



## EGYPTIAN FLAG IS RAISED AS ISRAEL HANDS OVER TABA By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, March 15 (JTA) -- After seven years of informal squabbling, formal negotiations and international arbitration, the last square yards of Sinai were finally returned to Egypt on Wednesday.

The Egyptian flag was raised on a hilltop overlooking Taba precisely at noon, nearly 22 years after Israel captured the area.

Israelis described the situation in Taba Wednesday as "a general snafu" and "organized chaos" in last-minute arrangements that were completed in the minutes before noon.

The transfer ceremony itself was low key on the Israeli side, as Foreign Ministry officials and Israeli police quietly walked across the border, completing the withdrawal.

There was jubilation on the Egyptian side, however, as officials, soldiers and some 100 cheering Egyptians watched the long-disputed area become their territory. It marked the return of the final piece of the entire Sinai Desert captured by Israel in the 1967 Six-Day War.

Israeli officials denied that the Israeli flag had been lowered in the enclave Tuesday to avoid doing so during the official raising of the Egyptian flag Wednesday.

They explained that official Israeli flags were always lowered at nightfall, but none was raised there again Wednesday morning.

As the hour approached, many Israeli journalists and tourists drove the short distance to Eilat to pick up their Israeli passports and return as Israeli tourists visiting a foreign country.

Last-minute preparations included financial arrangements for Israelis visiting Taba and permission for Israeli soldiers and tourists to enter the Taba enclave without need for official permission to leave Israel.

Israelis will be allowed to take 300 shekels, or \$170 a day, for their stay in Taba, up to a total of 4,000 shekels, or \$2,200.

### No Foreign Currency

Israelis are not allowed to take foreign currency into Taba, however. Inside the Taba Sonesta Hotel, formerly the Avia Sonesta, the Israel Discount Bank branch has been replaced by the Egyptian Misr Bank, where Israeli shekels can be exchanged for Egyptian pounds.

In the hotel, two telephone switchboards are now operating. One is linked to the Israeli Bezek national and international switchboard and the other to the Cairo exchange.

Some 65 of the Sonesta Hotel's 350 Israeli employees have resigned rather than continue work under Egyptian ownership, even with the continued management of former hotel owner Eli Papushado.

They continued their at times unruly demonstration this morning, demanding separation compensation at the rate of 350 percent.

But after Israeli police detained several of the more violent demonstrators, they moved their demonstration to the Israeli side of the border.

The disgruntled former employees were bolstered by several score of right-wing and Kach

movement members, who stood on the Israeli side of the border chanting that the Israeli government had treacherously handed over part of the "national heritage" to Egypt.

Egyptian celebrations at the hotel and at the nearby Rafi Nelson Resort Village were jubilant but unofficial.

The Egyptian government plans to hold official celebrations in the enclave on Sunday, probably with the participation of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and possibly also with King Hussein of Jordan.

Meanwhile, relatives of Israelis killed or wounded at Ras Burka three years ago complained Wednesday that Taba had been handed over before the Egyptians had paid them compensation for their bereavement.

The incident was caused when an Egyptian border policeman went berserk and shot at Israeli tourists vacationing on the Sinai coast.

Egypt said Wednesday that the promised compensation would be paid in a few days, after a delay caused by bureaucratic procedures.

## TWO WHO INFILTRATED FROM EGYPT SAY ARAFAT KNEW OF THEIR MISSION By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, March 15 (JTA) -- Israeli troops captured two members of the Islamic Jihad group trying to infiltrate from Egypt in the wee hours of Wednesday morning.

The terrorists, who threw grenades at an Israel Defense Force base near Rafah, at the southern end of the Gaza Strip, told interrogators they had been sent on their mission with the personal knowledge of Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasir Arafat.

The two, aged 15 and 17, crossed the border shortly after midnight Tuesday, apparently without the knowledge of Egyptian officials.

When explosions were heard near the IDF camp, patrols went out, quickly discovered the two young men and fired at them, wounding them lightly. The teen-agers then surrendered.

