

CHURCH GROUPS URGE BUSH TO REJECT ISRAELI REQUEST FOR LOAN GUARANTEES

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK, Feb. 4 (JTA) -- Fifteen leading church groups in the United States have urged President Bush to deny Israel's request for loan guarantees until it halts settlement-building in disputed territories.

In a statement delivered to the White House last week, the groups urged the administration to "oppose housing loan guarantees to Israel until it halts construction and expansion of settlements in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem."

The U.S. guarantees would allow Israel to borrow \$10 billion from commercial banks on favorable terms. The money would be used to help resettle immigrants from the former Soviet Union.

"The continuation of settlements poses an enormous obstacle to this fragile peace process," the four-paragraph church statement maintained.

"We seek peace and security for Israel as we seek justice and self-determination for Palestinians. Neither cause will be served by making loan guarantees while settlements continue to be built and expanded on land occupied since 1967," the statement said.

The signers include the professional leadership of the American Baptist Church, American Friends Service Committee, Episcopal Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church, Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, National Council of Churches, Presbyterian Church, Roman Catholic Conference of Major Superiors of Men, Unitarian Universalist Association and the United Church of Christ.

The National Council of Churches is the umbrella group representing 31 mainline, generally liberal, Protestant denominations, which claim some 40 million members.

All of its constituent churches, with the exception of the United Methodist Church, signed onto the statement individually, as well as through the National Council.

Jewish Groups Distressed

Representatives of the Jewish community were distressed by the statement.

"I regret that it was issued without consultation with the Synagogue Council of America, despite our longstanding relationship with the National Council of Churches," said Rabbi Joseph Ehrenkranz, chairman of the Synagogue Council's Israel Affairs Committee.

The council represents mainstream Orthodoxy, Conservative and Reform Judaism in inter-religious affairs.

"This is hardly the time for a one-sided declaration," Ehrenkranz said. "I hope that the individuals involved who signed the statement would accept our invitation to sit down, explore the issues, not the least of which is the humanitarian needs, which were not mentioned in the statement at all."

The Union of American Hebrew Congregations said it is "deeply troubling" that the church groups' statement linked the separate humanitarian and political issues.

"No less saddening is the manner in which this open letter came to the fore, without any consultation with us or others in the Jewish

community," said the Reform congregational body, in a statement issued by Rabbis Alexander Schindler and Gary Bretton-Granatoor, respectively its president and director of interreligious affairs.

"We regret that the traditional consultative process has been utterly disregarded in this instance, and we pray that the church action does not presage a rejection of the spirit of dialogue and consultation by the National Council of Churches and the groups which joined in this statement."

Rabbi A. James Rudin, director of interreligious affairs at the American Jewish Committee, said that the professional church leaders who signed the statement do not necessarily reflect the sentiment of their church members.

"On the local and regional level of these churches, there is strong understanding of Israel's needs," he said.

Some Christian Groups Supportive

He pointed out that other Christian groups are supporting Israel's request for the guarantees.

The National Christian Leadership Conference for Israel, an ecumenical group of Catholics, Evangelicals and mainline Protestants, is calling on the administration to approve the loan guarantees without regard to disputes over settlements in the territories.

Sister Rose Thering, a Catholic nun who is executive director of the group, has been quoted in the Catholic press as saying that the group has no official policy on the settlements but opposes tying the dispute about them to the guarantees.

The executive committee of the Leadership Conference issued a statement supporting the loan guarantees during its visit to Israel in January.

The Catholic establishment, in the form of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, has not taken a position on the loan guarantees.

But a group of 18 Evangelical Christian leaders, including Jerry Falwell and Pat Boone, placed an advertisement in the Washington Times late last month urging the president to approve the loan guarantees.

The first sentence of the ad states that the signers represent 70 million Christians. And it makes no bones about the fact that they include millions of voters who voted for Bush in 1988.

