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U. S. PREPARING TO INCREASE ITS 'MILITARY PRESENCE' IN THE MIDEAST

By Joseph Polakoff

WASHINGTON, Feb. 26 (JTA) -- The United States is preparing to increase its "military presence" in the Middle East in defense of its vital interests, the State Department said today but while this might include joint military exercises it will not take the form of American bases or the stationing of American forces in the area.

In making those comments, the State Department's chief spokesman, Hodding Carter, referred to the remarks made by Defense Secretary Harold Brown on the CBS-TV "Face the Nation" program yesterday that the U. S. would "take any action that is appropriate including military force" to defend its vital interests in the region.

Carter said "We are prepared to play a larger role in that area" but that no decision has been made yet on "a larger military presence. The details are not yet worked out." He stressed that "We are not considering a base structure or troops" but that the U. S. is having "ongoing discussions" with a number of countries. He did not name the countries.

Asked to define a "large presence" and specifically if joint maneuvers would fit that concept, Carter replied, "Clearly, joint exercises would make plain our sustained commitment in the area." He observed that "new elements of presence, new movements would reinforce the point we are concerned about -- security and stability in the area."

When he was asked if Israel has a role in this larger presence, Carter responded that "the security of a nation is served by its own strength and stability and we are trying to enhance that strength and stability." Pressed to explain "base structure," Carter said that in response to his own inquiries "he was told to "kick in the head" any suggestions of a U. S. air base in Sinai or naval base at Haifa. Asked if the enhanced American presence was related to the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty talks, Carter said "the resolution" of the treaty "stands on its own feet."

Carter was asked if the cancellation of orders for F-16 jet fighter bombers by the new regime in Iran means that Israel will receive its complement of 75 of the aircraft sooner than is presently scheduled, the State Department spokesman replied, "We are now studying the matter and having discussions with Congress. There is no final decision."

DISAPPOINTED WITH CURSORY TREATMENT OF GATHOLIC-JEWISH RELATIONS AT LATIN AMERICAN BISHOPS CONFERENCE

By David Friedman

NEW YORK, Feb. 26 (JTA) -- Jacobo Kovadloff, director of the American Jewish Committee's Latin American department, voiced disappointment today that the recently completed Conference of Latin American Bishops dealt so cursorily with the Catholic Church's relations with Jews.

In an interview with the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, Kovadloff said he was "disappointed"

that there was no condemnation of anti-Semitism or the Nazi movement, both of which he said are growing in Latin America. The conference dealt mainly with political and social problems.

Kovadloff, who is head of the A.J. Committee's Spanish in Mass Media Program, attended the conference as a journalist. The only Jew officially invited to the conference, which was held in Puebla, Mexico, was Paul Warszawski, chairman of the interreligious relations department of the Latin American Jewish Congress, who was one of five non-Catholic observers. Also attending as a journalist was Rabbi Leon Klenicki, associate editor of "Face to Face," an interreligious quarterly published by the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith.

Mgs. Jorge Mejia, head of the Vatican's Office of Relations with Jews, presented a "wonderful" working paper on relations with Jews, according to Kovadloff. But he said the final document issued by the Conference Feb. 13 only took note that "Judaism is present in the Continent" and reminded Catholics of the favorable declarations on Jews which emerged from Vatican II and after. The Bishops recommended "mutual understanding and appreciation between the believers of the two religions."

The Bishops were addressed by Pope John Paul II, the first time a Pope had visited Latin America. He warned the Latin American clergy against involvement in politics while at the same time he said the church must help the poor. The Pope received a delegation from the Mexican Jewish community while in Mexico City.

DOUBTS EXPRESSED WHETHER BEGIN SHOULD ATTEND SUMMIT WITHOUT SADAT

Move To Pressure Begin Is Seen

By Yitzhak Shargil

TEL AVIV, Feb. 26 (JTA) -- The highest level political circles in Jerusalem expressed serious doubts today whether Premier Menachem Begin should accept President Carter's invitation for a third Camp David meeting at which President Anwar Sadat would not be present.

Some of these circles, including Cabinet ministers, said that a summit without Sadat is an insult to the whole idea of a summit. Should Begin go to Washington he may find himself under very heavy pressure and it would be Begin who would be blamed if the summit did not produce the expected peace treaty, they said.

