

IN THE NEWS

U.S. seeks Israeli flexibility

The United States suggested to Israel that it must be more flexible about negotiating under fire.

U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell told Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom on Monday that while deceased Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat was able to exert control over Palestinian terrorist groups, it's unclear whether new Palestinian leaders will have the same clout, and Israel may need to be more flexible in working the new leaders.

Shalom: Iranian nuclear move lacking

Iran's suspension of uranium enrichment is not enough, and Israel wants Iran to cease all nuclear-related activity.

"The real intention of the Iranians is to develop a nuclear bomb," Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom said Monday in Cleveland, where he is attending the United Jewish Communities' annual General Assembly. "The suspension of the enrichment of uranium is not enough."

Iran's agreement this weekend to temporarily suspend enrichment satisfies a European demand ahead of the International Atomic Energy Agency meeting at the end of this month, but Shalom said Israel would join the United States in pressing for a full shutdown of the program.

Florida vouchers struck down again

Florida's school voucher law is unconstitutional, a U.S. court ruled.

The 1st District Court of Appeal ruled Nov. 11 that the law is unconstitutional because it allows tax dollars to be spent on religious schools.

The decision is the third ruling against the 1999 law, which allows students attending public schools that earn failing grades to receive vouchers to help them attend private or parochial schools.

The appellate court asked the Florida Supreme Court to review the issue.



WORLD REPORT

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Powell, who pushed 'road map,' to step down, still popular with Jews

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Colin Powell didn't see eye-to-eye with many people in the Bush administration on a host of international issues, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict often seemed to top the list.

In an administration that generally has won positive reviews from the Jewish community for its pro-Israel sentiments, Powell, who announced his resignation as secretary of state Monday, has at times been the asterisk. His department has taken a more internationalist approach to the conflict and has been among the first to speak out against Israeli military actions that some considered provocative.

But many believe that by the end of his tenure Powell had been relegated to a more minor role, presenting a more appealing face to the Arabs and Europeans while the White House and Pentagon orchestrated a Middle East policy that often angered those same circles.

"I think, at a certain point, he gave up," said David Makovsky, senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "I tend to think that if he wasn't content, he was resigned to the idea that the U.S.-Israeli relationship was going to be driven by the White House."

When Powell joined the Bush administration, Jewish activists were hopeful. He didn't have a track record on Middle Eastern issues, but he also didn't have any negative connotations for Jewish officials at a time when many feared Bush would follow his father's example of confrontation with the Jewish state.

As head of the State Department, how-

ever, Powell favored reliance on Foreign Service officers and other career officials who traditionally have been more sympathetic to the Palestinian cause.

Powell was seen as forwarding that view, pushing for greater even-handedness between Israelis and Palestinians — at a time when Jewish officials were urging the administration to distinguish between victims and aggressors — and for more international involvement to resolve the region's problems.

"Powell represented an establishment that often was at odds with the views of the White House," said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

For example, Powell was an advocate of the "Quartet," a diplomatic grouping of the United States, United Nations, Russia and the European Union that devised the "road map" plan for Israeli-Palestinian peace.

He also advocated more international efforts in Middle East peacemaking, and his department often voiced concerns about Israel's anti-terrorist measures, such as the

assassination of Palestinian terrorist leaders, strikes that sometimes led to civilian deaths as well.

"We were disappointed with Powell for consistently criticizing Israel for 'overreacting' militarily to terror attacks, and for not making an issue out of the Palestinian media and educational systems, educating hatred and murder and not for peace," said Morton Klein, national president of the Zionist Organization of America.

The views of Powell and his department of

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BEHIND
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HEADLINES

■ *Colin Powell, well respected by U.S. Jews, announces his resignation*

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ten isolated him from other foreign policy analysts in the administration, especially in the Pentagon and National Security Council. Most famously, Powell was more hesitant about the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, but ultimately made a case for it before the United Nations General Assembly.

"It was clear he came from an internationalist school of diplomacy," said Lewis Roth, assistant executive director of Americans for Peace Now. "He saw the value of working in international law to try and solve problems multilaterally."

On the Israeli-Palestinian front, Powell was somewhat marginalized when Elliott Abrams joined the National Security Council in 2002. Abrams began traveling extensively through the region and became one of the key architects of recent Bush administration policy in the Middle East, including the announcement supporting Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's plan to withdraw unilaterally from the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank.

Through it all, however, Powell remained highly popular in the U.S. Jewish community. He was a well-respected leader from his stints in previous administrations, including his service as chairman of the U.S. military's Joint Chiefs of Staff during the 1991 Persian Gulf War. He was known to mix in a few words of Yiddish — learned when he worked for a Bronx shop owner while in high school — when addressing Jewish audiences.

