

ARAFAT GETS COOL RECEPTION TO SPEECH AT U.N. IN GENEVA

By Tamar Levy

GENEVA, Feb. 13 (JTA) -- Yasir Arafat delivered a rambling speech to the U.N. Human Rights Commission here Thursday that accused Israel of all manner of crimes and outrages against the Palestinian people.

But he got a lukewarm reception, even from the Arab delegations that packed the hall.

The news media were clearly less interested in his polemics than in a recording of a wire-tapped telephone conversation he allegedly had last month with the Palestine Liberation Organization's representative in Paris, Ibrahim Souss, in which he unleashed invectives against the Jews.

The PLO chief claimed the offensive remarks had been "dubbed" into the tape broadcast by Cable News Network but was generally vague on the subject.

Arafat's appearance here was his first at an international forum since he sided with Saddam Hussein of Iraq in the Persian Gulf crisis and war last year, and his first address to the 53-member human rights panel since 1988.

If he had hoped to recoup the prestige gained four years ago, he failed completely.

Under pressure from the United States, Arafat was denied use of the podium, which is reserved for heads of state. He spoke from his seat on the rostrum.

Israel was absent from the hall and the United States was represented by one low-level official.

Arafat got no standing ovation from the Arabs as in 1988, and the applause after he spoke was tepid.

He was addressed as "chairman," not "president," as he had asked, claiming to be chief of the unborn "state of Palestine."

'Hateful And Racist Rhetoric'

The head of the U.S. delegation to the Human Rights Commission, Kenneth Blackwell, told a news conference before Arafat spoke that "consistent with our non-recognition of the self-proclaimed 'state of Palestine,' we oppose Arafat speaking as a 'head of state,' since the PLO is accredited as an observer delegation."

With respect to the notorious tape that overshadowed Arafat's visit, Blackwell observed that "people who are truly interested in Arab-Israeli reconciliation ought not to be engaging in hateful and racist rhetoric."

In the conversation, the voice said to be Arafat's denounced Jews as "dogs, filth, dirt" for allegedly protesting the brief visit to a Paris hospital last month of George Habash, leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which is suspected of numerous terrorist outrages.

CNN said it obtained the tape from a Western law-enforcement agency.

Arafat, at a news conference of his own, seemed evasive on the subject. "It is a fabricated tape. There are sections on this tape that are fabricated. Therefore, it is not something which concerns me. It concerns the French government," he said.

But the PLO chief did not deny the conver-

sation took place or that his was the voice on the tape.

The Arafat who spoke Thursday was not the colorful figure of old. He seemed to perspire profusely, and his hands shook at times as he delivered his pro-forma attacks on Israel and Israel's allies.

The Palestinians have made enough concessions and will make no more, he said. The intifada will continue and grow.

He begged the United Nations to provide protection to the Palestinians, whom he claimed were being starved by the Israelis and thrown into Nazi-style "concentration camps."

Arafat condemned the United States and Germany for giving Israel billions of dollars he claimed were used to build settlements in Palestinian territory.

In his next sentence, though, he praised the United States and Secretary of State James Baker for conditioning U.S. loan guarantees for immigrant absorption to an Israeli settlement freeze.

ISRAELI HELD BY POLICE IN MOSCOW WHILE HIS PAMYAT ATTACKERS GO FREE

By Susan Birnbaum

NEW YORK, Feb. 13 (JTA) -- A representative of an Israeli group was arrested Wednesday in Moscow after being beaten by a gang affiliated with the anti-Semitic group Pamyat, the National Conference on Soviet Jewry reported.

Zeev Wagner, an emissary for the organization SHAMIR, was taken into custody by Russian police, who arrested, then freed, his attackers.

Additional Pamyat members went to the police station to accuse Wagner of attacking the group, said Marvin Aschendorf, executive director of American Friends of SHAMIR, the Association of Jewish Professionals from the Soviet Union in Israel.

In an eerie replication of the way Soviet Jews were treated in the pre-glasnost era, Wagner was charged with hooliganism and remains in jail.

However, he has been interviewed by the media, a somewhat promising sign, said Aschendorf, who is based in New York.

