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CABINET REAFFIRMS READINESS TO NEGOTIATE WITH SYRIA ON DISENGAGEMENT AFTER POW LISTS ARE HANDED OVER AND RED CROSS IS PERMITTED TO VISIT POWs.

By David Landau, JTA Jerusalem Bureau Chief

JERUSALEM, Jan. 27 (JTA)--The Cabinet issued a statement today "reiterating Israel's readiness to negotiate with Syria on troop disengagement immediately after the lists of POWs are handed over to Israel and the Red Cross is permitted to visit them." This statement was issued after a seven-hour Cabinet meeting which discussed proposals brought last week from Damascus to Tel Aviv by U.S. Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger which he termed as "constructive ideas." The Cabinet heard reports from Deputy Premier Yigal Allon and Foreign Minister Abba Eban in which they described their talks with Kissinger. Observers saw the positive tone of the Cabinet statement as strengthening earlier assessments that Israel would not reject out of hand the ideas Kissinger brought with him. These ideas are understood to center on some kind of middle-man arrangement whereby the International Red Cross or some other organization would receive the POW lists in advance of any negotiations.

Cabinet Secretary Michael Arnon refused to elaborate on the Cabinet's statement or Kissinger's ideas but sources indicated that the Cabinet, while discussing the broad outlines of what are known to be Kissinger's and Syria's positions and views on disengagement, did not go into maps and details that was thought to be premature so long as no movement is made on the POW issue. But even as the Cabinet was making its decision, a five-hour artillery exchange took place in the Golan Heights. The Syrians opened fire in the Kafr Nassej, Kafr Maas, Rafid Junction and Mazraat Ben Jan areas in the central and southern Golan. Israel returned the artillery and tank fire. There were no casualties. But yesterday in a three-hour exchange of fire in the same area, one Israeli soldier was killed and two wounded. These have been the most serious engagements along the Syrian line since Egypt and Israel signed the disengagement agreement on Jan. 18.

Before the Cabinet session, observers here predicted that Israel would not reject the Kissinger proposals but would try and see them as a basis for further progress. Only if a preliminary arrangement for POW names were attained would Kissinger consider another shuttling visit to the region to try and move the parties towards a disengagement, the observers thought. Well placed sources here say Israel's offer to cede the two Syrian positions on Mt. Hermon and to allow back into the war zone some 15,000 civilian villagers who fled, still stands and is at the center of Kissinger's efforts. In return for this offer Israel demands an actual exchange of prisoners. But, say the sources, there can be no discussion of the offer until the Israeli sine qua non of POW lists and visits is fulfilled.

If progress is made on this problem talks could take place then on actual disengagement. Kissinger is known to think that disengagement should involve Israeli withdrawal to the pre-Yom Kippur line with the interposition of a UNEF force in the vacated area and Syrian reduction of forces (and perhaps parallel Israeli reduction, too). Officials said here over the weekend that Israel had not concretized its position on disengagement since, at the moment, the POW problem was paramount and prevented any progress. The officials could not say what Syria's views on the proposed disengagement would entail, either.

Well placed sources point out that there is far less pressure on Israel now with regard to Syrian disengagement than there was before and during the Israel-Egypt disengagement talks. But the Israeli government is laboring under intense internal and psychological pressure because of the POW issue--and Syria, knowing this, and knowing that it has no real military cards to play, is determined to exploit Israel's concern and sensitivity on this issue to a maximum.

These sources are cautiously confident that with Kissinger's ongoing efforts in Washington a preliminary arrangement can be reached, settling the POW problem and opening the way to substantial disengagement talks. But they stress that the Damascus regime is beset by pressures from within and from without and the extent to which President Assad can maneuver under these pressures will vitally influence the chances of progress. Inside the Syrian Baath, in the Iraqi Baath, and among such extremist Arab regimes as the Libyan, there is still great suspicion of the Israel-Egypt disengagement accord and much wariness over possible Israel-Syria accommodations. Assad would have to be extremely diplomatic and tactful in weathering a course between these potential obstacles, the Israeli sources point out.

KISSINGER: MODERATELY OPTIMISTIC ABOUT ISRAELI-SYRIAN DISENGAGEMENT

NEW YORK, Jan. 27 (JTA)--Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger said today that he was only "moderately optimistic" about the chances of getting disengagement talks underway between Israel and Syria. Speaking to newsmen before conferring for about an hour with United Nations Secretary General Kurt Waldheim in the Waldorf Towers suite of Ambassador to the UN John Scali, Kissinger was reluctant to discuss a report that Israeli and Jordanian officials have already begun to discuss disengagement along the Jordan River.

