

**BEARING NEW CONCESSIONS FROM ARABS,
BAKER BEGINS TALKS WITH WARY ISRAEL**
By David Landau

JERUSALEM, July 21 (JTA) -- Bearing new concessions from the Arab world, U.S. Secretary of State James Baker arrived in Israel on Sunday evening to face an Israeli leadership increasingly suspicious of Syrian motives and the U.S. incentives that may be driving them.

All he would say upon his arrival at Ben-Gurion Airport was that it was "hot," a word that seemed to describe both the weather and the political atmosphere.

Baker flew in from Amman, the Jordanian capital, where King Hussein indicated Sunday that his nation is ready to take part in a proposed peace conference with Israel.

The secretary received similar assurances Saturday from Saudi Arabia, after confirming Syrian willingness to negotiate with Israel during a visit to Damascus last Thursday.

His first meeting in Israel was with a group of West Bank Palestinian leaders, who have their own reservations about the peace conference scenario rapidly developing.

The scheduling allowed Baker to arrive at the Prime Minister's Office after the end of the Jewish fast of Tisha B'Av. He met there privately with Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, but ended the meeting early because he was not feeling well. Talks were to resume Monday morning.

Aware that too much pressure on an already wary Israeli leadership could produce a backlash, Baker is expected not to press Shamir for answers before he leaves on Monday.

Sources speculated that the secretary might pay a return visit to Israel at the end of the week to obtain an answer to the key question of the moment: whether Israel will agree to participate in a peace conference with a silent United Nations observer.

Rejects Deal On Arab Boycott

Shamir's government has already responded negatively to another proposal: a public offer by Saudi Arabia to end the 43-year-old Arab trade boycott of Israel if Israel stops building Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Shamir and other senior ministers denounced the tradeoff on grounds that the issues are in no way connected.

Defense Minister Moshe Arens called the offer "more of a gimmick than a sincere proposal."

While the idea infuriates the Likud regime and its right-wing partners, the opposition Labor Party seems amenable.

Yitzhak Rabin, Labor's No. 2 leader and possible choice to head the party in the 1992 elections, urged the government in a television interview to agree to a six-month freeze on settlements in return for a freeze of the boycott.

"After six months, we shall see which way things are going," Rabin said. He also appealed to the government to set aside "minor matters of procedure" and accept the American proposals for the peace conference.

A Labor Party no-confidence motion is to be heard in the Knesset on Monday afternoon.

If Baker and Shamir part without an accord,

the Knesset will become the forum for the opposition's attack on the government for missing what opposition circles see as an unprecedented opportunity to move toward peace.

Private diplomatic communications between Washington and Jerusalem in recent days have reportedly emphasized this same message in even starker tones, plainly implying that Israel's failure to respond favorably would lead to a major crisis between the two governments.

Assad Willing To Meet Shamir

The American proposals, seeking to bridge over Israeli and Arab differences, call for a U.N. observer to attend the peace conference, with the same status as that envisioned for the European Community's observer. That would be a lower status than the two powers hosting the conference, the United States and Soviet Union.

The U.S. proposals also call for the full conference plenary to reconvene periodically, but only with the consent of all the parties.

Until now, Shamir has opposed any U.N. role at the conference and any reconvening of it.

Syria had originally demanded an entirely U.N.-run conference, with the plenary in virtually permanent session. American diplomats say Damascus' agreement to the new proposals represents a major concession by the hardest-line Arab state.

Reports from Washington said Syrian President Hafez Assad specifically wrote in his letter to President Bush last week that he is willing to meet face to face with Shamir, within the framework of the proposed conference.

The Americans, moreover, have been at pains to assure Israel and its friends in Washington that they have given no secret undertakings to Damascus to facilitate the Syrian turnaround.

Israeli leaders have grumbled during recent days that Washington has withheld from Israel the full text of Assad's letter to Bush. But the United States counters that disclosure of such documents does not accord with accepted diplomatic practice.

Washington also denies that it has made a specific commitment to Syria to promote an Israeli return of the Golan Heights during the peace conference, even though the United States has never recognized Israel's virtual annexation of the strategic territory.

