

DISCOVERY OF POLICEMAN'S BODY TURNS ANXIETY TO GRIEF IN ISRAEL

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Dec. 15 (JTA) -- Nationwide apprehension about the fate of kidnapped border police Sgt. Maj. Nissim Toledano turned to grief Tuesday morning, when his body was found on a West Bank road nine miles north of Jerusalem.

Toledano, 29, had been stabbed repeatedly and strangled.

The discovery of his body brought to a sad end two days of tension in which the entire nation seemed to share the anxiety Toledano's family had undergone since the father of two was kidnapped before dawn Sunday on his way to work in Lod.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, delivering the news to the Knesset, pledged a relentless war against Hamas, the Islamic Resistance Movement in the territories, which claimed responsibility for Toledano's abduction.

Rabin, who also holds the defense portfolio, said the murder proved the kidnappers had no intention of negotiating over release of the border policeman and confirmed the government's wisdom in insisting on evidence that Toledano was alive as a condition for any bargaining.

He said the government had been "prepared to hold contacts" with the kidnappers.

But in Amman, Jordan, a spokesman for Hamas said the Israeli government had never seriously intended to negotiate, only to buy time. At the same time, the spokesman said the decision to kill Toledano had been made by the group that kidnapped him, not by Hamas leaders abroad.

Rabin said 1,200 Hamas leaders and activists throughout the administered territories had been arrested since the kidnapping Sunday. He urged Israelis to demonstrate maturity and restraint, and avoid panic and violence.

But in Lod, police wrestled with Jewish demonstrators, led by out-of-town radicals of the extremist Kach movement, who sought to attack Arab inhabitants of the town.

'Terror Has No Chance Against Us'

Toledano's body was found by a Bedouin woman named Fatima from a tribe encamped just off the main road between Jerusalem and Jericho. She ran back in fear to the camp, and her husband, Nasser, with the tribal chief, drove to the nearest Israeli Civil Administration office to inform the authorities.

Toledano was bound at the wrists and still wearing his green border police uniform. Police pathologists declined to give a precise time of death, but indications were that it had been on Sunday, some hours after his kidnapping.

On Sunday, the kidnappers had left a message at an office of the International Red Cross, demanding the release of the imprisoned Hamas leader, Sheik Ahmed Yassin, by 9 p.m. that night as their condition for Toledano's return. Yassin himself went on Israel Television to urge the kidnappers not to kill their victim.

"Neither Ahmed Yassin, nor Ahmed Jabril, nor Yasir Arafat will move us from here -- we are here to stay," a somber-voiced Rabin told the Knesset. "We will suffer setbacks, bite our lips

and carry on. Neither stones nor bullets will make us move. Terror has no chance against us."

Rabin said the army and security services had been instructed to conduct a "merciless" war against Hamas and its accomplices "within the framework of the law."

There should be no question of "interpretation" regarding the resoluteness of the instructions given to the army, the premier said, clearly anxious to ward off criticism by the right-wing opposition that the government and the army had been too soft or too slow in cracking down on the rising wave of shootings in the administered territories.

The territories were sealed off from Israel proper Monday, and there was no sign by Tuesday night that this measure would be eased soon.

Rabin, nevertheless, was attacked by David Levy of Likud, the former foreign minister. Referring to Rabin's announcement that 1,200 Hamas activists had been rounded up, Levy asked: "Where have you been till now? Why haven't you done this before now?"

Opposition leader Yitzhak Shamir, recuperating at home in Tel Aviv after cancer surgery, asserted Monday night in a televised interview that the security situation had degenerated since Rabin came to power beyond anything experienced under the Likud.

Calls For Pullout From Gaza

That assessment was challenged by Labor ministers, who cited intifada statistics for the years 1990 and 1991 to argue they were worse.

But certainly in terms of the public mood, the present time is a nadir. Many blame the government, and many others voice a fear that the problem of the territories appears insoluble.

Exacerbating this mood are reports from Washington that the peace talks, concluding their eighth round this week, are making negligible progress and are unlikely to achieve any real advance until the new U.S. administration takes over and works itself in.

