

**ALTERNATIVE MIDEAST PEACE PLANS
BEING FLOATED AT U.N. AND IN BONN**

By Allison Kaplan

UNITED NATIONS, July 18 (JTA) -- Israel's ambassador here has disputed reports that Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar asked the five permanent members of the Security Council on Monday to become directly involved in the Middle East peace process.

Perez de Cuellar reportedly asked the Security Council members to put together a peace plan during periodic informal meetings, according to a report Wednesday in *The New York Times*.

But Johanan Bein, Israel's acting permanent representative here, contended that Monday's meeting was merely a briefing on the recent visit to the Middle East by the secretary-general's envoy, Jean-Claude Aime.

"He didn't ask them to devise a plan," Bein said.

In Bonn, meanwhile, West German President Richard von Weizsacker, a longtime supporter of Israel, has called for the convening of an international peace conference, with the participation of the Palestine Liberation Organization, in order to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict.

His request was made Monday night at a state dinner honoring President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia.

Israel has long rejected the idea of an international peace conference under U.N. auspices, which it believes would strongly favor creation of a Palestinian state from the territories Israel captured in the 1967 Six-Day War. Instead, it favors direct negotiations with the Palestinians and its Arab neighbors.

The United States has mainly supported Israel's point of view. But recently there has been speculation, in both Israeli and American Jewish circles, that the Bush administration may look to an international solution if efforts toward a direct dialogue are stymied by the Israeli government.

U.S. Remains Committed To Dialogue

While the Bush administration's frustration with Israel has clearly grown recently, it has not indicated it is ready to abandon the direct negotiations approach.

That point was emphasized Wednesday at the daily State Department briefing in Washington. Department deputy spokesman Richard Boucher stressed that the United States "remains committed to moving forward to a dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians."

"We are working hard toward that objective," he said.

In Bonn, von Weizsacker's call for an international conference was challenged Tuesday by the West German daily *Die Welt*, which reported that the president had failed to clear his declaration with Chancellor Helmut Kohl's government.

His call also went beyond the policy of the European Community on the issue, the West German daily noted.

Last year, at a Madrid summit meeting of the heads of state of the 12 E.C. nations, an international conference was suggested as only one of several possibilities to deal with the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Die Welt, in an opinion column, sharply criticized von Weizsacker, remarking that the president made his suggestion at a time when the United States has suspended its dialogue with the PLO.

Moreover, East Germany has been making continual, sensational revelations about how the PLO and other international terrorist groups were protected and assisted by the former Communist regime.

So far, the Israeli Embassy in Bonn has not publicly reacted to the president's suggestion. The Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem is said to be studying von Weizsacker's declaration, which came as a surprise.

(JTA correspondents David Kantor in Bonn and David Friedman in Washington contributed to this report.)

**SHEVARDNADZE ASKS U.S. TO PREVENT
OLIM FROM SETTLING IN TERRITORIES**

By Edwin Eytan

PARIS, July 18 (JTA) -- The Soviet Union on Wednesday asked the United States to use "all its influence" to prevent the settlement of Soviet immigrants in the administered territories.

Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, here for international talks on the future of a united Germany, told reporters he had asked U.S. Secretary of State James Baker for America "to use its influence and its authority to ensure that the Jewish immigrants (from the Soviet Union) are not settled" in the territories.

The Soviet Union has come under mounting pressure from Arab states and from the Palestine Liberation Organization to stop the emigration of Soviet Jews, who they fear will settle in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, changing forever the demographics of the disputed areas.

Shevardnadze clearly rejected curtailing Soviet Jewish emigration outright. "We place no obstacle to the departure of all the Jews who want to leave," he said, "but what worries us is the problem of settling people from the Soviet Union in the occupied territories."

"The Arabs have a legitimate reason to worry about this," he said.

But last weekend, a prominent Soviet journalist visiting Israel said he himself had witnessed only a handful of Soviet Jews settling in the administered territories.

