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**ISRAEL AND U.S. SAID TO BE DISCUSSING
PLAN FOR TOTAL PULLOUT FROM GOLAN**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Feb. 24 (JTA) -- Israel and the United States are discussing a three-phase peace plan with Syria that would eventually entail a complete Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights, according to Knesset member Benjamin Netanyahu.

Netanyahu, a former deputy foreign minister who is running for leadership of the opposition Likud party, said in a radio interview Wednesday he had information that this was the substance of discussions between Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and his "American interlocutors."

But there was no confirmation from the Prime Minister's Office.

Netanyahu made the comments as U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher took a helicopter tour of the country's eastern and northern fronts, to inspect for himself the geographic and strategic challenges to Israel's security.

The secretary flew along the length of the "Green Line" separating Israel proper from the West Bank and then toured the Golan Heights.

The Israel Defense Force chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Ehud Barak, accompanied Christopher on his tour, pointing out the strategic and military significance of the Golan.

After the tour, Christopher said he understood the situation much better, but would save his impressions "for later."

"There is no question that geography complicates the matter and changes the situation very greatly," the secretary said.

Netanyahu, who opposes Israeli withdrawal from the Golan, said the first phase of the plan being discussed with the United States involves an Israeli declaration of readiness to cede sovereignty over the strategic plateau to Syria.

The second stage would be a partial withdrawal, accompanied by the deployment of American peacekeeping forces on the territory vacated.

In the third and final stage, the Israeli army would withdraw entirely from the Golan. Netanyahu was vague on the issue of whether the purported plan would mean the removal of Israeli civilian settlements too.

General's Remarks Cause Stir

There was no immediate response to Netanyahu's assertions from the government, which had its hands full dealing with another controversy over remarks made by the IDF deputy chief of staff, Maj. Gen. Amnon Shahak.

Shahak, in an off-the-record briefing Tuesday for American journalists, was quoted as saying that Israel could maintain adequate security even if it gave up all of the Golan.

American reporters also quoted Shahak, identified in articles as a "senior military official," as saying that "without withdrawal from the entire Golan Heights, there is no chance of peace."

Likud and other right-wing politicians have demanded that Rabin dismiss Shahak for his remarks.

But the Prime Minister's Office issued a

statement Wednesday saying Rabin, who is also defense minister, has full confidence in Shahak.

In the wake of the uproar, Shahak said Wednesday he was misquoted and that his statements were taken out of context.

"I am certain I didn't say there is no chance of peace without a full withdrawal," Shahak told Israeli army radio.

He went on to explain, "I meant to say, without recalling my exact words, that the Syrians won't come to the peace process unless they believe that in negotiations one can also discuss withdrawal."

But Shahak also stressed that as an army officer he believed the army's mission is to implement whatever political decisions the government makes.

"The Israel Defense Force does not define formal borders or draw political maps. We do what we are told," he said.

"If there is a threat to Israel from the Heights, then a variety of security arrangements will have to be made."

Likud Knesset member Eliahu Ben-Elissar, Israel's first ambassador to Cairo and a former chairman of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, complained that even if Shahak's words had been a slip of the tongue, he should be dismissed for allowing himself to fall into the trap.

"What is a senior officer doing making political statements to foreign correspondents?" Ben-Elissar asked.

Rabin has consistently said he would consider withdrawing from at least part of the Golan Heights, but he has never publicly stated what his final bargaining position would be in negotiations with Syria.

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

**CHRISTOPHER OFFERS PALESTINIANS
NEW PROPOSALS FOR RESUMING TALKS**
By Gil Sedan and Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, Feb. 24 (JTA) -- Palestinian negotiators say new proposals raised by U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher to break the deadlock over resuming the stalled peace talks are "worth looking at."

Palestinian spokeswoman Hanan Ashrawi said several "brainstorming ideas" were discussed during a second round Christopher held Wednesday with a delegation of Palestinian leaders he had met with a day earlier.

During his visit to the Middle East this week, Christopher has been trying to get the stalled bilateral peace talks back on track. But he has been forced to concentrate much of his efforts on trying to resolve the fate of the 415 Palestinians whom Israel deported to Lebanon in December.

At a news conference Wednesday before leaving Israel, Christopher said, "I think we made progress in explaining the situation with respect to the deportees, indicating that a process is under way which will resolve that issue."

"And, without being able to establish any timetable, I'll tell you we are going to be working on this problem over the next several days and

weeks, and I hope that there will be an early resumption of the peace talks," he added.

Yet Christopher cautioned that he left the Middle East recognizing there are still "obstacles that will have to be overcome."

Christopher also indicated that Israel would not come under American pressure to be the party making major new concessions on the deportation issue.

