DIGITAL BODYGUARDS

Several Israeli-developed apps are leading a revolution in personal safety **By Aviva Gat**

AS TERRORIST acts that Israel has been battling for decades become a global phenomenon, Israeli innovators are at the forefront of seeking solutions to help upgrade personal security.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu recently announced, "We are currently working on the development of an application that will allow every citizen, with the push of a button, to alert security forces, so that they get to the scene faster and are able to neutralize the terrorist."

Indeed, there are already several Israeli-developed apps that seek to accomplish this, including SayVU, NowForce, Musketeer and Reporty. While each app has slightly different methods and focuses on different ways to ensure the safety of its

users, they all have the same end objective.

"In the age of IoT [Internet of things], we should be able to understand and identify situations even if a person isn't capable of making a report," Amotz Koskas, CEO of SayVU, tells *The Jerusalem Report*.

Taking into account all the sensors people carry around today, from smartphones to Fitbit trackers, SayVU is working to exploit this technology. Their app or widget would run constantly in the background of the user's phone and would remain connected to sensors and collect data from its surroundings. For example, the app could be able to detect if you were moving quickly and then came to a sudden stop, likely signaling to the app that the user may have been in a severe car accident, depending

on the speed and deceleration.

The company is also working on creating capabilities for the app to understand natural language and analyze speech. So if a user suddenly screams, the app would detect distress and could notify the appropriate response team depending on data from the surrounding areas and further noises it perceives.

This technology isn't available yet, but at the rate the hi-tech sector advances and the determination of Israelis to find a way to achieve results, it could all be a reality soon.

"This should be the technology of 2020, but we're bringing it forward to 2016," says Koskas, noting that SayVU should be available in Israel in the coming year. So

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far, the company has been testing its bare-bones version through pilots in several Israeli locations such as Herzliya, Netivot and Mitzpe Ramon. In the future, it is looking to test the app in Rio de Janeiro, which may prove very useful during next summer's Olympics.

THE COMPANY is also working with local law enforcement so the app can report directly to the authorities. While still in the initial stages, SayVU is looking to be a technological leader in personal safety apps. It recently completed a program at the Herzliya Accelerator Center and is now looking for funding from new investors.

While the app has universal functions, it was inspired by a need to counter terror-ism in Israel. The company was created in June 2014, just after three young teenagers, Naftali Frenkel, Gil-ad Shaer and Eyal Yifrach were kidnapped in the West Bank and murdered. Right after the kidnapping, Shaer had managed to call the police to try to report their kidnapping, but the authorities didn't take the report as seriously as they should have. The police did not pay any attention to the call until five hours later when the mother of one of the boys reported her son missing.

It is impossible to say whether the police would have taken the report more seriously had it been reported by an app like SayVU, but the app would have been able to provide more real-time details to the police on the kidnapping.

This brutal terrorist act changed the land-scape for Israeli apps related to personal security. Another company, NowForce that already had a working product decided to release its app for free to users in Israel. Its SOS app has a panic button, which, if pressed, opens an SOS incident, a voice channel to the police and sends the phone's location to emergency service providers. It also sends an SMS to anyone registered as the user's emergency contact.The second feature of the SOS app is the "reporter function," which allows users to report any suspicious activities.

"We specialize in bringing in qualified first responders," NowForce cofounder Assaf Shafran tells The Report.

NowForce's app was previously only

sold to organizations, which can pay to have accounts for members, such as school campuses, emergency personnel and first responders, but since the kidnappings, all Israelis and people traveling in Israel can use the app. United Hatzalah, a large emergency medical service, receives the updates from the public SOS app. NowForce was founded in 2008 by Shafran, Anshel Pfeffer and Jonathan Bendheim. Headquartered in Israel, it now has offices in Washington DC and dozens of customers around the world.

Shafran says the app now has thousands of users in Israel and has seen increases in downloads due to the recent terror wave. Likely the most established and most used of the apps currently on the market, NowForce has held discussions with the government about making it a country-wide solution. Shafran said these talks were unrelated to Netanyahu's statement about creating an app, but that NowForce is already serving much of the Israeli public.

