



IN THE NEWS

Olmert does Congress

Israel's prime minister met with incoming and outgoing congressional leaders. Ehud Olmert made his stops in Congress on Monday afternoon after meeting with President Bush.

He met with Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), who is set to become speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, and Sen. Harry Reid (D-Nev.), who is set to become majority leader in the Senate, after Democrats won both houses in elections last week.

Olmert also met with the outgoing leader of the Republican majority in the Senate, Sen. Bill Frist (R-Tenn.), and with the Jewish caucuses in both houses.

Schumer gets top Dem spot

U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) was named to a leadership position in the Senate Democratic caucus.

Schumer, who is Jewish, was awarded the newly created post of vice-chairman of the Democratic conference after he defied expectations as leader of the Democratic Senate Campaign Committee and Democrats won six seats in elections last week — enough to gain control of the Senate.

Al-Jazeera to launch English channel

Al-Jazeera is set to launch an English-language news channel.

The Qatar-based satellite channel, watched in its original Arabic format by some 50 million viewers, will launch Wednesday.

Al-Jazeera, which has come under fire for its anti-American reporting from Iraq and for broadcasting videos of Osama Bin Laden, intends to compete with other global channels like CNN and the BBC.

American cable providers thus far have refused to carry the new channel, which will be available only online in the United States.

WORLD REPORT

PUBLISHED WEEKDAYS BY JTA—THE GLOBAL NEWS SERVICE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE · WWW.JTA.ORG

With Hezbollah war barely over, Israel perceives threats on horizon

By LESLIE SUSSER

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Less than three months after the guns fell silent between Israel and Hezbollah, Israeli military intelligence has warned the government to be ready for a new outbreak of fighting with the Lebanese Shi'ite militia as early as next spring.

Military intelligence also is warning of the possibility of war with Syria next summer.

And there's an even greater concern: With Prime Minister Ehud Olmert hinting that Israel might take military action to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons, the upshot could be a showdown with the complete Hezbollah-Syria-Iran axis sometime next year, a much wider war than last summer's confrontation with Hezbollah in southern Lebanon.

But to what extent is the Israeli assessment based on hard evidence, and how much of it is spin designed to persuade other actors to take firm action? In other words, is Israel trying to goad the United States and other leading players into taking stronger action against Iran — and, at the same time, warning Syria and Hezbollah not to test its patience?

Clearly, the biggest threat to Israel comes from Iran's nuclear program.

In a recent interview with Newsweek, Olmert argued that Iran must be made to fear the consequences of continuing its presumed nuclear weapons push. The Israeli position is that unless the mullahs in Tehran are worried about a military strike that could topple their regime, there's little

chance they'll drop their nuclear drive.

Israel believes that strictly applied sanctions, coupled with a credible military threat, might deter Iranian leaders without the use of force.

The new tough talk by Olmert and other Cabinet ministers seems intended to create a credible military threat, analysts say. In dealing with Iran, "we have many options," Olmert told Newsweek.

But not everyone in the American administration is buying the Israeli line. A senior U.S. official recently told journalists in Tel Aviv that he doubted Israel really has a military option: Iran is too big and its nuclear installations are too well protected and too widely scattered, he said.

Iranian leaders treat Israel's veiled threats with contempt. Foreign Minister Mohammed Ali Hussein declared that if Israel is foolish enough to attack, Iran's response "will be quick, strong and destructive, and will take just a few seconds."

Hussein indicated that Iran was in no mood to be deterred, promising to have 3,000 centrifuges capable of producing weapons grade uranium operating by next March.

Israeli officials are convinced that the issue goes far beyond Iran: If Iran is allowed to go nuclear, they believe, other Middle Eastern countries will attempt to follow suit.

In early November, six Arab countries — Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates — declared that they intend to adopt more robust nuclear programs. They claim the

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■ *A fresh round of fighting with Hezbollah could expand to Syria and Iran*

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programs would be for civilian purposes only and under strict International Atomic Energy Agency control.

But analysts say the six clearly were spurred to action by fear of a nuclear Iran and will want to develop a "security hedge" — the technological capacity to produce nuclear weapons on short notice if they feel threatened.

Some Israeli analysts see in this a very dangerous development.

"If the six or some of them develop a bomb, this will herald a lot more than a 'new Middle East.' It will be a new world, significantly more dangerous than the world that existed during the Cold War period," strategist Reuven Pedatzur of the Netanya Academic College wrote recently in Ha'aretz.

