

IN THE NEWS

Armed police plan is halted

Israel backed away from its plan to allow armed Palestinian Authority police.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon had planned to allow P.A. police to carry arms in hopes that they would rein in chaos in Palestinian areas, but it is unlikely to be carried out because of right-wing Israeli outcry at the idea of arming potential terrorists, Ha'aretz reported Tuesday.

Israeli officials confirmed the report.

E.U. OK's funds to Palestinian Authority

The European Union's anti-fraud unit said it had found no evidence that the Palestinian Authority used E.U. funds for terrorism.

In a news release Tuesday, the office said ongoing investigations into the Palestinian Authority so far had shown no signs of misuse of E.U. funds.

The office began investigating in February 2003 following concerns that funds from the union — the largest single donor to the Palestinian Authority — were being used for illegal activity, including terrorism.

New charges against Arab Bank

The Arab Bank laundered money to terrorists through the Holy Land Foundation, according to an amended lawsuit.

The \$875 million lawsuit, first filed last month by five families of American victims of Palestinian terrorism, alleges that the Jordanian bank laundered Saudi money to fund Palestinian terrorists and "martyrdom payments" to their families through local branches in the Palestinian territories.

The new lawsuit, filed Tuesday in U.S. federal court, links the bank to the Holy Land Foundation, which was indicted last month by the U.S. Justice Department for violating U.S. law for transferring money to Hamas front groups.

WORLD REPORT

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White House booklet lauds Bush's ties with Jews, and unsettles them

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A White House booklet called "President George W. Bush: A Friend of the American Jewish Community" has some of the Jews quoted and pictured inside feeling less than friendly.

Several of those quoted represent non-partisan organizations and are concerned the booklet implies an endorsement from them or their group.

Others believe the material crosses the line into overt campaigning for Jewish support by the White House less than four months ahead of the election.

The booklet raised a stir among Jewish officials in Washington this week. Several Jewish leaders said they were not contacted before their names appeared, and that it does not accurately reflect their group's sentiment on the administration's track record.

"I hate to be used," said one Jewish official quoted in the book, who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of angering the White House.

"The president selectively chose a statement where we praised him. There have been several comments that have had an opposite point of view expressed," the official said.

Other Jewish leaders quoted said it was a fair use of their statements and the political overtones were to be anticipated in an election year.

The Bush administration and re-election campaign have been overtly courting Jewish voters for more than a year now, portray-

ing Bush as a strong defender of Israel and a fighter against terrorism.

Those qualities have drawn praise from a diverse array of Jewish leaders for Bush's international leadership — but many Jewish community leaders remain opposed to his domestic policy and other decisions he has made since taking office.

Jewish leaders privately said the booklet, which includes praise from leaders of several Jewish organizations that frequently have challenged the Bush administration, could be misconstrued to reflect endorsements from a wide gamut of influential Jews.

Mailed Monday to Jewish leaders, the booklet touts Bush's efforts against anti-Semitism and terrorism, and his work supporting Israel and providing mechanisms for federal funding for Jewish sites and organizations.

It includes commentary taken from numerous Jewish officials and political leaders, as well as a timeline of significant events in the administration of interest to the Jewish community.

The White House says the document is a follow-up to a similar, all-text pamphlet produced two years ago. The latest booklet also was e-mailed to Jewish leaders in a PDF file.

Of note, the booklet includes comments from several Jewish leaders in battleground states for the 2004 presidential election, including a rabbi in Iowa, the Democratic mayor of Miami Beach, and rabbis from St. Petersburg, Fla. and Seattle.

Photos show Bush meeting with rabbis,

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BEHIND
THE
HEADLINES

■ Some say White House booklet uses Jews in a misleading way

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touring Jewish sites in Europe and lighting Chanukah candles with children at the White House.

White House spokeswoman Maria Tambouri defended the booklet as part of the responsibilities of the Office of White House Public Liaison.

"This is an official document and it catalogues the president's achievement on issues of importance to the Jewish community," Tambouri said.

She said all the quotes used were taken from the public record.

Among the Jewish organizational leaders quoted are Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism; Hannah Rosenthal and Michael Bohnen, the executive director and former chair of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs; Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League; and Howard Kohr and Amy Friedkin, executive director and former president of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

Most striking was the use of quotations by several leading Jewish organizational leaders that the White House has at times circumvented — choosing other Jewish officials seen as more in keeping with Bush

administration views — for meetings and receptions with the president.

