

IN THE NEWS

Five more soldiers killed in Gaza Strip

At least five Israeli soldiers were killed Wednesday in the Gaza Strip while trying to retrieve the remains of six soldiers killed Tuesday.

The new casualties came when the soldiers' armored personnel carrier was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade.

Wednesday's raid into Gaza came after Palestinian terrorist groups broadcast a macabre display of body parts of soldiers killed Tuesday and said they would hold them as bargaining chips.

Israeli officials said they would not negotiate for the return of the remains, and Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat reportedly called on the terrorist groups to turn over the remains.

At least three Palestinians were killed in Wednesday's fighting, after seven Palestinians were killed Tuesday.

Three die as Israel searches for bodies

Israeli forces hunting for the remains of six soldiers slain Tuesday in Gaza killed three Hamas terrorists.

Witnesses said at least 12 bystanders also were wounded in Wednesday's Israeli missile strike near a mosque in Gaza City's Zeitoun neighborhood, a Hamas stronghold.

Israel said the strike targeted a crew of Hamas bombers.

Toronto federation rebuilds city center

Toronto's Jewish federation recently launched a \$250 million redevelopment project in the city.

The project will include a public square, medical clinic and parkland project near the University of Toronto, as well as day camps, a Jewish high school and senior centers. Ted Sokolsky, president of the UJA Federation of Toronto, said the rapid expansion of the Toronto Jewish community sparked the project.

WORLD REPORT

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Under threat of Hezbollah missiles, Israel reconsiders its policy in north

By LESLIE SUSSER

JERUSALEM (JTA) — How much longer President Bush remains in office may have an impact on what Israel does to counter the threat from the Hezbollah.

After an early May flare-up with Hezbollah on Israel's northern border, some Israeli generals are pressing for a major military operation in southern Lebanon.

In calculated leaks to the press, Israel Defense Forces sources suggested that sooner or later Israel would launch a massive offensive against the terrorist group, and that such an operation has been in the cards ever since the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon four years ago this month.

The sources said contingency plans had been drawn up and the best timing would be while Bush, who regards Hezbollah as one of the most dangerous terrorist organizations in the world, is still in office.

The thinking is that Bush would give Israel a green light to crush Hezbollah, while his successor might not.

Israeli military sources say they're no longer prepared to tolerate a situation in which a hostile and capricious organization with no sovereign responsibility, with the backing of Syria and Iran, has 1,000 artillery pieces trained on towns and cities in Israel's north.

The recent media leaks may have been intended merely to deter Hezbollah from repeating an abortive, early May attack on an Israeli military position in the Shebaa Farms area of the Golan Heights.

In that operation, Hezbollah militiamen apparently intended to abduct Israeli soldiers as bargaining chips to use in future

prisoner exchange negotiations with Israel.

The bodies of three Israeli soldiers kidnapped by Hezbollah in October 2000 were part of a prisoner exchange this winter. Israel released hundreds of Arab prisoners in exchange for the soldiers' remains and an Israeli businessman kidnapped by Hezbollah in October 2000.

Even so, the possibility that the IDF intends to strike a major blow soon against Hezbollah can't be ruled out.

Ever since the United States invaded Iraq in March 2003 as part of its war against global terrorism, Israel has been considering the possibility of large-scale action to nullify Hezbollah's threat. In the four years since the Lebanon withdrawal, Hezbollah has received a steady stream of weapons from Iran through the Damascus airport, and its new long-range Katyusha rockets can reach the northern port of Haifa, Israel's third-largest city.

This has created an uneasy balance of fear, with Israel threatening major action against Hezbollah — and Lebanese and Syrian civilians in the north, and Hezbollah threatening to do just that if Israel tries to cripple its operational capacity.

Some Israeli strategists say this has created an intolerable tinderbox situation in which Hezbollah provocation could suck Israel into a war with Syria or even Iran. It's a threat that should be removed on Israel's terms, they say.

Moreover, over the past several months Hezbollah has become a major instigator of Palestinian terrorism. Israeli intelligence

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officers contend that Hezbollah money and agents in the field are the fuel keeping Palestinian terrorism going. Without Hezbollah, the officers say, the intifada would have quieted down long ago.

Why did Hezbollah choose to reopen hostilities now on the long-dormant northern front?

One theory is that after Israel foiled Hezbollah efforts to spark Palestinian terrorist attacks, it decided to reactivate the northern border.

According to this view, Hezbollah's secretary-general, Sheik Hassan Nasrallah, wanted to provide a semblance of continued action against Israel to enhance his organization's standing in Lebanon and the wider Arab world. Hezbollah is running in May 16 local elections in Lebanon.

