

**SHAMIR PLAYS DOWN CABINET DISUNITY,
DENIES RELATIONS WITH U.S. STRAINED**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, April 29 (JTA) -- Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir now says his Cabinet was unanimous in rejecting the American scenario for a Middle East peace conference.

He also is dismissing media warnings that the failure of Secretary of State James Baker's peace mission to the region would have serious consequences for U.S.-Israeli relations.

Shamir predicted Monday that Baker would soon resume his diplomatic initiative, which was interrupted Friday by news of his mother's death in Houston.

But there were ominous rumblings from Washington.

Senate Minority Leader Robert Dole (R-Kan.) told a television news panel Sunday that the United States might have to review its aid policy to the Middle East if countries there did not agree to hold Arab-Israeli peace talks.

Speaking on the ABC-TV program "This Week With David Brinkley," Dole said that Middle East countries should take advantage of the "window of opportunity" for peace opened by the Persian Gulf War.

"This is the best shot we've had, and if everybody says, 'Oh, we don't care to deal this way or this way,' then I think the United States might take a look at our foreign aid policies and a lot of other policies," the Republican leader said.

He mentioned no country by name. But last year, Dole proposed that the United States pare its aid to Israel and Egypt by 5 percent across the board. The idea was shot down by the White House, though some believe it was actually a trial balloon inspired by the administration.

Grumbling In Congress Reported

Dan Halpren, a knowledgeable Israeli observer and former diplomat, told army radio Monday, in an interview from Washington, that Israel's settlement policies and its dispute over peace conference modalities could affect future U.S.-Israeli relations.

He said that while there is no reason to fear an erosion of the present levels of aid resulting from political strains between Washington and Jerusalem, there is already "talk" in Congress of responding negatively to Israel's expected request this fall for massive U.S. government loan guarantees to help absorb immigrants.

Shamir, who briefed the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee on Monday and spoke to reporters afterward, denied there is any crisis with Washington and insisted his government is unanimous on peace policy.

Responding to local and American media reports that the Bush administration would lay much of the blame for Baker's lack of success on Israel and might "reassess" its Middle East policy, Shamir said that sort of media speculation had proven groundless in the past and would again.

In Washington, White House Press Secretary Marlin Fitzwater said Monday that the next U.S. moves in the Middle East would be determined

only after Baker, who is in mourning, reports to President Bush on his latest trip.

He conceded, however, that "the results so far have been slim. Obviously, that is somewhat disappointing," he said.

But Fitzwater dismissed the notion raised by Dole that future U.S. aid would be conditioned by a country's receptivity to peace negotiations.

"Our emphasis is on the policy side of trying to get an agreement," Fitzwater said. "We don't think it's appropriate to be talking about what would happen if that doesn't happen or to be threatening anyone."

'Not A Great Deal' Of Progress

Assessing Baker's mission to date, Fitzwater said, "While there was some progress made, it obviously was not a great deal. But we want to continue to work with the parties, and that would require not speculating on various statements or commenting on what people had to say."

The press secretary refused to comment on reported differences in the Israeli Cabinet over concessions to bring about a peace conference.

Shamir claimed Monday that he had no differences with Foreign Minister David Levy on the peace process. But the prime minister failed to support Levy when he was attacked by right-wing ministers at Sunday's Cabinet meeting for allegedly agreeing to Baker's ideas about a peace conference.

Israel's position had been that the proposed conference would serve as a brief ceremonial prelude to parallel direct talks Israel would conduct with the Palestinians and its Arab neighbors.

But Levy reportedly accepted Baker's suggestion Friday that if the direct talks became deadlocked, the conference could be reconvened after six months, though only with the consent of all parties.

Shamir denied this, insisting, "Levy did not agree to a reconvening conference" in his talks with Baker. He said the full Cabinet was in agreement that the conference would be a "one-time event" that would cease to exist once direct talks began.

(JTA correspondent Howard Rosenberg in Washington contributed to this report.)

