



Daily News Bulletin

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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israel lists 'security interests'

Israel's Cabinet decided to retain portions of the West Bank as security interests, agreeing that they would not be turned over to the Palestinians under a further redeployment or in any final-status agreement.

The areas designated would include land in the Jordan Valley and the western hills of the West Bank, buffer areas surrounding Jerusalem and Jewish settlements, military sites, holy Jewish sites and water sources.

The Israeli Cabinet is scheduled to hold another meeting Thursday to determine what if any proposals regarding the further redeployment Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will bring with him when he is slated to meet next week with President Clinton.

Meanwhile, American officials reportedly doubt that the Palestinian Authority can meet Israel's terms for authorizing a redeployment of its troops from portions of the West Bank. [Page 1]

Justices question AIPAC case

U.S. Supreme Court justices questioned the merit of a case involving the American Israel Public Affairs Committee as it heard oral arguments Wednesday.

A lawyer representing plaintiffs in the case charged the pro-Israel lobby with violating federal election law. [Page 3]

Vatican, PLO to hold talks

The Vatican and the Palestine Liberation Organization decided to negotiate an agreement on the status of Roman Catholic holy sites in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and eastern Jerusalem, according to a news report.

The discussions will also deal with properties owned by the Catholic Church in eastern Jerusalem.

Suit targets cemetery ban

Seven Jews and Christians are suing the city of Boca Raton, Fla., for banning all decorations at a local cemetery.

The families claim that the ban infringes on their right to express their religious beliefs at the grave sites of loved ones.

Because of the Martin Luther King holiday in the United States, the JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Monday, Jan. 19.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Calm before the storm: Will Clinton, Netanyahu collide?

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An air of expectation pervaded Israel this week as both the government and opposition looked to the prime minister's scheduled meeting with President Clinton in Washington on Jan. 20 as the key to future developments in both the domestic and international arenas.

Not even a tie vote on a Knesset no-confidence motion Monday nor a series of tough decisions on the peace process by the Cabinet on Tuesday seemed to disturb the tranquil atmosphere — in which many observers discerned an eerie quiet before a likely storm.

The questions on everyone's lips in the political community were: Will Clinton crack the whip at last, demanding from Israel a further redeployment on the West Bank of the "substantial and credible dimensions" that U.S. officials have been demanding?

If he does, will the hard-liners balk and threaten Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition, now reduced to a majority of one after the secession of former Foreign Minister David Levy's five-seat Geshet Party?

If they do, will Labor step into the breach and provide Netanyahu with the votes he needs in the Knesset to pass a meaningful redeployment?

If it does, will Netanyahu take up the Labor offer of parliamentary aid — or does he, too, prefer to fall rather than cede a "double-digit" swath of the biblical Land of Israel to the Palestinian Authority?

Having weathered the budget vote and Levy's walkout, Netanyahu is bracing himself not only for some hard talk in the White House, but for what may be the biggest domestic crisis of his 19-month premiership. Netanyahu's one hope is that Clinton is aware of his predicament, and therefore will go easy on him, since in the final analysis Washington would like to see a right-wing Israeli government cede land, even modest tracts, to the Palestinians and thereby embrace at least the principle of land-for-peace.

Clinton is scheduled to meet with Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat two days after Netanyahu, who also is expected to meet with members of Congress and American Jewish leaders during his three-day visit.

Although Clinton has not insisted that the Israeli leader bring with him a detailed redeployment proposal, he plainly intends to be in a position — at the end of his talks with Netanyahu — to be able to convey to Arafat whether, in his view, a deal is feasible.

He will demand enhanced efforts from the Palestinian leader to root out terrorism. For his part, Arafat can point to Israeli headlines this week reporting massive arrests of Hamas militants that resulted from close collaboration between Israeli and Palestinian security services. These seem to demonstrate that security cooperation is working, at least to some degree.

The Israeli Cabinet, meeting almost daily this week to prepare for Netanyahu's mission, voted unanimously Tuesday to demand full implementation by the Palestinians of their unfulfilled obligations under prior agreements before Israel goes ahead with a redeployment. Netanyahu denied that Israel was presenting the Palestinian Authority with an ultimatum for progress in peace negotiations. But the language of the Cabinet decision — and the hard-line ministers' support for it — seemed to indicate that it was an ultimatum.

The premier said he wants the Palestinians to revoke the Palestine National Covenant — which the Palestinians insist was effectively revoked in April 1996.

Both the Palestinians and the Labor opposition branded the Cabinet decision an

MIDEAST FOCUS

U.S. Jews blast conversion bill

"The conversion law will cause a deep rift in the Jewish nation," 80 North American Jewish federation leaders stated in a resolution during a Jewish Agency for Israel mission to the Jewish state.

