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KREMLIN OFFICIAL SIGNALS HIS COUNTRY WILL RESTORE TIES TO ISRAEL THIS WEEK

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, May 6 (JTA) -- The Soviet Union is expected Friday to announce the restoration of full diplomatic relations with Israel, which it broke nearly 24 years ago during the 1967 Six-Day War.

The formal announcement will be made when Soviet Foreign Minister Alexander Bessmertnykh arrives in Jerusalem on Friday, or the day after, a top Kremlin official told Israel Radio Monday.

But there was no official confirmation in either Moscow or Jerusalem.

Foreign Minister David Levy said here Monday, "I cannot guess, predict, confirm or deny voices that come from there (Moscow) on this matter. I will hear the foreign minister when he arrives here and will wait for the decisions and the fact," Levy told Israel Radio.

Andrei Grachov, foreign policy adviser to Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, was quoted by Israel Radio's Paris correspondent, Gideon Kotz, who is in Moscow.

According to Kotz, Grachov said the resumption of diplomatic ties with Israel was a natural component of Bessmertnykh's visit to Israel, the first ever by a top-ranking Soviet diplomat.

Israel had made clear that the Soviet Union could not play an active role in the Middle East peace process with the United States unless it first restored full diplomatic ties with Jerusalem.

Bessmertnykh will visit Damascus and Amman before coming to Israel on Friday for talks with Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and Levy. He will go on from there to Cairo and possibly Beirut.

The Soviet foreign minister will also have another meeting with Secretary of State James Baker, who will return to the region this week for another attempt to nudge Israel and the Arabs toward a peace conference.

Baker and Bessmertnykh last met on April 25 in the Caucasus resort town of Kislovodsk.

Bessmertnykh's spokesman, Vitaly Churkin, was quoted Monday as saying Baker's initiative had in effect failed and that the Soviet statesman was coming to the region with some new ideas.

BAKER SAYS HE'LL RETURN TO MIDEAST FOR FOURTH TRY AT PEACE DIPLOMACY

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, May 6 (JTA) -- Secretary of State James Baker will return to the Middle East this week for another try at bringing Israel, its neighboring Arab states and the Palestinians to the peace table.

Baker told reporters Monday that both he and President Bush agree that "as long as there's any hope for progress toward peace in the Middle East," the United States will continue the effort.

"I have discussed this at quite some length with the president," Baker said while welcoming visiting former Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze to the State Department.

Baker had briefed the president on his Middle East trip last week. But he also said that he spoke Sunday by telephone with Bush, who was at Bethesda Naval Hospital being treated for an irregular heartbeat, which struck him while jogging at Camp David.

Bush was back at the White House on Monday morning in time for his own meeting with Shevardnadze.

State Department deputy spokesman Richard Boucher said Baker will leave Friday on his fourth trip to the Middle East since the end of the Persian Gulf War.

The secretary will go to Israel, Syria, Jordan and Egypt, Boucher said. Not mentioned was Saudi Arabia, which during Baker's last trip said it would not participate in the peace process.

During his upcoming trip, Baker said he hopes to meet the current Soviet foreign minister, Alexander Bessmertnykh, who is touring the region. Bessmertnykh is scheduled to visit Israel on Friday, becoming the highest-ranking Soviet official to ever visit the Jewish state.

"It will be my hope and belief that I'll have an opportunity to meet with Minister Bessmertnykh during the course of this trip so that we can continue to try to coordinate our efforts to promote a peace conference jointly sponsored by the United States and the Soviet Union," Baker said.

He said such a conference would be "a very, very broad conference of a nature and type that has never taken place."

'We Still Need Some Answers'

Israel has accepted the idea of a conference sponsored by the United States and the Soviet Union, but only if Moscow resumes full diplomatic relations, broken during the 1967 Six-Day War. Israel has even agreed to allow some sort of European Community participation.

But Israel wants the peace conference to adjourn after a brief ceremony and then begin direct negotiations with each of the Arab countries participating, as well as the Palestinians.

Israel rejected Baker's last proposal that the conference be reconvened if no settlement is reached in six months.

