

SHARP QUESTIONS, CRITICISM RAISED OVER THE GOVERNMENT'S HANDLING OF THE PLO SITUATION IN LEBANON

By David Landau and Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Dec. 21 (JTA) -- The government's handling of the situation which culminated in the safe evacuation of Palestine Liberation Organization chief Yasir Arafat and some 4,000 of his men from Tripoli, northern Lebanon yesterday, raised sharp questions in the Knesset today and criticism in the press.

Premier Yitzhak Shamir and Defense Minister Moshe Arens responded to doubts expressed over the wisdom of a policy that called for relentless sea-air pounding of PLO positions in Tripoli coupled with tough rhetoric about punishing the terrorists but which, in the end, allowed Arafat and his loyalists to escape unscathed with at least a portion of their weapons.

That policy, critics contended, implied confusion of purpose on Israel's part, tarnished its image and, by its seeming illogic, gave rise to speculation that there were serious differences between the Premier and the Defense Minister. Shamir and Arens vigorously denied this.

Both sought to explain why Israel refused to guarantee safe conduct to the Greek car ferries that carried Arafat and his men to safety under the United Nations flag, with a French naval escort. The Israeli position had implied a threat of military interdiction to block the evacuation.

Explanations Are Offered

Arens explained that the government decided to articulate, as vigorously as possible, its objections to the UN-sanctioned rescue of the terrorists in ships of a friendly foreign power. At the same time, it would hit the PLO "as much as possible" before their departure. But, Arens stressed, it would not have been "proper" for Israel to force a confrontation on the high seas with naval forces of a friendly power or to attack the Greek merchant ships after the PLO had embarked.

Both men insisted that Israel would continue to strike at PLO forces remaining in Lebanon and Israeli warplanes in fact attacked today PLO bases near Baalbek in the northern Bekaa Valley which is under Syrian control.

Arens said Israel would "not allow the terrorists to establish themselves" in the areas of Lebanon vacated by the Israel Defense Force last September. It would "continue to demand of the Druze" that they oust PLO terrorists from the areas they control. Arens also warned that if the Syrians do not "restrain" the terrorists under their control, those terrorists would come under constant attack.

Reports Of Confusion And Recrimination

But despite the clarifications in the Knesset, reports persisted today of confusion and recrimination in political and military circles over the handling of the Tripoli episode. Yediot Achronot, Israel's largest daily, today quoted sources who felt that the Navy's bombardment of the PLO in Tripoli before the evacuation reflected "uncertainty and confused policy-making" by the government.

Those sources said, according to the newspaper, that the naval bombardment, while it exacted some retribution for the December 6 Jerusalem bus bombing by the terrorists, failed to prevent the PLO's evacuation and lent some credibility to Arafat's claim that the evacuation was a victory over Israel.

Similarly, the critics said, the naval action drew down on Israel an angry public reprimand from Washington and created the impression that Israel backed off under American pressure.

Arens insisted that Israel's action was correct in that it established the "basic fact that we had the power to hit them (the PLO) in Tripoli and we had the power to prevent them from leaving." The decision as to how far to exercise that power was a matter of broader political expediency, the Defense Minister indicated.

Arens Irritated With Shamir

But according to one report circulating today, Arens was irritated by Shamir's alleged signaling to the U.S. that Israel would give the rescue vessels safe passage while publicly the government perpetuated doubts as to its intentions.

Arens denied that he had at any time contemplated attacks on the rescue fleet. Shamir, for his part, stated flatly in the Knesset that "there are not, nor were there, any differences between us", meaning between himself and the Defense Minister.

Air Strikes Against PLO Dissidents

Today's Israeli air strikes were against the Syrian-backed PLO dissidents who, more than Israel, had forced Arafat out of Lebanon. A military spokesman said the main target of the raid was the Sheikh Abdullah camp one kilometer south of Baalbek, a former Lebanese army encampment taken over by militant Shiite Moslems backed by Iran.

The base was a training area and jumping-off point for the suicide truck bomb attacks on the American and French military headquarters in Beirut last October 23 and the November 4 attack on Israeli military headquarters in Tyre, the spokesman said. French aircraft attacked the same base last month.