Some Jewish leaders have complained about a lack of access and influence in this administration, and have said they were told by White House officials that more frequent praise for the president would win them greater access.

Now those compliments have been compiled in a booklet some see as an attempt to court Jewish voters.

Saperstein is quoted in the report praising Bush's statements against former Malaysian

Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammed, who told Islamist heads of state last year that Jews "rule the world by proxy."

Saperstein has been highly critical of administration policy on faith-based initiatives, civil liberties and other domestic policy issues, but said he believed the White House had the right to use the praise it receives from Jewish leaders on other issues.

"I do not think that a reasonable reading of this thing suggests that anyone whose quotes they use necessarily endorses or opposes the president," Saperstein said.



Orthodox Union president Harvey Blitz said the use of a quote from a 2002 Orthodox Union letter praising Bush's commitment to religious liberty was par for the course.

"That letter was not an endorsement of the president — we do not endorse candidates — but it's a political season," Blitz said. "While clearly what we wrote wasn't written with a political aim in mind, we put it in the public domain, and it's fair game for this kind of usage."

Foxman said comments from him and other non-partisan community leaders are used for political purposes every election season. He said he wished the White House had sought permission from the Jewish leaders, noting that many of them

likely would not have agreed.

Amy Schwartzman, senior rabbi of Temple Rodef Shalom in Falls Church, Va., was critical of Bush's stances on poverty and health care when she met him with other rabbis last fall. Nonetheless, she appears in a picture with Bush from that meeting.

She noted that her photo appears above quotes from Rosenthal, Bohnen and Saperstein about the former Malaysian leader, even though that was never broached in the meeting.

"Clearly, it's just a compilation of little quotes and pictures and there's no relation between them," she said. "It seems to be a political opportunity to draw the Jewish community closer."

Several Jewish officials quoted in the publication seemed pleased to be included.

"It's completely appropriate, coming from the White House, because it's the truth," said Miami Beach Mayor David Dermer, who has endorsed Bush. "This president's record on Israel is unparalleled. That message needs to get out."

Dermer said he hoped Jews in Florida — perhaps the most crucial battleground state in November — would heed the booklet's message.

"There are a number of people within the Florida Jewish community who from a cultural standpoint are tied to the Democratic Party and will not look outside that partisan world," he said. "But frankly we've been lucky to have this president in office now."

The National Jewish Democratic Council argued that publication of the booklet was "the height of politicization of the White House." The document compares Bush favorably with President Clinton, noting that Bush refused to meet with Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat.

Ira Forman, the NJDC's executive direc-

tor, said he was angered the White House included Bush's rebuke of the Malaysian prime minister, noting that it came only after several days of silence, was made in private and that Mahathir denied Bush ever delivered the rebuke.

(JTA Washington Bureau Chief Ron Kampeas contributed to this report.)

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Mekel appointed consul general for N.Y.

By RACHEL POMERANCE

NEW YORK (JTA) — A seasoned diplomat who cut his teeth in journalism will soon take over one of Israel's most prominent public relations jobs in the United States.

Starting next week, Arye Mekel, Israel's deputy permanent representative to the United Nations, will become consul general in New York.

He succeeds Alon Pinkas, a telegenic and articulate spokesman, whose three-year tenure ended in July.

Considered among the Foreign Ministry's most desirable assignments, the New York position also is one of the ministry's most taxing: The consul must interface with the financial, media and political power brokers of the world, along with the largest Jewish community outside Israel.

Nearly all the major American Jewish organizations are headquartered in New York.

Mekel, who is well-liked, well-informed and known for his media savvy, spent seven years as the Atlanta-based consul for six Southern states and held several other diplomatic postings before becoming Israel's deputy at the United Nations.

Many say his new assignment is a natural fit.

"In many ways, it's an obvious and welcome choice," said David Harris, executive director of the American Jewish Committee. "It's going to be a relatively smooth and seamless transition both because he knows New York and he knows the American Jewish community very well."

The posting, which covers New York, New Jersey and Connecticut, comes as Israel struggles to bolster its image in the U.S. and international media, among decision makers, in Jewish communities and the general public and on campus amid the ongoing intifada.

It also comes as Israel prepares to withdraw from the Gaza Strip, and is counting on American public support for the effort.

