



# Daily News Bulletin

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## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### **Battle erupts over Rachel's Tomb**

Israeli helicopters fired on Palestinian gunmen in a pre-dawn gun battle after the Palestinians opened fire on Rachel's Tomb near the West Bank city of Bethlehem. Israel's army said the gunmen were trying to take over the Jewish holy site. [Page 3]

### **Arafat packs automatic weapon**

Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat appeared in public carrying a submachine gun. He said Monday he was carrying the weapon because a main road in Gaza that he was traveling on was blocked by dozens of Jewish settlers protesting Israel's decision to reopen the artery to Palestinian traffic.

The road had been closed to Palestinians following the bombing of an Israeli school bus two weeks ago in which two people were killed and nine wounded. [Page 3]

### **Duma told to ban Communists**

A Russian lawmaker criticized the country's Parliament for failing to discuss a recent anti-Semitic incident in which a former regional official was beaten.

At a news conference last Friday, Alexander Fedulov also called for a ban on the Communist Party "as a means to curb anti-Semitic feelings in the society." At the conference, representatives of the Russian Jewish Congress and the Moscow office of the Anti-Defamation League also criticized the Parliament's silence and Russia's treatment of minorities.

### **Group: Settlements increasing**

Peace Now charged that Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak has done nothing to restrict the growth of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The group charged Monday that the pace of construction has been faster during Barak's tenure than under his predecessor, Benjamin Netanyahu.

### **Kissinger: Take little peace steps**

Israel and the Palestinians should find ways to coexist rather than aim for a comprehensive final peace accord, former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger said. In a piece in Monday's Washington Post, Kissinger urged a number of steps, including separating the two populations and closing some Israeli settlements. He also said the United States should adopt a more cautious role in peacemaking.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

### **Elections, end of Clinton term may lead to new Mideast accord**

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — For the players in the Middle East peace process, it may seem like the two-minute warning.

A peace treaty may be Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak's only chance at being re-elected in next year's elections.

The threat of a harder-line Likud leadership in Israel may convince Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat that it is urgent to strike a deal. And Bill Clinton, with less than two months remaining in his presidency, may have only one more chance to leave the diplomatic mark he has yearned for in eight years in office.

But can it be done?

Yossi Beilin, Israel's minister of justice, said last Friday "there is a chance" that a peace treaty could be agreed to in the last 50 days of the Clinton administration.

"We in the Middle East, despite all the differences and all the political costs, we are able to make peace," Beilin said in a lecture to Johns Hopkins University's Washington-based international studies school.

"The mainstream in both societies understand that if we want to live, we have to live together."

But while the parties might be motivated to return to the table, the same problems that have prevented a peace process in the past still linger.

Beilin, who met with the U.S. national security adviser, Sandy Berger, last Friday, said the Israelis and Palestinians solved the issue of territories during the Camp David summit this summer, and were very close to an agreement on security and the settlements in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

That leaves Jerusalem and the Palestinian refugees' right of return, the two hot-button issues that stalled the summit's attempts at a new peace treaty.

The catalysts for a possible new round of talks are Barak's call last week for early elections and the consensus opinion that a new peace agreement may be his only chance at retaining power.

Barak reiterated last week that he would like to reach a partial accord with the Palestinians that would encompass border issues, security and the future of the settlements, but postpone a final decision on the status of Jerusalem.

"Barak is walking a tightrope between believing a deal could be good for the country and help him politically and not tempting Yasser Arafat to jack up the price and make a deal counter-productive," said David Makovsky, senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

Palestinian officials have said that they are not interested in an interim solution.

"We will not be part of Israel's election campaign," Saeb Erekat, a top Palestinian negotiator, said Nov. 29 to the media.

"The issues he spoke about — the 10 percent of the land and so forth — these issues were supposed to be implemented last November. Once there is an agreement, there must be a comprehensive one. There is nothing new in what he said."

Jon Alterman, a Middle East expert with the U.S. Institute of Peace, said the Israeli prime minister might have a difficult time convincing Palestinians that his country will support any new concessions he makes, but new concessions are essential to any new agreement.

"I think the Oslo framework has taken us as close to the mountain as we are going

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Netanyahu vows decision soon

Former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he will decide soon whether he will run for prime minister in next year's Israeli elections.

Speaking upon his return to Israel from the United States, Netanyahu said Monday he is "close" to making up his mind because Israel's situation is "one that demands a decision."

### Labor still talks of unity gov't

Despite initial Knesset support for early elections, Labor Party officials say the creation of a national unity government with the Likud Party is still a possibility. However, opposition leader Ariel Sharon denied any contacts with Labor about such a government.

