

A test for Mid-east diplomacy

Carter will use Begin talk-in to point out some political realities

By Mark A Bruzonsky

ISRAEL'S Prime Minister, Menachem Begin, is expected to arrive in Washington on Tuesday.

Since mid-June, President Jimmy Carter has been attempting to prepare a receptive, even a cordial, atmosphere. For the discussions that take place during Begin's visit could determine much that will follow for the rest of this year in Mid-east diplomacy.

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Lastly, Carter's greatest difficulty will be in convincing Begin that the U.S. has the leverage over Israel, as well as the self-interest and determination, to pursue this path even though there could be serious domestic political repercussions.

A number of developments since the Israeli election have set the stage for this Carter-Begin tete-a-tete.

Early in June, Shmel Katz went to the U.S. Personal envoy of the expected prime minister was his calling-card upon arrival. Within a short time he was forced to register as a foreign agent, much to the displeasure of the Israeli embassy, which protested against the decision — one attributed to National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski.

January 1976, he said: "I think eventually the Palestinian people have to be recognised — their legitimate need, ultimately recognised as a nation with territory assigned to them on the East Bank or the West Bank.

Vice-President Mondale delivered the Administration's most important statement on Mid-east policy before the World Affairs Council of Northern California on June 17.

For a speech designed to be reassuring to American Jewry and the Israeli public, it was something of a failure. Among the most receptive comments from this target group was: "There's little new here, little we haven't heard before." The Jewish lobby's weekly newsletter termed the speech "disappoint-



The West Bank as Begin sees it

"Or can a process of reconciliation be started — a process in which peace protects Israel's security, a peace in which the urge for revenge and recrimination is replaced by mutual recognition and respect?" The U.S. answer is clear. Unfortunately, Begin's may be as well.

Bewilderment

After a few days of dazed bewilderment following the May 17 election, Israel's foreign service has begun a campaign to discredit and maybe even isolate Carter.

United Nations Resolution 242 is the heart of the effort. Israel is insisting that only this resolution — and not others which Carter erroneously referred to

Begin will attempt to convince the President of the errors in his ways.

"Of course the U.S. takes its own decisions," Begin recently conceded, "but from time to time we have to point out that they may be corrected and revised."

The U.S. and Israel "have a community of interest" in a tough policy. This is especially so since Israel is "the central factor preventing Communism from taking over" in the area. Begin told an American television audience just five days after his election upset.

And though there has been some backing away from such bluntness since then — under a barrage of desperate advice from American Jewish leaders and Congressional supporters — Begin has not really altered his basic beliefs and policies.

Carter will use all the charm and persuasion, which are his greatest assets, in trying to convince Begin of certain "political realities." He has set the stage for this effort by consciously sweetening the somewhat bitter atmosphere which was the immediate reaction to the Likud's coup d'état.

First among these "political realities" is the firm U.S. belief that the Arabs are prepared to talk peace with Israel.

Second, Carter will insist that the only realistic approach must be one whereby Israel is prepared to withdraw to approximately the 1967 borders, though special security arrangements beyond those borders can be arranged.

Third, Carter will elaborate on his advocacy of a "Palestinian homeland" which he expects to be founded in the occupied areas of the West Bank and Gaza Strip — the very territories Begin's party is committed to annexing but lacks both the domestic political power and the sheer political guts to accomplish.

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Katz, one of the ideological giants in the expansionist "Land of Israel Movement," and like Begin, a member of the high command of the underground Irgun during pre-state days, served primarily as an emissary to the anxious and bewildered American Jewish community. But he had a second function as well, which explains the emphasis put on meeting Brzezinski — preparing the way for Begin.

The importance of the Katz mission is at least three-fold. First, he represents the most uncompromising and doctrinaire spectrum of Israeli thinking. For him, retention of the West Bank is a must and recognition of any Palestinian national rights impossible.

Prophetic vision

Second, Katz clearly manifested what can be expected from Begin — a somewhat begrudging ambiguity and reasonableness in public forums; bluntness and a form of Jewish evangelical fanaticism when among Israel's supporters.

Third, the Carter Administration's coolness to Katz and the unprecedented requirement that he registers with the Justice Department may be signs of White House determination to carry on with what has been begun.

