



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 77, No. 8

Wednesday, January 13, 1999

82nd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Religious council bill put on hold

A Knesset committee refused to back a bill that would block the appointment of non-Orthodox representatives to local religious councils.

The move, which angered fervently Orthodox legislators, prevented the bill from returning to the full Knesset, which had already approved it in the first of three votes. [Page 4]

Ross: U.S. may play smaller role

The United States may play a smaller role when Israel and the Palestinian Authority launch final-status talks, according to the Clinton administration's Middle East envoy.

"Permanent status is not something that should be mediated," Dennis Ross said during a meeting at the Tel Aviv-based Peres Center for Peace, named after former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres.

"They must learn to live together," he said.

U.S. Supreme Court rules for El Al

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled against a New York woman who had sued El Al Airlines over a preflight body search.

In an 8-1 decision, the court ruled that the Warsaw Convention treaty, which governs international air travel, does not allow people to recover damages for injuries covered by local laws.

The woman said she was inappropriately touched by a female security officer during the search, which occurred in 1993. [Page 3]

Burglars enter pollster's office

Burglars broke into the Washington office of a leading American pollster recently hired by Israel's Labor Party for the May 17 elections.

Stanley Greenberg, who is one of President Clinton's primary pollsters, told police that his files on Israel were among those targeted in what he called a sophisticated break-in.

Rabbi indicted in murder case

A grand jury in New Jersey indicted a rabbi on charges of conspiring to murder his wife in 1994.

Prosecutors charge that Rabbi Fred Neulander hired a man to kill his wife because he was worried that their impending divorce would lead to the disclosure of his adultery.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Jewish groups keeping quiet as battle over Pollard intensifies

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — As President Clinton nears a decision on whether to grant clemency to Jonathan Pollard, opponents of the convicted spy are coming out of the woodwork in a concerted, unyielding effort to ensure that he remains locked up for life.

Pollard's supporters in the Jewish community, by contrast, have opted for a more low-key approach to winning his freedom, recognizing it as a losing public campaign and instead hoping to quietly persuade Clinton with the force of their arguments.

Clinton received recommendations on Pollard's case this week from his senior national security aides, nearly three months after pledging a review at the signing of the Wye peace accords.

All remain adamantly opposed to releasing the former U.S. navy analyst, who is serving a life sentence for handing over thousands of top-secret documents to Israel in 1984 and 1985.

The two top members of the Senate Intelligence Committee have also weighed in, urging fellow senators to demand that Pollard remain jailed, as have seven former U.S. defense secretaries.

At the same time, senior members of the U.S. intelligence community are now saying that Pollard did more damage to the country's national security than the public has been told.

Intelligence sources, breaking their long silence on the issue, released new information to The New Yorker magazine this week detailing four major U.S. intelligence systems they say Pollard betrayed. These allegations appear intended to undercut arguments that Pollard's admitted acts of espionage did no real damage to American national security.

Pollard told one of his supporters this week the new charges are "garbage."

The New Yorker said its sources had gone public because they feared Clinton "is about to give in to Israeli pressure to release Pollard."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu demanded Pollard's release during Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations in October at the Wye Plantation on Maryland's Eastern Shore.

A proposed deal for Pollard's release fell apart after the director of the Central Intelligence Agency, George Tenet, threatened to resign if Clinton agreed to the plan.

Clinton has twice denied clemency to Pollard — in 1993 and 1996.

In the face of the hostile and highly public anti-Pollard campaign, the Jewish community has remained comparatively quiet. A small cadre of supporters has been actively pressing the issue, while most of the organized Jewish community has remained on the sidelines.

The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, B'nai B'rith and the National Council of Young Israel have all sent letters to Clinton and to White House counsel Charles Ruff asking for leniency and for an opportunity to discuss the Pollard issue.

And three of the nation's most prominent Jews have asked for a meeting with Clinton to discuss the case.

Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel, World Jewish Congress President Edgar Bronfman and Harvard Law School Professor Alan Dershowitz, all of whom have close ties to the

MIDEAST FOCUS

Netanyahu changes policy

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reversed economic policy and declared it is time to "loosen our belts" and fund social spending programs.

Critics charged the premier made the move to win support in the run-up to the May elections.

Palestinian wounded in attack

A Palestinian was seriously wounded in a knife attack in Jerusalem's fervently Orthodox Mea Shearim neighborhood. The assault may be linked to eight other stabbings believed to be the work of a Jewish extremist, police said.

