

Middle East Report by Robert Dreyfuss

Will Begin doublecross Sadat?

The Israeli chief of staff's blast at Sadat may signal a pending break between the Camp David treaty partners.

A falling out between Israel and Egypt broke into the headlines in mid-September in what is perhaps the most serious diplomatic spat between the two since the Camp David treaty was signed.

The incident was triggered by a statement from Israeli Chief of Staff Gen. Rafael Eytan, concerning Sadat's Sept. 9 crackdown on his opposition. Eytan warned that "if Sadat goes," the Camp David agreement will collapse. The statement was characterized by Egyptian officials as meddling in Egypt's internal affairs.

The Egyptian government immediately requested an official explanation from Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, and harshly referred to Eytan's statement as "slanderous and harmful to the peace process."

The statement from Eytan reflects the emerging stance of both Begin and his hard-line defense minister, Ariel Sharon, who are known to be considering sacking the Camp David Treaty and refusing to return the remainder of the occupied Sinai territory to Egypt by April 1982. Since Sadat has come under fire from his opposition for signing the treaty, should Begin back out of the agreement this would seriously undercut Sadat. Fragments of Sadat's opposition are known to be mobilizing outside Egypt, with activity centered in London.

Begin's moves pivot around his

open effort to forge a formal U.S.-Israel military pact to dominate the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean. The prime minister pushed very hard for such an agreement during his talks last week with President Ronald Reagan. Begin aims to make Israel the sole Middle East player in Secretary of State Haig's cold war "strategic consensus"—though certain circles in Washington are not happy with Haig's overly cooperative approach to Begin.

Begin's emerging "Israel first" policy stance aims to undercut traditional U.S. relations with its two strongest Arab allies, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, a move which would destabilize both regimes. The Begin outlook was reflected in this month's *Commentary* magazine, the organ of the American Jewish Committee. Professor Robert W. Tucker, who was the first American strategist to advocate a NATO seizure of the Arab oilfields of the Persian Gulf, attacks Reagan in an article entitled "The Middle East: Carterism without Carter" for reneging on his 1980 campaign promise to make Israel the prime U.S. Middle East ally. Tucker then harshly attacks Sadat for refusing to give American troops base rights in Egypt.

But as one Egypt watcher commented, "Egypt has historically fought foreign military occupation, and to this day Sadat and Egypt's generals are very sensitive to grant-

ing American troops such a status."

It is significant in this light that it was Egyptian Defense Minister Gen. Abdul Halim Abu Ghazala, who personally rebuffed Eytan. In a Sept. 12 press statement, General Abu Ghazala chastized Eytan for his "irresponsible" statement and summoned Israeli Ambassador to Cairo Moshe Sasson to voice his displeasure. That same day he and Egyptian Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Adelrab el-Nabi Hafez announced that they were indefinitely postponing a late September trip to Israel in protest to Eytan's remarks.

"We need to have equipment in order to be able to deter and defend. The people around us have to see a strong Egypt, and a strong Saudi Arabia, and we must bring our two countries together again," said Abu Ghazala, in a candid interview with the U.S. *Armed Forces Journal* this month. "It could be a good axis for the West, and a stable power that could face any danger from the outside. Some people say, why don't we include Israel in this formula? I don't believe that this is the time to do this because of the Palestinian problem. If we solve the Palestinian problem, and if we find a just solution for the Palestinians, we could discuss this in the future, but now it is impossible."

The strongest motivation for Begin to renounce Camp David rests with his fears that the moment Sadat secures the Sinai he will renew ties with Egypt's Arab neighbors, particularly, Saudi Arabia, Egypt's best Arab friend until Sadat signed Camp David, which Riyadh denounced. A Saudi-Egyptian axis particularly with U.S. support, could become a formidable future military and diplomatic rival to Israel.