

## IN THE NEWS

## Israel to oppose rearming Palestinians

Ariel Sharon's top aide flew to Washington to argue against rearming the Palestinian Authority.

Dov Weisglass left for the United States over the weekend and is to meet Monday with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who has called on Israel to supply the Palestinian Authority with weapons and ammunition with which to rein in Gaza Strip gunmen.

## Pentagon: China spat will be resolved soon

Israel and the United States will resolve a dispute over the sale of arms to China "sooner rather than later," Pentagon spokesman Lawrence DiRita said last Friday said.

Shaul Mofaz, the Israeli defense minister, canceled a trip to Washington last week because the issue has yet to be resolved.

## Group upset over Iraqi constitution

The Anti-Defamation League urged the State Department to push for the removal of anti-Israel passages from Iraq's draft constitution.

"We hope the United States will encourage the drafters of the constitution to remove this objectionable, blatant anti-Israel discrimination in the draft text," the ADL's national director, Abraham Foxman, wrote July 27 to U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

"We are all hopeful that a democratic Iraq will be protected by a constitution that is free from bias and discrimination and will serve as a model for the entire region."

One article of the constitution states that "Any individual with another nationality (except for Israel) may obtain Iraqi nationality," while another article states that "Any Iraqi may have more than one nationality as long as the nationality is not Israel."

# WORLD REPORT

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## Congressional legislation would bar firms from penalizing Israel travelers

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

**W**ASHINGTON (JTA) — If Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz hadn't been denied life insurance because of her plans to travel to Israel, she wouldn't have believed it was possible insurance companies worked this way.

But now the Florida Democrat is working to make sure this stops being a problem for Americans who visit Israel.

On July 28, the first-year lawmaker introduced legislation with bipartisan support that would forbid insurance companies from denying policies based on legal foreign travel.

Currently, several major insurance companies routinely deny policies if applicants say they plan to travel to Israel, Kenya, Colombia or other countries deemed to be at risk of terror attacks.

"This is a blacklisting of American citizens who choose to go to specific countries because of their ethnic backgrounds," said Rep. Joseph Crowley (D-N.Y.), a co-sponsor of the Life Insurance Fairness for Travelers Act.

The legislation is similar to a bill, proposed last year and reintroduced July 28 by Rep. Rahm Emanuel (D-Ill.), that would prevent policy rejection based on past travel to high-risk countries.

The bills have been welcomed by numerous American Jewish groups. The two laws, taken together, could help numerous American Jews receive life insurance, and prevent

insurance companies from charging excessive fees to travelers.

Wasserman Schultz received a letter in March from American General Life Insurance Company, a subsidiary of AIG, informing her that her application for additional life insurance had been denied.

The application she completed for the insurance asked if she was planning foreign travel. She marked yes, having recently been elected to Congress.

On her way to Poland, she received a call from her husband, saying the company wanted to know which countries she was planning to visit. Although she had made no reservations yet, Wasserman Schultz said she would be going to Israel because she assumed she would travel there in a delegation of lawmakers within the next year.

"I know misrepresenting a fact on one of these forms is fraud," she said.

Joe Norton, a spokesman for AIG, said reinsurers, which provide insurance to insurance companies, require that travelers to Israel and several other countries be denied insurance.

"We're fully aware of the problem," Norton said. "We're looking for a solution and looking for answers."

Wasserman Schultz's bill would make it illegal to deny any person life insurance or discriminate in coverage based on legal foreign travel. Insurance companies would also be barred from charging excessive or unfair

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**'This is a blacklisting of American citizens who choose to go to specific countries because of their ethnic backgrounds.'**

**Rep. Joseph Crowley (D-N.Y.)**

## ■ Lawmakers work to make Israel travel discrimination illegal

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rates to international travelers.

The Life Insurance Anti-Discrimination in Travel Act, which Emanuel introduced the same day, would prohibit companies from using previous lawful travel experiences as a basis for denying coverage.

Wasserman Schultz, who is a co-sponsor of Emanuel's legislation, said the two bills were being introduced separately because they address separate issues, and to increase the chances one will pass.

But lawmakers acknowledge both are needed in tandem. Rep. Steve Israel (D-N.Y.) said he is planning a trip to Israel next month, and could be denied life insurance now because of his future travel.

"There has got to be a better standard," Wasserman Schultz said.

Several states have already passed similar legislation. Some state laws prevent policy denials based solely on previous travels, while others focus on both previous and future travel.

Lawmakers did not specifically call the insurance companies' policies anti-Semitic, but they did suggest it is an unfair practice.

They noted that numerous cities in the United States, and elsewhere around the world, are statistically more dangerous than cities in Israel.

Crowley, who is of Irish decent, said no one in his family was ever denied life insurance for potential travel to Northern Ireland, even at the height of the struggle between Catholics and Protestants.

