

**HAMAS KIDNAPS ISRAELI SOLDIER,
PROMPTING ISRAEL TO SEAL OFF GAZA**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Oct. 11 (JTA) -- The Islamic fundamentalist Hamas organization has kidnapped a 19-year-old Israeli soldier and is demanding the release of more than 50 prisoners in return for his life.

The soldier, Nachshon Waxman, who has been missing since Sunday, was reportedly taken near Lod, located between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.

In the Gaza Strip on Tuesday, Hamas released a videocassette showing the soldier's identification and other documents, his M-16 rifle and other equipment. Hamas says it has a second cassette showing the soldier himself.

In response to the claim, the Israeli army sealed off the Gaza Strip on Tuesday night.

The kidnapping also prompted Israel to suspend its talks with Palestinian negotiators in Cairo. According to Israel Radio, the head of the Israeli delegation, Maj. Gen. Danny Rothschild, was recalled to Jerusalem on Tuesday for consultations.

The station also reported that an emergency Cabinet meeting was to be held Wednesday.

Waxman, a resident of Jerusalem, serves in a crack infantry unit.

Israel's Channel Two Television reported Tuesday night that a reliable source had seen a second cassette showing the soldier himself, in which he begs the government to release the prisoners and warns that unless they are released he is liable to be tortured and killed.

Hamas was said to be demanding \$15 million from the government to release the second cassette.

Among the prisoners that Hamas is demanding be released is Sheik Ahmed Yassin, the disabled Gaza cleric who is regarded as the spiritual leader of Hamas. Israeli soldiers arrested Yassin in 1989. He is serving a life sentence for his involvement in the kidnapping and murder of two Israeli soldiers several years ago.

Waxman's father appeared on Israel Television on Tuesday night in a direct, personal appeal to Yasser Arafat, chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization, to track down the kidnappers and save his son, proving that he is capable of delivering real peace.

**RABIN AND ARAFAT POISED TO RECEIVE
NOBEL PEACE PRIZE FOR THEIR EFFORTS**

By Mitchell Danow

NEW YORK, Oct. 11 (JTA) -- Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat reportedly are slated to share this year's Nobel Peace Prize.

The Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten* issued the report Tuesday, three days before the Nobel Peace Prize Committee was scheduled to announce the winner of the award, valued at more than \$930,000.

In Israel, there is much speculation that Rabin and Arafat will share the prize as a result of their dramatic handshake on the South Lawn

of the White House last fall. The historic meeting set in motion the Israeli-Palestinian peace initiative that led to the first stage of Palestinian self-rule in May.

In Jerusalem, a spokeswoman for Rabin declined comment on the report, adding there would be no statement from the prime minister until the winner was officially announced.

Quoting unnamed sources, the newspaper reported that the five-member committee has had difficulty deciding who should be credited with launching the Israeli-Palestinian peace initiative.

Under current rules, no more than three people can share the prize.

The committee reportedly also considered Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and Mahmoud Abbas, a co-founder of the PLO. Peres and Abbas, who had engaged in back-channel negotiations in Oslo, Norway, actually signed the Declaration of Principles in Washington in September 1993.

One member of the committee, Kare Kristiansen, reportedly threatened to resign if Arafat was named a co-winner of the prize. Despite Arafat's role in the peace process, Kristiansen is concerned about the PLO leader's terrorist past, the newspaper reported.

NEWS ANALYSIS:**AS CHRISTOPHER SHUTTLES THE REGION,
SYRIA MOVES TOWARD PUBLIC DIPLOMACY**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Oct. 11 (JTA) -- With little progress emerging in the Israeli-Syrian peace negotiations, Damascus last week decided to let a well-known diplomat put Syria's case directly to the Israeli public.

Employing what has become known as "public diplomacy," Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa last Friday gave a first-ever interview to Israel Television, speaking in Washington with the station's Mideast affairs editor, Ehud Ya'ari.