The police also allowed Wagner's wife to bring him kosher food, as well as his tallit and tefillin. However, she was reportedly not permitted to see him.

Wagner, who immigrated to Israel from the Soviet Union, was sent back to Moscow two years ago for SHAMIR. A Lubavitcher Hasid, he is well known in Russia from frequent television, radio and newspaper interviews, in which he talks about Jewish or Israeli issues.

Wagner has been serving the Moscow Jewish community as a teacher and coordinator.

According to Aschendorf, Wagner was driving and saw a Pamyat demonstration in front of the Lenin Library. He stopped to use a public telephone, to tell his wife when he would be home.

With his back to the crowd, Wagner was talking to his wife when she heard shouting and what sounded like a crowd approaching, Aschendorf said.

The telephone receiver dropped and the line went dead.

A policeman present said Wagner was beaten

by about 10 or 12 Pamyat demonstrators. The police arrested all and took them to the local police station.

Aschendorf said that Wagner carried a can of mace for protection and had used it to fend off his attackers.

He said that "at the police station, the vanguard of the Pamyat demonstration came to bear witness that Zeev Wagner attacked them."

'Open Season On Jews?'

In the meantime, the Pamyat people were released, according to Wagner's wife.

"She saw the Pamyat people there. She was told that they were filing a complaint against Wagner, saying he attacked them," Aschendorf said.

"This is a little ridiculous, since one man does not attack a whole group," he said.

According to Aschendorf, the Pamyat people left the station singing the Pamyat anthem.

Wagner was then transferred to the police investigation department at 38 Petrovskaya Street, where he remained as of late Thursday.

Aschendorf pointed out that an existing statute against anti-Semitic incitement was not used against the Pamyat people.

Efforts are now being made to free Wagner through diplomatic channels, chiefly between the Israeli Embassy and Russian authorities, Aschendorf said.

That information was confirmed by an independent source, who said the Israelis have been actively engaged since Wednesday in attempts to obtain Wagner's release.

Said Aschendorf: "Whether this is a part of a different scenario, where there is a complete loss of control within the former Soviet republic, or whether this is going to be a signal to other fascists that it is now open season on Jews, that is something we have to see as time goes on."

The recent high visibility of the nationalist Pamyat in demonstrations against the government "should be a signal to all of us," said Aschendorf. "They have become the vanguard of a populist movement."

The bigger question, he said, is "what is the situation in the Russian republic itself with regard to law and order?"

PRO-ISRAEL THINK TANK RECOMMENDS THAT ISRAEL WITHDRAW LOAN REQUEST

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, Feb. 13 (JTA) -- A conservative, pro-Israel think tank here is urging Israel to withdraw its request for U.S. guarantees covering \$10 billion in loans needed for immigrant absorption.

The Heritage Foundation is recommending such a move for both economic and political reasons.

Policy analysts at the think tank argue that if Israel were to receive the loans, it would delay Jerusalem from making needed economic reforms.

The analysts also point out that by withdrawing the request, Israel would remove a means for President Bush and Secretary of State James Baker to pressure Israel on Jewish settlement in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

A report released this week by Edward Hudgins, director of Heritage's Center for International Economic Growth, and Joel Rosenberg, an analyst at the center, says the United States should refuse to guarantee the loans until Israel

makes the economic changes needed to ensure the \$10 billion will not be wasted.

They argue that for Israel to receive the guarantees, Jerusalem must "accelerate dramatically its long-promised but slow-moving reform of its economy by cutting its budget, reducing and reforming taxes, privatizing government-owned companies and deregulating extensively the private sector."

Israel is seeking the U.S. guarantees in order to get better terms from private banks for the loans. But the Heritage report argues that the money would be wasted without reforms.

"Owing money directly to foreign banks, without the shield of a U.S. guarantee, moreover, could impose enough discipline on Israeli leaders to prompt economic reform," they suggest.

Their arguments were rejected by officials at the Israeli Embassy here.

Amnon Neubach, the embassy's minister for economic affairs, said Israel is in the process of reforming its economy, but in an evolutionary way.

Israel has been making the reforms "step by step," in order not to increase unemployment, Neubach explained.

