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BACKGROUND REPORT BEGIN-WEIZMAN RIFT OVER THE AUTONOMY PLAN COULD BE CRITICAL

By David Landau and Yitzhak Shargil

JERUSALEM, May 20 (JTA) -- As Premier Menachem Begin prepared for his summit meeting with President Anwar Sadat at El Arish next weekend, a serious rift was opened between himself and Defense Minister Ezer Weizman over the 22-point autonomy plan for the West Bank and Gaza Strip that a majority of the 11-man ministerial committee on autonomy approved last Thursday.

Weizman objected strenuously to the plan as far too headline and detailed to serve even as Israel's opening position if the negotiations are to succeed. During the tense 7 1/2 hour ministerial committee meeting marked by sharp verbal exchanges between himself and Begin, he announced that he would vote against the plan when it is presented to the full Cabinet for debate tomorrow. He also said he would ask to be relieved from serving on the team of six ministers, headed by Interior Minister Yosef Burg, which is to conduct the negotiations with the Egyptians.

The latest crisis between Begin and Weizman -- which was headlined in the Egyptian as well as the Israeli press over the weekend -- came at the worst possible time for Begin's government. Coinciding as it does with mounting public resentment over runaway inflation, it has given the Labor Alignment opposition a potent weapon to attack the government on both the political and economic fronts. A public opinion poll published by Yediot Achronot over the weekend gave Likud only a 4 percent lead over Labor should elections be held now, its narrowest margin since Likud's election victory in 1977.

Moreover, the defection of Weizman on the crucial issue of autonomy barely a week before Israelis and Egyptians start their negotiations on the subject, can only weaken Israel's position. Labor Party chairman Shimon Peres charged in a telephone interview with the Jewish Telegraphic Agency over the weekend that the Likud government was "falling apart" on political and economic issues.

Features Of The Autonomy Plan

Several features of the autonomy plan are, in fact, considerably tougher than the program originally proposed by Begin to the ministerial committee two weeks ago. It articulates specifically Israel's demand that the "source of authority" for the autonomous councils to be elected on the West Bank and Gaza Strip remain the Israeli Military Government.

Under Begin's doctrine, the Military Government will be "withdrawn" -- the term used advisedly in the Camp David accords -- but not abolished. In his initial proposal, Begin only implied that point. But under pressure from Agriculture Minister Ariel Sharon and Education Minister Ze'evulun Hammer, he made it specific in the final version.

The plan also specified total Israeli control over government-owned and uncultivated lands on the West Bank and over all of the territory's water sources. It concludes with two unilateral

declarations: that Israel will never agree to a Palestinian state and that it will demand sovereignty over the West Bank and Gaza Strip at the end of the five-year transition period of autonomy.

More moderate ministers were reportedly opposed to including these ultimatums in a plan that, after all, is supposed to serve as a negotiating document. But the hardliners, with Begin's full endorsement, prevailed. While Weizman opposed the plan almost in its entirety, Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan and Deputy Premier Yigael Yadin are understood to have voted against those sections specifying Israeli control over State lands and water supplies.

Weizman Seeking To Bow Out

Weizman, for his part, has indicated that he will not participate in the Cabinet vote on the autonomy plan as a demonstration of his lack of confidence in it. His view, stated vigorously in the ministerial committee, is that Israel should enter the talks with Egypt -- due to start in Beersheba next Friday -- without any detailed or binding paper but rather with broad, informal guidelines prepared by the Cabinet to instruct the negotiating team.

He told the ministerial committee that his views were shared by the army and the defense establishment. That drew an angry rejoinder from Begin that the Defense Minister did not represent the army. "You represent the government toward the army," Weizman was told.

The Defense Minister confirmed in a Yediot Achronot interview Friday that he does not intend to participate in the autonomy negotiations although he will retain his membership on the supervising committee of 11 ministers.

Government circles conceded today that they are worried about the Begin-Weizman clash. Should the Defense Minister resign from the Cabinet, the repercussions could be catastrophic for Begin's coalition government. But confidants of Weizman said over the weekend that he is not considering resignation. They said that, on the contrary, he will continue to fight with determination for his views and expected, ultimately, to succeed and thereby prevent Israel from making the same kind of mistakes that threatened the peace treaty talks with Egypt last winter.

