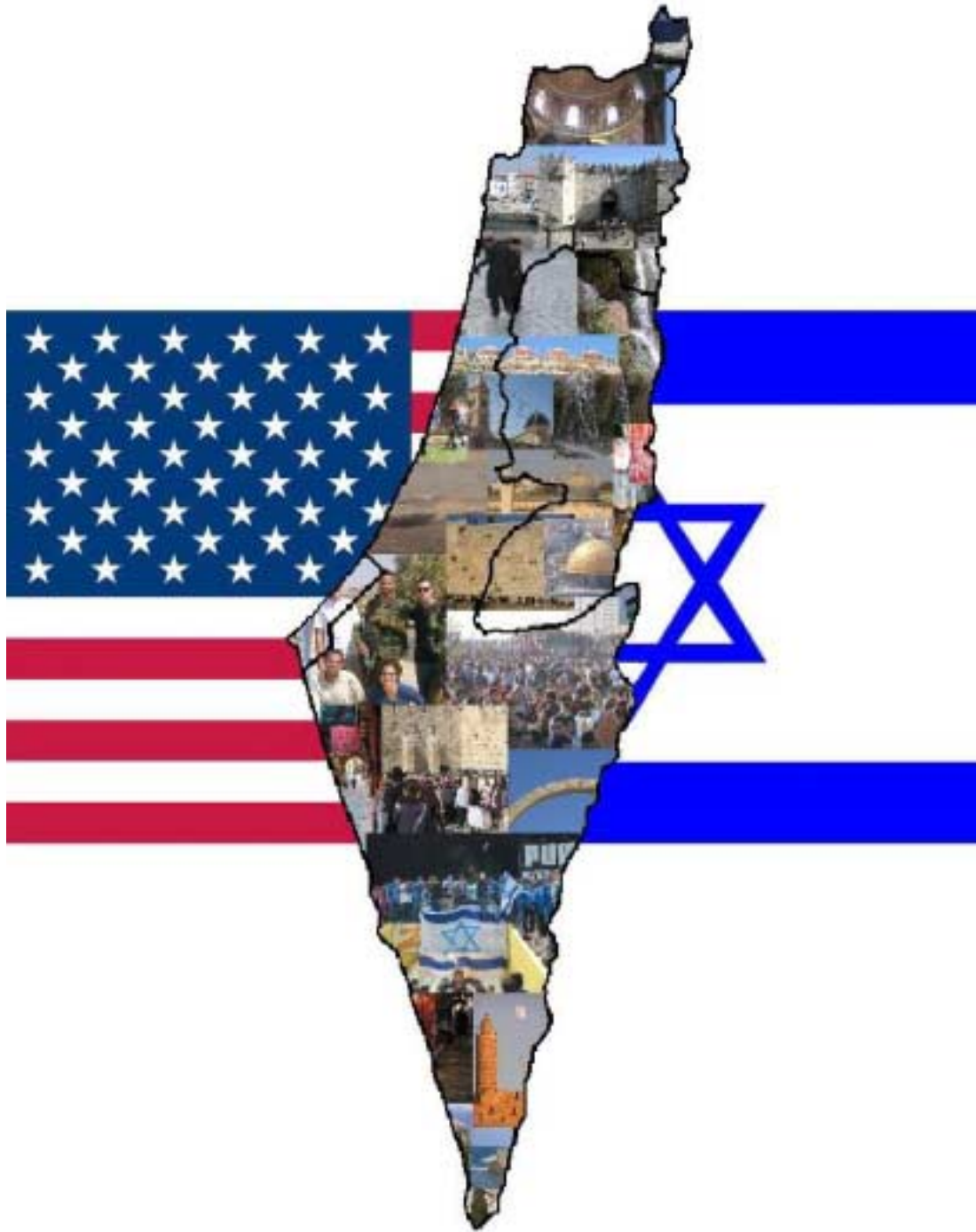


The Anna Sobol Levy Fellowship 2004-05

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem



Luke Conway • Maya Kroitoru • Travis Lee • Alex Pascal • Brett Schor

Biographies



In his capacity as a Lieutenant Colonel, former Armored Battalion Commander and current Spokesperson in the Israel Defense Forces (res.), **Tal Hazan** is serving for the second time as the coordinator for the ASL Fellowship. In addition to the monthly ASL trips to military sites that he organizes and the security-related discussions he facilitates, Tal works as a senior supervisor for the Israel Land Administration (ILA). However, after having had such a wonderful experience with the Rothberg International School, its management, and overseas students, Tal has recently decided to leave his position at the ILA in order to manage Rothberg's Office of Student Activities (OSA). In his few spare moments, Tal is also pursuing an MA in non-profit organizational management at the Hebrew University. Tal is married and has two children. He views his involvement with the ASL fellowship as a mutually rewarding experience. In addition to sharing his extensive knowledge about the military establishment and Israeli politics, Tal has thoroughly enjoyed learning from the ASL fellows about American politics and the US military.



