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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Clues in Istanbul attacks

Security videos may contain clues to Saturday's suicide bombings at two Istanbul synagogues.

Videos show two men driving slowly by the Neve Shalom and Beth Israel synagogues Saturday morning, shortly before the attacks that killed at least 23 people and wounded more than 300.

Israeli and Turkish officials said they believe that Al-Qaida or an affiliated organization was responsible for the bombings. [Page 1]

Suspected arson in Paris

France's highest officials will meet to discuss anti-Semitism on Monday.

French President Jacques Chirac and Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin will meet with top Cabinet ministers and then with French Jewish leaders, two days after the firebombing of a Jewish school outside Paris.

"The French republic cannot tolerate any anti-Semitic act," Chirac said.

In Saturday's incident, more than 60 firemen were called out in the early hours of Saturday morning after the fire was reported in the Mercaz Hatorah school in Gagny, north of the capital.

The fire totally destroyed a former factory that the school was converting into an extension bloc.

Visiting the site later Saturday, Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy said the fire appeared to be arson, citing evidence that the site had been broken into at two points.

Sharon: Jews will prevail

The Jewish people will not be deterred by terrorism, Israel's prime minister told North American Jewish leaders.

At the opening plenary Sunday of the North American Jewish federation system's annual General Assembly, being held in Jerusalem, Ariel Sharon said, "Our enemies have got to understand that the Jewish people cannot be broken." He received a thunderous ovation.

Sharon told the audience that Jews should make aliyah; promote Zionist education; and invest in Jerusalem, the Negev and the Galilee.

Shortly after he began speaking, Sharon was interrupted by hecklers urging the release of Jonathan Pollard, an American Jew jailed for spying for Israel.

After double bombings, Jews in Turkey dig out from the rubble

By Yigal Schleifer

ISTANBUL (JTA) — Turkish Jewish leaders are shocked by the force and sophistication of the bombings of two synagogues here during Shabbat services — but not surprised that the Jewish community was targeted.

"This was bound to happen," said Lina Filiba, executive vice president of the Turkish Jewish community. "Something here is changing. The peaceful life here is different now."

A pair of truck bombs exploded outside two of Istanbul's largest synagogues Saturday morning, killing at least 23 people and injuring more than 300. At least six of the dead were known to be Jewish.

The first explosion occurred at 9:30 near the main entrance of the city's central synagogue, Neve Shalom. The second took place a few minutes later at the back side of the Beit Israel synagogue, in Istanbul's Sisli neighborhood, about three miles away.

The blasts were heard from miles away and left the streets surrounding the synagogues littered with shards of broken glass. It's still not clear if the explosions were set off by suicide bombers driving by or if they were ignited by remote control, in trucks parked near the buildings. Turkish authorities have said they believe they were suicide attacks.

An usher working in Neve Shalom said it was filled with close to 400 people celebrating a Bar Mitzvah.

"We were in the middle of reading the Torah when we felt a big explosion. Everybody ran out," said the usher, who asked not to be named.

Another congregant standing atop the rubble looked out on the scene of destruction, holding a handkerchief to his face to keep out the strong smell of ammonia that filled the air after the explosion. The bombs were made of ammonium sulfate and nitrate, a Turkish security officer told CNN.

"What kind of peaceful Sabbath is this?" the congregant asked.

Condemnations poured in from around the world, including from such unlikely sources as Iran and Malaysia, both Muslim nations.

Israel's foreign minister, Silvan Shalom, flew to Turkey on Sunday to visit the bombing sites and meet with his Turkish counterpart, Abdullah Gul.

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan also toured the site Sunday afternoon, accompanied by Gul.

Turkish police arrested three people in connection with the bombings, but they already had been released a day later, according to news reports.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon opened the weekly Cabinet meeting with a statement of condolences for the victims.

"We saw yesterday yet again that terrorism knows no bounds," Sharon said. "Terrorism doesn't discriminate by religion or blood. The aim of terrorism is one, to sow fear and terror through the slaying of innocent people."

