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**ISRAEL AND SYRIA TOUGHEN RHETORIC,  
DIMMING CHANCES OF EARLY PROGRESS**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Oct. 18 (JTA) -- Israel and Syria are engaged in an escalating war of words.

Syrian President Hafez Assad, caught off guard by Israel's secret negotiations with the Palestine Liberation Organization in Norway, initially gave only conditional approval to the product of those talks: the interim self-rule agreement signed last month in Washington.

But in recent days, Assad has grown openly critical of the agreement and has maintained publicly that the PLO broke ranks with the Arab bloc in forging a separate peace with Israel.

In turn, Israeli leaders, far from attempting to mollify Damascus, have dug in their heels and are demanding that Syria clearly define the nature of the peace it wants to establish with Israel.

Failing that, say the Israelis, there can be little hope of progress on the Syrian negotiating track.

The heat on this ongoing verbal battle was turned up this week when Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa declared that his country would boycott the Washington peace talks if they remained "sterile."

In response, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin declared that he would not be "threatened" by Syrian demands.

Rabin told reporters during a visit to Nazareth on Sunday that Israel is committed to the negotiations with Syria and would accommodate itself to any change in timetable that Damascus requested.

But he added that reaching peace with the Palestinians "does not mean that we must automatically reach an agreement with other parties, if the conditions are not yet ripe."

Rather than offer any concessions to Damascus, Rabin stated bluntly, "Syria need peace just as much as Israel does."

Foreign Minister Shimon Peres directed his own barbs at Damascus on Sunday, saying in an Israel Television interview that Syria "cannot disturb the implementation of the Israeli-PLO agreement."

**Another Visit By Christopher?**

Israeli policy-makers seem to be interested in delaying the hour of truth with Syria until after Israeli public opinion gets adjusted to the agreement with the PLO. They fear that Israelis may find it too difficult to swallow both agreements -- which will involve territorial concessions -- in one blow.

With the Syrians promising to boycott the next round of talks in Washington and the Israelis retorting that they will not be bullied by the Syrians, many here believe that Washington should step in -- and quickly.

According to predictions by Israeli sources, U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher is likely to shuttle between Jerusalem and Damascus next month in a bid to put new momentum into the Israeli-Syrian track of the peace process.

Dennis Ross, Christopher's special coordinator for the peace talks, was making his own trip this week to various Middle East capitals,

with a scheduled stop in Jerusalem on Wednesday followed by a visit to Damascus.

Ross may also head to Tunis for talks with the PLO during his trip, say U.S. officials.

In Washington, the State Department said one purpose of Ross' trip is to ascertain whether or not another set of talks in Washington is the preferred next step for the peace process.

Department spokesman Mike McCurry told reporters Monday that both the Israelis and Palestinians had expressed "strong interest in resuming discussions here in Washington."

But for the moment, the Clinton administration has decided to defer the next round of the Washington talks until after Thanksgiving.

The Americans want to avoid a situation in which one of the parties fails to turn up at a scheduled round of negotiations.

**No Agreement Before Next Spring?**

The Israelis and Palestinians are meanwhile pushing ahead with their negotiations to implement the self-rule accord.

Indeed, the impressive singlemindedness on the part of these two new peace partners apparently has triggered a sense of suspicion, if not outright hostility, among policy-makers in Syria.

Damascus is worried that the Rabin government wants to keep the Syrian negotiations "on the back burner" while proceeding to implement its pact with the PLO.

To the Americans, and also to the Egyptians, the Israeli leaders profess themselves to be as intent and serious today on making peace with Syria as they were before the breakthrough in Oslo.

But Rabin says the Syrians have to this day not specified their readiness to establish a "full peace" with Israel -- a peace marked by open borders as well as by full diplomatic, commercial and cultural relations.

Only when he is satisfied that this is what Assad intends will the Israeli prime minister be prepared to negotiate the extent and terms of an Israeli withdrawal on the Golan Heights.

