

**MURDERS AT HEBRON MOSQUE PROMPT VIOLENCE, SHAME, SHOCK AND SORROW**

By Cynthia Mann and Mark Joffe

JERUSALEM, Feb. 27 (JTA) -- Israel's political and security establishments were reeling from the shock of the murders of dozens of Arabs by a Jewish settler in a mosque at the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron.

Responding to violence triggered by last Friday's attack, the government sealed off the territories and imposed curfews on population centers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

A closure order on the neighboring Jewish settlement of Kiryat Arba was also imposed.

Israeli leaders and politicians all across the political spectrum condemned the murders in the strongest terms. President Ezer Weizman called the attack the "worst thing that happened in the history of Zionism."

Police apparently were trying to arrest Jewish extremists from the Kach movement in Kiryat Arba, where the murderer, Dr. Baruch Goldstein, had lived.

Some Kach leaders were calling Goldstein, who was killed, a hero and a martyr.

The attack on the Muslim worshipers immediately ignited violent demonstrations and clashes inside the territories and in Arab centers throughout Israel, including Jaffa, Nazareth and eastern Jerusalem.

It sparked rioting on Jerusalem's Temple Mount by angry Muslim worshipers, who began throwing stones at the hundreds of Jews gathered for Purim prayer at the Western Wall below.

They also targeted police, who responded with tear gas and rubber bullets, but did not attempt to enter the Mount complex, the site of bloody clashes three years ago.

Up to 20 Palestinians were reported killed in the angry aftermath and scores wounded, many apparently by Israeli army fire, while radical Palestinian groups vowed revenge for the killings.

A 79-year-old Israeli was axed to death in Kfar Saba on Friday following the massacre, while many Israelis, including a year-old baby, were injured by stones thrown at their vehicles in or near Arab towns. Dozens of firebombs were hurled at security forces.

Israelis on the political left said the murderous assault made it imperative that there be rapid progress in the peace process, while some called on the government to evacuate or disarm the settlers and ban Kach activities.

Some on the political far right said the incident proved that the two peoples cannot live side by side.

'A Loathsome, Criminal Act'

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin condemned the killings as a "loathsome, criminal act of murder at a site holy to both Jews and Arabs" and called on Jews and Arabs to act with restraint.

The "crazed actions of disturbed individuals will not prevent the reconciliation between the citizens of the State of Israel and the Palestinian people," he said.

Foreign Minister Shimon Peres called the murders "a frightening expression of cruelty, devoid of human morality," and a "horrifying act which stands out in shocking contrast to our basic Jewish values."

Peres said the peace process would continue, undeterred.

"If anyone thinks that such criminal acts will slow the peace efforts, he is sorely mistaken," Peres said. "Peace is the true answer to the hatemongers and the sowers of grief."

Leaders of the Palestine Liberation Organization warned that the peace process would be set back unless the question of the settlements were put at the top of the negotiating agenda. They also called for international protection for the Palestinians.

PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat and other Palestinian leaders assigned responsibility for the attack to the Israel Defense Force, which they said failed to provide proper protection for the people at prayer.

Some sources here said the Palestinians would attend the peace talks that President Clinton called to be moved to Washington, although the Palestinians might delay their arrival as a protest.

The fatal clash occurred at the Tomb of the Patriarchs, also known as the Cave of Machpelah, on a tense morning after a daylong shoot-out in Jerusalem between the Israeli military and members of the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas movement. A Hamas leader was killed in that encounter.

Jews had been celebrating Purim, while Muslims were observing the holy month of Ramadan. Both religions consider the cave to be a holy site because it is said to be the tomb of Abraham, their common patriarch.

The cave is divided into halls designated for Jewish and Muslim prayers, which usually are scheduled at different times.

About 5:45 a.m. Friday, the mosque in the cave was filled with hundreds of Moslem worshipers, prostrate in prayer, when Goldstein entered the area, dressed in an army uniform, and began opening fire into the crowd with an automatic rifle.

