

BUSH CONVINCED, BUT OTHERS UNSURE ABOUT IMPACT OF AN ATTACK ON ISRAEL

By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, Dec. 19 (JTA) -- President Bush said this week that he was "absolutely convinced" the international coalition against Iraq would not "fall apart" if Saddam Hussein decided to attack Israel.

But State Department officials appear to be less certain about the consequences of a scenario in which Israel is dragged into the Persian Gulf crisis by an Iraqi military assault.

While Middle East experts in the department would not dispute Bush's statement, they were not particularly eager to affirm it either.

Even the president was a little vague Tuesday, when pressed on the possibility of an attack against Israel.

"I can't give you the specifics on that, but I'm absolutely convinced of it, and you can assume the way I've answered the question that we've inquired about that," Bush told a group of regional newspaper editors.

Bush's statement, which follows a similar one made nearly two weeks earlier by Secretary of State James Baker, is a departure from the practice of administration officials, who generally do not engage in answering hypothetical questions.

This raises the possibility that Bush's words may be more of a rhetorical device to warn Hussein against attacking Israel than an actual assessment of what is likely to happen.

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive director of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, said that while it "stands to reason" that the anti-Iraq coalition would "hold together if the United States came to the defense of Israel," nobody in the administration "has told us that."

Syrian Pledge To Defend Jordan

State Department deputy spokesman Richard Boucher had no comment Wednesday when asked about a news report that Syrian President Hafez Assad had assured visiting Jordanian Prime Minister Mudar Badran that he would come to Jordan's rescue in the event of an Israeli attack.

Syria has been part of the U.S.-led coalition against Iraq, while Jordan, which is economically dependent on Iraq, has officially remained neutral.

One State Department official who refused to comment on Bush's statement said it was "guesswork" to think that Assad would come to Jordan's defense if Israel attacked the Hashemite Kingdom. There are "so many possibilities" depending on the circumstances of such an attack, the official said.

A Syrian Embassy spokesman declined comment, saying he could only answer written questions. The press offices at the Saudi and Jordanian embassies did not provide any immediate reaction about any contingency plans involving any Israeli attack against an Arab country or an Arab attack against Israel.

But Baker told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee two weeks ago that if Iraq attacked Israel, "there would be an appropriate response by the United States and, in our view, the Arab coalition partners would understand that."

NEWS ANALYSIS:**LAHAT PROPOSAL FOR PALESTINIAN STATE MAY BE REFLECTION OF THE POPULAR MOOD**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Dec. 19 (JTA) -- When Tel Aviv Mayor Shlomo Lahat proclaimed on television last Saturday night that the Palestinians deserved a state of their own, his colleagues in the Likud bloc were stunned.

It was not the type of statement to be making scarcely a day after the brutal murder of three Israelis in Jaffa by a pair of Palestinian laborers from the Gaza Strip.

But there are some who believe the immensely popular mayor, a proven vote-getter, may be ahead of his party in reading the popular mood -- or at least the mood of middle-class Jews living on Israel's coastal plain, whose closest contact with the intifada until very recently was the nightly news.

Lahat, who is widely known by his army moniker, "Chich," is savvy when it comes to pleasing his constituents. After the Knesset passed two Orthodox-sponsored bills Monday to enforce modesty and Sabbath observance, the maverick mayor was on the air in minutes with his response.

The bustling places of entertainment in downtown Tel Aviv would not close on Friday nights, he vowed.

Lahat declared that, as mayor, he would do everything possible to ensure that all Tel Aviv residents, whatever their religious persuasion, could enjoy their Oneg Shabbat, in whatever way they saw fit.

It was a statement calculated to win the approval of at least 95 percent of the city's population -- all but the ultra-Orthodox.

And it posed no political problem, because the new legislation does not really threaten any change in Tel Aviv, barring a suicidal attempt by the small religious party representation on the City Council to force the mayor's hand.

Negotiations With Arafat

Lahat is usually unerring in making the kind of statement that solidifies his close rapport with the grass-roots bourgeoisie who comprise much of Tel Aviv's population.

