


IN THE NEWS
Rocket kills Israeli in Nahariya

An Israeli man was killed in a Hezbollah rocket attack in the northern Israeli town of Nahariya.

The death occurred during one of 12 Katyusha attacks on Nahariya on Tuesday, Mayor Jackie Sabag said.

Meanwhile in Lebanon, an Israeli airstrike killed at least 10 Lebanese soldiers. Tuesday's airstrike on an army base reportedly wounded 35 other soldiers.

Lawyers: Government pressured AIPAC

Prosecutors pressured AIPAC to cut off two employees charged with dealing in classified information, lawyers said in a motion to dismiss the case.

The brief filed Tuesday alleges that prosecutors conditioned their decision to drop an investigation of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee on AIPAC's agreement to fire Steve Rosen, the group's foreign policy director, and its Iran analyst, Keith Weissman, and to stop paying the pair's lawyers.

A spokesman for the U.S. Attorney's office did not return calls.

Israel disagrees with U.N. envoy

Israel's foreign minister and a U.N. envoy reportedly disagreed over the sequence of steps necessary to end the fighting between Israel and Hezbollah.

Israel wants the three soldiers recently abducted by Hezbollah and Hamas to be returned before it halts its attacks in Lebanon, while the United Nations team, headed by envoy Vijay Nambiar, proposed that the two steps be taken simultaneously, Ha'aretz reported.

Israel also reportedly wants Lebanon to deploy its own troops along the Israel-Lebanon border.

The U.N. delegation also met with Lebanese government officials.

WORLD REPORT

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Result of Israel-Hezbollah slugfest will reverberate through the region

By LESLIE SUSSER

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Fighting in the ongoing Israeli-Hezbollah standoff has been confined to two of the Middle East's smallest countries, but the outcome could have major strategic implications for the region as a whole.

The dismantling or severe weakening of the Shi'ite militia would be a major blow against global terrorism, rogue states Syria and Iran and possibly even Iran's nuclear plans, Israeli analysts maintain. But, they warn, if Hezbollah emerges intact as a fighting force, Israeli prestige and the global war on terrorism could suffer significant setbacks.

In the Israeli view, time is of the essence: If the international community does not allow Israel the time it needs to finish the job, the result could be a strategic defeat, analysts say, adding that Washington's position on the timeframe will be crucial.

The intensive Israeli bombing of Lebanese infrastructure and Hezbollah targets was triggered by Hezbollah's capture of two Israeli soldiers July 12 in an ambush in which eight other soldiers were killed.

The government decided it could no longer tolerate a situation in which the Shi'ite militia uses its 14,000 rockets to intimidate Israel and make cross-border raids with impunity, confident Israel will avoid sharp retaliation for fear of rocket attacks on its civilian population.

The aim of Israel's tough military response was to change the rules of the game, Defense Minister Amir Peretz declared last week, adding that Israel would not allow Hezbollah militiamen to return to their border positions

or continue to use rockets to threaten Israel.

But there is much more at stake. One of the unstated goals of the operation is to restore Israel's deterrent capacity: When the dust settles, will Israel be perceived as the fragile spider web Hezbollah chief Sheik Hassan Nasrallah likens it to, or as a regional superpower, capable of setting the Middle Eastern agenda? The strong air force response was intended to send the second message.

Some analysts put the stakes even higher, and see in Israel's fight against Hezbollah the front line in the West's battle against global terrorism. Maj.-Gen. (res.) Ya'acov Amidror, a former head of research in military intelligence, identifies three strategic gains that would ensue from Hezbollah's military demise: The capacity of Israel's enemies to produce terrorism would be significantly reduced; Lebanon would become a truly democratic country, a cornerstone in American efforts to democratize the Middle East; and, most important, the West's campaign to prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear power would receive a major boost.

"The Iranians use Hezbollah to threaten that if anyone takes action against their nuclear program, the Middle East will burn. Therefore, depriving Hezbollah of its firepower will have a major impact on the struggle to prevent the creation of a nuclear Iran," Amidror told JTA.

But will the Iranian mullahs allow Israel to achieve such a significant strategic victory? Amidror believes that, for now, there's little they can do about it.

"The great thing about the situation today

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NEWS ANALYSIS

■ *The standoff's outcome could have major strategic implications for the region*

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is that Iran doesn't have the capacity to influence what Israel does or doesn't do in Lebanon. This may not be the case in a few years' time, so there is wide global interest to allow Israel to act freely in Lebanon before it is too late," he maintains.

In an interview on Israel Radio, former Mossad chief Ephraim Halevy took a similar view.

