

REAGAN APPEALS FOR A CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT THAT WOULD ALLOW VOLUNTARY 'VOCAL PRAYER' IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, March 6 (JTA) — President Reagan made a strong appeal again today for a Constitutional amendment that would "allow voluntary vocal prayer" in public schools.

"I'm convinced that passage of this amendment would do more than any other action to reassert the faith and values that made America great," Reagan said in a speech to the 42nd annual convention of the National Association of Evangelicals in Columbus, Ohio. A text of the speech was made available at the White House.

Reagan, who has made the school prayer amendment a major issue of his campaign for re-election, urged the evangelicals to express their support to members of the Senate and House in order to ensure that the amendment gets the necessary two-thirds vote in both houses of Congress.

The Senate began discussion of the amendment yesterday. Sen. Howard Baker (R. Tenn.), the Majority Leader, promised an ample debate but said he would like the vote to come in two weeks. But Sen. Lowell Weicker (R. Conn.), who is leading the opposition, said that while he will not filibuster, the debate could take until June.

Aim Of The Amendment

Reagan stressed today that his amendment "explicitly states that no child must ever be forced to recite a prayer. Nor would it allow any State to compose the words of a prayer. But under this amendment, the federal government could not forbid voluntary vocal prayer in our schools. And by reasserting our children's freedom of religious expression, the amendment would help them to understand the diversity of America's religious beliefs and practices," Reagan said.

Some supporters of the amendment in the Senate are suggesting that prayer should be silent rather than vocal. But Weicker and other opponents of the amendment have argued that children can pray now in school but they are opposed to an organized prayer period.

The House is not expected to bring up the amendment until after the Senate, with a vote expected to be close, acts. But last night, a group of conservative Republicans held an all-night debate on the amendment. At the same time, a group of evangelicals held a prayer meeting in support of the amendment on the steps of the Capitol. National Jewish organizations and "main line" Protestant organizations are opposed to the amendment.

Reagan Cites An Incongruity

In his speech, Reagan said that the courts have not only banned prayer in the public schools but in New York, a court recently banned students in Albany from using a classroom for a voluntary prayer meeting.

"Hasn't something gone haywire when this great Constitution of ours is invoked to allow Nazis and Ku Klux Klan men to march on public property

and urge the extermination of Jews and the subjugation of Blacks, but it supposedly prevents our children from Bible study or the saying of a simple prayer in the schools?" the President asked.

Declaring that "America has begun a spiritual awakening," Reagan urged "tolerance and openness" to those who do not agree with these views. He urged the evangelicals to "use your pulpits to denounce racism, anti-Semitism and all ethnic and religious intolerance as evils."

The denouncing what he called the "Communist Sandinista regime" in Nicaragua, Reagan claimed that "threats and harassment have forced virtually all Nicaragua's Jews to flee their country."

SUPREME COURT UNDER SHARP ATTACK BY JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS FOR ITS NATIVITY DISPLAY DECISION
By Ben Gallob

NEW YORK, March 6 (JTA) — Initial Jewish civil and religious rights agency reactions today to the sudden shift by the Supreme Court in ruling that a city may present a Nativity scene as part of an official Christmas display without violating the Constitution contained some of the sharpest criticisms ever voiced by such agencies against the highest court of the land.

In a 5-4 decision, the Supreme Court handed down yesterday a ruling that, as part of an official Christmas display by the city-owned creche in Pawtucket, R.I., its nativity scene did not violate the church-state separation requirement.

Experts said the ruling on the permissible boundary between government and organized religion in the United States significantly shifted that boundary in favor of religion. The decision marked the first time that the Justices — though admittedly by the narrowest of margins — have permitted a government officially-sponsored display that is explicitly and exclusively Christian.

Certain To Encourage Yule Displays

The decision, *Lynch v. Donnelly*, the experts said, is certain to have a substantial effect in encouraging official Yule displays in public places. Uncertainty and increasing litigation has developed in recent years over the constitutionality of officially-sponsored Nativity scenes, with Jewish organizations, whatever their religious orientation, registered in opposition.

The three-year-old suit over Pawtucket's creche prompted most Rhode Island communities to cancel their Christmas displays.

