

BUSH URGES ARAFAT TO SPEAK OUT AGAINST PALESTINIAN TERRORISM

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, March 7 (JTA) -- President Bush urged Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasir Arafat on Tuesday to speak out against acts of terrorism.

"I'd like to see him forthrightly condemn any terror that might be perpetrated by the Palestinians," Bush said at a White House news conference.

The president said he was not accusing Arafat of condoning or furthering terrorism. "But I would like to see him speak out," he said. "It would do wonders, it would be very good for future dialogue."

Although the United States has complained to the PLO about two recent attempts by PLO groups to infiltrate Israel, Bush did not threaten to break off U.S. talks with the PLO. However, he said that "to the degree terrorist acts are condoned, it doesn't help the dialogue."

The New York Times reported Tuesday that Egyptian officials had failed to persuade Arafat to condemn the recent infiltration attempts. He reportedly told the Egyptians that he could not do so because of internal politics within the PLO.

On human rights, Bush said that the United States will continue to press the Soviet Union for improvements, although it might not be the first item on the agenda of bilateral talks.

"It may not be the first thing, but it'll be high on the agenda," the president said. He said Secretary of State James Baker, who met with Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze in Vienna on Tuesday, "will continue to raise it."

Bush seemed to reject the contention of the Reagan administration that human rights had been the first item on the agenda in every meeting that President Reagan had with Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev.

"I don't recall it always being the first thing, because the last meeting I attended with him (Reagan) and Mr. Gorbachev it was raised, but it wasn't the first thing," Bush said.

BAKER TELLS SOVIET THAT U.S. OPPOSES MIDEAST CONFERENCE NOW

By Reinhard Engel

VIENNA, March 7 (JTA) -- U.S. Secretary of State James Baker on Tuesday rejected Soviet calls for a Middle East peace conference, saying such a gathering would be "counterproductive at this time."

Baker made the remark at his first meeting with Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze since assuming office in January. Their meeting was described as friendly, despite a number of differences on policy matters.

The two men are here for an East-West conference whose major goal is a three-stage reduction in non-nuclear weapons and military personnel in Europe. There will also be discussions on human rights.

Baker said the human rights situation in the Soviet Union had improved through last December -- when Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev visited New York.

But since then, not very much has happened, the secretary of state said.

The hour-long meeting between the two men took place without the presence of aides. Following that, arms control experts were called in to participate.

Baker told his Soviet counterpart the United States was not ready to go along with an international conference on the Middle East. Instead, the Bush administration favors direct talks between Israel and the Palestinians, he said.

Baker told Shevardnadze that as far as the Middle East is concerned, "more work at the ground level" has to be done before a peace conference can be organized.

Soviet Meets With Waldheim

Diplomacy was not intended to be dealt with in front of television lights, he added.

Diplomatic sources later said the two had stuck to generalities, as both parties realized that no specific details could be discussed before Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's visit next month to Washington.

Baker said he would meet with Shevardnadze in Geneva in May to resume their discussion.

The East-West conference was opened here officially by Austrian President Kurt Waldheim. This duty brought him some relief from his general isolation.

During the recently concluded, 35-nation Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, no foreign minister came to visit Waldheim, who has been ostracized for his apparent link to Nazi wartime atrocities.

This time, at least four top diplomats will be paying courtesy calls at the Hofburg Castle.

Shevardnadze visited Waldheim on Monday, after seeing Chancellor Franz Vranitzky. Shevardnadze did not specify his reasons for the visit, nor did Italian Foreign Minister Giulio Andreotti, who also saw Waldheim on Monday.

The foreign ministers of Hungary and Cyprus have also announced they intend to see the Austrian president.

As for Baker, he called relations between the United States and Austria excellent. But he would not discuss the U.S. decision to place Waldheim on its "watch list" of undesirable aliens.

Alois Mock, Austria's vice chancellor and foreign minister, said that this designation, which bars the Austrian head of state from entering the United States, is the only shadow over U.S.-Austrian relations.

