

**ISRAEL MOVES TO CRACK DOWN
ON HAMAS IN WAKE OF ATTACK**

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, Oct. 20 (JTA) -- Israeli leaders have decided to crack down on the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas movement in response to its role in perpetrating one of the worst terrorist attacks in Israeli history.

Meeting in a special session for four hours Thursday, as victims of the deadly incident were buried, Israel's Cabinet resolved to keep the Gaza Strip and West Bank sealed off from Israel proper indefinitely. The move, proposed by Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who also serves as defense minister, will prevent thousands of Palestinians from reaching jobs in Israel.

The Cabinet also voted to put "additional means" at the disposal of the Israeli security services, "to intensify actions against Hamas and its military wing." But it did not elaborate on the type of expanded powers it had granted.

The Cabinet met a day after a terrorist bomb exploded aboard a bus in Tel Aviv, killing 21 Israelis and leaving more than 40 wounded.

The government released a list of casualties Thursday. Of the 42 people injured in the blast, 17 were sent home Wednesday night after receiving medical treatment.

At the Cabinet session, the government approved drafting soldiers into the police force and also heard recommendations for cutting off the supply of funds to Hamas.

Police Minister Moshe Shahal later spoke of the need "to deal with the contributions to Hamas that are going on, on an international basis, from Iran, on the one hand, and Arab Americans, on the other."

During the Cabinet meeting, Rabin heard proposals from his ministers for closing Gaza and the West Bank permanently, an idea he spoke of the night before.

"We need a separation between us and the Palestinians, not just for days, but as a way of life," the prime minister said in a television interview.

A spokesman for Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat termed the proposal "economic and social war" on Palestinians.

Opposition members called the Cabinet's decisions "too little, too late."

**THE UNTOLD STORY OF SYRIAN JEWRY:
HUNDREDS OF SYRIAN JEWS ESCAPED
DURING THE DECADES OF OPPRESSION**
[Part 2 of 3]

By Larry Yudelzon

NEW YORK, Oct. 19 (JTA) -- On June 8, 1956, a secret meeting of Jewish groups was convened in Paris.

The topic: Syrian Jewry.

It had been five years since a massive wave of illegal emigration had been shut off, and 4,000 Jews remained trapped within the borders of Israel's staunchest enemy.

Now, the situation seemed as dark as in late

1947 and early 1948, when Jewish homes and businesses were destroyed by rioters and synagogues were bombed.

Syria was undergoing internal turmoil, as factions and parties feuded.

"There were three or four different secret service organizations, each one watching the other," said Don Peretz, professor emeritus of Middle Eastern studies at the State University of New York in Binghamton, in an interview this week. "The Syrian Jews were under the auspices of one that the (ruling) Ba'ath party didn't have too good relations with."

The meeting in Paris was convened by the Alliance Israelite Universelle, a French Jewish organization that had long maintained a school in Damascus.

Present at the meeting were representatives of the American Jewish Committee, the British Board of Jewish Deputies, the Anglo-Jewish Association, B'nai B'rith, the Jewish Labor Committee, Agudath Israel and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

The group decided to avoid publicizing the peril facing Syrian Jews. Instead, it decided to seek intervention from Western governments on behalf of the Jews, and to ask those governments to grant entry permits to Syrian refugees.

At the meeting in Paris, the Jewish groups decided to investigate "the matter of rescue, by kosher or unkosher means," according to a summary of the proceedings.

Syria Made Overtures About Emigration

With the help of various Jewish organizations, illegal emigration took place throughout the 1950s and '60s.

There were also various times when Syria made overtures toward legalizing emigration.

One such time came at the end of 1956 -- perhaps in response to the Western governmental pressure the Jewish groups had sought.

But the terms of Syria's announced policy of legalized departures were stiff.

Syria demanded that those wishing to leave renounce their Syrian nationality, donate their real estate to the Organization of Arab Refugees of Palestine and pay an indemnification of several hundred dollars for males who were escaping military service. By the end of that year, only about 10 families had left. Others wanted to go -- but couldn't raise the funds.

