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ISRAEL BEGINS DIRECT NEGOTIATIONS WITH ARAB STATES AND PALESTINIANS

By Michel Di Paz

MADRID, Nov. 3 (JTA) -- The Middle East peace conference has confounded pessimists on both sides by remaining stubbornly alive after last week's ceremonial plenary session ended with a volley of vituperative exchanges between Israel and its Arab partners.

Up till the last minute Sunday, there was doubt that the conference would make it to its second phase: direct, bilateral talks Israel would hold separately with Syria, Lebanon and a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation.

Fears were heightened when the Syrian and Lebanese delegations did not show up for scheduled morning sessions with the Israelis. But the Israeli-Lebanese talks finally got off the ground early Sunday evening, and Israel's talks with Syria got under way around 10 p.m. local time.

The first round of talks between Israel and the joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation went forward without a hitch, beginning in the morning and concluding around 7 p.m. local time at the Perceps Palace here.

At a noon break following the morning session, Elyakim Rubinstein, head of the Israeli delegation, said, "The atmosphere at this first meeting was good, and so were the contacts."

"We spoke about things that are usually debated at this initial stage of negotiations," he said, refusing to elaborate.

At the end of the day, the chief Jordanian negotiator, Abdel Salam al-Majali, said the talks had been conducted in a "good, businesslike atmosphere."

He said negotiations would proceed on two tracks, one involving Israeli-Jordanian issues and the other involving Israeli-Palestinian issues.

Venue Of Next Round Unresolved

Rubinstein, who is secretary of the Israeli Cabinet, added that the "negotiations on the matters pertaining to the Palestinians will be conducted first, in the first phase, on an interim self-government arrangement."

Apparently unresolved was the question of where the discussions would resume. Majali would only say that "the parties expressed their views on the possible venue of the negotiations" and that "consultations will continue in this regard."

U.S. Secretary of State James Baker, whose eight months of diplomatic spadework is credited with bringing the conference about, acknowledged Sunday that "we are still having some differences between the parties that relate to where we meet and how we meet."

Speaking via satellite on NBC-TV's "Meet the Press" program, the secretary promised that if Israel and its Arab negotiating partners became deadlocked on either procedure or substance, the United States would intervene to help.

But he would not say whether he would offer Washington as a site for the bilateral encounters if Israel and the Arabs cannot agree on where to talk.

"We are right in the middle of sensitive discussions," Baker stressed. He said if no progress is made, the United States and Soviet

Union, as co-sponsors of the conference, "reserve the right to suggest some other solution."

But Baker, who left here Sunday night to return to Washington, ruled out appointing a special U.S. representative to the peace talks. "We cannot want peace more than the parties themselves do," he observed.

He said the United States would serve as an "honest broker" and a "catalyst" to bridge the differences between the parties.

"We will not walk away from the process. We worked too hard to bring it to this point," he said.

Israel Makes A Concession

The Israeli and Palestinian-Jordanian teams had no sooner concluded their first talks Sunday evening than Israeli and Lebanese negotiators met.

Salai Meridor, head of the Israeli delegation to the talks with Lebanon, reported afterward that the talks took place in a good atmosphere and focused largely on the issue of where they would continue.

Their meeting was followed by the first Israeli-Syrian face-to-face get-together ever without the presence of mediators. It was also the first meeting of the two sides since they verbally mauled each other Friday.

The Syrians, who emerged at the outset of the conference as its most bellicose and extreme Arab participant, finally agreed to the meeting after Israel conceded that the three sets of bilateral talks with Arab delegations could take place in the same building.

Israel had wanted separate locations to bolster its position that the talks should proceed independently of each other. But it backed down in the interest of getting the talks going.

Syria also was reportedly pressured to show up at the talks by Saudi Arabia, which warned Damascus not to block the peace process.

Whatever the reason, the conference stayed on schedule. The ground rules called for the first bilateral sessions to begin four days after the plenary opening Oct. 30, and they did.

But the day began inauspiciously when the Syrian and Lebanese delegations did not show up for their morning meetings with the Israelis, which were to have been held at different locations. Syria is known to exercise political and military control over Lebanon.

