DAILY NEWS BULLETIN
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PALESTINIAN DEMAND FOR RECOGNITION DELAYS RESUMPTION OF BILATERAL TALKS

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, Dec. 10 (JTA) -- Round Two of the bilateral peace talks got off to a rocky start Tuesday, when the Palestinians insisted on negotiating with Israel separately from the Jordanian delegation.

The impasse prevented the Israeli talks with the Jordanian-Palestinian delegation from starting as scheduled. But Israel did begin talks with Syria and with Lebanon.

The dispute over whether the Palestinians should negotiate with Israel as a separate delegation or together with Jordan appears to have more to do with how Israel and the Palestinians see the final status of the West Bank and Gaza Strip than with the current round of peace talks.

By insisting that Israel recognize the Palestinians as a separate delegation, the Palestinians were trying to establish "through procedure their claim as a separate state," Benjamin Netanyahu, the spokesman for the Israeli delegation, said Tuesday.

Hanan Ashrawi, the spokeswoman for the Palestinian delegation, admitted as much when she quipped, "If we ask for a separate room, we are asking for a separate state."

But Netanyahu, who a deputy minister in the Israeli Prime Minister's Office, said the Palestinians would achieve their political entity only in some sort of confederation with Jordan.

He stressed that this issue is for the future, and the talks must now center on Israel's proposal of an interim autonomy arrangement for the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Netanyahu and Ashrawi spoke at separate news conferences at their delegations' hotels after the Palestinians refused to resume the negotiations begun last month in Madrid unless Israel met separately with Jordan and the Palestinians.

Diplomacy Over Sips Of Coffee

As Elyakim Rubinstein, chairman of the Israeli delegation, sought to break the impasse with the Jordanian and Palestinian chairmen, the other delegates waited in the corridor, sipping coffee and talking to each other.

Despite the disagreement, the Jordanians and Palestinians were at least more friendly to the Israelis than one of the other Arab delegations.

Netanyahu said that during a break in the talks with one of the Arab delegations, which he refused to name, the Arabs refused to approach the coffee urn after the Israelis got there first.

The Palestinians maintain that the entire peace process envisioned a "two-track" approach, with talks between Israel and the Arab countries and between Israel and the Palestinians.

Ashrawi said the invitations to the participants as well as a letter of assurance to the Palestinians indicated this.

Netanyahu said it had always been clear that Israel would meet only with a joint delegation. But he stressed that once the talks started, the delegates could break up into subcommittees to deal with various issues.

"We are not a subcommittee," Ashrawi said. "We are a full delegation" that wants to have "direct bilateral negotiations to discuss the issues."

The United States seemed to back Israel's claim, when State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler said Monday that only one conference room had been assigned for the Palestinians and Jordan to meet with Israel.

The negotiations are being held at the State Department, although the United States is not participating at present.

Netanyahu said that substantive issues were discussed in the separate negotiations with Syria and Lebanon, although he seemed more optimistic about Lebanon than Syria.

He said Israel has no territorial dispute with Lebanon and only wants to ensure the security of its northern border. This is why Israel maintains a security zone in southern Lebanon.

But no one expects Lebanon to reach an agreement with Israel without Syria's approval. Syria, whose army now controls most of Lebanon, sabotaged a 1983 agreement between Israel and Lebanon worked out by George Shultz, who was then the U.S. secretary of state.

Yosef Ben-Aharon, chairman of the Israeli team negotiating with Syria, said after Tuesday's talks that the Syrians continued to focus on their demand for a return of the Golan Heights.

"There is no Syrian willingness as yet to engage in any substantive exchange on the components of peace," Ben-Aharon said.

NEWS ANALYSIS: PEACE TALKS IN WASHINGTON POINT TO SUCCESS OF 4-YEAR-OLD INTIFADA

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Dec. 10 (JTA) -- By both chance and design, the second round of Arab-Israeli peace talks opened in Washington one day after the fourth anniversary of the intifada, the Palestinian uprising that erupted in the West Bank and Gaza Strip on Dec. 9, 1987.

