JINSA

U.S. Military Academies Program 2012 Report

2012: An exceptional year for JINSA's Military Academies Program

- We doubled the number of participants from the U.S. Air Force Academy, the U.S. Military Academy (West Point), and the U.S. Naval Academy (Annapolis) from 30 to 60. We restored the U.S. Coast Guard Academy as a participant.

- We reinstated a lecture series on the campuses of the Military Academies that brings Israeli defense officials to address the cadets and midshipmen.

- We revamped the content of the Military Academies Program to ensure it was properly addressing the security issues facing our military.

- We undertook a new "Social Media" project to connect all past trip participants to JINSA, and to each other.

- JINSA's increased outreach this year prompted the U.S. Air Force Academy to add a preparatory course on Israeli strategy to its curriculum. JINSA is actively working to achieve similar results with the other academies.

JINSA Military Academies Program

There is a distinct difference between older and younger American officers in their perception of and knowledge about Israel. Americans who are generations removed from the Holocaust and who consider the Six Day War and the Yom Kippur War ancient history are prone to accept the media's rather unflattering view of Israel as reality.

This is particularly challenging when newly commissioned officers graduating from the Military Academies proceed to their first assignment without a clear understanding of Israel's strategic importance.

To bolster the relationship between the U.S. and Israel, which enhances security worldwide for both countries, JINSA created an intensive educational program for the rising generation of American military leadership. JINSA's program achieves results. In fact, following this year's increased outreach to the academies, we learned that the U.S. Air Force Academy has added to its curriculum a preparatory course on Israeli strategy for the cadets going to Israel. Beginning this year, program participants will be selected from cadets enrolling in this course. This is the Air Force Academy's first ever Israel-focused course. We are working to achieve similar results with the other academies.

JINSA's Military Academies Program is an antidote to the limited, one-dimensional view of Israel portrayed in the media – the primary source of information about Israel for most Americans. This program has two components:

- Annual Trips to Israel for Cadets and Midshipmen studying in the American military academies.

- Lecture series at the Military Academies conducted by Israeli defense and security professionals.

Component I: *2012 Military Academies Program in Israel*

2012 saw JINSA's Military Academies Program in Israel double in size, allowing 60 future U.S. military officers from the U.S. Air Force Academy, U.S. Military Academy at West Point, the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis and the Coast Guard Academy to experience Israel in a hands-on manner that emphasized personal interactions with Israelis from all backgrounds but especially with their IDF counterparts.

A charitable foundation grant allowed JINSA to expand the program in 2012, conducting two consecutive trips to Israel with the first trip spanning May 30 to June 17 and the second from June 23 to July 10. The addition of the second trip enabled JINSA to reinstate the Coast Guard as a participant academy. The Coast Guard has been and will be facing new international maritime challenges in the coming years and the connection and exposure to Israel can offer these future Coast Guard officers insight into dealing with terrorism and smuggling off their shorelines.

On the trips, cadets and midshipmen met and engaged in discussion with young Israeli officers, highlighting the role of the military in democratic countries, similarities and differences in officer schooling, and building bridges for future contact between their respective military establishments.

JINSA uses post-trip surveys and essays submitted by trip participants – more than 500 to date. Each year, JINSA compiles these essays and publishes a full report that imparts the participants' views on the program's overall influence on them as future military leaders of our country; how their misconceptions about Israel were changed with the program; and what made the biggest impression on them. The full report is enclosed.

This year's participants clearly indicated that their understanding of the complexity of the Middle East was dramatically enhanced as nearly all participants comment on the differences between the Israel they have seen on television and the Israel they visited. They consistently note that the information obtained on the program will make them more successful military officers especially through a keener understanding of Israel's democracy, civil society, and culture and deeper knowledge of the U.S.-Israel alliance.

The rigorous itinerary was constructed to meet the educational, religious, social, historical and security requirements of the cadets and midshipmen. The participants traveled nearly the entirety of the country experiencing major historical, religious and strategic sites.

JINSA arranged for a group of IDF junior officers to be embedded with the cadets and midshipmen ensuring that a sharing of experiences would occur. The enclosed report confirms the importance of this interaction as almost every participant regarded the "Mifgash" as the highlight of the program.

The cadets and midshipmen received college-level academic programming in the problems of the Middle East region, an area that will be of continuing concern to American military planners for the foreseeable future. To that end, the trip itinerary included briefings and extended question-and-answer sessions with high-level Israel Defense Force (IDF) officers, retired senior intelligence and national police officers, leading academics and journalists.

IDF Lone Soldiers (those whose families live abroad) joined the participants for a Shabbat dinner to further forge personal connection.

The two-and-a-half-week Military Academies Program in Israel continues to provide a positive, in-depth experience for the next generation of America's military leaders. It imparts the reality of Israel, its past and recent history, its security requirements and the capabilities it brings to meeting its defense needs and supporting Western interests in a crucial part of the world.

Component II: *2012 Military Academies Lecture Series*

This year JINSA was able to sponsor four successful lectures: two at the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, one at the U.S. Air Force Academy and one at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point.

General Amos Yadlin, Israel Air Force, spoke at Annapolis. General Yadlin retired from the IDF in December of 2010. His final position before retirement was as Chief of Defense Intelligence. A fighter pilot, Gen. Yadlin has been prominently featured in numerous articles and books for both his role as one of the eight pilots involved in the destruction of the Osirak Nuclear Reactor and numerous other missions. Gen. Yadlin is currently the Director of the Institute for National Security Studies in Israel.

General Dan Haloutz spent a week in America with JINSA traveling to all three academies for presentations at each. General Haloutz retired from the IDF in 2008 as Chief of Staff. Previously, he served as Commander of the Israel Air Force. He is the first "pilot" to become Chief of Staff.

During his visit to Annapolis, General Yadlin made three separate presentations. General Haloutz also spoke several times while visiting all three campuses.

Additionally, both Generals Haloutz and Yadlin met privately with respective Academy leadership.

Following frequent contact with the three military academies, JINSA concluded that for the series, a committee needed to be established that would function as a liaison from JINSA to the respective academies.

The committee as now established includes:

Admiral Leon "Bud" Edney, USN (ret.)
Former Supreme Allied Commander, NATO
JINSA Board of Advisors

Lieutenant General David P. Fridovich, USA (ret.)
Former Deputy Commander, U.S. Special Operation Command
Director at the JINSA Gemunder Center for Defense & Strategies

Lieutenant General Tad J. Oelstrom, USAF (ret.)
Former Superintendent of the U.S. Air Force Academy
Director of the National Security Program at the Kennedy School, Harvard University
JINSA Board of Advisors

JINSA has now commenced work for the next academic year to plan for three visits during the spring of 2013. A number of opportunities to further maximize JINSA's impact at the academies have been identified.

For future planning for the lecture series, JINSA has reached out to the IDF and other Israeli security entities. Agreement has been confirmed that they will work with JINSA to provide high-level speakers. These are the kinds of speakers the academies wish to invite as they believe this kind of exposure for the cadets and midshipmen will result in the greatest benefit for the students/future officers.