Problems On Left And Right

Settlement leaders in the Golan said Sunday they had been reassured by the Prime Minister's Office that the territory remains an integral part of the state and will not be returned in the context of peace negotiations.

But Shamir has far more to be concerned about than the sentiments of those living there.

Observers described the domestic political situation here Sunday as "the quiet before the storm." They predicted a forceful assault by the opposition parties if it turns out that Shamir offers no softening of his previous stance in response to the Syrian and Saudi concessions.

Labor leaders Shimon Peres and Rabin criticize Shamir for having insisted in the first place on Syrian participation in the peace process instead of agreeing to talks with Jordan and the Palestinians.

But having taken that position, they argue,

he cannot now reject the chance of negotiating with Damascus and thereby cast Israel as an impediment to peace in the eyes of its foremost supporters abroad.

On the right flank, Shamir is under relentless pressure from his coalition partners not to make any concessions whatsoever. Yuval Ne'eman of Tehiya said Sunday he is hopeful that the prime minister will indeed stick to his guns. But if he does not, Tehiya, along with its allies, the Tsomet and far-right Meledet parties will walk out of the government, they say.

Some political observers predict that Shamir, faced with U.S. insistence on convening the conference, will precipitate a coalition crisis, dissolving the Knesset.

The government would become a caretaker regime, pending early elections, giving Israel a long breathing spell during which there could be no major diplomatic activity on the peace front.

CHURCH URGES CUTBACK IN U.S. AID TO ISRAEL OVER SETTLEMENT POLICY By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK, July 21 (JTA) -- The American Jewish Committee has sharply criticized a resolution adopted last week by the Episcopal Church urging the United States to withhold aid from Israel equal to the amount Jerusalem spends on Jewish settlements in the administered territories and East Jerusalem.

The resolution, adopted during the church's 70th General Convention in Phoenix, urges the U.S. government to hold aid to Israel in escrow in the same amount that the Israeli government spends "to expand, develop or further establish Israeli settlements in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem."

It says the money should be released from escrow only "if proof is given that settlements are not being established."

"We find the Episcopal resolution unfair, unbalanced and not helpful in the current peace process," said Rabbi Robert Kravitz, AJCommittee's Arizona regional director, who was an official observer at the convention.

Rabbi A. James Rudin, national interreligious affairs director for the Jewish human relations agency, called the resolution "regrettable," "stale" and "one-sided." He pointed out that it makes demands solely on Israel and not on the Arab nations that have been formally at war with the Jewish state for 43 years.

The Episcopal convention failed to condemn the many "egregious human rights violations that are taking place within the Arab states, including the deportation of 1 million Yemenis from Saudi Arabia, the expulsion of 150,000 Palestinians by Kuwait, and the 4,000 Syrian Jews, who are virtually hostages in their own country," Rabbi Kravitz pointed out in a statement.

While the 2.4 million-member Episcopal Church is smaller than many other American religious groups, its influence is said to far outweigh its size.

President Bush, Secretary of State James Baker, National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft and Gen. H. Norman Schwarzkopf, commander of U.S. armed forces during the Persian Gulf War, are all Episcopalians, and the church has jokingly been called "the Republican Party at prayer."

The church leadership's anti-Israel bent is "very typical" of mainline Protestant denominations, said Rudin.

POLICE PREVENT CLASH ON TEMPLE MOUNT AS TEMPERS FLARE PRIOR TO BAKER VISIT By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, July 21 (JTA) -- Vigilant police prevented a possible clash between Arabs and Jews on the Temple Mount on Sunday, only hours before U.S. Secretary of State James Baker's expected arrival in Jerusalem.

Sunday was Tisha B'Av, the ninth day of the Hebrew month of Av, which is a fast day for observant Jews mourning the destruction of the Second Temple and other Jewish tragedies.

A militant Jewish group known as the Temple Mount Faithful attempted to enter the compound, which is now the site of Islamic shrines where Jews are not permitted to worship.

Police stopped them at the Mughrabi Gate, the entrance to the mount.

The group prayed, read from the Book of Lamentations, made insulting remarks about Baker and about an Israeli judge, Ezra Kama, and dispersed without incident.

Judge Kama published a report last Thursday critical of the conduct of the police in the so-called Temple Mount riots of last Oct. 8.

