

THE WEEKLY PRINT

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Inside New York magazine's anti-Israel shift — and the Jewish staffers left behind

From a contested genocide editorial policy to a stifled antisemitism training, former employees say leadership repeatedly failed to address their concerns after Oct. 7

By Matthew Kassel

In the years since Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attacks, *New York* magazine, once known for embodying the wry sophistication of the urban center left, has emerged as a key platform for anti-Israel content, a uniquely hostile ideological shift that is exposing raw feelings on a topic editorial leaders have struggled to meaningfully address publicly and behind the scenes.

Late last month, for instance, the magazine ran a letter confirming its editors had decided to use the term genocide to describe Israel's actions in Gaza, citing an "extensive review of genocide scholarship and interviews with multiple experts in the field of genocide studies" this past fall. The letter had come in response to widespread backlash over *New York's* recent controversial cover issue celebrating the city's burgeoning Middle Eastern cultural scene, which had stoked accusations of erasing Jews from its narrative.

Predating the institutional review, however, the magazine's editorial director, Gazelle Emami, had signed a public statement a few weeks after Hamas' terror attacks calling Israel's war in Gaza "an attempt to conduct genocide against the

Palestinian people." Emami had also solicited a polarizing Oct. 16, 2023, essay, "Explanations Are Not Excuses," by the author and activist Sarah Schulman, who called the violence the "consequence of consistent, unending brutality — paid for by the United States in billions of dollars in aid to Israel per year."

That story was flagged by members of a Jewish employee resource group at Vox Media, which was the magazine's parent company until its acquisition last month by the media scion James Murdoch, in an internal memo shared with editorial leaders alleging several instances of bias against Israel in the wake of Oct. 7.

One person familiar with *New York's* internal dynamics told *Jewish Insider* that Emami, who took on her role in October 2023, according to LinkedIn, is among the "key instigators" driving the magazine's increasingly antagonistic reporting and commentary on Israel. Emami and Mariam Aldahi, the managing editor, wrote an introductory note to the mid-August cover issue saying that the scene "was born out of the pain of the genocide in Gaza."

The person familiar with the situation, who was granted anonymity to avoid

professional reprisal, added that "some Jewish writers were very upset" about the cover issue and "complained internally," the latest instance in which Jewish employees have aired their objections to the magazine's coverage.

The scrutiny underscores how *New York* has been navigating long-simmering internal tensions over its coverage of Israel and handling of concerns raised by some Jewish staffers, according to people familiar with the matter. Former Jewish staffers say they faced an inhospitable work culture after the Oct. 7 attacks and struggled to find support from company leadership — even after an antisemitism training that drew pushback from some employees.

"It was not a healthy work environment," one former Jewish staffer who left after Oct. 7 told *JI* recently on condition of anonymity.

The magazine's top editor, David Haskell, who took the reins in 2019 and whose side vocations include whiskey and ceramic art, has faced skepticism from some observers who question if he is acquiescing to deputies who are aggressively committed to pushing an anti-Israel narrative.

Haskell is "very conflict-averse," according to a former staffer. "He seems

open to conversations on how to improve the coverage,” but it is “unclear if he has the fortitude to go against his staff,” the former staffer told JI.

More than a month after the cover issue was published, the fallout has prompted ongoing damage control within the magazine, which saw some longtime readers cancel their subscriptions “in protest of material they found antisemitic,” the letter from editors acknowledged.

The issue had centered around a tendentious cover story, “Habibi City,” which hailed a so-called “SWANA” renaissance in New York, using a little-known acronym for Southwest Asia and North Africa. While celebrating a vibrant network of Arab and Muslim trendsetters, however, the story suggested Jews and Israelis did not belong in the culture, citing “ethnic background” as complicating their ties to the region. In another passage that stoked backlash, the author, Zaina Arafat, cast Zionism as comparable to xenophobia and Islamophobia.

On Sept. 17, Haskell met privately for a virtual discussion with the leaders of Sephardic and Mizrahi groups that released an open letter calling on *New York* to issue a public correction acknowledging that the framing of its “SWANA” issue “excludes the Jews of the Middle East and North Africa except on ideological terms,” among other things.

Sarah Levin, the executive director of the nonprofit organization Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa, which organized the meeting, said in an interview with JI she could not share specific details about the discussion because Haskell, who personally reached out by email to set up the conversation in response to the letter, had asked it stay off the record.

“Our requests remain what they’ve been from the outset,” Levin said, adding that the 17 participants also pressed for “stronger editorial standards” with regard to coverage of “Zionism, Jewish identity and Middle Eastern people.” While the conversation was “respectful and cordial,” she said that she was unsure if Haskell was receptive to their concerns. “I have no idea how it landed,” she told JI.

Shortly after the Oct. 7 attacks, meanwhile, members of the Jewish employee resource group at Vox Media,

called the Tribe, had urged colleagues in the memo to avoid “both sides” framing as well as “dangerous and factually inaccurate ‘buzzwords’” including apartheid and genocide, which, the authors asserted, “are often used to evoke a visceral emotional reaction in favor of one group.”

The memo resulted in two separate meetings with leaders at *New York* and Vox Media, where Jewish staffers’ concerns were met with “a lot of silence and blank stares,” according to a former Jewish employee who had participated in the discussions. “Leadership did not look or feel engaged,” another former Jewish staffer who was present for the conversations told JI.

A week or so later, Tribe members received two emails in which they were told their input had been heard, even as they continued to feel alienated by the company’s ongoing coverage of Israel, former staffers said.

In response to a list of questions from JI, Lauren Starke, a spokesperson for *New York*, said in a statement on Monday: “David and the magazine’s editorial leadership take feedback from staff seriously; it’s not uncommon for individual staffers to disagree with coverage decisions and share their opinions with leadership. We’re grateful to have a culture that encourages that kind of dialogue.”

While the magazine, founded in 1968, was long viewed as an organ of New York’s socially liberal cognoscenti, its antagonistic approach to Israel has coincided with a broader ideological shift to the left on hot-button issues (such as youth transgender care) since the retirement in 2019 of Adam Moss, who had been the publication’s longest-serving editor-in-chief and is Haskell’s predecessor.

When he stepped down after 15 years atop the *New York* masthead, Moss, who is Jewish, had attributed his decision to a desire “to do something new,” saying that editors should have “term limits” and it was time for an overdue “blood transfusion” at the publication.

But a person close to Moss, now in his late 60s, said “one of the reasons Adam retired was because he was under assault from the staff over language use” amid rising sensitivities on politically charged social justice issues that have more broadly

contributed to tensions along generational lines.

