

February 20, 2024

#### JEWISH FEDERATIONS AND PARTNERS

- One of the many projects being supported by Jewish Federations through the Israel Emergency Campaign is a program for midwives to support pregnant women affected by the war, including those whose partners may have been killed, evacuees and others. More than 100 midwives are partnering with the Israel Midwives Association and the IDF Widows and Orphans Organization to accompany women through their pregnancy and delivery; they are providing emotional, practical, and other support. Read more [here](#).
- Last week, the US Senate passed the "National Security Act," a supplemental appropriations bill for military aid to both Israel and Ukraine, along with a significant increase to the Nonprofit Security Grant Program (NSGP). On Wednesday, Jewish Federations took out full-page ads, signed by additional Jewish organizations, in *Politico* and *The Hill* to show gratitude to the 70 senators who voted for the bill. To read Federations' leadership message, click [here](#). For more details on the Act, click [here](#). And to read Federation Chair Julie Platt's op-ed in the Jerusalem Post, click [here](#). For an Action Alert encouraging the House to take up the bill, click [here](#).

#### ISRAEL DEFENSE FORCES (IDF) ACTIVITIES

- Yesterday, an **IDF soldier died** of wounds sustained last week, bringing the total number of soldiers who have been killed since the ground operation began to 236, and 568 since October 7. See details of all the fallen soldiers [here](#).
- The IDF has now **withdrawn its last reserve brigade** from the Gaza Strip, as the military says that it has neared the end of its offensive in Khan Younis. The IDF has been withdrawing much of its reserve forces from the Gaza Strip in recent weeks, leaving the standing army to continue the fighting. Government officials say the IDF aims to release reservists to help Israel's economy, and to give troops a break before they are likely called up again, as lower-level intensity fighting in Gaza is expected to last for another year.
- Background: Hamas' **strategy** is founded on **hiding under and within civilian infrastructure**, including hospitals, in order to maximize civilian casualties and cause international pressure to prevent Israel from rightfully defending itself. Hamas has systematically exploited hospitals as cover for its tunnel system and to store weapons, launch rockets, shelter terrorists, operate command and operation centers, and hide hostages.
  - Hamas has been conducting terror operations from hospitals for many [years](#). In 2009 the IDF [reported](#) that during Operation Cast Lead, Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh operated a command and control center out of Shifa hospital and took over a ward of the hospital, believing that the IDF would not attack the hospital due to potential harm to civilians. Hamas isn't the only terrorist group to use hospitals as cover for military operations. The Al Salem hospital in Mosul was used by ISIS as a base for its attacks and was bombed by American troops.
  - Earlier in the war, much attention was placed on [Shifa Hospital](#). This week, the New York Times reported, "Hamas used the hospital for cover, stored weapons inside it and maintained a hardened tunnel beneath the complex that was supplied with water, power and air-conditioning."
  - The director of the Kamal Adwan hospital in northern Gaza admitted that up to 100 Hamas terrorists hid there and that some even had their own offices.
  - The IDF [uncovered](#) a tunnel under the Rantisi Hospital where it believes Hamas hid hostages.
  - The IDF said today that it has "credible intelligence" that Hamas held hostages at Nasser Hospital in the city of Khan Younis in southern Gaza, and there may be bodies of hostages currently hidden there.
  - Hamas terrorists continue to operate from and around Nasser and Al-Amal Hospitals, which includes [launching](#) a rocket from within Nasser.
  - The US corroborated Israel's position about the misuse of hospitals by Hamas, stating in a Pentagon release that, "We do have information that Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad uses some hospitals in the Gaza Strip, including the al-Shifa hospital, as a way to conceal and support their military operations and hold hostages."
  - [International law](#) stipulates that medical facilities lose their protected status if they are used for military purposes, and that the defending military must provide warnings and consider other protections before attacking a hospital.
  - [According](#) to International Law expert Michael Schmitt, "The IDF appears to have taken numerous [measures](#) to fulfill the obligation, such as by providing the requisite warnings, including medical teams and Arabic speakers when operating near hospitals, facilitating the evacuation of medical facilities, and maintaining dialogue with hospital authorities."
  - Today, the IDF [said](#) it is conducting a "precise and limited" operation inside Nasser hospital. As it has done with other hospitals, the IDF has [liaised](#) with the staff of Nasser to ensure that the hospital can remain operational. The IDF spokesperson said, "Our message to them is clear: We seek no harm to innocent civilians. We seek to find our hostages and bring them home. We seek to hunt down Hamas terrorists wherever they may be hiding."

