people and children hostage for months in unbearably harsh conditions.

But does this make it legitimate for us to act similarly? Forget about morality. Will Israel's brutality in the war and in its jails do anything to advance its goals? Will Hamas free its hostages faster if Israel abuses the Palestinians it is holding hostage?

Ravit Hecht

Winning the war? Israel is stuck

Not that the starting point, October 7, isn't a good reason for grief and despair, but the current situation, more than two months after the terrible massacre, is becoming a problem. Anywhere you turn you usually find that we're stuck – with a potential for further deterioration.

In the Gaza Strip the army, whose soldiers are risking their lives, racks up tactical wins such as uncovering tunnels, collecting arms and killing terrorists. But the expectation that this will produce a critical mass and ensure Hamas' defeat may not stand the test of reality, which is a war against a guerrilla organization.

Israel's daily body count, on top of incidents like this month's friendly-fire shooting of three hostages, create intolerable pressure that Israel will struggle to bear over the long run.

The hostage-release process is stuck because Hamas has no interest in a deal. The government's claim that the military pressure actually improves the hostages' chances doesn't stand the test of reality. Israel can oust Hamas from governing Gaza, but then the mess of administering the territory will be the problem.

Who will undertake the reconstruction of the Strip, manage it and hold the monopoly on the use of force? In other words, who will rule it? These are critical questions for guaranteeing Israel's security and preventing another October 7. If, for example, Qatar, which promotes and funds radical and political Islam, once again reaches into its purse, we'll have learned nothing and achieved nothing.

There is no point in rehashing the harm caused by Israel's occupation of Gaza, but still a significant segment of Israel's population, mainly the one relevant to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's political survival, aspires to it. Some even have a redemptive fantasy of renewing settlement in the Gaza Strip.

In the north, Hezbollah is continuing with its provocations, and the odds that nego-

tiations will get it to move its forces from the border are low. Government officials have convinced themselves that Hezbollah doesn't want an all-out war and that a few days of war will bring 60,000 displaced northerners back home.

This assessment should be taken with more than a pinch of salt, especially considering our bad experience with the doctrine of a "deterred Hamas."

Despite the increased threats, during these months no measures have been taken to prepare the home front for a war with Hezbollah, which will be incomparably worse than the one with Hamas. This is another failure that will expand until the guaranteed explosion.

In the face of these two fronts, not enough consideration is being given to the West Bank, where the frequency of terror attacks and violent incidents has increased dramatically since October 7. This is another powder keg almost certain to explode.

Israeli politics is also stuck, as is the process of replacing the prime minister, who more than half of Israelis neither believe nor trust. Removing him will require a massive and very painful protest, and he can be counted on to incite, poison and divide to the best of his ability in an attempt to survive.

But Netanyahu's replacement won't solve Israel's deepest problems. Many of his critics on the right are disappointed that he doesn't provide them with solutions such as the transfer or wholesale killing of Gaza's residents or the reoccupation of the Strip and the renewal of settlement there. Even if they join the forces moving to replace him, their core ideology dictates fundamentalist or Kahanist extremism, which has reciprocal relations with the Palestinian sentiment of escalation.

No great message is to be found in summarizing the points of despair, both old and new, that have been flashing since October 7. Still, the truth must be acknowledged: Nothing good threatens us at the moment. We're stuck.

Israel Harel

Let the IDF win decisively

It is a nearly certain that even if Hamas' military might is eliminated, this will not be "the last war." We are incapable of eradicating murderous ideologies. We must wake up from this messianic dream. But it is entirely possible that if the Israel Defense Forces is permitted this time to achieve a decisive, absolute military victory (and not only to obtain "successes," as in the 2014 Gaza war), as the prime minister, defense minister and IDF chief of staff have established as among the goals of the war, decades of quiet could be reached. In the absence of the Hamas army – and with an IDF that controls the Gaza Strip and moves aggressively to prevent this army's reconstitution – the Gazans are likely to choose construction over destruction.

Without Hamas, it will be possible to rebuild the Israeli border-area communities that were destroyed, to bring back their displaced residents and increase their ranks. Yes, the restoration their personal safety for long years to come may (and I pray that it will) revive the pioneering spirit in the kibbutz movement, which has been fading in recent decades, and instill – God willing – this renewed spirit in all Israelis.

In the words of Naomi Shemer, "All of this is nei-

ther a fable nor a dream." To steer the path to such a "hadash yameinu k'kedem" ("renew our days as of old"), the goals of the war must be adhered to strictly: to completely eliminate (yes, completely) the IDF has the power to do so) the warfare capabilities of the organization that slaughtered, burned, slashed and raped, and to maintain military rule in the Gaza Strip as long as there is a risk, however slight, of the welfare of the residents of southern Israel.

In a briefing for foreign diplomats on Tuesday, President Isaac Herzog said that Israel is ready for another humanitarian pause in exchange for the release of hostages. This willingness, even though any intelligent person understands the price our children and grandchildren will pay for it, has broad support among opinion-makers. And surprisingly enough (or not!), also among a few senior military commanders, who are showing the first signs of returning to the previous era.

The idea of another pause is less popular among the fighting forces on the ground and also, not surprisingly, among the families of fallen soldiers. Many of them expect visitors making shiva calls to convey their message to the decision-makers: Don't stop

the momentum; don't stop pursuing them, not even for a moment; don't create new bereaved families through capitulation to foreign interests; end the obsessive, bordering on masochistic, preoccupation with failures such as the fatal shooting of three hostages by soldiers; stop the hail of accusations and the searches for culprits. Take advantage of the soldiers' endless willingness to fight a decisive war, despite the dangers it holds for them.

I cannot swear that these are the messages of all the bereaved families. Naturally, I mainly meet families of a particular leaning. The same goes for most of the combat soldiers who talk to me. They convey to me the same messages as the families, but with even more force. The soldiers make it clear that these sentiments are shared by the vast majority of their comrades. Israeli soldiers of all stripes and tribes have come together for this campaign, knowing that they are liable to die in a war whose goal is to prevent further wars.

If this time too the government, with the support of the army, deviates from the main goal of the war, it will severely disappoint – I refrain from using a harsher and truer term – those who carry the burden, and the cost, of the war with their bodies.

We won't win. Not even together. We lost the current war in the Gaza Strip over our right to a national home in the Land of Israel October 7. Each additional day of the ground operation only increases the failure. When this terrible war ends, as expected, in a few weeks due to international pressure, Israel's situation will be worse than it was immediately after Hamas' barbaric attack. But might something good arise from this failure? Perhaps the end of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

On October 16, the war cabinet announced the war's goals: ending Hamas rule in Gaza and destroying its military capabilities; removing the threat of terror against Israel from Gaza; a maximal effort to resolve the hostage issue and defending Israel's borders and citizens. When the war ends, we won't have achieved even one of these.

Polls currently show that our actions in Gaza are bolstering Hamas' status among Palestinians, not only in Gaza but also in the West Bank. Those who didn't want Hamas in Gaza will now also get it in the Palestinian Authority. As for the hostages, what many saw as a maximal effort to free them was only partly successful; fewer than half were freed. And each day of additional fighting endangers the lives of the majority

who remain in captivity. If a deal is made to free them, not only will we have to release all Palestinians held in Israel, including those with "blood on their hands," we will also have to withdraw our forces and commit to ending the war. Hamas' leaders aren't stupid; they won't agree to anything less. Our friends sponsoring the deal will be required to provide guarantees that Israel won't resume the offensive afterward.

Israel's international standing has already hit an unprecedented nadir, which not only endangers its ties with its friends, especially the United States, but also Jewish communities worldwide and turns Israelis into pariahs abroad. Our standing among other countries in the region has also diminished dramatically.

Contrary to the presupposition that Hezbollah is deterred from attacking us, Israel is the one that's deterred. Its weakness against Hezbollah received resounding confirmation when U.S. President Joe Biden grasped the situation and quickly dispatched an impressive military force to the Mediterranean Sea.

And despite these American deterrent forces, Iran's satellites are managing to cause trouble. Hezbollah turned tens of thousands of residents of northern Israel into refugees in their

Hillel Schocken

Israel must recognize that it lost

own country, while from the south, the Houthis in Yemen have succeeded in severing Israel's maritime ties. Israel has thereby been forced to accept something it deemed grounds for war in 1956 and in 1967.

Without justifying the Palestinians' barbaric attack on communities in southern Israel, we have to view it as the current peak of their violent national

Israel must define ending Palestinians' opposition to its very existence as its supreme strategic policy goal – and not by their expulsion.

struggle against Israel's very existence as the Jewish people's national home in the Land of Israel.

