

**PALESTINIAN TRACK GAINS MOMENTUM
WHILE TALKS WITH SYRIA TREAD WATER****By Deborah Kalb
States News Service**

WASHINGTON, May 4 (JTA) -- The long-awaited ninth round of the Middle East peace talks seems to be confounding expectations.

While the often-problematic Israeli-Palestinian negotiations are finally starting to make substantive progress, the potentially promising Israeli-Syrian track is bogged down in a debate over definitions of terms.

"There have been a lot of surprises" in the talks thus far, said Mark Rosenblum, political director of Americans for Peace Now.

For one, the Israeli decision last week to allow 30 Palestinians deported between 1967 and 1987 back to their homes in the territories seems to have considerably brightened the mood both in Washington and the territories themselves.

"It was one of the few events since the beginning of the talks that was good P.R. for both the Israelis and the Palestinians," said Thomas Smerling, executive director of Project Nishma, a group formed to provide an American platform for Israeli generals who advocate trading land for peace.

"It is very rare that something can happen that makes both sides look good," he said.

The Palestinian negotiating team, many agree, needs such concrete results in the talks to strengthen its position against rejectionists at home, such as the fundamentalist Hamas group.

Both Israeli and Palestinian negotiators have expressed optimism in recent days that the talks will achieve some progress. That is a sharp contrast from two weeks ago, when it was still unclear whether the Palestinian delegation would even be returning for the new round of talks.

Of course, both sides recognize that the negotiations are a lengthy process, and the mood, as negotiators emerge to face the microphones and cameras outside the State Department, fluctuates from day to day.

Unilateral Concessions

Moreover, both sides acknowledge that the Israeli and Palestinian positions on many issues, such as the status of Jerusalem, remain at opposite ends of the spectrum.

Some experts expect further signs of a forthcoming attitude from the Israelis, who have already announced a series of concessions. But others suggest that the Israelis may be getting tired of making concessions and are waiting for the Arab parties to make gestures of their own.

"The general trend of the talks is that the Israelis are making one unilateral concession after another," said Daniel Pipes, director of the Middle East Council of the Foreign Policy Research Institute in Philadelphia. "I'm waiting for some response" from the Arab parties, he added.

In the Israeli-Syrian talks, meanwhile, negotiators spent a good part of the first week and a half trying to define their terms. The Syrians have said they are prepared to offer Israel "full peace" in exchange for a "full withdrawal" by Israel from the Golan Heights.

But the talks seemed snagged on what "full

peace" and "full withdrawal" from the Golan really mean.

As each side waited for the other to go first, the negotiators also tried, with difficulty, to draft a new joint statement of principles that would attempt to define what they are seeking to accomplish.

Before the current round of talks began, the Israeli-Syrian negotiations were perceived by many observers as having the best potential for a quick breakthrough. Some are now wondering whether the lack of progress in the first several meetings here represents a deliberate go-slow strategy from either the Syrians or the Israelis.

Some, like Smerling, think the Syrians may be slowing things down to allow the Palestinian track to "catch up."

Another observer of the peace process, however, suggested that perhaps it is the Israelis who are content to be "treading water" for a while on the Syrian track, while giving higher priority to the Palestinian track because of the volatile situation in the territories.

'You Know Who You're Dealing With'

But some still see the Syrian track as the one to focus on, noting that the Syrian negotiators, unlike their Palestinian counterparts, represent an existing government with a pragmatic outlook.

With Syrian President Hafez Assad, Pipes said, at least "you know who you're dealing with." He contrasted that situation with the Palestinian negotiators, whose authority to speak for their own people is sometimes in question.

And while Palestinian public opinion sometimes "veers to the extreme," Pipes said, Syrian policies tend to be "pragmatic, not radical."

The Jordanian and Lebanese talks, most agree, are of secondary priority. Any agreement with the Lebanese will have to wait until an accord is reached with Syria, experts say, and a similar situation exists for the Jordanians vis-à-vis the Palestinians.

Another potentially crucial factor in this new round of talks is the role of the Americans, who, along with the Russians, are serving as co-sponsors.