This proposal was seen as a means of appeasing Syria, which rejected the conference under U.S.-Soviet auspices and insisted on the sponsorship of the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council.

Yet when Baker broke off his last Middle East trip because of his mother's death April 26, he left the impression that it was Israel that was responsible for the impasse.

"We still need some answers from the Israeli government relating primarily to the modalities before we can move the process forward," State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler said as the Baker plane was leaving Israel.

The secretary would not say Monday whether he was optimistic about a peace conference. But he said he has reason "to think that we should continue this effort, that it is worth continuing and that there is some chance we might be successful."

Baker is expected again to bring up the administration's opposition to building or expanding Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The Israeli government has been accelerating the process under Sharon's prodding.

As he did before his last three visits to the

Middle East, Baker stressed Monday that the United States cannot impose peace on the Middle East. Peace can only be achieved if all the parties to the conflict want it.

But Shevardnadze, in a speech to the Brookings Institution, stressed the need to move faster for a solution.

"Israelis, Arabs and Palestinians have got to overcome this psychology of confrontation and a fateful belief" that the issues between them cannot be resolved, he said.

"The world has changed, and the Middle East cannot remain a hotbed," he said.

U.S. HINT ABOUT LINKING IMMIGRANT AID TO DIPLOMATIC PROGRESS ANGERS ISRAEL
By David Landau

JERUSALEM, May 6 (JTA) -- Israeli leaders are angered by recent American hints that the Jewish state cannot expect continued U.S. economic aid to help resettle thousands of Soviet immigrants if it categorically rejects territorial compromises for peace.

The proliferation of Jewish settlements in the administered territories has become a major bone of contention between Washington and Jerusalem, especially since new settlements were hastily erected during Secretary of State James Baker's recent diplomatic visits to the region.

The issue was raised in unusually blunt language by the U.S. ambassador to Israel, William Brown, in an address to Israeli business leaders last Friday at the Commercial and Industrial Club in Tel Aviv.

Observing that Israel has given "tremendous priority" to "providing housing in the territories," Brown said there was "no guarantee" Israel would receive the billions of dollars in loan guarantees it plans to request from Washington.

Brown's comment drew an angry response Monday from Finance Minister Yitzhak Moda'i. "I don't like what I heard," the Likud minister told Israel Radio's English-language newscast. He said he assumed the U.S. envoy was expressing the Bush administration's views.

Israel will not sell its vital interests in return for the money it needs to absorb the immigrants, Moda'i said, echoing a statement made in New York last week by Housing Minister Ariel Sharon.

Sharon, who returned from an American tour Sunday furious over being snubbed by the administration in Washington, warned against pressure on Israel to trade "land for Jews," meaning to give up some disputed territory for the money needed to absorb Soviet olim.

Homes Installed Overnight

Israel's ambassador in Washington, Zalman Shoval, confirmed Sunday that Israel would seek some $10 billion worth of loan guarantees this fall for absorption needs.

"We are going to approach the American government, and we can only hope and pray" that the response "will be a humanitarian one and that this will not be linked with political considerations of the moment," Shoval said in an address to the 85th annual meeting of the American Jewish Committee.

Israel has already received a $400 million loan guarantee from the United States for Soviet immigrant housing. In exchange, it pledged not to direct Soviet emigres to the administered territories.

But Ambassador Brown implied strongly that the Israeli government was evading that commitment by making it vastly easier for the newcomers to obtain housing in the territories than in Israel proper.

"Indeed, as we found out recently, mobile homes that sometimes take months to install on this side of the Green Line seem to be installed overnight in the West Bank," Brown said.

The "Green Line" is the boundary between the Arab territories Israel captured in the 1967 war and Israel proper.

Brown warned Israel in general not to count on foreign aid to absorb its immigrants.

"As a friend, I must tell you that to base your hopes mainly on the generosity of foreign governments, even my own, is not the whole solution.

"There can be no assurances that tens of billions of dollars will materialize that way," he said.

Although Israel says it is prepared to negotiate directly with the Arab states and Palestinians, Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir has vowed repeatedly that Israel would make no territorial compromises.

