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FIRST ISRAELI-FLAG VESSEL

NAVIGATES THE SUEZ CANAL

By Barbie Zelizer and Yitzhak Shargil

JERUSALEM, April 30 (JTA) -- The freighter Ashdod, owned by the Zim Lines, made history today. She became the first Israel-flag vessel ever to navigate the Suez Canal, thus formally ending Egypt's ban on Israeli shipping that began when the Jewish State was founded 31 years ago.

The Ashdod, commanded by Capt. Karal Mendelowitz, carrying a 22-man Israeli crew, entered the 103-mile long waterway at 6 a.m. local time, part of a 32-ship international convoy bound north from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean. She arrived at Port Said this evening and is expected to dock at her home port, Haifa tomorrow morning.

The passage through the canal was both routine and exceptional. There were no special ceremonies to mark the occasion. But from the moment the gray-hulled Israeli motorship approached Port Tewfik at the southern entrance of the waterway, sounding her horn in greeting, there were spontaneous outpourings of warmth from Egyptians on the shore. The Suez Canal Authority provided an escort of patrol boats through the canal as a security measure but also a sort of honor guard.

The escort and the blue-and-white Star of David flag flying from her mast alongside the Egyptian colors distinguished the Israeli ship from the rest of the convoy of cargo carriers and tankers flying the flags of Britain, France, Yugoslavia, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the Soviet Union.

Traversing the length of the canal occupies a full day as ships must proceed slowly through the narrow, brackish waters. As the Ashdod passed villages and townships, thousands of Egyptians lined the banks, waving, applauding and shouting "Salaam," "Shalom." At Port Said, as many Egyptians as could crowd her decks clamored aboard the Israeli ship to drink champagne toasts with Capt. Mendelowitz and the Egyptian canal pilot, Capt. Mohammed Nur Mackawi.

'In The Name Of Peace'

The Ashdod rode high on the water for she carried only ballast. Her containerized cargo, mainly from South Africa, had been discharged a week ago at Eilat. Zim had intended to sail her directly through the canal which was officially opened to Israeli vessels under the terms of the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty signed on March 26. But the canal authorities refused to grant her clearance, apparently for inter-Arab political reasons and the fact she was carrying goods from South Africa, a country boycotted by Egypt for its apartheid policies.

But with the ship emptied and the Israeli-Egyptian treaty formally put into effect last Wednesday, all barriers were removed. When Capt. Mendelowitz contacted the canal authorities at Alexandria yesterday, he received warm and enthusiastic messages welcoming the ship and her crew to Egyptian territorial waters "in the name of peace."

The Ashdod paid a \$10,000 fee for passage through the canal. The money was forwarded in advance by the Zim Lines through a Greek shipping agency in Port Said. The fee is based on net tonnage, a measurement calculated on the basis of revenue-earning space aboard ship. One net ton equals 100 cubic feet. In the case of the Ashdod, this worked out to 4500 net tons.

Only one other Israeli vessel ever approached the Suez Canal. In 1954, the freighter Bat Galim attempted to make a test case for Israel's right to passage which was supposedly guaranteed by international law. She was seized at Port Said and her crew was arrested. They were released several months later.

PALESTINIANS BEING TRAINED IN FRANCE

By Edwin Eytan

PARIS, April 30 (JTA) -- Palestinian air and ground crews carrying Abu Dhabi passports are being trained at a French air base near the city of Dijon. French officials say "all we know is that these people carry genuine Abu Dhabi passports" and privately add that "one Arab is for us as good as another. How can we tell the difference?" The French are not prepared to reveal the size of the group now undergoing intensive training on the 36 Mirage planes sold to the oil-rich state.

Jewish inhabitants of Dijon told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency that several of the trainees told them they are Palestinians. The crews live on the French base but often come into town. They generally prefer to shop at Jewish-owned shops, especially by those run by Jews of North African origin.

Several of these Jewish tradesmen say the trainees said they are being sent for advanced air training as part of "the Arab support for our cause." They reportedly said they will serve with the Abu Dhabi Air Force but will be free to "serve Palestine when the time comes."

The planes sold to Abu Dhabi are reportedly equipped with night-vision accessories and can carry air-to-air and air-to-ground French-made missiles. Several of the planes are two-seaters which can be used both for training purposes but also for low flying/ground support missions.

