

IN THE NEWS

Mofaz warns Iran over Ahmadinejad

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad will bring disaster upon his people, Israel's defense minister said.

Shaul Mofaz's remarks, in an address to the Herzliya strategy conference Saturday, added to speculation that Israel could take military action to prevent Iran from attaining nuclear weapons, especially in light of Ahmadinejad's recent statements questioning the Holocaust and calling for Israel to be "wiped off the map."

Though he stopped short of threatening military action, the defense minister said Israel "will not reconcile itself" to Iran getting the bomb.

An Iranian official brushed off Mofaz's comments. "Israel knows just how much of a fatal mistake it would be" to attack Iran, Foreign Ministry spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi told reporters.

Judge's comments highlight AIPAC case

The judge in the leak case against two former staffers of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee said classified information laws bind civilians, including journalists.

"Persons who have unauthorized possession, who come into unauthorized possession of classified information, must abide by the law," U.S. District Judge T.S. Ellis III said last Friday. "That applies to academics, lawyers, journalists, professors, whatever."

Ellis had just sentenced Lawrence Franklin, a former Pentagon analyst, to more than 12 years in prison for communicating classified information. Franklin is expected to testify in the case against former AIPAC staffers Steve Rosen and Keith Weissman when it goes to trial April 25.

The two men allegedly relayed classified information to an Israeli diplomat, a journalist and to fellow AIPAC staffers.

Ellis' comment was the clearest sign yet that the Rosen-Weissman case could have broad First Amendment implications.

WORLD REPORT

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Despite flap over scholar's ties, Brandeis stands behind Shikaki

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A Palestinian academic affiliated with Brandeis University dismissed allegations that he is linked to Islamic Jihad, and says he's not worried about attempts to persuade Jewish groups to cut him off.

Khalil Shikaki's employment at the Boston-area, Jewish-sponsored university came under fire from the Zionist Organization of America, which called on donors to reconsider their relationship with Brandeis. ZOA alleged that Shikaki distributed funds on behalf of figures associated with Islamic Jihad.

Shikaki flatly denied this.

"There was no transfer of funds," he told JTA on Jan. 19.

Shikaki, who heads the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research in Ramallah in the West Bank, co-teaches a course at Brandeis on peacemaking with an Israeli and an Egyptian academic.

He told JTA that the FBI interviewed him in 2003, showing him transcripts of 1995 conversations with Sameeh Hammoudeh, who was acquitted Dec. 6 in a Florida court of charges that he helped fund the Palestinian terrorist group.

Shikaki said the conversations, secretly recorded by the FBI, concerned funds for an orphanage in the West Bank city of Nablus run by his in-laws. The FBI never contacted him again, he said.

His efforts to fund the orphanage came from "a personal desire to help people," Shikaki said.

The government argued in its case against Hammoudeh and three others that "orphan-

ages" was a code word for Islamic Jihad, an organization led by Shikaki's brother Fatih until he was slain by Israeli agents in Malta in 1995.

An FBI spokesman refused to comment on the matter.

The revelation of the tapped conversations in the New York Sun last week led the ZOA and some individuals to call on Brandeis, a university with a strong Jewish donor base, to cut off Shikaki.

The ZOA "urged donors to reconsider their support for Brandeis unless the university responds appropriately," it said in a statement.

Brandeis says it is standing by Shikaki, noting that U.S. law enforcement never pursued any action against him.

"We believe that we still live in a country where people are presumed innocent until proven guilty," Brandeis President Jehuda Reinharz said in a statement. "If anyone has any real evidence against this individual, then they should bring it forward. The university has complete faith in the United States' law enforcement agencies, and no charges have ever been brought against Professor Shikaki. Should something arise in the future, the university will take that into account and act accordingly."

Morton Klein, ZOA's president, said the university's standard was too low.

"The standard shouldn't be 'innocent until proven guilty'; that's woefully inadequate," Klein told JTA. "There should be no taint at all."