On that occasion, rumors that members of the Temple Mount Faithful were about to invade their shrines stirred Arabs to throw rocks at Jews praying at the Western Wall below the mount.

Regular and riot police opened fire on the rock-throwers, killing 17 and wounding scores more. But the judge ruled that there was insufficient evidence to bring charges against anyone.

The authorities feared that extremist groups on either side might use the issue to cause trouble during Baker's visit.

GAZA ARAB CONFESSES TO HIT-AND-RUN THAT KILLED HITCHHIKING IDF SOLDIER By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, July 21 (JTA) -- A 43-year-old father of 11 from the Gaza Strip is reported to have confessed to police that he was the hit-and-run driver who fatally injured a young Israel Defense Force soldier waiting to hitch a ride on a highway near Ashkelon on Friday.

Jamal Abdul Kader al-Baz was nabbed Saturday night about 7 miles north of Jericho in the West Bank, where he was trying to cross the border into Jordan.

Under questioning, he said he accidentally struck the soldier after losing control of his car. But later, he reportedly admitted he swerved off the road intentionally to prove to intifada activists that he was not a collaborator.

The suspect reportedly said his brother was murdered a month ago on suspicion of collaborating with the Israeli authorities.

The incident occurred Friday afternoon near Nitzanim, north of Ashkelon, where a group of IDF recruits was waiting to hitch rides.

A car approaching at high speed struck Nadav Deri, 18, who had enlisted only four days earlier. He died of his injuries.

Deri was the third IDF soldier in seven months to be killed by a car driven by a Gaza Strip resident. Security sources said restrictions on those leaving the territory to find work in Israel, relaxed recently, will be tightened again.

The fatal car struck another vehicle while escaping, police said. It was eventually forced to stop by a flat tire and was found abandoned near a Rehovot hospital late Friday night.

ISRAEL LEERY OF ISLAMIC JIHAD'S LATEST OFFER ON LEBANON PRISONERS

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, July 21 (JTA) -- Israel's defense establishment is highly skeptical of a reported offer by the Islamic Jihad to allow representatives of the International Red Cross to visit Israelis it claims to be holding captive in Lebanon.

According to reports in the Lebanese press, the offer is contingent on the release of four Palestinians held in Israeli prisons, plus a guarantee to release all Palestinians and other Arabs incarcerated in Israel.

Although seven Israeli soldiers have been held prisoner in Lebanon for years, a senior defense official observed that the extremist Islamic Jihad offered no proof that it was their captor.

"This is an attempt to try to extract some questionable benefit by taking advantage of this painful, humanitarian problem," he said.

The official observed that "sometimes, to our great sorrow," the Lebanese media publishes proposals to Israel by groups which have no connection with Israeli prisoners.

"The announcement does not clarify the identity of the Israeli captives in question, and we have no proof that lends truth to the claim of the organization that it holds, or that an element called the Islamic Opposition holds, Israelis captive."

The official said Israel stands "ready to consider any proposal or demand for the release of prisoners on condition that it receives proof that its captives or missing persons are in the hands of those elements making the proposals."

WIFE OF AIRMAN MISSING IN LEBANON CAMPAIGNS ON HER HUSBAND'S BEHALF

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, July 21 (JTA) -- Tami Arad wants Americans to know that there are not only Americans being held hostage in Lebanon, but also seven Israelis.

One of them is her husband, Capt. Ron Arad, a navigator in the Israeli air force who has been a prisoner in Lebanon since October 1986.

Tami Arad was in Washington last week to speak to members of Congress and representatives of Jewish organizations about her husband, who she believes is alive, even though he has not been seen since the end of 1987.

He is being held by the Iranian government, not by the Shi'ite fundamentalist Hezbollah or some other Lebanese or Palestinian group, she maintained.

That is why Arad believes the time is propitious for obtaining her husband's release.

Groups holding the American hostages, including journalist Terry Anderson, have demanded the release of Palestinians and Lebanese being held as prisoners of war in Israel, in exchange for the Americans.

But Israel will never release the Arab prisoners without a guarantee of getting back its own prisoners, Arad said.