There were no Israeli casualties.

News of the incident was not reported until after Israel handed over the Taba resort to Egypt at noon Wednesday. Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin said the infiltration attempt had nothing to do with the return of Taba.

But he said it proved that terrorism is not confined to the northern border. Israeli troops in recent weeks have intercepted a number of terrorists attempting to infiltrate from Lebanon.

Gen. Yitzhak Mordechai, commander of the southern front, said the captured men told their interrogators that they had been sent on their mission with orders to attack Israeli soldiers or civilians and if possible to take hostages.

They said the orders were given with the express knowledge of Arafat, to whom they referred by his code-name, "Abu Amar." They claimed to be members of Islamic Jihad, a Moslem extremist group that has been active in Lebanon.

The terrorists said they had been promised a \$20,000 reward for every Israeli they shot dead or brought back alive. They were equipped with Karl Gustav submachine guns, Kalachnikov assault rifles, extra magazines and assault grenades.

**MAJORITY OF AMERICAN JEWS FAVOR ISRAELI TALKS WITH PLO, STUDY FINDS**  
 By Andrew Silow Carroll

NEW YORK, March 15 (JTA) -- A 58 percent majority of American Jews say Israel should be willing to talk with the Palestine Liberation Organization, as long as it recognizes Israel and renounces terrorism, a new study reports.

But only 14 percent of American Jews think Israel should talk with the PLO without these conditions and nearly nine out of 10 still regard the PLO as a terrorist organization.

The study also shows that despite discomfort over the Palestinian uprising and even more anguish over the "Who Is a Jew" issue, American Jewish support for Israel remains virtually unchanged since 1986.

The study lays to rest impressions that recent events in the Middle East have led American Jews to distance themselves from Israel, said Steven Cohen, the Queens College sociology professor who conducted the survey on behalf of the American Jewish Committee's Institute on American Jewish-Israeli Relations.

But Cohen noted that younger Jews are considerably less attached to Israel than their elders.

**Desire Peace, But Fear PLO**

Results of the study were announced Tuesday at a news conference at AJCommittee headquarters here. The findings are the result of a national survey of 944 American Jews in January and February by Market Facts Inc., a Washington-based research organization.

Measuring the effects of the Palestinian uprising on American Jewish opinion, the survey found that over a third of the respondents, 35 percent, said they were "morally outraged" by some of Israel's actions.

A clear majority, 54 percent, said they experienced feelings during the uprising that "Israelis were acting wrongly."

Asked about options for peace, 47 percent of the respondents said they believe the Palestinians have a right to a homeland in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as long as it does not threaten Israel. Twenty-three percent disagreed, and 30 percent said they were unsure.

Asked if "Israel should be willing to talk with the PLO," as long as it "recognizes Israel and renounces terrorism," 58 percent said yes, 18 percent said no and 24 percent were not sure.

Still, 86 percent of the respondents said they believe the PLO is a terrorist organization.

"Interestingly, American Jews and Israelis are very close in their attitudes toward peace," said Cohen. He quoted a recent Israeli survey which found that 54 percent of Israelis favor talks with the PLO if they meet preconditions.

"They are desperate for peace," he said, "but are still, literally, scared to death of the PLO."

**Anguish Over 'Who Is A Jew'**

To whatever extent American Jews were upset by Israel's response to the uprising, they were even more upset by the "Who Is a Jew" question, Cohen said.

A great majority, 86 percent, said they oppose changing Israel's Law of Return "so as to recognize only those conversions performed by an Orthodox rabbi."

Cohen said that unlike the uprising, the

proposed changes in the Law of Return affected respondents personally. Solid majorities said that the proposed changes would have brought into question the Jewish identity of some of their close friends or relatives, and that the changes would have meant that Israel was "declaring Conservative and Reform Judaism illegitimate."

AJCommittee has conducted similar surveys almost every year since 1981. The latest shows that 62 percent of American Jews feel "very close" or "fairly close" to Israel, the same percentage as in 1986, though a slight decrease from the 70 percent figure of 1988.

