



Daily News Bulletin

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83rd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Progress reported at D.C. talks

A senior Palestinian negotiator said the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks in Washington are inching closer to a deal that would give the Palestinians sovereignty over eastern Jerusalem.

"If we reach agreement on the basic details, we could have an agreement on Saturday," Yasser Abed Rabbo told Reuters on Thursday.

Meanwhile, the senior Israeli negotiator, Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami, said Thursday that President Clinton had presented the two sides a day earlier with the outline of a possible peace deal, most of which "Israel could definitely live with."

Peres fails to get needed backing

Shimon Peres dropped his bid for the Israeli premiership after the dovish Meretz Party voted not to back his candidacy.

The former premier had needed the support of 10 legislators in order to run when special elections are held Feb. 6. [Page 3]

No Christmas pardon for Pollard

Jonathan Pollard will not be part of the traditional Christmas pardons President Clinton will make over the weekend, White House Spokesman Jake Siewert said.

Siewert said Thursday the White House staff's review of Pollard's case has been completed, and the president will be making clemency decisions through the end of his term. [Page 1]

Report: Army targets Palestinians

A senior Israeli officer confirmed that the Israeli army has been systematically eliminating Palestinian terrorists, Israel Radio reported.

However, the officer would not call this a policy of liquidation, saying the purpose is to thwart attacks against Israeli soldiers and civilians.

The officer called the policy effective, saying terrorists are now putting more focus on staying safe than carrying out attacks. He said only terrorists are targeted, not innocent civilians or Palestinian leaders.

The JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published on Tuesday, Dec. 26.

Pollard backers push for release in waning days of Clinton's term

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — With dozens of elected officials in his corner, Jonathan Pollard still sits and waits for freedom.

The U.S. Navy intelligence analyst, sentenced in 1987 to life in prison for spying for Israel, is hoping that the years of appeals will finally pay off in the closing days of the Clinton administration.

Since pleading guilty to one count of passing classified information to an ally, he has become a human hot potato, his case subject to the vagaries of Middle East peace talks, a New York Senate race and presidential legacies.

President Clinton seemed close to granting clemency for Pollard in 1996, and almost released him as part of the 1998 Wye agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

Each time the deal fell through at the last moment, and Pollard's status remained unchanged.

On Thursday, White House Spokesman Jake Siewert said Pollard would not be among those pardoned over the Christmas holiday.

Siewert said the White House staff's review of Pollard's case has been completed, and the president will be making clemency decisions through the end of his term.

As the White House debates Pollard's release, his new attorneys battle the government in court.

Pollard is seeking a dismissal of his life sentence, claiming that he did not receive fair legal representation and that the government broke his plea agreement.

The present moment just might be Pollard's best chance to leave his North Carolina prison.

Clinton, who has aligned himself closely with Israel and the American Jewish community, is expected to join his predecessors in granting controversial clemencies on the last Christmas of his presidency.

The White House is considering clemency for former Wall Street executive Michael Milken and several figures involved in Clinton's Whitewater legal imbroglio. Pollard's name also has been mentioned.

In addition to the arguments made by Pollard's attorneys, the White House has received almost identical pleas from various lawmakers, including several members of Congress, dozens of New York officials, and Jewish organizational leaders.

First lady and Sen.-elect Hillary Rodham Clinton didn't endorse clemency for Pollard during her recent campaign, but did say that questions could be raised about the handling of the case.

Jewish activists and organizations, who have spent years keeping the Pollard case in the spotlight, are maneuvering for a final push at the Clinton White House.

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice president of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, visited the White House on Dec. 12 to plead Pollard's case.

After speaking with administration officials, he felt clemency was "possible," Hoenlein said.

"I don't come away thinking that the door is completely shut now," Hoenlein said. Daniel Cruise, spokesman for the National Security Council, said he has received a flood of media inquiries about the case.

Pollard's attorneys claim he should be released, either by the courts or by executive

MIDEAST FOCUS

Fight at border goes into 2nd day

Palestinian gunmen fired at Israeli army posts guarding the border with Egypt in the southern Gaza Strip.

At least one Palestinian was killed in Thursday's fighting.

A day earlier, Israeli troops fought a five-hour battle with Palestinian gunmen in the same area.

Palestinian driver hits soldiers

Two Israeli soldiers were moderately injured and another two lightly wounded after a Palestinian ran his car into them at a checkpoint located north of Jerusalem.

The driver escaped to a nearby village, where soldiers captured him later Thursday.

Knesset votes on deferments

Israel's Knesset gave preliminary approval to a bill that would extend army draft deferments for fervently Orthodox yeshiva students for another four months.

