

Middle East Report by Robert Dreyfuss

The French Connection

Israel's new-found friendship with France is not auspicious for peace efforts in the region.

The visit to Israel by French Foreign Minister Claude Cheysson in early December has marked an ominous shift in Middle East politics. Not only does the sudden rapprochement between Israel and France, after almost a decade of tension, give the Begin regime virtual free rein to carry out its long-threatened military strike into Lebanon; it also signals the public inauguration of a joint Israeli-French operation to disrupt Africa and destabilize Saudi Arabia.

Cheysson's trip—billed by both Israel and France as a diplomatic breakthrough—is the first in a series of trips by French officials to Israel. Early next year, French President François Mitterrand is slated to visit Israel. He will be followed soon thereafter by Defense Minister Charles Hernu.

The driving force behind the French government's courting of Israel is not Mitterrand per se, but those who control him, the Perminindex dirty money and assassination network tied into the Schlumberger interests that brought Mitterrand and the French Socialists to power in the first place. Cheysson's trip has served to strengthen and cement the ties of the supranational Perminindex networks in France to those in Israel, represented by the Begin-Sharon-Shamir axis in the current government.

Upon leaving Israel Dec. 8, Cheysson ingratiated himself completely with the Israelis by endorsing the Camp David peace process

and describing as "absurd" European efforts to supplant Camp David with the Venice declaration or other proposals.

"It is not our business to present proposals and plans and not the business of Europe either," said Cheysson. As long as Mitterrand remains in power in France, Cheysson continued, there will be "no French, no European initiative." The Middle East problem is to be solved by the states in the region, not outsiders, he stressed.

Israeli Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir embraced Cheysson's overtures, saying that the French Foreign Minister's visit heralded a "new era of relations between Israel and France" and marked an "end to European initiatives in the area."

Cheysson's attacks on the European peace efforts do not constitute an abandonment of a "third way" alternative to "superpower domination" of the region that the Europeans, under British tutelage, have been pursuing. Nor do they constitute a joining of hands with the United States in the name of Camp David. According to one Washington intelligence analyst, France will keep its distance from the United States, as well as from the British, as it pursues "a separate but parallel policy course modulated to both the Arabs and Israelis."

Cheysson's placement of the burden of proof on Israel and the Arabs themselves for a Middle East peace, combined with France's decision to lift its years-long arms

embargo to Israel, has strengthened the Begin government immeasurably, intelligence sources report, and gives Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon a carte blanche to follow through on his threats to launch a full-scale invasion of Lebanon.

With the collapse of negotiating efforts by U.S. special envoy to the Middle East Philip Habib, the probability of a Lebanese blow-up is great. Shamir has announced that Israel is "losing patience" in Lebanon, while Sharon declared he will not "tolerate a war of attrition" with the Palestinians in Lebanon.

According to one top-level Europe-based Israeli intelligence source, Sharon does not intend to deal with the Palestinians with mere retaliatory shelling but will opt instead for "drastic action." "The deal with France has given Israel the international legitimacy, support, and confidence necessary for such action," the source added.

The likelihood of an outbreak of hostilities increases with continued deterioration of the situation inside Lebanon. Car bombings, assassinations, and internecine warfare are once again daily events.

The strengthening of the French-Israeli connection has dire implications for Africa and Saudi Arabia. According to the West German press, the Cheysson visit to Israel will assist the Begin government in establishing wider contacts with the French-speaking African countries. Sharon recently made a secret visit to Africa, focusing on the former French colonies. One of the first fruits of Israel's Africa offensive has been Zaire President Mobutu's recent statement in Washington that he was open to renewing relations with Israel.