**GROUP'S REPORT ON PRISON CONDITIONS
IN ISRAEL AT CENTER OF CONTROVERSY**

By Aliza Marcus

NEW YORK, April 29 (JTA) -- A report on prison conditions in Israel and the administered territories that was commissioned but never published is at the center of a controversy over the objectivity of Middle East Watch, a human rights monitoring organization.

Rita Simon, a sociology professor at American University, suggests the report she did for Middle East Watch was not published, because it was "basically a positive report" and such reports are usually not issued by the monitoring group.

Syndicated newspaper columnist Mona Charon has charged that "Middle East Watch wanted a smear. When they got the truth, they tried to suppress it."

But human rights officials counter that Simon engaged in sloppy research practices,

turned in a first draft of "deplorable" quality and sent a copy of her draft report to Israeli police and military authorities, something that "borders on the unethical."

"She gave us a flimsy, unpublishable piece of work," said Aryeh Neier, executive director of Human Rights Watch, which comprises Middle East Watch and four other regional monitoring groups.

"It was a very brief, impressionistic account with very little hard information," said Neier, whose organization tracks human rights violations worldwide. "We simply don't publish work of such deplorable quality."

Simon countered that Middle East Watch was judging her report on the basis of a "rough draft," which was "meant to be worked on."

She also said that in academic circles, it is normal to send out draft copies and solicit comments before final publication.

Neier dismissed accusations that human rights groups avoid publishing positive reports, citing a recently released study of Poland's prison system, which was "highly positive," he said.

He also attributed the delay in the report's publication -- close to nine months after the research trip -- to the Persian Gulf crisis, which required Middle East Watch to shift its priorities to investigating allegations of Iraqi abuses, among other things.

'Neither Inhumane Nor Intolerable'

Simon and her daughter, Judith Simon, a lawyer who was part of the three-person team that visited the prisons, have since released their 48-page report privately.

It offers a general look at prison and detention camp conditions, with few references to international law or previously published reports and news articles, which are usually found in human rights reports.

In the conclusion, the Simons write that conditions in the Israeli detention centers are "neither inhumane nor intolerable." Overall, their report portrays Israeli prisons as well run and the inmates as content, given the circumstances.

"My concern was and is getting out an honest report, and when I saw that it was going to be shelved, I thought that was not consistent with" the time spent on the trip, said Simon.

Middle East Watch, meanwhile, has completed and issued its report on prison conditions in Israel and the administered territories. A letter from Neier attached to the report gives a brief description of the controversy and explains the delay in the report's release.

The report, "Prisons in Israel," was written by Eric Goldstein, the group's research director, who accompanied the Simons on the 12-day fact-finding mission to Israel last summer.

The delegation visited 12 facilities between July 29 and Aug. 7, including five prisons run by Israel Prison Services, two police jails and five Israel Defense Force detention camps for Palestinians in the administered territories.

The report is close to double the length of the Simons' report and gives a detailed critique of the prison and detention center system. Goldstein's report draws upon previously published information as well as interviews with lawyers and both former and current prisoners.

Far from being an unmediated attack on Israeli prisons, Goldstein's report states that in general, inmates receive basic necessities, food is adequate and they are not subjected to physical abuse by guards.

But the report says that a two-tier system exists in Israel: well-kept civilian prisons, run by the Israel Prison Service, and a network of detention centers, run by Israel Defense Force, for Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Although conditions in the IDF prison camps were better than those reported during 1988 and 1989, Goldstein writes, "the IDF has been negligent in providing appropriate facilities for its detainees, in view of the long periods that inmates are held in the camps."

Focus On Ketziot Camp

The Middle East Watch report highlights problems faced by detainees at Ketziot, the tent camp detention center in the Negev where over 6,000 Palestinians -- some sentenced, others awaiting trial and about 1,000 in "administrative detention" -- are being held under the authority of the IDF.

Ketziot, located in Israel proper, is in a closed military area, making visits from family members in the territories extremely difficult. "Virtually no family visits have taken place since it opened three years ago," the report says.

