

**EGYPT ACCEPTS ISRAELI ELECTION PLAN,
BUT NOT THE ENTIRE PEACE INITIATIVE**
By Allison Kaplan

NEW YORK, Sept. 28 (JTA) -- Egypt informed Israel on Thursday that it accepts Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's proposal to hold Palestinian elections in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Esmat Abdel Meguid conveyed that message to his Israeli counterpart, Moshe Arens, during a 90-minute meeting the two men held with U.S. Secretary of State James Baker at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel.

Meguid also told Arens he would be willing to visit Israel in the near future.

But according to Arens, the Egyptian side stopped short of accepting the other elements of the Israeli peace initiative endorsed by the Cabinet on May 14.

"I did not hear agreement from the Egyptians that they accept it," the Israeli foreign minister told reporters.

"It was not a meeting that led to an agreement," Arens explained. "It was a meeting for each to present his position."

Nevertheless, Baker appeared to be buoyed by the outcome of the trilateral session.

"I can say that maybe, and I would like to emphasize maybe, there was potential for progress," he told reporters afterward.

Officials from the three countries convened shortly after Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Israeli Vice Premier Shimon Peres concluded separate talks in the same hotel. Arens is to meet with the Egyptian president on Friday.

Mubarak reportedly told Peres that he visualizes a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation as being a possible end result of the peace process.

Peres, briefing reporters after the hour-long meeting, said Mubarak is prepared to accept a "more complex solution than a Palestinian state."

No Place For PLO In Talks

Peres, who heads the Labor Party, emerged from the meeting enthusiastic about his dialogue with Mubarak. He said that the Egyptian president expressed his desire to keep the peace process moving and seemed sensitive to Israel's concerns.

He said Mubarak told him that it was "no coincidence" that his 10-point plan to advance the peace process makes no mention of Palestinian self-determination, a Palestinian state or the Palestine Liberation Organization.

He also said Mubarak made it clear that the PLO would not participate in preliminary talks the Egyptian leader has proposed to hold between Israel and a delegation of Palestinian leaders.

But Peres confirmed that he and the Egyptian president spoke of a delegation that would include "one or two" Palestinian representatives from outside the administered territories.

The issue of PLO representation also came up in Arens' talks with Baker and Meguid. The Israeli Foreign minister said he made it clear that his government would not negotiate with any PLO representative.

When asked by reporters if Egypt was suggesting a PLO role, Arens, a Likud leader, replied, "I heard echoes to that effect." The PLO issue, he said, was "a focus of disagreement."

Another issue to come up during the round of talks Thursday was Mubarak's perceived reluctance to meet with Shamir.

During a meeting with American Jewish leaders early Thursday morning, Arens blamed a great deal of the strained relations between Egypt and Israel's Likud bloc on the Egyptian president's apparent refusal to discuss the peace initiative with the Israeli premier.

Mubarak's meeting in Cairo last week with Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin, Labor's No. 2 official, "highlights the fact that he won't meet with Shamir," Arens complained bitterly.

In the aftermath of the 1978 Camp David accords, meetings between Israeli and Egyptian leaders should be "a routine thing," the foreign minister said.

He added that Shamir "shouldn't have to make commitments" in order to persuade Mubarak to meet with him. "We don't have to go begging for a Mubarak-Shamir meeting," he said.

'Not Boycotting' Shamir

Peres told reporters later in the day that he pressed Mubarak on the subject. The vice premier said Mubarak told him he was "not boycotting" any meetings with Shamir, but merely wanted to avoid going into such a meeting unprepared.

"Holding a meeting without assured positive results will cause great damage," the Egyptian president was said to have remarked.

Mubarak also reportedly stressed to Peres the importance of the Israeli people rallying around the current peace proposals. Nimrod Novik, an aide to the vice premier, quoted the Egyptian president as saying:

"The opposition to the initiative in Israel feeds the extremists in the Palestinian camp who also oppose it. We have to make it clear to them that we have to put an end to the state of war. Even if it isn't love at first sight, there will be a new atmosphere, new relationships, a new Middle East."

Arens' morning meeting with the Jewish leaders was held under the auspices of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, which gave him a polite, if unenthusiastic, reception.

