

IN THE NEWS

Arafat, Qurei come to terms

The Palestinian Authority prime minister withdrew his resignation.

"The president has rejected my resignation and I will comply," Ahmed Qurei told reporters Tuesday after emergency talks with Yasser Arafat about Qurei's July 17 decision to quit.

Palestinian officials had said Arafat would mollify Qurei, who has pushed for widespread reform, by offering him some responsibility for Palestinian security forces, but the prime minister played down any such deal.

Levine appointed as adviser to Kerry

John Kerry appointed Mel Levine, a former congressman and active member of the pro-Israel community, as a top foreign policy adviser.

Levine, who served in the U.S. House of Representatives from California from 1983-1993, will chair Kerry's foreign policy team.

The Kerry team already is using Levine, who until recently was a member of the board of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, to reach out to U.S. Jews.

In the mid-1990s, Levine co-founded Builders for Peace with the president of the Arab American Institute, James Zogby. The group, which since has disbanded, promoted U.S. trade with the Palestinian areas.

Charity charged with backing terror

A U.S. charity was charged with funneling money to Palestinian terrorist groups.

On Tuesday, the Holy Land Foundation was charged with sending \$12.4 million to Hamas and other groups promoting violence in the Middle East.

Officials for the group, which is based in Texas, accused the FBI of fabricating evidence and relying on faulty Israeli translations of documents.

WORLD REPORT

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In wake of U.N. vote, Israel looks with trepidation at united Europe

By LESLIE SUSSER

JERUSALEM (JTA) — If Israeli officials thought the accession of 10 new countries to the European Union would produce a more pro-Israel E.U. foreign policy, the recent U.N. General Assembly vote against Israel's West Bank security barrier was a dose of cold water.

Now some high-ranking Israeli officials fear the E.U.'s unanimous vote against the fence was a sign that an energized and united Europe will take a stronger stand than ever on Israeli-Palestinian affairs, and could even move the United States away from its traditional support for the Jewish state.

Calling the July 20 vote a watershed, these Israeli officials say a more confident and assertive Europe may pressure the next U.S. administration to impose a deal on Israel and the Palestinians. They also may impose economic sanctions on Israel or even back calls for a single binational Israeli-Palestinian state — one that, through simple demographics, would become a majority Arab state in a few years time.

Other officials dismiss this scenario as far-fetched. They maintain that Israel's close economic, scientific and cultural ties with Europe preclude the possibility of the union leading a campaign that could mean the end of the Jewish state.

The Israeli establishment clearly has been rocked by the European vote, and is finding it difficult to assess its full significance.

When Javier Solana, the E.U.'s foreign policy chief, arrived in Jerusalem a few days after the vote, Israeli leaders were scathingly critical. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said it

would be difficult to incorporate Europe into any Israeli-Palestinian peace process unless it showed more sensitivity to Israel's security needs.

Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom said bluntly that he would find it difficult to convince the Israeli people that the European Union was a political partner they could trust.

But Solana brushed off the warnings. Standing at Shalom's side, he declared confidently: "We will be involved — whether you want us or not."

The vote was the first major issue on which the enlarged European Union expressed unanimity. Solana sees the vote as paving the way for a more influential European role on the international stage.

The vote proves the union is a political bloc with a common foreign policy, he said in an interview with Ha'aretz, noting that even would-be E.U. members, like Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania, had voted the same way.

This single, clear European voice is precisely what some Israeli officials fear. Until now, they note, Israel has been able to maneuver between E.U. countries with which it has closer ties, such as Germany and Britain, and countries that traditionally take a more pro-Palestinian line, such as France. If Europe continues to speak with a single voice, that kind of maneuvering may no longer be possible.

Some Israeli officials expect the worst: They predict the European Union will pressure whomever is elected U.S. president in November to exert more pressure on Israel to

Continued on page 2

NEWS
ANALYSIS

■ *After U.N. vote on fence, Israel looks with anxiety at united Europe*

Continued from page 1

resolve the Palestinian conflict, and that either Bush or Kerry — seeking a Middle Eastern success to make up for the imbroglio in Iraq — may well be receptive.

The officials point out that unlike the United States — which if necessary will resort to unilateral action against “rogue states” — Europe sets great store by the application of international law. The officials fear this could be further exploited by the Palestinians, following up on their success against the fence in the International Court of Justice.

Beyond that, the officials fear that if there is no progress in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, Europe may press for a single Israeli-Palestinian state, which quickly would have a Palestinian majority.

