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ISRAEL SEES ARMS CHARGES AS ATTEMPT TO DAMAGE RELATIONS WITH WASHINGTON
By David Landau

JERUSALEM, March 15 (JTA) -- Israel believes it is the victim of a coordinated attempt by U.S. government officials to undermine its relations with Washington through a series of leaks alleging that the Jewish state is transferring American weapons technology to third countries.

While no formal accusation has been made here, that clearly is the view of many ranking government officials, including Defense Minister Moshe Arens, who is meeting Monday in Washington with U.S. Defense Secretary Dick Cheney.

"A coordinated, badmouthing campaign" is how Deputy Minister Benjamin Netanyahu described the situation Sunday.

He spoke of "an obvious campaign aimed at denigrating Israel and sabotaging its relations with the United States."

Health Minister Ehud Olmert suggested to reporters after the weekly Cabinet meeting Sunday that there is a systematic effort in some U.S. circles to interfere in the Israeli election campaign.

"I am very unhappy at what I see and hear coming from the administration," he said.

The Wall Street Journal reported Friday that State Department Inspector General Sherman Funk had determined in a draft report that Israel has re-exported certain advanced American arms technologies to third countries without U.S. permission.

That apparently leaked story came on the heels of one in The Washington Times last week alleging that Israel transferred U.S. Patriot anti-missile technology to China.

South Africa, Chile, Ethiopia and other countries have been mentioned as recipients of U.S. technology unlawfully transferred by Israel, according to reports in U.S. newspapers and television newscasts last week.

'Bureaucratic War' Being Waged

In Washington, State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said Friday that the inspector general's investigation covered a series of countries, not just Israel, and would be made public in two weeks.

It was conducted for the State Department's Office of Defense Trade Controls, which issues licenses for U.S. weapons technology exports and is supposed to monitor the recipients' compliance with the applicable conditions.

The concern expressed by Israeli officials that a deliberate campaign to "smear Israel" is afoot got some credibility from a New York Times report Sunday by diplomatic correspondent Thomas Friedman.

Friedman wrote that a "bureaucratic war" was being waged between pro- and anti-Israel camps inside the Bush administration to influence administration policy toward the Jewish state.

In Jerusalem, the Cabinet did not formally discuss the matter at its weekly session, but senior ministers are clearly involved in ongoing consultations in other forums.

The Prime Minister's Office, backing up Arens and his aides visiting the United States,

issued a flat denial of the allegations over the weekend.

In Washington, Israeli Embassy spokeswoman Ruth Yaron issued a statement Friday saying that "Israel's policy is to adhere strictly to the procurement and technology transfer regulations."

"The allegations discussed in various press reports are sensitive matters which are subject to negotiations between the government of Israel and the government of the United States," the statement said.

The Israeli media broadly echoed the government's denials Sunday insofar as they pertained to the two most serious allegations -- that Israel transferred Patriot missile technology to China and technology related to the U.S.-funded Arrow missile-defense project to South Africa.

Some commentators were less definite about allegations relating to air-to-air missiles and to cluster bombs.

But they observed that those allegations referred to episodes several years ago. All stressed that Israel has since tightened procedures relating to weapons technology of U.S. origin.

Denial 'More Firm Than Ever'

Ze'ev Schiff, respected military analyst for the Israeli daily Ha'aretz, wrote Sunday that U.S. intelligence reports purporting to finger Israel on the Patriot and Arrow allegations were not necessarily reliable.

"American intelligence has made serious mistakes in the past," Schiff noted pointedly.

He said "a top-level re-examination" by the Israel Defense Force over the weekend has made Israel "more firm than ever in its denial."

Netanyahu, in a radio interview, said he was fully confident that Arens would be able to "prove conclusively" that the allegations were without foundation.

Opposition politicians rallied to the government on this issue.

Former Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who will lead the Labor Party in the June 23 elections, stressed that Israel always scrupulously adheres to the legal restrictions imposed on U.S. arms transfers.

Yossi Sarid of the Citizens Rights Movement and Yair Tsaban of Mapam said, on the other hand, that the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, of which both are veteran members, should have been more diligent in monitoring Israel's arms-exports industry.

