

**TWO SOLDIERS' ACCOUNTS ON HEBRON
AT ODDS WITH ISRAELI ARMY VERSION**
By Dvora Getzler

JERUSALEM, March 17 (JTA) -- Two Israeli soldiers who were on guard duty at the Tomb of the Patriarchs on the day Baruch Goldstein murdered at least 29 Palestinians have come forward with testimony that contradicts the Israeli army version of what took place on Feb. 25.

"We saw (Goldstein) with an M-16," Sgt. Kobi Yosef told the official commission investigating the killings at the Hebron mosque.

"About five minutes after him, another man entered with a Galil (assault rifle) strapped against his body," Yosef said.

His testimony, presented Wednesday, was supported by Pvt. Nir Drori who, along with Yosef, had been positioned at one of the gates leading into the mosque on the day of the killings.

Their statements directly contradicted the official army accounts, and provided some support to statements by Palestinians that more than one man had been involved in the shooting.

According to officials with the Israel Defense Force, Goldstein had acted alone.

Army investigators, who had found shell casings on the floor of the mosque after the killings, said all the casings had come from an Israeli-made Galil assault rifle. No shells from an M-16, an American-made weapon, were found at the scene.

The two soldiers further testified that they had fired toward the crowd of Muslim worshipers that came stampeding from the mosque after Goldstein opened fire.

Drori testified that he shot three or four times, and Yosef said he fired one bullet. Both denied that their fire had struck any worshipers.

Soldiers Feared For Their Lives

The soldiers said they had feared for their lives, believing a Palestinian was shooting inside the mosque. Their gunfire, they stated, had been intended to stop the worshipers from pouring out of the mosque.

"We wanted to create a jam at the door," said Yosef. "We thought it was an Arab who fired. We were afraid he would come out."

Earlier Wednesday, Lt. Rotem Ravivi, the only Israeli officer who was inside the Tomb of the Patriarchs at the time, contradicted portions of Yosef and Drori's testimony.

According to Ravivi, who saw Goldstein at the gate to the mosque, the settler was carrying a Galil rifle. He further stated that Goldstein was dressed in army uniform and had a bag and two-way radio.

Ravivi said he greeted Goldstein at the entrance to the cave and noted that he was in IDF uniform.

"He said he was on reserve duty," the officer told the panel, which met in Jerusalem's High Court of Justice.

Goldstein then went into the complex, and the officer, who was not in the prayer hall when

Goldstein opened fire, said he had no further contact with him.

Nor had Ravivi any reason to suspect anything was amiss, he told the court. Goldstein had never drawn the soldiers' attention to him in any way, he said.

Ravivi further described Goldstein as a "good guy," a man who could be trusted.

He also testified that Goldstein's car was one of only three civilian vehicles permitted to park in an IDF area near the mosque.

A total of 11 soldiers testified Wednesday before the five-man panel, which is chaired by Chief Justice Meir Shamgar and includes an Arab judge and a former IDF chief of staff.

There was some disagreement among the soldiers regarding the controversial standing orders to never open fire on Jewish settlers.

Some claimed to be aware of the orders, while at least one said he was not. Some added that they would not have obeyed the orders because they were illogical.

Border policemen, accompanied by attorneys, also testified Wednesday before the commission. The lawyers were present because the men had failed to be at their posts on the morning of the killings, and the policemen required the presence of counsel to prevent them from implicating themselves while testifying before the panel.

One man asking to be heard by the panel is reserve officer Shlomo Idelstein. On the morning of the killings, Idelstein said, he received an urgent phone call from Goldstein's wife, Miriam.

Miriam Goldstein, Idelstein said, asked him to intercept her husband, whom she said had not gone to the Tomb of the Patriarchs -- a site holy to Jews and Muslims alike -- simply to pray.

Idelstein tried to locate Goldstein, but failed to reach him on an emergency beeper.

Idelstein has written to the panel asking to give testimony about the month of reserve service he spent in Kiryat Arba, where Goldstein lived.