Powell won further support from the Jewish community for skipping the U.N.'s

World Conference Against Racism in 2001 when it became clear the forum would become an avenue for anti-Zionist sentiment. He later ordered the U.S. delegation to walk out of the conference when the proceedings turned harshly against Israel.

"It wasn't a popular thing to do" internationally, said Stacey Burdett, assistant director of government and national affairs at the Anti-Defamation League. "That act was taking a stand against racism and hatred."

Abraham Foxman, the ADL's national director, said that on several occasions he and Powell discussed the Jewish community's views of him and his role in the Bush administration. Foxman said he thought Powell was serving as a good soldier in the Cabinet.

"I think throughout the four years, the one thing that came out was that Colin Powell was a team player," Foxman said.

Even when he announced his resigna-

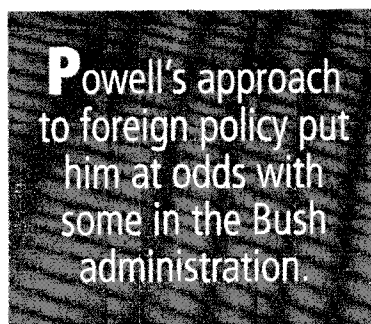
tion, Powell stressed to reporters that he would continue working on international issues until his replacement is confirmed by the Senate, and was expected to meet with the new Palestinian leadership next week when he travels to the Middle East.

He met Monday in Washington with Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom.

Several names have surfaced as possible replacements for Powell. Condoleezza Rice, President Bush's national security adviser, is considered the front-runner, though she has expressed more of

an interest in the Defense Department portfolio.

Other names mentioned are John Danforth, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations and former Republican senator, and Paul Wolfowitz, the deputy secretary of defense. Wolfowitz, seen as a key architect of the Iraq war, might have trouble winning Senate approval, analysts said. ■



Local Jews build new JCC in Ukraine

By VLADIMIR MATVEYEV

NIKOLAEV, Ukraine (JTA) — JCCs aren't usually considered architectural gems.

But the new JCC in this Black Sea port is an impressive structure for a city that hasn't seen much new construction since the fall of the USSR more than a decade ago.

"Now we have a home of our own, no more renting space on the side," said Yefim Itin, a 72-year-old retiree, echoing the pride that one could see on the faces of those members of the 7,000-strong Jewish community that gathered Nov. 9 for the building's official opening.

The center's three-story building features a contemporary design and interiors not usually seen in this region.

The 5,400-square-foot center includes a Jewish museum, library, classrooms, a computer class, drawing room and a social hall for meetings and holiday celebrations.

"The opening of a Jewish center is an important event both for the Jewish community and for the city of Nikolaev," said Vladislav Pronin, head of the department for national minorities and

migration with the Nikolaev Region State Administration.

Most of the facility's cost was covered by local donors — the Goldenbergs of Nikolaev; the Hersonskys of Kiev; the Maksimovs, immigrants to Israel from Nikolaev; and the family of Selwyn Forman of Britain, which has roots in Ukraine.

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee helped with the final push.

The idea of the center is the brainchild of Misha Goldenberg, head of the Nikolaev Jewish Culture Society.

But Goldenberg said credit should be divided between him and an American, Martin Horwitz, director of the Jewish Community Development Fund in Russia and Ukraine, a project of the American Jewish World Service.

Speaking at the official dedication, Horwitz said: "The opening of the JCC in Nikolaev is a good example of what different ethnic minorities and Jews in particular can achieve in today's independent Ukraine. You should all understand that nowadays much depends on your energy, your ideas and your actions." ■

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Jews expect less opposition to Justice nominee

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — For some national Jewish groups, Alberto Gonzales already has one thing in his favor as he enters a tough confirmation battle as President Bush's second attorney general: He isn't John Ashcroft.

Ashcroft was a lightning rod for criticism from liberal groups, and several Jewish leaders said seeing him resign as attorney general last week was a relief.

Ashcroft "was extreme in his policies and advanced an agenda that was antithetical to the National Council of Jewish Women's positions on issues," said Sammie Moshenberg, director of NCJW's Washington office.

NCJW is still assessing Gonzales, but Moshenberg — and other Jewish leaders who insisted on speaking off the record — said Gonzales was unlikely to face the same level of opposition Ashcroft did.

"Ashcroft was the exception, not the rule," Moshenberg said of NCJW's decision to formally oppose his nomination in 2001. "It is unusual for us to come out opposed to a presidential Cabinet pick. We're going into this looking at Gonzales' record with the presumption that he probably reflects the president's views, and the president is entitled to pick people who reflect his views."

Jewish legislators sounded a similar note.

"We will have to review his record very carefully, but I can tell you already he's a better candidate than John Ashcroft," said Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.).