The dissenting opinion left it uncertain whether the Supreme Court would have sustained the constitutionality only of a creche, or of another religious symbol, such as a cross, which Jewish organizations have indicated they would consider equally unconstitutional.

A suit involving a display of only Nativity figures, in a public park in Scarsdale, N.Y. is now before the Federal Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit in Manhattan.

Chief Justice Warren Burger, writing for the majority, declared that "admittedly" the Nativity scene in Pawtucket "is a reminder of the origins of Christmas." But, he added, there was no significant difference between such a display and a showing of such "masterpieces" as the depiction of the birth of Christ, the

Crucifixion, and other "explicit Christian themes and messages" in "publicly supported art galleries."

The 5-4 decision overturned rulings by a federal district court and a federal appeals court, which had ruled that the Pawtucket creche amounted to an official doctrine and was accordingly banned by the First Amendment clause prohibiting an official establishment of religion.

The Dissenting Opinion

Associate Justice William Brennan declared, in the dissent, that the maintenance and display at public expense of a symbol as "distinctively sectarian as a creche" should be viewed in the light of the proposition that a creche "is best understood as a mystical recreation of an event that lies at the heart of the Christian faith" and "simply cannot be viewed as playing the same role that an ordinary museum display does."

Brennan denounced the action by Pawtucket as "a coercive, though perhaps small, step toward establishing the sectarian preferences of the majority at the expense of the minority."

Pawtucket had included the life-sized creche in its Christmas display for 40 years. A group of Pawtucket residents, represented by the American Civil Liberties Union, challenged the creche, but not the rest of the display, in a 1980 lawsuit, winning in the two lower federal courts.

Burger declared the lower courts were wrong in "focussing almost exclusively on the creche" rather than the city's entire, "largely secular" Christmas display, which, he asserted, "engenders a friendly community spirit of good will in keeping with the season."

Reactions By Jewish Agencies

That "friendly community spirit of good will" was notably absent in the vigorous initial comments today from the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith; the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), the association of Reform synagogues; and the American Jewish Committee.

Seymour Reich, chairman of the ADL civil rights committee, said the Supreme Court ruling "undermines the time-honored First Amendment principle that government and religion should be kept separate from each other."

In unusually strong language, referring to the Supreme Court, Reich declared the decision was "a divisive one because it provides official sanction for the religious beliefs of one faith over that of other citizens. Such government involvement is the very thing the Founding Fathers strove to eliminate in erecting the wall of separation through the Bill of Rights."

Rabbi Alexander Schindler, UAHC president, declared that the decision "upsets long-standing tradition" and "is a defeat not only for church-state separation but for the very principle of religious freedom in our country -- and thus for the cause of religion itself."

Samuel Rabinove, legal director of the American Jewish Committee, noted that in a friend of the court brief in the case, filed jointly with the National Council of Churches of Christ, "we expressed our belief" that erecting a nativity scene each Christmas "was not a proper function of a municipality."

Rabinove said that the ruling had not changed "our view, as well as that of the National Council of Churches, that citizens of all faiths in America enjoy countless opportunities to express their religious beliefs and to pursue their religious practices without hindrance. There is simply no need to enlist the machinery of government for these purposes."

FCC REJECTS PETITIONS BY JEWISH GROUP SEEKING TO DENY RENEWAL OF 7 NBC NETWORK AFFILIATES FOR THEIR COVERAGE OF LEBANON WAR

By Kevin Freeman

NEW YORK, March 6 (JTA) -- The Federal Communications Commission has rejected petitions filed by the Americans For a Safe Israel (AFSI) which had sought to deny the renewal of the broadcast licenses of seven NBC network affiliate stations in New England and on the grounds that they "participated" in the distortion of media coverage of the war in Lebanon when broadcasting the NBC-TV "Nightly News" program.

While rejecting the petitions to deny license renewal, the FCC indicated that it would consider a review by its fairness/political broadcast branch of the AFSI's petitions' charge that the affiliates violated the Fairness Doctrine in its presentation of the war from June 1, 1982 through August 31, 1982, according to AFSI officials.

Current FCC regulations stipulate that a station's license must be challenged on its "overall programming" content and not specifically its broadcast of any one program, in this case the NBC-TV "Nightly News" program, the focus of the AFSI petitions. The network's license cannot be challenged. Only that of its owned and operated stations can be. Affiliate stations are privately owned and purchase NBC programs, including the NBC News programs.

