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**BUSH TO FOLLOW BAKER MISSION  
WITH MIDEAST TRIP OF HIS OWN**

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, March 13 (JTA) -- President Bush expects to visit Israel and other Middle East countries soon, although no date has been set.

Bush wants to go "sooner rather than later," White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater said Tuesday. Current speculation about the date centers on late April.

The president is expected also to visit Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkey, the main Middle East countries involved in Operation Desert Storm.

The impetus for the trip was an invitation from the government of Kuwait for Bush to visit that country in order to thank him for his leadership of the military coalition that liberated Kuwait from Iraqi occupation.

However, the presidential trip can also be seen as a follow-up to Secretary of State James Baker's visit to the Middle East this week. It would be a continuation of the administration's effort to use the prestige Bush reaped from his leadership in the Persian Gulf war to move the Middle East peace process forward.

The Middle East is the focus of meetings Bush will have with his main Western allies during the next five days. He left for Ottawa on Wednesday to meet with Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney.

On Thursday, he was to fly to Martinique for a meeting with French President Francois Mitterrand, which was to be followed by a weekend meeting in Bermuda with British Prime Minister John Major.

**Bush Urged To Press Arab Recognition**

Unlike Baker, who made his first visit to Israel this week, Bush visited Israel as vice president in July 1986, as part of a 10-day visit to the Middle East. On the Israel leg of the journey, he was accompanied by eight leading Jewish Republicans.

Baker's visit to Israel may have caused Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir to cancel a trip to Washington.

Shamir was scheduled to address the opening session of the 32nd annual policy conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee this Sunday. But he is not expected to attend now, although his appearance has not officially been canceled. He already canceled a visit to Canada that was scheduled this week.

On Capitol Hill, meanwhile, more than half the members of the House of Representatives have signed a letter to Bush asking him to "place official recognition of Israel" by the Arab states "at the top of your agenda for peace in the Middle East."

Pointing out that the United States liberated Kuwait and prevented an invasion of Saudi Arabia, the letter says those two countries "should unconditionally recognize the sovereignty of Israel and establish formal diplomatic relations."

At least 239 members of the House have signed the letter, according to an aide to Rep. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.), who is sponsoring it along with Rep. Vin Weber (R-Minn.).

**NEWS ANALYSIS:****BAKER TRIP YIELDS NO BREAKTHROUGHS,  
BUT CREATES AN ATMOSPHERE OF HOPE**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, March 13 (JTA) -- U.S. Secretary of State James Baker has succeeded in a few crowded days in creating an atmosphere of hopeful expectation on both sides of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

It is an ingredient notably absent for years from this region and a vital first step toward advancing the ambitious goals set forth by President Bush, who has indicated he wants to visit the region himself in the near future.

One idea extensively discussed by Baker at his meetings here with Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and others is for a regional peace conference, as opposed to an international one. It would involve all of the states of the region and the Palestinians, and it would be held under the auspices of the superpowers rather than the United Nations.

Baker will lose no time establishing the context for such an undertaking. His next step, according to Israeli sources, is an attempt to persuade the Kremlin to restore diplomatic relations with Israel. The subject was expected to come up during his visit to Moscow this week.

For the moment, though, the secretary urged his Israeli hosts to provide some "confidence-building" gestures to impress upon the Palestinians and the broader Arab world the sincerity of Israel's interest in a peace settlement.

**Reopening Universities**

He suggested, for example, that Israel consider reopening the universities in the West Bank, which have been shut down by the authorities since the start of the intifada in December 1987.

Baker and his aides also hinted that the Arab states may be prepared to make concomitant gestures, such as ending their longtime trade boycott of Israel.

Such moves do not, of course, address the fundamental issue of land for peace, the formula firmly endorsed by Bush in his March 6 speech to a joint session of Congress.

But they advance Washington's strategy, which is to create a climate of peacemaking on both sides of the conflict before plunging into the thicket of the peace terms themselves.

