



# Daily News Bulletin

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81<sup>st</sup> Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### U.S. officials meet on peace

President Clinton held a rare White House meeting on the Middle East peace process with his top foreign policy advisers to figure out how to get the Israelis and Palestinians "off the dime," said White House spokesman Mike McCurry.

At the session, which included Vice President Al Gore, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Sandy Berger, the national security adviser, Clinton decided that he would travel to Israel if there was a chance of a breakthrough, according to McCurry.

### Clinton reappoints Lerman

President Clinton reappointed Miles Lerman as chairman of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council.

Lerman was at the center of controversy earlier this year when he extended an invitation to the museum to Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat, then retracted it before extending it again.

The museum's executive council forced the museum's director, Walter Reich, to resign after the incident, prompting supporters of Reich to publicly oppose Lerman's reappointment.

### Report: Yatom Ok'd operation

The Israeli Mossad agents who were apprehended in Switzerland in February reportedly wanted to assassinate businessmen suspected of helping Hezbollah acquire biological and chemical weapons.

A report in the London Times quoted an unidentified Mossad agent who said the Swiss operation was approved by former Mossad leader Danny Yatom in an effort to salvage his reputation.

Yatom's reputation was sullied after an attempted Mossad assassination of a Hamas leader in Jordan last September. [Page 4]

### Sheinbein to stay in Israel

An American teen-ager who fled to Israel after allegedly committing a brutal murder in Maryland will remain, for now, in the Jewish state.

Maryland prosecutors rejected this week a compromise offered by Israel that would have brought Samuel Sheinbein back to the United States to stand trial, but serve any jail time in Israel.

The 17-year-old Sheinbein fled to Israel after the murder was committed in September, claiming Israeli citizenship.

## BEHIND THE HEADLINES

### Israel's Labor head launches own lobbying campaign in D.C.

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Two years after slamming Israel's Likud Party for lobbying in the United States against the sitting Israeli government, the opposition Labor Party has begun a similar initiative on this side of the Atlantic.

The White House warmly received Labor Party leader Ehud Barak on Feb. 20, as two top Labor activists toured Capitol Hill drumming up support for the man they hope will be the next prime minister of Israel.

Barak is certainly not the first Israeli to come to the United States seeking ways to undermine a political opponent. But many observers said his effort seemed particularly ironic in light of Labor's concerted campaign to ostracize Likud officials who attacked Labor here when Likud was out of power.

The campaign for influence in Washington comes at a critical juncture and could have enormous impact as the United States prepares to launch a new peace initiative.

If President Clinton follows through with his plan to revive the flagging Israeli-Palestinian peace process, it would mark the first time since Ronald Reagan was in office that the United States has put forward its own detailed and specific proposal on the peace process.

Reports continue to fly — although administration officials deny them — that Clinton and U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright will soon issue an ultimatum to the Palestinians and Israelis that will include a threat to go public and blame whichever side they feel responsible for the delay. Aware of the high stakes involved, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu circumvented the Israeli Embassy this week and dispatched his own envoy to work against the U.S. initiative.

Israeli opposition leaders have been working Capitol Hill since the mid-1980s. But now many American Jewish activists say that such activity may be getting out of hand.

"It gets kind of crowded, whatever side your talking about, when you have this kind of traffic," one longtime Jewish activist said on the condition that his name not be used.

From 1993 to 1996, Likud lobbyists, widely known as the "Gang of Three," worked the halls of Congress to undermine the peace policies of the successive governments of Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres.

Labor Party leaders, from the prime ministers on down, accused the trio of officials of reaching a new low by lobbying for specific legislation to pre-empt the Israeli government's peace initiatives with the Palestinians and Syrians. Yoram Ettinger, a former Israeli congressional liaison under the previous Likud regime, led the group.

But now, it appears that Labor is adopting many of the same practices.

Last week Barak's foreign policy adviser, Alon Pinkas, and Stanley Ringler, head of the Labor Party's North America desk, met with at least a dozen members of Congress or their aides, Democratic Party officials and Jewish organizational officials to lay the groundwork for future efforts. Specifically, Labor officials are expressing dismay with the lack of progress in the peace process since Netanyahu came to power in 1996. The Labor Party, whose platform advocates a Palestinian state, has indicated it would move faster in implementing agreements reached with the Palestinians.

When asked whether he was launching a Labor "gang," Barak said in a recent interview, "Maybe we have something to learn from it and to find a way to establish our own — not a gang — but a group of people who will advise congressmen."

So far, Labor has not crossed what many describe as the red line for opposition

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Officers question Israeli pullback

Senior Israeli military officers expressed doubt over the feasibility of a conditional Israeli troop withdrawal from southern Lebanon.

The Israel Defense Force chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Amnon Shahak, was quoted as telling the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee that it was unlikely that Syria, the main power broker in Lebanon, would let Beirut go ahead and reach a separate security arrangement with Israel.

