

**DISARRAY IN THE TOP ECHELONS
TESTS LIKUD'S ROOM TO MANEUVER**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Jan. 11 (JTA) -- Dramatic struggles within the Likud's upper echelons are sapping the strength of the opposition party, leaving it unprepared to tackle Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's coalition or to take advantage of public unease with the peace accord.

While some political observers think Rabin's government could unravel amid a host of political uncertainties, their assessment of the Likud's prospects is no more generous.

"The Labor-Meretz government is just about ready to fall," wrote Emuna Elon, a popular, right-of-center columnist for the newspaper Ma'ariv. "But the tragedy is that there is no alternative to take its place."

She may have exaggerated the weakness of Rabin's coalition, but her evaluation of the state of affairs among the leadership of Likud seemed to hit the mark.

The Likud leaders, she wrote, "are stuck in the mire of their own egos."

"Some of them do have fighting spirit," Elon said, "But they direct it all at infighting between themselves."

Elon's criticisms this week of Likud came on the heels of a dramatic worsening of relations among the top echelon of the Likud.

Ariel Sharon triggered the latest downturn with a frontal attack on Benjamin Netanyahu, the Likud chairman known here popularly as "Bibi."

Earlier this month, Sharon made the clear-cut pronouncement -- his first in recent years -- that he wants to run for the Likud leadership and then for prime minister.

The hard-line former defense minister took aim at Netanyahu for his inability to arouse widespread support among the Likud rank and file against last September's sudden accord between Rabin and Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat.

Sharon, who previously stood aloof from the race for leader of the Likud, has claimed that it is shortsighted and unfair of the party to have installed a neophyte like Netanyahu as its leader for the entire parliamentary term and into the next general election, which must be held by 1996.

Sharon Calls For New Party Elections

On Jan. 4, Sharon proposed a new round of "primaries" to give the party faithful another shot at choosing their leader. This time, he promised, he will run.

Likud insiders are saying a renewed leadership battle now or soon is unlikely if only because the party constitution requires a 75 percent majority in the Likud Central Committee to force such a move.

But many of those same insiders say in private that the party is unhappy with its performance under Netanyahu's leadership.

His critics note how the recent anti-government, anti-accord demonstrations in Jerusalem and around the country were attended mainly by religious-Zionist youngsters rather than grass-roots voters for Likud.

Many senior figures in the Likud Knesset faction are thought to be uncomfortable with Netanyahu's meteoric rise to the leadership.

They regard him as a political lightweight, a master of the television sound bite rather than a person of profound or single-minded political thinking.

In this context, these Likud critics note how Netanyahu originally announced he would honor the agreement with the PLO if he came to power.

But, they point out, he recently changed that stance, arguing that Arafat had violated the accord by failing to revoke portions of the Palestine National Covenant calling for the destruction of Israel.

The critics claim this zigzagging by Netanyahu reflected a shortsighted desire to curry favor with the factions of the far right, whose supporters, particularly those living in or linked to the settlements, are spearheading the public campaign against Rabin's policies.

Some observers think Sharon himself is angling for the support of these groups and would consider stepping outside the Likud to form a new party based on disgruntled Likud followers and other rightist groups.

'An Inveterate Underminer'

Sharon hotly denied this, recalling that it was he, in the early 1970s, who was instrumental in founding the Likud.

Netanyahu, for his part, referred this week to Sharon as "an inveterate underminer" -- a phrase originally used by Rabin in 1978 to describe his longtime Labor Party rival, Shimon Peres.

Shamir, who is sporadically active in public life, recently came to Netanyahu's side with the withering assertion that "Sharon will never be No. 1 in the Likud."

But Sharon's chances are regarded differently by another important figure on the right, Tsomet leader Rafael Eitan.

Eitan, whose staunchly nationalist party won eight Knesset seats in the surprise of the 1992 election, already cast his own hat into the prime ministerial ring, announcing he will run for the post in 1996.

This week, Eitan said Sharon was an eminently suitable candidate.

