

# JTA daily news bulletin

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## White House Officials Say Nixon's Mideast Statement Reaffirms Existing Policy

WASHINGTON, Jan. 26 (JTA)--White House officials said Monday that President Nixon was merely reaffirming existing policy in his message on arms and other matters issued Sunday. The message was sent to the "National Emergency Conference on Peace in the Middle East," an assembly of over 1,000 Jewish leaders from throughout the nation. The portion of the message that pledged U.S. aid to Israel to maintain a balance has caused an angry protest from the Arab nations.

White House spokesman Ronald Ziegler said that the President was reaffirming existing policy in stating that the United States would not hesitate to arm friendly states such as Israel if need arose. Mr. Ziegler said the remarks were not linked with the new French-Libyan arms deal. White House sources said that U.S. policies were misunderstood and misinterpreted by Israel's supporters and that the President sent the message to reaffirm and clarify the American stand on Israel.

Mr. Ziegler told the press at a briefing separate from the informal remarks of other officials that any additional arms sold to Israel would be on a "purchase basis" rather than in the form of a free grant. The spokesman was asked if the U.S. might also sell arms to the Arab states to maintain a balance. He replied that he was "not in a position to expand on our statement of yesterday." He referred to the President's message. Mr. Ziegler was asked if the President considered that an imbalance now existed. He replied that "we, of course, in reviewing the situation, will consider all aspects. But I wouldn't want to make a flat statement this afternoon." White House officials stressed that U.S. peace moves have created impressions regarded by the President as erroneous and that he issued the statement to correct any misunderstanding.

## Conference Urges Rescinding Of State Department's Specific Mideast Proposals

WASHINGTON, Jan. 26 (JTA)--The Nixon administration was urged Monday by a National Conference of Jewish leaders to rescind the State Department's "specific proposals" for a Middle East settlement "so that Arab-Israeli negotiations which President Nixon has called for will indeed be undertaken without pre-conditions." A resolution adopted by the Conference of over 1,000 leaders of national Jewish organizations and local Jewish communities praised President Nixon's message to the conference.

But the delegates, concluding a two day conference, criticized attempts by the U.S. and other big powers to draft the framework for an Arab-Israel settlement. Such efforts, their resolutions declared, "have in fact impeded progress toward a genuine peace." Another resolution condemned France's "anti-Israel and pro-Arab policy" and called on French President Georges Pompidou "to reverse it and lift the arms embargo against Israel." By its massive arms shipments to Libya, France "joins the Soviet Union in surrendering any credibility as to her neutrality or objectivity as a participant in the Four Power talks."

The resolution differentiated between the actions of the Pompidou regime and the "genuine sympathy and friendship extended by the French people to Israel in the past." Dr. William A. Wexler, president of B'nai B'rith and chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, the coalition that sponsored the Conference, met Monday with French Ambassador Charles Lucet. A number of Jewish leaders participated in the meeting at the French embassy. Conference delegates spent the day calling on members of Congress representing the 80 communities from which the delegates came. They met over 200 representatives and senators. Congressmen accorded the delegates "friendly receptions."

## Proposals Termed Inimical To Cause Of Peace In Middle East

In calling for withdrawal of the proposals submitted by the State Department at bilateral and Big Four talks, the conference resolution said the initiatives "suggest pre-determined Egypt-Israel and Jordan-Israel borders; that Jordan share in the administration of Jerusalem; and that the Arab refugees be repatriated under a formula that would flood Israel with those bent upon its destruction." The resolution said such proposals "endanger the security of Israel and imperil the cause of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East."

Rabbi Herschel Schacter of New York, General Chairman of the Conference, said he was gratified by the President's "assurances on the need for Arab-Israeli negotiations." But he warned that "Israel must not be bound or limited in those negotiations by the State Department's proposals." He said that the proposals must be withdrawn "if the negotiations are to have any meaning and any chance of success." The Conference urged the U.S. to provide Israel with "sufficient economic and military strength to deter any Arab ruler from aggression." The resolution said that "in the light of the massive arms shipments to Arab states by the Soviet Union, France and other countries, it is imperative that the U.S. continue to support the security of Israel with the military equipment she so urgently requires."

