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**ISRAEL REPLIES TO NEW IRAQI THREAT
BY SAYING IT PLANS NO FIRST STRIKE**
By David Landau and Hugh Orgel

JERUSALEM, Dec. 24 (JTA) -- Israeli leaders are taking pains to reassure the world that Israel is not planning a pre-emptive strike against Iraq, despite Saddam Hussein's threat Sunday to launch a missile attack on Tel Aviv if war breaks out in the Persian Gulf.

At the same time, Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, Defense Minister Moshe Arens and Foreign Minister David Levy issued statements calculated to calm public fears here.

Hussein said in an interview on Spanish television that Tel Aviv would be the first target of Iraqi missiles if hostilities broke out.

"We are not panicked by such statements, but we regard the threat with all seriousness," Shamir told reporters Monday during a visit to the Beit She'an Valley. "One cannot tell what that man might do."

He said that chances of war in the Persian Gulf are greater now than ever before and warned that if Israel were hit, it would strike back with all of its power.

Arens disclosed that the Israel Defense Force is on a higher state of alert than normally would be the case.

The reassurances beamed abroad that Israel will not initiate a first strike followed reports that President Bush had received pledges from his Arab coalition partners that they would not abandon the anti-Iraq coalition in the event of an unprovoked Iraqi attack against Israel.

According to analysts, that means that if the United States could demonstrate to Syria and Egypt that Hussein embroiled Israel in the conflict without provocation, they would stand firm behind the U.S.-led coalition in subsequent hostilities with Iraq.

Attempt To Drive Wedge In Coalition

That delicate issue is believed to have been discussed at length by Bush and Shamir when they met in Washington earlier this month, and the two reportedly reached an understanding.

For the United States, it is crucial to maintain unity against attempts by Hussein to drive a wedge into the coalition by disguising the Persian Gulf conflict as an Iraqi-Israeli war.

From Israel's perspective, the IDF must be able to respond instantly to an Iraqi strike without regard to how it will affect the U.S.-led campaign to oust Iraqi troops from Kuwait.

Israeli leaders and generals have hinted that Baghdad and other targets would suffer devastating blows, particularly if an Iraqi first strike employed unconventional weapons.

But there are two possible scenarios that could keep Israel out of war despite Iraqi efforts to drag it into one.

If the Iraqi strike against Israel were more symbolic than strategic, designed to impress the Arabs rather than hurt Israel severely, Israel might be able to hold off its retaliation on the assumption that the American-led coalition was moving into battle.

According to the second scenario, even if the Iraqi strike were painful, Israel might be able

to avoid embroilment if an American retaliation were massive and instant.

Meanwhile, the general atmosphere in Israel was increasingly somber this week as the war clouds seemed to darken. Experts were quoted by the news media as saying that the chances of war are growing and the chances of Israel's involvement are growing, too.

Jordan Warned And Reassured

Arens, speaking Monday to high-school students in Holon, observed that Israel has only gone to war when it has been attacked, "and that is what will happen in the future."

He said Iraq has missiles capable of reaching Israel, but they have only limited effectiveness.

The public seems to believe that if there is a war, it would, at least initially, involve the air force rather than the entire IDF.

That calculation arises from the belief that Iraq lacks the strength, in the face of the coalition threat against it, to mount a serious ground attack on Israel across Jordanian territory.

Israel has no contiguous border with Iraq. The two countries are separated by Jordan.

Foreign Minister Levy warned Jordan on Monday not to allow its territory to be used by the Iraqis to attack Israel. He said he hoped the Jordanians know that Israel has no hostile intentions against them.

"On the contrary, Israel has repeatedly stressed its interest in preserving stability in Jordan," Levy said.

He added that King Hussein must not allow his realm to serve as a bridge for Iraqi hostilities against Israel.

**ITALIAN LEADER GREETES PLO OFFICIAL,
BACKS SEPARATE STATE FOR PALESTINIANS**
By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME, Dec. 24 (JTA) -- Italy's President Francesco Cossiga expressed strong support for a Palestinian state at a diplomatic reception here and urged that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict not be relegated to the sidelines because of the possibility of war with Iraq.

