

ARAB DEPORTEES REMAIN AN OBSTACLE TO TALKS, CHRISTOPHER TELLS ISRAEL

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Feb. 23 (JTA) -- The Arab states all want to resume the suspended Middle East peace talks, but the fate of the Palestinians deported to Lebanon is still a major obstacle, U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher told Israeli leaders here Tuesday.

As both Israelis and Palestinians staged demonstrations, Christopher met with Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, as well as with a Palestinian delegation led by Faisal Husseini, who is a senior adviser to the Palestinian team negotiating with Israel.

Israeli officials were surprised and somewhat disconcerted to learn from Christopher that Egypt still sees the deportee issue as unresolved and an obstacle to resuming the peace process, despite the compromise deal worked out by Christopher and Rabin earlier this month.

Israel Television reported that Christopher urged Rabin to agree in practice, if not formally, to a more accelerated return of the deportees than first proposed.

At the same time, Christopher reportedly took a firm stand in his meeting with Palestinians, urging them to join in the resumption of the talks.

Reports from Arab sources spoke of a proposed "new compromise" that the secretary was bearing with him.

According to these reports, which significantly were not denied in the American camp, Israel would come under pressure to bring back two-thirds of the deportees before the talks are slated to resume and the final third before the end of the summer.

Under the deal worked out with Washington earlier this month, Israel agreed to accept back 101 of the 415 Palestinian activists deported to Lebanon in December. The rest would be returned by the end of the year.

Talks Could Resume Next Month

News reports said Christopher believes there is fair chance of resuming the talks as early as next month, rather than the April date that had been bandied about.

But the deportation crisis still looms. Husseini is said to have told Christopher of the near-unanimity of Palestinian opinion in the territories that resumption of the peace talks be conditioned on the prior return of all the deportees.

Indeed, Palestinians interviewed at random by both Israeli and foreign journalists here seemed united in their conviction that the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian negotiators from the territories must not agree to return to the talks under any other condition.

"If they agree, then they will no longer be the representatives of the Palestinian people," said one middle-aged Palestinian in a low-key interview with Israeli army radio.

But like the PLO and the Palestinian negotiators, Rabin too is under pressure from his own constituency.

When Rabin agreed to the compromise on the deportees, he vowed he would make no further

concessions. And on Tuesday, Israeli activists on the political right made clear to the prime minister that they would mount a vigorous campaign opposing concessions on this issue and others, such as withdrawing from the Golan Heights.

As Rabin and Christopher dined together Tuesday night, thousands of demonstrators protesting negotiations over the Golan Heights wound through the streets of Jerusalem bearing torches and placards.

While the marchers themselves largely comprised yeshiva students and Golan settlers, opinion polls consistently show that most Israelis are still uncomfortable with the idea of giving back the entire Golan, even in the context of international supervision or other security arrangements.

Yet those on all sides of the Middle East conflict are keenly aware that a moment of decision is at hand.

That point was driven home when Syria said last weekend that it is ready to resume the peace talks because they are "more important" than the crisis over the Palestinian deportees.

Christopher reportedly delivered a message to Rabin from Syrian President Hafez Assad, which said Damascus is ready to offer peace on Israel's terms, including full normalization and complete diplomatic relations. But it wants in return that Israeli renounce its sovereignty over all of the Golan Heights.

Snow From The Golan

Such an offer puts Israel in a difficult position. On the one hand, it holds out the prospect of "real peace" with one of Israel's most implacable foes.

On the other hand, even Labor and Social Affairs Minister Ora Namir, a member of the Labor Party's dovish wing, declared Tuesday that the government is determined not to cede all of the Golan.

Earlier in the day, members of Moshav Neveh Ativ in the northern Golan transported 15 tons of snow from Mount Hermon to the park across from the Prime Minister's Office and built an igloo.

"The igloo represents our feelings regarding our home in the Golan," explained Jeanine Nave, a moshav resident. "You see how cold this snow is? We would like to freeze any peace negotiations that call for a return of the Golan to Syria."