"I am not in the business of pressuring the Israelis to do anything. It's a government that takes action in its own interest," he said.

'Two Good Friends'

Later, addressing a dinner of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, Christopher said he hoped there would be "something good to announce in the near future," presumably referring to a date for resuming the talks.

He also said his meetings with Israeli leaders had "laid the basis" for a relationship between "two good friends, allies and partners."

Ashrawi, speaking at a news conference in eastern Jerusalem, said she would not elaborate on the details of the proposals raised in talks with Christopher.

So far it has been the official position of the Palestinians that they will not return to the peace until the deportees now stranded in southern Lebanon are allowed to return to the administered territories.

But Ashrawi's comments left the impression that the Palestinians are leaving the door open for a compromise deal.

She said the Palestinian delegates were discussing the ideas among themselves and with the Palestine Liberation Organization leadership in Tunis.

"We cannot make hasty decisions," Ashrawi said.

It was understood here that Christopher presented the Palestinians with ideas to speed up the return of the deportees, as well as plans for improving the quality of life for Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The secretary of state also is assumed to have discussed improvement of human rights conditions in the territories and the American role in the peace talks.

'More Promising Than Anticipated'

The meeting between Christopher and the Palestinians was held at the American Consulate in western Jerusalem.

Immediately afterward, Christopher rushed to meet again with Premier Yitzhak Rabin and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres.

Peres challenged the Palestinians to return to the peace talks.

Otherwise, he warned, Dr. Abdul Aziz Rantissi, the leader of the deportees, will be the one who calls the shots in the Middle East.

Christopher told the American Jewish leaders that his discussions with both sides "dug deeper and were more promising than anticipated."

He also said: "I'm doing all I can to bring the parties to the table. I'm giving it my highest priority."

Harry Wall, head of the Jerusalem office of the Anti-Defamation League, praised the secretary's remarks, calling them "very generous."

"He stated unequivocally, here in Jerusalem, his support for Israel and his commitment to the peace process," Wall said.

ISRAELIS WORRIED ABOUT SECURITY BUT READY TO COMPROMISE FOR PEACE **By Hugh Orgel**

TEL AVIV, Feb. 24 (JTA) -- Just over half the Israeli population is willing to give back to Syria some or all of the Golan Heights in exchange for peace, according to a recent survey.

The survey, conducted by Tel Aviv University's Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, also revealed that most Israelis are interested in peace but mistrust Arab intentions.

The poll, based on a representative sample of Israelis excluding those living on kibbutzim or in the administered territories, showed that Israelis regard the present moment as presenting more possibilities for peace than at any time since the Persian Gulf War.

Government policy in the territories is perceived as being too weak, and the public seems highly concerned about personal security.

The poll revealed that 33 percent of Israelis are ready to return a small portion of the Golan Heights in exchange for peace, 15 percent are prepared to give up a large part and 5 percent are willing to return the entire territory, which was annexed in the early 1980s.

Forty-six percent of those polled said they are opposed to returning any part of the Golan.

An overwhelming 89 percent expressed strong support for continued participation in the peace process, while 11 percent were opposed.

The survey showed that Israeli public opinion regarding the future status of the West Bank and Gaza Strip has become more moderate.

Twenty-nine percent favored the establishment of some sort of Palestinian autonomy, 20 percent were in favor of returning most of the territories to Jordan in exchange for a peace agreement, and 13 percent were ready to accept the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in the territories within the framework of a peace agreement.

However, 13 percent favored the annexation of the territories and the transfer of Arabs out of the area, 13 percent were in favor of full annexation and 6 percent favored the preservation of the status quo.

Fifty-eight percent said the Arabs are interested in peace, while 95 percent are of the opinion that Israel is interested in peace.

Eighty-five percent expressed concern about being harmed by Arabs during the course of their daily lives.

The view that the intifada and terrorism can be eliminated via military action was supported by 75 percent of the respondents.

About 60 percent said the government's policy in the territories is too weak, 30 percent said the policy is correct and about 10 percent charged it is too harsh.

ISRAELI FAILS IN U.N. BID

UNITED NATIONS, Feb. 24 (JTA) -- Yehudit Karp, Israel's deputy attorney general, lost her bid Wednesday to join the committee monitoring the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

This was the first such bid by an Israeli for a position on a United Nations committee. The 10 members of the committee are elected by the 128 signatory nations to the convention.

Karp fared better than some of the other candidates for the five vacant posts. She received support from 19 countries, among them Egypt.

HIGH COURT HEARS 2 RELIGION CASES FOLLOWED CLOSELY BY JEWISH GROUPS

By Deborah Kalb

States News Service

WASHINGTON, Feb. 24 (JTA) -- Jewish groups were split over two cases heard this week by the U.S. Supreme Court with important ramifications for church-state relations and free-speech protection.