The United States is working to keep the Palestinians at the talks by offering them something to take back to their constituency.

For example, the Palestinians announced last week that the Americans would be providing them with information on Israeli settlement activity in the territories.

The Israelis played this news down, saying that if the Palestinians wanted more information on Israeli settlement policies than what the Israelis had already given them, that was not a problem.

Buffeted by domestic pressures and difficult security situations at home, the Israelis and Palestinians are starting to see the importance of bolstering their opposite numbers.

"Negotiations start to take off," Smerling said, "when the negotiators realize that it is in their interest to strengthen the domestic position of the people across the table."

Here in Washington, he said, the parties are "getting to that point. It's not far off."

NEWS ANALYSIS: LIKUD SPLIT OVER BEST STRATEGY TO OPPOSE RABIN'S PEACE POLICIES

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, May 4 (JTA) -- Cracks are becoming apparent in the Likud party as leaders of the opposition struggle to come up with a unified position against the Labor-led government's policies on the peace process.

After having dominated the government for 15 years, the Likud, now out of power, is having trouble coming up with a clear policy to present to the nation as an alternative to the government's handling of negotiations with the Palestinians, Syrians and other Arab neighbors.

The hawkish wing of the Likud, led by former Defense Minister Ariel Sharon, has called upon the party to reject the principle of Palestinian autonomy in the territories, which was first outlined in the 1978 Camp David accords.

At the other end of the party spectrum are more moderate figures, such as former Police Minister Ronni Milo, who has supported the so-called "Gaza first" concept, under which Israel would work toward implementing Palestinian autonomy in the Gaza Strip unilaterally.

The party's recently elected leader, Benjamin Netanyahu, has not yet come down firmly on either side, though moderates in the Likud have criticized him for cooperating too closely with the smaller right-wing parties in the Knesset: Tsomet and Moledet.

At a meeting of the Likud Knesset faction on Monday, the first day of the parliament's summer session, Netanyahu delivered a rousing call for unity and an energetic assault upon the ruling coalition.

He also announced that the opposition parties had decided jointly to reject any agreements with coalition parties that in the past involved informal cooperation during votes in which Knesset members from both sides were absent.

Netanyahu said the opposition parties came to the decision in order to make parliamentary life as difficult as possible for the Labor-led coalition.

But former Justice Minister Dan Meridor urged that the Likud maintain a distance from the smaller right-wing parties.

"We are not merely an opposition like them," Meridor said. "We are the alternative."

Have To Present 'Bold Ideas'

Milo grabbed attention at the faction meeting by proposing formally that the Likud endorse the "Gaza first" approach to the peace process.

"We have to present the public with bold ideas," he declared.

Likud insiders pointed out that "Gaza first" was espoused last summer by another major Likud figure, Moshe Arens, then defense minister.

But Arens did not go public with his opinion until after the Likud's defeat in the June 1992 elections and his own decision to quit politics.

Another key figure in the party, Knesset member Ze'ev "Benny" Begin, tried to stake out a middle position between the hard-liners and the moderates.

Begin, rejecting Milo's position on Gaza, said the Likud should stick to the formula for peace and Palestinian autonomy worked out at Camp David by his father, the late Prime Minister Menachem Begin.

The younger Begin said that the Gaza first idea, meant, in effect, "abandoning Gaza."

Begin was equally scathing in his rejection of calls by hard-line Likudniks to abandon Camp David and the entire autonomy package.

In these positions, Begin is essentially articulating the position long held by former Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, who is increasingly taking on the role of party elder statesman.

Political observers say the Likud is plainly casting about for the right positions to take in its opposition to the government and during the quickened pace of the peace diplomacy.

The ongoing closure of the administered territories, imposed to curb Palestinian attacks on Israelis, has put the Likud in a sort of quandary.

While Likud politicians are pleased with the government's tough stance against the Palestinians, which is widely supported by the public, they are concerned that the closure is a step toward the eventual Israeli disengagement from the territories.

