

# The 'strategic consensus' attempt

*A revamped Camp David accord is intended to form an aggressively anti-Soviet bloc in the Middle East, writes Judith Wyr.*

Following the visit of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat to Washington this month, the Reagan administration's Middle East policy is settling into the impossible blueprint set down by Jimmy Carter's Camp David accords. The adoption of this step-by-step approach to the Middle East has nothing to do with negotiating peace; it is aimed at realizing Secretary of State Alexander Haig's cold-war policy of building a military "strategic consensus" in the region to confront the U.S.S.R.

The aggressiveness with which Washington is waving its confrontationist stance against the Soviets was demonstrated by the dogfight between American and Libyan fighter jets Aug. 19 over the Mediterranean in which two Libyan planes were downed. Prior to the incident, *Newsweek* magazine leaked that the Reagan administration had calculated that conducting major naval exercises in waters Libya claims to be territorial would constitute "Reagan's first direct challenge to Libyan strongman Muammar Qaddafi . . . and his allies in Moscow."

Following his meetings with Reagan, Sadat affirmed his desire to be a "protector of the Middle East" against the U.S.S.R. In an interview with the London *Sunday Times* Aug. 16, Sadat offered Egypt as "an advance launching platform from which the U.S. could deal with any troubled area . . . as the linchpin of American strategy in the Mediterranean and the Gulf."

Egypt is conducting extensive military exercises on the Libyan border simultaneous with U.S. naval exercises. Radio Moscow has responded, warning that the Egyptian military buildup on the Libyan border is threatening the Soviet ally Qaddafi, who is rumored to be planning a trip soon to confer with Kremlin leaders.

Sadat's private discussions with President Reagan are reported to have been decisive in swinging the White House behind the controversial Camp David framework. Syndicated columnists Evans and Novak on Aug. 18 reported that Sadat conferred with the President on the prospects that the Camp David signatories, Egypt and Israel, would become the key to forging a "strategic consensus" in the Middle East and that the United States was the "top card" in fostering a broader consensus with other Arab states to join the anti-Soviet axis via Camp David.

An Egyptian diplomat confirmed Aug. 18 that Sadat urged Reagan to open a dialogue with the Palestinians, beginning with prominent American-based Palestinians in order to draw them into phase two of the Camp David accords, the autonomy talks for Palestinian self-determination. But the motivation for bringing the Palestinians into the autonomy talks, which the Palestine Liberation Organization and its allies within the Palestinian community have refused to join, is chiefly aimed at Saudi Arabia and Jordan. Both countries have strongly opposed the Camp David accords on the grounds that up till now it has sidestepped the crucial Palestinian issue and has seriously divided the Arab world. But if Camp David can be shown to be a framework for beginning an unprecedented U.S.-Palestinian dialogue then Sadat and his ally, Secretary of State Haig, calculate that Saudi Arabia in particular might reverse its opposition. This, according to the Egyptian source, would open the way for integrating Saudi Arabia into the "anti-Soviet military bloc" which would extend to the Persian Gulf.

A well-informed Israeli source reports that, despite Israeli Premier Menachem Begin's ideological opposition to Israel's negotiating with the Palestinians, Begin is now prepared for such a dialogue via the autonomy talks. The source emphasized that the July 24 Lebanese ceasefire set a precedent for Israeli-PLO negotiations "though indirect." He stressed that "now Begin can do the same thing on the West Bank. . . . The idea is to have the mayors and the other pro-PLO officials there join in the talks with the blessing of the PLO, and in which the PLO and the Saudis behind them will watch over the agreements reached, but not participate directly."

Last week, Israeli Defense Minister General Ariel Sharon suddenly softened Israel's repressive policies toward West Bank Arabs, a policy Sharon himself has been architect of since Begin came to power in 1977.

## The Lebanese powderkeg

But bringing both the Palestinians and the Saudis into the hated Camp David negotiations will not be a smooth process, and both Arab and Israeli sources expect a new series of explosions in both the West Bank and Lebanon. Just last week, Saudi Crown Prince Fahd

issued a call for scrapping Camp David in favor of an overall peace dialogue between the Arab frontline states and Israel.

The announcement by Haig this week that he will release three shipments of embargoed F-15s and F-16s to Israel is a boon to Begin to renew his blitzkrieg into Lebanon, which last month left over 500 civilians dead following air raids against Beirut, forcing Reagan to embargo shipment of the jets.