But the committee chairman, Eliahu Ben-Elissar of Likud, linked the affair to the generally worsening state of relations between Washington and Jerusalem.

Relations have been strained by the Bush administration's insistence on linking requested U.S. loan guarantees with an Israeli freeze on construction in the administered territories.

But according to Schiff, the source of this episode may lie in an ongoing dispute within the administration over whether to sell Israel various advanced military technologies and systems.

American arms producers are siding with those in government who opposed such transfers, Schiff wrote.

(JTA correspondent David Friedman in Washington contributed to this report.)

CANADIAN JEWS ANGERED BY MOVE TO STOP WAR CRIMES PROCEEDINGS

By Gil Kezwer

TORONTO, March 15 (JTA) -- Canadian Jews are angry at the Justice Department's decision to stay proceedings against alleged Nazi war criminal Michael Pawlowski because of lack of evidence.

It is the third unsuccessful prosecution by the department's war crimes unit since it was established by Parliament in September 1987.

Pawlowski, a naturalized Canadian living since 1951 in Renfrew, Ontario, was charged on Dec. 15, 1989 with eight counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The charges were based on Pawlowski's involvement in the 1942 killings of 410 Jews and 80 Poles in the Minsk region of Nazi-occupied White Russia (now known as Belarus). At the time, he was a local policeman.

The case was crippled by a ruling last May against a government request to send a commission to the Soviet Union to gather and videotape testimony from elderly witnesses unable to come to Canada to testify.

Justice James Chadwick, a judge of the Ontario Court, General Division, ruled twice that videotaped evidence could jeopardize Pawlowski's right to a fair trial.

On Feb. 6, the Supreme Court of Canada denied federal prosecutors leave to appeal the pretrial ruling.

A witness who could have given critical testimony on the massacre of 80 Poles and eight Jews in the village of Yeskovichi died last May.

The decision to stay proceedings rather than drop the charges altogether means the prosecution could be reopened if new evidence arises, however unlikely that may be.

'A Tragedy From The Start'

Pawlowski broke his silence in the case briefly outside court after the charges were stayed. "I feel great because I was innocent at the beginning, and for two-and-a-half years I have suffered, for what?" he asked. "That's really shameful."

Pawlowski's lawyer, Donald Bayne, said there never was a case against the retired carpenter, only fabricated evidence invented by the KGB to frame the former anti-Communist fighter.

Earlier this month, Bayne made a request to Chadwick to recover \$155,000 (Canadian) in costs associated with his client's defense.

Sol Littman, director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Canadian office, was dismayed by the Justice Department decision. "The Pawlowski case has been a tragedy from the start," he said.

"What you have is inexperienced investigators making some serious mistakes in the gathering of evidence, compounded by a series of unanticipated legal judgments that virtually made it impossible to collect any evidence in the former Soviet Union," he said.

"Essentially the court refused to accept the validity of what is known as commissioned evidence, that is the videotaping of witnesses and the presentation of the videotaped evidence in the courts.

"This decision runs contrary to the practices employed" in Canada, the United States, Germany, Holland and Scotland, he said.

"If the Pawlowski case is allowed to serve as a precedent, then we might as well kiss the war crimes prosecutions process goodbye."

B'nai Brith Canada spokesman Paul Marcus

expressed extreme disappointment in the ruling. He said it indicates "low priority and a lack of sympathy from the judiciary.

"It points to the need for other remedies," such as denaturalization and deportation, he said.

Milton Harris, chairman of Canadian Jewish Congress' war crimes committee, was also sharply critical of the government.

'Just Going Through The Motions'

"The Justice Department is just going through the motions without the dogged determination necessary to produce results," he said. "The Crown's decision is the sad culmination of its mishandling of the Pawlowski case almost from the outset."

Harris believes the Justice Department "should have gone to trial and made a fresh application before the trial judge to collect evidence abroad. Had that been denied, they could have gone to the Court of Appeal," he said.

Unlike in the United States, Canadian law allows for criminal prosecutions for offenses allegedly perpetrated before the accused entered the country, in addition to civil proceedings such as deportation or extradition.