Throughout its 75 years of existence, Israel has managed to thwart the Palestinians' ambition to destroy it and their self-definition of Palestine as a sovereign state on the entire territory between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. It did so initially by imposing a military government on the Palestinians inside Israel and repulsing attacks from across the 1949 armistice lines, and later by military rule over Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, which it conquered in the

1967 Six-Day War.

The many years that have passed since then haven't weakened the Palestinians. The intensity of their opposition to Israel's very existence has exacted a price in blood from both sides, as well as an economic price that only continues to grow. To keep the current war from being a prelude to much larger outbreaks of violence and preserve

million Palestinians.

Nevertheless, it's hard to imagine that the world – which will soon force Israel to end the war in Gaza, given the tens of thousands of Palestinians killed and wounded and the material and humanitarian destruction, which has reached monstrous proportions – will allow this solution.

Israel's initial failure in the 1973 Yom Kippur War and the Egyptians' achievement in crossing the Suez Canal restored Egypt's honor and led to the signing of a peace agreement. Israel's recognition of its loss in the current war, as described above, will help restore the Palestinians' national honor, which has been trampled for 56 years.

This is apparently a necessary step in a process that will result in an end to the war in Gaza and a prisoner swap in which all Palestinians incarcerated in Israel will be released in exchange for all the Israeli hostages, whose fate depends on how much time passes before Israel recognizes this reality. Israel will be forced to recognize the Palestinians' right to a sovereign, independent state and hold negotiations with any leadership they choose over an end to the conflict on the basis on United Nations resolutions and the Saudi peace initiative. Might the disaster of October 7 actually herald a new future for the Middle East?

France moves against Israeli firm; Israel did nothing

Gur Megiddo and Omer Benjakob

An investigative news story published in February exposing an Israeli information-manipulation firm has led to the filing of three indictments in France, including against a senior journalist. In Israel, however, the police have done nothing, even though Tal Hanan, the man at the heart of the exposé, was documented hacking into private accounts from his Modi'in office.

French prosecutors have filed indictments in the wake of an exposé titled "Agents of Chaos" (published in TheMarker, Haaretz and several global media outlets as part of an investigation organized by Forbidden Stories), French media announced Monday. According to the reports, an indictment was filed on December 8 against the senior French journalist and against former news presenter Rachid M'Barki, for breach of trust and other offenses under French law.

M'Barki was accused of selling screen time on his show to interested parties. Suspicion against M'Barki arose from a remark by Tal Hanan (pseudonym "Jorge"), the owner of a Modi'in-based business committing fraud and disseminating false information for its customers



Tal Hanan, the Israeli at the heart of the investigation, was documented breaking into accounts.

all over the world, including by "buying" journalists. In a conversation with Haaretz and TheMarker reporters, who he thought were potential customers, Hanan boasted of planting a news item on a program hosted by M'Barki.

At the center of the Team Jorge exposé, published in February, is Hanan's disinformation for hire and

election interference as a service firm, which offers a number of duplicitous services such as hacking digital accounts, mass avatar operations to spread false information, custom-order cyberattacks and document forging. The exposé was based on an undercover investigation carried out by TheMarker and Haaretz journalists in collaboration

with Radio France investigative reporter Frédéric Métézeau. At the end of the last meeting with him in his Modi'in office, Hanan presented a YouTube video featuring an item broadcast on French network BFMTV's nightly news program hosted by M'Barki, and bragged that he had planted the news for a client.

Dishonest broadcast journalism

The news item claimed that sanctions imposed on Russian oligarchs in the U.S. and Europe due to the war in Ukraine would indirectly result in the loss of tens of thousands of jobs to workers in companies providing yachting services in Monaco and the French Riviera. The

piece's false claims raised questions, in part because it was not the type of item usually broadcast on the program.

Radio France's Métézeau took Hanan's claim to BFMTV. In response, the channel's management investigated additional items that M'Barki had previously broadcast and revealed additional evidence of the presenter's dishonest conduct. It was also revealed that news stories were often broadcast on M'Barki's initiative, bypassing his editors and instructing professionals at the station to push the news to his show's lineup.

When called to account, the television presenter admitted he had broadcast the item, against the standard editing process, at the request of French media consultant and lobbyist Jean-Pierre Duthion, who was his friend, but denied any financial transaction with Duthion. M'Barki was fired about a week after the Story Killers investigation was published, causing an uproar in French media. Since then, several media outlets have reported that he has moved to Morocco with his family.

In October, Duthion and another man, Nabil Ansari, were arrested in the case and charged with a series of corruption offenses. French media reported that the two men were accused of acting on be-

half of private businessmen, as well as foreign countries such as Qatar, Morocco and Bahrain, to gain influence in France through criminal means, including the "buying" of media icons.

Unlike in Israeli procedure, in France indictments are not made public at the time of filing, so information about the contents of these indictments is relatively limited. As of now, it is unclear which of Duthion's clients M'Barki allegedly acted for and how Duthion was connected to Hanan, if at all. What is clear is that the affair began with the removal of M'Barki – following Hanan's boastful comments, which turned out to have a certain factual basis.

While it took less than a year for French authorities to investigate the case and file indictments, the Israel Police did nothing about Hanan's chaos factory, which is still operating – even though Hanan was documented in a video allegedly committing criminal offenses such as hacking Google and Telegram accounts from his office on Israeli soil.

It appears that the video documentation could have sufficed to bring Hanan to trial, perhaps even to convict him – but the police have taken no action. According to information obtained by

TheMarker, at the beginning of the year there was initial discussion of opening an investigation against Hanan under the police's Investigation and Intelligence Division. Since then, as far as is known, there have been no further significant developments, and it seems the police have abandoned the case.

Hanan may have been adversely affected by the exposé even though he has not been investigated by police. His international travels have been limited due to concern he would be interrogated in certain countries, and sources say he even experienced a slowdown in business activity. Two sources familiar with Hanan's business say he fired most of his business' employees following the exposé's publication.

Despite these layoffs, Hanan went back to offering his firm's services a few weeks after the investigation was published, as demonstrated by emails and other evidence in the TheMarker's possession. Hanan's chaos factory is still open for business.

M'Barki has not responded to the exposé's findings or to police. Hanan's response, like the man himself, was impossible to get a hold of. On Agents of Chaos' publication in February, Hanan said: "There is no fault in my actions."

Sunday 24.12

CHANNEL KAN 11 (Y11/H11)

06.00 The Morning News 07.00 This Morning - with Arieh Golan 08.00 Kalman-Lieberman - Live Reshet Bet radio show 10.00 Today's Agenda - with Keren Neuhack 12.00 The Unimportant - On events that at first glance seem unimportant, but from a distance over the years, tell a bigger story about all of us 12.30 Kupa Rashit - Israeli comedy series (s.4) 13.00 Israel at War - with Sharon Wexler & Uri Levy 15.00 Israel at War - with Maya Rachlin & Dov Gil-Har 16.55 On the Other Hand - with Guy Zohar 17.55 Israel at War - with Ayala Hasson 19.50 The Evening News 21.50 Lionesses - Four women whose lives changed on October 7, go on a short vacation together with Hanoch Daum, and tell him how they became reluctant heroes on that fateful day 22.40 News 23.30 Kupa Rashit - Israeli comedy series (s.4) 00.00 Cassandra's Prophecy - A behind the scenes look of the economic war against the money laundering and drug trafficking network of Hezbollah and Iran 01.00 Cultural Icons: architect Ram Karmi

KESHET (Y12/H12)

05.30 Special news broadcast 06.00 Today's Headlines 07.00 The Morning Show - with Nir Raskin 09.30 Special news broadcast - with Nesli Barda & Yoav Limor 12.00 Special news broadcast 19.55 The News 22.00 Details unavailable 23.00 Special news broadcast

RESHET (Y13/H13)

05.30 News Flash 06.00 The Morning Show 09.00 Israel at War - Special news broadcast 19.55 The News 22.00 The Source - Investigative program 23.00 The Tube - with Guy Lerner 23.50 Israel at War - with Tal Barman 00.30 Whatever is Possible - with Guri Alfi 01.00 News Flash 01.05 Whatever is Possible (cont.) 01.35 Tonight - with Tom Aharon & Yael Poliakov 02.35 The World's Best Dishes: America - with Israeli Aharoni and Gidi Gov

HOT 3 (H3)

08.00 Zaguri (s.2) 08.45 The Irrational 09.25 Sanditon (s.3) 10.15 The Good Wife (s.2) 10.55 The Thing About Pam 11.40 The Irrational 12.25 Sanditon (s.3) 13.15 The Thing About Pam 14.00 New Amsterdam (s.5) 14.45 The Good Wife (s.2) 15.30 The Young and the Restless 16.10 The Bold and the Beautiful (2 eps) 16.55 The Young and the Restless 17.35 The Irrational 18.25 New Amsterdam (s.5) 19.10 Connected (s.2) 19.40 The Thing About Pam 20.25 Little Bird 21.15 New Amsterdam (s.5) 22.00 Shababnikim (s.2) 22.40 Zaguri (s.2) 23.30 Little Bird 00.15 The Good Wife (s.2) 01.00 Shababnikim (s.2) 01.40 Zaguri (s.2) 02.30 Little Bird

