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THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

date March 14, 1986
to Steering Committee, International Relations Commission
from George E. Gruen, Director, Israel & Middle East Affairs
subject Proposed U.S. Arms Sales to Saudi Arabia

The American Jewish Committee shares the concern of the United States Government to maintain the free flow of oil from the Arabian Peninsula and Persian Gulf, to support the security and stability of the pro-Western Gulf states, to oppose radical forces in the area and the expansion of Soviet influence into the region. We have serious questions, however, about the wisdom and efficacy of certain planned Administration actions intended to achieve these strategic goals.

The Reagan Administration notified Congress on March 11 that it proposes to sell Saudi Arabia \$354 million worth of additional sophisticated air-to-air, air-to-sea, and ground-to-air missiles in the belief that such action would advance these interests and that the sale was made urgent by the recent successes of the Iranian forces against Iraq and the potential threat this poses to neighboring Kuwait and eventually to Saudi Arabia. The Administration contends that failure to meet the Saudi requests at this time would harm bilateral Saudi-American relations and hurt the credibility of the United States with the rest of the Gulf Arabs. The Administration further contends that these arms are needed for Saudi defense, can be absorbed within the Saudi military, and

"do not represent a threat to Israel," since "this sale will not threaten Israel's qualitative military edge nor change the balance of power in the Middle East."

The American Jewish Committee believes that this sale should not be seen in isolation, but within the context of Saudi Arabia's overall program of acquisition of large quantities of the most advanced aircraft and missiles. We believe that before deciding whether or not to approve the present Saudi arms request, the Congress should carefully examine whether all these additional missiles are in fact needed in view of the large stockpile already present in Saudi Arabia. Indeed, the current Saudi ratio of missiles per plane exceeds that of the U.S. and Israeli air forces. In any case, their delivery should be made contingent on the depletion of existing supplies as they are expended in training and through attrition.

Moreover, in view of the limited number of serviceable planes available to the Iranian air force, there is considerable doubt as to how much of a realistic challenge they pose to Saudi Arabia, which already has numerous planes and missiles, as well as the effective advance warning and electronic support provided by the four U.S. Air Force AWACS currently stationed in the country. The recent Iranian successes against Iraq have been achieved through massive infantry attacks and not through airpower. The missiles are also no barrier to the propaganda and subversion campaigns being mounted by Iran against its conservative neighbors.

Finally, Congress should weigh the Administration's request in the context of the Congressionally mandated requirement that the Saudis must provide "substantial assistance" to the United States in promoting peace

in the region. We note with deep concern that Saudi Arabia continues to furnish financial assistance to Syria and the Palestine Liberation Organization to enable them to carry on what it calls the "armed struggle" against "the Zionist enemy." Moreover, the Saudis have in recent months proclaimed their "categorical solidarity" with Libya -- including a pledge to replace losses resulting from American economic sanctions. At the United Nations last December and at the Islamic Conference Organization meeting this past January the Saudis sponsored resolutions calling on all states to sever their ties with Israel and laying the groundwork for expelling the Jewish state from the United Nations.

In view of this record, it is crucial that the United States insist on verifiable safeguards to insure that any arms it furnishes -- and particularly such ideal terrorist weapons as the Stinger handheld anti-aircraft missiles -- be available exclusively for defense of Saudi territory. They must not be allowed to be diverted to use against Israeli or American aircraft by radical forces such as the PLO, the Syrians or the Libyans.

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86-580

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

date December 5, 1986
to Marc Tanenbaum
from Allan Kagedan
subject The Iran-Contra Affair

The Iran-Contra affair, and possible AJC responses to it, may come up at the Steering Committee meeting on December, 15. I would like to discuss one aspect of this matter in relation to which IRD could play a significant role.

A key issue that has surfaced over the past few weeks is Israel's involvement in international arms sales. This matter has plagued Israel and its friends for at least a decade. Israel's enemies have used it to portray the Jewish state as barbaric, relying on public ignorance about the larger arms sales of the superpowers, Western Europe and the certain third World countries. Just as important, the Jewish community has found no way of rebutting this criticism because it has remained uninformed about global arms sales.

Two facts about Israeli arms sales are clear: (1) They are now, and for the foreseeable future will remain, a significant feature of Israeli economic life and foreign relations; (2) the Israeli Government can not engage in public interpretation of them because any public admission of them is bound to offend one or another country, and because it would discourage potential buyers who want their dealings kept secret.

These three facts -- general and Jewish ignorance about global arms sales; Israel's involvement in them; the Israeli Government's inability to interpret them -- suggest a continuing Israeli image problem, which can harm Israel's standing in Congress. I believe IRD can play a remedial role in this matter, but before I address implementation, some discussion of whether we should get involved is needed.

