



KILLING OF SOLDIER IN NABLUS SIGNALS CONTINUATION OF UNREST

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Feb. 26 (JTA) -- The death of an Israeli soldier in the Nablus casbah on Friday has stirred angry reactions in Israel and revived a longstanding debate over the tactical deployment of security forces in the administered territories.

Sgt. Maj. Binyamin Meisner, 25, was killed when a building block was dropped on his head from a rooftop. He was buried Sunday in Kiryat Tivon, where he lived.

Meisner was the fifth Israel Defense Force soldier killed since the Palestinian uprising began 15 months ago.

The attack ended several weeks of relative calm in the territories and squelched recent optimistic comment that the uprising, which Arabs call the intifada, was petering out.

Violence flared anew Sunday in the Gaza Strip. A 20-year-old Palestinian was shot to death by soldiers protecting an Israeli tax collector who had come under a hail of stones from local youths.

The fatality was identified as Ahmed Abed Moharram. Several other Palestinians were wounded in the clash.

A worker at the Shifta Hospital in Gaza was killed by an unknown gunman Sunday. The victim reportedly was suspected of collaboration with the Israeli authorities.

Meanwhile, leaflet No. 36, the latest issued by the clandestine Palestinian leadership of the uprising, called on East Jerusalem Arabs to boycott the Jerusalem municipal elections to be held Tuesday.

But attention was riveted on Nablus, the largest Arab town in the West Bank.

A curfew clamped on the entire city Friday remained in force Sunday as the IDF continued house-to-house searches for the perpetrators. Families were forced out of their homes while the searches were conducted.

Several Arrests Reported

At least 20 local residents were reported arrested, though the IDF refused to disclose the actual number. Western news agencies reported as many as 150 had been detained.

Gen. Amram Mitzna, commander of the central sector, said there was a good chance the actual perpetrators would be caught.

The top story of the building from where the rock was dropped was destroyed by the IDF. Windows overlooking the alley where the soldier died were sealed off.

Building blocks are considered a lethal weapon by the IDF. Nine soldiers have been injured by them while patrolling Arab towns and villages. One was permanently paralyzed below the waist a year ago.

The IDF posts lookouts on rooftops to forestall such attacks. So far they have killed 10 Palestinians and wounded 30, all said to have been poised to drop rocks on soldiers patrolling the alleyways below.

The rock that killed Meisner weighed 33 pounds and was dropped from the roof of a three-story building.

The incident occurred Friday afternoon, as six paratroopers patrolled Yasmin Street in the casbah, as the old quarter of town is called.

The soldiers were suddenly attacked by a barrage of stones. They chased the masked assailants through the narrow alleys leading off the street.

As Meisner's group was running along one alley, the rock was dropped, striking him on the back of the neck. He died shortly afterward.

Meisner was an immigrant from Argentina. He was an outstanding member of the Kiryat Tivon water polo team.

His father, Erik Meisner, remarked at the funeral. "That's it, what is there to do? This is our life here."

Debate Over Tactical Deployment

But right-wing members of the Knesset had suggestions about what should be done.

Rafael Eitan of the Tsomet party, a former IDF chief of staff, said 10 Arab buildings near the scene of the attack should have been demolished immediately and 100 Palestinian youths deported to Lebanon.

Geula Cohen of the Tehiya party thought buildings should be demolished in the casbah to turn the alleys into wider thoroughfares.

But both Ran Cohen of the leftist Citizens Rights Movement and Yehuda Perah of Likud questioned Sunday whether soldiers should be deployed in the casbah at all, as long as they control the main streets and traffic arteries in the territories.

However, the IDF chief of staff, Gen. Dan Shomron, argues vigorously that the army must be seen everywhere in the territories, from the cities to the smallest villages.

"To control Judea and Samaria and Gaza, we must be able to reach everywhere," Shomron insisted over the weekend.

SEVEN ISRAELI ARABS ARRESTED ON CHARGES OF ESPIONAGE, TERROR

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Feb. 26 (JTA) -- Seven Israeli Arabs were arrested recently on suspicion of planning terrorist acts and espionage, a Haifa magistrates court disclosed Sunday.

