

**SHAS SAYS IT WILL REJOIN COALITION,  
STRENGTHENING RABIN AT CRITICAL TIME**  
By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Feb. 15 (JTA) -- The fervently Orthodox Sephardic Shas party announced plans this week to rejoin Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's government after Passover.

Shas leader Aryeh Deri said Tuesday that his party's return, after a five-month absence, was made possible by the government's decision to support legislation to continue the present ban on importing non-kosher meat, even after the industry is privatized.

The bill, which amends a quasi-constitutional law protecting occupational freedom, easily passed its initial Knesset vote on Tuesday by a vote of 82-11, after the Labor Party threw its support behind it.

It was supported, too, by all the religious parties and many traditional or observant members of the Likud opposition. Labor's left-wing coalition partner, Meretz, strongly opposed the bill.

Deri said Tuesday that the peace process, too, was a factor in Shas' decision to move slowly back into the coalition fold.

He said his party would rejoin the government after the Knesset's Passover recess "if nothing untoward happens in the peace talks till then."

But observers here expect many ups and downs and more political maneuvering before Shas actually rejoins the government, if indeed it ever does.

Deri himself is barred from resuming his former position as interior minister, since he is currently facing criminal charges relating to bribery and abuse of his office.

Another Shas Knesset member, Raphael Pinhasi, is also banned from regaining his former post as deputy religious affairs minister because he is also under indictment on separate corruption charges.

Shas withdrew from the coalition following a High Court of Justice ruling last September that Deri and Pinhasi had to step down from their posts to face the charges against them.

Shas, whose spiritual leader is the politically moderate Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, has always been the favorite coalition partner among Labor's doves.

**Welcome News For Rabin**

For Rabin, the news from Shas is welcome indeed. Since Shas left the coalition, Rabin has governed with a narrow 61-59 majority that relies on the support of two predominantly Arab parties outside the coalition.

No Israeli government has ever included the Arab parties in its coalition. Rabin has been particularly loath to base crucial national decisions, such as possible territorial compromise with the Syrians, on Arab support.

At the same time, Rabin has been aware that recent talk of reaching out to right-wing parties to help broaden the coalition has brought opposition within Labor.

In recent days, the National Religious Party,

the right-wing Tsomet party, and Yi'ud, a Tsomet breakaway, have sent out coalition feelers to Labor.

Observers here say that fear of such an expansion of the coalition to the right prompted the controversial remarks over the weekend by Knesset Member Nissim Zvili, the Labor Party's dovish secretary-general.

Zvili sparked a political storm by daring to predict publicly that a Palestinian state would eventually emerge from the process begun last September, when Israel agreed to grant Palestinian self-rule in the Gaza Strip and part of the West Bank.

Zvili also predicted aloud that Israel would eventually recognize Syrian sovereignty over the Golan Heights.

The secretary-general offered his prognoses in the course of a speech given last weekend to a group affiliated with the Mapam party, part of the Meretz bloc.

Zvili noted that Labor did not, as a matter of policy, favor the creation of a Palestinian state; rather it sought a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation.

But his assessment, he said, was that Labor's desire for such a joint entity would not ultimately carry the day.

An embarrassed prime minister quickly upbraided the ultra-dovish Zvili, while the Likud and other parties on the right made predictable hay of Labor's obvious discomfort.

But the storm of political controversy may have been deliberately seeded, according to some observers here.

**Scaring Away Right-Wing Allies**

These observers say Zvili made his remarks at this juncture because the time had been ripe for Rabin to find right-wing coalition partners. Zvili and other members of Labor's left flank sought to scare away any potential right-wing allies.

There is a sense among both Israeli and Palestine Liberation Organization negotiators that the main hurdles have been crossed in the talks leading to an Israeli withdrawal from parts of Gaza and the West Bank, and that the negotiating, though still daunting, should be relatively downhill from here.

The accord reached in Cairo last week, which spelled out the security arrangements for Palestinian self-rule, has fueled subsequent negotiations.