Luke Conway received his BA in Political Science from the University of Wisconsin, Madison in 2004. Upon graduation, he was commissioned as 2nd Lieutenant in the U.S. Army and after completing the Fellowship, he will attend the Armor Officer Basic Course at Ft. Knox. Luke spent his time in Jerusalem studying colloquial Arabic and Hebrew. During his year in Israel he traveled to Sinai and Ireland. Following his training in KY, Luke hopes to be assigned to Ft. Hood, Texas. After Luke's Army service he plans to return to Israel.



Maya Kroitoru received her B.A. Magna Cum Laude in International Affairs and Economics from the University of Colorado at Boulder where she founded and led the pro-Israel student movement and served as Hillel's Grinspoon Intern. During college, she worked for the America Israel Political Affairs Committee's Foreign Policy Issues Department. After participating in a summer program in Middle Eastern History and Politics at Tel Aviv University, Maya completed MARVA, an IDF training course, and volunteered on Kibbutz Ma'agan Michael for five months. Under the auspices of the National Security Education Program, Maya studied Jewish History in Prague and spent the following semester in an intensive Arabic immersion program in Morocco. Maya Kroitoru is currently pursuing an M.A. in Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and works as a research assistant.



A magna cum laude 2004 graduate of Davidson College, where he earned a BA degree in economics, **Travis Lee** is a recently commissioned 2nd Lieutenant in the U.S. Army. After his time as an ASL Fellow, Travis will be in Ft. Huachuca, Arizona for the Military Intelligence Officer Basic Course (MIOBC). Travis spent his time in Jerusalem studying colloquial and classical Arabic and Hebrew, as well as brushing up on previously studied German and Russian. He was also fortunate enough to travel to Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Cyprus, Egypt, and Lebanon during his time in Israel. Following his training in AZ, Travis hopes to join the Ranger Battalion for the duration of his four-year service to the Army, after which he plans to pursue a joint Ph.D.-J.D. degree.



Alex Pascal grew up in Newton, Massachusetts and received his B.A. in English with a minor in Political Science from Stanford University in 2001. After college, he worked in Boston as a financial consultant until he moved to South Africa to work with a local NGO. During his year at the Hebrew University, Alex studied Hebrew, Arabic, and Israeli politics and foreign policy. Alex also participated in a tutorial with Professor Oren Barak on state-building in the Middle East and worked at the West Bank & Gaza office of the National Democratic Institute (NDI) for International Affairs. In this capacity, he

served as an international election monitor in the territories during the several Palestinian elections that occurred this year. Alex traveled extensively throughout Israel and the region, including Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Egypt and Lebanon. In the fall of 2005, Alex will begin an M.A. in International Relations at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies in Washington, D.C. He aspires to work for the US Government to help conduct American foreign policy in the Middle East.



Brett Schor received his BA in History from the University of Virginia in 1998. After graduating from college he worked at a Capitol Hill-based public affairs and media consulting firm, volunteered in Israel for one year on Project Otzma, and most recently served as the Director of Student Affairs at the Embassy of Israel in Washington, DC. Brett is about to complete his MA in Israeli Society and Politics at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. This past year, in a tutorial with Dr. Asher Kaufman, Brett has been researching the local, regional and international implications of Israel's intervention in Lebanon and the IDF's unilateral withdrawal from South Lebanon in May 2000. Brett made aliyah in December 2004 and will begin six months of service in the IDF in November 2005.



August 2004: The “Security Barrier” and Qalandiya Checkpoint

Appropriately, the Fellows’ first trip was to observe the “Security Barrier” (or Wall, depending, as so much else here, on your perspective). Soon after arriving in Israel, the five ASL Fellows traveled to an area south of the Old City to see the course of the barrier through Jerusalem’s east. The glimpse of the source of much international and domestic news, controversy, and grief was sobering. It loomed on the hills near the Old City, slicing through the land, and, out of context of active conflict, appeared as a blight: an obstacle and nothing more. Keeping in mind the intent and rationale made it no easier for some of the Fellows to look fairly upon the barrier.

The Fellows then drove along the graffiti strewn wall itself, and into the Arab town of Abu Dis to see the direct effects of the “Security Barrier” on resident Palestinians. A gap in the fence dubbed a “humanitarian gate” was the Fellows’ destination. Here, Palestinians up to life’s various activities were observed passing through a narrow slot in the fence, through which they could only pass on foot. The scene put human faces on the criticism of the wall, removing it from the abstract place it had taken in international debate, and making it a tangible issue in the midst of the Fellows’ new home.



A windy stretch of the Security Fence on the outskirts of East Jerusalem

The Fellows proceeded to Gilo in southern Jerusalem to witness some of the reasoning behind the barrier. From behind a concrete shield, the Fellows gazed out at the Arab towns of Beit Jala and Bethlehem, and looked out at homes that had been fired upon during the Second Intifada. These were the sniper nests used by terrorists to fire upon Jewish homes. A scaled down version of the “Security Barrier” (though in essence the same idea), the Gilo wall was built to protect Jewish families from snipers as they went about their day. Though

another symbol of the divisions rife throughout Jerusalem, this wall clarified the idea behind the larger barrier that the Fellows had seen earlier.

