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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Palestinian truce talks fail

Discussions among Palestinian terrorist groups, the Palestinian Authority and Egypt failed to produce an agreement to halt attacks on Israelis.

The Palestinian groups demanded guarantees of a halt to Israeli strikes on their leaders before they would agree to stop their own attacks on Israelis.

Leaders of the groups said the Egyptian delegation, which wrapped up two days of meetings in the Gaza Strip on Monday, had offered to resume talks in Cairo and that the proposal was under consideration.

Meanwhile, Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom rejected the idea of a temporary cease-fire, which he said would only let Hamas reorganize.

Powell to visit Israel

Secretary of State Colin Powell will visit Israel on Friday, an administration official said. Powell will be in the Middle East this week and will meet Sunday with leaders of the other countries in the diplomatic "Quartet" that drafted the "road map" peace plan — the European Union, the United Nations and Russia.

The State Department would not confirm Powell's plans to visit Israel. Meanwhile, Powell and Bush's national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, met with an adviser to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in Washington on Monday as attempts continued to salvage the road map.

N.Y. Jewish population steady

New York's overall Jewish population has remained stable in the past decade, but the number of poor Jews has doubled.

These are among the major findings of the UJA-Federation of New York's Jewish Community Study of New York, the first in-depth demographic look at the area since 1991.

Covering New York City, Westchester County and Long Island's Nassau and Suffolk counties, the study found 1.4 million Jews in that area, with 244,000 living below the poverty line. Nineteen percent of New York's Jews call themselves Orthodox. New York has an intermarriage rate of 22 percent, which is relatively low compared to other communities.

The \$860,000 study of some 4,500 randomly selected households was conducted between March and September 2002 and has a margin of error of plus or minus 2.7 percent.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

U.S. forces as peacekeepers? Don't count on it, experts say

By Matthew E. Berger

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Some in Washington are calling for a U.S. or international military force to curtail escalating Israeli-Palestinian violence, but so far plans are too vague to get off the ground.

In theory, a peacekeeping force would create a buffer between clashing Israelis and Palestinians, reducing tension and violence. But analysts say it could be disastrous, with American troops becoming targets for terrorists or interfering with Israel's post-attack anti-terror operations.

In recent days, the White House has issued statements supporting Israel's strikes at Hamas and reiterating the need for terror to stop before the "road map" peace plan can progress. But there has been little official discussion of sending in U.S. troops.

Analysts say there is little chance of U.S. troops becoming involved in the conflict.

The calls for an American presence in the region — often heard when violence intensifies — are an attempt to find an alternative solution at desperate moments, analysts say, and aren't based on any well-vetted plan for a U.S. role. But some say the recent calls show a clearer understanding that military force is needed to prevent terror attacks and that the Palestinian Authority isn't up to the challenge.

A group of monitors led by envoy John Wolf and consisting mostly of CIA officials constitutes the U.S. presence on the ground in the zone of conflict. Wolf and his team are not engaged in negotiations or peacekeeping; they simply are charged with documenting Israeli and Palestinian compliance with their obligations under the road map.

In the past week, as violence again surged after a brief glimmer of hope following the Aqaba summit, several lawmakers and Middle East experts have suggested various plans for a stronger U.S. presence.

Sen. John Warner (R-Va.), chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, suggested using NATO forces, including U.S. troops, to provide a force that could minimize violence until Palestinian forces could take over security responsibility.

"It would not be a risk-free mission," Warner said on CNN on June 11, the day a Palestinian suicide bomber killed 17 Israelis in Jerusalem. "But mind you, the NATO forces would be composed of a number of countries. Possibly some of our Americans would be a part — a relatively small part — of the total equation."

Several days later, Sen. Richard Lugar (R-Ind.), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, also floated the idea of American troops being sent to the region.

"We have to be very, very careful about the use of American forces, whether they are to be all by themselves, whether with NATO, whether with the U.N.," Lugar said on "Fox News Sunday." "But clearly, if force is required ultimately to root out terrorism, it is possible there will be American participation."

