

MIDEAST PEACE PROCESS 'NOT STUCK,' LEVY SAYS AFTER MEETING WITH BAKER

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, June 13 (JTA) -- Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy emerged from talks Thursday morning with Secretary of State James Baker denying that the Middle East peace process is deadlocked, despite Israel's refusal to meet U.S. requests for flexibility on certain procedural issues.

"The process is not stuck," Levy told reporters after the meeting at the State Department, which last nearly two hours, about twice as long as scheduled.

But there was no indication from Levy or State Department officials that there had been any change on any of the issues that are dividing the United States and Israel.

Levy said the United States and Israel would remain in close consultations. He said he was assured that the United States would not surprise Israel with any new unacceptable proposals.

He made similar remarks late Thursday afternoon in New York, prior to an evening address before the 78th annual National Commission meeting of the Anti-Defamation League.

The State Department said Thursday that it does not consider the Middle East peace process to be over. Before the meeting, Baker told reporters that the United States will continue trying to bring about a peace conference as long as there is hope that such a meeting can be agreed upon.

A Number of Misunderstandings

The secretary assured a delegation of Jewish organizational leaders late Thursday afternoon that he personally remained committed to the peace process.

The nine-member delegation included leaders of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, American Israel Public Affairs Committee, American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Congress, National Jewish Coalition and the United Jewish Appeal.

Earlier in the day, State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler said the peace process cannot be deadlocked, since Syrian President Hafez Assad has still not answered the letter President Bush sent him requesting flexibility on plans to convene a peace conference.

Bush sent similar letters to Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and other Middle East leaders.

Tutwiler said Baker and Levy went over Shamir's response to the Bush letter, which was sent at the end of last week. While the letter has not been officially made public, it is known that Shamir rejected U.S. proposals for having a U.N. observer at the peace conference and for reconvening it periodically after direct negotiations begin.

Both proposals were offered to appease Syria, which wants the conference to be under U.N. auspices. Tutwiler made a point of saying that these two issues were discussed, but did not reveal anything further.

In his letter, Shamir also insisted on Israel's right to veto anyone on the list of Palestinian

delegates to peace talks, in order to prevent the participation of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

"Israel will not sit with those it does not want to sit down with," Levy said Thursday. "It will not be forced to sit with those it refuses to sit with."

The foreign minister said Israel has "a number of understandings" with the United States on this point, but added, "I do not intend to go into details."

Most observers here did not expect any changes on either side from the Levy-Baker meeting. It was widely believed that Levy was invited to Washington to hear Baker's views on the Shamir letter and take them back to his government in Jerusalem.

Levy stressed Thursday that Israel has offered "practical steps" for moving the peace process forward, but nothing has been forthcoming from the Arab states.

When reporters asked Baker if he plans to make a fifth trip to the Middle East soon, he replied, "No." But Levy said in today's world leaders do not have to visit each other to be in constant close touch.

Baker also denied a report in an Israeli newspaper that Bush plans to invite Israeli and Arab leaders to a meeting at Camp David, the presidential retreat in Maryland.

But Tutwiler left open as an option the suggestion that Bush might invite the Middle East leaders to a meeting at some other site.

Levy said he also raised with Baker Israel's concern about Syria's "takeover of Lebanon" and the buildup of armed terrorists in the southern part of the country.

"The fact that various militia and terrorist forces are allowed to keep their arms, the closer they are to Israel is a green light to attack Israel," Levy said.

ORTHODOX MINISTER SAYS KIBBUTZIM TURN IMMIGRANTS INTO CRIMINALS

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, June 13 (JTA) -- The cultural clash simmering between religious and secular Jews since Israel's founding flared suddenly this week into a political uproar touching on the absorption of immigrants, particularly newcomers from Ethiopia.

The flames were fed by Absorption Minister Yitzhak Peretz, an Orthodox rabbi, who objected to the Jewish Agency temporarily housing some Ethiopian olim at what he called "godless" kibbutzim. He contended doing so would result in them abandoning Judaism.