Inmates live in tents, which do not afford protection from the extreme summer heat nor from the cold winter nights, Goldstein writes.

In addition, the report says the camp's location within Israel proper is an infringement of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, which regulates the treatment of civilians living under occupation. The convention states that persons accused or convicted of offenses must be detained in the occupied country.

Unlike at other camps, tension between inmates and staff at Ketziot is very high, mail service is backlogged and subject to censorship, few books are allowed in and lawyers complain of being able to spend little time with their clients, the report says.

At Ketziot, the report says, authorities often resort to using tear gas. "The issue boils down to one of will. The intifada caught Israel off guard. Thousands of Palestinians were arrested, and Israel sought a quick means of incarcerating them," writes Goldstein.

"Now that three years have passed, Israel has not shown the inclination to transform the network of substandard detention camps into a system that conforms to the same standards as the prisons."

Israeli officials here, asked several times to comment on the report, declined all chances to do so, saying they had not received a copy of it.

GENEVA PROPOSED FOR MIDEAST PARLEY By Tamar Levy

GENEVA, April 29 (JTA) -- A ranking Swiss official has proposed that Geneva host a Middle East peace conference.

The suggestion was made by Klaus Jacobi, director general of the Swiss Foreign Ministry, on a visit to Cairo last week.

He said no objections were raised by the Egyptian foreign minister, Esmat Abdel Meguid, even though Egypt has offered to host a conference. Washington has offered as well.

But a Middle East peace conference seems more remote than ever since U.S. Secretary of State James Baker failed to get the agreement of Israel or the Arab states to such a gathering during his third visit to the region, which ended last Friday.

JEWES CONCERNED BY MOVE TO END CHURCH-STATE SEPARATION IN POLAND

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK, April 29 (JTA) -- The Polish Catholic Church, which has lately sought to improve Catholic attitudes toward Jews, has called for an end to the separation of church and state in Poland.

Though the proposal is not considered likely to win majority support in the current parliament, the first fully democratic parliamentary elections in late October could give way to a more sympathetic legislature.

A formal move to make Poland a theocracy would cause some concern among American Jewish communal leaders, because it could challenge the status of Poland's dwindling Jewish community, which numbers less than 10,000 out of an overwhelmingly Catholic population of 38 million.

But Jewish experts are also concerned that such a move could set a new political trend in Eastern Europe.

"Poland is a bellwether for the rest of Eastern Europe and Russia," explained George Spectre, director of political education at B'nai B'rith International in Washington.

"Poland's future as a Western-oriented state will hinge heavily on its willingness and ability to be pluralistic, even though it is overwhelmingly Polish Catholic," he said.

"Poland must create an atmosphere where minorities can feel that they're equal, not subsumed under an officially religious state," he said.

The proposal to unify church and state is suspected to have the support of Poland's staunchly Catholic president, Lech Walesa.

Bishop Backs The Separation

"Without Walesa's okay, I'm not sure this would be happening," said one observer, adding that former Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki, who ran against Walesa, "would have used all of his influence to defeat it."

The Polish Episcopate first introduced the notion of the church as state a year ago, and brought it up again several days ago, according to Bronislaw Geremek, the parliamentary leader of the Solidarity bloc, who spoke by telephone with Rabbi A. James Rudin, director of interreligious affairs for the American Jewish Committee.

Geremek, who serves as chairman of the parliamentary committee creating a new Polish constitution, told Rudin he believes "there can be and should be cooperation between the Roman Catholic Church and Poland."

But he added that, "in a modern European state, the principle must be the separation of church and state."

Bishop Henryk Muszynski, chairman of the Polish Episcopate's Commission for Dialogue With Judaism, agrees with this position.

"Both the church and state need the separation," Muszynski told Rudin in a telephone conversation. "The church can best do its role free of the state."

But others in the church apparently feel differently, though it is not yet clear whether the proposal has the backing of the entire Polish bishops organization or just a particular faction of clerics.

