



IN THE WAKE OF DEATH AND DESTRUCTION, ARGENTINE JEWRY FACES DRAMATIC CHANGES

By Raul Kollmann

BUENOS AIRES, July 24 (JTA) -- Nothing will ever be the same for Argentina's Jews after last week's bomb attack on the community's headquarters.

On Monday, when the winter holiday is over, children were scheduled to return to school, and pupils at Jewish schools were to face tighter security than ever before.

For the first time, police cars are being stationed at the school doors, and as the children go inside, their school bags are being examined one by one.

And parents will soon hold assemblies in Jewish schools and clubs to decide what additional measures should be taken to beef up security.

Diana Katz, the mother of a girl who goes to the Scholem Aleijem School in Buenos Aires, said she will send her daughter to a non-Jewish school next year.

"I cannot live in fear. You never know what murderers may do," she said.

But Juana Kilzi, whose two grandchildren also go to a Jewish school, thought otherwise.

"We must not creep into basements" out of fear, she said.

But fear was nonetheless felt by many here in the wake of the July 18 bomb blast, which completely leveled a seven-story building housing the Jewish Kehilla, or Jewish community organizations.

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; the archives on Jewish life in Argentina; and the Jewish Community Council, among other organizations.

At least 59 people are known to have died in the blast, and Jewish leaders are saying the toll may rise as high as 100. The blast echoed the one that demolished the Israeli Embassy here in March 1992. No one was ever tried for that attack, which killed 30 and injured 250.

'No Other Alternative'

Ruben Beraja, president of the DAIA, has announced that Israeli companies and experts will be engaged to provide security for the 200 Jewish institutions in the country.

"We will have to invest millions of dollars to carry out this transformation, but we have no other alternative," Beraja said.

Delia Dordon, the headmistress of a Jewish school, explained what her first security measures will be.

"Even the crates with vegetables we receive will be opened. We will ask the janitors of the neighboring houses to cooperate so that no unfamiliar cars are allowed into garages. We will study the history of each one of the persons that we hire.

"Parking will be prohibited on the block where Jewish institutions are located, and every school and club will be searched four times daily, inch by inch," she said.

In spite of all the fears and difficulties with security, the Jewish community has made a unanimous decision: All Jewish institutions in Buenos Aires will open their doors for business as usual this week.

The Jewish resolve was bolstered after more than 150,000 people gathered last week in the city's Congress Square to repudiate the act of terror that had claimed so many lives.

The July 21 rally, occurring three days after the bombing took place, was described as the largest mass demonstration to take place in Argentina in the last 10 years.

Six blocks in one direction, two in the other, three blocks behind the platform, shoulder to shoulder, Argentines from all walks of life stood, mostly silent, many under umbrellas, in a cold and steady rain.

'Today We Are All Jews'

Banners of extraordinary length reading "Hoy somos todos Judios" -- "Today we are all Jews" -- were unfurled above the heads of scores of demonstrators.

Posters proclaiming the rally and urging all to attend and "stand up against violence" had been placed in stores throughout Buenos Aires.

"The trade unions collectively called for a work stoppage so that people could come to this event," according to Jason Isaacson, an American Jewish Committee official who had flown here to express solidarity with Argentine Jews.

The Argentine government was shut down that day at 2 p.m. by presidential decree so that people could attend the rally, which began at 3:30 local time and lasted 90 minutes.

While the entire Jewish community seemed to be there, they were nonetheless outnumbered by non-Jews, and were joined by scores of Jews from other countries.

The crowd first sang the Argentine national anthem. Then came "Hatikvah," the Israeli national anthem, though most in the crowd were not able to participate.

Isaacson, director of government and international affairs for AJCommittee, attended the rally with Jacobo Kovadloff, an Argentinean who represented AJCommittee in Argentina until 1973.

Isaacson, who had never been in Argentina, found a country in mourning.

But he said he was deeply moved that the news of the bombing was being covered by all newspapers, with pages upon pages of text and photos and editorials.

