

## IN THE NEWS

**Hezbollah attacks northern Israeli towns**

Hezbollah militiamen launched a massive assault on Israel's northern border.

At least one Israeli was killed Monday when the Lebanese militia shelled Mount Dov and other army positions along the border.

Dozens of shells fell near the northern towns of Metulla and Shlomi, prompting authorities to order residents to shelters. Hezbollah guerrillas also stormed Ghajhar, an Arab village straddling the Israel-Lebanon border, in an apparent bid to kidnap Israeli soldiers.

But the army, which has been on high alert for such an operation, fired first, killing at least four Hezbollah men.

**Florida county full of Jewish residents**

A new demographic study shows that one in five residents of Palm Beach County, Fla., is Jewish.

That makes the South Florida county, a sprawling area north of Miami that includes Boca Raton and West Palm Beach, the most densely Jewish-populated metropolitan area in the United States.

The study, co-sponsored by the Jewish federations of South Palm Beach and Palm Beach counties, will be formally released in mid-December.

**Pollard lashes out at Israeli officials**

Jonathan Pollard lashed out at the Israeli government, accusing it of not doing more to win his release from prison.

"The political establishment is really a mafia, a collective mafia, and they take care of their own," Pollard, a former U.S. Navy analyst serving a life sentence for spying for Israel, said in a recorded interview broadcast on Israeli television Monday.

**Due to Thanksgiving, the JTA World Report will not be published on Friday, Nov. 25.**

# WORLD REPORT

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## In Israel, sifting the aftermath of Sharon's political earthquake

By LESLIE SUSSER

**J**ERUSALEM (JTA) — Ariel Sharon's dramatic break with the ruling Likud Party is expected to have implications far beyond Israeli politics.

Sharon's move Monday to form a new centrist party, currently dubbed "National Responsibility," will undoubtedly change the Israeli political landscape — but seasoned politicians assert that the prime minister would not have embarked on such a risky political adventure unless he plans major peace moves with the Palestinians that he knows wouldn't be acceptable to the Likud.

Though Sharon denies it, some pundits say he is aiming to create a new political constellation in which he can withdraw Israeli forces from most of the West Bank and set a new, long-term border with the Palestinians.

The move leaves the Likud in disarray, looking for a new leader and with polls predicting a resounding defeat in early elections, expected in March.

Sharon set in motion the process leading to early elections Monday morning when he called on President Moshe Katsav and asked him to dissolve the Knesset. Sharon then sent a letter to Tzachi Hanegbi, chairman of the Likud Central Committee, informing him that he was resigning from the party.

The two moves added up to a political earthquake: early elections in March, with the prime minister running for re-election at the head of a new party.

Few doubt that Sharon easily could have returned to power on a Likud ticket. He was well ahead of his potential leadership rivals within the party, and with Sharon at the

helm, polls predicted a comfortable win for Likud in the elections.

So why did Sharon make his risky move?

For one, he is tired of having to deal with rebels in the Likud Knesset faction and widespread opposition to his peace moves in the party's powerful Central Committee.

At least half of the Likud's Knesset faction opposed the unilateral withdrawal from Gaza and parts of the northern West Bank, Sharon's crowning foreign policy achievement. The Central Committee, with a sizeable contingent of well-organized right-wingers, often rejected key policy initiatives.

"Staying in the Likud would have meant wasting time in internal political battles, rather than doing what needs to be done," Sharon declared at a news conference Monday evening.

Political pundit Sima Kadmon, writing in Yediot Achronot, summed up the prime minister's dilemma: He could easily win re-election on a Likud ticket, but then wouldn't be able even to begin carrying out his political agenda.

"If he stayed in Likud, his victories would be undermined by an inability to form a coalition or to govern," Kadmon wrote.

To avoid the strength-sapping opposition he encountered as Likud leader, Sharon wants to reform Israel's political and party systems in ways that give the leader more power. Instead of unwieldy coalitions, he wants to introduce something like the American presidential system — and in his new party, there will be no potentially oppositional central committee.

"The Israeli people want to see politics

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NEWS  
ANALYSIS

## ■ Polls suggest Sharon faces a tight race with Labor leader Amir Peretz

*Continued from page 1*

in a different key," said Justice Minister Tzipi Livni, one of five Likud Cabinet ministers who left Likud with Sharon.

In his news conference, Sharon insisted that there would be no further unilateral withdrawals from the West Bank and said he intends to scrupulously follow the internationally approved "road map" peace plan — which envisages further Israeli territorial concessions — provided the Palestinians first meet their road map commitment to disarm terrorist groups.

