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# **SOVIET PRAISES ISRAEL FOR 'NOBLE' HANDLING OF HIJACKING INCIDENT** **By Hugh Orgel**

TEL AVIV, Dec. 4 (JTA) -- A bizarre hostage-taking incident in the Soviet Union that ended at Tel Aviv's Ben-Gurion Airport on Friday won Israel a warm official embrace from the Kremlin over the weekend.

In a rare and apparently sincere show of gratitude by the Communist superpower to the Jewish state, Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze issued a statement commending the Israeli government for handling this "barbaric deed" in a "noble and humanitarian way."

He said it set an example for intergovernmental relations all over the world. The statement was televised in Moscow and reported by Tass, the official Soviet news agency.

The glowing praise was in response to the way Israel dealt, firmly and without bloodshed, with the potentially explosive situation caused by five Soviet nationals who had themselves flown to Tel Aviv in an aircraft extorted from the Soviet authorities in exchange for child hostages.

All were deported back to the USSR Saturday to face trial.

To convey his message to Jerusalem officially, Shevardnadze summoned Arye Levin, head of the Israeli consular delegation that has been in Moscow since September, virtually ignored by Soviet officialdom.

Levin, who had been trying in vain to obtain an audience with any Soviet diplomat above the most junior consular level, found himself face to face with the foreign minister, one of the most powerful men in the regime of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.

## **Soviet Praise Televised**

Even more extraordinary was the presence of television cameras in Shevardnadze's office, recording the meeting for Soviet viewers.

Shevardnadze was quoted by Tass as telling Levin, "We thank the Israeli authorities for showing such goodwill and decisive suppression of the illegal action. Such norms of civilized intergovernmental relations must be firmly established in the modern world."

In Jerusalem, Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres expressed appreciation for the message Saturday night. He said he hoped that "ways to deepen the understanding between the two countries" would "soon be found."

He also noted that the consular delegation the Soviets have had in Israel since June 1987 and the Israeli team in Moscow functioned as full-fledged representation. He said he hoped this arrangement would continue.

Israel won praise and respect from many other countries as the world suspensefully watched the latest hostage-hijacking drama unfold.

In the end, Israel got an opportunity to demonstrate its humanitarian side. While agreeing that the hijackers were criminals, it conditioned their deportation on a written pledge, given by Moscow, that they would not be subjected to the death penalty.

The incident began last Thursday afternoon in Ordzhonikidze, a town in the Soviet Caucasus.

Pavel Vakshinitz, a bus driver said to have a criminal record; his wife, Tamara Mikhaelovna Vakshinitz; and three armed accomplices seized a school bus carrying 30 children and their teacher.

They drove to the town hall, where the bus driver demanded \$2 million in rubles and foreign currency, and a plane to fly out of the country. He threatened to kill the children if his demands were not met.

## **None Of Criminals Jewish**

Vakshinitz reportedly demanded an Ilyushin T-76 cargo plane equipped with a ramp to drive vehicles aboard. His intention apparently was to drive the busload of children onto the plane.

But as it turned out, he released the children. The five boarded the Ilyushin jet with two bags of currency, three pistols and a sawed-off shotgun, with which they forced the eight-member crew to follow orders.

The three accomplices were identified as Vladimir Morlovod, German Vishnikov and Vladimir Anastayev. None of the criminals is Jewish.

Tamara Vakshinitz subsequently was cleared of criminal intent. Soviet authorities affirmed that she had been forced by her husband to board the school bus and then the plane.

According to media reports, the hijackers were considering three destinations: Pakistan, South Africa and Israel. They said they chose Israel "because we heard that last month's elections there had resulted in the formation of an anti-communist government."

Moscow has seemed to be seeking a thaw in relations with Israel this past year. The exchange of consular delegations was the first official diplomatic contact since the Soviets severed ties with Israel in 1967.

Whether the hijacking incident will significantly advance the process remains to be seen.

Israeli envoy Levin, who has kept a low profile in Moscow since his arrival, met for 40 minutes with Shevardnadze Saturday, during which overtures seemed to have been made by both sides, in the opaque and oblique language of diplomacy.