In the first trial under the war crimes amendment to the Criminal Code, Imre Finta, 79, of Toronto was acquitted in May 1990 of kidnapping, forcible confinement and robbery of 8,617 Jews in the Hungarian city of Szeged in 1944.

Last March, charges were dropped against Stephen Reistetter of St. Catharines, Ontario, who was accused of sending some 3,000 Jews in Bardojov, Slovakia, to Nazi death camps.

As in the Pawlowski case, the Crown said there was insufficient evidence to proceed against Reistetter after two witnesses died and others proved unwilling or incapable of testifying.

In Vancouver, Jacob Luitjens, 72, was stripped of his Canadian citizenship Nov. 7 after a court ruling Oct. 23 that he had concealed his past Nazi ties when he immigrated to Canada from Paraguay in 1961.

The denaturalization paved the way for the retired University of British Columbia botany instructor to be sent to the Netherlands, where he was tried in absentia in 1948, convicted of collaborating with the enemy in time of war, and sentenced to life imprisonment.

The Netherlands officially requested Luitjens' extradition in January after the extradition treaty between the two countries was amended Dec. 1 to include the crime of collaboration.

Justice Minister Still Committed

A 1986-1987 commission headed by Justice Jules Deschenes identified 20 prime Nazi war crimes cases to be urgently pursued. The Quebec Superior Court judge also recommended another 200 cases be further investigated.

Despite the setbacks, Justice Minister Kim Campbell has reaffirmed her commitment to bring war criminals to justice.

"I met with our war crimes unit just a few months ago and made it clear to them that this was not a case of baseball, it was not a case of batting .500 or 1.000; that we would deal with each case on an individual basis, and that they should pursue their work on that basis," she said.

Littman of the Wiesenthal Center warned that "if we don't get four new cases into the courts this year, we might as well assume the government has opted out of the whole war crimes prosecution business."

LEVY BALKING AT SHAMIR ATTEMPT TO REUNITE RIVAL CAMPS IN LIKUD

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, March 15 (JTA) -- Foreign Minister David Levy is not responding to peace overtures from the Likud leadership to keep the party united for the upcoming election campaign.

Although he met privately with Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir last Thursday, Levy by all accounts still blames a cabal of Shamir, Moshe Arens and Ariel Sharon for the political humiliation he suffered when the Likud Central Committee selected the party's election slate two weeks ago.

Levy's candidates were virtually shut out of the voting March 1 and 2. And the foreign minister himself dropped from No. 2 to fourth place in the Likud hierarchy, behind Shamir, Arens and Sharon.

Shamir promised to set up a "joint committee" to discuss differences between the respective camps.

But Levy reportedly demanded that roughly a third of all party posts, from Cabinet ministers down, go to his people.

Levy bases that on his showing at the Central Committee last month, when he and Housing Minister Sharon mounted direct challenges to Shamir for party leadership.

Although the prime minister won handily with 46 percent of the Central Committee members backing him, Levy polled 32 percent and Sharon won 21 percent.

Meanwhile, members of Levy's camp continue to urge him to leave Likud and establish a new party with other disgruntled politicians.

They might include Aharon Abuhatzzeira, relegated to the perilous 36th spot on the election list, and Finance Minister Yitzhak Moda'i, who bolted Likud two years ago and is being rebuffed in his attempt to return.

3 PALESTINIANS KILLED, 1 WOUNDED IN A CLASH IN ASKAR REFUGEE CAMP

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, March 15 (JTA) -- Three Palestinians were killed and another wounded Sunday afternoon in a shoot-out with Israeli special forces in the Askar refugee camp near Nablus, in the West Bank.

The incident occurred when a special unit spotted four men wanted as terrorists by the security forces, who asked the men to stop.

According to military sources, the armed men shot at the troops, who returned fire, killing the three and lightly injuring the fourth. None of the soldiers was hurt.

The Israeli Defense Force said one of the men killed was the group's leader, Na'im Laham, 25, suspected of a number of cases of shooting army patrols and Israeli vehicles in the Nablus area in the last year. He was carrying a carbine rifle and a false identity card.

