

**IN THE NEWS**
**Tenet: Saddam had targeted Israel**

A threat to launch chemical weapons at Israel was a factor that helped make the case for the Iraq war, the CIA director said.

In his lengthy defense of the now-faulted intelligence that led up to last year's U.S. attack on Iraq, George Tenet said a person close to Saddam Hussein said "weapons of last resort were mobile launchers armed with chemical weapons, which would be fired at enemy forces and Israel."

Tenet described the Iraqi source as someone "who had direct access to Saddam and his inner circle."

The CIA director spoke Thursday at Georgetown University in Washington, his alma mater.

**Sharon grilled in bribery probe**

Ariel Sharon was questioned by police in connection with bribery charges against a businessman friend.

Four senior fraud squad officers spent three hours with the Israeli prime minister at his Jerusalem residence Thursday.

The officers interrogated him about allegations that businessman David Appel tried to bribe him through his son Gilad in the 1990s. Israeli media reported after the questioning that police said it is unlikely Sharon will be charged.

**Hamas man killed in explosion**

A Hamas military commander was killed in an explosion Thursday night in his home in Gaza City. Palestinians said Abdel Naser Abu Shuka, 36, died after receiving an "explosive package," Reuters reported.

However, Israeli military officials said the army suspected Abu Shuka died while preparing a bomb.

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# WORLD REPORT

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Tracy Sullivan/Connecticut Jewish Ledger

**REQUIEM FOR A DREAM**

Sen. Joseph Lieberman ends his bid for the presidency with an announcement in Hartford.

## Budget strong on Israel; domestic programs face cuts

By RON KAMPEAS

**W**ASHINGTON (JTA) — Spending on Israel remains strong in President Bush's proposed budget but domestic programs are under the knife, including those that most affect Jewish lives.

Surveying the details in the budget Bush handed to Congress on Monday, Jewish organizational officials were especially worried about funding for the elderly.

In Israel aid, Bush is proposing \$2.58 billion for fiscal year 2005, which formally starts on Oct. 1 this year.

That includes \$360 million for economic

aid and \$2.22 billion in defense aid. The figures are consistent with the seventh year of an aid restructuring program agreed to by the two governments, gradually reducing economic assistance to Israel while increasing military aid.

Aid to Egypt, at just over \$1.8 billion, is down \$40 million from last year; and aid to Jordan — \$456 million — remains unchanged.

In addition, the administration is requesting \$75 million, the same as last year, for assistance programs to benefit Palestinians. The money goes straight to non-governmental organizations and is banned from going to the Palestinian Authority. Some

*Continued on page 2*

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES**

## ■ Jewish social services would feel the pain of President Bush's cuts

*Continued from page 1*

Palestinian groups have said they would decline the money because they would not sign a pledge renouncing affiliation with terrorist groups.

Also unaffected is \$50 million for refugee resettlement in Israel, primarily for Ethiopian immigrants. Pro-Israel officials were not commenting publicly on the figures, but were quietly expressing satisfaction that the numbers remained steady.

The State Department also is budgeting \$25 million to explain U.S. policy — including support for Israel — to the Islamic world.

The “Partnerships for Learning” program is a “vehicle for positive dialogue and constructive action, particularly in the Islamic world, between the U.S. and other countries, especially where divergent views on specific policies (Arab-Israeli conflict, Iraq, corruption, human rights, rule of law, debt relief, terrorism, proliferation issues) often undermine overall good relations,” the budget proposal says.

Such expenditures reflect the budget's overall priority: protecting Americans at home and abroad.

The vast majority of the increases in Bush's \$2.4 trillion budget are for defense and homeland security needs. Domestically, few programs outside the Education

Department get perks, and a number of social service programs are targeted for elimination.

That's bad news for Jewish social services, which rely on federal money for about 60 percent of their funding — about \$6 billion out of \$10 billion per year for spending on nursing homes, hospitals and services for the elderly, according to unofficial figures.

“Looking at the budget as a whole, we're concerned that it would freeze non-defense and non-security programs,” said Charles Konigsberg, the top Washington lobbyist for the United Jewish Communities, the umbrella group of the North American Jewish federa-

tion system.

Konigsberg outlined several areas of Jewish concern directly affected by the budget:

- President Bush will not extend emergency federal contributions to Medicaid beyond June. The emergency contributions to the program, which deals with the poor and the invalid, were introduced last year to address the fiscal crisis in the states, which has not abated. Konigsberg called the contributions “vital” for programs serving the Jewish elderly.

“The need for the federal contributions has increased,” he said.

- Cuts in the Health and Human Services budget are likely to adversely affect the Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities program pioneered, to great acclaim, by the UJC and member federations. The program, which brings services to elderly people not ready to leave their communities, has been emulated by other groups.

- Cuts in the Department of Transportation budget target transportation for the elderly, despite advocacy in Congress last year for substantial increases. The money is “vital in assisting our elderly in accessing social services programs,” Konigsberg said.

