



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 78, No. 175

Friday, September 15, 2000

83rd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Candidates discuss Pollard case

U.S. Senate candidate Hillary Rodham Clinton said she is concerned about the use of secret evidence in the case of Jonathan Pollard, the former U.S. naval analyst serving a life sentence in a U.S. prison for spying for Israel.

In a televised debate, her Republican opponent, Rep. Rick Lazio, sidestepped the question of whether he believed Pollard should be pardoned and criticized President Clinton for not yet making a decision on whether to grant Pollard clemency.

Minister: 10 days crucial for talks

The next 10 days will be critical in determining whether an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal is possible, according to Israel's acting foreign minister.

Shlomo Ben-Ami spoke to journalists in New York on Thursday as the Clinton administration's peace team resumed separate talks with both sides in an effort to see whether the gaps that remain, particularly over the future of Jerusalem, are bridgeable.

Ben-Ami said no one knows for sure whether Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat is ready "to make a deal that falls short of the mythology, of the dream" of the Palestinian people.

Israel's U.N. move feted

Jewish groups honored U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Richard Holbrooke, and Acting Israeli Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami Wednesday for their role in successfully pushing for Israel's admission to one of the five regional groupings at the United Nations.

Israel had been the only one of the U.N.'s 188 member states not to be included in a grouping, as several Arab states had blocked its membership in the Asian grouping.

But Albright and Holbrooke said Israel's admission into the Western Europe and Others Group was only a first step because it came with strings attached.

Chase to allow outside audit

Chase Manhattan bank will allow an outside investigator to audit its wartime records to see if the bank helped the Nazis, according to the World Jewish Congress. As a result, the WJC said it would not try to block Chase's planned \$35 billion acquisition of investment banking firm J.P. Morgan & Co.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Nations see Jews as key to winning favor with U.S.

By Michael J. Jordan

NEW YORK (JTA) — It's after Labor Day, which means kids are back to school, the football season has kicked off and the presidential race is heating up.

With much less fanfare, the Jewish diplomatic season is also under way.

The three-day U.N. Millennium Summit last week presented American Jewish leaders with a unique opportunity: About 150 kings, presidents and prime ministers gathered together to discuss the lofty goals of global peace, prosperity and an end to infectious diseases.

On the sidelines of the summit, Jewish leaders scrambled to meet with dozens of these rulers. And the peak season continues with this month's annual U.N. General Assembly debate.

Leading the way was the American Jewish Committee, followed by the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. Also networking were groups like the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Congress and the leading pro-Israel lobby, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

Why U.S. Jews want to meet with world leaders is clear and well-known: The focal point of most of these meetings is Israel and how the Jewish state can foster stronger alliances around the world.

Why world leaders would want to meet with Jewish groups is more interesting, less publicized, and to some Jews, a bit discomfiting: These leaders believe in Jewish power.

In past years, such discussions between Jewish leaders and various heads of state centered on the Middle East peace process and soothing the hostile treatment toward Israel at the United Nations. Now, though, American Jewish leaders detect a shift in international opinion toward the Jewish state.

This shift, they say, is due to the fact that Israel is seen as making greater efforts in the peace process, has fully withdrawn from Lebanon and has more or less equal status at the United Nations. During the summer, Israel was finally accepted into the Western European grouping of the world body.

This year, the peace process was certainly a popular topic, as was how to apply international pressure on Iran to release 10 Iranian Jews the Jewish world believes were unjustly convicted in July on espionage charges.

In some cases, talks between American Jewish leaders and their counterpart across the table are a question of deepening relations with Israel. In other cases, there may be a state interested in establishing relations with Israel, but under pressure from other countries not to have formal ties. Such meetings are often confidential, said Jason Isaacson, the AJCommittee's director of government and international affairs.

"There are instances where tentative feelers are being put out, where we can assist and be an important interlocutor," Isaacson said. "But if even the discussion of modalities can be highly controversial, it serves no good purpose to publicize those meetings. If our interest is to encourage a more formal relationship, the best way may be to act discreetly and diplomatically and not in the public view."

In its publicized meetings, the AJCommittee met with, for example, President Ahmet Sezer of Turkey, which has a growing military alliance with Israel; President Abdurrahman Wahid of Indonesia, which is the largest Muslim country in the world; and President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, which is the economic and military powerhouse on the African continent. The Presidents Conference met with Sezer as

MIDEAST FOCUS

Arrow-II passes latest test

Israel's anti-ballistic Arrow-II missile passed a key test when it hit a simulated incoming missile.

"The test brings the Arrow-II success record to seven out of eight tests," a Defense Ministry statement said Thursday.

Abducted leaders seek freedom

Two Muslim fundamentalist leaders abducted by Israeli commandos from Lebanon appealed to Israel's Supreme Court for their release.

