

Flurry Of Diplomatic Activity Over South Lebanon: PERES PREDICTS THE IDF WILL LEAVE LEBANON DURING 5745

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Sept. 25 (JTA) -- A flurry of diplomatic activity over south Lebanon has suddenly raised hopes here that Israel soon may be in a position to pull its forces out. Premier Shimon Peres has publicly predicted that the Israel Defense Force will leave Lebanon during the new Hebrew calendar year, 5745, which begins tomorrow night.

The media is speaking of partial pullbacks, new deployments of United Nations troops and undisclosed deals with Syria. Such speculation is given substance by knowledge that the Labor-Likud unity government has given top priority -- along with the economic crisis -- to withdrawal of the IDF from Lebanon.

The new government also seems to have modified the position long held by its predecessor that any pullback of Israeli troops must be accompanied by the simultaneous withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon.

Israel has suffered heavy losses since it invaded Lebanon in June, 1982. This week alone, two soldiers were killed and 10 wounded in eight incidents. Since the war began, 597 Israelis were killed and nearly 4,000 were injured.

Indirect Contacts Between Israel and Syria

Indirect contacts between Israel and Syria apparently are underway, through the United States. Richard Murphy, the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, flew here from Damascus last night and conferred in Tel Aviv this morning with Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin and acting Foreign Minister Moshe Arens. He is scheduled to meet with Peres tomorrow.

Murphy was sent to the Middle East to investigate the terrorist bombing of the U.S. Embassy annex in east Beirut last Thursday. According to the State Department, he is utilizing his visit to confer with regional leaders. He met with President Amin Gemayel of Lebanon and with Syrian President Hafez Assad before coming to Israel.

Rabin is reported to be organizing and leading Israel's policymaking with respect to south Lebanon which involves both Syria and the future role of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). Rabin is known to favor a broader role for UNIFIL in terms of its geographical deployment and its operational responsibilities.

Insist On The SLA Remaining Intact

The Defense Minister does not propose to rely exclusively on UNIFIL to protect Israel's northern border from terrorist attacks or infiltration. He, and others in the government, insist that the Israel-backed South Lebanon Army (SLA) remain intact and in place, despite the acute embarrassment caused when SLA troops ran amok and massacred 13 civilians in a south Lebanese village last week.

Rabin hopes that the SLA can be deployed along a narrow border strip while UNIFIL expands its area of operations northward and eastward to fill the security gap left by a departing IDF. Officially,

UNIFIL would be policing all of south Lebanon, up to the Israeli border, according to the original terms of its mandate laid down in 1978.

The Syrian side of the equation is necessarily concealed from public view, at least at this stage. Government circles here, and the Administration in Washington, were hardly pleased by Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir's remark last week that Israel had asked the U.S. to mediate an agreement with Syria.

Nevertheless, Shamir's various statements in New York, where he is attending the 39th session of the UN General Assembly, appeared to signify some modification of his earlier positions on south Lebanon. He seems, for example, to have abandoned his deep distrust of UNIFIL as an effective element in security arrangements for Israel.

Israeli analysts say Syria is willing to go along with strict security arrangements for Israel in south Lebanon if only to get the IDF out.

These analysts note that Damascus has never really opposed security arrangements in the south but objected vehemently to political ties between Jerusalem and Lebanon or any other benefits accruing to Israel from its war in Lebanon.

The Syrians can claim now that the IDF is pulling out of Lebanon without any such ties or benefits having been gained, the analysts said.

BILLY GRAHAM, BACK FROM SOVIET TOUR, CLAIMS OPPRESSION OF JEWS THERE HAS DECLINED IN RECENT YEARS But Hedges When Asked Specifically About That Issue By Kevin Freeman

NEW YORK, Sept. 25 (JTA) -- The Rev. Billy Graham, just back from a 12-day tour of the Soviet Union, today said that oppression of Soviet Jews has lessened in recent years as compared to the period immediately following the Bolshevik revolution and the years of the Stalin regime.

Since the regime of Leonid Brezhnev in the 1970's, Graham said, "there seems to be far less oppression" of religious freedoms in the Soviet Union. He added that this "trend which started under Mr. Brezhnev seems to be continuing."