Neither lawmaker went into details of how a U.S. presence in the region would work. The only detailed plan for major U.S. participation in a peacekeeping effort was penned recently by Martin Indyk, the former U.S. ambassador to Israel who now is director of the Sabah Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution.

In a Foreign Affairs article last month, Indyk suggested a trusteeship for the future Palestinian state. U.S. and international trustees would oversee the establishment of the state, including the creation of a constitution and economic institutions.

U.S. and international special forces and other troops would be placed at the

MIDEAST FOCUS

Knesset backs Sharon on 'map'

The Israeli Knesset approved a statement by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon on the "road map" for peace.

The legislators voted 57-42 to approve a policy statement that focused on the anti-terror aspects of the U.S.-backed plan, ignoring the fact that the map also calls for concessions by Israel and a Palestinian state in three years.

Addressing the Knesset on Monday, Sharon said Israel would not be able to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians as long as "terror is running rampant."

Sharon noted that he was not required to bring the road map to the Knesset for approval, because it is not a signed agreement. The plan already has been endorsed by the Cabinet.

Labor Party race intensifies

Benjamin Ben-Eliezer plans to challenge Shimon Peres for the temporary leadership of Israel's Labor Party. The announcement by Israel's former defense minister contradicts his earlier declaration that he would back Peres for the one-year position until primaries are held to elect a permanent chairman.

Labor Party legislator Ophir Pines-Paz proposed that candidates for the temporary post commit not to run for the permanent position so their status doesn't advance their own interests, Israel Radio reported.

Court allows outpost removal

Israel's High Court rejected a petition by settlers to block the dismantling of a West Bank outpost. Monday's decision paved the way for the army to take down the Givat Yitzhak enclave, where several families live. The court issued a temporary injunction barring the removal of another inhabited enclave until arguments regarding settlers' claim to the land can be heard.



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restructuring the Palestinian security services, Indyk wrote.

"The operations of the trusteeship force could actually be more effective than current Israeli counterterrorism operations in Palestinian towns and refugee camps to the extent that they could rely on a reconstituted Palestinian security service that would have a greater ability to penetrate terrorist organizations than Israel does," Indyk wrote.

The force would need to be large enough to "impress Israelis and Palestinians with its seriousness," but the total number of troops could be under 10,000, Indyk said.

But the Bush administration seems unlikely to embrace the trusteeship idea, and it has shown no willingness to entangle U.S. forces in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"We've looked at this situation many, many times," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said. "Third-party monitoring is what we've consistently talked about, because we felt, upon careful analysis of the situation, that was the best thing to help the parties achieve their goals."

Israeli officials, who balk at the idea of an international monitoring or peacekeeping force, also wouldn't welcome a purely American force.

"Israel has never asked anyone to defend us," one Israeli official in Washington said. "The whole idea of someone defending us goes against the very foundation of the U.S.-Israeli relationship."

In addition, Israeli experts argue that peacekeepers would end up working against Israel. They would be powerless to stop terrorist groups' clandestine operations but could oppose Israel's more organized retaliations.

Lawmakers on Capitol Hill echoed those fears. One Democratic official said it is "stupid" to think that NATO or U.S. peacekeepers could confront Hamas better than the Israel Defense Force.

"At the same time that we have U.S. forces getting ambushed in Iraq, they think it would be a cakewalk to insert U.S. troops into the West Bank and Gaza," he said. "It's a plan built on hope." □

Candidate for El Salvador's president vows to move Israel embassy if elected

By Brian Harris

SAN JOSE, Costa Rica (JTA) — The leader of El Salvador's most popular political party said this week that he would close his country's embassy in Jerusalem if elected president next year.

In a television interview with a small station in San Salvador, Shafik Handal, leader of the leftist Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front legislative bloc and the front-runner for the party's presidential bid, said that "as someone of Palestinian descent," he would close the Jerusalem embassy if he wins the March 2004 presidential election.

