

**FEAR AND PANIC TAKE HOLD IN ARGENTINA FOLLOWING EXPLOSION AT JEWISH BUILDING**
By Susan Birnbaum

NEW YORK, July 18 (JTA) -- The Argentine Jewish community was left reeling after a bomb ripped through its communal offices in Buenos Aires on Monday morning, wreaking death and havoc in the building and surrounding neighborhood.

"There is awful consternation and enormous confusion," said a statement by representatives of the Latin American Jewish Congress, which is headquartered in Buenos Aires.

The blast completely leveled the seven-story building housing the Jewish Kehilla, or Jewish community organizations. At least 17 people were killed in the attack, and 127 injured, according to government officials.

The explosion took place as employees were arriving for work just before 10 a.m. local time. An estimated 100 people were inside the building at the time.

The death toll was expected to rise as workers sifted through the rubble. Among those killed were two police officers in a car stationed outside the building as a security measure.

The blast echoed the one that demolished the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires in March 1992.

No one was ever tried for that attack, which killed 30 and injured 250. At the time of that bombing, the Islamic Jihad in Beirut issued a statement claiming responsibility.

In this latest attack, a group calling itself Islamic Command called a local radio station to take responsibility.

Two foreigners were reportedly arrested in connection with the attack as they were trying to leave the country Monday, but Argentine officials declined to say whether they were members of any specific group.

Argentine President Appeals For Calm

Argentine President Carlos Menem had sealed the country's borders in order to prevent the escape of any suspected bombers and had appealed on the airwaves for calm.

In Israel, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin called the attack "a cowardly, criminal, despicable act" and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said, "We will do all we can to help those who have suffered in this attack."

The blast cast a pall over the opening of talks between Israel and Jordan on Monday. U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher, in Israel, said the attack was a reminder that "there are still enemies of peace" throughout the world.

"We redouble our efforts," he said, "while commiserating with the Jewish people in that terrible incident in Buenos Aires."

Jordan also condemned the attack, as did the Palestine Liberation Organization.

The blast sent ripples of fear throughout the Argentine Jewish community of 220,000, the largest in South America, which had barely recovered from the 1992 attack on the embassy.

Observers noted the similarities between the two attacks, including the apparent use of car bombs in both incidents and the fact that each building was undergoing construction work when the blast occurred, with workers freely coming and going.

This time, the bomb struck one of the community's most important addresses. The building housed the DAIA, the umbrella organization of Argentine Jewry; the AMIA, the community's 100-year-old main social service agency for the poor and aged; a library of YIVO, the Jewish Research Institute, where the archives on Jewish life in Argentina are stored; and the Jewish Community Council, among other organizations.

"They are really frightened," said Bernice Tannenbaum, coordinator of Hadassah International, who was in touch with her colleagues in Buenos Aires.

She said that "a call was made for complete silence in the area" so that any cries for help from under the debris could be detected.

Bernardo Zelcer, the Buenos Aires representative of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, described the mood as laden with "much perplexity and much pain."

Elan Steinberg, executive director of the World Jewish Congress in New York, said the Argentine government has called for three days of official mourning.

Steinberg also reported that leaders of the DAIA held a meeting late Monday with five government ministers at a secret location. "All indications point to Muslim fundamentalists," he said, after speaking with participants in the meeting.

WJC faxed Jewish communal offices around the world urging them to take special precautions since the explosion appeared to be of terrorist origins. A spokesman for B'nai B'rith International said his group was doing the same.

In New York, the American Jewish Committee held a hastily arranged meeting with the visiting Argentine minister of the interior, Carlos Ruckauf.

The minister assured the Jewish leaders that a full investigation was under way, and that he would take personal control of those efforts when he returns home. He was scheduled to leave New York on Monday.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES:**ADL REPORT BECOMES POLITICAL FOOTBALL IN DEBATE OVER ROLE OF RELIGIOUS RIGHT**
By Pamela Druckerman

NEW YORK, July 18 (JTA) -- When Republican National Committee Chairman Haley Barbour addressed a gathering of Jewish leaders last week, he had all the right opinions on Israel -- but failed to tell the group what it really wanted to hear.

Members of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations wanted to know that the Republican leader is as concerned as they are about the growing influence of the Christian religious right in the Republican Party.

"Our concern, some of us, is that the party has been targeted," Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, told Barbour.

"What we want to hear from you is: you're going to fight that targeting," Foxman said.

Foxman's concern is fueled by controversy surrounding a recent ADL report that details the political ambitions of religious right groups. The report has become the centerpiece of an election-year political firestorm over the growing power and influence of the religious right.

