

**IN KNESSET ADDRESS, CLINTON REPORTS CHANGE IN SYRIA, BUT NO BREAKTHROUGH**
By Cynthia Mann and Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, Oct. 27 (JTA) -- Fresh from his meeting with Syrian President Hafez Assad in Damascus, President Clinton told the Knesset on Thursday that he believes "something is changing" in Syria.

"Its leaders understand it is time to make peace," Clinton said.

Clinton said "some progress" had been made in his talks with Assad. But he had no breakthroughs to report.

In his warmly received address to the Israeli Parliament, Clinton also pledged that the United States would continue to stand by Israel, as it always had.

At the same time, Clinton made it clear the United States respects the will and independence of Israel in matters of its own defense and the pursuit of peace.

"Our role in war has been to help you defend yourself by yourself," the president said. "That is what you have asked. Now that you are taking risks for peace, our role is to help you to minimize the risks."

"The survival of Israel is important not only to our interests, but to every single value we hold dear as a people," he said.

Clinton vowed to work with Congress to maintain current levels of military and economic assistance to Israel. He also spoke of taking "concrete steps" to maintain Israel's strategic edge and of plans for "unprecedented" Israeli access to the American high-technology market.

At the same time, Clinton said, the United States is helping to build a peace "that will bring with it the safety and security Israel deserves."

Clinton Mentions Efforts To End Boycott

He cautioned that such a peace must "be real, based on treaty commitments arrived at directly by the parties involved, not imposed from outside."

Clinton talked about the efforts by the United States to end the Arab boycott and drew applause when he vowed, "We will not stop until it is completely lifted."

He praised the courage, vision and tenacity of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres for achieving the peace agreement with Jordan signed the day before, and made mention of the self-rule accord with the Palestinians.

But he said, "We must keep going until Syria and Lebanon close the circle of states entering into peace, and the other nations of the Arab world normalize their relations with Israel."

He said that earlier in the day in Damascus, Assad stated Syria's readiness to "commit itself to the requirements of peace through the establishment of normal, peaceful relations with Israel."

He said the United States has urged Assad "to speak to you (Israelis) in a language of peace you can understand. Today he began to do so.

"Of course it will take more than words," the president added.

Clinton mentioned the victims of terror attacks, singling out the parents of the recently kidnapped and murdered Israeli soldier, Nachshon Waxman, whom he called "a son of your nation and, I proudly say, a citizen of ours."

Waxman, whose mother is American-born, held dual U.S.-Israeli citizenship.

"We must stand against terror as strongly as we stand for peace, for without an end to terror there can be no peace," he said.

"America was proud to walk with you" on the path to the peace agreement with Jordan, Clinton said.

At a welcoming ceremony earlier in the day at Ben-Gurion Airport, Clinton said the peace treaty signed this week between Israel and Jordan "points the way toward a goal we have sought for a long time, a comprehensive peace in the Middle East."

President Ezer Weizman, who welcomed Clinton upon his arrival at the airport, thanked the United States for its role in Israel's peace-making efforts, both past and present.

Assad Reiterates Readiness To Make Peace

Referring to the day's talks in Syria, Weizman said, "We appreciate what you are doing and hope you are bringing good news. If not, we have patience."

Clinton flew from Amman to Damascus, where he and Assad met for three hours Thursday at the presidential palace. Clinton was the first American president to visit Syria since Richard Nixon did so in 1974.

At a joint news conference after his meeting with Clinton, Assad repeated Syria's readiness to make peace. He said Syria would accept "full normal relations," with Israel, but reiterated his demand that this must be in return for full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights.

Assad had made similar comments after meeting with Clinton in Geneva in January.

Assad's remarks fell short of any breakthrough, but even so, Clinton said the leader's statements had "gone beyond" previous Syrian positions. Clinton also said there had been some ideas discussed that he could not make public.

Syria remains on the State Department's list of countries that support terrorism. The two leaders were asked by reporters if the subject had come up in their talks. Assad said it had, but that the focus of the conversation was on the peace process.

Clinton also called for any peace agreement between Israel and Syria to provide adequate security measures, an Israeli demand.

"Security for one side should not come at the expense of the other's," he said.

From Damascus, Clinton flew to Israel to brief Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin on his meeting and to address the Knesset. What was struck from his itinerary, however, was a planned visit to Jewish, Christian and Muslim holy sites in the Old City of Jerusalem.

The trip was canceled amid Palestinian

opposition to Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert's plans to accompany Clinton in the Old City.

The Palestinians said the presence of an Israeli official would imply American recognition of Israeli rule over eastern Jerusalem.

The vast majority of nations, including the United States, have never recognized Israel's annexation of eastern Jerusalem. Clinton's visit would have been the first by an American president.

