



# Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 76, No. 22

Wednesday, February 4, 1998

81<sup>st</sup> Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Israel tries to calm fears

Israeli leaders tried to ease public anxiety over the tension in the Persian Gulf, stressing that it was unlikely Israel would be the target of an Iraqi attack.

The statements came amid criticism that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government has been silent about the state of Israel's preparedness in the face of a potential onslaught of Iraqi missiles.

### Rabin memorial defaced

Vandals spray-painted messages on a Jerusalem memorial to slain Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin that call Rabin a traitor and a murderer.

The extremist organization Kach claimed responsibility for the attack, saying it was retaliating against proposed legislation to remove a memorial at the grave of Dr. Baruch Goldstein, who murdered 29 Muslim worshipers at the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron in 1994.

### Arafat to release militants

Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat ordered the early release of two militants jailed for their involvement in the January 1995 twin bombings at the Beit Lid intersection between Netanya and the West Bank town of Tulkarm, a Palestinian prison official was quoted as saying. At least 22 were killed and about 60 wounded in the attack on the hitchhiking post used by Israeli soldiers.

### Sharansky gets new duties

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu gave the portion of the Foreign Ministry dealing with the former Soviet Union to his trade minister, Natan Sharansky. Officials at the ministry, overseen by Netanyahu after the recent resignation of David Levy, were reportedly angry at the move.

### Republicans urge sanctions

Republican lawmakers sent President Clinton a letter urging him to maintain full sanctions on Iran despite the recent overture by Iranian President Mohammed Khatami.

The letter came in response to a rumor that the White House is considering a move to certify Iran as cooperative in the war against drugs. Last year, Clinton removed Syria from the U.S. list of countries producing and trafficking in narcotics.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

### Exasperated Albright hints at shift in U.S. peace policy

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's decision to go public with her frustration over the Middle East peace process represented a change in U.S. policy — at least on the tactical level.

But does it presage a policy review on a more substantive level?

After meeting last weekend with Israeli and Palestinian leaders, Albright said the peace process had ground to a halt.

But the departure in her bleak assessment did not lie, many observers would argue, in the fact that the process is at a dead end.

It has been in that condition, in the view of these observers, for a full year now, ever since the Hebron Agreement was concluded in January 1997.

The novelty — and it is an ominous one — is that Albright, in public and private comments after her visits to Jerusalem and the West Bank town of Ramallah, appeared to cast aside the accepted diplomatic practice of depicting such high-level conversation in relatively optimistic terms.

Albright told both Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat that she was "sick and tired" of the two sides merely trading recriminations and presenting Washington with laundry lists of the other party's purported infringements of earlier accords.

More importantly, she made the tone and substance of her remarks to the two leaders public knowledge through well-placed leaks in the media.

During a news conference in Jerusalem wrapping up her brief effort here, she spoke of her frustration and noted bleakly that the peace process had been stuck over the same issues "for frankly too long."

The only ray of light she could offer was an arrangement for lower-ranking officials from the two sides to go to Washington next week for yet more talks.

But this is a dim ray indeed, since it would be hard to imagine that these officials could succeed where the highest ones — President Clinton met with Netanyahu and Arafat separately in Washington last month — have plainly failed.

Certainly, Albright's public utterances would seem to preclude the indefinite continuation of visits to the region by Dennis Ross, the U.S. special Middle East coordinator — visits occasionally punctuated by higher-level American efforts that likewise have produced no progress.

Indeed, developments on the ground this week indicated that the peace process could be in serious danger.

- During clashes between Israeli troops and Palestinian demonstrators near Bethlehem, Israeli and Palestinian security forces briefly trained their weapons on each other. They later backed off from an armed confrontation.

- The Palestinian Authority has been stockpiling weapons and building fortified positions in the event of an armed confrontation with Israel, according to Israeli news reports.

- The Israeli media cited assessments within the country's security establishment that Arafat would opt for violence if he became convinced that the political process had reached a dead end.

- A teen-age yeshiva student was wounded in a stabbing attack on his way to the Western Wall in Jerusalem's Old City. Police suspected that an Arab was responsible

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Netanyahu to oversee jubilee

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will oversee the group planning the events for Israel's 50th anniversary celebrations, according to an aide.

Netanyahu spokesman David Bar-Illan said that those previously "in charge were not experts at promoting something like this." Since its founding a year ago, the group has been beset by resignations and by organizational and funding problems.

### E.U. to give funds to Yad Vashem

The European Union said it was giving some \$500,000 to the Yad Vashem Holocaust museum in Jerusalem to help prepare a book about non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust.

The so-called Righteous Among Nations includes some 14,000 non-Jews whose heroism has been recognized by the Jewish state.