An Anti-Arab Extremist

An interim Israeli army report said Goldstein, who fired 118 bullets, acted alone. The army refused to say how many Palestinians were killed by Goldstein, though various accounts have put the death toll between 39 and 49.

Goldstein, born in Brooklyn, graduated from Yeshiva University and its Albert Einstein College of Medicine in 1981 and immigrated to Israel a decade ago.

He was an anti-Arab extremist and devoted adherent of the assassinated Kach leader, Rabbi Meir Kahane. Goldstein was a member of Kahane's Jewish Defense League before he made aliyah.

Friends and acquaintances of the attacker said Goldstein was a kind and gentle man who had snapped following the terrorist murders in December of settlers Mordechai and Shalom Lapid.

The Council of Jewish Settlements in Judea, Samaria and Gaza condemned the attack and expressed sympathy for the families of the victims.

But a spokesman blamed the incident on "fears and anxiety" caused by the "deteriorating security situation" and warned that other individuals could be moved to "unfortunate, unnecessary, counterproductive" actions such as Goldstein's.

Meanwhile, Education Minister Amnon Rubinstein, of the left-wing Meretz bloc, said the "Kahane-inspired organizations" should be declared illegal and their weapons be taken from them.

Absorption Minister Yair Tsaban, also of Meretz, suggested the government consider the evacuation of settlers from Hebron.

President Weizman visited Hebron on Sunday to pay his condolences to the Palestinian community and called on Arabs and Jews to work together.

Afterward he said the incident had caused "terrible harm" to relations between Israelis and Arabs and Jews and Muslims.

In Jerusalem, the Likud opposition leader, Benjamin Netanyahu applauded the government's decision on Sunday to appoint a formal commission of inquiry into the Hebron incident.

But he added, "It cannot be that we will only investigate the murder of Arabs by Jews." An inquiry must also investigate the murder of Jews by Arabs and of Arabs by Arabs, he said at the Fifth International Conference on the Jewish Media, which is meeting here.

The authorities, he said, should crack down on radical settlers -- "people like the Kach people" -- who take the law into their hands. "They should be dealt with very, very harshly."

However, Netanyahu emphasized that the "overwhelming majority" of the settlers have behaved responsibly.

At the media conference, Rabin, who also serves as defense minister, said that using a weapon that was issued for self-defense to attack people at prayer is "a new reality in the life of Israel, in the life of the Jewish people."

"It will take time to mend the damage that one person inflicted on the Jewish people, on the State of Israel and the people of Israel," he said.

"Being a Jew, a proud Jew and a proud Israeli, I believe in Jewish values," Rabin said. "What has taken place in Hebron, in my humble opinion, was against everything Judaism stands for. Therefore I believe every Jew has to be ashamed of what happened in Hebron."

U.N. FLOUNDERS ON RESPONSE TO THE SLAYING OF WORSHIPERS

By Susan Birnbaum

NEW YORK, Feb. 27 (JTA) -- After a lone Israeli gunman killed dozens of Muslim worshipers in Hebron, the United Nations struggled over the weekend to reach an agreement on a response to the assault at the Cave of Machpelah.

Gad Ya'acobi, Israel's ambassador to the United Nations, expressed regret for "the tragic, criminal murders in Hebron" and said "the only sincere solution to the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is to enhance the implementation of the agreement between Israel and the PLO."

"We will not allow militant fanatics from either side to undermine the peace," Ya'acobi said. "This was our reaction to killings by militants in the past, and this has to be our position now."

U.N. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali spoke of his "revulsion and outrage" over the killings and also voiced apprehension over the subsequent violence that erupted in the territories, in which more Palestinians were killed in confrontations with Israeli soldiers.

Boutros-Ghali called for calm so that the talks between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization could continue.

The murderer, Brooklyn-born Dr. Baruch Goldstein, was apparently beaten to death by Palestinians after he had managed to kill dozens of Muslim worshipers and injure more than 150 others at the site, also called the Tomb of the Patriarchs, which is holy to Jews, Muslims and Christians.