Stephen Flatow, whose daughter Alisa, a Brandeis alumnus, was killed in a 1995 Islamic Jihad terrorist attack in the Gaza Strip,

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BEHIND
THE
HEADLINES

■ Brandeis is standing behind Shikaki, saying alleged terrorist links have not been proven

Continued from page 1

also criticized the university, the Forward reported, though he stopped short of endorsing a boycott.

Shikaki, whose polls have uncovered strains of moderation among Palestinian voters, say he often has been the target of such campaigns by supporters of Israel who oppose compromise with the Palestinians.

Another such campaign did not prevent him from addressing the American Israel Public Affairs Committee policy conference in 2004, he said.

"I'm aware of people who have tried to prevent American Jewish groups from associating with me," he said. "In all cases, they have failed."

He suggested that such groups fear Palestinian moderation will hasten Israeli withdrawals from land the Palestinians claim.

Klein rejected the depiction of Shikaki as a moderate.

"We're upset about his being at Brandeis because the evidence is too strong he is involved with terrorist groups, and I've never heard him unequivocally condemning the Palestinian Authority for not dismantling terrorists," Klein said.

Shikaki tries to avoid opinion in his presentations, focusing on analysis. In a Jan. 19 presentation at the U.S. Institute of Peace, a government-run think tank in Washington, he predicted that P.A. President Mahmoud Abbas' failure to disarm Hamas would harm relations with

the United States if Hamas joins the P.A. government after Wednesday's legislative elections.

"Washington will have a hard time dealing with Hamas being in government at a time when Hamas does not recognize Israel" and keeps its weapons, Shikaki said.

The transcripts reported in the New York Sun suggest that the contact with Hammoudeh and his colleagues made Shikaki uncomfortable. Hammoudeh asks Shikaki on Jan. 15, 1995, "If you please, do us a favor. There is an amount of money for orphans in Nablus."

Shikaki replies: "Um...Eah. (pause, sighs.) Okay, when do you want to give it to them."

Shikaki cut off Hammoudeh a few weeks later, five days after President Clinton signed an order in late January 1995 designating Islamic Jihad as a terrorist group.

"If you have another way to give them money, any way but my way," the transcript records Shikaki as telling Hammoudeh on Jan. 28, 1995.

A February 1995 wiretap records Mazen al-Najjar, who was deported in 2001 because of his alleged Islamic Jihad ties, complaining to a colleague that "Khalil refused to receive" funds for orphans. Al-Najjar also suggests that the "Orphan Sponsorship Project" had used a Florida bank account in Shikaki's name.

Al-Najjar is a brother-in-law of Sami al-Arian, a professor who was the principal defendant in the Florida case. The jury acquitted al-Arian on some charges and

deadlocked on others.

Shikaki said his decision not to work with Hammoudeh had nothing to do with Clinton's order.

"At the time, I wasn't aware of Clinton's decree," he said.

Shikaki often works with Jewish groups. He has been a frequent guest of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, a think tank with a pro-Israel emphasis.

In 2003, a mob ransacked Shikaki's Ramallah offices and injured him after he published a poll showing that very few Pales-

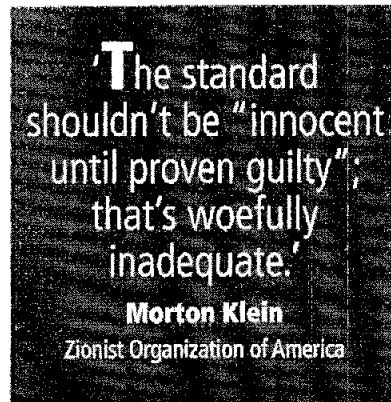
tinian refugees would actualize a "right of return" to Israel even if it were granted. Palestinian leaders have portrayed such a right as sacrosanct.

Shikaki also has a relationship with USIP, where he spoke Jan. 19 about the seeming contrast between moderation among mainstream Palestinians, which he said was increasing, and growing support for Hamas, a rejectionist terrorist group.

