



# Daily News Bulletin

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## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Israel: Iraqi threat still there

Iraq still poses a threat to Israel, Israel's defense minister said.

Speaking in the Knesset on Monday, Shaul Mofaz said American forces are operating in western Iraq to prevent the firing of missiles at Israel.

While there is no information any Iraqi missile launchers are in the area at the moment, that could change, Mofaz said.

### Bush offers Israel aid

President Bush submitted a supplemental aid package to Congress that includes \$10 billion in aid to Israel.

The \$74 billion package for war spending submitted Tuesday includes \$1 billion in military aid and \$9 billion in loan guarantees.

Israel had sought \$4 billion in aid, with an additional \$8 billion in loan guarantees.

The State Department said the conditions for the aid have not yet been worked out between the parties.

The White House has asked for the funds to be approved quickly, and congressional leaders from both parties have expressed support for the Israel aid.

### Passover kits head to U.S. troops

Chabad-Lubavitch is sending 1,000 Passover packages to U.S. Jewish troops serving in Afghanistan, Iraq, Kuwait and elsewhere.

Rabbi Mendy Katz of the Florida-based Aleph Institute, a subsidiary of Chabad, led a team of rabbis and rabbinical students who assembled the Passover kits at a Rahway, N.J., warehouse this week.

The packages contain Haggadahs, matzahs, horseradish, gefilte fish and seder plates, Chabad spokeswoman Renee Glick said.

Meanwhile, the Jewish Community Centers Association, the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism's New York Metropolitan Region and the Jewish Federation of Rockland County, N.Y., organized a \$25,000 effort to send Jewish soldiers kosher-for-Passover foods, the New York Jewish Week reported.

The United Synagogue is also sending solo seder kits for soldiers in the field who cannot join communal celebrations, the paper said. The Jewish Welfare Board's Jewish Chaplains Council estimates there are 1,500 Jewish troops in the Persian Gulf.

## WAR IN IRAQ

### For Israel, U.S. success or failure in Iraq has major consequences

By Leslie Susser

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The war in Iraq may not be Israel's war, as Prime Minister Ariel Sharon likes to say — but the stakes for Israel could hardly be higher.

If the United States wins a convincing victory, it could assure Israel's place in a more stable Middle East for years to come. If it does not, Israel could find itself the prime target of emboldened Middle Eastern radicals and face far greater threats to its existence than it does today.

An overwhelming American victory and the establishment of a pro-western regime would remove a nonconventional — and possibly nuclear — threat to Israel from a capricious rogue regime. Moreover, a pro-Western regime in Baghdad would finally lay to rest one of Israel's worst nightmares: a united "Eastern Front" consisting of Iraq, Syria and Jordan, with thousands of tanks ready to bear down on Israel from Jordanian territory.

With Iraq, the most powerful of the three countries, out of the equation, the balance of power would change dramatically. That, in turn, would make it most unlikely that Jordan could be persuaded to forego its peace treaty with Israel, leaving Syria on its own and the "Eastern Front" notion devoid of operational meaning.

A second major strategic benefit for Israel would be an American presence opposite Iran, perhaps Israel's most implacable foe. U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell said recently that the United States had "suddenly" discovered that "Iran is much further along, with a far more robust nuclear weapons development program, than anyone said it had."

Powell was commenting on the fact that Iran managed to set up a centrifuge plant near the town of Natanz, 200 miles south of Tehran, undetected by Western intelligence agencies. The Iranians deny that they intend to develop nuclear weapons, but the centrifuges could be used to manufacture weapons-grade uranium, enabling Iran to produce several nuclear bombs a year beginning in 2005.

A weakened Iraq, an American presence in the Persian Gulf and a credible American threat to disarm Iran might slow down the Iranian nuclear program.

American success in Iraq also might weaken the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah axis, which threatens Israel from the north. Last year the Iranians delivered over 700 rockets to the fundamentalist Shi'ite militia through Syria. Hezbollah now has 1,000 rockets in southern Lebanon, trained on Israeli targets.

