

6 SECURITY AND CONFLICT

In the Headlines

Twice a month, thousands gather at the Kotel plaza in Jerusalem to watch the induction of new soldiers into combat units of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), or Tzahal. These 18-year-olds have endured months of basic training in which they've conducted countless drills under the sweltering sun, marched almost 25 miles carrying heavy packs and weapons, and lived for a week in the field. Now they stand in straight rows, knowing the security, integrity, and strength of the country is in their hands. Security is a constant concern in this tiny country that has experienced more than its share of bloodshed.



"I swear and obligate myself on my word of honor to remain loyal to the State of Israel, its laws and its authorities...to obey all commands and orders given by authorized commanders [of the IDF], and to devote all my strength, and even sacrifice my life, in the defense of the homeland and the freedom of Israel."

— from the IDF's oath of allegiance

IDF





▲ IDF soldiers at the Kotel

Society and the army

Because army duty is compulsory, the army is more than a defensive body for the country; the swearing-in ceremony is an important rite of passage for young Israelis, and the army itself provides an important social network. Whether they are rich or poor, recent immigrants or sabras, Israelis from all walks of life serve their country together. Unit members, who spend two to three years depending on one another, often form close bonds. Even after active duty, they often reunite in reserves and thus maintain close friendships throughout their lives. Many jobs are only open to army veterans, and veterans get special benefits from the government.

ALTERNATIVES TO THE ARMY

The rule is that every able-bodied Israeli must serve in the army, but every rule has its exceptions. For example, religiously observant Jewish women, Arab Israelis, and yeshiva students are excused from serving in the IDF.

Many people who are exempt from IDF service still want to serve their country. **Sherut Leumi (National Service)** is a program in which 18- to 21-year-olds perform community work instead of military service. These volunteers are sent to schools, hospitals, or nursing homes where they might help immigrants or teens at risk, or serve poor communities—similar to AmeriCorps in the United States or Canada World Youth.

Design a flyer encouraging those exempted from the army to sign up for Sherut Leumi. Consider:

Why should they serve their country?

How does working in a school or hospital help the State of Israel?

What might the volunteer gain personally from doing Sherut Leumi?



▲ A volunteer tutors a Sudanese immigrant.





Drafted

In the shadow of unresolved conflicts with the Palestinians, Uri, a teen living in Jerusalem, is preparing to join the IDF.

Now that he's 18, he's been drafted. Israel is the only country in the world in which both men and women are required to serve—men for three years, and women for two. Afterward, they continue to serve for a few weeks a year in the reserves.

Uri is on his way to take the physical, psychological, and written exams that will determine where he will be assigned. If the results show he's capable and in tip-top shape, he'll be assigned a prestigious—and probably dangerous—job. Like many of his friends, he dreams about being a paratrooper, even though the idea of parachuting out of an airplane is terrifying.

▼ A tank on patrol in the Golan Heights.



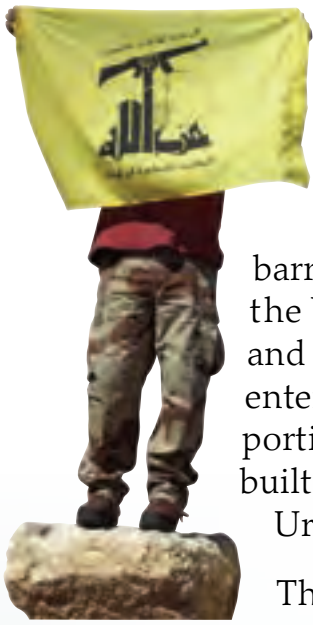
▲ IDF soldiers in the West Bank

Border security

On the bus, Uri's mind wanders to other jobs he might have in the army. If he joins the Armored Corps, Uri could learn to drive a tank. Those huge combat vehicles are the first line of attack during a war, and in peacetime they're used as mobile bunkers to perform various security duties, like patrolling Israel's borders.

Because Israel is bordered by hostile neighbors, border security is crucial. In Lebanon, the terrorist group **Hezbollah** is dedicated to destroying the State of Israel. Meanwhile, Syria is in a dispute with Israel over ownership of the Golan Heights. The borders with Egypt and Jordan are jointly maintained with those countries, which are at peace with Israel.