The impending withdrawal likely will figure prominently on Mekel's agenda once he begins his new job at the consulate in New York.

Pinkas came on board at the start of

the intifada, and served when the terrorist war reached its peak in early 2002.

The attacks have been curbed in the past year by Israel's West Bank security barrier, Mekel said.

"Now we are entering a new phase," Mekel said. "The center of our activity is the disengagement plan from Gaza, so this may call for a different activity."

Mekel, who has spent nearly 40 years in Israeli public life, began his career as a journalist for the Voice of Israel, Israel's state radio station, at the age of 19.

With degrees in political science and English language, as well as a master's in mass communication, Mekel's career often has straddled the spheres of media and diplomacy.

He has been an adjunct professor of Judaic studies at the University of Cincinnati, a foreign policy adviser to former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, director general of the Israel Broadcasting Authority and special adviser to the deputy foreign minister for combating anti-Semitism.

For Mekel, there's a common thread in the positions.

"Whether we work with the consulate or in the U.N., basically we do the same thing: Our mandate and our calling is to serve the Jewish state and the Jewish people," he said.

"We serve the same ideals and we fight for the same thing."

Those who know Mekel call him a gifted communicator.

"We always joked that the consul general assigned to the Southeast is really the consul general to CNN," said Sherry Frank, executive director of the American Jewish Committee's Atlanta chapter. "Arye Mekel, because of all of his public relations background, did a superb job of that."

Mekel also is considered well-informed about high-level politics and backroom deal making.

"He's very engaging, and he's in the know," said Neil Rubin, who was editor of the Atlanta Jewish Times during Mekel's southern stint and now is editor of the

Baltimore Jewish Times.

"He loves journalists and journalism, so he finds out about what's going on behind the scenes all the time because he was a journalist," Rubin said.

Additionally, "he's not afraid of both giving his opinion and representing the government well," said Rubin, noting that Mekel served under both Labor and Likud governments.

"He's articulate and experienced. He's a professional," added Abraham Foxman, national director of

the Anti-Defamation League.

"He did a very serious, significant job as No. 2 at the U.N.," acting as a liaison to the Jewish community and supporting Israel's U.N. ambassador, Dan Gillerman, Foxman said.

Mekel said he sees his mission and his life as bound up with Israel's.

At 58, he notes that he is roughly the same age as the Jewish state, which is 56 years old.

"I grew up with the state, and this is what defines me. The changes of the state, they define me," he said.

Mekel is the son of Holocaust survivors whose own parents were not as lucky. His family left the Soviet Union in 1949 and moved to an immigrant community near Haifa, where his father was a policeman for 30 years. His mother was a grocery cashier.

Despite offers to work in the private sector, Mekel says, "I always wanted to serve the Jewish state and the Jewish people."

He called his upcoming task a "large portfolio which I intend to maintain, together with my colleagues at the consulate and with the help of the Jewish organizations and the headquarters and support in Jerusalem."

Mekel also hopes to be able to showcase Israel's accomplishments, and not just its efforts against Palestinian terrorism.

Mekel's permanent residence is in Jerusalem, but he lives in New York with his wife, Ruth.

He has three children and three granddaughters.

Our calling is to serve the Jewish state and the Jewish people.

Arye Mekel

Israel's incoming consul general for N.Y.

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

West Bank gunman killed

Israeli forces said they killed a Palestinian gunman during a West Bank raid. The 18-year-old killed Tuesday was one of two Palestinians shot when they were seen sneaking up on troops in Nablus on Tuesday, military sources said.

Palestinians said the man was only throwing stones at the soldiers, who were on a raid for terrorist fugitives in the Balata refugee camp.

Palestinian inquiry blames Arafat

A Palestinian legislative inquiry blamed Yasser Arafat for recent anarchy in the Gaza Strip and West Bank.

The Palestinian legislative council said the reason for the chaos is that the Palestinian Authority and its president, Arafat, have not made the political decision to restore order. The report calls for an end to Kassam rocket fire into Israel and attacks inside Israel.

After the report was issued, Arafat announced Tuesday that he would offer Cabinet positions to two of his most outspoken critics, including Gaza Strip strongman Mohammed Dahlan.

West Bank bus ambush

Terrorists fired on an Israeli bus in the West Bank, wounding two people.