The interview, broadcast on the eve of U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher's arrival in the region, followed a Washington news briefing in which Israeli journalists for the first time were welcomed by the Syrians and encouraged to ask questions.

Sharaa had addressed the U.N. General Assembly in New York earlier last week, and was invited to Washington to meet with President Clinton and other administration officials. While in Washington, Sharaa also met with American Jewish leaders in what was seen as another attempt to jump-start the Israeli-Syrian talks.

With many Israelis balking at any land-for-peace deal with Syria, the decision by Damascus to put a human face on its negotiating stance may well add a new public relations facet to the long deadlocked talks.

The United States is known to have been pressing Syria hard to provide gestures of public goodwill to the Israeli public in order to help the Rabin government shore up support for its land-for-peace policy.

And, indeed, the interview was applauded in Jerusalem. On Sunday, Prime Minister Yitzhak

Rabin welcomed the television interview by the Syrian foreign minister as "a positive step."

The prime minister praised Sharaa's performance as "very relaxed," and said the wide gaps in the negotiations between Israel and Syria that were evident in the interview, were to be expected.

In the interview, Sharaa firmly restated Syria's insistence on total Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights, including evacuation of all the settlements there.

Rabin made the comments to Israel Television on the eve of a new round of Israel-Syrian negotiations conducted via Christopher, who arrived in Jerusalem on Sunday for his fifth round of Middle East shuttle diplomacy since May.

Upon his arrival, Christopher also praised Sharaa's interview.

"Some interesting things are happening here in the region," Christopher observed, noting "how far we've come" from the days of the Madrid Conference in late 1991, when Sharaa and his aides refused any contact with Israeli journalists.

'Substantive Gaps' Remain

But Christopher, like Rabin, noted the "substantive gaps" in the two sides' positions that the Sharaa interview had highlighted.

"There's a lot of work to be done," Christopher said.

The Christopher mission was at least partly overshadowed here by three events: a terror attack in Jerusalem on Sunday night that left two dead and 13 wounded, the kidnapping of an Israeli soldier by Hamas and the standoff between the United States and Iraq, in the wake of the Iraqi troop buildup along the border with Kuwait.

After meeting with Christopher on Monday, Rabin told reporters, "What we want is peace and security and dignity, for Israel and Syria. We want a fair peace that brings about normalization and security for both our countries."

But neither he nor Christopher had any breakthroughs to report by midweek.

The Iraqi military buildup resulted in last-minute changes in Christopher's schedule, including unscheduled visits to Amman and Kuwait City.

After meeting with Arab foreign ministers in Kuwait on Wednesday to discuss the Iraqi buildup, Christopher was scheduled to return to Damascus and Jerusalem later this week for further discussions.

Christopher's meeting with Syrian President Hafez Assad on Tuesday lasted more than three hours, and after it was over he told reporters that Israel and Syria were "moving in the right direction."

But aside from the carefully worded diplomatic language he employed when talking to reporters, Christopher again had no breakthroughs to report.

In the absence of diplomatic breakthroughs, Sharaa's interview with Israel Television was seen at the very least as a breakthrough on the public relations front.

In substance, however, the Syrian official angered many Israelis when he claimed in his interview that Syria had, in the past, always avoided bombing or shelling civilian targets.

Veterans at Tel Katzir and other kibbutzim at the foot of the Golan Heights vigorously contested Sharaa's version of history and provided

film and still photographs of past attacks on the troubled border with Syria to prove their point.

Still, Sharaa attempted to assure his Israeli audience that when peace came between Israel and Syria, "all people will feel absolutely satisfied. The fruits of peace will be there.

"We have to change the face of the region," Sharaa asserted in the interview.

He did not, however, specify in detail what elements of normalization he envisaged in any future peace treaty.

Sharaa said security arrangements should be balanced, and would provide Israel with confidence that no surprise attack could take place.

Similarly, he sought to assure the Israel public that peace with Syria would mean security and peace across the entire northern front.

The interview was arranged, under a veil of secrecy, by Israeli, Syrian and American diplomats in Washington.

