



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 80, No. 26

Thursday, February 7, 2002

85th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Terrorists kill 3, take hostages

At least three Israelis were killed and at least four injured Wednesday when Palestinian terrorists infiltrated a West Bank settlement.

The gunmen held residents hostage in a house before Israeli commandos stormed the building. At least one terrorist was believed killed in an ensuing gun battle with Israeli forces in the settlement of Hamra.

The settlement had received warning of a possible infiltration 10 minutes before the first shots were fired, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz.

Suicide bomber nabbed

Israeli police nabbed a suicide bomber en route to Jerusalem. A bus driver stopped Wednesday at a military checkpoint on the outskirts of the city and told police he had spotted a suspicious-looking man on board, according to a police spokesman.

"There was some sort of a struggle on the bus," the spokesman said. When the police took the suspicious man off, they found an explosive belt on his body.

Experts called to the scene safely defused the bomb. Israeli security forces are searching for a man the bomber said was his accomplice.

Missiles found in West Bank

Israeli soldiers intercepted a shipment of eight missiles hidden aboard a Palestinian truck.

The soldiers found the Kassam-1 missiles after setting up a surprise roadblock late Tuesday night in Palestinian-controlled territory between Nablus and Jenin, Israel Radio reported.

The missiles were hidden beneath a cargo of fruits and vegetables.

U.S. to continue talking to Arafat

The United States will continue dealing with Yasser Arafat, a top U.S. official said.

Reiterating U.S. policy, William Burns, undersecretary of state for Middle Eastern affairs, said at a meeting Wednesday in Cairo that Arafat remains the Palestinians' chosen leader.

His comment came after Israeli Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer suggested during a visit to Washington that the United States should bypass Arafat and deal instead with other Palestinian officials.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Conservative groups seek unity as they mark 100th anniversary

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — When the Conservative movement convenes in Washington next week, it will mark a lot of dramatic firsts. And it will embody for many a new commitment to collaboration among its numerous institutions.

But the five-day gathering, which begins Sunday, also comes amid concern that the 100-year-old movement is too factionalized and that it may be losing clout.

Among the firsts:

- Five Conservative groups that previously met independently — the congregational arm, rabbinic arm, and professional associations for synagogue executive directors, educators and cantors — will share one conference.

- A woman, Judy Yudof, will head the movement's congregational arm, the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism.

Neither Orthodox nor Reform bodies have had women in a comparable role, but the smaller Reconstructionist movement has.

- An Israeli rabbi will head the movement's rabbinic arm, the Rabbinical Assembly.

Rabbi Reuven Hammer, who made aliyah from the United States in 1973, was one of the rabbis involved in the 1998 Ne'eman Commission, a group that sought to find a compromise among the religious streams over contentious issues related to conversion.

- An Ethiopian-born Conservative rabbi, Yafet Alemu, who was ordained in Jerusalem in November, will be inducted into the Rabbinical Assembly.

More traditional than Reform, more liberal than Orthodox, the Conservative movement has always been challenging to define. It sees halachah, or Jewish law, as binding but takes a more liberal interpretation than Orthodoxy.

While most of its leaders observe Shabbat and keep kosher, the majority of its rank-and-file synagogue members — unlike Orthodox synagogue members — are not strictly observant.

The Reform movement has reached out to intermarried families and gay and lesbian Jews. In contrast, the Conservative movement welcomes individual intermarried Jews, but does not allow non-Jewish spouses to become synagogue members.

It also does not ordain openly gay rabbis.

Conservative leaders say they are facing numerous challenges, including trying to unite the movement and inspire members to take their Judaism more seriously at a time when the movement is not growing and, in fact, may be shrinking.

Both the Reform and Conservative movements say approximately 320,000 households in North America are affiliated with their synagogues.

However, the Conservative movement used to be larger than Reform.

