

**ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL BEGINS,
PALESTINIANS READY TO MOVE IN**

By Dvorah Getzler

JERUSALEM, April 5 (JTA) -- Though negotiations continue over the details, the experiment in Palestinian autonomy is getting under way. And a 27-year chapter in Israeli history is coming to a close.

Israeli troops are pulling out of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho.

And Palestinians are heading in.

In the past few days, the Israel Defense Force's transport corps has been trucking out trailers housing IDF district headquarters, the barbed wire that marked the bases and even the potted plants.

In a deeply symbolic gesture, Israel permitted the return this week to the territories of some 50 Palestinian deportees and fugitives.

And Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat has announced his desire to fly into Jericho when autonomy is implemented and then embark on a pilgrimage to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

Jails and the intifada detainees they hold have been relocated, as well.

Some of the equipment, and most of the prisoners, have been moved to inside the "Green Line" marking the pre-1967 border; the rest has been redeployed in Gush Katif, a settlement bloc at the south of the Gaza Strip, which will remain for now under Israeli control.

Outside Jericho, soldiers are pitching their tents within sight of will be, within a matter of weeks, an autonomous Palestinian enclave.

Israeli soldiers in Gaza seemed close to unanimity in their relief at departing a posting that for many has meant humiliation and frustration rather than military glory and heroism.

"This place is no good for us," a soldier told Israel Radio, echoing the words of many others. "You don't come out of here as a normal person."

'I Got Used To Throwing Stones'

The departure of the Israeli presence after nearly 27 years has some Palestinians at a loss. In the Deir el-Balah refugee camp in the south of the Gaza Strip, the final Israeli presence was scheduled to be removed on Wednesday, with outposts to be handed over to members of the PLO.

Dozens of clapping youths followed departing army vehicles through the camp, but when some began throwing stones Monday, soldiers opened fire, wounding nine.

"For seven years I got used to throwing stones at the army," Haimen al-Tawil, 14, was quoted as saying by the Yediot Aharonot newspaper, explaining that he wanted to take advantage of his last opportunity.

"Besides," he added, "I'm throwing stones at them so they will remember me."

At the border crossings from Egypt to the Gaza Strip and from Jordan to the West Bank, ululating women, cheering children and men

swallowing back their tears greeted the return Tuesday of the Palestinian deportees.

The returnees were, in almost every case, those who directed PLO action. They included the political and intellectual leadership of the intifada, the grass-roots uprising in the territories that began in 1987. They also included some who were expelled as early as the 1970s.

Israeli leaders insisted, to a skeptical Israeli public, that none of the returnees had blood on their hands.

Ghassan al-Khatib, who has been a member of the PLO negotiating team, is on record in the daily Ha'aretz as believing that the expellees, and the enthusiasm their return will engender, "will put a stop to the fall-off in support for the PLO."

Hebron's Mayor Reinstated

It is Arafat's PLO that is pushing the peace process, against the rejectionism of the fundamentalist Hamas.

The returnees will also take their place in building the foundations and ground-floor of Palestinian self-government. In a signal that Arafat intends to control these institutions, PLO local offices have recently been closed down to await the arrival of the PLO chairman's trustees.

In Hebron, similarly, former mayor Mustafa Natshe was reinstated at the special request of Arafat. He had been dismissed by the Israeli authorities in 1983, following the terrorist murder of Israeli yeshiva student Aharon Gross.

The vacuum of law and order created by the IDF's withdrawal is due to be filled by an armed Palestinian police force whose 10,000 men are training in Egypt and Jordan.

Details of the size of the force have been submitted, by the Israeli and PLO negotiators meeting in Cairo, for final approval by Arafat and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

But whatever their final numbers, the advance party of this force was due to arrive in Gaza and Jericho by the end of the week, to acquaint themselves with the area and its volatile population.

