

IN THE NEWS

Powell denounces anti-Semitism

Colin Powell denounced anti-Semitism at a major conference in Berlin.

"Today we confront the ugly reality that anti-Semitism is not just a fact of history, but a current event," the U.S. secretary of state said Wednesday, speaking to hundreds gathered for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's conference on anti-Semitism.

"It is not anti-Semitic to criticize the policies of the State of Israel, but the line is crossed" when Nazi symbols are used to portray Israeli policies, he said on the first day of the two-day conference.

Car bomb in Kfar Darom

A Palestinian car bombing wounded four Israeli soldiers in the Gaza Strip.

Troops opened fire at a jeep bearing an Israeli flag that drove up to the Kfar Darom settlement in a suspicious manner Wednesday. The car, which was packed with explosives, blew up, killing the driver and wounding four soldiers.

Hamas claimed responsibility for the planned attack, which came a day after tens of thousands of Israelis flocked to Gaza settlements in a show of support for the settlements and opposition to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's withdrawal plan.

Specter defeats primary challenger

Sen. Arlen Specter defeated a conservative rival in Pennsylvania's Republican primary.

Rep. Pat Toomey challenged Specter on the basis of the Jewish, four-term senator's relatively moderate views on abortion and other issues. Specter won a close race, 51 percent to 49 percent.

President Bush had campaigned for Specter, believing he has the better chance of helping him carry the closely divided state in November elections.

WORLD REPORT

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If Bush favors Israel, Europeans are willing to promote Palestinian aims

By LESLIE SUSSER

JERUSALEM (JTA) — After what it sees as President Bush's tilt toward Israel, the European Union is indicating that it wants to play a larger role in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict — with an eye toward promoting Palestinian interests.

In a series of under-reported statements after Bush's perceived watershed meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon on April 14, senior European officials have been hinting at greater European involvement on the ground and a new get-tough policy with Israel.

Addressing the European Parliament in Strasbourg on April 21, Chris Patten, the E.U.'s commissioner for external relations, declared bluntly that the Europeans are ready to help rehabilitate the Gaza Strip after Israel's promised withdrawal next year, on condition that the Israel Defense Forces guarantee "not to destroy again what we build."

Speaking in Tel Aviv the same day, Giancarlo Chevallard, the E.U.'s ambassador to Israel, warned that the European Union intends to link the level of ties with Israel to the Jewish state's "commitment to peacemaking."

Top European officials also have been meeting with their American counterparts to coordinate the precise role the union can play in the context of the Gaza withdrawal. This will be discussed further early next month at a meeting of the "Quartet" — a diplomatic grouping of the United States, European Union, United Nations and Russia that produced the "road map" peace plan.

The European Union began its campaign for a more significant role in the Gaza process by sending Javier Solana, its foreign policy point man, to Washington for an April 20 meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell.

Afterward, Solana outlined three principles of E.U. thinking on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: Nothing should be done to prejudge the outcome of final status negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians, the Quartet should coordinate its policy moves, and the withdrawal from Gaza should be carried out in an "appropriate manner."

All three principles implied criticism of Bush. In the European view, the American president prejudged issues of borders and refugees by saying the demographic realities on the ground — that is, Israeli settlements — should be taken into account in setting final borders, and that refugees should return to a future Palestinian state rather than to Israel.

Moreover, in declaring his "new" policy, Bush acted alone, without consulting his European partners, and did nothing to coordinate the Gaza withdrawal with the Palestinians.

Powell is taking the European sense of slight seriously. The day after his meeting with Solana, he approached Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Moratinos — who served for seven years as the E.U.'s special envoy to the Middle East — urging him to help with the Gaza plan.

The Europeans would like to play a role in coordinating the withdrawal with the Palestinians. They maintain that this is es-

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essential if the pullback is to create a new peace dynamic.

Patten made the point in his address to the European Parliament: "Our aim must be that Israelis recognize again the Palestinian Authority as their partner in the peace process. The objective should be to hand over Gaza and parts of the West Bank to the Palestinian Authority — not to Hamas — and to ensure that the handover takes place in an orderly fashion, not in a way that leads to more chaos and violence."

Patten suggests that the Europeans, rather than the Americans, could help bring the Palestinians into a positive process with Israel.

It's the Europeans, he points out, who more than anyone else have funded Palestinian projects; and it was constructive European influence that helped P.A. Finance Minister Salam Fayyad achieve transparency and accountability on budget procedures, in line with economic reforms the Quartet demanded of the Palestinian Authority.