In the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, 18 percent of American Jews were affiliated with Conservative synagogues and 16 percent with Reform ones, said Steven Cohen, a sociologist at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem who was involved with the study. In previous studies, the Conservative movement had been even larger, Cohen said.

Some in the Conservative movement say that Reform's recent growth can be credited, in part, to the fact that it is more unified.

While Reform's many institutions are united under one large administrative rubric — the Union of American Hebrew Congregations — which hosted its largest-ever biennial gathering in December with 5,800 people, the Conservative movement is

MIDEAST FOCUS

Terrorist came in ambulance

A female Palestinian bomber used a Red Crescent ambulance for cover to enter Jerusalem last month. Israeli security officials believe Wafa Idris, a Red Crescent volunteer from Ramallah, used the ambulance to get through a roadblock north of the city, the Israeli daily Ha'aretz reported. Israeli security officials said this proved the necessity of their policy of checking Palestinian ambulances at roadblocks.

One Israeli was killed and more than 100 wounded when Idris detonated a bomb in downtown Jerusalem on Jan. 27. Israel's security establishment has been unable to determine whether she intended to carry out a suicide attack, plant the bomb and leave, or pass the explosive to someone else.

Cheney to visit Israel

Vice President Dick Cheney plans to travel to Israel next week. Cheney will also visit eight other Middle East countries, but not the Palestinian territories, The Associated Press reported Wednesday.

CIA Director George Tenet will also be visiting the region next week, but not for a peacemaking effort, administration officials say.

Congress, Knesset to fight terror

The United States and Israel will work together on fighting counterfeiting and funding sources that go to support terrorism. U.S. lawmakers joined Israel's minister of public security, Uzi Landau, on Capitol Hill on Wednesday to announce the increased security dialogue.

Knesset passes state budget

Israel's Knesset overwhelmingly approved the nation's 2002 budget. In a major victory for Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, legislators on Wednesday approved the \$51 billion budget by a vote of 53 to 19, with one abstention.



Daily News Bulletin

Ivan Michael Schaeffer, *President*

Mark J. Joffe, *Executive Editor and Publisher*

Lisa Hostein, *Editor*

Michael S. Arnold, *Managing Editor*

Lenore A. Silverstein, *Finance and Administration Director*

Paula Simmonds, *Marketing and Development Director*

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.

© JTA Reproduction only by previous arrangement.

decentralized. Its many institutions not only raise funds separately, but have reputations for not communicating well among themselves.

"There are an awful lot of people who view this as the Conservative coalition — not a movement, at best a confederation," said Rabbi Daniel Allen, president of the Masorti Foundation for Conservative Judaism in Israel.

"Now people are starting to wonder out loud: 'Can we live with that; is that okay?'"

Next week's gathering is an effort to start to unite the movement, Conservative leaders said.

The Reform movement's more united structure "would be something I'd like to emulate," said Yudof, the United Synagogue's incoming president.

She said she has spoken recently with the heads of the Rabbinical Assembly and the Jewish Theological Seminary to discuss how the groups can work more closely, and that all acknowledged the need for change.

"Neither debated the fact that the arms are speaking at each other rather than with each other, and they seemed interested in how we might be able to work more collaboratively," said Yudof, who is from Minneapolis.

JTS is not part of the convention, but its chancellor, Rabbi Ismar Schorsch, and some of its leadership will attend.

In addition to the balkanization of the movement's national institutions, there is a disconnect, Yudof said, between individual members and the larger movement.

"There's a tendency to withdraw into the political life of one's own community and not have a global view of the movement," she said.

Two of the largest Conservative grass-roots institutions — the Women's League for Conservative Judaism and the Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs — are not participating. Leaders of those groups cited the high costs of the convention.

Organizers say the price reflects the cost of kosher catering — registration fees include three meals per day — and the fact that the convention is in Washington D.C.

Approximately 1,500 people are expected. Organizers say it is about what they had expected, though there had been initial concerns about turnout being lower.

