

## ISRAELIS DEFEND CAPTURE OF SHIITE, BUT SOME SAY PUBLICITY WAS WRONG By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Aug. 1 (JTA) -- Senior Israeli officials are charging that Israel made a serious error when it publicly acknowledged its responsibility for the capture of Shiite leader Sheikh Abdel Karim Obeid and his two aides.

Israeli newspapers quoted unnamed government officials Tuesday as saying that the public announcement that Israel was behind Obeid's abduction may have been both responsible for escalating the situation and the cause of any damage to U.S.-Israeli relations that grows out of the affair.

Though they did not criticize the operation itself, the officials also said the public acknowledgment may have closed off options for behind-the-scenes arrangements with either the Islamic fundamentalist Hezbollah movement or its Iranian sponsors.

The officials pointed out that by contrast, Israel has never acknowledged any role in the May 1988 murder of Khalil al-Wazir, a top Palestine Liberation Organization official also known as Abu Jihad. Israeli commandos are widely believed to have assassinated Wazir in a commando raid not unlike the one used to seize Obeid on July 28.

The proposal to capture Obeid was presented to Israel's Inner Cabinet three weeks ago.

The operation was approved by a vote of 11-1, with only Energy Minister Moshe Shahal of the Labor Party opposing the operation. Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin was authorized to decide the details of the operation.

During the Inner Cabinet discussion of the operation, Rabin reportedly explained that all possible measures to release three Israel Defense Force soldiers being held by Shiite groups in Lebanon had been exhausted.

### Hezbollah Had Rejected An Exchange

Hezbollah, which is believed to be holding two of the Israelis, had rejected a previous offer to exchange the soldiers for Shiites held in Israel, Rabin said.

Both direct and indirect negotiations for a prisoner exchange reportedly took place in London and other locations with the participation of Israeli intelligence officers.

The third Israeli is believed to be held by the more mainstream Shiite Amal militia.

Under Israeli interrogation Monday, Obeid confessed to involvement in the abduction of U.S. Lt. Col. William Higgins, as well as other kidnappings and attacks in southern Lebanon. A Hezbollah faction said Monday it had hanged Higgins in retaliation for Obeid's abduction.

Israeli officials said Obeid also admitted participating in the kidnapping of IDF soldiers Yossi Fink and Rahamim Alsheikh in February 1986, and helped plan numerous attacks against Israeli forces in southern Lebanon.

The revelation that Israeli negotiations with the Shiites for the release of their soldiers held in Lebanon had broken down helps paint a clearer picture of the rationale behind the government's decision to capture Obeid.

It is a cardinal principle of the Israeli Defense Force that no effort is spared to guarantee the safety of soldiers. Every soldier knows that if he falls prisoner, Israel will make every attempt to ensure that he returns home, as a result of either a military rescue operation or a prisoner-of-war exchange.

In an attempt to explain Israel's position to the United States and deal with the political implications of the Obeid kidnapping, the Foreign Ministry on Tuesday set up a special team, headed by Deputy Foreign Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, who formerly served as ambassador to the United Nations.

The team released a seven-point statement Tuesday which tried to clarify Israeli actions and reiterated Israel's offer of a prisoner exchange.

"Israel fully and wholeheartedly welcomes the call voiced by President Bush to bring about a reversal of the cycle of violence," the statement said. "It is in that spirit that Defense Minister Rabin publicly proposed yesterday to exchange all hostages of all nationalities for Shiites held by Israel."

The statement also pointed out that Israel made the decision to capture Obeid only after "peaceful efforts" to free its hostages had failed. It emphasized that the democratic world must remain united in the "common struggle" against terrorism.

## ADMINISTRATION, MEMBERS OF CONGRESS TRY TO PREVENT ANTI-ISRAEL BACKLASH By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, Aug. 1 (JTA) -- An effort is being made both by the Bush administration and Congress to prevent a backlash of criticism against Israel for its capture of an Islamic fundamentalist leader and the apparent subsequent murder of an American Marine officer.

"We have continuing and close contacts with Israel on this situation," White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater said Tuesday.

"Israel is a strong ally of the United States," he said. "We have an enduring and vibrant relationship, and interest in continuing their security. That certainly has not changed."