They note that the emerging generation of European elites has less empathy with Israel than their predecessors, and no Holocaust guilt, meaning they would have fewer reservations about joining a Palestinian-inspired campaign to delegitimize the Jewish state.

“We are losing the battle for legitimacy in Europe,” one official told JTA.

Other Israeli officials are less alarmist. They point out that, for now, the vision of independent Israeli and Palestinian states remains accepted throughout the international community, including the European Union.

Moreover, they say, bilateral ties with Europe are excellent: Israel is among a handful of non-European countries tak-

ing part in prestigious E.U. scientific projects like the development of the Galileo satellite.

And, they add, the European Union is seriously considering including Israel as one of the first members of “wider Europe,” a grouping incorporating peripheral states bordering Europe that will get trade and other concessions, in addition to those Israel already enjoys.

They also note that, despite its greater political cohesiveness, Europe is unlikely in the foreseeable future to wield as much political clout as the United States, which remains strongly supportive of Israel.

As for the security barrier, these officials say the Europeans, even those less friendly to Israel, have promised that there will be no economic or other sanctions, no matter how the issue plays out in the United Nations.

They also point out that Solana repeatedly stressed Israel’s right to self-defense, and that E.U. opposition to the barrier was only to its route, which dips into the West Bank at points. The Palestinians seem to have convinced the Europeans that the West Bank should belong only to them.

Israel is taking steps to combat the U.N.

vote against the fence, and to forestall an erosion of Israel’s international standing. The government has set up a team under Shavit Matias, a deputy attorney general, to address the legal implications of the July 9 ICJ ruling.

For one, Israel will argue that the fence route already is very different from the one the ICJ ruled on, and that it will change even further in accordance with rulings by Israel’s Supreme Court to lessen the fence’s burden on Palestinians.

Israel also will assemble legal and political arguments assert-

ing that the fence is a legitimate defensive step, not a land grab.

But officials on both sides of the argument over Europe agree that Israel’s trump card is Sharon’s disengagement plan. Pulling out of the Gaza Strip and part of the West Bank, they say, is the best way to convince the international community that Israel really intends to end its domination of the Palestinians and move toward a two-state solution.

This, they say, is Israel’s best chance of preempting European or other pressure down the road for a binational state. ■

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

Europe is unlikely in the foreseeable future to wield as much political clout as the United States.

Bringing Al-Jazeera to Canada

By BILL GLADSTONE

TORONTO (JTA) — Canadian Jewish officials have mixed feelings about a precedent-setting ruling by Canada’s telecommunications regulator that would allow cable distributors to import Al-Jazeera — provided they expunge any objectionable content.

Frank Dimant, executive vice president of B’nai Brith Canada, said allowing the Arabic-language news station into Canada in any form would open a “Pandora’s box of anti-Israeli and anti-American propaganda in Canadian living rooms.”

Other Jews applauded the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission for its decision, which also requires cable distributors to video-tape all Al-Jazeera broadcasts for review

in case of later complaints.

Cable industry representatives characterized the commission’s conditions as prohibitive, saying no cable company willingly would take on the responsibilities and costs associated with monitoring and censoring Al-Jazeera.

Commission spokesman Philippe Toussaint said the national regulator was attempting to balance the right of Canadians to access the channel — for which there clearly is a market — with their right to freedom from hate speech.

Commission chairman Charles Dalfen told media that cable companies would not necessarily have to censor objectionable material in advance, but would have to respond to any well-founded complaints about objectionable content or risk losing their license to carry the network. ■



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Bill on security at religious sites progresses

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Proponents of a bill to provide federal aid to secure religious sites have fought off a challenge from some Jewish lawmakers who worried the bill might infringe on the separation between church and state.

The High-Risk Non-Profit Security Enhancement Act passed the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee on July 21 despite a challenge from several senators who wanted to cut aid for security improvements to houses of worship.

The committee debate focused heavily on the split views within the Jewish community, and seemed to emphasize the fact that Jewish sites, particularly synagogues and other sectarian institutions, were sure to be beneficiaries of the \$100 million being considered for the project.

Federal aid would be a welcome relief to many Jewish organizations and institutions that have faced staggering security costs as terrorism fears have risen in recent years. But while several Jewish groups are leading the charge for the legislation, there is a quiet debate among other Jewish leaders and organizations who worry that their peers are ignoring traditional Jewish views on separation of church and state to back a bill that would benefit the community.