International Jewish organizations also mobilized. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee started a fund to help rebuild the damaged synagogues and is assessing how it can help the community.

The Jewish Agency for Israel sent a delegation of seven Turkish-speakers — among them two psychologists who are terror specialists and two youth leaders who are familiar with the Istanbul Jewish community — to Istanbul on Saturday night.

Israeli volunteers donned fluorescent vests and scoured the bomb sites for body

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israel kills 2 in Gaza

Israeli soldiers killed two Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

The deaths came Sunday as Israel was conducting a raid in the Rafah refugee camp on a suspected arms smuggler. The suspected smuggler, Hassan Abu Libdeh, was wounded after a gun battle that killed a local resident and one of Abu Libdeh's suspected accomplices.

Shin Bet leaders: Deal needed

Four former leaders of Israel's Shin Bet security service say the lack of a peace agreement with the Palestinians could lead to "catastrophe."

"We are heading downhill toward near-catastrophe. If nothing happens and we go on living by the sword, we will continue to wallow in the mud and destroy ourselves," Ya'akov Peri told the Israeli daily Yediot Achronot last week, speaking on behalf of colleagues Ami Ayalon, Avraham Shalom and Carmi Gillon.

The group recommends that Israel take unilateral steps such as withdrawing from the Gaza Strip and dismantling settlements, which they say will win Israel international goodwill.

A senior government source called the suggestions naive, Ha'aretz reported.

Israel gets new bomber

The first F-16I bomber headed for Israel will roll off the assembly line in Texas last Friday.

The first bomber will be viewed by an Israeli delegation that includes Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz. Each bomber costs \$45 million, and Lockheed Martin will make 102 of the planes, which are capable of reaching Iran or Libya from Israel.

After receiving all the jets, Israel will have the second largest fleet in the world, after the United States.



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parts. "We are, unfortunately, used to terror in Israel and feel we can help here, in accordance with Jewish law," their spokesman told curious local journalists.

An Israeli diplomat noted that Turkey was ripe for violence by Islamic terrorists.

"As the world's only Muslim democracy, with ties to Israel, Turkey is doubly likely to be hit by Islamist terrorism. That puts Turkish Jews all the more at risk," the diplomat said, according to Reuters.

Such concerns were nothing new for Nessli Varol, a 23-year-old daughter of Turkish emigres who flew in from Israel for the funeral of an uncle killed in the Beit Israel attack.

"The Jews here have a prosperous life, but there is also fear. They stick together and avoid too much exposure," she told Reuters. "When I used to visit my grandmother as a child, she would tell her Muslim friends I was from France, rather than Israel."

Jewish community officials said they have been on high alert for the last three months regarding possible attacks and had notified the police about their concerns. Security at Istanbul's synagogues had been increased in response, officials said.

"If we didn't have security as good as it is, the tragedy could have been a lot worse. We wouldn't have been as lucky," community leader Filiba said.

In front of the Neve Shalom Synagogue, a deep crater marked the spot where Turkish officials said the small, explosives-packed truck blew up. A blackened axle was all that remained of the vehicle.

The stone and wrought-iron facade of the synagogue was completely destroyed, the synagogue's foyer filled with a tangle of twisted metal and shattered glass.

The synagogue is located on a narrow street in one of Istanbul's most historic districts, an area filled with small shops selling lamps and chandeliers. The explosion devastated the entire length of the street, shattering store windows and leaving some balconies on the verge of collapse.

"I heard the explosion. I thought it was an earthquake. From my front terrace I saw people coming out of the synagogue, some of them covered in blood," said Gulen Guler, who lives in a building a few doors down from Neve Shalom. "We could see bodies lying in the street and windows smashed everywhere."

Neve Shalom's sanctuary is set off from the street, so the number of injured was relatively low and the damage was limited to the entrance.