The U.N. Security Council held a meeting Saturday night to draft a resolution on the murders, but was unable to reach agreement on the resolution's language.

Nasser Al-Kidwa, the PLO's U.N. observer, intimated that any delay in passing a resolution could also delay the resumption of the Israeli-PLO talks.

Although the Security Council was scheduled to meet again Monday to discuss the Hebron killings, an Israeli official said Sunday that it remained unclear whether that meeting would take place.

Informal Consultations Continuing

The official, who asked not to be identified, said informal consultations among members of the Security Council "are going on all the time, including by phone."

The official told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, "We don't think the U.N. should have any role other than to make some sort of a declaration, because we have negotiations going on between us and the Palestinians, and this is where things should be resolved."

The official explained that the delegates to the Security Council meeting had failed to agree on two out of four main points under discussion.

The official said the United States was in agreement with Israel on those two points.

The first of the four points was a condemnation of the massacre in Hebron.

The second point was a call for an urgent conclusion of the implementation of the Sept. 13 agreement between Israel and the PLO.

Israel and the United States did not agree to the third point, which was the PLO's desire for a paragraph discussing the need to guarantee the safety and security of Palestinians in the territories.

"They want to say 'including Jerusalem.' They always try to do this," the official said. "They always try to incorporate Jerusalem in the territories, and our position is that Jerusalem is not part of the territories, and they try to do this now."

The fourth point was "a call for an international presence in the territories to provide security for the Palestinians, which we oppose and the Americans opposed and many others opposed," the official said.

CABINET MOVES TO CURTAIL SETTLERS, CALLS FOR AN INQUIRY INTO ASSAULT

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Feb. 27 (JTA) -- Amid sharp differences of opinion, the Israeli Cabinet has agreed to launch an investigation into the circumstances surrounding the killings of Palestinians at a Hebron mosque and to attempt to limit the activities of Jewish extremists in the territories.

On Sunday, the Cabinet agreed to establish an official commission of inquiry into the killings. The commission, which will be headed by a Supreme Court judge, was criticized by Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who called the idea "a big mistake."

The Cabinet also ordered a series of legal and administrative measures aimed at extremists among West Bank settlers.

The measures include administrative detentions, enabling security forces to circumvent the courts and detain Israelis; enacting orders barring entry of certain, unspecified people into the West Bank, particularly Hebron; and disarming specific individuals and confiscating their weapons permits.

The Cabinet also gave Attorney General Michael Ben-Yair the task of exploring options for outlawing the Kach and Kahane Chai organizations, which were spawned by slain Jewish Defense League leader Meir Kahane and which strongly oppose the government's peace initiatives.

The officer in charge of the Central Command, Gen. Danny Yatom, told reporters on Sunday that administrative detention orders had already been issued against five prominent Kach activists, but only one had been served thus far.

According to media reports here, other Kach activists have gone into hiding.

Neither Rabin nor Yatom was prepared to say how many people would be affected by the various orders, which were yet to be issued.

During its meeting Sunday, the Cabinet also agreed that some 800 to 1,000 Palestinian prisoners and detainees would be released during the coming week.

The release of prisoners and detainees in large numbers has long been a key demand of the Palestine Liberation Organization during the negotiations for establishing self-rule in the Gaza Strip and West Bank town of Jericho.

Prisoner Releases Are Advanced

Israel had previously planned a prisoner release to coincide with the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, but the releases will be advanced and increased as a gesture to the PLO.

Israeli sources said the released Palestinians would not include anyone imprisoned for direct involvement in terrorism.

Israeli policy-makers hope the Cabinet's decisions, which are intended to demonstrate new resolve to stamp out Jewish extremism, will facilitate the quick resumption of the peace talks.

Some Cabinet ministers said over the weekend what is needed now is expediting the talks and agreement as soon as possible on Palestinian self-rule.

