

NEW THREAT TO ISRAEL?

You should know that the American tour of a PLO agent, recently noted in this column, was cut short. He never did make it to much of the country. That is a testament to your citizens' power. Protests had bombarded Washington when it was learned that the State Department had asked for a waiver to allow him to make the trip.

There is now further action on that matter. The House of Representatives has adopted an amendment to the State Department Authorization Act which would tighten the visa restrictions on admission to the United States for members of the PLO. This amendment is known as the Solarz-Derwinski amendment, and should receive the support of California Congressmen.

That State Department Authorization Act, essentially a funding bill, also includes a provision which cuts the U.S. contribution to the United Nations in an amount equal to one-quarter of the cost of the UN Special Unit on Palestinian Rights. That was the committee, you will remember, which sponsored special pro-Palestinian and anti-Israel celebrations and materials this past year. The Senate version of this authorization bill does not yet include this provision.

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) is working on these provisions of the State Department Authorization bill, but, as usual, it is critical for Senators and Congressmen to hear from their local constituents.

There is a cloud on the horizon, however, with respect to American financial assistance for Israel and for peace in the Middle East. The Administration's request for supplemental assistance to Israel and Egypt to implement the peace treaty, is known as the Special International Security Assistance Act of 1979. Over a four-year period, it would grant 800 million dollars for the construction of two Israeli air bases in the Negev, transplanted from the Sinai; a little over 2 billion dollars in military loans to Israel; a billion and a half in military loans and 300 million in economic loans to Egypt.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee approved this measure overwhelmingly, and the chances have been deemed good that it will pass both houses. But the cloud on the horizon comes in the form of Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina, who voted against the measure and has been speaking against it.

Senator Helms, the standard-bearer for the most conservative thought in Congress, has been talking about refusing aid for Israel if it does not refrain from West Bank settlements, does not sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and does not otherwise conform to American desires.

These are all debateable subjects -- but to put such a vise on Israel just before the delicate negotiations with Egypt, would be an act notably unfriendly to Israel and to Israel's ability to negotiate freely in the months ahead.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee has already defeated a Helms proposal along the above lines. But if anti-Israel sentiment starts developing on the "right wing," which Helms represents, then an ominous new day will have begun.

Most of the mushy thinking on Israel has, so far, actually come from elements of the "left wing," in terms, for example, of cutting off arms aid. The conservative elements have particularly understood the importance of Israel to the deterrence of Soviet imperialism in the Middle East.

Now the "economy" question threatens to overwhelm other considerations in some conservative minds. Shades of the disastrous isolationist economizing of the 1930s!

The importance of this supplementary aid to Israel and Egypt needs to be kept sharply in perspective. As Senator Alan Cranston said in a recent speech to the Irish-Israeli-Italian Society in San Francisco, this supplemental aid for Middle East peace is bound to save the U.S. money. He said that the money the U.S. will actually spend in grants over the next few years "is less than the cost of one aircraft carrier. Thinking strictly in terms of national defense, that's a bargain investment in U.S. security."