Plainly, Baker's swing through Saudi Arabia, where he met last weekend with eight Arab foreign ministers, and his stop in Egypt overnight Sunday did not produce dramatic breakthroughs.

He admitted as much here Monday night, when, at a news conference with "my friend David," as he called Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy, Baker spoke of the prospect of long, arduous diplomacy in the months ahead.

By the same token, the secretary did not flinch from that prospect. Nor did he avoid searching questions as to whether Washington is prepared to invest the requisite levels of American prestige and commitment.

In fact, Baker has elevated the profile of the American diplomatic initiative to a much higher level than most observers expected.

Reporters inevitably were reminded of Henry

Kissinger's ubiquitous "shuttle diplomacy" of the 1970s to arrange truces following the Yom Kippur War. Baker did not demur at the analogy.

In a tactical move designed to elicit forthcoming responses from Israel, Baker backed the Shamir government's positions on at least two elements of the unfolding peace process:

- He warmly congratulated the government for reaffirming its own May 1989 peace plan and went out of his way to pronounce that plan still valid and a working basis for progress.

- He supported Shamir's desire for a "two-track approach," in which the Arab states would be asked to normalize relations with Israel at the same time as Israel negotiates a settlement with the Palestinians.

### Conditions Are Ripe

That simultaneous effort was an element of Israel's 1989 initiative that did not get much attention at the time because the U.S. administration focused on the innovative plan for Palestinian elections.

In the wake of the Persian Gulf war and the cohesion shown by the U.S.-led coalition against Iraq, Baker apparently believes conditions are ripe for Israel and key Arab states to move toward non-belligerency and peace in tandem with Israeli-Palestinian talks.

But there is a rocky road ahead before those generalized principles begin to be translated into practice.

In Israel, the process may well lead to a breakup of the present governing coalition. Hard-line elements within the ruling Likud party are already protesting over what they perceive to be a weakening of resolve to make no territorial concessions.

At the same time, some of the religious parties in the government are urging greater flexibility.

There was a public hint of disagreement with the U.S. ideas during Baker's visit when Shamir's media spokesman, Avi Pazner, observed that Israel preferred to give "priority" to talks with the Arab states over talks with the Palestinians.

That attitude could create a "Catch-22" situation, because the Arab states condition their readiness to make peace with Israel on the Jewish state's ability to resolve its conflict with the Palestinians.

### Firsthand Look

Baker got a firsthand look at the tremendous obstacles to an Israeli-Palestinian settlement during his stay in Israel.

A pall was cast over the visit before it even began, when a Palestinian from the Gaza Strip on Sunday brutally stabbed four Israeli women to death near a children's playground in Jerusalem.

The secretary went out of his way to express solidarity and sympathy with the victims and their families. He laid wreaths on the graves in an unscheduled ceremony.

But in a speech Tuesday in the Galilee development town of Carmiel, Baker cited such terrorist acts as a compelling reason why "we peacemakers" must not be daunted from seizing the opportunity that the Gulf war victory had presented.

Baker's meeting on Tuesday with 10 local Palestinian leaders at the American Consulate in western Jerusalem was seen by some analysts here as a significant and potentially promising development.

It signaled the emergence of an indigenous, influential Palestinian representation in the administered territories after the Palestine Liberation Organization discredited itself in Washington and other Western capitals by supporting Saddam Hussein.

To be sure, the local Palestinians took pains to let Baker know their meeting with him was by grace of prior approval from Yasir Arafat at PLO headquarters in Tunis.

But U.S. officials said later that this seemed more a ritual incantation than an indication of the true state of affairs within the Palestinian nationalist movement.

Nevertheless, the United States will have to look to the Arab members of its anti-Iraq coalition to help the West Bank and Gaza Strip populations break loose from the grip the PLO has had on the Palestinians for decades.

Baker suggested that Israel could help greatly in that direction by easing certain restrictions in the administered territories.

Observers said that if Israel responded to this request with concrete measures, it would be seen as an achievement for Baker personally and would improve the prospects of an indigenous Palestinian leadership evolving.

