

**ISRAEL IS ANGRY AT THE PLO,
BUT TALKS LIKELY TO CONTINUE**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Jan. 4 (JTA) -- When Israel suspended negotiations with the Palestine Liberation Organization this week, it was a reflection of the surprise and anger felt here in the wake of the PLO's latest moves.

The surprise came when the PLO, which seemed to have accepted the security arrangements worked out in Cairo last week, made a sudden turnaround and announced publicly that no agreement had been reached.

The Israeli government's anger, most evident during the weekly Cabinet meeting Sunday, was based on the sense that the PLO could not be taken at its word.

There has also been growing concern here about the erosion of support for PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat within his own organization. There have been numerous defections by his young cadres in the territories and harsh criticisms of his leadership style by more established figures in the organization.

As a result of these disparate factors, there are varying assessments about the likelihood that the stalled negotiations for implementing Palestinian self-rule in the Gaza Strip and West Bank town of Jericho will soon once again move ahead.

The most authoritative word on the subject came from Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who, always cautious, predicted Tuesday that "in the coming days" the impasse would be overcome.

Mixed And Cautious Signals

"We both share an interest in the talks going forward," Rabin said. But "not at any price," he added, in comments to reporters after meeting with visiting British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd.

From Tunis, site of the PLO headquarters, there were similarly mixed and cautious signals.

But in the past few days there has been an intensive exchange of phone calls and faxes between senior Arafat adviser Nabil Sha'ath and Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres. This has provided much support for the view that the PLO indeed shares Israel's interest in resolving the present crisis.

The crisis erupted over the New Year's weekend, just as it seemed that a previous crisis was over.

After three rounds of high-level talks -- in Oslo, then in Paris and Versailles, and finally in Cairo -- it seemed that both sides had finally reached an agreement for implementing the self-rule accord.

But then, as Peres, the chief Israeli negotiator, was celebrating his success, the PLO said that there had been no agreement after all.

According to the PLO, there had merely been a draft of an Israeli working paper -- and Arafat soon announced that he objected to several of its details.

Following the predictably angry reaction of the Rabin government, Israel offered a slight change of stance.

Peres conceded that it was "legitimate" for Arafat to reject the Cairo agreement, even though

that meant overruling Mahmoud Abbas, who had headed the PLO delegation at the Cairo talks.

"But what then do you propose?" Peres asked in a radio interview, addressing the PLO leadership. "If you reject the Cairo understandings, how then do we continue toward implementation?"

The obstacles preventing implementation of the self-rule accord signed by Israel and the PLO in September revolve around several security issues, most importantly the question of who will control the borders between Gaza and Egypt and between Jericho and Jordan.

Peres and Rabin have insisted that Israel has made every effort to accommodate PLO sensitivities -- what they term "Palestinian honor" -- by agreeing to dual control procedures at the border crossing points.

But after allowing for a Palestinian presence at the borders, Rabin and Peres insisted that Israel could not relinquish its military control of the borders.

"In matters of security," Peres told the British foreign secretary Tuesday, "there will be no compromise whatsoever."

Peres pointed out that the PLO had honored its commitment to desist from acts of terrorism, but that this alone was not sufficient, in the long term, as a security guarantee for Israel.

Passing The Point Of No Return

And Rabin, also meeting with Hurd on Tuesday, went a bit further in his criticisms of the PLO, saying that it was not adhering to the spirit of the self-rule accord.

This, Rabin said, was the biggest stumbling block in the current talks.

Hurd, who was in Jerusalem as part of a Middle East tour, was careful not to get caught up in the charges and countercharges that have disrupted the negotiating process.

He stressed he was not in the area as a mediator between Israel and the PLO. But he also remarked that despite all the difficulties, he believed there was no turning back.

"I just feel as an outsider, as a well-wisher, that all those concerned are perhaps in the middle of a river, but they have passed the point where it's easier to go back than to go forward," he said.