The judges said Wednesday they would rule at a later date on the appeals by Sheik Abdel Karim Obeid, a Hezbollah leader, and Mustafa Dirani, a leader of the Amal movement.

Rabin daughter reveals illness

Israeli Knesset member Dalia Rabin-Pelossof, daughter of the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, revealed she is a breast cancer survivor.

At a conference on breast cancer in Jerusalem this week, Rabin-Pelossof disclosed she battled the disease eight years ago.

Tons of carp found dead

Some 400 tons of carp turned up dead in fish ponds in northern Israel. The incident came two weeks before Rosh Hashanah, when large amounts of the carp-based delicacy gefilte fish are traditionally consumed at holiday tables.

Poll: My-son-the-techie favored

The stereotype of the Jewish mother who likes to brag about her son the doctor does not appear to apply in Israel today.

A survey of 500 Israeli women found that 40 percent want their children to go into the high-tech industry. Fifteen percent still wish for a doctor, 11 percent for a lawyer and only 3 percent for a rabbi, the survey said.



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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well, but also with less prominent states like the former Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan. These meetings went beyond Israel and the fate of the local Jewish community; they also included discussion of global issues such as nuclear proliferation, international terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism.

It's hard to imagine any other religious or ethnic community in America with as active or ambitious an agenda as U.S. Jews. This outward-looking worldview, say Jewish leaders, is rooted in Jewish history and the Jewish people having lived for thousands of years in the Diaspora.

"We are an internationalist community," said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Presidents Conference. "We have a much broader perspective, not bound by the borders of this country. Foreign affairs is not exactly a burning passion of most Americans. But we pursue it far more than others do."

More interesting, perhaps, is why these foreign heads of state are willing — in many cases, in fact, eager — to meet with American Jewish leaders. Though they were generally in town for 24, 48 or 72 hours, with jam-packed itineraries, many made American Jewry a priority. One Jewish leader was even surprised when a foreign dignitary called and apologized profusely for having to cancel his planned meeting.

In fact, Jewish leaders nowadays often receive red-carpet treatment.

They have access to the corridors of power in most capitals around the world. A slew of foreign embassies in Washington have diplomats assigned to the "Jewish portfolio," said Isaacson, from the Chinese and Japanese; to the Germans and Poles, to the Egyptians, Jordanians, Moroccans and Tunisians; to the Argentinians and Australians. At Passover, they and others turn out in droves for diplomatic seders held in Washington and New York.

American Jewish leaders explain all this buttering up in euphemistic terms, suggesting that foreigners have a "fascination" with or "appreciation" for American Jews.

But when pressed, Jewish leaders admit the true driving force behind it is the lingering belief that Jews are capable of making or breaking relations with the United States and capable of wreaking havoc on the world's financial markets.

This belief is derived from the century-old hoax, "The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion." It is never articulated, say Jewish leaders, except for the rare gaffe by a less sophisticated diplomat. But the message is loud and clear when dignitary after dignitary says his country views the American Jewish community as a "central address" for improving relations with the world's lone superpower.

Several Jewish leaders say they used to try to disabuse various rulers of their perception of Jewish power, in light of the misery this myth has caused Jews. To no avail. Then they realized how it could also work in their favor.

On the flip side, they admit that on occasion, a Jewish activist here or there is guilty of fanning this mythology to advance his own agenda. He'll intimate to a stubborn head of state that the road to closer ties with Washington runs through American Jewry, presenting, in effect, an offer they cannot refuse.

"We don't traffic in that fear or suspicion, or exaggerate our depiction of the community's position," Isaacson said.

But he added, "I've been around politics for 20 years, and I've come to realize that perception is reality. If there's a perception of Jewish power, then that's the reality and you have to deal with that reality. What we do is we judiciously and with great care make use of that reality for noble ends."

Indeed, American Jews are viewed as vigilant and vocal, denouncing regimes that persecute Jews and other minorities, like Iran, and pressuring Congress, not always successfully, not to do business with rogue states. Likewise, Jewish groups praise leaders and states that respect human rights, and sometimes put in a good word for them on Capitol Hill.

In the case of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan, the trio pins their hopes for the future on ties to the West, not with Russia. These countries seem to believe that chummy relations with American Jews and Israel will help secure a beachhead into the United States. So they wanted advice, and assistance, on how to boost their image in Washington, and urged foreign investment, Jewish and otherwise, said Hoenlein.

"We reach out to them," he said, "and they reach out to us." □

JEWISH WORLD

Pledges made at prayer breakfast

President Clinton asked religious leaders for their help to encourage Americans to fight AIDS and provide educational opportunities to the world's poorer countries. Following the White House prayer breakfast Thursday, Jewish leaders said they plan to make tikkun olam, or repairing the world, a renewed priority.

