THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE ANNUAL MEETING

Committee on Israel Meeting

Friday, May 4, 1962 at 2:30 P.M.
Commodore Hotel, New York City

Present:

Maximo Yagupsky - Guest Speaker
Alan M. Stroock, Chairman
R. W. Apte (Miami, Fla.)
Arthur Ball (Clarence, N.Y.)
Dr. Max W. Bay (Los Angeles, Calif.)
Harold E. Beckman
Mrs. Harold E. Beckman
Mrs. Joseph Bernstein
Mrs. Richard Bleier
Dr. Morton Blaustein (Baltimore, Md.)
Ellis Brodstein (Reading, Pa.)
Dr. Jorge Bruetman (Buenos Aires, Arg.)
Mrs. Jorge Bruetman (Buenos Aires, Arg.)
Saadiah Cherniak
Ithiel Cohen (Pittsburgh, Pa.)
Beatrice Ehrlich
Bernard Friedman (Newport, Rhode Is.)
Ralph Friedman
David Glickman
Harold S. Goldberg (Boston, Mass.)
Mrs. Harold S. Goldberg (Boston, Mass.)
Mrs. Charles Goldstein (Miami, Fla.)
David Goldwasser (Atlanta, Ga.)
Roberto Graziani-Levy
Mrs. Roberto Graziani-Levy
Walter Hilborn (Los Angeles, Calif.)
Mrs. Stanley A. Hollander (Stamford, Conn.)
Gerald Israel (Paris)
Mrs. Lester Jaffe (Cincinnati, Ohio)
Benjamin Katz (Milwaukee, Wisc.)
Kaufman R. Katz
Frank Karelson
Julius Kislak (Jersey City, N.J.)
Mrs. Julius Kislak (Jersey City, N.J.)
Julio Kleinman (Buenos Aires, Arg.)
Mrs. Julio Kleinman (Buenos Aires, Arg.)
Nathan Kushin (Miami, Fla.)
Joseph Lelewel (Chicago, Ill.)
Sam Mallah (Buenos Aires, Arg.)
Alec Nasel (Melbourne, Australia)
Louis Milender (Boston, Mass.)
Mrs. Norma Mass (Cincinnati, Ohio)
Philip Perlmutter
Benjamin Pepper
Fred Roth (Cincinnati, Ohio)
Mrs. Roy Roger
Bernard Schieman (Menlo Pk., Calif)
Peter Schwabe (Río de Janeiro)
Mrs. Peter Schwabe (Río de Janeiro
Oscar Seager
Mrs. Simon Segel
Mrs. Jean Stahl (Boston, Mass.)
Burton Strauss
Mrs. Burton Strauss
Carl Taussig
Mrs. Carl Taussig
Miguel Teubal (Buenos Aires, Arg.
Howard Tiger (South Orange, N.J.)
Mrs. Nathan Ullian (Boston, Mass.
Marc Uveeler
Mrs. Marc Uveeler
Mrs. Philip Waterman
Murray Weisman (Stamford, Conn.)
Leland Wilhartz (Chicago, Ill.)
Mrs. Leland Wilhartz (Chicago, Ill.
Dr. Ignacio Winizky (B. A., Arg.)
Norman Winer

Staff

Lucy Davidowicz
Hanna F. Desser
Paul Freedman
Naomi Grand
Frances Green
Eliezer Greenberg
Hilton Himmelwahr
Hartha Jelenko
Sidney Liskofsky
Abraham Monk
Zachariah Shuster
Simon Segal
Susie Waldman
AGENDA

I. Chairman's report on recent developments in Israel, and in relation to Israel in the U.N. and elsewhere.

A. Discussion

II. Report by Maximo Yagupsky, director of the AJC office in Israel.

I. The Chairman welcomed AJC members from all parts of the United States and guests from France, Australia, Argentina and Brazil. Highlights of his report follow:

1. In Israel, as elsewhere, he stated, the AJC does not become involved in political, economic or military affairs. It is concerned about questions of civil rights, not only for Jews but for other minorities. Thus the situation of the Arab minority of about 240,000 persons -- and specifically of the approximately 205,000 Arabs living in areas under military rule -- has been of particular interest. While recognizing Israel's need to create safeguards against a fifth column, the AJC has felt that progress must be made in relaxing the military rule in order to permit Arab citizens to participate more fully in the democratic life of the country. The AJC has often expressed this view to Prime Minister David Ben Gurion and other leaders of Israel.

