

## IN THE NEWS

## U.S.: We're watching Israel's security fence

The United States will monitor Israel's proposed adjustments to its West Bank security barrier.

Israeli officials said several days ago they are considering adjusting the route to minimize inconvenience to Palestinians.

"It's quite clear that the Israelis understand, know what our concerns are, know what our objections are to various parts of this routing," U.S. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said Tuesday. "And we'll see to what extent they are taking those into account."

## Plot exposed to attack Canadian Jews

Hamas and Hezbollah agents planned to attack Jewish targets in Ottawa in 1999, according to a 90-page report by the CIA.

The plan by agents stationed in South America's "tri-border area," at the junction of Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay, was foiled when the suspects were rounded up by Argentine authorities. They were later released. In 2002, Ottawa police increased surveillance of local Jewish institutions after receiving threats against a synagogue.

## Religious insignia on way out in France

The French Parliament's lower house passed a bill banning the wearing of conspicuous religious insignia in state schools.

Tuesday's vote in the National Assembly passed by 494-36. If ratified by the Senate early next month, the wearing of large crosses, Muslim veils and yarmulkes will be banned beginning with the next academic year.

The vote was welcomed by Jewish groups in France, which traditionally have been strong supporters of France's historic separation of church and state.

**In observance of a U.S. holiday, JTA World Report will not publish Monday, Feb. 16.**

# WORLD REPORT

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## Bush administration begins embracing Sharon's proposals

By RON KAMPEAS

**W**ASHINGTON (JTA) — For Ariel Sharon's government, Washington is a town where once unimaginable dreams can come true.

The Bush administration is on board with the West Bank security barrier, officials who could once barely contain their impatience with Israel have shut out the Palestinians, and the president wants to learn more about the Israeli prime minister's plans for unilateral disengagement from the Palestinians.

The problem with answered prayers, Israel is finding, is that they lead to more questions. In recent meetings with their Israeli counterparts, top U.S. officials have asked Israel to fill in the gaps in Sharon's broad outlines of a break with the Gaza Strip and pullouts from remote areas of the West Bank.

"The Americans want details," an Israeli official said.

Israelis are scrambling to provide those details ahead of a visit to the region by two top White House officials: Steve Hadley, second-in-command at the National Security Council, and Elliot Abrams, the top Middle East official at the NSC. The two were to have gone to the Middle East this week, but administration officials said the visit has been postponed for the time being.

When they do visit, Giora Eiland, who heads Sharon's National Security Council, will present them with many options. After getting feedback from his U.S. counterparts, Eiland, top Sharon adviser Dov Weisglass and others on the Israeli security council will further refine the plans and arrive in Washington for more consultations a week later.

Sometime after that — as soon as early March — Sharon himself will arrive in Washington to present Bush with a detailed plan.

Americans were skeptical at first when Sharon announced his plans earlier this month for a unilateral withdrawal of Jewish settlements from Gaza, but a barrage of Israeli reassurances melted resistance.

The speedy evolution of the U.S. position on the fence from ambivalence to Israel's side was evident in U.S. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher's initial statements.

On Feb. 2, Boucher's position was pronouncedly wait-and-see: "I don't think I can put this move in isolation," he said. "What needs to be looked at is the overall commitment that they had made and the need to move on those specific commitments

that they've made so far."

It took just a day for him to sound more convinced: "We certainly welcome action on settlements," he said on Feb. 3. "We look for their action on their obligations."

Three elements contributed to U.S. openness to Sharon's surprise announcement: Deepening disappointment with the Palestinians' failure to control terrorists in the West Bank and Gaza Strip; the Israeli Labor Party's pledge to back the Gaza plan from the opposition should hard-line pro-settler parties bolt the ruling coalition; and reassurances from government officials that the withdrawal would hew to Bush's vision of working toward a viable Palestinian state.

"We see these processes in the framework of the president's vision of June 24, 2002," Israeli Trade and Industry Minister Ehud Olmert said Feb. 5 after meeting with U.S. Secre-

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NEWS  
ANALYSIS

## ■ *The Bush administration is warming to Sharon's way of thinking*

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tary of State Colin Powell in Washington.

Olmert was referring to the day Bush spoke of the establishment of a Palestinian state and an end to Palestinian terrorism by 2005. Olmert also reassured Powell that Israel would hasten the introduction of measures to ease the lives of Palestinians.

A deputy prime minister, Olmert said Bush administration officials were confident that Israel would not use disengagement as a pretext to choke off a viable Palestinian state and to entrench Israel's presence in the West Bank.

"They understood that it is not Israel's intention to create facts on the ground," Olmert later told reporters.

