



# Daily News Bulletin

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## TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

### Lawsuit against Sharon may end

Belgian legislators approved amendments that would narrow a war crimes law and invalidate a lawsuit against Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

On Tuesday night, the Belgian House of Representatives approved an amendment to the 1993 law, under which lawsuits could be filed against people and by people with no link to Belgium.

If passed, the law could improve Israeli-Belgian relations, which have been damaged by the lawsuit against Sharon.

Under the amendment, only those individuals living in nondemocratic countries could be tried in Belgium.

Other cases would be sent on to the country in question.

The amendment still requires Senate approval.

The lawsuit was filed against Sharon for his role in the 1982 massacre of Palestinian refugees by Lebanese Christian Phalangists.

### Holy sites bill proposed

U.S. Christian leaders are backing a congressional resolution that says holy sites in Israel and the Palestinian territories should remain under Israeli protection.

The Senate bill, introduced by Sen. Lindsay Graham (R-S.C.) and backed by the Christian Coalition and the Zionist Organization of America, calls for holy sites to be protected from desecration and open to visitors of all faiths.

A similar piece of legislation is expected to be introduced by Rep. Joe Wilson (R-S.C.) in the U.S. House of Representatives.

### Israel: No Israeli forces in Iraq

There were no Israeli forces in western Iraq, a senior Israeli army officer said.

Maj.-Gen. Amos Gilad, appointed to serve as a "national commentator" during the Iraqi conflict, said media reports that Israeli army commandos entered western Iraq before the outbreak of the war to look for Scud missile launchers are wrong.

"There are no Israelis," Gilad said on Israel Radio.

"The United States does not want Israelis in this war and Israel has declared that it is not part of the war, and has acted accordingly."

## WAR IN IRAQ

### Do Jewish journalists, soldiers face increased danger during war?

By Michael J. Jordan

NEW YORK (JTA) — It's now well known that just before Daniel Pearl's captors in Pakistan slit his throat last year, they forced The Wall Street Journal reporter to admit his Jewish blood.

Less known is that the faith of the American pilots captured by Iraq during the first Gulf War reportedly also animated their torturers.

"What is your religion?" a beaten, bloodied and blindfolded Marine Capt. Michael Craig Berryman was asked, according to testimony from Jan. 28, 1991.

"Baptist," he replied.

"No, you are a Jew!" they screamed.

The beatings grew more savage, says Berryman: "They just went crazy."

Neither the pilots nor Pearl, according to those familiar with his case, were captured because of their real or perceived Jewishness. Nevertheless, for the countless journalists and soldiers now in Iraq who are Jews, recent history indicates that their faith carries added risk in case of capture or imprisonment.

There are crucial distinctions between soldiers and journalists in hot spots. Soldiers are obeying orders, going where they are sent, while journalists are there willingly. And soldiers are combatants, whereas journalists are not.

Earlier this month, the British Ministry of Defense agreed to allow Jewish soldiers to erase religion from their dog tags, out of concern in the British Jewish community that they may be singled out for harsher treatment.

In the first Gulf War, U.S. Jewish soldiers deployed to the Gulf were encouraged to shield their identity and classify themselves on their dog tags as "Protestant B," an internal code to let military chaplains know the person was Jewish.

The military has made no concessions this time around, Major Tim Blair, a Pentagon spokesman, told JTA.

"We're not looking at this from the perspective of any specific religion, but from international law regarding prisoners of war," Blair said.

"We now have 4,000 or so enemy Iraqi prisoners, and we're giving them proper treatment according to the Geneva Conventions, if not better. And we expect the same humane treatment from the Iraqis who have our POWs."

The Geneva Conventions, adopted in 1949, states that "members of armed forces who have laid down their arms" shall "in all circumstances be treated humanely, without any adverse distinction founded on race, color, religion or faith."

It is this passage, among others, that lawyers for 17 American POWs — and 37 of their family members — contend the Iraqis violated in the first Gulf War.

In their \$610 million lawsuit against the Republic of Iraq, which co-counsel John Norton Moore says will soon come before the District of Columbia's Federal District Court, several POWs describe how they were not only accused of concealing their religion, but had their pants yanked down and genitals inspected.

