



# Daily News Bulletin

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## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Levy, Annan discuss withdrawal

Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy met in Geneva with U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan to formally announce Israeli plans to pull its troops out of southern Lebanon. Levy said Israel is ready to cooperate with the United Nations to put a peacekeeping mechanism into place to avoid violence after the pullout.

### U.N. honors diplomat rescuers

Dozens of diplomats who saved Jews during the Holocaust were honored at a ceremony at the United Nations. Monday's ceremony was held to mark the opening of a photo exhibit, "Visa for Life: The Righteous Diplomats," at the U.N. building in New York.

### Group calls for jailing Lileikis

The Simon Wiesenthal Center called on Lithuanian officials to jail a suspected Nazi war criminal.

Noting that Aleksandras Lileikis recently published his memoirs, the center said, "It seems obvious that if he is well enough to write such a book, he is certainly capable of being held accountable for his crimes." Lileikis' trial was suspended last year when the judge cited his poor health.

### China: Israel arms deal 'normal'

American concerns about Israeli arms sales to China will have no effect on Beijing's relations with Israel, according to a Chinese Foreign Ministry official.

Israel and China "have developed a relationship of friendship and cooperation" that "will not be affected by external factors," the spokesman said Tuesday about U.S. opposition to Israel's outfitting Chinese cargo planes with advanced radar systems.

"Military exchanges are a part of normal state-to-state relations," he said.

### Book: Jesus copied Menachem

A Jewish would-be messiah named Menachem may have been a role model for Jesus, according to an Israeli researcher.

Menachem, a leader of an ancient Jewish group called the Essenes, saw himself, as Jesus later did, as the suffering son of God, writes Israel Knohl, the head of the Bible Department at the Hebrew University. Knohl based his work on the "Thanksgiving Scroll," which was found hidden among the Dead Sea Scrolls.

## Federation 'owners' gather to address unresolved issues

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — Five months after a highly touted new system for coordinating North America's Jewish federations and setting a continental Jewish communal vision made its debut, a lot of questions remain about just how it will work.

Some of those questions will be addressed next week when leaders of more than 100 federations gather in Washington for what is being billed as an "owners' retreat" for their new umbrella organization, the United Jewish Communities.

Most concretely federations are expected to approve a plan that would essentially commit them to maintain current levels of funding for the UJC and overseas needs for the next two years.

However, many believe that the most critical long-term issues facing the newly formed organization — such as how strong and centralized it will be, the relative powers of the large and small federations and, most controversially, how to ensure that each federation contributes its "fair share" — ultimately will be determined over time and not as a result of one particular vote or discussion.

How these issues are ultimately resolved is important because they will determine the future course of the system that has traditionally been seen as American Jewry's central fund-raising and social welfare organization. Last year the system collectively raised nearly \$790 million for everything from funding Jewish day schools to rescuing and resettling refugees from Ethiopia, Chechnya and Kosovo.

"No matter what we say on pieces of paper, or what the actual resolutions will be, over time things will evolve," Charles Bronfman, chairman of the UJC's board, said in a telephone interview this week.

In addition while federations next week will hear preliminary reports from the UJC committees charged with developing a national budget and assessing overseas needs, neither committee's final recommendations will be ready until June.

Instead of nailing everything into place, the retreat is being viewed as the latest step in the development of the new organization and an attempt to get the federations' "buy-in," as one federation executive put it.

The UJC is a product of the merger of the United Jewish Appeal and the Council of Jewish Federations, which was spurred in large part because community federations wanted to have more control over the national system, particularly on decisions about funding overseas needs. Next week's owners' retreat — so named to emphasize the federations' new control — will define "what federation ownership of the UJC really means," according to the UJC's president and chief executive officer, Stephen Solender.

"We're looking to the federations to tell us what they want," he added.

In perhaps their first assertion of ownership, the federations have already decided to take the issue of obligation and enforcement — initially scheduled for discussion and a vote at next week's meeting — off the table.