Jewish proponents of the legislation have tried to show a united front for the bill, but the schism within the community

is becoming more obvious. Two Jewish lawmakers, Sens. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) and Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.), spoke in favor of the bill, while Sen. Carl Levin (D-Mich.) co-sponsored the amendment to deny aid to houses of worship, and was backed by Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.).

Lautenberg's opposition is noteworthy since he is a former general chairman of the United Jewish Appeal, which later merged with other organizations to become the United Jewish Communities federation umbrella group. The UJC was a chief proponent of the legislation.

The amendment would have banned security enhancements to nonprofit institutions used for sectarian instruction or religious worship.

Lautenberg argued that giving federal funds to religious sites, even with safeguards written into the bill, crossed a line of government support for religion.

He also presented a letter submitted last month by the Reform and Reconstructionist Jewish movements, which he called an example of the Jewish community's divisions on the bill.

In the letter, Reform and Reconstructionist leaders argued that federal aid or loan guarantees for houses of worship "seriously weakens the wall separating church and state, which is a vital protector of religious liberty for all Americans."

The bill's sponsors said the legislation

passes constitutional tests because the money would be used for a secular purpose and would not advance the institutions' religious mandates.

Groups like the American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Congress and Orthodox Union say the government should help meet the need to protect U.S. citizens.

"In the context of the severe threat of life and limb posed by the threat of terrorism, and the specific safeguards put in place to ensure funds do not flow to pervasively religious institutions, this does not violate the separation of church and state," said Richard Foltin, the AJCommittee's legislative director.

But others say Jewish groups have options other than taking federal money.

The amendment was defeated 10-6 and the legislation was forwarded to the full Senate. However, opposition to the bill may prevent it from passing Congress this year.

"I think it's fair to say virtually no legislation is going to pass Congress before it adjourns this year unless it is completely non-controversial," said Charles Konigsberg, UJC's vice president for public policy. "And that's certainly not the case with this bill."

However, \$50 million is earmarked in this year's Homeland Security appropriations bill for the security of nonprofit institutions. If that bill passes, the money will be allocated for a one-year period. ■

Judaica found near site of former synagogue in Poland

By RUTH ELLEN GRUBER

OSWIECIM, Poland (JTA) —The town where Auschwitz was located has yielded a trove of Judaica.

During an excavation last month of the site of the destroyed Great Synagogue in Oswiecim, the town in southern Poland where Auschwitz was built, archeologists working from a Holocaust survivor's memory unearthed a unique trove of Jewish ritual objects.

The objects, which had been buried since the Holocaust, include three bronze candelabras, a bronze menorah, 10 chandeliers and a ner tamid, or eternal lamp, that once hung before the synagogue ark. Tiles, marble plaques, charred wood and other material from the synagogue, which was burned to the ground in 1939 by invading Nazi forces, also were uncovered.

"We didn't include a miracle in our operating budget, but now we have to deal with one," said Tomasz Kuncewicz, director of the Auschwitz Jewish Center, a prayer and study complex near

the site of the notorious death camp. The find represents the complete interior moveable furnishings of the synagogue.

"It's amazing to have found something so complete," Kuncewicz said. "It seems as if such a discovery never happened before."

Before World War II, Oswiecim was a bustling town of 12,000 people, more than half of them Jews. Most local Jews were killed in the Holocaust, and only one of the town's synagogues survived the war. Long used as a warehouse, it was restituted to Polish Jews in 1998 and then refurbished as part of the Auschwitz Jewish Center complex, which opened in 2000. The center tells the story of prewar Jewish life here and elsewhere in Poland.

Funded by Polish and Israeli sources and filmed for Israeli television, the four-week excavation got under way at the end of May. The only clue where to dig had been the account of an elderly Holocaust survivor who recalled seeing the synagogue caretaker bury two large boxes near the synagogue shortly after the Nazi invasion in September 1939. ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Harvard returns controversial donation

Harvard returned a multimillion-dollar gift donated by the president of the United Arab Emirates.

Students and Jewish organizations at Harvard's divinity school protested the gift because of the president's support for a think tank that funded speakers who made anti-Semitic comments.

The think tank has since been closed.

N.Y. pick peeves Israelis

Israel's diplomatic union published a letter opposing a political appointment in New York.

In a statement sent Tuesday to Israel's entire Foreign Ministry, the union of ministry employees argued against the possible appointment of Ofra Proyce, a veteran Israeli spokeswoman who has been mentioned as the next consul general in New York.