#### ROCKETS

- In the **north**, Hezbollah continues to fire at Israeli targets, triggering significant Israeli retaliations.
- The number of **Hamas** rocket attacks on Israel remains very low, due to Hamas' significantly diminished capabilities.
- In the **Red Sea**, the US, the UK and Israel continue to defend against attacks by the Iran-back Houthi rebels in Yemen. Similarly, the US military continues to strike at pro-Iranian targets in Syria and Iraq.

#### HOSTAGES

- Perhaps the most famous of the hostages is the **Bibas Family**, particularly following widely-viewed video footage from October 7 of the young mother being kidnapped along with her two infant children. The two children are the last remaining minors to be held captive, and many believe they are no longer alive. Yesterday, the IDF released video footage (see [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)) that it had captured, showing the mother being led by gunman on October 7, while she tried to shelter her children. The Government of Israel has said that this is concrete proof that the family were alive when kidnapped, and that Hamas is responsible for their safety and well-being.

#### INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

- Israel's President Isaac Herzog published an [op-ed](#) in the *Wall Street Journal* last week, heavily criticizing the case brought by South Africa against Israel in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) at the Hague, and in particular noting how the case manipulated the President's own words and failed to recognize the true magnitude of the crimes against humanity perpetrated by Hamas.
- At the ICJ hearing, the **South African Government** [claimed](#) that Israeli 'apartheid' against Palestinians was worse than the crimes committed in Apartheid-era South Africa.
- **Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva** accused Israel of carrying out genocide in Gaza and fighting only against women and children. "What is happening in the Gaza Strip with the Palestinian people has no parallel in other historical moments," he said, before adding, "In fact, it did exist when Hitler decided to kill the Jews." In response, Israel's Foreign Minister Yisrael Katz summoned the Brazilian Ambassador to Israel to meet him at Yad Vashem, where the Ambassador was reprimanded. Brazil's President has now recalled his Ambassador home for consultations.

#### STORIES OF HEARTBREAK, HEROISM AND HOPE

- See the [story](#) of 61-year-old Lior Rudaef, an immigrant from Argentina who has a deep love for the earth of Israel and for Kibbutz life. He taught generations of young people how to drive tractors. A volunteer medic and ambulance driver, on the morning of October 7 he left his home to defend his Kibbutz and family, and has not been heard from since. Lior is presumed to be in Hamas captivity and requires medication for a heart condition. His wife Yaffa, four children and grandchildren are eagerly awaiting his return home.
- Read about [Shachar Zemach](#), 39, the peace activist who defended his kibbutz until his last bullet.

#### FURTHER READING

- [JTA](#): Jewish teens are looking at a new factor in their college search: antisemitism
- Former Chair of Israel's Bank of Israel (Federal Reserve): [On Moody's credit downgrade](#): Economic policy change cannot wait
- See this [article](#) by international law expert Michael Schmitt on Hamas's misuse of hospitals for terror purposes and the legal implications as dictated by international law.
- Why the [conflict on Israel's northern border](#) is growing more intense
- Watch [haredi Rabbi David Leibel](#) on the changing role of labor in the ultra-Orthodox world since October 7, and why haredim must join the workforce.
- [Israel on the international legal docket](#)

