



Daily News Bulletin

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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israel considers new buffer zone

Israel's defense minister warned that he may send troops to retake some Palestinian areas if Palestinians fire more rockets at Israel.

Benjamin Ben-Eliezer issued the warning Tuesday as Israeli officials consider creating buffer zones in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to protect Israeli communities from rocket attacks.

Despite the Israeli warnings, Hamas is defiantly maintaining the right to fire rockets at Israeli cities in order to counter Israeli air attacks on Palestinian areas.

More groups sought for terror list

U.S. lawmakers are urging President Bush to add several Palestinian groups to the U.S. terrorist list. The effort, being led by Reps. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.), asks Bush to add the Al-Aksa Brigade, the Tanzim militia and Force 17 to the list of foreign terrorist organizations.

"Doing so will demonstrate to these groups, those who direct them and those who associate with or support them that the failure of these groups to conform their behavior to civilized norms has a price," says the letter, which has close to 60 co-sponsors.

Rabbis shelve rights group vote

The Conservative movement's Rabbinical Assembly voted to postpone a resolution about an Israeli human rights group.

The group had been asked by some Israeli rabbis to withdraw its previous endorsement of Rabbis for Human Rights, a group that has criticized Israel's treatment of the Palestinians and whose recent activities — including replanting Palestinian olive trees that the Israeli army has bulldozed — have been controversial.

The Rabbinical Assembly decided to avoid making a statement about the group due to a lack of consensus among members, and for fear that a resolution against Rabbis for Human Rights would appear to be opposing the group's human rights ideals.

Because of the Presidents' Day holiday, the JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Monday, Feb. 18.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Conservative Jewish leaders seek 'leaner, meaner' movement

By Julie Wiener

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The Conservative movement is seeking to create a more educated and religiously committed membership, what one rabbi described as "a leaner, meaner Conservative movement."

The focus comes as demographic changes — particularly intermarriage — erode the Conservative movement's position as the dominant Jewish stream in North America.

While some fear Conservative Judaism is losing ground to the Reform movement — which has in recent years expanded through greater inclusiveness of diverse groups and a return to some traditional practices — few Conservative Jews are urging the movement to become more liberal or less demanding.

Rather the movement appears to be moving to step up demands on congregants and focus on a smaller, but more committed, core.

In a rare Washington convention combining five national Conservative bodies — the first time all had met together — several major speeches this week focused on requirements and demands.

Speaking on "The Synagogue of the Future," Steven Cohen, a sociology professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem who has studied contemporary American Jewish identity, suggested that higher standards, along with a greater focus on personal meaning and spirituality, will strengthen the Conservative movement.

"At times of high anxiety about Jewish stability and continuity, our tendency is to demand less, become less judgmental and more inclusive," he said. "In fact, this strategy is counterproductive."

Cohen cited research about churches by sociologist Laurence Iannoccone, who concluded that churches that demand more voluntarism and religious proficiency tend to be more vibrant and popular than ones that set lower bars.

"Yes, demanding more may mean discouraging some from joining our ranks; but fortunately, those who find us too demanding can turn to other valued Jewish choices for affiliation," Cohen said.

"At the same time, those who come to Conservative communities will be drawn to places that exude a spiritual vitality, communal cohesiveness and serious religiosity."

Cohen, like many others at the convention, also pointed out that while there is still a disconnect in observance between leaders and the rank and file, recent studies show that more Conservative Jews are educated and observant than at any time in recent history. Younger members, particularly graduates of the growing number of liberal Jewish day schools and the movement's Ramah network of summer camps, are often more observant and educated than their elders.

In addition, adult education participation is growing, both through synagogues and community-based programs like the Florence Melton Adult Mini-School.

Many in the field said they are noticing those changes.

Rabbi David Lerner of North Suburban Synagogue Beth El in suburban Chicago, said, "I feel like we're a leaner, meaner Conservative movement."

"We have a more knowledgeable cohort that is more observant than their parents, but we're maybe a little smaller."

