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ARE WE PREPARED?

The Soviet Union is five months into the most significant changing of the political guard since the death of Josef Stalin. The event has also opened a potentially historic new chapter in the 20 year struggle for the liberation of Russian Jewry. Are we prepared to deal with it?

The heir to Leonid Brezhnev, the owlish 68 year-old Yuri Andropov, has been characterized by some as a scotch drinking hail fellow well met with a taste for American jazz, a knowledge of English and probably a copy of the Wall Street Journal on his desk every morning. To others he is the grey menace who emerged from the KGB to transport us all in time to the darkest, deadliest days of the Cold War.

Both impressions are probably false. We know little of the private Andropov, but of the public one we can be sure of two things: a) The man who ran the world's largest secret police-spy network is unquestionably hypersensitive to the question of internal stability and security in the USSR and one who would go to the greatest lengths to strengthen it; b.) The man who now resides as chairman of the Presidium and general secretary of the communist party with his own handpicked cadre of aparachiks and the tacit support of the army is also the same Yuri Andropov who as boss of the KGB from 1961 to 1981 had to approve the issuance of exit visas to 280,000 Jews. Had he not, we can be sure those visas would never have been issued.

In brief, we are dealing with a man with many facets, not some one-dimensional celluloid villain. Ruthless? Utterly, when he thinks Soviet internal stability is at risk. This is the man who smashed the Helsinki Watch Groups throughout the USSR, condemned Shcharansky to a nightmare of brutal solitary

confi^Nment, broke Orlov and banished Sakharov to Gorki with a monumental disdain for so-called Public Opinion. But he is also the pragmatist who has been waging war on laziness, corruption, absenteeism and alcoholism in the USSR and must know full well that the biggest threat to his country isn't the number of Pershing IIs in West Germany but a Soviet economy that still can't feed, house, clothe and equip itself and an East European economy that teeters at the edge of an abyss that could also become the burial ground for 272 million Russians.

It is precisely with such a man that we Jews may be able to deal, providing we put all illusions, emotions and preconceptions into cold storage and get straight down to business. The question is what tack we take and whom we put in the drivers seat.

It is easier to name the vehicles that are inappropriate for this proposed journey into brass tacks negotiation than those that are. The list of non-starters should include emotional public denunciations, boycott campaigns, mock trials, street demonstrations and violence to Soviet persons or property. These tactics may have had some marginal influence on Krushchev and Brezhnev. Against the icy spymaster Andropov they won't work. On the contrary, there is every evidence they will make him even tougher to deal with. This is not to advocate a conspiracy of silence. However, as wholehearted participants in the marches and demonstrations of the 1960s and early 1970s, writers of some of the fieriest epistles of that period, and the objects of massive scorn for having been the first to suggest that what Russian Jews wanted was not matzot but airline tickets to Tel Aviv, we can say with some perspective that in the history of any liberation struggle every

strategy has its time and place. To confuse the circumstances of 1971 when a Brezhnev and Kosygin still cared what appeared on the editorial pages of the New York Times with those of post-Afghanistan, post-Solidarity 1983 when a Yuri Andropov couldn't care less, is to commit an in^cexusable blunder.

If we are to reach Andropov on behalf of 2.5 million Russian Jews it will only be on the basis of his self-interest. For all his power, including the power to grant and deny exit visas, Comrade Andropov has a problem: 272 million Soviet citizens who are sick and tired of sacrificing for a tomorrow that never seems to come, 272 million voices even the KGB and the threat of Lub-yanka won't be able to silence forever. In that context, Andropov needs 2.5 million discontented, potentially trouble-making Jews like a hole in the head. What he does need is a massive injection of consumer goods - food, clothing, housing, above all, housing - into his dying economy along with the know-how and equipment to produce them. In short, he needs trade, credits, non-strategic industrial, agricultural and technical exchange, perhaps even Most Favored Nation status - all the good things that flow from that much abused concept, détente. And despite all attempts to alternately intimidate and cozy up to the Japanese and West Europeans, he's smart enough to know there's only one real address for his shopping list: the United States. We have, in short, the makings of a deal.