When asked how they feel about Israel, compared to "three or four years ago," 8 percent said they felt more distant, 14 percent said they felt closer, 75 percent said they felt "about the same" and 3 percent were unsure.

Almost two-thirds of American Jews, 65 percent, said the destruction of Israel would feel like "one of the greatest personal tragedies in my life." That is the same percentage as in 1988, and even more than in 1986.

But only 55 percent of those under 35 answered positively to the question, compared to 71 percent of Jews in the 55 to 64 age group.

Cohen suggested that the less personally American Jews experienced the watershed events of the Holocaust, Israel's birth, and the major wars of 1967 and 1973, the less attachment they feel to Israel.

**EXPERT SAYS ISRAEL MAY LOSE U.S. SUPPORT IF STATUS QUO CONTINUES**  
 By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, March 15 (JTA) -- Israel will lose the support of the United States and American Jewry if the Palestinian uprising in the West Bank and Gaza Strip continues, the deputy director of a prestigious Israeli think tank warned Wednesday.

Joseph Alpher of the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies at Tel Aviv University said that what American Jewry did in its public outcry over the recent "Who Is a Jew" controversy was "pour (out) all of their reaction to the intifada, on which they didn't feel able to speak out."

Alpher, who directed the recent Jaffee Center study on options for peace, made these comments to reporters after he addressed the Washington Institute of the National Council of Jewish Women, a four-day meeting attended by some 700 women from across the country.

Lenore Feldman, NCJW president, told reporters that Jewish leaders expressed their concerns about the uprising to the Israelis privately.

"We've been telling them privately the status quo is not going to be appreciated by anybody," Feldman said. "It doesn't serve Israel well, it doesn't serve Jewry well."

But she said they were told that "American support of Israel is so firm and entrenched that it didn't matter whether American Jewish support was very strong or not."

During NCJW's four-day advocacy training program, which ended Wednesday, the delegates presented Congress with a petition signed by 10,000 persons advocating freedom of choice for abortions.

The NCJW also presented its Social Action Award to Gov. Madeleine Kunin of Vermont. Kunin, who is Jewish, was honored for her leadership in child care, education and the environment, all major concerns of NCJW.

## PLAN TO PROVIDE \$85 MILLION MORE FOR SOVIET REFUGEES WINS SUPPORT

By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, March 15 (JTA) -- The group responsible for helping resettle Soviet Jews in the United States reacted with tempered praise Wednesday to an imminent Bush administration proposal to increase the U.S. quota on Soviet refugees.

"I am delighted in the direction they are moving," said Karl Zukerman, executive vice president of HIAS, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society.

He was responding to a White House announcement Wednesday that President Bush will ask Congress for an additional \$85 million this fiscal year to help resettle Soviet refugees.

The proposal, which is expected to be submitted to Congress shortly, also would request \$15 million to help reduce refugee backlogs in other countries, according to White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater.

Fitzwater said the administration was not yet proposing how many additional refugees could enter the United States with those funds. That would come in negotiations with Congress, he said.

Zukerman refrained from giving full-blown endorsement to the plan until the administration says how much of the \$85 million will help Soviet Jews, including the split between expenditures for processing and resettlement.

Congress and Jewish groups have been pressuring the administration to increase funding and quotas for Soviet Jews.

They estimate that as many as 40,000 will want to leave the Soviet Union this year. But the United States has only earmarked 25,000 slots for Soviet refugees so far.

### 19,000 Waiting In Moscow

The Bush administration is also proposing to increase the number of Immigration and Naturalization Service processing officials in Moscow from two to six. The number in Rome would grow from five to seven, Fitzwater said.

Soviet Jews will benefit mainly from the increase in Rome, where most of them are processed, Zukerman said, while the increase in Moscow will primarily help Armenians. Of the 13,000 Soviets currently waiting to be processed at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, roughly 1,000 to 1,500 are Jews, he said.

