

**JEWISH GROUPS SPLIT ON TALBOTT AS CONFIRMATION HEARINGS BEGIN**  
By Deborah Kalb

WASHINGTON, Feb. 8 (JTA) -- The organized Jewish community is sharply split over President Clinton's nomination of Strobe Talbott to the key position of deputy secretary of state.

As Talbott's Senate confirmation hearings began Tuesday, battle lines were already drawn within the Jewish community over the touchy question of whether or not Talbott is anti-Israel.

Groups opposing the nominee charge that his writings as a Time magazine correspondent in the 1980s and early 1990s display a bias against Israel and that he therefore should not be confirmed to the No. 2 post at the State Department.

Talbott's supporters maintain he does understand the close relationship between the United States and Israel, and that he would not work to undermine it.

At his confirmation hearings, Talbott said he had changed his views since he wrote one particular 1981 Time article widely viewed as critical of Israel.

In response to a question from Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), he said, "I certainly don't feel the way, today, that I felt 13 years ago on this or many other subjects that we might discuss."

Talbott went on to say that "Israel is a very special country in the world, by virtue of its people, by virtue of the circumstances that brought about its birth."

He added, "We have a special obligation for reasons not only rooted in our moral obligation to Israel, but also rooted in our geopolitical interests, to support the security of Israel, and I think that the administration of which I am a part has made fairly dramatic strides in that direction."

The 1981 article in question said, among other things, that American Jews "wield influence" beyond their numbers.

It also said: "If Israel continues to take international law into its own hands as violently -- and as embarrassingly to the U.S. -- as it did in Baghdad and Beirut, then the next display of U.S. displeasure" might "include selective cut-backs in American military aid."

The piece appeared in Time shortly after Israel bombed an Iraqi nuclear reactor.

**'Talbot Will Be There'**

Sen. Howard Metzenbaum (D-Ohio), who along with Sen. John Glenn (D-Ohio) introduced Talbott to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, offered warm praise for the nominee, saying he could think of "no better pick for this job."

Metzenbaum said that Talbott had "written some things that, maybe, in retrospect, he might have changed."

"But I'm satisfied that on an overview that Strobe Talbott will be there, will be concerned, will be considerate about the State of Israel and its security in the Middle East. And if it were not for that, I would not be here supporting his candidacy," the senator added.

In his opening statement Talbott, an old

friend of the president's, addressed some of the concerns about his views of Israel.

"First, I have always believed that the U.S.-Israeli relationship is unshakable. Second, I have always believed that a strong Israel is in America's interest, because it serves the cause of peace and stability in the region," he said.

"Third, I am proud to be part of an administration that has already done so much to promote a comprehensive peace in the area, and I look forward to assisting Secretary (of State Warren) Christopher in any way I can to keep that process moving forward."

Beyond the question of Talbott's views of Israel, some Jewish groups have praised Talbott's work in his current position as the State Department's ambassador-at-large with special responsibility for the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union.

Talbott's field of expertise is the former Soviet Union, a point touched on by Sen. Joseph Biden (D-Del.) during the confirmation hearings.

"I don't think you understand the Middle East as well as you understand the Soviet Union," Biden told Talbott.

On Monday, Yossi Beilin, the outspoken Israeli deputy foreign minister, weighed into the debate, voicing support for Talbott.

"If there are people who are criticizing this nomination, they are not speaking on behalf of my government," Beilin said.

**Groups Pleased By Testimony**

The entire debate is being played out amid hints that Talbott, if confirmed for the deputy slot, could be in line for the top job at the State Department if Clinton grows dissatisfied with the performance of Christopher.

Talbott's long paper trail puts him in the position of being the Robert Bork of the State Department -- a nominee with a string of writings from which both supporters and opponents can quote at length.

As the controversy over Talbott erupted last week, two top officials from the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations met with the nominee. They reported that he had indicated he was committed to maintaining the administration's strong support for Israel.