A block away, another group of protesters had erected a huge placard of a smiling Yasir Arafat holding an American flag in one hand and a sign with the words "Welcome Warren" in the other. A collection of skulls and knives hung from his waist.

The demonstrators, all members of the group Victims of Arab Terror, set up a tent several weeks ago to protest the planned return of the Palestinian deportees.

Pointing to the likeness of Arafat, spokesman Meir Indor said: "We brought this today to protest Warren Christopher's attempts to pressure our government to return more of the deportees."

In the morning, the families of the Palestinian deportees also sought the secretary of state's attention by staging a rally.

Carrying placards and chanting "Bring back

our sons," the families walked to the Prime Minister's Office. Along the way, a scuffle broke out between the Palestinian protesters and members of the Golan moshav, but there were no serious injuries.

While Palestinians in the territories are insisting on an unconditional return of the deportees, the deportees themselves said this week they would be willing to accept a phased return, if Israel promises to end its policy of deportations.

That could only have come as relief to the Palestinian leadership, which is anxious not to miss out on the peace talks.

The Palestinian leaders are concerned they may be left behind if Rabin and Assad start to talk and make the bold decisions required to proceed toward peace.

ISRAELIS GREET CHRISTOPHER VISIT WITH MIX OF HOPE AND TREPIDATION By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM, Feb. 23 (JTA) -- Israelis reacted to U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher's visit here this week with a mixture of hopeful anticipation and trepidation.

In calls to radio talk shows and in overheated conversations among friends sipping cappuccino on Ben-Yehuda Street, ordinary Israelis said they are looking forward to a new, improved chapter in U.S.-Israel relations.

Yet while people here are excited about the possibility of starting a "clean slate" with the Clinton administration, they are wary about the unknown.

"Now that George Bush and James Baker are out of the picture, it will be interesting to see what the new administration will offer vis-a-vis the Middle East," said David Hornstein, a real-estate broker in Jerusalem.

"I believe that Baker was very pro-Arab and that he personally didn't like Jews very much. This came across in his dealings with the various governments in the region," Hornstein said.

"Christopher, on the other hand, is pretty much a blank," he said. "We'll find out soon enough where he stands."

While Hornstein assumed a "wait and see" attitude toward Christopher's visit, he argued that "Israelis have to stand strong on the issue of the Golan Heights."

Referring to a mass demonstration by Golan Heights residents and supporters, Hornstein said, "We need to show Clinton and Christopher that our security needs come first and that we need the Golan for security reasons."

Golan resident Zehavah Shatsky said she was convinced the U.S. administration has already made up its mind on the issue of territorial compromise.

"I'm very worried that Christopher will put pressure on the Israeli government to give back the Golan," she said. "Now more than ever, I feel as if the ground under my feet is shaky."

Tel Aviv book publisher Sarit Tinari was not quite as pessimistic.

"I'm glad Christopher has come," she said, "because Israelis need to get to know the person behind the title. There's a new American administration, so perhaps the relationship between Israel and the U.S. will improve."

"I hope that Clinton and Christopher will be more responsive to Israel's needs than Bush and Baker were in the past," she said.

Still, she said, "I can't help but be con-

cerned about the future role America will play in the peace process. I'm afraid that instead of acting in its traditional role as facilitator in the peace talks, it will try to interfere in the negotiations."

"While we can't expect America to be our guardian angel," Tinari said, "it doesn't own us either. We're an independent country, and only Israelis can know what is good for Israel."

UNIFIL SOLDIER KILLED IN LEBANON DURING SLA CLASH WITH HEZBOLLAH By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Feb. 23 (JTA) -- A Nepalese soldier serving with U.N. Interim Force in Lebanon was killed and another seriously wounded Monday.

They were caught in an exchange of fire between Hezbollah guerrillas and South Lebanon Army gunners on the northern edge of the Israeli-controlled security zone.

U.N. officials complained that the Israeli-backed SLA had deliberately shelled the U.N. post. But a senior Israel Defense Force officer stressed that the UNIFIL post had been hit during an exchange of fire and it was not certain from which side the shell had come.