One bright light, he said, is \$80 million earmarked for elderly immigrants, which will extend a seven-year assistance program to immigrants who have not yet become citizens.

Konigsberg said the program, which affects many Jewish immigrants from the

former Soviet Union and elsewhere, was crucial for older immigrants unlikely to pass citizenship exams because of language barriers and frailty. That also meant that the problem was unlikely to go away.

The program now needs congressional approval.

The White House called the UJC to give it a heads-up on the money for immigrant elderly — a sign that Bush is eager to assuage Jewish concerns about the aged.

Other cuts of concern cited by Konigsberg — especially in their effect on the elderly — include some affecting housing programs and assistance to military veterans.

One group already organizing action is B'nai B'rith International, which announced plans Monday to set up a grassroots network to lobby on behalf of the elderly.

“We have members around the country, and our job is to make sure they know what is and isn't in the proposed budget,” said Joel Kaplan, president of B'nai B'rith.

Despite the nod to the immigrant elderly, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society said it was unhappy with funding for refugee resettlement.

Bush's proposal seeks \$730 million, \$25 million less than the fiscal year 2004 budget currently in place — which itself was a decrease from 2003.

“Jews in particular know how critical it is that America keep its doors open to people in need,” said Leonard Glickman, HIAS' president. “We can't turn our backs on these vulnerable people now.”

More troubling for some is the prospect that the president will not be able to sustain even these levels of funding.

The budget projects a deficit of a half-trillion dollars. Though Bush also proposes measures to reduce the deficit in coming years, critics are concerned that his insistence on making temporary tax cuts permanent renders that pledge unrealistic.

The Reform movement especially has promised vigorous lobbying to maintain at least current levels of domestic spending.

“By arguing that tax cuts should be made permanent, the president is signaling that for the foreseeable future, resources to meet the needs of our fellow citizens in need will be unavailable,” said Rabbi David Saperstein, who heads the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.

Representatives of Orthodox groups had no comment on the budget.

**Some Jewish groups are vowing to lobby vigorously to restore cuts proposed by President Bush.**

### WORLD REPORT

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# Gibson film threatens to poison interfaith ties

By JOE BERKOFSKY

NEW YORK (JTA) — Jesus will appear on the Christian holy day of Ash Wednesday — thanks to Mel Gibson.

The Hollywood star directed and financed the \$25 million epic “The Passion of the Christ,” which is emerging from a nearly yearlong media storm and is due to hit 2,000 screens nationwide Feb. 25.

That Gibson’s “The Passion” will premier is certain. The big question is how a reportedly gory film about the last 12 hours in Jesus’s life, in Aramaic and Latin with subtitles, will play at the local multiplex.

Many Jewish organizational leaders also are waiting to see if a movie they say scapegoats the Jews for the crucifixion will produce legions of Jew-hating moviegoers and poison Christian-Jewish relations for years to come.

“It makes the Romans look like lambs who are being forced” to punish Jesus, “and it shows the Jews as bloodthirsty and vengeful and unending in their desire to see him crucified,” Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, said after emerging from a preview last month.

The movie debuts at a sensitive period in Catholic-Jewish relations. It also reflects a larger struggle within the Catholic Church over whether to continue promoting 40-year-old reforms that include renouncing the notion of collective Jewish guilt for Jesus’ crucifixion, an issue Gibson apparently brings to the silver screen.

“Tied loosely to the film, there is enormous concern on both sides” of the Catholic-Jewish divide “about which direction the church will be going in the post-John Paul II era,” said Rabbi Eugene Korn, a Seton Hall adjunct professor and longtime interfaith advocate. “There is contradictory data out there.”

Last month, some signs of hope about those ties surfaced in New York, where the World Jewish Congress hosted a two-day gathering that brought together 12 cardinals and six chief rabbis from nations as diverse as Angola and Ukraine with a group of Catholic and Jewish scholars.

The meeting was noteworthy not only for the unusual presence of leading papal contenders, but for the presence of top Orthodox Jewish figures as well.

WJC Chairman Israel Singer said that the conference helped “institutionalize”

contacts that have warmed ever since the Vatican’s 1965 reforms, known as *Nostra Aetate*, dropped the teaching that charged Jews with collective responsibility for killing Jesus. “The meeting was a sea change,” Singer said.

One participant, Father Patrick Desbois of Paris, said the meeting proved the church was committed to making inroads with Jews, in part because priests on both sides of the reform issue attended.

“Everybody thought that after John Paul there would be no more relations with Jews, but here we see the contrary,” Desbois said.

But even as the talks took place, the Gibson movie continued to inflame new tensions.

David Elcott, director of interreligious affairs for the American Jewish Committee, also saw the movie last month at one of the nation’s largest evangelical churches, in a Chicago suburb.

The movie shows the Jews as a “mob spitting, scratching, yelling, pummeling” at Jesus, “their faces contorted,” Elcott said. It’s an “assault on our commitment to interreligious dialogue and respect.”

