

JEWISH UNDERGROUND ISSUE EXPECTED TO COOL WITH PERES' FORMAL REQUEST FOR LEGAL OPINION ON REPRIEVES

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, May 28 (JTA) — Premier Shimon Peres' formal request to Attorney General Yitzhak Zamir for a legal opinion on the possibility of reprieve for members of an alleged Jewish terrorist underground is expected to take some of the heat out of the issue which threatens a confrontation between the Labor and Likud components of the national unity coalition government.

Peres' written request was received last Friday. Officials at the Attorney General's office said yesterday that work on a legal opinion was begun before the request arrived — after an informal discussion between Peres and Zamir earlier last week.

Legal observers expect Zamir to preclude the idea of dropping charges against the Jewish defendants presently on trial or awaiting trial. Of the 27 persons accused of membership in a Jewish terrorist underground responsible for acts of violence and conspiracy against Arab civilians in the West Bank over a four-year period, 10 have been tried and sentenced, most of them after plea bargaining. One man has completed his sentence and has been released. Two army officers are awaiting trial.

The remaining defendants are being tried in Jerusalem district court by a panel of three judges. The release on May 20 of 1,150 Palestinian prisoners, many of them serving life sentences for murder, in exchange for three Israeli soldiers held captive by a Palestinian terrorist group in Damascus, triggered demands from Jewish settlers in the West Bank and other militants for the immediate release of the defendants and the Jews already convicted.

Likud politicians, including Deputy Premier Yitzhak Shamir, have gone on record in favor of reprieve or amnesty for the accused Jews. Shamir stressed that this should be done through the channels provided by law.

Begin Helps To Defuse The Tension

Former Premier Menachem Begin helped defuse the tension surrounding the issue when he said in a newspaper interview published yesterday that he felt a reprieve should be considered, but only after the defendants were tried and sentenced.

That has been the position, too, of President Chaim Herzog whose exclusive prerogative it is to weigh reprieve. Herzog swiftly rejected the contention by some legal sources that he could exercise that prerogative before sentences are passed.

He has let it be known that he would consider applications for reprieve only after the judicial process has run its full course — meaning after trial and sentencing. He is supported in this by Justice Minister Moshe Nissim, a Likud Liberal.

Herzog has made it clear, moreover, that he would be prepared to entertain applications for clemency on an individual basis only, as is standard practice. He has said he would not consider a collective reprieve for the entire group of accused, as some of their supporters are demanding.

But there is strong opposition in leftist circles for any kind of clemency as a quid pro quo for the controversial prisoner exchange. The opposition Mapam and Citizens Rights Movement (CRM) have introduced motions in the Knesset for the creation of a commission of inquiry into the Lebanon war. This apparently is intended to embarrass Likud if it presses for clemency for the alleged Jewish terrorist underground members.

There is strong sympathy within the Labor Party for this tactic. But Premier Shimon Peres is opposed to such an approach. He has indicated that he personally does not favor an official inquiry into the Lebanon war, at least at this time. He is understood to be urging the Labor Knesset faction to allow its members to vote their conscience when the Mapam and CRM motions come up Wednesday.

It is almost certain that a Knesset decision to set up an inquiry — or even a Labor vote en-bloc for such a proposal — would spell the end of the unity coalition government. Shamir, the Likud leader, has made that clear.

Peres wants to keep the coalition alive for the present. Moreover, he is said to feel that an inquiry would focus attention on individuals responsible for the Lebanon war and thereby deflect what Peres believes should be the political blame for the war from attaching to the entire Likud party.

U.S. OFFICIAL CONFIDENT PALESTINIANS CAN BE FOUND WHO WOULD BE ACCEPTABLE TO ISRAEL FOR TALKS BETWEEN ISRAEL AND JORDANIAN-PALESTINIAN DELEGATION
By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, May 28 (JTA) — A senior Reagan Administration official expressed confidence today that Palestinians could be found who would be acceptable to Israel for negotiations between Israel and a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation.

"I'm confident that names can be found that will be acceptable to all parties," the official said while briefing reporters on the meetings scheduled here this week between King Hussein of Jordan and President Reagan and other Administration officials.

