

THE WEEKLY PRINT

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Maxwell Frost reneges on pro-Israel pledges

The Florida Democrat has shifted away from commitments he made to Jewish leaders during his first run for Congress, fueling frustration among former supporters

By Matthew Kassel

When Rep. Maxwell Frost (D-FL) won his first election to the House in 2022, Jewish leaders in his Orlando, Fla., district who had been encouraged by his personal outreach were optimistic he would follow through on a range of commitments he had made vowing to uphold support for Israel.

Despite some initial concerns about his history of involvement in pro-Palestinian demonstrations as well as relationships with anti-Israel activists, Frost had circulated a lengthy Middle East position paper in consultation, in part, with a top pro-Israel group that largely assuaged lingering reservations among Jewish community leaders over the sincerity of his views.

In the paper as well as a candidate questionnaire solicited by *Jewish Insider* during his first primary, the young progressive organizer, describing himself as both “pro-Israel” and “pro-Palestinian,” voiced opposition to conditioning aid to Israel — arguing that the security threats

facing the Jewish state are “far too grave” to enact such measures. In backing a two-state solution, he clarified that any agreement should require “the basic recognition that Israel has a right to exist” as well as “an end to the antisemitic rhetoric and positions of Hamas.” And if elected, he pledged to visit Israel — which he called “one of the United States’ most important allies and strategic partners.”

Now, almost midway into his second term, Jewish and pro-Israel leaders are expressing some buyer’s remorse as Frost, 28, has embraced positions that put him at odds with his past commitments, fueling frustration among those who had believed he would be a more dependable ally on key issues concerning Israel.

Frost, for his part, insists that the humanitarian conditions in Israel’s war with Hamas in Gaza have deteriorated so drastically during his tenure that he had no choice but to change his views, though that has not quelled discontent among his

former allies.

“He has broken a lot of promises,” said one Jewish leader, echoing others who expressed dismay with Frost’s turn in Congress.

The most recent move to draw scrutiny from Jewish and pro-Israel leaders is a letter Frost signed urging the Trump administration to recognize a Palestinian state over growing concerns with the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

The letter, signed by several prominent House progressives and led by Rep. Ro Khanna (D-CA) — who plans to introduce a similar resolution — said such a state “will need to fully recognize Israel” and guarantee “the disarmament of and relinquishing of power by Hamas.” But pro-Israel activists broadly see the renewed effort as a misguided concession to Hamas amid the ongoing war — as the terror group seeks to leverage international outrage over Israel’s military conduct.

Democratic Majority for Israel, whose

political arm had provided input on Frost's position paper during his primary, took issue with his decision to join the letter. While the group felt sufficiently comfortable with Frost's Middle East policy views when he first ran for Congress, opting not to intervene on behalf of a top primary rival who had won an endorsement from its super PAC, it has become dissatisfied with his approach as he has continued to stake out more adversarial stances toward Israel during his time in the House.

"We strongly support a two-state solution that ensures Israel's future as a Jewish and democratic state with recognized borders and upholds the right of Palestinians to live in freedom and security in a viable state of their own," Brian Romick, DMFI's president, said in a statement to JI on Tuesday. "But unilateral recognition of a Palestinian state at this time — as the terrorist group Hamas still governs parts of Gaza and continues to hold Israeli hostages — would not advance peace. It will instead prolong the war by incentivizing Hamas to reject any ceasefire deal, and reward the terrorism we saw on Oct. 7 while making future acts of terror more likely."

In addition to the letter — which followed a similar resolution he co-sponsored in 2023 during his first term — Frost in May joined legislation to place unprecedented new conditions on aid to Israel by withholding offensive weapons over its alleged violations of international law.

Last year, he also voted against a widely approved bill to provide supplemental aid to Israel six months after Hamas' attacks. In a statement explaining his thinking at the time, Frost wrote that he was "only able to justify aid for defense, not offense, and this legislation did not allow me to separate the two," as the war "has claimed the lives of countless innocent Palestinian civilians and brought us no closer to the return of innocent Israeli hostages held by Hamas."

"For me, the North Star here is having a two-state solution, and everything, all the decisions we make, have to point to that," Frost said, arguing that he has remained consistent in upholding his core beliefs on the conflict even as his positions on specific policies have changed since he launched his initial

campaign for Congress. "The thing I have in mind is the safety and security of everybody, of Israel, of Palestinians — of everybody."

Meanwhile, Frost has yet to fulfill his campaign vow to travel to Israel, and has declined invitations to do so while in Congress, according to a person familiar with the matter.

In an interview on Wednesday, Frost acknowledged that his approach has changed since he entered the House, attributing his new positions to his revulsion at Israel's behavior in Gaza — which he described as "completely unacceptable" and "abhorrent" in light of the civilian death toll. "In terms of specific policy points, things have changed," Frost told JI. "Things have changed a lot — and unfortunately, not for the better."

"For me, the North Star here is having a two-state solution, and everything, all the decisions we make, have to point to that," he added, arguing that he has remained consistent in upholding his core beliefs on the conflict even as his positions on specific policies have changed since he launched his initial campaign for Congress. "The thing I have in mind is the safety and security of everybody, of Israel, of Palestinians — of everybody."

Even as he condemned Hamas and said the terror group should have no role in rebuilding postwar Gaza, Frost said the conflict has evolved into what he regards as a "war on innocent people," resulting in "massive loss of innocent life" that has fueled his decision to speak up against the Israeli government and its ongoing military campaign.

In the Middle East position paper he wrote in his first primary, Frost had rejected placing additional conditions on aid to Israel because, he wrote at the time, it would "undermine Israel's ability to defend itself against the very serious threats it faces." But he explained on Wednesday he had also felt such measures were "already written into the law" and "we didn't really need to go further" in enforcing it at the time.

Now, however, "I do believe that the law is being violated," he told JI, clarifying his recent support for legislation that seeks to withhold transfers of offensive weapons to

Israel. "Because of that, we have to look at the way that we are both complicit but also encouraging the current behavior of the Netanyahu government," he said.

Unlike a handful of his far-left House colleagues who have accused Israel of carrying out a genocide in Gaza, Frost hesitated to use the term himself, calling it a "difficult" word because of its historical connection to the Holocaust. Still, he said he would not seek to discourage others from such charges. "I'm not going to sit here and defend what is going on right now in any way, shape or form," he said. "I understand why people use that word. But when we see what's going on, it's hard to find the words for it."

"There's a lot of things to hold, but the main thing is, yes, there are many things that have changed," he reiterated. "But for me, what has not changed is the main goal, which is making sure that everyone's safe and everyone's secure."

Frost is hardly alone among Democratic lawmakers who in recent months have become more critical of Israel's behavior, with even some of the staunchest supporters of the Jewish state struggling to defend the Israeli government as the humanitarian situation in Gaza has continued to worsen nearly two years into the war.

"It's a radical shift," one community activist told JI, voicing frustration with Frost's positions, even as he described their ongoing conversations as "very open and honest."