Leaving aside the question of whether the negotiations have passed the point of no return, some Israeli and American sources were quoted as suggesting that the upcoming meeting between President Clinton and Syria's President Hafez Assad, scheduled for Jan. 16 in Geneva, would serve as a catalyst for a breakthrough on the Israeli-Palestinian track.

Certain American sources went so far as to claim that the Clinton administration had actually foreseen the present deadlock -- and had scheduled the Clinton-Assad meeting with an eye toward breaking the Israeli-Palestinian deadlock.

During the negotiations in Oslo last summer that resulted in the self-rule accord, Israel did on occasion "threaten" to focus its efforts on reaching a deal with Syria -- and this had indeed prodded the Palestinians to move ahead.

But there can be no certainty at all that what worked then would work now.

**JEWISH SUPPORT FOR PEACE PROCESS
NOT WEAKENING IN U.S., SAYS LEADER**
By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, Jan. 4 (JTA) -- Despite some Israeli perceptions to the contrary, there has been no "real diminution" of U.S. Jewish support for the Middle East peace process, according to a top American Jewish organizational leader.

There is only a "growing concern and apprehension about violence and terror," Lester Pollack, chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, said in an address here.

He said that concerns about security are partly due to distortions by the media. He accused the media of not focusing enough on the "positive achievements of the peace process," such as the recent diplomatic accord with the Vatican.

Nevertheless, said Pollack, it is the task of the Conference of Presidents to "ensure that the euphoria of Sept. 13 did not blind the (U.S. Jewish) community and create a false sense of total achievement."

Pollack made the remarks in a keynote address at a ceremony for the presentation of the B'nai B'rith World Center Award for Journalism, in memory of Wolf S. Matsdorf. His address was titled, "American Jewry, Israel and the Peace Process."

Pollack said that "identification with Israel is the key to the lives of Diaspora Jews," and that therefore, "it is in the interest of all Jews to play a role in issues that bear on the safety and security of the state of Israel."

But, while, "American Jews are entitled to hold whatever beliefs they want" on Israeli security policies, he said, they "should express their views in responsible and effective ways."

"We do not believe that The New York Times should be the vehicle for these communications, but they should be made in private," he said, adding that only Israelis, whose lives are at risk, have the right to make decisions on security issues, echoing the line that has often been sounded by Israeli officials.

He said that the mandate of an umbrella organization such as the Conference of Presidents is to seek a consensus and "to support the policy and decisions of the democratically elected government of Israel in its pursuit of peace with security."

Pollack said if the peace process succeeds, the configuration of the organized American Jewish community and its agenda may be altered, but its "activity will not be less intense for the foreseeable future."

The Matsdorf awards were conferred on Hannah Semer, editor emeritus of the Davar daily newspaper, and on Michal Peleg, a features writer for Ha'aretz, another daily. Both were recognized for articles that explored the relationship between Israel and Diaspora Jews.

**IN POLICY REVERSAL, YESHIVA PLANNED
FOR SITE SLATED FOR ARAB GIRLS SCHOOL**
By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, Jan. 4 (JTA) -- Jerusalem's planning committee this week approved plans by a yeshiva in eastern Jerusalem to begin a construction project on a site that had been slated for an Arab girls school, marking a reversal in city policy.

Former Mayor Teddy Kollek last year issued

a demolition order for temporary booths that had been erected by Beit Orot Yeshiva, located near an Arab neighborhood on the Mount of Olives. But the order was not carried out.

The new mayor, Ehud Olmert, has expressed his support for the yeshiva's planned construction of housing and dormitories.

The committee voted 7-3 to allow the yeshiva to bring 12 trailers to the site, reportedly reflecting the new municipal government's plans to increase the Jewish presence in eastern Jerusalem. Seven of the caravans were brought there Monday night.

The vote went against a recommendation by the city's planning department, which argued that the land had to be rezoned before the construction project could be approved.

A Knesset member from the left-wing Meretz bloc has asked the attorney general to nullify the decision.