■
In contrast to the bilateral model of mutual deterrence between two rational players, which kept the Cold War within manageable limits, the "existence of a large number of circles of deterrence — each with its own rules of the game and different strategic considerations — will necessarily lead to instability. The dangers of miscalculation, of misunderstanding the actions of an opponent and of uncontrolled use of the bomb, will increase dramatically," Pedatzur warned.

He and other Israeli strategists argue that unless Iran is stopped, the international nonproliferation regime could collapse, with disastrous consequences for world peace.

On Syria, military intelligence is

taking a more ambivalent line. After warning of possible war with Damascus in the summer, intelligence officials now are urging the government to talk to the Syrians. If it works, such an approach could pry Syria away from the Iranian-Hezbollah orbit and take it out of the war equation.

Yet the government is unlikely to move soon. For months, Syria has been making peace overtures to Israel, while warning that their rejection could lead to war. But most Israeli leaders see the overtures as a trap, a Syrian attempt to use negotiations with Israel to score points in the international arena without really breaking with Iran or Hezbollah.

The Bush administration shares that view. Unless Syria stops serving as a conduit for Iranian arms to Hezbollah, harboring Palestinian terrorists, interfering in Lebanon and aiding anti-American forces in Iraq, Israel should not consider peace talks, American officials say. Yet the concern is that ignoring Damascus could create new tensions.

Moreover, intelligence analysts believe that in a situation where Israel

faces growing tension with Syria and Iran, their Lebanese proxy Hezbollah could spark new hostilities. According to both Israeli and American sources, rockets and other military supplies continue to flow to Hezbollah from Iran via Syria, despite the call for an arms embargo on Hezbollah in the U.N. Security

Council resolution that ended this summer's war.

Military intelligence estimates that Hezbollah now has about 20,000 rockets — slightly more than when the Lebanon war began in July. Indeed, Israel finds itself facing pretty much the same threat as it did before the war, which suggests that important war aims were not achieved.

The name of the game in Israel is to remedy as quickly

as possible the flaws in the Israel Defense Forces that the war exposed, and develop new methods of countering Hezbollah rockets. But will the IDF be able to do all that while keeping an eye on the bigger Iranian threat?

To put it more starkly: Will the IDF be ready in six months or so to cope with multiple threat from Hezbollah, Syria and Iran? ■

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Reuven Pedatzur
Netanya Academic College

Netanyahu: It's 1938 again

By TOM TUGEND

LOS ANGELES — Iran is planning to develop 25 nuclear weapons per year, ultimately with a range to reach the United States, Benjamin Netanyahu told the North American federation system's annual gathering.

"It's 1938 — and Iran is Germany," the Likud Party leader said repeatedly in an address Monday to some 5,000 delegates at the United Jewish Communities' General Assembly in Los Angeles. "When someone tells you he is going to exterminate you, believe him and stop him."

Netanyahu, leader of the opposition

in Israel's Knesset, said he had been trying for a decade to warn world leaders that Iran represents the greatest threat not just to Israel but also to Europe and America, "but nobody seems to care very strongly."

Hitler started a war and then tried to develop an atomic bomb, Netanyahu noted, while Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is building nuclear weapons first and then will start a war, he said.

Unlike 1938 and its aftermath, however, the Jewish people will not be the sacrificial lamb this time, Netanyahu declared. ■



WORLD
REPORT

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JTA WORLD REPORT is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For more information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at www.jta.org.
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Was Prague terror alert real?

By DINAH A. SPRITZER

PRAGUE (JTA) — Security measures are back to normal in Prague after a reported terrorist threat against Jewish sites during the High Holidays, but debate continues over the seriousness of the threat and its implications for Czech Jewry.

Three Czech Jews representing different organizations published a letter to Interior Minister Ivan Langer at the beginning of November, accusing the government of inventing the threat to divert attention from its domestic troubles.

One signatory, Rostislav Rod, told JTA that the government seemed to be employing a “Wag the Dog” scenario at the expense of Czech Jews. The reference was to a 1997 movie in which the U.S. president concocts a fictitious war to revive his flagging popularity.

The letter to Langer, printed as an advertisement in the daily Pravo newspaper, accuses the Interior Ministry of engaging in a “political media game” — and, as evidence, cites the far-fetched nature of the plot reported by Czech media, which included the planned bombing of the Jerusalem Synagogue at a time when very few worshipers would have been there.

“Why should terrorists attack a synagogue that is attended by a few Orthodox believers while the Spanish Synagogue was at the moment full of American Conservative Jews who are much richer?” the letter argues, suggesting that the orchestrator of the allegedly fake terror campaign did not know enough about Judaism to come up with a logical scenario.

