



ISRAEL MATTERS!

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NETANYAHU PICKED TO FORM NEW ISRAELI GOVERNMENT

Israel Used Gaza Fighting To Perfect Anti-Rocket System

Israeli weapons developers traced the paths of hundreds of rockets fired by militants during the recent Gaza fighting to help perfect a planned interception system.

During the Gaza offensive Israeli teams collected data on how the homemade rockets and the military-grade Katyushas fired by Gaza militants behaved in different weather conditions and how they were picked up by the interception system's radar, which is already operational officials said. The data will be used to assist in the construction of the so-called "Iron Dome" system.

Iron Dome, which is supposed to protect Israeli towns from rocket fire, is set to be operational in 2010. The system is being designed as an answer to the Gaza rocket fire, which so far has eluded Israel's sophisticated military. The project has been criticized by some experts because of its cost — each interceptor will cost between \$30,000 and \$40,000 — and because it needs 15 seconds to respond, too long to stop rockets from hitting targets adjacent to Gaza.

Iron Dome's first intercept test is scheduled for the end of 2009.

After the failure of his last-ditch effort to muster Kadima leader Tzipi Livni's support for a unity government, President Shimon Peres formally entrusted Likud chairman Benjamin ("Bibi") Netanyahu with the task of building a national coalition government. The right-wing Netanyahu was given 42 days to put together a coalition that might draw on Labor and Kadima, though he also spoke favorably of including the ultranationalist Yisrael Beiteinu party, which made substantial gains in the national election.



Benjamin Netanyahu accepts congratulations from President Shimon Peres

The U.S.-educated son of a noted Zionist historian, Netanyahu, 59, cast his comeback as vindication of the Likud's long view -- that ceding occupied Arab land unilaterally had backfired by encouraging Islamist foes of the Jewish state. "We've all come a long way, and everyone now realizes the extent to which Bibi's predictions proved true," said a senior Likud lawmaker.

Previously, Livni announced that she had no intention of joining a broad coalition under Netanyahu, despite the Likud chairman's assertion that he was willing to "go to great lengths" in order to induce Kadima to join his government.

"It appears that the coalition which has been formed in recent days lacks diplomatic vision," Livni said after the meeting. Livni rejected the president's plea that she reconsider joining a coalition comprised of the three largest parties - Kadima, Likud and Israeli Beiteinu - and asserted that a "broad coalition is worthless if it is not governed by values."

Netanyahu said after his meeting with Peres, that he would be willing to give Kadima several senior portfolios in his cabinet.

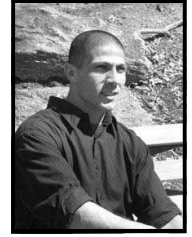
Netanyahu said repeatedly during the campaign that not forming a national-unity government when he was prime minister from 1996-99 was his worst-ever political mistake. Livni left him no choice but to repeat it when she vowed to remain in the opposition.

Livni's associates said she knew she could have received an unlimited number of portfolios from Netanyahu, but she was not willing to sacrifice her ideology, which she believes is far removed from that of the Likud.

Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Iran's nuclear designs and Israel's economic ills provided what Netanyahu needed to end ideological drift in his hawkish Likud party and more than double its seats in the recent election.

Lost in the Blur of Slogans

By Ishmael Khaldi - Deputy Consul General of Israel for the Pacific Northwest



For those who haven't heard, the first week in March has been designated as Israel Apartheid Week by activists who are either ill intentioned or misinformed. On American campuses, organizing committees are planning happenings to once again castigate Israel as the lone responsible party for all that maligns the Middle East.

Last year, at UC Berkeley, I had the opportunity to "dialogue" with some of the organizers of these events. My perspective is unique, both as the vice consul for Israel in San Francisco, and as a Bedouin and the highest-ranking Muslim representing Israel in the U.S. I was born into a Bedouin tribe in Northern Israel, one of 11 children, and began life as a shepherd living in our family tent. I went on to serve in the Israeli border police, and later earned a master's degree in political science from Tel Aviv University before joining the Israel Foreign Ministry.

I am a proud Israeli - along with many other non-Jewish Israelis such as Druze, Bahai, Bedouin, Christians and Muslims, who live in one of the most culturally diversified societies and the only true democracy in the Middle East. Like America, Israeli society is far from perfect, but let us deal honestly. By any yardstick you choose - educational opportunity, economic development, women and gay's rights, freedom of speech and assembly, legislative representation - Israel's minorities fare far better than any other country in the Middle East.

So, I would like to share the following with organizers of Israel Apartheid week, for those of them who are open to dialogue and not blinded by a hateful ideology:

You are part of the problem, not part of the solution: If you are really idealistic and committed to a better world, stop with the false rhetoric. We need moderate people to come together in good faith to help find the path to relieve the human suffering on both sides of the Israel-Palestinian conflict. Vilification and false labeling is a blind alley that is unjust and takes us nowhere.

You deny Israel the fundamental right of every society to defend itself: You condemn Israel for building a security barrier to protect its citizens from suicide bombers and for striking at buildings from which missiles are launched at its cities - but you never offer an alternative. Aren't you practicing yourself a deep form of racism by denying an entire society the right to defend itself?

You are betraying the moderate Muslims and Jews who are working to achieve peace: Your radicalism is undermining the forces for peace in Israel and in the Palestinian territories. We are working hard to move toward a peace agreement that recognizes the legitimate rights of both Israel and the Palestinian people, and you are tearing down by falsely vilifying one side.