Asked specifically whether he felt that oppression of the Soviet Jewish community has decreased since the Brezhnev regime, Graham said: "I don't know if there is more oppression or not in the Jewish community."

Today's news conference at the Hilton Hotel, attended by dozens of reporters, marked Graham's first full-scale meeting with the press since he returned last weekend from his second trip to the Soviet Union in as many years.

When he returned from the USSR in 1982, Graham caused considerable controversy in religious circles when he indicated that he thought there was a "measure of religious freedom" in the Soviet Union, a position disputed by many sources.

Graham said his most recent tour of the Soviet Union was a result of an invitation to him by the Russian Orthodox Church and the All-Union Council of the Evangelical Baptists of the U.S., which includes a number of denominations other than Baptists. The visit was sanctioned by the Soviet government, he said.

In a statement distributed to reporters prior to the news conference, Graham noted that he visited Jewish

synagogues in Moscow and Leningrad, and "I talked with several Jewish leaders in those cities about their religious and cultural life, aspirations and problems. I talked with Soviet officials about the possibilities for more Jews to emigrate as the number has decreased in the last two years."

Graham said he raised the issue of matters of concern to the Christian and Jewish community when he met privately with Soviet officials. He said he would not elaborate on these private meetings. It is understood that the issue of Jewish emigration was raised in these private meetings.

Soviet Jewish activist groups here and abroad have persistently pointed to stepped-up harassment and persecution of Soviet Jews. Emigration for Soviet Jews has reached its lowest levels since the mid-1970's, with little indication of the emigration doors being opened to Soviet Jews in the near future.

Graham said that in addition to visiting the two synagogues in Moscow and Leningrad, he attempted to visit synagogues in the Siberian academic community of Novosibirsk and also in Tallinn. He said he requested to meet with Jews in Novosibirsk but was told by officials they did not know of any Jews living there or of any synagogue.

On the airplane back to the U.S., Graham recounted that he was told by an unidentified passenger that there were in fact Jews who resided in Novosibirsk, many of them Soviet scientists.

Speculation on Graham's Stance

Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, the American Jewish Committee's director of international affairs, told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency following the news conference, which he attended, that Graham had privately pressed the issue of Soviet harassment and oppression of Jews and Jewish emigration when he met with Soviet officials.

As to why Graham decided to back away from public comments affirming Soviet Jewish harassment when asked by reporters at the news conference, Tanenbaum could only speculate. He suggested that it is perhaps part of Graham's concern that he again be allowed to visit the Soviet Union, a massive feat, according to Tanenbaum.

The AJ Committee official asserted further that Graham has been a strong activist and supporter on behalf of Soviet Jewry. He said Graham did make strong representation on behalf of Soviet Jews when he met privately with Soviet officials.

5 ISRAELI SOLDIERS KILLED, 5 INJURED IN HELICOPTER CRASH

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVI, Sept. 25 (JTA) — Five Israeli soldiers were killed and five were injured when a helicopter crashed during a training exercise in the Beit Shean valley yesterday, the army announced today.

A military spokesman said the Bell 212 helicopter with a crew of three and seven soldiers aboard was maneuvering through a narrow gorge between sheer cliffs in an exercise involving helicopter support for ground troops. When one of its two engines failed, the pilot attempted to lift the craft above the cliff line but it lacked power and slammed into the sides of the gorge.

Rescue parties from nearby Kibbutz Manola had difficulty reaching the wreckage because of the rugged terrain. Other helicopters landed on adjacent hilltops to remove the injured. The Air Force has established a commission to investigate the mishap.

ISRAEL'S TWO CHIEF RABBIS SAY THAT 'REFORM JEWS ARE JEWS, JUST LIKE US'

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Sept. 25 (JTA) — Israel's two Chief Rabbis appear to be extending an olive branch to Reform Judaism. "Reform Jews are Jews, just like us," Rabbi Avraham Shapira and Mordechai Eliahu said in a joint Rosh Hashanah eve interview here with representatives of the overseas Jewish media.

The Ashkenazic and Sephardic Chief Rabbis denied that they, in any way, "fail to recognize" the Jewishness of Reform Jews. This was a major departure from the position held by many Orthodox Jews here and abroad.

