

**NEGOTIATIONS WITH ARABS ON ALL ISSUES  
CAN BEGIN IMMEDIATELY, ISRAELI ASSERTS**  
**By Howard Rosenberg**

WASHINGTON, March 17 (JTA) -- Israel will waste no time seeking peace with its Arab neighbors and is prepared to negotiate with Syria on "all the issues," including territory, an Israeli Cabinet minister asserted here Sunday.

"The war and the events which took place recently should not be an excuse to delay efforts for peace negotiations but rather as stimuli, as an incentive, to start them on a basis that may lead to peace and security for Israel and for the other countries in our region," Health Minister Ehud Olmert said in an address to the 32nd annual policy conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

"We will immediately embark on negotiations to achieve peace with the Arab countries in our region, with Saudi Arabia, with Kuwait, with the (United) Arab Emirates, with Jordan, with Syria, without any delay," Olmert told some 2,000 delegates attending the AIPAC conference.

"Israel is prepared, is offering to sit at the table with each one of these countries and to negotiate immediately," he said.

With Syria, he said, "we are ready to negotiate all the issues, all of the claims, all of the demands, including the territorial demands of the Syrians," as well as Israeli demands.

Olmert's statement was the clearest indication in recent weeks that Israel is willing to discuss the future status of the Golan Heights with Syria.

Israel has previously said it is willing to enter negotiations with Syria without preconditions. But Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir has been quoted lately as saying that Israel would never give up the Golan Heights, which it captured from Syria in 1967 and annexed in 1980.

**Immediate Talks With Palestinians**

Olmert, a politically moderate member of Shamir's Likud bloc, made clear at the outset of his speech that he was speaking on behalf of the prime minister, who had been scheduled to address the AIPAC conference in person.

Shamir spoke to the convention by satellite hookup from Jerusalem, but limited his remarks to greetings and a brief report on Secretary of State James Baker's visit to Israel last week.

The prime minister said he had a "useful exchange of views" with Baker and was "encouraged by the secretary's cautious and friendly approach to the very complex problems of the region."

In his remarks, Olmert said Israel agrees with the "two-track approach" to the Middle East peace process that Baker has been advocating.

The idea, Olmert said, is that as Israel moves toward peace negotiations with its Arab neighbors, it simultaneously begins "an immediate process of negotiation with proper Palestinian representatives to achieve an interim agreement that will agree to a permanent solution of these problems."

That process "will start simultaneously, independently, at the same time right now," he emphasized, drawing a strong round of applause.

Olmert made clear what it meant "by proper Palestinian representatives." He said the Jewish state would not talk to the Palestine Liberation Organization, which, he claimed, does not "belong to the mainstream of history in our part of the world."

At the same time, though, he acknowledged that "one of the most important problems for the Middle East is the Palestinians."

Israel needs to achieve an "interim agreement for the autonomy for the Palestinian people with a delegation, with a leadership that will have the courage to represent the inhabitants of Judea, Samaria and Gaza," he said, referring to the administered territories.

**Israel Has No Reason To Stall**

Olmert appeared to challenge directly those who have charged the Israeli government is dragging its feet on reaching a settlement with the Palestinians.

"Israel has no purpose of stalling this process," he said. "Israel has no desire of stretching the time now in all kinds of preliminary inquiries of examinations that will lead nowhere."

At the same time, though, the world now recognizes that the Palestinian problem is not the biggest obstacle to peace in the Middle East, Olmert said.

The war in the Persian Gulf, he said, has made the world "aware of the enormous danger lying in the existence of terrorist states, dictators and not-democratic governments in our part of the world."

Praising the allied war effort against Iraq, Olmert expressed Israel's "great admiration and support for the enormous courage of the American political and military leadership that carried out this effort."

**BAKER, BACK FROM MIDEAST MISSION,  
TO PURSUE DIPLOMACY BY TELEPHONE**  
**By David Friedman**

WASHINGTON, March 17 (JTA) -- Secretary of State James Baker returned Sunday from his visit to the Middle East convinced there is a chance for progress in resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict because of the high standing the United States enjoys in the region in the aftermath of the Persian Gulf crisis.