The delegation's visit coincided with one by 75 American Orthodox rabbis, who are lobbying Knesset members to support the pending conversion bill, which would codify the Orthodox movement's control over all conversions performed in Israel.

Hamas cells planned attacks

The Hamas terror cells recently uncovered by Israeli security officials in the West Bank were planning suicide attacks in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, as well as car bombings and shootings in a number of Jewish settlements, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

The head of Israel's Shin Bet met earlier this week with Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat to discuss further action against terrorists.

Bomb explodes at Israel's border

A booby-trapped videocassette blew up at the Fatma Crossing between northern Israel and Lebanon, wounding three Israelis and three Lebanese citizens.

Israeli authorities alerted a police bomb expert about the suspicious object, which exploded while he was examining it. Among the wounded at the site was the Lebanese man carrying the videocassette.

Israel to invite pope

Israeli Tourism Minister Moshe Katzav is slated to meet next week in the Vatican with Pope John Paul II to discuss upcoming commemorations marking 2,000 years since the birth of Jesus.

Katzav is expected to invite the pope to be the first Christian to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the year 2000. Israel estimates that some 4.5 million pilgrims will arrive in Israel for the celebrations. The Vatican puts the figure at around 7 million.

obvious ploy to gain time and avoid withdrawing from more of the West Bank.

On Wednesday, the Cabinet decided that in a final-status agreement with the Palestinians Israel would retain control over "vital and national interests" in the West Bank. These include security zones along the eastern and western borders of the West Bank; buffer areas around Jerusalem and Jewish settlements; water, electricity and transportation sources; and historic sites sacred to the Jewish people.

The Cabinet last month approved, in principle, a redeployment, but also said that no decision on the scope of a pullback would be made before acting on the guidelines of a final-status accord.

But it appeared this week that the ministers might not agree on the amount of territory to transfer to the Palestinians before Netanyahu's meeting with Clinton.

The Clinton administration, meanwhile, was quietly making its own preparations — and drawing preliminary conclusions — for next week's talks in Washington. A trip to the region last week by U.S. Special Middle East Coordinator Dennis Ross produced little progress and, reportedly, little grounds for optimism — and Ross is considered the staunchest advocate among top U.S. officials of the thesis that Netanyahu can deliver on the peace process.

In her year-end policy address Tuesday, U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright expressed regret over the lack of progress in the peace process. Others in the White House and the State Department were said to have all but written off any realistic hope of concluding a redeployment as long as the Netanyahu government remains in power.

But the Clinton administration will also be considering other important Middle East developments as it decides on its posture for the talks with Netanyahu and Arafat:

- U.S.-Iraqi tensions are rising again following Baghdad's decision this week to bar a U.N. inspection team because of its American members. Military action by the United States alone, or in concert with some of its 1991 Gulf War allies, has not been ruled out. Clinton does not need tension with Arab states over the peace process in advance of such a decision.

- A U.S. dialogue with Iran could be opening up following Iranian President Mohammed Khatami's CNN interview, in which he softened his rhetoric against the United States. The Clinton administration clearly will not weaken its ties with Israel to pander to Tehran; but again, it does not need to court tensions with the Arab world over Palestinians just as this dialogue begins to evolve.

- Vice President Al Gore is said to be loath to see a confrontation develop with Israel, for fear of upsetting U.S. Jews, among whom are some of the strongest supporters of his planned presidential campaign. Clinton is said by Washington insiders to be extremely sensitive to Gore's electoral considerations.

But would a vigorous American policy, pressing both Netanyahu and Arafat, necessarily upset U.S. Jewry? Clearly, there is neither unanimity nor homogeneity among American Jews over Israel's peace process policy — as Clinton and Gore are being told by some of their pro-Labor supporters. □

Flap over bridge collapse enters mainstream papers

SYDNEY, Australia (JTA) — The deputy district attorney of Tel Aviv has jumped into the fray surrounding the bridge collapse at last summer's Maccabiah Games.

Janet Dodge attacked an editorial recently published in a major Australian newspaper as "factually inaccurate and misinformed." The editorial had criticized the way the Israeli legal process had dealt with the matter.

Last month, five Israelis were charged with negligent homicide in connection with the July tragedy at the Games' opening ceremonies, which resulted in the deaths of four Australian athletes and injured dozens of others. The indictments came after the relatives of the athletes who died or were injured in the tragedy spent months demanding that those responsible be brought to justice.

Dodge wrote that the editorial's criticism of the Israeli legal process was misguided and seemed to be based on the different requirements that Australia and Israel have for issuing indictments. □



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JEWISH WORLD

U.S. justices hear AIPAC case even as they question its merit

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The American Israel Public Affairs Committee was hit with sharp allegations about its political operations during oral arguments before the U.S. Supreme Court this week.

In a closely watched case that could affect the pro-Israel lobby, a lawyer representing several staunch opponents of AIPAC charged the organization with violating federal election law by making campaign contributions and expenditures on behalf of political candidates.

