

VOL. 71 - 76th YEAR
WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 8, 1993
NO. 229

CHRISTOPHER TRIP EASES TONE OF ISRAELI-SYRIAN RELATIONSHIP

By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, Dec. 7 (JTA) -- This week's visit by U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher may have helped change the atmosphere between Syria and Israel, but it is far too soon to talk about any breakthroughs, observers say.

What is clear is that Christopher has given Syrian President Hafez Assad a way to return to the negotiating table with Israel, they say.

Christopher has also prodded Assad into making some unusual goodwill gestures that Israel cannot ignore and that show a clear investment in the peace process, even if some believe his main motivation is winning U.S. favor.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin lauded as significant Syria's decision to allow a U.S. congressional delegation to investigate the fate of Israel's missing servicemen, who are believed to be in Lebanon.

The prime minister also welcomed Syria's agreement to grant exit visas to Syrian Jews.

Rabin made it clear, however, that Christopher did not ask Israel for new gestures or concessions, which doubtless came as a relief.

Expectations about the secretary's visit were deliberately played down. Christopher's only stated goal was to inject new life into the moribund peace talks between Israel and Syria, which Syria broke off months ago, claiming that Israel was not serious.

In fact, Israel had not especially welcomed Christopher's mission at this time.

Officials are preoccupied with working out the details of the autonomy accord with the Palestine Liberation Organization, scheduled to go into effect Dec. 13, and the violence that remains stubbornly attached to it.

They also have shied away from the prospect of U.S. pressure to move faster than they feel is wise regarding the Golan Heights.

Fate Of PLO Accord Will Have Impact

On this score, officials were relieved by Christopher's pronouncements Tuesday that the attention Israel is attaching to the PLO accord is appropriate.

It means Christopher did not accept Syria's claim that Israel had intentionally stopped their talks because of the agreement with the Palestinians.

At the same time, he made it clear the United States is interested in progress on all the negotiating tracks.

Analysts caution that it is too soon to assess the full impact of Christopher's mission. They point out that much can happen between now and the end of January, when the bilateral talks are expected to resume.

By the end of next month, the fate of the Israel-PLO accord will be much clearer, and that, more than anything, will determine the diplomatic leverage Syria will bring to the table.

Official implementation of the accord is slated to begin Dec. 13, but already there are "understandings" about delays.

The secretly orchestrated Oslo agreement was a blow to Syria's prestige and shattered the

notion of Syria-led Arab unity and Syrian control over the peace process.

Further, there were recent meetings in Washington where Israel appeared to win U.S. assurances that it will secure high-technology military support to offset whatever risks it takes for peace.

While these deals have not been finalized, it is likely Israel is looking forward to the delivery of a series of advanced U.S. fighter jets.

Taken together, experts said, these factors make Syria vulnerable enough to return to Washington and sit across from the Israelis.

On the other hand, if the PLO accord fails, Syria's position in the peace process will be strengthened and may harden.

Syria Wants To Re-Engage

Meanwhile, the two sides remain stuck over Syria's insistence that Israel declare its readiness to withdraw from the entire Golan Heights, and Israel's refusal to spell out its intentions until Syria explains the full peace it will guarantee in return.

Yossi Olmert, a Middle East expert and Israeli peace talks negotiator under the previous government, said Syria wanted to re-engage in the process "but didn't know how."

"After the Israel-PLO agreement, they felt out of the picture, and they needed to recover from the shock," he said.

"They also wanted and needed a very firm and specific American commitment that (the United States is) interested in being actively engaged, and apparently they got this commitment" from Christopher, Olmert said.

At the same time, he said, the Americans told the Syrians that Washington needed something in return to justify its involvement, and it got the commitment to the congressional investigating team.

Olmert said this was a "very clever" move because it will help soften congressional opposition to Syria and pave the way for Syria's removal from the U.S. list of international terrorists, its most coveted goal.

Assad, meanwhile, is avidly seeking a meeting with President Clinton, which clearly will elevate his prestige and also, said Olmert, "give him a better clue" to U.S. intentions.

