



ISRAEL, U.S. CONDEMN IRAQI THREAT TO RETALIATE AGAINST JEWISH STATE
By Gil Sedan and Hugh Orgel

JERUSALEM, April 2 (JTA) -- Israel branded Iraqi President Saddam Hussein a war criminal Monday and said it was "high time" the civilized world banded together to thwart his "criminal designs."

The statement, issued by Foreign Ministry spokesman Yossi Amihud, was Israel's official response to Hussein's threat earlier in the day that Iraq possesses advanced chemical weapons that could destroy "half of Israel."

"I swear to God we will let our fire eat half of Israel if it tries to wage anything against Iraq," Hussein was quoted as saying in a nationally broadcast speech in Baghdad.

Former Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin called the Iraqi leader "arrogant" and "boastful," and said he was "actually challenging the entire world."

"Israel is strong, and Iraq is not beyond its powerful strike capability," said Rabin, one of the 11 labor ministers who resigned from the Likud-led government on March 13.

The Foreign Ministry's statement stressed that "the fact that Iraq boasts with impunity about its murderous chemical weapons and that it is proud of its capacity to commit crimes against humanity," is a "reminder of the threat with which Israel is faced."

'Inflammatory And Outrageous'

In Washington, State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler called Hussein's remarks "irresponsible, inflammatory and outrageous."

She added that "nobody should be trumpeting chemical weapons."

The Israeli statement accused Iraq of "using universally banned chemical weapons against innocent civilians and its own citizens" in the recent past.

The reference apparently was to the use of poison gas by Iraq during its eight-year war with Iran, including alleged use of the lethal weapons against its own Kurdish population.

"It is high time for the civilized world to act in unity and see to it that Saddam Hussein will not find it possible to pursue his irresponsible and criminal designs," the Israeli statement concluded.

But Jerusalem also sought to calm tempers.

"Israel has no aggressive intentions against anyone," said Avi Pazner, press spokesman for Yitzhak Shamir, the caretaker prime minister.

He added, however that Israel "has sufficiently proven in the past that it is able to defend itself and will not be blackmailed by threats like that."

Rabin, speaking on Israel Radio, called Hussein's threat to destroy half of Israel "nonsense."

He admitted the Iraqis have the long-range missile capability, but Israel's reaction would be "many times more severe," he said.

Asked about the timing of the Baghdad statement, Rabin said he thought it was intended to signal Israel "that 1990 is not 1981."

In 1981, Israeli long-range fighter-bombers

destroyed a partly completed nuclear reactor near Baghdad, claiming it was about to produce weapons-grade plutonium.

The Iraqis, engaged in war with Iran at the time, did not respond.

But now, Hussein seems to be saying, he is free to retaliate against an Israeli attempt to knock out his chemical weapons plants or to interfere with Iraq's efforts to rebuild the reactor.

Accusations that Iraq is again developing a nuclear bomb surfaced last week in the United States and Britain. The two Western powers collaborated to thwart what they claimed was an attempt to smuggle devices that trigger nuclear bombs from the United States to Iraq.

(JTA correspondent Howard Rosenberg in Washington contributed to this report.)

MALEV RESUMES FLIGHTS OF SOVIET JEWS AS EMIGRATION LEVEL CONTINUES TO RISE
By Cathrine Gerson

JERUSALEM, April 2 (JTA) -- The Hungarian state airline Malev has resumed flights to Tel Aviv, bringing Soviet Jewish immigrants to Israel.

The first Malev flight from Budapest since last month landed at Ben-Gurion Airport on Sunday morning, Israel Radio reported. It was followed later in the day by an El Al flight from the Hungarian capital also carrying immigrants.

In New York, meanwhile, the National Conference on Soviet Jewry reported Monday that at least 7,300 Jews emigrated from the Soviet Union with Israeli visas in March, of whom more than 99 percent went to Israel.

The number of Soviet Jews who emigrated on U.S. visas is not yet known, but is believed to be small.

The March figure reflects a steady increase in Jewish emigration since the beginning of the year. A total of 4,713 Soviet Jews emigrated in January, and another 5,788 left the country in February.

