JEWISHINSIDER
NOVEMBER 20, 2026 ♦ 10 KISLEV, 5787

THE WEEKLY PRINT

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NOVEMBER 19, 2026

What the Trump-Xi-Putin summit means for Israel

Moscow and Beijing have played key roles in empowering Iran's threatening behavior, providing Tehran with weapons in recent months

By Lahav Harkov

Israel had a lot at stake at the summit between President Donald Trump, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping in Shenzhen, China, on Thursday, after Trump said earlier this week that one of his goals for the meeting is "trying to end the war in Iran," Middle East analysts told *Jewish Insider*.

Other matters on the agenda included denuclearization, AI and chips, trade and tariffs, and the war in Ukraine.

Moscow and Beijing have played notable roles in empowering Iran's threatening behavior. Russia, which shares intelligence with Tehran, has sent explosives and bomb components to the Islamic Republic in recent months. Washington has accused Beijing of moving to sell weapons to Iran via third parties to keep the arms transfers secret.

Trump, however, has not made any public remarks indicating that he planned to take a tough line on his interlocutors for their support for Iran, saying only that he hopes to bring the war to a close.

Ilan Berman, vice president of the American Foreign Policy Council, told JI that "there is a sense that [Trump] is eager to hammer out some sort of 'great power deal.' What that might mean, practically, is something like spheres of influence, which would give Beijing greater freedom of action in the Indo-Pacific and Moscow a freer hand vis-à-vis Ukraine and Europe."

Berman said that a "spheres of influence" agreement "would have an impact on Iran … because the Iranian regime is cooperating closely with both the Russians and the Chinese — and presumably would get grandfathered into any such arrangement. That, in turn, would mean greater freedom of action for Tehran and a serious security dilemma for Israel."

Trump is "going to try to get the Russians and Chinese to put pressure on the Iranian regime and likely will be willing to give them concessions if they agree to do that," Berman said, noting that the agreement could be a broad one that also involves Taiwan and the war in Ukraine.

The discussion of spheres of influence has led Russia to compare the summit to the post-World War II Yalta Conference, but Shira Efron, RAND Corporation's distinguished Israel policy chair, was skeptical that the summit would have much significance. "We talk about Yalta 81 years later, but I really doubt we'll talk about Shenzhen 81 months later," she said.

"The summit is important in the symbolism of it happening, but I have very low expectations on all matters that are important," she said. "Each leader is coming with different perspectives, agenda and interests."

However, Brig.-Gen. (res.) Assaf Orion, director of the Israel-China Policy Center at the Institute for National Security Studies at Tel Aviv University, told JI that "any result regarding Iran" is of interest to Israel.

"We don't know what Trump will decide and how he will manage the conflict with Iran. Will he try to promote an agreement with Russia and China? The chance that they will increase pressure on Iran to agree to what Trump wants is very low … I don't see great potential for Chinese or Russian intervention that will bring a major change to the situation," he said.

Efron said ending the war in Iran may not be in Moscow or Beijing's interest. "Neither is upset by the U.S. losing assets — weapon systems and interceptors — and the grind of service members preoccupied in the Middle East instead of protecting Europe and Southeast Asia. And there's also

America's failure to gather a global coalition [to fight Iran]."

"From an Israeli perspective, every time you bring in Russia and China it does not serve the Israeli interest," she said.

"I don't see Russia and China helping," Efron added, "but [if they do] they would definitely not be helping in a way that serves Israel's prime security interests, which are, if not toppling this regime, making sure it makes real concessions on the nuclear file and ballistic missiles."

As such, Orion argued that it's more important for Israel to watch what is happening in the Gulf than in Shenzhen. "I don't think Iran will give in to [Trump's] pressure, but I do think there is a chance that Iran will attack to exact a price for the pressure," he said.

Efron expressed concern that Israel could end up being discussed in denuclearization talks.

Israel has long had a policy of ambiguity about its own nuclear weapons, dating back to a tacit 1969 agreement that the U.S. would accept Israel's capabilities as long as it did not make official declarations about it. In the ensuing decades, that ambiguity has served as a significant deterrent for Israel while avoiding a regional arms race.

Efron noted that Rep. Joaquin Castro (D-TX) spearheaded a letter from 30 members of Congress earlier this year, calling to end Israel's ambiguity policy.

"It's another case where Israel is being dragged into a conversation about something that was never an issue," she lamented.

"If there really is an idea of a new START or quotas on nuclear arsenals, that should include China, because there is a concern about China building a nuclear arsenal," Efron added.

Orion said Beijing views itself as exempt from nuclear agreements between Moscow and Washington and is unlikely to agree to be involved in a new one.

Orion said the summit should be seen in the context of other Trump-Xi meetings, "meant to preserve strategic stability and make sure there is no significant escalation or hot conflict."

"It's a maintenance meeting," he said. "Everyone will get something out of it. Trump will show he's still dominant in foreign relations, Xi will show that he can bring world powers together. There's something for everyone."

Efron expressed a broader concern that the summit signaled American weakness on the global stage.

"Any erosion in U.S. leadership and the U.S. position has implications for Israel," she said. "Even though Trump is going to this summit hoping to have achievements in the foreign policy domain, where he still has control after his [midterms] loss domestically, he will not necessarily come back with what he's asking for. … China, without doing much, is getting the global status of hosting an unprecedented summit. This could lead to an erosion of U.S. [power], which could take Israel with it." ♦

NOVEMBER 16, 2026

JINSA leaders decry mismanagement of U.S.-Israel relationship — on both sides

JINSA CEO Michael Makovsky questioned why Israel allowed negotiations over the future of military assistance to remain unresolved before the elections

By Matthew Shea

In the aftermath of President Donald Trump's announcement earlier this month that the U.S. would end military aid to Israel, analysts at the Jewish Institute for National Security of America criticized the Israeli government's handling of negotiations and warned that the potential shift is being closely watched by Arab governments amid broader uncertainty over American security commitments.

Trump announced on the morning of Election Day that he and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had agreed months earlier to end U.S. military assistance to Israel by the end of 2026.

