

IN THE NEWS
U.N. council discusses resolution on Lebanon

The U.N. Security Council began deliberating a proposal Tuesday afternoon aimed at ending the Israel-Hezbollah war.

Lebanon has rejected a proposal agreed to over the weekend by France and the United States because it does not call for a complete withdrawal of Israeli forces.

Israel has said it will not withdraw until an international force can take its place and prevent Hezbollah's return to border areas.

Hezbollah kills three Israeli soldiers

Three Israeli soldiers were killed in fighting with Hezbollah in southern Lebanon late Monday night and Tuesday.

One of the soldiers was identified as Capt. Gilad Belahsan, 28, from Carmiel.

Israel said its forces killed at least 15 Hezbollah gunmen in several operations Tuesday in southern Lebanon, including a special forces raid on Tyre.

Several Hezbollah members also were captured, security sources said.

Also Tuesday, Israeli airstrike hit several buildings near the southern Lebanese city of Tyre.

At least six people reportedly were killed in the blast, which was believed to be aimed at a Hezbollah leader.

The attack reportedly took place as funerals were being held for Lebanese killed in earlier Israeli strikes.

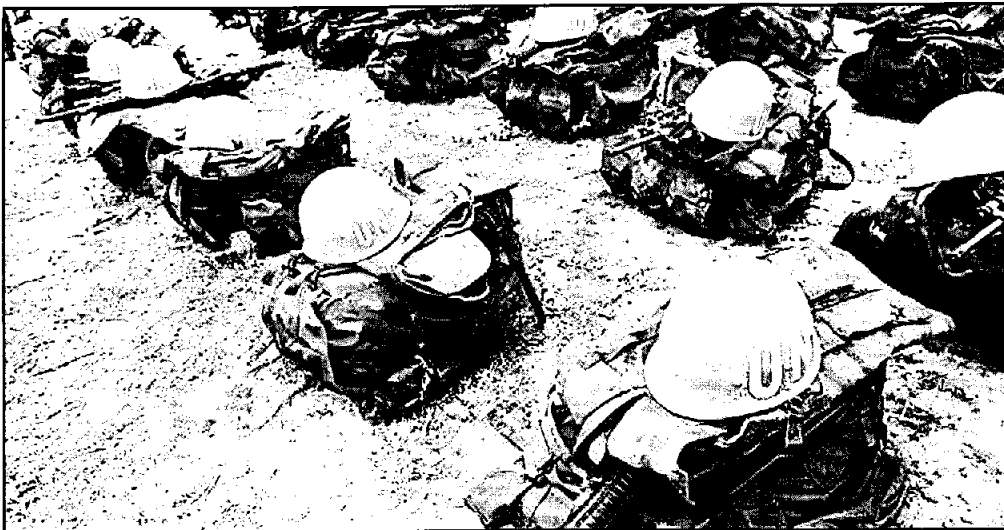
Israeli leaders to discuss expanding war

Israel's Security Cabinet is slated to discuss Wednesday the possibility of expanding Israel's operations in southern Lebanon.

Ehud Olmert's Cabinet is expected to discuss sending troops into the area up to the Litani River, much farther north than troops have deployed so far.

WORLD REPORT

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Martine Perret/UN

U.N. peacekeeper gear.

As U.N. seeks Mideast cease-fire, focus stays on international force

By LESLIE SUSSER

JERUSALEM (JTA) — As the international community tries to find a formula to stop the fierce fighting between Israel and Hezbollah, it faces what could prove to be an insoluble conundrum: how to get Hezbollah to accept its own military demise, or, alternatively, how to persuade Israel to make do with less.

Backed by Syria and Iran and still able to lob hundreds of Katyusha rockets into northern Israel, Hezbollah shows little sign of agreeing to an American-French effort to stop the war and put in motion moves that would neutralize the Shi'ite militia as a fighting force.

Israel, with the option of widening the ground war to put most of the Hezbollah rockets out of range, opposes any cease-fire

that would leave the radical organization's military wing intact.

A dramatic change on the ground or growing war weariness on either side could change things. But, for now, the fighting seems set to continue and even intensify.

Besides securing the release of the two soldiers abducted by Hezbollah on July 12, precipitating the war, Israel's main goal is the removal of the rocket threat on northern Israel. It hopes to achieve this through the creation of a demilitarized buffer zone in southern Lebanon, disarming Hezbollah and banning future supplies of arms to any force in Lebanon other than the elected government.

All three measures are included in the American-French initiative. That's one of the main reasons why the Lebanese side

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ANALYSIS

■ *Can the international community get Hezbollah to accept its own demise?*

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— both Hezbollah and the Beirut government — oppose it.

