

ISRAEL SAID TO BE SEEKING INDIRECT CONTACT WITH PLO

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Feb. 1 (JTA) -- Israel's defense establishment is cautiously trying to establish an indirect political dialogue with the Palestine Liberation Organization abroad, according to Israeli press reports.

Israel has the unofficial blessings of the United States in that endeavor, Ron Ben-Yishai, the well-informed military affairs correspondent of Yediot Achronot, reported Wednesday.

According to Ben-Yishai, the objective is to open channels for a dialogue through mediators. When the time is ripe, this will facilitate direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations to resolve the future of the administered territories.

Ben-Yishai said the defense establishment has concluded that without some sort of dialogue with the PLO, it will be impossible to end the uprising in the territories and promote a political process for a solution of the Palestinian problem.

Israel officially refuses to have any dealings with the PLO, and Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir has vowed it never will.

But according to Ben-Yishai, Shamir is fully aware of the initiative, which is being undertaken by Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

It is based on discreet talks with prominent Palestinian figures in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, including strong supporters of the PLO.

The PLO leadership, for its part opposes operational or political negotiations with Israeli representatives through Palestinians in the territories.

Rabin is reportedly trying to overcome that resistance by having the Palestinians convey messages between Tel Aviv and PLO headquarters in Tunis -- in effect an indirect dialogue with the PLO leadership.

U.S. Expresses Interest

The U.S. administration in Washington has expressed great interest in Rabin's plan and the attempts to implement it, Ben-Yishai wrote.

The Kuwaiti newspaper Al-Qabas, quoted by Ha'aretz Wednesday, said the Americans have been conducting secret discussions with the PLO to determine ways to end the Palestinian uprising and to stop what it calls Israel's "measures of suppression."

Rabin's initiative began when Shmuel Goren, the coordinator of government affairs in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, met secretly in prison with Palestinian activist Faisal al-Husseini. A week later, on last Sunday, he was released from six months' administrative detention.

Faisal is a PLO supporter, though he is said to differ with it on some issues. He commands great respect among Palestinians in the territories, militants and moderates alike.

Hundreds have visited him at home since his release from prison to express their support, including youths active in the uprising, Ma'ariv reported Wednesday.

Ma'ariv said Hussein told his supporters he is trying to facilitate political moves and has no intention of separating Palestinians in the territories from the PLO leadership abroad.

SETTLERS BLAME SHAMIR PEACE PLAN FOR FIREBOMB ATTACK ON YESHIVA

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Feb. 1 (JTA) -- Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's peace plan was blamed Wednesday for a firebomb attack on a yeshiva in Hebron.

No one was hurt by the explosion of two Molotov cocktails outside the Shavei Hebron yeshiva.

But Noam Arnon, a spokesman for Jewish settlers, claimed the attack was a "direct result" of Shamir's proposal that Israel Defense Force troops be pulled out of the largely Arab-populated areas of the West Bank as part of an interim settlement.

Uri Ariel, secretary of the Council of Jewish Settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, told reporters he had no doubt that attacks would increase because of the moves proposed by Shamir.

The prime minister unveiled his peace plan in an interview published Tuesday in the Paris daily Le Monde.

He repeated his ideas, without elaborating, to reporters here Wednesday.

He called the plan very simple. It consists of two stages: an interim settlement that would include autonomy for the Palestinians, followed by negotiations, without pre-conditions, "between Israel, the Palestinian Arabs and some Arab countries, if they will join the negotiations."

Shamir said he was sincerely convinced that "positive results will come" once negotiations begin.

He stressed, however, that Israel would never negotiate with the Palestine Liberation Organization and that no party could dictate the final outcome of the peace negotiations.

Rejects Rabin Peace Plan

Shamir added that these principles are part of the Likud-Labor unity government's program. He dismissed Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin's recent initiatives toward the Palestinians as "certain ideas, rather than a peace plan."

Shamir's plan was rejected by the PLO Wednesday as "outdated and a pretext for continued occupation."

Only scattered disturbances were reported in the territories Wednesday, but at least eight Arabs were wounded by security forces.

