



# ***ISRAEL MATTERS!***

Publication of the Israel Affairs Committee of Temple Beth Shalom

Issue Number 31  
December 2009

## **House of Representatives Condemns “Biased” United Nations Report on Gaza Fighting**

### **Senate Bill: US to Recognize Jerusalem as Capital of Israel**

Seven United States senators have sponsored a bill that would abolish the “security” waiver that American presidents have used to prevent implementing a 1995 law declaring that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel. Kansas Republican Senator Sam Brownback, a long-time supporter of Israel, introduced the bill and said, “It is long overdue for America to recognize the sovereign right of Israel to choose Jerusalem as its capital city.”

The proposed Jerusalem Embassy Relocation Act, number S. 2737, is “a bill to relocate to Jerusalem the United States Embassy in Israel.” It has six co-sponsors -- five Republicans, from Kentucky, Texas, Arizona, and Louisiana and Independent Senator Joe Lieberman of Connecticut.

The current waiver gives the president authority to delay recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel on the premise that doing so would endanger the security of the United States. Previous presidents, including George W. Bush, vowed during their election campaigns to recognize Jerusalem as the capital but they failed to carry out their election promise.

The senators introduced the bill following the recent visit to the United States by Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat, who said, “I believe moving the American embassy to Jerusalem will be the first step towards other embassies moving to the capital, as in every other country in the world.”

The US House of Representatives has condemned the UN Goldstone report as unfairly accusing Israel of committing war crimes in its 22-day war against militants in Gaza. By a margin of 344-36, lawmakers approved a non-binding resolution that calls the report “irredeemably biased and unworthy of further consideration or legitimacy.”

The symbolic measure also urges President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton “to strongly and unequivocally oppose” any discussion of the report or action on its findings in any international setting. The Obama administration has already condemned the report as unhelpful to its efforts to revive stalled Middle East peace talks.

“I think the UN report is unbalanced, and unfair, and inaccurate,” said Democratic House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer. “It’s unfortunate that the United Nations deals with Israel, in my opinion, in a totally biased and unbalanced way. And it is the only country in the world, Israel, that has a special focus by the United Nations,” he added.

“I have been to Gaza and I have read in its entirety the Goldstone report and I will tell you he says many things, that though unpleasant, are true, and must not be obstructed,” countered Democratic Representative Brian Baird. Baird bolstered his speech against the resolution with photographs of dead Palestinian children and Israeli children seeking shelter during a suspected Palestinian rocket attack.

The resolution, crafted by Republican Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, expressed support for the Obama administration’s condemnation of the report and urges opposition to its findings in any international forum. “The Goldstone Report illustrates the anti-freedom, anti-Israel bias which deeply pervades the UN system, and it does not deserve consideration or legitimacy from responsible nations,” she said after the vote. “Even in the fog of war, it is clear that Israel took every reasonable measure to minimize the risk of civilian casualties. It is clear that Israel had every right and duty to defend its citizens from the onslaught of rocket and mortar attacks from Hamas and other militants in Gaza,” she said.

Named after former South African judge Richard Goldstone, who headed the inquiry committee, the UN report accuses Israel and Hamas militants of war crimes during the 22-day conflict that flared up in late December 2008 and ended in January, leaving some 1,400 Palestinians and 13 Israelis dead. Goldstone recommended that Israel and the Islamist movement Hamas, which rules Gaza, face possible prosecution in The Hague if they fail to conduct credible investigations within six months.

## TBS Experiences in Israel: Sar-El through Volunteers for Israel

During October your editor learned firsthand what the phrase “getting out of your comfort zone” really means as I flew to Israel for a 2-week stint as a volunteer in Sar-El. Administered in the US by Volunteers for Israel (VFI), Sar-El (an acronym meaning “Service for Israel”) offers the opportunity for volunteers to provide direct service to Israel through physical labor and, not to be minimized, the positive effect on morale by their very presence.



