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FORD AND ISRAEL: WHAT'S AHEAD?

By Murray Zuckoff, JTA News Editor

WASHINGTON, Aug. 11 (JTA) -- With Gerald R. Ford as the new President, the question uppermost in the minds of Jewish leaders and the Jewish community as a whole is what, if any, changes can be expected in the American Middle East policy. The consensus, both private and public, emerging this weekend is that there will be no substantial change and that the U.S. will continue to seek ways to help establish a stable and lasting Mideast peace.

One of the encouraging signs, in addition to Ford's self-expressed attitude of friendship for the Jewish State, is that Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger will continue in his position under the new Administration. Ford himself made it clear that he will continue the foreign policy developed by President Nixon.

Speaking extemporaneously in front of his home Thursday night shortly after Nixon concluded his resignation speech, Ford declared: "Let me say without hesitation or reservation that the policy that has achieved peace and built the blocks for future peace will be continued as far as I am concerned as President of the United States."

He also referred by name to only one member of Nixon's Cabinet, Kissinger, who directed the talks which led to the disengagement agreements between Israel and her Arab neighbors, Egypt and Syria. Ford praised Kissinger as "a very great man" who has helped "to build the blocks of peace under President Nixon. I think those policies of peace will be continued, and those policies of peace should be continued." Observing that Kissinger had agreed to continue on as Secretary, Ford added that it means that "he and I will be working together in the pursuit of peace in the future, as we have achieved in the past."

Assures Dinitz Of Continued Friendship

The new President issued similar assurances when he met Friday with Israeli Ambassador Simcha Dinitz and affirmed that the U.S. would continue its friendship and take the required action to strengthen Israel's economy and military forces, it was reliably reported here. His meeting with Dinitz was one of a series of meetings he and Kissinger held with some 60 foreign envoys some two hours after Ford took the oath of office.

In the presence of reporters, Ford told a group of 15 Arab diplomats that "negotiating not only with opponents but with your own party is difficult, too," citing his 25 years in Congress. He assured the Arab envoys that Kissinger would continue to conduct Middle East negotiations as he did for former President Nixon. Ford also stressed in his meeting with the Arabs the continuity of U.S. foreign policy and his desire to achieve a lasting peace and friendship with all of the Arab nations.

This policy was also underlined by Nixon in his resignation speech. Citing his own foreign policy programs, he said that in the Mideast "100 million people in the Arab countries, many

of whom have considered us their enemies for nearly 20 years, now look on us as their friends. We must continue to build on that friendship so that peace can settle at last over the Middle East, and so that the cradle of civilization will not become its grave." Nixon, however, made no specific reference to Israel and its people.

Elements In Foreign Policy

Basically, however, it is still much too early to assess Ford's foreign policy views beyond the generalities he made since Thursday night. His involvement and expertise in foreign affairs has been almost nil. Whatever abilities he may have in dealing with these complex issues and in relating to the diverse and even antagonistic ideologies and objectives of the Russians, Chinese and Arabs will be tested shortly.

To a large extent Ford will be able to pay more attention to building and reinforcing U.S. foreign policies because for the first time in decades the U.S. is not embroiled in fighting wars abroad. Also, the foreign policies developed by Nixon will not be overshadowed and diminished by Watergate. Ford's views and actions in the area of foreign affairs will develop in the course of time -- welded by his own growing insights and the imperative needs of the nation to develop its economy domestically and its diplomatic and economic ties abroad.

Ford has said that while he was once an isolationist he is now an "ardent internationalist." Taking him at his word the question at this time is not how much internationalism but what kind, not with whom he will seek closer ties but to what extent. Observers note that Ford, as a Middle American, is less likely to seek the kind of alliances and foreign commitments that will require greater tax burdens on the American people.

During the interim period, until Ford and the new Administration has had a chance to settle down, the new President is likely to act in an ad hoc fashion and pragmatically, taking his cues from those in his Cabinet who will help him shape and formulate foreign policy, foremost perhaps, Kissinger. Ford's known capacity to moderate between divergent views and groups in the House while he was Republican leader indicates that he may strive to find some common ground among the diverse forces in America's political and economic arena that have interests in the Middle East.