HOT HBO (H4)

07.05 World on Fire (s.2) 08.00 Ridley Road 08.55 Mad Men 09.45 World on Fire (s.2) 10.40 The Plot Against America 11.40 Big Little Lies (s.2) 12.20 This Is Going to Hurt 13.10 Ridley Road 14.05 Mad Men 14.55 The Plot Against America 16.05 Big Little Lies (s.2) 16.55 This Is Going to Hurt 17.45 World on Fire (s.2) 18.45 Ridley Road 19.45 Time (s.2) 20.50 American Dad (s.19) 21.10 Mad Men 22.00 Crime (s.2) 22.55 Game of Thrones (s.8) 00.10 Sex and the City (s.6, 2 eps) 01.15 Crime (s.2) 02.10 Game of Thrones (s.8)

Solutions to Sudoku from Friday

Grid of numbers for Sudoku solution, Difficulty: Easy

Grid of numbers for Sudoku solution, Difficulty: Medium

Grid of numbers for Sudoku solution, Difficulty: Hard

HOT ZONE (H5)

06.30 Law & Order: Special Victims Unit (s.20) 07.15 CSI: Vegas (s.2) 07.55 S.W.A.T (s.6) 08.40 Fire Country 09.20 NCIS (s.20) 10.05 Law & Order (s.21) 10.45 Law & Order: Organized Crime (s.3) 11.25 Law & Order: Special Victims Unit (s.20) 12.10 Chicago Fire (s.9) 12.50 CSI: Vegas (s.2) 13.30 FBI (s.4) 14.15 Fire Country 15.00 NCIS (s.20) 15.40 Law & Order: Organized Crime (s.3) 16.20 Law & Order: Special Victims Unit (s.20) 17.05 Law & Order (s.21) 17.45 Fire Country 18.30 CSI: Vegas (s.2) 19.10 Chicago Fire (s.9) 19.50 NCIS (s.20) 20.35 Law & Order: Organized Crime (s.3) 21.15 FBI (s.4) 22.00 NCIS: Hawaii (s.2) 22.40 Chicago P.D. (s.7, 2 eps) 00.05 NCIS (s.20) 00.45 S.W.A.T (s.6) 01.30 NCIS: Hawaii (s.2) 02.10 FBI (s.4)

HOT CHANNEL 8 (H8)

06.00 Dead Asleep 06.45 Pinkas Adom - The Red Book a documentary on the Histadrut 07.55 The Albums - Mashina 08.55 Islands: Nature's Wild Laboratories - Burneo 09.40 The Savoy 10.30 Pinkas Adom - The Red Book a documentary on the Histadrut 11.40 Dead Asleep 12.20 The Albums - Mashina 13.20 Islands: Nature's Wild Laboratories - Burneo 14.05 The Savoy 14.55 Pinkas Adom - The Red Book a documentary on the Histadrut 16.05 Dead Asleep 16.45 The Albums - Mashina 17.45 Islands: Nature's Wild Laboratories - Burneo 18.30 Pinkas Adom - The Red Book a documentary on the Histadrut 19.40 Dead Asleep 20.25 The Savoy 21.15 Homeboys 22.20 Spotting Yossi 23.35 Mole in North Korea (pt.1) 00.40 Homeboys 01.45 Spotting Yossi

YES DOCU (Y8)

07.50 Stock Aitken Waterman: Legends of Pop 09.00 River 10.15 How They Really Do It: IKEE 11.15 Couples Therapy (s.4, 2 eps) 12.15 Burden of Proof (2 eps) 14.15 Stock Aitken Waterman: Legends of Pop 15.25 The Kingmaker 17.05 Italy's World Cup Triumph 18.00 Kingdom of Dreams 18.50 Kill Chain: The Cyber War on America's Elections 20.20 Icons Unearthed: The Simpsons (s.2) 21.05 Man on the Bus 22.00 Superpowered: The DC Story 22.55 Dangerous Breed: Crime. Cons. Cats. 23.50 Curse of the Chippendales 00.40 Icons Unearthed: The Simpsons (s.2) 01.25 Superpowered: The DC Story 02.20 Dangerous Breed: Crime. Cons. Cats.

HISTORY (Y44/H44)

06.20 Small Pieces of History: Dakar Submarine 06.35 Pawn Stars (2 eps) 08.00 History's Greatest Mysteries (s.3) 08.40 Pawn Stars 09.20 American Pickers 10.05 The Toys That Built the World (s.2) 10.50 Beyond Aokigahara (s.3) 11.30 Ancient Aliens 12.15 The Secret of Skinwalker Ranch 12.55 History's Greatest Mysteries (s.3) 13.40 The Toys That Built the World (s.2) 14.20 The Food That Built America (s.4) 15.05 Pawn Stars 15.45 American Pickers 16.20 The Toys That Built the World (s.2) 17.15 The Toys That Built the World (s.2) 17.55 The Food That Built America (s.4) 18.40 History's Greatest Mysteries (s.3) 19.20 Beyond Aokigahara (s.3) 20.00 The Secret of Skinwalker Ranch 20.55 Pawn Stars 21.35 Ancient Aliens 22.15 The Story of Us 22.30 The Unexplained (s.4) 23.10 The Proof is Out There (s.4) 23.50 History's Greatest Mysteries (s.3) 00.35 Beyond Aokigahara 01.20 Ancient Aliens 02.00 The Unexplained (s.4)

YES TV DRAMA (Y5)

06.00 Charmed (s.3) 06.45 Good Trouble (s.3) 07.30 Nancy Drew (s.2) 08.20 The Bachelor Australia (s.8) 09.10 A Million Little Things (s.4) 09.55 Charmed (s.3) 10.40 Good Trouble (s.3) 11.30 A Million Little Things (s.4) 12.15 Nancy Drew (s.2) 13.05 Good Trouble (s.3) 13.50 The Bachelor Australia (s.8) 14.50 A Million Little Things (s.4) 15.40 Yes Man (2 eps) 16.15 The Bold and the Beautiful 16.40 The Young and the Restless 17.25 Charmed (s.3) 18.10 Nancy Drew (s.2) 18.55 The Bachelor Australia (s.8) 19.55 The Bold and the Beautiful 20.20 The Young and the Restless 21.00 The Lovers (2 eps) 22.00 The Gilded Age (s.2) 23.00 Outlander (s.6) 00.10 Somebody Somewhere (s.2) 00.40 In Treatment 01.10 The Lovers (2 eps) 02.10 The Gilded Age (s.2)

YES TV ACTION (Y6)

06.20 9-1-1 (s.5) 07.05 NCIS: Los Angeles (s.10, 2 eps) 08.35 Leverage: Redemption (s.2) 09.15 FBI: Most Wanted (s.2) 10.00 FBI: Most Wanted (s.3) 10.45 Survivor (s.4) 12.15 NCIS: Los Angeles (s.10, 2 eps) 13.45 FBI: Most Wanted (s.2) 14.30 FBI: Most Wanted (s.3) 15.15 9-1-1 (s.5, 2 eps) 16.45 NCIS: Los Angeles (s.10, 2 eps) 18.15 Survivor (s.4) 19.45 The Equalizer (s.3) 20.30 FBI: Most Wanted (s.2) 21.15 FBI: Most Wanted (s.3) 22.00 NCIS: Los Angeles (s.12, 2 eps) 23.30 True Detective 00.25 The Wire (2 eps) 02.25 Pros and Cons (s.2)

YES TV COMEDY (Y7)

06.00 Silicon Valley (s.6) 07.00 How I Met Your Mother (s.6, 3 eps) 08.15 Baby Daddy (s.2, 2 eps) 09.05 B Positive (s.2, 2 eps) 09.55 Silicon Valley (s.6) 10.45 Saturday Night Live 11.55 The Simpsons (s.35) 12.20 Family Guy (s.22) 12.45 Kid Sister (s.2) 13.10 Frasier 13.40 Friends (s.5, 3 eps) 14.55 Silicon Valley (s.6) 15.45 B Positive (s.2, 2 eps) 16.35 Baby Daddy (s.2, 2 eps) 17.25 Family Guy (s.22) 17.50 The Simpsons (s.35) 18.15 Frasier 18.45 Kid Sister (s.2) 19.10 Saturday Night Live 20.20 Family Guy (s.20, 2 eps) 21.10 The Nanny (s.6, 2 eps) 22.00 Friends (s.3, 2 eps) 22.45 Hot in Cleveland (s.2, 2 eps) 23.30 Eastbound & Down (2 eps) 00.20 Entourage (s.8, 2 eps) 01.20 B Positive (s.2, 2 eps) 02.10 Baby Daddy (s.2, 2 eps)

EUROSPORT (Y61/H59)

