

**DESPITE TOUGH TALK ON CAPITOL HILL,
THE PRESIDENT REASSURES YITZHAK RABIN**
By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON, Nov. 21 (JTA) -- The United States remains committed to Israel's current aid levels and qualitative military edge, President Clinton assured Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin during a meeting in the Oval Office this week.

The assurance, often stated by U.S. officials in the presence of visiting Israeli leaders, carried particular significance this week since Rabin's three-day visit to the capital followed in the wake of hostile statements by some incoming congressional leaders about Israel's peace policies and foreign-aid levels.

The visit also came one week before donor countries were scheduled to meet in Brussels to discuss fulfilling aid pledges to the fledgling Palestinian Authority.

After the meeting, Rabin acknowledged the difficulties in the peace process but vowed to press ahead.

"There are problems, but we are continuing this process of reconciliation and solving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict," the prime minister said.

During a 30-minute private session before being joined by aides, the two leaders reportedly discussed the escalating violence in the Gaza Strip, Iran's involvement in terrorism, and the peace process.

According to senior administration officials, Clinton and Rabin focused primarily on the need to get financial aid to the Palestinians and on the Syrian-Israeli peace track.

Clinton Reaffirms Golan Policy

Clinton reaffirmed his support for U.S. troops on the Golan Heights if Syria and Israel sign a peace treaty.

If asked by Israel and Syria to send troops to the Golan, "I will come to the American people, I will come to the Congress, and I will make the case at that time based on an agreement that they would reach," Clinton said.

Clinton cautioned, however, that "there has been no agreement of any kind about this. We are jumping the gun here."

Clinton responded directly to recent comments by Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), who is slated to chair the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and who has called the "entire peace process a fraud."

Helms has also said he is opposed to sending U.S. troops to the Golan and that the whole foreign aid program should be re-evaluated.

"The prime minister has already said the process is not a fraud, it has been quite successful," Clinton said. "It has been the most successful process since Israel became a nation, and we'll just keep working at it to try to make it work better."

"I don't think I should say or do anything that would undermine the possibility of the parties reaching a peace," Clinton added, with a

clear shot at Helms: "I think that ought to be the position that all Americans take."

During their meeting Monday, Clinton and Rabin finalized plans to pursue the third stage of the joint American-Israeli development of the Arrow anti-missile defense program.

On Monday, Rabin also met with Sen. Bob Dole (R-Kan.) the majority leader-to-be.

Over the weekend, Dole said he opposed sending U.S. troops to the Golan Heights.

Rabin also met with Secretary of State Warren Christopher on Monday to discuss the peace process. Christopher plans to return to the Middle East for another round of meetings in Damascus and Jerusalem early next month.

**TRYING TO SAVE ITSELF: U.S. JEWS
STILL STRUGGLING WITH CONTINUITY**
By Larry Yudelson

DENVER, Nov. 21 (JTA) -- After rescuing Soviet, Syrian and Yemenite Jewry, the American Jewish community is trying to save itself.

For the third year in a row, the American Jewish community was the focus of fear, concern, and occasional consolation at the annual General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations.

Considered one of the major gatherings of the organized Jewish community, this year's assembly brought together 2,600 leaders of federations and other organizations for several days of speeches and workshops, study and shmoozing.

While hallway discussions and session turnout indicated a healthy concern over the Republican victory in this month's congressional elections, the delegates' attention focused primarily on issues falling under the rubric of "Jewish continuity": Jewish identity, affiliation and intermarriage.

Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin endorsed the direction of the conference, saying that with the opening of all the gates once closed to Jews, the rallying cry of "Let My People Go" has succeeded.

Now, he said, "the question should be, 'Let My People Be Jewish.' That is the agenda for you."

Twenty-five years ago, the only voices demanding the "Jewish agenda" were those of hundreds of college students, who picketed outside the convention demanding that Jewish education become a federation priority.

And apparently it has. This year, according to CJF, half of local federation allocations go to educational programming -- including community centers and camps.

In stark contrast to the protesting students of 25 years ago, this year, a student leader delivered an address long on plaudits and short on lamentations.

Wendy Smith, the 21-year-old president of the Yale University Hillel, praised the "successful and budding partnership between the community and the campus."

A 100-member contingent of college students added life to the assembly -- particularly during Shabbat dinner -- as it urged federation leaders

to move forward and approve a plan to increase Hillel funding over seven years.

Similarly, some progress was evident as the North American Commission on Jewish Identity and Continuity, created two years ago, discussed and debated its first draft report.

The report set forth a variety of principles, methods and projects by which the institutions of American Jewish life could gear up to reverse trends of assimilation and intermarriage.

