

**CLINTON MOVE TO DENY POLLARD CLEMENCY ANGERS HIS SUPPORTERS**

By Larry Yudelson

NEW YORK, March 23 (JTA) -- President Clinton's decision late Wednesday to deny clemency to Jonathan Pollard not only disappointed but angered the imprisoned spy's supporters, who believed they might have one last chance to make their case to the White House.

"We had been assured that the president's decision would be considered carefully following the Justice Department's recommendation and that we would be permitted to meet directly with White House officials to discuss the matter," said Ted Boutros, one of Pollard's lawyers.

"We were denied that opportunity," he said.

Clinton's decision came less than four hours after White House spokeswoman Dee Dee Myers said the Justice Department's recommendation in the Pollard case had not yet been reviewed by the president.

Clinton explained his decision in a statement issued late Wednesday afternoon. He noted that the former Navy analyst who spied for Israel had committed "one of the most serious crimes against our country -- placing national security secrets of the United States in the hands of another country."

Clinton said his judgment reflected the recommendation of Attorney General Janet Reno and "the unanimous views of the law enforcement and national security agencies."

He said he based his decision "upon the grave nature" of Pollard's offense and "the considerable damage that his actions caused our nation."

Many Jewish groups had asked the White House to commute Pollard's life jail sentence, which they see as overly harsh.

In his statement, Clinton said he had considered the argument that Pollard deserved a shorter prison sentence because he spied for a friendly nation.

Much Ambivalence Among American Jews

"I nevertheless believe that the enormity of Mr. Pollard's crime, the harm his actions caused to our country and the need to deter every person who might even consider such actions, warrant his continued incarceration," the president said.

Despite the successful efforts of Pollard's family to turn his case into a national Jewish issue, there remained much ambivalence about Pollard in the organized Jewish community.

While Pollard's advocates argued that he committed his crimes out of love for Israel's security and caused no real damage to American interests, many in the community were inclined to listen to the government's position that Pollard had spied for money and may have jeopardized American lives.

Signals from the White House in December that it was seeking to gauge the political impact of a clemency decision met with a response from the Jewish community that "I don't think was

overwhelming," said an official from one Jewish organization.

That ambivalence was evident in a letter mailed to the White House by the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council just hours before Clinton announced his decision.

While NJCRAC's annual plenum approved sending the letter last month, it took until this week for wording to be approved by its member national agencies.

The letter notes that "there are many in our community for whom there remain serious questions about the sentencing proceedings and Mr. Pollard's sentence."

It also acknowledges, however, that the decision on clemency can only be made "by someone in authority having access to the entire record in the case," much of which is classified.

The letter concludes: "We respectfully recommend, Mr. President, that, in your review of the Pollard case, if you determine that the sentence was inappropriate, you consider a modification of the sentence, including the possibility of commuting the sentence to time served."

But even this weak wording, which fell well short of asserting that the sentence was unjust or even inappropriate, was too much for one of NJCRAC's member agencies.

The Jewish War Veterans of America, which has traditionally taken a strong stance on national security issues, abstained from the letter.

Pollard was arrested while trying to seek refuge in the Israeli Embassy in November 1985. He pled guilty to passing secrets to Israel and was sentenced to life in jail in 1987.

He will be eligible for parole in November 1995, but under Justice Department guidelines release is unlikely until the year 2015, according to a published report.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES:**SETTLERS BATTLE TO STAY IN HEBRON DESPITE THE HARDSHIPS OF LIFE THERE**

By Michele Chabin

HEBRON, West Bank (JTA) -- To their opponents, they are religious fanatics bent on destroying the peace process.

To their supporters, they are brave pioneers who would rather die than forsake their claim to Eretz Yisrael.

In reality, the Jews of Hebron defy such tidy definitions. Comprised of 48 families and 150 yeshiva students, the community, and the issues surrounding it, are far from black and white.

Historically, both Jews and Arabs have a claim to Hebron, where, more than 3,000 years ago, the patriarch Abraham is said to have purchased a burial cave for his wife Sarah. According to tradition, Abraham himself is buried in the Machpela Cave, or Tomb of the Patriarchs.

Until the 1920s, Jewish and Arab residents of the city maintained an uneasy coexistence. Tensions between the two communities peaked in 1929, when Arabs massacred 69 Jews. The last Jews were forced out of Hebron following a riot in 1936.

In 1968, a year after Israel gained control of the West Bank, a small group of Jews returned to Hebron. In 1970, the government offered them a building site on the outskirts of the city, which later became the settlement of Kiryat Arba. In 1980, another group of Jews settled in Beit Hadassah, a former hospital in the heart of Hebron. They have remained there ever since.

Since Feb. 25, the day Baruch Goldstein, a Jewish settler from Kiryat Arba, murdered 29 Palestinians in a Hebron mosque, the Jewish settlers of Hebron have been at the center of a huge storm of controversy that shows no signs of subsiding.

