

THE WEEKLY PRINT

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OCTOBER 7, 2026

Three years after Oct. 7, Israel's security is 'much better,' but risks loom

Analysts say Israel's enemies are weakened, but warn of unresolved wars, strained ties with Arab neighbors, growing international isolation and a failure to learn the lessons of Oct. 7

By Lahav Harkov

On the third anniversary of the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas-led terror attacks on Israel, the Jewish state's borders are more secure, but there are still dangers looming and lessons to be learned, according to military and national security analysts.

Dan Diker, president of the Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs, told *Jewish Insider* on Tuesday that Israel "is in a better place in terms of its security."

"Kinetically, militarily, in counterterrorism and on the battlefield, we are in a much better place," he said. "We have defensible borders. That's an important point. It's not only in Judea and Samaria [the West Bank], but we have them 10 kilometers deep into Lebanon, security zones in [Syria] up to 20 kilometers, and some strategic depth in Gaza. We have multi-border strategic depth that we need to survive, and a consensus that we're not going anywhere."

"We are safer and more secure than we were three years ago," said Yaakov Katz, author of *While Israel Slept: How Hamas Surprised the Most Powerful Military in the Middle East*. "Iran is significantly weaker,

and its nuclear program is significantly weaker. Hezbollah is a fraction of what it was and Hamas is a fraction of what it was."

The wars of the last three years "created amazing opportunities on all fronts," Katz said. "We can create new alignments, agreements and security arrangements like never before. But that requires political will and courage. ... It could be that this will go to waste."

Katz expressed concern that there has been "no resolution" to any of the conflicts that emerged since Oct. 7.

Israel's enemies "are weaker today, but they will rebuild, like they always do," he said, "and the threat will return and emerge stronger and bigger if there isn't some kind of end strategy."

Diker argued that "the shock and awe of the intelligence collapse on Oct. 7 has shaken Israel's political, military, intelligence and security echelons to their core. It intuitively created a greater sense of modesty and self-criticism about the 'conceptzia,'" the Hebrew term for groupthink in the defense establishment ahead of the attacks.

One of the misconceptions that allowed

the Oct. 7 attacks to take place, Diker said, was an overreliance on technology, for which Israel's current, multi-front military presence is correcting.

"We can withdraw to international lines once [Iranian] terror proxies are disarmed, but ... we are the only ones who can disarm them. They will never do it on their own and no one else will do it. The thought that we didn't need to have a division or many brigades of soldiers in Gaza was false," he added.

Diker said that Israel's concept of national security relied in recent decades on deterrence, early warning, decisive victory and defense, but that since Oct. 7, it has added a new pillar: prevention.

"We are crouched and ready to pounce and destroy any sign of enemy movement, as opposed to waiting to respond to enemy fire or malign action. I think that prevention pillar is evident in Israel's massive use of force against Tehran, its courage in initiating very daring counterterrorism strategies, like the beeper strategy [against Hezbollah], which was very high-risk and high-value," he said.

Katz, however, said that the government

has not learned some of the important lessons of Oct. 7.

"The refusal to properly investigate and study what went wrong puts us in a bad position, because we can repeat these mistakes," he said. "Example in point, the FlyDubai [near-hijacking] had similar contours to how [the Oct. 7 attacks] happened. There was a belief that everything will be OK, and some other guy is in charge. In the end, no one was in charge and something that could have been prevented was not."

Ksenia Svetlova, a former Knesset member and executive director of the Regional Organization for Peace, Economics and Security, said that "tactically, [Israel is] in a better situation, because we mostly took care of Hamas and Hezbollah. They're not at the gates anymore."

However, she warned that Israel's strategic position has declined because of regional weaknesses.

"Oct. 7 and the Iran war showed [Arab allies'] weaknesses," she said. "The Gulf states couldn't defend themselves [against Iran] and America is not rushing to defend them. The only one defending itself and them is Israel, and there are some things the Emiratis are doing. Overall, we see the Arab Middle East's weakness, and two non-Arab countries are setting the tone, Iran and Turkey. And our alliances are with the Arab states, not Iran and Turkey."

Those countries saw how Gulf states behaved in the last year, and are factoring that in. Svetlova said, "We're in a worse situation because they were exposed."

At the same time, she noted that no Arab state with which Israel has diplomatic relations cut off those relations or closed its embassy in Israel, which some did in past conflicts.

"There are deep interests that these relationships are based on, and they are the best and only way to build the relations," Svetlova said. "Hamas and Islamic fundamentalist extremists are a shared enemy. ... We have a lot to offer and [Arab allies] have a lot to offer."

However, she warned against taking those relationships for granted.

"We have the strongest, broadest and

most significant relations with the UAE," Svetlova said, but pointed out that Abu Dhabi did not celebrate the anniversary of the Abraham Accords this year. "It's not because they don't value the accords ... but everything this government does in the West Bank creates tensions."

Svetlova noted that Israel's consistently peaceful borders in the past three years were the ones with Egypt and Jordan, countries with which Israel has peace agreements.

But those countries were destabilized by the war, she said, pointing to weekly demonstrations in Jordan for nearly two years. She said that Jerusalem's handling of the war in Gaza, such as its calls for residents of Gaza to be able to emigrate via Egypt, harmed the relationship.

"It will take years to rehabilitate relations with our neighbors," Svetlova said. "We could have taken advantage of the opportunity to bring those around us closer. Instead, we are eating away at the security of our friends, countries like Jordan that shot down Iranian missiles and cooperate with the U.S., and weakening our own security."

Israel's international standing has shifted dramatically in the West, as well.

"There's no question that three years after Oct. 7, Israel finds itself more isolated than before," Katz said. "Any of the sympathy or solidarity that it benefited from and enjoyed in the immediate aftermath of the Oct. 7 attack has long disappeared."

Katz said Israel may face unprecedented challenges as a result, in terms of economic sanctions, isolation, resolutions in international institutions and charges in international courts.

"This is a whole new front that Israel today is currently completely unprepared for. If, for example, European countries as well as the United States start to sanction banks, financial institutions and construction companies, this could start to impact every person who lives in Israel," he added.

Diker warned that Israel must do more to counter nonmilitary attacks, lest they further damage Israel's national security.

"The major challenge now is fighting the

weaponization of genocide against our people. That hasn't been solved [and] that is really hurting us," he said. "The notion that Israel is an apartheid genocidal state means something far-reaching and very dangerous ... [that] anybody who is amenable to Israel or supports Israel is all of a sudden a supporter of genocide, which means the enemies of Israel go after [them]."

Diker said that while there is a widespread public consensus that there is a major nonmilitary element to the war — "economic, political, social, academic and in the media, not just public diplomacy or PR problems" — the government has not taken that aspect seriously enough.

"We are in a better situation because we understand, and I think we are trying to convince our allies, that this is part and parcel of an Islamic war on the West," he said. "This is such an important part of our national security."