But he did not back down from pursuing his own candidacy, leading some pundits to predict that the two former generals -- who together ran the controversial invasion of Lebanon in 1982 -- may emerge from the current infighting on the right as a single ticket.

According to this scenario, Eitan will run for prime minister with a commitment to make Sharon his defense minister.

But one longtime Likud insider warned this week that it would be wrong to write off David Levy.

The former foreign minister, crushed by a Netanyahu-Sharon alliance in the buildup to the 1992 election, has been laying fairly low lately -- making do with periodic public assaults on Netanyahu's "autocratic style of leadership."

But Levy is not out for the count -- and he can be relied upon to return to the ring when the opportunity presents itself.

COURT RULES CHABAD MAY KEEP RELIGIOUS BOOTH AT AIRPORT

By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, Jan. 10 (JTA) -- Israel's Supreme Court has ruled that the Chabad Lubavitch movement may continue operating its booth in Ben-Gurion Airport, which offers religious services to passengers.

However, the court imposed restrictions on Chabad, saying it may not distribute religious material to those who do not solicit it and may not preach Chabad "ideology."

The ruling was a response to petitions challenging the Chabad operation filed by the left-wing Meretz bloc and the Movement for Progressive Judaism, the Israeli branch of the Reform movement.

Representatives of both petitioners welcomed the restrictions on Chabad but said they were disappointed that the court had failed to "give proper emphasis" to "the clear connection between Chabad's religious activities" and its "political (efforts) to undermine the peace process."

The Reform petition had sought permission to open a similar booth, claiming a refusal would amount to religious discrimination. If not permitted, it then asked that the Chabad booth be closed.

The Meretz petition also called for its own booth to distribute political material.

Both requests were denied.

A central claim of both petitions was that Chabad is being awarded privileges on the basis of its religious status but is, in fact, being openly political.

"The operation (is) sectarian, missionary, political and anti-Zionist," said Rabbi Uri Regev, head of the Israeli Religious Action Center of the Reform movement.

"On the basis of each and all of these characteristics we claimed it was improper for the airport authority to allow the booth to operate and to give (Chabad) a monopoly by refusing other groups," he said.

In its ruling, the Supreme Court panel said it saw nothing wrong with a "respectable, orderly and appropriate" rendering of religious services by Chabad at the airport.

But it ruled that it "was not acceptable" for Chabadniks to "wander around and solicit passengers" to accept their services.

It also ruled that it was unacceptable that the booth should be used to "propagate the ideology of the Chabad movement" or to "draw people nearer to it."

The court also cited the Airport Authority's reasoning that it would be inappropriate to allow movements with different opinions to compete to provide religious services.

GROUP PRESSES YELTSIN ON CONCERNS IN ADVANCE OF SUMMIT WITH CLINTON

By Larry Yudelson

NEW YORK, Jan. 11 (JTA) -- For years, American presidents have entered summits with their Russian counterparts with a list of Jewish concerns.

The meeting between Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin scheduled for Thursday and Friday in Moscow will be no exception.

In a departure from the days of the Soviet Union, the National Conference on Soviet Jewry has sent its concerns directly to Yeltsin as well.

The National Conference is hoping that American pressure, if not the good will of the politically embattled Yeltsin, might finally resolve the long-running issue of refuseniks, or Jews denied permission to emigrate.

While refuseniks once numbered more than 10,000, today the National Conference has a list of 150, and there is a commission of the Russian Foreign Ministry to deal with those cases.

But the Lavrov Commission, as it is known, meets only twice a month, and its procedures have not been clearly spelled out, according to the National Conference.

The group also wants Yeltsin to issue statements condemning anti-Semitism and ethnic violence.

"The recent violent acts of anti-Semitism, such as synagogue and cemetery desecrations, and attacks upon Jewish individuals are extremely distressing," Richard Wexler, the National Conference's chairman, and Mark Levin, its executive director, wrote in a letter to Yeltsin.

