

**ACROSS THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM,  
ISRAELIS HAIL TREATY WITH JORDAN**

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, Oct. 17 (JTA) -- Israelis across the political spectrum hailed the news this week that Israel and Jordan had signed the draft of a full-fledged peace treaty.

Within hours of the signing Monday, the Israeli Cabinet unanimously approved the treaty, which still has to be ratified by the Israeli and Jordanian Parliaments.

At a ceremony at Hashemiyeh palace near Amman, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and his Jordanian counterpart, Abdul Salam al-Majali, initialed the document in the presence of King Hussein, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and Crown Prince Hassan.

Agreement was reached on the draft treaty after the two sides reached compromises on long-standing differences on issues related to border disputes and the allocation of scant regional water supplies.

A formal signing ceremony is expected to take place next week in the Arava desert on the Israeli-Jordanian border. Israel and Jordan are expected to exchange ambassadors a month after signing a peace agreement.

Jordan will become the second Arab country to make peace with Israel. Egypt and Israel signed a peace treaty in 1979.

Speaking at the initialing ceremony, Hussein said the treaty heralded a new era.

"I pray this is something we leave behind for all the generations to come," Hussein said. "Peace, human dignity, warmth, a chance to live and to achieve what we deserve."

**'A Cornerstone For A New Middle East'**

Rabin praised Hussein's courage for pursuing peace with Israel, saying it was a "unique moment" for both countries.

Calling the treaty "a peace of dignity and honor," Rabin said it will "serve as a cornerstone for a new Middle East in which peace, development, and cooperation, will replace animosity, hatred, violence and wars."

Speaking before boarding Air Force One in Washington on Monday, President Clinton called the agreement "an extraordinary achievement."

"At a time when hatred and extremism and threatening behavior still stalk the Middle East, this agreement reminds us that moderation and reason are prevailing, that nations can put conflict behind them, that courageous statesmen can lead their people to peace," said Clinton.

According to U.S. officials, Clinton will attend next week's formal signing ceremony.

Monday's agreement comes nearly three months after the July 25 signing of the Washington Declaration at a White House ceremony where Hussein and Rabin formally agreed to end the 46-year state of belligerency between their countries.

The breakthrough to this week's signing came after Rabin and Peres flew to Jordan on Sunday night for intense negotiations that lasted up until the signing ceremony Monday. It was the

Israeli leaders' second visit to Amman in as many weeks.

The compromise on water was based on developing new water resources, rather than on dividing up existing ones, according to reports.

Israel and Jordan agreed to start new projects that would increase the Jordanian water supply, including the building of a dam on the Yarmuk River. The two sides plan to ask the World Bank to provide funds for the project, whose estimated cost is \$140 million.

Israeli officials said the two sides reached agreement on land disputes after making mutual concessions. Jordan had demanded the return of some 150 square miles of desert and farmland that Israel had seized after the 1948 War of Independence. Under the terms of the draft, Israel agreed to return to Jordan most of the land it demanded, with the understanding that it would be leased back to Israel.

Rabin said the international border would be determined on the basis of a boundary dating back to the period of the British Mandate, with what he called "minor modifications."

**EXODUS OF SYRIAN JEWRY COMPLETED  
AS CHIEF RABBI LEAVES N.Y. FOR ISRAEL**

By Larry Yudelson

NEW YORK, Oct. 17 (JTA) -- The exodus of Syrian Jewry has been declared complete.

The departure to Israel of Syrian Chief Rabbi Avraham Hamra on Monday marked the end of an emigration which began in April 1992 and has brought 3,800 of Syria's 4,000 Jews out of the country. Hamra, who had been living in New York for the past year, had been holding up his aliyah until virtually all of his community was safely out.

Israeli censors and American Jewish organizations involved in the exodus had kept the full pace of the departures quiet. The fact that a third of those who left Syria went on to Israel, after arriving in the United States, remained a total secret until this week.

At a reception in his honor Sunday night in Brooklyn, Hamra, tall and looking younger than his 51 years, stood at the podium in a catering hall and pronounced the Shehecheyanu blessing, thanking God for "sustaining and bringing us to this day."

All of the roughly 230 Jews still in Syria are free to leave, and a handful are expected to arrive in New York this week, according to those involved.

"Now the community in Syria is gone," Hamra said at a news conference Sunday, explaining why the time had come to make aliyah. "Now that there is an agreement on peace, what was recently a dream is being realized," he said, referring to the new atmosphere in the Middle East.

On the eve of his departure, more than 100 Syrian Jews gathered at the reception Sunday hosted by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

Some, like the rabbi, had only recently left.

Among that group was Selim Swed, who had become a focus of Jewish efforts when he was imprisoned by Syrian authorities in 1987.