They will certainly get a mixed reception. Some will regard them as conquering heroes. Supporters of the Hamas fundamentalist movement, which opposes the peace process, will view them as no better than quislings.

For the few thousands of Jewish settlers who will find their homes have become enclaves within or all-too-close neighbors with the autonomous Gaza and Jericho regions, the future seems uncertain, even though the IDF will be guarding them from within.

The deeply committed nationalists of Gush Emunim and their right-wing allies see the Gaza-Jericho autonomy as a threat to the future of settlement in "Greater Israel."

The IDF has few illusions about how they may react, no matter whether they are immediately affected or are those who live in West Bank areas where Palestinian autonomy may be still some five years away.

The IDF, the police and other security

personnel will be very much in evidence on all roads leading to the newly autonomous regions and barriers will go up on the day of the final IDF withdrawal.

But many settlers are less ideologically committed.

Eighteen families from the small Gaza Strip fishing village of Dugit set up protest tents just inside the Green Line, demanding that the government resettle them in Israel proper.

In other settlements, among them those in the Jordan Valley north of Jericho, there is bitterness for sure.

But there is also the beginning, albeit tentative and almost undercover, of a realization that life in the autonomous Palestinian areas may not be too attractive and that compensation may be the better part of valor. The precedent for such a pay-off was set by the government in the wake of the peace treaty with Egypt, when settlers in the Sinai were compensated for moving.

Also at the end of this week, the first members of an international observer force were due to arrive in Hebron. The force was established to meet Palestinian demands for enhanced security in the wake of the February massacre of at least 29 Palestinians by a settler in Hebron.

The force will be supplied by Norway, Denmark and Italy. Sixty members will patrol as observers, armed with revolvers.

Israel has never before agreed to an international observer force in the territories because that smacks of an infringement of its sovereignty.

And the right-wing opposition has denounced it as setting a possible precedent for the oft-mooted idea of internationalizing Jerusalem.

ISRAELIS ENCOUNTERING TROUBLE GAINING ENTRY TO TALKS IN OMAN

By Steven Weiss

WASHINGTON, April 5 (JTA) -- The United States is working to ensure that Israeli diplomats and journalists will be allowed to go to Oman for multilateral peace talks, in the wake of indications that the Persian Gulf emirate has backtracked on its earlier pledge to permit Israeli visitors.

Oman is hosting the upcoming round of multilateral talks dealing with regional water issues.

To prepare for those talks, scheduled for April 17-20, a team of Israeli diplomats was to depart for Oman this week. But the advance team was rebuffed by the Omani government, Ruth Yaron, spokeswoman for the Israeli Embassy here, confirmed Tuesday.

Yaron said the Israeli team planned to depart for the Arab country in a few days to a week.

"We expect the matter to be resolved soon," she said.

According to reports in the Israeli press, the central issue was the refusal by Oman to allow Israeli journalists to cover the peace talks, as originally promised when Oman committed to hosting the talks.

Israeli officials, through the Americans, made it known to Oman that if Israel's journalists cannot attend the talks, neither will its diplomats.

A source at the State Department confirmed that the Clinton administration had been in

contact with officials from Israel and Oman to discuss the entry of the Israeli team.

When the advance team does make it to Oman, securing entry for the Israeli journalists will top its agenda.

Oman is one of several Arab countries hosting the new round of multilateral talks, which is taking place in April and May.

SYRIA TO REMAIN ON U.S. DRUG LIST DESPITE EARLIER TALK OF EXEMPTION

By Steven Weiss

WASHINGTON, April 5 (JTA) -- Syria will remain on a U.S. list of countries not cooperating in the fight against illicit drugs, despite indications last week to the contrary.

President Clinton decided last Friday to keep Syria on the list, accepting a recommendation by Secretary of State Warren Christopher.

But Christopher is said to have overruled lower-level officials in the State Department who sought to reward Syria for its cooperation in the Middle East peace process.

