



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 80, No. 119

Wednesday, June 26, 2002

85th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Israel welcomes Bush speech

Israeli officials praised President Bush's Middle East policy speech.

The officials viewed Bush's call for a new Palestinian leadership, one "not compromised by terror," as a vindication of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's position that Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat must be replaced.

Sharon issued a statement saying that, like Bush, he has stated that progress toward peace can be made only after "there is a complete cessation of terror, violence and incitement, and when the Palestinian Authority enacts genuine reforms, including a new leadership at the top."

Foreign Minister Shimon Peres called Bush's speech "important" in its call for the establishment of two states living together in peace, but said Bush had not elaborated on how to reach this goal.

Speech disappoints Palestinians

Palestinian officials expressed disappointment with President Bush's speech. Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat issued a statement calling Bush's ideas a "serious contribution" toward peace, but he later brushed off Bush's call for a new Palestinian leadership.

"This is what my people will decide," Arafat told reporters Tuesday. "They are the only ones who can determine" who their leaders will be.

Other Palestinian officials echoed the sentiment. "Palestinian leaders don't come from parachutes from Washington or anywhere else. Palestinian leaders are elected directly by the Palestinian people," chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat told CNN.

The top E.U. foreign policy official, Javier Solana, likewise said it is up to the Palestinian people to choose their leaders. [Page 3]

Israeli astronaut's flight delayed

The flight of Israel's first astronaut aboard a NASA space shuttle has been delayed.

The July 19 launch of the Columbia shuttle will be delayed for a few weeks until engineers determine the cause of small cracks found in the propulsion systems of two other shuttles, NASA said Monday.

Columbia is scheduled to carry Israeli astronaut Ilan Ramon and six Americans on a 16-day scientific research mission.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Sharon delighted by Bush speech, but leftists warn it's shortsighted

By Leslie Susser

JERUSALEM (JTA) — President Bush's Middle East speech arguably was the most unabashedly pro-Israel statement ever by an American president — yet it is getting mixed reviews in Israel.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon is delighted by the fact that Bush did not lay down a firm deadline for Palestinian statehood, and that he made very clear what the Palestinians will have to do to before they can get their own state.

But Foreign Minister Shimon Peres fears that in demanding that the Palestinians oust Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat — and replace him with leaders "not compromised by terror" — the president may have pushed too far.

Instead of a new leadership and an end to terror, the Palestinian response might be one of defiant solidarity around Arafat, resulting in even worse terror, Peres and others on the Israeli left fear.

Several key questions remain after the speech: How will the Palestinians respond? What kind of road map will be presented to translate Bush's vision into reality? And what kind of practical changes will take place now on the ground?

Bush's speech "leaves many open questions and uncertainty regarding the next step to be taken," Knesset Speaker Avraham Burg said. "The president leaves the State of Israel alone facing the violence and the loss of life caused by the terrorist attacks without any clear commitment, without a sponsor for peace and without a roadway leading to his vision."

The differing assessments between left and right are not surprising, since Bush put the onus for change almost entirely on the Palestinians: They must elect new leaders, reform their political, economic, security and judicial institutions, and stop terror, Bush demanded.

Bush did make certain demands of Israel — to withdraw the army to positions held before the intifada began in September 2000, for example, and to end settlement building — but Bush clearly made such steps contingent on Palestinian performance.

The key issue therefore, is how the Palestinians respond. On the one hand, they might see the American demands as both arrogant and impossible, and increase their violence until Washington "gets serious."

On the other hand, they could conclude that America will back them all the way to statehood, and pour in enough funds to ensure that the state is viable, if they stop using terrorism and supporting a terrorist regime. The Palestinians could take Bush at his word, break sincerely with terrorism and wait to see whether Bush delivers on his promises. After initial praise from Arafat on Monday, Palestinian reaction turned increasingly defensive, arguing that they would choose their own leaders and that the speech did not offer them enough hope.

A lot will depend on how the U.S. administration follows up on the speech and how other key players, especially the Europeans, respond.