Several leading pundits, however, are convinced that Sharon must have more up his sleeve: If all he wants is to mark time with the road map, there would have been no real reason for him to leave the Likud, they argue.

Ma'ariv editor Amnon Dankner maintains that, if he's re-elected, Sharon will put forward a far-reaching political plan.

"His confidants are speaking about the possibility of establishing a new, very far-reaching line as Israel's eastern border with the Palestinians, a line that will be decided on in consultation with the Americans," Dankner writes. "The pullback will be carried out with the understanding and cooperation of the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah, but only after the Americans announce that they recognize it at least as a temporary, de facto border, until a final settlement in the far distant future."

Dan Naveh, one of six Likud ministers who did not follow Sharon out of the party,

claims that Sharon is only saying there will be no further withdrawals in order to attract Likud voters.

So far, 14 of the Likud's 40 Knesset members have joined Sharon. That's just enough to secure recognition by the Knesset as a breakaway faction entitled to significant public funding and air-time in the upcoming campaign.

The one prize Sharon wanted but didn't get was Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz, who decided to stay in the Likud and compete for its leadership. Other prime candidates for Sharon's new party include Labor legislator Haim Ramon; the former chief of the Shin Bet, Avi Dichter; and the president of Ben-Gurion University, Avishai Braverman, a highly regarded economist.

What are the new party's chances of success? In the past, several breakaway centrist parties have started with a bang and ended with a whimper. But none of those was led by a popular sitting prime minister, and initial polls suggest that

National Responsibility is likely to do well.

A weekend survey in Yediot Achro-not, taken before Sharon announced his new party, already showed it garnering 28 seats, tied with Labor under its new chief, Amir Peretz. Both parties placed well ahead of a Likud led by the new leadership front-runner, former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, which got 18 seats in the poll.

Sharon, the general who combined five disparate parties to form the Likud in 1973 and create a real challenge to decades of uninterrupted Labor rule, now has moved to marginalize the party he claims is dangerously out of control.

If he succeeds, he will add another chapter to a remarkable military and political career. More importantly, his bold new initiative almost certainly will have major consequences for Israel's future. ■

**Sharon's 'confidants are speaking about the possibility of establishing a new, very far-reaching line as Israel's eastern border with the Palestinians.'**

**Amnon Dankner**

Ma'ariv editor

## E.U. OKs border job

BRUSSELS (JTA) — The European Union authorized monitors for the border between the Gaza Strip and Egypt.

Under Monday's agreement, the European Union will send a unit of monitors to the Rafah border terminal by week's end so Palestinians can leave and enter Gaza.

The Palestinian Authority hopes that a total of 50-70 monitors ultimately will be posted at Rafah.

The European Union also said it would send observers to Palestinian Authority parliamentary elections in January.

According to Benita Ferrero-Waldner, an E.U. official, the observers will not hold formal contacts with Hamas, but neither will they shun members of the Islamic terrorist group who run in elections. ■

## Israeli arrested in West Bank

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An Israeli was arrested for trying to retrieve his son's stolen bicycle in the West Bank.

The Palestinian Authority said Monday its police had taken the man into custody after he came to the city of Kaikilya,

intent on finding the thieves and buying back the bicycle.

The man was handed over to Israeli authorities, and could face charges of violating a ban on entry to Palestinian Authority areas. ■



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# Reform Jews oppose Iraq war, Alito

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

HOUSTON (JTA) — The Reform movement in the United States has voted overwhelmingly to oppose both the war in Iraq and the nomination of Judge Samuel Alito for the U.S. Supreme Court.

The resolutions passed here over the weekend put the Union for Reform Judaism, the umbrella body of Reform congregations, front and center in the political debates roiling Washington.

The stances also place the movement, the largest stream in the United States, at odds with much of the organized Jewish community, which has avoided controversial stances on key political issues in recent years.

A White House official called the movement's Iraq resolution "deeply disappointing and short-sighted." The official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, suggested the Bush administration went into Iraq to fight political and religious persecution. He compared Iraq to the genocide in Darfur, where the Reform movement has sought White House intervention.

"You can't say you want us to get out of this conflict, if you want the president to get involved in Darfur, which are the same issues," the official said.

But participants at the movement's biennial convention here last week said the positions are in tune with what many American Jews are saying at home, or at least where they likely will be heading.