## Israeli Officials Hail Nixon's Statement As Eloquent Expression Of Friendship

JERUSALEM, Jan. 26 (JTA)--President Richard M. Nixon's message to the American-Jewish leadership conference in Washington, D.C. yesterday was hailed by Premier Golda Meir as an "eloquent expression" of "the friendship of the United States for Israel and its concern for Israel's security and peace." Mrs. Meir issued her statement last night in response to questions by newsmen. She said she saw reflected in the sentiments and policies of the Nixon message, "the attitude which I encountered in my conversations with the President last September and which I reported upon my return." Mrs. Meir said, "Being deeply concerned at certain United States diplomatic initiatives, we have never lost sight and always gave expression to the broad range of interests and objectives that our two countries have in common."

Mrs. Meir's apparent satisfaction with the President's message was echoed by several Israeli newspapers which received and published its full text. The evening daily Maariv said it represented "a halt to the erosion of the American position" which "had been obvious from the speech by (Secretary of State) William P. Rogers." Haaretz saw in the Nixon message, a reversal by the President of the policies followed by his State Department.

Mrs. Meir said in her official statement, "The sincere quest for a real and lasting peace was always the primary goal of both the United States and Israel. I am hopeful that the President's message and policies based on it will convince all concerned that this goal can be established as the President himself indicates, only through a freely negotiated agreement between the parties to the conflict. Until peace is established, Israel must be in a position to deter threats to its security. In this context I have noted with gratification President Nixon's statement that his Government is prepared to supply military equipment necessary to support our efforts to defend the safety of our people. The urgency of assisting Israel to maintain its capability to deter aggression and to defend itself has become more acute in the light of recent developments in the area regarding the massive supply of military equipment to the Arab countries."

## French Political Spokesmen, Right And Left, Assail Libya Arms Deal

PARIS, Jan. 26 (JTA)--French political figures of all complexions, including Gaullists and even sympathizers with the Arab cause, continued today to denounce the Government's arms deal with Libya. The main points of their criticism was that the sale of Mirage jets and other modern military equipment to the militant leftist regime in Tripoli endangered peace and jeopardized the integrity and honor of France.

Former Foreign Minister Georges Bidault declared today that "from the beginning to the end of this affair there has been deceit, double dealing and lies." The Federal Committee, a body presided over by the pro-Arab, Robert Buron, said in a published statement that French policies "can have serious consequences for world peace." The right-wing leader, Tixier Vignancourt, called France's Mideast policy "ridiculous" and Jean Lacanuet, the re-elected president of the French Centrist faction criticized it in even harsher terms. A Gaullist Deputy, Jacques Mercier, said in a speech yesterday that "the French Government's decision to sell Mirage planes to Libya and the manner in which it was reached may have serious consequences for French public opinion."

Government circles have adopted the attitude that verbal assaults cannot force a change of policy. But the weekly Nouvelle Observateur warned today that if Americans were unkind to President Georges Pompidou on his forthcoming visit to the United States, French national feelings would be hurt and would be transformed into anti-Semitism. The paper said it would be advisable if "people of good will advised both Israel and the American Jews to behave well." It added, however, that "no matter what one's position is on the Palestine affair, this latest maneuver (the Libyan arms deal) makes one sick."

## Death Toll From Explosion Continues To Rise; Committee Continues Probe

TEL AVIV, Jan. 26 (JTA)--The death toll rose to 20 in the aftermath of the ammunition explosion at Eilat's military harbor Saturday afternoon. The blast killed 18 Israeli soldiers and civilian workers, most of them instantly, and wounded 42 others. Two of the wounded succumbed today as funeral services were held for the other dead in a half dozen cities, towns and settlements all over the country. A military committee named by Chief of Staff Gen. Haim Bar Lev is investigating the cause of the disaster but has issued no statement yet. It is generally believed now that the explosion was touched off by an active mine, part of a truckload of mines being unloaded at the military dock. The mines were brought to Eilat reportedly after being planted on the Egyptian island of Shadwan in the Gulf of Suez by Israeli paratroopers who occupied the island for 32 hours last week.

