

**SENATOR'S PROPOSAL ON FOREIGN AID
SHIELDS ISRAEL, MIDDLE EAST FROM CUTS**

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON, Dec. 13 (JTA) -- Despite widespread fears that Israel will suffer a cut in foreign aid under a Republican-controlled legislature, Congress' new point man on aid has proposed protecting the entire Middle East from any reduction in American assistance.

Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), chairman of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations in the new Congress, unveiled his vision of a new foreign aid program on Monday.

His proposal shields Israel, Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinian Liberation Organization, as well as European countries, from a 20 percent foreign aid cut that he would apply everywhere else.

"Foreign aid needs to be relevant to the modern world, and we have to square that relevancy with fewer funds," McConnell said at a Senate news conference where he distributed the 48-page bill he plans to introduce when Congress convenes Jan. 4.

Backing Israel's \$3 billion and Egypt's \$2 billion annual aid package, McConnell said, "Security interests of our nation are directly affected by stability in the Middle East."

The pro-Israel lobby was quick to respond.

McConnell's bill is a "very broad and positive endorsement of the U.S.-Israel relationship," said an official of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

"The bill is very basic and covers all the bases for aid to Israel," said the official, who asked not to be identified.

In fact, McConnell's plan increases aid to the Middle East by \$100 million to allow for special assistance packages to support some aspects of the peace process.

Won't Back Aid To Syria

Although McConnell supports aid in general to the Middle East, he said he would not back aid to Syria even if a peace agreement with Israel is reached.

The chances of Congress doling out aid to Syria are "slim or none," he said.

Many pro-Israel activists breathed a sigh of relief as McConnell reiterated his strong support for Israel this week.

At the same time, some activists expressed concern that drastic cuts not only to foreign aid but also to domestic programs -- while leaving aid to Israel intact -- leave Israel and American Jews open to a potential anti-Israel backlash.

The U.S. will spend \$13.7 billion on foreign aid in fiscal year 1995. Although the program amounts to less than 1 percent of the entire federal budget, foreign aid continues to draw opposition from some lawmakers who argue the money is better spent on domestic programs.

"This bill is a new lease on life for foreign aid," McConnell said, acknowledging that many of his colleagues in Congress have targeted foreign aid.

"If we don't produce real changes in how

we administer foreign aid and do that soon, we will end up with no foreign aid at all," he said.

One of McConnell's primary responsibilities as the subcommittee chairman will be to shepherd the foreign aid bill through the legislative process.

While the task of reorganizing the foreign aid program falls under the responsibility of Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the actual spending bill comes under McConnell's domain.

Congressional spending is a two-fold process with an authorization bill that defines specific programs and an appropriations bill that, in essence, writes the check.

In order to prevent two floor debates on foreign aid -- one in the authorization process and a second in the appropriations process -- Congress has not passed a foreign aid authorization bill since 1986.

Instead lawmakers have continued to use the old authorization bill as the basis for the annual appropriations process, which has received close scrutiny in committee hearings and during floor debates.

Although McConnell's bill guts aid to Africa and forces states outside the Middle East and Europe to compete for shrinking foreign aid dollars, his position is much friendlier than that of Helms, who is an outspoken opponent of foreign aid.

Last month, Helms compared the foreign aid program to throwing money down "foreign rat-holes."

Helms has not decided if he will back McConnell's plan, according to a Helms' aide, "but he most definitely will hold hearings early next year."

Although Helms plans to hold hearings on a foreign aid authorization bill, most observers, including McConnell, do not expect a bill to emerge from that process.

Thus, while Helms' positions will clearly influence the foreign aid debate, he will have no formal role in the appropriations process.

"My subcommittee will probably be producing the only bill we pass this year in this area," McConnell said.

While McConnell's proposal helps to clarify how the Senate will proceed in the foreign aid debate, sentiment in the House is less certain.

Sonny Callahan (R-Ala.), who will chair the relevant House subcommittee on appropriations, has, during a decade in Congress, never voted in favor of a foreign aid bill, according to an aide.

However, the aide said that as chairman, Callahan will now "take a hard look at changing his position."

BEHIND THE HEADLINES:**JEWISH FAMILIES STRANDED IN CHECHNYA
AS THREAT OF RUSSIAN CIVIL WAR LOOMS**

By Lisa Glazer

MOSCOW, Dec. 13 (JTA) -- About 50 Jewish families are stranded in Grozny, the capital of the breakaway republic of Chechnya, where the threat

of a Russian civil war is looming, according to the Jewish Agency for Israel.

Russian troops and tanks stormed the republic over the weekend but stopped just short of the capital.

Amid fears of a violent military confrontation, Jewish leaders here and abroad are worrying about how to protect and evacuate the few remaining Jews in the highly volatile region.