Israeli sources said Wednesday that Shamir was pleased with the way Baker's visit went. And Foreign Minister Levy made no secret of his satisfaction.

The Americans, for their part, stressed at news briefings that Shamir did not actually say "no" to any of the secretary's ideas.

At this sensitive initial stage, that was about the best which could be hoped for. The Americans departed Wednesday morning gratified that progress had been made, if only in the realm of "atmospherics."

### GERMANS UNLIKELY TO PRESSURE LEVY ON MIDDLE EAST PEACE DURING VISIT

By David Kantor

BONN, March 13 (JTA) -- German leaders are expected to take great pains not to appear to be pressuring Israel during Foreign Minister David Levy's visit here Thursday and Friday.

Levy arrives here fresh from talks in Jerusalem earlier this week with U.S. Secretary of State James Baker.

According to knowledgeable sources here, Germany will refrain from offering him any advice inasmuch as the European Community has already decided against a new Middle East initiative now, in order to give American diplomacy a chance to work.

Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher therefore is expected to take his cue from the current chairman of the E.C. Council of Ministers, Luxembourg's Foreign Minister Jacques Poos, who said this week that the time is not ripe to press for an international conference for Middle East peace.

Israel is firmly opposed to an international conference in principle, and Washington has said that now is not the appropriate time for such a gathering.

The Germans, anxious not to irritate their guest, also are unlikely to suggest to Levy that Israel deal with the Palestine Liberation Organization.

According to German and Israeli officials here, their talks will concentrate on bilateral issues.

**SHARON RESCINDS RESIGNATION AS HEAD OF MINISTERIAL PANEL ON ABSORPTION**

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, March 13 (JTA) -- Housing Minister Ariel Sharon on Wednesday withdrew his resignation as chairman of the committee on immigrant absorption, saying the reasons that motivated him to quit no longer applied.

Sharon, who announced his resignation Sunday, had blasted the Industry and Trade Ministry for failing to provide sufficient jobs for immigrants from the Soviet Union and had accused Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir of lukewarm backing for his policies.

Sources close to the Prime Minister's Office said Sharon withdrew his resignation when he learned that Shamir planned to appoint Industry and Trade Minister Moshe Nissim, the very man he criticized, to replace him as chairman of the absorption committee.

His return to the panel also followed Finance Minister Yitzhak Moda'i's decision Tuesday to restore recent cuts in the subsidies new immigrants receive during their first year in the country.

The move brought the stipend back to its previous level of 17,000 shekels in cash and services for a family of three. That is equivalent to about \$7,750 under the new exchange rate set after the shekel's devaluation Sunday.

Sharon claimed Wednesday that it was he who had convinced the finance minister to act. He also said Shamir had promised him more support and additional powers and that he was assured the government would act vigorously to relieve unemployment among new olim.

Despite the acute housing shortage, lack of jobs is said to be the main cause of dissatisfaction among immigrants.

**KNESSET REJECTS DEATH PENALTY AS DETERRENT FOR TERRORISTS**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, March 13 (JTA) -- The Knesset on Wednesday decisively rejected the death penalty for terrorists, after a stormy debate in which one member was ejected and the session suspended for five minutes to allow tempers to cool.

The measure, introduced as a private members bill, rather than a government initiative, by Tzahi Hanegbi of Likud, called for hanging terrorists who commit murder. It was defeated by a vote of 35-16.

Justice Minister Dan Meridor explained that the government's opposition to capital punishment was based on neither moral nor legal considerations.

On both those grounds, hanging the perpetrators of heinous crimes is justified, he said. The issue therefore reduces to a pragmatic question, the justice minister said: Would hanging be a deterrent, or would it encourage crimes of desperation?

Meridor pointed out that Israel's security services continue to oppose the death sentence.

The ferocity of the debate reflected the country's shock and fury over Sunday's fatal stabbings of four Israeli women by an Palestinian from the Gaza Strip.

The debate degenerated rapidly into vituperative mudslinging between Hanegbi, on one side, and some members of the Labor Party and Citizens Rights Movement on the other.

