

IN THE NEWS

Bush signs security aid law

President Bush signed a law giving \$25 million to protect Jewish sites and other nonprofit institutions.

On Monday, Bush signed the Homeland Security Appropriations Act, which earmarks money for high-risk nonprofit institutions to be doled out by the Department of Homeland Security.

Former Libyan Jews didn't meet Gadhafi

A group of exiled Libyan Jews living in Italy did not meet as reported with Muammar Gadhafi during a four-day visit to Tripoli. [Story, pg. 3]

Candidates' wives address Jewish group

A visit to Israel in 1998 left a "deep impression" on the first couple, Laura Bush said.

"Our first visit to Israel in 1998 left a deep and lasting impression on both George and me," Bush told a United Jewish Communities conference of women donors in Washington on Monday.

"Israel is not only a land of rich history and faith, but also one where people of all races and creeds live together in a diverse democracy.

During a helicopter ride above the country, the president saw firsthand how precarious Israel's security situation is, and that's why President Bush has been so supportive of Israel's right to defend itself."

Teresa Heinz Kerry, Democratic candidate John Kerry's wife, addressed the Lion of Judah conference Sunday and discussed responsible philanthropy and her role in activism for Soviet Jewry in the 1970s and 1980s.

"This journey of ours, this journey of sharing and giving, is not merely noble or kind," Kerry said, detailing the results of an early childhood education program she funded. "It is also immensely practical."

WORLD REPORT

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U.S. Jews turning against war because of its impact on Israel

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — When it comes to the Iraq war, U.S. Jews have followed much the same trajectory as their fellow Americans: solid support leading into the war, grave doubts about it now.

What sets many Jews apart is how they factored Israel into both equations. In 2003, they felt gratitude that Saddam Hussein, one of Israel's most implacable foes, had been removed, yet there are concerns now that a misconceived or mismanaged adventure has empowered another implacable foe of Israel, the Iranian theocracy.

"The only nation that seems to have benefited by our invasion of Iraq is Iran, which is a far greater threat to Israel than Iraq was," said U.S. Rep. Shelley Berkley, (D-Nev.), a Jew and an outspoken pre-war proponent of invasion who feels President Bush deceived her.

Since the end of the war, Iran has established broad influence among Shi'ites in Iraq, and has come much closer to developing a nuclear weapons capacity that Iranian leaders hint might be used against Israel — a result, critics say, of neglect by a Bush administration obsessed with Iraq.

The perception in Washington is of a broad-based alliance between the pro-Israel community and the architects of the Iraq war, a perception that may have been reinforced by the support that some national Jewish groups evinced for the war.

Yet reliable polls demonstrate a profound turning away from the war among the general Jewish community.

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chair-

man of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, said that American Jewish leadership — which deals with the war on terrorism on a day-to-day basis — naturally was prone to be more aware of the importance of Iraq in that war.

"It's not that the leadership doesn't have reservations about particular actions," Hoenlein said. "But it wasn't just about the weapons of mass destruction. For those of us who deal every day with the issues, the war on terrorism is the defining issue of the 21st century, and the war in Iraq is part of that."

Jewish opposition to the war is pronounced — 10 percentage points more than among the general population, according to some national polls — and likely plays a role in continued, solid Jewish support for Democrats, despite the unprecedented backing for Israel that President Bush has shown.

"I was considering voting for Bush when I thought being in Iraq was best for us and best for Israel," said John Drill, 47, a building contractor in West Caldwell, N.J. "Then I thought it wasn't best for us, but it was good for Israel. Now I'm convinced it's not good for Israel."

At the end of 2002, just months before the war, an American Jewish Committee poll found that 59 percent of U.S. Jews approved U.S. action against Iraq, while 36 percent disapproved. A year later, those numbers had flipped to 54 percent against and 43 in favor.

In the most recent AJCommittee poll, posted last month, 66 percent of American Jews surveyed disapproved, and 30 percent approved. General polling of Americans shows opposition to the war in the mid-50s.

"There are more people who are conflicted

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NEWS
ANALYSIS

■ American Jews doubt Iraq war out of concern for Israel

Continued from page 1

now, who want to remove themselves from support of the war," Rabbi Amy Schwartzman of Temple Rodef Shalom in Falls Church, Va., said of her congregation.

That's a striking shift, she noted, given the number of military families at her temple. Schwartzman estimates that between six and 10 congregants have been in active military service throughout the Iraq war.

A number of factors have played into the reversal, many of them common to other Americans: the failure to find weapons of mass destruction, the uneasy transition to Iraqi rule and the increasing casualties among both U.S. military personnel and Iraqi civilians.

But both before and after the war, the danger facing Israel was a particularly strong factor driving Jewish opinion.

"Most people spoke as Americans first, although many people saw it through the lens of Israel," Schwartzman said of discussions among her temple members. "The question of whether we're creating a more secure Middle East was important to them as it relates to Israel."

