

AMERICAN JEWS CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC THAT CHANGE IN SOVIET LEADERSHIP WILL BRING IMPROVEMENT FOR SOVIET JEWRY
By Kevin Freeman

NEW YORK, March 12 (JTA) -- A mood best described as cautious optimism prevailed here today among officials involved with Soviet Jewish affairs as they speculated on the effect the new Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, will have on Soviet policy toward its Jewish community.

Gorbachev was named yesterday to succeed President Konstantin Chernenko who died Sunday evening from heart failure following deterioration of his lungs and liver at the age 73. He held power, succeeding Yuri Andropov, for just 13 months, most of that time in ill health.

The 54-year-old Gorbachev, representing a younger generation in Soviet leadership ranks, was elected General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, the country's most powerful political position at a session of the Central Committee.

Clearly the analysts suggested in interviews with the Jewish Telegraphic Agency that it remained too early to determine the trend of the new government toward dealing with Soviet Jewish citizens, particularly on issues regarding cultural and religious freedoms and emigration.

Gorbachev Seeks Detente

At the same time, these same analysts suggested that Gorbachev's past overtures to the West, including visits to Britain and Canada, and his call yesterday for economic reforms and a return to the policy of detente, may result in an easing of the plight of Soviet Jews.

Soviet Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union descended to its lowest levels in 1984, with only 896 Jews allowed to leave the USSR. This is a drastic reduction from the more than 50,000 who were permitted to emigrate in 1979 while Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev was in power.

Along with the decrease in emigration, Soviet Jews suffered under the Presidents Chernenko and Andropov a serious increase in harassment and persecution. There appears to have been a stepped up effort to suppress Jewish cultural and religious teachings in the Soviet Union, with sweeping arrests being made in recent months of unofficial teachers of Hebrew.

Gorbachev's Attitude Little Known

According to William Korey, director of international policy research for B'nai B'rith International, little is known in the public domain of Gorbachev's attitude with regard to Soviet Jewish emigration and religious and cultural freedom. "There is no record of this kind on Gorbachev," Korey said.

However, it was widely reported that Margaret Thatcher, the British Prime Minister, raised with Gorbachev last December the situation of Soviet Jews and Soviet dissidents. Gorbachev, according to reports, told Thatcher he had nothing new to say on the matter and referred her to Soviet legislation.

On the same visit to Britain, Norman St. John-Stevas, a Conservative member of Parliament, questioned him on religious freedom. Gorbachev was reported to have answered, "You govern your society; you leave us to govern ours."

In citing "positive" aspects of Gorbachev's ascent to power, Korey asserted that his talk of a return to detente along with a perception of Gorbachev as a strong and vigorous leader may prove helpful for Soviet Jews.

Furthermore, the B'nai B'rith official suggested that as an advocate of detente and his stated position of seeking economic reforms, there appears the need for the Soviets to engage with the West in negotiations for new technology. This, Korey said, would increase the West's bargaining position to seek an easing of the human rights situation in the Soviet Union.

"At this early stage of the game, it is terribly important for the West, to the extent that Gorbachev is an advocate of negotiations, to see to it that the issue of Soviet Jewry and human rights is up front and on the agenda" at all trade and arms negotiations, Korey said.

More Freedom Than Predecessors

Jerry Goodman, executive director of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, also hinted that Gorbachev's overtures to the West may help ease human rights in the Soviet Union. But Goodman suggested that Gorbachev will have more freedom to develop his own policies within the Soviet Union whereas Chernenko was "locked into" the policies of his predecessor, Andropov.

"Gorbachev," Goodman said, "is freer than Chernenko to make a change of policy with regard to Jews, especially with regard to emigration. While I don't think it will happen overnight, we should watch cautiously for (policy) shifts in the months ahead." Nonetheless, Goodman urged a continuation of public demonstrations on behalf of Soviet Jewry.

The Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry, meanwhile, held a demonstration Monday morning outside the Soviet Mission to the United Nations here. The 24 demonstrators, the number allowed to demonstrate on the block between Lexington and Third Avenue on 67th Street, urged the new Soviet leadership to seize the opportunity and "prove your good will and good intentions" by easing the human rights situation of Soviet Jews.

