

EGYPT SEEKING TO ENLIST FRANCE TO RENEW WESTERN DIPLOMATIC INITIATIVE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

By Edwin Eytan

PARIS, Jan. 15 (JTA) — Pierre Butros Ghali, the Egyptian Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, is seeking to enlist French leadership to renew the Western European diplomatic initiative in the Middle East, French sources said here today.

Ghali arrived in Paris last week and met with France's new Foreign Minister, Alexander Dumas, and with the Deputy Minister in charge of European Affairs, Catherine Lalumière. The sources said Egypt has called on France to intensify its actions within a Western European framework to relaunch a diplomatic initiative in the Middle East. Ghali told reporters, "We want to make sure that Europe does not forget the whole issue (of the Middle East) but bears it in mind at all times."

Meetings With American Leaders

The Egyptian diplomat is scheduled to meet this week with the Presidents of three African states — Ivory Coast, Senegal and Mali — to whom he will deliver personal messages from President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt.

Mubarak is believed to be calling on the African leaders to intensify their efforts for a negotiated solution in the Middle East with the active participation of Jordan and the Palestinians.

Franco-Egyptian relations are very close at this time. Cairo is negotiating a major arms contract with the French, amounting to several hundred million dollars for combat aircraft and electronic equipment, while it seeks a diplomatic initiative.

A French official spokesman said, however, that President Francois Mitterrand does not plan to launch new diplomatic moves in the Middle East without prior, in-depth consultations with Israel. Mitterrand gave that assurance to Israeli Premier Shimon Peres during his four-day official visit to Paris last month.

PANEL INVESTIGATING BANK SCANDAL TO HOLD SOME CLOSED DOOR SESSIONS

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Jan. 15 (JTA) — The commission of inquiry into the conduct of Israel's banks leading up to the collapse of bank shares in October, 1983 will be allowed to hold some of its sessions behind closed doors when dealing with delicate overseas banking matters.

The option of secrecy was extended by the Cabinet Sunday although the members of the commission have yet to be named by the President of the Supreme Court. The inquiry was approved by the Cabinet a week ago, at the urging of State Comptroller Yitzhak Tunik whose report on the bank shares collapse accused Israel's leading banks of "reprehensible manipulation."

The law allows judicial inquiries to hold sessions in secret only to protect State security or sensitive foreign relations matters. A majority of the Cabinet

voted Sunday to expand the secrecy option to "prevention of damage in matters of public importance." Communications Minister Amnon Rubinstein of the Shinui faction raised the only objection to the motion presented by Justice Minister Moshe Nissim. Nissim and his other colleagues feared that the bank inquiry might undermine the standing of Israeli banks doing business overseas by disclosing matters that they think are better left to the discretion of the bankers.

PLAN TO WITHDRAW IDF FROM LEBANON RUNS INTO PROBLEMS OVER UNIFIL ROLE

By Gil Sedan and Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Jan. 15 (JTA) — The plan to withdraw the Israel Defense Force from south Lebanon ran into problems today over the role the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) will play in the first stage of the three stage pullback approved by the Cabinet last night.

The first stage calls for evacuation of the IDF from the Awali River line and the coastal town of Sidon and its environs, to be completed within five weeks. Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin announced immediately after the Cabinet vote that Israel would seek arrangements for the Lebanese army and/or UNIFIL to take over the area.

But United Nations Undersecretary General Brian Urquhart told Rabin at a meeting this morning that such commitment was not within the mandate of UNIFIL and that he would have to refer the matter back to UN headquarters in New York.

View Of UN Official

Urquhart reportedly said there were "problems in principle" because the region of south Lebanon assigned to UNIFIL does not include the area from which the IDF will depart in the first stage of the withdrawal plan. He said he would ask UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar and, through him, the Security Council, to discuss changes in the UNIFIL mandate.

The UN diplomat arrived here last night for another round of talks with government leaders in Jerusalem, Beirut and Damascus in what has been called a last ditch effort to break the current impasse between Israel and Lebanon over a military security and withdrawal agreement. He met with Rabin and Chief of Staff Gen. Moshe Levy at Defense Ministry headquarters here and left at noon for Beirut. He is expected to return to Israel in a day or two.

