

undergoing special therapy to help his broken bones heal.

Eventually, he was declared well enough to make the 4,000-mile trip home to America. He was greeted with a hero's welcome at the airport, and again upon his arrival in his hometown of Huntsville, Texas. The navy gave him a promotion.

On July 18, 2006, a special ceremony was held at the White House where President Bush presented Marcus Luttrell with the navy's second-highest medal, the Navy Cross.

All of the SEALs killed in Operation Red Wings were given, posthumously, the highest awards offered by the US military. Lieutenant Murphy was awarded the Medal of Honor.

In the end, Operation Red Wings was considered a success in the sense that the army gathered critical information regarding Ahmad Shah, which led to disrupting his operations. Of course, it came at an extremely heavy price. Still, as a result of the operation, Shah was forced to flee to Pakistan.

After a few months in exile, Shah felt safe

enough to return to Afghanistan and renew his attacks on the American and Coalition forces there. The US military responded with Operation Whaler, in which nearly all of Shah's men were eliminated. Shah himself escaped, but in April 2008, he was killed during a gun battle with Pakistani forces, bringing an end to the "Most Wanted Terrorist in Kunar Province." ■

A Zman Exclusive Interview

Afghan Hero's Jewish Lawyers

Jewish Lawyers Defend the Man Who Saved Navy SEAL Marcus Luttrell

They are Torah-observant Jews who daven with a minyan three times a day, eat kosher and observe Shabbos... and they are among the most respected immigration lawyers in the country. Their clientele includes a colorful array of diplomats, foreign government officials and popular figures, on the one hand, and defectors and spies, on the other. More than once this has meant secret meetings with shady figures in dark corridors to work out agreements between them and the US government. Meet Leon (Levi) and his son Michael (Moshe Yosef) Wildes, the observant Jewish immigration lawyers who represent people like Mohammad Gulab, who risked their lives to rescue Americans.

In his wildest dreams, Mohammad Gulab never imagined the scene that greeted him: a wounded American soldier hiding in the shadows, his rifle pointed directly at Gulab. The American was tall, broad-shouldered and bearded, indicating he belonged to a commando unit. However, his uniform was filthy and torn, his feet blackened with sand and

blood-crusted wounds. It was obvious that without urgent aid, the American would not survive much longer.

The American was Navy SEAL Marcus Luttrell, one of a team of four who had taken part Operation Red Wings (see main article).

Gulab was in a dilemma. His peoples' sacred creed demanded that he offer

**Shimon Rosenberg
Y. Lefkowitz**

wounded man protection and hospitality, even at the cost of his life and that of his family and neighbors. Over the next days, local Taliban-affiliated leader Ahmad Shah sent a series of messengers to Gulab's family trying to convince them to hand the American over. When huge bribes failed, he threatened the entire village with reprisals. But Gulab was stubborn. He protected the American until a rescue squad came to get him a few days later.

The nightmare was over for the commando, but just beginning for Mohammad Gulab. The Taliban burned down his home, murdered his cousin, shot at him and even fired an RPG into the house where he stayed afterward.

Meanwhile, while journalists and private patriots in America created a movement to help him, the US government turned a blind eye to his ongoing predicament.

One man who refused to forget the good deed was a Torah-observant Jew named Michael Wildes. To Wildes, gratitude is central to his religious belief system and an integral part of the upbringing he received in the home of his father Leon Wildes, one of America's first renowned immigration lawyers.

Michael Wildes recognized in the story of Mohammad Gulab a unique opportunity to make a *kiddush Hashem*, and to repay his debt to America for opening its doors to his family when they were suffering from persecution in Russia. He decided to take on the case *pro bono*, not for compensation.

"This is not the first time," Michael Wildes tells **Zman**, "that our office has showed appreciation and helped, without compensation, a hero who risked his life to save others. As Orthodox Jews we feel it's our duty to show the way for others."

