

Olympic Fever

ISRAEL SENDS A STRONG DELEGATION TO THE SUMMER OLYMPICS IN BEIJING

With Congress on recess this month, all eyes turned to Beijing for the XXIX Olympiad. While the spotlight shone most heavily on the host nation of China, which tallied an impressive 51 gold medals, and the United States, which led all nations with a total of 110 medals, Israel also sent a strong delegation to the games. From swimming and fencing to judo and tennis, Israeli athletes competed in a wide array of sports in the 2008 Summer Olympics.

Despite impressive showings from a number of Israeli athletes, windsurfer Shahar Zubari won the Jewish state's only medal in Beijing, and the country's seventh-ever Olympic medal.

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert called Zubari after the race to congratulate him on his win. "I couldn't help but be impressed by your coolness, that soulful silence of yours, and the inner feelings that caused you to secure us a medal," Olmert said. "You have no idea how exciting it was when I saw you waving that flag. Know that you have brought many tears of joy to Israel."

Despite the friendly atmosphere of the Olympics, politics found its way into the games. Minutes before Iranian swimmer Mohammad Alirezaei was scheduled to compete against an Israeli, he pulled out of the race, citing illness.

The Iranian National Olympic Committee (INOC) had said before the race that there would be no issue with Alirezaei competing against an Israeli. "Alirezaei swims in lane one and the representative of the Zionist regime [swims] in lane seven, so they will not face each other," INOC secretary Ali Kafashian said.

Iran has not competed against Israel at the Olympics since the 1979 revolution. During the 2004 Athens Olympics, Iran's judo world champion refused to compete against an Israeli opponent. •NER•

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Report

SEPTEMBER 1-15, 2008

AIPAC'S BIWEEKLY ON AMERICAN MIDDLE EAST POLICY

EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Syria Turns to Russia

The regime in Damascus is on the market for more advanced weapons, including anti-aircraft missiles, and it appears to be finding a willing supplier in Moscow. Should Syria—one of the world's leading state sponsors of terrorism—succeed in acquiring advanced Russian arms, Damascus could be encouraged to further exacerbate its already aggressive behavior.

On the eve of his recent visit to Moscow, Syrian President Bashar Assad sounded anxious to deepen his country's military ties to Russia, perhaps in an effort to intimidate opponents and gain more leverage in ongoing talks with Israel. "Military and technical cooperation is the main issue," Assad said. "Weapons purchases are very important. I think we should speed it up."

According to published reports, Russian and Syrian officials discussed the sale of the S-300 anti-aircraft missile system (a system Moscow is also selling to Tehran), which could neutralize the Israeli air force in the event of renewed Syrian aggression. As a reminder, during the first few days of the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Soviet...see *Editor's Comments cont'd on pg. 58*

Safety at Sea

THE UNITED STATES, ISRAEL AND TURKEY PARTICIPATE IN SEARCH-AND-RESCUE DRILLS

In an effort to boost coordination among Israeli, Turkish and American forces operating in the Mediterranean Sea, Israel hosted a major trilateral search-and-rescue exercise last month in international waters.

During the two-day exercise, dubbed Reliant Mermaid IX, aircraft and ships from each of the three nations practiced a series of emergency rescue maneuvers off the coast of Israel.

Ilan Shriqui, commander of Israel's missile-boat fleet and captain of the exercise, said the operation was intended to promote familiarity between each of the three countries' naval forces that sail regu-



Photo by the Associated Press

The United States, Israel and Turkey have participated in joint naval drills since the mid-1990s.

larly in the Mediterranean, in case of an actual maritime rescue operation.

Reliant Mermaid exercises, which began in 1998 and have become a fixture of Israeli-Turkish ties, simulate scenarios with sinking ships, downed aircraft and other maritime emergencies, allowing each country to share and study best practices for responding to crises at sea.

Since the mid-1990s, Israel and Turkey—the first Muslim country to recognize the Jewish state when it did so in 1949—have maintained close defense ties. High-level officials from both countries meet semi-annually to map out joint strategy, and military units from each country train at the other's bases. Israel has also concluded several major agreements for upgrading Turkish defense equipment. •NER•

NER INTERVIEWS

EHUD YA'ARI, ISRAELI JOURNALIST AND EXPERT ON PALESTINIAN AFFAIRS

Ehud Ya'ari is a commentator for Israel's Channel 2 television and a columnist for The Jerusalem Report.