Security fence

In 2002, during the Second Intifada, the Israeli government started building a

barrier to separate much of the West Bank from Israel and prevent terrorists from entering the country. A portion of the fence was built just a few miles from Uri's home.

▲ Hezbollah's flag

The barrier succeeded in preventing attacks; however, it has provoked controversy because it was built in part on land owned or claimed by Palestinians. Opponents also argue that the barrier makes it harder for Palestinian civilians to get to jobs, schools, and hospitals in Israel; limits their access to water, a crucial resource; and even separates some people's homes from their fields and animal flocks. Israel's Supreme Court ruled that Israel has a right to build a fence to protect its citizens but has to balance the need for security with the impact of the fence on people living along its route.



▲ Portions of the **security barrier** between Israel and the West Bank. In a region where even names can be controversial, Israelis commonly call it a "security fence," while Palestinians often call it a "segregation wall."



security fence

Checkpoints

If Uri joins the Military Police Corps, he might end up manning a checkpoint. To prevent terrorists from entering Israel, Israel built checkpoints throughout the territories, where soldiers inspect travelers and vehicles for weapons and explosives. Weapons have been found hidden in rolled-up prayer rugs, and explosives in ambulances, and so everything—absolutely everything—must be thoroughly checked.



▲ An Israeli soldier searches a car at a checkpoint in Bethlehem.





Life in the territories

More than three million Arabs live in the territories that Israel captured during the 1967 Six-Day War, the vast majority in the West Bank. Unemployment and poverty rates are high, in part because Israeli border

▲ A boy in Gaza

security makes it difficult for many Palestinians to travel to jobs, and leads to shortages of food, medicine, and fuel.

In recent years there have been signs of economic improvement in the West Bank, such as the 2009 opening of the first movie theater in Nablus in twenty years, and the 2010 appearance of dozens of busy new restaurants and juice bars in Ramallah. With improved security, Israel has been able to reduce the number of checkpoints in the West Bank, making life a little easier for residents.



▼ A city in the West Bank

Responding to attacks

Uri's classmate Ziv boards the bus. Ziv joined the class in 2005 after the Disengagement, when Ziv's family and community were forced to leave their settlement in the Gaza Strip. In an effort to stop the rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip that followed Israel's pullout, in December 2008 Israel launched air strikes, followed by a ground assault. It destroyed various Hamas targets in Gaza that were the base for the attacks, but also destroyed private homes and schools.

► Name one fact that relates to Israel's security challenges or recent history for each of the places marked on this map.



▲ A class for women in business, in Gaza City





▲ Smoke rises from Gaza after an Israeli air strike against Hamas missile-launching sites.

In addition, Israel imposed a blockade on goods entering the region. Humanitarian aid was allowed, but Israel blocked almost everything else, including steel, pipes, and building equipment that could be used to make weapons. However, the more than four thousand homes that were reportedly destroyed by Israel in its 2008 air strikes cannot be rebuilt without these materials, and thousands of Palestinians remained homeless. The water and sewer system in Gaza, as well as electricity networks, were damaged; they also require supplies in order to be repaired.

There are no easy answers to the conflict. Israel needs to defend itself from Palestinian violence, and seeks to balance security with the humanitarian needs of the territories.

MEET A PALESTINIAN

Rami, age 17, is an Arab teen from Beit Tzafafa, in East Jerusalem. He is active in a group called Sulhita which brings together Muslim, Christian, and



Jewish youth—people like him who believe in working towards peace. Activities as varied as horseback riding or his favorite, Capoeira (a type of Brazilian martial arts combined with dance and music), let young people from different backgrounds share common interests.

“I try to do sulha (Arabic for mediation), every day by talking to people, trying to convince them we are all humans and what’s important is what’s inside the person,” says Rami.

A Muslim, Rami says his parents have always had Christian, Muslim, and Jewish friends and he grew up with the value of respecting all types of people. “Sometimes when I talk to people about this they may yell at me or be afraid of me, but I think there is a key to every person’s heart, if we can just find the key and open them up.”





