

ISRAEL REJECTS U.S. OFFER TO HELP BRIDGE GAP WITH THE PALESTINIANS

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Dec. 13 (JTA) -- Israel has rejected an American offer to present a paper to Israeli and Palestinian negotiators in Washington proposing ways to bridge gaps between the two sides on the issue of Palestinian autonomy.

The American proposal, which represents a departure in the bilateral peace talks, reportedly was made by State Department officials at the end of last week to the Israel's chief negotiator with the Palestinians, Elyakim Rubinstein.

American officials are not present at the bilateral talks, which are conducted at the State Department and are currently in their eighth round. But U.S. officials are fully briefed by both sides and, as sponsors of the peace process, act in an advisory role to all parties.

Israeli observers said the proposal appears to reflect a desire by the outgoing administration in Washington to step up its involvement and attain substantive progress before the inauguration of the new president next month.

The American offer may also reflect a lack of satisfaction in Washington with Israeli proposals on autonomy.

Israel, for its part, has complained about Palestinian hesitancy and lack of resolute leadership, which it sees as a key obstacle to swifter progress in the talks.

Israeli officials say the U.S. proposal, if implemented, would represent a deviation from the procedures agreed at the Madrid peace conference a year ago, which have governed the talks since.

They say American intervention at this stage would erode the principle of direct negotiations and could set an awkward precedent for the sets of negotiations.

Despite the rejection of the American move, Rubinstein and his colleagues reportedly are optimistic about the talks, following a fairly positive reaction by the Palestinians to the latest Israeli formulations.

PALESTINIANS KIDNAP POLICEMAN AND HOLD HIM HOSTAGE FOR SHEIK

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Dec. 13 (JTA) -- Palestinian terrorists touched off a new crisis in Israel on Sunday by apparently managing to kidnap a border policeman, whom they offered to free in exchange for the release of Sheik Ahmad Yassin, imprisoned leader of the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas movement.

The kidnapping was the climax in a series of incidents of escalating unrest as Palestinians marked the fifth anniversary of their uprising, the intifada.

The kidnapped policeman was identified as Sgt. Maj. Nissim Toledano, 29, a father of two.

Toledano left his residence in Lod early Sunday morning and did not report to his duty at the border police headquarters there. When a search began for the missing policeman, a relative of his found and identified his skullcap.

A few hours later, two masked men reportedly left a letter at the International Red Cross

office in El-Birch, threatening to kill the policeman by 9 p.m. Sunday, unless the authorities released Sheik Yassin, who is serving a life sentence for his involvement in the kidnapping and murder of two Israeli soldiers several years ago.

A photocopy of the policeman's credentials was attached to the letter.

In the letter, the kidnappers demanded that Yassin be released in the presence of representatives of the Red Cross as well as the ambassadors of Egypt, France and Sweden, to be televised live by Israel Television.

The letter was signed by the Iz a-Din al-Kassam terrorist group, the military wing of Hamas. The same group was believed to be responsible for attacks last week on Israeli soldiers in Gaza and Hebron.

The French ambassador to Israel said Sunday evening that he had received no request of any kind from the Israeli authorities. If such a request were to be made, he would report it to Paris.

A similar statement was made by Mohammed Basiouny, Egypt's ambassador to Israel.

In any event, the deadline passed with no immediate word on the policeman's fate.

The government issued a statement Sunday evening demanding the immediate release of Toledano, without any reference to the terrorists' demands.

Police set up a special headquarters command, which reportedly staged a widespread search for the missing policeman Sunday night, as a joint effort involving the Israel Defense Force and the Shin Bet internal security service.

Sheik Opposes Execution

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who also holds the defense portfolio, was briefing the Cabinet on the latest unrest in the territories when he was called out of the room and briefed on Toledano's kidnapping.

In an interview from jail, Yassin told Israel Television on Sunday night that he was opposed to executing the kidnapped policeman. He suggested that the kidnappers allow for more time, "so that their demands can be met."

However, Yassin added that if the officer were to be executed, this would be an inevitable result of the Israeli "occupation." He repeated time and again that only by giving up the territories would Israel manage to put an end to such incidents.