Rabbi Jerome Epstein, the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism's executive vice president, focused his speech at the convention around standards as well.

While it may be unrealistic to expect the majority of Conservative congregants to immediately become fully observant, Epstein said, some basic requirements can serve

MIDEAST FOCUS

Palestinian killed during firefight

Israeli troops killed a Palestinian gunman when they entered a West Bank town near Hebron. In Tuesday's raid, which lasted about five hours, Israeli soldiers went into the Palestinian-controlled town of Halhoul and arrested a member of Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement and a second man belonging to Islamic Jihad, Israeli military officials said.

There were exchanges of fire with Palestinian gunmen, during which soldiers shot and killed an armed man fleeing a building, the officials said. Israeli army bulldozers also destroyed a house that belonged to a member of Fatah. In another raid, Israel said it arrested 10 Palestinians in an area under its security control near Ramallah.

Israel checks rocket launch

The Israeli army checked reports that Palestinians tried to launch Kassam-2 rockets at Israel from the West Bank. Israeli troops heard explosions from the Balata refugee camp in Nablus early Tuesday morning and believed the rockets may have landed in Palestinian-controlled territory.

Arafat, security chief feuding?

A serious conflict reportedly has developed between Yasser Arafat and the head of Palestinian security in the West Bank. According to a Palestinian source, Arafat drew his gun during a meeting with Jibril Rajoub, Israel Radio reported.

Palestinian sources give different reasons for the dispute. Some say Arafat blames Rajoub for failing to prevent the release of prisoners this week from a Hebron jail. Others say Arafat is upset about a pamphlet, whose authenticity was later denied, which stated that Arafat's Fatah movement had bowed to pressure and dismantled the Al-Aksa Brigade, which has carried out terror attacks on Israeli civilians.



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as a "springboard for further Jewish growth." What Epstein called his "Compact of Commitment" includes commitments to regularly give tzedakah, or charity, light Shabbat candles and have a Shabbat meal, recite the blessing over bread before each meal, avoid shellfish and pork if not keeping fully kosher, and engage in adult learning.

Epstein urged synagogue leaders to "become the beacon to inspire Conservative Jews to live a more fulfilling and meaningful life."

"The goal must not be to lower expectations, but to create the 'bandwagon effect' of commitment to Jewish living — in which we are all involved and growing."

Rabbis and others said they supported higher standards, but some said it can be a tricky balancing act to be simultaneously more demanding and more welcoming.

"If you demand more, your congregants have more respect for what you're doing," said Rebecca Holmes, executive director of Temple Emunah in Lexington, Mass.

But Rabbi Debra Eisenman of Beth Tikva of West Boca, Fla., warned that people will rarely become more observant simply because they're commanded.

"You can say it over and over, but they'll do what they want," Eisenman said.

Ultimately, Jewish behavior has to be "modeled" by the rabbi and demonstrated as something that will add meaning to people's lives, she said.

"It's important to listen to what people need, then to say it's wonderful that you have those needs and this is how Jewish tradition answers them."

Rabbi Felipe Goodman of Temple Beth Sholom in Las Vegas said synagogues need to make sure congregants feel a reason to become more involved and observant, before piling on rules. The debate over requirements reminded him of a bitter dispute he encountered when he first came to his synagogue several years ago.

At the time, few people showed up for Shabbat services, but the old-timers were adamant about keeping a rule requiring all people called to recite the blessings before the Torah to wear a tie.

"I said, 'Who are you going to enforce this will on?'" he said.

At the heart of the tension that sometimes exists between imposing standards and being welcoming is the issue of intermarriage.

Unlike the more liberal Reform movement, the Conservative movement actively discourages intermarriage, does not allow its rabbis to officiate at intermarriages and does not allow non-Jewish spouses to become synagogue members.

Seen as poor Jewish role models, intermarried Jews are often excluded from leadership positions. They are not allowed to be religious school teachers, and in some synagogues they are not allowed to serve on the board.

