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Next Israeli Redeployment - ??

[January 21] PNA Chairman Yasser Arafat and Israeli PN Ehud Barak had agreed earlier this week to speed up talks in order to try to meet the February deadline for a framework Israeli-Palestinian agreement. Yasser Arafat, in Washington for talks with President Clinton, claimed that he and Ehud Barak had agreed that the next Israeli redeployment, originally scheduled for January 20 would be carried out in the next two weeks. In the Israeli press, coverage of the Palestinian peace process has been sidelined. This is partly due to sensational headlines concerning the investigation into alleged misconduct of President Weizmann, but one has a suspicion that is not the only reason,.

Israel-Syria Peace Talks Stalled

[January 19] Peace talks between Israel and Syria ground to a halt after Syrian negotiators insisted that the Israelis make a commitment to withdraw to the June 4, 1967 borders, evacuating all of the Golan heights including territories conquered by Syria in 1948, before continuing with the negotiations. This put an end to the Israeli strategy of attempting to negotiating other issues such as security and the nature of the peace first. Despite the deceptive closeness of the two sides expressed in the U.S. bridging document, which they chose to call a "Peace Treaty," it appears that neither side is willing, or able because of internal pressures, to take the steps required to bring about peace. Given the cold atmosphere and noted lack of handshakes on the part of the Syrians, as well as growing right-wing agitation in Israel against return of the Golan, it was unlikely that Barak could commit to such a withdrawal, which would have to pass a referendum. As long as the Israelis could not commit to withdraw, it was impossible for the Syrians to make any concessions, especially since the proceedings of the meetings and documents were being leaked to the press.

1948 Massacre at Tantura

[Jan 21, 2000] Teddy Katz, an Israeli historian, claims to have uncovered credible evidence that Israeli troops massacred 200 Palestinians in the Palestinian village of Tantura, near Haifa, on May 22-23 1948. According to articles run by the Reuters news and Israel's Ma'ariv newspaper, Katz, who did the research for a masters degree, said he had spoken to witnesses including soldiers who were present to support his findings. "It started at night and was over in a few hours," Katz said, "From testimonies and information I got from Jewish and Arab witnesses and from soldiers who were there, at least 200 people from the village of Tantura were killed by Israeli troops..." "From the numbers, this is definitely one of the biggest massacres," he told Reuters. However, there is no accurate count of how

many were killed, and one Arab account claimed 78 dead.

The Israeli army said in a statement it had no evidence of a massacre in Tantura in May 1948. But the army said once it had the research in hand, "it will be able to conduct a renewed examination of the subject." Katz said 14 Israeli soldiers were killed in the attack on the village. The man who led the assault was quoted as saying the villagers' deaths were a consequence of war and that reports of a massacre were "just stories." Shlomo Ambar, who was an explosives expert in the Alexandroni brigade and was present in the village, confirmed the massacre accounts of Arab witnesses in interviews with Katz, noting that no women or children were harmed, but that in addition to the shooting of unarmed prisoners there was also looting. He claimed that it was the one time that he remembers that troops ignored the bounds of decency and international law in dealing with the enemy, and can find no excuse for it. Subsequently, however he claimed that Katz misquoted him, as did others.

Tantura, near Haifa in northern Israel, numbered 1,500 residents at the time. It was later razed to make way for a parking lot for a nearby beach at Dor, and the Nahsholim kibbutz, or cooperative farm. The bodies are supposedly buried under the parking lot. Katz said the killing spree in Tantura was "more tragic and bigger" than in the village of [Deir Yassin just west of Jerusalem](#), where scores of Palestinians were killed on April 9, 1948, in an assault by Jewish dissident forces of the Irgun and Lehi. Unlike the Deir Yassin massacre, performed by poorly trained dissident terrorist groups, the Tantura massacre was performed by elite troops of the crack Palmach Alexandroni brigade, though apparently without the knowledge or consent of their superiors.

Meir Pail, who has lead the way in uncovering the facts about the Deir Yassin massacre, says he finds the report by Katz must be believed, as unpalatable as it is. Prof. Yoav Gelber, a historian of the 1948 War of Independence, says reports such as these without documentation are not to be believed, but Prof. Asa Kasher, who wrote the code of ethics of the IDF said "in Tantura a war crime was carried out."

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