Economic Needs Of U.S. In Mideast

There is no question, however, observers note, that Ford will opt for a policy of peace in the Mideast and try to achieve a balance between Israeli and Arab needs because that is the best course for the U.S. on many levels: to safeguard its current investments, especially in Saudi Arabia, and to lay the basis for opening up new areas for American capital, particularly in the Egyptian petrochemical industry; to offset whatever gains the Soviet Union still has in the area and to prevent the Russians from establishing political and economic hegemony while seeking, at the same time, to develop a policy of co-

existence with the USSR in the Mideast; to give the new Administration some respite from concentrating its energies abroad and begin to focus on domestic issues, specifically inflation and unemployment; and to maintain in the U.S. as a force capable of helping to stabilize a troublesome area.

Peace in the Mideast is also an economic necessity for the U.S. at this time especially in another way, observers noted. If the Mideast economies were to revert to full peacetime activities and the national budgets especially in Egypt and Syria were no longer largely devoted to military spending, U.S. trade with Arab nations could become more flourishing and thus provide an additional market for American capital and trade and also assure that the properties of American oil firms would be more secure and less subject to further nationalization.

This, however, does not mean that Ford and the new Administration will seek to exert one-sided pressure on Israel for her to come to some accommodation with the Arab states on their terms. In fact, some Arab newspapers and spokesmen have already expressed anxiety that Ford may be even more pro-Israel than Nixon. They cited Ford's views that Jerusalem should be the united capital of Israel and recalled that Ford had indicated some two years ago that the U.S. Embassy in Israel should be relocated from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Israeli Foreign Minister Yigal Allon, who met with Ford two weeks ago while he was still Vice-President, remarked afterwards that Ford is considered a friend of Israel. Allon noted that "I found him very well informed and we had a very interesting talk about matters in the Middle East." The Foreign Minister also observed that "I don't see anything like a change in his friendliness" when Ford becomes President.

(Similar expressions were voiced this weekend by Jewish leaders in this country and in Israel by leaders there. See separate stories.)

Has Good Track Record

In trying further to assess Ford's attitude towards Israel it was recalled that he has had a good track record with regards to the Jewish State since becoming Vice-President last Dec. On Jan. 8, in an address to the Manufacturing Chemists Association in Washington, Ford hinted that continuation of the Arab oil embargo could lead to a curtailment of food shipments to Arab countries where food commodities are perennially in short supply.

"Close an oil valve in the Middle East and you threaten to shut down a farm tractor in our Middle West," he stated. "Halt that tractor and some people in the world will hunger for bread." Ford observed that a "circular flow" was required to keep the industrialized nations running and to provide the Middle East with its basic needs, meaning a flow of oil to the West and a flow of food to the Mideast.

On Feb. 24, Ford told several hundred persons attending the 66th annual award dinner of B'nai Zion, where he was presented with the group's 1974 America-Israel Friendship Gold Medal "in recognition of his outstanding contributions to the furtherance of America-Israel friendship," that a "large share" of the credit for the Suez disengagement accord "accrues to the courage, goodwill and vision of leaders in

both Egypt and Israel."

Addressing himself to the issue of the Israeli POWs in Syria, Ford declared that "humanitarian considerations indicate that Syria and Israel should exchange full lists of prisoners and that both sides permit Red Cross visits to POW camps." He also told the gathering that "an era of peace is within our reach -- for the superpowers as well as the Middle Eastern countries;" but that "to reach that objective we have no alternatives but to maintain a strong defense."

Israeli President Ephraim Katzir, in a message to the meeting, lauded Ford as "a staunch and perceptive champion of the cause of strengthening the bonds of friendship between Israel and the United States." The then Premier Golda Meir, in a message, called Ford a "great American leader whose whole career bears testimony to his profound humanitarianism, his fearless support for freedom everywhere and his genuine friendship for Israel." Abba Eban, who was then Foreign Minister, also sent a message lauding Ford for his "efforts to strengthen the bonds of friendship between the people of the United States and the people of Israel" and for his "unswerving and meaningful championship of the State of Israel in its struggle for peace and security."