Less than 24 hours before the Haig announcement, Begin issued a scathing denunciation of Washington for withholding the jets. In the same speech Begin warned that he was prepared to renew attacks on "terrorists" in Lebanon. Last week, Israel conducted Air Force exercises in northern Israel near the Lebanese border. At the same time, Israel deployed two brigades into southern Lebanon in preparation for a new military offensive.

A crucial motivation for rekindling the Lebanon powderkeg is to blackmail Saudi Arabia into the Israel-Egypt alliance. An aide to Rep. Millicent Fenwick (R-N.J.), in a discussion of a recent meeting with Begin, stressed, "The key focus from here on will be to get the Saudis into our framework for future talks. The Saudis made a great contribution in working out the July 24 ceasefire in Lebanon, and we think Lebanon is the vehicle for breaking down the Saudis' resistance to Camp David and getting them into talks with Israel."

Begin, this week, sent a message to Haig, urging him to deploy special envoy to Lebanon Philip Habib to the Middle East to resume "peacekeeping efforts" for Lebanon. A protégé of Henry Kissinger, the instigator of the Lebanese civil war in 1976, Habib is working closely with Haig and is known to have convinced the Saudis to cooperate with the United States in the crisis management of the Lebanon situation.

According to a Washington journalist, Haig's press conference stunned both press and diplomatic communities. Despite repeated queries, he refused to give any indication that the United States would press Israel to adhere to the unilateral terms of all U.S. arms sales to Israel as established by the 1952 Military Arms Assistance Act. This law stipulates that Israel can only use U.S.-made arms for defensive purposes, and any offensive use must be cleared with Washington in advance.

The extremist Qaddafi is himself giving Begin a pretext for renewed military action against Lebanon. Last week, Libya finalized an agreement in principle with Lebanon to install a \$2 billion anti-aircraft missile system in Lebanon. Israel's bloody surge into Lebanon last month was justified by Israel's claims that Libya was arming and supplying fighters for Palestinians in Lebanon.

An Israeli source predicts that Begin is now prepared to bomb Syrian anti-aircraft missile installations in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley that were emplaced in May. This, says the source, is part of Israel's "increasing military

pressure on Syria," which earlier this year, had signed a military treaty with Moscow.

## Bringing the region under NATO

As *EIR* stated during the signing of the Camp David accord, its principal function was not to bring peace to but to pave the way for extending NATO into the Middle East. Such a scheme, particularly in light of current ice cold U.S.-Soviet relations significantly ups the prospects for a global crisis in the Middle East.

It is no secret in Washington that the White House links the release of the Israeli fighter jets with the upcoming proposal to the Congress to approve the sale of AWACS radar planes and other arms to Saudi Arabia, and has already informed Begin that Israel should soften its opposition to the sale.

But a congressional aide revealed that "there is no question but what the sale will be approved by the Congress despite the strong pro-Israel sentiment." She stressed the issue is what the "terms" of the sale will be, which are being hammered out in a compromise between the White House and pro-Israel senators like Henry Jackson. She predicts that the U.S. military will have total control over the AWACS movement and the intelligence they gather. Jackson is known to be demanding that the intelligence of the AWACS be turned over to Israel!

Hence the terms of the AWACS sale are being crafted to ally Saudi Arabia both with NATO via the United States and with Israel and Egypt. Recently when Sadat flew to Sudan to meet Sudanese President Numeiry, AWACS already stationed in Saudi Arabia—which are operated by the American military—were used to survey the airspace of Sadat's flight pattern.

The White House is now "floating" a plan for Lebanon through diplomatic channels to expand the United Nations peacekeeping forces (UNIFIL) in southern Lebanon from the current 6,000 level to 14,000. Begin strongly advocates such a plan.

The Camp David accords' major achievement is the placement of a similar multinational force, half of it American, in the Sinai following the Israeli withdrawal next year.

According to a U.N. source, the expansion of UNIFIL in Lebanon will be vetoed by the Soviets at the U.N. Security Council. But an Israeli source close to Begin's government insists that Begin is determined to "neutralize" southern Lebanon by expanding. "Begin sees the terrorists in Lebanon as Soviet-backed and I can guarantee you that he won't stop until they are out of the way."

Begin may well be preparing to extend his blitzkrieg beyond Lebanon directly into Syria. A Middle East diplomat warned that if the Soviet Union opposes the strategic consensus by pushing its allies in the Middle East like Syria "too far, Israel would just bomb Syria."