▲ An **unattended bag** may look harmless, but Israelis have learned to be cautious.

Because security is top priority, Israelis are extra careful. For example, there are guards checking bags at the entrance to most public buildings, banks, and department stores; public buses that travel through areas of conflict are bullet-proof; and Israelis are cautious about bags left unattended on crowded buses, sidewalks, or park benches. Having served in the army or reserves, most Israelis are trained to help in an emergency, and many even carry weapons. The shopping bag turns out to be harmless, and the bus finally settles down and continues on its way.

Day-to-day security

An unattended shopping bag on Uri's bus has caused quite a stir. The bus driver asks everyone to evacuate the bus just in case the bag contains something dangerous. Uri is used to this kind of thing and just hopes it won't take too long.

Because security is top priority, Israelis are extra

Airport safety

As a plane passes overhead, Uri's thoughts turn to the sky. Joining the Air Force would mean that Uri could learn how to fly. Fighter pilots often go on to fly for regular airlines after active duty. Israel's Ben-Gurion International Airport is considered the safest airport in the world, hands-down. Security officials—in uniform and plainclothes—patrol the airport at all times. They talk with each passenger and look for suspicious behavior, body language, and anything else that doesn't seem right.



▲ Many civilians own **gas masks** to protect against the threat of chemical or biological weapons.



◀ A **security guard** checks bags at the entrance to the Dizengoff Center, a shopping mall in Tel Aviv.

▼ No flight out of **Ben-Gurion International Airport** has ever been hijacked.



Intelligence

If Uri doesn't fly for the Air Force, he might find a cool job on the ground, like intelligence. Aman is the intelligence branch of the IDF. They collect information, evaluate security threats, and try to learn other countries' secrets.

In addition to Aman, Israel's intelligence community also includes the Mossad, which does overseas intelligence work, including pursuing terrorists and sharing intelligence with friendly countries, and the Shin Bet, which is responsible for exposing terrorist rings within the country, protecting important public officials, and keeping Israeli airlines safe. Uri can already picture himself as a spy with a fake mustache and a trench coat.

After taking his profile tests, at long last Uri sits across from his IDF interviewer. Drum roll please. . . . Uri has earned a very respectable 64 (out of 97) and opts to join the army police intelligence force. No trench coat or pilot's wings, but exciting and important all the same.

airport security



▲ **Soldiers** are a familiar sight on the streets of Israel.

DEBATE IT



Hawks and doves are birds, yes, but these terms are also used to describe people based on their political views. For a hawk, named after the predatory bird, military strength is often the means to peace and security, while a dove is more likely to look first to negotiation and compromise for peaceful ways to resolve a conflict.

In Israeli politics, doves endorse the strategy of returning portions of the disputed territories to the Palestinians in exchange for peace. The most successful example of land for peace occurred in 1979, when Israel returned the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt and signed a historic peace agreement. Hawks, on the other hand, maintain that secure borders are essential to Israel's existence; therefore, they are reluctant to return land seized on the West Bank and Gaza during the Six-Day War in 1967. Should Israel compromise and give up land for the sake of peace? Have a debate.

LAND FOR PEACE vs **DEMONSTRATE STRENGTH**

What other solution can you think of?



Military ethics

One of the most important things Uri will learn in the army is the Israeli military ethical code. Ethics play a big role in Israel's military. Any army must balance its nation's security needs with humanitarian concerns and the need

to protect civilians. It's especially important in Israel, where the terrorist organization Hamas tends to hide among civilians and deliberately place its equipment and fighters in places like schools and hospitals.

In fact, the Israeli army's official ethical code emphasizes the sanctity of human life and each soldier's obligation to act morally and ethically. Living according to these values can come at a significant cost, sometimes requiring soldiers to put their own lives at greater risk in order to avoid harming civilians on either side of the conflict, but the IDF is committed to its code of values based on Jewish tradition, democratic principles, and its military heritage.

LIVING JEWISH VALUES: פְּדִיוֹן שְׂבוּיִים *Pidyon Sh'vuyim*, Redeeming Captives

The Talmud (*Bava Batra* 8b) considers captivity worse than starvation or death, and says rescuing captives is commanded in the Torah verse, "Do not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor" (Leviticus 19:16).

