

CABINET DEBATES EXTENDING AUTONOMY TO PALESTINIANS IN THE TERRITORIES

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Dec. 18 (JTA) — The Cabinet was split Sunday over a proposal that Israel unilaterally extend autonomy to the Palestinian Arabs in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The idea was floated by two Labor ministers, Gad Yaacobi and Moshe Shahal, as the caretaker Cabinet groped for a response to the surprise U.S. move to open talks with the Palestine Liberation Organization.

The U.S. ambassador to Tunisia, Robert Pelletreau Jr., met Friday with four PLO representatives in Tunis, at the instructions of Secretary of State George Shultz.

Shultz's decision last Wednesday that PLO chief Yasir Arafat had in fact met the American requirements for a dialogue, postulated since 1975, was a major diplomatic and political blow to Israel.

Yaacobi, who is minister for economic coordination, and Shahal, the energy minister, suggested "one-sided autonomy" for the Palestinians, even if they did not ask for or accept it.

Moshe Arens, a ranking Likud minister close to Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, was reported by Israel Radio to favor the idea. Arens, however, denied the report and said he opposed such a move.

The two top Labor Party leaders, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin, also oppose the move.

Peres said Israel must search out local Palestinian leaders who could represent the West Bank and Gaza Strip in negotiations for a peace settlement.

He is on record as suggesting free elections in the territories to let the residents choose their representatives. But according to the best-informed opinion, anyone the Palestinians elected would have to have PLO approval.

Shamir, meanwhile, continued his bitter criticism of the American policy reversal. He called the decision to talk to the PLO erroneous. He claimed that Arafat has not changed his colors and that the PLO remains a terrorist organization dedicated to Israel's destruction.

Shamir charged that the world wants Israel to withdraw from the West Bank and Gaza Strip. That, according to him, would end chances for peace.

AS U.S. MEETS WITH PLO OFFICIALS, KILLINGS IN TERRITORIES ESCALATE

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Dec. 18 (JTA) — Eight Palestinians were killed in clashes with Israeli security forces in the West Bank and Gaza Strip over the weekend. Scores were reported wounded.

Several Jewish settlers were wounded in rock-throwing incidents over the weekend, including a baby girl, who was hospitalized in serious condition.

The underground unified command of the Palestinian uprising declared a three-day general strike in the territories to protest the killings. Most of the dead are youths in their early 20s.

Despite the strike and violence, some 40,000 Arab school children in the West Bank returned to classes Sunday.

Schools in Nablus, however, remained closed, as the Israel Defense Force clamped another curfew on the city, whose population of over 100,000 makes it the largest Arab town in the West Bank.

Curfews also were imposed on the West Bank town of Kalkilya, the Al-Amari refugee camp near Ramallah and most refugee camps in the Gaza Strip.

The escalation of violence and the death toll, the highest in several weeks, coincided with the first talks between the United States and the Palestine Liberation Organization.

They occurred Friday in the ancient city of Carthage, south of Tunis, and were conducted between the U.S. ambassador to Tunisia, Robert Pelletreau Jr., and four PLO representatives.

According to foreign media reports, the PLO delegation was headed by Yasir Abed Rabbo, a member of the organization's executive committee.

PLO Says Unrest Is Not Terrorism

According to Israeli military sources, the violence in the territories was touched off by Arab extremists opposed to PLO leader Yasir Arafat's diplomatic initiative.

But Arab sources said it was the Israelis who responded to Arafat's peace offer by taking harsher measures to suppress the intifada, the Palestinian uprising, which entered its second year nine days ago.

Pelletreau was designated by Secretary of State George Shultz to be the U.S. contact man with the PLO. Shultz authorized the talks last Wednesday in a sudden reversal of a 13-year ban on such contacts.

He did this after Arafat, in an address to the U.N. General Assembly in Geneva last Tuesday and at a news conference there Wednesday, ostensibly met U.S. conditions for dialogue.