In Tunis, however, initial reaction from PLO headquarters to these decisions was definitely tepid.

Following Friday's killings by Dr. Baruch Goldstein of the West Bank settlement of Kiryat

Arba, the PLO demanded an international presence in the territories to protect the Palestinians.

The PLO has also called for the dismantling of all Israeli settlements.

Meanwhile, the American-born Goldstein was buried Sunday in a temporary cemetery in Kiryat Arba after a funeral that began in Jerusalem and attracted a crowd of several hundred sympathetic mourners.

The Israel Defense Force apparently rejected his family's demand that Goldstein be buried in the ancient Jewish cemetery in Hebron.

Goldstein was clubbed to death by Muslims at the Hebron mosque after firing more than 100 rounds of ammunition from his army-issue Galil rifle.

On Sunday night, Yatom categorically denied that anyone but Goldstein had fired at the worshipers in the mosque. He rejected victims' accounts that soldiers arriving at the scene had fired into the crowd.

But Yatom conceded that some soldiers who should have been on duty at the mosque were apparently not there.

This was a reference to several border policemen who should have taken up positions at the entrances to the mosque at 5 a.m. Friday. Border policemen arrived later -- by which time the attack was over.

Rabin said the IDF and the defense establishment had "nothing to fear" from a commission of inquiry.

He had opposed the idea, he said, because it would entail a massive expenditure of energy by a large number of officeholders. Under the Commission of Inquiry Law of 1968, the president of the Supreme Court appoints commissions, selecting its chairman from among the list of serving or retired Supreme Court justices. Like a court of law, a commission hears evidence given under oath and has the power to subpoena witnesses.

Justice Minister David Libai, who proposed the establishment of a formal commission, said it was important for Israel, the Palestinians and the entire world to have full confidence in the factual findings of an official board of inquiry.

ENTERING THE CAVE WITHOUT CHALLENGE

NEW YORK, Feb. 27 (JTA) -- Two Israeli soldiers were positioned at the gate to the Cave of Machpelah and three others were on duty at street level, further away from the entrance, when Dr. Baruch Goldstein entered, according to Israeli media accounts.

Many have questioned how the gunman could have gained access to the mosque, where he killed dozens of Muslims worshipers.

Goldstein was well-known around the Cave of Machpelah as a resident of Kiryat Arba, a follower of the late Rabbi Meir Kahane and a frequent worshiper at the Tomb of the Patriarchs.

He was familiar both as a doctor and as a protester, and his presence was not regarded as anything out of the ordinary, the accounts said.

There were no soldiers inside the site, which is holy to Jews, Muslims and Christians. The government tries to avoid stationing soldiers where people pray.

No one would have stopped a Jew from going in, assuming he was going into the Jewish part of the cave to pray, said one Israeli official.

JEWISH COMMUNITY AT ODDS OVER ATTACK'S REPERCUSSIONS

By Pamela Druckerman

NEW YORK, Feb. 27 (JTA) -- While unilaterally condemning Friday's killing of at least 40 Muslims as the act of a "madman," Jewish leaders were divided over the political context of the killings and how the incident would and should affect the peace process.

The attack occurred early Friday when Dr. Baruch Goldstein of Kiryat Arba entered a Hebron mosque and opened fire on a packed crowd of Muslims who were kneeling in prayer.

Many Jewish leaders rushed to insist that the incident was an aberration that does not represent the sentiment of most Jews or the tone of Israeli-Palestinian relations.

"Just as we dare not blame all of the Palestinians for acts of terrorism committed against Israelis," said Frank Dimant, executive vice president of B'nai Brith Canada, "we should not seek now to blame all Israeli residents in the West Bank for the act of what was obviously one deranged individual."

Many also insisted that actions of Israeli and Palestinian extremists not be allowed to affect the course of the peace accords now being negotiated, stressing that both parties have suffered from ongoing violence and both will benefit from a peaceful resolution of the situation.