He said failure to resolve the conflict "is a source of serious instability" in the region.

The Italian chief of state, a Christian Democrat, spoke last Friday at his annual New Year's meeting with the foreign diplomatic corps. His remarks were consistent with the strong sympathy Italian governments have shown for the Palestinian cause.

Cossiga expressed his support for Palestinian statehood in his greeting to Nemer Hammad, the Palestine Liberation Organization's representative in Rome.

"I hope that you may be able to recompose your nation in an independent state with secure borders and that your people will no longer be oppressed and anguished by sorrows I have been a personal witness to and which I have followed with friendship for so many years," the Italian president said.

Cossiga also touched on the Palestinian issue in his address to the gathering.

"The absence of progress in the search for a solution is a source of serious instability and of

a mounting accumulation of highly destructive arms," he said.

"Our concern is further aggravated by the daily suffering of the people of the occupied territories, made more acute in these three years of intifada," he said.

"Our sensitivity for these sufferings and the consciousness of the necessity of a negotiated settlement, that safeguards the rights of nationalities and the security needs of both the Palestinian people and of Israel, are not pushed to the background even in this moment, when the danger of a terrible military conflagration looms in the Middle East," he said.

AIPAC CLEARED BY FEC OF CHARGES IT DIRECTS CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS

By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, Dec. 24 (JTA) -- The American Israel Public Affairs Committee has been cleared by the Federal Election Commission of charges that it coordinates congressional campaign contributions made by various pro-Israel political action committees, which are barred by federal law from acting in collusion.

The unanimous decision by the FEC's six commissioners was actually reached last December, but not officially released to the public until last week, after growing pressure from the pro-Israel community to have itself cleared from what AIPAC called "the complainants' paranoid conspiracy theory."

The FEC did not initially want to release its decision, because it has not yet ruled on a final issue: whether AIPAC must register as a political action committee. Unlike PACs, whose purpose is to make contributions to political candidates, AIPAC maintains that it is a non-partisan lobby for Israel in Washington.

An AIPAC spokesperson said the outstanding issue has to do with whether the 55,000-member organization is or is not technically a "membership organization." The FEC is expected to make that decision at the same time it concludes a similar inquiry into other groups with large memberships that have some involvement in the political arena.

The charges against the pro-Israel lobby were filed in January 1989 by seven former government officials, with help from the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee. They alleged that AIPAC had illegally coordinated political contributions made by 27 pro-Israel PACs.

Newer Charges Also Dismissed

Among the seven was former Rep. Paul Findley (R-Ill.), who has blamed AIPAC for his failure to win a 1982 re-election bid. Findley filed separate charges last July, alleging that AIPAC coordinated contributions to the re-election campaign of Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa), who had appeared at AIPAC fund-raising events in Atlanta in June 1989.

That charge was also dismissed by the FEC, in a unanimous ruling issued Oct. 30.

Federal election law allows a PAC to contribute a maximum of \$10,000 to a political candidate: \$5,000 in primary elections and \$5,000 in general elections.

The law prohibits PACs from coordinating their contributions, because that would create a "super PAC" with the ability to direct a series of \$5,000 checks to a candidate.

AIPAC would have violated the law if it had

been found to "establish, finance, control or maintain" more than one pro-Israel PAC.

The seven complainants alleged that AIPAC established, controls and maintains the PACs, but did not claim that AIPAC finances them.

But in a report by FEC General Counsel Lawrence Noble, dated Nov. 29, 1989, the FEC found "insufficient evidence" that AIPAC and the 27 PACs violated the law "by exceeding the contribution limitations" for PACs.

The FEC found some similarities among AIPAC and the PACs, including "similar patterns of contributions among some" of the PACs. It also found overlaps in membership between AIPAC and 24 of the PACs, with members of some PACs serving as AIPAC officers or as members of its executive committee or national council.

FEC rules, however, do not "preclude a person from participating in more than one organization," Noble wrote.