Mettle May Be Tested

Meanwhile it is expected that there will be a hiatus in the Administration's foreign policy activities while the changing of the guard takes place and while it reassesses priorities on the domestic front. But it is precisely this hiatus -- unavoidable in terms of shifting gears -- that is causing some anxiety among Jewish leaders in this country and Israeli leaders that the Arabs and Russians may try to create some untoward situation in the Mideast in order to test the new President's mettle.

FORD'S MESSAGES TO ISRAELI LEADERS ELICIT GRATIFICATION

From Combined JTA Israel Dispatches

JERUSALEM, Aug. 11 (JTA) -- Israeli officials appeared pleased today by the warm messages from President Ford and Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger to Premier Yitzhak Rabin and Foreign Minister Yigal Allon. The cordial treatment of Israeli Ambassador Simcha Dinitz by the newly inaugurated President was also noted with satisfaction here. Dinitz was one of the few envoys in Washington summoned into a private audience with the President shortly after the swearing-in ceremony Friday.

In his message to Rabin, Ford said one of his first acts would be "to re-affirm to Israel, as to all friendly states, the staunch U.S. adherence to its international policy, a policy based on bi-partisan support." Kissinger's message to Allon was not released. It was understood, however, that the Secretary stressed that U.S. friendship toward Israel was "deep-rooted and not dependent on this or that Administration."

Rabin sent "warm congratulations" to Ford "on behalf of the President of Israel, the government and the people...on assuming his eminent task." Rabin also voiced satisfaction with Ford's assurances of the continuity of American policies of aid to Israel and efforts to achieve peace in the Middle East.

Pledges To Continue U.S. Commitments

U.S. Ambassador Kenneth Keating delivered Ford's message to Rabin and later drove to

Allon's home in Kibbutz Ginosar to deliver Kissinger's letter to the Foreign Minister. An official statement by the government press office said that Ford had "promised the Israeli Premier to meet all the commitments undertaken by the U.S. towards Israel" and "stressed the continuation of long-range American support in all matters pertaining to Israel's defense and economic well being."

The statement added that Ford's message "also mentions that the U.S. would persevere in the peace efforts in the Middle East in which it has taken such an active part in recent months." Ford ended "by saying that he is looking forward with interest to Mr. Rabin's visit during the summer," the statement said.

The dramatic change of leadership in Washington came as no surprise to Israelis. But there were expressions of sorrow over the ending of the Nixon Presidency. Nixon is regarded here as a genuine friend of Israel, particularly since last October's war when the swift American airlift of weapons and supplies helped turn the tide against the joint Egyptian-Syrian attack. A certain amount of apprehension was only natural considering that there is a new and untested hand at the helm of the American foreign policy.

Seeks To Allay Fears

Defense Minister Shimon Peres sought to allay these fears. Replying to questions at a meeting in Tel Aviv Thursday night--before Nixon made his resignation announcement--Peres said that U.S. support for Israel was so deeply rooted that no change of Administration would affect it.

He spoke at the opening of a symposium of "Stratis," the Israeli Institute for Strategic Studies and Policy Analysis. Peres said that while the kind of friendship that exists between Washington and Jerusalem does not exclude differences of views from time to time, the U.S. appreciates that of all its partners on the world scene, "Israel has not been the most expensive nor the worst friend."

While Israeli officials expect no negative changes in Middle East policy under the Ford Administration there was a feeling here today that U.S. efforts for a solution to the Mideast conflict possibly will slow down while the new Administration is organizing itself. Reaction from the Arab states was somewhat different. Radio Cairo was quoted as saying that the Arabs would have to make a special effort to convince the new Administration to continue the "balanced" policy adopted by Nixon.

JEWISH LEADERS EXPRESS CONFIDENCE IN FORD, EXPRESS SORROW OVER EVENTS THAT LED TO NIXON'S RESIGNATION

By William Saphire

NEW YORK, Aug. 11 (JTA) -- American Jewish leaders offered strong expressions of confidence over the weekend that President Ford will continue America's efforts for peace in the Middle East and economic, diplomatic and military support for Israel. They also expressed sorrow over the events that led to President Nixon's resignation and gratitude and respect for the former President's aid and staunch friendship for Israel.

