RABIN BLAMES PLO FOR FATAL STABBING
OF ISRAELI OUTSIDE WALLS OF OLD CITY

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Feb. 20 (JTA) -- Defense
Minister Yitzhak Rabin blamed the Palestine
Liberation Organization "or one of the terrorist
organizations linked to it" for the stabbing death
of an Israeli soldier just outside the Old City
walls Saturday afternoon.

The victim, Shlomi Cohen, 20, was wearing
civilian clothes. He and a companion were
on their way to pray at the Western Wall.

Police, who were holding five suspects
Monday, explained there were differences between
this assault and past attacks on Jews and non-
Jewish tourists in East Jerusalem.

Cohen was the victim of a gang of five
attackers who confronted him and his friend.
Stabbings in the past have been the work of
"knife wolves," the police pointed out.

The site of the attack was a paved path-
way between David's Tower and the Zion Gate, a
direct route to the Western Wall long considered
unsafe because it bustles with pedestrian traffic and
is a favorite spot for family strolls on a Saturday
afternoon.

Most of the previous attacks have been
inside the Old City walls or in a neighborhood of
Arab small businesses near the Damascus Gate.

The timing also has police puzzled. The
attack came when the PLO is trying to improve
its image and has supposedly disavowed terrorism.

It occurred on the eve of a general strike
called by the underground Palestinian leadership
in the administered territories and East Jerusalem.

According to the Israeli authorities, the
strike is intended to regenerate enthusiasm for the
Palestinian uprising, which, they claim, has
been ebbing in recent weeks.

The last murder of a Jew in the shadow of
the Old City walls occurred a few months before
the uprising began in December 1987.

Cohen was stabbed in the heart by one of
five Arab youths who jostled him and his com-
panion. The friend tried to fight, but the Arab
youths escaped into the Old City's labyrinth of
narrow alleys.

The attack was condemned by Palestinian
activist Faisal al-Husseini, a supporter of the PLO
who engaged in private talks with some prominent
Israeli left and center politicians last week.

NEWS ANALYSIS:
PLANNED ARENS SESSION WITH SOVIET
IN CAIRO COULD SIGNAL BREAKTHROUGH

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Feb. 20 (JTA) -- The scheduled
meeting in Cairo this week between Israel's
foreign minister, Moshe Arens, and Soviet Foreign
Minister Eduard Shevardnadze is without doubt
the most promising event on the Middle East
peace front in many months.

Its significance is perhaps best appreciated
by stressing its venue -- the Egyptian capital.

Arens and Shevardnadze have met before, in
Paris, and could have met now in any city.

By choosing Cairo, in the course of his
important diplomatic tour of the Middle East, the
Soviet statesman is making an important policy
statement with far-reaching implications.

He is saying, in effect, that the Soviet
Union at last recognizes and acquiesces in the
American-orchestrated Israeli-Egyptian peace
treaty of 1979 as the cornerstone of the larger
peace edifice yet to be built between Israel and the
Arab states.

The treaty will have its 10th anniversary
next month and until now, the Soviets have been
hostile or, at best, reserved toward it.

They have branded the treaty and the Camp
David accords that led up to it as a separate
arrangement, designed to serve American, Israeli
and Egyptian interests rather than the cause of a
comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace.

Meeting Arens in Cairo signifies, moreover,
that the Soviets intend their own dramatically
enhanced diplomatic involvement in the Middle
East to proceed in step with the Americans, not
against them.

Shevardnadze, in effect, is signaling to the
new administration in Washington that, after the
Soviet setback in Afghanistan, Moscow urgently
wants to channel its energy into Middle East
peacemaking.

He is saying, too, that President Bush's
people had better climb aboard.

May Warm Soviet-Israeli Ties

On another front, the scheduled Arens-
Shevardnadze meeting has served to accelerate
the ongoing but sluggish thaw in relations be-
tween the Soviet Union and Israel.

Israel's prompt response to the overture
from Moscow doubtless has contributed to this.

The Israeli government, after all, could have
stood on ceremony and insisted that the Soviet
foreign minister come to Jerusalem, or renew
diplomatic ties with Israel, before the Israelis
would engage with him in a substantive peace
dialogue.

It now seems almost certain that diplomatic
relations between the two countries will be up-
graded in a matter of months.

At present, there is an Israeli consular
mission in Moscow and a Soviet delegation on the
same level in Tel Aviv.

The Arens-Shevardnadze meeting will also
give impetus to Israel's and Egypt's own diplo-
matic thaw, now conveniently facilitated by the
successful conclusion of their protracted dispute
over Taba.

Arens will call on President Hosni Mubarak
in Cairo, the first such high-level contact by an
Israeli diplomat for more than a year.

Observers here are saying that the friendly
relationship Arens has established with his Egypt-
ian counterpart, Esmat Abdel Meguid, has been a
useful factor in this rapprochement.

But when all is said and done, Arens and
Shevardnadze are not expected to reach substan-
tive or procedural accords at their Cairo meeting.

At best, their discussion will mark the start
of a new phase in regional peacemaking, which
will involve, for the first time, sustained and
constructive Soviet participation.