In the wake of the massacre, the settlers have found themselves under intense scrutiny--not only by the Palestinians but by their fellow Israelis.

For a solid month, the massacre and its fallout have dominated both the headlines and editorial pages of the daily newspapers. As radio and television broadcast live coverage of the Shamgar Commission's hearings into the massacre, op-ed writers continue to argue for and against the settlers' right to bear arms and about whether the government should evict them from Hebron.

While the political debate rages in the halls of the Knesset and on the newspapers' op-ed pages, the Jewish settlers of Hebron say they will not budge.

Recognizing that public opinion within Israel could ultimately decide their fate, the settlers have embarked on a public relations campaign that, they hope, will build sympathy for their cause.

They concede that they have an "image problem" and have appointed two spokespersons, one a native English speaker, to coordinate visits by the local and foreign press. Despite this, a major American magazine recently featured a gun-toting settler family on the cover, under the title, "Armed and Dangerous."

According to the settlers, hundreds of journalists and photographers have visited Beit Hadassah and the Avraham Aveinu complex, where most of the Jews of Hebron reside.

An Armed Camp

Despite the warm welcome that guests receive, there is no hiding the fact that the settlement is more an armed camp than a neighborhood.

Getting there at all is a complicated affair. Only those with shatterproof glass would dare drive their cars past Bethlehem, so most catch a bus from Jerusalem to Kiryat Arba. Once there, two jeeps filled with soldiers lead the bus through the winding roads of Hebron, often getting stoned along the way. Every Jew who wishes to enter or leave Hebron does so in an armed convoy.

Seemingly used to the danger, 30 school-children who commute daily to school in Kiryat Arba barely blinked an eye when the bus they were traveling in was stoned. The two journalists seated among the children were not nearly as calm.

Asked about the stones, the convoys and the soldiers patrolling the streets and rooftops, Hebron resident Ruti Hismi said, "We're feeling more tension than usual, but this isn't new, after all.

"At the beginning of the intifada six years ago, the situation was terrible," she recalled. "I

couldn't drive my car a few meters without getting stoned. It was worse then than it is today, because we didn't have shatterproof glass. My windshield was broken several times."

Though relations between Jews and Arabs in Hebron have never been optimal, "things were a lot quieter in the year before the signing of the peace accord" last September said Hismi, a mother of six. After the Israeli-Palestinian signing ceremony in Washington, "the tension grew, and the roads became more dangerous," she said.

'Not Easy To Live Here'

"It's not easy to live here," agreed Elisheva Federman, 22, whose husband, Noam, the spokesman of the outlawed, anti-Arab Kach movement, had been arrested the previous week.

"There are no services in Hebron," she said. "The children must travel to Kiryat Arba for schooling. There is no hospital or clinic, no post office or bank."

Anticipating the question she has been asked many times before, she continued, "My husband and I feel that Hebron is an important place for Jews to live, despite the hardships. It's more important to live here than to have a comfortable life. We feel very deeply connected to Hebron; it is the home of the fathers and mothers of the Jewish nation."

Federman defended her husband's innocence and said that his arrest was based "purely on political motives. It's easy," she asserted, "to say that Kach is a terrorist organization, but the government can't prove it. I'm glad to see that the government is using such a desperate act," she said, "because it means they are unsure of themselves."

Though she is not a member of Kach, Shani Horowitz, an American-born Israeli who has lived in Hebron for a dozen years, asserted that Noam Federman and other Kach leaders "were arrested without cause. They were arrested to give a prize to (Yasser) Arafat," she said, referring to the Palestine Liberation Organization leader.

Horowitz, a nursery school teacher with six children of her own, said that forcing the Jews to leave Hebron would create a precedent.

"Today they're talking about giving back Hebron. Tomorrow it could be the Western Wall," she said. Referring to Arab rioting within Israel proper following the Hebron massacre, Horowitz said, "The Arabs have shown us that the intifada isn't just in Judea and Samaria," as settlers refer to the West Bank.

"The question isn't Hebron -- it's the Jewish state," she said. "I'm not willing to give up one piece of it."

Like many of her fellow residents, Horowitz refused to discuss the deeds of Baruch Goldstein, who was the community's physician.

"I don't want to go into it," she said. "We had a lot of positive experiences with Baruch Goldstein." After a pause, she added: "You have to remember that Goldstein didn't live in Hebron. There is no reason we should be punished for what he did."

Hismi believes that Goldstein "simply cracked" under the strain of treating terror victims. "He was going through a terrible time," she explained. "He was the first person to arrive at any incident. He saved so many innocent people, and many died in his arms."