Voter manuals sent to shuls

Five thousand voter registration manuals are being mailed to nearly all synagogues in the United States.

The manuals were developed jointly by the Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist movements as part of an effort to get out the vote for the November elections.

Moscow JCC set to open

A Russian Jewish umbrella group plans to dedicate a new building housing the area's first Jewish community center Monday.

The Lubavitch-dominated Federation of Jewish Communities says it expects some 18,000 Muscovites — including Russian President Vladimir Putin — to attend the ceremony.

Cardinal: Let's limit immigration

An Italian cardinal was widely criticized after he said the nation's government should block Muslim immigration in order to preserve the country's Roman Catholic majority.

The far-right National Alliance party was among the few groups to agree with the comments of Cardinal Giacomo Biffi, who has sometimes been mentioned as a successor to Pope John Paul II. Muslims have overtaken Jews as Italy's second-largest religious group.

Germany bans far-right group

Germany outlawed a far-right group for spreading neo-Nazi propaganda. Interior Minister Otto Schily said he was banning Blood and Honor, which has about 200 members, for activities that breached Germany's Constitution.

Blood and Honor was founded in Britain and spread to Germany in 1994.

Neo-Nazis run in Lithuania

Three members of an illegal neo-Nazi party registered to run in Lithuania's Oct. 8 elections, according to the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews.

The head of Lithuania's Central Electoral Commission said the commission did not have the right or the power to bar the members of the National Social Union from running in races where their party affiliation did not play a role in their registration.

Hate crimes law gets boost with vote of support in House

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The House of Representatives has gone on record in support of national hate crimes legislation.

In a vote of 232-192 on Sept. 13, lawmakers voted to instruct House negotiators to keep hate crimes language in a defense bill currently under consideration.

The last-ditch effort means that expanded national hate crimes legislation could become law by the end of the year.

The vote is a nonbinding resolution, however, so the hate crimes language could be taken out of the bill when House and Senate negotiators hammer out a final version of it in conference.

But if they take out the provision, they would be thwarting the will of the majority of House members, warned Michael Lieberman, Washington counsel for the Anti-Defamation League.

Lieberman said the vote was the "strongest possible signal" the House could send to show their support for the federal government's ability to prosecute hate crimes.

The Senate passed the Local Law Enforcement Enhancement Act in June.

It adds crimes based on the victim's gender, sexual orientation and disability to existing hate crimes laws.

That provision is included in a defense authorization bill that House and Senate negotiators are discussing.

Many Jewish groups support national hate crimes legislation and cite recent hate crimes targeted at Jews, such as a white supremacist's shooting rampage last July in Illinois and the shooting at the North Valley Jewish Community Center in Los Angeles and the subsequent fatal shooting of a Filipino American mail carrier.

Some congressional Republicans oppose hate crimes legislation in part because they don't want to create special classes of victims. There is also concern that the federal government might overstep its bounds and interfere with state and local officials in their investigations of hate crimes.

Rep. Asa Hutchinson (R-Ark.) said during the House floor debate that he would not support the motion because he believes federal hate crimes law is neither constitutional nor necessary.

Shepherding the vote through the House, Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.) said it is "unrefuted" that many hate crimes are not prosecuted.

Earlier in the day at a White House event in support of hate crimes legislation, President Clinton called on Congress to "do the right thing" and at least make sure that "no one in our country is violated simply because of who they are." The administration has consistently backed a national hate crimes law.

Clinton also announced a new report that shows hate crimes are underreported and thousands of law enforcement agencies may have encountered hate crimes that were not reported to the FBI.

The president directed the Department of Justice to work with state and local law enforcement agencies to develop a plan to improve hate crimes reporting within 120 days. □

Ghetto archives sent to Germany

NEW YORK (JTA) — Nearly 60 years after they were packed in tin boxes and hidden by Warsaw Jews, the underground archives of the wartime Warsaw Ghetto are being sent to Germany.

The Ringelblum Archives, organized by historian Emanuel Ringelblum, who died in the Holocaust, will be exhibited at the Frankfurt Jewish Museum starting Sept. 23.

The archives include personal and official documents, and a host of other material documenting life under the harsh ghetto conditions.

The thousands of hidden documents were discovered after the war and today form the core of the collection of Warsaw's Jewish Historical Institute. □

Clinton administration enters fray in race for N.Y. Jewish votes

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — In the latest fighting for the crucial Jewish vote in the U.S. Senate race in New York, a new player — the Clinton administration — has entered the fray.

The White House recently released a 1998 photo of the Republican candidate, Rep. Rick Lazio (R-N.Y.), shaking hands with Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat during the congressman's trip to the Middle East.

