

STATE DEPT. TAKING CAUTIOUS VIEW OF PLO'S REPORTED POLICY SHIFT

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, July 27 (JTA) -- The State Department warned Thursday against giving too much credit to news reports that the Palestine Liberation Organization has eased its conditions for accepting Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's peace proposal.

Such reports may be circulating to the media as "trial balloons or for other reasons," State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler said.

"History shows that one should not make judgment, policies or actions on what may be inaccurate or unauthorized statements," she said. "We deal with official statements and actions as they are related to us through official channels."

But Tutwiler said the Shamir plan is being taken seriously both inside and outside the Middle East.

"The United States is working on a realistic approach to the elections," Tutwiler said. "We believe there is serious engagement on the Shamir election proposals."

She did not explain what she meant by "serious engagement."

The reports of a PLO shift were based on details of a meeting in Paris last week between Israeli and Soviet officials, as well as an American memorandum said to have reached Jerusalem.

According to the reports, the PLO would accept elections if Israel allowed Arab residents of East Jerusalem to participate, withdrew the army from population centers in the administered territories on Election Day and allowed a team of American and Egyptian observers to monitor the elections.

The PLO also would require that Israel state in advance of the elections its commitment to give up territory as part of a peace settlement.

No Such U.S. Memorandum

By contrast, the PLO had previously demanded that the Israeli army withdraw completely from the territories before the elections and be replaced by an international observer force.

The PLO's more relaxed conditions were revealed in Israel Wednesday by two Israeli newspapers, the Jerusalem Post and Ha'aretz. They based their reports on what they said was a U.S. memorandum stating that the PLO had informed the United States it had agreed to the elections and was ready to name a negotiating team to work out arrangements with Israel.

But Tutwiler reiterated Thursday that there is no such U.S. memorandum. She said the United States had not given Israel any written documents detailing its seven-month dialogue with the PLO in Tunis.

The details of the PLO conditions were provided by Nimrod Novik, political adviser to Vice Premier Shimon Peres, who received them in Paris from Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Genady Terrasov. The Soviet official met with Nimrod several days after meeting with PLO leader Yasir Arafat.

Tutwiler said the State Department had no comment on the PLO's reported new position. Nor would she say what was discussed in Tunis Wed-

nesday during an hour-long meeting between Robert Pelletreau, the U.S. ambassador to Tunisia, and Hakam Ballaoui, the PLO representative there.

But Tutwiler repeated U.S. objections to the PLO's insistence that Israel agree, before elections are held, to give up land for peace. Such a position would make "progress impossible," she said in an official statement.

The United States is opposed to any conditions that would prejudice the outcome of peace negotiations. For that reason, it also objected to the Likud Central Committee's July 5 decision to impose tough new conditions on the implementation of the peace plan.

Those conditions, which Shamir supported, included barring East Jerusalem residents from participating in the elections and declaring that Israel would never give up additional territory.

While Shamir is still technically bound by those conditions, they have not been amended to the government peace plan. The Israeli Cabinet voted Sunday to reaffirm the peace plan in its original form, without the Likud conditions.

The plan calls for Palestinians in the administered territories to elect representatives to negotiate with Israel on the terms of an interim autonomy settlement and, eventually, the final status of the territories.

SHAMIR'S TALKS WITH PALESTINIANS ARE REVILED BY LIKUD HARD-LINERS

By Gil Sedan and Hugh Orgel

JERUSALEM, July 27 (JTA) -- Likud hard-liners expressed total opposition Thursday to Yitzhak Shamir's recent talks with West Bank Palestinian leaders, and met to plot new strategy to scuttle the prime minister's peace plan.

Cabinet ministers Ariel Sharon, David Levy and Yitzhak Moda'i said they would wait until after the expected visit here next week by U.S. State Department officials before launching a broad public relations campaign within Likud to amend Shamir's peace initiative.

The trio was rebuffed in its last attempt to restrain the peace plan, when the Cabinet voted Sunday to reaffirm the plan without the constraining language they had forced on Shamir in the Likud Central Committee.