Moscow is still committed, at least officially,
to an international peace conference with all five
permanent members of the U.N. Security Council
and all regional parties, including the Palestine Liberation Organization, as participants.

Israel, and in particular Arnon and Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, firmly oppose that formula.

But Shamir recently reiterated his acceptance of the idea of a conference to be held under the joint auspices of the two superpowers.

That would seem to provide sufficient movement and flexibility for the Soviets and Americans to push matters forward.

Gap on Substantive Issues

These are procedural factors. On the substantive level, there is less cause for optimism.

Shamir and his Likud bloc do not accept the basic principle of land for peace in relation to the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

They do not accept the PLO as a negotiating partner and are implacably opposed to a Palestinian right to self-determination, if it leads to an independent Palestinian state.

But here, too, it can be argued that the choice of Cairo as the site of this important diplomatic contact may offer an avenue of hope, because of its implied acceptance of the Camp David approach.

Camp David, in pristine form -- before the various parties sullied it with their opposing interpretations -- prescribed a two-stage approach to peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

The first stage, autonomy, signifies less than independence for the Palestinians and left Israel in control of the territories, in terms of defense and security.

That fact, alone, if the Soviets regard it now in a favorable light, could conceivably furnish the basis for a dialogue between the global powers and the regional parties.

The Israelis and the Palestinians both are hurting after 14 months of unrest in the territories. Now they are conceivably doing some hard thinking about the future.

FRANCE EXPECTED TO GIVE SHAMIR WARM WELCOME, CHILLY ADVICE
By Edwin Eytan

PARIS, Feb. 20 (JTA) -- Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir of Israel is assured of an exceptionally warm welcome when he arrives here Tuesday on a three-day visit at the personal invitation of President Francois Mitterrand.

He can also expect some very frank talk from the French chief of state. These two aspects of his trip are not unrelated.

Shamir will be greeted at the airport by Prime Minister Michel Rocard. The following day he will place a wreath on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at the Arc de Triomphe.

In a country as conscious of protocol as France, both ceremonies are exceptional courtesies for a prime minister here on a "working visit." And they will be conferred at the express instruction of Mitterrand.

Diplomatic observers point out that this cordiality was not warranted by the personal relationship between Mitterrand, a Socialist, and Shamir, who heads Israel's right-wing Likud bloc.

Nor are their respective governments that close.

But France wants to demonstrate, in no uncertain terms, a high regard for Shamir and friendship for Israel, so that it can speak more bluntly to its guest.

France is at odds with Israel over the concept of an international conference to resolve the Israeli-Arab dispute and over the Palestine Liberation Organization's role in the Middle East peace process.

France will assume the rotating chairmanship of the European Community's Council of Ministers this summer. It is now held by Spain.

No New Israeli Plan Yet

Mitterrand is said to be preparing what diplomatic sources describe as a major peace offensive in the Middle East during France's six-month tenure.

He will try to convince Shamir that the steps he has in mind are not anti-Israel but, on the contrary, in Israel's interests.

French sources stress that Mitterrand remains Israel's longtime friend. Whatever he says when he and Shamir meet Wednesday for a working lunch at the Elysee Palace is to Israel's ultimate advantage, the French president is said to be convinced.

France wants to play a major role in the Middle East peace process. It is increasingly worried about what it feels to be the tendency of the United States and the Soviet Union to settle matters there between themselves in consultation with their respective client states.

Israeli diplomats say Shamir does not intend to unveil Israel's peace plan while in Paris.

His visit, nevertheless, creates a momentum that could lead to similar trips by the Israeli leader to London, Madrid and other Western European capitals in the weeks ahead.

In addition to lunching with Mitterrand, Shamir will be guest of honor at a banquet to be given by Rocard. He is to meet with the presidents of the French National Assembly and the Senate, and with several Cabinet ministers.

MASSIVE SEARCH IS LAUNCHED FOR MISSING ISRAELI SOLDIER
By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Feb. 20 (JTA) -- A massive search by ground and air continued Monday in southern Israel for a soldier missing four days.

But hope has dimmed that Sgt. Avi Sasportas of Ashdod, a paratrooper medic last seen near Gaza on Thursday, will be found alive.

The authorities fear he is the victim of a terrorist kidnapping. If so, it is likely his captors murdered him and left his body to be found as evidence of their action.

Nevertheless, some 2,000 Israeli Defense Force soldiers, border police and civilian volunteers continued to comb the countryside on foot, in jeeps and on horseback.

They are moving slowly through fields, woods and orchards, checking underbrush and searching inside caves.

IDF helicopters, pressed into service, are assisting from the air.

The search area, at first confined to the Ashdod-Gaza sector near the coast, has been extended inland to the Judean hills.

A special watch is being kept along the Egyptian and Jordanian boarders and on the beaches, in case the abductors try to smuggle the soldier out of the country.