Jewish Insider reported that Netanyahu first raised the prospect of phasing out U.S. assistance with Trump in December 2025, before the two governments began discussing a new security framework to replace the existing memorandum of understanding, which provides Israel with $3.8 billion annually through fiscal year 2028. Trump's Election Day announcement took supporters of the U.S.-Israel alliance by surprise; Netanyahu's office has since said aid will be phased out "gradually," and the agreement under negotiation would reportedly wind down funding over five years after the current MOU expires in 2028, rather than ending it this year.

Michael Makovsky, president and CEO of JINSA, questioned why Israel had allowed negotiations over the future of military assistance to remain unresolved before the elections. The think tank had proposed in August negotiating one final 10-year MOU to maintain current assistance levels while expanding joint defense cooperation.

"I personally don't understand how the Israelis allowed this to get this far to the U.S. midterms without an understanding," Makovsky said. "Israel should never have been allowed to get to the midterms without an agreement … Something like this, so important, had to be resolved by the president and the prime minister, and it hadn't been."

Asked whether Netanyahu had made a

mistake by attempting to get ahead of growing political opposition to American aid to Israel, Makovsky said the prime minister's decision was "defensible" but faulted the Israeli government for failing to establish a clear plan.

"I think it's defensible to get ahead of it, but then you have to have a plan. I don't get a sense there was on the Israeli side, and that was a mistake," Makovsky said. "I think you could understand why he did it. Whether he should have or not, you can debate. But if you're going to bring it up … what's the follow-through? And there really wasn't, I think."

Makovsky also pointed to the absence of former Israeli Strategic Affairs Minister Ron Dermer, a close Netanyahu confidant who previously played a central role in managing Israel's relationship with Washington, as a significant loss during the negotiations. (Dermer is a distinguished fellow at JINSA.)

Blaise Misztal, JINSA's vice president for policy, suggested that Trump's decision to highlight Israel on Election Day reflected the growing political sensitivity of American support for the Jewish state.

"I think whatever you think of the Vance tweet afterwards and what Trump has said and done, I think it's telling that when his back was up against the wall on Election Day and he was feeling desperate for the outcome of the election, the rabbit he tried to pull from his hat was Israel," Misztal said, referring to a social media post from Vice President JD Vance that attributed the GOP's midterm losses in large part due to the war in Iran and the U.S.-Israel relationship.

Asked whether the announcement signaled where the administration's policy could be headed over the next two years, Misztal suggested it could reflect Trump's recognition that support for Israel had become politically problematic.

With the political consensus surrounding U.S. support for Israel showing signs of shifting and the future of American military assistance now in question, Arab governments are closely monitoring the developments and weighing their potential implications for the region, according to Hussein Aboubakr Mansour, a fellow at JINSA's Gemunder Center for Defense and Strategy.

"The Middle East is an extremely unpredictable region. Very few things were actually secure in the Middle East, and one of them, for a very long time, was American support for Israel," he said. "If this changes, it's a whole new board game for everyone."

Mansour warned that a shift in Washington's commitments to Israel could alter the incentives that have historically encouraged Arab governments to normalize relations with the Jewish state, noting the role of American security assistance and diplomatic ties in agreements involving Egypt, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates, as well as previous negotiations with Saudi Arabia.

He added, however, that declining confidence in American security commitments could also encourage some Arab governments to pursue closer direct security partnerships with Israel.

The uncertainty surrounding American security commitments comes amid broader criticism of the Trump administration's handling of the war with Iran, with JINSA officials questioning the management of the conflict, the lack of a clearly defined strategy and the prospects for achieving Washington's objectives.

"There was a real lack of clarity in the United States on what our strategic objectives were," Misztal said. "I think there was disagreement within the government. You had different officials talking about different objectives, and I think that led to there not being a clear vision of how they wanted this war to end, or what they thought the war was meant to accomplish."

Misztal said Trump's initial call on Feb. 28 for the Iranian people to seize control of their country's future had provided the closest thing to a coherent strategic objective, but that the administration subsequently failed to develop a viable path toward achieving it.

"I think the moment that that fell apart on March 7, there was no roadmap for what the war was supposed to accomplish and how we were going to get out of it," Misztal said. "So without that, I think it became really hard to say the war could have done more than it did."

John Hannah, a JINSA senior fellow and a former national security advisor to Vice President Dick Cheney, said public disenchantment with the war heightened as Americans saw another Middle East conflict that dragged on, without key goals being achieved. He also criticized the administration's handling of the war as chaotic and lacking a clear process.

"It's been, I mean, just chaos of the way this war has been run," Hannah said. "This one looks particularly bad and lacking in any process except what's going on in one guy's mind from day to day and what he's communicating to the American people about the war and not communicating to the American people about the war."

Hannah said the conflict had further shaken Gulf governments' confidence in Washington's reliability as a security partner, particularly among leaders concerned about the consequences of another round of fighting. He noted that Saudi officials in particular expressed concern about renewed military escalation, citing the potential for devastating Iranian retaliation and doubts that another American campaign would achieve a decisive strategic outcome.

"Our nightmare scenario is escalation. It's another round of this fighting because we don't see a strategic result and end to this," Hannah said, recounting a Saudi official's assessment. "We have very little confidence in how this war was conducted by the United States, how it got us into this against our best advice. All the things we told the United States would happen happened."

Despite those concerns, Hannah emphasized that Gulf governments continued to view Washington as indispensable to their security, even as they sought additional regional partnerships to compensate for doubts about American commitments.

The conflict has also complicated prospects for a diplomatic settlement with Iran, with Hannah and Mansour describing growing concerns among Gulf governments about the fragmented nature of Iran's leadership.

Mansour said he had heard concerns from officials close to the Qatari leadership, who described Iranian decision-making as deeply fragmented and complicated by

competition among rival centers of power. Meanwhile, Hannah said a person close to the UAE leadership had expressed similar concern that Tehran lacked a central authority capable of making the concessions necessary for a deal.