The Al-Aksa Brigade claimed responsibility for Tuesday's early morning ambush on the Trans-Samaria Highway near the Barkan settlement, which targeted an armored bus carrying workers. Several other drivers were shot at, but none of them was injured. Security forces found bomb components at the scene, suggesting that a much larger attack had been planned.

Terrorist love connection?

An Israeli woman who reportedly is the lover of a Palestinian terrorist was arrested. Tali Fahima is suspected of assisting Palestinian terrorists to plan a terrorist attack and commit serious security breaches, Army Radio reported Tuesday.

Security officials believe Fahima is in constant contact with Zakaria Zubeidi, a leader of the Al-Aksa Brigade in the Jenin area who reportedly is Fahima's lover.

WORLD

Graves desecrated in French cemetery

Around 60 graves were daubed with swastikas and Nazi symbols at a Jewish cemetery in the French city of Lyon. Lyon's chief rabbi, Richard Wertenschlag, said the tombs were sprayed Monday with a variety of insignia including inverted swastikas and references to Hitler.

Some tombstones were also spray-painted with anti-Muslim expressions and the name "Phineas," a biblical figure associated with acts of zealotry committed to cleanse the Jewish community from impurity, Wertenschlag said.

The cemetery is the only Jewish burial ground in the center of Lyon, France's third largest Jewish community after Paris and Marseille, and dates from the end of the 18th century. Two men were arrested late Monday night in connection with the incident and remain in police custody.

Iraqis to give Israel a sporting chance

Iraqi athletes will not shun the Israeli delegation at the Athens Olympics. "I want to send a clear message to the Israeli people: It does not matter if you are Israeli, Palestinian or Iraqi, each of us has the basic right to live," Ahmed Al-Samarrai, president of the Iraqi

Olympic Committee, told Israel's Yediot Achronot newspaper on Tuesday. "We have no problem meeting the Israelis. This is sport, not politics."

At previous Olympics, Arab and Iranian athletes have refused to play against or even interact with Israel's delegation.

New Zealand condemns anti-Semitism

New Zealand's Parliament unanimously passed a statement condemning all forms of anti-Semitism and racism.

Tuesday's move came days after 95 headstones were toppled in the Jewish cemetery near the capital, Wellington. The cemetery's chapel, used for prayers before burials, was gutted by fire, leaving only swastika-etched walls standing.

AMIA victims to be honored?

An area in Buenos Aires near a Jewish center that was bombed might change its name to honor the victims.

The Buenos Aires city government and the city legislature's cultural department have proposed changing the name of the lot at Pasteur Street near the site of the 1994 AMIA bombing to "Victims of the AMIA Attack."

The still-unsolved bombing killed 85 people and wounded some 300.

NORTH AMERICA

JCC marks five years since attack

A JCC in Los Angeles on Sunday commemorated the fifth anniversary of an anti-Semitic shooting attack.

On Aug. 10, 1999, white supremacist Bufford Furrow, Jr. burst into the North Valley Jewish Community Center and opened fire.

He wounded two small boys, a teenager and an adult receptionist, and later killed a Filipino-American letter carrier nearby. Furrow is serving a life sentence without possibility of parole.

In the past five years, the North Valley center, like other JCCs in the area, has seen a drop in enrollment and income, but now is rebuilding its senior citizen and after-school child care programs.

Weiner wants Pollard clemency

A New York congressman called for clemency for Jonathan Pollard.

Rep. Anthony Weiner (D-N.Y.) wrote President Bush last week, on Pollard's birthday, asking him to grant the convicted spy clemency. "Mr. Pollard did commit a serious crime and he deserved to be punished for his action," Weiner wrote. "However, after reviewing the facts of the case and receiving multiple classified briefings on this matter, I believe that he has served a sentence that far exceeds the appropriate term for the crime he has committed."

Pollard, a former U.S. Navy analyst, has been serving a life sentence since 1986 in a U.S. jail.

Jewish TV network?

A lawyer in New York wants to launch a Jewish television network. John Odoner has lined up a slew of programs for Jewish Television, the new Jewish cable channel that he hopes will air early next year.

The real estate lawyer-turned-media maven told The New York Times his lineup would include a biblical quiz show and a political commentary program to be called "Jewishly Incorrect," among other broadcasts, including a reality show.

"It's not going to be nebbish central," Odoner told the Times. "It will certainly be political, in that it will highlight the international food fight that often is the Jewish people."