Twice during his election campaign, Carter spoke of Palestinian national rights. First at a November, 1975 conference where he stated: "I think one of the integral parts of an ultimate settlement has to be the recognition of the Palestinians as a people, as a nation, with a place to live and a right to choose their own leaders."

Speaking to a group of 75 Jewish leaders in

from this target group was: "There's little new here, little we haven't heard before." The Jewish lobby's weekly newsletter termed the speech "disappointing" and said it "further undermined Israel's negotiating position."

And yet it was an excellent speech carefully worked over by the White House, the National Security Council and the State Department. With his long-time record of concern for Israel, Mondale was given the job of dishing up the truth in the most generous manner possible. The gestures to Israel were considerable, especially the pledge that "we do not intend to use our military aid as pressure on Israel."

What caused the negative reactions among many of Israel's American troops were the specifics Mondale wisely included — return to approximately the borders that existed prior to the war of 1967, a Palestinian homeland or entity, and the express need for the U.S. to outline a framework for an enduring peace.

This framework, Mondale noted, will serve "as the basis for a phased negotiation and implementation of specific steps toward peace."

Mondale's oration was the December 1975 Brookings Institution report on the Mid-east dressed up to express the Carter Administration's vision; not a plan, but definitely at least an outline — one Begin has pledged "may be corrected or revised" after he informs Carter about the realities of the Mid-east from Likud's perspective.

One paragraph in the speech contained a question — one which will surely be directed to Begin often during his stay in Washington: "What of the future? Is it a future in which Israel's three million people try by force of arms alone to hold out against the hostility and growing power of the Arab world?"

effort. Israel is insisting that only this resolution — and not others which Carter erroneously referred to in May — can serve as the basis for potential negotiations (along with Resolution 338 passed during the 1973 war and which refers to 242).

On June 10 the Israeli embassy in Washington released a "policy background" paper titled "UN Security Council Resolution No. 242: Common Denominator in the Search for Middle East Peace."

On the cover appears the following quotation from President Johnson (September 10, 1968): "We are not the ones to say where other nation should draw lines between them that will assure each the greatest security. It is clear, however, that a return to the situation of June 4, 1967, will not bring peace. There must be secure and there must be recognised borders. Some such lines must be agreed to by the neighbours involved."

As for the Palestinian problem, all the paper has to say is "The resolution refers simply to 'refugees' — in cognizance of the existence of both an Arab refugee problem as well as Jewish refugees from Arab lands."

For Jimmy Carter, now "may be the most propitious time for a genuine settlement since the beginning of the Arab-Israeli conflict almost 30 years ago. To let this opportunity pass could mean disaster not only for the Mid-east, but perhaps for the international political and economic order as well."

For Menachem Begin, Carter's approach "means the revival of the Rogers Plan." Quoting former Prime Minister, Golda Meir, Begin has emphasised: "If any government of Israel ever accepted that plan, the Rogers Plan, it would commit treason."

The disaster, in Begin's view, would be to let Carter's Washington determine Jerusalem's policies.

"It is only realistic to expect that Begin will be less flexible and forthright than past Israeli governments, if not absolutely unyielding," the generally pro-Israeli *New Republic* editorialised in late May. "The elevation of Begin to national leadership severely cripples Israel's position in any political test. His position on the West Bank is simply unreasonable."

The editors went on to note that Israel is now in the "shaky position of condemning Arab terrorism while designating an extremist as its national leader."

Simmering

Yet such an attitude by a Left-leaning, intellectual journal — no matter how pro-Israel — will carry little weight with Begin and Likud. Anyone who has read Begin's *The Revolt* or his heir apparent, Ezer Weizman's *On Eagles' Wings* knows that these men are fighters and gamblers. No matter what they now say publicly, Weizman's comments just days before the election will determine their real attitudes.

"The country is simmering with anger against Carter," Weizman, nephew of Israel's first President, Chaim Weizman, told an American newsweekly. "It's too bad that he has to start in office by running head-on into a fight with us."

American-Israeli feuding is definitely ahead — what will be the exact nature of the battles and what strategies and "weapons" will be used are the remaining questions. As the *New Republic* summed things up, "We cannot rule out a monumental political crisis between Israel and the Carter Administration, and between the administration and Israel's friends in Congress, with Americans forced to choose up sides in a bitter fight."