"There is an enhanced credibility out there for the United States that might make possible some progress in some of these very, very intractable areas and problems that we have faced for a long time," Baker said Sunday on the ABC television program "This Week with David Brinkley."

During his 10-day trip, Baker visited Israel, where he met with Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, Foreign Minister David Levy and a group of Palestinians; Syria, where he also met with Lebanese officials; Saudi Arabia; Egypt; Kuwait; Qatar; the United Arab Emirates; Oman; and Bahrain. He also visited the Soviet Union and Turkey.

"I believe there is a sense on the part of most, if not all, of the governments I visited that this is a window of opportunity," Baker said.

He now plans to follow up his visit with

telephone calls to leaders of the region in which he is expected to make specific proposals based on his talks with Israeli and Arab leaders.

Baker is revealing few details about his specific proposals. Doing so, he said, could force the parties concerned to respond negatively.

#### Confidence-Building Measures

But he did explain the path which he is exploring.

"One of the things we have done on this trip was to suggest that the parties to the conflict consider reciprocal confidence-building measures," he said on the ABC program.

"There should be specific measures considered by Arab governments and specific measures considered by Israel," he said. He added that on a separate track, Israel and the Palestinians should move toward a "direct dialogue on negotiations."

The secretary said Israel and the Arab states should act simultaneously on these steps. "Nobody should have to go first," he said.

"They ought to be willing to move together, and they ought to abandon old rigid formulas and rigid stereotypes that have prevented peace for 10 these many years," he said.

While Baker did not reveal his suggestions Sunday, reports during his trip suggested that he had asked the Arab countries to announce an end to their state of belligerency with Israel and drop the economic boycott of the Jewish state.

Baker admitted Sunday that although "there has been a change in the region," none of the Arab leaders is ready to recognize Israel yet.

In Jerusalem, he reportedly suggested that Israel build confidence by reopening universities in the West Bank, shut down during the intifada, and by halting the building of new settlements.

Baker said the United States sees the building of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip or "the directing or diverting of new immigrants there as de facto annexation."

He explained that would be "changing the facts and circumstances on the ground in the absence of negotiations between the parties which would be designed to solve this Arab-Israeli conflict."

#### Soviets Should Restore Ties To Israel

Baker stressed that the United States cannot impose a solution on the region. "But we should be able to serve as a catalyst in helping, hopefully now more than ever."

He said the Soviet Union can be helpful in the Middle East process, but only if it restores full diplomatic relations with Israel.

"They are seriously thinking about it," he said.

If the Soviets "want to be effective and helpful in trying to bring about peace in the Middle East, this is something they ought to do," the secretary said.

"If they are going to be players and participate and try to help move the process forward, they ought to have the credibility that would come with full relations with Israel," he said.

Baker ruled out any role for the Palestine Liberation Organization. He said the United States broke off its dialogue with the PLO last June because Yasir Arafat would not condemn a foiled terrorist attack last May 30 on Tel Aviv beaches.

He said Arafat and the PLO would have to take even more steps now because of their support for Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait.

#### **LEVY'S VISIT TO GERMANY YIELDS ECONOMIC AND DIPLOMATIC BONANZA** **By David Kantor**

BONN, March 17 (JTA) -- Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy has good reasons to be pleased with his visit to Germany last week.

One is reported German willingness to give Israel a low-interest loan of up to 1 billion marks, roughly \$630 million, to help repair damage done by Iraqi Scud missiles during the Persian Gulf war.

Another is a statement released Friday by the German Foreign Ministry favoring bilateral talks between Israel and the Arab states instead of an international conference. That has been Israel's position all along.

The loan emerged from talks between Levy and Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, German television reported.

Levy, commenting on the report, refused to give details but said he was pleased with the progress made on economic cooperation in his talks with Genscher.

It is understood they concentrated on financial and economic assistance to Israel from Germany. The Israelis reportedly asked Bonn to take into account that the former East Germany never paid reparations to Israel. The two Germanys united Oct. 3.

Levy and his aides were delighted with the Foreign Ministry's statement that an international conference to settle the Arab-Israeli dispute would succeed only if it was preceded by bilateral talks among the parties concerned.