Some controversy erupted, however, over how the commission should proceed, whether in its current form or as a newly created CJF-sponsored implementation committee.

The continuity commission discussed the need to balance what it called "formative" educational experiences -- such as day school or supplementary programs -- with one-shot "transformative" experiences such as Israel trips. But the commission did not venture into the thorny issues of either pricing or funding.

Concerns About Jewish Education Accelerate

Even as these discussions moved forward at their slow, deliberate pace, there were signs that concern over Jewish education -- and its potential price tag -- was only going to accelerate.

The Jewish community is "warming to the challenge," Rabbi Brian Lurie, executive vice president of the United Jewish Appeal, said in an interview here.

In his keynote address, World Jewish Congress President Edgar Bronfman called for an affordable system of Jewish education, including high quality boarding schools.

Likud Party leader Benjamin Netanyahu, in his address, also urged the assembly to "construct a plan to finance the airfare and upkeep for two months in Israel for every young person aged 17 to 25."

On the opposite end of the political spectrum, Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin has been similarly urging communities to fully subsidize Israel trips for Jewish youth.

During his recent visit to America, Beilin raised the idea with Boston's federation leaders. While they were receptive in theory to signing on as a pilot project, there was some question about how to come up with the estimated \$4 million it would cost the community.

In neighboring Marblehead, Mass., meanwhile, the Jewish Federation of the North Shore became the first to sign on to such a plan.

Shortly before the G.A., the Marblehead federation passed a resolution making available 50 full subsidies for Israel trips, with the idea of expanding the program to encompass the several hundred Jewish teens believed to live in the community.

All these moves raise the question: How can federations pay for programs of Jewish education?

At the North Shore federation, which prides itself on its maverick ways, money for the Israel trips will come at the direct expense of allocations to UJA.

The federation's decision is based "on the rationale that the money will be spent directly in Israel," Neil Cooper, the federation's executive director, said in an interview here.

Bronfman, in his address, proposed that money be found by "reprioritizing the Jewish tax dollar," with an eye toward combining or closing

the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Committee and the American Jewish Congress.

ADL's national chairman, Abraham Foxman, disagreed that the money for education should come at the expense of his agency.

Also arguing against a redistribution of funds was Mendel Kaplan, who will soon conclude five years as chairman of the board of governors of the Jewish Agency. Calling on American Jews to "build more high schools," he argued that the money can be found.

"We have never been wealthier. We don't have to do it at the expense of anything else -- certainly not at the expense of Israel," he said.

Fund-raisers in the field agreed that money can be found to fund continuity programs.

Ivan Schaeffer of Washington said his community federation's Israel Quest program, which encourages and partially subsidizes Israel trips, "is proving to be a popular topic" in discussions with prospective endowment donors.

"This approach is donor centered," Schaeffer said at a session here that focused on Israel experiences. "We're talking about your children or grandchildren."

"Parents with an intermarried child or grandchild love Israel Quest. It's sad but it's true," said Schaeffer, who serves as national chair of the Israel Experience Program, which was launched two years ago by a coalition including CJF, UJA and the CRB Foundation.

The contention that new money can be found was borne out by a half-million dollar endowment received by the Jewish Federation Council of Greater Los Angeles to help fund Israel experience programs.

'We Have To Create A New Vision'

And Barry Shrage, president of Boston's Combined Jewish Philanthropies, argued that fostering Jewish identity is so effective in explaining and marketing the broader mandate of the Jewish community that it more than pays for itself.

"We have to create a new vision of the Jewish people, rooted in the Land of Israel, the people of Israel, and also the God and Torah of Israel," he said.

Such a new vision of the Jewish future and Jewish culture, said Shrage, would enable the community to compete against the visions that other causes are trying to sell to philanthropists.

"People are willing to pay for it, but we have to provide a very compelling vision of what Jewish learning means," said Shrage.

As was the case two years ago, sessions of Jewish study were a featured part of the G.A. schedule. While these sessions were not as well attended as plenaries headlined by Israeli or American politicians, for some delegates these constituted the high point.

"When we talk about Jewish continuity, we are really talking about Jewish content," said Martin Kraar, executive vice president of CJF.

For some at CJF, this inward focus explained why many participants found this G.A. quieter than many of its predecessors.

"What struck me about this G.A.," said Carl Sheingold, the assembly's program coordinator, "was that the organizations of Jewish life are trying to connect to the intimate, personal side of people's lives."

SARAJEVO JEWS BECOME TARGET OF POLICE CAMPAIGN AGAINST COMMUNITY

By Valerie Monchi
London Jewish Chronicle

LONDON, Nov. 21 (JTA) -- Jews in the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo have been hit by an apparent campaign against the community and its leaders, according to the president of the Jewish community there.

