

Talking With the P.L.O.: A Mideast in Motion

U.S. Ambassador in Tunisia
Makes Fast P.L.O. Contact

By PAUL DELANEY
Special to The New York Times

TUNIS, Dec. 15 — The diplomat designated as the sole American liaison with the Palestine Liberation Organization moved swiftly today to establish contact with the group and schedule formal talks.

The diplomat, Robert H. Pelletreau Jr., the Ambassador to Tunisia, acted this morning, telephoning P.L.O. headquarters here. Officials of the organization were elated over the American decision and pleased with the Ambassador's fast move.

Palestinians said the Ambassador and a team of P.L.O. leaders would meet Friday at the state guest palace in nearby Carthage.

One Palestinian official reported earlier that the initial session would

Palestinians say
the talks will
begin Friday in
Carthage.

take place tonight, but American Embassy officials denied that.

The Palestinians reported that the P.L.O. team would be made up of Abd Rabbo Abdelheh, the organization's director of information; Hourari Abda, culture director; Abd Gafar, director of the foreign office, and Hakam Beloui, representative to the Arab League, which is also based here.

The P.L.O. chairman, Yasir Arafat, does not plan to enter the talks initially, but will attend at a later stage, the Palestinians said.

Mr. Arafat met East German officials in East Berlin today, then headed to Rumania. It was not known when he intended to return to Tunis.

In Washington, an American official said Mr. Pelletreau had called the di-

rector general of the P.L.O.'s political section to try to arrange talks. It was not clear whether he was referring to Abu Yahia, the organization's political director.

Mr. Pelletreau, who has been Ambassador to Tunisia since March 1987, had an encounter with Palestinian terrorism in September 1970 when guerrillas of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, an extremist P.L.O. faction led by George Habash, kidnapped him on the streets of Amman, Jordan. He was held briefly at an Amman hotel with a group of other hostages before slipping away while his captors were not paying attention.

Mr. Pelletreau, 53 years old, has served in Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria and was Ambassador to Bahrain from 1985 until going to Tunis in 1987. He was Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Middle East and South Asian Affairs.

A Palestinian official here said today that when discussions with Mr. Pelletreau begin, the two sides would immediately touch on substantive issues.

"They will go over some details, talk about who participates and set up ground rules, but they will also exchange documents, Arafat's U.N. speech, the text of statements on the issues by President Reagan, Vice President Bush and Secretary Shultz," he said.

"The Ambassador called us this morning to inform us officially about the decision and to talk about arranging the meetings," he added. "We are very pleased by these developments and think we can finally get all parties moving ahead on a peaceful settlement."

The official was ebullient as he talked, a mood reflected here and throughout most of the Arab world. Feelings ran particularly high in Tunisia against American policy since an Israeli air attack in 1985 on P.L.O. headquarters in Tunis killed civilians in the surrounding neighborhood. Many



Yasir Arafat meeting with Erich Honecker, the East German leader, in East Berlin yesterday. Mr. Arafat was to meet later with the United States envoy to Tunisia, who has been appointed to act as intermediary in discussions with the P.L.O.

Tunisians asserted that American officials knew about the plans and should have warned the Tunisian Government to get civilians out of the area.

Another incident here, the slaying of Mr. Arafat's top aide, Wali Gihad, in April in an attack attributed to Israeli agents, again stirred anti-American emotion.

Nevertheless, a Tunisian artist who has been strongly critical of American policy over the two incidents today

praised the American decision to talk with the P.L.O. "I shouldn't say it's about time, but I am going to say it because it is time that some balance was put into American Middle East policies," he said.

Because of security fears, P.L.O. officials here move around frequently, changing offices and homes. Anti-American pronouncements were common in conversations here in the past. But there was little of that today.

State Dept. Sets Agenda
For Talks With P.L.O.

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United States would explain "our views of the peace process, how we see it, the importance of direct negotiations — all of the kinds of things that you know to be our approach to Middle East peace."

The United States favors an international conference as a prelude to direct negotiations between Israel and its Arab neighbors.

Mr. Redman said Palestinians had a "right to pursue their desire for an independent state" through direct negotiations with Israel. "They can bring that to the table if they want," he said.

The United States opposes the creation of an independent Palestinian state. Instead, it favors "self-government by the Palestinians" of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in some sort of association or confederation with Jordan. Israel has administered the two territories since it seized them in the 1967 Middle East war.

