**Michael Vivier:** “Hey Michael, it’s General Adam from the Israel Defense Forces.” And you don't know where this is coming from and who it's being sent by, and when it's being sent. I felt… this weird sense of like, ‘who is this watching you or thinking about you?’ And it’s… it did become persistent ultimately.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Hey, I’m Mishy Harman and this is Israel Story. As you know, we’re in the midst of our “Wartime Diaries” series, which is an attempt to collect slivers of life during these seemingly endless and difficult days.

For almost ten months now we’ve been experiencing several different war zones. And by that I don’t just mean the north and the south, Iran and Syria and now also - somewhat perplexingly - Yemen. I’m mainly talking about the fact that since October 7th there are different *kinds* of battlefields: There are actual battlefields - where people fight and are wounded and killed. And then, of course, there are secondary battlefields - on college campuses, in the court of public opinion, on social media, TV, newspapers, text messages. And while thankfully no one has been killed on *those* battlefields, at least not yet, they are - in disturbing ways - no less vicious. We’ve covered different aspects of this matter in various installments of Wartime Diaries because it’s something so pervasive that for many it’s become the haunting soundtrack of this terrible year. But today we want to share one small story, one of countless similar ones that have crossed our radar - about trolling, virtual bullying and Israel bashing. Zev Levi brings us this story.

**Michael Vivier:** So my name is Michael Vivier. I'm 28 years old, originally from Dallas. I’m a *ule hadash,* a new immigrant here in Israel. I've been living here for about four years, and currently live in Tel Aviv. I studied Middle East Studies and Arabic. I speak Arabic and read and write Arabic. And I follow many of the… like Hamas and a bunch of these groups on social media, I've seen and heard and watched horrible, horrible things, especially since October 7th, but also years before October 7th.

**Zev Levi:** So you weren’t all that surprised?

**Michael Vivier:** The shocking part of that day, unfortunately, was not necessarily the brutality because I felt like I had seen the dehumanization going on for so long. What shocked me was the reaction from the world - every day people on October 7th and October 8th, people posting, “did you think decolonization was going to be like chocolates and rabbits and flowers? This is what resistance looks like” and “things like this don't happen in a vacuum,” while they were still picking up bodies in Kfar Azza, before there was any retaliation. I just remember that feeling of being like, “oh my God, what… What world are people living in right now?” I vividly remember thinking of this in the two or three days after the war broke out. And it just seemed to be people that we all know in our lives, like friends of ours, you know, it took over. And that shocked me, that’s like an open wound I still have, for sure. I… I don't have the words to actually describe emotionally, what that feels like and what that does to me when I hear and see things like that.

**Zev Levi:** Did you think about maybe just like turning off Instagram and deleting the app and walking away?

**Michael Vivier:** No. I don't know, I want to and I need to know what people are saying and writing. So it was definitely… It would have been better for my health for sure to… to delete these apps. But I also felt like I couldn't, I don't know.

**Zev Levi:** So what *did* you do?

**Michael Vivier:** I really wanted to just post stories and glimpses of what happened on that day. Personal stories of victims of October 7th. A couple times a day, I would say. Stories of families with their names, videos from the funerals, pictures of the communities that were destroyed and just so people can actually, you know, see it before they are going and I don't know what impact, if any, it had.

**Zev Levi:** And you were doing all this social media posting from here, but then a few months ago you visited the States?

**Michael Vivier:** Yeah. I flew home to Dallas to see my family. I woke up early. It was a Friday morning, and I went out for a jog outside in the neighborhood. And as I was coming back onto the street, I got a text message from a number I didn't have in my phone: “Hey, Michael, it's General Adam from the Israel Defense Forces…” I saw the first few words of it and I completely disregarded it. Got into the house and then I thought, “wait a second. Like what? What what was that? Like OK, let's, let's see what this is because the words are kind of stuck in my head.” And then I opened my phone and then and then saw the full message. “Hey Michael, this is General Adam with the Israel Defense Force. As you know, 15,000 women and children have been killed in Gaza so far, but it's not enough. Can we count on your support so we can eradicate all of Palestine? Here's how you can help: 1) Keep spreading propaganda to your Western friends. Some of them are still dumb enough to believe it. 2) Come sign up and join the IDF. We're short on baby-killers and could use your help. Remember, Palestinians aren't people so it doesn't matter how many we kill.” So I was really taken aback. You know, my first thought was that this could be some type of bot, but then there were a couple things that were quite specific in the message. One, having my name and two, you know, the whole “keep spreading propaganda,” you know, could be sent by someone who's seeing things that I'm posting, so I kind of sat there for a bit and really was almost at a loss for words. Again, I was in the US, and while I was in Israel before, I mean things were terrifying, especially on October 7th, but walking in the streets you feel the sense of togetherness and unity and that everybody is there with each other, and we’ve just gone through the most horrific thing. And so this… Getting this text definitely triggered a change within me to where I felt pretty paranoid because I didn't know who this person was and there wasn't anything necessarily threatening in there. But it still definitely made me kind of look over my shoulder a little bit as I was walking through you know, my hometown.