"The Iraqis were apparently unaware that many American males are circumcised, regardless of their religious beliefs," Moore told JTA.

"It was also reasonably clear to those subjected to this offensive treatment that if they'd been Jewish, they would have been subjected to greater danger and greater torture."

"If we are to deter such outrageous behavior in the future, we have to bring it to the

## MIDEAST FOCUS

### Report: Israeli-Palestinian talks

Senior Israeli and Palestinian security officials reportedly held their first talks in months.

The head of the Israeli army's southern command and the head of Palestinian security in the Gaza Strip met on March 27, the daily Ma'ariv reported.

The report said the talks took place as part of efforts to ease violence in Gaza.

The Palestinians asked that Israel halt targeted assassinations of wanted Palestinians and incursions into Palestinian areas.

Israel insisted that Palestinian security forces take actions to end terrorist attacks.

### Hamas suspects arrested

Israeli troops arrested two men believed to be two senior Hamas commanders as part of an anti-terror raid. One of the commanders arrested in Hebron on Wednesday is suspected of planning an attack on a Jewish settlement last year in which four people were killed.

### Jewish Agency aids children

The Jewish Agency for Israel distributed \$5,000 each to children Wednesday who lost a parent in a terrorist attack.

The agency's terror victims fund is allocating a total of \$2.5 million to some 400 children. The money was raised by the United Jewish Communities' Israel Emergency Campaign.

### Barghouti back-up delayed

A French human rights group that had promised to bring 200 lawyers to defend Palestinian leader Marwan Barghouti at his trial in Israel said it had to delay the trip because of a shortage of lawyers.

Barghouti is on trial on charges of murdering dozens of Israelis in terrorist attacks. He says he does not recognize the authority of Israel to try him.



## Daily News Bulletin

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world's attention and ensure that this sort of action is punished."

How to protect Jewish soldiers is a tricky situation because no one wants the U.S. military to also treat its soldiers differently based on religion, says David Scheffer, the U.S. ambassador-at-large for war crimes issues from 1997-2001.

"There has to be a careful balance, because you want to preserve the security of your forces," Scheffer said.

"You may want to suggest they not wear a religious object, whether it be a cross or Star of David — not insisting on it but recommending it. It might be a matter of common sense and security, that religion not be broadcast through jewelry."

The greater risk for Jewish soldiers is no secret to their families.

"It's a big concern," said Allan Rubin, whose son, Daniel, 21, is a Marine currently in Iraq. "We talked to him and said he has to be extremely careful about it."

Their son, though, is full of youthful bravado, even sporting a Star of David tattoo on one of his muscular shoulders.

Said his father: "He kept telling us not to worry, that the Iraqis better watch out because he's 6-feet-2-inches and could kick their butts."

Judy Ledger is likewise concerned for her son, Matthew Boyer, who is also a Marine in Iraq. The 24-year-old's dog tag clearly states his religion as Judaism.

Says Ledger: "When it comes to POWs, I just think Daniel Pearl — that's all I can think about."

Despite Pearl's death, the Journal maintains a long-standing editorial policy of being blind to religion, said Brigitte Trafford, spokeswoman for Dow Jones, the Journal's parent company.

"We assign our reporters on the basis of their talent and the need for the assignment — not on the basis of their race, religion or ethnicity," Trafford said.

It's a policy most editors and journalists say they agree with: Let the journalist decide if their Jewishness makes it too risky.

Otherwise, they say, it may lead to a slippery slope of discrimination.

Knight Ridder, which publishes 31 newspapers nationwide, including The Miami Herald and The Philadelphia Inquirer, has 47 reporters and photographers currently in Iraq, said John Walcott, who heads up Knight Ridder's war coverage and is its Washington bureau chief. Walcott said he is unaware who among his staffers in Iraq is Jewish, though he admits they may face rougher treatment should they be captured.

He cited the case of another Wall Street Journal reporter, Jerry Seib, who was held hostage in 1987 while reporting from Iran. Seib was accused of being a spy and a Jew, Walcott said, although he is Roman Catholic.

