

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 "lone wolves," the police pointed out.

The scene of the attack was a paved pathway between David's Tower and the Zion Gate, a direct route to the Western Wall long considered safe 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 lagging 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 companion. 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 between 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 upgraded 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 diplomatic thaw, now conveniently facilitated by the successful conclusion of their protracted dispute over Tabá.

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 Egyptian 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 substantive 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 Arens 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, signified 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 of 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 is 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 paratroop 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 Israel 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 borders 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, Johanan 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.

Henry 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 catalogues. 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 Silow Carroll

NEW YORK, Feb. 20 (JTA) -- Jewish leaders in New Orleans are deploring the election of a former neo-Nazi and Ku Klux Klan leader to the Louisiana state legislature, but they say his election is less a symptom of widespread anti-Semitism or racism than simple political opportunism.

David Duke, a former Ku Klux Klan imperial wizard, won a narrow victory Saturday over fellow Republican John Treen in a runoff for a seat in the state House of Representatives.

Duke's victory came despite the intervention of the national Republican Party apparatus, including President Bush and former President Ronald Reagan.

The margin of victory was less than 250 votes in a district of 21,000 voters, and Treen has demanded a recount.

According to local leaders, Duke has traded in his past as a white supremacist for a squeaky-clean image as an arch conservative.

He was careful to steer clear of racial and anti-Semitic statements in his campaign and to appeal to the virtually all-white 81st District of suburban Metairie, La., with calculated stands on affirmative action, taxes and welfare reform.

The majority of voters in the district chose "to disregard his longtime record as an extremist and promoter of racial and religious prejudice," A.I. Botnick, director of the South Central regional office of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, said in a statement.

Botnick called Duke's election "a gain for the forces of racism and bigotry," but said it must be put in proper perspective.

JDO Presence May Have Backfired

"The outcome is disturbing," he said. "Yet ADL has seen no evidence that the result in Jefferson Parish is indicative of a broad turn toward racism among the American people."

During the campaign, Jews in Metairie preferred to keep a low profile to their opposition to Duke. Local Jewish leaders resented the intervention by the leader of a tiny, New York-based group, the militant Jewish Defense Organization.

Mordechai Levy, leader of the JDO, was in Metairie last week vowing to do "everything we can to destroy the David Duke campaign." Levy left Metairie before the election, and there were no reports of violence.

Rabbi Robert Loewy of Congregation Gates of Prayer, a reform synagogue in Metairie, said local Jewish leaders will come together to plan a coherent strategy to monitor Duke's actions and to work with Protestant and Catholic leaders on an interfaith response.

"There is not a wave of anti-Semitism in New Orleans, or racism in New Orleans. There is anti-Semitism and racism," he said, "but I don't think any more than where I grew up in Long Island or experienced as a rabbi in Texas."

Response to Duke's election will be the subject of consultations between leaders of a number of national Jewish organizations that are meeting this week in Washington as members of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council.

Duke, 38, is a longtime activist for "white power" who still leads the New Orleans-based National Association for the Advancement of

White People.

Pictures of Duke as a youth show him wearing a Nazi uniform with a swastika armband.

Duke has said he now repudiates the Ku Klux Klan, from which he resigned as imperial grand wizard 10 years ago to form his NAAWP.

Duke became a Republican shortly before the legislative race began last December. He told reporters this week that his election was not a "Jewish-Christian issue" and that neither Jews nor blacks have anything to fear from his victory.

HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIRMAN SAYS OK TO SELL ARMS TO SAUDIS, JORDAN

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, Feb. 20 (JTA) -- The chairman of the House subcommittee that deals with the Middle East told a Jewish audience Sunday night that the United States must continue to sell arms to Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

"I do not think it is in our national interest, I do not think it is in Israel's interest, for the United States to be replaced as the key military partner to these two Arab countries," said Rep. Lee Hamilton (D-Ind.), chairman of the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East.

On the other hand, he added, "it is not in our interest to sell these countries everything they ask for."

Speaking to the more than 500 delegates attending the annual meeting of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council at the Washington Hilton, Hamilton said that "the bruising battles over arms sales in the last several years has served none of us well."

Hamilton suggested instead an arms sale policy of "something between selling everything and selling nothing."

Earlier in the day, NJCRAC marked the upcoming 10th anniversary of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty -- which was signed on March 26, 1979 -- with a special session that turned into a friendly debate between Moshe Arad, the Israeli ambassador to the United States, and his Egyptian counterpart, El-Sayed Abdel Raouf el-Reedy.

The two envoys agreed that the peace treaty has worked despite disagreements that have developed. "And both countries are determined to keep it that way," Reedy said.

However, the ambassadors disagreed on how to get to the next step, a solution to the Palestinian problem.

Reedy called for an end to Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and the establishment of a Palestinian state, while Arad said such a state would pose a security threat to Israel.

Sen. Bob Packwood (R-Ore.), who spoke Sunday night along with Hamilton, warned that many Americans, who have little knowledge about the Middle East, now believe that it is Israel that is blocking negotiations.

Packwood stressed that it is up to Israel to decide whether it wants to negotiate with the PLO, but it must demonstrate that its decision is correct.

Packwood said that the public does not understand that even before statehood, Israel showed it was willing to give up land for peace.

He said the argument that Israel should give up "land for peace" is incorrectly stated. He said it should be, "Will the Arabs guarantee peace if they get land?"