### Palestinian beaten to death

A Palestinian prisoner reportedly died while in custody at a Palestinian jail near the West Bank town of Hebron.

A group representing Palestinian prisoners said Nasser Haroub, 23, died from hemorrhaging after being beaten.

### Three Israelis to skate at Nagano

Three ice skaters will represent Israel at the 1998 Winter Olympics, which open this weekend in Nagano, Japan.

Misha Shmerkin, who participated in the 1994 games in Lillehammer, Norway, will be joined by the skating duo of Galit Chayat and Sergei Sakanovsky.

Chayat, born to a Russian family in Kfar Saba, moved at age six with her family to the United States. Sakanovsky, born in Russia, received Israeli citizenship three years ago and moved to the United States to train with Chayat.

for the attack. Amid these developments, a sizable majority of Israelis are concerned about the deadlock in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, according to a poll conducted by Tel Aviv University.

Among the 500 Israelis surveyed, 83 percent said they were "fairly worried" or "very worried" about the continued inability of negotiators to move the peace process forward.

If, as Albright declared, it is up to the Israelis and Palestinians to make the "tough decisions," then the further treading of water by American diplomats only defers that moment of decision making.

U.S. policy-makers believe they have crafted a plan, based on the "reciprocity principle" that Netanyahu advocates, which can facilitate a series of gradual Israeli redeployments from the West Bank linked to Palestinian steps to live up to their commitments from already-signed accords.

But the Palestinians insist that the 13 percent to 15 percent withdrawal envisaged by Washington as the next redeployment is inadequate.

And the Israelis insist it is too much.

The Netanyahu government insists, moreover, that a withdrawal of such magnitude must be the last transfer of land until a permanent-status agreement is negotiated and concluded.

The Palestinians flatly reject that scenario and insist that the three further redeployments spelled out in the Oslo process — none of them implemented yet — continue to go forward as originally laid down, in tandem with the accelerated schedule for permanent-status talks that Israel has proposed.

Plainly, this is not the moment for a profound and comprehensive American policy review. The Clinton administration, and especially its foreign policy agencies, are preoccupied with the Iraqi crisis.

Possibly, though, if there is a resort to force against Iraq — not a solitary strike but a sustained military action — then the results of that event will directly affect American thinking on the Israeli-Arab peace process.

Granted, Albright was at pains to separate her frustrations with Israel in connection with the peace process from her expression of the United States' total commitment to stand by Israel should Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein decide to repeat his actions during the 1991 Gulf War and again rain missiles on the Jewish state.

But down the road, when the Iraqi crisis is resolved, its outcome will doubtlessly spur the Clinton administration into making some tough decisions of its own regarding the reluctance of Netanyahu and Arafat to make them.

On the Israeli right, now stronger than ever in Netanyahu's Cabinet, the hope and expectation is that the U.S. decision will be, in effect, to back off and look for more promising areas of foreign policy in which the beleaguered American president can score points.

In these circles, Clinton's domestic problems are seen as weakening his ability and his resolve to lean on Israel.

But after a military drubbing of Iraq, or after an 11th-hour compromise solution with Baghdad, administration officials may feel the need — and the strength — to expend new energy on breaking the Israeli-Palestinian logjam, and, far from turning away from it, Clinton and Albright may redouble their efforts to attain a redeployment package.

In terms of the Israeli-Arab peace process, therefore, which is now publicly acknowledged to be at a standstill, the Iraq crisis provides a temporary respite from fruitless diplomacy.

In the longer term, however, it could prove to be a turning point.

The Gulf War, which was backed by a coalition of Arab states, itself paved the way to the Madrid peace conference, which some analysts regard as the icebreaking event that eventually led to the Oslo accords.

This time, the coalition against Saddam looks sadly depleted.

Nevertheless, a political cataclysm induced by America's use of armed force — or, alternatively, an embarrassing rift with the United States' allies in the Arab world — could generate in Washington and in the region momentum to drive Israel and the Palestinians forward. □



## Daily News Bulletin

Caryn Rosen Adelman, *President*

Mark J. Joffe, *Executive Editor and Publisher*

Lisa Hostein, *Editor*

Kenneth Bandler, *Managing Editor*

Lenore A. Silverstein, *Business Manager*

JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at [www.jta.org](http://www.jta.org).  
© JTA      Reproduction only by previous arrangement.

## JEWISH WORLD

### Bill would target insurers

U.S. lawmakers introduced legislation that would force insurance companies to honor policies sold to Holocaust victims between 1920 and 1945.

The Holocaust Victims Insurance Act would require European insurance companies to provide a full accounting of how it handled such policies and would direct the companies to pay victims or their descendants if they have not done so already.

### Dreyfus honored in Paris

France's defense minister unveiled a plaque at the Military School in Paris honoring Capt. Alfred Dreyfus.