The perception of American power and American readiness to use it could lead Iran to rethink its ties with Hezbollah. It might also persuade Syria, not wanting to be held accountable for Hezbollah attacks on Israel, to rein in the organization.

Some Israeli analysts, including Sharon's national security adviser, Ephraim Halevy, say the ripple effect of American success even could lead to an Israel-Lebanon peace treaty, and possibly later to an accommodation with Syria.

In this optimistic scenario, the Syrians pull out of Lebanon, disarm Hezbollah and seek a peace treaty with Israel as part of a vigorous new effort to curry favor with a victorious Washington. But even if things don't go that far, the threat on Israel's northern border is likely to diminish.

Last but not least, American victory in Iraq could lead to some progress on the Palestinian front. If Saddam is toppled and replaced by a less belligerent and more pragmatic regime — even one that isn't exactly friendly toward Israel — that could

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Birthright funding may be cut

Israel's Cabinet proposed a cut in funding for Birthright Israel. As part of an austerity package to cut its budget, the Cabinet decided Tuesday to cut the equivalent of \$2.1 million to the program in 2003, and 20 million shekels, or \$4.2 million, in 2004.

The cost of the \$210 million program — which provides free trips to Israel for 18- to 26-year-olds who have never been on an organized trip to the country — is split evenly among Israel, philanthropists and local communities, with each party paying \$14 million per year. The resolution will move to the Knesset for approval. For its part, Birthright Israel is pleased "they recognized the importance of the program," said Marlene Post, chairwoman of Birthright Israel USA.

### Israeli offices vandalized in Italy

Anti-war demonstrators vandalized the building housing the offices of the Israeli trade and tourism bureaus in Milan.

Staff members at the bureaus said the vandalism was carried out Saturday by a small group of people who broke away from a mass anti-war demonstration involving thousands of people in downtown Milan.

### Palestinians phone in for Iraq

A Palestinian Islamist group has launched a solidarity phone campaign for Iraqis. Leaflets distributed in the Gaza Strip instructed Palestinians to phone a switchboard which connects them to residents of Baghdad, Israel Radio reported.

### Hoops moved to Greece

An international basketball game involving an Israeli team was moved to Greece.

Thursday's game between Maccabi Tel Aviv and Italy's Virtus Bologna was moved after officials with the Israeli team were unable to convince European basketball officials to play the game in Tel Aviv.

serve as a model for change among the Palestinians.

Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat could be further distanced from power and a new, reformed Palestinian leadership could help promote a peaceful modus vivendi with Israel.

There are two possible negative outcomes. One is that the American campaign in Iraq proves ineffectual and Saddam survives with his regime intact. The second, less drastic possibility is if fierce fighting leaves many American casualties, emboldening Arab radicals to think that it is possible to stand up to Western might — and making the United States far more wary of future engagements in the Middle East.

In either case, the prognosis for Israel would be dire. If Saddam survives, he could go nuclear a few years down the road, and might target Israel in revenge for what he calls the "American-Zionist conspiracy" against him. Even if he doesn't go nuclear, he could still seek to threaten Israel by other means.

Secondly, resurrection of the "Eastern Front" would become a theoretical option, with a strong Iraq exerting pressure on Jordan to break its ties with Israel and rejoin the rejectionist front.

U.S. failure in Iraq also would encourage Iran to ignore American pressure about its nuclear program and to produce nuclear weapons as soon as possible. Iran already has developed and tested a prototype missile, the Shihab 3, which can reach Israel with either conventional or non-conventional payloads.

The Iran-Syria-Hezbollah triangle also would get a boost from American failure in Iraq.

The recently published Argentinian Intelligence Services' (SIDE) account of the 1994 bombing of the AMIA Jewish community center in Buenos Aires by Iranian-controlled Hezbollah operatives indicates that the present rulers of Iran will stop at nothing when it comes to Israel.

According to SIDE'S 11-volume investigation, Iran's spiritual leader, Ayatollah Ali Khomeini, was personally involved in planning and approving the attack.

