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REAGAN, IN A LETTER TO BEGIN, SAYS THAT AMERICAN POLICY TOWARD ISRAEL HAS NOT CHANGED

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, Feb. 16 (JTA) — President Reagan, in a letter today to Premier Menachem Begin, sought to assure Israel that "American policy toward Israel has not changed" and that the U.S. is determined to maintain "Israel's qualitative technological edge" in the Middle East.

"Israel remains America's friend and ally," Reagan said. He said that recent press reports arising from Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger's trip to the Middle East which indicated that the U.S. was shifting its military policy away from Israel and toward the Arab states were "incorrect and exaggerated."

The "Dear Menachem" letter was released at the White House by David Gergen, White House Communications Director, just 2 1/2 hours before Moshe Arens, Israel's new Ambassador to the U.S. was to present his credentials to Reagan. Gergen said the letter was being released before the President sees a letter from Begin which is expected to be given to him by Arens.

The Begin letter is believed to express Israel's displeasure with reported U.S. proposals to sell Jordan F-16 jet fighters and Hawk mobile air defense systems and also refers to the Knesset resolution adopted yesterday by a vote of 88-3 deploring such sales.

Denies Move To Sell Arms To Jordan

But Reagan, in his letter stressed that no such move was planned and that Weinberger did not bring back with him a request from Jordan for new weapons. Gergen referred to statements by Weinberger on television this morning and by Secretary of State Alexander Haig on a television appearance Sunday which denied that there had been any such weapons request.

Appearing on the NBC-TV "Today" program, Weinberger said Israel's military edge would be a factor in any discussion of arms requests by Jordan. He said his review of Jordan's military needs during his visit to Amman last week was within the context of his responsibilities as Defense Secretary.

The Defense Secretary insisted that he had not suggested that U.S. policy was moving away from Israel. He said he had merely expressed the view that the U.S. needed more friends in the Middle East in addition to Israel.

However, reports from the Middle East said that King Hussein of Jordan would not officially make a request for U.S. arms until he was certain of Congressional approval of it.

No Redirection of U.S. Policy

Gergen also denied that a "senior official" in Weinberger's party on his Middle East trip had said the U.S. would "redirect" its military policy in the region away from Israel and toward the more moderate Arab states. He said that Defense Department spokesman Henry Cato had told him this statement was not made. Cato, at the Pentagon today, blamed the misunderstanding on airplane noise

although he conceded he was not present when the statement was supposed to have been made aboard Weinberger's jet on the return flight from the Middle East.

Nevertheless, Gergen said, if anyone in the Administration said that the Administration wanted to redirect its policy, that statement "was wrong."

Reagan's Letter To Begin

Reagan's letter to Begin said: "Recent press reports have presented incorrect and exaggerated commentary regarding U.S. military assistance policies for the Middle East.

"I want you to know that American policy toward Israel has not changed. Our commitments will be kept. I am determined to see that Israel's qualitative technological edge is maintained and am mindful as well of your concerns with respect to quantitative factors and their impact on Israel's security.

"The policy of this government remains as stated publicly by me. Secretary Haig's and Secretary Weinberger's statements on the public record are also clear. There has been no change regarding our military-supply relationship for Jordan and Secretary Weinberger brought me no new requests.

"Any decision on future sales to Jordan or any other country in the region will be made in the context of my Administration's firm commitment to Israel's security and the need to bring peace to the region.

"Israel remains America's friend and ally. However, I believe it is in the interests of both our countries for the U.S. to enhance its influence with other states in the region. I recognize the unique bond between the U.S. and Israel and the serious responsibilities which this bond imposes on us both."

Asked about the last sentence in the letter, Gergen said it refers to the question of restraint and consultations incumbent upon both countries.

Arens Stresses U.S.-Israeli Friendship

Meanwhile, Arens, in a prepared statement to be made when he presents his credentials, referred only obliquely to the problems between Israel and the U.S. He stressed the long friendship between the two countries and Israel's desire for peace.

"Israel's contribution to the peace process is one that goes beyond what our nation in our position could reasonably have been expected to make," Arens said. "If, nevertheless, we have made these commitments, it is because we wish to remain true to our fundamental yearning for peace and we have made them on the understanding that after the Sinai withdrawal is completed the peace process will continue as envisioned and agreed in the Camp David accords.

