

SHAMIR SAYS SOVIETS MUST RENEW TIES IF THEY WANT TO HOST PEACE CONFERENCE

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, April 14 (JTA) -- The Soviet Union will have to re-establish full diplomatic relations with Israel and allow Jewish immigrants to fly directly to Israel if it wants to co-host a Middle East peace conference with the United States, Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir asserted Sunday.

Shamir stated those terms at an airport news conference before taking off for London, where he was to meet with Soviet Prime Minister Valentin Pavlov.

Israel has long sought the renewal of diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, which severed them in 1967. Israel is currently represented in Moscow at the consular level. Its chief activity has been issuing visas to Soviet olim.

The issue of direct flights for immigrants has long been a sore point in Soviet-Israeli relations.

After months of delay, the two countries began direct commercial flights earlier this year, but those making aliyah are barred from using them. Instead, emigres must travel via various Eastern European capitals.

Shamir is going to London for the opening of an international investment bank for Eastern Europe, hosted by the British prime minister, John Major.

He also will be meeting with the leaders of Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania and the Netherlands.

The meeting with the Albanian leader comes after the disclosure last week that virtually the entire Jewish community of Albania had been allowed to immigrate over the last three months to Israel.

Shamir is said to hope that the talks will pave the way to diplomatic relations between the two countries.

SHARON CONTINUING TO CHALLENGE AGREEMENTS REACHED WITH BAKER

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, April 14 (JTA) -- Two senior Israeli Cabinet ministers remain sharply at odds over the understandings on the Middle East peace process reached last week with U.S. Secretary of State James Baker.

Foreign Minister David Levy continues to hail the agreements reached with Baker as a triumph for Israeli diplomacy.

But Housing Minister Ariel Sharon, Likud's most outspoken hard-liner, continues to snipe, hinting darkly that Levy has given away the store.

"All obstacles have been removed," coordination with the United States is "good," and Israel is on the road to peace with the Palestinians and the Arab countries, an ebullient Levy assured reporters after Sunday's Cabinet session.

He claimed most of his fellow ministers agreed with the way he handled the talks with Baker.

But Sharon complained that he and most of his colleagues were kept in the dark about the

details. He again demanded to know whether the government had indeed agreed to negotiate with a separate Palestinian delegation.

"The Egyptians are updated, Syria's (President Hafez) Assad is, and so will the Jordanians. And only we, who will have to bear the consequences, only we do not know," Sharon said.

He added parenthetically that "judging by the way the negotiations were handled, the consequences will be difficult."

No Move To Convene Central Committee

Levy, without mentioning Sharon by name, ridiculed his charges.

"To hear every Monday and Thursday elements in the government which attack the government as if it had sold the country, as if it were doing things behind the backs of ministers, as if abandoning essential assets. One must put an end to it," Levy said.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, who conducted most of the talks with Baker, has made no real move to quash the internal differences.

But "political sources," a code name for senior staffers at the Prime Minister's Office, said Sharon is out of line. He is well aware that the ministers were briefed last Thursday and that all of Israel's preconditions for entering the political process were met, they said.

Shamir has so far declined a demand by Sharon to convene Likud's Central Committee to debate the peace policy. Sharon enjoys considerable support in that grassroots party forum.

He is also in a position to throw a monkey-wrench into the process by pressing a massive settlement drive in the administered territories.

The Arab states and the Palestinians are demanding a freeze on settlement activities as a condition for peace talks. And the United States has declared repeatedly that Jewish settlements in the administered territories are an obstacle to peace.

Sharon challenged the American premise in an appearance Sunday on ABC-TV's "This Week With David Brinkley" program.

The housing minister maintained that Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip help the peace process by giving Israel the necessary security confidence it needs to begin negotiations.

"These settlements or communities give us the feeling of security, and therefore they will only contribute to peace," Sharon said.

Peres Sees Baker In Geneva

He also claimed the settlements are needed "in order to keep in our hands the most vital terrain for our existence," the high, controlling hills in the West Bank, to safeguard "our coastal plain, where two-thirds of our population live."