The feeling, for now at least, is that instituting threats of punishment and sanctions for federations that do not contribute a certain amount to the national system for dues and overseas needs would only turn communities off. The issue, say many involved, is needlessly divisive, particularly at a time when many federations are uncertain how the UJC will work and whether it will benefit them to participate.

"We're going in focusing on what we're going to do together, not what we're going to do to each other," said Stephen Hoffman, executive vice president of the Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland. "We're a voluntary system, and we believe that

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Militia ally vows fight to the end

The commander of Israel's militia ally in southern Lebanon vowed that his forces would fight on to protect their villages following a planned Israeli withdrawal from the region. "Just like you at Masada, we will fight for our land," Gen. Antoine Lahad said at an Israeli army base.

### Arafat slated to visit Washington

Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat is scheduled to visit Washington later this month for talks with President Clinton and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, the State Department said.

The talks are expected to concentrate on the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, which aim at reaching a final peace accord by September.

### Mossad may become legal

Israel's spy agency may be granted legal status, according to a Justice Ministry spokesman. Until now, the Mossad has lacked a formal framework for its operations. The spokesman's comment Sunday came as the Israeli Knesset is considering a bill to clarify the role of the Shin Bet domestic security service.

### Israel, Egypt to discuss gas deal

Israel and Egypt are expected to renew negotiations for Israel's purchase of Egyptian natural gas.

National Infrastructure Minister Eli Suissa is scheduled to travel to Egypt next week to discuss restarting the talks, which broke off last month.

### Tel Aviv may make Olympic bid

Tel Aviv officials may try to convince Olympic organizers to stage the 2012 games there.

Tel Aviv Mayor Ron Huldai said Monday that city officials have ordered a feasibility study to prepare for a possible bid to host the Games. The plan being studied calls for the conversion of an industrial area along the Yarkon River into an Olympic complex.

when the right process is followed to a conclusion and the needs are self-evident," he said, there "won't be a need to talk about sanctions, but instead, almost everyone will be where we need to be."

Wayne Feinstein, executive vice president of the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco — a federation that some consider a maverick because it has for years operated its own foundation in Israel and channeled only a third of its overseas funds through the national system — echoed that view.

"If the UJC is effective, and if members feel the benefit and value received for that membership, then all of us will willingly and voluntarily contribute what's necessary," said Feinstein.

Most people involved in the process, including Bronfman, Solender and the UJC's executive committee chairman, Joel Tauber, anticipate that the system will ultimately get federations to contribute through "moral suasion," rather than imposing penalties or sanctions on federations that don't cooperate. Despite their calls for greater control, it is unclear how great a priority the whole national system will be for federations, which are preoccupied with the concerns of their local communities.

"Every community has a list of high-priority items, and this is not going to make their top three," said John Uhlmann, past president of the Jewish Federation of Kansas City and a member of the UJC committee making recommendations about overseas needs and allocations.

However, Cleveland's Hoffman believes that if the national process is engaging enough, federations will participate.

"It's the wrong analysis to say federations are more concerned with local needs. That's just a given," he said. "When the national system is able to present a transparent, easily understood picture of what we want to do collectively and the federations participate, they'll pay the appropriate level of attention."

For their part, UJC leaders are heartened by what they describe as a high turnout level for the retreat: 110 out of 189 federations will be sending a total of more than 300 people, according to Solender. "In a voluntary system, people vote with their feet," said Solender. "They have to pay to get there, so the fact that 300 people will be there speaks volumes for the investment the federations are making."

While the merger process has been a lengthy one, UJC leaders say they have made key strides since the last large meeting with the federations, the General Assembly in Atlanta in November, where the UJC was officially launched.

The organization's four pillars, or focus areas — Jewish Renaissance and Renewal, Israel and Overseas, Campaign and Financial Resource Development and Human Services/Social Policy — have formed and held planning meetings.

UJC officials say they hope to leave the retreat with a timetable for working out the remaining details of establishing the UJC and with a green light — and at least temporary funding guarantees — for the pillars to begin their work.

