

PLAN TO UPGRADE REGIONAL TALKS IS SOURCE OF WORRY FOR ISRAELIS

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Nov. 14 (JTA) -- Israeli officials are expressing discomfort with Washington's plans to turn the multinational phase of the Middle East peace talks into an elaborate international conference on regional issues.

Israel has already conveyed to Washington its disquiet over U.S. Secretary of State James Baker's intention of opening such a conference with great fanfare either later this month or early in December.

Foreign Minister David Levy, who will head the Israeli delegation to the multinational talks, wrote to Baker this week about Israel's concerns and demanded that Israel be consulted on the format and procedures of the negotiations.

The subject is likely to be high on the agenda of Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's White House meeting with President Bush on Nov. 22. Shamir left Thursday night on a 10-day visit to the United States that will also include stops in Los Angeles, Boston, Baltimore and New York.

The multilateral talks were originally planned as the third stage of the peace conference that opened Oct. 30 in Madrid. But now, officials here fear, the talks are shaping up to be just the sort of international peace conference Israel has tried desperately for years to avoid.

Israel was, in fact, eager to meet with the Arab states collectively to discuss regional issues of mutual concern, such as the environment and water resources.

But those talks were to be completely divorced from the direct, bilateral negotiations Israel would hold separately with Syria, Lebanon and a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation.

The bilateral talks indeed got under way in Madrid, though little substantive was discussed and no dates have yet been set for the next encounters.

Meeting Set With Saudi Envoy

Now Israel fears it will be surrounded at the multinational talks by the Arab states and major powers from outside the region that have not notably challenged Arab demands.

Baker is said to be planning a high-profile opening in Moscow or another European capital. He hopes to bring to it the foreign ministers of the European Community, Japan and Canada, along with the Persian Gulf states and the Maghreb countries: Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco.

The American purpose is to get this array of nations to share the financial burdens arising from costly regional development schemes expected to emerge from the multilateral talks.

But Israeli policy-makers fear the close involvement of the international community in regional cooperation issues could turn into pressure on political matters Israel insists can only be settled at the negotiating table.

Specifically, they are concerned that, with offers of cash and other backing from the leading industrial nations, it will be difficult for Israel to resist pressure to agree to a settlement freeze, in exchange for termination of the Palestinian intifada and the Arab boycott against Israel.

The multilateral conference is likely to be among the topics discussed when members of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations meet in New York on Monday morning with the Saudi ambassador to the United States, Prince Bandar.

The Jewish Telegraphic Agency learned of plans for the meeting Thursday, which were later confirmed by Malcolm Hoehnlein, executive director of the Conference of Presidents.

Israeli officials, meanwhile, have reacted pessimistically to reports of Bush's meeting in New York on Tuesday with members of the Conference of Presidents and other prominent American Jewish leaders.

Bush was anxious to calm the tensions that arose between his administration and pro-Israel forces in Washington over Israel's request in September for U.S. guarantees covering \$10 billion in loans needed to resettle Soviet immigrants.

But the president would make no commitment on the guarantees until the 120-day moratorium he imposed on consideration of the issue expires in January.

Officials here concede privately that a breakthrough on the loan issue is unlikely at Shamir's meeting next week with Bush.

But they are expected to discuss the venue of the bilateral talks. The Arabs reject Israel's proposal that they alternate between Israel and Arab capitals.

Israel and Syria both have reservations about Washington.

Turkey and Cyprus have been suggested. Both are in geographical proximity to the Middle East but politically are not considered part of the region.

LIBYANS INDICTED FOR PAN AM BOMBING, BUT SYRIA STAYING ON TERRORISM LIST
By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, Nov. 14 (JTA) -- Although the Bush administration has absolved Syria for the 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103, it will not be removed from the U.S. list of countries supporting terrorism, the White House said Thursday.

The dramatic clearing of Syria's name, as well as that of Iran and Palestinian radical groups that have defected from the Palestine Liberation Organization, came Thursday, with the Justice Department's announcement that a federal grand jury had indicted two Libyans linked to that country's intelligence service in the December 1988 bombing over Lockerbie, Scotland.

