

GROUPS BLAST U.S. STATE DEPT. REPORT SAYING PLO IS COMPLYING WITH ACCORDS

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON, June 8 (JTA) -- Members of Congress and American Jewish leaders have criticized the State Department for a recent report concluding that the Palestine Liberation Organization is abiding by its commitments to Israel.

The report, released June 1, also states that in light of the PLO's compliance, the State Department has decided to allow the group to establish a diplomatic mission here.

The 14-page PLO Commitments Compliance Report outlines more than a dozen incidents since January when Palestinian leaders failed to condemn terrorism against Israel.

It also recounts statements by Arafat and his supporters advocating violence, including a May 10 speech at a Johannesburg mosque where PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat called for a "jihad" for Jerusalem.

And yet despite saying in the report that "the PLO should do more to condemn violence in a timely, authoritative and unambiguous fashion," the State Department concluded that "the PLO is abiding by its commitments."

The report drew widespread criticism from Jewish groups and their allies on Capitol Hill.

"Unfortunately, the report too often excuses the PLO's failure to respond to terrorism and seeks to limit the PLO's responsibility to condemn all acts of terrorism," said Neal Sher, executive director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

The PLO's 'Weak And Inadequate' Response

Arafat pledged in a September 1993 letter to Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin to renounce the use of terrorism and violence and to assume responsibility for all PLO elements and personnel. The letter also confirmed Arafat's commitment to recognize Israel's right to exist.

"On the few occasions when the PLO has spoken, its language in response to terrorist attacks has been weak and inadequate. In no instance has any PLO official stated unequivocally that Israelis should not be attacked," Sher said.

Despite the criticism of the State Department report, AIPAC officials confirmed their support for the peace process and praised the efforts of the Clinton administration in that regard.

Israeli officials here refused to comment directly on the report, saying it is an American document between government agencies.

Regarding the PLO's compliance with the peace accord, however, one official said, "We definitely not only expect but demand the PLO comply with the statements made in the letter from Arafat to Prime Minister Rabin."

Morton Klein, president of the Zionist Organization of America, which has been critical of the peace process, blasted the State Department report.

"The PLO is not abiding by anything. This administration should make it clear that U.S.

taxpayers' money will not go to the PLO until it shows it has transformed itself from a terrorist group," he said.

Klein made reference to the fact that the House of Representatives last month approved \$78 million in aid to the PLO for roads, housing and infrastructure development in the newly autonomous Gaza Strip and Jericho.

Rep. James Saxton (R-N.J.), co-founder of the Congressional Peace Accord Monitoring Group, called on President Clinton to "insist Yasser Arafat live up to the words he uttered on the lawn of the White House, condemn terrorism and express his dissatisfaction with the inaction by the PLO."

Saxton said the United States should consider further steps, including holding off on any American aid to the PLO, because "Arafat in no way has lived up to the agreements."

His bipartisan monitoring group, which includes 45 members of Congress, was drafting a coordinated response this week to condemn the State Department report.

In light of the State Department's decision that the PLO is in compliance with its end of the declaration of principles with Israel, officials plan to designate a foreign mission for the PLO in the United States.

The office will differ from an embassy, in that its personnel will have no diplomatic status, privileges or immunity.

Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (D-N.Y.) said the decision to grant a mission is "outrageous."

"Instead of a jihad for Jerusalem, Arafat should have called for a jihad for peace," D'Amato said, referring to the Johannesburg speech. "The State Department might think the PLO is in compliance with the peace agreement, but this senator thinks the PLO still has a long way to go."

GROUPS OPPOSED TO RABIN PEACE POLICIES LAUNCH A PUBLIC CAMPAIGN ABOUT GOLAN

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON, June 8 (JTA) -- Jewish groups opposed to the peace talks joined forces this week with Christian pro-Israel organizations to launch a pre-emptive strike against any Israeli-Syrian peace accord that would involve Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights.