“It was tough for him,” the Moss confidant told JI recently on the condition of anonymity to address private conversations. “The same kind of thing that’s happening in the Democratic Party happened at *New York*,” he added, alluding to debates around so-called woke culture.

Moss did not respond to a request to speak with JI sent to his agent.

During Moss’ tenure, “he probably looked at woke and was like, ‘This is just ridiculous,’” said a former staffer who had overlapped with him for a couple of years. “He kept an iron fist on making sure that stuff wouldn’t bubble out.”

The magazine’s recent cover issue is among the starkest illustrations of a narrative it had begun to promote in the immediate aftermath of Oct. 7, even though it had faced internal pushback from the start.

The publication has run stories incorporating Israeli and Jewish perspectives since the attacks, but some critics say its focus on Israel’s alleged war crimes has largely overlooked violence perpetrated by Hamas. A former employee at *New York*, for instance, said he had been particularly disappointed that the magazine’s cultural site, *Vulture*, did not mention the Nova music festival massacre.

More broadly, *New York* has adopted a reflexively skeptical approach to Israel, resulting in stories that have taken a suspicious view even of cultural figures with tangential connections to the Jewish state. The outlet has also published several feature stories with a hostile view of Israel’s military conduct against Hamas in Gaza — including one highly scrutinized cover article that appeared to liken the war to the Holocaust and later drew several corrections.

Matthew Pressman, an associate professor of journalism at Seton Hall University and author of a forthcoming book about the *New York Daily News*, said he did not think it was particularly unusual that *New York* had decided to allow the term genocide as part of its editorial policy because its “left-wing slant is part of its identity.”

“The fact that the magazine feels comfortable making this its house style suggests two things,” he told JI in a recent

interview. “One is that the staff feels strongly about that. Another calculation is it won’t cost them a lot of subscribers.”

Pressman said he had personally found *New York’s* explanation about how it had arrived at its decision “unsatisfying,” noting that he did not believe there is an “overwhelming scholarly consensus” that Israel is committing genocide, which he called “a word with a pretty clear, straightforward definition.”

“Magazine editors are supposed to be experts on words and their usage,” Pressman told JI, arguing that “they should use their own judgment on which words and phrases are best rather than outsourcing that judgment to academics.”

From a human resources perspective, the former Jewish staffers say they felt a sense of isolation after the Oct. 7 attacks. In the immediate aftermath of the massacre, Jewish employees were surprised that the company’s Diversity, Equity and Inclusion team had not sent a note highlighting support services of the sort Vox had offered following George Floyd’s murder, a local incident of anti-Asian violence and even an uptick of COVID cases in India.

When Jewish staffers posted publicly about the silence on Slack, Vox Media’s DEI lead shared a companywide note three days later acknowledging the attack and pointing staffers to some available resources such as grief counselors. “As a company that manages multiple news organizations, we do not typically send communications company-wide about global conflicts,” the message, which was shared with JI, also clarified.

Meanwhile, the former staffers recalled noticing a contact on Vox’s DEI team had, without explanation, been avoiding interactions with the Tribe — even as the contact had actively supported a Middle East and North Africa employee group. They were later told by other members that the DEI contact, who was new to the workforce, was struggling to deal with the conflict in Israel and Gaza and preferred not to engage on the issue with the Tribe — an explanation former staffers said they found unconvincing.

Prior to its acquisition by Murdoch in May, Vox Media’s DEI team was formally eliminated and its employee resource groups were dissolved, according to a source familiar with the matter. A spokesperson for Murdoch did not return JI’s request for comment.

Even before Oct. 7, Jewish staffers confronted some challenges tied to their identities as well as the crisis in the Middle East, former employees told JI. When Jewish staffers decided to name their resource group the Tribe, for instance, their choice initially garnered pushback because of its ties to Native Americans. The group was otherwise forbidden from using a blue and white logo until employees explained that the color scheme harkened back to the Bible and was not making direct reference to the Israeli flag.

By July 2024, some Tribe members succeeded in presenting a company antisemitism training led by the American Jewish Committee, one of the country’s most prominent pro-Israel groups. Before the event, Tribe members were informed by superiors it would be nonmandatory but open to anyone who wanted to attend, provoking frustrations among Tribe members who asked if a staffer who in a Slack channel had characterized Zionism as “demonic” would be required to join.

Steve Gosset, a spokesperson for the AJC, confirmed the organization conducted an antisemitism training at Vox Media in 2024 that was led by Saba Soomekh, an Iranian American author and professor who is the group’s director of training and education. (Soomekh did not respond to a request for comment from JI.)

The training session, according to organizers, drew close to 200 attendees and touched on such topics as the history of antisemitism, the meaning of Zionism and the fraught connotations of charged slogans like “from the river to the sea,” which some critics regard as a call to eliminate Israel as a Jewish state.

But while the hour-long virtual program garnered some positive reviews on Slack, some supporters felt their efforts were diminished when another Jewish staffer

leading a women’s employee resource group said in a Slack message that the event left her “very unsettled and confused,” while accusing the AJC of promoting “misinformation” in a session she claimed “felt like a divestment” from Vox Media’s values.

The employee said that she had “been approached by several staffers who were disappointed and offended by” the event and asked “to be connected with senior leadership at Vox” regarding her concerns, according to screenshots of the public note reviewed by JI.

One staffer in the Jewish employee resource group wrote in a Slack message afterward that the hostile question-and-answer session “really made me think that there were people who joined the training with less than good intentions, and it’s kind of breaking my heart right now.”

Another Tribe member voiced dismay that the event had “ended with people still somehow trying to spin how some things are justified or should be allowed,” adding, “If the editorial teams haven’t discussed how their coverage can contribute to hate speech and hate crimes, then it should be a mandatory conversation.”

Despite some words of encouragement, staffers felt the initial public backlash undermined their hopes to promote a more constructive internal dialogue about the competing sensitivities inherent in covering such a politically divisive issue as Israel, support for which has plummeted among younger demographics in the years after Oct. 7.

“The damage had already been done,” one of the organizers said of the staffer’s Slack message. “We worked so hard to have brought” the AJC program, “and we were so very proud of it. For a lot of people who didn’t feel positively about the training, it gave them a lot of fuel.”

A former staffer said it was “important to speak out” about the company’s recent direction on Israel, even after leaving. “It matters,” the staffer told JI, “how the narrative is shaped on this issue.” ♦

Rising Jewish Democrat in Michigan won't endorse El-Sayed

State Rep. Noah Arbit said El-Sayed aligns with people who want to 'purge the Democratic Party and American life of Zionists and, therefore, most Jews'

By Matthew Kassel

Noah Arbit, a rising Jewish Democrat in Michigan's state Legislature, has been a vocal critic of Abdul El-Sayed, a fellow Democrat whose Senate campaign in the key battleground state has exposed deep divisions within the Jewish community.