Hussein, who arrived here today from Providence, Rhode Island, where he attended the graduation of his son from Brown University, will meet with Reagan at the White House tomorrow. He is also scheduled to have separate meetings with Vice President George Bush, Secretary of State George Shultz, National Security Advisor Robert MacFarlane and Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, as well as members of Congress before leaving for California on Friday.

"Our goals are modest," the official said of the Hussein visit. He added, "We hope in the end it will lead to an extension of the peace process and to direct negotiations" between Israel and a Jordanian-Palestinian delegation.

On the joint delegation, the Administration official stressed that a U.S. meeting with such a group is not a "crucial issue" since the U.S. has already said it will meet such a delegation as long as there are no Palestine Liberation Organization members among the Palestinians.

The official said what will be critical is the delegation named to negotiate with Israel. He added that these

two joint delegations may not necessarily be made up of the same people. The official said that on the recent visit to the Middle East by Shultz and Richard Murphy, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, names of Palestinians were discussed on a "for example" basis but no definite list was drawn up. He noted that Shultz said that in order to get a Palestinian delegation it was necessary to move away from "categories" of people and just consider individual Palestinians.

Stressing that no one should expect any "dramatic occurrence in the next 48 hours," the official said that Shultz found in the Middle East a more pragmatic approach on all sides including in Jordan and among the Palestinians, and an understanding of the American approach.

"We have long believed it only by focusing on incremental steps that we can shape the reality in which negotiations can take place with the ultimate objective of achieving a durable comprehensive settlement between Israel and its Arab neighbors," he explained.

Cites 'Positive' Occurrences In The Mideast

The official said there had been "positive" occurrences in the Mideast since last October starting with the resumption of diplomatic relations between Egypt and Jordan. He said this was followed by the Palestine National Council meeting in Amman last November which he called "approchement" between Hussein and the Palestinians which in turn led to the February 11 agreement between Hussein and PLO leader Yasser Arafat.

The official noted that at the time the U.S. called the agreement a "milestone" among "many other milestones on the road to peace." He said that while the Hussein-Arafat accord does not explicitly endorse United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and Israel's right to exist, it does commit the PLO to seek a negotiated settlement based on the land for peace formula and UN and Security Council resolutions. He said this was the first positive PLO reference to Security Council resolutions.

The official said the agreement also commits the PLO to seek Palestinian self-determination through a confederation with Jordan. He said this could "apparently" mean that the "Palestinians would be willing to forego an independent state west of the Jordan if the rest of the plan fell into place."

He added, "As ambiguous as that document on February 11th may be, it does commit the PLO to support negotiations and support them in partnership with Jordan."

The official stressed that Jordan is central to the peace process and that Hussein "is determined not to let the door close to the possibility of a negotiated settlement." He added that Hussein "is equally determined" not to move forward without the Palestinians.

At the same time, the official rejected the Syrian view that any settlement required an Arab consensus.

Asked about arms for Jordan, the official said no decision has been made on any arms sales. He noted that the review started by the Administration in November of Mideast arms sales has still not been completed.

FIVE ISRAELI SOLDIERS WOUNDED

TEL AVIV, May 28 (JTA) -- Five Israeli soldiers were wounded in two incidents in the south Leban-

on security zone, just north of the Israel border yesterday. Two terrorists were killed, bring to 13 the number of terrorists slain by Israeli forces over the weekend.

Military sources said the upsurge in attacks on the Israel Defense Force and its allied South Lebanon Army (SLA) came from rival guerrilla and terrorist groups eager to outdo each other. The sources warned that the attacks might escalate as the Israeli presence in south Lebanon nears an end. The IDF is expected to be completely out of Lebanese territory by the beginning of next month.

In yesterday's incidents, four soldiers were wounded when a roadside explosive detonated as their patrol was passing near Majdel Selim village, about eight kilometers inside Lebanon opposite the Israeli border town of Manara. An IDF unit spotted two terrorists near the Akaya bridge over the Litani River further to the north and pursued them to Shakra village where the terrorists opened fire. One Israeli soldier was wounded before both terrorists were killed.

A Katyusha rocket was fired at an IDF position in the security zone today without causing casualties or damage.