These sources said that Weizman feels that while he and Dayan -- Israel's principal negotiators in the treaty process -- were often overruled by the Cabinet, their concepts eventually were adopted by the Cabinet majority. He believes, however, that the delays and shifts were harmful to the peace process and fears a similar situation will develop in the autonomy talks.

Difficult To Predict Outcome

Political pundits are wary of predicting the outcome of a prolonged quarrel between Begin and Weizman. While Weizman is popular in the public opinion polls, he lacks a firm base of support within Herut where Begin's tough approach to autonomy is certain to win back some of the waverers and die-hards who were dissatisfied with the peace treaty with Egypt.

Herut holds its national convention next month and Begin is expected to easily outmaneuver his Defense Minister should Weizman provoke a confrontation. Nevertheless, with the economy in severe trouble and the government's popularity declin-

ing according to the opinion polls, Begin is believed to want to avoid an all-out clash and may seek to smooth over his differences with Weizman at least for the time being.

Government circles maintain that no serious threat exists to its parliamentary majority. That view is based in part on the assumption that Yadin's Democratic Movement will not rock the boat for fear of new elections that would probably wipe it off the political map.

The Labor opposition takes quite a different view. Many Laborites are convinced that the Likud government is now more vulnerable than ever. In a statement released today, the Labor Party leadership heaped scorn on the autonomy plan which, they said, is tottering toward collapse even before the negotiations with Egypt begin.

View Of The Labor Opposition

In his interview with the JTA, Peres charged that Begin is heading blindly for a bi-national state. By proclaiming there is no more "green line," the demarcation between Israel and the West Bank, by insisting that autonomy will apply to people, not territory, and offering Israeli citizenship to West Bank and Gaza Strip Arabs, Begin was "inviting" them to be part of the autonomy, Peres said. "We shall wake up one morning and find ourselves with a bi-national state with three million Jews and two million Arabs," he said.

Peres accused Begin of presenting a hard-line version of autonomy for "internal consumption." In practice, he said, it contravened the Camp David agreement by retaining the Military Government as the final authority and would therefore be rejected out of hand by the Egyptians and the U.S. Peres noted that although the Camp David accords spoke of "withdrawal" not abolition of the Military Government, in the same sentence the agreement stipulated that the "self-governing authority" is to "replace the existing Military Government."

Peres said that if he were in office he would seek to renew the dialogue with Jordan, with the agreement of the Egyptians, to work out a territorial compromise on the West Bank. This option was implicit in the Camp David agreements in the repeated references to Security Council Resolution 242, Peres said. But Begin's ideological opposition prevented the present government from even considering it, he said.

U.S. SAYS IT WON'T SEND TROOPS TO SINAI TO OVERSEE ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL

By Joseph Polakoff

WASHINGTON, May 20 (JTA) -- The Carter Administration has explicitly denied that American combat troops will be sent to Sinai to supervise the Israeli withdrawal from that territory in accordance with the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. The denial came last Friday from State Department spokesman Hodding Carter, following a report that the United Nations Security Council appears unlikely to renew the UN Emergency Force (UNEF) mandate which has been functioning between the Israeli and Egyptian forces on the Sinai peninsula since the end of the Yom Kippur War.

Carter said that "the U.S. believes firmly" that the mandate should be renewed by the Security Council before it expires July 24. He pointed to Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, adopted after the Six-Day War and the Yom

Kippur War, respectively, and "other resolutions" both in the Council and the UN General Assembly indicating the "important role" of the UN in carrying out those resolutions.

With the Soviet Union considering a veto of a continuation of UNEF in support of the Arab states with which it is aligned against the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, Carter made it clear that the U.S. is emphasizing to the Soviet government not to block UNEF's continuation. "We are in close consultation with Security Council members," he said, "and making our strong views known. This clearly includes the Soviet Union. I cannot predict the outcome of these consultations." Carter did not identify the other Council members.

Saying he denied "totally" that the U.S. is going to put troops in Sinai if the Security Council refuses to act and the other nations do not go along with the U.S. position, Carter said "as a matter of policy of this government there is no planning, no decision, no agreement -- in fact a rejection of the idea of putting American troops into Sinai." He stressed that the U.S. monitoring units in Sinai do not constitute a military presence "and does not and will not have a military role."

