

Eye on Washington by William Jones

Israeli leader argues for peace accord

A Labor leader calls on American Jews to support the peace process, but ADL sabotage must be confronted.

Nissin Zvili, the secretary general of the Israeli Labor Party and a member of the Knesset (Parliament) Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, had his work cut out for him when he addressed the Washington branch of B'nai B'rith on April 5. Zvili was issuing an appeal to American Jews to support the efforts of the government of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin to achieve a viable peace in the Middle East.

It is not merely a question of finding "pragmatic" grounds for achieving an agreement between Jews and Arabs, Zvili said, but rather of a need "to adopt a completely new strategy in the region" by "finding the common interests of all the peoples in the area." Although Zvili brooked no illusions as to how difficult the road would be toward a lasting peace in the Middle East, he quietly explained that it would take "more strength and more courage to make peace than to wage war."

The conditions for such a peace, Zvili explained, had been created by 1) the disappearance of the Soviet Union, and 2) by the Arab countries reaching the decision that there was no way to destroy the state of Israel. It was, however, a complicated process, involving negotiations with three Arab countries and the Palestinians. The two major hurdles that remain are to reach an agreement with Syria and to solve the Palestinian problem.

Zvili was by no means "preaching to the choir." Some of the toughest opposition to the Middle East peace accords has come from the B'nai B'rith's Anti-Defamation League,

which is currently sponsoring the Ariel Sharon-Yitzhak Shamir effort to plunge Israel into civil war in its opposition to the peace accords. A peace agreement would seriously impinge on ADL manipulation, financial and otherwise, of the American Jewish community. The ADL has also provided the umbrella for the more militant Zionist groupings such as Meir Kahane's Jewish Defense League, out of which mass murderer Baruch Goldstein came, groupings characterized by Rabin as "scum." Abe Foxman, national director of the ADL, was even so bold as to attack the Rabin government for "seeking to restrain American Jewish opposition." This was also reflected in the words of Gerard Leval, a leading member of B'nai B'rith, who spoke just before Zvili at the Washington meeting. Leval noted, almost with relish, that the "slightest disturbance" could disrupt the peace process.

Zvili explained that a treaty with Jordan was practically a "done deal," but for political reasons, the details of this would only be announced by Jordan's King Hussein when the Israelis had reached an agreement with the Palestinians. Zvili also hinted that the Jordan agreement involved comprehensive economic development projects. It is the first instance of an agreement in the Mideast where "the key elements are issues of cooperation and development rather than of security," said Zvili. "When we examine our real interests, we can find them."

Zvili also indicated that one of the biggest hurdles would be to reach an

agreement with the Syrians. This had been an issue of discussion when Rabin last met with President Clinton. The United States played a particularly important mediating role in this regard when Clinton, during his European trip in January, made a special trip to Geneva to meet with Syrian President Hafez al-Assad.

Zvili didn't express optimism about a quick agreement with Syria, although he indicated that Israel could propose a package perhaps in a number of weeks. "We must be willing to pay a price" for peace with Syria, said Zvili, which would involve some kind of compromise on the Golan Heights, an area captured by Israel during the Yom Kippur War and generally regarded by Israeli military figures as integral to the security of the country. Various alternatives have been broached regarding this problem, including the possibility of having U.S. peacekeepers take over the Israeli positions. Although Zvili was grilled on this sensitive issue, he wouldn't allow himself to be pinned down to any particular solution, saying that all this would be subject to negotiation.

In response to a question from this reporter concerning the followup of the economic commitments which had been made by the Group of Seven to secure the political arrangements, Zvili admitted that there had been little progress. "Money has been committed," he said, but "little has been done. . . . The most important element of the entire peace process . . . is the economic development of the whole area of the Middle East."

If Zvili and the Israeli Labor Party are to succeed in mobilizing the needed support from the American Jewish community, they'll have to come down hard against the political sabotage being conducted by the B'nai B'rith's ADL and their terrorist compatriots against the agreement.