

## After Camp David: options in the Middle East

by Robert Dreyfuss

Ezer Weizman's resignation as Israel's minister of Defense, coming one day before the May 26 deadline for completing the Camp David Palestinian autonomy talks, marked the formal failure of the Carter administration's prize foreign policy achievement, the Egyptian-Israeli pact. Although the agreement has been virtually dead since the resignation last October of Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan, Weizman's brother-in-law, the passing of the May 26 target date without even the hint of an accord is the end of the Camp David era.

As a result, the entire Middle East—and the billions of petrodollars that go with it—is up for grabs. At least three separate diplomatic initiatives are being prepared for the next phase.

Immediately, Weizman's departure from the government of Prime Minister Menachem Begin leaves Israel fully under the control of the extremist clique of the ruling Herut Party and Likud, made up primarily of Begin's old 1940s terrorist cronies from the Irgun and the Stern gang. Since late 1979, Begin has replaced both Dayan and his finance minister with ultra-Zionist fanatics. Now the leading candidates for defense minister are Gen. Ariel Sharon, a radical expansionist linked to the Gush Emunim paramilitary gangs and the Jewish Defense League, and Moshe Arens, a Herut veteran who voted against the peace treaty with Egypt.

The Begin government, which also includes Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir, a convicted assassin who also voted against the Camp David treaty, is already on a war course. According to sources in the intelligence community, the Begin regime is now set on provoking a military

showdown with Syria, intensifying the pattern of illegal settlements and repression on the occupied West Bank, and stirring up sectarian sedition and Muslim Brotherhood rebellion inside Egypt.

### What next?

The three policy tracks for the Middle East can be described roughly as follows, although there is some overlap in each area.

First, after long preparations, the French and West German governments are preparing a comprehensive initiative aimed at securing an overall Middle East peace. That agreement, to be ratified (over British objections) at a June 12-13 meeting of the heads of state of the European Economic Community, calls for the establishment of a Palestinian state in the occupied West Bank and Gaza in exchange for mutual Israeli-Palestinian recognition.

The cornerstone of the European action is a French-sponsored deal to provide political and military security in the Persian Gulf, including an effective umbrella over Saudi Arabia, in exchange for far-reaching oil-for-technology deals between Europe and the Arab world.

That would place the bulk of Saudi and other Arab surplus petrodollars, along with billions in development contracts, in the hands of Paris and Bonn, to the detriment of British-controlled banks in London and New York.

From March 1-12, French President Giscard d'Estaing toured Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and the Persian Gulf countries where he made initial soundings for the

initiative. Since then France has concluded huge military deals with Saudi Arabia and Iraq.

Yesterday, Genscher also met with Egypt's Vice President Husni Mubarak. Egypt, though a party to the Camp David axis, is also now carefully watching the European initiative to see what will occur next month. Two weeks before the expiration of the Camp David deadline, Sadat unilaterally broke off the negotiations.

### **Enter the Brandt commission**

Second, the Foreign Secretary of Great Britain, Lord Carrington, the British aristocracy, and the Socialist International have geared up a counter-initiative to the French-led EEC which is designed to block any consolidation of continental European influence in the Arab world and prevent a European-Soviet entente over the Middle East.

In brief, their strategy involves the quick removal of the hated Begin government and its replacement with a more sophisticated, British-allied government led by the opposition Labour Party's ex-Prime Minister Shimon Peres, Yitzhak Rabin, Abba Eban, and Weizman. Leading the effort to put into power such a government are the European forces associated with the London Second International and the Brandt Commission, headed by former West German Chancellor Willy Brandt.

Their policy involves installing a Peres-Weizman regime that would appear more conciliatory on the question of Palestinian self-determination. By this means, London hopes to win some support in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and the PLO, and then rally much of the Islamic world into an informal "Islamic Defense Pact" ranged against the Soviet Union.

In a lead editorial May 25, the New York Times officially proclaimed the end of Camp David and called for Begin's overthrow. "Egypt, Israel, and the United States have plainly failed," wrote the Times. "Israel needs a new government that is willing to yield claimed rights in the West Bank in exchange for Palestinians yielding their claims to Israel proper." The Times then attacked "irrelevant European 'initiatives' and UN maneuvers" and warned that no real progress could occur until after the U.S. elections! "Until then, the Camp David accord has to kept afloat as the only available forum for progress."

Various London spokesmen echoed the same theme: no European initiative until after November 1980.

Backing the London strategy were a series of important deployments, two of which deserve mention. The first was a "fact-finding" mission led by Brandt associate Bruno Kreisky, Austria's chancellor, and two other Second International leaders, Olaf Palme of Sweden, and Felipe Gonzales of Spain, who visited Iran. Their mission was to explore whether Iran could be drawn into the anti-Soviet pact sought by London sometime later this year.

The second deployment was a tour to Saudi Arabia and Egypt by Katherine Graham, one of the leading members of the Brandt Commission and publisher of the Washington Post. Graham met with Saudi Prince Fahd, Prince Abdullah, Egypt's Sadat, and the deposed Shah of Iran, who is now in Cairo, for lengthy interviews. With a dozen political intelligence agents in tow, Graham was exploring whether or not the Saudis would be prepared to drop their French connection in exchange for a British-sponsored Palestinian initiative.

The Saudis were not obliging. In fact, Saudi-British ties are at their lowest point ever following the showing of the film "Death of a Princess" in London last month, after which the Saudis expelled the British ambassador and severed some trade with London. Lord Carrington last week, desperate to win Saudi favor, cried crocodile tears over the film and apologized to the Saudis, claiming to be "deeply offended" by the British-made film.

### **The war party**

Third, there is a party of war around Begin, Sharon, Shamir, and the present Israeli government. Since mid-February, the Israeli regime has deliberately undertaken policy moves that were calculated to disrupt the Egyptian-Israeli talks precisely because the ideologue Begin is not prepared to give up an inch of "Greater Israel."

Internationally, Begin is being propped up by a war party that includes the Jesuits, the Hapsburg-Pallavicini oligarchy in Europe, and the Brzezinski National Security Council. The strategy of this faction is to provoke an immediate confrontation in the Middle East by disrupting Egypt and spreading destabilization into the entire area. They are prepared, even, to sacrifice Sadat and Egypt in that effort.

In his interview with the Washington Post, Sadat told Katherine Graham that he is prepared to see enormous concentrations of U.S. military equipment, including squadrons of F-15 fighter-bombers, stationed in Egypt in case of a need for U.S. intervention into the Gulf. He also offered Egypt as the cornerstone of a regional military proxy for NATO, saying, "I can raise a million-soldier army. Yes, I have the potentialities. Give me the ability to reach Somalia, and to reach Oman."

But privately the Egyptians are very disturbed about the area situation. Although Sadat is still loyal to the London strategy, he is beset by serious internal problems that will not wait until 1981 or longer. By now, Egyptian intelligence is aware that the Israeli regime is preparing to destabilize Sadat, and they are deeply worried over the implications of Weizman's resignation precisely because they cannot be sure that Weizman and Co. can topple Begin. Despite his bravado, Sadat needs a Palestinian agreement and he needs financial help, and both quickly. For that reason, Egypt is at least casting sidelong glances at the European option.