One of Dozens of Stories

Mohammad Gulab is just one of many noteworthy figures who are counted among the clients of Leon Wildes and his son Michael. The Wildes cater to a colorful array of clientele that includes diplomats, foreign

officials and popular figures, on the one hand, as well as spies and defectors, on the other.

Often these are people who possess information vital for America's security, but they will not share it until they are assured that they will be protected. On more than one occasion, Michael Wildes has had to meet with shady characters in dark corridors to work out an agreement between them and the federal government.

"I have a bulletproof vest in my trunk," Michael Wildes tells us, "and when it's necessary I hire bodyguards. We are actively involved in making sure that immigration is used as a critical tool in the War on Terror to protect our soldiers and agents in enemy countries."

Some of his clients have disappeared, only to reappear under a new identity in some remote town somewhere in the United States where neighbors pay little attention to them.

As Michael explains to **Zman**:

We have represented many foreign whistleblowers in the War on Terror. Some of them were officials who held high positions in foreign governments and they witnessed how their governments financed terrorism. Others were diplomats and ambassadors who had information that was critical for America's security interests and we helped them defect under Section 13 of the immigration laws. Only a handful of such defections are authorized each year.



Michael Wildes with Michael Oren, former Israeli ambassador to the US.

Zman visited the striking office of the Wildes in a luxurious skyscraper on Manhattan's East Side. They shared with us the dramatic story of their family and how they climbed so quickly so high up the ladder of success—including Michael's career as the first Orthodox Jewish mayor in the history of the United States.

Did America Betray a Friend?

After Mohammad Gulab rescued Marcus Luttrell, the Afghan villager wanted to return to his pastoral life. However, matters did not proceed as planned. As Gulab told an American reporter, Luttrell called him to his bedside before the commando's medical evacuation to the United States and offered him \$200,000 to begin his life anew. Gulab turned down the offer, saying, "I didn't do it for money."

At the time, Gulab could not have foreseen the difficult turn of events. His home was torched, his property stolen, his family members were attacked and he was very nearly killed in an assassination attempt in 2009. Gulab was forced to relocate with his family to Asadabad. Still the Taliban continued sending him death threats, promising that one day they would kill him.

Michael Wildes shared with **Zman**:

Mr. Gulab showed me a letter that the local government sent him, which read: "Your Jewish handlers are not capable of helping you. Soon the Taliban will send you to your grave." A fatwa was issued that every proper Muslim had to kill him on the spot.

The US military hired Gulab as a construction worker on its base in Asadabad, for which he was paid \$280 per month. Over the next few years, he visited America several times to meet Luttrell in his Texas ranch. The first visit took place in 2010, after Luttrell helped Gulab obtain a temporary visa and paid the cost of his visit. They spent close to three weeks together on the ranch.

Unfortunately, Gulab did not apply for



Marcus Luttrell with the man who saved him, Mohammad Gulab, during a meeting at Luttrell's Texas ranch.



Rescuer and rescued are reunited in America.

asylum in the States. "If he had filed his request then, it would have been much easier to arrange it," Wildes tells us. Gulab was hesitant to apply because he was under the impression that if he did so he would never be able to return home.

After returning to Afghanistan, Gulab's situation deteriorated drastically. With the withdrawal of US troops in late 2014, he lost his protectors. His friends in America reported that he lived in constant fear and was forced to go into hiding. According to *Newsweek*, Gulab remained sequestered away throughout the day and only visited his family late at night.

One day a bomb detonated just a few feet away while Gulab was walking near his home. In an even more frightening incident, a group of

men banged loudly on his door very late one night, demanding that the door be opened. Gulab was not home and his family cowered inside, but they refused to open. Eventually, the group tossed a small bomb inside. Although one of Gulab's daughters suffered minor injuries, the family was too frightened to seek help in the middle of the night. They waited until morning before bringing her to the hospital.