With a proposed amendment to the defense authorization bill in hand, the groups have been feverishly trying to persuade members of Congress to enact legislation that would prevent the deployment of American soldiers unless burdensome requirements are met.

The troop issue is the first step in an effort by a new right-wing coalition to combat "the risk to Israel's survival posed by (Israeli) government policy" regarding the peace process, according to a statement issued by the new group that calls itself the Coalition for A Secure U.S.-Israel Friendship.

The coalition includes such groups as Americans for A Safe Israel, Rabbinical Alliance of America, Jewish War Veterans, Christians' Israel

Public Action Campaign, Center for Security Policy, World Committee for Israel, and Christians United for Israel.

At a news conference in New York on Monday announcing the group's formation, members of the coalition said that stationing U.S. troops in the Golan could harm Israeli-U.S. relations if they are fired upon; that they would be targets for terrorists; and that they would impede Israel's ability for a pre-emptive strike against Syria.

On Tuesday, the coalition sponsored a full-page advertisement in *The New York Times*, featuring a photograph of the mutilated body of an American soldier in Somalia.

"Have we forgotten the 18 U.S. servicemen murdered in Somalia? Have we forgotten the 241 U.S. Marines killed by Arab extremists in Beirut?" the advertisement asks.

The Israeli government sees the coalition as a Likud-inspired attempt to derail the peace process in general, according to Israeli officials.

Israeli officials said it is premature to comment on the need for U.S. forces on the Golan since talks with Syria have been stalled over the past several months.

The talks have been stymied by Syria's insistence that Israel declare its willingness to fully withdraw from the Golan before Syria states its willingness to pursue full peace with Israel.

However, the Israelis are quick to emphasize that any presence on the Golan Heights would not involve peacekeepers, but rather observers, such as those that have been serving in a multilateral force in the Sinai under the Camp David Accords.

'An Attempt To Cheat The American Public'

The Sinai observers, known officially as the Multinational Force and Observers, include a sizeable U.S. contingent. Although the Israelis generally are hesitant to become publicly entangled in internal American Jewish organizational affairs, Israeli officials emphasized that the effort to equate the Golan with Somalia is, as one official said, a "travesty of the truth."

"This is an attempt to cheat the American public by using the unrelated American experience in Somalia and Bosnia, while completely hiding the related experience of the MFO in the Sinai," said a senior Israeli official, referring to the observers in the Sinai.

Some Jewish organizational leaders criticized the right-wing groups for meddling in Israeli policy matters that should be left to the Israelis to decide.

Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, attacked the coalition, accusing it of exporting Israeli politics to the United States in "a crude, irresponsible and possibly counterproductive manner."

For these groups to "camouflage and pervert" their opposition to an accord with Syria "into an issue of U.S. troops in the Middle East is cynical, counterproductive and may be hurtful in the future," he said.

"Because there may be a need, and the United States may be the only party acceptable. So to use this as a weapon abroad, to undermine the current policy of the government, I think is shameful," Foxman said.

By mid-week, members of the coalition were trying in vain to find a senator to introduce their

one-page amendment, which would prevent the White House from using any taxpayer money to deploy U.S. peacekeepers on the Golan Heights.

The proposal also would require the secretary of defense and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to report to Congress on the risk to U.S. forces from terrorism, the cost estimates, the impact on the readiness of the U.S. armed forces elsewhere, the effect on Israel's strategic intelligence and warning capabilities and the duration of the mission.

The Senate Armed Services Committee is scheduled to finish its work on the authorization bill this week.

Members said that if the Senate Armed Services Committee does not include the amendment, the group will try to find a senator to sponsor an amendment when the bill reaches the Senate floor.

Herb Zweibon, executive director of AFSI, said at the news conference in New York on Monday that he believes an Israeli-Syrian "deal will go forward whether American troops are on the Golan or not." But, he said, he wants to tell the Israeli people not to rely on an American umbrella to protect them.

Ernest Bloch, president of Pro-Israel, another member of the coalition, defended the group's right to oppose the Israeli government's policies in the peace talks.