A source at the State Department would not comment on whether there was a difference of opinion within the department, but acknowledged that the matter had been discussed.

"We hope this year's certification decisions send a clear message: This administration is serious about combatting international narcotics trafficking," Robert Gelbard, assistant secretary of state for international narcotics matters, said at a briefing Monday.

By being placed on the list, Syria is deemed to have violated requirements that it cooperate with the United States or make efforts of its own to combat drug trafficking.

Countries on the list are penalized by having most of their U.S. foreign assistance withheld. Syria does not qualify for such aid in any case, since it is also on another U.S. penalty list: one including countries that support terrorism.

Clinton could have removed Syria from the drug trafficking list by citing U.S. national security concerns. But in what some called an effort to avoid a potential political gaffe, Christopher decided that Syria did not qualify under the national security exemption.

Congress, which received Clinton's list Friday, has 45 days to object to the president's recommendations.

At a State Department briefing Monday, Gelbard said Syria had made some progress in the fight against drug trafficking, but not enough.

"We remain very concerned about the problem of government officials, military and other, who continue to go unpunished for their protection of trafficking activities," he said.

However, there have been strides made in the eradication of drug harvesting in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley, which the United States holds Syria partially accountable for, Gelbard said.

Some pro-Israel forces on Capitol Hill were pleased with the administration's decision.

"We're relieved that the United States has decided to keep Syria on the list," said Josh Isay, spokesman for Rep. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.).

According to Isay, Schumer made clear following rumors that Syria might be removed from the list that he and other members of Congress would vigorously oppose any such action.

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES:
POPE PUTS RELATIONS WITH JEWS
AT TOP OF HIS ECUMENICAL AGENDA**
By Pamela Druckerman

NEW YORK, April 5 (JTA) -- Pope John Paul II has put Catholic-Jewish relations high on his ecumenical agenda, moving on theological and diplomatic fronts to strengthen ties between the Vatican and Israel and to stress the shared history between the two faiths.

In recent interviews and public statements, the Holy See has described Jews as "our elder brothers in the faith," and anti-Semitism as "anti-Christian."

As spiritual leader of nearly 1 billion Catholics for more than 15 years, he has built on the foundations laid down by the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, and has continued to pursue what many say is his own long-held personal commitment to improving relations between Catholics and Jews.

But it is the pope's recent recognition of the right of Jews to settle in Israel that has defined the recent sea change in Catholic-Jewish relations.

"It must be understood that Jews, who for 2,000 years have been dispersed among the nations of the world, had decided to return to the land of their ancestors. This is their right," said the 73-year-old leader in an interview with Parade magazine, an American mass-circulation weekly.

These comments, published in the magazine's Easter edition, follow the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between Israel and the Vatican last December, a move which was pushed forward by the pope himself.

Under his leadership, the Vatican has also dropped its insistence that Jerusalem be declared an international city, tacitly accepting a united Jerusalem under Israeli sovereignty.

And for the first time, the pope has sponsored the first official Vatican commemoration of the Holocaust. An international concert attended by dignitaries from around the world was scheduled for Yom Hashoah, April 7.

Many Believe Stumbling Block Gone

According to many observers, formal recognition of Israel removed what had been a major stumbling block to Catholic-Jewish relations, clearing the way for the kind of overtures that the pope continues to set in motion.

Rabbi A. James Rudin, head of interreligious affairs for the American Jewish Committee, said recent statements reflect a position that has been building since the pope's election in 1978.

These efforts, Rudin said, are an attempt to craft an enlightened notion among Catholics of the real historical relationship between the two groups.

"He's not talking to Jews about the Jewish religion; he's speaking to Catholics," Rudin said.

In 1979, the Pope returned to his native Poland to visit Auschwitz, where he knelt before a Hebrew inscription to pray for the victims of the Nazi concentration camp.

He became the first pope to visit a Jewish house of worship when, in 1986, he gave an address at the Rome synagogue.