**U.S. WARY AS RUSSIA SEEKS
RENEWED ROLE IN MIDDLE EAST**
By Deborah Kalb

WASHINGTON, March 17 (JTA) -- New diplomatic activity from the Russians has become the latest wild card thrown into the already volatile world of the Middle East peace process.

Russia, long an almost-invisible co-sponsor of the peace process, jumped into the fray in recent weeks, taking the United States and some in the pro-Israel community by surprise.

In the midst of U.S. efforts to get the peace process back on track in the wake of the Feb. 25 murders at the Hebron mosque, Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev recently turned up in the Middle East to discuss the peace process with the Israelis and the Palestinians.

And Russia recently called for a so-called "Madrid II" international conference on the Middle East.

The U.S. government responded to these activities with a reaction that was tepid at best.

The Russians "are a co-sponsor of the

Middle East peace talks, and therefore, have a right to have their say," President Clinton said Wednesday at a joint news conference with visiting Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

"I think it is very important, however," Clinton continued, "that as a co-sponsor, insofar as possible, that we coordinate our actions together and that anything they do is not seen as an obstacle to peace, but facilitates it."

The president took a wait-and-see attitude toward future Russian involvement in the Middle East, saying that whether the Russians were a "positive force" would be "revealed by their own conduct in the days and weeks ahead."

At a press briefing during this week's American Israel Public Affairs Committee policy conference, AIPAC President Steve Grossman offered few specifics in response to a question about the new Russian involvement.

Grossman said that the Russian involvement was "a fairly recent development" and that AIPAC officials had not discussed it in their contacts with the Clinton administration.

Itamar Rabinovich, the Israeli ambassador in Washington, told the AIPAC conference that "we very much hope that the Russians will fully coordinate their moves with Washington."

Middle East analysts differed on what they saw as the reasons behind -- and the importance of -- this new Russian initiative.

The Russian moves in the Middle East coincided with increased Russian diplomatic activity on other fronts, including Bosnia.

In his remarks Wednesday, Clinton spoke positively of Russian cooperation in working toward a resolution of the continuing conflict in Bosnia.

During the Cold War, the Middle East was an important East-West battlefield, with the Soviet Union backing and funding various Arab countries, including Syria.

Russian Influence Had Waned

But since the fall of the Soviet Union, the Russians have not played a major role in the region and have left most of the diplomatic work to the United States, the other co-sponsor of the Middle East peace process.

"When the Middle East moved toward peace, their influence waned," Richard Haass, an analyst at the Carnegie Endowment, said of the Russians.

Russian influence "was all on one side," especially with "radical" elements, added Haass, who served as a Middle East specialist in the Bush administration.

Most analysts, like Daniel Pipes, a Philadelphia-based Middle East expert, said the Russian initiative was not serious as far as the Middle East was concerned.

"It's hard to take it very seriously," Pipes said.

He added that the Russians have "no influence over important states" in the region and that their "military clout is diminished."

Pipes said even Russia's formerly close ties to Syria are now history.

"Syria was part of a network" including military and intelligence ties to Russia, Pipes said. "It's not there now."

Both Pipes and Adam Garfinkle, director of the Middle East Council at the Foreign Policy Research Institute in Philadelphia, said they

doubted Russia would continue to devote this relatively high level of attention to the Middle East.

Russia's actions in the Middle East were a result of "pique" over perceptions that the United States was ignoring Russia and not taking it seriously as a world power, Garfinkle said.

"The Russians feel taken for granted by the United States," he said.

In addition, Garfinkle said, within the Russian government there are old-style bureaucrats.

These persons would be pushing to regain Russia's former relationship with Arab countries as a major arms supplier, he said.

This could be another factor in Russia's activities.

Haass of the Carnegie Endowment said the Russian moves were "largely a function and a reaction to domestic (Russian) pressures and a desire to be seen as an independent great power."