If Secretary of State Colin Powell comes to the region soon with a more detailed road map for political movement, and if the Europeans also make political and economic support contingent on an end to terror, there could be positive movement.

But as former Prime Minister Ehud Barak noted in an interview with CNN immediately after Monday's speech, Arafat likely will try to exploit even the smallest gap between the European and American positions to save his political skin.

European leaders and U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan rejected Bush's call to

MIDEAST FOCUS

Four Palestinians killed in Hebron

Four Palestinian policemen were killed during a clash Tuesday with Israeli troops in Hebron. The clash took place after Israeli tanks rolled into Hebron and took control of the Palestinian Authority headquarters there. Soldiers declared a curfew in the city, confining more than 100,000 Palestinians to their homes.

The army issued a statement saying soldiers had discovered a bomb factory in Hebron and had arrested a "large number" of terror suspects.

Powell ponders Arafat re-election

U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell was noncommittal about what the United States would do if the Palestinians again elect Yasser Arafat as their leader.

"The United States will respect whatever they say as a people" when Palestinian elections are held, Powell said in an interview Tuesday with National Public Radio. Asked what would happen if they re-elect Arafat, he said, "Well, we'll just have to see how that plays out. I mean, we will deal with the circumstances as we find them."

Church official blasts terror

The Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem criticized the recent spate of Palestinian terror attacks in Jerusalem.

In a letter to Israeli President Moshe Katsav, Ireneos I called on "the leaders of all faiths to unite in full and clear condemnation" of such attacks.

No charges for ex-bank governor

Israel's attorney general, Elyakim Rubinstein, announced he will not open a criminal investigation against a former governor of the Bank of Israel.

In a report by the state comptroller, Jacob Frenkel had been accused of receiving sick pay, vacation pay and per diem expenses abroad to which he was not entitled.

replace Arafat, stressing that Arafat had been elected and that the Palestinians could choose their own leaders.

Most Israeli commentators are not optimistic that the speech will improve the situation on the ground.

"As far as the White House is concerned, either Palestine will be America, or the Middle East can wait," Ofer Shelah wrote in *Yediot Achronot*, "bleeding all the while."

Chemi Shalev commented in *Ma'ariv*: "Bush's speech was perhaps a big step forward for Ariel Sharon, but it seems a very small step for the prospects of peace."

Moreover, the speech left several key questions unanswered. For example, Bush did not mention the international Middle East peace conference that had been discussed for later this summer.

Does that mean the conference is contingent on changes in the Palestinian leadership and institutions? Or will it be used to jump-start movement in that direction by offering clear political rewards, like provisional Palestinian statehood?

Furthermore, will Sharon take Bush's unmistakable call to replace Arafat as license to expel him? For weeks now, Sharon has been pushing for Arafat's expulsion, only to be blocked by Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer and warnings from military intelligence and the Mossad.

On the Israeli right, however, the voices in favor of deporting Arafat are growing more insistent. Cabinet minister Dan Naveh, one of the leading advocates of expulsion, argues that as long as Arafat is around, no alternative Palestinian leadership can emerge.

"The voices of reason will be afraid to speak out," he argues.

Naveh dismisses assessments by military intelligence and the Mossad that Arafat would be more dangerous abroad than in the West Bank.

For now, Arafat is still in charge and, according to Israeli intelligence sources, doing nothing to stop terror attacks against Israel. Indeed, Sharon has made it clear that Israel's current invasion of Palestinian cities in the West Bank is part of a new security doctrine in which Israel "expects nothing of Arafat."

If the Oslo process meant handing over partial responsibility for Israel's security to the Palestinians, Israel is now reclaiming that responsibility in full. The new doctrine provides for a security fence between Israel and the West Bank to stop terrorists; periodic occupation of Palestinian cities to root out terrorist bases; and short, sharp operations based on pinpoint intelligence.

Operation Protective Wall, in which the Israel Defense Force took over Palestinian cities, destroyed terrorist infrastructure and made thousands of arrests, was a first run of the new doctrine.