After Foxman called the movie “painful,” he received a letter from Gibson urging a detente, though Foxman said Gibson never addressed his complaints or his request to add a postscript telling audiences not to interpret the movie as an indictment of the Jews.

This week, a Gibson aide said the actor-director decided, based on focus-group reactions, to cut a potentially incendiary line from the film in which the Jewish high priest Caiaphas says of Jesus’ death, “His blood be on us and on our children.” That line from the New Testament was used in passion plays throughout the centuries, and often triggered anti-Jewish violence.

“I do not take your concerns lightly,” Gibson wrote to Foxman, insisting that his purpose is to love and respect others “despite our differences.”

Foxman called the letter “kind,” but said it didn’t address the serious issues the ADL had raised about the film.

Such bitter reviews echoed earlier

warnings by a few rabbis who had seen earlier film drafts.

Gibson is a member of a Catholic fundamentalist sect that rejects Vatican authority and opposes its reforms, though Gibson has insisted he is not anti-Semitic.

Gibson “is as mensch as they get,” said Icon spokesman Alan Nierob. “He’s a wonderful person who’s just trying to make a good film.”

Nierob also dismissed any apparent contradiction between Gibson’s opposition to the Vatican and the apparent quest by Icon, his film company, for the church’s imprimatur. “It’s just a matter of building support,” he said.

In fact, the past year’s worth of media scrutiny has only helped “in terms of interest awareness” for the movie, Nierob said, and the Outreach Web site is even taking advance ticket orders.

Some think the Jewish attention to the film has only aggravated the situation.

Some Jewish groups “blundered” by helping generate such buzz for a movie that would likely have found few fans, said Elan Steinberg, executive vice president of the WJC. “I don’t remember the last blockbuster in Aramaic,” Steinberg said.

Some signs of goodwill have cropped up in the past year related to the movie.

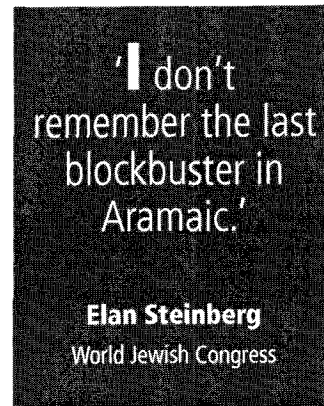
A group of Catholic and Jewish scholars who specialize in the study of the historical Jesus, and whose views Gibson rejects, criticized the movie as retrograde.

Recently, the Center for Christian-Jewish Relations at Boston College, a liberal Jesuit institution, issued “Facts, Faith and Film-making: Jesus’ Passion and Its Portrayal,” a guide intended to counter the film’s potential impact.

At the same time, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops issued “The Bible, the Jews and the Death of Jesus,” a collection of church papers intended to “end prejudices against Jews and Judaism.”

While the furor over the movie is likely to continue, interfaith activists remain confident that it won’t adversely affect progress in Catholic-Jewish relations.

Catholic-Jewish ties “will continue,” Korn said. “There are partners on both sides who want it to.”



# John Kerry: Appealing to Jews, Arabs

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A couple of weeks after eating lox and cream cheese at a synagogue in Des Moines, John Kerry took on bitter Arab coffee and baklava among Muslims in Cedar Rapids.

Both appearances had a salutary effect on caucus night Jan. 19, when the majority of both Iowa's Jews and Arabs helped the Massachusetts senator come out the clear winner. It's a pattern repeating itself nationwide.

Kerry, who after Tuesday's primaries has solidified his position as the front-runner in the race for the Democratic presidential nomination, appeals to competing constituencies otherwise at odds in the battle for the Democratic soul.

He is a friend to Jews and Arabs; a storied veteran of both the Vietnam War and of the movement that ended it; a fiscal conservative and an advocate of government spending for the disenfranchised; an opponent of President Bush's handling of the Iraq War; and a supporter of an assertive U.S. posture in the Persian Gulf.

Kerry's positions on the Israel-Palestinian conflict are a study in his facility for casting his speeches according to his audience, and filling them with knowledgeable terms and detailed anecdotes.

His Jewish stump speech — delivered with vigor and passion, with barely a pause — cites the Roosevelt administration's decision to turn away a ship of Jews fleeing Nazi-occupied Europe as a failure of U.S. policy he would never repeat.

He says he stood atop Masada and felt the echoes of Jewish resistance call to him. He shouts, extending each syllable with his broad Brahmin vowels: "Am Yisrael Chai!"

One on one, Kerry, 60, exudes athletic energy, even returning to play ice hockey since his treatment a year ago for prostate cancer. On the campaign trail, he often stoops over his interlocutors to look them straight in the eye. He never raises his voice.

Arab Americans thrill not just at his condemnation of Israel's security barrier — "We do not need another barrier to peace" — but at how he says he arrived at his conclusion.

Speaking at an Arab American Institute conference in Dearborn, Mich., in October, he described how in the West Bank he witnessed how "Palestinian women, traveling

on foot, were forced to stand in long lines at checkpoints with their children tugging at their sleeves and their arms loaded with groceries."

