

**ISRAEL MAKES CONCESSION ON JERICHO,
BUT TALKS WITH PLO ARE STILL STALLED**
By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Dec. 27 (JTA) -- Israel has offered to double the size of the Jericho district that will fall under Palestinian self rule, but its talks with the Palestine Liberation Organization remain deadlocked over a number of security issues.

Following a round of inconclusive talks in Cairo on Monday, Israeli and Palestinian negotiators pledged to continue contacts through the night and resume full-scale negotiations Tuesday.

The respective leaders of the two delegations -- Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and PLO negotiator Abu Mazen, also known as Mahmoud Abbas -- declined Monday evening to give details of their talks so far. But another PLO official said they were reviewing their positions and had not yet embarked upon active bargaining.

It was Peres and Abu Mazen who signed the historic Palestinian self-rule accord in Washington on Sept. 13.

The Cairo round is the third since the Dec. 13 deadline for the start of implementation of the accord passed without any action being taken.

Israel and the PLO have reached an impasse over security issues that include the question of who will control the borders between the Gaza Strip and Egypt and between the West Bank town of Jericho and Jordan.

Also at issue is the size of the Israeli force that will remain behind to protect settlers in the two regions. A third issue, the size of the Jericho district, is still in dispute as well.

Israel, which originally offered an area of 35 square miles, this week doubled what it was willing to turn over to the Palestinians.

The PLO had originally wanted Jericho to encompass an area of 140 square miles, but last week it reportedly indicated its willingness to settle for an area of 80 square miles.

The two sides met last week in Oslo and then in Paris and the French city of Versailles, but did not resolve their differences.

Abu Mazen's appearance at the head of the PLO team in Cairo was a cause of encouragement to the Israelis.

He is viewed as the PLO's second-in-command after Chairman Yasser Arafat. His absence from the negotiations in recent weeks was interpreted as signifying a falling-out between him and Arafat.

Peres Has Strong Words For Arafat

Arafat flew to Yemen on Monday, following talks in Cairo the day before with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Foreign Minister Amre Moussa.

Peres had some strong words to say about Arafat before flying off to Cairo, warning that it was up to the PLO chairman to back down from some of his demands.

"I hope very much that Arafat will climb down from his tree, because I am not bringing anything new" to the negotiations, he said in an interview with the daily newspaper Yediot Achronot.

Peres met alone with Moussa before the

negotiations with the Palestinians began Monday. Observers said the Egyptians were playing a key mediating role between the two sides.

Moussa told reporters Monday that he regarded the gaps between Israel and the PLO as bridgeable and "not too deep."

Peres flew to Cairo following a private talk with Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in what was seen as a final review of Israel's negotiating stance and fallback positions.

Rabin and Peres have repeatedly pledged to make no concessions on anything relating to Israel's security requirements.

On Sunday, the Israel Cabinet agreed to broaden its original proposal on the Jericho enclave.

Before leaving for Cairo on Monday, Peres helped fight off a no-confidence motion brought by the opposition.

"You're so clever," he snapped at Benjamin Netanyahu, leader of the opposition Likud party. "You say we are defeatists and idiots. Well, what do you propose?"

Peres told the Knesset that the negotiations may take "a day or two, or a week or two, or a month or two" -- but in the end there would be an agreement that would not jeopardize Israel's security and that would lead to "a moral and strong state for the Jewish people."

He said that Israel's administration of Gaza is not moral, given the conditions in which the populace there lives.

Netanyahu predicted there would be a commission of inquiry set up one day to investigate why the present government had released thousands of Palestinian terrorists from prison and why Israel had agreed to the proposed Palestinian police force.

When the no-confidence vote was taken, 55 Knesset members sided with the government and 44 with the opposition. Two members of the fervently religious Shas party abstained.

**DEADLY ATTACK ON IDF OFFICER FOLLOWS
HAMAS OFFER TO STOP SHOOTING SETTLERS**
By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, Dec. 27 (JTA) -- An Israel Defense Force officer shot to death last week by Palestinian extremists in the Gaza Strip is the highest-ranking soldier to be killed since the intifada began six years ago.

