

U.S. Jewish news

Controversy waxes full over Madame Tussaud's Yasser Arafat

By MICHAEL J. JORDAN
NEW YORK (JTA)

The sign above the white-washed doorway prepares visitors to meet "distinguished and diverse world citizens whose lives and achievements have had dramatic impact on the affairs of our planet." Upon entering the bright, airy rotunda, the eyes settle on wax figures of George Washington, Abraham Lincoln and a freshly cast George W. Bush, his right hand offered in a frozen gesture that seems to say, "I'm a uniter, not a divider."

To the left, standing before a row of Roman-style columns, is a pantheon of world leaders: Mahatma Gandhi, Pope John Paul II, the Dalai Lama, Nelson Mandela, Fidel Castro, Yasser Arafat, Mikhail Gorbachev and Golda Meir.

None was universally beloved.

But it's Arafat - smiling benignly with his hands clasped behind his back - who on May 17 sparked protests outside Madame Tussaud's New York, and extra security measures inside.

"Yasser Arafat is a symbol of terror and violence; he should not be glorified," said New York Assemblyman Dov Hikind, who led the two dozen or so protesters.

"Some people say, 'What's the big deal? It's only wax,'" Hikind said. "But it is a big deal. Thousands of visitors go through there, and to have him in that hall sends a message that he is kosher. And Yasser Arafat is not kosher, with all the Jews and Palestinians he's willing to sacrifice for his vision of peace."

Hikind and 58 fellow state legislators from across the political spectrum called last week for Madame Tussaud's to remove Arafat from its Times Square branch.



A CNN camera crew surrounds the wax likeness of Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat in Madame Tussaud's New York museum two weeks ago, after a group of Jews protested the inclusion of the Arafat statue in the exhibit. Credit: Michael J. Jordan/JTA.

The museum, which opened in October, occupies prime real estate that Hikind says is jointly owned by the city and state. New York Gov. George Pataki also took aim at the wax figure, arguing that "a flattering portrayal of Yasser Arafat has no place in New York City."

But Pataki immediately was criticized by the National Jewish Democratic Council for forging ahead with a planned \$100,000 U.S.-per-head fund-raiser at the museum in June to benefit the Republican Governors Association.

Elsewhere, Hikind's actions drew mixed reactions from New York Jews. Some expressed hostility, saying the protest makes Jews appear silly, hysterical or paranoid.

Others viewed it as a masterstroke of public relations. Local and national media were all over the story, highlighting what Jews say is Arafat's direct role in instigating violence and bloodshed.

With "hasbarah" - a Hebrew term that falls somewhere between

explanation and propaganda - assuming a central role as Israeli-Palestinian violence rolls on.

Hikind used the uproar to disseminate his pro-Israeli view in dozens of interviews.

Madame Tussaud's, for its part, said it has no plans to oust the waxy PLO leader. "The decision to portray an individual is irrespective of any political or religious stance," Janine Scarpello, the museum's general manager, said in a statement.

A spokeswoman for the museum, Terry Wills, said the museum's attractions are designed for "the personal experience, which encourages individual consideration and reflection. Some of the statues make you happy, some may make you sad, depending on your personal frame of reference."

The London Tussaud's, for example, includes statues of Hitler and Yugoslav despot Slobodan Milosevic.

Museum-goers generally were nonplussed by the situation.

American Jews applaud Bush stance on Mideast - but wary on settlements

By MATTHEW E. BERGER
WASHINGTON

(JTA) - American Jewish leaders are supportive of intensified U.S. efforts to end Mideast violence - as long as the Bush administration does not pressure Israel to freeze all settlement building.

Secretary of State Colin Powell on May 21 endorsed the report by a five-man international committee, led by former Sen. George Mitchell, that investigated the past eight months of Israeli-Palestinian violence. Powell also named William Burns, the ambassador to Jordan and designated assistant secretary for Near Eastern affairs, as a special assistant to try to bring Israel and the Palestinian Authority toward a cease-fire.

"All this did was surface the American involvement in trying to calm the situation and trying to kick start the discussions," said Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League. Most Jewish leaders concur, viewing Powell's words as a step in the right direction and in keeping with the Bush administration's stated goal of facilitating, rather than directing, any peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians.