'Steady Stream Of Unfounded Allegations'

Noble also found that pro-Israel PAC members attend AIPAC's annual policy conference and receive AIPAC data on candidates' voting records on pro-Israel issues.

However, "it appears that each respondent PAC makes independent decisions regarding which candidate to support," Noble concluded.

The FEC also found that the "similar patterns of contributions" reflect the fact that the PACs charged "are primarily single-issue PACs focusing on candidates who support Israel."

In other words, one would expect 27 PACs whose chief aim is to promote pro-Israel candidates to make similar contributions.

In examining lists of contributors to the PACs, the FEC "discovered that there was very little overlap between contributors," Noble wrote. "For the most part, the respondent PACs primarily received contributions from individuals around their geographic location."

David Ifshin, a Washington attorney who is AIPAC's legal counsel, said the FEC rulings put to rest "the steady stream of unfounded allegations concerning AIPAC's legitimate activities."

But Findley was not so willing to concur, telling the Jewish Telegraphic Agency from his home in Jacksonville, Ill., that both the December 1989 and October 1990 rulings were a "miscarriage of justice."

"The FEC has not been very diligent in monitoring the situation presented by the political action PACs that are devoted to the interests of the State of Israel," Findley said.

But the AIPAC spokesperson revealed that the FEC was, in fact, so satisfied with the several thousand pages of documentation provided by AIPAC that it did not need to subpoena any additional information from the pro-Israel lobby.

Asked if AIPAC should have to register as a PAC, Findley said, "Oh, sure. They operate in the political field for and against candidates. I learned from someone I won't name (at AIPAC) that at least 70 percent of all the resources of AIPAC (in 1984) were devoted to the defeat of (former Sen.) Charles Percy (R-Ill.), so it is far beyond being just an information agency."

The AIPAC spokesperson called Findley's 70 percent figure "absolute nonsense" and said the pro-Israel lobby does not act in an "outright" manner on behalf of candidates.

REMINDER: The JTA Daily News Bulletin will not be published on Wednesday, Dec. 26.

JEWISH GROUPS TAKE STAND OPPOSING A CHANGE IN ISRAEL'S ABORTION LAW

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK, Dec. 24 (JTA) -- A coalition of American Jewish organizations has issued a statement strongly protesting a proposed change in Israel's abortion law that it contends would have the effect of limiting the availability of abortions to Israeli women.

The proposed change is one of four legislative demands made by the Orthodox Agudat Yisrael party as a condition for joining the Likud-led government coalition on Nov. 18.

The statement was drafted last week by 14 national American Jewish organizations and released Monday. Copies will be sent to Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, Menachem Porush, the Agudat Yisrael deputy minister of labor and social affairs; Ettia Simcha, Shamir's adviser on women's affairs; and to every Cabinet minister.

The two-paragraph statement opposes "any legislation that would limit a woman's fundamental right to privacy and confidentiality in making this most personal decision." It points out that in any country where abortion has been restricted, "the result has been a dramatic increase in the death rate for women."

"We urge Israeli leaders not to risk women's lives in the interests of political expediency," it says.

There were 15,300 legal abortions performed in Israel in 1988 and 6,000 illegal abortions that year, the last for which figures are available.

Under current Israeli law, if a woman wants an abortion, she must petition one of 27 committees, which are located in hospitals. Each committee is composed of two doctors and a social worker.

Private Hospital Committees At Issue

Though just six of the 27 committees are in private hospitals, as opposed to public or government hospitals, private hospitals perform over half of the legal abortions in Israel, according to Sylvia Horwitz, associate director of the Israel office of the American Jewish Congress, one of the organizations that signed the statement.

Agudat Yisrael wants the committees in private hospitals to be eliminated. The religious party's contention, Horwitz said, is that the private hospitals have a financial interest in approving abortions.

Simcha, the adviser on women's affairs, agreed to a compromise with Porush of Agudah under which the eliminated private committees would be replaced by additional public ones.

But that compromise is unacceptable for several reasons, according to Leslie Newman, New York representative of the Coalition to Prevent Passage of the Abortion Amendment in Israel.

