

**CABINET, BRIEFED ON PEACE TALKS,
APPEARS READY TO MAKE CONCESSIONS**
By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, May 2 (JTA) -- The Israeli Cabinet appears to be ready to make far-reaching concessions to both the Syrians and Palestinians.

Briefing the Cabinet on the peace talks in Washington, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said Sunday that he is ready to hand over authority to Palestinians in a number of areas, including education, health, finance, police and water.

But a majority of ministers rejected a proposal by Foreign Minister Shimon Peres to hold early elections in the territories for a Palestinian self-governing authority.

The opposing ministers pointed out that the Palestinians themselves have not requested elections, because they are aware of the difficulties a referendum could cause, including internal power struggles and a delay in the peace process.

Environment Minister Yossi Sarid of the left-wing Meretz bloc suggested that Israel declare its readiness to negotiate with any organization, including the Palestine Liberation Organization, after a three-year period of autonomy, provided that the group prove itself to have acted constructively during that time period.

Police Minister Moshe Shahal spoke enthusiastically in support of Israel giving up the entire Golan Heights in exchange for full peace with the Syrians, including a guarantee of secure borders and full diplomatic relations.

In other business, the Cabinet further relaxed the general closure on the administered territories, raising to 33,000 the number of Palestinians allowed to work in Israel proper.

But only half the number of permits are being used by Palestinians, who are under pressure in the territories not to return to work in Israel unless the closure is lifted totally.

To date, 15,000 workers have been given security clearance and been approved for entry.

U.S. To Provide Economic Aid

The closure of the territories, imposed to curb Palestinian attacks against Israelis, has caused a severe labor shortage crisis in Israel.

The monthlong closure has virtually paralyzed the construction industry. Not only have building contractors failed to honor commitments, but real estate agents have already detected an increase in the prices of housing.

Although the Cabinet continued to lift the ban by incremental degrees, it reaffirmed the decision not to return to the situation that existed before the closure, when some 120,000 Palestinians entered Israel proper daily.

The Cabinet decided that work permits be given only to heads of families with children, in the belief that these individuals would be less likely to be potential terrorists. Entry will probably be allowed only to those who are at least 25 years old.

The four ministers from Meretz said they would support the continued closure only if unemployment benefits were paid to those Palestinians who had held jobs in Israel, just as an Israeli worker would be entitled to benefits.

However, the majority of ministers opposed

that condition, saying they preferred creating jobs inside the territories to paying unemployment benefits.

The economy in the territories may soon get a boost from the United States, according to Knesset member Abdel Wahab Darawshe of the Arab Democratic Party.

Darawshe, who just returned from a visit to the United States, discussed an American economic development plan for the territories with Martin Indyk, the National Security Council's top adviser on the Middle East.

According to Darawshe, Indyk said the Clinton administration had prepared a plan for an immediate aid package of \$24 million and was discussing a comprehensive aid package that would be a joint effort with the European Community and the Arab Gulf states.

Darawshe said Indyk told him the plan would be presented at the next round of multilateral economic talks, due to open in Rome this week.

Indyk told Darawshe he considered the situation in the territories, under the closure, to be a time bomb dangerous not only to the Palestinians, but to the entire region and to American interests in the Middle East.

**MOOD SHIFTS FROM DESPAIR TO JOY
WITH RETURN OF FIRST 15 DEPORTEES**
By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, May 2 (JTA) -- The mood among Palestinians in the administered territories has shifted from a general aura of despair to one of jubilation with the return of 15 men whom Israel had deported years ago but allowed back last week.

The scenes this past weekend were reminiscent of the days of early November 1991, when the Palestinian negotiating delegation returned from the first round of Middle East peace talks in Madrid. At the time, there was such optimism that Palestinians danced in the streets and covered Israeli soldiers with olive branches.

The Palestinian leaders who returned to the West Bank last Friday, some of them unknown to the present generation, were carried on shoulders and hailed as heroes.