It was not clear why the Israelis removed the mines once they had been laid, as Egyptian forces presumably will return to Shadwan. The Israelis also removed tons of Egyptian military hardware and ammunition and an entire Decca radar unit. According to unofficial reports, six tons of mines were returned to Eilat and were de-activated while in transit. But due to an error or oversight, one of them was "live" when it was being discharged as part of a truckload on to the Eilat dock. A jar to the truck touched it off causing the truck to blow up, it was said today.

Military authorities released the names of 16 dead yesterday. The names of the other four, released today, are Sgt. Maj. Yeshayahu Miller, 25, of Mishmar Hashiva; Pvt. Yoram Alfi, 26, of Tel Aviv; Pvt. Shmuel Posner, 39, of Holon; and Sgt. Maj. Moshe Maayan, 22, of Holon. Most of the injured soldiers are at Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem, Beilinson Hospital in Petach Tikvah and Tel Hashomer Hospital in Tel Aviv.

## Move Developing In Israel To Reverse Supreme Court Ruling On Who Is A Jew

JERUSALEM, Jan. 26 (JTA)--The Ministry of Interior today ordered its Haifa office to delay the registration of the children of Lt. Commander Benjamin Shalit as Jews by nationality. The instructions were issued in the expectation that the Knesset will pass legislation nullifying last Friday's majority ruling by the Israeli Supreme Court which allows Israelis to hold Jewish nationality without being Jewish by religion. The Shalit children, though Israeli citizens by birth, are not considered Jewish according to halachah--religious law--because their Scottish-born mother who professes no religion, was never converted to Judaism.

The Orthodox National Religious Party threatened Sunday to resign from the national coalition government unless legislation is introduced in the Knesset reversing the high court's decision. Most political observers believe the religious party will have its way as it has on previous occasions when issues arose questioning the Orthodox interpretation of who is a Jew. Labor Party and NRP leaders met last night and reportedly reached an "understanding." The right-wing nationalist Herut party, a component of Gahal, the second largest political faction in Israel, came out in support of the Religious Party's demands. Its Gahal partner, the Liberal Party, is yet to be heard from.

The Attorney General said today that he was considering initiating criminal proceedings against persons who have written threatening letters to Supreme Court justices over the Shalit case. The justices disclosed that they received many letters while the case was still sub judice trying to influence their decisions, which constitutes contempt of court under Israeli law. They did not disclose the identity of the letter writers but said that some of the letters came from Government sources and were written on official State letterheads. The Attorney General said the writers of those letters enjoyed parliamentary immunity and could not be prosecuted. But threatening letters, received after the court ruling in the case by the five justices who wrote the majority decision, could be the subject of criminal proceedings, he said. He said that those letters came mostly from religious fanatics who occupy no official positions. The number of letters was not disclosed.

### Scheduled Cabinet Meeting Expected To Nullify Legislation

The Cabinet will hold a special session on Thursday on the issue of the high court's decision and is expected to initiate nullifying legislation. The exact form the legislation will take is uncertain but quick action is expected. Observers believe the Government will introduce secondary legislation that will enable the Minister of Interior to instruct clerks to register Israelis as Jews according to religious precepts. These instructions could be amended by another Interior Minister at some future time. The present Minister of Interior, Moshe Shapiro, heads the National Religious Party.

Observers said the Government is anxious not to delay the matter because delay would enable more extreme religious parties to demand stricter legislation or secular parties to seek parliamentary affirmation of the court's decision. One possibility mentioned is that the Government will drop the category of nationality from identity cards, leaving only religion. That would render the Supreme Court's decision academic. Such a move was suggested when the high court first opened hearings in the Shalit case nearly a year ago but was rejected by the Government at the time.

