

**PERES SEEKS TO REASSURE AMERICAN JEWS
ABOUT VIABILITY OF PALESTINIAN ENTITY**
By Pamela Druckerman and Larry Yudelson

NEW YORK, May 24 (JTA) -- In a sometimes testy meeting with American Jewish leaders here this week, Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres gave some insight into how an autonomous Palestinian entity might operate and sought to reassure a skeptical audience about the viability of Palestinian self-rule.

Addressing the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations on Monday, Peres was adamant that Jerusalem would not become the de facto center of Palestinian autonomy.

He assured his listeners that the city would remain "politically closed" but "religiously open."

"We will not limit religious activities in Jerusalem, but we will not permit political activities by the Palestinians there," he said.

Peres also tried to assuage concerns of some in the audience who said that Israel may not be sufficiently sensitive to hurdles facing the implementation of autonomy.

"If there is a mine, we have mine sweepers. We will discover them," he said.

And he urged the skeptical crowd to give the agreement time to become effective.

"An agreement is tested by its implementation," Peres said. "If it will not be implemented it will not be an agreement."

But Peres refused to bow to pressure to make sweeping statements on the limits of Israeli tolerance in the face of further terrorist attacks or breeches in the accords, insisting Israel is "strong enough without declarations."

'You Will Become Comfortable'

When a member of the Conference of Presidents said he was "uncomfortable" with the way autonomy had been taking shape, Peres was soothing but firm.

"So it will take a little bit of time and you will become comfortable," Peres said.

One of the most sensitive issues has been "hot-pursuit," the right of Israeli forces to pursue Palestinian attackers into the autonomy zones in Gaza and Jericho.

Peres affirmed the principle that while Israel will vigorously pursue attackers outside the autonomous regions, Palestinians are responsible for pursuing those who flee into them.

And he said Palestinians should monitor all cars that pass through Palestinian guards.

"If it is under our jurisdiction, we will do everything that is necessary. If it is under their jurisdiction, they have the obligation to do so," he said.

Peres predicted that Palestinians would do a better job than Israelis in governing in the newly autonomous regions because they will have "less inhibitions."

"If an Israeli soldier is chasing a Palestinian boy, it's an international problem. It's a story for the television. But if Palestinian police will do it, it's their problem. Nobody takes photos," he said.

But Peres also described the difficulty members of the newly installed Palestinian police force have in Gaza, explaining that many have been brought in from outside countries like Yemen and Iraq and are not yet trained and familiar with the area.

The foreign minister also said that even in a worst-case scenario the Palestinian police force would not pose a significant threat to Israeli security.

"Let's say they had 9,000 police. Will they challenge the Israeli army? Let's be reasonable."

But in any event, he said Israel was not at all anxious to re-occupy the Gaza strip.

"No sir, once is enough," he said.

Peres also said that the success of the peace process depends on developing economic parity between Palestinians and Israelis, including raising the Palestinian standard of living.

"We know that we shall never achieve a political peace unless there shall be an entirely different economic state," Peres said.

But Peres also recognized the difficulty in implementing these ideas, and ultimately sought recourse in Jewish tradition.

"Miracle," Peres said, "is a part of our reality."

A concrete example of the "changing world" of peace and cooperation the foreign minister sketched out came in a breakfast meeting Tuesday with ambassadors to the United Nations.

At the meeting were representatives from 10 of the 15 Security Council members, including Russia, China, Nigeria and the Muslim state of Djibouti.

Also present were representatives of India, Greece, Norway, Morocco and the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Peres called on the nations to send money to the Palestinians immediately, suggesting that Japan transmit \$30 million of its \$200 million pledge.

Later, Peres later told the United Jewish Appeal that the breakfast meeting was quite a change from the days when "most of our problems were from the United Nations, and we were providing them with most of their agenda."

NEWS ANALYSIS:**ISRAEL WARNS PLO ON VIOLATING ACCORD
BUT REMAINS OPTIMISTIC ON AUTONOMY**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, May 24 (JTA) -- The loudest, clearest warning was delivered, in solemn tones and with the full weight of the government's authority, by the minister of police, Moshe Shahal.

If the Palestine Liberation Organization were to create a "material breach" of its agreement with Israel, that breach "would not remain unilateral," Shahal told the Knesset on Monday. "The situation would return to what it was before."

The warning, with its implied threat of a complete curtailment of any further negotiations with the PLO, came after a tape-recording was released last week of a speech delivered by PLO

Chairman Yasser Arafat in a mosque in Johannesburg on May 11.

In that speech, Arafat called on his audience of devoted Muslims to continue the "jihad" for Jerusalem.

Subsequently, the PLO leader and his aides sought to undo the damage by asserting that "jihad" had been used in the "spiritual, not warlike" sense, although the Arabic word is generally rendered in English as "holy war."

