

IN THE NEWS

Diplomat denies any wrongdoing

A senior Israeli diplomat who had contact with the Pentagon analyst suspected of passing classified documents to Israel has denied any wrongdoing.

Naor Gilon, the No. 2 diplomat at the Israeli Embassy in Washington, told Israel's daily Ma'ariv he did nothing inappropriate in his meetings with the analyst, Larry Franklin. "My hands are clean. I have nothing to hide, all my activities are well within the parameters of accepted diplomatic norms and procedure," Gilon said.

The FBI believes Franklin passed classified information about U.S. policy deliberations on Iran to AIPAC, and that the material then may have been passed to Israeli officials.

Jew held in Paris arson

A Jewish man is being held by police in connection with an arson attack at a Jewish social center in Paris last week.

According to police sources, the man had attended the center on numerous occasions and had previously worked at the institution. The soup kitchen was set alight Aug. 22, and swastikas and anti-Semitic slogans were scrawled on refrigerators in the building. Police described the man as unstable and regard him as the principal suspect.

Gandhi urges Palestinian march

Mahatma Gandhi's grandson urged Palestinians in Jordan to march into Israel, saying a confrontation with Israelis would be good publicity. Arun Gandhi said a massive march of Palestinians to their ancestors' homes would shock the world into taking notice if Israel ended up killing a couple hundred marchers, Reuters reported.

"They may kill 200 men, women and children. And that would shock the world," Gandhi said in the West Bank city of Ramallah.

WORLD REPORT

PUBLISHED WEEKDAYS BY JTA—THE GLOBAL NEWS SERVICE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE · WWW.JTA.ORG

Jewish officials say investigation will cause only short-term damage

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

NEW YORK (JTA) — American Jewish officials say they don't think an FBI investigation of a Pentagon staffer accused of passing classified U.S. government documents to the pro-Israel lobby will result in espionage charges — but they worry that the affair still may dampen their efforts on behalf of Israel, at least in the short term.

Larry Franklin, who is not Jewish, is accused of passing classified information to American Israel Public Affairs Committee officials, who may have passed the information along to Israel.

Questions of what will emerge from the year-long investigation overshadowed a salute to Jewish Republicans on Sunday at the start of the party's national convention in New York.

Jewish organizational leaders said they don't think charges will be filed against the two AIPAC officials, whom the Jerusalem Post identified as Steven Rosen and Keith Weissman. AIPAC would not confirm the officials' identity.

Organizational leaders also said that in the long run they don't think the case will disrupt pro-Israel lobbying efforts or their overall influence in Washington.

"These allegations are outrageous as well as baseless," AIPAC President Bernice Manocherian told the crowd at Sunday's Jewish Republican event. "They will not dissuade us from exercising our right as American citizens to be involved in the political process."

Jewish officials noted that they had been

through more difficult periods — most notably the 1985 arrest of Jonathan Pollard, a Jew who worked as a U.S. Navy analyst and confessed to spying for Israel — yet had retained their clout in Washington.

Privately, however, some Jewish organizational leaders were concerned that the investigation would hamper their work in the short term, with peers questioning their loyalty and adversaries gaining new ammunition to attack them.

"I believe they will be exonerated, but the damage is done by having it on the front page of all the newspapers and having the questions out there," said one Jewish leader, who spoke on condition of anonymity. "They will question what Jewish organizations are doing and what their real agenda is."

In Israel, media were filled with the latest news on the investigation, but Israeli officials insisted their hands were clean.

Israeli diplomats and officials tried to downplay the story, saying it is mostly a question of internal U.S. political intrigue. Natan Sharansky, the minister of Diaspora affairs, said there was no truth to the allegation of spying and suggested the story was borne of an internal rift between the Pentagon and the CIA.

Intelligence on Iran is of particular interest to Israel because officials fear the Islamic republic is trying to develop nuclear arms. Iran also supports Hezbollah, which continues to try to attack Israel from the Lebanese border and is reportedly also active in the West Bank.

Yet after the Pollard affair, Israeli officials

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say strict orders were put in place against any form of spying in the United States.

Israel's ambassador to the United States, Danny Ayalon, told the Yediot Achronot newspaper that there is no truth to allegations of espionage.

"For information on U.S. policy toward Iran we do not need assessments from a mid-level intelligence official in the Pentagon," Ayalon said. "I am in constant contact with Condoleezza Rice, the national security adviser, and other senior officials."

AIPAC officials and other Jewish organizational leaders were rallying behind the pro-Israel lobby Sunday, publicly questioning the motives behind the leak to CBS News last Friday and the timing of the story.