The group is alleged to be associated with Ahmed Jabril's extremist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command.

The court limited the information given to the news media, and not all of the suspects were identified.

They include a Nazareth couple, Bassam and Yusra Mahazumi, who are the parents of five children. Electronics equipment was seized at their home.

Bassam Mahazumi was arrested at Ben-Gurion Airport earlier this month. He had just arrived from Europe, where he allegedly had been in contact with his spy handlers.

Mahazumi reportedly confessed he worked for a terrorist organization for more than a year. His wife was arrested for membership in the organization.

Another suspect in custody is Mohammad Abu-Tir of Jerusalem. He was one of more than

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1,000 security prisoners released by Israel in a controversial exchange deal with Jabril's organization three years ago.

The three others in custody were described as members of the extreme Islamic fundamentalist organization Hamas.

The court also announced Sunday the arrest and indictment of an Israeli Jew, Binyamin Shenkman, on security charges.

He allegedly gave the Palestine Liberation Organization details of his military service during a visit to Athens, for which he reportedly asked \$1.5 million.

**NEWS ANALYSIS:
ON DIPLOMATIC AND DOMESTIC FRONTS,
THE PEACE PROCESS IS MOVING FORWARD**
By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Feb. 26 (JTA) -- The Middle East peace process, almost dormant for years, seems suddenly to have evolved into two distinct and dramatic dynamics, each rushing ahead toward unpredictable conclusions.

But they are moving in parallel. And the main question for observers of this turbulent region is how, if at all, will they meet? For parallel lines, we are taught in geometry, never intersect.

These two political processes, moreover, are unfolding each according to its own internal dynamic, as though oblivious of one another.

One dynamic is diplomatic. Spurred on by a suddenly energetic and conciliatory Soviet Union, the leaders of the region have been drawn into a maelstrom of meetings, trips and talks.

The high point so far was Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze's meetings in Cairo, on the same day last week, with Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Arens and Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasir Arafat.

The venue, the timing, and the dramatic personae ensured that this day of diplomatic drama would seize top headlines around the world.

The fact that all participants in both meetings came out smiling served to strengthen the impact of the Soviet initiative upon world opinion.

The United States has sought to retain a cool, almost condescending detachment.

President George Bush and Secretary of State James Baker have repeatedly insisted that they will not be prodded into premature actions by high-profile Soviet diplomacy.

Focus Of Talks In Washington

But when the president met with the Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Israel's President Chaim Herzog and Jordan's King Hussein -- all in Tokyo for the funeral of Emperor Hirohito -- the natural deduction by the media was that Washington was getting into the Middle East act after all, so as not to leave the field wide open for Shevardnadze and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.

The Soviet foreign minister, who continued his swing through the region with a rare audience with Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran, has scheduled an early March meeting with Baker. The Middle East will plainly be high on the agenda.

There are also high-level contacts between each of the superpowers and the European Community, following a fact-finding mission to the Middle East by the foreign ministers of Spain, France and Greece.

Arens has spent time in London with Prime

Minister Margaret Thatcher and Sir Geoffrey Howe, the British foreign secretary. Premier Yitzhak Shamir spent much of last week in Paris, and now the two Likud politicians and their aides are planning important visits to Washington.

On a parallel track -- and, in the view of seasoned observers, no less dramatically significant -- is the ongoing de-demonization of the PLO in Israeli public opinion.

The shift is happening faster than even the most optimistic doves could have hoped.

53 Percent Favor PLO Talks

One much-publicized reflection was a poll that showed 53 percent of Israelis in favor of negotiations with the PLO.

Yet many of the people who say they would favor talks with the PLO say in the same breath that they expect such talks to lead nowhere, or that they personally oppose territorial concessions on the West Bank.

Many, perhaps most, Israelis still staunchly oppose the very notion of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Nevertheless, the change in attitude to the very notion of talking to the PLO is real and profound.

As a result, when left-wing politicians of Labor and various small opposition parties recently launched a series of meetings with PLO figures, such as Faisal Husseini and Bassam Abu Sharif, right-wing circles found it suddenly difficult to stir up a broad-based reaction of outrage.