**8 YEARS LATER, JORDANIAN CHARGED WITH ATTEMPTED EL AL BOMBING**

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, March 13 (JTA) -- A Jordanian citizen was charged in a Lod military court Wednesday with attempting to bomb an El Al airliner in mid-flight eight years ago.

The incident, which included the successful smuggling of a bomb on board an El Al flight, was revealed for the first time at the arraignment of Fuad Hassin a-Shara, 36, allegedly a member of the terrorist May 15 faction of Al Fatah, the main branch of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Shara was removed last year from a car ferry, which was stopped and boarded by the Israeli navy on the high seas while enroute from Cyprus to Lebanon.

According to the charge sheet, Shara befriended a young Greek woman, whom he sent to Israel on a shopping trip with money and a return air ticket.

He allegedly instructed her to become acquainted with security measures at Ben-Gurion Airport, purchase souvenirs in various parts of the country and meet him in London.

Unknown to the woman, Shara allegedly gave her a booby-trapped suitcase fixed to explode during the return flight to London. It failed to explode and was discovered after the plane landed at London.

The case is reminiscent of one in April 1986 in which Nezar Hindawi, a Jordanian, tried to dupe his pregnant Irish girlfriend into bringing a bomb made of Semtex plastic explosives, hidden in her luggage, aboard an El Al jumbo jet from London to Tel Aviv. The attempt was successfully stopped when El Al security personnel became suspicious of a pregnant woman traveling alone to Israel for a visit.

Hindawi was convicted in the fall of that year in London's Old Bailey criminal courthouse and sentenced to 45 years in prison.

The charge sheet against Shara did not specify how the bomb was discovered or what happened to the courier.

Shara was also charged with planting bombs at the Israeli Embassy in Singapore six years ago and at the El Al office in Naples 11 years ago.

**SLA DISMANTLES MORE KATYUSHAS**

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, March 13 (JTA) -- Two Katyusha rockets discovered at the northern edge of the southern Lebanon security zone Tuesday were dismantled by elements of the Israeli-allied South Lebanon Army, but not without incident.

The rocket launchers, with timing devices, were aimed in the direction of Israel. As the SLA soldiers deactivated them, one fired accidentally, sending a rocket crashing into an open field near the Israeli border.

There were no casualties or damage in the impact area or injury to the SLA troops.

Israel was the target of several volleys of Katyusha rockets fired by members of the Palestine Liberation Organization during the Persian Gulf war. All of the rockets landed short of their targets in northern Israel, coming down in the SLA-patrolled southern Lebanon security zone.

After the Gulf war cease-fire, a Katyusha did land in northern Israel but in an unpopulated area, doing no damage and causing no injury.

**GORBACHEV URGES RELIGIOUS LEADERS TO HELP REDUCE TENSIONS IN THE USSR**

By Charles Hoffman

MOSCOW, March 13 (JTA) -- Rabbi Adolph Shayeitch, religious leader of Moscow's Choral Synagogue, told Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev on Wednesday that the government must give freedom to all nationalities, languages and religions in the Soviet Union.

Shayeitch spoke at a gathering of religious leaders called by Gorbachev to discuss rising tensions and conflicts between the dozens of nationalities and republics that make up the Soviet Union.

This is reportedly the first time Gorbachev has convened leaders of all religious movements in the Soviet Union, including Shayeitch, who is the country's senior rabbi. At a similar meeting two years ago, Gorbachev conferred only with the heads of the Russian Orthodox Church.

According to Shayeitch, Gorbachev urged the religious leaders to use their moral authority to reduce tensions. The religious leaders must explain to their followers, Gorbachev said, that only if all the components of the Soviet Union hold together can the country be strong.

This Sunday a crucial referendum related to the nationalities question will be held across the country. The vote is being seen as a critical test of Gorbachev's popularity, which has dropped precipitously because of his failure to improve the country's miserable economic conditions.

Shayeitch said he told the gathering that "all of us are patriots. Jews can be citizens of the Soviet Union, but they also want to be Jews."