But in Iraq today, Walcott said, "I honestly believe that with the U.S. gunning for Saddam, those distinctions are rapidly shrinking. A Jewish, Baptist or even a Muslim soldier is likely to be treated equally badly by this Iraqi regime."

"They are likely to lump together all Americans and Brits together as 'Jews and Crusaders' in much the same way that Osama bin Laden has."

Even beyond Iraq, one prominent Jewish journalist says that given the current climate in the Arab world, he would reconsider reporting from certain locales.

"After the Daniel Pearl murder, I think journalists who are Jewish have to be very careful about putting themselves in a place where their lives will be at risk," said Pulitzer Prize-winner Joshua Friedman, who began reporting from the Arab world 40 years ago.

"I probably wouldn't go alone to some of these places that I once went to," said Friedman, current board member of the Committee to Protect Journalists.

"We're vulnerable because we're Jewish, and I'd never felt that before. There's a fever of anti-Semitism today in Muslim countries and we have to face it, right? It's true."

Still, not too many journalists would be dissuaded, Friedman, who won his Pulitzer for Newsday in 1985 for his coverage of Ethiopia's famine, conceded.

One Jewish Army reservist, anticipating a call-up, says he's well aware of what happened to the American POWs in 1991 and to Daniel Pearl.

He admits to trying to suppress thoughts of worst-case scenarios.

"I don't know any soldier who thinks that you're going to be the one who gets captured or killed," says Philip, a New England resident who requested anonymity.

"As far as being a Jew, that's just something extra. If the Iraqis find out I'm Jewish and they torture me worse than the other POWs, I'd probably find it unbearable." □

(JTA Staff Writer Joe Berkofsky in New York contributed to this report.)

## JEWISH WORLD

### New British law on immigrants

A British law went into effect that may be used to expel an Islamic clergyman who preaches hate. The law permits revoking the citizenship of immigrants who act against the country's vital interests.

Labor politician Andrew Dismore said the law should be used against Abu Hamza al-Masri, a radical Muslim cleric who claims the Sept. 11 attacks were a Jewish plot and that the space shuttle Columbia was destroyed by God because Christians, an Israeli Jew and a Hindu were on board.

### Groups back Corrie resolution

Several left-wing Jewish groups are backing a congressional resolution that calls for an investigation into the death of a U.S. woman killed last month by an Israeli bulldozer in the Gaza Strip.

The Rachel Corrie Resolution, introduced last week by Rep. Brian Baird (D-Wash.), expresses sympathy to Corrie's parents, and asks the governments of Israel and the United States to ensure that the situation will not be repeated.

The resolution is being backed by Jews for Peace in Palestine and Israel, the Tikkun Community, Not in My Name and smaller Jewish organizations.

### British military cemetery defaced

A British military cemetery in northern France was defaced with swastikas and anti-war slogans.

The cemetery, containing the gravestones of more than 10,000 soldiers who died in World War I, was defaced last week, the French media reported Wednesday. The main memorial at the site in Etaples was also defaced with anti-American slogans, including "Yankees Go Home" and "Saddam will win and drink your blood."

### War criminal to face extradition

A convicted Nazi war criminal is fit for an extradition hearing, a Canadian judge said.

The judge ruled Tuesday against Michael Seifert, convicted in absentia by an Italian military court of murdering 11 prisoners at the Bolzano concentration camp. The Canadian government says Seifert, born in Ukraine, lied about his Nazi past when he applied to enter Canada in 1951.

### Gravestones destroyed in Russia

Forty-two gravestones were destroyed recently in a Jewish cemetery located in the Russian region of Dagestan, according to the Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union.

A source in the Jewish community of the city of Makhachkala attributed the desecration to reaction within this predominantly Muslim region to the war in Iraq.

## ACROSS THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

### Some local Jewish groups wary as charity for Israel opens in Russia

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — The main group that raises money for Israel in countries outside the United States is now operating in Russia.

The move means that Keren Hayesod is functioning in the largest Eastern European country.

"We see today the former Soviet Union as any other country in the world," said Gadi Dror, executive adviser to Keren Hayesod's chairman. "So we made a strategic decision to start working this year in the FSU."

