

Vol. LX - 65th Year

Monday, April 26, 1982

No. 79

**A NEW CHAPTER BEGINS;
ISRAEL LEAVES SINAI ON SCHEDULE,
THREE YEARS AFTER SIGNING PEACE
TREATY WITH EGYPT AND ALMOST 15
YEARS AFTER CAPTURING AREA IN 1967**
By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, April 25 (JTA) -- Israel today completed its evacuation of Sinai, exactly three years after the signing of the peace treaty with Egypt and the Camp David accords and just two months under 15 years since capturing the area in the Six-Day War of 1967.

The Israel army did not leave the region with banners flying, in a demonstration of the sacrifices Israel was making for the sake of peace with its largest Arab neighbor. The army simply left, with no formal flag-lowering or hand-over ceremonies.

Apart from a brief 10-minute ceremony at Ophira at which the Israel Air Force lowered the flag and the last helicopter left the ground on its way back to Israel at 7:30 in the morning, the only timetable for the steps in the total evacuation was that "the last man should be out of the area and back across the old-new border by noon," an army spokesman solemnly declared.

Peacekeeping Force Will Begin Patrolling Area

A multi-national peace keeping force of some 2,500 men, with half the personnel and 60 percent of the financing provided by the United States, will begin patrolling Sinai. The force is drawn up from 11 nations, but it will not operate under the auspices of the United Nations as have previous peacekeeping forces in the Middle East.

Each contingent is bringing its own equipment and it is likely to cost about \$225 million to set up and operate the force in its first year. The task of the force will be to patrol the Sinai side of the new Israeli-Egyptian border stretching from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea.

Today, within minutes of the last Israeli soldier leaving Ophira, Egyptian officials were putting up new signs at the nearby airfield, saying in Arabic and English: "Sharm e-Sheikh" -- its old name prior to its Israeli take-over 15 years before.

By this afternoon, Egyptian flags were raised at the three border-crossing points of Rafah and Nitza-nan, as well as the still temporary crossing point south of Taba near Eilat, the future of which is still under discussion in Cairo.

But on the ruins of Yamit, or nearby, some Egyptian flags were already to be seen this morning, raised by Bedouins waiting to move in to take whatever has been left behind.

The Holdouts in Yamit

Within the ruins of Yamit, a small group of some 20 anti-withdrawal demonstrators, led by Kiryat Arba Rabbi Moshe Levinger, were allowed to remain over Shabbat in the Sephardi Synagogue, the only building still standing among the ruins.

The group was joined by a few Jerusalem rabbis

allowed to spend the last Sabbath there, and a couple of hundred anti-withdrawal movement members who infiltrated back through army roadblocks.

At a ceremony in the synagogue this morning Rabbi Haim Druckman and the militants announced the establishment of a new political party, to be called "Shvut Israel" (Israel Return) working for the return of the evacuated area to Israel, and aimed to compete with the National Religious Party.

The members then tore their clothes in sign of mourning and marched out with the Torah scrolls, back across the international border.

Evacuating Sinai for Peace

In a lengthy order of the day, Defense Minister Ariel Sharon declared that Israel was not retiring from Sinai but evacuating willingly for peace.

He said that the town of Yamit had been destroyed and razed to the ground to prevent the shedding of Jewish blood. He said that this was the first time in Israel's history that such action had been undertaken willingly.

Sharon praised the soldiers who had taken part in the Yamit operation: "Evacuating their brothers and sisters, not with violence but with love and understanding..."

"The ruins of Yamit will bear eternal proof that we have done over and above human imagination to meet our obligations under the peace treaty so that our children will not point an accusing finger at us and tell us we have missed the opportunity..."

"No Arab army has succeeded -- and never will succeed -- in demolishing an Israeli town. Only we, with our own hands, were forced to destroy Yamit. We were forced to erase it from the face of the earth to implement the peace agreement on time, without spilling Jewish blood."

One Building Remains in Yamit

Shortly before noon the southern front commander toured the international border, from the ruins of Yamit where some 2,000 militants had been ousted and 600 houses destroyed, to Taba south of Eilat, where soldiers now staff a temporary line running just south of the disputed Rafi Nelson village and a luxury hotel complex still abuilding. The exact line of the agreed border is still to be determined.

