

**CROSSING THE JORDAN: PERES ENCOUNTERS WORDS OF HOPE AND PROMISES OF PEACE**

By Dvora Getzler

JERUSALEM, July 20 (JTA) -- Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and his Jordanian counterpart, Abdul Salam al-Majali, have decided to meet on a monthly basis and will take turns hosting each other in their respective countries.

The two officials agreed to establish regular contact at the conclusion of their meeting on Wednesday.

Described repeatedly by both political leaders as "historic," the meeting, on the Jordanian shore of the Dead Sea, marked the first time an Israeli official publicly set foot on Jordanian soil.

"It took us 15 minutes to fly over," said Peres, when he arrived by helicopter for the meeting with Majali and U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher.

"It took us 46 years to arrive at this time and place of peace and promise," Peres added.

The three-way meeting of foreign ministers, which came two days after Israeli and Jordanian officials began negotiating such issues as borders and water rights, focused on regional economic cooperation.

The trilateral meeting took place five days before Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Jordanian King Hussein were to hold a historic summit in Washington.

Reporters failed to get Peres and Majali to say whether the two countries, which have been formally at war for 46 years, would announce their mutual recognition at next week's White House meeting.

The two leaders did express the belief, after the two countries had been in a technical state of war since 1948, that their two countries were about to embark on an era of peaceful relations.

"Peace," Peres said, "is not the World Cup. We are not going to have one group winning. We are going to have all groups winning in (terms of mutual) understanding."

"The war is behind (us). Peace is a state of mind, it is not a matter of declarations," said Majali. "Peace is here, as we can see."

NEWS ANALYSIS:**ROLE OF MAIN AMERICAN JEWISH GROUP IS DEBATED AS PEACE PROCESS UNFOLDS**

By Larry Yudelson

NEW YORK, July 20 (JTA) -- In the 10 months since Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat shook hands on the White House lawn, American Jewry's leading umbrella organization has not faxed out one news release to hail Israel for the risks it has taken for peace with the Palestinians.

By contrast, in one week last year, the group, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, issued three news releases hailing Israel for granting asylum to 84 Bosnian Muslim refugees.

Nor has the conference run any full-page advertisements in The New York Times this year supporting Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's moves.

At the same time, several ads have been placed by right-wing Jewish groups, among them members of the conference, attacking Rabin's policies and the idea of trading land for peace.

Old-timers remember the conference placing ads hailing Israel's withdrawal from the Sinai. In 1989, as then-Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's policies of settling the West Bank and the Gaza Strip was creating a crisis in U.S.-Israel relations, the conference took out three full-page ads to express solidarity with Israel.

The omission of similar efforts now is emblematic of what some say is a resounding silence emanating from the Conference of Presidents and other mainstream Jewish organizations when it comes to supporting the peace process.

While the Presidents Conference is financially one of the smallest Jewish organizations, as the umbrella body for 50 national Jewish groups it serves as the leading spokesman for the Jewish community on international affairs, and particularly matters regarding Israel.

Conference Organized 1991 Lobbying Effort

It was the conference that organized the massive 1991 lobbying effort to win Israel \$10 billion in loan guarantees from the United States.

"Our community knows what it is to mobilize on issues of vital concern," said Thomas Smerling, executive director of Project Nishma, a group supporting the present peace process. "To date, we have not seen that kind of a mobilization about the peace process."

Now, at a time when the organized American Jewish community could be scoring points by highlighting the far-reaching concessions Israel has made to reach peace with the Palestinians -- such as the withdrawal from Gaza and Jericho -- the Conference of Presidents has been relatively quiet.

Opponents of the peace process, by contrast, have been quite vocal, leaving some in the American public with the impression that the opponents' view is the dominant one in the American Jewish community.

"If the only ads that appear are from the right wing, certainly there ought to be some kind of response to demonstrate that in the Jewish community not everyone shares that point of view," said Adam Simms, co-editor of P.S., a liberal Jewish newsletter.

Last week, the topic came up at a meeting in which Itamar Rabinovich, Israeli ambassador to the United States, addressed the Conference of Presidents.

"Where are you?" is how one participant summed up the general theme of the meeting.

Rabinovich expressed "a general observation that the leadership of the community is not as out front in support of the peace process as are those who are raising questions about the peace process," said another participant.

Officials with the Israeli Embassy and the Conference of Presidents denied that Rabinovich criticized Jewish leadership on the peace process.

But other officials with Jewish organizations said that criticism of Jewish leadership is precise-

ly what they have been hearing from Israeli officials in Jerusalem, Washington and New York.

"Everybody knows what is going on, but no one is willing to speak about it, because it harms the Jewish community," said one such official, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the conference, denied that there has been any weakness in the conference's support for the peace process.