According to Rudin, the proposal was revived by the episcopate partly to further its interest in outlawing abortion, which was made a common form of birth control under Communist rule.

WALESA FRUSTRATED HIS DENIALS OF ANTI-SEMITISM ARE DISBELIEVED

By Julian Kossoff

London Jewish Chronicle

LONDON, April 29 (JTA) -- President Lech Walesa of Poland is still trying to erase the image that he is anti-Semitic.

"I have so many times had to prove I'm not. And each time I have tried to persuade people I'm not, everybody believes that I am," the former Solidarity trade union leader said during a three-day state visit to Britain last week.

"The more I prove, the more they disbelieve," he said.

Walesa had the same complaint when he visited the United States last month and spoke to Holocaust survivors in Washington on March 21.

Accusations of alleged anti-Semitism on the part of Walesa arose with the bitterly fought political campaign in Poland that culminated in his election to the presidency in December. During that campaign, there were constant anti-Semitic innuendoes aimed at Walesa's opponent, then Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki, who, though not Jewish, was lobbed with oblique accusations that he was not "a true Pole."

Walesa is faulted for having done nothing to restrain the remarks, especially so because of his angry retort that he was "100 percent Polish," when asked at an election rally if there were not "too many Jews" in the Polish government.

Walesa said he neither created nor exploited anti-Semitism in the election campaign, but admitted it was a major problem in a country with fewer than 10,000 Jews.

"I say wherever anti-Semitism appears, no matter what people think of me, I oppose it," the Polish leader declared.

He is scheduled to visit Israel in May in an attempt to mend fences with Jews in Poland and abroad. Apart from the symbolic importance, his visit is expected to improve bilateral and commercial relations between Poland and Israel.

NOTORIOUS GERMAN NEO-NAZI IS DEAD

By David Kantor

BONN, April 29 (JTA) -- Michael Kuehnen, a 35-year-old neo-Nazi agitator who hated Jews and foreigners in equal measure, died last week at a hospital in Kassel.

Kuehnen was most recently in the news for organizing Skinheads and other neo-Nazi thugs to attack tourists from Poland visiting Germany since the visa requirements were lifted.

He headed a string of extreme right-wing organizations, all of them outlawed by the authorities. The last, the National Union, was considered the most violent.

Kuehnen spent nearly five years in prison for scores of crimes linked to his neo-Nazi activities, which included producing and distributing anti-Semitic material.

In the late 1970s, he reportedly received some weapons and logistical support from the Palestine Liberation Organization.

He also developed contacts in what was formerly East Germany, where the Communist rulers were inclined to help neo-Nazis from West Germany in order to prove that the federal republic was "fascistic."

Kuehnen's supporters rallied Saturday in Frankfurt, vowing to carry on their leader's political work.

EUROPEAN RABBIS WAGING BATTLE TO DEFEND KOSHER MEAT SLAUGHTER

By Charles Hoffman

JERUSALEM, April 29 (JTA) -- The Conference of European Rabbis has won an important round with the Council of Europe in its struggle to preserve the right to slaughter animals according to the laws of kashrut, and is now seeking a similar victory in the European Community.

Rabbi Avraham Guigui of Brussels reported on the struggle against attempts to ban or restrict ritual slaughter, or shechita, to close to 60 of his colleagues at the Conference European Rabbis, which was held here last week to discuss issues of common interest. The gathering was held under the auspices of Religious Affairs Minister Avner Shaki.

Guigui, who represents the rabbinical conference on issues of shechita in contacts with inter-governmental bodies, told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency that in a recent meeting with officials of the Council of Europe, the officials "decided to drop all proposed measures to ban or restrict shechita, after they heard our presentation."

He said that groups for the prevention of cruelty to animals had campaigned against ritual slaughter, as practiced by Jews and Moslems.

Their main claim in regard to Jewish practice is that any method of slaughter that does not include stunning the animal before it is killed--such as shechita -- causes needless pain and should be banned.