Levy described the statement as a major diplomatic success for Israel. One of his aides pointed out that Germany has largely adopted Israel's position that the peace process should begin with direct dialogue rather than an international conference.

A participant in the talks here reported that at one point a German official remarked that an international conference should not be treated like "theological dogma."

The conference scenario, until recently favored by the European Community, could culminate rather than launch the peace process, the official was quoted as saying.

#### A Visit To Buchenwald

Levy had his first meeting as foreign minister with Chancellor Helmut Kohl, who expressed respect and thanks for Israel's restraint under missile attack during the Gulf war.

Levy thanked the German government for assisting Israel in its time of peril. Kohl reportedly showed interest in Levy's background. The Moroccan-born foreign minister is the first Sephardic Jew to hold that office.

Levy also met with the president of Germany, Richard von Weizsacker, with whom he conversed in French. His political talks were conducted through interpreters.

Levy left Frankfurt on Friday for Rome to meet with the Italian foreign minister, Gianni de Michelis. He was due back in Israel on Sunday.

Before leaving Germany, the Israeli foreign minister visited the site of the Buchenwald concentration camp near Weimar, capital of the state of Thuringia, in what was once East Germany.

Levy was the first ranking Israeli diplomat to set foot on what had been East German soil. He delivered a brief statement at the memorial to those who died at Buchenwald.

# MANY GAS MASKS ISSUED TO ISRAELIS WERE INEFFECTIVE, NEWSPAPER CHARGES

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, March 17 (JTA) -- Hundreds of thousands of gas masks issued to Israeli civilians in the months before the Persian Gulf war began would have provided little or no protection in a chemical attack, according to a report by Ze'ev Schiff published Sunday in the daily Ha'aretz.

Schiff, one of Israel's most respected military affairs commentators, quoted allegations by the state comptroller that about 1.4 million gas masks distributed to the public were unfit for use.

The charge could have serious repercussions for the defense establishment.

Schiff said a warning letter to Defense Minister Moshe Arens from Comptroller Miriam Ben-Porat at the time of the war was kept secret until revealed by Ha'aretz.

Arens and the Israel Defense Force chief of staff, Gen. Dan Shomron, flatly denied the charge Sunday at the weekly Cabinet meeting.

But the Defense Ministry seemed to hedge. It said the 1.4 million figure was inaccurate, but conceded that as many as 860,000 gas masks could have been ineffective.

According to Ha'aretz, the masks supplied to the civilian population had a protective factor of 100, compared with a protective factor of 1,000 in the masks supplied to the IDF and those manufactured in the United States.

The Defense Ministry admitted that gas masks manufactured between 1972 and 1986 offered "reasonable" protection if the user remained inside a gas-proof room and was equipped with atropine, an antidote to poison gas that must be injected on exposure.

Ha'aretz quoted experts who said that approach neglected the chance that people might have been caught outdoors during a chemical attack or that their sealed rooms would be exposed in the event of a direct hit.

Schiff said the entire matter would be discussed shortly by the Knesset's State Control Committee.

According to Ha'aretz, the comptroller reported that 170,000 gas masks manufactured in Israel years ago were obsolete. Sold abroad, they were repurchased in the emergency at high cost, because there were insufficient masks for the entire population, including Arabs.

Ha'aretz quoted IDF officers as saying the obsolete masks should be replaced immediately.

## ISRAELI JETS HIT PALESTINIAN BASE

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, March 17 (JTA) -- Israeli air force jets Friday raided a terrorist stronghold near Syrian lines in eastern Lebanon and returned safely to their bases, a military spokesman announced.

The raid was Israel's fifth over Lebanon this year. The target was an installation in the Bekaa Valley near the Beirut-Damascus road, used by the Libyan-backed Palestine Popular Struggle Front headed by Samir Goshch.

There was no return fire from either the target or the Syrian army units encamped nearby.

Police in Lebanon said seven fighters were wounded in the raid.

Lebanese sources said 12 people have been killed and 41 wounded in the four previous Israeli air raids this year.