JINSA Military Academies Program in Israel

Post-Trip Reports by Cadets & Midshipmen (Summer 2012)

Participants are asked 4 questions and requested to answer these on a survey JINSA uses to help evaluate the program's impact and effectiveness. Reports are broken down by question.

JINSA ASKS:

How do you expect this experience to benefit you as an American military officer?

USNA Participant

Once I was in Israel, I could see first-hand some of the security complexities that she faces, what an IDF soldier is really like, and how the relationship between our countries is one that is essential to both sides. I will take this knowledge of one of our strongest allies with me in my career as an officer, and I will continue to advocate a strong cooperation between our two nations. Having contact with members of Israel's military will also serve me well in my future, because I will potentially be working with some of the people that I met, and learning a great deal about their military culture will allow me to be able to work more effectively with them. Because Israel is our strongest ally in the region, and a model for the entire area, we must continue to share our culture and values with each other to ensure that we can form a united front on issues in the region.

USMA Participant

As a future Army officer, I expect this experience to benefit me in several ways. Primarily, the interaction with Israeli officers and soldiers was one of the best experiences of the trip. Israel is a close ally of the United States, but that statement means little until you meet those Soldiers. Israelis and Americans have many values in common. To interact with them strengthens those bonds. Additionally, I better understand the position Israel is in within the Middle East, and why they make the decisions they do. As an officer, it will be vital to understand our ally's intentions and motivations. I feel that I have a better understanding as to why Israelis make the decisions they do in the Middle East.

USAFA Participant

Simply knowing the caliber and capability of their forces has built trust in my mind and excitement for working with them in the future. The motivation and experience I saw in their ranks has helped me gain further respect for them that will last all the way through my career as an officer.

USAFA Participant

The most significant benefit I received from this program is a better understanding not only of the complex political and social problems in Israel, but also a healthy appreciation for the challenges modern military leaders face in today's conflicts that are heavily influenced by the media and propaganda. I was amazed when I was shown the lengths the Israeli military goes to in order to prevent innocents from being caught in the crossfire between soldiers and enemy combatants... Such an action is regarded as strategic folly in most other military organizations, but the Israeli army and air force have learned that the media is often more potent a weapon than any tank or plane. In addition to demonstrating an understanding the ideological war that is being waged, the practice of warning inhabitants of incoming strikes shows that the Israeli military values human life very highly; a mentality that should always be present in the mind of a military officer.

Abbreviations: United States Military Academy (USMA); United States Air Force Academy (USAFA); United States Naval Academy (USNA); United States Coast Guard Academy (USCGA)

USAFA Participant
I expect this experience to benefit me as a future officer because it helped open my eyes to some of the security threats that the United States faces. By learning about the conflict between the various factions in the region, I gained an appreciation for the complexity of the conflict and the interests of a variety of groups. This new interest has prompted me to put more effort into keeping up with the events in the Middle East. This enhanced understanding will hopefully serve me well as an officer.

USAFA Participant
My experience in Israel will continue to influence me as a future officer in the United States Air Force. As a firstie with only one year left until graduation, I have been thinking long and hard about the responsibility I am soon to inherit with my commission. I hope to take the lessons I have learned from the IDF soldiers and serve my subordinates with integrity. I intend to be a leader who takes care of their subordinates with the intention of bringing them home safely…After this trip, I understand Israel and its actions far better than had I merely relied on CNN.

USNA Participant
Having the firsthand knowledge of an extremely important part of the world that I will be serving in will be invaluable when I am called upon. Being able to reflect on my experiences to incorporate them into my decision making will be priceless. Actually being on the ground, interacting with the sites and people of a country that is so important to the United States is somewhat rare in our military and I a very grateful for the opportunity to change that.

USNA Participant
The irony of the Mifgash, was that despite being Israeli, Captains and Lieutenants in the military, and having many communication barriers, they were just like us. They appreciated similar things, watched the same shows, behaved like Americans, and were even practically the same age. We bonded and made great friends. Fifteen years from now it is inevitable that many of the participants of the program will still be in the service and be dealing with Foreign Affairs, specifically those regarding Israeli security. Who knows, one day we might be working alongside some of the IDF officers and friends we made.

USNA Participant
I really got to form a relationship with the IDF officers and ask them questions on a personal level since we were in a non-operational atmosphere. The experience widened my perspective of Israel, and now when I read or hear about Israel in the news I have a much better understanding of what it is actually like in Israel. The understanding gained from this trip is invaluable as a future officer because I will undoubtedly work with the Israeli military and have gained such an appreciation for them as a people and a country. I will share this new understanding with others who could not have gained it without seeing the country and the people first hand.

USNA Participant
Whether it was in informal conversation on the bus with our tour guide, an experienced Israeli officer himself, or during an established discussion about morality and decision-making in the military, I gained much awareness from the Israeli officers. Despite the cultural, religious, and geographical differences, there is a universally shared morality and ethical code. Many times in the military doing the right thing may be difficult or decisions could be grey. However, through the personal experiences of the Israelis along with the input of fellow cadets and the U.S. officers, I gained some insight that will definitely help me with decision making in my military career. Also, wherever my military or civilian career might take me, Israel and the US alliance with this country will forever be very special to me.

USCGA Participant
With this experience, I more thoroughly understand that the problems in the Middle East cannot be solved with a "quick fix". This trip has empowered me with the knowledge to educate others on the complexity of the problems in the Middle East. This concept of a quick fix cannot be applied to Israel; in fact the issues

are so complex and affect so many people that a quick fix would only make the situation worse. As future American military officers we are leaders in our generation and will have a valuable opinion on the issues facing the United States. Having an appreciation for the complexity of the Middle East I will be able to use the respect that goes with being a military officer to advise others on the situation so that well-informed decisions may be made. After having been to Israel, it is easy to see how skewed our perception of Israel is, but I will have the opportunity to present a truthful report.

USNA Participant

I believe that my time in Israel has given me an even greater respect for the Israel Defense Forces, and allowed me to adopt certain principles into my own leadership style. Additionally, I have obtained a greater understanding of the political and social situation within Israel and her surrounding neighbors.

USNA Participant

JINSA showed us all of the great things about Israel and as academy graduates we have a strong possibility to be affecting national policy as we grow older and wiser. This trip has solidified a positive and long lasting stance towards Israel and I really hope the right people are elected as leaders of our countries to foster our relationship. I am so grateful that I was able to go. Words cannot describe how meaningful and amazing this trip was for me. On a related side story, I bought a funny shirt that said "Don't worry America, Israel is behind you." Well I believe that Israel should feel the same way; that we absolutely have your back. I really loved the trip and love Israel. Thank you again!

USAFA Participant

The JINSA Academy trip was my third time traveling to Israel, but the military focus of this trip made it the most educational and beneficial of the three… This trip provided insight into one of America's greatest allies, and the complexity of problems they must face every day.