They were unambiguous recognition of Israel, unqualified renunciation of terrorism and acceptance of U.N. Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, which call for the return of formerly Arab territory and security for Israel and its neighbors.

The feeling here is that the supporters of Arafat, no less than the rejectionists, want to make clear that the intifada is continuing, regardless of any new political momentum.

According to a report by Moshe Arad, Israel's ambassador to Washington, the U.S. government has informed Israel that the PLO does not regard attacks on military targets or the uprising in the territories to be terrorist acts.

Arafat's position on terrorism was explained to Arad by Richard Murphy, the U.S. assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern and South Asian affairs. The United States apparently made no objections to the PLO interpretation.

Rioting began in Nablus early Friday, apparently unrelated to what was transpiring in Tunis or in Washington.

It was touched off by the funeral of a 15-year-old Arab youngster, who died of wounds suffered three weeks ago in a skirmish with the IDF.

The funeral became a mass demonstration.

Israeli troops opened fire, killing Yassin Shahshour and Faiz Shawki, both 20. Many more in the crowd were wounded.

Later clashes took the lives of Iyad Abu-Hillal, 18, and Nidal Abdul Hak. Another 20-year-old, Mohammad al-Kawni, died of his wounds Saturday.

Use Of Bullets Increasing

Two other Palestinians, Mohammad Nasser Hawash, 20, and Jihad Mustafa Umrani, 22, were pronounced "brain dead" at Mokassed Hospital in Jerusalem. Both sustained bullet wounds in their heads.

Three more Palestinians died Sunday.

The army is looking into the deaths of Suhair Ziyad, 23, and Mohammed Farahat from the Shabura neighborhood of Rafah, a town on the southern border of the Gaza Strip.

Arab sources said they were killed and three others were wounded in a clash with the IDF.

Another youth was fatally shot by soldiers Sunday in Deir al-Ghusun village, near Tulkarm in the West Bank.

The IDF said soldiers opened fire when the youth was about to throw a heavy brick on a soldier from a rooftop.

Dr. Hani Abidin, a spokesman for Mokassed, which is an Arab hospital, told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency that the number of patients admitted with bullet wounds in the head has increased sharply in the past week.

He said until recently, most injuries were caused by rubber or plastic bullets fired at the lower parts of the body. But in the last week, the use of live bullets has increased, and many have been aimed at the head.

According to Abidin, this marks a return to the pattern of the early days of the uprising in December 1987.

10-Month-Old Seriously Wounded

Meanwhile, Jewish settlers are furious over a rock attack that seriously injured Yona Assaf, 10-month-old daughter of residents of Dolev, a settlement north of Jerusalem.

She was struck in the head Friday afternoon by a rock thrown into her parents' car as they drove through the Arab town of Beituniya.

The child was rushed to the intensive care unit of Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem, where her condition was pronounced serious.

Settlers from Dolev entered Beituniya Saturday, staging a sit-down strike. They demanded that the defense minister or the chief of staff come to them with proposals to improve the security situation in the territories immediately.

Also wounded over the weekend were a couple from Ginot Shomron. Their car crashed Saturday night near Kalkilya, after coming under a hail of stones.

The driver, Alex Burger, was reported to be still unconscious Sunday, after undergoing an operation for a fractured skull.

His wife, Rina, suffered broken ribs, but was reported to be in fairly good condition. Their two children were released from the hospital.

A 4-year-old Swiss tourist was injured Saturday night by a rock thrown near Oranit, a settlement near Kfar Sava. The boy underwent surgery for a broken jaw.

In response to the latest incidents, Gen. Amram Mitzna, IDF commander for the central region, said the army would institute more severe punishments against rock-throwers.

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT URGES PLO BE RECOGNIZED AS GOVERNMENT By Yossi Lempkowicz

STRASBOURG, Dec. 18 (JTA) -- The Parliament of Europe voted 60-52 late Thursday for a resolution urging the 12 nations of the European Community to recognize the Palestine Liberation Organization as the "Palestinian government in exile."

