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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Bush: Attacks on allies possible

President Bush said attacks on America's allies are possible as American military action against Iraq looms. "In desperation," Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein "and terrorist groups might try to conduct terrorist operations against the American people and our friends," Bush said during an address to the United States on Monday night.

The allies Bush referred to are widely believed to include Israel.

Bush to propose loan guarantees

The White House is expected to propose additional military aid and loan guarantees for Israel in the coming days.

The funds are expected to be included in a supplemental aid package proposed to Congress in the opening days of military action against Iraq to pay for the attack. Israel has requested \$4 billion in foreign aid and \$8 billion in loan guarantees.

An Israeli official said the country is likely to receive the full loan guarantee request, but may have to settle for less in military aid.

Iran may help in bomb probes

An emissary from Iran is expected to visit Argentina soon to help investigate the two terrorist attacks on Jewish institutions in Buenos Aires.

The emissary's arrival would indicate a change in Iran's position in the 1992 Israeli Embassy and 1994 AMIA bombings, which together killed more than 100 people.

Israeli, 2 Hamas militants killed

An Israeli soldier and two senior members of Hamas were killed in separate clashes in the West Bank on Tuesday.

Near Bethlehem, a group of reservists was conducting a house search when a Hamas gunman opened fire, killing Sgt. Maj. Ami Cohen, 27, of Netanya, and wounding another soldier. In the return fire, the Hamas gunman was killed. He was identified as Ali Alian, a senior Hamas militant considered responsible for several terrorist attacks.

In an exchange of fire near the settlement of Emanuel, Israeli troops killed Nasser Asida, a Hamas member wanted for killing 19 Israelis, Israel Radio reported.

CRISIS IN IRAQ

For rabbis, it's no coincidence war on Iraq again linked to Purim

By Joe Berkofsky

NEW YORK (JTA) — Purim celebrates the ancient Jewish victory over evil in Persia, but this year it also signaled war against Iraq.

Few Jewish leaders and thinkers failed to hear the historic echoes.

Rabbi Ismar Schorsch, chancellor of the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary in New York and a tough critic of the war against Iraq, pointed to the Fast of Esther, which precedes the holiday and falls on the 13th of Adar on the Jewish calendar, which this year came on Monday.

"We are on the 13th of Adar, we are on the dark side of Purim," Schorsch said. "It will take some time before we reach the light side."

Schorsch, who called Iraq "a paper tiger that we have turned into a mortal enemy" despite greater threats from countries such as North Korea, was not alone in drawing historic parallels between Purim and the Iraq war.

Others drew very different lessons.

Blu Greenberg, an Orthodox feminist leader based in New York, supports the Bush administration's campaign against Iraq as a "preventive war," much as the ancient Jews defended themselves against Haman's plot to destroy them.

Watching President Bush's speech to the nation on Monday, Greenberg said she was struck by the similarities between the talmudic principle that "if someone comes to kill you, you should rise up and kill them first," while trying not to harm innocents.

While she remains "ambivalent" about the war and would have preferred a diplomatic solution, "this seems to be a war of self-defense in the long-range scheme of things."

Though some Jews criticize the intensity with which the ancient Jews fought back against Haman and his kin, "to me it's always mind-boggling that when someone comes to kill you and you defend yourself, you're accused of being bloodthirsty," Greenberg said.

Like the Purim story in the Book of Esther, there is no mention of God in this conflict either, she added.

Iraqi dictator "Saddam Hussein is not an Islamic leader," Greenberg said. "God is hidden, but one still has to have the hope and optimism that the ruler of the universe will shape this chapter so that good, not evil, will prevail."

Conservative Rabbi Mark Diamond, executive vice president of the Board of Rabbis of Southern California, posted an online d'var Torah, or interpretation of the Torah, linking Purim and the war.

Diamond timed his writing for Shabbat Zachor, the Sabbath before Purim, when Jews are told both to remember their ancient enemy Amalek and not to forget him.