"There's nobody in Iran right now to make a decision about a deal. Nobody can," Hannah said, recounting that assessment. "It's this fierce rivalry and competing power centers that nobody wants to take responsibility for bringing this thing to a conclusion and making the kinds of concessions to the United States and Israel that they might have to make for a serious diplomatic deal." ♦

NOVEMBER 16, 2026

The man who could make Eisenkot prime minister

Ronen Manelis has been Eisenkot's right-hand man for years, working with the Yashar leader first in the IDF, then through the election and now coalition negotiations

By Lahav Harkov

Three months after the Hamas-led Oct. 7, 2023, attacks on Israel, and about a month after Yashar party leader Gadi Eisenkot's son Gal was killed in action in Gaza, a man walked into the former IDF chief of staff's house with a plan to make him prime minister.

"Gadi, you are the only one who can do it," the man said. "This is the plan. Let's do it."

"Get out of my sight. I'm not touching it," Eisenkot responded.

Recalling the scene in a TV interview, Eisenkot's eventual campaign manager, Ronen Manelis, said he told Eisenkot: "There is no other choice; there is no one else who can do it."

Eisenkot agreed to return to the discussion in a year, in January 2025.

Now, nearly three years after that first conversation, President Isaac Herzog has tasked Eisenkot, who represents a bloc opposing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, with forming the next Israeli government.

Eisenkot and Manelis have been close for over 20 years, since Manelis was a young IDF intelligence officer and Eisenkot was commander of the IDF Judea and Samaria Division. Eisenkot mentored Manelis and was a major catalyst for his meteoric rise in the military ranks. Now, Manelis, who served as Yashar campaign manager and is the party's top negotiator in coalition talks, may repay him by making him prime minister.

Manelis, 47, grew up in Bet Shemesh, the son of immigrants from the Soviet Union. He served as an intelligence officer in the IDF, and completed degrees at Hebrew University and Tel Aviv University during his service.

In 2003, Manelis was the top intelligence officer in Nablus, and he "immediately clicked" with the Judea and Samaria division commander, according to a report in *The Marker*.

A decade later, Eisenkot appointed Manelis his top aide when he was head of the IDF Operations Directorate, and Manelis remained Eisenkot's right-hand man when he was head of Northern Command. In 2015, Manelis was promoted to the rank of colonel and appointed assistant to Eisenkot, then the IDF chief of staff.

A source who served with Manelis in the IDF told *Jewish Insider* that "Gadi was his person. The relationship between the top aide and the chief of staff is always the closest, not just professional. It's personal."

The Yashar campaign did not make Manelis available for an interview.

Before Manelis' swift ascent in the IDF's ranks, in 2001 he was invited to participate in a program that allowed officers to serve at Army Radio, one of Israel's most popular news stations. Manelis reportedly loved his time producing the station's weekend newsmagazine program. His commander during that time, Golan Yochpaz, hired Manelis two decades later as a radio host and commentator on Israel's public broadcaster, Kan, after he left the IDF.

> **"Under Manelis was the only time we had clearly defined, written goals. He printed pamphlets of his coherent strategy, which took into account all audiences – Israeli, Arabic-speaking and international," an IDF source said. "We all knew which audiences we had to reach. He made us give in [Key Performance Indicators] so he could assess where we need to be and how to get there. ... For as long as I've known him, that characterized everything he touched."**

With a love of the media and a bit of experience in the news, Manelis asked Eisenkot to appoint him IDF spokesperson. He was promoted to the rank of brigadier general and became the youngest person ever in the role, at 38, a position he held between 2017-2020.

As spokesperson, the IDF source said, Manelis "dug his hands as deep as possible into the dirt ... and reorganized and rebuilt the entire system."

Manelis named his strategy for the IDF Spokesperson's Office "dandelion," as in, the flower whose "delicate seeds [are] carried far and wide by the wind." He later used the same name for his private consulting and strategy firm.

Other colleagues from Manelis' time in the IDF criticized him in *The Marker* profile for being "arrogant" and not a team player. He was accused, for instance, of micromanaging the IDF Spokesperson's Office, reaching out directly to journalists whose

reporting he disapproved of, rather than delegating.

After departing the IDF, Manelis in 2021 was appointed director-general of the Strategic Affairs Ministry, working under Orit Farkash-Hacohen. At the time, the ministry focused on fighting the delegitimization of Israel. But after five months, Manelis resigned, saying that he "cannot execute [his] responsibilities as [he] interpret[s] them," that the ministry was unnecessary and he hoped that his departure would allow for "an orderly process that will lead to the merging of the ministry with other government ministries and executive bodies."

It was then that he established his private firm — the first candidate he advised was running for the Latvian parliament — and joined Kan and later Israel's Channel 12 as an analyst.

On Oct. 8, 2023, Manelis returned to the IDF Spokesperson's Office as a reservist.

"He came back to the IDF Spokesperson's Office to the worst position, running the back office," the IDF source said. "He did the hard work with zero credit. It's quite a hit to one's ego to be No. 2, but he worked. He cared about the mission and he cares about the country."

On July 1, 2025, the day that Eisenkot quit Benny Gantz's Blue and White Party and the Knesset to announce an independent run, Manelis quit his media job and officially joined Eisenkot.

> **"There is no job in the world that better prepares someone to lead a national political campaign than that of IDF spokesperson," American-Israeli pollster Stephan Miller argued. "The similarities are many — managing hundreds of staff, mostly young people, serving as a high-pressure wordsmith, dealing with actual life-and-death crises, handling PR, production and advertising, and social media teams, managing a budget of millions of dollars."**

The IDF source said it was a "no-brainer" for Manelis to work with Eisenkot: "He's loyal and a good friend and believes in him." The source also called Manelis a "strategic genius," and expressed hope that he will bring the talents he displayed in the IDF to the whole country.

American-Israeli pollster Stephan Miller, a former protege of James Carville and Arthur Finkelstein, who advised the Yashar campaign, told JI that despite Manelis' nontraditional background for a campaign manager, "he had already acquired the necessary skill set from the army."

Manelis was the Yashar campaign manager, but he brought his tendency to micromanage with him from his IDF spokesperson days, reportedly involving himself in the party's ground game, social media, poll analysis and choosing candidates.