Watching all the banners proclaiming "Today we are all Jews," Isaacson said he felt that "today I am an Argentinean."

Roxana Rizzo, a young Catholic girl in the crowd, had a Magen David pinned to her chest, because, as she explained, "Today I'm also Jewish."

Close by, Yang Baek, a Protestant woman from Korea, carried a sign in her own language,

which she translated: "Let's clean up the garbage."

"We Koreans have also closed our shops today. In the Once district (the city's traditional Jewish neighborhood), the Jews are our neighbors and we get along fine," Yang said.

Argentina's president, Carlos Menem, who has a friendly relationship with the Jewish community, was booed when he appeared. He did not address the rally, but other government figures and Jewish leaders did.

Many in the Jewish community here believe that the government has not done enough to protect Jewish institutions. They remember the failure of the government investigation into the 1992 attack on the Israeli Embassy that killed 30 people. Many believe that if the terrorists had been found, this latest attack would not have occurred.

Beraja of the DAIA reflected this feeling when he spoke at the rally:

"Terror comes to those societies where justice is weak and where the systems for prevention and punishment are not efficient," he said.

Meanwhile, the survivors of the attack and the relatives of the dead and missing await an explanation.

Salomon Belgorovski is still searching for a reason for the death of his wife, Dorita.

Belgorovski, who worked in the treasury department of the community building, jumped into the inner yard when he felt the floor move, the furniture fly and the ceiling collapse.

He called out to his wife, who also worked in the building, but there was no answer.

Rosa Montagno, pregnant with her third child and on her way to the doctor, passed the ill-fated building just as the blast occurred. Her 6-year-old son, Sebastian, was killed instantly. Montagno is recovering in the hospital.

Perhaps the most dramatic story was that of Jacobo Chemanuel, the man in charge of the building's coffee shop.

A National Obsession

Twelve hours after the attack, firemen heard his voice under the rubble. Saving his life became a national obsession as his rescue was broadcast live. Removing stones and beams to reach him, firemen made a tunnel to put coffee within his reach and talked to him so he wouldn't fall asleep.

A full 31 hours later, Chemanuel was rescued and rushed to the hospital to undergo two operations. Later his right foot was amputated. But with it all, Chemanuel, a diabetic with a heart condition, was fighting against the odds. His heart failed and Chemanuel died last Friday afternoon.

In a search for answers to the tragedy, Isaacson and Kovadloff of AJCommittee met last Friday with leaders of Jewish groups, Israeli Embassy personnel and with Argentine Foreign Minister Guido di Tella and Interior Minister Carlos Ruckauff.

Rabbi Avi Weiss, a New York activist and the leader of AMCHA-Coalition of Jewish Concerns, held a private meeting with Menem last Friday and encouraged the Argentine president to apprehend the perpetrators as quickly as possible to avoid a similar tragedy in the future, he said in a statement.

When Isaacson asked if the attack could have involved tie-ins among former Nazis who found haven in Argentina and other South American countries, neo-Nazis and Islamic extremist groups, he was told: "It's a possibility."

The Jewish leaders were also told it was possible that Muslim extremist groups were operating in Argentina.

A southern Lebanon-based Islamic group, calling itself the Supporters of God, has claimed responsibility for the July 18 attack.

Little is known about this organization, but the group reportedly issued a statement three months ago from the Lebanese town of Sidon promising all-out war against Israel.

If their claim proves true, it would bear out Israel's assertion last week that a Middle East terror group was behind the bombing.

Isaacson said he was told by many that "Argentina is a sieve; that it is not difficult to get either contraband or undesirables into the country and out again."

There have been some reports from other South American countries that there were or would be attempts on Jewish or Israeli targets in the region.

Meanwhile, synagogues throughout Argentina held special services last Friday night.

Isaacson and Kovadloff attended one service at a Conservative synagogue, Beth El in Buenos Aires, where about 1,500 people were packed in and spilling out onto the street.

Isaacson said, "While we were singing the Shema, there was a police helicopter beating its wings over our heads."

