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**BACKGROUND REPORT:
U.S.-USSR TALKS ON THE MIDEAST
DESCRIBED AS 'EXCHANGE' OF VIEWS
AND NOT ANY FORM OF NEGOTIATIONS**
By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, Feb. 18 (JTA) -- Richard Murphy, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, is preparing to meet his Soviet counterpart, Vladimir Polykov, in Vienna tomorrow, for two days of talks on the Middle East which the State Department here is emphasizing will be "exchange" of views and not any form of negotiations.

A State Department official, briefing reporters on the upcoming meetings, said that the United States has assured Israel and the Arab countries that the U.S. and the Soviet Union are not coming together "to impose a U.S.-Soviet plan on the area." The U.S. remains committed to direct negotiations between Israel and the Arab countries, the official said.

Ambassador Meir Rosenne raised Israel's concerns about the Vienna meeting when he met with Murphy last Wednesday. An Israel Embassy spokesman would not comment on whether Rosenne had felt reassured by Murphy's explanation of the U.S. approach toward the meeting.

This should be viewed in the "context of the management of U.S.-Soviet relations rather than in the context of the Middle East," the State Department official said Friday. He said its purpose is "to help avoid miscalculations and to reduce the potential risk of U.S.-Soviet confrontation."

The official added that the Vienna meeting will have served its purpose if "we have a better understanding of what Soviet views are, and for them to understand better what our views are." He said this "is in both our interests."

U.S. To Raise Four Topics

The U.S. will raise four topics: Arab-Israel issues, which is expected to be the major subject discussed; south Lebanon; Afghanistan; and the Iran-Iraq war, the official said. But he stressed the meeting will not be negotiations nor an attempt to reach an agreement with the Soviet Union, nor a "precursor" for an international conference, nor is it expected to change either the U.S. or Soviet positions on the Mideast.

In keeping with the Reagan Administration's efforts to downplay the Vienna meeting, Murphy will return to Washington rather than going to the Mideast to brief the various governments about the talks. The official stressed that when Murphy next goes to the region, it will not be in connection with the Vienna talks.

The State Department official said that while the agreement reached by King Hussein of Jordan and Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasir Arafat on negotiations is expected to come up in Vienna, it will not be in an important part of the talks. But the official said that the U.S. does expect to raise their call for an international conference to negotiate a comprehensive Mideast peace settlement.

The international conference, opposed by both Israel and the U.S., is seen as a vehicle the USSR hopes to use to get itself back into the Mideast peace process. "We don't deny the Soviets have interests in the area," the official said. But he added they have not played a helpful role in the Mideast and "for them to play a helpful role there has to be a revolution really in their position."

Soviets Have To Demonstrate Their Sincerity

The State Department official said one way the Soviets could demonstrate their "sincerity" would be to resume diplomatic relations with Israel and another could be in the improvement of the treatment of Soviet Jews. The official said that the condition of Soviet Jews "is one of the indicators of the Soviet attitude toward playing a truly disinterested role in the context of the Middle East; not directly, but indirectly."

The official also provided some background on the talks, explaining that for two years the U.S. had told the Soviet Union it was interested in discussing regional issues, including the Mideast. This was reiterated by President Reagan in his speech to the United Nations General Assembly last September.

But the Soviet Union showed no interest in discussing the Mideast until several weeks before the start of last month's arms control talks in Geneva between Secretary of State George Shultz and Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, the State Department official said. The Vienna meeting was arranged after the Geneva talks.

**IDF COMPLETES FIRST STAGE
OF ITS WITHDRAWAL FROM LEBANON
TWO DAYS AHEAD OF SCHEDULE**

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, Feb. 18 (JTA) -- The Israel Defense Force completed the first stage of its withdrawal from south Lebanon Saturday, two days ahead of the schedule which had set February 18 as the date of their final departure.

The pull-out from the port city of Sidon and the rest of the northwest sector of south Lebanon was accomplished smoothly. But elation over that accomplishment was marred by new casualties. One Israeli soldier was killed yesterday and three others were wounded by a roadside explosive near Tyre as the IDF deployed along its new lines. It was the fifth IDF fatality in two weeks.

According to a military spokesman, a convoy was approaching El-Basuriya village east of Tyre when a 15-kilogram charge of explosives was detonated under the lead escort jeep and an armored personnel carrier, causing the casualties.