Israel's Attitude Towards UNIFIL

Rabin told Urquhart that Israel thought UNIFIL has a major role to play in the first stage of the pullback which would bring the IDF to a line along the Litani River, running from the coast, south of Sidon, to Nabatiya.

Israel would like to see UNIFIL troops patrol the region north of the Litani. The Lebanese and Syrians seem to insist that the UN force confine itself to its present zone of operations just north of the Israeli border though not contiguous to it.

Israel wants the strip immediately north of the international border in the hands of its ally, the South Lebanon Army (SLA), a Christian militia commanded by

Gen. Antoine Lahad, which would continue to operate with IDF advisers after the final stage of the withdrawal plan when all Israeli troops will have left Lebanese soil.

Likud Restive Over Withdrawal Plan

Meanwhile, Likud has become increasingly restive over the withdrawal plan which the Cabinet approved by a vote of 16-6 following two days of debate. The party's Knesset faction is incensed because two Likud ministers, David Levy of the Herut bloc and Gideon Patt of the Liberal Party, broke ranks to vote with the Labor ministers and their allies in favor of the plan. Neither minister had consulted the party caucus before they voted.

Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir, the leader of Likud, told reporters today that he did not like the withdrawal plan because he thought it was fraught with dangers and contained no satisfactory security arrangements.

He stressed, however, that those were his only considerations when he voted against the Defense Ministry's proposals. There was nothing political in the context of Likud versus Labor, he said. He said he regretted that Levy and Patt saw fit to vote for the plan but that only proved that the voting was based on practical considerations, not politics.

Whether the shaky Labor-Likud unity coalition will be affected remains to be seen. Both the Likud and Labor Knesset factions have scheduled meetings later today.

Issue Of Concern To Residents In The North

The pullout of the IDF from south Lebanon has long been an issue of concern to residents of towns and settlements in northern Israel. Maj. Gen. Uri Orr, commander of the northern area, sought to reassure them at a meeting in Nahariya today that the fight against terrorism will continue from the IDF's new lines.

He repeated what he told residents of the border town of Kiryat Shmona a week ago, that he could not guarantee that no Katyusha rockets would ever again fall in Galilee. But he said it would be possible to ensure that there will be no terrorist infiltrations into Israel from Lebanon.

Orr said he did not think the IDF, once it has left Lebanon, should return there if fighting breaks out between rival religious and ethnic groups. That is a matter which the Lebanese President and his government must deal with, the general said.

One of the major incentives for an IDF pullout has been the steadily mounting casualties sustained by Israeli forces in Lebanon. Even as the Cabinet debated the issue yesterday, a military spokesman announced that two IDF soldiers were killed and seven wounded in two roadside explosions. Four Lebanese civilians were killed in the blasts.

The loss of the two soldiers brought to 606 the number of fatalities sustained by the IDF since Israel invaded Lebanon in June, 1982.

U.S. WELCOMES ISRAEL'S DECISION

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, Jan. 15 (JTA) — The Reagan Administration welcomed today Israel's decision to withdraw its troops from Lebanon and said it could be a "new impetus" for the Israeli-Lebanese talks at Nakura.

"The United States welcomes Israel's decision to withdraw its forces from Lebanon," State Department deputy spokesman Alan Romberg said. He said it was "consistent" with the U.S. effort to bring about a withdrawal of all foreign forces from that country.

Romberg would not comment specifically about the plan approved by the Israeli Cabinet yesterday which calls for the withdrawal in three stages, beginning in about five weeks and ending in six to nine months. But he noted that Israeli officials have said that Israel now plans to return to the talks at Nakura.

"We continue to support the UN-sponsored talks in Nakura for achieving arrangements necessary for the resolution of security problems in south Lebanon," Romberg said. "We believe the Israeli decision could provide a new impetus for progress in Nakura for arrangements in the best interests of all parties involved."