Meanwhile, the state attorney has ruled that the IDF's use of plastic bullets in the territories is legal. His findings, based on the work of a team of legal experts, were presented to the Inner Cabinet on Wednesday.

In another development, security forces and police announced the capture of an Al Fatah terrorist cell operating in the Jezreel Valley area inside Israel and the Samaria area of the West Bank.

Most of their activities involved arson. The cell was led by a resident of the Israeli Arab town of Umm el-Fahm, near Hadera, who allegedly was approached by Al Fatah while on pilgrimage to Mecca last year.

Al Fatah is the military arm of the PLO headed by Yasser Arafat, who announced in December that the PLO had renounced terrorism.

STATEMENT CRITICIZING ISRAEL FAILS IN U.N. SECURITY COUNCIL

By Andrew Silow Carroll

UNITED NATIONS, Feb. 1 (JTA) -- The Palestine Liberation Organization has failed in its two-week attempt to convince United Nations Security Council members to agree on a statement critical of tough new measures by Israel in the administered territories.

Security Council members were unable to reach the consensus necessary for a statement, after the United States said a draft was one-sided and should be rewritten to call for restraint on both sides of the Palestinian uprising.

The United States is one of five permanent members of the council, each with the power to veto resolutions.

Any move to break the stalemate will have to wait until the new president of the Security Council, Ambassador Jai Pratap Rana of Nepal, sets an agenda for the coming weeks. Rana's one-month term as president began Wednesday.

PLO SHOULD RENOUNCE PAST DEEDS, COL. NORTH TELLS PRAYER BREAKFAST

By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, Feb. 1 (JTA) -- Lt. Col. Oliver North said Wednesday that if the Palestine Liberation Organization has truly renounced terrorism, then it should condemn its murder of Israeli athletes during the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich, West Germany.

"Why not also renounce the Munich massacre, the children's carnage in Ma'alot and deliver up the man who masterminded the seizure of the cruise ship Achille Lauro and murdered an American citizen, Leon Klinghoffer?" he said.

He was referring to the May 1974 massacre of Israeli school children by PLO infiltrators and the October 1986 hijacking of an Italian cruise ship.

North was the keynote speaker at the eighth annual Roundtable Prayer Breakfast for Israel at the National Religious Broadcasters convention here. North, whose trial for alleged illegal activities in the Iran-Contra affair opened Tuesday, was greeted with a 40-second standing ovation.

A few hundred Christians and Jews attended the breakfast, which featured Israeli flags at each guest's seat, the singing of Hatikvah, and a former refusenik, Alyosha Ryabinov, at the piano.

The event was sponsored by three Christian groups: the Religious Roundtable and the Brotherhood Forest of Israel, both of Memphis, Tenn., and Intercessors for America of Reston, Va.

North spoke of faithfulness extending from "this country to those with whom we have made commitments. That is an appropriate issue today at a breakfast honoring Israel."

He criticized intellectuals, journalists and politicians for "believing that (Soviet leader Mikhail) Gorbachev is good and that (PLO leader Yasir) Arafat is all right and that we should forget the past.

"I believe that if we do so, we will do so in the jeopardy of the future," he said.

North recalled the 50th anniversary of Kristallnacht in November, which marked "the day in which Adolf Hitler turned loose his jack-booted thugs to start one of the most murderous atrocities known to man."

Earlier, the Rev. Charles Mims of the Tabernacle of Faith Baptist Church in Los Angeles

welcomed "my friends of Israel," and said he is fighting anti-Semitism in Watts, a predominantly black section of Los Angeles.

Israel And South Africa Praised

Ed McAteer, the master of ceremonies, who during the presidential primaries headed Christians and Jews for Bush, praised Israel and South Africa for being the only two countries that banned the showing of "The Last Temptation of Christ" from movie theaters.

McAteer also praised the United States and Israel as the sole countries to oppose a United Nations vote on moving the U.N. General Assembly to Geneva to hear Arafat speak.

Moshe Aumann, consul general at the Israeli Embassy here, told the crowd, "It is good to be among people whose faith, whose deep and abiding love of the Bible are not just things remembered from some distant past or learned by rote once in Sunday school, but something that lives in you."