Various groups and politicians took Gulab's predicament to heart and lobbied with the American government to rescue the rescuer. They were left disappointed when government bureaucracy did respond in a timely manner. The chief problem was that Gulab's life was dependent on the cooperation of several agencies. These included the UN Refugee Agency, the Department of Homeland Security and the Refugee Admissions division of the State Department. All agreed to help, but beyond that nothing was done.

At that point, Gulab's friends in America turned to Michael Wildes, who tried to make use of his extensive contacts. But he found himself up against a bureaucratic wall.

"It's very complicated," Wildes explains. "The State Department said that there are things they are not permitted to share with me that are dragging out the matter. It disappoints me because he put his life and his family's on the line. How can it take so long to bring him to America?"

When *Zman* researched the story, we found an astonishing report that in April 2007 Gulab was arrested by US soldiers on the base where he worked. "They put me in chains," Gulab told reporter James Rupert, "and put in earplugs and a sack over my head. They accused me of meeting with the Taliban. I felt very hurt and I was embarrassed to tell my family about it. I couldn't eat, I was so upset."

According to Rupert, the arrest followed after Gulab met with a Pakistani correspondent for *Newsweek*, who wrote the story of Luttrell's rescue. This meeting alarmed US officials. Eventually, the military realized its mistake and freed Gulab, although they offered no apology or even explanation. He

was also forbidden from entering the base, though he continued to receive his paycheck.

Obviously, the incident left Gulab with a very bad taste in his mouth. It was bad enough that he lived every second in fear of the Taliban; now he had to be accused of supporting them as well?

The good news is that Michael Wildes' intervention brought results. In January 2015, Gulab was quietly relocated from Afghanistan to another country where he will remain until he is permitted to emigrate to America. Wildes is still very disappointed.

He's still in hiding because his life is in danger. How can America fight terror if it refuses to protect those who serve its interests? I'm bitterly disappointed that we had to go through all these difficulties to obtain exit visas for him and his family, obtain passports for them and obtain for them visas to travel to another country. When he tried to save Luttrell he didn't have to go through all these convoluted procedures.

As Wildes and Gulab report, the American embassy in Kabul warned Wildes not to come there demanding asylum, since the embassy was already under de-facto siege in the unstable conditions of Afghanistan. In addition, the embassy expressed its concern that it would not be able to safely escort him out of Kabul. The only option was to smuggle Gulab and his family to another country.

Wildes is optimistic that in the end he will be able to bring Gulab to the United States and that he will receive the permits to stay here permanently. He is quick to add that this is far from the only case in which US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS; prior to 2003 the INS—Immigration and Naturalization Services) behaved coldly toward people who risked so much to help Americans. Ironically, the same agency that issued entry visas to the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks and could not control hundreds of thousands of people living illegally in America on student visas, decided to crack down on the people most deserving of being allowed in!



Former Navy SEAL Marcus Luttrell spending time in Texas with his Pashtun savior, Mohammad Gulab.



Gulab in hiding with a copy of a memo that the US Embassy sent to Washington recommending he be granted asylum in America.

"I represented untold numbers of husbands and wives of people who died in the 9/11 attacks," Wildes says, "and despite the government's promises that they would be given resident status in America, the INS took steps to remove them. We fought for them to remain here."

The Jewish Lawyer for America's Heroes

Mohammad Gulab is only one of many heroes counted amongst Michael Wildes' clients. Another is Kwame James, a 6-foot-8 athlete who was 23 at the time.

The story took place on December 22, 2001. American Airlines Flight 63 was cruising 30,000 feet above the Atlantic Ocean. James was napping in his seat when a flight attendant roused him.

Seconds earlier, Richard Reid—a British citizen who converted to Islam while in prison—lit a match and tried to detonate a bomb hidden in his shoes. Reid was scuffling with passengers and the crew when the

flight attendant woke up the burly James. Still sleepy and confused, James heard someone say the word "bomb" and then smelled the sharp scent of a burning match. He instantly jumped from his seat and ran 10 rows to the "shoe-bomber's" seat where he and three others restrained the terrorist, tying up his hands and feet with belts and headset wires. He remained standing guard over the would-be bomber while the plane was diverted to Boston for an emergency landing.