Asked whether the U.S. will support an Egyptian-Israeli force to supervise the withdrawal activities, Carter said it was a "conjectural possibility" but "I don't see that envisioned right now." He did not deny that the question of the Sinai force would be discussed when President Carter and Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev meet in Vienna June 15 for three days to discuss principally the finalization of the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT-2).

PENTAGON SELECTS TWO CONTRACTORS TO CONSTRUCT NEGEV AIR BASES

NEW YORK, May 20 (JTA) -- The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has selected two contractors to design and construct two military air bases in Israel's Negev region. Maj. Gen. James A. Johnson, division engineer of the Corps' North Atlantic Division Office here, announced the selection of Negev Airbase Constructors, a joint venture of Perini Corporation, sponsor (Framingham, Mass.), Harbert Construction Corporation (Birmingham, Ala.), Paul N. Howard Company (Greensboro, N.C.), and Louis Berger International, Inc. (East Orange, N.J.), to construct one of the air bases.

The other air base will be constructed by Air Base Constructors, a joint venture of Guy F. Atkinson Company, sponsor, (San Francisco); Dillingham Corporation (Honolulu); and Nello L. Teer Company (Durham, N.C.) in association with Tippetts-Abbett-McCarthy-Stratton (New York City).

The construction effort will begin immediately and the air bases will be initially operational within three years, Johnson said. The bases, which will cost a total of about \$1 billion, will replace two military air bases in Sinai that Israel is returning under terms of the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty.

On May 7, the Corps of Engineers selected Management Support Associates, a joint venture of Lester B. Knight and Associates, Inc. (Chicago); A. Epstein and Sons International, Inc. (Chicago); and Pope, Evans and Robbins, Inc. (New York) as Management Support Contractor in connection with the construction.

NEW YORK (JTA) -- A new organization to promote Yiddish culture and support various Yiddish programs and clubs in Israel, the League of Friends of Labor Israel, will hold its national founding conference June 9 and 10 at the New York Sheraton Hotel.

CATHOLIC, PROTESTANT CLERICS GENERALLY FAVOR REFORM JUDAISM'S PROPOSAL FOR SEEKING CONVERTS

NEW YORK, May 20 (JTA) — Leading Catholic and Protestant clergymen and scholars have endorsed — with some cautionary observations — a proposal by Rabbi Alexander Schindler, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), to seek converts to the Jewish faith among the "unchurched" or others searching for roots in religion, according to a report released here today by the UAHC, the central body of Reform Judaism in the U.S. and Canada. The proposal, which would reverse a 400-year-old Jewish tradition of not proselytizing, was advanced last December by Schindler.

The UAHC's 180-member board then set up a task force to study the question of "bringing the message of Judaism" to any and all who wish to examine or embrace it. The task force, headed by David Belin of Des Moines, convened here this weekend in conjunction with the semi-annual meeting of the UAHC board of trustees. It will report to the UAHC's General Assembly in December.

The UAHC's Department of Interreligious Affairs made public responses to the questionnaire sent to 31 Catholic and Protestant theologians. Eighteen responded. None of the four Fundamentalist or Evangelical representatives who were sent the questionnaire answered.

Rabbi Balfour Brickner, the department's director, asked four questions. They were: whether missionary efforts imply a superiority of one religion over another; whether there are "differences between the efforts of ... fringe groups and the posture of mission of your denomination"; whether Schindler's call legitimizes Christian missionary efforts; and do missionary efforts directed at the "unchurched" affect interreligious relations.

Two-Way Street Cited

The responses received by Brickner were overwhelmingly favorable to the proposal. Many of them made the point that an outreach program to non-Jews would strengthen self-understanding and identification among members of the Jewish community and that Schindler's call demonstrated the vitality of Judaism and the Jewish community in this country.

The Christian leaders also praised Schindler for not seeking to imply a superiority of Judaism over other faiths. None indicated concern that a Jewish missionary effort would damage interfaith relations. At the same time, however, several respondents made the point that seeking converts among the "unchurched" was a two-way street and that the large number of unaffiliated Jews in the United States might be deemed legitimate "targets" for Christian proselytizing.

Kristen Stendahl, dean of the Harvard University Divinity School, wrote that Schindler's "analysis of the place and potential of such a mission ... is correct." On the question of the superiority of one religion over another that might be implied in missionary efforts, Stendahl replied that this depended on the perspective from which the mission was carried out.