'SECOND KLAUS BARBIE CASE' **IS REPORTED BY THE ADL**

NEW YORK, Dec. 21 (JTA) -- The Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith today revealed that U.S. Army Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC) employed a Nazi war criminal convicted by a Belgian military court of 67 war crimes, including the torture of two American Army pilots.

The ADL identified him as Robert Jan Verbelen, a former Belgian citizen now living in Austria, and described his connection with the CIC as "a second Klaus Barbie case."

According to ADL, Verbelen, who fled his native country after the war, worked for American authorities in Austria from 1946 to 1955 under the name Alfred H. Schwab. The ADL said it has information that the U.S. Army was aware of Verbelen's true identity when he was hired.

In 1947, Verbelen was tried in absentia and sentenced to death by a Belgian military court after having been convicted of crimes involving mass murders and terrorist acts. The acts he was found guilty of, ADL

further disclosed, included unlawfully capturing, imprisoning and torturing two American pilots, identified at Lt. Nuntio Street and Lt. Eugene Dingledine, who were shot down over Belgium.

The two eventually wound up at Buchenwald concentration camp, from which they were liberated by the Russians in the closing days of World War II. The ADL said it did not know where the men were from or whether they are still alive.

Justice Department Urged To Investigate

In a letter to U.S. Attorney General William French Smith (dated December 16), Justin Finger, director of ADL's Civil Rights Division, called on the Justice Department to investigate how Verbelen was able to escape to Austria, the circumstances of his recruitment and employment by the CIC and his having secured Austrian citizenship.

Pointing out that the Verbelen case is the second of its kind to be uncovered, he further requested a comprehensive Justice Department investigation of the role of Nazi war criminals in U.S. counterintelligence operations after World War II.

Finger said the documentation on Verbelen was obtained by ADL from the U.S. Army Intelligence and Security Command at Ft. Meade, Md. under the Freedom of Information Act, and from the Belgian government, and other sources here and abroad.

He noted that the Verbelen case follows by four months the Justice Department's confirmation that Klaus Barbie, known as the "butcher of Lyon" was employed by American authorities including the CIC, after being given the death penalty by a French court for sending thousands to their deaths in Nazi concentration camps.

Verbelen's Other Activities

According to ADL, Verbelen, now 72, lives in Vienna, speaks before pro-Nazi groups and writes for right-wing publications. Before and during World War II, he was a leader of the Flemish Nazi group De Vlag (The Flag) which was responsible for organizing terror and murder operations in Belgium.

The records show that following the withdrawal of American troops from Austria in 1955, Verbelen was hired as an agent by that country's state police and four years later was granted Austrian citizenship. In 1965, he was tried and acquitted by an Austrian court on war crime charges, which triggered sharp protests in Belgium as well as in other nations.

For a time during his residence in Austria, ADL said, Verbelen used the name of Isaac Meisels as an alias. Meisels, a Jew from Brussels, was murdered by the Nazis during the war.

MUBARAK CONCERNED ABOUT 'STALEMATE' IN THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, Dec. 21 (JTA) -- Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak has expressed concern to President Reagan about the "stalemate" in the Middle East peace process and urged that ways be found to "energize" it, a senior Administration official said today.

Mubarak's comments were made in a letter to Reagan delivered by Egypt's Foreign Minister, Kamal Hassan Ali, during a 15-minute meeting with

the President and Vice President George Bush at the White House this morning, the official said.

Ali stressed Egypt's continued commitment to the Camp David peace process and to Reagan's Middle East peace initiative, according to the official. Ali also maintained that in order to be effective, the peace process needs Jordanian participation.

Sought To Convince The PLO Of Jordan's Role

At his meetings with Reagan today and with Secretary of State George Shultz yesterday, Ali stressed that Egypt has sought to convince the Palestine Liberation Organization to give Jordan the authority it feels necessary to enter the negotiations.

The Administration official said that the Egyptians believe that a new opportunity exists with the evacuation of Yasir Arafat and his forces from Tripoli in northern Lebanon yesterday. Ali himself said that this could increase chances that Hussein and the Palestinians would accept the Reagan plan.

