

**GAPS BETWEEN ISRAEL AND PLO  
ON SELF-RULE PACT REMAIN WIDE**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Dec. 21 (JTA) -- As Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization inched their way this week toward an agreement for implementing the self-rule accord, the two sides seemed stalemated.

In fact, at the beginning of the week, as teams of high-level officials from Jerusalem and Tunis made their way to Oslo, Israel and the PLO seemed agreed on one point only: to fail to reach agreement on implementation would be an unmitigated disaster.

Put another way, the respective leaders of the Jewish state and the PLO would be doomed to political extinction if the accord they signed in Washington in September was not implemented soon.

But beyond this common realization, the gaps between the negotiating teams remained wide and seemingly unbridgeable.

Three key issues divided the two sides: control of the borders between the Gaza Strip and Egypt and between the West Bank town of Jericho and Jordan; the size of the Jericho district that will fall under Palestinian administration; and the size of Israeli security forces that will remain to protect settlers in Gaza and Jericho.

**Potential Invitation To Terrorists**

For Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, all three issues go to the heart of Israel's security concerns.

An unpoliced border at the Jordan River or the Sinai could invite terrorist groups to cross not only into the autonomous Palestinian areas but on into Israel itself.

"They could travel straight to Tel Aviv," Rabin said this week. "There would be nothing to stop them."

This is especially the case since both Israel and the PLO are planning to maintain closely linked economies during the five-year interim period.

For Arafat, on the other hand, the borders and the crossing points are symbols of Palestinian national pride.

These are the places where flags are flown, passports stamped and visas issued -- all of which reflect the trappings of incipient Palestinian sovereignty.

Arafat, of course, sees the five-year interim period called for in the accord as a corridor to eventual Palestinian independence and statehood.

The border issue, along with the size of the Jericho district, had been the subject of ambiguous wording in the declaration of principles that formed the basis of the accord.

The declaration speaks of Israel's control of "external security," but it also invokes the notion of "mutual cooperation."

Because of the ambiguity, both sides are claiming a right to control the borders. And because of the ambiguity, they now have the painstaking task of reaching an agreement on unambiguous specifics.

As the talks moved from Oslo to Paris at

midweek, Rabin and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres firmly insisted there would be no wavering on the border-control issue.

They indicated, however, that there was flexibility in the Israeli positions and even managed an optimistic assessment of the negotiations.

As the agonizing, almost bitter rounds of semi-secret negotiations proceeded this week in wintry European capitals, seasoned observers in the Middle East were already fixing their gaze on the next focus of diplomatic activity -- the meeting between President Clinton and Syrian President Hafez Assad scheduled for mid-January.

Preparations have already begun in Damascus and Washington for the historic Assad-Clinton meeting, which is likely to take place in Geneva.

But the prospect of that meeting does not make all Israelis particularly happy.

During his visit to Washington last month, Rabin assured Clinton that Israel would be ready to negotiate in earnest with Syria once Damascus indicated it was willing to pursue a "full peace" with Israel, including open borders, free trade and full diplomatic exchanges.

But most observers here think Rabin -- and indeed the rest of his Cabinet -- would prefer a longer breathing space, during which they could implement the Palestinian accord before launching into the painful question of withdrawing from the Golan Heights.

The perception in Jerusalem is that Clinton would not have agreed to the meeting with Assad unless he had received fairly solid assurances that the Syrian president will, in fact, use the occasion to make a statement regarding the "full peace" with Israel.

If that does happen -- and if Israel and the PLO have by then successfully concluded their negotiations and embarked on implementation of the accord -- the epicenter of Middle East peace-making will then dramatically shift to the Israeli-Syrian track.

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES:****JERICHO IS WAITING FOR CHANGE  
AMID ANXIETY ABOUT THE FUTURE**

By Cynthia Mann

JERICHO, West Bank, Dec. 21 (JTA) -- At this important, if uncertain, juncture in the negotiations between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, the residents here waited this week with a mixture of hope and cynicism as negotiators in Oslo and Paris crafted compromises in the self-rule accord.