The ceremony followed a series of commemorations last month marking 100 years since author Emile Zola penned "J'accuse" in support of Dreyfus, a Jewish army officer wrongly convicted of spying for Germany.

### Farrakhan expelled

Authorities in southern Russia expelled Louis Farrakhan.

Officials in the autonomous region of Dagestan expelled a delegation of foreign Muslims led by the Nation of Islam leader, saying Farrakhan and his group lacked the proper documents.

But the leader of Union of Muslims of Russia, an umbrella group that invited Farrakhan to Russia, said the expulsion was politically motivated and was due to the fact that Dagestani authorities "erroneously described Farrakhan as an extremist."

Farrakhan's delegation was to have traveled to the Dagestani-Chechen border to meet with the leadership of the former breakaway Russian region of Chechnya. Chechnya, like Dagestan, is predominantly Muslim.

### Two Israelis win medicine prize

The Jerusalem-based Wolf Foundation awarded two Israelis the Wolf Prize in medicine for their discoveries in the field of immunology.

Michael Sela, 74, and Ruth Arnon, 65, both of the Weizman Institute of Science in Rehovot, Israel, will share the \$100,000 prize.

### Americans plan China trip

Three prominent American religious leaders are preparing to travel to China next week to observe and discuss religious freedom there.

The delegates, including Rabbi Arthur Schneier, president of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, met with President Clinton and National Security Adviser Sandy Berger to discuss the scheduled meetings with Chinese government officials and leaders of the Buddhist, Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, Taoist and Jewish communities in China, Tibet and Hong Kong.

## Report: Israel, Palestinians commit 'serious' rights abuses

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Israel and the Palestinian Authority continue to commit "serious human rights abuses," according to the annual U.S. State Department report on human rights.

The voluminous account on virtually every country in the world chronicles everything from deaths in police custody to the rights of women and the disabled.

"You'll find evidence of human rights abuses in both Israel and the territories," John Shattuck, U.S. assistant secretary of state for democracy and human rights, said in a briefing on the report.

While Israel generally respects human rights, the report says, the country sometimes mistreats Palestinian detainees.

Tying the incidence of human rights abuses to movement in the peace process, the report says that Israel's main problems over the years have arisen from "policies and practices in the occupied territories and from its fight against terrorism."

The Israeli redeployments from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip "have significantly reduced the scope of these problems," the report says.

According to the State Department, one Palestinian was killed while in Israeli detention in 1997, compared with two deaths in 1996.

Seven detainees died in Palestinian prisons, including two who the Palestinian Authority said died after being tortured, according to the report. In 1996, four Palestinians died while in custody.

Neither Israeli nor Palestinian officials were available to comment on the State Department report.

While this report does not focus on all terrorist incidents — a separate U.S. report issued later in the year does — it does mention the 24 victims killed in suicide bombings after the Palestinians "slackened security cooperation" following the start of Israeli construction at Har Homa, a development in southeastern Jerusalem.

For their part, Israeli troops killed 10 Palestinian demonstrators, including a deaf and mentally impaired 14-year-old boy in Gaza and an 8-year-old boy in Bethlehem, according to the report.

Based on information provided by U.S. embassies around the world, the annual report is usually respected for its accuracy — and often attacked by U.S. allies for its analysis.

But this year, one part of the report's accuracy is being called into question.

After listing the names of Palestinian youths killed during clashes with Israeli troops in the section on the West Bank and Gaza, including areas under Palestinian control, the report states, "No Israeli civilians or security personnel were killed or seriously wounded by [Palestinian] demonstrators."

However, there were at least 35 incidents where Israelis were injured by Palestinians during demonstrations, many seriously, according to news clippings gathered by the Zionist Organization of America.

In one incident on July 1, Palestinian protesters threw pipe bombs at Israeli soldiers in Hebron.

"In an anguishing scene caught on videotape, two Israeli soldiers fell screaming to the ground and left a thick trail of blood as medics carried them away," The Washington Post reported on July 5.

State Department officials could not immediately comment on the apparent discrepancies, but the issue was expected to be raised by Jewish activists at a Wednesday briefing with Shattuck.

The apparent discrepancy comes on the heels of the release of another State Department report that includes a "serious policy gaffe," according to a State Department official who spoke on the condition that he not be identified.

The Jan. 23 interim report on worldwide religious persecution names "Palestine" as a country.

In a partial list of some of the conflicts in which religion is a factor, the report includes "Bosnia, Northern Ireland, and Israel-Palestine." □

## Pluralism poll on Israeli views results in unintended findings

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — The results of a new survey of Israeli attitudes about religious pluralism are not having the effects intended by the Orthodox group that commissioned it.

