

ANALYSTS SKEPTICAL ABOUT REPORT SYRIA IS READY TO RECOGNIZE ISRAEL

By Aliza Marcus

NEW YORK, Feb. 13 (JTA) -- Syria's reported offer Wednesday to recognize Israel's right to exist as part of a Middle East peace settlement is being greeted by foreign policy analysts with interest tempered by skepticism over what, if anything, it actually means.

Israeli officials reacted cautiously to reports of the offer, and the Israeli Consulate here issued a short statement reiterating Israel's desire to enter into "direct, bilateral, unconditional" negotiations with its Arab neighbors.

"We have in the past extended our hand for peace and normalization to Syria, as to any other Arab country, since Israel was established in 1948," said Yuval Rotem, the consulate spokesman.

Syria's proposal, announced by German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher after a meeting Wednesday with his Syrian counterpart in Damascus, specifically refers to Israel recognizing the Palestinians' right to self-determination as a condition for Syrian recognition of Israel.

Middle East experts here say the proposal, if true, could be a sign of the softening of the normally tense Israeli-Syrian relations.

Syrian President Hafez Assad has been one of the Jewish state's staunchest enemies, and before the Persian Gulf war started, Syria was considered by the United States and others to be possibly the leading exporter of terrorism.

Since the Aug. 2 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, Syria has linked up with the United States to fight Iraqi aggression, in the process shedding some of its negative image and perhaps becoming more open to U.S. influence, analysts said.

A Freer Hand In Lebanon?

According to Patrick Clawson, author of the study "Syria's Unaffordable Ambitions," Syria may have made this offer with an eye toward halting the arms race with Israel and using some of its new financial aid for other purposes. Like many of the countries taking part in the multinational effort to drive Iraq out of Kuwait, Syria has received financial aid promises from Saudi Arabia.

Clawson also asked whether in exchange for softening its position toward Israel, Syria expected to be given a freer hand in its intervention in Lebanon, as well as being treated as a major player in the region.

"Still, it's only a small step forward, because the offer includes first an overall settlement for the Palestinians," said Clawson, who is editor of *Orbis*, a journal published by the Foreign Policy Research Institute in Philadelphia.

Other analysts pointed out that with the diminished Soviet role in the region, Syria must look for a new supporter for weapons and economic aid. If the Soviet Union's place is to be taken by the United States, then it is to Assad's advantage to appear more moderate.

"This is a chance for Syria to make inroads with the United States, but I think it's really a little early to come to any definitive decisions until we know more about the offer," said Ken Jacobson, director of international affairs for the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith.

Still, there have been other signs of a softening of Syria's position toward Israel. Last June, Clawson said, there were credible rumors floating around of Syrian interest in accepting a demilitarized Golan Heights from Israel in exchange for a peace treaty. Israel captured the Golan Heights during the 1967 war and has since annexed it.

A few days ago, Secretary of State James Baker suggested to Israel's ambassador to the United States that Israel consider demilitarizing the Golan Heights and putting it under U.N. or U.S. supervision. Israeli officials have not formally responded to this suggestion.

No Change In Hostile Rhetoric

An Israeli official who did not want to be identified questioned whether Syrian officials would later deny Genscher's report, and he also asked why Genscher should have been the first to release the information.

"We are trying to be cautious about this statement, because we are used to having this kind of statement come from foreign ministers during private talks, which has later been contradicted by public statement," the Israeli said.

American Jewish organizational leaders were also skeptical.

"We have seen these games before, so it's hard to know where the Syrians stand," said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive director of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. "So we shouldn't read too much into it at this stage."

If Assad is "ready to negotiate, let him come directly with a proposal," Hoenlein said.

Some analysts pointed out that Syria's offer is not unlike earlier Israeli offers -- only turned on its head. Israel has always offered direct negotiations before settling the Palestinian question, while Syria wants the reverse.

Israeli officials added that recent statements out of Syria did not point to a radical shift in the country's position toward Israel.

A Syrian official attending the United Nations Human Rights Commission meetings in Geneva last Friday publicly resurrected the ancient blood libel against Jews.