RECORD NUMBER OF LEGISLATORS SIGN LETTER SUPPORTING UNIFIED JERUSALEM
By Jennifer Batog

WASHINGTON, Oct. 11 (JTA) -- As Jerusalem moves again to the forefront of peace negotiations between Israel and its neighbors, a record number of members of Congress sent a letter to President Clinton supporting a united Jerusalem and asking the administration to oppose Palestinian claims to Israel's capital.

The Oct. 7 letter, signed by 279 members of Congress, said the legislators remain "unwavering" in their belief that "Jerusalem is Israel's capital, and only Israel's capital, and that it must remain a united city under Israeli sovereignty."

While praising the administration's efforts to move the peace process forward, the letter also said the representatives were "very concerned" about U.S. government actions which may give credibility to the Palestinian claim on Jerusalem.

It expressed support as well for recent legislation prohibiting the establishment of new offices in Jerusalem to deal with the Palestinian ruling body in the Gaza Strip and Jericho.

Both the House of Representatives and Senate passed such bills earlier this session, which also included a ban on meetings in Jerusalem between American officials and representatives of the Palestinian Authority.

"At this time in the peace process the letter, with its bipartisan support and the number of members who signed it, prove how important Jerusalem is to Israel and how strong the American commitment is to keeping it the unified capital of Israel," Rep. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.), one of the letter's co-sponsors, said through a spokeswoman.

The letter, signed by 146 Democrats and 133 Republicans, shows strong bipartisan support in Congress for Israel, said Rep. Eliot Engel (D-N.Y.), another co-sponsor.

Reps. Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.), John Lewis (D-Ga.), Bill Paxton (R-N.Y.) and Benjamin Gilman (R-N.Y.) also co-sponsored the letter.

Neal Sher, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee's executive director, praised the bipartisan support. "This historic statement makes clear Congress' unyielding bipartisan commitment to Israeli sovereignty over a united Jerusalem," he said in a statement.

JEWISH LEADERS PRESS ARGENTINA TO RESOLVE BOMBING AFTER NEW ARRESTS
By Gail Donaldson

BUENOS AIRES, Oct. 11 (JTA) -- Following the arrests over the weekend of three new suspects in the July 18 bombing of the Jewish community center here, leaders of several South American Jewish communities joined in an effort to step up the pressure on Argentina to resolve the attack.

Jewish organizations from neighboring Brazil, Chile and Uruguay joined Argentine protesters at the now-weekly Monday morning gathering outside Buenos Aires' Central Courthouse to press for a resolution of the attack and of the March 1992 explosion of the Israeli Embassy here.

The attack on the community center claimed 99 lives, and the one on the embassy killed 30.

While the protests, which are held Monday morning as a reminder of the attack this summer, had been silent until now, participants this week vented their frustration at investigators' lack of progress.

"In the country of the full stop, due obedience and pardon it is logical that these crimes go unpunished," said human rights activist Hermann Schiller.

He referred to laws that closed investigations and eventually pardoned military leaders accused of the torture and murder of at least 9,000 alleged leftist subversives during Argentina's last military regime, which ruled from 1976 to 1983.

Schiller said law-enforcement officials should redouble their efforts to find local residents who may have collaborated with foreign terrorists.

"We are not denying the murderers may belong to Hezbollah," the pro-Iranian terrorist organization, he said. "However, we cannot be sure that the Nazis had nothing to do with this criminal act."

Argentina is home to a large German expatriate community, some of whom are suspected former Nazis.

Police Arrest Three of Mideast Descent

Over the weekend police arrested a man identified as Lebanese or Syrian, Ali al-Hasan, and two Argentineans of Syrian descent, Ernesto Tanuz and his son, Julio. The latter two were reportedly Hasan's landlords.

Police reportedly found eight pounds of explosives, false documents from the Syrian Embassy and clippings about the bombing in Hasan's home in the Buenos Aires suburb of Castelar.