The writers seemed unaware that terrorists in other places have indeed attacked Jewish sites — in Casablanca, Morocco, for example — on days when they apparently didn’t realize the buildings would be empty.

Rod and the other signatories also demanded that former intelligence chief Karel Randak, who was fired after criticizing the government’s response to the threat, be allowed to testify in Parliament. Langer, who has prevented Randak from appearing before Parliament, citing security concerns, has not responded to the letter.

Complicating matters, one of the signatories, Frantisek Fendrych, who heads the Jewish Liberal Union congregation, told the Prague Post that the letter to Langer

was just a draft, and was released to Pravo without his consent. He stood by its contents, however.

In an interview with JTA, Langer said the writers do not speak for the Jewish community, but added that he can’t discuss the particulars of their allegations for security reasons.

“Don’t waste our time, please, with his issues,” he said of Rod.

Prague saw a dramatic increase in police presence on the streets beginning Sept. 23,

Rosh Hashanah, when the government announced a terrorism threat but did not provide details.

Jews and non-Jews are still wondering what was behind the threat.

The letter to Langer has spurred private and public concern about security for Jewish sites, the state’s ability to protect its citizens and whether any threat ever existed.

An Oct. 6 report in Mlada Fronta Dnes, a leading newspaper, stated that according to an anonymous Czech intelligence source, Islamic extremists had plotted to blow up a synagogue full of Jews. The government refused to comment on the report.

When the terrorist alert subsided in mid-October after Simchat Torah, Prague Mayor Pavel Bem told journalists that there had been a specific threat to Jewish sites in Prague, a statement reiterated on the Czech Foreign Intelligence Service’s Web site.

Bem and Langer belong to the same party, the center-right Civic Democrats, which runs the government but does not have a majority in Parliament, the result of a June election stalemate. Rod and his fellow signatories believe Langer may be trying to cover up political instability with a fake terrorism alert that “smacks of the misuse of Jewish issues,” Petr Pechan, the third signatory, told JTA.

The letter to Langer was challenged by some members of the Prague Jewish community who felt that publicly accusing the government was not in the best interests of the capital’s Jewish population, which numbers up to 3,000.

The identity of the three signatories was an issue for Katerina Weberova, co-

ordinator of the Bejt Simcha Reform congregation, since they previously had been involved in what she deemed “angry letter writing” and “controversies.”

About three years ago, Fendrych accused longtime community heads in a monthly newsletter of exploiting the inherited riches of Holocaust victims for their own devices, a concern echoed by a number of the community leaders’ opponents.

Rod briefly was at the center of a political storm last year when he came forward as the source of money for a loan that his uncle had given to Prime Minister Stanislav Gross to purchase an apartment. Gross was

forced to resign over speculation that he had obtained the apartment through corruption.

Pechan once was part of the Conservative Masorti Olami congregation in Prague. He since has had a falling-out with the group’s rabbi and

has formed his own organization, Masorti Czech Republic.

Gafna Foltynova, coordinator for Masorti Olami in the Czech Republic, felt the letter posed legitimate questions, but emphasized that she had been pleased, not disturbed, by the increased police presence in Prague.

“The headlines in the press are saying ‘Czech Jews ask Langer’ when it’s really only these three people,” she noted.

Meanwhile, leaders of Prague’s Jewish community and the Czech Federation of Jewish Communities wrote a separate letter to the Interior Ministry at the start of the month after holding several meetings with police about security issues.

Tomas Kraus, head of the federation, said they were not concerned about the validity of the September threats, since Jewish sites in Europe usually are viewed as targets.

“On the contrary, we are happy the police and the ministry are taking any potential threat so seriously and were glad to see a stepped up police presence. What we are more concerned about is that we have been asking repeatedly for the streets in the Jewish town to be closed off to cars to prevent attacks, and that this is not happening,” he said. ■

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Why should terrorists attack a synagogue that is attended by a few Orthodox believers?

Letter excerpt from Czech Jewish leaders

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

Hamas: New P.A. won't recognize Israel

A Hamas official said the next Palestinian Authority government will not recognize Israel.

Moussa Abu Marzuk, deputy to Hamas supreme leader Khaled Meshaal, said Monday night that even if his governing faction and the rival Fatah Party manage to put together a new coalition, it will not recognize the Jewish state, "nor be required to."

While welcoming the coalition talks as a potential opportunity to re-engage the Palestinian Authority, Western power brokers insist that for aid to be renewed, the new government must recognize Israel's right to exist, accept past peace deals, and renounce terrorism.