Rabbi Israel Miller, chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, declared, "On the basis of his record and public pronouncements, we have

every confidence that President Gerald Ford will adhere to the basic theme of the traditional American approach to the Middle East since 1940 and will continue our country's assistance to Israel through diplomatic, military and economic support."

Mrs. Charlotte Jacobson, chairman of the American Section of the World Zionist Organization, asserted, "We have every hope that the new administration under President Gerald Ford will build upon the foundations Mr. Nixon laid in foreign affairs, particularly in the Middle East." Of the former President, Mrs. Jacobson said that his great abilities exerted in the cause of world peace had produced solid accomplishments. "It is a matter of deep regret" that Nixon resigned, she said.

Termed A Friend Of Jews

Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg, president of the American Jewish Congress, expressed "hope and confidence" that under Ford the bi-partisan policy of support for issues of concern to Jews such as the safety of Israel and the condition of Jews in the Soviet Union and Syria will be continued. Noting that Nixon had "met on a number of occasions with representatives of leading Jewish organizations" to discuss international issues affecting Jews, Rabbi Hertzberg expressed hope that "President Ford will see fit to continue the practice of meeting with Jewish community leadership if the occasion may warrant."

Rabbi Mordecai Waxman, president of the Rabbinical Assembly, the Conservative rabbinat, said American Jews congratulated Ford and wished him well "in the well grounded belief that he has always been a man of good will, a friend of the Jews and that he will continue the traditional American program of economic and military aid to Israel."

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the congregational branch of Reform Judaism, extended "best wishes and a prayer" for Ford. Rabbi Moshe Sherer, executive president of the Agudat Israel of America, claimed, "The Jewish community, especially the religious sector, has a devoted friend in President Ford." He predicted that the new President would be "highly sensitive" to the needs of the Jewish people on the domestic scene and to the continued support of Israel on the military and economic fronts.

Will Rally Behind Ford

Elmer L. Winter, president of the American Jewish Committee hailed Nixon's decision to step down voluntarily, and noted that "the country will surely now rally behind President Ford and prove once again that the American people have the capacity for meeting unprecedented challenges and for reconciliation."

Lewis D. Cole, chairman, and Isaiah M. Minkoff, executive vice chairman of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, welcomed "Mr. Nixon's reassertion, as one of the last acts of his presidency, of the goals of international peace and domestic harmony." They also commended "Gerald Ford's vigorous affirmation that he will continue to pursue these goals," and stated: "We wish President Ford well and offer him all encouragement and cooperation in efforts directed toward the establishment of true peace in the world."

Seymour Graubard, national chairman of the B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation League, stated in a letter to Ford that the ADL "offers you its

full support in your efforts to lead our nation to its highest ideals, its preservation of civil liberties and its international security...We devoutly wish that your administration will witness the achievement of your high goals."

A Record Of Integrity, Humanness

David M. Blumberg, president of B'nai B'rith, emphasized in a message to Ford the organization's "utmost cooperation" in his efforts to restore "the great American resource -- the unity of our dynamic people." Blumberg observed that "Our nation is fortunate that you bring to your new task an indispensable asset: the confidence and affection of the American people earned by a record of integrity and humanness."

Mrs. Eleanor Marvin, national president of the National Council of Jewish Women, stated: "We wish President Ford great success in his fulfillment of (his) office and all its responsibilities, challenges and opportunities." Mrs. Rose Matzkin, president of Hadassah, sent Ford "Our best wishes and our prayers" and pledged "our cooperation during this challenging time in history as you lead us to domestic peace and prosperity and to peace and justice in the world."

Max Fisher, and Mrs. Fisher of Detroit, were among the 161 official guests invited for Ford's inauguration Friday. Fisher is chairman of the Jewish Agency Board of Governors.

