



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 79, No. 193

Wednesday, October 24, 2001

84th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Bush demands Israeli withdrawal

President Bush asked Israel to withdraw its troops from Palestinian-ruled cities in the West Bank.

Bush made the request to Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres when he joined a meeting between Peres and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice taking place Tuesday at the White House.

Peres later told reporters Israel would withdraw its forces as soon as the Palestinians "take over in their own hands the introduction of law and tranquility."

Peres is one of several Israeli politicians currently visiting Washington. [Page 1]

U.S. officer claims discrimination

An intelligence officer in the U.S. Army claims anti-Semitism underlay a decision by army officials to strip him of his security clearance, according to the Jerusalem Post.

Maj. Shawn Pine, who holds dual U.S.-Israeli citizenship and served in an elite unit of the Israeli army before joining the American military, says the decision against him was based on his close ties to the Jewish state.

Iraq said behind Sept. 11 attacks

Iraq likely was behind the Sept. 11 terror attacks in New York and Washington, according to a former CIA director.

If Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein is responsible, the United States should not stop short of "absolute destruction" of his dictatorial regime, James Woolsey told the national convention of the American Jewish Congress on Monday.

Woolsey also suggested that the United States might be willing to work with Syria in the international fight against terrorism if useful intelligence could be gained.

Sharpton plans to visit Israel

The Rev. Al Sharpton will visit Israel later this week to "show solidarity with victims of terrorism" and help improve black-Jewish relations, according to a spokeswoman for the black leader.

Sharpton is a controversial community leader and former New York mayoral candidate whom some Jews view as having fanned the 1991 riots in the Brooklyn neighborhood of Crown Heights.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Tensions between U.S. and Israel adding urgency to ministers' visits

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A long-planned parade of Israeli officials to the U.S. capital this week has taken on a sense of urgency in light of the recent assassination of an Israeli Cabinet member and Israeli incursions into the West Bank.

The meetings have been scheduled for weeks, but this week's call from President Bush and other top officials that Israel withdraw from Palestinian-controlled territory has raised the level of tension between the allies.

There is a growing feeling that the United States either does not understand Israel's domestic terrorist threat — or that it is ignoring it to garner Arab support for the coalition against terrorism that Bush is orchestrating to combat Osama bin Laden and the forces behind the Sept. 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon.

Given the current tensions, the American Jewish community is stepping up its lobbying efforts to make Israel's case. Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said after meeting with Bush and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice on Tuesday that the president had reiterated the administration's position that Israel should withdraw its troops from Palestinian-ruled cities in the West Bank.

The foreign minister said Bush had suggested that the continuing violence in the region made it harder for him to maintain the coalition against terror.

"The United States feels that in order to organize the proper coalition, they need tranquility in the Middle East as much as we can, to reduce fire, to reduce the flames. And we understand it. The problem is how to do it," Peres said at the National Press Club on Monday.

The Bush administration says it understands Israel's plight, but the empathy only goes so far.

"Our argument is that you are going beyond the immediate need," a State Department official said, referring to Israel's decision this week to launch its biggest military operation in areas under Palestinian control since the Oslo peace process was set in motion in 1993. "It's a question of degree."

Jewish and Israeli officials say that behind closed doors, State Department officials express an understanding for what Israel has to do to control violence in the region.

Israel says it will stay stationed around six Palestinian-controlled cities in the West Bank until it is satisfied President Authority President Yasser Arafat is sufficiently cracking down on terrorists.

Dan Meridor, a minister without portfolio in the Israeli government, speaking to the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations on Tuesday, said that Israel should never be put in a situation where it is not allowed to protect its own citizens. "Israel has to take action sometimes," he said, adding, "I think America does understand it."

At the same time, administration officials are telling Israeli and Jewish leaders of their need to publicly condemn Israeli actions to please the Arab world.

After his meeting with Secretary of State Colin Powell on Tuesday, Peres said the secretary's private comments were not as sharp as the public rhetoric.