His vacillating stances also illustrate some of the cross-pressures facing progressive Democrats who are not completely aligned with the party's far left on its hostility toward Israel. Pro-Israel Democrats have recently voiced their concerns that anti-Israel policies could become a litmus test for the left in the midterms, particularly amid Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's moves to occupy the enclave.

But Jewish community leaders in Frost's district, who spoke on condition of anonymity to address what they characterize as an increasingly delicate relationship with the congressman, explained they are particularly disappointed with his evolution

on Middle East policy, given their initial hopes that he would be among a dwindling number of progressive allies committed to defending Israel in the House.

"It's a radical shift," one community activist told JI, voicing frustration with Frost's positions, even as he described their ongoing conversations as "very open and honest."

The activist noted that Frost, who had been a prominent gun control advocate before he was elected to Congress, has "a good heart and doesn't want to see people dying." But "as a result," he said, Frost has "a lot of blind spots" in his assessment of the conflict. The activist argued that Frost's critique of Israel's conduct in Gaza has ignored Hamas' role in perpetuating the crisis as it refuses to surrender.

"At the end of the day, he very much comes from the 'oppressor-oppressed' worldview and sees Israel as the oppressor," the activist said.

Frost, for his part, said his statements have been misconstrued by a wide range of critics across the spectrum, including pro-Palestinian activists who allege that he made separate commitments during his first primary bid that he has failed to uphold in Congress.

He stressed that he does not "do tit-for-tat stuff" while addressing the war. "Whenever I post about the hostages, I'll have people sending me messages. 'What about this?' No," he said. "Whenever I post about Palestinians, I'll have people saying, 'What about this?' No, I will post about it all. I will talk about it all. I will say how I feel about everything."

"I'm very firm in that, just coming from a place of, since I was 15 years old, being involved in the fight to end gun violence, and have grown up through a movement of death," he told JI. "I just don't think that's the way to live as a human, quite frankly."

"We've been disappointed that he has not met the commitments he gave to us," one DMFI source told JI. "At the same time, we're grateful that he has come to realize he made a mistake in at least one case, but members of Congress should think through their votes fully and discuss them with knowledgeable people before casting them."

Even as Jewish and pro-Israel leaders say their relationships with Frost have worsened in recent months, frustration over his approach to Israel has been mounting since his first term, when he called for an "immediate ceasefire" in Gaza just days after Hamas' terror attacks. As a freshman, he also voted against a resolution condemning rising antisemitic activity on college campuses, but he later said that vote had been a mistake after meeting with Jewish students in his district.

While Frost had shown contrition for his vote on the resolution in November 2023, DMFI still expressed dissatisfaction with his initial decision at the time — alleging he had not performed proper due diligence beforehand. "We've been disappointed that he has not met the commitments he gave to us," one DMFI source told JI not long after the vote.

"At the same time, we're grateful that he has come to realize he made a mistake in at least one case, but members of Congress should think through their votes fully and discuss them with knowledgeable people before casting them," the source stated.

A spokesperson for Frost told JI at the time that the congressman "is trying to hold multiple truths all at once" as he receives input from constituents pushing opposing interests.

"I'm very comfortable with the decisions I've made," Frost said of his approach to Israel. "As I walk the streets of my district, as I speak with the people in my district, this is where I find most people are at. They're not really at the extremes that I've heard from."

Speaking with JI on Wednesday, Frost said he has appreciated his ongoing discussions with pro-Israel leaders in his district — even if they have not been aligned on major policy questions in recent months. "Hearing their perspective is really important," he confirmed. "What I always tell people is I might not always come to the conclusion that you agree with," he said, "but I hope you'll always feel I've engaged in good faith."

He suggested that Jewish community activists who have been irked by his approach to the Middle East have not fully

reckoned with his belief that Israel's military actions have damaged its reputation in the United States. "It's palpable across the country, and I think a lot of this has to do with the decisions that are being made by Netanyahu," he argued.

"I'm very comfortable with the decisions I've made," Frost said of his approach to Israel. "As I walk the streets of my district, as I speak with the people in my district, this is where I find most people are at. They're not really at the extremes that I've heard from."

When he assumed office in 2023, Frost had sought guidance from pro-Israel Democrats including Rep. Ritchie Torres (D-NY), who enthusiastically backed his campaign, and House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY), one person familiar with the matter told JI. But the congressman has since drifted away from the two lawmakers on Israel while staking out positions that have put him more in line with the far left.

More recently, Frost has built closer relationships with such leading Israel critics as Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY), the source told JI, even if he has resisted identifying as an official member of the so-called Squad of progressive House Democrats.

Owing in part to his network in Congress, Jewish community leaders are doubtful Frost will change his views on Israel. "It may be the best that we can hope is that he doesn't become an actual member of the Squad," said one activist, while noting that Frost is "totally safe" in his deeply blue district as he seeks a third term next year.

Still, the activist said, "his refusal to actually go and see" Israel "first-hand is a problem," particularly in light of his primary vow to visit the Jewish state as a congressman.

Frost, who acknowledged the commitment that he had made, said he hopes to see the region "at some point," but added that it has "been difficult to figure out the timing."

After the interview, Frost asked his spokesperson to clarify that he would "like to travel to the region at a point where he'd be able to visit both Israel and the Gaza Strip," indicating a potential visit is unlikely to occur in the foreseeable future. ♦

After mainstream groups express concern over Gaza aid crisis, experts say Jewish world widening tent of acceptable views on Israel

'It needed to happen,' Steven Windmueller, emeritus professor of Jewish communal service, tells eJP 'So many folks are asking questions, and they have been to so few places where people were prepared to offer answers, or at least give space for the right to ask such questions'

By Jay Deitcher

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

In recent weeks, the needle appears to have shifted on what is considered acceptable to talk about in the Jewish philanthropic world related to criticism of Israel. This comes after multiple mainstream organizations and figures with clear Zionist bona fides, such as the American Jewish Committee, British Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, the Zionist Federation of Australia and others, have released statements expressing deep concern about the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

Those remarks, all of which primarily blamed the situation on the Hamas terror group, which launched the war with its brutal Oct. 7 attacks and perpetuates it by holding 50 people hostage, seem to have signalled to the wider Jewish community that criticizing aspects of Israel's conduct in its war against Hamas is not out of bounds.

Just on Wednesday, dozens of prominent Jewish philanthropists from around the world signed a letter, along with thousands of other Jews, calling for an end to the war in Gaza, a crackdown on settler violence in the West Bank and denouncing the extremist rhetoric of some Israeli politicians.

Until now, the majority of Jewish nonprofits, day schools and movements have refrained from criticizing Israeli policies and actions in Gaza and the West Bank. This has made some members of those organizations who have harbored such concerns fearful that they could lose their jobs if they voice their criticisms of Israel. But with institutions now providing a more nuanced example of what it means to support Israel — including criticism and even outright condemnation, in the case of

the Reform movement — the lines of what can and can't be appear to have shifted.

"It needed to happen," Steven Windmueller, emeritus professor of Jewish communal service at the Jack H. Skirball Campus of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Los Angeles, told eJewishPhilanthropy. "Probably because the situation itself has evolved to a point where the donor, the student, the rabbi, you name it... where everyone is struggling to find a way forward in terms of how to understand what is happening, how to question and ask questions about the crisis and the response."