ISRAELI TROOPS CAN SHOOT SETTLERS, CHIEF OF STAFF TESTIFIES TO COMMISSION

By Dvora Getzler

JERUSALEM, March 23 (JTA) -- Israel's highest-ranking army officer has told the official commission investigating the Hebron massacre that there were never any standing orders that soldiers should never shoot at Jewish settlers.

Army Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Ehud Barak, testifying before the commission on Wednesday, said that the army's open-fire instructions did not preclude firing at an Israeli.

"A massacre is a massacre is a massacre. You do not need special orders to know what to do," he said.

His statement contradicted testimony previously given to the commission by officers and soldiers alike, who indicated it was their understanding they were never to fire on Israelis, particularly militant, gun-wielding settlers.

Addressing the earlier testimony, Barak acknowledged to the panel that it was obvious that the army's open-fire orders had been misunderstood.

But he made it clear that his soldiers were allowed to shoot at an Israeli who was endangering anyone's life.

"In no case is there, nor can there be, an army order which says it is forbidden to shoot at a settler even if he is shooting at others or at you. The opposite is true," said Barak.

He also told the panel that had the army's security precautions been followed to the letter, it was highly likely that the massacre might have been prevented, or at least minimized.

IDF KILLS 4 HAMAS LEADERS IN 18-HOUR HEBRON BATTLE

By Dvora Getzler

JERUSALEM, March 23 (JTA) -- At least four leading Hamas terrorists were killed in an 18-hour battle with Israeli troops in Hebron that ended Wednesday.

The forces of the Islamic fundamentalist movement had entrenched themselves in several buildings in Hebron. The siege ended when the Israeli military blew up their hideouts.

A pregnant Palestinian woman who was the mother of four was killed during the fighting. According to Israeli sources, she fell victim to a Hamas bullet. Palestinian sources countered that she was shot by the Israel Defense Force.

A second woman was injured during the fighting and taken to Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem. Five IDF soldiers were lightly wounded in the battle.

Explaining why the fighting had lasted so long, the army chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Ehud Barak, said the IDF had gone to extreme lengths to prevent civilian casualties.

Hebron has been under a 24-hour curfew for almost every day since Feb. 25, when the mosque massacre took place.

The United States expressed concern Wednesday about the fighting in Hebron.

"The incident in Hebron is clearly one of concern to us," U.S. State Department spokesman Mike McCurry said at a news briefing. "We are attempting to get more detail based on some of the initial reports that we've seen."

ISRAELI EMBASSY IN BANGKOK TARGETED BY MEN LINKED TO TRADE CENTER BOMBING

NEW YORK, March 23 (JTA) -- A suspect in the last year's bombing of the World Trade Center in Manhattan is now being linked to an attempted bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Bangkok, Thailand.

The would-be suicide attack, which experts reportedly say could have caused damage over a half-mile radius, was averted March 11 when the driver of a bomb-filled truck ran into a motorcyclist.

The driver fled the scene of the traffic accident, which was less than a half-mile from the Israeli Embassy.

Not until a week later was the close call discovered, when police found a ton of explosives hidden in a water tank on the back of the truck.

Also found in the water tank was the body of a Thai driver who had delivered the rented truck to the perpetrators.

According to the Nation, an English-language daily in Bangkok, a high-ranking local police source identified one of the terrorists as Ramzi Yousef, one of three terrorists who remain at large after allegedly carrying out the bomb attack on the World Trade Center on Feb. 26 last year.

Security had already been ordered increased around the Embassy and the Bangkok synagogue, in the wake of last month's massacre of Palestinians in Hebron.

The bomb found in the truck was made of ammonium nitrate fertilizer, diesel oil and C-4 explosives -- a mixture similar to that used in the World Trade Center bombing.

Thai police found 25 sacks of ammonium nitrate on March 18 in an abandoned house, which the landlord said had been rented to a group of Arab men.

Police lifted fingerprints from the house, which they said would be useful in identifying the terrorists.

At least four people were involved in assembling the bomb, according to the police, who added it was likely that some Thais were involved since it would have been difficult for foreigners to obtain all the bomb's ingredients without local help.

Bangkok's Metropolitan Police commissioner, Chaisit Kanchanakit, said he met with Israeli Embassy officials on Monday and that they had agreed to send anti-terrorism experts to help in the investigation.

Members of an American anti-terrorist unit reportedly will also assist in the investigation.

Suspicion is currently focused on several fundamentalist groups opposed to any regional peace initiatives with Israel.

In 1992, members of a fundamentalist group detonated a bomb in front of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires. Twenty people were killed instantly and 240 wounded in the incident.

The explosives used in that attack were of the same type found in the truck in Bangkok, according to local news reports.

Because of Passover, the JTA Daily News Bulletin will not be published either Monday, March 28 or Tuesday, March 29.