Some Likud strategists have suggested that the party focus instead on the issue of returning the Golan Heights to Syria, a move many Israelis are against.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's own position on the Golan is unclear. And a considerable number of those within the Labor Party are uncomfortable with the notion of total withdrawal, even in return for full peace and normalization with Syria.

The problem with this approach is that it would effectively mean abandoning the fight to retain "Judea and Samaria," which has always been a higher ideological priority for the Likud than holding onto the Golan.

DEATHS BREAK QUIET IN TERRITORIES

JERUSALEM, May 4 (JTA) -- A relatively quiet period in the administered territories over the past month was broken this week by the deaths of seven Palestinians, shot in clashes with Israeli troops, and the wounding of an Israeli vegetable merchant in a stabbing attack.

In the attack on the Israeli, the Israel Defense Force said only that the Jewish merchant was stabbed and lightly wounded in the northern Gaza Strip on Tuesday.

In other incidents Tuesday, three Palestinians were shot dead by Israeli soldiers, according to workers at a United Nations clinic. The army confirmed one death and said it was checking the other reports.

On Monday, the army said soldiers in the Gaza Strip had shot dead four Palestinians, two of whom were wanted in connection with armed attacks on Israelis.

ISRAEL ATTACKS HEZBOLLAH BASES

TEL AVIV, May 4 (JTA) -- Israeli forces continued their ongoing policy of striking terrorist bases in southern Lebanon, attacking targets north of the border security zone this week.

Israeli helicopters on Tuesday struck buildings north of the zone in Tibnit village, known to be a stronghold of the Iranian-backed Shi'ite Hezbollah organization.

According to reports from Lebanon, seven Lebanese residents were wounded in the attack on Tibnit and two guerrillas were killed during separate artillery attacks on other bases north of the security zone.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES:**JEWISH REBIRTH IN ODESSA FACING
ONSLAUGHT FROM JEWS FOR JESUS**

By Jed Sunden

ODESSA, Ukraine (JTA) -- When hundreds of Jews arrived at the Odessa Philharmonic Hall last week to attend a concert in honor of Israel's 45th anniversary, the local chapter of Jews for Jesus showed up too.

Standing in the shadow of the once-famous Brodsky Synagogue, members of the American-based missionary group handed out hundreds of pamphlets and brochures to those attending the concert, in what is becoming a regular occurrence in the city.

No one is quite sure why Jews for Jesus has targeted Odessa, a port city on the Black Sea with a population of 1.2 million. Though their presence in other cities in the former Soviet Union is negligible, their literature has appeared here regularly over the past year.

Apparently, Odessa, which has a Jewish population of approximately 60,000 and a colorful Jewish past, is one of the group's top priorities.

Funded by money from America, the local Jews for Jesus chapter has been able to publish dozens of pamphlets, brochures and books in Russian to hand out to the local population. Many of the chapter's members are Americans who have been sent to the Soviet successor states to continue their missionary work.

The organization refuses to answer questions about its activities in Odessa, so it is difficult to estimate the extent or success of its work.

Though Odessa Rabbi Ishaya Gisser joked that with the amount of money they spend for each Jew they convert, "the Jews for Jesus do pretty bad business in Odessa," the sheer mass of propaganda has had some effect.

In an effort to combat the missionary activity, the rabbi wrote a book for people in the community exposing the aims of the organization.

In striking contrast to the well-funded Jews for Jesus, the local Jewish community is suffering from severe financial difficulties.

A Lack Of Synagogues

Though Odessa was home to 47 synagogues at the turn of the century, the sole synagogue not confiscated and closed by the Communist government collapsed last July. As it stands now, the Jewish community of Odessa is without a place to hold regular services.

Two years ago, the local government returned one synagogue to the Community of Jewish Culture. Last year, a Jewish community center was opened in the building, which also houses the Israel Center, the local Jewish school and a hall where services are held on Shabbat.

A second synagogue was returned to the Jewish community last year. After being used as a warehouse for 70 years, the building is in need of massive repairs before it can be used as a synagogue again.