The fact that the operation was followed quickly by a new wave of suicide bombings shows just how widespread the terror bases are and how quickly the terrorists are able to regroup. Yet IDF sources are confident that the problem lies not in the overall concept but in the fact that the army simply did not stay in the cities long enough, as international pressure for an Israeli withdrawal mounted.

This time, as Operation Determined Path gets under way, the IDF intends to stay in Palestinian areas much longer — perhaps even for several months at a stretch — until the security fence is erected. But there clearly is no intention of formally reoccupying the West Bank. Both Sharon and Ben-Eliezer have come out strongly against formal reoccupation, which would leave Israel responsible for providing Palestinians with basic services such as education and garbage collection.

Amos Gilad, the coordinator of government activities in the Palestinian territories, is adamant that Operation Determined Path is meant only to strike at terrorist bases, not to reinstitute a civil administration. The IDF, he says, will limit itself to encouraging the Palestinian civil authority and helping international agencies dispense aid.

The trouble with the new policy is that Israel could find itself sucked into reoccupation and responsibility for some 3.5 million Palestinians — and with an American peace plan that some deride as unrealistic.

If it continues, the status quo could prove inimical to Israel's long-term interests. According to recent demographic projections, Palestinians will be a majority between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea by 2010. If they are still occupied by Israel, they might demand a single, binational state, rather than a two-state solution, thus forcing Israelis to choose between a Jewish state and a democratic one. □

(Leslie Susser is the diplomatic correspondent for the *Jerusalem Report*.)



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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JEWISH WORLD

Syrian textbooks spread hate

Syrian textbooks teach hatred of Jews and destruction of the State of Israel, according to a new report. On Tuesday, B'nai B'rith International unveiled "Jihad, Jews, Anti-Semitism in Syrian School Texts," which examined 68 textbooks from Syrian schools.

Through lessons in all grades, students are taught to hate Zionism and Jews, seek to destroy Israel, view terrorist activity as martyrdom and reject peace with Israel, the report found. The books also contain maps that show "Palestine" in place of Israel, and illustrations of Israeli soldiers killing Arabs.

No charges for politician's remark

German prosecutors decided not to press charges against a German politician who allegedly made anti-Semitic remarks.

Prosecutors on Monday rejected a complaint that accused Jurgen Mollemann, vice president of the Free Democratic Party, of racial incitement and slander.

The complaint stemmed from comments Mollemann made last month suggesting that Michel Friedman, a vice president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, helped provoke anti-Semitism by his manner and behavior.

Russian woman gets award

A Russian woman who was injured when she tried to remove a booby-trapped, anti-Semitic sign received an award.

President Vladimir Putin awarded the Russian Order of Courage to Tatyana Sapunova, 28, who suffered burns and eye injuries last month when a bomb exploded as she tried to remove the sign next to a highway near Moscow.

Sapunova, who is being treated for her wounds in Israel, was given the award "for courage and selflessness in fulfilling her civic duty."

Since the incident, several copycat signs with dummy explosives have been found on Russian roads.

If Bush weighed 50 kilos more?

The mayor of Jerusalem praised President Bush for his Middle East policy speech.

Speaking before young professionals at an American Israel Public Affairs Committee dinner Monday, Ehud Olmert joked that if Bush weighed "50 kilos more" — about 110 pounds — one might have thought it was Prime Minister Ariel Sharon giving the speech.

Olmert also implied that Secretary of State Colin Powell was not as supportive of Israel and had to endure Bush's pro-Israel speech.

Olmert also said Israel will find Palestinian terrorists and those who harbor them, and "we will kill them."

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Palestinians reject Bush speech, but it could catalyze calls for change

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Even before President Bush called for replacing the Palestinian Authority leadership, there were growing indications that Palestinians were doing some soul-searching.

One indication was a June 19 petition against suicide bombings, signed by the PLO's top official for Jerusalem, Sari Nusseibeh; Palestinian legislator Hanan Ashrawi; and other Palestinian intellectuals.

The petition, which was published twice as an advertisement in eastern Jerusalem's Arab press, was the most impressive public move against the current wave of Palestinian terrorist attacks in recent months.