USAFA Participant

Strategically, I learned that the Israeli people will never apologize for their right to exist as a people and as a nation. They have a never quit, never lose attitude that is truly infectious. As a military officer and servant leader, I will carry this exact attitude into my unit. Operationally, when I was in Israel I had the opportunity to spend several days with a company commander of an infantry unit who was about my age. He told me that the greatest leadership lesson he could offer was to genuinely care for the welfare of his troops. I will bring this trait to my unit as an officer.

USAFA Participant

The briefings I received on intelligence, Islamic fundamentalism, and geopolitics were top notch and offered an extraordinary perspective on issues that not only affect the U.S. Military but also the entire world. I know this program fostered my officer development.

USNA Participant

Through my education at the Naval Academy I have pursued a course of Arabic study with the intent to hopefully conduct business with the Middle East in the future. Clearly the role Israel plays in the region is fundamental to understand in order to get a holistic perspective. After spending a semester in a Muslim, Gulf country it was eye opening to see the wide differences between the Arab and Israeli cultures… This knowledge and global perspective is especially necessary as a leader in America's Naval forces where we are expected to be an example of righteous justice and civility for the world.

USMA Participant

JINSA exposed me to Israel's role in the region. I learned of Israel's delicate and sometimes precarious position as it deals with the surrounding Arab nations externally and the Palestinians internally. This knowledge will help me understand future conflicts in the region as the U.S. works with both Israel and the Arab nations.

The time I spent with the IDF officers was invaluable because it exposed me to how the IDF operates, the IDF's culture, and the perspective of young Israelis. I will be able to better work with the IDF due to the exposure to its structure, history of the nation, and layout of its country. I also observed the benefits of having a close and open relationship between the officer and enlisted ranks. Because all officers are enlisted first, there is a greater understanding between the ranks and an easy flow of information. As an officer, I will work to emulate the careful balance of an open, respectful relationship.

USMA Participant

This trip will benefit me in many ways as an Army officer. I expect that many cadets will use this prompt to elaborate on conflict in the Middle East and the importance of Israel as an American ally with the likelihood that American troops will serve alongside Israeli soldiers.

USAFA Participant

Having always read about the Arab-Israeli conflict, I never truly understood the complexities surrounding the issue. After visiting the West Bank, Gaza, Lebanon, and Syrian borders and gaining an understanding for the compactness of Israeli and talking to the people who live on the so called frontier, I finally began to grasp the difficulty of the Israeli plight. I think that is the biggest mistake that American officers can make; not understanding a conflict that is taking place. I feel that because of my trip to Israel, I better understand the issue that is boiling in the region, and as a result, will be better able to handle and possibly help the situation if and when that time ever comes.

USAFA Participant

My experience in Israel will help me as an officer by providing me exposure to a modern, industrialized state that does not have assured security… In Israel, there are real possibilities of tactical nuclear strikes, land invasion, and terrorist actions. Israel's geographical characteristics make it particularly vulnerable to attack, but it has been able to survive for over 60 years.

How does Israel accomplish this? I believe it is the endorsement of two core ideas that leads Israel to stable security. First, Israelis support universal military service, a program that not only provides able bodies (critical for such a small country), but also engrains understanding of and support for the state's military affairs. Second, perhaps as a product of the first, Israel strongly invests in military technologies, evident by their powerful Air Force and sophisticated Iron Dome air defense system. Through these measures, Israel maintains the resources needed for success in modern conflicts. It is beneficial for U.S. military officers to be immersed in this culture for a period of time, as it reminds us that no one, including the U.S., is invincible. Further, we witness firsthand the effects of big security risks on a society, and the sacrifices necessary to meet security demands.

USNA Participant

From the ashes rose a nation, one strong and with strong friends, a nation that understands responsibility to fellow man and the necessity to protect itself. If a fire should start in the mountains, new trees will grow from the soot, a village will rise from the blackened earth. Should a similar situation ever occur, it is everyone's responsibility to do what they can to help rebuild … JINSA has helped open my eyes to the responsibility I bear from not just strategic and tactical standpoints, but from humanitarian viewpoints as well. Thank you for this opportunity and experience.

USNA Participant

Whenever I consider my time as an officer in the United States Armed Services, I only think about the impact I will have on my American sailors. However, my experience with JINSA has reminded me that I am an officer of the free world too. Traveling to Israel, meeting IDF officers, and interacting with civilians in their home environment demonstrated that as a future officer, I also inherit the responsibilities of an ambassador. My reach and impact as an officer is not limited to the American navy but my fellow officers abroad. My summer with JINSA will help me strengthen the relationship between American and foreign officers.

USMA Participant

As a future officer in the United States Armed Services I know that my experiences in Israel will enhance my regional awareness, supplement my cross-cultural knowledge and improve my ability to work with foreign armed forces. .. Gaining cross-cultural knowledge in a Middle Eastern country is imperative to operating with other people of the region. Understanding the language, customs and views of the world are critical for successful interactions. Spending valuable time with young military officers and various enlisted men gave me the opportunity to learn how to connect on various levels in order to work as a team.

USCGA Participant

I expect that as I am carrying out my duties off the American Coast I will always have the image of the IDF soldiers I met in the back of my mind. Knowing that they are fighting for the survival of their homeland and protecting parents and children from attacks will motivate me to carry out my role with more vigor and enthusiasm.

JINSA ASKS:

What was the biggest misconception you took to Israel and how it was corrected or changed during the program?

USNA Participant

The biggest misconception that I took to Israel is with regards to their position in the Middle East. I have grown up hearing of and reading about Israel's plight but I had always assumed that a quick fix could be achieved, whether through sovereign military action, peaceful international assistance, or even external pressure from foreign countries, especially the United States of America. However, between my time spent on the ground observing in Israel and the summation of several group discussions throughout the trip, I have realized that Israel's situation is much deeper than I had superficially assumed. Firstly, offensive military action has no benefit to Israel because the country has no desire to expand or exert control on other peoples. I learned that far from being expansionist, which is a characteristic that could be reasonable assumed based on their success in previous wars, Israel is a country content with the land already in possession. In fact, it appears that they are more than willing to give up both land and control over the ethnic groups occupying the land. Secondly, I realized that the current world posture of "throwing money at the problem" is ineffective. Indeed, it appears that pumping money into surrounding countries in an attempt to increase stability in the area is having an opposite effect. Rather than using a "hands off" approach to respond to the issues, the world needs to either take a more active role or take no action at all.

USNA Participant

The biggest misconception I had concerning Israel was that when conducting military operations, there was little concern for collateral damage. From various lectures and conversations with military officers, I discovered the exact opposite is true. Israel, in fact, makes every effort to limit the sacrifice of innocent lives. Although the terrorists try to use this "weakness" to their advantage, the Israelis do not sacrifice their humanity despite the fact that eliminating the threat would result in greater security for their country.

