

(Fitzer)

Reuters broke this story and
was several hours ahead.

She broke this story

BANGKOK POST

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Soviet team slips into Israel to mend ties

[14 JUL 1987

Tel Aviv (Reuter) — The first official Soviet delegation to visit Israel in 20 years slipped into the country incognito on Sunday night on the same flight as a Soviet Jewish dissident who was mobbed on arrival, informed sources said.

A spokeswoman for the Finnish Embassy, which represents Soviet interests in Israel, confirmed the eight-member consular delegation arrived on Sunday night but refused to disclose their whereabouts.

The sources said the delegation was on the same Austrian Airlines flight from Vienna as freed dissident Yuli Edelstein, 28, who was given a tumultuous welcome by hundreds of religious nationalists.

The Soviet diplomats are officially due to survey property belonging to the Russian Orthodox Church and renew the passports of Soviet citizens living in Israel.

However their visit is widely seen as heralding a gradual thaw in political relations between Israel and the Soviet

Union, which severed ties during the 1967 Middle East war.

Members of the delegation yesterday visited the Finnish embassy annex in Tel Aviv officially named the "Bureau of the Protecting Power" which handles Soviet interests.

Diplomatic sources said the leader of the consular mission was the deputy head of the Soviet foreign ministry consular section, Yevgeny Antipov, and the delegation included the deputy head of the ministry's Middle East desk.

The sources said they received three-month multiple entry visas from the Dutch embassy in Moscow, which represents Israeli interests in the Soviet capital.

Foreign Minister Shimon Peres said on Sunday he expected the Soviet Union would soon be in contact with Israel over the issue of Soviet participation in a proposed Middle East peace conference.

But asked yesterday if he would discuss his proposal for a UN-sponsored conference with the visiting Soviet diplomats, Peres replied: "The delegation will come. The delegation will be consular. We will not exaggerate its importance."

Peres said the most burning issue which Israel wanted to raise with Moscow was "the fate of Soviet Jews".

Edelstein, freed from a Siberian labour camp after nearly three years imprisonment on what he

called trumped-up drug charges, was the latest in a series of prominent Soviet Jews to be allowed to emigrate in the last year.

However Israeli leaders have said the increased pace of Jewish emigration is still unsatisfactory and Moscow must open the gates to all Jews wishing to leave the Soviet Union.

Peres has set the resumption of full diplomatic relations and free emigration as conditions for Soviet participation in a peace conference.

The Foreign Minister has said Israel expects to be allowed to send a delegation on a reciprocal consular visit to Moscow, although the Soviet Union has said there are no grounds for such a visit.

Meanwhile Industry and Trade Minister Ariel Sharon called on the government to fire Peres because of Peres' attempts to convene the conference.

Sharon's remarks on Sunday night to the right-wing Herut Party's Central Committee heated up tensions in Israel's multiparty government, which is sharply divided over the proposed conference.

MOSCOW Stalls in Resuming Ties With Israel

ASAHI EVENING NEWS
By Gail Fitzer

JERUSALEM (Reuter)—The arrival this week in the Soviet Union of the first official Israeli mission in 21 years signals that Moscow is likely to restore full diplomatic ties but will stall as long as possible, Israeli analysts say.

The Soviet leadership, they say, is weighing the benefits of improved ties with the United States and a stronger position in the Middle East against antagonism among Arab countries and a likely increase in nationalism among Soviet Jews.

"There is definitely movement in the direction of renewing relations," said Yaacov Ro'i, professor of Russian history at Tel Aviv University. "The Soviets seem to appreciate the fact that the resumption of ties will bring them some benefits, in the world at large and in the United States.

"They are gradually moving in the direction of relations, although they are doing it as slowly as they can, and demanding as high a price as they can."

Israel had demanded the visit since last July when a Soviet consular mission arrived in Tel Aviv, ostensibly to survey property belonging to the Russian Orthodox Church and to renew the passports of Soviet citizens.

The first official Soviet mission to Israel since Moscow severed diplomatic relations during the 1967 Middle East war has repeatedly extended its stay despite a thin workload.

Israel has restored low-level relations with two East European states in the past two years—Poland and Hungary.

But Ro'i said that as long as there was no American pressure on Moscow, and no prospect of an international Middle East peace conference, the Soviets had nothing to gain from resuming ties immediately with Israel.