U.S. millionaire meets candidates

A Florida millionaire who backs Jewish settlement expansion in Jerusalem and the West Bank arrived in Israel to meet with right-wing candidates for prime minister. Traveling with a group of other Jewish philanthropists who share his views, Dr. Irving Moskowitz did not say whether he intends to give financial backing to any candidate.

Sharon lauds Japanese proposal

A Japanese plan for a unilateral Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon is "very impressive," Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon said. The plan, which also calls for a resumption of Israeli-Syrian negotiations is reportedly being considered by Damascus and Beirut. Japanese Foreign Minister Masahiko Komura presented the plan during visits to each of the respective countries during a recent trip.

Labor legislator joins Shahak

A member of the Israeli Knesset said he is bolting the Labor Party to join the centrist party being formed by former army chief Amnon Lipkin-Shahak. Hagai Meiron's move marked the first defection from Labor to Shahak and raised concerns among Labor leaders that it may trigger additional departures.



Daily News Bulletin

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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.
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president, were preparing a letter this week asking Clinton to delay any decision until they have a chance to state the case personally for releasing him.

"The crimes of Jonathan Pollard were contemptible, and we reject any effort to justify or rationalize them," a draft of their letter states.

"At the same time, in light of his many years of incarceration and his repeated statements of contrition, we would wish to address to you our hope that as president you could consider the redeeming quality of mercy by invoking compassion at the human level."

Outside those efforts, there has been little public clamor in recent weeks among Pollard's supporters for his release — and certainly nothing to match the vitriol of the opponents.

According to some Jewish leaders, however, their reticence results from both practical realities and tactics.

The issue of clemency has long been a source of division in the Jewish community. Over the years, several Jewish groups have waged various campaigns to win Pollard's freedom, but most efforts became bogged down in controversy.

While a consensus has formed in the community in recent years that Pollard should be released on humanitarian grounds, "for many it's not a pressing issue," said Seymour Reich, a former chairman of the Conference of Presidents who serves as co-chairman of the group's Pollard committee.

"There are some people for whom Pollard's fate is a matter of intense concern," but it would be "hard to say that it's a major priority for the organized Jewish community," said Lawrence Rubin, executive vice chairman of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs.

The council, an umbrella body of local and national Jewish organizations, supports Pollard's release but has elected not to lobby publicly on the convicted spy's behalf.

The issue also presents something of a Catch-22. Each time Pollard's supporters in the Jewish community have drawn public attention to his case, the opposition has only grown louder.

For that reason, Jewish advocates say they have opted to press the issue behind the scenes.

"The more drama that's associated with this, the worse it turns out to be for Pollard," said Phil Baum, executive director of the American Jewish Congress.

"There have to be patient, persistent efforts, not highly dramatized and celebrated," said Baum, who co-chairs the Pollard committee of the Conference of Presidents.

"This is an issue that needs to be done quietly," said Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, which has taken no official position on Pollard. A flood of letters or newspaper ads would serve no purpose at this point, he added, because "the administration knows well where the community is."

At the same time, Pollard and many of his closest supporters have expressed their frustration in recent weeks that the Jewish community is not doing more on his behalf.

His wife, Esther, said in an interview that nobody is asking Jewish organizational leaders to "march a brass band down Pennsylvania Avenue. Nothing could be more counterproductive than public grandstanding at this point."

But she added: "Given the threat to due process to Jews in America, given the blatant disregard of justice, one would have expected a far more vigorous response from every sector of the American Jewish community and Israel."

While the specific recommendations Clinton received this week from the departments of State, Defense and Justice, as well as the CIA, remain under wraps, they are certain to make clear the extent of opposition Clinton will have to overcome within his administration if he opts for leniency.

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, for her part, told Clinton she believes there are no compelling foreign policy considerations to justify releasing Pollard.

White House officials have said they will make sure the full array of opinions are heard before the president makes a decision.

But it remains unclear whether Jewish advocates will have an opportunity to make the case for Pollard's release personally.

It is also unclear when Clinton will arrive at a conclusion, although some administration officials have said they believe he may wait weeks or even months before deciding. □

JEWISH WORLD

Clinton forms Nazi archives panel

President Clinton created a working group to make all classified American records relating to Nazi war criminals available to the public as soon as possible. Several Cabinet officials, including Defense Secretary William Cohen and Attorney General Janet Reno, were named to the group.

Bishops criticize Polish priest

A Polish priest who made repeated anti-Semitic statements in the past was criticized by several bishops for selling anti-Semitic publications at his parish church.

Father Henryk Jankowski reportedly moved the bookstand from the church to his residence next door after two representatives of the Gdansk archbishop ordered him to stop selling what they described as books that "promote hatred."