The ministers said they are planning to summon a new meeting of the Central Committee for the purposes of "renewed wide discussion" of the peace plan.

Sharon said he opposed Shamir's contacts with West Bank leaders, even though he did not know with whom Shamir has been meeting.

"He does not tell me, and does not even keep the Cabinet, or the political Inner Cabinet informed of what he is doing," Sharon complained to reporters.

Rigorous debate over the reported meetings between Palestinian leaders and Shamir is not limited to the Israeli hard-liners.

It is also a subject of controversy within the Palestinian political community, not excluding the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Local Palestinians are unclear whether or not the recent meetings were sanctioned by the PLO. They are also debating whether the meetings only serve Israel's purposes by circumventing the

PLO or actually represent indirect talks between Israel and the PLO.

On Monday, PLO officials, including Chairman Yasir Arafat, reported that they had endorsed the meetings, even identifying the four Palestinians who were said to have taken part. Shamir denied the claim.

One of the Palestinian participants, El-Bireh attorney Jamil Tarifi, is well known as a supporter of the PLO, but was careful Tuesday not to identify himself with the PLO.

Another Palestinian identified by the PLO was Mahmoud Abu-Zuluf, editor of the East Jerusalem daily Al-Kuds. He denied that he took part in the meetings, joining those who criticized the talks as an end-run around the PLO.

Another key opponent to holding talks with Israeli leaders is Faisal Hussein, the East Jerusalem academic whom Israel has variously denigrated and championed as a Palestinian spokesman.

"This is an attempt by the government of Israel to paint a certain political picture, and to signal to the West -- particularly to the U.S. -- that it negotiates with residents of the territories in a way which deprives from the PLO its role in the political process," Hussein told reporters Thursday. Shamir himself keeps insisting that there are no indirect talks being held with the PLO.

During a lengthy interview Wednesday on Israel television, Shamir said talks with the PLO were "impossible," and added, "If I were the U.S., I would concentrate my efforts on the Arab states rather than the PLO."

He also dismissed any talk about a change in PLO policy. "The only thing Arafat wants is to see me dead," Shamir said. Then, turning to his two interviewers, he added, "Arafat wants to see you dead, as well."

CAN ISRAEL TRY A PALESTINIAN FAIRLY? CASE TO BE ARGUED IN FEDERAL COURT By Allison Kaplan

NEW YORK, July 27 (JTA) -- The issue of whether a suspected Palestinian terrorist can receive a fair trial in Israel has taken center stage in a federal court in Brooklyn.

Mahmoud El-Abed Ahmad, a naturalized American citizen who was born in the West Bank city of Ramallah, has been charged in Israel with taking part in an attack on an Egged bus in the West Bank in 1986, an attack which left the bus driver dead and a passenger wounded.

The U.S. government has been seeking Ahmad's extradition to Israel for more than two years, to face a string of charges including murder.

Ahmad has remained incarcerated in the Metropolitan Correction Center in Manhattan throughout his legal fight against extradition. Former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark has been Ahmad's lawyer in the prolonged court battle.

In his latest court petition, Clark stated that Ahmad's "chances of receiving even a modicum of due process within the Israeli judicial system are nonexistent." In Israel, Ahmad would "be faced with procedures and/or treatment that is antipathetic to a federal court's sense of decency."

To support these claims, Clark has called expert witnesses to testify before U.S. District Judge Jack Weinstein, among them Lea Tsemel, a West Bank attorney well known for defending Palestinians, and Abdeen Jabara, the president of

the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee.

Clark has also submitted voluminous documentation to the court compiled by Palestinian and other sources, which details alleged mistreatment of Palestinians in Israeli custody.

The U.S. government, which is fighting for Ahmad's extradition, plans to call two of its own experts to testify Wednesday to defend the Israeli system of justice.

Dershowitz To Testify

One witness will be the celebrated Harvard law Professor Alan Dershowitz, who has observed and written about the judicial process in Israel.

"My view is that anybody can get a fair trial in Israel," Dershowitz said in a telephone interview.

Ahmad, who is also known by the name Mahmoud Abed Atta, is reputedly a member of Abu Nidal's terrorist group.

