

U.S. SAYS IT'S NOT ASKING ISRAEL TO FREE FUNDAMENTALIST CLERIC

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, Aug. 2 (JTA) — The United States is not asking Israel to release Sheikh Abdul Karim Obeid, despite a threat by Islamic fundamentalist terrorists to kill a second American hostage, the State Department said Wednesday.

"We do not deal over hostages," department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler stated emphatically.

"The terrorists are demanding that this gentleman (Obeid) be released, and that would fall in the area of the United States participating in a deal with terrorists," Tutwiler explained.

She said U.S. policy has been to avoid making "concessions to terrorists holding official or private American citizens hostage. We hold those responsible for the taking of innocent hostages fully responsible for their safety."

A group called the Revolutionary Justice Organization announced Tuesday that it would kill U.S. hostage Joseph Cicippio on Thursday, unless Israel released Obeid, a leader of the Shiite fundamentalist Hezbollah, or Party of God.

Obeid and two of his aides were seized at his home in southern Lebanon last Friday by Israeli commandos, who brought them to Israel for interrogation about involvement in terrorist activities.

The threat against Cicippio was made after another group, the Organization for the Oppressed on Earth, released a videotape Monday purporting to show U.S. Marine Lt. Col. William Higgins hanging from a rope.

"We cannot confirm that it was Col. Higgins in the video tape," Tutwiler said. She said forensic specialists were trying to determine the identity of man shown in the tape, the time of death and the cause of death.

The United States also was trying to recover the body through the United Nations and the International Red Cross, she said.

Not Meant To Pressure Israel

Tutwiler's statement seemed to negate the impression left by President Bush on Monday that the United States was pressuring Israel to release Obeid. In a statement issued late that night, Bush urged "all parties who hold hostages in the Middle East to release them forthwith."

Administration officials this week denied that the statement was meant to put pressure on Israel. White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater pointed out that the Bush statement reiterated U.S. opposition to negotiations with hostage-takers.

This ruled out U.S. support for Israel's offer Monday to free Obeid and 150 Shiite prisoners in its custody, in return for the release of three Israeli soldiers held by Shiites in southern Lebanon and 16 American and other foreign hostages.

The United States took the same position in 1985, when terrorists who were holding hostages from a TWA plane they had hijacked demanded the release of Shiite prisoners in Israel. The United States refused to press Israel, but acquiesced when Israel released the prisoners, an

action it claimed it had planned even before the hijacking.

Tutwiler also made a point Wednesday of praising a statement issued jointly Tuesday by Iranian President-elect Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze. It expressed their regret over the killing of Higgins and condemned "all acts of a terrorist nature."

Tutwiler said Rafsanjani should act upon this statement to help release all hostages held in southern Lebanon. Hezbollah and its various Shiite front groups were believed to be inspired and financed by the Iranian regime of Rafsanjani's predecessor, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

Move To Extradite Obeid

"We remain convinced that Iran is in a unique position to bring significant influence to bear on those who hold the hostages, and (we) call upon it to do so," Tutwiler said.

She said Iran should use this influence "to obtain the immediate, unconditional and safe release" of the hostages.

At the White House, Fitzwater said that Syria also has such influence, since it has a sizeable armed force in Lebanon.

On Capitol Hill, Rep. Gary Ackerman (D-N.Y.) was planning to introduce a resolution calling on Bush to begin proceedings immediately to have Israel extradite Obeid to the United States, so he could stand trial for the kidnapping, torture and possible murder of Higgins.

Israeli officials who have interrogated Obeid say he has admitted to helping orchestrate the kidnapping.

Elsewhere on the Hill, Senate Minority Leader Robert Dole (R-Kan.), who has been the leading public critic of the Israeli taking of Obeid, tried to soften his stand Wednesday.

"My basic message to Israel is this: We are in this together," Dole said. "We both have vital interests at stake. Whenever possible, we ought to act together, and always we ought to take fully into account the vital interests of the other when they contemplate unilateral action. That is a way to avoid any wedge, any wedge, being driven between us."