USNA Participant

My biggest misconception about Israel prior to arrival was centered on the military. Specifically, after reading about IDF soldiers in the news I assumed all were beefed up, brutal, war machines overly obsessed with security and extremely Islamophobic. Imagine my surprise meeting officers like the quiet, humble, and supremely responsible Itamar who wouldn't cross the street until the light changed on the off chance someone recognized him as an officer. Or the small, spirited Amir, a Dutch lone-soldier. It was shocking to see army officers as small and unassuming as these men, but who acted as such stunning examples of professionalism. You would be extremely hard-pressed to find a group of 22-23 year old American military officers who behave with the same level of humility and dignity of these men. Realizing at the same time that they were nearly our same age brought even more astonishment. Far from the blood thirsty, intense men I imagined I could truly relate to these dedicated men and hope that my leadership can measure up to their example when I am commissioned.

USNA Participant

The misconceptions and misinterpretations people have towards the current state of Israel are amazing. Before coming to Israel, I too was naïve towards the "security state of Israel." Being in the Navy, we are presented with more credible material and shown things more informative than what the general American population receives. However, the true state of Israel cannot be discussed or presented; rather it must be seen and experienced.

Remnants of past wars remain scattered throughout Israel: bomb shelters, trenches, battered artillery equipment, and even vast mine fields up in the Golan Heights. When we were commuting from Kfar Blum to Mitzpeh Ramon, we stopped at the Nevatim Air Force base to interact with local pilots and see the aviation platforms Israel is currently flying. While eating in the mess hall, a few of the guys and I began talking to an individual eating lunch by himself. He was an Apache pilot who had just got back from "a morning flight routine." Hours prior to talking with him, he had been flying near the Gaza strip and shot down a rocket headed towards Jerusalem…

The people recognize what is going on- the violence from regional countries including Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, and the Palestinian neighbors- yet they continue to live and thrive in such an environment. People in Israel do not dwell, rather they live their lives because they have confidence in their country. Israel is a little country surrounded by much larger, and more populated ones. You can drive nearly the entire region, north to south, in eight hours. In doing so, you can pass by all sorts of Islamic groups that resent and have hatred towards the Israeli Western way. Some of these groups, the Hamas, Fatah, Hezbollah, and the Muslim brotherhood have communities just on the other side of the security borders that we saw. When in the Golan Heights, our bus stopped outside a three layered fence defended by an IDF pillbox. Within 100 yards of our bus flew Hezbollah flags in a community that more than likely had participated in terroristic actions. Due to the inevitable fact of nature that multiple right wing Islamic groups are trying to drive out the Jewish population from Israel, security within the country is not joked about or taken light-heartedly. Israel is a complicated country and will truly never be fully understood unless your perceptions were created through your own eyes.

USMA Participant

My biggest misconception of Israel was that it was a state that was unwilling to compromise on peace. Israel is often portrayed in the media as a state unwilling to come to an agreement and completely indisposed to any sort of compromise. Throughout my two and a half week journey through Israel, I learned that Israel, on many occasions, have offered peace to its neighbors at great cost to themselves. I was not aware of the fact that Israel had given all of the Sinai back to Egypt and offered to cede the Golan Heights to Syria in exchange for peace. They had also disengaged from the Gaza strip by completely removing Jewish settlers from the area. Their eventual goal is to create a lasting peace that the people of not only Israel, but the region can enjoy.

USNA Participant

The one misconception I did realize was that there is no universal definition of the West Bank. From what I learned, it just means the West Bank of the Jordan River, but that is a lot of land that Israel still controls. I think that the real border with the Palestinian West Bank is the 25 foot security fence that is currently surrounding the Palestinian West Bank. I think that should be referred to as the West Bank completely. In the media and politics, people throw around the term West Bank a lot, and I really don't think any of them know what it means. I remember during the first week in Israel there was a story of 800 new homes being developed in the West Bank and it was portrayed by our media and our government, including our President and Secretary of State. that Israel was building new homes for Jewish settlers in Palestinian land. From what I understand, these homes are being built on the Israeli side of the security fence so it seems that there should really be no issue with Jewish homes being built in the Israeli controlled portion of the West Bank.

USNA Participant
It is true that all Israelis (almost all) serve at least two years in the IDF, but for them the military is a way of life. It is part of growing up and a way of giving back to their country, and they see it as an honor and a privilege to give back. They do not want to attack all of their enemies, and the fact that they are a defense force as opposed to a military means that the soldiers in Israel and indeed the culture of the military is very different than ours. It was very interesting and exciting to see some of the similarities between our military and theirs, but also to see how their situation has made their military very different in many aspects from ours.

USMA Participant
The biggest misconception I took to Israel was that the Jewish people wanted to eliminate all of Islam and take over the Middle East. However, this trip provided us the opportunity to hear from all different domains of the Jewish culture to include military leaders, political leaders, academic leaders, and just normal Jewish people living their lives. After hearing from many different leaders of the Jewish state, it became apparent that the Jewish people do not want anything but peace. They are willing to compromise and to settle with their Muslim neighbors, however at this time their Muslim counterparts are reluctant to recognize or work with the State of Israel.

USAFA Participant
The biggest misconception that I had was that Israeli people and the Israeli nation are rogue and belligerent. I fostered this misconception because of what I had heard and read from the liberal media in the United States. However, after listening to countless speakers and visiting many military bases, the negative connotation that I associated with Israel completely disappeared and was replaced with an utmost respect for the people and the nation. I found that while Israel will do anything to remain a sovereign nation, the people fight and defend their lives with an attitude evocative of chivalry.

USAFA Participant
The biggest misconception that I brought to Israel is that there really isn't a true peace in the area. I was never aware of the constant bombings going on because whenever rockets are fired, life goes on in Israel like nothing bad is happening. This led me to believe that there was actually peace in the region when in fact there is a war going on. The ability of the Israelis to keep living their lives in these conditions was amazing to me.

USAFA Participant
I did not realize that rockets attacks occur almost weekly because it is not something that is covered by the news media. I also thought that with the agreement talks between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority that most of the violent aggression would cease, however it seemed that with the Arab Spring sweeping across the Middle East that Palestinian groups associated with the more radical fundamentalists are becoming more emboldened.

USAFA Participant
The biggest misconception I brought with me to Israel was my belief that Israelis are as insulated from the conflicts that their country is involved in as we are. Having lived in America all my life, I had the naive belief that conflicts most often only directly affect the professional military and their families. It is true that most Americans are aware of the conflicts we are involved in, but few of them in the civilian world have to face the negative consequences of our involvements overseas. Conversely, it seemed to me that nearly everyone in Israel had a family member, or knew someone with a family member, who has been killed in a war or violent attack. The Israelis are very aware of the cost of their independence and this awareness is clearly evident in their belief in the necessity for a strong national defense.

USAFA Participant
I thought that there would be more negative feelings toward having to serve in the military rather than being given the option. My perspective was changed by those that I was able to talk to while I was there. Mandatory service seemed to inspire more national pride and unity. I was especially surprised by the Lone Soldiers, who were from other countries but had come to Israel to serve.

USAFA Participant
I expected to feel much more threatened physically. I was amazed by how "normal" life appeared despite the continual threat of rocket attacks. So much of what we see in the media is about the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, and we forget to realize that those are only two very concentrated areas of violence within the region. By travelling around to different areas of the country and by examining the borders in several locations, I realized that, for the most part, Israel is actually quite safe.

