

IN THE NEWS

U.S. backs talks for Israel, Syria

The United States supports direct peace talks between Israel and Syria.

Syria previously had insisted on three-way talks, with the United States as a partner.

The Syrian foreign minister recently turned down Israeli President Moshe Katsav's proposal for direct talks, saying the offer was not taken seriously because Katsav is primarily a figurehead.

Last Friday, U.S. State Department spokesman Adam Ereli said the United States supports direct talks.

"We have long made clear the importance of direct dialogue between Israel and its neighbors," Ereli said. "That's the quickest way to solving these issues and engaging in a process that leads to a negotiated settlement."

Meanwhile, reports surfaced that Israeli and Syrian officials met secretly months before Assad's interview with the Times.

Satterfield: Settlers threaten Israel's future

Israel's demographic future is "stark," a top U.S. State Department official said.

David Satterfield, the department's second in charge on Middle East issues, said Israel's settlement policy could undermine its status as a Jewish and democratic state.

"Settlements continue to grow today, encouraged by specific ongoing government policies," Satterfield said Monday at a State Department conference on the 1967 Six-Day War. "And this persists even as it becomes clearer and clearer that the logic of settlements and the reality of demographics could threaten the future of Israel itself as a Jewish democratic state."

Satterfield also called on the Palestinians to finally confront terrorist groups.

"A transformed Palestinian leadership is essential to the ability to achieve a Palestinian state," he said.

WORLD REPORT

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Survey: Jews warming to Bush but oppose his domestic agenda

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — U.S. Jews remain solidly Democratic, although support for President Bush has increased.

Those results come from a new survey, which also shows sharp drops in Jewish support for issues dear to the Republican president — including the war on terrorism and the Iraq conflict.

The findings are part of the American Jewish Committee's annual survey of American Jewry.

The survey shows a sharp rise in concern about anti-Semitism in Europe; an increase in concern about anti-Semitism in America; strong support for keeping the words "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance; strong support for a multilateral U.S. foreign policy; and a small rise in support for the establishment of a Palestinian state.

The survey was conducted by Market Facts Inc., which surveyed 1,000 Jews by phone between Nov. 25 and Dec. 11. The poll has a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percent.

Though the survey shows that American Jews still are solidly Democratic, it also shows Bush faring better than he did in 2000 against all possible Democratic candidates except Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.).

Bush would get 31 percent of the Jewish vote in theoretical matchups with Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.), former Vermont Gov. Howard Dean and Rep. Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.). The president would get 29 percent against former Gen. Wesley Clark.

Against Lieberman, Bush's share of the Jewish vote would fall to 24 percent, the same

percentage of respondents who said they voted for the president in 2000, according to the survey.

The survey shows that 51 percent of respondents consider themselves Democrats, 16 percent Republicans and 31 percent independents.

David Harris, the AJCommittee's executive director, said of the increase in support for Bush: "We have to presume it is driven by President Bush's policy, particularly with respect to Israel and in the war on terrorism."

That increase falls short of the 39 percent support Reagan got in 1980, against an incumbent Democrat Jimmy Carter, perceived by some Jews as hostile to Israel. Reagan's support dropped to 31 percent in 1984, after tensions with Israel over the Lebanon war and the sale of AWACS airplanes to Saudi Arabia.

The survey also shows sharp drops in Jewish support for Bush on the war on terrorism and the war in Iraq. From a high of 85 percent support a few months after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, Jewish support for Bush's war on terrorism fell to 59 percent a year ago and to 41 percent this year.

On Iraq, Jewish support for the war dropped to 43 percent this year from 59 percent a year ago, before the war but after the administration had made clear that it was planning military action.

The decline in Jewish support for the president's Iraq policy comes after months of allegations that the Bush administration's justifications for the war were based on faulty — and possibly fabricated — intelligence.

Bush's spokesman have acknowledged

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FOCUS
ON
ISSUES

■ AJCommittee survey shows Jews support Bush on Israel but not at home

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that some of its intelligence was faulty, but insist that the overall picture of a gathering threat in Iraq was accurate.

This week, CBS' "60 Minutes" broadcast an interview in which Bush's former treasury secretary, Paul O'Neill, said Bush planned to oust Saddam Hussein from power before the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

The White House would not confirm or deny O'Neill's allegations except to say that the success of the wars on terror and Iraq speaks for itself.

Democrats have accused the president of diverting billions of dollars to the Iraq war that would have been better spent combating terrorism elsewhere.

When it comes to anti-Semitism in Europe, the survey shows a sharp increase in concern about the phenomenon: Fifty-five percent of respondents said the problem was "very serious," up from 41 percent a year ago.

More than twice as many respondents said anti-Semitism posed a greater threat to Jewish life in the United States than intermarriage — 68 percent versus 27 percent.