"Israel, as our free democratic friend and ally, has earned our support," the ad continues. "This humanitarian, virtually cost-free effort will save lives and must not be linked to political issues."

PEACE NOW URGES SETTLEMENT FREEZE BE U.S. CONDITION FOR LOAN PACKAGE

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, Feb. 4 (JTA) -- Americans for Peace Now is urging the Bush administration to require an Israeli settlement freeze as a condition for receiving U.S. guarantees for \$10 billion in immigrant resettlement loans.

"Unless there is a reversal of Israeli government policy on the settlement issues, there is no serious chance for approval of unconditional loan guarantees," the organization said in a position paper issued here this week.

"The best way to get the guarantees for the

absorption of new immigrants is to support directly conditioning the loan guarantees on a freeze on Israeli settlements," the paper said.

The group's stance was rejected by the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. Shoshana Cardin, the umbrella group's chairman, said there should be "absolutely no linkage between issues that are on the table in the peace process."

She also said that it is neither appropriate nor helpful at this point "to establish preconditions for what is a very important and critical humanitarian need."

While Peace Now charges that the settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip harm the peace process, the position paper also urges the Arab states and the Palestinians to end violence against Israel and lift their economic boycott.

"To fail to do so signals to the Israelis that it is only Israel that must make concessions, a proposition that is only likely to lead to decades more violence and conflict," the statement said.

The position paper was issued during the organization's national leadership meeting here. After the meeting ended Tuesday, about 125 participants fanned out across Capitol Hill to explain the group's position to members of the Senate and House of Representatives.

The 10,000-member American Friends of Peace Now supports Israel's request for the loan guarantees, and its position was taken only after months of discussion, Mark Rosenblum, the group's political director, stressed in an interview.

Shalom Achshav (Peace Now in Israel) has been urging such a step, because it believes that Israel's scarce funds, including the loan money, should be used to house and provide jobs for immigrants, as well as improve economic conditions in Israel, rather than to build settlements in the territories, Rosenblum said.

Rejects Leahy Proposal

The statement urges that any agreement on the loans between the United States and Israel be made public. This is partly aimed at reports that the Bush administration has proposed a partial freeze on settlements that would allow Israel to go ahead with those already being built or approved for construction.

In addition, the administration is said to want to consider the loan guarantees on an annual basis, rather than give approval now to a five-year package of guarantees that would be released in annual installments covering \$2 billion.

Rosenblum said this could result in disputes every year between Israel and the United States over the conditions.

American Friends of Peace Now also rejects a proposal by Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) that would reduce the amount covered by the loan guarantees by every dollar Israel spends on the settlements.

"Deducting from the guarantees amounts spent on the settlements will not put an end to settlement activity," the position paper said.

Meanwhile, Agudath Israel of America has written to President Bush urging that there be no link between the settlements issue and the loan guarantees.

The settlement issue "should have no bearing on an issue that clearly does unite the United States and Israel: the need to provide humanitarian assistance for the hundreds of thousands of Russian Jews who have flocked to the State of Israel in search of a better life," said the letter.

AFSI SURVEY FINDS AMERICAN JEWS OPPOSED TO TERRITORIAL COMPROMISE

By Larry Yudelson

NEW YORK, Feb. 4 (JTA) -- A majority of American Jews oppose linking U.S. humanitarian aid for Israeli immigrants from the former Soviet Union to Israel's settlement policy in the administered territories.

But an even larger number believe the United States has already made that linkage.

Those were among the findings of a national survey commissioned by Americans for a Safe Israel and released here Tuesday.

The survey also found a 51 percent majority agreeing that "Israel should not give up any of the disputed territories," while 36 percent disagreed.

But roughly half of those supporting territorial compromise said they would change their position "if it meant the creation of an independent Palestinian state."

The poll of 511 adult Jews, selected at random by a market research firm from a list of synagogue members and donors to Jewish causes, was commissioned by AFSI in response to a poll taken last fall of federation leaders across North America.