Other Israeli circles said, however, that even though Begin may hesitate to go to Camp David without his counterpart, Sadat, present, he will reluctantly accept Carter's invitation to demonstrate respect for the American President.

Unconfirmed reports said that the invitation, though not yet officially conveyed to the Prime Minister's Office, appeared to be an ultimatum. Some sources said that as Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan understood it, Carter's invitation implied a hint that he may withdraw himself from any further involvement in the Israeli-Egyptian negotiations if Begin does not come forth with an announcement accepting the invitation. Dayan apparently agreed to the idea of a summit without Sadat.

What Dayan may not have realized at his White House meeting with Carter yesterday was that such an invitation could be regarded as an ultimatum and some Israelis were rather uneasy about it.

Begin reportedly was ready to accept the invitation without delay but had second thoughts and decided to await the special Cabinet meeting he called for tomorrow morning when Dayan presents his report on the latest Camp David meeting. After the Cabinet reaches a decision, Begin will phrase his reply.

The prevailing mood in Jerusalem indicates that a significant number of ministers will not recommend acceptance of the invitation. Dayan is expected to support acceptance of the Carter invitation which the President viewed as raising the negotiations to the heads-of-government level. Khalil, who is also Egypt's Foreign Minister, was Dayan's counterpart at the Camp David talks. At the summit level he would act as Prime Minister and thus technically be Begin's counterpart.

But the fear here is that Khalil may request time to discuss conclusions of his talks with Begin with Egypt's highest political personality, Sadat. Begin will have no one to refer to, being at the highest political level in Israel. The Americans are said to be aware of this danger, but decided to take the risk and call Begin to Washington.

Strange Situation Noted

Israeli circles noted the strange situation that has developed. On one hand, Sadat said that he delegated full authority to Khalil to conclude the negotiations. On the other hand, Egypt has made it clear that there will be no more concessions on its part and only Israel will have to yield. If this is the case, sources here ask, why should Begin go to Camp David?

Dayan, who arrived here this evening from Washington, said he is convinced the Camp David talks which concluded yesterday will continue. He refused to elaborate, saying he will report on these talks tomorrow to the Cabinet. He added that Eliahu Ben-Elissar, director general of the Prime Minister's Office, remained in Washington to maintain contact with all sides.

(In Egypt, the state-controlled Cairo Radio said the call for a new summit indicated "certain obstacles had obstructed the process of the peace settlement." The official Middle East News Agency quoted U.S. sources close to the Camp David talks as saying that a decision still had to be made on three or four points and that the delegates had gone a considerable way in formulating documents and some maps. There were no elaborations.)

Meanwhile, Labor Party chairman Shimon Peres also expressed uneasiness over the circumstances of the new invitation from Carter. Peres said today that he is aware that two problems that were not solved at the meetings between Dayan, Khalil and Secretary of State Cyrus Vance are the same that came up after last November's Blair House meeting. They are the questions of the "linkage" and "priority of obligations."

Peres regarded the invitation as somewhat insulting but nevertheless believes Begin should go to Camp David because no effort should be spared in the quest for peace.

A GUDATH ISRAEL RAPS HOLOCAUST COMMISSION REMEMBRANCE DAYS PLANS

NEW YORK, Feb. 26 (JTA) -- The Agudath Israel of America has charged that the initial plan advanced by President Carter's Commission on the Holocaust to mark the week of April 22-29 as "Days of Remembrance" for victims of

Nazism has offended the sensibilities of Orthodox Jews.

Noting that the week's activities are scheduled to open with ceremonies at Temple Emanu-El in New York and conclude in the National Cathedral of the Episcopal Church in Washington, the Orthodox Jewish organization said that the program appears designed to reflect the "ecumenical aspirations of some of the Commission's participants rather than to authentically project the theme of Remembrance."

Calling upon the Commission "to rethink its entire attitude" and to "come up with a program that will be an honor for the memory of the martyrs," the Agudath Israel declared in a statement: "In honoring the memory of six million martyrs, we must bear in mind that a major segment of them were uncompromising in their Orthodoxy, and because of their religious convictions would have avoided participation in religious ceremonies held in any house of worship other than an Orthodox synagogue. . . . A combination of a temple and a church is hardly the place to perpetuate their hallowed memory."