The only building left standing in Yamit is the Sephardi Synagogue which has been marked as a holy site which the Egyptians have promised to maintain and allow Israeli rabbinical inspection at frequent intervals.

Shortly before the evacuation deadline army patrols searched the Yamit area and Air Force planes and helicopters flew over the region looking for militants who might have hidden in the dunes.

The Egyptians have undertaken to return any such demonstrators found to Israeli authorities within eight hours. If any are caught on a second

JTA daily news bulletin

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Published by Jewish Telegraphic Agency / 165 West 46th Street / New York, N. Y. 10036-2574

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The Egyptians have undertaken to return any such demonstrators found to Israeli authorities within eight hours. If any are caught on a second

infiltration attempt, they will be taken by the Egyptians for police interrogation.

The new "Shvut Israel" political movement formed by Druckman has termed Yamit a "Holy City" and vows to work for an Israeli return to Yamit and Sinai.

The movement was denounced by the NRP, which said that the demand for a return to Sinai was tantamount to a call for renewed war. The new movement is also opposed by the Tehiya movement which regards it as a weakening of the front to ensure Israeli settlement on the West Bank.

In his order of the day, Sharon stated that the Sinai withdrawal was the "red line in Israeli concessions."

While the last Israeli soldiers were withdrawing from Sinai, Labor Party leader Shimon Peres was as far away as possible -- touring the northern border along Lebanon.

He praised the Israeli soldiers for the manner in which they had carried out an essential but most unpleasant task in removing die-hard militants who had attacked them from rooftops. He also said he felt he had to praise Premier Menachem Begin for having carried out the withdrawal, on time in accordance with an international obligation.

But Peres added he could not forgive him for the many mistakes made in the three years of negotiations leading up to the Sinai evacuation. He said that from his personal knowledge from talks with the late Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, he knew that some territorial concessions could have been obtained from the Egyptians -- including continued Israeli use of Air Force bases in Sinai.

MUBARAK CONGRATULATES BEGIN ON ISRAEL'S WITHDRAWAL FROM SINAI

by David Landau

Jerusalem, April 25 (JTA) -- President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt telephoned Premier Menachem Begin this morning to congratulate him on the completion of the Sinai withdrawal. Israeli officials said Mubarak reiterated his pledge that peace between the two nations would be eternal. Begin took the call during the weekly Cabinet meeting.

Meanwhile, the text has been released of Mubarak's letter to Begin of last week -- the letter which enabled Begin to tell his Cabinet last Wednesday that he had received satisfactory reassurances from Egypt, and to recommend to the Cabinet that Israel complete the withdrawal on schedule.

The letter begins by reiterating Egypt's commitment to peace which Mubarak describes as a "strategic, not merely tactical goal." There then follows lengthy quotations, mainly in indirect speech, from the March 1979 letter from Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Begin to President Carter pledging to negotiate "in good faith" over Palestinian autonomy. Israeli officials were particularly pleased that Mubarak referred to Camp David as "the only document binding on both our countries," and affirmed that this was Egypt's policy "now and it would remain unchanged in the future."

The letter ends with a strong presentation of Egypt's position that the arbitration regarding Tabah should be given a definite deadline, so as not to leave unresolved issues between the two sides that could cause friction in the future. Negotiations over Tabah continued today in Cairo between high Israeli, Egyptian and American officials.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES ISRAEL LEAVES AN AREA WHERE ITS BLOODIEST WARS TOOK PLACE

by Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, April 25 (JTA) -- When Israel completed its withdrawal from Sinai today, it left behind not just a large strategic hinterland, the rubble of once prosperous settlements and natural resources, including oil, of incalculable value to a resource-poor nation. It left behind the scenes of its bloodiest wars and greatest losses in terms of lives and equipment.

The sandy, rocky plains and jagged mountains of the peninsula are the grave of more Israeli soldiers than any other area of combat in the five years Israel has fought since it proclaimed independence in May, 1948. From that moment, in fact, Sinai was a battlefield. The 15 years of Israeli occupation which ended today was only the longest of a series of occupations and withdrawals that began 34 years ago.