Bronfman Visit Still On

The World Jewish Congress informed the Jewish Telegraphic Agency today that the visit to the Soviet Union by Edgar Bronfman, WJC president and head of Seagram & Sons, Inc., would not be affected by Chernenko's death. Bronfman announced he would "raise the Soviet Jewry issue in all respects" when he visits the Soviet Union. No date has been set for Bronfman's visit.

Israel Singer, WJC executive director, today provided a "wait and see attitude" regarding the future of Soviet Jewry and its relationship to the change in leadership in the Kremlin. He, too, stressed the need to watch for "signals" of any change in current policy toward Soviet Jewish activities and emigration.

Singer cautioned however that the Soviet Union remains a place where change is gradual, and Gorbachev will need months, or perhaps longer before he can consolidate power to implement any change regarding the plight of Soviet Jewry.

Moreover, Gorbachev has visited the West and has been made aware of the West's concern for human rights and the Soviet Jewish problem, said Singer, adding, "He would be well advised to take it off the list of problems."

SHAMIR HOPEFUL ABOUT GORBACHEV

By Yossi Lemkovicz

BRUSSELS, March 12 (JTA) — Israeli Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir expressed guarded hope today that the change of leadership in the Kremlin may result eventually in the normalization of relations between the Soviet Union and Israel.

Shamir, at a press conference marking the end of his three-day visit to Belgium, referred to the death Sunday of Soviet President Konstantin Chernenko and his immediate replacement by Mikhail Gorbachev who was named Chairman of the Soviet Communist Party and is expected shortly to be named President.

Shamir said he hoped the USSR, which broke diplomatic relations with Israel after the 1967 Six-Day War, would now move to resolve the problem of the emigration of Soviet Jews and change its attitude toward the Jewish State. However, he stressed, it is much too early to make any predictions.

U.S. JEWS URGE MUBARAK TO DEMONSTRATE TO OTHER ARABS BENEFIT OF PEACE WITH ISRAEL

WASHINGTON, March 12 (JTA) — American Jewish leaders yesterday told President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt that "no possible progress toward peace" could be made in the Middle East unless Israel were involved in direct talks with its Arab neighbors.

Mubarak was urged "to demonstrate to his fellow Arab leaders the advantages of peace with Israel by giving genuine content to that peace — by returning his Ambassador to Israel and by fulfilling the commitment to trade, tourism and cultural exchanges contained in the treaty between Egypt and Israel."

"Only if the Arab world recognizes that peace with Israel can bring political and economic dividends will the circle of peace grow wider," said Kenneth Bialkin, chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

Bialkin led a group of some 20 leaders of American Jewish organizations in an hour long meeting with the Egyptian leader at the Madison Hotel. Mubarak yesterday began a three day official visit to Washington which includes meetings with President Reagan and other senior Administration officials.

Mubarak Confident Of Progress

Bialkin, addressing reporters after the meeting, described as "spirited and friendly," said the Egyptian leader repeated his commitment to peace with Israel and voiced confidence that progress would be made in three areas so that he could return his Ambassador to Israel and promote trade and tourism with Israel.

The three areas referred to by Mubarak were: a complete Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon;

some movement on the Palestinian problem; and a resolution of the dispute over Taba, the 800-square meter enclave south of Eilat that is claimed by both Egypt and Israel.

Mubarak, according to Bialkin, expressed satisfaction at Israel's decision to withdraw from Lebanon and understanding that the Palestinian issue posed great difficulties for any Israeli government. But Bialkin reported that Mubarak appeared troubled by the lingering dispute over Taba. Mubarak said that Egyptian public opinion was not yet ready for the return of its Ambassador to Israel, withdrawn following the massacre of Palestinians at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in September, 1982. In turn, the Jewish leaders urged Mubarak to "exercise genuine leadership" by helping to mold public opinion in his country to understand the advantages of normal relations with Israel.