Newman Abuissa, who organized support for Kerry among American Arabs in Cedar Rapids and who is now a Kerry delegate from Iowa, says, "He dealt with the Arab issue on a personal level; he knows names and events."

Across the state in Des Moines, another Kerry delegate, Paulee Lipsman, echoes the same sentiment from the Jewish perspective: "He has a good grasp of Jewish history, and understands the historical aspects of where we are today."

People who have known Kerry a long time say that such diversity is natural to any Boston politician, who has to deal with large ethnic communities. That includes a Jewish community of 275,000, about 4.5 percent of the state's total population, and one that reflects the spectrum of U.S. Jewish opinion.

"He's been very accessible to the Jewish community," says Nancy Kaufman, the director of the Jewish Community Relations Council in Boston.

"He's been willing to engage and be challenging, always willing to learn. He's been able to respond to the diversity of the community."

Jim Shaer, Kerry's chief of staff for 16 years, says Kerry often queried him about his background as a Lebanese American, just as he would engage his many Jewish staffers.

"He saw us as resources; he saw that we each had something to contribute," Shaer says of Kerry.

But Kerry's opponents say that a man who makes himself all things to all people adds up to nothing.

Mickey Kaus, an influential political columnist for Slate, has said he "loathes" Kerry. "There is a phony, clean facade, and the reality behind the phony facade," he wrote this week. "Courageous soldiers do not always make courageous politicians."

A close examination of his speeches to Jews and Arabs shows they fall short on detail.

Notably, in earning Arab American applause with his line about Israel's security fence, Kerry never said he would suggest Israel remove the barrier.

Characterizing Kerry as a flip-flopper is unfair, say Jewish community professionals who work with him. They say it's an unsophisticated way of understanding a man who carefully considers each position.

"He doesn't usually react or respond in a visceral way, he's very deliberative," says Kaufman of the JCRC.

"His deliberativeness is taken for aloofness, but it really is him taking time

to pause, think and balance pros and cons of giving voice to an issue. Once he has totally evaluated and considered an issue, he has no problems taking a position."

Still, there is an ambiguity that is stamped on his public life. He earned ribbons for his heroism as a lieutenant in Vietnam, even as his opposition to the war solidified; he earned headlines for tossing them over a fence in front of the Capitol when he returned and joined the antiwar movement.

Kerry himself bristles at the charge that he wants to stake out both sides of an issue.

After his rivals made much of contrasting Kerry's 2002 vote to give Bush war powers with his later outspoken criticism of how Bush prosecuted the war in 2003, the candidate told reporters to study his Senate speech when he made the vote.

In it, he makes clear his vote is predicated on Bush's willingness to work with the United Nations and the United States' allies. "If he fails to do so, I will be among the first to speak out," he said at the time.

Some of his critics make a connection between the allegation that "he does not know himself" and his failure to research his own Jewish roots until the Boston Globe uncovered his grandfather's Jewish birth a year ago.

"Kerry's confusion about his heritage mirrors a larger confusion about his essence," Globe columnist Joan Vennoch, an especially vigorous Kerry critic, wrote at the time.

"Who is he? What does he believe in?"

**Kerry, who has Jewish roots, 'has a good grasp of Jewish history.'**

**Paulee Lipsman**  
Kerry delegate

A closer examination of the record shows that such criticism is unfair, according to a follow-up by Reform Judaism magazine last summer.

Kerry's grandfather, Frederick, had been at pains to hide his Judaism long before his arrival in the United States. He had changed his name from Kohn to Kerry. His business career in the United States rose and then fell; he shot himself to death in a Boston hotel in 1921.

The article suggested that without the considerable research resources of a newspaper like the *Globe*, Kerry had no way of uncovering his grandfather's origins — although he had tried over the years. He was apparently stunned when he found out a year ago.

Now he routinely mentions the fact when he campaigns among Jews. Lipsman, the recently elected Iowa delegate, recalls telling Kerry, when she first met him, that she favored Connecticut Sen. Joseph Lieberman because she wanted to see a Jewish president elected.

"I'm part Jewish, too," he allegedly said. He also notes his younger brother Cameron's conversion to Judaism 20 years ago after marrying a Jewish woman.

Most prominent of his Jewish supporters is his key Massachusetts fund-raiser, Alan Solomont, a leading Boston philanthropist who says he was drawn to Kerry because of his Middle East policies.