He was released after more than five years the same week the exodus began in 1992. On Sunday, he was happily making the rounds with his daughter and son-in-law, inviting people to the forthcoming wedding of another daughter.

Also at the gathering were those from the community's second generation, children of immigrants who left Syria early this century and who had fought for the emigration of their cousins.

Others had arrived by stealth during the decades in which emigration from Syria was banned, but had risked everything to escape.

Even after Syrian President Hafez Assad permitted Jews to travel freely, and thereby tacitly permitted the community's emigration, Syrian Jews feared to rejoice publicly.

Over the past years, Israeli censors banned coverage of the exodus out of fear of jeopardizing the operation, and American Jewish publications voluntarily downplayed the story.

**Hamra Will Join 1,500 Syrian Jews In Israel**

Israel had planned to lift the cloak of secrecy Tuesday, as Hamra stepped off the plane at Ben-Gurion Airport, but the story was publicized in Israel on Monday following an announcement from Syria.

In Israel, Hamra will join 1,500 Syrian Jews who have made aliyah in the past two years after arriving in New York from Damascus. That part of the exodus has been kept absolutely secret until now since in giving permission for Jews to travel in 1992, Assad specifically stipulated that they were not to go to Israel.

More of the recent arrivals are expected to follow the rabbi to Israel, according to officials of the Jewish Agency for Israel, which has sent special emissaries to encourage aliyah among the newcomers in New York.

"It's a hard time," said Eddie Hamra, a cousin of the rabbi who escaped to New York 15 years ago, explaining why so many of the new arrivals are moving on to Israel. "The economy is going down and it's very difficult to find jobs."

Habib Kamkhaji, a doctor who left Damascus two years ago, hopes by the end of the year to move to Israel. It will be easier to be accredited there with his Damascus University medical degree, he said.

Moving to Israel will be the fulfillment of all he was taught in his Jewish school in Damascus.

"In the Talmud Torah, it was always Israel, Israel, the Jewish people have to go to Israel," he said.

At the reception Sunday, those whose families number among the estimated 230 Jews still in Syria were the most reluctant to talk about their plans. They were also the most disturbed about the publicity being given now to the departures.

All those now in Syria hold travel documents and could leave tomorrow, according to Syrian Jews and officials of the JDC, which had coordinated the exodus.

Some are still selling property and getting ready to travel. Some feel they are too old to start a new life. Others have sent their family to safety in the United States but have continued running their businesses in Damascus.

And some, said Janet Zolta, the daughter of Syrians who came to America early in the century and an activist in the Brooklyn Syrian community, "are waiting until they can walk across the border" when peace with Israel is achieved.

So why now is Hamra, who was the spiritual leader of the Syrian Jewish community since the mid-1970s, moving to Israel amid such publicity?

"Because of the advances in peace with Syria," he replied. He noted the recent Syrian gestures toward Israel, such as Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa's interview with Israel Television.

"Solving the problem of Syrian Jews is a big step toward peace. Maybe I am a piece of the peace," Hamra said.

One American Jewish leader voiced similar speculation this week.

**'A Shot In The Arm To Syrian Negotiations'**

"It is being timed to give a shot in the arm to the Syrian negotiations and reflect some good will on the part of the Syrians," said the leader, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The fact that the announcement of Hamra's departure came from Damascus on Monday served to support this view.

At his news conference Sunday, Hamra joked with reporters and sidestepped sensitive questions with a smile and the skill of a seasoned diplomat who was trained in dealing with Syria's secret police.

When asked, for instance, if the decision to go public with his aliyah and to lift the broad cloak of censorship was based on decisions from political higher-ups in Israel, the United States or Syria, the rabbi replied:

"I always weigh every communal decision with reasonable people."

In remarks directed at the Israeli public delivered in excellent Hebrew learned from years of studies and clandestine listening to Israel Radio broadcasts, Hamra was full of praise for Assad.

The Syrian president "understood our desire to unify with our families."

He had praise as well for the American and Israeli governments.

And he thanked the Jewish organizations, which had assisted in the exodus of his community.

The emigration and resettlement in Brooklyn involved the cooperation of the JDC, which handled the arrangements from Syria to New York; the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, which helped obtain refugee asylum for the Syrian Jews who had arrived on visitor visas; and the New York Association for New Americans, an agency of New York's UJA-Federation, and the Sephardic Bikur Cholim, an agency of the Syrian Jewish community, which cooperated on resettlement efforts.

As to his own plans for the future, after he settles in Holon where he has family, Hamra had only a smile and a shrug of the shoulders.

The mood this week was best captured by Ralph Goldman, executive vice president emeritus of the JDC, who quoted a biblical verse at Sunday's Brooklyn celebration.

"Zeh hayom asah hashem, nagila v'nishmach bo," he said: "This is the day that God has made. Let us be happy and rejoice in it."