ISAAC CHARCHAT DEAD AT 81

NEW YORK, May 28 (JTA) -- Funeral services were held here today for Isaac Charchat, president of the container shipping firm United Cargo Corporation, who died last Saturday of heart failure at New York Hospital. He was 81 years old.

Born in Sweden, the son of a wealthy businessman, Charchat became a United States citizen 35 years ago. He built his early career in shipping. When World War II brought that business to a halt, he used his time to develop a unique accounting system, one of the first to utilize computers.

In the late 1950's, he revolutionized the world maritime trade by introducing containerized cargoes, a concept he later used to create what was dubbed the "Landbridge" from the Far East to Europe across the continental United States.

Last year, Shengold Publishers in New York published Charchat's autobiographical novel, "A Constant Reminder," that, though in fiction form, is based on the facts of Charchat's life. He warns of the possibility of history to repeat itself in its most evil aspects.

The book seeks to explain and to detail the historical dynamics that led to the Holocaust, an aspect which Charchat felt was infrequently and inadequately dealt with by those who chronicle the horrors of the Holocaust.

Earlier this month, Charchat participated in the Jerusalem International Book Fair. He was also involved in the distribution of books of foreign publishers in the United States and England. He said recently that Israel, more than any other community, is a melting pot of languages. "It is the perfect setting for such a fair," he said.

FIRST SHEEP AIRLIFT TO ISRAEL

SAN ANGELO, May 28 (JTA) -- This predominantly Christian town in Texas, is showing that it can make a difference to a community in Israel. Friends of the Jewish National Fund in Texas are sending 27 Rambouillet sheep tomorrow to Moshav Beit Yatir, a small agricultural community in dire need of an economic base.

The sheep left the Clinton Hodges ranch near San Angelo by truck on May 26 and are scheduled to arrive at JFK Airport in New York tomorrow. After inspection by U.S.D.A. veterinarians, the sheep will be loaded onto an El Al cargo plane for Israel. Thanks to the joint efforts of Mary Linthicum, a Christian rancher, along

with the community of San Angelo, Texas, generous Christian and Jewish volunteers and the JNF, a seven-year dream will become a reality.

Much of the philosophy behind Linthicum's efforts is based on Biblical passages, such as the following from Jeremiah, ... "There shall again be a habitation of shepherds causing their flocks to lie down."

Meetings were held at sheep ranches in West Texas to discuss the selection of animals, veterinarian fees, and transportation problems. In addition, six San Angelo clergymen offered support through their churches. Drives for funds were held at restaurants and malls throughout the area.

The project's major stumbling block was the enormous air/land transportation costs. San Angelo philanthropists Nathan Donsky, Monte Nolen and John Pearson, along with prominent leaders in Dallas lent support. In addition, Israeli Consul General Naphtalie lavie and some friends in New York raised funds for transportation.

Moshav Beit Yatir, the town selected to be the recipient of the Texans' gift is located 20 miles south of Jerusalem. The community was founded two and a half years ago, and the land on which it is located was prepared for development by JNF.

The moshav desperately needs a firm economic base to ensure survival. It is hoped that the Rambouillet sheep, known for their high quality wool and meat, will create economic security for the 25 young families. Though there is a Mediterranean strain of sheep in Israel, at present there are no Rambouillet sheep.

LABOR ACTS TO PRESERVE UNITY GOVERNMENT

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, May 28 (JTA) -- The Labor Party, in the interests of preserving the unity government, decided today that it would abstain from voting on motions by two leftist opposition factions in the Knesset to create a special commission of inquiry into the Lebanon war.

The conciliatory gesture by Labor nevertheless drew a warning from Likud that its decision would only heighten tensions between the two major components of the unity government. Coalition chairman Sarah Doron, a Likud Liberal, sent a letter to Premier Shimon Peres today charging that the decision to abstain violated the coalition agreements. Likud apparently would have Labor join it in opposing the motions.

The decision, following a lengthy meeting between the Labor Party Executive and the Labor Knesset faction, amounted to a compromise. Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin declared it would be unthinkable for Labor to vote against an inquiry. The upshot is that the Labor MKs will vote neither for nor against the measure when it comes up on the Knesset floor, probably tomorrow.