USNA Participant
In particular, the biggest misconception corrected during the program is that the recent rebellions and uprisings in many Arab countries is a welcome and positive turn of events.

USNA Participant
My biggest misconception is that I thought Israel would be unsafe and dangerous since that's all the media portrays. I did not expect Israel to be so beautiful and fun. I was surprised to see Israelis carry out their daily life and even enjoy a fun night life despite the tensions occurring literally miles away.

JINSA ASKS:
What was the most important thing you learned through the program?

USMA Participant
Until this trip I did not have a clear opinion on Israel, which considering today's modern globalized world, is an important thing to have. I had heard the arguments from both sides, and wasn't sure what to believe. So I decided I'd wait and see what this trip could tell me. After the first few days my opinion was starting to take shape. Trying to be cautious I decided that if anyone asked me what I thought about Israel and its people I would respond with one word: "tolerant." It's not a bad word; in fact it's an essential requirement for any government and people to survive in the modern world. The problem with the word "tolerant" is that it has no character, no meaning; it is sterile. If there is one thing Israel is not, it's not sterile. So I began the search for another word. The second word I came up with was "passionate." I do not mean nationalistic or just proud, but truly filled with passion for the nation. Almost every person is engaged in preserving the state, the people, the culture, and the history. Every aspect of Israel is dear to Israeli's. Now if we combine the two words we have a beautiful thing. Tolerant passion is something that I believe every state and every people should strive for. It is the intersection between an indispensable sense of self worth and the essential recognition of others' values. To me, this is Israel.

USNA Participant
The trip to Israel was a moving and eye opening experience. It was very shocking how the world media tends to portray Israel as the "bad guy." A lot of the briefs on the Palestinian conflict gave an eye opening view of what is really going on with Israel, Palestine, and the rest of the Islamic world… A lot of times Israel gets portrayed as the oppressor, when Israel is the one surrounded by entities that want to bring an end to the existence of the state…

Another important thing that I learned is that Israel is the United States' only true ally in the Middle East region. A tank commander put it a great way that "Israel is the best and most important aircraft carrier in the region." It is a very true statement because the United States has a true ally and friend in Israel. This led me to believe that the United States needs to have the back of Israel and strengthen our ties with each other even more. There is a connection between our two wonderful nations and we should honor this connection and develop our interactions more. We should have Israel's back and they should have ours. It can and will develop into a great friendship and partnership as long as the right leaders become elected. Our guide, Jonathon Cutler, phrased our connection well in one word, destiny. I truly believe that our two special countries are destined to grow, thrive, and stand together.

USAFA Participant
The most important thing I learned from the program is that America is not alone. While the U.S. does have many allies, it seems that the U.S. is constantly attacked in the media. Having support from the young men and women I talked to was a relieving to hear. While the U.S. and Israel do not have a perfect relationship, I learned that we share much in common and have many of the same values. I returned to America feeling less lonely in the world and pumped for working with a friendly nation in the future.

USAFA Participant
I was impressed by the similarities between Israeli and American cultures. This is important because there aren't many other Western cultures in the Middle East aside from Israel. It is a unique nest for Western ideas, which I personally believe are humanity's most promising route to progress. In future considerations of the Middle East, I will keep this in mind in reference to other players vying for power in the region. Despite claims of historical rights to land from cultural and religious groups, there are some cultures I would prefer to have power in certain places. In the Middle East, those people are the Israelis.

USNA Participant
If asked about the most important things learned through JINSA, the answer would be a culmination of astonishment centered on the lack of actual knowledge Americans have regarding the political situation in these countries and the danger inherent in the teachings of Hamas, the Islamic Brotherhood, and Islamic fundamentalism in general. No longer are the uprisings viewed as healthy world changes, they are now seen as boiling pots with the hope that the flames subside before everyone gets burned.

This realization is also the biggest take-away from a future American military officer viewpoint. To understand the situation the world is in, the politics that go into deciding where American troops go, the choosing of the lesser of two evils, the possible physical and ideological landscapes that sailors and marines may be fighting in – these are the lessons that are necessary for all military personnel, especially the officers.

USNA Participant
The most important thing that I learned was that Israel has a vested interest in partnering with the United States and we would do well to exploit our positive relationship in order to promote peace and stability in the region (ensuring our mutual security).

USNA Participant
The most important thing I took away from this program was an understanding for Israel.

It is incredible to me how this country which is the size of New Jersey and has a population that is half the size of NYC can be so powerful. Despite the conflicts that occur within and surrounding Israel, these people want to live their lives in peace and security in a land that only a generation or two before them secured. Everything about Israel from the work ethic, the hospitality, the technology, the agriculture, and the history impressed me and none of it is what I expected coming on this trip. Israel has so much worth fighting for and I feel that the people know this and have that passion to prevent any enemy from taking that peace from them.

USNA Participant
The lectures by various officers, journalists, professors and other officials set the stage for everything we got to experience in person. I thought they were very helpful with understanding the culture, the history of the country, and the present and future political and military situation of the Israelis. Through these lectures I was able to realize how important it is for the U.S. and Israel to remain very close allies and to work together. Not only do our countries share very similar beliefs and ideologies, but there is a very special connection and support system between the two nations that I believe will continue to stay strong.

USMA Participant
The most important things I learned from the program were about the IDF. Through our "Mifgash" I was able to relate to the IDF soldiers on a personal level and learn so much from them. I never realized how difficult it must be to deploy to a hostile area within your own country and then go home on the weekend to your loved ones. In my interaction with the IDF soldiers I gained an appreciation for the IDF as a whole and I can definitely sympathize with their cause. I became friends with them and plan to stay in contact with them as time goes on. I think more Americans should learn about the IDF and become familiar with their struggle. Everything about the IDF was interesting to me and I loved learning about this extraordinary fighting force.

USMA Participant
The most important thing that I learned through this program is that the United States and Israel are two very different nations with very similar values, morals, and ideals. My belief in our nations' shared destinies was cemented one night when our group went out to cliffs overlooking the Ramon Crater one night and discussed the core values of the IDF. We went over different scenarios that the IDF soldiers had lived through and talked about what we would have done in their shoes. It turned out that IDF values are nearly identical to our values as members of the United States Armed Forces, and helped me to see through the eyes of young men and women fighting a similar fight that I will someday in the future. In addition, I found that there is a mutual respect between Americans and Israeli citizens that comes with being two stable democracies in an increasingly unstable world.

USMA Participant
The most important thing that I learned was the importance of international cooperation. With the world shrinking every day, it is important for different nations to work together and share resources. For the United States, Israel is a virtual aircraft carrier in the Middle East. It is important to have an ally so close to the wars we are in. The Israelis can support and aid our efforts in a much faster way.