### Suspected terrorists arrested

Palestinian police reportedly arrested seven men on suspicion of being active in the fundamentalist Hamas organization.

Relatives of the seven said the arrests were carried out at the men's homes in Nablus and the Balata refugee camp.

### Palestinians observe strike

Shops and schools were closed in eastern Jerusalem as Palestinians observed a general strike to protest Israeli policy in the city and a planned tour by Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert.

In calling for the sanctions, the Palestinian Fatah organization said in a leaflet that "the danger to Jerusalem has never been as great as it is today."

### Son of Kahane cleared

Israel's Supreme Court deared right-wing activist Benjamin Ze'ev Kahane of charges of inciting rebellion.

The court overturned a district court ruling against Kahane on charges of distributing leaflets calling for attacks on Arabs.

The case involving Kahane marked the first time that a charge of rebellion was brought before the high court.

Kahane is the son of the late extremist Rabbi Meir Kahane.

party activity — lobbying for specific legislation against the wishes of the government.

But still, many Jewish activists expressed surprise at the irony that Labor officials are now laying the groundwork for the type of strategy they so vehemently opposed when they were in power. "This smacks of glass houses," said one Jewish activist, who is sympathetic to Labor policies.

The Labor effort is even more stinging, many say, because it comes in contrast to the cool reception Netanyahu continues to receive from the Clinton administration.

After refusing to meet with Netanyahu for several months, Clinton received the Israeli prime minister in late January only after U.S. officials carefully scripted an identical session between Clinton and Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat.

While details of the hourlong Barak-Clinton meeting remain sparse, Barak said of the meeting, "We talked about the Iraqi crisis and potential responses on Saddam and the implications for the overall Middle East peace process." But sources have said Barak, a former Israel Defense Force chief of staff, and Clinton spoke briefly about the emerging U.S. peace plan that the White House could unveil later this month.

Under the plan, according to sources, Israel would be required to withdraw from another 13.1 percent of the West Bank. That redeployment would be made in phases and would be directly linked to Palestinian cooperation and action on security issues.

Barak is said to have told Clinton that the Israeli public would welcome his plan as long as there is no perception of exaggerated American pressure.

For its part, the Netanyahu government would prefer to see a smaller redeployment and wants any subsequent redeployments to be part of final-status negotiations.

As part of his own campaign against the U.S. administration's plan, Netanyahu dispatched his senior adviser, David Bar-Illan, who arrived in Washington this week to drum up support for Netanyahu in Congress and in the Jewish community.

At the last minute, Israel's former ambassador to the United States, Zalman Shoval, stayed in Israel to work with a delegation of American Jewish leaders who were on their annual mission to Israel.

Delegates of the umbrella group, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, voiced objection Monday to any attempt by the Clinton administration to pressure Israel to break the deadlock in peace talks with the Palestinians.

"We believe strongly that preconditions, or conditions imposed, as in the past will not find success," said Melvin Salberg, chairman of the Conference of Presidents.

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the group, said Clinton had assured the organization that the United States "will not second-guess issues concerning Israel's defense."

He said any proposal that appeared to be "an imposition or an ultimatum" on Israel would complicate efforts to revive the talks. But one member of the conference, speaking on condition of anonymity, said there is a "widespread perception" among U.S. Jews that "Israel is in fact dragging its feet on the peace process, even though it has legitimate concerns of reciprocity" by the Palestinians.

But even those who believe the United States should play a more active role said this should be done quietly.

"To varying degrees, some of us are in favor of the U.S. proposing solutions and making suggestions privately," said Philip Meltzer, president of the Association of Reform Zionists of America.

For his part, Barak told the Conference of Presidents that the United States should move its own plan forward and that it should not be interpreted as pressure.

Clinton runs "the most friendly administration in American history," he said.

While Barak may have Clinton's ear, it is less clear how much success he and his Labor colleagues will have on Capitol Hill, which leans more toward Likud ideology.

Labor has planned its next move. Sources say a visit by Ori Orr, a Labor member of Knesset, is expected later this month. "Many fresh congressmen and senators haven't had an opportunity to learn the Middle East in detail," Barak said in the interview.

"We may be able to explain the real situation of what is really needed of both sides in a way that will be more contributing to the success of peace," he said.

But as the Israeli premier has already made clear, Barak will have competition. □

(JTA correspondent Avi Machlis in Jerusalem contributed to this report.)



## Daily News Bulletin

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## JEWISH WORLD

### Sharansky: Israel-Russia ties linked to Iran's military effort

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Natan Sharansky has made it clear that an expansion of Israeli-Russian ties depends on Moscow ending any assistance to Iran's ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons programs.

The former Prisoner of Zion, who is currently Israel's trade and industry minister, conveyed that message during his two-day visit to the Russian capital this week.