On Monday, Dole lashed out at Israel on the Senate floor, saying its capture of Obeid was irresponsible. "Perhaps a little more restraint on the part of the Israelis one of these days would be refreshing," he was quoted as saying.

ISRAEL CONSIDERED REPERCUSSIONS BEFORE ORDERING SHEIKH'S SEIZURE

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Aug. 2 (JTA) — As American and United Nations officials arrived in Israel on Wednesday, in part to discuss the hostage situation, Israeli leaders shed new light on the decision-making process that led to the capture of Sheikh Abdul Karim Obeid.

Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin told the Knesset on Wednesday that Israel's Inner Cabinet considered "every possible reaction and repercussion — that which actually happened, and even worse" before approving the July 28 raid on Obeid's home in Jibchit, Lebanon.

Rabin was replying to three no-confidence motions introduced by the Arab Communist parties. All three were soundly defeated.

Obeid, the leader of a Shiite extremist faction called the Organization of the Oppressed on Earth, and two of his aides were seized by Israeli commandos and spirited away to Israel.

In retaliation, the group, which is believed to be connected with the Islamic fundamentalist Hezbollah, or Party of God, announced Monday that it had hanged Lt. Col. William Higgins, an American Marine who headed the U.N. Truce Supervision Organization in Lebanon before he was kidnapped in February 1988.

Neither Israeli nor American officials have been able to confirm that Higgins was actually murdered Monday, while Obeid was in Israeli custody. Sources here say Israel passed information to the United States at the beginning of the year indicating that Higgins had been killed at the end of 1988.

U.S. Official Meets With Arens

In the hope of establishing whether and when Higgins was actually killed, U.N. Undersecretary-General Marrack Goulding arrived in Israel on Wednesday and was flown by helicopter from Ben-Gurion Airport to the headquarters of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon.

Goulding is due to visit Beirut and Damascus, where he is expected to try to convince Hezbollah leaders to release Higgins' body for forensic examinations.

Also arriving in Israel on Wednesday was John Kelly, the new U.S. assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern and South Asian affairs. He is on an introductory study mission to the Middle East, which was planned before the Obeid-Higgins affair began.

The crisis was on the agenda of talks Kelly held Wednesday with Foreign Minister Moshe Arens, but no further details of the meeting were disclosed. The American official also was scheduled to meet Wednesday with Vice Premier Shimon Peres.

Speaking in an Israeli television interview immediately after his session with Kelly, Arens said the events of the past few days, while tragic, had also produced some positive developments.

He observed that both the United States and the Soviet Union were pressuring Iran and Syria to use their influence to win the release of all hostages being held by Shiite groups in Lebanon.

Obtaining the release of three Israeli soldiers being held in Lebanon as prisoners of war was Israel's primary motivation in seizing Sheikh Obeid. But Israeli officials have also said they hoped from the start that the Moslem cleric could be used to win the release of all civilian hostages in Lebanon.

Obeid's House Used To Plan Attacks

Rabin told the Knesset on Wednesday that plans to capture Obeid were first discussed and ratified by the Inner Cabinet two months ago, with the operation due to take place a month later.

But as that time approached, there were signs that efforts to negotiate a prisoner exchange, through intermediaries overseas, might bear fruit. Rabin then suggested the operation be postponed for a month.

Three weeks ago, it became clear that Hezbollah would not cooperate in a prisoner swap.

The Inner Cabinet met again and voted 11-1 to approve the operation carried out last Friday.

The defense minister also disclosed that the International Committee of the Red Cross had requested Israel's permission last Friday to visit Obeid and his aides in their place of detention.

He said he had agreed on condition of mutuality — that the Red Cross also meet with the three Israeli soldiers held in Lebanon.

Rabin told the Knesset that Obeid had played an active role in the planning and implementation of terrorist operations against Israeli soldiers and innocent civilians in Israel and Lebanon. Those who kidnapped two of the Israeli soldiers had left for their operation from Obeid's home in Jibchit, he said.

And he said the three terrorists who kidnapped Higgins had also planned that abduction in Obeid's house, where one of them returned afterward. The private car used in the Higgins kidnapping had been hidden in Obeid's garage for at least a month after the event, Rabin said.