Despite their concerns over these and other issues, the National Conference is continuing to back Yeltsin and sustained American economic aid, which it hopes will strengthen the Russian government's efforts at political and social reform.

The summit comes at a time when Jewish groups are concerned with the results of the recent elections for the Duma, the lower house of Russia's Parliament.

Ultrationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy captured 65 of the 450 seats in the Parliament and has another 75 allies opposed to democratic reform, according to the National Conference.

Against Zhirinovskiy's success, pro-reform parties captured only 106 seats, with the largest bloc in the legislature not clearly on one side or the other.

"Yeltsin is going to need greater backing of the West for social and political reform," Wexler said Tuesday in a telephone conference call with members of Jewish news organizations.

AN IMMIGRANT IN SKATING RINK IS ISRAEL'S SHOT AT OLYMPICS

NEW YORK, Jan. 11 (JTA) -- Israel, a country not known for winter sports, will be represented for the first time in the Winter Olympics by an immigrant from the former Soviet Union.

Mikhail Shmerkin, a 23-year-old figure skater, will represent Israel next month in Lillehammer, Norway. He was previously a champion Soviet skater, finishing fifth in the Youth World Championship, which was held in the United States in 1985.

Shmerkin, known as Misha, was born in Odessa, Ukraine, where he began skating at the age of 4. At 13, he went to a special boarding school for gifted athletes.

In 1989, Shmerkin was a skating champion of Ukraine in the senior division.

Shmerkin trains most of the year at Israel's Canada Centre close to the Lebanese border, and has also returned to Russia for additional training for the Olympics.

Immigrants from the former Soviet Union with substantial athletic training have invigorated Israel's sports pantheon. Eleven olim from the former Soviet Union competed for Israel in the 1992 Barcelona summer games.

Yael Arad -- not a Soviet immigrant -- was the first Israeli to win an Olympic medal. She won a silver medal in judo at the Barcelona games.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES:

IN GERMANY, INTERFAITH GROUPS GRAPPLE WITH BOTH RACISM AND APATHETIC PUBLIC

By Ruth E. Gruber

HAMBURG, Germany (JTA) -- At a time of rising nationalism, xenophobia, neo-Nazi violence and Holocaust denial, numerous initiatives are taking place around Germany aimed at increasing awareness of Jewish heritage and of overcoming anti-Semitism and other forms of racism here.

While these are seen as important, even people involved admit that their influence on society is limited.

"Some of us younger members of the board of the Society for Christian-Jewish Cooperation are trying to make our work more political," said Ralf Meister-Karanikas, a minister who is an active member of the society in Hamburg.

"We want to have more controversial debates in public and bring what we are doing to the attention of the media, to put pressure on politicians," he said. "It can't be that we just work for a small group who are interested in Jewish matters, and who look back into the past."

In Hamburg, there are numerous groups -- such as the Society for Christian-Jewish Cooperation and a German-Israeli friendship organization -- that attempt to deal with interfaith relations.

"But in all the societies, at all the events, we see the same faces," said one Christian engaged in interfaith dialogue.

"The problem is that the population stands aside," the German Jewish leader, Ignatz Bubis, told a 12-member U.S. Christian-Jewish group in a meeting in Frankfurt last November on the eve of the Kristallnacht anniversary.

"Churches have lost influence," Bubis said.

In a series of meetings in a half-dozen German cities, the American group from the Center for Christian-Jewish Understanding at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Conn., was told repeatedly that outside pressure was needed to encourage German authorities to crack down on extremism and to support homegrown, non-governmental efforts to combat hate.

'Nazi Period Has Not Been Worked Out'

"Germans are still dangerous," said Ralph Giordano, a Holocaust survivor and leading German author.

"Not the whole people," he said, "but the Nazi period has not been worked out -- you can still feel it."

But he added: "It is also important to watch the positive things that are going on here. Many Germans are very anxious about what is happening and they ask what to do. A great part of the German population is prepared to do something against the old-new danger."

Part of that is violence that has been attributed to young people.