As soon as they landed, SWAT officers stormed the plane through every door. James could hear Reid murmur, "What must happen will happen."

All the US newspapers described James as a hero. Everyone understood that, thanks in great part to him, 197 lives had been spared. Federal prosecutors made James an offer that he accepted immediately: If he testified in court against Reid he would be granted a permit to live in America.

James was born in Canada to a UN diplomat and was raised on the Caribbean island of Trinidad. He was in America on a worker's visa which had to be renewed every six months. Now, though, he was between jobs and that precluded getting his visa extended. The federal government's promise of permanent residency rights was an unexpected blessing at just the right time.

A few months later, Richard Reid pleaded guilty to all charges and was sentenced to life in America's highest-security prison. Now federal prosecutors had no further need for James and his testimony, and they refused to help him renew his visa. The INS also refused to extend his worker's visa, since he did not have a job, but James argued that without his visa it would be impossible to land another job in America. When the news hit that the INS insisted James leave the United States as soon as his visa ran out, the story generated shock and anger.

James' case wound up on the desk of Michael Wildes. In a media appearance, Wildes stated, "This gentleman is no less a hero than Todd Beamer

and Jeremy Glick.” He was referring to two men on ill-fated United Airlines Flight 93 on September 11, 2001, who led a passenger revolt against the hijackers. Although the plane crashed killing all aboard, the two prevented it from being flown into a building (presumed to be the White House or the Capitol).



Kwame James, a 6'8" man, awoke to screams and quickly subdued the would-be terror bomber.



The shoe in which the bomb was concealed.



Richard Reid is taken into custody after his removal from the airplane.

Wildes immediately added, “In Judaism, we have a concept of *hakaras hatov*; a good deed must be rewarded. What are we doing? We’re telling Mr. James, ‘Thank you for neutralizing the terrorist, and now board an airplane and leave the country’?! That’s not right. America must make an example of this gentleman, to say nothing of keeping its promises. If nothing else, it’s a good business practice for our government to respect its promises. We told this gentleman clearly, ‘If you’ll testify for us, then we will help you.’ Because the shoe-bomber decided to enter a plea bargain doesn’t mean we turn our backs on heroes.”

As always, when Wildes gets involved in a situation he is not satisfied with just fighting Immigration Services on a legal front. He used his political clout to appeal to then-New York Senator Hillary Clinton, New York Congressman Joseph Crowley and other officials. They applied pressure to the appropriate federal officials and succeeded in overriding the red tape. Not only was James permitted to remain in America, but in April 2010 he was sworn in as a US citizen. It had taken nearly 10 years, but James had only good things to say about the country that gave him such a hard time rewarding his heroic efforts.

“I became a citizen of one of the best countries in the world and I am very happy,” he said. “All the things that people come here for, that’s what I’m here for, the opportunity. You can come from nothing and become something here, just through hard work.”

Dangerous Liaisons

In addition to his bulletproof vest, Wildes also holds a gun permit and occasionally relies on armed bodyguards. This is necessary since he must often meet with dangerous individuals.

“We’ve been involved in many delicate matters,” Wildes explains. “For example, we represented a man who according to FBI accusations played a role in the attack on the Khobar Towers in Riyadh in 1996. [This

was a presumed Al-Qaeda truck bombing of a housing complex in Saudi Arabia where US Air Force personnel were stationed. The death toll reached 19, and hundreds more were injured.] That person was caught in Canada and they wanted to deport him to Saudi Arabia.

“We worked out an agreement that the person not be extradited to Saudi Arabia in exchange for his cooperation with the authorities. The exact details of the agreement still must stay sealed. But this much I can tell you, that thanks to his cooperation, investigators received much critical information which helped America catch a large number of terrorists.”

It is interesting how the dozens of Muslims that Wildes has represented over the years have had no issues dealing with a Torah-observant Jewish lawyer, even when he practiced his religion openly. Michael Wildes often lunches with clients in secret locations and enjoys his kosher meal.