He brought several of his deputies from the IDF Spokesperson's Office, including his No. 2, Yael Wolf.

After the Israeli news program "Uvda" aired an episode on Eisenkot in which Manelis was a dominant figure, Israeli right-wing political and media figures fixated on the campaign manager.

Perhaps the most quoted part of the hour-long "Uvda" report was when Miller presented research showing that Israelis, in recent years, are more likely to self-identify as right-wing. Eisenkot asked whether "right" and "left" refer to a candidate's approach to the Palestinians. Manelis interjected: "What do I have to do, or what topics do we have to discuss, so that someone will think I'm right-wing?"

Firebrand right-wing television host Yinon Magal posted the clip and wrote: "This is the whole story of this election in one sentence."

Manelis' media appearances combined with Eisenkot's unpolished image also led critics on the right to repeatedly claim that Manelis was a kind of puppetmaster pulling Eisenkot's strings.

New Likud MK Jacob Bardugo, a businessman-turned-political commentator with close ties to Netanyahu, was a political analyst on Army Radio while Manelis was IDF spokesperson.

Days before the election, Bardugo called Eisenkot a "clown," and "basically a puppet being operated by Manelis, who tells him 'come, say it like this.'"

After Eisenkot publicly called on Netanyahu not to attack Iran last week, Deputy Minister Almog Cohen, also of Likud, wrote on X – in a reference to Esau and Jacob in the week's Torah portion – "the voice is the voice of Eisenkot, and the words are the words of Manelis. I warmly recommend that Gadi Eisenkot release Ronen Manelis ... and not let him harm Israel's national security."

The sources who spoke to JI drew a very different picture of Manelis' personality.

The IDF source said it was apparent from the campaign that Manelis did not push Eisenkot in directions that were not natural for the candidate.

The source noted that Eisenkot's party is called "Yashar," which means direct or honest, and said, "The name of the party is in the nature of these two people. Manelis is a straight talker, which is why he earns people's trust. ... Gadi never claims to be something that he's not, even at the expense of the campaign. The Israeli public appreciates the fact that he is authentic. ... The campaign is very consistent with the person that he is — and he has not been a political person over the years."

Miller said that he "loved working with Ronen," who he called "whip-smart, always cool under pressure and created an ego-less culture on the campaign, traits that frankly matched Gadi."

On Election Day, Miller recounted, he saw data that one of the parties in the anti-Netanyahu bloc was underperforming.

"That actually might have been an opportunity to our benefit, but instead, Ronen immediately picked up the phone to the campaign manager of the other party, gave them our report and asked if we could help," Miller said. ♦

NOVEMBER 18, 2026

With $41M raised, Israel's Ohr Torah Stone launches campaign to spread its brand of Modern Orthodoxy

Announcing the $100 million 'Guiding Light' campaign, the organization's leader, Rabbi Kenneth Brander, says he hopes to build more and bigger schools, develop stronger leaders and improve inter-communal ties

By Judah Ari Gross

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

In a time of growing polarization and division, the Israeli Modern Orthodox Ohr Torah Stone network of schools and institutions is betting that its brand of more moderate, accepting Judaism is just what Israel and the Jewish world need right now.

Expanding its existing schools, building several more, training teachers, developing future leaders, getting more female clergy members in positions of influence and freeing more women "chained" to recalcitrant husbands: That is only part of the ambitious agenda that Rabbi Kenneth Brander, president and *rosh yeshiva* of Ohr Torah Stone, laid out for the organization's next few years on Tuesday night in midtown Manhattan's Pierre Hotel at a gala dinner attended by hundreds of supporters and stakeholders.

"Tonight, we are launching our 'Guiding Light' $100 million campaign," Brander said, adding that the organization hoped to raise that amount in the next five years, having so far raised $41 million toward the goal.

In addition to serving as the launch of the campaign, the gala also honored Judy and Morry Weiss of Cleveland, as well as their children, who have long supported the movement, including pledging some $4 million for the new campaign.

At the buffet-style dinner, Ohr Torah Stone also honored Israeli Ambassador to the U.S. Yechiel Leiter, who delivered an impassioned plea on behalf of the younger generation of Israeli Jews, whom he called "the greatest generation we've ever had."

Leiter focused his speech on two of his sons, one of whom, Moshe, was killed in battle in Gaza in the wake of the Oct. 7 terror attacks, and the other, Neria, was critically wounded in a terrorist car-ramming while on reserve duty in the West Bank. Though Neria is now breathing on his own, he remains unconscious, Leiter said.

"Who saved the country [on Oct. 7]? Kids with no orders. There was a complete breakdown in the chain of command, complete chaos. A generation rose, took personal responsibility, and ran straight into the line of fire. Normal people run away from the line of fire, not into it. But not this generation of Jews," Leiter said. "That's what you're supporting."

In addition, Ohr Torah Stone presented its community service award to Julie Stern Joseph, a graduate of three of its programs, who teaches at the Jewish Center of Atlantic Beach, on Long Island, and the Stern College for Women.

Speaking on the sidelines of the event, an enthusiastic Brander told *eJewishPhilanthropy* that he was thrilled with the turnout and optimistic about the campaign. "The hotel said we could have at most 300 guests, so of course we have 320," he quipped.

Ohr Torah Stone was created in 1983 by Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, a charismatic graduate of Yeshiva University, who moved to Israel that year after founding the influential Modern Orthodox Lincoln Square Synagogue in Manhattan. Over the past 43 years, Ohr Torah Stone has grown to include 33 schools, yeshivas, seminaries and other houses of learning, as well as an interfaith center, an emissary program, a gap-year program for young adults with special needs and Yad LaIsha, a legal organization that works to obtain ritual divorces for *agunot*, women whose husbands refuse to grant them one. The network's activities have historically been focused in Jerusalem and the Etzion settlement bloc in the central West Bank, where Riskin established a community.

Along with a number of other more progressive religious institutions — such as the Shalom Hartman Institute, Tzohar and Itim — Ohr Torah Stone is part of a broader movement that is pushing back against a pronounced rightward shift within Israel's religious Zionist community, which has seen growing influence of so-called *Haredi Leumi* — nationalist Haredi — voices, particularly in the political sphere, in recent years.