Peres sought to mollify Laborites who favor an inquiry into the war conducted by a Likud-led government. He urged his party to take no stand on the issue in order to preserve the unity government. At the same time he made it clear that he favors an inquiry in principle. However, Peres said, given the pressing problems that face the nation and the government, now is not the time. In effect, he reserved the right to raise the issue at some future date.

Peres was also in a conciliatory mood at a joint meeting of the entire coalition last night. In addition

to an inquiry into the war, the burning issue was amnesty for 27 accused members of a Jewish terrorist underground currently on trial or serving sentences for acts of violence against Arab civilians in the West Bank.

Immediate amnesty is demanded by Jewish settlers in the territory, backed by Likud, in light of the controversial prisoner exchange in which 1,150 convicted Palestinian terrorists were freed in return for three Israeli soldiers. Addressing those demands, Peres said all coalition members were united in the desire "not to destroy the judicial system" and in their abhorrence of violence, regardless of its source.

Likud, nevertheless, appears to be using the issue to regain lost ground with its rightwing constituency angered by the fact that the Jewish terrorist suspects were arrested when a Likud government, headed by Yitzhak Shamir, was in office. Today, Shamir addressed the wives of the defendants who have been on a hunger strike for the past week. He told them the majority of the nation supports freedom for their accused spouses.

ISRAELI-EGYPTIAN TALKS TO RESUME IN CAIRO ON THURSDAY

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, May 28 (JTA) -- Israeli-Egyptian talks on the level of senior diplomats will resume in Cairo Thursday, following a visit to Israel this week by the Egyptian Minister of Energy, Abdel Hadi Kandil.

Israeli sources attached importance to the visit, the first by a Cabinet-level Egyptian since relations soured three years ago. The guest visited the Hadera power station today, escorted by Israeli Energy Minister Moshe Shahal.

Yesterday, Kandil discussed with Premier Shimon Peres and Deputy Premier Yitzhak Shamir the issue of Taba along with other bilateral problems that are the subjects of the Cairo talks. He reiterated Cairo's demand for international arbitration over the disputed beach site near Eilat, while Shamir made another bid to persuade Egypt that conciliation is a shorter, cheaper and above all less tension-ridden process for conflict-resolution.

Kandil met alone with Peres yesterday for some 15 minutes, before both men were joined by aides. The understanding among reporters was that he conveyed to the Premier a personal message from President Hosni Mubarak.

Observers here expect the issue of Taba to come before the Cabinet shortly, with the team of diplomats reporting that Cairo is adamant in its insistence on arbitration.

Labor Party ministers under Peres are understood to be inclined to go along with that, under certain conditions, on the understanding that Israel's agreement to arbitration would facilitate an across-the-board improvement in relations between the two countries. The Likud, however, is reluctant to forego its long-standing position in favor of conciliation, at least as a first stage to be attempted prior to arbitration.

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LONDON (JTA) -- The PLO opened an office in Copenhagen last week, the WJCongress reported here. The office does not enjoy diplomatic status nor protection and therefore cannot be viewed as formal recognition of the PLO, the WJC said.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES THE JEWS OF THE FAR EAST

By Ben Frank

(Part One Of A Three-Part Series)

HONG KONG, May 28 (JTA) — Here, in the emporium of the Orient, there is a saying that to build a proper house, one has to have good "feng shui" (favorable wind and water) to exist. The 200-family Jewish community of Hong Kong found and developed the necessary ingredients to build a proper house.

The community, originated from 22 countries, find this hub of Asia the most convenient place from which to do business with the nations of the Orient. Many of them are still China traders. An example is Lord Kadorrie, a member of the famous Jewish family, and chairman of the China Light and Power Company. He is a pillar of the Hong Kong establishment.

It is also recalled here that Sir Matthew Nathan served as Hong Kong's only Jewish governor early in this century. Indeed, the main thoroughfare on the Kowloon side of the island is called Nathan Road, in his honor.

The Focal Point

The Jewish presence is focused on the Ohel Leah Synagogue at 70 Robinson Road and the Jewish Recreation Club next door, presented by the Kadorrie family. The grounds are spacious, the atmosphere is warm and the greetings are friendly. This is one Jewish community which goes out of its way to encourage visitors whom it hopes will also use the facilities of the club.