Lt. Col. Meir Mintz, coordinator of special units operating against Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip, was shot to death last Friday in an ambush in which three other soldiers were also wounded.

The Islamic fundamentalist Hamas movement claimed responsibility for the attack, saying it was an act of revenge for the Nov. 24 killing by Israeli security forces of Imad Akkel, the group's commander in the northern Gaza Strip.

Mintz, 35, had a 2-year-old child and reportedly had just learned that his wife was pregnant with a second child.

He was riding in a jeep when gunmen opened fire with automatic weapons. Two other soldiers riding with Mintz returned the fire after being slightly wounded.

Lt. Gen. Ehud Barak, the IDF chief of staff,

denied charges that the recent return of Hamas deportees from southern Lebanon had strengthened the organization's hand.

He was referring to the final group of Islamic fundamentalists allowed to return to their homes in the administered territories on Dec. 15 after spending a year in exile in southern Lebanon. They had been expelled in December 1992 following a series of murderous attacks on Israelis.

The attack on Mintz came after the military wing of Hamas, Izz a-Din al-Kassam, issued a statement saying it would stop shooting settlers if Israeli soldiers stopped shooting Palestinians.

The statement was issued Dec. 23 in a leaflet that contained a host of other conditions for ceasing attacks on settlers.

The statement also called for Jewish settlers to leave Gaza within three months and for West Bank settlers to turn in their weapons and leave their homes within a year.

Hamas also reportedly demanded an end to the operations of Israeli undercover units in the territories and the release of all Palestinian prisoners Israel is holding.

Hamas called on Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin to agree to the conditions on the evening news.

The day after Mintz's murder, Hamas issued yet another leaflet charging that the Israeli government did not understand the significance of the Hamas offer.

In this latest leaflet, which was distributed Saturday, the fundamentalist organization also said it would suspend attacks for three days to give Israeli leaders more time to respond.

Hamas has also claimed responsibility for the murder in Ashdod of a 60-year-old security guard, whose body was found last Friday.

SETTLERS FILE PETITION WITH COURT TO PROTEST BAN ON MARCH AGAINST PLO

By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, Dec. 27 (JTA) -- Israeli police have rejected a request by Jewish settlers to demonstrate in front of Palestinian headquarters in eastern Jerusalem, prompting the settlers to file a petition of protest with the Supreme Court.

Spokesmen at Orient House, the base for Palestinian negotiators to the peace talks, reportedly called the demonstration, planned for Tuesday night, a provocation. But they said that if it did take place, they could not and would not interfere so long as demonstrators stayed away from the building.

Leaders of the Council of Jewish Communities in Judea, Samaria and Gaza said they had no intention of making trouble. They said they wanted to protest the decision to make the building the headquarters of the Palestine Liberation Organization with the PLO flag flying in front.

"We are demonstrating because we think it is impossible that the government of a (would-be) Palestinian state will be in Jerusalem," said council spokesman Shai Bazak.

"The Israeli government told us that the status of Jerusalem is not (up) for negotiation and the Palestinians keep saying Jerusalem is their city.

"Let them have their capital" in Amman, he said.

Bazak was noncommittal when asked if the demonstration would go forward if the Supreme Court rejects the council's petition.

NORWAY, UNIFIL PROTEST KILLING OF NORWEGIAN OFFICER BY ISRAELIS

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Dec. 27 (JTA) -- The government of Norway and United Nations officials have strongly protested the killing by an Israeli tank patrol of a Norwegian officer serving with the U.N. Interim Force in Lebanon.

The incident occurred Sunday night in the Israeli-controlled border security zone of southern Lebanon. Members of an Israel Defense Force unit mistook a UNIFIL patrol for members of the Islamic fundamentalist Hezbollah movement, which has been staging attacks on Israelis.

A second Norwegian soldier was wounded in the incident.

The commander of the Israeli patrol personally apologized for the fatal error to the Norwegian battalion commander whose troops were part of the U.N. forces operating in the region.

The IDF's commander in charge of the Northern Sector has meanwhile called for a commission to investigate the incident.