Communal leaders contacted by telephone said police had arrested and interrogated a number of Sarajevo Jews, some of whom hold dual Bosnian-Israeli citizenship.

Local police "are trying to discredit leading persons in the community. We are a totally unpolitical organization," said Ivan Ceresnjec, who added that the authorities seemed intent upon establishing that Jews had been conniving with the enemy.

The Muslim-dominated Bosnian government, led by President Alija Izetbegovic, has been fighting rebel Serbs since 1992 to maintain a unified, multiethnic Bosnia.

It has recently renewed an alliance with independent Bosnian Croat militias.

Local Jewish leaders are viewing the police action with grave concern -- particularly since the Jewish community has strived to maintain the trust of all parties in the ongoing conflict, providing humanitarian assistance to whomever needed it, regardless of religious affiliation.

The campaign reportedly began on July 14, when a car with four Jewish passengers was searched and its occupants detained for "informative talks."

Police Took Passports, Communal Documents

The vice president of Sarajevo's Jewish community, Danilo Nikolic, was subsequently held for five days, during which he was interrogated 10 hours a day.

Sonya Elazar, head of a Jewish women's organization in Sarajevo, has also been questioned. Elazar is the niece of the late Lieut. Gen. David "Dado" Elazar, the Israeli chief of staff during the 1973 Yom Kippur War.

All those arrested were subsequently released, but police also seized passports and communal documents.

Seeking the return of the passports and papers, Ceresnjec met with the Bosnian prime minister, Haris Siladzic, and the chief of state security, Nedzad Ugljen.

An aide to Ugljen said he was not available for comment.

Israeli Foreign Ministry officials in Jerusalem said Wednesday they knew nothing of the arrests.

Siladzic assured communal leaders that the police action had been an "unfortunate" episode and that the documents would be promptly returned.

"But I waited for two weeks, and nothing happened," said Ceresnjec. "They have since returned some of the papers."

Ceresnjec said allegations by Bosnian officials that Jews were acting against Bosnian national interest were "totally unfounded."

"We are helping civilians on all sides. All parties have expressed their gratitude for what we are doing. We have been literally risking our lives to save lives," he said.

PLO AND HAMAS REACH AGREEMENT AS THEY CONTINUE TO VIE FOR SUPPORT

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Nov. 21 (JTA) -- Even as they reportedly reached an accord to ease their simmering tensions, Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat and officials with the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas movement continued to vie for support among Palestinians this week.

The two sides blamed each other for the outbreak of violence in the Gaza Strip last Friday that left 14 Palestinians dead and about 250 others wounded.

The violence was sparked by clashes between Palestinian police and fundamentalists who had gathered outside Gaza City's main mosque.

But Hamas reportedly has said it will not formally sign the accord until Arafat assumes full responsibility for last Friday's violence.

According to the agreement, the Palestinian Authority will establish two committees to determine responsibility for the violence.

Separate committees will also be created to reduce tensions in Gaza.

In an unprecedented move, Israeli Arab politicians arrived in Gaza on Saturday to act as mediators between the two sides in an effort to broker the accord.

On Monday, some 10,000 supporters gathered in a sports stadium in Gaza City to show their solidarity with Arafat.

Many in the crowd were armed, and they fired their weapons into the air during the gathering to demonstrate their backing of Arafat.

It was reportedly the largest show of support Arafat received since he arrived in Gaza in July to assume the leadership of the Palestinian autonomy.

Speaking at the rally, Arafat blamed Hamas for starting last Friday's rioting.

Referring to Iran, which backs Hamas and the smaller Islamic Jihad movement, Arafat said that the clashes had been instituted by "outside elements."

He also had strong words for those who oppose the Palestinian Authority, saying, "We will not allow anybody to sow disorder and we will not allow anyone to destroy what we have built."

Hamas, which continues to blame Arafat and the Palestinian police for last Friday's events, meanwhile distributed leaflets in Gaza vowing to attack members of the Palestinian Authority and launch a civil war unless Arafat tried and executed those who were responsible for the violence.

Pro-Hamas demonstrations were held in the territories Monday. But they proceeded without incident, and few people observed a general strike called by Hamas.

SOLDIERS WOUNDED IN LEBANON ATTACK

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, Nov. 21 (JTA) -- Three Israeli soldiers were wounded Monday in an attack launched by the Islamic fundamentalist Hezbollah movement in the central sector of the southern Lebanon security zone.

Israel and its allied South Lebanon Army responded to the attack by launching artillery fire at Hezbollah positions.