"If the Israeli government is embarked on policies that we believe will lead to the destruction of Israel, a policy of national suicide, then we are morally obligated to speak out," he said.

In addition, Bloch said, since "the Land of Israel is not only the possession of those Jews living in Israel, the Israelis, but of Jews living throughout the world," all Jews have a right to speak out against giving up parts of the Land of Israel.

(Contributing to this report was Larry Yudelson in New York)

ISRAELI AIR FORCE STRIKES AT HEZBOLLAH IN RESPONSE TO KATYUSHA ROCKET ATTACKS By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, June 8 (JTA) -- In Israel's 18th air assault in southern Lebanon this year, Israeli air force jets attacked targets of the Islamic fundamentalist Hezbollah movement located north of the security zone Wednesday.

The assault took place several hours after Hezbollah launched Katyusha rocket attacks on the Lebanese town of Marjayoun, where the South Lebanon Army, Israel's ally in the region, maintains its headquarters. There was no immediate word about casualties from either assault.

Hours before the Hezbollah rocket attacks, Israeli and SLA forces employed tanks and artillery to turn back an assault by the Iran-backed Shi'ite Muslim fighters in the northern sector of the security zone.

There have been almost daily skirmishes in southern Lebanon since May 21, when Israeli commandos abducted Shi'ite guerrilla leader Mustafa Dirani from his home in eastern Lebanon.

On June 2, Israel launched a devastating air strike on a Hezbollah training base in eastern Lebanon. As many as 50 Hezbollah members were reported killed in the strike and up to 200 were wounded.

JEWISH GROUPS OFFER MIXED RESPONSE TO FARRAKHAN INCLUSION IN NAACP SUMMIT

By Pamela Druckerman

NEW YORK, June 8 (JTA) -- Sounding alternately fiery, tolerant and tepid, Jewish leaders responded with mixed emotions to the inclusion of Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan in the NAACP's African American leadership summit this weekend.

While some are planning to position themselves outside NAACP headquarters in Baltimore where the summit will be held, or meet behind the scenes with black leaders, most of the mainstream American Jewish groups are adopting a wait-and-see attitude.

Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Reform movement's Religious Action Center and a board member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, downplayed the emphasis on Farrakhan's inclusion.

"For the Jewish community it is far more important what comes out of the summit as a consensus of the black community than who is invited," Saperstein said.

After a season of heated media exchanges between black and Jewish leaders over overtures toward Farrakhan by the prestigious civil rights group, Jewish leaders are now taking a more low-key approach.

Mindful of the backlash that resulted when Jewish groups pressed mainstream black leaders to condemn Farrakhan's anti-Semitic rhetoric earlier this year, many Jewish leaders are backing away from ultimatums.

"We're not drawing lines in the sand," said Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League. "We will continue to work with them," he said, referring to the NAACP.

Foxman and other Jewish leaders have basically followed this line since a meeting in February with the NAACP. The meeting was precipitated by the NAACP's acceptance of Farrakhan's handling of Khalid Abdul Muhammad, a top Nation of Islam aide who had made anti-Semitic statements.

It was the ADL that had first publicized Muhammad's remarks in January. After Farrakhan subsequently distanced himself from the tone, but not the substance, of Muhammad's comments and fired him as national spokesman for the Nation of Islam, the NAACP said it was "satisfied" with Farrakhan's actions. At the same time, it invited him to participate in the leadership summit.

Jewish Groups Disappointed By NAACP

Jewish groups responded with disappointment to the NAACP's willingness to accept Farrakhan's claims.

In February, leaders of the ADL and the NAACP met to try to work out a joint agenda, but were unable to reach agreement on how to deal with Farrakhan. They did, however, pledge to continue working with each other.

In addition to Farrakhan, approximately 100 black community, political and religious leaders, including Rep. Kweisi Mfume (D-Md.), the Congressional Black Caucus chairman, and the Rev. Jesse Jackson, were invited to the leadership summit, scheduled for June 12 to 14.