# RISHON LE-ZION KILLER SENTENCED, GETS 7 LIFE TERMS FOR 7 DEATHS

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, March 17 (JTA) -- Ami Popper, a dishonorably discharged Israel Defense Force veteran who killed seven Arabs and wounded 10 in an unprovoked armed attack near Rishon le-Zion last May 20, received the maximum prison sentence Sunday.

Family members rioted in court for an hour after the district judge imposed seven cumulative life sentences for the premeditated murder of each victim, plus 20 years for the attempted murder of an unspecified number of others.

The dead and wounded were Palestinian day laborers from the Gaza Strip who had been waiting in a field outside Rishon le-Zion early on a Sunday morning to be picked up by Israeli employers when Popper opened fire on them.

According to the charges, Popper, wearing his brother's IDF uniform, sprayed the workers with automatic fire from a Galil assault rifle.

The accused sat quietly until sentence was pronounced, when he began to pound the table with his fist. When he was ordered removed from the court, Popper's grandfather began to rant against the judges until he nearly collapsed and was taken away in an ambulance.

Popper's sister and other family members went into a frenzy. They cursed the judges and the prosecuting team, which was headed by an attorney who burst into tears.

The judges expressed horror at the cold-blooded murders. They said his act was "one of the most horrid, senseless crimes ever committed in Israel, contrary to all human behavior or Jewish values."

## COURT TO DECIDE ON PLEA BARGAIN OF FORMER AIR FORCE ARMS BUYER

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, March 17 (JTA) -- A military court must decide shortly whether to accept the plea bargain of Brig. Gen. Rami Dotan, former head of the Israel air force purchasing mission in New York, who was arrested last October.

Dotan was found guilty Sunday of serious criminal conduct by a special court-martial sitting at Israel Defense Force general headquarters.

According to Dotan's attorneys, he is prepared to confess, among other things, to 12 counts of corruption, bribery, illegally absconding with at least \$12 million in Defense Ministry funds and conspiracy to murder.

He promises to return all of the money illegally obtained, cooperate with the military investigation and name his accomplices.

He will accept in exchange a maximum 13-year prison sentence, reduction in rank to private and a dishonorable discharge.

But the military court postponed a decision after hearing summations Sunday and a closed-door interview with Dotan.

The 46-year-old general is the most senior IDF officer to stand trial on such grave charges.

Apart from fraud and embezzlement, he is accused of conspiracy to induce an IDF sergeant major, the highest rank of non-commissioned officer, to murder the so-called "whistle-blower" in the case, Ofer Pa'il.

Pa'il worked at the purchasing mission in New York under Dotan's command in the mid-1980s.

## SOVIET FOREIGN MINISTER TELLS RABBI THE KREMLIN IS WAITING FOR A GESTURE

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, March 17 (JTA) -- Ensuring Israel's security is "an integral part" of Soviet policy, Soviet Foreign Minister Alexander Bessmertnykh told an Israeli rabbi visiting Moscow last week.

He also said he thinks Israel "should be rewarded and shown recognition" for the restraint it showed by not retaliating for Iraqi missile attacks during the Persian Gulf war.

The Soviet diplomat made those remarks at a meeting with the chief rabbi of Rehovot, Simcha Kook, according to New York City Councilman Noah Dear, who said he arranged the meeting and was present at it.

Dear told Israeli officials Sunday that Bessmertnykh said the Soviet Union would restore full diplomatic relations with Israel when Israel offered a demonstrative gesture signaling its commitment to a comprehensive peace in the region.

But according to the Brooklyn Democrat, Moscow is not demanding that Israel agree to an international conference.

The gesture he said Moscow is "carefully watching and waiting for" is "something less than that."

Bessmertnykh, who formerly served as Soviet ambassador to Washington, said he believes it is "easier" for Israel to offer such a gesture in the postwar situation, Dear said.

When Kook spoke of the "miracle of the Scuds" that caused virtually no casualties and relatively little damage to Israel, Bessmertnykh is said to have remarked that "another miracle" was Israel's forbearance.