Those who want economic reforms in Israel should realize that without the U.S. loan guarantees, there will be an "acceleration of the government in the absorption process, welfare and economic system in Israel," said Yoram Ettinger, minister for congressional affairs at the embassy.

But if the guarantees are provided, it will encourage the government to adopt a "hands-off" policy on the economy, since "funds will now be available for the private market in Israel," Ettinger said.

While arguing that the United States cannot provide the guarantees until reforms are made, the Heritage analysts warn that a U.S. refusal "in the midst of the peace talks, would appear to punish Israel unfairly. Yet, to accede to the request in its current form," they say, "also would be unfair to Israel and to American taxpayers."

This is why the Heritage analysts urge Israel to withdraw its request as the best solution.

A withdrawal also would "remove pressure from Israel to compromise its negotiating position in its talks with the Arabs and deny Bush and Baker a lever to press Israel on the settlements in the occupied territories," the analysts say.

"Israel should not allow its critics to hold it hostage over the loans."

TOY PISTOL TURNS DEADLY FOR ARAB

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Feb. 13 (JTA) -- Israel Defense Force soldiers fatally shot a masked 19-year-old Arab who pointed a pistol at them which turned out to be a toy.

The soldiers confronted the youth Thursday while he was smearing graffiti on a wall in Khan Yunis, in the Gaza Strip. They said they fired because the gun pointed at them seemed real.

The soldiers even claimed at one point that they heard it fire and saw a flash emerge from the muzzle.

Meanwhile, a 55-year-old resident of the Arab town of Kalkilya, in the West Bank, was shot to death by an unknown assailant Thursday.

The victim was identified as Ahmad Sa'ad. His son, who rushed to his aid, sustained head injuries and was hospitalized in nearby Kfar Sava.

ISRAELIS NABBED IN CAIRO AS SPIES HAVE LONG PERSONAL BUSINESS TIES

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Feb. 13 (JTA) -- Yael Ovitz, a 32-year-old mother of two, had not heard from her husband David for five days and she was worried.

But now the Givatayim housewife is relieved. David Ovitz is in prison in Egypt and may face charges of complicity in espionage. But "at least we know what happened to him," said his brother, Moshe.

Egypt officially notified Israel on Wednesday that it had arrested Ovitz, a furniture importer, in Cairo in connection with an alleged spy ring of Israeli Arabs.

He was linked to Farres Mussarti of Ramla, who was arrested in Cairo last week with his 17-year-old daughter, Faya, on suspicion of spying. Farres' 21-year-old son, Majed, was apprehended Sunday entering Egypt from Libya.

The Ovitzes and Mussartis go back a long time. It is no secret that Farres Mussarti and his brother Ibrahim once worked in a garage owned by David Ovitz.

When David Ovitz went into business, buying furniture in Egypt to sell at his shop in the Jaffa flea market, he took Farres along as an interpreter.

David speaks neither Arabic nor English, his wife explained. "I just hope the Egyptians will understand that they have made a grave mistake," she said.

The Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem apparently thinks they will. It reportedly received information that Ovitz is not really suspected of spying and will be freed in a few days.

As for the Mussartis, Israel was told they could be interviewed by an official from its consulate in Cairo as soon as the investigation is completed. But there is a possibility the Egyptians are stalling to save face.

Sources here suggested Cairo had been hoodwinked by Libya's secret service into investigating a fictitious espionage plot to embarrass Israel.

INCUMBENTS IN BOTH LIKUD AND LABOR FACING CHALLENGERS WITHIN PARTIES

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Feb. 13 (JTA) -- Israel's two major parties are preparing for the June 23 elections with the incumbent leaders of both under challenge.

In Labor, the contest is pretty much between veteran campaigners Shimon Peres and Yitzhak Rabin, both of whom have served as prime minister. Labor will go the U.S. route and decide by a primary election, scheduled Feb. 19.

One day later, the more than 3,000 members of Likud's Central Committee will decide who will head its electoral ticket.

A new contender officially entered the race when Foreign Minister David Levy told a jubilant crowd of cheering supporters at a Herzliya hotel Saturday night that he had decided to challenge Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir.

Levy is fresh from a good performance at the multilateral peace conference in Moscow, which followed on the heels of diplomatic successes for Israel with China and India.