Speaking to eJP ahead of the gala, Brander highlighted this tension, lamenting the divisive politics of these far-right figures, which alienate both secular Israelis and most Diaspora Jews. "Our unity is our strength," he said.

He particularly condemned religious Zionist leaders' unwillingness to speak out against Israeli extremist violence against Palestinians, noting that one influential *Haredi Leumi* rabbi issued a divisive *halachic* opinion that ostensibly granted permission to Jews to steal olives from Palestinian groves in the West Bank, which he called a "*hillul Hashem*," a desecration of God's name.

Asked if decreased support for the Religious Zionism and Otzma Yehudit parties, which specifically cater to the religious Zionist community, could result in losing state funding for its institutions, including his own, Brander said this was a risk he was willing to take.

"I am willing to lose money to build a more moral society," he told eJP.

Brander also highlighted this tension between religious fervor and social justice in his remarks, recalling a conversation with students at one of his yeshivas, who asked him to come with them to the Temple Mount.

"I told them, 'I do not go up to the Temple Mount,'" Brander said. "[They responded,] 'Rabbi! Don't you believe in the need to build the third Temple, don't you believe in the redemption of the Jewish People?' I said, 'You know when the third Temple is going to be built? When there are no *agunot*... when we have quality education, when we have the leaders that the country needs, when we are engaged in community and take responsibility. That's when the third Temple will be built."

These more religiously progressive organizations were, by and large, started by, inspired by or are currently led by American immigrants, noted professor Adam Ferziger in his recent book, *Agents of Change*, which is about the American figures who have had an outsized influence on Israeli religious life, including Riskin. The more successful of these "agents of change," Ferziger told eJP recently, were able to take the more American ideas of Modern Orthodoxy — a distinct ideology from Israeli religious Zionism — and apply them in the Israeli milieu.

"What is so profound about the Ohr Torah Stone network is that it's all over Israel. It's not just in southern or western Jerusalem and the Etzion bloc [where American immigrants tend to live]," Ferziger said. "On the contrary, it's taking an Israelified or whatever you want to call it, a transnationalized sort of moderate Orthodoxy and creating vehicles to introduce that as an alternative form of religious Zionism within Israel."

Ferziger, a scholar of Jewish religious movements who holds the Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch Chair in the Department of Jewish History and Contemporary Jewry at Bar-Ilan University, said that Riskin and Brander created a network of institutions that have shared values but are also able to "have their own character," which is maintained through incentives.

"One of the things that Kenny does — I don't know if he likes to talk about it — he incentivizes his schools to go along with his [projects]," Ferziger said, explaining that a school or yeshiva can unlock additional funding if it agrees to teach a particular subject.

"The big thing here is that Ohr Torah Stone is becoming the banner framework for expanding what I call [Israeli Modern Orthodoxy]. And this next major step is... not just in terms of more institutions expanding geographically, but expanding in addressing new constituencies, cultivating people who are Israeli, who can take those messages and make them more effective," said Ferziger, who noted that he had previously discussed the new campaign with Brander, who is a longtime friend.

While most of the people at the gala came from the Modern Orthodox community, many of Ohr Torah Stone's supporters do not necessarily come from that world, but see in it a way to build a more moderate and pluralist religious community in Israel, where matters of religion and state can be so divisive.

"I think that what [Brander] wants to do is to cultivate people who respect tradition, who aren't necessarily personally observant but who see that there is a value in shoring up and building up this particular constituency," Ferziger said.

In his unveiling of "Guiding Light," Brander broke down the campaign into four main categories: education, which requires $40 million; and leadership, community and responsibility, each of which needs $20 million.

In addition to the support from the Weiss family, the initiative has already received a $14 million donation from Monique Katz and her family; $6 million from Dorit and Ben J. Genet; $3 million from Dr. Riva Collins and Ira Mitzner; and $2 million from Caroline and Dan Katz, among others, Ohr Torah Stone said.

"Our schools serve thousands of students, and the demand continues to exceed the places available," Brander said. "If we are to bring a religious Zionist, Modern Orthodox education to more than our current 5,000 students, we need to expand our campuses, our *batei midrash*, our classrooms and our laboratories."

He noted that the Israeli government has also inquired about the network opening new schools in northern Israel, which would require training additional administrators and teachers.

Brander also stressed the need for Ohr Torah Stone to increase the number of female religious leaders, particularly to support the growing number of religious women who are choosing to enlist in the Israeli military, despite being entitled to an exemption. He noted that several Ohr Torah Stone graduates are in the process of taking the state rabbinate exams, following a yearslong legal battle, which would make them "not rabbis... but members of the clergy."

"This year, 6,500 of the 9,500 11th grade young ladies in the religious Zionist school system indicated... that they want to serve in the IDF. That is an unprecedented number," he said. "And the IDF has asked Ohr Torah Stone to help build *halachic* emotional support for the thousands of religious women serving. Recently, we placed — for the first time in the history of the State of Israel — two women to serve as *rabaniot*, as female chaplains, in the IDF."

More broadly, Brander said that Ohr Torah Stone needs to invest more heavily in leadership development, identifying and cultivating the next generation of Modern Orthodox leaders through new programs and centers. "If we have learned one thing from the latest elections in Israel, it's that the country is hungry for inspiring leadership," he said.

Regarding the "community" aspect of the new expansion, Brander — who has long advocated for a more pluralistic view of Jewish denominations — said Ohr Torah Stone planned to significantly ramp up its efforts to bridge divides in Israeli society over religious issues. The movement has been piloting a program dubbed "Batei Mifgash," or meeting houses, in three cities, where representatives of various religious and secular backgrounds in the community get together to discuss contentious local subjects — public prayer, *kashrut*, laws of Shabbat. That program will be expanded to 20 cities in the coming years.

Wrapping up his remarks, Brander acknowledged that plans for the organization were ambitious, as is the nine-figure price tag that accompanies it.

