

**ISRAEL ABDUCTS SHI'ITE LEADER
IN HOPE OF AIDING AIRMAN'S CASE**

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, May 22 (JTA) -- The Israeli commandos who abducted a Muslim fundamentalist leader in Lebanon on Saturday brought back videos and documents that officials here hope will shed light on the whereabouts of Ron Arad, the long-missing Israeli airman whose case has been taken up by supporters around the world.

Israeli officials were quick to begin interrogating Shi'ite Muslim guerrilla leader Mustafa Dirani about Arad, who was shot down over Lebanon in 1982.

But military leaders say they are not planning to use Dirani, 43, as a bargaining chip for Arad's return.

Arad is one of six Israeli soldiers listed as missing in Lebanon, and he is the one believed to have the greatest chance of still being alive.

Dirani was abducted from his home in eastern Lebanon early Saturday morning, when some 40 Israeli commandos in two helicopter gunships flew over the Syrian-controlled Bekaa Valley and descended upon the Shi'ite leader's village of Kasanara.

The commandos snatched Dirani from his bed while his family looked on. During their seven-minute stay in Dirani's house, the commandos also collected documents and videotapes that they hope will prove useful in locating Arad.

Acting on direct orders from Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who also serves as defense minister, the Israeli commandos refrained from shooting at any civilians around the targeted house.

The predawn kidnapping was nearly identical to the 1988 abduction of Sheik Abdel Karim Obeid, then a leader of the Islamic fundamentalist Hezbollah in southern Lebanon. At a news conference Saturday night, Rabin admitted that the attempt to use Obeid as a bargaining chip had been a mistake.

He told reporters that Dirani had been abducted solely to obtain information about Arad -- a statement seconded by the Israel Defense Force chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Ehud Barak, and the IDF's intelligence chief, Uri Saguy.

Could Spark New Attacks

Dirani was head of security for Amal, a Syria-backed militia operating in Lebanon, when Arad was captured during Israel's 1982 Lebanon campaign. Dirani is said to have held Arad for two years in a hideout in Beirut.

Dirani subsequently broke away from Amal and founded the Believers Resistance Group, an organization linked to Hezbollah and closely connected with Iran. The Israeli government believes Dirani's supporters later sold Arad for \$300,000 to Iran's Revolutionary Guards.

But Israel is convinced that Dirani still has information about Arad's present whereabouts.

Dirani's abduction took place after attempts to locate Arad through diplomatic channels led nowhere.

Israeli opposition leaders initially joined the

government in praising the planning and execution of the daring raid.

But by Sunday, opposition politicians were on the attack. They charged that the Labor government was using the plight of Arad and public concern about his safety for "cynical political purposes, to divert public attention from Rabin's lack of leadership and his disastrous policies, which are helping to establish a Palestinian state."

The abduction is considered likely to spark new attacks by fundamentalist militias against Israeli soldiers in southern Lebanon.

Hezbollah attacks increased after Obeid was kidnapped in 1988 and after another Shi'ite leader, Sheik Abbas Musawi, was killed during a 1992 Israeli assault on his motorcade.

Hezbollah officials were quick to denounce the abduction and to charge American complicity.

"This is an act of state terrorism sanctioned by the Great Satan, America," read a statement issued by Hezbollah. "It proves once again Israel's terrorist nature."

Syria, the leading wielder of power in Lebanon, had no immediate comment on the abduction, nor was it clear how the raid would affect the long-stalled Israeli-Syrian peace negotiations.

**KILLING OF TWO SOLDIERS IN GAZA
SUGGESTS FLAW IN SECURITY SETUP**

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, May 22 (JTA) -- The killing of two Israeli soldiers at a Gaza Strip checkpoint last Friday has highlighted what many security officials consider a major problem in the autonomy accord Israel signed with the Palestine Liberation Organization in Cairo earlier this month.