By Tuesday, even Maj. Gen. Amnon Shahak, the generally cautious Israeli chief delegate to the Israel-PLO talks in the Sinai border town of Taba, confirmed that much progress was being made.

This means the first stage of the Israel-PLO declaration of principles now looks significantly nearer to implementation than it did until recently.

And it means that potential rightist allies, wary of joining the government while key decisions remained to be made in the talks, could now contemplate signing on.

**LOW-KEY MIDEAST TALKS RESUME  
IN WASHINGTON AMID NO FANFARE**

By Deborah Kalb

WASHINGTON, Feb. 15 (JTA) -- With no fanfare, Israeli and Arab negotiators returned here this week to resume their low-key peace talks.

The official talks between Israel and Lebanon, Syria and the Palestinians, resumed Tuesday after a break lasting over a week.

The resumption of talks between Israel and Jordan was postponed until Wednesday because airline problems delayed the Jordanian negotiators' arrival here.

The parties agreed to switch from their earlier high-profile, media-saturated format to this quieter mode in an effort to achieve more progress.

"We would hope the pace would be due and deliberate and that there would be progress in this next round of discussions," State Department spokesman Mike McCurry told reporters Monday.

The first set of these more secretive talks began last month, and little progress was reported.

Negotiators are meeting at the State Department and at another downtown State Department facility, but the meetings have not been publicized and there are no "stakeouts" outside the department for news-hungry reporters.

The talks are co-sponsored by the United States and Russia.

The Israeli-Syrian talks, about which there is the most curiosity, have been stalemated for months over definitions of peace and withdrawal.

The Israelis have been waiting for the Syrians to spell out their vision of a future peace with Israel, while the Syrians have been waiting for the Israelis to delineate plans for withdrawing from the Golan Heights.

Meanwhile, Israeli and Jordanian economic negotiators were scheduled to meet Thursday in a separate process that grew out of an agreement last fall between Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and Jordanian Crown Prince Hassan.

The two sides agreed to meet and discuss economic issues in a tripartite format that also includes the United States.

Banking will be among the issues on the agenda for these negotiators, who previously held meetings in Paris.

**SENATE VOTE ON TALBOTT POSTPONED  
AS CONTROVERSY AROUND HIM CONTINUES**

By Steven Weiss

WASHINGTON, Feb. 15 (JTA) -- The Senate has decided to postpone consideration of Strobe Talbott, President Clinton's nominee to be deputy secretary of state, amid continuing controversy over Talbott's alleged anti-Israel bias.

The Senate on Feb. 10 unanimously consented to hold off considering Talbott's nomination that day and delay the vote until Feb. 22, when lawmakers return from a recess.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee voted 17-2 on Feb. 9 to approve Talbott for the State Department's No. 2 post, thereby sending the matter to the full Senate.

Talbott has come under fire in recent weeks, with several Jewish groups accusing him of ex-

pressing a bias against Israel in articles he wrote for Time magazine in the 1980s and early 1990s.

In confirmation hearings before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee last week, Talbott said his attitude toward Israel had changed since he wrote the articles.

According to a Senate staffer, nine unnamed Republican senators proposed to hold off the final vote. Observers said the delay will give senators time to look at Talbott's record and evaluate his fitness for the position.

The Zionist Organization of America, one Jewish group that remains unconvinced by Talbott's proclaimed change of heart, called his recent statements supporting Israel "not persuasive."

"The ZOA is urging all American friends of Israel to call their senators and urge them to vote against Talbott," Morton Klein, national president of the ZOA, said in a statement last week.

Meanwhile, the Talbott debate has caused some division within the Jewish community.

The American Jewish Congress released a statement Feb. 9 supporting Talbott's statements in which he distanced himself from his earlier anti-Israel writings.

The AJCongress also challenged claims by the Jewish War Veterans of the USA that Clinton's nomination of Talbott was a sign of his lessening support for Israel.