My group of 18 was assigned to an Israel Defense Forces (IDF) base known by the Hebrew acronym BAKUM. Near Tel Aviv, BAKUM is the first base to which every soldier in the IDF reports. Its function is to rapidly begin the process of transforming 18 year old boys and girls into soldiers. Because of that rude awakening, we learned that no veteran of the IDF remembers BAKUM fondly.

The accommodations at BAKUM were hardly luxurious. On the contrary, it was pretty much like a 0-star hotel. We lived like the soldiers did. In barracks. On bunk beds. Using latrines. Hiking to/ from the distant mess hall. But, that which doesn't kill us makes us stronger, right? And, speaking of food, it was plentiful, Kosher, and fairly tasty — especially if you like cucumbers and tomatoes.

Taking orders from our two young female soldiers — madrichot (leaders) — our group's assignment was to pack the “kit (duffle) bags” that each new soldier received during his/her processing into the army. By all accounts, our highly-motivated group set the standard for volunteer efficiency by packing more than 6,000 (!) kit bags. By the time we completed our tour of duty it seemed every officer on the base knew of our accomplishments, for when chatting with them we frequently heard, “Sar-El! Kol HaKavod (‘all the honor!’) We walked tall in our IDF uniforms!

It was hard, sweaty, and at times frustrating, work. A sense of humor was an absolute necessity. Overall, the experience rewarded each of us with a well-earned pride of accomplishment knowing that we had truly provided useful service to Israel.

I'm frequently asked if I would do it again. Yes, I would. In fact, the next time I'd like to put together a group from TBS. What are you doing next October? Let me know if you're interested in a Sar-El adventure. For more information log on to [www.vfi-usa.org](http://www.vfi-usa.org) and/or [www.sar-el.org](http://www.sar-el.org), or just call me.

L'hetraot, Ed Berns



New soldiers with their Sar-El packed kit bags follow their group leader.

## Israeli is One of Three to Win Nobel Prize in Chemistry

Two Americans and an Israeli won the 2009 Nobel Prize in chemistry for atom-by-atom mapping of the protein-making factories within cells. The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences said the work on ribosomes by Venkatraman Ramakrishnan, Thomas Steitz, and Israeli, Ada Yonath has been fundamental to the scientific understanding of life. They will split the 10 million Swedish Crowns (US\$1.4 million) award.



Ada Yonath

Yonath, 70, is the fourth woman to win the Nobel chemistry prize and the first Israeli woman. “I'm really, really happy,” Yonath said. She added that she was hardly expecting the great honor. “People who think they made such a huge contribution sit and wait for the award and get angry when they don't get it. I'm not like that.” Referring to her ground-breaking study, she said, “The topic was such that if a breakthrough could really be achieved, it would have Nobel-winning potential. It was considered difficult to the point of impossible.” She added, “People were skeptical and I myself wasn't sure we would make it – but indeed we did.”

Ribosomes are crucial to life because they produce the proteins that control the chemistry of plants, animals, and humans. Working separately, the three laureates used a method called X-ray crystallography to pinpoint the positions of the hundreds of thousands of atoms that make up the ribosome.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu congratulated Yonath, saying, “I, as all other Israelis, am extremely proud of you. The Nobel Prize is the true Olympics of mankind.” Opposition Chairwoman Tzipi Livni stressed the feminine side. “I was excited, and I am proud that it's a woman winning the prestigious prize. I know that when women reach achievements, particularly such an achievement, it gives strength to other women to dare and succeed. In addition, I view your win as a very important one because it strengthens Israel's image beyond the conflict, Israel as a country which nurtures science and manages to illustrate through women like you its contribution to science and humanity.”

There have been nine Nobel prizes won by Israelis: three for chemistry (Yonath, 2009; Aaron Ciechanover and Avram Hershko, 2004), three for peace (Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres, 1994, and Menachem Begin, 1978), two for economics (Yisrael Aumann, 2005, and Daniel Kahneman, 2002), and one for literature (Shmuel Yosef Agnon, 1966).

## US Generals Flood Israel for Joint Military Exercise

An unprecedented number of American generals, along with 1,400 U.S. army soldiers, recently participated with top IDF brass in the high-level, "Juniper Cobra" military exercise. One senior IDF source remarked, "I've never seen so many American generals."