But until now, Arbit had not yet publicly clarified if he is willing to set aside his differences and endorse El-Sayed, like some prominent Jewish Democrats in the state who have recently announced their support despite reservations with his hostile stances on Israel and approach to countering antisemitism.

In an interview with *Jewish Insider* on Monday, Arbit, 31, confirmed that he would not be endorsing El-Sayed, pointing to what he called the nominee's promotion of antisemitic conspiracy theories and affiliations with extremist figures on the far left, among other issues he cast as deal-breakers in the closely contested race.

"At the very least," El-Sayed "aligns himself with people who want to purge the Democratic Party and American life of Zionists and, therefore, most Jews," Arbit said. "That is unacceptable."

Asked if he believed El-Sayed himself is antisemitic, Arbit referenced a fiery speech he had delivered last week on the floor of the state House in which he had argued there was no longer a meaningful distinction between anti-Zionism and anti-Jewish prejudice at a moment when "the logical leap to justifying violence against Israelis and all Jews becomes so tiny as to be invisible."

"The definition of antisemitism as just a shorthand for hating Jews is useless because you don't have to hate Jews to be a vector for conspiracy theories," he told *JJ*. "I think it's very, very clear that the fulcrum of Abdul's campaign was an antisemitic conspiracy about AIPAC being the No. 1 obstacle toward universal healthcare, better

schools and better roads in Michigan and in America."

"It's just a dog whistle," Arbit said of El-Sayed's demonization of AIPAC, the pro-Israel group that spent more than \$30 million opposing his primary campaign and is now backing his rival, former GOP Rep. Mike Rogers. "It is a neat, clever argument. You take an unpopular policy and you say this is the reason why you don't have nice things. It is the demagogue's oldest trick in the book."

While Arbit declined to share how he will vote in the November election, which could help decide control of the Senate, he strongly suggested he would not be casting a ballot either for El-Sayed or Rogers, calling both candidates "unacceptable options for Michigan" who "threaten" his constituents. "That," he said, "is a tragic place to be."

"I feel that it is a moral question for each voter to answer as to who is frankly less threatening to them," said Arbit, who on Monday joined the Nonnegotiable Michigan campaign laying out a series of demands to El-Sayed related to Jewish safety and Israel's right to exist. "For me personally," Arbit noted, "I don't know how to choose between" El-Sayed and Rogers, whom he condemned as a "bootlicker" for President Donald Trump.

His struggle to reckon with a polarizing election reflects the difficult choices and sense of alienation now facing many Jewish Democrats in the state who have begun to question their place in a party to which they have long been loyal.

"We have a group text with a number of Jewish Democratic elected officials where it's basically one long commiseration session about everything going on," Arbit said. "How we feel under siege and under assault by people we consider friends and ideological allies and basically watching the radicalization of our party."

"It's a very difficult position to be in as a liberal Jewish Democrat," he explained.

With just over a month until the general election, Arbit stands out as one of the most prominent Jewish Democrats withholding support for El-Sayed, even as the Democratic nominee has ramped up his efforts to mend fences with skeptical Jewish voters who remain uncomfortable with his views and feel he has not fully addressed their concerns.

Even though El-Sayed has condemned antisemitism while pledging his commitment to Jewish safety, his uncompromising stances on Israel have continued to raise questions among critics. He has also faced some scrutiny from Jewish Democrats who have cast doubt on the sincerity of his recent apology for equivocating over the attack in March against a synagogue in West Bloomfield, a heavily Jewish Detroit suburb in Arbit's legislative district.

Despite his criticism of El-Sayed, Arbit, who is running for reelection this cycle, said he believed the Democratic nominee will claim victory in the Senate contest. But while Arbit predicted he himself would "probably win West Bloomfield by double digits," he envisioned El-Sayed prevailing in the community by just a couple of points, "if he wins" the area at all.

"I think that there is going to be a massive underperformance by him in communities he hasn't entirely successfully worked to feel comfortable with his candidacy," Arbit elaborated, pointing to what he characterized as "an unwillingness to be accountable for your statements and actions."

"Abdul consistently judges pro-Israel Jews in Michigan, and the entire Zionist movement, by Israel's most extremist elements, such as [Itamar] Ben-Gvir and [Bezalel] Smotrich," Arbit said, referring to far-right ministers in Israeli Prime Minister

Netanyahu's coalition, "yet gets very indignant when people judge him by the most extreme statements of Hasan Piker," a Twitch streamer who has espoused antisemitic rhetoric and with whom El-Sayed campaigned during the primary.

"I have a huge problem with that hypocrisy," Arbit added. "Should you judge a movement by its fringes or shouldn't you? Which is it?"

Arbit, who has long warned of antisemitism in his party, said he did not judge Jewish Democrats who have recently backed El-Sayed — such as Michigan's attorney general, Dana Nessel, who had voiced strong reservations with his candidacy before endorsing him last week.

"I empathize tremendously with people in the Jewish community," he said, while acknowledging that there are many voters in the state who "simply do not want to risk a Republican Senate" and have been weighing the contest accordingly. "Every vote is like comparing apples and oranges," he noted. "Everyone is weighing different factors."

Arbit said he sat down with El-Sayed after he had won the Aug. 4 primary and "explained to him very earnestly" about his upbringing and "understanding of Zionism."

He said it had been "framed by the

understanding that minority groups are only safe under conditions of democracy, freedom and the rule of law, and also how that understanding really led to my empathy for Palestinians and their dispossession in 1948," which had led him to believe that "the best way to right that is a two-state solution."

It was challenging to find common ground, he said. "I think it's very difficult because he won't even commit to a two-state solution, where one of those two states is Jewish," Arbit explained. "We have fundamentally different positions on that."

Still, he credited El-Sayed for speaking with him in spite of their profound disagreements. "I've obviously criticized him publicly," he told JI. "I think that it is a sign of a mature leader for someone who is willing to have a conversation with people who don't agree with them."

"If Abdul wins," he told JI, "my constituents will be his constituents, and it'll be up to him to demonstrate he is also representing all people in West Bloomfield — including the Jewish community — with faith and fidelity. That is a challenge that I would put to him."

For his part, Arbit said his own mission is "to put sand in the gears of both the far right and the far left." His floor speech last week was born out of rising frustration with

what he characterized as a growing radicalization on the far left after Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, terror attacks in Israel. "This conflict has colored my entire tenure," he told JI, "because I took office in January 2023."