(JTA staff writer Susan Birnbaum in New York contributed to this report.)

NEO-NAZIS RIOT AT BUCHENWALD SITE

By Gil Sedan

BONN, July 24 (JTA) -- Ignatz Bubis, the chairman of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, has sharply criticized "the light hand" with which German authorities handled a case of a group of Skinheads who on Saturday night desecrated the memorial site at the former concentration camp of Buchenwald.

The group of 22 skinheads arrived at Buchenwald by bus from the nearby towns of Erfurt and Gera in the central German state of Thuringia. They soon started running wild through the camp, chanting Nazi slogans and throwing stones.

When one worker at the memorial site tried to stop them, they threatened to burn her to death. No one was hurt in the rioting, but several monuments were lightly damaged.

The woman worker managed to summon the police, who interrogated the group, but later released all but one.

Bubis said in an interview that if the police had handled the case as a "severe disruption of public order," as it is phrased in the German law books, or as one involving the use of Nazi slogans or threats of violence, all 22 suspects would have remained in custody.

"The way the authorities have handled this case and others is an open invitation to repeat the vandalism," said Bubis.

Some 70,000 people were either murdered in Buchenwald during the Holocaust or transferred from there to other death camps.

PANAMA'S JEWISH COMMUNITY MOURNS ITS DEAD AS IT WORRIES ABOUT A MOTIVE

By Lisa Hostein

NEW YORK, July 24 (JTA) -- Emanuel Attie was on his way to meet his daughter at the Shevet Achim synagogue in Panama City to set a date for her wedding.

Solomon Chochron was also headed for the synagogue, hoping to make it in time for afternoon prayers.

Neither man ever made it.

The two were among the 21 victims of last week's deadly plane explosion that took the lives of 12 members of Panama's small Jewish community.

Panama's president-elect, Ernesto Perez Balladares, visiting Washington last week, said the crash "was not an accident, but a planted bomb inside the plane."

The day after the July 19 crash, several thousands of the 7,000-member close-knit community turned out to bury their dead -- and to worry over the motive that downed the commuter plane en route from Colon, a commercial free-trade center about 50 miles from Panama City.

"Shock and fear has clearly set in," Mitchell Drimmer said in a phone interview from Panama City.

Drimmer, a New York purchasing agent for department stores in Panama, has developed close ties with the Panamanian Jewish community over the years. He flew south as soon as he heard about the plane crash.

"You come for the weddings and Bar Mitzvahs," he said. "You have to come for the tragedies, too."

Occurring just one day after the devastating explosion that rocked the Jewish community's headquarters in Buenos Aires, many feared the Panama plane crash was yet another terrorist attack aimed at Jews.

However, speculation in the Jewish community and elsewhere in Panama has shifted to the belief that this "wasn't political, but drug-related," according to a source in the community who asked not to be named.

Suspicion About Passenger's Ties To Cartel

One of the victims, Saul Schwartz, reportedly was under investigation by Italian authorities for ties to the Medellin, Colombia, drug cartel.

Last year, Schwartz, a gold dealer, had been kidnapped and later released, Drimmer said.

A month ago, Schwartz's cousin Alan allegedly attempted to assassinate him by attaching a hand grenade to the steering wheel of Saul Schwartz's car. The grenade went off and Schwartz was injured.

Adding to the speculation that the plane bomb was motivated by drug-related crimes rather than anti-Semitism is the fact that there were "better" sites to bomb if Jews alone were the target, according to one source.

He cited Panama City's three synagogues, its Jewish community center and even the next flight out of Colon, which would have carried more than 50 Jewish passengers.

Despite the widespread belief, as one source put it, that the explosion "has all the makings of a Colombian hit," Panama's Jews continue to feel uneasy over the incident.

"We will not sleep until we know if this is an act of anti-Semitic terror or drug-related narcotics terror," Drimmer quoted one community leader as saying.