"We categorically reject as totally unfounded the charge by the Jewish War Veterans that the Clinton Administration is changing its support of Israel," the AJCongress statement read.

In response, Jewish War Veterans National Commander Edward Blatt sent a letter to AJCongress accusing its leaders of supporting Clinton's policies with "blind assent."

**SECURITY TIGHTENED AFTER ATTACKS**

JERUSALEM, Feb. 15 (JTA) -- Police say they will tighten security measures in the wake of a series of terrorist incidents here.

They say they will set up more roadblocks, increase patrols and tighten controls over permits issued to Palestinians crossing the Green Line from the administered territories to work inside Israel.

On Tuesday, a 37-year-old Russian immigrant was attacked in Ashdod by a Palestinian with an ax and moderately wounded.

A 17-year-old suspect from Gaza was arrested by police, who said he told them he had come to Ashdod to kill Jews, Israel Television reported.

Meanwhile, the effort is still under way to find the assailants responsible for the ambush earlier this week of three agents from the Shin Bet, the country's secret police. One of them, Noam Cohen, died from his wounds.

Intelligence sources have said that the three were on their way to meet an informant who is believed to have planned the ambush. It is believed the informant may have been trying to refute accusations he was collaborating with Israeli authorities.

Meanwhile, a 17-year-old Palestinian was killed and two others wounded by Israel Defense Force troops during clashes in the Gaza Strip, Israel Television reported.

## NJCRAC AVOIDS, FOR NOW, A DEBATE ON RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN ISRAEL

By Larry Yudelson

NEW YORK, Feb. 15 (JTA) -- A major battle in the United States between Reform and Orthodox groups over religious pluralism in Israel has been postponed but not averted.

The Reform movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations had hoped the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council would take a bold stand on the issue at its annual plenum next week in New Orleans.

But a resolution offered by the UAHC calling on Israel "to end the religious monopoly granted to one segment of Jewry" will not be debated on the plenum floor.

A NJCRAC committee responsible for plenum resolutions, meeting two weeks before the annual gathering of delegates from Jewish communities across the country, ruled that the pluralism resolution must first go through the umbrella organization's committee-heavy "process."

This averted a threat by the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America to walk out of NJCRAC if the topic were raised. Such a move would have left the major umbrella group charged with setting Jewish communal policy without an Orthodox voice.

The rationale behind the Orthodox Union's walkout threat, which was first reported by the New York-based weekly Forward, was explained by Betty Ehrenberg, executive director of the group's Institute for Public Affairs.

"We see this as a religious issue and as an internal Israeli issue, and on the basis of those two facts, we don't feel NJCRAC is the proper venue for addressing these issues," she said.

"One day the Israelis will decide on a constitution and will decide on their own religious structures, but this is not something American Jews should determine by remote control."

But Rabbi Eric Yoffie, director of the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism, insists that religious pluralism in Israel is "a political issue and a civil rights issue."

"We can't apply one standard to this country and apply a different one when look to the Jewish state," he said, noting the strong support of NJCRAC -- including the Orthodox Union -- for American legislation supporting the rights of religious minorities.

### Local Communities Taking Stands

Despite the procedural defeat the Reform movement suffered with its resolution, which Yoffie admits was submitted late in the elaborate NJCRAC process, the UAHC hopes to bring up the resolution at the umbrella group's 1995 plenum.

And meanwhile, the Reform movement intends to seek the support of local Jewish community relations councils for its position. NJCRAC is made up of over 100 of these local councils, as well as 13 national Jewish organizations.

Already, the Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation of Portland, Ore., has adopted the call "to extend full freedom of religion to all Jews in Israel."

For its part, the Orthodox Union has alerted its members, and the Orthodox rabbinate, that the issue is now on the local agenda.

"I would be very surprised if many com-

munities decided to pass this," said Ehrenberg of the O.U. "I think there will be many JCRCs who will decide this will be too divisive."