Most of the day's injured came from the Beit Israel Synagogue, which was filled with an estimated 300 people, many of them there to celebrate the recent renovation of a smaller sanctuary in the back of the synagogue, close to where the car bomb exploded.

After the bombing, that sanctuary was littered with dust and shattered glass, prayer books and blood-stained prayer shawls covering the ground and the rows of wooden chairs.

The force of the explosion carried through the synagogue, completely blowing out a large window in the building's front, leaving a large empty circle where a stained glass Star of David used to be.

Among those killed at Beit Israel were a woman in her 80s and her 8-year-old granddaughter. At Neve Shalom, the victims included a woman who was four months pregnant.

Turkey's chief rabbi, Isak Haleva, and Ben Zion Pinto, president of the 20,000-member Turkish Jewish community, were at Beit Israel when the bombing occurred. Neither was injured.

"I was praying when suddenly there was an explosion under us and all the windows blew open and I was left standing there in shock in the middle of heavy smoke," Haleva said.

Neve Shalom, which means "Oasis of Peace" in Hebrew, was the target of a terrorist attack in 1986, when gunmen believed to be Palestinians from the Abu Nidal terrorist group burst into the synagogue, killing 22.

Since then, security at Istanbul's synagogues has been extremely tight, with 24-hour police protection augmented by a private security force hired by the Turkish Jewish community. An outlawed Turkish radical group called the Great Eastern Islamic Raiders Front claimed responsibility for the attacks.

Turkish officials dismissed the claim, however, saying the group did not have the resources to mount this kind of coordinated attack. □

JEWISH WORLD

Rice: No decision on loans

No decision has been made about deducting the cost of Israel's security fence from U.S. loan guarantees, Condoleezza Rice said. But President Bush's national security adviser said Israel's security fence "continues to be a problem."

Speaking at the White House on Nov. 13, Rice said the Bush administration is concerned that the fence would "somehow prejudice the outcome" of future peace talks with the Palestinians, and could infringe on Palestinians' lives. "They have made some adjustments to the route of the fence," Rice continued. "Those are appreciated."

Falash Mura claim victory

Israel's Supreme Court called on the government to explain why it has not yet brought to Israel thousands of Ethiopians claiming Jewish ancestry.

The Nov. 13 decision demands that the Israeli government and Interior Minister Avraham Poraz submit a detailed explanation, within a month, of why the government hasn't implemented a February decision to determine the eligibility for aliyah of thousands of Falash Mura, Ethiopians who claim Jewish ancestry, and bring them to Israel, said Omri Kaufman, who represented a group of petitioners against the government.

Russian Jews may lose funder

A Russian Jewish leader with ties to the embattled oil giant Yukos is threatening to cut funding to a major Russian Jewish program.

Leonid Nevzlin is about to make the decision regarding the Moscow-based Research Center for Russian and East European Jewry, which he established, to protest government pressure on him and Yukos, his aide told JTA.

Nevzlin's former boss at Yukos, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, is now sitting in a Moscow jail after being charged with fraud and tax evasion, but many suspect political motives to the case.

Nevzlin is currently living in Israel, which has granted him citizenship.

Laurence Tisch dead at 80

Laurence Tisch, former president of the UJA-Federation of New York, died Saturday in New York at the age of 80.

Tisch was known for the Loews Corporation, which owned hotels, insurance companies and movie theaters, among other industries.

He also was known for inviting rabbis to discuss biblical passages with him and his family. His son, James, is chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

Following an anti-Semitic speech, politician ousted from German party

By Toby Axelrod

BERLIN (JTA) — A German politician who gave an anti-Semitic speech in October has been thrown out of his party's Parliament faction.

At a special meeting last Friday in Berlin, the Christian Democratic Party voted overwhelmingly to eject Martin Hohmann. It was the first time in its history that the conservative party has made such a decision.

In all, 198 CDU Parliament members voted to oust Hohmann, while 28 opposed the move and 16 abstained.

Hohmann remains a member of Parliament, but with no party affiliation. He had no immediate public reaction to the news.