Fueling speculation that the bombing was the action of a terrorist group, according to Drimmer, was the fact that one of the bodies found in the wreckage had been registered on the flight under an Arab name. So far, the body has not been claimed by any family or friends.

Drimmer also noted that a bullet hole had been found in the fuselage of the aircraft.

"We don't know what it means," said Drimmer, adding that the question remained of whether "the bullet was from the ground coming in or from the inside going out."

He noted that reports indicate that officials of Mossad, the Israeli intelligence service, were in Panama helping with the investigation. But officials with the Panamanian government and the Israeli Embassy would not confirm the reports.

Panama's Jewish community, meanwhile, is doing its best to cope with the present lack of hard answers about the motives behind the crash.

Joseph Harari, chairman of the Latin American section of B'nai B'rith International and an uncle of one of the victims, said, "First we wish to bury our dead. Then I think we will pressure the local authorities" to find the cause.

Regardless of cause or motive, the crash left families and friends in Panama's wealthy and mostly observant community in deep mourning.

Late-Night Funerals Were Arranged

For Miriam Harouche, the crash signaled the end of her family as she had known it. She lost her husband, Mauricio, and her son, Isaac. Now her daughter-in-law intends to return to her native Colombia, taking her children with her.

The funerals for most of the Jewish victims were held late at night on July 20. According to Drimmer, the Jews had secured special permission from Panamanian Vice President Guillermo Ford to contravene Panamanian law to hold the funerals at night in order to abide by Jewish tradition, which requires burial within 24 hours of death.

At a mass funeral at the city's Sephardic cemetery, eight of the victims were buried in consecutive graves at the burial ground.

Laid to rest alongside Emanuel Attie, president of a local lodge of B'nai B'rith, was his 24-year-old nephew, Alberto Attie, who had only recently announced his engagement to be married.

Others buried at the Sephardic cemetery were the Harouches, Joseph Gershon, Elizabeth Phillips, Freddy Moade and Solomon Chochron, 21, who had been heading home for Mincha prayers.

According to Drimmer, Gershon, who was in his 40s, was one of the few survivors of the Eilat, the Israeli warship destroyed by the Egyptians in October 1967.

Two of the victims, Schwartz and Chaya Jaaker, were interred at the Ashkenazic cemetery.

The victims also included two Israelis. The parents of one of them, Moshe Pardo, were scheduled to fly in from Israel to bury their son on Sunday. The body of the other Israeli, Rami Gabay, was flown to Israel for burial.

With its free-trade zone, Panama attracted hundreds of Israeli businesspeople. In fact, it was the Israelis who started the trend of flying between Panama City and Colon, said Drimmer.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES:**THIS WEEK'S RABIN-HUSSEIN SUMMIT
WILL CAP DECADES OF SECRET TALKS**

By Adam Garfinkle

PHILADELPHIA, July 24 (JTA) -- When King Hussein and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin meet publicly in Washington on Monday, Israel and Jordan will bring into the open a history of private summitry that dates back to the days before Israel and Jordan became states.

The record of more than two dozen Israeli-Jordanian secret summits in the last 30 years alone reflects a remarkable saga of diplomatic sobriety within a tempest of violence, of personal civility amid general hatred, of common interests overcoming the pull of public rhetoric.

Was Israeli-Jordanian private summitry able to prevent wars and bring peace? No. But it did establish a limit to enmity. It also built sufficient private confidence that one day conditions would be ripe for peace.

Media reports have made frequent reference to the secret summits of the past, but few, if any, details have been provided. Here are some of those details:

Abdallah, emir of Transjordan after 1922, engaged the Zionist movement at many points before the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.

Between 1946 and 1948, on the eve of partition, Abdallah held several secret meetings with Jewish Agency representatives.

In November 1947, Abdallah met with Golda Meyerson (later Meir) at Naharayim, and met her again on May 11, 1948 at Abdallah's palace in Amman. While there she was introduced to the king's grandson Hussein, then 13 years old.

These meetings resulted in Israel acquiescing to the Hashemite absorption of Arab Palestine and, Jerusalem excluded, the Hashemites pledged not to invade Israel. Abdallah kept his promise.