Israeli Foreign Minister Simon Peres, who favors a U.N.-sponsored conference, is said to have said Moscow must resume diplomatic relations before it can participate in such a forum.

Yuri Stern, spokesman for the Soviet Jewry Information Center, an independent group of emigrant activists, freed the Soviet leadership as in no hurry to re-

establish links.

"The Soviets are dragging things out for their own reasons, to minimize the risk in Arab lands, to test the influence on Soviet Jewish nationalism and because it is a problem ideologically after so many years of anti-Israeli propaganda," he said.

Israeli analysts note marked improvements in Soviet attitudes to Israel and attribute them to Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's interest in improving ties with Washington and playing a greater role in the Middle East.

They point to increases in Soviet Jewish emigration, a decline in anti-Israeli Soviet propaganda, more Soviet citizens visiting relatives here, Soviet films and performers in Israel and several meetings between Israeli and Soviet officials.

The most significant took place last month when right-wing Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir met Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze at the United Nations.

One prominent intermediary, U.S. Jewish oil magnate Armand Hammer, who has known every Soviet leader since Lenin, forecast that Israeli President Chaim Herzog, Shamir or Peres would soon be invited to Moscow.

The Soviet Union has been a major supplier of arms to the Arab world and a key backer of the Palestine Liberation Organization since

1967 and Gorbachev's more moderate stand appears to have worried some Arabs.

Amnon Sella, professor of international relations and Russian studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, said Gorbachev had carefully calculated the effect of his moves on Arab opinion.

"He probably found out from his Arab allies that it would not cause any damage to the Soviet position in the Arab world," he said.

Whatever Moscow's reasoning, some officials are

clearly hoping the slow process launched last year will produce quick, concrete results.

Officially, the delegation will survey the building that housed the Israeli Embassy in Moscow from 1948 to 1967, and which Israel still rents for some \$100,000 a year.

It hopes to establish close contact with the Jewish community and will review procedures with the Dutch Embassy for issuing Israeli visas to Soviet Jews. The Netherlands has represented Israeli interests in Moscow since

1967. The delegation may be entitled to broaden its tasks in Moscow, including meetings with Soviet officials.

But officials here openly acknowledge that its scope may be limited by broader considerations.

"I would venture the suspicion that neither the definition of their mandate nor the definition of ours truly reflects the very modest interest in deepening relations," said Foreign Ministry Deputy Director-General Yeschahu Anug.

Israel fights Palestinian revolt on military, diplomatic fronts

By Gail Fitzer 12 DEC 1988

Reuter

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM — A year to the day after the first stone was thrown by Palestinian militants, Israel is fighting military and diplomatic battles to crush the revolt in the occupied Arab territories and limit damage to its international standing.

It has not been very successful on either front, Israeli analysts say.

Since Palestinians launched their unprecedented revolt with a mass protest in the Jabalya refugee camp of the occupied Gaza Strip last Dec. 9, Israeli leaders have repeatedly vowed to quell the violence.

A year later, and after the deaths of at least 330 Arabs and 11 Jews, the wounding of more than 10,000 protesters and the detention of 20,000 in the Gaza Strip and occupied West Bank, the uprising goes on.

"It is one of the toughest confrontations I have known throughout my long security experience," Defence Minister Yitzhak Rabin, a former army chief of staff, said Thursday.

He acknowledged Palestinians won international sympathy and increased world recognition of their cause with the revolt.

Retired Brigadier-General Amos Gilboa, former adviser to Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir on Arab affairs, told reporters: "We are very weak in the sphere of propaganda, we are always reacting, not initiating."

Palestinian militants in the territories not only challenged Israeli rule — they also spurred on the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) to score important diplomatic gains.

The Palestine National Council (PNC) last month declared an independent Palestinian state and accepted U.N. resolutions implying recognition of Israel's right to exist.

PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat issued a joint statement with a group of five American Jewish peace campaigners Wednesday accepting Israel's right to exist and condemning terrorism.

Deputy foreign ministry spokesman Motti Amichai said Israel's world political status did not suffer during the first 11 months of the uprising despite widespread international condemnation of the army's handling of the revolt.

But he said the PNC meeting in Algiers on Nov. 20 was a turning point.

"Until now I think we succeeded in transmitting to the decision-makers in the Western world our preoccupation and the graveness of the security problems of Israel.