These changes, where organizations feel the need to widen the conversations around Israel and Zionism are happening "from the bottom-up," Windmueller said. "So many folks are asking questions, and they have been to so few places where people were prepared to offer answers, or at least give space for the right to ask such questions."

According to Windmueller, the people pushing for these shifts are not "necessarily coming at this from a point of view of being an anti-Zionist or a non-Zionist, but rather from the point of view of their love of and engagement with Israel and their difficulty and even frustration at times with understanding and managing the events that are unfolding."

He added: "That's a very different kind of conversation than one having to do with folks who have walked away from the Israel discourse. This is where the mainstream of the Jewish community is having, finally, that kind of essential conversation."

Even though leaders and funders may have anxiety over taking this step of opening communal discourse to critical attitudes toward Israel, "there's also a sense [that]

there are internal differences that we can no longer avoid," Melissa Weintraub, co-CEO of Resetting the Table, a nonprofit that works with organizations to counter polarization in the workplace, told eJP.

These "subterranean tensions" have been "bubbling and just breaking through to the surface," she said.

Some New York Jews are openly supporting anti-Zionist Democratic mayoral candidate Zohran Mamdani because of his stances on Israel, not despite them. Some progressive Orthodox Jews have also condemned the Israeli government for their actions in Gaza and the West Bank under the banner of Smol Emuni, a group that counts among its members Rabbi Yosef Blau, the former *mashgiach ruchani* (spiritual supervisor) at Yeshiva University's rabbinical school and a past president of Religious Zionists of America.

"Differences don't tend to go away without being addressed," Weintraub said, adding that this isn't simply a liberal issue: Jews on the right have also been cast out from social justice organizations for their views. Stifling certain voices causes everyone in a community to trust each other less.

In a communal religion like Judaism, the prospect of being excommunicated is terrifying. For people working for Jewish organizations, it is also a threat to their livelihood.

"One of the ways in which these kinds of statements from major Jewish institutions make a difference is by signaling very explicitly to people, 'Actually, this thing that you're feeling is not going to push you outside the boundaries of the 'we,'" Joanna Ware, executive director of the progressive

Jewish Liberation Fund, told eJP.

Although the conversation is opening, there still need to be boundaries, Windmueller believes. “There are some sort of core principles that we stand for as a community. We’re not going to move outside of the comfort zone that Zionism and Israel’s right to exist are core to the Jewish story and essential to modern Jewish history... If we’re going to call ourselves a community, reaffirming those key positions will be essential.”

There are some Jewish nonprofits that will never take a stance on what is occurring in Israel and Gaza. For Ilana Kaufman, the CEO of Jews of Color Initiative, taking a stance simply does not align with its mission. “By way of policy, we do not dabble with international affairs,” she said. It’s not that the organization is apolitical, but its leaders made a decision to be “politically, nonpolitical, [which] has created an environment where the diversity of the Jewish People can thrive.”

There have been staff, funders and grantees who have wanted the organization to take a firmer stance on what is occurring in the Middle East, but “it’s not something

we do,” Kaufman said. “If you want to talk about the most innovative way to make a grant, this is a place for you.”

Still, Jews of color run the gamut politically, a reality Kaufman understands. “People need to be human and in their own space outside of work,” she said.

If an employee’s actions off the clock interfere with the organization’s mission to support Jews of color in America, especially if it causes a schism with partners legitimately invested in improving racial inclusion, Kaufman will have a conversation with them.

“I have been really clear with the staff that their social media posts will have legs, and I can’t control those, and I will only defend them to the point that it’s appropriate in my role in service to the work,” she said. “They have choices to make. I’ve asked them if they feel like they cannot be in service to the mission to let me know, and we will try to make that an easy transition.”

But things are changing in JOCI, too. If an employee accused Israel of causing the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, “six months ago, [we] probably would have had a conversation about it,” Kaufman said.

Today, that would be less likely as others with influence and authority have spoken out on the topic. “It’s signaling that it’s more acceptable,” she said.

The fact that many Jewish organizations are opening up direct and honest dialogue among their constituents is a huge step to cultivating a safe space for differing views, Weintraub said, and the Jewish community is actually doing better than the larger American community, which is completely polarized.

Broadening the conversation can serve as an opportunity to educate, address concerns and correct falsehoods, Windmueller said, because people simply want to better understand what is actually happening in Gaza. “If people are able to unpack and go deeper in understanding why somebody is employing a term and whether or not that’s a correct or even appropriate definition, that can only happen when you have discourse, when you have dialog, and it doesn’t happen when people are shut down or shut out from having their questions answered,” he said. ♦

AUGUST 8, 2025

Rich Goldberg reflects on Trump administration service on Energy Dominance Council

The outgoing Trump official praised the president’s ‘willingness to defy, truly, a crowd of idiots out in the Twitter-sphere’ warning about the U.S. strikes against Iran’s nuclear program

By Marc Rod

Rich Goldberg, a senior advisor at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, this week concluded a monthslong stint in the Trump administration as the senior counselor for the White House’s new National Energy Dominance Council (NEDC) and a senior advisor to Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum.

Goldberg helped launch the NEDC, which he compared in an interview with *Jewish Insider* this week to a “[National Security Council], only for energy,” coordinating with the White House, Burgum

and Secretary of Energy Christopher Wright to build domestic production of energy and exploitation of oil, gas, coal and nuclear resources, as well as critical minerals. That effort includes moves to speed up approvals for energy projects.

He said that the council is particularly focused on the energy demands of the growing AI space, which are “so enormous that we truly have a national emergency on our hands.” He said the U.S. will “lose the [AI] arms race to China” if it can’t increase its capacity to generate power, in partnership with U.S. allies.

He added that the NEDC is also focused on exporting American energy to allies, with the goal of de-linking them from U.S. adversaries and using U.S. energy to promote stability amid potential global energy crises.

As part of the NEDC’s efforts, the U.S. and Israel signed a memorandum of understanding on U.S.-Israel energy and artificial intelligence cooperation during Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s July visit to the U.S.

“This has huge potential for the future, when you think about combining the Israeli tech and innovation ecosystem and having

the smartest people in Israel and startups focused on power generation, focused on advanced energy solutions, focused on AI applications for energy, and combining that with U.S. infrastructure, U.S. know-how, U.S. leadership,” Goldberg said.

He said that the program could be expanded to include the United Arab Emirates, which is stepping up its investments in the U.S. and in AI.

Goldberg argued that the administration’s “energy dominance” approach can help offset the impacts of global instability, pointing to the Israel-Iran war as an example. He said that the U.S.’ lack of dependence on Middle Eastern oil gave it “flexibility” in taking action against Iran, including imposing primary and secondary sanctions on Iranian oil, and carrying out strikes.

He said that expanding U.S. energy production will also allow it to respond quickly and assist allies and partners if their supplies might be interrupted. Goldberg noted that the administration had reached out to Egypt and Jordan when the war began to ensure their energy supplies wouldn’t be impacted.