To the organizers of Israel Apartheid Week I would like to say: If Israel were an apartheid state, I would not have been appointed here, nor would I have chosen to take upon myself this duty. There are many Arabs, both within Israel and in the Palestinian territories who have taken great courage to walk the path of peace. You should stand with us, rather than against us.

International Bubble Boy Cure Based on Israeli Research

The film "The Boy in the Plastic Bubble" opened America's eyes to the rare genetic disorder -- severe combined immunodeficiency (SCID) -- afflicting up to 100 babies every year in the U.S. David Vetter, whose story the movie is based on, was a Texas boy who succumbed to the fatal disease known as Bubble Boy disease at the age of 12, after living years behind plastic barriers that protected his immune system from germs.

Thanks to research developed by an Israeli doctor, Prof. Shimon Slavin, babies and children everywhere may be spared from this fatal disease. Recent research based on Slavin's ground-breaking gene replacement approach developed in Israel, was tried and tested by a team of scientists from around the globe. The results were a success.

Using Slavin's approach, the international team, including researchers from Italy, found and then reported in the New England Journal of Medicine that Slavin's gene therapy protocol -- reduced-intensity conditioning (RIC) -- not only treats but appears to have cured eight out of the 10 children they treated for the fatal Bubble Boy disease.

In Bubble Boy disease, the less common and fatal form of it is found in babies with a genetic defect -- their tiny bodies don't produce enough of the enzyme adenosine deaminase (ADA). Using Slavin's methods, international scientists took marrow cells from the patients and in the laboratory inserted "corrected" versions of the cells, versions that know how to produce the adenosine deaminase enzyme.

U.S., Israel Disagree on Iran Arms Threat

U.S. intelligence officials told Congress that Iran has not produced the highly enriched uranium necessary for a nuclear weapon and has not decided to do so, an assessment that contrasts with an earlier Israeli warning that Iran has crossed the "technological threshold" in its pursuit of the bomb. Director of National Intelligence Dennis C. Blair said that Iran has not decided to pursue the production of weapons-grade uranium and the parallel ability to load it onto a ballistic missile.

"The overall situation -- and the intelligence community agrees on this -- [is] that Iran has not decided to press forward . . . to have a nuclear weapon on top of a ballistic missile," Blair told the Senate Armed Services Committee. "Our current estimate is that the minimum time at which Iran could technically produce the amount of highly enriched uranium for a single weapon is 2010 to 2015." Iran recently announced its first space launch and said it had successfully tested an air-to-surface missile with a 70-mile range. "Whether they develop a nuclear weapon which could then be put in that missile is a separate decision which Iran has not made yet," Blair said.

Israeli officials have a different view of Iran's goals.

"Iran continues to stockpile hundreds of kilograms of low-level enriched uranium and hopes to use the dialogue with the West to buy the time it requires in order to move towards an ability to manufacture a nuclear bomb." Blair said Israel was working from the same facts but had drawn a different interpretation of their meaning. "The Israelis are far more concerned about it, and they take more of a worst-case approach to these things from their point of view," he said.

Israel Engaged in Covert War Inside Iran: Reuters Reports

Israel is involved in a covert war of sabotage inside Iran to try to delay Tehran's alleged attempts to develop a nuclear weapon, Britain's Daily Telegraph has reported, quoting a former CIA agent and intelligence experts. Israel was said to have targeted Iranian nuclear scientists with letter bombs and poisoned packages and had set off explosions in Iran. Some analysts caution that reports of such a "dirty war" may form part of a psychological warfare campaign to unsettle Iran.

Israel, widely assumed to be the only nuclear power in the Middle East, declined all comment on the report.

"Israel has launched a covert war against Iran as an alternative to direct military strikes against Tehran's nuclear program," the paper reported. "It is using hit-men, sabotage, front companies and double agents to disrupt the regime's weapons project, the experts say."

The newspaper said Israel's "decapitation" strategy had targeted members of Iran's atomic program, hoping to set back the country's nuclear ambitions without resorting to war. As evidence of Israel's reported strategy, Iran watchers have pointed to events such as the death of a prominent nuclear scientist at the Isfahan uranium plant who died at home from apparent gas poisoning in 2007.

"It's a good policy, short of taking them out militarily, which probably carries unacceptable risks," the former CIA agent was reported to have said. "Even if there's no truth to it, it's part of what is a massive psychological war against Iran's nuclear program."

Israel and California Cut World's Largest Solar Energy Deal

An Israeli company and a Californian one are making solar power history. Southern California Edison (SCE) and BrightSource Energy from Israel have signed the world's largest solar energy deal. Now awaiting approval from the California Public Utilities Commission, when the contracts are fulfilled -- as early as 2013 -- the Israeli-CA sun project will power almost 1 million California homes.

According to the president of BrightSource, Israel Kroizer, the project will be the world's largest solar energy project. Some 1,300 megawatts of energy will be created, with the first plant to be built in Ivanpah, California, expected to generate 286,000 megawatt-hours per year. The project will also create more jobs in the region. "It's the biggest solar energy project ever signed," Kroizer emphasized, and when complete it will be the largest solar energy plant in the world."

BrightSource launched its pilot plant in Israel's Negev Desert. It employs thousands of tiny mirrors called heliostats to reflect sunlight from the heliostats onto a boiler atop a tower producing steam from the concentrated heat. The steam is then piped to a turbine to generate electricity. Built with water-conserving principles in mind, the system uses air-cooling to convert the steam back into water.

As part of the deal with its American partner SCE, BrightSource will maintain its engineering and logistics facilities in Israel. In a few months, Kroizer says, BrightSource will start constructing the solar project. Next on its list for solar energy power plants are more in southwest California, Arizona and New Mexico.