"Because of the way the PNC declarations were interpreted in Western capitals, this task is beginning to be more difficult now and this is probably the biggest task we have before us in the near future," Amichai said.

Israeli leaders rejected PLO acceptance of Israel as a "publicity stunt" and a ploy to destroy the Jewish state but several European countries praised Arafat. The Israelis were particularly incensed by the way Sweden gave a welcome usually reserved for heads of state this week but the United States, Israel's closest ally, said the PLO "still had a considerable way to go."

Israeli analysts say the PLO declarations are aimed at

Washington, which has said it will only talk to the PLO when it recognises Israel, stops terrorism and accepts U.N. Resolutions 242 and 338 on the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The uprising has pushed Israelis to the right, Israeli analysts say. The result was a slight edge for Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's Likud, far-right and religious parties in Nov. 1 elections.

Amichai said Israelis were initially shocked by the outbreak of the revolt and may have sympathised with the 1.7 million Palestinians struggling against occupation.

When the protests grew more violent and underground Palestinian leaders issued militant declarations, Israelis began to regard the revolt as a threat to their existence.

"It is easier to identify them now as the enemy who wants to take over and no longer as poor refugees trying to get rid of military control," Amichai said.

The Israeli army has had a hard time dealing with the uprising. But commentators say soldiers have grown accustomed to their daily tasks of suppressing protests with beatings, teargas, and bullets.

Chief foreign ministry spokesman Alon Liel said the suffering to both peoples caused by the uprising was "creating deep scars which are not helping the process of peace in the region."

Government press office director Yoram Ettinger expressed concern that the uprising was spilling over from the occupied territories with Arab citizens in Israel itself taking part in protests and strikes.

CLANDESTINE HIGHER EDUCATION NETWORK

FOR NEWS - 7/11/88

Palestinian varsities defy Israel

By GAIL FITZER in Ramallah (West Bank)

IN HOMES, mosques, churches, high schools and offices, thousands of Palestinian students are secretly continuing their university studies in defiance of Israeli authorities.

Frustrated by Israel's closure of all five universities in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, Palestinian educators have set up a clandestine network for higher education.

"We're not making any gains. We're simply trying to minimise the brutality of this collective punishment," said Mr Albert Aghazarian, spokesman for Bir Zeit University near Ramallah.

"We are trying to maintain universities with structure so that they won't wither away."

Israel closed four universities in the West Bank, one in the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem's technical colleges on January 8 1988, a month after the outbreak of the Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation, now in its 16th month. The Government said they were centres of anti-Israeli violence.

The closure left 18,000 students with an incomplete education.

Police said this month they had uncovered underground classes in East Jerusalem run by three Palestinian universities and warned high school principals to stop the university classes held in their schools.

"I don't think we have to yield and stop teaching our students ... we consider the closing of the universities and schools a massacre of education," said Mr Musa Dar-

wish, spokesman for Bethlehem University.

Prof Sa'eb Erakat, a political science professor at An-Najah University in Nablus, said several teachers and students were arrested earlier this year while taking part in classes at a building owned by the Friends of An-Najah University.

"It's a very difficult task to go about education in such a manner. Israel is the first nation ever to use education as a means of punishment," he said.

Bir Zeit expanded its underground education network this month to include 200 professors and more than 1,000 students, up from 400. Its normal student body is 2,500.

"Right now for the first time, we are trying to teach students who are not close to graduation," said Mr Nabeel Kassis, vice-president for academic affairs.

He was interviewed off campus

in Bir Zeit's Board of Trustees building in Ramallah, the only university building not closed down by the army.

Some 150 students have graduated since the university was officially closed. About 250 students graduated each year when it was open.

Lecturers insist they are not violating Israeli orders by teaching outside the university campuses.

Checkpoints

Mr Kassis said lecturers are not contravening any direct orders. "We're only doing regular teaching in unusually difficult circumstances.

"What we are doing is regular teaching with strict controls. We do not control how they meet, but we control the outcome," Mr Kassis said.

In the underground education

network, students have more personal contact with teachers, classes are smaller and the mode of instruction is closer to a tutorial. Students have a greater burden of responsibility since classes meet less often.

But teachers and students say problems abound.

Universities do not have the staff, money or facilities to teach their whole student body or to take in new students.