The IDF officer said he thought it possible the UNIFIL soldier had been deliberately killed by Hezbollah gunmen "to create a provocation."

In an earlier incident Monday, Israeli soldiers foiled a terrorist attack in the western sector of the security zone, killing one terrorist and wounding a second, who managed to escape after being hit. There were no Israeli casualties.

The slain terrorist was carrying an M-16 assault rifle, a large amount of ammunition and hand grenades. Also found on his body was a picture of Sheik Abbas Musawi, the Hezbollah leader killed in an Israeli helicopter gunship attack one year ago.

Clashes between Hezbollah forces and Israeli and Israeli-allied SLA troops have heated up during the last week as Hezbollah marked the anniversary of Musawi's assassination with increased activity.

RABIN SHOCKED BY ISRAELI POVERTY By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Feb. 23 (JTA) -- Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, returning shocked from a visit to an impoverished Tel Aviv neighborhood, has expressed concern about deteriorating social and economic conditions.

Rabin, who toured the poorer areas of southern Tel Aviv last week, said he was surprised at the high rate of unemployment, the lack of medical services and the high use of drugs.

"One mother told me of drug addicts sitting in front of every house," Rabin said Monday, addressing a meeting of the ruling coalition's factions in the Knesset.

Rabin painted a gloomy picture of Israel's economic situation and compared the country to a family in a state of bankruptcy.

"At times during the tour," Rabin recalled, "I did not know whether I was in Khan Yunis, the Jabalya refugee camp in Gaza, or in Tel Aviv."

He charged that no new housing was built in the southern neighborhoods of Tel Aviv during the Likud-led government because so much of its budget had gone to the administered territories.

OPENING OF ARCHIVES IN ARGENTINA HAS YIELDED FEW DETAILS ON NAZIS

By Victoria Verlichak

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) -- A year after Argentine President Carlos Menem declared amid much fanfare that he was releasing secret files on Nazi war criminals in the country, almost nothing of import has actually been made public.

At the time, Menem declared that Argentina was "repaying a debt to humanity" and he declassified a small amount of information to coincide with his announcement. He ordered more files to be turned over to the National Archives, but not much has been released since then.

Simon Wiesenthal, the prominent hunter of Nazi war criminals, told a newspaper here that Menem's move "was just a show and nothing of importance was turned over. Some files were missing; others were incomplete or superficial."

"The Argentine government still hides information so as to deny Gen. Juan Peron's responsibility in harboring Nazi war criminals," Wiesenthal added.

When Menem first made his announcement, there was much excitement and expectation among Jewish groups to obtain sought-after information, since it is believed that Argentina once had the largest concentration of Nazi war criminals in the world.

Peron, who led Argentina during the late 1940s and early 1950s, was known as an admirer of fascism and Nazism and served as a military officer under Italian fascist leader Benito Mussolini.

During his reign, many Nazis lived in Argentina. Among them were Josef Mengele, the Auschwitz doctor who performed sadistic experiments on inmates; Martin Bormann, Hitler's deputy; Josef Schwammberger, commander of the Polish ghetto of Przemysl; Eduard Roschmann, Riga captain of the SS; and Walter Kutschmann, responsible for mass shootings in Lvov.

Nazi-hunters point out that files on at least 40 top Nazis known to have lived in Argentina are missing.

Pages Missing From Files

The quality of the documents released a year ago has also been criticized. Eighty percent consist of newspaper clippings. Of 261 folios sent to the National Archives by the Argentine intelligence service, 255 are photostat copies from mostly foreign newspapers.

Argentine police files on Mengele, for example, have 21 consecutive pages missing, with the explanation that they were "purged" during the military dictatorship of the early 1970s.

Menem made his announcement last year before his first official visit to the United States, partly to satisfy the demands of the American Jewish community. An embarrassing article by Nazi-hunter Gerald Posner that discussed Peron's ties to the Nazis had also appeared in The New York Times.