The legislation will likely face strong opposition from the insurance industry. But Rep. Spencer Bachus (R-Ala.), a co-

sponsor of the bill and key member of the House Financial Services Committee, said the legislation came at an important moment. Insurance and reinsurance companies are expected to lobby for renewal of the Terrorist Risk Insurance Act, which provides government reimbursement to insurance companies for catastrophic losses from acts of terrorism.

He said if the companies want some-

thing from Congress, they will be asked to back these bills.

Wasserman Schultz said the industry's current policy could leave many Jews without protection.

"What's going to happen is it's either going to cause people not to travel to these countries, or not insure themselves and risk the results of what might happen," she said. ■

## Sharon mends fences in France

By LAUREN ELKIN

PARIS (JTA) — A year ago, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon caused a diplomatic flap when he urged French Jews to flee anti-Semitism at home and move to the Jewish state.

This year, just ahead of a fence-mending visit to Paris — called to repair rifts caused not just by the Israeli prime minister's comments but by France's pronounced pro-Palestinian tilt — the French Interior Ministry reported that anti-Semitic attacks had fallen by 48 percent in the first half of 2005, compared with the same period in 2004.

In 2004, 561 verbal or minor physical attacks were reported, versus 290 for this year. Violent acts, such as bombings or arson, are down from 148 to 49. Anti-Semitic graffiti has dropped as well — from 413 incidents the previous year to 241 this year.

The statistics were confirmed by CRIF, the umbrella organization of secular French Jewish groups.

"These results are the fruit of an effort begun in 2002, both through a productive dialogue with representatives of the Jewish community as well as a determined commitment by the domestic security services in the struggle against all forms of anti-Semitism," the report said.

The statistics came on the eve of a visit in which Sharon and French President Jacques Chirac each expressed their warm sentiments toward the other country.

In a working lunch July 27 that lasted two and a half hours, Chirac characterized Syria as a "threat to the stability of the region." The two leaders also discussed Lebanon and Iran.

Sharon rejected a French request to supply the Palestinian Authority security forces with arms and ammunition, noting that a P.A. policeman was involved in a terrorist attack over the weekend that killed an elderly Israeli couple.

On July 28, Sharon met with French Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy, who asked how France could help Israel reach an accord with the Palestinians. Sharon said the French should try to persuade P.A. President Mahmoud Abbas to take steps against terrorism, the Jerusalem Post reported.

Sharon later met with French Jewish leaders.

"The best means to guarantee the future of the Jewish people is aliyah," Sharon told the Jewish audience, according to the Post.

Unlike his earlier statement that so angered French officials, Sharon on July 28 did not tie his aliyah call to anti-Semitism. Though the number of anti-Semitic attacks in France is down, the past week saw more anti-Semitic incidents than usual, with attacks in the capital and its suburbs on July 19 and 20.

Then, on July 23, three bottles of hydrochloric acid were thrown at a Jewish school in the 18th District of Paris. No one was injured, though one of the bottles landed inside the school's synagogue while worshippers were celebrating Shabbat.

Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy visited the school, where he announced that "no act of anti-Semitism or racism is a minor act."

"The only strategy" to combat anti-Semitism, he said, is one of "zero tolerance."

On July 26, Sarkozy met with Roger Cukierman, CRIF's president, who thanked the interior minister, the chief of police and the Paris district attorney for their "efficient" pursuit of perpetrators of anti-Semitic acts. He suggested that local governments implement a plan to educate parents of teenagers on racism and anti-Semitism, organize visits to Auschwitz or the Shoah Memorial in Paris, and hold interreligious conferences.

The police chief, Pierre Mutz, suggested that newly assigned police officers might visit the Shoah Memorial as well. ■

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# Vatican, Israel engage in verbal sparring

By RUTH ELLEN GRUBER

ROME (JTA) — A public spat over the Vatican's attitude toward terrorism — and toward Israel — is straining relations between Israel and the Holy See just three weeks before Pope Benedict XVI is due to visit a synagogue in his native Germany.

The dispute erupted a week ago, when Israel protested that the pope had “deliberately failed” to include terrorist attacks in Israel in a July 24 condemnation of recent terrorism in Egypt, Britain, Turkey and Iraq. “We expected that the new pope, who on taking office emphasized the importance he places on relations between the church and the Jewish people, would behave differently,” an Israeli Foreign Ministry statement said.

Citing the July 12 suicide attack in Netanya that killed five Israelis, the statement called on the pope to condemn attacks “against Jews in the same way he condemns terror attacks against others.”

Escalating salvos from both sides culminated July 28 with an unusually harsh Vatican statement that accused Israel of breaking international law in its actions against Palestinians and declared that Vatican

policy would not be dictated by Jerusalem.