Under the terms of the accord, which establishes Palestinian self-rule in Gaza and the West Bank town of Jericho, the Israel Defense Force can only pursue individuals suspected of terrorism into the autonomous areas during a violent incident, not after it has already occurred.

Israel's right-wing opposition immediately pounced on the attack as proof that Israel had reached poorly conceived security arrangements with the PLO.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who faced criticism about the security issue from some members of his own Cabinet, directed his charges against Palestinian leaders.

At a news conference in Tel Aviv on Saturday night, Rabin said that Palestinian failure to control the violence against Israelis could put the continuation of the peace process at risk.

If the Palestinians do not prove that they can take control of Gaza and Jericho, "it will make it harder for us to continue and execute the further stages of the declaration of principles that we signed," he said, referring to the autonomy blueprint inked last September in Washington.

But the prime minister also warned the Israeli public that "so long as occupation continues and there is resistance, we will have to continue to pay the price in blood.

"Blood is the price of an occupation of a

foreign nation rising up against our control," he added.

Nabil Sha'ath, the senior PLO negotiator in the Cairo talks, said after he arrived in Gaza last Friday that the Palestinian police would investigate the murders, but not engage in a manhunt.

If the Israelis "give us names of suspects, we can investigate," he was quoted as saying.

Palestinians Are 'Disorganized'

IDF sources stated meanwhile that the Palestinian leadership should not be blamed entirely for last Friday's incident.

"The problem is inherent in the (self-rule) agreement itself, in that it prevents us from going after assailants and terrorists," one officer said.

But he also said the Palestinians are "disorganized" and demanded that they "make sure that cars headed toward Israel aren't carrying gunmen."

The issue of whether the IDF can engage in "hot pursuits" of suspected terrorists fleeing into the autonomous zones was among the numerous security issues that were subject to lengthy Israeli-PLO negotiations before the Cairo agreement was signed.

Two Islamic fundamentalist groups opposed to the Israeli-PLO peace initiative, Islamic Jihad and Hamas, were quick to claim responsibility for last Friday's attack.

The two victims of the attack, both of whom were on reserve duty, were identified as Staff Sgt. Moshe Bukra, 30, and Cpl. Erez Ben-Baruch, 24.

Along with a third soldier, they were manning a temporary roadblock at the Erez checkpoint, at the northern end of Gaza, at dawn Friday when a vehicle came at them from the direction of Gaza City. The vehicle passed them, did a U-turn and then opened fire at the guard post as it returned.

The two soldiers were killed on the spot, but the third soldier, who was unhurt, managed to fire a few shots at the fleeing attackers, who sped toward Beit Lahiya in Gaza, which had officially come under Palestinian control only a few days earlier.

Israeli reinforcements soon rushed to the site of the attack, but they refrained from pursuing the vehicle.

Gaza Is Sealed Off

In a separate incident the same day, two civilian Israelis who were driving a garbage truck were slightly wounded when shot at from a passing car near the settlement of Morag, at the southern end of Gaza.

There was further unrest Sunday, when one member of Islamic Jihad was killed and four Hamas members were captured by the IDF following a 10-hour operation in the West Bank town of Hebron.

The IDF strike followed the murder of two Israeli settlers south of Hebron last week by members of Hamas.

The man belonging to Islamic Jihad was killed when the IDF fired two anti-tank missiles at a building in which he was hiding, refusing to surrender. He was said to have been responsible for a recent attack on an IDF soldier.

In response to Friday's incidents in Gaza,

Prime Minister Rabin immediately ordered the IDF to seal off Gaza until May 29.

The IDF is demanding that the Palestinian police set up roadblocks inside Gaza, where Palestinian residents and their vehicles can be searched for arms before they reach Israel.

Palestinian officers conceded after the attack that they still lacked effective control over Gaza. They said there were not yet enough police officers in place, and they complained again that they lack funds to pay their salaries.