Some family members of the victims expressed doubt over the indictments and even spoke of a White House coverup.

John Frick Root, whose wife, Hanne Marie, was among the dead, told the daily New York Newsday the U.S. indictment "is an attempt at a coverup by the Bush administration. Syria and Iran and Libya conspired together to blow up Pan Am 103," he said.

Detailed plots had been reconstructed in the three years since the attack on the plane, which killed 270 people. Those reconstructions had pointed largely to Syria and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command.

What later led investigators to Libya, the

Justice Department said, was evidence that both a piece of an automatic timer found in the wreckage and clothing, purchased in Malta, were traced to two Libyans, Abdel Basset Ali al-Megrahi and Lamen Khalifa Fhimah.

The timer was bought in Switzerland by "a Libyan front company, which sublet office space in Zurich" from the timing device-maker, Meister et Bolliger, Ltd. Telecommunications, according to the indictment.

Arrest And Extradition Sought

Many of the details matched those already reported as the puzzle of Pan Am 103 was reconstructed.

The Justice Department papers said that the timer and plastic explosives had been inserted into a Toshiba radio-cassette player and placed in a Samsonite suitcase, which was transported first on an Air Malta flight to Frankfurt and from there on the Pan Am 103 flight.

For nearly three years, despite complicated investigations by the media, the U.S. and Scottish governments had refrained from charging any parties with the crime. The bombing killed all 259 people aboard the airplane, 193 of whom were U.S. nationals. Eleven people on the ground were killed as well.

Scotland's Justice Ministry is now pursuing a similar indictment. Both countries hope to apprehend the two Libyans, despite the lack of extradition treaties between their countries and Libya.

U.S. Assistant Attorney General Robert Mueller refused to speculate Thursday on how that would be achieved and, when pressed by reporters, would not rule out kidnapping the suspects.

But Mueller, who heads the Justice Department's Criminal Division, said one easy way to catch them would be arrest in some other country that does have extradition treaties with the United States or Scotland.

The White House and State Department spokesmen, Marlin Fitzwater and Richard Boucher, refused to rule out any options.

U.S. officials would not comment Thursday on Libya's motive, but it has been reported it may have been retaliation against the United States for a 1986 air attack against Tripoli, which caused destruction and deaths, including that of an adopted daughter of Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi.

Boucher said only that Libya has a long history of financing, harboring and training terrorist groups, which continues to the present.

Ahmed Jabril Group Was Suspected

Iran had also been considered a suspect, eager to retaliate for the 1988 accidental downing of an Iranian Airbus over the Persian Gulf by the U.S. Navy warship Vincennes. All 290 people on board, most of them Iranians, were killed.

Hard-line Palestinian groups that have broken from the PLO were also highly suspect. Chief among them was the Syrian-based Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command, whose leader, Ahmed Jabril, a welcome guest in Damascus, had all but been accused of planting the bomb by the news media, which said he had been paid handsomely for the bombing.

Suspicion had centered on the Jabril group because, in addition to being based in Syria, it is financed by Iran. A number of its members were arrested in then West Germany in 1988 in connection with bombs planned for other flights.

A more recent theory has been that members of the Jabril group paid Gadhafi's agents to carry out the Pan Am attack.

But both Fitzwater and Boucher said Thursday that there is no evidence linking the Jabril group to the Lockerbie incident.

Still, Fitzwater said Thursday that the United States would not lift its sanctions against Syria just because it has been cleared of responsibility for the downing of Pan Am 103.

An administration official said that Syria continues to be involved in terrorism. "There is no change in our approach to Syria" just because the alleged perpetrators were not linked to that country, he said.

A Syrian Embassy official declined to comment on the issue.

Syria has been on the U.S. list of terrorist nations since it was first compiled in 1979. Countries on the list cannot receive U.S. foreign aid, or goods and technology that would bolster their military capabilities.