"We try to reflect the consensus of our member organizations," said Hoenlein. "We have always left it to the government of Israel to make decisions on security issues.

"We had a discussion about doing an ad," said Hoenlein. "It's a question about what purpose it serves, the right time to do it, having the resources. Is it the most efficacious use of funds? The cost factor is a significant one."

Hoenlein said that while the Conference of Presidents did not issue a statement at the signing of the Cairo accord -- which put into effect the Palestinian self-rule agreement between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization -- Lester Pollack, chairman of the conference, attended the May 4 ceremony.

If the Conference of Presidents were to take a more high-profile role in promoting the peace process, evidence from surveys of American Jews taken over the past 10 months indicates it would find wide support among the community.

The most recent poll, which found 88 percent of American Jews supporting the peace process, was sponsored by the Israel Policy Forum, an organization formed to rally American Jews behind Israel's Labor government. Earlier polls, including one sponsored by the American Jewish Committee, showed similar findings.

"The poll demonstrates that there is an enormous potential for tapping into the community's desire for the peace process to work," said Jonathan Jacoby, executive vice president of the Israel Policy Forum.

Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, said the low-key reaction of mainstream Jewish organizations is "commensurate with the reality, which is exactly what's happening in Israel.

"The Israeli public are more cautious, more circumspect, on where and how quickly (the peace process) is going," said Foxman.

Not Necessarily Its Role

But if the Jewish organizational leaders who said their meeting with Rabinovich touched on the broader issue of support for Rabin's initiative are correct, it would appear that the Israeli government is concerned that the lack of euphoria is becoming a political liability.

Liability or not, American Jewish organizations in general, and the Conference of Presidents in particular, do not necessarily see their role as actively supporting Israeli government policy.

"We represent a consensus of the member organizations of the Conference of Presidents," said Hoenlein.

"The conference has generally supported the democratically elected government of Israel. It does not mean we support its policies, positions or statements. There are often differences even within the government on particular policies or aspects of policies.

"On the peace process, the conference supports Israel's pursuit for peace, as we did before. We supported Shamir when he went to Madrid, (former Prime Minister Menachem) Begin when he went to Camp David. We support the search for peace, we don't draw borders. That's a decision for Israel and its people to make."

Said one Presidents Conference veteran: "When there's a very strong sentiment, like unity with Israel or support with the government for withdrawing from Sinai, taking risks for peace, that's one thing. When the community is divided, there would be difficulty in arriving at a consensus statement."

In fact, it is hard to remember a time when so many members of the conference have been so loudly at odds with a sitting Israeli government.

Job Is 'To Keep The Community Together'

"Part of our job is to keep the community together, which I think we have done quite well," said Hoenlein. "Despite the divisiveness, we have presented a wide variety of views.

"We're trying to move the debate to within the conference, so people will have their discussion within the conference, as a central forum where the entire leadership of the Jewish community can participate," said Hoenlein.

He said the conference is working on a consensus statement about the peace process, and the issues "where there is -- I think -- a clear consensus: Jerusalem, the 'right of return' of Arab refugees, a Palestinian state."

Hoenlein stressed that his organization has acted to support the peace process.

Examples he cited included protests to the Clinton administration about a proposal to open an American office in eastern Jerusalem to disperse aid to the Palestinian autonomous regions; efforts to clarify reports that the United States would prematurely forgive Jordan's debts; and statements condemning PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat's repeated failure to denounce terrorist attacks against Jews.

None of these measures, however, involve taking a stand in favor of Rabin's controversial moves.

Most fall into the old category of opposing American favors toward Arabs.

This may reflect more than just the need to maintain a consensus with groups nervous about the peace process or nostalgic for the Likud.

As "defense agencies," American Jewish groups are trained to react to threats.

If the community is indeed uncertain how to respond, it is not clear that it has been receiving strong signals, at least until now, from the current Israeli government.

This is in contrast to the Shamir years, when the prime minister's office was in frequent contact with the conference, not only to explain policies but to help set strategy.

At last week's meeting, Rabinovich reportedly offered some concrete suggestions.

Among them were Jewish organizational support for events marking the first anniversary in September of the accord with the PLO.

But one participant, personally highly supportive of the peace process, said the specific suggestions "were less important than the question: 'why aren't you planning, why aren't you moving?'"

BOMBING OF PANAMANIAN PLANE LEAVES JEWISH COMMUNITY WORRIED AND FEARFUL

By Susan Birnbaum

NEW YORK, July 20 (JTA) -- The Jewish community of Panama was engulfed by grief and apprehension this week following the deadly crash of a commuter plane Tuesday carrying mostly Jews on a flight between Panama City and Colon.