Though work has begun on the building, the lack of resources in the community to pay for the renovation has delayed the completion of the job, and only the gutted shell of the former synagogue remains standing.

The government has so far refused to discuss returning either the Brodsky Synagogue, which now houses the city archives, or the Glavnaya Synagogue, now a sports club.

Though the Jewish community of Odessa

today faces severe problems, the city has a rich Jewish history. Before World War II, nearly one in three residents of Odessa was Jewish. The Holocaust and emigration reduced the Jewish population from over a quarter of a million to 60,000.

Long regarded as a free-thinking city, Odessa was the site of the first Jewish secular school in the Russian Empire and the birthplace of the first Hebrew newspaper, Hamelitz.

At the turn of the century, many leading Jewish figures lived here, including the Zionist thinker Ahad Ha'am, the Hebrew poet Chaim Nachman Bialik and the historian Simon Dubnow. The Yiddish writer Mendele Mocher S'forim is buried in the city's Jewish cemetery.

Today, the Jewish community is slowly rebuilding after 70 years of forced assimilation by the Soviet government.

But throughout the city, Americans and Russians, wearing their trademark blue sweatshirts with "Jews for Jesus" written in white Hebrew, English and Russian lettering, are handing out literature and continuing their missionary work against the Jewish population.

**AUSTRALIAN TRIAL OF ACCUSED NAZI
RECESSES TO UKRAINE FOR EVIDENCE**

By Jeremy Jones

SYDNEY, Australia, May 4 (JTA) -- The trial of accused Nazi war criminal Ivan Polyukhovitch has taken a temporary recess so the court can make a trip to Ukraine to hear evidence from a witness there.

At least six people, including Supreme Court Justice Brian Cox, representatives of the defense and prosecution, and interpreters, are making the trip to take evidence from a witness, believed to be Polyukhovitch's first wife.

Videotaped evidence from the trip, believed to cost about \$26,000, will be presented to the jury when the officials return.

Polyukhovitch has pleaded not guilty to charges of murder and participation in a 1942 mass murder that took place in the Ukrainian village of Serniki.

The announcement of the delay in the trial, which is already in its seventh week, prompted the jury foreman to ask how long the defense will take to present its case, explaining that "jurors and their employers wanted to know when they could return to work."

After first saying that the time needed by the defense to make its arguments was ruled "by factors beyond my control," senior defense lawyer Michael David predicted it would take another four days to make his case, leading to a mid-May conclusion of the hearing.

Polyukhovitch, who migrated to Australia in 1949, has admitted he lived in the Serniki area during World War II. He has been identified as the gun-toting "Ivanekho" by a number of witnesses.

The current events in Bosnia-Herzegovina and reports of "ethnic cleansing" of Moslem populations by Serbians and Croats have prompted renewed calls here for the government to reopen investigations into Nazi war criminals and other individuals residing in Australia who committed crimes against humanity.

A call by the former director of the Special Investigations Unit, Robert Greenwood, to have the government extend the reach of the law and complete outstanding investigations has received growing support in the news media.

N.Y. ORTHODOX COMMUNITY DIVIDED ON MARCHING IN ISRAEL DAY PARADE

By Larry Yudelson

NEW YORK, May 4 (JTA) -- The Orthodox community here is split on whether to march in the local Salute to Israel Parade on Sunday, following a decision by the parade's organizers to allow the participation of the city's gay and lesbian synagogue.

As part of a compromise worked out last month, the American Zionist Youth Foundation, which organizes the parade, permitted Congregation Beth Simchat Torah to march in the parade under a shared banner with the Association of Reform Zionists of America.

But the compromise failed to mollify all the Orthodox groups. Late last month, the Yeshiva Principals Council of the New York Board of Jewish Education voted to withdraw its schools from the march.

Students from the dozens of New York day schools represented by the council have traditionally made up a major portion of the annual march down Fifth Avenue.

The opposition of the majority of yeshiva principals was echoed by the organizational bodies of mainstream Orthodoxy: the Rabbinical Council of America, the Union of Jewish Congregations of America and the National Council of Young Israel, among others.