Egypt Committed To Peace Treaty

Mubarak insisted that the absence of the Egyptian envoy from Israel did not mean an absence of contact and dialogue with the Jewish State, Bialkin reported. "Mubarak expressed confidence that his envoy to Israel would be returned and that trade, tourism and cultural exchanges would follow," said Bialkin, adding, "He kept telling us to 'be patient,' and he repeated that Egypt 'respects its commitments to Israel 100 percent,' and never thinks of going back on the peace treaty."

Mubarak also told the delegation that he recognized there could be no solution to the Arab-Israel conflict unless both sides sat down with each other and talked. "Mubarak justified his proposals for a Jordanian-Palestinian-American meeting as a way of making a 'psychological' breaking toward peace. We told him this idea was a non-starter and would serve to delay the peace process, which could only advance when Israel met directly with Jordan and a non-PLO delegation of Palestinian Arabs."

Disappointed By 2 Mubarak Comments

The delegation of Jewish leaders was especially disappointed, according to Bialkin, by two statements by Mubarak. "One was his defense of (PLO chief) Yasir Arafat as a 'moderate,' a description we told him we could not accept," Bialkin said.

"The other was his rather off-hand response to a question we raised on what Egyptian children read in their textbooks and learned at school about Israel and the Jewish people. Mr. Mubarak dismissed the question as one that would take care of itself once normal relations with Israel were restored. Our response was that a better understanding of Israel and 'the people who live there was essential to such a peace,'" Bialkin said.

U.S. VETOES ANTI-ISRAEL RESOLUTION By Yitzhak Rabi

UNITED NATIONS, March 12 (JTA) — The United States today vetoed a Lebanese resolution in the Security Council condemning Israel and demanding the immediate withdrawal of all Israeli forces from south Lebanon.

The vote on the resolution was 11-1 in favor with three abstentions. The abstaining countries were the United Kingdom, Denmark and Australia. The U.S. cast the opposing vote.

The Lebanese draft resolution sought to condemn the Israeli "practices and measures against the civilian population in southern Lebanon, the western Bekaa and the Rashaya district which are in violation

of the rules and principles of international law." The resolution also demanded implementation of previous Security Council resolutions calling for the immediate withdrawal of all Israeli military forces in Lebanon.

U.S. Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick, in a short statement before she cast the veto, described the Lebanese draft resolution as "unbalanced" and as a draft that "does not accord Israel fair treatment." She said that even the debate in the Security Council on the Lebanese complaint did not accord Israel "fair treatment," noting that Israel was accused of horrendous crimes it did not commit.

Moreover, Kirkpatrick said, the "hostility that singled out Israel" in the Security Council had manifested itself even when the victims in Lebanon were Israeli soldiers. She charged that the Lebanese draft resolution was replete with "double standards" and the debate in the Security Council was marked by "doublespeak."

She said Lebanon refused to modify its draft resolution so that the U.S. could join in supporting it. She reiterated Washington's support of Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon but added that the U.S. wants to see the withdrawal of all foreign forces in Lebanon.

The Israeli Ambassador, Binyamin Netanyahu, said that Israel will continue to protect its soldiers and citizens and will not be deterred by acts of fanaticism such as occurred this week in Lebanon in which 12 Israeli soldiers were killed.

MUBARAK GETS MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS FROM REAGAN ON INITIATIVE

By Judith Kohn

WASHINGTON, March 12 (JTA) — Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, on his second day of an official visit to Washington, appears to have heard more questions than answers from President Reagan about the Egyptian leader's efforts to push forward a new Middle East peace initiative with renewed U.S. involvement.

Although both Reagan and Mubarak spoke positively about their discussions this morning, neither mentioned any substantive results or new areas of agreement on how to proceed toward expanding the peace process.

In his statement at the White House, following today's meeting, Reagan alluded to recent proposals by Mubarak which have included a call for direct negotiations between Israel and a joint Palestinian-Jordanian delegation, as well as a subsequent suggestion to hold preliminary talks between the delegation and U.S. government officials.

Israeli Premier Shimon Peres has welcomed the first suggestion but rejected the second. Reagan Administration officials have appeared leary about pursuing Mubarak's idea of preliminary talks, but have not discarded it out of hand.