GRUELING DEBATE FORESEEN IN KNESSET ON DEATH PENALTY ISSUE

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, April 30 (JTA) -- Yesterday's Cabinet debate that resulted in a 7-5 vote in favor of applying the death penalty to terrorists who commit acts of extreme violence and cruelty saw the emergence of sharp differences of opinion on the subject that foreshadow another grueling debate when the matter is taken up by the Knesset. A number of ministers are known to have suggested deferring the discussion. But Premier Menachem Begin insisted that the Cabinet act now on his proposal.

Negative votes were cast by Defense Minister Ezer Weizman, Agriculture Minister Ariel Sharon, Education Minister Zevulun Hammer, Minister of Social Betterment Yisrael Katz and Religious Affairs Minister Aharon Abu-Hatzeira. Absorption Minister David Levy abstained.

According to Israel Radio, Weizman said he voted against applying the death penalty because the Army General Staff was not consulted on what he said was essentially a defense-related issue. Sharon argued that the move would worsen Arab-

Jewish relations and said he opposed "declaratory decisions that might never be carried out." Katz was opposed on both moral and practical grounds.

Four ministers were abroad — Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan, Interior Minister Yosef Burg, Minister of Commerce and Industry Gideon Palt and Energy Minister Yitzhak Moda'i. But Cabinet sources said the outcome would have been the same were all of them present. Dayan and Burg would have voted against the death penalty and the others for it, the sources indicated.

Justice Minister Shmuel Tamir explained to reporters after the Cabinet meeting that what they had done in effect was to remove all interference by the executive branch with the "machinery of justice." The decision whether or not to demand the death penalty in extreme cases would rest solely with the Attorney General in civil court cases and with the Judge Advocate General in military courts, Tamir said. Up to now, prosecutors have been under orders not to request capital punishment. Although it is not outlawed, it has never been applied except in the case of Adolf Eichmann.

Tamir said the Cabinet's intention is not to apply the death penalty except in particularly barbaric cases, such as the Lod Airport massacre of 1972 and last year's shooting rampage by terrorists on the Tel Aviv-Haifa highway. Two perpetrators of the latter were taken alive and are in jail awaiting trial as are two of the four terrorists who attacked Nahariya last Sunday. Kozo Okamoto, the only terrorist to survive the Lod outrage, is presently serving a life sentence in Israel.

Not Retroactive Legislation

Tamir stressed that if the new policy is implemented it would not be "retroactive legislation," meaning that terrorists now awaiting trial would not face the death penalty nor would Okamoto. Cabinet Secretary Arye Naor told reporters later that Begin had ruled out hanging as a form of execution because it was not "becoming" for the Jewish State to hang people. The Premier prefers shooting, Naor said.

Israel has never legislated any particular form of execution. Eichmann was hanged under the British Mandatory law that stipulates hanging by the neck until dead. Naor said the required amendments would be enacted "if and when" a terrorist is sentenced to death.

Begin injected a political note during the Cabinet debate when he disclosed what he said was a hitherto secret decision by the Cabinet of former Premier Yitzhak Rabin in February 1976. According to Begin, the Labor government decided to empower the Premier and a committee of ministers to allow military prosecutors to demand the death penalty in specific instances. Begin denounced that as "an intolerable decision" because it represented interference by the executive branch in the judicial process. It was never acted upon and, Naor told reporters yesterday, it has now been voided by the present government.

The matter was publicized apparently to show that the previous government also contemplated application of the death penalty in extreme circumstances but had gone about it in an unconstitutional way. The Labor Party leadership did not react immediately to the charge. But it issued a statement last night deploring the Cabinet's decision which it said would be ineffectual and counter-productive if implemented. Labor

called for more effective measures to prevent terrorist attacks. Thus the stage was set for a heated debate in the Knesset.

CHRISTIANS URGED TO UNDERSTAND HOLOCAUST, PREVENT ITS RECURRENCE

By Joseph Palakoff

WASHINGTON, April 30 (JTA) — The more than 2000 persons who filled the National Cathedral of the Episcopal Church yesterday for the conclusion of the eight "Days of Remembrance of the Victims of the Holocaust" heard a strong appeal for Christians to understand the Holocaust and prevent its recurrence.

"The time has come for something more than a generalized non-sectarian good feeling," Sen. John C. Danforth (R., Mo.), an Episcopal minister, told the interfaith congregation which included First Lady Rosalynn Carter and Treasury Secretary W. Michael Blumenthal, who is himself a refugee from Nazi Germany. "The time has come for an examination of the Holocaust in the light of what each of us professes as believing persons."