The case, *FEC vs. Akins*, stems from 1989, when a group of former government officials, all known as anti-Israel, began battling to convince the Federal Election Commission to regulate AIPAC as a political action committee and thereby subject it to restrictive campaign finance laws.

Such a designation would limit contributions to and expenditures by AIPAC, which defines itself as a membership organization, not a political action committee.

A move by the court could have a broader impact on all membership organizations in the political arena.

Among the plaintiffs are James Akins, former U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia, and former U.S. Rep. Paul Findley (R-Ill.).

The case is unusual in that AIPAC — a registered lobby on behalf of issues affecting Israel-U.S. relations — is not a direct party to the case. But the organization was the central focus of Wednesday's proceedings at the Supreme Court.

Daniel Schember, an attorney representing the plaintiffs, argued that AIPAC is a PAC that has made "extensive campaign contributions over an extended period of time."

"What we're seeking essentially is to determine to which candidates did AIPAC contribute, how much time did AIPAC staffers devote" to making such contributions "and how much effort did they put into it," Schember told the justices.

AIPAC maintains that it makes no such expenditures.

"AIPAC communicates with its members about matters of interest to them and seeks to educate members of Congress about the issues that are important to AIPAC and its members," Tom Hungar, a lawyer representing AIPAC, told reporters outside the Supreme Court.

"That's no different than what any other grass-roots lobbying organization does, and that's constitutionally protected activity," he said.

In the one-hour proceedings, the justices grappled with a host of other legal issues stemming from the 9-year-old case, including whether the plaintiffs had standing — meaning whether they had a direct, personal stake in the outcome.

In fact, the justices, throughout the arguments, questioned whether the case should even be before the high court. A key issue at hand is the so-called "major purpose" test used by the FEC to determine whether AIPAC qualified as a PAC.

In 1992, the FEC, which monitors compliance with campaign laws, found that AIPAC spent money in an effort to influence congressional elections. But the FEC decided not to designate AIPAC as a political committee because it said that was not the group's "major purpose."

A lower court and a three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia initially upheld the FEC's decision.

But in December 1996, the appeals court ruled that the FEC misapplied the law.

Now the Supreme Court, which is expected to rule by the end of its term in June, could determine that the plaintiffs have no standing or it could overturn a lower court's ruling, either of which outcome would mean the case would end.

Or, if the court upholds the appeals court and strikes down the major purpose test, AIPAC's fate would again lie with the FEC. AIPAC officials and lawyers for the organization remain confident that the high court's decision would not affect AIPAC.

Asked about the political motivations of the plaintiffs, Philip Friedman, general counsel for AIPAC, said that because the plaintiffs haven't been successful advancing their anti-Israel agenda on Capitol Hill, "they've tried to take their case to the courts and fight what they can't win over in Congress on the steps of the Supreme Court." □

Austria to probe art origins

Austria announced that it would examine the origins of all artworks in state museums to determine whether former owners were forced to give them up to the Nazis.

The decision comes a week after two paintings in the possession of the state-owned Leopold Collection were impounded in New York after two Jewish families claimed that relatives had been forced to sell the paintings to the Nazis.

A spokeswoman for the collection, in an apparent attempt to prevent the collection from being singled out, said at least 16 others paintings once owned by one of the Jewish families were hanging in museums and homes in the United States.

Swiss refuse apology

Switzerland refused to apologize for recent comments made by the country's president that most of the criticism of Switzerland for its dealings with the Nazis had come from New York.

A group of U.S. financial officers had said the intent of Flavio Cotti's remarks "borders on anti-Semitism," but a Swiss official said in a letter that this interpretation was "outrageous."

Insurers accused of lying

Heirs of Holocaust victims charged that European insurers denied the existence of thousands of insurance policies and refused to pay claims to the families of victims who perished during World War II.

The charges emerged during a hearing held at the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles.

French premier honors Zola

French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin lashed out at the anti-Semitism rampant in the country 100 years ago, which he said was behind the false charges brought against Alfred Dreyfus, the Jewish army captain wrongfully convicted of treason and sentenced to life imprisonment on Devil's Island.

Jospin's comments came amid a week of events marking the centennial of the publication of "J'Accuse," a defense of Dreyfus by French writer Emile Zola.

Yiddish thespian honored

Russian artists and performers held a candlelight vigil in Moscow to commemorate a Yiddish actor and theater director who was killed by Stalin's secret police in 1948.

The vigil was part of a weeklong tribute to Solomon Mikhoels, whose death marked the beginning of anti-Jewish pogroms in the Soviet Union that eased only with the dictator's death in 1953.

