



# Daily News Bulletin

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85th Year

## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### **Bethlehem, Gaza first**

Israeli troops began withdrawing from the West Bank city of Bethlehem.

Israeli Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer and two top P.A. officials agreed Sunday on a plan under which Israeli troops will gradually pull back from Palestinian areas, beginning with Bethlehem and the Gaza Strip.

Hamas and Islamic Jihad vowed to continue attacks despite the agreement. [Page 3]

### **Report: Abu Nidal's body found**

The body of terrorist Abu Nidal reportedly was discovered in an apartment in Baghdad.

According to the Palestinian daily Al-Ayyam, a body believed to be Abu Nidal's was found with gunshot wounds that indicated he had committed suicide, Israel Radio reported Monday.

There was no confirmation of the report. Abu Nidal headed a terrorist organization that split from the PLO in 1974 and was long suspected of carrying out terrorist attacks against Israeli as well as PLO targets.

Abu Nidal was behind a 1982 attempted assassination of Israel's then-ambassador to Britain, Shlomo Argov, which was considered one of the triggers for the Israeli invasion of Lebanon that year.

Abu Nidal also masterminded gun and grenade attacks on Israeli airline check-in desks in Rome and Vienna in December 1985 in which 19 people died and more than 100 were wounded.

### **9/11 lawsuit implicates McKinney**

Contributors to Rep. Cynthia McKinney (D-Ga.) were named as terrorist financiers in a federal lawsuit filed by Sept. 11 victims.

The lawsuit comes as Jewish groups are backing McKinney's opponent, Denise Majette, in Tuesday's Democratic primary.

The \$1 trillion lawsuit, filed Aug. 15 by more than 600 relatives of people who died in the terrorist attacks, seeks damages from the "financial sponsors of terror" who "hide behind the facade of legitimacy."

Several supporters of McKinney — whom Jewish activists long have considered one of the most anti-Israel members of Congress — were alleged to support Al-Qaida, Hamas and Hezbollah, according to the Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

## **Polls show lower Israel support, as many in U.S. blame both sides**

*By Joe Berkofsky*

NEW YORK (JTA) — Americans tired of Mideast violence increasingly blame Israel and the Palestinians equally and dismiss each side's cause as "hopeless," according to a series of new polls of American views of the conflict.

Overall, 42 percent of Americans support Israel, while only 10 percent support the Palestinians.

Yet about the same amount surveyed say they remain neutral in the conflict — favoring neither side or backing both equally — a marked erosion of long-standing support for Israel.

In addition, a majority want the Bush administration to pressure both Israel and the Palestinians to negotiate, and they overwhelmingly support a two-state solution to the Mideast conflict — even if it includes the "right of return" for Palestinian refugees to Israel.

These assessments arise from a series of surveys last month that show public support for Israel slipping from 50 percent less than a year ago, turning instead to apathy or disgust with violence by both sides.

"The moral edge that Israel has always enjoyed is that it has always appeared strongly desirous of peace and generally willing to accept the partition of the land of Israel," said Steven Cohen, professor at the Melton Centre at Hebrew University. "Insofar as we don't look like we are committed to peace or interested in a two-state solution, we suffer in the eyes of public opinion."

In the surveys, taken by prominent Democratic pollster Stanley Greenberg and funded by several Jewish organizations and private donors, many Americans said the conflict seems "hopeless." They characterize it as a "holy war" that has endured for thousands of years and could last centuries more without peace.

The Jewish organizations hope to fight that ambivalence with a multimillion-dollar national ad campaign emphasizing Israeli democracy and its shared values with the United States, its willingness to make peace and its importance as a strategic American ally.

The forces behind what's being called the Israel PR Campaign are Democratic political consultant Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi, Republican strategist Frank Luntz and Greenberg.

They're hoping to convince American Jewish organizations — and the Israeli government — to adapt their communications strategy.

The executive director of the American Jewish Committee, David Harris, said the organization is prepared to make "a significant commitment" in funding the centerpiece of the PR campaign, a series of upcoming national ads on CNN, Fox News and MSNBC.