"[Director-General] Yinon Ahiman told me that if we want to do everything that I just spoke about, it's going to cost at least $100 million," he said with a smile. "So our

goal is to fund it in five years so that we can fulfill our dreams and our goals — and Yinon's job is to make sure it doesn't cost anything more than $100 million."

Disclosure: Ohr Torah Stone provided eJewishPhilanthropy with transportation from Israel and accommodation for the New York gala. ♦

NOVEMBER 17, 2026

Jewish groups' reactions to NYPD reform highlight Mamdani's clash with Menin

The UJA-Federation of New York and the American Jewish Committee are working to block the CURB Act, which Mamdani supports and the Council speaker has opposed

By Will Bredderman

Two leading Jewish organizations' responses to New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani's disbandment of the NYPD's protest management team are highlighting what insiders described as a ploy by the mayor to embarrass City Council Speaker Julie Menin, one of his most prominent political rivals.

Mamdani announced Monday he would roll the terror-fighting functions of the Strategic Response Group into the department's larger counterterrorism bureau, and shift its civil disorder responsibilities to a new "Patrol Support Division," officially honoring a campaign pledge to end the SRG, some of whose tactics have been criticized, while making no changes to police headcount.

The mayor debuted the policy in a double-barreled media hit: an exclusive interview with a local TV station alongside NYPD Commissioner Jessica Tisch, and a short-form video on his official social media channels with Councilmember Chi Ossé, a fellow member of the Democratic Socialists of America and sponsor of the anti-SRG Communities United to Reject Brutality Act.

In response, the UJA-Federation of New York and the American Jewish Committee attacked not Mamdani's policy change but Ossé's legislation, which would go even further by prohibiting the deployment of any specialized unit with crowd-control responsibilities to protests. Mamdani has endorsed the bill while also asserting in the video on Monday his new reforms would "accomplish the key changes" the proposal calls for.

"AJC applauds Commissioner Tisch and the NYPD for their unwavering commitment to protecting Jewish New Yorkers and all New Yorkers," AJC's regional director, Andrew Gross, said in a statement to *Jewish Insider* on Tuesday. "At the same time, we are concerned by the mayor's support for the CURB Act, which could put New Yorkers at greater risk. Peaceful protest is a fundamental right, but changes to policing must not come at the expense of public safety or leave communities targeted by antisemitism, intimidation, and violence more vulnerable."

Gross' comments echoed an X post from UJA-Federation Monday evening.

"We are deeply concerned about the CURB Act, and Mayor Mamdani´s support for it," the civic group wrote. "At a time when New York's Jewish community is facing unprecedented harassment and violence around synagogues and other communal institutions, the proposed legislation would limit the tools available to the NYPD to keep New Yorkers safe. This moment calls for more protection for our city, not less."

The comments pointed to a behind-the-scenes struggle, according to sources with knowledge of the City Hall drama who requested anonymity to discuss the situation freely. The fight is not, as some supposed, between Mamdani and Tisch, who in both the TV interview and an internal department email assured anxious observers that nothing substantive about police crowd-control protocol would change — a view insiders said they believe the NYPD commissioner genuinely holds.

Rather, they argued, Mamdani's real foe is Menin. Superficially eliminating the SRG and announcing it alongside Ossé, while simultaneously calling for the passage of the CURB Act, is a gambit to remove hard-left pressure from his own office and place it on the Council speaker.

Moreover, the CURB Act places Menin in an awkward position because she has declined to let it come up for a vote despite 27 of the 51 members of the City Council, themselves either allied with the far left or fearful of its ire, signing onto the bill.

Menin's office did not deny the dynamic, but provided a statement asserting that the mayor's current executive powers over the NYPD would enable him to enact all elements in Ossé's legislation without any Council action at all.

"The administration has the authority to implement any changes it wants to see to the operations and structure of the NYPD without legislative action," a spokesperson for the speaker said in a statement.

Mamdani's office refused to answer questions about its political maneuvering, instead forwarding a transcript of the mayor's remarks at a press conference Tuesday morning in which he again endorsed the CURB Act and called for concerns about its provisions to be worked out "during the legislative process." ♦

NOVEMBER 18, 2026

‘Forever changed’ but choosing ‘to look ahead’: Michigan’s Temple Israel charts a new course

As it rebuilds, Temple Israel grapples with scars left by terror attack

By Marc Rod

WEST BLOOMFIELD, Mich. — Driving up to Temple Israel in West Bloomfield, Mich., in late October, seven months after the nation’s largest Reform congregation was attacked by a Hezbollah-inspired terrorist, a visitor confronts a striking contrast.

The synagogue’s lush campus is surrounded by green lawns, colorful trees turning vivid shades of red, orange and yellow with the coming of fall — and a ring of new security measures that lend an ominous note to the scene.

On the campus itself, the contrasts multiply: preschoolers frolic happily on an outdoor playground while just inside the temple building, a large group of staff, clergy, security and construction personnel discuss the ongoing rebuilding efforts. The temple’s preschool is open, but other parts of the building remain in various states of restoration.

Walking through the building, in some areas, it’s hard to tell that anything happened without looking closely. Other areas are in a transitional phase — plastic sheeting still covers the floor and fresh paint still shines on the walls, with some rooms and offices still empty, and others being stocked with temporary furniture so that staff could return.

And some parts of the building are stripped down to the studs — bare metal, concrete and brick — the state that the entire facility was in just months ago.

These contrasts are, in some ways, a metaphor for the state of the congregation itself: recovering and moving ahead, even while still grappling with the scars and disruptions wrought by the attack.

Staff at Temple Israel told *Jewish Insider* they think many people don’t understand the scope of attack and its impacts, and emphasized that it was only down to a series of “miracles” that none of the 104 children and about 50 others who were on site that day were killed.

Just after noon on March 12, 2026, Ayman Mohamed Ghazali, the Hezbollah-inspired terrorist who attacked the temple, plowed his truck, laden with fireworks, gasoline canisters and weapons, at high speed into a side entrance of the temple.

The truck penetrated more than 130 feet into the building, passing directly next to a room full of babies, seriously injuring a security guard and ultimately coming to a halt a handful of feet from a multipurpose room being used as a gymnasium for preschoolers, when the truck became stuck in a narrow doorframe.