Near East Report: What's the relationship between Fatah and Hamas following the recent infighting in Gaza?

Ehud Ya'ari: Fatah and Hamas are moving toward some sort of reconciliation in the near future. In the meantime, both factions are cleansing the territory under their control—Hamas in Gaza and Fatah in the West Bank—of an organized presence by the other faction.

So there's an ongoing series of confrontations in both areas. There have been mass arrests by each faction of the other's supporters. The trend is toward some sort of arrangement that will allow a pretense of a national unity government, probably led by technocrats, not politicians. However, Gaza will remain under Hamas control, while the West Bank will hopefully remain under the control of the Palestinian Authority (PA).

NER: Why did Fatah members in Gaza flee to Israel during recent clashes?

EY: They had no choice. They were threatened by Hamas with arrests and probably execution on the street. Had they tried to go to Egypt, they would have faced a massive border wall and the Egyptian police. Egypt is telling the Palestinians: Don't come here. The Palestinians understand. If their safety is threatened, they run toward Israel, knowing they will not be executed there.

NER: How strong is Hamas militarily?

EY: Hamas has a massive system of tunnels. The Egyptians are making a bit more effort to uncover tunnels and blow them up, but this doesn't have a serious effect on the traffic underground.

Hamas today may have nearly 20,000 armed people in Gaza. It is feverishly expanding its military force by training new recruits, taking advantage of the ceasefire to be stronger if and when the ceasefire collapses.

Hamas is trying to bring in heavier weapons. It now has several hundred anti-tank missiles, more rocket-propelled grenades and more grenade launchers. It has probably fetched a few anti-aircraft shoulder-fired missiles as well.

Hamas is very strong in the West Bank, but since Operation Defensive Shield in 2002, there isn't a Hamas militia or a production line of suicide bombers and terrorists there. There are only remnants of Hamas cells, but at the grassroots level, Hamas in the West Bank is at least as popular and powerful as Fatah.

But in the West Bank—because of the constant IDF activity and the better-organized PA—Hamas can't block the dismantling of its civilian infrastructure and the closure of its charity organizations. Hamas is mainly on the defensive, with most of its top leaders in the West Bank sitting in Israeli or Palestinian jails.

NER: Will the threat from Gaza force Israel into a major military operation?

EY: So far, the Egyptian-mediated ceasefire is holding. Hamas begged for a ceasefire and will do everything possible for now to maintain it, including quietly arresting people who are trying to shoot rockets into Israel.

Defense Minister Ehud Barak said Israel will launch a major operation into Gaza only if there's no other choice. It's not the Israeli government's preference.

However, the pressure on Hamas is being maintained through the diplomatic and political blockade and the very restrictive policy of traffic through border crossings. This policy is proving effective.

NER: Are PA security forces effective?

EY: The PA is kept alive only through the very generous foreign contributions and constant nightly IDF raids against Palestinian terrorists. If the PA were left to its own devices, I don't believe it could contain Hamas.

There is an undeclared division of labor whereby the PA is responsible for the cities in daytime and the IDF, whenever necessary, goes in after dusk. So yes, the PA is mounting operations and making arrests and has dismantled several Hamas-linked cells, but the PA is in no position to take charge of the West Bank in the foreseeable future.

HAMAS TODAY MAY HAVE NEARLY 20,000 ARMED PEOPLE IN GAZA. IT IS FEVERISHLY EXPANDING ITS MILITARY FORCE BY TRAINING NEW RECRUITS.

NER: How is the United States working to bolster Fatah over Hamas?

EY: The United States is training 3,000 new recruits for the PA's Presidential Guard. That's an impressive number in West Bank terms. But even when fully deployed—and that will take time—their capabilities will be restricted because they can't rely on Fatah, the PA's political backbone. Fatah is basically a nonexistent movement with tens of thousands of members. How come? All these people belong to the patronage system that Fatah established many years ago, but Fatah itself isn't really kicking any more.