Meanwhile, the head of the yeshiva told Israel Radio the yeshiva plans to purchase nearby land and homes from Palestinians as part of its expansion efforts.

**RABIN ORDERS A SPEEDING UP
OF PLANS TO EXPAND AIRPORT**
By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Jan. 4 (JTA) -- Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin has instructed Israel's transport minister to expedite plans for enlarging Ben-Gurion Airport so the international facility will be able to handle 10 million passengers a year by century's end.

The present facilities can handle only 4 million travelers annually. Expansion plans include constructing a new terminal and runway extension.

Rabin, meeting Monday with airport authority heads, told Transport Minister Yisrael Kessar to bring the plans to the Cabinet as soon as possible for government approval.

Motti Debi, who is airport chief, presented the plans for the new terminal at the meeting, which was also attended by Finance Minister Avraham Shohat.

The new terminal will be a separate building close to the existing structure, which was created through a series of smaller extensions to the original small building in use since the days of the British Mandate.

Like major terminals at sophisticated airfields elsewhere in the world, the new structure will consist of a central building around which a series of fingers are linked to parked airplanes by adjustable covered passageways.

At Ben-Gurion now, passengers currently deplane over a movable staircase and have to take a bus to the main terminal.

Rabin instructed Kessar to ensure that construction, due to begin next year, be completed by the end of 1998.

The construction is to be financed by private investors and the sale of a 15-year bond.

The cost of the first part of the project, to enlarge traveler capacity, is estimated at \$500 million.

A second stage, to increase capacity to 15 million passengers a year, is to cost another \$350 million.

The airport, at the hub of the country's major north-south and east-west road systems, is also planned to be linked by rail to the country's major population centers.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES:

JEWISH ACTIVISTS ALREADY GEARING UP FOR THE 1994 CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS

By Deborah Kalb

WASHINGTON (JTA) -- 1994 has scarcely begun, but Jewish politicians in both parties are already gearing up for the important midterm elections and looking even further ahead to the presidential election of 1996.

Pro-Israel political activists note with some concern that the political climate is currently volatile, with many incumbents already announcing they will not seek re-election in 1994.

This volatility, they say, could lead to a turnover rate even higher than that of the 1992 election, when there were 110 freshman members of Congress.

And that trend in turn could affect pro-Israel incumbents with seniority on important committees who are up for re-election.

One-third of the Senate and the entire House of Representatives will be elected next November, in addition to gubernatorial and local races around the country.

Of the record 10 Jews now serving in the Senate, four are up for re-election in November and one, Sen. Howard Metzenbaum (D-Ohio), has announced he will not seek another term.

Jewish activists say they will miss the 76-year-old Metzenbaum, who has been active on both foreign and domestic issues important to the Jewish community.

His son-in-law, Joel Hyatt, who is viewed as pro-Israel, is running for his seat.

Neither Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.), who sits on the Armed Services Committee and has been active on Jewish issues, nor Sen. Herbert Kohl (D-Wis.), who is on the key Appropriations Committee, is viewed as facing a particularly difficult race.

But Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.) is seen as facing a tough challenge from the Republican speaker of the New Jersey House, Chuck Haytain, who is close to incoming Republican New Jersey Gov. Christine Todd Whitman.

GOP Jews Reaching For Grass Roots

Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), who was elected in 1992 to a special two-year Senate term, is running again, against freshman House Rep. Michael Huffington (R-Calif.). The incumbent may have problems with California's weak economy.

Another pro-Israel senator up for re-election is Sen. Connie Mack (R-Fla.). Mack, who is not Jewish, faced a tough race the last time around.

And senators retiring after this year include some who have been friends of the pro-Israel community, including Sen. Dennis DeConcini (D-Ariz.).

Rep. Sam Coppersmith (D-Ariz.), a freshman who is Jewish, is considering running for DeConcini's seat, as is Rep. Jon Kyl (R-Ariz.), who is viewed favorably by pro-Israel activists.