When he became stuck, Ghazali began shooting out through his front window, while security personnel responded in seconds.

The attacker managed to set off fireworks, starting a blaze that scorched the hallway and surrounding areas and burned through a section of the roof, and produced smoke that penetrated throughout the building, but did not ignite the fuel in his truck.

Mixed with water from the temple’s sprinkler system, the smoke created a toxic brew that soaked through carpets, walls and insulation, and contaminated the entire heating and air conditioning system. The entire building had to be stripped down to the studs and rebuilt internally from scratch.

The temple’s Torahs were extracted 30 hours after the attack — their covers stinking of smoke but the scrolls themselves undamaged.

For months, staff said, a heavy chemical smell lingered throughout the building, and anyone going inside had to wear personal protective equipment and then couldn’t wear their shoes in their homes, to avoid tracking in toxic chemicals.

The temple prioritized rebuilding its sanctuary and preschool first, which reopened six months to the day from the attack, barely in time for the High Holy Days. Even 24 hours before the holiday, the congregation was unsure whether Rosh Hashanah services could be held on site.

“People describe coming back for the High Holy Days as being overwhelming. I think they found it overwhelmingly joyous and meaningful and gave an entire new perspective on what it means to start a new year, and a new appreciation for their congregation — not only physically being back here, but what we managed to do in the six months between, how we managed to hold a congregation together,” Rabbi Jennifer Kaluzny told JI, sitting in the temple’s cavernous sanctuary, flanked with tall stained-glass windows and an enormous gilded ark, which was still waiting for some pews to be reinstalled.

Kaluzny and Cassi Cohen, Temple Israel’s director of development, said that community members and staff have responded and healed in different ways. The temple has had therapists and social workers on site since the attack, and has also provided opportunities for members to engage through programming and volunteer work.

“I wish more people really understood what’s been going on here because I think it’s ultimately a good story,” Kaluzny said. “It’s not an easy story. It’s not a happy story, in the sense of why we’re doing all of what we’re doing, but it’s a good story. I think we’ve tried to approach everything with an understanding — like our president said at High Holy Days — that we are forever changed, but we choose to look towards the future. We choose to look ahead. We choose to have hope. We choose to say that our future is bright.”

She said that she hopes the congregation

can send the message to its community and Jews elsewhere that, at a time of rising antisemitism, Jews should "lean in" to their Judaism and "not run away." Cohen said the temple is trying to provide opportunities for people to engage in any way they can.

Attendance at Temple Israel has increased since the attack — the preschool is full and has a waiting list, membership has grown, religious school attendance is up and staff have all stayed on, "which I think is a real testament to the place it was before and the place that it is now," Cohen said.

If not for a series of what Cohen called "miracles," the attack could have been much worse. The hallway and neighboring office, on other days of the week, or even a few minutes later, would have been packed with people. The attacker was pinned inside his car by the doorframe, unable to get out. The gasoline in the truck did not ignite.

And staff had received an FBI training just a few weeks before the attack, which prepared them to respond.

The community is still carrying scars from the attack. Kaluzny said that while she's grateful Ghazali didn't kill anyone, "he definitely accomplished a lot of trauma, displacement, a lot of distrust in an environment where we usually felt completely safe."

She said that staff members' children are still grappling with their near-death experiences, and that she still tenses up when she hears sirens, worrying that emergency services are headed to Temple Israel. She said that community members are also now more aware of and conscious of security procedures, like looking for exit routes out of the building.

"People — and rightfully so — they go back to their lives. They're living their lives — and thank God we're doing the same — but there isn't one thing this attack didn't touch, from our personal lives and our professional lives. Not one aspect of our lives."

Cohen added that, while the temple is functioning and holding services, the recovery still has a long way to go and will carry ongoing costs in reconstruction, changes to security, changes to how the temple operates and the community's ongoing trauma. Staff estimate that there are still six months remaining for the physical reconstruction process.

Kaluzny said that staff and clergy have also needed to balance their own feelings with the needs of the congregation "because nothing has stopped."

"My resolve for this community and for the place that I work has never been greater," Cohen added.

Kaluzny and Cohen offered thanks to a long list of partners and community institutions that have helped out since the attack. "The community response was overwhelming in the most beautiful, incredible way," Cohen said.

The gratitude that Temple Israel staff feel for their security officers is palpable. Passing them in the halls, Cohen and Kaluzny greeted security officers with warm smiles and hugs. "They have become such an integral part of the congregation. They're family, we love them. There's a genuine care, a genuine relationship — it's more than just a job," Kaluzny said.

Cohen and Kaluzny thanked Belfor Property Restoration, the reconstruction company, which she said had been an "incredible partner" and was the reason they were able to return to the site so quickly; Jewish Family Services, which provided mental health support; Hebrew Free Loan, which provided its largest-ever interest-free loan to help keep operations running; the local Jewish Community Center, which hosted the preschool and staff and clergy offices; and a slew of area synagogues, businesses, country clubs and more that have hosted Temple Israel services or otherwise pitched in.

Kaluzny added that the community will "never, ever, ever be able to thank" the Chaldean country club across the street, which welcomed staff and preschoolers immediately after the attacks, prepared food and bought diapers for the youngest babies.

The Temple Israel community welcomed representatives from the Chaldean community for High Holy Day services, where they carried Torah scrolls.

A Conservative synagogue had been prepared to host the Temple Israel community for the High Holy Days if they hadn't been able to use their own sanctuary.

"They were absolutely bending over backwards to make our experience what we wanted it to be, and I think that that's true of every congregation that's housed us since we have been welcomed with open arms, been made to feel comfortable," Kaluzny said. "And our families have been patient. We've moved bar and bat mitzvahs. We've moved weddings. You name it, we've moved it. And the entire community has said, 'Yes, and how can we help?'"

Through it all, congregational life has continued, even if changed; one of the rabbis' grandsons had a bar mitzvah the day after the attack, welcomed in by a local country club.

During the rebuilding process, the temple is undertaking additional security upgrades and related measures, as well as some internal renovations. While insurance is covering costs up to restoring the building to its previous state, none of the changes or upgrades are covered — leaving $10 million to $15 million worth of uncovered costs.

