

ARABS EXPECTED TO PRESS U.N. TO UPGRADE STATUS OF THE PLO

By Edwin Eytan and Tamar Levy

GENEVA, Dec. 12 (JTA) — The Arab states are expected to press the U.N. General Assembly this week to upgrade the status of the Palestine Liberation Organization in the world organization.

The assembly may also be asked by the Arabs to send U.N. troops to protect the Palestinian inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, according to Western diplomats here.

A special session of the U.N. General Assembly is to open here Tuesday. The assembly's annual debate on Palestine, usually conducted in New York, was shifted to U.N. European headquarters in Geneva, after the U.S. State Department refused to allow Yasir Arafat to come to New York to address the session.

As it turns out, the U.S. action seems to have guaranteed the Palestine Liberation Organization leader much wider exposure and sympathy than otherwise might have been the case. He is likely to bask in worldwide attention here for the next three days.

Arafat is expected to address the world body on Tuesday. Palestinian sources say he will deliver a "message of peace" and will ask the United Nations to help "start moving the peace process."

He is expected to pursue the peace offensive he launched at a meeting of the Palestine National Council in Algiers last month and continued more recently in Stockholm, where he met with five American Jews.

The PNC, which serves as the PLO's legislative body, proclaimed an independent Palestinian state in Algiers on Nov. 15. Western diplomats here expect the Arab states to press the assembly to accord the state some manner of recognition.

Israelis To Walk Out

The PLO presently enjoys observer status at the United Nations. But that can be upgraded without the approval of the U.N. Security Council. The General Assembly is scheduled to vote on the matter Thursday.

Arafat will be ushered into the chamber Tuesday by U.N. Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar and Dante Caputo, this year's president of the General Assembly.

That is a courtesy normally reserved for heads of state. But Arafat will deliver his speech from the speakers rostrum rather than from his armchair. Addressing the body seated is a privilege granted government leaders.

When Arafat mounts the podium to speak, the Israeli delegation will walk out of the hall. The delegation is headed by the acting permanent representative of Israel to the United Nations, Ambassador Johanan Bein.

"We shall not reply to Arafat's speech, but address the (Palestinian) issue globally, as we always do to clarify our stand," Bein told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

The U.S. delegation is headed by Ambassador Vernon Walters, the U.S. permanent representative to the United Nations. Vladimir Petrovsky, the Soviet deputy foreign minister for Middle Eastern affairs, heads the Russian delegation. He will speak Wednesday.

Altogether, more than 100 U.N. member states are attending the session. The delegations include more than 20 foreign ministers.

But the only Western foreign minister present will be Karolos Papoulias of Greece. He is representing the 12-nation European Community, which he currently chairs.

Also in Geneva for the special U.N. session are a number of fringe groups, some advocating a hard line and others favoring direct talks between the PLO and Israel.

Americans for a Safe Israel and the Coalition of Concern, a group headed by New York Rabbi Avraham Weiss, held a joint news conference here Monday, warning of the danger of the PLO and calling for the extension of Israeli law to the administered territories.

Israeli peace activist Abie Nathan, on the other hand, is here to try to persuade "the two sides to talk together."

SOVIETS TURN BACK ISRAELI PLANES, BUT ASK THEM TO RETURN ON TUESDAY

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Dec. 12 (JTA) — Two Israeli planes bearing rescue specialists and equipment were turned away Monday from earthquake-devastated Soviet Armenia, apparently because of poor organization and conflicting instructions.

Two giant air force Hercules cargo planes took off from Israel early in the morning with 50 IDF and Magen David Adom medical and rescue specialists aboard and tons of equipment.

But the aircraft returned to Israel a few hours after takeoff. They were turned back shortly before landing at the Soviet Armenian capital of Yerevan.

The Soviet authorities told them by radio to return to Israel because their personnel and supplies were not needed in the region to which they had been directed.

But they were asked to fly back Tuesday to a different part of Armenia devastated by the earthquake.