In February, opposition parties in the Knesset introduced five motions to abolish military rule. Prime Minister Ben Gurion expressed disapproval of the motions, on the ground that such rule is essential to Israel's security. The motions were defeated by a narrow margin. Subsequently he made several concessions, including the lifting of the curfew for some 45,000 Arabs on the Jordan border. Meanwhile, a group of intellectual leaders in Ihud -- an organization supporting friendship and equal treatment of Arabs as the way to peace between Israel and the Arab states -- issued a statement challenging Mr. Ben Gurion's position.

2. The Arab refugee question was discussed again at the U.N. General Assembly in December, following a report by Dr. Joseph L. Johnson, special consultant of the Palestine Conciliation Commission, and in connection with the continuation of U.N.R.W.A. aid to the refugees. Two Arab resolutions recommending that all the refugees be permitted to return to Israel were voted down. The General Assembly directed Dr. Johnson to make further efforts to find a solution to the problem, and he began his second tour of the Middle East in Israel, in mid-April.
3. A proposed libel law, setting up a criminal offense called "libel against the State" was introduced in the Knesset in March. A major aspect related to cases of libel against Israel by the press, and involved secret hearings and suppression of news of proceedings and of final judgments. The press of Israel and other countries expressed strong disapproval of the law, and particularly of this section. The bill was withdrawn for reconsideration. Its introduction was a distressing sign that some elements in Israel do not recognize the need to protect and preserve democratic procedures, and demonstrated the need for vigilance in this area.

4. In the realm of religion, concern has long been felt about the threat to civil liberties created by the dominance of the Orthodox element and its often extreme positions and actions. Recently, a Conservative group established a chapel for religious services and a dormitory, and the first Reform synagogue was dedicated in Jerusalem. It is hoped that progress will be made as a result of these and similar future developments, in liberalizing the religious atmosphere in Israel.

5. Although the AJC ordinarily does not concern itself with political or military questions, it has given consideration recently to the explosive situation on the Sea of Galilee, which erupted in armed conflict between Syria and Israel in March and holds serious implications for the future. Discussions have been held with Israeli officials in New York and Washington on this subject. The area around the Sea is not an ordinary strip of land, but part of the bloodstream of Israel's economic life, especially in the absorption of immigrants. The waters of the Sea are an important fishing ground and are also part of the projected irrigation system for the arid Negev region.

The Sea has never been part of Syria. In 1923, an agreement between Great Britain and France established it within the area of Palestine. This was maintained throughout the British Mandate over Palestine, and was reaffirmed by the Armistice Agreement between Israel and Syria in 1949. The 1923 agreement permitted Syrians to use the Sea for fishing, subject to Palestine police control, and the Israel-Syria armistice prohibited crossing of the armistice line by Syrian civilians. According to Israeli spokesmen, police permits are required for all who wish to fish in the Sea, including Israelis -- and Syria was offered the same arrangement, but refused. The Syrians claim that fishermen have the right to use the Sea without permission or licensing; the Israelis feel that the failure of Syrian authorities to end this "illegal trespassing" is a major cause of friction.
In 1951, Israel began a three-year project to drain the Huleh marshes north of the Sea. Syria objected strongly at the U.N. and Israeli workers were attacked. The U.N. supported Israel's objective; the drainage was accomplished.

From 1953 to 1955, efforts were made to launch the Johnston Plan for development of the Jordan Valley, to provide irrigation for nearly a quarter of a million acres in Jordan, Israel, Lebanon and Syria. Agreement was reached by technicians for all four countries, but the plan was rejected by the Arab League. Syria's objection was based on the fact that the project would benefit Israel as well as the Arab states.

In 1953, Israel announced plans to use water from the Sea for irrigation in the Negev. In March, 1962, Syria complained to the U.N. Security Council that her security is endangered by Israel's preparations for this project.

Border hostilities between Israel and Syria and an attack by the Israel Army against Syrian positions east of the Sea led to a Security Council resolution in January 1956, condemning the Israeli military action. The resolution was branded by the Israelis as one-sided and unfair because it had not taken Syrian provocation into consideration.

For about four years thereafter, there were complaints and counter-complaints about illegal fishing, firing on fishing boats and police boats, etc., but the past two years were relatively quiet. Then, early in March, occurred the first of a series of clashes which were climaxed by a strong Israeli military action against several Syrian positions on March 16. This resulted in a substantial loss of life and materiel on both sides. According to a confidential report to the AJC by an Israel spokesman, the Israeli action was a military success, but a difficult one. During the operation, the Israelis noted evidence of the strong support given Syria by the Soviet Union. Soviet heavy artillery could not be silenced, and out-ranged the Israeli artillery.