The selling of arms is generally viewed as a dirty, immoral, wasteful business. Arms are expensive, and they are meant to kill for either defensive and offensive aims. Many of the arms purchasers are poor countries who could well put their limited resources for other purposes. But the arms trade thrives because of nations' instinct for self-defense and, practically speaking, efforts to limited conventional arms transfers -- a valuable goal -- have failed. One can argue, with merit, that since arms sales are seen as unethical a Jewish organization should not

discuss Israeli arms sales because this would bring too much attention to this ugly matter. Yet, silence has given Israel's adversaries an open field to exploit this issue.

One can also argue that, since at best the sale of arms makes Israel no better than other countries if not any worse, discussing the issue can lead Jews to question whether Israel is not merely "a country like all the others." Yet if support for Israel is to be founded on a false vision of the country, it surely will be rather shaky. These are difficult issues which require careful consideration, and we may well wish to consult with Israel's foreign ministry on them.

On balance, I feel that by placing Israeli arms sales in the context of world trends we would be rendering a service to the Jewish State. We could do so in several ways.

1. Issue a backgrounder accurately reporting on Israel's position in the world arms market, showing that it sells less than other Western democracies and that, if anything, it has more moral reason to sell than do others. The Iran-Iraq war and sales to both countries can be used as a case study. The backgrounder would be targeted at US opinion makers.
2. Encourage M.J. Rosenberg to devote a column in the Washington Report to this issue.
3. Issue a backgrounder for Anglo-Jewish publications on the arms sales dilemmas facing Israel.
4. Commission a study by an Israeli or other academic on Israeli arms sales, the dilemmas they pose for domestic and foreign policy, and the possibility of reducing the economic imperative behind arms sales.

Israeli arms sales ^{are} ~~is~~ ~~an~~ emotionally-charged ~~issue~~. Interpreting them differs from the standard human rights concerns of AJC. But these sales are a geopolitical reality, a central issue of U.S. and global public opinion, and it might be time for us to address them.

cc: David Harris

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/smm

STEERING COMMITTEE
OF THE
COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
MONDAY, DECEMBER 15, 1986
AJC HEADQUARTERS
MILES JAFFE, CHAIRMAN, PRESIDING

A G E N D A

- I The Iran U.S. Arms Crisis: Implications for Israel and American Jewry
- II Report on AJC Meeting with Dr. Karolos Papoulias, Greek Foreign Minister; December 1, 1986
- III Update on South Africa and AJC Programming Possibilities
- IV Academy of the Air for Jewish Studies: An Outreach Program to Soviet Jews
- V An Appraisal of the Current Situation in the Middle East
- Special Guest: Marrack Goulding
United Nations Undersecretary General
for Political Affairs
- VI Austria's November National Elections: Significance for AJC Programming
- VII Proposal for Auschwitz Symposium in Cracow, Poland
- VIII IRD Missions to Latin America, 1987
- IX Reorganizing AJC's Office in Jerusalem

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OFFICIAL ISRAELI COMMENT
ON THE ARMS TO IRAN CONTROVERSY

Following are excerpts from the statement by Vice-Premier and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres in the Knesset, 26 November 1986, in reply to the debate on arms to Iran:

"...For us it is all right to say to the United States: Help us in the matter of Soviet Jewry - and they are not allowed to say to us: Help us in another matter? What kind of pressure is involved here? ... What we did was to help the United States in a humanitarian matter. ...

"U.S. Attorney-General Edwin Meese was asked: Did Israel deposit moneys in the accounts in which it was asked to deposit them, and Meese replied: These are some of the details we are still looking into, because we have not seen the persons involved. ... Even he did not say this (that Israel transferred money to the Contras - Ed.), and we notified him yesterday as to what we were going to say. ...

"I want, first of all, to define the moral considerations. A democratic country that fights tirelessly and fearlessly against terror sometimes finds itself in a dilemma, when some of its subjects are kidnapped and it is impossible to effect their release by military means. And I am proud of a democratic state that does not forget even one single citizen, and breaks its head to find a way to save hostages. ... Israel - with both of its major parties - agreed, with a heavy heart... to release 1,150 terrorists in order to enable three of its own soldiers to come home. Was this a simple matter? Was there no clash of moral considerations here? And when we return 1,500 prisoners in exchange for the body of one soldier, what does this show - that we are opportunists? ...that we have no moral considerations? Or does it show that we care about every human being, even after he is dead. Is that a lack of moral consideration?

"Were we out to win a victory here? What sale of arms? Israel sold arms? Did we receive one single cent from this thing? ... Did we do this for profit? ...