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said the explanation was unconvincing. But, grudgingly, he accepted it.

Hardly was that episode over when another, even more damaging segment of the same tape was released in Jerusalem on Sunday.

In that portion of the taped Johannesburg speech, Arafat compared his agreement with Israel to the agreement concluded by the Prophet Mohammad with the Koreish tribe in the year 628.

That agreement was abrogated by Mohammad two years after it was signed.

Again Arafat's propaganda machine swung into action, seeking to persuade a perplexed and by-now-furious Israeli public that Mohammad had reneged only because the Koreish reneged first.

This theological-cum-historical discussion might have been conducted with more patience, and perhaps more credence, on the Israeli side had it not flared up just two days after the killing, by Islamic Jihad terrorists, of two Israeli soldiers manning a checkpoint in the Gaza Strip.

It was precisely this sort of tragedy that the withdrawal from Gaza was supposed to prevent. Indeed, that was the logic that had led the large majority of the Israeli public to support the pullout in the first place.

Attack Highlighted Israeli Fears

It was also precisely this sort of tragedy that Israelis feared most with regard to the nascent Palestinian autonomy that has begun to take shape in Gaza and Jericho this month.

Making matters worse, Palestinian police at a Gaza checkpoint pumped bullets into the tires of an Israeli truck on Monday. No one was hurt; but again, the extreme insecurity of an ostensibly security-oriented agreement seemed to have been demonstrated.

On the settler-Palestinian front, meanwhile, there have been charges and counter-charges regarding alleged provocations at the ancient synagogue in Jericho. And there are persistent reports of Gazan youths hurling verbal abuse across the barbed-wire fences that surround the Jewish settlements in the Strip.

During his Knesset speech on Monday, Shahal, a lawyer, used the carefully veiled, yet precise, language of lawyers.

But his statement -- coordinated with the prime minister and delivered in the course of a debate over a no-confidence motion in the Knesset -- represented Israel's considered reaction to the series of disturbing events that have occurred during this initial, delicate period in the implementation of the Palestinian self-rule accord.

The PLO, for its part, is purporting to speak in the same considered tone. There were clear signs by midweek that the PLO leadership in Tunis was troubled by, and finally responding to, the wave of anger and bitterness that has swept Israel in the wake of the recent setbacks.

But in the meantime, Rabin and his ministers are in a bind.

Until now, when embarrassed by bursts of old-style, hostile rhetoric from the PLO side, they have frequently replied that the "real test" will come with the actual implementation of the accord. But now the "real test" has begun, and it has gotten off to a not-altogether encouraging start.

The PLO police plainly have not yet taken a proper grip on Gaza and Jericho, the two areas now under their control. One of those areas, Gaza, is teeming with more than three-quarters of a million people and has acute social and economic problems.

Cash Is Scarce

The PLO civilian administration has likewise not yet reached its full complement. Nor has Arafat completed his appointments to the Palestinian Authority, the 24-member governing council.

Ready cash, moreover, is scarce. Nabil Sha'ath, the PLO's top negotiator during the Cairo negotiations leading up to the implementation accord, crossed into Gaza last weekend with a much needed \$5 million shot-in-the arm for the nascent Palestinian police force.

But that is only "first aid" when compared to the needs of the dawning Palestinian autonomy.

Promises and pledges of funding from abroad have yet to materialize. And the PLO, moreover, has yet to win the confidence of the prospective donors that it has an efficient and non-corrupt administrative machine in place to disburse the promised assistance.

And yet senior Israeli officials, in the military and in intelligence, stress in their top-level reports and assessments that all is not black, nor even gray.

The ranking PLO police officers, many of them former commanders of the Palestine Liberation Army, have impressed their Israeli counterparts with their businesslike approach and professionalism, and with their evident commitment to make the agreement succeed.

These senior Israeli officials are urging the political echelon to see the full picture and to give the fledgling Palestinian government a grace period in which to prove itself.

It was for that reason, according to informed insiders, that the Israeli government's reaction to the fatal shooting of the two soldiers last Friday was relatively low-key.

By midweek, moreover, strong signals were arriving from the PLO's Tunis headquarters to the effect that Arafat and his key aides will take steps to allay Israeli concerns.

As part of these steps, the PLO leader will complete his appointments to the Palestinian Authority this week. And, according to Arafat's Israeli Arab adviser, Dr. Ahmed Tibi, the Palestine National Council will "soon" be convened to abrogate the provisions of the Palestine National Covenant that reject Israel's right to existence.

A more cynical evaluation of the efforts by Israel and the PLO to put things back on track would doubtless point to an abiding political fact:

Rabin, Peres and Arafat are three men in the same boat. They either float or sink together.

Hence the resilient determination of all three of them to make the agreement work.

