

RABIN PROPOSES THAT 'FORUM OF FOUR' TAKE NEXT ACTION ON PEACE PROCESS

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Feb. 13 (JTA) -- Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin has come to Likud's rescue, in the aftermath of its turbulent Central Committee meeting Monday night, with a proposal that could save the Labor-Likud unity government and conceivably advance Israel's peace initiative.

Labor's No. 2 leader proposed in a radio interview Tuesday that the government's next tactical moves in the peace process be shaped by the four senior ministers of both parties.

They are Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and Foreign Minister Moshe Arens of Likud, and Vice Premier Shimon Peres and Rabin of Labor.

By virtue of seniority, the so-called "Forum of Four" supersedes the policy-making Inner Cabinet, composed of six Likud and six Labor ministers, where deadlock along party lines reigns more often than consensus.

Rabin's suggestion has the virtue of allowing Shamir to continue to head the unity government, despite the internal crisis in his own party.

It would mute the clamor by more dovish Laborites -- Peres among them -- to break now with Likud and try to form a Labor-led alternative government, in partnership with the religious and leftist parties.

Arens May Meet With Baker

The defense minister said the four may meet before Arens departs on a trip that could include a meeting in the United States with Secretary of State James Baker.

Arens is scheduled to stop in New York on Friday, en route to Mexico. There were reports here that he would use the layover to meet with Baker. But neither the State Department nor the Israeli Embassy in Washington could confirm those reports.

Such a meeting could set the stage for a long delayed meeting Baker is to have with Arens and his Egyptian counterpart, Esmat Abdel Meguid.

That meeting, which was supposed to take place in January, is intended to establish the terms for an Israeli-Palestinian dialogue to be hosted by Egypt, for the purpose of setting the ground rules for Palestinian elections in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The current split in Likud between the Shamir-Arens camp and the hard-line bloc led by Industry and Trade Minister Ariel Sharon has focused on which Palestinians will be allowed to participate in both the dialogue and the elections.

Actually, the two Likud camps are less far apart than their rift would indicate.

Both adamantly oppose any role in the peace process for the Palestine Liberation Organization, direct or indirect.

Both oppose allowing Palestinians deported from Israel to participate in the dialogue, and both oppose allowing Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem to participate in the elections.

But Shamir has been more equivocal in his public statements on these points, explaining that the government needs room to maneuver.

Sharon and his supporters leap on this to

accuse the prime minister of being soft on the Palestinians.

The government's Labor component would make concessions to the Palestinians under certain conditions, a position appreciated by the United States and Egypt.

These differences between the coalition partners would have to be resolved by the four senior ministers before Arens leaves.

Resignation Still Not Official

Rabin conceded there would also have to be a clearcut decision by the Inner Cabinet and possibly the full Cabinet in advance of any meeting between Baker and the two foreign ministers.

Nevertheless, Rabin's short-term recipe takes a good deal of pressure off Likud.

Shamir has yet to deal with Sharon's resignation, which the dissident minister brazenly announced as he opened the Monday night meeting in his capacity as chairman of the Likud Central Committee.

Sharon read a scathing hand-written letter of resignation to the 2,600 assembled delegates, in which he accused the prime minister of incompetence and cowardice.

It was a letter Shamir still has not seen.

Pundits are undecided whether Sharon's public resignation is to be taken seriously or whether it was a tactic to capture the attention of the Central Committee from Shamir and cast himself in the role of underdog.

According to law, a minister must submit his resignation to the prime minister, who presents it to the full Cabinet.

The Cabinet does not meet until Sunday. Sharon's resignation would become effective 48 hours later, or not before Feb. 20.

Shamir is not urging his rival to reconsider. But another powerful Likud figure, Construction and Housing Minister David Levy, seems to have assumed the role of mediator.

Levy, who has been allied with Sharon against Shamir's peace diplomacy, appealed to both camps to relent for the sake of party unity. He met privately with Shamir late Monday night and talked to Sharon alone Tuesday morning.

While not abandoning the hard-line camp, Levy found himself courted by Shamir, whose apparent purpose is to isolate Sharon and force him to implement his resignation.