'The Fate of a Single Citizen'

"Let me read to you what Mr. Meese said concerning the question why they decided to supply arms to Iran. Here is what he said: '...to try to bring an end to the Iran-Iraq war, to try to decrease the participation of Iran in the terrorism in the Middle East, and to get our hostages.'
...

"As an Israeli and as a human being, I want to say that I am filled with admiration for the President of the United States, a country with 230 million inhabitants, and yet when six of his citizens are held hostage, he does not rest for one moment. Does that make him an arms merchant?

"A truly democratic country will remain responsible for the fate, the safety, the freedom - and sometimes the memory - of one single citizen. That was the consideration before us, so do not try to defame us. This was not a matter of money: Israel made not one single cent from all this. I am proud and deeply moved that a man like Secretary of State George Shultz - a very unusual person in whose honesty and integrity I believe - whenever he goes to Moscow, he puts the concerns of Soviet Jewry at the head of the agenda. Does this mean that he is under orders from me? And if the President, in his turn, asks us to do something - what then? ... I was proud when three American hostages were released, even though they are not Israelis. ...

"This was not an Israeli operation. And I want to say something else. I want to say what it was that compelled us yesterday to go public. Because I thought that Israel should keep quiet; that is what my colleagues and I thought. This is an American matter, not an Israeli one. Israel was asked to help, and it was glad to do so. We wanted to do so quietly - just as they help us quietly and do not tell the whole world how it is done. What happened yesterday (Meese's statement) was the insinuation, not even the statement, that we had supposedly transferred money to the Contras. There was no such thing. The money never even reached Israel. Mr. Meese related to everything that had happened since last January. Not one cent passed through Israel. There was a sum of money, and a bank account, and the Iranians transferred the money directly. ...

Matters of Principle

"I wish now to relate to some unequivocal matters of principle.

"Even a state that is engaged in a continuing and merciless fight against terror, if it is a democratic state, it never ceases to search for ways - and, in the absence of a military option, other ways - to bring to safety people who have been taken hostage and whose lives are in jeopardy. I regard this as a moral principle. Mr. Meese, too, admitted that this was one of the objectives.

"Principle No. 2: If the State of Israel wishes to receive the help of other nations - not in shady transactions, but in saving lives - then, when Israel is asked to help, it must do so. And if it is requested to render this help clandestinely, then so it shall be done. In any case, foreign policy cannot always be conducted in the open.

"Principle No. 3: All the talk about arms sales is totally baseless in this context. We received arms, and we transferred arms to Iran, with a certain goal and objective.

"A fourth point: Israel had no connection with the transfer of moneys.

"A fifth point: Israel made no profit for itself.

"And a sixth point: I want to say to the Members of the Knesset: Instead of sitting day and night and debating whether we are on Iran's side or Iraq's - of course I totally reject Iranian fundamentalism, just as I reject Iraq's gas warfare, Iraqi terror, the Iraqi military threat against Israel - I am not obligated to make a move. And how will it help us to make moves? Let us say China supplied three billion (dollars), and let us say that arms transferred through Israel were worth 12 million: will that determine the outcome of the war? ...

Not Israel's Secret

"To the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Security Committee, I want to say this: I am in favor of parliamentary supervision - but not of a minority over the majority. I submit that, in addition to rules, the realities of a situation sometimes indicate an exception to a rule. This can be rather difficult. In the present instance, what was involved was not an Israeli secret. If it had been only a matter of an Israeli secret, I would have favored a reporting to the subcommittee. The Foreign Affairs and Security Committee agreed that subjects like these should be discussed in a subcommittee. So long as the secret was not ours, we were precluded from bringing the matter (to the subcommittee). When the matter became public property, I notified the Foreign Affairs and Security Committee yesterday that, indeed, we would report to the subcommittee. In what way does this reflect contempt? ...

"Members of the Knesset, I do not ask forgiveness for anything. I feel certain that I acted in accordance with the true sentiments of the majority of this House. I as Prime Minister (at the time - Ed.), Yitzhak Shamir as Vice-Premier and Foreign Minister, and Yitzhak Rabin as Defence Minister - under the prevailing rules of this government, we three are the ones who are authorized to approve arms transactions. We acted as our consciences dictated, from motives that were entirely moral in nature, and not in order to deal in arms. The fact that an arms deal took place as a technical means was unavoidable; but that was not the goal.

"We had no part in the matter concerning the Contras. We made no profit on the financial or any other side of the matter. Our intent was - earnestly, sincerely and honestly - to help a country that helps us, in a matter whose motivation I understand - to save human lives, under the most complex of conditions. ...

"I therefore propose, Mr. Speaker, that the matter be referred to the Foreign Affairs and Security Committee."