In 1997 the Polish church suspended Jankowski for one year for making anti-Semitic comments from the pulpit.

Frank house sees record visitors

A record number of visitors toured the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam last year. More than 822,000 people visited the house where the teen-age diarist and her family hid from the Nazis, a 16 percent increase over 1997, according to officials at the Anne Frank Foundation.

The officials attributed the increase to publicity surrounding the recent publication of newly discovered pages from her diary.

Rabbi injured in car accident

A Reform rabbi remains in critical condition in Washington after the car she was driving spun out of control on an icy patch of road.

Rabbi Lynne Landsberg, the director of the Mid-Atlantic Council of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, was driving her son to Hebrew school when the accident occurred. Her son was not seriously injured.

Jewish journalist prize awarded

A columnist for the Israeli daily newspaper Ha'aretz and a contributing editor for the Jerusalem Report magazine are dividing this year's JDC-Smolard Award for journalism.

The judges gave the awards to Eliyahu Salpeter for his writing on Israel-Diaspora issues and Micha Odenheimer of the Jerusalem Report for a cover story he wrote on Ethiopian Jews.

The award was established by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and is named for longtime JTA Editor Boris Smolard, who donated the award's annual \$2,500 prize.

U.S. Supreme Court rules for El Al in case involving passenger search

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A New York woman who sued the Israeli airline El Al over a preflight body search cannot collect damages, the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled.

In an 8-1 decision Tuesday, the justices said a 1929 international treaty on air travel precludes passengers from invoking domestic U.S. law to sue airlines over matters not covered by the treaty.

The court overturned a ruling by a federal appeals court, which held that Tsui Yuan Tseng, a clinical nutritionist at the Beth Israel Medical Center in New York, could sue El Al under New York personal-injury law for emotional trauma she claims stemmed from a stringent El Al security search.

The incident occurred in 1993, when Tseng, while checking in for a flight from John F. Kennedy International Airport to Tel Aviv, was classified as a "high-risk" passenger, confined for more than an hour, questioned and subjected to what she called an inappropriate search by a female security guard of her entire body.

Tseng sued for \$5 million, accusing El Al of false imprisonment, inflicting psychological and emotional injuries, and damaging or losing some of her personal belongings.

The airline, backed by the Clinton administration, argued that it is not liable because the incident did not fall within the provisions of the 1929 Warsaw Convention treaty on international air travel.

In throwing out Tseng's lawsuit, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, writing for the court majority, said, "We would be hard put to conclude that the delegates at Warsaw meant to subject air carriers to the distinct, non-uniform liability rules of the individual signatory nations."

She added, "Courts of other nations bound by the Convention have also recognized the treaty's encompassing pre-emptive effect."

Justice John Paul Stevens, the lone dissenter to the court's ruling, said a treaty should not be interpreted to pre-empt a nation's laws unless it clearly states it intends to do so.

The decision is not expected to affect future cases. Last fall, the United States ratified a new treaty that modifies the Warsaw Convention in a way that would specifically prevent similar lawsuits. □

Castro attends Chanukah fete in historic Havana synagogue visit

By Bill Gladstone

TORONTO (JTA) — Cuban President Fidel Castro was an honored guest at a Havana synagogue recently, where he mingled with 200 congregants during Chanukah celebrations last month.

The visit was the Cuban leader's first to a synagogue, according to the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, whose local official in Havana led the Chanukah program.

Castro spent about two hours in the synagogue, where he participated in the lighting of Chanukah candles and heard a children's musical presentation, according to officials of the Canadian Jewish Congress.

The group maintains regular contact with the 1,200-member Cuban Jewish community and has been sending them Passover foods for more than 30 years.

Community leader Jose Miller told Jack Silverstone, CJC executive vice president, that Castro expressed his admiration for the Jewish people and their history, and spoke out against racism.

In a speech during his Dec. 20 visit to the synagogue, the Cuban leader commended the way in which Jews have maintained their identity and continuity despite the tragedies they have endured. □

Haifa religious council to meet with non-Orthodox representatives

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A Knesset vote aimed at setting back the cause of religious pluralism in Israel has been put on hold.

In the latest in a string of victories for the Conservative and Reform movements, a Knesset committee refused this week to back a bill that would block the appointment of non-Orthodox representatives to local religious councils.

Tuesday's move by the Knesset Law Committee, which angered fervently Orthodox legislators, prevented the bill from returning to the full Knesset.

The committee vote came on the heels of a court decision that helped clear the way for the Haifa religious council to meet next week with Orthodox, Conservative and Reform representatives.