It is not clear yet whether the Russians want to play a role in the Middle East in order to increase their international prestige or whether they seek "to recreate the bipolarism of the Cold War days," said Robert Satloff of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

He cautioned that the Russians may see an increased role in the Middle East as a golden opportunity to participate in a peacekeeping force on the Golan Heights, if the Israeli-Syrian negotiations make progress.

Satloff said this is "one of the issues we have to be careful about."

"Where does constructive participation end and self-aggrandizement begin?" he asked.

Rabin and Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat were planning to visit Moscow next month, he said.

BANK OF JORDAN TO REOPEN ON WEST BANK By Dvorah Getzler

JERUSALEM, March 17 (JTA) -- The Bank of Jordan has received a license to open its doors again on the West Bank.

The license, which was granted Wednesday, enables the bank to re-establish a West Bank presence for the first time since the 1967 Six-Day War.

The bank's first branch will open in Ramallah, with others scheduled to follow.

The civil administration in the territories and Israel's supervisor of banks are involved in negotiations with other Arab banks to enable them to set up branches in the West Bank and Gaza.

Banking sources also note that talks with local businessmen in the territories about establishing a Palestinian bank in the West Bank are also progressing.

A partnership between Israel's Bank Leumi and Palestinian interests to set up a joint banking project in the West Bank had been suggested by the Palestinians in December.

The suggestion was made shortly after Jordan reached an agreement on banking with Israel.

The Jordanian agreement was signed in Washington on Dec. 5 by representatives of the Bank of Israel and the Jordanian central bank.

The agreement paved the way for the speedy reopening of Jordanian banks in the West Bank.

AMID HEIGHTENED SECURITY IN FRANCE, A TRIAL FOR CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

By Michel Di Paz

VERSAILLES, France, March 17 (JTA) -- Four hundred policemen and elite forces surrounded the Versailles courtroom where the first trial of a French citizen indicted for crimes against humanity was about to start.

Police marksmen were visible on the roofs of the Versailles Court of Justice on Thursday. More than 100 journalists from around the world packed the courtroom where Paul Touvier, after years of hiding from the authorities, was to go on trial.

Touvier, the 79-year-old former head of intelligence for the pro-Nazi French militia in German-occupied Lyons, entered the courtroom Thursday, walking with apparent difficulty. He has prostate cancer.

Only 15 seats were made available to the public, and they were occupied mainly by relatives of Touvier's victims.

On June 29, 1944, Touvier personally picked seven Jewish hostages and had them executed in retaliation for the assassination the previous day of Philippe Henriot, the propaganda minister of the Vichy regime.

Touvier was condemned to death twice in 1946 and 1947 for war crimes, but he managed to elude French authorities. He subsequently took shelter in various French convents and monasteries until President Georges Pompidou pardoned him in November 1972.

Touvier emerged from hiding, but Jewish and French veterans groups initiated charges against him of crimes against humanity, a charge that is not subject to the statute of limitations and for which pardons do not apply.

Touvier went into hiding again. He was arrested after he was discovered in May 1989 hiding out in a Nice monastery.

The only person brought to trial in France before now for crimes against humanity was Klaus Barbie, the German Gestapo police chief in Lyon. Barbie was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1987. He died in jail of cancer in 1991.

Little Chance For Another Trial

Three other Frenchmen have been charged with crimes against humanity, but their cases never went to trial.

Rene Bousquet, who was Vichy's police chief between 1942 and 1944 and was charged with the deportation of 2,000 Jewish children, was killed by a deranged gunman last June at the age of 82.

Jean Leguay, who was indicted in 1979 for organizing the first mass roundup of Jews in France in 1942, died of natural causes in 1989 at the age of 79.

Maurice Papon, a senior official in wartime Bordeaux, has managed to block his trial with a series of legal maneuvers. Papon, who served as Paris police chief in the 1960s and was a Cabinet member in the 1970s, is 83 and may never come before a court.

