

Anglo File

Pacifists assail Israel Scouts for recruiting army enlistees overseas

By Cnaan Liphshiz

Local pacifists this week sharply criticized the Israel Scouts movement for recruiting ex-Israelis and Diaspora Jews to enlist into the Israeli military, saying its project "cynically brainwashes children into joining Israel's foreign legion." Over the past five years, the Garin Tzabar project, which the Israel Scouts founded in 1991, has seen a 500-percent spike in participation. This week, the final members of a record-breaking cohort of 160 army-age Jews from the West, predominantly from the U.S., arrived in Israel. They are set to enlist in the coming weeks.

Twenty of the participants of the program, which the movement runs in partnership with the Israel Defense Forces, the Jewish Agency, MASA and the Absorption Ministry, are new immigrants. The remaining 140 are children of ex-Israelis.

"The cooperation between the Israeli military and Israel's branch of the Scouts movement, the result of which is 'Garin Tzabar,' is incredibly scandalous," says Russian-born Sergei Sandler from New Profile – a movement devoted to countering militarism in Israeli society. Ruth Hiller, New Profile's U.S.-born co-founder, said the organization has been monitoring Garin Tzabar for a long time. New Profile's youth group coordinator, Raanan Forshner, said he



Garin Tzabar recruits on Tuesday at JFK Airport in New York just before coming to Israel.

Eugene Golovinsky

was "alarmed" at the growth in the numbers. "Equipped with very little if any information and understanding of the complicated network of conflicts in the Middle East, and with lots of adrenaline, these children are ideal targets for such recruitment efforts," said Sandler. "It is not hard to turn them into enthusiastic 'volunteers' to the army." Tzabar participants do express enthusiasm about joining the army. But in a conversation on Tuesday with some

of the program's recruits, several said they had contacted Garin Tzabar, and not the other way around, after deciding to enlist. "I talked about joining the army for years," Edan Ben-Atar, 20, from Maryland said at the Nordia Guesthouse near Netanya, where some of the recruits currently reside. "But I don't think it would have happened if it weren't for the [Garin Tzabar] program." Ben Atar's family left Sderot almost 10 years ago. Today, his accent and demeanor are

indistinguishable from any American his age.

Boasting an impressive knowledge of IDF combat units, which he says he picked up on the internet, Daniel Wolkowitz, 20, came to Garin Tzabar specifically to request facilitation of his enlistment. Wolkowitz, who was born in New York to ex-Israeli parents, said he picked Tzabar after consulting with friends on the best way to enlist.

One Tzabar guide said most recruits are not Scouts gradu-

ates or trainees at all, and join Garin Tzabar and the Israel Scouts groups in the U.S. for the sole purpose of entering the IDF through the program. The Garin Tzabar staff, he said, is made up of fewer than 10 individuals.

"We don't indoctrinate or convince any of the recruits," said Idan Ianovici, himself a Tzabar graduate who worked as an emissary of the program in the U.S. Ianovici explained the Israel Scouts abroad started out as a solution for ex-Is-

raeli parents who wanted an Israel-oriented base of support for their children. "We give a social framework and facilitate enlistment issues for the recruits – that's all," he said.

New Profile's Sandler said, "The recruitment effort is here disguised as a seemingly harmless youth activity, backed by the 'brand name' of the Scouts." Calling the use of scout symbols "doubly deplorable," he added, "The Israeli Scouts movement should be disaffiliated from the international one and should not be allowed to use the name or symbols of the Scouts in any future activity, for using this name and these symbols in such a cynical way and for such immoral purposes."

The Geneva-based World Organization of the Scout Movement did not reply to Anglo File's requests for a reaction to these complaints.

According to data compiled by the organizers of Garin Tzabar, 80 percent of the project's graduates immigrate to Israel. The families of more than 30 percent of graduates eventually follow them and move to Israel. Acknowledging this as an achievement, Raanan Forshner, New Profile youth coordinator, said: "Let Israel appeal to young American Jews by boasting a modern, advanced society, instead of brandishing a powerful army. Surely, we have better things to offer."