The United States is expected to be more visible in coming weeks and months - but not necessarily more proactive. The Jewish community's chief concern is that the United States will add its muscle to international pressure to freeze all expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The Mitchell report calls for a complete settlement freeze, including expansion that Israel says is needed to accommodate existing settlements' "natural growth."

Powell said May 21 that he supports a settlement freeze, but did



ABRAHAM FOXMAN, national director, Anti-Defamation League: Supported the commission report.

not directly tackle the natural growth argument. "What I want to see is what possibilities exist to bridge the very, very sharp differences and disagreements that exist between the two sides with respect to expansion within existing settlements," Powell said. "This is a contentious one, and I want to be in the position to see if I can - if my team and I can find ways to bridge the very, very serious

Behind the headlines

Despite pressure, U.S. is quiet on Israeli use of American weapons

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) - The Bush administration is staying relatively quiet about Israel's use of American-made weapons in attacks against the Palestinians, despite demands by Arab American groups to investigate the practice. Israel purchases much of its weaponry from the United States. According to U.S. law, foreign governments are allowed to use U.S. weapons only for defensive actions or internal security.

Israel used American-made F-16s May 18 to attack Palestinian paramilitary installations in retaliation for a suicide bombing earlier in the day in Netanya. Arab American groups have been pushing the government to review Israel's use of American-made weapons. Arab American Institute President James Zogby said the State Department has assured him that the matter is under review, and is pressing officials to expedite it.

"It's an outrageous acceleration," Zogby said. "It makes the United States appear implicated because we are supplying the technology, we are supplying the weaponry." Arab sources say Congress may take action on the matter, but lawmakers are waiting for the State Department report before planning their next move.

The administration will not say whether the matter is under formal review. Israel - backed by allies in Washington - says the attack on security stations in the West Bank was defensive, and therefore permissible under guidelines for using U.S.-made weapons. "The operation was a counterterrorism operation. Counterterrorism is by definition defensive," said Mark Regev, spokesman for the Israeli Embassy. "If there weren't Palestinian attacks against Israel, we would not have been forced to respond."

differences that now exist."

Two weeks ago, Foxman warned the Mitchell Commission against appearing to tie an end to Palestinian violence to an Israeli settlement freeze. The Palestinians are demanding precisely such an interpretation. However, after both Mitchell and Powell emphasized May 21 that the first step must be an unconditional end to violence, Foxman supported the commission report. "Settlements have always been policy that American governments have been opposed to," Foxman said.

Other Jewish organizations, however, have said they are concerned that media reports and Palestinian Authority rhetoric is shifting opinion, making people believe that settlement development is the cause of the violence.

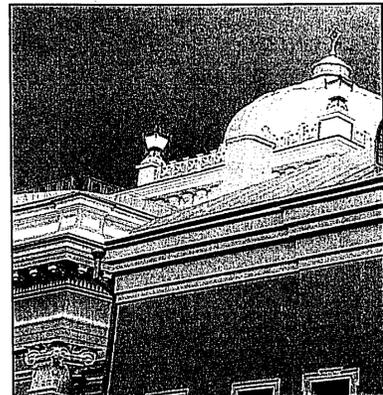
World Jewish news/ Russian column

A century after it was destroyed, a Star of David flies over Moscow

By LEV GORODETSKY
MOSCOW (JTA)

The symbolism was evident. Two weeks ago, a group of Jewish children released a flock of doves at a ceremony two weeks ago marking the restoration of a dome and gilded Star of David on the capital's main synagogue. The new addition to the Moscow skyline came at a time when relations between Moscow's Jewish community and the Russian authorities are marked by a relative peace.

Indeed, at the May 16 ceremony, Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov and one of Russia's two chief rabbis, Adolph Shayevich, together laid a cornerstone for a new Jewish community



The newly restored dome and gilded Star of David, top right, on Moscow's main synagogue, the Choral Synagogue. Credit: Lev Gorodetsky/JTA.

center. When Luzhkov was approached about the idea of restoring the

dome, he reacted enthusiastically, said Pinchas Goldschmidt, Moscow's chief rabbi. Luzhkov helped the synagogue cut through the red tape for building permits needed in downtown Moscow and even suggested funding sources. Luzhkov is known for his friendly relations with the Moscow Jewish community. A few years ago, he helped Lubavitch Jews restore the Marina Roscha Synagogue, which burned down in 1994.

