

**ISRAEL REJECTS DEMJANJUK RULING;
JEWISH GROUPS URGING U.S. TO APPEAL**

By Deborah Kalb

WASHINGTON, Aug. 4 (JTA) -- Jewish organizational leaders and members of Congress are urging the Justice Department to appeal a federal court decision ordering the government to allow John Demjanjuk's return to the United States.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the 6th Circuit ruled Tuesday in Cincinnati that Demjanjuk must be allowed to return in the wake of a decision last week by Israel's Supreme Court overturning his 1988 conviction and death sentence for war crimes committed at the Treblinka death camp in Poland.

The appeals court called Demjanjuk "stateless and homeless," and ruled that "basic humanitarian considerations embodied in the U.S. Constitution require that steps be taken" to ensure that justice is carried out.

In Jerusalem, the Israeli Justice Ministry said that the Cincinnati court's ruling that Demjanjuk should be returned to the United States is not legally binding on the State of Israel.

The ministry said the attorney general would announce on Aug. 11 whether Israel intends to retry Demjanjuk or deport him immediately.

In a separate development, Israel's Supreme Court on Wednesday rejected a request from Demjanjuk's lawyer, Yoram Sheftel, to move up the hearing on whether to retry Demjanjuk.

Sheftel predicted Wednesday that Israel would not try his client on further charges and that Demjanjuk would return to the United States next week.

Originally, Israel had planned to deport the former Cleveland autoworker to his native Ukraine, which had indicated it would allow him to enter the country. But that was before the Cincinnati court cleared the way for his return to the United States.

U.S. Not Sure It Will Appeal

On Tuesday, the Ukrainian ambassador to Israel, Yuri Scherbak, warned that Demjanjuk could be tried for Nazi war crimes if he returned to his native country.

"If Demjanjuk will arrive in Ukraine and if there will be a solid basis for it, the authoritative institutions in Ukraine will open the criminal file against him and carry out the required investigations," he said.

Meanwhile, in the wake of the circuit court ruling, Reps. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) and Nita Lowey (D-N.Y.) joined a host of Jewish groups in calling on the Justice Department to appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court.

The Justice Department was still uncertain Wednesday as to whether it would appeal. A spokeswoman said the department needed to review the written order from the circuit court and evaluate it before making a decision.

The department could appeal either to the Supreme Court, or to an "en banc" panel of 14 judges of the appeals court. Tuesday's decision was made by a smaller three-judge panel.

Last week, following the Israeli Supreme Court ruling, the Justice Department had said it

would bar Demjanjuk from returning to the United States, which extradited him in 1986.

Schumer planned to hand a letter to Deputy Attorney General Philip Heymann on Wednesday afternoon urging the Justice Department to seek a Supreme Court stay of the appeals court decision.

The letter, from Schumer and Lowey to Attorney General Janet Reno, called the appeals court decision "legally and morally insupportable."

Schumer and Lowey argued in their letter that while the Israeli Supreme Court had overturned Demjanjuk's conviction for war crimes at Treblinka, it had nonetheless found there was convincing evidence that he had served as a Nazi guard at the Trawniki training camp and the Sobibor death camp.

"This firm evidence of Demjanjuk's participation in the extermination of Jews clearly and firmly supports the grounds for Demjanjuk's denaturalization," the lawmakers wrote.

In a separate letter to Reno, Lowey wrote that the appeals court ruling "ignores the basis for revoking Demjanjuk's citizenship and is an affront to the countless millions who were killed during the Holocaust."

"The United States must never be a haven for former Nazis," Lowey wrote.

Survivor Attempts Suicide

The head of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Israel, Ephraim Zuroff, was among those expressing outrage over the Cincinnati appeals court decision there Wednesday.

"The reasons that led the American government to strip Demjanjuk of his American citizenship and ultimately extradite him are as valid today as they were in 1981 when he was denaturalized and in 1986 when he was extradited," Zuroff told Israel Radio.

"If anything, the findings of the (Israeli) Supreme Court confirmed the decision of the American government to take away his American citizenship," he said.

"The fact that the court in Cincinnati ignored those findings is, quite frankly, a tremendous slap in the face to the State of Israel."