Fitzwater, who spoke to reporters after President Bush met for 90 minutes with Secretary of State James Baker, Defense Secretary Richard Cheney and other national security advisers, said experts are studying a videotape purportedly showing the hanging of Lt. Col. William Higgins by a pro-Iranian Shiite Moslem group.

But U.S. officials have not been able to determine whether the man shown hanging from a makeshift gallows is Higgins. There was also no indication yet whether the incident took place Monday or some time earlier.

The Organization of the Oppressed on Earth, which kidnapped Higgins in February 1988, said it killed Higgins on Monday, because Israel had not released its leader, Sheikh Abdul Karim Obeid, who was seized by Israeli commandos on July 28, in a raid on his home in southern Lebanon.

The organization, which is believed to be a front group for the Islamic fundamentalist Hezbollah, or Party of God, threatened to kill another American hostage, Joseph Cicippio, if Is-

raelis did not release Obeid. The deadline was extended for another 48 hours on Tuesday.

After Higgins' death was announced early Monday, Bush cut short a two-day trip to the West, and met Monday night with national security advisers and then with members of Congress.

#### **Bush Urges Release Of All Hostages**

He issued a statement late Monday night, which was seen as implied criticism of Israel.

"On Friday, I said that the taking of any hostages was not helpful to the Middle East peace process," Bush said in the statement. "The brutal and tragic events of today have underscored the validity of that statement."

The president said that he now wanted "to go beyond that statement with an urgent call for all, all parties who hold hostages in the Middle East, to release them forthwith as a humanitarian gesture, to begin to reverse the cycle of violence in that region."

Fitzwater denied Tuesday that the Bush statement was aimed at putting pressure on Israel. "The statement last night applies to all countries in the region," he said. "The statement speaks for itself."

In his statement Monday night, Bush made clear that the United States does not support an Israeli proposal, issued Monday before Higgins' death was announced, that it would trade Obeid and all Shiite prisoners held by Israel if the Shiites would free three Israeli soldiers held in southern Lebanon, as well as all American and other civilian hostages held there.

"Our firm opposition to negotiating with hostage-takers was further reinforced in my discussions this evening with the administration and consultations with the congressional leadership," Bush said.

"We do not negotiate for the release of hostages," Fitzwater reiterated Tuesday. But he stressed that "Israel is a sovereign nation. They have a different policy with regard to hostages than we have."

#### **Dole Statement Assailed**

But Sen. Richard Lugar (R-Ind.), a leading Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said the United States should cooperate with Israel in attempting such a swap.

The most public criticism of Israel came from Senate Minority Leader Robert Dole (R-Kan.), who said Monday on the Senate floor that Israel should have notified Washington before taking action that might endanger American lives.

Dole took the floor again Tuesday to stress that Israel and America are on the same side.

But he again said, "I cannot condone, as a thinking person, how any government -- ours, the Israeli government or any other civilized government -- could embark on this unilateral, free-lancing course, without regard to the effect on innocent citizens of other friendly countries, without regard to our common front against terrorism."

Rep. Howard Berman (D-Calif.) called Dole's remarks "a contemptible slander."

"It must be said loudly, clearly and unequivocally that there is only one party responsible for the murder of Col. Higgins, and that is his Shiite Moslem captors," he said Monday.

"Let us put the blame where it belongs: on the outrageous terrorists, and even, yes, on some of the Western powers that are willing to countenance them," said Rep. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.).

#### **JEWISH GROUPS OUTRAGED BY MURDER, PLAY DOWN U.S.-ISRAEL DISAGREEMENTS** **By Allison Kaplan**

NEW YORK, Aug. 1 (JTA) -- American Jewish groups have reacted with outrage to reports of the murder of Lt. Col. William Higgins by Moslem extremists in Lebanon, calling the apparent execution cruel, barbaric and brutal.

But Jewish leaders also tried to play down disagreements between Israel and the United States over the events of the past few days, emphasizing in their statements the threats that both countries face.

"The United States and Israel are fighting a common enemy -- international terrorism," said Seymour Reich, chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. He called the Higgins murder "a barbaric act that the civilized world must deplore."