GERMANY TOUGHENS LEGISLATION ON EXTREMISM, HOLOCAUST DENIAL By Gil Sedan

BONN, May 22 (JTA) -- The lower house of the German parliament has approved legislation that would toughen penalties for violence perpetrated by right-wing extremists.

The legislation, adopted last Friday by the Bundestag, increases the maximum penalty for assaults from three to five years and permits the authorities to jail assailants preventively.

It also would punish those promulgating the so-called "Auschwitz lie" with a sentence of up to three years in prison.

The need for a new bill criminalizing Holocaust denial arose after the Federal Court of Justice ruled in March that under the law at the time, Holocaust denial did not in itself provide sufficient grounds to press charges.

The legislation must still be ratified by the Bundesrat, the upper house, representing Germany's 16 federal states.

Highlighting the need for a new tougher law, Ignatz Bubis, chairman of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, said that right-wing radicalism was so widespread throughout Western Europe that more comprehensive measures were needed to combat it.

Bubis suggested in a newspaper interview that the European Union set up a joint secret service to fight right-wing extremism. He added that European countries were no longer able to cope with the situation on their own.

The same day that the Bundestag approved the new crime bill, it was discovered that neo-Nazis had desecrated a Jewish cemetery in the Bavarian city of Hoechberg.

Thirteen tombstones were found overturned and vandalized in the cemetery. Police said that the desecration had taken place on May 18, but that the vandalism was only discovered by visitors there two days later.

The police have so far made no arrests in the case.

Earlier this month, police detained two high school students suspected of having desecrated a Jewish cemetery in the town of Bad Kissingen.

Reflecting another attempt to crack down on the extreme right, prosecutors in Frankfurt are considering taking legal steps against Gunter Deckert, chairman of the extreme right-wing National Democratic Party.

Deckert, 54, had published an open letter to Michel Friedman, a member of the board of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, suggesting that Friedman should "pack up his belongings and go where he belongs -- Israel."

The letter further stated that Germany did not need "a chief Jewish commissar."

NEWS ANALYSIS:**LIKUD OPPOSITION DEEPLY DIVIDED ABOUT HOW TO FIGHT PEACE POLICY**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, May 22 (JTA) -- Gaza and Jericho have entered a brave new political reality, and leaders of Israel's opposition Likud party are bitterly divided about how to cope with it.

Party leader Benjamin Netanyahu and others have declared that they believe the Palestine Liberation Organization to have violated its accord with Israel and that they therefore do not feel bound to uphold it.

But beyond this pledge to ignore the agreement implemented this month, those who would like to lead Israel in place of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin have given no indication of how they would deal with the new reality.

This weakness is reflected in a poll conducted last week and published Friday by the Israeli mass-circulation daily Yediot Achronot.

The survey showed Israelis preferring Labor's Rabin over Likud's Netanyahu by 50 to 38, when asked to choose who was best suited to lead the country.

In fact, Netanyahu has come under fierce criticism from within his party, with critics charging that instead of leading the opposition, he is himself led by extremist circles, particularly Jewish settlers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Coming from old warhorse Ariel Sharon, such criticisms can be seen as merely the latest opportunistic sniping. Sharon, who has never embraced Netanyahu's victory in a party primary that Sharon chose not to enter, called publicly last week for a "renewed leadership" at the head of the anti-government alliance.

The Yediot Achronot survey showed that Sharon is not the only one who would like to see Rabin out and someone other than Netanyahu in.

Pitted against a broader array of potential leaders, Netanyahu drew only 19 percent. Sharon was supported by 12 percent, and 11 percent preferred Rafael Eitan, head of the right-wing Tsomet party.

(By contrast, Rabin dominated contenders on the left, receiving 36 percent backing. That far exceeded the 7 and 9 percent received respectively by Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and Haim Ramon, incoming secretary-general of the Histadrut labor federation.)