Abu Nidal's organization has taken responsibility for the April 12, 1986, West Bank bus attack in which three men threw Molotov cocktails and fired automatic weapons at an Israeli bus near the Dir Abu Mishal intersection, killing the bus driver and wounding a passenger.

Two Palestinians were tried and convicted in the attack. The Israeli government says the two men implicated Ahmad as their accomplice in statements they made while in custody.

By that time, Ahmad had fled the country.

After a global manhunt, Ahmad was located in Venezuela by Israel and the FBI in April 1987.

Since there is no extradition treaty between Venezuela and Israel, Ahmad was deported to the United States, where a warrant for his arrest had been issued. Upon his arrival at Kennedy Airport, he was immediately taken into custody, and Israel formally requested his extradition two months later.

In Ahmad's first extradition hearing, Magistrate John Caden ruled that the government could not extradite him to Israel.

Caden concluded that the bus attack was "a political act" which made Ahmad immune to extradition. He also ruled that Ahmad had been brought illegally to the United States.

But Caden's ruling was reversed when the government filed its extradition request for a second time, and Magistrate Edward Korman granted the extradition.

Court sources say a final ruling on the appeal now before Judge Weinstein is not expected until late September, following oral arguments and the submission of legal briefs.

If Weinstein rules in the government's favor and upholds the extradition order, Ahmad has the right to appeal the case to the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, and potentially to the Supreme Court.

GALIL HAS MORE ARABS THAN JEWS By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, July 27 (JTA) -- The Galilee region has lost its Jewish majority for the first time, according to a memorandum recently sent to Labor Central Committee members by Micha Goldman, a Labor Knesset member and head of the Kfar Tavor local council.

During the past two years, some 23,000 residents have left the Galilee, 11,000 of them in 1988.

The ratio of Jews to Arabs in the region now stands at 95 Jews for every 100 Arabs.

NCSJ HEAD ASKS U.S. HELP ON LONG-TERM REFUSENIKS

NEW YORK, July 27 (JTA) -- The head of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry has asked Secretary of State James Baker for U.S. help in resolving the issue of long-term refuseniks.

Shoshana Cardin, chairwoman of the National Conference, wrote a letter to Baker citing Soviet failure to allow long-term refuseniks to emigrate.

Cardin wrote that the problem was still outstanding despite assurances given by the Soviet Union on Jan. 19. That was the date it signed the concluding document of the Vienna follow-up meeting of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, which monitors implementation of Helsinki human rights accords.

Soviet willingness to live up to its CSCE commitments should be "a decisive factor in determining whether the United States will participate in the CSCE Human Dimensions Conference now scheduled for Moscow in September 1991," Cardin wrote.

Specifically, she said, Soviet resolution of 600 refusenik cases since January has "regrettably" fallen far short of the Soviet Union's obligation under the Vienna accords.

Of those 600, said Cardin, a full 25 percent of them have remained in refusal for over 10 years.

She cited the section of the Vienna document that says, "Everyone shall be free to leave any country, including his own."

The document specifies that participating states "will take the necessary steps to find solutions as expeditiously as possible, but in any case within six months."

More than six months have passed since the Soviets put their signature to that accord, noted Cardin.

LOCAL MUNICIPALITIES IN ISRAEL PLEDGE TO ABSORB SOVIET IMMIGRANTS

By Cathrine Gerson

JERUSALEM, July 27 (JTA) -- Local city councils in Israel have pledged to welcome into their individual communities a fixed number of the half-million Soviet immigrants expected to arrive here in the next few years.

The pledges ranged from cities like Ashkelon, which said it would accept 2,000 over the next five years, to smaller towns like Yehud, which committed to absorbing 200 refugees.

The pledges took place at a meeting Wednesday of the Conference of Mayors, which was convened by the Jewish Agency in order to discuss ways to implement a proposal called "Absorption Through the Local Municipalities."

The proposal, put together by Uri Gordon, head of the Jewish Agency's Immigration and Absorption Department, outlines a plan of direct absorption by local authorities in place of the current system of absorption by the Jewish Agency and the government's Immigration Ministry.