However, he added, "Israel has yet to publicly declare that the non-military multidimensional Iranian, Russian, Chinese, Turkish, Qatari ideological warfare and political warfare is officially a national security threat. Until that happens, the budget and prioritization that Israel must assign to this war won't be there. That's why we keep getting it wrong."

Diker suggested that Israel adopt hybrid warfare, a phrase often used to refer to Russian influence campaigns.

"All versions of nonmilitary warfare have to be embraced, collected and mobilized against our enemies," Diker said.

With an acrimonious election set for the end of the month, politicians have been placing blame on each other, the security establishment and beyond for the failures of Oct. 7, but no state commission of inquiry has been formed to investigate.

"The same leaders responsible for the greatest failure are still in their position," Katz lamented. "There's no culture of accountability in Israel. You can say it doesn't make a difference, but I think it does."

Katz noted that the societal and political issues that divided Israel before Oct. 7 have not been resolved, and that poses an additional danger to Israel.

"Oct. 7 was the clearest example that when you have no social cohesion, you are going to pay a real price on a national security level," he said. "Oct. 7 happened after five elections in 3.5 years, and a year of

judicial reform that ripped the country apart. ... All those fissures in society, all those issues remain and have gotten even bigger: Haredi [conscription in the IDF], judicial reform, 'yes Bibi,' 'no Bibi,' left, right,

the Palestinian question. Everything is still there." ♦

OCTOBER 7, 2026

The Siegels lost their home and community on Oct. 7. Now they're finding their way forward

The former hostages talk with JI about survivor's guilt and rebuilding their lives far from their Kibbutz Kfar Aza home

By Melissa Weiss

Keith Siegel was held captive by Hamas for 484 days. Of those, 433 were spent apart from his wife, Aviva, who was taken hostage with him but released after 51 days in captivity.

"Every day counts," he was quick to point out on Tuesday, when he and Aviva met with *Jewish Insider* in Tel Aviv ahead of the third anniversary of the Oct. 7 Hamas attacks on Israel. "Maybe every hour." Those 433 days were the longest the couple, who have been together since Keith was 20 and Aviva was 18, had ever been apart.

The Siegels — both immigrants to Israel, him from North Carolina and her from South Africa — built their lives and family in the southern Israeli community of Kfar Aza, kilometers from the border with Gaza. It was from their home there — in their own car — that they were taken by terrorists who stormed their kibbutz on the morning of Oct. 7, 2023. In the wake of her release in November 2023, Aviva became one of the most prominent champions for the release of the hostages; after he was freed, Keith joined his wife's efforts.

They now live in northern Israel, near two of their four children but far from what had for decades been their home in the small border community, whose population before the attacks had hovered around 300 families — 900 people in total. Only around 50 families have returned to Kfar Aza, with many, like the Siegels, choosing to resettle elsewhere in the country.

Aviva reflected on the pain she continues to feel. "It's difficult to start your life again in

a new place, not feeling at home after what you went through," she said. "What you want after you go through something is to go home and to recover in your home, but unfortunately, Kfar Aza people can't do that, because we're not able to. It hurts. It really, really hurts."

This year, the Siegels will mark the anniversary with family, far from Kfar Aza. Even as they grieve the loss of their home and community, with all of the hostages returned, they are now able to look toward the future. Their daughter Shir announced over the summer that she was expecting a child, the Siegels' first grandchild to be born in the aftermath of the attacks.

In part to deal with the trauma of her abduction and ordeal in Gaza, Aviva wrote a book about her experiences, *Survived to Tell: A Hostage's True Story of October 7 and 51 Days in Captivity*. It was released in Hebrew earlier this year and in English this month. When she began writing it, her husband of more than 40 years was still a hostage, and she didn't know if he would return alive. As she put pen to paper, she had her grandchildren in mind.

"I remember thinking, 'I have to leave all these words for our grandchildren, because if Keith doesn't come home, and he might never ever come home alive, that they'll be able to read the love between us and how amazing Keith was,'" Aviva reflected.

This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.

Jewish Insider: Tomorrow marks the three-year anniversary of the Oct. 7 attacks.

It's also the first anniversary with all of the hostages home. What does this anniversary mean to the two of you?

Aviva Siegel: This anniversary is, for me, completely different, because a year ago the hostages were still in Gaza. This time, it's painful in a different way, because last [year] I was still doing everything I could to bring them back. This time, having everybody here is making me feel what happened, and what happened on our kibbutz and in our community to the people is really, really breaking me apart. Before, I wasn't able to carry everything at once. So I had Keith back, and we had the hostages back, and now I'm able to carry things that happen to others. That hurts. It really, really, really hurts. ... It's a very hard time starting to understand more about what happened to other people and what they went through, and being able to hear stories in our community.

It hasn't been easy for me at all ... when Keith wasn't out, I could imagine to myself, 'I'm going to go and bury Keith with all these people around me.' ... I knew that things could happen, especially after what happened [in August 2024] to Hersh [Goldberg-Polin] and Carmel [Gat] and Eden [Yerushalmi] and the six hostages [who were killed in captivity]. I, in my thoughts, [felt] more than ever that Keith would come back dead.

So I'm trying to hold on to the good part, that Keith is alive and that he's here, that I'm alive and I'm here with Keith, and we both are here for our families.

JJ: *I remember seeing you at Hersh's funeral, and I was wondering at that time what you were thinking in that moment.*

AS: Well, you know, I loved Hersh's parents so much, and I was so connected to them in my soul. I couldn't not let myself go, but I was full of emotions. I could hardly handle myself. It was like, in a way, saying, "Just disconnect yourself from what's happening now, and try not to feel, because that's Hersh, and [the next one] could be Keith." I felt lonely, frightened, and it was the whole thing about Hersh and Carmel and Eden and the others, it really broke me up into pieces, completely and utterly.

JJ: *Keith, as we hit three years, what does this year mean for you?*

Keith Siegel: It's very dynamic, how I feel and what I think about and the directions that my thoughts take me in. I think a lot about gratitude, and I'm so grateful to be alive, and that Aviva is alive, and that our family is whole. So I think a lot about that, and I think a lot about how important my family is to me, which is something that I thought about so much when I was in captivity, and both worrying about them so much, on the one hand, [and] on the other hand, feeling that they gave me a lot of strength, being empowered by my family, and knowing that I must survive in order to return to my family, because that's the solution to their suffering that they experienced for so long.

So it's both, and now I would say the gratitude, and I would also say the sorrow, the pain, the void [of] 64 people from our community, Kfar Aza, which was at the time a total of 900 people. We lost 64 of them, and 19 were kidnapped. Two of them didn't come back; they were killed in Gaza. The people, many of them are friends, neighbors, acquaintances, people that we've known for a very long time. It's hard for me to deal with the fact that I and we were released alive, and so many others were not.

