

J.S. Spending Huge Sum for Peace Pact, But Mideast War Would Cost Much More

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Substantial American money, considerable long-term diplomatic efforts, plus possible U.S. military and security arrangements were all pledged by President Carter as an integral part of the bilateral Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty that may be signed before the end of this month.

While details are not yet known, ballpark monetary figures and the general form of the diplomatic and security undertakings are being discussed between the White House and Capitol Hill. The details are still being worked out between the administration and the Begin and Sadat governments.

Last Wednesday, in a briefing with congressional leaders, President Carter reviewed his commitments to a program of financial aid amounting to about \$5 billion for the next three years, with the money to be shared by the two countries. There had been speculation the figure might be much higher, closer to \$10 billion.

But, of course, even this \$5 billion figure is on top of the nearly \$3 billion which the U.S. now provides annually to the two countries for military and economic assistance. Israel now receives about \$1.8 billion, with three-fifths going for military purposes. Egypt receives somewhat less than \$1 billion in economic assistance.

Congressional reaction, at this time of euphoria throughout official Washington, seems to assure that Capitol Hill will fully endorse the president this time around.

"If this is a fair estimate of the cost, it's a real bargain," Senate Minority Leader Howard Baker, R-Tenn., noted upon leaving Wednesday's meeting with the president.

And on the House side, Rep. Stephen Solarz of New York appeared to reflect general sentiment in saying, "The cost of preventing war is much less than the cost of paying for a war. I think this

is a good buy, a good bargain for the U.S. and that trouble-filled part of the world."

The extra \$5 billion, from preliminary indications, will probably be distributed in this way:

- \$2 billion to finance Israeli military withdrawal from the Sinai and for creation of a substantial Israeli military machine in the Israeli Negev which borders Egypt. This aid will probably come as part loan and part grant.

- \$2 billion in military assistance for Egypt, probably in the form of grants.

- \$1 billion in additional economic assistance to be divided between the two countries.

Middle East analysts here are somewhat surprised by the small amount of additional economic assistance being discussed for Egypt. Sadat has many times in recent months insisted that his country desperately needs a "Carter plan" involving \$15 billion over the next five years. "We may not as yet fully know what understandings exist between Carter and Sadat," one close observer of Egyptian-American relations suggests.

Another Middle East expert points out, though, that Egypt's economy has a limited capacity to absorb American economic aid, aid which comes in the form of support for specific projects rather than cash which could be used as part of Egypt's overall national budget.

Saudi Arabian aid to Egypt, though, which is estimated at \$2 billion a year, does come in the form of general budgetary support. Should the Saudis cut off, decrease or delay this aid, the U.S. may well find itself having to pick up this tab as well.

Though the Saudis are committed by last October's Baghdad Summit Conference to terminating their support to Egypt if Sadat signs this treaty with Israel, past Saudi government actions suggest they may be more cautious. Former Kissinger aide, and

more recently deputy assistant secretary of defense, Leslie Janka, concludes: "I doubt the Saudis will risk any action which threatens Sadat's continuance as Egypt's leader."

But Ambassador L. Dean Brown, president of Washington's prestigious Middle East Institute, is far more concerned about Egypt's possible isolation from the other moderate Arab states.

"If Sadat signs the agreement and there is nothing further on the second framework — and all of Israel's statements imply that even if there is an autonomous West Bank, it won't consist of much in the way of autonomy — even the Saudis will carry out what was agreed in Baghdad, the cutting off of all economic assistance to Egypt."

"If Sadat is cut off from other sources," Brown warns, the U.S. might have to provide "some \$15 billion to \$25 billion to Egypt during the next five years." Besides his own diplomatic experience, Brown is in an excellent position to make this assessment — his brother Don Brown heads the U.S. Agency for International Development offices in Cairo.

Beyond money, Carter has committed the U.S. to take a direct role in all further efforts to mold a comprehensive peace between Israel and the Arabs. From Egypt's perspective, this is a crucial American undertaking.

"The difficulties which we have to overcome now are greater than the difficulties we have overcome in the last 18 months," acting foreign minister Butros Ghali stated during the week. "We are just at the beginning of a long process."

This pledge of American diplomatic efforts may prove a burden on the time, capacity and patience of the White House and key State Department personnel for many years to come.

Finally, the U.S. is currently involved in serious discussions concerning military security in the Middle East

region. Both defense ministers Ezer Weizman and Kamal Hasenan Ali are in Washington this weekend continuing the talks opened by Secretary of Defense Harold Brown when he toured the region last month and continued by President Carter last week.

Though the White House has given public assurances that no U.S. forces are to be sent to the Middle East and that no mutual defense pacts are being proposed, other, looser, security arrangements may result. For instance, written assurances are being prepared for submission to Israel concerning American commitments to Israel's security as well as a 10 to 15-year American guarantee to supply Israel with oil should her own sources dry up for political reasons.

An important part of this commitment of oil obliges the U.S. to provide a supply from its own sources should Egypt not sell a sufficient amount to Israel from the wells it is recovering in Sinai. This issue was reportedly one of the last hurdles to reaching the treaty.

At the moment, it appears that more elaborate U.S. military undertakings are not taking place, though they have been discussed. A Soviet television commentator this week bluntly stated that the U.S. is getting "naval bases in Alex-

andria (Egypt) and Haifa (Israel), and air bases in Sinai and thus digs in after the failure of its policy in Iran."

It is known that the Begin government has suggested Washington that American Air Force units be stationed at two of the Sinai bases from which the Israeli Army is withdrawing, but so far at least, Egypt and maybe the U.S. have opposed this idea.

It would be premature to make any firm judgment about the impending Egyptian-Israeli treaty will ultimately cost the United States. In the words of caution offered by Leslie Janka are worth consideration:

"The high cost of the first treaty runs the risk of ultimately disillusioning the American people, in that the modest first step comes dearly. We may find ourselves committed to billions at each step along the way, and the process seems open-ended. The potential pitfalls and estimates, all of which may cost extra American billions to solve, are likely to exceed the willingness of the American people to go on paying."