The attack also may be connected to the second phase of last January's prisoner exchange deal, in which Hezbollah is supposed to provide information on Ron Arad, an Israel Air Force navigator who went missing in Lebanon 18 years ago, in return for more Palestinian and Lebanese prisoners held by Israel.

During a May 8 tour of the northern border's outposts involved in the recent exchanges, the IDF chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Moshe Ya'alon, intimated that Israel was re-evaluating its policy toward Hezbollah.

"We respond firmly to Hezbollah provocations to prevent them from escalating in the north," he said. "We need to consider what has to be done so that there will be order in the north."

There are likely to be two main schools

of thought in the IDF re-evaluation. Cautionary voices argue that the northern border has been relatively quiet precisely because of the high stakes involved, and the status quo shouldn't be upset.

Some military officials, meanwhile, maintain that the situation in the north is an explosion waiting to happen, and the only question is what Israel should do to defuse it.

One possibility is direct action against the militiamen, which easily could escalate into wider confrontation with Lebanon, Syria and even Iran.

Another would be to use diplomatic channels to persuade Lebanon and Syria to pull Hezbollah back from its border positions. The knowledge that an Israeli offensive against Hezbollah could spill over into action against Lebanon and Syria might induce them to rein in the group.

Commenting on the anticipated strategic review, the military analyst for Israel's daily *Ma'ariv*, Amir Rappaport, came down on the side of action.

"True, an operation against Hezbollah may exact a high price for a while in the north. But a bombing blitz like America's in Iraq (with exactly the same weapons) could remind Nasrallah of the real military balance of power in the Middle East, and cut his organization down to size," he wrote.

What's clear is that, even if quiet now, the northern border could erupt suddenly if Hezbollah launches new attacks and Israel decides that the time has come to alter the strategic balance. And that could entail a major cross-border confrontation until a more lasting quiet is restored. ■

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

California bar moved for Tisha B'Av

By TOM TUGEND

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — The State Bar of California, yielding to an eight-month lobbying effort, will excuse observant Jews from taking the bar examination on Tisha B'Av.

Reversing an earlier denial, the Committee of Bar Examiners rearranged the schedule so that observers of the fast day of Tisha B'Av can take the first part of the three-day test on July 28, not July 27.

"It shows that the state bar has a heart, though it's sometimes hard to find," said professor Laurie Levenson, of the Loyola University law school.

Two persistent Jewish lawyers, and pressure by state legislators and civil rights groups, helped secure the change.

Under the committee's ruling, Tisha B'Av observers must file a statement from a rabbi confirming the applicant's religious beliefs and a petition promising not to contact or seek information from those taking the exam July 27. The petition and statement must be received by June 15. Instructions are available at www.calbar.ca.gov under "Admissions."

Before the May 1 ruling, seven applicants had petitioned to be excused from taking the exam on Tisha B'Av.

The whole matter likely would have slipped under the radar but for attorney Baruch Cohen, an Orthodox Jew. In late

August 2003, Cohen was casually checking the dates for the 2004 bar exam when the July 27 date raised a red flag.

Cohen then sent a letter to the state bar's Admissions Office explaining the significance of Tisha B'Av, a day of fasting and mourning that marks the destruction of the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem, among other Jewish calamities. Eating, drinking and bathing are forbidden during the 25-hour fast.

Two weeks later, Roberta Scharlin Zinman, also a Los Angeles lawyer, joined the fray and sent a letter to the state bar.

In November, the American Civil Liberties Union — on behalf of the Progressive Jewish Alliance, the Muslim Public Affairs Council and a Christian clergyman — asked the state bar to take up the Cohen and Zinman requests.

After California state Assemblymen Alan Lowenthal and Paul Koretz lent their support to the campaign, the bar's board of governors reversed an earlier decision and in mid-April issued an "emergency" policy instructing its committee to offer "reasonable accommodations" if an exam date conflicted with a religious holiday.

On May 1, the committee unanimously reversed itself and approved the Tisha B'Av accommodations.

To avoid future conflicts, Zinman has volunteered to send a Jewish calendar to the state bar. ■

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Will new U.S. law affect Cuba's Jews?

By LARRY LUXNER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Jewish humanitarian groups are debating how tough new U.S. regulations aimed at depriving the Castro regime of dollars will affect Cuba's estimated 1,500 Jews.

"This strategy encourages the spending of money to help organizations to protect dissidents and to promote human rights," President Bush said as the State Department made public a 423-page report prepared over the last six months by the administration's top-secret Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba. "It is a strategy that will prevent the regime from exploiting hard currency of tourists and of remittances to Cubans to prop up their repressive regime."

Yet congressional critics on both sides of the aisle view the policy primarily as an election-year maneuver aimed at winning the votes of hard-line Cuban exiles in southern Florida.

