



ISRAEL MATTERS!

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ISRAEL ARMY: NO CHARGES IN GAZA PROBE

Obama to Muslims: Don't Blame Everything on Israel

At the end of his recent visit to Turkey, President Barack Obama met with Muslim, Christian and Jewish students, and urged Muslims to look at the "two sides" to the Arab-Israeli conflict. "In the Muslim world, the notion that somehow everything is the fault of the Israelis lacks balance because there are two sides to every question," Obama said. To the Jewish members of the group he said, "I say the same thing to my Jewish friends - you have to see the perspective of the Palestinians. Learning to stand in someone else's shoes, to see through their eyes... this is how peace begins."

Obama reiterated the US commitment to previous understandings, including the process launched at Annapolis in 2007, promoting a peace agreement between Israel and its neighbors.



President Barack Obama waves after addressing the Turkish Parliament General Assembly

Addressing the Turkish parliament, he also voiced unequivocal support for a two-state solution. "Let me be clear," Obama said, "the United States strongly supports the goal of two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. That is a goal shared by Palestinians, Israelis, and people of good will around the world."

The Israeli army has closed an investigation into alleged killings of civilians during its offensive in the Gaza Strip, saying soldiers' testimonies were based on hearsay, "purposely exaggerated" and not supported by facts. Allegations of wrongful shootings emerged from some soldiers speaking in a closed-door meeting at a military prep school. Their accounts, along with their reports of vandalism in Palestinian homes, had been published by Israeli media.

The army's chief prosecutor angrily accused the soldiers of harming Israel's international image. "It will be difficult to evaluate the damage done to the image and morals of the Israel Defense Forces and its soldiers ... in Israel and the world," Brig. Gen. Avichai Mendelblit said. Human rights groups accused the military of carrying out a biased and hasty inquiry that ignored key evidence and urged an independent body be formed to investigate Israeli army activity in Gaza.

One case involved the killing of an elderly woman by a rooftop sniper, and the second described a sniper fatally shooting a mother and two children who had entered a no-go zone, according to a transcript of the testimony obtained by The Associated Press. The soldiers' accounts set off soul-searching in Israel where the military is widely revered. They also echoed Palestinian allegations that Israel's assault did not distinguish between civilians and combatants, and fueled assertions by some international rights groups that Israel violated the laws of war.

In announcing its findings, the army said the soldiers' testimonies "were purposely exaggerated and made extreme, in order to make a point."

In the case of the elderly woman shot by a sniper, the soldier "was only repeating a rumor he had heard" that she was shot without provocation, the army said. Maj. Yehoshua Gutler, legal assistant to the military's advocate general, said the elderly woman was wearing bulky clothing and the soldiers had reason to believe she was a threat after intelligence reports showed " Hamas was going to use an elderly woman as a suicide bomber as they had in the past." The woman continued to advance despite repeated calls to stop and warning shots fired in the air, and soldiers had "no choice" but to shoot, Gutler said.

A second soldier had reported a sniper shooting a woman and two children but later clarified his statement to say it was "an incident that he had not witnessed." Gutler said the investigation showed that the family "was not fired at and not put in peril at any stage and left the premises unharmed."

Defense Minister Ehud Barak said the investigation showed that Israel possesses "the most moral army in the world."

Poll Shows India is Israel's Best Friend

As part of its effort to “rebrand” Israel in the eyes of the world, the Israel Foreign Ministry conducted a poll of 5,215 people from 13 countries described as “central” ones. The poll found that the people of India are Israel's best friends, at least among the larger powers as 58 percent of Indians surveyed said that they support Israel.

56 percent of U.S. citizens expressed support for Israel, as did 52 percent of Russians, 50 percent of Mexicans, 48 percent of Chinese, and 39 percent of Italians.

Results of the poll show that 27 percent of the world's citizens support Israel politically, while 24 percent think Israel is an “arrogant” country. An identical proportion – 24 percent – see Israel as a “creative” country and 17 percent see it as being a “friendly” one. 35 percent said that they see Israel as a racist country.

A 2007 Gallup poll of Americans found that 58 percent sympathized with Israel over the Palestinian Authority.

Most of the survey was conducted before Operation ‘Cast Lead’ in Gaza was launched in late December.

UN: Israel #1 in Water Recycling

Despite it's constant struggle to maintain a sufficient water supply – or perhaps because of it – Israel was named the world's most efficient recycled water user in a United Nations report issued in honor of International Water Day. Presented at the 5th World Water Forum in Istanbul, Turkey, the UN report also ranked Israel as one of the world's leaders in desalinated water use.

Israel purifies and reuses almost 70 percent of its waste water each year for agriculture. Much of the leftover sewage water is reused for other purposes.

Israeli Scientists Search Ocean Floor for Super Antibiotic

Israeli zoologists believe they may have discovered an answer to a dangerous fungal infection, *Cryptococcus neoformans*, thought to be responsible for an estimated one million deaths each year worldwide, including some 600,000 in sub-Saharan Africa. The discovery: the common marine sponge.

Scientists from the Department of Zoology at Tel Aviv University have identified several antibiotic candidates among the unique compounds that help a sponge fend off predators and infections. Project leader Prof. Micha Ilan, and his graduate students are identifying, isolating and purifying those that could be the super-antibiotics of the future. The researchers have so far isolated thousands of bacteria and fungi, including a few hundred unique actinobacteria. So far, several dozen hold promise as new drugs.

Sponges protect themselves by building associations and partnerships with bacteria and fungi. The researchers are tapping into those relationships by looking at the same chemicals that the sponge uses for defense as a means to fight infection in humans.

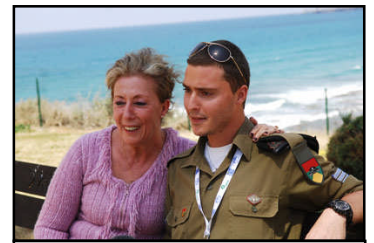
Drug developers have long known about the potential goldmine of pharmaceuticals in the marine environment, particularly among sedentary life like marine sponges. Those compounds are found in very small quantities, however. Collecting and extracting large amounts of the chemicals would mean killing huge quantities of animals. Instead, the scientists take cultures from sea sponges with minimal damage to the natural environment. Their symbionts are grown and tested in a “wet” laboratory at the school.

IDF Holds Massive Seder, Pesach Bash for 400 Lone Soldiers

The IDF held a massive Seder for 400 “lone soldiers.” Lone soldiers are defined as those who immigrated to Israel without their parents or whose parents have emigrated from Israel, as well as orphans and soldiers who are not in touch with their families for other reasons.

The soldiers arrived at “Al HaYam” seaside resort village at Givat Olga, near Hadera and were joined by the IDF Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi who spoke with the soldiers and participated in a special program on IDF Radio.

Lt. Gen. Ashkenazi spoke with several lone soldiers on the program, including Sgt. Avi Ben-Zaken, who made Aliyah from Venezuela and had not seen his mother, Clara, for three years since his enlistment. The radio staff surprised Ben-Zaken by putting his mother on the line – and then surprised him even more by having her walk into the studio. She had been flown into Israel especially for the occasion by the Friends of the IDF. [*For more information about Friends of the IDF visit: www.fidf.org]*



Sgt. Avi Ben-Zaken with mother, Clara

The 400 soldiers also participated in a communal Seder attended by Defense Minister Ehud Barak and other top officers. In addition, they were treated to various privileges, including a chance to record a “single” in a special musical studio and to call their families abroad for free and wish them a happy Pesach. The soldiers also participated in sports activities, and female soldiers enjoyed makeup and beauty workshops.