* * *

[This is based on the official translation provided by Israeli Foreign Ministry sources. -- G. Gruen]



THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

Institute of Human Relations • 165 East 56 Street, New York, N.Y. 10022 • PLaza 1-4000

Dec. 9, 1986

Marc:

As I have mentioned to David Harris, I will be in Toronto on December 15. The tickets were purchased long ago, and, unfortunately, an illness in the family has made the trip very timely.

David suggested that I draft the attached memo as it may be suggestive of an area for discussion at the Steering Committee. I would be happy to discuss this with you more fully either before or after the 15th.

I will be taking 1/2 vacation day and 1/2 comp. time day on the 15th

Allen Taylor

Perspectives on Israeli Arms Sales

1. Since the beginning of the Iran-Iraq War, 33 countries ~~including~~ ~~Israel~~ have sold weapons to the parties in conflict. Nine including the U.S., USSR, China, France, ^{Israel} Italy, East Germany, Switzerland, Brazil and North Korea.
2. Over the ten years 1973 to 1983, Israel sold 1.8 billion dollars worth of conventional weapons. In 1983 alone, U.S. sold 9.9 billion, France 1.9 billion, UK 608 million, West Germany 645 million, Italy 1.6 billion.
3. Current Israeli sales rank behind U.S. USSR, France, Britain, Germany, Italy, North and South Korea, Soviet bloc countries like Romania and Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and are on par with Brazil. Israel sells appreciably fewer arms than our Western allies and far less than America does.

Conclusion

4. Overall, Israeli sales are marginal compared with sales of other states, including NATO members.

Sources: Congressional Research Service
SIPRI YEARBOOK

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December 7, 1986

JEWISH CONCERNS OVER IRANSCAPE
WINS RELIGION COMMENTARY
RABBI MARC H. TANENBAUM* OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

Like the rest of America, Jewish leaders last week were preoccupied with trying to sort out the bizarre Iran-U.S.-Israel arms connections.

In the face of the firestorm of charges and denials, few responsible Jewish leaders with whom I spoke were prepared to make any public statement about this incredibly complicated mess. But some internal consensus appears to be emerging.

First, most serious Jewish leaders believe that only the principal actors in this drama -- in the United States, in Israel, and in Iran have authority to shed light on these events. Then, Jewish leaders support other Americans in welcoming the several investigations of the Iranscam. And the general feeling is -- Let the chips fall where they may.

Beyond that, Jewish leaders are concerned that the office of the Presidency and that of Secretary George Shultz among others not be undermined. While no person is above the law, due process must be pursued in a way that does not enfeeble American leadership. And then Jewish leaders are concerned that in the desperate confusion, the scapegoating of Israel for the failure of others is not allowed to take place. Clearly, Israel shares America's convictions about the value of human life, and did everything it could to save three American hostages.

As for the Swiss bank accounts and the Contras, and the secret Soviet arms to Iran, let the investigations uncover everything that needs to be uncovered before any of us make snap and wrong judgments.

*Rabbi Tanenbaum, who is director of the international relations department of the American Jewish Committee, presents a weekly religion commentary over WINS-Westinghouse Broadcasting System.

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

date December 11, 1986
to AJC Area Directors
from Marc H. Tanenbaum
subject Press coverage of Iran-U.S.-Israel-Contras

Please refer to David Gordis' memo to you dated Dec. 8.

As part of the AJC's monitoring of responses to the Iran-U.S.-Israel crisis, the International Relations Department is undertaking an analysis of newspaper responses in the United States, Europe, Central and South America and Israel.

We wish to focus specifically on whether and how the charges of Israel's supposed manipulating of U.S. foreign policy for its own interests, Israel's alleged involvement in "overcharging" Iran for the arms transfers, responsibility for setting up the Swiss bank accounts, and the handing over of millions of dollars to the contras in Nicaragua is treated in your press. (If feasible, also send us reports on troubling or offensive TV and radio commentaries.)

This is not intended in any way as an exhaustive study. Rather we are interested in obtaining a representative sample of editorials, columns and letters to the editors that deal with these themes. We would very much appreciate your cooperation in sending us such clippings as soon as possible.

The Congressional hearings in Washington now on the Iranscam (or Irangate, as you prefer) may well provide occasion for such editorial responses, and we are eager to see them.

Judy Banki of the Interreligious Affairs Department suggested that she would be interested in seeing similar clips in the Catholic, Protestant, and Evangelical areas.

Perhaps a university or graduate student, or competent lay person might undertake these surveys for your office. In any case, we need to collect this material as quickly as is feasible. Please send this material to me directly with copies to Geri Rozanski. Thanks very much for your cooperation. And Chag Sameach!

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