Rank and File

◆ **SORRY, WRONG NUMBER:** It sounded like a good idea when the Pensioners Affairs Ministry announced last Monday it had created a new telephone information service in English for senior citizens. "They can ask anything they want," Nathalie Abramowitz, the ministry's English press coordinator, told Anglo File. All the pensioners have to do is dial "8840," she noted, and the staff "will provide advice and help to pensioners and their families in questions and matters of social rights, rights of Holocaust survivors, support services, social security, welfare, health and more." However, a trial call yesterday revealed that the new hotline still needs some work: a recorded voice in Hebrew tells callers to dial three for English. "Our phone center is only three days old," the ministry's spokesman, Yoni Itzhak, told Anglo File. "We now have a few days ahead of us in which we will fix all our initial problems. We take all feedback seriously." (Raphael Ahren)

◆ **SDEROT HEART HUCKABEE:**

Former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee is on Tuesday scheduled to visit Sderot in coordination with the city's Hesder Yeshiva under U.S.-born Rabbi David Fendel, who is originally from Long Island. Huckabee, who campaigned for the Republican nomination for the presidential race and is rumored to be earmarked by the Republican hopeful John McCain to be Vice Presidential candidate, will be accompanied by New York State Assemblyman Dov Hikind on a tour of the yeshiva campus. In addition, the visitors will tour other parts of the city, and meet with families whose houses were damaged or destroyed by rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip. (Cnaan Liphshiz)



Cnaan Liphshiz
Rabbi David Fendel

◆ **THE DOCTOR WILL SEE YOU – LATER:** When Hebrew University student Hana Pesachov realized that many immigrants felt misunderstood by their doctor, she decided to investigate the matter for her master's thesis. "Many people think that Americans and Canadians are similar to Israelis, because they are Westerners," the 26-year-old said. "But their public health needs are very different." Pesachov, a native Israeli who lived in Toronto for more than 10 years and got married in Jerusalem just yesterday, is still looking for participants to be interviewed for her study. Immigrants from Western countries who came to Israel between 1993 and January 2008 are invited to write to hpesachov@hotmail.com. (Raphael Ahren)

Have an idea about an item for Rank and File? E-mail us at english@haaretz.co.il

Three years on, Anglos still in mourning for Gaza pullout

By Cnaan Liphshiz

English speaking Israelis gathered last week to commemorate the 2005 disengagement from Gaza's Gush Katif, calling the move anti-democratic. Some of the 250 Anglos who attended last week's event at the Great Jerusalem Synagogue came to remember their homes in the Gaza Strip, which they were ordered to leave three years ago this month. Others came to consolidate a lobby of Israeli-Americans to prevent another pullout.

The event was organized by the Council of Young Israel Rabbis in Israel, and featured speakers who recalled their lives in Gush Katif during its heyday, the disengagement itself, and an update on the status of the evicted. Organizers announced two specific projects during the event: a fund raiser to buy school materials for 3,000 children of Gush Katif evacuees, and another to help approximately 200 former residents who cannot afford urgent dental care.

Speaking into an orange-colored microphone, the Council's U.S.-born cofounder, Rabbi Shalom Gold, told the predominantly modern-Orthodox crowd that the remarkable thing about the disengagement was not the suffering it caused the evacuees but "the excellent stupidity" of the move. "They told us it was going to make the country more Jewish and democratic," he said, "and it was a lie!" Gold later told Anglo File he was there to prevent the next pullout. "Nothing can justify such stupid and treacherous moves," he added.

Other speakers cast doubts on Israel's democratic nature. Particularly outspoken was Harvey Schwartz, chairman of the American Israeli Action Coalition – a nonprofit lobby group recently co-founded by American-Israelis. Its stated mission is to bring together U.S. citizens in Israel "to influence Israeli policy and American policy toward Israel."