But Brent Scowcroft, President Bush's national security adviser, disagreed with Sharon that Israel needs strategic depth to be secure. He recalled that Israel gave up the Sinai to Egypt for a peace treaty.

The Israelis "don't have strategic depth against the largest force in the Middle East and are quite secure on that border," Scowcroft said.

He suggested that the same security can be achieved by giving up other land for peace.

In Geneva, meanwhile, Shimon Peres, leader

of Israel's opposition Labor Party, met with Baker on Friday.

In an interview with the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, Peres explained that he was abroad when Baker was in Jerusalem. He said he did not want to give the impression of talking to Baker behind the Shamir government's back. But he added that he was not really convinced Shamir had the capacity or will to negotiate sincerely.

Peres said the Labor Party is prepared to support whatever kind of conference is agreed to, international or regional.

But he warned that the "two-track" approach -- simultaneous separate talks with the Arab states and the Palestinians -- poses the danger of linkage. A stalemate could be created if Syria is not willing to give up its claims to the Golan Heights, Peres said.

(Contributing to this report were JTA correspondents David Friedman in Washington and Tamar Levy in Geneva.)

PALESTINIAN RELEASED FROM DETENTION BACKS PLAN FOR A REGIONAL CONFERENCE By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, April 14 (JTA) -- A prominent Palestinian activist, detained in Israel without trial for the past five months, was released Friday and may travel to Washington soon to meet Secretary of State James Baker.

Radwan Abu-Ayyash, chairman of the Palestinian Journalists Association, told reporters he had a number of invitations from Washington and European capitals to discuss the Middle East peace process.

But he may be at odds with others in the local Palestinian political community.

Abu-Ayyash spoke favorably of Baker's plan for a regional peace conference, saying, "If a regional conference is a step toward an international conference, the thing is worth a thorough study and review."

It was rejected, however, by the six Palestinian leaders who met with Baker here on April 9, led by Faisal Husseini, the senior Palestinian political figure in East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

Israel has agreed in principle to a regional conference as a prologue to direct talks with the Arabs, but it rules out a larger international conference under the auspices of the United Nations.

Abu-Ayyash, a known supporter of Al Fatah, the largest military faction of the Palestine Liberation Organization, was arrested five months ago on suspicion of involvement in the intifada, or Palestinian uprising, an accusation he denied. The arrest occurred after a series of stabbing attacks against Jews following the Oct. 8 riots on Jerusalem's Temple Mount.

His release Friday from the West Bank central prison in Nablus to an enthusiastic reception was recorded by dozens of foreign television news crews.

Abu-Ayyash returned to his home in the West Bank city of Ramallah.

Whether and when he travels abroad will depend on getting the approval and necessary documents from the Israeli authorities.

Meanwhile, two other Palestinian activists remain under administrative arrest. Ziyad Abu-Ziyad, a journalist, and Dr. Sari Nusseibeh, a lecturer at Bir Zeit University in the West Bank, are scheduled to be released next month.

IDEA OF CURB ON ARMS SALES TO MIDEAST GETS MIXED REVIEW IN PRO-ISRAEL CIRCLES By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, April 14 (JTA) -- The idea of a moratorium on U.S. arms sales to the Middle East has picked up support in recent days from pro-Israel lawmakers and lobbyists on Capitol Hill.

But some Israeli officials are expressing concern that a unilateral U.S. ban could adversely hurt Israel, since the Jewish state relies much more on America for arms than do the Arab nations, which also purchase materiel from suppliers in Europe and Asia.

The American Israeli Public Affairs Committee, the pre-eminent lobby for Israel in Washington, endorsed the concept of a curb on U.S. arms sales to the region last week.

During an April 9 question-and-answer session with the House Appropriations subcommittee on foreign operations, AIPAC's executive director, Thomas Dine, said he supported a letter sent to President Bush earlier this month by five key Democrats in the House of Representatives that calls on the administration to halt any new sales unilaterally.