Another, more promising window of opportunity apparently opened in 1962.

The JDC "had every reason to believe that there would be a considerable movement of Jews out of Syria in the course of the foreseeable future," wrote Charles Jordan, then executive vice chairman of the JDC on Feb. 12, turning down a request for \$2,000 to build more classrooms in Syria.

But the operation started to go wrong.

Reports told of a number of young people leaving the country illegally who were caught, brought back to Damascus and tortured to terrify the rest of the community.

By the end of the year, according to the

WZO, 620 Jews had reached Israel. But hundreds more were ready to leave.

The consequences of this large-scale, but clandestine, emigration were at the center of what was JDC's first direct trip to Syria since the creation of the State of Israel.

Traveling as a tourist in 1963, the JDC's Jordan met with Jewish communities throughout the Middle East.

On his visit, Jordan discovered that the Syrians had arrested a group who had been smuggling Jews out through Aleppo to Turkey.

As the JTA was to report on Oct. 10, 1963, based on the rare testimony of a "French Jewish tourist" returning from a three-month stay in Syria, "a number of Jews were in the Damascus central jail, awaiting trial early in 1964 on a variety of charges, including 'attempted illegal exit' and Zionist leanings."

The illegal exodus also had ramifications in neighboring Beirut, which still had a very small, but relatively stable, Jewish community.

The JDC helped free Syrian Jews imprisoned for arriving in Lebanon without proper papers.

The organization also hired a lawyer and posted bail for Albert Elia, secretary-general of the Lebanese Jewish community, who was charged with treason and faced the death penalty for aiding the Syrian Jews. Elia was acquitted.

A new era in the relationship of American and Syrian Jews opened up after 1970, when Hafez Assad took power in a coup. In America, meanwhile, as the Soviet Jewry movement was speaking up, the decision was made to include Syrian Jewry on the American Jewish communal agenda.

Assad Considered Better Than Predecessors

"At that point we were uncertain of how to proceed, whether in public demonstrations or more covertly, under the assumption they were able to get out covertly, one by one," recalled Phil Baum, the executive director of the American Jewish Congress who in the early 1970s chaired the subcommission on Syrian Jewry of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council.

"We were told there were opportunities for them to leave, to get across the mountains, and they were doing so," he said. So street rallies were put in abeyance, only scheduled when there was a crackdown on the illegal emigration.

From early on, Syria's Jews considered Assad an improvement over his predecessors, according to Ambassador Richard Murphy, who represented the United States in Damascus from 1974 to 1978.

"It was linked to Assad's attitudes to minorities in the country, as a president himself from a minority," said Murphy.

Assad is a member of Syria's Alawite minority.

In 1974, when Assad met with a delegation of Jews including Rabbi Avraham Hamra, who would soon become the community's chief rabbi.

Assad was "all ears," Hamra related this week in a New York interview, before his departure to Israel on Monday.

"From that time, it got better, slowly slowly," he said.

Assad quickly dropped restrictions on travel within Syria, quotas in universities and restrictions on commerce.

That same year, the United States and Syria

restored diplomatic ties broken in 1967. And with formal channels open between Washington and Damascus, "we expressed our concern" about the Syrian Jews, recalled Murphy, who is now a senior fellow at the Council of Foreign Relations.

In Canada, meanwhile, Judy Feld Carr had formed a committee to help Syrian Jews, after reading an account of 12 Jewish boys killed while crossing a minefield in their flight from Syria. She sent a telegram to Hamra in Damascus, asking what the Syrian Jews wanted from Canada.

"Surprisingly enough, he answered," recalled Carr this week.

Assad Begins Permitting Emigration

This was the beginning of what was to become, over the years, "hundreds of thousands of dollars of religious books, talleisim and tefillin. The first box was sent in 1972, and every single box was received without exception."