"I think that most criticism of Israel these days is not just about Israel's policies, but is calling into question the very foundation of the state," he said. The far left, he argued, has "no agenda to improve the rights and lives of Palestinians. It is all about hating Israel, and that is what makes this movement so vacuous and so dangerous."

With regard to El-Sayed's potential elevation to the Senate, Arbit clarified that he was "not really worried about" Israel's future. "I'm worried about the climate for Jews in Michigan and in the Democratic Party."

"This is an incredibly obviously uncomfortable time to be a liberal Zionist Democrat," Arbit told JI. "We are about to find out whether there is enough space in the party for those of us who are good Democrats but also are unwilling to relinquish our connections and commitments to our homeland — to Israel." ♦

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While others pivot away, new donor collective Har Initiative doubles down on combating antisemitism

The collaborative, which has mobilized \$75 million and plans to distribute \$120 million more, is co-chaired by the heads of the Samuelli and Blank Foundations, featuring a diverse array of funders

By Jay Deitcher

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

Immediately after the Oct. 7 massacres in Israel, Jewish philanthropists poured money into more than 160 organizations claiming to fight antisemitism — but the problem was, according to a 2025 Jewish Funders Network's study, the initiatives were often

redundant and couldn't prove they accomplished anything.

The study provided further evidence that the Jewish community's efforts to combat antisemitism were not effective — a realization that has been leading many Jewish funders to pivot away from the field. Earlier this year, *New York Times* columnist Bret Stephens accentuated the need to shift funding away from combating

antisemitism at February's 46th annual State of World Jewry address, calling for the American Jewish community to dismantle the Anti-Defamation League and focus on education and instilling Jewish pride instead.

At the same time as many were pulling funding, a coalition of donors was doubling down on combating the world's oldest hatred through innovative initiatives

centered on building Jewish pride, supporting boycotted initiatives, cultivating cross-cultural partnerships and educating potential allies, instead of attacking antisemites who refused to listen.

Formed in 2024 — and first revealed in the most recent edition of Maimonides Fund's *Sapir* quarterly journal— the Har Initiative mobilized nearly \$75 million from 11 donors to support 15 grantees between 2024 and 2025. For most grantees, the funding was the largest gift ever received in their organizations' history.

Co-chaired by Lindsey Spindle, president of the Samuelli Foundation, and Fay Twersky, president of the Arthur Blank Family Foundation, the Har Initiative is not a pooled fund. Instead, donors choose from a portfolio of initiatives with the floor for participation set at a \$10 million commitment that can be spread across grantees. Investments are for five years of unrestricted funding, allowing grantees room to pivot and take risks.

"Historically in Jewish philanthropy, people give in very short time frames and under a large set of restrictions," Spindle told *eJewishPhilanthropy*. "In the private equity world, for example, when someone comes with a pitch deck to an investor around a new idea, oftentimes, they get five years of money and a lot of runway to figure out how to make a company work. If that's how we know innovation works in the private sector, why wouldn't we treat the same thing in the social sector when we have a problem that is this complicated and dynamic?"

The initiative is made up of 12 funders, including The Tepper Foundation, The Einhorn Collaborative, the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Philanthropies and Maimonides Fund. Many partners are not typical Jewish philanthropic heavyweights. Funders come from across the U.S. with vast ideological differences, which is important, according to Spindle. "When we offer people a range of choices, it means that people have some agency. It's really pluralism in action," she said.

Prior to Oct. 7, the Samuelli Foundation funded "broadly across a set of established, traditional Jewish organizations (like you'd

spread peanut butter over a slice of bread)," Spindle wrote in her essay in *Sapir*.

After the massacres and in the wake of the Gaza war, Broadcom Co-founder Henry Samuelli, his wife, Susan, and Spindle "were stunned in the revelation of how deep and broad and entrenched and violent antisemitism had become," Spindle said. "We felt like whatever we had been doing before was wholly insufficient, and we needed a new way to work to engage on these issues."

With this realization, Spindle contacted her friend Twersky and Home Depot Co-founder Arthur Blank, who reached out to other funders. Everyone agreed that the moment called for "big ideas," Spindle said. "Innovation, big thinking, risk taking and a willingness to try to work in ways that we haven't worked together before."

Members of the collective first met in November 2024 at a retreat center in the hills of Montana, leading to the initiative's name — "har" meaning mountain in Hebrew. The name is also symbolic of the arduous task ahead of the donors.

Instead of screaming at people over antisemitism, the initiative combats the virus "through the lens of building — building new alliances, building healthier discourse on Israel, building safety in institutions — and we have a specific category that is also about Jewish thriving, but it has to have a specific relation to antisemitism," Spindle said.

In order to create innovative change, funders need to take risks, Spindle said. "You have to be willing to lose some money or some social standing or friends, all of which I think almost every Jewish person I know has. But what people feel like they're gaining through participation here [is] real community, people with shared values and interests."

Post-Oct. 7, many funders invested based on a gut reaction, Mark Charendoff, the president of Maimonides Fund, told eJP, but there are initiatives that clearly make an impact on antisemitism, such as security at synagogues and researching the algorithm of how antisemitism spreads online.

"There's a difference between trying to convince antisemites to love us, which strikes me as not a particularly good use of

money, versus educating people about the reality on the ground in Israel or of the Gaza war," Charendoff said.

A benefit of working in coalition with other funders is getting exposed to new initiatives, he said. "A lot of times you go into meetings, and you know everyone there really, really well... But when I walk into Har, it's a lot of people that I don't know... A lot of [other Har donors'] grantees are not our grantees, and that makes us smarter when we interact with people that we hadn't had that chance to interact with up until now."

It's unrealistic for philanthropists to only fund proven initiatives that target antisemitism, William Foster, the managing director of The Bridgespan Group, which provides consulting to Har grantees, told eJP. Especially since antisemitism hadn't been taken as seriously in the U.S. until the October 2018 mass shooting at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh that left 11 worshippers dead.

"We're in the first inning of trying to figure out what to do," Foster said. "There's very little that's proven in the nonprofit sector, period, so the notion that in the first handful of years of taking contemporary antisemitism seriously, we would only fund proven things [is not realistic]... The notion that Jewish thriving has all kinds of proven [research], not so true."

To document an initiative's impact, The Bridgespan Group helps the grantees create a five-year plan, measuring if they reach their goals, which can pivot if needed, each year. Nearly, every grantee exceeded their targets in their inaugural years. There are also Har grantees that are focused specifically on researching strategies that work, including the Polarization and Extremism Research and Innovation Lab (PERIL) at American University.

"Our whole ethos is test, test, test," Cynthia Miller-Idriss, a sociologist and professor at American University and the founding director of PERIL, told eJP.