Faisal Husseini, the top Palestine Liberation Organization official in Jerusalem, said that had Olmert accompanied Clinton's entourage to the Temple Mount, the two would not have been granted access.

Instead, Hillary Rodham Clinton visited the Western Wall, accompanied by Olmert. Clinton was due to meet with Olmert later at the King David Hotel.

**JEWES AND MUSLIMS AT CONFERENCE
FACE HOSTILITY, SEEK COMMON CAUSE**
By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

DENVER, Oct. 27 (JTA) -- Beyond the mutual suspicion and hostility, there are issues on which Jews and Muslims can make common cause, representatives of the two groups said at a recent conference here.

The conference on "Women, Families and Children in Islamic and Judaic Traditions," held Oct. 23-26, was primarily an academic one.

Professors of Islamic and Judaic studies, anthropologists and ethnographers, all presented papers on their own topics of expertise.

They spoke, for example, about "The Status of Sephardic Women in Salonika in the Period of 19th Century Modernization" and "Gendering and Engendering in the post-Independence Novel in Islamic Senegal."

More pragmatic issues were addressed in a session titled "Muslim-Jewish Dialogue: Strategic Ways to Proceed."

According to Rabbi A. James Rudin, director of interreligious affairs for the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish community and the emerging Muslim community in the United States should work together on public policy issues of mutual benefit.

They include: issues under the bioethics rubric, like assisted suicide, organ transplant and surrogate parenting; public education; immigration and bigotry.

There is also a joint stake in fighting "the exclusivist agenda of the religious right, whose leaders want to make this a Christian America," said Rudin.

"We have to say as loud as we can that Jews and Muslims belong in America and that America belongs to us," he said.

Salam al-Maryati, director of the Los Angeles-based Muslim Public Affairs Council, spoke at the same session about the sense of vulnerability and victimization that Muslims feel in America, where the terms Muslim, Arab and terrorist tend to be considered synonymous.

The Muslim community in the United States is relatively young and small, about one-third the size of the Jewish community here.

"We are where the Jewish community was 100 years ago, with our handicaps, fears and prejudices," said Maryati, who left the conference

early to join President Clinton's entourage to the peace treaty signing between Jordan and Israel on Wednesday.

Maryati said there is a widespread perception among American Muslims that Jews control the media and politics, and "that the Jews are out to attack Islam."

The rapprochement between Israel and Jordan, and the historic treaty with the Palestinians, combined with Muslims' increasing numbers in the United States, have led to new interest on the part of the Jewish community in establishing a relationship.

'A Form Of Scapegoating'

But, as was clear at the conference, the tensions that continue to play out in the Middle East impact developments on American soil and feed the level of mutual suspicion.

The FBI and Justice Department are investigating some Muslim groups in America in an effort to stop money from the United States from flowing to Hamas, the terrorist group responsible for several recent terrorist acts on Israeli soil.

Maryati decried the American government's investigation of Muslim groups as "part of a Likud campaign" against Muslims and called it "a form of scapegoating."

He said that if individuals are suspected, then they, rather than institutions, should be prosecuted. "Once you start talking about institutions you have crossed that fine line to scapegoating religious groups," he said.

Muslim-Jewish relations in America are in their infancy, said Rudin, who called them "the new frontier in interreligious affairs."

Rudin cautioned that it will take a lot of work and a lot of time to work past the mutual suspicion that is a natural outgrowth of the years of enmity in the Middle East. "Americans are always wanting a quick fix, but that doesn't work in human relations," he said.

Other conference participants included Fathi Osman, a scholar in residence at the Islamic Center of Southern California.

He spoke about how classical Islamic law regards the status of women.

The meeting was convened under the auspices of The Institute for Islamic-Judaic Studies at Denver University, and chaired by Seth Ward, who runs the institute.

An important -- and positive -- outcome of the conference was the opportunity for Jews and Muslims to move beyond their titles and religious affiliations and to get to know one another as people.

"The real work that happens is the inter-personal contact at meals, between sessions," said Rabbi Lori Forman, interreligious affairs program specialist at the American Jewish Committee and the conference co-chair.

One coffee break found Ada Aharoni, an Israeli author and peace activist, involved in deep conversation with Aida Osman, the wife of the Islamic scholar. Both were born and spent their youth in Egypt. To their mutual delight, they discovered that both had known the head of the Jewish hospital in Alexandria.

The two women -- both middle aged and both mothers -- found something they shared, a common thread that bridged the chasm that divides their peoples.

JORDAN CONCERNED ABOUT GETTING ITS SHARE OF ECONOMIC PEACE DIVIDEND

By Larry Yudelson

NEW YORK, Oct. 27 (JTA) -- Jordan is worried about getting its share of the peace dividend and of being economically overwhelmed by Israel, according to a Jordanian government official.