The apparent contradiction between the increase in Jewish support for Bush generally and the decline in support for his policies likely is the result of Bush's stance toward the Jewish state. Bush pleased many Jews by describing Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon as a "man of peace" while consistently snubbing Yasser Arafat, the Palestinian Authority presi-

dent, because of his ties to terrorism.

Optimism about U.S.-Israel relations remains steady. This year, 86 percent of respondents said relations were very or somewhat positive; last year, 90 percent of respondents said so.

But 37 percent of respondents said they are less optimistic about the possibility of Israel achieving peace with the Arab world now than they were a year ago; only 5 percent are more optimistic.

Support for Israel's handling of its relations with the Palestinian Authority eroded somewhat, as 60 percent said they supported Israel's handling of the situation, down from 67 percent last year.

Meanwhile, U.S. Jewish support for a Palestinian state rose slightly to 54 percent, from 49 percent last year.

Democrats are worried about positive Jewish perceptions of Bush's Israel policies. Recently, top Democrats revealed to JTA that they formulated a plan some 18 months ago to solidify Jewish support for Democrats and demonstrate that Democrats are better for Israel than Bush.

Democrats said the poll was reassuring, despite the growth in support for Bush.

"It's 2-1 for any Democrat, despite the fact that we're in the middle of a very tough primary season," said Steve Rabinowitz, a top Washington consultant to the party. "All this poll does is reinforce the notion that Jews vote Democratic."

The figures showing Lieberman faring better than any other Democrat against Bush belie the claim that Jews are less likely to support a Jewish candidate because of concern that it would be bad for the Jews. It's a claim Lieberman has taken pains to refute when campaigning among Jews.

Still, anti-Semitism in the United States remains a concern. Respondents who said it was a very serious problem rose to 37 percent, from 29 percent last year. Respondents describing anti-Semitism as very serious on college campuses rose to 28 percent, from 23 percent last year.

Respondents also identified Muslims as the most anti-Semitic group, with 55 per-

cent saying "most or many" Muslims are anti-Semitic. Those figures were consistent with 2002 but showed a reversal from 2001, when only 44 percent of respondents said most or many Muslims were anti-Semitic.

After Muslims, the group perceived as most anti-Semitic was the religious right, with 41 percent saying "most or many" were anti-Semites.

Consistent with prior surveys, the 2003 survey showed Jews staking out positions opposite the president on domestic issues. About 73 percent said they opposed using taxpayer money to fund religious institutions or religious schools.

But Jews show solid support — 66 percent — for keeping the words "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance. The question appeared for the first time in the survey, after a California appeals court ruled against the use of the phrase. The U.S. Supreme Court is slated to hear the case in March.

The Democrats' alignment with Jews on domestic issues is one way they hope to maintain Jewish community support. The AJCommittee's survey bolsters the potential effectiveness of that strategy.

John Zogby, a leading Washington pollster, says recent findings in his own studies show that Democrats have nothing to worry about regarding Jewish support. His most recent survey showed that 82 percent of Jewish voters espoused "Clinton values," associated with the former president and his wife, Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.).

Other findings in the survey showing little change from 2002:

- 74 percent said they felt very close or fairly close to the Jewish state;
- 81 percent said they agree that the Arabs' goal is Israel's destruction, not return of the territories captured in the 1967 Six-Day War;
- 15 percent support increased immigration to the United States, 43 percent said it should remain steady and 41 percent support a decrease; and
- 54 percent said being Jewish is very important and 34 percent said it is fairly important. Half of the respondents said they were affiliated with a synagogue, and half were not.

More than twice as many respondents said anti-Semitism posed a greater threat to Jewish life in the United States than intermarriage.

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British Jews upset about inexperienced envoy

By ANDREW MORRIS

LONDON (JTA) — In most diplomatic circles, a posting to London is considered second only to Washington.

But not, it seems, in Jerusalem's eyes.

More than a year after the current Israeli ambassador's term was supposed to end, a replacement has yet to be found in London. To make matters worse, many consider the favored candidate — Russian-born tycoon Zvi Hefetz — unsuited for the job.

Among other things, he can't speak decent English, as he has admitted.

Zvi Shtauber, the incumbent, was meant to leave the palatial embassy in London's exclusive Kensington Palace Gardens in 2002. Appointed by former Prime Minister Ehud Barak, Shtauber already has seen his tenure extended twice after two previous attempts to replace him failed.

It's still unclear just when Shtauber — who is seen as an effective ambassador by both Israel and the British Jewish community — finally will step down as ambassador to the Court of St. James, as the London emissary officially is known.

The Israeli government can make up to 11 political appointments per term — they are normally reserved for the highest profile ambassadorial posts. The debacle in London began when a political appointee to replace Shtauber, former Cabinet minister Dalia Itzik, pulled out early last year after criticism of her English.

