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Arab Americans slam U.S. Mid-east policies

By Mark Bruzonsky

IN AN unusually critical and tough statement, the National Association of Arab Americans (NAAA) has issued a statement in Washington denouncing the Egyptian-Israeli treaty and the new course of American Mid-east diplomacy.

The statement was of particular importance since in the past NAAA has supported Carter administration Mid-east diplomacy. Even after the Camp David accords, NAAA refused to take a bluntly negative attitude.

NAAA's statement indicates "profound misgivings" about the separate peace treaty and the Carter administration's ability to pursue a more comprehensive settlement.

"American diplomatic efforts in the Mid-east should be judged by whether they advance peace and ... support the American national interests in the region," the statement argued. But this treaty, it added, "may impede, rather than enhance" both goals.

"Regional stability, access to oil, resolution of the Palestinian problem, and reduced Soviet opportunities are all legitimate American interests in the Mid-east, not one of which is likely to be served by the bilateral treaty," the statement continues. It then goes on to list five considerations "likely to outweigh President Carter's professed commitment to a comprehensive Mid-east peace." These considerations are:

- "The administration has retreated to 'step by step' diplomacy as the result of Israeli intransigence and pressure from the pro-Israel lobby in America.

- "Israel's determination to keep the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip and to deny Palestinian political aspirations remains unchanged and will be eased by

additional arms transfers from the U.S. and neutralization of Egypt.

- "American obsession with the Camp David formula marks any country that dissents from it as an opponent of peace. America's traditional friends in the Arab world, Jordan and Saudi Arabia in particular, find themselves castigated by the administration because of their reservations about Camp David.

- "President Carter has exhausted his and the nation's reserves in achieving the first and presumably easiest stage of Mid-east peace. A comprehensive peace will require a confrontation with Israel over withdrawal and Palestinian self-determination which Carter will not be likely to undertake for fear of alienating traditionally Democratic Jewish voters/contributors on the eve of the 1980 election campaign.

- "Anger and frustration in the Arab world are likely to result in destabilisation and increase the possibility of war, with incalculable costs for the U.S."

Releasing NAAA's statement, President Hisham Sharabi pointed out: "Prime Minister Menachem Begin has been candid in telling the world that Israel is determined to tighten its grip on occupied Arab Jerusalem and the West Bank/Gaza Strip, plus blocking for all time the achievement of Palestinian self-determination."

The NAAA statement concluded that "it is not too late for the U.S. to salvage the situation in the Mid-east, but it will require the following two conditions as a bare minimum:

- "Explicit American commitment to securing Israeli withdrawal from the occupied West Bank/Gaza Strip and Arab Jerusalem.

- "Endorsement of the right of Palestinian self-determination and the right to choose their own representatives."