The Egyptians argued that Arafat continues "to be the most popular leader" among the Palestinians. The Administration official said that while the U.S. hopes the Egyptians are right, it does not know what role the PLO can or will now play.

Attitude Toward New U.S.-Israeli Accord

Ali told the Americans that while Egypt is not concerned about the new strategic cooperation agreement between Israel and the U.S., announced during Israeli Premier Yitzhak Shamir's visit to Washington last month, some Arab leaders believe the U.S. has fundamentally changed its policy. He said Egypt has tried to allay their fears.

Reagan told Ali that the U.S. wants the same relationship with its Arab friends that it has with Israel, according to the Administration official. Ali replied that he was reassured by the President's remarks today as well as by his comments on the same subject at his press conference last night.

Ali said, after his talk with Shultz yesterday, that "We (Egypt) know that the United States and Israel have this relation and all our concern was (over) the impact of this coordination on the peace process. But as we have listened to the explanation, we are satisfied," he added.

Basis For Progress In Lebanon

Ali told the Americans that progress could be made in Lebanon if there was a phased Israeli withdrawal coordinated with a Lebanese build-up behind it. The official noted that Ali was expressing the view of other Arab states that if this is done, the Arab states could put pressure on Syria to withdraw.

"We're not persuaded that a unilateral Israeli withdrawal even if that was in the cards, is going to motivate Syria to get out," the official said. "We have not seen the evidence of any Arab pressure on Syria on other occasions."

The official said that Egyptian-Israeli relations were discussed, although the question of when Egypt will return its ambassador to Israel was not brought up by either side.

But Ali reiterated the determination of the Mubarak government to work for improved relations with Israel, according to the U.S. official who noted that there were specific areas of cooperation, such as the sale of Egyptian oil to Israel, Israeli tourism to Egypt and the visits of senior Israelis to Cairo. The

official noted that both Israel and Egypt place "enormous value" on their peace treaty.

Ali said yesterday that the Palestinian issue remained the crux of the Middle East problem and said Egypt wanted the U.S. to continue its role as mediator. He said his talk with Shultz included a discussion of U.S. aid to Egypt and "hopefully all our goals in this respect will be fulfilled."

Egypt, the largest recipient of U.S. foreign aid after Israel, will reportedly receive \$1.1 billion in military grants and \$1 billion in economic aid in fiscal 1985, if Congress goes along with the Administration's request. The State Department has declined to comment on this report.

REAGAN: THERE IS NOTHING NEW IN THE ACCORD SIGNED BY THE U.S. AND ISRAEL By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, Dec. 21 (JTA) -- President Reagan continued last night the effort of his Administration to convince Arab states that the agreement for strategic cooperation reached during Israeli Premier Yitzhak Shamir's visit here was not anything new.

"There was no signed agreement or anything else," Reagan said, in response to questions at a nationally televised press conference. "We were really reaffirming the relationship we have had since 1948."

A senior State Department official made the same point in briefing foreign correspondents yesterday. But he noted that the joint United States-Israeli military and political group, which will have its first meeting in mid-January, will make the relationship "more structured" and "more formalized."

Reagan said last night that he "emphasized" to Shamir that the United States also wants to move forward with its relations with the "moderate Arab states" so that the United States can be a "catalyst" in trying to bring peace to the Middle East.

He said that "if we're to have any chance of bringing them together, continuing the process that started at Camp David where Egypt and Israel wound up with a peace treaty ... we've got to befriend all of those countries and they've got to be able to trust us that we can be fair to all of them."

Says Moderate Arabs Ready To Negotiate With Israel

The President indicated he believed that moderate Arab states are ready to negotiate with Israel. He noted there had been "refusal on their part to even acknowledge the right of Israel to exist as a nation. So therefore, there could be no negotiations." But Reagan added that the late Egyptian President Anwar Sadat "broke out of that mold" and that resulted in peace between Israel and Egypt.

"Our goal was to see if we couldn't find more leaders and more governments that would become 'Egyptys' in a sense, in settling their disputes and having peace," Reagan stressed. "And today, the very fact that there's an indication that they are willing and prepared to negotiate differences indicates that they no longer are holding that position or refusing to let Israel exist."