The visit came as Russian President Boris Yeltsin reshuffled his Cabinet in a move that some saw as an indication of a possible shift in Moscow's sales of nuclear technology to Iran. It also came two weeks after officials with the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, the main umbrella group of American Jewish organizations, pressed Moscow on the Iran issue.

While in Moscow, Sharansky held talks with top-ranking Russian officials, including Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov and Yuri Koptev, who is in charge of the Russian space agency.

Russia is reportedly involved in the construction of an Iranian nuclear power plant, which Israel says might help Iran advance its military nuclear program.

Earlier this year, the Kremlin announced that it has stopped supplying missile technology to Iran, and officials have said they have thwarted plans of some Russian companies to provide the Islamic republic with technology that has military applications.

At a news conference here Tuesday, Sharansky said, "There is absolutely no evidence that the Russian government is deliberately promoting" Iran's missile program, but he added that "the knowledge of Russian scientists, technologies of Russian companies are being used in Iran." He urged the Yeltsin government to do "everything possible to prevent the leak" of missile technology from Russia to Iran.

On Monday, Yeltsin dismissed his atomic energy minister, Viktor Mikhailov, one of his longest-serving Cabinet members. Mikhailov has been known as a major supporter of nuclear cooperation with Iran.

One leading Russian expert said Mikhailov had implemented "his own personal policy," particularly regarding sales of nuclear technology to Iran.

At the end of Sharansky's stay in Moscow — the second since his release from a Soviet labor camp in a 1986 East-West prisoner exchange — he was expected to visit the Moscow Institute for Physics and Technology, the school from which he graduated 30 years ago. □

### Jewish bachelor finds love, but she won't go to Alaska

NEW YORK (JTA) — The Alaskan Jewish bachelor who came to New York to find a bride is considering something he never thought he'd do: Move to the Big Apple.

Jay Ramras, 33, came to New York four months ago from Fairbanks, Ala., at a relative's suggestion. With approximately one-third of the nation's Jewish population, and a demographic that favors men over women, Ramras figured the odds were good that he could find a Jewish bride here.

An owner of a growing chain of restaurants, Ramras quickly became a cause celebre in New York. He dined at the trendiest spots, spoke at synagogues, hosted singles' events and was the subject of weekly updates in New York magazine.

He also dated dozens of women. He was about to give up and return home when he met someone who stole his heart. Ramras' choice is a 28-year-old Jewish marketing executive. There's one catch, though: she won't move to Alaska.

So he was scheduled to head back to Fairbanks this week for that time-honored experience: giving the relationship some breathing room — perhaps distance will make the heart grow fonder. He also wants to get back to real life. "I'm not a playboy," he says. "I'm a worker bee." □

### Israeli arrested in Russia

An Israeli was arrested for allegedly trying to smuggle diamonds out of Russia.

According to customs officials, Avraham Aderet was hiding diamonds worth more than \$150,000. Aderet is currently being held in an airport detention facility.

According to investigators with the Moscow police department, Aderet said an unidentified person had asked him to transfer the diamonds on an El Al flight bound for Tel Aviv.

The Israeli Embassy in Moscow confirmed the arrest and said it was monitoring the situation.

Representatives of Moscow's Jewish community say they have been making every effort to ease the situation of the 45-year-old Tel Aviv resident, who is an observant Jew.

### Lawyer appeals for Hass

The lawyer for a former Italian SS officer asked an appeals court to overturn Karl Hass' conviction for his role in Italy's worst World War II massacre.

The lawyer said Hass, who was freed despite being convicted last year, was simply following Hitler's orders when he participated in the 1944 Ardeatine Caves massacre that killed 335 Italians, 75 of them Jews.

### Hate groups increase

The number of hate groups in America is on the rise, according to a report by the Southern Poverty Law Center.

The report attributes the rise to the proliferation of hate-related Internet sites and white power rock-and-roll music.

### Convent given to government

A group of nuns, whose convent is on the outskirts of Auschwitz have given the building to the Polish government. The Carmelite nuns built the convent in the 1980s, but left in 1993 after protests from Jewish groups about the location of the convent.

### L.A. offers reward

The City of Los Angeles is offering a \$20,000 reward for information regarding arson attacks at two Orthodox synagogues during Chanukah.

The fires damaged portions of Congregation Kehillas Yaacov and Congregation Shaarei Tefilah, which are located on the same block in the traditionally Jewish Fairfax district.

In announcing the reward at a news conference, the captain of the Los Angeles City Fire Department, Steve Ruda, said that a two-month investigation by local and federal officials "has come up against a lot of dead ends."

NEWS ANALYSIS**Botched Mossad operation further strains ties with Swiss***By Fredy Rom*

BERN (JTA) — It seems ironic that the latest Mossad fiasco took place in Switzerland.