Indeed, Lahat's favorable standing has advanced Likud's fortunes in recent elections among ordinary, middle-of-the-road Israelis.

It was with great chagrin, therefore, that Likud loyalists watched Lahat tell the nation on the prime time television news Saturday night that the Palestinians ought to have the opportunity to set up their independent state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

To bring that about, the handsome, silver-haired reserve general recommended immediate negotiations with Yasser Arafat and his Palestine Liberation Organization.

Lahat said this was the only rational conclusion that could be drawn from the recent wave of terrorist stabbings, culminating in the Jaffa incident last Friday.

The three victims of that attack, all factory workers, were hacked to death at an aluminum-processing plant. Seasoned police officers were

shaken by the savagery of the crime.

Lahat said he favored the death-penalty for such murderers. But he assured his audience that he "was not shooting from the hip" when he recommended a Palestinian state.

"This is a carefully thought-out position," Lahat said. He said it was shared by his Likud colleague, the mayor of neighboring Herzliya, with whom he said he was working on a policy platform for a "new movement."

Lahat's bombshell raised demands from elements in Likud for his immediate ouster from the party.

Cooler heads prevailed in the Prime Minister's Office. The line was put out that popular as he may be, the Tel Aviv mayor is "at most a municipal authority who does not speak for the party and cannot speak on national policy issues."

Lahat remained confident that there would be no reprisals because Likud needs him.

A Withdrawal From The Golan

On Monday, he told Ma'ariv that he favors not only a Palestinian state but Israel's withdrawal from the Golan Heights, in the framework of a peace treaty with Syria.

Such statements are rank heresy to Likud and an embarrassment to its leadership.

But beneath the embarrassment lie searching questions.

Has Lahat proven more adept at gauging the popular mood, at least among the middle class, than Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and Defense Minister Moshe Arens, with their sonorous rhetoric?

Is the intifada, now spilling over into Israel proper, causing mainstream Israelis -- the kind who have swung to Likud in recent elections -- to reconsider retaining Israel's grip on the administered territories?

On the other hand, are those middle classes who form the backbone of the population of Tel Aviv and the coastal plane representative of a majority of the nation?

Israeli and foreign observers have noted during the three years of the intifada an almost unnatural propensity of Tel Aviv residents to pretend the uprising is not happening -- or is happening thousands of miles away.

Even those who do their reserve duty and face the intifada first-hand seem to have a remarkable facility for putting it out of their minds as soon as they doff their uniforms.

Politicians are asking whether the flip side of this tendency to repress emotionally is a new political flexibility, accurately articulated by Lahat.

At Sunday's Cabinet meeting, the prime minister spoke of the century-long war between Jews and Arabs in this land. He called for cool resolve in the face of the current terror.

But for Lahat, "the Palestinians are a fact of life. Arafat is their leader, even if I don't like him.

"Only if they turn us down, despite our offer to negotiate over a separate state, would I then say: 'Let us settle 200,000 Jews in Judea and Samaria.' But then we will know that we have genuinely exhausted every possibility of peace," the mayor said.

The Palestinians, he added, are "the Jews of the Arab world. The Arabs themselves don't support their demand for a state. If we approach them with sagacity and help them, together we will be able to live in this region as in paradise."

TOURISM DROP HAS COST ISRAEL

\$750 MILLION IN LOST REVENUE

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Dec. 19 (JTA) -- The drop in tourism to Israel caused by the Persian Gulf crisis has cost the Jewish state \$750 million in lost revenue this year, Tourism Minister Gideon Patt told a world conference of Jewish National Fund leaders meeting here this week.

Patt urged the JNF professional and lay leaders to encourage their constituents to tour Israel now. But his assurance that gas masks would be available for every visitor should the need arise might have reduced the effectiveness of his message.

The big decline in tourism began after Iraq invaded Kuwait on Aug. 2, Patt said. But he was optimistic that "everything will change, and change fast, once the situation in the Gulf reaches some sort of solution."

But tourism is not Israel's only pressing problem.