"We know that we can rely on your Administration to give your full support to the continuation of this process that the peace between Israel and Egypt may grow and flourish and indeed may prevail with the other countries of the region as well."

Arens expressed the "profound gratitude" of the Israeli government and people for Reagan's "longstanding friendship toward Israel, for the understanding you have shown for its needs and for the generous help you have extended to my country. Even

though differences have sometimes arisen between us, as frequently happens among the best of friends, let me assure you Mr. President that you, as well as the great American nation are at all times held in the highest esteem among all segments of our people."

Cites Shared Values And Traditions

Arens stressed that the U.S. and Israel are bound together by "the ideals and values we hold in common." He said, "it is these shared values and traditions that establish the basis for the common interests for the U.S. and Israel."

Arens noted "those who know history, those who know the Bible as a reflection of history and as the great spiritual heritage of Western civilization are cognizant of the fact that modern Israel is a return of an age-old people to its ancestral homeland. Unfortunately, awareness of this fact is only slowly, very slowly beginning to dawn upon the consciousness of the peoples in Israel's own region; indeed most of our neighbor states are still deeply hostile to the phenomenon of Jewish liberation with which they have yet to come to terms."

Arens praised the U.S. for helping achieve the Camp David accords and the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty but he added that "it is difficult to express in words the great price that Israel is paying for these agreements. Israel is relinquishing territory containing a great resource that has played a vital role in the security of our nation. Israel is assuming a most difficult economic burden. The removal of farmers from their fields and residences, from their homes, is a traumatic experience Israel will undergo during the next few months as we complete the withdrawal from Sinai." The withdrawal is scheduled to be completed April 25.

RABIN BLAMES REAGAN ADMINISTRATION FOR STALEMATE IN AUTONOMY TALKS

MIAMI BEACH, Fla., Feb. 16 (JTA) -- Former Israeli Premier Yitzhak Rabin said the Reagan Administration is responsible for the stalemate in the autonomy negotiations between Egypt and Israel because it remained aloof to the progress of the implementation of the Camp David agreement throughout the whole of 1981.

Rabin, who is presently a member of the Knesset, expressed this view in his keynote address at the 16th annual conference of the Israel Histadrut Foundation. The conference here was attended by over 750 delegates from around the country and Canada which celebrated the \$70 Million Year of the Foundation, an American charity which focuses on various deferred giving programs for the benefit of the vast network of social, health and educational institutions of Histadrut. The \$70 Million Award was presented to Israel Kessar, deputy secretary general of Histadrut, by Rabbi Leon Kronish, spiritual leader of Temple Beth Shalom of Miami Beach and chairman of the Israel Histadrut Foundation's Board of Directors.

Rabin strongly criticized the Reagan Administration for building its Middle East strategy on the very fragile foundation of the feudal regime of Saudi Arabia, which is "rich, but very weak."

"Is it not ironic to base a Middle East peace policy on a country which is banker for the radical, rejectionist and terrorist forces in the Middle East while depriving the only country

which has the courage to make a bold step toward a lasting peace with Israel," Rabin concluded;

AJCONGRESS ASKS TOY MAKERS TO HALT SALE OF ITEMS BEARING NAZI INSIGNIA

NEW YORK, Feb. 16 (JTA) -- The American Jewish Congress has called on American toy makers to halt the production and sale of war toys bearing Nazi insignia. The ban would include replicas of guns, shells, military vehicles, aircraft, warships and miniatures of Nazi officers and soldiers.

The request to the toy industry, voiced by Julius Schatz, consultant on Jewish affairs to the AJCongress and chairman of the committee on community education of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council, called the marketing of toys bearing the Nazi insignia "a foul reminder of one of history's most besial episodes."

Schatz charged such toys lead to psychological damage in children who play with them. He cited a statement by Dr. Mortimer Blumenthal, Chief of Pediatric Psychiatry at New York's Mount Sinai Medical Center, who said such toys have a "corrosive mental influence" on children.

Blumenthal declared that the "specific use of toy military models which are artfully marked with Nazi insignia must raise serious questions about the permanent influence which such Nazi insignia exert on the child's mind."

