

She was healthy and full of life when she was kidnapped, and this is what they did to her ...

If this is what happened to Elma after 50 days, what is happening to those who have been there 125 days? And with no end in sight ...

FEB 6, 2024 DANIEL GORDIS



It's a reference to Netanyahu, of course, and growing national frustration with the government's inability to find some way to get the remaining hostages home. Haaretz, obviously, has never been a huge fan of Bibi—but this headline could have appeared in almost any Israeli newspaper this week.

For much of the past ten days or so, Israelis have waited anxiously to hear whether Hamas would accept a proposal by Israel that would have led to the return of all of the hostages, in various stages, in exchange for a cease-fire of some sort—the exact details were not clear.

As of today, not only is there no deal, but both the Israeli and American governments are warning that we should not get our hopes up, that there is no deal

about to be hatched. This, understandably, was yet another agonizing disappointment for the families of the hostages, who worry that with each passing day, more will die and others will become very ill.

As the above video makes clear, the treatment of the hostages has, in some cases, been horrifying. The video about Elma Avraham came out around the 100th day of captivity on Israeli TV about three weeks ago. What she and her children say about the urgency of getting the rest of the hostages out has only become more urgent.

Israelis are quite rightly consumed by the hostage issue. Yesterday, on the way to Tel Aviv, I stopped at a red light and saw the sign below right outside the window of my car.



It's the now ubiquitous array of hostages still being held, with the Hebrew words that say "No stopping until they all come home." On the sign, though, someone pasted some white paper and wrote "כוח = ניצחון" - בכוח - בלי מו"מ, which means, "by force, no negotiations."

Obviously, if Israel could have brought the hostages out by force, it would have. So they're likely to get home only through negotiations—but it's clear that the frustration is wearing on an already weary society.

When I parked in Tel Aviv, I walked through the plaza outside the Opera House and Museum on my way to my meeting. Since the very first days of the war, that plaza has been turned into *Kikar Ha-Chatufim*, Hostage Square. It was a rainy day in Tel Aviv, so there weren't a ton of people there, but it's still beyond painful.

There's a gigantic screen counting the ticking seconds, as you can see in this brief video:



And there are displays throughout, such as this table set for the hostages, waiting for them to return. In the background, as you can see on the right below, is the iconic tower of the *Kiryah*, Israel's IDF headquarters, our Pentagon. It's smack in the middle of Tel Aviv (though there has been much discussion of moving it to the Negev).

I don't know how many people who see the setup find it as ironic as I did. After all, those people are hostages because the people who work in the *Kiryah* (ie, all the top brass) utterly failed to do their jobs.



There are signs everywhere, each put up by a different organization. From left to right below:

- “We are all hostages, until they all return.”
- “There’s no such thing as victory without the hostages [returned]” and underneath, the [Mahanot HaOlim Youth Movement](#) stands with the families of the hostages
- “The paratroopers from October 1973 embrace the families and hostages of October 2023, and send them strength from the depths of our hearts” and underneath, “the organization for the preservation of the memory of Paratroopers on the [Round Mountain](#).”



People each seek some way of “interacting” with people they cannot interact with. In one of the main tents, a woman was drawing the faces of the hostages and hanging them, working from photos she had on her phone. The families of the hostages built a fake “tunnel” with the same dimensions as the Hamas tunnels, so visitors could get a sense of the claustrophobia (and worse). The walls turned into places where people used markers of all different colors to send messages of



In what to me was the height of irony, in the photo below you see that same sign as the one in the very top photo above, this time not at a traffic light, but at the same plaza. And behind it, a more permanent sign about Israel’s devotion to the principles of the Declaration of Independence. There, in one shot, a reminder of the first massive calamity of 2023, which now, in light of the horrific calamity of

October, can at times even seem quaint.



If you haven't yet watched the video above about Elma Avraham, do. That's a formerly completely healthy woman after fifty days of hospitalization, once she was released from captivity after about fifty days.

For those remaining, it's been 125 days.

One shudders to imagine. ...