"We would like to believe that those who stand behind the military operations, whose targets are civilians in Israel, will reconsider their acts because we do not see that they lead to any results, except for more hatred and animosity between the two peoples," the petition read.

The petition was signed by 55 Palestinian personalities. It was followed by another advertisement a few days later with even more signatures. To be sure, the writers of the petition carefully chose their words to stay within the Palestinian consensus.

They did not call suicide bombings "terrorist attacks," for example, but "military operations." In addition, they did not say that the attacks against civilians were immoral per se, simply that they weren't useful to the Palestinian cause.

In any case, the petition coincided with a rally in the Gaza Strip in which hundreds protested over deteriorating economic conditions, demanding work and food rather than armed struggle. Some demonstrators told reporters that they wanted to know what had happened to relief money from overseas, little of which had made its way from the Palestinian Authority to the people.

Some analysts, like Zuheir Hamdan, the "village head" of the eastern Jerusalem neighborhood of Sur Baher, said he thought both the petition and the demonstration were the work of Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat.

Hamdan told JTA that Arafat encouraged the petition — indeed, he went on record praising it — to strengthen the appearance of moderation.

With outside pressure mounting to overthrow Arafat, he may understand that his only chance for continued popular support will be an improvement in the Palestinians' economic situation.

Israel is unlikely to reopen its gates to Palestinian workers in the foreseeable future, and significant economic aid from the United States will depend on a cessation of violence — as Bush indicated in his speech this week.

Now, with Bush having come out strongly against the Palestinian leader — on Monday he called "on the Palestinian people to elect new leaders, leaders not compromised by terror" — Arafat is likely to intensify his efforts to hang on to his image as the only leader able to rally the Palestinian people behind him.

Indeed, for nearly a decade of the Oslo peace process, even as evidence mounted that he was in gross violation of his peace commitments, Arafat maneuvered to stay in power by presenting himself as indispensable.

Curiously, in his initial reaction, Arafat described Bush's speech as "a serious effort to push the peace process." The next day, however, he joined other Palestinian officials in saying that only the Palestinians would choose their own leaders. Bush's call for new leadership was "not acceptable," Palestinian Cabinet Minister Saeb Erekat said.

Indeed, the present P.A. leadership is well aware that Arafat's removal may also mean the end of their political careers.

"Yasser Arafat was elected in democratic elections, and President Bush and others must respect this," Erekat said.

Israeli Arab legislator Ahmed Tibi, who previously served as a top adviser to Arafat, said Bush had surpassed Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon as the person Palestinians hated most. "Arafat will remain head of the Palestinian Authority, and American pressure to replace him will only increase the violence," Tibi warned. □

FBI warning for sites fuels concern and vigilance, not panic

By Joe Berkofsky

NEW YORK (JTA) — An FBI warning that Al-Qaida might attack Jewish targets with gas trucks ignited widespread concern and fueled heightened security in Jewish communities nationwide this week.

From Jewish organization offices to community centers to synagogues, news spread quickly last Friday of the latest FBI terror warning that Al-Qaida operatives at one point discussed attacking Jewish institutions with bomb-laden gasoline tankers.

The Anti-Defamation League and the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, both based in New York, alerted member agencies throughout the country about the potential attacks, and many then notified local groups.

"The ADL is advising Jewish institutions to be extremely alert to fuel and tanker trucks parked near their facilities," said the ADL's director of security, Robert Martin.

"The police should be called immediately if any doubt exists relative to the legitimacy of such trucks (i.e., no fuel delivery was expected)," Martin said in a memo.

Yet Jewish groups were also being cautioned not to overreact to the fuel-truck alert since, like earlier Al-Qaida threats and subsequent FBI warnings, it did not refer to any specific targets or dates and remained uncorroborated.

"There's no reason for panic," said Martin Raffel, associate executive director of the JCPA.

"We're not saying this is business as usual. This is a time for special vigilance. Prudence and alertness, not panic, is the message we're trying to get across."