Indeed, an American setback in Iraq would encourage radical terrorists throughout the world, and especially in the Middle East, to step up their campaigns — and Israel would be a prime target.

As one Israeli pundit put it: "From an Israeli point of view, the success of the war is imperative. If pictures" of American POWs "like those we saw on Sunday continue to stream out of Iraq, it won't be long before extremists in the Arab world start scenting blood and 'join the party.' If that happens, the northern border could heat up, motivation to carry out terror in Israel will grow and moderate Arab regimes, whose stability is vital for Israel, will be at risk."

Indeed, the radical threat could take its toll on moderate Arab regimes too, leaving Israel in a region more volatile than ever, exposed to terrorist and possibly even nonconventional weapons attacks from all quarters.

Israelis are keeping their fingers crossed for America. But they could just as easily be keeping their fingers crossed for themselves. □

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

## Torontonians shop Israel

NEW YORK (JTA) — More than 15,000 people came to the Israel Mall, a marketplace of more than 75 Israeli merchants set up in the Bathurst Jewish Community Center in north Toronto, on its first full day.

The project, now in its second year, is intended to help Israeli merchants who have suffered economically during the Palestinian intifada.

Their merchandise has been set up in the BJCC gymnasium, and two adjacent halls have been transformed into art galleries.

Organizers predict that over the four days of the event, which began Sunday, visitors will spend more than the \$500,000 that was spent during the inaugural event last year.

Sponsors are the Israel Now Consortium of the UJA Federation of Greater Toronto, the Toronto Zionist Council, Israel Bonds and the Government of Israel's economic mission. □



## Daily News Bulletin

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## JEWISH WORLD

### Solidarity amid war

Several Jewish groups are sponsoring a solidarity mission to Israel.

More than 30 people departed Monday on the three-day Action of Unity Mission to show support for Israel amid fears that Iraq will react to the U.S. attack by striking Israel.

"While no one can predict the effects of war, Jews fear that an American attack on Iraq may result in harm to Israel, who will be more isolated than ever before," said Ronald Lauder, president of the Jewish National Fund. "Now is the time to act and show our unyielding support for Israel by being with its citizens during their time of need."

The JNF is a sponsor of the trip, along with groups such as Hadassah, American Friends of Likud and the Zionist Organization of America.

### Fears of Muslim attacks in France

Muslim youths could attack Jewish property in France out of anger at the U.S. invasion of Iraq, a French official said. Yves Bertrand, the head of France's domestic intelligence agency, made his comments this week after a French Islamic leader said the Iraq war is polarizing French Muslims and is undermining moderate Islam in France.

### Boris Berezovsky arrested

A Russian tycoon with Jewish roots was arrested in Britain. British police said Tuesday they arrested Boris Berezovsky at the request of Russian authorities, who want to extradite him for alleged fraud in 1994 and 1995, when he headed the LogoVaz company in Russia.

Berezovsky was one of the financial oligarchs who held immense power during the early days of post-Soviet Russia.

### Auschwitz gets Ladino plaque

A memorial to some 150,000 Ladino speakers who perished during the Shoah was unveiled at Auschwitz.

The stone in Ladino, the language spoken by many Sephardi Jews, joins 20 others at the camp. Monday's placement of the plaque follows a three-year campaign by JEAA, an international organization representing the Ladino community.

### Triangle fire site made landmark

The site of the Triangle shirtwaist fire was designated a New York City landmark.

The site of the fire that killed 146 workers, many of them Jewish immigrant women, became a landmark on Tuesday, the 92nd anniversary of the fire.

The fire helped spur the U.S. labor movement and workplace safety measures.

## AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

### More than one-quarter of Jews in France want to leave, poll finds

By Joe Berkofsky

NEW YORK (JTA) — French Jews have grown so disgusted with anti-Semitism that more than one-quarter of them are considering emigrating.

That's according to a new survey of the 500,000-member French Jewish community, the second largest in the Diaspora.

The poll was conducted by The Israel Project, which previously measured American attitudes about Jews and Israel in order to produce pro-Israel ads.