In one session at this week's convention, a rabbi said she had turned down a pulpit position because some of the synagogue's board members were intermarried.

And while leaders say they want to encourage conversion and do not want to lose Jews who intermarry, the movement has generally avoided reaching out to interfaith families, fearing that doing so would undermine Jewish prohibitions.

However, a small number of intermarried Jews are joining Conservative synagogues anyway, and several Conservative leaders are urging the movement to do a better job of welcoming intermarried families. "An interfaith family striving to create a Jewish home and live by Jewish values has a place in my community," said Rabbi Isaac Jeret of Temple Emanu-El in Palm Beach, Fla..

"More and more, interfaith people are coming to me and saying that back East they were members of Reform temples, but they want to try Conservative now," Goodman of Las Vegas said.

Judy Yudof, the new president of United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, said synagogues can do a better job of making interfaith families comfortable, while retaining its principles.

For example, even if the non-Jewish spouse cannot become a member, the synagogue can still send out letters addressing the entire family.

"If we're not welcoming, why would they want to be a part of us?" she said.

Ed Case, publisher of Interfaithfamily.com, said reception to his display at the convention exhibit hall — his first time there — was warmer than he had anticipated.

In one day more than 40 participants approached his booth and expressed interest or support, he said.

While most people walk by and look surprised to see his exhibit, he said, "No one's hissing." □

JEWISH WORLD

Oscar nominations announced

Several Jews were among the Academy Award nominees announced Tuesday. Writer Akiva Goldsman was nominated in the adapted screenplay category for "A Beautiful Mind," the story of a brilliant mathematician battling schizophrenia.

In the same category, Terry Zwigoff was nominated as co-writer of "Ghost World."

As in past years, the documentary feature category produced at least one entry of particular Jewish interest. "Promises," by Justine Shapiro and B.Z. Goldberg, deals with the Middle East conflict as seen through the eyes of Israeli and Palestinian children.

Van linked to AMIA attack

Residue of explosives was found in a van allegedly used in a deadly 1994 bombing of the AMIA Jewish community center in Buenos Aires. It has widely been assumed that the van was used in the attack, which killed 85 people and wounded 300.

But proving that the van was used is crucial for prosecutors in an ongoing case against 20 people accused of roles in the bombing.

Rally in New York to boot PLO

More than 50 people gathered in New York calling for the Palestinian Mission to the United Nations to be closed.

Singing Hebrew peace songs, handing out leaflets to taxis and passers-by and chanting "Stop the murder, stop the hate, PLO out of our state," the protesters argued that the Palestinian mission uses New York resources to support a terrorist organization.

"PLO out of NYC," a group formed a year and a half ago, includes 40 students from area universities.

JNF going to Israel

The Jewish National Fund is celebrating its 100th anniversary with a mission to Israel.

Next week's trip, which will include JNF supporters from 40 countries, will focus on efforts to solve Israel's water crisis.

Israel, Germany in historic match

In what is being hailed as a historic first, an Israeli national soccer team will play on German soil.

Along with some 20,000 fans, several VIPs will attend Wednesday's game in the western town of Kaiserslautern: German President Johannes Rau; Israel's ambassador to Germany, Shimon Stein; and Paul Spiegel, president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany.

"It borders on a miracle that, only 57 years after the worst crimes committed against humanity, such a match can take place in Germany," Spiegel told the Berlin newspaper Die Welt.

Young federation leaders lobby so their elders can 'age in place'

By Sharon Samber

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The average Joe doesn't know what a NORC is, but Jewish communal leaders are aiming to change that.

On Tuesday, 2000 representatives of communities around the country lobbied on Capitol Hill, trying to educate their lawmakers about the need for services to naturally occurring retirement communities, or NORCs.

NORCs are residential housing developments where people moved decades ago, raised families and aged, and where they want to continue living independently.

The issue has become a priority agenda item for the public policy arm of the United Jewish Communities, the umbrella of the federation system.

Allowing people to "age in place" is much cheaper than the institutionalization involved with nursing homes or assisted living facilities, UJC officials say.