"All roads are blocked, but at the first opportunity they will leave. The conditions there are very, very bad," said Alla Levy, a deputy director at the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem.

"They didn't leave already because they had problems with their families or their property, and now they are very sorry about it."

Levy said that a number of Jewish refugees have escaped to Nalchik, a city in a nearby republic.

"We are taking care of them and trying to take them to Israel," she said.

Located in the Caucasus Mountains in southern Russia, Chechnya is home to about 1.2 million people, most of them Muslims.

It has an old but small Jewish community, which, according to legend, dates back as early as the sixth century B.C.E.

In 1897, a census reported between 1,000 and 2,000 Jews in Grozny.

In the past few years, however, most of its members emigrated to Israel or America.

Most of Chechnya's Jews were "Mountain Jews," the name given to Jews from the Caucasus who continued to follow their religious traditions even while adapting culturally to local life.

Michael Chlenov, who oversees the Vaad, the federation of Jewish institutions in Russia, recently visited Vladikavkaz, the capital of the neighboring republic of North Ossetia, where other Jewish refugees from Grozny are currently living.

No Tradition Of Anti-Semitism

He said the Jewish refugees were reporting that Grozny had become overrun with crime and that they had fled the political instability.

According to Chlenov, Chechnya and other Muslim republics within Russia do not have a tradition of anti-Semitism.

However, Chechnya does have a strong independent streak, and anti-Russian feelings run deep.

The republic broke away from Russia in 1991 and since then has been at odds with Moscow's leadership, which has covertly backed the republic's political opposition as part of an attempt to topple the government of President Dzhokhar Dudayev.

Until now, however, the Russian government has avoided direct military involvement in Chechnya.

But this weekend, 40,000 troops were sent in, the biggest Russian military action since the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. As of midweek, Russian casualty reports listed nine servicemen killed and 14 wounded.

Numerous protests against the invasion took place this weekend in Moscow, as many expressed opposition to a renewed reliance on force by Russia.

"I think the situation is terrible for all the people in this country, Jews and Russians," said

Alexander Lieberman, the director of the Moscow office of the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews.

"If we have war, it could mean the end of democracy and free speech and the return to the time when we were a great empire, but a strong army with not enough food."

Taking a more cautious approach, Chlenov from the Vaad said, "The events in general are very important because they symbolize a change in the political situation in Russia." However, he said it is too early to analyze the implications of this change.

Chlenov noted that the Vaad signed a statement released by the recently formed Congress of National Minorities in Russia expressing disagreement with solving the problems in Chechnya through violence and bloodshed.

SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS' DECLARATION INCLUDES PLANS FOR FIGHTING TERRORISM By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON, Dec. 13 (JTA) -- Nations in the Western Hemisphere have agreed to work together to fight terrorism in the region.

At the Summit of the Americas over the weekend in Miami, 34 nations issued a declaration and plan of action that include little-publicized provisions focusing on the rising tide of terrorism in the hemisphere.

The nations, including the United States, pledged to "condemn terrorism in all its forms, and will, using all legal means, combat terrorist acts anywhere in the Americas with unity and vigor."

Calling national and international terrorism a "systematic and deliberate violation of the rights of individuals and an assault on democracy," the nations pledged to convene a special conference of the Organization of American States to discuss how to prevent terrorism.

The Summit of the Americas comes at the end of one of the deadliest years the Jewish community in Latin America has seen.

In July, a terrorist bomb ripped apart Argentina's Jewish community center, killing at nearly 100 people. The following day, 12 Jews died aboard a Panamanian commuter plane that exploded in midair.

The Western Hemisphere nations also agreed to promote agreements "aimed at prosecuting terrorists and penalizing terrorist activities."

The states also reaffirmed extradition treaties that cover the entire hemisphere.

Warren Eisenberg, director of B'nai B'rith's International Council, hailed the inclusion of terrorism on the summit's agenda and the high priority that the Clinton administration has placed on terrorism.

"This recognizes that the world has changed and that countries that were viewed as insular and isolated are now part of the growing world," he said.

B'nai B'rith was invited by the White House to attend the conference, Eisenberg said.

Elan Steinberg, executive director of the World Jewish Congress, said, "We are pleased that the leaders took seriously the need to address the terrorist menace and plan to fully participate in the regional conference on terrorism."

(JTA staff writer Susan Birnbaum in New York contributed to this report.)

REVERSING ROLES, JEWS SLAM JACKSON FOR REMARKS ABOUT CHRISTIAN COALITION
By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK, Dec. 13 (JTA) -- Who's on first? These days it's not easy to keep score of who's in or out of favor as far as Jewish organizational leaders are concerned.