The tour’s final stop was the Qalandiya checkpoint north of Jerusalem where, just days earlier, a suicide bomber had struck on his way to a more populated target. The checkpoint, Israel’s largest and busiest, made clear the lengths to which Israel has gone to protect itself. Viewing the checkpoint inspired sympathy for the Palestinians who waited in long lines to be searched and questioned before passing between the West Bank and Israel. However, the knowledge that the bomber who had struck earlier in the week had not reached Jerusalem (and a more crowded venue in which to detonate) due to the measures in place at Qalandiya (and, in all likelihood, due to the presence of the “Security Barrier”) made clear the delicate balance between Israeli security and Palestinian quality of life.

It became more difficult to look upon Qalandiya, the Gilo wall, the “humanitarian gate,” and the entire “Security Barrier” with sympathy for one side of the conflict more than other. This first tour enlightened the Fellows about the general security situation in their new home and throughout Israel. It made clear the attentiveness to detail and the open mind required over the course of the year to understand the complexities of the conflict.

September 2004: Qalqilya



The Fellows with a squad of soldiers in Alfe Menashe

In September, the Fellows traveled to a settlement near the Palestinian town of Qalqilya called Alfe Menashe, and to a nearby IDF intelligence base. The trip was made in order to get a closer look at how the IDF monitors the “Security Barrier.” High on the hills of Alfe Menashe, a group of four IDF soldiers (two males and two females) waited outside of their Humvee. They chatted in Hebrew to one another, M-16s slung over their soldiers, and awaited their next mission. This group’s responsibility was to monitor the fences around Qalqilya to ensure that no one with the intent to harm Israelis got into Israel or the settlements. They were also responsible for opening and closing several gates to allow Palestinian farmers into their fields.

The Fellows were able to have a brief conversation with these soldiers to better understand their jobs and how they feel about their tasks. Each of the soldiers was at a different point in their IDF service and each gave a different take on their duties. Some presented surprisingly harsh, perhaps racist, attitudes toward the Palestinians. Other soldiers held a more sympathetic view of the Palestinians, but each knew their job, knew what was at stake if they failed or were lazy, and tried their hardest to accomplish the mission. The discussion ended as the soldiers left to open gates for the farmers.

A young lieutenant met the Fellows at the base (a handful of buildings clustered on a hill top near Qalqilya) and took them inside to view the equipment and methods used to monitor the area for terrorist activity. The rooms looked more like the offices of a dot-com business than a military installation, with pictures tacked on walls and hand written signs on desks and computers. However, closer inspection made clear that this was a serious, non-stop military operation that demanded much of the young people in charge of it.

The Fellows saw large wall maps of the entire West Bank and the Qalqilya area. Each was broken down into areas of responsibility, which corresponded with military units. The lieutenant explained that his station watched the fences and roads around Qalqilya, and alerted constantly moving teams in the field if something suspicious was detected. The equipment used by these soldiers to monitor their sector ranged from the low tech (Bedouin trackers) to the highly advanced (video cameras and motion detectors). The Fellows watched in real time as such advanced systems searched for terrorist activity and learned that the whole system was impressively synchronized.

The trip to Qalqilya was an interesting lesson in the lengths the IDF goes to defend Israel, while at the same time trying to tiptoe around the lives of the Palestinians. The Fellows saw how the IDF integrated high-tech equipment with the human soldier in order to secure the borders. They were also witness to how this system set up by the IDF makes normal life for the Palestinians around Qalqilya impossible. Still, by meeting the soldiers charged with opening gates to allow Palestinians access to their fields, the Fellows learned first hand the delicate balance the IDF has in place to protect and defend Israel, and to alleviate (where possible) hardships on the Palestinians.



A view of Alfe Menashe with Qalqilya in the background

October 2004: The Northern Command and the Lebanese Border

The first long-distance trip by the ASL Fellows was to an armor base far in the north of Israel along the Lebanese border. During the drive, an eccentric IDF spokesperson spoke to the Fellows about the presence and activities of the IDF troops and Hezbollah militiamen stationed along the border. The Lebanese militant group is responsible for terrorizing northern Israeli communities and IDF forces. The spokesman explained the rules under which the IDF responds to attacks by Hezbollah. As the van approached the border, the yellow and green flag of Hezbollah was visible on the Lebanese side, hoisted atop IDF installations left over from Operation Peace for the Galilee and the subsequent Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon.



Tal on his old stomping ground.

Before arriving at the armor base, the Fellows viewed more closely the Hezbollah encampments. Using binoculars, the Fellows spied several buildings and towers used by the Shi'a militia in its continued campaign against Israel, and heard the details of recent attacks on Israeli civilians and soldiers. They learned of techniques used by Hezbollah to infiltrate the border and carry out attacks. With the capabilities, location, and actions of Hezbollah in mind, the Fellows moved on to a nearby IDF armor installation for an explanation of Israel's response to Hezbollah and the measures taken to protect northern Israel.