Not Calling For Legal Ban

Schatz pointed out that the AJCongress is not calling for a legal ban on such toys. "This organization has fought long and hard to protect constitutional freedoms," he said. "We don't want to infringe on the right of toymakers to make toys of their choosing. But we do ask them to show a degree of sensitivity to the memory of the millions who died at the hands of the Nazis."

He said one toy manufacturer, Lindberg Products, Inc. of Skokie, Illinois, has already agreed to give up its line of swastika-marked model war toys. "We hope others will follow this company's lead," he added.

Schatz also noted that in West Germany, legislation has been in effect for several years prohibiting the manufacture or sales of toys bearing Nazi insignia.

The AJCongress initiated its campaign against swastika-marked toys two years ago. Its current request for a self-imposed ban by toy makers comes at a time when the manufacturers are holding their 79th Annual American Toy Fair in New York City.

NEW YORK (JTA) -- Police have reported that there have been "almost 100" incidents in the last month in the predominately Orthodox Jewish Midwood section of Brooklyn of teenagers snatching the hats of rabbis and students as they walk to their yeshivas.

Several days ago three teenagers were arrested for snatching hats. While they were in the police station-house waiting to be booked, the three asked the police if they wanted to buy hats. "It's a big joke to them," said Police Officer Aniello Tuzzio who made the arrests. Tuzzio said that among the hats found in their possession was one belonging to a 69-year-old rabbi.

TORONTO (JTA) -- A Hungarian-language publication from Australia, "Ut es Cel" ("Path and Destination"), has been banned from Canadian mail for hate-mongering. The periodical is replete with anti-Semitic material.

600 TROOPS FROM CRACK 82nd AIRBORNE DIVISION TO BE INCLUDED IN U.S. CONTINGENT IN THE SINAI FORCE

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Feb. 16 (JTA) -- The American contingent in the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) for Sinai will include 600 troops from the crack 82nd Airborne Division, Defense Minister Ariel Sharon was informed yesterday.

He was told by MFO director Gen. Leaman Hunt of the U.S. and Gen. Frederick Bull-Hansen of Norway, who will command the MFO, that the American unit would be stationed on Tiran Island which commands access to the Gulf of Aqaba and the Israeli port of Eilat. The 82nd Airborne Division is a significant element of the Rapid Deployment Force the U.S. is developing to respond to military threats in the Middle East and other parts of the world.

The U.S. will provide the greater proportion of the 2,500-man peacekeeping force that will patrol Sinai after Israel completes its withdrawal next April. Four European powers -- Britain, France, Italy and Holland -- will also contribute to the MFO. Italy will supply a naval patrol force, France will staff a field hospital and Britain will provide logistical and administrative assistance.

Yesterday, the Dutch Cabinet formally approved the participation of a 100-man unit from Holland in the MFO and parliamentary approval is expected to follow. The Dutch force will include 75 communications experts and 25 military policemen. The former began their training February 1. Australia is understood to be ready to provide 10 helicopters and their crews. Other participants in the MFO are Colombia, Uruguay and Fiji.

UNEXPECTED HIKE IN THE C.O.L INDEX

By Gil Sedan and Hugh Orgel

JERUSALEM, Feb. 16 (JTA) -- Finance Minister Yoram Aridor is expected to renew his demands for sharp reductions in government spending in face of an unexpected upward surge of the cost-of-living index last month, following a downward trend last year.

The Central Bureau of Statistics reported yesterday that the c.o.l. for January rose by a record 8.3 percent, the highest increase for that month since the Bureau began recording statistics when Israel was founded in 1948.

The c.o.l. index rose by no more than 7.3 percent in January of 1980 and 1981. The Bureau said last month's increase was caused largely by price hikes resulting from sharp cuts in government subsidies.

The January rise was alarming because it pushed the annual rate of inflation up to 127 percent compared to 101 percent last year. The big jump was registered despite declines of 2.2 percent in the prices of fruits and vegetables and a 3.1 percent decrease in the prices of clothing and footwear. But building costs went up by 13.3 percent last month. Builders announced that the price of housing would increase at a similar rate despite a slowdown in the sale of apartments.