Israel today withdrew, not in defeat nor under intense international pressure, but in compliance with a peace treaty, solemnly entered into with Egypt three years ago. It was not a happy withdrawal but a willing one.

The first time the Israeli army entered Sinai was in December, 1948, in pursuit of an Egyptian army that had invaded the new Jewish State only a few months earlier. The Egyptians retreated and Israeli forces occupied the northern salient of the peninsula until forced to withdraw under urgent Anglo-American pressure. Egypt retained the Gaza Strip and, despite the armistice agreements, there was no peace along the southern borders.

Border Warfare Was Incessant

Border warfare was incessant and Israel, hoping to put an end to it, joined eight years later with the British and French effort to regain the recently nationalized Suez Canal and unseat the troublesome regime of Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser.

In October, 1956, in what came to be known as the Sinai campaign, the Israeli army thrust into the peninsula in force and within eight days was entrenched on the eastern banks of the canal. But the Anglo-French invasion of Egypt faltered under the influence of opposition at home, the threat of Soviet intervention and powerful pressure from Washington against its allies.

The British and French forces withdrew. The Israeli army remained stubbornly in place for several months until Eisenhower's threat to withdraw American economic and political support of Israel forced Premier David Ben Gurion to yield the security asset only recently won. Early in 1957, the Israeli forces pulled out of Sinai for the second time.

In May, 1967, Nasser, firmly entrenched in Cairo and bent on international adventurism, summarily ordered United Nations peacekeeping forces out of the peninsula and declared a blockade of Israeli shipping entering the Straits of Tiran. The Israeli government, then headed by Premier Levi Eshkol, debated long and arduously over how to counter this new menace.

In early June, a powerful Israeli army supported by the air force swept again into Sinai. Egyptian defenses crumbled. On the sixth day after the start of hostilities, Israel was in possession of the entire peninsula. That sweeping victory has gone

down in history as the Six-Day War.)

1967 War Brought No Peace

It brought no peace. Almost immediately, the Egyptians opened their war of attrition. Powerless to retake Sinai, they resorted to artillery and air warfare along the new frontier of the Suez Canal. It did not command headlines abroad, but it was costly to both sides.

Between March 1969 and August, 1970, Israel suffered 244 soldiers dead and 683 wounded. On August 7, 1970, Nasser agreed to an American call for a cease-fire. Under the cover of that demarche, the Egyptians moved their missile batteries for the first time to the banks of the canal.

The cease-fire brought political stalemate. But when Anwar Sadat succeeded to the Presidency of Egypt after Nasser's death, he adopted parallel political and military strategies. He abandoned his predecessor's strong Soviet orientation and moved closer to the United States, exerting pressure for a political solution with Israel. At the same time, he planned a military strike against Israel in coordination with Syria. The surprise attack on October 6, 1973, Yom Kippur, caught Israel unprepared.

The Yom Kippur War

Egypt's forces crossed the Suez Canal and overcame the Israeli defenders on the first day of battle. Although Israel swiftly mobilized, and with a life-line of military supplies air-lifted from the U.S. gained the better of her foes, the Yom Kippur War was by far the costliest of Israel's battlefield experiences.

Between October, 1973 and the first disengagement agreement on January 18, 1974, 1,630 Israeli soldiers died, 4,242 were wounded and 232 were taken prisoners of war. The battle for Sinai ended in military stalemate because of the cease-fire imposed by the United States and the United Nations. But Sadat had succeeded in breaking the political stalemate.

By February 22, 1976, the Israeli army completed the evacuation of 6180 square kilometers of Sinai under the terms of the disengagement agreement. This was the first fruit of Henry Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy in the Middle East. It was also the first time Israel returned territory to an Arab foe in accordance with an agreement.

Israel relinquished control of the strategic Giddi and Mitla passes in the Sinai mountains, the traditional Egyptian attack route to Israel's borders. Also given up were the Abu Rodeis oilfields which had been supplying almost 66 percent of Israel's petroleum needs. Later, the even more productive Alma oilfields in the Gulf of Suez were returned to Egypt ending Israel's brief period of oil self-sufficiency.

