



S/S 7408446

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, D.C. 20520

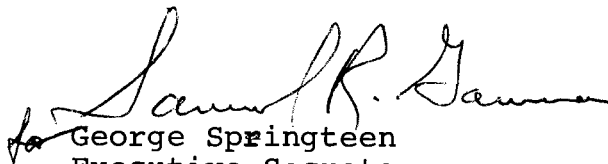
April 27, 1974

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. JOHN O. MARSH  
OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT

Subject: Briefing Paper for Call on the  
Vice President by Israeli  
Chief Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef

Chief Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef, leader of the Israeli Sephardic community, will call on the Vice President April 29. The attached briefing paper outlines that the Chief Rabbi is expected to express appreciation for U.S. support for Israel and raise the issues of Jews in Arab countries and Israeli POW's held by Syria. We recommend that the Vice President avoid discussing in detail these sensitive matters which are closely linked to our Middle East peace efforts. Polite acknowledgment that the U.S. Government is aware of these subjects should suffice.

  
George Springteen  
Executive Secretary

Attachment:

Briefing Paper with attachment.

DECLASSIFIED  
E.O. 12958, Sec. 3.5  
NSC Memo, 11/24/98, State Dept. Guidelines  
By WJH, NARA, Date 10/24/00



- During his present trip to the Middle East the Secretary of State will be apprised of these issues and their importance to Israel.

- We now have diplomatic contact with Syria, though not formal relations, and at such time as we feel our intervention would be helpful we will raise these humanitarian issues with Syria.

Attachment:

Biographic information.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
BRIEFING PAPER

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

MEMORANDUM FOR THE VICE PRESIDENT

Subject: Your meeting with Israeli Chief Rabbi  
Ovadia Yosef, Monday, April 29, at  
11:00 a.m.

Setting:

Chief Rabbi Yosef is currently visiting the U.S. where he has many followers among the Sephardic Jews. His call on you presents an occasion for the U.S. Administration to honor the religious leader of about one-half of Israel's population. The Chief Rabbi will be accompanied by Mr. Harry Walker and an interpreter. Biographic information is attached.

Analysis/Background:

The Chief Rabbi is expected to express his appreciation for U.S. support for Israel and raise the subjects of the plight of Jews in Arab countries whose governments prevent Jews from emigrating freely, particularly Syria, and the fate of Israeli POW's held by Syria. These issues are of great concern to Israel. This concern and the question of an exchange of POW's has been conveyed to the Syrians by Secretary Kissinger. This sensitive issue cannot be discussed in detail with officials like the Chief Rabbi who, although genuinely concerned with the issues, are not directly involved in the negotiations.

Your Talking Points (if asked):

- The U.S. is aware of the situation of Jews in Arab countries and the special problem of the Israeli POW's held by Syria.

- The U.S. shares Israel's concern in these matters which are of genuine human interest to us.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~  
GDS

WHM 10/24/00

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

ISRAEL

Ovadhiah YOSEF

Chief Rabbi

Ovadhiah Yosef became Chief Rabbi for the minority Sephardi (originally Spanish but also oriental and East European Jews) community in October 1972. This position also carries the traditional title of Rishon Le-Zion (First for Zion) which is only attributed to the Chief Sephardi Rabbi by his followers. Yosef shares the Chief Rabbinate with Rabbi Shlomo Goren who is leader of the majority Ashkenazi (German and West European) community. Goren's position is a much more dominant and powerful one, in part a function of Goren's ability and personality.

Yosef was born 1919 in Baghdad, Iraq. Little is known about his attitudes and background. His attitude toward the U.S. is regarded as extremely friendly.

Current political affiliation: None. Yosef has not formally affiliated himself with any of Israel's religious parties but he is probably sympathetic to the ultra-orthodox parties. Because of his noninvolvement in political matters, it is not known how he is regarded by Israeli politicians.

Relations with Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren: Relations between the two Chief Rabbis has been described as "worse than terrible" by knowledgeable sources. Goren and Yosef are barely on speaking terms and this of course affects the work and functioning of the Chief Rabbinate. Bad relations between Yosef and Goren practically date back to the time of their election as Chief Rabbis. Yosef took exception to several controversial decisions handed down by the Chief Rabbinical Court on grounds that Goren had pushed through decisions by steamroller tactics, there had not been proper consultations between Goren and Yosef prior to arriving at decisions and, finally, decisions were based on political expediency rather than Halacha (religious law). Yosef is regarded as very rigid in his interpretation of religious law by liberal religious leaders.

Yosef is said to be a warm, hospitable person. He is soft-spoken and obviously very well disposed toward Americans. There is a distinct "other worldly" and spiritual cast to his character.

Yosef is married and has eleven children, six girls and five boys. His wife, Margalit, was born in Aleppo, Syria, in 1928.

Rabbi Yosef speaks only Hebrew but also understands Arabic. He does not know English.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

DECLASSIFIED

E.O. 12958, Sec. 3.5

NSC Memo, 11/24/98, State Dept. Guidelines

By W. H. M., NARA, Date 10/24/00

DS 4/26/74