“I think we have a lot of flexibility right now, if we wanted to, to curtail Iranian energy flows dramatically,” Goldberg said. “But obviously what [President Donald Trump] directed and accomplished at the end of the 12-day war, combined with what the Israelis accomplished, has given him far more tremendous options and flexibility than any sanctions ever could.”

Goldberg argued that the setbacks to Iran’s nuclear program from the U.S. and Israeli strikes have also “dramatically improved the energy shipment picture and our national security picture” in the Middle East, making it more risky for Iran to threaten maritime shipping in the Strait of Hormuz, which he also called a blow to China.

Goldberg also highlighted the fact that the administration recently stopped providing waivers that allowed Iraq to continue purchasing energy from Iran. He said that increased U.S. production allows the U.S. to work with Iraq to de-link its energy supply from Iran.

“The energy sector, the financial sector

has been the financial pathway for Iran, along with its terror militias ... to maintain effective control and influence over Baghdad,” Goldberg said. “This is not in the U.S. interest, it’s not in Iraq’s interest.”

He said Iraq is “Iran’s Alamo” — one of its last strongholds outside its borders, aside from the Houthis in Yemen — “and we would be committing policy malpractice not to seize the moment.” He added that Iraq also has “tremendous natural resources” that could be developed if the influence and threat of Iranian-backed militias could be eliminated.

As for the Houthis, Goldberg said that there will need to be “creative ways” to address that threat, involving Gulf partners and Israel.

He said that the Middle East also provides great opportunities for growth in the energy sector, ultimately through the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (IMEC) — a proposed pipeline, rail and shipping corridor that would run from Mumbai through the Gulf states and Israel to Greece. Saudi-Israeli normalization would be critical to advancing the IMEC vision.

The IMEC proposal would also sidestep the Houthi threat in the Red Sea, Goldberg noted.

“This is where IMEC presents a real game-changing opportunity through energy infrastructure,” he said. “It’s absolutely conceivable and something we should be putting all of our energy behind, politically, to have a Saudi-to-Europe pipeline connection that runs straight through Eilat. The infrastructure is largely mapped out. It would take a relatively modest infrastructure investment upgrade.”

He said that the vision goes beyond simple normalization: “What we’re looking at is complete economic and energy integration and a transformation of global supply chains.” He said that makes him “optimistic” about the future for the region.

Asked about his inside perspective on the Trump administration’s decision-making around the Israel-Iran war and the U.S.’ decision to bomb Iran, Goldberg praised Trump, saying that “you could not have scripted how everything played out better” and lauded Trump for his “willingness to defy, truly, a crowd of idiots out in the

Twitter-sphere that were screaming of all kinds of crazy things that might happen if the U.S. did the obvious and removed the Iranian ability to cross the nuclear threshold in any short amount of time.”

Goldberg said that the U.S. strikes were a response to a “core national security interest” and a “clear and present national security threat” that “bogged us down in the world,” “distracted us from longer-term strategic threats” and “increased price premiums” for energy and shipping supply chains.

He also argued that the Israeli military campaign against Iran could not have seen the success that it did unless Trump had been elected president, arguing that the weapons shipments that the Biden administration withheld from Israel were critical to the Israeli operations, as was Trump’s willingness to deploy U.S. military assets to defend Israel. He dismissed the notion that the Trump administration had prematurely forced Israel to cut off its military operation against Iran.

Goldberg said that reimposing United Nations sanctions on Iran through the snapback mechanism would be a critical step toward “enshrining the policy of no reconstitution at the Security Council,” and prevent a future president — he named left-wing Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) or right-wing podcast host Tucker Carlson — from attempting to revive the Obama-era nuclear deal and granting sanctions relief once again.

“The president, from everything that I have seen, is fundamentally committed to ensuring Iran does not reconstitute its nuclear program, dismantles it further if he can achieve that diplomatically, and is not allowed to continue to foment wars, sponsor terrorism,” Goldberg said. “The Iranians now have to fear Donald Trump using force at any given moment,” he added.

Goldberg said that media reports of breaches between Trump and the Israeli government were “false” and “politically motivated in some sort of disinformation campaign.”

“The one truth I know is that the Trump administration — the president, the prime minister — are closely, closely coordinated,” Goldberg said.



Regarding the future of Gaza, Goldberg emphasized that Hamas has not negotiated in good faith to release the hostages, and said that “at some point, we should have a question of what value the Hamas leaders outside of Gaza present to us” if they are not being helpful — or are actively harmful — in achieving hostage-release deals.

He added that Trump’s proposal for the mass relocation of the population of Gaza for rebuilding and anti-Hamas operations is still on the table if other efforts fail. Goldberg

suggested that the existing Israeli strategy of clearing areas but then withdrawing, rather than setting up new governance, had not been successful, but that a new Israeli occupation strategy could provide space for such an approach. He said there are other options that could be “in between those two.”

“[The Gaza Humanitarian Foundation] is fundamentally the greatest assault on the Hamas-international aid humanitarian apparatus that could possibly exist, which

is why they need it to die,” Goldberg continued. “If they lose the fight against GHF, if GHF evolves further into something that actually goes into communities ... and the IDF facilitates that in some way, and it proves to be successful and [non-Hamas] people are willing to step up” to take on leadership and civil service roles, “you have a hope for Gaza.”

He said that abandoning the GHF or an equivalent effort would be a major victory for Hamas. ♦

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Lessons from Gaza disengagement remain relevant 20 years later

A lack of a ‘day-after plan’ and an unwillingness to address threats before they grew left Sharon’s 2005 promises unfulfilled. What has Israel learned since then?

By Lahav Harkov

Twenty years ago this month, Israel dismantled 21 settlements in the Gaza Strip, forcing 8,000 Israelis to evacuate and demolishing their homes, in what was known as the disengagement. That process was met with mass protests on the streets and the splintering of the Likud party, whose leader, then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, initiated and oversaw the disengagement.

While Sharon did not promise peace as a result of the disengagement, the plan was presented as a move to make Israel more secure, while fewer soldiers would have to die protecting a small number of residents in the Gaza Strip. The prime minister and his supporters said that if even one rocket was shot from Gaza after the pull-out, Israel would respond militarily. They also promised that the disengagement would ensure that “this whole package called the Palestinian state, with all that it entails,

[would be] removed indefinitely from our agenda ... all with a presidential blessing and the ratification of both houses of Congress,” as Sharon’s senior advisor, Dov “Dubi” Weisglass, put it at the time.

Two decades later, Israel is fighting its longest war in Gaza, after the Oct. 7, 2023, massacres and attacks perpetrated by the Hamas terrorist organization that has controlled Gaza since 2006. In the interim years, Hamas and other Palestinian terrorist groups in Gaza shot hundreds and sometimes thousands of rockets at Israeli population centers each year, prompting five major Israeli military operations in Gaza.

As to Weisglass’ 2004 promise that international pressure to reach a two-state solution would be put in “formaldehyde,” Sharon’s political protege and the Israeli prime minister immediately following him, Ehud Olmert, offered the Palestinians a state in 2008. Last week, 11 countries announced

their intention to recognize a Palestinian state.