"In the broader sense, the rhetoric coming out of Syria has been as hostile to Israel as ever before, and one doesn't come to any firm feelings that the Syrians have made any radical changes," said Jacobson of ADL.

U.S. AND ISRAEL HAVE NO COMMENT ON REPORTED PROMISE OF RADAR CODES
By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, Feb. 13 (JTA) -- U.S. and Israeli officials have declined comment on a CBS News report that the United States has promised to give Israel the electronic airplane identification codes it needs before it can launch an air strike on Iraqi targets.

In Israel, military and diplomatic commentators dismissed the CBS report as false. They said Defense Minister Moshe Arens had not requested the radar codes during his meetings Monday with President Bush, Defense Secretary Dick Cheney and Secretary of State James Baker.

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive director of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, also said the issue was "not discussed" and "not resolved" during the Arens visit. "Our understanding is that the CBS reports were wrong," he said.

But a reliable pro-Israel lobbyist here said Wednesday that the Pentagon has promised to provide the Identification Friend or Foe codes to Israel if Iraq attacks the Jewish state with unconventional weapons.

The electronic recognition codes, which are changed daily, are needed by the Israeli air force to distinguish allied aircraft from Iraqi planes. Without them, Israeli jets the run risk of accidentally shooting down "friendly" aircraft or mistaking enemy planes for allied ones.

U.S. officials "understand that if there is a gas bombing, Israel is going to go" launch an attack, regardless of whether or not it has the codes, the pro-Israel lobbyist said.

Israel Thinks It Can Do It Better

Bombings that would provoke swift Israeli retaliation include any Iraqi Scud missile attack with warheads containing biological, chemical or nuclear warheads, he said.

It is known that Iraq has chemical weapons, but U.S. officials have questioned whether Iraq is capable of mounting chemical warheads on its modified Scud missiles.

The CBS News report Tuesday said that the United States had agreed to provide the airline codes to Israel, but only after the allied forces begin a land invasion of Kuwait. During that phase of the war, allied bombers are expected to hit targets mainly in Kuwait, rather than in western Iraq, where Israeli planes would strike.

Capt. Sig Adams, a Pentagon spokesman, refused to comment on the report, except to say that since it was by CBS State Department correspondent Bill Plante, "it must have been a State Department source" who provided the information.

While the pro-Israel lobbyist and Hoenlein differed on whether the airline codes were requested, they seemed to agree Arens told senior U.S. officials Israel believes it is better able than the allied forces to destroy Iraq's Scud launchers.

"It may very well be that they discussed that," Hoenlein said. U.S. officials are "very much aware of Israel's feelings in that regard. I assume at some point that matter has come up."

When Arens made the comment about Israel's perceived superiority in destroying Iraqi Scuds, "there was nothing specifically stated from the U.S. side," the lobbyist reported.

(JTA correspondent Hugh Orgel in Tel Aviv contributed to this report.)

U.N CHIEF ASKED TO URGE IRAQ NOT TO USE UNCONVENTIONAL ARMS By Aliza Marcus

NEW YORK, Feb. 13 (JTA) -- U.N. Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar is being urged by three Jewish leaders to tell Iraq that the use of unconventional weapons against civilian populations would represent a "retreat for humanity in history."

The leaders, presidents of the American Jewish Committee, the Anglo-Jewish Association of Great Britain and the Alliance Israelite Universelle of France, sent the message Monday to Perez de Cuellar to draw his attention to the dangers of Iraq's chemical and biological arsenal.

"There was a real desire to alert the secretary-general of the real danger to world peace of such a horrific prospect of chemical or biological weapons, and we hope the U.N. will speak and speak out forcefully," said Sholom Comay, president of AJCommittee.

The message appealed to public opinion, "sometimes muted by pacifist tendencies, to understand the extreme importance of what is at stake."

The message also conveyed the fear of the "eventual use toward terrorist ends of chemical or bacteriological warfare against the civilian populations of Israel or of Saudi Arabia."

SADDAM HUSSEIN MUST BE OVERTHROWN IF THERE IS TO BE PEACE, SHAMIR SAYS By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME, Feb. 13 (JTA) -- Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir believes one of the allies' goals in the Persian Gulf war should be the removal of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein from power.