All 21 on board were killed, among whom 12 were Jewish, and at least four of them Israeli, according to the Israeli Embassy in Panama City and other sources.

The flight is a known route for Jewish business commuters, and the Jewish community feared that the plane had been bombed by terrorists. Most of the passengers lived in Panama City and worked in Colon, an important commercial city that is part of a free-trade zone.

Panama's president-elect, Ernesto Perez Balladares, who was in Washington this week to meet with President Clinton, confirmed to reporters Wednesday that the crash "was not an accident, but a planted bomb inside the plane."

The incident sparked concern among the 7,000-member Panamanian Jewish community, especially since it occurred only one day after a bomb exploded in the main Jewish community building in Buenos Aires, killing at least 34 people.

"The whole Jewish community is in shock," said Joseph Harari, chairman of the Latin American section of B'nai B'rith, speaking from Panama City. Harari knew all the victims and is an uncle of one of them.

Harari had ironically been asked by Kent Schiner, international president of B'nai B'rith, to go to Buenos Aires as the organization's Latin American representative at a march to be held Thursday by the Jewish community to protest Monday's bombing.

When asked about sabotage, Harari said, "The community doesn't wish to comment or speculate on what it can be.

"But we can only indicate from what we read and learn from local officials that apparently the plane exploded in midair. All the passengers and crew were found dead in the radius of the crash," he said.

Previous Bombing Attempt On A Victim

The crash took place over mountainous terrain in heavy rain at 4:30 p.m. local time.

Harari said, "The community wants to get the first findings" from the Panamanian government, to "determine the cause of the accident. "We have sent our request to the president."

Warren Eisenberg, executive director of B'nai B'rith in Washington, said that because no one was arrested after the bombing in Argentina, "we are very concerned with them catching people.

"We have raised the issue with the State Department," Eisenberg added, and said that the matter would be brought to the attention of Panama's president-elect.

Two sources familiar with the Panamanian Jewish community told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency that the attack may be linked to an extortion campaign that has targeted several Jewish business leaders in recent months.

There was also some speculation that the downing might be tied to the recent kidnapping

of one of the crash victims, Saul Schwartz, said sources in the community.

The mystery was complicated by the fact that one of Schwartz's cousins had placed a bomb in his vehicle some time ago. Schwartz was not injured in that attack.

"I don't know if we can link this at this time," said Harari, and preferred not to comment further on that case.

Schwartz, a wholesale jeweler, had also been recently accused in Italy of smuggling gold bullion. He had denied any wrongdoing.

Two other victims were Emanuel Attie, an active member of the Panama Jewish community and president of a local lodge of B'nai B'rith, and his nephew, Alberto Attie.

The other Jewish victims of the crash were identified in the Panamanian press as Chaya Yaker; Joseph Gershon; Moshe Pardo; Isaac Harroche and his son, Mauricio; Rami Gabay; Simon Chocron; Lizzie Philips; and Freddy Moade.

Said Harari, "First we wish to bury our dead. Then I think we will pressure the local authorities to take the appropriate action, and insist that they find" the cause.

(JTA staff intern Jeannie Rosenfeld in New York contributed to this report.)

RECALLING ATTEMPT ON HITLER'S LIFE, KOHL HAILS DECENCY OVER WICKEDNESS

By Gil Sedan

BONN, July 20 (JTA) -- Speaking at a ceremony marking the 50th anniversary of a failed assassination attempt on Adolf Hitler, German Chancellor Helmut Kohl used the occasion to depict the attempt as a symbol of bravery for his country.

"The history of the present century has taught us that the decisive moral dividing line is not between left and right, but rather between decency and wickedness," said Kohl.

Speaking in front of the wall where four German army officers were shot following the abortive assassination attempt on July 20, 1944, Kohl warned against choosing "the political extremes" to provide answers for the country's future.

"Only if all of us will be united will those forces fail to bring the fatherland to destruction once again," he said.

Ceremonies were held throughout Germany on Wednesday to mark the attempt by Count Claus Schenk von Stauffenberg and other high-ranking German officers to kill Hitler before he destroyed Germany.

Stauffenberg, the chief of staff at the General Army Office in Berlin, attended a meeting with Hitler at Hitler's office and left a briefcase containing a time bomb under the table near Hitler's feet. Stauffenberg then left the room.

The bomb exploded, but Hitler, protected by part of the table, was only slightly hurt. However, four other officials were killed.

Stauffenberg flew back to Berlin in an effort to put a planned coup into effect, but he and other ringleaders in the assassination attempt were captured by the SS and put before a firing squad the night of the attempt.

Hitler had more than 5,000 people arrested following the failed attempt on his life. According to historians, some 2,800 people were executed.