Significant Events Recalled

But the disengagement agreements were the precursor of far more significant events: Sadat's historic visit to Jerusalem on November 19, 1977, the Camp David accords in September, 1978 and the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty signed in Washington in March, 1979.

The treaty called for Israel's withdrawal from all of Sinai in stages. The final stage was completed today. Israel gave up much:

The 250-400 kilometers of territory between the nearest Egyptian forces and its border; the three military air bases it built in Sinai, said to be the most modern and sophisticated in the world; the electronic

warning system in the mountains which had been used for monitoring Egyptian military movements and now could be used by the Egyptians to monitor Israel; the defense line from Sharm el-Sheikh to the Mediterranean coast; the model resort town of Yamit and its surrounding network of agricultural villages.

But these losses are balanced by a peace treaty and normal diplomatic relations between Israel and its most populous and powerful Arab neighbor, and the demilitarization of most of Sinai. If the treaty holds, Israel will have gained what it said it ardently wished after the Six-Day War -- peace for which it was willing to sacrifice territory to obtain.

REAGAN PRAISES ISRAEL'S COURAGE IN TAKING GREAT RISKS FOR PEACE by David Friedman

WASHINGTON, April 25 (JTA) -- President Reagan today praised Israel's "courage in taking the great risks which peace require." A statement issued by the White House as Israel completed its withdrawal from Sinai said: "We note today the successful completion by Israel of the withdrawal of its forces from the Sinai peninsula and the re-establishment there of full Egyptian sovereignty. The President believes that withdrawal represents a truly major sacrifice by Israel and he admires its courage in taking the great risks which true peace requires. He admires as well the courageous Egyptian initiative without which peace with Israel could not have been achieved.

"Israel's withdrawal from Sinai marks the beginning of a new era in the peaceful relations between Israel and Egypt, peaceful relations which should be taken by us all as the model for the future in that troubled region. The President is determined that the United States, together with Egypt and Israel, will continue to pursue the course of peace under Camp David with renewed vigor and dedication. It will not be an easy task but, with the example of Egypt and Israel before us, it can be achieved."

BEGIN SAYS ISRAEL WILL CONDUCT IN GOOD FAITH NEGOTIATIONS TO REACH AN AGREEMENT ON AUTONOMY By Kevin Freeman

NEW YORK, April 25 (JTA) -- Premier Menachem Begin said today that Israel will "conduct in good faith" negotiations to reach an agreement on autonomy for the Palestinians on the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

But at the same time, as Israel relinquished the final portion of Sinai to Egypt in accordance with the Camp David agreement, Begin said Israel would not tolerate any Egyptian breach of the peace treaty.

"If at any time, they should commit a breach of their commitments under the peace treaty, then Israel's reaction will be swift," Begin said in an interview on NBC-TV's "Meet the Press" program broadcast via satellite from the Prime Minister's Office in Jerusalem. The Israeli Premier did not indicate what Israel would consider as constituting such a breach or how Israel would react. The scheduled half-hour program was cut short by some 10 minutes because of technical difficulties.

On the issue of autonomy, Begin said that the proposal by Israel to allow 13 local functions to be administered by the ruling Palestinian authorities is "the widest ever suggested to any ethnical group." As for the criticism of the government's ouster of three democratically elected mayors on the West Bank and Gaza, Begin said the mayors were either members of the Palestine Liberation Organization or identified with the PLO. He added that the mayors tried to undermine security in the area and were in touch with PLO chief Yasir Arafat.

He rejected the contention that the Reagan Administration would "change" its relations with Israel following the Sinai withdrawal. Begin said he had no indication "that the U.S. government will change its course and use pressure against Israel. But if at any time we face pressure, we shall press back."

The Premier said that regarding the Golan Heights, Israel could not return it to Syria because it would be unable to monitor a breach in any agreement. He said that the Golan Law, which applied Israeli law and jurisdiction to the Heights last December, would continue to stand under any negotiated settlement for the Heights. He rejected outright any comparison between the Golan and Sinai.