Syria had additional sanctions imposed against it after a British court, in 1986, implicated Damascus in the attempted bombing of an El Al Airlines plane in London, which had 230 U.S. nationals aboard.

ISRAELI POLICE ARREST 25 SUSPECTS IN ARAB TERROR RING NEAR HADERA By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Nov. 14 (JTA) -- Police arrested 25 Israeli Arabs this week said to be members of hostile groups operating in the Hadera area.

Aided by security forces, they bagged 15 suspects in Umm el-Fahm and 10 in nearby Muawiya village. It was reported to be the largest haul of alleged subversives among Israel's Arab population this year.

In addition, Israeli police in the West Bank shot to death a 24-year-old Palestinian in the Jenin market Thursday.

Police claimed the man ignored orders to halt and tried to draw a weapon when he was shot. He was identified as a member of the Black Panther terrorist organization, on the wanted list.

The arrests inside Israel proper seemed to contradict the claim made only last week by the prime minister's adviser on Arab affairs, Dr. Alexander Blei, that subversive activities among Israeli Arabs has been reduced to virtually nil since the Persian Gulf War last winter.

It appears, instead, that Israeli Arab groups in some locations are being radicalized by contacts with terrorist cells in the West Bank.

The Arabs arrested in Muawiya are suspected of unlawful possession of firearms, including improvised guns and ammunition.

The Umm el-Fahm group is supposedly led by a resident of the nearby West Bank town of Yabad. He is suspected of murdering a man in the town for collaborating with the Israeli authorities.

He is also alleged to have recruited Umm el-Fahm residents for the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which is associated with the Marxist Sons of the Land group, considered the most anti-Israel organization operating legally in the country.

Some members of the Democratic Front and the Communists were said to be included this week by mainstream Palestinians in the formation of political action committees following the Madrid peace conference. The committees are a precursor to self-rule.

LITHUANIA WILL SET UP A PANEL TO RESOLVE REHABILITATION ISSUE

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK, Nov. 14 (JTA) -- Lithuanian President Vytautas Landsbergis has agreed to set up a commission to resolve charges that his government exonerated war criminals involved in atrocities against Jews during World War II.

Landsbergis told American Jewish communal leaders here Thursday that his government is working to determine which cases should not have been rehabilitated in the mass amnesty.

He said he has invited the Israeli government and other organizations to work with Lithuania to reach accurate conclusions in cases where it is difficult to determine the extent of an individual's participation in war crimes against Jews.

In a separate meeting here Tuesday with officials of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, Landsbergis agreed to set up a special commission to investigate those cases.

He is proposing a joint parliamentary commission with Israel, an idea endorsed by Dov Shilansky, speaker of the Israeli Knesset and a native of Lithuania.

Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associate dean of the Wiesenthal Center, said that the commission would likely involve representatives from the Knesset, the Israeli Ministry of Justice, the Israeli police, the Wiesenthal Center and the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial, in addition to Lithuanian officials.

A proposal for the commission's composition was worked out with Ramunas Bojdanas, Landsbergis' foreign affairs adviser, in a follow-up meeting Wednesday, and is now under consideration by the Lithuanians, Cooper said.

An estimated 35,000 Lithuanians to date have been exonerated under the May 1990 Lithuanian rehabilitation law. The law absolves them of culpability for crimes they were accused of committing by the Soviet Union following the war, and provides them with restitution for their time in prison.

Many were declared guilty by the Soviets of crimes against the Communist government, and others of collaboration with the Nazis.

Those found guilty of the first charge have been rightly rehabilitated, Landsbergis said at an American Jewish Committee luncheon here Thursday. He said 500 of those found guilty of the second charge have been denied exoneration.

2,000 Cases May Be Reviewed

But there is a third category, Landsbergis said, where it is not as clear whether rehabilitation is justified. This category includes Lithuanians who were members of military units that murdered Jews but about whom there is no evidence of personal participation in the killing.