"What is happening in the North is an indirect confrontation between Israel and Iran," he argued. "It will have an impact on the entire Middle East and on the positions and prestige of many regional players. The more clear-cut and significant the Israeli victory, the greater the positive ramifications will be."

Hezbollah's decisive defeat would reverberate in Gaza and Tehran. Analysts say that images of destruction in Lebanon could dampen Palestinian terrorist morale and signal to Iran the kind of fate that might be in store for it if it continues to defy the West on the nuclear issue.

International conditions for Israeli action have never been more favorable. In the post-Sept. 11 world, Hezbollah is isolated in the international community. Even Arab countries like Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan blamed the militant group's "irresponsibility," rather than Israel, for the current crisis.

Moreover, Syrian troops are no longer in Lebanon, having left after last year's assassination of former Lebanese Prime

Minister Rafik Hariri. And recognizing their interest in striking a blow against global terror and Iran's long terrorist arm, members of the G-8 industrial nations meeting in St. Petersburg, Russia, issued a joint communique Sunday that seemed to give Israel more time to act.

Former Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz estimated Monday that it would take about another two weeks to achieve a decisive result.

The endgame will depend on the military results on the ground and just how much of Hezbollah's Katyusha rocket capability Israel is able to destroy. It also will depend on whether Israel feels compelled to send in ground forces to nullify Hezbollah's remaining rocket power. For now, Iran and Syria are sending Hezbollah messages encouraging it to stand firm.

In a Knesset address Monday, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert outlined Israel's public conditions for ending the crisis: return of the kidnapped soldiers, an end to Hezbollah rocket fire and the deployment of Lebanese army forces along the border with Israel.

These three conditions are likely to morph into a demand for the implementation of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1559 of September 2004, which calls for

the dismantling of all Lebanese militias, including Hezbollah.

The question is whether Hezbollah will be weak enough after the fighting for the Lebanese government, with help from the international community, to be able to impose that kind of solution.

Will Hezbollah militiamen agree to be incorporated into the Lebanese

army? And will Israel agree to the dispatch of a multinational force to patrol the border and help impose a cease-fire?

For Israel, the optimal solution would be Hezbollah transformed into a solely political organization, the central Lebanese government in control of all armed forces and a positive modus vivendi between Jerusalem and Beirut.

But, even if the IDF achieves a decisive military victory, it may have to make do with less. Hezbollah and its Iranian and Syrian patrons will do all they can to prevent the group from being stripped of its military power, no matter how the fighting ends.

The Iranians use Hezbollah to threaten that if anyone takes action against their nuclear program, the Middle East will burn. Therefore, depriving Hezbollah of its firepower will have a major impact on the struggle to prevent the creation of a nuclear Iran.

Israeli Maj. Gen. Ya'acov Amidror
Former head of research, IDF intelligence

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Saudi slams Hezbollah, Hamas

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Saudi Arabia issued a rare condemnation of Hezbollah and Hamas violence. Statements by the government in Riyadh on the recent fighting in Lebanon and the Gaza Strip departed from traditional Saudi censure of Israel by blaming Hezbollah and Hamas for their provocative attacks.

"Some elements and groups have got loose and slipped into taking decisions on their own that Israel has exploited to wage a ferocious war against Lebanon and to imprison the entire Palestinian people," a Cabinet statement said Monday.

It appeared to be a veiled reference to abductions of Israeli soldiers carried out by the Lebanese militia and the radical Palestinian Islamist faction, which prompted Israel's retaliatory offensives.

But Saudi Arabia, which has championed a regional peace proposal under which Israel would relinquish all territories captured in the 1967 Six-Day War, also suggested that U.S. support for the Jewish state was holding up rapprochement. "Some countries' total support for Israeli policies has hindered taking a decision," the statement said.

Summer programs scramble to adjust

By RACHEL SILVERMAN

NEW YORK (JTA) — Ever since rockets from Lebanon started pouring down on Israel, Emily Kramer has been able to think of only one thing: her sister.

Kramer, 24, of New York City, says she talks to Samantha, 17, who is on a B'nai B'rith Youth Organization program in Israel, "like 100 times a day." The rest of the time she's glued to CNN, or calling her parents for updates.

With violence spiraling since Hezbollah launched a cross-border raid last week, summer programs to Israel have been fielding calls from anxious relatives and confronting tough security decisions.

One trip, the only program slated to be based entirely in the North, has been canceled outright. Many more have adjusted their itineraries to avoid both Israel's northern border and the area near the Gaza Strip.

Other trips report a slow trickle of kids leaving of their own volition.

"I can assure you that we are, moment by moment, monitoring what's happening and making decisions," said Emily Grotta, director of marketing and communications for the Israel experience program of North American Federation of Temple Youth, which is affiliated with the Reform movement.