"The Religious Right: The Assault on Tolerance and Pluralism in America," paints the Christian right's conservative political agenda--most notably its stated opposition to the separation of church and state -- as a threat to religious pluralism in America.

The 193-page report, released last month, also outlines these groups' plans to gain control of the Republican Party.

Barbour -- who said he had not read the ADL report -- flatly denied charges that religious right groups have launched a "takeover" of the Republican Party.

"If I thought there was danger of our party being taken over by anybody, Christians, Jews or mugwumps, I would be very concerned about it," Barbour said.

But the success of Christian right groups in recent state Republican conventions from Minnesota to Texas, including the nomination -- with their overwhelming support -- of Oliver North as Virginia's Republican candidate for Senate, has fueled concern that religious right groups are having a substantial national impact, forcing moderates and old-line conservatives to the fringes of the Republican Party.

The ADL report brought to the fore this tension within the Republican Party, threatening to expose the alliances between mainstream and religious right groups, and providing fodder for Democratic attacks in an important election year.

Both Parties Trying To Manipulate Issue

Since the release of the ADL report, critics -- including conservative columnists and religious right groups themselves -- have accused the ADL of anti-Christian bigotry, and of working in tandem with the Democratic Party to launch partisan attacks.

Both Republicans and Democrats have tried to maneuver the issue to their political advantage.

Rep. Vic Fazio (D-Calif.), chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, last month launched a broad-scale attack on the religious right, charging it with "taking over the political party of Lincoln."

Such attacks are portrayed by conservatives as religiously motivated, anti-Christian campaigns.

In his address to the Conference of Presidents on June 11, Barbour accused Fazio of firing the "opening shot" in a "Christian-bashing campaign" aimed at making the religious right a divisive political issue for Republicans in the November elections.

Similar sentiments have been sounded in the press.

"Christians active in politics are now on the receiving end of an extraordinary campaign of bias and prejudice," William Bennett, former secretary of education in the Reagan administra-

tion and now closely affiliated with religious right groups, wrote in the New York Post on June 28.

In public statements and correspondence with the ADL, religious right groups portray themselves as inexplicably demonized by the ADL, despite the religious right's strong support for Israel.

In a June 22 letter to Foxman, Robertson accused the ADL of "false charges of anti-Semitism" in "an obvious effort to discredit the role of people of faith in the civic process."

In his response on July 13, Foxman said Robertson had confused "legitimate criticism with defamation.

"Our concern focuses on political positions and statements held by the Coalition and other religious right groups on certain issues -- not with the role of religious people in the civic process," Foxman wrote.

Attacks On ADL As Camouflage

David Cantor, a senior research analyst at ADL and author of the report, said the attacks on the ADL are an attempt to deflect legitimate criticism away from the Christian right.

"If we have no credibility, then the attacks against the religious right lose some credibility," said Cantor. "They are attacking us because they believe it provides some kind of cover from Democratic attacks."

Cantor said Republicans do not want to alienate the Christian right supporters -- most of them evangelical and fundamentalist Christians--that are expected to be decisive voting blocks in the November elections.

Officials at the Republican National Committee estimate that the religious right accounts for up to 25 percent of the active members of the party, though less than 12 percent of total party membership.

The ADL flatly denies any partisan motives or affiliation with the Democratic Party. And it insists the report aims at explaining the history and political strategies of the religious right, not at labeling religious right groups or leaders as anti-Semitic.

For its part, the Christian Coalition denies any formal affiliation with the Republican Party.

"We are an organization of people of faith holding up the issues banner," explained Christian Coalition spokesman Mike Russell.

Russell said the group puts the weight of its cadre of volunteers and activists behind candidates from either political party who endorse Christian Coalition platforms.

With a databank of 1.2 million committed voters and activists, it is a strategy, said Russell, that works.

Some conservative Jewish groups -- most notably Americans For A Safe Israel -- have made common cause with the religious right.

AFSI cites the religious right's historically strong support for Israel as a reason why Jews should accept, if not encourage the movement.

In his address to the Conference of Presidents, Barbour repeatedly cited this support to assuage Jewish concerns about the religious right.

But after his talk, a member of the conference approached Barbour at the dais.

"Israel is part of our agenda, but it's not our total agenda," she said.

(JTA correspondent Matthew Dorf in Washington contributed to this report.)

CHRISTOPHER ARRIVES WITH BOLD AGENDA AS ISRAEL AND JORDAN HUDDLE IN TENTS

By Dvora Getzler

JERUSALEM, July 18 (JTA) -- As Israeli and Jordanian teams convened in a tent on their border in yet another of this year's historic milestones on the road to Middle East peace, U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher arrived in Israel with a packed diplomatic agenda that included preparations for next week's summit between Jordan's King Hussein and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in Washington, a tripartite meeting with his Israeli and Jordanian counterparts in Jordan, and a shuttle between Jerusalem and Damascus.