The bleak mood in Jerusalem has given renewed momentum to the "Gaza-first" school, sources say. Several Cabinet ministers have urged the prime minister to consider announcing a departure date from the Gaza Strip, say in 18 months time, and put the onus on the local leadership to set up a self-rule arrangement by then, with or without the West Bank.

But both Rabin and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres are firmly opposed to a unilateral withdrawal by Israel.

On the far right of the political spectrum, the Moledet party called for the deportation of Hamas activists and for the institution of the death penalty for terrorist murders.

On the far left, too, the mood was tough and somber. Yossi Sarid, the Meretz bloc's Knesset caucus chairman, called for "an iron fist against Hamas," and the Peace Now movement urged the government to "do everything necessary to stamp out terror."

In New York, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations condemned Toledano's murder as "a depraved, mindless act of terrorism clearly designed to sabotage the current Arab-Israeli negotiations."

NEWS ANALYSIS:

MURDER OF BORDER POLICEMAN POINTS TO RISE OF RADICALISM IN TERRITORIES

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Dec. 15 (JTA) -- Outrage and grief over the murder of an Israeli border policeman kidnapped by Moslem fundamentalists this week has not obscured an emerging shift in the Palestinian power lineup.

While a delegation closely aligned with the Palestine Liberation Organization holds slow-moving peace negotiations with Israel in Washington, radical Moslem fundamentalists are assuming a leading role in the administered territories themselves.

Terrorists linked with Hamas, the Islamic Resistance Movement in the territories, have been staging increasingly daring attacks.

One terrorist holed up in a village near Nablus last week fought off Israeli soldiers, killing a border policeman as troops stormed his shelter. Other squads carried out two separate ambushes of Israeli army vehicles, killing four soldiers and wounding several others.

And then on Sunday, members of Hamas' military wing kidnapped and murdered border police Sgt. Maj. Nissim Toledano, a 29-year-old father of two.

Hamas has been gaining support in the territories in the past year as hopes faded for a quick breakthrough in the peace process.

It has won elections in a number of public organizations. And it recently negotiated an agreement giving it 40 percent representation in a newly appointed local council in the city of Gaza.

The movement's standing received a boost when Israel's prime minister announced publicly that he was ready to negotiate an exchange of the kidnapped border policeman for the ailing Hamas leader, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, who is now serving a life sentence in jail in connection with the murder of two soldiers.

Palestinian support is growing in the territories, particularly in the Gaza Strip, for the proposition that rifles should speak in the absence of gains by the PLO.

Talk Of Renewed 'Armed Struggle'

Some on the left side of the Israeli political spectrum are saying that Jerusalem is learning too late that a government that rejects the PLO as a negotiating partner will find itself compelled to talk to Hamas.

Moreover, there is fear that the success of the Hamas and of the competing Islamic Jihad organization may radicalize secular groups associated with the PLO.

What can Israel do?

On the military scene, not much. It closed off traffic from the territories to Israel proper in the wake of the kidnapping and rounded up about 1,000 Hamas activists, among them high-level leaders of the movement. But it is unclear whether this will reverse the recent upsurge in Hamas radicalism.

Heads of political committees in the Gaza Strip that are affiliated with the PLO this week called for suspension of the peace talks in Washington. Leaders of PLO-affiliated terror groups are privately arguing that it is time to rejoin the "armed struggle" against Israel and not leave Hamas in sole command of the battlefield.

A few months ago, the concern was that an agreement with the Palestinians would trigger

internal warfare among Palestinian factions. Now, it seems, the factions are competing over who can hurt the Israelis more. From Gaza, the talks in Washington seem to be taking place on another planet.

The frustration is not only that of the Palestinians. The Israeli opposition, led by the Likud, is planning a no-confidence motion in the government, against the background of the deteriorating security situation.

More significantly, the Jewish street is also warming up. Several hundred Jews blocked traffic Monday night in the Arab-populated Rakevet neighborhood of Lod, hometown of the murdered border policeman.