Reason For Earlier Pull-Out

Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin informed the Cabinet yesterday that the pull-out from Sidon and the rest of the Awali River sector was advanced by two days because of intelligence reports that terrorists intended to attack the departing IDF units today. Rabin's explanation was in part to mollify religious elements in the government who raised an outcry over why the withdrawal took place on Saturday, in violation of the Sabbath.

Premier Shimon Peres observed that IDF operations in Lebanon went on seven days a week without objections from the religious. "What is the difference if the IDF moves on Saturday northward or southward," he asked. A Haaretz reporter who witnessed the evacuation from Sidon wrote that he had never seen so many skullcap-wearing men express such pleasure at riding on the Sabbath, a reference to observant soldiers.

The pull-out was also witnessed by Rabin, Chief of Staff Gen. Moshe Levy and senior officers of the northern command who watched from a hill-top overlooking Sidon.

Lebanese Army Enters Sidon

As the Israeli troops left, promptly at noon, units of the Lebanese regular army crossed the Awali River and entered Sidon to the cheers of enthusiastic crowds. The Lebanese regulars are taking over the positions evacuated by the IDF. President Amin Gemayel and Premier Rashid Karamah visited Sidon to demonstrate that the Beirut regime is indeed firmly in control of at least a part of south Lebanon.

As if to further that impression, the Lebanese Defense Minister announced that he had instructed his troops to fire on the IDF if any confrontation developed. He said the Lebanese army would fight the Israelis if they attempted to return to south Lebanon.

IDF Encamped On A New Line

The IDF is now encamped on a new line extending from the coast, along the Litani River to the mountain town of Jezzine. The Cabinet is expected to begin discussing the second stage of the pull-out within a week. According to senior IDF officers, it will be more complicated and difficult than the first stage. But military sources said it could begin in about three weeks.

The second stage will bring the IDF to a line closer to the Israeli border and will involve the mass movement of troops rather than equipment. According to military sources, the IDF will be most vulnerable to attack in this stage as it leaves the eastern sector of south Lebanon where it presently faces the forces of Syria and Palestine Liberation Organization dissidents led by Abu Moussa, Yasir Arafat's principal rival for leadership of the PLO.

IDF Delighted To Be Leaving Sidon

The Israeli troops were delighted to be leaving Sidon and the Awali River line where they had been subjected to continuous harassment by hostile elements, mainly Shiite Moslems. A sour note was struck when Orthodox elements in the government denounced the army for choosing Saturday to pull out of Sidon.

An anonymous note accompanied the withdrawal. At least four Lebanese were reported murdered for collaborating with the IDF, and a fleet of locally-owned trucks used to help the Israelis evacuate was destroyed. The culprits are believed to be the Shiite Moslem militia or other elements hostile to Israel.

**PERES VISITING ITALY AND RUMANIA;
MESSAGES FROM ARAFAT AWAIT HIM**
By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Feb. 18 (JTA) — Premier Shimon Peres' brief visits to Italy and Rumania, on which he left today, have generated more than routine political interest. Italian Premier Bettino Craxi said on a Voice of Israel Radio interview last night that he has

received a message from Palestine Liberation Organization chief Yasir Arafat and would inform Peres of its contents when he reaches Rome.

Craxi said Arafat's message arrived following the announcement in Amman last week that he and King Hussein of Jordan had agreed on a framework for negotiating a Middle East settlement. The Italian leader called the agreement a serious development.

His comment raised concern among Israeli hawks who were also alarmed by reports that Peres would receive a letter from Arafat while in Rumania, after his visit to Rome. He is scheduled to meet in Bucharest with President Nicolae Ceausescu who played a role some eight years ago in paving the way for Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's historic journey to Jerusalem.

Rumania is the only Communist bloc nation which maintains diplomatic relations with Israel and is considered a likely go-between in arranging contacts between Israel and its Arab foes.

Peres, Weizman Warmly Greeted In Rome

(Peres, accompanied by Minister-Without-Portfolio Ezer Weizman, arrived at Rome's Campiano Airport this afternoon where he was warmly greeted by Craxi and reviewed a guard of honor. He and Craxi are personal friends of long standing, both having served as vice presidents of the Socialist International.)