Praised For Positive Contribution

Calling the Egyptian President's recent suggestions "a positive contribution" Reagan said today, "We note particularly your realistic assessment that the path to peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors is through direct negotiations."

Reagan stressed that "as was reaffirmed in my initiative of September 1, 1982, the United States also believes that the outcome of this process must also recognize the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people."

Reagan's statement on the Palestinians was similar to the one he made following a meeting with the Egyptian President during a visit to Washington last year. Mubarak is said to have embarrassed the Administration at that time, by calling on Reagan publicly to recognize the Palestine Liberation Organization and its leader, Yasir Arafat.

Fails To Move Reagan

No similar appeal was made in today's departure remarks. But Mubarak did indicate that he had failed to move the American President on pursuing his suggestions.

"Destiny has chosen you to lead this great nation at a time when a golden opportunity for peace is available," Mubarak told Reagan in his statement following their meeting. He added, "The Jordanian-Palestinian agreement to pursue a peaceful settlement is a major development that should not be discounted or discarded."

He was referring to an agreement concluded last month between Arafat and King Hussein of Jordan on the formation of a joint PLO-Jordanian delegation to negotiate a Middle East settlement. The agreement accepts "United Nations and Security Council resolutions" but does not explicitly state resolutions 242 and 338. The U.S. has refused to recognize the PLO until it accepts those resolutions and specifically recognizes Israel's right to exist.

No U.S. Commitments

In a briefing this afternoon, a senior Administration official said today's meeting had produced no U.S. commitments on Mubarak's proposals. "It was a discussion where one answer led to another question, so its an unfolding process," the officials said. But he added that Jordanian Foreign Minister Taher al-Masri is expected in Washington next week for further talks on expanding the peace process.

Mubarak is scheduled to meet this afternoon with members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee where he will be presented with a letter from Rep. Lawrence Smith (D. Fla.) calling for further improvements in Egyptian-Israeli relations. The letter has been signed by 98 Representatives.

2 MORE ISRAELI SOLDIERS KILLED

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, March 12 (JTA) — Two more Israeli soldiers were killed and two were wounded in south Lebanon today, bringing Israel Defense Force casualties over a 48-hour period to 14 dead and 16 wounded. Twelve soldiers were killed and 14 wounded in a suicide truck-bomb attack on an IDF convoy Sunday.

There were four attacks on the IDF in south Lebanon last night and another two this morning, none of which caused casualties.

Military sources said the latest casualties occurred when a patrol came under small arms fire near the Kasmiye bridge over the Litani River, east of Tyre. The area, densely populated by Shiite Moslems, has been the scene of daily attacks on Israeli units. The IDF, for its part, has been searching Shiite villages, arresting suspected terrorists, seizing large quantities of weapons and explosives and destroying the houses where they were found.

But the situation, as the IDF continues its phased three-stage withdrawal from south Lebanon, appears to be worsening by the day. The deaths of 14 Israeli soldiers since Sunday brought to 637 the number of fatalities sustained by the IDF since it invaded Lebanon in June, 1982.

RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY ADMITS FIRST 2 WOMEN RABBIS TO CONSERVATIVE GROUP

MIAMI BEACH, March 12 (JTA) — The Rabbinical Assembly, the international body of Conservative rabbis, overwhelmingly voted for the first time to admit two women Reform rabbis yesterday.

After rejecting the two candidates, both of whom received Reform ordination, two years in a row, the 85th annual meeting here of the 1,200-member Conservative rabbinical group accepted the applications of Rabbi Beverly Magidson, of Congregation Beth Shalom, Clifton Park, N.Y., a Conservative synagogue, and Rabbi Jan Carol Kaufman of Rockville, Md., chaplain of a Jewish day school.

The affirmative vote followed the adoption last month of a constitutional amendment by members of the Rabbinical Assembly by a vote of 636 to 267 to admit upon ordination the graduating class of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. Thus Amy Eilberg, a 30-year-old student from Philadelphia won her right to become Conservative Judaism's first woman rabbi.

Student Rabbis Applauded

At the assembly session here at the Eden Roc Hotel, Eilberg and others in her 1985 class were introduced to overwhelming applause by the assembled delegates with repeated echoes of "today we have made history." The ordination of this year's class will be held in May in New York City.