Peretz made the statements during an angry television encounter Wednesday night with Mooki Tsur, secretary of TAKAM, the United Kibbutz Movement. Appearing on Israel Television's nightly newscast, Peretz charged that the kibbutzim had enticed immigrants from Arab countries away from Judaism during the 1950s and 1960s.

The absorption minister implied that this was responsible for a high crime rate among Israelis of Sephardic origin. He said Israeli jails were now "full with sons and daughters of Middle Eastern origin."

"It Peretz wants a kulturkampf, he will have one" declared Ya'acov Tsur, a Laborite who preceded him as minister of absorption. "Peretz ought to know that he is the absorption minister of the entire people of Israel, not just the ultra-Orthodox ones."

The opposition Labor Party promptly introduced a motion of no confidence in the Knesset and demanded that the Likud-led government dismiss Peretz forthwith.

Similar motions were filed by the Citizens Rights Movement, Mapam and the Center-Shinui Movement, all parties on the left wing of the political spectrum.

Labor Party leader Shimon Peres held the Likud government responsible.

"If Rabbi Peretz were a private person, OK, that is his view," Peres said. "But he represents a government, and the government must bear the consequences of his approach."

Yitzhak Rabin, Labor's No. 2 leader, told Israel Radio: "This outburst of deep hatred from a rabbi and Cabinet minister in Israel points to a most serious phenomenon -- a real effort to tear at the social fabric of Israel."

Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir tried to cool spirits Thursday, saying Peretz should have no cause for concern that the kibbutzim would disrespect the religious needs of the Ethiopian immigrants.

'I Will Not Be Silent'

But Peretz declared Thursday that he would not retract his allegations and got a message of support from Israel's Sephardic chief rabbi, Mordechai Eliahu.

"I will not be silent nor rest until this evil is lifted," the minister said.

The Jewish Agency, meanwhile, announced that it would no longer direct Ethiopian olim to kibbutzim in any case, because there was no longer a need to find temporary housing for them.

Only about 700 of the more than 14,000 Ethiopians airlifted to Israel in Operation Solomon were quartered in kibbutzim.

A Jewish Agency official emphasized, however, that it would not hesitate to refer more immigrants to kibbutzim if the need arose again.

The head of the Ethiopian Immigrants Association, Adisu Masala, demanded Thursday that the immigrants be allowed to decide for themselves where they should live.

"With all the options that exist in the State of Israel and all the alternatives, the decision must be left up to us and not to others," he said.

Kibbutz and Mapam activists demonstrated outside Peretz's Jerusalem residence Thursday and then moved to the Absorption Ministry, where one demonstrator was arrested.

Peretz, who served in the last government as interior minister, won election to the Knesset as a member of the Orthodox Shas party. But he has since quit Shas and retains his Knesset seat and Cabinet office as an independent.

Peretz is rumored to be considering the establishment of a new religious party to replace Shas, which is troubled by the police investigation of its leaders for alleged financial misconduct.

Political pundits note that the anti-secular polemics he used in his provocative television appearance were the same he employed in his past election campaigns on behalf of Shas.

According to these observers, his purpose might be to create a new religious power base around himself.

E.C. TO LOAN ISRAEL \$95 MILLION

By Yossi Lempkovicz

BRUSSELS, June 13 (JTA) -- The European Community will loan Israel up to \$95 million for industrial development over the next five years, according to a financial protocol just signed here.

The signatories were Ambassador Joseph Weyland of Luxembourg, the country that currently holds the rotating chairmanship of the E.C. Council of Ministers, and Juan Pratt, director general for Mediterranean policy of the European Executive Commission.

Israel was represented by its ambassador to the E.C., Avi Primor.

A joint statement issued after the signing explained that the European Investment Bank, the E.C.'s financial institution, would extend credits to Israel for a period up to Oct. 31, 1996.

The loans would be earmarked for projects contributing to Israel's economic growth, in the framework of the E.C.-Israel trade and financial cooperation agreement signed in May 1975.