The service here marked the end of a week of observances throughout the country which started with a memorial service in New York's Temple Emanu-El April 22 and featured a ceremony marking International Holocaust Day at the Rotunda of the U.S. Capitol last Tuesday which was addressed by President Carter.

Also participating in yesterday's service at the National Cathedral were Msgr. Francis V. Lally of the U.S. Catholic Conference; Rabbi Irving Greenberg, executive director of the President's Commission on the Holocaust; and the Rev. John Walker, Episcopal Bishop of Washington.

Raised In The Christian Faith

In his sermon, Danforth called on the congregation to "face an uncomfortable fact squarely and frankly. The murder of six million Jews was accomplished by people who, while having reverted to a paganism, had been raised in the Christian faith. Their ideology was, of course, hopelessly twisted and insane. But it sprang, somehow, from the traditions of Christianity — in a contorted grotesque shape, wholly inconsistent with the tenets of our religion."

Outlining persecutions and killings of Jews through the centuries, Danforth said that "brutally anti-Semitic activity, perpetrated by persons thoroughly familiar with Christianity, or even worse, in the name of Christianity is, therefore, not of recent origin. Its roots have been traced to the time of the early church."

The Holocaust must be considered the darkest single period of human history, Danforth stated. "It was the blackest epoch of history, born in the darkest regions of the soul." He pointed out that "the extreme to which sin was carried by the Nazis creates a sense of nightmarish unreality in our minds. It is difficult for us to comprehend the magnitude of the Holocaust."

Stressing that six million Jews had been murdered, one million of them children, Danforth said: "It was true genocide. It was a systematic effort to destroy an entire people just because they were a people — they were Jews." Christians often point out that some of their faith were also victims of the Holocaust, dissenting clergy in particular, Danforth observed. "This is true, but this was not genocide," he declared. "Christians were not put to death because they were Christians. Jews were put to death because they were Jews."

KUZNETSOV, DYMSHITS IN ISRAEL

By Yitzhak Shargil

TEL AVIV, April 30 (JTA) -- "Silva Zalmanson will testify whenever she saw me I assured her that her husband, Eduard Kuznetsov, will return," Premier Menachem Begin asserted today. "I told her he will return and here he is."

Begin made this statement as he welcomed Kuznetsov and Mark Dymshits at Ben Gurion Airport after they arrived from New York where they had been taken from a Siberian prison along with three other Soviet dissidents in exchange for two Russians jailed in the United States on spy charges. Silva Zalmanson also accompanied her husband from New York.

Also there to greet the two new arrivals were five other Soviet Jews, who, like them, had been imprisoned in the 1970 Leningrad hijacking trial and who had arrived here yesterday. One of them was Vulf Zalmanson, Silva's brother.

The welcome today was almost a carbon copy of yesterday's joyous greeting ceremony. Begin again spoke in Hebrew, Russian and English as he called Kuznetsov and Dymshits heroes of the spirit. He again thanked President Carter for what he has done in behalf of Soviet Jewry and the Prisoners of Zion in particular. He said he was sure when Carter meets with Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev he will take up the matter of the Soviet Jews still in prison or in exile in Siberia.

Leon Dulzin, chairman of the World Zionist Organization and Jewish Agency Executives, declared that no effort will be spared to bring about the release of the prisoners.

Kuznetsov repeated what he said during his speech at a massive Soviet Jewry rally in New York yesterday, that his nine years in Soviet prisons were easier because he knew the entire Jewish people was behind him.

Dymshits, a pilot and engineer, spoke with emotion of his experience aboard the EL AL plane which brought him and Kuznetsov to Israel and how he had been invited into the cockpit and shown the advanced technology of the EL AL Boeing.

Reunion With Families

As in yesterday's ceremony, the two new arrivals were presented identity cards by Absorption Minister David Levy, making them full-fledged Israeli citizens. They were then hoisted on the shoulders of the crowd in a heroes' welcome.

Meanwhile, the five who arrived yesterday had many emotional reunions with their families today. Leib Khnokh went to the apartment of his aged parents in Migdal Haemek where he saw for the first time his eight-year-old son Yigal. The boy was born in Israel after his mother left the Soviet Union following Khnokh's arrest.