**JEWISH AGENCY PROTESTS PLANS BY HIAS TO OPEN MOSCOW OFFICE
JTA Staff Report**

JERUSALEM Feb. 13 (JTA) -- The Jewish Agency for Israel has been actively seeking to keep the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society from opening an office in Moscow, according to Simcha Dinitz, chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive.

A decision to take such action was made by the Jewish Agency Executive some weeks ago, aides to Dinitz have disclosed.

Since then, Dinitz has approached the Council of Jewish Federations and various other Jewish organizations in North America, in an effort to influence HIAS to forgo any plan to set up a Moscow operation.

Dinitz believes that a HIAS office in Moscow

could trigger a renewed spurt of interest by Soviet Jews in immigration to the United States.

The United States had been the destination of choice for the vast majority of Soviet Jews prior to Oct. 1, when the Bush administration changed its policy on admitting refugees to the United States.

Since then, it has refused to consider Jews who leave the Soviet Union on Israeli visas. With an annual U.S. quota on Soviet refugees now set at 50,000, the required American visas are hard to come by. Therefore, most Jews now leaving the Soviet Union are settling in Israel.

Under the old U.S. policy, HIAS officials based in Vienna and Rome assisted Jewish refugees who had arrived there from the Soviet Union and were interested in immigrating to the United States. Now that such refugees must be processed before they leave the Soviet Union, HIAS wants to set up an office in Moscow.

HIAS Not Trying To Divert Jews

In New York, Karl Zukerman, executive vice president of HIAS, strongly took issue with the Jewish Agency's position against the Moscow office.

HIAS is "not interested in encouraging anybody to come to the U.S.," he maintained.

Zukerman said he found it "interesting that the Jewish Agency Executive, which took this decision several weeks ago, has talked to all kinds of organizations in the U.S., but never to HIAS."

"If they had, we could have explained to them exactly what was going on, and their concerns could have been alleviated," he said.

Zukerman said that the office HIAS hopes to set up in Moscow would be designed in a way that could not be possibly be construed as encouraging Soviet Jews who might otherwise go to Israel to hold out hope that they would be permitted to immigrate to the United States.

The office, he said, would only assist Soviet Jews who had already overcome a major hurdle toward being granted refugee status and admission to the United States: winning an interview at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow.

Such an office would not exclusively be occupied by HIAS, but would be shared by all voluntary organizations that assist Soviets in their immigration to the United States.

"The Department of State has asked HIAS to run an office on behalf of all the voluntary migratory agencies, to assist persons who have already applied to (immigrate to) the United States and have been scheduled for interviews," said Zukerman.

In any case, Soviet authorities so far have been opposed to the plan and are "holding strong in their refusals to allow any of the voluntary agencies into Moscow," said Phillip Saperia, assistant executive vice president of HIAS.

Preference For Divided Families

The Soviets have a "a political concern that they don't view any citizen of the Soviet Union as a refugee and they don't want voluntary agencies involved in processing people from the Soviet Union as refugees," he said.

To qualify for U.S. refugee status, the Soviets must demonstrate a "well-founded" fear of persecution. Because the number of would-be emigrants is astronomical, and the number of refugee slots limited, the State Department is giving preference to those with immediate family

already in the United States.

Zukerman said that contrary to the Jewish Agency's fears, HIAS does not wish to send a signal to Soviet Jews that immigration to the United States will become easier.

"We share (the Jewish Agency's) concern that people who do not have close family in the United States not be misled into thinking they will be able to come to the United States in the next several years," he said.

Early indications are that the U.S. government is holding potential Soviet immigrants to tough standards for refugee status. In October and November, two thirds of Soviet Jews who applied for U.S. refugee status in Moscow were refused it, said Saperia of HIAS. He did not have any updated figures.

But Saperia said those refusals are not "arbitrary and capricious," as HIAS termed refusals in Rome between September 1988 and the summer of 1989.

He also said there is "every indication" that the Justice Department's Immigration and Naturalization Service is going to review the Moscow refusals in light of new congressional guidelines approved last fall.