The residents believe the agreement will dramatically change their lives by removing their nemesis, the Israeli military authorities, from their somnolent oasis town at the foot of the Judean Hills, four miles west of the Jordan River.

That, they say, is paramount, while the type and composition of the Palestinian government to come afterward is secondary.

But they are impatient with promises, especially since Dec. 13 came and went without the accord going into effect as scheduled.

"I woke at 6 in the morning to see a change, looked out the window and into the street, but I didn't see anything," said Ra'afat Hussein, 23.

"All the time they are talking about peace and the economy and we hope to see something new, but we see nothing. The problem is that Israel lies and what we hear is different from what we see," he said.

Nevertheless, he stressed, people in Jericho are "friendly, not like in Gaza. If Israel wants to live in peace, we want to live in peace. We just want to be free."

"We're waiting, but nothing's happening," said Nasser Ahroof, 25. "Maybe we'll have to wait 10 years and not 10 days, but I've been waiting 25 years."

Saeb Nazef, the head of Jericho's PLO office, said he was worried about the failure to honor the first deadline in the agreement's timetable.

He said it set a bad precedent in Israel-PLO negotiations and weakened Israel's credibility in the eyes of Palestinians.

But, he said, "the most important thing is to get rid of the Israeli occupation and to have the other side (Israel) look at us and deal with us as equals."

Jericho, with a population of about 15,000, has been one of the least militant places in the territories. The rejectionist Islamic Hamas movement has little presence here, and the vast majority of the people support PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat and the autonomy accord he has fashioned.

Some residents say Israeli rule has not been as hard on them as on the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

#### Tourism Has Been Hard-Hit

Nonetheless, they say they have suffered, especially since the start of the Palestinian uprising, or intifada, from high unemployment, sparse economic development and restriction of movement.

Tourism, particularly, has been hard-hit, despite the rich history and climate that are Jericho's natural draw.

Israelis traveling from Jerusalem routinely take a left fork in the road that leads them away from the town, toward Tiberias. Their route avoids the banana, orange and date trees of Jericho, away from the town's engaging but empty garden restaurants.

But lately, in a sign of the changing times, drivers passing through in cars with yellow Israeli license plates are flagged down by restaurateurs eager for their business.

This is one of the only changes, however, since the Sept. 13 signing of the accord slated to grant self-rule to Jericho.

Drivers taking the right fork in the road approach the town center on a road lined with neat and richly colored rows of produce. At one end of the town's main square, the Israeli flag still waves prominently atop the military police station.

Scores of men congregate around the square, which is clogged with dozens of idle Mercedes taxicabs. Time seems to stand still.

But there are undeniable changes. The Palestinian flag is visible everywhere. One vegetable cart boasts a host of them in miniature. Plastic-coated portraits of Arafat can be seen in several shop windows.

And down the road is the storefront office of the PLO.

Nazef, the PLO chief, said there have been two changes since the signing of the accord in September: "We opened this office, and we raised

the flag without going to jail.

"But this is not a big enough change and it is not important," he said.

"When we raised the flags with masks on we felt better. We didn't sign the agreement to reach only these goals," he said.

Adnan Hammad is the local head of the Palestinian Democratic Union, a pro-peace faction of the PLO. He is concerned about what will happen after Israel's military withdrawal.

He conceded that another struggle, one for democratic leadership, will begin once autonomy takes effect.

It will be a "very hard process to transfer the instrument (of Palestinian government) from Tunis to Jericho," and "we are not satisfied with what Arafat says now," he said.

"We look for a good future for our people, and without democracy we can't achieve it," he said.

"If there is no democracy and (the leadership) starts working as if it is in Tunis," many people will be dissatisfied, Hammad said.

"What is most important is the future of the Palestinian people and how to reach an independent state, not Arafat," agreed Nazef.