The bill — designed to bypass a recent Supreme Court decision requiring the government to appoint Conservative and Reform representatives to municipal religious councils — was approved last month by the Knesset in the first of three votes.

Religious legislators had sought passage of the "bypass bill," which requires every member of a religious council to abide by rulings of the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate. Reform and Conservative leaders were furious after the Knesset backed the bill in the first vote, saying the bill mocked the court's ruling.

This week, the high court issued another decision that blocked Orthodox efforts to prevent Conservative and Reform representatives from taking seats in the powerful religious councils, which have exclusive jurisdiction over marriage, kashrut, burial and other religious matters for all Jews living in Israel.

The court, which ordered the Haifa religious council to allow the participation of non-Orthodox representatives, deemed illegal an order from Interior Minister Eli Suissa of the fervently Orthodox Shas Party to delay the meeting in order to prevent Conservative and Reform members from attending.

While the Haifa council is expected to convene next week, the head of the council, Yitzhak Getz, said he believes that some Orthodox members would boycott the gathering, adding that he would adjourn the meeting if fewer than half of the members attend.

After the Law Committee blocked the bill Tuesday, fervently Orthodox Knesset members lashed out at two religiously observant members of the committee, Alex Lubotzky of the Third Way Party and Zvi Weinberg of the immigrant-rights Yisrael Ba'Aliyah Party, for voting with the majority.

Lubotzky countered that the local religious councils are outmoded and inefficient. Echoing a familiar criticism of the councils, he also charged that they primarily serve as a "source of political jobs."

Along with the dispute over the religious councils, Orthodox legislators have also turned up the heat on another issue in Israel's ongoing battle over religious pluralism.

Drawing criticism from the liberal streams in the United States as well as Israel, the legislators are seeking to revive a bill that would give the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate sole control over conversions performed in Israel.

A liberal U.S. Jewish group weighed in on the twin issues of conversions and the religious councils with an advertisement

Sunday in The New York Times calling on American Jews to flood the Israeli Embassy in Washington with phone calls to oppose the two bills.

"It's time for American Jews to tell the Israeli government exactly what we are. Jews," the New Israel Fund said in the ad.

An official with the embassy said Tuesday that their switchboard had been flooded with calls — but that the campaign had not disrupted normal operations. □

Report: Abu Nidal flees Egypt, seeks safe haven in Iraqi capital

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — Fearful that he may be handed over to a Western government, a Palestinian terrorist said to be responsible for killing or wounding 900 people in 20 countries has moved from Egypt to Iraq, according to news reports here.

Quoting diplomatic sources, the Guardian newspaper said Abu Nidal fled to Baghdad from a Palestinian hospital in a Cairo suburb, where he had been receiving treatment for leukemia.

Now aged 61, and reportedly dying, Jaffa-born Sabri al-Banna adopted his nom de guerre when he joined the Palestine Liberation Organization. After a meteoric rise through the group's hierarchy, he broke with PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat in the early 1970s to oppose the possibility of a negotiated settlement with Israel.

Later, as head of his own Fatah Revolutionary Council — once described by the U.S. State Department as "the most dangerous terrorist organization in existence" — he was, at times, backed by Iraq, Syria and, most recently, Libya, where he had lived until arriving in Cairo last July under a false name and carrying a Tunisian passport.

Since 1974, Abu Nidal's death squads struck at Israeli, Jewish and Western targets, as well as PLO officials who were regarded as moderate. Among Abu Nidal's most recent high-profile attacks were the simultaneous gun-and-grenade attacks on the El Al passenger counters at Rome and Vienna airports in 1985 and the assassination of the PLO intelligence chief in 1991.

Abu Nidal is believed to have moved to Iraq in mid-December and is reportedly being treated in one of the lavishly equipped clinics reserved for Saddam Hussein and his inner circle.

Arab sources were quoted as saying the Libyans, already facing Western pressure over their refusal to extradite two bombing suspects from the 1988 Pan Am 103 crash in Lockerbie, Scotland, wanted to find another country where Abu Nidal could spend his final days. For their part, the Egyptians sought to end an embarrassment for President Hosni Mubarak.

"It is entirely credible that he is in Iraq," said a veteran Middle East analyst. "Saddam doesn't forget a friend, just the same way as he doesn't forget an enemy."

Abu Nidal served as PLO representative to Baghdad in the 1970s.

He is thought to have feared that Egypt would succumb to the sort of pressure that led Sudan to hand over the international terrorist known as Carlos the Jackal, who was seized in 1994, taken to France and convicted of murder charges.

Abu Nidal's organization, broken by internal feuds as its leader became increasingly enfeebled, is no longer considered an active terrorist threat. □