LUBAVITCH CELEBRATE REBBE'S BIRTHDAY EVEN AS HE LIES IN CRITICAL CONDITION

By Pamela Druckerman

NEW YORK, March 23 (JTA) -- Lubavitch Chasidim in Crown Heights revved up their Mitzvah tanks this week to celebrate their rebbe's 92nd birthday on Wednesday.

But instead of following their usual route across the city from the Brooklyn Bridge, this year the converted trailers embarked from Beth Israel Medical Center in Manhattan, where Rabbi Menachem Schneerson lay in critical condition following the massive stroke he suffered on March 10.

Supporters of the rebbe were using his birthday, which falls on the 11th of Nissan according to the Hebrew calendar, to encourage what one Lubavitch leader called "introspection and action."

From varying points on the Lubavitch political spectrum, news conferences, media alerts and legislation heralded the coming of the Messiah or, alternatively, the need to perform mitzvot, or commandments, to help the rebbe's recovery.

At a news conference at the hospital on Monday, Lubavitch spokesman Rabbi Yehudah Krinsky faced clusters of microphones and television cameras to set forth a birthday plea.

"Start with one act of kindness, to one other person, and soon these individual acts will multiply into a world truly transformed," he said.

This message was echoed in a full-page advertisement taken out by a Lubavitch organization in Monday's New York Times, where -- beneath a life-size portrait of the rebbe -- readers were asked to give the ailing leader "the gift he really wants."

"Give charity, study Torah, say a prayer, think about your purpose in life, be a source of inspiration to others," the ad implored.

Followers Hold Special Services

At the movement's Chabad outreach centers around the world, followers held special services to pray for the rebbe's recovery.

In Los Angeles, an estimated 1,000 supporters gathered at the Orthodox Beth Jacob Congregation for a special worship service.

And some in the Lubavitch community fasted Tuesday from sunrise to midday because of the rebbe's condition.

In Washington, American Friends of Lubavitch hosted a reception on Capitol Hill and a dinner at a hotel on March 15 for a "U.S. Congressional Tribute to Education."

Several hundred people, including members of Congress and Jewish organizational officials, gathered for the dinner, which marked the expected congressional passage and presidential approval of "Education and Sharing Day, U.S.A." as the annual commemoration of the rebbe's birthday.

The resolution passed in the House of Representatives by unanimous consent Monday, and was expected to be approved by the Senate.

Rabbi Abraham Shemtov of Philadelphia, a Lubavitch leader, said a Lubavitch delegation expected to meet with President Clinton after he signs the resolution.

But even the birthday celebrations highlighted the split between those in the movement

who have vociferously promoted Schneerson as the Messiah and others closer to the rebbe himself, who emphasize the need for Jewish outreach and religious observance.

Rabbi Shmuel Butman, leader of the International Campaign to Bring the Messiah, gathered some 2,000 supporters outside Beth Israel on Tuesday to be at "the doorstep of the great revelation."

Others continued the silent prayer and devotion which has been going on since the rebbe's condition became critical.

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

SCHOOL PRAYER AMENDMENT PASSES HOUSE DESPITE SOME JEWISH GROUPS' OPPOSITION

By Steven Weiss

WASHINGTON, March 23 (JTA) -- Jewish groups opposing the measure lost a battle in Congress this week with the passage of an amendment promoting voluntary school prayer.

The amendment, sponsored by Rep. Sam Johnson (R-Texas), would withhold federal funds from schools that prohibit voluntary prayer by students. It was passed by the House of Representatives by an overwhelming 345-64 margin.

Critics of the measure -- including the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress and the Anti-Defamation League -- claim that the measure has little effect because schools have always allowed students to pray voluntarily.

They say that this legislation only complicates the matter by threatening administrators with the loss of crucial federal funds.

Opponents also say that schools with difficulty determining what is lawful prayer as opposed to unlawful prayer will decide to allow prayer in order to avoid a penalty.

"Faced with the threat of litigation and a possible cut-off of federal funds, school boards and principals may err on the side of broadly permitting all kinds of organized religious activity," Melvin Salberg, ADL's national chairman, said in a statement.

The House action Monday follows the passage last month in the Senate of a similar amendment to another bill, sponsored by Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.). Both proposals were offered as amendments to larger education bills.

Critics of the Helms proposal were also opposed to the House version, calling both amendments needless invitations for excessive government entanglement with religion.

But despite the efforts of groups opposed to prayer in schools, both the House and Senate initiatives have passed convincingly.

"The numbers speak for themselves," said Jeffrey Weill, a public policy fellow at AJCommittee, in reference to the strong congressional support for school prayer.

Indeed, Monday's landslide House vote followed a 75-22 Senate count in favor of Helms' amendment, causing some prayer opponents to rethink their future strategy on the issue.

"The House vote is a warning that we have a lot of work to do as far as educating members of Congress about school prayer in particular and the separation of church and state in general," said Mark Pelavin, Washington representative of AJCongress.