“It's not always possible to immediately follow every attack against Israel with a public statement of condemnation,” the Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro Valls said in the statement.

This was partly because “attacks against Israel were sometimes followed by immediate Israeli reactions not always compatible with the norms of international law,” he said. “It would, consequently, have been impossible to condemn the former and remain silent on the latter.”

He added, “Just as the Israeli government understandably does not allow its pronouncements to be dictated by others, neither can the Holy See accept lessons and directives from any other authority concerning the orientation and contents of its own declarations.”

Navarro's statement came in direct response to assertions made by Israeli Foreign Ministry official Nimrod Barkan to the Jerusalem Post that Israel had quietly protested that Benedict's predecessor, Pope John Paul II, had also refrained from condemning terror attacks in Israel.

Israel was now going public with such concerns, he said, in the hope that Benedict would change this policy.

Israeli and Vatican officials cooled their rhetoric over the weekend, but observers said the bitter dispute represented Benedict's first major diplomatic crisis since he was elected pope in April following the death of his predecessor.

“This is a very undiplomatic escalation of mutual accusations — each one more lamentable than the next,” said Rabbi David Rosen, the Jerusalem-based director of interreligious affairs for the American Jewish Committee, who assigned blame to both sides.

“There was indeed an original omission in the words of Pope Benedict that should have been corrected,” he said. “However, Israel's public reaction was so intemperate that it inevitably backfired.”

Nevertheless, he added, “Navarro Valls' latest comment suggesting that there is moral equivalence between terrorism and

Israel's reprisals in self-defense is a moral stain on the integrity of the church. I am sure that Pope Benedict had no knowledge that such a deplorable comment would be made in the name of the Holy See and I trust that he will find the opportunity to correct this serious aberration.”

Rosen called the affair a “very regrettable storm in a teacup” and predicted that it would blow over.

Observers said the spat seemed all the more unexpected because since he took office in April, Benedict has repeatedly pledged to further Jewish-Catholic relations both in statements and in

meetings with international Jewish leaders.

Benedict is due to meet with German Jewish leaders and visit the synagogue in Cologne on Aug. 19. It will be the first visit ever by a pope to a synagogue in Germany and the first to a synagogue since John Paul's landmark visit to Tempio Maggiore, or the Great Synagogue of Rome, in 1986.

Abraham Foxman, the national director of the Anti-Defamation League, and Gary Bretton-Granatoor, the group's interfaith affairs director, wrote to Navarro expressing concern about both the escalating rhetoric and Israel's omission from the “litany of places beset by terrorism.”

They said they were “especially troubled” by his assertion that Israel's policies broke international law and, like Rosen, said that it did not seem to reflect Benedict's thinking.

“This is a serious charge, and we cannot believe that Pope Benedict XVI would have made such a determination,” they wrote. “Nor can we believe that such a determination would have factored into a decision as to whether or not Israel should be included in a list of countries afflicted by wanton terrorism.”

Rome's chief rabbi, Riccardo Di Segni, decried the “clearly political polemics.”

The Holy See, he told the Corriere della Sera newspaper, is a “political institution, and, as such, has precise interests to protect in the chess game of the Middle East.”

He added, “I hope that Benedict, who knows theology so well, will quickly try to also understand the ways of politics and the art of diplomacy.”

**‘This is a very undiplomatic escalation of mutual accusations — each one more lamentable than the next.’**

**Rabbi David Rosen**

American Jewish Committee official

## THIS WEEK

### MONDAY

■ With Congress formally in recess, sources say President Bush may appoint John Bolton as U.N. ambassador as early as this week. The president has a right to make recess appointments until the start of the next Congress in January 2007. Senate Democrats have blocked Bolton's nomination, wanting more information on his alleged use of classified information against rivals in the State Department, and objecting to his tough calls for United Nations reform.

■ Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's top adviser arrives in Washington to consult with the Bush administration on the period following Israel's pullout from the Gaza Strip. Dov Weisglass will meet with officials at the State Department and National Security Council to discuss U.S. assistance in developing the Negev and the Galilee, the areas most likely to absorb the 10,000 settlers Israel evacuates from Gaza and a portion of the northern West Bank.

### TUESDAY

■ The World Union of Jewish Studies conference continues in Jerusalem. More than 1,000 participants from around the world are participating in the quadrennial conference, which began Sunday and ends Thursday.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### MIDDLE EAST

#### Welcome to Nitzanim

Israel unveiled a temporary housing developments for housing settlers evacuated from the Gaza Strip.

Only 130 of 350 homes planned for the Nitzanim park have been fully installed, but it was opened Sunday for orientation tours by Gaza settlers slated for evacuation next month.

Officials said the community, which is intended to provide temporary housing while evacuees decide on their final destinations, would soon be filled.

#### Anti-withdrawal rally could be OK'd

Israel signaled flexibility on a massive demonstration planned against the Gaza Strip withdrawal.