At the start of the meeting, Shevardnadze asked the Israeli if he was not freezing in Moscow's frigid winter.

Levin, an experienced diplomat, replied that the Soviet capital was cold indeed, but there was "much warmth" in it that needs only to be found.

The foreign minister reportedly was pleased with the response and commended Levin for it.

## **A Telex From Moscow**

Israel become embroiled in the bizarre incident on Friday morning, when the Israeli Civil Aviation Authority received a telexed message from its Moscow counterpart -- the first such direct communication in many years. It asked if Ben-Gurion Airport could accommodate a T-76 aircraft carrying "criminals who had hijacked it."

After brief, high-level discussions in Israel, and exchanges of information with Moscow and other capitals, including Washington, permission was given for the plane to land. Israeli air force F-15 jets escorted it to the airport.

Scores of ambulances and rescue service vehicles stood by as the Russian plane was taxied

to a side runway. Armed soldiers and police were ready should weapons be brought into play.

Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin and the Israel Defense Force chief of staff, Gen. Dan Shomron, had already set up operational headquarters at the airport. Foreign Minister Peres also was directly involved and Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir was kept informed as developments unfolded.

The hijackers gave themselves up without incident and were locked up over night in the Tel Kabir jail in Tel Aviv.

Shamir, in his capacity as interior minister, and in consultation with the attorney general, decided to deport the criminals immediately for entering the country illegally.

Israel has no extradition treaty with the USSR.

By noon Saturday, an Aeroflot Tupolov TU-54 passenger aircraft arrived from the Soviet Union with a crew of technicians, police and medical personnel to pick up the criminals and assist the IL-76 and crew on their return flight.

The crew enjoyed an unexpected holiday, sunning themselves on the Tel Aviv beach.

#### Rabin Remarks Criticized

The one sour note in the entire affair concerned Rabin's reportedly disparaging remarks over the way the Soviet authorities handled the affair. He was sharply criticized by other government officials, including members of his own Labor Party.

While waiting at the airport, Rabin remarked to reporters that "one can only express amazement" at the Soviets' decision to allow the aircraft to leave their country.

"How can a superpower like the Soviet Union allow five simple robbers with four pistols and one hunting gun, when the children had already been freed, when not even one hostage was on the airplane, to leave the Soviet Union?" Rabin wondered aloud.

Similar criticism was expressed by the Israel Airlines Pilots Association. Other officials pointed out that the Soviets, unlike Israelis, have had little experience with this sort of situation.

The captain of the IL-76 said the incident could not be strictly classified as an "aircraft hijacking," because the plane was provided by the Soviet civil aviation authorities and was authorized to leave.

In a footnote to the affair, ultra-Orthodox Cabinet Minister Yosef Shapira demanded Sunday that Rabin explain why he allowed "desecration of the Sabbath" in connection with activities around the hijacked plane.

#### **ISRAELIS LOSE MATCH IN MOSCOW, BUT WIN HEARTS OF SOVIET JEWS** By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Dec. 4 (JTA) -- It was a triumph in defeat and it warmed the hearts of Jews throughout the Soviet Union on a frigid Saturday.

The Hapoel volleyball team from Kiryat Ata, the Israeli champions, played the Moscow Dynamos, the Soviet Cup-holders in Moscow.

Hapoel was soundly beaten -- 15-8, 15-3 and 15-2 -- in what was the first round of the European Cup tournament.

But the contest was clearly a case where the game was more important than the victory.

The televised match was the first time in the 21 years since Moscow severed diplomatic

relations with Israel that Israeli and Russian sports teams met anywhere but in a third country.

The Israelis got a tremendous reception from the crowd and the press.

Moishe Alpia, the Kiryat Ata club manager, reported in a telephone interview from Moscow that their welcome from Jews and non-Jews was "outstanding."

He said that many Jewish spectators waved Israeli flags and chanted "Hapoel, Hapoel!" throughout the game.

Although the Israelis lost, the only carping in Israel was from the ultra-Orthodox parties, which complained to the mayor of Kiryat Ata that he allowed the team to play on the Sabbath.

Hapoel will have a chance to even scores when the Muscovites come to Israel next week for a return match.