07.30 Alpine Skiing - World Cup in France 08.30 Alpine Skiing - World Cup in Val Gardena, Switzerland 10.45 Alpine Skiing - World Cup in Engelberg, Switzerland 12.45 Alpine Skiing - World Cup in Alta Badia, Italy 13.00 Alpine Skiing - World Cup in France 13.30 Biathlon - World Cup in Switzerland 14.15 Alpine Skiing - World Cup in Alta Badia, Italy 15.30 Biathlon - World Cup in Switzerland 16.45 Ski Jumping - World Cup in Engelberg, Switzerland 18.45 Cross Country Skiing - World Cup in Trondheim, Norway 19.45 Snooker - Scottish Open in Edinburgh, Scotland 00.00 Equestrianism - FEI World Cup in USA 01.00 Ski Jumping - World Cup in Engelberg, Switzerland 02.30 Snooker - Scottish Open in Edinburgh, Scotland

MOVIE CHANNELS

HOT CINEMA 1 (H16)

08.30 Misconduct (USA, 2016). Thriller. Dir: Shintaro Shimosa. With Josh Duhamel, Anthony Hopkins, Al Pacino. 10.15 Limitless (USA, 2011). Action. Dir: Neil Burger. With Bradley Cooper, Anna Friel. 12.05 The Adjustment Bureau (USA, 2011). Drama. Dir: George Nolfi. With Matt Damon, Emily Blunt. 13.50 Richard Jewell (USA, 2019). Biography crime. Dir: Clint Eastwood. With Paul Walter Hauser, Sam Rockwell, Brandon Stanley, Kathy Bates. 16.00 Midway (China/Hong Kong/Canada/USA, 2019). Action. Dir: Roland Emmerich. With Ed Skrein, Patrick Wilson, Woody Harrelson. 18.15 The Outfit (UK/USA, 2022). Crime. Dir: Graham Moore. With Mark Rylance, Zoey Deutch, John Gurney-Mason. 20.05 Murder on the Orient Express (USA, 2017). Drama. Directed by and starring Kenneth Branagh. With Penelope Cruz, Willem Dafoe. 22.00 The Beach (USA, 2000). Adventure drama. Dir: Danny Boyle. With Leonardo DiCaprio, Tilda Swinton, Virginie Ledoyen. 23.55 Machete Kills (USA, 2013). Action thriller. Dir: Robert Rodriguez. With Danny Trejo, Alexa Penavega, Mel Gibson. 01.40 Universal Soldier: Day of Reckoning (USA, 2012). Action. Dir: John Hyams. With Jean-Claude Van Damme, Dolph Lundgren.

HOT CINEMA 2 (H17)

08.00 Vault (USA, 2019). Action. Dir: Tom DeNucci. With Don Johnson, Burt Young, Theo Rossi. 09.40 Rush (UK/Germany, 2013). Biography. Dir: Ron Howard. With Daniel Brühl, Chris Hemsworth, Olivia Wilde. 11.45 The Operative (France/Israel/Germany/USA, 2019). Thriller. Dir: Yuval Adler. With Diane Kruger, Martin Freeman, Ohad Knoller. 13.40 Goldfinger (UK, 1964). James Bond. Dir: Guy Hamilton. With Sean Connery, Gert Frobe, Honor Blackman. 15.30 Source Code (USA/France, 2011). Action. Dir: Duncan Jones. With Jake Gyllenhaal, Michelle Monaghan. 17.05 Operation Seawolf (USA, 2022). Action. Dir: Steven Luke. With Hiram A. Murray, Andrew Stecker, Apostolos Giilarmis. 18.35 Panama (Puerto Rico/USA/UK, 2022). Action. Dir: Mark Nevelinde. With Cole Hauser, Mel Gibson. 20.10 The Protégé (USA/UK, 2021). Action thriller. Dir: Martin Campbell. With Michael Keaton, Maggie Q, Samuel L. Jackson. 22.00 The Forbidden Kingdom (USA/China, 2008). Action. Dir: Rob Minkoff. With Jet Li, Jackie Chan. 23.40 Death Race (USA/Germany/UK, 2008). Action. Dir: Paul W.S. Anderson. With Jason Statham, Joan Allen. 01.25 The Courier (UK, 2019). Action. Dir: Zackary Adler. With Olga Kurylenko, Gary Oldman, Amit Shah.

HOT CINEMA 3 (H18)

07.05 Fast Track (USA, 2006). Comedy. Dir: Jesse Peretz. With Zach Braff, Amanda Peet. 08.40 And So It Goes (USA, 2014). Comedy. Dir: Rob Reiner. With Michael Douglas, Diane Keaton, Sterling Jerins. 10.15 Man Up (UK/France, 2015). Romantic comedy. Dir: Ben Palmer. With Lake Bell, Simon Pegg, Ophelia Lovibond. 11.45 The Heartbreak Kid (USA, 2007). Comedy. Dir: Bobby and Peter Farrelly. With Ben Stiller, Malin Akerman. 13.45 Poms (USA/UK, 2019). Comedy. Dir: Zara Hayes. With Diane Keaton, Jacqui Weaver, Celia Weston. 15.15 Game Night (USA, 2018). Comedy. Dir: John Francis Daley, Jonathan Goldstein. With Jason Bateman, Rachel McAdams, Kyle Chandler. 16.55 Hall Pass (USA, 2011). Comedy. Dir: Bobby Farrelly. With Owen Wilson, Jason Sudekis, Christina Applegate. 18.40 The Love Punch (France, 2013). Comedy. Dir: Joel Hopkins. With Pierce Brosnan, Emma Thompson, Timothy Spall. 20.15 Ride Along (USA, 2014). Action. Dir: Tim Story. With Ice Cube, Kevin Hart. 22.00 Rocket Science (USA, 2007). Comedy. Dir: Jeffrey Blitz. With Nicholas D'Agostino, Anna Kendrick. 23.40 Wanderlust (USA, 2012). Comedy. Dir: David Wain. With Jennifer Aniston, Paul Rudd. 01.20 Road Trip (USA, 2000). Comedy. Dir: Todd Phillips. With Breckin Meyer, Seann William Scott, Amy Smart.

HOT CINEMA 4 (H19)

07.55 On Golden Pond (USA, 1981). Drama. Dir: Mark Rydell. With Jane Fonda, Henry Fonda, Katharine Hepburn. 18.15 The Outfit (UK/USA, 2022). Crime. Dir: Graham Moore. With Mark Rylance, Zoey Deutch, John Gurney-Mason. 20.05 Murder on the Orient Express (USA, 2017). Drama. Directed by and starring Kenneth Branagh. With Penelope Cruz, Willem Dafoe. 22.00 The Beach (USA, 2000). Adventure drama. Dir: Danny Boyle. With Leonardo DiCaprio, Tilda Swinton, Virginie Ledoyen. 23.55 Machete Kills (USA, 2013). Action thriller. Dir: Robert Rodriguez. With Danny Trejo, Alexa Penavega, Mel Gibson. 01.40 Universal Soldier: Day of Reckoning (USA, 2012). Action. Dir: John Hyams. With Jean-Claude Van Damme, Dolph Lundgren.

09.40 Out of Africa (USA, 1985). Drama. Dir: Sydney Pollack. With Meryl Streep, Robert Redford. 12.20 Darkest Hour (USA/UK, 2017). Biography drama. Dir: Joe Wright. With Gary Oldman, Lily James, Kristin Scott Thomas. 14.20 Downton Abbey: A New Era (UK/USA, 2022). Romantic drama. Dir: Simon Curtis. With Hugh Bonneville, Jim Carter, Michelle Dockery. 16.25 Miss You Already (UK, 2015). Romantic comedy. Dir: Catherine Hardwicke. With Drew Barrymore, Toni Collette, Dominic Cooper. 18.15 Worth (UK/Canada/USA, 2020). Biography drama. Sara Colangelo. With Michael Keaton, Amy Ryan, Stanley Tucci. 20.10 My Sister's Keeper (USA, 2009). Drama. Dir: Nick Cassavetes. With Cameron Diaz, Abigail Breslin, Alec Gilarmis. 22.00 Out of the Furnace (USA/UK, 2013). Crime thriller. Dir: Scott Cooper. With Christian Bale, Casey Affleck, Zoe Saldana. 23.55 Supernova (UK, 2020). Romantic drama. Dir: Harry MacQueen. With Colin Firth, Stanley Tucci, Pappa Hayward. 01.30 Resistance (UK/France/Germany/USA, 2020). Biography drama. Dir: Jonathan Jakubowicz. With Jesse Eisenberg, Clémence Poésy, Matthias Schweighöfer.