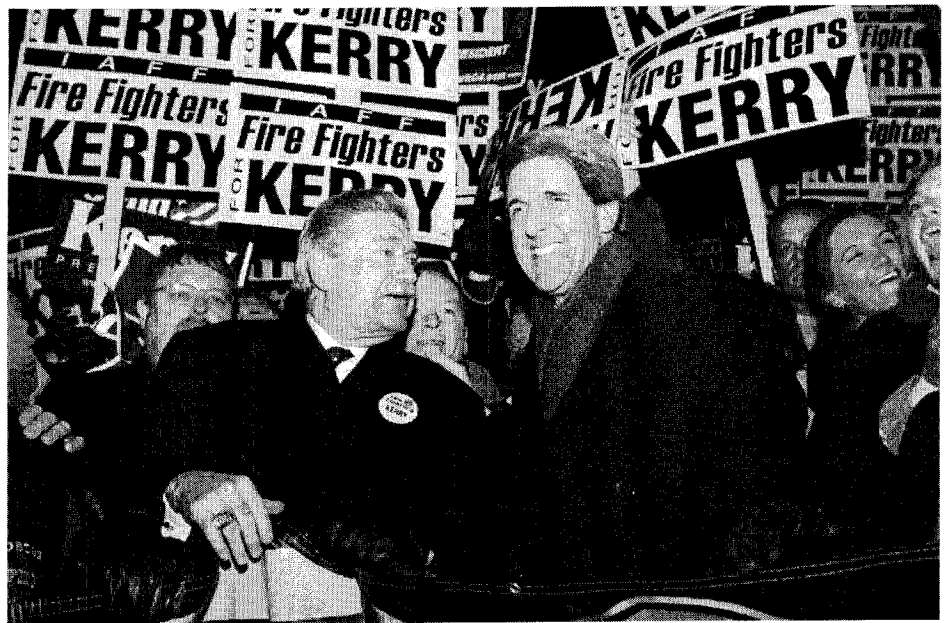
"He regards the U.S. relationship with Israel as special, in U.S. interests, as the only democracy in the region," says Solomont. "At the same time, he believes the United States has a very important role to play in trying to assist Israel in ending the conflict, and the current administration is a lot of talk, and not a lot of action."

That means, Kerry has said, that he would emulate Clinton's intensely involved activism.

"In the first days of a Kerry administration, I will appoint a presidential ambassador to the peace process who will report directly to me and the secretary of state — and who will work day-to-day to move the process forward and make an early assessment of how to build on areas of agreement and disagreement," Kerry said in a statement to JTA.

An official in a pro-Israel group described Kerry's record on Israel-related votes during his nearly 20 years in the Senate as "outstanding."

But some pro-Israel activists who have met privately with Kerry worry that, like Clinton, his determined bent to forge peace



At a recent campaign rally, candidate Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) stands with supporters. IAFF

— even absent a credible Palestinian partner — could lead to clashes with Israel's government, especially the current government led by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

They say Kerry has privately expressed his distaste for Sharon, and point out that Solomont is a leading figure in the Israel Policy Forum, a group that strongly promotes U.S. engagement in the region and has been sharply critical of the Sharon government.

Among the critics' concerns is that Kerry would consider as Middle East emissaries personalities unpalatable to the Jewish community, including former Secretary of State James Baker.

Those concerns have yet to receive much of a public airing, and Kerry has been spared the Jewish communal criticism suffered by former Vermont Gov. Howard Dean, once his chief rival in the primaries.

Kerry is at pains to underscore his commitment to Israel, and has made criticism of Saudi Arabia — and its closeness to the Bush administration — a centerpiece of his campaign among Jews.

"While Saudi officials and spokesmen have said repeatedly that the Saudi government is opposed to every form of terrorism, the Saudi regime openly and enthusiastically supports Hamas," Kerry said in his JTA statement.

"The Saudis cannot pick and choose among terrorist groups, approving some while claiming to oppose others."

That rhetoric has disappointed some Arab Americans who are otherwise enthu-

siastic about Kerry's campaign.

"It's a bit flippant," says James Zogby of the Arab American Institute. "It may get applause, but I'm not sure its good policy, and I'm not sure it doesn't feed the anti-Arab rhetoric. We need to have a more substantive discussion on Saudi Arabia and how we can help them move forward and reform."

Beyond foreign policy, Kerry's Jewish supporters note his staunch support for domestic issues supported by the majority of American Jews. He is pro-choice, he wants to extend health care coverage and he is a strong supporter of the separation of church and state.

Despite his mostly liberal voting record, Orthodox activists say they appreciate the lead he has taken with the Workplace Religious Freedom Act, which would encourage employers to accommodate workplace religious needs, including religious garb and flexible time for holidays.

His Senate career has also showcased a proficiency stemming from his first job, as a prosecutor. He led the hearings into the Iran-Contra arms-for-hostages scandal in the 1980s.

Many of Kerry's races have been last-minute close, and his supporters attribute it to the "the guy you marry as opposed to the guy you date" factor.

"He starts making sense when people are looking for stability, when they want to find their comfort levels," says Richard Morningstar of Boston, a former U.S. ambassador to the European Union who has known Kerry since 1980.



# With Gaza plan, Sharon looks to be bold

By LESLIE SUSSER

JERUSALEM (JTA) — In announcing a plan to evacuate nearly all of the Jewish communities in the Gaza Strip, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon is signaling that he's serious about creating large blocs of Palestinian territory free of Israelis — and that he is willing to gamble with his political future.

