

NATION & WORLD

No agreement as Israel-Syria negotiations near end

BY BARRY SCHWEID
ASSOCIATED PRESS

SHEPHERDSTOWN, W.Va. — Despite President Clinton's renewed intervention, Israel-Syria negotiations on a land-for-peace treaty appeared to be nearing a close Sunday without even a tentative agreement.

Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak, describing the weeklong talks over territory, peace terms, water and security as complex and difficult, was making plans to depart for home Monday.

Diplomatic sources said Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa was likely to follow on Tuesday.

On the sensitive issue of establishing a new border once Israel pulls back on the Golan Heights, Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy said "nothing has been agreed upon."

Clinton, who had intervened in the negotiations four times before Sunday, headed back to the site of the talks at nightfall Sunday. "He's going for meetings," a White House official said. "The process continues."

Committees met Sunday on all the key issues, and State Department spokesman James Rubin said the two sides responded positively to a statement presented Friday by the United States.

The seven-page document, which is a summary of points of accord and discord, could become the basis for an eventual "core agreement," Rubin said.

But he said Israel and Syria still faced "enormous decisions" and "we don't ex-

pect those decisions to be made in a matter of days."

American mediators hadn't offered "bridging proposals" designed to close the gap where the two sides were in disagreement, Rubin added.

In Jerusalem, Israel Cabinet Minister Haim Ramon said Syria had refused to permit Israel to retain an early warning station on the Golan Heights once it's relinquished.

But, Ramon said, Syria was prepared to consider a station manned mostly by American and French personnel, with a Syrian presence and a symbolic Israeli presence.

Yielding the plateau would strip Israel of a capability to watch any Syrian military preparations, including tanks rolling down toward the border.

Barak and al-Sharaa could leave behind experts to continue deliberations. But Rubin said there was no decision on how negotiations would proceed, although he said the United States wanted full-blown negotiations to reconvene "sooner rather than later."

"There is no doubt that the negotiation is difficult," Barak told Israeli reporters while touring the Antietam National Battlefield, a Civil War site in Sharpsburg, Md., with Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

In his first public remarks since the talks began Jan. 3, Barak said "the negotiation is very complex."

The prime minister, speaking Hebrew, also gave assurances to the Israeli public that "we will not sign an agree-

ment unless, in our opinion, it will strengthen the security of Israel and address its vital needs."

Israel is contemplating a withdrawal from the Golan Heights, a border high-ground with a commanding view of Syria, in exchange for a peace treaty.

Barak, his wife, Nava, and Levy were shown a 26-minute documentary film recreating the Antietam battle in which North and South suffered 22,726 casualties on Sept. 17, 1862.

They also listened to a lecture about the blood day from a National Park Service ranger and Bruce Reidel, who is on the Near East desk at the National Security Council and a Civil War buff.

Albright then hosted a luncheon for Barak at Hillsboro, her Virginia retreat across the border from West Virginia, and returned to the secluded negotiations site just outside Shepherdstown to meet with al-Sharaa.

Also Sunday, *Al-Hayat*, a Saudi news-

paper published in London, said Israel had agreed to pull back to the 1923 border with Syria and that Syria was insisting on a deeper pullback, to the border that existed at the eve of the 1967 Mideast war.

Rubin said the account wasn't credible. He told reporters the newspaper's report differed in "substantive ways" from the document prepared at Albright's direction and presented by Clinton to Barak and al-Sharaa on Friday.

In Syria, the state-run *Al-Thawra* newspaper said Sunday that the West Virginia peace talks are "in serious danger."

"It is clear that there are Israeli directives to ... break up the talks in an attempt to add hurdles and hamper them to leave the political process spinning in place," the newspaper said in an editorial.



CHECHNYA

from page A5

Kukhareenko said. The Russians liberated the post. The rebels' fate wasn't known.

Chechen presidential spokesman Selim Abdulmuslimov told the Interfax news agency that about 500 rebels took over the center of Shali on Sunday, raising a green Chechen flag, and that federal troops were fleeing. But the military

reporter didn't notice any unusual military movements outside the town on Sunday.

As federal forces have intensified their assault on Grozny and the southern mountains, the rebels have promised to wage a guerrilla war in areas already controlled by Russian troops.

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