YES MOVIES DRAMA (Y1)

06.45 Charade (USA, 1963). Comedy thriller. Dir: Stanley Donen. With Audrey Hepburn, Cary Grant, James Coburn. 08.40 A.I. Artificial Intelligence (USA, 2001). Sci-fi. Dir: Steven Spielberg. With Jude Law, William Hurt. 11.05 Little Women (USA, 2019). Romantic drama. Dir: Greta Gerwig. With Saoirse Ronan, Emma Watson, Florence Pugh. 13.20 The Post (USA/UK, 2017). Biography. Dir: Steven Spielberg. With Meryl Streep, Tom Hanks, Sarah Paulson. 15.15 12 Mighty Orphans (USA, 2021). Sports history. Dir: Ty Roberts. With Luke Wilson, Vanessa Shaw, Wayne Knight. 17.15 Breaking Through (USA, 2015). Musical drama. Dir: John Swetnam. With Anitta, Sophia Aguiar, Larry Bourgeois. 18.55 Sound of Metal (USA, 2019). Drama. Dir: Darius Marder. With Riz Ahmed, Olivia Cooke, Paul Raci. 21.00 A Good Person (USA, 2023). Drama. Dir: Zach Braff. With Florence Pugh, Morgan Freeman, Celeste O'Connor. 23.05 Julieta (Spain, 2016). Romantic drama. Dir: Pedro Almodovar. With Emma Suarez, Adriana Ugarte, Daniel Grao. 00.45 If These Walls Could Talk 2 (USA, 2000). Drama. Dir: Martha Coolidge. With Vanessa Redgrave, Sharon Stone. 02.30 Frankie and Johnny (USA, 1991). Romantic drama. Dir: Garry Marshall. With Al Pacino, Michelle Pfeifer.

YES MOVIES ACTION (Y2)

08.20 Terminator Genisys (USA, 2015). Sci-fi. Dir: Alan Turiel. With Arnold Schwarzenegger, Jason Clarke, Emilia Clarke.

10.30 Jurassic World: Dominion (USA/China/Malta, 2022). Adventure. Dir: Colin Trevorrow. With Chris Pratt, Bryce Dallas Howard, Laura Dern. 12.55 Shane (USA, 1953). Drama. Dir: George Stevens. With Alan Ladd, Jean Arthur. 14.55 Rocky IV (USA, 1985). Boxing drama. Directed by and starring Sylvester Stallone. With Talia Shire, Dolph Lundgren, Bud Young, Brigitte Nielsen. 16.25 Beast (USA/Iceland/Japan, 2022). Action. Dir: Baltasar Kormákur. With Lijabuya Gongu, Martin Munro, Daniel Hadebe. 18.00 The Commuter (France/USA, 2018). Action. Dir: Jaume Collet-Serra. With Liam Neeson, Vera Farmiga, Patrick Wilson. 19.45 The Equalizer (USA, 2014). Action. Dir: Antoine Fuqua. With Denzel Washington, Marton Csokas, Chloë Grace Moretz. 22.00 Inside Man (USA, 2006). Crime. Dir: Spike Lee. Directed Washington, Clive Owen. 00.05 The Squad Antigang (France/UK, 2015). Action. Dir: Benjamin Rocher. With Jean Reno, Alban Lenoir, Caterina Murino. 01.40 Fargo (USA, 1996). Thriller. Dir: Joel and Ethan Coen. With Frances McDormand, William H. Macy, Steve Buscemi.

YES MOVIES COMEDY (Y3)

07.55 Yasmines Wedding (Netherlands, 2022). Drama. Dir: Johan Nijenhuis. With Soumaya Ahouaoui, Walid Bemberek Samir. 09.50 French Kiss (USA, 1995). Romantic comedy. Dir: Lawrence Kasdan. With Meg Ryan, Kevin Kline, Timothy Hutton. 11.45 Punch-Drunk Love (USA, 2002). Comedy. Dir: Paul Thomas Anderson. With Adam Sandler, Emily Watson. 13.20 To Catch a Thief (USA, 1955). Mystery drama. Dir: Alfred Hitchcock. With Cary Grant, Grace Kelly. 15.10 Frequently Asked Questions About Time Travel (UK, 2009). Comedy. Dir: Gareth Carrivick. With Chris O'Dowd, Marc Wootton. 16.35 Johnny English (UK, 2003). Action comedy. Dir: Peter Howitt. With Rowan Atkinson, Ben Miller, Natalie Imbruglia, John Malkovich. 18.00 Ace Ventura: Pet Detective (USA, 1994). Comedy. Dir: Tom Shadyac. With Jim Carey, Courteney Cox. 19.30 The Big Lebowski (USA, 1998). Comedy. Dirs: Ethan Coen, Joel Coen. With Jeff Bridges, John Goodman, Julianne Moore, Steve Buscemi. 21.30 Everything Everywhere All at Once (USA, 2022). Action comedy. Dirs: Dan Kwan, Daniel Scheinert. With Michelle Yeoh, Stephanie Hsu, Jamie Lee Curtis. 23.45 Violent Night (USA/Canada, 2022). Action. Dir: Tommy Wirkola. With David Harbour, John Leguizamo, Beverly D'Angelo. 01.40 Wedding Crashers (USA, 2005). Comedy. Dir: David Dobkin. With Owen Wilson, Vince Vaughn.

News on the Hour: CNN (Y102/H205) | Sky News (Y103/H203) | BBC (H204) | Fox News (Y105/H202)

Sudoku puzzle grid with difficulty: Easy and tips for solving.

What it's like to live in Ashkelon, Hamas' most targeted city

Since war broke out, 1,380 rockets have been launched at Ashkelon, almost 200 landed and three of them hit a hospital. In spite of the fear and the difficulty, the city's residents don't receive any government assistance

Eden Solomon

Yaakov Hazan has lived in Ashkelon for 35 years, all his life. But on the morning of October 8 he couldn't take it any longer and left the bombed city with his wife and four children. "I have a mamad [safe room] but we couldn't stay," he said. "There was immense pressure in the house. My wife has suffered from PTSD since a rocket fell on our house during Operation Protective Edge, and the children have also suffered a lot. They were afraid and didn't stop crying; their souls don't have a mamad."

It took the family a month and a half to return home. On the way, they wandered through six places, including Ra'anana, Jerusalem and Ma'aleh Adumim. A new place every week. They stayed with people who opened their home to them, or in hotels which they paid for themselves. Six weeks spent away from home cost them 12,000 shekels (\$3,300), for which they didn't receive any compensation.

Since his return home, the economic situation hasn't been simple for Hazan, a building materials salesman who works in the center of the country, and his wife, a teacher in Kfar Silver. "In addition to the expenses for the period away from home, my employer cut 30 percent of our salaries because the industry has suffered since the beginning of the war, and my wife is also working part time," he said. "Already a week ago they warned her that she has to come back, but there's no choice, the children have no school and she's forced to stay with them. One day she misses work, one day I do."

For about a decade Ashkelon has been the most targeted city in Israel, and it holds the dubious title in this war too: From October 7 to December 14, 1,380 rockets were launched in its direction and 198 hit the city, including the shrapnel scattered over 487 sites. According to the reports of Magen David Adom emergency medical services, one person was killed and 41 were wounded by rocket fragments, including three seriously and six moderately. Another 45 people were lightly wounded on their way to a protected space, and 36 suffered anxiety attacks. The city's Barzilai Medical Center sustained three rocket attacks and in terms of siren alerts, it has surpassed Sderot.

But in spite of all that, Ashkelon residents don't receive any government assistance – no tax benefits, no grants, no cancellation of property tax, no living

expenses and no wartime evacuation assistance. The decisions made by the government since the start of the war skipped them too. Instead of evacuation, they received a grant for independent departure and "refreshment" outside the city – 200 shekels per adult and 100 per child a day, for 15 days – and even that was given only to residents without safe spaces, the elderly and those lacking family support. In the final analysis, tens of thousands of residents were left without a solution. Like the Hazan family, which has a safe room in the house, they aren't eligible for evacuation or for living and sleeping expenses.

In October the Knesset Finance Committee decided to grant Ashkelon the status of a border community for a year. But even that decision helps only business owners in the city, who will be compensated for all the indirect damage caused them since the start of the war. The

'Anyone who doesn't live in the south doesn't understand the situation we're in. And if the public doesn't understand then how could the politicians know?'

rest of the residents, whose work is also adversely affected, are getting no compensation.

The feeling among some of the city residents is that they aren't being heard. "The war will end, and as in every round, they'll expect us to carry on. But it's impossible to skip over us and to get back to business as usual. There are many people in Ashkelon who suffered, both financially and psychologically," he said.

Making their cry heard

Hazan lives in the Agamim neighborhood, the



People taking shelter in a staircase during a siren. Ilan Assayag



People lying on the ground during a rocket attack on Ashkelon, October 7. Ilan Assayag

city's southernmost neighborhood. The sounds of the bombardment in Gaza can be clearly heard and the shock waves can be felt too. A week and a half into the war, Hazan, along with three other neighborhood residents who also left the city with their families during the first days, spent thousands out of pocket, and are still losing many work days, decided that they're tired of keeping quiet.