Staff at the office of Federal Judge Susana Morris Douglas, who questioned the suspects early this week, were unable to confirm the findings.

Argentine officials have reacted cautiously to the latest detentions, and the judge investigating the bombing, Juan Jose Galeano, had not interviewed the suspects as of Tuesday.

Interior Minister Carlos Ruckauf reportedly said the arrests were only "leads" in the investigation. "Each of the leads has to be followed, but nobody should get excited about that. They are only leads. I am very cautious."

About a dozen people have been arrested since the investigation began, although only the most recent suspects and an Argentine who sold

the vehicle used in the bombing remain in detention. The two men of Syrian descent arrested over the weekend were expected to be released shortly.

In August, after interviewing a self-proclaimed Iranian defector in Venezuela, Galeano said Iranian diplomats had supported the attack.

The charges provoked Teheran and Buenos Aires into withdrawing their ambassadors for consultation, and Argentina's Supreme Court ruled Galeano had collected sufficient proof for an investigation into Iran's involvement.

RIGHT-WING PARTIES SCORE VICTORIES IN ELECTIONS IN AUSTRIA AND BELGIUM
By Marta S. Halpert

VIENNA, Oct. 11 (JTA) -- Right-wing parties scored dramatic victories in elections held Sunday in both Austria and Belgium.

In Austria, the right-wing Freedom Party won 22.8 percent of the vote, increasing its number of seats in the country's 183-seat legislature to 42 from the 33 seats it won in 1990.

The European Jewish Congress criticized the results in Austria, saying the country had apparently not learned from the mistakes of its Nazi past.

"These results show that Austria has not learned its lesson from the past in teaching its younger generations to engage in the paths of tolerance and in the values of democracy," the group said in a statement.

While the ruling Social Democrats led by Chancellor Franz Vranitzky appeared poised to form another coalition government, the party's loss of 14 seats in the legislature prompted Vranitzky to term the election results "a very bitter, clear and large defeat" for his party.

The Freedom Party is led by Jorg Haider, a slick politician who recently led an unsuccessful campaign to keep Austria out of the European Union and another one to declare his country closed to foreigners.

Prior to his current electoral success, which makes the Freedom Party the strongest far-right party in Western Europe, Haider was forced to resign as governor of the Austrian province of Carinthia in 1988, after he expressed support for the Third Reich's labor policies.

Haider, who says unabashedly he wants to be the next Austrian chancellor, continues to garner support among young neo-Nazis and old Communist leaders.

Blaming foreigners for the rise in the country's crime rates and stating that he wants an immediate end to immigration, Haider stated that his party was ready "to take responsibility for all of Austria in 1998."

In Belgium, extreme-right parties also made big gains in local elections Sunday, when some 7 million Belgians elected new municipal councils.

Far-right parties made considerable gains both in the Flemish and the French-speaking parts of the country, with Antwerp and Brussels being particularly hit by what the daily newspaper La Libre Belgique called the "extreme-right contagion."

One out of three votes in Antwerp went to the extreme right.

(JTA correspondent Joseph Kopel in Brussels contributed to this report.)

BEHIND THE HEADLINES:
**ZIMBABWE'S JEWS LOSING THEIR RABBI,
BUT REMAIN COMMITTED TO COMMUNITY**

By Deborah Kazis

HARARE, Zimbabwe, Oct. 11 (JTA) -- Zimbabwean Jews celebrated Simchat Torah this year as they do every year -- singing and dancing with the Torah into the night in their modern stone and glass synagogue.

But this year, there was sadness mixed with the joy.

The community's only rabbi, Indian-born Rabbi Itzhak Menashe, was leaving the next day to work with 20 Jewish families in the southwest African nation of Namibia.

No replacement for the rabbi has yet been found, and the community is very concerned.

"At the end of the day, only one thing keeps a Jewish community together. We have to have religious leadership. If we don't have spiritual leadership in this country, then the Jewish community will not last," said Stanley Harris, president of the Jewish community here.