It's a worry Democrats are mining.

"Our friends in the Middle East, including most prominently Israel, have been placed in greater danger because of the policy blunders and sheer incompetence with which the civilian Pentagon officials have conducted this war," former Vice President Al Gore told the liberal group Move-On in Washington on Monday.

Of course, Jews also are concerned about issues of concern to all Americans

— especially the prospect that an overextended military might necessitate a return to a national draft, despite Bush administration assurances to the contrary.

"I never imagined I would have to think about my son going to a foreign war to fight," said Stacy Ritter, 44, a Florida state representative who is Jewish. "This time when I go into the voting booth, I'm going to be thinking about my son."

Such thinking is late but welcome, said Sue Niederer, 55, a substitute teacher from Pennington, N.J., who opposed the war from the outset. The dangers of the Iraq war were brought home to her on Feb. 3 when her son, Army Second Lt. Seth Dvorin, was killed trying to dismantle a bomb in Iraq.

"The Jewish people I know, we accept responsibility, we as an ethnic group don't appreciate someone not taking responsibility for what they created," she said, recalling High Holy Days injunctions to seek redemption for sins against God and fellow men.

Niederer made headlines last month when New Jersey state police arrested her for trespassing at a Laura Bush function. Niederer wore a T-shirt declaring "Mr. Bush, you killed my son," and asked the First Lady why the first daughters were not serving if the war in Iraq was just.

Such views are the product of the reflexively liberal world view of most U.S. Jews, according to Tom Neumann, executive director of the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs.

"Jews are so liberal in some ways that they don't understand their own interests," he said.

The war on terrorism — a new type of war — can't be wrapped up neatly and quickly, Neumann said.

"It's not over yet. The war will go on for many decades," Neumann said. "This Iraq war is everything the president said it was: It's a war against terrorism. It's not some guy in a foxhole, it's seven or eight countries supporting terrorism."

That's a view that apparently continues to prevail among national Jewish groups, despite growing grassroots opposition. The American Israel Public Affairs Com-

mittee has been unstinting in supporting the war; in his speech to the AIPAC policy conference in May, Bush earned his biggest cheers when he mentioned Iraq.

In June, the American Jewish Committee awarded Australian Prime Minister John Howard its "Liberties Medallion,"

in large part for his role in defying his own public's opinion and allying with the United States in Iraq.

The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations never formally endorsed the war, but its daily e-mail bulletin to constituents often

links to articles supporting the war.

Such expressions of support derive from a tradition of American Jewish deference to two governments: Jewish leaders reflexively heed the sitting Israeli government, and Prime Minister Ariel Sharon is glad to have the United States on board as an ally against Arab recalcitrance; and the Bush administration's "with-us-or-against-us" posture on Iraq has cowed Jewish groups that value White House access.

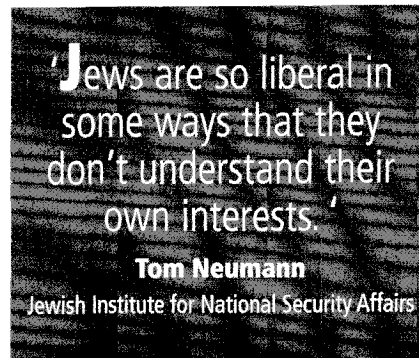
Still, there are signs that Jewish organizational leaders are beginning to edge toward a degree of criticism. The Anti-Defamation League, which expressed its support for Bush administration policy before the war, said in May that it was "deeply troubled" by allegations of prisoner abuse by U.S. troops. So did the Reform movement and the National Council of Jewish Women.

Berkley, the Nevada representative, suggested that a sense of betrayal underlies the growing anger.

A former AIPAC board member, Berkley recalls asking Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney before the war how Israel would factor into any invasion plan.

"The vice president explained in great detail at that meeting in the White House that they knew exactly where the weapons of mass destruction were located in Iraq that were aimed at Israel, and he assured me that when we went in, those missiles would be the first that the United States takes out," she said. "In retrospect, this administration had absolutely no idea what we were getting into."

"They deceived themselves, and in doing so they deceived the rest of us," she said. ■



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Victims of Nazi Gold Train seek reparations

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Progress is apparently being made in efforts to reach a settlement between the U.S. Justice Department and Hungarian-born Jews, who say the U.S. government mishandled their property that was seized from the Nazis during the Holocaust.

Negotiations are going well enough that both parties asked a federal judge Monday evening to postpone the next scheduled hearing on a class-action lawsuit by Holocaust survivors who were victims of the Hungarian Gold Train.

"We feel we are making enough progress to keep talking," said Sam Dubbin, a Florida attorney representing the victims in the suit.