Pressure From The Saudis

Observers were aroused when the Saudi Arabian ambassador to the United States, Prince Bandar Bin Abdul Aziz, an observer at the peace conference, broke his official silence.

In an interview with a Saudi reporter, the envoy said King Fahd of Saudi Arabia had "intensified his contacts with Syrian President Hafez Assad in order to promote the cause of peace."

The prince was quoted as saying, "These contacts will have positive results."

The Saudi ambassador also reportedly said the peace conference has already "passed many stages, while many people across the world doubted our capacity to overcome the hurdles."

The hurdles from the very start were formidable.

Before he left Madrid on Friday, the head of

Israel's delegation, Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, loosed a fierce attack on the Syrian regime.

Looking directly at the Syrian foreign minister, Farouk al-Sharaa, Shamir said Syria merited the "dubious honor of being one of the most oppressive, tyrannical regimes in the world." He called Syria the "home of a host of terrorist organizations that spread violence and death to all manner of innocent targets."

Calls Shamir A Terrorist

The Syrian minister quickly counterattacked.

Casting aside a prepared speech, he produced a photo of a wanted fugitive poster dating from the late 1940s.

It contained a photograph of 32-year-old Polish-born Yitzhak Yezernitzki, the future prime minister of Israel, who was then sought by the British authorities for terrorist activities.

Baker looked annoyed with the Syrian, and Boris Pankin, the Soviet foreign minister, who was co-chairing the session, signaled Sharaa that his time had run out.

The Syrian reportedly tried to persuade the Palestinians not to show up for their Sunday morning meeting with the Israelis but failed.

Moreover, it was learned that the moderate Arab states, notably Egypt, were infuriated by Sharaa's personal attack on Israel's prime minister. Most Arab delegates felt his outburst was a "mistake" that gave Israel a public relations advantage.

The head of the Palestinian delegation, Haider Abdel-Shafi, also attacked Shamir on Friday. He was resentful that the Israeli leader flew home right after his speech that morning.

Shamir's reason was that he had to be back in Jerusalem before the Sabbath. But Abdel-Shafi pointed out that Shamir is not strictly observant and had left behind other members of the delegation who are.

There was an unscheduled two-hour suspension during which Baker tried in vain to bridge the gap between the Israelis and Syrians.

He finally had to close the first phase of the conference, the ceremonial plenary, with an acknowledgment that the venue of the bilateral talks remains unsettled.

Baker stressed that the U.S.-Soviet co-sponsors favor continuing the talks in Madrid. Israel has insisted on Middle East locales, rotating between Jerusalem and Arab capitals.

Rumored Meeting With Arafat

The U.S. secretary of state also said he wanted to "pay tribute" to "individuals who made essential contributions" to the peace process.

He cited, among others, Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy, who did not come to Madrid; Palestinian activist Faisal Husseini, who heads the advisory committee to the Palestinian delegation; and Hanan Ashrawi, who acted as the delegation spokeswoman, though neither she nor Husseini are official members.

Husseini and Ashrawi flew to Morocco on Friday night to dine with King Hassan II. They also reportedly met with Palestine Liberation Organization chief Yasir Arafat, either in Morocco or elsewhere in North Africa.

But Israel, which has vowed to walk out of the conference if the PLO was in any way involved, dismissed the reports. Israel's deputy foreign minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, pointed out that neither Husseini nor Ashrawi belong to the Palestinian negotiating team.

Both are considered to be the team's liaison to the PLO.

Israeli diplomats who remained in Madrid over the Sabbath kept a low profile. The Arab delegations were closeted at meetings trying apparently to come up with a common negotiating position.

(Contributing to this report were JTA correspondents David Friedman and Howard Rosenberg in Washington.)

SHAMIR HAILED BY HIS CABINET, BUT IS STILL AT ODDS WITH LEVY By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Nov. 3 (JTA) -- Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir won a vote of confidence from his Cabinet colleagues Sunday for his leadership of the Israeli delegation at the Madrid peace conference.