"We write to urge you to declare a unilateral pause in arms sale to countries in the Middle East and Persian Gulf," the letter began.

The letter's authors, who include Majority Leader Richard Gephardt of Missouri and Rep. Dante Fascell of Florida, chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, also called on the administration to work to obtain agreements with other countries to halt their sales to the region.

The letter cited as a source of instability the "proliferation of arms, including chemical, biological, nuclear, and conventional weapons and missile technologies."

But it did not explicitly call on the administration to withdraw recent packages working their way through Congress to sell billions of dollars in arms to Israel, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

Bush Appears To Oppose Idea

Also signing the letter were Reps. Lee Hamilton of Indiana, chairman of the Foreign Affairs subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East; David Obey, chairman of the Appropriations subcommittee on foreign operations; and Sam Gejdenson of Connecticut.

Gejdenson said such an embargo would be a "vital step" to "secure peace in the Middle East and stability in the region."

But Rep. Henry Hyde (R-Ill.) said during an April 11 House Foreign Affairs subcommittee hearing that he opposes a unilateral embargo. While a multilateral embargo is a "great idea," if the United States goes ahead with unilateral curbs, "we will find ourselves rather lonely," Hyde said.

The administration has also been skeptical of the idea. When Bush was asked March 1 about ending arms sales to the region, the president replied, "I don't think there will be any arms embargo, because we are not going to let any friend come into a role where its security is threatened."

Those Israeli officials and lobbyists in Washington who oppose an arms moratorium fear it will work to the detriment of Israel's security.

They argue that the Jewish state has used arms sales to bolster its security over the past 43 years despite the fact that the Arab world has expanded its arsenal at a much greater rate.

ONE-THIRD OF SOVIET IMMIGRANTS WANT TO LEAVE ISRAEL, PAPER SAYS

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, April 14 (JTA) -- Up to one-third of recent immigrants from the Soviet Union want to leave Israel, mainly because of economic difficulties that stem from the lack of jobs, the Israeli daily Ma'ariv reported Sunday.

The newspaper attributed its information to voluntary Soviet immigrant aid associations.

It reported that one-third of the 4,500 Soviet immigrants in the small Galilee town of Carmiel are contemplating leaving, their favored destination being Canada.

While there was no confirmation from official sources, Uri Gordon, head of the Jewish Agency's immigration department, acknowledged that hundreds of families have approached the agency inquiring about the possibility of leaving the country.

Gordon attributed the newcomers' dissatisfaction to desperation over job prospects.

The army radio broadcast comments by immigrants to the effect that friends and relatives in the Soviet Union are rethinking their decision to come to Israel because of the lack of jobs.

Many of these potential olim hold good jobs at home and do not relish the prospect of trading them for handouts in Israel.

The Israeli news media regularly carry stories of Soviet immigrant families in serious financial straits. Over the weekend, for instance, there was a disturbing account of two families living in a butcher shop in Carmiel.

The Knesset is scheduled Monday to debate increasing the level of government aid given new arrivals. The government would also extend the time they are eligible for public assistance.

"It's not the money," one recent immigrant was quoted as saying. "It's the question of work. If you have no work, you are no one. If you get handouts, you're like a good dog getting food from its owner."

ISRAEL TO AIRLIFT AID TO KURDS IN COOPERATION WITH RED CRESCENT

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, April 14 (JTA) -- Israel will begin airlifting shipments of humanitarian aid this week to Kurdish refugees on the Iraqi-Turkish border.

An Israeli air force Hercules transport is scheduled to take off Tuesday carrying six tons of medical supplies, clothing, blankets and other essentials on a list of needed items provided by Turkey's Red Crescent Society to the Magen David Adom of Israel.

Other planeloads will follow.

It is the first instance of direct communications between the Red Crescent and the MDA, the Moslem and Israeli equivalents of the Red Cross.

The supplies were donated by the Israeli government and the MDA. The clothing was purchased with contributions made to a special fund established by the Association of Jews from Kurdistan.