The Egyptian government, which sees itself fulfilling a key middleman role, is seeking to assure both Israel and Syria of the other's commitment and sincerity.

Significantly though, even the Egyptians recognize that the frenetic pace of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations will inevitably take a toll on the Israeli-Syrian track.

In an interview on Israel Television this week, Egyptian top presidential aide Osama el-Baz urged Israel to move ahead in its negotiations with Syria.

But he nonetheless acknowledged that a realistic target date for a declaration of principles between the two countries would be "early spring."

That time frame would probably disappoint the American secretary of state and his Middle East peace team, who are looking for quicker progress.

But it represents a hardheaded assessment, by a central and seasoned player in regional diplomacy, of what is attainable.

(Contributing to this report was JTA correspondent Deborah Kalb in Washington.)

## SECRETARY OF STATE SOLICITS VIEWS OF JEWISH LEADERS ON MIDEAST POLICY

By Deborah Kalb

WASHINGTON, Oct. 18 (JTA) -- As the Middle East peace process heads into a critical period, Secretary of State Warren Christopher has been reaching out to American Jewish leaders, inviting them to small meetings to discuss U.S. policy toward the region.

The meetings are coming at a time of great hope and continued worries for American Jewry.

As most American Jews rejoice over the recent Israeli-Palestinian accord, there are still important questions in their minds about the future shape of the Middle East peace process, Syria's role in the talks and the apparent lack of progress in dismantling the Arab economic boycott against Israel.

On Monday, Christopher met separately with two small groups of Jewish leaders to discuss the peace process, the boycott, U.S. loan guarantees to Israel and Iran's weapons development program.

And last week, the secretary met with two top officials of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

The meetings were all at Christopher's request.

A State Department official said Monday that the sessions were part of a series of meetings with interested parties in which the department sought to explain U.S. policy, especially in light of the recent Israeli-Palestinian agreement.

Smaller meetings, the official said, enabled the secretary to have a wide range of views.

But the official said it was doubtful more such meetings would occur in the very near future, because the secretary is leaving the country Wednesday.

### Progress On Boycott Possible

A half-hour meeting Monday morning included David Harris, executive director of the American Jewish Committee; Linda Kamm and Richard Gunther, co-presidents-elect of Americans for Peace Now; and journalist John Wallach, who founded the "Seeds of Peace" camp for Israeli and Arab youths.

The secretary also held a 45-minute session Monday afternoon with Lester Pollack, chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations; Malcolm Hoenlein, the umbrella group's executive vice chairman; Melvin Salberg, national chairman of the Anti-Defamation League; and Abraham Foxman, ADL's national director.

According to Pollack, who served as the delegation's spokesman, Christopher said the peace process was moving along, as demonstrated by the fact that envoy Dennis Ross was in the region.

Pollack said Christopher also pledged the administration would continue pushing Arab countries to end their economic boycott. The boycott affects both Israel and companies doing business with the Jewish state.

The secretary expressed optimism that positive developments would occur before the next Arab League meeting, where Arab countries could add more companies to the boycott list.

On the topic of U.S. loan guarantees to Israel, the secretary said the United States and Israel were trying to work out a way to redefine legislative requirements that resulted in Washington slapping a \$437 million penalty on Israel's second \$2 billion installment of loan guarantees.

## AMERICAN JEWISH GROUP CONVEYS SUPPORT FOR PLO PACT TO ISRAEL

By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, Oct. 18 (JTA) -- Leaders of one of the biggest American Jewish umbrella groups have met with Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and other Israeli leaders to be briefed on the peace process and to convey a message of strong support from their constituency back home.

"We told Rabin that polls show 80 percent plus (of American Jews) support the decision to go down this road with a mixture of hope and anxiety," said Maynard Wishner, chair of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council.

"Being here and meeting with the people charged with trying to implement the (Israeli-Palestinian) agreement helps us understand the complexity" of the process, said Martin Raffel, associate executive vice chair of NJCRAC and director of its Israel Task Force.