The symbolism is hard to ignore. The confluence of dates signifies both the continuing violence in the Holy Land and the hopes for a peaceful future. They are two sides of the same coin.

The Arab-Israeli conflict continues, but it has entered a new phase. Whatever the outcome, no one can deny the sheer novelty of the fact that Israelis and Palestinians are facing each other across the negotiating table for the first time since 1948, each side intent on finding solutions to their mutual problems.

This could not have happened but for the intifada.

After years of indifference by the world, and despite bitter internal struggles and being on the losing side of the Persian Gulf War, the Palestinians have succeeded in pushing their case to the forefront of the international agenda.

The Palestinians have paid a high price to reach the stage they are at.

According to official Israeli statistics, about 160,000 incidents of unrest have occurred in the last four years, an average of 110 per day. More than 1,200 Palestinians have died in the intifada. About 14,000 were wounded; thousands are in jail.

Rock-throwing, a regular Palestinian activity

during the intifada's first three years, is down by half this year. But the uprising has moved one rung up on the ladder of violence.

The intifada's fourth year was marked by a steep rise in the use of firearms by the Palestinians. There were 120 shootings this year, more than double last year's number. About 90 hand grenades were thrown at Israeli targets, more than 10 times as many as in 1990.

"It's a real war," Pinhas Wallerstein, head of the Binyamin regional council in the West Bank, remarked this week.

If it is a war, Israel clearly has won but is not victorious.

The Palestinians have already achieved a certain measure of autonomy in the territories. Many Arab villages and the centers of Arab cities are for all practical purposes run by local popular committees. The Israel Defense Force does not pretend to control those areas.

Israelis do not move freely in the territories. In the past, their main concern was stoning. Now they fear shooting as well. The lack of safety is felt by Israelis in parts of East Jerusalem no less than in the territories.

The intifada has affected the IDF's morale and technical proficiency. Soldiers spend inordinate time patrolling Arab villages at the expense of training. Too many soldiers are doing police work instead of preparing for combat.

Unable To Stop The Intifada

Israel's greatest defeat is that after four years, it has been unable to end the intifada.

It has been suppressed, it has been limited in scope, and the local Palestinian population has been forced to pay a high price: Jewish settlers have increased their numbers to 120,000 and hope to add 50,000 by the end of 1992.

But the wheel of history will never be turned back to December 1987. That is one reason why militant settlers have taken the offensive in the territories in recent weeks.

With or without the government's consent, they have planted new settlements in the West Bank and pressed their incursion into Arab areas of East Jerusalem.

Most recently, Jewish squatters took over buildings in the Arab village of Silwan, which lies inside Jerusalem's municipal boundaries.

Claiming ownership, they have succeeded in focusing international attention on the sensitive issue of Jerusalem, something the government has striven to avoid because it considers Jerusalem non-negotiable.

All of these developments are related directly or indirectly to the intifada.

Yet Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir played down its importance this week. He warned the Palestinians that the longer the uprising lasted, the more they would suffer, while Israel would continue to absorb immigrants and grow stronger.

But even as Shamir spoke, his Cabinet secretary, Elyakim Rubinstein, was in Washington, preparing to discuss Palestinian autonomy in the territories with a delegation that gets its instructions from Israel's mortal enemy, the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Shamir promised in the Knesset this week that even if the Palestinians get some degree of autonomy, Jewish settlers would never be subjected to any non-Israeli authority.

But the very fact that this issue was on the agenda shows how far the Palestinians have come since 1987.

BUCHANAN CANDIDACY COMPLICATES GOP'S QUEST FOR THE JEWISH VOTE

By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, Dec. 10 (JTA) -- Patrick Buchanan's announcement Tuesday that he will challenge President Bush for the 1992 Republican presidential nomination will likely make it harder for the GOP to convince American Jewish voters that the party is not hostile to their interests.

Democrats had a similar problem trying to portray their party as pro-Jewish in 1984 and 1988, when the Rev. Jesse Jackson ran for the nomination. Jackson, who was accused of slurring Jews, supporting black anti-Semites and showing bias against Israel, is not running this time.