"At a time when the United States faces very real terrorist threats in the Middle East and elsewhere, the administration's absurd and increasingly bizarre obsession with Cuba is more than just a shame — it's a dangerous diversion from reality," said Sen. Max Baucus (D-Montana). "This is clearly an attack on the Cuban people and a further outrageous waste" of the Office of Foreign Assets Control's time and resources.

Under new rules announced May 6, the Treasury Department's OFAC will continue to let Cuban-Americans send \$1,200 a year to Cuba in the form of family remittances, but the remittances will be restricted only to immediate family members.

Among other things, Cuban-Americans will be allowed to send their loved ones only one "gift parcel" per month per household. Those parcels can consist only of medicines, medical supplies, receive-only radios and batteries, not to exceed a total value of \$200. Food also can be sent, with no limit on value.

In addition, Cuban-Americans will be allowed to visit their families in Cuba only once every three years, rather than once a year under current policy. When they do go to Cuba, they'll be allowed to stay a maximum of only 14 days and spend \$50 a day — a dramatic reduction from the \$164 per diem now in effect.

Finally, Cuban-Americans flying to the island on charter flights will not be allowed to carry more than 44 pounds of accompanied baggage, in a move designed to deprive the Cuban government of the ability to charge excess baggage fees of \$2 per pound above the 44-pound limit.

The operator of a Web site called www.jewishcuba.org, Richard Smith, said that Jewish humanitarian groups visiting Cuba won't be seriously affected by the crackdown, but elderly and infirm Cuban Jews who depend on remittances will be.

"Hopefully these rules will not be implemented fully, or if they are, hopefully people will find a way around them," he said.

Stan Falkenstein, founder of the Jewish Cuba Connection in Marina del Rey, Calif., sees things differently.

"From my perspective, I don't see the current round of new regulations having an incredibly large effect on the Jewish community, because most of the financial help they get comes from the missions," he said. "However, if those missions were severely limited, or if the \$50 per diem was to apply to them, it would have a devastating effect on the community."

Falkenstein's group has sponsored six or seven humanitarian trips to Cuba in the past two years. He said there's a perceptible difference between the Clinton administration and the Bush administration on Cuba.

"When I first started bringing groups to Cuba, we were an arm of American foreign policy. I don't get that sense today," he said. "The Bush administration and the U.S. Interests Section in Havana would be just as happy if fewer people came."

Cash remittances from Cuban-Americans — which amount to \$400 million to \$800 million a year — are Cuba's largest source of foreign exchange after tourism.

In addition, more than 125,000 Cuban-Americans visited the island last year. According to the commission's report, at least 31,000 traveled to Cuba more than once, generating \$96 million for the Castro government in 2003.

The new rules seek to discourage Cuban-

Americans from spending dollars in government-owned shops and staying in hotels that are owned by the government and therefore benefit Castro directly.

June Safran, who runs the San Francisco-based Cuban-American Jewish Mission, said she's very worried about how the restrictions might impact average Cubans, both Jewish and non-Jewish.

"There are a lot of people without shoes, lots of hungry people in Cuba, people who eat rolls in the morning and let the children have the milk," she told JTA. "If remittances are cut back, it will exacerbate the problems."

Bush's policy review also calls for tougher

enforcement of existing regulations that forbid most U.S. citizens from visiting Cuba. Exceptions to the travel ban include journalists, business travelers with a specific license, participants on bona fide humanitarian or religious missions or students on educational trips that directly support U.S. policy goals.

"Continued and strengthened enforcement of travel restrictions will ensure that permitted travel is not abused and used as a cover for tourism, illegal business travel or to evade restrictions on carrying cash into Cuba," the report said.

Safran said she has taken Jewish humanitarian groups — ranging in size from eight to 30 people — to Cuba 17 times.

"We have always tried to make our trips extremely Jewish, with daily activities in the synagogue and study sessions with Jewish people," she said. "The license our organization has is for taking humanitarian aid down to the Jewish community and conducting religious activities."

But Safran isn't sure the Office of Foreign Assets Control will renew her license when it expires next month.

Mark Weinstein, who runs a program called Jewish Cuban Experience, sends missions to Cuba on a weekly basis. Participants don't have to worry about breaking the law because Weinstein has an Office of Foreign Assets Control license.

"This is not tourism. We support the Jewish community over there," he said. "People bring medicine. This is legitimate — no monkey business." ■

'If remittances are cut back, it will exacerbate the problems.'

June Safran
Cuban-American Jewish Mission

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Jews meet with Democrats

Jewish organizational officials met with Democratic representatives to discuss domestic and Israel-related issues.

Hannah Rosenthal, executive director of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, said at least 35 Democratic members of the U.S. House of Representatives attended Tuesday's meeting.

It was planned for one hour, but lasted more than two.