Sergei Volovetz, foreign editor of the liberal newspaper *Moscow News*, told Israel army radio that those few immigrants he encountered in the territories were mainly Soviet Jews who had come to Israel in the 1970s.

He said the current wave of olim were city-dwellers who, he believed, would not want to settle in the West Bank or Gaza Strip.

In Paris, the Soviet foreign minister met with Baker for over two-and-a-half hours Wednesday morning, but the Middle East was only "briefly mentioned," as most of their discussions centered on German reunification, Cambodia and Afghanistan.

Baker reportedly told the Soviets that he will "know better how matters stand in the Middle East" after his forthcoming meeting with Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy, Soviet

sources reported.

The secretary of state had asked Levy to meet with him here at this time, but Levy, who recently suffered a mild heart attack, was advised not to travel. The two men are now expected to meet next month in Washington.

The American and Soviet foreign ministers are scheduled to meet again in September in Moscow. Soviet sources say they expect the two will thoroughly review the Middle East situation then, after the Americans will have heard the Israeli response to their questions.

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

KNESSET MEMBERS BACK RENT FREEZE AS PROTESTS OVER HOUSING ESCALATE By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, July 18 (JTA) -- Some 63 members of Knesset, representing all political parties, signed a petition Wednesday urging the government to impose a national freeze on rents and said they would sponsor a bill to enforce that goal.

The action came in the wake of increasingly volatile protests over skyrocketing rents, caused by the influx of Soviet Jewish immigrants.

The acute housing shortage has forced many young Israelis to abandon apartments they can no longer afford. Growing numbers are moving into makeshift tents, both to seek shelter and to graphically demonstrate their plight.

The drama intensified this week, as a group of newly homeless Israelis who had climbed to a rooftop in Bat Yam, just south of Tel Aviv, threatened to commit mass suicide.

They ended their action Wednesday, when Mayor Ehud Kinamon promised them a meeting with Housing Minister Ariel Sharon.

One of the protesters remarked, "If you don't pound on the table, nobody hears you in Israel."

The group of 30, including pregnant women and small children, had climbed to the roof of the Bat Yam City Hall on Tuesday night and threatened to blow themselves up by igniting cooking gas. Some of the demonstrators threw burning tires and firebombs from the rooftop.

At daybreak, the demonstrators set up barricades at the building's entrance and would not let municipal workers enter. Only journalists with press cards were allowed inside.

In front of the building, some 100 families had set up tents, creating a virtual tent city. By the end of the day, the young couples left the municipal building, hoping to meet Sharon shortly.

Protests In Other Localities

Police said they would take legal measures against the demonstrators.

However, just as this crisis had been solved, a number of homeless Israelis took over the municipal building in Givat Shmuel, near Bnei Brak.

In Herzliya, the municipality threatened to use legal measures to evacuate a local tent settlement.

The protests escalated after Israel's High Court of Justice on Tuesday invalidated emergency powers the Cabinet had given July 1 to Sharon to deal with the housing crisis.

The court, responding to a petition filed by Knesset member Avraham Poraz of the center-left Shinui party, ruled that the government could not bypass existing laws with emergency regulations,

saying existing legal remedies were sufficient to solve the crisis.

The court decision may have triggered a new wave of pessimism among Israelis having trouble finding affordable housing. Many had been optimistic that Sharon's "bulldozer approach" would speed the construction of new apartments.

In New York, an official at the center of efforts to absorb Soviet Jewish immigrants maintained Wednesday that 70,000 additional housing units "will still be built," regardless of the ban on emergency measures.

"The Supreme Court believed that it can be done without special emergency measures. Whatever legislation needs to be passed to get it done, the Knesset will pass it," said Simcha Dinitz, chairman of the World Zionist Organization and Jewish Agency Executives.

Dinitz, who was addressing Hadassah's national convention, seemed perturbed by recent protests over the housing shortage in Israel.

"This is politics," he said, insisting that the shortage of apartments "has nothing to do with aliyah. It has existed for years. If anything, the aliyah will help solve the problem," he said.