"I honestly think we're ahead of the curve," said Rabbi Jack Paskoff, 44, of Congregation Shaarai Shomayim in Lancaster, Pa. But, he added, he didn't think the movement was as outspoken as it should be.

Throughout the halls of the vast George R. Brown Convention Center, participants seemed determined to mitigate the stronghold they say Christian conservatives have on American politics. On both resolutions, participants said, they were angry and fearful of the impact decisions made today would have on future generations.

"There is an overbidding disgust of politicians in Washington who aren't getting the job done," said Richard Davis, a retired salesman from Houston.

The disdain for those in power in Washington was palpable throughout the convention, which brought together some 4,000 Jews from congregations across the United States.

Ironically, the votes against the Bush administration policies occurred in the George Bush Ballroom of the convention center, named for the current president's father, who once represented Texas in Congress.

The disdain extended to the union's president, Rabbi Eric Yoffie, who used his address Saturday to chastise the religious right.

"We are particularly offended by the suggestion that the opposite of the religious right is the voice of atheism," Yoffie said. "We are appalled when 'people of faith' is used in such a way that it excludes us, as well as most Jews, Catholics and Muslims.

What could be more bigoted than to claim that you have a monopoly on God and that anyone who disagrees with you is not a person of faith."

He called the religious right's opposition to gay rights reminiscent of the Nazis.

"We cannot forget that when Hitler came to power in 1933, one of the first things that he did was ban gay organizations," Yoffie said.

The Iraq war resolution called for some troops to be withdrawn beginning next month, and sought more transparency on the war and a clear exit strategy for the conflict. The resolution also calls for an examination of prewar intelligence.

While the resolution doesn't explicitly oppose the war, the movement hailed it as such, making it the first major American Jewish group to take that stance.

The timing was significant. The vote came a day after Rep. John Murtha (D-Pa.), a senior lawmaker known for his military expertise, called for an immediate withdrawal of forces — and on the same day that the House of Representatives, after a rancorous debate, voted against bringing troops back home right away.

Some here wanted the union to debate an immediate withdrawal as well, officials said, but an amendment to the resolution was not introduced.

Indeed, only one person lined up to speak against the war resolution, and it passed by an overwhelming voice vote, after limited debate.

The debate on Alito was more extensive,

but focused largely on the merits of speaking out against the nomination before his confirmation hearings conclude in January.

"No man should be presumed guilty before getting a proper hearing," said Rob Weisgrau of Cardiff By The Sea, Calif. "Before this process has gone through, I don't think we can take a stand."

Despite a spirited

presentation from Jeff Wasserstein, a self-proclaimed liberal Jew who clerked for Alito and said the judge had a strong respect for precedents, few seemed convinced the judge would further the movement's core values.

The resolution said Alito "would threaten protection of the most fundamental rights which our movement supports" and "would shift the ideological balance of the Supreme Court on matters of core concern to the Reform Movement," including reproductive rights and separation of church and state.

The union became the second major Jewish group to oppose Alito, joining the National Council of Jewish Women.

The White House official called the Alito resolution "misguided."

"If you look at Judge Alito's record, he has a tremendous record on welcoming religion into our lives and arguing we all should have the freedom to worship," he said.

Many at the biennial said they were looking for the Reform movement to speak out more on controversial issues, to mirror the intense feelings of local Jewish communities.

"I get the sense back home that there is a real level of frustration about the war in Iraq," said Rabbi Harley Karz-Wagman of Temple Beth Or in Everett, Wash. "The dislike and the betrayal is a lot stronger than what our resolution says."

That is not the case everywhere, however. Some participants from smaller and more conservative Jewish communities said the Reform movement's positions went beyond where their peers are.

"I think most of the community looks at the national organizations for leadership. They need to take a position so people can see how it fits with their community," said Marzy Bauer, a hospital administrator from South Bend, Ind.

(JTA correspondent Sue Fishkoff contributed to this report.)

**'I honestly think we're ahead of the curve.'**

**Jack Paskoff**  
Reform rabbi

**FOCUS  
ON  
ISSUES**

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## WORLD

### E.U. to monitor Palestinian elections

The European Union will send a team of observers to monitor Palestinian legislative elections, scheduled for Jan. 25.

The observers will be deployed in mid-December, allowing them to monitor preparations for the elections and help Palestinian officials meet international standards.

The European Union plans to send 172 observers.

So far, the European Union has allocated around \$20 million to the electoral process.

### German Reform Jews to get state funding

Reform Jewish communities in Germany became part of the Central Council of Jews in Germany.