(In addition to their talks, Peres will meet with Pope John Paul II, the first Israeli Prime Minister to meet with a Pope since Golda Meir was granted a Papal audience in 1973. He will also confer with President Sandro Pertini of Italy and with Foreign Minister Giulio Andreotti before leaving for Bucharest.)

Knesset Unit Discusses Israelis-PLO Contacts

Meanwhile, the Knesset House Committee today discussed the issue of contacts between Israelis and representatives of the PLO. The matter at hand is the demand by five Likud MKs to waive the immunity of MKs Mattityahu Peled and Mohammad Miari of the Progressive List for Peace to open the way for possible legal action over their meeting with Arafat in Tunis a week ago.

Attorney General Yitzhak Zamir has asked the police to determine whether the meeting compromised Israel's security. The police investigation is still in progress.

HERZOG: NO NEW EUROPEAN MIDEAST INITIATIVE EXPECTED AT THIS TIME

TEL AVIV, Feb. 18 (JTA) — President Chaim Herzog, returning from his week-long European visit late Friday afternoon, told reporters that no new Middle East initiative by the European nations should be expected at this time.

Herzog, accompanied by his wife, Ora, visited Luxembourg, Strasbourg and Brussels. In Strasbourg the Israeli chief of State addressed the Parliament of Europe. He said he had presented to the European leaders he met, Israel's position with respect to its agricultural exports to Western Europe in light of the impending admission of Spain and Portugal into the European Economic Community (EEC).

The President and his wife and their party landed at Atarot Airport, just outside of Jerusalem. Premier Shimon Peres, Deputy Premier Yitzhak Shamir and Knesset Speaker Shlomo Hillel were on hand to greet the President. There was no formal welcoming ceremony because of the imminence of the Sabbath and the cold, wet weather.

Eyewitness Account About Mengele: FORMER U.S. SOLDIER SAYS HE SAW AUSCHWITZ DEATH CAMP DOCTOR IN U.S. ARMY DETENTION CAMP IN JULY, 1945

LOS ANGELES, Feb. 18 (JTA) — Josef Mengele, the notorious Auschwitz death camp doctor, was in U.S. army custody shortly after the end of World War II, according to a former American soldier who said he saw him in an army detention camp for captured Nazis on or about July 10, 1945.

Walter Kempthorne, a retired aerospace engineer, told a press conference at the Simon Wiesenthal Center here that he had a chance meeting with a Nazi prisoner while serving as a guard at the Idar-Oberstein detention camp in the U.S.-occupied sector of Germany.

He said other American soldiers told him later that the prisoner in question was "Mengele," the bastard who sterilized 3,000 women in Auschwitz. Kempthorne said that at the time neither the name of the prisoner nor of the camp meant anything to him. "But as a 19-year-old American I was shocked at the crimes described. It's something I could never forget," he said.

Account Seems To Confirm Other Information

Kempthorne was accompanied at the press conference by Sens. Arlen Specter (R., Pa.) and Alfonse D'Amato (R., N.Y.) who are leading efforts in Congress to press the U.S. to help track down and apprehend Mengele, the most notorious Nazi war criminal still at large. The former soldier's testimony seemed to confirm recently disclosed information that Mengele was detained by the U.S. authorities after the war and then freed.

Referring to the prisoner identified as Mengele, Kempthorne said: "While not getting a full frontal view of the man, I do recall that he apparently tried to bleach his black hair and was approximately 5-foot-8 and 160 pounds, a description that matches Mengele's appearance at that time."

He said that the inmates of the Idar-Oberstein camp were all Nazis who were being interrogated and either released or held for trial. The camp was run by the U.S. Army's Counterintelligence Corps (CIC). Kempthorne explained that his battalion was assigned to watchtower duty and was not part of the CIC.

"A few days after the incident, on July 14, Bastille Day, my unit was relieved by French troops and I had no further opportunity to come in contact" with any of the prisoners, Kempthorne said. He said he decided to come forward at this time after reading articles in the press "that the U.S. government has launched an official investigation into the Mengele case."

D'AMATO CALLS FOR INCREASED EFFORTS TO APPREHEND MENGELE

By Yitzhak Rabi

NEW YORK, Feb. 18 (JTA) — Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R., N.Y.) called here last night for increased efforts to apprehend the notorious Nazi doctor, Josef Mengele, who conducted barbaric experiments on Jewish and other inmates at the Auschwitz concentration camp during World War II.

