

Carter, Vance 'Split' On Israel's West Bank Settlements

On his return to Israel after meeting with President Carter in Washington, Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin formally authorized a government decision to legalize three Jewish settlements in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Early reports from Washington claimed that the authorization had been based on a covert arrangement agreed to by Carter and Begin; a report from the *Daily Telegraph* of London leaked that the two leaders had arranged a "secret deal" over the West Bank.

In his July 28 Washington press conference, Carter virtually endorsed the provocative Begin move, claiming that "this was a major political issue in Israel" and that Begin, "like myself, has run on campaign commitments and I think he is trying to accommodate the interest of peace as best he can."

Preceding Carter's mouthings, the State Department July 26 condemned Begin's moves as a "violation of international law." Secretary of State Cyrus Vance moaned that he was "deeply disappointed" in the legalization of the settlements.

The seeming contradiction in these postures can be readily explained by the Carter Administration's simultaneous intent to buffer up an Israeli military threat against the neighboring Arab states while nurturing an illusion of "U.S.-Israeli confrontation" in order to provide Vance with some desperately needed bargaining chips with the Arabs when he arrives in the Middle East August 1 for a renewed round of shuttle diplomacy moves. These "pressure Israel" bargaining chips are fundamental to the Administration's strategy of blackmailing Arab leaders into abandoning the Palestine Liberation Organization in the context of U.S.-mediated Arab-Israeli negotiations.

The detailing of the Carter Administration's strategy was laid out succinctly by *Washington Post* editorialist Stephen S. Rosenfeld July 29. Rosenfeld insisted that the PLO is "being eased out of the picture by Arab states intent on reaching a settlement" and on accepting the "geographically, politically and militarily constricted 'homeland' that is on Jimmy Carter's drafting board." Claiming that the Arab states are agreeing to "reduce"

the PLO — for example, "it is no surprise to see (Jordan's King) Hussein kissing off the PLO" — Rosenfeld lied that "Moscow is going along."

The crimp in the strategy, however, is Israel's West Bank policy. Noting that for the Arabs, the PLO's "departure... will be an ordeal," Rosenfeld worries that "the danger of Begin's religious obsession is precisely that it keeps Israelis from looking objectively" at the option of destroying the PLO.

The majority view of veteran Mideast observers is that the whole "grand design" of having the Arabs "sell out" the PLO is doomed to failure since, in the words of one former Mideast diplomat, "Vance doesn't know a damned thing about the Mideast and would be better off staying home."

Similarly, a top RAND Corporation Mideast hand assessed that "I can't see the Arabs agreeing to abandon the PLO. Sadat (of Egypt) may want to, but he has emerged too weakened from this Libyan adventure to do it. And Assad (of Syria) has no intention of doing that, he needs the PLO for his own Mideast plans."

A Deal With Begin?

Begin, who prior to his Washington trip had shown signs of adopting a foreign policy independent of Washington, has recently shown signs that he is playing along with the "Destroy the PLO" brinkmanship strategy. In a New York speech July 22, Begin yelled that the PLO was Israel's most "implacable enemy since the Nazis." The PLO's aim, he insisted, was to restore the Nazi concentration camps, "Auschwitz, Buchenwald... They will never succeed in doing so."

Begin is also the first Israeli premier to loudly proclaim his government's support for Lebanon's fascist militias in southern Lebanon, under the mantle of "defending the Christian community." Ultra-nationalist Begin likened "the Christians" to "the Jews when we were in Europe — isolated and persecuted."

Such proclamations may presage the Israeli move in force into southern Lebanon — the overt blackmail side of Vance's attempts to armtwist the Arabs into deserting the PLO.