### Indyk: Mistrust blocks peace

Distrust between Israel and the Palestinians makes the chances for a peace agreement slim, U.S. Ambassador to Israel Martin Indyk said while accepting an honor in Baltimore, according to the Jerusalem Post. The United States should not get involved in the latest round of negotiations, Indyk said Sunday, echoing Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak's comments to President Clinton several days earlier.

### Jordan called on to cancel treaty

Fourteen Jordanian lawmakers called for canceling Jordan's 1994 peace treaty with Israel.

The speaker of the Parliament was quoted by a Jordanian newspaper as confirming that he received such a petition shortly after the legislature reconvened just over a week ago. He said a parliamentary legal committee would review the request.

### Palestinians plan 'Days of Rage'

The Palestinian leadership is calling for two "Days of Rage" on Friday and Saturday to mark the 13th anniversary of the outbreak of the 1987-1993 intifada, or Palestinian uprising.

to get," Alterman said. "I think we will have to be more creative."

But any new Israeli concessions will only show Barak's desperation and political weakness, said Daniel Pipes, director of the Middle East Report and a columnist for the Jerusalem Post.

"There is a collapse of will among the Israeli leadership, and the Palestinians believe they can do a whole lot better through force," Pipes said. "Whatever Barak puts on the table will be seen as the minimum."

If no deal is struck and the Likud Party returns to power in Israel, chances may dwindle that negotiations can pick up where they left off at Camp David.

"Arafat believes that he can be the kingmaker in Israel, but there is a real danger that he overplays his hand, and this could blow up in Barak's or Arafat's face," Makovsky said.

But although Labor and Likud employ different language when discussing concessions to the Palestinians, Pipes said the fundamental stances of the parties are not so dissimilar.

Additionally, any deal signed by a Likud prime minister almost automatically has the support of Labor and, therefore, a majority of people in Israel.

Arafat also might consider waiting for a new resident in the White House — one who is less involved and whom Palestinians perceive as less pro-Israel.

"Too many Arabs have whispered into Arafat's ear that he will get a better deal if he only waits for George W. Bush," Makovsky said.

Barak would be wise to put off elections for as long as possible, giving him time after the United States settles its presidential battle to restart the peace process, Makovsky said.

But waiting would leave Barak without Clinton, one of his key allies, and would leave that ally out of the peace process he has helped shape for eight years.

Although his term in the White House is almost over, Clinton does not have the problems that most lame-duck leaders would face.

Because of the confusion over who is the next president, Clinton's status has in fact heightened, and he has as much weight in the United States as he did before Election Day.

Two months from now, the next president, whether Bush or Vice President Al Gore, may still be required to intervene in the Middle East, but is unlikely to have the same passion for the region.

"I think American presidents are drawn to the Middle East either by opportunity or necessity," Makovsky said. "I don't think after what Clinton has gone through another president is going to say, 'Let's see how I can succeed where he failed.'"

In a phone conversation with Barak last week, Clinton acknowledged the "narrowing window of what he can do while still in office," National Security Council spokesman P.J. Crowley said, but both leaders said they still see a role for the U.S. president.

Beilin seemed confident that the two sides can return to the negotiating table before Clinton's term ends.

He said that although both Palestinians and Israelis may believe they deserve more concessions, they must work together to find a middle ground that makes the region livable.

"Dreams are nice and fights are sometimes very heroic," he said. "But the bottom line is death and guns."

For the current leaders even to discuss getting back together to hash out an agreement, the violence in the region must be toned down, if not halted entirely, experts said.

The hope of a lasting accord is remote. Chances are better, analysts said, for a continuation of the interim status agreed to at Oslo.

And although expectations are being downplayed, American Jews are holding out hope for some agreement in the short-term.

"When a room is very dark, even a small candle creates a lot of light," said Tom Smerling, Washington director of the Israel Policy Forum, a pro-peace group. "It may be a long shot, but it's the best chance we may see for a long time for a far-reaching deal." □



## Daily News Bulletin

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## JEWISH WORLD

### Holland to seek Shoah-era claims

Holland is launching an international advertising campaign to reach Jewish claimants whose property was looted during the Nazi occupation.

The Dutch government has set aside some \$141 million to repay the claimants.

### Reform Jewry gets Ford grant

The Reform movement in the United States received \$500,000 from the Ford Foundation for an initiative aimed at educating American Jews about peace and social issues in Israel.

The three-year project, "Seeking Peace, Seeking Justice," is part of Reform Jewry's "commitment to a peaceful resolution to the violence that continues to engulf the Middle East," according to a statement from the movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

### Ex-SS officer goes on trial

A former SS officer who went on trial in Germany is accused of gunning down seven Jews at a concentration camp in Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia. Julius Viel, 82, appeared in court Monday after doctors said last week that he is fit to stand trial.