According to an IDF spokesman, an Israeli tank patrol had been engaged in a night search for terrorists near Marjayoun, in the eastern sector of the buffer security zone.

Seeing what appeared to be suspicious persons, the tank commander opened fire, discovering only later that he had fired on a UNIFIL force on foot patrol.

Members of the Israeli unit subsequently offered to help the stricken Norwegian force, calling in a helicopter to airlift the wounded soldier to a hospital in Haifa.

UNIFIL spokesman Timor Goksel complained that the IDF had earlier contacted UNIFIL headquarters to learn if they had any information about terrorist movements in the area.

'Too Much Indiscriminate Firing'

Goksel said the Israelis were told that UNIFIL knew of no terrorist movements.

"There was therefore no need for the patrolling tank to have opened fire with mortar rounds and automatic fire on the five-man foot patrol without challenge," Goksel said.

He added that members of Israel's ally in the region, the South Lebanon Army, had earlier opened fire on Irish troops serving with UNIFIL but had caused no casualties in that incident.

"And then came this incident with the IDF. There's just too much indiscriminate firing going on," Goksel complained.

Yossi Beilin, Israel's deputy foreign minister, telephoned his Norwegian counterpart, Jan Egeland, in Oslo to offer his regrets over the incident and to promise an inquiry.

Egeland in turn protested the incident to Beilin and said the Norwegian Embassy in Tel Aviv would soon present a formal written protest to Israel.

"I said that this is completely incomprehensible from the Norwegian side. The Norwegian patrol was in the U.N. area. It was a normal patrol," Egeland told Norwegian national radio.

"In many ways this episode shows how wrong the entire Israeli occupation of south Lebanon is," he said, adding, "There are often unclear responsibilities and lines of command."

UNIFIL has lost 195 soldiers, including 20 Norwegians, since deploying peacekeeping forces in southern Lebanon in 1978. The U.N. force now has about 5,400 troops operating in the region.

PEACE PROCESS MAY HAVE HINDERED ISRAELI-VATICAN PACT ON RELATIONS

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK, Dec. 27 (JTA) -- Contrary to popular belief, the historic accord signed in September between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization may have actually delayed the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between Israel and the Vatican rather than spurred it on, according to one source involved in the negotiations.

Many have interpreted the Vatican's decision to finally recognize the State of Israel now, after more than four decades, as a direct result of the peace process and Israel's shedding of the pariah status that long clung to it in the international community.

But Rabbi David Rosen believes the recent Israeli-PLO accord may actually have slowed things down. Rosen, an expert on interreligious affairs, is one of seven members of the Israeli team that negotiated with seven Vatican representatives for just over a year on the diplomatic agreement, which is expected to be signed in Jerusalem on Thursday.

Under the agreement, Israel and the Vatican will exchange "special representatives" immediately, and within four months ambassadors will be named.

Among those being considered for a posting as Israel's first ambassador to the Vatican is Rosen himself, a former chief rabbi of Ireland who is now director of interfaith affairs in Israel for the Anti-Defamation League.

The agreement also reportedly includes a commitment by the Roman Catholic Church to oppose anti-Semitism throughout the world and to support the current Middle East peace process.

Israel, in turn, reportedly has agreed to respect the religious rights of all Catholics and to allow the church to operate schools, run charities and own property in Israel.

Most of the work on the agreement between Israel and the Vatican "had been completed by May, and it was a matter of endorsement by the hierarchy," Rosen said recently from Israel.

Didn't Want Policies Dictated By Arafat

The peace handshake at the White House between Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat "probably delayed it because the Vatican didn't want to be seen as having its policies determined by Arafat," he said.

"There have been purely bureaucratic delays since the end of September," he said. "It would have been nice if the church would have contributed to the peace process earlier in the day, but that doesn't detract from the historic culmination of the 30 years' process, and that's certainly exciting."

Rosen, in his comment about the 30-year process, was speaking of the Second Vatican Council, convened by Popes John XXIII and Paul VI from 1962 to 1965, which culminated with the promulgation of the document "Nostra Aetate" (In Our Time).