He is not ready, Olmert said, to meet Rabin face to face, despite speculation of such a summit under U.S. auspices.

Hagai Meirov, a Labor Party Knesset member, said it is too soon to know the impact of Christopher's visit.

He also said that the weightiest issues, security and demilitarization of the Golan Heights, can best be addressed in secret channels, not in Washington.

But the importance of Syria's recent goodwill gestures should not be underestimated. "It is a kind of hint that bigger things are being built," Meirov said.

Syria's official English-language daily newspaper reported Tuesday that Syria had rejected an offer from Israel to withdraw from the Golan Heights in four phases in return for immediate peace with the Syrians. The paper said the offer had been conveyed by Christopher.

NEWS ANALYSIS: WHILE THE DEADLINE LOOMS, DECISIONS ON AUTONOMY LAG

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Dec. 7 (JTA) -- The leading Israeli cartoonist Ze'ev expressed it best.

At the beginning of December, in the daily newspaper Ha'aretz, Ze'ev drew Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat chasing the dove of peace through the days of the calendar.

Ze'ev's calendar, like every calendar, showed the days of the month: 1, 2, 3, etc.

In his calendar, however, Dec. 12 was followed by . . . Dec. 12, and then again by Dec. 12.

In fact, each day of the rest of the month was marked Dec. 12, pointedly noting that these two protagonists of peace were seeking desperately to put off their next appointment with history: Dec. 13.

The 13th is the day that was to have ushered in a new era of peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

It is the day on which the first steps toward implementing the Palestinian self-rule accord were scheduled to begin in the Gaza Strip and West Bank town of Jericho.

Following the historic signing of the accord in Washington on Sept. 13, Israel and the PLO undertook to complete a series of detailed negotiations on Gaza and Jericho by Dec. 13 and to begin implementing the accord during a four-month period that was scheduled to start by Dec. 13.

But now, with Dec. 13 at hand, the negotiations are embarrassingly far from being concluded -- while a mounting wave of violence threatens to drown public support for the peace accord among Israelis and Palestinians alike.

Midweek, as U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher was shuttling between regional capitals of the Middle East, unofficial reports asserted that Rabin and Arafat had agreed to defer the Dec. 13 deadline for two weeks.

Rabin-Arafat Summit Possible

Rabin has said publicly that what is important is the second deadline -- April 13 -- by which time the four-month implementation period was to be concluded.

"Better a good and clear agreement two weeks later," Rabin said, than an agreement that meets the deadline but is full of ambiguity.

Israeli negotiators this week presented their Palestinian counterparts with a 100-plus-page draft spelling out the implementation of the self-rule accord. The draft, they said, took account of the positions of both sides.

The Israeli negotiators fully anticipated further arduous give-and-take discussions on numerous points. And with the Dec. 13 deadline fast approaching, they are beginning to accept the Palestinian view that only a meeting between Rabin and Arafat will resolve the final problems.

The problems to be worked out include the size of the autonomous Jericho area to fall under Palestinian authority, who will control the border crossings to Jordan and Egypt, and how to guarantee security for Jewish settlers.

The expected Rabin-Arafat "summit" may be held . . . on Dec. 12.

For his part, Arafat has indicated that he wants the meeting before Dec. 13 arrives.

Nabil Sha'ath, the chief Palestinian negotia-

tor at the implementation talks in Cairo, told reporters Tuesday that he was urging a Rabin-Arafat meeting before the 13th.

And Palestinian representatives in the territories, meeting with Christopher, urged him to press both sides to meet the Dec. 13 deadline.

Palestinian spokeswoman Hanan Ashrawi said the group of 12 Palestinians had told Christopher that missing the deadline would damage Israel's credibility and would represent a failure of the two sides' commitment to peace just when the first tangible demonstration of that commitment was supposed to go into effect.

Whether or not the deadline is met, observers expect the day to be marked by some gestures, no matter how symbolic or unsubstantial.