Leaders of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith issued a statement pointing out that "one of the major goals of terrorists is to foster dissent among civilized nations."

"The terrorists should not divert us from the main issue -- the vicious and deliberate killing of civilians, as well as the taking of hostages," the statement said.

Robert Lifton, president of the American Jewish Congress, said that the murder should remind both the United States and Israel of the need to take strong measures against terrorism.

"The murder of Col. Higgins also emphasizes the great risks for peace Israel is being asked to take -- and which it is in fact taking," Lifton said.

#### **Seizure Of Obeid Defended**

A B'nai B'rith official criticized the attempt by some Americans to equate the holding of hostages by Shiite groups in Lebanon with Israel's July 28 capture of a Shiite leader, Sheikh Abdul Karim Obeid.

Thomas Neumann, executive vice president of B'nai B'rith International, said that "even the use of the term 'kidnapping' or 'abduction' in reference to Israel's arrest of a notorious terrorist is an affront to sensibility and justice."

Harvey Feldman, international relations director of the American Jewish Committee, also decried such a comparison. Higgins, he noted, "was part of a U.N. peacekeeping mission, while Obeid was the commander of assassination brigades. There can be no equivalence."

"To say that international law forbids seizing killers where you find them is simply incorrect," he added. "Israel, like other nations, has the right to take direct action against those who attack its citizens or plan terrorist acts on Israeli territory."

The Zionist Organization of America also issued a statement saying Israel should not be blamed for the Higgins incident. "This is the time to stand with Israel against terrorism," it said.

The Workmen's Circle called for world pressure on the "Iranian masters" of Shiite fundamentalist groups to aid the release of all hostages.

One Jewish leader argued that now is not the time to be issuing statements. "I believe it is premature, so soon after the shocking news of Lt. Col. Higgins' death, to be issuing statements before all the facts are in," Rabbi Alexander Schindler, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, said -- in a statement.

**U.N. LEADER MEETS WITH ISRAELI,  
DISPATCHES EMISSARY TO LEBANON**  
By Allison Kaplan

UNITED NATIONS, Aug. 1 (JTA) -- U.N. Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar met briefly Tuesday with a representative from Israel's mission to the United Nations.

The meeting took place on the heels of an announcement that Perez de Cuellar was sending Marrack Goulding, undersecretary-general for special political affairs, to the Middle East on a fact-finding mission to try to determine exactly what happened to U.S. Lt. Col. William Higgins.

Higgins headed the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization in Lebanon before he was kidnapped in February 1988 by a faction of the Islamic fundamentalist Hezbollah, or Party of God.

Goulding, who is presently in Europe, will travel first to southern Lebanon, where United Nations forces are stationed.

A U.N. spokesman indicated that Goulding also will travel to other countries in the Middle East, but would not specify where.

Part of Goulding's agenda in Lebanon will be an attempt to recover Higgins' body.

His corpse would be the best evidence to determine whether Higgins was killed Monday, after the Israeli capture of Sheikh Abdul Karim Obeid, or some time much earlier, as some have suggested.

David Matnai, second-in-command at Israel's U.N. mission, met with Perez de Cuellar on Tuesday afternoon. He was standing in for Acting U.N. Ambassador Johanan Bein, who is in Israel.

The Israelis described the meeting as "cordial" and said Matnai expressed his concern regarding Higgins and the other hostages.

**SOME EUROPEAN GOVERNMENTS BLAME  
ISRAEL FOR MURDER OF U.S. HOSTAGE**  
By Edwin Eytan

PARIS, Aug. 1 (JTA) -- European governments were united this week in expressing their revulsion at the murder of Lt. Col. William Higgins, but divided over whether Israel was partly to blame for his hanging by the Shiite fundamentalist Hezbollah group.

In Moscow, the Soviet Foreign Ministry issued a communique expressing "shock and horror" over Higgins' killing and blaming the deterioration of the situation in Lebanon on Israel's July 28 capture of Hezbollah leader Sheikh Abdul Karim Obeid.

In Stockholm, Swedish Foreign Minister Sten Andersson condemned both Higgins' murder and Israel's capture of the Shiite leader.