On Monday, the JNF leaders heard from Housing Minister Ariel Sharon that construction of new homes is not keeping pace with the arrival rate of immigrants from the Soviet Union.

Sharon, known as the "aliyah czar," chairs the Ministerial Absorption Committee, a panel of Cabinet ministers who deal with immigration and absorption issues.

Meeting with the JNF group at a new housing site in the Negev township of Sderot, Sharon vowed that no newcomers would be without a roof over their heads.

The Sderot site is one of a dozen where the infrastructure work was done by JNF heavy equipment teams.

Sharon spoke of 400,000 olim next year, out of an estimated 2.5 million Jews still in the Soviet Union.

"This means we shall have to build half a million homes over four to five years, which is one-third of all the homes built here since 1948," Sharon said.

He said housing construction was 18 months behind schedule and needed an immediate infusion of \$4 billion.

Pointing to the Sderot site, where 700 homes will be ready in six months, Sharon said they would only "solve the housing problems of two nights of immigrant arrivals."

STRAINS IN TOP RANKS OF THE IDF SEEN IN A RESHUFFLING OF POSTS

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Dec. 19 (JTA) -- A high-level reshuffling of commands announced Tuesday by the Israel Defense Force reflects strained relations at the top echelons of the IDF, according to military sources.

Maj. Gen. Yitzhak Mordechai, head of the IDF Central Command, has been switched to head the Northern Command, replacing Maj. Gen. Yossi Peled, who is retiring from active service.

The central sector will now be commanded by Maj. Gen. Dani Yaton, who is presently head of the IDF's Training Branch.

The announcements, which came as a surprise, were described by military sources as a decision by the defense establishment to diminish the influence of outgoing Chief of Staff Dan Shomron on the future composition of the General Staff. Shomron's term expires in April.

STUDY OF GERMAN VIEWS ON JEWS YIELDS 'DISTURBING' FINDINGS

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK, Dec. 19 (JTA) -- A majority of citizens in unified Germany believe that "it is time to put the memory of the Holocaust behind us," according to a new study sponsored by the American Jewish Committee.

The survey, the first poll of attitudes on issues relating to Jews in newly reunified Germany, also revealed that 38 percent of Germans believe that "Jews exploit the Holocaust for their own purposes."

The same percentage agree that "now, as in the past, Jews exert too much influence on world events."

Polling took place between Oct. 1 and 15, in face-to-face interviews with 1,922 people across Germany.

Of that total, 995 people were citizens of the former West Germany, and 826 people were citizens of the former East Germany. Fifty people were parliamentarians and party figures from what was West Germany, and 51 were East German politicians.

Over half of those questioned, some 52 percent, believe Israel has no special claim on Germany and that "Israel is a state like any other."

Nearly one-third of those polled believe that "Zionism is racism."

Just 22 percent of those polled favor paying reparations to Jews for property lost during the Nazi era.

A ban on anti-Semitic groups enjoys widespread popularity among Germans from both the East and West, with 79 percent approving, and 73 percent favor teaching about the Nazi period in schools. But only 55 percent support prosecuting Nazi war criminals.

East Germans More Positive

The results of the study were "disturbing," according to David Harris, executive vice president of the AJCommittee.

Most surprising for the researchers was the disparity between the opinions of former East and West Germans.

While it is West Germans who have had more exposure to education about the Third Reich over the last four decades, the attitudes of former East Germans were much more positive toward Jewish concerns, the survey found.

Nearly two-thirds of West Germans believe that "it is time to put the memory of the Holocaust behind us," but less than half, 44 percent, of East Germans agree.

And while just one-fifth of the former East Germans polled believe "Jews exert too much influence on world events" and that "Jews are exploiting the Holocaust for their own purposes," over twice as many -- 44 and 45 percent, respectively -- former West Germans agreed.

Dr. David Jordice, senior vice president of D3 Systems, the U.S. marketing and opinion research organization that conducted the survey, together with the Emnid Institute, a German polling organization, offered one possible reason that East Germans have more liberal attitudes toward Jewish concerns.