A young IDF captain named Amir, who had studied and lived in New Jersey and spoke nearly unaccented English, greeted the Fellows. He spoke briefly of being in charge of this particular tank platoon, and mentioned the recent attacks. The meeting began with a short PowerPoint presentation by Amir, including photos of Hezbollah attacks and explanations of how his forces respond to such incidents. Amir stressed to the Fellows Israel's measured response when firing into Lebanon: only the source of the fire received return fire and his forces never entered Lebanon. The Fellows heard about the nightly patrols and practiced ambushes that the armor unit at the base conducted in order to prepare itself for the worst. Amir expressed much pride in his unit (and a little disdain for the UN forces responsible for monitoring the border between Israel and Lebanon). Amir answered many questions from the Fellows and took them on a brief tour of the base.



The Fellows at an armor base on the Northern Border

As with the intelligence base near Qalqilya, the armor base was little more than a cluster of small buildings that served as the headquarters for a tank platoon. Parked neatly in the back of the base were several Merkava 3 Israeli tanks, as well as several armored personnel carriers. Amir answered many questions about the tanks and allowed some of the Fellows to view the interior of one of the vehicles. As with the soldiers the Fellows met near Qalqilya, Amir displayed unwavering dedication to Israel and its defense. He made clear that Israel respects Lebanon's territorial integrity, but that it would always retaliate against Hezbollah and that his unit would continue to train as hard as it does in order to remain prepared.

Interesting due not only to the subject matter involved (the actions of a notorious terrorist group), but also to the detailed account of an IDF officer's experiences on the ground, the trip to the northern border was filled with the stuff of international news stories and Pulitzer Prize winning bestsellers. Yet, Amir and the rest of the soldiers at the armor base, and even the Hezbollah terrorists only hundreds of meters north, provided a more human, realistic element to the trip. It was enlightening to learn about the context in which Hezbollah's attacks occur, and sobering to listen to the explanations of an IDF officer about his unit's exercises and duties. Here, in the dusty, hot shadows of northern Israel's mountains and in the trailers and soldiers of a small IDF armor base, front-page headlines came to life.

November 2004: Erez Border Crossing



Palestinians from Gaza waiting to enter Israel

The ASL tour to the Erez Border Crossing between Israel and the Gaza Strip illustrated the delicate, transformative nature of Israeli security. The tour began with a discussion about the security procedures that vehicles and people crossing from Gaza into Israel endure. The Fellows discovered that an industrial zone at the crossing was established during the Oslo Peace Process in an effort to provide job opportunities for Palestinians in Gaza. They then entered the security check area established for the Palestinians. Whereas two hundred thousand Palestinian workers used to cross this area twice a day; it is now primarily utilized by Palestinians visiting family members in Israeli prisons. The Fellows noted that there must be substantial cooperation between the IDF and PA police to coordinate the entrance of these individuals. The IDF employs female soldiers to work at the crossing in order to inspect Palestinian women and conserve their cultural and religious codes. When asked about the

dangerous nature of their work; the soldiers replied that there is always a risk involved in performing body checks, but the reality is that most of the searching is done before the Palestinians can even approach the Israeli side of the inspection area. They further commented that security procedures are constantly revamped and upgraded in order to maintain the element of surprise and to keep up with Palestinian strategic enhancements. After observing a small group of Palestinians pass the security check and board buses escorting them to Israel, the Fellows continued to the VIP section of the crossing where many influential Palestinian leaders meet with Israeli officials, and where journalists and international aid workers cross into Gaza. The honor system is heavily visible in this section of Erez as security procedures are not as stringent as the ones utilized prior.



The vehicle checkpoint at the Erez terminal.

Following the visit to the Erez Crossing, the Fellows traveled to Nir-Am Kibbutz situated near Gaza for an amazing view of Gaza City. As they observed the region, the Fellows received a briefing on the history of the Kibbutz and the local security situation. The conversation focused on the danger posed by Qassam rockets targeting Sderot and the rationale behind Israel's response measures. The Fellows were bewildered by the small size of the region, especially considering the proximity of Ashkelon and Ashdod to Gaza and its rockets. Finally, Tal explained the difficulty of tank incursions in Gaza due to the terrain and orientation problems.

The tour came to an official end as the Fellows ate a picnic lunch and discussed their observations, thoughts and reactions from the day with Tal and our accompanying IDF spokesperson.

December 2004: The Jordan Valley and Reserve Duty



The Fellows mingle with IDF reservists.

Located along the West Bank of the Jordan River, the Jordan Valley is a region whose strategic significance, although positively affecting Israeli security, has been debated since the 1967 war. The tour started with a short visit to a scale model of the Jordan Valley at Mifgash HaBikaa near Moshav Yafit. While there, the Fellows discussed the political ideology of the Israeli residents of the valley. They also engaged in a lively debate over the strategic value in maintaining a military presence there now that Israel has a peace agreement with Jordan and the threat from Iraq has been dramatically reduced. The group was divided over whether it remains in Israel's interest to hold onto the Jordan Valley for security or other geo-

political reasons. Afterwards, the Fellows traveled further east along the hot and desolate landscape. This area has few residents and the only forms of life they encountered were swarms of flies and IDF Reservists from Tal's old battalion.