He said he gave Israelis "credit for recognizing the partnership" with American Jewry and their obligation to share information. Now, he said, "we are in a position to help interpret" to NJCRAC's constituency the challenges ahead.

Wishner and Raffel were part of the 17-member delegation that delivered to the Israeli leadership an organizational policy statement of strong support for recent developments in the peace process. The statement was devised after two days of intensive meetings with representatives from all over the United States.

In Israel, delegates met with political leaders, strategic, military and economic analysts, diplomats, industrialists, administrators in the territories and members of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

### 'Things Don't Happen Immediately'

They were impressed, they said, by the scope and complexity of the details that have yet to be worked out. But they were also impressed by the "seriousness of purpose" to make the agreement work by "those on the front lines" on both sides.

"Our charge is to communicate to our constituency it is a long process," said Lynn Lyss, who will succeed Wishner as NJCRAC chair.

She said she was concerned that many have not looked "beyond the handshake" of Sept. 13 between Rabin and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat and would be disappointed when "things don't happen immediately."

Her caution was echoed by Wishner. "We have tried to build an awareness that support for the process means being prepared to encounter difficult issues, and that not everything is in the hands of the Israelis," he said.

The future may be fraught with difficulties, said Wishner, who added that he believes both sides need more "confidence-building" measures.

He said he told the Palestinians with whom he met that he has been disappointed by the absence of some such measures following Arafat's pledge to renounce violence and to recognize Israel's right to exist.

Lawrence Rubin, NJCRAC executive vice chairman, said the umbrella group is planning a conference next month "to educate and energize its constituency to educate communities" about the peace process.

The leaders said they would continue meanwhile to reinforce the efforts by the United States to advance the peace process.

## JEWISH PRO-CHOICE GROUPS FIND ABORTION BATTLES ARE NOT OVER

By Deborah Kalb

WASHINGTON, Oct. 18 (JTA) -- When President Clinton came into office in January as the first pro-choice president in years, many in the Jewish community who had long supported abortion rights were thrilled.

And when Clinton, in his first week in office, threw out many Reagan-Bush era laws restricting abortions in various circumstances, there were outpourings of joy from these Jewish abortion-rights advocates.

With the exception of some Orthodox groups, much of the organized Jewish world has taken a strong stand in favor of a woman's right to choose abortion to end a pregnancy.

But now these Jewish organizational officials are finding that, even with a pro-choice president in the White House, not all the abortion battles are going their way.

At the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue, members of Congress are continuing to enact laws that concern Jewish officials.

Recently, both houses of Congress voted to retain the so-called Hyde Amendment, allowing federal funding of abortions for poor women only in the case of rape or incest.

The amendment is one of the longtime pet hates of the pro-choice movement.

The National Council of Jewish Women, a group that has been in the forefront of Jewish pro-choice activism, released a statement following the recent Senate passage of the Hyde Amendment, calling the 59-40 vote "a grave injustice to women on Medicaid."

Adoption of the Hyde Amendment was "a significant loss," said Mark Pelavin, Washington representative for the American Jewish Congress, another pro-choice group actively lobbying members of Congress.

### Biggest Abortion Battle Yet To Come

"When Clinton was first elected, there was a tendency to be complacent," said Sammie Moshenberg, NCJW's Washington representative.

But pro-choice forces soon "discovered that it was still an uphill battle. It was a help to have a friend in the White House, but you're still dealing with Congress" which reflects a variety of opinions on the abortion issue, Moshenberg added.

However, both Pelavin and Moshenberg pointed out that Congress has passed some pro-choice measures this session, reversing years of legislation restricting abortion.

For example, Congress recently approved legislation lifting a 10-year ban on federal workers' ability to choose insurance programs that include abortion coverage.

And both houses of Congress approved a conference bill last week overturning a longtime ban on the District of Columbia's ability to use its own funds to pay for Medicaid abortions.

The Senate and House of Representatives are scheduled to vote shortly on the conference report.

Still, pro-choice Jewish organizational officials say they are not relaxing their lobbying efforts.