Part of the first day of Touvier's trial was devoted to jury selection. Once the nine members of the jury were chosen, Touvier's lawyer, Jacques Tremolet de Villers, argued that the court should dismiss all but one of civil suits that had been brought against Touvier by 23 plaintiffs.

Touvier's lawyer based his argument on a

new French penal code which a statute of limitation of 30 years for civil suits.

The court was recessed, and it took almost three hours for the three judges to reach their conclusion: International treaties on crimes against humanity supersede national laws. The plaintiffs were allowed to sue Touvier.

The rest of the session was devoted to establishing if all the witnesses against Touvier had been duly notified and would appear in court.

Prime Minister Edouard Balladur, who was secretary-general of the French presidency in 1971 when Pompidou pardoned Touvier, sent a letter asking not to testify. "I wasn't instrumental in the pardon," Balladur wrote.

The court will decide this later in the trial.

Jewish groups tried to demonstrate outside the courtroom but were kept at bay by the police.

French Nazi-hunter Serge Klarsfeld's organization, the Sons and Daughters of Jews Deported from France, displayed banners that included a quote of Charles de Gaulle: "Touvier? Twelve bullets!"

Klarsfeld and his supporters tried to reach the Court of Justice, carrying wreaths of flowers in memory of Touvier's victims, but they were prevented from doing so. They left the flowers by a tree in front of the building.

The majority of the French population was in favor of bringing Touvier to trial. More than 64 percent of those recently polled supported the idea, saying it would help shed light on this dark period of French history.

INTERMARRIAGE AMONG AUSTRALIAN JEWS FAR BELOW THAT OF AMERICAN COMMUNITY

By Jeremy Jones

SYDNEY, Australia, March 17 (JTA) -- A study of Australian Jews reveals that intermarriage remains far below that of American Jews.

The report, conducted by a New South Wales University doctoral student, compared the rate of 13.1 percent intermarriage with that of the United States, where more than half the Jews wed since 1985 have married non-Jews.

The favorable figure for the Australian Jewish community was also compared to that for other Australian groups.

Anglicans married out at a rate of 34.7 percent, and Australian Catholics had a rate of 29.9 percent.

Muslims in Australia had the lowest intermarriage rate, at 6 percent. Buddhists intermarried at a rate of 15.6 percent.

The survey, titled "Marriage Across Religious Boundaries," was based on previously unpublished data from the 1991 Australian census and was published in People and Places magazine.

The author, Tony Gariano, noted that the census question on religion was not mandatory. Still, 90 percent of the population claimed to belong to a particular religion or identified themselves as having "no religion."

Gariano, who is Jewish, told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency that "the low out-marriage rate for Jews is well-documented."

The census figures support research conducted by the Australian Jewish Welfare Society and by Bill Rubinstein of Deakin University. Deakin said the rate of intermarriage among Jews in Australia "is the lowest in the Diaspora."

SURVEY OF JEWISH DEMOCRATS REVEALS EDUCATION, ISRAEL TOP THEIR CONCERNS

By Deborah Kalb

WASHINGTON, March 17 (JTA) -- A wide-ranging survey released this week by a Jewish Democratic group revealed that education, Israel, and health care were among issues ranked highly by Jewish Democrats.

Education topped the list, with 86 percent of respondents calling it "very important." Israel and health tied for second, with 81 percent ranking them "very important."

Only 26 percent of respondents ranked freeing Jonathan Pollard, convicted of spying for Israel, as "very important."

The survey, conducted by the National Jewish Democratic Council, a group promoting grass-roots Jewish Democratic political activity, consisted of responses from 886 of the group's members.

"It is a good and accurate reflection of how active members feel," said Hyman Bookbinder, a longtime Jewish community leader who serves on the executive committee of the council.

But Bookbinder added that he could not "insist that this was a true sample of all Jews in America." He said the breakdown of respondents by denomination was fairly reflective of the Jewish community as a whole.