Charges By The Jewish Group

The AFSI, a New York-based activist group founded in 1971, has focused its claims of media distortion of the coverage of Israel's invasion of Lebanon on NBC News. It has charged the network with, among other things, "deliberate" falsification of facts, biased reporting and editorializing, and "tendentious and selective interviewing techniques."

AFSI director Peter Goldman said that what caused AFSI to focus on NBC News and not ABC or CBS News broadcasts was that it viewed NBC as the worst of the three networks in what he termed the "misrepresentation" of the events surrounding the war in Lebanon. AFSI officials said NBC News president Reuven Frank has declined to speak with AFSI leaders about the allegations. An NBC spokesperson told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency that the network would have no comment on the AFSI charges or the petitions it filed.

In each of the seven 43-page briefs filed against the network affiliates, the AFSI contended that during 600 minutes of reporting on the Lebanese conflict in the summer of 1982, less than 30 minutes were devoted to airing Israeli or objective points of view, while most of the rest of the war was presented from the Arab perspective.

Upon filing the petitions, Goldman said: "We are asking the FCC to deny broadcast licenses to the stations because they failed to fulfill--under law--the Fairness Doctrine, and participated in NBC's deliberate distortion of news. NBC misled and deceived the American public, and we believe it is the duty of the FCC to protect the public's right to be correctly informed."

JERUSALEM (JTA) -- Four men were remanded in custody by a Jerusalem magistrate for 15 days Tuesday in connection with the armed attack Sunday on an Arab bus near Ramallah. The court banned publication of any details of the proceedings -- including the four men's identifications.

SPECIAL ANALYSIS THE GULF WAR AND ISRAEL

By Arno Herzberg

NEW YORK, March 6 (JTA) — At the core of the United States policy in the Middle East is the assumption that peace and harmony will reign in the region once the Arab-Israeli conflict has been resolved. This assumption is wrong. The Arab-Israeli conflict is not the prime cause of the long-standing problems plaguing the Mideast.

Numerous rivalries, boundary disputes, and hostilities based on religious differences have kept the region in a constant state of instability and turmoil, to a point where local armed skirmishes have led to civil wars and to outright and widespread wars between countries. There are conflicts between Iraq and Iran, between Iraq and Kuwait, between North and South Yemen, between South Yemen and Oman, and between Syria and Lebanon.

In addition, there are ongoing confrontations and local wars by the official governments against minority groups: in Iraq, against the Kurds; in Egypt, against the Copts; in Lebanon, against the Druze; and in Iran, against the Bahai. Not to be overlooked is the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the terrible loss of lives there.

These local and intra-state conflagrations baffle Western minds and are enigmas to the Western way of thinking. Efforts by Western powers to mediate these struggles have been fraught with failure; their insights, judgements and value systems run aground trying to understand attitudes totally alien to their systems of logic and historical perspectives.

Logic And Rationality Defied

The bitterest conflict is the war between Iran and Iraq, which began in September 1980 and which shows no signs of being resolved in the near future. The consequences for both countries show how border disputes can get out of hand, how they defy logic and rationality.

The hostilities between the two countries (dubbed the Persian Gulf war in the media and in political circles) have led to devastating results: more than 100,000 dead and wounded, thousands of homes destroyed, lives disrupted, and economies derailed. At stake is the border between Iran and Iraq and the area around the Shatt al-Arab, the major shipping lane through which the oil tankers pass on their trips to the West and Japan.

Conflicts about demarcation lines go back about 50 years. Iraq denied Iran control of the shipping lanes. Each country tried to support insurgents in the other. It was a smoldering conflict which finally seemed to have been resolved by an agreement signed in June 1975. But three years later the Shah was deposed and the Islamic revolution, led by the Ayatollah Khomeini, created chaos in Iran.

Iraq's ruler, Saddam Hussein, saw an opportunity to regain lost territory and influence. In September 1980 Iraq renounced the 1975 agreement. This was a prelude to a full-scale invasion of the 90 square miles from Qasr-i-Sheiria (in the north) to Badra and Mehran (in the south). At the same time, Iraq claimed unilateral control of the Shatt al-Arab.