Some in the field say it is getting more difficult to recruit members to their synagogues. Elisa Spungen Bildner, who calls herself a "very committed" Conservative Jew and is a co-founder of the Foundation for Jewish Camping, said the "competition is fierce" for potential synagogue members.

"It's much easier not to be a Conservative Jew," Bildner said. "Coupled with so many intermarriages and the acceptance of the intermarried by the Reform movement, it makes the Conservative movement's job tough."

Bildner, who belongs to Congregation Shomrei Emunah in Montclair, N.J., said she recently spoke with the synagogue's membership chair about the challenges.

"I look at Conservative Judaism as a way to be egalitarian and also observant, which Orthodoxy does not allow me to do. That's what propels me."

But around her, she said she sees, "declining numbers of religiously observant or committed Jews."

Conservative synagogues, she said, require more background knowledge of Hebrew and liturgy than Reform ones, although in recent years, Reform synagogues have incorporated more Hebrew and more traditional rituals.

However, others are more optimistic about the Conservative movement.

Riv-Ellen Prell, an American studies professor at University of Minnesota who has studied the Conservative movement, said one can see the "vitality of the Conservative movement in the growth of day schools and in the ongoing and growing popularity of the Ramah Movement, whose camps are oversubscribed."

In a recent study done with other researchers, Prell also found that the educational expectations for Bar and Bat Mitzvah, as well as a commitment to study following Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, have grown in recent years in the Conservative movement.

Rabbi Joel Meyers, executive vice president of the Rabbinical Assembly, said that "Reform is probably the largest of the movements and probably will remain so for awhile."

But he said that while Reform may be attracting Jews on the "margins" of the Conservative movement, studies have shown that "people opt for the Conservative movement." □

JEWISH WORLD

Faith-based compromise reached

The U.S. Senate reached a compromise on faith-based legislation.

Under the compromise, controversial parts of the bill, which would have given direct government funding to religious groups that provide social services, have been removed, according to The Washington Post.

The bill instead will focus on tax incentives and other measures to increase public and private support for non-profit groups.

Legislator: U.S. must stay in Sinai

Rep. Tom Lantos (D-Calif.) has asked the United States to keep soldiers in the Sinai.

Lantos, in a letter to National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, said the drastic cut in America's contribution to the international peacekeeping force in the Sinai, as suggested by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, "would produce an unfortunate result in the region."

Lantos, who is the ranking minority member of the House International Relations Committee, added: "Now is not the time to experiment with letting the Israelis and Egyptians try to make things work on their own."

French minister blasts Israel

France's foreign minister lashed out at Israel's policies. During a speech Wednesday to French legislators, Hubert Vedrine blasted the "absurdity" of Israel's "policy of pure military repression."

Vedrine added that "since the Israeli government and the American government contest the political legitimacy" of the Palestinian Authority, the Palestinians should hold new elections that would be "democratically incontestable."

In another development, the French Foreign Ministry announced Wednesday that France will provide some \$6.3 million in aid to the Palestinians this year.

This represents a 10 percent increase over last year's total.

Extremist plans presidential run

The leader of a far-right party plans to run in France's presidential elections.

Jean-Marie Le Pen, longtime leader of the National Front, announced Monday that he has obtained the 500 signatures of elected officials needed to run in the first round of presidential elections this April.

During some three decades on the national stage, Le Pen has made no secret of his anti-Semitic views, a tactic that has contributed to his support in conservative areas of southeastern France.

Hadassah lays off many staff, citing the downturn in economy

By Rachel Pomerance

NEW YORK (JTA) — As Hadassah prepares to celebrate its 90th anniversary, the women's Zionist organization has laid off 10 percent of the staff from its headquarters here.

Hadassah officials, confirming the layoffs, say last Friday's move was a prudent and necessary fiscal one that will leave its programs intact.

But some insiders say the dramatic cutback casts doubt on the organization's ability to remain a leader in the Jewish community.