"In view of the political situation, it is not astonishing that young people do what they do, including violence," he said. "As long as we have politicians who play the nationalist card at the cost of hurting minorities in order to win votes, then I am very much afraid that situation will not change."

Next to a shopping mall in Poppensbützel, in northern Hamburg, a monument stands on the site of a Nazi concentration camp for women. "We must remember -- never again," it says.

"But look when it was erected, 1989," said a Holocaust survivor who is one of the 1,500 or so

Jews now living in Hamburg. "If that's when they began remembering, who can be surprised that there are young neo-Nazis today?"

Two non-violent trends also concern many Germans trying to fight right-wing extremism: historical revisionism and the "relativizing" of the Holocaust -- comparing it to other atrocities -- and an increasingly open resentment among Germans at the perception that they should be ashamed of being Germans and of their heritage.

"After 1945 there was a shame in saying, I am proud to be German. This was understandable," Bubis said.

"Today you have a generation that is saying: 'Why should others say that I'm proud to be this or proud to be that and only we Germans are not allowed to say it?' The right-wing parties have zeroed in on this vacuum," he said.

Holocaust denial thrives on these feelings.

"Increasingly, over the past 10 years, there has been a stronger tendency to deny the Holocaust, to try to do so by way of so-called science," Bubis said.

"These people are a small number, but there is almost a huge number of people who are trying to relativize the Holocaust."

People, including politicians, he said, make statements such as "the Holocaust was unique, but there have been many unique occurrences in history."

"People say, 'It was in the past; we are not to be blamed for this history,'" said Dr. Martin Stohr, president of the International Council of Christians and Jews.

"People say, 'It was a historical event, let's study it as a historical event, something that is not part of our time.'

"Politicians say, 'Let us leave the shadow of Hitler, to be a normal people like other nations,'" Stohr said.

"These are the roots of revisionism," he said. "It is very important to see this field of non-Nazi attitudes which promote neo-Nazi attitudes and thinking."

CLINTON ASKED FOR PROBE ON WALLEMBERG
By Deborah Kalb

WASHINGTON (JTA) -- A member of Congress has written to President Clinton urging that he ask Russian President Boris Yeltsin for a "definitive, public investigation" into the long-mysterious fate of Raoul Wallenberg.

Wallenberg, a Swedish diplomat, reached almost-legendary status in the Jewish community by saving the lives of 100,000 Hungarian Jews during World War II.

But his postwar fate is uncertain, with conflicting reports that he died in a prison camp in the former Soviet Union or was still alive there, until at least several years ago.

Rep. Eliot Engel (D-N.Y.), who sponsored a resolution in Congress acknowledging the Russian government's cooperation in providing documents relating to Wallenberg's fate, wrote to Clinton on Jan. 4.

"When you meet President Yeltsin later this month, I urge that you request a definitive, public investigation into Wallenberg's whereabouts and fate," Engel wrote.

"Only through a full, in-depth inquiry will the world learn what happened to Raoul Wallenberg," he wrote.

Clinton is scheduled to meet with Yeltsin in Moscow on Thursday and Friday.

AFTER YEAR IN OFFICE, CLINTON SCORES HIGH WITH JEWISH GROUPS

By Deborah Kalb

WASHINGTON, Jan. 11 (JTA) -- If not for the thorny problem of Bosnia-Herzegovina, President Clinton would win almost uniformly positive reviews of his first year in office from the organized Jewish community here.

Clinton has earned high marks from many American Jewish leaders on issues ranging from his treatment of Israel to his support of a host of domestic programs backed by many Jewish organizations.

The one fly in the ointment has been what many in the Jewish community see as the administration's tepid response to the continuing war in Bosnia, where the horrors of "ethnic cleansing" evoke images of the Holocaust.

Overall, however, Jewish leaders see Clinton's performance on substantive issues in a positive light -- which is perhaps not surprising considering that Clinton won about 80 percent of the Jewish vote in 1992.

"On the whole, it has been an exceedingly successful year if measured by the passage of important legislation and executive orders," said Rabbi David Saperstein, head of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.