The Government is most anxious to avoid a cabinet crisis that would be precipitated by a Religious Party walk-out and also to mute the controversy which has aroused passions on both sides of the issue. (The Court's decision has already had echoes in Jewish communities abroad where it was bitterly denounced in Orthodox circles. Rabbi Henry Siegman, executive vice president of the Synagogue Council of America, an umbrella organization embracing the Reform, Conservative and Orthodox branches of Judaism in America, said yesterday that the decision "may very well trigger something the Jewish community has been trying to avoid--a Kulturkampf, a cultural conflict between religious and secular Jews." Something of a conflict has already developed in Orthodox ranks in the United States. The Rabbinical Alliance, which has often been at odds with other Orthodox factions, today blamed the Israeli Supreme Court's decision on so-called "liberal" Orthodoxy. It claimed that the "liberal" Orthodox rabbinate helped generate an attitude of disregard for the sanctity of Jewish religious law by association with non-Orthodox rabbinic and synagogue bodies. The Orthodox Agudat Israel of America denounced the Israeli court's ruling and claimed that it would "give huge impetus to the vanishing Jew by encouraging assimilation." The organization's executive board contended that the decision removed one of the major deterrents to inter-marriage. It urged "traditional Jews to unite in a massive effort to change the laws of Israel" to conform with the Orthodox concept of Jewish identity.)

## British Officials Deny Charge They Reneged On Sale Of Chieftain Tanks To Israel

LONDON, Jan. 26 (JTA)--Official British circles appeared embarrassed today by Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan's blunt charge that Britain reneged on a deal to sell Israel Chieftain tanks after negotiations between the two countries reached an advanced stage. Gen. Dayan said in Tel Aviv yesterday that Britain was trying to sell the tanks to Libya after going back on a "very firm promise" to Israel.

Government circles denied Gen. Dayan's assertion that Whitehall "thinks it must choose between Israel and the Arabs" and has gone over to the Arab side. They said that both sides get equal treatment with respect to arms supplies and that this had been made clear to Parliament by Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart and to Israeli authorities by Deputy Foreign Secretary George Thomas when he visited Tel Aviv. Gen. Dayan said yesterday that contract negotiations had reached the stage where British technical experts went to Israel to discuss design changes suggested by the Israelis and accepted them. He said Israel had not paid anything for the Chieftain tanks as it had for 50 Mirage jets which the French Government subsequently refused to deliver.

## Egyptian Delegation To UN Gives Its Version Of What Happened At Shadwan Island

UNITED NATIONS, N.Y. (Jan. 26 (JTA))--Ambassador Michael Comay, political advisor to Prime Minister Golda Meir on UN affairs had a meeting this afternoon with Secretary General U Thant. The meeting followed one earlier in the day between Mr. Thant and Ambassador Zayet, the head of the Egyptian delegation. The Israeli Mission scheduled a press conference at UN headquarters for Thursday morning with Ambassador Yosef Tekoah, head of the Israeli mission.

The Egyptian delegation took an unprecedented action today in distributing a press statement reporting that Egyptian forces had "repelled" an Israeli attempt on Shadwan Island. Usually, the Egyptians report Israeli "aggressions" in the form of complaints to the Security Council. This time, the Egyptian version of the episode was put out to the press directly. The Egyptian report asserted the island was uninhabited and housed "a lighthouse and an old British made radar station for the guidance of shipping." According to the Egyptian version the Israelis failed both Thursday and Friday despite heavy numerical superiority "to gain control over the island." The release said similar actions could be expected "in battles the aim of which is to demoralize the people of the UAR and bring them to submission."

