

11 April 1986

## **SURRENDERING TO PRESSURE**

IT IS surely not possible that our government believes that America's supplying large quantities of sophisticated arms to Saudi Arabia is a good thing for Israel, or that assurances that these arms would "never be used against Israel" can be taken seriously. We know, after all, that the leaders of the country are not all deaf and blind – and suffering from amnesia.

The government is not actively opposing Washington's current plan to add more weapons to the Saudi's overflowing arsenals.

Nobody has even tried seriously to deny the abject reasoning behind this restraint: the government does not want to upset relations with the U.S. It has been cowed by experience. In 1981, for example, the opposition to the U.S. administration's plan to supply Awacs spy-planes to the Saudis evoked not only harsh anti-Israeli comments, but some old-fashioned anti-Semitic code-words from within the administration.

The Saudis, it should be remembered, long ago proclaimed that the inordinately large quantities of arms they acquire are to serve all the Arab states for use against the Israeli enemy.

THE SAUDI example is part of a sour pattern which appears repeatedly in the web of relations between the U.S. and Israel. Surrender on vital issues to pressure – or the fear of pressure – has been a central feature in the behaviour of Israeli governments, from Labour to Likud. The examples could fill a bulky doctorate thesis; and each surrender has been followed by the unabashed pretence that nothing important had been sacrificed.

Weakness of character in the Israeli government increases the responsibility of the American Jewish community to be supportive of Israel. Administration pressures can be countered. There is a tremendous body of support for Israel in the American political world. It stems from the perception that the U.S. and Israel share not only common values, but also common interests. The 1981 proposal to sell Awacs spy-planes to Saudi Arabia was met by fierce resistance – which all but succeeded – in both houses of Congress – because the threat posed to Israel by the Awacs was seen as a threat also to American interests. Similarly, the current projected deal with the Saudis is being hotly contested by U.S. legislation.

Surely the role of the U.S. Jewish leaders is clearly indicated. They should undoubtedly join in the opposition to the deal – but they must go further. They must take direct issue with the administration on the subject of the bullying of Israel. They must assert their refusal to have their intelligence insulted, and to have their hands tied, by the derisory notion that Jerusalem is happy with the sale of arms to Saudi Arabia.

This demands a change in their policy – of pretending once Israel has given in, that "if Israel agrees, who are we to interfere?" If they recognize an obligation to stand up for the security of Israel, they should protest not only against the arms deal but also against Washington's policy of "twisting Israel's arm" to acquiesce in measures inimical to its security.

Such a bold move will also add heart to Israel's political friends; and give direction to an all-too-often bewildered Jewish community.

A SERIOUS situation has made itself manifest in another sphere vital to the interests of Israel and the Jewish people at large: American Jewish intervention to frustrate the movement of repatriation of Soviet Jews to the Jewish homeland.

Obscure as the motives of the Soviet leaders may be, the fact is that the gates to Jewish emigration were opened in the early Seventies in the wake of a series of acts of courageous defiance by young Jews – like Sperling, Kazakov, Kochubayevsky – who insisted that their homeland was Israel and they were entitled to go and live there. This demand was in consonance with the Soviet Union’s own constitutional doctrine, which permits “repatriation” to a homeland outside the USSR.

Thus Jews – *exceptionally* – were allowed out, on condition that they would in fact proceed to their homeland.

A tremendous opportunity thus opened up for a substantial exodus from the Soviet Union. About a quarter of a million did leave. Whether a high level of emigration would be maintained is a matter for speculation. What is certain is that in the course of time the Soviets were presented with a perfect justification for shutting the gates. Most of the departing Jews were not repatriating at all, but were making their way to the U.S. The proportion of “drop outs” reached 70 per cent.

This contemptuous frustration of a positive Soviet act has been achieved by collaboration between some American Jews and the U.S. administration. The Hias organization which took on a new lease of life when it began its work of luring Soviet Jews away from Israel, is far from being Zionist; and U.S. administrations have always harboured a substantial anti-Zionist element.

The Soviet Jews, leaving the Soviet Union in legal and orderly fashion, with an Israeli visa in their pockets, and assured of a fraternal welcome in their national home, are assured at some stage by official-looking American Jews, that if they wish they can go off to the U.S., the land of rich opportunity. The U.S. government ignores the Israeli visa; and baptizes the Jew-on-his-way-to-his-Homeland as a poor homeless refugee, qualifying for emergency entry into the U.S.

THUS THE miraculous revival of Zionism in the stony soil of the Soviet Union, and the astonishing cooperation of the Soviet authorities, have been converted into a disastrous episode in Zionist history. The cry of the world-wide movement for the freeing of Soviet Jews to go to Israel has become hollow and unconvincing. And the U.S. has systematically degraded Israeli sovereignty.