"The secretary gave me a full explanation of the American policy and intentions," Peres said. "I didn't discover any contradiction in the American policy and the Israeli policy."

Peres has said the Israelis intend to withdraw; it's just a matter of timing.

And in an effort to counterbalance the U.S. condemnation of Israel, White House

MIDEAST FOCUS

Church leads Bethlehem march

A Vatican official led hundreds of people on a march through Bethlehem calling on Israel to withdraw from the West Bank city.

Pietro Sambì appealed for an end to Israeli "intervention," saying the fighting should stop, "especially in so sacred a place like Bethlehem, which is the heart of all Christianity."

Hamas official dies in car blast

Hamas vowed to avenge the killing of its Nablus commander, whom Israeli officials accuse of being behind a series of deadly suicide bombings in Israel.

Palestinians say Israeli security forces killed Ayman Halaweh on Monday by booby-trapping his car. Israel did not claim responsibility for the incident, but the Prime Minister's Office issued a statement saying that Halaweh was at the top of the list of militants Israel had asked the Palestinian Authority to arrest.

Croatian president to visit Israel

Stipe Mesic plans to be the first Croatian president to visit Israel, embarking on a mission next week to smooth relations troubled by Croatia's Nazi past.

Mesic will hold talks with Israeli President Moshe Katzav, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, and will address the Knesset, his office said. Mesic's predecessor, the late Franjo Tudjman, was accused of trying to whitewash Croatia's fascist past.

Nixon crony hits Israeli radio

Conservative radio host G. Gordon Liddy is hosting a week of shows in Jerusalem, in conjunction with Jerusalem Post radio.

Liddy, who served jail time for his role in the Watergate scandal that resulted in President Richard Nixon's resignation, will interview Israeli political figures and take calls from Israelis.



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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officials are leaking details of a letter sent Monday to Arafat.

"It's a very strong message, a personal message," said Sean McCormack, an NSC spokesman. "Our position is that the Palestinian Authority must act decisively."

The focus of Peres' Washington meetings — as well as those of Sharon foreign policy adviser, Zalman Shoval, and Meridor — has changed dramatically from the original goal.

Israel had wanted to seek clarification on its role — or lack thereof — in the coalition against terror and find American empathy for Israel's own battle against terrorism.

But reports that the Bush administration was planning a new initiative to end the violence in the region led to a new agenda. Sharon's unity government wanted more information and more influence on the U.S. plan.

Last week's assassination of Israeli Tourism Minister Rehavam Ze'evi, and the Israeli incursions that followed, turned the agenda on its head once again.

In light of recent events, the new U.S. initiative appears to have been shelved.

Now, the Israeli government is using the ministers to explain its rationale for its military actions at a time when the United States is pushing Israel toward negotiations.

But with so many Israeli diplomats coming at the same time, vying for the attention of the Bush administration when the White House's focus is on its war in Afghanistan, concern is growing that Israel's public relations campaign may backfire.

Sources say that the dovish Peres and the hawkish Shoval are giving wildly different interpretations of Israel's climate and the situation it faces — even though Peres' public comments attacking Palestinian actions have been more forceful in recent days.

There is fear that the influx of Israelis will only serve to confuse, and possibly anger, administration officials.

"The administration is getting at least three different ministers with three different points of view," said David Makovsky, senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "The net effect is confusion."

For their part, American Jewish groups publicly criticized the administration's position on Israel's military activity this week.

The statements came after a month of more cautious activity aimed at expressing concern about Israel's exclusion from the war on terrorism while not undercutting the U.S. policy.

In a statement released Tuesday, the Conference of Presidents said the Bush administration, in asking Israel to withdraw immediately from all Palestinian-controlled areas, was asking Israel to "become a victim of terror."