TWO MORE LABOR MINISTERS URGING FUTURE NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE PLO

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, March 7 (JTA) -- Two ranking Labor Party ministers are publicly urging future negotiations between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, despite the fact that the party has committed itself to opposing such a dialogue.

One of the ministers has also given credence to claims made repeatedly by PLO chairman Yasir Arafat that there have been indirect contacts between Israel and the PLO over a cease-fire in

southern Lebanon -- despite official Israeli denials.

The two ministers are Moshe Shahal, minister of energy, and Gad Ya'acobi, minister of communications, both of whom see themselves as possible future party leaders.

The two have voiced criticism recently of the Labor Party's current leadership and present policies.

Shahal told reporters Monday that "Arafat is very eager for a South Lebanon truce" and is trying to achieve one through contacts via the United States.

Shahal said there was evidence that Arafat had ordered his forces in that region to cool down, but not entirely cease, armed action, as long as Israel continues its sporadic air and ground raids.

On the broader Israeli-Palestinian issue, Shahal proposed a new memorandum of understanding between Jerusalem and Washington in which the conditions for dialogue with the Palestinians would include their abandonment of the right of return to the territory of pre-1967 Israel.

If Israel could be sure that the United States would stick fast to that principle, Shahal said he would favor negotiations between Israel and any Palestinians who met the conditions. He spoke of a possible Jordan-Palestinian confederation as the ultimate solution.

Says 'Jordanian Option' Is Dead

Shahal was unequivocal in rejecting any attempted distinction between Palestinians inside the territories and those living abroad, in terms of their political representation.

Ya'acobi, in an interview with the Jerusalem Post published Tuesday, envisaged talks with Arafat if the PLO leader were to be elected by the West Bank and Gaza Palestinians as their representative.

He appeared to approve of Arafat and other diaspora Palestinians running in elections in the territories, alongside local candidates.

Ya'acobi said boldly that the "Jordanian option," long the central plank of Labor Party peace policy, is no longer relevant.

Both ministers thereby diverged sharply from their party's past policies and also from the leadership's more recent amendment to that policy: Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin's proposal for elections that would produce an indigenous "alternative leadership" for the Palestinians and neutralize the influence of the PLO.

The two appeared to line up with Ministers Mordechai Gur and Ezer Weizman, who in recent weeks have also outlined positions that imply eventual negotiations between Israel and the PLO, and do not rule out a form of Palestinian sovereignty, though within a broader framework of confederation.

The two ministers' views are a far cry from Premier Yitzhak Shamir's repeated assertions that Israel will never negotiate with the PLO, and that it will not swap territory for peace.

But the direct and immediate domestic fallout is likely to be felt within the crisis-ridden Labor Party, rather than between Labor and Likud.

Likud is riding high at this time after its marked successes in the Feb. 28 municipal elections.

Likud leaders watch with unconcealed gratification such embarrassing and weakening public upheavals inside Labor.

IDF DESTROYS HOUSES OF 2 YOUTHS IMPLICATED IN DEATH OF SOLDIER

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, March 8 (JTA) -- The sound of explosions rolled once again through the narrow alleys of the Nablus casbah this week, as Israeli security forces demolished the homes of two local youths implicated in the Feb. 24 murder of Israeli Defense Force reservist Binyamin Meisner.

Ibrahim Tartuk, 18, and Samir Nanash, 22, have been suspected by the General Security Service since a few days after the attack, but the difficulty of tracing them in the labyrinthine pathways of the casbah prevented an earlier arrest.

Moreover, the group to which the suspects belong, responsible for planning the attack, is a local organization with no ties to established terrorist groups. This substantially increased the problems in finding them.

Tartuk was apprehended last Friday upon his return to his abode in the Yasmina neighborhood of the casbah.

Apparently, the murder involved a pre-meditated scheme in which four other youths, who also have been arrested, began throwing stones at soldiers to provoke them into pursuit. This created a diversion, enabling Tartuk to drop a large, concrete building block on Meisner without being observed.

All six suspects have participated in past riots in Nablus, but none has been connected to actual previous terrorist acts.