KS: *Yeah, survivor's guilt. I was very, very active in advocacy until all the hostages came back. I think I was basically focusing pretty much all of my energy and all of my ability to think about and feel in that. And I, after they all came back, [was] gradually entering a new phase of my life.*

JJ: *Aviva, in reading your book I learned*

that after being kidnapped, you didn't know what had happened to your son, Shai [who was also in Kfar Aza]. Keith, did you know over the course of the time that you were in Gaza, did you learn at some point that he had survived?

KS: *Yes, I learned it four-and-a-half months into my time in captivity, on the 21st of February at 8 in the morning, when I heard my daughter in an interview on the radio that one of the terrorists was listening to. It's an Israeli station that broadcasts Arabic, so I was sitting there together with another hostage and a terrorist in a very, very small room, and the radio was on. It was all Arabic, trying to understand ... and all of a sudden, I hear the interviewer introducing my daughter Elan in Arabic. It was about a five-minute interview and I heard all of it, and in the middle of the interview, she said 'Shai is OK.' The interviewer didn't even ask her to. Some of the hostages that were released said that they heard either radio or television. So [my family] knew that information might reach me.*

JJ: *So it was intentional. She wanted to make sure you got that message.*

KS: *So very, very wow. Just to hear her voice, and to have certainty that Aviva made it back alive because I didn't even know that. Just being totally disconnected and knowing virtually nothing about what's going on, and the bits and pieces of information, not knowing if it's true.*

JJ: *You talk a lot about the Kfar Aza community. What does that mean to you now that you're not living there anymore, that so many people who were living there are no longer there? What is the Kfar Aza community to you now?*

AS: *A lot of pain. I think it just takes me to a lot of pain knowing that there's still people that don't know if they'll be able to go back to live there, and don't want to go back to live there. It's difficult to start your life again in a new place, not feeling at home after what you went through. What you want after you go through something is to go home and to recover in your home, but unfortunately, Kfar Aza people can't do that, because we're not able to. It hurts. It really, really hurts.*

JJ: *Now you've written a book about your time, and you want that to be out in the world to raise awareness. You're about to*

welcome another grandchild. What do you want the next few years of your life to look like?

AS: *Well, I would love it [if] the people that are in charge of the world and are able to change this world will stand up for human rights and say OK, humans live once, have a party, enjoy your life, love, eat, dance and just enjoy life. But instead of that, we're getting the feeling that we need to be scared of so many things: that the war will come again, that Hamas will do bad things again, that ISIS will do bad things, that Hezbollah will do bad things, and that feeling of this whole thing hasn't ended yet. What more is going to happen really, really frightens me.*

JJ: *You write so much in the book about your relationships with the girls [you were held with in Gaza], with Liri Albag, with Agam Berger, with Amit Soussana. What is your relationship like with them now?*

AS: *Yeah, we write to each other on the WhatsApp group.*

JJ: *What's the WhatsApp group called?*

AS: *Well, we used to have that group all together, but it didn't really work. So I write to them, but all of them are written [with the Hebrew term of endearment that means "my perfect"], "Liri hamushlemet sheli," "Agam hamushlemet sheli." We shared a lot of love and a lot of that part of our life. I'll always carry it with me, and I love the girls so much. I don't see them as often as I would want to see them.*

KS: *We've seen them at weddings. Four weddings in the last month and a half.*

AS: *And I'm just going to say that Amit's mother passed away, and it really, really breaks my heart because I know she loved her mom so much, because she showed her love in captivity to her mom all the time, and it really, really breaks my heart that she has to deal with that in such a short time, even that she's still deep into her own trauma, and now she won't have a mom to hug her and to support her. It's difficult. It's very, very difficult. I want everybody to have a better life and not to go through anything that could be traumatic, like losing a mom.*

JJ: *Do the two of you talk much between yourselves about the time that you were in Gaza and the time after Aviva left when you were in Gaza alone? Is that a regular*

conversation, filling in the gaps of what you were each doing?

AS: Yeah, quite often we talk about something that we remember, and I can just say that for months I didn't want to ask Keith anything. I just wanted him to tell me what happened, and I didn't want to put any pressure on him to touch the truth because it hurts. And until today, I'm still hearing more and more things that happened to Keith while he was in captivity because I haven't heard it all.

If there's something that I'm lucky about, it's that he can understand when I talk about captivity or feel about what happened to me because he knows what I feel. So it really helps me.

JI: Like a support for each other, because you know what you've gone through.

KS: We are our own support group. We're a couple, and also a support group.

JI: I didn't realize until I read the book of your love story — I didn't realize you met when you were very young.

KS: My brother's wife ... introduced us. I was 20. Aviva was 18. When we got married, I was 21. Aviva was almost 20.

AS: When I decided to write the book, I remember that it was difficult for me to start on [Oct. 7], and so my therapist helped me [and told me] that I should just write whatever I wanted to write. I remember thinking, 'I have to leave all these words for our grandchildren, because if Keith doesn't come home, and he might never ever come home alive, that they'll be able to read the love between us and how amazing Keith was.' And I remember saying to myself all the time, again and again, 'They're going to love Keith and the relationship that we had even more, and they're going to love the girls that we were with even more, because I spoke about the love between us,' and I really, really meant it when I wrote it because I didn't know if people [would] come home. I wanted them, when they read it, to really understand what I felt and what happened between Keith and I in captivity, because it was very important for them to take that instead of taking the hard parts.

JI: Keith, did you have any idea after Aviva had been released that she had become this internationally recognized advocate for your release?

KS: I saw my family a few times on television. So I saw Aviva and Elan when [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu spoke in Congress. It was just very shadowy, sitting in the audience. I saw them in Hostage Square the day after the proof-of-life video of Omri Miran, a hostage that Hamas did a proof-of-life video for us, so I saw Aviva, Elan and Shir sitting on stage. But no.

JI: Were you surprised when you found out that she had been on every TV station and talked to every major world leader?

KS: Very surprised, amazed. And I still don't know the extent of everything she did. You know she did so, so much. It's huge. I'm thinking I will never know everything. Aviva and two of my daughters especially, Shir and Elan, and Shai and Gal, our two other children, and everybody had their own role. It was a team, and many, many others, many people that have never met me and didn't know me, that advocated for my release. [It was] truly extraordinary proof of humanity and caring. [There were] so many caring people that did so much for me and for us and continue to do that. So that's a shining light amongst a lot of the darkness that we experienced. Not only actual darkness, because [we] literally spent a lot of time in the dark in captivity, but also in a figurative way, so it gives me a lot of strength and a lot of optimism and belief in good.

JI: I learned in the book that even though you are both from English-speaking countries, you speak Hebrew at home and to each other. Is it weird when you're talking to Americans or other foreigners, and you're doing it in English with each other?