Sharon hopes to convince the United States that his plan for unilateral disengagement from the Palestinians not only is consistent with the internationally approved "road map" peace plan, but that he has every chance of taking it forward.

However, as soon as Sharon made his dramatic announcement Monday about a Gaza withdrawal, a chorus of angry right wingers in his coalition, including some in his own Likud Party, threatened to topple his government — with some accusing the prime minister of conjuring up grandiose schemes to deflect attention from corruption investigations swirling around him and his sons.

A few days earlier, Sharon had given instructions to Giora Eiland, his newly appointed national security adviser, to prepare a detailed disengagement plan regarding the West Bank security fence that would give the Palestinians maximum freedom and give Israel maximum security.

A close Sharon aide told JTA that the need to get international support for the disengagement plan, and the desire to cause the Palestinians as few humanitarian problems as possible, could lead to the fence being rerouted closer to the pre-1967 boundary, known as the Green Line.

"The more consensus there is over the route and the fewer humanitarian problems it creates, the more likely it is to be accepted as a positive stage in the road map," the aide said.

Indeed, if the plan is to fly, American support will be crucial. Sharon will take a detailed draft of Eiland's proposal when he goes to Washington later this month to meet President Bush. Before that, American envoys are expected in Jerusalem to discuss it.

So far, the American response has been encouraging. Until recently, the official U.S. position had been that the road map, though stalled, was the only game in town. After a late January visit to Washington,

however, Sharon's bureau chief, Dov Weisglass, reported that the administration was ready to listen to other ideas. For Sharon, that was the signal to proceed.

Skeptics point out that Sharon did not give any deadline for the planned evacuations. But his deputy, Ehud Olmert, the Likud Cabinet minister most supportive of the disengagement policy, says a pullback will begin around June or July.

That is, if Sharon is still in power by then. The right-wing National Union bloc and the National Religious Party both have made clear that they will quit Sharon's government if a single settlement is touched.

If they do, however, Sharon may well be able to form an alternative government with the Labor Party. Labor's temporary leader, Shimon Peres reportedly told party colleagues Tuesday that he would support the Gaza evacuation — possibly clearing the way for another national unity government.

On the face of it, a coalition with Labor would give Sharon a strong coalition of 74 in the 120-member Knesset: 40 legislators from Likud, 19 from Labor and 15 from the centrist Shinui Party.

Paradoxically, however, that would leave him at the mercy of the right wingers in his own Likud, since 15 Likudniks voting against the government would be enough to bring it down.

A rival like former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu could trigger a party rebellion that would topple Sharon and bring Netanyahu to power.

Sharon, though, is confident that public support for disengagement will deter his Likud rivals.

A poll in Tuesday's Yediot Achronot newspaper showed that 59 percent of the public support the Gaza evacuation plan — 34 percent oppose it — while 57 percent believe Sharon is acting for reasons of state and only 24 percent think he is motivated by the corruption investigation.

To build on that support, Sharon's office has launched a campaign to convince the public that the plan is in Israel's best interest.

Sharon's aide, for example, paints a rosy picture in which disengagement helps produce a Palestinian peace partner by improving the Palestinians' quality of life.

The goal, he says, is to have Palestinian areas in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank with no Israeli soldiers, no Jewish settlers, no blockades and no roadblocks. The Palestinians would have absolute freedom of movement and would run their own affairs.

With help from the United States and the European Union, the Palestinians could rebuild their economy and provide jobs.

According to the official, Sharon hopes that once the Palestinians taste freedom and prosperity, their attraction to terrorism will decrease and a new, widely backed Palestinian leadership will emerge that is ready to talk peace based on the road map, with all issues — including final borders — on the table.

But there is another, far less upbeat scenario. Israeli officials acknowledge that the current situation on the Palestinian side is increasingly chaotic and that the Palestinian Authority is not in control. Indeed, in private, they refer to the Palestinian Authority as a "non-authority" and to P.A. Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei as a "non-prime minister."

Though they long have demanded an Israeli withdrawal, many Palestinian officials reportedly fear that a unilateral and uncoordinated one could lead to a complete breakdown of law and order — from which a strengthened Hamas could come to power, refusing to negotiate peace with Israel.

Despite all the political difficulties and the uncertain future, Sharon is behaving like a man who has made up his mind:

On Tuesday he declared that, as much as it pained him, he had reached the conclusion that "for the sake of Israel's future security and prosperity," settlements would have to be evacuated.

Sharon seems to be hovering between great deeds and disgrace.

The next weeks and months will decide his fate — and possibly the shape of the region for years to come.

**A** poll shows Sharon appears to have the support of the Israeli public for his plan.

## HOLIDAYS

## Forget Groundhog Day: Tu B'Shevat has arrived again

By JANE ULMAN

**E**NCINO, Calif. (JTA) — At daybreak Monday, Punxsutawney Phil, the world's most acclaimed groundhog, made his annual appearance to inspect his shadow, to determine if spring is imminent or if we are destined for six more weeks of winter.

Unfortunately, Phil predicted six more weeks of winter.