The controversy surrounding Hohmann comes after an uproar over another German politician, Jurgen Mollemann, who died earlier this year in what many believe to be a suicide after he accused then-German Jewish leader Michel Friedman of provoking anti-Semitism.

Hohmann's Oct. 3 speech, in which he suggested that Jews could be seen as a "nation of perpetrators" because some of those involved in atrocities during the Russian Revolution had a Jewish background, has renewed debate about anti-Semitism and national identity in today's Germany.

The speech, which came to public attention Oct. 30 after reportedly being circulated by a neo-Nazi, raised general alarms about the penetration of right-wing extremist ideologies into mainstream parties. In fact, an opinion poll released Nov. 13 showed that about half of CDU supporters do not consider Hohmann's views anti-Semitic.

Critics say Hohmann's speech, delivered on German Unity Day, was designed to boost national pride by reducing the magnitude of German crimes against humanity in World War II by turning the victims into perpetrators. Hohmann also focused on resentment against reparations to Holocaust survivors.

German newspapers have reported receiving numerous letters from readers asking, "What is anti-Semitic about Hohmann's speech?"

A common defensive response to charges of anti-Semitism here is that "one must be allowed to criticize Jews or Israel" as part of the normalization of post-World War II Germany.

In fact, topics such as Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts, the suffering of Germans during and after World War II, and confrontation with the Nazi past are handled daily in German political, media and academic venues.

The new survey by a German opinion research institute, Infratest dimap, showed that 49 percent of CDU voters and sympathizers did not consider Hohmann's words anti-Semitic — they felt "such statements must be possible today" — while 44 percent disagreed. A reprimand was enough punishment for Hohmann, 48 percent said, while 45 percent of respondents want him kicked out of the party.

Other studies have suggested that anti-Semitic views are common in German society. A study conducted by Infratest in October 2002 for the American Jewish Committee concluded that 52 percent of Germans believe Jews exploit the memory of the Holocaust for their own purposes. On the other hand, most Germans favor Holocaust education and Holocaust memorials, the survey showed.

That poll also found that 60 percent of Germans acknowledge that anti-Semitism is a problem; 35 percent said the problem is increasing; and 59 percent agreed that "many people in Germany are afraid to express their true feelings about Jews."

In November 2002, Bielefeld University released a study showing that 22 percent of Germans agreed without reservation that "many Jews try to take advantage today of the history of the Third Reich, and the Germans pay for this." In all, as many as 80 percent of respondents agreed to some degree with the statement.

Since the Hohmann affair broke, many media outlets have confronted readers' questions about anti-Semitism head-on, publishing interviews with experts, summaries of the history of the Russian Revolution and point-by-point analyses of Hohmann's errors and manipulation of facts. □

Senate committee to probe Ford's link to anti-Israel groups

By Edwin Black

WASHINGTON (JTA) — "Questions raised about the Ford Foundation and terrorist front organizations obviously must be answered," said Sen. Charles Grassley (R-Iowa), chairman of the Senate Finance Committee.

The committee, Grassley said, "will be reviewing the matter to determine if the tax code is properly structured to penalize tax-exempt foundations for making such donations."

Grassley's announcement came Nov. 13 in response to a formal request by Sen. Rick Santorum (R-Pa.) for an investigation of Ford, part of a growing chorus of voices on Capitol Hill calling for increased scrutiny of the Ford Foundation's funding practices.

The calls come in the wake of a JTA investigation that found that Ford, one of America's largest philanthropic institutions, provides millions of dollars to a host of Palestinian and pro-Palestinian groups that are at the forefront of a vicious anti-Israel campaign.

Speaking earlier this month from the Senate floor, Santorum cited reports published by JTA and picked up by newspapers around the country that "describe how the Ford Foundation gave millions of dollars to dozens of Palestinian organizations that have been in the forefront of the anti-Semitic and anti-Israel campaign that is ongoing around the world."