One U.S. Navy commander said the exercise was aimed at "specific threats." Before he could be more specific about identifying those threats, however, public affairs officials interrupted him to divert the conversation from the scenario of Israel attacking Iran's nuclear facilities and defending itself from a counter-attack.

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, Defense Minister Ehud Barak, IDF Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi, along with the commander of the U.S. force in Europe and U.S. ambassador to Israel, James Cunningham, attended the three-week exercise during November. It is one of the largest joint training drills and it fueled speculation that the United States is preparing for the worst while hoping for the best concerning Iran's nuclear program.

Former IDF General Yitzchak Ben-Israel told the BBC, "Of one thing we are serious: We will not let Iran have a nuclear bomb." He said that the joint drill, which is held annually, "is not a bluff" but is aimed at pressuring Iran to back down from its refusal to cooperate with international authorities on its program to enrich uranium, a key element for a nuclear weapon." He added, "If Iran will not be pressed, if Iran continues to insist that it has the right to go and enrich uranium as much as it wants, then someone will have to use force."

"Overall, the goal is to ensure peace in the region, and maybe even farther from this region," said Prime Minister Netanyahu. "I think the IDF and the U.S. Armed Forces are creating a new path, and the goal is to defend Israel. This exercise, unique and large in scale, is an expression of the meaningful relations between Israel and the United States." The exercise included a live-fire component and a multi-layered active defense system.

As the joint drill was taking place, German Chancellor Angela Merkel told the U.S. Congress, "Whoever threatens Israel also threatens us."

## Venezuela Doesn't Want Israeli Tourists

Venezuela, under President Hugo Chavez, is taking additional steps to deter Israelis from visiting the country. An Israeli tour group slated to visit Venezuela was forced to cancel a planned trip due to unreasonable demands placed on the would-be tourists. The group of 13 Israelis was set to fly to Venezuela, with lodging, tours, and flights previously arranged by an Israeli travel company. When the company requested tourist visas for its clients, the demands of the Venezuelan government placed an insurmountable barrier that ultimately led to the cancellation of the trip.

The difficulties began with the absence of a Venezuelan diplomatic presence in Israel. In January of this year, Venezuela expelled Israel's ambassador from the country and cut diplomatic relations. Israel responded by expelling Venezuela's ambassador to Israel. Under the current circumstances, Israelis seeking a Venezuelan visa must apply through a consulate outside Israel. The Venezuelans would only agree to accept the Israelis' visa applications at the Venezuelan embassy in Amman, Jordan. In addition, Venezuela demanded that applicants appear in person with personal documentation to receive the visas. As the tour company representative said, "There are those who are afraid to travel to Jordan."

Israeli officials have criticized Venezuela's President Chavez for his support of Iran's nuclear program, his support of Iranian leader Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and his outspoken condemnation of Israel.

## IDF Chief of Staff in Germany

IDF Chief of Staff, Lt. Gen. Gabi Ashkenazi, recently proclaimed to the world from a podium in Germany that the Jewish Nation has "renewed itself in its Land" and that it would not be wise for Iran, or anyone else, to "test our power." Ashkenazi made the statement as part of a speech he delivered mostly in Hebrew from Platform 17 of the Grunewald Train Station, in Berlin, where a Holocaust memorial marks the forced deportations of tens of thousands of Jews to the Nazi death camps. The German Bundeswehr (national defense force) Chief Of Staff, General Wolfgang Schneiderhan, accompanied General Ashkenazi. Ashkenazi's father was a Bulgarian survivor of the Holocaust.

Ashkenazi noted the close relationship that exists today between the armies of Israel and Germany. "The very fact that the German Chief of the General Staff and the Israeli Chief of Staff are standing here together, shoulder to shoulder, 64 years after the Second World War, and the warm cooperation our militaries share, demonstrates our steadfast determination that never again will such atrocities occur."

