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VIOLENCE ALONG BORDER WITH LEBANON HALTED AS TWO SIDES SEE LITTLE GAIN

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Feb. 23 (JTA) -- A week of violence along Israel's border with Lebanon has ended for the moment, apparently because both sides believe little can be gained by escalating tensions further.

After six days of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah guerrillas in southern Lebanon, an uneasy truce emerged over the weekend.

No Katyusha rockets fell in Upper Galilee and there were no punishing artillery barrages from the Israel Defense Force and its allied South Lebanon Army.

But the IDF remains on high alert, and some nervous residents of Galilee are still spending nights in bomb shelters.

A decision to back off from further confrontation with Israel was reportedly reached at a weekend meeting Syrian and Lebanese army officers had with representatives of the fundamentalist Hezbollah and its mainstream Shi'ite counterpart, the Amal militia.

Amal, headed by Nabih Berri, agreed last week to establish a common front with its Iranian-backed rival against the Israelis.

But the prevailing view here is that Hezbollah is obeying orders from its real bosses, Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani and Syrian President Hafez Assad.

They, in turn, may be heeding the wishes of Washington, where U.S.-sponsored Arab-Israeli peace talks resume Monday. Syria and Lebanon will be attending those talks.

Iran and Syria are said to be eager to prove to the United States that they are indispensable factors in the Middle East equation.

The Iranian and Syrian presidents are also said to have agreed by telephone that the deteriorating situation in southern Lebanon was "giving Israel a pretext to act there as it pleased."

Pressure From Shi'ite Villagers

In addition, Hezbollah faced pressure from the local Shi'ite population in southern Lebanon. Thousands of villagers forced to flee their homes under IDF and SLA shelling realized they were paying a higher price for the Katyusha rocket assaults than their intended targets, the Israelis in Upper Galilee.

Such considerations seemed to bear out Israeli military sources, who credited the IDF's tactics with silencing the Katyusha batteries.

But Israel itself is under constraints, as well. In the middle of peace talks and with a tough election campaign about to start, the Likud government cannot afford to launch an all-out assault on guerrilla bases in Lebanon the way Menachem Begin's government did 10 years ago.

That would not only stir a serious internal debate but would inevitably widen Israel's troubling rift with Washington.

Such considerations were reflected in remarks over the weekend by the IDF chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Ehud Barak. He said the army would not repeat the large-scale operation it carried out in southern Lebanon last week but would instead resort if necessary to a combination

of countermeasures against Katyusha rocket attacks.

That was something of a retreat from Israel's more aggressive stance last week.

Last week's hostilities, in fact, began with the IDF's carefully executed assassination of Hezbollah leader Sheik Abbas Musawi on Feb. 16, an act for which Israel promptly took responsibility and justified by publishing a long list of Hezbollah terrorist acts and atrocities.

5-Year-Old Israeli Girl Killed

According to a senior Hezbollah cleric, Sheik Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah, the Katyusha attacks on Galilee that began almost immediately afterward were not an ordinary Hezbollah tactic but intended to avenge Musawi's death.

Each side has been bloodied, and both are now claiming victory.

The IDF's relentless artillery pounding of Hezbollah bases and its tank and helicopter-supported incursion into southern Lebanon beyond the security zone last week undoubtedly hurt the guerrillas badly.

Hezbollah claims victory on the basis of the IDF's swift withdrawal from the southern Lebanese villages of Yatar and Kafra, which it occupied briefly on Wednesday.

The IDF lost two men in the raid on Kafra. Capt. Eran Alkawi, 24, of Rishon le-Zion and Sgt. Ram Inbar, 22, a combat engineer from Nahal Oz were buried in their hometowns Friday.

A civilian casualty was 5-year-old Avia Elizada, killed by fragments of a Katyusha rocket that exploded Friday outside her home at Moshav Granot in western Galilee.

But IDF sources now say that the Katyusha rocket that killed her as she ran to greet her father was fired by Palestinian terrorists, not Hezbollah fighters.

They blame the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which was not bound by any understanding reached with the Shi'ites in southern Lebanon.