On July 13, NFTY, which sent about 600 kids to Israel on summer programs, moved several groups from the northern Golan Heights to the southern portion, farther from Lebanon.

"If we have to curtail certain activities, then we curtail them," agreed Jules Gutin, director of the Conservative movement's United Synagogue Youth. The program canceled buses going to Safed and Haifa last week.

In other ways too, programs are remaining vigilant and responsive. Most trips already have in place communication networks such as listservs, hotlines or emergency cell phones. Staff-to-participant ratios are high, and unsupervised free time is kept to a minimum. Public transportation is generally avoided.

In addition, most groups make decisions based on information from sources like the Jewish Agency for Israel, which takes its cues from Israel's military, police and security services.

Agency spokesman Michael Jankelowitz said many groups have chosen to head south to the Negev and Eilat. He estimated there are about 10,000 Jewish kids from abroad in Israel on summer trips, 6,000 of them American.

But he said the majority of these students will be heading home soon, as peak trip season draws to a close in July.

A spokesman for birthright israel said that only a small portion — just fewer than 1,000 of the 11,000 students it shuttled to Israel this summer — are currently there. They are being diverted from the North.

The rest of the groups participating in the free 10-day trips for 18-25 year-olds have finished their tours, and are safely back in their home countries.

He said that he has not heard of any students leaving prematurely, and that the organization has not been inundated with queries from concerned parents.

One program to scrap its itinerary altogether has been a Reform group out of Great Britain, Jankelowitz said. That group was supposed to take 400 students to a location just north of the Sea of Galilee, outside the approved zone. Jankelowitz said the group is now scrambling to put together an alternative plan.

"There is no mass exodus of kids on programs to Israel," he confirmed.

In a letter to parents and relatives, officials with Hadassah's Young Judaea program explained their rationale.

"Our program participants and counselors continue to report that the programs are achieving their educational goals," the letter reads. "The kids are seeing Israel, they are learning from first-hand experience. They are having a powerful, group educational experience. They are strengthening their Jewish identities and their Zionist commitment. They are having fun."

In fact, some programs are using the current situation as a platform to teach kids about life in Middle East.

USY has brought in experts to discuss

the crisis, and is working to foster dialogue between teens.

"That's an important part of their Israel experience," Gutin said. "When they come back after spending six weeks in Israel, they weren't just there as tourists. We want to make sure they felt they were well-informed."

Groups also are struggling to keep parents up to speed.

"Parents want specifics on where their kid is visiting. They want to know the details of what applies to their kid," Gutin said. "Parents understandably want to be reassured, and that's a major part of our responsibility as well."

The stress may be even more profound for the parents of special-needs children.

Nechama Braun, administrator of the Yad B'Yad program, which mainstreams special needs kids into its Israel trip, said those parents have more anxiety to begin with.

"As a group of people with special needs, the concern and anxiety is probably tenfold as sending a typical child to Israel," Braun said.

"But they also have a lot of trust in our decisions," she said of the parents. "We've been doing this for 15 years."

Whether the upsurge in violence will have a long-term effect on Israel teen trips remains to be seen.

During the intifada, many programs canceled their trips altogether, while others were drastically scaled back.

USY, for example, which sent 76 participants in 2002, now has 420.

For those on the ground, the situation remains unnerving.

Around midnight Sunday, Samantha Kramer's B'BYO group left Tel Aviv for a safer location in Jerusalem.

"We had just come back from Yad Vashem, and they told us at dinner," Kramer said. "We went back, packed and moved. We didn't get into Jerusalem until 1:30, 2 a.m."

"It's nerve-racking, I'm not gonna lie, knowing that I'm like down the street" from violent areas, Kramer continued. "You have to sit there and think about that at night."

FOCUS ON ISSUES

There is no mass exodus of kids on programs to Israel.

Michael Jankelowitz

Spokesman, Jewish Agency for Israel

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

U.S. blasts Syria on conflict

The Bush administration reiterated its criticism of Syrian President Bashar Assad for not doing anything to end the Israel-Hezbollah crisis.

Assad, one of Hezbollah's main patrons, is "not doing what he can to create stability, which would be to stop housing terrorist organizations and providing safe haven for them and permitting people to conduct terrorist operations or at least planning on his soil," White House spokesman Tony Snow said Tuesday.

Senate expresses support for Israel

The U.S. Senate supported Israel's right to "take appropriate action to deter aggression by terrorist groups and their state sponsors." The non-binding resolution passed unanimously Tuesday night. The vote, scheduled for Monday, was delayed after some senators expressed concern about a sentence urging the president "to continue fully supporting Israel as Israel exercises its right of self-defense in Lebanon and Gaza."

