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**STATE DEPT. REPORTS BIG DECLINE
IN MIDEAST TERRORISM SINCE 1988**
By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, April 30 (JTA) -- Middle East terrorism declined sharply in 1989, in part because of a dramatic reduction in operations by groups affiliated with the Palestine Liberation Organization, the State Department said in a report it released Monday.

The department's annual "Patterns of Global Terrorism" report recorded 193 terrorist incidents in the Middle East last year, down from 313 in 1988.

Of the 193 incidents, 155, or just over 80 percent, reflected violence in Israel and the administered territories. There were 250 such incidents in 1988.

The report found that dissension within Abu Nidal's Fatah Revolutionary Council led to a decrease in the group's operations. Previously, the organization was "one of the most active and deadly terrorist groups," it said.

In addition, various states previously linked to terrorist groups, including Libya and Syria, "remained wary of getting caught sponsoring terrorists and reduced their support," the report said. But it added that "Iran was a notable exception."

As far as Israel is concerned, the report found a moderate increase in the number of Palestinians killed in the administered territories, but a decline in the number killed by Israeli security forces or settlers: from 335 in 1988 to 304 last year.

At the same time, there was a sharp increase in the number of Palestinians killed by fellow Palestinians, from 25 in 1988 to 128 in 1989.

Also in 1989, 13 Israelis were killed by Palestinians, compared to 11 the prior year.

Over 12 Cross-Border Attacks

During the year, "PLO hard-liners and Syrian-backed Palestinian groups outside the PLO attempted more than a dozen cross-border attacks on Israel," the report said.

It attributed three of those incidents to "hard-line elements in the PLO" and noted that no Israeli civilians were killed in any of the attacks.

In overall terms, the level of international terrorism worldwide last year "declined sharply" from 1988.

The number of terrorist incidents dropped from 856 to 528, the report found.

The Middle East continued to experience the largest number of incidents of international terrorism, incurring 193 attacks, or 37 percent of the worldwide total.

The report warned that among the worldwide developments that could lead to an increase in terrorism in the future are "rivalries among Middle Eastern governments -- particularly between Iran and Saudi Arabia."

Also cited were "emerging alliances among Middle Eastern sponsors and groups, such as between Iran and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command and other radical Palestinian groups."

**STATE DEPARTMENT 'PERPLEXED'
BY SHAMIR'S REMARKS ON PEACE**
By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, April 30 (JTA) -- The State Department said Monday that it was "perplexed" by acting Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's statements opposing a U.S. framework for an Israeli-Palestinian dialogue.

Shamir, who last Friday received a 21-day mandate to try to form a new government, said in an Independence Day radio interview, excerpts of which were broadcast Sunday, that any new Likud-led government would not respond positively to a U.S. proposal for a preliminary Israeli-Palestinian dialogue.

"We are perplexed by the prime minister's statement," said State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler.

"The government of Israel asked us to find a Palestinian partner from the territories to help implement its May 1989 initiative," which "we were on the verge of accomplishing," she said.

The purpose of such a dialogue, to be held in Cairo, would be to set the ground rules for holding Palestinian elections in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Secretary of State James Baker conceived the idea to help implement an official Israeli peace plan approved by the Shamir-led government last May.

Accepting Baker's concept "meant saying yes to the government of Israel's plan, yes to Israeli-Palestinian dialogue and yes to peace," Tutwiler said. "Continuing to say no will give us very little to work with and will probably mean losing an important opportunity to move peace forward."

But she added, "We hope that once the political situation in Israel clarifies, we can work with the government of Israel to move ahead."

If the Israeli peace initiative fails, Baker has threatened to reveal the recent history of U.S. negotiations with Israel and Egypt, to tell the world who was at fault for making it fail. Egypt represents the Palestine Liberation Organization in the talks.

"That time has been approaching," Tutwiler said. But she added, "As we have said many times, we are looking forward to working with an Israeli government that emerges."

Tutwiler said she does not expect the details to be revealed now. "I just don't think that's in the cards," she said.