"If it is the Commission's intentions that the week's activities include as broad a spectrum of participants as possible and be effective in commemorating the Holocaust, it should avoid any particular religious identifications foreign to the spirit of the Holocaust victims. One would expect that a U.S. government-sponsored commission would refrain from steps that would offend both the memory of the Holocaust victims and many American religious Jews who would choose to honor them."

JEWIS IN IRAN

NEW YORK, Feb. 26 (JTA) -- The future of Jews in Iran will depend on the relationship between the United States and Iran, according to Leon Dulzin, chairman of the Jewish Agency and World Zionist Organization Executives. In an interview last week with Steve North, a reporter for radio station WGRC in Nanuet, N.Y., Dulzin said: "If there will be a normal relationship, or a more or less acceptable relationship, of course, the Jews will be protected. If the relations turn out to be anti-American as well as anti-Israeli, the Jews might be in danger. It's very difficult to foresee."

Dulzin, who returned to Israel last Thursday after a two-week visit in the United States and Mexico, told North that if the situation of the Jews in Iran will become endangered, "certainly Israel would take action. I mean it very seriously." While he declined to specify what action Israel would take, he affirmed:

"We are today in a position to act in a way that we could not have before there was a Jewish State. We will not remain objective or neutral. The Jewish State came to life in order to protect Jewish lives, and we've proved it during our short history. I hope there won't be the need for it, but if it will be necessary, we'll find ways and means to save and protect the Jews there (in Iran)." Dulzin said that of the 90,000 Jews in Iran last year, only some 65,000 remain. He said "thousands and thousands more would like to leave but their situation appears to be uncertain."

Asked by North if Israel expected the close association between Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and the Palestine Liberation Organization, Dulzin said: "We knew a long time ago the very close association between Khomeini and the PLO. It looks like, unfortunately, it was a surprise for the United States, but we knew about it all the time."

SHARP PRICE HIKES IN ISRAEL

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Feb. 26 (JTA) -- Sharp increases in the price of petroleum products, especially gasoline, went into effect at midnight last night boosting the cost-of-living index by about two percent and sparking a new controversy over the government's fiscal policies. The price hikes were decided on yesterday by a special ministerial committee comprised of Finance Minister Simcha Ehrlich, Energy Minister Yitzhak Modai and the Minister of Commerce and Industry Gideon Patil.

The price of gasoline soared 39 percent compared to an average 32 percent for other types of fuel. A gallon of high octane gas sold for \$2.50 today, up from \$1.80 yesterday. But Israelis face still further price increases. The Knesset Finance Committee is expected to approve a 24 percent rise in the price of electricity to be followed by a boost in fares for public transportation, new increases in the prices of manufactured goods and of most products and services.

A spokesman for the Energy Ministry said that the increased price of fuel was necessary because Iran is no longer selling oil to Israel and supplies must be imported from "far and indirect" sources that are more expensive. He also noted that world oil prices have risen "dramatically" since the revolution in Iran and the government had to raise the domestic price in terms of the Israeli Pound.

Treasury officials are known to have warned against a sudden, massive rise in oil prices that would accelerate inflation. Their recommendation for gradual increases over the year was opposed by Modai who argued that a substantial hike now would encourage restraint in fuel consumption. According to recent statistics published here, Israel has one of the highest oil consumption per capita rates in the world.

However, Modai's views prevailed. He announced today that the price increase would be accompanied by other energy saving measures now under consideration, including stricter limits on the use of publicly owned vehicles and stricter enforcement of highway speed limits.

Protests Against Increases

Both Histadrut and the Manufacturers Association protested vehemently today against the latest increases. Yeruhom Meshel, Secretary General of Histadrut, said the measure would result in further deterioration of the national economy. He said he had received a letter from Ehrlich only a few days ago promising to reduce the inflation rate by 10 percent this year. "How could Ehrlich make such promises when he knew that oil prices were about to go up?" Meshel asked.

Avraham Shavit, president of the Manufacturers Association, said "Even now we have difficulty competing with European products. The new hikes are much higher than those in Europe and make it much more difficult to compete on the export market." Shavit termed the projected 24 percent increase in the price of electric power "sheef chutzpa." He insisted that a 17 percent rise would have been sufficient.