But the Russian Jewish Congress, one of Russia's leading Jewish groups, is opposing Keren Hayesod's efforts, saying that it could undermine its own fund-raising work.

Keren Hayesod also plans to start campaigns in Ukraine and Moldova, and to begin activities in other former Soviet republics within the next five years, Dror said. Keren Hayesod, which raised \$130 million worldwide last year, is expected to announce the official launch of its fund-raising campaign in Russia later this year or next.

It had been originally slated for this spring, but has been put off due to the current international situation and the difficulty of finding a top luminary to launch its campaign.

Meanwhile, Russian authorities last month granted Keren Hayesod an official license, enabling the fund to open its Moscow branch.

Keren Hayesod, which aids Israel through the work of the Jewish Agency for Israel, is also heavily involved in humanitarian projects in the Jewish state, providing assistance to hospitals, fire-fighting units and community centers for underprivileged citizens.

Keren Hayesod lists tens of thousands of donors across the globe, though officials admit that the top 10 percent of its donor base provides 90 percent of the funds raised.

Officials with the fund say they believe it is possible to raise money in this part of the world for Israeli causes because of economic improvements in the region.

"We believe that Jewish leaders in the former Soviet Union are no different than the leaders in New York, London or any other major community, and businessmen here are no less capable than other international businesspeople" of getting involved in international Jewish causes, Dror said.

Jewish leaders here generally believe that the fund has come to Russia due to the support of Leonid Nevzlin, a leading Russian Jewish philanthropist and politician.

Nevzlin, an oil executive and former president of the Russian Jewish Congress who currently is a member of Russia's upper house of Parliament, is one of the country's richest citizens. He was not available for comment.

Dror noted that his organization has not set any financial target for its initial operations in the former Soviet Union.

The fund's officials say they want the entire Russian Jewish community to benefit from the new operation. Plans are under way to bring the organization's experience in Jewish education and young leadership training to Russian communities.

But not everyone in the community is welcoming the organization's presence here.

Leaders of the RJC called last year on its donors not to support Keren Hayesod's campaign, but to support projects in Israel directly.

Yevgeny Satanovsky, the group's president, told JTA he fears that funds raised domestically "will be washed out" by Keren Hayesod and other "international political intermediaries." He said the million-strong Russian-speaking community in Israel is setting a "special tone to our relations to Israel" and the "Western European and Latin American model of helping Israel through some third parties is not acceptable to us."

Another Jewish umbrella group that is heavily involved in domestic fund raising cautiously welcomed Keren Hayesod entrance into the Russian Jewish arena. But Rabbi Berel Lazar, one of Russia's two chief rabbis and leader of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia, said the Russian Jewish poor should be helped first.

But Dror argues that those Russian charities that are afraid their donor base would shrink once Keren Hayesod launches its operations in Russia have nothing to worry about. □

## NEWS ANALYSIS

## Young Assad places a risky bet: For Saddam and against the U.S.

By Leslie Susser

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Syrian President Bashar Assad has inherited much of his late father's parochial paranoia, Israeli analysts argue — but little of his astute political judgment.

In the first Persian Gulf War, the wily Hafez Assad lined up on the side of the American-led coalition, the analysts note, while in the second, Bashar Assad seems to be doing all he can to bait the American superpower.

It could end up costing him dearly.

Judging from his public statements, Assad seems convinced that the Bush administration will not stop at Iraq, and that after an American victory in Baghdad he could be next on the regime-change agenda.

Therefore, when Assad vilifies America and openly aids the Iraqi war effort, he believes he is fighting for his life. In late March, buoyed by what he saw as initial Iraqi success in resisting the American-led invasion, Assad explained the basis of his thinking in a fierce diatribe against Israel and the United States.

The war in Iraq, he told the Lebanese newspaper *As-Safir*, was an Israeli-American conspiracy “designed to redraw the political map of the Middle East.”

In Assad's view, the United States would take Iraq's oil, and Israel would become the dominant regional power.

“After Iraq, it will be the turn of other Arab countries, and I don't rule out the possibility of an American attempt to attack Syria, inspired by Israel,” he declared.