Posner wrote, "In the Argentine police files lies the answer to some of the greatest mysteries of World War II, including Martin Bormann's destiny, Adolf Hitler's heir, and that hundreds of millions of dollars taken from concentration camp victims were transferred to South America."

Posner recently told a Buenos Aires newspaper that the files released by Menem did not shed much new light. Furthermore, some of the documents seen by Posner during his 1984 re-

search for his book on Mengele were not among the ones released in 1992.

"I can clearly state that the dossier on Martin Bormann I saw was much bigger than the one open to the public," said Posner.

"I can't believe that police investigations into the numerous alleged appearances of Bormann during the 1950s and 1960s amounted to cutting out reports from foreign publications," he said.

According to Eugenio Rom, director of the National Archives, many government agencies have not complied with the official request that documents be forwarded to the archives.

The Foreign Affairs Ministry, for example, has not done anything to open consular files from key European ports through which many Nazis passed on their way to Argentina.

Wiesenthal Turns Down Invitation

Nazi-hunter Shimon Samuels, of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, has also been unable to get Central Bank files released.

Rom said he would continue to press for more information, including material sought by Wiesenthal to track down top Nazi war criminals.

Last year, Wiesenthal told Rom he hoped to locate Rudolf Mildner, a Gestapo head in a Polish city now believed to be 83 years old.

Another Nazi actively sought is Gestapo head Heinrich Muller. No details at all of these two men were among the files released in 1992.

In the wake of the criticism expressed by Wiesenthal regarding Menem's failure to live up to his promises of releasing files, the Nazi-hunter was invited recently to visit Argentina.

But Wiesenthal has maintained publicly dozens of times that he has no wish to come to Argentina because he fears for his safety.

"Every Argentine government has protected war criminals," he said almost a year ago. Wiesenthal, who is 83, was also quoted as saying: "At my age, it's not necessary to run risks with so many paid assassins around."

DEMJANJUK PLANNING A HUNGER STRIKE TO PROTEST 'MISTAKEN IDENTITY' CASE

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Feb. 23 (JTA) -- John Demjanjuk, the Nazi war criminal sentenced to death by an Israeli court, has decided to go on a hunger strike from his prison cell starting Monday, his lawyer said this week.

Demjanjuk, 73, has appealed his verdict to Israel's High Court of Justice, and sources say a ruling in the long-running case should be issued within two months.

Monday marks the seventh anniversary of the day when Demjanjuk was extradited to Israel from the United States.

Demjanjuk has planned the hunger strike to protest his situation, said attorney Yoram Sheftel.

Demjanjuk claims the case against him is one of mistaken identity and that he never committed the crimes attributed to Ivan the Terrible, the notorious killer of Jews at the Treblinka death camp in Nazi-occupied Poland.

The former Cleveland autoworker has also complained about the lengthy amount of time that his trial and appeal has taken.

The last court session in the appeal was held June 9, 1992.

Sources at the Justice Ministry said the judges are now in the process of writing their ruling on the appeal.

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES:
PROBLEMS FOR JEWS IN FORMER USSR
CONTINUE DESPITE MASS EMIGRATION**

By Deborah Kalb
States News Service

WASHINGTON (JTA) -- The American Jewish community should not be lulled into thinking that the fall of the Soviet Union and the continuing mass emigration of Jews from its successor states mark an end to the problems faced by Jews in the region.

So says Mark Levin, executive director of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry. He believes people who think the work of the Soviet Jewry advocacy movement is over "are mistaken."

If anything, he said, dealing with 15 separate countries, each with their own regulations, makes the situation "more complicated" for Jews still seeking to emigrate.

Levin, a longtime NCSJ staffer who took over as the group's executive director last fall, discussed the continuing problems facing Jews in the former Soviet republics, in an interview with the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

The National Conference serves as the coordinating agency for the organized Jewish community's efforts on behalf of Jews in the former Soviet Union.

In recent months, some in the American Jewish community have questioned the usefulness of maintaining high-profile advocacy efforts for Jews in the ex-Soviet republics in the post-Cold War era.