The senators said the passage should include calls on Israel to show restraint, but after consultations, the passage remained as originally drafted. A similar bill is to be considered Wednesday by the U.S. House of Representatives. The American Israel Public Affairs Committee praised the resolution, which was sponsored by the leaders of both parties.

"Congress recognizes that Israel has been forced to respond to unprovoked attacks and, like the United States and all sovereign nations, has the right and duty to defend its citizens," AIPAC said in a statement.

Groups laud failure of gay marriage ban

Two Jewish groups praised the U.S. House of Representatives for defeating a proposal to place a constitutional ban on gay marriage.

The Federal Marriage Amendment would have tarnished the Constitution's "rich tradition of progress, enshrine discrimination in our nation's most sacred document and undermine the principle of equal protection for all citizens under the law," Rabbi David Saperstein, the director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, said in a statement.

The Anti-Defamation League also praised the 236-187 vote, which failed by 46 votes to gain the two-thirds necessary for passage.

Most Jewish groups oppose the ban, but the Orthodox Union and Agudath Israel of America backed the amendment.

The Senate failed to pass a similar amendment last month.

Senate endorses embryonic stem-cell research

The U.S. Senate joined the House of Representatives in passing legislation that would expand federally funded stem-cell research to include embryonic cells.

The legislation passed 63-37 in a vote Wednesday. Jewish groups across the spectrum support the legislation, but conservative Christian groups have vigorously opposed it, saying it is unethical because embryos represent a life form. President Bush has vowed to veto the legislation.

Santorum hosts Jewish event

Sen. Rick Santorum (R-Pa.) hosted 50 Pennsylvania Jewish leaders and supporters at a Washington conference.

Speakers at Tuesday's Jewish Leadership Summit praised Santorum's record on Israel, Iran and combating terrorism.

They also discussed the escalation of violence between Israel, the Palestinians and Lebanon and U.S. support for Israel. Santorum,

a conservative Republican, is trailing his rival by as much as 18 percentage points in his bid for a third term in November, and Democrats criticized the appearance of non-partisan Jewish leaders at the event.

Speakers said the event was routine and insisted they were not there to endorse Santorum. Much of the event focused on Israel.

MIDDLE EAST

Israel: We destroyed trucks from Syria

Israel said it destroyed two trucks carrying weapons from Syria into Lebanon.

But an Israeli defense official, Maj. Gen. Gadi Eizenkot, said Tuesday that Syria is not currently a target for possible Israeli airstrikes.

Border infiltrations foiled

Israeli troops thwarted two attempts by Hezbollah militiamen to launch attacks across the Lebanese border.

Soldiers spotted an armed Hezbollah squad trying to cut across the frontier fence and into the northern Israeli town of Avivim late Monday night. The troops opened fire, hitting several of the would-be infiltrators. There were also clashes between Israeli troops stationed at Mount Dov, near the Golan Heights, and Hezbollah gunmen. No Israelis were hurt.

Gunmen killed in Gaza

Israeli forces killed two Palestinian gunmen in the northern Gaza Strip.

Troops who moved into the Gaza town of Beit Hanoun earlier this week to stop cross-border rocket attacks killed two gunmen Tuesday before withdrawing. Israel has launched several military sweeps of the Gaza Strip since Palestinian gunmen abducted an Israeli soldier on the border last month.

Israelis back offensive

The vast majority of Israelis back the offensive in Lebanon, a survey found. According to the Yediot Achronot poll published Tuesday, 86 percent of Israelis described as justified the shelling of Lebanese infrastructure launched after Hezbollah militiamen killed eight Israeli soldiers and abducted another two in a border raid last week.

More than half of respondents said Israel should press the offensive until Hezbollah chief Sheik Hassan Nasrallah is killed. Seventeen percent said Israel should cease fire and enter talks with the radical Shi'ite group or the Lebanese government.

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Defense Minister Amir Peretz also scored high approval ratings. Asked by Yediot to rate their performances in the crisis, 78 percent of respondents praised Olmert and 72 percent commended Peretz.

WORLD

AMIA bombing marked

The 12th anniversary of the bombing of a Jewish center in Buenos Aires was commemorated.

Relatives of the victims of the 1994 bombing of the AMIA center joined Argentine and world Jewish leaders, a few Argentine politicians and members of the country's Jewish community Tuesday for a rally in front of the AMIA building.

The current Argentine government has declared July 18 a national mourning day, but few government officials attended Tuesday's event. President Nestor Kirchner, leading the country since 2003, is in Paraguay on a state visit. The bombing killed 85 people and wounded about 300.