Some of our clients were Saudi diplomats or other types of defectors who quietly gave information to American spy agencies, and eventually their security was endangered. Fatwas were issued against my clients and there were instances when people threatened the lives of my clients and my own.

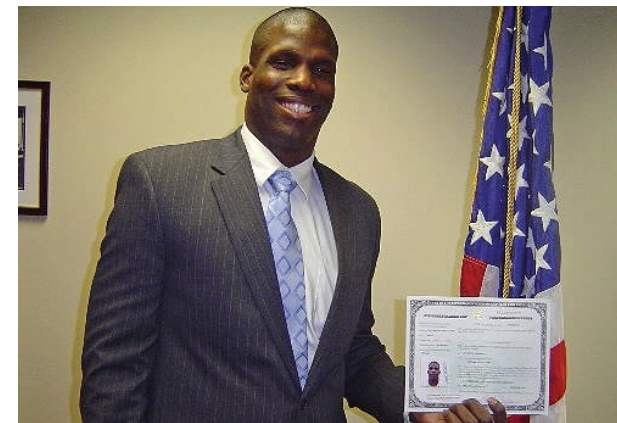
One of those clients was Mohammed Abdallah Al-Khilewi, a former Saudi diplomat and millionaire who defected to the United States in May 1994. Al-Khilewi began his career in the Saudi government in 1958 and rose quickly until he became Saudi Arabia’s ambassador to the UN in 1992.

In May 1994, Al-Khilewi created an international sensation when he wrote an open letter on official embassy stationery accusing Saudi King Fahd of despotism. In the declaration, he also accused the Saudi kingdom of robbing the country’s wealth and argued that the people deserve to benefit from their country’s natural resources.

After his brave act, Al-Khilewi was approached on US soil by the Saudi secret



Wildes arranged a meeting between James and New York Congressman Joseph Crowley, who worked actively to ensure James could remain in America.



Thanks to the efforts of Mr. Wildes, James was granted American citizenship.

police, who threatened him. He immediately defected to the US, bringing with him 14,000 Saudi government documents. These revealed the rampant human rights violations of the Saudi regime, as well as the terrible corruption within the royal family and its support of Islamic terrorists. In particular, he brought evidence that the Saudis were providing both financial and technical support to the terror group Hamas.

Al-Khilewi’s high profile made him the perfect candidate to become a client of Mr. Michael Wildes. A few weeks later, Wildes brought Al-Khilewi, two FBI agents and a representative of the office of the US Attorney to his Manhattan office. “We gave them several documents to ‘sample’ the treasure the diplomat brought with him and placed them on the table. But the agents did not want to accept the material under any circumstances.”

Perhaps Saudi Arabia's vast oil reserves have something to do with the American officials' hesitations...? Whatever the case, Michael Wildes was deeply disappointed that he never heard from those officials again.

Meanwhile, Al-Khilewi provided copies of diplomatic cables which showed that the Saudi embassy had spied on several Jewish groups in New York and installed spy apparatus in the groups' offices. He also provided detailed information on how the Saudis gave \$7 billion to Iraqi president Saddam Hussein to advance his nuclear program during the 1980s.

The FBI warned its agents not to accept any evidence of criminal activity on the part of the Saudis, even if it took place on American soil (arguably a violation of the agency's mandate), out of fear of angering its close ally and oil provider. Wildes, however, continued fighting for the diplomat to obtain asylum.

Wildes' work began to gain steam thanks to none other than the Saudi authorities themselves. Members of Al-Khilewi's family were called and threatened, "Tell your relative that we can catch him even in America; we can catch him even if he goes to the moon."

Now Wildes could prove that Al-Khilewi's life was in danger. The New York media also reported that Saudi agents were on the trail of Al-Khilewi in New York to eliminate him.

In August 1994, Wildes finally obtained asylum for Al-Khilewi, who now lives in the

US under an assumed identity. Since then he has handed over a wealth of information critical in protecting America's security interests.