The resolution also stressed the "usefulness" of a direct meeting between the E.C. foreign ministers and PLO chief Yasir Arafat.

But the European Community is wary of such moves at this time. And even in the more sympathetic parliament, its legislative body, little more than a fifth of the 518 members participated in the vote. There were 10 abstentions.

Supporting the resolution were the Communist deputies, part of the Socialist faction, the Spanish Conservatives and the ecological Greens.

The Liberals, British Conservatives and French Gaullists voted against it, while the French Socialists and Christian Democrats abstained.

The resolution also asked the various Palestinian components and the Israelis to refrain from any acts of violence or provocation in the Israeli-administered territories.

It called on the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China to establish diplomatic relations with Israel.

The balloting in the parliament here last Thursday coincided with the 104-2 vote at the U.N. General Assembly in Geneva to recognize the Palestinian state proclaimed by Arafat in Algiers last month.

Only Israel and the United States were opposed. But there were 36 abstentions, including all of E.C. member states.

No Position On Declared State

Although Arafat visited the parliament here last September at the invitation of the Socialist faction, the European Community has yet to take an explicit position on recognition of the proclaimed state.

The explanation given here is that any Middle East peace settlement "implies the creation of a defined territory for the Palestinian state, which guarantees Israel's right to exist within secure and internationally recognized boundaries."

Similarly, the 12 E.C. countries, while welcoming the Algiers declarations as "positive steps," individually stopped short of recognizing the Palestinian state.

Several of the deputies here expressed regret that the 12 E.C. leaders were unable to "make a more significant gesture" at their summit meeting in Rhodes earlier this month.

But the United States was praised for its decision last week to establish an official dialogue with the PLO.

In Rome, the Vatican also hailed the American decision.

"Finally, there has arrived the good news that could open the road to a negotiated settlement for the Middle East," a Vatican radio commentator said.

He called the American move "completely unexpected" and said it was "a sign that reason is beginning to prevail."

(JTA correspondent Ruth E. Gruber in Rome contributed to this report.)

TIKKUN PANELISTS BACK PLO TALKS, BUT STILL CHALLENGE PALESTINIANS

By Andrew Silow Carroll

NEW YORK, Dec. 18 (JTA) — A conference of American Jewish progressives opened Sunday with a panel's strong support of the U.S. move to begin talks with the Palestine Liberation Organization.

The endorsement, shared by the Palestinian speakers on the panel, was markedly different from the lukewarm reception given by the major American Jewish organizations to the U.S. decision to reverse its ban on contacts with the PLO.

But according to conference organizer Michael Lerner, that is the point of the conclave and his two-and-half-year-old magazine Tikkun, which is sponsoring the gathering.

"We want to say to the press and the world that the American Jewish leadership interviewed so often by the press does not speak for us," Lerner, who is Tikkun's editor, said at the opening session of the conference.

Lerner's words were greeted with warm applause by the more than 1,500 people who packed a ballroom of Manhattan's Penta Hotel.

His words also opened the way for open disagreement among the panelists. They included Edward Said, a literature professor at Columbia University and a member of the Palestine National Council; Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, a professor at Northwestern University who also sits on the PNC; Michael Walzer, a professor of social science at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton and a co-editor of Dissent; and Letty Cottin Pogrebin, founding editor of Ms. magazine.

Myth Of Jewish Paranoia

Said, for instance, called on American Jewish intellectuals to become public "witnesses to the present" and testify about Israeli actions against Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, including shootings, the razing of houses and expulsions.

"There has to be a recognition and acknowledgement for the injustice done to our people by yours, in your name," said Said.

Lerner countered by disputing traditional Palestinian assessments that Israeli security concerns are the product of paranoia.

"It is not paranoia when Jews hear over and over again in the Arab press, not of a two-state solution, but of a two-stage solution -- with the second stage after statehood to be the liberation of the rest of Palestine."

A galvanizing presence at the session was that of Moshe Amirav, a former Likud Knesset member.