## Democratic Senators Assail Administration's Israel Policy As Jeopardy To Peace

WASHINGTON, Jan. 26 (JTA)--A number of Democratic Senators took the Senate floor Monday to assail the administration's policy on Israel. Sen. Joseph Tydings, Maryland, said "I fear a dangerous retrogression in U.S. policy is occurring." He condemned the government's Middle East peace proposals, depicting this initiative as a source of jeopardy to Israel. The Senator said the United States was "morally committed to the preservation of Israel as a Jewish homeland."

Sen. Abraham Ribicoff, of Connecticut, charged that the State Department has been "outclassed and outmaneuvered" by the Soviet Union in the Middle East. He said "we have been left with egg a la russe on our face as a result of the Soviet backtracking while the Israelis are now faced with a serious undercutting of their bargaining position. Regretably, significant concessions were offered, without consultation, by Israel's only major ally, the United States." Sen. Ribicoff said administration policy was undermining Israel but winning no new friends among the Arabs. He asserted that the administration had played into the hands of the Soviet Union. In his view, the U.S. had, by proposing a detailed settlement, too quickly encouraged Arab hostilities and allowed the Arabs to avoid a real settlement.

He said the United States was attempting to bring about "an imposed settlement."

## Hamilton Fish, Former Isolationist; Defends Israel's Right To Armed Defense

NEW YORK, Jan. 26 (JTA)--Former New York Congressman Hamilton Fish who was a leader in the 1930's of the isolationist movement "America First," called upon President Nixon, Secretary of State William P. Rogers, and Congress to preserve Israel and recognize its right to exist through armed defense. Fish, who was the author of the American Balfour Resolution adopted by Congress in 1922, urged support of Israel's existence "against the open and brazen efforts of Soviet Russia to arm all one Party Socialist totalitarian Arab nations for the purpose of destroying the free State of Israel." He stated that as long as Moscow seeks to dominate the Arab nations "the United States should supply needed armaments to Israel to preserve its independence" and added that "there is no substitute for freedom and it is not negotiable." Fish also assailed the sale by France of 100 combat airplanes to Libya. Noting that he recently visited Israel, Fish declared: "Israel is not asking for men or for volunteers but only for the right to buy armaments to defend her independence and security until the different Arab nations agree to definite peace terms with her."

## Black Columnist Back From Israel Reports Favorable Impression

NEW YORK, Jan. 26 (JTA)--Dick Edwards, a columnist for the New York Amsterdam News, the largest Negro weekly newspaper in America, says he thought "This will be the pabulum tour" when he was invited to participate with nine other black journalists in a fact-finding tour of Israel. He said he was convinced that the Israel Government issued the invitation in order to score propaganda points. But in the first of a series of articles, titled "Black Man in Israel" which began in the Amsterdam News this week, Mr. Edwards wrote: "I am going to admit that all of my suspicions were lulled because the tour also included a session with hostile Arabs and Arab leaders and they really showered down on the Israelis, even though we taped the session."

Mr. Edwards said his group was briefed in Jerusalem by Mordechai Lador, of the American desk of the Israel Foreign Ministry who told them that Israel was concerned over Arab efforts to influence the black community in the United States. The journalists asked him how he thought the Arabs were doing in their campaign. Mr. Edwards quoted his reply at length: "Our Arab friends and neighbors, in their activities--what they are trying to project is that here are the Israelis, of European origin, therefore they have pinkish, or a white or a colorless pigmentation--which is only partly true as there are as many dark skinned Israelis as fair skinned....Arabs are not all black either, but many of them are dark or brown. Of course, Israel has ties with western countries, especially the United States. Anti-establishment sentiment which is in the black communities is played up these days. Here is Israel, a friend of the establishment; you are anti-establishment, we are anti-Israeli, therefore you are our friend, says the Arabs." Mr. Lador went on to say, Mr. Edwards reported, that "There is always this kind of mathematical logic which equates certain things and tries to make a full circle out of it. We believe that, rather than try to get out and win everybody over into fighting our neighbor, we try to sit down and settle our differences with our neighbors." Mr. Edwards reported that the Israeli official told the black journalists that he could offer no prediction as to when peace and understanding with the Arabs would come about.