

**CLINTON TAPS JEWISH OFFICIAL
TO BECOME AMBASSADOR TO ISRAEL**

By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON, Dec. 22 (JTA) -- As expected, the White House has nominated Martin Indyk, an Australian-born Jew, to be the next U.S. ambassador to Israel.

Indyk, 43, is known as a staunch supporter of Israel and would be the first Jew to serve in the coveted post. If confirmed, Indyk will replace Ambassador Edward Djerejian, who resigned as ambassador last summer to head a public policy institute at Rice University in Texas.

Indyk's nomination is "not expected to draw opposition" in the Senate, said a senior aide to Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), the incoming chairman of the Senate International Affairs Committee, formerly called the Foreign Relations Committee.

Helms' committee will oversee Indyk's confirmation process.

"But we're withholding judgment until we see his papers," the aide added, referring to research that the committee staff puts together after nominations become final.

No hearings have yet been scheduled, but action is expected early in the new year.

Indyk, who worked as a consultant for the pro-Israel lobby, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, for about a nine-month stint in the mid-1980s, currently serves as the National Security Council Adviser on the Middle East.

He also served as the founding executive director of the influential Washington Institute for Near East Policy, a pro-Israel think tank.

'An Invaluable Asset'

AIPAC President Steve Grossman lauded Indyk for what he termed his "virtual encyclopedic knowledge" of the U.S.-Israel relationship and the Middle East in general. "Martin will be an invaluable asset to this administration and this country," Grossman said in a telephone interview.

Grossman predicted broad bipartisan support for the nomination in the Senate.

In announcing the nomination Thursday, President Clinton said in a statement, "I am confident his extensive background and experience in the region, as well as his commitment to furthering the peace process and the role he has played as my adviser on these issues, will serve to promote American interests in the Middle East."

The White House began contacting Jewish leaders in August to inform them of Clinton's decision to nominate Indyk.

Indyk has served as the administration's point man for the Middle East peace talks. He is well-known for his dual containment approach toward Iran and Iraq, which advocates a strong U.S. policy against each nation.

Indyk became a U.S. citizen immediately before he was appointed to the Clinton administration. Although the expected announcement has garnered widespread praise in the Jewish community, Indyk's loss at the White House comes at a critical time in the Middle East peace process.

**RECONCILIATION ATTEMPT BACKFIRES
IN WAKE OF BEILIN, JEWISH AGENCY SESSION**

By Larry Yudelson

NEW YORK, Dec. 22 (JTA) -- An effort by Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin and leaders of the Jewish Agency for Israel to find common ground for cooperation may have backfired this week.

A meeting Monday night apparently concluded with both sides thinking they had reached an understanding of where each side stood.

But a front-page report on the meeting in the Israeli daily newspaper Ha'aretz this week -- and the brouhaha it created -- suggested that the gap remained wide.

Beilin has been criticizing the Jewish Agency and the World Zionist Organization for being outmoded and undemocratic. Leaders of the established bodies retort that Beilin fails to understand what the bodies do and the reality of Diaspora fund raising.

The Jewish Agency is the primary recipient of funds raised for Israel by the United Jewish Appeal in the United States. The WZO undertakes Jewish educational efforts in the Diaspora and provides a mechanism for Diaspora Zionist organizations to participate in Jewish Agency decisions.

According to the Ha'aretz headline, the Jewish Agency had agreed to Beilin's suggestion that it close up shop. Apparently that wasn't quite the case. The article sparked a flurry of denials by all meeting participants.

"I burst out in such laughter that I thought I would die," Jewish Agency Acting Chairman Yehiel Leket told Israel Television, describing his reaction to the news account. Beilin similarly termed the newspaper headline "totally nonsense."

Beilin did apparently, as the paper reported, reiterate his vision of a new international Jewish organization, which he dubs Beit Yisrael.

But, as Beilin said in phone interview from Jerusalem on Thursday, "the Agency people were of course not ready to consider the idea of this organization replacing the current organization."

Disputed Versions Of An Agreement

According to Beilin, the major accomplishment of the meeting was an agreement with the Jewish Agency to attempt a pilot program in one American Jewish community to provide Jewish teens with vouchers for free trips to Israel.

According to the Jewish Agency version of the meeting, there was less concrete agreement on this issue. The Ha'aretz article also prompted a memo to Beilin from Moshe Nativ, the Jewish Agency's director-general. In an effort to contain some of the damage caused by the newspaper report, the memo was distributed to the leadership of American Jewish federations.

Beilin characterized Nativ's memo as "much closer to the reality" than the Ha'aretz report.

In his letter, Nativ wrote, "We agreed that a joint staff team would analyze only the feasibility of a pilot project that would involve one or two communities in the United States.

"Their mandate would be simply to deter-

mine if interest and funding could be available to increase the number of unaffiliated youth in Israel Experience programs, and if it may be possible to do so without any cost to the participant," the letter continued.