"As a result of the retreat, we'll have the rules of the game set and we'll be given time to produce results," said Tauber. □

## Jewish hoop fans to invade Greek city

ATHENS (JTA) — The Greek city of Salonika is about to take on a distinctly Jewish flavor.

Some 3,000 Israeli basketball fans are expected to descend on the Northern port city for the European basketball tournament April 18-20. The fans are coming to watch the Maccabi Tel Aviv team, a tournament participant.

Airline tickets from Israel to Greece are sold out, hotels are fully booked throughout the Salonika area and requests for tickets by Israeli fans are still pouring in.

At least another 1,000 European Jews are expected to come watch the games.

The local Jewish community is bracing itself — because the games will coincide with Passover and many of the fans will want to attend seders. Salonika's rabbi has already received requests to have him help the fans find kosher facilities for Passover.

But Andrea Sefiha, president of Salonika's Jewish community, told JTA the city does not have a facility large enough to host the expected 4,000 Jewish fans. □



## Daily News Bulletin

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## JEWISH WORLD

### Gay Jews say Reform vote is a step toward acceptance

By Julie Wiener

#### Senate panel to meet on Shoah

The U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee was scheduled to hold a hearing Wednesday on Holocaust-era restitution issues. The panel will examine foreign policy effects of reparations, restitution and anti-Semitism abroad.

#### Insurers agree to post names

European insurance firms agreed to post on the Internet the names of 10,000 Holocaust-era policies that remain unpaid. The agreement came during a meeting Tuesday in Washington of the International Commission on Holocaust Era Insurance Claims. The names can be viewed at [www.icheic.org](http://www.icheic.org).

#### U.S. legislators condemn Haider

The U.S. House of Representatives passed a resolution that condemns the "anti-democratic, racist and xenophobic" views expressed by Jorg Haider and his far-right Freedom Party and calls upon the Clinton administration to continue its scrutiny of the new Austrian government.

The resolution is necessary even though Haider recently resigned from the party because Haider is a force within the government and is governor of one of Austria's most populous provinces, said Rep. Tom Lantos (D-Calif.), who sponsored Monday's resolution.

#### Russian neo-Nazis arrested

Russian police recently arrested 12 members of the country's leading neo-Nazi group.

According to a television report, the arrests came after the police obtained information that one of the leaders of the Omsk branch of Russian National Unity had close ties with the city's mafia.

#### Gadhafi calls invitation a joke

Libyan leader Muammar Gadhafi dismissed reports that Libya had invited a senior Israeli politician to visit as an April Fools' joke.

His comment came after the secretary of Israel's Labor Party, Ra'anana Cohen, said he was invited to visit Libya by the head of the Libyan delegation at a conference of legislators from Mediterranean states that met this week in Marseilles, France.

#### PBS to air film on Jewish brigade

A film about an all-Jewish brigade that fought for the Allies during World War II is scheduled to air next month on U.S. public television.

"In Our Own Hands: The Hidden Story of the Jewish Brigade in World War II" tells the story of the brigade from its formation in the 1930s to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. The film is scheduled to be shown in most U.S. cities on April 26, the eighth night of Passover.

NEW YORK (JTA) — Steven Fruh, 56, grew up thinking homosexuality and religion were incompatible.

So, when he realized he was gay, he abandoned Judaism. But 11 years ago when he discovered Congregation Beth Simchat Torah, it was a "revelation" to him that one could be "observant and gay."

The feeling of acceptance Fruh found upon discovering the world's oldest and largest gay synagogue was experienced by other gay Jews last week when Reform rabbis overwhelmingly approved a resolution affirming that "the relationship of a Jewish, same-gender couple is worthy of affirmation through appropriate Jewish ritual."

The bimah at the Manhattan synagogue — where the rabbis already officiate at gay and lesbian weddings — features two rainbow-colored gay liberation flags alongside the United States and Israeli flags. During a recent Hebrew class there, Fruh and his classmates said the Central Conference of American Rabbis' resolution was an important step toward greater acceptance for gays and lesbians.