"The spirit of Rabbi Schindler's paper," he commented, "indicates that it need not have such implications." He added that he felt confident that the UAHC's proposed program would be free of "spiritual imperialism." Stendahl observed that "it is important to couple the mission-

ary stance with interfaith dialogues and consultations" to make sure that misinterpretations are corrected.

A Move To Be Welcomed

Responding on behalf of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Dr. Eugene Fisher said: "An active Judaism which vigorously proclaims its own unique message to the world and openly invites all interested in experiencing the richness and depth of its religious tradition is something to be welcomed in a pluralistic society."

Fisher, who heads the Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations of the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Religious Affairs, also stressed the need for continuing dialogue between Jewish and Catholic religious leaders to explore "the many theoretical and pragmatic questions which face us in coming to grips with how we are to view each other in terms of God's overall plan of salvation."

Another prominent Catholic theologian, Rev. John T. Pawlikowski, a professor at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, called the proposal "basically a Jewish decision," and found no objections to it in principle. "I feel an argument can be made for such a move," he said. But he warned that "many Christians may misinterpret it. They may also use it to justify their own missionizing of Jews."

Dr. Harvey G. Cox of the Harvard University Divinity School, said he welcomed Schindler's initiative and that he could think "of no good reason why any thoughtful Christian should find it objectionable." For a person not born Jewish to choose to be a Jew "further escalates the currently growing belief that any religion is something one chooses, not something due to an accident of birth," Cox observed, adding: "This in turn suggests that people born Jewish can choose another path, and should be allowed to do so if it seems more persuasive to them."

He said that "I am opposed to Christians trying to convert Jews. I do not extend my opposition to the case of 'secularized' Jews for whom Judaism has ceased to have any personal meaning. I believe nothing is gained by refusing to share one's faith with such persons. However, even in these cases, I would hope that such people would 'return' to the Torah and to Judaism, if that is possible, and I would direct my efforts in that way."

Prof. Gregory Baum, of Toronto, a Catholic theologian who resigned from the active priesthood and now teaches at St. Michael's College of the University of Toronto, endorsed the UAHC proposal, noting that the proposed outreach movement might have "a profound effect on the self-understanding of the Jewish community." He said he strongly opposed "the church's effort to convert Jews, be they religious or non-religious."

He added that "the church's missionary outreach was an axis of anti-Semitism. It was based on the Christian negation of Jewish existence. And the negation which at first was purely spiritual became eventually social and political because the church became the religion of the state. For this reason a mission of the church directed toward the Jew is offensive to me. It is obscene. It is impenitent."

Advantages Of The Proposal

Peter Berger, a liberal Protestant associated with the Mediating Structures Project in New York City, favored the idea of American Judaism adopting a missionary stance because, in his view, "a religious community in a pluralistic society will increasingly find that it will be plausible to those within it only if it can make itself plausible to outsiders." Putting it another way, he said: "Judaism

will convince "its own" only if it succeeds in convincing others."

Rev. Malcolm Boyd of Sherman Oaks, Cal., author of "Are You Running With Me, Jesus?" and other books, said: "Rabbi Schindler's outreach program is something that Jews and non-Jews alike need for the deepening -- and hopefully permanent improvement -- of interreligious relations. It can be enormously beneficial. Old images can be shattered, stereotypes discarded, outmoded and false attitudes relegated to the dust bin."

Views Will Be Studied

Brickner said the responses would be "scrupulously and conscientiously studied and evaluated" by Schindler and other officials of the UAHC and "members of the task force charged with developing a conceptual and practical plan of operation for the outreach program will take careful account of the views and points expressed. This should help immeasurably to avoid pitfalls as our proposal is implemented."

Brickner noted that the lack of response from Fundamentalists and Evangelicals was significant, particularly since many Jewish groups have responded favorably to the evangelical support of Israel. "Evangelical Protestantism is an enigma to American Jewry," he said. "On the one hand Jews deeply appreciate their support of Israel. On the other hand, we remain dubious of a theology that motivates at least some Evangelicals to seek the conversion of Jews."