If that is not accomplished, Israel and the entire region will face more wars in the future, Shamir warned in an interview published Wednesday in the Italian daily Corriere della Sera.

He stressed that Israel fully intends to pursue the peace process with its Arab neighbors and the Palestinians in the postwar period.

Shamir also urged the Vatican to extend diplomatic recognition to Israel.

"The pope should clearly express his political attitude toward us. In other words, he should immediately recognize the State of Israel," the prime minister said.

"We are not running this war, but as interested observers, we say that the crisis cannot be resolved without the removal of the Iraqi dictator. A conclusion that does not envision this would expose us, within a short time, to new attacks," Shamir maintained.

He said that while Israel is not part of the U.S.-led coalition fighting Iraq, it is in close contact with the allies with respect to its position and eventual response to Iraqi missile attacks on Israel.

"When we decide to do our part, we will not act autonomously but in strict coordination with the leaders of the coalition," the Israeli leader said, adding, "As far as this is concerned, we are in permanent contact with the American authorities."

Shamir said he did not believe the Gulf war would escalate into a general conflict between "the Judeo-Christian world and the radical Moslem bloc."

He said the attitude of the Palestine Liberation Organization and other Arab forces that support Saddam Hussein confirm Israel's view of the PLO. He said he hoped the rest of the world would come to share that view.

The prime minister said that despite the "treacherous and unrestrained aggression" against Israeli civilians by Iraq, with the enthusiastic backing of the Palestinian population, "we have to think about the postwar period."

"Given that we fervently believe in the eternity of our state and for no reasons on earth are we disposed to give up the aspirations to live one day in peace within secure boundaries, we will seek to exploit the new situation that will be created in order to reach our objective," Shamir said.

SHAMIR ATTEMPTS TO MOLLIFY LEVY, BUT MAY REALLY SEEK TO ISOLATE HIM

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Feb. 13 (JTA) -- Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir is seeking to mollify David Levy over what the foreign minister considers an intrusion into his foreign policy domain by Defense Minister Moshe Arens.

But observers here detect a devious game being played at the top echelons of the Likud government aimed at isolating Levy, who may have emerged as too independent a foreign minister for Shamir's taste.

Levy was furious that Arens visited Washington four days before his own scheduled visit, meeting not only with his U.S. counterpart, Defense Secretary Dick Cheney, but with President Bush and with Secretary of State James Baker, whom Levy was scheduled to see Friday.

Levy abruptly postponed his trip Tuesday.

Shamir, who had been on the sidelines, heaped praise on the foreign minister Wednesday for his recent talks with the German foreign minister, Hans-Dietrich Genscher. They led to German arms assistance to Israel and a revival of submarine building orders Arens was forced to cancel last year for budgetary reasons.

But while the premier seemed to be aware of Levy's offended sensibilities, political observers believe he is not overly concerned with them.

Even his praise for Levy associated the foreign minister with defense issues, as if to say there was nothing wrong with the defense minister discussing diplomatic topics in Washington.

Sources in the Prime Minister's Office are saying that Shamir and Levy do not "think alike." They say Shamir has several "accounts" he wants to settle with Levy, who was long considered a Likud hard-liner.

Shamir is angry at the foreign minister for refusing to vote to confirm Shamir's appointment of Rehavam Ze'evi of the extreme right-wing Moledet party to the Cabinet. And he disapproves of Levy's remarks in support of opening a diplomatic process with Syria, which is heresy to Shamir.

The prime minister resents what he considers attempts by Levy to appear to be guiding Israeli foreign policy, especially in the United States.

Shamir, who is allied with Arens in the Likud bloc, is believed to have signaled both Levy and the U.S. administration that he is boss.

ISRAEL AGAIN RAIDS SOUTHERN LEBANON

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Feb. 13 (JTA) -- Israeli air strikes against terrorist bases in southern Lebanon were reported Tuesday night, followed by an intense half-hour artillery barrage Wednesday by the Israel Defense Force and its allied South Lebanon Army.

According to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, Israeli air force planes dropped flares over Palestinian refugee camps in the areas of Tyre and Sidon during the night in order to illuminate targets.