**BILL INTRODUCED TO ENSURE RELIGIOUS RIGHTS IN THE WORKPLACE**

By Jennifer Batog

WASHINGTON, Oct. 17 (JTA) -- Observant Jews could have an easier time striking the balance between religious and work obligations if Congress acts on a bill introduced earlier this month by Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-N.Y.).

The Workplace Religious Freedom Act would increase employers' obligations to accommodate their employees' religious beliefs as long as this does not cause undue hardship, those who worked on the bill said.

"Employers should not be unduly burdened, but they should take reasonable steps to allow people of all faiths to earn a living," Nadler said in a speech introducing the bill just before Congress adjourned Oct. 8 for the November elections.

Although the bill had no chance of passing during this past session, advocates hope to gain support for it during the congressional recess.

Among the problems faced by observant Jews in the workplace are leaving early for the Sabbath, requiring days off for holidays and wearing religiously required clothing.

A 1972 amendment to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 addresses the issue of religious accommodation.

But the courts so narrowly interpreted the amendment that it left employers with relatively few obligations, said Richard Foltin, legislative director and counsel for the American Jewish Committee.

**Original Amendment 'Needed Strengthening'**

The bill "would give the protection the weight Congress intended in the first place," Foltin said.

The Institute for Public Affairs of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America felt the original amendment "needed strengthening," said Executive Director Betty Ehrenberg, "especially in regard to the Sabbath."

The bill would also clarify the meaning of "reasonable accommodations," said Dennis Rapps, executive director of the National Jewish Commission on Law and Public Affairs.

Under the proposed bill, an employer cannot refuse to accommodate employees with religious obligations and suggests that employers accept alternative measures as long as the solution would not cause undue hardship to the business.

The bill would, for example, allow employees to make up time lost for religious reasons and choose when to make up that time.

AJCommittee and the Orthodox Union worked on the bill as members of the Coalition for Religious Freedom in the Workplace, a broad-based coalition that includes many of the same organizations that had worked to secure the passage of last year's Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

That measure provided protection from undue government encroachment on religious practices.

The coalition includes the American Jewish Congress, the Council on Religious Freedom, the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, the Anti-Defamation League, the General Conference of Seventh Day Adventists, the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, Agudath Israel

of America, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the National Association of Evangelicals.

Many of the bill's supporters say it will be a priority in the next session, when, according to Ehrenberg, it will be reintroduced with more "fanfare."

The coalition will use the recess to mount a campaign to get the bill passed, according to Ehrenberg.

**IDF RETREAT FROM HAMAS RIOTERS PROMPTS SUSPENSION OF IDF SERGEANT**

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Oct. 17 (JTA) -- An Israeli army sergeant who commanded an Israel Defense Force checkpoint in the Gaza Strip on Sunday has been suspended from duty for abandoning military equipment when he withdrew his unit in the face of approaching Hamas demonstrators.

The incident began when a group of Hamas supporters from Gaza City's Islamic University arrived aboard 20 buses at the Netzarim junction, and set out to cause a confrontation with Israeli troops and settlers from Netzarim.

The demonstration had been sparked by Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat's roundup last week of members of the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas in an effort to help locate kidnapped Israeli soldier Nachshon Waxman, who was abducted and subsequently killed by members of the militant movement last week.

After the demonstrators set tires on fire and began throwing rocks at Israeli soldiers, the IDF withdrew to avoid a confrontation, and to let the situation be handled by the Palestinian police.

While the IDF sergeant was not reprimanded for participating in the withdrawal, he was suspended for leaving behind equipment that included a classified map, binoculars and a number of smoke grenades.

The grenades were subsequently used by the demonstrators against the withdrawing Israeli soldiers.

The Palestinian police took some five hours to disperse the demonstrators, during which time Israeli soldiers and settlers remained within the perimeter of Netzarim, a Jewish settlement in the Gaza Strip that houses about 35 families.

When a pregnant settler went into labor during the confrontation, the IDF ordered in a helicopter to take her to a nearby hospital.

Zvi Hendel, leader of the 5,000 Jewish settlers living in the Gaza Strip, told Israel Army Radio that the Palestinian demonstrators were armed.

"This was not an ordinary demonstration where they block a road and sing songs. Here we are talking about weapons," he said.

Deputy Defense Minister Mordechai Gur, who was on a tour of the nearby Gush Katif settlement area at the time, later defended the IDF decision to withdraw from the confrontation.

"It is a serious question when to interfere and when not to," he told Israel Radio.

"We have an interest in seeing how the Palestinian Authority takes control of the situation, because that is what they committed themselves to do" under the terms of the self-rule accord signed last year in Washington, said Gur.