Initially, the Lebanese government seemed inclined to accept a solution that would enable it to move its forces to the border with Israel and disarm Hezbollah. But with Hezbollah continuing to rocket Israeli towns and cities and gaining more support in Lebanon, the government is even more reluctant than usual to confront the militants.

Syria and Iran, Hezbollah's main backers, also are determined not to allow a cease-fire that might compromise what they see as their wider regional interests. On Sunday, ahead of an Arab League emergency meeting in Beirut, Syria's foreign minister, Walid Muallem, arrived in the Lebanese capital to ensure that the Lebanese did not buckle under international pressure for an end to hostilities.

■
A key element of the American-French plan is the dispatch to southern Lebanon of an international peacekeeping force to help the Lebanese army deploy there. This could be a staged process: First, as hostilities taper off, a beefing up of the United Nations' interim forces, UNIFIL, already in the area; and later, once there is a stable cease-fire, the dispatch of a larger force with a considerably wider mandate.

Israel argues that the size, composition and mandate of this second force will be crucial. Israel would prefer a

multinational force under, say, French command, rather than a U.N. force subject to the organization's hamstrung bureaucracy.

Israel believes the force's mandate should be to help the Lebanese army keep southern Lebanon free of armed militants, stop the flow of arms to Hezbollah across the Syrian border, help disarm Hezbollah and prevent any recurrence of rocket fire into northern Israel.

In order to carry out its mission, the force would have to be made up of 10,000 to 20,000 well-trained troops, with authority to open fire if necessary.

The issue of the international force is complicated by differences between Israel and Lebanon over the timing. Israel also says its troops must remain in southern Lebanon until the international force moves in to replace them — since Hezbollah is sure to exploit any vacuum to move back into the area.

For its part, Hezbollah says there will be no cease-fire until all Israeli forces in Lebanon withdraw.

But there's a more fundamental question: Assuming peacekeepers do move in, will they be able to do the job?

■
Israel has not had good experiences with international peacekeepers in the past.

The United Nations Truce Supervision and Observer force, which was deployed on the border with Egypt after Israel's 1948 War of Independence, pulled out at the first sign of trouble in 1967 before the outbreak of the Six-Day War.

Likewise, UNIFIL has proved unable to stop repeated terrorist attacks on Israel, often standing by while terrorists operate right next to U.N. positions, confident that Israel will feel unable to respond.

Some Israeli analysts hope that this time things will be different, with a well-armed, Western-led multinational

force aware of the strategic importance of a stable Lebanon as a bulwark against Iran's drive for nuclear power and regional hegemony.

Others, however, argue that precisely because of the wider regional implications, Iran and Syria will never allow a stable, Western-leaning Lebanon to emerge. They maintain that no international force will be able to disarm Hezbollah and that Iranian- and Syrian-sponsored Hezbollah terrorism probably would be turned against the force itself — just as, in the early 1980s, Hezbollah launched a campaign of terrorism to drive out American and French peacekeepers.

These analysts maintain that the best hope for a stable Lebanon is a deal with Syria.

They hold that as soon as the international force is in place, American and Israeli approaches should be made to Damascus with the aim of detaching Syria from the Iranian axis, establishing a Syrian buffer between Iran and Hezbollah.

The next few days could be crucial. The Lebanese government is working to amend the U.S.-French draft in its favor. But as long as Hezbollah continues to fire rockets across the border on a daily basis, the Israeli government remains skeptical about the chances of a diplomatic breakthrough.

■
Prime Minister Ehud Olmert reportedly has decided to give diplomacy a few more days and, if nothing comes of it, to widen the scope of Israel's land offensive, with a view to putting a stop to the Katyusha bombardments by military means.

That could concentrate minds in Lebanon and lead to a cease-fire agreement. If not, it will mean a new and much wider war against Hezbollah that will put off the diplomatic countdown for some weeks yet. ■

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On the ground with Israeli reservists

By DAN BARON

WADI YAROUN, Lebanon (JTA) — Serving as part of Israel's offensive in southern Lebanon has raised several major concerns for Avi, a 34-year-old social worker turned reserve soldier.

First, there's the risk of Hezbollah sniper fire and mortar barrages.

Then there's the chafing from the ill-fitting boots Avi was issued in the rush of his regiment's eight-hour call-up notice.

But the most pressing of Avi's preoccupations is what he'll tell his wife when he finally makes it home.

"She thinks I'm patrolling the border on the Israeli side, that we reservists merely replaced the regular troops who went into battle," he tells a reporter embedded with his unit during a break in a path-clearing mission between the Lebanese villages of Yaroun and Bint Jbeil.