"The time for talking about the problem has come to an end, and the time for seeking a solution is long overdue," Harris said.

TV is "where the battleground really is," he added. "The way to shape it is with ads."

The AJCommittee was the first to sign onto the new strategy. Others include the United Jewish Communities, which is the umbrella of local Jewish federations, and Israel 21C, a group of pro-Israel high-tech entrepreneurs in California's Silicon Valley.

So far the AJCommittee has supplied a portion of the \$700,000 required for the initial polling and for cable TV ads that have run in recent months in the Washington area.

The rest of the money has come from private family foundations and donors, with

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Use of 'human shields' blocked

Israel's High Court issued a temporary injunction barring the army from using 'human shields' to tell terrorists to come out of hiding.

The court gave the army one week to explain the tactic.

In issuing the injunction, the court was responding to petitions filed by human rights groups protesting the army's practice of sending a Palestinian into a building where a suspect is believed to be hiding to relay the army's request that the suspect surrender.

The petition was filed following an incident in the West Bank last week in which a 19-year-old Palestinian, whom Israeli troops allegedly forced to summon a wanted Hamas member from his home, was killed by gunfire.

### Hamas fugitive apprehended

Israeli forces detained a suspected Hamas terrorist in the West Bank.

Muhammed Araf was among some 10 Palestinians detained near a refugee camp near Tulkarm, Israel Radio reported.

### Court hears deportation protests

Israel's High Court was due to hear petitions against the planned deportations of three relatives of Palestinian terrorists.

Last week, the court issued an injunction barring the army from deporting the three from the West Bank to the Gaza Strip until the petitions are heard.

Lawyers for the three Palestinians, relatives of terrorists involved in attacks in Tel Aviv and near the West Bank settlement of Immanuel, argue that the deportations violate international law.

The state representative argued that the three aided their relatives' terrorist activity, and that the deportations are an effective means of deterring future attacks.

Mizrahi, who initiated the project, bearing the initial \$50,000 tab.

Twice this month, the AJCommittee and the pollsters sought to win wider support for the new strategy in meetings with leaders of Jewish groups, including the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, the American Jewish Congress, Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life, the American Zionist Movement and CAMERA, the media watchdog group.

They also met in Jerusalem in recent weeks with senior Israeli officials, including Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, army officials, government spokespeople and academics. More meetings are being planned with groups such as the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the pro-Israel lobby.

The mid-July surveys measure attitudes about Israel and the Palestinians among five different groups: "opinion elites," general voters, Jews, African Americans and college students.

While the full results are being closely guarded, JTA secured memos by Greenberg and Luntz summarizing the findings and outlining a communications strategy meant to win back American hearts and minds for Israel.

While backing for Israel stands at 42 percent and support for the Palestinians at just 10 percent, the other half of respondents have pulled away from the conflict, maintaining that they support both sides equally or neither side at all.

Opinion leaders—high-income, highly educated, media-savvy people—are evenly split between those who support both sides or neither side, while most African Americans, college students and registered voters say they support neither side.

When pressed, opinion leaders—whom the strategists consider the most important group, because of their influence—say they have moved from supporting Israel toward sympathizing with the Palestinians, from 14 percent to 28 percent, in recent months, according to Greenberg's memo. Though these opinion elites call Israel a key U.S. ally, they also believe that Israel is blocking efforts toward peace, and want the United States to pressure Israel to negotiate a peace deal.

Asked whether Israel or the Palestinians are "morally right" in the conflict, 54 percent of opinion leaders said "both" or "neither," while only 34 percent chose Israel.

Asked where their sympathies lie, 42 percent of opinion leaders did not choose any side, while 41 percent said Israel.

Perhaps more troubling, African Americans, college students and registered voters tend to be more negative about Israel.

Only 37 percent support U.S. military intervention if Israel is attacked, compared with 65 percent among opinion leaders.