Perhaps because many of the 30- and 40-somethings have aging parents and grandparents, the task for educating Congress about the issue fell to UJC's young leadership conference participants, who were gathered here this week for a three-day convention. The goal of the lobbying effort was to lay the groundwork for creating legislation and ultimately some form of national programming, UJC officials said.

The number of Jewish elderly is expected to soar over the coming decade, and UJC wants leaders at the national and local levels to look beyond traditional methods of caring for the elderly to develop new plans and policies.

Many communities have been preparing to increase services to the elderly, but as baby boomers age, the need is becoming more urgent, say experts in the field.

The problem is especially acute in the Jewish community.

An estimated 20 percent of American Jewry is 65 or older, a significantly higher proportion than among the general population, where the figure is around 13 percent.

The 1990 National Jewish Population Survey showed that 920,000 Jewish Americans are at least 65 years of age.

There are an estimated 10 million seniors living in NORCs, and the vast majority want to remain living in their own homes, according to UJC officials.

Providing help to seniors could mean a lot of different things depending on the community.

For example, a large apartment complex could include space for health care and legal services. In a more suburban area, such services could mean a shuttle bus for seniors to get to special programs. For a number of lawmakers — or their aides — it was the first time they were hearing about the idea.

Indeed, for some conference participants, it was also their introduction to the issue.

On the bus ride to Capitol Hill on Tuesday, some people were poring over their information sheets and said they felt like they were cramming for a test.

In Florida, where the number of Jewish elderly is particularly high, one might expect people to be more knowledgeable about the subject.

But the Jewish community, the general community and lawmakers are not aware of NORCs, said Marisa Weinstock of Miami.

The young leaders are interested in the subject and happy to inform others, Weinstock said.

"We have parents and grandparents," she said. "And one day we'll be in that position, too."

Will Springer of Miami said Florida should be more proactive about getting funding for NORCS, but added all states should be interested in the concept.

After meeting with their individual members of Congress, many participants agreed that the lawmakers were very receptive to the idea of helping NORCs.

While there is no legislation about NORCs right now, UJC is working with a senator on developing a bill, according to Diana Aviv, UJC's vice president of public policy. She did not want to name the senator.

At the end of last year, \$3.68 million in federal funds were designated for Jewish agencies in Baltimore, Cleveland, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and St. Louis to serve the elderly living in NORCs.

This was seen as a model program, which UJC hopes to expand. □

NEWS ANALYSIS

On Sharon's return, chances rise for war or peace — take your pick*By David Landau*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — All-out war — or a return to peace-making.

Both of those options seemed closer this week as Israel and the Palestinians intensified their 16-month armed struggle, while would-be negotiators intensified efforts to resurrect peace talks.

The latest escalation in the intifada was the use by Hamas, for the first time, of ground-to-ground missiles.

Two homemade Kassam-2 rockets, packing some nine pounds of high-explosive material, landed in Negev farmland Sunday.

Those launches caused no damage, but the missiles' range is enough to wreak havoc if launched from the West Bank at Israel's heavily populated coastal strip.

Israel last week intercepted a shipment of missiles on its way to Jenin, a city on the West Bank border with Israel. On Tuesday, Israeli officials were investigating what they believe was an abortive missile launch, also emanating from the West Bank.

The missiles seemed a clear Palestinian challenge to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, given his repeated warnings that firing missiles would provoke an Israeli reaction entirely different from anything yet undertaken.

Israeli Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer spoke Tuesday of the possibility of reoccupying a large swath of land along the Green Line to push launchers back to where missiles couldn't threaten Israeli cities. Israel reportedly has warned the United States of this possibility.

For its part, the Palestinian Authority did not try to curb the escalation, but instead released dozens of suspected terrorists from jail, arguing that they were in danger from Israeli bombs. Others were freed by mobs while P.A. police looked on impassively.

Some Israeli analysts argue that Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat, far from seeking a cease-fire, wants to provoke a disproportionate Israeli reaction that will widen the conflict to the rest of the Middle East and force international intervention.