"When we first set off, I had enough cell phone reception to call her occasionally and keep up appearances, but now we're further in, and out of touch," he says. "It's a problem."

With thousands of reservists joining the month-old war against Hezbollah, the dilemma faced by Avi — who didn't give his last name for fear of worrying his wife — is familiar to a growing number of households in Israel. And as casualties mount, tragedy never seems far off.

■
A Hezbollah Katyusha rocket fired into northern Israel on Sunday killed 12 reservists while they awaited deployment in Lebanon.

"Husbands, fathers, brothers who won't return, wives crying over graves, children orphaned," the Yediot Achronot newspaper mourned.

Fighting has been intense on the ground, too, especially around Bint Jbeil, the sprawling Hezbollah stronghold that is the final destination of Avi's regiment.

At least two of some 20 soldiers killed in close combat at Bint Jbeil have been reservists.

News of the casualties reaches Avi's regiment incrementally, reported over the military radio and passed along from soldier to soldier.

Most of the troops, who range in age from 22 to mid-40s and hail from a variety of professions, shrug it off.

"There's only one thing that's important, and that is completing our assignment," says Liraz Shmuely, a 30-year-old from Jerusalem. "There's no point in nursing doubts. If we don't do the job, then who will?"

To be sure, the mission gives the 200-strong regiment much to think about. They must escort two bulldozers that grind up a path through rocky scrub deep in the Hezbollah heartland.

In a grim irony of an asymmetrical war in which the enemy pops up to fire anti-tank missiles at choice targets and then melts into the countryside, Israel's armored vehicles must be protected by exposed foot soldiers.

The troops prefer to move at night, believing that Hezbollah — unlike the Israel Defense Forces — doesn't widely issue infrared goggles to its personnel.

The belief that nighttime is safer appeared to have been proven correct a day earlier when, 30 minutes into an afternoon foray around the rich tobacco fields that grace Yaroun's outskirts, eight mortar shells were fired at the reservists. They escaped serious casualties only by leaping into an irrigation ditch.

Maneuvering over such treacherous ground in the dark has its dangers too, especially given the fact many of the troops are not exactly in the fighting fitness of their conscript days.

One portly man is laid up with a slipped disk, another with a sprained ankle. They await evacuation to the border in the back of the next available tank that passes.

■
But there are no complaints from the others, just an equanimity born of fatigue and quiet dedication.

According to a platoon commander, three of the regiment's men backed out at the border, saying they had "premonitions" they wouldn't come out in one piece. No one resents them or calls for a court-martial.

"We had more than enough people calling and volunteering to take part," explains the officer, architecture student Eyal Yossinger, 29.

Two bulldozer drivers, both in their mid-20s, crack jokes in a bid to lighten the regiment's spirits.

Others bring out a camping stove to make Bedouin-style coffee to offset the cold, tinned field rations.

The older soldiers use the breaks in the trek to catch up on sleep — oblivious to the constant whiz and thump of Israeli artillery and Hezbollah rockets overhead — or discuss politics.

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert now appears set on re-establishing, de facto, the Israeli buffer zone in southern

Lebanon that was abandoned in 2000. How long that will last is a matter of debate.

No Israeli official wants to reoccupy Lebanese territory, and Olmert says Israeli troops will withdraw as soon as a foreign peacekeeper force deploys. But some say that's far off.

"Look at what the peacekeepers did in Bosnia — nothing!" says Oleg, a sergeant who immigrated from the former Soviet Union. "My concern is that we are going to be doing a lot of reserve duty in southern Lebanon from now on."

■
There are things that give encouragement, though. Military officials talk of more than 400 Hezbollah fighters killed and several more — dozens even — captured in battle. They eventually could be traded for two Israeli soldiers the terrorist group has held since a July 12 border raid that triggered the war.

The fact that the Hezbollah captives surrendered to incoming troops suggests both that the vaunted Shi'ite fanaticism is not uniform and that Israel's reputation for fair play precedes it.

"That's why we always win our wars in the end — because we have a moral code," says Lt. Col. Nissim Houry, the regiment commander and a building contractor in civilian life. ■

Three of the regiment's men backed out at the border, saying they had 'premonitions' they wouldn't come out in one piece. No one resents them or calls for a court-martial.

NEWS IN BRIEF

WORLD

Annan: Kana attack could be part of pattern

Israel's attack on Kana may be part of a larger pattern of violations of international law in the Israel-Hezbollah war, Kofi Annan said in a report. The report, released Monday by the U.N. secretary-general, said the July 30 attack was serious enough to merit a more thorough investigation.