In fact, the historic hostility between the Lebanese Shi'ites and Palestinians is exceeded only by their common animosity toward Israel.

Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 was intended to destroy Palestinian terrorist bases. The Jewish state had no quarrel at the time with the 1.5 million Shi'ites who comprise about half of Lebanon's population.

In fact, the invading Israeli troops were cheered in many Shi'ite towns. It was only after the IDF ensconced itself in Lebanon that fanatical Islamic organizations such as Hezbollah emerged and began harassing the IDF.

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

4 IMMIGRANTS STABBED, ONE FATALLY

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Feb. 23 (JTA) -- A new immigrant from the former Soviet Union was killed and three other olim were wounded Friday by a knife-wielding Arab in Kfar Sava, a grim reminder that the intifada still goes on.

Genia Friedmann, 42, who arrived in Israel only six weeks ago, was fatally stabbed while

shopping. Her father, Yitzhak Gudiss, 65, was wounded.

The assailant, Yussuf Abd el-Rahman, 20, of the nearby West Bank town of Kalkilya, also slightly wounded Dr. Larissa Patrikov, 41, and her husband, Dr. Yevgeny Patrikov, 39, both unemployed gynecologists from the former Soviet Union.

Rahman was shot and seriously wounded by an Israel Defense Force soldier who protected him from an enraged Jewish mob until the police arrived.

The young Arab told police later that his intention was "to kill Jews" to avenge the arrest of his brother at a police roadblock the previous day.

The Palestinian branch of the fundamentalist Islamic Jihad claimed, however, that it had ordered the stabbings to avenge the death in southern Lebanon of Sheik Abbas Musawi, leader of the Shi'ite fundamentalist Hezbollah, who was killed Feb. 16 in an IDF precision attack on his motorcade.

GAO REPORT IS CITED BY OPPONENTS AND PROPONENTS OF LOAN GUARANTEES

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, Feb. 23 (JTA) -- A report just issued by a congressional watchdog agency is being used by some in Congress to bolster the Bush administration's case for linking Israel's request for U.S. loan guarantees to a freeze on settlement-building in the administered territories.

But Israeli officials believe the report may actually help convince Congress to approve the guarantees, which would make it easier for Israel to borrow \$10 billion on commercial capital markets to help absorb thousands of immigrants.

The report by the General Accounting Office, released last week, demonstrates that Israel kept its promise not to use any of the \$400 million in U.S. loan guarantees received last year in the West Bank or Gaza Strip, according to Yoram Ettinger, minister for congressional affairs at the Israeli Embassy here.

Furthermore, Ettinger said, the GAO report accepts Israel's need for an additional \$10 billion to help it absorb an estimated 1 million immigrants from the republics of the former Soviet Union over the next five years.

The report also expresses the belief that Israel will be able to repay the money so that the United States as the guarantor will not be stuck with the bill.

Nevertheless, the report is being used by Sen. Robert Byrd (D-W.Va.), chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, to argue that written pledges by Israel not to use the money in the territories are meaningless unless Israel institutes a freeze on settlements.

Byrd argued for the report from the GAO, which monitors for Congress the implementation of legislation and the use of federal funds.

"Receiving written assurances as to how the money will be spent, without any accompanying change in Israeli settlement policy, is an exercise in building a dam of paper," Byrd said in releasing the GAO study.

The report points out that the actual use of the \$400 million borrowed by Israel "cannot be determined because money is fungible -- funds made available through loan guarantees made other Israeli funds available for use as the Israeli government determined.

"The dollars were deposited with the Israeli Ministry of Finance and became commingled with other money, thus losing their separate identity," the report says.

But Ettinger argued that all money is fungible, since it all goes in and comes out of the same Treasury. "To suggest that money is fungible is to suggest that a circle is round," he said.

Little Negative Impact Expected

Despite Byrd's comments, pro-Israel lobbyists do not expect the report to have much of a negative impact on congressional support for the guarantees. They believe a majority of the Senate Appropriations Committee is ready to override any doubts by Byrd or Sen. Patrick Leahy, (D-Vt.), chairman of the panel's foreign operations subcommittee.