He seemed to be counseling patience when he told them the conference is "at its early stage" and that the important developments are yet to come.

Shamir returned to Jerusalem on Friday after a verbal brawl with the Syrian foreign minister, Farouk al-Sharaa. He praised the two co-hosts, U.S. Secretary of State James Baker and Soviet Foreign Minister Boris Pankin, for their "objective" positions.

He was less pleased with the stance of the European Community, represented by Dutch Foreign Minister Hans van den Broek, who currently chairs the E.C. Council of Ministers.

Shamir dismissed the Arabs' speeches as the usual anti-Israel rhetoric so often heard at the United Nations. He accused the Syrian foreign minister of repeatedly distorting history.

But many Israelis who watched the Madrid proceedings on television were more interested in knowing whether and how Shamir intended to mend fences with his own foreign minister, David Levy.

The two men met for 30 minutes Sunday but apparently resolved nothing. They agreed to continue their conversation Wednesday.

Netanyahu Role Praised

Relations between the two, which were always troubled, plunged when Shamir announced shortly before the Madrid opening that he would personally lead the Israeli delegation, although the conference was to be conducted on the foreign ministerial level.

The relatively moderate Levy took that as a personal vote of no confidence and stayed home. He was further infuriated because Shamir invited the hawkish deputy foreign minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, with whom he does not get along.

Netanyahu emerged as spokesman for the Israeli delegation. Some of Levy's foes rubbed salt in his wounds by praising the younger diplomat at Sunday's Cabinet session for the skill with which he organized Israeli public relations efforts in Madrid.

Agriculture Minister Rafael Eitan of the far-right Tsomet party proposed Netanyahu be appointed minister of information.

There was no reaction from Levy, who sat silent throughout the Cabinet meeting. The foreign minister was in fact the only minister who said nothing about the Madrid conference.

Health Minister Ehud Olmert said he was sure Shamir and Levy would eventually patch up their differences.

PEACE FEVER SEIZES PALESTINIANS, BEARING OLIVE BRANCHES OF PEACE

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Nov. 3 (JTA) -- Peace fever seized the Palestinian population in East Jerusalem and throughout the administered territories over the weekend.

Crowds, among them scores of former security prisoners, marched through streets bearing olive branches. Israeli security forces stood by, but for the most part did not interfere.

The Palestinians' jubilation was over the appearance of their delegation at the Middle East peace conference, which opened Oct. 30 in Madrid's Royal Palace.

Although it is officially a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation, the 14 Palestinian delegates representing the territories were in the limelight of the world news media.

For the first time in history, the Palestinians had a validated identity. Thousands at the peace demonstrations saw it as the herald of independence.

Israeli authorities cooperated to the extent of lifting the curfew in Gaza and removing the roadblocks that had kept West Bank Palestinians from entering Jerusalem during the opening of the Madrid conference opening.

The curfew and the barriers were aimed at the anti-peace element, notably the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas, which exhorted Palestinians to continue the armed struggle.

Clashes between pro- and anti-peace activists left 50 wounded in the Gaza Strip over the weekend.

The biggest peace demonstration was held Friday afternoon in a schoolyard in Ramallah. The main speakers were such Palestinian notables as Dr. Sari Nusseibeh and Ziyad Abu-Ziyad.

They could very well have gone to Madrid as part of an unofficial group advising the Palestinian delegates. But they preferred to stay home.

Nusseibeh appealed to the superpowers to take an active role in the peace process, not be mere observers.

The common theme of the speeches was to urge the populace to take to the streets with olive branches, the universal symbol of peace, instead of rocks, the principal weapon of the intifada, which will be four years old next month.

Observers noted that the leaders of public opinion in the Palestinian towns mostly were former inmates of Israeli prisons. Having earned their spurs, they are now influencing policy.

The rally ended with a large parade down the main street, which was awash with olive branches.

Similar demonstrations took place in other West Bank towns, though on a small scale.

The only confrontation was in East Jerusalem, where police dispersed peace demonstrators outside the Rockefeller Museum and detained several Palestinians who "violated public order."