The document, for the first time in Catholic history, called for an improved relationship between the church and Jewish people, lifted the church's charge of deicide against the Jews and decried anti-Semitism as contrary to the spirit of the Gospel.

This year's agreement between the Vatican

and Israel, said Rosen, is the "climax of a process of reconciliation that started with the Second Vatican Council."

Though the agreement's content was in place by May, working out the language of the document itself took several months more, said Rosen.

"Working out a text was very complicated business. Both parties are very textually oriented religious traditions, and a nuance is not insignificant."

"These are two parties with different perspectives on the nature of the authority it is subject to," he explained.

"There have obviously been some difficult moments, but the discussions have generally been cordial and businesslike, with a common determination to reach this stage," said Rosen.

The negotiating teams met sporadically, rotating between Rome and Jerusalem.

They brought in representatives of various Israeli ministries and professional experts to help them hone the finer points of the agreement.

They would typically gather for a week, break for a week and then meet again for a week, said Rosen, for a total half-dozen time.

He said one hiatus of several months occurred as an unofficial expression of protest from the Vatican side when Israel deported 415 Muslim extremists from the administered territories to southern Lebanon in December 1992.

A STORM OF PROTEST ERUPTS IN ISRAEL OVER CLEARING EMBATTLED POLICE BRASS

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Dec. 27 (JTA) -- A decision last week by Attorney General Michael Ben-Yair to clear Israel's police inspector general of any wrongdoing in bribery allegations has aroused a storm of public protest.

According to newspaper reports, Police Inspector General Rafi Peled allegedly took bribes in the form of greatly reduced costs for hotel stays.

Police Minister Moshe Shahal has criticized Peled for his "lack of sensitivity" in accepting the discounts, but no other official action has so far been taken against Peled.

In the aftermath of Ben-Yair's decision not to pursue the case, politicians here are demanding that Peled be dismissed or be persuaded to resign.

A Jerusalem law student has challenged the attorney general's ruling in a petition to the Supreme Court, claiming that a police officer of lesser rank would have received far more serious punishment.

Critics of Peled are claiming that his acceptance of discounted hotel bills represented nothing less than taking bribes.

According to published newspaper accounts, Peled and other senior police officers were entertained at hotels of the Moriah hotel chain in Tiberias and at the Dead Sea.

They were photographed relaxing in the Tiberias hotel's whirlpool, and the pictures were later used for the hotel chain's publicity campaign.

Peled has denied any wrongdoing, claiming that he stayed at the hotel at the invitation of the Moriah's owner, an old personal friend, and that he granted no favors in return.

Reacting to Ben-Yair's decision not to pursue the case, former Police Comptroller Avraham Adan told Israel Radio that Peled's standing had been seriously weakened by media disclosures.

AUSTRALIAN JEWS PROTEST PLANNED ZHIRINOVSKY VISIT

By Jeremy Jones

SYDNEY, Australia, Dec. 27 (JTA) -- Leaders of Jewish organizations here are protesting a visit planned for next month by Russian ultranationalist Vladimir Zhirinovsky, but they concede there is little they can do to prevent it.

"The man is a self-confessed racist and anti-Semite. He should stay out of Australia," Mark Leibler, the president of the Australian Zionist Federation, told a local radio interviewer.

"I don't think he should be granted a visa to enter this country," Leibler said.

Despite the protests of Leibler and other Jewish leaders here, government sources have confirmed there are no apparent legal grounds to deny Zhirinovsky entry to Australia.

Diane Shteinman, who is active with the Australian Campaign for Soviet Jewry, said she did not think the government had "really legitimate reasons" to deny Zhirinovsky a visa.

But she expressed hope that Australia would accurately regard him as "a destabilizing influence" and be "extremely vigilant" overseeing his activities.

Zhirinovsky's anti-Jewish statements have drawn wide notice in the media, along with recollections that this son of a Jewish father once received an invitation, which he sought, to make aliyah, and that he was active in a KGB-backed Jewish cultural organization in the 1980s.

Australian representatives of Zhirinovsky's far right-wing Liberal Democratic Party have said he is planning to visit Australia next month. The purpose of his visit, they say, is to visit a niece and conduct "business."