The action took place after the High Court of Justice refused to give legislators any more extensions to work out a compromise on the controversial deferments.

Athens Games get Israel's help

An Israeli police official is among a team of international experts helping Athens prepare for the 2004 Olympic Games.

The official, who serves as deputy chief of operations for the Israeli police, had advised the Australian Olympic Committee on security issues before the Sydney Games.

Israelis to scarf down doughnuts

Israelis will consume some 32 million doughnuts and about 1 million liters of oil during the eight-day Chanukah festival that begins Thursday night.

order, for several reasons. Foremost is the contention that Pollard's sentence was exorbitant compared to those given other spies convicted on similar charges.

Pollard's new lawyers, Eliot Lauer and Jacques Semmelman, criticize Pollard's previous attorney, Richard Hibey, because he did not ask for an adjournment after the government submitted a memo from then-Secretary of State Caspar Weinberger a day before sentencing and did not file a motion to appeal the life sentence, they say.

Pollard's wife Esther said Hibey's services were paid for by the Israeli government and were inadequate.

Hibey refused to comment.

But Joseph DiGenova, the former U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia who handled the case for the government, said the case was handled by the book. He noted that none of Pollard's claims has held up on appeal.

"There's no justification for clemency," DiGenova said. "It's a classic handling of an espionage case."

Esther Pollard claims her husband was convicted on "secret evidence," information sensitive to national security that was excluded from the public court record.

A second motion filed by his attorneys in September, to the United States District Court for the District of Columbia, seeks to view those documents.

The government responded that the statute of limitations to appeal the sentencing has expired, but Pollard's lawyers claim the statute should be extended because of new evidence, specifically Hibey's handling of the case.

The sentence should have been appealed immediately because it violated Pollard's plea bargain with the government, his attorneys said. DiGenova, however, claims the sentencing judge had the right to go beyond the recommendation.

DiGenova also vigorously disputes the secret evidence claim, noting that Pollard did not raise the issue in previous appeals.

"They had access to everything," he said.

DiGenova said Pollard's sentence was harsh because of the damage he did to national security and the amount of compromising material he gave Israel.

He also said Pollard has not shown true remorse.

In his latest letter to Clinton, however, Pollard said he has expressed remorse to anyone who would listen.

"I fully appreciate that what I did was wrong. Grievously wrong," Pollard wrote on Dec. 3.

"My intent was to help Israel, but I had no right to violate the laws of this country or the trust it had placed in me.

"I had no right to place myself above the law."

The intelligence community demands that Pollard stay in jail, fearful that clemency would set a bad precedent.

Central Intelligence Agency Director George Tenet threatened to resign if Pollard was released in 1998, apparently scuttling any deal at the Wye summit.

DiGenova and others have said that releasing Pollard would leave a stain on Clinton's legacy.

However, Esther Pollard says that Clinton has the opportunity to take a new approach to the case now precisely because he's a lame duck.

Her husband's chief advocate and spokesman, Esther Pollard has had to cash in her pension to pay for her efforts on Pollard's behalf.

Childhood friends, the two married in 1993 after they became reacquainted through letters in the early years of Pollard's jail sentence.

Esther Pollard is worried about Jonathan's health, specifically the growths in his sinus cavity that have not been biopsied.

She worries that cancer will have to be added to his list of ailments, which includes arthritis and an infected gallbladder.

Each afternoon, she races to her Toronto home for her daily solace, a phone call from prison that breaks up the time between her monthly treks to North Carolina.

Esther Pollard sees the current situation as a golden opportunity for Clinton to make amends for the alleged failings of the legal system.

"It is a chance for him to look at the compelling legal reasons for Jonathan's request for clemency and to grant it because of the blotch this case has been on our American judicial system," she said. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Peres pulls out of P.M. race, leaving choice of two generals

By JTA staff

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Former Prime Minister Shimon Peres' decision not to run for premier in Israel's Feb. 6 elections has left Israeli voters with just two candidates: Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Likud Party chairman Ariel Sharon.

Peres becomes the second former premier in a week to throw the political scene into turmoil by announcing his candidacy, only to recant days later.

His decision follows the strange spectacle of former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who announced his triumphal return to politics, urged his party to vote against a law allowing him to run, and then pulled out of the race when Parliament refused to disband.

Peres, an architect of the peace process with the Palestinians, is reviled by many right-wing Israelis as dangerously conciliatory.

Hoping to challenge Barak from the left, Peres failed to garner the 10 Knesset supporters needed to put his name on the ballot, as the far-left Meretz Party — Peres' natural constituency — urged him to unite with Barak.