(A weird historic comparison comes to mind. In the days of Nazi excesses before and during the Holocaust, European Jews who *were* helpless refugees in danger of their lives, were stonily denied a haven in the U.S.)

Despite the manifest growing gravity of the problem, the Israeli government under Begin made no move to put a stop to the pernicious process. The chairman of the Jewish Agency, Arye Dulzin, did make efforts to move the then prime minister to take action – but to no avail. Only in the national unity government have there been signs of an understanding of the problem. Prime Minister Peres revealed publicly that he had been taken to task by Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze, who made it plain that the Soviet Union could not tolerate a situation where Jews who had been allowed to leave the USSR to go to Israel went off to the U.S.

Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir actually raised the matter with Secretary of State Shultz – who brushed him off with two arguments. One was that the Soviet Jews were entitled to “freedom of choice.” This is a quite outrageous piece of phoney liberalism. The Soviet Jews are not entitled to “freedom of choice” – any more than the signer of a cheque is free to choose whether to honour it or not. Nor are they free to endanger the chances of freedom of Jews left behind in the USSR. Nor have they any right to hold the State of Israel up to contempt; or to bring ridicule and frustration to the tens of thousands of people, Jews and non-Jews, who have worked tirelessly to support the cause of their repatriation to Israel.

Shultz evidently did not touch on these minor matters, nor did he explain why the U.S. government finds it honourable and necessary to effect a false change of states precisely for Soviet Jews.

Shultz’s second argument was no less shocking. The administration had responded to pressure from members of the Jewish community.

WE ARE entitled to know who these influential Jews are. Moreover, this is an issue on which the titular leadership of the American Jewish community has remained silent. It is time for communication to be established between the government of Israel and the American Jewish leaders with a view to joint action to put an end to the disgrace, and the pain of the breakdown of the Soviet Zionist movement. At least let honesty and dignity be restored to the cry, “Let my people go!”

*See Letter to the Editor on the following page*

## **HIAS AND SOVIET DROPOUTS**

*To the Editor of The Jerusalem Post*

Sir, – As President of Hias, I must express dismay over the inaccuracies and misguided assumptions made by Shmuel Katz in regard to the question of Soviet Jewish emigration (“Surrendering to pressure” – April 11). It seems we must, once again, reiterate the well known and widely documented fact that the Jewish Agency continues, as it always has, to greet emigrating Soviet Jews in Vienna. It is the only body to interact with the émigrés when they first enter the free world. Hias has no contact with the Soviet refugees until the Jewish Agency has completed its interviews and determined that the refugees will not be making aliya. Therefore, we do not understand how anyone could continue to harbour the notion that Hias could encourage Soviet Jews not to go to Israel.

Your readers should also know that in 1981, a test period of close to five months, during which Hias refused to assist Soviet Jews not referred to us by the Jewish Agency in Vienna, showed that (1) permission to emigrate from the Soviet Union did not increase, (2) the percentage of Soviet Jews opting to go to Israel did not increase, and, most importantly, (3) virtually every Soviet Jew who was not assisted by Hias in Vienna was helped by other groups to get to the United States.

From the moment that the gates opened in the late ‘60s, the Soviets have been acutely aware that some Jews have opted not to go to Israel. It has consistently been the opinion of the world’s most respected political analysts that official policy toward the Soviet Jews in general and Soviet Jewish emigration, in particular, is largely a matter of the condition of the relationship between the USSR and the United States.

A vital omission from Mr. Katz’s article is the fact that, when the Soviets began to close the doors of emigration to the Jewish population in the late ‘70s, they were also closed for all ethnic groups, not just Jews. The gates have remained barely ajar for Armenians, Germans and others, as well as for Jews.

He appears to be asking that we take at face value anything that the Soviets reportedly say about Jewish emigration. Why should we trust them on this subject when we doubt them on so much else?

Mr. Katz describes our agency’s assistance to Jews to reunite with their close relatives as “luring” them away from Israel. Surely, it would be more productive if he (and other similarly misinformed individuals) ceased creating divisions among Jews and began instead to uphold the free world’s commitment to and support of the concept of family reunion and freedom of movement that is at the very foundation of the Helsinki Accords.

Hias continues to reaffirm its long-standing commitment to a strong Israel and acknowledges the need to have soviet Jews choose to make aliya to help strengthen the country. We have long worked, and continue our efforts with other organizations, to achieve that vital objective.

*ROBERT L. ISRAELOFF*