The progression of events in the Demjanjuk case has been deeply troubling to Holocaust survivors. Anguish over his acquittal last week even led one survivor in the Israeli town of Nahariya to attempt suicide.

Ya'akov Weinberger, 66, was reported to have swallowed more than 40 Valium pills on Monday and was taken to the hospital after being found unconscious on the street.

He reportedly left a letter to his family apologizing for the action, which he said was a result of the pain he felt after Demjanjuk's conviction and death sentence were overturned.

"The truth is, I just cannot face the acquittal," he wrote, according to Israeli news agencies. "I lost six family members in the Holocaust, my parents and four others, and the pain is too much to bear."

Weinberger said his action was prompted by the feeling he was "cut off from everything around him and said he could only think of the terrible injustice done to Holocaust survivors."

(Contributing to this report was JTA correspondent Cynthia Mann in Jerusalem.)

NEWS ANALYSIS:
ISRAELI TOUGHNESS ON LEBANON
MAY HAVE BOOSTED PEACE TALKS

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Aug. 4 (JTA) -- The violence along the Israeli-Lebanese border last week, which some had feared would derail the Middle East peace process, appears to have had the opposite effect.

Israel's strong-handed response to violence in Lebanon and Washington's intervention to bring the exchange of artillery and rocket fire to a halt is now viewed as having given a boost to peace negotiations between Israel and Syria.

With U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher shuttling from one Middle East capital to another this week, Israel's northern border continued to be the center of attention for the second week running -- only this week the focus was on peace, not war.

The security of northern Israel -- both in the border areas facing the hills of Lebanon and in those below the Golan Heights -- is the substance of a re-energized effort by the United States to move the desultory peace process toward concrete progress.

Having brokered a cease-fire in the brief but violent warfare that flared in southern Lebanon last week, Christopher was anxious to seize the momentum by personally mediating between Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and the tough Syrian leader Hafez Assad.

Rabin demonstrated that he, too, could be tough last week. In response to repeated attacks on Israeli soldiers by the Iranian-backed Hezbollah movement, the prime minister directed a vast array of Israeli fire power at hostile targets in Lebanon for five days running.

Paradoxically perhaps, the language of toughness is the one through which Rabin and Assad can make meaningful headway toward a peace settlement.

Seasoned observers recall that it was Rabin, as prime minister in 1975, who first enabled Assad to take control of Lebanon, giving an Israeli "green light" to the deployment of Syrian troops in that war-torn land, in support of beleaguered Christian forces.

At that time, Rabin argued forcefully that Syria's control of Lebanon would redound ultimately to Israel's advantage.

Optimism In Damascus

The Syrian action last week in sharply reining in Hezbollah was, at least on the immediate tactical plane, a convincing vindication of Rabin's prognostication of nearly two decades ago.

The fact that Syria acted as it did in defiance of Iran, Hezbollah's chief backer, is the single most encouraging aspect of the entire episode, say Israeli officials.

After traveling to Egypt on Monday to meet with President Hosni Mubarak, Christopher met at length with Rabin on Tuesday and with Assad on Wednesday. He was due back in Jerusalem on Thursday for further talks, and some predicted he would stay in the region longer.

Israeli sources said Rabin had armed the U.S. secretary with a "new message" for the Syrian president.

Following the meeting with Christopher, Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa was optimistic about the peace talks.

"We believe that the talks Secretary Chris-

topher has had today may salvage the peace process," he told reporters in Damascus.

He added that had the Israeli shelling of southern Lebanon continued, they "would have buried the peace process in the rubble."

While in Jerusalem on Tuesday, Christopher sought to bring Israel's dovish president, Ezer Weizman, into the decision-making loop. In a private conversation at the president's residence, the secretary reportedly argued that Israel needs to offer "a little more" to the Palestinians -- in order to enable Assad to move ahead on his front.

While the Israeli-Syrian track in the peace negotiations is clearly in the forefront of the current diplomacy, the secretary has not abandoned the Israeli-Palestinian track. This despite the grief and anger that the bombardment of southern Lebanon caused to the Palestinian representatives, with whom Christopher met Tuesday.