According to unofficial sources here, 65 percent of Soviet Jews coming to Israel travel via Budapest. The number of new arrivals is not announced for security reasons.

Malev abruptly halted the transport of Soviet Jewish emigres to Israel last month, following threats by the Islamic Jihad for the Liberation of Palestine of terrorist attacks on aircraft and airports.

The airline has now restored regular flights, but has not yet implemented an agreement to start special charter flights carrying Soviet Jews to Israel.

UJA LEADERS SPEND A DAWN WELCOMING SOVIET EMIGRES
By Mark Joffe

LOD, Israel, March 30 (JTA) -- It was nearly 5 a.m. Friday when five buses drove onto the tarmac of Ben-Gurion Airport and disgorged some 120 weary United Jewish Appeal leaders.

Hours earlier they had holed themselves up in a hotel banquet room for three grueling hours and raised \$10.6 million among themselves for Operation Exodus, UJA's special campaign to aid the resettlement of Soviet Jews in Israel.

But now it was time to help the Soviet Jews in another way -- by giving a group of arriving immigrants a special welcome to Israel.

As they stepped from deluxe coaches into the chilly pre-dawn air, the UJA leaders were handed flowers and candy to present to the new arrivals.

There was hot chocolate to sip as an antidote to the nighttime breeze.

But what really seemed to warm the UJA leaders, as they awaited the arrival of an El Al jet from Budapest, were the Israeli songs that blared from the loudspeakers erected on the tarmac.

As the plane rolled in majestically, the song switched to "Heiveinu Shalom Aleichem" and the crowd pressed closer to the portable staircase that would enable the arriving Soviets to take their final few steps to freedom.

'Want To Kiss The Soil'

And then, the cabin door opened, and a white-bearded, rabbi stepped off the plane, followed by a crowd of curiosity-stricken passengers. They looked a bit bewildered as the euphoric Americans tearfully pressed flowers and chocolate into their hands.

"I want to kiss the soil," exclaimed a short, auburn-haired woman named Etta, who had traveled from Soviet Armenia.

"I hope everyone will be able to leave Russia," she said, adding that the situation in Armenia was "quite bad" for Jews.

As it turned out, though, Etta was one of only 50 Soviet immigrants aboard a flight carrying 160 Israelis and Hungarian tourists from Budapest.

When the UJA group learned this, it caucused and immediately decided to await the next plane, which would arrive 30 minutes later with 170 Soviet immigrants aboard.

And so, as dawn began to break, the ritual was repeated. But this time there were no flowers or chocolate bars to present. The UJA leaders improvised, substituting the one thing they had plenty of: kisses and warm embraces.

This time, the Soviet Jews were not hard to find. Here was a woman from Samarkand, who said she had come to find a sister she had not seen in 45 years.

And there was a family from Minsk, whose two small children became instant celebrities with the amateur photography crowd.

A blond teen-ager from Tashkent named Leonid described the situation for Jews in the Soviet Asian city as "not so bad, but not so good."

His curly-headed friend Misha said, "I like my people, I like my land. But the Uzbek land don't like me because I'm Jewish."

'The Only Country For Jews'

He opened up his coat to show off a T-shirt emblazoned with the word "Seattle," but then said with unmistakable conviction, "Israel is the only country for Jews."

Meanwhile, a group of immigrants from the first plane was inside the airport terminal making its way through the first stage of the absorption process.

After clearing passport control and Customs checks, the immigrants were ushered to a separate lounge, where they waited to meet privately with a counselor from the Absorption Ministry.

Among those sitting in the lounge were Yuri and Lyuba Natanson, a young couple from Kiev.

They said they decided to make aliyah in January 1989, when they realized conditions were not getting any better for Jews.

Yuri, a 28-year-old computer programmer, and Lyuba, a 27-year-old chemist who is now pregnant, said they both faced job discrimination in the Soviet Ukraine.

"Anti-Semitism becomes bigger and bigger," said Lyuba.

"The situation is very serious, very dangerous," Yuri agreed.

He said the anti-Semitic group Pamyat had picked up popularity in Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Novosibirsk, Sverdlovsk and other Soviet cities.

The Natansons said they had "little information" about Israel and were not sure where they were going to live.