"Historically, the East German government favored the Arab side politically, and in an oppressive regime, people often sought a way to tweak their government's nose," he explained. But he admitted, "We don't have a full answer yet."

Great differences also existed between the opinions of German leaders and the beliefs of their constituents.

For example, while 100 percent of the politicians believe that schoolchildren should be taught about the Nazi period, only 68.5 percent of West German voters, and 84 percent of East Germans agreed.

Symposium Planned In Bonn

Younger and better-educated Germans were less likely to express negative attitudes, the survey found.

"One of the most encouraging results of the survey was the way the 'elites' (as the politicians are called) responded," said AJCommittee's Harris. "Our challenge is to more effectively utilize the elites to transmit their opinions."

"This information provides a firm base upon which we can develop programming responses to troubling trends," he said.

According to Dr. David Singer, director of research and publications at AJCommittee, the results of the survey pose "a serious challenge to Germans and to Jews as well."

The issues raised by the survey will be addressed at a symposium next March in Bonn, under the joint auspices of AJCommittee and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

There, about two dozen politicians, educators and journalists will discuss "why these attitudes develop and what can be done about them," said Wolfgang Pordzik, the North American representative of the German foundation.

FORMER SS GUARD HAS 2 MONTHS TO APPEAL DENATURALIZATION

By Marilyn Ruby

The Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle

MILWAUKEE, Dec. 19 (JTA) -- Anton Tittjung of Greenfield, Wis., has two months to appeal the revocation of his U.S. citizenship for concealing his service as a guard at a Nazi concentration camp during World War II.

Federal District Court Judge John Reynolds ruled here last Friday that Tittjung, 66, was a member of the Waffen SS Death's Head Battalion that guarded the Gross Raming subcamp of the Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria.

The judge noted that at Gross Raming, "at least 185 prisoners were killed during the period of Tittjung's service."

The U.S. Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations accused him of concealing his SS service in 1952 when he entered the United States, and again in 1973, when he successfully applied for U.S. citizenship.

OSI will begin deportation proceedings against Tittjung after two months if he has not filed an appeal, according to Ronnie Edelman, the Justice Department's head prosecutor in the hearing.

If deported, Tittjung could choose the country of his relocation, according to Edelman.

Tittjung's attorney, David Cannon of Milwaukee, had no comment Tuesday about the case. A man who answered the telephone at Tittjung's house said the defendant had no comment.

A deportation hearing similar to Tittjung's will begin in federal court here Jan. 2 against Anton Baumann of West Allis, Wis.

Baumann allegedly served in Buchenwald concentration camp in Germany and the Stutthof camp in occupied Poland.

WIESENTHAL CENTER ASKS ICRC TO CUT TIES TO RED CRESCENT By Tamar Levy

GENEVA, Dec. 19 (JTA) -- The Simon Wiesenthal Center has urged the International Committee of the Red Cross to sever all connections with the Palestinian Red Crescent, so that it does not find itself condoning an affront to the memory of 6 million Jewish Holocaust victims.

An article published in the July 1990 edition of the Palestinian Red Crescent's official organ, Balsam, called the existence of gas chambers a Jewish hoax to bilk money for Israel from Germany, along with other anti-Semitic canards.

The article was brought to the attention of ICRC President Cornelio Sommaruga by the European representative of the Wiesenthal Center, Shimon Samuels, who met with him Tuesday at the ICRC's Geneva headquarters, and in a letter signed by Rabbis Marvin Hier and Abraham Cooper, the center's dean and associate dean respectively.

Sommaruga's response to Samuels was that while he sympathized with the center's point of view and regretted the article, the ICRC could not intervene in the affairs of the 148 separate societies affiliated with the Red Cross.

He said that to "enter into the controversy would endanger ICRC action in the field," and advised Samuels not to press the issue too hard in today's climate.

Sommaruga told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency that he saw no point in giving publicity to an obscure journal virtually unknown in most of the world.