(In Jerusalem, the Prime Minister's Office issued a statement today denying a report which appeared in the New York Times that Israelis and Jordanians had begun such talks and that under consideration was an Israeli pullback of 13 kilometers with Jordan also demanding the ceding of Jericho. The statement declared that no meetings on disengagement or any other subject had taken place between Israel and Jordan.)

Kissinger praised what he termed the tremendous cooperation of the UN in connection with the Israeli-Egyptian disengagement agreement. Without the UN's role, he said, the accord would never have been possible. Observers noted that Kissinger

ger's praise for the UN and his meeting with Waldheim was an effort to reinsert the world body into the Middle East peace negotiations. The UN had been overshadowed by Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy between Israel and Egypt in working out the accord.

Scali told newsmen that he was satisfied with the progress so far in solving the Mideast crisis but cautioned that there were serious problems ahead. These, he noted, included the disengagement talks between Syria and Israel and the continuing oil embargo "and its role in promoting or lessening the prospects for peace." He described the Israeli-Syrian talks as "perhaps the most sensitive of all."

ISRAELIS CONTINUE TO WITHDRAW

WEST BANK, SUEZ CANAL, Jan. 27 (JTA)--Israeli forces today renewed their withdrawal from the western bank of the Suez Canal after a respite yesterday for the Sabbath. The withdrawal which officially began Friday has been dubbed "The Great Pullout" by Israeli soldiers as hundreds of tanks, half-tanks, troop carriers and trucks, loaded with men and equipment, are moving eastward across the canal. The roads in southern Sinai are jammed with the heavy traffic caused by the pullout.

According to plans, the last Israeli soldier to leave the first cleared area will be a liaison officer with the United Nations and he will inform the UN forces at 8 a.m. tomorrow that the withdrawal has been completed. The UN forces will then step in and six hours later will turn the territory over to the Egyptians. A similar procedure will take place at noon at Kilometer 101.

On Thursday, when the disengagement of forces was worked out, Israeli and Egyptian-based journalists were permitted to mingle for the first time and there were frequent political discussions between Israeli and Egyptian newsmen. Israeli troops have greeted the withdrawal with great joy. It was reported that one group of Israelis was trying to organize a soccer game with Egyptian soldiers before there is total disengagement.

PRESS BARRED FROM SOUTHERN FRONT

TEL AVIV, Jan. 27 (JTA)--The Israeli Journalists Association has expressed its anxiety over the decision of the Defense Ministry to "restrict the work of journalists in fulfilling their journalistic work" in covering the Israeli withdrawal on the southern front. The Association has asked for an urgent meeting with Defense Minister Moshe Dayan. The Foreign Press Association in Israel has also protested against the 72-hour blackout imposed by the army authorities on covering the Israeli withdrawal.

Dayan instructed the army spokesman not to permit the presence of journalists--Israeli and foreign--on the scene when Israelis began to withdraw because such a coverage would have given the impression of a one-sided retreat. The presence of journalists will be permitted, however, when the Egyptians start thinning out their forces on the east bank of the Suez.

This decision was attacked today in editorials by Haaretz and Yediot Aharonot. They stated that hiding technical facts from the public would only increase the disbelief of the public in the government's information machinery. Moreover, it provides the world with an open field for Egyptian-inspired information. Both papers claimed this decision cannot be regarded as motivated by military considerations, but is rather a politically inspired decision.

SEARCH FOR ISRAELI DEAD SOLDIERS EXPECTED TO TAKE MANY WEEKS

TEL AVIV, Jan. 27 (JTA)--The operation of locating, collecting and identifying the bodies of Israeli soldiers killed during the Yom Kippur War in areas now held by Egyptians will take many weeks. Till now--after five days of search--only 17 bodies were found and returned to Israel for identification and burial. There are an estimated 350 bodies in the area of the Egyptian Second Army in the northern Sinai. Chief Army Chaplain, Rabbi Mordechai Firon, is heading this operation in which crews of the army chaplainship and other soldiers are crisscrossing the areas where a search was permitted.

Funeral services will be held tomorrow at the military cemetery of Kiryat Shaul near Tel Aviv for Air Force pilot Maoz Porez who was killed during the first days of the war by Egyptian anti-aircraft fire. In 1968 he was a first officer in the El Al plane that was hijacked to Algeria--the first of the hijackings in the Israeli-Arab war. The body of Mr. Porez was discovered recently and identified.