PERIL creates 75-second videos that "pre-bunk" viewers for antisemitic conspiracy theories with "a tiny microdose of the propaganda, and then we have a 15-second counter narrative where you tell them this is why it isn't true."

The institute does large research trials on the videos' impact. Their 2024-25 videos were shown to lead to a 12% reduction in antisemitism and a 24% increase in viewers' willingness to speak up when they hear someone say something antisemitic.

"It's like testing a medication," Miller-Idriss said. "You have to make sure it works in a live trial before you send it out because a lot of people with good intentions design interventions that have the potential to backfire and make the problem worse."

PERIL's "pre-bunking" techniques have been incorporated in another Har-funded initiative, The Tell Institute, which was founded in 2024 and launched in 2025 by author Dara Horn to educate public school students about antisemitism.

The institute's eight-lesson crash course teaches antisemitism as a lie told throughout history, not a bigotry similar to racism. The lie blames Jews for whatever a person holds dear.

"We are introducing students to pattern recognition," Horn said. "In other words, it's not don't hate people, it's how might you be being manipulated and how can you recognize that pattern when you encounter it?"

Support from the Har Institute has allowed Tell to expand beyond the 12 schools in which the program was launched. Today, it is taught in over 40 public schools and in Hebrew schools because even Jewish students need a dose of the vaccine.

Har's support was "a game changer for

[the Jewish Book Council] and helping us launch Nu Reads," Naomi Firestone-Teeter, CEO of JBC, told eJP. JBC's bimonthly book club was launched in reaction to boycotts across the literary world, where Jewish authors have had appearances canceled and are listed on Zionist blacklists.

Within four months of launching in October 2025, Nu Reads had over 2,000 readers signed up to receive books by Jewish authors. Having the backing from a coalition of esteemed philanthropists gave the Nu Reads credibility, allowing the JBC to find additional funding for the initiative, Firestone-Teeter said.

Additional grantees include Center for Countering Digital Hate, Civitas, Fuente Latina, Or Initiative, Resetting the Table, Sixpoint, Facing History and Ourselves, Interfaith America, Project Shema, Repair the World, Tel Aviv Institute and Hillel Campus Partners, which supports universities that want to make changes to support Jewish students.

"Through our expansive work with universities both before and after Oct. 7, we recognized the deep structural challenges impeding effective responses to clear cases of antisemitism," Adam Lehman, CEO of Hillel International, told eJP. "We realized that to break through these deeper structural issues, we need to go beyond antisemitism education by sharing best practices and reactive troubleshooting. We are also piloting longer-term engagements with university partners that encourage real change in areas such as student codes of

conduct, campus safety and security measures, and cross-campus bridge-building initiatives."

Not all grantees are Jewish. "It seems improbable to me that we are going to reduce antisemitism on our own," Spindle said. "It seems way more likely that we're going to reduce antisemitism when we're building alliances with people who care about a society that is less hateful, less divided, less polarized... Our personal view is that innovations can come from all corners of the world."

The next gathering of the partners will be held in October. Bret Stephens will be in attendance to speak with donors. Having Stephens present is important, Twersky told eJP, because "We've always had Jewish thriving as part of our pathway... We just don't think it's the only pathway. We both say, 'OK, what you're arguing makes sense, but we don't think you have the only answer either.'"

At the event, Har will announce 11 new grantees receiving \$120 million, another step on the long slog up the mountain.

Even though combating antisemitism may seem hopeless to some, "I am a pathologically positive person," Spindle said. "If you are in the world of philanthropy, you believe that change is possible... Social change is generational work. We didn't get to where we are overnight, and we're not going to fix it in a day. This takes long-term, sustained investment in a very dynamic environment." ♦

OCTOBER 1, 2026

Elisha Wiesel: U.S. Holocaust Museum has ‘unique responsibility’ to counter genocide claims against Israel

Wiesel, the son of Holocaust survivor and Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel, pointed to the museum’s past work documenting atrocities in Sudan and against the Yazidis and Rohingya

By Matthew Shea

Elisha Wiesel urged the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum on Wednesday to speak up against what he called the false accusation that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza, arguing that the institution his father helped create has a “unique responsibility” to address the issue.

Wiesel, the son of Holocaust survivor and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Elie Wiesel, made the appeal while delivering special remarks at “Honoring the Life, Lessons and Legacy of Elie Wiesel.” The event, held on what would have been his father’s 98th birthday, marked a decade since the elder Wiesel’s death. It was organized with the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, the State Department’s Office of the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism, the Embassy of Romania and *Moment* magazine.

The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum has not endorsed accusations of “genocide” regarding Israel’s military actions in Gaza, but neither has the organization issued formal institutional statements to address or quell the label. Instead, the museum has maintained its core organizational focus: educating the public about the Holocaust, condemning the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas terrorist attacks and raising awareness about the subsequent rise in global antisemitism.

This neutral stance has not shielded the museum from intense political crossfire. Pro-Israel advocates and some Jewish community leaders argue that Holocaust institutions have a moral obligation to explicitly reject the “genocide” accusation, calling it a form of Holocaust inversion and a weaponization of Jewish history against Jewish people. Some have pointed to the Illinois Holocaust Museum, which distributed internal guides clarifying that

the Gaza conflict lacks genocidal intent, as a model the national museum should follow.

“But on one question, this museum has a unique responsibility, and it is one we must face together,” Wiesel said. “Since October 7, the word genocide has been used as a weapon against Israel on campuses, at the United Nations, and even by a member of your own governing council. The charge is false.”

Wiesel pointed to the museum’s past work documenting atrocities in Darfur and against the Yazidis and Rohingya, arguing that the institution has the expertise and authority to properly address genocide accusations against Israel in a credible format.

“You made your own findings for Darfur, the Yazidis, Rohingya,” he said. “You have the scholars, the credibility and the mandate to do the same here to explain with the rigor you applied to Burma why the genocide label does not fit Gaza and what the misuse of Holocaust language does to Jews around the world.”

“Declining to join the accusation is not the same as dismantling it. You can do that. You have that power,” Wiesel added. “All of these other Holocaust and genocide museums around the country, I think, would respond to that leadership...That was my father’s vision: a place that remembers and then acts.”

Wiesel also referenced several voices within the museum’s broader community who have spoken out on the issue.

“Stu Eisenstadt, a dear friend of my parents, who helped birth this museum, has written about how the terms “genocide,” “Holocaust,” and “Nazi” are being weaponized to attack the legitimacy of the Jewish state,” Wiesel said. “In July, Chairman [Jeff] Miller invited [New York City] Mayor [Zohran] Mamdani here to learn what genocide actually looks like.