JEWISH GROUPS REMAIN NONCOMMITTAL TOWARD NEW GERMAN PRESIDENT HERZOG

By Miriam Widman

BERLIN, May 24 (JTA) -- Jewish community leaders remained somewhat noncommittal regarding the election this week of conservative Judge Roman Herzog to succeed Richard von Weizsacker as Germany's seventh president.

Comments from both Jerzy Kanal, head of Berlin's Jewish community and Ignatz Bubis, chairman of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, showed that Herzog was not their first choice.

"I don't take it as a tragedy," Kanal told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency on Tuesday.

The Berlin leader said he was not sure what Herzog's views were toward Israel. But he added that "they are surely not negative. He has some Jewish acquaintances."

Kanal noted that Herzog's chief opponent, Social Democratic leader Johannes Rau "is maybe a bit more liberal and is more involved in political life."

Public opinion polls showed that if voters had elected the president directly -- rather than by the electoral college system currently in use -- Rau would have won.

But the election was seen as a test of Chancellor Helmut Kohl and his Christian Democratic Union. Kohl strongly backed Herzog, and warned Christian Democratic delegates to the special assembly that if Herzog lost, the party's chances in this fall's elections would suffer.

The role of president in Germany is largely ceremonial. But von Weizsacker, with his aristocratic elegance and his efforts on behalf of minorities, gave the position a certain flair during his 10 years at the post.

Von Weizsacker also won over Jewish groups by using his position to remind Germans time and again not to forget their wartime past and to warn against a resurgence of xenophobia in the country.

In a radio interview Monday, Bubis called Herzog's election "a good choice, but it would have been equally good for me if Rau or (Free Democratic Party candidate) Hildegard Hamm-Bruecher had been elected."

Herzog Elected In Third Round Of Voting

It was unclear whether Bubis had voted for Herzog. As a long-time member of the centrist Free Democratic Party, he cast a vote during Monday's election, and his party had a key role in the voting.

Herzog was elected in the third round of voting with 696 votes to Rau's 605. This followed the withdrawal of Hamm-Bruecher's candidacy before the third round and a 69-40 decision by the Free Democratic Party to support Herzog.

A candidate proposed at the last minute by the radical right-wing Republicans received 11 votes in the final round.

Herzog, chief justice of Germany's highest court and relatively unknown to the German public, had created some controversy before his election.

Earlier this month, he irritated even members of his own party when, in the course of a newspaper interview, he said that foreigners living here for the second or third generation should be

faced with the choice of becoming German citizens or leaving Germany.

The remark, which he later retracted, prompted protests from the Free Democratic Party, the junior coalition partner whose support was crucial for Herzog's election.

Herzog's attitudes toward anti-Semitism and xenophobia were put to a test when he responded last week to a question put to him at a televised debate by a young Jew from Dusseldorf.

The man referred emotionally to the recent wave of neo-Nazi violence in Germany and to the recent firebomb attack on a synagogue in the northern German city of Lubeck. But he got no specific answer other than a general remark about the fact that "some old Nazis" were still around.

But with the election now over, the country as a whole is giving the new, largely unknown president the chance to clarify his positions on such crucial matters as the growing wave of right-wing extremism and how Germany should deal with its Nazi past.

(Contributing to this report was JTA correspondent David Kantor in Bonn.)

TALMUD IS PUBLISHED IN RUSSIA FOR FIRST TIME SINCE REVOLUTION

By Lisa Glazer

MOSCOW, May 22 (JTA) -- Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, the world-renowned scholar and educator who translated the Talmud into everyday language, is visiting Russia to commemorate the publication of the first volume of a new edition of the Talmud published in Russia.

The simple, deep-blue, hard-bound book is the first Russian Talmud produced since 1917, and was created with the sponsorship of the Russian Academy of Sciences and financial support from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

The initial print run is 6,000 copies.

Steinsaltz, a sliver of a man with a wispy white beard, described the publication of the Talmud in Russian as part of his ongoing work with Russian Jewry.

"It is like a tree without the branches -- if you water it and tend it, new branches will grow. The roots are still there," he said.

Besides producing the Russian Talmud, which will eventually include at least 10 volumes, Steinsaltz has helped create a number of key Jewish institutions in Russia.

They include Mekor Chaim, a yeshiva; Lamed, a school to train teachers for Jewish schools; and the Jewish University of Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Steinsaltz's commitment to Jewish education, including secular subjects, reflects his broad-minded approach to Judaism.

"It's an idea of Rabbi Steinsaltz's that Russian Jewish intellectuals must be absorbed into Jewish culture and religion. He says that the Jewish University is the most effective way to bring people in," explained Arkady Kovelman, the rector of the Jewish University in Moscow.