According to Israeli sources, however, the secretary feels hamstrung by what he senses to be a lack of coordination between the Palestinian leadership in the territories -- with whom he holds his meetings -- and the Palestine Liberation Organization in Tunis, with whom he has maintained indirect contact through Egypt.

Surprise Visit To Lebanon

Foreign Minister Shimon Peres is pressing for a partial deal in which the Palestinians and the Israelis would sign a declaration of principles and immediately begin implementing an autonomy plan in the Gaza Strip and part of the West Bank.

Christopher reportedly has promised the Palestinians that signing such a declaration would set the "five-year clock" running -- toward the second phase of talks on the permanent status of the territories that is prescribed in the Camp David accords and documents establishing the framework for the 1991 Madrid peace conference.

But Israeli sources say the Palestinians' insistence on introducing Jerusalem as an immediate negotiating issue is leading the talks into a dead end.

On Wednesday, Christopher made a surprise trip from Syria to Lebanon, where he discussed the peace process with President Elias Hrawi, Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri and Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri.

With security an obvious concern, Christopher and his aides traveled in armored transports that included two trucks with machine guns mounted on their roofs.

The United States, like Israel, has for years been pressing Lebanese authorities to curb the guerrilla activities of Hezbollah, the only faction allowed to keep its arms at the end of 15 years of civil war in 1990.

The Lebanese, in turn, maintain they cannot disarm Hezbollah until Israel withdraws from southern Lebanon.

But since the cease-fire went into effect last weekend, the Syrian-backed Lebanese have been dispatching troops to the south in what many observers see as a major blow to Hezbollah influence in the area.

After his meeting with the Lebanese, Christopher said that Beirut appeared ready to continue the 21-month-old peace talks with Israel.

"I want once again not to over-build expectations," the secretary was quoted as telling reporters in the Lebanese town of Zahle, "but I think we have salvaged the peace process, and I think we will be able to resume the discussions, hopefully energized by these events."

DAMASCUS STAND ON SYRIAN JEWS GREETED IN U.S. WITH SKEPTICISM

By Deborah Kalb

WASHINGTON, Aug. 4 (JTA) -- Jewish leaders here reacted with skepticism and disappointment to Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa's comment this week that Syrian Jews are as free to travel as any other Syrian citizens.

Jewish groups and U.S. government officials have raised concerns that, despite a pledge last year from Syrian President Hafez Assad to allow free travel for Jews, very few of Syria's 1,400 Jews have received travel visas in recent months.

Sharaa made his statement at a joint news conference Wednesday in Damascus with visiting U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher.

In response to a question, the Syrian foreign minister said that "free travel is allowed to all Syrian citizens, and certainly including the Syrian Jews. And (there is) no discrimination among the Syrian citizens, regardless of their religion.

"And if there is any bureaucratic difficulties, it applies to all," he said. "I want to make clear: We can not give a privilege to a certain class of people in our country, and this is a commitment by the Syrian government, which we are not going to back away from."

Rep. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.), head of a congressional task force on Syrian Jewry, criticized Sharaa's remarks in a statement Wednesday.

"This blatant lie is just one more attempt by Assad to deceive the world into thinking that Syria has changed its ways," Schumer said.

And Alice Harary, president of the Council for the Rescue of Syrian Jews, said Sharaa's statement was "not very encouraging."

"The bureaucratic difficulties which were to have been lifted persist, with only three to five permissions being issued each week," she said.

Denies Supplying Hezbollah

The Clinton administration has raised the issue of Syrian Jews' ability to travel with the Syrian government.

In a letter to 73 senators last month, President Clinton said his administration would not let the Syrian Jews' plight "slip from our attention."

Syria had originally announced a free-travel policy for Jews in April 1992, reversing its older practice of barring its Jewish population from leaving the country in family groups.

But between last October and January 1993, none of the 1,400 Jews still remaining in Syria were granted travel visas. And in recent months, only a few Jews per week have received visas.

On another topic, Sharaa denied Wednesday that Syria was serving as a transfer point for Iranian weapons bound for Lebanon.

Last week, Rep. Tom Lantos (D-Calif.) said he had information indicating that Syria was involved in shipping Iranian weapons to the Shi'ite fundamentalist Hezbollah movement in Lebanon, just prior to the recent upsurge in attacks on Israeli troops.