For more than a year, Switzerland has suffered strained relations with Israel and the larger Jewish world over allegations that Swiss banks helped bankroll the Nazi war effort and hoarded the wealth of Jews who opened secret accounts here during the Holocaust era.

It is true that Switzerland and Israel have cooperated closely on international security issues and are likely to continue to do so after all the publicity — which neither side desired — surrounding the failed Mossad operation dies down.

The operation was foiled last month when police surprised five Mossad agents attempting to bug an apartment in a Bern suburb.

The apartment was believed to belong to a suspected Hezbollah operative who was suspected of helping the fundamentalist movement plan terror attacks on Jewish and Israeli targets in Switzerland.

But according to a report in the London Times on Tuesday, the bugging operation may have been only a cover story. An unidentified Mossad officer based in Brussels told the Times that the agents were on a mission to assassinate two people — one of them the suspected Hezbollah operative — who were suspected of helping the Islamic militant group acquire chemical and biological weapons.

One of the Israeli agents was arrested, and the other four were released after being detained briefly. There was speculation here this week that the detained Mossad agent would be expelled soon, as Swiss authorities sought to put an end to the affair.

Just the same, the affair may have repercussions on the seemingly unrelated issue of Switzerland's activities during the war years. Last year, as newly released archives painted an increasingly dark picture of Swiss activities during World War II, there were repeated backlashes against local Jews — and the international Jewish community — for what some Swiss citizens perceived as a smear campaign against them.

It seems likely, at least among those already angered by the perceived Jewish onslaught, that the Mossad operation would further fuel their reactions.

"Of course, the attack against Switzerland will have some influence in the country's stance against the demands of Jewish organizations," a high-ranking Swiss diplomat who serves as an adviser to President Flavio Cotti was reported as saying at a dinner for members of the media.

"In the future, we will be able to turn back such demands more forcefully," the diplomat added. He was presumably referring to international efforts to force Switzerland to take further steps to make reparations for its wartime actions.

Swiss banks have already established a Holocaust Memorial Fund totaling about \$190 million, some of whose moneys have already been distributed to Holocaust survivors in Eastern Europe.

The country is scheduled to hold a controversial referendum later this year regarding the establishment of a separate \$7 billion foundation for victims of disasters, presumably including the Holocaust.

It is unclear whether the fallout from the Mossad episode would affect the referendum's outcome.

A spokesman for the Swiss Foreign Ministry denied that the Mossad fiasco would be linked to how Switzerland deals with allegations regarding its wartime behavior.

"These are two different issues," Franz Egle said in an interview. At the same time, he added, they could indeed become intertwined by some officials — but not by anyone in "our ministry."

Meanwhile, Israel issued a formal apology last Friday for the Mossad operation, but stopped short of pledging that the foreign intelligence agency would refrain from future actions on Swiss territory.

The director general of Israel's Foreign Ministry, Eitan Ben-Tsur, expressed "Israel's regrets over the incident and the complications caused as a result to the Swiss government."

Ben-Tsur also wrote that "terror presents a continuous threat to the security of Israel and its citizens as well as to the peace process and stability" in the Middle East.

The letter, which Switzerland had demanded, received a lukewarm reception in Bern.

"President Cotti has taken note of the apology from the Israeli government and has called it a positive step by Israel," a Swiss Foreign Ministry spokeswoman told reporters in Bern. "Nonetheless, the act remains a severe and unacceptable violation of Swiss sovereignty."

She added that Cotti was still deciding whether he would go ahead with a visit to Israel that had been planned for May.

The Mossad operation was launched after Israel received information that the Iranian-backed fundamentalist Hezbollah movement was planning a terror attack on Jewish targets in Switzerland, including the Israeli Embassy, according to newspaper reports.

The failed operation was believed to be the straw that broke the professional back of Mossad head Danny Yatom, who resigned last week. Yatom had already come under fire from a government-appointed commission in connection with another botched Mossad operation — an assassination attempt on a Hamas official last September in Jordan.

The target of the Mossad operation in Bern was Abdallah El-Zein, a 32-year-old Lebanese national.

He reportedly helped to coordinate Hezbollah activities in Europe and maintained close contacts with the Iranian Embassy in Switzerland.

But one Israeli newspaper quoted the man's former wife as saying that he had not lived in the apartment building targeted by the Mossad for four years.

The Mossad officer interviewed by the London Times said that at least one member of the team that bungled the Jordan operation was among the agents detained in Switzerland.

But the Times commented that in making the disclosures about the Swiss operation, the "disgruntled" Mossad officer "appeared to be motivated by a desire to influence the appointment" of Yatom's successor.

The paper noted that senior figures are trying to dissuade Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu "from appointing another outsider, like former Major-General Yatom, unfamiliar with the world of covert intelligence." □

(JTA correspondents Naomi Segal in Jerusalem and Douglas Davis in London contributed to this report.)