Meanwhile, eyes are on Israel's championship Maccabee Tel Aviv basketball team, which is scheduled to play the CSKA Red Army sports club team in Moscow Jan. 12. A return match in Tel Aviv is scheduled for March 2.

#### **AGUDAT YISRAEL SIDES WITH LIKUD, GIVING SHAMIR PROBABLE MAJORITY** By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Dec. 4 (JTA) -- Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir appeared on the way Sunday night to forming a Likud-led government, just before his 21-day mandate to complete the task was to expire Monday.

Shamir was expected to ask President Chaim Herzog Monday morning for a 21-day extension, which he is allowed by law, to wrap up negotiations with his probable coalition partners, the ultra-Orthodox and far right-wing parties.

The stalemate that prevented Shamir from forming a government until now was broken Sunday evening when Agudat Yisrael's Council of Sages decided to resist the blandishments of Labor and cast its lot with Likud.

Degel HaTorah, an Agudah breakaway party that had been wavering for the past week, also announced it was concluding a deal with Likud.

With Degel's two seats, Agudah's five and the other religious and rightist factions in line, Shamir would have a governing majority of 65 in the 120-member Knesset.

The Agudah sages made their announcement after a six-hour meeting in Bnei Brak, where they had been visited first by Likud and later by Labor Party ministers.

Until then, uncertainty cast a pall over Israel's political scene, as both Labor and Likud ardently courted the religious extremists, much to the disgust of some top figures in each party.

As the two major parties tried to outbid each other for the favor of the religious parties, serious internal cracks began to show in their leadership ranks.

Several key Likud ministers refused Sunday to add their signatures to a document outlining Likud's undertakings to the Agudah. Similar rebellion was rife in Labor's ranks.

But the dissent inside the Likud apparently did not deter Agudah from siding with the party.

In the end, the Agudah politicians made it clear that Likud's pledges on the "Who Is a Jew" issue were more satisfactory than Labor's.

But there were rumblings inside Likud on Sunday night, with several Knesset members insisting they would not support the Orthodox initiative.

**UNITED STATES NOW DENYING REFUGE TO HUNDREDS OF JEWS LEAVING USSR**  
By Andrew Silow Carroll

NEW YORK, Dec. 4 (JTA) -- For the first time, American immigration officials are challenging the refugee status of Soviet Jewish emigres, with the result that hundreds of them may not be allowed to come to the United States.

According to various Jewish organizations, the challenges are occurring in Rome, usually the next-to-last stop for Soviet Jews intent on coming to the United States. There, 179 Soviet Jews have been denied refugee visas since September, according to HIAS, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society.

In addition, more than 300 "delayniks" are said to be in limbo in Rome, awaiting a decision by immigration officials that was once automatic for Soviet Jews. From January through Nov. 29, 12,794 Soviet Jews were processed by HIAS officials in Rome.

Soviet Jewry activists, American Jewish resettlement agencies and Soviet Jews themselves are claiming the new policy contradicts the reality of Jewish life in the Soviet Union and reneges on years of official promises to Jews there.

Furthermore, they fear losing government subsidies to refugees that defray the mounting costs of resettlement.

The State Department denies there is a new policy. But both State and Justice department spokespersons confirmed on Friday that refugee visas had been denied to those Soviet Jews who were unable to demonstrate a "well-founded fear of persecution" in their home country.

Last week, the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews distributed a petition signed by 60 Soviet Jewish families in Italy who were told they could not enter the United States as refugees.

**'No Change In U.S. Policy'**

"What is the difference between us and others who have fled their countries under dictatorship governments to save their lives from persecution?" they asked.

In a second petition released by UCSJ, 345 Soviet Jewish families appealed to the U.S. government and public to reverse the recent policy.

In Washington, State Department spokeswoman Phyllis Oakley said Friday that while there are Soviet Jews who have not qualified for refugee status, there is "no change in U.S. policy."

According to the Refugee Act of 1980, the State Department provides the Immigration and Naturalization Service with guidance on the political situation of a country's citizens.

Both State and Justice officials said that those denied refugee visas could enter the United States as public interest "parolees." Parolees must show an affidavit of support from a sponsor in the United States saying that the applicant will not be a liability on the public welfare system.