Peaceful demonstrations took place in the streets of the West Bank, with no interference by Israeli security forces. And buoyant residents once again spoke of a "Palestinian state around the corner."

The Israeli offer to allow back a total of 30 Palestinians deported between 1967 and 1987, coinciding with the resumption of the peace talks in Washington, has given a much-needed boost to those within the Palestinian camp supporting the peace talks and aligned with the mainstream circles of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

The boost comes just in time for the pro-peace and pro-PLO forces, after months in which the influence and popularity of the rejectionist Islamic Hamas group appeared to be rising, triggered by the December deportation of 415 Islamic activists from the territories.

A mass rally in the West Bank city of Ramallah in honor of the 15 returnees featured the broadcast of a live telephone call by PLO leader Yasir Arafat directly from Tunis, blessing

the returnees and declaring: "I already see the Palestinian state."

The 15 Palestinians who crossed over the Allenby Bridge from Jordan into the West Bank are the first half of the group of 30 approved by Israel. The next 15 are expected to return soon.

Thousands awaited the deportees as they returned home. When the group crossed the Allenby Bridge and approached the passengers terminal close to Jericho, the mass of people lost control and virtually stormed the bus.

First Step To Recognizing PLO?

The crowd climbed onto the bus waving the Palestinian flag, forced open the bus doors, pulled out the returnees and carried them on their shoulders, chanting nationalist songs to the music of bands of Palestinian youths.

"The solution has begun today," Dr. Azmi Shueibi, 46, a dentist from El-Bireh expelled in 1986, said as he crossed into the West Bank.

In Jericho, Ahmad Ahmad, deported 24 years ago, shouted as he was carried around by dancing youths: "This is the happiest day in my life; only the day the Palestinian state is established will be happier."

Shueibi said the return of the 15 Palestinian leaders amounts to a de facto recognition of the PLO by Israel.

"They deported us because we were the first to declare that the PLO was the legitimate representative of the Palestinians," he said.

"They know that I am one of the PLO, and they allowed my return," he said. "This is the first step that the Israelis accept that the PLO is our representative."

HAMAS ADDED TO U.S. TERRORISM LIST; IRAN NOW SEEN AS THE BIGGEST THREAT

By Deborah Kalb
States News Service

WASHINGTON, May 2 (JTA) -- Hamas, the Islamic fundamentalist group that has risen to international prominence in recent months, has now achieved the dubious distinction of having its own listing in the State Department's annual report on global terrorism.

The report, "Patterns of Global Terrorism 1992," released Friday, says that "various elements of Hamas have used both political and violent means, including terrorism, to pursue the goal of establishing an Islamic Palestinian state in place of Israel."

Hamas, an acronym for the Islamic Resistance Movement, was involved in the killing of an Israeli border guard late last year, which was one of the events leading to Israel's decision in December to deport 415 Palestinians, most of whom were Hamas supporters.

Since then, the group has been in the news because of both the deportees and ongoing reports that Hamas has engaged in active fund raising here in the United States.

Syria, one of Israel's negotiating partners in the Middle East peace talks, retained a place on the list of countries regarded by the United States as state sponsors of terrorism, along with Cuba, Iran, Iraq, Libya and North Korea.

But the State Department views Iran and Iraq as far more dangerous havens for terrorists than Syria, which has tried in recent years to have its name removed from the list. Congress bars U.S. aid to any country supporting terrorism.

"There is no evidence that Syrian officials

have been directly involved in planning or executing terrorist attacks outside Lebanon since 1986," the report says, "but Syria continues to provide support and safe haven to a number of groups that engage in international terrorism."

It adds that "Syria has at times restrained the activities of these groups."

The report says that Syria and Syrian-controlled areas of Lebanon are the site of training camps and bases for such terrorist groups as the Abu Nidal organization, Hezbollah and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command.

The report describes Iran as "the most dangerous state sponsor of terrorism in 1992, with over 20 acts in 1992 attributable to it or its surrogates."

It links Iran to the March 1992 bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires, which the report calls the "deadliest act of terrorism in 1992."