Just less than 50 percent of respondents say they think Israel wants peace. Only 34 percent call Israel morally right and just 27 percent see Israel as the victim in the battle.

"We cannot take much satisfaction in the fact that the Palestinians score even lower on these key measures," Greenberg notes in his memo.

Palestinian propaganda, together with news reporting that suggests a moral equivalence between the sides, may have failed in building support for the Palestinians, but it has undermined support for Israel, the study suggests.

While the opinion leaders believe the Palestinians are mainly responsible for Mideast violence, more than 40 percent see Israel as an obstacle to peace, 36 percent say Israel is acting like the terrorists itself and half say Israel is illegally occupying Palestinian land. Among the other groups, the perception is worse.

The notion that Israel has become like the Palestinian terrorists rises to 40 percent among African Americans, 45 percent among college students and 47 percent among Washington-area opinion leaders.

Most of those surveyed also agree that Israeli settlements, the "occupation" and military actions are provoking "new Palestinian grievances and a new generation of potential terrorists who will eventually strike the United States."

Ambivalence cuts across party lines. Only 36 percent of Democrats, 37 percent of moderate Republicans and 35 percent of independents back Israel in the conflict.

Israel's strongest support comes from conservative Republicans, 68 percent of whom support Israel. The pollsters say this group backs Israel largely because it supports President Bush's anti-terror stance and because of its fundamentalist Christian beliefs.

While only one-fourth of the general public says Israel is morally right in the conflict, 60 percent of conservative Republicans think so. □



## Daily News Bulletin

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## JEWISH WORLD

### Rabbi presses for Dalai Lama

A Jewish leader criticized Russian authorities for refusing to grant a visa to the Dalai Lama.

"It is impossible to apply the regular bureaucratic manner to leaders of the country's traditional religions," Berel Lazar, one of Russia's two chief rabbis, said Monday.

The government's refusal will force the Dalai Lama to cancel his trip next month to areas in southeastern Russia where more than 1 million Buddhists live.

The decision apparently was motivated by the Kremlin's desire not to offend China, which has maintained strict control over Tibet since the Dalai Lama fled into Indian exile in 1959.

Russian legislation considers Buddhism one of four "traditional faiths," along with Orthodox Christianity, Islam and Judaism. The designation gives the faiths certain privileges in Russia.

### French extremist site closed

A French judge ordered an extremist Web site closed.

The recent ruling against the site, linked to a group known as Racial Unity, followed a complaint from a Jewish student group and an anti-racism group that the site featured anti-Semitism on several of its pages. A member of Racial Unity allegedly tried to kill French President Jacques Chirac on July 14.

### Nazi-denial conviction upheld

A German court upheld a jail sentence for a former teacher who downplayed the Holocaust.

The court denied an appeal Monday made by the unidentified 62-year-old, who wrote to a Munich historian to claim that Hitler never gave the orders for the Holocaust. His assertions are "absurd and monstrous," the court ruled. The man previously lost his teaching job after being convicted twice of violating Germany's law against racial hatred.

### Jewish commitment reaffirmed

Young adult Jewish leaders reaffirmed their commitment to social justice. The commitment was made by the 360 men and women who attended the United Jewish Communities National Young Leadership Cabinet Retreat in Scottsdale, Ariz., last week.

### Belarus Shoah memorial damaged

A Holocaust memorial in Belarus was seriously damaged.

Vandals recently destroyed statues and smashed fences around the site where 8,500 Jews of the town of Lida were killed by the Nazis, according to the Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union. The same memorial was vandalized four years ago.

## BEHIND THE HEADLINES

### Israel begins withdrawing troops, but can people begin to hope again?

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Anyone wishing to check just how low Israeli-Palestinian trust has sunk need only look at this week's agreement on a gradual Israeli troop withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and Bethlehem.

Even a year ago, with the Palestinians demanding a complete Israeli withdrawal to positions held before the intifada began, a plan for a withdrawal from just two areas would have been considered laughable.

Yet this week, people were hoping against hope that even a modest agreement might finally herald a return to brighter times.