"Maybe we go to Haifa," said Yuri, indicating that Lyuba's great-aunt immigrated two months ago and now lives there.

For a couple uncertain of their future, they seemed remarkably calm. Perhaps the UJA welcoming ceremony had helped set them at ease.

The welcome was "wonderful," Yuri exclaimed. "We did not think about this wonderful meeting."

AS BULGARIA AND ISRAEL FORGE TIES, SNAG DEVELOPS OVER AIRPORT SECURITY
By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, April 2 (JTA) -- Israel and Bulgaria, on the brink of resuming diplomatic relations, have run into a snag over reciprocal privileges for their respective national airlines.

Israel's Civil Aviation Authority has refused landing rights at Ben-Gurion Airport to a Bulgarian Balkanair flight, because the agency is dissatisfied with security arrangements at the airport in Sofia, the Bulgarian capital.

The Israeli authorities insist the Bulgarians bring their airport security up to their strict standards before landing rights in Israel are granted to Balkanair. That includes rigid Israeli supervision of the terminals serving flights for Israel.

Sun d'Or, an El Al subsidiary, has been flying charter flights to Bulgaria in the absence of a formal aviation agreement between the two countries. It monitors its own security.

The Civil Aviation Authority rejected Balkanair's request for the one charter flight for which permission was asked, because Bulgaria did not allow Sun d'Or to supervise security at the Sofia terminal serving the flight, an El Al spokesperson said.

The delay may force cancellation of the Balkanair flight, which is scheduled to carry 110 Bulgarian pilgrims to Israel this weekend and bring 140 Israeli tourists to Bulgaria for the Passover-Easter holidays next week.

There are not as yet scheduled flights between Sofia and Tel Aviv by either airline.

Aviation correspondents note that air service between Israel and most Eastern European countries started on an ad hoc basis before formal security arrangements were made. Agreements usually followed quickly when El Al canceled arrangements it considered inadequate.

Meanwhile, Deputy Foreign Minister Binyamin Netanyahu departed for Sofia on Monday. He will complete arrangements for Foreign Minister Moshe Arens' official visit to Bulgaria later this month to sign an agreement restoring diplomatic relations.

LABOR'S HOPE OF BUILDING COALITION FADES AS 21-DAY DEADLINE APPROACHES

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, April 2 (JTA) -- The Labor Party's hopes of putting together a viable coalition government seemed to be fading fast this week as the April 11 deadline for accomplishing the task loomed relentlessly nearer.

On that date, the second day of Passover, the 21-day mandate Labor Party leader Shimon Peres received from President Chaim Herzog will expire.

Unless the Labor Party chief has good grounds for requesting an extension, as allowed by law, the baton will be passed to acting Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, leader of Likud.

The Knesset is evenly split 60-60 between the two major parties and the factions supporting each.

Peres has failed so far to pry loose a single defector from the Likud bloc to break the arithmetical deadlock. The mysterious "Knesset member X" Laborites claim was ready to bolt Likud has yet to show his or her face.

Peres is still courting the ultra-Orthodox Degel HaTorah and Shas parties, with eight Knesset votes between them. But they have remained firmly in the Likud camp, despite their reported affinity for Labor's land-for-peace formula.

Political observers wrote off Degel after its spiritual mentor, Rabbi Eliezer Schach, delivered a fierce attack on the non-observant Jews of the kibbutz movement at the party's convention in Tel Aviv on March 26.

Schach's polemic was considered a slap at Labor, which draws much of its grass-roots support from the kibbutzim.

Moda'i Camp Siding With Shamir

Labor has what it believes is a firm deal with the ultra-Orthodox Agudat Yisrael party. But it is good only as long as Peres' mandate lasts, the Agudah repeatedly makes clear.

Labor's hopes glimmered briefly last week when a bloc of five Likud defectors calling itself the Party for the Advancement of Liberal-Zionist Values indicated it was prepared for coalition talks with Peres. The five are former members of Likud's Liberal Party wing, led by Yitzhak Moda'i, the former minister of economics and planning.

Moda'i, who quit Likud last month because he thought Shamir's peace diplomacy was too soft, would seem to have no affinity for Peres' willingness to compromise for peace.