On Sunday, the first airlift of Israeli relief supplies was welcomed by Soviet authorities in Armenia. According to reports from Yerevan and Moscow, the Soviet news media have made special mention of Israel's earthquake relief effort.

But authorities have requested that Israeli army personnel wear civilian clothes and that the red Shield of David emblem not be prominently displayed on medical equipment.

Meanwhile, the Magen David Adom, Israel's first-aid and blood collection agency, has protested that its rescue team and medical supplies were not included in the first Israeli relief flight to Armenia on Sunday.

The MDA has been trying for years to achieve international recognition as a humanitarian agency on a par with the Red Cross and the Moslem Red Crescent.

Since the disastrous earthquake struck Soviet Armenia last Wednesday, the MDA set up blood donation centers in the largest cities. Hundreds of Israelis have given blood to be flown to Yerevan.

Meanwhile, the Soviet consular delegation in Tel Aviv has opened a special bank account here for donations to Armenian earthquake relief.

THREE LONG-TERM REFUSENIKS GET PERMISSION TO EMIGRATE

By Susan Birnbaum

NEW YORK, Dec. 12 (JTA) — Two long-term refusniks told two weeks ago that their knowledge of "state secrets" would no longer be used as a grounds for denying them permission to emigrate have been promised exit visas, the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews reported Monday.

Roald Zelichonok, 52, and Eduard Markov, both of Leningrad, were notified by OVIR emigration authorities last week that they could emigrate.

Another Soviet Jew long refused for "state secrecy" reasons also has received permission. He is Julian Khasin of Moscow.

Lynn Singer, a past president of the Union of Councils and now executive director of the Long Island Committee for Soviet Jewry, received the news in telephone conversations she had with the three men.

The reports were confirmed by the National Conference on Soviet Jewry.

Zelichonok, an electronics engineer who was jailed for teaching Hebrew in the privacy of his apartment, has been waiting 10 years for an exit visa. He received his permission last Friday.

Singer said Zelichonok had remarked that the first Jewish observance of anything in his life was Chanukah 1977, and so his permission on Chanukah was especially meaningful to him.

Zelichonok's wife, Galina, returned to Leningrad last Wednesday after three months in the West, where she was treated for an eye disease and attended a scientific conference in her husband's stead.

Markov, an energy engineer refused permission to emigrate for nine years, was told last Tuesday he could leave.

Khasin, a computer engineer, had been refused permission to emigrate since 1980.

IDF EVACUATED UNIT FROM LEBANON TO AVOID CLASH WITH SYRIAN TROOPS

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Dec. 12 (JTA) — The Israeli commando force that attacked a Palestinian terrorist base deep inside Lebanon last Friday was thrown into some confusion when its commanding officer, Lt. Col. Amir Meital, was killed in the early stages of the assault.

That appears to have been one reason for a top-level decision to withdraw the force with great haste, leaving behind four soldiers who were belatedly rescued.

Another reason was the possibility of a clash with Syrian troops deployed nearby.

Those factors emerged Monday as the Israel Defense Force high command continued to investigate the operation.

In addition to Meital's death, three soldiers were wounded in the raid, which was otherwise described as a great success.

The target was a subterranean base of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command, a terrorist group headed by Ahmed Jabril. The base was located near Naameh village, less than 20 miles from Beirut, the Lebanese capital.

The general staff seems most disturbed by the fact that the evacuation by helicopter violated a cardinal rule of the IDF: never leave a soldier behind in enemy territory.

The IDF chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Dan Shomron, assumed full personal responsibility for ordering the evacuation to proceed even though a head count indicated four men missing. He stressed the need to save lives.

Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin expressed full confidence in Shomron on Monday and claimed the ultimate responsibility was in fact his.

Maj. Gen. Doron Rubin, head of the IDF's training branch, who had overall command of the operation, said the proximity of Syrian troops to the main body of the Israeli commando force was an important factor in Shomron's decision.

Shomron disclosed that the raid on Jabril's base was mounted only after the planners deemed it fairly certain that nearby Syrian troops would not intervene.