"I believe that the time has come to stand up and contest the leadership. I believe that I can cut across party lines and draw the largest num-

ber of citizens to the Likud message," the Moroccan-born foreign minister said.

While Levy may be at the peak of his popularity because of his dedication to the peace process, political pundits have little doubt that Shamir will easily prevail over both Levy and his other challenger, Housing Minister Ariel Sharon.

A first-round victory Feb. 20 will require at least 50 percent of the Central Committee vote.

A good showing by Levy would doubtless strengthen his bid to retain the No. 2 spot on the Likud electoral list and the foreign affairs portfolio -- both coveted by Defense Minister Moshe Arens, who held them in the 1980s.

Similarly, an impressive tally by the hawkish Sharon would advance his chances to succeed Shamir when the premier, now 76, steps down.

Labor's primary election will be nationwide. The party's 150,000 registered members will be eligible to vote. The winner must top 40 percent of the vote or face the runner-up in a runoff.

A poll of Labor activists, conducted by the Hanoach Smith Research Institute, showed Yitzhak Rabin ahead of incumbent party Chairman Shimon Peres, with Rabin getting 40 percent against Peres' 30 percent.

Rabin also led in a poll conducted by the Teleseker Institute for the newspaper Ma'ariv.

Other aspirants for the Labor Party leadership, such as Yisrael Kessar, secretary-general of Histadrut, and Knesset member Ora Namir, trail far behind in the polls.

Asked which leader has the best chance of beating the rival party, Rabin was favored 48 to 19 percent over Peres.

The same question posed to Likud members showed 27 percent thought Shamir was the most effective leader.

But Benjamin Netanyahu, the considerably younger deputy minister who was spokesman for the Israeli delegation at the bilateral talks with the Arabs, was on his heels, with 26 percent.

Another rising star in Likud, Ze'ev (Benny) Begin, was third in the poll, but trailed with only 12.6 percent. Levy and Sharon were out of the running with 7 and 5.5 percent respectively.

MODA'I OFFERS TO RETURN TO LIKUD

JERUSALEM, Feb. 13 (JTA) -- Finance Minister Yitzhak Moda'i, a political outcast in recent years, has offered to return "unconditionally" to the Likud fold for the upcoming Knesset elections.

He is expected to be accepted with the backing of the party's leadership when Likud's 3,500 member Central Committee meets Feb. 20 to put together an election list.

Moda'i has agreed to waive the guaranteed safe slot on the list, which Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir gave him in exchange for his support two years ago.

The episode earned Moda'i more than a few enemies. The finance minister and a group of Knesset colleagues broke from Likud in early 1990 to establish an independent faction they called the Movement for the Promotion of Zionist Ideals.

It flirted briefly with Labor Party leader Shimon Peres, who vainly tried to put together an alternative coalition government in spring 1990.

Though scorned as an "opportunist" by many Likud loyalists, Moda'i agreed that his faction would support Shamir against Peres, provided his re-election to Knesset was assured.

Now, he says, he is willing to take his chances like any other candidate.

U.S. HAS PLEDGED SAUDIS PROTECTION SINCE 1947, TV DOCUMENTARY REPORTS

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, Feb. 13 (JTA) -- The United States has had a secret pledge since 1947 to protect Saudi Arabia from any attack, according to a television documentary to be aired next week.

The program, "The Secret Files: Washington, Israel and the Gulf," also points out that at the same time, Washington has maintained its "special relationship" with Israel, which is second only to the ties between the United States and Britain.

The film, produced by the Washington Post and WETA-TV, Washington's public broadcasting station, was previewed Tuesday at the Brookings Institution. It will be shown on public television stations nationwide next Monday night.

Narrated by Ben Bradlee, former editor of the Washington Post, the documentary attempts to show that formal, secret U.S. commitments to both Israel and Saudi Arabia led to the U.S. involvement in the Persian Gulf War a year ago.

The information was obtained from once-classified material in presidential libraries and the national archives.

Different perspectives of the same historical events are given by Amos Elon, an Israeli journalist, and Jamil Mroue, a Lebanese journalist.

