

IS PLO READY TO RECOGNIZE ISRAEL?

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the statement by Issam Sartawi, an advisor to PLO chief Yasir Arafat. Asked specifically about Sartawi's statement, in a speech before the French Institute of International Relations, Fischer said: "The position of the U.S. government on negotiations with the PLO remains as we have stated before." The U.S. has refused to negotiate with the PLO until it recognizes Israel's right to exist and accepts United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. Sartawi, speaking in Paris, said the PLO "has formally conceded to Israel in the most unequivocal manner, the right to exist on a reciprocal basis" and urged the U.S. to deal directly with the PLO. In the negotiations presently being conducted in Beirut by Philip Habib, the U.S. special envoy speaks only to Lebanese officials, some of whom then negotiate with the PLO.

Secretary of State-designate George Shultz, during his confirmation hearings before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee also said he had little faith in statements coming from PLO officials. But just before the Committee voted unanimously to recommend the confirmation of Shultz, its chairman, Sen. Charles Percy (R. Ill.) said he had received a report from a "neutral source" that the PLO was ready to recognize Israel. At a meeting of the Committee, however,

Sen. John Glenn (D. Ohio) said it should be up to Israel, not the U.S., to see if Sartawi's statement was now the PLO policy. He suggested that Premier Menachem Begin study the statement closely to see if the PLO really means what one PLO official is saying.

Meanwhile at a press conference at the National Press Club, Uri Avnery, an Israeli journalist and leader of the opposition Sheli faction, said Sartawi repeated his statement at a joint

press conference in London with himself and Israeli Gen. (Ret.) Mattityahu Peled, another leader of Sheli.

Avnery, who interviewed Arafat in west Beirut said Arafat had made similar statements at the time.

Avnery said that even more important than what Arafat said in the interview, the first he ever granted an Israeli, was that it was held at all. He

noted that he and other Israelis had been meeting with PLO officials for the last eight years but when those meetings became public, the PLO always denied they had taken place. This time, however, according to Avnery, it was

the PLO itself which first made public his interview with Arafat. The PLO has not repudiated Sartawi's statement, Avnery added.

My Arab Experience

BY RABBI MARC H. TANENBAUM

CAIRO, Egypt -- After traveling through Egypt last month, I developed a new understanding of why the late Anwar Sadat made peace with Israel. It had less to do with friendship for Israel than with the threat of overwhelming poverty throughout Egypt.

Just outside the Cairo International Airport at midnight, I saw dozens of Egyptian peasants wrapped in their jelabbahs sleeping on the bare ground. In the center of Cairo, there is a huge cemetery called the "City of the Dead" where thousands of Egyptian fellahin sleep every night. It is estimated that about a million poor Egyptians in Cairo have no place to live.

Traveling up the Nile River to Aswan, I stopped off at several cities and villages. The dusty, unpaved street, the stench from donkeys and goats and human offal, the diseased faces, the Biblical scenes of farmers still tilling the narrow patches of farm land with water-buffaloes. Those powerful images make clear how desperate is the economic and social condition of most Egyptians. The need for President Mubarak to concentrate on domestic reconstruction is therefore not a luxury; it is clearly a matter of the very survival of Egypt. Peace with Israel is a precondition for concentration on domestic social reconstruction.

My trip to Egypt also gave me another insight into Israel - Arab relations. It is an insight thrust upon me in the Cairo bazaar, Khan Khalil, and in other Arab souks. When Arab merchants bargain in selling their merchandise, you must prepare yourself for an experience in fantasy-life. The Arab merchant invariably starts with astronomical overpricing. After a half-hour haggling, walking away and returning, the price is finally brought down to something reasonable. It's frustrating, aggravating, but if you want something bad enough, you stay with it until the deal is struck. That, too, I am persuaded, is the Arab diplomatic style of negotiations. More than anything else, one needs a course in Arab anthropology and psychology. And above all, large doses of "geduld" -- plain old patience until fantasy is checked out against reality.

NAVON BLASTS FRENCH PRESIDENT

JERUSALEM (WNS) -- In a rare political statement, President Yitzhak Navon blasted French President Mitterrand for comparing Israel's actions in Lebanon to the Nazis deliberate razing of the French village, Oradour-sur-Olane, and massacring its inhabitants during World War II. "With this calumny, you have gone too far," Navon said here July 11 in a speech marking Theodore Herzl's Memorial Day in Jerusalem.

Mitterrand reportedly made the comparison in Paris in a statement during his visit to Budapest. French sources in Paris said he had been "grossly misquoted." These sources noted that Mitterrand was asked by a correspondent of the Palestinian news agency, Wafa, what he thought about the "Oradour carried out by the Israelis in Lebanon." Mitterrand answered, according to French sources, "I did not condone Oradour in France and I would not condone it in Lebanon."

Meanwhile the Israeli Ambassador to France, Meir Rosenne, lodged a formal complaint against the French President and reportedly told Foreign Ministry Secretary General Francis Gutmann that any parallel between the two is "absolutely inadmissible." However, the Elysee Palace Chief of Staff, Jean Louis Bianco, rapped Israel saying: "The Israeli authorities failed to check their facts before protesting." He added: "The President, who has always shown his attachment to Israel, does not need to reaffirm it once again."

The incident created by Mitterrand's reported remark and by the successive Israel and French protests has brought Franco-Israeli relations to the lowest ebb since the Socialist electoral victory last spring. Israeli officials have been angered by what they view as Mitterrand's attempts to save the Palestine Liberation Organization leadership in Beirut.

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