The supplies will be turned over to the Turkish Red Crescent in Turkey. The Red Crescent will transport them over several hundreds of miles of mountainous terrain to the border region, where hundreds of thousands of Kurds fleeing the forces of Saddam Hussein are stranded without food or shelter.

In New York, meanwhile, the American Jewish World Service has launched a fund-raising drive to provide food, clothing and medical supplies to Kurdish and Shi'ite refugees fleeing Iraq.

Contributions may be sent to AJWS, Kurdish Relief, 1290 Avenue of the Americas, 11th Floor, New York, N.Y. 10104.

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee is also collecting funds to provide relief to the Kurdish refugees. Contributions may be sent to Open Mailbox for Kurdish Refugees, JDC, 711 Third Ave, 10th floor, New York, N.Y. 10017.

SCATHING REPORT ON GAS MASKS PUBLISHED DESPITE IDF'S DISSENT

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, April 14 (JTA) -- An abridged version of State Comptroller Miriam Ben-Porat's sharply critical report on the gas masks distributed to the civilian population was published Sunday, to the defense establishment's angry dissent.

Although the Knesset Control Committee deleted some parts of the report for security reasons and toned down others, it generally accepted Ben-Porat's conclusions.

The government, on the other hand, stood by the strong objections raised by Defense Minister Moshe Arens and the Israel Defense Force chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Ehud Barak.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir told the Cabinet on Sunday there was no need to discuss the report because Arens had spoken for the government.

The comptroller, a former member of the High Court of Justice, charged that up to a third of the civilian population was not provided with the same standard of protection against poison gas attack that the IDF provided for itself.

The distribution of gas masks and other gas-proof devices to the public was completed before the Persian Gulf war began on Jan. 17.

The masks, though used almost daily during the war, were never truly put to test. The Iraqis fired 39 Scud missiles at Israel during the seven-week war, none with chemical warheads.

But Ben-Porat charged the IDF provided masks and gas-proof cribs for infants, known as mamatim, which were known to be ineffective and years behind the state of the art.

Arens and Barak insisted to the Cabinet that the equipment was the best available considering budget cuts and time limits imposed by the political echelon.

IDF REPORTS TWO OPERATIONS IN LEBANON

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, April 14 (JTA) -- An Israel Defense Force patrol killed two terrorists in a clash in the southern Lebanese security zone Sunday morning.

There were no IDF casualties in what was described as a "routine operation" in the western sector of the 50-mile-long zone paralleling the Israeli border.

On Friday, Israeli air force planes bombed a base of Abu Nidal's Fatah Revolutionary Council near the southern Lebanon port city of Sidon.

An IDF spokesman said the base was used to launch attacks on Israel. All planes returned safely, the spokesman said.

Reports from the area said four people were killed and nine were injured in the air attack.

MEXICAN PRESIDENT PLEDGES TO BACK DRIVE TO REPEAL ZIONISM RESOLUTION

CHICAGO, April 14 (JTA) -- Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari told an appreciative Jewish audience here last week that his country would gladly vote to reverse the resolution denigrating Zionism as a form of racism that Mexico supported in the U.N. General Assembly 16 years ago.

If a vote to rescind comes to the floor of the General Assembly, "Mexico will show it is a friend of the state of Israel," Salinas declared at a reception given in his honor last Thursday night by the American Jewish Committee.

"We in Mexico have great respect for the State of Israel as a sovereign nation and a member of the international community," Salinas said. "We have strong diplomatic ties that we value very much."

Mexico supported the 1975 resolution. But in recent years, Salinas and other government officials have indicated privately their willingness to support attempts to repeal it.

Mexico is the latest of several Latin American countries to support the repeal effort. Last month, the General Assembly of Panama voted unanimously to call on the U.N. General Assembly to rescind the 1975 resolution.

Other Latin American nations to have called for repeal of the infamous resolution include Colombia, Argentina, Ecuador, Guatemala, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela, according to the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith.