Annan said he cannot confirm or deny Israel's claims that Hezbollah was launching rockets from Kana before the attack. Initial accounts said some 56 people were killed in the attack, but the number was later halved.

U.N. council to meet on Israel

The U.N. Human Rights Council is expected to discuss a resolution later this week condemning Israel for its actions in Lebanon.

The Organization of the Islamic Conference called for the meeting. Last month, the council voted to criticize Israel's actions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The U.N. General Assembly created the council in March to replace the old Human Rights Commission, which included several nations with poor human rights records and which focused disproportionately on Israel.

Britain refuses to extradite Polish Jew

Britain refused to extradite a Jewish woman to Poland to stand trial for her role as one of the harshest military prosecutors of the Communist era.

The Polish government had requested the extradition of Helena Wolinska, 87, in 1999, according to Polish Radio. They want to try her for the arrest of 16 non-Communists, including a general of the Polish underground army from World War II who was executed.

Students visit Sarajevo

Thirty Jewish and Palestinian American students visited Bosnia recently to seek solutions to conflict in the Middle East. Reuters reported that the university students studying comparative conflict analysis were among a growing number of young people to visit Bosnia, scene of a brutal ethnic conflict in the early 1990s, in search of clues to peace between Israel and its neighbors.

Last month's visit by students throughout the United States was organized by Abraham's Vision, a group that encourages dialogue between Jews and Palestinians.

MIDDLE EAST

Birthright for war-torn Israelis

Some 10,000 residents of Kiryat Shmona will temporarily trade in bomb shelters for a trip around Israel. At the request of the Israeli prime minister, Taglit-birthright Israel, which usually provides free trips for young adult Diaspora Jews, is organizing the weeklong excursions.

The estimated \$4.5 million bill will be picked up by new and equal funding from the Israeli government, the Jewish Agency for Israel and private philanthropists.

Protesters arrested in Israel

Israeli police arrested 12 protesters who blocked the entrance to an Israeli air force base in northern Israel. Some 40 people opposed to Israel's policy in Lebanon demonstrated Tuesday.

Fund helps northern Israelis

The New Israel Fund recently launched an emergency fund-raising campaign aimed at helping the vulnerable in northern Israel. The

fund has provided direct assistance as well as grants to 11 organizations operating in northern Israel, and has enabled hundreds of Israelis to relocate away from the conflict zone.

NORTH AMERICA

Christian group backs northern Israelis

A U.S. group supported by evangelical Christians recently pledged \$9 million to help residents of northern Israel.

The International Fellowship of Christians and Jews will provide assistance to 1,500 families whose houses have been damaged during Israel's war with Hezbollah. The money also will go to future reconstruction projects.

Poll: Republicans more supportive of Israel

U.S. Republicans are far more likely than Democrats to advocate U.S. support for Israel rather than a neutral role in the region, a poll found.

The Los Angeles Times/Bloomberg poll, conducted July 28-Aug. 1, showed that Republicans supported alignment with the Jewish state over neutrality by 64 percent to 29 percent, while Democrats supported neutrality over alignment with the Jewish state, 54 percent to 39 percent. The poll interviewed 1,478 adults and has a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

Hadassah members visit Israel

Seventy Hadassah members arrived in northern Israel to show their solidarity with the Jewish state.

The women came to Israel on Tuesday and will spend the night in Haifa, despite recent attacks on the port city. Trip attendees met with Haifa's mayor, viewed areas damaged by Hezbollah rocket attacks and visited wounded soldiers.

U.S. commanders support Israel

More than 50 retired top commanders of the U.S. armed forces declared their "strong support" for Israel's military response to Hezbollah.

The commanders, representing NATO, U.S. Naval Operations, Special Operations, Army Combat Readiness, Air Warfare, Space and Missile Defense, Service Chiefs of Staffs and other commands, issued a joint statement Monday.

"We believe that Israel's military operation to remove Hezbollah from southern Lebanon is a correct and legitimate response to the creation of an armed force accountable to Syria and Iran and using Lebanese territory to engage in cross-border warfare," the statement says.

FBI: Synagogue packages OK

Packages sent to three Pittsburgh synagogues appear to be harmless, the FBI said.

Some streets around the three synagogues were closed down Tuesday after the packages, which had no return addresses, were received. The packages turned out to be mass mailings.

Orthodox group praises Coast Guard

An Orthodox Jewish organization lauded the U.S. Coast Guard's reversal of an earlier decision banning religious headgear on duty. Agudath Israel of America had pressed the matter with the Coast Guard and its parent agency, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

The policy, which prevented an Orthodox man from wearing his yarmulke on duty, was overturned last week. The Orthodox Union also praised the Coast Guard decision.