

**INQUIRY INTO FRIENDLY FIRE INCIDENT
INDICATES SOLDIERS WERE DOZING ON DUTY**
By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, May 25 (JTA) -- Initial findings of the investigation into the deaths of four Israeli soldiers in a friendly fire accident in Lebanon indicate the clash was started when two dozing soldiers were awakened by sounds and immediately opened fire.

The paratroop company involved had divided into two groups, one of which lay in ambush at the top of a hill while the other squad proceeded through the wadi below. The company was searching for hostile guerrilla units in the southern Lebanon security zone.

The two squad commanders were in radio contact as the operation continued through rocky terrain, on a dark night with a thick mist.

At one moment, the lower group arranged to move upwards but strayed in the dark. Instead of climbing directly upwards, as they had indicated by radio, they veered to the side.

Two of the men in the hilltop ambush appeared to have dozed off but woke to the sounds of men clambering toward them among the rocks.

The two opened fire, believing the men below to be guerrillas. They killed one of the approaching soldiers and wounded others.

The squad below, edgy because of a previous report by one of its members that he had seen enemy guerrillas, returned the fire with automatic weapons and hand grenades. The two soldiers who had originally opened fire, and another ambusher, were killed in the short firefight, which lasted only a few seconds.

The two squads were only 20 to 30 feet apart at the time of the clash near the village of Kantara on the northern edge of the security zone -- the scene of several clashes with Hezbollah forces in recent weeks.

The paratroop company, plagued by a series of incidents, has now lost nine of its members since their posting to Lebanon at the beginning of April.

A month ago, the company commander, his deputy and another man were all killed in a roadside bomb explosion.

Soldier Dies Playing Russian Roulette

Last week, the medic who had treated the wounded in that explosion died while playing a version of Russian roulette.

The soldier pulled loose the magazine of his automatic rifle -- making it a matter of chance whether the weapon would fire or not -- put the gun to his head and pulled the trigger as his comrades watched.

Psychologists suggested the company members may have been especially edgy because of the previous incidents.

According to reports from Lebanon, Hezbollah activists in the area heard the shooting in the mishap and presumed another "resistance group" was fighting the Israelis.

When Israeli helicopters flew into the area to evacuate the dead, the guerrillas opened fire.

Over a score of Israeli soldiers have been killed during friendly fire incidents in Lebanon and the West Bank in the past two years.

Several medium-rank officers have been disciplined following official inquiry committee investigations. But there have been public complaints that some of the officers disciplined have subsequently been promoted. No senior commanders have been faulted in the inquiries.

**MULTILATERAL TALKS ON ENVIRONMENT
REPORT SOME PROGRESS IN TOKYO**
By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, May 25 (JTA) -- Progress was reported by participants to the Middle East multilateral talks on the environment, which completed another round in Tokyo this week, despite efforts by the Palestinian delegation to politicize the proceedings.

The parties agreed to establish a new group of experts to devise a comprehensive regional strategy for environmental action that would operate in a peaceful Middle East.

While optimistic, the head of the Israeli delegation, Yisrael Peleg, dispelled the notion that there could be any "breakthroughs" in the multilateral talks because they are designed to make incremental progress.

"First we define a common agenda," he said. "Second, we try to find common solutions, and eventually we (begin) to implement those solutions."

"At this point," he continued, "I think we are on the verge of moving from common definitions into projects."

The talks, which were attended by representatives of 40 nations, are one of five multilateral working groups that supplement the bilateral peace negotiations in Washington.

According to reports by Israel's Environment Ministry, the Palestinian delegation injected politics into the Tokyo meetings by raising the issue of deportations and curfews in the administered territories.

The delegation also requested the creation of a national Palestinian agency for the environment.

Peleg urged the parties not to depart from the environmental agenda.

"This is not the business of the multilateral talks," said Peleg, who is the director general of the Environment Ministry. "I will not be side-tracked into responding to the politics of blame."