Tartuk and Nanash reportedly have admitted to the killing of Meisner.

In other developments in the territories, an autopsy performed on the body of a Palestinian prisoner who died in a Gaza prison on Monday revealed no signs of foul play.

Died Before Interrogation

Israel Television reported Tuesday that the prisoner, Yussuf Alayan, expired prior to interrogation, contrary to initial allegations that he died in an interrogation cell.

Alayan, 32, had complained of nausea and an ulcer condition upon his arrival at the prison on Saturday night.

A medic administered medication and scheduled a visit with a doctor for the next day; however, Alayan died that same night.

Initially, reports of his death gave rise to speculation of another apparent instance of an Arab prisoner dying while under interrogation.

But police sources state that the autopsy puts all such talk to rest, clearly showing Alayan's death to be of "natural causes" and not due to physical violence.

Despite the autopsy's "conclusive" findings, police say they have not yet officially completed their investigation.

As a result of Alayan's death, the army imposed a curfew Tuesday on the Shabura neighborhood in Rafah to prevent possible unrest.

In other parts of Gaza, violent clashes occurred between demonstrators and the army.

The army said four residents were wounded in the Jabalya refugee camp, contradicting Arab sources who claimed 30 injuries.

Meanwhile, at the United Nations Relief and Works Agency clinic in Gaza, troops were forced to rescue a squad of soldiers trapped and attacked on the grounds of the clinic by stone-throwers whom they had chased there.

UJA CAMPAIGN FOR SOVIET JEWS IS SAID TO 'EXPLOIT' ZIONISM

By Cathrine Gerson

JERUSALEM, March 7 (JTA) -- Speakers from several factions in the Knesset attacked the United Jewish Appeal on Monday for launching a fund-raising campaign that "exploits" the name of Israel on behalf of Soviet Jews who have no intention of living here.

Their anger was directed at UJA's recently announced "Passage to Freedom" campaign, a special effort to raise \$75 million to cover the costs of resettling large numbers of Soviet Jews in the United States and Israel.

Ephraim Gur of Labor, who emigrated from Soviet Georgia as a teen-ager in the early 1970s, called the effort a "sabotage of Zionism."

Israeli lawmakers are frustrated that 90 percent of recent Soviet Jews emigrating on Israeli visas have chosen to "drop out" -- that is, live elsewhere than Israel. The Israelis say special efforts on their behalf only encourage the trend.

But Immigration and Absorption Minister Yitzhak Peretz implied that gaps in absorption services provided to new immigrants were partly responsible for the high drop-out rate. He called the deficiencies in such services "astounding."

Half of the money raised by the special resettlement campaign is earmarked for the Jewish Agency's absorption facilities in Israel.

Meanwhile, the World Zionist Executive called on world Jewry to stop funding services for Soviet Jewish emigrants in Ladispoli, Italy, who are awaiting entry to the United States and other countries.

The Executive recommended that the facilities there be closed immediately. Israelis are embarrassed by reports that more than 7,000 Soviet Jews are choosing to languish in Italy rather than settle in Israel.

'FRESH REFUSALS' OF SOVIET JEWS PRIVY TO STATE SECRETS REPORTED

By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, March 7 (JTA) -- The Soviet Union has given "fresh refusals" to Jews wishing to emigrate who were allegedly privy to state secrets, refusenik Judith Lurie told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency on Tuesday.

"We have several refuseniks for state secrets who have never had any secrets before. I am speaking about the fresh refusals," Lurie said from Moscow in a telephone conference call placed by B'nai B'rith International.

In addition, "those old refuseniks who happen to be in contact with secrets more than 10, 15 and 25 years also have been given fresh refusals," she said.

On another issue, Lurie said the new Jewish cultural center in Moscow, the Solomon Mikhoels Center, which opened Feb. 12, has been closed temporarily for "repairs." But she did not blame the closing on any political foul play.

Lurie spoke after B'nai B'rith leaders in 10 countries and five states praised her role in a hunger strike planned Wednesday through Friday by 46 refuseniks belonging to Jewish Women Against Refusal.