Reports from Sidon said Israeli planes attacked bases of the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Islamic fundamentalist Hezbollah (Party of God). One plane fired an air-to-ground missile at a site used by the PLO's Al Fatah wing, the report said.

The IDF and SLA shelling from the southern Lebanon security zone did not affect areas occu-

ped by the Lebanese regular army, which has been moving south during the past two weeks, sources in Lebanon said.

Lebanon's defense minister, Michel Murr, was reported to have said Tuesday in Beirut that the Lebanese army has been ordered to prevent attacks on Israel from the areas under its control.

ISRAELIS BECOMING SOUND EXPERTS, IDENTIFYING SCUDS BY THEIR 'WHOOOSH'

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Feb. 13 (JTA) -- Confined to a room sealed with tape and plastic sheets against poison gas, yet still wearing gas masks, thousands of Israelis enduring the Scud missile blitz depend on their ears to let them know what's happening.

Their radios are the source of official information and instructions. But most people are tuned to more immediate sounds, after four weeks of intermittent missile attacks that have injured hundreds and damaged over 7,000 homes in the Tel Aviv and Ramat Gan areas.

If, two minutes after the alert sirens sound, the now-familiar "whoosh" of a Patriot anti-missile missile has not been heard, people can be fairly certain that whatever was incoming is not headed in their direction.

But every time the Patriots make their noisy way skyward, there are a few tense seconds of listening. The midair explosion of a Patriot intercepting a Scud presages a shower of debris that can cause heavy damage and casualties.

Some people relax when they hear the ear-splitting blast of a Scud warhead. They are convinced, rightly or wrongly, that the louder the explosion the more likely it is that the Scud carried a conventional warhead.

No one has yet heard the sound a chemical warhead makes, and all hope they never will.

Brig. Gen. Nachman Shai, the Israel Defense Force's official spokesman, insists that the threat of gas attack is very real and that in the event of one, a gas-proof room in one's home is the safest place to be.

Kids Whose Families Fled Taunted

Shai's voice has become Israel's most familiar, heard on the air immediately after sirens sound. When a missile hits, it is Shai who assures the public that "experts are on their way to or already at the impact site to ascertain the type of missile fired."

When it is confirmed the missile is conventional, as all have been so far, the country is released from shelter region by region.

Residents of the affected area -- mainly Greater Tel Aviv -- are told they can remove their gas masks. But they are instructed to remain in the sealed rooms a while longer, probably to keep them from going out to inspect the damage and interfering with rescue work.

The stouthearted residents of Tel Aviv, Ramat Gan and adjacent townships designated Area 1 by the civil defense, are proud that they have toughed out more than a dozen missile strikes since Jan. 18. They look down with disdain on those who have fled the city for safer parts.

Now that children have returned to school, kids who were evacuated by their parents after the first missile attack face the merciless scorn of classmates who stayed. It will be even worse for the youngsters who were taken abroad "for the duration" and did not share the experiences of the missile blitz with their peers.

CANADIAN RIGHTS LEAGUE FINDS HIGHEST ANTI-SEMITISM EVER

By Bram D. Eisenthal

MONTREAL, Feb. 13 (JTA) -- The number of anti-Semitic incidents in Canada has reached its highest level in the nine years since figures were tabulated, according to the Quebec branch of the League for Human Rights of B'nai Brith Canada.

At a news conference called here to disclose the findings of its 1990 audit of anti-Semitic incidents, the league reported a total of 210 such acts, up from 176 last year -- a 19 percent increase.

A news conference was held simultaneously in Toronto, where racist groups have been more active of late.

The report takes into account acts against individuals or institutions, including harassment, hate propaganda and vandalism of a racial nature, which are reported to the league, which is affiliated with the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai Brith in the United States.

Acts of harassment were dramatically higher, up from 113 in 1989 to 150 in 1990, an increase of 33 percent. Acts of vandalism actually decreased, from 63 the previous year to 60 last year. But overall, the statistics have tripled since 1987, when there were 55 anti-Semitic incidents.