**AS ISRAEL CELEBRATES 42ND BIRTHDAY,
ELECTORAL REFORM IS HIGH ON AGENDA**
By Gil Sedan and Hugh Orgel

JERUSALEM, April 30 (JTA) -- Petitions bearing the signatures of half a million Israelis demanding reform of the electoral system were delivered to President Chaim Herzog on Monday, as Israel marked the 42nd anniversary of its independence.

Indicative of a swiftly growing grass-roots movement, the petitions were brought to the doors of the president's official residence here in cars, pickup trucks and other vehicles.

They were carried into the reception room in all manner of boxes, parcels and envelopes, to be deposited before a chief of state who is him-

self firmly committed to the principle of reform.

Herzog, in fact, devoted much of his televised Independence Day address to the subject.

"The political process as it unfolds before us has become unacceptable in the eyes of many," the president said, in a clear allusion to the efforts by both major parties to establish governing coalitions.

He spoke of mounting public disgust with the spectacle of back-room bargaining, deal-making and outright political bribery that have characterized those efforts on both sides since the Likud-Labor unity government was toppled March 15.

"There has almost never been so overwhelming a public protest. The citizen who has the democratic right to choose his representatives freely cannot react calmly when political machinations make an absolute mockery of the principles of democracy and lead to distortions unworthy of a free society," Herzog declared.

Nevertheless, the president, whose office is non-political but prestigious and influential, has been careful not to lean toward any specific plan for reform. He stressed only that all movements toward that goal should follow democratic guidelines.

Herzog is aware that plans abound and that while the reformers may agree in principle on the need to change the system, differences prevail among them as to how.

Under the present system, voters cast ballots for party lists, which are awarded Knesset seats in proportion to the size of their vote.

Disproportionate Bargaining Power

The system has effectively prevented either of the major parties from winning a governing majority, thereby placing disproportionate bargaining power in the hands of small factions of unrepresentative, narrow-issue groups.

Some reformers want Herzog to appoint a presidential commission to devise an alternative system. Others want the Knesset to name the experts.

At the same time, there are signs of mounting distrust of all politicians.

As Herzog noted in his address, there have been calls for electoral reform since the era of David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, who warned of a "catastrophe" unless officeholders were made directly accountable to the voters.

But until now, the movement for reform has been largely unfocused.

What seems to have captured the public imagination and media attention this time around is the current political vacuum and the activism of a group of Israel Defense Force combat veterans.

It began last month, when IDF reserve Lt. Col. Avi Kadish and two fellow reserve officers began a monthlong hunger strike outside the Knesset building.

The three were soon joined by other IDF reservists, including Maj. Eliad Shraga, who staged his own hunger strike outside the president's residence.

Then, on April 7, over 100,000 Israelis gathered outside Tel Aviv City Hall in a massive demonstration for reform.

Kaddish wants the Knesset to pass a law authorizing the president to appoint a commission for electoral reform.

"We are no experts. We want to force the Knesset members to appoint the experts, who will come up with the solution," he said Monday.

ON INDEPENDENCE DAY, HERZOG URGES PRIORITY FOR IMMIGRANTS' ABSORPTION

By Hugh Orgel and Gil Sedan

TEL AVIV, April 30 (JTA) -- President Chaim Herzog exhorted Israelis on Monday to treat the absorption of immigrants "as the most pressing challenge in our list of national priorities."

"We must divert to it the energies of our very best people," he said in a nationally televised Independence Day address.

In that connection, the president alluded to shortcomings in the absorption process, stating flatly that Israel seems not to have been prepared for the massive influx of olim, mainly from the Soviet Union.

As the country celebrated the 42nd anniversary of its independence, the president reminded it of the "miracle of the opening of the gates" of the Soviet Union to Jewish emigration.

"Yet sadly, even this marvelous hour vouchsafed to us by history is not free of difficulties and shortcomings," he said.

"The Arab world, to be sure, has united in opposition to aliyah -- the soul and essence of Zionism. But we, for our part, discover shortcomings in our own ranks -- unnecessary difficulties, defects, neglect.

"Inevitably, one wonders how we were not prepared for the massive aliyah that we knew to be imminent," Herzog said. He cautioned against treating the aliyah as simply routine.