E.C. SCORES ISRAEL ON SETTLEMENTS, SUPPORTS U.S. MIDEAST PEACE ROLE
By Yossi Lempkowicz

BRUSSELS, May 6 (JTA) -- The European Community, declaring that it "fully supports" the U.S. peace initiative in the Middle East, has sharply admonished Israel for continuing to build settlements in the administered territories, which it considers illegal and a hindrance to the American efforts.

The statement, the first on the subject since the Persian Gulf War, was issued in advance of a visit to be made this week by Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy, who will meet with E.C. ministers.

The declaration was released over the weekend by European Political Cooperation, the foreign policy coordination instrument of the 12 E.C. member states.

The statement expressed "grave concern" over the establishment of two new settlements established to coincide with Secretary of State James Baker's most recent visits to Israel on a U.S. Middle East peace mission.

Settlers hastily erected the settlement of Revava during the night of April 15-16, just prior to Baker's second visit to Israel, and Talmon on April 22, to coincide with his third visit to the Jewish state.

The E.C., in its statement, "deplored" the fact that the Israeli government authorized the settlements.

The statement reaffirmed the E.C.'s position that "Jewish settlements in the territories occupied by Israel since 1967, including East Jerusalem, are illegal under international law and the Fourth Geneva Convention."

It said they were "especially harmful at a time when all parties should show flexibility and realism."

The E.C. has asked for a role in a Middle East peace conference under joint U.S.-Soviet sponsorship.

Israel has been reluctant to agree because of what it perceives as Europe's "pro-Arab" attitude. But Levy is nevertheless expected to discuss the matter with his E.C. colleagues.

B LEAGUE ASSAILED FOR ADDING :OMPANIES TO BOYCOTT BLACKLIST

oward Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, May 6 (JTA) -- Jewish groups assailed the Arab Central Boycott Office for ıg to its blacklist 110 companies that have ess ties to Israel.

The action was taken by the boycott office, m of the 21-member Arab League, at its 64th nnual meeting, which ended Saturday in ıscus, Syria.

The boycott office also decided to remove 10 anies from its list, including the Coca-Cola ɔased in Atlanta, Ga. Coca-Cola was unoffi- removed from the list in 1989 after Egypt everal Persian Gulf states allowed it to build ng plants there.

Coca-Cola spokesman Carlton Curtis said the ı would have "no effect on our business in , which continues," the Washington Times ted.

Of the 110 companies added to the list, 104 ɔartially owned by media tycoon Robert 'ell, who apparently drew the boycott office's ɔr his 1988 purchase of a one-third stake in ıv, an Israeli newspaper. Maxwell is also on ɔard of the Jerusalem Post.

Will Maslow, general counsel at the American h Congress, and editor of its monthly Boy- Report, said the new additions were mostly companies. "If that's all they came up with, ɔt so startling," he said.

But Maslow criticized the boycott office for :ategorical refusal to accept Secretary (of James) Baker's very mild proposal to stop tting American companies." Baker made the ıtion during his recent visits to the Middle following the end of the allied war against

Shrugs Off' Arab Move

The State Department had no direct comment ıe announcement Sunday by the boycott , except to say: "The position of the United against the boycott has been firm and lding. As we have said many times, the should end their boycott and end their nges to Israel's legitimacy."

The State Department's deputy spokesman, rd Boucher, was asked at his daily briefing ıy whether the new blacklistings constitute stacle to peace, a phrase the department has to describe new Israeli settlements in the Bank.

'I am not going to try to characterize it," d. "We are not going to get into the game ıying who comes first as far as confidence- ng measures."

But Abraham Foxman, national director of nti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, said statement Monday afternoon that "after 43 of rejectionism," the "responsibility of lence-building is on the Arab world."

While the Bush administration "sharply zes Israeli actions, it shrugs off hostile activities," Foxman said. He called on the istration to "publicly condemn the Arab e decision as an obstacle to peace."

The American Jewish Committee, in a state- Monday, criticized the latest blacklisting as ɔmic blackmail." The decision "tragically ates once again the unwillingness of the world, except Egypt, to alter its unremitting ıty to Israel."