Rima Khalaf, Jordan's minister of industry and trade, addressing a recent symposium sponsored by the America-Israel Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said that "we can transform the Middle East to a future that will offer stability to all the people in the area."

But for this to happen, she warned, "we should give each country the same potential to benefit from peace."

In her cautious tone, Khalaf staked out a middle ground at the symposium, which focused on economic opportunities in the new Middle East.

Most optimistic were Israeli and American Jewish business executives, speaking of the potential for Israeli trade throughout the Arab world. Most pessimistic were two prominent Palestinian American businessmen, who reminded the audience that "the occupation continues."

The symposium took place even before Israel and Jordan agreed on terms of the peace treaty signed Wednesday.

The treaty commits the two countries to conclude negotiations on economic aspects of their new relationship within six months.

In these negotiations, Jordan is asking for economic barriers between the two countries to be eliminated very slowly. The lengthy transition period it is seeking, by one account, is 15 years.

If Jordan and Israel do not undertake a "gradual and well-planned opening of economies to each other," said Khalaf, they will unleash economic forces that would polarize the two economies, to the detriment of her nation and ultimately of peace.

Israel wants barriers dropped far sooner.

Representing Israel at the symposium last month was Gad Ya'acobi, Israel's ambassador to the United Nations.

Israel Not Seeking Economic Domination

He repeated Israeli reassurances that it is not seeking economic domination over its neighboring states.

"We know that there is a connection between the economic and human situation and the chances for reconciliation and peace, which is our principal goal," he said.

In a subsequent interview, Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres expressed his view that "an open trade will bring the Jordanian economy closer to the Israeli one."

He said the relationship between the United States and Mexico in the wake of the North American Free Trade Agreement provides an argument for open economies.

"By Mexico joining the U.S. in a free trade zone, America did not become poorer like people feared, but Mexico became wealthy," said Peres.

David Stone, an American Jewish lawyer who has long represented Israeli companies and has now begun representing Arab firms seeking to do business with Israel, told the symposium that Jordan is indeed committed to trade with Israel.

"I perceive a real will, both on the governmental and businessman level, to proceed quickly," he said.

While Jordanians are "taken aback by the speed of developments," he said that he has personal knowledge of a number of transactions happening right now.

During a September visit to Amman, Stone met with senior officials of the Jordan Investment Corp., a government company involved in economic development and privatization.

"They gave me a list of 10 specific projects they were seeking tenders for," he said.

Stone said that throughout the Arab world, including countries still far from signing any agreement with the Jewish state, there are business ventures quietly taking place.

Still, it remains unclear whether there is really a political will on the part of Arab governments to encourage business with the Israelis, said Stone. "There is a genuine fear of Israeli economic domination."

And destructive rhetoric continues.

Stone said he had been talking very seriously with a European company that was considering an investment in the Gaza Strip that would have created 3,000 jobs.

In the middle of negotiations, Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat made his speech promising to lead a jihad for Jerusalem.

Jordan Anxious For Business With Israel

The Europeans grew frightened, and the venture collapsed.

Stone said that Egypt, like Jordan, is anxious to do business with Israel.

"For the first 17 years after Camp David, Egypt had a very formal, publicized policy of freezing economic relations with Israel. That has turned around 180 degrees. The Egyptian government is anxious, for a lot of reasons, in pushing people to do business with Israel," he said.

On the other hand, the Gulf states -- with the exception of Oman and Bahrain -- are not anxious to do business with Israel. But on an unofficial level, he said, people are eager.

"I'm personally involved in several Saudi-Israeli deals, where they meet face to face," said Stone.

Most problematic of all, said Stone, is investing in the areas under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority.

"There is no legal infrastructure, no way of doing business," he said.

Fuad Sahouri, president of the Palestinian-American Chamber of Commerce, however, urged American investors to consider the West Bank and Gaza.

"These are the times of opportunities," he said.

In the end, he predicted, "NAFTA is going to be duplicated in the Middle East."

But a decidedly gloomier view came from Zahi Khouri, head of the Palestinian Development and Investment Co.

"You have to come down to ground level," he said, warning against "too much euphoria."

"It is still an occupied area. There are still roadblocks. You cannot move your goods freely from Ramallah (in the West Bank) to Jerusalem or Amman."

NEWS ANALYSIS:**HAMAS, ONCE IGNORED BY ISRAEL,
NOW POSES SERIOUS THREAT TO PEACE**

By Gil Sedan

BONN, Oct. 27 (JTA) -- They say that the death squads of Izz a-Din al-Kassam, the military branch of the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas movement, number only several dozen.

But that seems to be all they need to pose a serious threat to the Middle East peace process.