But we Jews don't need this public-seeking prognosticator to tell us if spring is en route. On sundown Friday, Tu B'Shevat arrives.

Yes, long before the original Punxsutawney Phil emerged from his Pennsylvania burrow in 1886, the festival of Tu B'Shevat marked the reawakening of the trees from their winter hibernation.

The holiday dates back to the second century C.E., when the rabbis of the Mishnah declared Tu B'Shevat, literally the 15th day of the Hebrew month of Shevat, the New Year of the Trees.

Tu B'Shevat marked the start of the fiscal year for Israel's farmers, who were required to donate a tenth of their crops to support the priesthood and the poor.

Tu B'Shevat has metamorphosed into a meaningful and multi-faceted holiday.

In the 16th century, mystics in Safed, in the northern Galilee, interpreted tree to mean Tree of Life, whose roots reached up to the heavens and whose branches extended to earth.

And so they designed a seder, modeled on the Passover seder.

In the late 19th century, when the early Zionists began settling in Palestine and reclaiming the land, Tu B'Shevat took on new significance.

More recently, Tu B'Shevat has become a kind of Jewish Earth Day.

Tu B'Shevat should be especially welcome this year, because, with most of North America gripped in cold, it signals the beginnings of spring. No matter what Punxsutawney Phil says. ■

*Jane Ulman is a writer in Encino, Calif. She is the mother of four sons.*

## Demographer Egon Mayer, advocate of outreach, is dead

By JOE BERKOFSKY

NEW YORK (JTA) — Edmund Case was leaving a career in corporate law for Jewish social work, anxious to tackle intermarriage issues.

Case, at the time a graduate student at Brandeis University, called Egon Mayer, chairman of Brooklyn College's sociology department. Mayer visited with Case for two hours and promised to help him.

Case eventually launched [interfaithfamily.com](http://interfaithfamily.com) to promote Jewish choices for interfaith families.

Because of Mayer's encouragement, Case said, "I ended up devoting my life to the cause of outreach and the intermarried."

Last Friday, Mayer, one of the most prominent — and, in some quarters, controversial — chroniclers of American Jewry, died at his Laurel Hollow, N.Y., home after battling gall bladder cancer. He was 59.

While many of Mayer's closest friends knew he had been ill, his death came as a deep blow to the wider American Jewish community, where he was considered a pioneer in advocating outreach to interfaith families and unaffiliated Jews in response to rising intermarriage rates and declining communal ties.

"His was an important voice in the Jewish community," said Gary Tobin, a demographer and president of the Institute for Jewish and Community Research in San Francisco. "He established what over time is going to be an important institutional presence in Jewish life, which is outreach."

Mayer's scholarly work initially focused on the fervently Orthodox in America. In 1979 he wrote "From Suburb to Shtetl," which examined the Brooklyn neighborhood of Borough Park and how Chasidic sects confront modern culture.

In 1985 he wrote "Love and Tradition: Marriage Between Jews and Christians," which examined intermarriage and amplified those voices who said it would benefit the Jewish community to welcome non-Jewish spouses and their children

rather than shun them. Mayer later delved deeper into interfaith families, publishing such works as "Conversion Among the Intermarried: Choosing to Become Jewish." In 1990 he was among the authors of the National Jewish Population Survey, a landmark study funded by the national Jewish federation system.

That study became infamous for its finding that — while the overall intermarriage rate was 28 percent — about half of those Jews who had wed in the past five years had married non-Jews.

The community split into those urging greater efforts to boost Jewish identity to prevent intermarriage and others who said outreach to more marginal Jews — and to intermarried families — would draw them closer to the tradition.

In 1988, Mayer became founding director of the Jewish Outreach Institute in New York, the first communal effort devoted to outreach.

"He was one of the few people able to challenge the Jewish establishment to be more inclusive and open-minded," said Myrna Baron, executive director of the Center for Cultural Judaism in New York.

The center, a headquarters for the Secular Humanistic Judaism movement, last year reissued the landmark 2001 American Jewish Identity Survey. Mayer worked on the study with Barry Kosmin and Ariela Keysar at the graduate center of the City University of New York.

The survey replicated the methodology of the 1990 NJPS and found that intermarriage had risen to 33 percent, while 49 percent of American Jews considered themselves secular to some degree.

The survey sparked more dissent and even criticism. Mayer was born in Switzerland and raised in Hungary. His family immigrated to the United States during the 1956 Hungarian revolution.

Other projects included an investigation of Rudolf Kasztner, a Hungarian Jew who negotiated a deal with Adolf Eichmann to select a group of Hungarian Jews — among them Mayer's parents — to Switzerland during the Nazi era. ■

**M**ayer put outreach on the map for the organized Jewish community.

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## NORTH AMERICA

### Profiling not for U.S.

The United States has to learn from Israel about security, but it will never practice ethnic profiling like Israel, a U.S. official told JTA.

Asa Hutchinson, the undersecretary for Homeland Security, toured Israel in November to learn what Israel could contribute to the U.S. post-Sept. 11 border security.