Despite the situation on the ground — or perhaps because of it — two new diplomatic initiatives to bring the sides back to peace talks were put on the table this week.

The European Union is pushing a peace package involving immediate recognition of a Palestinian state and elections in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

At the same time, Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres is promoting a plan that he drafted with Ahmed Karia, speaker of the Palestinian Parliament, calling for the recognition of a Palestinian state immediately after a cease-fire has been stabilized, and before other issues are negotiated.

The proposal, pushed most energetically by France, was discussed by the 15 E.U. foreign ministers in Spain last weekend. It reflects the European position that Israeli and American insistence on a full cease-fire before political talks resume prevents meaningful progress. The E.U. proposal — and the worldview behind it — sets up a possible confrontation between Europe and America on Mideast policy.

The Bush administration has taken a particularly tough line with Arafat since a series of deadly terrorist attacks in early December ruined an American peace mission undertaken largely in response to Arab pressure. Arafat's standing was further weakened

by evidence of P.A. involvement in an attempt to smuggle 50 tons of weapons from Iran to Gaza — which Arafat then denied in a letter to President Bush.

Europe, on the other hand, has been much more critical of Israel, arguing that Arafat can't really be expected to crack down on terror when he is under Israeli siege in Ramallah.

The Europeans say Israel and a new Palestinian state should immediately exchange recognitions, to be followed by international recognition of Palestine and the holding of elections there.

Arafat likely would win a strong vote of confidence in the elections, enabling him to get tough with Palestinian terrorist groups, or so the theory goes. A renewed mandate also would undercut Israeli attempts to bypass Arafat and develop a more moderate Palestinian leadership.

Negotiations then would take place on outstanding issues, including the borders of the two states.

Both Britain and Germany have signaled reservations on the plan. Their respective foreign ministers, Jack Straw and Joschka Fischer, were due in the Middle East late in the week and were to meet with Sharon and Arafat. Straw told his colleagues in Spain that Israel needs stronger security guarantees, as it is being attacked by terrorists daily.

But even the British and Germans are said to be uncomfortable with what Europe sees as the blanket support the Bush administration is giving Israel, and the lack of diplomatic effort — as the Europeans see it — to break the deadlock.

Israel dismisses the E.U. plan as "divorced from the reality on the ground," in the words of one highly placed source.

Israel of course welcomes the strong U.S. backing, but Sharon's aides concede that Bush and his team did not endorse Sharon's assertion, during his visit to Washington last week, that Arafat is the "obstacle to peace" and needs to be replaced.

Though exasperated with Arafat, the White House does not favor his removal at this time. Israeli analysts say Bush's primary concern is to keep the Israeli-Palestinian confrontation relatively controlled while Washington prepares a possible strike against Iraq.

Meanwhile, Peres is circulating to Cabinet ministers a four-point plan that he and Karia developed, presumably with Arafat's blessing. The program provides for:

- A full cease-fire and implementation of the Mitchell Commission recommendations, which include a freeze on Israeli settlement construction in the West Bank and Gaza Strip;
- Mutual recognition between independent states. The recognition would be based on U.N. Resolutions 242 and 338, which call on Israel to withdraw from "territories" — the Arabs would like to interpret this as "all the territories" — it conquered in 1967;
- Final peace negotiations to be concluded within 12 months; and
- International peacekeeping forces and aid machinery to bolster the agreement.

Peres is canvassing support from Shas, the opposition Shinui Party and even a right-wing bloc. However, political observers say he is unlikely to win much backing, especially since his own Labor Party is split over the wisdom and practicality of the proposals.

Some Laborites contended midweek that the Palestinians are demanding a side proposal guaranteeing a complete Israeli withdrawal from the entire West Bank, Gaza Strip and eastern Jerusalem, setting the borders of the future Palestinian state.

While many Labor politicians would not object to those borders, it is foolhardy to concede them before negotiations even begin, some warned. □