



ISRAEL MATTERS!

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US Approves "Stealth" Fighter Aircraft Sale to Israel

Israelis Will No Longer Require Visas to Visit the US

The Bush administration has given its tentative consent to annul the US visa requirement for Israelis.

Israeli Interior Minister Meir Sheerit met with US Secretary of Homeland Security, Michael Chertoff and Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte, regarding Israel's desire for a visa-free status. The three agreed to form teams which would begin formulating the necessary changes in policy. The US did stipulate the change in Israel's compliance to switch its passport system from paper to biometric documents.

Israelis wishing to travel to the US are currently required to have an entry visa. The process of obtaining one requires a fee, which currently stands at \$131, a consulate interview and a lengthy wait. Despite the red tape, however, 98% of the applicants are granted a US visa. "This is a significant accomplishment," said Minister Sheerit. "There is no reason for Israelis to have to go through the hassle of getting a visa. Israel doesn't require Americans visiting it to have a visa and there is no reason for the US to demand that of Israelis."

Israel has recently become eligible for the US visa mitigation, under the State Department's guidelines. Chertoff gave his consent to the move, ordering a State Department inspection aimed at ensuring Israel meets the criteria.

During 2008, 313,000 Israelis traveled to the United States.

The Pentagon's Defense Security Cooperation Agency has approved the \$15.2 billion sale of 25 of the stealthy F-35 Joint Strike Fighters for Israel with an option for another 50, saying it is vital to US national security interests to assist Israel in the development of "a strong and ready self-defense capability."

Israel is the first foreign nation to receive the up-to-the-minute Lockheed Martin F-35 Joint Strike stealth fighter, which will replace the older F-16 fighters and enhance its air-to-air and air-to-ground defenses.

Military sources report that President George W. Bush, in mid-financial crisis, fully discharged his promise of a defense package for Israel before he left office.



The Jerusalem Post reports the Pentagon has agreed to supply the F-35A Lightning II variant to Israel as early as 2012, instead of in 2014 or 2015. It also quoted an Israeli defense official as saying that: "This plane [the F-35] can fly into downtown Tehran without anyone even knowing

about it since it can't be detected on radar."

Earlier, the Pentagon approved up to \$330 million in three separate arms deals for Israel and posted its advanced FBX-band radar system to an Israeli Air Force base in the Negev.

The first consignment of 25 F-35's has a conventional take-off and landing (CTOL) configuration, while the next 50 are short take-off and vertical landing (STOVL) aircraft. In the event of an armed conflict, the Israel Air Force calculates that its long runways will be in danger of attack by Iran, Syria, Hezbollah and Hamas.

The timing and technology agreements reportedly came in the wake of a Washington meeting between Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak and US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates during which assurances were tendered that sensitive technologies would not be passed to third parties. Israel's relationship with the F-35 program has been described as rocky at times, but its re-admittance restored its Security Cooperative Participant status in the program.

Paul McCartney Performs Concert in Israel

Kicking it off with the familiar Beatles' song "Hello, Goodbye" McCartney performed to the joy of tens of thousands of cheering fans.



McCartney billed the September 26th concert, "Friendship First," saying he's on a mission of peace for Israel and the Palestinians.

Singing "Give Peace a Chance," he stopped and let the audience sing the chorus alone. "Here tonight you sang it, you want it," the 66-year-old rocker said. He dedicated the song to his fellow Beatle, John Lennon, who was killed in New York in 1980.

Fireworks lit the sky as McCartney sang "Live and Let Die."

A crowd made up of Israelis of all ages, estimated at 40,000, cheered as McCartney performed outdoors in Tel Aviv's Yarkon Park on the warm late summer night. Some wore T-shirts with the slogan, "I love Paul."

He greeted the crowd with a mixture of English and Hebrew, wishing concert goers "shana tova," happy new year, ahead of the Jewish new year holiday.

His repertoire included many Beatles hits, as well as songs from his post-Beatles group, Wings. The songs included "Yesterday," "Back in the USSR," "Hey Jude" and "Jet." He added two encores.

The Beatles had been scheduled to perform in 1965. But in one of the country's most widely repeated tales, an Israeli official supposedly called off the concert for fear it would corrupt the nation's youth. So pervasive is this story that Israel's ambassador in London, Ron Prosor, sent a letter to McCartney and Ringo Starr, the two surviving Beatles, to express regret over the matter. "Israel missed a chance to learn from the most influential musicians of the decade, and the Beatles missed an opportunity to reach out to one of the most passionate audiences in the world," he wrote. He invited them to play during this year's celebrations marking Israel's 60th anniversary.

When McCartney announced plans for the concert he acknowledged the brouhaha, saying he was finally coming "43 years after being banned by the Israeli government." He promised to give fans "the night they have been waiting decades for."

