On the Golan Heights, Israeli residents face two big security threats: missiles and refugees crossing the border

By BEN SALES

ALONIE HABASHAN, Israel (JTA) — A fence made of chain links and rusted barbed wire once was enough to separate the Golan Heights from Syria. That’s no longer the case.

A few feet away from what one area resident called a ‘cattle fence’ — one easy to jump if not for the electric current running through it — a newer barrier of crosstocing shiny steel bars towers high above the heads of nearby soldiers.

As Syria’s civil war escalates next door, Israelis have grown concerned that spillover could undermine the sense of security that Golan residents have enjoyed since the end of the 1973 Yom Kippur War.

Israel started construction on the new fence separating the Golan Heights from Syria, seen in front of the old one, in response to possible consequences from the Syrian civil war.

JTA Special Report: The Syria Spillover

“The chaos presents a situation in Syria where there’s no rule, and a lot of entities can enter that can put us in danger because they have no national or diplomatic responsibility,” said Ori Kasher, deputy head of the Golan Regional Council.

Heightened security awareness is new for residents of the Golan, the mountainous region in Israel’s northeast corner captured from Syria in 1967’s Six-Day War. The Bible mentions it as a place of refuge, and for many Israelis it is exactly that. Two hours from the country’s congested center, filled with national parks and bed-and-breakfasts, the Golan has remained immune from the terrorists and missiles that have bombarded Israel in recent decades.

But the sense of sanctuary is eroding. Mortar shells and gunfire from the Syrian civil war began spilling into the Golan November of last year. A returning fire — the first cross-border conflict on the Golan since 1973. One shell landed in a back yard in this agricultural village 500 yards from the border.

In January, Israel announced construction of the new fence to prevent Syrians from infiltrating the border. Last week, seven Syrians crossed into Israel to seek medical attention; they are hospitalized in the northern Israeli city of Safed.

Residents have tried to ignore their neighbors’ conflict, but they say it’s becoming more difficult. Some worry that rebels succeed in toppling the regime of President Bashar Assad, Islamist groups will exploit the opportunity to attack Israel, as terrorists did following Israel’s withdrawal from Gaza in 2005.

“They’ll turn this into another Gaza,” said Yarim Dekel, a resident of Aloney Haba- shan. “I don’t think what’s happening here is different from what’s happening in the rest of Israel.”

Like many Golan towns, the 56-family Aloney Habashan is tightly knit. Residents are used to leaving their doors unlocked and the town’s entrance gate open, Dekel said, though they have been hearing of research by younger, more serious… and his line of thinking was that if they were willing to focus exclusively on this subject.

Saidel is the author of an anthology of 16 scholarly essays about the many ways Jewish women were assaulted during the Shoah. "Sonja’s talk is part of this initiative that we have to raise awareness, so she’ll be talking about the historical context. This topic of sexual violence against Jewish women during the Holocaust is something that has been silenced or muted for a couple of generations now. So the work that she and her co-editor Rochelle have done is really path breaking.”

Kennedy said that Hedgepeth will speak about her new book titled “Slinky Chick Rocks” is among the artists included in the exhibition are Janije Visscher, Bette Globus Goodman and Perci Chester, whose piece titled “Slinky Chick Rocks” is pictured above. “Each artist must have the chance to stake their artistic claim.”

The exhibition is on display through March 28 at the Miles Gallery at the Minnetonka Center for the Arts, 2240 North Shore Dr., Wayzata. For information, visit: www.trafficzoneart.com. — E.E.B.
There was an evening featuring Ehud Barak, former prime minister of Israel. It took place at Beth El Synagogue on March 17. ( photo by )

An evening with Ehud Barak will be held tonight in St. Louis Park. Beth El Synagogue is hosting “An Evening with Ehud Barak,” a program featuring former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, March 17 at Beth El Synagogue, 5224 W. 26th St., St. Louis Park.

However, the core of the Barak governance approach is the concept of dialogue and direct access to the peace process. In May 2000, Barak ordered the withdrawal of the Israeli forces from their positions in South Lebanon, ending 18 tragic and bloody years of Israel’s presence there. He also led far-reaching efforts to negotiate peace agreements, first with Syria and later with the Palestinians. These efforts culminated in the active participation of President Bill Clinton and his administration, which led to the Camp David agreements of 1995.

Ehud Barak was a key negotiator in the negotiations leading to the 1995 Interim Agreement on the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area. He served as the prime minister of Israel from 1999 to 2001, and as defense minister from 1995 to 1999. He is the recipient of numerous awards and honors, including the 2005 Nobel Peace Prize.

Beth El hosting ‘Passoverama’

In honor of the completion of the Beth El Synagogue Gift Shop, the shop is hosting Passoverama. Passover items will be offered each Sunday in March at the gift shop at the synagogue, 5224 W. 26th St., St. Louis Park.

According to a press release, the gift shop is the largest selection of seder plates and matzo trays in Min- neapolis, as well as a special section of sale Passover items. Artists include Shraga Landesman, Sara Beames, Adi Sadler and many others.

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