"We cannot allow Mengele to avoid justice," D'Amato declared at the annual dinner of Bnai Zion at the Grand Hyatt Hotel, where he was presented with the 1985 American-Israeli Award. "We are now in a race against time," he declared. "If

we don't catch him soon, he may be free to die in bed of old age. This is a far more peaceful fate than this mass murderer and torturer deserves."

The Senator told the more than 600 people at the dinner that he believes that "the noose is beginning to tighten around Mengele." He said that recently obtained documents indicate that Mengele may have been living in Canada under the alias "Menke."

Charges U.S. Army With Being Unresponsive

"In June of 1962, a request for information from the Visa Control Section of the Canadian Embassy in Cologne, West Germany, to the U.S. Army Europe's Central Registry for Information asked for any documentation they might have on Mengele, such as fingerprints or photographs," D'Amato said.

"The letter stated that an individual named Josef Menke was living in Canada and that the Canadians had information which led them to believe this Menke might be Mengele." But, D'Amato charged, the U.S. Army was unresponsive and did not provide the Canadians with useful information to pursue the case.

D'Amato added: "Published information leads me to believe there was official involvement by U.S. and other Allied government agencies in the exodus of Nazis from Germany after World War II. I want to know if Mengele had any official assistance in his escape from justice. If he did, I want to know who helped him. Any person who was involved in helping war criminals escape punishment must be held to account for his action."

Last week Sen. Arlen Specter (R., Pa.) announced in Los Angeles that formal Senate hearings on the Mengele case will start in Washington tomorrow.

Situation Of Soviet Jewry Is Worsening

Binyamin Netanyahu, Israel's Ambassador to the United Nations, told the audience the situation of Soviet Jewry is continuing to worsen. He called on American Jews and non-Jews alike to join together in renewed efforts to save Soviet Jewry and end its persecution by the Soviet authorities.

Kalman Sultanik, a member of the World Zionist Executive and a veteran Zionist leader, received the Bnai Zion's 1985 Dr. Harris Levine Award for his contribution and dedication to public Jewish life.

RABIN OPPOSES IN PRINCIPLE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF JEWISH SETTLEMENTS IN THE HEART OF WEST BANK ARAB TOWNS

TEL AVIV, Feb. 18 (JTA) — Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin has made it clear that he is opposed in principle to the establishment of Jewish settlements in the heart of Arab towns on the West Bank such as Nablus and Hebron. He promised a delegation of Knesset members of the Citizens Rights Movement (CRM) that no Jewish settlement will be established on the controversial site of Tel Rumeida in Hebron unless the government sanctions it.

He added that he hoped no such decision will be made. Tel Rumeida is a hilltop in the middle of Arab Hebron where Jewish militants from nearby Kiryat Arba established themselves shortly before the Knesset elections last July — with the approval of then Defense Minister Moshe Arens.

The present Labor-Likud coalition government has refused to allow the settlers to expand. The West Bank Civil Administration last week declared Tel Rumeida an archaeological site which forbids the settlers to erect permanent housing there. The settlers themselves are defiant.

RA CLEARS WAY FOR ACCEPTANCE OF ITS FIRST WOMAN RABBI

By Aviva Cantor

NEW YORK, Feb. 18 (JTA) — The Rabbinical Assembly (RA) — the international organization of Conservative rabbis — has cleared the way for the acceptance of its first female member. She is Amy Eilberg, 30, who is scheduled to be the first woman to graduate from the Rabbinical School of the (Conservative) Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) and be ordained in May.

The roadblock to the acceptance of Eilberg — and other Conservative women rabbis following in her footsteps — was cleared by the passage of an amendment to the RA's constitution, the RA announced at a news conference last Thursday.

According to the amendment, all graduates of the JTS will automatically become RA members upon ordination. The amendment passed by a vote of 636-267 conducted in a recent mail ballot of the RA membership.

Previously, graduates had to be voted into RA membership individually by 75 percent of the delegates to an RA convention — which remains the procedure for non-JTS rabbis who apply. The amendment was conceived to avert a possible floor fight on such a vote on Eilberg's acceptance into the RA membership, according to sources familiar with Conservative movement politics.

