

No Limits On Congressional Hypocrisy

Looming quite literally right in front of us is a major swindle by Israel, an unprecedented but very public "diversion" of hundreds of millions of American dollars specifically designated to pay for the greatest resettlement of Jews since World War Two — and all at the expense of the Palestinians of course.

What is involved here is a major political conspiracy being perpetrated by a Congress held hostage to Jewish lobby pressures and money.

At a time when funds should be reduced to Israel for a growing variety of reasons — including the end of the cold war, Israel's gross violations of human rights, the Pollard affair and the Contra scandals, and the need to re-allocate the small amount of American aid allocated worldwide, to name just a few — the American taxpayer is now being further enlisted to reward the intransigent and belligerent Israelis.

No wonder those who have power in Israel — and it's important to understand that Likud and Labour are really Siamese twins — are disinclined to make major political concessions as they are well aware how they can continue to enlist the American Congress on their side when it comes to further monetary give-aways as well as blocking any serious political pressures from the Executive branch.

The most important current example of these realities is Israel's new grab for more than \$400 million in US loans that is currently "sailing through Congress" according to an analysis

prepared by *The Washington Times*.

- Never before have such housing funds been allocated at the request of any country; in the past it was always the US Agency for International Development (AID) which initiated such requests.

- Until now, the greatest amount ever allocated to any country in a single year has been just \$25 million. The Israelis are likely to get six or seven times this amount yearly for the next two or three years at least!

- In the past, all such housing funds have gone to impoverished countries. No country with Israel's standard of living has even received any such funds. The previously richest country to receive any housing funds, Portugal, has a standard of living less than half that of Israel's. And it's not enough that Congress is violating all of its prior principles and concerns to find more and more ways of channelling greater funds to Israel.

- While all other borrowers pay a loan origination fee of 1 percent, Congressman Howard Berman of California has got the House Foreign Affairs Committee to reduce this to 1/4 of one percent for the Israelis, thus costing the US another \$3 million.

- All other countries pay one-half of one percent of the outstanding balance as a normal servicing fee on these funds. But a new provision now limits the yearly ceiling to just \$150,000 and will represent another savings to Israel (i.e. cost of the US) of nearly \$2 million yearly.

From



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Of course the Bush administration is on record indicating that it is against providing Israel these additional funds unless and until the Israelis promise that they will not be using any of these dollars to settle Soviet Jews in the occupied territories.

But the political reality here in Washington is that this really isn't a serious restriction — it's more a matter of public relations with the Arabs. The Israelis are sure to get around it one way or another. Indeed the Israelis have developed quite an expertise over the past few decades in avoiding American restrictions and in holding out for better timing to achieve their goals.

What has been happening over the past year or so is that Israel has pursued a clear and clever strategy ever since it became certain that large numbers of Soviet Jews are likely to be leaving their country.

The first step was to ensure that most of these Soviet Jews would have to go to Israel whether they wanted to or not. The major necessity for Israel was to get American Jewry to drop its insistence on "freedom of choice" and to get the American Congress to

restrict Soviet Jewish immigration into the US.

Both of these goals have been accomplished and now the US will only accept about a fourth of the number of Soviet Jews who are emigrating.

The second step was to set up travel mechanisms that quite literally force Soviet Jews to go to Israel. Here is where the concept of "direct flights" originated and here is where the current effort to get the American Congress to push for "direct flights" comes in.

Partly because of Arab counter-pressure this goal has yet to be fully accomplished. But with America's gates closed and a variety of charter and clandestine means available, most Soviet Jews are going to be faced with "no choice" whether or not there are "direct flights."

The third step, currently underway, is to insist on American dollars, or "guarantees" if that sounds more palatable, to give Israel the financial resources necessary to "resettle" these Soviet Jews without further lowering the general standard of living in today's Israel.

And the fourth step, one with an eye to the future of course, is to use the new emigrants to strengthen and expand the Israeli state — even if that goal has to be put in the background for a while in view of the current political climate.

What does this all mean?

With steps one and two accomplished, and with step three well on the way and four quite inevi-

table once the other steps are taken, the Israelis are enjoying a major strategic success even as the Intifada continues, public opinion worsens, and the political deadlock within Israel continues.

Furthermore, should there be some more serious political problems ahead, the Israelis are well positioned to accomplish their aims even while appearing to bend a bit should that be thought a good idea.

Most important of all the Israelis have managed to define the terms of public debate in a way quite to their benefit.

The public debate goody isn't over whether large numbers of Soviet Jews should go to Israel; it's about whether or not American money should be used to help them settle in the occupied territories.

The debate isn't any longer over whether Soviet Jews should have freedom to go where they wish (as it was until recently), but over whether or not there should be "direct flights."

And of course, in this overall context the debate isn't over pressuring the Israelis to respect Palestinian rights, but rather about the emigration of Soviet Jews and some kind of eventual but very limited talks with Palestinians in Cairo.

In short, today's public discussion isn't about pressuring the Israelis to stop crushing the Palestinians and allow them their freedom now that the Palestinians have both recognized Israel's right to exist and declared their own statehood.

Instead what is being debated is whether or not the Israelis should go to Cairo to talk with non-PLO Palestinians about elections under Israeli occupation that will then lead, somehow and at some-time, to talks with non-PLO Palestinians about "autonomy" rather than independence.

All this represents, to my way

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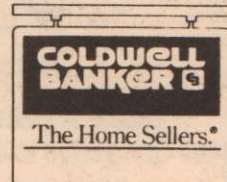
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of thinking at least, a major public relations defeat for Yasser Arafat and the PLO.

For the Israelis have maneuvered into a position in which they can drag out "talks about talks" for a very long time while they step up pressures to crush the Intifada; into a position where the small concessions they will eventually make will be made to appear huge; into a position in which time is now on the side of the Israelis rather than that of the Palestinians.

There are some compensating factors, of course, and they have been much discussed. But they are not dominant.

The struggle for Palestine that has dominated much of this century is not about to be concluded peacefully in the foreseeable future.

Put it behooves all who care about a real peace, a just peace, a lasting peace, to realize that the struggle is just beginning for real.

Yes, one way or another, there will probably be some kind of talks in Cairo or elsewhere and

probably some time this year. Not talks about a Palestinian state mind you, or even about a comprehensive peace; but rather talks about more talks, about limited elections under occupation; talks about what "kosher" Palestinians under very restricted conditions and with a very restricted agenda will then "negotiate" about the very autonomy rejected a decade ago at Camp David!

And in this context the campaign to squeeze from the Americans more tangible concessions will be renewed. That's when, if Congress hasn't already approved all the further monies to resettle Soviet Jews the issue will be activated and accomplished—or even more will be sought.

So make no mistake about it, the historic influx of Soviet Jews to Israel with American underwriting has the potential to become a major strategic defeat not only for PLO and Arab diplomacy but also for the chances of accomplishing the "mutual-recognition two-state settlement" that has been so tortuously discussed for so long.