In addition to trying to help Israel and Syria along the road to peace, Christopher told reporters, he would also engage in efforts to pursue peace between Israel and Lebanon.

"There is new hope, new opportunities here," Christopher said after meeting with Rabin on Monday.

"Peace is possible," he said. "We must grasp that opportunity as firmly as we can."

During his latest mission to the Middle East, Christopher was also scheduled to visit Syria and Jordan and to meet with Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat.

Rabin appeared less upbeat than Christopher after their meeting on Monday.

"The United States wants to help, but the United States knows that the responsibility for the achievement of peace rests first and foremost with the two sides concerned," the prime minister said.

The first leg of Christopher's visit to the region came as Israeli and Jordanian negotiators met on their common border to launch their first public bilateral talks in the region.

Optimism prevailed as the talks got off the ground in tents in Ein Avrona in the Arava.

Both sides emphasized that their ultimate goal is to sign a peace treaty.

Fayez al-Tarawneh, the head of the Jordanian delegation, said he expects the negotiations "will culminate in a treaty of peace that delineates carefully our rights and duties under conditions of peace."

Israel's chief negotiator with the Jordanians, Elyakim Rubinstein, said, "The peace we seek is between two states, but also between peoples."

Moving the talks to the region, he said, "should bring even closer home to the peoples of Israel and of Jordan the message of peace."

ISRAELIS, PALESTINIANS JOIN FORCES TO INVESTIGATE RIOTING ON GAZA BORDER

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, July 18 (JTA) -- In the wake of bloody riots on the border between Israel and the Gaza Strip, Israeli and Palestinian officials are working together to investigate the cause of the violence that left at least two dead and scores wounded.

The Erez checkpoint at the northern end of the Gaza Strip was quiet and empty Monday, closed down indefinitely by Israeli officials following the mass rioting a day earlier by Palestinian laborers seeking entry into Israel.

When the daylong melee was over, two

Palestinians were dead and at least 75 were wounded. On the Israeli side, 17 soldiers and border police were wounded, as well as a civilian employee of the Egged bus cooperative.

At least one member of the Israeli border police was in critical condition.

Sunday's violence, the bloodiest since Palestinian self-rule began in Gaza and the West Bank town of Jericho in May, precipitated a crisis of confidence between Israel and the Palestinians at a time when officials from the two sides are trying to determine how far to extend autonomy throughout the West Bank.

The joint Israeli-Palestine Liberation Organization coordinating committee that is overseeing the autonomy agreement met Monday to discuss the ramifications of the rioting and the closure of the border.

Israeli officials have said the border would remain closed -- and no Palestinian workers would be allowed entry -- until a more efficient inspection arrangement is established.

The committee is also trying to determine why the Palestinian police force failed to perform a preliminary check of would-be laborers to ensure that they had Israeli-issued work permits and that they carried no firearms.

Israel's top military official, Maj. Gen. Ehud Barak, has blamed the whole episode on the Palestinian police for not showing up early enough to oversee the checkpoint.

By the time the police arrived and began the procedure, Barak said, it was already after dawn, hours after the workers had begun assembling at the border.

Pressing forward at the Erez crossing, a group of laborers began throwing rocks at the Israeli officials at the other side of the checkpoint.

Investigating If Hamas Incited Violence

The Palestinian police, apparently unable to handle the mob, fired on both the Palestinian workers and on Israeli security personnel located on the other side of the crossing at the northern end of the Gaza Strip.

Israeli soldiers and border police opened fire on the legs of the rioters.

But most of the shots fired were said to have come from the weapons of the Palestinian police.

Meanwhile, the joint Israeli-PLO committee is also reportedly examining evidence that organizers from Hamas, the anti-peace Muslim fundamentalist organization, were present at the checkpoint, orchestrating and encouraging the rioters.

According to reports, Hamas organizers stood out in the crowd as they moved from group to group.

They were dressed in long white Arab robes that are the preferred uniform of the extremist religious Hamas and are rarely worn by Palestinians seeking work in Israel.

Following searches in the Gaza Strip, the Palestinian police reportedly have arrested persons involved in the printing of Hamas-signed posters appealing for anti-Israel demonstrations at the border.

In addition to the human casualties in the daylong rioting, property damage incurred by the rioting is estimated to total millions of dollars.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES:

**IN ETHNICALLY MIXED SERBIAN TOWN,
A COMMUNITY RECALLS WWII DEPORTATIONS**
By Ruth E. Gruber

SUBOTICA, Yugoslavia, July 18 (JTA) -- In the gloriously ornate, tragically abandoned synagogue in this ethnically mixed town in Serbia's Vojvodina province, a Roman Catholic choir sings "Shalom Aleichem" to an audience of Hungarians, Serbs, Croats and Jews.

