

January 4, 1985

Handling the superpowers

IN SOME quarters sour reactions have greeted the U.S. request that the government permit it to set up a Voice of America radio transmitter in Israel. Most distressing has been the manifestation in those quarters of a convincing facsimile of the true “ghetto spirit.” Its exponents are frightened by a vision of Soviet displeasure.

Soviet displeasure? Most recently Moscow has opened a new black chapter in the ongoing persecution of its Jewish citizens. Only last week it was reported that official anti-Semitic literature is now being distributed at Soviet ports. Almost every day there is new harassment, designed to crush the spirit of proud Jews, fantastic charges are leveled against them (like drugs in *mezuzot*), there are new arrests, new banishments, accompanied by cold-blooded brutality. Anatoly Sharansky, Yosef Begun, Ida Nudel – the list of victims grows ever longer. Not to mention the small fact that the Soviet Union has for years been the foremost purveyor, along with the Arabs, of international propaganda and incitement to action against Israel.

With this – and so much more – in full view, these people urge that Israel should not do anything that might annoy the Russians. To make their case, they hardly mention what the Soviet Union has been and is doing to its Jewish citizens. Thus, Prof. Shlomo Avineri dismisses that whole subject by saying that Israel would like to see “a *more liberal* Soviet policy towards its Jewish community” (“Speaking for ourselves,” *The Jerusalem Post*, January 2, 1985). Others (again ignoring the realities of the Soviet Inquisition) suggest that Israel should now seek “dialogue” with Moscow, and the re-establishment of diplomatic relations.

Cravenness thus once again proves to be wedded to stupidity. The USSR after all proclaims almost weekly that for the boon of diplomatic relations, Israel must pay by prior acceptance of all the Arabs’ territorial demands.

If the proposed posture of resignation were extended to its logical conclusion, all protests and demonstrations against Soviet anti-Semitic persecution and propaganda should cease. After all, they undoubtedly anger the Soviets.

WHEREAS, in fact, human dignity, a minimum of national self-respect that the protection of Soviet Jewry – demand that protest and demonstration be intensified and accelerated. Those heroic men and women in the USSR could probably assure a quiet life for themselves, albeit as second- or third-class citizens, suffering only the barbs of anti-Semitic propaganda and discrimination, but freed from personal persecution.

It is, however, they, armed as they are only with the desperate resolution not to deny their identity or their identification with their nation, who insist that the public campaign on their behalf be intensified. They are certain that only in such a campaign, echoing throughout the world, lies their hope for them; and, not waiting for our approval, they persist in their doughty, dignified stance.

Their belief is founded in experience. It was only when Jewish activists in the early ’70s broke through the wall of silence, demanding the right to leave the Soviet state, that Moscow opened the gates. Later, it was when the world-wide protest movement was at its height that the number of exit permits reached its peak.

Even if Soviet reactions were to be considered, it can be said with assurance that the Soviets will not alleviate their treatment of Jews one whit if Israel withholds its consent to the U.S. request. It would be a grotesque blunder for Israel to administer a gratuitous snub to the U.S. in order to “appease” Moscow. This is an important matter on which Israel can help the U.S. The government should not delay its positive reply.

REGRETTABLY, the U.S. has itself been pursuing a policy inimical to Israeli interests and to the interests of Soviet Jewry. Washington is administering an ongoing snub to Israeli sovereignty and is helping to provide the Soviet Union with an unanswerable excuse for shutting the gates against Jews’ leaving.

The condition for Soviet acquiescence in the emigration of Jews – as a glaring exception to the rigid Soviet refusal to allow other people to emigrate – was that Jews proceed to join relatives in Israel *as their homeland*. That is what made possible the strange phenomenon of Jews leaving the USSR for Israel even while Moscow was urging all the Arab states to join Egypt and Syria in their Yom Kippur attack on Israel.

In time, it became evident that many Soviet Jews (for various pragmatic reasons) had been persuaded to prefer going to the U.S. It was, however, the Israeli entry visa and Israel’s willing undertaking of the practical arrangements for the transfer of emigrants that set up an agreement in fact between Israel and the USSR to ensure that the condition for the Soviet exit permit would be fulfilled, and the emigrants would go to Israel.

Even countries at war sometimes reach specific agreements and agreements should be kept. This is most certainly the case in Israel’s agreement on the aliyah of Jews from the USSR, especially as Moscow can always shut the gates at will. What could be more foolish than to endanger the welcome change that had taken place in Soviet policy?

THAT IS exactly what was done. Certain Jewish elements in the U.S., prominently the Hias organization, pounced on the idea of capitalizing on some Soviet Jews’ doubts about Israel, by offering them the alternative of going to the U.S.

The result was a surge of “drop-outs” who went to the U.S. – in breach of the emigrants’ undertakings and of the understanding between Israel and the USSR. The organizers and defenders of this breach, claim that they are thereby helping Soviet Jews to freedom. How careless with the truth can people get? The Soviet Union, for all its sins, allows Jews out of its own free will – the Israeli visa and an invitation from a relative in Israel enables them to leave the USSR. It is only when they have reached Vienna, where they are already free, that Hias steps in to make them “free” – free of Israel.

The promoters of this charade also urge the right of Soviet Jews to “freedom of choice.” Two of them (Morey Schapira and Lynn Singer) wrote (*The Jerusalem Post*, November 13, 1984):

“The freedom to live in the country of one’s choice is the embodiment of American democracy.”

This is specious nonsense. Is any Frenchman, or Turk, or Ethiopian free to go and live in the U.S. or any other country he “chooses”? But the Russian emigrant has in any case a prior obligation to honour his undertaking to go to Israel. None of the moralizers or babblers about freedom of choice would dare claim that once having signed a contract, or a cheque, they themselves would feel “free to choose” whether to honour their signature or not.

The whole machination could not succeed, however, without the crucial cooperation of the U.S. government. The drop-out, guided by Hias officials, goes off to Italy where, again on the strength of his Israeli visa, he is allowed transit. In Rome he goes to the U.S. Embassy, which confers on him the false status of a “refugee.” He is then hustled off to the U.S.

The U.S. government thus treats the Israeli visa with contempt – the visa which is the symbol and certificate of the Jewish people’s hard-won sovereignty. The conferment of “refugee” status on people who hold a valid Israeli visa is an act unfriendly to Israel. It reflects, knowingly or not, a 70-year-old anti-Zionist tradition in the State Department.

More serious even for Soviet Jews: Moscow’s condition for their release having been flagrantly violated, it is presented on a platter with the perfect excuse for shutting the gates against those remaining Jews who wish to leave.

FOR YEARS Israeli governments tolerated this situation – intimidated by the demagogic threat that they might be regarded as “illiberal.” Recently, however, they appear to have awakened to the enormity of the danger – and to the absurdity, in the circumstances, of the “drop-out,” of calling on Moscow to let the Jews go to their homeland.

It is essential and urgent that the most energetic diplomatic, and public, campaign be launched to persuade the U.S. government to abandon its hurtful policy. If there is any chance of Moscow’s reopening the gates, the U.S. and the Jewish people should not be encouraging them not to do so.