Hadassah, with 300,000 members, is among the largest women's membership organizations — and the largest Zionist membership organization — in the United States.

The group, which was founded on Purim in 1912 by Henrietta Szold, is primarily known for its support of two hospitals in Israel, medical research, Jewish education and a youth movement.

Before last Friday, the organization employed some 200 to 300 people at its headquarters, which also includes a heavily involved volunteer staff. Among the departments that lost much of their professional staffs were those devoted to public affairs, Washington affairs, and Israel, Zionist and international affairs.

"Absolutely nothing will be affected," said Ellen Marson, Hadassah's national executive director. "Rest assured that Hadassah is well."

She said that none of their programs were eliminated, and the remaining staff is expected to meet the same demands as before. The move reflected "very painful and difficult decisions here" that were required to adjust to a dismal economic market.

Marson declined to give specific budget figures or losses due to a decline in market investments. But, she said, like so many other organizations currently facing this dilemma, "Hadassah wanted to review and then reduce its administrative costs."

The move came as a shock to most of the staff, who had no forewarning about the number of layoffs or about who would be fired, according to someone close to the organization.

Some said those laid off were hurried out of the building, given only a few hours to clean out their desks after being notified of their release.

And some dispute the notion that Hadassah can maintain business as usual in departments that were cut by one-third or more.

Also, some said they resented that the action took place last Friday, a day when most of the volunteers, who play a powerful role in the organization, are not in.

But Marson said it was a thoughtful decision by both volunteers and professionals, made "with all of the expert help that we could consult with."

Still, many think last Friday's layoffs are not the end.

When asked about future firings, Marson said, "As of today, we don't have any plans for any other layoffs at Hadassah House," the organization's headquarters in New York. "We will be looking into operations throughout the country to review" them.

Asked about possible cuts to the organization's hospitals in Israel, she said the institutions would be safe, but added it "depends on how the economy goes."

As for their 1,100 chapters across the country, which serve as social and activist groups for many women, Marson said she does not foresee their receiving any less support from the national office. □

Hadassah hosting Israel mission

NEW YORK (JTA) — Hadassah plans to conduct a "legacy mission" to Israel.

The five-day study and travel tour will allow Hadassah members to "follow in the footsteps of our foremothers," according to Hadassah President Bonnie Lipton.

Participants will visit the sites where early Hadassah leaders "lived and worked as they established the foundations of Hadassah," Lipton added.

The mission, which is limited to 40 participants, will take place March 10-17 as part of events marking the 90th anniversary of Hadassah's founding. □

After initial cold shoulder, U.S. seeks Israeli help against terror

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The United States increasingly is looking to Israel for assistance and advice in its ongoing war against terrorism.

Shortly after the Sept. 11 attacks, the Bush administration seemed hesitant to publicly utilize Israel's intelligence capabilities. While Israel's expertise in the field is unquestioned, U.S. officials feared a partnership with Israel could anger Arab states, which America was courting for its coalition against Afghanistan.

But that attitude has changed recently as the administration has steered away from the Arab coalition. In addition, the Bush administration has drawn closer to Israel as it has seen the Palestinian Authority's unwillingness to crack down on terror groups.

Uzi Landau, Israel's minister of public security, met senior U.S. officials and lawmakers this week to discuss how Israel and the United States can help each other fight terrorism.

Specifically, Israel and the United States are planning a homeland security dialogue to better synchronize activities between the Knesset and Congress. The idea is to revive and extend the Inter-Parliamentary Commission, a cooperative dialogue on missile defense formed in 1998.

Landau has been working with Sens. John Kyl (R-Ariz.) and Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.) to revive the commission, which could begin holding hearings in April or May.

Increased coordination between terrorist groups and organized crime, and the threat of weapons of mass destruction, have made increased coordination necessary, Landau said.