Police dispersed the crowd and arrested two demonstrators. Rioters stoned the residence of Lod's mayor, Maxim Levy, brother of former Foreign Minister David Levy, as an expression of their displeasure with the authorities. The major blamed the attack on activists of the extremist Kach movement.

By midweek, Palestinian radicals seemed to be getting closer to achieving their goal of disrupting the peace process.

It was precisely that point which provided a consistent focus for Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin as tension over the kidnap-murder mounted. In public appearances and a television interview, he reiterated that nothing would deter him from pursuing peace.

Rabin, who also holds the defense portfolio, rejected charges that the security situation has deteriorated. On the contrary, he said, in the past half year it has improved, as a result of the decision to block male residents of the Gaza Strip under age 20 from entering Israel proper.

COMRADE ACCIDENTALLY KILLED SOLDIER

TEL AVIV, Dec. 15 (JTA) -- Israeli army investigators have found that a rifle shot accidentally fired by a comrade killed a 19-year-old corporal Saturday night in southern Lebanon amid fierce exchanges of fire between Israeli forces and guerrillas to the north.

Cpl. Chaim Bar-Natan of Jerusalem was near the head of a patrol making its way over mountainous, rocky and bush-strewn terrain when a soldier behind him slipped and fell, discharging his weapon in an "operational accident," a preliminary report said.

The accident occurred Saturday in the security zone during a weekend marked by heavy exchanges of fire the Israeli army and its South Lebanon Army allies had with terrorist gunners to the north.

Bar-Natan was buried Monday at the military cemetery at Mount Herzl in Jerusalem.

OFFICERS DISMISSED FOR 'FRIENDLY FIRE'

TEL AVIV, Dec. 15 (JTA) -- Two Israeli army officers have been dismissed and four others disciplined following an exchange of "friendly fire" last week between units of the paratroopers and the border police that slightly wounded four soldiers.

A major and a captain were cashiered by the chief of the Central Command, Maj. Gen. Danny Yatom, after the incident, which took place near Jenin in the West Bank. Both units had been engaged in anti-terrorist operations.

Among those disciplined was the military commander of the Jenin area.

TALKS CONTINUE DESPITE VIOLENCE AND DIFFERENCES AMONG THE PARTIES

By Cynthia Mann
States News Service

WASHINGTON, Dec. 15 (JTA) -- The flagging Arab-Israeli peace talks continued this week in the shadow of intensified violence back home, capped by the killing of an Israeli border policeman by Arab fundamentalists.

The negotiators acknowledged the impact of the violence on the talks, but vowed to persevere.

Israeli Ambassador Zalman Shoval, who is a member of the negotiating team, expressed "shock and abhorrence with this brutal act of murder."

But he said those who killed Sgt. Maj. Nissim Toledano "also want to kill the peace process, and we're not going to let them have that sort of prize."

Haidar Abdel-Shafi, the chief Palestinian negotiator, said on Monday that violence had thrown "a shadow of grief and discontent" over the deliberations. But he said the recent events were a natural byproduct of the Israeli "occupation" and only made it more urgent to find a peaceful solution.

Abdel-Shafi's comments followed the killings of Israeli reserve soldiers, the kidnapping of the border policeman and weekend rioting in the Gaza Strip, which saw scores of Palestinians wounded by Israeli troops.

Elyakim Rubinstein, chairman of the Israeli team negotiating with the Palestinians, called the events "very saddening and very tragic."

Nevertheless, he said, "the only way to achieve peace is to negotiate, despite the violence, to try to fulfill our mission."

The eighth round of talks was due to conclude Thursday with meetings between President Bush and the members of the various delegations. Bush had hoped his intervention would inject momentum into the process, which has flagged since the U.S. presidential election.

Joint Arab-Jewish Statement

In the same vein, an unusual show of support for the peace process was made Tuesday by a prominent Arab American organization and a leading Jewish American group.

Henry Siegman, executive director of the American Jewish Congress, and Khalil Jahshan, executive director of the National Association of Arab Americans, held a news conference in downtown Washington to announce a joint initiative in support of peace.