Faculty members are often unable to reach students in distant villages. Military curfews and checkpoints prevent students from reaching their classes and professors are frequently hard pressed to find places where they can teach.

Students are deprived of modern facilities as they may not use on-campus university laboratories or libraries.

University officials said most students had not paid tuition fees

during the uprising and universities had not paid faculty salaries, which were provided instead by the Association of Arab Universities via Jordan.

Professors and students say defying the Israeli closure increases their motivation.

"I think the academic level has been better during the intifada (uprising) because students are more motivated," said Mr Majed Abdel Fattah, 24, head of Bir Zeit's student council.

"Now the teachers are doing more. They think it's a kind of struggle against a policy of spreading ignorance."

The army appears to have turned a blind eye to clandestine university classes in the West Bank.

"I think they know that we are teaching and they say they are sort of overlooking that," said Mr Gabi Baramki, vice-president of Bir Zeit. Heater

TORONTO GLOBE P.1

BY GAIL FITZER

Reuter News Agency

JERUSALEM

Israel and Egypt are pursuing intensive negotiations trying to arrange a visit to Jerusalem by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, a spokesman for Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir said yesterday.

Preparations began as Mr. Shamir worked on a Middle East peace initiative based on the Camp David accords with Egypt, which envisaged limited Palestinian self-rule in the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Aides said the proposals, which Mr. Shamir would announce before visiting Washington in February, involve adjustments to the 1978 accords.

Mr. Mubarak, who has not visited Israel during his eight years in power, said in a weekend newspaper interview that he is willing to do so if it would yield positive results for peace.

"There are now intensive contacts with Egypt about promoting the possibility of a Mubarak visit to Israel," Mr. Shamir's spokesman, Yossi Ahimeir, said. "The Prime Minister is very interested in seeing Mr. Mubarak in Israel."

Foreign Minister Moshe Arens held talks with Egyptian Ambassador Mohammed Bassiouny yesterday in his first meeting with a foreign envoy.

Egyptian Foreign Ministry officials said in Cairo that they were unaware of contacts on a possible Mubarak visit. One senior official said the ministry has not been briefed by Mr. Bassiouny on his meeting with Mr. Arens.

Egyptian officials were skeptical of Israel's willingness to meet Mr. Mubarak's conditions for a visit — that it would lead to a solution of the Palestinian issue and "a just peace."

A Palestine Liberation Organization spokesman, Ahmed Abdul-Rahman, said in Baghdad that Mr. Shamir's peace initiative is a political manoeuvre aimed at gaining time.

"The Israeli government has no way to solve the Palestinian question other than an international conference and UN resolutions," he said.

Mr. Ahimeir said Mr. Shamir wants to implement the Camp David provisions for limited Palestinian self-rule, including the election of an administrative council, as soon as possible.

"He is ready to make adjustments, to hear demands from Jordan — which is not a partner right now — and to continue the negotiations about the scheme for autonomy," he said.

Israeli leaders, including Mr. Arens and Deputy Prime Minister Shimon Peres, have said the new national unity government that took office last week must produce a peace initiative to counter a PLO diplomatic offensive.

Shamir

● From Page One

renounced terrorism in Geneva this month.

The new Israeli cabinet has pledged not to negotiate with the PLO, but thousands of Israelis demonstrated in Tel Aviv on Saturday to urge the government to talk peace with the Palestinian organization.

Egypt has said the Camp David accords are outdated and has called for an international Middle East peace conference that would include the PLO.

Jordan, other Arab states and the clandestine leaders of a year-old Palestinian uprising in the occupied territories have rejected the accords and insisted on an international conference with PLO participation.

Mr. Shamir rejects a UN-sponsored peace conference but has agreed that the United States and the Soviet Union could provide a joint umbrella for peace talks involving Israel, Egypt, Jordan and non-PLO Palestinian representatives.

The Camp David accords, the basis of Israel's 1979 peace treaty with Egypt, call for negotiations on the final status of the West Bank and Gaza Strip to begin three years after Palestinian self-rule is implemented.

Israel captured the territories, home to 1.75 million Palestinians, from Jordan and Egypt in the 1967 Six-Day War. More than 330 Palestinians and 14 Israelis have died in the anti-Israel revolt that erupted in the occupied areas on Dec. 9, 1987.

Shcharansky says no to politics



ANATOLY Shcharansky: Fighting for Soviet Jewry.