Boris Penson, an artist, went to his mother's apartment in Netanya and plans to start his painting again. Hillel Butman is going to Kibbutz Na'an where his wife is already a member, and Anatoly Altman is going to Kibbutz Yagur.

ISRAEL MARKING 31ST ANNIVERSARY

JERUSALEM, April 30 (JTA) -- Israel prepared today to celebrate the 31st anniversary of its independence, the first at peace with one of its Arab neighbors, and also its annual day of remembrance for the nation's war dead. Memorial day begins this evening at the Western Wall where President Yitzhak Navon and Chief of Staff Gen. Raphael Eitan will conduct ceremonies honoring

Israel's fallen soldiers. Premier Menachem Begin will deliver a televised message to the bereaved families.

Memorial services will be held throughout Israel and at all military bases tomorrow. Flags will be flown at half mast and all places of entertainment will be closed until sundown when fireworks displays will mark the beginning of Independence Day to be celebrated tomorrow night and Wednesday.

Begin's Independence Day message to the Jewish people was released this morning. He cited the "very difficult" events of the past few months when "doubts were cast on our dedication to peace. Baseless charges were laid," he said. "We had to hear a condemnation not only from foreigners but also, and even more painful, from some of our own people. But truth will always prevail. Justice triumphs. We must always insure that truth and justice do not prevail too late," he said.

Leon Dulzin, chairman of the World Zionist Organization and Jewish Agency Executives, also delivered an Independence Day message. "Peace is now at our doorstep. To maintain it, let us unite in building it," he said. "Let us hope that we will now be able to attend with less pressure to some of the most urgent Zionist tasks which have, until now, been postponed or only partially attended to." He listed those tasks as aliya aimed at doubling the Jewish population of Israel "within the coming generation"; bridging the social gap in Israel; and advancing Jewish education abroad.

This year, Independence Day will be opened officially with the kindling of 13 beacons in the presence of the seven Soviet Jewish Prisoners of Conscience who have just arrived in Israel. In past years, only 12 beacons have been lighted. The 13th will represent Israel's sacrifice for peace. The emphasis on this Independence Day will be on the peace just concluded with Egypt and the hope of broadening it to include Israel's other neighbors.

CARTER WILL NOT FORGET SOVIET POGS

WASHINGTON, April 30 (JTA) -- President Carter indicated today that he would continue to press the Soviet Union for the release of dissidents and Jewish activists, such as Anatoly Shcharansky, who are still in prison. "We have not forgotten other human rights activists in the Soviet Union who are being punished or imprisoned," he said in answer to a question at a White House press conference.

Carter said he had personally approved the agreement last week whereby five Soviet dissidents were released from prison in exchange for two Soviet spies held in the U.S. He said the names were agreed upon after long negotiations and he felt the exchange was "fair."

In response to an earlier question, Carter said he would like to see both the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China receive most-favored-nation trade benefits "if it can be done in compliance with existing law." This was obviously a reference to the Jackson-Vanik Amendment which requires improved emigration procedures before the benefits can be granted to a Communist country.

Carter also called upon Israel to "severely restrict" all new settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip whether they are officially approved by the Knesset or established unofficially by groups within Israel. He said the Israeli government knows well the U.S. position, which is that such settlements are "inconsistent with international law" and an "obstacle to peace." He said Israel interprets the law differently and there is "a limit to what we can do with a sovereign nation." (By David Friedman)

BEHIND THE HEADLINES THE U.S. AND THE PLO

By Joseph Polakoff

WASHINGTON, April 30 (JTA) -- The Carter Administration's attitude and relationship with the Palestine Liberation Organization are under scrutiny and questioning again. The State Department insists there is no change in U.S. policy but many in the Congress are skeptical.

Much of the current situation stems from recent developments that include assertions by two State Department officials to a Congressional subcommittee that the U.S. can have "informal" contacts with the PLO without violating the U.S. agreement with Israel and from the waiver by Secretary of State Cyrus Vance of the restrictions to grant a visa in late March to Shafik Al-Hout, chief of the PLO's Beirut operations, which enabled him to speak and travel freely in the U.S. for three weeks.

Another incident was the meeting by two Carter Administration officials with Al-Hout at a party at the Syrian Embassy on Syrian Nation Day.

Shift Of Responsibility

As a result, the House last Wednesday modified the so-called McGovern Amendment by including the Solarz-Derwinski Amendment to the State Department's authorization legislation. That puts direct responsibility for visas on the Secretary of State rather than on the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS).