She said that for JCRCs to adopt this measure would "dramatically reduce their effect," since there will be a whole segment of the Jewish community that they will not be representing.

The controversy comes at a time when the Orthodox Union has walked a narrow, treacherous course on the issue at the top of the agenda of the NJCRAC plenum and the Jewish community as a whole: the Middle East peace process.

The O.U. has expressed concern over the direction of the peace process, but unlike the rival Young Israel movement, it has not loudly opposed it. The O.U. has also taken criticism for sending its leadership last September to the White House ceremony where Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization signed the historic declaration of principles on self-rule in the administered territories.

An O.U. walkout now from the NJCRAC umbrella could have sparked a reassessment of the organization's efforts to maintain a position on the peace process compatible with the general support given by other, non-Orthodox organizations.

### More Important Than Peace?

For Yoffie, though, preventing an O.U. shift on the peace process was never a consideration.

"Their answer is that it (the resolution) cannot be considered at anytime, so I don't find those reasons compelling," he said.

"For 45 years, there's always been a compelling reason why this cannot be considered by communal bodies," he said. "There are new issues on the agenda. We can't put them off until the peace process is completed, which will take years.

"I still want the Orthodox Union in NJCRAC, but they cannot prevent NJCRAC, which has dealt with a whole range of issues, including those internal to Israel, from putting such issues on the agenda," said Yoffie.

But the scheduled keynote speaker at the NJCRAC plenum, Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin, says he thinks peace is more important than pluralism.

"My general opinion is we should be a liberal, pluralistic society," Beilin told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. "But if you ask if it is the most important thing on the agenda, I would say no, it's not the most important."

### GAZA PHOTO FETCHES WORLD PRESS AWARD

AMSTERDAM, Feb. 15 (JTA) -- A black-and-white photograph of three Palestinian boys in the Gaza Strip won first prize in the World Press 1993 photo contest.

The photograph, by Larry Towell, a Canadian working for Magnum, shows the boys, about 12 years old, standing against a wall with slogans in Arabic and holding up their pistols.

The pictures were judged by an international panel of photographers in Amsterdam, where the award was announced last Friday.

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Because of Presidents' Day, the Daily News Bulletin will not be published Monday, Feb. 21.

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**BEHIND THE HEADLINES:**
**SARAJEVO MUSLIM WHO SAVED JEWS  
FINDS A WARM WELCOME IN ISRAEL**

By Michele Chabin

MEVASSERET ZION, Israel, Feb. 15 (JTA) -- It has been 50 years since the Hartagas, a Muslim family from Sarajevo, saved the lives of their Jewish neighbors during the darkest days of the Holocaust.

Last week, some of that "debt" was repaid when Zajniba Hartaga-Susic, 76, and her family were evacuated from the war-torn Bosnian capital in a daring rescue operation spearheaded by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

Devout Muslims, the Hartagas provided refuge to three Jewish families during World War II. The Kabilios, who made aliyah in 1950, brought the Hartagas' actions to the attention of Yad Vashem, which honored the family as Righteous Gentiles in 1985. "It was then," says Zajniba, "that I fell in love with Israel."

Over the years, the Hartagas and Kabilios have maintained strong ties. In addition to the Jerusalem reunion nine years ago, the two families corresponded whenever circumstances permitted.

Though the elder Kabilios are now deceased, Tova (Kabilio) Grinberg, who was a small child at the start of the Second World War, has a box full of treasured photographs and letters from the Hartagas that span more than half a century. She is especially close to Zarfa, Zajniba's older daughter and a friend, who is still in Sarajevo.

In 1992, at the start of the Yugoslav civil war, Tova invited the Hartagas to Israel for a second visit. Zarfa's daughter and grandchildren flew to Israel for a three-month stay.

Such visits soon became impossible, however, as the civil war intensified. Sarajevo residents became virtual prisoners in their homes when sniper fire erupted. In the past two years, thousands have died from wounds, hunger and disease.

Despite the efforts of the United Nations and other relief organizations to gain safe passage for the neediest refugees, only a few thousand people have been rescued since fighting began.