Concerning Israel's air raid into Lebanon last week, Begin justified this because of PLO actions which the Premier said killed 17 Israelis and wounded another 250 men, women and children. But he said, "If they are quiet on the other side, we shall keep peace on our side."

EGYPT'S ENVOY TO GERMANY SUGGESTS MOVE TO CONVINC 'REJECTION FRONT' TO JOIN THE MIDEAST PEACE PROCESS

By David Kantor

BONN, April 25 (JTA) -- The Egyptian Ambassador to West Germany, Aisha Rateb, has suggested that her country serve as a mediator between Israel and the Arab states of the "rejection front" to convince them to join the Middle East peace process and contribute to it. But she maintained that Egypt has only a limited role to play with respect to Palestinian autonomy, according to an interview published in Die Welt.

Without the participation of all Arab countries, it is impossible to reach a permanent peace in the region, the envoy said. "After we recover our national territory," referring to Israel's withdrawal from Sinai completed today, "we will be in a better position to serve as a go-between," she said.

She said Israel's evacuation of Sinai proved its commitment to its treaty with Egypt. It shows the other Arab countries that one can rely on Jerusalem and "We hope that this will serve as a major incentive to bring them into the peace process," she said.

According to Rateb, Egypt does not have the right nor the desire to represent the Palestinians in the autonomy talks but merely to create a framework which would encourage them to participate in the process determining their future and their own nationhood. If an agreement is reached, she added, it would be the task of the Palestinians and of Jordan to implement it.

BEGIN OPPOSED TO PROSECUTING SOME 60 ANTI - WITHDRAWAL DIE - HARDERS

JERUSALEM, April 25 (JTA) -- Premier Menachem Begin today expressed his personal opinion against prosecuting some three score anti-withdrawal

die-hards arrested by police during the Yamit evacuation. At the weekly Cabinet meeting (according to unofficial reports) Begin said he would favor "forgiving them."

Attorney General Yitzhak Zamir said the state and the army must not, in his view, "Forgo its honor" regarding the alleged miscreants who had deliberately assailed the government, the Knesset and democracy. Begin said he did not want to "interfere" with the judicial process and it was not immediately clear how the episode would end.

After the Cabinet meeting Begin released the warm letters of congratulations he had sent to Defense Minister Ariel Sharon, Chief of Staff Gen. Rafael Eitan, the officer in charge of the southern command and the superintendent of police.

To Sharon, Begin wrote that there had never been a more complex and delicate challenge posed to a Cabinet minister in Israel, and it was largely thanks to Sharon that not a drop of Jewish blood had been spilled during the evacuation of Yamit. To Eitan, Begin wrote: "Happy is the man who is in overall command of such an army." Begin also wrote to Jihan Sadat, recalling her late husband's role in bringing this day to pass and also recalling Sadat's famous pledge: "No more war, no more bloodshed."

WEST GERMANY SEEN GIVING HIGH DIPLOMATIC PRIORITY TO THE MIDEAST

BONN, April 25 (JTA) -- Government sources predicted here that the Middle East will soon be given a position of high priority in West German diplomatic activity. They said that the completion of Israel's withdrawal from Sinai has opened a new chapter in Middle East diplomacy and the joint European efforts will soon be made to resolve the Palestinian issue. In Bonn's view, such efforts are essential to speed progress toward a general peace settlement.

The sources said that while Bonn is standing by the European Economic Community's 1980 Venice declaration calling for the Palestine Liberation Organization to be associated with the peace process, it is equally anxious to improve relations with Israel. Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher is expected to announce a date for his planned visit to Israel within the next few weeks.

While Bonn's official view seems to encourage new European moves in the Middle East, Alois Mertens, foreign policy spokesman for the opposition Christian Democratic Union, has warned against any separate European initiative.

JERUSALEM (JTA) -- Residents of the small town of Tubas in Samaria took over the local police station Sunday in protest against the "completion of the separate peace treaty with Egypt." A small force of Israeli security personnel who were summoned to the town evacuated the Arabs by using tear gas and firing shots into the air. A local policeman was wounded during the operation. Aside from this incident, there was relative quiet in the territories today.