While in Russia, Steinsaltz's schedule includes meetings with students from the Jewish University of Moscow, delivering a lecture at Moscow's Choral Synagogue and attending a breakfast prayer meeting with leaders from the Russian Orthodox Church, muftis and the Dalai Lama of Tibet, who is also now in Russia.

POLLSTER DISAVOWS RESULTS OF AJCOMMITTEE HOLOCAUST SURVEY

By Pamela Druckerman

NEW YORK, May 24 (JTA) -- A question in a survey commissioned by the American Jewish Committee which found that nearly a quarter of Americans believe the Holocaust might not have happened has been disavowed by the pollster who conducted it.

Burns Roper, the now-retired chairman of Roper Starch Worldwide, which conducted the poll, said the question meant to gauge Holocaust denial used a confusing double negative, which elicited a response opposite of what many respondents intended.

A Gallup poll conducted in January that asked a similar question, without the double negative, found that only 9 percent of respondents expressed doubt that the Holocaust had occurred.

Results of Roper's April 1993 survey had sent shock waves through the Jewish world and elsewhere, eliciting incredulous responses from concentration camp survivors and contributing to fears that Holocaust deniers may have made real inroads into mainstream American life.

Addressing a conference of professional pollsters earlier this month, Roper said the whole incident was destructive and unfortunate.

"We should never have approved the question, and we certainly never should have written it," Roper said.

Doubts about the wording of the faulty question were raised soon after the survey was released in April 1993.

But David Harris, executive director of AJCommittee, said his organization chose not to report possible flaws in the widely publicized survey until its findings had been re-tested.

"The issue was: If in fact there was confusion, what does one do? One tests it," Harris said.

Harris said the wording of the question was given additional credence when it was later used in the United Kingdom, France and Germany. There, responses that the Holocaust may not have happened ranged from 5 percent to 8 percent, findings more consistent with expectations.

Entire Survey To Be Repeated

The AJCommittee has since commissioned Roper to repeat the entire survey, eliminating the double negative from the problem question. The results are set to be released by June.

Harris said Roper had rightfully assumed full responsibility for the mistake.

"We're not experts in the wording of questions. That's the reason you turn to polling firms," Harris said.

The controversial question was: "Does it seem possible or does it seem impossible to you that the Nazi extermination of the Jews never happened?"

In his address to the American Association for Public Opinion Research on May 13, Roper said the survey question was a rewrite of one that had been submitted to his organization by the AJCommittee, and which was ultimately approved by both groups.

He said that pollsters had focused on avoiding phrasing the question in a way that would

influence a respondent to give an affirmative answer. They had failed, however, to recognize the confusing double negative.

Roper said the faulty question was not identified in the pre-publication analysis stage because its statistical results were consistent with results from the other 16 questions in the survey.

Responses to that question showed that 22 percent of adults and 20 percent of high school students surveyed said it was possible that the Holocaust did not happen. Twelve percent of adults responded that they did not know if it was possible or impossible.

The survey, called "What Do Americans Know About the Holocaust?," was based on questionnaires filled out by 992 adults and 506 high school students.

In the January Gallup poll which asked, "Do you doubt the Holocaust actually happened or not?" only 9 percent of respondents answered in the affirmative. When Gallup asked an even more specific question, less than 3 percent of respondents said the Holocaust "definitely" or "probably" did not happen.

But when Gallup repeated the wording of Roper's double negative question, 33 percent of respondents said it was "possible" that the Holocaust did not occur.

Deborah Lipstadt, author of "Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory," said the AJCommittee poll was still noteworthy because of the responses to some of the other questions. Some of these results reveal an "appalling American ignorance of the most basic facts of the Holocaust," she said.

According to the poll's published results, 38 percent of adults and 53 percent of high school students either "don't know" or incorrectly explain what is meant by "the Holocaust."

BERLIN DISTRICT COUNCIL REJECTS PLANS FOR A HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL

By Igal Avidan

BERLIN, May 24 (JTA) -- The local council in the Berlin district of Steglitz has rejected a proposed memorial to the 1,600 Jews from the district who were killed during the Holocaust.

But the memorial will nonetheless be erected this year, after Berlin's senator for construction decided to use his right to override the district decision.

The Steglitz district council voted earlier this month to stop the memorial project, saying that the envisioned size of the memorial was too large and that a proposed inscription did not clearly differentiate between the Holocaust and "actual events" in Germany.

Ignatz Bubis, chairman of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, criticized the council's decision, saying it was acting as if it wanted the memorial to be no larger than a telephone booth.

The conservative-led council in Steglitz, a wealthy southwestern Berlin district, had also rejected the memorial in March, saying it was too provocative for the area's main square.

Critics of the district council accused the members of anti-Semitism and of attempting to hide the region's Nazi past.

During World War II, the Nazi headquarters for administering all concentration camps was located in Steglitz.