FORD ADMINISTRATION TO BE TESTED THIS WEEK WITH THE ARRIVAL OF FAHMY AND HUSSEIN

WASHINGTON, Aug. 11 (JTA) -- The Ford Administration's Middle East policy will have its first test this week with the arrivals in Washington of Egyptian Foreign Minister Ismail Fahmy and King Hussein of Jordan. The visits by Middle East figures were scheduled before Nixon's resignation from the Presidency.

(Israeli Premier Yitzhak Rabin told his Cabinet in Jerusalem today that no date has been set for his proposed visit to Washington. Israeli officials said they expected it to take place in Sept. or Oct., shortly after Foreign Minister Yigal Allon goes to New York to attend the opening of the United Nations General Assembly.)

Arab leaders reportedly have expressed concern over the transition of power because Ford, when he was the Republican leader in the House, frequently made speeches on behalf of Israel and, like most Congressmen, supported a strong Israel. But sources here said his aides have insisted that this did not rule out efforts by Ford for a Middle East settlement and the continued improvement of U.S. ties with the Arab world. The new White House Press Secretary, Jerald TerHorst, said Friday, "The President, along with Secretary Kissinger underlines the continuity of bi-partisan American foreign policy."

General Peace Talks A Topic

Fahmy is due here tomorrow to start another round of Middle East peace talks with Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger and may also confer with Ford. The talks are expected to focus on the resumption of the Geneva peace conference and Israeli

territorial withdrawals. The delicate matter of Palestinian representation at the Geneva conference is expected to be one of the subjects discussed, reliable sources said.

Another issue expected to come up in the talks with Fahmy, and with Hussein who is expected here later in the week, is Jordan's refusal to attend the Geneva conference without an Israeli agreement to withdraw troops from the West Bank of the Jordan River. Israeli pull-backs were features of the disengagement agreements with Egypt and Syria worked out earlier in the year through the offices of Kissinger.

The visits of Middle East diplomats and leaders this week are part of a continuing dialogue established by Kissinger and former President Nixon during their intensive Middle East diplomacy last spring. Allon and Jordanian Foreign Minister Zaid al-Rifai, were in Washington for talks with Kissinger during the last two weeks.

CABINET APPROVES SLASHES IN GOVERNMENT SPENDING

JERUSALEM, Aug. 11 (JTA) -- The Cabinet today approved slashes of close to IL one-billion in the budgets of ministries and other government departments. The sum breaks down into cuts of IL 340 million in regular budgets and over IL 600 million in the "development budgets" of most government departments. Most of the money saved would go towards financing additional defense expenditure; treasury senior official Arnon Gafni told newsmen. These expenses include construction of fortifications on the new front lines, shelters and bunkers in border settlements and security fences in the north.

The largest cut is in the budget (regular budget) of the Education Ministry -- IL 88 million from secondary and higher education together. The plan to introduce free tenth grade schooling has been shelved for the time being and government-paid stipends to school children in secondary schools and universities will be awarded with much greater parsimoniousness.

IL 100 million has been pared off the Communications Ministry development budget -- meaning a longer wait for people who have ordered telephones. The one ministry's budget cut -- proposed by the Treasury at nearly IL 3 million -- which has not yet been approved is Aharon Yariv's Information Ministry. Yariv is still discussing with Premier Yitzhak Rabin the validity of this ministry's continued existence. Meanwhile Yariv is strenuously opposing any cut in his total IL 24 million budget.

TEL AVIV (JTA) -- An Israeli Navy patrol boat intercepted and sank a boat manned by terrorists in a brief exchange of fire off Israel's northern coast near the Lebanese border shortly before midnight Friday. There were no Israeli casualties. A military spokesman said the sunken craft was identified as the same type used by terrorists who infiltrated the Israeli seaside town of Nahariya and killed four persons last June 23. It was believed to be engaged in a similar attempt to infiltrate terrorists into Israel by sea for assaults on civilians.

UNITED NATIONS (JTA) -- President Ford proposed a meeting between himself and UN Secretary General Kurt Waldheim to discuss the Middle East and other world problems, saying he was impressed by the UN role in the Middle East.