AMERICAN ORT ADOPTS 1974 BUDGET \$35,360,000 FOR WORK IN 21 COUNTRIES

NEW YORK, Jan. 27 (JTA)--The American ORT Federation concluded its 52nd annual national conference today with the adoption of a 1974 budget of \$35,360,000 for the educational, vocational and economic aid of 70,000 youth and adults in Jewish communities in 21 countries throughout the world. Concluding its three-day conclave at the Americana Hotel, the 750 delegates re-elected Dr. William Haber as national president and designated David Page of Detroit as the 1974 ORT Man of the Year.

Dr. Max M. Braude of Geneva, ORT director general, reported that almost two-thirds of the funds, \$20,184,000, will be allocated for ORT's technical schools in Israel. A large part of the balance, over \$9 million, will be spent in France for the retraining of the almost 300,000 North African Jewish refugees who have resettled there in the past decade. About \$1.5 million will be spent in South America (Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Venezuela) and an equal amount will be divided between the impoverished Jews of Morocco and Iran, both groups of which are largely in the process of emigration.

The ORT has also expended \$25 million for educational retraining programs in 10 sub-Saharan African, Asian and Latin American countries, it was reported by Paul Bernick, executive director. These funds came from the U.S. Agency for International Development, the World Bank and a number of member countries of the United Nations.

Speaking of the Moslem countries, Dr. Braude said: "There is no future for Jews in Moslem countries. In North Africa, once the home of a half million Jews, we have completed our program in Algeria and Tunisia because the Jews left. In Morocco, with a current population of about 40,000, we still served 1300 students last year. But despite fears and concerns, these Jews are leaving very slowly so there is still work to be done there."

On South America, Dr. Braude said that as recently as 10 years ago ORT trained about five hundred students in three countries. Last year, he said, "this grew to 3500 in Argentina, 703 in Brazil, 600 in Uruguay and 800 in Venezuela." In Argentina, as well as the other countries, "the Jews face not only economic uncertainties but fear and civil unrest as well," he said. No matter what the future, "they will prepare for professions and technological careers."

HERZOG: USSR'S ROLE IN MIDEAST OF GREATER IMPORTANCE TO INITIAL SUCCESS OF SYRIA AND EGYPT THAN THE FAILINGS OF ISRAEL'S LEADERSHIP

NEW YORK, Jan. 27 (JTA)—Gen. Chaim Herzog, ORT-Israel president, suggested here last night, that the failings of Israel's leadership were of lesser importance in the initial successes of Egypt and Syria in the Yom Kippur War than the "active, determined part" of the Soviet Union "in preventing peace from coming to the Middle East." Addressing the banquet session of the 52nd annual American ORT conference, Herzog, who is also a military commentator, said that factor deserved consideration by "the devotees of detente, wherever they are," who, he said, could continue "to delude themselves as much as they want." He said the facts showed that "at no stage did the Soviet Union relinquish one iota of its policy and ambitions in the Middle East" or "anywhere else in the world."

He said there was a very strong tendency, both in Israel and in the Jewish world elsewhere, to place a considerable degree of blame on the Israeli leadership for what occurred in Oct. He asserted that he had "no hesitation in apportioning the guilt where it lies," but, he added, "we are tending, by means of the time-honored Jewish process of self-flagellation," to give the picture "a distorted perspective." Herzog declared that the force which attacked Israel on Yom Kippur day on both fronts was roughly equivalent in total force of men, tanks, artillery, planes, to the total force that NATO could muster. It was against this force, he said, "against which many countries might have succumbed, that Israel stood its ground heroically and not only held its ground but finally moved over to counter-attack and to an incredible military victory." He said an Israeli defense force outnumbered 10-1 on the Golan Heights fought off and pushed back an attack backed by 1400 Syrian tanks.

Herzog said the spirit of Israel was such that its forces reached a line within artillery range of Damascus in Syria and occupied 1600 square kilometers of Egyptian territory. He said if it had not been for the intervention of the major powers and the Security Council, the Egyptian Third Army "would have been destroyed within a matter of days and the destruction of the entire Egyptian army would have followed as a result." Herzog said the "political reality" after the October cease-fire was that the Soviet Union and the United States "had resolved not to allow either side to achieve a decision in the area." He said Egyptian hopes to force Israel to remain mobilized indefinitely were frustrated by the fact that the Israeli economy "which you helped build," had shown "an incredible degree of resilience and has proved to be stronger than we ever imagined."