"This doesn't mean we don't have anything to say about these criticisms," he continued, "but we want to go further in identifying our cooperative projects" in the areas of water pollution, environmental education, desert control and other topics.

The Palestinians were also urged by the Japanese facilitators to focus on projects that could attain immediate results and to stay faithful to the spirit of the working groups rather than veer off the track.

Peleg reported to the conference about Israeli efforts to teach environmental awareness, including the designation in Israel of the year of the environment, slated to begin in August.

He also welcomed a Jordanian endorsement of the Israeli proposal to name 1994 the year of the environment in the Middle East and praised the Jordanians for pushing the importance of environmental education.

POLICE QUESTION SETTLERS ON THREATS TO TAKE UP ARMS

By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, May 25 (JTA) -- Police have questioned right-wing settlers in the territories and Golan Heights in connection with threats made by activists that they would take up arms to resist Israeli withdrawal from these lands.

In the past month, as Israel was engaged in negotiations with Arab parties that could eventually lead to territorial concessions in exchange for peace, some settlers said they would fight against any government-ordered withdrawal.

Such threats are being treated by police as possible criminal incitement to rebellion. The authorities are also investigating reports that some right-wing settlers have begun stockpiling weapons to be used in a future struggle against withdrawal.

Some of the Golan residents who have already been interrogated said they never meant they would take up arms against the Israel Defense Force.

They said they only meant to indicate they would wage a "legitimate" struggle, exercising their democratic rights to remain on the land where they currently live.

Residents of Moshav Neve Ativ in the Golan, some of whom are under investigation, have charged that left-wing figures within the government have been using the police as a political instrument to pressure the Golan residents into submitting to territorial concessions.

DUTCH FOREIGN MINISTER IN MIDEAST URGES PERSONAL RABIN-ASSAD MEETING

By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, May 25 (JTA) -- The Dutch foreign minister said during a visit here this week that a face-to-face meeting between the leaders of Syria and Israel would be the best way to secure a comprehensive peace.

Pieter Hendrik Kooymans made the comment after meeting first with Syrian President Hafez Assad and then with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

"I have the feeling now that the parties are running around in vicious circles," he said Tuesday.

"One expects the other to commit itself to complete withdrawal," Kooymans said. The other, he continued, wants to know "what is to be understood by full peace."

"I've tried to explain to both President Assad and Prime Minister Rabin that I feel -- and in principle Prime Minister Rabin agrees with that -- that some effort must be undertaken to break that vicious circle and to have a real consultation on what is going to be the content of a peace agreement," the foreign minister said.

Kooymans conceded he had "no indication" that prospects were bright for such a direct meeting despite his "pleading" to Assad, but he insisted Syria is greatly invested in the resumption of the peace talks.

D'AMATO AND KEMP SIGN AD WARNING ISRAEL NOT TO COUNT ON U.S. SUPPORT

By Larry Yudelson

NEW YORK, May 25 (JTA) -- Two of Israel's staunchest Republican supporters have warned Israel: Don't count on us.

That is not a position usually taken by Senator Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.) and Jack Kemp, former secretary of housing and urban development under President Bush.

But in an advertisement last month that appeared in two Israeli newspapers, they warned against Israeli reliance on U.S. security guarantees.

The advertisement was placed by Americans for a Safe Israel, a group that opposes territorial concessions by Israel.

Any American promise to intervene in the face of Arab aggression after such concessions were made would be inherently futile, according to the ad.

"It's not hard to imagine what Arab armies could do to Israel while congressmen were debating whether or not to authorize U.S. intervention," said the ad.

At a recent conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, Kemp expressed his support for the policy of the previous Israeli government, which opposed territorial compromise.

D'Amato has also expressed his preference for Likud policies and has been a supporter of Ateret Cohanim, which encourages Jewish settlement in the Moslem quarter of Jerusalem.