Aridor Intends To Curb Inflation

Aridor has stated his intention to bring Israel's inflation rate down from triple to double-digit proportions. His goal this year is a 90 percent rate. But he insists he cannot do this unless his fellow ministers agree to cut down government spending. He is embroiled in arguments with many of his colleagues on this issue, though so far he has

avoided a Cabinet debate. He faces strong opposition and does not have the support of Premier Menachem Begin.

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, an average family in Israel needed a monthly income of 11,700 Shekels (\$670) in January to sustain the same standard of living as last year. The Bureau also noted that the c.o.l. has increased some 500-fold since September, 1951.

AUSTRIAN POLICE CONDUCTING INTENSIVE CHECK ON ARABS LIVING IN THE COUNTRY

VIENNA, Feb. 16 (JTA) -- The State Police are conducting a house-to-house check of the estimated 4,600 Arabs presently living in Austria. Special squads visited about 900 Arabs last week to examine their visas and residence permits. Many were said to have no valid papers.

The check was ordered by the government following renewed threats against the lives of Austrian political figures by an extremist Palestinian group, Al Asifa. Al Asifa was implicated in the attack on the Jewish community center and synagogue here last August in which two persons were killed and 18 were wounded, and in the assassination of Heinz Nittel, a Vienna City Council member, last May.

Arab Ambassadors accredited to Austria were informed of the measures in advance by Chancellor Bruno Kreisky last week. Apart from the diplomatic corps, most Arab residents of Austria are either students or workers, chiefly newspaper vendors. One of the two Palestinian Arabs convicted for the community center attack has been a student in Austria for the past two years.

RENEE GOLDSTUCK DEAD AT 63

BRUSSELS, Feb. 16 (JTA) -- Renee Goldstick, who was the Jewish Telegraphic Agency's correspondent here for close to 30 years, died last week at the age of 63 after a long and painful illness. During that period she reported on developments within the Brussels Jewish community and on the work of the European Economic Community. Ms. Goldstick joined the Jewish Agency before the Jewish State was established and afterwards served for 20 years as the private secretary to Israel's Ambassador to Belgium and at the same time reported for the JTA.

PROJECT RENEWAL DEFENDED

JERUSALEM, Feb. 16 (JTA) -- Deputy Premier David Levy hotly defended Project Renewal against charges by opposition Knesset members that it has become a bureaucratic mess. Levy, who is also Minister of Housing, invited the critics to tour some Project Renewal neighborhoods with him and after that, he said, he would agree to a general debate on the issue.

Project Renewal is a slum clearance and rehabilitation effort undertaken by the Israel government and the Jewish Agency in partnership with overseas Jewry. Labor MK Shoshana Arbeli-Almosino complained that Premier Menachem Begin had promised five years ago that 160 slum neighborhoods all over the country would be rehabilitated. But the project has sunk into a "swamp" of bureaucracy and intrigues, she said.

Levy reported that in the last three years, some 4000 new dwelling units have been built, 1400 others enlarged and 15,000 renovated. He said about 1,000 families have been moved to other neighborhoods. Levy accused the previous Labor government of creating the conditions which the Likud government is trying to eliminate or at least ameliorate.

REAGAN SAYS THE U.S. STANDS SOLIDLY WITH ISRAEL

WASHINGTON, Feb. 16 (JTA) -- A message from President Reagan to a National Prayer Breakfast for Israel here last week declared that the United States stands solidly with Israel and expressed the hope that Israel should be "strong and free and live in peace."

The message was delivered by Martin Blackwell, a White House aide to the prayer breakfast, sponsored by the Round Table, a group of Evangelical Christians. The breakfast, the first in honor of Israel by the Round Table, was held in conjunction with the annual convention of the National Association of Religious Broadcasters.

Ministers Offer Prayers For Israel

About six Evangelical ministers offered prayers for Israel, including the Rev. Bailey Smith, president of the Southern Baptist Convention, who a little more than a year-and-a-half ago said that God does not hear the prayers of Jews. Smith recently visited Israel and returned impressed by the Jewish State, full of praise for Israel and for what he said was its "humane" treatment of Arabs. Also during the prayer breakfast, a band played Israeli songs and kosher breakfast was available for those who wanted it.