"This was an extraordinary showing," Rosenthal said. "They're treating the Jewish community as a serious constituency and recognizing the many issues that are driving our community and will drive us as voters."

The participants, who included representatives of national Jewish groups and Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Jewry, were invited by the House Democratic leader, Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.).

Democrats are trying to keep their traditional 3-1 support among Jewish voters, whom they fear may be swayed toward the Republican Party by President Bush's pro-Israel record.

"Democrats look forward to continuing our partnership with the Jewish community," Pelosi said in a statement.

Hebrew scholar dies at 93

Hebrew scholar Samuel Iwry, an authority on the Dead Sea Scrolls, died Saturday in Baltimore at age 93.

Iwry wrote the first doctoral dissertation on the scrolls, which shed light on Judaism and the origins of Christianity.

He also was one of the world's leading Hebrew scholars.

Born in Poland, Iwry was a direct descendant of the Ba'al Shem Tov, the founder of Chasidism.

MIDDLE EAST

Ron Arad's body found?

Hezbollah reportedly disclosed the burial site of missing Israeli airman Ron Arad.

Israel's Channel Two television cited Lebanese reports that the militia had located Arad's body in Nebi Sheet, a Shi'ite village east of Beirut, and intended to pass his remains to Israeli authorities for authentication.

Arad, an Israel Air Force navigator, bailed out of his airplane over Lebanon in 1986 and disappeared.

According to the latest reports, Lebanese villagers lynched and buried him in revenge for an Israeli air raid.

Israeli officials did not immediately comment.

Earlier this week, the Jerusalem Post, citing European sources, said Hezbollah gave Israeli officials a bone fragment purported to belong to Arad.

Israeli officials denied the report.

Clash of consciences

Israeli conscientious objectors scuffled with settlers on the Gaza Strip boundary.

Scores of Israelis who have refused to do mandatory military service held a demonstration at the Kissufim junction Wednesday, calling for Israeli troops to be withdrawn from Gaza.

"Why are we needless risking our soldiers? If we do not get out, there will be more fatalities," David Zonnstein said.

He was referring to six soldiers killed Tuesday by a land mine in Gaza City.

Several settlers who passed through Kissufim on their way into Gaza scuffled with the demonstrators.

There were no reports of injuries.

No ban on Amir nuptials

The Knesset rejected a bill banning Yitzhak Rabin's assassin, Yigal Amir, from marrying. Only 14 lawmakers supported the bill proposed Wednesday by Eitan Cabel of the Labor Party; 60 opposed it. Amir, who is serving a life sentence in solitary confinement for killing the Israeli prime minister in 1995, recently got engaged and requested permission to marry.

The Prisons Service has yet to issue a decision.

WORLD

U.S., Poland sign Holocaust site agreement

The United States and Poland signed an agreement to protect sites associated with the Holocaust.

"A special situation exists regarding Jewish cultural sites," said Warren Miller, chairman of the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad, who signed the agreement Tuesday along with Poland's ambassador to the United States, Prezemyslaw Grudzinski.

"The Holocaust left few and, in many places, no Jews to take care of these sites, because most were murdered or forced to flee," Miller said.

Mass graves, Holocaust memorials, cemeteries and places of worship are included in the agreement.

Israel investigating New Zealand incident

The Israeli Embassy in New Zealand is investigating the brief detention at Auckland Airport of the treasurer of the Jewish Agency for Israel.

Treasurer Shai Hermesh and his senior consultant, Yigal Sela, were detained by customs agents at the airport for several hours last week on suspicion that the two were Mossad agents or drug-runners or were illegally transporting food across borders.

Sela said the agents told them, "We are treating all you Israelis the same — you are nothing but drug dealers and spies."

The incident comes amid accusations that two Israelis arrested and charged with fraudulently attempting to obtain New Zealand passports several weeks ago were Mossad agents.

Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Yoni Peled said, "We have received a full report and are currently checking the details."

Rabbi attends Putin inauguration

Berel Lazar, one of Russia's two chief rabbis, attended President Vladimir Putin's inauguration.

As leader of one of Russia's "traditional" faiths, along with the local leaders of Orthodox Christianity, Islam and Buddhism, Lazar was invited to the May 7 ceremony marking the start of Putin's second four-year term.

Following the ceremony, Putin announced that Mikhail Fradkov will remain Russia's prime minister. Fradkov was born to a Jewish father.

Grossmann, Elon win prizes

Israeli writers David Grossmann and Amos Elon won prestigious British literary prizes.

The awards were presented last week.

Grossmann won the 2004 Jewish Quarterly Wingate award for fiction for his novel, "Someone to Run With," which focuses on Israeli street kids by exploring the lives of two Israeli teenagers brought together by a Labrador.

Elon won the nonfiction award for "The Pity of it All: A Portrait of Jews in Germany, 1743-1933."