Shikaki predicted that Hamas would not win outright in the Palestinian elections, but would make a strong enough showing to join a coalition government.

Palestinian voters "turned to Hamas because they were angry, they turned to Hamas because they wanted clean government," he said.

He also projected that Abbas, a relative moderate, would use a Hamas alliance to crush Islamic Jihad after the elections. He said Islamic Jihad has little support among Palestinians, and mostly follows Iran's agenda.



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Palestinians rank peacemaking low

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Palestinians care far more about internal security and the release of prisoners than about negotiating peace, a new poll shows.

The highest-ranking issues in the poll, released ahead of Wednesday's Palestinian legislative elections, were, in order of importance: release of prisoners from Israeli jails, creating internal security, forging national unity, increasing

employment and fighting corruption. Confronting Israel and negotiating peace were much lower down.

The poll was commissioned by the Arab American Institute and was taken last week; results were published last Friday. The president of the institute, James Zogby, said Israel's unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip helped explain the low priority given to peace talks.

Latvian proposal would return Jewish properties

By YASHA LEVINE

RIGA, Latvia (JTA) — The dilapidated carcass of a wooden synagogue that dates back to before World War II stands on a side street of Jurmala, a 30-minute train ride from the capital of Riga.

This synagogue is one of many such Jewish communal properties in this Baltic nation currently in the government's possession. But this may change soon: A proposed Latvian law would return some 200 properties to the country's Jewish community — and could go a long way toward making the community self-sufficient.

Latvia's prewar Jewish population numbered 100,000, and the community owned a large number of communal and private properties here.

In 2003, the Council of Latvian Jewish Communities was organized as an umbrella organization to unite 12 Jewish

organizations scattered around eight Latvian cities, representing roughly 10,000 Latvian Jews.

One of the primary objectives of the council was to facilitate the restitution process, says Gennady Trifisik, a representative of the Jewish community of Jurmala.

The cash-strapped community is in dire need of a resolution to the current property situation. The Jurmala synagogue, for instance, is rented by the state to the Jewish community, which formerly owned the building. But as long as the future of the property's ownership is uncertain, the community is not ready to make the costly repairs the synagogue needs in order to function.

Instead, to cover costs, the community is subletting the building. It now houses a small produce market and deli, which, ironically, sells pork.

According to Arkady Suharenko of the Council of Latvian Jewish Communities and Congregations, a 1992 Latvian law allowed for the restitution of Jewish property, but required only the return of communal properties to observant Jewish communities.

Thanks to this law, a number of historic Jewish properties were regained, including Riga's Jewish Theater and Jewish Hospital, as well as some prayer halls and synagogues around Latvia.

But at the time, Latvia's Jewish communities were poorly organized and many missed the 1996 deadline to make their claims. Additionally, a number of communal properties in prewar Latvia were actually registered as private property and thus could not be claimed by the Jewish community under the previous law, local Jewish leaders say.

The new proposal will instead create a centralized list of all the contested properties and the compensation requested for each of them — either in the form of the property itself, an alternative property or monetary compensation.

By pre-negotiating the properties, the

community hopes to expedite the legislative process. To further smooth the process and possibly to minimize anti-Semitic reaction, the bill will not make claims to Jewish property in private hands.

"We want to push this through the Cabinet and Parliament as fast as possible," Suharenko says.

There is a parliamentary election this year in Latvia, and new lawmakers could make the law's passage uncertain.

There is a potential problem with the new law: Ninety percent of the prewar Latvian Jewish population perished during the Holocaust. Most of the Jews now living in Latvia arrived during the Soviet period

— Latvia was part of the Soviet Union from 1945 to 1989 — and cannot make a direct hereditary claim to the property of the prewar Latvian population.

Solomon Bukin-golts, a Jewish economic adviser to the Latvian president, says the issue is being resolved.