The Council of Europe, which includes the 12 European Community states and others, such as Switzerland and the Scandinavian countries, can only recommend certain policies to its members, Guigui said.

Much more serious, he said, are the regulations now being prepared by the European Community for 1992, which when passed will be binding on its member countries.

Concern Over Moslem Slaughter

"Our goal," Guigui said, "is to have all European countries, and particularly the E.C., recognize shechita as an acceptable method of slaughter.

"The declaration adopted by the Council of Europe said that ritual slaughter should be carried out only in licensed slaughter houses by authorized experts. As Jews, we have no problem with this, since this is the way shechita is practiced," he explained.

"There has been a positive atmosphere in our talks with the E.C., and I hope that the issues can be resolved in the next few weeks," Guigui said.

Shechita was banned previously in Switzerland and Sweden.

Part of the anti-shechita atmosphere, Guigui said, was generated by opposition to Moslem ritual slaughter, which can be performed anywhere, with any kind of knife, and by anyone, which often creates unsanitary conditions.

There has been no cooperation between Jews and Moslems, he said, in contacts with the Council of Europe or the European Community.

The Council of Europe had realized, he said, that shechita could not incorporate stunning into its procedures. Nevertheless, certain proposals were raised to restrict shechita.

"They wanted shechita to be limited to local consumption and not for export. They also wanted the shochet (slaughterer) to be under veterinary

supervision, which of course is impossible for us," Guigui said.

"They also wanted the meat from the hind-quarters, which Jews do not eat, to bear a stamp that it had been slaughtered according to shechita. This would make it much more difficult to sell these portions to Gentiles, and would considerably raise the price of kosher meat."

What convinced the council to drop these proposals, he said, was "testimony by veterinary experts given on our behalf. They presented scientific proof that shechita causes no more pain to the animal than the stunning method does."

EFFORTS FAIL TO PROD SOVIET JEWS IN GERMANY TO RETURN TO ISRAEL

By David Kantor

BONN, April 29 (JTA) -- Efforts to convince some 300 Soviet Jews in Berlin to return to Israel have had meager success.

Only about 15 of the former olim who left Israel are said to be willing now to board a flight to Tel Aviv. But others have admitted telling falsehoods about their treatment in Israel.

The 300 Soviet Jews came to Germany in January at the height of the Persian Gulf War, claiming they were escaping Iraqi Scud missiles falling on Israel.

But when their temporary visas expired last month, they refused to return. Many said they were disappointed with Israel, were mistreated there and were forced to settle in the administered territories.

They carry Israeli travel documents, and the Jerusalem government insists they must not be treated as refugees but be made to return to Israel, whose nationals they are.

Israel asked the Germans to make clear to the emigres that they had no chance to become legal residents of Berlin. The Israelis expected that would put an end to an embarrassing situation that was being used by some hostile groups in Berlin to discredit Israel.

The German authorities, anxious to cooperate with Israel but extremely sensitive when dealing with Jews seeking haven, tried gentle persuasion. But they made clear they would never forcibly expel the Jews, who congregated in Berlin.

It appears almost certain that those who refuse to return to Israel will not be expelled and may even get assistance to settle in Germany.

Some who complained against Israel now say that they were encouraged by certain supporters of their cause in Berlin to falsely describe their experiences in Israel.

FEAST OF BOOTHS AT BOOK FAIR

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, April 29 (JTA) -- Some 100,000 books from 40 countries can be seen at the 15th International Book Fair, which opened Sunday in Jerusalem.

The 800 participating publishers set up their booths in an 8,400-square-yard exhibition area. While the number of publishers is the same as at the last book fair two years ago, there are fewer books because of delays in shipping caused by the Persian Gulf War.

A highlight of the exhibition is presentation of the Jerusalem Award, which is given at each fair to the author who has best expressed the issue of human freedom in society. This year's prize will go to Polish writer Zbigniew Herbert.