The two issued a joint statement that called the current talks "the best chance in our lifetime for a secure, comprehensive and lasting peace."

They said the stakes are too high to risk letting the opportunity for resolution slip by.

"History teaches that stagnation in negotiations leads to renewed risk of war. This must not be allowed to happen," they said.

As Americans, they called on the United States to "fully re-engage" in the process, which has been stalled by the presidential transition.

Sitting in front of their respective organizational banners that announced their disparate constituencies, they said it was the first time there had been such a public joint effort, which was sponsored by Project Nishma, a dovish educational organization.

Such cooperation, observed Siegman, helps the two groups guard against the inclination to "demonize one another."

SINCE ELECTION, SYRIA HAS STOPPED ISSUING PERMITS FOR JEWS TO TRAVEL

By Larry Yudelson

NEW YORK, Dec. 15 (JTA) -- Syria has not granted travel permits to Syrian Jews for the past eight weeks, since the eve of Bill Clinton's election victory, according to State Department officials and Jewish activists.

But Syrian Jews already holding permits have been permitted to travel abroad during this period, and those seeking to travel have been permitted to submit applications.

The Syrian policy permitting Jews to travel freely was announced in April through the State Department and White House. It followed decades in which the 4,000-member Syrian Jewish community was barred from travel abroad and was reportedly subjected to surveillance, intimidation and harassment from the secret police.

Since the shift in Syrian policy, 2,600 Jews have used their visas, generally traveling to Brooklyn's large Syrian Jewish community. There are roughly 1,400 Jews remaining in Syria, of whom 400 do not intend to leave.

American Jewish advocacy groups first became aware that Syria was no longer issuing the exit permits some weeks ago. But they have been hesitant about making this a public issue.

"We have been in touch with the State Department and White House, and have been assured that they are addressing the issue with the Syrians," said Seymour Reich, who heads the Syrian Jewry task force of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

The United States has raised the issue several times with the Syrians, reportedly at the ambassadorial level.

"They maintain there has been no change in the Syrian policy decision permitting Syrian Jews the right to travel like other Syrians," said a State Department official in Washington.

'Trying To Sell The Jews Twice'

The Jewish community's decision to keep a low profile on the issue is not only a reflection of the fact that the Bush administration is working on the problem.

Activists also feel that the Syrian retreat from its policy of free travel was designed to send a signal to President-elect Bill Clinton, who on the campaign trail had criticized the Bush administration for not taking a hard enough line on Syria for its involvement in terrorism.

"It has to be determined the best way to deal with this," said one Jewish activist. The Jewish community, he said, is "engaged in various operations and activities to try different approaches to get the message to the Syrians about what is happening," including contacts with government officials and others.

One Washington analyst who follows the peace process explained that "the Syrians are looking to leverage their assets to the greatest extent possible and muster up their most compelling presentation to the new administration."

Syrian President Hafez Assad "initially released the Jews to make nice to a president who has been defeated and is now leaving town, so he's essentially trying to sell the Jews twice. Since there's a new buyer, there's an opportunity for a new sale," said the analyst.

"Assad is playing it both ways: He is pursuing peace and he is pursuing conflict. And Clinton will have to play it both ways: carrot and stick."

VATICAN'S NEW CATECHISM GENERALLY WELL-RECEIVED BY JEWISH EXPERTS

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK, Dec. 15 (JTA) -- It is a measure of just how far the Catholic attitude toward Jews and Judaism has evolved in recent years that the church's new catechism has been generally well-received by Jewish experts.

These interreligious affairs experts say the document is basically fair and balanced when it comes to issues of Jewish concern.

But the catechism's gaps and omissions on these issues also illustrate precisely where there is need for improvement in the Catholic understanding of Judaism, observers say.

The 676-page "Catechism of the Catholic Church," signed by Pope John Paul II in October and released in French last month, is the Vatican's official blueprint for the teaching of Catholicism worldwide.

It is intended to consolidate the lessons of the church on thousands of theological issues that have been elucidated since Vatican Council II opened three decades ago. It is to be used in concert with Vatican Council II documents and explications, rather than to supplant them.