Dear said the session with Bessmertnykh lasted two hours and that Rabbi Yitzhak Rosenberg, national director of synagogue programming for the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, was also present.

### 'Had Tears In His Eyes'

According to Dear, Bessmertnykh "had tears in his eyes" and choked with emotion as Rabbi Kook expounded on the historical and metaphysical bonds between the people of Israel and its land.

Kook explained that according to Jewish tradition, the rivalry between Cain and Abel, between Isaac and Ishmael, was over control of "Eretz Yisrael," the Land of Israel.

He added that Jews had never for one day ceased living in Jerusalem, even during the darkest periods of the Exile.

The Soviet diplomat replied, "I never knew that."

Dear said the emotional high came when Kook told his host that Jews mention "the rebuilding of Zion" every time they say grace after meals, that a Jewish bride and groom stand under the nuptial canopy facing Jerusalem and that the corpse of a Jew is laid out with his feet facing the holy city.

According to Dear, Bessmertnykh's reply astonished his guests. He is reported to have said that he now understood why a friend of his years ago had thrown away his whole life and career in order to settle in Israel, a land he had never visited.

"When I asked him why, he simply said, 'That is my homeland,' " the Soviet foreign minister reportedly said.

## ANTI-SEMITISM IN EVIDENCE AT RALLY BY SLOVAK SEPARATISTS IN BRATISLAVA

By Josef Klansky

PRAGUE, March 17 (JTA) -- Thousands of Slovak separatists chanted anti-Czech, anti-Semitic slogans, waved portraits of Nazi war criminal Josef Tiso and physically assaulted President Vaclav Havel of Czechoslovakia last week in the main square of Bratislava, the Slovak capital.

The occasion last Thursday was the 52nd anniversary of the founding of the Nazi puppet state of Slovakia on March 14, 1939. The date has become a rallying point of Slovak nationalism in which a strong element of anti-Semitism persists.

One person was arrested for unlawful conduct. Stanislav Panis, a member of the Slovak Parliament who is a jazz drummer, was referred to the attorney general by Jan Mlynarik, a fellow member of Parliament. He was accused of propagating fascism, which is illegal under the penal code.

The separatists, who cherish the memory of their short-lived statehood, waved its artifacts in the square, including Tiso's portrait and the colors of the notorious Hlinka Guard, the fascist militia during the Nazi occupation.

Tiso, a Roman Catholic priest Hitler installed as president of the Slovak state, was hanged for war crimes on April 17, 1949. He ordered the deportation of 70,000 Slovak Jews, virtually the entire Jewish population, to Nazi death camps.

The adulation his memory received last Thursday in Bratislava apparently did not impress the prime minister of Slovakia, Vladimir Meciar, who claimed the influence of fascist elements in Slovakia is being exaggerated.

Meciar, who was abroad last Thursday, blamed Havel's office, specifically presidential press spokesman Michael Zantovsky.

Zantovsky, whose mother is Jewish, recently charged that many Slovak nationalists believe the Nazi puppet state was the golden age of the Slovak nation.

The Prague daily Lidove Noviny recalled in an editorial Saturday that Tiso paid the Nazis 500 marks for every Jew deported from Slovakia. "This war criminal was adored in the main square of Bratislava as father of the motherland," the editorial observed.

Havel himself warned in a recent broadcast to the nation against nostalgia for an event that brought war and misery.

His unexpected appearance in Bratislava on the anniversary was criticized by some Slovak newspapers. But leading Czech and Slovak personalities praised him for his courage.

Frantisek Miklosko, chairman of the Slovak National Council, who accompanied Havel, apologized for the behavior of the crowd. He urged his fellow Slovaks to wake up from their depression and lethargy and present themselves to the world as a civilized, culturally mature nation.

## FEBRUARY INFLATION WAS 0.6 PERCENT

TEL AVIV, March 17 (JTA) -- The cost-of-living index rose by 0.6 percent in February, the second-lowest increase in the past 12 months, according to figures released Friday by the Central Bureau of Statistics.

The rise was only 0.4 percent in December 1990, but the cost of living increased 1.3 percent in January. The index now stands at 179.7 on a baseline of 100 set in 1987.