"Very rarely does history grant us great opportunities," he said. "we must recognize its generosity today and exploit it to the full, for we cannot know what tomorrow will bring.

"One thing is certain: Jewish history will never forgive us if we fail to live up to the greatness of this hour," Herzog said.

Most Israelis took advantage of Monday's mild weather to spend the holiday in picnics in the country or at the beaches.

But with the unresolved political situation on many minds, many people participated in mass demonstrations for electoral reform, which took place in the Knesset rose garden in Jerusalem and in the square outside City Hall in Tel Aviv.

NICARAGUA TO RESTORE TIES WITH ISRAEL

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, April 30 (JTA) -- Nicaragua will restore diplomatic ties with Israel, broken by the former Sandinista government in protest against Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the Foreign Ministry reported Sunday.

It said an understanding to that effect was given by Nicaragua's newly elected president, Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, in a conversation with a senior Israeli diplomat, David Turgeman, who represented Israel at her inauguration in Managua last week.

In 1983, there were U.S. government reports on ties between the Sandinistas, who were ousted in the recent election, and the Palestine Liberation Organization. The reports indicated the PLO supplied training and military materiel to the Sandinistas.

Virtually the entire Jewish community fled Nicaragua at the time the Sandinistas came to power.

Israel was a reported "second country" in the provision of U.S. arms to the Contra rebels in the complex Iran-Contra scandal.

**WJC GATHERING IN BERLIN SCALED BACK
IN FACE OF CONCERN ABOUT REUNIFICATION****By Allison Kaplan**

NEW YORK, April 30 (JTA) -- Because of doubts over German reunification and memories of the Holocaust, what was originally billed as the first World Jewish Congress meeting in Germany has been significantly scaled down.

Instead of holding a large-scale formal meeting of the group's Executive in Berlin from May 6 to 8, as originally planned, the WJC is inviting its representatives from various nations to attend a ceremony in Berlin as individual members of a delegation accompanying WJC President Edgar Bronfman.

Bronfman, along with Heinz Galinski, the chairman of the West Berlin Jewish community, will take part in a formal reading of a Jewish declaration marking the 45th anniversary of V-E Day, at the invitation of the German Jewish community. The reading will take place at the Wannsee Villa, outside of Berlin, where Nazi leaders plotted the destruction of the Jews.

"We are going precisely to the place where they sought to destroy us, to say that we are here," said Elan Steinberg, WJC executive director.

But members of the World Zionist Organization Executive who are also WJC officials have chosen to boycott the event.

In Jerusalem, WZO Chairman Simcha Dinitz, who is an ex-officio member of the WJC Executive, announced last week that he would not attend the Berlin meeting. He said it would send the wrong signal by implying Jewish approval of the reunification of Germany.

Abides By Dinitz Decision

Dinitz said he had reached his decision after consultations with the Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and Foreign Minister Moshe Arens. He said because of his decision, other WZO members were obligated to absent themselves, as well.

Kalman Sultanik, a member of the WZO Executive and a vice president of the WJC, said he would abide by Dinitz's decision. "I am obligated as a representative of the Executive to the decision of the WZO Executive," Sultanik said.

Steinberg of the WJC said he was "surprised" that Dinitz referred to conversations with the Israel leaders.

"The president of the World Jewish Congress met with the prime minister to discuss with him the need for a Jewish moral statement on the German question. The green light for this event came from the prime minister," Steinberg said.

"Dinitz has the right not to go, and I think he's making the wrong decision. He's losing the opportunity to make our concerns known about German reunification," Steinberg said.

Others active in the WJC see it differently.

Rabbi Fabian Schonfeld, secretary of the WJC's American Section, said he argued vigorously against the entire ceremony when it was first proposed.

"To go into a room, to breathe the air that was breathed by Hitler and Goering?" Schonfeld asked. He said he could not attend the ceremony, whether or not it was part of a formal WJC meeting.

"I cannot accept being in the room where they planned our extermination," he said.

(JTA correspondent David Landau in Jerusalem contributed to this report.)