Hezbollah, an Islamic terrorist group described as "Iran's most important client," was responsible for the bombing, which killed 29 people and wounded 242.

Some Good News, Too

There is also good news in the report. To begin with, the number of international terrorist incidents was down to 361 in 1992, from 567 the year before.

U.S. casualties from terrorist acts, the report says, were the lowest ever since the State Department began compiling such data in 1968. Only two Americans were killed in terrorist incidents. (The 1993 total is already higher, as a result of February's World Trade Center bombing.)

A senior State Department official credited greater international cooperation and the decline of Eastern Europe as a terrorist sanctuary as important reasons for the decrease.

Americans continue to be the primary targets for terrorism. Nearly 40 percent of the 361 incidents last year targeted Americans or their property.

The report says there were 79 international terrorist incidents in the Middle East in 1992, the same number as the year before. Most of them were "Iraqi-sponsored attacks against U.N. personnel working in Iraq."

Israel and the territories, the report says, suffered a "sharp increase in terrorism and violence" in late 1992.

The report says there were fewer infiltration attempts into Israel in 1992 (seven, compared to 20 the previous year) because of "stepped-up border security by Israeli, Egyptian, and Jordanian forces."

The Palestinian uprising in the territories receives two paragraphs in the report, which describes the intifada as "primarily a civil insurrection that contains elements of terrorism in specific instances."

Steven Emerson, a writer and terrorism expert, said that putting Hamas on the list of terrorist organizations will be meaningful only if the action has "some teeth attached."

The United States, he said, should work more actively to protest support given to Hamas by such countries as Syria and Saudi Arabia, and should restrict Hamas operatives entering or working in the United States.

"The fact is, there hasn't been a major protest" by the U.S. government in either of those areas, Emerson said.

IDF SOLDIER KILLED BY A ROAD MINE WHILE PATROLLING SOUTHERN LEBANON

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, May 2 (JTA) -- An Israeli soldier was killed Saturday on patrol in southern Lebanon, after he inadvertently triggered a mine.

Cpl. Yuval Ratig, 18, of Kfar Azar stepped on a tripwire which detonated the bomb, apparently planted by anti-Israeli guerrillas. Ratig was killed instantly.

The bomb went off as Ratig's paratroop unit crossed the slopes of the hill on which the ruins of the ancient Beaufort crusader castle stand in the eastern sector of the border security zone.

Ratig had just completed his introductory series of parachute jumps and was on his first operational patrol when he died.

He was the fifth Israeli soldier killed this year by roadside bombs in southern Lebanon. The Israeli army reported recently that approximately 40 such bombs have been discovered this year. Most of these bombs were defused or neutralized without causing any casualties or damage.

The bomb blast was the latest of a series of clashes involving Israeli forces in recent days.

On Friday morning, Israeli helicopters attacked a base belonging to Ahmed Jabril's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command in the Ain Hilweh refugee camp near Sidon.

Lebanese reports said that at least one Jabril supporter was killed and two others wounded in the attack on a building used as a command post by the PFLP-GC. Lebanese army troops were reported to have fired at the helicopter, but missed.

In a separate incident, Israeli forces were reported by the Lebanese media as firing four tank rounds Saturday near the site where the 400-odd Palestinians deported by Israel in December had gathered near the crossing point into the security zone.

The group had organized a march toward the crossing point from their tent camp to protest the U.S.-backed Middle East peace talks.

The shots, which landed some 1,000 yards from where the demonstrators were standing, were apparently intended to warn them not to approach the border area. The move appeared to be successful, since deportees withdrew to their tent camp.

COUPLE SURVIVE ARAB'S ATTACK

By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, May 2 (JTA) -- An Arab gunman attacked a Jewish couple here over the weekend, in one of the few such violent incidents since the government banned Palestinians from the territories from entering Israel proper a month ago.

Sheftel Vinokurov, the 49-year-old husband, was shot in the shoulder while he and his wife were out taking a walk with their dog last Friday evening.