AS: Not really, because with my mom we used to both speak in English, [and] he used to talk to his brother in English. So we had our groups of English people that we used to talk to.

KS: It's weird. It was very weird in the beginning. We've been doing it for so long that it's less weird, but we never talk to each other in English.

JI: You're about to have another grandchild, and it's the first grandchild who will be born after you both came back. Now this is going to be a child who has no memory of what had happened. What do you wish for them?

AS: Wow. That they'll never have to be scared that something will happen to them. It'll just pull everybody up. We all went through such a hard time as a family. ... I think it's going to be healing for everybody. It's going to be unbelievable. And we all love babies.

JI: We're in a country that loves babies.

JI: Do you have dogs in your new home?

KS: Our children have dogs. We've had dogs.

AS: Elani, our daughter, got a dog a couple of months ago, maybe four months ago, and it's really, really helping the kids.

KS: He helps me, too. I've always loved dogs, but the way I experience dogs since I came back from Gaza is totally different.

JI: In a way they didn't before?

KS: Not to the extent, like much more. Much, much more.

JI: What would you say has been the biggest change for each of you emotionally since you came home?

AS: The trauma is with me all the time, in many many ways, and I feel that as much as I want to run away from it, it's there, and I can feel that it's changed me. I'm just so scared that something will happen to anybody that I know, and I'm scared that something would happen to Keith.

AS: And I wasn't like that before. I wasn't scared to be sick. I wasn't scared to feel pain. Now everything frightens me so much. And our life has changed in many, many ways. I want to just say that I would love my life to be like it was before, but we also are living closer to two of our daughters [and] that is the best thing that we could have asked for. We lost our community, our house, our friends on the kibbutz, our jobs, but we gained family and lots of time with family, and it's lovely.

KS: I think I mentioned dynamics of how things are evolving, kind of like getting to know the new — I don't want to say the new Keith. But getting to know, I mean, the new Keith. I'm doing totally different things than I did before. I'm experiencing emotions and thoughts that I never experienced before. I like emotions as far as the volume, like how powerful they are. Being on this mission of telling my story and looking for opportunities, coming to know that I have a voice that people will

listen to, which is something I experienced very limited in the past.

Huge numbers of people that are interested in listening to what I have to say and feeling like I can use my voice to do things, and I want to do good. And how can

I do good and kind of trying to navigate that, and on a journey exploring how I can use my voice that I have because I experienced such a terrible thing. And finding it very, very challenging to speak, and tell the story and find the words, and

it's frustrating, but it's also rewarding, and it's hard, but it's also very meaningful, and I feel very passionate about it. ♦

OCTOBER 7, 2026

After years of hostage advocacy, Kibbutz Be'eri survivor turns toward the future

Shoshan Haran, who survived 50 days in Hamas captivity, talks to JI about her new memoir and what she calls a campaign to invert the truth about Oct. 7.

By Haley Cohen

For two years, Shoshan Haran thought of nothing except the hostages. After surviving 50 days in Hamas captivity, she spent much of the next two years traveling between the United States, Europe and Israel, meeting with lawmakers and government officials and pressing for the release of the remaining captives — including her son-in-law, Tal Shoham, who spent 505 days in Gaza, about half of that time in an underground tunnel.

Now, on the third anniversary of the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas attacks and with every hostage either returned alive or brought home for burial, Haran is allowing herself to think about what comes next. “This is the first anniversary that we can start looking at the future,” she told *Jewish Insider*.

Her new memoir, *Mission in Captivity: One Woman's Struggle to Survive and Save Her Family in Gaza*, is part of that next chapter — an effort to document what she experienced, mourn what she lost and make her voice heard about the events of Oct. 7 and their aftermath. Originally published in Hebrew, *Mission in Captivity* was released in English on Tuesday, one day ahead of the third anniversary of the attacks.

“I wrote the book so my voice will be heard,” said Haran, who was kidnapped from her home in Kibbutz Be'eri — the kibbutz her father founded after fleeing Nazi Germany and where she was born. Haran was taken alongside her daughter,

Adi Shoham; her son-in-law, Tal; her grandchildren Yahel and Naveh (then aged 3 and 8); her sister-in-law Sharon; and her niece, Noam (then aged 12). The Shohams were visiting Haran to celebrate the holiday of Simchat Torah. Haran's husband, Avshal Haran, and sister and brother-in-law, Lilach and Evyatar Kipnis, were murdered during the attack.

“It's a platform and my way to communicate to the world,” Haran said of her book. She's now living on a small kibbutz in northern Israel called Ma'ayan Tzvi, as Kibbutz Be'eri — where 101 civilians were murdered on Oct. 7, accounting for roughly 10% of the community's population — is being rebuilt.

Haran initially assumed that Israelis did not need to be told what happened on Oct. 7. But writing the book changed her mind. “I was surprised because when I started to write the book, from my point of view, the goal was to address the world. I thought in Israel people knew what happened. But from the readers' comments, I learned that it was not true.”

She also sees a vital global need for the book — particularly on Western college campuses, where distorted narratives about Israel have intensified since the attacks.

“For me what's important is countering the inversion of the truth we are facing. The false campaign is working in a successful way to change the worldview of what happened. They depict the attackers as victims. This campaign started at 6:33 a.m.

— four minutes after we heard the alarms on Oct. 7, they launched a heavily financed social media campaign saying Israel is doing genocide in Gaza. They twisted the worldview about what happened. There are two arms that are working against us — the terrorist jihadist arm led by Iran and its proxies: Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis. And then you have soft jihad, spearheaded and financed by Qatar, which wages an awareness campaign designed to mislead the world.”

“I'm not afraid to talk to anyone, although I'm troubled by the aggression from those who call themselves liberals and progressives whenever they encounter facts that contradict their preconceived narrative,” said Haran, who is speaking to Jewish communities on her current book tour, but said she would like to do so at universities as well in the future.

In the book, Haran describes the period before Oct. 7 as one of “double blindness”: Israelis living near the Gaza border knew Hamas posed a threat, but could not imagine the scale of the danger, while the Hamas terrorists who held her captive, she said, had little understanding of why Jews live in Israel or the history of the Jewish people.

“We knew there was terror but we thought it was a small part of the population,” she said, describing life on Kibbutz Be'eri — about 3 miles from the Gaza border — as “98% paradise and two percent hell,” despite the constant missile

threat. “Because of our own moral values, we were unable to comprehend that they really wanted to kill us,” she said. “As citizens, we didn’t see protection as our duty. This is the role of the IDF and Mossad.”

Her conversations with her captors revealed a similar gulf in understanding, she said. “They had no idea why Jews are living in Israel. They had no clue about the deep-rooted history of the Jewish people in Israel, and no clue about the Holocaust.”

Haran credits her work pre-Oct. 7, as an agronomist who founded the nonprofit Fair Planet to bring agricultural knowledge to farmers in Africa, for instilling in her the confidence to have those conversations with her captors — all while fighting not just for her own survival, but for the lives of her younger family members.