ARSON AGAINST MOSQUE STRAINS TIES BETWEEN ARABS AND JEWS

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Dec. 12 (JTA) — Arson on Saturday against a mosque in the Bedouin village of Ibtin, near Haifa, has seriously strained relations between Israeli Jews and their 700,000 fellow Arab citizens.

Israeli Arabs of all political persuasions view the arson, believed to be the work of Jewish extremists, as part of a larger campaign by the Jewish authorities to harass and intimidate the Israeli Arab minority.

The depth of the bitterness was evident when Haifa Mayor Arye Gurel and Meir Cohen-Avidov, a former Likud Knesset member, came to a meeting of Arab leaders to condemn the arson and offer sympathy. They got a cold reception.

They then walked out of the meeting in anger when the leader of Israel's Moslem community, Sheikh Abdallah Nimer, commented that the burning of the mosque was no more an outrage than the demolition of illegally constructed Arab homes by Israeli authorities.

He was referring to the recent bulldozing of homes in the Israeli Arab town of Taiba near Kfar Sava.

Nimer added that any act against the Arab population in the administered territories was an act against the Arab community in Israel.

That open identification with the Palestinian uprising incensed Cohen-Avidov. "I came here to identify as a religious person with those who protested the desecration of a holy place," he said.

"It is unfortunate that the stage has been used for wild incitement against the state."

Radicalization of Israeli Jews

But Israeli Arabs have what they consider serious grievances. They see the arson as evidence of the further radicalization of Israeli Jews.

The newly built mosque in Ibtin was not badly damaged by the fire. But prayer rugs and Korans valued in the tens of thousands of dollars were destroyed.

The Religious Affairs Ministry promptly promised to pay for the damage. But senior Arab mayors, Arab Knesset members and others decided Sunday "not to wait for the government to fulfill its promises."

They announced the creation of a public committee to raise funds among the Moslem population to repair the mosque. They promised it would reopen for prayers on Friday, the Moslem sabbath.

EBAN AND KISSINGER AGREE U.S. MUST TAKE LEAD IN PEACE PROCESS

By Andrew Silow Carroll

NEW YORK, Dec. 12 (JTA) — Abba Eban and Henry Kissinger said Monday that an Israeli-Palestinian peace settlement will only come about with the mediation of the United States.

The two veteran diplomats, one a former Israeli foreign minister, the other a former U.S. secretary of state, were the speakers at a symposium held in honor of the United Jewish Appeal's 50th anniversary.

Philanthropic leaders from all over North America and Canada gathered at New York's Waldorf-Astoria Hotel on Sunday for the two-day "jubilee" and its schedule of forums, planning meetings, awards ceremonies and entertainment.

In a session Monday morning, Eban and Kissinger argued for a strong U.S. role in peace negotiations between Israel and Palestinians on the basis that the present stalemate is untenable.

"I don't believe Israel can stay where it is," said Kissinger. "Nor do I believe Israel can return to the 1967 borders.

"What Israel needs is a negotiating position. It must find some platform on which it can stand with the U.S.," he said.

Kissinger said he favors negotiations leading to an interim arrangement, during which Palestinians would form some type of government in the administered territories and prove their ability to coexist with Israel.

Israel, in the meantime, would have to restate its commitment to U.N. Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, which call for a land-for-peace solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Exploratory Talks With PLO

That is essentially the position of Israel's Likud party, which favors direct negotiations and an interim solution as specified by the 1978 Camp David accords.

But Eban, a veteran of Israel's Labor Alignment, said he does not believe in what he called "this myth of direct negotiations."

"All settlements in Mideast history have demanded a third party," he said. "The U.S. should be active and a little audacious, and not mind talking to abrasive people."

The U.S. role, said Eban, should extend to exploratory talks with the PLO, if the PLO meets certain conditions set by the U.S. government when Kissinger was conducting shuttle diplomacy in the mid-1970s.

"I do not believe the U.S. government should be attacked if they explore the ground by talking to people," said Eban. "Many Israelis will trust the United States to hold that discussion (with the PLO) without sacrificing our interests. Israel without the U.S. is not going to go anywhere in negotiations."