One case, *Zobrest vs. Catalina Foothills School District*, deals with whether or not a deaf high school student who attends parochial school can have a sign language interpreter paid for with public funds.

In the other case, *Lamb's Chapel vs. Center Moriches Union Free School District*, the justices must rule on whether an evangelical church group can use a public school, after school hours, to show a movie with a Christian theme.

Both of these cases, argued Wednesday before the court, could have repercussions in the Jewish community, and Jewish groups have filed friend-of-the-court briefs and taken a strong interest in their outcomes.

The oral arguments were often lively and were punctuated by laughter from those viewing the proceedings.

James Zobrest, the deaf student, was in the audience, and the court, for the first time, had a sign-language interpreter present.

Zobrest's attorney, William Ball, argued that an interpreter was a "window of communication" who would be conveying religious messages, but would not have the authority of a teacher.

He dismissed arguments that the interpreter would be seen by other children in the class as symbolizing a church-state union.

John Richardson, arguing for the school district, said the district could provide services for the student, unlike this service, that were not involved in "religious indoctrination."

The American Jewish Congress, the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism and several Orthodox groups are siding with the student in the *Zobrest* case, arguing that the use of public funds to pay for an interpreter in a parochial school would not infringe on the wall separating church and state.

Orthodox Groups Support Student

Abba Cohen, director of the Washington office of Agudath Israel, an Orthodox group, said that the student and his family are being placed in an "unfortunate position," in which they are in effect being asked to choose between giving up a religious education or giving up state aid.

Nathan Lewin, a Washington attorney who serves as vice president of COLPA, the National Jewish Commission on Law and Public Affairs, which represents the interests of observant Jews in courts and legislatures, said that the brief filed by his group in the case asked the court to go further than the petitioner's brief.

COLPA, Lewin said, asked the court to re-examine past cases that denied aid to handicapped children on parochial school premises.

On the other side, the American Jewish Committee and the Anti-Defamation League filed briefs saying that the presence of a public employee in a parochial school, interpreting information that could include some religious content, would violate the clause of the First Amendment prohibiting government "establishment of religion."

"What we are saying," said Michael Lieberman, associate director and counsel of ADL's Washington office, "is that we have a situation with a public employee inside a pervasively sectarian institution."

The *Zobrest* case is just "one more skirmish in an unrelenting war" to have "public funding in non-public schools," said Samuel Rabinove, AJ-Committee's legal director.

AJ-Committee, Rabinove said, "believes that public funds should go to public schools only." Otherwise, he added, American education could become fragmented, with each group using "public tax dollars for their own schools."

Lower courts have ruled in favor of the school district.

In the *Lamb's Chapel* case, the Jewish community is again split.

The evangelical church involved in the case lost its suit in federal district court and on appeal, when the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 2nd Circuit ruled that a school building is not an open public forum, so that excluding religious groups does not violate the Constitution.

A 'Limited Public Forum?'

The case involves free speech issues as well as church-state concerns.

It centers in part around whether a public school after teaching hours is a "limited public forum."

The legal definition of a limited public forum includes the forum's right to limit the type of speech expressed within it, based on the speech's content. For example, all religious speech or political speech could be prohibited.

In oral arguments Wednesday, the *Lamb's Chapel* attorney, Jay Alan Sekulow, argued that religious speech such as that in the *Lamb's Chapel* film provides a civic benefit to the public, and that was what was mandated by the school's policy of who was allowed to use the facilities.

Justice John Paul Stevens asked how Sekulow would respond if a religious group advocated marijuana smoking.

After Sekulow said the group should be allowed, Justice Byron White judiciously pointed out that smoking marijuana was against the law.

The ADL filed a brief in the case on the side of the school district, as it did in the *Zobrest* case. "Our brief asserted that the school district does have the right to make a decision on who can use the facilities," Lieberman said.

On the other side were the Orthodox groups, who argued that the religious group should be allowed to use the facilities after school hours.

"There's no reason why" religious groups "should not have the rights other groups have," Agudath Israel's Cohen said.

Lewin of COLPA said that his group took the free-speech issues inherent in the case into account, as well as the church-state issues.

"It would be a violation of the First Amendment to exclude religious speech or any religious access from public premises when no school is going on, and no kids are around," Lewin explained.

Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center, said that the Reform movement's position was that the school should be able to rent its facility to religious groups.

"To do this at a time when no students are around, and to disallow only religious groups, is to discriminate against religion," Saperstein emphasized.

HERZOG MEETS WITH BRITISH LEADERS, DISCUSSES ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM

By Bernard Josephs

London Jewish Chronicle

LONDON, Feb. 24 (JTA) -- The threat of Islamic fundamentalism was high on the agenda this week as Israel's President Chaim Herzog met British leaders during the first official visit to Britain by an Israeli head of state.