Vinokurov, who emigrated with his wife, Alvira, from Leningrad in 1977, said he normally takes his gun with him on such walks but neglected to do so this time.

After the assailant shot Vinokurov, he pointed the gun at the woman, but Vinokurov lunged toward the attacker and also released his bull terrier dog.

The attacker fired the gun, but missed the woman and fled.

FRENCH APPEALS COURT IS TO DECIDE IN JUNE ON TOUVIER WAR CRIME CASE

By Michel Di Paz

PARIS, May 2 (JTA) -- A French court of appeals is to decide next month whether the French Nazi collaborator Paul Touvier will stand trial for crimes against humanity.

Touvier, 78, is charged with choosing seven Jewish hostages who were executed by France's collaborationist Vichy regime on June 28, 1944, in retaliation for the assassination by partisans of the head of Vichy's propaganda department.

The Versailles Court of Appeals met in a closed session last week to deliberate on the matter, after government prosecutor Bernard Pasturaud urged that Touvier be prosecuted.

The court will hand down its decision on June 2.

Touvier's lawyer, Jacques Tremolet de Villers, said his client was being prosecuted as a scapegoat.

"I'm doing my best so that it is the Touvier case that will be heard, and not the case of the Vichy regime," de Villers said.

According to his lawyer, Touvier did his best to save a large number of hostages. By picking "only" seven to be killed, he supposedly spared the lives of hundreds of persons, Jews and non-Jews alike.

De Villers said Touvier's action, by reducing the number of hostages to be killed from 100 to 7, could actually be seen as a legitimate way to defend the rest of the hostages.

"Concretely speaking, a crime was committed, but there was no criminal intention," de Villers said.

But Pasturaud ridiculed de Villers' argument.

Demonstrations Outside The Court

As the legal debate went on inside the court, some 250 people demonstrated outside the building, demanding that the judges decide in favor of bringing Touvier to trial.

Some of the demonstrators carried signs reading "Touvier, you sent all my family to death, now you must pay."

An earlier decision taken last year not to prosecute Touvier caused an uproar in France, particularly since the three judges handing down that decision appeared to absolve the Vichy regime of all guilt.

Those judges said that the government of Marshal Philippe Petain had no responsibility whatsoever in the mass murder of Europe's Jews in the Holocaust.

In response, noted historians reminded France that the Vichy regime issued racial and anti-Semitic laws without being asked to do so by the Nazi occupiers.

However, many observers consider Touvier's alleged crimes to be small in comparison to two other Frenchmen already indicted for crimes against humanity, Rene Bousquet and Maurice Papon, both over 80.

Bousquet was in charge of the Vichy police and personally oversaw the arrests and deportation of Jewish children.

Papon, in charge of the Bordeaux region in the southwest of France, issued orders to the local police that any opposition to the deportation of Jews be immediately quashed and reported.

But some politicians are opposed to bringing Bousquet and Papon to court, fearing it would "disrupt the social peace in France."

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES:
R.A. CONVENTION HIGHLIGHTS TENSION
WITHIN THE CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT**

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

LOS ANGELES (JTA) -- The recent convention of the Conservative movement's Rabbinical Assembly illuminated a central tension within the movement.

The key issue: whether the ultimate authority on Jewish law is the individual rabbi or whether responsibility for halachic interpretation rests with a more centralized committee.

The topic was the central focus of the convention's official speeches, meetings of unofficial "rump" groups and behind-the-scenes debates.

This tension has arisen within the movement, as it does periodically, out of last year's debate on the role of gay men and lesbians in Conservative Judaism.

Speakers from within the R.A. with all points of view spoke their piece at the convention, held in Los Angeles from March 21 to 24, as did leaders from the movement's other arms.

And while different speakers weighed in on the intricacies of interpreting Jewish law, Rabbi Ismar Schorsch, chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary, lambasted them all.

He berated the assembled rabbis for being out of touch with their congregants and focusing on issues such as sexuality while intermarriage and continuity should be their primary concern.