Jewish and Christian groups participating in the convention plan to lobby members of Congress later in the week, urging an end to the U.S. dialogue with the PLO.

The Jewish groups are Americans For a Safe Israel, Herut-Zionists of America and the Jewish Political Caucus. The other groups are the Religious Roundtable and the International Christian Embassy/Jerusalem.

The groups issued a seven-point proclamation, which, among other things, calls on the U.S. government not to sell any weapons to countries in a state of war with Israel.

Herbert Zweibon, chairman of AFSI, said his group will press lawmakers to have Israel's \$1.8 billion in military aid transferred from the State Department to a line-item in the Pentagon budget.

INNER CABINET AGREES TO COMMIT TO A DATE FOR PULLOUT FROM TABA

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Feb. 1 (JTA) -- The Inner Cabinet agreed Wednesday to commit Israel to a definite pullout date from Taba, but linked it to agreement on the purchase price of the Avia Sonesta Hotel and "access for Israeli citizens."

The government policy-making body made the offer to break the impasse that has developed in the dispute with Egypt over Taba.

The offer was forwarded to Egyptian Foreign Minister Esmat Abdel Meguid in Cairo by the U.S. State Department's legal adviser, Abraham Sofaer, who has been trying to mediate the Taba talks.

President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt was quoted in Cairo as saying he could not understand why "Israel was putting obstacles in the path of bilateral relations because of ownership of the Sonesta Hotel."

Taba, a tiny beach enclave on the Gulf of Eilat, was awarded to Egypt by international arbitration last year.

The area's only tangible assets are the Avia Sonesta Hotel and the Rafi Nelson Vacation Village, resorts built and managed by Israelis. Their final status is under negotiation.

The Inner Cabinet decided Israel would continue the Taba talks and try to hand over sovereignty to Egypt within a specified "and brief" time period, "after an agreement on the cost of the Avia Sonesta and access for Israeli citizens."

Cairo is impatient to take possession of Taba and has been pressing Israel to set a date before negotiations are concluded.

SOVIET JEWS DEFECTION TO ISRAEL CAUSES CONSTERNATION FOR OFFICIALS

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Feb. 1 (JTA) — Israeli officials are circumspect over the defection to Israel of a prominent member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences who arrived here this week.

Jacob Kogan, 48, a distinguished mathematician, literally bolted from an official Soviet delegation attending an international conference on computers in Paris.

He reportedly left his hotel early one morning last week to jog. He made his way directly to the Israeli Embassy, where he asked for asylum.

The Foreign Ministry, apparently embarrassed by the defection at a time when Israeli-Soviet relations seem to be improving, stressed that Kogan arrived in Israel "through normal procedures."

"As with all Jews wishing to come to Israel," he was first issued a tourist visa and then, since he had no money, was referred to the Jewish Agency in Paris, which provided him with an air ticket, a Foreign Ministry spokesman explained Wednesday.

Kogan landed at Ben-Gurion Airport carrying a small bag and still wearing his running shoes.

He is presently housed at the Milman immigrant absorption center in Tel Aviv, but has not yet been issued an immigrant's visa.

Kogan left a wife and two sons, ages 7 and 10, in Moscow. He told reporters here he had wanted to go to Israel for a long time.

But he did not apply for an exit permit, because he would immediately have lost his job and would have had to wait for years as a refusenik because of his alleged knowledge of state secrets, he said.

Israeli officials apparently want him to keep a low profile. After telling reporters Wednesday that he was "very happy" to be in Israel, he was whisked away before he could be asked any questions.

U.S., SOME ISRAELIS SAID TO OPPOSE CHOICE OF SHARANSKY FOR U.N. POST

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Feb. 1 (JTA) — Strong misgivings have surfaced over the proposed appointment of Soviet Jewry activist Natan Sharansky to be Israel's ambassador to the United Nations.

Liberal and leftist circles fear Sharansky's strong anti-Soviet stance could compromise Israel's policies at a time when relations with Moscow seem to be warming.

According to the Jerusalem Post, U.S. State Department officials have expressed similar concerns, which have been conveyed to Jerusalem by the Israeli Embassy in Washington. Sharansky is an outspoken critic of Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev. He calls his "glasnost" (openness) policy more cosmetic than indicative of long-term, substantive changes in the Soviet system.