Bush already knew Ashcroft was resigning when, after his re-election, he extended his hand to Americans who voted against him and pledged to move forward in bipartisanship.

In his handwritten resignation letter — signed with a typical religious flourish, "May God continue to bless, guide and direct you" — Ashcroft alluded to a recent illness. But Bush might also have seen an opportunity for outreach by replacing a polarizing figure with a relative moderate.

As a U.S. senator from Missouri, Ashcroft alienated many in the organized Jewish community when he introduced pioneering legislation in 1996 to funnel federal funds to religious institutions that provide social services.

In 2001, Ashcroft was confirmed as attorney general by a bare Senate majority,

reflecting an unusually high level of opposition for a Cabinet pick. Within weeks he was fulfilling some Jewish groups' fears, leading Justice Department staff in bible study sessions.

Ashcroft's avid pursuit of terrorists after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks led to further complications, especially with the civil liberties community. Especially galling to some were his emphasis on secrecy and his attempts to impose blanket closures on hearings involving immigrants.

Ashcroft was instrumental in the drafting of the Patriot Act, which passed overwhelmingly in the months after Sept. 11 and expanded the government's terrorism-fighting powers. Many in the Jewish community and in Congress felt Ashcroft interpreted the act's powers too broadly.

Marc Stern, co-director of the American Jewish Congress' legal department, said some of the criticism was unfair.

"The war on terrorism posed questions any attorney general would have found difficult," Stern said. "No one could have served in that position in a time such as this and escaped criticism."

Ashcroft got a much better reception from the Orthodox Jewish community, which welcomed his public expressions of faith and his opening of more doors for religion in government.

"We've had an incredibly productive four years," said Nathan Diament, director of the Orthodox Union's Institute for Public Affairs. "We urged them to make religious-liberty issues a specific priority for the department."

Diament said Ashcroft's Justice Department pushed to give religious groups and individuals equal footing under the law, advocating for religious land-use laws and backing school vouchers at the U.S. Supreme Court. The department also was a key player in the fight to give religious charities federal funds to provide social services.

"We were pleased that the Department of Justice, through its faith-based office, was the legal support team for the faith-based initiatives," Diament said.

Stern said Ashcroft tended to err on the side of prosecutorial zeal rather than civil liberties.

"Some of the criticism was merited," he said. "We believe his successor, Mr. Gonzales, will be able to adjust course to balance the war on terror with the distinct American values embedded in the Constitution."

As a Texas Supreme Court justice — who was appointed by then-Gov. George W. Bush — Gonzales earned a reputation as a relative moderate.

But some aspects of his service as White House counsel in the last administration troubled human-rights groups.

They charge that Gonzales' description,

in an internal memo in the lead-up to the Iraq war, of the Geneva Conventions as "quaint" and "obsolete" helped promote a lax culture that culminated in the abuses at the Abu Ghraib prison. Additionally, Gonzales consulted with Bush on nominations of conservative judges to federal courts.

Gonzales' effusive endorsement from the Christian Coalition also won't win him points with some Jewish groups.

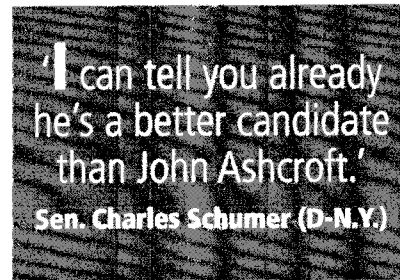
"We look forward to Alberto Gonzales — when he is confirmed as attorney general — continuing the tough policies instituted by Attorney General Ashcroft against terrorists which have protected America from another horrendous attack," said Roberta Combs, president of the powerful evangelical lobby group.

Some of Gonzales' pluses — his ethnic background and the fact that he is seen as less of an ideologue — will help him overcome the avid opposition Ashcroft inspired in so many.

Bush emphasized Gonzales' background as one of eight children of Mexican migrant workers, a nod to Hispanic Americans who voted for Bush on Nov. 2 in considerably greater numbers than they did in 2000.

While Jewish voters also gave Bush more support in 2004, it was predominantly because of his foreign policy rather than his social and domestic policy priorities. It's anticipated that Gonzales and other Bush administration officials will continue to reach out to religious conservatives, including Orthodox Jews, on those fronts.

(Staff Writer Matthew E. Berger in Washington contributed to this report.)



NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Full disclosure sought on Arafat

The Palestinian Authority asked French officials to release a medical report on Yasser Arafat's death.

The request was made Monday amid growing rumors among Palestinians that Israel poisoned the Palestinian Authority president.

Arafat succumbed to a mysterious illness in a military hospital outside Paris on Nov. 11.

Under French law, his widow, Suha, has the right to withhold details on his death, but she was not immediately available for comment on the Palestinian Authority request.