But the Republicans now have a double challenge with Buchanan and David Duke, the former American Nazi and ex-grand wizard of the Ku Klux Klan. Duke, a Louisiana state representative who lost his bid for the governorship last month, announced his candidacy for president last week.

While Buchanan, a conservative newspaper and television commentator, is considered more respectable than Duke, he has upset many American Jews by questioning their alleged dual loyalty to Israel and the United States.

In a 13-page report on Buchanan, released before he announced his presidential bid, the Anti-Defamation League concluded that the former White House aide has exhibited a "disturbing pattern of baiting Jews and attacking Israel."

Buchanan, who worked in the Nixon and Reagan administrations, has also defended accused Nazi war criminals and called for the dismantling of the Justice Department's Nazi-hunting unit, the Office of Special Investigations.

Duke, on the other hand, is an avowed white supremacist whose message of restoring America's Christian values is widely perceived as hostile to Jews and other minorities.

Bush's Weak Standing Among Jews

Both Buchanan and Duke have opposed affirmative action and many of the "Great Society" programs of the 1960s that American Jews helped conceive and overwhelmingly supported.

They have sounded an "America First" theme that would get rid of foreign aid to Israel and other countries.

The National Jewish Coalition, a Republican group, will likely try to convince American Jews that Buchanan and Duke are fringe candidates that do not represent the mainstream policies of the GOP. But its task will be complicated by the fact that President Bush's policies toward Israel have received little approval from U.S. Jewry.

The president's standing among American Jews plummeted in September, when he attacked the "powerful political lobbyists" who had come to Washington to urge Congress to approve loan guarantees for Israel.

Duke and Buchanan are the first Republicans to announce their candidacy. The Democratic field so far includes former California Gov. Jerry Brown; Arkansas Gov. Bill Clinton, Iowa Sen. Tom Harkin; former Massachusetts Sen. Paul Tsongas; and Virginia Gov. L. Douglas Wilder.

Most of the campaigns so far have attacked Bush's perceived preoccupation with international concerns at the expense of the economy and helping Americans. But unlike Buchanan and Duke, the Democratic candidates support continuing the $3 billion in annual U.S. aid to Israel.

NEWS ANALYSIS:
FUTURE OF SOVIET JEWRY UNCLEAR AS MOSCOW GOVERNMENT UNRAVELS
By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, Dec. 10 (JTA) -- The accelerating disintegration of the Soviet central government has created new concerns about the future safety and status of Soviet Jewry and its ability to emigrate freely.

The decision Sunday by the three Slavic republics of the old Soviet Union to form a Commonwealth of Independent States is but the latest and most dramatic of a string of moves in recent weeks that have badly weakened and all but destroyed Mikhail Gorbachev's Kremlin government.

There were reports Tuesday that Gorbachev was close to resigning as president.

It remains to be seen whether the other nine Soviet republics will join the commonwealth formed by Russia, Byelorussia and Ukraine.

But in any case, power has shifted from Moscow to the individual republics. They are already exercising virtual autonomy in matters of domestic policy and increasingly are becoming involved directly in foreign relations.

Of specific concern to advocacy groups for Soviet Jewry is what type of emigration policy will be adopted by the various republics. In recent years, they have generally followed Moscow's policy, which has made it possible for hundreds of thousands of Jews to leave the country.

Of more general concern is the type of governments that will be empowered in the republics. There is uncertainty over whether, in the absence of communism, the republics will become truly democratic entities.

There is concern that in some republics, especially Georgia and Moldavia, ultranationalist groups hostile to the interests of Jews and other ethnic minorities could become more popular and see their xenophobic policies implemented.

In other republics, including the three Slavic ones that formed the commonwealth, the concern is that conditions may be ripe to enact laws favoring one ethnic group over another, thereby exacerbating tensions.

Ethnic Violence Possible

In addition, the economic crises in the various republics could lead to outright ethnic wars beyond the scattered violence that has occurred thus far. In a worse-case scenario, that violence could lead to the type of civil war that has devastated Yugoslavia with deadly results.

"The combination of economic and political instability that exists is conducive (and) has the potential for fueling ethnic conflicts," said Martin Wenick, executive director of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry.