Interior Security Minister Gideon Ezra said Sunday that thousands of protesters would be allowed to rally in the southern town of Sderot as long as they do not try to march into the main Gaza settlement bloc, which has been sealed off by the army.

"Police will allow the anti-disengagement activists to demonstrate in Sderot only if they can prevent them from reaching Gush Katif. Police will be deployed as necessary to prevent a trek from Sderot southward," Ezra told Israel's Army Radio.

But the Yesha settler council has so far stood firm in its plan to turn the rally, scheduled for Tuesday, into a march on Gaza, after a similar effort earlier this month was disrupted by police.

#### Lesson in ethics

Israel's attorney general said trying Ariel Sharon's son on corruption charges would be a lesson in political ethics.

Menachem Mazuz indicted Omri Sharon last week on charges including fraud, breach of trust and perjury for his role in funding his father's race for the Likud Party leadership in 1999.

"I think that it is in the public's interest to send a clear message today, before elections are held, to all those who are meant to take part in the elections, that there is a price to violating funding laws and election laws," Mazuz told Israel's Channel Two television Saturday, referring to the national election scheduled for next year.

Omri Sharon, a Likud lawmaker, forfeited his parliamentary immunity, and a trial is expected in Tel Aviv Magistrates' Court. If convicted on all charges, he faces a maximum prison sentence of seven years.

#### Arabs, Israelis work together for clean water

Israeli and Palestinian groups are joining forces to collect and treat wastewater from the Palestinian city of Tulkarm.

The Hefer Valley Regional Council is working with local Tulkarm leaders to clean the water at a Jewish National Fund water-treatment center in Kibbutz Yad Hanna.

The project will help prevent pollution of the Alexander River, which the JNF has rehabilitated.

### NORTH AMERICA

#### Jewish leaders condemn church declarations

American Jewish groups called on the Disciples of Christ denomination to reconsider recent anti-Israel declarations.

In a letter released last Friday, representatives of the three major Jewish denominations and other large Jewish organizations expressed "grave concern" at the church's recent call for Israel to tear down its West Bank security barrier.

"We wonder with amazement why your denomination proposes an action that would render innocent individuals even more vulner-

able to terrorism," read the letter, which was addressed to the newly elected head of the church, Rev. Sharon Watkins.

But the letter commended the church for rejecting the use of economic sanctions, including divestment, against Israel.

Signatories included the Anti-Defamation League, Orthodox Union, American Jewish Committee, Jewish Council for Public Affairs, American Jewish Congress, Union for Reform Judaism and United Synagogue for Conservative Judaism.

#### Stem-cell bill future brightens

Jewish groups welcomed the Senate majority leader's announcement that he supports a bill to expand embryonic stem-cell research.

The statement by Sen. Bill Frist (R-Tenn.) brightened prospects for the bill, which President Bush opposes.

The legislation, backed by a wide swath of American Jewish organizations, including Hadassah and the Orthodox Union, passed the U.S. House of Representatives in May.

A Senate vote is not expected until September, but President Bush has vowed to veto the bill.

#### Daylight savings time extended

The U.S. Senate passed an energy bill that will extend daylight savings time by a month.

The bill passed last Friday originally was meant to extend DST by two months as an energy-saving measure.

That was reduced to a month — three weeks in spring and a week in the fall — after lobbying by Conservative and Orthodox Jewish groups concerned that the extension would force observant Jews to choose between saying morning prayers and getting to work on time.

The U.S. House of Representatives also passed the bill, and President Bush said he would sign it.

The change does not kick in until 2007.

### WORLD

#### U.N. to Lebanon: Rein in Hezbollah

The U.N. Security Council unanimously called on Lebanon to control its southern border with Israel.

"The Security Council calls upon the government of Lebanon to fully extend and exercise its sole and effective authority throughout the south, including through the deployment of a sufficient number of Lebanese armed and security forces," the council said last Friday in a resolution extending the mandate of its peacekeepers in southern Lebanon for another six months.

Hezbollah in recent weeks has increased its assault on Israeli border positions.

Israel withdrew in 2000 to U.N.-certified lines, but Hezbollah and the Lebanese government have used the continued Israeli presence in the tiny Shebaa Farms area as a pretext to continue attacks.

The 2000 U.N. ruling said the Shebaa Farms was Syrian, and its fate should be resolved between Israel and Syria.

#### Report: Allies didn't understand German codes

The Allies failed to understand coded Nazi messages regarding the Holocaust, a U.S. government report suggests.

The report, "Eavesdropping in Hell," said Britain intercepted messages beginning in 1941 that could have confirmed the scope of the Holocaust, The New York Times reported.

But the report said that the Allies could have done little with the information to save some of the 6 million Jews killed in the Holocaust.