Question of a Peace Conference

A major question is whether the United States will now favor P.L.O. participation at a peace conference, given Israel's continued hostility toward dealing with the group.

In the interview, Mr. Shultz said the chief problem is "how you bring about direct negotiations between the key parties, to find your way to peace and how to structure that and how the Palestinians will be represented."

"It's still a big problem," he said. "You have to find a way of Palestinian representation that will also be compatible with Israeli representation."

Addressing the issue today, Mr. Redman said: "The question of which parties participate in negotiations is not for the United States to decide unilaterally. That is up to the parties, Arabs and Israelis alike, to decide."

Under the peace plan outlined by the United States earlier this year, the Secretary General of the United Nations would invite "the parties involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict," as well as the five permanent members of the Se-

curity Council, to the international conference on the Middle East.

Mr. Redman referred to the P.L.O. today as "one of the parties in the Middle East." But neither he nor other American officials would say whether they thought the P.L.O. should attend the conference.

Mr. Shamir said on Tuesday, "We are not ready and will never be ready to talk to the P.L.O."

1975 Agreement With U.S.

In the past, the United States has said that Israel should negotiate with a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation on issues like the future of the occupied territories. But the feasibility of such a delegation has come into question since King Hussein of Jordan announced on July 31 that he was breaking his legal and administrative ties with the territories and would not pretend to speak

U.S. officials
continue to
hammer on the
terrorism issue.

for Palestinians residing there.

Under a 1975 agreement with Israel, the United States has shunned contact with the P.L.O. Henry A. Kissinger, who as Secretary of State set the original conditions for dealing with the P.L.O., said today that "it was reasonable" for Mr. Shultz to conclude that the conditions had been met in "a complex, convoluted statement" issued by Mr. Arafat on Wednesday.

But in an interview, Mr. Kissinger cautioned that "the United States should do nothing until the new administration can determine both the substance of what it wants to achieve and the procedure it wishes to follow."

The American conditions for dealing with the P.L.O. were that it recognize Israel's right to exist, that it accept United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 as the basis for peace in the Middle East and that it renounce terrorism. After comments by Mr. Arafat at a news conference in Geneva on Wednesday, the President Reagan declared that the conditions had been met.

The United States Ambassador to Israel, Thomas R. Pickering, said today that the United States' next move in the Middle East was to organize talks on a transition period intended to build confidence between Arabs and Israelis.

More Warnings on Terrorism

"The idea of an interim or transitional period has been introduced in the process in order to find a way to give both sides an opportunity to become comfortable with the rather vast changes that would have to be made in achieving a final peace settlement," Mr. Pickering said in remarks to the Israel Council on Foreign Relations.

In the transition period, as envisioned by the United States, Israel would give Palestinians an opportunity to run some of their own affairs in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

At the White House, Mr. Reagan said the United States would "certainly break off communications" with the P.L.O. if the group committed terrorist acts in the future.

Richard W. Murphy, the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, said that more terrorism "may well occur."

In an interview on the NBC News program "Today," Mr. Murphy said: "This is a very disorganized outfit, the P.L.O. There are many different elements in it." If terrorism occurs after Mr. Arafat's declaration renouncing it, then members of the P.L.O. will "have to explain what their stand is — how did this happen, who did it, and are you going to dissociate yourselves from it," Mr. Murphy said.

State Department officials said they would closely monitor the conduct of P.L.O. members including Mr. Arafat, who was described by Mr. Shultz less than three weeks ago as "an accessory" to terrorism. On Wednesday, Mr. Reagan said the P.L.O. "must demonstrate that its renunciation of terrorism is pervasive and permanent," and Mr. Redman said today that "performance is going to count."

A member of the transition team for Mr. Bush said that the United States would have "devalued its word" if it had not opened talks with the P.L.O. after the group met the American criteria for such a dialogue. "You can't establish conditions and then change the ground rules when they are met," he said.

"The purpose of a dialogue is to see whether a meeting with the P.L.O. is serious and productive," said the aide to Mr. Bush. "If all we hear is propagandistic posturing or an effort to get the U.S. to deliver Israel, it will be neither serious nor productive. Peace has to be made with Israel, not with the United States."

Mixed Reviews in Congress

Members of Congress were cautious in reacting to Mr. Reagan's decision to open a dialogue with the P.L.O. George J. Mitchell, the Maine Democrat selected to be Senate majority leader in the next Congress, said he supported the decision and regarded it as "a significant step toward advancing the peace process."

But Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina, the ranking Republican on the Foreign Relations Committee, said: "I deeply regret the Administration's decision. The United States simply cannot combat international terrorism by negotiating with terrorists."

Representative Charles E. Schumer, a Democrat, said the move was an "enormous worry" for many people in his Brooklyn district.

"On the other hand," Mr. Schumer said, "there's genuine hope that peace can happen."

Israel Leaders Unhappy;
A Blunder, Shamir Says

By JOEL BRINKLEY
Special to The New York Times

JERUSALEM, Dec. 15 — Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir today called the United States decision to talk with the Palestine Liberation Organization a dangerous "blunder" that "will not help us, not help the United States and not help the peace process."

Foreign Minister Shimon Peres suggested that the United States and other countries that are willing to talk to the P.L.O. were naive, saying, "While other countries are expressing their views out of sincere hope, we express our views from bitter experience."

While some Israelis of the political left said they were delighted with the American decision, Mr. Peres and Mr. Shamir expressed the prevailing view: concern that bordered on anguish as Israel realized that on relations with the P.L.O. it was now alone.

'Not the Ideal Situation'

In an interview today, Mr. Shamir acknowledged that with the American announcement on Wednesday, no other country agreed with his view that negotiations should not be held with the P.L.O. under any circumstances.

Being alone "is not the ideal situation," he said. "It is not agreeable. But we are used to it for a long time."

Israel's job now, Mr. Shamir said, is to try to persuade the United States to change its mind. "If they really talk to the P.L.O., every day they will have a reason to stop," he said.

While Mr. Peres went out of his way to say he believed that Israel's relations with the United States would remain "as friendly, as deep, as meaningful" as they have been, Mr. Shamir had a somewhat darker view.

"This will have an impact," he said. "You can't ignore it. You can't deny it."

A 'Slap' for Israel

Mr. Peres suggested that the P.L.O.'s own actions will eventually convince the United States that it erred.

"I surely see a change in their rhetoric, but I hardly see a change in their

actions," he said. "And this is the discrepancy which makes me so worried. If one Molotov cocktail is thrown in the territories, it will nullify" Mr. Arafat's renunciation of terrorism.

Newspaper editorials agreed with that general line. The daily Hadashot called the American decision "the most painful diplomatic slap Israel has received since establishment," while Maariv said "the P.L.O. chief has once again made a fool out of the Americans."

Other Israelis were of a different view, saying that perhaps the P.L.O. has really changed.

Ezer Weizman of the Labor Party said: "I think we've started a new era. In my estimation, the pressure of the U.S. has brought about a change in the P.L.O. I certainly don't think it's a sad day." Several other Labor Party members agreed.

'The Day We Hoped for'

Yosi Sarid of the Citizens Rights Movement expressed a view voiced by many left-wing Israelis when he said he was surprised by Mr. Peres's remarks today. "It sounded like it came from Yitzhak Shamir's mouth," he said.