Days after hosting Rev. Jesse Jackson at a news conference devoted to promoting the fact that there are ties binding black and Jewish political interests, the American Jewish Congress has criticized the black leader for remarks he made linking the Christian Coalition to anti-Semites of earlier eras.

"There is an ideological and historical connection" linking the Christian Coalition today to the anti-Semites and white supremacists of earlier eras -- including those in Nazi Germany, Jackson said in a recent interview with the editorial board of the Chicago Sun-Times and during a speech at the Park Avenue Synagogue in Manhattan earlier this month.

Much of the Christian Coalition's "language and threats and spirit and behavior is mean," Jackson said at the synagogue.

"If this were Germany, we would call it fascism. If this were South Africa, we would call it racism. Here, we call it conservatism," he said.

Phil Baum, AJCongress executive director, took issue with Jackson's statements.

In a Dec. 9 letter to Jackson, Baum wrote, "Nothing in their program remotely approaches the genocidal anti-Semitism of the Nazis or the total rejection of democracy, which is the political teaching of fascism.

"The terms 'fascist' and 'Nazi' carry powerful resonances for Jews," Baum said. "It is important to us that these not be diluted by profligate use for partisan advantage."

Last week, Jackson joined the American Jewish Congress at a news conference announcing the results of a study of congressional voting records. The study revealed that black and Jewish legislators generally vote in support of each others' interests.

ADL Also Defends Christian Coalition

Jackson and AJCongress leaders said that the findings counter the increasingly prevalent notion that the two communities have no common interests.

The Anti-Defamation League also ran to the defense of the Christian Coalition. In a statement, ADL described Jackson's comparison of the politically conservative group to the Nazis as "inappropriate, inaccurate and highly divisive."

It wasn't long ago that the ADL was entrenched in its own highly visible confrontation with the Christian Coalition.

Earlier this year the Jewish organization criticized Christian Coalition founder Rev. Pat Robertson and his ideological brethren for what the ADL said was an attempt on the part of those on the religious right to portray themselves as the victims of liberalism.

The ADL study, "The Religious Right: The Assault on Tolerance and Pluralism in America," prompted counterattacks by the Christian Coalition, including a widely disseminated booklet, "A Campaign of Falsehoods: The Anti-Defamation League's Defamation of Religious Conservatives."

Jewish political conservatives rushed to the Christian Coalition's aid at the time, criticizing the ADL for intolerance in a New York Times ad.

An agreement to tone down the rhetoric was reached during a conciliatory Nov. 30 meeting in Washington between representatives of the ADL and other Jewish groups and members of the religious right, including Ralph Reed, executive director of the Christian Coalition, and Jerry Falwell, head of the now-defunct Moral Majority.

Reed told the Washington Post that he and the Jewish organizational leaders had agreed to step forward in mutual defense when any of them are attacked with "religious bigotry."

Not all Jewish groups, however, were quick to defend the religious right against Jackson.

Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Reform movement's Religious Action Center, took issue with some of the language Jackson used but agreed with his thesis.

"He compared Christians who manipulate Christianity to justify intolerance and group hatred here with those who have done so in other historic situations," said Saperstein.

"When religious groups give sanction to intolerance, they justify the evil that grows out of it," he said.

"The religious right must be held responsible for not condemning the extremists in their midst, lest they sanction intolerance," Saperstein said. "We expect it of the black community. Why should it be any different for people on the right?"

FRENCH DELEGATION TRAVELS TO BEIRUT TO SEEK FATE OF MISSING LEBANESE JEWS
By Michel Di Paz

PARIS, Dec. 13 (JTA) -- A French delegation traveled last week to Beirut to urge Lebanese authorities to clarify the fate of seven Lebanese Jewish hostages who have been missing for as long as a decade.

The delegation, led by Roger Pinto, vice president of CRIF, the umbrella organization of French Jewish organizations, included a former Cabinet minister and two members of the National Assembly. They met with Lebanese Foreign Minister Faris Bouez and with human rights and Red Cross officials to discuss the hostages.

"All those we met with committed themselves to do their best to obtain information" about the hostages, said Pinto.

"Our message was clear: an end must be put to the nightmare of the hostages' relatives. If the missing ones are alive, they must be released at once. If they are dead, their bodies must be given back to their families," said Pinto.

The French group released the names of the missing members of Beirut's Jewish community.

Selim Murad Jammus, secretary of Beirut's Jewish community, was abducted in 1984. Dr. Elie Hallac, a physician and vice president of the community, was abducted from his home on March 30, 1985, the same day that Elie Srour, another community member, was abducted.

Isaac Sasson, president of Beirut's Jewish community, was abducted March 31, 1985, on his way to the airport. Yehuda Beniste, owner of a transport company, was abducted Feb. 15, 1986. His son Yusef was abducted three months later. Henri Mann, a shopowner, disappeared in 1986.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES:
**MOVING TOWARD A SMOKE-FREE ISRAEL?
SLOWLY, SLOWLY, NEW LAW MAKES INROADS**
 By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM, Dec. 13 (JTA) -- Spend an hour at the local office of Bituach Leumi, Israel's social security office, and you will leave smelling like cigarettes.