USCGA Participant
Throughout the program there were many learning opportunities, however, the greatest takeaway I had was the closeness and seriousness of the threat to Israel's national security. I have never experienced biased media in the manner that was presented as the status quo on the trip, such as reporting that Israeli soldiers were cutting organs out of children or drinking the blood of Palestinians. Yet when Israeli conflicts are presented in the media it does tend to show the Israelis as provocative and unwilling to compromise. This I have learned is completely untrue. Seeing and exploring the Golan Heights, visiting a kibbutz across a field from the Gaza strip and hearing both the Israeli and Palestinian sides of the conflict have taught me that the efforts put forward by the Israeli government are not only justified but necessary and conciliatory in many instances.

USAFA Participant
The most important thing that I learned through the JINSA Academy trip was how much the Israeli people want peace. Yes, they will defend themselves and their land at all costs, but they desperately want peace.

USAFA Participant
The Israeli government, and especially its military, face difficult decisions every day and must do their best to preserve the delicate balance that exists between the wide range of people groups that live in Israel. From settlements in the West Bank to how Israeli-Arabs are treated, there are few countries on earth that are as successful as Israel in maintaining stability within their own country.

USAFA Participant
The most important thing I learned from the trip was how similar the Israelis are to Americans, but at the same time how different. For example, the Israelis are at least if not more patriotic than America, which I believe is unlike most other Western countries. They are different in that their loyalty cuts across national lines, as shown by the lone soldiers. The other important thing I learned is how important the Israelis are as a bulwark of civilization against an often uncivilized enemy.

USNA Participant

The most important insight I gained over the course of the trip relates to the mindset of the Israeli people. One of the most memorable experiences came in Jerusalem overlooking the town of Bethlehem. At this point our guide took the time to elaborate on his, and the people of Israel's experience during the second intifada. We heard about the wall that had to be constructed along the road we were standing on looking at Bethlehem in order to protect Israelis from sniper fire. Yoni told stories of a time he was supposed to meet a friend in a bar. He was running a few minutes late, and his friend was waiting for him inside. Just as he was walking up to the door of the bar, the place blew up at the hands of a suicide bomber with his friend inside. We heard how parents were afraid to send their kids to schools on busses or afraid to go on the same train to work with their spouse out of fear of attack. Obviously understanding this mindset is fundamental to understanding Israel's domestic and foreign policy stances. I think without actually travelling to Israel, seeing the proximity of hostile peoples, and listening to the stories firsthand I would not have truly been capable of grasping the magnitudes of the constant dilemma the Israeli people face. I believe understanding this mindset was one of the most fundamental pieces of knowledge gained from the trip that I will apply to my thinking and opinions in the future.

USNA Participant

One of the most important things that I learned from my travels in Israel revolved around the idea of "compulsory service"… Inevitably, every single person has a common bond; they can relate to one another for all suffered in boot camp, many fought in previous wars with one another, and all understand the true meaning of "service." I found this to be one of the most special and respectable aspects of Israel. The Israeli people have values, compassion, take the meaning of friendship and family seriously, and have an unbreakable amount of pride. There is an inconceivable bond among its citizens.

Whenever we entered a new city or establishment, we were always welcomed with a smile. People in Israel are genuine and compassionate…Although I lived in Hong Kong for 3 years, have traveled extensively throughout the pacific, Europe, and South America, I have never felt so comfortable in a foreign environment nor have I ever felt a true bond to the people. In many regions of this world, morals, ethics, discipline, and a human backbone are declining characteristics. I have gained a more positive assurance after my time in Israel that good people do exist in this world.

On the fourth of July, the entire JINSA group and multiple IDF officers went out to enjoy the Jerusalem nightlife. On our way to one of the clubs, we began singing the American National Anthem and chanting "U.S.A." Not only did we receive an unconditional amount of support from the Israelis, we actually had random people come up to us as we sang, shake our hands, and give us high-fives. Some people even sang along or offered to buy a round of beers. It was truly special. Despite how complicated of a place Israel is, the people that the country is composed of are what make it such a special and great place.

USMA Participant

I learned that the situation in the Middle East is far more complex and dangerous than I previously imagined. The struggle for power and dominance puts Israel in great danger every day. Moreover the differences in ideologies, primarily religion, create an environment that will continually seek to dominate. I have no solution for the situation but I am now far more able to comprehend the Middle East and its complexities.

USMA Participant

The state of Israel is a representation of freedom for the Jewish people and has been since its formulation. What I feel brings about this intense pride is that everyone understands what they have hasn't come without a cost. Even to this day their freedom is being threatened by radical Islamic faith. The IDF soldiers are at war every minute of their lives from radical Islamists not only in their country but also the Islamic countries surrounding it. This threat from my experience brings the Israelis even closer and their pride shows. I can't remember a day that I didn't see an Israeli flag flying from a balcony, pole, or window during my trip. It was an honor to see such pride for ones country and the respect the people have for it.

USMA Participant
Israel is an island of prosperity within the region. Of course, everyone knows that Israel is far more developed and Westernized than its surrounding neighbors, however, the shear polarity of difference is almost startling. Israel has more startup companies on the NASDAQ than any other country in the world (with the exception of the U.S.). The U.S. and Israel are close allies, but the most important concept I felt I learned was just how intertwined our two nations are.

USAFA Participant
There are more similarities than differences among the U.S. military and its allies than there are differences. While uniforms and regulations may differ, the motivation for serving and to do well seems to be the same.

USAFA Participant
The most important thing I learned through this program is the responsibility of officership. An Israeli tank commander, for example, needs to be an expert on how to operate every position in the tank. The commander also rides the tank with his head outside of the protected armor, taking a risk to obtain the best view of the battlefield. This trip also made me think a lot about the ethical connotations of officership. An officer needs to conduct his or herself with the upmost integrity and should always be prepared to make the tough decisions and make the highest sacrifice.

One last lesson that I learned is the fact that Israelis have an almost zero tolerance for casualties. They value their soldiers' lives and will do everything in their power to ensure that they return home safely. Our guest speakers kept emphasizing that Israel is a small country and as we traveled from the north to the south in just half of a day, I finally started to understand. Israel is too small to accept many casualties. It must focus on preserving future generations as well as the national security of today.

USNA Participant
JINSA placed future American officers from three different service academies into a foreign country. This fostered tremendous bonds and friendships that overlook any service, religious, or ethnic differences.

USNA Participant
The most important thing I learned from the program was the degree of value placed on the individual Israeli soldier. As a future naval officer, I want to do everything I can to communicate to my sailors that their contribution is important to the mission. The IDF officers take an extraordinary amount of time getting to know the people under their command. It is my opinion that such an exertion of effort only produces positive results in performance, morale, and mission accomplishment.

USNA Participant
The most important things that I learned throughout the program were all of the history… You can read about Israeli Wars all day and gain a great perspective on what has gone on in this great land but until you actually visit the sites and hear the stories it is not the same…Tying together the reading and research that I have done with actual observations to create a knowledge base that is really important to have in this day and age in the most important region in the world. Standing there in the bunker on the Golan Heights hearing this story from Yoni gave me the chills and truly showed me what Israel is all about.

A big reason that I wanted to go on the trip was to experience what the Israeli military is like and the program did a great job doing that for me…For Israel, there is no surrendering, no retreat and no peace treaty. There is unfortunately only win or lose and it is all on the line every time they go to war. This concept affects everything they do in the military because they have to be 100% ready at all times, otherwise there is no more Israel.