Acknowledging Said, Amirav said Israelis need to be self-critical. He described his own defection from Likud to form a coalition of reserve officers and intellectuals who favor relinquishing the administered territories in the interest of security.

Amirav said he is willing to say of the PLO, "Let's give them a chance." However, what cannot be ignored, he added, are the "generations of suspicion of a second genocide based on repeated Arab assertions of 'driving the Jews into the sea.'"

The Tikkun conference will run through Tuesday, with major sessions on such topics as Zionism in the wake of the Palestinian uprising, black-Jewish relations and the future of liberal politics.

LIKUD-LABOR TALKS HIT IMPASSE OVER CABINET POSTS, SETTLEMENTS

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Dec. 18 (JTA) — Talks aimed at putting together a Likud-Labor coalition seemed to have reached an impasse Sunday.

Spokespersons for Labor said the positions of the two parties on key issues were too far apart to be bridged.

Likud, meanwhile, is making a last-ditch effort to put together a narrow coalition with the Orthodox and right-wing parties.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir has summoned Likud's potential partners of the religious bloc and secular right to a meeting Sunday night. He will try to dispose of loose ends and reach final agreements with them.

The prime minister hopes to present a government to President Chaim Herzog before Dec. 25, the date his second and last 21-day mandate to form a government expires.

If he reports failure, the president will ask the leader of another party to attempt the task. Presumably, it would be Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, who heads the Labor Party.

It was Herzog's unprecedented call for a Likud-Labor coalition last month that led to the renewal of negotiations between the two major parties.

But they have made little progress since. They have been unable to resolve differences over the division of Cabinet portfolios and the chairmanships of key Knesset committees.

Finance Post For Peres

Peres reportedly would agree to become finance minister in the new government, provided that Labor chairs the Knesset Finance Committee.

Labor's intense interest in that area is motivated, some observers say, by the need to bail out a giant Socialist enterprise, the Histadrut-owned Koor Industries, which faces bankruptcy.

Labor also is said to have balked at the over-generous government subsidies Likud promised the ultra-Orthodox school system and religious institutions.

Other points of dispute include the Education Ministry, presently held by Labor but promised by Shamir to the Orthodox parties, and the number of new settlements to be established in the West Bank.

Shamir has promised the right-wingers 40, at the rate of 10 a year during each of the four years of the next government's tenure. Labor will agree to no more than six in four years.

Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who has been a strong advocate of a Labor partnership with Likud, said Sunday that such an arrangement is impossible under Likud terms.

Rabin was quoted as telling Labor ministers it would be "madness" to cut the defense budget to provide funds for religious institutions.

Meanwhile, associates of Shamir said if he manages to form a narrow rightist government, he would name Moshe Arens foreign minister and retain the defense portfolio for himself "temporarily," until Labor agreed to join the government.

If those are his plans, they could cause an upheaval in the top ranks of Likud. David Levy is said to have his eye on the Foreign Ministry. Ariel Sharon has made it clear he intends to be the next defense minister.

BUSH'S PICK FOR PENTAGON POST FAVORS STRONGER TIES TO ISRAEL

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, Dec. 16 (JTA) -- Former Sen. John Tower (R-Texas) is expected to work to increase the strategic cooperation between Israel and the United States while supporting continued arms sales to Arab countries, if the Senate confirms him as the new secretary of defense.

Tower, who was named to head the Pentagon by President-elect George Bush on Friday, had a record of support for Israel and Soviet Jewry during his 24 years in the Senate.

Even before Bush's election in November, Tower had been expected to be named to the post he has long sought. But the announcement, expected weeks ago, had been held up by rumors about Tower's personal life, his closeness to defense contractors and the push by some Bush advisers for someone with more management experience at a time of fiscal austerity.

Bush said Friday that Tower had received a "clean bill of health" and will be stronger in his new job because of the intensive investigation he had undergone.

Tower, who was chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee during President Reagan's first term, when the Republicans controlled the Senate, has visited Israel eight times and made five trips to other Middle East countries.