The coalition is an umbrella group of 40 Israeli women's rights, civil rights and family planning organizations, including the Israel Women's Network, the Association for Civil Rights in Israel and the Israel Family Planning Association.

The Simcha-Porush compromise would effectively reduce the availability of abortion, even if all six private hospital committees were replaced, according to Newman.

Committees in public hospitals meet just one or two days a week to consider requests, whereas committees in private hospitals meet up to six days a week, Horwitz said.

If all of the committees were at public

hospitals, fewer cases would be considered, and women would have to wait longer to be approved, "often past the first trimester," according to the Coalition to Prevent Passage.

Cost Likely To Increase

As a result of the longer waiting time, many more women would seek illegal abortions from private doctors, the coalition says. And that would likely drive up the price, currently about \$1,000, which is nearly a month's salary for the average Israeli.

"If market demand increases the cost of private abortions, lower-income women will be forced to resort to back-alley abortions, performed under unsanitary and often life-threatening conditions," the coalition said in its background literature on the proposed legislation.

The coalition, now backed by 14 American Jewish organizations, has developed an alternative amendment, which proposes that the committees eliminated in private hospitals be replaced by committees in clinics and branch hospitals of Kupat Holim, the national health service offered by the Histadrut labor federation.

That would increase the number of cases considered and improve the geographic distribution of committees, since Kupat Holim clinics exist all over Israel.

And while Agudat Yisrael's amendment would give the power to establish or eliminate committees to the Ministry of Health, where the decisions would be subject to partisan political considerations, the alternative amendment "outlines clear medical criteria to determine which facilities may set up committees," said the Israeli coalition.

"The alternative amendment addresses Agudat Yisrael's concern about the alleged fiscal interest of private hospitals without limiting access to abortion committees," the group said.

Under current law, an abortion can be obtained in Israel for one of four reasons: if the pregnancy is extramarital or the result of a forbidden relationship, like rape or incest; if the woman is under 18 or over 40 years old; if there is risk of the child being born physically or mentally abnormal; or if the pregnancy is a health risk for the woman.

Originally there was a fifth clause permitting abortion for social or economic reasons, but that was repealed in 1979 because of pressure from the religious parties, Newman said.

Has Passed First Reading

The present amendment is now being considered by the Knesset Labor and Welfare Committee, after winning initial passage by the full house, and is expected to be introduced for a second reading any day, according to Newman.

If the legislation does not pass the second reading, it can be sent back to committee for further consideration and negotiation.

The joint statement opposing the Israeli legislation was organized by the National Council of Jewish Women at the request of the Coalition to Prevent Passage.

Also signing it were American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Congress, Americans for a Progressive Israel, Association of Reform Zionists of America, B'nai B'rith Women, Federation of Reconstructionist Congregations and Havurot, Jewish Labor Committee, Na'amat USA, National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, New Israel Fund, Rabbinical Assembly, United Synagogue of America and Women's League for Conservative Judaism.

**IDF OFFICER CHARGED WITH FRAUD
GETS NO SYMPATHY FROM COMRADES**

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Dec. 24 (JTA) -- An Israel Defense Force reserve officer has appealed to the High Court of Justice to cancel a plea bargain agreement made by an air force brigadier general accused of embezzling tens of millions of dollars slated for defense purchases.

Yona Yahav, a Haifa city councilman who is a reserve lieutenant colonel in the military police, filed the appeal apparently on behalf of IDF officers who believe Rami Dotan should be tried for treason.

Brig. Gen. Amnon Strashnov, the IDF judge advocate general, announced the plea bargain on Dec. 20, saying it was the only way to get to the bottom of a very serious investigation.

But Yahav asked the High Court to void the deal on grounds that it "contradicts all logic and reasonable precepts of law."

Yahav argued that it "violates the attorney general's directive against concluding such an arrangement with a figure considered central to a criminal conspiracy."

Dotan was remanded in custody for another 30 days by a military appeals court Monday. He has been under military police guard for the past six weeks at Tel Hashomer Hospital, where he is undergoing treatment for high blood pressure.