The synagogue building is Sephardic in design; it quickly reminds one that this is the Far East. American Jews are encouraged to attend services at 6:30 every Friday night and at 9:30 Saturday morning in this synagogue built in 1902. On Saturday mornings, services are followed by a kiddush. On a recent trip here, this correspondent met Jews from Australia, Iran, England, the United States and Israel. The "baal koreh" (reader) was a Sephardic Jew from Israel; another Israeli helped him officiate.

The Jewish community is transient; young IBM-type executives, bankers, engineers, export-import businessmen, and a number of Jews in the diplomatic corps. One big Jewish community event is the Sunday afternoon Bar-B-Q where conversation about children, schools and tennis mingles with steaks and chicken sizzling on outdoor grills. The Bar-B-Q is a meeting place for Jews who want to be with other Jews.

Jews Thrive On The Island

Jews thrive in Hong Kong, the key to Asia, the world's third largest financial center which boasts the second largest container port. Zim Lines maintains its Far East headquarters here. The island is enterprising, hustling, competitive and business-like. Some say money still is the language spoken in Hong Kong which in English means "fragrant harbor" and which has been and undoubtedly will remain a "golden egg" for the People's Republic of China.

No one in the Jewish community broods over the Chinese-British agreement which in 12 years calls for returning Hong Kong to China. The general impression among the Jewish congregation is that the Chinese will honor the agreements which state that

after 1997 the present system in Hong Kong is to stay in effect for 50 years. Jewish leaders also feel that China is tolerant of religious beliefs and that the Chinese do not renege on agreements.

Besides, China is opening up to the West. It wants trade and supplies, and expansion. China realizes that Hong Kong can provide the bursts of energy that are needed to refuel the one billion people of China. There is today a "capitalist component in China." There is an expansion of privately owned business. If the new system is allowed to flourish, there will be Jews in Hong Kong.

The hotel situation has opened up and tourism is flourishing here. Many Jewish tourists and businessmen stay in the luxurious hotels, such as the centrally-located Mandarin Hotel. They fly from Vancouver aboard Cathay Pacific Airlines which jets to about 30 cities in the Far East alone. Cathay supplies kosher food on request on its flights. The Mandarin Hotel, both in Vancouver and in Hong Kong, can help the kosher traveler.

The Jewish Recreation Club serves kosher-style food. But soon, with the help of C. Berkowitz of South Wind Tours and Travel, that company may supply glatt kosher food to the club and to travelers to the Far East. South Wind, located in New York City, sponsors tours which include glatt kosher food packaged under rabbinical supervision as well as no travel on the Sabbath in its tours to the Far East and China.

There is also kosher-style food at the Beverly Hills Deli adjacent to the Pedestrian Bridge on the Kowloon side of the island. Matzoh ball soup, corned beef and hot pastrami sandwiches are available. Upon request, strictly kosher packages can be obtained there.

Community Established In 1857

There is no reason to doubt that Jewish interest in Hong Kong will be renewed and renewed, just as it has been since the 1842 Treaty of Nanking opened Chinese ports to foreign settlements. It was then that the Sassoon and Kadorrie families and other leading Jewish families whose origins were in Baghdad, pioneered the Jewish settlements in Canton, Shanghai and Hong Kong. Actually, the Hong Kong Jewish community was first established in 1857. The Jews were an intimate part of the rich and variegated life of the China Treaty Ports.

The Jewish population numbered 60 Sephardim in 1882, 100 in 1921 (mainly Sephardim), 250 in 1954 (half Sephardim and half Ashkenazim). Today there are about 200 Jewish families here.

There is a fine Hong Kong Jewish Chronicle newspaper which reports on the activities of the Jews on the island. Over the years, the Hong Kong and Jewish community has had a connection, however small, with the Jewish communities of China.

With China opening up, more research will be done on the Jews of China, especially regarding the Jews of Kaifeng, and the famous "silk route," which brought Jewish traders to the Orient as long ago as the 8th century.

The times may change, but one thing is certain: The Jewish community remains alive under the leadership of Mark Eljensberg, who, with other leaders, likes to call Hong Kong, "this small outpost of the diaspora."

(Tomorrow: The Jews Of Japan)