The real question, as these sources see it, is whether Congress will authorize the guarantees without the backing of the Bush administration.

Congress was asked to do just that "as quickly as possible" by the AFL-CIO Executive Council at its annual meeting in Bal Harbour, Fla.

"Such support for Israel, a reliable democratic ally, is in the U.S. national interest," the council said, according to Lenore Miller, president of the Jewish Labor Committee and a member of the Executive Council.

The council statement also noted that the 120-day postponement of congressional consideration of the loan guarantees asked by President Bush has passed, and "it is clear that President Bush has reneged on his promise to reinstate the loan guarantee process."

As for the GAO report, Ettinger said it shows that the \$400 million borrowed last year had no impact on Israel's settlement policy. The report said Israel is expected to certify that the \$400 million in loans was used to finance 12,303 housing mortgages valued at \$425 million within Israel's pre-1967 borders.

"Israel has not directed or required Soviet immigrants to settle in the occupied territories, and it does not offer special incentives that are unique to Soviet immigrants for settling there," the report says.

But it points out that the Israeli government offers incentives to encourage Israelis, including immigrants, to move to the territories.

Israel Able To Repay Loans

The report estimates that 8,800 of 332,000 immigrants who arrived since 1989 -- under 3 percent -- have settled in the territories. But Ettinger said the actual figure is only 1,000, since Israel does not accept the U.S. contention that East Jerusalem is part of the West Bank.

The GAO analysis finds that Israel will be able to repay the \$10 billion in loans and "continue its past record of payment under most foreseeable circumstances."

But the report stresses this will require Israel implementing its economic reforms and announced absorption plan, including providing most jobs for Soviet immigrants in the private sector.

Without the loan guarantees, the government would have to play a much larger role in the absorption process, Ettinger observed.

He also pointed out that the \$400 million in loans provided \$148 million in revenue for U.S. companies, chiefly in the housing industry. "Imagine how much can be earned from the \$10 billion," he said.

ISRAELIS SEE LITTLE MOVEMENT YET TOWARD ACCORD WITH U.S. ON LOANS

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Feb. 23 (JTA) -- Government officials here are clearly dismayed by the lack of progress in negotiations with the Bush administration over the U.S. terms for underwriting \$10 billion in loans Israel wants over the next five years to help absorb immigrants.

Israel's ambassador in Washington, Zalman Shoval, had his third private meeting on the subject Friday with U.S. Secretary of State James Baker.

But neither side seems to have given ground on the major obstacle: U.S. insistence that Israel halt its settlement-building program in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Shoval left the State Department on Friday afternoon saying, "There is no agreement yet. We will have another talk." He declined further comment.

Rumors floated in Jerusalem over the weekend that Shoval's dialogue with Baker was becoming increasingly harsh. But that could not be confirmed inasmuch as the two men met in complete privacy, with no aides present.

In any case, government circles here are bracing for a tough administration line when Baker testifies before Congress on Monday. Although the loans issue was not formally raised at Sunday's Cabinet meeting, it was very much in the air.

Several ministers sounded pessimistic in their comments to reporters. "We will not be dictated to," Absorption Minister Yitzhak Peretz declared, echoing the line taken by most coalition politicians.

The administration's position is that it will support Israel's loan guarantee request in principle to help it absorb the 1 million immigrants, mainly from the former Soviet Union, expected to arrive here over the next five years.

But the administration insists on three conditions: Israel must complete only those housing units in the territories already under construction; it must halt new housing starts; and it must accept that the United States would deduct from the amount of the loans guaranteed annually one dollar for every dollar Israel spends for Jewish settlement on the disputed land.

U.S. Jews Oppose Linkage

Israel's top economic official, Bank of Israel Governor Ya'acov Frankel, is presently in Washington leading an Israeli diplomatic and lobbying effort in support of the loan guarantees.

Meanwhile, members of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, here on a brief study mission, are understood to be counseling moderation on the settlements issue in their informal contacts with Israeli government figures.