Jews in New York speculated the leak was an effort to hurt "neo-conservatives" in the Defense Department who were architects for the Iraq war and have supported efforts to protect Israel.

Two Jews in high positions in the Defense Department, Deputy Secretary Paul Wolfowitz and Undersecretary Douglas Feith, have been named repeatedly in press accounts about the case, though the man accused of passing the information is a lower-level officer who worked for Feith.

AIPAC leaders said they believe the controversy will make the organization stronger in the end. Advocates enraged by the erroneous charges will be more prone to support the organization and its

efforts, they said.

They pointed to the fact that no lawmakers or public officials have cancelled plans to speak to AIPAC leaders in New York this week, and that New York's Republican governor, George Pataki, made a surprise appearance at a private event last Saturday to show solidarity with the Israel lobby.

But Jewish communal officials wondered whether they might be left out in the cold for a while.

"People in New York and Washington may end up understanding, and it may not hurt our ability to do business in 10 years," one Jewish official said. "But in the short term, I don't see how it can't."

The future depends in large part on what happens next in the federal probe.

Initial reports suggested a sensational story, but since then AIPAC advocates have been heartened as subsequent reports suggest the case might not rise to the level of espionage, and Franklin may be charged only with mishandling classified information.

Later reports even have suggested that Franklin might not be charged at all.

Jewish officials said the Pollard case immediately came to mind when they heard the news last Friday. But they universally suggested that this case would not rise to that level.

For one, no one has raised the question

of Israel giving money to Franklin or others for information.

In addition, Franklin is accused of passing along a draft policy directive on U.S. efforts against Iran, not information that could have jeopardized American lives.

A high-ranking Israeli military official who served in Washington said he had met with Franklin several times and doubted he had been involved in anything improper.

"All of the meetings with Franklin were professional and to the point," the official, who did not want his name used, told Yediot Achronot. "He would update us or we would update him. The meetings would take place at different venues — at the Pentagon, at restaurants and occasionally at the embassy. We are talking about meetings that are very accepted in the world of diplomacy, where people exchange shared updates. We are not talking about state secrets, but of general security information."

For now, Jewish officials hope they can keep the community focused on the New York convention, and hope the issue will leave the front page.

"Until the matter is resolved, as I think it will be, there will be some hesitation" to work with the Jewish community, one Jewish official said.

(JTA Correspondent Dina Kraft contributed to this story from Tel Aviv.)

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Controversial Croatian plaque removed

By VLASTA KOVAC

ZAGREB, Croatia (JTA) — Croatian authorities have removed a controversial memorial plaque to a high-ranking official in the Croatian Nazi puppet state during World War II.

The plaque recently had been erected on a wall surrounding the church in Mile Budak's native village of Sveti Rok, southeast of Zagreb. After a public uproar, authorities removed the plaque Aug. 26.

Budak was the minister for religion and education in the pro-Nazi Ustasha government. In 1941, he signed race laws similar to the Nazis' infamous Nuremberg

Laws, paving the way for Jews, Serbs and Gypsies to be deported. He was known for his chauvinist politics and radical statements against Serbs. After the war, Budak was hanged as a war criminal.

The memorial erected to mark 115 years since his birth in 1889 did not mention his political activities, so readers learned only that Budak was a Croatian writer and patriot.

A number of Croatian public personalities expressed their disapproval, including President Stipe Mesic and the speaker of the Croatian government.

The main Jewish group in Zagreb did not officially comment on the affair.

JTA WORLD REPORT

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JTA WORLD REPORT is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For more information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at www.jta.org.
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French Jews worry about crying wolf

By PHILIP CARMEL

PARIS (JTA) — French Jewish leaders fear they may have cried wolf once too often after a Jew was arrested in connection with the well-publicized arson of a Jewish community center in central Paris.

Paris police say a 52-year-old Jewish man arrested Monday morning in connection with the Aug. 22 torching of the Judaeo-Spanish social center in the capital's 11th district is the principal suspect in the arson.

Police said the man, identified only as "Raphael B." and described as unstable, is a former caretaker at the institution who had received free meals in return for his volunteer activities.

It is believed that the center wanted to part company with the man, provoking what police think was an act of vengeance.

Investigators found keys to the center at the man's former rented apartment. This discovery tied in with earlier evidence, including the fact that the burned building's front door was damaged from the inside during the arson, rather than being forced from the exterior.