Key figures from that period told *Jewish Insider* that the Israeli government’s failure to formulate a day-after plan for Gaza — a criticism that has been leveled at Jerusalem in the current war — is in part to blame for the unfulfilled promises of the disengagement.

Gilad Erdan, a former senior Israeli cabinet minister and ambassador to the U.S., was a freshman Likud lawmaker when the disengagement was announced, and became a leading figure in the party’s rebellion against Sharon, which then-Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu — who voted in favor of the disengagement plan in early key votes — joined at a later stage.

Erdan noted to *JI* that Sharon not only claimed the disengagement would improve Israel’s security, he said that “if Israel doesn’t take this step, there will be other diplomatic



plans [that the world will] try to force on Israel, and this step will free us of pressure from the international community. It's clear that it didn't reduce pressure, it increased it."

"What happened then, and is still the case now, is that Israel didn't have an alternative plan on the table, whether for the coming few years or the short term," Erdan said. "This is something to consider as a lesson of the disengagement."

"I think a Palestinian state is now off of the agenda for many years ... Something we can consider a lesson of the disengagement is that we should say no withdrawals, no unilateralism, no to a Palestinian state. I think those lessons were learned over the years at a great cost in blood," said Gilad Erdan, who was a freshman Likud lawmaker when the disengagement was announced, and became a leading figure in the party's rebellion against Sharon.

Israel now has "an opportunity to present a plan ... that puts Israel's security and our right to the land at the forefront, but we are not presenting any diplomatic plan for the world to discuss. Even if the international community doesn't accept it — so what? What looks crazy today could look different in 20 years. It's not like we'll have peace with the Palestinians in five minutes," the former ambassador stated.

Erdan said that the aftermath of the disengagement underscored for Israelis the danger of a potential Palestinian state.

"I think a Palestinian state is now off of the agenda for many years ... Something we can consider a lesson of the disengagement is that we should say no withdrawals, no unilateralism, no to a Palestinian state. I think those lessons were learned over the years at a great cost in blood," he said.

Elliott Abrams, who was deputy national security advisor to the George W. Bush administration at the time of the disengagement, told *JI* that Sharon did have a larger overarching idea behind the move, but subsequent prime ministers did not follow through with it.

"Sharon said at the time that Israel needs to establish its borders, and I think he would have done something ... with the West Bank.

Whatever the future of Israel is, it doesn't include Gaza, which has no use economically and no significance religiously," was the logic, Abrams said.

"Establish a border, build a wall, and maybe something will change in 100 years, but for now, try to have a border for Israel," Abrams said. "It was a larger plan and then Sharon had his stroke" in December 2005, followed by another in January 2006 that left him in a vegetative state until his death in 2014.

"Sharon refused for domestic reasons to work with the Palestinian Authority at all on Gaza, because it would make it look like a reward," following the years-long wave of Palestinian terrorism called the Second Intifada, Abrams recalled.

"Sharon wasn't going to have anything to do with [the PA]; he was just going to leave Gaza," Abrams said. "It's a question whether it would have been possible to avoid a Hamas takeover in June 2006, followed by the complete collapse of the PA [in Gaza]. It's a question worth asking. It is a fact that there was zero coordination."

Though Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat died after Sharon announced the disengagement, the Israeli prime minister did not reconsider his plan in light of the election of new leader Mahmoud Abbas — who remains PA president 20 years later.

Abrams argued that international pressure was not a major contributing factor to the disengagement, noting that the plan was entirely Sharon's and not something Bush sought for him to do.

Still, Abrams said that "international pressure to make concessions to the Palestinians is Israel's predicament. That is simply a fact ... I don't think this is a problem that has a solution. I think it's a condition."

"Israelis have to decide when they're going to say 'drop dead,' when they're going to say politely 'no, we can't do that,' when to take half measures and when they're going to agree," he added. "Those questions have not changed much. They get worse for a while sometimes, and then better and then worse again, depending on how successful Arab propaganda campaigns are and how unsuccessful Israel's campaigns are. It also depends on how strong the support is from the U.S. in resisting the other pressure."

Erdan similarly said that "Sharon sent

Dubi Weisglass to convince [Bush], one of the most supportive presidents ever, to support the disengagement. Bush didn't want to support it at first ... there wasn't such significant international pressure."

Rather, Erdan, who was Sharon's political advisor a decade before the disengagement, said the debate was more of a domestic Israeli one, after Sharon "changed 180 degrees from all of the ideas he had presented to us about security and ideology, Judea and Samaria," the Biblical term for the West Bank.

The disengagement came after "Israel was under pressure from terrorism," Erdan said.

"The disengagement was a terrible, historic mistake that inspired the Oct. 7 massacre," Erdan argued. "It not only gave [Hamas] the opportunity to dig tunnels and arm itself, it gave them the motivation, the desire and the belief that they could do it. That the strong Israel, led by the decorated General Ariel Sharon, retreated unilaterally when facing terrorism strengthened the extremists in Palestinian society and led to the loss of deterrence we experienced two years ago."

Erdan also argued that the disengagement did not reduce Israeli deaths, saying that the number of Israeli soldiers and civilians killed in attacks emanating from Gaza in 1967-2005, when Israel controlled the territory, was smaller than in the ensuing years 18 years before the latest war.

Abrams pointed out that Sharon and Olmert did not fulfill their promise of striking back if any attacks came from Gaza.

"The problem began very quickly," Abrams recalled, "because Sharon in the first few months, and then after he had a stroke it was Olmert, never enforced their own statements about Gaza."

Two Qassam rockets were shot from Gaza into Israel while the disengagement was still taking place, and another 33 during the remainder of that year. From 2005 to 2006, the number of rocket and mortar attacks from Gaza on Israel rose 42% to 1,777. Hamas also began building tunnels into Israel at that time.

Abrams recalled that when Sharon initiated the disengagement and presented it to Bush and then the public, Sharon argued that "if Israel got out of Gaza, there would be

no excuse for any attack from Gaza on Israel, and if there were attacks, they would be met with the strongest, most forceful military reaction. It never happened.”

“Don’t let your enemies get into a position where they can do you great harm. That was learned, and that explains the attacks on Hezbollah and Iran. That is the right lesson. That is the lesson Israel did not seem to learn when it got out of Gaza,” said Elliott Abrams, who was deputy national security advisor to the George W. Bush administration at the time of the disengagement.

Israel at the time, he said, “had an opportunity to respond very strongly to Hamas right away, and it would have had considerable American and international support ... It was an opportunity that was missed ... by Sharon, Olmert and later [since 2009, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu. It was a continuing problem.”

Abrams said that after the Oct. 7 attacks, Israel learned at least one lesson it had failed to internalize after the disengagement: “Don’t let your enemies get into a position where they can do you great harm. That was learned, and that explains the attacks on Hezbollah and Iran. That is the right lesson. That is the lesson Israel did not seem to learn when it got out of Gaza.”

“Israel is a democracy and the whole Jewish people debate about everything nonstop,” Erdan said, but “the lessons of the disengagement are growing over the years. It didn’t happen overnight.”