Explaining the apparent redundancy of the commandment, Diamond said we should remember Amalek's "sneak attack" against the oldest and sickest Jews during their exodus from Egyptian slavery, and we should "confront" such evil — yet not abuse our power in doing so.

"There are times like now when we may not have a choice but to go to war," he said, "but even in war, that's the most difficult test of one's compassion."

Jewish sages have interpreted Amalek as a source of evil that reappears in different form from generation to generation.

Rabbi Yosef Kanefsky, of the modern Orthodox Congregation B'nai David-Judea

MIDEAST FOCUS

Arafat OKs prime minister bill

Yasser Arafat signed legislation Tuesday approving a Palestinian prime minister.

The Palestinian Authority president is expected to offer the job to his longtime deputy, Mahmoud Abbas.

The move toward Palestinian power-sharing has helped motivate President Bush to announce that he will soon release his "road map" aimed at jump-starting the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

Israel to investigate death

The State Department says it will allow Israel to lead the investigation into the death of an American pro-Palestinian activist.

Rachel Corrie, 23, was killed in Gaza on Sunday by an Israeli bulldozer during the demolition of a house allegedly used by Palestinian terrorists. Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon told President Bush on Monday that his office would monitor the investigation, the White House said.

"The United States deeply regrets this tragic death," a State Department spokesman said.

Vigil held for bulldozed woman

A dovish Jewish group is joining with Arab groups to condemn the death of an American activist killed Sunday by an Israeli bulldozer in the Gaza Strip. Jews for Peace in Palestine and Israel is joining a vigil outside the Israeli Embassy in Washington on Tuesday to remember Rachel Corrie, a 23-year-old from Olympia, Wash.

Israeli hotel honors Bush

A Jerusalem hotel has temporarily renamed itself in honor of President Bush. The Jerusalem Gold Hotel has chosen to salute the American commander-in-chief for his efforts against Iraq by renaming itself the George W. Bush Hotel, and a large sign has been erected on the front of the building.



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in Los Angeles, agreed that while war against Iraq may be "morally and legally justified," Jews shouldn't welcome it.

"Our role as Jews is to really reject the mood and attitude that seems to be enveloping much of the pro-war camp," Kanefsky said.

"There's a degree of barely repressed excitement at the prospect of pounding Baghdad into submission," he said. "But even when war is a mitzvah," as Maimonides said, "you should see it as a failure of humankind."

Like others, Kanefsky also found it hard to ignore Purim's messages, particularly since the 1991 Gulf War also ended on Purim.

"On Purim, the Jews gathered and put their enemies to the sword. At the same time, they did not take the booty of war," Kanefsky said. "That is the Megillah's way of saying war is not about personal gain or plundering, but about saving our lives and our children's lives."

Rabbi Martin Weiner of San Francisco, outgoing president of the Reform movement's rabbinical union, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, used Shabbat Zachor to draw a line from Amalek to Hitler to Saddam.

A modern-day Amalek, Saddam has attacked four of his neighbors, gassed tens of thousands of his own people and pays stipends to suicide bombers, Weiner said, so "it's terribly important to remove him."

Last September, Weiner was among those who backed a resolution from the Reform movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations urging a pre-emptive strike against Iraq if Congress supported it and U.N. backing was sought.

But for Reform Rabbi Don Rossoff, of Temple B'nai Or in Morristown, N.J., Amalek casts a very different shadow. Rossoff said he has refrained from publicly sermonizing this Purim about the war, which he opposes, because he is "haunted by Baruch Goldstein, who called the Arabs Amalek."

Goldstein, a doctor in an Israeli settlement near the West Bank city of Hebron, shot to death 29 Palestinians praying in Hebron's Tomb of the Patriarch on Purim Day in 1994.

Saddam is "a tyrannical, murderous dictator" who "would probably wipe out Israel if he could," Rossoff added. "But he's not the only one around. His name just starts with 'H,' " like Haman.

Another war critic is Rabbi Toba Spitzer, of the Reconstructionist Congregation Dorshei Tzedek in West Newton, Mass., who used Shabbat Zachor to talk about the uses of memory.