**NEWS ANALYSIS:**
**DESPITE TRAUMA OF KIDNAPPING ORDEAL, ISRAEL AND PLO WON'T ABANDON PROCESS**

By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, Oct. 17 (JTA) -- Despite Israel's decision to resume talks with the Palestinians, the kidnapping and killing of Nachshon Waxman has revived some difficult questions about the future of Israeli-Palestinian peace.

For one thing, the weeklong ordeal surrounding the soldier's kidnapping has left the Israeli people reeling and their confidence in the peace process with the Palestinians shaken.

The affair also weakened Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat, who is caught between Israeli demands to crack down on Hamas militants in Gaza and the risk of Palestinian civil war.

The Waxman affair has sharply highlighted the critical tests Arafat must pass in the days ahead to ensure the survival of his nascent Palestinian Authority and the autonomy it oversees.

Some believe the fresh doubts it triggered over Palestinian security capabilities could slow down the next phases of autonomy, which call for Israeli redeployment in the West Bank on the eve of Palestinian elections and a stepped-up role for Palestinian security forces.

But analysts say that both Israeli and Palestinian leaders have a vested interest in minimizing the damage from last week's events.

They say both sides must convince their skeptical constituents that the painful process will pay off as they move forward as sure-footedly as possible.

**'Too Much To Risk'**

"Both parties have too much to risk to abandon the process," said Elie Rekhess, an analyst with Tel Aviv University's Dayan Center for Middle East Research.

Thus, despite the wrenching episode which climaxed in a failed commando rescue operation last Friday night, Israeli officials were scheduled to return to the table with the Palestinians in Cairo on Tuesday. On Monday, the government also reopened the border with Gaza, closed since the kidnapping last week.

The main test in the eyes of Israeli leaders will be Arafat's ability to show he is serious about security. This will help them defend the agreement before their own opposition and a disheartened public.

Arafat "can't have peace with Israel and peace with Hamas terror groups" at the same time, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said.

Some observers believe that how the PLO handles the Hamas opposition will be Arafat's true test.

In the wake of the kidnapping, which Arafat saw as a direct challenge and embarrassment to his authority by Hamas, the PLO leader ordered hundreds of alleged Hamas activists arrested.

On Monday, however, the Palestinian Authority, which rules over the Gaza Strip and the West Bank enclave of Jericho, released some of the Hamas detainees.

At the same time, it announced a new campaign against unlicensed weapons in the self-rule areas.

To everyone, however, it is clear that Arafat must walk a tightrope to meet Israeli demands to be a good-faith partner in their agreement and to avoid an all-out conflict among Palestinians.

As part of his difficult balancing act, Arafat has made the distinction between the military wing of Hamas and its political party, which he has no interest in outlawing, according to analysts.

The political arm of Hamas enjoys broad support and Arafat wants to include it in the election process.

At the same time, such a distinction makes it more palatable for Arafat to crack down on the military operation, according to Gershon Baskin, co-director of the Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information.

"He'll say there's no room for two security forces" in Gaza, Baskin said.

According to Barry Rubin, professor at Bar Ilan University's BESA Center for Strategic Studies, Arafat will take action against Hamas only to the degree that he sees its actions as a threat to his authority.

Chances are, Rubin said, Arafat's get-tough measures will be "too much for Hamas and not enough for Israel."

Still, Israel understands the pressures on Arafat and will not demand the unattainable, he said. "What Israel wants is progress and improvements."

**'Between The Anvil And The Hammer'**

The PLO is "between the anvil and the hammer," according to Rekhess of Tel Aviv University.

He said he believes the PLO genuinely wants to comply with its peace accord with Israel, but that it is also threatened by "an opposition of a kind never confronted by them before."

Rekhess said it should not be forgotten how "very revolutionary" it was to have Palestinian security forces cooperating with Israeli forces in the days following the kidnapping.

But he believes Arafat is not likely to "crack down" any time soon in the contest with Hamas and will try instead to find a "compromise" solution aimed at bringing the fundamentalists into the political process.

"It's a delicate game," he said, adding that he believes Arafat has enough maneuverability to play it.

Khalil Shikaki, director of the Center for Palestine Research and Studies in Nablus, was unruffled by the recent turbulent events.

"There is no doubt this setback is a temporary one," he said. "I see a few problems ahead, but not enough to defeat the process."

Shikaki does believe, however, that Arafat has failed to "deliver to the Israelis on security" because he is hampered in his fight against Hamas by his lack of legitimacy among some of his own people.

"Arafat faces a Catch-22," he said. "He needs elections badly" to win legitimacy and fight the militant opposition, but "he is unable to hold them because Israel won't redeploy until he delivers on security."

Under the terms of the Israeli-PLO accord, Palestinian elections are to take place after Israel withdraws from major population centers in the West Bank.