All these facts were admitted by Obeid during his interrogation in Israel, he said.

Israeli Offer Still Good

Rabin said there was also evidence that Obeid had been involved in a car-bomb attack that killed 12 Israeli soldiers near the Israeli-Lebanese border four years ago.

The defense minister listed a series of terrorist actions that Hezbollah had carried out, operating under the aegis of the Khomeini regime in Iran. They included the murder three years ago of eight Beirut Jews, whose bodies were thrown out into the street.

Hezbollah was also responsible for car-bombings that led to the deaths of more than 300 Americans stationed in Beirut, as well as a number of French citizens.

But despite all of these terrorist acts, Israel's offer to exchange prisoners still stands, Rabin said.

According to the deal, first proposed Monday, shortly before Higgins' death was reported, Israel would free all Shiite prisoners in its custody, including Obeid, in exchange for the release of the three Israeli prisoners and the 18 foreign nationals held hostage in Lebanon.

THREE TERRORISTS KILLED AT BORDER **By Hugh Orgel**

TEL AVIV, Aug. 2 (JTA) — Three Palestinian terrorists on their way toward the Galilee panhandle to commit mass slaughter were killed in a clash with the South Lebanon Army on Tuesday. There were no casualties among the SLA troops.

The stack of leaflets and the type of weapons the terrorists carried indicated that they had planned to kill as many Israelis as possible rather than take hostages for bargaining purposes.

According to documents found on their bodies, they were members of Talaat Yacub's pro-Syrian group known variously as the Front for Palestine Liberation or the Palestine Popular Struggle Front.

The heavily armed terrorists had intended to infiltrate Israel and perpetrate "murderous attack" on Kibbutz Manara or Kibbutz Margaliyot.

The two kibbutzim are opposite the spot near Hula village, some three miles from the border, where the gunmen were sighted by the SLA troops, who then proceeded to give chase and kill them in a running gun battle.

WOMEN PRAYING AT WESTERN WALL DRAGGED AWAY BY SECURITY GUARDS

By Cathrine Gerson

JERUSALEM, Aug. 2 (JTA) — A dozen women attempting to conduct monthly Rosh Hodesh services Wednesday at the Western Wall were dragged away, one by one, by female security guards.

The trouble started immediately after the group, which calls itself Women of the Wall, arrived at the Kotel, where 15 security guards hired by the Religious Affairs Ministry were stationed.

According to Bonna Haberman, a member of the group, the guards encircled the women even before they started praying. "They pulled us and pushed us so hard that finally we were all on the floor," Haberman said.

Ultra-Orthodox women praying individually at the Wall, who oppose women conducting prayer services, threw water and mud at the group. Haberman said afterward she looked as if she had been in a mud fight.

Reached at her home Wednesday afternoon, Haberman, a recent Canadian emigrant, expressed her horror at what happened. She said she was covered with cuts and bruises.

"We kept our calm all the time, and stayed absolutely passive through the horrible scenes," she said. She claimed that Rabbi Meir Yehuda Getz, who is religious trustee of the Wall, "looked on at what was going on with pride."

She also said that this latest incident has not deterred the women, but rather made them more determined than ever to ensure that their rights are upheld.

Women are allowed to pray at the Wall, but they must do so individually. Men, on the other hand, organize minyanim for prayer, as they would in a synagogue, wear prayer shawls and carry the Torah.

Women of the Wall contend there is no halachic ban on their doing the same.

70,000 PALESTINIANS RETURN TO CLASS AS ISRAEL REOPENS WEST BANK SCHOOLS

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Aug. 2 (JTA) — Some 70,000 young Palestinians returned to classes on Wednesday as the civil administration reopened junior high schools in the West Bank.

This was the implementation of phase two of the administration's decision to reopen the schools, despite the ongoing intifada.

All schools in the West Bank have been shut down throughout the school year, except for a few weeks in December and January. Primary schools and 12th grade classes reopened 12 days ago. With the reopening of junior high schools, only 10th and 11th grade classes are still closed.