"The information that the congressman has got is absolutely false," Sharaa said.

In Congress this week, a Senate subcommittee approved language restricting U.S. aid to Syria until the president determines it has met specific requirements, including ending support for terrorists and allowing free emigration.

The language, included in the subcommittee markup of the fiscal year 1994 foreign aid authorization bill, was also in last year's legislation.

WEDDING BELZ RING IN JERUSALEM AT MASSIVE HASIDIC CELEBRATION

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Aug. 4 (JTA) -- The largest wedding ever held in the modern history of Israel ended joyously at dawn Wednesday, as the last of 30,000 guests departed from the 429-ft.-long tent erected for the occasion in the Jerusalem Hasidic suburb of Kiryat Belz.

Aharon Mordechai, 17, only son and heir of Yissachar Dov Rokeach, the rebbe of Belz, had taken as his bride Sarah-Leah Lemberger, daughter of a devout but little-known rabbi, Shimon Lemberger, from the northern township of Kiryat Ata.

"She is her own 'yichus,'" jubilant Belzer Hasidim told outsiders, referring to her family heritage. "Our rebbe wanted a student at one of our seminaries, who has all the qualities and merits."

Sarah-Leah and her new husband were married by the groom's grandfather, the 84-year-old rebbe of Vishnitz, on a huge platform-chupah under the stars.

Rabbi Eliezer Shach, 94, leader of the non-Hasidic fervently Orthodox Jews in Israel, came from Bnei Brak to bless the young couple under the chupah.

For the Belz Hasidic community, the second-largest in Israel after Ger, the wedding marked the high-point in a process of rapid -- in the Hasidim's view, miraculous -- recovery from near-total annihilation in the Holocaust.

The previous rebbe, Aharon Rokeach, escaped to Palestine through Hungary, a broken man, to head a sect that had been reduced from tens of thousands to a few hundred.

Now the wedding brought together thousands of Hasidim from Belzer branches around the world and many thousands more in Israel itself.

One-and-a-half tons of gefilte fish and 39,000 gallons of soft drinks were among the items on the caterer's menu in what was surely the largest meal eaten in the city since Temple times.

Earlier in the week, reviving a "rebbeish" tradition, the Belzer rebbe gave a prenuptial feast for the poor of Jerusalem. Yissachar Dov himself poured the drinks and served the food for the dozens of beggars and tramps gathered in the Belzer yeshiva, and handed each of them 200 shekels, the equivalent of about \$70.

MINOR EARTHQUAKES ROCK ISRAEL

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Aug. 4 (JTA) -- A series of earthquakes has rocked Israel this past week, with 13 quakes and some 100 minor tremors registered on Tuesday alone.

The quakes caused neither casualties nor damage, other than knocking pictures off walls.

The quakes on Tuesday, which was the fourth day of tremors, ranged in intensity from under 3 on the Richter scale up to 5.8. They were centered in the Gulf of Aqaba.

The epicenters of the tremors were in the earthquake-prone Syria-East Africa Rift, which includes the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon, the Jordan River Valley and the Red Sea into East Africa.

The quakes and some of the very minor tremors were felt throughout much of central and southern Israel, including Jerusalem, Beersheba, Eilat and Tel Aviv.

JEWISH GROUPS HAIL CLINTON STANCE ON POSSIBLE USE OF FORCE IN BOSNIA

By Deborah Kalb

WASHINGTON, Aug. 4 (JTA) -- A coalition of Jewish and other religious groups supporting stronger U.S. action in Bosnia-Herzegovina praised the president this week for his decision to support the use of U.S. air power in the former Yugoslav republic under certain circumstances.

The American Task Force for Bosnia, a coalition of Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Arab American and other groups, said in a statement Tuesday that it welcomed Clinton's statement.

Last week, the president said that, if asked, the United States would use American air power to protect U.N. troops in Sarajevo.

This week, NATO officials began military preparations for possible air strikes against Serbian forces in Bosnia.

Jewish groups have been active in lobbying the administration to take stronger action to protect the Bosnian Muslims, including the use of military force if necessary.