Leket also said that during the meeting, Beilin had withdrawn his suggestion that Diaspora Jews should stop making donations to Israel. He added that Beilin was convinced of the need to continue raising funds from abroad for immigration, absorption and Jewish education.

Beilin stirred controversy earlier this year when he suggested that the booming Israeli economy should no longer be dependent on "charity" from abroad.

Beilin confirmed that he supports Diaspora fund raising for certain issues.

But Beilin and the Agency remain divided over whether Jewish contributions from abroad should be used for social programs. Beilin says those should be the responsibility of the Israeli government alone.

More ambiguous were Leket's comments on Beit Yisrael, the proposed international, democratic Jewish organization that Beilin has proposed to replace the World Zionist Organization.

"I told Beilin, and not for the first time, that if he wants to form another Jewish organization, then he should turn to those people who are not involved in any other Jewish group," Leket told Israel Radio.

"I had the impression at the end of the meeting that he accepted the idea," Leket said.

According to Nativ's account of the discussions, "If 'Beit Yisrael' is to be established, it was to be understood that its defined purpose would be to enhance Jewish identity and to increase the number of Diaspora youth from the unaffiliated sector in Israel Experience programs.

"In this context, it was agreed that if such an effort is to be undertaken, the Youth and Hachalutz Department (of the WZO) could organize the entire program," Nativ said. The youth department currently organizes a wide range of programs for Diaspora youth in Israel.

Beilin, however, said in the interview that he was not convinced that Beit Yisrael should reach out only to the unaffiliated.

"I generally think we need a democratic organization, not an oligarchic and plutocratic one like the Jewish Agency," he said.

The effort to find common ground may have been fatally damaged by the erroneous press report and its aftermath.

Nativ concluded his letter to Beilin saying that he would advise the Jewish Agency "not to continue further discussions."

Beilin, who denied planting the story for political purposes, said he lamented the erroneous report and the furor it created. "The truth is that the meeting itself was a very good one," he said.

(JTA correspondent Naomi Segal in Jerusalem contributed to this story.)

EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT REJECTS INVITATION AS WEIZMAN CONCLUDES AN OFFICIAL VISIT

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Dec. 22 (JTA) -- Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak said this week that he would not visit Israel any time soon because such

a visit could thwart peace talks between Israel and Syria.

"If I thought my visit to Israel could help the peace process, I would come tomorrow morning," Mubarak said Wednesday, addressing Israeli reporters who were accompanying Israeli President Ezer Weizman on a trip to the Egyptian capital.

Explaining his decision, Mubarak said such a visit could cause Damascus to feel isolated, which would cause Syrian President Hafez Assad to harden his position in the long-stalled Israeli-Syrian negotiations.

There were expectations that Weizman's three-day visit to Egypt this week would lead to a reciprocal visit by Mubarak, who, much to the dismay of Israelis, has not made the trip since he became president in 1981.

Former Egyptian President Anwar Sadat visited Jerusalem in November 1977, paving the way for an Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty in 1979.

Despite the treaty, relations between the two countries have been described as a "cold peace."

Weizman reportedly tried hard to persuade Mubarak to change his mind, but without success.

While turning down the invitation to visit Israel, Mubarak and his ministers nonetheless took pains to persuade the Israeli reporters -- and through them the Israeli public -- that Israeli-Egyptian relations are warming.

The Egyptian president also cautioned patience in negotiations with Syria, saying Assad has "problems with his public opinion."

He warned Israel to expect further problems with fundamentalist terrorism among the Palestinians.

"Do not expect (Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser) Arafat to be able to restore security overnight," he said.

He argued that years ago, Israel had supported the creation of the Hamas movement in the Gaza Strip to serve as a counterweight to the PLO.

Israel can not expect Arafat to immediately overcome a problem that Israel was originally responsible for, he said.

"It is not simple. These are crazy people," said Mubarak, who has had to contend with Islamic fundamentalists in his own country.

But he added: "If anyone can deal with the problem, Arafat can. He is the most courageous person."

CROSSING THE JORDAN FOR KOSHER FARE?

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, Dec. 22 (JTA) -- A Jordanian hotel has reportedly begun serving kosher meals in an effort to attract Israel tourists who observe Jewish dietary laws.

Jacco Klip, food and beverage manager at the government-owned Intercontinental Hotel in Amman, said he was considering hiring a Jewish cook to prepare kosher food.

"We have started serving these kind of meals since (Israeli) tourists began coming to Jordan," he said.

At least 3,000 Israeli tourists have visited Jordan since July, when King Hussein and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin signed the Washington Declaration, formally ending the 46-year state of war between the two countries.

**E.U. APPROVES NEW TRADE ACCORD;
MOVE WILL EXPAND TIES TO ISRAEL**

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, Dec. 22 (JTA) -- The council of ministers of the European Union has approved, in principle, a new trade accord with Israel.