What seems to be shaping up is a complex carrot-and-stick policy in which the United States encourages Israel and puts pressure on the Palestinians, while the Europeans do the reverse.

Patten made clear that Europe is prepared to continue its humanitarian assistance to the Palestinians and help rebuild their economic infrastructure. But at the same time he was highly critical of Israel.

"We are certainly prepared to continue our humanitarian assistance and to support the rebuilding of the infrastructure of those areas from which the Israel Defense Forces withdraw," he said in Strasbourg. "But I have to say that this time I think we should seek certain guarantees from the Israel Defense Forces that they will not destroy again what we build."

The Europeans are not making do with mere criticism: They intend to use their economic clout to exert political pressure on Israel.

Europe is Israel's largest trading partner, and Israel has a preferential trade agreement with E.U. countries.

It took Israel years to negotiate the agreement, and for years it has been trying to upgrade it. Now the Europeans say bluntly that they intend to create a linkage between their economic ties with Israel and the way Israel deals with the Palestinian issue.

At his Tel Aviv news conference April 21, Chevallard declared that "up till now we kept the strengthening of bilateral relations with Israel separate from the re-

gional diplomatic process. From this point on they will be part of one complex."

He did not envision sanctions on Israel, but said the Europeans would enhance or downgrade their ties with Israel depending on its peacemaking performance.

He added that the Europeans expected that Israel would "recognize that the E.U. has a large role to play in the Middle East" and, in the future, he suggested that Israel consult not only with the United States, as it had on the Gaza plan, but with Europe as well.

Some Israeli analysts believe the Europeans may even suggest an alternative plan to the one Bush and Sharon agreed to in the White House.

It's more likely, however, that they will seek a role within the framework of the Israeli-American plan and will use their support for the Palestinians to make inroads in the Arab world, where the United States is struggling, partly because of its support for Israel and partly because of the situation in Iraq.

(Leslie Susser is the diplomatic correspondent for the Jerusalem Report.)

The Europeans intend to use their economic clout to exert political pressure on Israel.

Prague Jews seek honors for woman

By MAGNUS BENNETT

PRAGUE (JTA) — Jewish leaders here want to honor a Czech woman who risked her life to help Jewish slave laborers during the Holocaust.

Helena Vovsova smuggled letters and packages to and from family members of half a dozen Jewish boys who, against their will, had been drafted to cut down trees on the estate of the widow of Reinhard Heydrich, the highest Nazi official in the Czech Republic.

Vovsova was 15 when she became a gardener at the Panenske Brezany chateau just outside Prague in 1941. The following year it became the residence of Heydrich, who was assassinated by Czech agents after a shootout in Prague in May 1942.

But Heydrich's wife Lina saw an opportunity for profit shortly after his death. She ordered Jews to be brought to the

chateau to fell the trees, even though they were hundreds of years old. She then sold them at a profit.

Vovsova, one of a dozen local Czechs working at the chateau, took an enormous risk by helping the boys.

"They were young boys, maybe 19 years old, and I was sorry for them and wanted to help," said Vovsova, 78, who said she hid letters under her clothing to fool the German guards. She also passed on food and clothing when she had the opportunity.

Prague Jewish officials learned about Vovsova's exploits in the Czech media recently and say they now want to recognize her achievements.

"She was a very courageous girl," said Milan Platovsky, one of the few slave laborers at the chateau who is still alive. "She took tremendous risks because she was bringing me things for me and my friends."

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Before vote, Likudniks debate Sharon plan

By DINA KRAFT

RAMAT EFAL, Israel (JTA) — The large living room is packed with opinionated Likud Party members, sitting in white plastic chairs that have been assembled to accommodate the crowd.

As the April 22 meeting in this upscale Tel Aviv suburb heats up, each member seems to have a different opinion on Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's plan to withdraw Israeli settlements and troops unilaterally from Gaza and parts of the West Bank.

The group of some 50 party faithful have gathered to hear Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz stump for Sharon's plan ahead of a May 2 Likud referendum on the plan. The members represent Likud branches from central Israel.

"This is no regular meeting; it carries real weight, for we are on the verge of a difficult decision," said Shabbatai Yosef, of Likud's Holon branch.

Passage of the referendum had seemed increasingly likely following Sharon's triumphant return from Washington two weeks ago with a letter in hand from President Bush supporting the plan. Bush also said in the letter that Israel should be able to keep some West Bank land in a future peace deal and that Palestinian refugees should not be allowed to return to Israel.