USNA Participant
When I think about my visit to Israel, the thing that sticks in my mind is our interaction with the IDF, and how patriotic and proud they all are of their country. In a culture of mandatory service, many

countries would turn sour to the idea and it would be protested in many areas (like the United States during the Vietnam War), but in Israel it is a privilege to serve. Nearly every single soldier I talked to had overwhelming pride in their country, and expressed how excited they were to serve in the IDF to protect the Jewish state. Some of them brought up the fact that their predecessors created the state of Israel to provide safe haven for the Jewish people, that throughout the decades many have fought to defend that country, and they are next in the long line of defenders of the Jewish state. For a military that is solely defensive, and for a military that has had to fight numerous enemies that surround them, they have had to create a strong culture of cooperation and unity, and I believe they have done a great job of that.

JINSA ASKS:
What was the highlight of the program?

USAFA Participant
The highlight of the program, by far, was our "Mifgash" with IDF Officers…The IDF soldiers gave us a cultural depth that we could trust due to our similar ages and career fields…They were the single element that took the program from "good" to "life changing."

USAFA Participant
We tackled tough subjects in briefings with military leaders but at the same time encountered the personal side of the Israeli military through interaction with its young soldiers. I have never been part of a trip after which I felt like I have truly "done it all." It was the experience of a lifetime and one that I will not soon forget.

USNA Participant
The interaction with the IDF officers was the highlight. Being the same age as them and a future officer, there were many things that we found both similar and different about each other. This experience was invaluable in understanding our different cultures and countries. I learned how young people in the military can have such an impact on the relationship between countries. The IDF officers that we met were so genuine and showed us through their actions how Israel is a hardworking, confident, resilient, and powerful country. Through the interaction and time with them, I saw all of my misconceptions being shattered. I will never think about Israel the same and also have already shared what I learned to many others who possessed the same misconceptions that I had.

USMA Participant
The highlight of the program to me was the integration of Israeli Defense Force (IDF) officers into our group. This allowed for first hand interaction and conversation over a multiple day period and for us to truly build relationships and get to know the mindset of the Israeli citizen soldier. The IDF officers/soldiers were able to provide us personal experiences from both their military and personal lives during the trip…I was amazed by how similar the values and mindset of the IDF personnel were to ours. I can definitely say that providing IDF personnel to mingle with the group truly enriched our experience and provided opportunities to learn and discover areas of the Israeli life that we would not have observed otherwise.

USMA Participant
I believe the highlight of the program was the military aspect of things, to include the "Mifgash" with the IDF officers. I got to put a face with the military side of things, and have made friends that I believe I can depend on for cooperation in my future career if I ever find myself situated in Israel again.

USMA Participant
The highlight of my JINSA military academy program was the "Mifgash" we had with IDF officers. No media can truly capture what it is like to spend time with people from this country. It was our first interaction with people who were of our age and were also serving as officers in the IDF and both groups found out quickly that our motivations, experiences, and operating procedures are quite similar! It was refreshing to witness the appreciation that the IDF has of American support for their military. Ultimately, the "Mifgash" was the highlight because I was able to create new friendships with the future of Israel.

USCGA Participant
The highlights of the program for me are the visits to the Golan Heights, and the borders of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Being able to put a real life image and feeling to these names is something that will last with me forever. Additionally, the images I witnessed in these places such as the Syrian mine fields, Hezbollah flags flying in Lebanon, and high security walls and fences show the true need for security in these areas and help to tell the story of the conflict. Witnessing these sights along with speaking with IDF members about their values and methods of combating terrorism truly showed the nature of the conflict and is something I will carry with me for life.

USAFA Participant
The highlight of the trip to Israel for me was listening to the lecturers that JINSA provided. I felt I gained unique insights into the social, political, and military aspects of Israeli life through the speakers.

USAFA Participant
The highlight of the program was meeting the IDF soldiers and being able to spend time with now. Whether it was picking their brains for knowledge about the Israeli military and leadership, or just hanging out as friends, I will forever remember those times I spent with them.

USAFA Participant
I loved the interaction with the cadets and midshipmen from the other service academies and the IDF officers. I enjoyed all of my experiences because I was with an amazing group of people. Through the internet we are able to keep the connection alive, and I hope to see many of the people I met at some point in the future.

USAFA Participant
The highlight of the program was meeting the IDF officers during the "Mifgash." This experience allowed us to gain insight into the way the IDF works and meet people our own age who have to deal with problems far greater than we do. The amount of responsibility they hold gave us something to look up to and shoot for when we become officers.

USAFA Participant
The highlight of the program was the "Mifgash" with the IDF Officers. It was such a great insight into Israeli life both in uniform and out. They were not only professional and mature, but they were also extremely friendly. I learned more about Israel and its unique culture from these interactions than most of the touring…the most unique aspect of the trip was meeting young Israelis around my age who also have dedicated their time in service to their country.

USAFA Participant
The best part of the program was being able to spend such a long amount of time in the company of the group of Israeli officers. It was much more beneficial than if it had just been a dinner or a briefing with them. We were able to really get to know them and learn a great deal that we would not have had the time to or have thought of it our time together had been briefer.

USNA Participant
The highlight of the program was the "Mifgash" with the IDF soldiers. I found it to be a tremendous learning experience which allowed us to interact with soldiers our own age who have already served for, in some cases, three or more years. Despite our very different upbringings and cultural differences, it was very easy to relate to the IDF soldiers. They fully welcomed their responsibilities as Israeli soldiers, but were still able to relax and have fun when they had the chance.

USNA Participant
One of the most practical things I took away from Israel was the networking opportunities and the friends I made. Not only the friends made from the United States Army, Coast Guard, Navy and Air Force, but the plethora of individuals I met and became close to from the IDF. One of the nights in Haifa was devoted to

interacting with six "Lone Soldiers," or members of the Israeli Defense Forces who were not Israeli. The individuals we met were American, Canadian, and Brazilian Jews who volunteered to fight on behalf of Israel. They were not forced in any manner to do such things. They just had such a profound appreciation and love for the country, that they were willing to sacrifice their lives on behalf of Israel.

USCGA Participant

Meeting with the IDF soldiers and cadets from the other service academies has been a once in a lifetime opportunity. The trip itself was an incredible experience but it was the people on the trip that made the entire experience remarkable. The speakers we had the privilege to interact with were very knowledgeable in their respective fields and presented engaging presentations. This opportunity was also a valuable leadership experience. The officers who accompanied us on the trip in addition to the IDF soldiers were exceptional leaders. In all of my interactions, I learned many valuable lessons on leadership that I will take with me throughout my career in the Coast Guard.

USMA Participant

The highlight of the program was having the opportunity to meet some Israeli Defense Force soldiers. The fact that everyone must serve in the military is such a foreign concept to me and having the chance to talk to people my own age who could account to what that is like was incredible. By talking to them I came to better understand what Israel is fighting for and how it affects everyone in its boundaries. Not only that, but I made some great friends!