Simcha Dinitz, chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive, spelled out the program for the absorption of Soviet Jews and the 3,000 to 4,000 people from South America who are expected to leave their countries of origin within the next five years.

Dinitz said that a high percentage of these Jews could be convinced to immigrate to Israel if assured of employment and adequate housing and

schooling for their children.

The representatives from the councils appeared enthusiastic about the role they could play in absorbing new immigrants.

One after another rose to give details of the employment situation in their cities, and their experience in absorbing immigrants in the past.

Mordechai Linik, head of Yehud's local council, arrived with a folder showing how his township is preparing itself for the expected influx of immigrants.

Linik called for a central body with representatives from the Jewish Agency, the Ministry of Absorption and other government ministries to coordinate absorption with the local councils.

The call was echoed by Labor Knesset member Eli Dayan, mayor of Ashkelon, and others.

SOVIET STUDENTS ARRIVE IN ISRAEL

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, July 27 (JTA) -- Eight young Jewish university graduates from the Soviet Union arrived in Israel today for a stay on a kibbutz.

They are the first to participate in the "Russian Orange" project, which is being jointly sponsored by the Mapam-affiliated Kibbutz Artzi, the Jewish Agency and the Foreign Ministry.

The students will attend a special Hebrew-language ulpan set up for them at Kibbutz Ein Dor for 10 to 12 weeks, and will also work half a day on the kibbutz.

They will be adopted by kibbutz families and will tour the country and attend seminars.

Initiators of the project hope that the participants will immigrate to Israel and will choose to live on a kibbutz.

BUSH NOMINEE 'CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC' THAT POPE WILL RECOGNIZE ISRAEL SOON

By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, July 27 (JTA) -- President Bush's nominee for ambassador to the Vatican said last week that he was "cautiously optimistic" that Pope John Paul II would eventually grant diplomatic recognition to Israel.

Thomas Patrick Melady, the ambassador-designate, made those comments at his July 19 confirmation hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Sen. Joseph Biden (D-Del.), who questioned Melady, noted that the Vatican recognizes Israel's right to exist and that John Paul II has met Israeli officials on several occasions.

But at the same time, Biden said, the Vatican has declined to establish full diplomatic ties because they believe that recognition should come only after a Middle East peace agreement that defines Israel's borders and satisfies Palestinian demands for a national homeland.

Melady replied that he thinks the Vatican should extend diplomatic recognition to Israel.

Biden asked Melady how important it is that the Vatican be perceived as being more sympathetic to the concerns and problems facing Israel and the Jewish people worldwide.

"I think it is in the interest of what the Vatican, the Holy See, wants to accomplish in regard to the reduction of tensions," Melady said. "There are things that can be done."

On another issue, Melady said the controversy at the former Auschwitz concentration camp where nuns have erected a convent "is not directly a matter of U.S. government interest."

SWISS AGREE TO EXTRADITE EX-NAZI TO WEST GERMANY

By Tamar Levy

GENEVA, July 27 (JTA) -- The Swiss Justice Ministry and police said they have given orders to extradite convicted Nazi Gottfried Weise to West Germany.

Weise, 68, a former SS man whose lethal target practice earned him the nickname "William Tell of Auschwitz," apparently identified himself to medical personnel at a hospital in the resort town of Thun, in the German part of Switzerland.

He had been admitted to the hospital suffering from what has been reported both as a mild stroke and heart trouble.

Weise is believed to have been hiding out in Switzerland since the spring, under the alias Gerhard Sieber. He has been the subject of a massive Interpol manhunt since he fled his home in Wuppertal, West Germany.

Weise was found guilty in January 1988 of having murdered at least five persons in 1944 in his capacity as an SS guard at the Auschwitz death camp.

He appealed his life sentence but the German high court upheld the sentence.

Swiss authorities had taken Weise's passport from him, but he reportedly obtained false papers and hid with the help of a neo-Nazi network.