Another example of a questionable case, he said, is if someone did not pull the trigger, but "escorted people to their execution."

Landsbergis told Wiesenthal Center officials that 1,000 to 2,000 of the exonerations already granted may need to be reviewed, Cooper said.

Many more Lithuanians convicted of war crimes by the Soviets, or their children, are expected to still apply for rehabilitation, and Lithuanian estimates of the number of future applications runs "easily into the six figures," Cooper said.

Even as Landsbergis pledged to "resolve this by concretely defining what problems exist and

moving to deal with them," he was defensive about the way that the Western media have portrayed Lithuanian responsiveness to the wrongful exonerations since they were first made public in a New York Times article Sept. 5.

"There have been unjust accusations and inaccurate depictions of our history," he said Thursday.

According to Mark Weitzman, associate director of educational outreach for the Wiesenthal Center, who participated in the meetings Tuesday and Wednesday, "Landsbergis' father is honored by Yad Vashem as a righteous Gentile. He is not happy about his own or country's name being dragged around in this issue."

He said the Wiesenthal Center officials have the sense that the Lithuanian leader wants to resolve the issue soon.

'More Work To Be Done'

Landsbergis has pledged to vote for a repeal of the 1975 U.N. resolution denigrating Zionism as racism when it comes before the General Assembly, David Harris, executive vice president of the AJCommittee, announced at the luncheon.

But as to the extent of Landsbergis' remarks, Harris said, "clearly there is still a good deal more work to be done in Lithuania. There are still definitional questions and procedural questions that remain ambiguous.

"But what we heard today," he said, "was an important step toward recognizing that a serious problem remains that needs to be addressed."

Not everyone attending the luncheon was satisfied with what Landsbergis said.

"What was unequivocally missing was a statement of apology and regret that the people of Lithuania took part in the killing of Jews," said Abraham Bayer, director of international concerns for the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council.

"There were pogroms (by Lithuanians) before the Nazis entered Vilnius," he said, "and there has never been a full-fledged apology to the Jewish people."

AUSTRIAN RIGHTIST DENIES ANTI-SEMITISM By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME, Nov. 14 (JTA) -- The unexpected strong showing of Jorg Haider's far right-wing Freedom Party in the Vienna municipal elections last weekend has sent shock waves beyond Austria's borders.

It prompted the Italian newspaper Il Messaggero to ask Haider point-blank if he is an anti-Semite.

"Absolutely not," he replied in an interview the paper published Wednesday.

He denied having said in a June speech to the provincial Parliament of Carinthia that the labor policies of the Third Reich, which sent Jews to concentration camps, were on the right track.

"It is false that I gave a positive evaluation of Nazism," he said. He accused the Socialists of distorting his remarks to try to break his party's coalition with the conservative but mainstream People's Party.

Haider won in Vienna after a right-wing campaign based on a familiar mixture of nationalism and xenophobia. His party doubled its 1987 vote to win 23 seats in the 100-member municipal council, making it the second strongest party after the Socialists.

NEWS ANALYSIS:
COMPROMISE CIVIL RIGHTS BILL HAILED
AS BENEFITING JEWS, OTHER MINORITIES
 By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, Nov. 14 (JTA) -- The new civil rights bill, which cleared its final vote in Congress last week and is expected to be signed shortly by President Bush, is seen as bolstering protection against job discrimination for Jews as well as women and various minority groups.

"Many of us in the Jewish community have been working on the bill since February 1990, and there is a general sense of exhaustion," said Michael Lieberman, associate director and counsel of the Anti-Defamation League Washington office.

"The final bill is not perfect, not the way we wanted it to be," Lieberman said. "But it is an important achievement."

The Senate approved the bill Oct. 30 by a 93-5 vote, after Bush worked out compromises on a Democratic bill with Sen. John Danforth (R-Mo.). The House of Representatives, which earlier approved the Democratic version, endorsed the compromise bill Nov. 7 by a vote of 381-38.