Milumim or the IDF Reserve starts immediately after active army service and is an important factor in the overall success of the IDF's mission to protect the citizens of Israel. Reserve soldiers perform critical tasks ranging from service support (ensuring that army maintenance and management runs smoothly) to providing much needed relief to the regular army. The Fellows met members of a reservist battalion who provide important security by systematically checking all infractions along the border fence with Jordan. Their first glimpse into IDF reserve life on the Jordan Valley was in the form of a question and answer session with the company commander. The Fellows learned how the reserve system functions,



Members of Tal's old reserve battalion perform a practice exercise in the Jordan Valley.

and about the reserve personnel management, their mission, and problems that arise in juggling the lives of reservists who frequently have fulltime obligations with their family, career or studies, or all of the above. As interesting as this discussion was, the best was yet to come. In the final installment of this tour the Fellows had the honor of witnessing the well-oiled Israeli military conduct a mock fence breach. Using soldiers from their Bedouin Tracker Squad (which is unique to the Israeli Military), they practiced tracking an infiltrator along the fence-line. After this fine example of soldiering, the Fellows were wished a happy Sylvester (New Years) and traveled back to Jerusalem.

January 2005: IDF Spokespersons Bureau

On an outstanding visit to the IDF Spokespersons Bureau in Tel Aviv, the Fellows had an insightful meeting with active duty soldiers working in the foreign media division. After a short briefing by the head of the department about the role of the spokespeople in the IDF and the challenges they face, they had a more in-depth discussion with the soldiers serving as media liaisons who are in regular contact with the foreign press. The Fellows pressed the soldiers for an explanation surrounding the IDF's sometimes delayed response to the media on controversial incidents, such as the Rachel Corrie incident and the alleged Jenin massacre, which have been widely reported and caused considerable damage to Israel's international standing. The soldiers emphasized that the IDF's Spokespersons Unit does not function like other public relations firms; rather it is far more concerned about providing the media with truthful and credible information than it is with political spin. They explained how time-consuming and difficult it is to verify reports in the foreign media and to conduct full-scale investigations into allegations against soldiers. As a result, the IDF frequently cannot provide a rapid and credible response for journalists writing on deadline and anxious to file breaking news stories first. The soldiers conceded that the practice of fact-checking and investigating each allegation often comes at a high political price, as was the case for Rachel Corrie and Jenin. The seriousness and professionalism of the soldiers with whom we met was quite impressive, especially considering their youth and lack of formal training in communications. On a separate visit to the photography and video unit of the IDF, the Fellows toured production facilities and spoke with the unit commander. They also watched a clip of a movie recently produced on the three Israeli soldiers who were kidnapped by Hezbollah in October 2000 and the subsequent German-brokered negotiations which secured the return of their corpses to Israel in 2004.

Later this month, the Fellows each had an opportunity to deliver a mock political briefing on an Israeli security matter. Tal divided the group into two teams and provided them with circumstances or policies which required explanation in a balanced but persuasive way. The topics related to Israel's security fence and a hypothetical reprisal attack on a Hezbollah outpost in South Lebanon. The exercise challenged the Fellows to put aside their own political beliefs and present a fair assessment of sometimes controversial Israeli security scenarios that are routinely covered in the foreign press.



Luke (left) and Travis (right) delivering mock security briefings

February 2005: Lifta/Off-Roading



The ruins of Lifta.

The ASL tour to Lifta, a small community located on the side of a hill at the entrance to Jerusalem, exposed the fellows to the beauty, mysticism and tragedy of Jerusalem's history. What is now a deserted town filled with almond trees and spectacular views, used to be a thriving Arab community before the 1948 Independence War. Whereas most formerly Arab towns were completely demolished upon the creation of the State of Israel; Lifta was transformed into a residence for Jewish immigrants from North Africa. However, these Jews left willingly in the 1960's because of the difficulty of life they endured there. The harsh conditions are supported by the abundance of the Almond Tree, the only plant rigid enough to thrive in the area. The village also holds

something very important and special to Jews, a natural Mikveh. Here, religious Jews can be seen purifying themselves during specified times. Now an abandoned city, the State of Israel has put forth different suggestions to handle it including ideas for restoration, renovation and desecration of the city.

Before the day was over the Fellows personally experienced the capabilities of Tal's Toyota pick-up, which after its spectacular performance on rugged terrain could quite possibly be considered a new design model for the Merkava 5. On this trip the Fellows traversed through trialing terrain. Teamwork and Tal's tank commanding experience were the only things that kept them together; nevertheless, mother-nature halted the Fellows' progress. Although the area was reconnoitered, the recent rain flooded the group's passage. Yet despite nature's attempts to stop them, the Fellows found an alternative route and eventually found a quiet, dry place to have their picnic and discuss the exhilarating events of the day.



Tal and the Fellows on an off-roading excursion.