That leaves only two former generals, both of whom have security credentials — always key with Israeli voters, especially given the current Israeli-Palestinian violence — but also significant negatives.

Barak, Israel's most-decorated soldier, is a former army chief of staff who earned his wings in daring commando raids behind enemy lines and years ago laid out a visionary plan to modernize the Israel Defense Forces.

Sharon is a veteran of all of Israel's wars, and distinguished himself as a brilliant strategist during the Sinai campaigns of 1967 and 1973.

Neither candidate lacks detractors, however.

Elected in a landslide just 18 months ago, Barak, 58, alienated supporters and opponents alike with his allegedly autocratic and paranoid governing style, sidelining the Labor Party's elder statesmen — such as Peres — and taking little counsel.

A gifted chess player, tinkerer and classical musician with a graduate degree from Stanford, he angered secular voters by abandoning campaign pledges to tackle Israel's social problems, choosing instead to woo religious backing for his diplomatic strategy.

That effort ultimately failed, as the religious parties bolted Barak's coalition one by one and his bold peace overtures to Syria and the Palestinian Authority crumbled into dust, on one front, and violence on the other.

In the end, Barak's quick descent from broad mandate to minority government could be attributed to one main factor: people skills.

Sharon, 72, nicknamed "Bulldozer" for his girth and determination, has served in six Cabinet posts over the years but has never challenged for the top spot.

Even the most ardent peaceniks admit that when Sharon directed the West Bank settlement campaign under then-Prime Minister Menachem Begin 20 years ago, he demonstrated a brilliant strategic vision — evilly brilliant to those who see the placement of the settlements as one of the main obstacles to peace with the Palestinians.

It was with that same determination that Sharon almost single-handedly led Israel into the Lebanon War in 1982, allegedly deceiving Begin into approving a modest military campaign that masked grandiose regional goals.

He was forced to step down as defense minister when a government commission found him indirectly responsible for the massacre of Palestinians in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, having failed to foresee the carnage when Israel's Lebanese Christian allies were allowed into the Palestinian camps.

Sharon's past leads many Palestinians, and some Western governments, to depict him as a fire-breathing warmonger. In power, however, he often has displayed a surprising pragmatism, ordering the traumatic evacuation of Yamit in northern Sinai as part of the peace treaty with Egypt, and signing off on the 1998 Wye Accords with the Palestinians as Netanyahu's foreign minister.

In the campaign, Sharon is expected to portray Barak as inexperienced and his broad peace concessions as irresponsible. Barak, for his part, likely will warn that a Sharon victory will mean the end of the peace process. □

Birthright aids follow-up projects

A program that sends young Jewish adults on free educational trips to Israel awarded \$1 million in grants for efforts to engage the trips' alumni in Jewish life.

Among the 16 follow-up projects Birthright Israel is funding around North America are a wilderness adventure in New Mexico, an Israeli business investment program and several programs that combine reunions, Shabbat celebrations and volunteer opportunities.

Austrian offer termed insufficient

Austria agreed to pay an initial installment of \$150 million to compensate Jews whose property was looted by the Nazis.

After a day of talks with Austrian officials Thursday in Washington, U.S. Deputy Treasury Secretary Stuart Eizenstat called the Austrian offer a "good-faith effort," but said more needed to be done in order for Austria to achieve "legal peace."

The Claims Conference, which is negotiating on behalf of Jewish victims of the Nazis, said the offer is "not adequate." Talks are slated to resume January in Vienna and Washington.

U.S. to release list of looted art

The U.S. Justice Department plans to release next week a list of 2,000 artworks seized by the Nazis.

The list could prove invaluable to American museums, which have agreed to return looted works to the Jewish families from which they were stolen, according to the World Jewish Congress.

Furor over neo-Nazi soldiers

The deputy chairman of the Australian Government's Parliamentary Defense Committee urged Jewish ex-servicemen and others to protest the army's apparent lack of concern after it was reported that three former members of an elite unit were neo-Nazi members of a skinhead rock band called "Blood Oath."

Roger Price said the discovery that the men had been in the battalion two years ago reflected a serious problem. He said "the idea that there is a significant penetration of an army unit by extreme-right influences would disturb quite a number of people."

Action sought on offensive ads

An umbrella organization for fervently Orthodox Jews in the United States is urging New York's Metropolitan Transit Authority to remove provocative advertisements from subways and buses.

Agudath Israel of America called on the MTA at least to remove such ads from mass transit serving religious neighborhoods.

Jewish reaction mixed as Bush pushes for faith-based initiatives

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — President-elect George W. Bush's meeting this week with religious leaders shows he intends to move ahead with his controversial plan to involve religious institutions in social welfare programming.