But publicly, Jewish leaders gathering here for both the Conference of Presidents mission and for a World Jewish Congress conference are closing ranks behind Israel's loan request. They insist that the U.S. guarantees not be linked to the issue of Jewish settlements in the territories.

Shoshana Cardin, chairman of the Conference of Presidents, has disapproved of the linkage in strong terms, saying political issues should not interfere with a pressing request for humanitarian assistance.

That position was echoed here by Evelyn

Sommer, head of the WJC's America Section, and Jean Kahn, president of the European Jewish Congress and of CRIF, the representative council of French Jewish organizations.

Israel Radio quoted an unnamed "top American Jewish official" Sunday as saying that President Bush "was endangering the peace process with his tough position on the loan guarantees Israel has requested."

There is also concern here that during the bilateral peace talks in Washington this week, the Arab delegations, especially the Palestinians, will demand that the settlement dispute be dealt with forthwith.

So far, they have shown forbearance on that issue. But with the Bush administration and some members of Congress lined up against the Israeli government's settlement policies, the Arabs might decide the moment is opportune to "make an issue" of the settlements.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir did not refer directly to the loan guarantees in a speech Sunday to the WJC Executive. But he urged world Jewry's "maximum financial involvement" in Israel, through "contribution and investment, skill and experience."

FRENCH OFFICIAL PRESSES SYRIA ON NAZI, IMPRISONMENT OF JEWS

By Michael Di Paz

PARIS, Feb. 23 (JTA) -- French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas apparently got nowhere when he raised two issues of Jewish concern with the foreign minister of Syria last week during a visit to Damascus.

The Syrians denied, as they have in the past, any knowledge of the whereabouts of Nazi war criminal Alois Brunner, who found haven in Syria more than 35 years ago and resided, at least until recently, in Damascus.

With respect to the mistreatment of Syria's Jewish community and, specifically, the continued imprisonment of two Jewish brothers, Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa reportedly "took notice" of Dumas' complaints. That is the diplomatic equivalent of "file and forget."

The Syrian news media did not report the French visitor's queries about Brunner or his concern for the plight of the Jews.

Dumas was to have visited Damascus in December, but was forced to postpone his trip because the Syrians were irked by his interest in those issues.

He had been briefed by French Nazi-hunter Beate Klarsfeld, who was expelled from Syria on Dec. 10 after she came to protest the official protection given Brunner.

Brunner had been living under the alias Georg Fisher in a villa on George Haddad Street in Damascus. On Dec. 15, he dropped out of sight. Klarsfeld believes the Syrians moved him to a less visible location to avoid embarrassment.

A Foreign Ministry spokesman told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency that Dumas instructed the French ambassador in Damascus to speed up efforts with his German counterpart there to present a joint request for Brunner's extradition.

The 79-year-old war criminal commanded the Drancy internment center near Paris, where Jews were herded for deportation to Auschwitz.

He is wanted by France and Germany to stand trial for crimes against humanity. Extradition requests by both countries so far have gone unanswered by Syria.

JEWISH AND CATHOLIC LEADERS CONFER IN POLAND, CZECHOSLOVAKIA, HUNGARY

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK, Feb. 23 (JTA) -- Jewish and Catholic religious leaders who met last week in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary agreed that intensified efforts are needed to teach Catholic priests and educators in those countries about Judaism and their church's relationship with it.

The unprecedented joint trip was arranged to implement a September 1990 document, known as the Prague Declaration, that called for concrete measures to eradicate anti-Semitism from Catholic teachings, particularly in those Central and Eastern European countries that were essentially closed off to the West during the era of Communist rule.

The group included five representatives of IJCIC, the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations, which represents world Jewry in dialogue with other faiths.

Representing the Vatican was Monsignor Pier Francesco Fumagalli, secretary of its Commission for Religious Relations With the Jews.

In each country, the joint delegation met with the primate of the local Catholic Church and with the papal nuncio, or Vatican political representative. The group also met with Jewish community officials in Krakow, Prague and Budapest.

A statement signed by both the Jews and the Catholics at the conclusion of the trip said that "priority must be extended in each country to the area of general education and to the training of educators."