Shtauber's tenure was extended while Jerusalem put forth another candidate who was a politician rather than a career diplomat — Roni Milo, the former Tel Aviv

mayor and Cabinet minister.

Milo speaks excellent English and was seen as a popular choice by the embassy in London, the British civil service and the local Jewish community. But Milo eventually announced that he had decided not to take the job.

Enter the next nominee: Hefetz, a lawyer and friend of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's son Omri. Hefetz is the principal owner of the Hapoel Tel Aviv basketball team and deputy chairman of Israel's daily Ma'ariv.

Hefetz's foes in Israel include career diplomat Colette Avital, who has asked Israel's civil service commissioner to bar him. The appointment is pending a joint investigation of the Civil Service Commission and the Justice Ministry.

Hefetz has been accused of "buffing up" his resume to emphasize his diplomatic experience, which he claimed was built largely through one month spent working with Nativ, an agency responsible for establishing relations between Israel and Jews in the former Soviet bloc. In that job, he mainly issued visas for Jews who wanted to go to Israel. That experience made him instrumental in re-establishing Israeli ties with Moscow, Hefetz told the Civil Service Commission, because he helped to establish educational and cultural ties in the former Soviet Union.

But a former head of Nativ cast serious doubt on Hefetz's claims, Ha'aretz said.

"The temporary emissaries were not accredited and were not authorized to maintain contact with any diplomatic official," Ya'akov Kedmi told the paper.

Others are worried about something much more basic — Hefetz's English.

"I am not so much concerned about his tarnished reputation as about the fact that he doesn't speak fluent English. This is important. This is critical," Ahron Bregman, an Israeli-born and London-based expert on the Middle East, told JTA.

Bregman isn't alone in arguing that Hefetz's poor English is a fatal flaw to his candidacy. A delegation from British Jewry's umbrella organization, the Board of Deputies, recently met with Sharon in Jerusalem and expressed serious concerns about how effective Hefetz or any Israeli official without excellent English could be.

"There is a necessity to ensure that Israel's diplomatic representatives abroad and its spokesmen used in Israel to address the foreign media should have a sufficient command of English to enable Israel's message to be clearly understood," said the board's senior vice president, Jerry Lewis.

Hefetz admitted that his English is poor but said he would be willing to take a course to bring it up to par.

However, the Israeli Embassy questioned the stance of the board and other community representatives.

"So if he comes to London, they won't speak to him?" the embassy's press spokeswoman, Shuli Davidovitch, asked rhetorically.

The embassy also scorned the notion that relations between Jerusalem and the British civil service have become strained because Shtauber has been left in limbo.

Swiss blast government for supporting 'Geneva accord'

By FREDY ROM

ZURICH (JTA) — Swiss legislators are criticizing their government for offering financial and logistical support to the "Geneva accord" proposal for Israeli-Palestinian peace.

Foreign Minister Micheline Calmy-Rey came under fire last week from some legislators and a group called the Swiss Taxpayer Association.

"The support of the so-called Geneva initiative is a waste of taxpayers' money," the association's president, Alfred Heer, told a Zurich news conference Jan. 6. In addition, he said, government backing for the accord harmed Swiss-Israeli relations.

The initiative, which was negotiated by Israeli opposition figures and Palestinians close to Palestinian Authority President

Yasser Arafat, was strongly repudiated by the Israeli government.

Heer estimates that Switzerland's government spent more than \$6 million to support and promote the proposal, which was launched Dec. 1 at a ceremony in Geneva. But Alessandro Delprete, spokesman for the foreign minister, denied the charges.

"We spent just a little more than \$1 million," he told JTA.

Heer, however, said the Foreign Ministry also supported the initiative indirectly through humanitarian foundations.

"By supporting the initiative, the Swiss foreign minister harmed the reputation and political and economic interests of Switzerland," added Christoph Moergeli, a member of Parliament. "It is absolutely inadmissible that Switzerland interferes in a foreign conflict without the support of all parties in conflict. This is a slap in the face of the freely elected government of Israel."

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Dean seeking more fence info

Howard Dean said he wants to hear more information from the Israeli government about the route of its West Bank security fence.

Danny Siebright, a foreign policy adviser to the Democratic presidential candidate, told reporters Monday that Dean would like to be briefed by Israel as to why the fence crosses into the West Bank in some places. Leon Fuerth, the new chairman of Dean's foreign policy team, said he believed Dean understands the rationale for the security fence.

He also said he believed Israel "will have as good a friend in the White House as it has ever had" if Dean is elected.

Fuerth also said he believed that, as president, Dean would be intimately involved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Fuerth would not say whether Dean would move the U.S. Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, as mandated by U.S. law, or whether he would exercise a presidential waiver on national security grounds.