In recent weeks, some in the Jewish community have voiced frustration with what they see as a weak and vacillating administration policy toward the crisis in the former Yugoslav republic.

The administration has voiced support for stronger measures at various points, only to back away. Clearly, task force members are hoping this latest round of statements from the administration is a preview of something more substantial.

The Serbian policy of "ethnic cleansing," directed primarily at Bosnia's Muslims, has had special resonance for American Jews, who see echoes of the Nazi Holocaust in the Serbians' attempt to rid whole geographic areas of Muslims.

The ethnic unrest in Bosnia has united Jewish and Arab American groups, often on opposing sides of a variety of issues, in a cause.

The coalition's statement Tuesday warned of the consequences to Europe if Muslim-controlled Sarajevo were allowed to fall.

"The fall of Sarajevo, if allowed by Western inaction, would have grave consequences for the future stability of Europe and U.S. interests in the region," the statement said.

The Jewish groups signing the statement were the American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Congress, B'nai B'rith International and the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.

JEWISH DEMOCRATIC ACTIVISTS TAKE AIM AT RELIGIOUS RIGHT DURING CONFERENCE

By Deborah Kalb

WASHINGTON (JTA) -- The so-called "religious right" is becoming a powerful force in both local and national politics, a group of Jewish Democratic activists was told this week.

Experts from religious and constitutional liberties groups told participants in a conference sponsored by the National Jewish Democratic Council that the Christian Coalition, a religious right organization sponsored by the Rev. Pat Robertson, could have 1 million members by the end of the year.

The NJDC, a group formed to strengthen ties between the Jewish community and the Democratic Party, has become involved in the effort to combat the agenda of groups like Robertson's.

The religious right has a variety of goals, including support of school prayer and opposition to both abortion rights and gay rights, that are

at odds with positions taken by the majority of the American Jewish community.

In recent months, the NJDC has been organizing an ad-hoc coalition of over 40 groups who oppose this agenda, including religious, pro-choice, education and moderate Republican groups.

Arthur Kropp, president of the constitutional liberties group People for the American Way, told the conference Sunday that the religious right movement had changed and grown compared to its 1980s configuration.

In the 1980s, he said, the movement consisted primarily of prominent television evangelists, without a real political organization behind them.

Now, he said, there is a strong and successful grass-roots effort on the state and local level, backing up the national visibility of Robertson and other religious leaders.

In one day recently, Kropp said, the Christian Coalition signed up 27,000 new members.

The movement succeeds in the current climate, Kropp said, by feeding on American fears about loss of control over their surroundings.

"The religious right asks the right questions" about issues of concern to Americans, Kropp said. He added, however, that the movement "almost always has the wrong answers."

The groups have learned how to work within the political system, often placing candidates in local school board races that receive little attention and then working up from there, he said.

"We don't have to be afraid of them," Kropp told the approximately 120 NJDC members gathered for the speech. "If we run the other way, it is at our peril."

He urged NJDC members to get involved in local races and to encourage young people to participate in the political process.

Among the political races concerning the NJDC is the contest in Virginia for lieutenant governor.

The NJDC released a statement in June criticizing Republican nominee Mike Farris for his ties to the Moral Majority and other religious right groups.

James Dunn, a Baptist minister who serves as executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee, warned NJDC members that the "hard-line leadership" of the religious right sees Jews as either "pawns or prospects."

Dunn urged closer coordination among opponents of the religious right to combat the latter's appeal.

The NJDC, a relatively new group, was founded in 1990 in an effort to involve more Jews in Democratic politics after many Jews drifted toward the Republican party in the 1980s.

It now has 4,000 members in 13 chapters and committees around the country.

With a Democratic president in the White House, the group is shifting its focus and adjusting to its insider status.

Several NJDC officials have taken high positions in the Clinton administration, including NJDC vice chair Stuart Eizenstat, recently named U.S. ambassador to the European Community.

Eizenstat, a former Carter administration official, spoke at Sunday's dinner session, arguing that the NJDC was a needed counterweight to the "eroding of our social conscience" among American young people, including young Jews.

Prominent administration officials including Transportation Secretary Federico Pena and Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala addressed the group Monday.