United States support in the \$2.2 billion aid "was a direct answer to this declared Arab policy," he said, adding, "the incredible Jewish outpouring" of help to Israel "had a direct effect on the Arab thinking" about crippling Israel by forcing continued mobilization. He praised Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger for his "incredible drive, tenacity and diplomatic ability" in bringing about the Israeli-Egyptian disengagement accord. He said if the Egyptians honored it, it would be a good one for both countries "because it diminishes the prospects of immediate hostility, removes from Israel the pressures relating to the blocking of the Suez Canal" and creates "a basis for future negotiations."

Herzog stated that if the agreement is not honored by the Egyptians "at least it leaves us with a shortened line of defense, giving us good defensive positions and leaving us with most of the strategic depth afforded by the Sinai Peninsula, to say nothing of the oil fields and Sharm el Sheikh." He added, however, that Israel would not make further geographical moves "without a meaningful change in the attitude of the Egyptians toward Israel, politically and economically." Herzog expressed the view that Israel was now in a position "to find a modus vivendi with Jordan," adding, "within the framework of this we have to seek a way also to meet the problem of the Palestinians."

CABINET SUPPORTS ELAZAR AGAINST ATTACKS BY SHARON

JERUSALEM, Jan. 27 (JTA)—The Cabinet today issued a lengthy statement in which Premier Golda Meir and Defense Minister Moshe Dayan and the entire Cabinet expressed their confidence in Chief of Staff David Elazar in the wake of attacks by Gen. Ariel (Arik) Sharon. The Likud Knesseter, who was relieved of his divisional command by Elazar last week, said in weekend newspaper interviews that the full responsibility for the difficulties Israel encountered during the Yom Kippur War rested squarely on Elazar's shoulders. He demanded that Elazar be relieved of his command. Sharon's statements were raised at the Cabinet by Health Minister Victor Shemtov and Tourism Minister Moshe Kol. In the Cabinet statement, drafted by Minister-Without-Portfolio Israel Galili, Mrs. Meir was quoted: "We all esteem Elazar's actions before and during the war. The whole Cabinet had confidence in Elazar, the Chief of Staff." She then strongly denounced statements attributed to Sharon that there exists "an ideology of non-discipline which is alien to Zahal." She also warned against revelation of military secrets in this connection and noted that a committee was currently investigating all charges and accusations.

Sharon issued a series of charges against the army high command claiming that Elazar did not acquaint himself with the conditions of the military reality in the Sinai, did not understand the intentions of the Egyptians, that initiative on the part of the Israeli army and insight into the tactics and strategy of the Egyptian army was replaced by a reliance on military hardware. Making these charges in interviews in Maariv and Yediot Aharonot, Sharon claimed that since Yitzhak Rabin left the army the Israel Defense Force "ceased to be a brilliant army." He stated that Elazar's shortsightedness and reliance on the quantity of arms rather than the quality of military tactics and strategy was a serious mistake "because quantitatively we shall never be able to surpass our enemies."

The Likud leader, who was in command of a division that crossed the Suez, expressed warm words and high esteem for Dayan, saying that he should serve in the next Cabinet. "He is a brave man and an original thinker and is not to be blamed for the mistakes in the Yom Kippur War," Sharon said of Dayan. The Defense Minister, he continued, "is ten times superior to any other Labor Alignment candidate for the post of Defense Minister." Dayan, however, reaffirmed his full support of the army and its command: "To my mind they are first call commanders. The Israel Defense Force is a good army and it has good commanders. I knew all the past chiefs of staff and the future candidates and I would not make one transfer."

BEHIND THE HEADLINES SADAT'S CREDIBILITY GAP

By Ehud Yaari, JTA Jerusalem Correspondent

JERUSALEM, Jan. 27 (JTA)--One of the main lessons of Egypt's conduct throughout the disengagement talks was a very pronounced gap--completely unbridgeable--between statements for public consumption and real bargaining positions. In fact, as one observer here put it, nothing said by the Egyptians in public ever reached the ears either of Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger or the Israeli negotiators in private. Thus, those Israelis who tended since the Yom Kippur War to accept Egyptian statements substantially at face value are once again questioning the true significance of what they hear on Cairo Radio or read in the Egyptian press.

The same goes for Egyptians themselves. Once misled by President Anwar Sadat concerning Egypt's conditions for a disengagement, other Arab governments too will now add more than a grain of salt to every Egyptian declaration in the future. It seems that Sadat deliberately initiated this new credibility gap. He was prepared to sacrifice the newly-won confidence in Egypt's word, of which he was so proud, for the sake of an immediate political goal. Sadat decided upon a campaign of mis-information in order to be able to carry through the negotiations unhindered.