The first day of the hunger strike, held annually since 1987, coincides with International Women's Day.

The National Conference on Soviet Jewry

Wednesday was to call Inna Uspensky, a member of Lurie's group, from the office of Rep. Louis Stokes (D-Ohio), chairman of the Congressional Coalition for Soviet Jews. Congressional Wives for Soviet Jews and the U.S. Helsinki Commission also planned to sponsor that event.

The Union of Councils for Soviet Jews was to call another Soviet Jewish women's group, Jewish Women for Emigration and Survival in Refusal, on Wednesday and Thursday.

SWEDEN POSTPONES MOVE TO BAN THE KOSHER SLAUGHTER OF POULTRY

By Susan Birnbaum

NEW YORK, March 7 (JTA) -- Intervention by American rabbinical groups has staved off for the present a Swedish government ban on the slaughtering of kosher poultry.

Last week, a delegation of leaders of three Orthodox bodies made an emergency visit to the Swedish consul general in New York to gain time for Swedish Jews to continue the practice of shehita of fowl, which Sweden declared inhumane in legislation passed last September.

B'nai B'rith International also has been involved in orchestrating what it called a "world-wide protest" of the Swedish ban.

The Swedish government had originally given the Jewish community a moratorium on the ban until March 1, after previous intercession by Jewish groups.

This time, Jewish groups who sanction, service or observe the practice of kashrut in America have interceded as representatives of world Jewry and succeeded in extending the moratorium until June 30.

The groups have also invited a delegation from the Swedish Department of Agriculture to come to America to observe shehita in an attempt to persuade them that the practice is humane.

In Sweden, slaughterhouses stun their prey before killing them. But this practice is contrary to Jewish law.

Because fowl may not legally be imported into Sweden, the ban would leave its Jewish community with no source of kosher poultry.

Obtaining kosher meat is not a new problem in Sweden, which banned kosher slaughter of cows and sheep in 1937. Jewish groups claim the ban stems from the influence of Nazi propaganda at that time.

The extension of the ban to poultry would mark the first time a European government has banned kosher slaughter since the Nazi era.

Rabbi Max Schreier, president of the Rabbinical Council of America, cabled Swedish Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson on March 1, saying, "We are deeply distressed by the effort of the Swedish Parliament to ban the import of poultry, slaughtered according to humane biblical laws."

The telegram was signed by Schreier; Rabbi Binyamin Wolfish, executive vice president of the RCA; Rabbi Emanuel Holzer, chairman of the RCA's kashrut committee; Sidney Kwestel, president of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America; and Rabbi Moshe Sherer, president of Agudath Israel of America.

Schreier and Holzer also met with B.G. Sporrang, the Swedish deputy consul general to New York, who cabled the Swedish Foreign Ministry in Stockholm on the matter. His message apparently did not fall on deaf ears.

There are about 16,000 Jews in Sweden, most of them in Stockholm.

STATE DEPARTMENT GRANTS U.S. VISA FOR HUSSEINI

By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, March 7 (JTA) -- The State Department has decided to grant a visa to Palestinian activist Faisal al-Husseini, but no decision has been made on two members of the Palestine Liberation Organization, a U.S. official said Tuesday afternoon.

Frances Jones, spokeswoman for the department's consular affairs bureau, did not indicate when a decision will be made on whether to issue visas to Afif Safieh, the PLO's representative in the Netherlands, and Nabil Shaath, a senior adviser to PLO leader Yasir Arafat and a member of the Palestine National Council's political committee.

The three are planning to speak at a conference at Columbia University this weekend sponsored by Columbia; Al-Fajr, a Palestinian Arabic newspaper in East Jerusalem; the left-wing Israeli magazine New Outlook; American Friends of Peace Now; and the American Council for Palestinian Affairs.

At his regular briefing Tuesday, department spokesman Charles Redman said Hussein "is not a PLO member and therefore does not require a waiver" of a congressional statute restricting the entry of PLO members into the United States.

Redman said he expected a decision soon on the two other visa requests in light of the conference this weekend.