The arrest shocked community leaders who had successfully mobilized the French political establishment to condemn what appeared to be an anti-Semitic attack.

Moise Cohen, president of the Paris Consistoire — the country's principal Jewish religious group and the organization that owns the burned building — was sharply critical of community leaders he said had reacted "without taking the necessary precautions."

"From the beginning we thought this wasn't normal," Cohen told JTA. "The building is in a very quiet neighborhood and there was no indication on the outside that it was a former synagogue. From the start of the investigation, the police thought it was someone connected to the institution."

Cohen was equally scathing about politicians "who fear they're going to be accused of not doing enough" to tackle anti-Semitism — though in part they have become zealous in their condemnations following stinging criticism that they weren't taking anti-Semitism seriously enough.

Political reaction following the inci-

dent was strong, particularly since swastikas and various anti-Semitic slogans were daubed around the gutted building.

President Jacques Chirac was among those quick to suspect anti-Semitic motives, while Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin rushed back to the capital from his hometown of Poitiers to visit the scene and reassure the Jewish community.

In the aftermath of the attack, Jewish leaders sought to link the incident to recent cases in which judges had been lenient with anti-Semitic offenders.

The Jewish community could have been excused had its cries of anti-Semitism been isolated to one attack that turned out to have different motives. But the recent arson is only the latest example of politicians and community leaders reacting to an event with horror, only to have to ask questions later.

In July, an incident in which a young Jewish woman claimed she and her baby were attacked on a suburban train drew fierce condemnations from politicians and religious leaders — until it was discovered that the woman had made up the story.

Similarly, the recent knifing of a yeshiva student in the Paris suburbs also apparently was not motivated by anti-Semitism. And police still are investigating claims by a rabbi that he was stabbed outside his synagogue in January 2003, as reports allege that the rabbi may have stabbed himself.

Less in the media spotlight is the burning last November of an unoccupied annex of a Jewish school in the Parisian suburb of Gagny. It looks less and less likely that the incident was motivated by anti-Semitism.

The Gagny arson led the government to enact new measures to tackle rising anti-Semitism, with Raffarin heading-up a high-profile Cabinet committee on the issue.

Nevertheless, for Jewish organizations and for the government, these cases are merely isolated incidents in a tide of nearly 300 reported acts of anti-Semitism in France since the beginning of 2004.

Roger Benarroch, vice president

of the CRIF umbrella organization of French Jewry, told JTA that last week's arson and the reaction to it should "not cause us to lose sight of the essential, that the climate of anti-Semitism makes these things credible."

But he admitted that such events "give our detractors, and the anti-Semites, an excuse to doubt us."

Similar comments came from France's Union of Jewish Students, a group in the vanguard of the fight against anti-Semitism.

However, certain groups were critical of

what they regard as Israel's exploitation of the arson incident, which came just weeks after Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon called on French Jews to leave the country "immediately" because of rising anti-Semitism.

Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom flew hastily to Paris to hold talks with government officials and Jewish leaders following the arson, and to visit the destroyed center.

Benarroch sharply criticized the visit, telling JTA that "the Israelis should be more careful" and "shouldn't meddle in the internal affairs of the community."

Shalom "can't have it both ways," Benarroch said. "On the one hand he says he wants all French people to mobilize against anti-Semitism, but on the other Israel interferes, making it a Jewish issue. That's a contradictory position."

That said, Shalom last week was considerably more nuanced about the arson attack than many community leaders.

Visiting the burned-out building, Shalom told reporters that "we should leave the French authorities to conduct their investigation." He added that it was "of little importance what happened here when we know that during the last six months there have been more than 170 anti-Semitic incidents" in France.

The Consistoire's Cohen, though, issued a warning to the Jewish community.

"Sixty years after the Shoah, every anti-Semitic incident rightly goes to the community's head," he said. "When you cry wolf, you need to be very careful and ever vigilant. We are becoming less and less credible." ■

Israel 'shouldn't meddle in the internal affairs of the community.'

Roger Benarroch
French Jewish organizational official

NEWS IN BRIEF

WORLD

Austrians forgetting war?

A new study shows Austrians are forgetting about World War II. The study, released Aug. 27 by the Linz-based IMAS Institute, found that 10 percent of Austrians do not know who Hitler was — double the number from 1985.

Only 76 percent recognize the name of Soviet dictator Josef Stalin; 69 percent know who British Prime Minister Winston Churchill was; and 64 percent recognize the name of Italian dictator Benito Mussolini.

In all, 1,014 Austrians were contacted for the questionnaire. The margin of error was not released.