In Connecticut, the pro-Israel community is keeping an eye on the re-election bid of Democratic Rep. Sam Gejdenson, a high-ranking Jewish member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee who has been active on pro-Israel causes. Gejdenson just squeaked by on his 1992 re-election bid.

And some anticipate a close race coming up for Rep. Nita Lowey (D-N.Y.), a Jewish, pro-Israel member who sits on the key Foreign Operations subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee.

Meanwhile, Jewish Republicans, buoyed by

Republican wins in the 1993 state and local elections, are talking about building on that success in 1994 and beyond.

The National Jewish Coalition, which promotes ties between the Republican Party and the Jewish community, is reaching out around the country to establish grass-roots connections.

Matt Brooks, the group's executive director, has said that the coalition is planning to hold events or possibly to build chapters in Cleveland and Columbus, St. Louis, Houston and Boston.

The group, which was founded in the Republican heyday of the mid-1980s, also plans to be involved in various issues coming up in 1994, including health care and foreign aid reform.

"A tremendous opportunity exists in the Jewish community for a Republican message," and the coalition will take advantage of that opportunity, Brooks said.

In November, Republicans won the New York City mayoral race and the gubernatorial races in New Jersey and Virginia, garnering some Jewish support in the process.

The atmosphere at a recent coalition reception was energetic.

Competitive In All American Communities

About 275 people turned out at a Washington hotel to listen to Jack Kemp, former secretary of housing and urban development and one of the favorite candidates for Jewish Republicans in the 1996 presidential sweepstakes.

Kemp told the crowd that the Republican Party was the party of Abraham Lincoln, who stood for equality.

"We want to be competitive in all the communities of America," Kemp said.

Other potential 1996 presidential candidates favored by Jewish Republicans include Sen. Phil Gramm (R-Tex.) and former Defense Secretary Dick Cheney.

On the Democratic side, meanwhile, Jewish activists are not taking it easy, despite the fact that a Democrat is now sitting in the White House for the first time in a dozen years.

The National Jewish Democratic Council, a group fostering grass-roots Jewish Democratic political activity, is mobilizing its supporters to combat the increasingly powerful agenda of the so-called "religious right."

The religious right's agenda includes support for school prayer and opposition to abortion rights and gay rights, positions at odds with those taken by most of the mainstream Jewish community.

The council, which has taken a leadership role on the issue in the Jewish community, is planning to organize a series of seminars around the country to teach activists how to work against candidates of the religious right.

Health care will also be on the group's agenda, including the perennially touchy issue of abortion rights.

The council recently urged members of Congress to include abortion coverage in any future national health care plan.

Wealthy people "have always had a choice; poor people didn't," said Steve Gutow, the group's executive director. "The government has been the only source of abortion-related services for the poor."

The council is also hoping to expand its base around the country and is looking specifically at areas with large Jewish populations such as Los Angeles, Florida, New York and Ohio.

FOCUS ON THE ISSUES:
CONDITIONS FOR OLIM IN ISRAEL ARE BETTER, BUT MORE TO BE DONE

By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, Jan. 4 (JTA) -- Yair Tsaban, Israel's minister of immigrant absorption, does not believe the current instability in Russia will necessarily produce a new wave of emigration.

According to Tsaban, a flood of immigrants from the newly independent states of the old Soviet Union requires events that are "more dramatic, not to say more traumatic" than last fall's aborted coup in Russia or the success of extreme nationalism in the latest elections there.

"In Jewish life, there is a certain tendency to internalize the situation of instability and to live with it," he said during a recent interview with the Jewish Telegraphic Agency at his office in the Absorption Ministry.

Tsaban took issue with a statement made recently at a conference in Moscow by Uri Gordon, chairman of the Immigration and Absorption Department of the Jewish Agency for Israel.

Gordon was quoted as saying that hundreds of thousands of would-be emigrants in Russia were "sitting on their suitcases."

In spite of the uncertainty and instability there, Gordon said, they were not taking the steps to make aliyah because of reports that Israel was not doing enough for new immigrants.