That survey, released in November on the eve of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's visit to the United States, was commissioned by the Wilstein Institute of Jewish Policy Studies in Los Angeles.

It showed a majority of the federation leadership taking a dovish line on the territories, contrary to that of the Shamir government and AFSI.

Those findings appeared to be at odds with a broader survey of American Jews conducted last summer by the American Jewish Committee. It found 67 percent believing Israel should hold onto the West Bank, with only 11 percent opposing.

"We wanted to know if the Wilstein poll represented a shift in attitudes," AFSI Chairman Herbert Zweibon said, explaining his group's motives for commissioning a new survey.

He said his group's findings confirm the AJCommittee poll, indicating that the American Jewish grass roots is more hawkish than its leadership.

"I call it the reverse cream process," said Zweibon, who says Israel should annex the disputed territories. "The bad comes to the top, and what stays at the bottom is good common sense."

The AFSI survey also found that by a margin of 70 to 20 percent, American Jews believe the Bush administration is not an honest broker in the Arab-Israeli peace negotiations.

KNESSET VOTES TO DISSOLVE ITSELF

JERUSALEM, Feb. 4 (JTA) -- The Knesset, having agreed to early elections on June 23, on Tuesday began the legislative process of dissolving itself.

A bill terminating the 12th Knesset passed its first reading by a vote of 45-0. The measure, introduced jointly by Likud and Labor, was expected to sail through the committee stage and pass all of the required three readings.

But the present session of the Knesset will continue at least until the Passover recess in April and possibly afterward. The date for final adjournment is still in dispute between Labor and Likud.

JEWISH GROUPS PROTEST U.S. ATTEMPT TO EASE BOYCOTT-RELATED RESTRICTIONS

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, Feb. 4 (JTA) -- American Jewish organizations have expressed outrage that the Bush administration's proposed 1993 budget seeks to eliminate a restriction relating to compliance with the Arab boycott of Israel, as well as a prohibition against issuing "Israel only" passports.

The proposals "couldn't do more to sanction the Arab boycott of Israel if the Arab League had written it itself," charged Rep. Bill Green (R-N.Y.), who discovered the State Department plan.

Green, a member of the House Appropriations subcommittee on foreign operations, found the two proposed deletions in an appendix to the State Department budget, on Page 717 of the published federal budget, unveiled last week.

The provisions would nullify the section of a 1991 law that prohibits the U.S. government from making purchases from foreign firms that comply with the Arab League boycott of Israel or discriminate on the basis of religion.

Also scrapped would be a section that prohibits the practice of issuing passports for travel to Israel only. Such passports have been issued in the past so that travelers to Israel can enter Arab countries with passports that do not bear Israeli entry or exit stamps.

Opponents of the practice say it encourages Arab countries to continue rejecting passports with Israeli customs markings.

The 1991 law allows the secretary of state to issue a waiver on a country-by-country basis if that is necessary to carry out its diplomatic efforts in the country.

In the 1992 fiscal year, the State Department found that in 23 countries that are members of the Arab League or have large Moslem populations, it would be impracticable to obtain goods and services only from firms that certify that they do not comply with boycott.

This meant that U.S. embassies and other facilities in these countries could buy goods from local companies. But they still could not buy from other non-U.S. companies that sent goods into those countries without receiving a certificate of non-compliance.

Trying To 'Undo The Work Of Congress'

But in the 1993 budget, the State Department seeks to delete the entire provision, regardless of whether a waiver applied or did not.

"In plain English, what this says is that the State Department thinks it's OK to do business with firms that comply with the Arab boycott of Israel," Green said.

"Also, that we should play along with the Arab countries' denial of entry to anyone with an Israel stamp on their passport."

Green promised to fight for a reversal of the State Department proposal.

Phil Baum, associate executive director of the American Jewish Congress, accused the administration of "trying covertly to undo the work of Congress," which wanted to prohibit government contracts to firms that comply with the boycott.