She reminded her congregation that in Shabbat Tikudei, in the Book of Kings, the completion of the building of the temple is given to King Solomon rather than King David, a warrior "whose hands were covered with blood."

"Our ultimate vision of holiness cannot coexist with war," Spitzer said.

Rabbi Avi Shafran, director of public affairs for the New York-based Orthodox Agudath Israel of America, said war has made it open season for anti-Semitic attacks in the form of slander — just as Jewish tradition holds that Amalek represented cynicism, and Haman symbolized evil speech.

Shafran pointed to Conservative pundit Pat Buchanan, who accused Jews of egging on the 1991 Persian Gulf War and has made similar comments this time around, and Rep. James Moran (D-Va.), who has blamed Jews in the Bush administration for pushing the United States toward war.

Instead of making outright anti-Semitic comments, such slander is "snide and insinuating," Shafran said, and is accepted as political criticism.

"Once again, everything is focused on the Jews," Shafran said. "If we're not baking Christians into our matzah, we must be war-mongering."

For Rabbi Mordecai Finley, of the unaffiliated Ohr HaTorah Congregation in Los Angeles, whose son Kayitz is in the Marines and stationed in Kuwait, Purim has taken on new meaning.

Last Purim, Finley recalled, he sensed a wave of anti-Semitism coming from Europe and left-wing groups in the United States.

Now he is "heartened" that Bush is "willing to draw a line" against evil, he said.

"Last year it felt like the 12th of Adar," Finley said, referring to the day before the Jews began fighting back against their enemies. "This year I feel like it's the 13th of Adar. The battle has begun." □

JEWISH WORLD

Rice to speak to AIPAC

Condoleezza Rice will address Jewish leaders at the annual conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

The national security adviser will represent the Bush administration, as will John Negroponte, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, and William Burns, assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs.

The policy conference is scheduled to run from March 30 through April 1.

Moran may be challenged

A former campaign worker for Rep. James Moran (D-Va.) with ties to the Jewish community is considering running against the controversial congressman.

Jeremy Bash, who served as a legal adviser for Al Gore's 2000 presidential campaign and whose father is rabbi emeritus of the Arlington-Fairfax Jewish Congregation in Virginia, is considering challenging Moran in the 2004 Democratic primary, along with several other candidates.

Bash would need to move from his Washington home to be eligible to run.

Moran faces an uncertain future after telling constituents earlier this month that the Jewish community is responsible for the Bush administration's push for war with Iraq.

Belgian Jews seek ambassador

Belgium's Jewish community has asked the Israeli government to return its ambassador to Brussels. Ambassador Yehudi Keinar was recalled a month ago after the Belgian Supreme Court ruled Israeli officials could be charged with war crimes in connection with the 1982 massacre of Palestinians refugees by Christian militiamen in Lebanon.

The Jewish community in Brussels says an ambassador is needed to combat Belgium's efforts to tie the impending Iraq war with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

German extremists live

A German court threw out a bid to ban a right-wing extremist party.

The country's highest court said it took the action Tuesday regarding the NPD because evidence garnered against the party from paid informants was tainted. The government said it would not attempt to retry the case.

Fla. man can keep license plate

A Florida man will be allowed to keep his JEWBAN license plate.

Officials will allow Tabares Gomer to keep the plate because it's a term Gomer and other Cuban Jews use to describe themselves.

CRISIS IN IRAQ

Israelis spend Purim preparing to seal rooms ahead of Iraq war

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA)—Twelve years after Purim celebrations in Israel marked the end of the first Persian Gulf War, Israelis spent the holiday this week preparing for the next war.

With an American attack on Iraq imminent, the Israel Defense Force's Home Front Command on Tuesday ordered the public to prepare sealed rooms for protection against potential chemical or biological attack.

The army said the public should not yet open their gas mask kits.

Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz said President Bush's speech Monday giving dictator Saddam Hussein and his sons 48 hours to leave Iraq motivated the decision to heighten the level of civil defense readiness.

At the same time, Mofaz reiterated the view that an Iraqi attack on Israel in response to a U.S.-led military strike was very unlikely.