“At some point, I did tell the captors about Fair Planet,” she recalled. “They asked me, ‘Why don’t you come to help our farmers in Gaza?’ I told them I’d be glad to come once there is peace.”

“Being in Gaza with bombs all over us, with captors pointing guns at us, I was focused on the here and now,” she told JI. “I do think my life experience before Oct. 7 equipped me with the strength to look the captors in the eye and demand respect.”

Haran — who describes herself as

someone who believed deeply in cooperation and peace — said her time in captivity changed the way she thinks about the possibility of peace, though she has not lost hope. “If we will be able to stop the funding of terror and change the education system in Gaza and the West Bank — which teaches children to hate Jews and trains them to be fighters from age 5 — peace could be possible. You need to address the roots that nourish the terror.”

“Many people ask me if I see any grounds for optimism,” she continued. “First of all, look at Israel’s Arab population; they make up about 20% of the country. They did not join the attack on Israel and since then, there has been a sharp rise in the number of young Israeli Arabs who join the civil service in Israel. Another reason for optimism is that quite a few Muslim nations are actively seeking ties with Israel. They recognize that ‘pro-Palestinian’ rhetoric often harms Palestinians, and they understand that Iran drives the region’s instability. I hope this momentum continues to build.”

Haran was released on Nov. 25, 2023, alongside Adi and her grandchildren, as part of a temporary ceasefire and hostage release agreement.

For Haran, the hardest part came after she returned home. During her 50 days in

captivity, she had little understanding of the scale of the Oct. 7 attacks or what had happened to her husband, Avshal.

“During captivity we did not know the scope of the attack,” she said. “We didn’t know about the Nova music festival or other kibbutzim. And I didn’t know about my husband. I did suspect that my sister and her husband were murdered on the spot because their house was severely shattered. When we returned, we realized how hard it was going to be.”

“The second part is harder,” she said, referring to the aftermath of returning home. Her son-in-law Tal remained in captivity for another 455 days, until his release in February 2025. “That was my whole identity — the fight to release the hostages.”

Instead of being broken by catastrophe, Haran is determined to continue what she calls her “mission” — a nod to the book’s title. That mission now centers on a U.S. book tour speaking to Jewish audiences, which began on Sept. 30.

“I want the world to know what happened and how we got to this point,” she said. “I want readers to base their opinions and actions on facts and an understanding of the complexity of the issue; that’s why I wrote the book.” ♦

OCTOBER 7, 2026

The freshmen on Oct. 7, 2023, who became Jewish leaders in the terror attacks’ aftermath

Three students who arrived on campus weeks before the attacks describe how the past three years reshaped their Jewish identities, through religious observance, community and activism

By Haley Cohen

Seven months after Hamas’ Oct. 7, 2023, attacks in Israel, Erica Ho stood beneath a Chabad tent on Harvard’s campus and became a bat mitzvah on her 20th birthday.

Growing up in Albuquerque, N.M., with a Chinese father and Jewish mother, Ho lived miles away from the nearest synagogue and felt disconnected from the local Jewish community. When she arrived at Harvard in

September 2023 — never having celebrated a bat mitzvah — she described herself as “technically Jewish.”

For Ho and other members of the college class that arrived on campus just weeks before Oct. 7 — most of whom are now seniors — the three years since have become a defining chapter of their Jewish lives.

As the third anniversary of Oct. 7

approached, *Jewish Insider* spoke with three Jewish students who entered college weeks before the attacks, expecting the next four years to be defined by the ordinary milestones of young adulthood.

Instead, on campuses from Cambridge to Los Angeles to Washington, D.C., the historic rise in antisemitism and protests over Israel that followed the attacks and the ensuing war in Gaza thrust students into

Jewish communities and political fights they had not expected to join — reshaping their college experiences and, in some cases, their plans for life after graduation.

According to Jewish Federations of North America data, college students are a key driver in the nationwide rise of Jewish engagement since the fall of 2023, which the group has dubbed “the surge,” even as reported antisemitic incidents on campuses have also surged.

For Ho, an environmental science and economics major, the transformation began almost immediately after the attacks. A week after Oct. 7, Harvard Chabad held its annual “Shabbat 1,000” dinner, bringing hundreds of students together at a moment when many were unsure whether it was safe to gather publicly as Jews. Ho remembers weighing the risks before deciding to attend.

“There’s a camp that was, ‘This is not the event to sit out,’” she recalled. “If there’s anything to do right now, it’s to gather and show Jewish people are resilient.”

Ho had not come to Harvard looking for a Jewish community. But in the months that followed, she became increasingly involved with Chabad, joining its board as a sophomore and participating in weekly Torah learning. In May 2024, she celebrated her 20th birthday by becoming a bat mitzvah on the Cambridge campus — an experience she describes as a commitment to Judaism for the rest of her life.

Her experience was distinct from that of many Jewish students who came to Harvard with a strong sense of Jewish identity. Because Ho is half Chinese and does not consider herself visibly Jewish, she said she did not personally experience much of the antisemitism that roiled the Ivy League campus and made other students seek out Jewish spaces for safety. Instead, she was drawn in by what she saw as a newfound confidence and solidarity within the Jewish community.

“I think what Chabad, and other Jewish campus communities, did a good job of after Oct. 7 was not retreating into hiding,” she told JI. “I remember there being a huge amount of support and vocalism.” That atmosphere, she said, made Jewish spaces feel “much more vibrant” — and helped

give her the confidence to claim an identity she had once barely felt connected to, one she wants to continue pursuing post-graduation.

For Delilah Hirshland, a history and political science major at the University of California, Los Angeles, her path into activism began not with a Jewish gathering but with the shock that came from learning that people she had just met in her first weeks of college justified the attacks on Israel, bringing about a desire to surround herself with like-minded peers instead.

“Oct. 7 happened at the end of my second week here. For those first two weeks before, I spent a lot of time getting to know people in my dorm and people in my majors — very much in the humanities sphere,” she told JI. “After the attacks, the people I had met started to post things saying that Hamas was justified. It was shocking for me. It quickly threw me into this world of Israel activism and Jewish life.”

Hirshland serves as co-president of UCLA’s Students Supporting Israel chapter. “SSI, Hillel events and Jewish life in general have been my main support system over these years,” she said.

“I don’t think I would be involved in Jewish life and Israel advocacy if the attacks didn’t happen. I think about that a lot. I personally became more conscious of my identity and of my beliefs,” Hirshland said, noting that she also saw a shift in the school administration’s attitude towards pro-Israel students.

“At first, they were hesitant to publicly take our side — especially later in freshman year with the encampments. Our new chancellor [Julio Frenk] is very supportive of us,” said Hirshland.

For Jacob Intrator, Oct. 7 and its aftermath ultimately changed the course of his college career, and what comes next.