They point out that one of the biggest abortion battles -- on abortion's inclusion in the Clinton health care reform package -- is looming just around the corner.

## PANEL FORMED TO RE-EXAMINE ISRAELI TIES TO THE DIASPORA

By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, Oct. 18 (JTA) -- Foreign Minister Shimon Peres has launched a drive to examine and prepare for the changing relationship between Israel and Diaspora Jews, according to Labor Party veteran Uri Gordon.

Gordon, head of the immigration and absorption department of the Jewish Agency for Israel, told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency this week that Peres has tapped him to head a new committee dedicated to the effort.

The committee is being formed, according to a letter from Peres to Gordon, partly in recognition of the "significant transformation" of Diaspora Jewry in recent decades as well as the lack of a special connection felt by Israelis toward Diaspora Jews.

In the Diaspora, "the generation that lived through the horrors of the Holocaust and saw the birth of the State of Israel is slowly aging," Peres wrote. At the same time, "the Jewish communities are increasingly occupied with their own internal problems."

Meanwhile, "Israeli society is distancing itself from Diaspora Jewry," Peres wrote.

But the foreign minister's brainchild is also, and perhaps more urgently, a product of Israel's posture "on the threshold of an era of peace in the Middle East."

"The realities of such a peace will completely alter the relationship between Israel and the Diaspora," Peres wrote.

On one hand, the diminished threat to Israel's security will reduce the "binding force" between the two Jewries, "while, on the other hand, many new opportunities for economic and spiritual cooperation" will surface.

The Israeli government was under fire for many months following its election last year for failing to cultivate good relations with Diaspora Jewry. Peres' new committee appears to be part of a recent campaign of more careful diplomacy.

Meanwhile, Gordon conceded the initiative is only one of many dedicated to the complex Israel-Diaspora connection. Indeed, he is one of the founders of another well-established group with the same purpose, the Israel Forum.

But Gordon says this is not business as usual. "I'm not talking only about a new project," he said. "I am talking of a new conception, a completely fresh look at the problem."

Gordon stressed that the endeavor would be independent, "without connection to the WZO or the Jewish Agency." Eytan Bentsur, the senior deputy director-general of the Foreign Ministry, has been appointed to serve with Gordon as co-chair of the committee.

### ISRAELI PRICE INDEX UP 1 PERCENT

TEL AVIV, Oct. 18 (JTA) -- Israel's cost-of-living index rose by 1 percent in September, ending any chances of limiting this year's annual inflation rate to a single-digit figure.

On the basis of the 1 percent increases seen during the last two months, economists are forecasting an 11 percent inflation rate for 1993.

The Central Bureau of Statistics said that the cost of a standard basket of goods and service for the average urban family of four, including housing costs, now stands at 5,025 shekels a month, or \$1,757.

# **HUNGARIAN ANTI-SEMITIC POLITICIAN SHOWS UP AT ANTI-NAZI COMMEMORATION** By Agnes Bohm

BUDAPEST, Oct. 18 (JTA) -- A Hungarian politician known for his anti-Semitic diatribes made a surprise appearance last week at a ceremony commemorating victims of the Nazis.

During his appearance, Istvan Csurka went out of his way to shake the hands of Jewish leaders in attendance and to lay a wreath to the victims.

Istvan Zoltai, the leader of the Hungarian Jewish community, told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency the handshakes were like that between Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat.

Zoltai said he was very surprised that Csurka showed up.

Csurka has used a radio program and a ruling party newspaper to repeatedly blame Jews for Hungary's problems.

Csurka was among several Hungarian political figures attending the Oct. 14 ceremony, which was held at Hungary's only monument to Jewish victims of the Nazi-appointed Prime Minister Ferenc Szalasi, who came to power Oct. 15, 1944.

Szalasi, leader of the fascist group Arrow Cross, was responsible for the murders of thousands of Jews, many of whom were thrown into the Danube River.

The monument is situated on the river bank.

