

Israel puts mounting strain on 'U.S. special relationship'

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IT IS becoming evident in Washington that American-Israeli relations are not simply at a periodic low point.

There is actually a simmering crisis which may foreshadow a basic rethinking of the "special relationship" — the term which has characterised the unique 30-year friendship between the U.S. and the Jewish state.

President Carter's refusal to co-ordinate policy with Israel over the recent Security Council vote to establish the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (Unifil) may become the rule rather than the exception. "The U.S. used to be our protection from the UN," an Israeli foreign ministry official harshly complained a few days ago.

The package arms sale proposal now before the Congress also represents an unprecedented departure from past practice.

Israel is more incensed that her arms supply is being linked to weapons for Egypt and Saudi Arabia than that the U.S. is considering supplying weapons to these other countries.

Consequently that looming arms package battle on Capitol Hill actually represents a fight by the White House to free itself from the former practice of co-ordinating policies with Israel.

The head of the "Jewish lobby"

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in Washington

visited the White House on Tuesday and asked President Carter's chief Congressional liaison, Frank Moore, to delay formal announcement of the sale. The White House put its foot down firmly and loudly.

In fact, in a move specially designed to demonstrate this newly sought freedom, President Carter invited members of the Senate, and separately members of the House, to go to the White House, while Prime Minister Menachem Begin was still in town, to be told how imperative the arms package is.

Freedom

In one of Begin's earlier visits to Washington he openly indicated that his Likud government felt that important differences of principle and policy between Jerusalem and Washington sometimes could not be overlooked or hidden.

He was severely criticised by Labour Party leaders who had premised their entire political strategy on the necessity of U.S.-Israel co-ordination. Labour was prepared for hard back-room bargaining but always attempted to

camouflage differences in public and usually yielded whenever schisms threatened.

Rather than yielding, Begin's basic approach appears to be confrontation.

He forced Carter to back down last October when he reversed, within hours, the stated policies and political thrust incorporated into the U.S.-Soviet joint statement. Now Begin has attempted to head off a confrontation with the president something administration spokesmen were all but openly predicting before the recent commando incidents precipitated changes in the actual situation in the Mid-east — through Begin's invasion of southern Lebanon.

By tampering with American domestic politics in creating hostility towards the White House among the Jewish community, Begin hoped to create a less favourable climate for Carter during the week of crucial talks.

Disgust

Meanwhile, the effort by pro-Israeli forces to cripple, humble and frighten the administration has been stepped up. So far, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Carter's

National Security Chief and Mid-east policy architect, has become the primary target.

The president himself is only being indirectly rebuffed, although he has been put on notice.

For instance, in preparation for his latest visit to Carter, Begin manipulated Rabbi Alexander Schindler, one of American Jewry's best known spokesmen, into a public squabble with Brzezinski.

"So far the anger is not at Carter," Rabbi Schindler told the *New York Times* in a call he himself initiated. But, he added: "There's a big question mark on Carter."

This week the pro-Israeli weekly *The New Republic* lashed out: "Brzezinski has been consistently wrong — too dense to understand the requirements for security and peace of Israelis and moderate Arabs alike, out of sync with the views of the American people and our representative institutions."

But a gesture of Carter's after his first few hours of meetings with Begin may have told more the all the Press releases and spokesmen's comments. Walking back into the White House after escorting Begin to his car, the president paused to grab something from a shrub. He then hurled it to the ground in a seeming expression of disgust.