It also sent a signal about who in the Jewish community he plans to consult on the issue — a signal that some Jewish leaders are not happy about.

Bush's meeting in Austin included some 30 Christian, Jewish and Muslim leaders. There he laid out plans to establish a federal Office of Faith-Based Action.

The Jewish representatives at the meeting were Murray Friedman, a conservative thinker who also serves as director of the Mid-Atlantic region of the American Jewish Committee, and Rabbi Daniel Lapin, a Seattle-area Orthodox rabbi and president of Toward Tradition.

The early timing of the meeting suggests Bush's desire to make so-called charitable choice programs a priority.

Charitable choice, passed as part of the 1996 welfare reform legislation, allows religious institutions to bid for government social service contracts in areas such as drug counseling and job training.

"I'm afraid we'll hear a lot of it in the next four years," said the Rev. Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, a group that monitors religious liberties. Lynn calls the establishment of a federal office "outrageous," and anticipates that many lawsuits will emerge challenging the religious-based programming.

The Jewish community remains divided on the role of faith-based organizations in public policy.

Most Jewish organizations worry about violations of church-state separation, as well as the possibility that such programs could involve proselytizing and coercion.

But others want to give synagogues and Jewish organizations more of a role and a chance at more funding.

Friedman, who is working on a project with a number of religious groups to study charitable choice, said he conveyed to Bush the concerns of some in the Jewish community about religious intrusion in the public arena.

Bush told the group that his plan would not fund churches, just the services that the churches perform, said Friedman, who also is director of the Feinstein Center for American Jewish History at Temple University in Philadelphia. Friedman said he senses the Jewish community is nervous about the issue, but he encourages Jewish groups to enter the discussion.

Lapin, the other Jewish participant, said he told Bush the meeting would help "to undo the epidemic of secularism that was unleashed in America eight years ago."

Lapin said that having a Jew in charge of the Office of Faith-Based Action would help downplay any fears that such an office was intended to "Christianize" America.

Stephen Goldsmith, the former Jewish mayor of Indianapolis who served as a key domestic adviser in the Bush campaign, is thought to be Bush's choice to head the office.

By placing religious values at the core of the incoming

administration, Bush will do a great deal to help unify the country, Lapin said at the meeting.

Lapin, known for his involvement in conservative projects, including a voter registration project led earlier this year by the Rev. Jerry Falwell, said he believes that faith-based social programs have performed much better than their secular counterparts. But opponents of charitable choice say there is little evidence to show that.

Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, said that strengthening religious institutions is necessary, but churches, synagogues and mosques should not be the "be all and end all solutions" to social ills.

Foxman expressed dismay at the Jewish representation at the meeting.

The American Jewish community and its views were not represented, he said, adding that the ADL is writing to Bush to ask for a meeting on this issue.

Orthodox Jewish groups say the whole concept of religious organizations running social programs is nothing new.

For example, the fervently Orthodox group Agudath Israel of America runs many housing, job training and drug counseling programs through its affiliate for community services, and the affiliate is substantially subsidized by government funds.

David Zwiebel, the group's executive vice president for government and public affairs, said the new federal office could lay down precise guidelines that will address the church-state issues. By running programs through a central office, Zwiebel said, "there will be greater care that the constitutional line is respected."

Nathan Diament, director of the Orthodox Union's Institute for Public Affairs, said there are ways to allow faith-based groups to partner with the government and place protections against religious coercion and proselytization.

Both Orthodox organizations said they anticipated Bush would include representatives from the organized Jewish community in future discussions. □

Publisher of 'Mein Kampf' under investigation in Slovakia

By Magnus Bennett

PRAGUE (JTA) — A new entry has been added to the docket of legal cases involving translations of Hitler's "Mein Kampf."

Police in Slovakia confirmed Monday that they are investigating publisher Agnes Burdova, who may face charges for publishing a new Slovak translation of the book. A police official said the investigation began as soon as police found out that Burdova was publishing the book, in which Hitler spelled out his racist ideology.

In another development, Czech state prosecutors brought charges this week against an Internet site owner who offered to sell Czech translations of Hitler's "Mein Kampf." Vit Varak is accused of promoting movements that seek to suppress human rights.

Earlier this month, Czech publisher Michal Zitko was handed a three-year suspended sentence and fined \$50,000 for publishing Hitler's text without disclaimers or commentaries. Zitko is appealing the judgment.

Burdova recently printed several thousand copies for the Slovak market. The book is apparently accompanied by a 30-page commentary explaining the book's anti-Semitic content. □