The compromise bill moves the conditions for seeking legal remedies for job discrimination nearer to what they were under the Supreme Court's 1971 *Griggs vs. Duke Power Co.* ruling, said Judith Golub, legislative director for the American Jewish Committee.

Griggs was overturned in 1989 by several Supreme Court rulings that made it more difficult to prove unintentional discrimination on the part of employers.

Golub said the new civil rights bill sends "a message to the court that they are too cramped in their reading" of the discrimination laws.

Will Not Result In Quotas

The other major element of the civil rights bill allows those who suffer discrimination on the basis of sex, religion, national origin or physical disability to sue for damages.

Until now, only victims of racial discrimination could do this, under an 1886 law passed during the Reconstruction era. The new bill would allow suits not just for discrimination in hiring decisions but also for on-the-job discrimination, including sexual harassment, as well as bias in dismissals and promotions.

But "first and foremost, this bill will not result in the imposition of quotas," said Lieberman of ADL. "This has been a primary concern" of Jewish organizations.

ADL and several other Jewish groups had denied all along that the bill, even in its earlier incarnations, would have led to minority hiring quotas. But Bush vetoed the 1990 bill and was prepared to veto this year's bill on the grounds that it would have resulted in quotas.

Several Jewish officials admitted privately that they could not see much difference on the quota issue between the original Democratic bill and the compromise version that the White House ultimately accepted.

Many pundits had attributed Bush's change of mind to the controversy that developed over sexual harassment during the confirmation hearings for Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas.

There has also been concern that the Republican Party could be damaged badly on its commitment to racial justice if David Duke, a Republican state legislator and ex-leader of the Ku Klux Klan, is elected governor of Louisiana.

Golub of AJCommittee said the important outcome of the compromise may be to "send a signal that using race divisively is off the agenda" in next year's political campaign.

Like Bush, two Orthodox groups, the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America and Agudath Israel of America, had expressed concern that the original bill would result in quotas because employers would institute them to avoid costly legal action.

Orthodox Groups Mainly Satisfied

But William Rapfogel, executive director of the Orthodox Union's Institute for Public Affairs, said his group is "happy that there is a civil rights bill."

He said that while there is lingering concern that the bill could result in quotas over unintentional discrimination, the compromise measure is a move in the right direction.

Agudath Israel issued a statement saying it feels the new bill "does not unreasonably jeopardize the standard of merit-based employment."

But the group cautioned that employers might still resort to quotas because they are still required to follow statistical guidelines.

The fact, though, that most major Jewish groups are satisfied that the civil rights bill will not lead to quotas has had a healing effect on strains between the black and Jewish communities, at least on the national level, according to Rabbi David Saperstein, co-director and counsel of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations' Religious Action Center.

He noted that Bush even mentioned the stand taken by Jewish groups, because he knew that the organized Jewish community opposes quotas in any form.

Saperstein and others also pointed out that the bill provides "added protection against religious discrimination" for Jews and other religious minorities.

But the Lieberman of ADL believes that Jews already had that right, based on recent Supreme Court interpretations of the 1866 law.

However, Mark Pelavin, Washington representative of the American Jewish Congress, said it is still an "open question" whether Jews are considered a race or a religious minority under the 1866 law, which only covers racial discrimination.

Dismay Over Ceiling On Damages

The new bill also contains two other measures that could benefit Jews, Lieberman said. One would bar "race-norming," the practice of adjusting federal test scores on the base of race or ethnic background.

The other extends the protection of anti-discrimination laws to U.S. citizens working for American companies abroad. "Any Jew who works for an American company abroad is now covered," Lieberman said.

The one compromise in the bill that still upsets many Jewish organizations, as well as women's groups and other supporters of the original bill, is that a ceiling of \$300,000 has been placed on the amount of damages that women, religious minorities and the disabled can receive for discrimination.

Golub of AJCommittee said there is already a move in Congress to introduce legislation that will remove the caps. But the main reason for damages is to get employers to "end discrimination in the first place," she said.