"How to govern the Gaza Strip and the West Bank depends on what the Palestinians want," he said. "We insist on elections."

Nazef is not concerned that Arafat has not given a firm date for those elections, however, "as long as Israel withdraws by April 13."

"Any rules which will be imposed here will not be a dictatorship," Nazef said. "Most important is that the leadership will be Palestinian and won't deal with us like the Israeli authority of the occupation."

There is little concern expressed here about Hamas rejectionists and their ability to torpedo the agreement.

#### Locals Are Hoping For Progress

Hammad said that in many cases, especially among the young, allegiance to the ideology of Hamas does not run deep, and if Palestinian self-rule is fair and efficient, they will shift their allegiance to the autonomy plan.

The locals also appear sanguine about the prospects for economic development, despite the reluctance of the international community to release money pledged for urgent infrastructure and economic projects in Jericho and Gaza.

The donor countries have expressed mistrust of how Arafat will handle the money. They claim there are too many politicians and not enough expert economists involved.

Hammad is concerned that his people not expect too much when the aid finally arrives.

"If people expect (PLO) money to come in and be divided among them the way it was during the intifada," he said, they will be disappointed.

Instead, he said, "we will create jobs and rebuild our city."

But even with foreign aid and a fully implemented self-rule agreement, the people here have long memories.

"Since 1967 until this moment," said Nazef, "Jericho has been the same, suffering from persecution from Israeli authority."

"We believe the Palestinian tragedy began in 1917 with the Balfour Declaration," Nazef said, "and our historical pages are filled with blood."

"I need a long time to teach my child how to love his neighbor," he said, "because we have lived (so long) in an atmosphere like this."

## FUND-RAISING DRIVE FOR SETTLERS SPARKS FIRE WITHIN JEWISH AGENCY

By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, Dec. 21 (JTA) -- A fund-raising drive for Israeli settlers in the administered territories has sparked a clash among leaders of the Jewish Agency and the World Zionist Organization.

At the center of the controversy is Jacques Kupfer, a member of the WZO's executive committee and chairman of the French Zionist group affiliated with Israel's Likud opposition party.

According to a Jewish Agency spokesman, Kupfer distributed more than 30,000 leaflets on behalf of the French campaign for the settlers, who are opposed to Israel's accord with the Palestine Liberation Organization.

The Jewish Agency is the chief recipient of funds raised for Israel by the United Jewish Appeal and its global counterpart, Keren Hayesod. Half of the Jewish Agency leadership consists of leaders and representatives of the WZO.

At a heated meeting of the WZO's executive committee Monday, Kupfer was charged with undermining the organization by calling for contributions to an alternative campaign that would drain money from the UJA and Keren Hayesod.

Making the charge were two members of the executive committee from the Labor Party, Uri Gordon and Yehiel Leket.

They said it was impossible for Kupfer to continue to represent a Zionist institution while going against it, the Jewish Agency spokesman said.

According to the spokesman, Kupfer's fund-raising material warned: "Israel and Jerusalem are in danger. If you want to ensure that your money is not going to reach the PLO, contribute to the Fund for Saving Israel."

### 'No Contradiction' To Aid Settlers

Some settlers have called on world Jewry to oppose the Israeli government's accord with the PLO by boycotting the UJA.

The UJA and the Jewish Agency are not spending money on economic development activities with the Palestinians and the PLO.

Critics of the Israeli-Palestinian accord, however, argue that philanthropic activities approved by the Israeli government free state money for other activities -- among them implementing the accord.

Kupfer was vehemently defended by a Likud supporter on the executive committee, Shlomo Gravetz.

It was perfectly legitimate to raise funds for the settlers in the face of the government's failure to stand by them, Gravetz said, and there was no contradiction between that and raising money for UJA.

Gravetz said that as far as he knew, Kupfer never told people not to give to UJA.

"The sacred mechanism to support the state of Israel is the regular campaign, either UJA or Keren Hayesod," said Gravetz, "and there is no way Likud will ever say don't give money to this."