The American Jewish leaders pressed Arens repeatedly on Likud's rejection of Mubarak's 10-point plan and expressed concern about the current turmoil between Likud and Labor.

"There does not need to be a public show of unity, but surely there should not be a public show of disunity," commented Seymour Reich, chairman of the Conference of Presidents.

Arens acknowledged to the Americans that Israel has "the beginning of a coalition crisis" on its hands. He said that while he hoped the crisis would be resolved, he could not say for certain that the government would not fall.

A showdown over the Egyptian plan is likely to occur Wednesday, when the Israeli Cabinet is scheduled to convene for a special session on the peace process.

Peres told reporters he hoped Israel would "not kill this chance" to take a step toward peace. "I don't want the issue to be whether or not there is a government," he said. "I want it to be whether or not there's a peace process."

SOVIET OFFICIAL EXTENDS TO ARENS INVITATION HE COULD ONLY REFUSE

By Allison Kaplan

UNITED NATIONS, Sept. 28 (JTA) -- Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze extended a friendly invitation to Moshe Arens on Thursday that he must have known the Israeli foreign minister would not accept.

The Soviet official asked Arens to meet with members of the Palestine Liberation Organization, offering his "good offices" to host such a meeting in the Soviet Union.

Arens is a leader in Israel's Likud bloc, which is known for its firm stance against all contact with the PLO.

Shevardnadze told reporters of his offer after meeting with Arens here for an hour and 15 minutes. The meeting appeared to have been cordial, despite the difference of views on the PLO.

Arens said that the spirit of the discussions was "friendly," though Shevardnadze would only describe the encounter as "businesslike and constructive" -- which, in diplomatic parlance, usually signals disagreements.

Both men were positive about contacts between Soviet and Israeli leaders becoming more frequent and, in Shevardnadze's words, "systematic."

Arens said after the meeting that he was pleased that the Soviet Union did not reject Israel's peace initiative. He said he still held out hope that the Soviets could eventually endorse it.

His optimism appeared to have some basis.

Shevardnadze said he noted during his meeting with Arens that "there are reasonable elements" in the Israeli initiative.

He said that although the Soviet Union continues to endorse an international peace conference as the ultimate means of resolving the Middle East conflict, it does not "exclude the idea" of holding Palestinian elections in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as proposed in the Israeli plan.

PLO Must Be 'Reckoned With'

But he reiterated his country's position that the PLO must play a central role in negotiations.

"If the PLO is ignored in the process of the settlement, such a settlement won't take place," Shevardnadze said. "The PLO is a real force -- a force to be reckoned with."

The Soviet foreign minister called Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's recent peace proposals "interesting," but did not make a point of urging Arens to accept the 10-point Egyptian plan.

When asked if the Soviet Union felt "left out" of the trilateral meeting that Arens, U.S. Secretary of State James Baker and Egyptian Foreign Minister Esmat Abdel Meguid were to hold later in the day, the white-haired diplomat smiled.

"We do not easily take offense," he quipped.

The Israeli and Soviet diplomats also discussed the development of relations between their two countries. Though they do not enjoy full diplomatic relations, Israel and the Soviet Union maintain consular delegations in each other's countries.

Shevardnadze said that "possible economic links at a non-governmental level" were discussed.

Arens said that he was told by Shevardnadze that the subject of direct flights to Israel from

the Soviet Union "will be given consideration by the authorities in Moscow."

Shevardnadze said he was aware that talks on the subject were in progress between El Al and Aeroflot, the two countries' national airlines.

The Soviet foreign minister paused cautiously when he was asked about an invitation to visit the Soviet Union that was extended to Shimon Peres by Genrikh Borovikh, a member of the Soviet trade delegation that met with the Israeli finance minister in New York last week.

"Borovikh represents an autonomous organization: the Soviet Peace committee," Shevardnadze said. He said that in his capacity as foreign minister, he would not be directly involved in such a visit.

But Shevardnadze did not rule out the possibility of meeting with Peres, should such a visit take place.