Last April, the pope ordered a group of

Carmelite nuns to leave their convent on the grounds of Auschwitz, following ongoing charges from Jews that their presence was a religious desecration and defusing what was thought to be a potentially explosive situation.

And throughout his travels, the pope has met with local Jewish communities and stressed his dedication to Jewish concerns.

Since establishing ties with Israel, the Israeli government has invited John Paul II to visit the country and he has announced his desire to do so.

These grand diplomatic gestures are meant to filter down through the Catholic hierarchy into Catholic schools and seminaries, where images of Jews and Jewish history are cast.

It was the Second Vatican Council that set the tone for a new era in Catholic-Jewish relations. The council ruled that Jews could no longer be referred to as "Christ-killers" and anti-Semitic statements had to be erased from Catholic liturgy.

Since then, Jewish groups have worked to help implement programs in the United States and abroad that educate Catholics on Jewish history, values and religious beliefs.

Observers admit that it will take some time for the messages of the Catholic leadership to filter down to general attitudes and behavior.

Many also recognize that some Jews are reluctant to change notions about Christianity built over centuries of hostile relations.

Brother William Martin, director of the ecumenical and religious affairs commission of the Archdiocese of New York, said that despite a perception among Jews that the pope, being Polish, is anti-Semitic, it is actually his Polish upbringing that helped shape his affinity for Jews.

Childhood Friends Were Jews

In the recent Parade interview, the pope described his childhood in the Polish town of Wadowice, where he went to school with Jewish children and had many close Jewish friends.

While in his early 20s, he watched as Jews and others were rounded up by the Nazis for deportation, an event which helped shape his commitment to working with the Jewish people.

The pope's outspoken dedication to Catholic-Jewish relations has been met with high praise from most of the organized Jewish community, which welcomed diplomatic ties between the Vatican and Israel.

But Leon Feldman, secretary of the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations, said that relations with the Vatican must be seen through more than one lens. IJCIC is the umbrella organization which works with Christian denominations on issues of common concern.

"On the one hand they are a religious force, on the other hand they are a political force," said Feldman. He added that the Vatican has made repeated calls for free access to holy places in Jerusalem in order to maintain a hand in the bargaining process between Arabs and Jews.

Of particular concern to the Vatican are the Catholics living as minorities in Arab countries.

Feldman said that despite recent advances, it will be years before the pope's overtures "trickle down" to average Catholics and Jews. He said memories of the Vatican's response to the Holocaust still haunt many Jews. Under Pope Pius XII, the Vatican failed to react to the slaughter of Jews at the hands of the Nazis.

JUDGE ORDERS DEPORTATION OF WWII MAUTHAUSEN CAMP GUARD

By Marilyn Ruby

The Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle

MILWAUKEE, April 5 (JTA) -- A federal immigration judge has ordered the deportation of Anton Tittjung, a 69-year-old suburban Milwaukee man found to have lied about serving as a Nazi concentration camp guard during World War II.

Tittjung has until April 29 to designate a destination, according to an April 1 ruling by U.S. Immigration Judge G. MacKenzie Rast in Chicago. If Tittjung does not meet the deadline, he will be deported to Croatia, site of the Yugoslav town of his birth.

After a three-day denaturalization hearing in 1990, a federal judge in Milwaukee ruled Tittjung had lied about his background to gain entry into the United States in 1952 and to obtain citizenship in 1974.

U.S. law prohibits entry by former Nazi concentration camp guards.

Mordecai Lee, executive director of the Milwaukee Jewish Council for Community Relations, called deportation a fitting consequence for Tittjung's wartime actions. "We're dealing with a clear-cut violation of federal law, and the consequences of breaking that federal law seem overwhelmingly obvious," he said.

"If a person lies to become an American citizen, then it only makes sense that the consequence is to strip the person of that citizenship and restore them to the legal and geographical status they would have had, had they not lied in the first place," said Lee.