Then, in the summer of 1948, Cols. Moshe Dayan and Abdallah al-Tal established a direct telephone line between the two countries.

Talks Were Leaked, Abdallah Was Killed

Further meetings led on Feb. 28, 1950, to a "Draft of a Treaty of Peace Between Israel and the Hashemite Jordan Kingdom." These negotiations were leaked by al-Tal, and Abdallah was assassinated at al-Aksa Mosque in Jerusalem on July 21, 1951 by a Palestinian gunman. Prince Hussein was at his side.

When Hussein became king in 1953, he remembered Meir's visits to his grandfather. So did the Israelis, but attempts to arrange a secret summit with Hussein came to naught until 1963. In September 1963, the king met with Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion's personal representative, Ya'akov Herzog, in London.

Hussein met Herzog again in July 1967 shortly after the June war, in which Jordan lost the West Bank to Israel.

This meeting took place after messages were sent to the king offering the return of territory for peace, but before the August summit in Khartoum, Sudan, when the Arabs rejected any accommodation with Israel.

While hopes were dashed for a quick diplomatic solution, Israel-Jordan summitry continued.

The highest-level meeting occurred in March

1970, when Defense Minister Moshe Dayan and Jordanian Chief of Staff Zaid bin Shaker met in the Gulf of Aqaba; and in May, when Prime Minister Meir and the king met on the island of Jezirat Faron in the Gulf of Eilat.

There was civil war in Jordan and a Syrian invasion in September 1970, and Israel helped the king face down both. In March 1971, Hussein and Rifai flew by helicopter to the Foreign Ministry guest house near Tel Aviv to meet with Meir and Dayan. Meir proposed a detailed permanent settlement with Jordan. The king said no.

After the Likud came to power in May 1977, Israeli-Jordanian secret summitry fell off sharply. Likud ideology sought to delegitimize the Hashemites through its "Jordan-Is-Palestine" claims. Its "Greater Israel" ambitions left no room for Israeli-Hashemite reconciliation.

On Sept. 14, 1984, Shimon Peres became prime minister, heading a national unity government. New contacts with Jordan led to a Peres-Hussein summit in London on Oct. 5, 1985, which led, in turn, to a January 1986 tentative agreement on a temporary joint administration of the West Bank.

In October 1986, Yitzhak Shamir "rotated" into the prime ministry and Peres became foreign minister, but that did not stop Peres' pursuit of a new so-called "Jordanian option."

In January 1987, Peres traveled to Jordan with a sizable delegation. Between January and April, the two sides held several lower-level meetings.

Shamir Refused To Accept The Deal

These led to the so-called "London Agreement" between Peres and Hussein in April 1987, which was an attempt to finesse the Palestinian issue between Israel and Jordan, and which marked Israel's provisional agreement to attend an international conference on Middle East peace.

But Shamir refused to accept the deal, so the deal went down and the summitry ebbed.

Summitry recommenced in the context of the Kuwaiti crisis.

In June 1990, Shamir and top officials flew to London and stayed there at the king's personal residence.

Rabin's return to power in June 1992 marked the final push toward this week's public summit.

Following the signing of the declaration of principles by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization on Sept. 13, 1993, Israel and Jordan publicly signed a similar agreement.

Rabin and Hussein met on Sept. 26 on a boat in the Gulf of Eilat. A major agreement on future relations was struck.

Hussein and Rabin met again in London on June 1.

Six days later came the major breakthrough when Israeli and Jordanian negotiators meeting in Washington agreed to regional talks aimed at signing a bilateral peace treaty.

Last week, Israeli and Jordanian principals met publicly, straddling their border in the Arava.

On July 20, Peres met in Jordan with Jordanian Prime Minister Abdel Salam al-Majali and, on Monday -- the long-awaited first public summit is set to take place in Washington.

(Adam Garfinkle is director of the Middle East Council of the Foreign Policy Research Institute in Philadelphia.)