While Israel is the home of NowForce, one of its main uses now is on school campuses in the US, which have been the scenes of numerous shootings of late.

"While the stabbings in Israel are very unfortunate, when someone walks with an M-16 assault rifle onto a campus with tons of kids, that's even more disturbing sometimes," Shafran says. "Universities in the US are under a lot of pressure to implement some technology and we provide that."

NowForce provides a free app for campuses, with extra features available for a paid service. Shafran says the next step for NowForce will be to be capable of determining the exact location and room number where an incident is taking place. Already, dozens of campuses use the app, including Johns Hopkins University, as well as many other smaller schools. The app is also used for Birthright groups coming to Israel and at many synagogues around the US.

"What people really want is to have a real bodyguard with them. They don't want an app. They want someone to come and walk with them, but they can't have that. So we are trying to replicate and provide that toolset of a real bodyguard," Shafran says. "We get someone by your side."

Of course, sometimes the nearest person to an incident is not always an official first responder, but another civilian who may be able to help. This is what a third app, Musketeer, is looking to capitalize on.

"The concept is very similar to Uber and Airbnb, or any of these shared economy type technologies where you are able to offer help and there are other people who need help," Jason Wolf, the cofounder and CEO of Musketeer, tells The Report. "If you only have one or the other, it is not a stable marketplace. Our revolution, if you

We are trying to replicate and provide that toolset of a real bodyguard; we get someone by your side

will, in personal safety is that society can do a lot of things by itself."

The app creates a community of Musketeers, or people who are willing to help those around them in need. Users of the app can seek help from other users anytime they feel unsafe or need emergency care. When someone on the app seeks help, other Musketeers in the area receive an alert that someone nearby is in need. When a Musketeer accepts the "help call," that responder receives an exact location of the person seeking help and the fastest route to get there. The app also opens a chat with the ability to send and receive audio and video files.

ONE EXAMPLE of a use for the app is if someone needs to walk home late at night through dark streets. While it isn't exactly an emergency, sometimes it is comforting to have someone accompany you so you feel safe. Musketeer screens all of its users to ensure the safety of those seeking help.

"We're creating a new fabric of security for people," Wolf says, noting that a user can usually receive help within three minutes. "In the case of cardiac arrest, it doesn't really help to call emergency services because it is only four minutes until brain death," and, according to Wolf, emergency response time can take at least six minutes. He relates that medical emergencies account for roughly half of the times people use the app.

The app is being used all over Israel and,

in any given location, especially the metropolitan areas of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, there are usually 30 to 40 Musketeers around, Wolf says. Altogether, the app has between 20,000 and 30,000 users.

Musketeer also works with emergency services and has already been integrated with Magen David Adom, the national medical emergency service, and recently has been integrating local communities' emergency services into the app free of charge following recent terror attacks.

Wolf cofounded the app with Shaul Avidov in 2012. The company started a pilot in 2014, and officially launched countrywide in April 2015. Next, the company will launch in the Bay Area in California and in Australia. Wolf says the company has received many requests from people all over Europe to use the app.

"Technically, it works all over the world," Wolf says. "But for maximum impact, you need a certain density of population. I think within two to three years this concept of being a Musketeer, being a part of this social network that is for safety, will be something that should work anywhere in the world."

Another safety app hitting the market January 1 is Reporty. Similar to the concept of NowForce's SOS app, Reporty is working to become another technologically advanced app that connects its users to the different emergency service providers.

The app was started after its CEO Amir Elichai was robbed on the beach in Israel. He called the police who asked him so many questions that by the time the responders were on their way, the thief had already gotten away with Elichai's wallet.

From there, Elichai created a team and even formed a partnership with former prime minister Ehud Barak, who invested $1 million in Reporty in April. The company is working with local law enforcement and is looking to become a global leader in personal safety in smart cities. According to cofounder and CMO Lital Leshem, one of Reporty's advantages is that it has the technology to show exact locations indoors.

Personal safety is a basic human right. And while this right cannot always be guaranteed, these apps are providing tools to enable people to protect this right. It shouldn't be long before these technologies expand out of Israel and across the globe. ∎