

# Israeli air strike targets Syrian base

The retaliatory move comes after Islamic Jihad claims responsibility for a suicide bombing on Saturday

By Joel Greenberg  
Chicago Tribune (KRT)

JERUSALEM — In the first Israeli attack on Syrian territory in nearly three decades, Israeli warplanes on Sunday struck what the army said was a Palestinian militant training base 10 miles from Damascus in retaliation for a Palestinian suicide bombing on Saturday that killed 19 Israelis.

The army said warplanes had struck deep in Syria at the Ein Saheb base, which a military spokesman described as an Iranian-supported training camp for militant groups, including Islamic Jihad and Hamas. Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for Saturday's bombing in the port city of Haifa.

The strike in Syria was a significant departure from previous Israeli retaliations after suicide bombings because it was the first time during the past three years of violent conflict with the Palestinians that Israel had hit back in a neighboring Arab country. Previous strikes had hit targets in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Israeli officials asserted that Syria and Iran expanded the arena of conflict by hosting, funding and directing Palestinian militants from across the border. They noted that the United States had launched military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq as part of its declared war on terrorism and has demanded that Syria close offices of militant groups operating from Damascus.

"This attack against Islamic Jihad shows that in this axis of terror no one will have immunity," said Raanan Gissin, a spokesman for Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. "No geographical lo-

cation and no distance will serve as an impediment if these organizations and their leaders continue to issue orders and plan strikes against Israel. We are exercising our right to self-defense."

Syria urged the U.N. Security Council on Sunday to condemn the airstrike. Syria's United Nations ambassador, Fayssal Mekdad, said the strike was blatant military aggression, telling an emergency meeting of the 15-member council that "Arabs and many people across the globe feel that Israel is above the law."

An Islamic Jihad spokesman in Beirut denied that the group had bases in Syria.

"We do not have any training camps or bases in Syria or any other country," the spokesman, Abu Imad al-Rifai, told the Al-Jazeera satellite channel. "All our bases are inside the Palestinian-occupied territories."

A commander of the militant Popular Front for the Liberation of Pales-

tine told The Associated Press in Damascus that the camp struck by Israel was one of its deserted bases and that a civilian guard had been injured.

However, an Israeli security official said militants from Islamic Jihad and Hamas were trained at the camp in using explosives, artillery and guerrilla tactics. Some of the militant trainees eventually returned to the West Bank and Gaza Strip to set up operational networks, while others are active in Lebanon, the official said.

Deputy Defense Minister Zeev Boim said that the possibility of a Syrian military response had been taken into consideration when planning Sunday's airstrike.

"This is a risk we are taking," he told Israel Radio. "But this is part of the war we have to wage against terror."

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# Supreme Court faces election spotlight

As the presidential election nears, high-stakes cases are expected to illustrate divisions in the court

By Jan Crawford Greenburg  
Chicago Tribune (KRT)

WASHINGTON — After a blockbuster term with landmark rulings on affirmative action and gay rights, the Supreme Court returns to the bench this week to begin a new session that could find the nine justices once again in a glaring spotlight.

The court's cases — focusing on everything from campaign finance reform to separation of church and state — will be scrutinized closely as always. But this time there's a twist: The justices also will find themselves a major issue in the presidential campaign.

Already, candidates are pointing to the court to illustrate the high stakes in next year's election. With the justices divided 5-4 on a host of controversial issues — including race, religion and restrictions on abortion —

the next president could have a dramatic impact on American life with just one or two appointments.

And most observers say those appointments are inevitable for the next presidential term, since it appears President Bush will not nominate a justice by the end of 2004. The current court has been intact since 1994, a record in the modern era, and the same nine are expected to return next year because justices historically have not retired during presidential election years.

"The most extraordinary thing is the continuity we've had with these nine justices," said Christopher Landau, a Washington attorney who practices before the court.

As a result, it appears even more certain the next president will have a chance to put a unique stamp on the court. Four of the justices are over 70; Justice John Paul Stevens is the oldest, at 83, and Chief Justice William Rehnquist is 79.

With so much on the line, the candidates already have begun turning their attention to the court. On Friday,

Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., argued in a speech to the National Council of Negro Women that a second term for Bush would produce right-wing nominees who would restrict affirmative action, hate crimes laws, abortion rights and voting rights.

Just one new justice, for example, could have meant a different outcome in last summer's historic affirmative action decision, which said colleges and universities could take race into account in creating a diverse student body.

And the court has several high-profile cases coming up this term that could divide the justices and sharply illustrate the stakes for the future. Already the justices have announced they will decide a key religion case, another involving a state's obligations under the Americans with Disabilities Act and several addressing the power of police to stop and search people.

Other important cases include challenges to policies adopted after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001; a challenge to federal efforts to prohibit doctors from telling patients about

medical marijuana; and an appeal of a decision prohibiting school children from saying "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance. The court will announce in coming weeks whether it will take up those cases, which would significantly ratchet up the term's importance.

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