He toured Israel's West Bank security barrier and quizzed Israeli officials about identifying suicide bombers.

"We can learn from each other," Hutchinson told JTA prior to attending an American Israel Public Affairs Committee event in Washington on Wednesday.

On airline inspections, Hutchinson said, Israel does a good job of selective questioning and "focusing on intent," but said that was an option not open to U.S. authorities, who would never "profile based on ethnic characteristics."

### Envoy cancels condolence call

Canada's ambassador to Israel canceled a condolence call to the home of a Canadian-born man killed in a terror attack.

Donald Sinclair's visit to the family of Yechezkel Goldberg, killed in last week's Jerusalem bus bombing, was called off because Goldberg lived in the West Bank, the Jerusalem Post reported.

A Canadian spokeswoman said the government had offered to help Goldberg's family, but that not visiting beyond Israel's pre-1967 borders is consistent with Canadian policy.

### Rumsfeld: Don't count out Syria

Syria is testing chemical weapons, helps fund Hezbollah and is unhelpful in Iraq, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld said, but that does not rule out U.S.-Syria engagement.

In his testimony Wednesday before the Senate, Rumsfeld said Syrian President Bashar Assad was working with Iran to fund Hezbollah, bringing members down through Damascus into Lebanon and into Israel.

Still, Rumsfeld agreed with senators who said there was no downside to exploring feelers Assad has put out to improve the relationship.

### U.S. official plants trees in Israel

The chief of the U.S. Forest Service is planting trees in Israel in honor of Tu B'Shevat. The Jewish National Fund is hosting Dale Bosworth during his weeklong visits to Israeli forests.

### Google, mein kinder

The search engine Google introduced a Yiddish version.

The popular search engine recently introduced a Yiddish search option, with Yiddish menus and messages. Users must have Hebrew or Yiddish language software on their computers, the New York Jewish Week reported.

## MIDDLE EAST

### Olmert: 'Road map' still good

Any unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip would only take place in the context of the U.S.-led "road map" peace initiative, Israel's deputy prime minister told Colin Powell.

Ehud Olmert met with the U.S. secretary of state in Washington on Thursday and elaborated on Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's proposal to pull settlements out of the Gaza Strip. Sharon's announcement reflected frustration with the current Palestinian leadership, Olmert said.

### No progress in summit meet

A meeting aimed at establishing a possible Israeli-Palestinian summit apparently made no progress.

Israel Radio reported that the Palestinians failed to present any new ideas for cracking down on terror at Wednesday's meeting between Dov Weisglass, Ariel Sharon's chief of staff, and his counterpart in Ahmed Qurei's office, Hassan Abu Libdeh.

### Jewish threats against Sharon rise

Potential threats against Ariel Sharon from extremist Israeli settlers are increasing.

The warning by the head of Israel's Shin Bet security service came in a closed-door meeting, and was reported by the Israeli newspaper Ma'ariv.

The report comes amid growing anger in the settler movement over the Israeli prime minister's plan to evacuate most Jewish communities in the Gaza Strip, which is seen as a precursor to a West Bank withdrawal.

### Long arm of the law

Israeli firms that employ Jews on Shabbat may face new fines. Israeli Trade Minister Ehud Olmert said Wednesday that the fines must be reimposed because the government must follow the law.

The fines had been waived after a request from Justice Minister Yosef "Tommy" Lapid, the leader of the secularist Shinui Party.

## WORLD

### Swiss bank retargeted

A lawsuit was filed against a Swiss bank, alleging that the bank was part-owner of the German firm that manufactured Zyklon-B.

Ed Fagan filed the \$35 million lawsuit against UBS.

A spokesman for the bank dismissed the suit as baseless.

### Israel's envoy back to Austria

Israel returned its ambassador to Austria after a four-year hiatus. Avraham Toledo presented his credentials Thursday in Vienna.

Israel recalled its ambassador in 2000 after the ultranationalist party of Jorg Haider joined the country's government.

Israel has said it decided to reinstate its envoy after Austria made several symbolic acts demonstrating remorse for Austria's complicity during the Holocaust.

### Students to protest court

The largest Jewish student organization plans to join protests against the International Court of Justice hearings on Israel's security fence.

The Jerusalem-based World Union of Jewish Students, which represents hundreds of thousands of Jewish students worldwide, is coordinating a "silent protest march" for Feb. 23, the day of the hearings at The Hague, the group's president, Peleg Reshef, told JTA.

### AJCommittee opens Brussels office

The American Jewish Committee is set to open its new Transatlantic Institute in Brussels.

The Feb. 12 opening will be attended by Javier Solana, the E.U.'s senior foreign policy official; Foreign Minister Louis Michel of Belgium; and U.S. ambassadors to the European Union and NATO. The launch also comes at the end of a diplomatic mission by the AJCommittee's board of governors throughout Europe and Asia.

As part of that initiative, the officials met on Thursday with Pope John Paul II, who reiterated that racism and anti-Semitism must be