The panelists were asked about the recent meeting in Stockholm between Arafat and a contingent of American Jewish intellectuals, during which Arafat was said to inch closer to unqualified recognition of Israel and denunciation of terrorism.

Eban said that the world had only to wait to judge Arafat's sincerity until Tuesday, when the PLO chief is expected to address a special United Nations General Assembly session in Geneva.

Said Kissinger: "If the Palestinians want to make an unambiguous statement (recognizing Israel), they know how. But they're so divided

among themselves. What they present to us as a change they want to be able to present to colleagues as freedom to do what they want to do."

The UJA gathering began Sunday night with a dinner honoring past and present national chairmen and executives, including William Rosenwald.

Rosenwald, as head of the National Refugee Coordinating Committee, was one of the original signers of the charter creating UJA after the Kristallnacht pogrom of 1938.

The conclave concluded Monday afternoon with a national board of trustees meeting.

ARABS LACK DESIRE FOR DEMOCRACY AND PEACE, SAYS KIRKPATRICK

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Dec. 12 (JTA) — Jeane Kirkpatrick, the former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, ruled out the possibility of Israeli-Arab peace in the foreseeable future because of what she contends is a lack of commitment to democracy by the Palestinians.

But two Israeli scholars indicated that Israel has to meet the current Palestinian peace offensive with a credible policy initiative of its own.

They and others spoke at the first session of the fourth annual Jeane Kirkpatrick Forum at Tel Aviv University, named in honor of the former envoy, who was an outspoken friend of Israel in the world organization.

The theme this year is "The Year 2000: Prospects and Possibilities for Arab-Israeli Cooperation."

Kirkpatrick, known for her ultraconservative view of world affairs, insisted there were no prospects for peace until the Palestinians conformed to democratic values.

She also noted that both Israel and the United States emerged from their recent elections with divided governments, leaving both countries without the ability to undertake policy departures that do not enjoy a broad consensus.

Professor Itamar Rabinovitch, director of Tel Aviv University's Dayan Center, observed that the Palestine Liberation Organization was changing its tone and language in an effort to satisfy American conditions for dialogue.

Dr. Shai Feldman, of the university's Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, said a serious situation would develop if the PLO's new tone succeeds in Washington but Israel responds with a negative position.

Another speaker, U.S. Sen. Robert Kasten (R-Wis.), said American-Israel cooperation will be preserved under the incoming Bush administration.

He said there would be no diminution of U.S. economic and military aid to Israel and it will continue to be given in the form of grants.

Kasten said the American-Israeli strategic cooperation agreement would save Israel \$100 million or more a year for the next 25 years.

He said interest rates on military loans will continue to be linked to current market levels and Israel will be allowed to compete with the NATO countries in arms sales to the United States.

Kasten said Israel's role in the Strategic Defense Initiative will depend on the level of funding the Congress provides for the highly controversial program, known as "Star Wars."

Dr. Joseph Goell, a Jerusalem Post columnist, said Israel's political system has ceased to function and is in urgent need of reform.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES: JEWISH AGENCY CHAIRMAN OPTIMISTIC ON IMPROVEMENTS FOR SOVIETS JEWS

By Mark Joffe

NEW ORLEANS (JTA) - The mysterious diversion of a Soviet airliner to Israel on Dec. 2 may have marked the first time an Aeroflot plane touched down at Ben-Gurion Airport.

But what is not well known is that an Israeli aircraft had made an unprecedented landing at Moscow's international airport just one month before.

The plane left Israel on Nov. 1 for the first direct flight to the Soviet capital. Aboard were top officials of the World Jewish Congress and the Jewish Agency for Israel, who were on their way to the Kremlin for meetings with top Soviet officials.

As Mendel Kaplan describes it, the direct flight was not the only unique aspect of the trip.

The Jewish leaders apparently received unprecedented assurances from Soviet leaders that meaningful changes in the quality of life for Jews remaining in the Soviet Union would be instituted in the near future.