Both sides say they want the hearing postponed until Dec. 1, but Judge Patricia Seitz, a U.S. district court judge in Miami, where the case is being handled, has yet to rule.

A train carrying possessions of 600,000 Holocaust victims — filling 29 boxcars — was seized by the United States in October 1945, shortly after the end of World War II.

The items had been confiscated by the Nazis before the Jews were sent to concentration camps.

U.S. officials at the time said they would return the property to Hungary, but some of the property was misplaced, some was used for homes and offices of Army officials and some was auctioned, according to court documents.

Estimates place the value of the property at between \$50 million and \$120 million in today's currency.

The victims filed suit in May 2001, seeking reparations, and have gained political support from both Democrats and Republicans in Congress for their case.

There are 25 plaintiffs in the case, which could benefit thousands of Hungarian survivors and their heirs, Dubbin said.

There is a \$10,000 limit in monetary awards that each beneficiary could receive.

Seitz, the U.S. district court judge, appointed Fred Fielding, a member of the 9/11 Commission, to mediate the case.

Fielding did not return calls requesting comment, and the Justice Department did not respond to an inquiry.

But in its motion to dismiss the case, a motion that is still pending despite the settlement talks, the government suggests there is no proof that the victims' properties are the ones seized by the United States.

"Plaintiffs cannot establish that the property which they are claiming in this lawsuit was on the Gold Train when the U.S. Army took control of the train or that, even if it had been, restituting it to Hungary — as Plaintiffs argue the United States should have done — would have enabled them to regain possession of it," the government said in its motion.

Much of the most valuable property had already been taken off, the government argued. And other items had been dispersed, making it impossible to determine the owner of each item.

The Justice Department also says in its brief that the statute of limitations on this case passed decades ago.

The U.S. government said it did not know what had happened to the Gold Train property until 1999, when a report by the Presidential Commission on Holocaust Assets in the United States determined that much of the merchandise was mishandled by the U.S. government.

Later investigations found looting by senior military officials.

The United States has worked to force other foreign countries and companies to pay restitution for possessions seized from Holocaust victims in that era.

The Gold Train victims have found support from numerous lawmakers. Seventeen senators, both Democrats and Republicans, signed a letter in May asking the Justice Department to settle the case.

And Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.) sent a letter to Karl Rove, a senior adviser to President Bush, late last month, asking for help in resolving the matter through mediation.

Democratic presidential contender

Sen. John Kerry also has called on the Bush administration to resolve the case.

"It is time to honor our obligation to these Holocaust survivors by quickly and fairly settling their claims," Kerry said in a statement. "Justice for Holocaust survivors is a test of our basic values. It is the right thing to do."

Dubbin said his 25 clients are elderly, and mediation would prevent them from waiting years for reparations, which would likely be the situation if the case continued through the courts.

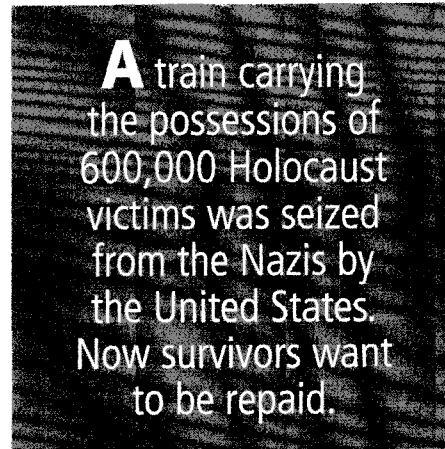
Baruch Epstein, a plaintiff in the case, said his mother had a receipt for a pocket watch and 99 pieces of gold that his grandfather placed in a bank in

Debrechen, Hungary, before being sent to Auschwitz, where he was gassed.

The 71-year-old resident of Hollywood, Fla, said he wished he had at least one piece of gold that he could hand down to his 15-year-old grandson as a family heirloom.

Epstein said he and his sister, who lives in Zurich, had tried to get the property from the Hungarian government before learning what became of property on the Gold Train.

"It is high time for the U.S. government to remove the black patch from itself," he said.



Israel criticizes E.U. on Syria

Israel criticized the European Union for signing a political and economic cooperation deal with Syria.

Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom told the Israeli newspaper Ma'ariv that it is ironic that the deal, signed Tuesday, comes as the United States is stepping up pressure on Syria, which the U.S. State Department lists as a sponsor of terrorism.

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Terror language leads to grant rejection

A civil liberties group said it would not take money from two major U.S. foundations because it considers the requisite anti-terrorist language in their grant agreements an attack on free speech.

The American Civil Liberties Union said it rejected money from the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations because the anti-terror provisions could impede work done by the ACLU and other organizations.

"Just because we weren't going to be intimidated or our speech wasn't going to be chilled doesn't mean we can overlook the potentially negative impact the language will have on other entities," said Nadine Strossen, the ACLU's president.