The Mexican chief of state is barnstorming the United States in favor of the proposed Free Trade Agreement treaty, which would allow the freer flow of investments and goods across the Mexican, United States and Canadian borders.

Chicago. It was arranged in light of the Jewish organization's activities in Mexico and its contacts with the Mexican Jewish community.

The president spoke fondly of Mexico's Jews, stressing their contributions to the country's commerce and culture.

Several Mexican Jewish leaders accompanied him at the reception, along with the Mexican ambassador to the United States, Gustavo Petriccioli.

Alfredo Achar, president of the Central Jewish Community of Mexico, said 50,000 Jews live in that country, 43,000 of them in Mexico City, the capital.

The country has four Orthodox and three Conservative congregations, and a Jewish sports center. There are 11 Jewish day schools, including two yeshivot and three which feature Yiddish programs in addition to modern Hebrew.

ISRAEL MAY ABOLISH HOTEL STARS

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, April 14 (JTA) -- Israel may abolish the "star" system for grading hotels in order to encourage competition and discourage excessive prices, Tourism Minister Gideon Patt told a meeting of the Israel Hoteliers Association last week.

The star system is used all over the world to classify hotels according to objective standards of quality.

The difference between one and five stars is reflected in the price differential, which is supervised and enforced by the ministry.

Patt admitted his ministry's standards are

somewhat more lenient to the hotelier than in other countries.

But the system itself discourages fair competition and keeps prices artificially high, the tourism minister said, at a time when Israel's hotels need all the business they can get.

STORY OF ISRAELI SPY FOR USSR REVEALED AFTER COURT LIFTS BAN

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, April 14 (JTA) -- The Jerusalem District Court has finally lifted the veil of secrecy that for 35 years surrounded the case of Ze'ev Avni, a rising young diplomat in Israel's foreign service who was convicted in August 1956 of spying for the Soviet Union.

The revelations were immediately splashed across the front page of the afternoon tabloid Yediot Achronot, which was instrumental in getting the court to declassify the case.

Avni's story had been only hinted at in previous publications, including the diary of the late Moshe Sharett, Israel's first foreign minister.

Avni served 10 years of a 14-year prison sentence and has since led an uneventful life practicing psychology.

The revelations allowed Issar Harel, retired chief of the Israeli intelligence agency Mossad, who first confronted the spy, to comment on the case. According to Harel, Avni acted not for monetary gain but out of ideological convictions.

"Basically he was an honest man, a real gentleman," Harel said. "He changed his attitude and did not ask to receive privileges in prison. He had become a real Israeli patriot."

Avni was born in Riga, Latvia, and during World War II joined a Soviet spy ring aimed at the Nazis.

After the war, the Soviets planted him in Israel as a "mole," the term for a spy who is a member of the organization he is spying on.

Avni joined the foreign service and rose rapidly, serving as economic attache at the Israeli embassies in Brussels, Athens and Belgrade.

As a high-ranking diplomat, he "had access to the most sensitive secrets, which he gave the Russians," Harel said.

In Brussels, Avni had entree to the embassy cipher room and was able to provide his Soviet handlers with Israeli codes with which they could decipher top-secret communications with Jerusalem.

He acted not out of greed but from the conviction of a "devoted Communist," Harel said. "I don't think he meant to harm Israel. He had the absurd Communist perception that he was serving some noble doctrines he thought right, morally and historically."

Avni's downfall came after four years. Harel and Amos Manor, then head of the Shin Bet internal security agency, told him they knew he was a Soviet spy. After an initial denial, he confessed all and cooperated.

According to Harel, Avni was supplied with newspapers and periodicals while in prison and gradually became disillusioned with communism.

"He slowly realized how wrong he was. He tried to repair some of the damage he had caused," the former Mossad chief said.

The daily Ma'ariv reported Sunday that after Avni left prison, the Defense Ministry employed him as a psychologist to counsel settlers forced to evacuate Ophira, in southern Sinai, when the peninsula was handed back to Egypt.