Israelis warn of earthquake risk

A major earthquake in Israel would kill thousands of people, experts warned. According to specialists who convened Tuesday in Ashdod for a conference on earthquakes, as many as 16,000 Israelis could die if a major tremor strikes, a real possibility considering that the Holy Land straddles the Syria-Africa Rift.

The biggest danger is in the collapse of residential buildings that were not constructed with earthquakes in mind, experts said. Infrastructure Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer said the government is aware of the problem, but "until disaster strikes, this is far from the minds of the decision-makers and budgets."

Sneh: Rules on Palestinian Americans to be modified

Israel's deputy defense minister pledged to reform rules currently keeping Palestinian Americans from staying in the West Bank.

Ephraim Sneh met Monday with Ziad Asali, president of the American Task Force on Palestine, and discussed visa restrictions on Palestinians who hold American citizenship who travel to and from Palestinian areas.

The restrictions are partly a result of Israel's refusal to communicate with the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority.

According to the task force, Sneh told Asali that the government would announce guidelines soon dealing with the travel restrictions, "in particular allowing Palestinian Americans to renew their visas without having to leave the occupied territories."

Russian aliyah in reverse?

The number of Russian immigrants to Israel who return to their native land reportedly is rising steeply. Yediot Achronot reported Tuesday that the number of naturalized Israelis from Russia who go back to the country of their birth has increased more than sixfold in the past three years.

It said many were drawn by the improved Russian economy, while others maintained homes in both places. In response, the Foreign Ministry said the rate of return by Russian immigrants is less than 5 percent.

Report: Israel chose cheap bombs

Israel reportedly decided against using a local, safe variety of cluster-bombs during its war against Hezbollah for cost reasons.

Citing security sources, Ha'aretz reported Tuesday that Israel's air force and artillery decided to use U.S.-made cluster munitions in the Lebanon war because these could be payed for out of U.S. defense grants, overlooking the fact that the weapons had a high "dud" rate.

Leftover cluster bombs have killed 14 people in Lebanon since hostilities ended, and wounded dozens. According to Ha'aretz, an Israeli arms firm produces a more reliable cluster bomb, but this was not covered by the armed forces' budgets.

WORLD

E.U. commissioner slams Iran

The European commissioner for external relations sharply condemned Iran. Benita Ferrero-Waldner made the remarks Sunday in Paris to the governing board of the World Jewish Congress.

A former Austrian foreign minister, Ferrero-Waldner focused on the European Union's role in the Middle East and said Iran left the international community "with no alternative" to sanctions regarding its nuclear program.

"The repeated statements from" Iran's president and others questioning the Holocaust and Israel's right to exist are totally unacceptable," she said.

Germany tries Holocaust denier

A German court began the trial of an alleged Holocaust denier deported by the United States. Germar Rudolf, 42, claimed in a 1991 article that the Nazis did not gas Jews at Auschwitz.

He faces up to five years in prison if convicted of "representing the Holocaust as a myth" and disturbing the peace of the dead.

As the trial began in Mannheim, the defendant, a chemist who testified on behalf of British Holocaust denier David Irving, called the Holocaust a "gigantic fraud."

Rudolf was sentenced to 14 months by a German court in 1995 for Holocaust denial, but fled Germany.

He applied to the United States for political asylum in 2000, was rejected and deported in November 2005 to serve the sentence.

Groundbreaking held for Polish JCC

Groundbreaking was held in Krakow for Poland's first Jewish community center.

The \$1.2 million, four-story center is slated to open in late 2007 or early 2008 on the grounds of the Temple Synagogue in the Kazmierz district.

Britain's Prince Charles was a key donor to the center, which also is being supported by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

Human Rights Council to discuss Gaza

The U.N. Human Rights Council will convene a special session to discuss recent Israeli actions in Gaza.

The Wednesday session in Geneva was called in response to a request from Arab and Muslim states.

The council will also consider a draft resolution, co-sponsored by more than 30 mostly Arab states, condemning the "Israeli targeting and killing of Palestinian civilians" in Beit Hanoun and establishing a high-level fact-finding mission.

The meeting will be the third special session devoted to Israel. The council has held only two regular sessions since it first convened in June.

NORTH AMERICA

Weinberg and JFN give new grant for elderly

The Jewish Funders Network and the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation have started a matching grants program to help the elderly.

The organizations announced the program at a reception Monday at the United Jewish Communities' General Assembly in Los Angeles.

The foundations have allocated \$2 million to match first-time gifts to the elderly of \$25,000 to \$50,000 from members of the Jewish Funders Network.