CZECHOSLOVAK LEADER TELLS ISRAEL PRAGUE WILL SELL TANKS TO SYRIA

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, May 6 (JTA) -- Economic exigencies are forcing Czechoslovakia to sell tanks to Syria, its prime minister, Marian Calfa, explained here Monday.

Calfa, who is in Jerusalem as guest of the World Jewish Congress' ninth plenary assembly, acknowledged that the weapons, Soviet-designed T-72 tanks, pose a military challenge to Israel.

His admission drew an angry response from Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, who reminded the Czechoslovak leader that the Soviet bloc had always demonstrated its hostility toward Israel by supplying advanced weaponry to Israel's enemies.

But Czechoslovakia is no longer part of a Communist bloc and is striving for democracy and a market economy. That in essence is the reason why it must sell its products to all comers, Syria included, if it is to achieve economic viability, explained Calfa, who views world Jewry as a potential source of investments in his country.

"We Czechs would much prefer to lock up the arms factories and convert to peaceful production," he said.

The United States reportedly has offered to help, while urging Czechoslovakia not to export tanks to Syria and Iran.

The Czechoslovak press, quoting State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler, reported last Friday that the United States was prepared to send a team of consultants to Czechoslovakia to help speed up the conversion of its arms industry to civilian production.

In Prague, the daily Lidove Noviny, citing "well-informed sources," reported Saturday that the Americans distanced themselves from tank sale to Syria but expressed understanding of the economic problems that made it necessary.

The Israeli ambassador in Prague, Joel Sher, told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency that he doubted the tank sale to Syria would materialize.

Here in Jerusalem, Calfa assured Shamir that it is not his country's intention that Czechoslovak weapons ever be used against Israel. But Czechoslovakia owes money to Syria and can pay off its debt with the tanks, he explained.

Shamir reportedly was not mollified. He also faulted Prague for continuing to have relations with the Palestine Liberation Organization, even after the PLO had largely discredited itself by supporting Iraq in the Persian Gulf War.

(JTA correspondent Josef Klansky in Prague contributed to this report.)

ISRAEL AND PRAGUE INK ARTS ACCORD

By Josef Klansky

PRAGUE, May 6 (JTA) -- Israel and Czechoslovakia have just concluded an agreement for mutual cooperation in the arts, sciences and education and a variety of cultural exchanges.

The formal document was signed in Prague on April 29 by Foreign Minister Jiri Dienstbier and the Israeli ambassador, Joel Sher.

Under the agreement, the two countries will exchange exhibitions and jointly arrange festivals, film weeks and other cultural events.

Next week, the opera company of the Slovak National Theater will perform in Israel.

Israeli cellist Misha Maisky and the Israel Piano Trio are scheduled to appear at the Prague Spring Music Festival on May 24 and 25.

BOSCHWITZ SAYS HE EXPECTS ETHIOPIA TO INCREASE RATE OF JEWISH EMIGRATION

By Howard Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, May 6 (JTA) -- President Bush's special emissary to Ethiopia said Monday that he expects the Ethiopian government to increase the rate of Jewish emigration to Israel from the current rate of 1,000 a month.

Former Sen. Rudy Boschwitz (R-Minn.) told reporters after meeting for 15 minutes with Bush and his top advisers, "We'll be watching for the emigration numbers to change."

Boschwitz said that he and top U.S. African experts, who met with Ethiopian President Mengistu Haile Mariam and other senior Ethiopian officials for 13 hours late last month, did not hammer out a formal agreement with the government in the sense that something was signed.

But he did not rule out that an understanding was reached.

The fate of Ethiopian Jews is tied closely to the success or failure of U.S. efforts to bring about negotiations between the government and rebel forces from the northern provinces of Eritrea and Tigre, Boschwitz said.

The rebel forces are within 40 miles of Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian capital, where the country's estimated 18,000 Jews have converged in the hope of being swiftly airlifted to Israel.