The two Chief Rabbis also contended that the controversial "Who is a Jew?" issue was "wrongly portrayed" as one of "recognition or non-recognition" of other Jews. The fact is, said Shapira, the only issue at stake is the conversion procedure practiced by Reform rabbis.

"We do not interfere or comment on these rabbis' activities in any other areas. But in the matter of conversion, Jewry is like a club. You cannot join unless all the rest of the membership agrees to the terms of your joining," Shapira said.

Eliahu said he considered the demand for pluralism in conversion as a contravention of the spirit of unity. He likened that spirit to the one which motivated the creation of a national unity government and stressed that it required further strengthening in face of troubled times.

Explain Stand On Furlough For Prisoners

They explained why they had petitioned the government — without success — to release 20 suspected members of the Jewish terrorist underground from custody to allow them to spend the High Holidays with their families. According to the Chief Rabbis, this was "in no way out of the ordinary." They said they frequently received appeals before festivals from the families of prisoners and always responded by attempting to secure furloughs for those in custody.

In this case, the suspects are on trial and under remand. The Chief Rabbis said they were told that the chances of furlough were slim. "But we do not accept this distinction on moral grounds," Shapira said. "A man is held innocent until proved otherwise."

8 ISRAELI TENNIS STARS TO USSR TO PLAY RUSSIANS IN DAVIS CUP MATCH

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Sept. 25 (JTA) — Eight members of Israel's national tennis team will leave their training camp in Salzburg, Austria, tomorrow, for Donetsk in the Soviet Union where they will play the Russian team in the Davis Cup match beginning Saturday. The games, to have started Thursday, were postponed for the Rosh Hashanah holiday.

Five non-playing members of the Israeli squad have still not received Soviet visas and may not be able to attend the meet. David Harnik, chairman of the Israel Tennis Association, (ITA) will call on the Soviet Consul, Viktor Upinov, in Vienna today to try to secure visas for Ron Steel, an Australian national who coaches the Israeli team, Allen Fox, an American technical advisor and three Israelis — trainer Pini Shimon, ITA president Mordechai Mayer and Zvi Meyer, secretary general of the ITA.

SPECIAL TO THE JTA GRAPPLING WITH MODERNITY

By Lisa Palmieri-Billig

NEW YORK, Sept. 25 (JTA) -- A cry of concern mingled with hope that comes from an inner knowledge of what the battle for Judaism's survival is all about, was raised by 150 rabbis and lay leaders from the United States, Canada, Israel and South America at the Synagogue Council of America's 10th annual High Holy Days conference for Jewish leadership held recently at the Lincoln Square Synagogue.

The theme of the gathering was "Challenge to Our Faith; American Judaism Responds to Modernity - Evaluations and Assessments." Issues were met head on, and in summing up, Rabbi Henry Michelman, executive vice president of the Synagogue Council, said the conference was just the beginning of a year of soul-searching meant to "comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable," with consultations between the Council and regional religious and lay leaders across the country.

All three branches were represented by the key rabbinical speakers: Dr. Gerson Cohen (Conservative), chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America; Dr. Alfred Gottschalk (Reform), president of the Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion in New York; and Dr. Emanuel Rackman (Orthodox), president of Bar Ilan University in Ramat Gan, Israel.

Two Interrelated Issues

Although each speaker approached the topic of modernity through the filter of his particular affiliation, the problems that persistently emerged centered around two main and interrelated issues.

One is the rapidly diminishing population of American and world Jewry: in the U.S., the number of Jews declined from 3.5 percent of the total population to 2.7 percent in one generation; and in Latin America the number of Jews dwindled from 850,000 in 1959 to 480,000 presently, with only 75,000 of the "losses" attributed to post-1948 aliyah, according to the speakers. The second problem is the religious and political "polarization" of present-day Judaism, as Rackman phrased it.

These issues were brought into sharp focus by Rabbi Marshall Meyer, who founded the Latin American Rabbinical Seminary in Argentina and served as its rector for 25 years, and who is now vice president of the University of Judaism in Los Angeles.

Meyer, who was guest speaker at the conference, issued an impassioned plea for saving Argentina's fledgling democracy under President Raul Alfonsín by releasing the economic squeeze on its debts to the United States and presented a vivid description of the tortures and brutal murders committed for years by the military juntas during the 1970's while the world remained silent. He said these issues were "political" only on one level.