(JTA staff writer Elena Neuman in New York contributed to this report.)

IDF TRAINING EXERCISES CANCELED IN AFTERMATH OF DEADLY ACCIDENT By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, July 18 (JTA) -- All Israel Defense Force training exercises and war games were canceled Wednesday, as three of the five soldiers killed Tuesday in a training accident were buried.

Wednesday and Thursday are to be devoted to special lectures in all army units on precautions that must be taken by all troops.

The soldiers were killed when a 155mm artillery shell fired from a distance of some seven miles slammed into an infantry unit that had just succeeded in a simulated capture of a hilltop. The "softening-up shell" was supposed to have been directed at their next target, which was located less than a mile away.

The exercise was carried out in the Negev, at a site frequently used for similar exercises.

The three soldiers buried Wednesday were identified as Sgt. Aharon Marius, 33, of Kibbutz Kfar Azar; Sgt. Maj. Ram Katz, 32, of Givatayim; and Sgt. Yosef Spiegler, 25, of Nahariya.

Three of the 10 soldiers wounded in the incident were reported Wednesday to remain in serious condition.

Ma'ariv reported Wednesday that 29 soldiers have been killed in training exercises in the last five years.

FATE OF ISRAELI MOUNTAINEERS DIMS By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, July 18 (JTA) -- Hopes have virtually faded of finding alive any of the 60 international mountaineers who were buried under an avalanche of snow last Friday in the Pamir mountain range in Soviet Tadzhikistan, near the Chinese border.

The group, which included four Israelis, had been at a base camp at an elevation of 17,490 feet, preparing for the final assault on the 23,406-foot Lenin Peak, when a minor earth tremor triggered a massive snowslide. The entire camp was carried some 1,000 feet.

**CITING 'IRRECONCILABLE DIFFERENCES,'
JONATHAN POLLARD FILES FOR DIVORCE**
By Allison Kaplan

NEW YORK, July 18 (JTA) -- Jonathan Pollard, serving a life term in prison for spying on behalf of Israel, has filed divorce papers against his wife, Anne, citing "irreconcilable differences" as the reason for ending the marriage.

Anne Pollard received the papers Wednesday in her bed at New York's Mount Sinai Hospital, where she is receiving treatment for a digestive disorder.

Her medical condition worsened during her 40-month stay in prison, where she was sentenced after pleading guilty to being an accessory after the fact to possession of classified documents. She was released from a Manhattan halfway house in March.

A statement released by an attorney for Jonathan Pollard states that he "very deeply regrets that this action must be taken and wishes his wife the very best, but also desires to make clear that she no longer speaks for him for any purpose."

The statement added that Pollard had planned divorce action earlier, but "postponed taking this action for several months due to his wife's ongoing testing for illness and unavailability to visit him at the prison."

Anne Pollard was "absolutely beside herself" over the divorce action, said her attorney, Mark Baker. A statement released on her behalf quoted her as saying, "I am deeply grieved by this action as I had hoped for children and a life together someday."

Baker blames Jonathan Pollard's family for influencing him against his wife. The couple have not seen each other in four years and have not communicated in several months.

The divorce action follows months of growing animosity between the two families since Anne Pollard's release. Each side has accused the other of trying to monopolize and control efforts to free Jonathan Pollard.

"People who have their own agendas are exploiting the fact that Jonathan cannot meet with Anne without others present," Baker said.

Judith Barnett, an attorney for Jonathan Pollard, responded that "this is a decision which was made 100 percent by Jonathan Pollard."

The Pollards were married on Aug. 9, 1985. Three months later, on Nov. 21, Jonathan Pollard, then a U.S. naval intelligence analyst, was arrested outside the Israeli Embassy in Washington.