**VICHY ROLE IN DEPORTING CHILDREN
DOCUMENTED BY FRENCH MAGAZINE****By Edwin Eytan**

PARIS, April 30 (JTA) -- An incident in which Vichy France police officials during World War II deported Jewish children above and beyond Nazi requests was reported last weekend by the French news magazine L'Express.

Although the episode, which resulted in the deaths of thousands, was one of the most repugnant examples of Nazi collaboration by Frenchmen during the war, not one of the officials has been brought to justice, the mass-circulation news weekly reported.

It began when French police arrested 3,500 Jewish children in July 1942 on orders of the Vichy government.

The Nazis had asked only for the detention of adults over 16. But the Vichy police also rounded up children under 16, and as young as 6 months.

The children were confined with their mothers in two concentration camps that were built and run by the French inside France, while Vichy waited for further instructions from the Germans, L'Express reported.

Louis Darquier de Pellepoix, at the time in charge of Jewish affairs in Vichy, suggested that the children be placed in special homes in France. But Police Chief Jean Leguay and his immediate superior, Rene Bosquet, urged the Germans to take them as deportees.

While waiting for the Gestapo to decide, the two French police officials handed over the children's mothers to be deported, L'Express reported.

The youngsters were left practically unattended while Berlin took its time. Two weeks later, on July 31, the Gestapo acceded to the French request.

The children were placed on special trains to Auschwitz. Fewer than a dozen are known to have survived.

According to L'Express, Leguay was the police official who initially urged the Gestapo to deport the children. He was never tried for war crimes and died an old man at his home in Paris last year.

The magazine stressed that no Frenchman has ever been indicted, much less tried for collaboration with the Nazis.

Although much was made of the life sentence imposed on the former Lyon Gestapo chief Klaus Barbie in 1988 for crimes against humanity, Barbie was, after all, a German, L'Express pointed out. France simply does not want to open the closet in which so many of its own skeletons hang, the news weekly concluded.

**U.S. JEWISH DELEGATION GOING TO MOSCOW
TO SET UP POLL, MONITOR ANTI-SEMITISM****By David Friedman**

WASHINGTON, April 30 (JTA) -- Three officials of the American Jewish Committee are leaving for the Soviet Union on Tuesday to make arrangements for conducting a survey there of Soviet Jews and non-Jews.

The visit was timed so there would be an American Jewish presence in the Soviet Union on May 5, the date anti-Semitic groups have threatened to carry out a pogrom against the Jewish community, said David Harris, AJCommittee's Washington representative.

THE GARDEN IS EDEN AS EUROPEAN-STYLE ORTHODOXY CELEBRATES DAF YOMI SIYUM

By Jonathan Mark

The New York Jewish Week

NEW YORK, April 30 (JTA) -- The ninth Siyum Hashas of Daf Yomi in Madison Square Garden on Thursday was more than just a gathering to mark the completion of the study of Talmud.

The New York arena -- where presidents have been nominated, rock-and-roll superstars confirmed, sports teams adored and heavyweight champions crowned -- saw European-style Orthodoxy rise from what seemed to be defeat at the twin fists of the Holocaust and assimilation to reclaim its pre-eminence over the more "modern" factions of Orthodoxy, as 17,000 black-hatted men and 3,000 modestly dressed women packed the hall.

Though there were many in the assemblage who completed the Daf Yomi (page-a-day) study of the Talmud in such "modern" or "centrist" strongholds as Young Israel or in groups led by Yeshiva University graduates, even they seemed to acknowledge the surrender of their theological faction by covering their trademark knitted kipot with the widebrimmed black fedoras that reflect the European-Orthodox ethos.

The siyum, organized by Agudath Israel of America, was dedicated to those who died in the Holocaust. The 20,000 assembled stood for a recitation of Kaddish and El Molch Rachamim, traditional prayers for the dead.

Sung As A Requiem

That was followed by a haunting, dirge-like version of Ani Ma'amin, the affirmation of faith in the coming of the Messiah that was once sung by thousands on the way to gas chambers and was now being sung as a requiem by the standing, swaying multitude at Madison Square Garden.