Apparently, he felt that by admitting in advance Egypt's real terms he would invite unbearable Arab pressure to discontinue the disengagement talks. That was why he chose to disguise his real conditions behind a heavy smoke screen of tough propaganda. Arab reaction to the disengagements terms in fact justified his concern. Iraq, Libya and a considerable section of the Palestinian armed organizations have denounced Sadat's move as a sell-out to the U.S. Others, notably Saudi Arabia, Syria and Algeria, were somewhat more reserved in their response although clearly suspicious of this "separate settlement."

To allay these suspicions Sadat embarked immediately after the agreement was signed upon a "clarification offensive" aimed at convincing both his Arab and Soviet allies that Cairo would stop at this point and go no further towards settlement unless accompanied by Syria and the Palestinians. But Sadat still has lots of explaining to do. The major discrepancies between Egypt's public pronouncements and his real positions were:

--Line of Israeli withdrawal: Egypt said publicly it would not tolerate continued Israeli occupation of the Mitla-Gidi line. Hassanein Heykal, Al Ahram's editor, wrote that such a continued Israeli presence would be "disaster" for the Arabs. And a Cairo radio commentator declared that an El Arish-Ras Muhamad line would be Egypt's minimal demand. Yet Sadat finally accepted Israeli troops 10 kilometers west of the passes.

--Thinning out of forces: Every Egyptian spokesman took pains to stress that the east bank of the canal was Egyptian sovereign territory so there could be no question concerning the number or strength of forces stationed there. However, Sadat agreed to retain there only 7000 soldiers out of the 70,000 he now has there with only 30 of the 700 tanks, few artillery batteries and no missiles.

--The canal and its cities: The Egyptians rejected all hints that the canal should be reopened once the disengagement was completed. Yet Sadat assured Israel through Kissinger that this is exactly what they are going to do now--and without

delay.

--Israel's west bank enclave: For months now Egyptian generals, politicians and journalists told their public that the Israel-west bank force could be wiped out within 24 hours. They tried to depict these troops as "hostages" rather than as a threat to Egypt. Suddenly, once the agreement was signed, Egyptian spokesmen switched to explanations that operations to drive Israelis out would have meant 15,000 Egyptian casualties.

How did Sadat explain these contradictions? We still do not know. However, one thing is almost certain. From now on he will have to be much more careful. The old trick of deliberate mis-information against one's own allies cannot be used too often without boomeranging one way or another. The next stage of the Geneva conference may well be the victim of Sadat's narrowed scope for maneuver. He could hardly hope to try once again to "go it alone," explaining to his allies what he was doing only once it was done.

\$50 M GRANT TO ISRAEL MADE BY U.S.

WASHINGTON, Jan. 27 (JTA)--A third grant of \$50 million in three years was made by the United States to Israel to help it maintain economic stability during a period of heavy defense expenditures. Daniel Parker, administrator of the Agency for Economic Development, and Israel's Ambassador Simcha Dinitz formalized the agreement conveying the grant in a brief ceremony Friday at the State Department.

Israel will use the \$50 million to import industrial and other commodities from the U.S. The products will be sold in Israel and the proceeds in Israeli Pounds will be applied to support Israel's national budget. Related U.S. services also may be derived from the grant. Parker told Dinitz that the new grant illustrated "the very substantial empathy the American people feel for you and your country." Parker added that Israel's "exemplary management" of previous United States grants induce "a high level of confidence in your government."

Referring to the cost of the Yom Kippur War, Parker said it was "indeed remarkable" that Israel is surviving in view of the "unusual burden on your economy." Noting the influx of Soviet Jews, he said "we certainly wish to assist in this effort as well."

Dinitz replied that "you have always made us feel as partners." He thanked "the government, the Congress and the people of the United States, not only for what they have done but for the spirit in which it is done." Undersecretary of State-designate Joseph J. Sisco, emphasizing the timeliness of the grant, since it coincided with the disengagement agreement between Israel and Egypt, said that the grant would enable "many more" of the Israeli people to contribute to Israel's peace-time needs.

JERUSALEM (JTA)--The Jewish National Fund and American Hadassah are cooperating in a major tree-planting and landscaping program designed to make three Negev development towns into more attractive and residential places. Some 120,000 trees are to be planted under the program in the towns of Sderot, Netivot and Ofakim--all development towns with mainly Oriental populations. JNF does not as a rule operate inside urban areas but it was decided to make an exception in the case of this scheme. Hadassah has undertaken to raise \$2,700,000 over three years to pay for the project.

TEL AVIV (JTA)--Despite the war, Israel retained its position as the world's principal producer/exporter of polished gem diamonds for 1973.