Federation leader apologizes to survivors for funding letter

By Natalie Weinstein

Jewish Bulletin of Northern California

SAN FRANCISCO (JTA) — Taken to task by a group of Holocaust survivors, the San Francisco-based Jewish Community Federation's president has expressed his regrets for upsetting anyone with his recent statements on Israel.

"I'm sorry people are misreading what we were trying to do," Alan Rothenberg said last week. "I'm sorry we've angered some people."

In December, Rothenberg wrote a letter to top donors emphasizing that the federation "does not fund the Israeli government." By pointing out that federation money supports the people of Israel, not a particular government, he hoped to quell concerns of numerous donors unhappy with the current administration.

But not everyone liked his approach.

In a recent edition of the *Jewish Bulletin of Northern California*, 120 survivors, their relatives and friends took out a full-page advertisement criticizing Rothenberg and the federation.

The ad read in part: "We strongly suspect that those so cavalier in their support of Israel — so embarrassed that they must claim as a response 'we don't fund the Israeli government' — do not recall or choose not to recall the Spring of 1948 which saw a nation rise as a phoenix from our parents' ashes imbuing all Jews across the board with hope in the future."

Last week, Rothenberg said he didn't mean to give an impression that the federation doesn't support Israel.

"We view as one of our most important tasks helping the people of Israel — and helping the people of the United States appreciate, love and respect Israel as our homeland," he said.

"I think there is a miscommunication here that is really unfortunate."

Wayne Feinstein, the federation's executive vice president, echoed Rothenberg.

"There was a fair amount of confusion," said Feinstein. "We have never distanced ourselves from Israel."

Taking formal action, Rothenberg sent a letter last week to everyone who signed the ad, reiterating the federation's "continuing rock-solid support for Israel" and stressing that his "statement that our funds do not support the government of Israel was not intended to distance us."

But several of the individuals who signed the ad do not believe they misinterpreted the federation's original intention.

"To openly say, 'We don't support the government of Israel' — it's really a slap in the face," said Annie Glass, a San Franciscan and a Holocaust survivor.

"How can they say, 'We don't support the government but we support the people'?" she said.

"The government is the people, and the people is the government."

"The message is that Israel is bad," she added. "It's not right." Rothenberg disagreed with such sentiments.

"They are making a very narrow distinction — that by saying we don't fund the government we are being disloyal to Israel," he said.

Gabriel Piotrkowski, another survivor who signed the ad, saw the federation as playing into the hands of Israel's enemies when it

specifically pointed out that it doesn't fund the government.

"We cannot do a thing like that to the Jewish state — You have to be careful what you say in the paper, like a diplomat," said Piotrkowski, who lives in San Francisco. "Sometimes you open your mouth too much."

Piotrkowski said survivors can be particularly sensitive to criticism of Israel because they experienced what happened to the Jews before a Jewish nation existed.

"Nobody cared about us because we had no land, no power," he said.

Rothenberg's original letter was sent Dec. 9 to the approximately 2,000 donors who give \$1,000 or more to the federation's annual campaign.

That letter read in part: "Every day we seem to be inundated with news stories about Israel that make us shake our heads and wonder if this is the same land of milk and honey that we looked to with such pride as our spiritual and moral compass."

Rothenberg said he wrote those comments in reaction to many donors' concerns about the battle over religious pluralism in Israel and, to a lesser extent, the stalled peace process.

Federation leaders have feared that such concerns might translate into lower contributions to the annual campaign.

Last year, the federation raised a record \$19.8 million.

About 35 percent of that was sent overseas — mostly to Israel. Legally, those philanthropic funds cannot go directly to the Israeli government. Instead, the money goes to non-governmental entities, such as the Jewish Agency for Israel.

Although the original letter was meant to ease the minds of donors, it ended up bothering a fair number of them.

Most of those who signed the ad are themselves federation contributors.

While some said the incident would affect their annual donations, others said it would not.

Harry Recht, a Holocaust survivor and a San Franciscan who signed the ad, said he is considering splitting his family's federation donation in half and sending the rest directly to Israeli organizations.

Glass has mixed feelings about donating to the federation this year.

But in the end, Glass said she probably will write a check.

"I don't want to hit back at the federation. I want them to think," she said.

Not all Holocaust survivors agreed with those who signed the ad.

Bill Lowenberg, a former federation president and former vice chairman of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum's council, praised the federation and Rothenberg.

"Out of all federations, San Francisco has been one of the most loyal, most supporting and most caring regarding Israel," he said.

Lowenberg, who himself supports Netanyahu, said his fellow survivors who signed the ad didn't understand the point of Rothenberg's "appropriate, timely and necessary" letter.

The letter, Lowenberg said, was meant to let the donors know why they should continue to give, regardless of who is running the government.

"We have good politicians and bad politicians — but one thing we have no choice about is the survival of the Jewish people," he said.

"If you penalize the poor and the sick and those who need education, it's horrible." □