Zimbabwe, one of the most advanced African countries, lies just north of South Africa. The country has 80,000 whites, of which 1,000 are Jewish, out of a total population of 12 million.

Two-thirds of the country's Jews live in the capital of Harare, with the rest residing in Zimbabwe's second largest city, Bulawayo.

There is both an Ashkenazic and a Sephardic community here. Ashkenazi Jews have been in Zimbabwe for more than 100 years. World War II brought an influx of Sephardic Jews from the Greek island of Rhodes, where they fled the Nazi occupation.

At its peak in 1960, there were 10,000 Jews here when this was the British colony of Rhodesia. During the war which led to Zimbabwe's independence in 1980, most of the Jews fled the country.

Today, Zimbabwe's small Jewish community is united and committed. It supports a Jewish nursery school, a primary school and a Habonim youth group. Jews here maintain close ties to Israel, where many in the community have relatives.

A Tenuous Element To Their Lifestyles

Harare's Jews, many of whom earn their living from manufacturing fabrics, clothing and furniture, lead privileged lives. But there is a tenuous element to their lifestyles, since the political and economic future of their country is uncertain.

Harare is a modern city, made beautiful by countless Jacaranda trees covered with huge purple flowers that light up the city and carpet its streets with purple.

But outside the capital, people live in desperate conditions in mud huts, lacking proper housing, food and medical care.

As is common throughout Africa, it is estimated that between 30 and 40 percent of the population is infected with the AIDS virus.

Blindness and severe eye diseases are also widespread, and there are only three native ophthalmologists in the whole country.

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, working along with the local Jewish community and the government of Zimbabwe, has

organized an eye clinic in a hospital in the remote northern city of Bindura.

Yair Porges, an Israeli ophthalmologist, runs the clinic, which is the only such facility in a province of more than 1 million people.

"I see a lot of catastrophes that could have been prevented," Porges says, noting that patients often come to him with terrible complications after having sought help from local faith healers.

"The faith healers scratch their eyes with knives and put mud, potatoes and spit in their eyes," said Porges. "They'll put anything in people's eyes."

More than 100 people have come to Porges blind -- but they left with full vision.

"To make people see -- this is a feeling I cannot describe. This is why I have come," Porges said.

Porges has been in Zimbabwe for a year-and-a-half and will stay for another six months, by which time he hopes to have trained a native Zimbabwean ophthalmologist to take his place.

In the meantime, for Porges and other members of the Jewish community, there is little certainty about what the political future will bring.

The Zimbabwean government is decidedly pro-Palestinian, but in the wake of the signing of the Palestinian self-rule accord last fall in Washington, the country recently established diplomatic ties with Israel.

In the aftermath of the forging of those ties, the Jewish community here is anxiously awaiting the opening of the Israeli Embassy, which is scheduled for next month.

Despite that promising occasion, uncertainty is causing many here, including the leader of the community, to think of moving elsewhere.

"I left in 1978, during the war. I had had enough and decided to take my family and go to Israel," said Harris, who was born in Zimbabwe. "Then in 1980 Zimbabwe became independent, and I am one of those that came back."

"But I will eventually go," Harris added. "My family will go."

Many in the community share their president's thoughts of moving, but they have mixed emotions about the idea.

Zimbabwe is their home -- where they were born, raised families and developed businesses. They lead good lives here, and if they can find a rabbi many will see in that good reason to remain.

PALESTINIAN POLICE TRAIN IN HOLLAND

By Henriette Boas

AMSTERDAM, Oct. 11 (JTA) -- A contingent of Palestinian police from the Gaza Strip is in the Netherlands taking lessons from the Dutch police on how to maintain order and control violence using peaceful methods.

The 22-member contingent, led by Brig. Gen. Ziad Arif, is to remain until the end of October.

In mid-September, the Dutch government donated 32 mobile homes to serve as temporary homes for former Palestinian prisoners living in the autonomous Jericho district. Under the terms of the accord between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, Palestinians freed from Israeli jails were required to spend the rest of their prison terms within the Jericho district.