Commenting on the lengthy battle to win the right for women to be admitted into Conservative Judaism as rabbinic candidates, Rabbi Cassel Abelson, RA vice president from Minneapolis, said, "We are closing one act of the drama and opening the way for the next stage. We hope those who oppose us on this issue will now become a vocal minority and together join with us in tackling the many questions that confront us as rabbis and a religious movement."

Lone Dissenter

One voice opposed to the admission of the women candidates, Rabbi Selig Auerbach of Lake Placid, N.Y., said, "Let us not vote emotions or personalities, we are still fighting a basic question of the halacha — Jewish law."

The admission of both rabbis Magidson and Kaufman required a majority vote of 75 percent of those RA members present at the convention — except for a handful of opposing and abstaining votes, the 400 Conservative rabbis raised their hands high when voting "yes."

Last year the vote on admission for Magidson was 230 to 99, short by 20 votes of the 75 percent required. Kaufman's application last year was not voted upon.

LEADER OF CONSERVATIVE RABBIS EXPRESSES COMMITMENT TO HALACHA

MIAMI BEACH, March 12 (JTA) — Rabbi Alexander Shapiro, the president of the Rabbinical Assembly, yesterday affirmed Conservative Jewry's commitment to halacha and said the movement would continue to formulate policy based upon the wide spectrum of opinion within Conservative Jewry.

"Our approach to the halacha is determined by the interpretations made for us by the RA's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards representing a spectrum of opinions from far right and far left and

everything in between, consisting of a group of people whose commitment to Torah and Mitzvot is beyond all doubt and whose wisdom is very much needed in these times," Shapiro said.

Addressing the 85th annual meeting of the 1,200 member Conservative Rabbinic body, Shapiro, of South Orange, N.J., noted that the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards includes Rabbinic representatives of the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) of America and the United Synagogue of America.

Shapiro also declared in strong terms that Conservative Judaism will continue to maintain its upholding of halacha by recognizing only the lineage of the mother in determining Jewish status, unlike Reform Judaism which recognizes both the mother and father.

Opposes Patrilinealism

Shapiro said, "Our law committee has ruled clearly that there is no place in our movement and there is no halachic legitimacy for an affirmation of patrilinealism." In his presidential address, Shapiro declared, "Our path will remain that of matrilinealism motivated as we all are by our concern for klal Israel — the unity of the Jewish people."

In April 1983, shortly after the Reform movement adopted its position the Rabbinical Assembly's Committee on Law and Standards voted 18-1 to reaffirm the matrilineal position.

Shapiro also announced that along with Dr. Gerson Cohen, chancellor of the JTS, a conference on ideology has been established consisting of 12 members — six from the RA and six from the Seminary "whose task it will be to discuss and debate" the nature of Conservative ideology as it affects us in the concluding years of the 20th century.

The RA president made it clear that this means seeking the opinions of all members of the Conservative movement regardless of political ideology. "I call on all members of the Assembly not to turn away from each other in anger and resentment but rather on the spirit of Aaron to work together and preserve the strength of the Conservative movement that is both pluralistic, deeply spiritual and at peace with one another," he declared.

Orthodox Leader Warns Of Schism

Meanwhile, the president of the Orthodox Rabbinical Council of America declared last night that unless all Jews maintain halachic standards in marriage, divorce and conversion, a vast part of the American Jewish community could disappear.

In an unprecedented appearance before the Conservative Rabbinic group, Rabbi Louis Bernstein added that if the schism between Orthodoxy and Conservative Judaism grows wider on matters of marriage, divorce and conversion, Orthodox Jews would not marry those Jews whose Judaism was questioned. He urged all Jews to maintain halachic standards.

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Bread and pita will not be allowed to be sold publicly throughout the week of Passover if a bill which passed its preliminary reading in the Knesset Tuesday eventually becomes law. The bill was introduced by the NRP's Avner Sikiy and other Orthodox Knesseters joined his initiative. The bill is unlikely to come into effect in time for this Pesach. In fact, some pundits question whether it will ultimately pass through the statutory three readings at all.