Reasons For Concern

Behind the concern was the fact that at floor fights for two years in a row, RA conventions rejected the application of Rabbi Beverly Magidson, who was ordained as a Reform rabbi in 1979, while accepting into membership several male Reform rabbis.

At the 1983 convention, held in Dallas, the vote on Magidson's application was 210 in favor to 75 opposed — only four votes short of the 75 percent required. At the 1984 convention, held in April in Kiamesha Lake New York, Magidson received 230 votes to 99 against — or 17 votes short.

The repeated rejection of Magidson's application and the seeming decline in support for her admission to the RA largely were attributed by knowledgeable sources to the feeling in the organization that the first woman it admits should be a JTS graduate. This would then pave the way for the acceptance of women rabbis who were not JTS graduates, such as Magidson, in the future.

What made possible the application of a woman ordained by JTS was the decision of its Faculty Senate to accept women as rabbinical students, reached by a 34-8 vote in October 1983 after over 10 years of heated and often bitter debate within the Conservative movement.

In keeping with the decision, 18 women were admitted as students in the JTS Rabbinical School's incoming (1984-85) class — comprising approximately 50 percent of the students. Several of the women students, who had taken courses at JTS during the past few years, will now receive credit and be ordained before the end of the usual six-year period of study.

'A Momentous, Historic Event'

Philadelphia-born Eilberg holds a Masters degree in Talmud from the JTS. She also holds a B.A. in Near Eastern and Judaic Studies from Brandeis University, and an MSW from Smith College. She is the daughter of former Rep. Joshua Eilberg and Gladys Eilberg, a social worker.

At Thursday's news conference, Eilberg called the RA vote "a momentous, historic event" and "a great day for American Judaism and for American

Jewish women." The Conservative movement, she said, "has declared in a resounding voice that it is dedicated to an ideal of a fully egalitarian community."

Referring, as well, to the JTS decision to admit women as rabbinical students, Eilberg said that for American Jewish women "the long vigil is over and the wait was fully justified." She added:

"As of today, Jewish women need never again feel that their gender is a barrier to their full participation in Jewish life. They need never again doubt the commitment of the Conservative movement to complete equality for women." But the process, she said, "is only beginning." She continued:

"Only now can we begin the long-term process of acknowledging the special contributions that women can make to Judaism, of exploring women's unique and hitherto ignored perspectives on Jewish tradition, and of incorporating those vital insights and contributions into the mainstream of Jewish life."

Entering A New Era

Rabbi Alexander Shapiro, president of the RA, told the news conference that, with the decision, "the Conservative movement as a whole is now about to enter into an entirely new era in its development," with women as well as men able to "enrich Jewish life throughout the world."

The decision, he added, "represents a recognition that all of us, both men and women, are created in God's image and that the potential for spiritual greatness exists in all human beings."

Dr. Gerson Cohen, chancellor of the JTS — who had successfully pressed for the acceptance of women as rabbinical students there — expressed the hope that "all concerned with the health of Conservative Judaism will join together in a renewed spirit of co-operation and look toward the future."

Opponents Speak Out

This was an obvious reference to a group of rabbis within the Conservative movement who have long been opposed to women being ordained as rabbis. David Novak, a spokesrabbi for the Union for Traditional Conservative Judaism, called the RA decision "contrary to Jewish law" and warned that it would divide the movement.

Meanwhile, the National Council of Young Israel (NCYI), a modern Orthodox organization, condemned the RA decision as an "abandonment" by the Conservative movement "of all respect for the Divine authority and authenticity of our religious heritage" and called it a "heresy."

NCYI president Harold Jacobs called upon all Orthodox organizations to sever their ties with both Conservative and Reform organizations and end their participation in umbrella bodies such as the Synagogue Council of America.

NEW YORK (JTA) — Arabsat, the first Arab telecommunications satellite, was launched last week from a space center in French Guiana. It will provide telephone, telex, television and radio transmissions for the 22 member-states of the Arab League. The official Saudi news agency described Arabsat as the first of three Arab satellites built by a consortium headed by the French company, Aerospatiale. The second is to be launched by the U.S. space shuttle later this year and the third will be held in reserve. The satellite's main control and command center is located in Dirab, Saudi Arabia.