In effect, the guidelines would make it easier for a refugee applicant to demonstrate "a well-founded fear of persecution."

(Contributing to this report were JTA staff writer Allison Kaplan in New York and JTA correspondents David Landau in Jerusalem and Howard Rosenberg in Washington.)

EXTRA \$70 MILLION FOR REFUGEES IS NOW IN THE HANDS OF CONGRESS By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, Feb. 13 (JTA) -- Jewish groups are hoping that Congress will quickly approve a request made last week by the Bush administration for \$70 million in supplemental funds for the State Department's refugee budget.

The money is needed to bridge a shortfall to bring 40,000 Soviet refugees to the United States this fiscal year with full government funding. An additional 10,000 refugees will be admitted with private assistance.

Mark Talisman, director of the Washington Action Office of the Council of Jewish Federations, said the measure could be approved within two weeks, if it is attached to a bill providing emergency relief to Panama.

Talisman said he does not expect the request to linger for months. He warned that "anything past March" would be "a disaster" for the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society.

The two agencies, which rely on State Department funds to help cover the refugees' costs while in transit to the United States, are expected to receive \$30 million of the \$70 million.

The supplemental funds are needed largely because Congress last fall allocated \$55 million less than was needed to cover the costs of bringing the 1990 quota of refugees to the United States.

The gap grew recently when the State Department transferred \$15 million from its refugee admissions budget to a Health and Human Services Department program that assists newly arrived refugees with initial resettlement costs.

That transfer brought some financial relief to Jewish community federations, which receive matching funds from the HHS program.

SHAMIR EXPLAINS TO THE KNESSET HIS CALL FOR A 'GREATER ISRAEL'

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Feb. 13 (JTA) -- Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir told the Knesset on Tuesday that when he recently said that large-scale aliyah required a "greater Israel," he meant "spiritual greatness," not demographics or territory.

Shamir spoke in reply to 10 motions of no confidence in the government. Two of the motions complained that the government is not prepared to deal with the huge influx of immigrants, mainly from the Soviet Union.

The others objected to his remarks to Likud activists last month, which were widely interpreted at home and abroad to mean that Israel planned to settle Soviet immigrants in the administered territories.

That drew strong warnings from both the United States and the Soviet Union. The Arab states, charging that Israel planned to displace Palestinians with the Soviet newcomers, Union, appealed to Moscow to halt Jewish emigration.

They have now taken their campaign to the U.N. Security Council in New York and to the U.N. Human Rights Commission meeting in Geneva.

Shamir insisted he never said Israel needed the internationally disputed areas to absorb Soviet Jews. But that does not mean that Israelis are not free to live wherever they want, he said.

"Immigrants should have the same right. Immigration is the cornerstone of the Jewish state. As long as there is an Israel, there will be immigration to all parts of the Land of Israel," Shamir told the Knesset.

Statistics show that fewer than 1 percent of Soviet Jews who come to Israel settle in the West Bank.

Nevertheless, the International Committee of the Red Cross claimed in Geneva on Tuesday that Israel was violating international law by settling new immigrants in the territories.

BERLIN JEWS STAGE DEMONSTRATION TO PROTEST ANTI-SEMITISM IN USSR

By David Kantor

EAST BERLIN, Feb. 13 (JTA) -- About 100 Jews from East and West Berlin demonstrated outside the Soviet Embassy in East Berlin on Monday against anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union.

Holding aloft banners saying "Don't allow pogroms in the Soviet Union" and "Stop anti-Semitism in your country," the group delivered an open letter addressed to Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev.

The letter urged speedy action against groups in the Soviet Union that threaten Jews with violence or circulate anti-Semitic material.

An embassy official accepted the letter and told the demonstrators it would be sent to Gorbachev's office in Moscow.

The official East German news agency ADN reported Tuesday that the demonstration was the first of its kind in East Berlin since 1945.

They were not allowed in past years because neither the Soviet occupation forces nor the East German government would acknowledge there was anti-Semitism in Communist countries.

That changed abruptly with the new regime in East Germany.

Members of both Berlin Jewish communities, meanwhile, said their joint demonstration was a sign the communities were "growing together."