An official with the Israeli Embassy in Washington refused to comment on the ad, saying that "this is a domestic American debate."

But the official, Nimrod Barkan, said that the security arrangements being considered as part of any peace treaty "are not guarantees, but seriously constructed security arrangements, such as withdrawals of forces and demilitarized zones."

"There are no American guarantees on the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty," he said.

That treaty was also opposed by Americans for a Safe Israel.

Among the others signing the ad were U.S. Rep. Robert Dornan (R-Calif.); former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Frank Gaffney Jr.; former Assistant Secretary of State Elliot Abrams; and G. Gordon Liddy, a former Nixon aide.

LIKUD'S MILO RUNS FOR TEL AVIV MAYOR

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, May 25 (JTA) -- Likud Knesset Member Ronni Milo, the former police minister, has announced he is running for mayor of Tel Aviv as an independent candidate.

The only other contender to announce his candidacy is the Labor Party's Avigdor Kahalani, a hawkish Knesset member and national war hero.

Milo, a Tel Aviv resident, stressed he would not be running as a candidate of the Likud party, which denounced his announcement.

Milo claimed that Likud party chairman Benjamin Netanyahu supported his candidacy, but local party officials denied it.

The incumbent mayor, Shlomo Lahat, is a Likudnik, but he has announced his intention to retire from political life.

Milo told a news conference that public figures from all sides of the political spectrum would appear on his list as candidates for spots on the City Council.

Because of the Shavuot holiday, the JTA Daily News Bulletin will not be published Thursday, May 27. The Bulletin will also not be published Monday, May 31, because of Memorial Day.

UKRAINE IS FIRST EX-SOVIET REPUBLIC TO SET UP PROCESS FOR PROPERTY RETURN

By Jed Sunden

ODESSA, Ukraine, May 25 (JTA) -- Ukraine has become the first of the Soviet successor states to establish a clear legal process under which Jewish communities should be able to reclaim hundreds of communal properties confiscated during the communist era.

In contrast to the other former Soviet republics, which so far have returned relatively small amounts of Jewish communal property, Ukraine has already returned some 30 buildings to the Jewish community.

Eventually, the Ukrainian statutes could lead to the return of hundreds of Jewish community buildings, such as synagogues and social centers, seized by the former communist government.

While many of the buildings were destroyed, especially during World War II, many others were converted into warehouses, archives, factories and athletic clubs.

The recent passage of a parliamentary law and a presidential decree now allows all established religious communities to file claims with the local government for the return of confiscated property.

Responding to the opportunity, the Union of Jewish Religious Organizations in Ukraine, an umbrella group representing over 50 communities throughout the country, sponsored a two-day seminar last week in Odessa to help individual communities and congregations begin work on the restitution process.

So far, Jewish communities have filed claims on roughly 200 buildings in over 60 different cities. It is expected that hundreds of other buildings will be claimed within the next year.

Yuri Polansky, a Ukrainian lawyer who is working with the union on the restitution process, said it would help those Jewish communities which are trying to rebuild themselves.

"In these difficult times, when so many Jews are leaving, the return of Jewish communal property represents one of the most important opportunities to preserve and save Jewish culture in Ukraine," Polansky said.

Religious Articles To Be Returned Too

In addition to buildings, the law also provides for the return of confiscated religious articles.

Under the communist regime, Torah scrolls, menorahs and other ritual pieces were taken from synagogues and placed in museums, archives or storage facilities, where they still remain. In his address to the conference in Odessa, Rabbi Yaakov Bleich, the chief rabbi of Ukraine and chairman of the union, said: "It is a tragedy that there are still communities without a single kosher Torah scroll, while hundreds are sitting in archives."

Since the seized religious articles have been dispersed throughout the country, it is assumed that they will be much harder to track down than the confiscated buildings.

Starting Jan. 1, 1994, local government offices are scheduled to begin making decisions on all claims put forth by religious communities.