The dome and star graced the Choral Synagogue for a short time in the early 1890s, when Czar Alexander III bent to the will of the Russian Orthodox Church and ordered them taken down. This decree started a period of persecution for the Moscow Jewish community. Thousands of Jews were evicted from the city between 1892 and 1897, and the Jewish population of Moscow dwindled from 26,000 to 5,000. The Choral Synagogue was closed down. It was re-opened in 1906, but for the past century it has had only a plain roof.

According to legend, the church's opposition to the dome in the 1890s began after the then-mayor of Moscow saw the dome, thought it was an Orthodox church and crossed himself.



New president of the Russian Jewish Congress, oil magnate Leonid Nevzlin. Credit: Lev Gorodetsky/JTA.

New Russian Jewish leader hopes to make order out of chaos

By LEV GORODETSKY
MOSCOW (JTA)

When the Russian Jewish Congress delegates voted for a new president two weeks ago, they already knew who would win - the only candidate, oil magnate Leonid Nevzlin. They also knew what they wanted in the new leader of one of Russia's Jewish umbrella groups - someone who could lead the RJC out of its struggles with the Kremlin and the chaos that had enveloped it under its controversial former leader, Vladimir Goussinsky.

By all accounts, Nevzlin, who has been serving as interim RJC president since Goussinsky resigned on March 1, fits the bill. He's successful, mild-mannered and - perhaps, most importantly - less emotional than his predecessor.

His troubles - he is currently living outside of Russia, which has unsuccessfully tried to extradite him - have harmed the RJC, and drawn the organization's resources away from serving the country's roughly 600,000 Jews.

Speaking at the RJC conference in an apparent reference to Goussinsky's problems, Nevzlin said, "The future of the Jewish community depends on its relations with the authorities."



Дорогие друзья, Вы приглашаетесь на ежегодный отчётный вечер и презентацию лучших волонтеров Jewish Child and Family Service, который состоится в среду 6-го июня, 2001 года в Бернсу театре в помещении Asper Jewish Community Campus, 123 Doncaster St. Вы получите возможность послушать нашего гостя из США Елейн Вайс, автора книги «Имеют ли место оскорбления, унижения, грубость и пассивность в еврейских домах?»

Сизифов труд Роберта Минчела
Премьер-министр Израиля Ариэль Шарон положительно отозвался об отчёте Джорджа Минчела - председателя комиссии ООН по исследованию ближневосточного кризиса и поиску возможных путей его разрешения. Этот документ был предоставлен секретарём США Пауэлом.

Пресс-секретарь Ариэля Шарона отметил, что Израиль очень признателен Джорджу Минчелу за верное понимание ситуации, и особенно за то, что в отчёте говорится о невозможности проведения переговоров с воюющей стороной.

Сам документ не представляет из себя ничего сенсационного. Скорее, он содержит общие слова и описания возможных путей решения проблемы, но всё это уже не раз обсуждалось, и ничего нового до сих пор не придумано. Да и трудно в подобной ситуации придумать новое. При этом нестабильности, ситуация на Ближнем Востоке довольно однообразна: практически каждый день со стороны палестинских поселений ведётся обстрел мирных кварталов и Израиль иногда отвечает точными ударами. Но даже если бы Израиль принял тактику Палестины, всё равно это бы не решило конфликт, т.к. Арафат никогда не считался с человеческими жертвами, и ему всё равно, какой ценой он войдёт в историю, и сколько подростков погибнет, взорвав себя с его именем на устах. В отчёте предлагается, в частности, такая схема: запретить строительство новых поселений на спорной территории, но оставить в покое уже существующие поселения. На самом деле, этот план существует уже давно, и называется платом Переса. Проблема только в том, что для того, чтобы договориться, нужно как минимум сесть за стол переговоров, а этого не произойдёт, пока со стороны Палестины будут продолжаться обстрелы, а Ясир Арафат будет называть себя «борцом с мировым сионизмом».

Министр иностранных дел Израиля Шимон Перес отозвался положительно о даплом отчёте ООН и посетил Москву на прошлой неделе по данному вопросу.

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