"It's important from a symbolic point of view," said Fruh, who was seated next to his partner, Paul Marsolini. "The largest Jewish organization has said our relationships have just as much validity" as the relationships of heterosexual couples, he said.

The resolution, which does not use the words "marriage" or "wedding" and which was modified shortly before the vote to emphasize that not all Reform rabbis agree on same-sex unions, does not make as strong a statement as the Beth Simchat Torah students would have liked.

One student, 32-year-old Kim Felsenthal, said she was disappointed that the resolution did not use the word "marriage," but she described it as "a start."

That view was echoed by Rachel Gartner, a rabbinical student at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, who was teaching the Hebrew class that night.

"I would've liked to see kiddushin," she said, referring to the Hebrew word for marriage. "But as a general broad statement, it's thrilling."

Modifications or not, Marsolini said the resolution is still a "tremendous step forward."

Another student, Marsha Cohen, who introduced herself as the "straight mother of a gay son," said she was excited about the resolution, which she called "a step."

"It's not perfect, but it's pretty good, and the more people get used to it, the better," she said. "Why shouldn't my one son have the same rights and privileges as the other son?"

Class members said they hope the resolution would influence other religious movements. "May the Conservative movement be next!" Fruh exclaimed.

However there was little hope that leaders of Orthodox Judaism, which condemned the resolution, will welcome gays and lesbians anytime soon.

In the synagogue office, next to the large, open room where the Hebrew class was gathered, several board members — meeting to plan the synagogue's first cemetery — reacted positively to the Reform resolution.

"I think it's obvious that it's going to give rabbis that want to perform same-sex marriages more support, without having to worry about losing their jobs," said Yolanda Potasinski, a president of this 27-year-old, 800-member congregation.

The resolution "sets a great example for other movements," Potasinski added, noting that at her own commitment ceremony, the congregation's rabbi, Sharon Kleinbaum, officiated using liturgy based on the traditional Jewish wedding ceremony.

Also, added Potasinski, "People have this stereotype that we're so different, but this is a validation and just kind of another way for people to understand gay and lesbian couples are no different from other Jews."

And, as their meeting that night demonstrated, many Jews have yet to accept them. The cemetery is necessary, explained Potasinski, not only because so many congregants are being lost to AIDS, but because families of many members have refused to allow them to be buried in the family plots. □

**NEWS ANALYSIS****Israel lays the groundwork for withdrawal from Lebanon***By David Landau*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — If there was any remaining uncertainty, Israel made it clear this week that it is planning to proceed with a withdrawal of its forces from southern Lebanon.

Prime Minister Ehud Barak conveyed the message clearly to visiting U.S. Defense Secretary William Cohen, and Foreign Minister David Levy traveled to Geneva to convey the same message to U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

The deadline for a withdrawal is still July 7, but the actual date may come even sooner as Barak gives up any lingering hope of a comprehensive agreement with Syria.

Barak pledged in his election campaign last year to withdraw Israeli troops from southern Lebanon by July, with or without a comprehensive peace agreement with Syria.

Now, apparently, the “with” option has evaporated and only the “without” scenario remains. The Israeli premier, badly hurt politically by Syria’s recent rejection of his peace proposal, must now deliver on the Lebanon withdrawal — or he will lose his remaining credibility with the Israeli public.

To Egypt and other moderate Arab states, Barak’s motives and intentions blend comfortably into their broader strategy.

After all, as the Egyptians have publicly pointed out, it is patently illogical for the Arabs to oppose what they have always demanded: Israel’s withdrawal from sovereign Arab soil.

Barak has sought international backing for the planned withdrawal by saying it would take place under the terms of U.N. Security Council Resolution 425, which called for the pullback in 1978 — and which Israel now plans to implement.

The resolution was expected to top the agenda during Levy’s meeting in Geneva with Annan.