Likewise in Bern, the Swiss Foreign Ministry informed Israel that it condemns both acts.

French political leaders have refrained from criticizing Israel or implying any Israeli responsibility in the killing of Higgins, but the French press has accused Israel of having unsuccessfully gambled with the lives of the Western hostages in Lebanon.

In a front-page editorial titled "The Apprentice Sorcerers," the influential newspaper *Le Monde* said, "Israel has lost its gamble" and has started "a new cycle of violence."

French President Francois Mitterrand sent a letter to President Bush on Tuesday expressing "the indignation and sympathy of the French people" at the "atrocious assassination."

**PLO'S LATEST BID FOR RECOGNITION  
IS TO SIGN GENEVA CONVENTIONS**  
By Tamar Levy

GENEVA, Aug. 1 (JTA) -- The Palestine Liberation Organization has applied for the second time to be a signatory to the Geneva Conventions as the "State of Palestine," and the petition has Israel worried.

According to Israeli Embassy sources in Bern, the situation is very delicate.

The Swiss government, which is the guardian of the Geneva Conventions, rejected a similar appeal in May because the application was improperly filed. It is now expected to reconsider the appeal.

The PLO has also applied for membership in the Madrid-based World Tourist Organization, according to the Washington Jewish Week.

The United States is supporting Israel in calling for rejection of the PLO bids.

In Washington, the assistant secretary of state for international organization affairs, John Bolton, told the Washington Jewish Week that the PLO's ongoing effort to gain recognition by world bodies could strain its dialogue with the United States.

A spokesperson at the Swiss Foreign Ministry in Bern told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency that so far no decision has been taken on the bid to sign the Geneva Conventions. A decision will most probably not be taken until September at the earliest.

An Israeli source in Bern, the Swiss capital, said Israel would view the acceptance of "Palestine" to the Geneva Conventions as "a terrible act, as it would open the door to the PLO being accepted in practically all U.N. organizations, and it would give it legitimacy."

The Geneva Conventions are a series of international agreements that began in 1864 concerning the treatment of prisoners of war and of the sick, wounded and dead in battle. The Swiss government is responsible for accepting or rejecting applications of proposed signatories.

**Must Notify Signatory States**

Switzerland is under obligation to announce in writing to all signatory states when a state asks to adhere to the conventions.

Critics of Israel, especially the PLO, have repeatedly invoked the Geneva Conventions when complaining that Israel defies international law by deporting Palestinians it categorizes as terrorists.

The latest applications are among several attempts the PLO has made within the last three months to be officially accepted by world bodies, including the World Health Organization, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the International Telecommunications Union.

The WHO and UNESCO voted May 12 and June 14 respectively to defer considering the PLO's status. The ITU simply tabled an Arab League initiative to admit the PLO and expel Israel.

Negative reaction to the latest PLO push for legitimacy was registered by the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith.

In a July 27 letter to Swiss Foreign Minister Rene Felber, ADL's national director, Abraham Foxman, said that "permitting the PLO back-door entry into the international community sends a signal to the PLO that it is not expected to uphold the standards of civilized society."

## PROSECUTION OF WAR CRIMINALS IS DEBATED IN BRITISH PRESS

London Jewish Chronicle

LONDON, Aug. 1 (JTA) -- A government panel's recommendation to allow Britain to pursue one-time Nazi war criminals more aggressively has led to rancorous and even slanderous debate in the British press.

Initial newspaper editorials welcomed the Parliamentary War Crimes Inquiry Report, which recommended changing British law to prosecute alleged World War II criminals who became British citizens after the war.

The report says that the changes would allow the immediate prosecution of three people living in Britain, and that at least 75 other cases warrant further investigation.

The Independent and Guardian newspapers came out strongly in favor of the recommendations, as did a columnist for the Daily Mail.

However, Jewish columnists in the Standard and Times have argued against the trials, as have various members of Parliament in letters to editors.

The writers fear over-zealous prosecutors miscarrying justice. They question the morality of pursuing old men for 40-year-old crimes.

The most scurrilous attacks on the Inquiry Report appeared in the Sunday Telegraph and the Daily Telegraph.