Dotan's alleged criminal conduct dates from 1984 and 1985, when he was the air force's senior procurement officer attached to the Defense Ministry's purchasing mission in New York.

His alleged accomplices include Harold Katz, a New York lawyer who holds dual Israeli and U.S. citizenship.

Katz, who has reportedly agreed to turn state's evidence in exchange for partial immunity, is suspected of being a financial courier for Dotan and for Jonathan Pollard, a former U.S. Navy analyst convicted of spying for Israel.

'Rami Betrayed Us All'

Yahav maintained that the plea bargains with Dotan and Katz "border on being unacceptable in the extreme because the two should have been charged with offenses that senior IDF officers have termed treason."

Strashnov said last week that Dotan has promised to return \$10 million to \$12 million he allegedly bilked from the Defense Ministry and to provide the names of his confederates.

The only condition he demanded was that the IDF refrain from prosecuting his wife, who allegedly participated in his swindles.

Strashnov said that even with the plea bargain, Dotan would face a 10- to 13-year prison term. He is charged with bribery, breach of trust, fraud and illegal acceptance of funds while conspiring to commit a crime.

Dotan was allegedly on the payroll of American military contractors while he was a procurement officer for Israel and received kick-backs from other firms.

He allegedly maintained illegal bank accounts abroad and set up dummy companies in the United States and Canada to conceal his thefts.

The IDF chief of staff, Gen. Dan Shomron, said last week that anyone employed in the defense establishment who harms Israel's security is surely a traitor.

Said Gen. Aviuh Bin-Nun, the air force commander, "Rami betrayed us all."

There is no reference to treason in the charge sheet, nor is there any mention of attempts by Dotan to cause bodily harm to Ofer Pa'il, an Israeli engineer who served under him in New York and later alerted the Defense Ministry to his alleged thefts.

The local news media reported last week that Dotan put out a "contract" on Pa'il to prevent him from giving evidence.

Asked about that, Strashnov said it was "not exactly a case of attempted murder" but declined to elaborate.

**FORMER IDF RECRUIT PLEADS GUILTY
TO RISHON LE-ZION SHOOTING SPREE**

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Dec. 24 (JTA) -- Ami Popper pleaded guilty Sunday in Tel Aviv District Court to shooting to death seven Arabs and wounding 10 others near Rishon le-Zion last May.

The 21-year-old former Israel Defense Force recruit reversed his earlier not guilty plea, entered even though he had cooperated with police in a reconstruction of the crime.

He insisted the May 20 killings were not premeditated.

All of the victims were Palestinian day laborers from the Gaza Strip waiting at a pick-up point for their Israeli employers.

The shooting spree triggered large-scale rioting in the administered territories and appeals by Palestinians for international protection.

Popper was described as mentally ill at the time of his arrest. But court-appointed psychologists declared him competent to stand trial.

His defense lawyers, also court-appointed, have demanded more state funds to seek a new ruling on his mental state from "objective psychiatrists."

The three-judge panel hearing the case was shown a videotape Monday of Popper's re-enactment of the shootings.

He told police at the time that his motive was revenge for his alleged rape by an Arab when he was 13 while four other Arabs watched and laughed.

He claimed he recognized his assailant among the laborers "with almost complete certainty" after lying in wait all night near the pick-up point.

Girlfriend Testifies

He said he emptied an entire magazine into the Arab who allegedly raped him and used four more magazines on the other workers, "in revenge for the laughter of those who had watched him being raped."

Popper wore his brother's IDF uniform during the shootings with an IDF-issue automatic rifle.

Popper's girlfriend also testified in court, her identity protected by court order. She said she had broken off their relationship two weeks before the assault and that Popper had threatened suicide.

The witness said that the day after the murders, when Popper was being sought by police, he drove to her home in a car with license plates from the administered territories and told her he had "done something terrible."

She testified Popper told her, "I shot seven Arabs to death in order to get close to you."

The woman also said that during their friendship, Popper had told her about his rape by an Arab.