Boschwitz said the rebel leaders themselves are not particularly hostile to the Jews despite their ties to Israel, which has been accused of supplying the government with weaponry. He said Israel had supplied Ethiopia only with "very light arms in small quantities."

"I don't think it's the rebels that one would be concerned about," Boschwitz said. "It's just the fact that if Addis Ababa goes into an unrestrained (situation), it may in fact be an orgy in which many thousands of people are killed.

Jews Are 'Particularly Vulnerable'

The Jews are "particularly vulnerable because they are seen as a privileged group," he said, referring to special aid that they have received from the worldwide Jewish community.

During a photo session in the Oval Office, Bush told reporters that getting the Jews out of Ethiopia "is a concern that I share, and Rudy took a big step forward there in talking to the Ethiopian authorities."

Bush, who called the trip a "mission of conscience and a mission of compassion," added, "I know you got some words of encouragement from the Ethiopian government, and I think it's a mission that many in this country, when they understand it, will appreciate."

Also attending the meeting with Boschwitz were Vice President Dan Quayle, Chief of Staff John Sununu, Secretary of State James Baker and Brent Scowcroft, the national security adviser.

Israeli officials have remained tight-lipped about any possible evacuation plans. Boschwitz, when asked if the capacity exists to get the Jews out quickly, replied, "Yes. That means more airplanes."

In New York, Malcolm Hoenlein, executive director of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, said, "Everything is set. Everything will be there for a quick removal when the time comes."

Hoenlein added, however, that "it's still not clear what the outcome will be" of the Boschwitz mission, which he called "very important."

SOVIET JEWS FILL 'EMPTY CHAIR' AT WJC ASSEMBLY IN JERUSALEM

By Charles Hoffman

JERUSALEM, May 6 (JTA) -- Soviet Jewry officially took its rightful place among the Jewish communities of the world Monday, as the ninth plenary assembly of the World Jewish Congress convened here.

"This is truly a historic moment," said Michael Chlenov, head of the Soviet Jewish delegation to the assembly and co-president of the Vaad, the umbrella body of Jewish institutions in the Soviet Union.

Chlenov, an ethnographer who has been a Jewish cultural activist in Moscow since the early 1970s, told reporters here last week that the 65 delegates from the Soviet Union "represent the complexity and, we hope, the unity of our community today."

Avi Beker, director of the Israel Section of the WJC, said that since the organization was founded in 1936, an empty chair has always been set aside at WJC assemblies for delegates from the Soviet Union.

Chlenov and other Soviet Jews have attended WJC meetings for the last two years, but not as official representatives of Soviet Jewry.

The delay in putting together an official delegation of Soviet Jews stemmed from internal tensions within the Vaad that reflect the struggle between the central government and the independence-minded republics that has been tearing at the fabric of the Soviet state.

Valery Engel, a Vaad leader from Moscow and president of the Association for Jewish Studies and Jewish Culture, said that "the independence movements in the republics have again raised an old question: Who should the Jews identify with, the republics or the central government?

Coping With The Present

"The Vaad is the only organization encompassing all Jews in the Soviet Union," he said. "But we have to understand that the actual work for Jewish culture, aliyah and fighting anti-Semitism is done by local associations. This creates a real dilemma for them."

Vaad leaders from the Ukraine and the Baltic states had sought separate representation for their associations in the WJC, as a gesture of support for their local independence movements.

The national leaders of the Vaad and the WJC were opposed to this.

To solve this problem, a new regional section in the WJC was created for Soviet Jewry, to give greater representation from the republics. The new branch, although it is referred to as the East Europe-Asia Continental Section, does not yet have an official name, nor are its boundaries exactly defined.

Chlenov said that Soviet Jewry today faces "dangers of anti-Semitism, and the dangers of economic collapse and political disintegration, which we share with the entire Soviet population.

Chlenov said he is often asked if there is a future for Soviet Jews. "I don't know about a future," he said, "but there is a present, and we must cope with it.

"Not all Soviet Jews will leave even within five years; this will be a long process, unless a catastrophe occurs," he said. "Meanwhile, we have our lives there, and we must organize Jewish life and secure Jewish rights as long as there are Jews in the Soviet Union."