"On the other hand," he said, "as a result of the government's policies (with regard to the) settlers in Judea and Samaria, there is a real problem there, both economically and spiritually."

The Likud believes in the duty to support them, he said.

"There is no contradiction whatsoever in assisting the regular campaign and giving some

money to benefit the settlers," he continued. He called the incident part of a continuing effort by the Labor Party, "probably in cooperation with the government," to delegitimize the settlers.

At the suggestion of Simcha Dinitz, chairman of the Jewish Agency and the WZO, Gravetz has requested a letter from Kupfer that clarifies his position and states that he did not intend to undermine the UJA.

In New York, UJA Executive Vice President Brian Lurie said that despite "rumblings here in New York City" about boycotting the UJA, the annual campaign is up 7 percent over last year. He attributes part of the increase to optimism resulting from the peace process.

*(Contributing to this report was JTA staff writer Larry Yudelson in New York.)*

## CONGRESSIONAL GROUP PREPARES FOR MIDEAST PROBE ON ISRAELI MIAs

By Deborah Kalb

WASHINGTON, Dec. 21 (JTA) -- Following up on Syrian President Hafez Assad's recent pledge of cooperation, a U.S. congressional delegation will be heading to the Middle East next month to investigate the long-mysterious fate of six Israeli soldiers missing in action in Lebanon.

Plans for the delegation's specific itinerary are being kept quiet here.

But a staffer from the House Foreign Affairs Committee said Monday that the delegation plans to travel to the region at some point between Jan. 1 and Jan. 25, when Congress returns for its new session.

The investigation could coincide with President Clinton's meeting with the Syrian leader, scheduled for next month in Geneva.

The four-person delegation will be headed by Mike Van Dusen, chief of staff of the House committee, and will include a Foreign Service officer from the State Department's Israel desk.

The delegation will look into the fates of six Israelis: Ron Arad, Zachary Baumel, Yehuda Katz, Zvi Feldman, Yossi Fink and Rachamim Alsheikh.

Arad is believed to have the best chance of being alive.

In addition to his pledge on the issue of Israeli MIAs, the Syrian president also vowed recently to issue travel documents by the end of the year to all the Jews living in Syria.

In an interview Tuesday with the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.), just back from the Middle East, said that both Assad and Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa had said in meetings that the Jews would be allowed to leave by the end of the year.

There are now an estimated 1,350 Jews remaining in Syria, most of whom do not have permits to leave.

Specter, who said he discussed the Syrian Jews with Assad on three previous occasions as well, was part of a congressional delegation that also included Sens. Dennis DeConcini (D-Ariz.), Charles Grassley (R-Iowa), Bob Graham (D-Fla.) and Rep. Bill Richardson (R-N.M.).

DeConcini, Graham and Richardson serve on congressional intelligence committees.

The delegation also visited Israel, Jordan and Egypt, where they met with Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat.

Capitol Hill sources this week denied a published report in Israel that the delegation had met with radical Palestinians and Iranian-backed Muslim militants while in Syria.

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES:**

**CHRISTMAS FINDS 20 PERCENT OF AMERICAN JEWS IN THE PEWS**  
By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK, Dec. 21 (JTA) -- Lanie Poisson is one of an estimated 1.2 million people in America who were born Jews but who will be celebrating Christmas.

That is roughly one-fifth of the American Jewish population.

About half of these have converted to or actively identify with a faith other than Judaism, which in America is almost always Christianity.

The other 600,000 describe themselves as Jews by ethnicity or culture, but not by religion, according to data from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey.

And "those Jews who say they're not Jewish by religion tacitly adopt Christian culture," said Samuel Klausner, a professor of sociology at the University of Pennsylvania and an expert on Jews who identify with other faiths.

"These people are, by and large, lost to the Jewish community," he said.

In practice, they do not behave much differently than Jews who have formally converted to Christianity.