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES:
OUT IN THE PARK IN SLOVAKIA:
JEWS NOW DISPLAY THEIR TRADITIONS**
By Ruth E. Gruber

BRATISLAVA, Slovakia, July 20 (JTA) -- On a hot Friday morning in a park not far from the center of Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia, a dozen or so children are working on arts and crafts projects, supervised by several adults.

They are all wearing T-shirts with Hebrew lettering, and the boys wear yarmulkes or caps.

On a folding table lie the day's projects -- pictures of candlesticks, challah and other Sabbath symbols.

Some of the children are making bouquets of paper flowers to put on the Shabbat table, and some of the children had spent the early part of the morning helping bake challah in a nearby apartment.

Two policemen watch from nearby.

This is the last day of Bratislava's two-week Jewish Day Camp, a program that expanded from only five participants when it started last year to about two dozen children this summer.

It is one of the activities begun by Bratislava's new, American-born rabbi as a means of instilling Judaism into the younger members of a community which, like Jewish communities all over post-Communist East-Central Europe, is attempting to revitalize itself.

"Basically, the camp is fun, and the kids learn about Judaism. It's so they'll associate Judaism with fun," Rabbi Baruch Myers, of Maplewood, N.J., said. "The experience is very important, but it really bears fruit for the whole year."

Myers, 30, a member of the Chabad Lubavitch movement, was hired as the rabbi of the Bratislava Jewish community last summer.

New Religious Focal Point

His arrival as the first rabbi in Bratislava for at least a generation has been one of the most important events in the revival of the Bratislava community, giving a new religious focal point to a community which historically was a major center of Jewish learning in Central Europe.

Although estimates of Bratislava's current Jewish population range up to 1,000, Myers said that only 400 people are formally affiliated with the community.

Most Bratislava Jews today are highly secularized, and -- as elsewhere in East-Central Europe -- know little about Judaism.

After the fall of communism in late 1989 and early 1990, the Jewish community initiated highly popular educational programs and other activities on Jewish history and culture, but these programs have had little religious content.

"There was a profound Jewish religious presence in Bratislava" before the war, Myers said. "Following the Holocaust, there was a tremendous destruction of Jewish life. Now, secularism here is very well entrenched. But people do still have memories of religion here.

"It's like if you have scraped down a painting on a canvas to paint something else on top of it; sometimes the old image peeks through," he said.

Myers said the older generation is sym-

pathetic toward religion, but the students are difficult to reach.

Among Myers' projects are the translation into Slovak and widespread dissemination in the community of colorful Chabad pamphlets giving simple explanations of Jewish holidays, their history and observance, as well as recipes for traditional holiday foods.

The publications were at first financed by private sources within Chabad, but have begun to be sponsored by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

Fero Alexander, executive chairman of the Union of Jewish Religious Communities of Slovakia, praised Myers' efforts, but said he had little expectation of a religious revival among Bratislava Jews.

"I can't imagine the people here becoming Orthodox," he said. "I can't imagine that young people here will become religious."

Among the reasons for this, Alexander said, is that it is extremely difficult or expensive to obtain kosher food and supplies.

Myers said he founded the summer camp, financed by both Chabad and JDC, for young children as well as for their families.

"One family had told their daughter all her life not to say in public that she was Jewish because it was not clear what the climate might be," said Myers' wife, Chana, who directs the camp. "But now she's thrilled to be here with other Jewish kids."

Chana Myers said that this reaction and participation in the camp clearly show that Jews in Bratislava are becoming more relaxed and open about their Jewish identities.

"People say that it will take a generation for the fear to go away, but you can see it happening," she said. "Jewish pride is developing, the ability to say that you are Jewish out loud, without fear."

**BRITISH JEWS AND LAWMAKERS PROTEST
PLANNED MEETING OF EXTREMIST MUSLIMS**
By Bernard Josephs
London Jewish Chronicle

LONDON, July 20 (JTA) -- Thousands of supporters of an extremist Muslim group that has openly called for the killing of Jews are planning to hold an international conference here next month.

The Aug. 7 event, for which some 12,000 tickets have been distributed, has sparked protests from members of Parliament and expressions of concern from the Jewish community.

Members of Britain's Muslim community of 1.5 million, the vast majority of whom oppose radical fundamentalism, have also expressed concern.

The meeting, billed as the largest of its type outside the Muslim world, has been organized by an Islamic fundamentalist group calling itself Hizb ut-Tahrir. The group, which has been banned in most pro-Western Arab countries, attacks Western values and stridently opposes Jews and Israel.

There is speculation that some of the costs of the rally will be picked up by Iran.

One of the group's leaflets, advertising a previous meeting in London, said: "The hour of the resurrection will not come until the Muslims fight the Jews and kill them."