"Our assessment hasn't changed. The threat is low and our preparedness is high," Mofaz said during a visit Tuesday to the special broadcasting studios set up by the Home Front Command. "What changed was the speech of President Bush early this morning, essentially giving a clear ultimatum to Saddam Hussein and Iraq, and determining a timetable that when this ultimatum expires, the American strike is inevitable."

The defense minister went on to add that Israelis should not alter their regular routine because of the heightened state of civil defense preparations.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was due to convene security and political consultations to discuss the situation.

The order to prepare sealed rooms came hours before Iraq rejected Bush's ultimatum. It also came a day after the army formally instructed the public to acquire materials to prepare sealed rooms in their homes.

The army also issued call-up orders for several hundred reservists who serve in the Home Front Command and anti-aircraft units.

The civil preparations, detailed in an instruction booklet distributed by the Home Front Command several weeks ago, included purchasing plastic sheeting and duct tape to seal a room; stocking up on bottled water and canned and dry foods; buying batteries for radios and flashlights in the event of a power outage; and packing a personal bag for each family member in the event of an evacuation due to a nonconventional attack.

The directive was the latest in a series of phased civil defense preparations that have been implemented over the past several months. They included a campaign calling on the population to update their gas mask kits, an information booklet on preparing a sealed room and what to do in the event of attack, and an advisory to stock up on supplies needed to prepare sealed rooms.

Maj.-Gen. Amos Gilad, chosen to serve as a "national commentator" during the conflict, rejected criticism that the army's gradual approach to preparing the public was confusing. "The easy decision could have been to tell the public 'to open the masks three months ago,'" he said on Israel Radio. "The correct decision has to be taken at the right time."

As part of the heightened readiness, an Israeli public television channel was to begin broadcasting instructional videos Tuesday on how to prepare a sealed room and how to put on gas masks. Gas mask distribution centers were to be open for extended hours on Wednesday and Thursday.

Israel's fuel, electricity and water authorities said they were prepared to go on emergency footing, and a situation room was being opened in the infrastructure ministry in Jerusalem. On Monday, before the army order to prepare sealed rooms, shoppers from Ramat Gan, which was hit by Iraqi missiles in 1991, were divided over whether to prepare sealed rooms.

As some shoppers loaded nylon sheeting and special protection kits for pets into their carts, one woman said she was not making any specific preparations.

"After the last war, some said the plastic and tape wouldn't have helped us anyway," she told Israel's Channel 2 television. "So what's different now?" □

CRISIS IN IRAQ

Around the country, Jews on edge as nation prepares for war on Iraq

By Rachel Pomerance

NEW YORK (JTA)—While President Bush was laying down the gauntlet to Saddam Hussein, giving him 48 hours to choose between peace and war, the streets here were marked by drunken celebration.

Emerald-clad St. Patrick's Day celebrants and costumed Purim party-goers masked the general anxiety of impending war Monday night as the government's Department of Homeland Security upped its terror gauge to high alert.

New Yorkers at packed Purim parties guarded by security said Jewish events and institutions would be likely targets in case of terrorist attack. But the revelers said they were just as concerned about their safety anywhere in New York, listing the subway, major bridges and tunnels as flashpoints of anxiety.

"I don't feel nervous being Jewish. I feel nervous being a New Yorker," said Karen Sinai, 25, at a Chabad-Lubavitch Purim party on the top floor of a Manhattan building.

New York lacks the sirens and shelters that Israel has in place for emergencies, the law student said, and its island status makes evacuation difficult.

"I feel vulnerable here," Sinai said.

On the eve of war, Jewish communities around the country expressed emotions ranging from fear for personal security to fear for Israel's security to finding security in God.

Some were determined to keep war and its accompanying anxiety from interfering with their lives. Others found relief that war apparently was about to begin after months of anticipation. Still others stepped up their anti-war activities.

In Marietta, Ga., Rabbi Shalom Lewis of Congregation Etz Chaim welcomed the fact that a decision about whether or not to go to war appeared to have been taken.