These are brave voices, and they speak from within your family. I am grateful to them both. What I am asking for you to consider is that the institution itself find its voice alongside theirs.”

Wiesel also placed his appeal in the context of what he sees as a broader misuse of Holocaust terminology against Israel and Jews, something he says is fomenting global antisemitism.

“The genocide charge turns the Jewish state into the new Nazis. It turns the Jewish people back into a threat to be removed from the family of nations. It inverts the Holocaust,” he said. “Those who start the accusation know exactly what they are doing. They know that the uninformed will spread hatred like wildfire.”

Wiesel acknowledged that the museum faces constraints as a federal institution that private citizens do not, and expressed a deep admiration for its work and efforts in honoring his father’s legacy. He said his appeal was rooted in his deep connection to the institution through his father.

The elder Wiesel was appointed by President Jimmy Carter in 1978 to chair the President’s Commission on the Holocaust, and later served as founding chairman of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council, helping drive the museum’s creation. The museum opened in Washington in 1993 after years of work by Wiesel and others.

“The [U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum] is an actual child of my father,” Wiesel said. “He had it in his mind before anybody else did. He convinced a president. He convinced a country. He fought through the bureaucracy, which is something he hated to do.”

Wiesel described the museum as a “little sibling” his father left him and said he remains “grateful to everyone who works here and to everyone who walks through

these doors for carrying on this vision, for showing the truth every day.”

In an interview with *Jewish Insider* following the event, Wiesel said that special relationship made the appeal particularly difficult.

“It wasn’t easy to tell the [U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum] tonight that I think they’re missing an opportunity,” Wiesel told *JL*. “I had to really think hard on how do you do that diplomatically and with love, and with all of the good intentions, and make people feel it?”

“It’s not a criticism, it’s not an attack, it’s how can you have a Holocaust museum that bears my father’s etchings all over its place, all over its soul, and Israel is under attack?” he continued. “And one of the biggest lies affecting the Jewish people is that Israel is committing genocide. [The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum] has the expertise and the power and the standing

to weigh in, and what a difference it would make!”

In making the case, Wiesel said he was inspired by what he learned from his father about speaking truthfully even when doing so could come at the expense of political access or personal relationships.

The younger Wiesel pointed to footage of his father urging President Ronald Reagan, as a friend, not to visit the Bitburg cemetery in 1985. The visit, planned during Reagan’s trip to West Germany with Chancellor Helmut Kohl, drew criticism because members of the Waffen-SS were buried there. Wiesel recalled his father sweating as he made his case.

He also referenced his father turning to President Bill Clinton at the museum’s 1993 dedication to plead for an end to the bloodshed in Bosnia. In both instances, Wiesel presented remembrance not as a

reason to stay silent, but as an obligation to speak

“My father stood always with truth and the concept that you have to fight lies,” Wiesel said. “We have to fight the lies wherever we are, and with whatever platform we have. We can’t wait for somebody else to do it. We can’t hope some other leader is going to do it for us. Whatever our circle is, whatever our platform is, we have to use it.”

Still, Wiesel made clear that his remarks came from his own convictions.

“I felt the need that if I’m going to come here, I want to come and not say what my father would have said, but speak the words that I’m inspired by my father to say,” Wiesel said. “And tonight, that message was about what I think the museum can really do to make a difference in antisemitism: by being clear that Israel is not committing genocide.” ♦

SEPTEMBER 30, 2026

U.S. protection revives Hormuz oil traffic as debate shifts to how long it can last

*‘Iran’s fundamental choice remains the same: negotiate from a weakening position or continue escalating against a president who has already shown that he is prepared to continue applying pressure,’ former Trump administration Middle East envoy Jason Greenblatt told *JL**

By Matthew Shea

U.S. efforts to protect commercial shipping through the Strait of Hormuz have helped revive Persian Gulf oil exports and weaken Iran’s grip on the waterway, experts now acknowledge, but a debate is brewing over how durable those gains are, and whether Washington is willing to sustain the costly naval commitment that underpins them.

Persian Gulf crude exports rebounded to nearly 13 million barrels a day in September, approaching 72% to 80% of pre-war volumes as regional flows head back toward normal levels. According to maritime tracker Kpler, crude oil moving specifically through the Strait of Hormuz climbed to a wartime high average of 7.4 million barrels a day — supplemented by alternative pipeline and ship-to-ship routes

— with an average of 17 to 19 tankers securely transiting the waterway daily under U.S. military protection.

U.S. military protection and the absence of confirmed Iranian attacks for nearly a week have helped commercial traffic increase, while Gulf exporters have also relied on ship-to-ship transfers in the Gulf of Oman and the United Arab Emirates’ Fujairah pipeline, which bypasses the Strait. In addition, Saudi Arabia resumed oil shipments from its Red Sea port of Yanbu after restarting the East-West pipeline, restoring a critical export route that allows the kingdom to bypass the Strait of Hormuz.

Analysts said that pressure could potentially increase Tehran’s incentive to ratchet up military tensions. In a video

address on Tuesday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel had received “indications” that adversaries would try to attack the country ahead of its upcoming elections, slated for Oct. 27.

Ari Cicurel, associate director of foreign policy at the Jewish Institute for National Security of America, said the recent developments have challenged assumptions about how effectively Iran could use the strait to constrain international commerce.

“I think some in the foreign policy community underestimated the U.S. ability to break Iran’s effective hold over the strait, particularly the logistical capacity to sustain an alternative shipping route and protect commercial traffic,” Cicurel said. “Iran can impose costs on shipping, but the

U.S. response has shown that the regime cannot translate those costs into a sustained blockade that preserves the same level of economic leverage as U.S. operations.”

The shift has reshaped Tehran’s relationship with the companies that depend on the waterway, Cicurel said, making it harder for Iran to dictate who can use the strait and on what terms. “The Navy’s blockade and protection of commercial shipping have shifted the cost of disrupting the strait onto Iran, which has lost most of its exports while its Gulf neighbors have increased their oil shipments,” he said. “Shippers now have a route through the strait that does not depend on Tehran’s permission” — eroding Iran’s leverage in negotiations.

But Cicurel said Iran can still attempt to influence decisions by creating enough uncertainty around the safety of the strait to deter companies from using it.

“Even with its leverage diminished, the Iranian regime has repeatedly withstood economic pressure by diverting money from the Iranian people to its military, and it will likely continue to do so to keep funding attacks as its revenue shrinks. Iran will likely keep launching calibrated attacks to extract as much of its remaining leverage as possible and to convince insurers and shipping companies the strait remains unsafe,” Cicurel said.