Harry Hurwitz, the Israel Embassy Minister of Information, told the audience that Israel has proven it is willing to make sacrifices for peace. He said Israel draws its strength from its own people and from the support of friends in the United States and elsewhere. Hurwitz stressed that despite momentary differences between the United States and Israel, the friendship between the two countries is solid, based on shared human values and common security interests.

Moved By The Program

About 60 American Jewish leaders attended the prayer breakfast. Hyman Bookbinder, Washington representative of the American Jewish Committee, said he was quite moved by the program and that he saw as a "genuine caring for Israel" by the Evangelical Christians.

A similar comment was made by Rabbi Joshua Haberman of the Washington Hebrew Congregation. He said he discovered that the Evangelical Christians have gone beyond support of Israel as the Holy Land and also supported it as a modern political and social entity.

PERU'S JEWISH COMMUNITY DISMAYED OVER THAT COUNTRY'S VOTE FOR UN ASSEMBLY'S ANTI-ISRAEL RESOLUTION

LIMA, Feb. 16 (JTA) -- The Jewish community of Peru has expressed its "profound dismay" over that country's vote in favor of the United Nations General Assembly resolution of February 5 condemning Israel for annexing the Golan Heights and demanding punitive sanctions against Israel and its total isolation from the world community.

A statement released here by Leopoldo Kahn, president of the Asociacion Judia Del Peru, noted that in supporting "the Communist-Arab initiative," Peru isolated itself "from the other democratic nations of the Western and Christian world, as well as the Latin American family, including those fellow nations of the Andean Pact." The latter, Chile and Argentina, abstained. The United States and Western European countries

joined Israel in voting against the measure which was overwhelmingly supported by the Communist bloc and Third World countries.

The statement observed that the resolution "far from being a call to negotiations leading to the search for peace in the Middle East and the opening of dialogue between the parties involved, gave unusual support to Syria and the Arab nations of the 'rejection front' who maintain a permanent state of belligerence towards Israel, refusing to recognize her right to exist as a nation."

Particular Concern Expressed

The statement also found fault with "the reservations expressed by our Foreign Ministry -- post factum" which "do not in essence modify the condemnatory vote." Particular concern was expressed over that part of the Foreign Ministry's statement which found "morally and politically indispensable" the participation of "foreign powers" in the Middle East peace process.

This was seen as "referring implicitly to the Soviet Union, a country which has no diplomatic relations with Israel and whose international policy has been questioned world-wide because of the intervention in Afghanistan and the recent events in Poland."

The statement concluded: "The Peruvian Jewish community, like other important personalities and members of the press, expresses the hope that our foreign policy be a faithful reflection of the democratic thinking by which our nation lives. We feel protected by the conviction that the historic friendship between friendly nations -- such as Peru and Israel -- will be strengthened and increased when nourished by common streams that emanate from a solid, pacifist, pluralist, and democratic vocation."

SOLIDARITY SUNDAY FOR SOVIET JEWRY TO BE HELD MAY 2

NEW YORK, Feb. 16 (JTA) -- Some 150,000 people are expected to take part in the 11th annual Solidarity Sunday for Soviet Jewry, it was announced by the Greater New York Conference on Soviet Jewry which sponsors the event.

Seymour Lachman, chairman of the Conference, stressed that Soviet Jews face a desperate situation. He noted that during the past year, the Soviet government has virtually halted Jewish emigration and has drastically increased harassment and imprisonment of teachers and activists.

Zeesy Schnur, director of the Conference, urged synagogues, organizations and individuals to begin mobilizing now for the May 2 march and rally. "Add your voice to those of 150,000 others in sending the strongest freedom message ever to Washington, the Kremlin and to the Soviet Jews themselves. We must not fail them now," she said.

Lachman announced that the chairmen for this year's event will be Seymour Katz and Rabbi Haskel Lookstein, both vice chairmen of the Conference. Lookstein is also rabbi of Congregation Kehillath Jeshurun and headmaster of the Ramaz School.

TEL AVIV (JTA) -- Bir Zeit University, a center and focus of Arab nationalist sentiment on the West Bank, was again in uproar Monday when an official of the education department of the Israeli civilian authority for the region was beaten up by students. The official, Zion Gabai, was given medical treatment after escaping by firing his pistol into the air. There has been a mood of hostility on the campus ever since the university was closed last November because of riots.