When Assad took power in the summer of 2000, analysts pointed to his Western education — he studied ophthalmology in England — as a sign that he would be more modern and liberal than his authoritarian father. He would open up Syria's economic and political system, they predicted, and would recognize the benefit of peace with Israel.

But such optimists have been sorely disappointed. An initial political opening has been stifled, and the younger Assad seems even less inclined to contemplate peace with the Jewish state than was his father, who at least entertained negotiations.

Analysts speculate that that's because Hafez Assad had firsthand experience of Israel's military might from the 1967 and 1973 wars, while his son's formative experiences — such as Israel's response to the first intifada in the early 1990s and its flight from southern Lebanon in 2000 — have been of an Israel unwilling to risk its prosperity in military confrontations and willing to retreat in the face even of light casualties.

Assad clearly sees the American war against Iraq and the Arab-Israeli conflict as part of the same apocalyptic struggle: It is, in his view, a zero-sum game that will benefit either Syria or Israel.

As long as Israel exists, he said in the *As-Safir* interview, Syria is under threat. He would never be able to trust Israel, he added, “because it was treacherous by nature.”

But there's more: Since “Israel controlled the United States through its Jewish lobby,” Assad presumably can't trust the United States either. Given this worldview, it's not surprising that Assad has decided to gamble on Saddam Hussein. In helping the Iraqi war effort, he apparently is hoping that the Americans will be stopped in their tracks and will never reach Baghdad, let alone Damascus.

So Assad has kept Syria's border with Iraq open, making Syria the only country to allow volunteers and war materiel through to help Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein.

By late March, thousands of Arab, mainly Syrian, volunteers were streaming across the open border to northern Iraq. Syria also sent some military equipment to the Iraqi forces.

Before that, in the run-up to war, Syria reportedly purchased tank engines and aircraft for Iraq in Eastern Europe.

Moreover, Assad is thought to be hiding illegal Iraqi weapons that were spirited across the border to Syria before the fighting erupted. In testimony to the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee in late March, the intelligence research chief of the Israel Defense Force, Yossi Kupferwasser claimed that Saddam may have transferred Scud missiles and biological and chemical weapons to Syria before the outbreak of war.

In late March, U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld warned the Syrians that the United States would not tolerate much more. He called the Syrian shipment of night-vision goggles a “hostile act” for which the United States would hold Damascus accountable.

A few days later, Secretary of State Colin Powell indicated that Syria would have to make a “critical choice” about whose side it is on.

“Syria can continue direct support for terrorist groups and the dying regime of Saddam Hussein, or it can embark on a different and more hopeful course,” Powell told the American Israel Public Affairs Committee on Sunday night. “Either way, Syria bears the responsibility for its choices, and for the consequences.”

Syria is not only proving to be Iraq's closest supporter in the war. It is also on the State Department's list of terrorist states and, according to Israeli intelligence, has the biggest stockpile of chemical weapons of any Middle Eastern country. Syria produces chemical warheads as well as the Scud missiles to deliver them.

The terrorist organizations Syria hosts claim to have sent hundreds of suicide bombers to Iraq to attack American troops. Ramadan Shalah, the Damascus-based commander of Islamic Jihad — which claimed responsibility for Sunday's suicide bombing in Netanya — declared that the bombing was his organization's “gift to the Iraqi people,” and that hundreds of his followers were already in Iraq to fight “the murderer Bush.”

“This excessive self-confidence could not exist without the approval of the Jihad's landlord, the Syrian regime,” as one Israeli analyst noted.

By far the biggest and most potent terrorist organization Syria backs is the Iranian-controlled Hezbollah, which has an estimated 10,000 Katyusha rockets trained on targets in Israel, and which has a proven operational capacity all over the world.

Some U.S. defense analysts see Hezbollah as the foremost terrorist organization in the world, more dangerous even than Al-Qaida. To deal with Syria after the war in Iraq, one idea the Bush administration apparently is contemplating is a U.S.-imposed land, sea and air blockade on Syria until it dismantles its weapons of mass destruction, expels terrorist organizations from Damascus and disarms Hezbollah.

Assad seems to be hoping that an American imbroglio in Iraq will save his regime, but he also has taken out some insurance against an America that emerges from the war as the undisputed power broker in the Middle Eastern. □

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