The United States which had asked Israel to slow its diplomatic preparations for the withdrawal, now seems to be agreeing with Levy’s overture to the international community. Just the same, as Cohen made clear in Tel Aviv on Monday, Washington will not deploy troops in southern Lebanon as part of an international peacekeeping force following the Israeli withdrawal.

It was somehow fitting that Levy’s diplomatic encounter signaling Israel’s determination to make the unilateral withdrawal — in the face of angry Syrian objections — should be held in the same city where Syrian President Hafez Assad last week pulled down the curtain on Israeli-Syrian peace negotiations.

Assad’s flat rejection of Israel’s peace proposals, which President Clinton personally conveyed to the Syrian leader in Geneva, was greeted with incredulity both in Jerusalem and in Washington. If Assad was going to offer a humiliating rejection, Israeli and U.S. officials wondered, why had Assad asked Clinton to meet him in the first place?

The officials have been hoping that Assad was playing a game of brinkmanship, but with each passing day since the Geneva summit, that hope is fading.

“The ball is in Syria’s court,” Clinton said after the summit — and it appears that it will be staying there indefinitely as Syrian diplomats fan out among Arab and world capitals to explain that it was Israel’s obstinacy that blocked an agreement.

Syria is demanding a full return of the Golan Heights to the boundary that existed before the 1967 Six-Day War — that is, including the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Israel, which demands full control of what is its most significant water source, suggested trading land elsewhere for the slim strip of shoreline. Barak and other Israeli officials have pointed to the 1923 border, which did not give Syria any presence on the Galilee. Clinton implicitly endorsed Barak’s offer to Assad.

Syria rejected the offer — and is now opposing Israel’s plans for a unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon. Syria has long used Hezbollah gunmen in Lebanon as a proxy, giving them the green light to step up attacks on Israeli troops to try to force concessions.

A unilateral withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanon would deprive Assad of this leverage.

According to several analysts, Syria also opposes the withdrawal because it would throw a harsh spotlight on its own continued presence in Lebanon, where it maintains some 35,000 troops. An Israeli withdrawal, these analysts say, could increase pressure on Syria to leave, too.

Whatever their thinking, Syrian and Lebanese officials are now resorting to threats in order to deter Barak from his course.

The latest of these came over the weekend, when the Lebanese defense minister announced that if Israel leaves, the Syrian army might deploy along the Israeli-Lebanese border.

For 24 years, ever since Syria’s first incursion into Lebanon in 1976, Damascus has been careful not to move its troops south of Sidon under an unwritten agreement with Israel. If it did so now, it would raise tensions between the two countries.

Syria itself was quick this week to dissociate itself from the Lebanese minister’s assertion.

For its part, Israel was slow to react officially, deliberately giving Damascus time to defuse the potential bombshell.

On that level, at least, the two sparring partners still read each other clearly — and understand their common interests. But the danger of armed exchanges, which could quickly escalate to draw in the Syrians, will still be present following an Israeli withdrawal.

Hezbollah gunmen or Palestinian groups that oppose the Oslo peace process, attacking across the border, could trigger massive Israeli retaliations against Lebanon.

Given the high concentration of Syrian troops, civilians and economic interests on Lebanese soil, a confrontation between Israel and Syria could well occur.

Israel is turning now to Annan and the international community in an effort to reduce that risk. The U.N. force in Lebanon, known as UNIFIL, has been in the southern portion of the country, where it has not done very much, for more than 20 years.

Now, possibly, it could finally come into its own as a genuine peacekeeping mechanism and implement its mandate under Resolution 425, which calls on it to help the Lebanese government restore control over the southern portion of the country.

France, for one, is eager to see its soldiers involved in such a mission — if, of course, there is credit to be gained for it within the Arab world. The commander of the South Lebanon Army, Israel’s militia ally in Lebanon, has little faith in this scenario.

Gen. Antoine Lahad declared this week that his soldiers would stay together as a fighting force to protect their villages after an Israeli withdrawal. Informed Israeli sources wonder, though, to what extent the general’s fighting words actually represent the fighting morale of his soldiers. □