The temple is currently undertaking a $40 million capital campaign to assist, with $21.5 million raised already.

Cohen said that the temple needs financial support, while also emphasizing the need for the national Jewish community to advocate for greater security support from Washington for Jewish institutions.

Cohen and other members of the temple's leadership have visited D.C. on several occasions to advocate for expanded Nonprofit Security Grant Program funding, and have brought a series of political leaders to visit the site.

"Yes, we're doing work within our own Temple Israel, but we know that there's also an obligation to the greater Jewish community, and so people need to speak up. People need to find ways to help other Jewish organizations," she said. "We are better when we are all stronger. Advocate in Washington, get involved in your synagogue, get involved with a Jewish agency. Just find a way to make your difference and support something in any way you can." ♦

NOVEMBER 19, 2026

Inspired by Sheryl Sandberg, Donna Gilbert donates $5M for Ramah California scholarship endowment

Gilbert makes the gift after receiving her own scholarship to attend Camp Ramah as a girl in the 1950s, her son says

By Judah Ari Gross

The article first appeared in eJewishPhilanthropy.

When Donna Gilbert, 83, was a girl growing up in Omaha, Neb., her family was "pretty poor." When she was 16, her father, a railroad worker, died of heart failure, leaving the family in even harder straits. The local synagogue, led by Rabbi Myer Kripke, who used to drive her to school, decided to send her to Jewish summer camp, to the Camp Ramah two states over in Wisconsin, her son, David Gilbert, told *eJewishPhilanthropy*.

"And it changed her life. We don't know how to answer *why* it changed her life, but it did," Gilbert said, speaking from his home in San Diego.

On Thursday, as his mother marks her 83rd birthday — her second bat mitzvah, in the Jewish tradition — she is doing so through two major acts of generosity: a $5 million donation to the University of Southern California to fund a global justice center, and a donation of the same amount to Camp Ramah in Ojai, Calif.

That latter gift will create a scholarship endowment that the camp's director, Rabbi Joe Menashe, told eJP will allow "upwards of 75-100" children each year to attend the camp who would not have been able to otherwise.

"Obviously affordability throughout the Jewish world is an ongoing, perennial challenge — synagogue, day schools and without a question camps as well," Menashe said. "This gift moves the needle in such a significant way. ... Hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of Jewish souls will be able to have a meaningful Jewish camping and Ramah experience."

According to Gilbert, the idea for the endowment came from Sheryl Sandberg, who earlier this year created her own scholarship fund in memory of her late husband, Dave Goldberg, who attended the camp as a child.

As the family was discussing where she should focus her philanthropy, they came across Sandberg's Facebook post about the Dave Goldberg Scholarship.

"Sheryl Sandberg came out with a pledge. And we went to our mom and said, 'Hey, mom, can we give to Camp Ramah?' We all believe in that cause," Gilbert recalled, noting that he and his five siblings — Sam, Jerry, Stacey, Julie and Daniel — had all attended Camp Ramah as children, with some also serving as counselors.

In a statement to eJP, Sandberg said that she was thrilled to see that her gift had inspired the Gilberts and hoped that their gift would, in turn, inspire others.

"When we announced The Dave Goldberg Scholarship, we hoped it would help more Jewish kids get to camp every summer. We didn't expect that it would move another family to also give so generously," Sandberg said. "Donna Gilbert got to Ramah because her synagogue in Omaha believed in her, and that stayed with her for the rest of her life. Now her family is passing it on. Dave would have loved that. Every scholarship to camp is a bet on a child, and I hope the Gilberts' gift inspires more families to make that bet."

Menashe too said that he hoped that other families and funders would draw inspiration from the Gilberts, adding: "It doesn't have to be Ramah California. It can be any camp across the country."

The family's gift — one of the largest ones that the California camp has received and one of the largest given to any individual camp — will allow the camp to "increase the size of [scholarships] and add more people who might not otherwise have thought that Ramah and Jewish camping is possible," said Menashe, who noted that the endowment will begin subsidizing some scholarships next summer.

"This gift is a huge swing at the plate to enable us to feel proud that Ramah will be more accessible and inclusive for decades to come," he said.

Menashe noted that in addition to its size, the endowment stands out for going toward a "noncapital project," not to infrastructure or buildings that can be slapped with the donor's name.

"There's no vanity here," Gilbert said, explaining that this exemplifies his mother.

"She wants to do *tzedakah* and *tikkun olam*," he said, adding with a chuckle, "and she's making me be more Jewish than I'm used to."

Gilbert said that the family, and particularly his mother, are relatively new to the philanthropy world, even though he and his siblings have all been successful professionally. "Three doctors, two lawyers and me," said Gilbert, an investor and CEO of financial technology firm FairSquare.

His mother initially wanted to wait and have him and his siblings make significant charitable donations in her honor posthumously, but the siblings convinced her that she should be directly involved in the process, deciding what causes matter most to her, he said.

"We didn't grow up knowing any of this. We grew up like a normal family; [I'm the] son of a doctor. So this is kind of a whole new era for our family," he said. "We're making our mom proud. I'm proud of that. Really proud of that. Yeah. So, there's a lot of family pride."

Gilbert explained that the decision to donate $5 million to USC came from the school providing a full scholarship to his

mother, though she ultimately only attended the school for one year.

The support for Ramah was a result of her deep Jewish values, he said, recalling that his mother and father used to leave him and his siblings at home alone so they could attend the Brandeis-Bardin Institute retreats in Simi Valley, Calif., to study with Rabbi Joseph Telushkin and Dennis Prager. Gilbert said his mother believes deeply in the need to cultivate a deep and substantial Jewish identity, regardless of politics or background — something that camps are able to do as it is "Jewish 24/7."

"The immersive nature of Jewish communal living and education that Camp Ramah provides formed part of the foundation that shaped the rest of her life," Gilbert's son Jerry said in a statement. "My parents provided that experience for me and my siblings. She has never forgotten that scholarship and is thrilled to provide the same meaningful experience to others." ♦