Suharenko is optimistic about the outcome, calling the attitude of the Cabinet members involved in the drafting "well-intentioned and constructive."

Since the proposal is still being drafted, neither the list of the claimed properties nor the estimated value of the restitution is being disclosed.

At the moment, Latvia's Jewish community heavily relies on financial aid from international Jewish organizations for survival — the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and Chabad are two of its biggest sponsors.

But that may change. If the process is successful, the community plans to establish a trust fund overseen by a board of Jewish organizations to manage the assets of the restitution, which may be in the tens of millions of dollars.

"The Jewish community in Latvia has been on its way to self-sufficiency. If the restitution process goes as planned, the community will be able to fully support itself and also help other Jewish communities," says Andres Spokoiny, the Paris-based JDC country director for the Baltic states.

**ACROSS THE
FORMER
SOVIET
UNION**

THIS WEEK

MONDAY

Canadian voters go to the polls. Despite the historic ties between the Jewish community and both the centrist Liberals and the left-leaning New Democrats, many observers predict that the Canadian Jewish vote will shift to the right.

TUESDAY

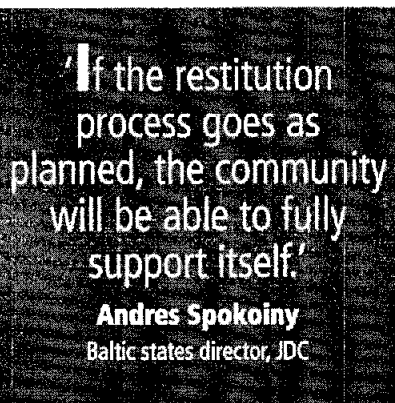
The City Council of Tenafly, N.J., is scheduled to vote on a settlement that allows for the building of a Sabbath boundary. The vote would settle the long-standing controversial issue regarding the eruv, which permits observant Jews to carry some items and push carriages and wheelchairs on the Sabbath.

WEDNESDAY

Palestinians elect a new legislative council. Polls show Hamas will win at least a third of the seats, probably necessitating their inclusion in a Palestinian government. Israeli officials have vowed not to negotiate with Hamas until the group lays down its weapons.

THURSDAY

The United Nations sponsors a candlelight vigil in honor of the Holocaust at the Fifth Avenue Synagogue in New York City. The event helps kick off the United Nations' first commemoration of Holocaust Memorial Day on Friday. An exhibit of memoirs written by Holocaust survivors will also be displayed this week at the United Nations.



NEWS IN BRIEF

WORLD

Russia mulls security for religious sites

The Russian government may be prepared to bring the religious sites of St. Petersburg's main faiths under partial police protection.

Representatives of the St. Petersburg Jewish community met with Ilya Klebanov, the representative of the Russian president in the St. Petersburg region, to discuss the growing trend of racial hatred.

The meeting was held in response to two recent synagogue attacks in Russia — one in Moscow, the other in Rostov-on-Don.

"Klebanov told the Jewish community that it would still be responsible for its own internal security and that the government is ready to provide only an external police presence," Moyshe Treskunov, a spokesman for the Jewish community, told JTA.

The details of the new security measures will be worked out during a meeting with the leaders of St. Petersburg's main faiths.

The meeting, scheduled to take place at the end of January, will also be used as a forum to discuss comprehensive measures with which to combat xenophobia.

Anti-Semitic incidents drop in France

French officials said stronger policing caused a significant drop in anti-Semitic incidents last year.

The number of anti-Semitic incidents dropped by 46 percent last year, from 974 in 2004 to 504 in 2005, the first decrease since the intifada began in 2000. Jewish leaders in France called the statistic an "encouraging sign."

Israel gets new papal envoy

Pope Benedict XVI named a new envoy to Israel.

The Vatican announced Saturday that Archbishop Antonio Franco, currently Papal Nuncio in the Philippines, would take up the post as nuncio, or envoy, in Israel and Cyprus and become apostolic delegate in Jerusalem and the West Bank.