Intrator arrived at Georgia Tech in fall 2023 with little connection to Jewish campus life. But after Oct. 7, he began reconsidering what he wanted from college and ultimately transferred to Georgetown, a Catholic university where he said, ironically, he found what he had been missing: a Jewish community and, amid

increasingly intense battles over Israel, a cause he felt compelled to fight for.

When he arrived at Georgetown in spring 2025, a student government referendum calling for the university to divest from Israel became an early challenge. Intrator, then new to the campus, organized against the referendum, writing to administrators that the measure had been passed in violation of student government rules. The letter attracted the support of members of Congress and ultimately helped spur the university to reject the referendum.

But Intrator didn’t stop there. He became president of the campus chapter of Students Supporting Israel, then ran a slate of candidates for student government, arguing that students who opposed the referendum needed a voice in the body that had passed it. The slate won, and Intrator became vice speaker of student government.

“[My advocacy] really only originated once I got to Georgetown,” Intrator, a government and economics major, told JI. “I saw more passion for pro-Israel politics here, but I’ve also seen a lot of hatred for it, and a lot more antisemitism than I had ever seen before. Unlike when I was at Georgia Tech, here I saw it as my duty to fight for Israel.”

“At Georgia Tech, I was studying engineering. My life now is quite a reversal,” he continued.

Intrator is considering a future in politics, motivated in part by what he sees as a need for younger voices to engage in debates over Israel and antisemitism.

“After I graduate, I have an interest in getting involved in politics outside of college. When you look at polls, you see the numbers in which young Americans are turning against Israel and in many ways against the Jewish people. People complain about having 60-year-old politicians lecturing the 30-year-old generation. They want younger people who understand the problems they have. That’s animating my involvement in politics,” he said.

“I want to be a voice and a platform for my generation.”

For all three students, Oct. 7 became a defining moment in their college careers.

The aftermath became about more than responding to a moment of crisis: It pushed them to define their Jewish identities in ways they had not anticipated when they arrived on campus — whether through religious observance, Jewish community or political activism — suggesting that for a generation of Jewish students, the campus

upheaval of the last three years may have lasting consequences far after graduation.

Their experiences are part of a broad shift that Rabbi Hirschy Zarchi, who leads Harvard Chabad, has watched unfold on his campus and others since Oct. 7. Students who arrived with varying levels of connection to Judaism, he said, have

emerged with a stronger sense of Jewish identity and responsibility.

“In this challenging period for our people and the world, I observed young people deepen their Jewish identity and belonging, and double down on their Jewish pride and responsibility,” Zarchi told JI. “The Jewish future will be led by the young, courageous leaders who have emerged at this time.” ♦

OCTOBER 8, 2026

Michigan Hillel’s break with Israel advocacy groups raises questions about where it stands

The Michigan campus Hillel says it will focus on Jewish life and learning after disaffiliating from groups such as J Street U. A Jewish regent calls the move ‘self-defeating,’ and a pro-Israel student leader says Hillel has grown reluctant to embrace Zionism

By Haley Cohen

University of Michigan Hillel is ending its formal affiliations with student groups and national organizations engaged in Israel advocacy, lobbying or political organizing, while insisting that the policy does not represent a retreat from its support for Israel.

The policy, announced by interim Executive Director Cindy Hughey in a message to students at the start of the academic year last month, is part of what Michigan Hillel described as a renewed focus on Jewish life, learning and community.

University of Michigan Hillel said it will “no longer formally affiliate with national organizations or student groups whose primary work involves Israel-related advocacy, lobbying, or political organizing,” but it will continue to offer Israel education, cultural programming and discussions about Israel.

Those programs, it said, should center “a range of student voices and perspectives” rather than advocacy. The change leaves Israel-related programming to Hillel staff or student clubs, rather than formal affiliations with outside advocacy groups. At the time of the decision, JStreet was the only advocacy group impacted. The decision will apply to all groups affiliated with national advocacy organizations, if

they wish to affiliate with Michigan Hillel going forward, according to the group.

The announcement comes weeks after Michigan Hillel pushed the University of Michigan chapter of J Street U out of its umbrella, telling the student group that it could remain affiliated with Hillel only if it disassociated from the national organization. J Street U, the student organizing arm of the progressive Israel advocacy group J Street, has said the decision was effectively aimed at closing its chapter because of its political advocacy on Israel.

The move has fueled competing interpretations of Hillel’s direction — some on campus see the new policy as an effort to further distance the organization from J Street and other progressive groups, while others argue that Michigan Hillel has already moved too far to the left by giving space to groups and perspectives they view as hostile to Israel.

“J Street U has played an important role on campus as a pro-Israel organization substantively aligned with a large number of American Jews and American Jewish students,” Jordan Acker, a University of Michigan regent, who is Jewish, told *Jewish Insider*.

“J Street and J Street U should be included as important voices within the

tent, not removed in this self-defeating way,” Acker continued. “Other voices in the pro-Israel tent deserve respect and a platform. Decisions like this one make that harder.”

For some Jewish students at Michigan, the shift has raised questions about whether Hillel is retreating from a role they see as central to Jewish life on campus: supporting Israel.

Dan Viderman, a senior active in the Students Supporting Israel chapter on campus, told JI he was involved with Hillel when arriving at the university in 2023 and that the organization continues to play an important role in building Jewish community on campus, but had also been a visible supporter of Israel during his freshman year.

He said that changed as J Street’s presence on campus grew, and that the latest policy has left him questioning whether Hillel is truly becoming apolitical or is instead moving away from Israel advocacy. “I noticed that the J Street presence was ramping up on campus, especially at Hillel,” said Viderman. “A lot of the people working at J Street were also on the government board of Hillel. This is a recurring theme this year as well. I recognize that Hillel put out that statement. I know they have removed J Street and any

pro-Israel organizations. They claim to just want to focus on Jewish life, which would be respectable and commendable if that's genuinely what they were doing, but I haven't noticed that to be the case. I haven't seen that they're being entirely apolitical about this."

Viderman planned an Oct. 7 commemoration event with SSI this week to mark the three-year anniversary of the Hamas attacks on Israel, an event that he described as "unequivocally about Zionism." Hillel hosted a separate memorial program.

Viderman said that following meetings with Hillel to see if they'd want to co-host the event, "we felt unclear about Hillel's stance" on Zionism.

"It was disorganized amongst everyone on the Hillel board. There was basically unequivocal negative sentiment towards anything pro-Israel being done," he said. "They wanted to just do Oct. 7 as a broader commemoration of the lives lost, and they

wanted to make it Jewish without making it about Israel."

"There's still an Israel fellow and you can still say you're a Zionist in Hillel, but I think you would be facing more pushback as opposed to before, because of these new policies that are being brought up."

However, Hillel International and Michigan Hillel pushed back, emphasizing that it does not need to affiliate with independent groups to be pro-Israel.