Initiative Came From Settlers

The rebellion against Netanyahu from members of the Likud leadership who had previously rallied behind him was evident earlier this month when the Knesset debated the Gaza-Jericho implementation agreement signed by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization in Cairo.

Leading Likud figures, including former Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, David Levy, Ze'ev (Benny) Begin and Dan Meridor, balked volubly at Netanyahu's decision that Likud and the other opposition parties should walk out of the Knesset when the time came for the vote on the accord.

In the end, these rebels were overruled, and all the opposition benches did indeed empty, in a rare display of unparliamentary behavior in the legislature. Shamir and Meridor went home early in demonstrative disgust.

Netanyahu's critics saw the move as an

indication of how the party chairman was following the extremist opposition, rather than leading the sort of centrist opposition that might recapture the small but crucial swing voters who decide the outcome of Israeli elections.

The initiative to boycott the Knesset vote came in a letter to opposition Knesset members from Uri Ariel, chairman of a leading settlers group, the Judea and Samaria Council, and was strongly advocated by National Religious Party hard-liner Hanan Porat.

Shamir, Levy, Meridor and others opposed the idea, but Netanyahu decided ultimately to adopt it and demand party uniformity on it.

Sharon charged that Likud, though the largest political force on the right, was not in fact leading the battle against the government's peace policy.

The activists leading the fight, he said, come from outside Likud's ranks, and the party has had little success getting its members out onto the streets to protest the dangers and failures of the peace process.

Sharon said Likud needs a new, collective leadership, and he declared himself ready to be part of it.

While such talk is idle -- the Likud constitution makes a mid-term leadership election difficult to instigate -- the former general's timing reflects Netanyahu's current weakness.

A Missed Opportunity

Paradoxically, this weakness has been brought on less by the army withdrawal from Gaza than by the Labor Party's crushing defeat in this month's Histadrut elections at the hands of Labor renegade Haim Ramon.

Likud stalwarts are now ruefully reminding their leader that their party, too, had a potential election-winner -- in the form of popular Knesset member Meir Shetreet.

Opinion polls taken earlier this year showed Shetreet, a former treasurer of the Jewish Agency for Israel, beating the Labor incumbent as Histadrut secretary-general, Haim Habersfeld.

Moreover, political insiders said at the time that if Shetreet ran, Haim Ramon might forgo his intention of doing so.

With Shetreet, the Likud could have captured the powerful Histadrut machine -- for the first time ever.

But Netanyahu refused to reopen the race for a Likud Histadrut candidate, upholding the right of longtime Histadrut opposition leader Yaakov Shamai to run, for a third time, for the secretary-generalship.

As expected, Shamai, an unpopular Knesset member, was trounced. He not only picked up none of Labor's losses; his own share of the vote was sliced from 28 percent to 16. (Ramon won with 46 percent; Labor got 34 percent.)

Shetreet, a relative dove on the peace issue, refuses to take issue publicly with Netanyahu over the Histadrut missed opportunity.

Some observers say Netanyahu did not back him because of a pending police inquiry into his use of credit cards while at the Jewish Agency.

As to the criticism of Netanyahu over the peace issue, however, Shetreet put his oar in last week: The masses are not turning out for Likud, Shetreet suggested, because they support the peace that Netanyahu has been railing against.

FOCUS ON ISSUES:

ACTIVISTS JOIN FORCES ACROSS NATION TO COMBAT STRENGTH OF RELIGIOUS RIGHT
 By Pamela Druckerman

NEW YORK (JTA) -- Peggy Norman is proud of her list.

Over the past 18 months, the Portland-based director of RightWatch has compiled the names of 30,000 Oregon residents with links to the Christian religious right.

She will use the list to identify candidates for local office with ties to the religious right, tracking them at public forums and publicizing her findings in a voter's guide.

Like other local activists who have been drawn into the battle against the growing influence of candidates for local office who are backed by the religious right, Norman insists the only way to fight them is on the ground.