About half of those asked were able to identify Anne Frank. Nearly 30 percent could not define "concentration camp," "persecution of the Jews," "Auschwitz," "Holocaust," "Stalingrad" and "Hiroshima." Of those between ages 16 and 29, the numbers were lower.

The study comes on the heels of another report, released three weeks ago, which indicated that 31 percent of Austrians believe National Socialism had some positive aspects.

NORTH AMERICA

Rare find in Reform archives

Archivists at Cincinnati's Hebrew Union College have found old minutes from Reform movement meetings in the 1870s.

"This is the kind of find that is rare and thoroughly exhilarating," said Gary Zola, executive director of the Marcus Center, part of the American Jewish Archives.

The archives, which document the early years of the Reform institution, were found earlier this month amid old files in the basement of HUC's administrative building.

The first entry in the 500-page volume is dated July 16, 1874.

Duke pressured on pro-Palestinian parley

Pro-Israel activists are urging Duke University to deny the Palestinian Solidarity Movement meeting space for an October conference.

Duke officials have said they will not cancel the event, the Chronicle of Higher Education reported.

Pro-Israel activists say the Palestinian group supports terrorism, and are circulating an online petition to get the university to cancel the event.

Last year, the controversial group was forced to move its annual conference to Ohio State University from Rutgers University, in New Jersey, after Rutgers canceled the conference following widespread protests.

As of early last week, the online petition had garnered more than 12,000 signatures, the Chronicle reported.

State: Detainee conditions poor

Conditions for Palestinians in Israeli interrogation and detention centers are poor, the State Department said.

Answering a query last week about a recent hunger strike by Palestinian prisoners, the department said it has found that Israeli prisons meet international standards but interrogation centers and detention camps do not.

It cited reports by human rights groups describing insufficient living space, torture and inadequate medical care.

The State Department said the conditions are part of "extensive" discussions among Israel, the United States and the international community.

It said Israel had pledged to provide all detainees a bed, exercise, telephone and visitation rights, and less crowded facilities.

MIDDLE EAST

Likud group to visit South Africa

A Likud Party delegation will visit South Africa for the first time in the post-apartheid era.

The delegation will depart Tuesday.

The African National Congress, which came to power in 1994, historically has maintained close ties with the PLO and backs the Palestinians in international arenas.

The Israeli delegation's leader, Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade Michael Ratzon, said the trip reflects South Africa's desire to initiate a dialogue with Israel's government.

The director general of South Africa's Department of Foreign Affairs said on a recent visit to Israel that "Israel has misunderstood our engagement. Any support for Palestinians they perceive as anti-Israel."

He said the visit should "open up lines of communication" with Jerusalem.

Over the last several years, only left-wing politicians and peace activists from Israel have been guests of the South African government.

Israel offers leaving a Gaza settlement intact

Israel told the World Bank it would consider leaving one Gaza settlement intact to be developed as a hospital for Palestinians.

Israel also said it would be interested in selling the Erez industrial park to international organizations.

The proposals are part of Israel's plan to withdraw from the Gaza Strip, news reports said.

On Sunday, Israeli officials met World Bank representatives to discuss various economic aspects of the expected pullout from Gaza. During the talks, the Israelis said the plan is to raze all Gaza settlements except for one.

The officials said high-rise buildings would be built at the demolished settlements to house those currently living in refugee camps, Israel's daily Ma'ariv reported.

Settlers evacuated from outpost

The Israeli army and police evacuated a group of young settlers trying to set up a West Bank outpost Monday. The settlers were trying to establish the outpost near Hebron illegally.

This was their 19th failed attempt to establish an outpost there, but they vowed to return.

Storks make deadly mistake

A flock of migrating storks met a watery end in an Israeli toxic dump. At least 150 storks bound from Europe to Africa died Monday after stopping to drink from a reservoir of acidic effluvia near a major Dead Sea plant. The Parks Authority said it was trying to revive several dozen members of the flock that had not immediately succumbed to the poison.

Parks officials said they are considering posting rangers to scare off any other migrating birds that might mistake the toxic lake for a natural body of water.

Home-wrecking Shin Bet?

An Israeli whose estranged husband was a Shin Bet agent is suing the government.

The lawyer for the woman, a mother of seven identified only by her first initial, H., told Israel Radio on Monday that she divorced her husband after discovering that he had served for 15 years as a Shin Bet spy among suspected extremist settler groups. Now H., who also claims her husband beat her, wants part of his government pension, in addition to alimony.

Government officials did not immediately comment.