

Mideast tensions rise as Soviet Jews emigrate

by Joseph Brewda

Current plans by the U.S. and Soviet governments to ship some 750,000 to 1 million Soviet Jews to Israel over the coming months and years, may dramatically destabilize an already tense region. It is expected that all the Soviet Jews will be settled on the Israeli-occupied West Bank which was seized from Jordan in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. The massive increase in Jewish settlements on the West Bank is expected to lead to the formal annexation of the occupied territories by Israel as part of a plan for "Greater Israel." On May 5, King Hussein of Jordan called for an emergency Arab summit to deal with the effects of the influx.

Not the least among regional concerns is the way this population boom might trigger a new Arab-Israeli war. The next Israeli government will probably be run by Likud leader Yitzhak Shamir, but will be dominated by a triumvirate of Gen. Ariel Sharon, David Levi, and Yitzhak Modai—all fanatically committed to territorial expansion. According to some reports, certain strata in the Israeli leadership associated with Sharon may be planning a solution to the "Palestinian problem" once and for all. Their ambitious plan reportedly entails expelling the Palestinians from the West Bank into Jordan, overthrowing the Jordanian King, and declaring that Jordan is now "Palestine." The West Bank would then be populated by incoming Soviet Jews.

There are currently some 70,000 Jews who live among the 1.75 million Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Israel's total Jewish population is approximately 3 million. Israeli government spokesmen have projected that between 100,000 and 250,000 Soviet Jews will arrive in Israel this year. They estimate that as many as 500,000 may arrive by 1991. More than 10,000 Soviet Jews arrived in Israel in April 1990, compared to less than a 1,000 in April 1989. The Israeli Bank of Israel has already called for borrowing \$2 billion over three years to house these expected immigrants. Meanwhile, the construction of Palestinian homes on the West Bank has been de facto banned.

Soviet Jews used as condominium pawn

The policy of funneling Soviet Jewish émigrés into Israel, rather than letting them into the United States or elsewhere, is a policy agreed to by both superpowers at the Malta summit, and reflects the strong, if somewhat conflicted relationship which both Moscow and Washington have to Tel Aviv.

Israel and Syria are the main condominium partners in the region; both Moscow and Washington intend to increase the strength of both states, at the expense of others in the region.

Ever since U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko negotiated the first phase of détente in the early 1970s, the issue of Soviet Jewish emigration has been used in the most cynical fashion. To some degree, Moscow's shifting policy on allowing Soviet Jews to leave, who justifiably fear Russian anti-Semitism, has served as a barometer of superpower relations. So, while 29,000 Soviet Jews were allowed to emigrate to the United States in 1979, Reagan's announcement of the Strategic Defense Initiative in 1983 and related policies drove the rate down to less than 500 in 1984. Since the 1986 Reykjavik summit, emigration has been steadily rising, up to 37,000 in 1989.

The problem from the Israeli standpoint with this emigration is that virtually all Soviet Jews have preferred to emigrate to the United States rather than Israel. Furthermore, large numbers of Israeli Jews have also fled to the United States throughout the 1970s. The Zionist dream, even for Israelis, is simply not working.

Soviet Jews turned away from U.S.

To deal with that concern, the Reagan and Bush administrations, together with the Gorbachov regime, have employed a series of cruel measures.

Until recent years, all fleeing Soviet Jews would emigrate through Vienna, where they would typically receive international refugee status. This status would allow them to come to the United States without being subject to national quota restrictions. The U.S. Justice Department, partly to deal with this "problem," began slandering Austrian President Kurt Waldheim as a "Nazi," and put him on a "watch list." As a result of this downturn in U.S.-Austrian relations, the channel has been constricted.

Similarly, the opening up of Israeli diplomatic negotiations with Russia has led to arrangements for shipping Soviet and Eastern European Jews to Israel on direct flights. These fleeing Jews are granted immediate Israeli citizenship upon their arrival—thereby placing them under restrictive U.S. quota allotments. The Bush administration only allows 20,000 Israelis to emigrate to the U.S. each year—and only those who meet various educational standards. The Bush administration has also reduced maximum Soviet Jewish emigration to the U.S. to a low 30,000 a year.

In short, Washington will accept only a small number of Jewish refugees, and has forced the rest to move to Israel, despite the fact that virtually none of these refugees want to go there. This was the technique used to build up the Jewish population in Palestine, and then Israel, in the post-war period. Jews fleeing Europe were denied entry to the United States by the anti-Semitic U.S. Establishment. They had nowhere else to go.