Finalized at a Tel Aviv meeting Sunday night between Israeli Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer and Palestinian Authority Interior Minister, Gen. Abdel Razak Yiheyeh, the plan calls for Israeli troops to gradually pull back from Palestinian areas.

Israel originally had wanted to withdraw only from the Gaza Strip, but gave in to Palestinian demands and included a West Bank city, Bethlehem, in the mix.

Even as skeptics said the plan would not work, Israel pulled all of its troops out of Bethlehem on Monday. They remained surrounding the city and manning roadblocks in the area.

A Defense Ministry statement added that the withdrawal was contingent on the Palestinians taking "responsibility to calm the security situation and reduce violence."

The Palestinians will assume responsibility for security in the areas as the Israeli army evacuates. In addition, Israel is to lessen restrictions on Palestinian civilians, and local commanders on both sides would meet in coming days, while Ben-Eliezer would continue to monitor the discussions.

After the seemingly endless violence of the past two years — which has almost removed the term "breakthrough" from the political lexicon — many see the "Gaza/Bethlehem First" plan as the best hope for restarting a political process.

Ben-Eliezer called the plan the most "real" of recent proposals, because the sides are proceeding "step by step."

"There is a real opportunity here for the Palestinians to stop the violence and terror and set out on a new path," he was quoted as saying.

However, in a sign of how deeply the two sides mistrust one another, even such a limited agreement is being met with skepticism.

Israeli security officials stressed that the real test of the agreement will be what happens on the ground — and the discovery of an explosives laboratory in the West Bank city of Nablus, and a security alert Monday for a possible terrorist attack in northern Israel, underscored the remaining dangers.

As of Monday night, Israeli troops had not left any of the Gaza Strip, in light of terrorist alerts.

Jibril Rajoub, the former head of the Palestinian Authority's Preventive Security Service in the West Bank, said the Palestinian security forces had been devastated by the Israeli military actions in the territories, and wouldn't be able to crack down on terrorists. "The Palestinian security agencies in the West Bank have been destroyed, and so has their infrastructure. I don't believe they can play any role," the Jerusalem Post quoted Rajoub as saying.

Hamas and Islamic Jihad swiftly declared their opposition to the agreement and vowed to continue attacking Israel. Hamas officials said the agreement was an attempt to pacify the Palestinian street ahead of an American attack on Iraq. Islamic Jihad officials called it a "political gamble."

Likud legislator Yuval Steinitz, like other right-wing members of the Knesset, called the agreement a "joke."

"Eight years after the failure of the Oslo process," Steinitz said, "again and again, we are prepared to forgive our enemies."

For a few days this week, though, there was some hope that the worst might be over — but for most Israelis, the hope was faint and guarded. □

## Jewish communities in Dresden and Prague digging out from floods

By Toby Axelrod

BERLIN (JTA) — Flood waters have forced some 150 Jewish immigrant families to evacuate their refugee home in Dresden.

They have joined at least 30,000 other residents of the historic German city who have lost homes and belongings in recent days, as floods from the Elbe River swept downstream.

By Monday, 15 people had died as a result of the floods in the state of Saxony in eastern Germany.

In Dresden, the raging waters damaged landmark buildings — including the city's new synagogue — and cut off much communication and travel.

The Jewish immigrants, most of whom had come from the former Soviet Union within the past six months, evacuated their refugee home last Friday as waters rose and engulfed apartments.

"These are very poor people, and they lost everything," said Rabbi Shneur Havlin, who runs a Lubavitch congregation in Dresden. "We are giving everything to these families — places to sleep and eat — until the government can help," said Havlin, director of Chabad Lubavitch in Saxony.

Roman Koenig, president of the Dresden Jewish community, reported on Aug. 15 via the Berlin-based Central Council of Jews in Germany that representatives were checking daily on frail or disabled members of the community.

But on Monday, it was still unclear whether everyone was safe.