ACRIMONY, INSTEAD OF JOY, MARKS NEW YEAR AT HERUT HEADQUARTERS

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Sept. 28 (JTA) -- What should have been joyful toasts to a sweet New Year turned into acrimonious words on Thursday at Herut Party headquarters in Tel Aviv.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir crossed verbal swords with Deputy Prime Minister David Levy, in a bitter follow-up to a tough speech Shamir delivered Wednesday night at a Likud rally.

At the rally, Shamir spoke in defense of his political ally, Foreign Minister Moshe Arens, who he said was "on an important national mission" promoting the Israeli peace initiative.

But on Thursday, the differences within the ranks erupted into a cacophonous shouting match, after Shamir took the opportunity of the traditional annual toast to call for unity within the party and warned unnamed hard-liners to avoid debilitating splits that have weakened the party.

Shamir's remarks were interpreted as directed at Levy, Industry and Trade Minister Ariel Sharon and Economics and Planning Minister Yitzhak Moda'i, all of whom this week renewed their combined attacks on Shamir and Arens over the peace process.

Sharon blamed Arens' Foreign Ministry under for bringing about Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's active intervention in the peace moves, an intervention welcomed by the Labor Party and the Bush administration but scorned by Likud.

Weizman Backs Rabin

The premier protested, "There is no inexorable, fated division in our ranks."

Levy took the rostrum to strongly challenge that belief, saying he "could not remain silent" and "did not expect" the prime minister to upbraid his party colleagues at what was supposed to be a festive event.

Levy waxed eloquent defending himself and his colleagues. His pronouncements then provoked Ronni Milo, environmental protection minister and a Shamir devotee, to chide him, ending with each calling the other names.

In other political news, Science and Development Minister Ezer Weizman, a dovish Labor Party minister, declared Wednesday that Yitzhak Rabin, the defense minister, would be the best man to lead Labor and Israel to peace.

Weizman said he felt the more centrist Rabin was the preferred leader for Labor, especially after his talks with Mubarak in Cairo last week.

FRENCH MAGAZINE OFFERS TESTIMONY HIGGINS WAS KILLED A YEAR EARLIER

By Edwin Eytan

PARIS, Sept. 28 (JTA) -- A French magazine is offering purported testimony that Lt. Col. William Higgins, the American Marine who was kidnapped by Hezbollah, was killed more than a year before Israel abducted the Lebanese Hezbollah leader Sheikh Abdel Karim Obeid.

The magazine also hints that British Anglican Church representative Terry Waite, who was himself kidnapped in January 1987, and another unnamed American might have been executed together with Higgins.

On Thursday, Paris Match, the popular French news and entertainment magazine, printed what it says is a photostat copy of a handwritten letter, dated July 8, 1988, from then Iranian Premier Mir Hussein Mussavi to the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, informing him of Higgins' execution by "our Hezbollah brothers in South Lebanon."

Obeid, who Israel charges led Hezbollah activities in Lebanon and masterminded terrorist acts, was abducted July 28 and brought to Israel. Following that act, Hezbollah claimed it executed Higgins in retaliation for Obeid's abduction.

The copy of the letter that appears in Paris Match is marked "confidential and urgent" and says Higgins was executed in reprisal for the shooting down of an Iranian airliner in July 1988 by the U.S. Naval ship Vincennes in the Persian Gulf.

The magazine said the Lebanese Hezbollah kept the killing of the American officer secret, intending to use the information at a later date.

COMEDIAN JACKIE MASON DENIES PUBLISHED REMARKS WERE RACIST

By Adam Dickter

NEW YORK, Sept. 28 (JTA) -- Comedian and TV-star Jackie Mason, under attack by several Jewish groups for controversial comments he made about blacks and Jews, scoffed at charges that he was a racist.

Mason was quoted in the weekly Village Voice here as saying that New York mayoral candidate David Dinkins "has accomplished absolutely nothing in his life" and "looks like a black model without a job."

The comic was also quoted as attacking Jews who voted for Dinkins in the Democratic primary: "There is a sick Jewish problem of voting for a black man no matter how unfit he is for the job," Mason said in the article. "All you have to do is be black and don't curse the Jews directly and the Jew will vote for a black in a second."