“In the early years after the disengagement, we realized the Palestinians had the ability and desire to launch missiles and rockets, so we can’t live in the delusion that [Gaza would be] the Singapore of the Middle East,” he said. “Only on Oct. 7 did many more people in Israel believe that not only unilateral but any withdrawal is bad. Israelis totally lost trust in the Palestinians and realized that Jewish settlements have a great and significant security value ... We cannot only rely on technology and smart cameras; physical presence is essential ... I think a lot of us woke up from our delusions

on Oct. 7 that withdrawals will lead the Palestinians to reconcile with us.”

Still, Erdan said, “there are people who continue to claim that the price of staying in Gaza would be even higher, so I can’t say all the lessons were learned. With time, more are learned.”

“Having settlers in Gaza [would be] insane. It was a tremendous strain on the IDF. Do we really want to add that strain? It seems insane to me,” said Abrams.

It appears likely from Israeli leaders’ statements and positions in ceasefire negotiations that, at the end of the war, Israel will retain some of Gaza as a buffer zone between Israelis and Palestinians.

Beyond that, many on the Israeli right have called for Israel to retake part or all of Gaza. Some called for annexation as a military tactic to pressure Hamas, which was discussed in recent Israeli Security Cabinet meetings, and others have been calling from the beginning of the war to reverse the disengagement and for Israelis to be allowed to settle in Gaza again.

Abrams said that “having settlers in Gaza [would be] insane. It was a tremendous strain on the IDF. Do we really want to add that strain? It seems insane to me.”

Despite the lack of follow-through to reap the possible security benefits of the disengagement, Abrams said “Sharon was right.”

“First, we need to win the war,” Erdan said. “We are in a different situation today. Israel, unfortunately, already uprooted the [Israeli] towns and we are in a war with consequences for our future. I don’t think bringing the issue of settlements into it now contributes to our effort to win the campaign ... We don’t have to give the international community more tools to make the matter of total victory in the war more complex ... Israel should look at its interests and its priorities.”

“I personally do not believe that maintaining 7,000 [Israeli] settlers in the

middle of 2 million hostile Arabs in Gaza, and using a substantial part of the IDF to protect them, was a sensible plan for Israel,” he said.

Abrams also took issue with the idea of annexing parts of Gaza to pressure Hamas: “It strikes me that that’s not going to move the remaining Hamas leadership living in tunnels in Gaza to agree to let the hostages out. They don’t seem to care about anything. It is truly a death cult ... It doesn’t seem to me — putting aside the legality or illegality — that it would work.”

Erdan said that, in principle, he believes “Jews have the right to live anywhere in the Land of Israel, and a solution to a conflict must include the moral principle that every population can choose where to live and the other side must accept it.”

However, he said that Israeli resettlement of Gaza is “not the most urgent or central thing.”

“First, we need to win the war,” Erdan said. “We are in a different situation today. Israel, unfortunately, already uprooted the [Israeli] towns and we are in a war with consequences for our future. I don’t think bringing the issue of settlements into it now contributes to our effort to win the campaign ... We don’t have to give the international community more tools to make the matter of total victory in the war more complex ... Israel should look at its interests and its priorities.”

Abrams called the idea of maintaining a buffer zone “very sensible to protect Israelis in Israel.”

Erdan also favored Israel retaining a buffer zone in Gaza, because “even if Hamas isn’t there anymore, we don’t know who will be.”

“I don’t think the end lines of the war need to be the Sharon disengagement lines,” he said. “We don’t need to leave the Philadelphi Corridor [along the border with Egypt] and we don’t need the people of Gaza to return to live so close [to Israelis], almost up to my parents’ house in Ashkelon.” ♦

Jews connected to Chabad are ‘surging’ more than in other denominations, JFNA survey finds

Poll does not show why the Hasidic movement has seen more engagement, but JFNA’s chief impact and growth officer says there are lessons other groups can learn

By Judah Ari Gross

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

As American Jewry overall has experienced an increase in Jewish engagement in the wake of the Oct. 7 terror attacks, in what has been deemed “The Surge,” the largest rise has been seen among those connected to the Chabad-Lubavitch movement, outpacing all other denominations and among unaffiliated Jews, according to survey data from Jewish Federations of North America that were provided exclusively to eJewishPhilanthropy.

According to the findings, which come from data collected by JFNA earlier this year, among the Jews affiliated with Chabad, 44% reported deeper involvement in Jewish life since Oct. 7. This can refer to both someone who was already engaged Jewishly but became more so or someone who was previously uninvolved who has started taking part in Jewish activities. This places the Hasidic movement above Orthodox Judaism (42%), Conservative Judaism (36%), Reform Judaism (33%) and those of “no particular denomination” (24%). The survey polled 1,877 self-identifying Jews who were recruited via text message from March 5-25.

There is, however, an overlap between these groups, as most of those who reported participating in Chabad activities also identified with another denomination. According to the poll, some 30% of the respondents said that they took part in Chabad activities in a typical year. Of these, 39% identified as Reform, 20% as Conservative, 21% as Orthodox, 4% as something else and 15% as no particular denomination.

In the months following the Hamas attacks and the resulting rise in antisemitism around the world, JFNA first identified

“The Surge” in Jewish engagement, finding that 42% of survey respondents reported becoming more involved in Jewish life. Earlier this year, the organization conducted a follow-up study indicating that “The Surge” was continuing albeit at a slightly slower pace, with 31% of respondents now reporting increased engagement.

In general, the survey indicated that the two groups who have been “stickiest” — maintaining their increased levels of engagement — are people who were already “very engaged” and became more so post-Oct. 7 and people who were “not at all engaged” and started becoming involved in Jewish life post-Oct. 7. Collectively, these groups represent 50% of respondents, with 14% identifying as “very engaged” and 36% as “not at all.”

Since presenting those findings in April, JFNA has continued breaking down the data to identify additional trends that may inform the policies and initiatives of Jewish organizations in the U.S.

The survey data does not indicate why Chabad saw the greatest increase in engagement, though Mimi Kravetz, the chief impact and growth officer at JFNA, said there are indications of what may be driving the growth, principally Chabad’s many locations and the unintimidating atmosphere that Chabad leaders have cultivated. Kravetz said that these findings, particularly the latter, should be taken into consideration by other organizations.

“We often see in our local research that when we ask people why they’re not engaging, they say, ‘There’s nothing near me.’ So it’s accurate to say that one of the reasons that Chabad might see higher engagement is that they’re more likely to be local because they just are in lots of communities, including small communities. So that’s definitely part of it,” Kravetz told

eJP. “There’s other quotes that we saw in our interviews that also indicate that often... people feel very comfortable and very welcome [at a Chabad house], in a moment when they’re looking for something. And there’s not that financial barrier to entry that synagogues sometimes [have, since people] think of them as membership organizations. So that’s something for our institutions to consider and think about.”

The survey found that, regardless of denomination, the overwhelming majority of increasingly involved Jews have had enjoyable experiences during those new activities, with positive responses being reported by between 83% and 93% of respondents. Negative experiences were rare, below 5% across the board. According to Kravetz, most of the negative or “anxious” experiences appeared to have more to do with the people reporting them than with the movements they were interacting with. For instance, people who are financially vulnerable, people with disabilities, LGBTQ respondents were more likely to report less positive experiences regardless of the denomination — an apparent indication that the Jewish community overall needs to improve welcoming such groups, but not an issue only for specific movements.