"Consistent with the Hillel movement's leading role in Israel engagement, Michigan Hillel remains committed to substantial Israel-related programming, education, and immersive experiences," a Hillel International spokesperson told JI. "Michigan Hillel shared that this decision was specifically limited to independent national advocacy organizations."

In a follow-up statement to students sent on Monday, Hughey wrote, "Michigan Hillel is, and will always remain, a steadfast supporter of Israel."

"We will continue our programming focused on Israeli culture, Israel education, Birthright, thoughtful conversations about Israel, exploring Jewish identity, religious studies, and the many other topics that matter to you," she said. "Michigan Hillel remains committed to supporting Jewish students and to combatting antisemitism and BDS when it arises on our campus. This new policy does not change that commitment."

"Hillel at Michigan is sharpening its focus on Jewish life and learning programs, supporting students in building community. There will no longer be any independent advocacy groups affiliated with Hillel; we encourage students interested in advocacy to get involved directly with independent advocacy groups," Hughey told JI. "Hillel will continue to be a pluralistic and safe place for students of all backgrounds to explore Jewish life, history, memory, and community." ♦

OCTOBER 7, 2026

3 years on, ICF aids 573 kids, young adults orphaned on Oct. 7 with the long, slow road to recovery

The Israeli Children's Fund, also known as Atufim Be'Ahava, was created to provide for the 'civilian orphans' who lost one or both parents in the Oct. 7 terror attack

By Judah Ari Gross

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

In a single bloody day, hundreds of Israeli children and young adults had their lives upended as their parents were butchered in the deadliest terror attack in Israel's history and one of the deadliest ever. In some cases, they too were injured by the very terrorists who killed their parents or were forced to witness the brutality; in others, they learned of it from afar.

For the children with one living parent, they are being cared for by a person grappling with their own traumas from the Oct. 7 terror attacks. Those who lost both have mainly been fostered by aunts and

uncles or grandparents, who also have just lost a sibling or child — in some cases, more than one.

Many of these orphans from the hardest-hit kibbutzim are still displaced; others have left the communities in which they were raised entirely, finding it too painful to remain in the same place and with the same people from before the attack.

Three years later, their needs — financial, psychological, social, educational — remain immense. They are also unique.

"Everything is much slower than you would believe," Mody Kidon, the co-founder and chairman of the Israeli Children's Fund, told *eJewishPhilanthropy* recently. "We

have to be more patient. Each one of them is a different story."

ICF, known in Hebrew as Atufim B'Ahava ("Wrapped in love"), supports 573 Oct. 7 orphans, from those that were still *in utero* when their fathers were killed up to those age 30. Roughly two-thirds of them are minors; 15% of them are from hostage families. Three-quarters lost their father, and 8% lost both parents. Most of them are from southern Israel, mainly the Gaza border communities, but also 17% from Bedouin communities.

"It's a huge, huge number. It's a number that's unrealistic — you can't imagine it," Kidon said.

A former Israeli Air Force pilot, Kidon went into his family's advertising firm,

Gitam, helping build it into the country's largest, and then broke into the field of real estate investing nearly 20 years ago.

When the Oct. 7 terror attacks began, his first thoughts were about the people he knew in the Gaza border area. And he realized: "Kibbutz Be'eri — it is one of my investors." Be'eri was one of the hardest-hit communities in the Oct. 7 attacks, with hundreds of Palestinian terrorists infiltrating the kibbutz, killing more than 100 people, injuring scores more and taking 32 people hostage. It took days before the IDF had killed or captured all of the terrorists that had broken into the kibbutz.

In those initial hours, Kidon called Harel Yitzhaki, a former CEO of the kibbutz's Be'eri Printing Press and member of the community's investment committee, and promised to set up a fund to support the kibbutz's orphans.

"[The idea] jumped to my head," Kidon recalled. "When you are managing money for other people, you usually say that you have to respect it like this is the money of orphans and widows. This is how they educate you to be very, very careful of other people's money. So immediately, I tell him, 'This is my responsibility now. I'm taking care of your orphans.'"

At Yitzhaki's urging, Kidon expanded this to include the orphans of the entire Gaza border region. Kidon said Yitzhaki also encouraged him to wait a few days before launching the fund, as others had expressed interest in supporting the victims of the attack.

"After three days, he gave me a few names... and I called them immediately," he said. "I told them, 'We're going to do everything together. We don't want there to be competition between the organizations. We want to help [the victims].'"

A few days later, that group merged with a similar venture founded by Chemi Peres, an entrepreneur and son of former Israeli President Shimon Peres, to create ICF. The founders set about hiring top professionals to lead the organization and began raising funds from the Israeli business community, private philanthropists, family foundations and Jewish communities abroad.

The organization also began to establish clear guidelines — what kind of assistance

it would provide and to whom. For one, as to not overlap with the work of the IDF Widows and Orphans Organization, which supports the bereaved children of fallen soldiers, police and security personnel, ICF decided that it would only focus on the "civilian orphans," who generally do not have the same level of support from the government and nonprofits as military orphans.

ICF also adopted more expansive criteria, providing support to orphans up to age 30, out of an understanding that most children continue receiving significant financial support from their parents through young adulthood.

This also gave the organization a clear end date: 2053, though its work will technically continue a few months beyond that. "We have 10 babies that were born after the attacks. We have a few that were born in May 2024," CEO Miri Yaacobi Horowitz told eJP.

Its financial support is provided in "three kinds of packages," Yaacobi Horowitz said. The first is focused on the immediate rehabilitation needs, providing funding for mental health care, resilience and recovery programs — paying for things beyond what is covered by government benefits and the National Insurance Institute.

The second is the "opportunity package," paying for the formal and informal education programs that a parent would normally pay for: from after-school activities for elementary school children and summer camps to vocational training and scholarships for higher education.

And the third, Yaacobi Horowitz said, is for "lifecycle milestones": birthday gifts, presents for Rosh Hashanah and Passover; bar and bat mitzvahs, weddings, graduations, first children, help buying a first car.

So far, the organization says that it has allocated some NIS 15 million (\$4.88 million). Some of these grants are given to all beneficiaries; others are needs-based, with a retired judge serving as the head of the grants committee, which operates with recommendations from social workers, Yaacobi Horowitz said.

"We understood with time that giving money in this kind of situation of loss and

trauma has to be combined with professional, tailor-made guidance, and this is how we we started to build our professional team of social workers who are guiding each family, each young adult to make sure that they are exercising their rights, that they get our [regular] grants, and then to feel what what is really needed," she said.

The adoptive uncle of a teenager who lost both of his parents in the Oct. 7 attacks told eJP that when he and his wife took in their nephew, they realized that their home was physically not prepared for another person to live in. They reached out to ICF for help. "They gave a sizable grant for us to do a renovation so we could house him," the uncle said, speaking anonymously to preserve his family's privacy.