"We must not allow this or other acts of violence to undermine the peace negotiations, incite tensions in the area or provoke further bloodshed," said Lester Pollack, chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. Pollack said his organization was "stunned" by the killings.

The chairperson of the National Jewish Community Relations Council, Lynn Lyss, said the incident highlights the need for speedy implementation of the declaration of principles signed in September.

"We hope that today's tragedy will spur a renewal of efforts to bring peace and reconciliation between Israel and the Palestinians," Lyss said in a statement.

Killings Violate Jewish Law

Lyss and others applauded President Clinton's call for the peace negotiations to be resumed "in continuous session" in Washington.

Religious and communal leaders also stressed that the killings are a violation of Jewish law.

Rabbi Marvin Hier, dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, condemned the killings as "a senseless, wanton murder that dishonors the principles of Judaism."

But others insisted the incident be seen as part of a larger sense of frustration and uncertainty among settlers in the occupied territories.

While condemning the killing, Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, founder of Lincoln Square Synagogue in New York and chief rabbi of the West Bank settlement of Efrat, called Baruch Goldstein, an American-born Israeli, "a very compassionate doctor who just went insane."

Riskin, who said Goldstein was known as the "tzaddik (righteous man) of Kiryat Arba," said Goldstein had been extremely frustrated by attacks on Israeli settlers and anti-Jewish sentiment voiced by some West Bank Arabs. Riskin, visiting

New York, said further acts of violence against West Bank Palestinians could not be prevented unless the Israeli government takes the settlements "out of the position of uncertainty."

Americans for a Safe Israel, a group that is aligned with the Likud or right-wing elements in Israel, said a poll of their constituents revealed that most blame the Israeli government for the attack, faulting it for creating "enormous frustration" among Jewish settlers.

The organization attacked Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres for allowing the Palestine Liberation Organization to "get away with murder in recent months."

Others saw the incident as proof that it is time for the Hebron settlers to move out.

The left-leaning Americans for Peace Now said that to ensure the peace process proceeds unimpeded, the Israeli government should "remove Jewish settlers from the heart of Hebron where their presence inflames relations and poses a danger to all residents of the area."

Henry Siegman, executive director of the American Jewish Congress, faulted the Israeli government for allowing Goldstein and other members of Kahane Chai to live so close to an Arab city. "To allow fevered right-wing Jewish radicals to settle in the midst of heavily populated Palestinian urban areas like the city of Hebron is to invite this kind of tragedy," he said.

But Judy Balint, a spokeswoman for the Coalition for Jewish concerns-AMCHA, said the incident does not alter the right of Jews to live wherever they have legally taken up residence. She described calls by some Palestinians to disarm Jewish settlers as "outrageous. It's obvious that Jews will be subject to revenge attacks" and must be able to defend themselves, she said.

She added, "One must understand that Hebron is crackling with anti-Jewish hatred by local Arabs. Just this past Saturday a mob of local Arabs entered the same Tomb of the Patriarchs screaming 'Death to the Jews.'"

MIDEAST STATES BREAK OFF BILATERAL TALKS WITH ISRAEL

By Susan Birnbaum

NEW YORK, Feb. 27 (JTA) -- The Clinton administration has advised the Israeli Embassy that the Syrian, Lebanese and Jordanian negotiators have ended their bilateral talks with Israel earlier than scheduled, according to Ruth Yaron, spokesperson for the embassy.

Yaron would not comment on media reports that the talks were "broken off" because of the shootings of Muslim worshipers in Hebron, saying it was up to the other parties to say that.

"We have been advised by the U.S. administration that the Syrian, Lebanese and Jordanian negotiators have decided to end the present round of bilateral negotiations early. They were supposed to end Wednesday, March 2, and they have decided to end it earlier," Yaron said.

"We have expressed, through the U.S. administration, our disappointment that our Arab interlocutors decided to end this round of peace talks earlier than scheduled. We feel that at this specific moment it would have been important to continue the peace talks, since this would have been a comforting message for our respective people," she said.