

January 6, 1995

ONE OF A KIND

IT is to be hoped that the symposium to be held in Jerusalem next week in memory of Sen. Henry Jackson will engender some tangible proposal for perpetuation of that memory in the Jewish consciousness. Jackson's concern for the welfare of our people, and his unremitting vigilance over the security of its harassed land of Israel fused harmoniously with his deep-seated conviction that a strong and proud Israel was an essential component of American global strategy.

A series of episodes, bunched together at the beginning of the 1970s, provide some reflection of that relationship. In 1968, about a year after their defeat in the Six Day War, the Egyptians, with the support of the Soviet Union, launched the War of Attrition across the Suez Canal. In 1970, when his military situation was deteriorating, president Gamal Abdel Nasser agreed to a cease-fire, urged on him by Washington with Soviet acquiescence.

Israel accepted, on condition that the agreement would include a weapons standstill. It was particularly concerned at the acquisition by Egypt of a new Soviet missile (SAM-6), to which Israel had no reply. Twelve hours after signature of the agreement (August 7, 1970), Egypt (with Soviet support) violated it; the missiles were brought down to the canal.

Israel protested to Washington. When reports of the violation were confirmed by US intelligence, Jackson, realizing at once the severe threat to Israel, addressed a strongly worded demand to the president's adviser on national security, to insist on the immediate withdrawal of the illegally emplaced missiles. He was not heeded: Washington did not want to tangle with the Soviets; and Jerusalem was "persuaded" to keep silent.

Jackson did not rest, and later told the Senate Armed Services Committee: "The net effect [of the violation] is to imperil the effectiveness of the Israeli Air Force ... If the hostilities resume, the IAF will pay a heavy price in lives and aircraft in attempting to destroy the SAM defense system." Three years later (October 14, 1973), in an impassioned speech in Los Angeles while the Yom Kippur War was raging, Jackson recalled those unheeded warnings which now, day after day, were being vindicated. The SAM missiles were taking a terrible toll of Israeli pilots. Only days after that speech, Jackson found himself called upon once more to deal with a grim violation of trust.

Here both Israel and Soviet Jewry were involved. HE IS indeed perhaps best remembered for his prolonged and unrelenting struggle for the opening of the gates of the Soviet Union to emigration. This struggle he took to the floor of the Senate, fathering the famous Jackson-Vanik Amendment.

The US administration, following an agreement in 1972 with Moscow, was sponsoring a bill in Congress for preferential trade treatment for, among others, the Soviet Union. The Jackson-Vanik Amendment would deny that treatment to the Soviets unless and until they opened their gates to emigration. The distress of the administration, which had set its heart on this major act of appeasement, was considerable, especially when it became apparent that the amendment was likely to be accepted by Congress, that it was clearly favored by most citizens, and was being unanimously welcomed by the

Jewish community - whose own campaign for Soviet Jewry was in full swing.

A tremendous campaign of pressure was launched by the administration. It had no effect on Jackson himself, and so the State Department's main force was turned on the Jewish community. The president himself entered the fray.

He was reported as telling the Jewish community that he knew better than Jackson what was good for the Soviet Jews. The Jews and their friends remained adamant. Suddenly, however, Henry Kissinger, newly appointed secretary of state, perceived a crack in Jackson's campaign.

Israel's fortunes in the Yom Kippur War were at their lowest ebb and he, Kissinger, would use Israel's distress to break the Jackson-Vanik Amendment. Israel was in urgent need of replacements for its depleted arsenal, and its requests to Washington for arms were meeting no response. The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations was alerted and, believing that secretary of defense James Schlesinger was responsible for the delay, a delegation went to Kissinger to ask him to intervene to get the arms moving to Israel.

He agreed to do so, but at a price. What he "asked" was simple: that they should go to Jackson and ask him, in the name of the US Jewish community, to withdraw the Jackson-Vanik Amendment. What transpired at that tense meeting with Jackson was made known to me several days later.

When Jackson heard what the three- man delegation wanted, he had "hit the ceiling." "You are apparently prepared," he said, "to abandon your brothers in the Soviet Union. That's up to you. I am not prepared to do so.

Apart from which, my activity is not confined to the Jews alone; I am working for free emigration for all." Thus ended the administration's campaign. But not entirely: the arms were still not dispatched. Now another great personality entered the arena: Adm.

Elmo Zumwalt, the head of the US Navy. Here, from an entirely different angle is his story, as told in his memoirs: "I was a strong proponent of resupplying Israel rapidly and I was disturbed at the mysterious delay ... I became convinced that, in the absence of US resupply, Israel was going to lose the war. At that point I did something I would not have done if I had been sure that [president] Richard Nixon, and not unelected, unaccountable Henry Kissinger, was making national policy about the war.

I told Scoop Jackson that I was quite sure that it was the White House, not the Pentagon, that was delaying the resupply of Israel. I told him that I believed Israel was going to lose if the US did not get equipment aloft at once. I don't know just what Scoop did with my information ... " What "Scoop" did I was privileged to learn from him on a later visit to the US. "I went to Nixon that very day together with a colleague - and raised hell.

I told him that his own orders for supplying Israel were not being carried out, and every day's delay could be disastrous. Nixon hadn't known what was going on." (He was engrossed in the Watergate crisis.) It was then that Schlesinger was given the order to dispatch the arms to Israel.

It must be added that Jackson never had a "need" for the Jewish vote. The Jewish community in his home state, Washington, is comparatively small - and Jackson won all his elections by overwhelming majorities. The whole House of Israel should make sure that his memory is appropriately honored.