Meanwhile, the U.S. delegation prepared a resolution containing references to poor behavior by both Israel and Syria. Apparently, the Arab delegations indicated they would not accept it unless adverse references to Syria were omitted. The U.S. and British delegations then prepared and sponsored -- and, according to Israeli sources, actively sought support for -- a resolution containing unmitigated censure of Israel. This
was passed on April 1 by a vote of 10 to 1, with France abstaining. The Israelis regarded it as a complete Arab victory.

Both the Israeli Government and interested persons in this country have been concerned about the action of the U.S. at the U.N. One explanation is that the U.S. advanced such a strong resolution because it wished to avoid a Soviet veto — thus placing Israel in the midst of "cold war" considerations. Since the American moves in March followed U.S. refusal at the December session of the U.N. General Assembly to support a 16-nation resolution calling for direct peace negotiations between Israel and the Arab states, the Israelis and others feel some anxiety about the U.S. attitude. The Israelis recall President Kennedy's campaign pledge to promote peace in the area.

Press reactions in several leading American newspapers with regard to the U.S. stand were strongly negative. A typical one stressed the pro-Western position of Israel, deplored the American action in joining Israel's enemies in a vote of censure, and said that Syria should also have been condemned.

The AJC is continuing to explore the situation, including such questions as the possibility of the stationing of a U.N. patrol boat in the Sea of Galilee to prevent future conflict. As an American Jewish organization sympathetic to Israel, the AJC must consider whether it would be helpful to take a public position on this matter. The Chairman recommended that if AJC chapters are confronted with queries, they handle the subject with care and caution.

A. In the discussion which ensued, the following major points were made: In the vote on the U.N. resolution recommending direct peace negotiations between Israel and the Arab states, the U.S. not only did not abstain from voting but actually voted against it. To some observers this seemed to be symptomatic of a basic change in U.S. policy toward Israel. Perhaps an effort should be made to convince Administration officials that its apparently anti-Israel attitude is not in the best interests of this country, because the situation will get out of hand if the Arabs conclude that the U.S. is willing to sacrifice Israel to secure their friendship and also to prevent a Soviet veto. Also, it would be helpful to discuss this question with American delegates to the U.N., especially Ambassador Adlai Stevenson.

II. Mr. Yagupsky stated that the response to the initial steps taken by the AJC office in Israel had been favorable and often enthusiastic. Government officials, leaders of public opinion and the press and others indicated that they considered the program an important one, particularly at the present time. Foreign Minister Golda Meir, whom he had seen shortly before he came to New York, sent greetings to the Annual Meeting, as
did Prime Minister David Ben Gurion.

All the Israelis with whom he had discussed the program of the AJC expressed special interest in approaches to the youth of the country, Mr. Yagupsky reported. He said that the older generation is generally aware of the background, interests and accomplishments of the American Jewish and other Jewish communities — but that the youth is almost totally unacquainted with such facts, and has developed a negative attitude. Among the reasons for this lack of knowledge and understanding were the initial pressures placed upon young people in the early years of Israel's struggle for existence and the need since then to build up the country. Also, there is a prevalent feeling that Israel is the only place in the world where Jews can be safe, and therefore it will be a haven for the Jews of other countries.

The AJC office plans to study the "why" and the "how" of the younger generation's attitude, to seek means of changing it, and to establish lines of cooperation with government officials and others for this purpose. Leading figures at the Hebrew University, Bar-Ilan University and other educational institutions have pledged their cooperation.

Other basic questions which the AJC office is already exploring or will investigate in the near future include the situation of the Arab minority and the attitudes toward military rule, the integration of "oriental" newcomers who now number about half of the population, the development and consolidation of democratic principles and practices, and the position of religious groups on the political and social scene.

Mr. Yagupsky stated that "Voed" (Era), a Hebrew-language magazine along the lines of "Commentary" will be launched in the near future by the AJC office in cooperation with a group of outstanding Israelis, and is expected to help greatly in providing a forum for new ideas and approaches to major problems.

Following completion of the AJC study on youth attitudes, an educational program, aimed at disseminating information about Jews and Jewish communities elsewhere, will be created. It is hoped that this will stimulate fruitful intercommunication among Jewish youth in Israel with their contemporaries throughout the world.

Another approach will be made through Kol Israel, the radio station, which agreed to provide time for an AJC-sponsored program along the lines of "The Eternal Light." Initially, the program will cover aspects of Jewish life abroad.

In the "thinking" stage is a project involving the cooperation of groups of Christians and Jews abroad, who, it is believed, could provide counsel and guidance on several current social problems in Israel.

Hanna F. Desser, Secretary Committee on Israel