"To counter grass-roots organizing, you have to do grass-roots organizing," she said.

For the past several years, candidates backed by conservative Christian groups have succeeded in quietly capturing a growing number of seats on local school boards, planning commissions and other bodies. Now small cavalries of grass-roots activists across the United States have mounted counteroffensives.

And what began as local opposition efforts are coalescing into national groups, working to articulate a unified strategy for countering right-wing activities, and providing the resources for local efforts to advance grass-roots campaigns.

Though a few years behind the religious right movement in organization and strategy, activists on all levels are gaining momentum as they slowly master the nuts and bolts of grass-roots political organizing.

Jewish groups have taken a leading role in rallying against the religious right, charging that attempts by right-wing fundamentalist and evangelical groups to influence public school curricula and gain national political power are part of an effort to obscure the constitutional distinction in America between church and state.

There is also concern that frequent calls by the religious right for a "Christian America" are meant to exclude the practice of other faiths.

Up Against Formidable Opponent

The National Jewish Democratic Council will soon publish a manual detailing strategies for organizing against the religious right, which is meant to be a blueprint for local activists.

The National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, meanwhile, has reprinted a questionnaire to be given to candidates, gauging their positions on issues ranging from sex education to school prayer.

NJCRC also has encouraged its 117 member community relations councils around the country to monitor local races by circulating and publicizing candidate questionnaires and, if necessary, running opposition candidates.

Pat Lewis, press and policy director of the Jewish Democratic council, explained that Jews are particularly sensitive to perceived threats to religious or political freedom.

"We've heard those things before, and it's never worked out well for us," Lewis said.

But activists are up against a formidable op-

ponent, whose sophisticated political organizing skills and finely tuned media savvy have parlayed it into a national political force.

Spearheading Christian Right activities is the Christian Coalition, a branch of the international evangelical operation led by Pat Robertson, and the California-based Citizens for Educational Excellence, led by Robert Simonds.

Taking advantage of low voter turnout in local elections, groups with ties to these national organizations identify and mobilize core groups of supporters, to elect slates of pro-right candidates.

They also play on traditionally low media coverage of these races, declining press interviews and denying or disguising their affiliation with national groups on the religious right.

Once elected, however, these candidates generally begin to move on a cluster of flagship issues, including staunch support for prayer in schools, the teaching of biblical creationism, implementation of abstinence-only sex education, banning of books deemed to be anti-Christian, and elimination of the federal Head Start program and multi-cultural curricula.

Infrastructure Not Yet In Place

Opponents of the religious right have responded by forming coalitions of parents groups and local activist organizations, and by soliciting the endorsement of teachers unions and prominent citizens for slates of moderate candidates.

They also have sought to defuse the so-called stealth strategy of religious-right candidates by distributing the results of candidate questionnaires and researching the background and ideological affiliation of candidates.

Activists say they also hope to thwart the self-declared strategy of the religious right: to build a cadre of local political office-holders who will move up the political ranks, eventually running for state and national offices.

The theory, which has been affirmed in counter-campaigns from California to Virginia, is that once voters realize that their district has been targeted by the religious right, they will be moved to go to the polls.

But observers say that there is still a great deal of catching up to do.

"We're talking about building an enormous response to an enormous problem," said Matthew Freeman, director of research at People for the American Way. "The infrastructure is not yet in place for people to fight back."

From the start, the religious right has had distinct advantages, including its ability to draw from an identifiable constituency -- those people belonging to churches affiliated with the movement -- and to pool their resources into a common agenda set by national Christian-right organizations.

Opposition activists are working in reverse, trying to gather groups working on divergent issues, like reproductive rights and free speech, into coalitions that focus just on the religious right.

And opponents say messages from the religious right -- such as the common refrain that prayer will end violence in schools -- are both tempting in their simplicity and cheap.

"Prayer is free, other programs cost money," said Lewis of the Jewish Democratic group.