Three of the six other Israelis believed held captive in Lebanon have been missing since a 1982 battle with the Syrian army, during Israel's invasion of Lebanon. Their names are Yehuda Katz, Zachary Shlomo Baumel and Zvi Feldman.

The other three, Joseph Fink, Rachamim Alsheikh and Samir Assad, are believed to have

been captured in 1985 by Amal, the mainstream Shi'ite militia.

Arad believes the problem can be solved by what she calls a "circular" deal, in which the Israeli and American hostages, and the prisoners held in Israel, are released in a three-way swap.

"We can help each other," she said.

Arad said that members of Congress voiced concern that such a deal could conflict with the U.S. policy against negotiating with terrorists and kidnappers. But they were amenable to her proposal to let Israel do the "dirty work," she said.

A 'Humanitarian Problem'

The 30-year-old Arad, accompanied by her 6-year-old daughter, Yuval, urged everyone not to look at her husband's plight in terms of Middle East politics, or even the peace process.

"It is a humanitarian problem," she said.

"We are talking about people."

Arad said her husband was known to be in good condition after he was first captured in Lebanon. He and the pilot of an Israeli air force Phantom bailed out over the southern coastal city of Sidon.

The pilot was rescued, but Arad was captured by Amal, the Shi'ite organization headed by Nabih Berri, who had him transferred to Beirut.

Tami Arad said that while her husband was held in Beirut, she received a picture of him and a letter.

But at the beginning of 1988, Mustafa Dirani, who was in charge of Amal's security, split with the organization and took the Israeli navigator with him.

Since then, Arad has not heard from her husband, and nobody has admitted to holding him.

But she said the Israeli government believes her husband is still alive and is being held by the Iranians, either in Lebanon or perhaps in Iran.

It is thought that Dirani, a Shi'ite fundamentalist with ties to Iran, turned Arad over to the Iranians after holding him for a year. Iran has never acknowledged holding him and has refused queries from the International Red Cross.

Arad urged sympathetic listeners to write to Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani and the Iranian ambassador to the United Nations, demanding information about her husband.

NEW COMMANDER OF AIR FORCE NAMED By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, July 21 (JTA) -- Brig. Gen. Herzl Boidinger, a former combat pilot with an outstanding record and wide air force experience, will be the Israeli air force's new commander, effective Jan. 1, 1992.

But the Defense Ministry's announcement, like many other recent changes in the Israel Defense Force, was greeted with rumblings of discontent among senior officers, aimed mainly at the IDF chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Ehud Barak.

In appointing Boidinger, who will be raised in rank to major general when he takes over his new command, Defense Minister Moshe Arens acted on Barak's recommendation.

After the announcement, at least five letters of resignation were received from other air force brigadier generals who apparently believed they were better qualified than the appointee.

Boidinger will replace Maj. Gen. Avihu Bin-Nun, air force commander for the last four years, who had planned to retire earlier but was asked by Barak to stay on until the end of the year.

SYRIA REPORTEDLY SEEKING NEW HAVEN FOR NAZI WAR CRIMINAL ALOIS BRUNNER

By Michel Di Paz

PARIS, July 21 (JTA) -- Cultivating a new role as friend of the West, President Hafez Assad of Syria may not want to be caught harboring a man said to be one of the most vicious Nazi war criminals known to be alive.

He has therefore reportedly asked Gen. Ali Duba, head of Syria's secret police, to find a new haven for former SS officer Alois Brunner, alias Georg Fischer, who is believed to have lived in Syria since 1954, according to the French weekly *Le Point*.

Duba's job is to find a Latin American nation willing to shelter Brunner, 79, the wartime assistant of Adolf Eichmann, *Le Point* reported.

Last week, a French judge, Jean-Pierre Getti, officially requested that Syrian authorities help track down Brunner, who is said to have deported over 100,000 Jews from Salonika, Greece, and tens of thousands more from France.

A similar French request in 1988 was returned with the notation that there was no Alois Brunner in Syria. But Judge Getti's arrest warrant asked for Brunner, a.k.a. Georg Fischer, whose last known address was Haddad Street, Damascus.