At the same time, Romberg said the U.S. would not become a participant in the talks which, he continually stressed, are under UN auspices. He said the U.S. will continue its present role of trying to be as "helpful as we can." Romberg said there were no plans for Richard Murphy, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, to return to the region, although he said he could not rule out the possibility of Murphy going there sometime soon.

PERES: U.S. AND ISRAEL ARE 'PARTNERS' IN MAKING FREEDOM A WORLD REALITY By Hugh Orgel

JERUSALEM, Jan. 15 (JTA) — Premier Shimon Peres said that Israel considers itself as "partners" of the United States in the endeavor "to make freedom a reality" in the world. He spoke in connection with Israel's huge international debt and its request for substantial increases in U.S. economic and military aid.

Addressing a luncheon meeting of the Foreign Press Association here yesterday, Peres said Israel owed the U.S. \$11 billion, of which \$10 billion is the principal and interest on previous loans. He stressed however that American aid to Israel was part of its global commitment and for the U.S. was "still the cheapest, lowest and maybe best" investment.

"Imagine the American position in the Middle East without Israel, or imagine the American position in South America with an Israel there," Peres said, a reference apparently to the massive debts owed by several South American countries.

"We do not think of ourselves as beggars but as partners in the same great exercise of our time -- to make freedom a reality," Peres told the assembled journalists.

WALLENBERG REMEMBRANCE DAY PROCLAIMED

TRENTON, N.J., Jan. 15 (JTA) — Governor Thomas Kean has proclaimed January 17 as "A Day of Remembrance" in honor of the 40th Anniversary of the disappearance of Raoul Wallenberg. The Swedish diplomat, whose heroic actions saved the lives of untold thousands of Jews in Hungary during World War II, will be paid tribute, when churches and public buildings throughout the free world ring their bells at noon.

Kean stated, "Raoul Wallenberg did not shrug his shoulders or deny his responsibility as a human being. He took the burden upon himself, he took the risks, and in doing so he saved thousands of innocent people who were caught in events beyond their control." Wallenberg was made an Honorary Citizen of the United States in 1981.

HADASSAH WARNS THAT AMENDING THE LAW OF RETURN THREATENS JEWISH UNITY

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Dec. 15 (JTA) — The national board of Hadassah, currently meeting here, warned today that "any action to amend the Law of Return threatens the unity of the Jewish people."

The warning was contained in a letter handed to Premier Shimon Peres by Ruth Popkin, national president of Hadassah, the largest Zionist organization in the United States. An amendment to the Law of Return, demanded by the Orthodox religious establishment, will have its preliminary reading in the Knesset tomorrow.

The amendment, long sought by the religious parties in Israel and their backers in the U.S., would give the Orthodox rabbinate in Israel exclusive right to determine who is a Jew. If adopted, the amendment would make invalid conversions to Judaism performed by non-Orthodox rabbis in Israel and abroad.

The Hadassah letter urged the Israeli political community to "remove this divisive issue from its agenda." It cautioned that any change in the Law of Return would jeopardize "the relationship between diaspora Jewry and the Jews of Israel. The Law has stood as a sacred affirmation of the unity of the Jewish people. It says simply and unconditionally: Any Jew can come home to Israel."

ECONOMIC CRISIS HITS KUPAT HOLIM

By Yitzhak Rabi

NEW YORK, Jan. 15 (JTA) — Kupat Holim, Israel's largest sick-fund and health network, which is owned and operated by the Histadrut, is facing difficulties as a result of the deepening economic crisis in the country, Prof. Chaim Doron, chairman of Kupat Holim, said today.

Doron, speaking at a luncheon for American labor leaders sponsored by the National Committee for Labor Israel, said that the performance of Kupat Holim might be affected by the proposed cut in the Health Ministry allocation to Kupat Holim's budget of \$727 million.

Doron said that the government currently provides 11 percent of Kupat Holim's annual budget but it wants to reduce its share in the budget to under 10 percent.

"This cut will have a severe impact on Kupat Holim," Doron said, adding that as a result Kupat Holim will have to raise the monthly dues of its members. He said that currently, each member pays about five percent of his or her salary as membership dues each month. He said that members' dues amount to 20 percent of Kupat Holim's budget while the employers pay 46 percent of the overall budget.