The left, sensing a chink in the so-recently solid wall of mutual hatred between Israel and the PLO, has been pressing ahead.

Last week, the PLO's No. 2 man, Abu Iyad, was prevailed upon to send a videotaped appeal to an international peace symposium convened in Jerusalem. His statements there were the PLO's most unequivocal so far in favor of a two-state solution to the decades-old conflict.

News Conference With PLO

Another psychological barrier tumbled at week's end, when 11 Israeli journalists, in Cairo to cover the diplomatic meetings, attended a news conference held especially for the Israeli press by PLO leader Arafat.

Uri Porat, director general of the Israeli Broadcasting Authority, decreed that footage of this unprecedented event not be screened. But Haim Yevin, the popular director of TV, defied the order and showed viewers film of the news conference.

Whether this dynamic, and the parallel diplomatic one, will catalyze a peaceful political solution for Israelis and Palestinians is impossible to predict at this juncture.

The PLO itself is still notoriously splintered, unreliable and deeply unprepossessing from the Israeli standpoint.

The Soviets, too, have a very long record of obstructionism and hostility that cannot be wiped out merely by Shevardnadze's smiles.

Israel's key leaders, both in Likud and in Labor, are still committed to positions that would seem to preclude Israel-PLO negotiations resulting in massive Israeli concessions.

Nevertheless, given the extent of the changes that have already been wrought inside the USSR, in Soviet policy, in PLO rhetoric and in Israeli public attitudes, a breakthrough in efforts to reach a settlement of the Israeli-Arab conflict cannot be ruled out.

BRITISH FIRM ASKED SUBCONTRACTOR IN U.S. TO COMPLY WITH BOYCOTT

By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, Feb. 26 (JTA) -- British Aerospace Inc., Britain's largest military contractor, has apologized to a Long Island firm for asking it to comply with the Arab boycott against Israel, a spokeswoman for the company said Friday.

Barbara Hartnett, spokeswoman for British Aerospace's military affairs office here, said that a letter of apology was sent to a Plainview, N.Y., firm, Machine Components Corp., over language contained in a Dec. 7 purchase order.

The firm's military aircraft division in Preston, England, had ordered six toggle joystick switches, which can be used in as many as six airplanes, for \$330 from the New York company.

In the order, British Aerospace had asked for assurances that the items were not "made in Israel directly or indirectly, in whole or in part."

Les Dubav, engineering sales manager at Machine Components Corp., added that the British firm also wanted assurances that the items were not going to be transported on Israeli carriers. He said his firm filed a report on the incident Dec. 27 with the Commerce Department's Office of Anti-Boycott Compliance.

Dubav added that in mid-February, British Aerospace sent a new order with the language omitted. In the apology, "they said the girl who typed it typed the wrong information," Dubav said. He termed firm's explanation "baloney," but said he considers the matter closed.

Those responsible for requesting the assurances, Hartnett said, "have been called to task by the CEO (chief executive officer) over here. That is certainly something that we don't want to be associated with."

British Aerospace, among other things, builds Tornado fighter planes, which it agreed to sell last year to Saudi Arabia. While complying with the Arab boycott is not illegal under British law, U.S. law forbids American firms from doing so.

But Hartnett said such a demand by her firm "will not happen again."

VICE PRESIDENT QUAYLE TURNS SYMPATHETIC EAR TO THE ORTHODOX

WASHINGTON, Feb. 26 (JTA) -- Orthodox Jewry, which recently announced it would press its viewpoints and issues in Washington, has found a sympathetic ear in the Bush administration.

Rabbi Moshe Sherer, president of the Agudath Israel of America, reported that Vice President Dan Quayle displayed great sensitivity to concerns of Orthodox Jews in the United States at their recent meeting in the White House.

According to Sherer, this was demonstrated on the issue of abortion, the main focus of their conversation.

Although Agudath Israel and the Bush administration are squarely in the "pro-life" camp, he said the vice president agreed with the Orthodox position that the law should permit an abortion where an individual's religious beliefs would require one, for example where necessary to save a mother's life.