In the Sunday Telegraph, a columnist called the board's recommendations "an affront to the very heart of English law and even of English life" and labeled Jewish Parliament member Greville Janner as "zealous."

The Daily Telegraph columnist went even further, calling Jewish activists "terrifying in their fanaticism and unappeasable thirst for vengeance" in their pursuit of war criminals and complaints over the Carmelite convent still in place at the site of the Auschwitz death camp.

The press debate is complicating matters for community leaders, who are hoping to avoid a repetition of the inter-communal conflict that has accompanied Nazi prosecution in other countries.

In Canada, Australia and the United States, pursuit of war criminals from Eastern Europe has led to tension between Jews and local Ukrainian and Baltic communities.

Home Secretary Douglas Hurd said he would delay a decision on the board recommendations until both houses of Parliament return and debate the issue in the autumn.

But supporters and opponents of the measure seem sure it will pass, based on its strong wording and the bipartisan participation of the inquiry board's 100 members.

## ZIONIST MOVEMENT IS REVIVED IN USSR

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Aug. 1 (JTA) -- For the first time since the Russian Revolution of 1917, a Zionist group is being allowed to operate in the Soviet Union in broad daylight.

Israel Radio reported that some 40 people, from 20 different cities, attended ceremonies in Moscow on Tuesday marking the group's founding.

Aryeh (Lev) Gorodetsky, chairman of the Hebrew Teachers Association, told Israel Radio in a telephone interview that the time was right to renew the political Zionist movement there. He said the prime functions of the group would be to prepare people for aliyah and fight anti-Semitism.

## U.S. BLAMES VOLUNTARY GROUPS FOR BACKLOG OF SOVIET REFUGEES

By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, Aug. 1 (JTA) -- The State Department has blamed a backlog in Italy of thousands of Soviet emigrants, mostly Jews, on the failure of voluntary agencies to file the necessary applications for them to enter the United States as refugees.

The applications must be filed before officials of the Justice Department's Immigration and Naturalization Service can consider granting refugee status.

The State Department blamed the volunteer groups during a meeting last week with members of Congress.

"Until the groups did their job of preparing the documents, the Immigration Service could not do anything with these people," Ivan Selin, undersecretary of state for management, told the lawmakers, according to a congressional aide present.

Of the 17,000 Soviets housed in transit centers outside of Rome at the end of July, 11,500 were Jewish, Karl Zukerman, executive vice president of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, said last week.

Zukerman said that of the 11,500 Soviet Jews, there were roughly 3,500 for whom HIAS had not yet filed the applications.

They are coming in such large numbers that it takes "about two and a half weeks from the time they arrive in Rome to the time that we get their papers to the INS," he explained.

Zukerman said HIAS would like to reduce that period to two weeks or less. He added that HIAS is diverting 25 percent of its resources in Rome to appeal denials of refugee status to some emigrants and to assemble thorough documentation to reduce the likelihood that others will be refused.

## 5,500 Had Not Filed Applications

Since Sept. 1, close to 20 percent of Soviet Jews seeking refugee status have been refused on the grounds that they could not adequately demonstrate a "well-founded fear of persecution" in the Soviet Union. Half of those refused are ultimately granted refugee status on appeal.

But that could soon change. The House and Senate have each passed bills making it easier for Soviet Jewish emigrants to gain U.S. refugee status. Conferees are expected to iron out the differences in the two bills in September, after Congress returns from its summer recess.

The backlog problem was discussed at a meeting requested by Rep. Benjamin Gilman (R-N.Y.), chairman of the congressional Ad Hoc Task Force on Soviet Refugees.

The group was founded earlier this year by 10 Jewish lawmakers as a response to the problems Soviet Jews had begun to face in acquiring refugee status.

Of the 17,000 Soviet emigrants in transit centers at the end of July, 4,800 had been granted refugee status and were awaiting flights to the United States, Undersecretary Selin said.

Another 4,200 had been refused refugee status, 400 of whom had also been refused on appeal. Some 2,500 were awaiting interviews with INS officials who will decide whether to grant them refugee status.

The remaining 5,500, Selin said, had not completed the necessary application forms.