But many of the schools most clearly identified with Modern Orthodoxy have decided to march nonetheless. Others have been wavering back and forth, and have not yet made their decisions.

Those Orthodox groups that plan to march say saluting Israel together with non-Orthodox religious denominations and non-religious Zionists never implied an endorsement of those views.

"The Israel Day Parade is a time for all Zionist groups, whether halachic or not, to show their commitment to Israel," said Rabbi Avi Weiss of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

School Already Invested Money

Among those marching are the high schools affiliated with Yeshiva University. A university spokesman had no further comment on the decision.

The grand marshal of the parade, Mexican industrialist Marcos Katz, is a major donor to the university.

One source said Yeshiva's decision to march was made, in part, because of the money that had already been invested in the parade. The school conditioned its participation, according to the source, on Congregation Beth Simchat Torah marching at least half an hour after the Yeshiva contingent.

At the same time, the decision has become the subject of controversy on the Yeshiva University campus, with some of the Talmud faculty leading a fierce opposition to the decision, hoping for a reversal before Sunday.

"It's a fight for the soul and heart of Modern Orthodoxy," said sociologist William Helmreich, whose book, "The World of the Yeshiva," looked at the internal dynamics of Orthodox Judaism.

"If the Modern Orthodox back out, it will mean they're not a power to be reckoned with. The right-wing yeshivas never supported the march to begin with," said Helmreich.

But one rabbi who has proudly carried the

Modern Orthodox banner and argued strongly for Orthodox participation in the broader Jewish community complained bitterly that he has been betrayed by the Reform movement.

"The big winner here is (Reform leader Rabbi Alexander) Schindler and (the anti-Zionist) Satmar," said Rabbi Louis Bernstein, a past president of the Religious Zionists of America.

As an example of how the controversy is splitting the Orthodox community, Bernstein pointed to the Yeshiva of Flatbush. The school is not pulling out of the parade.

But faced with opposition by the leaders of the large Syrian Jewish community in Flatbush, many of the students will not go.

'Vote Against A Homosexual Lifestyle'

Rabbi Moshe Tendler, a member of the Yeshiva University Talmud faculty who advised the day school principals to withdraw, said that the Orthodox withdrawal does not reflect any anti-Zionism.

"No one will interpret our absence as a failure to support Israel. It will be a vote against a homosexual lifestyle," he said.

He explained that marching alongside a homosexual congregation was more problematic than marching with a Reform congregation because the former has broken "with the norms of society."

He admitted, though, that the controversy over gay participation in the St. Patrick's Day parade "has no minor effect on the attitude the halachah takes.

"We don't allow certain laws in Judaism that would seem to be more lenient than in other religions," Tendler said. "Otherwise it would seem the Catholic Church is of greater morality than we are."

One explanation for the wall-to-wall opposition from the Orthodox rabbinic groups could perhaps be found in an article that appeared in a recent issue of Jewish Action, a magazine published by the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America.

The article, "Homosexuality and the Orthodox Jewish Community," argued that by fighting the acceptance of homosexuality, the Orthodox community could perhaps, "halt, in the entire Jewish community, a major trend away from Torah, for the first time" in some 200 years.

"We have an opportunity to shape the community rather than merely respond to its decline; to stop the slippage rather than to resign ourselves to being a minority with reference to still another area of observance," wrote the authors: Rabbi Pinchas Stolper, executive vice president of the Orthodox Union; Rabbi Marc Angel, past president of the Rabbinical Council of America; and Rabbi Hillel Goldberg, a contributing editor of Jewish Action.

ALCOHOLISM HIGH AMONG IMMIGRANTS

TEL AVIV, May 4 (JTA) -- One-third of alcoholics receiving treatment in Israel are recent immigrants from the former Soviet Union, according to a study by the Society for Alcoholism in Israel.

Many of these immigrants are afraid to seek treatment, because people who admitted to alcoholism in the former Soviet Union would lose their job and driver's license, said Dr. Shoshana Weiss of the Alcoholism Prevention Society.