Yassin, 55, established Hamas, an acronym for the Islamic Resistance Movement, during the early weeks of the intifada in December 1987.

At the age of 14, Yassin was injured playing soccer and he has been paralyzed since from the waist down. He later became a teacher of Islamic studies and soon established himself as a senior religious leader in the Gaza Strip.

Yassin was first arrested in 1985, charged with setting up an illegal Islamic organization that advocated armed struggle against Israel and an Islamic state to replace Israel.

He was sentenced to 15 years in jail, but was released a few months later in a prisoners exchange with Ahmed Jabril's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command.

He was rearrested in 1989, in connection

with the kidnapping and murder of Israel Defense Force soldiers Avi Sasportas and Ilan Sa'adon. He was then sentenced to life in prison.

Yassin reportedly is in bad health. Israeli authorities have expressed concern that he may die in custody, and there has been speculation that he may be released soon due to his illness.

The kidnapping of Toledano may have upset those plans, since judging from past experience, it is unlikely that the authorities will bow to the terrorists' demands.

INTIFADA RETURNS WITH VENGEANCE AS VIOLENCE BUILDS IN TERRITORIES

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Dec. 13 (JTA) -- The intifada, the Palestinian uprising that was believed only a few months ago to have fizzled out almost completely, has come back with a vengeance in recent days, five years after it first erupted.

The latest round of violence, a combination of daring terrorist attacks and massive demonstrations, began early last week with the killing of three Israeli soldiers, whose vehicle came under fire on a road bypassing the city of Gaza.

A similar terrorist attack took place Saturday night in the West Bank, when terrorists opened fire on a military vehicle at the southern entrance to Hebron.

An IDF soldier, Sgt. Yuval Tutanji, 24, of Eilat, was killed in the attack.

The Islamic fundamentalist Hamas movement took responsibility for that attack, which was believed to be the work of its military wing, the Iz a-Din al-Kassam group.

Another Israeli was killed two nights earlier in a shootout with terrorists in the village of Anza, south of the West Bank town of Jenin.

Inspector Sasson Mordoch of an anti-terrorist unit of the border police, was fatally shot as the unit attempted to apprehend a wanted terrorist, Moussa Brahama, head of the Islamic Jihad movement in the Jenin area.

But most of the violence was centered in the Gaza Strip, where massive riots broke out over the weekend.

Three Palestinians were killed Saturday in clashes with the army, and at least 75 were wounded, as hundreds of residents of the Jabalya refugee camp stormed a military outpost and almost took it over. The soldiers needed to fire live bullets to deter the crowd.

Violence continued Sunday, leaving one Palestinian dead and at least 20 more wounded. Fifteen Israel Defense Force soldiers and border police officers were also injured in rock-throwing incidents.

Sunday's riots began as masked men staged a nationalist parade at the Nuseirat refugee camp in the Gaza Strip. The security forces dispersed the crowd by force, as most refugee camps in the strip continued to be under curfew.

Likud Plans No-Confidence Motion

Another terrorist incident was averted over the weekend, when a booby-trapped car was discovered on the Hebron Road in Jerusalem, shortly before it was to detonate. The car contained two gas canisters, each connected to an explosive charge.

The Israeli Cabinet, sitting as a ministerial defense committee, discussed the deteriorating situation Sunday.

Military experts expressed deep concern over

the number of weapons in the hands of the terrorists and the fact that they are staging increasingly more daring attacks.

The opposition reacted angrily to the developments, accusing the government of failing to cope with the situation. The Likud Knesset faction decided Sunday to present the Knesset with a motion of no confidence in the government.

Moshe Katsav, chairman of the Likud Knesset faction, said there was a direct link between the gestures the government had made toward the Palestinians in the peace process and the escalation in the territories.

The Tsomet party said it was time to replace the government with a new government that would "safeguard the public's safety."

The far-right Moledet party demanded an interruption of the peace negotiations with the Palestinians and the immediate implementation of the death penalty for terrorist murderers.