One of those officials, Malcolm Hoenlein, the group's executive vice chairman, said as the hearings were going on Tuesday that he thought Talbott had "sought to distance himself from his earlier writings" during the early questioning.

Hoenlein said his group welcomed Talbott's comments on the importance of a strong Israel and on the moral and strategic underpinnings of the U.S.-Israeli relationship.

Other Jewish officials were also cautiously pleased by Talbott's remarks during the first round of questioning.

Jess Hordes, Washington representative for the Anti-Defamation League, said that although he was still "puzzled" by at least one of Talbott's remarks at the hearing, overall he was "looking forward to working" with Talbott.

Mark Pelavin, Washington representative for

the American Jewish Congress, said his group felt that Talbott would "continue to uphold the Clinton administration's policy of strong support for Israel."

Jason Isaacson, Washington representative for the American Jewish Committee, said it was important to keep several facts in mind, including the Clinton administration's strong support for Israel, Talbott's performance in his current job and the nominee's statement that he has "undergone an evolution in his thinking on Israel."

#### Some Republicans Critical

Last week, the National Jewish Coalition, a Republican group, and the Zionist Organization of America each release selections from Talbott's writings for Time in the 1980s and early 1990s. The groups criticized Talbott for, among a variety of other things, comparing Israel to Iraq in a 1990 article.

Other groups opposing Talbott include the Jewish War Veterans of America and the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs.

On the other side, the National Jewish Democratic Council and Americans for Peace Now have voiced support for the nominee, as has Steve Grossman, president of the powerful American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

And Mark Levin, executive director of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, said last week that his organization has worked well with Talbott in his current position.

The controversy over Talbott has spread beyond the American Jewish community, as members of Congress have been weighing in with their views of the nominee.

Some Republicans have voiced criticisms of Talbott. Last week, Rep. Jim Saxton (R-N.J.) urged Clinton to withdraw the nomination because of Talbott's views on Israel. And Sens. Connie Mack (R-Fla.) and Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.) added their voices to the call Monday in a letter to Clinton.

One key senator, Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), the ranking Republican on the Senate Appropriations subcommittee on foreign operations, told members of the Jewish press Tuesday morning that he had not yet decided on how to vote on Talbott's nomination.

But McConnell said he thought some of Talbott's views on Israel were "goofy" and bring "into question his overall judgment."

#### NEWS ANALYSIS:

#### **ISRAEL GRAPPLES WITH PEACE WHILE TRYING TO COPE WITH WAR**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Feb. 8 (JTA) -- As Israel buried four more of its young men this week, killed in a Hezbollah ambush in South Lebanon, the country wrestled -- yet again -- with the terrible contradiction inherent in talking peace while waging incessant war.

The rightist opposition, led by Likud chief Benjamin Netanyahu, demanded that the talks with Syria be suspended in the wake of this latest outrage. The Labor-led government insisted that the negotiations must go on.

The public at large, aware of Syria's vicarious connection -- and arguable responsibility -- for Hezbollah's actions, could only listen in sullen

frustration as the debate took its predictable course.

The northern front is of course not the only one on which the Rabin government faces the pressures of violence on the one hand, and progress toward peace on the other.

Israeli and Palestinian negotiators meeting in Cairo this week are reporting that slow progress is being made in reaching an agreement to implement the self-rule accord.

Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat met Tuesday in Cairo as their aides continued a marathon effort to draft an agreement on the security-related aspects of the accord.

The two men agreed to intervene personally whenever their subordinates ran into obstacles.

Meanwhile, the dilemma in southern Lebanon persists. Since July 1993, when the Israel Defense Force conducted a large-scale sweep against the Hezbollah, 15 IDF soldiers have died at the hands of the fundamentalist Shiite organization.

The long-stalled Israeli-Syrian negotiations have resumed in Washington against a backdrop of hope that followed President Clinton's landmark meeting with Syria's President Hafez Assad in Geneva last month.