In order to file a claim, the present-day community must document that the building previously belonged to it before the property was confiscated.

As a result of the absence of official re-

cords in most cases, other forms of documentation must be found to support the claim.

The difficulty in documentation is compounded by the fact that the western regions of Ukraine were controlled by Poland, Hungary, Romania and Czechoslovakia until World War II, and the necessary building records still remain in those countries.

At the conference, advisers presented the different ways a community could find information on Jewish property from archives, museums and even such informal sources as guidebooks and postcards.

Though the restitution procedure is backed by presidential decree, it is clear that doubts remain in the Jewish community about the possibility of a large-scale return of communal property.

Some Jewish leaders, believing that the Ukrainian government may just be mouthing sentiments, have adopted a wait-and-see approach.

Other communities are almost completely ignoring the restitution procedure.

"We can hope that communities will overcome the Soviet mentality of complacency, and reclaim what rightfully belongs to the Jewish community," Bleich said.

AZERBAIJANI LEADER TELLS UJA MISSION THAT ALL GROUPS ARE FREE TO WORSHIP

BAKU, Azerbaijan, May 25 (JTA) -- The president of Azerbaijan told a visiting American Jewish delegation that the mainly Moslem republic guaranteed freedom of worship to all of the more than 30 ethnic groups in the country.

"For us, the Christian church, the Jewish synagogue and the Moslem mosque are all sacred because they are houses of God," said President Abulfaz Elchibey.

The president made the remark last week in a meeting with a 40-member United Jewish Appeal delegation -- the largest U.S. delegation to visit his country since it declared its independence from the Soviet Union in 1990.

The leader of the UJA delegation, Carole Solomon of Philadelphia, noted the republic's move toward a democratic government and guarantees of human rights.

However, the delegation reported that the president was unclear on the question of the freedom of Jews of draft age to emigrate from his country.

The UJA delegation visited Azerbaijan on a fact-finding mission for Operation Exodus, the campaign funding the emigration of Jews from the former Soviet Union.

According to Azerbaijani law, all men between the ages of 17 and 28 are banned from leaving the country before completing their military service.

Louba Baredani, the Jewish Agency's emissary in Baku, said, "In practice the government generally allows Jews of military age, who have not yet received draft notices, to leave, provided they go with their families. But those seeking to emigrate alone are not allowed to go."

Ethnic conflicts in the former Soviet republics in the Caucasus mountains, as well as deteriorating economic conditions, are the main factors behind the emigration to Israel of about 500 Jews a month from the region.

The Jewish community in Azerbaijan, which numbered 80,000 in 1989, has been reduced to less than 40,000 today.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES:

MOROCCO'S JEWS FEEL PROTECTED BY KING, BUT ALWAYS WARY OF SHIFTS IN MIDEAST
[Part 2 Of 2]

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

MARRAKECH, Morocco (JTA) -- Morocco's Jews are fiercely proud of their special status in a kingdom that is thoroughly Moslem.

King Hassan II is regarded by the Jews to be as benign and beneficent a ruler as one could hope for in the Arab world, and they are almost uniformly grateful for the protection he and his father, Mohammed V, have afforded them.

"God bless him. The king is second to God," said Fortunato Morenu, a leader of the Rabat Jewish community who hosted a party for a delegation of six rabbis and a journalist visiting the country at the invitation of the king.

Morenu has as many pictures of the king in his home as the most fervent of Lubavitchers have of their rebbe.

In his living-room, Morenu's walls boast a plethora of royal photographs. In addition to the requisite large portrait of Hassan in stately repose, Morenu has hung two photographs of himself bowing to kiss the king's hand, and one of him whispering in the king's ear.

Large photographs of the king adorn the walls of most every home and Jewish organization. In the most popular version, King Hassan is posed regally in a gilt throne, looking pensively into the distance.

Pictures of his two sons are almost as popular, often shots of them in military uniforms.