"Jews have at least been given the color of presumption of having been persecuted by definition," said Philip Saperia, assistant executive vice president of HIAS. "All of a sudden, cases accepted over the years are being denied."

"The recent INS policy of quizzing every Soviet Jew to prove a history of persecution--and denying some Jews refugee status on that basis -- repudiates everything our country has stood for since Helsinki," said Pamela Cohen, national president of the UCSJ.

The State Department each year sets a ceiling on the number of refugee visas available worldwide. This year, the quota is 94,000, of which only 84,000 slots are fully funded.

Only 16,000 of those slots have been set aside for all Soviet refugees: Jews, Armenians, Pentecostal Christians and ethnic Germans.

**1988 Quota Surpassed**

By September, the number of Soviet citizens seeking refuge in the United States had already surpassed 16,000. The process of screening refugee applications began that month, according to Saperia of HIAS.

The State Department also announced, early last month, that because the refugee budget had been drained, the processing of further Soviet Jewish applications would have to wait until the beginning of January.

While Jewish organizations have welcomed the easing of restrictions on Soviet Jewish emigration, resettling refugees represents a formidable financial challenge.

Last year, Jewish communities around the country spent an estimated \$14 million on resettling Soviet emigres. This year, when Jews have been leaving the Soviet Union at a rate of 1,500 a month, they are expected to spend \$66 million.

Officials of HIAS, the Council of Jewish Federations, the American Jewish Committee and the National Conference on Soviet Jewry are seeking a meeting with Attorney General Richard Thornburgh to discuss their concerns.

The organizations are also hoping that Congress will recommend an increase in the refugee quotas and request additional funding for refugee resettlement.

The greater challenge is the dollars.

When the State Department increased the number of refugee slots by 15,000 last year to accommodate a surge in Armenian emigration from the Soviet Union, it did not request additional funding. As a result, the State Department ran out of cash in July, and hundreds of people, mostly Armenians, were stranded at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow.

The crush was only alleviated with a \$20 million emergency allocation, which came out of the next fiscal year's budget.

**Illusion Of Liberalization**

Soviet Jewry activists are concerned that U.S. officials are beginning to rethink American refugee policy in light of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of "glasnost" (openness). They fear American officials are becoming dubious that persecution of Jews is still a problem in the USSR.

But activists say recent Soviet promises to legalize the teaching of Hebrew and to establish a Jewish cultural center in Moscow have created only the illusion of liberalization.

"Despite palpable improvements in immigration and the ability to travel back and forth, and some improvements that came with glasnost, the fundamental basis of fear on the part of Jews in the Soviet Union has not changed," said David Waksberg, executive director of the Bay Area Council for Soviet Jews in San Francisco.

A State Department source said the department is taking a number of actions to ease the caseload in Moscow and Rome, including hiring more officials at those embassies.

(JTA correspondent Howard Rosenberg in Washington contributed to this report.)

## EX-ENVOYS SAY U.N. CAN'T MEDIATE UNTIL IT REPEALS ZIONISM DECREE

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, Dec. 4 (JTA) -- If the United Nations wants to play a role in the Middle East, then it must first repeal its 1975 resolution equating Zionism with racism, two former U.S. ambassadors to the United Nations said Sunday.

Sen. Daniel Moynihan (D-N.Y.), who was the U.S. representative to the United Nations when the General Assembly adopted the resolution, and Jeane Kirkpatrick made this challenge on NBC-TV's "Meet the Press" program Sunday morning.

"Let the other side take the first step," Moynihan said. "They have used the United Nations as a place to delegitimize the existence, the right to existence of the State of Israel."

But he said if the resolution is repealed, "a lot of things are possible."

Both Moynihan and Kirkpatrick indicated support of the decision by Secretary of State George Shultz to bar Yasir Arafat, chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization, from entering the United States to address a General Assembly debate on the Palestinians.

They particularly noted the appearance at the recent Palestine National Council meeting in Algiers of Mohammed (Abul) Abbas, a close associate of Arafat who masterminded the hijacking of the Italian cruise liner Achille Lauro. During that incident, Leon Klinghoffer, a wheelchair-bound New York Jew, was shot and thrown overboard.