The denominational findings are broken down further by synagogue membership. For instance, the pollsters found that roughly three-quarters of the Orthodox respondents who reported increased engagement were already members of synagogues — an indication that they were part of the group of “very engaged” people who became even more engaged post-Oct. 7. Perhaps unsurprisingly, among respondents “of no particular denomination,” more than 90% were not members of synagogues. Among Chabad-affiliated and Conservative respondents, the breakdown was 50-50, and

among Reform respondents, roughly two-thirds of those who said they were more engaged were not synagogue members.

According to Kravetz, there is a correlation between synagogue membership and Jewish engagement — synagogue members are more likely to be active in Jewish life — but it is imperfect. “Sometimes somebody will tell you that they are very engaged... [but] they do not have a formal synagogue membership or affiliation. So it’s not a proxy,” she said.

While the pollsters looked at the

denominational breakdowns, they also found that much of the increased engagement among less-involved people is not necessarily happening at synagogues, Kravetz said.

“A lot of their engagement is in less formal ways, in social groups, on social media or other communal access points. For example, we saw that... oftentimes it was a local JCC, which doesn’t require any religious affiliation or denomination, and is a place where people might be most willing to show up if they don’t feel affiliated

with any particular religious community or movement,” she said. “And so for federations, that’s really important because it means both that we want to be supporting some of these other ways people are engaging, reaching them on social media, reaching them in their WhatsApp groups... supporting JCCs and other institutions that are less affiliated, in addition to, of course, continuing to partner with synagogues, which are a core area for those who are already at all engaged.” ♦

AUGUST 5, 2025

James Walkinshaw sounds more supportive of Israel than his former boss

Walkinshaw said the U.S.-Israel relationship ‘has immense strategic importance to the United States, and I want to see a strong U.S. Israel relationship with bipartisan support’

By Gabby Deutch

James Walkinshaw, a longtime former aide to Rep. Gerry Connolly (D-VA), aims to follow in his late mentor’s footsteps as the strong favorite to win a special general election in Virginia’s 11th Congressional District in September.

Walkinshaw, who has been a member of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors for the last five years, spent more than a decade as Connolly’s chief of staff on Capitol Hill. He’s now running to fill the seat Connolly held from 2009 until his death earlier this year. Walkinshaw said that Connolly, who was not planning to seek reelection next year, had encouraged him to run, and he received the endorsement of Connolly’s family members.

Asked if he sees any major differences between himself and Connolly — whether on policy or his approach to the role of a member of Congress — Walkinshaw said that there are few, and that he was aligned with his former boss’ views on most issues.

But when it comes to Israel, Walkinshaw

sounds likely to adopt a more moderate tone on Middle East policy, something of a contrast from Connolly, who took an increasingly critical view of the Jewish state during his tenure in the House.

Connolly, who was a senior member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, represented a sizable Jewish population and a significant Muslim population in his Northern Virginia district.

“I’m a strong believer in the importance and value of a secure, democratic ... Jewish state,” Walkinshaw told Jewish Insider. “I think the U.S.-Israel relationship has immense historical importance. It has immense strategic importance to the United States, and I want to see a strong U.S.-Israel relationship with bipartisan support.”

He said that the current situation in Gaza presents “a very difficult moment in the region and in the relationship, but my hope is we can get through this moment and preserve the really important relationship that we have.”

Walkinshaw said he’s hopeful that talks will resume to return all of the remaining hostages, end the violence in Gaza and increase humanitarian aid to alleviate the current crisis, which he described as “unacceptable.”

Walkinshaw said he opposes the push by some progressive House members for a full halt to U.S. military aid to Israel, arguing that “severing the U.S.-Israel relationship in that way” would not serve anyone’s interests, including the Palestinians. “I think it is really important that relationship continue.”

“I wish that President Trump had continued to pursue that diplomatic path. I think that path was still available to him when the decision was made to launch the strikes against Iran. And I’m hopeful that that diplomatic path can be resumed,”
Walkinshaw told JI.

“But I do think that the president of the

United States, whether it's Joe Biden or Donald Trump, has a responsibility to be a neutral broker and try to encourage both sides to come to an agreement to reach a ceasefire and the president of United States has a lot of leverage in those conversations, and should use it," he continued.

Walkinshaw said that a nuclear-armed Iran is "unacceptable" and would endanger both Israeli and U.S. interests globally, but said that a deal with the Iranian regime is the only path to guaranteeing that Iran cannot obtain a nuclear weapon.

"I wish that President Trump had continued to pursue that diplomatic path. I think that path was still available to him when the decision was made to launch the strikes against Iran. And I'm hopeful that that diplomatic path can be resumed," Walkinshaw told JI, when asked about the administration's June military strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities.

He argued that although the U.S. and Israeli strikes had "diminished" the regime's capabilities, Iran still has the capacity to rebuild and resume its nuclear weapons program, potentially in a more covert fashion than in the past.

And he said he believes that the Constitution and the War Powers Act "are clear" that Trump should have come to Congress for authorization before launching the strikes.

Walkinshaw's district has seen a series of antisemitic incidents in recent months, including the arrest of a George Mason University student for plotting a terror attack against the Israeli consulate in New York and the discovery of pro-terrorism materials in the homes of two other students.

"The first thing we all have to do as leaders is speak out clearly that any form of hate or discrimination, including antisemitism, are absolutely unacceptable," Walkinshaw said. He said that he would work in Congress to speak out against antisemitism "wherever it might take root" and to "ensure that in our schools, we're educating students about antisemitism and ways to speak out against it and be involved in the very important efforts to end antisemitism."

He noted that George Mason falls under the supervision of the state, and that Fairfax County has no authority over the campus or campus property, but said he's "proud of the work that the Fairfax County Police Department did in coordination with other law enforcement agencies" to respond to the three students in question.

He also noted that there was a spree of instances of antisemitic graffiti in the district he represents on the Fairfax County board, all perpetrated by one individual. He said that, after those incidents, he brought together a local group of interfaith leaders to speak out and show solidarity with the Jewish community.

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Walkinshaw added that he's "proud of the strong relationship I've built with the Jewish community here in Fairfax" and that he would plan, as a member of Congress, to continue to stand with the community, in both times of celebration and mourning.

Eileen Filler-Corn, the former Virginia House speaker and outspoken supporter of Israel, endorsed Walkinshaw. She agreed that the nominee has longstanding connections with the Jewish community.

"He's been very, very active with our community and very supportive of our community and engaged," Filler-Corn told JI, as he consistently attends community events and vigils. "He's not a new face to the Jewish community. He's somebody we know very well. And he doesn't just say the right things. He actually walks the walk."

She added that he has reached out and shown up consistently, even when "things change and things become hard."

"He is somebody that does his research and listens and learns, and I do believe he has been extremely supportive of our community amid the rise in antisemitism," she continued, adding that he has a record of action and public comments as supervisor

to back that up.