**WEST GERMAN JEWS PROTEST
REMOVAL OF AUSCHWITZ PLAQUE**
By David Kantor

BONN, July 18 (JTA) -- The Jewish community in West Germany strongly protested Tuesday against Poland's removal of plaques claiming that 4 million people, mostly Poles, died at the Auschwitz and Birkenau death camps, according to a report in the liberal Polish daily Gazeta Wyborcza.

Gazeta Wyborcza said the plaques were removed in accordance with historical surveys that show there were 1.1 million victims of the two camps, of whom European Jews accounted for at least 960,000.

The numbers and identities of the major victims, as detailed on the plaques, has in recent

years been disputed by highly respected Jewish scholars of the Holocaust, including Yehuda Bauer in Jerusalem and Professor Raul Hilberg of the University of Vermont.

They estimate the number of Jews killed at Auschwitz was approximately 1.35 million, out of a total of 1.6 million people killed there.

Heinz Galinski, chairman of the Jewish community of West Germany and himself an Auschwitz survivor, said he was appalled by the news of the removal. He called the move a mockery of the victims and said he would not participate in speculation over the number of Nazi victims.

Supply Ammunition For Extremists

The West German daily Frankfurter Rundschau, in an editorial Tuesday, also criticized the removal of the plaque, saying it would supply ammunition to extremists who deny the Holocaust altogether.

The plaques, which were placed in front of the International Monument to Victims of Fascism, noted the deaths of 4 million victims, and listed Poles, not Jews, as first among the dead.

The director of the Auschwitz State Museum's history department, Franciszek Piper, said the overall number now can be given as 1.1 million, Wyborcza Gazeta reported. That figure is based on studies of numbered inmates, letters linked to preparation of transports to the camps and lists drawn up in the ghettos of many countries, Piper said.

He said that 90 percent of the victims were Jewish.

Given that some victims were probably not documented, Piper said, the maximum figure of victims at Auschwitz-Birkenau still cannot be greater than 1.5 million.

According to Gazeta Wyborcza, research Piper conducted between 1980 and 1986 will be published next year by the Auschwitz State Museum and Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem.

According to Rabbi Marvin Hier, dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles, the original figures had been inflated to diminish the number of Jewish victims, in accordance with Communist wishes.

From Soviet Figures

The figure of 4 million on the original plaque came from Soviet figures provided by a Soviet commission that visited the camp in February 1945, one week after the Soviets liberated the camp. That commission submitted its finding to the Nuremberg war-crimes trials.

Hier, who just returned from visiting Auschwitz, explained that "by making it sound as if, for example, they said 4 million were killed, if Jewish historians said only 2 million were killed, therefore others could be said to have suffered as much as the Jews.

"That was the purpose," he said. "Now, with the fall of the Communist regime in Poland, a commission was established to look into charges that the Jewish aspect of the tragedy has been diminished.

"The commission carefully reviewed the records," he said, "and concluded that it had been an attempt to diminish the Jewish tragedy. Therefore, they concluded they have to remove that sign."

(JTA staff writer Susan Birnbaum in New York contributed to this report.)

BEHIND THE HEADLINES:
JEWISH GROUPS MONITORING LEGISLATION BEFORE CONGRESS ON PANOPLY OF ISSUES
 By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, July 18 (JTA) -- Jewish groups are carefully monitoring a number of bills Congress is expected to act on before it begins its Labor Day recess in early August.

Representatives of several Jewish organizations have been intensively lobbying senators this week to back the Civil Rights Act of 1990, which is expected to come up for a vote soon.

Other pending bills deal with such issues as foreign aid to Israel, sanctions against Iraq, federal aid to sectarian child-care programs, restrictions on ritual practices that violate state laws and exemptions for religious institutions from provisions of the Disabilities Act.

Jewish groups were relieved when the House of Representatives failed Tuesday to muster enough votes to adopt a constitutional amendment to balance the federal budget.

The vote was 279-150, seven votes short of the required two-thirds majority. The bill also would have needed to win approval from two-thirds of the Senate and ratification by at least 38 states.

Pro-Israel groups feared that the \$3 billion foreign aid package Israel receives from the United States each year would be a casualty of any across-the-board budget-cutting mechanism.