The U.S. and Israeli administrations already work closely on security issues, but it is essential that the two parliaments also be in sync, said Rep. Curt Weldon (R-Pa.). Weldon encouraged other lawmakers to sign up to participate in the commission.

Kyl listed a few things the commission will focus on, including counterfeiting, cutting off funding streams to criminal and terrorist elements and working to develop a legal framework that will address terrorism in a cross-border fashion.

While in town, Landau met with FBI Director Robert Mueller and Homeland Security Director Tom Ridge to enhance intelligence and security cooperation between the two countries.

"We cannot fight" terrorism "alone," Landau said Wednesday. "We have to mobilize democratic countries around the world."

Israel has been providing information, both clandestinely and in the open, since the Sept. 11 attacks. Israeli intelligence on terrorist organizations and their funding led the United States to freeze assets of the Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development, a U.S. charity that allegedly has funneled money to Hamas.

Israel's experience in lessening combat casualties has proved informative, as has its know-how in dismantling roadside bombs.

Israel also provided intelligence on a Florida professor with ties to a terrorist organization. Sami al-Arian was fired from South Florida State University when the school learned of his ties to members of Islamic Jihad, based partly on Israeli intelligence.

America can also learn a thing or two from Israel in terms of public vigilance.

"You need to change the state of mind of your society to understand this threat," Landau said.

That includes preparing citizens to be cognizant of those around them, which will provide "many more eyes" for spotting

suspicious people and packages. He also said Israel has been urging public places and businesses to take responsibility for their security and coordinate efforts with law enforcement.

Landau's meetings in Washington are considered indicative of a new interest in increased cooperation.

"America understands the Israeli people have a reservoir of information which they are willing to make available to the United States," a former senior Pentagon official said. "Israel's reputation in the practical side is very high."

Israel's knowledge of Afghanistan and Al Qaida was limited. Now that the United States is looking at Iraq and Iran as possible targets in the war on terrorism, however, Israel's insight could be very useful.

Landau's visit to Washington focused not only on homeland defense issues, but also on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Like more senior officials to visit Washington this week — Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer — Landau urged U.S. officials add the Palestinian Authority to President Bush's "axis of evil," which currently includes North Korea, Iraq and Iran.

"The Palestinian entity is basically a rogue entity, providing a safe haven for any terrorist organization that wants to contribute to the destruction of the State of Israel," Landau said. □

Israel, Iran engage in war of words as Israeli leaders pay visit to U.S.

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A war of words has erupted between Israel and Iran. Foreign Minister Shimon Peres this week claimed Iran is sending its elite Revolutionary Guards to Lebanon to prepare for an attack on Israel.

Iran has "converted Lebanon into a ball of explosives, endangering the future of Lebanon," Peres said in New York after meeting with U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

Peres also said Iran is arming Hezbollah terrorists in Lebanon with thousands of missiles that can strike Israeli cities.

Peres' comments came as Iran's defense minister, Admiral Ali Shamkhani, responded to a reporter's question by saying that "If Israel carries out any military action against Iran, it will face a response that will be unimaginable to any Israeli politician."

Israeli officials have been playing up the Iranian threat after President Bush referred to Iran in his State of the Union speech as being part of an "axis of evil," along with North Korea and Iraq.

Israeli Transportation Minister Ephraim Sneh denied suggestions by Tehran that Israel might attack Iran's nuclear power plant.

Cabinet minister Dan Meridor said Israel is trying to convince Russia and Western countries to cut links with Iran as long as it seeks to develop weapons of mass destruction.

In addition, the Israel Defense Force chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Shaul Mofaz, described Iranian efforts to obtain nuclear capability as a long-term, existential threat.

Briefing the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, Mofaz also said that Israel had developed the capability during the past year to protect itself from an Iranian missile attack.

During separate visits to Washington this week, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer are expected to warn officials about the threat posed by Iran.

Israeli leaders had been reviewing policy toward Iran before the Washington talks. □