Wildes was also involved in immigration cases of former intelligence agents that the CIA will not permit him to discuss. "I can't talk about many sensitive cases I've been involved in," he says. "My clients know that they can trust me to protect them and their families. I can't betray their trust."

From Bialystok to Ellis Island

The story of the Wildes in America begins with the family's patriarch, the late Mr. Harry Wildes. He was born Avraham Hirsh Vildansky in the Jewish-majority city of Bialystok, today located in northeastern Poland but then part of the Russian Empire. He was raised in a Torah-observant home and received a solid Jewish education that led him to a yeshivah.

The young Avraham Hirsh suffered through a difficult childhood, first under the Russian Czar and later under the Communists. In 1920, Vildansky sailed to America. He was 20 years old when the ship docked in New York Harbor.

Avraham Hirsh had an older brother living there who had shortened his name to Wildes, so he decided to follow suit. There was already a large community of Jews from Bialystok in New York City. They had their own shul, the Bialystoker Synagogue on the Lower East Side, which is still known today for its ornate interior. (As the oldest operating shul in Manhattan, it has been designated a historical landmark.)

Harry Wildes first began working on the Lower East Side. He was fluent in several languages, including Polish, Russian, Ukrainian, Yiddish and English. As a result, it was not difficult for him to find employment.

The rabbi of the Bialystoker Synagogue introduced Wildes to his future wife, a young woman from an observant family living in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, who had immigrated to the US in the previous century. Wildes'



Mr. Wildes with client Mohammad Abdallah Al-Khilewi (right), a former Saudi diplomat who defected to the US in May 1994 and brought with him many explosive secrets.



Wildes with Al-Khilewi in front of Capitol Hill, surrounded by bodyguards.

wealthy father-in-law set him up with his own dry goods store in the small village of Olyphant, Pennsylvania, about five miles from Scranton, where there was barely a minyan of Jews.

Jewish Refugees

The Wildes raised their two sons according to Jewish tradition. Harry helped the fledgling Jewish community grow and ran the small shul where just 12 men gathered each *Shabbos*.

The elder of the two Wildes boys became a doctor while Leon went to Yeshiva College (today a division of Yeshiva University). Leon Wildes told *Zman* that when he entered Yeshiva College he did not even dream of embarking on a professional career. He was more interested in the half day of Jewish studies than the other half that was devoted to secular subjects. He planned to become a

rabbi and encourage others to come closer to their heritage.

After graduating, Wildes received a scholarship to the prominent law school at New York University. This became the foundation of his subsequent career.

As the son of immigrants, immigration is a field that brings Leon Wildes particular pleasure. His original plan was not to specialize in immigration, however. When he entered law school, a person could not make a living as an immigration attorney. "In fact, there wasn't even a course on immigration in law school," Leon Wildes reports.

One day I passed by the bulletin board of HIAS [Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, an organization dedicated to assisting Jewish immigrants to America that was created in the late 1800s in response to the massive influx of refugees seeking shelter from the Czarist pogroms] and I saw that they had an opening for a lawyer to deal with immigration issues. It said on the note that they preferred the sort who knew Yiddish or Hebrew, so they could speak to the Jewish immigrants. I knew both languages, so I contacted them right away. HIAS hired me and trained me in the field.

When Leon Wildes began his new job and first met with the refugees he listened to their tales of woe. Their accounts of persecution moved him deeply. He decided that if the opportunity ever arose he would become a board member of HIAS and do everything he could to advance the organization's agenda. (Years later, his wish was fulfilled, and Leon Wildes remains a member of the HIAS board of directors.)

Leon Wildes was ready to go to incredible extremes to help others. During the 1970s, he worked very hard to bring hundreds of young Jewish Iranians to America on student visas. He faced fierce opposition from the



Aftermath of the Al Qaeda attack on Kohbar Towers, a large housing complex in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, where US Air Force personnel were stationed.