Franco, 68, has served in the Philippines since 1999.

MIDDLE EAST

Palestinian terrorist killed

A Palestinian terrorist was killed in the Gaza Strip. Mahmoud Abad Al A'al, a member of the Palestinian Popular Resistance Committees, died Sunday in an explosion, the source of which was unclear.

Six others were wounded. In related news, Israeli troops killed a Palestinian near the Gaza Strip's northern border.

Security sources said troops opened fire Saturday at a group of Palestinians trying to crawl to the border fence after they ignored warnings to halt and identify themselves.

One man was killed and another two wounded and taken to Palestinian hospitals for treatment.

Egypt: Hamas recognizes Israel

Hamas recognizes Israel and can hold talks with it, Egypt's foreign minister said.

"I am confident that Hamas recognizes the existence of Israel and I am confident that it is able to coexist with the idea of negotiations with Israel," Ahmed Aboul Gheit, whose country has been a key Israeli-Palestinian peace broker, said in an interview published Saturday.

"There's no need to keep equivocating on this matter, especially since Hamas has already accepted a truce with Israel for the sake of negotiations," he told the London-based newspaper Asharq al-Awsat.

Hamas, an Islamic terrorist group running in this week's Palestinian

Authority parliamentary elections, says there is no plan to change its charter, which calls for the Jewish state's destruction.

But Hamas officials have hinted that they could go along with Palestinian Authority negotiations with Israel.

Israel, for its part, has ruled out such talks as long as Hamas keeps its weapons.

Israelis eye West Bank withdrawals

Most Israelis favor further unilateral withdrawals in the West Bank, a poll found.

According to last Friday's survey in Ma'ariv, 51 percent of Israelis believe that with no peace deal on the horizon with the Palestinians, Israel should quit areas of the West Bank on its own.

Four of some 120 settlements in the territory were evacuated last year just after the Gaza Strip withdrawal.

Interim Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, whose Kadima Party is likely to win the March 28 general elections, has called for more West Bank withdrawals, but stopped short of saying these should be unilateral.

Assassin's brother deeper in trouble

The brother of Yitzhak Rabin's assassin was convicted of threatening Ariel Sharon's life.

Hagai Amir, who is serving a 16-year prison sentence for helping his brother, Yigal, shoot Rabin in 1995, was convicted by the Netanya Magistrate's Court on Sunday of threatening the life of Israel's current prime minister.

According to prosecutors, Amir told prison guards that he could arrange for Sharon to be killed "with one phone call."

His lawyers called the comments a "joke."

There was no immediate word on whether the new conviction would mean more prison time for Hagai Amir.

According to Israeli media, prosecutors would accept Amir not receiving any reduction of his current sentence: Under Israeli law, convicts can expect their time behind bars to be reduced by one-third for good behavior.

NORTH AMERICA

Russian minister condemns Jackson-Vanik

Russia's foreign minister said U.S. laws tying Russia's trade status to human-rights conditions were an "unfair use of economic levers to political ends."

Sergey Lavrov criticized the Jackson-Vanik laws last Friday, which were used to punish the former Soviet Union for its policies prohibiting Jewish emigration.

Lavrov suggested the policy, hailed by American Jewish groups, does not comport with international law.

Russia has sought an end to the restrictions — a step that has garnered some Jewish support — but Congress has yet to act.

Schustermans expand to Israel

The Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation is opening an office in Jerusalem and will expand funding efforts in Israel.

The nonprofit, to be called Keren Schusterman, or Schusterman Foundation-Israel, should be formed in late January, according to Sandy Cardin, executive director of the parent foundation.

The Israel office will focus on helping victims of child abuse and strengthening Jewish identity, a need that is "as great in Israel as in the former Soviet Union or the United States," Cardin says.

The foundation is particularly interested in Jewish identity projects that bridge the divide between secular and religious Israelis, he says.