ALLEGED SPY REPORTEDLY TRIED TO KEEP WALDHEIM OFF WATCH LIST

NEW YORK, July 27 (JTA) -- Felix Bloch, who allegedly provided sensitive information to the Soviet Union while working as a State Department official, lobbied to keep Austrian President Kurt Waldheim's name off the U.S. watch list of undesirable aliens, according to published reports.

A Vienna native whose family fled the Nazis there in 1938, Bloch is said to have operated in Vienna as a Soviet spy working within the U.S. Embassy.

He is a longtime friend of Austrian Foreign Minister Alois Mock, a political colleague of Waldheim, whose wartime past in the German Wehrmacht was revealed during his campaign for Austrian president.

The two men, who knew each other from college days in Bologna, Italy, discussed the Waldheim matter at great length.

Mock, like Waldheim a member of the conservative People's Party, fought the U.S. decision to place Waldheim on the list of people who may not enter the United States because of charges they persecuted people for racial reasons.

Mock recently made a fresh attempt to remove Waldheim's name from the watch list.

No formal charges have been filed against Bloch, although U.S. government authorities are continuing to investigate the espionage charges.

Because of his high position in the State Department and his long career there, it is believed that potential damage to American security could be severe, if the allegations of spying are found to be true.

Bloch, who worked at the U.S. Embassy in Vienna from 1980 to 1987, served for a time under former U.S. Ambassador Ronald Lauder, who says he dismissed Bloch for "insubordination."

Lauder said in interviews Monday that he "didn't like" Bloch, and that he "felt there was something the matter with him."

HOLLAND WARNS TOURISTS ON DANGERS OF ISRAELI TRAVEL

By Henrietta Boas

AMSTERDAM, July 27 (JTA) -- The Dutch Foreign Ministry has issued a warning to travel agencies organizing tours to Israel saying that due to the intifada, Dutch tourists should not visit the administered territories or East Jerusalem.

The warning followed an advisory by the Dutch Embassy in Tel Aviv, which stated that Dutch tourists could be safe only inside pre-1967 Israeli borders.

The warning suggested that tourists who decide to visit East Jerusalem should not do so after sunset or by themselves, adding that on Fridays tourists should first inquire with the tourist police near Jaffa Gate about the situation on that day.

Jerusalem Mayor Teddy Kollek has protested the East Jerusalem warning, saying there has not been a noticeable increase in deaths there since the beginning of the Palestinian uprising.

Apparently, the Dutch Embassy issued its statement nearly three months ago, but it was not made public until it was leaked in the daily "De Telegraaf" on Wednesday.

So far, no Dutch tourist has been killed or wounded in Israel or the administered territories since the start of the intifada.

One Dutch citizen was killed and 18 wounded, however, in the overturning of an Egyptian tourist bus Sunday in the Sinai desert near Ismailia. The mishap has been ruled an accident caused by the careless driving of the Egyptian driver.

The general association of tourist agencies in Holland, ANVR, has said that it acknowledges the warning, but in its view tourists can visit Israel safely.

OUT-PATIENT DEATHS RULED AN ACCIDENT By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, July 27 (JTA) -- A preliminary medical investigation into the deaths of two outpatients at the Beilinson Hospital in Petach Tikva reveals that their deaths were apparently caused by a pharmacist's error.

The two men died after drinking pre-X-ray laxatives that were accidentally poisoned. Medical sources say the poisoning resulted from the failure to add a substance to the laxative which neutralizes or weakens other components.

It is being called a human error rather than a willful act.

The 30-year-old pharmacist who mixed the laxatives has been temporarily suspended. She denies any responsibility, insisting that poisonous materials are kept under lock and key.

OLD BONE REVEALS PREHISTORIC SPEECH

TEL AVIV, July 27 (JTA) -- A tiny mouth bone that was discovered in excavations at the Kabra caves on the Carmel coast has convinced scientists that prehistoric man, unlike the monkey, was able to talk, according to Tel Aviv University Professor Baruch Ernsburg, a member of an international research team working at the excavation site.

A complete skeleton of a prehistoric man, estimated to be about 60,000 years old, has previously been found at Kabra.