But there precisely is the rub.

Before that Geneva summit meeting and in its immediate aftermath, Hezbollah activities were kept to a minimum -- presumably by stern Syrian restraining measures.

Now, with the negotiations with Israel under way once again, the Syrians, in an effort to placate their more militant constituencies, apparently feel that renewed violence in South Lebanon is again in their interests.

#### 'This Is Not The Way To Go'

Israel's predicament is underscored by Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin himself.

In his reaction to the Clinton-Assad meeting, Rabin noted pointedly that one necessary and useful way in which Syria could demonstrate its seriousness and sincerity in peacemaking would be to bring its restraining influence to bear on the Hezbollah.

On Tuesday, reacting to the incident in Lebanon of the day before -- and obliquely to Netanyahu's demand that Israel suspend the negotiations -- Rabin reiterated the need for Syria to take "confidence-building steps."

Damascus' passivity in the face of Hezbollah aggression is the exact opposite of confidence-building, the premier observed.

"If Syria intends to move toward peace, this is not the way to go," Rabin noted.

Labor's leftist coalition partner, Meretz, accused the Likud of "exploiting" the heavy loss of life for political ends.

Netanyahu's call for a suspension of the talks was just that, said Meretz Knesset member Ran Cohen. To end the bloodshed, what was needed was negotiation, not suspension, he said.

Rabin's remarks, as well as those of Netanyahu, appeared to penetrate Syrian insensitivity: an official broadcast on Damascus Radio on Tuesday evening proclaimed Syria's innocence for the fatal incident Monday.

The blame, according to the Syrian commentator, rests with Israel itself, because it willfully persists with its occupation of southern Lebanon.

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES:  
FARRAKHAN'S RESPONSE TO AIDE MAY PROVE  
A 'FAULT LINE' BETWEEN BLACKS AND JEWS**  
By Pamela Druckerman

NEW YORK, Feb. 8 (JTA) -- As Jewish and black leaders struggle to determine how to manage the ongoing crisis surrounding Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan, the militant black leader has -- at least for now -- succeeded in determining the course of dialogue between the two communities.

Many Jewish and black leaders say they are dismayed by the amount of attention that Farrakhan and his followers have gotten in recent days, following the minister's tepid reaction to a top aide's anti-Semitic remarks.

They insist that they are anxious to move past this issue and return to a substantive dialogue between the two groups.

But many Jewish organizations are warning that they cannot resume a dialogue until questions regarding the black community's acceptance of Farrakhan's remarks are resolved.

"It is unfortunate to see Louis Farrakhan setting the agenda of black-Jewish dialogue," said Michael Kotzin, director of the Jewish Community Relations Council in Chicago, where Farrakhan is based.

Farrakhan, leader of the radical Black Muslim faction, had been under pressure to distance himself from statements made by an aide, Khalid Abdul Muhammad, at a speech at Kean College in New Jersey last November.

In the speech, Muhammad accused Jews of "sucking our blood in the black community" and said that Jews control the White House, the media and the Federal Reserve. He also said that Jews brought the Holocaust upon themselves.

At a news conference Feb. 3, Farrakhan failed to repudiate Muhammad's claims, saying he would stand by the "truths" of Muhammad's speech and condemning only "the manner in which those truths were represented."

He said that Muhammad had been dismissed from his position as a national assistant but would remain a member of the Nation of Islam.

Farrakhan went on to accuse the Anti-Defamation League of plotting to destroy the Nation of Islam by disrupting the organization's relations with other black groups.

The ADL had widely publicized Muhammad's speech by publishing its contents in a full-page advertisement in The New York Times last month.

**Outrage At Farrakhan's Response**

American Jewish organizations were outraged at Farrakhan's response to his aide and lashed into his reaffirmation of Muhammad's "truths."