The other two were identified as Hajaj Ibrahim Hajaj, 19, and Imad Bashrak, 21, from the village of Tammun in the Samaria region of the West Bank.

The injured man was not identified.

Following the clash, the army clamped a curfew on the camp and began searches. During the searches, a homemade hand grenade was thrown at the troops, who returned fire. No one was hurt in that exchange.

A KASHRUT QUARREL IN NETANYA HOLDS UP ETHIOPIAN MARRIAGES

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, March 15 (JTA) -- The Ethiopian community in Israel is facing a "marital bottleneck" because the only rabbi prepared to conduct marriages between them is embroiled in a kashrut controversy in his city and has ceased performing marriages for the past two months.

Rabbi David Chelouche, Sephardic chief rabbi of Netanya, says the seaside resort is being infiltrated by large quantities of non-kosher meat from nearby Arab villages, and he has his hands full battling this development.

"All my appeals" to Israel's Chief Rabbinate "have gone unheeded," he told the Israeli daily Davar.

His suspension of Ethiopian marriage rites is apparently intended as a way of bringing pressure to bear on the Chief Rabbinate to come to his aid over the kashrut problem, in which Chelouche is squared off against the chairman of the Religious Council in Netanya.

Until this began to be a problem, Chelouche had been marrying some 15 Ethiopian couples each month. "I've told community leaders to prepare the paperwork and stand by for when I can free myself up to see to them," the rabbi said.

Other Orthodox rabbis in Israel -- who are by law the only rabbis licensed to conduct marriages between Jews -- have been reluctant to marry the Ethiopians unless they first undergo a "giyur lechumra" conversion, a procedure "just to be sure," performed even though a person is considered Jewish by definition.

Rabbis require this procedure, because until recent times, the Ethiopians had been cut off from the established Jewish community for centuries, dating prior to Talmudic times.

But the Ethiopians object to such conversions, which they regard as a challenge to the authenticity of their Judaism.

Mobile Homes Policy Criticized

Meanwhile, former Absorption Minister Ya'acov Tsur, a member of the Labor Party, has attacked the present government's policy on Ethiopian absorption, which he claims is creating ghettos of mobile homes populated only by Ethiopian families.

Recent Ethiopian immigrants, confronting a culture entirely different from their native one, tend to prefer the privacy of the mobile homes to the communal atmosphere of absorption centers located in former hotels.

In recent weeks, groups of Ethiopians have left their absorption centers in Jerusalem and Arad and moved into mobile home sites in Beer-sheba and near Ramla said to have not been ready for habitation.

The move has been forcing absorption authorities to acquiesce even though the sites had not been completely prepared. Tsur criticized the whole policy of directing the Ethiopians to such sites. He said it meant they would not intermingle with the general population.

Tsur added that most of the Ethiopians were unemployed and there did not seem to be plans afoot to teach them useful trades.

Ethiopian immigrant leader Adiso Massala told reporters that the sewage system at some of the trailer sites is unsatisfactory and that many of the mobile homes have proven vulnerable to the winter rains and snow.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES: SOUTH AFRICAN JEWRY TAKES A STAND BACKING POLITICAL REFORM REFERENDUM By Suzanne Belling

JOHANNESBURG, March 15 (JTA) -- Regardless of its outcome, this week's nationwide referendum on political reform here has forced the South African Jewish Board of Deputies to take a stand on a controversial issue.

For the first time in 44 years, the representative body of South African Jewry has openly taken sides on a fiercely divisive national political issue and, in the process, caught up with its constituency, the vast majority of South Africa's 118,000 Jews.

The Board of Deputies vocally supported the reform process initiated by President F.W. de Klerk and his National Party against the strenuous opposition of the all-white, far-right Conservative Party, which would reinstitute the apartheid system.

The board urged Jews to vote "yes" to the question on Tuesday's ballot: "Do you support continuation of the reform process which the state president began on Feb. 2, 1990 and which is aimed at a new constitution through negotiations?"

It is an issue many believe will decide whether South Africa evolves peacefully into a non-racial democratic society or is plunged into civil war.