ISRAELI YOUTH DELEGATION IN THE U.S.

By Yitzhak Rabi

NEW YORK, Feb. 26 (JTA) -- A delegation of 70 Israeli high school students has been bring-

ing the "message of young Israel" to American youth since Feb. 8, and according to the head of the delegation, Yehoshua Trigor, all members of the delegation "are doing a splendid job."

"The purpose of the delegation," Trigor explained in an interview with the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, "is to leave a residue of good will" among American youth. He said that this is the seventh annual youth delegation to the U.S. which the Israel Foreign Ministry is sponsoring.

"The United States is important to Israel and the members of the delegation are here to convey information to American high school students, to present them with the problems and achievements of Israeli youth," said Trigor, a former diplomat who has been heading the delegation for the last few years.

The members of the delegation -- 35 boys and 35 girls between the ages of 16 to 18 -- are all top students in their classes from all parts of Israel. They were selected for their knowledge of Israeli society, Jewish tradition and history and fluency in English. All were trained in two seminars -- sponsored by the Foreign Ministry and by the Education Ministry -- before going on their mission.

During their two-month tour across the United States, the members of the delegation are staying with American families ("usually Jewish families"), Trigor said. Appearing in teams of two, the youngsters lecture in schools for about six hours each day. "In the first 10 days of their tour, the members of the delegation appeared in 120 schools across the United States, talked with some 60 Jewish groups and youth movements, gave 20 TV interviews, 30 radio interviews and 50 interviews to the press," Trigor said with obvious satisfaction.

According to him, the youths' stay with Jewish families exposes the Israeli youngsters to the love and devotion of American Jews to Israel. "This is very important," Trigor observed, adding: "When they return to Israel they can tell not only about the U.S. in general but also about the Jewish community here and its warmth to Israel." He said that the whole operation is financed by Israel's Foreign Ministry, including the preparatory seminars in Israel.

UNITED NATIONS (JTA) -- Jordan requested a meeting of the Security Council to discuss Israel's settlements on the West Bank. The request was made Monday in a letter addressed to this month's President of the Council, Kuwait's UN Ambassador Abdalla Yacoub Bishara.

AMSTERDAM (JTA) -- Arie Pais, the Dutch Minister of Education, has written to the publishers of the widely used Dutch dictionary, "Koenen Endepols," on the way it defines the term Jew. Pais, who is Jewish, wrote that complaints have reached him that the definition in the dictionary presents a negative image of the Jew. He expressed hope that a later edition of the dictionary would provide a more positive definition of the term Jew.

CHICAGO (JTA) -- Plans for the gala launching of the inaugural flight of El Al from O'Hare Airport April 26 are being made by a committee of community leaders, appointed by Raymond Epstein, chairman of the Public Affairs Committee of the Jewish United Fund. After the ceremonies, surrounding the hoisting of the flag of Israel at O'Hare, the inaugural flight will depart carrying, among other dignitaries, a campaign workers mission from the Jewish United Fund of Metropolitan Chicago.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES: CONCORDAT'S REVISION POSES PROBLEMS

By Lisa Palmieri-Billig

ROME, Feb. 26 (JTA) -- The 50th anniversary of the signing of the Italian Church-State Concordat (incorporated into the Constitution in 1947) was greeted last week with as much contention as celebration.

The fourth draft of the Concordat's revision, released late last week, drawn up by a special committee of experts designated by the Italian Parliament, shows evidence of Catholic forces retreating back into self-protective positions that have already mobilized secular political groups into preparations for a more frontal clash.

If the present government crisis degenerates into a call for premature general elections, the evening-out of differences will take even longer than now expected. Several of the controversies directly or indirectly involve the interests of Italian Jewry. One is the recognition of Roman Catholicism as the official state religion in Italy as decreed by the 1929 Concordat.

The Italian Senate suggested the elimination of this concept. But while the third draft of the revision stated, "The principle of Catholicism being the state religion of Italy is no longer to be considered binding," the fourth draft softened the statement into, "The recognition of the principle... is no longer to be considered binding."