**Zev Levi:** And then, a few days later, you got another message.

**Michael Vivier:** Yeah. “Michael, it's General Adam with an update from the killing fields. We have successfully eliminated 82 journalists. I know your Western friends will be confused since journalists aren't Hamas. But if they ask, just call them anti-Semites and change the subject as fast as you can. Can we count on you to murder a journalist today in support of Israel? Or maybe you can blow up a hospital so more babies in the NICU can die? And remember, make your enemy strip naked to humiliate them as this is necessary and not psychological torture. If you ever start to feel bad, don't. This is what you support. Be proud of your genocide.”

**Zev Levi:** And this was…

**Michael Vivier:** Coming from all different phone numbers - all of them Dallas area code, but all different, unique phone numbers. The feeling that I felt is that there is someone, I don't know who, I don't know where, that is monitoring or watching what I'm posting, and sitting and kind of like putting together these messages about it. And who… who is this? Who's taking time out of the day? Because I know it's a person now. I know it's a person now. You know, at the beginning it could have been a bot, now I'm sure it's a person. It's multiple numbers. Is it a person that's paying for multiple numbers, right? Are they investing money into this? They’re clearly investing a lot of time into this. And those were a lot of the questions racing through my head. I was, you know, thinking constantly what is going on and that I mean, definitely got to a point of paranoia.

**Zev Levi:** Youwould literally look around to see if like somebody was watching you and texting, like at the same time...

**Michael Vivier:** It sounds super dramatic, but in a couple of cases, I did. Definitely when I was out in some public places. And then a few days later, “Michael, it's General Adam checking back in. We need your help. We just killed three hostages that we thought were innocent Palestinians. How can we spin this to say that Hamas did it?” A few minutes later, “while you think I have great news, we just killed another journalist. How happy and proud are you right now, Michael? How come you don't post anything about all the killing, Michael?” I had a suspicion of someone that this could possibly be. This person's account had replied to some of the things I posted with some like pretty harmful and aggressive messages. It wasn't the only thing I had seen. But it was kind of like the most invested response I had seen, and so… I am one of if not the only Jewish person this person might know. And so when I received that text, “how happy and proud are you right now? Why don't you post anything about the killing Michael?” I mean, I… I don't know. I went on to Instagram. And I looked up this person that I thought it might be. And I saw that they posted a story. And I looked at their story. And it was a picture of me. So that was pretty shocking to see and left me a bit speechless. The picture was from about two months before… we're in a street somewhere in Tel Aviv, sirens go off, we run out of the car, there were no shelters nearby, there are no buildings we could run into. So we went next to this kind of like little wall that we found, and just crouched down. And my wife took a picture of me, posted it to Instagram, and I wrote “we're on our way home, this happened,” because at the time, I was trying to share with people the experience of what it's like living here. And when I saw this story that he posted, it was that picture screenshotted from two plus months before, basically saying something like, “Gaza is destroyed and this kid is doing photo shoots in the streets of Tel Aviv,” and like, “oh, no scary siren” or something like that. I don't know if it was crazy for me to like, be be getting upset about this. I was like, “you know what, like, this person has no anything. Like, why should this even matter to me?” But then I thought also, you know, like, I'm not comfortable with the fact that my face is being used, being broadcasted to however many people out there, right? That that one was was kind of tough.

**Zev Levi:** And does that feel a relief? Like, “oh, I know who it is? It's one person and it's this…” or is that like, it's now become a more present threat?

**Michael Vivier:** OK, so there was a relief, a little bit after, I think, because I think that for a while I was paranoid, like “how many people are involved in this? There's many numbers, I don't know.” And then when I figured out who it was, I got really afraid for, for my family, also being like harassed with messages but also potentially, like physically, too. That's what I was really afraid of.

**Zev Levi:** Yeah.

**Michael Vivier:** And then the most recent one from, I would say, I don't know, a week-and-a-half ago was here in Israel: “Michael, isn't it great how many Palestinians have been murdered in the last few months? You must be so proud. Do you feel any remorse at all? Of course not, because you're a bloodthirsty Israeli. Keep up the good work. You're a champion of genocide and ethnic cleansing. I wonder if you think you're a good person, because you aren't. You are evil incarnate to support these things. I hope you realize how morally bankrupt you are and change your ways. You are a terrible person. Pose for another photo shoot behind a wall, while you obliterate millions of people's homes. You make me sick, absolute scum.”

**Zev Levi:** Has that changed at all how often you post or what you post?

**Michael Vivier:** For a bit, yeah, absolutely, a few days. Because I was definitely paranoid for a certain degree of like, ‘OK, do I know who's following me? Do I know what the stuff I'm posting is… where it's being republished and posted and whatnot,’ definitely. But we're fighting a lot of battles right now, you know, physical battles, like with our soldiers here, with just devastating news coming in every day. And then also, I think, this kind of global battle when it comes to like, our identity and our safety, and I'm at a place now where I feel as motivated as ever to… to kind of take part in that fight.

**Zev Levi:** Can you tell us what the name is of the account that was trolling you?

**Michael Vivier:** I'm not going to share the name of the account. I don't think it's important, or matters, who the individual is. I think what's important here is that many people are experiencing some degree of this as a consequence of this war.

**Zev Levi:** And if you were to bump into this person, what would you say?

**Michael Vivier:** I thought about that a lot. And I don't know. Because there's so much I want to say and I also don't want to say anything because I don't think it's worth it. I don't think he deserves to have anything said to him. Yeah.

**Zev Levi:** Thanks for coming mate.

**Michael Vivier:** Yeah. Thank you so much.