Despite their small numbers, much of Hamas' strength derives from the fact that hundreds of thousands of Palestinians support it -- many of whom do not even know what the inside of a mosque looks like.

The irony of the matter is that 10 years ago the Islamic fundamentalist movement in the Gaza Strip was so weak, so unimportant, that so-called Israeli "Arab experts" even encouraged their activities.

The thinking on the part of these experts was simple: a strong fundamentalist movement would dilute the strength of the Palestine Liberation Organization. As a result, Israel would be able to divide and conquer.

Conquer? After six years of the Palestinian uprising, after an additional year since Israel and the PLO signed the Palestinian self-rule accord, it seems clear that Israel has not managed to conquer the roiling hatreds of Gazan or West Bank Palestinians.

Divide? Yes, the PLO and Hamas are divided. But nowadays PLO officials fear Hamas, their leading political rival, at least as much as the Israelis do.

When President Clinton pressed PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat during a meeting in Cairo on Wednesday to clamp down on Hamas terror attacks, Arafat reportedly replied, "I'm their main target and, of course, I'm doing everything I can. Why wouldn't I do everything if I'm their main target?"

It is clear from his recent actions that Arafat is not eager to tackle Hamas head on.

Roundups of Hamas activists by the Palestinian police under Arafat's control have been followed by their release within a matter of days.

Weapons Not Collected

Beginning in May, when self-rule officially began, Palestinian authorities have repeatedly announced that they were going to collect weapons from Hamas followers. Such collections have so far not taken place.

At the Cairo meeting this week, U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher presented Arafat with the choice of supporting Israel or supporting Hamas. To this Arafat gave the non-committal reply that he supports "the peace of the brave."

With its threats of all-out Palestinian civil war, Hamas has indeed weakened the PLO, at a time when Israel needs a strong PLO.

Instead, as the Oct. 19 suicide bus bombing in Tel Aviv proved -- to cite only one instance -- Hamas has become strong enough to deliver a death blow to the nascent Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

Not even Sheik Ahmed Yassin, the ailing, crippled leader of Hamas who has been in an Israeli jail since 1989, can influence his followers.

Yassin, 58, founded the Majd al-Mujaheddin

radical Islamic organization in the early 1980s, a Gazan echo of the Islamic revolution in Iran. Like his Teheran counterparts, he carried an appealing message: Islam is the solution to everything, to personal as well as national problems.

Yassin, paralyzed since he was 12 from a soccer injury, soon emerged not only as spiritual leader but also as clandestine military commander.

He was arrested in 1984 by the Israeli authorities and sentenced to 12 years in jail for the illegal possession of weapons and explosives. A year later, he was released in a prisoner exchange between Israel and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

Two years after that, he became spiritual leader of the Palestinian uprising. Hamas -- an acronym for the Islamic Resistance Movement and an Arabic word meaning "fervor" -- came into the world on Dec. 14, 1987, five days after the intifada began in the squalid refugee camps of Gaza.

When Yassin was brought before an Israeli military court in 1991 for his involvement in the murder of two kidnapped Israeli soldiers, Avi Sasportas and Ilan Sa'adon, and for inciting violence, he voiced his followers' resentments.

'History Will Not Forgive You'

"The Jewish people drank from the cup of sorrow and lived dispersed in the world," he said. "Now the same people want to force the Palestinians to drink from the same cup. History will not forgive you, and God will judge us all."

The military branch of Hamas was founded at the beginning of 1988 by Sheik Salah Shehade, a follower of Yassin's who was dean of students at the Islamic University in Gaza City.

This branch, the Izz a-Din al-Kassam Brigades (named for the leader of a terrorist group that operated during the British Mandate), operates almost independently of the political movement. It receives its marching orders directly from Hamas headquarters in Jordan and Syria.

While the military wing makes the headlines, the political branch has steadily built popular support by building kindergartens, schools, clinics, hospitals, and, more than anything else, mosques.

Its moneys come from ordinary Palestinians who make donations, but more importantly, from funds supplied by Iran, Saudi Arabia and Islamic groups throughout the world.

As recent events have shown, Islamic fundamentalists have succeeded in threatening the Israeli-Palestinian peace initiative.

But there are strong moderate elements within Hamas that support political action, people who feel that the organization can achieve more by participating in the upcoming Palestinian elections in Gaza and the West Bank.

For that to happen, the PLO needs to give Hamas a chance to play a fair and nonviolent political game -- and so do the Israelis.

There is absolutely no guarantee that free political involvement on the part of Hamas will stop terrorism. But one thing is for sure -- whoever blocks the way of Hamas to the political playing field will face the same group in the terrorist arena.

(Gil Sedan is Arab affairs correspondent for Israel Television. He is currently serving a three-year tour as chief European correspondent for the Israel Broadcasting Authority.)