In light of the absence of representation for city residents and the shared feeling that, as Hazan put it, "they erased Ashkelon from the story of the war," they started what they call the "headquarters for the struggle for Ashkelon residents." The goal: To voice the cry of distress of city residents.

"We feel invisible, as though there are 164,000 second-class citizens between Zikim and Ashdod," says Alina Guez, 31, a mother of two and a member of the struggle headquarters, who moved to the city about five years ago. "We decided to fight for our rights."

On October 7 Guez was on vacation in Eilat with her family. As the hours passed, and the seriousness of the events started to become clear, she realized that there was no possibility of returning home. "At first we knew only that our neighbors

were closing themselves up in their homes, and all the guests in the hotel extended their stay for another night, because nobody understood what was happening," she says. The next day, when the residents of the center of the country started to organize to return home, the family extended their stay. "At first for four days and then more, because we knew that Ashkelon would be bombed as during every round. At our request, the hotel owner gave us a 50 percent discount."

The coerced vacation ultimately lasted two weeks, during which Guez spent 8,000 shekels out of pocket. "8,000 shekels is only for the room, it doesn't include food or other expenditures, like clothes," she explained. "Originally we came for a short weekend with minimal clothing. I had to buy lots of things there."

Along with the lack of protected spaces in Ashkelon, as compared to Sderot for example, which Guez said is "not logical," there is the lack of financial benefits for the city residents. "It's not acceptable for benefits to be given only to a certain region. If I have a safe room, does that pay the many expenses for the coerced stay away from home? Does it help the fears? Nobody pays us for the days I missed work, and nobody supports the children who are dealing with anxiety, and it's not only them."

Guez was speaking from experience: For the past 15 years since Operation Cast Lead, she has dealt with anxiety. From the beginning of the current war, the thought of leaving the city permanently has often crossed her mind. "If I could afford it, I would leave as soon as possible," she admitted. "We don't see a future for the children here. Raising children who are second-class citizens as far as the government is concerned – that's not a life. Who will make up for the studies that they're missing? In any case there are significant

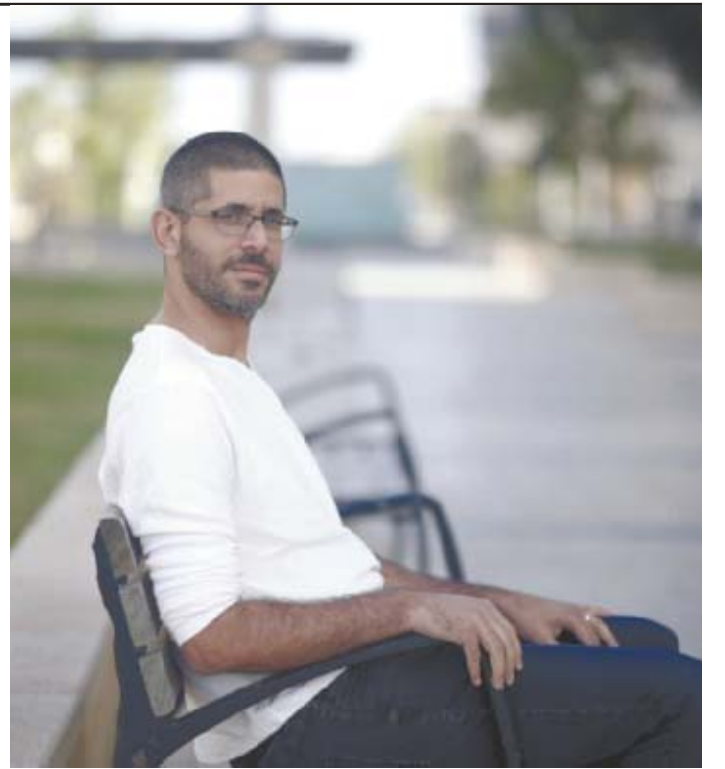
differences between the periphery and the center of the country, and now they're intensifying. During every military campaign we suffer in all respects."

They've erased us from the map

As opposed to Guez, Udi Ben Hamo, who was born and raised in Ashkelon and is the father of two young children, doesn't see himself living anywhere else. As a veteran Ashkelon resident living in the Agamim neighborhood in the southernmost building in the city, he's very familiar with the attacks from the Gaza Strip and the sirens, from up close. But the present war was the first time that he left the city with his family.

"We've already had days here of hundreds of rockets, to the point where you can't even go out to the grocery store, and you think 10 times whether to take a shower," he said. But on October 7, when they told all the neighborhood residents to shut themselves up in their homes due to attempts at infiltration, and there was shooting all night long, flares and helicopters, "it started to be very frightening, and we decided to leave the city for a few weeks to be with my wife's parents in the center of the country."

Ben Hamo, 36, is a high-tech worker who works in Herzliya. He crosses the metropolitan Tel Aviv area regularly on his way to work, but this time, staying in the center, far from his home under fire, brought with it a painful insight. "You walk around in the center and it's simply another world – the stores are open, schools are operating, the cafes too, people go on walks," he said. "I realized that anyone who doesn't live in the south doesn't understand the situation we're in in Ashkelon. And if the public doesn't understand then how could all



Yaakov Hazan. "They erased Ashkelon from the story of the war:"

Ilan Assayag



People inspecting where a rocket hit, last month. Ilan Assayag

the politicians sitting in the Knesset committees know? They have no idea."

Ben Hamo started to take an interest in the government decisions and to make an in-depth study of the budgets and the distribution of money. "I was surprised to discover that Ashkelon doesn't come up for discussion in any manner. It isn't part of the discussion at all," he said, "whether it's a meeting of all the regional council heads with the Education Ministry, who examine budget for all kinds of pedagogical and psychological programs, and we're not even invited, or that in terms of the Tekuma Authority, which is in charge of rehabilitating the entire region, we aren't even close to being included. The bubble burst for me. I understood that nobody cares about us, in spite of everything we're going through. As though they've erased us from the map."

With this insight, Ben Hamo returned to the neighborhood and started to assemble "a few guys" and to disseminate the messages and to repeat them outside the city as well, in order to reach the decision makers. That's how the struggle headquarters was started, and since then it has collected the signatures of thousands of residents.

"Nobody really talks about Ashkelon, and we wanted them to hear us," said Hazan. "We started to give interviews, to meet with activists in the city and

to go to the Knesset. So that they'll explain to us once and for all why, after so many years of attacks and damage, Ashkelon isn't counted as part of the Gaza border communities."

Throughout the years, Israel has granted the frontline communities benefits, on a geographical basis. As of now, it helps the residents of the southern communities that are located at a distance of up to 7 kilometers (4.3 miles) from the border of the Gaza Strip. Ashkelon, whose southern border is 7.2 kilometers from the Strip, isn't among the eligible communities.

The struggle headquarters has posited clear goals: Providing protected spaces for the city, the construction of comprehensive pedagogical programs for the pupils whose studies are adversely affected, financial benefits for the residents, including living grants, tax benefits, repayment of expenses in time of combat, cancelling property taxes and mortgages and, above all, including Ashkelon in the Tekuma Authority.

"We're demanding answers, to know what will happen to us," added Ben Hamo. "I heard a discussion with Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich – these people are simply disconnected. Everyone who talks about the subject, it's as though he has no idea what he's talking about. We want someone to tell us exactly why we don't receive assistance."

Hazan added that "Some Knesset members told us to

our faces [that] 'You're a big city, that's the problem.' But the fact that we're a big city doesn't mean we can absorb fire without assistance. We don't expect to receive all the benefits that the Gaza border communities receive, but at least a certain amount of support. Another MK said that we didn't receive benefits because we didn't suffer what the Gaza communities suffered. Did people have to be killed in order for us to receive support?"

The children stay at home

Ashkelon is one of the only cities in Israel in which the education system hasn't returned to regular routine. And while students in the rest of the country have gone back to school, the students in the city are still studying in so-called pods in a limited format, with fourth- to ninth-graders only learning remotely, on Zoom. That means that hundreds of parents are forced to miss days of work and their income has been reduced, but recognition and assistance aren't visible on the horizon.

"For three weeks, until early November, I didn't work at all, even after we returned home from Eilat. At work they asked me to come but I couldn't, because there was no school at all," said Guez.

The fact that on December 1 some of the preschools in the city started to operate in the pod format doesn't solve the problem either, she said. "I have two children in two different preschools. If my daughter is in a pod on Sunday and Monday, and my son is in a pod on Wednesday and Thursday, that means that every day at least one of them is home, so how does that help me? My husband and I are doing shifts [at home] at the expense of days off from work. I work two days a week and he works three. What will happen with that? Who will repay the money, if they return it at all? I don't know. At the moment I owe hours at work, I'm minus 350 hours."

POTTERY

Continued from page 8

team point out that this determination is debatable because fingerprint identification may reveal age and maybe sex, but not talent.