NER: What more can be done to support Fatah over Hamas?

EY: I'm afraid Fatah may be beyond salvation. But the situation is complex because Hamas is slowly imposing something that at times resembles a Taliban regime and is quickly losing popularity in Gaza.

In the West Bank, Fatah keeps losing popularity, too. Hamas is not filling this vacuum, though. Fatah and Hamas have equally low popularity in the West Bank, each around 30 percent.

NER: What is the latest on Gilad Shalit?

EY: I don't see a deal for Gilad Shalit's release before there is a deal between the PA and Hamas. •NER•



Photo courtesy of Ehud Ya'ari
Ya'ari said Hamas is on the defensive in the West Bank.

Dangerous Development

A NEW LEBANESE GOVERNMENT DEAL GIVES HIZBALLAH VETO POWER IN THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT WHILE THE TERRORIST ARMY KEEPS ITS WEAPONS AND STRENGTHENS ITS ABILITY TO STRIKE ISRAEL

After weeks of intense negotiations, Lebanese factions have agreed to a ministerial statement that defines the government's working parameters until the spring 2009 elections. The new unity government cements Hizballah's status as a "legitimate player" in Lebanese politics with veto power over all decision-making.

Hizballah Allowed to Keep Arms

While most of the ministerial statement concerns internal Lebanese political affairs, one key passage emphasizes "the right of Lebanon's people, army and Resistance to liberate the Shebaa Farms...and defend Lebanon and its territorial waters in the face of any enemy *using all legal and possible means*" [emphasis added].

In simpler terms, the clause grants the "Resistance"—better known as Hizballah—the right to keep its weapons, effectively placing the terrorist army on equal footing with the Lebanese Armed Forces. The statement also implicitly allows Hizballah to start another war against Israel—a scenario that the terrorist group has been actively preparing for by smuggling thousands of rockets.

Lebanon's new president, Michel Suleiman, whose appointment was welcomed by the United States as a compromise among rival factions, affirmed the

new Lebanese defense policy in an August 1 speech, threatening that "the countdown for liberating the rest of our lands has begun. And today I confirm the [use] of all available and legitimate means to achieve this goal."

Claims on Shebaa Farms are an Excuse to Maintain State of War

When Lebanese leaders speak of "liberating" territory, they are referring to Shebaa Farms, a 10-square-mile area on the northern edge of the Golan Heights, which Israel captured from Syria in 1967. Hizballah has long used Israeli control of Shebaa Farms as a pretext for maintaining a state of war against Israel. The United Nations, however, has declared the issue resolved.

When Israel withdrew from southern Lebanon in 2000, U.N. cartographers demarcated the border and certified the Israeli pullout from "all Lebanese territory." In June 2000, then-U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan confirmed "full compliance" with relevant Security Council resolutions. The issue of Shebaa Farms, vis-à-vis Lebanon, appeared to be settled.

However, the new Lebanese ministerial statement has again brought the Shebaa Farms issue to the forefront. In response, two members of Congress—Reps. Joe Knollenberg (R-MI) and David Scott (D-

GA)—have sent a letter to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice calling on her to clarify the U.S. position on the matter. "We firmly believe the United States and the international community should stand by the Security Council's previous determination that the Shebaa Farms are not occupied Lebanese territory and the withdrawal of Israeli forces is a matter for Syria and Israel to negotiate," the letter said.

Should Israel withdraw from Shebaa Farms, Hizballah has already revived another alleged reason for maintaining its weapons—an old Lebanese claim for seven villages in northern Israel.

Israel Views Lebanon as Hostile

Recognizing the dangerous new reality in Lebanon, Israel has announced that it will hold the government of Lebanon responsible for any attack from its territory. This decision represents a dramatic shift in Israeli policy, which had previously distinguished Hizballah's actions from those of the Lebanese government.

The Israeli defense establishment believes that the new policy toward Lebanon improves Israel's deterrent power, as Hizballah understands the severe ramifications of the new situation should there be any attacks against Israel or Jews around the world. •NER•



Hizballah Legitimized.

The Iran-backed terrorist group can now veto Lebanese government decisions.



Rockets in Range.