February 2005: The Ofer Military Court of Appeals for the West Bank & Gaza Strip

At this IDF judicial facility near the town of Ramallah in the West Bank, the Fellows gained keen insight into the functioning and utility of IDF military courts in the Territories through discussions with IDF officials and other security personnel as well as direct exposure to the legal process itself. The visit began with an extensive briefing by Colonel Shaul Gordon, the President of the Military Court of Appeals. Col. Gordon first gave the Fellows a broad overview of his own military career, the framework for the application of law by occupying powers and the history of the IDF's court system in the Territories. Having provided this crucial background information, Col. Gordon then delved into the operational particulars of the military tribunals such as their legal process and key actors, and a variety of critical and controversial issues. Speaking from his own extensive experience as a sitting judge in military tribunals and responding to probing questions from the fellows, Col. Gordon addressed, inter alia: the use of "administrative detention" to prevent terrorism, the reliability of intelligence and methods for gathering evidence, due process for Palestinian defendants and detainees, procedural transparency, and the ethical quandaries with respect to balancing Palestinian rights with Israeli security. Although some of the Fellows expressed skepticism about the necessity of employing certain methods to ensure security and wondered whether they were worth the harm to Israel's international image and relations with the Palestinians, the group was impressed by the IDF's general ability to live up to Israel's democratic ideals.



Fellows being briefed by Col. Shaul Gordon.



Ofer Military Court tour.

Following the briefing the Fellows toured of the IDF base. Despite their appreciation of the obvious need to prosecute Palestinian crime in order to maintain law and order in the Territories, some of the Fellows were moved by the sight of Palestinians waiting in a holding area to attend their relatives' trials. The highlight of the day was sitting in court, watching the tribunals in action. In the first case, the Fellows witnessed an evidentiary hearing in which a young Palestinian man, defended by an old Israeli-Arab lawyer and prosecuted by a Israeli woman his own age, was on trial for smuggling weapons into the West Bank. The second case involved a group of four Palestinian defendants accused of attacking Israeli soldiers. The Fellows were all fascinated by the dynamics of the courtroom: trials conducted in Hebrew and translated for the defendants' sake into Arabic, young Israeli soldier-prosecutors and older

(mostly) Arab defense lawyers, families of the Palestinian defendants' observing the proceedings, and above all the prevailing sense of procedural normalcy inside despite the complicated political context and security conditions outside the base. At the end of the visit, the Fellows had the unique opportunity to speak with a lawyer from the legal office of the Shin Bet security service who explained Shabak's role in the legal process, especially administrative detention, and the legal constraints under which its agents operated.

Overall, the Fellows came away from this visit to the IDF's Military Court of Appeals enlightened about Israel's administration of the Territories, counter-terror efforts, and daily struggle to achieve high democratic standards of civil rights under very difficult security conditions.

March 2005: Civil Administration Headquarters in the West Bank

The Fellows visited the headquarters of the IDF Civil Administration on the outskirts of Ramallah in the West Bank. There, they were met by a young soldier from the IDF Spokespersons Unit named Adam who guided the Fellows around the base. Several Fellows noted how different the grounds of the Civil Administration appeared, despite the presence of olive uniformed soldiers, than the other IDF bases they had visited, as the former resembled an office park much more than a military installation. From the roof of the main building, the Fellows looked out over downtown Ramallah as Adam explained the post-Oslo development of the “capital city of the Palestinian Authority [PA]”, and how the Civil Administration continued to function under fire during the 2nd Intifada.



View of Ramallah from Civil Administration HQ.

Following the tour, the Fellows were briefed by Major Colin Hames, a top advisor to the Government on Palestinian politics and humanitarian conditions. Major Hames described the Civil Administration’s responsibility for the civilian aspects of the Occupation in terms of coordinating and providing services for the Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. He delineated the Civil Administration’s history from its beginning in the aftermath of the June 1967 War, troubles caused by the 1st Intifada, demise in the Oslo period (when the PA assumed responsibility for service provision in Areas “A” and “B”), and finally, resuscitation as a result of the collapse of the PA and impending humanitarian crisis in the Territories. The Fellows questioned Major Hames extensively about both his own knowledge of Palestinian politics and society and Civil Administration relations with the Palestinians in official and private capacities. Though several Fellows were skeptical about the depth of the Major’s knowledge and reliability of its sources, Major Hames did enlighten the Fellows in many ways about the socio-political reality on the ground. He also addressed the diminishing internal challenge the Civil Administration faced due to the organizational culture of the IDF, whose militaristic, fighting mentality often causes soldiers to look down upon the Civil Administration as separate from the “real” Army.



Briefing by Major Shalev on IDF-NGO coordination.

The Fellows next met with Major Avi Shalev, Senior Liaison Officer to International Organizations, to discuss the IDF’s relations with international NGOs. Major Shalev explained that the IDF works hard to maintain congenial, open relationships with these organizations because they assume the lion’s share of humanitarian relief and assistance to the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Major Shalev informed the Fellows that the Palestinian Territories received per capita more foreign aid than any other country in the world. He emphasized how important it was for Israel that this financial aid reach the Palestinians (via international NGOs operating in the Territories) in order to prevent a humanitarian crisis that would place a substantial burden on Israeli resources and potentially provoke a mass uprising of Palestinians. To illustrate this point, Major Shalev cited the example of Operation Defensive Shield in 2002, in which his team facilitated access to the Territories for international organizations both during the combat and immediately afterward. The Fellows inquired about how Palestinian humanitarian needs are weighed against the risks that NGOs’ access to and presence in the Territories pose to Israeli security.