The film is most explicit about the agreements with Saudi Arabia, which began in December 1947, less than a week after the United Nations agreed to the partition of Palestine.

Then King Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud secretly promised President Harry Truman that he would not be drawn into a fight with the United States over Palestine, in return for U.S. military support.

Bombers Flew In 1963

The Saudi king then believed his country was threatened by the Hashemite kingdoms in Iraq and Jordan, an eerie augury of an alignment that would take place 45 years later.

He received a pledge from the United States that the United States would "take energetic measures to ward off" any aggression against Saudi Arabia.

Thus began the military buildup of the Saudis, who felt threatened in the 1960s by Egypt, after 1967 by Israel and in 1979 by Iran.

Operation Desert Shield was not the first time the United States acted on its pledge, according to the film. In 1963, President John Kennedy ordered U.S. fighter bombers to fly defensive missions along the Saudi-Yemeni border, after learning of a plot by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser to kill the Saudi royal family.

While the film points out Washington's parallel commitments to both Saudi Arabia and Israel, differences in Washington's relations with the two countries were discussed after the screening by Samuel Lewis, a former U.S. ambassador to Israel.

Lewis pointed out that "the secrecy has been all about Saudi Arabia," whereas "the American public and the Congress have been remarkably aware of the degree of the U.S. commitment to Israel."

Lewis also said the film made it appear that U.S. arms had helped establish Israel and enabled it to survive during all its subsequent wars, despite the fact that the United States did not become Israel's major arms supplier until after the 1967 Six-Day War.

HOUSE BEING BUILT IN ISRAEL FOR THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK, Feb. 13 (JTA) -- He'll soon have his own house in Israel, but the Lubavitcher rebbe will not be making aliyah -- that is, not until the Messiah brings every Jew to Eretz Yisrael.

When real estate developers who are followers of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson recently decided to expand Kfar Chabad, a 1,000-family community located between Ben-Gurion Airport and Tel Aviv, they came to the rebbe for a blessing, and with a petition calling on him to reveal the fact that he is the Messiah.

They also asked the 89-year-old Hasidic leader if he would like them to build a house for him in Kfar Chabad. The rebbe said yes.

But the rebbe did not mean that he would get on a plane the next day for the Holy Land, explain his followers. Rather, he is expecting the imminent arrival of the Messiah to bring us all to Eretz Yisrael.

The initiator of the rebbe's new house, Zosha Rivkin, reportedly tried to convince Schneerson twice in the past to have a house built for him in the Lubavitch enclave, only succeeding recently.

The rebbe was overheard telling the developers, during their visit to the movement's headquarters in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, that "many people have houses in more than one country."

His own ancestors are among them: The second Lubavitcher rebbe, Dov Ber Schneuri, known as the Mittler rebbe, purchased a building in Hebron in the early part of the 19th century.

But the only member of the Lubavitch dynasty ever to have visited Israel was the previous rebbe, Yosef Yitzchok Schneersohn, the current rebbe's father-in-law, who was there for a few days in the summer of 1929, on his way from Russia to the United States.

(JTA correspondent Hugh Orgel in Tel Aviv contributed to this report.)

DUTCH JEWISH NEWSPAPER EDITOR DEAD

By Henriette Boas

AMSTERDAM, Feb. 13 (JTA) -- Several hundred mourners attended the funeral here Wednesday of Maurits Kopuit, editor for 20 years of the Dutch Jewish weekly Nieuw Israelietisch Weekblad, who was reputedly the best-known Jewish personality in Holland.

He died Monday while undergoing heart surgery, at the age of 62.

An individualist, iconoclast and controversial figure who attracted legions of friends and hordes of enemies, Kopuit was a relentless critic of the Jewish establishment.

But he opened his op-ed page to all shades of opinion and his newspaper was widely read by non-Jews as well as Jews.

Born in Amsterdam, Kopuit lost his father in World War II while he was hidden in Nazi-occupied Holland. He went to work after the war for the leading Dutch daily, Algemeen Handelsblad.

Kopuit was appointed editor of the Jewish weekly in 1971. His successor has not been named.

REMINDER: The JTA Daily News Bulletin will not be published on Monday, Feb. 17.