At the same time, the fate of Jonathan Pollard became a campaign issue amid questions about the role of Lazio's opponent in the November election, first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, in preventing the convicted spy's transfer to a new prison.

White House officials said they released the Arafat photo because Lazio had criticized President Clinton for shaking Cuban leader Fidel Castro's hand last week at the U.N. Millennium Summit in New York and had criticized Hillary Clinton for kissing Arafat's wife, Suha, during a visit to the West Bank last year.

Lazio responded by criticizing the Clinton administration for spending "taxpayer dollars" on the first lady's campaign.

He has complained from the beginning that Hillary Clinton enjoys an unfair advantage because she has the resources of the administration.

The incident underscores how each side sorely wants to score points with Jewish voters.

The race is a statistical dead heat. But according to two Zogby International polls in the past few weeks, Clinton is the favorite among Jewish voters.

In one poll, Clinton led Lazio by a margin of 52-34 percent; the second poll had her ahead by 70-23 percent.

Lazio spokesman Michael Marr claimed the smaller margin was a more accurate barometer of the electorate, but admitted that the campaign needed to "hold its own" with the Jewish vote.

Another politically sensitive issue for the Jewish community that showed up on the campaign trail recently was the case of Pollard, the former U.S. Navy analyst serving a life sentence in a U.S. jail for spying for Israel.

While a senator's influence on the case is dubious, the issue is still tossed about like a political football.

Clinton spokeswoman Cathy Levine said the first lady is considering meeting with Pollard's wife, Esther.

Pollard supporters say his sentence was too harsh, noting that Americans convicted of spying for enemies of the U.S. have received lighter sentences than Pollard.

In 1998 at the Wye Plantation peace summit, then-Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pressured Clinton to take the case under review. Netanyahu claimed Clinton had promised to let Pollard go free.

Soon after, the president said he would make the decision in "a prompt way." The administration is still reviewing the Pollard case and is expected to make a recommendation to the president, according to administration officials.

P.J. Crowley, a spokesman for the National Security Council, told JTA that the review of the Pollard case is "ongoing" and that there is no timetable for its resolution. Crowley said Hillary Clinton is not involved in the review process.

On CNN's "Evans Novak Hunt & Shields" over the weekend, White House Chief of Staff John Podesta said the president would not make a decision on Pollard until he gets a recommendation.

Asked if a presidential pardon of Pollard before the Nov. 7 election would appear to be pandering for the Jewish vote in New York to help Hillary Clinton's campaign, Podesta refused to answer, saying he did not want to speculate.

Meanwhile, neither Hillary Clinton nor Lazio has announced a position on Pollard. Lazio has said that he would ask the next president to review the Pollard case "on humanitarian grounds" and make a decision on whether he should remain in jail.

Jewish leaders in New York told the first lady last month they feared for Pollard's safety because officials planned to transfer Pollard to a maximum security facility in Virginia.

Clinton campaign spokesman Howard Wolfson said Sunday that Clinton was concerned "on humanitarian grounds" and conveyed those concerns to the "appropriate authorities." He did not say whom she contacted.

Esther Pollard confirmed that Democratic New York Assemblyman Dov Hikind, a New York state assemblyman from Brooklyn, raised the issue with Clinton, but could not say whether Clinton had anything to do with the fact that her husband was not transferred from his North Carolina prison. □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Czech Jews rebury remains in saga of burial ground dispute

By Magnus Bennett

PRAGUE (JTA) — A dispute surrounding one of Europe's oldest Jewish burial sites in Prague has taken a dramatic twist, as the remains of 157 bodies removed from the site for research were privately reburied here.

Last Friday's reburial ceremony, conducted by Czech Chief Rabbi Karol Sidon, bypassed a major sticking point in negotiations between the local Jewish community and the site's owners over the fate of the remains, which were removed some months ago.

The owner of the site, insurance company Ceska pojistovna, gained permission two years ago to build a high-rise apartment block and underground garage there. But when workers found the Jewish cemetery, it became the focus of attention of Orthodox groups dedicated to preserving Jewish heritage.

In March, following meetings with local and international Jewish representatives and the insurance company, the Czech government announced that construction could proceed as long as the remains of several hundred Jews were left undisturbed.

Czech Jewish leaders said last Friday's religious ceremony, which was held in the New Jewish Cemetery, marked an end to months of wrangling over the site at Vladislavova Street.

But foreign-based Orthodox Jews, who have staged a series of protests over the construction in recent months, said they were "shocked and astonished" at the claim that the issue was now resolved and vowed to continue their fight to halt all building work at the site.

The ceremony, attended by more than 20 leading members of the Czech Jewish community, was arranged at short notice following delays in the return of the remains to their original resting place. □