Militant anti-abortionists demand a "no exceptions" policy, Sherer pointed out.

He said Quayle opposed that policy and assured him that the administration would fight to ensure the availability of abortion to save a

mother's life.

Other issues discussed at their meeting included Israel's security, the plight of Jews in lands of oppression and the importance of preserving the independence and vitality of Jewish education in the United States.

"Dan Quayle obviously has a strong sense of commitment to fundamental principles like religious freedom, economic opportunity, strong families and stable communities," Sherer said.

"These are the values that made this country great and have enabled Orthodox Jewry to grow and flourish on these shores," he said.

SEARCH FOR MISSING SOLDIER YIELDS FEW CLUES AFTER MORE THAN A WEEK

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Feb. 26 (JTA) -- The massive search for Sgt. Avi Sasportas continued Sunday with no evidence of the Israel Defense Force paratrooper's fate, save for footprints suggesting he was kidnapped.

The police are reported to be relying on intelligence sources in Arab towns and villages for clues to the whereabouts of the paratrooper, missing for 10 days.

The search, which has employed thousands of soldiers, border police and civilian volunteers for more than a week, was narrowed down to the Lachish region over the weekend.

The ground is being scoured yard by yard. Some areas have been gone over four or five times.

Bedouin trackers reported traces of footprints of a man in stocking feet and two men in boots. This fits the kidnap theory, especially since Sasportas' boots were found early in the search.

Police said his abductors probably made him remove them so it would be difficult for him to escape.

Sasportas, who comes from Ashdod, was last seen on Feb. 16 at a road junction outside his military base near Gaza, waiting for a lift home.

ANTI-ISRAEL AD IN SOUTH AFRICA FOUND TO CONTAIN FALSE INFORMATION

JOHANNESBURG, Feb. 26 (JTA) -- The South African Zionist Federation has exposed as fraudulent an advertisement widely published in South Africa last month alleging Israeli brutality toward Palestinian children.

The ad, which appeared in major dailies throughout the republic, offered awards totaling 2,000 rand (about \$800) in prizes for the best caption to a photograph that purported to be that of an Arab mother snatching her child from "the clutches of soldiers in Israel."

The ad was sponsored by the Islamic Propagation Center in Durban. It contained a statement criticizing Jews for thinking "of the Zionist-Arab conflict in Jewish terms only."

The statement was by Leopold Weiss, described as an "Austrian German Jew" and identified as "a special correspondent of the Frankfurter Zeitung."

The South African Zionist Federation said it discovered on investigation that "the photograph used was not an original, but was a combination of two photographs"; the Frankfurter Zeitung newspaper "has not been in print since 1933"; and that Leopold Weiss "converted to Islam some 50 years ago."

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES:
WHAT IS THE APPROPRIATE JEWISH
RESPONSE TO THE RUSHDIE AFFAIR?**

By Andrew Silow Carroll

NEW YORK, Feb. 26 (JTA) -- Major Jewish organizations, so often at the forefront of struggles for human rights and freedom of expression, have had only a muted reaction so far to the predicament of British writer Salman Rushdie.

An exception has been the World Jewish Congress, whose American Section said last week that it "deplores and is dismayed" by Iranian leader Ayatollah Khomeini's death threat against the Indian-born novelist.

It called on all nations to treat death threats against Rushdie as terrorism.

The American Jewish Congress also reacted strongly, in a statement released here last week.

It said, "The outrageous and barbarous threats against the life of Salman Rushdie demand condemnation and public denunciation from every part of the civilized world."

AJCongress called on the U.S. government and the United Nations "not only to register worldwide revulsion over these abominable threats, but to recommend appropriate concerted action to prevent them from being carried out."

Khomeini and his followers believe Rushdie's book, "The Satanic Verses," blasphemes Islam by caricaturing the prophet Mohammed.

Individual Jewish writers, either in interviews with the Jewish Telegraphic Agency or as part of writers' organizations, have also deplored the death threat and the reluctance of major bookstore chains to stock the novel.