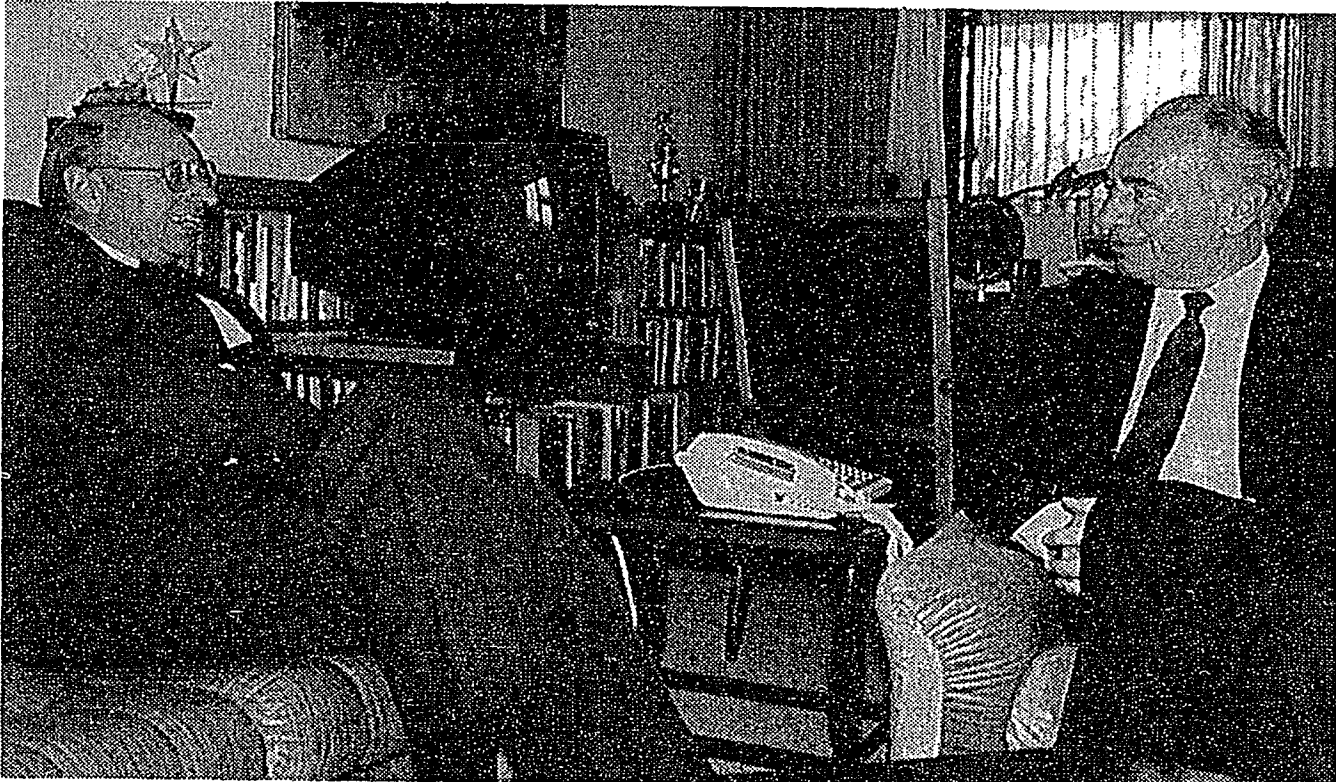
In Mr. Sarid's view, "this is the day we hoped for."

"For the first time in the history of the region, peace is within reach," he said.

Thomas R. Pickering, the United States Ambassador to Israel, notified the Prime Minister's office of the American decision early today. Yosi Ben Aharon, Mr. Shamir's chief of staff, got the call and said he tried to change Mr. Pickering's mind from the first moment.

"I told Ambassador Pickering that when he called at 1 A.M. that we were very sorry, that this was the wrong step, that this would not bring us any closer to peace — the very opposite," he said.

By this morning, Mr. Ben Aharon was saying, "We hope this will be a



Foreign Minister Shimon Peres of Israel, right, meeting with Thomas Pickering, United States Ambassador to Israel, in Tel Aviv. Although he opposes the American decision to talk with the Palestine Liberation Organization, Mr. Peres said the move would not affect Israeli-American relations.

short, passing phase that will pass very fast, and we'll go back on the track."

'Not Entirely Surprising'

Mr. Pickering met with both Mr. Shamir and Mr. Peres today, and an official familiar with the meetings said Mr. Shamir stressed his anger and disappointment while Mr. Peres reassured Mr. Pickering that Israel's relationship with the United States should not change because of this.

Mr. Shamir said he and others in the Government had been expecting this possibility for the last several weeks.

"Unfortunately this is not entirely surprising," he said. "In the last months or weeks, there was a feeling something was going on under the surface. We could feel there was such a threat."

He, too, suggested that only Israel

knew Mr. Arafat's true nature. "There's not any government that knows what we know," he said.

Even as Mr. Shamir and Mr. Peres reacted to the American decision today, they also continued trying to form a new government, and officials from both sides said that while the development gave Labor and Likud a common purpose, it also made the negotiations more complex.

Wants Negotiations Halted

Mr. Weizman said the negotiations should be stopped for the time being. "The problems between us and the Likud have increased because of what happened with the P.L.O.," he said.

One difficulty is that some in Labor want Mr. Peres to remain as Foreign Minister, given the new circumstances. Likud has essentially given him the

choice of remaining in the Foreign Ministry or becoming Finance Minister. Today Mr. Peres said he had decided to become Finance Minister.

Still, under the coalition agreement under discussion now, Mr. Shamir said, either the Labor Party or Likud would be able to veto any new foreign policy initiative. Labor and Likud will be represented equally on the Cabinet, Mr. Shamir said, so that unless both parties agree no new actions can be taken.