"It would allow the two parties to deepen cooperation contributing to Israel's economic development and to the strengthening of their relations in their mutual interest," the statement said.

The E.C. has signed trade and financial cooperation agreements with a dozen Mediterranean countries.

IDF TENSION SINCE BARAK TOOK HELM BREAKS INTO ISRAEL'S NEWSPAPERS

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, June 13 (JTA) -- The Israel Defense Force reacted sharply this week when the latest rumblings of discontent among senior officers over the methods of the new chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Ehud Barak, hit the pages of Israel's largest daily.

According to Yediot Achronot, there is anger in the upper echelons of the army at the treatment of a highly regarded brigade commander, identified only as "Col. S."

Although praised as "one of my best" by former Chief of Staff Dan Shomron, the colonel was separated from his command in the northern sector and reassigned to what his colleagues described as a "post of lesser importance" in the administered territories, Yediot Achronot reported.

The IDF issued a statement Wednesday making clear that "the assignment of colonels to various posts is the responsibility and the authority of the chief of the general staff. The subject has not in the past, and will not in the future, be discussed on the pages of newspapers."

The paper quoted officers as saying Barak ordered the shift because he considered the colonel to be a protege of Gen. Yossi Peled, former commander of the northern sector, with whom he reportedly had been feuding.

The IDF officers corps has been rankled by the many cuts in personnel which Barak, citing budgetary constraints, has made since he took over last month as chief of staff.

Included among the cuts has been the elimination of certain posts -- leading to deferred promotions for some career officers and early retirement for others.

Barak has also eliminated most IDF publications, including highly regarded professional journals, and army radio has been relegated to civilian hands.

RCA REINSTATES RABBIS IT DISCIPLINED FOR MEMBERSHIP IN LIBERAL FELLOWSHIP

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

SPRING GLEN, N.Y., June 13 (JTA) -- In an effort to prevent further division between liberal and conservative elements in the modern Orthodox movement, the Rabbinical Council of America has reinstated the eight rabbis it had effectively suspended because of their membership in the more liberal Fellowship of Traditional Orthodox Rabbis.

The RCA's 50-member executive committee passed a resolution reinstating them to membership in good standing on Monday during its annual convention here. It called for a case-by-case evaluation of their positions within the RCA by the organization's internal affairs committee, the Va'ad ha-Kavod.

Rabbis involved on both sides say they are now hoping to resolve their differences quietly, without the rancor and recriminations that have characterized relations for the past two years.

The more liberal rabbis have described RCA efforts to get them to drop their FTOR membership "coercive" and "threatening," while RCA rabbis have considered the FTOR rabbis "renegade troublemakers," say some of those involved.

Early in 1988, the RCA passed a resolution declaring membership in the FTOR "incompatible" with membership in the RCA, which is the largest association of Orthodox rabbis in the United States. The resolution was reaffirmed in March 1990 by the RCA executive committee.

This spring, the RCA sent eight of the rabbis affiliated with both organizations letters telling them the RCA would no longer consider them members in good standing.

Why the RCA sent the letters to only eight of the estimated 15 to 20 rabbis with dual affiliation remains unclear. "The RCA may not know about the rest," one rabbi suggested.

Contrary Stance On Mixed Seating

The move effectively suspended the eight rabbis, denying them the RCA imprimatur on the conversions, marriages and divorces they perform. That imprimatur is extremely valuable because the Israeli Chief Rabbinate accepts the RCA's approval in matters of personal status.

Moreover, many of the synagogues belonging to the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America require their pulpit rabbis to be RCA members or eligible for RCA membership.

The original RCA decision was based on the fact that the FTOR includes rabbis who are RCA members and rabbis who are not, some of whom do not meet RCA standards for membership, according to Rabbi Marc Angel, the RCA president.

But the RCA also does not like the fact that the FTOR has taken positions contrary to RCA policy by endorsing the right of women to pray with a Torah at the Western Wall and allowing men and women to sit together in the synagogue.