A sea change for the Syrian community took place in 1977. Rep. Stephen Solarz (D-N.Y.) and President Jimmy Carter had both taken up the issue. And Assad began permitting travel both in and out of Syria.

For the JDC, this meant an opportunity to make direct contact with the Syrian Jews they had been indirectly aiding.

Stephen Shalom, the son of Syrian emigre to Brooklyn, traveled to Syria, surveying the need of the Jews there. In Kamichli, where 400 Jews lived near the Turkish border 10 hours away from Aleppo, Shalom was greeted with an ecstatic torchlight celebration.

"I suddenly saw the rabbi sort of drawing something out from his side, and before I knew it, he had slaughtered a lamb in my honor," said Shalom. "Blood was running down the steps of the synagogue. They later gave me the skin."

By 1980, Hamra was able to visit New York, a trip he would make several times. At one point in the 1980s, Hamra quietly sent two students to America to study to be kosher butchers.

And while Assad continued to forbid emigration, and ensured that complete families would not leave the country, he put in place new policies that resulted in a quiet migration of hundreds of Syrian Jews over the next decade.

Visas were given out to hundreds of young women, unable to find husbands in Syria because so many young Jewish men had left the country.

Others were given travel permits under special circumstances, such as the need for medical treatment.

And others forfeited the high bond they were required to post to guarantee their return and settled in New York.

"They used me as a test case," said Mayer Ballas, who left Syria in December 1977.

"I had to pay a lot of money. I had to leave a \$10,000 bond to come out and study," said Ballas.

Feld Carr's funds, supported by donors across Canada, began helping Syrian Jews take advantage of these new opportunities for emigration.

"There were payments for everybody, that's for sure," she said. "The payments varied; there was no consistent amount," but they ran to the thousands of dollars.

"It was really, really sensitive, really quiet work," she said.

DEATH OF JUDGE IN DEMJANJUK CASE DELAYS NEW VERDICT ON DEPORTATION

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON, Oct. 20 (JTA) -- The sudden death of the Cleveland judge in the John Demjanjuk case has delayed indefinitely a new round of denaturalization hearings against the notorious Nazi war criminal.

U.S. District Judge Frank Battisti, 72, died Wednesday from what doctors said were complications from a tick bite suffered during a fishing trip last month.

Sources close to the case expressed both grief and frustration that any new judge appointed to the case will not have as much knowledge of the issues as Battisti had.

Battisti was the original judge who had ordered Demjanjuk's extradition to Israel in 1986.

"What had been a clear path to deportation is no longer clear. This will certainly delay things," said a source, who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

The case now is expected to be heard by another district judge in Cleveland, Ohio, or to be directed to a deportation court.

After Demjanjuk was extradited to Israel, he was convicted and sentenced to death for being the brutal Treblinka concentration camp guard known as "Ivan the Terrible." After spending seven years in an Israeli prison, however, the Israeli Supreme Court last year overturned his conviction.

However, the American and Israeli courts have not questioned that Demjanjuk did commit other Nazi war crimes while serving as a guard at the Sobibor death camp and at the Flossenburg and Regensburg concentration camps.

The Israeli Supreme Court's decision cleared the way for his return to the United States in September 1993.

Earlier this month, the U.S. Supreme Court elected not to hear an appeal of a lower court ruling that found Justice Department officials mishandled Demjanjuk's case when its Nazi-hunting unit, the Office of Special Investigations, pursued his original denaturalization.

'A Tragic Development'

The court's move cleared the way for Battisti to re-open a new round of denaturalization hearings. The hearings would be based in part on charges that he lied about his Nazi past when he applied to immigrate to the United States in 1951.

Successful prosecution of the 74-year-old retired Ohio auto worker in denaturalization hearings could clear the way for his deportation.

Throughout his protracted legal battle, Demjanjuk has said he is not guilty and is, instead, a victim of mistaken identity.