According to the poll, 26 percent of those surveyed said they have considered emigrating due to worsening French anti-Semitism.

Of them, 13 percent are "seriously" considering leaving, according to Washington pollster Stan Greenberg, who led the surveys and focus groups.

The mood among French Jews is like a "severe depression," said Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi, a founder of The Israel Project.

However, CRIF, the main umbrella organization for secular French Jews, criticized the survey, saying American Jews simply do not understand the French community.

"U.S. Jews have a complex because they didn't help the Jews of Europe during the Second World War," CRIF spokeswoman Edith Lenczner said.

The poll "doesn't anywhere near correspond with CRIF figures which were conducted with a far larger sample group," she said.

The Israel Project survey was carried out among 493 French Jews between Nov. 29 and Dec. 18, and two 12-person focus groups on Oct. 22 and 23. It had a margin of error of 4.4 percent.

The desire that it found to leave France coincides with a big jump in French Jewish perceptions of anti-Semitism.

Some 82 percent of respondents say anti-Semitism is a serious problem in France and 78 say it has deepened in the past few years.

Moreover, 38 percent of respondents say they personally have been the targets of anti-Semitic incidents, and 58 percent say they know friends or relatives who have been singled out.

Only 30 percent of Jews said they don't know anyone who has experienced some form of anti-Semitism.

Most of those who are thinking of leaving — 64 percent — have been victims of anti-Semitism, whether physical attacks, verbal assaults or some other form of anti-Jewish behavior.

"They felt attacked by anti-Semitism — that could mean either verbally or some kind of pressure, not necessarily that they got beat over the head on the way to school," Laszlo Mizrahi said. "But it's like sexual harassment — if you feel it, you feel it."

Anti-Semitism has grown so virulent in France that many observant Jews disguise the fact that they wear yarmulkes, she said.

In fact, religious and Sephardic Jews are more likely to have experienced anti-Semitism, and thus more likely to want to leave.

"As relatively recent immigrants, these Jews are less integrated into French society and have less confidence in French institutions than secular and Ashkenazi Jews," Greenberg said in a memo summarizing his findings.

Yet most French Jews are saying put, with 64 percent maintaining they should stay and fight anti-Semitism and 21 percent saying they should ignore it.

Not surprisingly, those who want to leave are more pessimistic about possibilities for the future in France.

Of those who have thought seriously of leaving, 83 percent said they expect anti-Semitism to get worse.

Only 4 percent of French Jews see improvement on the horizon.

Fully 86 percent of those considering leaving are eyeing Israel, compared to 60 percent who would think of moving to the United States. "It's interesting that they consider Israel safer than France," Laszlo Mizrahi said. □

(JTA correspondent Philip Carmel in Paris contributed to this report.)

## WAR IN IRAQ

**Jews in Muslim lands feared vulnerable as war intensifies***By Rachel Pomerance*

NEW YORK (JTA) — As the U.S. military pounds Iraq, Jewish communities in Muslim countries may become increasingly vulnerable.

Jews not only are tiny minorities in the Muslim world, but to some of their surrounding public, they represent the perceived twin threats of Israel and America.

As coverage from Al-Jazeera and other Arab stations rouses the Muslim world with tireless coverage of the war — which many Muslims think came at Israel's behest — Jewish communities could become a whipping-boy for feverish ideologues.

"There are indications that angry and instigated crowds could turn violent and direct their anger and aggression toward individual Jews and Jewish communal installations," said Steven Schwager, executive vice president of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

In anticipation of the war, the JDC has been working with Jewish communities in Muslim countries, along with their governments and non-governmental organizations.

The JDC, the North American federation system's overseas partner for relief and welfare, instructs Jews in Muslim countries to keep a low profile and helps them assess risks, such as attending Jewish day school or synagogue.

The World Jewish Congress also has heightened its contacts with Jews in Muslim countries with a hotline, Web site and weekly conference calls. "We're acting as a listening post," said Israel Singer, the WJC's chairman.

Singer said there currently is no threat to Jews in Muslim countries, "but we should watch and we should be alert."