The song was part of a unique ecumenical service that joined Yugoslavia's only rabbi, Cadik Danon, with local Catholic, Protestant and Serbian Orthodox clergy in prayers and scriptural readings.

The service was one of the key elements in commemorations held earlier this month to mark the deportation of Subotica's Jews during World War II.

The commemorations, organized by Subotica city officials and the city's 250-member Jewish community, honored the memory of 4,000 Subotica Jews deported to Auschwitz and killed 50 years ago.

Held against the background of war and ethnic tension in the former Yugoslavia, the commemoration also stressed the need for tolerance among all religious and ethnic groups.

"It is very important that in an abandoned synagogue there should be prayer again," said Mirko Vajcenfeld, president of the Subotica Jewish community. "(We hope) this will be a link that brings together the various communities."

David Albahari, president of the Federation of Yugoslav Jewish Communities, said, "The commemoration gave us the chance to remind others of the importance of memory.

"Memory was really the thing that actually made the existence of the Jewish people possible over all these centuries -- the memory of good and bad things without any insistence on revenge if the memories were bad," he said.

Subotica, located on the border with Hungary, was part of Hungary until World War I and was occupied by Hungary again during World War II.

City Is An Ethnic Mix

Its more than 5,000 Jews were deported to Auschwitz in 1944, along with the Jews of the rest of Hungary. Some 4,000 perished, and most of the survivors emigrated to Israel or elsewhere after the war.

Similar commemorations of the deportations have taken place this year in many Hungarian towns.

Subotica's 120,000 population is an ethnic mix of Hungarians, Croats, Serbs and others, and the city prides itself on its history of tolerance among ethnic groups -- a tolerance that has managed to persist despite the ethnic conflict and polarization in most of the rest of former Yugoslavia.

Today Subotica is one of the few cities in Serbia that is governed by parties opposed to the policies of the central government of Slobodan Milosevic.

Led by Mayor Jozsef Kasza, the city has hosted many peace workshops and promoted efforts to foster tolerance.

The commemoration of the Jewish deporta-

tion and a project to restore the synagogue -- a glorious example of Hungarian art nouveau architecture built in 1902 -- were part of this local commitment to maintain the multiculturalism.

And though the commemorations were partly funded with money from the Serbian government, Serbian and Yugoslav federal officials did not respond to invitations to attend.

**ISRAELI CHIEF OF STAFF VISITS
SACHSENHAUSEN CONCENTRATION CAMP**
By Gil Sedan

SACHSENHAUSEN, Germany, July 18 (JTA) -- On the first official visit to Germany by an Israel Defense Force chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Ehud Barak paid a visit last week to the site of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp.

Accompanied by his German counterpart, Gen. Klaus Naumann, Barak laid a wreath at the site where 100,000 Jews and other prisoners were led to their deaths in the gas chambers.

"We are the last generation with a living memory of the Holocaust," Barak said in his July 13 speech here. "For the next generation, and the generations to follow, the extermination will only be a fading memory.

"Only a strong, developing and blooming Israel is the answer to the crimes that were committed against Jews. This generation of Germans bears no personal guilt for the Holocaust, but the German people bears the historical responsibility for the destruction of a greater part of the Jewish people," Barak said.

Barak was in Germany at the invitation of Naumann, who visited Israel two years ago. While at the concentration camp last week, Naumann laid a wreath beside the one placed by Barak.

Two years ago, 10 days after Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin visited the site, neo-Nazis set fire to the barracks that had served as a museum of Jewish resistance at the camp.

Authorities at the Sachsenhausen Memorial Center kept the burned barracks untouched, to serve as a warning about the recent rise of neo-Nazism in Europe.

Two days before visiting the concentration camp, Barak held meetings with Naumann and other German officials to discuss military issues of mutual interest to the two countries.

During those meetings, Barak expressed concern over Germany's strong ties with Iran and Iraq.

The Germans replied that it was important for them to maintain contacts with the two countries, adding that it would serve Israeli interests as well.

During Barak's visit, Germany's Constitutional Court issued a ruling enabling German troops to participate in peacekeeping missions launched by the United Nations or NATO.

Germany's postwar constitution, called the Basic Law, had been interpreted until now as allowing German forces to be deployed only in cases of self-defense.

Naumann said Germany would be willing to partake in peacekeeping operations. But he thought it unlikely that German troops would become involved in peacekeeping operations in the Middle East, especially the Golan Heights, where international peacekeepers may be placed as part of an envisioned Israel-Syria peace arrangement.