"I hate to say it, but Israel is not a democratic country," said Schwartz, who immigrated to Israel 10 months ago from New York with his wife. He views the continuation of peace talks with the Palestinians and Syria as proof the government lacks democratic standards. The lobby group issued a statement last week calling on Prime Minister



Cnaan Liphshiz
Evacuee aid projects were launched at last week's event.

Ehud Olmert to suspend talks.

Despite a noticeable rightward tilt in their approach, the American-Israeli coalition claims to be non-partisan. "We will not form a political party nor will we endorse any specific candidate in Israel or in the U.S.," Schwartz says. As for the disengagement, Schwartz believes the "overwhelming majority of Americans in Is-

rael think this was a terrible tragedy." He said the new lobby work towards changing the system of government in Israel. "Any congressman knows that unless he or she satisfies your problems, there's no getting reelected," he explained. "But here no Knesset member has direct responsibility. Who's my representative? Who's yours? You don't have one. That's not democracy." Lack of accountability, according to Schwartz, is part of the reason for "the deplorable behavior of Israeli politicians."

Another sphere in which his organization hopes to make a difference is Israel's relationship with the U.S. "Most Jews live in New York, Florida, Pennsylvania, California and Michigan -- the key battleground states in the presidential race," Schwartz said. "That means U.S. citizens in Israel can unite and use their political clout to demand more clarity on the Israel issue."

Speak for yourself

Some Americans in Israel take issue with a new lobby group they say is speaking in their name. The American Israeli Action Coalition was recently formed "to serve as a united voice of American citizens living in Israel," according to its Web site. "I do not believe it is a possible for anyone to fulfill this role, particularly a self-appointed voice," said Hillel Schenker, vice chair of Democrats Abroad Israel. "These people are obviously to the right of George W. Bush and Condoleezza Rice, both of whom want the talks to continue." Schenker, who moved from New York to Tel Aviv in 1963, added, "They represent themselves, they represent a certain percentage of the American citizens living in Israel, but that's all," he said.

The new lobby says it aims to provide American citizens in Israel with "the long-needed ability to have a highly effective, positive influence upon American policy towards Israel and the Middle East." The organization demands a halt to Israeli-Palestinian peace talks until a new government is installed and holds that "dividing Jerusalem will only increase terror attacks."

David London, the executive director of the Association of Americans and Canadians in Israel, said that the American community in Israel claims people from the entire spectrum of religious and political involvement and defies generalities. "No one organization can claim politically or religiously to represent our community," he said. "Exactly for this reason there is an organization like AACI that does not involve itself in partisan politics or is involved with religious issues."

The American Israeli Action Coalition, however, doesn't accept this criticism. "I don't think [the American-Israeli community] is as diverse as others make it out to be," said Rabbi Aaron Tirschwell, the group's director, who immigrated to Israel four years ago. "I am sure that there are differences of opinions. However, there are issues of common ground that all American Israelis can agree upon," such as safety and security. If the 250,000 Americans living in Israel were united as one group, he said, it could have a significant impact. "That doesn't mean we represent all of them but certainly it is an opportunity." (Raphael Ahren)

It's all been done before, and it all failed, says former ambassador about Israel advocacy projects

Alon Pinkas pours cold water on StandWithUs graduates, saying approach is too apologetic

By Cnaan Liphshiz

Having just enjoyed the presentation of six new projects to improve Israel's image abroad, the 150 Israeli students who convened on Wednesday at the Begin Center in Jerusalem seemed to be in a particularly self-congratulatory mood. They didn't realize Alon Pinkas, Israel's former consul general in the U.S., was about to provide them with a reality-check.

"All of these projects are nothing new," he told the crowd of students from all six major local universities and the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya. "The Foreign Ministry has been involving itself with such projects for the past 40 years. Everything here has been thought of already, and it all failed."

Pinkas was referring to pitches (see box) by graduates of a program by StandWithUs – a Los Angeles-based Israel advocacy nonprofit, which in 2006 started the Israel fellowship program to train students to "redefine the way Israel is perceived" in the media and on campuses abroad.