The administration's statement was "inappropriate, intemperate and defies logic in the face of current U.S. efforts in the war against terrorism," the group said. □

Fears delay Brazil center's opening

RECIFE, Brazil (JTA) — The opening of a Jewish center on the site of a 17th-century synagogue in Brazil has been indefinitely postponed after Brazil's president refused to attend a dedication ceremony because he feared a possible terrorist attack.

The center in the city of Recife, where the Zur Israel Synagogue once stood, is slated to host public lectures and an exhibit on Jewish immigration to Brazil.

Jewish leaders were disappointed by the decision made by Fernando Henrique Cardoso and his vice president, Marco Maciel, which came days before Sunday's ceremony was scheduled to take place.

"All the invitations for the inauguration were already sent out. We had to cancel it over the phone," said Bernardo Schwartz, an engineer who oversaw the renovation.

The second floor of the center, which is furnished with newly crafted period furniture, was rebuilt according to the synagogue's original specifications.

Approximately 1,500 Jews live in Recife, which has two other functioning synagogues.

The synagogue was used between 1641 and 1654, when it served many in the Brazilian Jewish community.

The center was funded by the Brazilian government, the city of Recife and the Joseph Safra Foundation. □

JEWISH WORLD

War crimes appeal begins

A Nazi war crimes suspect was wheeled into an Australian court on a stretcher Tuesday for the beginning of his appeal against extradition to Latvia.

The lawyer for Konrad Kalejs, 88, said his client suffers from dementia.

For years, Kalejs has faced charges of being involved in the wartime slaughter of civilians when he served as an officer in Latvia's pro-Nazi Arajs Kommando unit. The militia is held directly responsible for the deaths of some 100,000 civilians, including 30,000 Jews, between 1941 and 1943.

B'nai B'rith creates service corps

B'nai B'rith International established a War Service Corps that will enlist volunteers around the United States to "perform necessary community activities at the local and national levels," the group's president, Richard Heideman, announced Tuesday.

B'nai B'rith recently sent a letter to President Bush outlining plans for the corps, which will support the military, as well as local police, fire and rescue units.

Rabbis plan anti-terror vigil

An interdenominational group of New York-area rabbis will hold a large prayer vigil in Manhattan on Nov. 11 "for America, against terrorism" to drive home the point that "America and Israel face a common enemy," said an organizer, Rabbi Avi Weiss.

Weiss led a similar group of rabbis in a June 3 pro-Israel rally in New York that drew thousands.

Benigni film breaks TV record

Actor and director Roberto Benigni's Academy Award-winning film about the Holocaust grabbed a record share of the viewing audience for its premiere showing on Italian television Monday night.

More than 16 million Italians — or more than one in every two viewers — tuned in to watch "Life is Beautiful," which tells the story of an Italian Jew who tries to shield his small son from the horrors of a Nazi death camp by pretending it is all a game.

Arab students hand out hate

The American Jewish Committee condemned an Arab student group's recent distribution at New York University of anti-Semitic material written by a former leader of the Ku Klux Klan.

The information written by David Duke was disseminated by Arab Students United at a time when Americans are especially sensitive to attacks on ethnic or faith groups. "There is no place in American society, and certainly not on a university campus, for this type of incitement against Jews," said David Harris, AJCommittee's executive director.

New survey undercuts report of huge U.S. Muslim population

By Michael J. Jordan

NEW YORK (JTA) — In the run-up to the 2000 presidential elections, Jewish leaders fretted about the perceived surge in influence of American Muslims — both politically and numerically — and how it might affect U.S. support for Israel.

Now Jewish leaders have statistics contradicting earlier claims that said Muslims make up more than 2 percent of the American population, which would make them as numerous as U.S. Jews. The American Jewish Committee this week released a new survey, commissioned soon after the Sept. 11 terror attacks, that its author describes as "the most credible estimate" to date of the size of America's Muslim community.