Jason Greenblatt, former White House Middle East envoy in the first Trump administration, similarly argued that U.S. efforts to reopen the strait were underestimated.

“As is often the case, much of the media, diplomatic community and foreign-policy establishment wrung their hands, predicted disaster, blamed President [Donald] Trump for the war and underestimated him and the enormous military and economic power of the United States,” Greenblatt said. “The conventional wisdom was that Iran’s leverage in the Strait of Hormuz could not be broken. President Trump demonstrated how that leverage can be eroded when Tehran is confronted with American military strength, relentless economic pressure and a president willing to use both.”

Greenblatt cautioned that the conflict is “far from over,” and warned that “complex and dangerous situations like this take time to resolve.”

“I expect Tehran will test the United States again,” he said. “But Iran’s fundamental choice remains the same: negotiate from a weakening position or continue escalating against a president who has already shown that he is prepared to continue applying pressure, regardless of the critics or the political calendar.”

Elliott Abrams, who served as Iran envoy during the first Trump administration and is now a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, said the U.S. Navy’s performance has exceeded some experts’ expectations.

Still, he said, “I do not expect a deal soon, before the U.S. elections, because that would be a gift to Trump — unless Trump is willing to accept terms that greatly advantage Iran, which I also don’t expect right now.”

Garrett Nada, a policy analyst at the Israel Policy Forum, however, asserted there was “little doubt” that the U.S. could effectively regain control of the strait. The harder question, he said, is whether the current approach can be maintained as the financial and operational costs accumulate.

Nada cited a *Bloomberg* report estimating that the U.S. naval blockade of Iran has costed \$32.5 million per day, which he said captures only part of the resources Washington is committing to keeping commercial traffic moving.

“That estimate does not even include the additional operation costs of aerial and maritime drones, ships, manned aircraft, satellites, U.S. personnel and other U.S. assets used to guide and protect commercial traffic,” Nada said. “In the process, U.S. forces have come under Iranian attack, including from small boats, missiles, and drones. Two weeks ago, eight U.S. Marines were injured in a cruise missile attack, for example.”

That same report also outlined how Washington’s naval blockade has drained its global military power, decreasing available resources for deployment elsewhere in the world. Nada said the operation is also imposing costs on the

private companies that have resumed using the waterway, creating another question about how long the current system can function.

“Aside from increased wait times for transit and more complicated travel arrangements, shippers have to pay higher crew compensation, charter rates, insurance and reinsurance premiums, and other operating expenses,” he added.

Even with those costs, Nada said the renewed traffic represents a meaningful strategic setback for Tehran because each vessel that successfully passes through the strait reduces Iran’s ability to use the waterway as leverage.

“The combination of sanctions and the blockade may be pushing Iran to try diplomacy with the U.S. again to secure its interests,” he said. “If diplomacy fails, however, Iran will be more likely to resort to military escalation as a way to restore some of its leverage.”

Matthew Levitt, a senior fellow at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, similarly identified the durability of the U.S. commitment as the central unanswered question.

“The question is how long the United States will be willing to maintain the type of commitment necessary to enable oil flows at this level,” Levitt said. “This, even as customers have yet to feel economic relief at home and the price of diesel and other commodities like fertilizer remain sky high.”

Daniel Shapiro, the U.S. ambassador to Israel during the Obama administration and a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council, said the increased oil flows are “significant” but cautioned against viewing them as evidence that the broader economic consequences of the conflict have been resolved.

“The increased flow of oil through the Strait of Hormuz is significant. Combined with the blockade of Iranian ports and expanded sanctions, it is putting pressure on the Iranian economy and relieving some of the international economic fallout. But only some. Oil remains over \$100 per barrel. Gas averages \$4.50 per gallon. Diesel is at \$6.50,” Shapiro said.

The recovery in oil traffic also masks

continued disruptions elsewhere in the region, Shapiro said, with other commodities still struggling to reach global markets and attacks on alternative supply routes offsetting some of the gains through the strait.

“Few other commodities — natural gas, fertilizer, helium — are getting through the strait. And the Houthis offset some of the Hormuz gain by bombing the Saudi pipeline that was bringing 5 million barrels per day to the market via the Red Sea. Iran also has escalation options it has not activated yet,” Shapiro said.

Shapiro said the restored flows are a “limited tactical” achievement that do not resolve the underlying strategic problem. If the U.S. eventually reduces its presence, he said, Iran could again seek to assert control over the waterway.

“The limited tactical success of restoring some of the pre-war oil flow through the strait has come at enormous, and unsustainable, cost, and masks the lack of a strategy to keep Iran from ultimately reasserting its control over the strait when, inevitably, the U.S. scales down its operations,” Shapiro said. “The larger point is that the struggle for control of the Strait of Hormuz is a massive, costly undertaking made necessary by an ill-advised war. Will the U.S. Navy be called upon to maintain a blockade of Iranian ports and escort oil tankers ... forever?”

“It has already put enormous strain on the Navy, pulled assets from elsewhere, and will leave us with delayed maintenance and disrupted deployment rotations for years to come,” he added.

Kristin Diwan, a senior resident scholar at the Arab Gulf States Institute, said alternative routes have been a key part of

increased oil flows, but have not restored a fully reliable passageway through the region.

“U.S. and Gulf coordination on alternative routes and shuttle ships have increased the flow of oil and weakened Iran’s leverage in the Strait. But this is a daily battle that comes at some cost,” Diwan said. “The Iranians continue to strike ships involved in the transfer, preventing a consistent and reliable passage. And some products, most importantly diesel fuel and LNG, are more constrained and have few, if any, alternative routes.”

The pressure on Iran’s economy could nevertheless be creating an opening for diplomacy, Diwan said, as Tehran weighs whether to make concessions in exchange for an end to restrictions on its oil exports.

“The Iranians are contemplating compromise to end the ban on their oil exports which indicates that the economic blockade is beginning to bite. Still a ‘mini-deal,’ based on – but less than – the previous MOU agreement, appears to be a long-shot. Internal disagreement within the Iranian establishment and conflicting impulses from President Trump will be hard for Qatari mediators to overcome,” she said.

Meanwhile, Jonathan Ruhe, a fellow at JINSA, said the “real underestimation” was on the part of the Trump administration. He noted that while the oil is “flowing again,” Washington should have heeded presumptions that Tehran could potentially close the strait during the conflict.