The invasion was successful. Iraq took an oil-rich Iranian province and advanced into other areas without meeting serious Iranian opposition. But Khomeini's Iran recovered from chaos and rebuilt its army. Iran has vowed to continue the war until it

has overthrown the Iraqi government. Iraq has begun to use chemical warfare against Iran, in violation of the Geneva Protocol of 1925, which Iraq agreed to adhere to in 1931.

Thorny Questions Raised

The ease with which Iraq tore up the 1975 agreement raises some thorny questions. If agreements signed by Arab states with each other can be abrogated at will, what can Israel expect when it signs an accord with an Arab state? Will the peace treaty with Egypt withstand the test of time? Will future agreements and treaties last or will they be renounced as soon as the ink is dry?

Certainly, the abrogation of the Israel-Lebanon May 17 agreement yesterday by Lebanon under the relentless pressure of Syria bodes ill for future agreements between Israel and Arab states.

Agreements by Arab governments are about as constant as the wind-blown grains of sand in their desert kingdoms. For example, President Hafez Assad of Syria said he would recall his troops from Lebanon as soon as the Israelis said that they would evacuate their troops. Israel began its redeployment, but Syria refused to budge. It is now apparent that Assad has not the slightest intention of having his troops leave Lebanon quickly or easily.

Iraq Has Sought To Destroy Israel

As long as Iran and Iraq are locked in combat, they cannot take part in the "solution" of the Arab-Israeli conflict; they can only exacerbate the problem. Iraq has sought to destroy Israel ever since 1948. During Israel's War of Independence, and again during the Yom Kippur War in 1973, Iraqi forces were massed against Israel. At times, Iraqi forces were stationed in Jordan to support that country in its struggle against Israel.

Now, war with Iran has turned Iraq's attention away from Israel. This has provided Israel with some military relief on its eastern border. As long as the Gulf war continues, there is one less threat for Israel. But the dialectic of the situation is that as long as the war continues, the instability and tensions in the region become aggravated and Israel's security is further menaced.

Strange Political Alignments

There was a rumor some time ago that Israel provided some spare parts and equipment to Iran, in part to help it defeat Iraq and thereby help to curtail its nuclear production activities, and in part to alleviate the hostage situation of Iranian Jews. Iran hotly denied such a deal. But true or not, the Gulf war has created some strange political alignments.

Iraq is supported by other Gulf states. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and others have loaned Iraq more than \$25 billion of oil money on favorable terms. Iraq is further supported by Jordan which opened its port of Aqaba for the shipment of war material. There was a general declaration of support for Iraq issued at the Fez summit conference in September 1982. In addition, Iraq has the backing of the Soviet Union which is always eager to increase tensions. The Russians deliver military equipment and get, in turn, hard currency for this hardware.

On the other hand, Iran has the support of Syria and Libya. Syria closed the oil pipeline from Iraq which passed through its territory, thus making it difficult for Iraq to export its oil. The loss from the pipeline closure is estimated to amount to some \$6 billion annually. A flow of weapons from Syria and Libya sustains the offensive capability of the Ayatollah's army.

Iran also has friends in the West. Last year it became West Germany's biggest Middle East trading partner, a position that traditionally has been held by Saudi Arabia. The importance of Iran's trading position is not lost on Bonn. German government officials said yesterday that when selling arms to the Saudis, Bonn will have to take into consideration Iran's opposition to the Gulf kingdom.

U.S. And Israel In A Quandry

Israel and the United States are in a quandry. Any move on the part of Iran towards the south would pave the way for a spread of the Islamic revolution. Regimes in the Gulf states would be threatened by insurgency and face the same fate as the Shah's regime. Terrorism, Iranian style, would plague the West and endanger whatever property and investments they now have in the Gulf countries.

Most ominous and threatening of all, Iran could decide to mine the Strait of Hormuz, thus creating havoc for the West. The oil tankers which pass through it could be destroyed, or at the very least be easy targets for attack. The flow of oil could be halted. Israel would feel the brunt of a victorious Iran; it could become the target of the fanatical fundamentalist Islamic wrath of Khomeini.