He was a strong supporter of the development of strategic cooperation during the Reagan administration, in the belief that Israel is the major ally in preventing Soviet influence in the Middle East.

Tower was considered influential in the adoption of the strong plank in support of Israel at the Republican National Convention in New Orleans last August, according to pro-Israel activists.

Supported AWACS Sale

He supports foreign aid in general and aid to Israel in particular. He also was a strong supporter of the 1978 Camp David accords, which led to the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty.

Tower was one of 76 senators who wrote President Gerald Ford a letter in 1974 objecting to his "reassessment," which held up arms sales to Israel. He was also critical of the Carter administration in 1980 for the U.S. vote in favor of a U.N. Security Council condemning Israel's settlement policy. President Jimmy Carter later apologized for the U.S. vote.

But Tower has not supported congressional moves urging the United States to move its embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, on the grounds that this is a decision to be made by the president, not Congress.

Tower was quoted in 1981 as supporting a "balanced policy" in the Middle East. He has supported all U.S. arms sales to Arab countries.

In a Senate speech supporting the sale of AWACS surveillance planes to Saudi Arabia, Tower stressed that the United States "has no better friend in the Middle East than Israel." He stressed that the sale to the Saudis did not jeopardize Israel's security and he would never vote for anything that did.

Tower was first elected to the Senate in 1961, in a special election after Lyndon Johnson gave up his seat to become vice president. He was the first Republican senator elected in Texas since the Reconstruction era.

Although he had planned to return to private life after retiring from the Senate at the end of 1984, just two weeks later President Reagan named him as the United States negotiator on long-range missiles at the nuclear arms talks in Geneva. He served in this capacity for 14 months.

Headed Iran-Contra Inquiry

Reagan called upon him again after it was revealed that the United States had secretly sold arms to Iran and used profits from the sale to help the Contras in their rebellion against the Sandinista government in Nicaragua.

Tower headed the three-member panel that investigated the role of the National Security Council in the affair. Another member of the committee was Lt. Gen. Brent Scowcroft, who Bush has named as his national security adviser.

The Tower Commission's report, issued in February 1987, did not blame Israel for the U.S. involvement in the Iran/Contra affair. "U.S. decision-makers made their own decisions and must bear responsibility for the consequences," the report said.

Tower was born in Houston on Sept. 29, 1925. During World War II, he enlisted in the Navy at the age of 17 and served aboard an amphibious gunboat in the Pacific. He was later a senior chief petty officer in the U.S. Navy Reserves.

He holds a bachelor's degree in political science from Southwestern University and a master's in the same subject from Southern Methodist University, both in Texas.

AMAL RESCUES UNIFIL TROOPS KIDNAPPED AFTER IDF RAID

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Dec. 18 (JTA) -- The mainstream Shiite Amal militia rescued three Irish soldiers and a Red Cross worker in southern Lebanon over the weekend, 24 hours after they were kidnapped by pro-Iranian Islamic extremists.

The kidnapping was said to have been precipitated by an Israel Defense Force crackdown on members of a Shiite fundamentalist group called Believers Resistance.

Meanwhile, two soldiers of the Israeli-backed South Lebanon Army were killed when a road mine exploded as their unit passed near El-Khayam village, in the southern Lebanon security zone.

Two Katyusha rockets fired from outside the zone damaged the American Christian missionary radio and television transmitters in southern Lebanon, just north of Metullah.

The kidnapped soldiers were members of the Irish battalion of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon. They were snatched by armed gunmen Friday morning while on duty at a UNIFIL checkpoint near Tibnin village, just north of the security zone.

They were returned unharmed Saturday to their battalion headquarters in Tibnin. Amal found them in the vicinity of Tyre on the southern Lebanon coast, less than 10 miles from where they were kidnapped.

The soldiers were suffering from exhaustion, because they were force-marched all night through difficult terrain.

They were identified as Cpl. Patrick Macken, 35; Pvt. Brian Kearney, 25; and Pvt. Bernak McCarughey, 30. Also held was Peter Winkler, a Swiss official of the Red Cross.