Details that emerged over this weekend reinforced Olmert's message that Israel was ready to work within the confines of Bush's vision. Eiland and other officials outlined plans to change the route of the security fence, a pledge that addressed U.S. concerns that the fence was cutting too deeply into the West Bank.

Boucher said Tuesday that the United States was monitoring the adjustments.

"It's quite clear that the Israelis understand, know what our concerns are, know what our objections are to various parts of this routing," Boucher said. "And we'll see to what extent they are taking those into account or making changes."

There was also talk of moving Gaza settlers to the West Bank to expand settlements there, but administration officials said they understood that to be little more than talk — as opposed to the more sub-

stantive pledges to reroute the security barrier and remove the Gaza settlements.

"Look, let's take it one step at a time — pulling out of settlements is a good thing," said one administration official. "It's the kind of action that could jump-start a dialogue between the parties."

The Americans showed their pleasure with Sharon by shoring up support for him in the United States and abroad. U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan enthusiastically endorsed the removal of Gaza settlements — not coincidentally, Jewish officials said, a day after meeting Bush.

"Withdrawal from Gaza that has been announced by the prime minister, if it does take place, can really give us a very important moment — a new dynamic that can propel the process forward," Annan said.

Other U.S. carrots for Sharon's pledge had to do with new support for a security fence reviled not long ago by Bush himself.

Speaking to an American Israel Public Affairs Committee event last week in Washington, Asa Hutchinson, an undersecretary for the Homeland Security Dept. who is close to Bush, said he "understood a nation's desire to have a security fence."

Powell also had something to do with the decision in Europe to oppose the upcoming Feb. 23 hearing on Israel's security fence at the International Court of Justice at The Hague.

These are all signs, Jewish officials say, of the Bush administration's understanding that Sharon needs international legitimacy if he is to undertake something as traumatic as the removal of settlements.

Israelis, for their part, are impressed. "We're negotiating with the United States without negotiating with the Palestinians," one official said. "It's a radical change."

Maybe so, but the ultimate American goal is to get the Israelis and Palestinians back to the table — and soon.

"We've been pressing hard for the two leaders to speak to one another," Powell told editors of *The Washington Post* last week.

Powell said they were also looking to

the Palestinians for ideas.

"There are some suggestions of a Palestinian security plan that's being worked on, but it's slow, and I don't want to convey a false sense of optimism."

If anything, the Americans despair more than ever of the Palestinian commitment to reforming their security forces.

The State Department is still smarting from an Oct. 15 bomb attack on a U.S. convoy in Gaza that killed three. The latest Palestinian effort to

assuage U.S. security concerns — a closed door military trial of four charged in the bombing — backfired.

U.S. officials said the trial this week was little more than a kangaroo court.

"We do not believe that the proceedings now under way represent the application of justice that we seek," a State Department official said. "What is required is a genuine investigation which definitively resolves these killings by bringing to justice those responsible."

Palestinians say Israel has destroyed their security capabilities, and the Palestinian Authority is hardly in a position now to reassert its security authority.

"The territories are almost entirely under Israeli control," Ghassan Khatib, the Palestinian labor minister, said. "Security-wise, the Palestinians are restricted from doing anything, including their security work."

Khatib said the process needs greater American involvement in order to revive.

That's typical of a Palestinian tradition of reliance on outsiders to nudge the parties into hard decisions, said Jonathan Jacoby, a founder of the Israel Policy Forum.

"The Palestinians, generally speaking, are waiting for someone to champion their cause, which I don't think is a very constructive way of confronting it," Jacoby said.

Sharon's pledge to withdraw from Gaza — if he makes good on it — is just the factor that might spur the Palestinians into responding in kind and get them back to the table, Jacoby said.

"Now they have something to react to, which is good," he said.

**The U.S. administration knows Sharon needs international legitimacy if he is to undertake something as traumatic as removing settlements.**

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# Hillel's interim president asked to stay

By RACHEL POMERANCE

NEW YORK (JTA) — Hillel is asking its interim president to stay on as head of the international Jewish campus organization, JTA has learned.

Avraham Infeld, a longtime Israeli educator, was hired for one year in May 2003 after Richard Joel left the helm of the organization to become president of Yeshiva University.

Now, after less than a year as interim president, Infeld's job rating is so high he is being asked to stay on.

"Avraham has done an outstanding job all around — not only as a leader, but inspiring the organization on all levels, on being a sound administrator, on having that wonderful word 'vision,' and he has been a remarkably pleasant surprise," said Michael Steinhardt, co-chairman of Hillel's board of directors. "There's an overwhelming sense of satisfaction that he'll be with us for some time longer."