Sasportas was last seen by a fellow soldier at the Hodiya road junction east of Gaza, waiting for a lift home from the IDF base where he was stationed. The alarm was raised by his family and girlfriend when Sasportas failed to return home.
U.S. VETOES RESOLUTION DEPLORING ISRAEL'S HANDLING OF INTIFADA
By Andrew Silow Carroll

UNITED NATIONS, Feb. 20 (JTA) -- Israeli officials breathed a sigh of relief Friday as the United States vetoed a Security Council resolution strongly deploring Israel's handling of unrest in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The resolution, which condemned "violation of human rights" and "persistent policies and practices against the Palestinian people," was supported by the 14 other current members of the Security Council.

As one of five permanent members of the Security Council, the United States reserves the power of veto.

Explaining the U.S. move, Ambassador Herbert Okun said the resolution was flawed because it severely criticized Israeli policies without taking into account "the context in which they occur or the excesses of the other side."

His statements closely matched those of Israeli officials two weeks ago when they responded to a U.S. State Department human rights report highly critical of Israeli actions in the territories.

Israelis were concerned that the report's critical passages would be reflected in subsequent U.S. diplomacy, like the Security Council vote.

Okun referred obliquely to the human rights report when he said that the United States had made clear to the Israelis its concern over the razing of Palestinian homes, inappropriate use of live fire in riot control and the expulsion of Palestinian residents.

The vetoed resolution would have strongly criticized Israel for "the opening of fire that has resulted in injuries and deaths of Palestinian civilians, including children."

It would have called on Israel to comply with articles of the Fourth Geneva Convention that protect civilians in time of war, and on the United Nations to help achieve a lasting settlement of the Middle East conflict.

The debate, which began Feb. 10, was largely the initiative of the Palestine Liberation Organization's U.N. delegation, now known as the Palestine Permanent Observer Mission.

In four days of debate, virtually all of the speakers criticized Israel for its actions in the 14-month-old Palestinian uprising, in which hundreds of Palestinians have been killed and thousands injured in clashes with Israeli troops.

Speaking at the opening of the debate, Israel's acting U.N. ambassador, Johannan Bein, said that Israel's actions in the territories were justified in the face of violent demonstrations. He said Israel continued to call for direct negotiations with Palestinians and Arab countries versus an international conference.

U.N. RIGHTS PANEL CONDEMNS ISRAEL; U.S. ALONE OPPOSES THREE RESOLUTIONS
By Tamar Levy

GENEVA, Feb. 20 (JTA) -- The U.N. Human Rights Commission has harshly condemned Israel for violating the human rights of Palestinians in the territories it administers and demanded it end its occupation of them forthwith.

That was the content of three resolutions overwhelmingly adopted by the 43-nation panel at the midpoint of its annual six-week conference here last Friday.

The United States was the only country to vote against all three. Britain, Canada, the West European countries and Japan either voted against or abstained.

The American delegate, Craig Kuehl, said afterward that his government has often made clear that it opposes excessive Israeli measures in non-life-threatening situations in the territories.

But he regretted that the resolutions appeared to him to be more concerned with one-sided criticism of Israel than with finding a solution to the problems they cited.

H.R. Horace Steel, representing the United Kingdom, said the language of the resolutions was wholly disproportionate and inappropriate and therefore his delegation could not vote in their support.

Violation Of Geneva Conventions

Similarly, Ross Hynes of Canada said his delegation voted against the resolutions critical of Israel because of the harshness of their language and references to concentration camps and war crimes.

The resolutions were notably redundant inasmuch as they called both for Israel's withdrawal from "Palestine" and an end to its "occupation" of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and the "Syrian Arab Golan Heights."

The litany of charges against Israel also was almost identical in each of the resolutions.

Within the broad framework of violations of the Aug. 12, 1949, Geneva Conventions aimed at protecting civilians in occupied areas in time of war, Israel was alleged among other things to have killed Palestinians, including children; permanently crippled youths by breaking their bones; savagely beat and maltreated women, inducing miscarriages; tortured detainees; and gassed civilians.

The resolutions were easily carried by a majority composed of African, Asian, Latin American, Arab and Soviet bloc countries.

The first two resolutions were adopted by 31-1, with 10 abstentions, and 32-8, with two abstentions, respectively. The third resolution was adopted 32-1, with nine abstentions.

PUBLISHER RUSHING TO GET 'SATANIC VERSES' INTO HEBREW
By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Feb. 20 (JTA) -- An Israeli publishing house is rushing to get "Satanic Verses" translated into Hebrew for speedy publication.

Niva Lanir, chief editor of Keter Publications, one of Israel's leading publishing houses, said Monday that her company had contracted to publish a Hebrew translation of the 500-page book on the basis of the pre-publication catalogue. Keter is presently negotiating with translators, she said.

Lanir said that Keter's contract was completed long before the writer infuriated Islamic fundamentalists all over the world, who alleged, without ever seeing it, that his book blasphemed their faith.

The author, Salman Rushdie, an Indian-born British subject, has become a target for assassination since Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini of Iran offered $1 million to anyone who would murder him.

Islamic fundamentalists have also threatened the lives of other publishers and booksellers.
ELECTION OF FORMER KLANSMAN IS CONDEMNED BY JEWISH LEADERS
By Andrew-Slows Carro...