Situations Of Uneven Treatment

Requests in the "note" to the special committee for the Concordat by the Union of Italian Jewish Communities, are aimed mostly at attaining a new democratic equality of all religions before Italian law. The special status of Roman Catholicism in Italy has created many situations of uneven treatment.

For example: At present, crimes against Catholicism and its institutions are punishable by law while similar crimes against Judaism and its institutions are not. Another bone of contention is the teaching of religion in the school system. The 1929 Concordat considered the inculcation of Catholic doctrine to be "the crowning aim" of public education.

Contesting this notion, the Italian Senate requested the Concordat committee to change the status of religion in the public school curriculum from "compulsory" to "voluntary." But again, the fourth draft of the revision falls back to the position of religion as a "required" subject, offering the possibility, however, of students being excused on request, as in the past.

Italian Jewry sides with the Senate on this matter, in consideration of the lesser psychological pressures brought to bear on Jewish children when left free to choose or not choose to study religion, rather than having to ask permission to be "excused" from attending a class that is compulsory for the majority.

A third matter bearing directly on the future of Jewish institutions in Italy is the effect of a law passed in 1975 aimed at the transfer of all religious public welfare institutions to the local regional governments in Italy.

Lawsuit Against Jewish Welfare Institutions

This law was amended in 1977 to exclude institutions sponsoring "activity inherent to the religious-educational sphere." The 27 Jewish institutions spread throughout Italy (schools, nurseries, hospitals, social work agencies, or-

phanages, old age homes and social centers) caring for the needs of Italy's 40,000 Jews, and 35 percent of the much more numerous Catholic institutions received exemption from a hand-over to the state, on this basis.

But in the present political climate of radicalized controversy, sections of the Socialist and Communist parties have objected to these exemptions. The regional administration of Piedmont has filed a lawsuit against Jewish welfare institutions in the cities of the region (Turin, Vercelli, Casale and Alessandria), and the Jewish nursery school of Rome, challenging the qualifications that entitle them to remain under Jewish management.

Demands By Jewish Community

To illustrate the "religious-educational function" of its institutions, the Union of Italian Jewish Communities originally pointed out the special Jewish requirements for kosher food, Sabbath and Jewish holiday observance, the teaching and observance of Jewish history, law and tradition. Reminded of this, Socialist Party leaders replied by assuring Italian Jewry that the case will not be officially pursued by the party. But to date the lawsuit has not been withdrawn. If it is not activated within two years, however, it automatically expires.

Other demands of Italian Jewry's "note" to the Concordat committee, which will be up for discussion, include the possibility (now lacking) for rabbis to offer religious assistance in hospitals, prisons and in the army. Presently only Catholic priests may officiate in these public places.

Italian Jews have also requested the transfer of the Jewish catacombs in Italy from Catholic jurisdiction to the Italian government as a first step for subsequent management by an international Jewish body such as the Heritage Committee of the World Jewish Congress which recently made a preliminary survey of the situation.

Italian Jews are asking further that marriage legislation be revised to validate Jewish wedding ceremonies and place them on a par with Catholic weddings. At present, the rites of Catholic priests are legally binding while weddings officiated over by rabbis are considered incomplete, requiring additional authorization by the Italian government.

EXPLOSION AVERTED IN JERUSALEM

TEL AVIV, Feb. 26 (JTA) -- A powerful bomb was discovered early this afternoon at the Mahane Yehudah market in Jerusalem and dismantled by a police sapper. The bomb was hidden in a plastic bag and placed near a vendor's shop at Etz Hachofim Street. A store owner discovered the plastic kit and when no one claimed it, he took it in a crate to a small deserted alley where the police sapper dismantled it. The market area was evacuated but was reopened after a thorough search. The discovery of the bomb prevented a mass tragedy in the usually crowded market. The Mahane Yehudah market has been a frequent target of terrorist bomb explosions.

TEL AVIV (JTA) -- If a peace treaty is signed by the summer, when the Labor Party intends to hold its international seminar on Middle East affairs at Beth Berl, President Anwar Sadat of Egypt will be invited to participate. This was announced here over the weekend as Labor Party chairman Shimon Peres was preparing to leave for Lisbon to participate in Portugal's Socialist Party convention beginning Tuesday. The seminar will also invite European Socialist leaders.