At the same time, the President stressed that "the Middle East is a tinderbox; it is the one place that could start a war that no one wanted because of its importance, particularly to the free world and to our allies. And we can't just turn away and say if we don't look, it'll go away."

Reagan's remarks were one of the reasons he gave in expressing his determination to keep the marines in Lebanon until the United States had achieved its objective. "The marines will come home as quickly as we can possibly bring them home" after "accomplishing our mission," the President said.

He added that the decision will not have anything to do with the 1984 Presidential election campaign. "I will tell you this," Reagan declared, "no decision regarding the lives and the safety of our servicemen will ever be made by me for a political reason."

Reagan, who was repeatedly questioned about the marines last night, said that his statement last week that they might be pulled out if there was a total collapse in Lebanon was a "hypothetical answer" to a "hypothetical question."

He said that what he was trying to say was that the only reason for pulling out the marines and the other members of the multi-national force, other than accomplishing its mission, would be if there was a "complete change of course" in Lebanon from the one which brought the MNF into Lebanon.

But the President stressed that "progress has been made." He outlined the mission of the marines last night as going behind the Lebanese army as it takes over the territory evacuated by the foreign forces in order to "try to achieve some stability and maintain order, because Lebanon doesn't have the forces to do both."

Seeking A Political Solution In Lebanon

Reagan said the United States is seeking a political solution in Lebanon and believes it can avoid a war with Syria. But he added, "I will not OK a mission or ask or order our armed forces to go some place where there is danger and tell them they have not the right to defend themselves."

He said that the firings by U.S. ships and planes on the forces that have sniped at the marines have resulted "rather than stepped-up activity that there has been some pause for thought on those that were deciding that the multinational forces were fair game."

At the same time, Reagan said he believed there would continue to be terrorist attacks against the marines. "But are we -- and where would we be in the world -- are we to let the terrorists win?" Reagan said. "Are we to say that, well, if terrorists are going to be active, we'll give in to them, we'll back away?"

PROMOTING INTERNAL IMMIGRATION

JERUSALEM, Dec. 21 (JTA) -- The younger generation of Israeli politicians is promoting internal immigration from the center of the country to outlying development towns in the hope that this will encourage young Jews from abroad to immigrate to Israel and settle in the towns.

That challenge was presented at a meeting in Kiryat Gat of the younger members of the various political parties, sponsored by the Zionist Council. Yerah Glatter, Mayor of Yeroham, said at the meeting that Israeli leaders and leaders of world Jewry know very little about the development towns and therefore they are not on the immigration map.

According to Arye Zimuki, chairman of the Zionist Council, the main problem of the development towns is their negative false image. He urged Jewish and Zionist organizations to correct this. Zeev Baum, acting mayor of Kiryat Gat said there are some 140 immigrant families in the local absorption center.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES" THE HOLY PITCHER, OR LIVING THE GOOD LIFE ALONG THE DANUBE By Milton Jacoby

BUDAPEST, Dec. 21 (JTA) -- "Tossing the Challah" is an unforgettable highlight of the Oneg Shabbat following Friday evening services at the Rabbinical Seminary in Budapest. The tosser is Rabbi Alexander Scheiber, the eminent scholar, historian, and head of the seminary, which is famous throughout Europe.

"This is my holy sport," he recently declared to this reporter, as he distributed pieces of challah to each of the 300 Jews crowding the room, often pitching the Sabbath bread with unerring accuracy to those some distance from him.

The atmosphere was charged with warm fellowship and religious communion; the effect was that of a large close-knit family rather than an assemblage of hundreds of individuals.

The Jews of Hungary indeed seem to be living the good life in a Socialist state, and they are the envy of their co-religionists in the other Eastern European countries. It is estimated that there are 80,000 Jews in Hungary with more than three-quarters residing in Budapest; there are more rabbis and more active synagogues here than in all the other Soviet-dominated nations combined.