"The indecision and the waffling and the interminable compromising and discussions and negotiation have been wearying," he said. "It's kind of like extended foreplay."

The time has come to "pick a path," he said.

For many American Jews, war against Saddam Hussein's Iraq is the right move.

"I'm totally fine with" Bush's 48-hour ultimatum, said Danielle Izsak, 34, of San Francisco. "Everyone's gonna hate me, but how long has it been? Let's get some action. I'm anti-war, but because my father was in the military, I understand that some actions needed to be taken to achieve results. Saddam is not taking this seriously."

Jacob Tanz, interviewed in the social hall of Reform Congregation Beth Am in Los Altos, Calif., made a similar point.

"I think this war is justified," he said. "We need to get rid of Saddam. We missed the opportunity 12 years ago."

Rabbi Murray Berger, a chaplain, soldier and president of the Dallas Rabbinical Association, says he was in Israel when the 1991 Persian Gulf War broke out.

"As much as I'm a peaceful person, as is the Jewish community, there are times if you are being threatened, you must face the foe. If you don't, you will be annihilated or enslaved," Berger said.

Berger says America's status as a world power carries certain responsibilities.

"There are ethics involved with being a power," he said, "and

just as it is immoral to abuse power, it is immoral not to use power for the good of humanity."

"President Bush is definitely doing the right thing," said Felix Nacht of South Euclid, Ohio, who recalled the horrors of World War II, when he fled to Shanghai during the Holocaust.

Saddam is "like Hitler, is a danger to the whole world," he said. "As Jews we have learned during our long history that evil triumphs when good men do nothing."

But not everyone is so sure. Deb Mason, a student government member at Ohio State University, said that the likelihood of war has shaken many students out of their customary political apathy.

"As students we know that if anything happens, it's our friends going," said Mason, who was celebrating St. Patrick's Day at a bar Monday night.

"When President Bush came on the television, everyone in the whole bar got silent. It was just chilling."

Zvika Rimalt, an Israeli living in San Francisco, also said the situation was more complex than many people might realize.

"The United States is going to get itself into so much trouble that we'll see the repercussions for years to come," said Rimalt, 32. "I'm afraid it will be a disaster bigger than Vietnam. The Israeli occupation of Lebanon will look like nothing compared to the American occupation of Iraq."

"I'm afraid America is going to learn a very painful lesson about the limits of power."

Many Jews think Saddam's overthrow will benefit Israel.

"Saddam is a danger to America, but an even more imminent threat to Israel. His mind is as scary as Hitler's," said Oscar Stein, an army veteran in Los Angeles.

But others see the possible effect on Israel differently.

"I'm fearful for what's going to happen to Israel and the Israeli people," said Phil Hankin of Oakland, Calif. "I have a number of relatives and friends there, and this is kind of frightening," he said. "They all have their safe rooms and their supplies."

Some were concerned about Bush's strategy.

"I can understand Bush's goal of removing Saddam, but I can't fathom the process in which he dissipated the good will toward the United States in a very short time," said Gerald Bubis, a Peace Now activist in Los Angeles.

"I am greatly concerned what his action will do to the future of the United States, NATO and our relations with the European Union."

Meanwhile, The Shalom Center in Philadelphia has compiled about 175 signatures for a Jewish anti-war ad that was slated to appear on a full page of The New York Times on Thursday.

Titled "Why Jews Should Oppose War in Iraq," the ad cites a Torah passage to pursue justice. The ad also warns that war will "kill innocent Iraqis by the thousands" along with "countless American soldiers," and will "subject Americans, Israelis and civilians of many other nations to the danger of hellish terrorist reprisals."

With a decision on war falling on Purim, many Jews interpreted the holiday to fit their ideology.

In New York, Rabbi Yisroel Stone, 28, said the Megillah's message was Jewish empowerment.

"If we're connected to God and we're connected to the Torah," he said, "we have nothing to fear." □

(The Jewish Bulletin of Northern California, Dallas Jewish Week and Cleveland Jewish News provided material for this report.)