ARAFAT HINTS AT NEW TERROR WAVE IF MADRID PEACE CONFERENCE FAILS

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME, Nov. 3 (JTA) -- Yasir Arafat hinted at a new wave of Arab terrorism against American and European targets if the Madrid peace conference ends in failure.

That was how many interpreted the Palestine Liberation Organization chief's remarks in an

interview published Saturday in the daily *Corriere della Sera*. He was clearly not optimistic about the outcome of the peace talks, although his interview was given before all the Arab delegations in Madrid, including the Palestinians and Jordanians, sat down with Israel to discuss where subsequent talks would be held.

Arafat dismissed the speeches made by Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir in Madrid as "the same old slogans, the old dreams, the old language."

According to Arafat, Shamir is out of tune with the post-Persian Gulf War world.

If the conference fails, "there will be a great instability in the entire region. Many problems for everyone," Arafat said.

"Americans and Europeans would pay a very heavy price," he warned. Asked to elaborate, Arafat said, "Imagine what the extremist groups that operate in the region will do. These groups of fanatics represent a formidable force and will not sit with their hands folded."

He referred specifically to Hamas, a violence-prone Islamic fundamentalist movement that cropped up in the Gaza Strip shortly after the intifada began in December 1987.

The PLO chief was evasive when asked if he was in full control of the Palestinian movement in the Israeli-administered territories.

ABIE NATHAN BROUGHT HANDCUFFED TO COURT HEARING ON HIS SENTENCE

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Nov. 3 (JTA) -- Peace activist Abie Nathan, serving an 18-month prison sentence for meeting with Yasir Arafat and other leaders of the Palestine Liberation Organization in June, was brought in handcuffs from Ma'asiyahu Prison to Tel Aviv Magistrates Court on Sunday for a resumption of his trial for earlier meetings he held with the PLO leader.

The usually ebullient Nathan seemed downcast as he heard the court state it must decide whether, in light of his latest violation, it should activate a suspended sentence he received for an alleged meeting with Arafat in 1989.

Nathan freely confessed to meeting Arafat in Tunis six months ago, in violation of the Israeli law against consorting with the enemy.

But he insists the earlier encounter was not illegal, because it occurred at a news conference attended by the general news media. He has appealed that conviction to the High Court of Justice.

The Magistrates Court will hold its next hearing on the suspended sentence on Jan. 10, by which time the High Court of Justice is expected to have ruled on Nathan's appeal.

Nathan's predicament has generated sympathy in some circles. Not only was he handcuffed like a common criminal but, it could be argued, he is serving time for doing nothing worse than Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and his aides have done by attending the Middle East peace conference in Madrid.

The Israeli leader faced a Palestinian delegation that acknowledged Arafat as its leader, admitted loyalty to the PLO and made no bones about getting its orders from Tunis.

Nathan, for his part, indicated he will not appeal for clemency to President Chaim Herzog. To do so, he says, would be to admit that talking to the enemy for the sake of peace is a criminal offense.

SYRIA NOT READY TO MAKE GESTURES ON EMIGRATION, NAZI WAR CRIMINAL

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES, Nov. 3 (JTA) -- If Syria is contemplating measures to build confidence with Israel, they do not include extraditing a notorious war criminal or withdrawing a viciously anti-Semitic book, according to the official spokesman of the Syrian delegation to the Madrid peace talks.

In a 30-minute interview last Thursday with a representative of the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center, spokesman Mohammed al-Jannan also ruled out letting an estimated 4,000 Jews remaining in Syria leave for the United States or Israel until "after peace."

And he reiterated Syria's refusal to attend planned multilateral talks between Israel and the Arab countries on regional problems.

Shimon Samuels, director of the Wiesenthal Center's European office, obtained the interview in Madrid in his capacity as an accredited reporter for the center's Page One radio program.

Samuels showed Jannan newspaper interviews with Austrian war criminal Alois Brunner, who has been living freely in Damascus for decades, and asked why Syria would not honor extradition requests for Brunner from Germany, France and Austria.