While the media routinely cites a population of 6 million to 7 million U.S. Muslims — in the wake of the Sept. 11 terror attacks, estimates have been as high as 10 million — University of Chicago researcher Tom Smith says the real number is anywhere from 1.9 million to 2.8 million.

"The Muslim community is an important part of the American mosaic, but they are not as large a part as the figures cited in the media and by others would lead some to believe," said Smith, who directs the General Social Survey at the university's National Opinion Research Center.

"It's quite common that groups overestimate the size of their community since they are very involved with the community, and tend to see themselves as larger than an objective standard can verify," he said.

An American Muslim leader immediately denounced the survey as inaccurate and the AJCommittee as politically motivated.

The report is a "desperate attempt to discount the role of American Muslims," Ibrahim Hooper of the Council on American-Islamic Relations told the Associated Press. "Very often the representatives of the extremist wing of the pro-Israel lobby, such as the American Jewish Committee, seek to block Muslim political participation," Hooper reportedly said.

The AJCommittee denied the charge. Spokesman Kenneth Bandler said his organization instead is "working to advance Muslim-Jewish relations."

"We're not seeking to diminish their influence in this country, but it's important to know accurately what their population is," Bandler said. "We're anxious to develop ties with Muslim groups with whom we can seriously have a relationship, meaning groups that don't endorse terrorism."

The AJCommittee also was eager to give guidance to media that it believes unwittingly publish dramatically inflated population figures.

When the report was completed late last week, the AJCommittee passed it along to both The New York Times and The Associated Press.

The 6-7 million figure appears as "an established fact, even in the pages of The New York Times," Bandler said. "We wanted to set the record straight on these numbers, and that's it. People in the newsrooms, in political offices and the general reader can draw their own conclusions."

Smith, for his part, said he is not concerned about rising Muslim political influence.

"I'm only interested in scientifically bad numbers," said Smith, who is not Jewish. "If one is given wrong information, one will be guided inappropriately."

For the past decade, Smith said, he has read publications that printed Muslim population estimates that didn't jibe with his research.

He said he wrote to the editors of USA Today and American Demographer, a trade journal, contesting their population estimates, but neither letter was published.

Smith estimated that Muslims make up 0.7 percent of the adult population. Extrapolating that out to the general population produced a range of 1.9 million to 2.8 million. When reading population studies, Smith says it always critical to consider the source.

"When there aren't scientifically credible numbers, someone supplies those numbers and they usually represent an advocacy group," he said. "Many counts are not actually counts. It's based on someone saying, 'Oh, there's that many.' And those numbers could be wildly inaccurate." □

NEWS ANALYSIS

Sharon caught between U.S. calls, demands from his core supporters

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Does Prime Minister Ariel Sharon intend to depose Yasser Arafat and dismantle the Palestinian Authority?

This question was being asked with mounting urgency around the world this week as Israeli tanks and infantry dug into positions deep inside Palestinian territory in the West Bank.

Compounding international concerns, Sharon and other Israeli officials are comparing the Palestinian Authority to the Taliban, saying both are harboring and helping terrorists. The implication was clear: Just as the United States is resolved to destroy the Taliban, so, too, Israel, exercising the basic right of self-defense, is justified in making war on the Palestinian Authority.

During his visit to Washington this week, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres assured Vice President Dick Cheney, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Secretary of State Colin Powell that Israel does not intend either to remove Arafat or to bring about the collapse of the P.A.

But does Peres speak for Sharon anymore?

Relations within the national unity government — with the Likud and its hawkish allies on one side, and Peres' Labor Party on the other — approached the breaking point this week as the two sides wrangled over the extent and duration of Israel's military operations.

Perhaps it was the serious suspicion that Sharon has resolved to destroy Arafat that prompted the U.S. State Department to issue an unusually sharp statement Monday calling on Israel to withdraw "immediately from all Palestinian-controlled areas."

The United States clearly wants to defuse the Israeli-Palestinian violence as it seeks to maintain Arab support for its international coalition against terror.