But wait. We must digress. Somebody was firing clay in Gravettian Europe more than 24,000 years before the advent of ceramics in those parts?

The ceramic Venus of Dolni Vestonice was discovered in 1925 south of Brno and changed everything we know about, well, some things. She was created about 30,000 years ago (do not confuse her with the Venus of Willendorf of Austria, carved out of limestone 25,000-30,000 years ago, or the Venus of Hohle Fels, made of mammoth ivory about 40,000 years ago).

The clay comprising the Venus of Dolni Vestonice was local and it was dirty, in the sense of being contaminated with fragments of mammoth tusk, animal

bones and charcoal. Impure clay tends to crack, break or explode during firing; some evidently survived the process. The Venus was finished in an open fire that could have reached a temperature of 500 to 800 degrees Celsius (932 to 1472 degrees Fahrenheit), but the extraordinary thing is that she was fired at all, 24,000 years before pottery techniques reached the region.

In fact, at least 5,000 ceramic artifacts were found at Dolni Vestonice. So this is the earliest ceramic we know of, though they weren't making practical items like pots, Svoboda confirms: just figurines, women and animals such as owls, lions, reindeer and rhinoceroses.

It has been postulated that a child's prints appear on the Czech Venus because maybe the pre-fired statuette was handed around in some sort of ritual, but that is pure speculation.

The Venus and her animal companions in the Gravettian pantheon are the earliest-known fired clay, aside from people unintentionally baking the clay rim of

hearths, Svoboda points out. Vessel manufacture apparently emerged in the Far East as much as 20,000 years ago, and would reach the Middle East and region of Tel Burna by about 9,000 years ago (and today's Czech Republic by about 7,000 years ago, Svoboda says).

Anyway, by the time of the figurines and vessels that Shai and the team studied at Bronze Age Tel Burna, practical potting had been around in the Near East for thousands of years. Now we ask, what were children's fingerprints doing on these items?

Suffer the children

Were children making items or just hanging about mom? Hard to say, but child labor in Bronze Age Canaan wouldn't have had the implications it does today.

Rona Avissar Lewis, director of the Israel Exploration Society and an expert on childhood in ancient Israel, pegs the appearance of the children's fingerprints on the clay to, possibly, a sign of socialization:

teaching the child about the world of the adults, like when we let kids help cook.

"We don't have enough information to know how [children's] life was in every site," she qualifies. "Were the children under a responsible adult? Was each with its family? But what arises from the work is beautiful: it indicates that the children were in the working environment too."

Further testimony to children imitating adults may be found at Tel Nagila from the Middle Bronze Age. Ceramic vessels (not figurines) with children's fingerprints were also found – and, lo, they were terrible, Avissar Lewis says: "Absolutely dreadful, but they were fired." So the adults enabled these vessels to be finished even though their craftsmanship was pathetic, presumably to encourage the maker. Like we hang our offspring's hideous drawings on the refrigerator. Love love love.

At Tel Burna, says Avissar Lewis, the fact that child and adult fingerprints were found on plaques could



Front and back of a plaque figurine. Back has impression from left hand, including palm, middle and index fingers and thumb. Finger impressions on sides of plaque. Jon Ross

attest to socialization in the religious aspect as well.

At Gath/Tel es-Safi, print analysis concluded that men made the bowls but women may have helped make the storage jars – that was 1,300 years before Tel Burna, in the Early Bronze Age, as Prof. Aren Maier, director of the Gath excavation, points out. Different time, different place. And there's another difference.

The prints at Gath were

found on pottery in a domestic context, while at Tel Burna the ceramics came from the cultic enclosure.

Who knows who made cultic items at Gath – and, also, the figurines at Tel Burna were poor in quality, Ross adds. "Not well fired. Not particularly well made, a lot of flaws in it." Those flaws included asymmetry, and they were fired at low temperature – possibly not even in a kiln but on an open

fire. The pottery at nearby Gath, which predated Tel Burna by 1,300 years, was of a better quality, he adds.

So what have we? Almost 80 percent of the fingerprints on the pottery at Tel Burna was made by females, mostly adolescent to early adult. All the prints on figurines and closed serving vessels and chalices were female. Since about 17 percent of the prints were from children, the archaeologists posit that the kiddies weren't just hanging about but were playing an active role in manufacturing, and were taught the craft by the women.

But men did do some potting, like in Gath and Greece and Egypt – which brings us to the ancient Egyptian penchant for expansion.

"During the 13th century B.C.E., Egyptian New Kingdom imperialism intensified under the 19th dynasty," Shai and the team write, and they wreaked havoc in Canaan: "intensified conflict, a prolonged 'settlement crunch,' depopulation, a depressed rural sector with agrarian economies in decline, labor

shortages, the emptying of the countryside," and more.

When the living is good and access to land and resources is high – women dominate potting, it was argued in Bryan Byrne's model in 1994. According to this model, when the land is scarce and resources are strained, "men are incentivized to learn crafts and seek out alternative (even undesirable) work." Sigh.

While this model is a tad reductionist, the team points out that it fits the situation at Tel Burna. Late Bronze Age Canaan was under stress, and maybe the presence of some men on the potting floor was caused by them having no choice. They were disenfranchised and forced to diversify into "women's work." Or maybe the men were incapacitated or dead – see the Egyptian imperialism – and the women had to handle the day-to-day potting.

In any case, relatively few appear to have sustained the craft. And that could be because making household pottery was just no way to make a good living.



For Batia Holin, rescued from Kfar Azza. Netta Shalem-Sokolovsky



Shira Eylon, killed at the Re'im festival. Gai Safran Lulai

NOYA DAN, 13 YEARS OLD
*MURDERED BY HAMAS

Noya Dan, 13, "a fellow 'Harry Potter' fan." Alona Millgram



For "anyone who is missing or who misses others." Aya Chor

Leora Eren Frucht

Noya Dan, a 13-year-old "Harry Potter" fan, was one of over 1,200 people murdered by Hamas terrorists in Israel on October 7.

Haim Ben Aryeh was a bus driver from Sderot who drove the surviving children of Kibbutz Be'eri to safety that Saturday night – but weeks later, traumatized by things he'd seen, took his own life.

Police officer Yigal Singer helped hundreds escape the massacre at the Nova music festival at Re'im before he himself was seriously wounded.

All three are featured in an artistic initiative called "Names & Faces" – @namesandfaces.il on Instagram – paying tribute through illustrations to those affected by the brutal attack.

"The idea was born about three days after the start of the war on October 7," says one of the project's initiators, illustrator Or Segal. "The internet was full of images and clips of the horror that we all saw, and there was lots of pain and fear."

"We felt there was a need for those people who were hurt by all that happened to be portrayed in a respectful and empathetic manner, that they deserve to be shown in a different way – not just through the horror," explains Segal. She launched the project together with three other Tel Aviv illustrators: Shahar Tal, Yael Volovelsky and Maya Bar Yehuda.

In an open call for proposals on Instagram, the four women invited colleagues to submit illustrations that paid tribute to anyone in Israel affected by the events of Black Saturday and its aftermath. To date, the site has some 70 illustrations by dozens of artists in a variety of techniques, with new ones added every few days.

The project started and continues as an online initiative on Instagram. However, it is also being presented as a physical exhibition at Jerusalem's Safra Square as part of the Outline Festival – which this year is devoted to the theme of illustration and words during wartime. "Names & Faces" opened Tuesday and is set to run until May.

Some of the illustrations

'An attempt at healing': Exhibition pays tribute to heroes and victims of October 7

'Names & Faces' shines a spotlight on some of the people and events of Black Saturday, with the hope that by telling individuals' stories, Israelis can slowly begin to recover



Awad Darawshe, an Israeli Arab paramedic who stayed at the Nova festival to save lives until he was murdered. Eden Spivak

were previously mounted on billboards in Tel Aviv, and many more will be heading to Argentina in January for an exhibition at an art center in Buenos Aires.

'Sanctifying life'

Many of the project's illustrations are devoted to people who were either killed or taken hostage, some of whom have since been released.

Alona Millgram's illustration of a grinning Noya Dan in a Gryffindor tie commemorates "a fellow 'Harry Potter' fan" – murdered by Hamas.

Noa Kelner pays tribute to Haim Ben Aryeh, the uncle of a dear friend, writing that "the horrors he had seen that night broke his heart, and he had not been himself since. On the morning of October 25, he was found dead inside his bus." Kelner has depicted him with warm smiling eyes, standing next to his vehicle.

Other illustrations are a more general tribute. A powerful black and white illustration by Keren Katz, for instance, shows a stylized abstract male figure

hunched over on the ground, shielding someone from the inky blackness surrounding them. "I chose to draw all the fathers – those who hugged, protected, directed to a safe haven, sacrificed themselves, strengthened, rescued, cried, held. When they go out to protect [someone], everyone is their child," writes Katz of her work.