But after an initial swing toward Sharon's plan from some of the party's leaders who were ambivalent about the idea, the party's 200,000 members appeared sharply divided.

A poll in Ha'aretz last week showed that 47 percent of Likud voters who planned to vote in the referendum were in favor of the pullout plan, with 40 percent against. A poll of Likud members generally showed an even closer split, with 44 percent for the plan and 40 percent against.

If the referendum passes, Sharon will have succeeded for the first time in committing Likud — the party that historically has championed the cause of Greater Israel — to the withdrawal of settlements from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

But the Palestinians have rejected the plan, saying Israel will use it as an excuse not to withdraw from sizable parts of the West Bank.

There was little consensus at the members' meeting. Yitzhak Dadosh, from Or Yehuda, said he is against the plan, but his wife is for it.

Carmel Shamah, who heads the Ramat Gan branch of Likud, urged his fellow party members to vote for the plan.

"It is not an easy plan, and I was personally against it before we saw the letter from President Bush, and then my opinion changed," he said.

A man from Herzliya who identified himself as Avigdor said that if Likud votes for the plan, the party will have lost its ideology.

But Mofaz, echoing sentiments expressed by those in favor of the disengagement plan, said building Jewish settlements in Gaza is a historic mistake, and that ideology is positive only as long as it served the interests of the country.

Mofaz is one of several key Likud officials who has heeded Sharon's call to help garner support for the disengagement plan.

"Because we are strong, we can bring forward a policy that will change the current reality," Mofaz told the group.

Carrying out the plan, he said, would help ensure a Jewish majority in the Jewish state. Furthermore, he said, a border with Gaza would be defensible, and in withdrawing from Gaza, Israel would create a new reality that eventually could lead to an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In a move that may be an indication of shifting political winds, Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Education Minister Limor Livnat — both of whom opted to support Sharon's plan only after Bush's endorsement of it in mid-April — told Sharon on Sunday that they would not help campaign for support for the plan among Likud's members.

Cabinet minister Ehud Olmert warned that the referendum could fail if senior ministers do not actively campaign for it among the Likud electorate.

Sharon's staff is stepping up its public relations campaign for the plan with a new warning: Those who vote against the plan will bear responsibility if the Likud-led government falls and a new left-of-center coalition rises in its wake.

Meanwhile, Israeli political analysts say Sharon's fresh threats against Yasser

Arafat are part of the prime minister's strategy to woo undecided Likud voters. Sharon told Israeli television last Friday that he no longer feels bound by a pledge to the United States not to harm the Palestinian Authority president. The Bush administration has told Sharon that it believes his commitment not to harm Arafat still stands.

"Sharon voices his arrogant threats as he winks knowingly to the Likud members: He is warming up to their rowdy temperament in order to guarantee their support for his disengagement plan," columnist Uzi Benziman wrote in Sunday's edition of Ha'aretz.

Olmert said there is no imminent plan to kill Arafat.

"Prime Minister Ariel Sharon does not intend to carry something out this week, or today or tomorrow," Olmert told Israeli Army Radio on Sunday.

In Haifa, Likud leaders said support for the disengagement plan is strong. That shows, they said, that the Likud rank and file is more centrist than the party's national leadership, which includes strong opponents of the disengagement plan.

Opponents say pulling out of Gaza sets the dangerous precedent of Israel withdrawing under Palestinian terrorist fire. They also are opposed ideologically to withdrawal from Gaza or the West Bank because they consider them parts of the biblical Land of Israel.

In Jerusalem, Likud members appear more divided, said Yaron Zitgiyahu, who heads an organization of Likud members who are vendors at Mahane Yehuda, Jerusalem's open-air food market.

He said he will vote for the plan and noted, "Those who will decide for it are more vocal. Those who are against it are keeping more silent, trying to figure out which way to vote."

Bush's support for Sharon's plan has had a significant impact on Likud opinion on the plan, he said.

"What Bush said shows that Sharon is first-rate when it comes to security, and that the plan of disengagement will not weaken us but strengthen us," Zitgiyahu said.

The referendum could fail if senior ministers don't actively campaign for it among the Likud electorate.

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Nuclear watchdog to visit Israel

The United Nations' chief nuclear watchdog is expected to visit Israel.

Officials would not discuss the agenda for the July visit by Mohamed ElBaradei, head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, calling it routine.

ElBaradei recently has stepped up calls for Israel to sign the U.N. Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and open up its atomic reactors to international inspection, calling this an important step toward ridding the Middle East of weapons of mass destruction.

Palestinian activist detained

Israeli police detained a Palestinian intellectual for employing illegal workers.