For the solidly middle-class family, it "felt like a luxury" to get a grant to redo their home, he said, but it was also not something that they would have done otherwise.

In addition to the grants, ICF also offers mentoring and support groups — for adoptive families, for teenagers getting ready to join the army or for widows with young children — as well as financial guidance, Yaacobi Horowitz said.

Sagit Kupperman, an ICF social worker who works with teenagers and their families, and Tom Regev, an ICF social worker who works with young adults over 18, stressed the importance of this customized approach.

"We are three years later, but people are still struggling — mentally, financially and in terms of employment," Regev said.

"We have to adapt for everyone. There is no magic solution," Kupperman told eJP. "We all try to see what each of them needs."

Some beneficiaries need to be empowered to do things for themselves, to not rely too heavily on outside help. Others struggle to ask for help and need to learn that they can trust people again.

"Being in a position of having to ask for help is very awkward and uncomfortable," the adoptive uncle told eJP.

On the other hand, he said, his nephew wryly jokes about the easy access to the myriad organizations and individuals who are willing to provide assistance and gifts as

being his “orphan powers.” The uncle recalled his nephew being given three laptops by donors at one point. When one organization learned that his nephew used to play an instrument, it just bought one for him; it sat unused under his bed. This is while the family is trying to teach the teenage boy about personal finances and responsibility, the uncle noted.

Kupperman and Regev said that this is an area of consideration for them as they determine how best to support ICF’s beneficiaries and not only how to immediately give them everything that they ask for.

“It has to come from a place of connection, not just being an ATM,” Kupperman said.

Regev noted that many of her adult clients are also in a position of both receiving help and giving it to others.

“One person I work with is a preschool teacher; another is a doctor. There is a lot of giving [help] as well, of thinking, ‘How am I being supported and how do I provide support?’” she said. This is important, she added, to prevent a sense of “victimhood or pitifulness.”

In addition to navigating the needs of the beneficiaries, ICF and its social workers also help their beneficiaries navigate the often complex, intimidating maze of nonprofits and government offices that they must work with to receive the benefits that they are entitled to.

“We are working internally very, very hard to understand all the rights,” Yaacobi Horowitz said.

In addition to researching the government guidelines, ICF is also part of The War Orphans Forum, a network of organizations that support the orphans created in the Oct. 7 attacks and the wars that followed.

As an example, Yaacobi Horowitz said that ICF informs its beneficiaries of the various summer programs that are available to them. “We talk to all the [other] organizations,” she said. “And we have this mini-site for our beneficiaries [where] they can see all the programs of all the organizations — and that’s not us. We are not running any summer programs.”

The adoptive uncle, who in his

professional capacity works at the intersection of government offices and the nonprofit sector, highlighted ICF’s cooperation with other groups, stressing that this is often not the case.

“They are part of this community of NGOs that are aware of the need, are willing to work together, and are working to make sure that the aid is being distributed based on need and equity,” he said.

The uncle — who was not referred to eJP by ICF — said that the organization stood out for its professionalism and sensitivity.

“We really like them. They have been thoughtful, kind, considerate and helpful. Our contact there [Kupperman] has been wonderful,” he said. “They have been very good, given how complicated our situation is in all sorts of ways, and I think that is generally true of other families.”

According to Kidon and Yaacobi Horowitz, the organization is roughly half-funded, with approximately 70% of its funds coming from donors abroad and 30% from Israeli supporters.

“We need to understand that recovery is not a linear process. They have ups and downs, ups and downs all the time, and it’s really so individual and so long-term, which is something that I’m not sure anyone knew or understood in the beginning,” Yaacobi Horowitz said. “This is complex, personal work that we need to build as we go. ... We don’t know exactly how the trauma will be exposed, and what will be the needs. And our job is to stay here with them.”

On Saturday night, Kidon, Yaacobi Horowitz and ICF’s head of fundraising, Caroline Hagerty, along with two of the organization’s beneficiaries, traveled to the United States, where they will visit five communities — New York, Washington, Miami, Atlanta and Dallas — over the course of three weeks to raise money for the fund.

“There are so many organizations, and there are so many needs and so many causes,” Kidon said. “And we really respect other causes. But I think, as a Jew, this is the most important thing: to take care of widows and orphans.”

While ICF is bringing two of the young adult orphans that it supports on this fundraising trip, both ICF employees and

the adoptive uncle of an orphan told eJP that the organization does not exploit the personal tragedies of its beneficiaries for fundraising purposes.

“We had NGOs come in that were unpleasant, in my view,” the uncle said. “They had a savior complex; it felt like they were in it for themselves, using us and our suffering to feel good about themselves, using our ‘sob story’ to raise money. I’ve had none of that with ICF.”

The social workers, Kupperman and Regev, noted that ICF’s website does not feature photographs of their beneficiaries, nor are they generally used in other promotional materials.

“If you ask me the names [of beneficiaries], I cannot tell you,” Kidon said. “I don’t want to know any name. I want everything to be just through the professionals.”

At the same time, Kupperman and Regev said, there are beneficiaries who *want* to be involved in supporting the organization, and that can also be respected.

The most important thing, Regev said, is to give them the power to choose. “They lost their sense of control [in the Oct. 7 attacks],” she said. “We need to return that. Everything we do has to be done openly, explicitly, transparently and with dialogue.”

This week, around the three-year anniversary, Kupperman said that the organization and its social workers are slowing down their activities, focusing on personal connection and offering warmth and strength to their beneficiaries, in recognition of the sensitivity of the period. “There’s less bureaucracy these days,” she said. “If we are speaking with them, it’s about our relationship.”

At the same time, Kupperman stressed, for the survivors and families of victims, Oct. 7 is only one of many painful days of the year. Birthdays, anniversaries, holidays can all serve as painful reminders of the ones that they have lost. For hostage families, there are also release dates or days when they learned that a loved one had been killed in captivity.

“There are many other dates during the year that can be triggers,” she said.

Asked how the needs of beneficiaries have changed after three years, from the

initial months after the Oct. 7 attacks to today, Yaacobi Horowitz started to answer but then paused to reconsider.

“I was slow with my answer because the differences are not as big as you think,” she said, noting that the organization’s most recent grants included support for families moving back to Gaza-border kibbutzim and private mental health support — the types

of funding that ICF has been providing for years at this point. “It’s still [support for] basic functioning,” she added.

At the same time, Yaacobi Horowitz noted, the organization has also given grants for joyful occasions, marking growth and progress.

“We have already helped with more than 30 weddings,” she said, noting that they

have also given 11 grants to adult orphans who have had their first child and 33 grants for children celebrating a bar or bat mitzvah, as well as 79 scholarships for higher education.

“So life goes on, but it’s still slower than you’d think,” she said. “Recovery is a very slow process.” ♦