"Jews are sick with complexes," he said. "They feel guilty for the black predicament as if the Jews caused it. Jews have always marched for the blacks."

Mason denied that the remarks were racist and said he had been fighting racism all his life. "Anybody who calls me a racist should be shot like a horse in the street," the comic said at a news conference on Wednesday, the day the Voice is published.

On Thursday, Mason issued a statement "from the bottom of my heart. I am a comedian, not a politician. I make jokes about life and people, and the jokes, whether they are about black people, Jewish people or Gentiles, come from affection and people know that."

"But I've learned a lesson from the last few days. What's funny on the stage can be insensitive when it's said off the stage and in the world of politics. And for my insensitivity, I apologize."

The immediate impact of the controversy was that Mason, an outspoken supporter of Dinkins' Republican rival, Rudolph Giuliani, had resigned from the campaign.

Jewish organizations, including the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York, American Jewish Congress, American Jewish Committee and UJA-Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York, were quick to denounce Mason's comments.

The JCRC issued a statement saying, "We are disappointed and offended by Jackie Mason's remarks regarding mayoral candidate David Dinkins, and the black and Jewish communities."

"Rather than being humorous, Mr. Mason has resorted to racial characterizations which are an affront to all New Yorkers, regardless of their race or religion."

Mason was also quoted in the Voice taking potshots at Jewish philanthropy: "A big percentage of the money the United Jewish Appeal collects goes to the general fund, which is directly responsible for funding black organizations of every kind like anti-drug centers, alcoholic centers, food distribution centers."

"The Jews are constantly giving millions of dollars to black people. Have you ever heard of black people giving a quarter to a Jew? I never heard a black person say we have to help the poor Jews. There are plenty of poor Jews in the world . . . I'm not saying blacks should be giving to 'the Jews,' but Jews don't owe anything to the blacks."

UJA-Federation issued a statement saying, "Mr. Mason does not speak for this organization or for the Jewish community, and his statements are ill-informed and inaccurate. They are also insulting."

Mason and lawyer Raoul Felder said the remarks were taken out of context and that they would file a \$25 million libel suit against the newspaper.

An angry Mason said it was "sick" and "distorted" to consider his remarks racist. He pointed out comments he made poking fun at Ed Koch, and the fact that he's made worse ethnic comments about Jews.

Mason insisted the sole intention of his comments was to point out that Jews and other voters should vote for the best candidate, regardless of race. He said he feels Jews are only voting for Dinkins because he is black, and "Jews feel bad for blacks because of all the trouble they've had in this country for no good reason."

ISRAEL'S POPULATION AT 4.53 MILLION

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM, Sept. 28 (JTA) -- On the eve of Rosh Hashanah, the population figure for Israel stands at 4,530,000 Israelis, with 81.6 percent of the population being Jewish, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics.

In addition, some 17 thousand immigrants came to Israel this year, an increase of 30 percent compared to last year.

And for the first time in the history of the state, the number of births was higher than 100,000.

The population figure for 5749 showed an increase of 1.6 percent in the past year.

**THE NEW RECONSTRUCTIONIST SIDDIR:
OUT WITH THE NEW, IN WITH THE OLD**
By J.J. Goldberg
The New York Jewish Week

NEW YORK, Sept. 28 (JTA) -- Reconstructionist Judaism, the small religious movement famed for challenging many of Judaism's most cherished precepts, has issued a new prayer book that defies some basic tenets of Reconstructionism itself.

Entitled "Kol Haneshama," or voice of the soul, it is the movement's first new prayer book in 44 years.

As its name hints, the prayer book abandons the classical Reconstructionist disdain for the spiritual and other-worldly. It is steeped in awe of Divine mysteries, including once-spurned miracles such as the parting of the Red Sea.

It even restores -- albeit as an "alternative" reading -- Judaism's most defiant declaration of chosenness, the "Aleynu" prayer.

"This represents the coming together of what has been the reputation of Reconstructionism for intellectual honesty, which has been maintained, and a new sense of openness," Rabbi Arthur Green, president of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, said at a news conference where "Kol Haneshama" was unveiled.