Fitzwater said 14,200 Soviet refugees have been admitted so far this fiscal year from the Soviet Union. An additional 19,000 refugees are waiting in Moscow to leave, and 7,000 are already in Rome.

The U.S. proposals were first revealed Tuesday by Secretary of State James Baker, during testimony before the House Appropriations subcommittee on foreign operations. Baker testified before the Senate counterpart to that committee Wednesday, and heard criticism of U.S. refugee policy.

Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), the subcommittee chairman, told Baker, "We have probably reached a point where it makes sense to go back and totally look at how our quotas are set up."

Sen. Robert Kasten (R-Wis.) said, "Sometime in April, we are going to run out of money in each of the places (Moscow and Rome). We have got people backed up for five and six weeks of processing in Rome."

## WJC PLANS OFFICE IN BUDAPEST AMID TALK OF HUNGARY-ISRAEL TIES

By Susan Birnbaum

NEW YORK, March 15 (JTA) -- Amid growing speculation that full diplomatic ties between Hungary and Israel could be resumed as early as the end of April, the World Jewish Congress has announced plans to open an office in Budapest in July.

Resumption of relations would make Hungary the first of the Eastern Bloc nations that broke relations with Israel after the Six-Day War to resume ties.

Earlier this month, the Hungarian minister of communications, transport and construction signed an accord on travel between the two countries.

Andras Derzsi signed the accord in Tel Aviv with Israeli Transport Minister Moshe Katsav, establishing regular flights between Tel Aviv and Budapest by El Al Airlines and Hungary's national Malev Airlines.

At the same time, Derzsi signed a memorandum of understanding for bilateral cooperation in the area of communications with Communications Minister Gad Ya'acobi, who will pay an official visit to Budapest at the end of May.

The agreement on establishing the WJC office in Budapest was reached with the Hungarian government following two months of negotiations, according to Elan Steinberg, WJC executive director.

The bureau in the Hungarian capital will mark the first time a WJC office will be established in a Communist country.

Jewish communities in Communist countries, such as Romania, Poland, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and even East Germany and Cuba, have WJC affiliates but do not maintain formal WJC offices.

## LIKUD AND LABOR BOTH CLAIM VICTORY IN MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, March 15 (JTA) -- Both Likud and the Labor Party claimed victory in Tuesday's runoff elections for mayors and local council chairpersons.

Likud officials pointed out that their candidates had won in 11 of the 19 localities in which the two parties had competed directly against each other.

But Labor said their eight gains, some of them removing incumbent Likud mayors, showed that the sharp decline in Labor fortunes indicated by the results of the first round two weeks ago had been halted.

In Even Yehuda, Likud candidate Zivia Ben-Dror won the mayoralty, becoming the first woman ever to head a local council.

In the Arab sector, Islamic fundamentalists won in two localities: the Bedouin town of Rahat, near Beersheba, and the Arab village of Jaljulya, near Kfar Sava.

Both major parties are now competing for leadership in the important local government association body in which the Likud claims to have won 70 of the 140 seats.

But Labor claims the support of a number of independent mayors, as well as that of a number of Arab mayors, whose backing would enable Labor to maintain the local government control it has had for over 50 years.

The attention of both major parties now turns to the Histadrut elections in November.

**SHAMIR'S SOLIDARITY CONFERENCE  
WINNING BROAD BACKING IN U.S.**

By Andrew Silow Carroll

NEW YORK, March 15 (JTA) -- Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir has been largely successful in rallying leaders of American Jewish organizations behind his "Conference on Jewish Solidarity With Israel," taking place in Jerusalem March 20 to 22.

But there is some ambivalence about the event, even among those who are participating. Some are wary that Shamir will use the gathering, which comes just weeks before his meetings in Washington with the Bush administration, as proof that American Jewry stands firmly behind the Likud leader's political agenda.

Close to 1,000 hand-picked Jewish leaders from the United States and elsewhere are expected at the conference, described by Shamir's office as an attempt to form a "united front" that will "solidify the bond between the Jewish people and the State of Israel."