There was speculation nevertheless that the defectors might be won over by offers of important ministerial portfolios in a Labor-led regime.

Instead, the more cynical pundits seem to have been right when they suggested that Moda'i's approach to Labor was a tactic aimed at Shamir. The Likud leader seems to have swallowed his pride and promised the defectors safe seats on the party's next election list if they return to the fold.

Moda'i met privately with Shamir on Monday. A second meeting was scheduled with a larger Likud forum.

Shamir, meanwhile, seems to be successfully plugging his leaks. He met this week with two Knesset members rumored to be fair game for Laborite blandishments -- Aharon Abuhateira of Likud and Avner Shaki, a National Religious Party minister without portfolio.

PALESTINIAN DEATH TOLL DOWN, SAYS ISRAELI HUMAN RIGHTS GROUP

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, April 2 (JTA) -- Palestinian fatalities in the administered territories dropped by more than half during the first three months of this year, an Israeli human rights organization reported Monday.

According to figures released by B'tselem, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, 30 Palestinians were shot to death by Israeli security forces in the first quarter of 1990, compared to 64 in the previous three months.

The casualties are related to the intifada, the Palestinian uprising now in its third year.

An Israel Defense Force spokesman said the figures were more or less accurate, depending on the exact time period in question.

He refused to explain what might have caused the decline. The IDF is known, however, to have tightened discipline over the use of firearms by soldiers in the territories.

But a sharp discrepancy remains between official IDF casualty figures and those of the human rights group.

B'tselem says 637 Palestinians have been killed by the IDF since the intifada began in December 1987. The IDF puts the number at 589.

The difference may be accounted for by the fact that the IDF takes its figures only from military sources and hospitals, while B'tselem records casualty reports from Arab sources, too.

Ten IDF soldiers and nine Israeli civilians also lost their lives in the territories as a result of the intifada.

JORDANIAN CAPTURED NEAR JERICHO

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, April 2 (JTA) -- An armed Jordanian soldier who infiltrated into Israel was captured by an Israel Defense Force patrol near Jericho early Monday, after an all-night search.

The man, wearing a Jordanian army uniform, was found cowering in a banana grove at dawn. He carried an M-16 rifle and extra magazines but surrendered without a struggle.

Signs that a border intrusion occurred were discovered Sunday. Settlements in the area were put on an alert that lasted 20 hours.

DOCTORS STRIKE HITS ISRAELI HOSPITALS

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, April 2 (JTA) -- Israel was hit by another health care crisis Monday, when 2,600 physicians walked off the job at government hospitals all over the country.

Their 24-hour strike was called in support of longstanding demands for salaries equal to those paid doctors employed by Kupat Holim, the Hista-drut health care agency.

A Jerusalem labor court denied the Health Ministry a restraining order Sunday.

The court found that the Government Doctors Association gave the statutory three-week advance notice of the work stoppage but that the government failed to meet with them in that period to discuss their grievances.

The state-owned hospitals have gone on a restricted Sabbath schedule Monday and Tuesday. Elective surgery has been postponed, and only emergency procedures are being carried out.

JEWISH LEADERS ENCOURAGED BY WORK THAT HAS BEGUN ON AUSCHWITZ CENTER

By Allison Kaplan

NEW YORK, April 2 (JTA) -- American and Belgian Jewish officials returning from recent visits to Auschwitz say they are encouraged by the work that has begun on a center that will house the Carmelite nuns now living in the controversial convent on the grounds of the former death camp.

Rabbi A. James Rudin, director of interreligious affairs for the American Jewish Committee, said he observed a construction van and a small bulldozer at the site where ground was broken in February by the archbishop of Krakow, Franciszek Macharski. Rudin visited Auschwitz with an AJCommittee delegation earlier this month.

The Polish commitment toward building the interreligious center "is not just talk anymore," Rudin said. But he added that no time frame had been given yet for the center's completion or for when the nuns will move out of their present quarters.

The nuns' presence at Auschwitz has caused strain in Catholic-Jewish relations in recent years. Tensions were eased last year after the Catholic Church agreed to abide by its 1987 commitment to relocate the convent away from the site of the death camp.