Visitors, many of them on disability or maternity leave, puff on cigarettes in offices and lobbies. The cloud of smoke is especially thick near the front entrance, where the security guard joins others for a drag.

The scene is not much different at Building No. 1 of the Jerusalem Municipality, which houses, among other things, the mayor's office.

Go upstairs to the building-permit department, and you will find several of the visitors smoking as they talk to city clerks.

When a non-smoker says pointedly, "This is a non-smoking area, isn't it?" the smokers shrug their shoulders, make a few snide remarks and continue their conversations.

Asked why the smoking ban is not being enforced, one of the clerks replies, "The law is new, and it will take people time to get used to it. In the meantime, you'll just have to bear with us."

The fact that people throughout Israel are smoking in public workplaces is not surprising. But it is illegal.

On Oct. 19, the Israeli government enacted far-reaching legislation that bans smoking in virtually all of Israel's 60,000 workplaces.

The law's only concession to smokers is a provision enabling employees to designate a "smoking corner," provided that the smoke does not pollute the rest of the office, shop or factory.

Rabin Refused To Sign Law

But the legislation, which came in the form of an amendment to the groundbreaking 1984 law that prohibited smoking in such public places as buses, movie theaters, banks, hospitals, schools, and restaurants with 20 or more seats, almost never got enacted.

After the legislation was approved by the Knesset in 1993, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin -- then acting health minister and an unabashed chain smoker -- refused to sign it into law.

It was only after a permanent health minister was named that the amendment became official law.

But, as anti-smoking activists are quick to say, passing the legislation was only half the battle; enforcing it has been the real challenge.

Israelis are definitely smoking less than they used to, with today's official figure of 31 percent significantly lower than the 42 percent who smoked during the 1980s.

But just where and when Israelis smoke defies all logic.

Whereas buses and movie theaters are virtually smoke-free, few people think twice about lighting up in a restaurant, hospital, bank or university.

Dr. Alma Avni, director of the Health Ministry's Occupational Health Service, says she is hopeful that the new legislation, and the publicity storm that preceded it, will finally get people

thinking. Already, she says, "we have received hundreds of complaints about non-compliance. Right now, we don't have 100 percent or even 90 percent of the smoking population complying with the law, but it is a start."

Avni admits that enforcement is the biggest challenge.

"It is hard to get hospital visitors and patients not to smoke when they see physicians smoking, and that is true of many places," she says.

"We are working closely with the police, but it is a question of priorities. If a police officer has to choose between investigating a suspicious object (suspected of being a bomb) or stopping someone from smoking in a restaurant, it is obvious what action he will take first," she says.

Though pleased with the legislation as a whole, Miri Ziv, director of the Israel Cancer Society Association, agrees that it is not easily enforced.

"If someone is caught smoking, he can be fined 170 shekels (about \$56), but the fact is that fines aren't being given out. Our police have other problems to worry about," she says.

Both Ziv and Avni contend that it is only a matter of time -- and education -- before Israelis comply with the law.

"Before drafting the amendment," Ziv recalls, "we contracted a firm to do a survey of the general population.

"Ninety percent of those questioned supported a bill limiting smoking in the workplace. But what really surprised us was the fact that 87 percent of the smokers said they supported it.

"Many of them said they would like to give up smoking, but didn't have the willpower while others smoked around them," Ziv says. "Others said that they were tired of being asked to stop smoking, and that by designating a smoking area, they could smoke guilt-free."

Avni is optimistic. She says "it is a proven fact that secondhand smoke causes cancer, and employees cannot just leave the room, like they can a restaurant, if others are smoking. If non-smokers stand up for their rights, things will improve. In Israel, 70 percent of the public doesn't smoke, and I think peer pressure will ultimately win out."

"We've already received many reports from companies saying that fewer people are smoking. I think that's something to be proud of," she says.

KNESSET PASSES HEALTH INSURANCE LAW
 By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, Dec. 13 (JTA) -- The National Health Insurance Law passed its final obstacle this week when the Knesset passed an amendment calling for its implementation on Jan. 1.

The amendment effectively severed the last tie between the Histadrut and the health tax citizens pay for health fund membership. Until now, the Histadrut has collected the health tax for the Kupat Holim Clalit health fund, which it owns, and has deducted a portion for its needs.

The National Health Insurance Law was passed by the Knesset several months ago, but its implementation was delayed until an alternative source of funding could be found. Histadrut is seeking to solve its funding problems in negotiations with the government and private sector employers.