JERUSALEM: A year after he was freed from a Soviet labour camp and allowed to leave for Israel, Anatoly Shcharansky is resisting calls to enter politics but fighting hard for Soviet Jewry.

Some Israelis have suggested the diminutive, balding, former dissident should run for president of Israel.

He has become a national symbol, with his zest in starting a new life here after nine years in Soviet jails and labour camps and a 12-year separation from his wife, Avital.

In Israeli eyes, Mr Shcharansky is the model Soviet Jew — one of a minority who wish to emigrate to Israel rather than the United States.

Interviewed in his sparsely decorated Jerusalem office, he joked: "The more I say I am not going into politics, the less people believe me. I have no plans to go into politics."

Shcharansky, 39, said political office would hinder his attempts to pressure Soviet authorities to increase Jewish emigration.

"I think the moment I join any party, my opportunities will decrease because I'll immediately become the target of attacks. Politicians are among the most hated people," he said.

He described his first year of freedom in Israel as the happiest time of his life.

Last August, his mother, brother, sister-in-law and Jan asphaw arrived in Israel. In November, Avital gave birth to their daughter, Rachel, nine months after their reunion.

"It has been the beginning of that life of which we were deprived for so many years. It was also a year of continuation of the struggle for Soviet Jewry in which I could finally take part with all my energy," he said.

Shcharansky married Avital a day before she left the Soviet Union in 1974, expecting to join her soon. After he was refused an exit visa, he became the spokesman for the Jewish emigration movement in Moscow.

Three years later, he was arrested on charges of spying for the United States — an accusation he consistently denied. In 1978, he was sentenced to 13 years in prison and labour camps

by
Gail Fitzer

and became the focus of an international human rights campaign.

After an intensive drive for his release led by Avital, Moscow released Mr Shcharansky a year ago this week in an east-west prisoner exchange in Berlin.

He was given a hero's welcome here by emotional crowds and the entire Israeli leadership, including the then Prime Minister Shimon Peres.

He was carried shoulder-high to the Wailing Wall, Judaism's holiest site, surrounded by thousands of jubilant Israelis.

"The only thing I miss about Russia is good people. But I don't miss Russia as a country or as a place to live," he said.

Mr Shcharansky, who has adopted the Hebrew name Natap, is writing his autobiography. Most of the profits will go toward the struggle for Soviet Jewish emigration, he said.

Since the late 1960s, only 175,000 of a total 280,000 Jews who left the Soviet Union came to Israel and Moscow has cited these figures as a reason to prohibit Jewish emigration.

A senior Israeli immigration official said this week at least 90 percent of Soviet Jews would choose the United States over Israel if given the choice.

There are mounting calls for emigrating Jews to be forced to settle here, by withdrawing their refugee status in America.

Mr Shcharansky opposes compulsion. "I prefer that as many Jews as possible will come to Israel. But thank God those people who appear in the free world have freedom of choice," he said.

He said he saw a need for more tolerance and dialogue between all sectors of society to solve Israel's problems, mainly the Arab-Israeli conflict and the tensions between religious and secular Jews.

"I would like to see much more tolerance,

much more patience — I think we need dialogues in all directions — religious-non-religious, left right, Jew-Arab," he said.

Asked if he would also protest at human rights violations by Israel against Arab prisoners and Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and Gaza strip, Mr Shcharansky replied: "I don't see myself as any model or leader in such terms, but simply, as a loyal citizen interested that this state will be both Jewish and democratic. I think each time I see the opportunity to contribute to it, I will always do so."

He met two Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) supporters in November who sought his help to prevent the expulsion of Israel of an east Jerusalem Arab newspaper editor.

Sharply criticised by Israeli right-wingers, Mr Shcharansky publicly attacked the PLO and denied knowing the Arabs were PLO supporters.

He said comparisons between human rights violations in the Soviet Union and Israel were "very dangerous."

"It is important to understand the nature of these problems is very different. Here we have free society — which faces some very serious problems connected with its struggle against world terrorism.

"When instead of trying to analyse the problems which exist and which need dialogue we help these terrorists to present themselves as human rights activists, we do a very bad service to democratic society," he said.

Mr Shcharansky said the fact that during the separation, Avital had become an observant Orthodox Jew, unlike himself, had not caused marital problems.