But Jewish officials vehemently disagree. "Every day this Nazi war criminal draws breath in the United States is atrocious," said Michael Lieberman, associate director and counsel of the Anti-Defamation League's Washington office.

"Demjanjuk lied on his immigrations papers, and that is statutory grounds for denaturalization," Lieberman said.

Elan Steinberg, executive director of the World Jewish Congress, called Battisti's death "a tragic development."

"Judge Battisti was poised, clearly given his record, to make clear Demjanjuk's culpability and participation in the Holocaust," Steinberg said.

Steinberg said that while he is confident that Demjanjuk eventually will be deported, the process has now been "delayed indefinitely."

IN SHOW OF SUPPORT, CLINTON LIMITS DEDUCTIONS FROM LOAN GUARANTEES

By Jennifer Batog

WASHINGTON, Oct. 20 (JTA) -- In another show of U.S. support for the Middle East peace process, President Clinton limited deductions from this year's \$2 billion annual loan guarantee for Israel.

Clinton cut \$95 million from a proposed \$311.8 million deduction, reducing it to \$216.8 million, a State Department official said.

The loan guarantees enable Israel to borrow money in the commercial markets at a favorable rate.

"It's in our national interest to help Israel continue to implement the peace process," the official said, explaining the rationale behind the reduction.

During the peace process's initial stages, the United States agreed to give Israel up to \$10 billion in loan guarantees over five years to aid in the resettlement of Soviet Jews. After a protracted fight on Capitol Hill that engulfed the Jewish community, the first installment became available in 1992.

As part of the agreement, the United States deducts from the guarantee the amount Israel spends in the West Bank and Gaza Strip on non-security projects like settlement construction, the official said. The president has the authority to waive part of the deduction if he feels it is in the national interest.

Since 1992 Israel has borrowed a total of about \$3.6 billion, according to the State Department. There was no deduction in 1992. For 1993, then-President Bush authorized a \$437 million deduction primarily for settlements started under the government of former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir.

For this year, Israel has been authorized \$2 billion, minus the \$216.8 million, a State Department official said. Israel has not yet drawn on the guarantee for this year.

DUTCH POLICE ARREST THREE ISRAELIS

By Henrietta Boas

AMSTERDAM, Oct. 20 (JTA) -- Cooperating with an Israeli effort to crack down on Israeli drug traffickers around the world, Dutch police recently arrested three Israelis who allegedly operated a laboratory for the production of a drug known as Ecstasy.

Police discovered the laboratory, located in the town of Wormerveer, some 19 miles north of Amsterdam, after neighbors complained about the smell of ammonia escaping from the building.

The three Israelis, one of whom is a chemical engineer, arrived in Holland in August.

Reflecting what was apparently an international effort to break up the Ecstasy production and distribution ring, police in Antwerp, Belgium, arrested a fourth suspect, and in Israel nine additional people were arrested.

FREE MOSCOW SHOWINGS OF 'SCHINDLER' DESIGNED TO HELP FIGHT ANTI-SEMITISM

By Lisa Glazer

MOSCOW, Oct. 20 (JTA) -- Before "Schindler's List" arrived in Russia, the Holocaust epic was eagerly awaited as a mind-changing tool against ingrained anti-Semitism.

Then the director Steven Spielberg canceled his plans to visit Russia, the premiere was postponed and the police nabbed members of a neo-Nazi gang that had allegedly planned bomb attacks on theaters scheduled to show the film.

By the time the film eventually opened, it was a low-key event that generated minimal attention.

But now, finally, the film's full educational potential is being explored.

On Sunday, more than 1,000 people -- Russian military students, concentration camp survivors, World War II veterans and Jewish families -- packed a large theater in central Moscow for what may be the first in a six-month series of free Sunday screenings.

The event was organized by Rabbi Yosef Cunin, an American who oversees the Chabad Lubavitch Bolshaya Bronnaya Synagogue.

Instead of offering tickets only to religious Jews, Cunin wants to present the film to assimilated Jews and Russians from various walks of life.