Early polls show that a plurality of voters support the FMLN, which has the largest voting bloc in the legislature.

The ex-guerrilla party hopes to unseat the right-wing National Republican Alliance, or ARENA, from the presidency. It has controlled the presidency since the mid-1980s, when U.S.-backed ARENA governments fought a bloody civil war with Marxist FMLN rebels.

Costa Rica and El Salvador, which received military aid from Israel during the civil war, are the only countries with embassies in Jerusalem, Israel's capital. Most countries have their embassies in Tel Aviv; many do not recognize Israel's rights in Jerusalem.

Handal's spokeswoman, Patricia Munoz, told JTA that Handal would maintain diplomatic relations with Israel if elected.

"Shafik has his roots in Palestine and identifies with the Arab community in El Salvador," FMLN spokesperson Marco Tulio Ramos said.

While Handal's candidacy has the support of the FMLN's political leadership, his nomination is not assured.

Widely seen as representing the FMLN's old guard of orthodox leftists and dismissed as a dinosaur by ARENA leaders, Handal has split the party along ideological lines in the past.

The reform wing of the party backs New San Salvador Mayor Oscar Ortiz for the nomination. The primary election is July 27. □

JEWISH WORLD

Bush postpones embassy move

President Bush again delayed moving the U.S. Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem.

In a statement last Friday, Bush said it was in the "national security interests of the United States" to postpone moving the embassy from Tel Aviv for an additional six months.

Since the Embassy Relocation Act was passed in 1995, presidents repeatedly have postponed the move.

As a presidential candidate, Bush had told Jewish leaders that moving the embassy would be one of his first actions.

Court upholds donations law

The U.S. Supreme Court upheld a ban on interest-group donations to federal candidates.

Monday's 7-2 court ruling rejected an argument from North Carolina Right to Life, which claimed that non-profits should be exempt from campaign financing laws because they rely on individuals for most of their donations. Challenges to the broader campaign finance law are still in the works.

Australia bans Palestinian charity

Australia added the Al-Aqsa Foundation to its list of terror groups, paving the way for the country to freeze the charity's assets.

Monday's decision by the Australian government makes it illegal to finance the group, which is believed to funnel money to families of suicide bombers.

The United States, Germany, the Netherlands and Denmark also have banned the group.

Islamists triumph in France

Fundamentalist Islamic candidates won key positions in second-round elections for the Council of French Muslims.

Candidates with the Union of French Islamic Organizations secured the presidencies of the Paris, Marseille-Nice and Alsace regions, defeating supporters of the moderate Paris Mosque faction of Council President Dalil Boubakeur.

The victories by the union — an organization that has strong links to the international fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood and that receives financial backing from the Gulf states — open up the possibility that Boubakeur may be forced to resign.

Britain won't outlaw slaughter

The British government will ignore a semi-official recommendation that would outlaw kosher slaughter, a source close to the government has told JTA.

David Mencer, chairman of the Labor Friends of Israel lobbying group, said he had been assured that Prime Minister Tony Blair and the governing Labor party are committed to protecting kosher slaughter.

ACROSS THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

In Ukraine, teachers, musicians enjoy distance learning program

By Daniel MacIsaac

KIEV, Ukraine (JTA) — Fostering the spiritual rebirth among Jews in post-Communist Ukraine is no simple matter, particularly because the physical distance between communities can impede efforts.

Enter Kiev's Jewish Education Center, which has the first distance-learning education program for Jewish teachers in Ukraine.

Co-sponsored by the Dutch Jewish Humanitarian Foundation and the Jewish Agency for Israel, the distance-learning graduate program opened in March with the first of a series of quarterly sessions that saw students from across the country — as well as one from Estonia — gather in Kiev to meet instructors face-to-face and attend classes together. Between seminars, the students study on their own, complete assignments and communicate with their teachers by Internet or mail.