#### JEWISH FEDERATIONS

- **Jewish Federations' Israel Emergency Campaign** has now raised a total of more than \$780 million and allocated close to \$350 million. For details, click [here](#). See these resources by Jewish Federations that give insight into some areas of Federations' emergency allocations:
  - [LGBTQ+ Community](#)
  - [Young Children](#)
  - [Volunteers](#)
  - [Women](#)
  - [Pastoral Guidance](#)
  - [Bedouin Communities](#)
  - [Food Security](#)
  - [People with Disabilities](#)
- **Convening on the Future of Israel Educational Travel**: The Israel Educational Travel Alliance (IETA), the consortium of over 100 Israel educational travel organizations housed at Jewish Federations of North America, will hold a convening in Washington, DC from **Wednesday, February 28 to Friday, March 1** to assess the future of the field of Israel educational immersive travel in the wake of 10/7. We welcome all Federation professionals who are involved with Israel-immersive experiences to participate. Register [here](#). For more information, take a look at the FAQs or contact Melody.Desanto@jna.org for more information.
- Jewish Federations recently released the [Israel Emergency Impact Report & resource package](#) to articulate the system-wide impact in Israel since 10/7. Watch a recent webinar (recording [here](#)) to learn more about this data, and the allocations processes.
- Registration for Birthright Israel's summer round is now open. See this [link](#) for important [FAQs](#) to help potential participants and their parents navigate any concerns over the security situation. Interested parties can reserve their spot [here](#). Registration is also open for Onward's summer internships and fellowship programs – an opportunity for Birthright Israel alumni and those looking for a longer experience in Israel.
- As part of the [Second Line Initiative](#), Jewish Federations are partnering with the Israel Ministry of Health, the Israel Trauma Coalition, and Birthright Israel to recruit qualified volunteers to provide both in-person and remote support to both affected populations and local mental health professionals in Israel. Native Hebrew speakers are particularly in demand, although speakers of French, Russian, Ukrainian, Arabic, Amharic, and Spanish will also be considered. Volunteers must be able to travel to Israel for six weeks. This is a golden opportunity for engagement, particularly for communities that can recruit a small group as a cohort. To apply, click [here](#). For more information, contact [Hannah Miller](#).
- Jewish Federations' [10/7 Project](#) is a collaboration with AJC, AIPAC, ADL, and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. The [10/7 Project](#) is an organized effort to **counter the disinformation** about the attacks of October 7th and Israel's response, especially aimed at the key media and government influencers. [See here](#) for more information about the 10/7 project, as well as this [news bulletin](#).
- Resources: Readers can see links to resources, background, research and other information on the current war [here](#); can access a Jewish Federations toolkit [here](#), and can refer to the [Community Mobilization Center Resource Hub](#) for the latest talking points and tools.
- **Details**: For information on the latest overall numbers from the conflict, see [here](#).
- **Webinar**: The Jewish People Policy Institute (JPPI): Daily webinars sponsored by Jewish Federations and the Jewish Agency are offered. A rotating team of analysts of Israeli military affairs, the US-Israel relationship, Israel's political system, and of the country's diverse society will speak every **Monday and Thursday from 11-11:30 am ET**. No registration is required. Join [here](#).
- **Volunteering**: Read [this](#) updated Jewish Federations' update on the latest volunteering opportunities in Israel right now.
- **Local Authorities**: Jewish Federations have produced a document answering questions about funding impacted localities and municipalities in Israel. [See here](#).
- **Read** the latest communication from the Community Mobilization Center [here](#).
- **Previous updates** can be found [here](#).

#### JEWISH FEDERATIONS

Our Israel Office, having activated emergency protocols, is working closely with our partners on the ground, and is in close contact with the Government of Israel and the IDF. We will continue to update as the situation develops.

For more information, please contact: Jewish Federations of North America's Dani Wassner [dani.wassner@jewishfederations.org](mailto:dani.wassner@jewishfederations.org)  
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