He added he is "baffled by those who say 'forgive and forget,' " including Tittjung's wife and members of their Roman Catholic parish.

Wife Questions Why Jews Are Interested

"Mr. Tittjung was an active participant in the worst act of genocide in recorded history," Lee said. "It's no wonder that not only does that disqualify him for American citizenship, but there's no statute of limitations on correcting the wrong based on his wartime record."

Tittjung's wife, Katarina, was quoted April 2 in The Milwaukee Journal as saying her husband "went to war like everyone else" and that the United States has denied him justice. She told the Milwaukee Sentinel she could not understand why Jews would show interest in the case.

Lee retorted that these comments are "not surprising" coming "from the wife of someone who denies participating in the Final Solution and who expects forgiveness without ever admitting to anything or asking for forgiveness."

"Tittjung's strategy has been to run out the clock by filing as many appeals as he is legally entitled to, notwithstanding their lack of legal merit," Lee said.

"He is hoping to take advantage of the American concept of justice to evade justice. The victims of the Holocaust did not have those legal protections."

The U.S. Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations used captured Nazi documents to prove Tittjung was a member of the SS Death Head's Battalion and was an armed guard at the Mauthausen camp near Linz, Austria, and its Grossraming subcamp.

LUBAVITCH CHASIDIM IN BRAWL OVER ACCESS TO AILING REBBE

By Pamela Druckerman

NEW YORK, April 5 (JTA) -- Tensions are running high at the Lubavitchers' ongoing vigil for their ailing rebbe, as demonstrated by the arrest this week of three Lubavitch youths on charges of assaulting a Chasid as he tried to enter the rebbe's hospital room.

Police have charged Brooklyn residents Yanky Prager, 21, Jack Hershkop, 21 and his brother Aaron Hershkop, 17, with third degree assault, claiming the three youths "beat up" 47-year-old Chaim Halberstam at the Beth Israel Medical Center in lower Manhattan.

The brawl took place Sunday evening outside the intensive care unit where Rabbi Menachem Schneerson, the 92-year-old Lubavitch leader, breathes with the help of a respirator.

Halberstam, one of several people who regularly takes turns watching over the rebbe, reportedly left the rebbe's room in order to participate in evening prayers. When he tried to re-enter the room his path was blocked by the alleged attackers.

Halberstam, who runs the World Lubavitch Communications Center, which distributes recordings of the rebbe's teachings, was brought to the Beth Israel emergency room and given stitches for a wound over his left eye.

Incident Called 'Game Of Power'

From his office at Lubavitch headquarters in Crown Heights on Monday, Halberstam -- who has criticized some Lubavitch leaders for not being aggressive enough in the rebbe's medical care -- said the incident was part of a "game of power" between people within the Lubavitch movement.

He claimed to have been approached earlier in the day by the same three young men who warned him that he was "going down this week."

Halberstam said the attackers were known in Crown Heights as "hoodlums," who could not have gained access to the heavily guarded seventh floor of the hospital without approval from someone in the Lubavitch leadership.

Prager, one of the three men charged in the attack, said he had come to the seventh floor to pray and was asked by someone in the Lubavitch movement -- whom he would only identify as a "higher authority" -- to prevent Halberstam from going back into the room.

Prager said that, contrary to the police report, Halberstam wildly attacked the group of young men, forcing them to restrain him in "self-defense."

He described Halberstam as a "troublemaker" who had "no business going into the rebbe's room."

"Some people are afraid of him. I'm not afraid of him," Prager said. "I'm afraid of God and that's all."

Prager and the Hershkop brothers were given summonses to appear in Manhattan Criminal Court on April 25.

Schneerson, who is reportedly unconscious and in very critical condition, has been hospitalized since suffering a massive stroke on March 10. A struggle over his care and the movement's leadership has shaken Lubavitch since he was first severely debilitated by a stroke two years ago.