AS CHANUKAH NEARS, DEBATE INTENSIFIES OVER RELIGIOUS DISPLAYS ON PUBLIC LAND

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON, Nov. 21 (JTA) -- It has been five years since the Supreme Court banned religious displays inside government buildings, but the creche and menorah debate continues to gain new fervor with each holiday season.

With government buildings -- including city halls and courthouses -- off-limits, religious groups have increasingly turned to public parks to display Nativity scenes or menorahs.

Next week, Jews in almost every state will light over 200 menorahs on public land to celebrate the festival of lights. At the same time, Nativity scenes will begin to spring up across the country as the Christmas season gets under way.

The debate over holiday displays has divided not only various courts and civic groups, but the Jewish community as well.

Defense organizations, such as the Anti-Defamation League, American Jewish Congress and American Jewish Committee, have supported legal challenges to Nativity scenes and crosses on public land, as well as to menorahs.

They have found themselves at times arguing against Chabad and other religious activists who sponsor menorahs in at least 44 states.

"In essence, Chanukah is a festival celebrating the religious liberty and freedom of the Jewish people, and that's why we use public forums," said Rabbi Levi Shemtov, director of the Washington office of the American Friends of Lubavitch.

"The essential point is that if we are allowed by law to display a menorah, we should do it," he said.

A Matter Of Religion, Or Just Season?

Opponents argue that religious symbols on government property convey the message that the government is endorsing one religion over another, which would violate the Constitution.

This side of the debate also argues that passers-by who do not belong to the religious groups being represented in a display are made to feel like second-class citizens.

The courts have ruled that while menorahs, crosses and creches fall under the category of religious symbols, Christmas trees and Santa Claus displays do not.

Arguing that no prayers are said over a Christmas tree and that they carry no religious significance, courts have declared trees and Santa Claus displays seasonal symbols and have permitted them in public buildings.

Despite the ban on menorahs and creches inside government buildings, "when a menorah stands alone in a park or in front of a city hall, there's generally no problem," said Nathan Lewin, president of the American section of the International Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists. Lewin has litigated dozens of cases supporting menorah lightings on public property.

"So far as private religious displays in public forums, the courts have ruled consistently in our favor with a few exceptions," he said.

Courts have developed an informal test when determining whether displays violate the separation of church and state.

The Supreme Court ruled in a landmark 1989

case that a holiday display in an Allegheny, Pa., courthouse was unconstitutional.

The justices decided that the creche display, without any secular symbols of the holiday season, clearly endorsed Christianity over other religions.

Since this ruling, legal challenges to Nativity scenes have sprung up across the country. But courts have drawn a sharp distinction between displays in government buildings and those in public parks, leaving open the door for menorah displays on government-owned land.

In Indianapolis, city officials and Jews are currently locked in a legal battle over a menorah near City Hall. The case hinges on whether supporters of the menorah can prove that the city is trying to silence religious speech. A decision in the case was expected before Chanukah begins.

Some of the most prominent public lightings of menorahs by the American Friends of Lubavitch slated for next week include those in Central Park in Manhattan, Independence Mall in Philadelphia, the State Capitol in Georgia and the Ellipse behind the White House in Washington.

Lubavitch also plan public lightings in front of scores of city halls across the country.

In another related case, the Supreme Court has let stand a lower court decision that two hilltop displays of massive crosses sitting atop the highest points in San Diego favor Christianity over other religions and must come down.

Without comment, the high court last month rejected an appeal by the city of San Diego to allow the crosses to remain. One of the crosses serves as a monument to American veterans.

The Supreme Court in effect upheld the California Court of Appeals decision last year that the cross is the "quintessential symbol of Christianity," and since it stood on public ground it violated the state's constitutional ban against favoring one religion over another.

Jewish organizations that filed friend-of-the-court briefs against the display of the crosses hailed the Supreme Court's decision.

The San Diego case, however, will not have an impact on holiday displays.

Unlike legal challenges to menorahs and Christmas displays mounted in recent years, the San Diego case focused on what the court called a "preeminent symbol" of religious faith.

ISRAELI FIGURES SHOW AGING POPULATION

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, Nov. 21 (JTA) -- According to the latest findings of the Central Bureau of Statistics, the Israeli population is aging, immigrants from the former Soviet Union make up the largest ethnic group and tourists are shortening their stays in Israel.

The annual report on the Israeli population in 1993 found that 9.4 percent of Israel's population of 5.4 million people was over 65 years old, compared to 8.9 percent in 1985.

The report also said there were 712,000 immigrants from the former Soviet Union in 1993. Israelis of Moroccan background were the second-largest group, with more than 500,000 people.

Israeli-born citizens made up 61 percent of the population, compared to 64 percent in 1989.

In the past year, 33,500 couples married, 7,000 divorced and 112,000 babies were born.