**'Israel Is Our Home Now'**

Evacuating the Hartagas proved to be especially difficult, says JDC field operator Eli Eliezri, because "it is very hard, and dangerous, to get Muslims through Serbian checkpoints."

But Eliezri, who has led nearly a dozen rescue operations in the former Yugoslavia, says, "We were determined to get the Hartagas safely out of Bosnia and to Israel. This was a special case because they are special people. It is a kind of payback for the assistance they gave Jews."

Last week, the Hartagas learned they were among 280 people who would leave Sarajevo in the rescue convoy. They packed a few belongings -- photographs, an old clock and borrowed clothes -- and bade farewell to their country.

"There is no going back," Aida, Zajniba's younger daughter, said on her arrival in Israel. "Israel is our home now."

Aida spoke from her new home in the Mevasseret Zion Absorption Center. Just days after arriving in Israel, the Hartagas -- Zajniba, daughter Aida, Aida's Serbian husband, Branumir, and 10-year-old granddaughter, Stella -- are getting settled. The center, on a mountain just outside

Jerusalem, the sprawling center houses 200 new immigrant families, including several from the former Yugoslavia. Though their apartment and its furnishings are modest, the Hartagas call their new home "paradise." Having spent two years with virtually no electricity, it does not occur to them to turn on the lights as the sun goes down.

"I'm sorry. I forgot we have electricity," Aida tells a visitor with an embarrassed smile. "We've gotten used to living without lights and heat. Firewood in Sarajevo is extremely scarce and expensive. To prepare our last meal, I burned a pair of shoes, and that provided enough fire to cook dinner."

Though the war has been difficult for everyone, Aida says, "it was especially hard for mother." Sitting next to her daughter on a donated sofa, Zajniba points to her right leg, which was amputated many years ago.

**'If Your Neighbor Needs Help, You Must Help'**

"I was afraid to take off my prosthesis, even when I went to sleep, for fear there would be a bomb and I would have to move around quickly," she says. "It hurt all the time."

Though she finds it difficult to get around, using a cane or wheelchair, Zajniba, a tall, thin woman with short gray hair, nonetheless insisted on visiting Yad Vashem on Monday, three days after arriving in Israel.

Sitting beside Tova Grinberg, before the tree that was planted in the Hartagas' name nine years ago, Zajniba smiled as she was presented with a certificate of honorary citizenship. The family will also receive a monthly stipend and favorable loans, usually reserved for Jewish immigrants who have made aliyah under the Law of Return.

"Emotionally, leaving Sarajevo wasn't all that difficult," says Zajniba. "I had been to Israel in 1985" and "when it came time to make a decision, I tried to do what was right for my daughter and her family. They are young and need a fresh start. At my age, all I need is peace."

Aida says the family is eager to integrate into Israeli society. "My husband and I plan to begin Hebrew ulpan classes next week, and we've enrolled Stella in the neighborhood school."

Asked why Stella, a Muslim, is not attending an Arab school, Aida says, "I am a Muslim but my husband is Serb. Our lives go beyond religious and ethnic identities." Stella "needs to be at the heart of Israeli society."

Unlike many of the families from Sarajevo who have little or no knowledge of Judaism and Israel, "the Hartagas know a great deal about Jewish customs," says Shira Ozer, director of the absorption center. As an example, she relates how "a CBS-TV film crew arrived at the center wishing to interview the family right before Shabbat.

"I went into the family's apartment and told them there was a film crew outside. Zajniba asked me to apologize to the crew, saying she could not do the interview at that time because it would be disrespectful to her Jewish neighbors. She asked them to come back after Shabbat, and they did," Ozer says.

This respect for others led the Hartagas to save Jewish lives. "It was normal," says a modest Zajniba. "In Sarajevo we have a saying: 'If your neighbor is a good person and needs help, you must help him.' What more is there to say?" Now her concern is "to repay everyone's kindness."