Only a handful of Muslim countries have enough Jews to constitute a substantial community.

According to the JDC, Iran has 23,000 Jews; Turkey, 23,000; Morocco 5,000; Tunisia, 1,500; Yemen, 280; and Iraq, 60.

Hundreds of thousands of Jews who lived in Muslim countries fled their homes, and often prominent positions, during the last century, amid the creation of Israel and its early wars for existence.

The rise of two "isms" at the time — anti-Semitism and Zionism — prompted their move to Israel and elsewhere.

Today, Jews are free to leave these countries — although in Yemen and Iran, Jews are not allowed to go to Israel.

In Morocco and Tunisia, the governments have taken steps to secure their Jewish communities with added police protection in Jewish neighborhoods and institutions.

Still, with Muslim populations restive — demonstrators clashed with police this weekend near the American embassies in Egypt and Yemen — Jews are on high alert.

"Historically, whatever happened in the world has affected the Jews from Arab countries, but it also depends very heavily on the current Arab leader," said Vivienne Roumani-Denn, executive director of the American Sephardi Federation.

Considering the combination of factors, Roumani-Denn admitted that if she were a Jew in an Arab country, "I would be a little nervous, just because of our history."

Here is the situation around the region:

- In Tunisia, Jews already were uneasy after Al-Qaida exploded a gas truck outside a synagogue last April in Djerba, one of the main Jewish population centers. The explosion killed 18, most of whom were German tourists.

At its own expense, the Tunisian government rebuilt the synagogue and added security guards. It also beefed up security at another synagogue in Tunis.

"There's a real feeling that the government is trying to protect them," said Jerry Sorkin, a Philadelphia-area businessman who has operated tours to Tunisia since the mid-1980s and has close ties with its Jewish community.

Sorkin said Tunisia genuinely wants to protect its Jews, but also is concerned with its image abroad and relies heavily on tourism. The March 16 stabbing of a Jewish jeweler there — largely dismissed as a criminal, not anti-Semitic act — further rattled the community.

"There's the underlying insecurity that goes with these types of times," Sorkin said.

But Tunisian Jews consider their home more secure than places like Israel or France, likely points of immigration, he said.

- In Morocco, King Mohammed VI has sought to reassure the Jewish community since the outbreak of the war, with public announcements warning citizens against harming each other.

Still, the Jewish community is said to be nervous. A visiting Jew in Morocco declined an interview with JTA, fearing his phone was tapped. And Jewish schools closed early last Friday. Sources say the holy Muslim day can lead to a higher risk of attacks.

- In Yemen, the few Jews are scattered in small villages throughout the country. With no Jewish institutions, the community is considered less of a target.

- Anti-American sentiment is running high in Turkey, and its Jews have been warned of possible attacks. The well-organized community, which has varied Jewish institutions, has taken measures to secure itself, such as closing schools and dispersing Jews into small clusters for synagogue services.

- Iranian Jewish leaders sent messages to friends and relatives in Europe last week, indicating they did not feel threatened, according to sources close to the community.

Sam Kermanian, secretary-general of the Los Angeles-based Iranian-American Jewish Federation, said of the community: "We are always concerned about their safety and security, but there isn't any heightened sense of security because of the war with Iraq that we know of."

Despite the trials and imprisonment of more than a dozen Iranian Jews on what were widely believed to be false charges of spying for Israel in recent years, Iran hosts a thriving Jewish community. Tehran, where most Iranian Jews live, hosts a Jewish old-age home, a Jewish hospital, Jewish schools and a Jewish community center.

- The Jews of Iraq are considered the most vulnerable community in the Muslim world, due to their tiny number and the war that surrounds them. According to JDC, the possibility of an anti-Semitic backlash places them in even greater danger than other Iraqis who are suffering through the war.

About 40 Jews live in Baghdad, 15 of whom are elderly and live in its synagogue. JDC recently learned of 20 Jews in other cities throughout the country. When Baghdad is safe for humanitarian organizations, JDC will assist Iraq's Jews in whatever ways they need, Schwager said. □