When Joel left Hillel last spring, the group was saddled with the task of finding a successor to someone whose charisma and vision had transformed Hillel from an image of humdrum campus chapels into vibrant campus communities. Joel turned Hillel into one of the most respected American Jewish organizations.

Joel's departure also came as campuses became one of America's main battlegrounds for public opinion on the

Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

A range of Jewish groups, including some that previously had little to do with students, rolled out campus programs aiming to transform ill-informed Jewish students into Zionist activists.

Hillel was thrust to the forefront of the crusade to give Jewish students an education on Israel in the face of pro-Palestinian rhetoric.

Infeld was asked to fill the post when Hillel's top choice at the time, Jevin Eagle, the Boston-based senior vice president of the office-supply giant Staples, turned down the position. According to sources close to the process, Eagle didn't want to relocate to Hillel's Washington headquarters.

Now after an extensive search process, Hillel's search committee has unanimously recommended that Infeld stay on. It could not be confirmed how long the tenure would be, but some sources suggested it would be at least two years.

Infeld was in Israel this week and could not be reached for comment. According to one insider, he was considering the matter with his family before making a firm commitment.

The Hillel board is expected to embrace the recommendation wholeheartedly.

Infeld, who moved to Israel in 1959 from South Africa, has a long history in the field of Jewish and Zionist education. Before signing on full-time at Hillel, he was Hillel's Israel-based counsel for Jewish affairs.

He was the founder of the pluralist Melitz Center for Jewish Zionist Education in Israel and he helped direct the planning process for birthright Israel, the program providing free trips to Israel for 18- to-26-year-olds who have never before been on a peer educational trip to the Jewish state.

He served as director-general of the Shalom Hartman Institute, the Jerusalem-based center for Jewish education, and Gesher Educational Affiliates, which promotes religious-secular dialogue.

In an interview in August at Hillel's annual Charles Schusterman International Student Leaders Assembly, Infeld said he was committed to a maximum of 14 months with Hillel.

Asked if he would stay longer, he said, "My grandchildren wouldn't let me consider it," but he also has hinted that he would consider it.

In an interview with JTA last August, he expressed frustration with trying to make serious changes at Hillel while he was playing an interim role, which he said is a "caretaker" position.

"Richard Joel already won the revolution, and now is the time to stabilize the organization," he said last summer.

Speculating about what qualities he would like to see in his successor, Infeld said then that the person should have the magnetism that can "inspire Jewishly" and the business skills to "lead a management team."

## Polish floating art exhibit a testament to Jewish history

By RUTH ELLEN GRUBER

ROME (JTA) — A floating art installation by a Polish artist in a former synagogue provides a dramatic counterpoint to the infamous installation in Stockholm about a Palestinian suicide bomber.

Israel's ambassador to Sweden made headlines last month by disrupting artwork featuring a portrait of a Palestinian suicide bomber floating in a white boat in a basin of blood-red water.

In the western Polish city of Poznan, however, artist Janusz Marciniak made far different use of a symbolic watery backdrop for an installation symbolizing Jewish loss, hope and renewal.

Marciniak shaped 600 burning memorial candles into a huge Star of David and set it floating on the surface of the pool located in Poznan's former synagogue.

Called "Atlantis," the work was presented Jan. 15 during the annual "Days of Judaism" initiative sponsored by the Roman Catholic church. The Poznan ceremony was the central event of a number of related initiatives around the country.

The glowing Star of David floated on the water, creating eerie shadows and echoes in the darkened hall.

Some 600 people, most of them holding blue torch lights, crowded into the once-grandiose structure that was turned into a swimming pool by the Nazis. Organizers ran out of torches and had to turn people away for lack of space.

Catholic officials and Warsaw Rabbi Michael Schudrich gave speeches, followed by a concert by the Poznan University Choir which included Hatikvah, the Yiddish song "Papirossen," the Eric Clapton song "Tears in Heaven" and other pieces reflecting hopeful themes.

At the end of the ceremony, Poznan's small Jewish community placed a commemorative plaque on the synagogue wall.

"It was really a fantastic atmosphere, which was enhanced by the wonderful acoustics of the building," Marciniak told JTA by telephone. "For me, it was an unforgettable experience."

Some 3.5 million Jews lived in Poland before World War II — and 3 million were murdered in the Holocaust.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### MIDDLE EAST

#### **Arafat adviser: Some terror a mistake**

Palestinian attacks within Israel's pre-1967 borders are a mistake, Yasser Arafat's security adviser said.

"There is no reason to try to justify and to give any legitimacy to such terror attacks," Jibril Rajoub told American Jewish Committee delegates in Jerusalem on Tuesday.

But Rajoub made it clear that, like most Palestinians, he considers attacks on Israeli settlers legitimate, saying Israel must remove all settlements from the West Bank and Gaza Strip if it wants peace.