But Levin strongly contested that view, citing unstable conditions in some of the republics as among the reasons for American Jews to stay involved.

"The National Conference's mandate is a very clear and focused one," he said. "We are not in search of a new mission to keep the organization going."

"To accept the situation inside the former Soviet Union as being the status quo for years to come," he said, "is to put one's head in the sand and not recognize how far the countries of the former Soviet Union have to go to reach fully functioning democratic governments."

The NCSJ, Levin said, remains committed to two goals: helping Soviet Jews emigrate "in as free and unencumbered a manner as possible," and helping those Jews still in the former Soviet lands "learn about their heritage."

More Anti-Semitism In Tajikistan

"Now is not the time to sit back and pat ourselves on the back for our good work," Levin said. "Now is the time to ensure" that the good that was done "doesn't go to waste."

Levin pointed to continuing barriers to emigration facing Jews in the former Soviet Union, both bureaucratic and political. In the Central Asian republics, for example, unrest has led to a rise in emigration, he said.

Dail Stolow, director of overseas operations for the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, recently returned from a trip to Tajikistan, a Central Asian republic currently torn apart by civil war.

Stolow said that the vast majority of Tajikistan's 4,000 Jews are seeking to emigrate. About 1,000 hope to settle in the United States under the government's family reunification program, and the rest are applying to move to Israel.

The increase in both Islamic fundamentalism and nationalism in Tajikistan have resulted in an

"increase in incidents of verbal anti-Semitism and an increase in some physical violence directed at those who are planning to leave," she said.

Stolow said that HIAS officials have met with U.S. government representatives to discuss their trip to Tajikistan and the problems facing the Jewish community there.

"The fact that HIAS went there impressed people with how concerned and serious we are about the community in Tajikistan," Stolow said, adding that U.S. officials are trying to expedite the departure of Jews from the remote republic.

Both Stolow and Levin of the National Conference expressed concern over a new Russian emigration law that was scheduled to go into effect in January but has been postponed.

The law would require applicants leaving from Russia to possess a passport from their country of citizenship, Stolow said. Most Jews emigrating from the various republics do so via Moscow's international airport and therefore would fall under the provisions of the law.

The problem, Stolow explained, is that most of these new countries do not have their own passports yet. In meetings with immigration officials in Tajikistan, HIAS officials suggested that the authorities consider using old Soviet passports stamped with Tajik government emblems as a way around this dilemma.

Refusal Rate Is Up

Levin said that the new emigration law, when it goes into effect, can still be used to deny people the right to emigrate on the grounds that they possess state secrets.

Access to state secrets was one of several pretexts the Soviets used to deny Jews the right to emigrate. Other grounds for refusal was an emigre's so-called "poor relatives" who, left behind in the Soviet Union, could become a burden to the state.

Levin explained that this "poor relative" problem could be taken care of in most cases if the new law were interpreted broadly, but if it were interpreted narrowly, it would still cause difficulties.

He said that recently the refusal rate for Jews seeking to leave went up slightly, and that the refusals were based on either access to "state secrets" or the "poor relative" problem.

"We'll have to wait and see how" the new law "is actually implemented" before evaluating it, Levin said. But "the bottom line is that it makes the situation more complicated," because all 15 of the former Soviet countries could implement their own interpretation of the law.

"There are no simple solutions to the issues being faced by the advocacy movement today," he said.

Levin expressed concern about ethnic tensions and economic unrest in the various republics. He said the National Conference is monitoring nationalistic forces in Russia, Ukraine and Central Asia.

In Russia, he said, old-style Communists and ultranationalists are joining together to blame Jews for the economic problems facing the nation.

"As we see in other parts of Europe," he said, "nationalism has the potential to be a very destructive force in the former Soviet Union."

While the current situation "may not require large demonstrations" by U.S. advocacy groups, he said, that "doesn't mean we shouldn't continue to be actively engaged in assisting the Jews of the former Soviet Union."