A series of meetings will address strategies for economic development, community empower-

ment and moral and spiritual renewal in the black community.

NAACP Director Benjamin Chavis said Farrakhan will attend, but a spokesman for the organization would not confirm whether the Nation of Islam leader was scheduled to address the summit. The spokesman said that all invited guests would have an opportunity to speak.

The summit follows the reaffirmation on May 20 by the NAACP's board of directors that the 85-year-old group is a "mainstream civil rights organization," in the wake of criticism that the group had been taking on a separatist bent.

Donald Rojas, NAACP communications director, rejected the separatism charges outright.

"Inviting one of over 100 African American leaders to sit down with other African American leaders, how does that make the NAACP not a mainstream civil rights organization? That's quite a leap," Rojas said.

Chavis Wants To Reach Out To 'All Elements'

Rojas said Chavis would continue to reach out to "all elements" of the black community, explaining that Chavis believes in "the principle of dialogue and inclusion."

But while mindful of the need of black leaders to address problems facing the black community, many Jewish groups still expressed concern over Farrakhan's inclusion in this event.

"They'd like to have it both ways," said Stephen Steinlight, director of the AJCommittee's national affairs commission. "They'd like us to understand and remain allies and they'd like to have this relationship" with the Nation of Islam.

"This embrace is absolutely impossible and endangers enormously our ability to work together," he added.

Steinlight explained the NAACP's association with Farrakhan as an attempt to appeal to the younger, disenfranchised black community, to whom Farrakhan has broad appeal.

"The NAACP is an aging organization which is concerned about being irrelevant, at a time when so much of the African American community is in crisis," said Steinlight.

But even within the NAACP, the invitation to Farrakhan has met with controversy.

Joseph Madison, a member of the NAACP's board of directors, said the board was not consulted on who would be invited to the conference. He said the vast majority of board members are "very, very concerned" about the NAACP's relationship with the Nation of Islam.

He dismissed the notion that the group was reaching out to Farrakhan as a means of attracting black youth, pointing out that the NAACP already runs the country's largest secular black youth group.

Karen Senter, co-director for national concerns at the National Jewish Community Relations Council, said the Jewish community does not need to overstate its message. "Whatever the African American community has to do to deal with these issues, they know how we feel and they know where we stand," she said.

But some other Jewish groups, including one led by activist Rabbi Avi Weiss and another co-sponsored by Tikkun Magazine Editor Michael Lerner and New York Civil Rights Coalition Director Michael Meyer, plan to stage protests outside the NAACP meeting this weekend.

JEWISH AGENCY ATTACKS SATMAR HASIDIM AS REBBE ARRIVES FOR VISIT IN ISRAEL

By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, June 8 (JTA) -- The Jewish Agency for Israel launched a stinging attack on the Satmar Hasidim this week on the eve of the Satmar rebbe's first visit to Israel in 11 years.

It is the latest in a recent exchange of angry charges between the Israeli government and the Satmar over the treatment of Yemenite immigrants.

"World Satmar Hasidism is anti-Zionist and works for the clear and declared goal of frustrating the immigration and sabotaging the absorption of Yemenite Jews in Israel," said Yehiel Leket, acting chairman of the Jewish Agency, in a statement issued this week.

The group "does not hesitate to use any means to achieve this goal," he said.

Satmar Rebbe Moshe Teitelbaum is known for his fervent anti-Zionism. But his visit comes amid allegations by veteran Yemenite immigrants that Satmar Hasidim have bribed recent Yemenite immigrants to leave Israel.

There also have been charges that Yemenite children in Satmar yeshivas in the United States have not been permitted to leave.

A spokesman for the rebbe in the United States was quoted this week in the Israeli press as rejecting the charges as shocking falsehoods.

But at the same time he was quoted as conceding that the Satmar community tries "as hard as we can to influence Yemenite Jews to stay in the U.S."