A group of Palestinians had urged McCartney to call off the show, saying it was supporting the Israeli occupation of the West Bank. A radical Muslim preacher in Lebanon also called on McCartney to cancel the show saying doing the concert might make him a target for a suicide bombing. Omar Bakri said McCartney's decision to perform as part of Israel's 60th anniversary celebrations had turned him into the enemy of Muslims worldwide.

During a visit to the biblical town of Bethlehem before the concert McCartney brushed off the criticism. "I get criticized everywhere I go, but I don't listen to them," McCartney said. "I'm bringing a message of peace, and I think that's what the region needs."

Iranian Boy to Get Cancer Treatment in Israel

A 13-year-old cancer victim from Iran recently came to Israel for treatment, the hospital which received him said, attracting media interest in a country used to decades of hostility with Tehran. The boy, who has an advanced brain tumor, had traveled from Turkey with his parents after undergoing surgery as well as chemotherapy and radiotherapy in Iran that failed to cure him, Chaim Sheba Medical Centre director Zeev Rotstein said.

Turkish doctors advised his family to seek help at Sheba, which has an international reputation and experience in treating patients from countries that have no diplomatic ties with Israel. "He has been suffering from the tumor for more than a year," Rotstein said. "We are doing our best, in the knowledge that his chances are not very good." Sheba declined to give the boy's name citing concern that his family could face legal problems when they return to Iran.

The boy and his parents received permission to enter Israel from the Israeli embassy in Ankara. Iran has stirred war fears with fiercely anti-Israel rhetoric.

We hope you continue to enjoy reading *Israel Matters!* Please send your comments – we love to hear from you – to Ed and Randy Berns, Co-chairs of the TBS Israel Affairs Committee, at: israelaffairs@tbshamden.com

As a follow-up to the 2008/5769 High Holiday Israel Appeal, the following charities, services and organizations are offered for your consideration as ways to support Israel.

ORGANIZATION	DESCRIPTION	INTERNET WEBSITE
A Package From Home	The mission of A Package From Home is to strengthen the spirit and resolve of each Israeli soldier and to show appreciation for the sacrifices they make in securing the safety and survival of Israel and its people. The organization sends thousands of packages to Chayalim Bodedim (soldiers without family in Israel) and combat soldiers. Each package contains a letter of appreciation from children and adults from all over the world for their part in securing the country.	www.apackagefromhome.org
American Friends of Magen David Adom - ARMDI	Magen David Adom (MDA – Israel's equivalent to the Red Cross) and its team of trained volunteer and professional medical responders provides the entire nation's pre-hospital emergency medical needs, including disaster, ambulance and blood services.	www.afmda.org/
Friends of the Israel Defense Forces	Friends of the Israel Defense Forces (FIDF) is the American partner of the Association for the Wellbeing of Israel's Soldiers. FIDF helps support social, educational and recreational programs and facilities for the young men and women soldiers of Israel who defend the Jewish homeland.	www.israelsoldiers.org
Hadassah Medical Center	Hadassah University Medical Center, Jerusalem, is known for pioneering new medical techniques. A premier teaching hospital and research center, the Medical Center is equipped with the most sophisticated diagnostic, treatment and research equipment enabling its world renowned faculty to furnish the most modern medical care in an atmosphere that embraces excellence.	www.hadassah.org.il/ English
Jewish Agency for Israel	A global partnership committed to the Jewish future that stands on a history-making track record. Together with the United Jewish Communities (UJC) in North America and Keren Hayesod - United Israel Appeal around the world, its partnership has brought 3 million people to Israel. The Jewish Agency believes that Israel stands at the heart of the Jewish future.	www.jewishagency.org
Sar-El	The Hebrew acronym meaning "Service for Israel", administers the VFI program in Israel. Sar-El was formed in 1982 through the initiative of General A. Davidi (Ret.) who enlisted volunteers to help alleviate manpower shortages during the war in Lebanon. The majority of volunteers work on army bases alongside or under the direction of soldiers and perform duties that allow soldiers and other professional staff to focus their time where their skills are most needed.	www.sar-el.org/
Taglit – Birthright Israel	An innovative partnership between the people of Israel through their government, local Jewish communities, and leading Jewish philanthropists provides the gift of first time, peer group, educational trips to Israel for Jewish young adults ages 18 to 26. The program was created to send thousands of young Jewish adults from all over the world to Israel as a gift to diminish the growing division between Israel and Jewish communities around the world; to strengthen the sense of solidarity between Israeli youth and Jewish communities around the world, and to promote the role of Israel as a powerful resource in Jewish learning.	www.birthrightisrael.com
Volunteers for Israel (VFI)	The mission of Volunteers for Israel is to connect Americans to Israel through volunteer service. VFI partners with military and civilian organizations that enable volunteers to work side-by-side with Israelis and to promote solidarity and good will among Israelis, American Jews, and other friends of Israel. See Sar-El, above.	www.vfi-usa.org/index.html