Gordon made it clear that this perception is at odds with the actual data on absorption. But his comments stung nevertheless.

In the interview, Tsaban said Israel must "bear responsibility for every Jew who is ready to come, and we must do everything to improve the conditions of olim," or immigrants.

But he rejected the charge that Israel's absorption policy dramatically influences the rate of immigration to Israel. He said that the quality of absorption may influence whether the annual immigration total "remains nearly 80,000, or whether it increases to 90, 95 or 100,000.

"But I don't believe that it depends on us to close the gap between 80,000 and 200,000," he added. "This depends mainly on the situation abroad."

Immigration Level Remained Constant

In fact, Tsaban said, immigration to Israel was nearly the same in 1993 as the year before, both overall and from the newly independent states of the old Soviet Union.

Approximately 77,500 immigrants arrived in Israel last year from countries around the world, including 69,132 from the former Soviet republics, according to the National Conference on Soviet Jewry in New York.

In 1992, the total number of immigrants was 78,100, including 64,057 from the newly independent states, according to the National Conference's Soviet Jewry Research Bureau.

At the same time, 35,581 Jews from the former Soviet republics arrived in the United States last year under the government's refugee program, compared to 45,888 the year before, according to the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society.

Tsaban looked back on 1993 as a year in which he repeatedly risked his political prestige in battles with the government to assign a higher priority to the settlement of new immigrants. And he did not always win.

Even after the Knesset on Dec. 31 approved the 1994 state budget submitted by his own

government, Tsaban made a point of stating that he was not satisfied with the allocations for absorption. He made the comment even though his ministry received roughly \$471 million, up from about \$428 million the year before.

Just the same, for Tsaban, a large, soft-spoken, genial man, "the glass is half-full."

Despite what he described as the "positive, significant changes" he has introduced since the start of his tenure at the Absorption Ministry, Tsaban thinks there is still a long way to go in bringing Israeli public opinion to a recognition of these accomplishments.

While there have been a lot of "positive changes," there is still not an overwhelming feeling among immigrants and Israeli society in general that "a real radical change in the policies of klitah (absorption) was implemented during this period," he said.

Tsaban recited impressive statistics to show how the government is meeting the challenge of providing immigrants with housing and jobs.

In 1993, he pointed out, 35,000 families took advantage of specially subsidized mortgages and bought apartments, compared to 25,000 the year before.

In all, he said, more than 70,000 of about 140,000 immigrant families are living in their own homes following the influx of nearly half a million immigrants since 1989.

Of these, 53,000 families are living in free-market housing with subsidies provided by the Absorption Ministry.

'Impressive Decline' In Unemployment

Tsaban noted that he fought successfully during 1993 for the first increase in housing subsidies in four years. But he said that better solutions need to be found.

He estimated that 30,000 families need public housing, especially single-parent families, the retired and the handicapped.

Tsaban conceded there is a problem of unemployment and underemployment among the new olim. But he also cited the "impressive decline" in unemployment among olim -- from more than 39 percent in 1991, to 29 percent in 1992, to around 20 percent in 1993.

At the same time, he stressed the difficulty of finding appropriate professional employment for the Russians -- "a unique group without a precedent on the globe," in which more than 60 percent have degrees in higher education.

"This is, on the one hand, very precious human capital, but if you get this human capital in a massive way, in an intensive period, it is not simple to use it in an appropriate way," he said.

Tsaban described how he fought for money for jobs and training programs for vulnerable immigrant groups such as women, musicians and those over the age of 45, who, he said, will otherwise stay "on the margin."

He has struggled, he said, to find ways to utilize the extraordinary numbers of musicians who have immigrated here. One result was the establishment of new conservatories in Israel's Arab sectors, staffed by Russian Jewish musicians.

Despite these successes, Tsaban still feels there is more to do.

"I shall not hide the fact that there are disputes in the government" about immigrant absorption policy, he said. "And in spite of the fact that I believe we are doing things much better than the previous government, from my point of view it is not enough."