But, although black leaders were willing to call on Farrakhan to repudiate the incendiary remarks made by his aide, they did not seem willing to challenge Farrakhan's response.

Tensions were heightened when the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, a mainstream black civil rights group, released a statement saying it was "satisfied" with the condemnation and disciplinary action taken by Farrakhan against Muhammad.

"The NAACP is prepared to believe Minister Farrakhan's statement that he is neither anti-Semitic nor racist," the statement said. It added

that it looked forward "to concrete deeds in the future that would affirm his statements."

In a statement released Monday, the American Jewish Committee sharply criticized the NAACP's response to Farrakhan's comments, calling on "the entire civil rights community" to reject him.

AJCommittee Executive Director David Harris said that by failing to repudiate Farrakhan's remarks, the NAACP "not only turns a deaf ear to bigotry, but also seeks to rehabilitate the bigot."

Harris said that considering the long history of cooperation between the AJCommittee and the NAACP, the black group's acceptance of Farrakhan's remarks was "hard to believe."

In an interview, Harris warned the NAACP move could create a "fault line" between black and Jewish groups and among Jewish groups themselves.

While praising black leaders for their willingness to speak out against Muhammad's Kean College speech, a statement released by the ADL said the group was disappointed by the willingness of the NAACP and others to accept Farrakhan's renunciation.

**'Time To Move On'**

But in an interview, ADL National Director Abraham Foxman said he did not want this incident to jeopardize relations between black and Jewish groups.

By distancing themselves from organizations that are aligned with Farrakhan, Jewish organizations may risk jeopardizing long-standing relationships with these groups.

But some Jewish leaders insist that the issue must be resolved to the satisfaction of all involved.

"You can't just ignore it and hope that it doesn't happen again," said Mark Weitzman, national associate director of educational outreach for the Simon Wiesenthal Center. "The lies have to be confronted."

Others fear that further confrontation may divert attention from more productive aspects of black-Jewish relations.

"We should not allow Farrakhan to define relations between Jews and African Americans," said Karen Senter, co-director of national concerns for the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council. "It's time to move on."

"The notion that every black leader has to frame a response exactly the way Jewish organizations would want it can only lead to an 'in' list that dooms coalitional relations," said Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Reform movement's Religious Action Center in Washington.

"If we keep pushing at this point," Saperstein said, "our pushing will become the issue."

Calling the controversy surrounding Farrakhan a "rhetoric war," the Rev. Jesse Jackson in a Feb. 3 statement urged that discussion turn to questions of the economy and jobs.

Jackson praised Farrakhan's disciplinary action against his aide but declined to comment specifically on the content of Farrakhan's speech.

Other black leaders say they are dissatisfied with Farrakhan's mixed message, and pressed him to repudiate of Muhammad's remarks.

*(Contributing to this report was JTA correspondent Deborah Kalb in Washington.)*

## JERUSALEM INTERFAITH CONFERENCE BRINGS RECORD NUMBER OF CHRISTIAN LUMINARIES

By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, Feb. 8 (JTA) -- A huge interfaith conference held here last week broke new ground by bringing many church luminaries to Jerusalem for the first time and thereby offering de facto recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the capital city.

Top Christian leaders joined rabbis from around the world to address the common challenges posed by modernity in the largest interfaith conference ever held in Jerusalem.

Despite a boycott by Israel's Orthodox and fervently Orthodox establishment, the International Jewish/Christian Conference on Modern Social and Scientific Challenges was hailed as a big success, drawing more than 500 delegates from nearly 100 countries.

The presence of so many Christian leaders comes in the wake of the recent establishment of diplomatic ties between the Vatican and Israel and a generally warmer international attitude toward Israel as a result of the Middle East peace accords.

"There were top appointees of the church from the Vatican and top appointees of the Protestants from Geneva," said Rabbi Joseph Ehrenkranz, administration director of the Center for Christian Jewish Understanding at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Conn.