"I don't know him," replied Jannan. "This is not an issue of the peace conference."

Jannan also proved unenthusiastic when asked if Syria might withdraw "The Matzah of Zion," a book written by Syrian Defense Minister Mustafa Tlas that resurrects the blood libel against Jews with gory graphics.

"Have you read the book?" asked the spokesman. "We do not allow anti-Semitism; we are a tolerant society. Read the book -- it is true. Read it, then come back to me."

Asked whether Syria would allow its remaining Jews to leave for the United States, Jannan said, "We have no problem. The Jews are prosperous businessmen in Syria -- but let the Americans take them."

"Could they go to Israel?" asked Samuels.

"No, Israel is our enemy," responded Jannan.

"But if you boycott the multilateral talks, peace is not nearby. Can they leave now for the U.S.?" asked Samuels.

"No," answered Jannan, "only after peace."

IRAN'S CALL FOR WAR AGAINST ISRAEL PROTESTED IN LETTER TO U.N. CHIEF

By Larry Yudelson

UNITED NATIONS, Nov. 3 (JTA) -- Israeli Ambassador Yoram Aridor has charged Iran with violating the U.N. Charter by calling for an Islamic holy war against Israel.

In an Oct. 31 letter to U.N. Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar, Aridor pointed to remarks at the International Conference to Support the Islamic Revolution of the People of Palestine, held Oct. 19 to 22 in Teheran, under the auspices of the Iranian government.

Aridor cited the official Iranian news agency, which quoted Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani as telling conference participants that "Iran is even ready to dispatch troops to fight Israel along with the Palestinians."

The conference concluded with a 28-point declaration which called for the "elimination of the Zionist existence" and cited "the need for an

all-out jihad (holy war) against the Zionist regime."

Aridor said Rafsanjani's remarks, and similar statements by spiritual leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, violate Article 2(4) of the U.N. Charter, which requires member states to "refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force" against other states.

Describing the conference as "a blatant effort to undermine efforts to promote peace in the Middle East" on the eve of the Madrid peace conference, Aridor pointed out that the Palestine Liberation Organization was represented by Sheikh Abd el-Hamid al-Sayeh, speaker of the Palestine National Council.

ISRAEL STOPS SHELLING LEBANON, REPORTEDLY AFTER U.S. PRESSURE

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Nov. 3 (JTA) -- Israel has ceased shelling positions in southern Lebanon, according to some reports because of pressure from the United States.

Washington had expressed concern that the stepped-up Israeli military activity in southern Lebanon could derail the Middle East peace conference in Madrid.

In an Israel Radio interview Sunday, Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Arens would neither confirm nor deny reports that U.S. pressure had silenced the Israeli barrage. The area was the source of attacks last week on Israeli troops by the Iranian-backed Hezbollah, or Party of God.

Last week, Arens said the Madrid peace conference would not deter Israel from taking measures to ensure the safety of its population along the northern border.

An upsurge of guerrilla activity in and around the southern Lebanon security zone over the past week, mainly from Hezbollah quarters, was aimed at preventing the Arab-Israeli peace talks.

Attacks have left six Israel Defense Force soldiers dead and six wounded, victims of land mine explosions and predawn skirmishes with infiltrators.

The IDF and its allied South Lebanon Army retaliated heavily with artillery and tank fire aimed at Shi'ite villages north of the security zone, where the Hezbollah fighters were believed to have local support and shelter.

The Israeli air force bombed terrorist targets and followed up with strafing attacks by helicopter gunships.

But the IDF dismissed reports of a massive military buildup in the region and denied that it had warned villagers north of the security zone to evacuate their homes to get out of the way of a major new offensive.

News reports Saturday claimed Israel had given the Shi'ite villagers in the region 12 hours to evacuate the zone.

But Israeli military sources said the order had come either from the SLA or a local Israeli commander.

Warnings appear to have been broadcast by the SLA-sponsored Voice of the South radio station.

There were reports of villagers fleeing Saturday, but by Sunday there were reports of many returning home.

Israeli military sources said Israel had asked the SLA to stop calling for an evacuation of the zone.