How seriously does Comrade Andropov take this matter of his failing economy? We got a broad hint of the answer to that just last November in Moscow. On that occasion 250 U.S. industrialists were assembled as guests of the non-governmental US-USSR Trade and Economic Council to talk about expanded trade between the two nations. This was going on despite the intense bilateral chill brought on by the continued occupation of Afghanistan and the manhandling of Poland's

Solidarity movement. Business, after all, is business. In the midst of these discussions and just prior to the hosting of a gala dinner for the industrialists in the Kremlin, Brezhnev died. Under the circumstances, it might have been expected the conference would adjourn and the delegates head for home. Not in this case. Andropov, who moved with lightning speed to seize the fallen reins, would not hear of it. He insisted that the Americans remain in place so that all his (Andropov's) "cards would be put on the table as to what the Soviet Union wishes to buy from the U.S." Thus, the deadly seriousness with which the new ruler of the Kremlin approaches the matter of trade with the United States

Can the Jews capitalize on his need to the benefit of 2.5 million of our brethren? That will depend in the first instance on our willingness to put all other feelings and considerations aside and move out front and center in advocating a massive expansion of non-strategic trade and non-military scientific and technical exchange with the USSR supported by generous credits. It won't be easy in the current political environment and the difficulty is compounded by the need to link trade with exit visas without seeming to paint Andropov into an ideological corner.

We already know how these things can go tragically wrong from the ill-fated 1974 Trade act which sought to exchange \$ 75 million a year in credits over a four-year period for 60,000 Jewish exit-permits annually. There were only two things wrong with the deal: 1.) The \$ 75 million credit ceiling clamped on an agreement fought and won by the valiant Henry Jackson over the opposition of Henry Kissinger and much of the Jewish Establishment was a kick in the teeth to a Soviet Government that was set to sign contracts for 8.9 billion dollars of American goods and services and 2.) For that kind of money

- probably not even for the \$ 3 billion in credits it would have taken to seal the bargain - the Kremlin rulers were not about to leave themselves open to the charge that they had "sold out" Marxist-Leninist principles for American goods. In response to Senator Jackson's understandable but ill-advised announcement that "we've won" when the Soviets seemed initially to accept the deal, Brezhnev was reported to have told a member of David Rockefeller's staff: "You can't do that to us!"

Thus did the 1974 Trade Act and all its bright hopes go down the tubes. It took five more years, an Afghanistan invasion, a grain embargo and an Olympics boycott for Jewish Repatriation to follow, but follow it did. The wonder is not that Jewish exit-permits declined to 81 a month, but rather how they ever reached the exalted figures of 29,000 in 1978 and 51,000 in 1979, even as the Soviets were violating with impunity the Basket III provisions of the Helsinki Accords to which they had affixed their signature in 1975. Was the Kremlin trying to prove something to Jimmy Carter, get the message through to the world or merely experimenting to see whether a flood of Jewish exit visas could muffle international support for Orlov, Sakharov, the Helsinki Watch groups and the democratic dissident movement? We can only guess.

Hopefully, we Jews have learned at least this much from the 1974 experience: The Soviets will not be bought at discount and certainly not at the cost of ideological embarrassment. Their economic malaise is vast but even vaster is their internal insecurity and in any contest between the two, the needs of security will prevail. The price-tag on Jewish freedom will be high but the prize is great. At this juncture, with the cool technocrat Andropov at the helm it can only be gained through a quiet agreement with a quid pro quo to the

Russians in terms of non-strategic trade and economic assistance - quiet diplomacy but with no ambiguities.