Zoltai, the Jewish leader, expressed hope that Csurka's presence at the commemoration represented a change of mind and that his attitude toward the Jewish community would improve in the future.

But Rabbi Tamas Raj, who is a member of the Hungarian Parliament, told JTA he feared that Csurka, who is up for election next year, attended the event for purely political reasons.

No price is too steep for Csurka to get re-elected, said Raj.

Csurka was formerly the second-highest-ranking politician of the ruling Democratic Forum.

Last December, after Hungarian Jews, the World Jewish Congress and American lawmakers registered repeated concern over Csurka's blatant anti-Semitism and called for his political ouster, Prime Minister Jozsef Antall demoted Csurka from his position as vice president of the ruling Democratic Forum.

In June, Antall expelled Csurka and four of his followers from the party's parliamentary faction. In July, Csurka formed his own party.

## **GERMAN COURT ACQUITS 2 OF ARSON**

PARIS, Oct. 18 (JTA) -- A court in the eastern German city of Potsdam has acquitted two skinheads of setting a fire that destroyed a Holocaust museum at the former Sachsenhausen concentration camp on the eve of Rosh Hashanah 1992.

The court released the two because of "lack of evidence." The state of Brandenburg had requested the court hand down stiff sentences and has decided to appeal the acquittals.

When they were arrested last year, the two skinheads first acknowledged that they had taken part in the arson, together with some two score neo-Nazis. However, they then denied involvement.

Ignatz Bubis, president of the German Jewish community, has called the verdict "incomprehensible."

# **GENERAL ASSEMBLY WON'T CONDEMN ISRAEL FOR TIES WITH SOUTH AFRICA** By Larry Yudelson

UNITED NATIONS, Oct. 18 (JTA) -- Breaking a tradition that has been in existence for about 20 years, the General Assembly will not condemn Israel this year for its cooperation with the "apartheid regime" of South Africa.

The decision not to censure Israel for its ties with South Africa comes as the result of several contributing factors, including a vastly different South Africa and Israel's new relations with the Palestine Liberation Organization.

The group of African states that had moved annually to blast Israel for its relations with South Africa decided not to support the resolution after meeting with the PLO's permanent U.N. observer, Nasser al-Kidwa.

Kidwa advised the African delegates that the condemnation had no place in light of the changes that have taken place in both South Africa and the Middle East.

Without this support for the traditional anti-Israel resolution, it seems unlikely that any state will even offer the anti-Israel decree, which had been renewed annually for years.

Israel's U.N. ambassador, Gad Yaacobi, said the change marks "the first fruits" of Israel's efforts to eliminate long-standing critical resolutions at the United Nations.

It also follows the rapprochement between the United Nations and South Africa now that that country has scheduled its first non-racial elections.

So markedly positive have been changes in South Africa that South African President F.W. de Clerk and African National Congress leader Nelson Mandela were just named co-recipients of the Nobel Peace Prize.

## **INTERPOL NAMES ISRAELI TO POSITION AT BEHEST OF AGENCY'S ARAB MEMBERS** By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Oct. 18 (JTA) -- Interpol, the international police network, has elected an Israeli to a position on its executive committee for the first time in the agency's history.

The election is largely due to the support of the agency's Arab members, which comes following the new relations established between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization.

On Sunday, Israeli Police Inspector General Rafi Peled formally announced that Deputy Commander Etti Yevnin had been elected to the post. The election is conducted by secret ballot.

Yevnin is not only the first Israeli member on Interpol's executive committee but also its first-ever woman member. She becomes one of two members from Asia on the committee.

Peled said Yevnin, who is head of international relations for the Israeli police, beat out the Australian inspector general and a senior Jordanian police officer for the post.

Police Commander Yossi Levi, who speaks fluent Arabic, negotiated the support of the Persian Gulf states, Egypt, Morocco and apparently Syria for the Israeli police officer.

Levi said: "We knew we had a chance to win but were still astonished by the support we received from the Arab nations."

In return, Israel helped gather support for Egypt to represent Africa on the executive committee.