In fact, the results are being welcomed by leaders of the Reform and Conservative movements, who are hailing the findings as a vindication of their views of the religious pluralism controversy.

A study of 500 adult Israeli Jews was conducted Jan. 22 by the Gallup Institute/Israel for the Orthodox Union, a New York-based organization that represents centrist Orthodox congregations and concerns. The poll had a margin of error of a little more than 4 percent.

Those responding to the O.U. poll were asked 16 questions. The answers to just six of them were made public by the O.U., which then tried to withdraw one of the findings from its news release because it was "confusing," said the O.U.'s president, Dr. Mandell Ganchrow.

That finding was that nearly half of those surveyed said there can be only one standard regarding conversions to Judaism in Israel, while 43 percent believe that more than one standard is acceptable.

Officials of the liberal movements suggested that the finding was revoked because it didn't support the O.U.'s claims that the liberal movements are virtually unknown and unwanted in the Jewish state.

The survey was conducted just as the most recent chapter in the ongoing battle over the rights of non-Orthodox movements in Israel was concluded.

Two different proposals have been put forward in an effort to resolve the controversial issue surrounding the lack of official recognition of Reform and Conservative conversions in the Jewish state.

The fate of those proposals is far from certain, but it made the O.U. survey results especially pertinent.

The poll found that while 53 percent of Israelis don't know any Reform or Conservative Jews and 33 percent know very few, the Israeli public is evenly divided about how much it knows about the liberal movements.

About one-third of Israelis polled said they don't know anything, or very little, about Reform and Conservative Judaism; one-third said they know something about the liberal movements; and one-third said they know a lot about them, said Charles Levine, a public relations representative who spoke for the O.U. during its conference held in Israel last week.

The O.U., like many Orthodox groups in Israel and in America, has been lobbying hard to ensure that the Chief Rabbinate retain sole control over conversions and other matters of personal status, such as marriage and divorce.

Ganchrow said the O.U. plans to use the data as a basis to determine the extent of its outreach in Israel and how the group should be spending its time and money.

The survey also found that:

- Nearly 45 percent surveyed believe the Chief Rabbinate is the most appropriate body to decide the question "Who is a Jew?" contrasted with 27 percent who prefer that Israel's courts decide

and 15 percent who think that the matter should be determined in the Knesset.

- For a circumcision, wedding, funeral or other personal ceremony, 42 percent of respondents said they would prefer that an Orthodox rabbi officiate, 22 percent said they would prefer a Reform rabbi, 10 percent a Conservative rabbi and 11 percent said they didn't care. Six percent said that they preferred none of those options, and 8 percent said they didn't know.

- Seventy-seven percent said they would not be interested in joining a Reform or Conservative synagogue or community.

Conservative and Reform reaction was swift.

"I'm very grateful to the Orthodox Union," said Rabbi Jerome Epstein, executive vice president of the United Synagogue for Conservative Judaism.

Epstein said he believed the survey's findings underscore the potential for the Conservative movement's success in the Jewish state.

Epstein said that if 45 percent of respondents prefer that the Chief Rabbinate be the sole arbiter of Jewish status, then over half do not.

"That's basically what we've been saying: Yes, the Chief Rabbinate has the legal right to do what they're doing, but they don't have the support of the people," he said.

For his part, Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the Reform movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations, said the fact that almost half as many respondents said they would prefer Reform officiation at a life-cycle ceremony as would prefer Orthodox "is extraordinary."

"These numbers tell me that given how small we are, we're remarkably well known and there is sympathy to us because people are simply unhappy with the coercive monopolistic nature of religious life in Israel," Yoffie said.

"The numbers are not unfavorable to us, but even if they were, political rights are not determined by polling.

"Israel has to be a democratic country which allows for freedom of religion, and you do that because it's the character of democratic government and it's the right thing to do." □

## Israelis discuss conversion law

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Members of a Knesset committee lobbied Israel's chief rabbis to back a government committee's recommendations to resolve the conversion crisis in Israel.

Israel's chief Ashkenazi rabbi, Yisrael Meir Lau, told the members of the Absorption Committee that the rabbinate's council would render a decision after reviewing the Ne'eman Committee's recommendations.

The council is slated to discuss the matter next week.

The Ne'eman Committee, after seven months of complex and intensive negotiations, recommended last month a plan that would have the Orthodox, Conservative and Reform movements jointly prepare potential converts.

The formal conversion would be conducted by Orthodox religious courts.

While the Reform and Conservative movements have indicated their acceptance of the Ne'eman Committee's plan, the politically powerful fervently Orthodox parties in Israel — Shas, Agudat Yisrael and Degel HaTorah — issued a joint edict last week rejecting the Ne'eman Committee's approach. □