Forty-three percent of respondents identified themselves as Reform, 38 percent as Conservative, 6 percent as Orthodox, 3 percent as Reconstructionist and 6 percent other.

But Bookbinder also said that the responses tended to be "somewhat skewed to the elderly." Only 39 percent of respondents were 50 years old or younger.

The survey, the results of which were released Wednesday, was mailed in December to the homes of 3,900 members of the Jewish Democratic group, and 23 percent responded, most of them during the first two weeks of January. The group has a total of about 5,000 members in 43 states.

On the Middle East peace process, 86 percent of respondents said they either strongly or somewhat agreed with the statement, "I support the recent Israel-PLO agreement."

Hebron Killings May Have Had Effect

"We are quite gratified the membership indicated a very, very high approval for the Middle East peace process," Bookbinder said.

He added, though, that the fallout from the killings of Arab worshipers by a Jewish settler in Hebron "might have affected some issues."

But "overall, it was a confirmation of where progressive Jewish Democrats are on the issues of the day," Bookbinder said.

On other issues relating to the peace process, 84 percent of respondents agreed that the United States should recognize a united Jerusalem as Israel's capital. Only 21 percent supported the idea of an internationalized Jerusalem.

On Syria, 85 percent said they agreed that Syrian participation in the peace process was essential to the success of the process.

Fifty-seven percent agreed that Israel should be willing to withdraw partially from the Golan Heights to ensure peace. But only 22 percent said Israel should entirely withdraw from the Golan.

Among statements in the survey dealing with

Israel, the one receiving the most approval was for the continuation of Israel's annual \$3 billion in U.S. aid. Ninety-one percent of respondents agreed with that goal.

Much of the survey dealt with domestic issues.

Other issues at the top of the respondents' agenda included crime and anti-Semitism, both ranked "very important" by 78 percent of respondents; economic policies, 69 percent; human rights, 67 percent; opposing the "religious right," 67 percent; civil rights, 65 percent; and foreign policy, 63 percent.

Scoring lower were church-state issues, 57 percent; abortion, 55 percent; women's rights, 53 percent; environment, 47 percent; black-Jewish relations, 37 percent; foreign aid, 36 percent; gay rights, 31 percent; freeing Pollard, 26 percent; and the North American Free Trade Agreement, 24 percent.

Respondents were presented with the topics and asked how important they considered them.

The Pollard figure was "consistent with the attitude our advisory board and executive committee had," Bookbinder said. "We wouldn't object to good treatment, release or reduction" of Pollard's life sentence, "but there was no strong support for this, identified as a Jewish or a Democratic issue."

When identified by gender, the survey showed significant differences on some key issues. Sixty-two percent of the respondents were men.

Seventy-seven percent of women ranked abortion as "very important," compared to only 41 percent of the male respondents.

Sixty-seven percent of women called church-state issues "very important," as opposed to 50 percent of the men.

And 78 percent of the women termed human rights "very important," compared to 59 percent of the men.

56 Percent Support Death Penalty

The study also surveyed people on specific issues concerning crime, health care, church-state matters and education.

On the issue of crime, a whopping 95 percent of respondents said they agreed that sales and possession of handguns should be restricted.

Fifty-six percent said they supported the death penalty.

On health care, almost the entire sample, 98 percent, said that health care reform was necessary in the United States. Seventy-eight percent said they supported the Clinton plan.

The survey revealed that 92 percent of respondents opposed the teaching of religion in public schools and 84 percent opposed prayer in public schools.

But 76 percent of respondents agreed that public schools should teach about religion.

Eighty-nine percent of respondents said that parents should not be allowed to use tax dollars to send children to religious schools, and 86 percent felt the same way about private schools.

But 54 percent agreed that parents should be allowed to choose the public school to which they send their child, even a school in another district.

"A year after Clinton took office, the issues he's dealing with continue to hit home with this core group of active Democrats," Monte Friedkin, chair of the group, said in a statement.