Richard Nixon, who for all his other failings probably knows the Soviet mind-set better than anyone in the West delineated the guidelines and limitations of such an agreement in an article that both our latter day dé-tentists and activists for Soviet Jewry might well commit to memory. Writing in the New York Times of August 19, 1982 ("On Economic Power"), the former president asserted that "the real leverage we gain from East-West trade is both more subtle and complex. The Soviet leaders want what the West produces, and they are willing to give up something to get it. They will give up more in private than they will in public. The key is to make it very clear to them that there is an iron link between their behavior and the West's willingness to make the trade deals they hope for, while not doing so in such a way that they lose face. For example: Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union was increased from less than 1,000 in 1968 to nearly 35,000 in 1973 as a result of our private pressure. But then Congress passed the Jackson/Vanik Amendment, which put the Russians on the spot publicly by tying trade to emigration policies, and the number of Jews allowed to leave was cut in half..."

If non-strategic trade, conditioned upon such "iron linked" but quiet guarantees, is the key to reopening the doors that have been locked on 2.5 million Russian Jews, the question remains, who among us should be invested with the task of bringing it about. Israel cannot. The U.S. Government will not (though all depends on its approval) and this is certainly not an arena for lone-wolf diplomacy, however skilled and well intentioned. It is a Jewish challenge and must be met by Jews, but it is unlikely that any national

Jewish group or organization, permanent or ad hoc, would have the credibility to command Andropov's attention. No, if this cat is to be belled at all, it will require a completely fresh approach - AN INTERNATIONAL APPROACH. While some may scoff at the suggestion, past history, beginning with the First International Conference in Brussels in 1971, has shown that only with the elevation of our efforts on behalf of Russian Jews to the international level were we able to elicit any response from the Kremlin rulers. Those five Soviet planes that ringed the Brussels airport were no mirage, nor was the army of propagandists that descended on the Belgian capital to denounce a conference Moscow was unable to stop. The Soviets were shaken and the 13,700 exit permits issued from March to December 1971 (vs. 800 for all of the previous year) were a clear function of their discomfort. Mr. Andropov, lest it be forgotten, was in on that decision.

Mindful of this fact and the opening of the doors of the USSR to 125,000 Jewish repatriates over the ensuing five years - an act whose precedent-shattering importance within the context of Soviet history ~~has never been fully appreciated~~ has never been fully appreciated - a majority of the 1,200 delegates to the Second International Conference in Brussels in 1976 signed a proclamation calling for the creation of a 'Permanent International Secretariat for Soviet Jews' staffed and dedicated to the dealing with the Soviet Jewry question on an exclusive basis. The answer to this petition to give Russian Jews and their cause a status at least equal to that accorded our various fund raising activities was a cavalier statement to the chair from the plenum on the last day of the Conference declaring that "the Presidium of Brussels will act as the 'permanent' group in charge of Jewish affairs in the USSR and will meet twice a year to discuss all problems.."

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Thus was the most urgent Jewish issue since the creation of Israel emasculated like poor-bread and distributed among people who already wore three of four different hats. Two and a half million Jewish lives were simply allowed to fall between the chairs. Only today, seven bitter years later, are the calamitous results of this miscarriage of a sound proposal full evident.

We are now at the Third International Conference with yet one more opportunity to do what we should have done 20 years ago, - perhaps the last. We cannot undo the damage of the last seven years, but we can finally give to what is no longer the Soviet Jewish Question but the Soviet Jewish Crisis the high priority it deserves. We can only do that by creating the machinery capable of reawakening a global concern for 2.5 million trapped people along with the kind of international Jewish negotiating team of top businessmen, bankers, scientists and political figures that will compell Yuri Andropov's attention and interest.

The hour is late. While the lives of Shcharansky and other Prisoners of Zion ebb away and tens of thousands who dared ask to leave are caught in a cul d'sac of no exit permits, no jobs, no housing, no higher education for their children, we sit here in default of the gravest Jewish responsibility of our time.

We dare not leave this holiest of cities without seeking redemption.

MORRIS BRAFMAN
WILLIAM MEHLMAN

Jerusalem, March 11th 1983

Begun - film

- ① symbol of struggle by SJ for self identity
- ② sewed kipah + tofilin bags; danced in middle of prisoners + guards
- ③ triple-jeopardy
2x Siberian exile
- ④ line stops at Begun →

Let my people go -

Let my people know