Still, the latest FBI warning, which preceded a report in The New York Times on Sunday that Al-Qaida claimed responsibility for the deadly fuel truck bombing of a synagogue on the Tunisian island of Djerba on April 11, inflamed fears nonetheless.

Last Friday, "we were inundated with calls," Raffel said.

People asked if they should attend Shabbat services, or what kinds of precautions they could take, he said. "People are nervous."

Hoping in part to dampen such fears, these groups are urging several steps in response to the latest threat, including coordinating security measures with local police.

"We are encouraging the Jewish community leadership in New York to maintain a high level of contact with local police officials, and in addition we're encouraging vigilance on the part of institutions and organizations," said Rabbi Michael Miller, executive vice president of the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York.

Hoping to arm the Jewish community with some simple weapons to combat potential attacks, New York's JCRC also sent details last Friday about the creation of the New York Police Department Counterterrorism Hotline (888-NYC-SAFE).

"If you hear a rumor or see something suspicious call this number immediately," the JCRC memo said.

Some moved to take pre-emptive action.

The Orthodox Union scheduled a day of safety training July 10 for synagogues, schools and community facilities.

The O.U. said the session, set for 10 A.M.-3:30 P.M. at its New York office, would also be Webcast — at www.ou.org. Rabbi Moshe Krupka, the O.U.'s national director of community and

synagogue services, said the session was sparked by "an alarming increase" in worldwide anti-Semitic violence and the FBI warnings that "terrorists may try to use fuel tankers to attacks Jewish schools and synagogues."

A team of European-based security specialists will discuss handling a range of anti-Jewish threats, the O.U. said, including break-ins, suspicious mail or objects, bomb threats, desecration of Jewish facilities, hate mail, personal attacks and even "strangers in our synagogues and schools."

Around the country, synagogues and institutions reacted swiftly to the latest in a series of terror alerts.

Rabbi William Hamilton, of Congregation Kehillath Israel in Brookline, Mass., said he'd met with local police twice since last Friday, and police have increased patrols past the synagogue, located on a main street in the heavily Jewish suburb of Boston.

"Concern was pretty high" among Kehillath Israel's members after last Friday's warning, Hamilton said.

At least one Jewish institution reacted by trying to make itself a less visible target. In the Dallas area, the Akiba Academy's Camp Kulanu summer camp removed a welcome sign and asked police for extra surveillance.

And at Temple B'nai Israel, in Tupelo, Miss., Shabbat services included a reading of the FBI warning. Though congregants agreed the tiny 25-family synagogue remained an unlikely target, they also decided to remain on guard.

Nervousness about terrorism has been running high for months, and some said they sensed the latest warning did not have the same impact as the World Trade Center attacks last year.

"There was greater concern after Sept. 11," said Sue Fox, executive director of the Shorefront YMHA of Brighton Beach, in Brooklyn. Fox said the YMHA has already taken such measures as installing security cameras and hiring unarmed security guards, but she did contact local police to discuss the gas-truck threat.

But Fox added that the latest alert raised some issues that remained unanswered.

Earlier terror warnings about Jewish targets have also met with some skepticism.

In May, Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, said he did not take seriously an FBI alert on the heels of reports that U.S. forces in Afghanistan unearthed Al-Qaida documents listing 12 Jewish groups as potential targets.

While underscoring the need to remain vigilant, Hoenlein called those particular documents outdated and vague.

So far this year, the JCRC has issued four terror alerts based on general warnings by the FBI. Some Jewish leaders said their communities had long ago beefed up security.

Rabbi Mark Diamond, executive vice president of the Board of Rabbis of Southern California, said many Jewish institutions in the Los Angeles area toughened their security after a deadly shooting rampage at a local Jewish community center in 1999.

Though many like Diamond agreed that people should be careful, he also cautioned that they should keep the situation in perspective.

"We don't want people to be panicked — already people are living with some degree of fear," Diamond said. "Don't not come to synagogue because there's a tanker truck on the corner." □

(Mara Dresner of the Connecticut Jewish Ledger, Larry Brook of the Deep South Jewish Voice and Sharon Wisch-Ray of the Texas Jewish Post contributed to this report.)