COURT OVERTURNS CONVICTION ON SOLDIER'S USE OF FIREARMS

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Feb. 13 (JTA) -- The High Court of Justice has reversed the conviction of an Israeli soldier whom two military courts found guilty of wrongfully using firearms against a Palestinian in the Gaza Strip.

Justice Meir Shamgar, president of the court, acquitted Sgt. Maj. David Ankonina.

The soldier was in charge of a roadblock conducting routine checks of Arab drivers when some approaching drivers suddenly turned away. After ordering them to stop, Ankonina fired his weapon, first into the air and then at the wheels. One driver was fatally shot.

A military court of the Southern Command found that he "lost his cool" and acted out of rage "to teach the driver a lesson."

A military appeals court upheld that verdict. But Judge Shamgar ruled that the soldier bore no criminal responsibility for firing his weapon in obedience to a legal command.

In another case, the Israel Defense Force judge advocate general, Brig. Amnon Strashnov, dropped charges against two officers accused of firing rubber bullets at a Jenin resident from a closer range than allowed by regulations.

They allegedly fired from a distance of 23 feet, whereas the minimum allowed is 50 feet. But Strashnov decided after rechecking the facts not to pursue the case.

Meanwhile, Brig. Gen. Ya'acov Or, former IDF commander in the Gaza Strip, testified at the trial of four soldiers of the Givati Brigade accused of fatally beating a Gaza resident.

Or said he did not permit beating civilians for punitive reasons, but "others may have given orders which were improperly understood."

Defense counsel Moshe Yisrael submitted the minutes of a meeting of senior officers in the Gaza Strip which showed that soldiers were authorized to beat up Arab civilians for refusing to remove roadblocks set up by intifada activists.

ISRAELI ARMY HAS NOT BE WEAKENED BY FIGHTING INTIFADA, SAYS CHIEF

By Gil Sedan and Hugh Orgel

JERUSALEM, Feb. 13 (JTA) -- Only 7 percent of the Israel Defense Force's manpower is involved in efforts to control the intifada.

The rest is engaged in normal training and weapons development and is fully prepared for war, Gen. Dan Shomron, the IDF chief of staff, told an audience in Ramat Gan on Sunday.

He said that according to IDF intelligence, the perception in the Arab states is that Israeli military forces have not been weakened as a result of the Palestinian uprising in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, now in its third year.

The Syrians know the IDF would not be firing plastic or rubber bullets in a real war, Shomron said.

Addressing the Diamond Merchants Club, the chief of staff said the IDF would rather not have to deal with the intifada, but that is far from saying it cannot cope with it.

Shomron had no doubt that the IDF could continue maintaining order in the territories within the framework of the law. He said the military remains obedient to civilian rule and does not dictate to the national leadership what its priorities should be.

BRITISH JEWS BLOCKED IMMIGRATION OF OTHERS DURING WAR, BOOK CLAIMS

London Jewish Chronicle

LONDON Feb. 13 (JTA) -- Out of their own prejudices and fears of anti-Semitism, Anglo-Jewish leaders blocked the entry into Britain of certain Jews fleeing Nazi persecution during the 1930s, according to an essay on British refugee policy just published here.

While they persuaded the Home Office to admit many more Jews than it had originally intended, they also lobbied to be allowed to choose who would be let in, Louise London writes in "The Making of Modern Anglo-Jewry," a collection of historical essays.

Dr. David Cesarani, director of studies at the Wiener Library in London and editor of the book, noted that several of the essays broke taboos by exposing darker sides of the Anglo-Jewish experience, rather than the "apologetic" history written in the past by authors who worried about what non-Jews would think.

The book contains essays exposing instances of exploitation of Jews by other Jews, and prejudice "even to the point of not helping some types of Jews in Eastern Europe because they're not the right kind of Jews needed in this country."

London's essay, amplifying work done by Jewish historians A.J. Sherman and Bernard Wasserstein, states that "Fears of anti-Semitism, of demands on their charity and their own prejudices led Anglo-Jewish leaders to seek controls on the quality and quantity of Jews entering Britain."