PROTESTS MOUNT OVER PLANS TO BUILD SHOPPING MALL NEAR RAVENSBRUCK CAMP

NEW YORK, July 21 (JTA) -- The Anti-Defamation League has urged the German government to halt construction of a shopping center next to the site of the Ravensbruck concentration camp, some 50 miles north of Berlin in what was formerly East Germany.

Abraham Foxman, ADL's national director, appealed directly to Manfred Stolpe, the prime minister of the federal state of Brandenburg, where Ravensbruck is located, to abandon the project, which has already aroused fierce controversy in Germany.

In a letter made public here Friday, he asked the prime minister to "do everything to prevent the implementation of such a plan, so as to preserve the integrity of this site, which should serve as a permanent reminder and warning to the people of Germany and of the world of the horrors of Nazi rule."

The shopping center is under construction on a cobblestone road in the town of Furstenberg. The road was built by slave laborers from more than 20 countries who were incarcerated at Ravensbruck during World War II. The mall would be located about 1,800 feet from a memorial to them.

Government officials offered as a compromise the planting of foliage to obscure the site of the market from that road.

More than 132,000 inmates, mostly women and children, passed through the camp. At least 90,000 died. The prisoners were mostly Jews, but also Gypsies, nuns, Christian activists and others the Nazis considered opponents of their regime.

Furstenberg, now bereft of Soviet military patronage and anxious for business and jobs, licensed the construction in January on land utilized until recently by Soviet troops. The mall is a project of the Kaiser supermarket chain, a subsidiary of Tengelmann & Co., the German food giant that owns A&P supermarkets in the United States, according to *The New York Times*.

But building seems to have been suspended, at least temporarily. Hans Christian Bremme,

chairman of Tengelmann's, said the firm is reconsidering plans to operate the store.

Another tenant, the French automaker Renault, pulled out after the controversy generated protest demonstrations and, in one instance, violence. Bombs damaged an unfinished market and a Kaiser store in Berlin. An urban guerrilla group called Revolutionary Cells has claimed responsibility, the *Times* reported.

But many mainstream Germans are picketing the construction site, too. On July 10, a group of women demonstrated in Berlin against the mall. They were led by Inge Rabe, whose mother was an inmate of Ravensbruck.

The Jewish communities of Germany, Belgium and France have also protested.

Jurgen Dittberner, an official of the Ministry of Culture of Brandenburg said it is not too late to convert the shopping center into a library, removing signs of commerce from a site of human suffering.

But the protests have generated a backlash.

Residents of the former East German town want the center for the jobs it would create and for easy access to consumer goods, which were rare during four decades of Communist rule.

NEW ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS IN EGYPT CAST DOUBT ON EXISTENCE OF SLAVERY

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME, July 21 (JTA) -- A startling archaeological discovery has cast doubt on the existence of harsh slavery in Egypt when the pyramids were built and, by inference, on the veracity of the biblical account of Exodus.

The Turin newspaper *La Stampa* reported on diggings near the Great Pyramids of Giza, outside Cairo, where a city dating from 3000 BCE has been unearthed.

It contains buildings, graveyards, records and artifacts which indicate that the pyramid-builders were not slaves but well-paid workers who enjoyed a good standard of living, *La Stampa* said.

They were paid for their labor in gold and food, according to *La Stampa*, which quotes Professor Zaki Hawass, director of antiquities at Giza, who excavated the city.

The professor will elaborate on his findings in a paper to be delivered at the international conference of Egyptologists in Turin from Sept. 1 to 8. About 1,500 experts from 30 countries are expected to attend.

La Stampa also quoted Italian archaeologist Silvio Curto, who said the city and necropolis unearthed at Giza confirm a theory that arose from earlier diggings elsewhere.

Curto, who will co-chair the Turin conference, told *La Stampa* that the new discoveries go a long way to disproving the accounts of the ancient Roman historians, such as Herodotus.

The Romans' accounts were filtered through the perspectives of their own society, in which slavery existed, and "it was unthinkable that such gigantic construction could have been accomplished without forced labor," Curto said.

As for Exodus, he added, "the slavery cited by the holy book can be understood in a moral, not literal sense."

He observed that Moses, "a man of superior intellect, educated at court, probably realized that his people, through contact with a society like that of Egypt, ran the risk of being swallowed up culturally and could lose the outstanding points of their own civilization."