In talks, due to take place Thursday with Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd and Friday with Prime Minister John Major, the president was expected to raise the danger posed by Iranian-backed terrorists, including Hamas.

The president, arriving in the wake of the expulsion of 415 Hamas activists from the administered territories, also showed himself ready to answer criticism of Israel's tactics.

Addressing a dinner hosted by the lord chancellor, Lord Mackay, on Tuesday -- the first day of his four-day visit -- Herzog pointed out that despite the fundamentalist onslaught the law reigns supreme in Israel.

He continued: "It is not for me to burden you with the details and manner in which this war is being conducted in many countries. Suffice to say that (unlike in Israel) there are no supreme courts to which one can apply.

"There are no media to report. The issues are dealt with summarily, in an unequivocal manner which would hardly meet with your lordship's approval."

The president again echoed Israel's growing concern in an address on Wednesday to Joint Israel Appeal fund-raisers. He told them Islamic fundamentalism is "the greatest single danger to the free world today," combining "religious fanaticism and abysmal hatred" with efforts to acquire weapons of mass destruction.

"We as part of the free world must continue to raise our voice in warning against the spread of Islamic fundamentalism backed by Iran," he said.

New Warmth In Relations

In addition to Islamic fundamentalism, Herzog said he would discuss the Arab boycott of Israel with Major and Hurd.

"I will tell them that Britain should pass legislation outlawing the boycott."

He said he would also be requesting that Britain help locate missing Israeli soldiers in Lebanon.

Herzog's official visit, at the invitation of the British government, underlines the new warmth in relations between London and Jerusalem.

There have been previous visits by Israeli heads of state, and Herzog himself was knighted by the queen. But the visits were not official state trips, and all points of protocol were not followed in those instances.

This visit, British sources said, served to illustrate Britain's desire to help keep the Middle East peace process alive.

Despite the seriousness of the issues discussed, the visit had all the pomp and ceremony associated with a state visit.

On Wednesday, Herzog and his wife, Aura, heard a Coldstream Guards band play "Hatikvah," for the first time at Buckingham Palace, before luncheon with the queen.

It was "the best version of 'Hatikvah' I have ever heard," said Herzog.

SHAS DEPUTY MINISTER TO FIGHT EFFORT TO REMOVE HIS IMMUNITY

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Feb. 24 (JTA) -- Deputy Religious Affairs Minister Rafael Pinhasi of the fervently Orthodox Shas party intends to fight an effort to deprive him of his parliamentary immunity so that he can be prosecuted for alleged misappropriation of election funds.

Attorney General Yosef Harish asked the Knesset this week to remove Pinhasi's parliamentary immunity.

Attached to the official request was a charge sheet referring to alleged Shas misappropriations of state-supplied election funds during the 1988 parliamentary campaign and afterward.

There are no charges of personal wrongdoing in the charge sheet, a point that Pinhasi intends to rely on heavily in his fight against the move to arraign him.

Pinhasi is one of three Shas officials accused of wrongly appropriating funds.

Knesset member Yair Levy was convicted of malfeasance and has begun serving a five-year term for stealing monies from the party. Levy lost his parliamentary immunity in November 1991.

Interior Minister Arye Deri recently agreed to cooperate with the police investigation into his alleged wrongdoings, which has been in progress for the past two years.

The fight to remove Pinhasi's immunity will take place first in the House Committee of the Knesset, which must make a recommendation to the plenary. The full Knesset must vote on the measure.

Political observers say the case is by no means open and shut. The alleged crimes are political rather than personal, and, Pinhasi points out, Shas has paid fines for its wrongdoings, which were originally exposed by the state comptroller.

Several members of Knesset may feel Shas is being victimized by the legal establishment and that the charges against Pinhasi are not substantiated.

Pinhasi was communication minister when the investigation began.

SOUTH AFRICAN JEWS HOLD SPECIAL FAST

By Suzanne Belling

JOHANNESBURG, Feb. 24 (JTA) -- Thousands of Johannesburg Jews fasted for 24 hours last week, following a number of tragedies involving local Jews.

The fast, called for by religious leaders, with prayers led by Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris, was held to show solidarity with members of the community who had suffered loss through unnatural deaths and accidents.

The Sunday Times reported that the South African ambassador to the United States, Harry Schwarz, joined in the fast.

The tragedies included several young people who were killed or seriously injured in road accidents, a boating accident which claimed the lives of three Jewish yachtsmen, a young medical student who fell to his death while bird-watching, a fatal accidental shooting and four Jewish race-horse owners who were victimized in their homes by gunmen.

Prayers were also said for the future of South Africa, which is in the process of dismantling apartheid.