"We saw it as divisiveness within the Orthodox rabbinate, which is not healthy," Angel said.

"A small group of rabbis was able to divert attention to themselves in a way that was inimical to the positions and policies of the RCA," he said. And "this group had credibility because it had RCA rabbis."

"I felt they should function within the council. We could handle any items on their agenda," he said.

But it was precisely because the founders of FTOR felt that there was no room within the RCA for many of their concerns that they first founded the FTOR in 1987.

It began as a way for liberal Orthodox rabbis -- often called "traditional" -- to share items of concern, issues that they felt were not being addressed by the 1,000-member RCA.

The FTOR has developed into an organization that takes public positions on issues and helps match rabbis who need pulpits to congregations seeking rabbis.

Not An Outright Expulsion

A lawyer representing the dual-affiliation rabbis sent a letter to the RCA in mid-May stating that its de facto expulsion of the eight rabbis took place without due process and was an infringement on their rights.

"Our attorney, after examining our constitution, informed us that we have a right to expel members, call them before the Va'ad ha-Kavod or leave them alone," said Angel. But "there isn't a category of 'member not in good standing.'"

Angel said the eight rabbis in question were not simply expelled, because he wants to bring about conciliation, rather than further disharmony, between those on the left and right in modern Orthodoxy.

The issues of concern to the FTOR rabbis "should be mainstream RCA discussions," he maintained.

But one rabbi belonging to both groups is not sure the reinstatement was necessarily motivated out of a desire to find a place for the liberals' agenda in the RCA.

According to the RCA constitution, "they cannot expel anyone through the executive committee, only through the Va'ad ha-Kavod," Rabbi Avraham Weiss of New York pointed out.

"On the one hand, their decision is a capitulation," he said. "On the other hand, it could be ominous."

However, by most accounts, efforts this week to establish communication between the two groups have met with some success, in large part because of efforts made by Angel, who is concluding the first year of his two-year term as president.

Rabbi Ira Grussgott, one of the rabbis who is a member of both organizations, acknowledged that Angel has "left the door open to see if we can't resolve this in a way that isn't confrontational."

'Begun To Understand Each Others' Positions'

Grussgott met with Angel during the convention at the Homowack Lodge here and came away with the sense that "for the first time, we had begun to understand each others' positions in a far more extensive fashion" than before.

"More face-to-face talks would help us resolve our differences," he said. The "FTOR has felt a frustration that some of its needs are not on the agenda of the RCA. At least negotiations can now ensue in good faith."

"Under Rabbi Angel, the RCA has in fact become an organization responsive to the needs of all of the rabbis," said Rabbi Ephraim Zimand, president of the FTOR and a member of the RCA.

"But is it a reflection of the presidency of Rabbi Angel, which will end, or is it indigenous to the organization?" he asked. "Is he indicative of the direction of the council, or is he an anachronism?"

ANTI-ISRAEL LOBBY HAS SMART TACTICS BUT LIMITED SUCCESS, SAYS ADL STUDY

NEW YORK, June 13 (JTA) -- An anti-Israel lobby spearheaded by several major Arab-American organizations is using sophisticated techniques to win the support of U.S. policy-makers and public opinion, especially on college campuses, for the Palestinian cause.

But so far it has had only limited success, according to a new study prepared by the Civil Rights Division of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith.

Titled "The Anti-Israel Lobby Today: An Examination of the Themes and Tactics of an Evolving Propaganda Movement," the report was to be released here Friday at the ADL's 78th annual National Commission meeting.

It documents the anti-Israel efforts of two related groups, the American Educational Trust and the Council for the National Interest, whose leadership includes many former U.S. government officials and former members of Congress.

"By becoming more directly and consistently involved with political campaigns, legislative deliberations and party platform debates, the anti-Israel lobby has sharpened the skills of promotion and persuasion necessary to influence the formulation of public policy," the report says.

It cites as examples of growing political savvy the sponsorship of four pro-Palestinian ballot measures in California and Massachusetts during the 1988 elections.