But Doron, who is here for a three-day visit, said he hopes the budget cut will not have an impact on Kupat Holim's services to its members. According to Doron, Kupat Holim is trying to reduce its costs by cutting down on unneeded hospitalization and by decreasing the number of its employees.

MACCABI TEL AVIV HOOPSTERS IN GAMES AGAINST TSKA MOSCOW TEAM

BRUSSELS, Jan. 15 (JTA) — Hundreds of supporters of Israel's Maccabi Tel Aviv basketball team awaited in Deurne, near Antwerp, for the team's scheduled games tomorrow and Thursday evenings

against the Soviet Union's TSKA Moscow team in the finals of the men's European Basketball Champion's Cup.

Since Israel and the Soviet Union do not have diplomatic relations, the basketball teams are playing their two games at a neutral site. Belgium, for the fourth time since 1981, has been chosen for this match between two of the best teams in the European tournament.

The selection of Belgium as the venue for this year's game is due to the efforts of Leon Wandel, a former basketball player and manager of the Belgium national team, who keeps himself busy with the organization of the Maccabi Tel Aviv-Moscow encounter.

The 51-year-old industrialist is a member of the International Federation of Basketball Associations (IFBA) and of the Committee of European Cups. This year, the basketball final will be played at the arena hall in Deurne where almost all the 3,500 seats have been sold. Hundreds of supporters were expected here from Israel.

Today, a special El Al flight carrying the Israeli team and its supporters, was due to land at Deurne-Antwerp Airport for the first time in the history of this regional airport. Moreover, hundreds of Jews from the nearby city of Antwerp, waving Israeli flags, are expected in the arena hall to support the Tel Aviv team.

While the Israeli squad will be made to feel almost as if it were playing at its home court, the Soviet team, on the other hand, will only be accompanied by officials of the Soviet Embassy. The Israeli team has played the team from Moscow five times in this competition, with the Israelis taking four of the five games.

In the actual final competition, three teams are leading with five points. They are Maccabi Tel Aviv, Cibona Zagreb (Yugoslavia) and Boncorama (Italy). TSKA Moscow has four points.

MODAI: ISRAELIS ARE THE MOST TAXED BUT MOST PAMPERED IN THE WORLD

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Jan. 15 (JTA) — Israelis, who often describe themselves as the most heavily taxed people in the world are also the most "pampered," according to Finance Minister Yitzhak Modai. They must be prepared to accept a drastic reduction in their standard of living, he told a meeting of the Engineers Club here.

Modai said the government aims to reduce living standards to the level of 1980 which would be "decent" but not "comfortable" in order to implement the massive budget cuts necessary for economic recovery. He admitted that the cuts he seeks have not yet been effected.

The Israel government carries a burden comparable to a country with six times the population, he said. No other country in the world has one-quarter of its population in productive enterprises and more than one-third in service jobs, Modai declared. In no other country does the public pay less than 20 percent of its total expenditures for health and education.

Modai noted that Israelis visit doctors five times more frequently than Western Europeans and use four times as much medication per capita. "If the choice is between Sparta and Athens, then I prefer Sparta," Modai said. "The Spartans worked harder and they were not pampered."

SPECIAL TO THE JTA WITNESSES TO A NIGHTMARE

By Daniella Niv

JERUSALEM, Jan. 15 (JTA) — The twins who survived Josef Mengele's notorious "experiments" still bear the physical and mental scars. Some have never talked about their experiences. Now, 40 years later, they plan to take the witness stand in a public hearing and tell the world about Birkenau-Auschwitz.

"J'Accuse," the first international conference of Auschwitz twin-survivors, will be held between February 3 and 6, at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. The public hearing will be the central event.

Dozens of twins will recall their horrific experiences at the camp before a panel of judges. Doctors and others who worked with Mengele, the chief doctor at Auschwitz, will tell of his "experiments." Medical experts will testify to their possible effects on the survivors and their offspring.

The conference's goals are manifold. Survivors want to influence world opinion to apprehend Mengele, the "angel of death." The victims want to document his atrocities for generations to come. This need has assumed an urgency now, since the twins, children during the Holocaust, have reached middle-age.