The statement said it is "essential to publish and to disseminate as soon as possible the fundamental texts" of the Catholic Church concerning "its relations to the Jewish people, according to the principles of the Second Vatican Council."

Those texts should be written in the vernacular languages and distributed "in the broadest possible fashion," the statement said.

Meeting With Cardinal Glemp

Joining the group in Poland was Bishop Henryk Muszynski, chairman of the Polish Bishops Commission for Dialogue with Judaism, and Cardinal Franciszek Macharski, archbishop of Krakow.

Several of the Jewish delegates also met with Cardinal Josef Glemp, the country's primate, who in 1989 accused Jews of exerting control over the international media, among other unflattering charges.

While visiting the United States last fall, Glemp expressed regret for his remarks, met with a group of American Jewish rabbis and invited them to Poland. Last week's meeting was in response to that invitation, according to the participants.

During the 45-minute session, Glemp assured his Jewish guests "that his concern was ongoing, that anti-Semitism is unworthy of our civilization," Rabbi Mordechai Waxman reported in a phone interview from Warsaw.

Waxman represented the Synagogue Council of America, an agency of Orthodox, Conservative and Reform leaders that serves as IJCIC's American secretariat.

According to participants in the meeting, Glemp said "We are expressing our sincere regrets because of the anti-Semitic events which were caused on Polish soil. We can learn much from the Jewish nation."

Glemp "came off as a man who learned

something in his visit to America," Waxman said. "Apparently Glemp had been impressed on his visit to the U.S., for the first time encountering a vital Jewish community."

While in Poland, the Jewish and Catholic leaders visited the Umschlagplatz, where, during the Holocaust, Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto were assembled for deportation to the death camps.

Emotional Visit To Auschwitz

They also paid an emotional visit to Auschwitz and checked on the progress of the new convent being constructed some distance away from the death camp. The Carmelite nuns who now occupy a building on the Auschwitz grounds are expected to move to the new complex by the end of the year.

Standing before the ovens that cremated many of the 1.5 million Jews who died at Auschwitz, the Jewish leaders recited Kaddish and the Catholics recited Psalm 130, in Latin, which is part of their funeral liturgy.

"We embraced each other there," said Rabbi Mark Winer, spokesman for the five-member IJCIC delegation.

There was "a sense of fellowship among us and tears all around" as the group contemplated the destruction that had occurred at that site, Winer said in a telephone interview from Warsaw.

The group also visited the museum at Auschwitz, where changes in the presentation of the Holocaust have recently been made. Under Communist rule, exhibits spoke mainly of martyrs in the fight against fascism, rather than victims of a systematic campaign to exterminate the Jewish people.

Some of the exhibits and literature at the museum have been changed to emphasize the uniquely Jewish nature of the tragedy at Auschwitz.

"There's an increased commitment to the specificity of the Jewish suffering, but they have a way to go," said Rabbi A. James Rudin, director of interreligious affairs for the American Jewish Committee and an IJCIC delegate.

"They have to get into the origin and development of Nazism, some of the heroism of Jews fighting back and an understanding of the enormity of it," he said in an interview from Warsaw.

'Poles Really Don't Know Jews'

A museum administrator promised the delegates that changes in the exhibits would be made so that every visitor understands the purpose of the camp was to kill Jews.

And at the Birkenau death camp, less than two miles away, 19 carved-stone memorials in as many languages have been sandblasted so that their Communist-era rhetoric can be replaced with language that makes clear the Jewish suffering at that site, according to Rudin.

Today an estimated 5,000 to 15,000 Jews live in Poland.

"An entire generation of Poles really don't know Jews," said Rabbi Waxman, though "they are wrestling with the meaning of Christianity in light of the meaning of the Shoah," or Holocaust.

"The ultimate irony is that this bleak place which is 'Judenrein' (empty of Jews), is the source of the most profound commitment to make teshuvah (repentance) for the anti-Semitic past," said Rabbi Winer.

"The commitment of the Catholic hierarchy," he said, "is absolutely inspiring."