Moreover, some argue, the Soviets are likely to take offense if a man they convicted of spying for the United States — however trumped-up the charges may have been — heads the Israeli delegation in the world organization.

But a spokesperson for the Soviet Mission to the United Nations in New York, quoted by Ma'ariv Wednesday, said Sharansky's appointment would be of no concern to the USSR.

"Whatever we think about him, you are

entitled to make your own diplomatic appointments," the spokesperson was quoted as saying.

Media reports Tuesday said Sharansky was approached informally for the U.N. job by Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, Foreign Minister Moshe Arens and Deputy Foreign Minister Binyamin Netanyahu.

But Shamir later appeared to distance himself from the offer.

Picked By Netanyahu

A spokesman said the prime minister was not asked officially to approve Sharansky's appointment. It must also have the consent of Shamir's coalition partner, Vice Premier Shimon Peres, who heads the Labor Party and also serves as finance minister.

It was in fact Netanyahu, Israel's U.N. ambassador until he quit last year to run for the Knesset, who picked Sharansky as his successor.

Arens reportedly agreed readily to the choice. Sharansky has strong backing in Likud and among right-wing hard-liners in general.

But Sharansky has carefully refrained from expressing a preference for any political party during the three years he has been in Israel.

He has strong support in the Soviet Jewish emigre community here. Many believe that his appointment to the prestigious U.N. post would encourage more Jews leaving the Soviet Union to go to Israel instead of the United States.

Foreign service careerists, unlike Netanyahu and Arens, are less than enthusiastic at the prospect of Sharansky heading Israel's U.N. delegation.

They point to his lack of formal diplomatic training and experience. They also note that it has been standard procedure not to name anyone to an ambassadorial post who has lived in Israel for less than 11 years.

Sharansky arrived here in February 1986, after spending 13 years in Soviet prisons and labor camps.

JANUARY EMIGRATION FIGURES DIP; NCSJ HIRES STATE DEPT. OFFICIAL

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, Feb. 1 (JTA) — A total of 2,725 Jews left the Soviet Union in January, the National Conference on Soviet Jewry reported Wednesday.

This is 25 percent less than December's total of 3,652. However, if the January rate is maintained or increased for the rest of the year, more than 32,000 Jews will leave the Soviet Union in 1989. Nearly 19,000 emigrated last year.

Meanwhile, the board of governors of the National Conference, meeting here Wednesday, approved the appointment of Martin Wenick as the organization's new executive director.

Wenick, 50, is currently deputy assistant secretary of state for coordination in the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research. A career foreign service officer, he is scheduled to take up his new position in March.

Wenick served in Moscow, Rome, Prague and Kabul, before becoming director of the State Department's Office of Northern Europe and later director of the Office of Eastern European and Yugoslav Affairs.

A native of Caldwell, N.J., he graduated from Brown University and did graduate work in Soviet and East European affairs before joining the foreign service.

U.S. FIRMS LINKED TO SHIPMENT OF LETHAL CHEMICALS TO MIDEAST

By Susan Birnbaum

NEW YORK, Feb. 1 (JTA) — American companies have shipped large quantities of substances that can be manufactured into chemical weapons to Middle East countries, U.S. Customs officials have discovered.

The U.S. shipments were uncovered as Customs officials stepped up scrutiny of chemical exports, following revelations that West German firms were involved in shipping chemicals to Libya for use in an alleged poison gas plant.

According to recent reports in The New York Times, Iran was able secretly to recruit the help of companies in Germany, the United States and Asia to increase its stockpile of chemical weapons.

Subsequent inquiries also reveal shipments of chemicals to Jordan and then, officials believe, to Iraq. Presumably such chemical weapons could be used against Israel.

The findings came to light during U.S. Customs investigations of a Baltimore firm, Alcolac International, whose records drew attention because of their use of vague terminology indicating the chemicals' destination.

American export law requires special licensing of chemicals that can be used in the production of poison gas and completely forbids their shipment to Iran, Iraq and Syria.

The findings of the investigations came to light when American court documents were recently made public in Baltimore.