"We will not know for a few days what happened to our friends and neighbors because people cannot reach each other," Jewish community board member Nora Goldenbogen said.

Telephones were still not working and cell phones could not be recharged since there was no power in much of the city. E-mail, too, was cut off.

The chairman of the World Jewish Congress, Israel Singer, is setting up an international Jewish task force in an attempt to save and restore historical Jewish sites damaged recently in the floods in Europe, according to Ha'aretz.

Singer said the WJC planned to raise money from both Jewish and non-Jewish sources and also to enlist volunteers from around the world to assist in the restoration works.

In Germany, it was difficult for representatives of the Central Council of Jews to visit Dresden, as the city's train station was severely flooded, temporarily halting train traffic in and out of the city. By Tuesday, however, some service had been restored.

The basement of the city's new liberal synagogue, dedicated in November 2001, was flooded despite the desperate efforts of the fire department and countless volunteers. Before noon last Friday, the waters poured over sandbags and filled the cellar.

But it could have been a lot worse, Goldenbogen said.

"We worked from Thursday on in shifts," she said. "We watched as the water rose, and then decided we needed help. There were not enough sandbags. So we called the fire department and they reacted very fast."

"They were there for more than 20 hours, pumping," said Goldenbogen, an historian and director of the Hatikva Meeting Place in Dresden, a source for cultural and historical information about the city's Jewish community. "Eventually the water went in,

but it was one of the few buildings in the old city that was not so terribly affected."

Volunteers ran the religious gamut, she said, and firefighters came from across Germany.

The firefighters "said to me many times that they saw it as their duty to protect the synagogue," said Goldenbogen. Dresden's original synagogue was burned down on Kristallnacht, the Nazi pogrom against Jews and their property in November 1938.

Last week, preparing for the high water, community members brought the Torah Scrolls and prayer books to the community house, which — like the Hatikva center, as well as the older Jewish cemeteries — is on higher ground, Goldenbogen said.

Early reports that the city's new Jewish cemetery had been flooded turned out not to be true, she said.

A spokesperson for the Central Council said extra security measures had been taken all across Dresden — including at the new synagogue — to make up for alarm systems shut down with the loss of electricity.

Israeli President Moshe Katsav phoned German President Johannes Rau, offering assistance and the "sympathy and solidarity of the Israeli people." According to the Israeli Embassy in Berlin, Rau expressed his thanks and hopes that the "catastrophe would soon come to an end." He also invited Katsav to visit Germany.

Should he visit Dresden today, Katsav would likely find devastation and hospitality in equal measure.

This past Sabbath, some 50 people managed to cross one bridge before it was closed in order to reach the Chabad House for services and a "big kiddush." Some families stayed overnight in the rabbi's home and in the Chabad house nearby.

Havlin and his wife, Chana, who moved to Germany from Israel five months ago, live in an area that was spared the worst of the flooding.

They were reached by cell phone.

"Our contact with the Jewish community is very good," Havlin said. "They are not Orthodox and we are, but we have a very good connection."

By Monday, the Elbe had dropped about three feet, reaching a level of under 25 feet.

But the underground water table continued to rise, endangering the foundations of buildings even in areas not affected by the flooding, according to Germany's Inforadio.

Until the waters recede, the extent of damage to Dresden's landmark buildings, apartments and private homes will remain unknown.

On Monday, experts said they feared the famous organ in Dresden's Semper Opera house was ruined, as its main works lie below ground. In TV news footage, the beloved landmark appeared to float in a sea of brown water.

The true state of affairs will only be revealed once layers of mud, trash and sewage are cleared away.

The Jewish community soon will assess the damage to its new synagogue, which was dedicated last fall, exactly 63 years after the original synagogue was destroyed by Nazi arsonists.

The synagogue, which has room for 300 worshipers, cost more than \$10 million and was supported by the City of Dresden, the State of Saxony and the private Foundation for the Rebuilding of the Dresden Synagogue. "The community has a lot of problems" to solve, said Havlin, who had visited the site and seen the water filling the basement. □