Even if the Israel Defense Force is not yet prepared to pull all of its forces out of the Gaza Strip, some symbolic pullback will be likely -- provided the security situation permits it.

In anticipation of the Dec. 13 deadline, leaders of Arafat's mainstream Al Fatah movement in Gaza have been working the streets vigorously these past few days to keep a lid on violence and tension.

Recent violence by rejectionist Palestinians and, to an increasing extent, by Jewish settlers, was visibly sapping the political strength of both the Rabin government and the Arafat-led Fatah.

In less than a week, five Israelis were killed as a result of the mounting violence.

On Monday, an Israeli man and his 22-year-old son were shot dead, and three younger siblings were wounded, in an ambush by Palestinian Arabs outside the West Bank town of Hebron.

Growing Increasingly Skeptical

The attack came in retaliation for the killing Sunday of an Arab man by Jewish settlers in Hebron who described the killing as an act of self-defense.

Also on Sunday, an attack on a bus on the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv highway claimed the life of one Israeli, as well as that of the perpetrator, a member of the Islamic Jihad terrorist group, who was shot and killed by an Israeli soldier.

A second attack on a bus occurred Monday, when two Israelis were reported injured following a firebomb attack on a bus in the West Bank north of Jerusalem.

With each passing day, and with each new killing, Israelis and Palestinians grow increasingly skeptical.

And those who were previously merely skeptical become outright hostile -- and actively participate in protests and demonstrations against the self-rule accord.

For Rabin and Arafat, whose futures -- indeed, their very survival as politicians -- are inextricably linked to the success of the accord, there can be no turning back.

They are in a complex race against the clock. They certainly want to wrap up the negotiations and begin taking tangible steps toward implementing the accord.

But they both know they must either reduce the violence, or else the accord, as well as the hopes invested in it, will go up in smoke.

With innocent people dying almost daily this week, the three months since the signing of the accord have provided a striking lesson in how quickly time passes and moods change in the tense atmosphere of a region poised between peace and renewed turmoil.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES:**JEWISH COMMUNITY OF MANY MINDS
ON CLEMENCY FOR JONATHAN POLLARD**

By Larry Yudelson

NEW YORK, Dec. 7 (JTA) -- When senior Clinton administration officials would meet with Jewish organizational leaders in recent months, a question was often put to the Jews: What is the sentiment in the community concerning Jonathan Pollard?

It was an important question for President Clinton, who was trying to decide whether to grant a request for clemency for Pollard, the former civilian naval analyst who has been serving a life sentence for spying on behalf of Israel.

As the Justice Department conducted the official review of the Pollard case, the president had to weigh the inevitable opposition from intelligence agencies against the arguments and political clout of the Jewish community, which supported him overwhelmingly at the polls in the 1992 elections.

Within the Jewish community, freedom for Jonathan Pollard has often appeared to be as self-evident a cause as freedom for Soviet Jewry, judging by coverage of the issue in Jewish newspapers, sermons in synagogues and appeals from Israeli leaders.

But for the White House -- and indeed, for the organized Jewish community -- the view has not been that clear.

A 1991 poll by the American Jewish Committee showed that not much more than half of American Jews had heard of Jonathan Pollard, and no more than 22 percent thought Jewish organizations should campaign to reduce his sentence.

And there has been a split among Jewish organizations. Those the White House is most accustomed to dealing with have been taking the lowest profile on the issue.

The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, an umbrella organization that includes both groups strongly advocating for Jonathan Pollard and those who have maintained it is not an issue for the Jewish community, has taken no stand.

A Flurry Of Lobbying

Its rationale is that the mandate of the conference is to deal with international issues.

The umbrella dealing with domestic American concerns, the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, voted last February to take no stance regarding Pollard.

Little surprise, then, that unnamed White House officials told The New York Times this week that Clinton wanted to hear from American Jews on the issue.

The Times reported that Clinton "had yet to make up his mind and that protests following reports of his opposition to clemency could alter the dynamics of his decision making."