The reopening of the junior high schools reportedly went smoothly, with no disturbances reported.

This was the second time this week that school proceeded as scheduled. An estimated 80 percent of the Palestinian pupils showed up to classes on Sunday, despite orders by the unified command of the uprising to stay home during a general strike.

The high attendance was attributed partly to the Hamas fundamentalist movement, which ordered students to go to classes despite the strike.

Gen. Amram Mitzna, head of the Israel De-

fense Force central command, told members of the Knesset Education Committee, who visited schools in Ramallah and El-Bireh on Tuesday, that the schools were reopened after parents and principals promised the schools would no longer serve as sites for demonstrations.

"The time is ripe for reopening the schools," said Mitzna. "The pupils and their parents have come to the conclusion that the children want to learn."

Mitzna cited three incidents in which teachers and students drove masked youths out of three West Bank schools, after the intruders tried to persuade them to leave classrooms and demonstrate outside.

TALK RADIO, NOT DIRECT TALKS, BUT ARENS SPEAKS WITH ARABS

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Aug. 2 (JTA) — For 90 minutes this week, it seemed as if a dream came true — telephone lines to Jerusalem were overloaded with calls from Kuwait, Beirut, Cairo and other Arab cities.

The occasion was a phone-in program organized by the Arabic program on Israel Radio. The guest in the studio was Foreign Minister Moshe Arens, visibly enjoying direct contacts with the Arab world that came with no international conference and no preconditions.

"Why don't you meet (Yasir) Arafat and resolve the problem?" asked Mohammad Salem from Kuwait.

He received the traditional Israeli response: that Israel will talk only to Arab countries and to representatives of the residents in the administered territories. Most of the other questions dealt with the Palestinian issue, with many callers arguing that Israel should negotiate with the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Arens politely told his listeners that he was glad he could talk directly to residents of Arab countries, but they failed to move him away from the traditional Israeli position to boycott anything that hints of the PLO.

In fact, when Mike Yunis, the PLO representative in Cyprus, phoned in with the same question, Arens refused to talk to him.

There are no direct telephone lines between Israel and the Arab world, with the exception of Egypt. Solan Communications in London, a private communications company, arranged the telephone hookup through a computerized transmitter. Arab listeners dialed 00-4416-248244 and were directly linked with the studio in Jerusalem.

Albert Yunis, a resident of East Beirut, wanted to know whether Israel's continued holding of Sheikh Abdul Karim Obeid did not amount to a death sentence on the other hostages.

"If we release that criminal, we will only encourage more terrorist activities," Arens said. He reiterated Israel's readiness to exchange prisoners.

Yunis added a good word. He told the Israeli minister that most of the people in Christian East Beirut supported the kidnapping of Obeid, and were hoping that it would end up with an exchange of prisoners.

Arens refused to go further into the Obeid kidnapping, but said that the only way to fight terrorism was to avoid giving in to it.

Arens fielded questions from Lebanon, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Bahrain, Egypt, Abu Dhabi, Israel and the territories.

PBS PRODUCING PROGRAM TO OFFSET CRITICISM OF 'DAYS OF RAGE' FILM

By Allison Kaplan

NEW YORK, Aug. 2 (JTA) — Despite a storm of protests and criticism, plans to air the Public Broadcasting Service's controversial documentary "Days of Rage: The Young Palestinians" continue, and programming that will frame the film is now under production.

The PBS affiliate in New York that is sponsoring the film, WNET-TV, last week taped a panel discussion, which will be edited and presented after "Days of Rage." Crews from WNET are also currently in Israel, shooting footage for additional programming to be shown both before and after the film.

WNET executives believe this programming will balance the pro-Palestinian slant of "Days of Rage."

The estimated cost of the "wraparound" programming is \$150,000, while the 90-minute documentary itself cost only \$180,000 to produce.

Preparations for the airing of the film, scheduled for Sept. 6, follow claims by numerous Jewish organizations that the documentary is an anti-Israel propaganda piece.

Numerous letters of protest have been sent to both PBS and WNET, asking that they reconsider their decision to show "Days of Rage." Some WNET members, who make yearly contributions to the station, have threatened to cancel their memberships if the documentary is shown.