German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel, the current head of the council of ministers, informed Foreign Minister Shimon Peres of the decision in a phone call this week.

Kinkel said the agreement would be signed in a matter of weeks.

The agreement, which came after a long period of negotiations, will broaden Israel's ties with the E.U. It updates a 1975 trade agreement between Israel and the former Common Market.

In recent years, Israel has tried to elevate its trading status to gain better access to the European market. Israel is currently suffering a \$5 billion trade deficit with the E.U., which is its main trading partner.

The E.U.'s 12 member nations decided to strengthen their relations with Israel after it signed the Palestinian self-rule accord in Washington last year.

At a summit conference last week of the leaders of the E.U.'s 12 member countries, the organization declared that Israel should be granted a "privileged status" in its relations with the organization's member states.

**POVERTY STRIKES ONE IN FIVE
ISRAELI CHILDREN, REPORT SAYS**

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, Dec. 22 (JTA) -- One out of every five Israeli children, or about 470,000 youngsters, lived below the poverty line last year, according to a report released this week by an independent organization that monitors child welfare statistics.

The National Council for the Welfare of the Child said that the highest rates of poverty among children were found in Jerusalem and Bnei Brak, near Tel Aviv. Both areas are home to large concentrations of fervently Orthodox families.

Dr. Yitzhak Cadman, executive director of the council, said child poverty has been steadily growing in Israel over the past three years.

He noted a widening gap between children who receive proper health care and education, and those who do not.

"If they do not get the basic (resources) to prepare them for adult life, they will be unable to contribute to society," he said.

This week's report conflicted with numbers in another report released last month by the National Insurance Institute.

According to that report, an estimated 279,000 Israeli children were living in poverty. Overall, 12 percent of Israel's population, or some 648,000 Israelis, lived below the poverty line in 1993, according to the institute's figures.

**HAMAS ACTIVIST OFFERS TO EXCHANGE
ISRAELI SOLDIER'S BODY FOR PRISONERS**

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, Dec. 22 (JTA) -- A Hamas activist wanted by the Israeli authorities says he has information on the whereabouts of the body

of an Israeli soldier who was kidnapped and murdered by members of the Islamic fundamentalist group five years ago.

Abed Rabbo Abu Hussa said last week that Hamas is ready to enter negotiations to return the body of Ilan Sa'adon in exchange for the return of Palestinian prisoners.

This week, the Hamas activist followed up on the offer by sending a fax to the Sa'adon family's lawyer, Amir Avrahami, in which he asked if Israel was willing to negotiate.

"Tell your government that I am the only one who can deal with you," the fax said. "I am in a safe place, and you won't catch me alive. But if I die, I will die with all the information I know on Sa'adon."

Part of the two-page document was illegible, and it was unclear where the fax originated.

Israeli security sources dismissed Abu Hussa's claim, saying he was a "liar" and was "low" on the wanted list.

The fax did not mention previous Hamas demands for the release of Palestinian prisoners, including the longstanding demand for the freedom of Sheik Ahmed Yassin, the founder of the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas movement.

Earlier this month, Yassin called on his followers to reveal the burial place of Sa'adon.

Yassin, who is serving a life sentence in an Israeli jail for ordering the deaths of Palestinians suspected of collaborating with Israel, brought up the issue of the missing soldier during a meeting that took place earlier this month with two Palestinian leaders.

Dr. Ahmed Tibi, a close adviser to Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat, and Sheikh Abdullah Nimir Darwish, the head of the Islamic movement in Israel, had met with Yassin to see if he would turn over Sa'adon's body in exchange for his release.

Hamas officials have long been calling for the release of Yassin, a move Israel has repeatedly refused to make.

ISRAEL, PLO AGREE TO PURSUE TALKS

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM, Dec. 22 (JTA) -- Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization agreed this week to hold secret, top-level talks in an effort to break the impasse over negotiations on implementing the next phase of the Palestinian self-rule accord.

"We do not intend, until we reach agreement, to let details of the negotiations become known," Foreign Minister Shimon Peres told reporters after meeting with PLO leader Yasser Arafat in the Gaza Strip on Wednesday.

"We have started talks to establish ways and procedures to carry out negotiations on the next phase of the accord," he said.

Peres added that top-level talks involving himself, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Arafat were the best way to overcome differences on the sensitive next phase of the Palestinian self-rule accord.

The next phase calls for an Israeli troop withdrawal from the West Bank on the eve of Palestinian elections.

Arafat meanwhile said that he would communicate with Peres and Rabin "through telephone, faxes and meetings."