The Need To Talk To Others

The twins feel a growing need to talk to others who endured similar horrors, and to learn the ramifications of what was done to them. Miriam Zeiger, one of the conference's organizers, told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency in an interview: "I don't know what they injected into me. I wonder what effects it has had, what I may be passing on to my children. Our research has shown that Mengele's test tubes often contained kerosene or viruses, regardless of what was written on the labels."

"Candles," an organization of Auschwitz twin-survivors, was founded a year ago, when Miriam's sister Eva Kor met another twin at a Holocaust conference in the United States. They found they had common experiences. Eva, who lives in Indiana, asked her sister Miriam to track down twin-survivors living in Israel.

Their advertisement in Maariv brought a flood of responses from other twins. Eva quickly arranged a visit to Israel. A hastily-planned gathering attracted more than 60 survivors — and marked the birth of "Candles."

"I met people I had not seen for 40 years. It was very emotional. We talked about the future, about what we were going to do, not about the past," said Miriam.

Recalling The Reign Of Terror

Eva and Miriam were five-and-a-half years old when Hungary invaded Rumanian Transylvania in 1940. For four years they lived under a reign of terror. Then, in 1944, Germany invaded Hungary, and soldiers came to take them away.

"We were herded into the death trains. The journey lasted three days and we were hungry, but worst of all we had nothing to drink. My mother gave us a lemon to suck," Miriam recalled.

"When the doors finally opened the pressure of the bodies was terrible. We fell out, and that was the last I saw of my father and two elder sisters. We

heard a shout, twins — and my mother asked an officer standing nearby if it was good to be twins. He said it was. So she brought us forward. That was the last time I saw my mother."

Miriam remembers Mengele's face vividly. He came every morning to the Birkenau experimentation block. "He was a good-looking man, elegant, dark. He looked tall to us, but then, we were little girls.

"Eva was injected with something and she got a high temperature. She was taken to the sick ward, and they said she would die. But somebody brought her food every day, and in six or eight weeks time she was better.

"While she was sick they left me alone. Without Eva I wasn't of interest to them. They took large amounts of blood as infusions for German soldiers on the front. I was very weak and in a state of severe malnutrition. When I later fell sick, Eva risked her life to steal potatoes from the kitchen."

Two Sisters Reunited After The War

Miriam and Eva consider themselves lucky. They arrived at Birkenau late in the war and therefore were saved from the terrible operations — biopsies, castration and sterilization — performed on more veteran inmates.

After the liberation of the camps, the two sisters were reunited with an aunt and made their way to Rumania. In 1956 they came to Israel.

Miriam now lives in Ashkelon with her husband and has three daughters. In addition to her job as a nurse, she spends much of her time preparing for the February conference.

On January 27, representatives of the survivors will retrace the route of the notorious three-kilometer death-march from Birkenau to Auschwitz, wearing striped prisoners uniforms.

One week after the symbolic march, the first twins Conference will open at Yad Vashem with the dedication of a camp liberation memorial made by survivor Elise Polack. Simone Weil, former President of the European-Parliament and herself a concentration camp survivor, will dedicate the statue.

Survivors will come from Israel, the United States, Canada, Australia, Germany, Hungary and Rumania to take part in the conference.

Planned Activities At The Conference

A symposium will be held on the effects of the Holocaust on the second and third generations, with experts in the fields of history, psychology and psychiatry. Workshops on topics such as the psychiatric treatment of Holocaust survivors and the legal aspects of experiments on humans will take place in the afternoons. The mornings will be devoted to the public hearing.

Meanwhile, Mengele still roams free. Nazi-hunter Simon Wiesenthal contends that he is living in north Paraguay, shielded by Gen. Alfredo Stroessner, despite statements by Paraguay's Administration that Mengele left the country years ago.

The conference's organizers are still trying to locate some of the 183 twins who are believed to have survived the camps. Information on the whereabouts of twin-survivors (and contributions to the conference's proceedings) can be sent to: "J'Accuse," 16 Astraua Street, Jerusalem, Israel.