The program includes topics in Jewish tradition and history, psychology, art and literature, as well as Hebrew and Yiddish.

After about two years of study, students will receive diplomas recognized by Ukraine's Education Ministry, said the JEC's director, Yana Yanover.

"The main innovations of the program are the focus on local Jewish heritage, as well as the collaboration we're enjoying with the Israeli government," Yanover said.

Yanover said the 16 students in the first group to go through the program fell into two types: those who work as teachers in their own communities and those who are musicians and musical educators. A second group began this month.

Teachers focused on Hebrew for the course's language component, Yanover said, while the musicians opted for Yiddish.

"Studying Yiddish poetry and music had an immediate impact on these students, since they immediately began composing their own pieces based on what they had learned," Yanover said.

But Yanover was quick to point out that there is a good deal of overlap between the two kinds of students in the program.

"The most important result of the first seminar session was that two different groups of contemporary Jewish intelligentsia had gathered together to study together," she said. "For many, it was the first time teachers and musicians had met on such a professional and intimate level and had the opportunity to communicate informally and enrich one another with their own personal Jewish experiences."

For student Igor Kazhdan, 28, the program is about enriching both himself and his young family. A graduate of the Kiev Music Academy, Kazhdan directs and plays accordion in the Nigunim Jewish Orchestra.

His wife Natasha, a professor at the academy, plays violin in the five-piece orchestra. The oldest two of their three children — Alexander, 7, and Edward, 5 — help out on percussion instruments like the triangle and bongos during holiday concerts.

Kazhdan embodies the qualities Yanover described: He wants to explore the Jewish world beyond music and to learn more about "the story of the Jewish people."

"I became interested in Jewish history and literature about a year and a half ago and I began to read Yiddish, because my own studies had always been very much focused on music and I never felt I knew enough about my own culture," Kazhdan said. "When I heard about the Education Center program, I took the opportunity to sign up, and so did my wife — so that beside playing together, we can study together at home."

The humor of his favorite Yiddish writer, the Ukraine-born Sholem Aleichem, whom he has studied through the JEC program, has had an influence on the work of the Nigunim Orchestra, Kazhdan said.

"We've taken well-known melodies and, working together at home, have given them an original arrangement, taking something serious and making it lighter and then playing with it through the orchestra," he said.

The next seminar session is scheduled for August, just before Kiev's klezmer festival — a time when music and Yiddish experts from around the world will be gathering in Kiev. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Left's ideology may have won the day, but its parties are in ruins

By Matthew Gutman

TEL AVIV (JTA) — Yair Sultan leaned back in a rat-eaten chair at the illegal settlement outpost of Beit El East.

Gently stroking the settlement's puppy, he philosophized on the importance of the soon-to-be-dismantled West Bank encampment.

"It's the left," Sultan said with disdain after concluding a monologue about how "the left is behind" the outpost evacuations.

With a decidedly right-wing government in place, the conspiracy theories of the settlers, who blame a nebulous "left" for many of their woes, may have proven true in a roundabout way: Many say the policies of the left have won the day when even Prime Minister Ariel Sharon backs the establishment of a Palestinian state, blasts the "occupation" and orders the evacuation of settlements.

But where is the left? That's the question many Israelis are asking.

"In suspended animation," answers Yaron Ezrahi, a senior researcher at the Israel Democracy Institute.

Ezrahi says the left has ceased squabbling over whether former Prime Minister Ehud Barak gave Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat the "ultimate offer" in peace talks in 2000. Instead, it's focusing on how quietly to push Israel into embracing a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

To do that, Ezrahi says, leftists concluded they would have to "give the right-wing coalition the opportunity to test its policies and spectacularly fail. And I think the left believes that is what happened."

Despite Sharon's tough rhetoric, Israel's military crackdowns have not ended terrorism, the country is resuming negotiations with the Palestinians and many settlements have been put on the chopping block, Ezrahi notes.