"If for some reason there would be a decision to have a political appointment, then it must be guaranteed beyond any doubt that the appointment will carry criteria of excellence and professionalism that are necessary for this position," the letter stated, arguing that the position should be filled by a member of the ministry.

The choice of Proyce, 48, is subject to approval by the Civil Service and Israeli Cabinet. She was a spokeswoman for the Israeli delegation to the United Nations in the 1990s, a role that brought her in regular contact with Jewish organizations.

What's in a word?

An Israeli newspaper clarified comments by Jewish official Malcolm Hoenlein that rankled a U.S. Muslim group.

An apparently faulty translation caused the confusion. Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, was quoted Monday on Ma'ariv's English Web site as saying that America is the "ultimate battleground" for Muslims. After the Council on American Islamic Relations saw the remarks and called for Hoenlein's resignation, the remarks were changed to refer to Islamists, rather than Muslims.

The mistake was blamed on a Hebrew-speaking reporter who did not differentiate between Islamists, a term that can refer to Islamic fundamentalists, and Muslims in general.

Hoenlein told JTA that CAIR wasted no opportunity to exploit the situation, making public calls for him to resign without contacting him for clarification.

WORLD

Arabs oppose anti-Semitism resolution

Arab countries are opposing a U.N. initiative to condemn anti-Semitism.

In a July 15 meeting with European countries, Jordan voiced concern over the proposed initiative, saying everyone opposes racial or ethnic bias so there is no need to formally condemn it. Jordan said Arab countries were concerned that charges of anti-Semitism were being used to discourage any criticism of Israel.

The Palestinians' U.N. ambassador, Nasser Al-Kidwa, said he was disappointed with a recent comment by U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan calling a 1975 U.N. resolution that denigrated Zionism as racism an "especially unfortunate decision."

Arye Mekeel, Israel's deputy permanent representative to the United Nations, told JTA: "We hope the Europeans will not give in to this pressure from the Arab group and that they will move ahead toward pressing a resolution condemning anti-Semitism in the upcoming General Assembly."

Serbian Jewish leader quits after threats

The president of a Jewish community in Serbia stepped down after receiving death threats.

Members of the 200-strong Subotica Jewish community said Mira Poljakovic resigned this month, along with several members of her board. The community made no official comment, nor was it clear who made the threats, but community members said Poljakovic clearly took the threats seriously.

The Subotica community has been split recently by bitter internal disputes between factions that supported and opposed Poljakovic's communal policies.

French Jews go to Israel

Almost 200 French immigrants arrived in Israel on Wednesday.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and other government officials welcomed them as they stepped off a flight chartered by the Jewish Agency for Israel. Sharon caused a diplomatic flap with France earlier this month when he called on all French Jews to move to Israel, citing the recent rise in anti-Semitism in the country.

Bomb threat in Argentina

A bomb threat against the Israeli embassy was received in Buenos Aires. An embassy spokeswoman told JTA it was not necessary to evacuate the building after Tuesday's threat. The embassy was bombed in a deadly terrorist attack in March 1992.

French Jewish cemetery desecrated

Swastikas were painted on tombstones in a Jewish cemetery in eastern France. On Wednesday morning, a person visiting the cemetery near Strasbourg, which dates from the 17th century, found 32 gravestones desecrated, mostly with red or blue swastikas, French Jewish official Pierre Levy told JTA.

MIDDLE EAST

Officers oppose Gaza plan

A group of Israeli army officers came out against Ariel Sharon's plan to withdraw from the Gaza Strip.

Dozens of officers, some of them retired, launched Ruach Aheret, or A Different Spirit, on Wednesday. The group says the Israeli prime minister's plan to withdraw unilaterally from the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank endangers Israel.

Organizers said they have no intention of calling on troops to refuse orders to evacuate Israeli settlements, but the Israeli army chief of staff still issued a warning against subordination.

Settler compensation seen

Israeli settlers slated for evacuation could receive compensation as soon as September.

Residents of the Gaza Strip and West Bank settlements who agree to leave voluntarily under Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's disengagement plan could get the first installment of their relocation package within two months, political sources said Wednesday.

According to the sources, 80 families from the West Bank and 15 families from Gaza already have come forward to accept the offer.

Arrow test postponed

Bad weather delayed a test of Israel's anti-missile Arrow system. The Arrow-2, a multimillion-dollar Israeli system developed with U.S. aid, was to be launched against an incoming Scud missile off the California coast Tuesday in its first live test.

But sources said the test was postponed indefinitely due to a storm front.