Hizballah has stockpiled some 40,000 rockets and missiles—three times more than what it had before its 2006 war against Israel.



WHAT DOES ISRAEL SEE WHEN IT LOOKS NORTH TO LEBANON?



Anti-Israel Rhetoric.

Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora has said that his country would be the last Arab state to sign a peace treaty with Israel.



A Culture of Violence.

Tens of thousands of Lebanese people attend Hizballah rallies in Beirut.

made Egyptian anti-aircraft missiles shot down dozens of Israeli aircraft seeking to block the Egyptian invasion across the Suez Canal. Syria also is reportedly seeking modern jet fighters, anti-tank missiles and rockets.

Why is Israel worried about the impending arms deal? During the 2006 war in Lebanon, Hizballah used Syrian-supplied anti-tank missiles and rockets with great success. Some of those weapons originated in Russia.

In blatant violation of U.N. Security Council demands, Syria has, in the past two years, sent Hizballah massive weapons shipments across its border with Lebanon, more than tripling Hizballah's rocket arsenal since the Lebanon war. Thus, should Syria get its hands on advanced Russian weapons, there is good reason to suspect that Hizballah would soon have some of them in its arsenal.

Not only Hizballah would benefit from a stronger Syria. Damascus is home to nearly a dozen Palestinian terrorist groups, including Hamas, which is massively arming itself in Gaza. Israel fears that new Russian-made Syrian arms could reach Gaza as well.

The United States should recognize the threat of a Russian arms sale to Syria—a country that has opened its border with Iraq to Islamist terrorists—and dissuade the Kremlin from pursuing such a dangerous path. If the deal goes through, one must ask what Russia's intentions in the Middle East really are. •NER•

Radical Leader

JOURNALIST KASRA NAJI DECONSTRUCTS MAHMOUD AHMADINEJAD'S POPULAR IMAGE AND GIVES READERS AN INTRICATE ACCOUNT OF HIS LIFE AND WORLDVIEW



Before Mahmoud Ahmadinejad stood behind a podium with an English sign reading “The World Without Zionism” and told his audience to imagine a world without the twin evils of America and Israel, few outside of Iran had paid much attention to him. That was in 2005. Three years later, he is, despite his difficult-to-pronounce surname, one of the most talked about—and most feared—world leaders.

Yet most Western pundits only know Ahmadinejad from his bizarre and often bellicose public statements about topics such as Israel, the Holocaust and Islam. Who is the man behind the headlines? How much power does he really have? And most importantly, where is he leading his country?

In the new book *Ahmadinejad: The Secret History of Iran's Radical Leader*, Iranian journalist Kasra Naji answers these questions and many more. Naji, who spent years in Iran interviewing key figures, analyzes Ahmadinejad's rise, from a regional governor, to university professor, to mayor of Tehran and eventually, his unexpected and highly contested election as president.

Naji also examines Ahmadinejad's formative years as a university student during the 1979 Islamic Revolution, when he emerged as a leading activist on behalf of the exiled Ayatollah Khomeini. In an effort to purge universities of secular influence, Ahmadinejad worked on a committee that screened prospective professors and students

according to their devotion to Islamist ideals.


“Ahmadinejad was of the opinion that all our problems had emanated from the universities and the Western thoughts that were taught in them,” said one professor who knew the future president. “He had developed an encyclopedic view of Islam that believed Islam is an all-embracing and comprehensive religion that has the answer to every problem.”

As Naji makes clear, Ahmadinejad has few qualms about Iran's coercive Islamist government. He is a deeply religious man who believes he is on a divine mission to change the world—a fact made more worrisome by his insistence that Iran master nuclear weapons technology.

Nearly 30 years after the revolution, Ahmadinejad's Iran remains an Islamic theocracy that forbids a woman from leaving the country without the permission of her husband or father; where a woman cannot be a judge, nor can she run for president; and where two women witnesses are needed in court when a single male will do.

With the support of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the Revolutionary Guard and the clerical establishment, Ahmadinejad is secure in his position as Iran's top executive. Anyone seeking to better understand the populist professor-turned-president—and the complicated country he represents—should read Naji's study of the man at Iran's helm. •NER•

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