The Israeli military leader made clear that Jerusalem would not tolerate an existential threat from Iran, noting that past history has firmly engraved upon Jews the lesson that they can rely on no one but themselves. Ashkenazi then stated, in English: "In the name of the entire Jewish Nation, I am committed to do our utmost in order to prevent Jewish blood from being spilled once again."

## Editorial: How You Can Help Israel – Support “Friends of the IDF”

On an earlier page in this issue of *Israel Matters!* I described some of my recent experiences as a volunteer with Sar-El on an Israeli army base. While on the base, I was pleasantly surprised to see many examples of the work of a charity my family has supported for a long time: **Friends of the IDF** (FIDF). Along with providing a welcoming pavilion and gift bags of personal supplies for each soldier, I found a centrally-located soldiers’ lounge (photo below right), complete with comfortable chairs and a large, flat screen TV, donated by FIDF.



Created in 1981, Friends of the IDF is a not-for-profit organization with the mission of providing and supporting social, educational, cultural, and recreational programs and facilities for the young men and women soldiers of the Israeli army .



These days the news reports are replete with examples of personal and corporate betrayals of trusts. As donors, who can blame us for wondering whether our hard-earned contributions are actually being put to the charities’ advertised

purposes. The truth is that we send off our checks and hope for the best. That’s why I’m pleased to report from first-hand experience that FIDF uses its resources for the benefit of the soldiers of the IDF — exactly as promised.

For more information on Friends of the IDF, log on to <http://www.israelsoldiers.org/>

Ed Berns

## Israeli Naval Force Intercepts Iranian Weapon Ship

A special Israel Navy force recently intercepted and boarded a ship 100 miles off the coast of Israel. The ship, flying the flag of Antigua, was carrying weapons under civilian disguise. An IDF spokesperson said that after the ship was boarded a check determined it was carrying thirty-six shipping containers of weaponry disguised as civilian cargo.

Roughly 500 tons of weapons, rockets, and missiles were found disguised as civilian cargo and hidden among hundreds of other containers on board the cargo vessel “Francop.” The Israel Navy force which intercepted the ship included missile boats and naval commandos, intelligence, and explosive experts. The naval commando force boarded the vessel and conducted an initial search that followed search protocols as dictated by International Law. Following the initial search, and after it became clear that the vessel was carrying weapons, the ship was directed by the Israel Navy to dock at the Israeli Naval base at Ashdod for additional searches and a detailed inspection of the ship’s cargo. The captain of the ship agreed to the search. The Israel Navy conducted all activity without any force. Following the inspection of the ship and removal of the weapons the vessel was released.

The IDF announced the weapons found on board the ship originated from Iran, and were intended for the Hezbollah terror organization for use against Israel. They said the weapons discovered at sea constituted a violation of UN Security Council Resolutions 1747 and 1701 that strictly forbid Iran from exporting or trading any form of weapons. The IDF said it was a well-known Iranian technique to take advantage of cargo ships flying different flags to smuggle containers loaded with large amounts of highly volatile weaponry to terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah.

Among the intercepted arms being shipped by Iran to Hezbollah were heavy munitions, such as 122mm Katyusha rockets (see picture at right), that were packaged in crates labeled “parts of bulldozer” and “equipment for construction.” A total of about 9,000 mortar bombs of different types were seized, along with about 2,000 Katyusha artillery rockets, 3,000 recoil-less gun shells, 20,000 grenades, and over a half million rounds of small arms ammunition.



The operation was authorized by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the Minister of Defense, Ehud Barak .

Remarking on the seizure, President Shimon Peres stated: “The IDF today successfully intercepted a ship that was apparently en route from Iran to Syria and Hezbollah. Although all the parties deny it, the entire world is today witness to the wide gap between what Syria and Iran say and what they in fact do. The actions of Iran and Syria contradict all international law. Both Iran and Syria are continuously arming the terrorist organizations, first and foremost Hezbollah and Hamas, and are clearly working to undermine peace in the Middle East. The interception of the arms ship is of the highest importance in military terms, but also has political importance. No one can argue with facts. This is an important achievement for the army and for the entire State of Israel.”