Shultz's decision has been condemned by all the members of the United Nations except for Israel and the United States. The U.N. General Assembly voted 154-2 on Friday to move its debate to Geneva, so that Arafat can address it.

### Shultz Defends Decision

In an appearance Sunday morning on ABC-TV's "This Week with David Brinkley," Shultz said his decision was the right one.

"As people get further and further from it, and look back on it, I think they are going to come around and see how important it is for us to be very clear and very firm in our attitude toward terrorism," he said.

Shultz said he had allowed other PLO members to enter the United States for the debate and not Arafat, because "Arafat must know about, condone and lend support to the terrorist activities taking place, particularly of the Fatah organization, of which he is the chairman."

The secretary said that while he welcomed "some signs of movement" by the PNC at its Algiers meeting, the major progress seen by some is "not a reasonable interpretation" of the political document issued by the PNC.

He said a section listing the U.N. resolutions the PNC supports does not mention Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. He said that in another section, in which the PNC calls for an international conference for peace negotiations, there is "heavily conditioned acceptance" of the two resolutions.

It was on this "that people have this notion that they have recognized Israel's right to exist," Shultz said. "You have to strain yourself pretty hard to find it."

Shultz said that what is necessary is for the PLO "to say it straight out that they have accepted Israel's right to exist, that they accept 242 and 338 and they flatly renounce the use of terrorism in all of its forms."

## LARGE EXHIBITION OF JEWISH ART TO GO ON DISPLAY IN BELGRADE

By Ruth E. Gruber

BELGRADE, Yugoslavia, Dec. 4 (JTA) -- The Yugoslav capital will play host next month to the largest exhibition of native Jewish art, culture and history ever mounted in this country.

Titled "Jews on the Territory of Yugoslavia," it opens here Jan. 16 for a six-week run.

It will be in two sections, explained Milica Mhailovic, curator of Belgrade's Jewish Museum, because there is no single hall in the city big enough to contain all of it.

The exhibit may eventually travel to Tel Aviv, London and New York. It was seen last April through June in Zagreb, capital of the Yugoslav province of Croatia, and during the summer in Sarajevo, capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Jews have lived in the country that is now Yugoslavia for nearly 2,000 years. The land was always a bridge between Europe and the Middle East, a blend of many cultures.

It was home to more than 80,000 Jews before World War II. The Holocaust claimed the lives of about 67,000 Yugoslavs. Today, the Jewish population numbers roughly 6,000.

The exhibit shows their rich heritage. It brings together ritual artifacts and artistic works from more than 30 Jewish, local and state museums in Yugoslavia. Among these are oil lamps and a menorah dating from the second century, and illuminated Hebrew manuscripts, such as the famous Sarajevo Hagaddah.

There are photographs and drawings of the architectural variety and large number of synagogues that once existed, old Jewish neighborhoods, Jewish school groups, clubs, aid societies and summer camps.

The accompanying catalogue contains a five-page glossary of Serbo-Croatian translations of Hebrew terms. It also contains a detailed chronology of the Jewish presence in Yugoslavia. Archaeological finds date back nearly 1,000 years.

Jewish life here in the Middle Ages is richly documented, as is the 15th- and 16th-century influx of Jews expelled from Spain.

The years of Nazi occupation after 1941 are treated in detail. There are exhibits showing the week-by-week, sometimes day-by-day, escalation of persecutions, deportations and killings, as well as the Jewish participation in the resistance movement.

### SETTLER GETS THREE-YEAR SENTENCE

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Dec. 4 (JTA) -- Israel Zeev, an American-born Jewish settler from the West Bank town of Shiloh, was given a three-year prison sentence Sunday for killing an Arab shepherd in a quarrel over grazing rights last May 5.

Zeev also received a two-year suspended prison term. The sentence, pronounced by Jerusalem district court Judge Zvi Cohen, is the lightest allowed by law.

Cohen took Zeev's word that his fatal shooting of Jawda Abdullah Awad and the wounding of another shepherd in a field near Shiloh were not intentional.

The judge decided that Zeev fired only to frighten the Arabs. Nevertheless, he ordered him to pay the wounded Arab 30,000 shekels (about \$18,500).