He chose military students for some of the first free tickets because "these are the people who are going to be influencing the country, who will be holding the guns years from now."

The idea was popular, Cunin said, and won backing from Jewish business executives and Chabad of California, who covered the basic costs of the movie theater. East-West Creative Association, the film's Russian distributors, decided to donate the film for the effort.

The results were heartening. Even after the applause following Sunday's screening, there were several minutes of thoughtful silence from the audience.

Afterwards, teen-age military students dressed in green wool uniforms left the theater beside elderly concentration camp survivors and Jewish families. While the film was a catalyst for conversations among the military students about whether fascism will rise again in Russia, Jewish families dwelled on their own experiences with anti-Semitism, according to Cunin.

Since the initial event was organized, Cunin said a Jewish businessman has offered to pay for free weekly screenings of "Schindler's List" for the next six months.

AT CEREMONY COMMEMORATING DREYFUS, PARIS MAYOR TIES VICHY TO NAZI REGIME

By Michel Di Paz

PARIS, Oct. 20 (JTA) -- Speaking at the unveiling this week of a statue commemorating Capt. Alfred Dreyfus, Paris Mayor Jacques Chirac charged that France's wartime Vichy regime was an accomplice in the Nazi campaign to exterminate European Jewry.

According to observers, Chirac's comments marked the first time that a top-ranking French political leader explicitly charged the Vichy regime with complicity in the Holocaust.

Chirac, leader of the conservative Gaullist Party and a contender to succeed French President Francois Mitterrand in elections scheduled for next May, spoke Sunday at ceremonies marking the centennial of Dreyfus' arrest on trumped-up charges of spying for Germany.

Chirac also said that the same forces that led to the false accusal and conviction of the Jewish army officer 100 years ago were still existent in Europe and France today.

Noting that "injustice, anti-Semitism, xenophobia and national division" all played a factor in the celebrated case, Chirac said these same factors, particularly antipathy toward Jews, were still prevalent today.

Dreyfus was arrested in 1894 after a French spy in the German Embassy found a document purportedly in Dreyfus' handwriting that provided sensitive information to the Germans.

Dreyfus was subsequently arrested, convicted on charges of espionage, publicly stripped of his military medals and sent to Devil's Island, a French penal colony off the coast of French Guiana, in South America.

In ensuing years there were growing calls for Dreyfus' release, most notably by author Emile Zola, whose newspaper article, "J'Accuse," charged that top army officials had fabricated the case against Dreyfus.

In July 1906, the verdict against Dreyfus was annulled by a civilian court, and he was reinstated into the army, where he rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel and fought the Germans in World War I.

Saying that the Dreyfus case provided the French people with a lesson in vigilance to prevent the repetition of such a scandal, Chirac said, "A century ago, the establishment wanted to destroy one individual. Half a century ago, the Vichy regime was objectively the accomplice in a genocide. It's not the same scope, but it stems from the same source of evil."

PRAGUE'S JEWISH COMMUNITY REGAINS ITS VALUABLE JEWISH MUSEUM, JUDAICA

By Josef Klansky

PRAGUE, Oct. 20 (JTA) -- The Czech government officially has returned the Prague Jewish Museum to the Prague Jewish community.

The museum, which was confiscated by the Nazis in 1939 and subsequently taken over by the postwar Communist regime, houses one of the world's largest collections of Judaica, some of whose priceless objects date back to the 16th century.

President Vaclav Havel attended an Oct. 13 ceremony marking the return, along with other Czech government officials, Israeli Ambassador Moshe Yegar, and leaders of the Czech Jewish community.

The new director of the museum, Leo Pavlat, stressed the importance of the museum and called upon Jewish museums and institutions abroad to lend assistance to the Prague Jewish Museum in order to improve upon its already significant international reputation.

In an interview at the ceremony, Havel said he was pleased that the museum was being returned to its rightful owners and expressed the hope that this was just the beginning of the process of satisfying Jewish claims.