A Transmutation Of Values Is Imperative

Meyer, who was an outspoken critic of the Argentine military during the years of the "dirty war," and who was appointed to the Commission on the Disappearance of Persons last December shortly after Alfonsín was elected, said his involvement in the issues of human rights and political freedom was not merely that of an anguished outcry of one individual against injustice but a plea for Jews to realize that the ubiquitous question, "Is it good for the Jews?"

must be transmuted to "Is it good for the human race?" This transmutation is imperative, Meyer said, if Judaism "is not to forget the message for which it was chosen."

He warned that "any society that gives up on the due process of law is doomed to become a jungle, no matter whether it speaks in the name of 'American democracy' of 'the Torah' or whatever." He expressed concern about the danger of "terror engulfing the world." His "diagnosis of life in Israel and the diaspora today" is that they are in a state "as serious as in the year 70 CE," when the Second Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the conquering Romans.

A sub-issue of the "polarization" of contemporary Judaism that disturbed Meyer as well as many other speakers at the conference was, as Meyer put it, the "theocratic threat of an Israeli State where I and others are not considered rabbis" because they are Conservative or Reform.

Even Rackman, who is Orthodox, said he realized it would be desirable for "status" to be found in Israel for Conservative and Reform rabbis. For him, the problem was that the Reform Jews do not accept halacha "as binding." Rackman said that "sometimes individual freedom must be sacrificed for the sake of the group, for unity."

'Unholy Mix Of Church And State'

A number of speakers discussed the issue of church-state separation in the U.S., an issue which has dominated the Presidential campaign. They questioned whether the mix of politics and religion should be among the topics for sermons during the High Holy Days. Some rabbis said they did not want to inject religion into politics, but other rabbis said it was unavoidable this year.

Rabbi Joseph Glaser, executive vice president of the Central Conference of American rabbis, the association of American Reform rabbis, who was chairman of the conference, in his summary of the themes of the meeting, referred to the "unhealthy and unholy mix of church and state," and said "we are in times of great peril."

Rabbi Mordecai Waxman, president of the Synagogue Council of America, which represents the rabbinical and congregational agencies of Reform, Conservative and Orthodox Judaism, said that "polarization did not exist in the past to the extent it does today." He said that "We engage in raging debates on 'Who is a Jew' rather than on 'What is a Jew'. Perhaps we should turn to another question now, namely, 'Why is a Jew?'"

Israel And The Diaspora

Gottschalk focused on another dimension of "polarization." He expressed fear "that time and current circumstances are also eroding the powerful influence that Israel has had in sustaining and uniting American Jews" who today feel "a certain disillusion ... emotional fatigue ... disaffection."

He said he felt that Israel and American Jewry might well be "better served if American Jews were more ready to debate openly and fearlessly those issues which affect our common destiny," such as "Israel's religious establishment's refusal to give recognition to Conservative and Reform Judaism."

Jews in the diaspora "cannot go on living their Jewishness vicariously through Israel, especially if the Israeli government at any given time, through its legal apparatus, declares diaspora forms of Judaism as being illegitimate, alien, and therefore not to be recognized," Gottschalk declared.

He also severely criticized "Judaism frozen in its shtetl garb" imbued with "mindless traditionalism" which can offer "a momentary nostalgic high but cannot answer the questions of our young people today."

Dealing with the diminishing number of Jews around the world due, according to some of the speakers, to apathy and intermarriage, the tide could be stemmed by encouraging larger families. Gottschalk said there is "a clear moral imperative to rebuild and reconstitute the Jewish people's numerical strength. Over a million and a half Jewish children had their lives cut off in the Holocaust.... Generations need to be raised and nurtured in their memory."

Waxman said that one reason for the decline of the number of Jews is that Judaism today is a political and social but not a "spiritual community." At present, he added, "people's need for spiritual answers is not being effectively met by Judaism."

SHAMIR ASKS FOR MEETING WITH GROMYKO By Yitzhak Rabi

NEW YORK, Sept. 25 (JTA) -- Israel's Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir disclosed here today that he has asked for a meeting with Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko and that he does not rule out a positive response. Shamir and Gromyko are attending the 39th session of the United Nations General Assembly.