The Anti-Defamation League also expressed concern about the administration proposal, in a letter to Secretary of State James Baker from Melvin Salberg, ADL national chairman, and Abraham Foxman, its national director.

They stressed that the anti-boycott provision

"only holds foreign companies to the same standards upheld for American companies."

The Jewish Community Relations Council of New York also sent Baker a letter of protest signed by Kenneth Bialkin, its president, and Michael Miller, executive director.

They said they could not understand why, with the Middle East peace talks going on, "the State Department would submit to Arab pressure and capitulate to the boycott," rather than insist that the "Arab states abandon this economic warfare against Israel."

Bialkin is also president of the International Committee on Free Trade with Israel, which monitors boycott-related activities.

AS ATTACKS AGAINST SETTLERS MOUNT, ISRAELI ARMY EASES FIREARMS RULES

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Feb. 4 (JTA) -- In the wake of fatal attacks by Arab gunmen on Jewish settlers, the Israel Defense Force has eased the rules governing when and how soldiers may use firearms against Arab suspects in the administered territories.

Although the IDF offered no details, security sources confirmed this week that the troops have been given much wider leeway.

Until now, the rules permitted soldiers to open fire only if their lives were threatened, if suspects did not respond to orders to halt, or in encounters with masked individuals.

The IDF chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Ehud Barak, reportedly eased those restrictions on the recommendations of Maj. Gen. Danny Yatom, commander of the central sector, which includes the West Bank.

It was unacceptable, military sources were quoted as saying, that soldiers could not respond instantly to shots fired at them, because they had to first decide if the rules allowed them to.

Coincidentally, the modified regulations were publicized here on the same day as the U.S. State Department's annual country-by-country report on the status of human rights.

It noted "a substantial drop" in the number of Palestinians killed in the territories last year.

B'Tselem, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, published a report this week accusing the army of discrimination in the kind of protest activities it allows in the administered territories.

According to the report, the army tends to ban expressions of political dissent by Palestinians and Israelis objecting to settlements, but allows demonstrations by settlers, who often bash the IDF for allegedly lax security measures.

Theoretically, every Palestinian is entitled to request a permit to hold a parade or rally. But until recently, Palestinians did not bother, knowing the permits were unlikely to be granted.

That policy changed slightly after the Middle East peace conference in Madrid last October. The army allowed peace demonstrations and "olive branch" parades. But even then, its policy was arbitrary. Some peace rallies were banned and some of their participants arrested.

The army reacted to the B'Tselem report by explaining that military commanders who issue permits for political demonstrations take into account "the law, the security and public order."

These are the only considerations, a military spokesman said, and there is no discrimination against any organization or political body.

DUKE QUIETLY GETTING HIS NAME ON BALLOTS IN SEVERAL STATES

By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, Feb. 4 (JTA) -- While Republican presidential contender Patrick Buchanan has been making headlines in New Hampshire, white supremacist candidate David Duke has been quietly getting his name on several state ballots.

So far, Duke has been successful in 10 of 14 attempts to get onto state ballots for the Republican presidential primaries.

But he has also ruled out running in 14 states, and has yet to earn federal matching funds, which go to any candidate who has raised at least \$5,000 in 20 different states from contributors of \$250 or less.

Marc Ellis, the Duke campaign spokesman, said he is "confident" Duke will qualify for matching funds within the next four weeks.

Duke is a former Ku Klux Klan grand wizard who first ran as a Republican in 1989 in a successful campaign for Louisiana state representative. His attempts to get onto ballots are being challenged, with mixed results, by Republicans who claim Duke is not an authentic member of their party.

Republican activists are trying to limit any negative association voters may make between Duke and the policies of the Grand Old Party.

But Democratic activists are trying to underscore that association.

Steve Gutow, executive director of the National Jewish Democratic Council, said Duke is "an indication of the kind of politics of hatred and division that this administration has practiced since its inception."