In 1933, she reports, Anglo-Jewry's representative body, the Board of Deputies of British Jews, chaired by German-born stockbroker Otto Schiff, convinced the Home Office to let in German Jews on the basis of a communal guarantee that they would not become public charges.

Jews trickled into Britain until the mass exodus that followed the Nazi takeover of Austria on March 12, 1938.

The Home Office was determined to impose controls over their entry, and the Board of Deputies endorsed this, London writes.

It would be "very difficult to get rid of a refugee" once in Britain, Schiff told Home Office officials.

Visa restrictions were considered "especially necessary in the case of Austrians who were largely of the shopkeeper and small-trader class, and would therefore prove much more difficult to emigrate than the average German," Schiff said, according to Home Office minutes.

But London's essay stresses that Schiff's work also rescued thousands of Jews from the Nazis.

ADL REPORT WARNS ABOUT AMERICA'S GROWING DEPENDENCE ON ARAB OIL

PALM BEACH, Fla., Feb. 13 (JTA) -- America's growing dependence on imported Arab oil could erode U.S. support for Israel in the 1990s, the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith warned in a report issued here Sunday.

The report, titled "America's Oil Situation: Still Getting Worse," was released by Burton Levinson, ADL's national chairman, on the final day of the organization's National Executive Committee meeting here.

It points out that U.S. oil production hit a 25-year low last year, while U.S. dependence on imported oil increased almost 9 percent.

But U.S. dependence on oil from members of OPEC, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, went up 18 percent, and dependence on oil from the dominant Arab members of OPEC increased 20 percent, ADL reported.

"Every American citizen who cares about the future of his country and its economic well-being, and every citizen who believes that U.S. Middle East policy should be conducted free from foreign pressures should be concerned," said Levinson.

The report recalled that in the 1970s, Washington was the target of blackmail by the Arab members of OPEC, "and that oil dependence spawned U.S. vulnerability to petrodollar diplomacy."

Now, instead of the overtly hostile policies of the 1970s, the Arab oil producers, especially Saudi Arabia, "appear to be 'killing us with kindness,' in an apparent effort to preserve the long-term market for their oil," the report said.

It cited as an example the Saudi offer to help the United States fill its Strategic Petroleum Reserve by leasing it oil.

ADL pointed out that the reserve was established after the Arab oil boycott of 1973 and was resolutely opposed by the Arab oil producers.

"The Saudi record of the last 15 or 17 years makes it clear that they have sabotaged American peacemaking efforts in the Middle East, that they sought to undercut and undermine the late Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, and that their actions belie the mythology of the desert kingdom as being 'moderate,' 'pro-Western' and 'pro-American,'" the report said.

RABBIS ISSUE EDICT AGAINST VCRs

By Cathrine Gerson

JERUSALEM, Feb. 13 (JTA) -- Two ultra-Orthodox rabbis, branding video cassette recorders "dreadful" and "demoralizing," have forbidden the pious from keeping them in their homes.

The rabbinic ruling was handed down Monday by Rabbis Shmuel Halevi Wassner and Nissim Karlit, leading halachic authorities in the ultra-Orthodox township of Bnei Brak. The rabbis spoke on behalf of the Zichron Meir religious court in Bnei Brak.

Their edict was promptly circulated in posters and advertisements to religious population centers all over the country.

Families who want to raise their children according to halachah were warned to "stay away from VCRs."

They must not be introduced into "private homes or institutions, even if they are used to show wedding tapes or other family events."

The rabbis said they had heard of "dreadful disturbances caused by the demoralizing instrument called video."

ISRAELI FLOWER SALES BLOSSOM

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Feb. 13 (JTA) -- Israel has shipped some 50 million fresh-cut flowers to the United States and Europe in the last few days to meet the demand for Valentine's Day, the so-called "lovers' festival" celebrated on Feb. 14.

Agrexco, the government's fruit and vegetable export agency, reported that Israel has sent 370 million flowers abroad since the start of the season, for earnings of \$60.5 million.

That compares with 318 million blossoms valued at \$58 million in the same period last year.