The article indicated that Clinton is leaning against commutation of Pollard's sentence.

For supporters of Pollard, these remarks on the eve of the Justice Department's conclusion of the review, set off a flurry of lobbying.

Seymour Reich, president of the American Zionist Movement, and Rabbi Avi Weiss, president of the Coalition for Jewish Concerns-Amcha, said they were mobilizing their constituencies to inundate the White House with calls and faxes.

Pollard has been in federal prison for eight years. As a decision on clemency seemed

imminent, a long-standing divide among Jewish groups over the issue came to the surface.

It is a division that both sides agree has pitted the grass roots against either "the establishment" or "the knowledgeable professionals," depending on which side is making the characterization.

NJCRCAC and those groups whose bread and butter consists of dealings with Washington on domestic issues have consistently held back from supporting Pollard.

Those groups that represent specific constituencies have increasingly come on board.

These include the rabbinic organizations of the Reform, Conservative and Orthodox branches of Judaism, and half of the Jewish community relations councils.

Tension also has been evident within the organizations themselves.

The Union of American Hebrew Congregations recently came out for commutation of Pollard's sentence.

The position was taken by a vote of its convention, attended by 4,000 people, and overruled the position of the organization's committee on social actions.

Similarly, while the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America sponsored a petition drive at its member synagogues, its Institute of Public Affairs is not taking action on behalf of Pollard.

Some members of the Jewish War Veterans have launched a petition drive to move the organization from its noncommittal support of a review of the sentence to favoring commutation.

JWV's current position was stated by former national commander Albert Schlossberg, who was quoted in a JWV publication saying, "any act of espionage, whether for an ally or an enemy, will not be tolerated by this organization."

Those who signed the petition said they would resign from JWV if it does not change its position.

The Anti-Defamation League has not taken a position.

The ADL's chairman, Melvin Salberg, and national director, Abraham Foxman, have written the White House asking for clemency, saying "as serious as his crime was, Jonathan Pollard has paid his debt to society."

RABIN THANKS BULGARIANS

By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, Dec. 7 (JTA) -- Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin this week thanked the Bulgarian people for saving 50,000 Jews during the Holocaust.

"We, the members of the Jewish people, remember and will forever remember the handful who came to our aid," Rabin said in the Knesset in the presence of Bulgaria's president, Zhelyu Zhelev, and his wife, Mariyka.

"A place of honor in Jewish history is reserved for the Bulgarian people and its heroes, including those who paid with their lives, who saved the lives of most of Bulgarian Jewry," the prime minister said.

"The Bulgarian people believe that human dignity and democracy go hand in hand," Zhelev said.

He characterized his three-day visit as an effort to explore cooperation with Israel for the sake of all countries in the Middle East, Mediterranean and Black Sea regions.

NEW STATUE OF NAZI COLLABORATOR SPARKS CONCERN FOR ROMANIA'S JEWS

By Steven Weiss

WASHINGTON, Dec. 7 (JTA) -- A memorial to a Romanian Nazi collaborator has been erected near Bucharest to the dismay of Jewish groups, who fear the emergence of a wave of anti-Semitism in Romania.

At least one statue of wartime despot Ion Antonescu has been seen near the capital in recent weeks.

During Antonescu's dictatorial rule, from 1940 to 1944, more than 250,000 Jews died in territories controlled by Romania.

Antonescu's precise role in these deaths has been debated for years, but Jewish groups agree that Antonescu, who was executed in Romania as a war criminal in 1946, cared little -- if at all -- about his country's Jews.

"The Jewish population is deeply worried and concerned" about the increasing xenophobic and anti-Semitic displays, Chief Rabbi Moses Rosen, president of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Romania, said in a statement.

The chairman of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, Miles Lerman, presented Jewish concerns to Romanian Ambassador Aurel Munteanu in a meeting here last week.

"I have met with the ambassador to express our concern about the re-idolizing of Ion Antonescu," Lerman said after the meeting.