The participants in the taped panel discussion were Seymour Reich, chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations; James Zogby, director of the Arab American Institute; Richard Murphy, former U.S. assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern and South Asian affairs; Walter Ruby, New York correspondent for the Jerusalem Post; and Alan Keyes, who served as assistant secretary of state for international organization affairs during the Reagan administration.

A 'Horrendous' Documentary

The discussion was moderated by Hodding Carter, who was the State Department spokesman during the Carter administration.

Reich said he was pleased with the nature of the panel's discussion, but that it remains to be seen what portion of it ends up on the cutting room floor.

The panel discussed issues surrounding the intifada and the Middle East peace process, as well as the question of whether "Days of Rage" should have been aired at all.

Reich said that he would have preferred that the documentary not be shown, but that once WNET made its decision, he welcomed the opportunity to take part in the panel.

As for the content of "Days of Rage" itself, Reich called it "horrendous."

"It wasn't even a documentary," Reich said. "It was political commentary. Any suggestion that there was any objectivity is ridiculous."

While agreeing that the film was "badly flawed" factually, Ruby conceded that on an emotional level, "Days of Rage" was deeply powerful and affecting.

Ruby accused producer Jo Franklin-Trout of using "heavy-handed technique to slam home her message of advocacy for the Palestinian cause." But he felt "the film also contains moments of exceptional power and truth."

ARAB SINGER HITS SOUR NOTE AT PARTY FOR ARMY COMMANDER

By Cathrine Gerson

JERUSALEM, Aug. 2 (JTA) — The first-ever Arab woman to serve in the Israel Defense Force took the biggest risk of her military career Sunday — and bombed.

Performing at a farewell party for the outgoing head of the southern command, Haya Samir caused a scandal when she sang a song interpreted by many to be critical of Israel's handling of the Palestinian uprising.

Some officers booed and others stalked out of the celebration when Samir, a member of the prestigious Southern Command Entertainment Group, launched into the Hebrew lyrics of her own composition, "Man, Man of Land."

"Captives of killing are drawn to it blindly/hungry for justice and chewing hatred/while calmness cries out to all the sons of the Earth."

According to an army spokesman, Samir's song was not part of the repertoire for the celebration for Maj. Gen. Yitzhak Mordechai, who will succeed Amram Mitzna as head of the central command.

"Yitzhak Mordechai loved her singing, and we wanted to give him a nice time," said an officer after the show. "She used us."

This is not the first time Samir has been at the center of press attention or controversy. Some of the same officers and journalists who prize her spectacular voice also point out her non-conformist approach to military rules.

But never had she breached army propriety before such a high-level audience. Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Chief of Staff Dan Shomron were in attendance, although neither joined the protests that followed.

Parents Fled Egypt

Samir's story is a bizarre tale of dual and seemingly irreconcilable identities. Born in Israel to Egyptian Moslem parents, she was 8 before she found out she wasn't Jewish.

Lili, her mother, was born as Naiwa Ibrahim Mussa in the Nile delta. Her father, Yosef, was born Nabie Sarhan and was a well-known Egyptian poet and journalist who clashed with the Nasser regime and was forced to escape from Egypt.

When no Arab country was prepared to grant the Sarhans asylum, Nabie decided to try his luck at the Israeli Consulate in Athens.

Arriving in Jerusalem in 1968, the couple adopted the Jewish last name Samir and lived under their assumed identities as new Jewish immigrants.

Haya was born a few months after their arrival in Israel and grew up with Shabbat candles on Friday nights and the traditional Jewish cholent stew on Saturdays.

Samir may never have learned the truth about her past if not for the arrival in Jerusalem of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat in November 1977.

Egyptian journalists covering the Sadat visit recognized their old colleague Nabie Sarhan.

Samir remains unrepentant about her performance Sunday or her own ambivalent feelings about the uprising.

She said after the show that she had not intended her song as a political statement. "It was a song about life," she said. As for the officers who walked out, Samir was more blunt. "They can go to hell," she said.