"It's the coming together of the mystical and the spiritual with the intellectually honest and rigid."

"The simple question, 'Do I literally believe in this or not?' is not the exact determinant of what one can say in prayer," Green said.

The new prayer book was compiled by a committee of rabbis and lay leaders and was edited by Rabbi David Teutsch, dean of admissions at the Reconstructionist college in Wyncotte, Pa.

Friday Services Only

The siddur contains only the Friday night service; a full-scale Sabbath and festival prayer book is expected in about two years.

"This revision has been a long time coming," said Lillian Kaplan, past president of the Federation of Reconstructionist Congregations and Havurot, who launched the prayer book project two years ago.

Reconstructionism's first prayer book, Kaplan said, "was printed in 1945 for a generation of Jews who were steeped in Jewish tradition and were looking for ways to assimilate. Now that condition has almost been reversed."

The new prayer book, she said, is aimed at "a new generation of Jews who come from assimilated backgrounds and are looking for ways to return to tradition."

The 1945 prayer book purposely eliminated such classic Jewish ideas as chosenness, resurrection of the dead and the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem. Those changes reflected the theories of Reconstructionism's founder, the late Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, author of the 1935 work "Judaism as a Civilization."

Kaplan's innovations prompted outraged reactions at the time from some figures on the religious right, who went so far as to stage a public burning of the 1945 prayer book. The burning was reported on the front page of The New York Times.

The new prayer book -- hardly less daring -- is influenced by such modern trends as feminism, environmentalism, "New Age" mysticism, and the havurah-style Judaism of the 1960s.

It adds liturgical treatments of the Holocaust and the birth of Israel; avoids references to God as "he"; lists the matriarchs along with the patriarchs; offers visual aids to private meditation; and provides musical notation to traditional Sabbath songs. About half the supplementary readings are written by women.

"This is a model of a user-friendly prayer book," said Rabbi Mordecai Lieblich, executive director of the Reconstructionist federation. "The person we had in mind was not the rabbi, but the person who is actually praying."

The book's most striking departure, however, is not what is new but what is very old. Veering from the strict rationalism associated with Mordecai Kaplan, the new book reinstates some of the traditional prayers and concepts dropped from the original Reconstructionist liturgy.

Reward And Punishment

"Probably the most radical departure from tradition in the old prayer book," said Green, "was the removal of the second paragraph of the 'Shma' which was seen to be referring to reward and punishment."

The paragraph, beginning with the words "v'haya im shamo'a," is a section of Deuteronomy warning that disobedience will bring drought and exile.

"The new prayer book restores it," Green said, "with an alternative (immediately following it). Not because we believe in literal reward and punishment, but because ecological concerns have shown us that human actions have consequences."

As a result, Green said, "we were able to reaffirm that paragraph."

Alternatives to specific prayers are offered throughout the 272-page book. The most extreme case -- and the book's most symbolic return to tradition -- is in the emotion-laden "Aleynu" prayer which closes the traditional service.

In its ancient form, the "Aleynu" calls on the community to "exalt the Lord" who "has not made us like the peoples of the earth."

The 1945 prayer book completely rewrote the passage, substituting a call from the Torah blessings to praise the Lord "who gave us the true Torah and planted eternal life in our midst."

The new edition offers the 1945 "Aleynu," but follows it immediately with the traditional version and a synthesized one composed by Green.

"Some people in the movement, especially after the Holocaust, feel there is reason to come back to the original 'Aleynu,'" Green said.

Not A Top-Down Process

Others, however, continue to oppose it -- hence its position as the second of three choices.

"On the 'Aleynu,' we felt we didn't have a position we could unite the movement around," said Teutsch. "Liturgy is not just a top-down process. You have to listen to the people who pray. Not only are theological choices made, but also deep emotional choices. People look at a certain prayer and say, 'This is what I grew up with.'"

"Jewish prayer books are usually translated by a committee of rabbis," Green said. "This is the first translation of a Jewish prayer book by a recognized poet."

"We think that American Jews, regardless of where they start, are capable of intense spirituality," said editor Teutsch. "This allows them to grow. I think that is going to change the way other prayer books look."