He observed further that "while individual Protestants have spoken out clearly and forcefully in opposition to the conversion of Jews, mainline Protestant denominations have not. Until this is done, their relationships with the Jewish community of this country will remain uncertain and somewhat strained."

CITING MIDEAST PROBLEMS, STRAUSS TO BEGIN JOB AT AN EARLIER DATE

WASHINGTON, May 20 (JTA) -- Robert S. Strauss, President Carter's newly appointed ambassador-at-large to the Israeli-Egyptian talks on Palestinian autonomy, will join those negotiations in late June rather than in August as he had previously indicated. He explained to reporters at a State Department news conference yesterday that he was advancing his timetable because of "negative trends" in the region.

He listed these as Arab hostility toward Egypt that was "more intense than I thought it would be," the rising incidence of Palestinian terrorism against Israel and Israel's continuing establishment of settlements on the West Bank.

Strauss, who is going to China next week in his capacity as the President's special trade negotiator, will not be present at the summit meeting between Premier Menachem Begin of Israel and President Anwar Sadat of Egypt at El Arish in Sinai next week, which will formally open the next phase of Israeli-Egyptian talks. He will be represented there, however, by his deputy, James F. Leonard Jr., who will accompany Secretary of State Cyrus Vance to El Arish and remain in the region for a time, Strauss said.

Expects 'Extreme Positions'

Strauss said he expected the Israelis and Egyptians to lay down "some pretty extreme positions" at the start of their talks on the future of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. But he said he would allow the two parties to negotiate on all possibilities for a settlement before the U.S. ad-

vances ideas of its own. "When the time comes for us to assume a far more active role," Strauss said he would serve as "a strong negotiator, an advocate of positions."

"We're going to be a full partner in every respect... In form and substance," he told the reporters. "I am an activist. I have a high energy level. I'm in the middle of things even if I belong there or not. I want to be there, I want to start playing an active, a very dominant controlling role, if you will, very shortly, in determining what our posture is."

Strauss said that he felt that the next phase of Israeli-Egyptian talks offer "a fresh beginning. I feel it is more of a political negotiation than I earlier thought," he said.

U.S. Military Delegation In Cairo

The State Department confirmed, meanwhile, that a high level American military delegation was due to arrive in Cairo today for talks with Egyptian defense officials on American arms sales to Egypt. The delegation is headed by Erich Von Marbo, Deputy Director of the Defense Department's Defense Security Assistance Agency.

An earlier report from Cairo said the talks were part of a series of meetings between Egypt and the U.S. to determine how Egypt will utilize the \$1.5 billion in military credits granted it by Washington. According to the semi-official Egyptian newspaper Al Ahram, the U.S. will provide Egypt with Phantom jet fighters, air defense missiles, armored troop carriers, electronic equipment and naval units.

ITALY, ISRAEL IN NEW AIR AGREEMENT

By Lisa Palmieri-Billig

ROME, May 20 (JTA) -- Until today, Italy was Israel's only friend in Western Europe with which it did not have an air agreement. That situation was rectified yesterday when Israel's Ambassador to Rome, Moshe Alon, and Italy's Director General for Economic Affairs, Mario Mondelli, signed an agreement which permits El Al and Alitalia to carry passengers to and from Italy and Israel, plus "two points beyond."

Israel's "two points" beyond Rome will be the U.S. and Mexico, while Italy has yet to specify its preferences in the Near East and Far East. El Al used to fly the Rome-U.S. route but dropped it in the past few years in line with company-to-company agreements with Alitalia. These agreements were renewed on a yearly basis and lacked the permanent status that air agreement regulations have. Basic principles and flight schedules were included in the agreement.

El Al's new ability to carry passengers to and from Rome to the U.S. and Mexico is considered important for Israel, Alon told Jewish news media reporters here yesterday. Hopes are that the "beyond points" will prove economically profitable for both countries and could lead to the promotion of further investments in equipment and auxiliary services, such as air-hotels and rental cars. At a future date, service might even be extended to South America. Negotiations were initiated in Jerusalem last October and concluded here with the signing of the agreement.

NEW YORK (JTA) -- The Fourth Pan-American Maccabiah Games will be held in Mexico City July 21-29. These Games are similar to the quadrennial Maccabiah in Israel, but participation is limited to teams from North, South and Central American countries. The U.S. team is sponsored by the United States Committee Sports for Israel.