“The real underestimation was the Trump administration’s failure to anticipate and preempt Iran’s initial efforts to threaten the strait. Extensive U.S. war plans built this exact scenario into their assumptions, but it

was discounted,” Ruhe said. “The U.S. military, particularly the Navy, always had the ability to counter Iran’s unconventional maritime threats, but doing so became a lot harder once Iran dropped its first mines in the water and scared off commercial shipping with its opening drone strikes. Only recently have those mines, radars and other Iranian military assets been degraded, enabling the tough work of naval escorting to begin belatedly.”

Ruhe explained that while the flow of oil presents several diplomatic and economic benefits for the U.S. in its confrontation with Iran, he warned that Tehran’s leverage in talks may not shift.

“There are many diplomatic, economic, and operational benefits to getting oil flowing again. Yet it’s hard to imagine how any of this meaningfully changes Tehran’s negotiating posture,” Ruhe said. “Tellingly, Iran’s recent seven-day plan offered no concessions compared to the June MOU, when traffic through Hormuz was much lower. For all the military and economic pounding it has taken, the regime has been predictably stubborn in resisting Trump’s demands.”

“If the recent upsurge in Hormuz traffic proves sustainable, and if the U.S. naval blockade on Iran remains effective, the regime could see diminishing downside in restarting attacks upstream from Hormuz, targeting the Arabian Gulf, commercial vessels, and energy sites with mines, drones, and missiles,” Ruhe continued. “Those strikes proved incredibly successful early in the war, and Iran currently has no reason to believe that’s no longer the case.” ♦

SEPTEMBER 30, 2026

Passenger recounts dramatic effort to save Israel-bound FlyDubai flight

Yaniv Hayoun said he helped overpower the co-pilot and briefly took control of the aircraft after the captain was stabbed

By AJ Rodriguez

Still wearing a bloodstained shirt, Yaniv Hayoun described to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Wednesday how he rushed into the cockpit of a FlyDubai flight, helped overpower a co-pilot accused of stabbing the captain and briefly grabbed the aircraft's controls as the plane was in rapid descent.

Hayoun — who, along with the other passengers on board, had just touched down in Israel after making an emergency landing in Saudi Arabia and was immediately invited to meet with the prime minister — said he entered the cockpit after hearing screams and found the wounded captain as well as the co-pilot attempting to destroy the controls. He pulled the suspected attacker away and called on other passengers to help restrain him before returning to the cockpit.

With the aircraft still descending, Hayoun said he pulled back on the controls in an effort to stabilize the plane until another pilot traveling aboard the flight took over. Asked by Netanyahu how he

knew what to do, Hayoun pointed to an unlikely source: “Air Crash Investigation,” the series chronicling aviation disasters.

The incident, which Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz called a “jihadist terrorist attack attempt,” captured worldwide attention as an example of the danger everyday Israelis face from terrorism, as well as their heroism and resilience.

Despite being seriously injured, Capt. Smit Machchhar, an Indian national with 13 years of experience as a pilot, was reported to be in stable condition by the Indian Embassy in Riyadh later on Wednesday. Netanyahu hailed him as a “true hero” who had “saved the lives of 174 people” aboard. One passenger was also lightly injured and treated by Magen David Adom after returning to Israel.

The incident quickly prompted a security response in Israel, with Netanyahu holding briefings and ordering heightened checks on pilots flying into the country. The new measures will include verifying the identities of pilots aboard both Israeli and

foreign carriers, according to the Prime Minister's Office.

The prime minister spoke with UAE President Mohammed bin Zayed and later with President Donald Trump as Israeli officials continued to assess the attack and its implications for aviation security. Trump said Netanyahu briefed him at length on the incident and described the co-pilot as “perhaps a terrorist or perhaps a whack-job.” He also praised Hayoun, noting that he is a plumber by trade. “I think it's the most amazing story,” Trump said.

FlyDubai, meanwhile, temporarily suspended flights to Israel while the incident remains under investigation. El Al said it expects to resume service between Tel Aviv and Dubai in November, while Arkia and Israir are also preparing to return to Dubai after the UAE agreed to Israeli security requirements which had been preventing Israeli carriers from restarting after suspending flights during the Iran war. ♦

SEPTEMBER 27, 2026

Sunkist says it will bring back beloved Fruit Gems after national outcry following eJP report

‘We hear you, Sunkist Fruit Gems fans!’ the company wrote, saying it had found a new manufacturer for the kosher synagogue staple

By Judah Ari Gross

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

Days after eJewishPhilanthropy reported on the discontinuation of the synagogue staple Sunkist

Fruit Gems, the company announced on Saturday that it would be bringing back the beloved kosher candy.

“We hear you, Sunkist Fruit Gems fans! The good news: Sunkist Fruit Gems are not

going anywhere,” Sunkist wrote on its Instagram page. “We’ve been working with a new trusted family owned candy maker to help us bring back the same great flavor,

quality, kosher certification, and fruit-forward goodness you know and love.”

The company said that it is “aiming to have them back on shelves very soon.”

In a statement to eJP, the company said that it planned to revive the candies in early 2027, manufactured by Kentucky-based confectionery company CandyRific.

On Thursday, eJP reported that the squishy neon-colored candies had been discontinued in May. For more than a half-century, the individually wrapped, kosher-certified and, crucially, not-too-hard candies had been ubiquitous in synagogues of all denominations and types across the United States, typically used to shower bar and bat mitzvah children, couples about to be wedded and other celebrants.

The discontinuation of the Fruit Gems prompted a good-hearted national backlash, particularly on social media, where people jokingly called the move

“antisemitic” or wrote “*baruch dayan emet*,” the traditional phrase that is used when hearing that a person has died. Writing the next day in eJP, Sara Fredman Aeder, a vice president at the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York, recommended a mass campaign to save the beloved sweets. There were also multiple follow-up articles penned in other news outlets, including one in *The New York Times*, along with online petitions and, eJP has learned, several Shabbat sermons in synagogues.

Sales of the Fruit Gems promptly spiked as synagogues and individuals rushed to purchase the remaining candies in warehouses before they went out of stock, and the suddenly precious Gems sold out on Amazon and Walmart.

A spokesperson for The Ferrara Candy Company, which purchased the firm manufacturing Sunkist Fruit Gems, told eJP

last week that it was possible for the candies to be revived if there were sufficient demand for them.

“You never know,” the representatives said, “but that’s not likely.”

News that Sunkist would indeed revive the candy was met with joy and appreciation on social media, toward both the company and eJP for prompting the outcry with its report.

“You need to have some medal or honorific presented to you as a hero of Judaism,” Dave Cavell, a speechwriter for former Vice President Kamala Harris, wrote to eJP’s Jay Deitcher in response to the news.

“Thank you,” another social media user wrote in response to Sunkist’s Instagram post. “Our special occasions would never be the same without them.”

Jay Deitcher contributed to this report. ♦