Viel became a respected journalist in postwar Germany and was awarded a government medal for his writings on hiking.

### Pope asked to cancel Haider visit

The chairman of the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations asked the Vatican to cancel a planned meeting this month between Pope John Paul II and Austrian right-wing politician Jorg Haider. Haider is expected to meet the pope Dec. 16, when he formally presents this year's Christmas tree to the Vatican.

### Dartmouth to serve kosher, halal

Dartmouth College is planning to open one of the nation's few college dining facilities to serve meals for students observing Jewish and Muslim dietary laws.

The new dining hall, to open next fall, results from a proposal jointly submitted by a committee of Jewish and Muslim students.

### B'nai B'rith leader dies at 87

Dr. William Wexler, president of B'nai B'rith International from 1965 to 1971, died Nov. 30 of an apparent heart attack at 87.

During his presidency, B'nai B'rith gained official status at the United Nations as a non-governmental organization. Wexler was also chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations from 1969 to 1972.

## Heavy fighting renewed as Rachel's Tomb is besieged

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Another flare-up of violence early this week has threatened efforts to bring an end to more than two months of clashes.

In a three-hour battle Monday, Palestinian gunmen attacked Rachel's Tomb, a Jewish holy site under Israeli guard at the entrance to the West Bank city of Bethlehem. In response, Israeli helicopter gunships targeted a Palestinian position near a refugee camp, from which heavy fire had been directed at Israeli troops at the tomb.

Israel Defense Force officials said the Palestinians, who launched a coordinated attack on the shrine from three directions, were trying to take over the tomb, considered the burial site of the biblical matriarch.

Israeli control of the site is guaranteed by various agreements between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, but since the recent violence began Palestinian officials have demanded that Israel evacuate the site. Mindful of the way that Joseph's Tomb near Nablus was trashed as soon as Israeli troops evacuated in October, Israel has refused.

An army spokesman described Monday's incident as one of the most "dangerous" events since the Palestinian violence began in late September.

Palestinian officials said the fighting broke out after soldiers and Jewish settlers attacked Muslim worshippers in the nearby village of Hussan, wounding at least 25 people. The IDF denied the charge.

Also Monday, a member of the fundamentalist Hamas group whom the Palestinian Authority recently freed from jail along with dozens of other militants blew himself up in the Gaza Strip, apparently while preparing a bomb for use against a nearby Jewish settlement.

Monday's clashes prompted Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat to repeat his call for an international peacekeeping force to be sent to the region. Arafat also accused Israel of breaking pledges to try to end the violence.

"It was a shock. We had agreed to cool it down," Arafat told reporters in Gaza City.

Reviewing an honor guard after his return Monday from Qatar, Arafat carried a submachine gun.

He said he was carrying the weapon because a main Gaza Strip road that he was traveling on was blocked by dozens of Jewish settlers protesting Israel's decision to reopen the artery to Palestinian traffic. The road had been closed to Palestinians following the bombing of an Israeli school bus two weeks ago in which two people were killed and nine wounded.

Israeli security officials denied Arafat's claim, saying the settlers were cleared from the road before Arafat's convoy came through.

In other violence Monday, the southern Jerusalem neighborhood of Gilo again came under fire from the nearby Arab town of Beit Jalla. There were no reports of injuries, but one apartment was damaged.

And an Israeli was lightly wounded in a shooting attack near the Jewish city of Ariel in the West Bank. There were several other shooting incidents in the area Monday, but no reports of Israeli or Palestinian fatalities.

Israel this week said it would cooperate with a U.S.-led fact-finding panel probing the causes of the violence. To date, nearly 300 Palestinians and 35 Israelis have died since the unrest began two months ago. During a telephone call last Friday, Prime Minister Ehud Barak and President Clinton discussed the panel, whose members are due to arrive in the Middle East later this month.

With Barak lagging in public opinion polls, it is widely believed that his main hope for re-election rests on clinching a deal with the Palestinians. But the prime minister appeared downbeat about the prospects for reaching an accord in the near future.

The Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported that Barak put the chances of reaching a peace deal before the end of Clinton's term at just 10 percent.

Meanwhile, the Knesset on Monday gave preliminary approval to a bill that would prevent a prime minister who lacks a parliamentary majority, such as Barak, from signing international agreements. □

## AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

## Romanian Jews fret over future as choice for next president nears

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME (JTA) — Romanians go to the polls on Sunday knowing that their next president will either be one of Europe's most notorious anti-Semites or an elderly ex-Communist long accused of corruption and resistance to democratic reform.