Several yeshivas and talmud torahs, kosher butchers, old-age homes, a hospital and an orphanage attest to the devotion to Judaism within the country. There are reports, however, that many of the small synagogues in the countryside are neglected, or have been sold and turned into libraries or warehouses, with their contents of priceless Judaica lost or destroyed.

The Special Pride Of Hungarian Jews

But, above all, the seminary is the special pride of Jewish Hungary. It was founded in 1877 by Emperor Franz Josef I, and is the only state rabbinical seminary in the world, according to Scheiber, who has been its director since 1950. There are currently students from East Germany, Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union, and, of course, from Hungary itself, who are trained to become rabbis, cantors, or teachers throughout Eastern Europe.

Besides the secondary school, there is a center of adult education and well-known choir. It receives financial support from the government, the Jewish community, and the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture founded by Nahum Goldmann to maintain intellectual life in the Eastern Jewish world.

Budapest Jews Were Relatively Fortunate

Scheiber stated that the Jews of Budapest were relatively fortunate during World War II, for the ghetto in the center of town, containing 200,000 Jews, was not blown up. Before 1944, he said there were 250,000 Jews out of the total Hungarian population of one million in Budapest and anti-Semites called it "Judapest."

By a quirk of fate, the ghetto, which the Nazis planned to destroy on January 20, 1945, was liberated by Russian forces just two days earlier and many of the inhabitants were so grateful that they turned Communist. And yet, some 2,300 Jews were killed in the ghetto, many by Hungarian fascists.

Scheiber indicated that relations with the government were "excellent" and that he deals most amicably

ably with its Bureau of Religious Affairs. He revealed that next year, on the 40th anniversary of the deportation of Hungarian Jews, the government will, for the first time, permit many thousands to visit Israel and will also welcome Israelis of Hungarian descent.

'Life Here Is Good For Jews'

One of the largest synagogues in the world is the Dohany Synagogue in the very center of town, which has a seating capacity of 3,300 and attracts, on major holidays, an overflow audience of more than 5,000. The 124-year-old edifice is flanked by a smaller synagogue which attracts some 200 congregants for the regular Sabbath services.

Chief Rabbi of the Dohany Synagogue and also Chief Rabbi of Hungary, Dr. Shalho has been a member of the Hungarian Parliament since 1980 (according to Shalho, there are other Jews in Parliament, but these are unaffiliated with the community) and has been closely identified with government leaders.

He informed this reporter that he hopes to visit Israel, for the first time, in 1984 on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the deportation. "Life here is good for Jews, they are not beggars, but make good livings in all kinds of enterprises," he insisted. It appears that relations between Dohany Street and the rabbinical seminary are rather formal and that the two operate as separate and distinct fiefdoms.

Memorial To The Holocaust Victims

A visit to the Jewish cemetery in the suburbs revealed an impressive memorial to the Holocaust victims, 75 feet high and 40 feet broad and flanked by a stone pergola with nine columns listing the names of Hungarian Jews exterminated during World War II.

The memorial bears the inscription, "They were killed with hate, they will be remembered with love." Apparently, this tribute to the martyred has not been visited by government leaders, but foreign dignitaries like Helmut Schmidt have come to pay their respects.

Despite the restrictions imposed by an atheist government and the daily deploring of Israel and Zionism in the media, it appears that the average Hungarian Jew has made the best of it, and that the Jewish community, as an entity and primarily through its unique rabbinical seminary, plays a role of central and far-reaching significance throughout the entire Eastern bloc.

KNESSET PASSES EDUCATION BILL

JERUSALEM, Dec. 21 (JTA) -- The Knesset today passed a controversial education bill that requires every family to pay an 800 Shekel (about \$8) a month education fee. The bill, adopted on its first reading, goes to the Knesset Finance Committee where the Tami faction threatens to kill it on grounds that it imposes an unfair burden on low income families.

The two Tami MKs boycotted today's vote. They said they did not vote against the measure because it would have been unseemly for a coalition partner to vote against the government of which it is a member. But Ben-Zion Rubin, Deputy Minister of Labor and Welfare who is a Tami MK, said his party would raise the matter in the Cabinet and if the Cabinet fails to alter the bill, Tami would vote against it in the Finance Committee.