Filler-Corn said she's had the opportunity to speak with Walkinshaw many times both before and after Oct. 7, 2023, about Israel policy, and emphasized that he's always available to listen and talk about issues with her. She said she believes he understands the issues at play, and that he's also willing to research and learn about them.

"I have been very, very pleased with what he has shared," she continued, noting that he had highlighted the need to free the hostages during a candidate forum in the Democratic primary.

Walkinshaw told JI he ultimately decided to run for Congress because he feels that his community is "under attack from the Trump administration" and that the administration is threatening American democracy.

"I think by and large, if voters in the 11th District liked what they got from Gerry Connolly in terms of his philosophy and in terms of his approach to fighting for the people he represented, then they're going to like what they get from me if I'm successful on Sept. 9," Walkinshaw told JI.

Given his experience, he argued, he's well-placed to advocate for the community, and has a deep understanding of the centrality of constituent services issues to the role and of how to deliver results in the House.

He said he's aiming to follow in Connolly's footsteps and gain a seat on the House Oversight Committee, of which Connolly was briefly the ranking member prior to his death, highlighting the high proportion of government contractors and federal employees in his district impacted by the Trump administration's mass cuts to the federal government. Walkinshaw also named affordability as a top priority, which he said should be a focus for every Democratic candidate.

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AUGUST 5, 2025

Shocked by poor Gaza war reporting, L.A. couple launches fellowship to improve coverage on Israel, Jewish life

New initiative, created in partnership with Jewish Federation Los Angeles, will provide support to 10 early- to mid-career journalists

By Ayala Or-El

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

The initial — and false — reports accusing Israel of bombing Gaza's Al-Ahli Arab Hospital on Oct. 17, 2023, along with a wildly inflated death toll, spurred Jacki Karsh to action. The explosion had actually been caused by a failed rocket launch by the Palestinian Islamic Jihad terrorist group, killing dozens of people — not the hundreds that were initially claimed in news reports around the world, including the home page of *The New York Times*.

"The story was reported incorrectly and then the correction was so muted, it was not like, 'Wow! We just completely messed up this story,'" said Karsh, a six-time Emmy-nominated multimedia journalist. "It had already affected how everyone perceived the war. When numbers come from a Ministry of Health run by Hamas, whether that's done deliberately or not, it influences how people perceive the story — and it can even shape policies."

To combat this, Karsh and her husband, Jeff, in partnership with Jewish Federation Los Angeles, have launched the Karsh Journalism Fellowship — a first-of-its-kind program focused solely on improving media coverage of antisemitism, Jewish life and Israel.

At a time when these topics dominate headlines, journalists often lack the background to report on them with accuracy and depth. "This is a pivotal moment to invest in rigorous journalism on Jewish issues," Jacki Karsh told eJewishPhilanthropy.

The program offers reporters in-depth training, mentorship and access to leading experts to help ensure coverage that reflects the complexity and diversity of Jewish life — while actively addressing harmful

biases and misinformation in mainstream reporting.

The Al-Ahli Arab Hospital bombing was just one example of the many instances of false and biased coverage surrounding the war in Gaza and the related rise in global antisemitism that made Karsh realize she had to act.

"I was thinking, if there had been one person in that newsroom who had stood up and said, 'We need to wait. We cannot rush into this — this will have an impact if we don't verify.' They were getting more information from the terrorists who were responsible for Oct. 7. If we even just wait 24 hours — which, I know, in news is a lifetime — so even a few hours until the smoke clears... but there was nobody that really stood up."

The Karshes opened enrollment for the fellowship late last month and plan to close it on Sept. 1. The program will begin in January 2026 and will take place over three immersive weekends in major American news markets. Over the course of a year, 10 early- to mid-career journalists from across media platforms will participate in intensive retreats in Los Angeles, New York, and Washington.

Each all-expenses-paid gathering will feature expert-led sessions on essential topics such as "The Myth of Jewish Media Control," "How to Cover Antisemitism," "Middle East Misinformation" and "Jews in the American Mosaic." This multicity structure is designed to expose fellows to diverse perspectives, cultural institutions and communities while fostering a national professional network.

Each fellow will receive a \$4,000 stipend and will complete a substantive reporting project under professional mentorship

while continuing to work with their current editor.

Karsh had served as a board member of the Jewish Federation in Los Angeles for several years and recently returned from a federation mission to Israel, accompanying a delegation of local Los Angeles politicians — none of whom were Jewish — to see Israel for the first time.

"I've been to Israel a million and one times," she said, "but this time was different. For me, it was really eye-opening to see Israel through somebody else's eyes. I was witnessing how political leaders perceived Israel — some of them encountering the complexities of the region for the very first time."

She said the group arrived with open minds and a genuine willingness to learn and ask questions. "It was a hard trip," she admitted. "There were tough conversations, but I think it was probably one of the most rewarding things I've ever done."

Karsh first presented the idea for the fellowship to the Jewish Federation in November 2023. Initially, she envisioned it as a local initiative based in Los Angeles but quickly realized its potential for broader impact.

"Jewish journalism about Jews affects the entire American Jewish population," she said. "So why just isolate ourselves to Los Angeles? I told them I wanted to build something that would have a lasting impact on the Jewish story, both in America and abroad," she recalled.

Rabbi Noah Farkas, CEO of Jewish Federation Los Angeles, supported the vision and suggested bringing in someone with experience beyond the federation's scope. That's when Rob Eshman joined the

project. Eshman, a former editor-in-chief of the *Jewish Journal* and national editor of *The Forward* (now a senior columnist), serves as the fellowship's director.

"This fellowship is designed for working journalists who want a deeper understanding of complex, controversial issues," Eshman said. "We are building a program that will help build careers."

The program has assembled distinguished journalists as mentors from across the ideological spectrum, including from *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, *The New York Times*, *The Spectator* and *ATTN*.

As a journalist herself, Karsh has reported extensively on issues of homelessness, civic life and human interest stories. She is

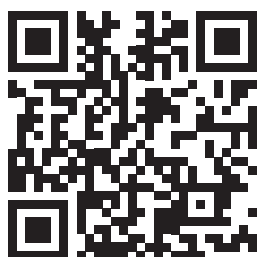
also an advocate for strengthening public understanding of antisemitism and Israel through rigorous journalism and public engagement. Her husband, Jeff, is the founder and managing partner of Tryperion Holdings, a leading investment manager specializing in value-driven real estate investments with over \$2 billion in assets. The couple has three young children.

Karsh hopes the program will expand to include more journalists and cities, and that it will promote integrity and accuracy in newsrooms. "We want journalists to understand the impact that their reporting has on Jewish issues and Israel, and how that, in turn, affects the global Jewish population — and to understand the power

of the pen or broadcast."

"I think the stories about us are often not told by us," Karsh said. "That leads to a lack of nuance, and an intense focus that can distort the reality on the ground. A lot of journalism today has been hijacked by activism. What was once a straightforward news piece has turned into something else entirely."

Karsh doesn't believe only Jews can tell Jewish stories — but she does believe the fellows can make a meaningful difference. "We're hoping they understand the power of even a five-word comment. It can change everything." ♦



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