Asked in those interviews whether Jews might also be angered by a book that mocks their beliefs or history, many of the writers agreed but said there are ways of expressing anger short of death threats or book burnings.

Unfortunately, they said, an odious anti-Semitic tract is the price to be paid for the principle of freedom of expression.

Concern About Iranian Jews

The WJC statement was signed by Rabbi Wolfe Kelman, chairman of the organization's American Section. Kelman was also a signator, along with Rabbi Marshall Meyer of Manhattan's Temple B'nai Jeshurun, of a similar statement released by the Temple of Understanding, a New York-based interfaith organization.

Kelman said he was surprised by the lack of a greater Jewish response to the Rushdie affair, although he said he understood the hesitation.

"I imagine part of it may be concern of further weakening relations between Iran and Israel, and endangering the lives of Jews in Iran," he said. "It's a delicate question we weigh all the time."

But Kelman suggested the affair may offer to supporters of Israel an opportunity as well. "It's important that when Jews are being characterized as oppressors and the Muslims as victims, there is this dramatic exemplar of why Israel must be careful living in a region that does not recognize pluralism."

Putting it more strongly was Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, former director of interreligious affairs for the American Jewish Committee. Tanenbaum, who writes a column distributed by JTA, said the controversy "discloses the core of a fanatic Islamic cosmology, which defines mankind as pitted in a clash between the children of light

and the children of darkness (Satan).

"It illuminates the magnitude of the ideological barbarism with which Israel has had to contend since its founding in 1948," he said.

The Price Of Freedom

The Rushdie affair illuminates for Jews conflicts that go back to the Enlightenment of the 18th century.

Freedom of speech has meant not only Jews' freedom to read and write what they want, but for others to publish sometimes ugly, even libelous ideas. Revisionist works denying the Holocaust are advertised by small publishers; Hitler's "Mein Kampf" and the 19th-century forgery "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion" are readily available.

Even works by Jewish writers sometimes cause anguish. When he wrote "Portnoy's Complaint" in 1969, Philip Roth was denounced as a "self-hating Jew" whose unflattering portraits of Jewish bourgeoisie would comfort anti-Semites.

Rushdie raised Roth's case this week when he submitted, from his hiding place in England, a review of Roth's memoirs, "The Facts."

What responsibility does an artist have to avoid offending the sensibilities of a group? Has Rushdie only himself to blame for words he knew were potentially offensive to Moslems?

Chaim Potok, the novelist and rabbi, said that, as an artist, his own sense of responsibility "is limited to my own vision of the truth" and, he added, "my willingness to pay the price of that vision. If Rushdie didn't know what he was doing, he was either naive or stupid."

But the point is not Rushdie's actions, said Potok and other writers, but Khomeini's.

Where Torah Stands On Blasphemy

Hugh Nissenson, whose most recent book is "The Elephant and My Jewish Problem," a collection of short stories and journal entries, said certainly there are subjects that would make the Jewish community furious.

"The difference is no one would put a price on the writer's head and call for his execution," he said. If his own publisher came out with a reprint of "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion," "I would not like it," said Nissenson, "but I'd be damned before I'd call for its suppression."

Potok, who took part in a rally in support of Rushdie in Philadelphia last week, said he has lobbied in the past against textbooks that have distorted Jewish history. But he called those efforts "acceptable maneuvering," versus threats on an author's life.

Potok noted that "The Protocols" have been reprinted around the world, including Arab countries, and the Jewish response has been to avoid an "overwhelming fuss" and create interest in the book that was not there before.

Ann Roiphe, who has written a novel about the newly Orthodox, says the Rushdie affair should sound a warning to Jews. "I look at the ayatollah and see a potential endpoint if our own fundamentalists are not checked by the rest of us," she said.

Execution for blasphemy has its roots in the Bible. In Leviticus 24:14, the Lord commands Moses, saying, "he that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death."

But modern history records no example of a Jew being put to death by other Jews for blasphemy. Even history's most famous Jewish heretic, philosopher Baruch Spinoza, was merely banned by the Jewish community of Amsterdam, in 1656.