Jerusalem was taken aback by the tone of the statement.

Just the same, the Prime Minister's Office rebuffed the U.S. call, saying the military operations — the most extensive since the two sides signed their interim peace accords in 1993 — would continue, with the aim of apprehending terrorists and preventing acts of terrorism.

Israel has demanded that the Palestinian Authority extradite those members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine responsible for last week's assassination in Jerusalem of Tourism Minister Rehavam Ze'evi.

On Monday night, meanwhile, close to 100,000 people demonstrated in the streets of Jerusalem to demand that the government "Get rid of Arafat and fight terrorism."

Organizers of the event, buoyed by the Israel Defense Force's operations in the West Bank, insisted that the demonstration was not against Sharon — as had originally been planned.

Instead, it was designed to bolster and encourage the premier now that he had adopted a warlike posture following the Ze'evi assassination.

As for deposing Arafat, the conventional wisdom among Israelis has long been that any successor to Arafat would be worse. The fundamentalist Hamas, growing increasingly popular in the Palestinian territories, would seize power.

After more than a year of Israeli-Palestinian violence, there is little love left for Arafat among Israeli moderates.

The conventional wisdom still holds true. But the prospect of a Hamas-led Palestinian entity no longer worries some Israeli hard-liners.

At least, they argue, it would not be wooed by Washington and the West to support the U.S.-led international anti-terror coalition.

Moreover, they say, if Arafat is toppled, the West Bank and Gaza Strip might not fall entirely into the hands of the Islamic fundamentalists.

Instead, the areas might be divided into fragments, in which local warlords — some perhaps amenable to Israeli influence — would divide up power.

In the eyes of these hard-liners, this would represent an improvement over the present, when terror and bloodshed against Israelis both in Israel and in the West Bank and Gaza have become an almost daily occurrence.

Where does Sharon stand in this evolving debate?

The answer, according to one well-placed source with frequent access to the prime minister, is that there is more than one Sharon.

According to this source, the premier, always a complex personality, is torn between competing pressures.

On the personal level, the general-turned-politician does not want to end his long career leading an open-ended war.

He has repeatedly declared that he would be ready to offer "painful concessions" for real peace with the Palestinians. His eight months of relative restraint — in the face of constant violent provocations by the Palestinians — demonstrate his desire to break through to peace.

At the same time, Sharon has not abandoned his fundamental ideological support for the right of Jews to settle everywhere in the Greater Land of Israel.

Add the U.S. pressures on Israel to back off from its military operations in the West Bank, and you have a truly beleaguered prime minister.

At Monday night's demonstration in Jerusalem, the leader of the National Religious Party, Rabbi Yitzhak Levy, demanded that Sharon make his choice: If the P.A. does indeed harbor terrorists, as Sharon has claimed, then the premier must fire Peres, who is visiting Washington making the opposite argument. One government cannot speak with two voices, Levy said.

Avigdor Lieberman, leader of the Israel, Our Home Party — which deferred its planned secession from the government following the killing of Ze'evi — demanded at the demonstration that Sharon formally declare the P.A. a terrorist enemy and order the army back into Palestinian areas of Hebron.

Otherwise, Lieberman said, his party would quit — as he had first announced when Israeli troops withdrew from Hebron last week. Yet to do either of these would trigger an avalanche of American condemnation, and could well push Labor out of the coalition.

U.S. officials have come down hard on Arafat, too, publicly and in private.

They are demanding that he act against the PFLP, though they are not specifically endorsing Israel's demand that he extradite the perpetrators of Ze'evi's assassination to Israel.

If Arafat, under this arm-twisting, does take some credible action, this could at least partially defuse Sharon's dilemma.

He could order the army out of the West Bank cities, claiming that the military incursions had achieved their goal.

In the short term, Sharon would have succeeded in balancing the conflicting pressures facing him. In the longer term, however, his predicament is unenviable. □