

Middle East Report by Robert Dreyfuss

Begin's re-election bid: an outrage

It's unlikely that the Labour Party will muster itself to defeat the self-righteous maniac in the prime ministry.

In an extraordinary show of theatrics, Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin smugly justified Israel's air raid on Iraq's nuclear reactor this week as "a morally supreme act of self-defense."

Begin's allusion to morality is a theme he has repeatedly utilized in his bid for victory in the June 30 elections. He has flaunted his commitment to halting Arab terrorism by conducting even more deadly terrorist assaults against the nation of Lebanon and now Iraq, with no regard for the national sovereignty of these Arab nations.

This, plus Begin's grievous condemnations of other governments as anti-Semitic and disregard for all diplomatic conventions, underscores Begin's morally corrupting influence on Israel. He has moreover undercut Israel's standing abroad and degraded international statecraft.

The morally corrupting influence of Begin is perhaps most poignantly shown in the dramatic comeback he has made over the last three months in overtaking his opponent for the premiership, Labour Party chief Shimon Peres. Each time Begin has ordered a raid against Lebanon his ratings in the polls have increased.

There are indications that Begin may have received some support from certain factions within the Reagan administration. Begin's increase in popularity in Israeli pre-electoral polls and Peres's decline

overlapped with the arrival of Secretary of State Alexander Haig to Israel in early April. As *EIR* reported, Haig gave a private go-ahead to Begin to renew Israeli attacks on Lebanon.

One week earlier National Security Adviser Richard Allen, an outspoken supporter of Israel, set a precedent as the first American government official to publicly advocate Israeli attacks on Lebanon as "hot pursuit" of terrorists.

Less than a week after Haig's departure, Israel commenced a new and bloody series of attacks; and Begin, desperate to overtake Peres in the polls, began a demagogic campaign to whip up national ferment against the Palestinians and Syrians in Lebanon. Begin pledged full military support for Israel's allies, the Lebanese Maronites, who have been battling Syrian forces in Lebanon.

At that time, *EIR* revealed that Haig and Allen were suspected of working out a dirty deal between Syria and Israel to run a controlled conflict in Lebanon leading to that country's partition. Syrian President Assad was suspected of engaging in such an arrangement, like Begin, to strengthen his power at home.

By late April, Syria and Israel were locked into a crisis which teetered on the edge of war following Israel's downing of a Syrian helicopter over Eastern Lebanon and Syria's deployment of anti-aircraft

missiles into Lebanon.

Arab sources report that in fact the presence of Syrian missiles in Lebanon did not jeopardize Israeli security since Israeli fighters could neutralize them. Nonetheless, Begin took the opportunity to intensify his demagogy by threatening war and continuing limited Israeli air raids into Lebanon. Curiously the raids skillfully avoided Syrian troop positions. Meanwhile Begin's poll ratings continued to climb, overtaking Peres.

Begin opened up a new flank in his maniacal re-election bid in early May. During a parliamentary speech, he lambasted West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt as being a Nazi. Begin's attack was stimulated by his resentment of West Germany's strong economic ties with developing Arab states.

Throughout the election campaign the prime minister has justified his aggressive military posture as aimed at preventing another Holocaust. Following the Iraqi raid, Begin delivered a melodramatic colloquy, shrieking the destruction of the reactor had delivered Israel from nuclear extermination by Iraq—despite recognition in intelligence circles that Iraq is incapable of making a bomb.

Much of Begin's rhetoric has been aimed at stirring up his supporters, the majority of whom are oriental Jews—the least-educated strata of Israeli society who swung the election for him in 1977. However, neither Peres himself nor Israel's middle class had voiced any strong opposition over recent weeks. Following the Iraqi raid, Peres finally issued an attack on Begin for using the attack for election purposes. This may have come too late to turn the tide.