According to Belgian Jewish leaders, fund raising for the project by the Catholic Church in Paris and other cities ensures that construction of the interfaith center will continue to be financed for at least another six months.

Lazard Perez, chairman of the Coordinating Committee of Belgian Jewish Organizations, and Maurice Pioro, head of the association of former Jewish deportees from Belgium, met recently at the site near Auschwitz with a delegate from the Polish government.

The Cross Is Still There

The Belgians reported that a placard in front of the construction site indicates that funding for the building is being provided by a foundation created by the Polish Church. A sketch presents the future configuration of the interreligious center for education, prayer and information.

The center, located approximately 600 yards from the Auschwitz site, will house an administrative building, a hotel and youth hostel, meeting halls, a kitchen and a library. The convent that will house the Carmelite nuns is to be separated from the interfaith center by a wall.

According to the Belgian leaders, the Polish authorities also seem to be willing to rethink the presentation of the official Auschwitz museum, which, the Jews claim, does not mention that 90 percent of those who died there were Jews.

The Belgian visitors were told by their Polish guide that a new text will be placed at the monument in memory of the victims at the former Birkenau death camp, adjacent to Auschwitz, to remind visitors that Jews were the main victims.

The Belgian leaders were apparently disappointed by the fact that a large cross in the garden of the convent is still there, despite repeated demands that it be removed.

But the Polish authorities said they are considering the possibility of replacing the cross with a memorial plate to mark the Nazi slaughter of Polish patriots at the site.

(JTA correspondent Yossi Lempkowicz in Brussels contributed to this report.)

ANNE POLLARD RELEASED ON PAROLE AFTER 40 MONTHS OF FIVE-YEAR TERM

By Elena Neuman

NEW YORK, April 2 (JTA) -- After 40 months in federal prisons and a halfway house, Anne Henderson Pollard, wife of convicted spy Jonathan Pollard, was released on mandatory parole last Friday.

Pollard received two concurrent five-year sentences after pleading guilty to being an accessory after the fact to her husband's possession of classified documents in their apartment.

Jonathan Pollard pleaded guilty in June 1986 to passing classified U.S. documents to Israel. He has since filed a motion to withdraw his guilty plea, contending the government failed to live up to its responsibilities under the plea bargain.

Both Pollards feel that their punishment -- five years for Anne and life imprisonment in solitary confinement for Jonathan -- has been excessively severe.

According to the Justice for the Pollards advocacy group, Anne Pollard is the only person to be prosecuted or imprisoned as an accessory after the fact on any charge in the United States after a perpetrator pleaded guilty to a crime and cooperated with authorities.

The group also says she is the only person ever imprisoned for someone else's possession of classified documents.

"She was merely an accessory after the fact," said Mark Baker, an attorney working on her case. "All she did was remove some documents from her house at her husband's request. She may have known in general what the documents contained, but she did not aid her husband's giving documents to Israel in any way."

The Pollards claim they were targeted for particularly harsh punishment by former Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger and former Attorney General Edwin Meese.

"It's been called the American Dreyfus case," said Baker. "There were elements of the U.S. government intent on making her life as unpleasant as possible."

BERLIN PHILHARMONIC COMING TO ISRAEL

By David Kantor

BONN, April 2 (JTA) -- The Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra will be leaving for Israel shortly on its first concert tour of the Jewish state.

The world-famous ensemble will be in Israel from April 8 to April 19 and will perform together with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra at the Mann Auditorium in Tel Aviv on April 18.

The joint patrons of the concert are President Richard von Weizsacker of West Germany and President Chaim Herzog of Israel.

"This trip should have taken place long ago," said Ulrich Eckhardt, the municipal official responsible for the Berlin Philharmonic.

The reason it didn't was the Berlin orchestra's strong identification with its late conductor, Herbert von Karajan, a dedicated member of the Nazi party in the era of the Third Reich.

Karajan died nine months ago.

The Berlin Philharmonic will play in Israel under the baton of Daniel Barenboim. Zubin Mehta will conduct the Israel Philharmonic.

Eckhardt told the West German news agency DPA that the tour will call attention to the wide range of cultural relations that have been developing for years between West Berlin and Israel.