The decision to admit liberal Jewish associations, and thus to include them in distribution of federal funds, was announced Monday after a vote of the council's board.

The announcement was welcomed by the German Reform group and by the Central Council, which is non-denominational but whose members since World War II have largely been traditional communities.

### Catholic traditionalist wants Jews to convert

Pope Benedict XVI should try to convert Jews, a leader of a break-away Catholic group said.

"Jews and members of other religions should be told to convert because they are members of false systems," Franz Schmidberger said.

Schmidberger is an official with the Society of Saint Pius X, which does not recognize the decisions of the Second Vatican Council of the 1960s, when Jews were absolved of collective responsibility for Jesus' death. Benedict has emphasized the importance of interfaith discussions and respect for Judaism since taking over as pope in April.

### Group helps quake victims

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee donated \$100,000 for earthquake relief in South Asia.

The JDC said the group would help parts of Pakistan and India that were devastated by the Oct. 8 earthquake, which killed 73,000 people. The money will go to projects that provide winter-ready shelters, bedding and psychological support, among others.

### Swiss racist to keep rank

A Swiss lieutenant and Hitler admirer who was sentenced to two months in prison will be allowed to serve as an officer in the Swiss army.

Along with two dozen other extremists, the officer attacked people at an anti-racism rally near Lucerne last year.

### Palestinian week in Ireland protested

The Embassy of Israel in Ireland sent an open letter to the provost of Trinity College, Dublin, protesting a "Palestinian Awareness Week."

The letter charges that the scheduled events, which include public meetings, films and a protest outside the offices of a construction firm that does business in Israel, "is less concerned with raising Palestinian awareness than with anti-Israel activity."

The embassy was particularly concerned about a scheduled debate on the academic boycott of Israel, which the letter described as "anathema to the concept of free academic expression."

The Palestinian week was held Nov. 14-18 at Trinity College, Ireland's oldest university, and was organized by the Trinity One World Society.

### Group blasts Ukrainian university

The Simon Wiesenthal Center called on Ukraine to rescind the accreditation of a Ukrainian university that backed a call by Iran's

president to destroy Israel. The university, known as MAUP, is known for its anti-Semitic publications.

"By supporting Ahmadinejad's threat to Israel, MAUP's consistent Jew-baiting now culminated in an endorsement of genocide," said Rabbi Abraham Cooper, the Wiesenthal Center's associate dean, referring to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

The international community criticized Ahmadinejad's comments.

### Latin American Jewish leaders meet

Democracy, human rights, security and terrorism were the focal points of a meeting hosted by the American Jewish Committee's Latin America Institute.

More than 100 people participated in the two-day meeting, held last week in Buenos Aires.

Presidents of the Jewish communities of several South American countries took part, as did experts from the Organization of American States.

## MIDDLE EAST

### Arabs suspected of revenge killing

Two Israeli Arabs are suspected in the political murder of a Jewish woman.

Haifa District Court indicted the two men from the Arab village of Baka Al-Gharbiya on Monday after they confessed to bludgeoning Katie David, an off-duty security guard, last month.

Security sources suspect the murder was revenge for the killing of four Israeli Arabs by a Jewish terrorist in the northern town of Shfaram in August.

### P.A. finance man quits

Palestinian Authority finance minister Salam Fayyad, an internationally respected reformer, quit.

Fayyad, who resigned Saturday, said he wanted to run in Palestinian legislative elections, scheduled for January.

Fayyad also reportedly was frustrated with the Palestinian Authority's inability to face its financial issues.

Fayyad's presence in the government was seen as a key to restoring the confidence of international donors after years of P.A. corruption under Yasser Arafat.

### Israeli peace group probed

Israeli police opened an investigation into a left-wing group that it suspects has been paying Israeli soldiers not to serve in the military.

Officials with the organization, which is known as Yesh Gvul, denied the charges.

## NORTH AMERICA

### Reform Jews support Katrina victims

Reform congregations in North America have contributed more than \$3 million to victims of Hurricane Katrina.

Reform congregations also have sent volunteers, clothing and food to Jewish and non-Jewish victims of the storm.

### Groups combat domestic violence

Two Jewish groups partnered to fight domestic abuse.

Jewish Women's International and the New York Board of Rabbis launched Sh'ma Kolenu, or Hear Our Voice, last week.

The project aims to educate area rabbis about domestic violence and how to stop it.

The organization hopes the project will serve as a model for other communities across the United States.