The Palestinian Red Crescent enjoys observer status with the ICRC, as does Israel. The ICRC moreover recognizes the Red Crescent, the Red Cross equivalent in Islamic countries, but not the Magen David Adom, its Israeli equivalent.

Samuels pointed that out to the ICRC chief. He reminded him of the meager help rendered Holocaust victims and Nazi persecutees by the Red Cross during World War II, and also brought up the fact that after the war, the Red Cross helped German war criminals get passports to escape to South America.

Jewish Control Of Media Alleged

The Palestinian Red Crescent is headed by Fathi Arafat, a medical doctor and the brother of Yasir Arafat, chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Dr. Arafat is listed as "general supervisor" on the masthead of Balsam, published in Nicosia, Cyprus, so he must be held responsible for its contents, the Wiesenthal Center said.

Balsam published a seven-page article, authored by Rim Arnov, which quoted extensively from Holocaust revisionists. Among those cited was French historian Robert Faurisson, whose 1976 book claiming there were not and could not have been gas chambers at Nazi concentration camps has been discredited by scholars.

Claiming that Israel could not survive without huge infusions of funds from Germany, the article charged that "the lie concerning the gas chambers enabled the Jews to establish the State of Israel."

It complained that anyone who questioned the Holocaust was threatened and subjected to ridicule by the pro-Zionist press.

According to the article, Jews have controlled the French media since the Revolution in

1789. "The Jews own 75 percent of the publishing houses in France, 100 percent of the press and 90 percent of the film and theater industries," it alleged.

"Jews regard themselves as the landlords of humanity, and the Nuremberg courts were manned mainly by Jews and their friends, who were directed by President Roosevelt's legal adviser, Samuel Rosenman," the Balsam piece said.

In their letter to Sommaruga, Hier and Cooper wrote: "In the name of the victims of the Holocaust, and in the name of our 380,000 members, we urge you to condemn this terrible provocation and to immediately discontinue the ICRC's relationship with the Palestinian Red Crescent Society.

"The international community in general, and the ICRC in particular, did not do enough to help the victims of the Holocaust in life. It should, therefore, take the lead in safeguarding their memory."

JUDGE REVOKES \$300,000 BAIL FOR ALLEGED KILLER OF KAHANE

By Jonathan Mark
The New York Jewish Week

NEW YORK, Dec. 19 (JTA) -- Expressing "outrage" and "revulsion" over strident attempts to influence his decision by both Jewish supporters of the late Rabbi Meir Kahane and Moslem backers of his accused killer, El Sayyid Nosair, New York State Supreme Court Judge A'vin Schlesinger revoked Nosair's bail Tuesday.

Schlesinger said he reversed his earlier decision to release the Egyptian-born former city employee on \$300,000 bail because of ample evidence that he might leave the jurisdiction, depart the country or kill himself if bail were posted.

There also was "a rather strong case" against the accused, the judge remarked. He promised an early trial.

Nosair, 35, is charged with the murder of Kahane, founder of the militant Jewish Defense League in New York and of the anti-Arab Kach movement in Israel, while he was addressing a Zionist meeting at a midtown Manhattan hotel on Nov. 5.

Nosair has pleaded not guilty.

Schlesinger, who is Jewish, set bail on Dec. 5 but suspended it temporarily so that the Manhattan District Attorney's Office could reargue.

Schlesinger came under intense fire from Jewish elements led by N.Y. State Assemblyman Dov Hikind and City Councilman Noach Dear, who represent heavily Orthodox Jewish neighborhoods in Brooklyn.

Hikind and Dear were among several hundred mostly Orthodox Jews who demonstrated against bail outside the courthouse Tuesday, while a similar number of devout Moslems demonstrated for Nosair's release.

The two groups burned flags and screamed threats and invectives at each other but were kept apart by the police.

Schlesinger, who refused to disqualify himself because he is Jewish, as some had argued he should, angrily reprimanded the hundreds of people who threatened his life, made crank phone calls and demonstrated outside his home after his original decision to set bail.

He said the harassment was "odious" and expressed "contempt and utter revulsion" at the level of "hate which I have never experienced" before.