Aharon Domb, a leader of the settlement movement in Hebron, said that the most frightening thing about the new situation was that "everybody was getting used to it," as if terrorist attacks had become a matter of daily routine. He, too, blamed the government for having failed to address the situation adequately.

IDF SOLDIER KILLED IN LEBANON AS FORCES EXCHANGE HEAVY FIRE

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Dec. 13 (JTA) -- An Israeli soldier was killed in what was described as an "operational accident" in the southern Lebanon security zone Saturday night.

No details of the incident were given. But Cpl. Chaim Bin-Nun, 19, of Jerusalem was unofficially reported to have been killed by the accidental discharge of a firearm while on patrol in the security zone.

The spokesman for the Israel Defense Force said an investigation had begun into the accident's cause.

This was the latest death in a series of fatal accidents and serious casualties that have occurred in the Israeli army in recent months.

Most of these accidents have taken place during training exercises and have been largely due to relaxed discipline, which is causing concern both inside and outside the army.

Bin-Nun's death came toward the end of a violent weekend in the area. It was marked by fierce and sustained exchanges of artillery and mortar and rocket fire between forces of the IDF and its allied South Lebanon Army inside the zone, and guerrilla forces north of the zone.

The artillery, tank and mortar bombardments were reported to have been the heaviest since the IDF's responses last month to the Islamic fundamentalist Hezbollah's Katyusha rocket attacks against northern Israeli towns and villages.

Friday's heavy barrage from IDF and SLA gunners was a response to an attack by terrorist gunners using rocket-propelled grenades and mortars against SLA positions in the region of Beit Yahoun village, along the zone's northern border.

An SLA soldier was lightly wounded in the exchange.

Hezbollah, in a statement issued in Beirut, claimed responsibility for the shooting, which was the latest in a wave of similar attacks and roadside bombings by the extremist Iranian-backed Shi'ite organization and its Shi'ite rival, Amal.

ANTI-ISRAEL MEASURES PASS U.N., BUT THIS TIME WITH LESS SUPPORT

By Larry Yudelson

UNITED NATIONS, Dec. 13 (JTA) -- An annual package of resolutions on the Middle East, many of them criticizing Israel, passed the General Assembly on Friday by large margins.

But Israeli officials were stressing the good news: Several of the most egregious anti-Israel resolutions did not come to a vote, but were postponed indefinitely by their Arab sponsors, presumably because they feared risking defeat.

Other measures had their language toned down, and there was an increase in the number of countries abstaining, rather than supporting the hostile measures.

Israeli officials described the outcome as a moderate change in the right direction.

"The softer language and the improved results of the votes are a consequence of the end of the Cold War, the peace negotiations and the changed policies of the Israeli government," Israeli Ambassador Gad Yaacobi said afterward.

Yaacobi stressed that dramatic turnarounds are not to be expected, given the slow-moving nature of the United Nations, where resolutions automatically come up for renewal each year.

This nature was illustrated when the Arab states agreed to postpone, rather than drop altogether, an omnibus resolution reiterating criticisms that have accumulated over the years on such issues as the Camp David accords and Israel's destruction of the Iraqi nuclear reactor.

Yaacobi had made these "deadwood" resolutions, as he called them, a central target of his diplomatic efforts.

In those resolutions that did pass, Israelis drew attention to the more moderate tone of the condemnation.

For example, a resolution criticizing Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights lacked language that in past years accused Israel of not desiring peace and not complying with U.N. resolutions.

It also did not call on Israel to withdraw from the Golan prior to peace negotiations and did not call for sanctions to be placed on Israel.

Even on this gentler resolution, the 70 abstentions nearly balanced the 72 votes it received from the Arab states and their allies. Joining Israel in casting votes against the measure were the United States and Micronesia.

ISSUE OF EUROPEAN RACISM IS RAISED BY ISRAEL AT U.N.

By Larry Yudelson

UNITED NATIONS, Dec. 13 (JTA) -- Israel's ambassador to the United Nations has raised the issue of rising racism and anti-Semitism in Europe with the world body.

In a letter to U.N. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Yaacobi conveyed "the deep concern of the government and people of Israel" over the phenomenon.