One was passed in Cambridge and parts of Somerville, Mass., calling on political leaders to support the creation of a Palestinian state.

Canon Fodder

Pro-Arab propagandists approach American college students with positive-sounding themes, such as human rights and national interest.

American colleges have been the prime targets of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, or ADC, and the Palestine Solidarity Committee, which have formed on-campus chapters.

The ADC sent students on one of its "Eye-witness Israel" tours. After traveling through the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the students issued a statement on their return condemning Israel.

The familiar "Zionism-is-racism" theme, echoing the 1975 U.N. General Assembly resolution, is promoted on campuses by the Muslim Students Association.

Another theme of the ADC is opposition to Soviet Jewish immigration to Israel.

After an ADC delegation visited the Soviet Union, its leader, Abdeen Jabara, charged that "Soviet Jews are being used as cannon fodder by the Israeli government to help its expansionist goals."

The ADL report concludes that the successes of the pro-Arab propaganda drive have been limited and uneven. Recent polls show U.S. public support and sympathy for Israel to be at an all-time high.

"These groups have skillfully exploited such diverse phenomena as American economic uncertainty and televised scenes of intifada violence to advance their cause, with some tangible results," the ADL study says.

"However, Israel's supportive role and victimization by Iraq during the Gulf war bolstered the image of the Jewish state as a democratic ally in the American mind."

NEW BOOK PUBLISHED HONORS ALL ITALIAN JEWISH DEPORTEES

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME, June 13 (JTA) -- A new book which names and traces the fate of every one of the 8,000 Italian Jews deported or imprisoned by the Nazis in World War II was honored here Wednesday night.

The ceremonies drew a standing-room-only crowd of diplomats, intellectuals and religious and community leaders of all faiths to the magnificent Palazzo Giustiniani in the heart of Rome.

The keynote address was delivered by Giovanni Spadolini, president of the Italian Senate and a former prime minister.

The diplomats present included the ambassadors of Germany and Israel and the charge d'affaires of the Polish Embassy. The Vatican was represented by Cardinal Johannes Willebrands, formerly secretary of the Holy See's Commission on Religious Relations with the Jews.

Among the dignitaries present were Italian Chief Rabbi Elio Toaff and Tullia Zevi, president of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities.

The guest of honor was Liliana Picciotto Fargion, editor of the vast work of research, titled "The Book of Memory -- The Jews Deported from Italy 1943-45."

Published only weeks ago, its first edition has already been sold out.

Other speakers included Nazi-hunters Simon Wiesenthal of Vienna and Serge Klarsfeld of Paris. Klarsfeld remarked that Fargion's book gave breath to each person as a human being and not just a number.

"Naming the shadows already brings them out of the darkness," he said.

Spadolini, a vocal friend of the Jews and Israel, referred to Israel as the "state which arose out of the ashes of the Holocaust."

For that reason, he said, "the entire West, including the Soviet Union, must show its firm determination to guarantee the historic borders of Israel and the safety of its population."

STRICT WATER-SAVING MEASURES PROMPTED BY CONTINUING DROUGHT

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, June 13 (JTA) -- Strict water conservation measures were announced Wednesday by Agriculture Minister Rafael Eitan, in the face of Israel's continuing drought.

The restrictions include a ban on watering public parks and private gardens and lawns during the daylight hours.

The rules will remain in force through October 1992.

Eitan has been urging drastic conservation measures since last winter, when the seasonal rains were late for the fourth consecutive year and the level of Lake Kinneret, the country's largest natural reservoir, fell dangerously low.

He nevertheless encountered strong opposition. The new rules are a compromise with critics, who warned that verdant areas in towns and villages could become arid wastelands.

But Eitan told the public they would have to make the choice between sitting on lawns or eating tomatoes.

Homeowner are banned from planting new lawns or seasonal plants. They may plant new gardens of up to one-eighth of an acre, provided they get permission from the water commissioner.