Several streets and squares throughout Romania have been dedicated to Antonescu in recent years, sparking fears among the approximately 17,000 Jews in the country that anti-Semitism was on the rise on a widespread scale.

One statue, erected in the town of Slobozia near Bucharest, is of particular concern because it was financed by local police and supported by at least one right-wing politician in the Romanian government.

'Keep Up the Pressure' On Romania

Jewish groups have not charged Romanian President Ion Iliescu with responsibility for the statue, although they would like him to do more to combat anti-Semitism.

"We don't question or accuse President Iliescu of any support of the statue. He just hasn't done enough so far" in denouncing it, said George Spectre, associate director for international, governmental, and Israel affairs at B'nai B'rith.

Washington sources also believe that the Romanian government should do more to disassociate itself from anti-Semitic activity. What the administration might do, if anything, to curb such activity in Romania is unclear.

Alfred Moses, vice president of the American Jewish Committee, voiced his concerns directly to Iliescu two days before the statue near Bucharest was erected and was reassured it was not going to be put up.

"We ought to keep up the pressure," Moses said.

The memorial's erection on Oct. 22 came one day after Congress voted to grant most-favored-nation status to Romania, thereby giving the country certain trade privileges. Congress is known to take human rights activity into account when deciding a country's trade status.

But observers here discounted talk of any link between the congressional vote and the appearance of the statue.

BOMB ATTACK ON VIENNA MAYOR RAISES CONCERN FOR MINORITIES

By Susan Birnbaum

NEW YORK, Dec. 7 (JTA) -- Bombings aimed at advocates of minority groups, including the pro-Jewish mayor of Vienna, have raised concern in Austria about the rise of anti-immigrant sentiment.

At least 10 letter bombs have been sent, and Austrian authorities believe neo-Nazis are behind the attacks.

The mayor of Vienna, Helmut Zilk, was seriously injured Sunday when a letter bomb exploded as he was opening his mail.

Zilk, so far the most seriously injured of the persons who received such bombs, lost all or part of at least three fingers of his left hand.

The attack on Zilk and others has particularly affected Jewish and Israeli leaders, who hold high regard for the mayor and his position as protector of minority rights and dignity in Vienna.

The Austrian capital has for years served as a gateway, transit center and haven for refugees from the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia and other troubled areas.

Emigrating Jews, in particular, have benefited from Vienna's hospitality. Agencies such as the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee have long maintained high-profile offices in the Austrian capital.

Israeli leaders Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres sent get-well wishes to Zilk, as did former Jerusalem Mayor Teddy Kollek, a Vienna native.

Last month, Zilk and Kollek together hosted the opening in Vienna of a Jewish museum, a project that Zilk promised in 1986 amid the squall of reports on successful presidential candidate Kurt Waldheim's Nazi past.

The Bombs Came from Right-Wing Circles

JDC President Milton Wolf, a former U.S. ambassador to Austria, issued a statement expressing hope for a quick recovery for Zilk and all the victims of the letter bombs.

"In the last decade, Vienna has served as a gate to freedom for many hundreds of thousands of refugees and, among them, Russian Jews," Wolf said.

"Mayor Zilk has always demonstrated a humanitarian spirit by helping or by actively facilitating our work," he said.

Zilk also serves as president of the local Jewish Welcome Service, which provides Jewish cultural tours of Vienna.

Interior Minister Franz Loschnak said it seemed the bombs "come from right-wing circles where there is hatred of foreigners and all who try to help them."

The ministry has sent warnings to more than 100 individuals and agencies that could be targets.

The bombs, made of nitroglycerine inserted in drinking straws and electronically detonated, were of a professional nature, police sources said.

The police were reportedly focusing on a small right-wing group based in the province of Lower Austria. Unexploded letter bombs defused by police contained the message, "We are fighting back. Count Rudiger von Starhemberg."

Von Starhemberg led Vienna's successful resistance to the Ottoman Turks in 1683 and is regarded as a symbol of heroism by Austrian neo-Nazis, government officials said.