R.A. President Rabbi Gerald Zelizer replied to Schorsch's remarks by saying that the position of the JTS leadership "unfortunately isolates the seminary from the living Jewish context even more. The Rabbinical Assembly, thank God, has enough human resources to deal with both continuity and sexuality."

Zelizer added: "I regret that JTS has elected not to be a partner on a study on a basic, eternal, God-given issue, which could bring the seminary from only an ivory-tower institution into the living religious context in which rabbis live."

He was referring to the Commission on Human Sexuality, created at the 1992 R.A. convention and charged with assessing the needs of Conservative Jews regarding sexuality, as well as examining Judaism's views on sexuality and sexual ethics.

Zelizer also resented the intrusion by the third arm of the Conservative movement -- the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism -- into what he saw as an internal R.A. issue.

The leadership of the United Synagogue -- the movement's lay arm -- sent a letter to presidents of Conservative synagogues prior to the R.A. convention, urging them to tell their rabbis that they support the authority of the movement's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards.

The committee is the central body which takes up questions about Jewish law and, after debate and consideration, presents the movement with its positions.

That letter from the United Synagogue on an internal R.A. matter was, said Zelizer, beyond "the boundary of organizational propriety."

The tug-of-war over halachic authority within the Conservative movement has been waged periodically since the law committee was founded in 1927.

Because Conservative Judaism is committed to interpreting tradition in the context of modernity, to formulating positions not on either end of the spectrum and to understanding Jewish law in

light of its historical context, its positions are nuanced and subject to disagreements over interpretation.

Most of the R.A. convention's major speeches addressed the issue of halachic authority and the rhetoric volleyed by several speakers included direct jabs at their ideological opponents.

In the view of Rabbi Gordon Tucker, a member of the law committee and former dean of the JTS rabbinical school, "the distinctive and delicate balance between the (committee) and the mara d'atra (individual rabbi in each community) allows for religious and halachic creativity locally, where the need for it arises and where its authenticity can best be evaluated."

Wrote Tucker, in a historic overview of the tension which was distributed to the attending rabbis, the principle of mara d'atra "is a precious resource indeed, and it should not be lightly dismissed for the sake of an elusive 'uniformity' which will disappoint tomorrow those whom it satisfies today."

The current fight is related to the contention of some rabbis that positions held by the movement are not sufficiently sensitive to the real-life needs of Conservative congregants.

It also grew out of last year's most controversial issue -- whether or not openly homosexual men and women are fit to serve as rabbis and in other positions of Jewish leadership.

Last year, after much debate and wrangling on the law committee, which is composed of 25 voting members from the R.A. and five non-voting members representing the United Synagogue, the primary position adopted was that sexually active homosexuals are not permitted to be rabbis because their behavior violates Jewish law.

The position was written by Rabbi Joel Roth, who is stepping down June 30 from his position as dean of the rabbinical school.

The related issue of whether Conservative rabbis can work as spiritual leaders of gay and lesbian synagogues was raised at the 1992 R.A. convention, where members voted that they may, indeed, serve those congregations.

Some members of the Rabbinical Assembly, primarily those opposed to change in the legal status of gays and lesbians, felt that the decision made in resolution form by the members of the R.A. was a subversion of the halachic process and undermined the authority of the law committee.

That rump group, led by Roth, met during the convention here to discuss their strategy to ensure that the central authority of the law committee is reconfirmed.

Other rabbis feel strongly that this group is attempting to limit the authority that each rabbi possesses as mara d'atra.

JEWS MAKE UP 72 PERCENT OF JERUSALEM
By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, April 29 (JTA) -- Jerusalem's Jewish population has reached 400,000 out of 560,000 residents, or 72 percent of the city, according to new statistics released by the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies.

Since the start of the new wave of aliyah, Jerusalem has absorbed some 35,000 new immigrants. Some 75 percent of the new immigrants said they were satisfied with their absorption in the capital.

Despite these encouraging figures, the new statistics point out that 5,600 more people left the city than came to it last year.