Regionally, Toronto experienced the highest incidence of anti-Semitic acts, 78 cases, of which 67 percent constituted harassment. There were 28 cases of anti-Semitic acts recorded in the rest of Ontario.

Montreal was tied with British Columbia for the second-highest rate of anti-Semitic acts, 34 such incidents.

The audit refers to "two disturbing trends": that 1990 represents the third straight year of increased incidents and that anti-Semitic acts have dramatically risen in severity.

The league's report theorizes that increases in anti-Semitic acts may have been affected by 1990 having been a year of social, political and economic upheaval both nationally and internationally.

'Marginal Racist Groups'

Moreover, it was noted, in 1990 there was still confusion about the interpretation of the "hate propaganda" section of Canada's Criminal Code. Canada's high court did not uphold the validity of the anti-hate law until December 1990, by which time most of the anti-Semitic incidents had occurred.

At the Montreal conference, the league's Quebec branch president, Concordia University Professor Stephen Scheinberg, said he believed the increase in incidents does not portend a dangerous alignment of neo-Nazi or white supremacist groups in Canada.

"To my mind, the majority of incidents are confined to marginal racist groups among the population," he said. "But these groups are also getting better organized all the time, and we have to remain vigilant."

He singled out several of the incidents, including cemetery desecrations in Montreal, Ottawa and Quebec City over a six-week period last spring, and assaults on Hasidic Jews in Montreal's Outremont suburb last October as among the major incidents affecting Jews locally.

Scheinberg said anti-Semitism in Canada during the 1930s and 1940s may have been much worse than today, but was not reported.

DISCOVERY OF LETTER BOMB IN LONDON PUTS JEWISH AGENCIES IN U.K. ON ALERT

By Bernard Josephs
London Jewish Chronicle

LONDON, Feb. 13 (JTA) -- The discovery of a letter bomb in the office of a Jewish communal organization Tuesday morning has put the entire British Jewish community on the alert and triggered a major police investigation.

Scotland Yard and officials of the Board of Deputies of British Jews have urged Jews all over country to exercise maximum vigilance.

Board of Deputies officials telephoned communal organizations throughout the country to make sure the "be vigilant" message struck home.

"This appears to have been an incendiary device and could have caused injury to anyone who opened it," a police spokesman said.

The target was Jewish Care, a welfare organization that has offices in Golders Green, northwest London.

Anti-terrorist squad detectives and bomb squad officers were called to the scene. The building and others in the vicinity, including the Menorah Primary School and the Michael Sobell Day Center for the Elderly, were evacuated.

Julian Snowman, a postal clerk employed by Jewish Care, discovered the device in the morning mail, only a few days after a threatening letter had been received. He said he became suspicious because the 7-by-5-inch brown, padded envelope had no return address and felt as though there were metal inside it.

The envelope was addressed in press-on lettering to the Jewish Welfare Board, Jewish Care's former name. "I recognized the lettering as being similar to a letter we had received a week earlier," Snowman said.

That letter, mailed in the Islington section of London, threatened "death" and was signed by "Mulhazin (Arabic for colonel) Mamzart Islam."

But the police said they do not believe the bomb came from an Arab terrorist group.

A spokesman for the Board of Deputies' community security organization said the letter bomb was the first to be delivered to a Jewish organization in "many years."

He said it was an escalation of recent attacks and threats against the Jewish community, including arson at a school and two synagogues in London and Birmingham, and anti-Semitic daubings on gravestones at Jewish cemeteries.

NATIONAL FRONT DISAVOWS LEAFLETS

PARIS, Feb. 13 (JTA) -- Jean-Marie Le Pen's extreme right-wing National Front has dissociated itself from a splinter group that has been handing out anti-Semitic leaflets in its name.

Le Pen's spokesman, Alain Vizier, said the head of the group, Michel Schneider, "has been kicked out of the National Front because of his extremist positions."

"We are very upset because he uses the name of his former boss in our party, but he is in fact in total opposition to Le Pen," Vizier told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

The leaflets, in Arabic, urge France's Moslem population to rally against "world Zionism."

They allege that "Zionism rules and dominates directly and indirectly all the vital and strategic areas, including the press, the banking financial institutions, security, justice, the army and finally the power."