"I think there was not a big difference between me and Avital in our feelings. We were expressing the same things in different forms and we continue to be a very democratic and tolerant family," he said.

Mr Shcharansky is trying to shield his personal life from the media while using his fame to advance his cause.

"We are doing our best to destroy this celebrity status, but I cannot say we are always successful in this struggle," he said. — Reuter

(AM-ISRAEL-RABIN (SCHEDULED, NEWS ANALYSIS))

RABIN, FAILING TO END REVOLT, IS NEWEST ISRAELI PEACE-SEEKER:

By Gail Fitzer

JERUSALEM, Feb 7. Reuter - Defence Minister Yitzhak Rabin, having failed to quash an Arab revolt with Israeli military might, is scouring his own prisons for a Palestinian negotiating partner.

Rabin, a former chief of staff who heads the hawkish faction in the Labour party, has eclipsed Labour leader Shimon Peres as the party's chief peace-seeker.

He has arranged numerous meetings in recent weeks between senior military officials and Palestinians he himself ordered imprisoned in a bid to suppress the uprising in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip.

After 14 months of the revolt, Rabin has admitted he cannot end the violence with an "iron fist" alone. He recently visited Palestinian prisoners at the Ketzioth detention camp in southern Israel to promote his personal peace plan.

His proposals call for elections in the occupied territories to choose local representatives to peace talks with Israel, a period of self-rule in the areas and an eventual Palestinian confederation with either Jordan or Israel.

Rabin legitimised talks with prominent PLO supporters, including Faisal al-Husseini, whom he kept in jail for 18 of the past 21 months. Israel regards Hussein as the senior PLO activist in the West Bank.

Israel has vowed never to speak with the Palestine Liberation Organisation and Rabin is searching for ways to bypass the group.

Critics say his attempts to drive a wedge between Palestinians in the territories and the PLO leadership in Tunis have made it more difficult for local leaders to talk to Israel.

By building up Hussein as a potential negotiating partner, Rabin undermined the Palestinian leader's stature and forced him to step back from a conditional endorsement of elections.

Facing international criticism over the army's use of force against the uprising, and pressure on Israel to produce new peace proposals, Rabin launched his initiative in January.

"The problem now is that after 14 months of the intifada (Arabic for uprising), we are facing a turning point, especially in our relations with the United States. The speculation from everywhere in Washington is that they are expecting some change in our policy," a senior defence source said.

Rabin launched his initiative while the more dovish Peres, who championed an international peace conference as foreign minister in the previous cabinet, was bogged down in Israel's economic problems as finance minister.

At the same time, the 66-year-old Rabin has upstaged Likud Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir who promised the world he would announce an Israeli initiative when he visits Washington in April.

"The problem is that Shamir and (Foreign Minister Moshe) Arens are very clever and intelligent, but according to their ideology, they cannot move or do anything," the defence source said.

"Even if they spread rumours about changes, the furthest they can go is the autonomy story from about 10 years ago," the source said in a reference to the 1978 Camp David peace accords.

Shamir has cited Camp David, rejected by almost the entire Arab world, as the basis for any peace settlement.

"There is a vacuum now and that's the reason Rabin has issued his proposal. He thinks we came to a turning point and we have to decide," the source said.

Shamir blocked Peres' efforts to convene a Middle East peace conference during the previous government, but analysts say Shamir trusts the more hawkish Rabin and is likely to give him a freer hand in pursuing peace moves.

"He (Shamir) knows Rabin very well. He relies on him more than on Peres and he knows his intentions, so he's not worried as in the previous cabinet," a source close to Shamir said.

Some Shamir aides criticised Rabin for publicising his plan in the media without government approval.

"We prefer that such ideas will be discussed in the proper institutions, perhaps at the inner cabinet and not through the media," said Shamir's bureau chief Yossi Ahimeir.

Israeli commentators accused Rabin of launching his plan as a public relations exercise.

"The idea is to create the impression among the Americans and perhaps also the West Europeans that Israel is genuinely interested in finding an interlocutor who can deliver the goods and achieve agreements acceptable to the Palestinian leadership abroad," Jerusalem Post Middle East editor Yehuda Litani wrote.

"The sad fact, however, is that Israel is unable and undoubtedly also unwilling to make far-reaching concessions at this stage. So it has to rely on shadow boxing and smokescreens to conceal the paralysis of its policy," he said.

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