A war cannot be ruled out, and the U.S. could become embroiled in it. The stakes in the outcome would be very high indeed, for Iran, for Israel and for the U.S. and other Western powers. But no matter who would win, Israel would lose in the ensuing Middle East turmoil.

JEWISH LEADERS, KOHL HOLD FRANK DISCUSSION ON ARMS SALE TO SAUDIS BUT NO ONE'S MIND IS CHANGED

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, March 6 (JTA) — A dozen Jewish leaders held a "frank and open" discussion with Chancellor Helmut Kohl of West Germany here yesterday but no one's mind was changed on the possibility of Bonn selling arms to Saudi Arabia, according to Edgar Bronfman, president of the World Jewish Congress.

"People came in with the view that it is wrong, the German Federal Republic should not sell arms to Saudi Arabia, and left with the feeling they had made very little impact on the decision of the Chancellor," Bronfman said after the one-hour meeting at Kohl's hotel.

But, he added, he believes the meeting resulted in a "better understanding between the Chancellor and the Jewish world. I think these things take time and a lot of interpersonal relations," he said.

Bronfman, who had a private meeting with Kohl before the general meeting said he accepted the Chancellor's invitation to meet with him again in Bonn at the end of this month. While Kohl insisted that it was up to his government to make the decision, Bronfman said he got a "very good understanding of the way the Jewish people feel on the subject. Of that there can be no doubt." Several of the participants at the meeting were Holocaust survivors.

Kohl also told the Jewish group that he would sell only defensive weapons to Saudi Arabia. Bronfman said one of the participants noted that both defensive and offensive weapons kill.

The German leader said he would take responsibility to ensure that whatever weapons were sold to the Saudis "didn't get into terrorist or radical Arab hands." As he did on the NBC-TV "Meet the Press" program last Sunday, Kohl "categorically" ruled out selling the Leopard II tank to Saudi Arabia, according to Bronfman.

Bronfman noted that before the weapons deal is actually signed, much could happen, such as the Saudis being unwilling to buy the weapons the Germans offer. While he did not say so, there was an implication that without the tanks, the Saudis might not want to purchase arms from the West Germans.

The issue has created a good deal of anxiety among Jews and it will take time to alleviate this, Bronfman noted. "Actions will probably speak louder than words," he said.

Stresses Support For Israel And The Jewish People

Bronfman said Kohl stressed his support for Israel and for the Jewish people, saying that he had learned to be opposed to anti-Semitism at his "mother's breast." Bronfman said he believes the Chancellor spoke from the "heart" and "I don't think anybody could have left the room not fully understanding Chancellor Kohl's commitment to the existence and security of the State of Israel."

Kohl did not mention the advertisements by Jewish organizations that have appeared in various newspapers in the last few days opposing any German arms sales to Saudi Arabia, according to Bronfman. He would not say, however, if this was raised at his private meeting with Kohl.

But Bronfman noted that at the end of both the private and general meetings, Kohl said that no event and not even some of the harsh questions put to him could do anything to change his "love and respect for the Jewish people."

Bronfman said there was also a brief discussion of the issue of Soviet Jewry with Kohl expressing his support for Jewish emigration to Israel which he called their "spiritual homeland." Kohl also promised to raise the issue of Spain establishing diplomatic relations with Israel when he meets with Spanish President Felipe Gonzalez Marquez in Madrid this month.

ARENS; ABROGATION OF MAY 17 ACCORD WILL NOT INFLUENCE IDF DEPLOYMENT

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, March 6 (JTA) — Defense Minister Moshe Arens said today that the Lebanese government's abrogation of the May 17 agreement would have no influence on the Israel Defense Force deployment in south Lebanon. He said the IDF had been active for some months to ensure the safety of Galilee towns and villages — the original announced aim of the Lebanon war.

Arens said the most serious aspect of the abrogation of the agreement yesterday was the behavior of Syrian President Hafez Assad who was ready to take the most extreme and brutal steps to ensure that no Middle East countries would open relations with Israel.

The Defense Minister said negotiations were being held with a number of organizations in south Lebanon to ensure that Israel's aim of peace on its northern border would be implemented. He said it is hoped that maintaining peace and preventing the return of terrorists to south Lebanon would be borne by local Lebanese organizations.