Despite the complications added today, Mr. Shamir said he expects a new government to be formed next week. But a Labor negotiator was not so optimistic.

"Maybe next week," he said. "But after today, it's going to be a hard several days."

Major U.S. Jewish Group Says It Won't Fight U.S. Decision to Talk With the P.L.O.

By ARI L. GOLDMAN

In an unusual difference of opinion with the Israeli Government, the major umbrella organization of American Jews said yesterday that it would not fight the decision of the Reagan Administration to open talks with the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Morris B. Abram, the chairman of the umbrella group, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, offered particularly high praise for Secretary of State George P. Shultz, who announced the opening to the P.L.O. on Wednesday.

"Knowing this man and knowing his obduracy and his care, I accept what he has done," Mr. Abram said at a news conference at his law office in Manhattan. "I believe him to be a man who would like to produce peace in the area without impairing the security of Israel one bit."

In Israel, yesterday, both Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres denounced the American move. Mr. Shamir said the immediate objective was to change the mind of the Reagan Administration. It

was the kind of statement that Israeli leaders often use to ask American Jews to support their cause.

Support for Israel Affirmed

While not picking up the Israeli cause, Mr. Abram strongly reaffirmed the support of the United States and American Jews for Israel and was highly critical of the P.L.O. and its chairman, Yasir Arafat. He said Mr. Arafat's conciliatory words "must now be translated into deeds."

As a first step, Mr. Abram said, the P.L.O. must repudiate its charter, the Palestine National Covenant, which calls for the destruction of Israel. Such a step, he said, must be a "threshold demand" of the United States in its talks with the Palestinians. "There can be no progress toward peace in the Middle East if the P.L.O. insists on adhering to that covenant," he said.

He said that he was not hopeful American-P.L.O. talks would be fruitful but that they would instead reveal that "the obstacle to peace is not Israel but Arab intransigence."

The American Jewish acceptance of

the decision to talk with the P.L.O. was unusual because Mr. Abram's group — made up of the presidents of the 46 largest American Jewish organizations — has been a staunch supporter of positions taken by the Israeli Government. Also, because it attempts to achieve a consensus between its many members, the Presidents Conference generally speaks with great caution.

Mr. Abram, who spoke after a hastily called meeting of the Presidents Conference behind closed doors, said he was speaking with the backing of the vast majority of the group's constituent organizations. But he said he did not plan to press the Israelis to see it his way.

"I do not give Israelis advice on matters affecting their peace, their security and their lives," he said.

U.S. Move Called Naïve

A person who attended the closed-door meeting who asked not to be identified said the American move put the Jewish groups in an awkward position, torn between an American Secretary of State many Jews admire and an Israeli Prime Minister and Foreign

Minister they feel obliged to support.

One member of the Presidents Conference that differed with what emerged as the consensus was the Zionist Organization of America. "The U.S. has now embarked on a premature, naive policy by agreeing to negotiate with terrorists," said Dr. Kenneth A. Kellner, national vice president of the organization.

Even more critical of the United States policy was a politically right-leaning Jewish organization that demonstrated against Mr. Arafat when he addressed a special meeting of the United Nations General Assembly in Geneva last week.

'A Very Hopeful Development'

"We came to Geneva to express support as Americans and proud Jews for Secretary Shultz's courageous stand in denying Arafat entry into the U.S.," said Rabbi Avi Weiss, a Bronx rabbi who is the chairman of the group, the Coalition of Concern. "We are shocked that a man whom we respect has suddenly taken on the coloration of Neville

Chamberlain, in effect capitulating to murderers and thugs."

At the other end of the political spectrum, left-leaning American Jewish organizations hailed the American decision. Michael Lerner, the editor of the California-based Tikkun magazine, called it "a very hopeful and positive development."

The next step, he said, was for Israel to enter into talks with the P.L.O., something that Israeli leaders have vowed will never happen. Mr. Lerner said he expected that a resolution urging Israel to take the step would be approved at a conference of 1,500 American Jews next week in New York.

The meeting, called the Conference of Liberal and Progressive Jewish Intellectuals, will be held at the Penta Hotel in Manhattan on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday. Mr. Lerner said he believed that Israel now had an opportunity to negotiate from a position of strength, adding, "If Israel turns its back on the olive branch extended by the P.L.O. it might face a climate five years from now that is less favorable."