Israel is committed to bringing home all of its soldiers, including those who have been captured and the bodies of those who have been killed. As of 2009, Israel has released close to 7,000 Palestinian prisoners in exchange for the freedom of 19 Israelis and the bodies of 8 others. Some Israelis object to making these agreements, however. They say that it encourages their enemies to kidnap Israelis, it endangers all Israeli citizens by sending known killers back to the streets, and violates Israel's policy of refusing to negotiate with terrorists.

What do you think? Is there a point at which the price is too steep for *pidyon sh'vuyim*?

Explain your answer. _____

▼ Israeli soldier **Gilad Shalit** was captured by Hamas in 2006. Israelis demonstrate in 2009 for his release.



DEBATE IT



There are many conflicting opinions when it comes to Israeli security issues, from settlements to checkpoints, exceptions to military service, prisoner exchanges, and more. We can respect each other's opinions, even when we disagree.

Underline all the potential debate topics you can find in this chapter, then discuss your viewpoints on these issues with your classmates. How does it feel to disagree with each other about Israel's actions? Brainstorm ways to respond to conflicting viewpoints held by classmates, friends, family members, or even the media.

YOUR TURN: MILITARY SERVICE

When Uri graduates from high school, he's headed straight for the IDF. College will wait until after his three years of service are finished.

What would you like to do after high school?

Imagine that you were required to do army service. What job in the military would you choose? Why?



▲ Women cadets taking part in infantry training



American role

Although America doesn't always agree with Israel's policies and actions, the United States is one of Israel's most important allies and shows its support with financial, military, and diplomatic aid. The U.S. recognizes that Israel is the only democratic nation in the Middle East, and the two countries work together to fight terrorism.



▲ U.S. President Bill Clinton (center) hosted peace talks between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak (left) and Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat (right) at Camp David in 2000.

American presidents have initiated and moderated many of the peace negotiations between Israel and neighboring countries, including the Camp David Accords between Israel and Egypt (1978), the Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (1993), and the Israel-Jordan peace treaty (1994). Unfortunately, peace negotiations between Israel and Syria have failed, Israel and Lebanon are far from peace, and agreements with the Palestinians have repeatedly broken down.

American allies



▲ Yasir Arafat, Shimon Peres, and Yitzhak Rabin display their Nobel Peace Prizes.

Building peace

Continued negotiations between Israel, Palestinian leaders, and the world community seek to establish lasting peace in the Middle East. Israel is at peace with Jordan and Egypt. PLO chairman Yasir Arafat, Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin together won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1994 for their efforts toward peace in the region. But there's much work to be done to ensure a peaceful, secure future in which Israelis and Palestinians can live side-by-side in harmony.



▲ The signing ceremony for the **Israel-Jordan peace treaty**, 1994

CREATIVE DIALOGUE

Here are some of the many organizations that bring people together in creative ways to encourage dialogue for peace.

- ▼ **Peace Child Israel** provides Jewish and Arab teens the opportunity to write and produce an original play that highlights how they experience the Arab-Israeli conflict. To do this, they need to get to know each other and overcome stereotypes. The program culminates in live performances that bring the message of tolerance to mixed audiences of Jews and Arabs.



- In the United States, **Seeds of Peace International Camp**, located at Pleasant Lake in Maine, brings together teens from areas in conflict around the world, including Israeli and Palestinian teens, for three weeks of canoeing, basketball, and color games, as well as dialogue about war and peace. The hope is that when teens from different cultures meet in a neutral setting, free from the pressures and prejudices of home, they discover common ground, break down barriers of mistrust, and open the door to friendship, reconciliation, and coexistence. Plant a seed of friendship, and you've got a shot at growing peace.

What do each of these programs have in common? Why do you think the programs are targeted at kids? Look for programs that promote peace and understanding in other chapters of this book.



- ▲ **Twinned Peace & Sport Schools** of the Peres Center for Peace is an afterschool program for Israeli and Palestinian kids who come together for sporting and social activities. Whether on the soccer field or the basketball court, kids learn to accept cultural differences and break down negative stereotypes while improving sports skills and having fun.