Used To Produce Mustard Gas

The investigations of Alcolac revealed that an Iranian diplomat, Seyed Kharim Ali Sobhani, working through the Iranian Embassy in Bonn, arranged three shipments in 1987 and 1988 of thiodiglycol, a chemical used in the manufacture of mustard gas.

The first two shipments, totaling 90 tons, went through. But the third, weighing 120 tons, was intercepted by Customs, which substituted water for the chemical and then traced its passage.

It is estimated that a ton of thiodiglycol yields at least a ton of mustard gas; 120 tons will cover an area of about 60 square miles. Thiodiglycol is also used in the manufacture of ink and textile dyes.

To avoid the appearance of breaking U.S. export regulations, the shipping of the chemical was effected through circuitous routes, via Thessaloniki, Greece; Karachi, Pakistan; and Singapore.

On Monday, federal officials in Baltimore announced the arrests of an official of a Brooklyn, N.Y., company and of a Dutch businessman. They were charged with organizing illegal export of these chemicals to Jordan, which they allegedly purchased from Alcolac.

Officials believe the ultimate destination of the chemicals was Iraq.

Nicholas Delfino, an official of the Nu Kraft Mercantile Corporation of Brooklyn, and Frans van Anraat, a Dutch citizen identified as both a European representative and customer of Nu Kraft, were arrested last weekend.

Delfino surrendered himself in Baltimore, where he is free on \$500,000 bond.

Van Anraat was arrested at his home in Italy, and pertinent documents found there were seized by Italian officials. America has asked that

Italy extradite van Anraat.

Alcolac pleaded guilty Monday to one count of knowingly violating export laws.

Documents show that Nu Kraft bought four shipments of thiodiglycol, totaling 500 tons, from Alcolac between November 1987 and March 1988.

They were shipped via Norfolk, Va., to Antwerp and Rotterdam. Documents indicate the chemicals were destined for customers in Western Europe.

Three shipments went to Jordan. The destination of the fourth is unknown.

WJC LEADER, CITING AUSCHWITZ CONVENT, WARNS OF SPLIT IN VATICAN RELATIONS

By Joseph Finklestone

London Jewish Chronicle

LONDON, Feb. 1 (JTA) — The co-chairman of the World Jewish Congress has accused the Polish Catholic Church of being insensitive and anti-Semitic, and warned that there could be a complete suspension of relations between the Vatican and world Jewry if a Carmelite convent is not removed from the grounds of Auschwitz.

Dr. Gerhard Reigner's comments came following suggestions that the Polish Roman Catholic Church may break an agreement — signed Feb. 22, 1987 — to have the convent moved by Feb. 22 of this year. The nuns have not yet vacated the grounds.

In an interview with the International Catholic Press Agency, Reigner warned there could be a complete suspension of relations between world Jewry and the Vatican.

Reigner believes that while the Vatican is in favor of removing the convent, the Polish Church is opposing the implementation of the agreement.

He has accused the Polish Church of being anti-Semitic and of not being willing to accept new ideas or teachings.

"I have the impression that the difficulties don't come from the Vatican. To the contrary, they come from the Polish Church, that has not yet achieved every new theology begun by Vatican II," Reigner said.

Word of the planned removal of the convent was announced last week by France's highest-ranking Catholic prelate, Cardinal Albert Decourray of Lyon, a sign considered by some Catholic and Jewish representatives to interfaith talks as further indication the controversial convent will be moved.

Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, former chairman of the group that has been negotiating with the Vatican on this matter, said Wednesday that a meeting is scheduled this week among four cardinals, including possibly the pope, on how to proceed to make the transition.

Tanenbaum said the immediate problem is to find an interim place for the nuns to move once they move off the grounds of Auschwitz.

"Pressure from the Jewish community must continue," Tanenbaum said, "but in order for it to be effective, it must be pointed, reasonable and moderate statements that will support our allies and friends in the Vatican and the Polish Church, and not paralyze their ability to function by playing into the hands of our worst enemies among the Polish Catholic traditionalists."

"I think it is possible to find a constructive resolution, and we simply have to use prudence and wisdom to bring about that result."

(JTA staff writer Susan Birnbaum in New York contributed to this report.)