The bill also had "the potential to have a drastic impact" on a number of domestic programs that benefit Jewish groups, said Mark Pelavin, Washington representative of the American Jewish Congress.

Exemption On Import Quotas

Israel received a direct benefit in a totally unrelated bill Tuesday, when the Senate voted to exempt Israel and Canada from protectionist legislation limiting U.S. imports of textiles, clothing and footwear.

Since those countries have signed free trade agreements with the United States, they were exempted from new quotas limiting the growth of such imports to 1 percent annually.

The House is not scheduled to consider the measure until after Labor Day.

Also Tuesday, one of Israel's enemies, Iraq, suffered a setback when the Senate Banking Committee approved various sanctions against Baghdad, including making it ineligible for Commodity Credit Corporation credit guarantees.

Iraq was designated to receive \$1 billion in the credit guarantees this year, half of which is on hold because of a Justice Department inquiry into alleged Iraqi abuses of the program.

Meanwhile, the Civil Rights Act advanced a step toward passage Tuesday, when the Senate voted to limit further debate on the bill to a maximum of 30 hours. Several Jewish groups had actively lobbied for approval of the "cloture" motion, which passed by a vote of 62-38.

The bill provides legislative remedies that essentially overturn several recent court rulings that have cut back on the use of affirmative action in hiring and promotion decisions.

Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.), the bill's sponsor, met Tuesday with 35 groups that support the bill, including the American Jewish Committee, AJCongress, Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, National Council of Jewish Women and Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

But at least one Jewish group, Agudath Israel of America, opposes certain provisions of the bill, because it fears they will force some employers to resort to quotas in order to avoid litigation.

Other Jewish groups opposed to quotas disagree.

It remains unclear whether President Bush would sign such a bill if it passed the Senate and the House, where it is still locked in committee.

Child Care Bill Stalled

The cloture vote was the first key vote on the measure on the Senate floor. Among the votes yet to come will be one on adoption of a substitute civil rights bill, sponsored by Sen. Nancy Kassebaum (R-Kan.).

Most Jewish groups strenuously oppose that bill, which would shift the burden of proof from the employers toward victims of racial discrimination and would not allow victims of religious or sex discrimination to sue for damages.

Jewish groups are also divided over provisions of the multibillion-dollar child care bill recently approved by the House and Senate.

The bill would allow child-care programs involved in religious instruction to receive federal funds. It also would allow sectarian child-care providers receiving federal aid to use religious preferences in hiring workers and admitting clients.

While those provisions are welcomed by Orthodox groups, whose institutions stand to benefit, a wide spectrum of other Jewish organizations have opposed aid to sectarian programs, saying it would violate the constitutionally required separation of church and state.

Those groups hope President Bush will veto the bill. If he does, it will likely be for other reasons, such as budgetary concerns and his preference for distributing the aid through tax credits rather than grants.

The bill cannot go to the White House for signature until House and Senate negotiators iron out differences between the \$10 billion House version of the bill and the \$27 billion Senate version.

Similar language on hiring preferences is being proposed as well in the National Service Act, pending in the House Education and Labor Committee, which would provide federal aid to employers promoting voluntary service.

Religious Accommodation Bills

Meanwhile, Rep. Stephen Solarz (D-N.Y.) is expected to introduce a bill next week that seeks to reverse the recent Supreme Court ruling upholding an Oregon law barring American Indians from using the drug peyote in their religious rituals.

Jewish groups were upset that the Supreme Court created a new test that defers to state laws when they collide with religious liberties.

The old test, which the amendment would restore, requires statutes that infringe on religious practices to serve a "compelling interest."

Solarz earlier this year introduced a bill that would require employers to make special accommodations to employees who do not want to work on their Sabbath or religious holidays.

AJCongress helped draft both of Solarz's measures, which have support ranging from the liberal People for the American Way to the conservative Agudath Israel and National Association of Evangelicals.