Democratic activists denounce Duke publicly, but do not rule out the possibility that votes for Duke could chip away at a probable George Bush lead and thereby help elect a Democrat to the presidency.

Unlike Duke, Buchanan, Bush's chief GOP rival, is having an easy time getting onto state ballots.

Republicans agree that Buchanan, who has been accused of making anti-Semitic statements, has "legitimate Republican credentials," said Gary Koops, spokesman for the Republican National Committee.

Won't Run In New York Or New Hampshire

Duke has decided to limit his contests, opting, for example, not to run in New York because it has "some really Byzantine" ballot laws, said his campaign chairman.

Duke is also not running in New Hampshire, site of the first primary. Nor is he vying in four states that hold caucuses rather than primaries: Arizona, Iowa, Missouri and Virginia.

The other states he has ruled out are Arizona, Colorado, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, North Dakota, Pennsylvania and South Dakota, his campaign chairman said.

In four states, government officials have denied his application to be included on the Republican ballot: Florida, Georgia, Rhode Island and Wisconsin. A Rhode Island court later reversed the government's ruling, and in the three other states the matter is hung up in the courts.

The 10 states in which Duke's name is on the ballot are Connecticut, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee and Texas.

Campaign Chairman Ellis called it "Kafka-

esque" for states to have blocked Duke's inclusion on their ballots.

In all four cases contested, the American Civil Liberties Union is representing the Duke in the courts. The ACLU is also trying to secure the ballot inclusion of lesser-known candidates from both parties, such as former Sen. Eugene McCarthy (D-Minn.) and imprisoned right-wing extremist Lyndon LaRouche.

Nine candidates have so far qualified for such funds, two of whom are Republicans Bush and Buchanan.

Six Democrats have qualified for matching funds: former California Gov. Edmund (Jerry) Brown, Arkansas Gov. Bill Clinton, Sen. Tom Harkin of Iowa, Sen. Bob Kerrey of Nebraska, former Sen. Paul Tsongas of Massachusetts and Virginia Gov. L. Douglas Wilder, who has dropped out of the race.

A seventh, Lenora Fulani, is running as either a Democrat or an independent. Fulani heads the New Alliance Party, which supports Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan's position on Jews and which critics charge is anti-Semitic.

CZECH TANKS BOUND FOR SYRIA INTERCEPTED BY GERMAN SHIP

By David Kantor

BONN, Feb. 4 (JTA) -- A German freighter bound for Syria with a cargo of Soviet-model T-72 tanks was intercepted by a German navy frigate in the western Mediterranean last month and forced to return to a German port.

Legal action may be taken against the ship's owners, government sources said.

A senior aide to Chancellor Helmut Kohl, Bren Schmidbauer, said the incident should serve as a warning that Bonn fully intends to implement its new, more stringent regulations against the illegal export of arms.

According to information released here, the ship, Gotewind, loaded 16 T-72 tanks at a Polish port on Jan. 12. The tanks were manufactured in Czechoslovakia, which has had large-scale arms transactions with Syria.

They may have been part of a shipment specifically denounced last month by Czechoslovak President Vaclav Havel, who vowed it would be the last.

Government sources here said about 300 tanks were involved in the deal. They implied that ships of various flags were transporting them, along with other weapons systems, ammunition and spare parts to Syria.

The Gotewind called briefly at Hamburg before sailing for Syria. It was intercepted in international waters near Malta by the German navy frigate Bremen, which was participating in NATO war games in the area.

The frigate used its two helicopters to locate the vessel with the illegal cargo. It was ordered to return to Germany and was reported due at Kiel or Hamburg in the next five days.

Legal experts here differ over whether the diversion was consistent with international law. But a government spokesman rejected criticism, saying the principle of preventing the illegal trafficking in arms took priority.

Meanwhile, an investigation has begun in Kiel into the activities of the Gotewind's owners, the Karl-Heinz Basse shipping company, which is based in Rendsburg. The owners could face up to four years in prison if convicted of violating export regulations and transporting arms illegally.