Shamir made the disclosure at a press conference with Israeli reporters at Israel's Mission to the UN. If the meeting transpires it will be the second between Shamir and Gromyko who met at the General Assembly three years ago and the first high level contact between Israeli and Soviet diplomats since then.

Talks To Spain's F.M. About Ties With Israel

This morning, Shamir met with the Spanish Foreign Minister, Fernando Moran. He said their conversation dealt with the Middle East situation, Europe and the European Economic Community (EEC). "We spoke about the establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and Spain," Shamir said, adding that "There is no doubt that such relations will be established in the future, the question is only when."

He said that Moran could not tell him just when diplomatic ties with Israel will be established. But, Shamir said, it is clear that they will be after Spain becomes a member of the EEC, possibly next year.

Meeting With Other Foreign Ministers

Shamir also met today with Foreign Minister Claude Cheysson of France. He said that Israel has "a special dialogue with France" and that bilateral talks between the two countries are progressing satisfactorily.

Another of Shamir's meetings today was with the Foreign Minister of Liberia, Ernest Eastman. The Israeli Foreign Minister said, in reply to a question, that his stay in New York will include meetings with the Foreign Ministers of African nations that do not have diplomatic ties with Israel. He declined to specify which countries.

Shamir met yesterday with British Foreign Secretary Geoffrey Howe and invited him to visit Israel. Howe accepted and a visit was scheduled for the end of next month.

Shamir will continue his meetings with various foreign ministers this afternoon. He is also scheduled

to meet with President Raul Alfonsin of Argentina and with the West German Foreign Minister, Hans-Dietrich Genscher.

Meanwhile, Israel's new Ambassador to the UN, Binyamin Netanyahu, will present his credentials this afternoon to UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar.

EGYPT'S F. M. SAYS HIS COUNTRY WANTS TO IMPROVE TIES WITH ISRAEL BUT IDF'S PRESENCE IN LEBANON IS AN OBSTACLE By Yitzhak Rabi

NEW YORK, Sept. 25 (JTA) -- Foreign Minister Abdel Meguid of Egypt told Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir of Israel yesterday that Egypt is interested in improving its relations with Israel. But he made it clear that Israel's continued presence in Lebanon is an obstacle in that direction.

The meeting between Shamir and Meguid, at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel, was originally planned to last 45 minutes but instead lasted 90 minutes. It was the first Israeli-Egyptian contact on the foreign ministerial level since the Egyptians recalled their Ambassador from Tel Aviv in September, 1982, during the war in Lebanon. The meeting was requested by Israel. Two years ago, Egypt refused a similar request by Israel.

The issue of Egypt's continued refusal to return its Ambassador to Israel was raised at yesterday's meeting. According to Shamir's spokesman, Avi Pazner, the Israeli Foreign Minister told Meguid that Lebanon should not constitute an obstacle to improved relations between their two countries.

"We want to leave Lebanon, but we first seek security measures for our northern border," Shamir reportedly said, adding that Israel sees no reason why the Egyptian Ambassador should not return to Israel. Shamir claimed that Egypt and Israel do not have ideological differences regarding Lebanon because Israel is willing to leave Lebanon. "It is only a technical matter," Shamir told Meguid.

Issues Of Taba, Palestinians Discussed

During the meeting, which Shamir's spokesman described as "friendly and honest," two other major issues were brought up: the controversy over Taba, a disputed territory near Eilat presently held by Israel, and the Palestinian question.

Shamir said that the Taba issue concerns a tiny territory of only 900 square meters. He said that Israel has returned to Egypt more than 65,000 square kilometers in the Sinai and it is hard for him to understand why Egypt engages in a major dispute over the small territory of Taba. He said the issue could be resolved through negotiations.

As for the Palestinian problem, Shamir said that Israel is ready to resume the autonomy negotiations with Egypt, Jordan and Palestinian representatives from the West Bank, in line with the Camp David accords.

"Israel is not satisfied by the present relations between Egypt and Israel. We are not satisfied with the present cold peace," Shamir told Meguid. He said that one of the goals of the new Israeli government is to improve relations with Egypt.

Shamir's spokesman said that the two Foreign Ministers did not set a date for a new meeting. "We hope, however, that other meetings on the same level will continue in the future," Pazner said.

Wishes for a very Happy New Year to all our readers.