Husseini, director of the Arab Studies Center in Jerusalem, was recently released from an Israeli prison, where he had served his second six-month term in 13 months.

MAN WHO CLAIMED TO KIDNAP SOLDIER WAS A FRAUD AND HAS BEEN ARRESTED

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, March 7 (JTA) -- Efficient intelligence work by the police and security services has led to the arrest of a Gaza Strip resident who claimed last week to be holding missing Israel Defense Force Sgt. Avi Sasportas.

But the man appears to have no real connection to the soldier's disappearance, and the paratrooper medic's whereabouts remain a mystery.

One of the most widespread searches ever held in Israel was scaled down and virtually called off last week, when no traces of the missing soldier were found.

But intelligence work continued. On Monday, police announced that a 35-year-old resident of the Mughazi refugee camp, near Gaza, had been arrested.

He had phoned the Agence France-Presse news agency, Israel Radio and Gaza lawyer Fayez Abu-Rahme, claiming that an unknown terrorist organization held Sasportas and would shortly be issuing a nine-minute videotape recording of him in captivity. The videotape never materialized.

The man demanded the freeing of Palestinians arrested during the intifada and compensation for the families of West Bank and Gaza Strip Arabs killed during the uprising in the territories.

But his interrogators discovered that the man had no connection with Sasportas or his disappearance. He allegedly had tried his bluff to effect the release of friends held in Israeli detention centers for intifada-related activities.

Sasportas was last seen Feb. 16 at a road junction near a military base in the Gaza Strip.

12 NATIONS JOIN TO PROMOTE THINGS FRENCH AND JEWISH

By Edwin Eytan

PARIS, March 7 (JTA) -- French-speaking Jewish communities from a dozen countries on Monday created an association to jointly promote Judaism and French culture.

The new body, organized under the auspices of the World Jewish Congress, will also serve as a link between the various communities in Algeria, Belgium, Canada, Israel, Luxembourg, Spain, Switzerland, Morocco, Portugal, Polynesia and Zaire.

The delegates were hosted by French Senator Michel Dreyfus-Schmidt, vice president of the WJC, who chaired the two-day meeting.

The organization is being promoted and aided by the French Council for the Promotion of the French Language, an official body headed by President Francois Mitterrand.

The new association will also be invited to take part in the forthcoming meeting of the heads of French-speaking countries scheduled to meet in May in Dakar, Senegal, according to the French delegate to the new Jewish group.

It is believed that this indirect backing by the French government will enable the Algerian Jewish community to take part in the work of the association.

The Algerian Jewish community, which is rarely seen or heard from these days, was represented at the Paris conclave by Roger Said. He said there are only about 250 Jews remaining in Algeria, out of the once 80,000-strong Jewish community that existed until Algeria's independence from France.

The delegate from Morocco, Serge Berdugo, reported there are some 12,000 Jews left in Morocco, where all Jewish communities have resident rabbis and enjoy full religious and cultural lives.

The French minister in charge of the promotion of French, Alain Decaux, deplored the fact that Israel had stopped encouraging the use of French, despite the half-million Israelis of North African origin for whom French is their mother tongue.

IT'S OFFICIAL: LABOR WINS HAIFA

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, March 7 (JTA) -- The official results in the Haifa municipal elections announced Monday award the mayoralty to incumbent Labor Party Mayor Arye Gurel.

Gurel won with 42.31 percent of the 100,000 valid votes cast, almost 4 percent ahead of his Likud rival, Rami Dotan, who got 38.38 percent.

But Dotan and the Likud party, described by Labor as "bad losers," are not giving up easily.

They and representatives of other contending parties -- the Communists and the religious front -- have refused to sign the official protocol of the results. Likud is preparing to ask the High Court of Justice to throw out the election results because of irregularities.

Shinui candidate Yehudit Naot took third place, with 12.99 percent, and two other candidates got under 2.5 percent each of the direct vote for the mayor post.

Of the 105,392 votes cast, 5,610 were disqualified. Likud has claimed that the number of disqualified votes was "unusually large," and that most of them had voted for their candidates.