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee last Thursday did not take up the amendment sponsored by Reps. Stephen Solarz (D. NY) and Edward Derwinski (R. MI.) in voting out the authorization money bill for the State Department for the coming fiscal year, but Sen. George McGovern (D. SD) made it clear that his measure was to support the Helsinki Accords and not to justify visas for PLO members. The matter, committee sources said, will be taken up on the Senate floor.

The Department contends that it acted on the Al-Hout visa under regulations other than the McGovern Amendment which it wants to remain law but Solarz pointed out that the Department invoked the McGovern measure in the past when it discussed visas for PLO members.

The Department has also insisted that Al-Hout personally is not a terrorist and is opposed to terrorism but it refused to say when and where he made such statements. The INS told JTA that the visa application is not protected by the privacy act and the State Department could reveal the application contents if it wished.

Informal Contacts With PLO

At a hearing by the House Middle East subcommittee last Thursday led by Rep. Lee Hamilton (D. Ind.), Assistant Secretary of State Harold Saunders and the Department's legal advisor, Herbert Hansell, contended that informal contacts with the PLO were theoretically possible without violating the assurances which the U.S. gave to Israel in writing Sept. 1, 1975 as part of the second Sinai agreement.

Following up the Saunders-Hansell testimony, the State Department said Friday that "specifically" the assurances were that "the U.S. will not recognize nor negotiate with the PLO so long as the PLO does not recognize Israel's right to exist and UN Security Council Resolution 242." The Department also quoted President Carter's statement to an Egyptian cor-

respondent on March 22 that if the PLO is willing to accept those two conditions, the U.S. will "immediately start working directly with that organization as such."

This aroused anger among Israelis who agreed that the language in the 1975 accord is negotiation and recognition but "the spirit of it was for the U.S. not to have contacts of any kind with the PLO."

When Saunders at the subcommittee hearing described Al-Hout as "a relative moderate in the spectrum of the PLO" who is not "personally involved in terrorism," Rep. Millicent Fenwick (R. NJ) retorted: "That's like picking out one from a group of gangsters because he says he doesn't kill on Sunday." She said "We shouldn't talk to the PLO at all."

State Department spokesman Thomas Reston said it is necessary to "apply a little bit of common sense" to the circumstances like dealing with the PLO on administrative matters such as granting visas for the United Nations meetings. "When somebody appears in front of you and sticks out his hand in a pure amenity sense -- sure we've shaken hands but there is no substantive message that we mean to convey by shaking hands."

CLARK RAPPED ON ISRAEL EMBASSY MOVE

By Ben Kayfetz

TORONTO, April 30 (JTA) -- Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau said yesterday it is "totally irresponsible" for Joe Clark, leader of the opposition Progressive-Conservative Party, to propose moving the Canadian Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem at a time of delicate Middle-East negotiations. Clark had said last week that if he becomes Prime Minister he would move the embassy.

Addressing a press conference, Trudeau said "I deem it to be the height of irresponsibility to make that kind of statement presumably just to influence some votes in this (next month's general) election." Trudeau pointed out that the U.S. and most Western allies have refused to change their embassy locations because it would imply taking sides at a time when balance is required.

Earlier, Arab Information Center official Hans Hilmy warned in Ottawa that the Arab states would have to "take some action against Canada" if Clark carried out his promise. He said Arabs would regard the move as clearly anti-Arab and a violation of "our basic rights." Other attacks on Clark's announcement came from the Arab-Canada Chamber of Commerce, the Arab Palestine Association of Toronto and the Council of Moslem Communities of Canada. A spokesman for the 5000-member Arab Palestine Association said "we consider this to be a cheap and irresponsible way of gaining votes."

PORTUGAL TO GRANT PLO FACILITIES

LONDON, April 30 (JTA) -- The Portuguese government is ready to grant the Palestine Liberation Organization "all facilities" to establish a delegation in Lisbon, according to a Portuguese Foreign Ministry spokesman quoted by Lisbon Radio's overseas service. He said the PLO could count on the Portuguese government's support and that Portugal's official position was favorable to it, adding: "The Portuguese government considered that the PLO was the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and favored a just solution to the situation in the Middle East so that the hopes of the Palestinians would be realized." The pledge was given last week to a delegation of the Portuguese Association of Friendship with the Arab Countries.