"There is still no vision as to what kind of government will be implanted or superimposed on the former USSR," said Pamela Cohen, president of the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews.

Both Soviet Jewry groups will be watching closely as the republics decide whether to adopt or revise the Soviet Union's regulations for issuing of emigration visas and passports.

Rabbi Avraham Weiss, national director of the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry, said Jewish groups should be pressuring the republics not only to guarantee Jewish emigration but to accelerate it.

"Every day you wait with the changes taking place in the Soviet Union may be too late for Soviet Jewry," he said.

Jewish groups also will be monitoring what types of laws and regulations the republics adopt regarding the extent of permissible religious activity, the registration of religious groups and the import of religious goods.

The problem, as one Jewish organizational official put it, is that "each republic has to be approached separately" on these issues.

'Enormous Psychological Unrest'

Wenick said that the National Conference has already discussed emigration matters with leaders of the Russian, Byelorussian and Ukrainian republics.

And leaders of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee recently met with the leaders of Moldavia, a republic bordering Romania considered fertile for anti-Semitism, and Azerbaijan, a Moslem-majority republic that, like others in Central Asia, has the potential for adopting pro-Islamic fundamentalist policies.

They promised to protect the rights of the Jewish minority and to allow free emigration.

In announcing the formation of their commonwealth Sunday, the three Slavic republics pledged to honor all international accords that were signed by the Soviet Union. This apparently includes the 1975 Helsinki Accords, which call on treaty members to have liberal emigration policies.

Other guarantees that the commonwealth has agreed to uphold include "freedoms of all citizens irrespective of nationality," State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler said Monday.

Perhaps the biggest threat to Soviet Jews right now is uncertainty about the future.

Cohen of the Union of Councils said that for Jews in the various republics, there is currently "no repression, but there's no guarantees for anything that anybody is doing, which causes enormous psychological unrest."

Jews have an "enormous fear" that a "political earthquake" may erupt, with either an authoritarian or totalitarian government assuming power, she said.

KLARSFELD RETURNS SAFELY TO PARIS
By Michel Di Paz

PARIS, Dec. 10 (JTA) -- Nazi-hunter Beate Klarsfeld has returned safely to Paris, after being expelled from Syria, where she went last week to protest the haven given Nazi war criminal Alois Brunner and the denial of emigration rights to Syrian Jews.

Although she was confined to her hotel room under house arrest after demonstrating Saturday outside the Interior Ministry in Damascus, Klarsfeld believes her mission was not in vain.

Its purpose was to force French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas to raise the issue of Brunner during his official visit to Syria on Dec. 19, she told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

Brunner, who commanded the Drancy detention center near Paris, where French Jews were herded for deportation to Auschwitz, is one of the few major Nazi war criminals still at large.

Sentenced in absentia to death for mass murder, he has lived for the past 30 years under an alias in a villa in Damascus.

But on Oct. 15 he disappeared from those premises. The Syrian authorities, who consistently have denied that Brunner ever lived there, are reportedly trying to ease him out of the country.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES:
CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT STRUGGLES WITH ITS POLICY ON HOMOSEXUALITY
By Yosef I. Abramowitz
Baltimore Jewish Times

NEW YORK (JTA) -- Beth Cohen served for six years as executive director of Congregation Sharit Israel, a Conservative synagogue in Washington.

Her duties included leading services, tutoring for Bar and Bat Mitzvah lessons, and substitute teaching in the Hebrew school.

When her name appeared as "B. Cohen" in an article in a local Jewish newspaper about an international convention of gay and lesbian Jews, the rabbi of her congregation asked her to step down.

"The rabbi felt that I became a public sinner and I would no longer be able to lead the congregation in prayer or participate in any of those rituals that I had been participating in previously," she said.

When the synagogue board refused the rabbi's request to have Cohen fired, a year-long battle ensued. During that time, Cohen left on her own because she did not want to be the cause of a split in the congregation.

She was ultimately hired "as an open lesbian," she said, to be executive director of a Reform congregation.