#### **Suha Arafat's dirty laundry?**

A French court is investigating Yasser Arafat's wife for suspected money laundering.

Suha Arafat, wife of the Palestinian Authority president, made a number of major transfers from accounts in Switzerland to Paris accounts in recent months, according to reports in the French weekly *Le Canard Enchaîné*.

The investigation follows a request from France's Finance Ministry and the Bank of France and concerns about \$10 million in transfers, the paper reported.

Suha Arafat and the couple's daughter have lived in the French capital since the beginning of the Palestinian intifada in 2000.

#### **Military chief uneasy on withdrawal**

Evacuating Gaza Strip settlements may result in even more Palestinian terrorism, Israel's military intelligence chief said. Maj. Gen. Aharon Ze'evi-Farkash was addressing the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee on Tuesday for the first time since Prime Minister Ariel Sharon announced last week that he plans to remove 17 of Gaza's 21 settlements.

"Palestinian terror groups have concluded that the proposal is a victory for terror, and this could accelerate terror in Judea and Samaria," Ze'evi-Farkash said, speaking of terrorism aimed at Jews in the West Bank.

But he noted that the opposite outcome also was possible: that Israeli unilateralism would prod the Palestinian Authority into following up on its commitments to crack down on terrorism.

#### **They play hockey in Israel?**

Israel's junior national ice hockey team is visiting the United States. The 18 members of the team will play several exhibition games in the New York area from Feb. 22-26. Hockey's popularity in Israel has grown in recent years, buoyed by immigrants from the former Soviet Union.

### WORLD

#### **Giving peace a chance**

The European Film Academy announced Tuesday that it will now accept Israeli and Palestinian members.

The decision, made public at the Berlin International Film Festival, means both groups are eligible for Europe's equivalent of the Academy Award.

#### **Israeli survivors abroad to get pensions**

Israeli Holocaust survivors living abroad will be able to receive pensions from the Jewish state, according to a new law. The law, which passed Monday, was sponsored by Knesset member Colette Avital.

To receive their pensions, survivors must go to the Israeli embassy or consulate closest to them and present relevant documentation.

#### **Tolerance museum for Brazil**

Sao Paulo, Brazil, will get a Museum of Tolerance.

The museum will be established on a university campus, according to historian Anita Novinsky, the project's leader. B'nai B'rith is supporting the project.

It is unknown when the museum will open.

#### **Terror trial in Germany**

The trial began of two Jordanians and a Palestinian charged with planning attacks on Jews and Jewish venues in Germany.

The trial, which got under way Tuesday, is the second case related to the El Tawhid terrorist group. The three men, suspected members of a group that is linked to Al-Qaida, were arrested in April 2002 after tapped telephone conversations alerted German security agencies to suspicious activities.

The first trial ended in a four-year jail sentence for group member Shadi Moh'd Mustafa Abdalla, 27.

#### **Panel: France should pay it all back**

France should pay the remaining \$154 million due to Jewish families whose property was looted during World War II, recommended a government panel called the Commission for the Indemnity of Looting Victims.

#### **PETA Holocaust ad protested**

A German group is fighting an ad campaign that compares the suffering of animals to that of Holocaust victims.

Action Reconciliation Service for Peace, a Berlin-based group that sends young German volunteers to work with Holocaust survivors around the world, is urging Germans to write to the radical animal-rights group PETA, demanding that it drop its "Holocaust on your Plate" ad campaign.

A spokesperson for PETA could not be reached. The campaign's posters show images of emaciated concentration-camp inmates next to photos of chickens, turkeys and other animals fattened for slaughter. The ads are due to be launched in Germany in March.

#### **Holocaust site posters OK**

Posters calling Berlin's Holocaust memorial site an "atonement park" are not illegal.

As a result, there will be no attempt to punish those who plastered the site with posters over the weekend, Berlin's state prosecutor announced.

### NORTH AMERICA

#### **Insurance dispute reaches Illinois**

An Illinois state legislator introduced a bill that would make it illegal for people to be denied life insurance based on their travels. The move comes after some people in the state were denied life insurance because they have traveled to Israel, state Sen. Ira Silverstein said. The bill is based on one introduced recently in New York.

#### **Poll: Americans back Israel's fence**

Americans back Israel's West Bank security barrier, a new poll says. In the poll conducted for the Alliance for Research on National Security Issues, 68 percent of respondents agreed that "Israel has the right to take action to defend itself by building a security fence, even if many other countries disagree."

Fifty-seven percent said Israel has the right to continue building its fence even if the International Court of Justice — which is to consider the issue on Feb. 23 — rules against it.