On the domestic side, the key issue for many Jewish groups was Clinton's enthusiastic backing of a landmark religious freedom bill.

The Religious Freedom Restoration Act, supported by an unusual interfaith coalition including many Jewish groups, was signed into law by the president this past fall.

The law is designed to make it harder for the government to infringe on religious practices.

"The fact that it was passed, signed and so eagerly embraced by the administration was very heartening," said Abba Cohen, Washington representative for Agudath Israel, a group representing the concerns of fervently Orthodox Jews.

Jewish groups also supported other acts backed and signed into law by Clinton, including a national service bill for young people, a bill making it easier to vote, and a bill providing unpaid leave from work to people with new children or seriously ill relatives.

'Undid Destructive Policy'

In addition, with the exception of some Orthodox groups, most Jewish organizations back the president's pro-choice abortion policies and praise him for lifting abortion restrictions enacted by his predecessors.

"He really set policy and undid destructive policy to improve reproductive rights for women in this country," said Sammie Moshenberg, Washington representative for the National Council of Jewish Women. "We are delighted with that."

Moving to foreign policy and the issue of U.S.-Israel relations, Clinton and his secretary of state, Warren Christopher, have scored well.

"The Clinton administration set the tone from the very beginning" in "developing relations with the relatively new administration in Israel, which paid significant dividends for both countries," said Steve Grossman, president of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

The highlight of the past year for many American Jews was September's landmark signing, at a ceremony on the White House lawn, of the Israeli-Palestinian accord, including the famous handshake between Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak

Rabin and Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat.

While Clinton did not initiate the conditions leading to this political coup, Jewish groups praised him and Christopher for maintaining policies that resulted in such an outcome.

Jewish leaders noted that Christopher was involved in defusing two major crises -- regarding the 415 Palestinians deported from Israel in late 1992 and the fighting last summer near the Israel-Lebanon border -- that could have derailed the peace process.

"On two critical tests, the deportees and Lebanon, Secretary Christopher and the president did very well," said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice president of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

The administration also was praised for its commitment to maintaining Israel's high level of U.S. aid, \$3 billion a year, and for efforts to end the longtime Arab economic boycott of Israel.

Clinton "worked to ensure that the foreign aid package to Israel was protected in a year when there were budget cuts elsewhere," said Jess Hordes, Washington representative for the Anti-Defamation League.

Many Jews Impatient About Bosnia

But on the issue of Bosnia, Jewish groups have been sharply critical of Clinton's policies.

For more than a year, many in the Jewish community have been urging the Bush and Clinton administrations to take actions that would end the ethnic warfare and atrocities committed in large part by Serbian forces against Bosnian Muslims.

Many Jews are impatient and angry.

"The biggest negative surprise and the most tragic has been the complete lack of action on Bosnia," said Mark Pelavin, Washington representative for the American Jewish Congress.

"The president talked a good game during the campaign, but it hasn't been borne out," since he took office," he said.

Another note of criticism has come from some who are concerned that invitations to White House functions are tilted toward the left wing of the American Jewish community.

One source who requested anonymity said a number of Jewish activists thought this sense of estrangement could hurt Clinton's re-election bid.

But there was no sense that these concerns would affect the U.S.-Israel relationship, the source said.

Also well-received has been Clinton's attitude toward religion.

Clinton has been outspoken in calling for renewed emphasis on religious and civic values in combatting crime and other problems.

A group of religious leaders, including rabbis, sent him a letter last month praising his approach and vowing to work with him.

Kent Schiner, president of B'nai B'rith, praised Clinton for participating in a Havdalah service at the Jefferson Memorial this fall commemorating the group's 150th anniversary.

Clinton's participation "says something, that he's sending a message to the Jewish community that he cares and he is trying to reach out," Schiner said.

Said Jason Isaacson, Washington representative for the American Jewish Committee, "There seems to be a genuine focus by this president on the civic environment of the nation, with much greater attention to relations between groups and tolerance for diversity."