Yaacobi also raised the issue in a meeting with Stoyan Ganev, president of the U.N. General Assembly. In that meeting, he asked Ganev to address the topic in his closing speech to the General Assembly.

The letter to the secretary-general will be circulated to the U.N. membership.

And while unlike a resolution, it has no formal impact on the world body, Yaacobi's letter could be seen as a sign that the new ambassador

intends to take the United Nations seriously as a diplomatic arena.

In the letter, Yaacobi reiterated statements made last month by the Israeli Cabinet, President Chaim Herzog and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres concerning the renewed manifestations of anti-Semitism in Germany and other nations of Europe.

"It is the duty of the world to remember the atrocities of the past and not to allow them to cast their ugly shadow upon the future," wrote Yaacobi.

"Nations should enact appropriate legislation and severely punish those who commit acts of racist violence. It is our duty and our mission to condemn this threat without hesitation, and to put an end to it."

ITALIAN SOCCER PLAYERS TOSS BALL OF RACISM OUT OF THE PLAYING FIELD

By Ruth E. Gruber

ROME, Dec. 13 (JTA) -- In attempt to fight the phenomenon of anti-Semitism at European soccer games, Italian soccer players staged demonstrations against racism Sunday before the opening whistle of soccer matches all across the country.

In crowded stadiums all over Italy, soccer players went into the pitch before the game carrying big banners reading, "No to Racism."

The demonstrations were carried out as an initiative of the Italian Soccer Players Association, in an attempt to send the message to a broad group of Italians, many of whom have manifested worrisome prejudices.

Italy's soccer stadiums, as those in other European countries, have for some time been the scene of demonstrations in the stands by militant fans who have hurled anti-Semitic and racist abuse at opponents and who have waved neo-Nazi-style banners.

Tullia Zevi, president of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities, took up the issue several months ago with soccer authorities.

In a parallel action, tens of thousands of people took part in demonstrations in various Italian cities Saturday protesting both racism and anti-Semitism and commemorating a terrorist attack in Milan in 1969.

The marches were the latest in a series of mass rallies and protests against racism which had taken place in Italy in recent weeks.

HUNGARIAN NEO-NAZI HAS TIES ABROAD

By Agnes Bohm

BUDAPEST, Dec. 13 (JTA) -- The recent conviction of a neo-Nazi leader in Hungary has not severed the international links forged by the Hungarian extremist right.

Istvan Gyorkos, head of the Hungarian National Front, received a year's suspended sentence for illegal activities from a court in his hometown of Gyor, in western Hungary.

But in a recent interview, he told Hungarian Television he continues to maintain ties with similar Spanish, Austrian and German organizations, including groups banned in Germany.

Gyorkos, who also claims ties with Hungarian emigres in America, says he is seeking to transform his movement into a political party.

At the same time, he has pressed for rehabilitation of the Hungarian Arrow Cross movement, which collaborated with the Nazis in World War II.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES:
**A RUN ON RING DINGS IN ISRAEL
AS AMERICA FOOD FESTIVAL ARRIVES**

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM (JTA) -- Americans living in Israel have been in ecstasy this past month, ever since the country's largest supermarket chain launched its America Food Festival.

Held in all 72 branches of the Supersol-Hypercol chain, the monthlong festival has attracted droves of customers in search of Drake's Yankee Doodles, Jiffy Peanut Butter and Post Grape Nuts Cereal.

This year's biennial event features several hundred American-made products and has been "a big success," said Mordechai Kreiner, the supermarkets' vice president for marketing.

"This is our fourth such festival in eight years, and we've learned through trial and error which American products Israeli consumers prefer."

While the festival appeals first and foremost to Americans, said Kreiner, "there are also many Israelis who have lived in North America for some period of time and who became fond of American products."

Word of mouth and glossy ads in the Hebrew newspapers have also attracted a fair number of native-born customers. "Israelis who have heard of certain American products from their friends are eager to try something new," Kreiner said.

"Then there are several items, such as Kellogg's cereals and Miller's cheeses, that gained a local following from past festivals and are now sought after by everyone."