Participants, from youth group leaders to British press baron Robert Maxwell, will take part in three days of speeches and "working groups," and are expected to signal their approval for a series of conference resolutions.

All 46 member organizations of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, an additional seven observer groups and 11 of its past chairmen signed a statement of support for the conference that appeared in Sunday's New York Times.

"Whatever our individual points of view, we are unified in our commitment to Israel's security, its independence, its economic vitality and the well-being of its citizenry," read the ad.

**'A Sense Of Isolation'**

Those enthusiastic about the event see it as a reaffirmation of American Jewish support in the wake of recent tension, including the bitter Diaspora opposition to the proposed "Who Is a Jew" amendment to the Law of Return that alarmed Israeli leaders.

So did the American Jewish leadership's tepid reaction to the U.S. decision in December to open a dialogue with the Palestine Liberation Organization.

"This is a time when Israel needs an expression of solidarity," said Samuel Cohen, executive vice president of the Jewish National Fund of America.

"There's a sense of isolation, especially in view of the difficult year Israel had this past year," said Cohen. Israel "needs a show of solidarity for the people in government in Washington, that the Jews are with Israel, that we aren't two communities."

Criticism of the conference has been muted, because few can argue with any attempt to demonstrate their love of Israel.

"We have no problem with the conference, but would have a great problem if it were to be used inappropriately for the far narrower purpose that world Jewry supports the specifics of this government's peace process," said Henry Siegman, executive director of the American Jewish Congress.

AJCongress, a frequent critic of Shamir's hard-line policies, will be represented by Siegman and its president, Robert Lifton.

Helping to allay fears that the conference will serve partisan Likud interests are key mem-

bers of the Labor Party, who took part in its planning.

Vice Premier Shimon Peres will address the conference, as will his party colleague, Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

Mordechai Gur, a Labor minister without portfolio, was in the United States last week visiting communities to drum up support and participation.

**An Uncertain Consensus**

"Solidarity could not be represented as something that could promote Likud," said Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associate dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles.

Cooper claims the idea for the conference came out of discussions between Wiesenthal Center officials and Shamir.

"We're trying to highlight again to ourselves and the world that there is a consensus on basic ideas," he explained.

Cooper said these ideas include a unified Jerusalem and Israel's "basic geo-military needs."

But other leaders are less certain what that consensus embraces. Despite the fact that Likud has been given control over foreign policy, Israel's national unity government is still divided along party lines over the best path toward a resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Both Likud and Labor officially oppose a Palestinian state and the Palestine Liberation Organization as a legitimate negotiating partner. And Shamir now supports positions once linked to Peres: a role for both the Soviets and Jordanians in the peace process.

But Labor leaders support trading land for peace, while Shamir sums up his views on territorial compromise by saying "not one inch."

Rabbi Wolfe Kelman, executive vice president of the Conservative movement's Rabbinical Assembly, said he is not attending the conference, mainly because of scheduling conflicts.

But Kelman termed the conference's goals "a vague, amorphous idea of solidarity."

**Shamir 'Deserves A Chance'**

On the other hand, Kelman said, "I hope many people will go. I have no desire to see it fail. I don't know anybody who is staying away because they don't agree with Shamir. They support the State of Israel, which Labor is as much involved in as Likud."

Some who agree with the stated aims of the conference, but disagree with Shamir's approach to the peace process, see it as an opportunity to tell him so.

Chuck Buxbaum, national secretary of Haborim 'Labor Zionist' Youth and chairman of the American Zionist Youth Council, said he is going "to express solidarity with Israel, to express the commitment of Zionist youth to aliyah and Zionist education -- but also to express the fact that many American Zionist youth are very troubled with Israel's current policies."

Another frequent critic of Shamir's policies, Rabbi Alexander Schindler of the Reform movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations, said he will attend the conference because "my love of Israel transcends party policy to embrace an entire people."

Shamir, he said, "deserves a chance to prove that he is a bona fide peacemaker. We will give him a fair and responsible hearing."

(J.J. Goldberg, associate editor of *The New York Jewish Week*, contributed to this report.)