The foundations rules were put into place after a JTA investigative series last fall found that the Ford Foundation had funded virulently anti-Israel groups with links to terrorist organizations.

Bush campaigner to chat with Jews

A top Jewish adviser to President Bush's campaign is hosting an online chat with Jewish voters.

Jay Lefkowitz, a member of the Jewish Team for Bush and formerly the deputy assistant to the president for domestic policy, will take questions from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. Eastern Standard Time Thursday night.

Lefkowitz will discuss "how the President's values and strong record of accomplishment are important to the Jewish community," the campaign Web site said.

Participants may pre-register at <http://www.georgewbush.com/Chat/chatitem.aspx?ID=45>.

ADL blasts campus newspaper editorial

The Anti-Defamation League criticized an editorial in Duke university's campus newspaper.

Philip Kurian's piece, which ran after Jewish groups organized programming to balance a pro-Palestinian student conference last weekend, "contains a number of classic stereotypes about Jews, including charges of excessive wealth, power and a lack of concern for anyone but themselves," the ADL said in a statement.

In the piece, Kurian, a student at the school, wrote, "Regardless of your political stance or position on the PSM conference, it is impossible to ignore the unprecedented outpouring of the pro-Jewish, pro-Israeli support in defiance of free speech at Duke."

He also accused Jews of exploiting the "Holocaust industry" for political gain.

WORLD

Report: Anti-Semitism threatens France

Anti-Semitism and racism are threats to French democracy, according to a government-sponsored report.

In a 70-page document presented Tuesday to Interior Minister Dominique de Villepin, the report's author, Jean-Christophe Rupin, called for increased judicial involvement to fight anti-Semitism in schools, and the creation of a national center to compile details and statistics on anti-Semitism and racism.

More controversially, Rupin also suggested combating "radical anti-Zionists who were anti-Semitic by proxy" by the creation of new legislation that would outlaw comparisons of Israel to apartheid or Nazism.

Figures for anti-Semitic incidents in France between January and September this year reached some 166 acts and 166 threats, more than the total for all of 2003.

However, de Villepin said there had been a sharp drop in anti-Semitic incidents since June.

Shake-up at Russian Jewish group?

The Russian Jewish Congress is likely to have a new president in an apparent attempt to restructure one of Russian Jewry's leading organizations.

During a closed-door meeting Tuesday, the group's leading donors approved Vladimir Slutsker to replace the current president, Yevgeny Satanovsky, JTA has learned.

A banker and member of Russian Parliament's upper house, Slutsker is little known to the public.

A newcomer to Jewish public life, he joined the RJC leadership only this month by making a financial contribution of \$250,000.

Slutsker is believed to be close to Vladimir Ressin, the Jewish deputy mayor of Moscow, who has sought to overcome the existing split between the RJC and its major rival, the Federation of Jewish Communities, the Chabad-run organization that is the largest Jewish group in Russia.

RJC leaders still will have to vote on the choice of Slutsker as president. In an interview with JTA, Satanovsky downplayed the importance of the development and denied that any change in leadership has taken place.

Partnership aims to build Polish Jewry

A new partnership aims to build Jewish life in Poland and build interest in Poland among American Jews.

The Lauder-Taube Heritage Initiative is focusing on such areas as historical preservation and scholarship; religious education and spiritual life; traveling exhibitions; arts and media seed grants; and public education and outreach.

The program is a joint effort of the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation and the Taube Foundation for Jewish Life & Culture.

Lauder and Taube sat side by side at a Tuesday meeting of the Taube Foundation for Jewish Life & Culture in San Francisco, where he is the newest board member.

"Poland is a symbol of the center of Jewish life. It's a Jewish community that wants to be included and we should do everything we can to help them," said Lauder, the president of the Jewish National Fund.

Added Taube, president of the Koret Foundation, "People have to understand that then is then and now is now and move beyond the tragic history of Poland. There is new Jewish life in Poland."

MIDDLE EAST

U.S. envoy meets Egyptians

The top U.S. Middle East envoy is in Egypt, discussing Israeli-Palestinian relations with leaders there.

William Burns, assistant secretary of state for the Near East, met with Egyptian leaders Tuesday.

Egypt has a central role in ensuring a smooth transition should Israel withdraw from the Gaza Strip next year.

Israeli soldier slain

Palestinian gunmen killed an Israeli soldier at his West Bank base. The soldier was shot dead Tuesday as he lounged in his tent at Mevo Dotan, a settlement in the West Bank which has a military garrison.

The Al-Aksa Brigade, a terrorist wing of Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement, claimed responsibility.

Gaza bombers killed

Israeli soldiers killed two Palestinians who tried to plant a bomb on the boundary between the Gaza Strip and Israel.

The terrorists were shot dead Tuesday as they approached the fence at the Sufa crossing.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attempted bombing.