Psalms were also recited for Soviet Jewry, and there was a rousing version of L'shana Hab'ah B'Yerushalayim -- Next Year in Jerusalem.

The evening was bracketed by what many felt were particularly beautiful and transcendent prayer services -- what someone suggested was the largest minyan since the Holy Temple was destroyed 2,000 years ago.

At souvenir stands, where people purchased pocket-sized commemorative editions of the Talmud, thousands also rented FM radios through which English-speaking Talmudists could listen to a simultaneous translation of the proceedings that were almost entirely in Yiddish, as if midtown Manhattan was Lodz or Lublin, where earlier siyumim were held in the 1930s.

One of the few who spoke in English was Rav Simon Schwab, of Congregation K'hal Adath Jeshurun in Washington Heights.

Schwab, who was born in Germany and educated in Lithuania, recalled that "America was considered the treif medina, (the land of the forbidden). Even the stones were considered treif. Those at the first siyum (in Lodz) could not have envisioned this."

Schwab explained that the learning of Daf Yomi is Torah L'shmah, Torah learning for its own sake, one of the purest, least ego-oriented enterprises in the Jewish community: "No diplomas are handed out, no honors, no awards."

Sitting in front of over 150 rabbis on the massive stage and looking out at the crowd representing a multitude of different Orthodox

institutions, Schwab noted that Daf Yomi unites the entire "Torah community."

Indeed, Rav Meir Shapiro, who first proposed the seven-and-a-half-year Daf Yomi cycle at an Agudah convention in 1923, conceived the program as a unifying umbrella over the increasingly diverse and international Jewish community.

Shapiro pointed out that Jewish unity is visible on every page of Talmud, which includes a Mishnah written in Israel, Gemarah written in Babylonia, the codes of the Rif written in Morocco, Rambam written in Egypt, Rashi and Tosfot written in France, and the Maharam written in Poland.

Lineup Of Rabbis

The Garden traditionally hangs a banner from its ceiling proclaiming "613," the number of victories by Knicks basketball coach Red Holzman, but on this night the packed arena understood that number to only mean the number of commandments in the Torah.

The arena's giant scoreboard was used to announce that the afternoon or evening services could be found on page 61 of the souvenir program. The scoreboard also announced in bright lights the "lineup" of rabbis at the microphone: The Bluzhover rebbe, Rav Zvi Spira; The Novominsker rebbe, Rav Yaakov Perlow, and so forth.

The transformation of the Garden seemed most surrealistic in the holding-areas behind the stage, where austere rabbis and their side-curved entourage stood amid the Ringling Brothers & Barnum and Bailey circus wagons, hoops and paraphernalia, while the stench of elephants filled the air and the honking of an unseen animal menagerie was heard through doors and walls.

Off to the side, teen-agers ignored the speakers on stage as they huddled backstage with Garden personnel around black-and-white televisions showing a basketball game.

For the first time in the nine siyumim of Daf Yomi, women were allowed to attend; for one night, the Garden's "blue seats," the top-level balcony, made the arena resemble the two-tiered synagogues of pre war Poland.

These seats, usually the province of the most vulgar hockey fans, now was home to modest and predominantly young yeshiva women, who appreciated both their historic inclusion and the stunning panoramic view of the packed hall.

In Support Of Family

Though none of the women admitted to learning Daf Yomi, they were there in support of their fathers, husbands, brothers and sons. Many of the male and female students at the siyum came on class trips from as far away as Mexico City, Baltimore, Cleveland and Montreal.

One young Soviet woman, who arrived in New York just three weeks ago, didn't have a ticket, but waited outside the sold-out arena, just to watch what seemed to be the ingathering of Jewish exiles to the Garden.

She hoped that somehow she would get a ticket, and somehow she got one. Once inside, looking out over the sea of 20,000 Jews committed to learning Torah, she told a reporter, "I cannot believe my eyes. I have never seen so many Jews together, learning, being friends."

At the podium, a rabbi was saying that he hoped the messiah would arrive by the next siyum of the Talmud. For the Soviet woman, the messiah's presence didn't seem any more unlikely than her own.