Sari Nusseibeh, the Al-Quds University president who co-led a grass-roots peace campaign with former Israeli Shin Bet chief Ami Ayalon, was detained on his eastern Jerusalem campus Wednesday. Police said a patrol arrived at the campus and rounded up several Palestinians who did not have residency or work permits. When Nusseibeh identified himself as their employer, he was detained for questioning, too.

Sports vs. security

Israel extended a closure on the West Bank and Gaza Strip amid fears terrorists could strike a basketball tournament. The closure was imposed after Israel assassinated Hamas founder Sheik Ahmed Yassin last month, and was meant to have been lifted following Independence Day this week.

But it was extended by four days to cover the Final Four European basketball tournament being held in Tel Aviv, police sources said Wednesday. Israeli, Italian and Russian teams will take part in the tournament, which ends Saturday night.

The foreign teams at first vacillated on attending because of terrorism fears, but finally agreed after receiving Israeli assurances they would be heavily guarded.

Libya invites Israeli chessmen

Libya invited Israel's chess team to participate in the World Chess Championship in Tripoli.

Following talks with World Chess Federation officials, who insisted that Israel be allowed to participate, Libyan leader Muammar Gadhafi's son Saif Al-Islam welcomed any player who wishes to participate in the June 18-July 13 competition.

WORLD

British Jews back Blair

The umbrella organization of British Jewry said former diplomats who criticized Tony Blair's Middle East policy were "ignorant." Neville Nagler, director general of the Board of Deputies, said the letter from the ex-diplomats "shows a complete misunderstanding" of the Israel-Palestinian conflict. He compared the signatories to those who "sought to appease Hitler."

The open letter, released Monday by 52 former diplomats, slammed the British prime minister for endorsing the withdrawal plan of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, endorsed by President Bush. They called the plan one-sided and illegal.

Anti-Semitism in Argentina stable

Anti-Semitism in Argentina has held relatively stable, according to a new survey. The Center for Social Studies of the DAIA umbrella

organization of Jewish groups counted 177 anti-Semitic incidents last year, up from 148 in 2002 but down from 185 in 2001.

El Al bomb scare

London's main airport was partly evacuated after a bomb scare at the El Al desk.

Officials at Heathrow Airport said Terminal One was partly evacuated Wednesday while police attended to a suspicious package left at the ticketing counter of Israel's national carrier. The package was found to be harmless.

NORTH AMERICA

Jewish candidate vies for Congress

A Jewish state senator in Pennsylvania won the Democratic primary to run for a congressional seat in suburban Philadelphia. Allyson Schwartz's victory Tuesday means she will vie against Dr. Melissa Brown for the seat left vacant by Rep. Joe Hoeffel, who will challenge Republican Sen. Arlen Specter — who also is Jewish — in November.

Thousands rally in Montreal

Up to 20,000 people gathered in downtown Montreal to celebrate Israel's Independence Day.

Thousands of people marched through the city's downtown area waving Israeli flags and peace placards before reaching the park where the celebration was held.

Kerry to address ADL

Sen. John Kerry will address the Anti-Defamation League's national leadership conference. The Massachusetts senator will give his first major address to an American Jewish audience since becoming the presumptive Democratic nominee for president, speaking at a May 3 lunch session of ADL's Amy Glass National Leadership Conference in Washington.

Reform rabbis blast sex slavery

The Reform movement's rabbinical body urged governments to combat the global sex-slave trade.

Meeting in Jerusalem, the Central Conference of American Rabbis' board of trustees blasted the trafficking of an estimated 800,000 to 900,000 people each year as sex slaves and forced laborers.

The rabbis called for states to enact legislation against human trafficking; urged governments to grant visas to trafficking victims; and urged non-governmental organizations to fight the sex trade.

Shareholders urge corporate clean-up

A Jewish group of activist shareholders is urging corporate reform.

The Jewish Shareholder Engagement Network, launched by the Philadelphia-based Shefa Fund in 2003, has members representing institutions worth more than \$1.3 billion.

The group is joining 270 Catholic and Protestant groups at the Center for Corporate Responsibility in demanding corporate transparency, board-of-director accountability and social responsibility.

Russell Crowe backs Jewish school

Russell Crowe offered to help rebuild a Montreal-area Jewish day school that was firebombed.

The actor, in Toronto making a film, offered the United Talmud Torah moral and financial support after the bombing earlier this month destroyed the school's library. Crowe "was very upset at what had happened," a school spokesperson told a Toronto newspaper.