Project co-founder Shahar Tal explains that "there was the event of October 7 and the specific people affected by it – and then there is the whole country that experienced trauma. Some illustrations speak to the feelings of all those people." In that vein is Aya Chor's colored pencil illustration depicting a figure looking skyward toward a jumble of outstretched hands and birds – dedicated to "anyone who's missing, and to anyone who misses others."

Noga Erlich Kochavi's haunting image of a frightened woman lying alone in the darkness is devoted to "anyone who feels lost, to anyone who has lost her will, to anyone who needs a hug."



Avia Ganot, who was murdered at the Nova music festival. Reut Bortz

Some illustrators chose to portray someone close to them. Others opted to depict a stranger whose story moved them.

After reading about Shira Eylon, one of the young women killed at the music festival in Re'im, illustrator Gai Safran Lulai dedicated her illustration to her, writing: "I'm sure we could have been the best of friends." Inspired by Eylon's trip to India and her love for all living things, Safran Lulai renders her sitting on a swing exuding harmony, surrounded by plants and animals.

Segal says it is no coincidence that the name of the project evokes a phrase that has become a motto of Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance

Center: "Unto every person there is a name." This is not to say that what happened on October 7 compares to the Holocaust, but rather that it's possible to learn from that experience how to commemorate horrific chapters in history, she says.

"Over the years there has been a change in the way the Holocaust is commemorated – from recalling all the terrible things the Nazis did to remembering what life was like before that. There is an understanding that behind the disaster are not just historic events but people, and there is a need to commemorate the individual."

Tal adds: "Behind every story is a person with a face and a name and a life and a whole world. There is a life,



Haim Ben Aryeh, who drove children from Kibbutz Be'eri to safety Oct. 7. "The horrors he saw broke his heart." Noa Kelner

Shahar Tal: 'Behind every story is a person with a face and a name and a life and a whole world. There is a life, even if they are no longer [with us], and this is about sanctifying that life and all that was before.'

even if they are no longer [with us], and this is about sanctifying that life and all that was before."

For Segal, whose grandparents were Holocaust survivors, the Shoah reference point resonates strongly. "Of course the events were very different, but what they have in common is that terrible and deep blow to our sense of security that we felt on October 7. In that respect, I am relieved that my grandparents were no longer alive on that day, so they were spared from experiencing all that again."

'Begin to heal'

The stories accompanying the illustrations appear in three languages: English,

Hebrew and Arabic. "It's in Hebrew because it is meant for Israeli society – and also for the illustrators themselves for whom the work is an attempt at healing, a kind of therapy for them," says Segal.

It's in English in order to reach out to the rest of the world and serve as hasbara (public diplomacy), she explains. "When we talk about October 7, there was a huge crime committed against us, and to talk about it just among ourselves and in Hebrew is important but not enough."

"I feel that in the global discourse of the art world, it is important to include the point of view of illustrators who live in the State of Israel – the fear, the grief, the loss that we felt in the wake of October 7. There is a need for this perspective," Segal adds. "The decision to include Arabic is because we live in the State of Israel and, to our sorrow, among those killed and kidnapped are Arabs and Druze," notes Tal. "We have a shared destiny. It's important for us that this speaks to everyone

and includes everyone who is part of this story."

Several of the illustrations pay homage to Israeli Arabs who lost their lives that day.

Eden Spivak's black and white drawing of a medic treating an injured person, against the backdrop of a menacing thick black shadow, is a tribute to Awad Darawshe, 23, of Iksal, an Arab village near Nazareth.

"A paramedic at the [Nova] music festival, Awad chose to stay at the festival grounds under fire and tend to the wounded for as long he possibly could, until he was murdered by Hamas. Thank you Awad for holding fast to humanity even in the darkest of moments," Spivak writes in the accompanying text.

Illustrator Daniel Hemed portrays Abd al Rahman Al Nasasraah, a Bedouin man who was murdered in his car while trying to rescue people from the Nova music festival at Re'im. In Hemed's illustration, red anemones climb and cling to Al Nasasraah's bullet-ridden car.

The decision to have the text in Arabic has another purpose as well, says Segal: "There is the hidden hope that maybe there is someone on the other side who wants to listen."

Although Segal is no stranger to depicting the suffering of Palestinians in Gaza, those "on the other side" are not portrayed in this project, which focuses only on the experiences of those in Israel whose lives were upended – or ended – October 7 and in the weeks that followed.

Two years ago, she initiated a project that brought together 40 illustrators to commemorate the Palestinian and Israeli children killed in the last Israel-Hamas flare-up, in May 2021. When asked about the decision not to include the experiences of Gazans this time, she explains the need to focus on October 7 in order to move forward.

"It was an event of a different sort than anything that came before, and that requires us to stop and look at it, frame it and reflect on it," she says. "October 7 was a one-sided, unprovoked attack against civilians, including women and children, babies and the elderly. I think we have to shine a spotlight on that day, on what this disaster did to the people closest to us, to begin to heal."

Segal continues: "We are against all violence against civilians. My goal is to come to terms with the open, bleeding wounds and bandage them. Once we do that in our own society, there will hopefully be place again for projects like the one I launched two years ago."

Pottery was usually women's work in biblical Libnah

Most of the fingerprints on ceramics from Tel Burna have been identified as those of young women and children

Ruth Schuster

The division of labor by sex isn't universal and uniform today, and plausibly wasn't in antiquity. The burning question of the day is who made pottery in Canaan, and why they did so. It seems that at Tel Burna, which is identified as the biblical city of Libnah, if men had better things to do, they didn't make pottery.

Tel Burna dates to the Late Bronze Age and it seems the potters there were mostly young females, based on analysis of ancient fingerprints left on figurines and vessels. The study, by Prof. Itzhaq Shai and Jon Ross of the University of Manitoba, was published recently in the *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology*.

This contrasts with Gath from the Early Bronze Age, ancient Greece and ancient Egypt, where fingerprint analysis indicates that the potters were chiefly men.

Shai and the team point out that the Egyptian indication is based on texts and tomb



A fingerprint on the exterior rim of a storage jar found at Tel Burna. Jon Ross

art that may depict centralized urban workshops but not craftwork in the home. We also add that paleodermatoglyphics – analysis of ancient fingerprints – to discern sex is highly controversial. Shai, however, contends that the technique is gaining in acceptance.

Anyway, the team at Tel Burna analyzed 52 fingerprints on 40 ceramic items, including two nude female figurines, two bull figurines and a variety of vessels.

Young adolescents and children averaging about 12 made small "closed serving vessels" – jugs and juglets.

Other vessels seem to have been made by teenagers and young adults in their early 20s, the researchers concluded: the average age was 18-19.

The bigger and more complex the vessels, the older their manufacturers. But in any case, the data suggests that few continued to make pottery later in life, say Shai and the team.

How are fingerprints of teenagers distinguished from prints of "young adults"? "In modern forensics, the features of the prints, the ridge widths, stop growing by the 20s," Ross explains by phone. So the archaeologists can theoretically distinguish a child from a teen from an adult, but not, say, a 30-year-old versus a 50-year-old.

Eight objects at Tel Burna bore prints of both adult and child, which could attest to apprenticeship, Ross says. He adds that if the child's print is on a vessel's exterior, that could be accidental and not a sign of them being involved in its manufacture. If the print is inside, though, then the child touched the vessel while it was being

shaped and was therefore more clearly involved in manufacture.

We add that pottery doesn't typically bear the makers' fingerprints, because the potter smooths out

The cultic items at Tel Burna were 'pretty much all' made by female adolescents, Ross says. One plaque figurine has a single adult fingerprint.

the surface before drying the thing for firing. (Drying must be done slowly and can take from one to three to four weeks. Inadequately dried vessels crack or explode in the kiln.)

Playing with gods

The cultic items at Tel Burna were "pretty much all" made by female adoles-

cents, Ross says. One plaque figurine has a single adult fingerprint. Another has prints from a child aged 9 to 14 (maximum margin of error). It could have been made by an adult and subsequently touched by the child after being demolded, the team notes. A Mycenaean-style bull figurine bears prints of both a child and an adult.

There is a startling precedent to all this. Fingerprints of a child aged 7-15 were detected on the Venus of Dolni Vestonice – a fired clay female figurine made 30,000 years ago, found in what is today the Czech Republic. Her dating was confirmed to Haaretz by the paleoanthropologist Prof. Jiri Svoboda, emeritus of the Brno Academy of Science and Masaryk University, by email. The Venus is associated with the Gravettian early European culture (the late part of the Aurignacian period).

Researchers of the Venus of Dolni Vestonice don't think a minor would have had the skill to make anything that good. Shai and the

See POTTERY, Page 7

Weather

Scattered showers

Intermittent rain Sunday, mainly in northern and central Israel, that may cause flooding. The rain will let up toward evening. Monday will be partly cloudy and slightly warmer with a chance of showers in the morning. Tuesday and Wednesday promise to be fine and slightly warmer.