Not that the left had much choice in the matter. The left-wing Meretz Party and the center-left Labor suffered humiliating defeats in last January's elections, winning only about 20 percent of the Knesset's seats.

With his overwhelming success at the polls, Sharon knew he had the right wing in his pocket. Now, by veering leftward, he has managed to reach what few Israeli leaders since David Ben-Gurion have achieved: a consensus of the centrist Israeli public.

According to a poll conducted for the daily Yediot Achronot by the Dahaf Center, two-thirds of Israelis believe Israel is harmed by the "occupation," a term Sharon whipped out of his rhetorical deck only two weeks ago.

At the same time, a majority of respondents said they believe Sharon will honor the "road map" peace plan, if only because of overwhelming American pressure.

Yet Sharon's about-face has come at a price to his credibility: Only 54 percent of Israelis believe Sharon is trustworthy or relatively so, down from 74 percent a year ago, the poll found.

About 40 percent of respondents said they believe Sharon ordered last week's botched hit on Hamas leader Abdel Aziz Rantissi in order to torpedo the road map — this, despite Israel's claim that intelligence assessments recommended the attack and the army's work dismantling illegal settlement outposts in the West Bank in accordance with the road map.

Regardless of his reasoning, Sharon seems to have saved Peace Now. When the former patron of the settlement movement called Israel's rule over the Palestinians "occupation," it removed the stigma that had engulfed Peace Now since the intifada began, said the group's acting director, Yariv Oppenheimer.

Peace Now activists are beginning to reawaken to a new era. Their grandiose visions of a "new Middle East" have been swept away and replaced by a more prosaic approach wherein quitting the territories is portrayed as something to be done "for the sake of Israel," Oppenheimer said.

"Our backs are now straightened and activists are coming out of the so-called closet to support us," he said, referring to a recent 1,000-person rally in Jerusalem, which also included Palestinian activists.

Despite an opening for the grass-roots left, Israel's left-wing political parties remain moribund.

Political veterans Shimon Peres and Benjamin Ben-Eliezer are struggling for control of Labor, while politicians who were supposed to be the party's rising stars — such as Haim Ramon, Shlomo Ben-Ami and Avraham Burg — have failed to rise.

A poll released by the Prime Minister's Office and published by Army Radio indicated that if elections were held this week, Labor would win only eight to 12 Knesset seats, a fall of nearly two-thirds from its position of power just four years ago.

According to long-standing leftists, Labor's participation in the national unity government during Sharon's first term damaged the party.

"How could we criticize the stagnation of the peace process when one of its founding fathers, Peres, sat near Sharon at the Cabinet table doing absolutely nothing?" one Labor veteran asked.

Even a silent and squabbling Labor Party in the opposition is better than an emasculated one stuck in a national unity government with Likud, the veteran said.

Adding to Labor's problems is Sharon's success at making himself the man of the hour.

The future of the left is "linked with the fact that the alternative to Sharon looks so miserable. There is really no obvious candidate to inherit Sharon's position," Ezrahi said.

Even on the right, Ezrahi noted, Sharon has succeeded in weakening another potential heir, Benjamin Netanyahu, by painting him into a far-right-wing corner.

Without a strong left and with a diluted right in Israel, Ezrahi said, "We have negotiations between a party that lost its power" — the Palestinian Authority — "and the party that lost its ideology," the Likud. □

E.U. may add Hamas to terror list

NEW YORK (JTA) — The European Union should add Hamas to its list of terrorist organizations, the E.U.'s Middle East envoy said. Miguel Angel Moratinos made the comments in the Spanish newspaper El Pais.

Other E.U. officials said they feared such a step might just inflame the Middle East conflict.

Over the weekend, France's foreign minister, Dominique de Villepin, said the 15-member group should consider sending peacekeepers to the Middle East.

But George Papandreou of Greece, whose country holds the presidency of the European Union, said it is too early for such a step. □