In addition to wooing new customers, the festival has a larger function, said Leon Recanati, chairman of the Supersol stores.

"We are introducing American foods to the Israeli public and creating a potential market for U.S. producers." Israel, he said, "is a natural market for U.S. food producers who are aware of kashrut laws.

"Since Supersol imports only kosher food, it is much easier to work with the U.S. in this regard than, say, with the European Community. In our small way, we are doing our part in fostering American-Israeli trade relations in implementing the U.S.-Israel Free Trade Agreement."

A Craving For Haagen-Dazs

Often, said Kreiner, Israel's liberal free-trade agreement with the United States has allowed Israeli products to enter the American market, but not vice-versa.

"Many of the items in the festival, such as Empire poultry, are one-shot deals, because there are laws protecting local producers. Until these (protectionist) laws are rescinded, consumers will have to make do with mostly local fare," he said.

In some instances, the festival has inspired local manufacturers to produce a foreign product here in Israel.

"Sometimes a local producer not only makes an item for sale here after seeing it at a festival, but subsequently succeeds in exporting it to the U.S. That's what happened with chocolate chips. Now we're exporting them abroad," said Kreiner.

Thanks to increased cooperation between the American and Israeli food industries, many American items are now standards in Israeli supermarkets. Heinz ketchup has become a staple, as have Pepsi-Cola and Pfeiffer salad dressings.

If this year's customers have their way,

Haagen-Dazs ice cream will become a regular item in Israeli supermarkets. The entire nine-flavor assortment was sold out throughout the country in less than a week.

"We bought four containers," said Jody Zaviv, a native of Encino, Calif. "We also made a point of buying lots of Philadelphia-brand cream cheese. We didn't spend as much money as we have in past festivals because the prices were high," she added.

Cost didn't stop the Loshinkys, who originally hail from New York. "I think we must have spent about \$700 on American products," said Shlomo, a caterer.

"In order to find Haagen-Dazs we even went to a supermarket in Kiryat Hayovel, a neighborhood with very few Americans. There weren't any more containers, so other people must have had the same idea."

Ice cream wasn't the only thing on their minds, though. "We bought 15 boxes of Ring Dings, an Empire frozen turkey for Thanksgiving, and lots of cream soda, root beer and sliced American cheese.

"We've been anticipating this festival for months," he said with a grin. "I told my wife Shahar three months ago, the festival is coming, start cleaning out the freezer!"

**GORBACHEV COMPARES SELF TO MOSES
AS HE RECEIVES A TORAH FROM JEWS**
By Rochelle G. Sidel

SAO PAULO, Brazil (JTA) -- Former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev was presented with a Torah scroll and a medal here last week by leaders of the Latin American Jewish Congress, in gratitude for his contributions to world peace, democracy and human rights.

In accepting the Torah and medal, Gorbachev compared his quest for freedom with that of Moses. He said that once people move forward toward freedom, there can be no going backward.

For example, he said, when the Jews left Egypt and wandered in the wilderness, many of them complained and said they wanted to return. However, Moses insisted on going forward toward the Promised Land, even when the going got tough.

Gorbachev spoke warmly of his recent visit to Israel, and said he saw there "the great desire of the people to have peace." He joked that in Israel, unlike Brazil, he did not need an interpreter, because everyone speaks Russian.

He said that now that there is no longer an Iron Curtain, frequent encounters between people of all continents and all religions are possible.

"Perhaps what is most important is one person encountering another," he said. He stressed that there is no longer a Cold War, but there are other problems, such as ethnic conflicts in the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, and the poverty in Latin America.

Benno Milnitzky, president of the Latin American Jewish Congress, presented Gorbachev with the Medal of Israel and thanked him "for advancing world disarmament, restoring democracy and freedom of religious expression within the ex-Soviet Union, as well as the right to free mobility for its citizens, regardless of religion or origin."

Gorbachev and his wife, Raisa, were in Sao Paulo as part of a four-country Latin American trip. The Sao Paulo meeting was the only Jewish event on Gorbachev's agenda in Latin America.