Through their meetings at the Civil Administration and observations of Major Hames' and Major Shalev's contrasting professional styles, the Fellows developed a more comprehensive understanding of the Occupation as well as a sense of disquiet about its potentially corrosive effects on the IDF and Israeli society.

March 2005: Menachem Begin Heritage Center

Late on a sunny morning, the Fellows met with Judy and Larry Besserman (wonderful Israeli-American friends of ASL founder Captain Jerome Levy) for an “unofficial” ASL tour of the Menachem Begin Heritage Center in southern Jerusalem. A tour of the center was attempted earlier in the year by the Fellows, but ended in a lunch overlooking the Tower of David and Jerusalem’s Turkish city walls from the Center’s restaurant. On this morning, however, the tour guide (and founder/director of the Begin Center) was present and anxious to begin.

One time advisor and confidant to the former Likud Prime Minister Harry Hurwitz guided the Fellows through the museum. Mr. Hurwitz helped establish the Begin Center as a place to study, as well as remember, the life and achievements of Menachem Begin, Israel’s first Likud Prime Minister. Resembling a presidential library in the U.S., the museum was setup as a journey through Begin’s life, from his origins in Lithuania to the pinnacle of Israeli politics, with impressive interactive and informative audio-visual displays and recordings of Begin’s speeches. With the Fellows the whole time, as he was with Begin during much of his life, Mr. Hurwitz provided insightful “insider” answers to questions, and added anecdotes and personal information that the audio guide lacked.

To conclude, Mr. Hurwitz took the Fellows to see a mock Knesset chamber in which students hold mock sessions of Knesset. He explained the Center’s purpose and its future, mentioning the vast quantity and array of documents it held, how it operated as a research center, and how it functioned even as a place of debate, discussion, and education about Israel and politics. The morning’s final stop was in Mr. Hurwitz’s office, which allowed for a magnificent view of the Old City. Mr. Hurwitz joked that he had founded the Center for the view alone. The tour enhanced the Fellows’ understanding of Begin the man and provided healthy appreciation for the Center’s purpose in honoring and remembering Begin, as well as serving Israeli civic life, in the spirit of democracy and freedom of information, as a research library and center of political debate.



The Fellows with Harry Hurwitz at the Menachem Begin Heritage Center

April 2005: The BBC Mideast Bureau

In a follow-up visit to the tour of the IDF Spokespersons Bureau, Tal arranged for the Fellows to meet with Andrew Steele, the BBC's Mideast Bureau Chief. Prior to the meeting, the Fellows researched and discussed various controversies surrounding the BBC's coverage of Israel. In addition to widespread accusations of a general anti-Israel bias in their reporting, they discussed the BBC's vilification of Prime Minister Sharon, and its alleged involvement in smuggling out of Israel an illegally taped interview with nuclear spy Mordechai Vanunu. After a brief tour of the BBC's TV and radio studios, the Fellows had a fascinating discussion with Mr. Steele about his take on why the Israeli government has singled out the BBC network for unbalanced coverage. Perhaps most compelling among his explanations was that, as the world's largest network for Middle East news, the BBC is more closely monitored by the Israeli government than other networks. Mr. Steele suggested that most news reports from Israel are just as critical, but they go largely unnoticed since other networks carry less influence than the BBC. Comparatively speaking, he maintained that CNN, the second largest news network, has capitulated to Israeli diplomatic pressure to curtail its critical reporting of Israeli policies, whereas the BBC has admirably (in his view) withstood the same pressure.



BBC Middle East Bureau Chief Andrew Steele with the Fellows.

Responding to claims that the IDF is sometimes denied a fair chance to present its side of the story due to the lengthy fact-checking process, Mr. Steele agreed that the IDF is definitely at a disadvantage. He went on to say, however, that the IDF sometimes hides behind assertions that it needs more time to verify reports hoping that the story will eventually be overshadowed by other news items. Steele also defended his network's coverage of Operation Defensive Shield and maintained that BBC reporting never referred to a "massacre" in Jenin without attributing it to senior Palestinian officials. He then went on to accuse the IDF of having mishandled the Jenin incident by denying journalists entry into the refugee camp to confirm or reject Palestinian allegations. While the visit definitely shed light on many of the challenges foreign correspondents face in covering the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, most of the Fellows left the studio feeling that excessive blame for the BBC's anti-Israel slant was deflected onto the Israeli government.

May 2005: The Golan Heights

After a pre-dawn wake-up call, the ASL Fellows piled into the van for the long drive from Jerusalem north to the Golan Heights in order to observe a live IDF armor exercise, learn about the 1973 Yom Kippur/October War, and grasp the strategic and political significance of the terrain.

The Fellows arrived several hours later at Katzrin which housed a massive scale model of the Golan Heights that Tal used to enhance their understanding of the geography and topography of the territory that Israel captured from Syria in the 1967 War. They discussed the role of terrain in the military strategies of Israel's general defense of the Golan and Syria's invasion of it in 1973. Afterward, the Fellows watched a video presentation on Israeli settlement of and life in the Golan, which helped them understand its political, economic and psychological integration into Israel as well as the controversy surrounding the area.



Live IDF Armor demonstration in the Golan Heights.