ISLAMIC ORGANIZATION'S CHARGES AGAINST DOCUMENTARY RAISE QUESTIONS OF TACTICS

By Sam Skolnik

Washington Jewish Week

WASHINGTON, Dec. 22 (JTA) -- Vandalism of a local Muslim school -- and accusations that the perpetrators were anti-Muslim zealots incited by a recent PBS television documentary on Islamic fundamentalism -- have raised questions about both the tactics and the ideological underpinnings of an increasingly active Islamic advocacy organization in Washington.

At the center of the tangled web of charges and countercharges lies the Council on American Islamic Relations and its executive director, Nihad Awad.

The council describes itself as a "nonprofit Islamic advocacy organization that challenges acts of discrimination against Muslims in America."

It spearheaded an effort earlier this year to prevent the broadcast of *Jihad in America*, a one-hour documentary shown in November on PBS stations nationwide.

The council claimed the film, which chronicles the history of Islamic fundamentalist terrorism and highlights its growing infrastructure in the United States, would precipitate an angry wave of anti-Muslim fervor.

The group, based in Washington, has since charged that the documentary has been responsible for incidents of vandalism and fires at various mosques in Maryland and New York.

In a news release, the organization claimed that on Nov. 26, the Muslim Community School in Potomac, Md. had been subject to hate-inspired vandalism.

"Less than one week after the airing of *Jihad in America*, a PBS documentary that made wide-ranging allegations against the Muslim community in America, an Islamic institution mentioned in that program has been attacked by vandals," the release says.

'A Direct Result Of Distortions'

"We believe this attack is a direct result of the distortions and stereotyping of American Muslims in the documentary," Awad, the group's executive director said in the statement.

But Montgomery County, Md. police officials insisted the relatively minor attack was clearly not hate-related. In fact, they say the principal of the school, Salahuddeen Kareem, never mentioned to them the possibility of hate-related violence and told police the incident probably was instigated by a few of the older students at the school.

According to Officer Robin Xander, who visited the school while investigating the case, the possibility of this being a hate crime is "really far-fetched, if you ask me."

Xander, who filed a report to the same effect, said that sometime during that afternoon or evening, the perpetrators emptied three fire extinguishers into a computer room, the nursery and the door to the principal's office, causing minimal damage.

Officials from the Muslim Community School, which had the council handle its public relations, did not return phone calls. The council's spokesman, Ibrahim Hooper, would not answer any questions about the case, other than to say the news

release "speaks for itself." Awad did not return phone calls.

Mohammad al-Asi, spiritual leader of the Islamic Education Center -- which is housed in the same building as the Muslim Community School -- also would not comment on the case.

Al-Asi, who spoke before a Jewish-Islamic dialogue held at Washington Hebrew Congregation in March, is quoted on camera in the documentary saying, "The Jews have disproportionate control over the instruments of government."

The incident in Potomac is not the only one the council has blamed on the documentary.

In late October, days after a fire was set on a stairway rug outside a small mosque in Brooklyn, the group sent out a news release entitled, "New York Mosque Set on Fire: PBS Jihad in America Documentary May Prompt More Hate Crimes." The release continued, "We expect more of these hate crimes in the near future."

But the fire outside the Al Ikhwa mosque occurred almost a entire month before the documentary aired on PBS.

According to New York Police Department spokeswoman Det. Kim Royster, the fire was being investigated as an arson, but the NYPD had not determined the fire to be a "bias crime."

The case is still being investigated, said Royster, and there are currently no suspects.

Steven Emerson, producer of the PBS documentary, said that NYPD intelligence officials had told him that the Brooklyn fire was the "product of an internal dispute."

'Fabrications And Hysteria'

Emerson, who has authored numerous articles and books on terrorism, said that blaming his documentary for these acts leaves him "no doubt that Mr. Awad is engaged in the same sorts of fabrications and hysteria that his parent organization, Hamas, is engaged in."

Hamas is the Arabic acronym for Islamic Resistance Movement, a Palestinian terrorist organization based in the Gaza Strip and West Bank.

Concerning the Potomac incident, Emerson said that Awad "has been hoisted by his own petard here."

"If anything, this should show that he is part of a propaganda operation," Emerson said, adding that it is a "sad day for the larger Islamic American community, which has allowed itself to be manipulated by Awad."

Links between Awad, who founded the council roughly one year ago, and Hamas, responsible for more than 100 murders in Israel in recent months, stretch through Texas.

Before starting his new organization, Awad served as public relations director for the Richardson, Texas-based Islamic Association for Palestine from 1992 through early 1994.

The association and its in-house newsletter, the *Muslim World Monitor*, repeatedly have published articles supportive of Hamas that were clearly anti-Semitic. One pamphlet handed out at organization conferences, for example, was entitled, "America's Greatest Enemy: The Jew!"

In a recent "60 Minutes" segment on the rise and dangers of Islamic fundamentalism in the United States, Awad admitted the group had distributed the crudely anti-Semitic pamphlet but said he had asked that it be canceled.