USMA Participant

The highlight of the program was having the Israeli Defense Force integrated with us. Their perspective on nationality, war and peace were far different than mine but we shared common values and interests that I now believe all Soldiers posses. They not only taught me about their culture, but also about their military and their country's desire for peace. The importance placed on achieving peace made me realize that we as Americans are fortunate not to have to fight wars on our own soil.

USMA Participant

As a West Point cadet, I spend most of my time surrounded by other West Point cadets. We have a particular mentality and are usually quite similar in many ways. Although there are many highlights to the trip, I felt the greatest one was the fact that we did the trip with our sister academies. This gave us the opportunity to see other cadets from other services and to get to know them during an excellent cultural, historical, and influential trip. Now that the trip is done, I still have the memories of the trip, but I also have comrades in every service who have shared that experience with me.

USAFA Participant

I am extremely pleased with the very complete program JINSA put together. It offered a well-rounded look at Israel and I left extremely satisfied with my experience. I cannot think of anything that could be done to improve the overall quality of the trip. In closing, I would like to express my sincerest thanks and gratitude to the people at JINSA for allowing me to experience Israel. It was a program I will definitely never forget.

The first of two Military Academies Programs in Israel with officers from the IDF.

Escort Commentaries

USNA Officer Escort

In a generic sense, future military officers need to recognize the differences in cultural experiences and empirical reality that create differences among people. On the other hand, they need to be aware of the basic values and principles that unite all human beings. The trip to Israel contributed to both goals, above and beyond what they learned about a specific country at a specific point in history. In a sense, content is less important than experience.

More specifically, given the unique US-Israeli relationship, some of these impending officers may well be working together in the future.

A related benefit lay in bringing together representatives of U.S. military bureaucracies who often compete more than they cooperate (especially over missions and funds). I was fascinated to eavesdrop on the four groups (3 U.S. Academy groups and the IDF officers) as they pelted each other with questions like, "What courses do you have to take?" ""How does one get chosen to be a pilot?" "Why do people voluntarily decide to serve?" While all the participants shared a heightened sense of patriotism and a unique set of skills, they also came from institutions with differing rules and cultures. It is good for them to discover that similar tasks can be accomplished in a variety of ways; none of which is completely right or completely wrong. Teaching future officers flexibility and creativity is a constant challenge when dealing with organizations built on extensive rules and regimented efficiency.

From a military perspective, my most important insight was recognizing the degree to which the IDF attempted to avoid collateral damage, especially in light of provocative action by their enemies. The commitment to ethical behavior is an advantage when making their case to the wider world, but also a strategic detriment, especially when dealing with non-state actors.

USNA Officer Escort

Traveling to Israel with the JINSA Military Academies Program has increased my awareness of Israel as a country and a people in many aspects very much like US citizens. They are not defined by the conflict surrounding them, but they approach it the best way that any nation could, honoring their heritage and values while striving towards a sustained existence and a peaceful life. As a military officer any time you face a conflict it is important to reflect on and seek these common values and possible parallel intents.

JINSA Military Academies Program in Israel

Program Highlights

"Mifgash" – Days-long interaction and travel with young IDF officers

Visits to:

IDF Navy Bahad Base
Hatzerim IDF Air Force Base
Bislach – Academy for Military Infantry Corps
Bahad 1 – Officers Academy on *Leadership & Those Who Follow: And What Connects Them*
Latrun – Armed Forces Memorial
U.S. Embassy
Ayalon Insitute – pre-state clandestine munitions factory
IDF Spokespersons Office
Misgav Av – security briefing overlooking Lebanon
Jeep tour on the Golan Heights and a visit to Emek Habecha, the Valley of Tears
Mt. Bental – security briefing overlooking Syria
Ammunition Hill
Yemin Orde
Moshav Netiv Ha'asarah located on Israel's border with Gaza

Briefings by:

Prof. Amatzia Baram on *Middle Eastern History*
Brig. Gen. Simon Perry, Israel National Police (ret.) on *Perceptions of the World Through the Eyes of the Islamic Fundamentalist*
Prof. Reuven Hazan on *the Labyrinth of Israeli Politics*
Khaled Abu Toameh on *Palestinian affairs*
Dr. Rachel Korazim on *the Memory of the Holocaust in Contemporary Israeli Society*
Col. Bentzi Gruber, IDF (res.) on *Ethics & Dilemmas in the Field*
Yoram Hessel, former chief of Global Operations for the Mossad
Gen. Dan Haloutz, IDF (ret.), former Chief of Staff
IDF briefings on Gaza

The program also included visits to religious, historical, and cultural sites

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Military academy students travel to Israel

By Emily Genco

Coast Guard cadets during a Regimental Change of Command ceremony. Photo by Sean D. Elliot, AP.

This Saturday, 45 cadets and midshipmen will travel to Israel to meet with Israeli Defense Force members.

For the first time in recent memory, three fourth-year cadets — or rising seniors — from the United States Coast Guard Academy will join representatives from the United States Air Force, Naval and Military Academies.

The Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA) has organized the program for twenty years. It represents a longstanding effort to expose the nation's future military officers to the cultural, political and military histories of Israel, according to James Colbert, JINSA Director for Policy and Communications.

The Coast Guard Academy's participation represents an opportunity to branch out and explore new ways to professionally enrich cadets and cultivate relationships within the Israeli Defense Force, according to Coast Guard Academy Cadet Training Officer, Cmdr. Jeffrey Haukom.

"I think it's important that our cadets learn how to build international relations, in general, for the simple matter that we don't know where we're going to be in a decade or two," Haukom said.

Besides enriching cadets, the opportunity enables the future officers to "make personal contacts in a country whose security is intimately tied to that of the United States," according to a 2011 report.

The cadets and midshipmen will tour military bases and sites of religious and historical importance to the Israeli people. Participants will meet Israeli academics, cadets and embassy officials.

"It certainly strengthens American national security to have our future military officers get to know Israel as a country and also have an opportunity to meet young Israeli officers," Colbert said.

Israeli youth complete compulsory military service. Men serve three years and women less than two.

The meetings between Israeli and American cadets are opportunities to find common ground but also discuss differences, according to Haukom.

The program spans two and a half weeks. Each day includes 10 to 14 hours of meetings and tours.

The experience will benefit the future military officers whether they decide to remain in the military or rejoin civilian life, according to Haukom.

All Americans will indirectly benefit in terms of national security.

"Having been there, having met Israelis will enable [the participants] to be better officers and better represent the interests of the United States, They will do this through both learning on the ground and the personal connections they will make," Colbert said.

In 2012, JINSA brings Israeli Generals to the Military Academies

General Amos Yadlin, former Chief of Defense Intelligence, spoke at Annapolis. A fighter pilot, Gen. Yadlin was one of the eight pilots involved in the destruction of the Osirak Nuclear Reactor in Iraq.

General Dan Haloutz, former Chief of Staff of the IDF, traveled with JINSA to the U.S. Air Force Academy, West Point and Annapolis.