"The results could bring a turnaround in domestic and foreign policy and a reversal in international policies toward Romania," Catherine Lovatt wrote in the *Central Europe Review*, an online magazine.

"A new pariah of Europe may be just around the corner."

Sunday's second-round vote pits Corneliu Vadim Tudor, leader of the ultranationalist Romania Mare, or Greater Romania Party, against Ion Iliescu, a former Communist who served as president from 1990 to 1996.

In first-round elections Nov. 26, the 70-year-old Iliescu came in first out of a dozen candidates with 36 percent of the vote. Tudor, 51, came in second with 28 percent.

Tudor's success in particular sounded alarm bells among Romania's 12,000 Jews. It raised worrisome questions about how Jews and other minorities would fare should he win. It has also prompted some Romanian Jews to rethink their decision to stay in Romania.

The results of the first round represented a crushing defeat for the liberal-centrist government that ruled the country for the past four years and left democratic-minded voters at a loss.

"For us, as Jews, there is no real choice: A nationalist Communist confronts a nationalist fascist," said Ladislau Gyemant, a historian who directs the Jewish Studies Institute in the Transylvanian city of Cluj. "I myself will not vote because there is no candidate for whom it is worth walking to the polls," he told JTA.

The European Union imposed sanctions on Austria earlier this year when the Freedom Party of right-wing nationalist Jorg Haider entered the Austrian government. Israel protested by withdrawing its ambassador from Vienna.

The European Union has since lifted those sanctions.

There has been no indication so far of possible reprisals against Romania should Tudor win, even though since his days as a "court poet" to deposed and executed Communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu, he has long been under scrutiny by Jewish and other watchdog groups.

Holocaust scholar Randolph Braham calls Tudor a neo-fascist, and international Jewish groups describe Romania Mare as Romania's "most nationalist and anti-Semitic" party.

"The Anti-Defamation League has long followed the career of Corneliu Vadim Tudor, and his record of propagating anti-Semitism and racism through his party newspaper," a spokesperson for the ADL told JTA.

"It is unfortunate that at a time when Romania is seeking a future of greater partnership with the West, so many Romanians voted for a party and an individual who preach an old message of scapegoating, exclusion and nativism," the spokesperson said.

"We hope that in the next round of voting, Romanians will reject this message and work toward a more vibrant, tolerant and inclusive society."

Tudor's support in the first round of voting was spectacular, given that his party won little more than 2 percent in June's local elections. He promoted himself as untainted by the corruption, economic failures and political infighting that have characterized Romania's governments during the past decade.

"What is really scary is when I hear people say that they will vote for Tudor because he is clean and therefore he should be given a chance to see what he can do," said Marko, a Jewish sales executive in Bucharest who asked that his last name not be used.

Tudor in particular reached out to disaffected young people who see no future ahead of them in a country where nearly half the population exists on little more than one dollar a day.

"His 'solutions' are both radical and simplistic, particularly those blaming the current situation on Romania's foreign 'enemies' and on its domestic 'puppets,'" wrote Radio Free Europe analyst Michael Shafir.

Among those Tudor counts as "enemies," Shafir wrote, are "the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and an undefined, but obviously Jewish-led globalization drive."

A Tudor victory could have a serious impact on the future of Romania's Jewish community, most of whom are elderly. Fewer than 1,000 are under the age of 35.

For decades, the pattern of Jewish life in Romania was to encourage aliyah among young people. Thousands of Jews emigrated to Israel during the Cold War, making it one of the few Communist countries from which Jews could legally immigrate to Israel.

With the support of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the community now focuses on making sure that the elderly who would not or could not move to Israel live out their lives in dignity.

Even after the fall of communism, when Jewish communities in other post-Communist countries took advantage of new freedoms to begin upgrading Jewish education and fostering community development, little was done in Romania to change this pattern.

Only within the past year have new programs been implemented aimed at reaching out to the unaffiliated and bolstering Jewish involvement and education.

These initiatives include long-distance outreach and education projects aimed at Jews living in isolated communities.

The middle generation — which in Romania means anyone between 30 and 60 — was given particular attention in these initiatives. But the initiatives also included compiling a computerized database of Jews aged 15 to 35 and establishing a new, nationwide youth organization whose aims include spotting, training and encouraging new communal leaders.

People involved in implementing these projects say the response so far has been encouraging.

But the prospect of an electoral victory by Tudor has prompted at least some Jews to reconsider their options.

"My brother and sister both made aliyah years ago," said Marko, who is in his 30s.

"I stayed here in Bucharest because my parents are here. They are elderly and did not want to make the move to Israel. I also have to say that I wanted to do my part to help build up my country after Ceausescu.

"But the way I feel now," he added, "is that it may be time to say good-bye to Mama." □