Natalia Soklova, Zhirinovsky's niece, lives in the Sydney suburb of Redfern, which is home to a large proportion of Jewish emigres from the former Soviet Union.

Preparations for Zhirinovsky's planned visit are being handled by Noel Hughes, who has said he is in business with Soklova.

Could Be Deported If He Incites Violence

Hughes said he is interested in establishing trade deals with Russia which Zhirinovsky might be able to facilitate.

Zhirinovsky startled the world with his strong showing in Russia's parliamentary elections, held Dec. 12. Zhirinovsky, who is widely seen as fascist, anti-Semitic, xenophobic and militantly ultranationalist, won 24 percent of the vote.

As of Dec. 24, Zhirinovsky had not applied for a visa to enter Australia, but a spokeswoman for the Department of Foreign Affairs in Canberra, the capital, confirmed that there are no legal obstacles to his planned visit.

If he does make the trip, however, Zhirinovsky will be bound to respect Australian law while in the country. As a result, he could be deported if he becomes involved in activities inciting violence during his stay.

Last week, Zhirinovsky caused a major stir when he met with two right-wing hosts in Europe.

On Dec. 21, he met in Munich with Gerhard Frey, the head of the German People's Union, a prominent right-wing group whose newspaper has questioned the existence of the Nazi death camp at Auschwitz.

The following day, Zhirinovsky traveled to the Austrian Alps, where he was hosted at a ski resort by Edwin Neuwirth, an Austrian who is a

veteran of the Nazi-era Waffen SS. The two held a news conference in which Neuwirth also voiced doubts about the existence of gas chambers.

Germans of all stripes raised an uproar and called for a ban on Zhirinovsky entering Germany again.

DECISION NOT TO BURY JEWISH SOLDIER NEXT TO BEDOUIN HERO RAISES HACKLES

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Dec. 27 (JTA) -- Protests have erupted in the Knesset and throughout Israel over a decision not to bury a Jewish Israeli soldier next to the grave of a Muslim war hero who fought for Israel in the early days of the Jewish state.

The incident received public attention Monday following a news report that Israeli police had found a 26-year-old army officer dead the day before in his Tel Aviv apartment with his service revolver at his side. Police declared it a case of suicide and withheld the officer's name.

According to the report, the Defense Ministry Graves Unit, which is responsible for choosing and maintaining the gravesites of Israeli soldiers, subsequently chose a plot for the officer in the military section of Tel Aviv's Kiryat Shaul Cemetery.

The plot was located between the grave of a soldier who had been declared non-Jewish because his mother was not a Jew and the grave of Lt. Col. Amos Yarkoni, a Bedouin who led a crack Israeli commando unit after he threw in his lot with the early Jewish state.

Yarkoni was buried a few years ago in the military section of the Tel Aviv cemetery with full military honors during a Muslim ceremony.

Both his original name, Abd el-Majed Khader, and his adopted Hebrew name, Amos Yarkoni, were inscribed on his headstone.

When the Military Chaplain's Unit, which prepares bodies for burial and conducts funeral services, discovered that the Jewish officer who was declared a suicide was to be buried between two non-Jews, it informed the chief military chaplain, Maj. Gen. Gad Navon.

According to initial media reports, Navon decided to bury the officer at a different site, among Jewish graves.

Labor Knesset member Ori Orr, chairman of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, disclosed that Navon had discussed the matter with Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and that Rabin had upheld Navon's decision.

In interviews conducted by Israel Radio throughout Monday, a vast majority of Israeli soldiers -- including many who described themselves as Orthodox Jews -- said they firmly believed that anyone who fought and died alongside Jews in the defense of Israel should be buried among Jews, regardless of his religious affiliation.

The matter came before the Knesset, where Labor member Ephraim Sneh proposed a bill that would prevent such decisions by the Military Chaplain's Unit in the future.

Moledet Knesset member Rehavam Ze'evi, a former general, announced he had made arrangements to purchase a burial plot for himself next to the grave of Yarkoni.

Many of Yarkoni's friends and army colleagues gathered at his flower-bedecked gravesite Monday to express their sorrow at what they believed was an insult to his memory.