The spokesman said Yemenite Jews have a better chance of remaining faithful to Jewish tradition in the United States than in the non-religious settlements they have been placed in over the years in Israel.

Accuses 'Agents' Of Creating Fabrication

He also accused "agents" of the Jewish Agency of creating the fabrication because they resent the Satmars' interference and "their monopoly of the Yemenite Jews."

Uri Gordon, head of the immigration and absorption department of the Jewish Agency, said in a statement that the agency has absorbed the immigrants with sensitivity to religious tradition. He said the children are educated in fervently Orthodox institutions.

Gordon charged the Satmars with using the Yemenites as a fund-raising tool.

Meanwhile, Leket said the rebbe's expression in Israel of his anti-Zionism represents a "cynical and disgraceful exploitation of Israeli pluralism and democracy" and that he preferred that the visit not take place.

Tens of thousands of the rebbe's followers greeted him upon his arrival Tuesday evening in Jerusalem's Mea Shearim district. He was scheduled to stay in Israel for two weeks.

Leket said agency representatives would boycott any visits by the rebbe to Yemenite absorption centers.

He also referred to the ongoing civil war in Yemen, saying, "Even this does not deter the Satmar Hasidim from mounting a 'War of the Jews,' aimed at persuading the Jews of Yemen not to immigrate to Israel."

He said the Satmar activities may jeopardize

continuing efforts to bring Yemenite Jews to Israel. Since the summer of 1992, 429 Yemenite Jews have come to Israel with the help of the Jewish Agency, according to an agency source.

Some 500 Jews remain in strife-ridden Yemen, but they are not directly threatened by the civil war, he said.

SARID BECOMES FIRST MINISTER TO VISIT AUTONOMOUS JERICHO

By Dvorah Getzler

JERUSALEM, June 8 (JTA) -- Environment Minister Yossi Sarid this week became the first Cabinet minister to pay an official visit to the autonomous Jericho district in the West Bank.

Sarid, a member of the left-wing Meretz bloc who played a key role in the autonomy negotiations, said during Wednesday's visit that the Palestinians were doing a good job of organizing their affairs.

He added that the Israeli government had no complaints about the way the newly formed Palestinian police force was controlling the autonomous entity.

"It is very much in our interest to see the Palestinian police function well, and we will do everything we can to help them," said Sarid.

Jericho and the Gaza Strip became autonomous Palestinian entities last month.

Among those whom Sarid met while in Jericho were Faisal Husseini and Jabril Rajoub.

Husseini is one of the newly named members of the Palestinian governing authority, which has overall responsibility for overseeing Palestinian affairs in Jericho and Gaza. Rajoub is head of all Palestinian security forces in the West Bank.

Sarid noted that the status of Jerusalem had not been raised during his discussions with the Palestinian leaders, although the issue of whether the Palestinians will be able to maintain offices in eastern Jerusalem has been a matter of sharp controversy in Israel over the past two weeks.

Sarid also said there had been no discussion of a recent Israeli order banning Rajoub from leaving Jericho. The order had been issued after Rajoub had allegedly incited Palestinians living in the territories and in Israel.

During his visit, Sarid went to Jericho's ancient synagogue, the scene of recent conflicts between the Palestinian police and groups of Israeli settlers, who have repeatedly charged that the synagogue has been desecrated by the police.

"I think the Palestinian police behave toward them (the settlers) with respect and that there have been some episodes here during which the settlers have not reciprocated that respect. And I think this constitutes more than a little provocation," Sarid said.

"We've got to get it straight: if their (the settlers') presence in the synagogue is for the purpose of prayer and study, that's just fine. But if their purpose is political, if their being here is a political act, then we have to take a different stand. From what I've seen over the past few weeks and days, I'm inclined to think their purpose is far more political than spiritual," he said.

He advocated keeping an eye on the settlers to prevent provocations from escalating into outright conflict. But he firmly opposes preventing settlers from attending the synagogue, which he said is their right according to the Cairo accord.