Publicly, the Jews adore the king without qualification. They are fond of repeating a story about his father, Mohammed V, who refused to turn lists of his Jewish subjects over to the Nazis, saying that there was no difference between one Moroccan and another.

"We are here together (with Moslems) in love, in peace and in brotherhood," said Rabbi Aaron Monsonego, the director of Ozar HaTorah schools in Casablanca and the son of the country's chief rabbi, Yedidiah Monsonego.

King's Relationship With Jews Not Simple

Privately, however, some Moroccan Jews indicate that the relationship between the Jews and the government is not as simple or tranquil as it may first appear.

As an Islamic state, Morocco is officially at odds with Israel.

Moroccans are unable to phone out to Israel, though Israelis can phone in to Moroccans. There is no mail service between the two countries at all, and discussion of Israel is tacitly discouraged.

The only way Israelis can visit Morocco is to divest themselves of their passports at a Moroccan embassy in Western Europe and sign a document stating they were born in the North African kingdom.

The Palestine Liberation Organization is recognized by King Hassan as a government-in-exile and has an embassy in Rabat. When PLO chairman Yasir Arafat comes to meet with the King three or four times a year, he is welcomed as a head of state, said sources.

Morocco's Jews understand that no matter how supportive the government is toward Jews, the Moroccan people's sympathies, as Arabs, lie with the Palestinians.

The Islamic fundamentalism which has wrought havoc in neighboring Algeria and in

Egypt is not a serious concern to the Jews of Morocco, they said.

According to Jacky Kadosh, scion of Marrakech's most prominent Jewish family, it is because Moroccans are, by their nature, moderate Moslems and because the king is revered not only as a head of state and the head of the military, but as a religious leader.

But when political tensions run high, the Jews feel it, some said. During the 1991 Persian Gulf War, for example, "Jews were afraid to leave their houses," said one insider.

According to Albert Weizman, a native Moroccan Jew who oversees the work of the America Jewish Joint Distribution Committee in the country, "it can be uncomfortable to live in a Moslem country, and that's why youth don't want to come back."

Yet according to Kadosh, leader of Marrakech's 100-family Jewish community, the Jews have been well-protected from harm.

During the Persian Gulf War "the chief of police in Marrakech told my father 'you have my phone number and to call if there is any problem at all,'" Kadosh recalled.

Close Attention Has A Flip Side

But the close attention paid by the government to the Jewish community, which most Jews said is for their own protection, has a flip side.

The Jews of Fez hosted a dinner to welcome the delegation from the New York Board of Rabbis on its second night in Morocco.

The rabbis were accompanied throughout their stay by a government employee, a representative of the Moroccan Tourism Office.

She joined the dinner party in Fez and was translating the New Yorkers' comments from English into French.

When the conversation turned to talk of Israel and Jewish security in Morocco, Rabbi Sabagh warned his guests from New York in Hebrew that there was a "trap" among them, and to be careful of what they said in front of the government escort.

In Marrakech, Kadosh has a policy of not allowing the government security guards or escorts that generally accompany Jewish delegations visiting Morocco to eat with the guests in the dining room.

It is important, he told the visiting rabbis, to send the government a message that some places in the Jewish community are inviolable.

For the king, a good relationship with his Jewish subjects is valuable political capital to be used in the unfolding drama of the Middle East peace process.

King Hassan is almost unique in his ability to serve as an intermediary who can speak to both the Arab world and the West, who can boast of a good relationship with the Jews while demonstrating his commitment to the Palestinian, and larger Arab agenda.

An oft-discussed question is what will happen to the Jews when King Hassan II, who is now in his early 60s, dies.

Will the son who succeeds him be as beneficent a ruler over the Jews as King Hassan and his father before him?

"It's a big question," said the JDC's Weizman. "The fate of the Middle East and the fate of the Jews here have always been linked.

"The Jews here pray day and night for the good health of the king -- because they know that no one can protect them like he does."