The graduates, whom the organization hand-picks for the one-year program, are expected to present an innovative project by the end of that year.

Hasbara is a Jewish state of mind

But the six teams which make up the StandWithUs class of 2007-2008 failed to impress Pinkas, who started off by saying he would deliberately put things in blunt terms to put the students in a different mind frame. *Hasbara*, the Hebrew word for Israel-advocacy, Pinkas said, "is not a policy, but a Jewish state of mind."

Presenting Israel as the victim of Arab aggression is impossible, according to Pinkas. "In a sense we're telling the world we're a modern, industrialized country – with 120 firms traded on Nasdaq and GDP levels to rival the European Union, while trying to convince everyone that the Palestinians are a threat to us," he said. "Even if that's true there's no way this is go-



Abigail Bakovic
NOT JUST TAKING A STAND: The students from local universities who presented six new Israel-advocacy programs on Wednesday at the Begin Center in Jerusalem, together with StandWithUs director Michael Dickson, second from left.

ing to fly." Israel's advocates, he said, cannot "have their cake and eat it too."

Amos Hermon, a member of the Jewish Agency Executive and chair of its anti-Semitism task force, sang a different tune, telling the students it warmed his heart to see a group of committed young men and women "who don't sit around and complain [in front of the television] on Friday nights, but get up take action."

Responding to this defense, Pinkas said that there was "nothing wrong" with complaining on Friday nights. "It's fine, it's a lifestyle choice. It's what we do. Stop thinking you'll convince the whole world in the righteousness of our ways," he said.

Noting that Japan, Sweden and "even Belgium which is a made up state" do not feel the need to defend their right to exist, Pinkas advised the students – who seemed to be shocked into silence by his words – instead to take it easy. "The whole preoccupation is apologetic by definition," he added, "Yes to public diplomacy, no to apologetics. Let the Canadians defend their right to exist, not us," he concluded.

From couch surfing to imitation passports

StandWithUs fellows from Israel's major universities presented the following six projects:

Haifa University and Technion fellows unveiled a web-based project entitled Jewgether, which will allow young Jews from all over the world to meet online, and stay at each other's houses instead of going to a hotel. The model is based on the CouchSurfing Project – the world's largest free, Internet-based, international hospitality exchange network – and will become operational in the coming weeks.

The IDC fellowship team set up a program to grant diplomatic skills, advocacy methods and useful knowledge on Israel's image abroad to private businessmen and students traveling abroad. The Always-an-Ambassador program aims to train 600 groups of non-official representatives, to augment formal Israel-advocacy.

The members of the Hebrew University contingent took up the daunting task of explaining Israel's position to NGO workers from Europe and elsewhere, who came here to help Palestinians. The group of 22 participants met with more than 200 idealists from all over the world who are notorious for having a one-sided approach. "We also wanted to hear and internalize what they had to say, even if some of it was infuriating," project director Lotem Goffer told Anglo File.

At Ben Gurion University, the fellows gave cameras to children from underprivileged backgrounds and minorities in the Negev to take pictures of what Israel means to them. The result was an exhibition of more than 200 pictures, which will be presented around the country in the coming months and may eventually be exhibited abroad.

Bar-Ilan fellows came up with a way of re-branding Israel from the get-go, by giving foreigners who land at Ben Gurion Airport an information pamphlet designed to resemble a passport. The Passport to Israel program, which receives funding from the Foreign Ministry, informs readers about the nicer aspects of life in Israel, such as the booming economy, the night life and the natural treasures. The promoters are working with the Israel Police to have officers at passport control hand out the "passports."

As reported by Anglo File, the Tel Aviv contingent will host an ambitious, 5-day educational conference simulating an international peace summit. The event, starting Sunday, will allow students from across the globe role play delegates representing Israel, her neighbors and the superpowers. Shirah Bergman, who presented the project, told Anglo File that the team is currently putting last minute efforts into facilitating the attendance of students from the West Bank. (Cnaan Liphshiz)