Santorum said he would ask Grassley to direct the Finance Committee to "look into this more deeply and again review the controls we have in place for foundation activities and grants overseas."

The JTA investigation, published a month ago, did not identify any instances of Ford monies being linked to terrorism. But it described Ford's extensive funding of Palestinian groups that turned the 2001 U.N. World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa, into a focused indictment of Israel as an illegitimate apartheid, colonial and genocidal regime, with invective that many observers felt crossed the line into anti-Semitism.

Ford officials refused to answer any questions regarding the activities of specific Palestinian groups or their use of Ford funds.

The congressional response to the revelations about Ford was spearheaded by Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-N.Y.), who obtained the signature of 20 colleagues on a petition demanding that Ford halt its funding of such groups and observe U.S. government funding guidelines designed to stop charitable donations to the Middle East from ending up in terrorist hands.

After the revelations, the State Department said, "In light of these charges, and because it is an enforcement issue against a U.S.-based organization, it is an area in which we are talking to the Department of Justice."

Sources at the Justice Department said they still were trying to decide which department might pursue the matter.

"It might be the criminal division for violations of the Patriot Act," one official said.

Blain Rethmeier, a Justice Department press officer, refused to confirm or deny whether an investigation has been initiated.

Several congressional and Jewish communal sources indicated they would challenge the foundation's tax-exempt status with the

Internal Revenue Service. Facing the calls for scrutiny of its funding practices, the Ford Foundation seems to be in disarray over its next move.

The foundation initially denied that groups it funded were engaged in anti-Israel agitation.

"We have seen no indication that our grantees in Durban or elsewhere engaged in anti-Semitic speech or activities," said Alexander Wilde, Ford's vice president of communications.

"Some of our human rights and development grantees have certainly been critical of policies and practices of the Israeli government insofar as these discriminate against Palestinians or otherwise violate their rights, according to internationally agreed human rights standards and international law," he said.

But the day after the JTA investigation was published last month, the foundation reversed itself. Bradford Smith, vice president of Ford's Peace and Social Justice Programs, wrote to the Forward, "Like many, we were shocked by the extremist rhetoric of some participants on Israeli-Palestinian issues."

Even after Wilde told the New York Sun, "We see no way to change the way we do business," other Ford officials signaled that change indeed might be possible.

"Separate from Durban," Smith said in his letter to the Forward, "we have held frank and productive discussions with Palestinian grantees, including the Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO), concerning images and messages that we deemed inflammatory." After Nadler pressed the issue in Congress, Ford's president, Susan Berresford, agreed to meet Nadler in New York on Nov. 3 to discuss the issue.

"In essence, we said, 'Let's not debate the past. Let's ensure that what happened will not happen again,'" Nadler said.

Ford also followed up with others, including Jewish officials, to answer the rising tide of criticism. Shortly after the Nadler meeting, Berresford contacted Mortimer Zuckerman, a media magnate who is the immediate past chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. A meeting was held Nov. 12, but details were not available.

Congress and Jewish groups are insisting on more than cosmetic changes.

The groups funded by Ford have refused to sign a Certification Regarding Terrorist Financing, a pledge required by USAID, which affirms that no funds have made or will make their way into organizations to "advocate or support terrorist activities."

"A note of reality crept in when Ford saw that the JTA information was credible and the facts against them were solid," said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents. "We are seeing the first signs of change, but they are still funding these same organizations. That is a matter of concern and hopefully we will see a change."

Congress and Jewish groups are demanding complete transparency and open files. Ford does not provide access to information regarding its grants until 10 years after the grant is made.

Despite the calls by members of congress for greater transparency, Ford officials say they will never open their files. □

Edwin Black is the author of "War Against the Weak: Eugenics and America's Campaign to Create a Master Race." In May 2003, he won the American Society of Journalists and Authors' award for best book of the year for "IBM and the Holocaust." The entire JTA investigative series on Ford Foundation funding can be read at www.jta.org/ford.asp.