**Russian Church Leader To Visit Israel**

On Wednesday, the Sephardic chief rabbi of Israel, Mordechai Eliyahu, met here with the patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, Alexei II. This is the first visit of an Israeli chief rabbi to the Soviet Union.

The patriarch was apparently wary of publicity about the historic meeting, as he barred reporters and photographers from attending.

Eliyahu was in Moscow to attend the second Congress of the Union of Jewish Religious Communities in the Soviet Union, which ended its three-day conference on Wednesday.

The Ashkenazic chief rabbi, Avraham Shapira, also planned to attend, but canceled his participation at the last minute, for reasons that are not clear.

Rabbi Arthur Schneier, senior rabbi of the Park East Synagogue in New York, attended the meeting between Eliyahu and the patriarch, which lasted for 40 minutes. Schneier said the Russian Orthodox leader was looking forward to his first pilgrimage to Israel, which begins March 27.

The trip, the first ever to Israel by a head of the Russian Orthodox Church, was originally scheduled for mid-January, but was postponed because of the war in the Persian Gulf.

Eliyahu and Schneier asked the patriarch to speak out against anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union. Alexei reportedly replied that his church had done nothing to hurt the Jews and that it stood for peace.

While in Moscow, Schneier also met with Soviet officials, including Foreign Minister Alexander Bessmertnykh, who assured Schneier that the Soviet Union is eager to play a positive and constructive role in resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict.

**LONDON JEWS GET LETTER BOMBS, RAISING FEARS OF HATE CAMPAIGN**

By Julian Kossof

London Jewish Chronicle

LONDON, March 13 (JTA) -- Two explosive devices mailed to Jewish addresses in London last week have raised fears that the British Jewish community is the target of a letter bomb campaign.

Nobody was injured, but only because one of the devices failed to explode when it was opened.

A spokesman for the Board of Deputies of British Jews said one letter bomb was delivered to a Jewish gift shop, Jerusalem the Golden, in Golders Green, northwest London.

The other was received at the Hillel House student center in the West End.

The spokesman said both resembled the letter bomb sent last month to Jewish Care, a communal welfare organization, which also did not explode.

All three were described as "crude" devices which could nevertheless "blind or blow off someone's fingers if it went off."

Haim Lubashevsky, who owns the shop in Golders Green, said he received the letter bomb last Friday, although it was misaddressed to the "Israel Arts Company."

The lethal packet lay on the counter all morning before he opened it. When he did, Lubashevsky said, he found the envelope "stuffed with cotton wool, a battery, wires and gunpowder."

Two weeks earlier, an anonymous telephone caller with a British accent told a shop employee, "Infidels, you have been sent a device."

Hillel House, which is used by hundreds of Jewish students daily, received a similar envelope last Friday. It lay unnoticed until Monday morning, when an alert staff member became suspicious and called police.

"It gave us a real fright and has put us on our toes in terms of increased security," said Susan Benjamin, the Hillel House administrator.

She suggested that post office employees be more vigilant as well.

**PAN AM TO RESUME ISRAEL FLIGHTS**

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, March 13 (JTA) -- Pan American World Airways, which suspended service to Israel when the Persian Gulf war began on Jan. 17, announced it will resume flights from New York to Tel Aviv on April 11.

It is the last of the international airlines to restore service to Israel, but will return vastly improved.

With resumption of air service to Tel Aviv, Pan Am will provide direct flights, rather than its previous service, which required Israel-bound passengers to change planes in Paris.

Meanwhile, El Al, Israel's national air carrier, which alone maintained uninterrupted service to Israel during the seven-week Persian Gulf war, ranks near the top of the list with world air travelers, according to a survey conducted by the British monthly publication Which.

The magazine polled 31,000 passengers who flew 47 international airlines during the past year. El Al rated second for in-flight service, up from sixth place two years ago.

It edged out Swissair, which dropped to third place. First honors were taken by the Hong Kong-based Cathay Pacific airline.