But the debate continued within Sharit Israel, and the congregation urged the rabbi to seek a teshuvah, or rabbinic responsa, from the law committee of the Conservative movement's Rabbinical Assembly.

Five years later, that law committee is about to hear formal arguments, pro and con, on maintaining a ban on the ordination of homosexuals and on removing gay and lesbian Jews from positions of religious leadership in the Conservative movement.

Sanctions From The R.A.

This would include teachers, youth workers and "board members of synagogues or other national, regional or local institutions of the Conservative movement, adult or youth."

Rabbi Joel Roth, who heads the law committee, will argue further Wednesday that "a heterosexual leader who advocates the halachic coequality of homosexuality" and permits homosexual behavior should be disqualified.

If Roth's teshuvah comes before the entire Rabbinical Assembly and is accepted, a rabbi permitting homosexual behavior would be dismissed from the Conservative rabbinical body.

The implications of such action are far-reaching, given the national network of Ramah summer camps, United Synagogue Youth chapters, Solomon Schechter Day Schools and hundreds of synagogues that serve the estimated 40 percent of American Jewry that affiliates with the movement.

It is indicative of the Conservative movement, which seeks to blend tradition and modernity, that it is struggling with a sensitive issue and hearing two viewpoints from within.

What is unusual, though, is how extreme those two views are. For while Roth would seek to ban lesbians and gay men from leadership positions, Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson will urge the committee to sanctify homosexual unions.

Artson argues that the Torah's prohibition of homosexual acts does not apply to a "mutually exclusive, long-term adult homosexual relationship" but only to "oppressive, coercive or idolatrous" acts.

He will call for developing ceremonies for sanctifying gay and lesbian relationships and urge that sexual orientation no longer provide halachic grounds for "the denial of synagogue office or honors, for exclusion or expulsion from the rabbinate, the cantorate, or from a career in Jewish education."

Few observers expect a definitive answer from Wednesday's debate. More likely than one or the other of the two extreme views being accepted is that the committee will not vote, but continue to review the controversial subject.

Another possibility is that a third, compromise teshuvah will be adopted. One reportedly is being developed by Rabbi Elliot Dorf, provost of the University of Judaism in Los Angeles.

A Gay Presence At JTS

Many students at the Jewish Theological Seminary believe that just as accepting women into rabbinical school was voted down in 1979 and then passed years later, eventually gay and lesbian students will be accepted.

A few years ago the subject was taboo on campus. But a small item in the Oct. 14 edition of "Divrei Hayamim," the weekly seminary in-house bulletin, announced the formation of the Incognito Club of the Graduate Student Organization. It described itself as "dedicated to exploring the needs and concerns of the gay and lesbian population here at JTS."

The very presence of a gay population at the seminary came as a surprise to some students. But 30 students and one faculty member attended the club's first public activity (it also meets privately, off campus) and discussed how congregations can best serve gay and lesbian worshippers.

Some rabbis and congregational leaders in the Conservative movement think the seminary is slow to recognize and respond to the sexual climate of American Jewry.

Rabbi J.D. Sacks of Jersey City, N.J., says synagogues must decide: They can choose to define themselves so narrowly "that people will know they cannot or should not come," or they can be "the kind of place that is going to be very open to people."

Moves Toward Tolerance

Several Conservative congregations in the New York area have taken increasingly tolerant stands on homosexuality.

The board of the Park Slope Jewish Center in Brooklyn recently voted to allow gay and lesbian couples to join at a family rate, instead of as two singles.

Said Rabbi Sammy Barth: "We speak about partners rather than husbands, wives or spouses," even though most members are heterosexual.

At Bnai Jeshurun in Manhattan, a lesbian couple will soon publicly celebrate their relationship. Rabbi Rolando Matalon said he is "a little worried" about the potential shock to members, but he thinks the synagogue can take it.

The next synagogue newsletter will include an ad asking members to start a gay and lesbian group for Shabbat dinners.

Wednesday's law committee meeting may result in a startling decision, either way, but more likely it will mark the beginning of what may be a long debate regarding the status of gays and lesbians in the Conservative movement.