They then went to watch a live armor exercise being conducted by the IDF (with the head of the Northern Command in attendance) to practice an Israeli counter-attack to an invasion of the Golan by Syrian land forces. The Fellows saw the Israeli tanks move into position while Tal, in consultation with IDF personnel present, explained to the Fellows the tactical objectives and procedures of the exercise. The 188th Armored

Battalion put on an overwhelming sensory display – with persistent machine gun fire spraying the field, the thundering launch of tank shells that shook their bodies to their core and fiery explosions lighting up the ground, followed by the maneuvering of minesweepers, tanks and other vehicles advancing through a mock minefield. The Fellows certainly left with a far better appreciation of Israeli land force capabilities and the physical sensation of war.

That afternoon, the Fellows embarked on a tour of key sites in the 1973 Yom Kippur/October War, beginning with Ben Tal, a former IDF lookout post next to the Syrian armistice line that surveys southwestern Syria (including the ruined city of Quneitra), Har Dov and southeastern Lebanon. Atop Ben Tal, the Fellows enjoyed some of Tal's world-renowned sweet tea while discussing the causes and consequences of the 1973 war, its impact on Israeli state and society, and the strategic importance of the Golan Heights. The Fellows also heard about the personal experience of their driver, Avi, who was wounded in the war. From there, they traveled to the Valley of Tears to learn about the exploits of the IDF's 77th Brigade that, in dire circumstances and against great odds, halted the Syrian advance through the Golan in 1973. The tour concluded at a memorial site for the 77th Brigade, from which the Fellows could look out into the battlefield and palpably envision some of the most awesome tank battles in military history that occurred there between Israeli and Syrian forces. On the way back to the Jerusalem, the blazing sun and merciless heat compelled everyone to stop for a refreshing swim (and a few games of "chicken") in a natural pool – formerly used by Syrian army officers – in a Golan forest.



Alex, Luke, Travis, and Tal at the Syrian Officers' Pool in the Golan.

May 2005: Ethnic Minorities in Israel and “At-Risk” Youth in the Military



Mr. Kadaan chats with the Fellows

On an emotion-laden trip up to the Galilee, the Fellows started the day with a visit to Baka Al Gharbia where they met with an Arab Israeli named Adel Kadaan, whose legal battle against the State has attracted national attention over the past decade. Mr. Kadaan, a nurse at the Hillel Yafe hospital in Hadera, explained how studying with, and providing medical care to, many Jewish Israelis during his life has exposed him to a positive side of Israel that few Arabs have experienced. The high quality of life that he observed in Jewish communities inspired Mr. Kadaan to attempt to move his family to a nearby Jewish community called Katzir, so his children can have better educational and economic opportunities. Initially denied a permit to buy state-owned land there in 1995, Mr. Kadaan then consulted with the Israeli Civil Rights Association, which engaged in a lengthy legal battle on his behalf. The Israeli Supreme Court ruled in Mr. Kadaan’s favor in 2000. Yet bureaucratic foot-dragging has delayed his efforts and he remains skeptical about ever receiving the legal documentation to move to Katzir. While some of the Fellows were appalled by the institutionalized discrimination that obstructed Mr. Kadaan, others saw his struggle as a politically-motivated venture seeking to challenge the Jewish character of Israel. On the drive to the next stop, an extremely charged debate ensued among the Fellows over Israeli policies that, in the name of preserving Israel’s “Jewishness,” could also be perceived as discriminatory and undemocratic.

Next, the Fellows visited the home of Azzam Azzam, an Israeli-Druze whose sudden release from Egyptian prison in December 2004 (after serving eight years on espionage charges) made him an Israeli celebrity. In addition to telling his dramatic story of being arrested, tortured, falsely accused, and imprisoned by Egyptian authorities, Azzam and his brother Sami vividly described the high-level Israeli diplomatic channels and American political pressure on Egypt that kept Azzam alive and ultimately secured his early release. It was interesting for the Fellows to see an ethnic minority passionately embrace his country and praise the State. Tal’s powerful concluding remarks noted how Azam’s experience put a mirror up to Israeli society, reminding all citizens that despite the Jewish character of the State, Israeli national identity and citizenship often transcends the country’s religious, cultural and ethnic differences.



The Fellows with Azzam Azzam and his brother, Sami.



Brett, Tal, and Alex engage a recruit at Havet Hashomer.

The Fellows' last visit of the day was to Havet Hashomer (“The Guards’ Farm”), a military base established by former Chief of Staff Rafael Eitan for Israeli youth who would normally be deemed unfit for military service. Many youths serving on this base come from troubled backgrounds. Built on the notion that the IDF is the “People’s Army,” Havet Hashomer offers new recruits a last chance to use the army as a tool for building life skills and integrating into Israeli society. Almost all of the soldiers here are Mizrahim (Jews from Arab countries) or new immigrants from development towns. Our visit entailed a brief presentation by Havet Hashomer’s commander and panel discussions with soldiers and junior commanders. The Fellows explored questions such as whether the IDF should play a role in socializing Israeli youth. Everyone left feeling that Havet Hashomer positively impacted the lives of at-risk youth and the IDF should continue to support such a program.