Kaplan, who is chairman of the Jewish Agency Board of Governors, discussed those promises in a wide-ranging interview here last month during the 57th General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations.

One promise the Jewish delegation signed was an agreement with Soviet officials permitting Soviet Jews to set up a body that would represent their interests and have contact with other organized bodies of world Jewry.

The Soviets also promised to establish a Jewish cultural center in Moscow and to allow Jewish journals and a Jewish lecture bureau.

Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze personally informed the Jewish delegation that the teaching of Hebrew would be decriminalized.

Amending The Constitution

Furthermore, Religious Affairs Minister Konstantin Kharchev said the Soviet Constitution would be amended this spring to allow the teaching of Jewish heritage.

There will be no restrictions on teaching Jewish subjects anywhere in the Soviet Union, Kaplan said.

Among other subjects discussed was the resolution of long-term emigration cases and the possibility of restoring diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and Israel.

But if assurances were made in these areas, Kaplan and the other members of the delegation are not talking about them.

This, of course, was not the first meeting between Jewish leaders and Kremlin officials.

WJC Congress President Edgar Bronfman, who was on the mission, had met with Soviet leaders in the past, as had Morris Abram, past chairman of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry and current chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, who declined an invitation to be included on this trip.

Each time such a mission took place, participants returned toting bags of Soviet good will and promises, some of which were never kept.

But Kaplan said he was confident that the Soviets would live up to their pledges this time around. He listed three reasons.

First, the Soviets are now facing ethnic unrest in several corners of their vast nation.

In Estonia and Lithuania, Armenia and Azerbaijan, ethnic tensions present a real threat to the stability of the Soviet regime and the viability of the Soviet system.

Kaplan believes the resolution of grievances from another ethnic minority, the Jews, could well serve as a pilot project for assuaging the concerns of all ethnic groups.

Second, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev has expressed concern about the "brain drain" of talent leaving the Soviet Union.

With Jewish emigration at its highest in nearly a decade, the Soviets are looking for ways to entice some of their best and brightest to stay, Kaplan said.

Finally, the Soviets want desperately to host an international human rights conference in 1991, the Jewish Agency official observed.

The United States and other Western countries are unwilling to participate in such a conference unless the Soviet government makes further headway in resolving its own longstanding human rights problems.

Soviets' Self-Interests

In sum, Kaplan believes the Soviets are willing to make significant changes in the quality of Jewish life, not out of some new-found good will, but for pragmatic reasons of self-interest.

Perhaps the new Soviet realpolitik does not come as a surprise to Kaplan since he is trying to accomplish a little "perestroika" (restructuring) of his own in the Jewish Agency.

Just as Gorbachev has begun to tackle the problem of waste and corruption in the government and Communist Party bureaucracy, so Kaplan has tried to rout out duplication and mismanagement in the Jewish Agency.

A longstanding complaint had been that the Jewish Agency and various ministries of the Israeli government were both trying to take responsibility for the same tasks.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the area of immigrant absorption, where the government's Absorption Ministry and the agency's Immigration and Absorption Department appeared to be stepping on each others' toes while still not managing to cover immigrants' needs adequately.

Kaplan and Simcha Dinitz, who chairs the World Zionist Organization-Jewish Agency Executive, recently signed a contract with the Absorption Ministry to transfer most absorption responsibility to the government.

Direct Absorption

Under the new plan, 55 to 70 percent of all immigrants will be absorbed directly, meaning they will be settled in apartments rather than housed temporarily in absorption centers, where most olim spend their first six months in Israel.

The Jewish Agency will continue to help the government come up with the money to find "housing solutions" for Ethiopian and Soviet immigrants.

But more of its budget will be devoted to education and job training - to helping immigrants become self-sufficient in Israel.

Soviet Jews have been among the most vocal of immigrants to complain about Israel's absorption system.

With improvements expected both in the absorption process in Israel and the living conditions for Jews in the USSR, Soviet Jews will soon have a more promising alternative to choose from - if Mendel Kaplan gets his way.