Although they will describe themselves as "secular" or having some Jewish attachments, they are rarely, if ever, found in synagogues and are thoroughly assimilated into American liberal Protestant culture.

They have Christmas trees in their living rooms, wreaths on their doors, go to church on Christmas, have few Jewish friends and give to Christian, rather than Jewish, philanthropies, Klausner said.

Further, the Christian community does not think of them as Jews, he said.

"Within a generation or so," Klausner said, "they become fully members of the Christian community."

Lanie Poisson was born Ilana Fox. Now 35, she is deeply involved in a fundamentalist Christian church.

Born to Holocaust survivors, she did not find a spiritual home in Judaism.

**Did Not Find Satisfying Answers**

Poisson said that in her home in an all-Jewish neighborhood of Queens, New York, her parents' Jewish connection focused on politics and Israel.

The family would go to synagogue twice a year, on the High Holy Days, and would have a Passover seder. On Chanukah, the family would light a menorah and exchange presents.

When she and her sister were asked if they wanted to go to Hebrew school, they declined.

As a teen-ager, Poisson began asking existential, spiritual questions of religious Jews in her extended family, and of non-Jews she knew through school. She did not find any satisfying answers but put aside her search for a few years.

A decade ago, an acquaintance who was part of a fundamentalist Christian church challenged her to read the Bible. She read the Jewish and Christian Bibles and went back to rabbis with questions about messianic prophecy.

"I found that I didn't get answers to my questions because they weren't knowledgeable about it, and my faith grew more in seeing how the Scriptures fit together," she said.

"I always wanted to make a difference in

the world, and never associated it with anything spiritual before I began to read," she said.

Four months later, she was baptized.

A couple of years later she married the man who had first introduced her to the church, and today their lives, and those of their children, revolve around the church.

Poisson's story illustrates the search of many converts.

"These are Jewish people yearning for something meaningful spiritually in their religious lives, and the Judaism they knew was empty," said Rabbi Tovia Singer, director of Jews for Judaism of Greater New York.

Klausner said part of the responsibility for the conversions and Jews' identification with Christianity lies with churches.

"They are in collusion with this. They have become very lax about their own requirements for membership. They don't ask you if you're baptized anymore, so Jews are just sitting in churches," he said.

Klausner does not fault missionaries from evangelical and "Hebrew-Christian" churches.

"Evangelizing is an opportunity for people who already have the tendencies to move out," he said.

**Committing To A More Stringent System**

While Jews who become Christians often say they feel liberated from "the whole picture of Judaism," they usually are making a transition from less commitment and involvement to a more stringent system, said Klausner.

The reason Jews seek out Christianity, he said, is the breakdown of Jewish religious authority, he said. "People seek meaning by going to another, more structured system."

"The freedom is really the discovery that there is order in the world," he said.

"By the second and third generation of Jews who identify more with Christianity than with Judaism, people move into fundamentalist churches" where they become committed, he said.

According to Singer, many converts from Judaism to Christianity become "born-again" Christians. "Our studies have found that 67 percent of 'Hebrew-Christians' went to Hebrew school. It's that little bit of information that turns Jews off," Singer said.

"Many say the first time they felt they had a personal relationship with God was with Yeshua," or Jesus, he said.

Judaism's "spiritual elements are often not taught and transmitted," he said.

"Liberal denominations sometimes throw out our most precious fruit, our personal relationship with God," said Singer.

In contrast, "ministers tell them that every word of the Bible is God's and that's exactly what they want to hear," the rabbi said.

"It's ineffective to transmit this nebulous Judaism," he said, "and it's been the evangelical community that's reached out to them."

The flow of Jews into Christianity will increase as intermarriage does, warns Klausner.

According to demographer Egon Mayer, of the Center for Judaic Studies at the City University of New York, about 60 percent of the people who say they were born Jewish and are now a different religion are themselves the children of an interfaith marriage.

Few children of Jews identifying themselves as having no religion or as Christian will be connected to Judaism, said Klausner and Mayer.