The catechism has been seven years and several drafts in the making, and is the first such document to be promulgated by the Vatican since the 16th century.

It will be used by priests, educators and publishers as the foundation of what they teach to children and adults about Catholicism.

Official translations into English, Spanish, German, Italian and Latin are slated for publication early in 1993.

Emphasis On Christianity's Jewish Roots

In the meantime, American Jewish interreligious affairs experts have translated the French version to analyze its contents.

The catechism includes many issues related to Jews and Judaism, some of which were applauded by Jewish commentators, others criticized.

One positive aspect noted by analysts is the repeated emphasis on Christianity's roots in Judaism, through frequent reiterations of the Jewishness of Mary and Jesus.

The language of Vatican II, which revolutionized Catholicism's attitudes toward Jews and Judaism, is incorporated throughout the catechism.

One section, for example, states that Jews are not collectively responsible for the death of Jesus and that Jews should never be presented as if they are rejected by God.

While that clear and unequivocal repudiation of the decide charge was welcomed by the Jewish analysts, it does not go far enough, said Rabbi Leon Klenicki, director of interfaith affairs for the Anti-Defamation League.

It would have been appropriate to include a condemnation of anti-Semitism at that point, said Klenicki.

"It would help educators understand that the anti-Judaism of the New Testament, if it's not explained, opens the door to anti-Semitism, as it has through the centuries," he said.

Rabbi Jack Bemporad, director of the Center for Christian-Jewish Understanding at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Conn., described the lack of guidance within the catechism on interpreting dicey Christian biblical statements as worrisome.

"Unless read contextually, many New Test-

ament statements appear to be anti-Jewish," he said.

And while the catechism condemns racism and discrimination, there is no specific mention of anti-Semitism or of the Holocaust.

That lack of specificity contrasts sharply with recent statements by Catholic leaders, including the pope, who have denounced hatred of Jews as a sin and have shown sensitivity toward the Holocaust.

That gap is "a disappointment," said Bemporad.

The closest the catechism comes to addressing the Holocaust is in a section that describes the extermination of a people or an ethnic minority as "a mortal sin."

A section applauded by both Klenicki and Rabbi A. James Rudin, director of interreligious affairs for the American Jewish Committee, is one in which Catholics are urged to gain a better understanding of the Jewish faith because it will provide a better understanding of the Christian liturgy.

Does Not Break New Ground

On the whole, the catechism "consolidates, rather than retreats from Vatican II, but doesn't break any new ground," according to Rudin.

It gives "final authority to what we've worked on for 30 years," he said.

In all, there are 23 index references to Jews and Judaism, and more to the nation of Israel, which is mentioned in the theological sense rather than in a modern political context.

But the analysts disagreed as to whether the new catechism fully respects the integrity of Judaism and the Jewish people's relationship with God.

According to Klenicki, the catechism gives "official sanction to the teaching of contempt" for Judaism because, in his interpretation, it implies in several places that "we Jews appear only to prepare the way for Jesus. There is no reference to Judaism after the coming of Jesus," he said.

But according to Bemporad, the unique and irrevocable nature of Jews' covenant with God is stated clearly in the catechism.

And, said Rudin, while the catechism "clearly speaks of the ultimate truth of Christianity as a faith commitment, it does not advance this truth by defaming, denigrating or debasing Jews or Judaism.

"This is a Christian document, so of course it states that the ultimate religious truth is Jesus and Christianity, but not at the expense of Jews or Judaism," he said.

Jews Should Have Been Shown Draft

The instances where the catechism does not treat Judaism fully or fairly could have been prevented had a draft of the document been brought for review to Jewish experts involved with Christian-Jewish dialogue, said Bemporad.

But this was not possible within the current official framework for Catholic-Jewish dialogue, Bemporad pointed out.

One of the Jewish partners is the Synagogue Council of America; its Orthodox members prohibit any discussions of theological issues in that dialogue.

Bemporad founded the Center for Christian-Jewish Understanding at Sacred Heart University a year ago precisely to be able to work around the theology obstacle.