Since May 1948, the Board of Deputies had avoided entering the political arena. It wanted no repeat of the anxiety caused that year when it went on record against the National Party, which then supported apartheid, shortly before its surprise election victory.

Until now, the Board of Deputies has confined itself to pronouncements on moral issues, although in that context, its stand and actions against apartheid, injustice and discrimination in recent years has assumed a higher profile.

Most Jews Will Vote 'Yes'

Then, in a joint statement with Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris, endorsed by the South African Zionist Federation, the board's national chairman, Mervyn Smith, called for a "yes" vote.

"The South African Jewish Board of Deputies has always been committed to the reform process in South Africa," said Smith.

Harris added that he "looked forward to a decisive, positive 'yes' vote, which would enable the negotiation process to continue unabated."

The chief rabbi was referring to the government's negotiations with the African National Congress.

Professor Harold Rudolph, a former mayor of Johannesburg and chairman of the board's Transvaal Council, told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency that "while there is no such thing as a Jewish vote, it is quite apparent that the overwhelming majority of Jews will vote yes."

That is particularly true in the cities, he said, adding that Jews who would vote "no" live predominantly in rural areas.

They constitute a small minority, he said, with most Jews living in urban areas. The region with the largest Jewish population in South Africa is the Transvaal, where Jews number approximately 60,000.

Opposition Jewish parliamentarian Tony Leon of the progressive Democratic Party said South African Jews should vote "yes" to avoid their

citizenship being "negated" by the anti-Semitic Conservative Party and its right-wing allies, which oppose de Klerk's reforms.

The leading Jewish women's organizations, the Union of Jewish Women and the Women's Zionist Council, have called on women to support the reform process.

Some Right-Wing Jewish Opposition

Most rabbis -- Orthodox, Conservative and Reform -- have echoed this call.

Rabbi Avraham Tanzer, head of the Yeshiva College and a large Johannesburg congregation, said in a statement that the referendum offers a political choice between negotiating a democratic future or choosing confrontation, with the threat of anarchy, disorder and even civil war.

It offers an economic choice between reconstruction and growth or a wasteland of increasing unemployment and poverty, he said. And as for sports and culture, it offers choices between international participation and domestic isolation.

The statement was signed jointly with Gerald Leissner, the college's chairman and current president of the Board of Deputies.

Some right-wing Orthodox rabbis and a small number of other Jewish right-wingers, including some former Israelis, have publicly favored a negative vote and occasionally sounded as stridently racist as right-wing anti-Semites.

Among the prominent Jewish supporters of the ruling National Party, Issy Pinshaw, a member of de Klerk's President's Council, has actively promoted reform and negotiation in South Africa.

He invited Foreign Minister R.F. "Pik" Botha recently to address 600 residents of Sandringham Gardens, the largest Jewish old-age home in South Africa.

Botha told the audience, which included Yeshiva College pupils and cheering black staff members: "If you vote 'yes,' you are voting for a new South Africa. A 'no' vote will put us back into the dark days of isolation -- far more dangerous isolation."

Leading Jewish business people and sports stars have spoken out firmly on the side of reform.

Bertie Lubner, a top businessman, communal leader and supporter of de Klerk, predicted an "overwhelming Jewish 'yes' vote."

He emphasized both the dire economic consequences of a "no" vote and his opposition to racial discrimination.

Cuts Across Partisan Lines

Ronnie Kasrils, a flamboyant Jewish member of the African National Congress and leader of the South African Community Party, highlighted an irony of the referendum: that as a former exile and fugitive from the South African Police, he would support the National Party state president in the referendum.

Recently retired Communist Party Secretary-General Joe Slovo, a Lithuanian-born Jew, also has advocated a "yes" vote.

The referendum campaign cut across partisan political lines. The reform process is supported by the National Party and Democratic Party, and opposed by an alliance of the right-wing Conservative Party, the Herstigte Nasionale Party and the neo-Nazi Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging, or AWB, which uses a swastika-like emblem.

Although Jews in South Africa make up just over 2 percent of the white population, they have been eagerly courted by all sides.