ADL: Keep campaigns Holocaust-free

The Anti-Defamation League called on presidential candidates to keep references to the Holocaust out of the campaign.

"We have witnessed a proliferation of comparisons to Hitler and his policies, which have been parroted by supporters of both Democratic and Republican candidates," Abraham Foxman, the national director of the ADL, said in a statement.

The call by the ADL comes after a pro-Democratic Web site briefly posted advertisements comparing President Bush to Hitler.

Saudi Arabian killed Jew in Houston

A Saudi Arabian national in Houston pled guilty to slashing a Jewish friend's throat after undergoing a religious revival. Mohammed Ali Alayed, 23, faces up to 60 years in jail after the Aug. 6 attack on Ariel Sellouk, 23, the *Houston Chronicle* reported Monday. Houston police did not find a religious motive for the slaying.

UJC Israel gets chairs

The United Jewish Communities appointed two chairpersons of the organization's Israel branch. Ronny Douek of Herzliya and Susie Gelman of Chevy Chase, Md., will help strengthen the connection between the North American federation system and its office in Israel.

Douek, recently nominated by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon as chairman of Israel's drug enforcement agency, is an Israeli businessman, social activist and philanthropist; Gelman co-chaired the 2003 General Assembly in Jerusalem.

WORLD

Jew honored as Righteous Gentile

A French Catholic priest who was born Jewish and saved hundreds during the Holocaust was named a Righteous Gentile. Father Alexandre Glasberg was honored Monday by the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem.

Glasberg, who was born in Ukraine to Jewish parents but was baptized at an early age, founded the Amitie Chretien movement, which found safe houses for Jews in the non-occupied zone of France.

Glasberg's brother, Vila, who took over leadership of the movement while his brother was on the run from the Gestapo and was later caught and murdered by the Nazis, was honored posthumously at the Jerusalem ceremony. After the war, Alexandre Glasberg helped Jews, especially from Morocco, Iraq and Egypt, immigrate secretly to Israel.

Group presses E.U. on bombings

The Simon Wiesenthal Center called on the European Union to help make suicide bombings crimes against humanity.

Following a meeting with E.U. official Javier Solana last Friday, the center's international liaison director, Shimon Samuels, said E.U. support for such a legal device would be "a new legal and moral tool in the struggle against those who sponsor, train, or incite these terrorist mass murderers."

The Brussels meeting came a day after two E.U. lawmakers, Ilke Schroeder from Germany and Marco Cappato of Italy, announced they would submit a draft resolution to the European Parliament endorsing the anti-terrorism initiative.

Class reunion — in Libya

Muammar Gadhafi reportedly will allow dozens of Jews who immigrated to Israel to return for a school reunion.

On Monday, Israel's daily Ma'ariv quoted Rafael Luzon, a graduate of a church-run school in Bengazi, saying he received official Libyan permission for all alumni to attend this year's reunion.

"The Libyans agreed that the reunion will include Jews who were born in Libya and now live in Israel, on condition that their birthplace is noted in their passport," Luzon told Ma'ariv, adding that several officials in Tripoli said they saw the visit as an important means of rapprochement with Israel.

MIDDLE EAST

Palestinian to get money from Israel

Israel decided a Palestinian deserves compensation for damages suffered during the first intifada.

Israel's High Court ruled Monday that Ossama Hamed can receive money for injuries he suffered when Israeli police fired rubber bullets at him in 1991.

The court found that Hamed, then 11, was an innocent bystander and that police were derelict in their duties by shooting on the run at night at unidentified targets. A Haifa court will decide on the exact amount of damages.

Cabbie complicity

An Israeli Jewish taxi driver is accused of driving a Palestinian suicide bomber to an attack last month. The Tel Aviv Magistrate's Court on Monday charged Ofer Schwartzbaum of complicity in manslaughter and grievous bodily harm for driving the terrorist to the scene of the Dec. 25 attack outside Tel Aviv, which killed four people.

Schwartzbaum confessed to bringing in two Palestinians from the West Bank boundary line for \$25 but said he thought they were illegal laborers.

The Shin Bet arrested Schwartzbaum and the bomber's suspected companion soon after the attack but had kept a gag order on the case.

Good fencing makes good neighbors

Israeli fencers are being excluded from an international fencing tournament in Jordan.

Ha'aretz reported this week that the head of the Jordanian fencing union asked the two Israeli athletes not to attend the tournament beginning in Aqaba this Thursday out of concern their presence would lead to a boycott by Arab participants.

"He told me explicitly that we are not welcome at the tournament," Israeli fencing union head Vladimir Shklar told the paper.

Shklar said the exclusion could seriously harm the Israeli fencers' Olympic prospects.