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Soviet-Jewish Migration to Israel

Why do the Arabs fear it and fight it?

There are 2 to 3 million Jews living in the USSR, after Israel and the U. S. the third largest such group in the world today. Under the Soviet Communist system, their culture and their religion have been ruthlessly suppressed for decades. Emigration was virtually impossible. Lately, under glasnost and the more enlightened leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev, the gates of emigration have begun to open. Most of the emigrants choose Israel as their destination. All Arabs — and not just the "Palestinians" — are unanimous and strident in their opposition to this immigration. What motivates them? What is their concern?

What are the facts?

■ It is important to remember that Israel was created for a specific purpose. It is the ingathering of Jews from all over the world, especially those who had been subject for centuries to hostility, violence, oppression, ghettoization, expulsion and — eventually, the unprecedented disaster of the Holocaust, in which 6 million Jews perished. The yearning for the re-establishment of the Jewish homeland in what came to be called "Palestine" had been unremitting over the centuries. In 1917, the British were in control of Palestine and issued the Balfour Declaration, which called for the establishment of "...a national home for Jewish people". This Declaration was confirmed by the League of Nations. The concept of Palestine as a Jewish state was further confirmed by the United Nations, which recognized the new-born Jewish state in 1948.

■ During the second World War, many of the millions of Jews that died in the gas chambers of the Nazis could have been saved if they had been allowed into Palestine. The British, however, under the unrelenting threats of the Arabs, buckled under that pressure and effectively throttled Jewish emigration to Israel, thus condemning many to horrible deaths. The situation today is comparable: Under "glasnost", the virulent history-old anti-Semitism of the Russians and the new-found hatreds in the Islamic parts of the Soviet Union subject the Jewish population to imminent great physical danger and possible pogroms. Emigration to Israel is the only solution.

■ The Arab world has regarded this exodus with undisguised hostility and has urged the Soviet Union to restrict or even to stop emigration to Israel alto-

gether. Pretext for this hostility and opposition is the alleged fear that the Soviet-Jewish immigrants will settle in the administered territories, thus threatening the Palestinian inhabitants and their future hopes for a homeland. But, this is a false charge, a "red herring". The Israeli government gives no incentives to any of the immigrants to move to those areas. Fewer than 1% of all Soviet-Jewish immigrants have moved into the territories.

■ The concern of the Arab states, virtually all of which (with the notable exception of Egypt) consider themselves in a state of war with Israel and which have the destruction of Israel at the top of their agendas, is not with the "Palestinians". In fact, the "Palestinians" and their aspiration for a homeland are a matter of some indifference to the Arab nations, a pretext and justification for the enmity to Israel. If they were truly concerned about the "Palestinians" and their well-being, they would not have suffered their staying in refugee camps for over forty years, in conditions of utter misery. The real reason is the basic Arab view that the existence of Israel on any land that the Arabs think of as "sacred Arab soil" is considered a Western and Christian plot against Islam and the Arab world and that the destruction of Israel is a sacred religious duty, which calls for "jihad" (holy war) against the "infidels". Even if Israel could be induced to grant the "Palestinians" their mini-state, it would not change the hostility of the Arab nations one iota. Their aim would still be the destruction of Israel, except that, with a Palestinian state in Israel's heartland, the Arab armies would only be minutes away from Jerusalem, from Tel Aviv, and from the military, industrial, and population centers of the country.

The mass immigration of Soviet Jews to Israel would strengthen Israel. Anything that strengthens Israel is perceived by the Arabs as weakening them and thus making more difficult the planned destruction and dismemberment of the Jewish state. The prospect of Jewish immigration strikes terror in Arab hearts. That explains the hysterical statements and saber rattlings at the recent Arab summit in Baghdad. It explains Arab pressure on the Soviet Union to halt this emigration. It explains why, under Arab pressure, the Soviet Union does not allow direct flights from and to Israel; it explains pressure and threats to blow up commercial aircraft of those countries bordering the Soviet Union that may permit transshipment of Soviet Jews to Israel. But the world must remember and keep well in mind that Israel was created to be a refuge and homeland to persecuted Jews anywhere in the world. During the second World War, the world stood idly by and did not allow Jews to enter Palestine, which could have saved millions. Nothing like it can be allowed to happen again. Soviet Jews are in imminent mortal danger. They want to leave the Soviet Union and go to Israel. Despite Arab frenzied opposition, the world must see to it that nothing happens to slow this exodus.

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Facts and Logic About the Middle East
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