"And they were here on an equal footing (with the Jews) at the invitation of the Jewish people," he said. "Outside of the pope, what more (could) you want?"

The conference was sponsored by the Bamot Center for Cultural and Social Studies in cooperation with the Tantur Ecumenical Institute.

The notables included Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who is the world's most powerful cardinal and is the leading conservative voice in the Catholic Church, based in Rome; Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, the archbishop of Milan, who is often named as a possible candidate to succeed Pope John Paul II and is the most prominent church liberal; and the archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey.

### 'Number Of Cardinals Knocked My Eyes Out'

"The academic and scholarly positions being staked out (were) not spectacularly new or groundbreaking," said Rabbi Irving Greenberg, the New York-based president of CLAL, the Center for Jewish Learning and Leadership, and one of the keynote speakers.

But the "highly visible, Jewish-sponsored" interfaith dynamic of the conference in Jerusalem was "remarkable," he said. "The number of cardinals knocked my eyes out.

"And theology follows reality," he said. He pointed to a "historic transformation of the church toward a covenantal pluralism in its attitude toward Judaism," as evidenced by Ratzinger's speech.

Ratzinger referred to the history of the relationship between "Israel and Christendom" as one "drenched with blood and tears" and one "of mistrust and hostility."

But he also saw the relationship as one marked "again and again by attempts at forgiveness, understanding and mutual acceptance. "After

Auschwitz, the mission of reconciliation and acceptance permits no deferral," he said.

Even as a child, said the cardinal, he could never understand how Jews could be condemned by the church for the death of Jesus.

"Jews and Christians should accept each other in profound inner reconciliation, neither in disregard of their faith nor in its denial, but out of the depth of faith itself. In their mutual reconciliation they should become a force for peace in and for the world," he said.

Prominent rabbis from abroad included Rene Sirat, former chief rabbi of France and current president of the Conference of European Rabbis, and South Africa's Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris.

Rabbi David Rosen, former chief rabbi of Ireland and current director of interfaith relations for the Anti-Defamation League in Israel, served as conference chairman.

But several European and Israeli Orthodox rabbis scheduled to attend the conference apparently succumbed to pressure from the Orthodox and fervently Orthodox establishment not to participate.

A statement was issued in the names of Israel's chief rabbis, Yisrael Lau and Eliahu Bakshi-Doron, calling on local rabbis not to attend. Former Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren, originally slated to participate, withdrew and publicly criticized the conference.

These rabbis maintained the gathering was predicated on the false assumption that the two faiths share common ground. They said the meeting would confer an unacceptable legitimacy on Christianity.

### Dialogue To Find Common Solutions

Sirat said he believed the protest may have been a result of a misunderstanding about the nature of the conference. "Perhaps (the rabbis) were afraid there would be theological arguments," he said.

Instead, Sirat said the conference afforded a chance for "a real dialogue to find solutions to problems we all face," including AIDS, poverty, homelessness, violence and the strife in the former Yugoslavia.

Also on the agenda were the ethical and moral implications of genetic engineering, medical advances in fertility and the artificial prolongation of life.

Sirat said he hoped the next conference would include religious leaders from Islam.

Meanwhile, Jerusalem's Latin Patriarch Michel Sabbah, a Palestinian, gave a speech voicing his hopes of achieving an enduring peace between Christians, Jews and Muslims in Israel and of promoting ethical and religious values in a pluralistic society.

He said he has exercised his pastoral ministry "in the context of a constant cycle of moral and physical violence, of daily anxieties and sufferings, heightened by intermittent wars."

He said he is now rejoicing "in that new hope that has been born through the political initiatives of the local and international negotiators." And he warned that "if that hope is shattered," then "catastrophe looms."

Tourism Minister Uzi Baram said travel to Israel by church leaders would legitimate in a new way Christian pilgrimages to Israel. This could greatly impact tourism and the economy, he said.