Nabil Sha'ath, the P.A.'s foreign minister, last week dismissed the possibility of poisoning.

Katyushas launched at Israel

Two rockets were fired at Israel from Lebanon, causing no casualties.

One of the Katyushas fired Monday was believed to have landed near the northern Israeli town of Shlomi, while the other did not cross the frontier.

Lebanese officials said they were investigating who was behind the salvo.

Hezbollah, which controls southern Lebanon, denied involvement, but in the past the Shi'ite militia has tacitly allowed Palestinian terrorist groups to launch cross-border attacks.

Shalom in dark about church divestment

Israel's foreign minister is unaware of plans by U.S. churches to divest from Israel.

Silvan Shalom, in Cleveland on Monday for the annual General Assembly of the United Jewish Communities, was asked what he thought the damage would be if the Presbyterian and Episcopal churches went ahead with plans to divest from companies dealing with Israel.

Shalom said he had nothing to say.

"I have not heard of this," he said.

The issue has been taken up by U.S. Jewish communal activists in recent months.

Relocation package inches forward

The Knesset budgeted compensation for Israeli settlers who volunteer to be evacuated under Ariel Sharon's Gaza withdrawal plan.

The \$8 million package was passed by a vote of 10-8 in the Knesset Finance Committee on Monday, two weeks later than expected.

Previous votes had been postponed until there was a clear committee majority for the Israeli prime minister's plan to withdraw from the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank next year.

Some \$7 million will go to settlers who volunteer to leave their homes before the September 2005 deadline, while the rest is to fund the Justice Ministry panel that drew up the relocation package.

Intifada costs billions

The four-year fight against Palestinian intifada terrorism has cost Israel's economy \$12.5 billion.

According to Treasury figures released this week, the service sector, especially tourism, has been hardest hit by the violence that erupted in September 2000.

The figure of \$12.5 billion is roughly equivalent to Israel's annual defense budget.

The Palestinians have lost \$4.5 billion in the past four years, a heavy blow given the fragile economic infrastructure in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

NORTH AMERICA

Mehlman likely to head RNC

President Bush tapped Ken Mehlman to lead the Republican Party. Mehlman, who is Jewish, won the president's endorsement to lead the Republican National Committee.

He served as chairman of President Bush's re-election campaign.

The party will officially choose its chairman next year, but Bush's endorsement is likely to prove pivotal.

Student paper runs anti-Semitic cartoon

The student newspaper at the University of Illinois apologized for an anti-Semitic cartoon.

In the strip in the Daily Illini, a student says he wants to tell a "Jew joke" but decides not to because he doesn't want "Isiah down at the bank to beat me with his nose," the Chicago Sun-Times reported.

The cartoonist, Matt Vroom, along with the editor who approved the strip, were both suspended.

In the apology, the paper's editor in chief, Evan McLaughlin, told the Sun-Times that even though Vroom "did not intend for the comic to degrade Jewish people or Judaism, we understand that the content was offensive to those concerned."

The strip was rejected for publication but was left in a folder with other cartoons.

A student filling in for several editors out of town at a journalism conference saw the strip and ran it.

Marrying for dollars

A Baltimore-based kosher organization is offering a cash prize to any matchmaker who marries off an Orthodox woman in the city.

The Star-K service said it is offering \$2,000 in response to a "crisis" among Orthodox singles, the New Jersey Jewish News reported.

The single woman must be at least 22 years and two months old at the time the engagement is announced.

WORLD

Argentine Jews appeal acquittal

Argentine Jewish groups appealed the acquittal of five defendants in the bombing of an Argentine Jewish center.

The DAIA Jewish political umbrella organization, the AMIA Jewish community center and the largest group of victims' relatives, Familiares de las Victimas, united Monday in the appeal.

Five locals were acquitted in September of involvement in the July 1994 attack on the AMIA center in Buenos Aires, which killed 85 people and wounded some 300. The bombing has never been solved.

Turkish bomb victims honored

Turks marked a year since the Istanbul synagogue bombings.

"Our citizens stood firm on that day and stand firm today in the wake of an attack on the Turkish republic's secular state. Terrorism will never achieve its aim," city official Kamil Basar told Jews and Muslims gathered Monday at Neve Shalom, one of two Istanbul synagogues targeted by suicide car bombers on Nov. 15, 2003.

Twenty-four people, most of them Muslim passersby, were killed in the attacks claimed by a local group linked to Al-Qaida.

At the second synagogue targeted, Beit Yisrael, Turkish flags were hung alongside pictures of victims.

"Let us not forget that it was not only our Jewish citizens who died but our Muslim citizens, too," local mayor Mustafa Sarigul said.

"We will work together for the peace of the world's people regardless of religion, language, race, culture or sect."