

At the same time, the Soviets are reinforcing their presence in the Arab world in expectation of a Vance diplomatic embarrassment. Soviet pressure was in large part responsible for the accords worked out between the PLO and Syria, and, in the wake of Vance's departure from Egypt, top level Soviet representatives held meetings with Egyptian Foreign Minister Ismail Fahmy in Cairo, possibly preparing for a previously arranged August trip to Cairo by Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko.

Throughout this week, Soviet and other East Bloc media have been sharply critical of Sadat's "working group," labelling it a "departure from the 1974 Rabat Accords" recognizing the PLO as the legitimate representatives of the Palestinians.

One source close to the Carter Administration commented, after Vance's Damascus arrival, that, "I hope Vance has gotten prior Soviet agreements on what he's now doing. If not, there's a good chance the Arabs are going to just turn around and call in the Soviets and then we're in big trouble."

Whether this emerging array of European-Soviet countermoves could include U.S.-backed Israel is now a moot question. Notably, this week, Israel's Energy Minister, Yitzhak Moday, for the first time threatened that if the United States continued to refuse to authorize the sale of nuclear reactors to Israel, then the Israeli government would look towards Europe as an alternative. Israel is well known to possess nuclear weapons; it is nuclear energy in the service of peace and economic development which the Carter Administration is determined to deny its "strongest Mideast ally."

Sadat On The Ropes

Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's unfortunate endorsement this week of the chimerical plan worked out with Secretary of State Cyrus Vance to convene a "working group" of Arab and Israeli foreign ministers in Washington may be the straw that breaks the camel's back.

According to Arab diplomatic sources, the internal opposition inside Egypt to Sadat and his corrupt circle of military chiefs — especially in the wake of the aborted Egyptian invasion of Libya last week — is growing to critical mass. In the evaluation of experienced U.S. analysts, unless there is a significant breakthrough toward a Middle East peace settlement, Sadat's chances

of surviving as president of Egypt past October are nil. Sadat's four-year tightrope act is coming to an end.

The growing domestic crisis in Egypt, fed by a spiralling economic collapse, threatens to push Sadat again into renewed confrontation with Libya. Libya's Prime Minister Abdessalam Jalloud charged at a press conference this week in Tripoli that Egypt was massing troops on the Libyan border following a ceasefire after the four-day border war, and that nearly the entire Egyptian air force has been stationed in bases in western Egypt poised to attack Libya. Jalloud also said that Libya had obtained documentary evidence to prove that the U.S. instigated the start of the Egypt-Libya war.

Within Egypt, civilian and military opposition to Sadat is receiving the quiet backing of Libya. The Libyan government of Muammar Qaddafi — a regime which Sadat has pledged to overthrow by force — has begun making contacts with former Egyptian officials who now oppose Sadat. These officials, sources say, are in contact with rebellious circles in the army, especially among middle-level officers.

Since the attack on Libya, the Egyptian army has been hit by a number of mutinies and rebellions, a situation that forced Sadat to issue a threatening communique commanding his army personnel to remain loyal. So afraid was Sadat of the possibility that his officers would refuse to carry out orders to move against Libya that even field commanders were not told of the impending action until two hours before the war!

The opposition to Sadat is of two forms, both leftist — including the Egyptian communists and Nasserists — and rightist, such as the Muslim Brotherhood. Although the latter are divided into several competing Muslim factions, each with an allegiance to a different outside backer, there is evidence that some of the rightist Muslim groups are secretly cooperating with the left to overthrow Sadat.

The driving force behind the Egyptian crisis is the worsening economic disaster. A foreign debt of between \$12 and \$18 billion has thrown the entire economy into a tailspin despite occasional handouts from Saudi Arabia, and there has been a near total lack of capital investment since the 1973 war. Infrastructure — communications, transport, and the like — have collapsed in disorder, and Egypt's agriculture is suffering from an absence of fertilizer and pesticide. According to *Pravda*, the Soviet daily, most of this year's cotton crop will be lost to an infestation, wiping out the chief Egyptian export commodity.