

# Carter and Begin: Down to business

By Mark A. Bruzonsky  
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When President Carter and Prime Minister Menahem Begin meet in Washington on Tuesday, they will begin the most crucial consultations between the United States and Israel in memory.

While attempting to prepare a receptive, even a cordial, atmosphere, Carter has been careful to insist on his three-part outline for a Mideast settlement:

- Withdrawal by Israel to approximately the 1967 borders.
- Creation of a Palestinian "homeland."
- Steps by the Arabs towards normalized relations between Israel and her Arab neighbors.

Begin is sure to attempt to convince the President of the errors of his ways.

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

Though there has been some backing away from such aggressive bluntness — under a barrage of desperate advice from American Jewish leaders and congressional supporters — Begin has not really altered his basic beliefs or policies. Nor has he backed off from his promise to "undertake a great public opinion" campaign in an effort to play politics in Jimmy Carter's own backyard.

Carter's charm and persuasiveness, his greatest fortes, will be called upon in his attempt to convince Begin of certain "political realities." Setting the stage for this effort, the President has consciously sweetened the rather bitter atmosphere which was Washington's immediate reaction to the democratic coup d'etat of Begin's Likud Party. A

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warm congratulatory message from Carter greeted Begin the day of his oath-taking. Further, Carter has just recommended to Congress an additional \$115 million sale of sophisticated arms.

Yet Carter chose to begin these crucial negotiations with Israel's new right-wing government with tough, public challenges to Begin's policies. He appointed Vice President Walter Mondale to outline, in some detail, the Administration's peace package. And he ordered the State Department to release a carefully worded and blunt statement insisting "that progress toward a negotiated peace in the Middle East is essential this year if future disaster is to be avoided."

This statement, which infuriated the Israelis, left no doubt that such progress is only feasible if Israel is prepared to negotiate the return of *all* occupied territories — especially the West Bank which Begin and his Likud associates have pledged never to yield to Arab control. Then, Carter, outlining at his June 30 press conference that there would be no further commenting on Mideast matters until after the Begin visit, quickly returned to the fostering of a receptive atmosphere.

He met with 53 Jewish leaders at the White House on July 6 and repeatedly reassured them of his deep commitment to Israel's welfare and his demands for full and unconditional peace from the Arabs.

First among the "political realities" the President will express to Begin is the American government's belief that Arab leaders are finally prepared, after three decades of hostilities, to talk peace with the Jewish state.

Second, Carter will insist that Israel must be prepared to withdraw her sovereignty frontiers essentially to the 1967 lines, though special security arrangements in areas now occupied by Israel can be arranged. In short, Carter

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will be sensitive to Israeli security worries, but not to Biblical claims — his own religious bent notwithstanding.

Third, Carter will elaborate on his advocacy of a "Palestinian homeland" — an entity whose political status remains at issue but whose location Carter expects to be the currently occupied ("liberated") in Begin terminology) areas of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Last, Carter's greatest difficulty will be in convincing Begin that the United States has the leverage over Israel, as well as the determination, to pursue this course even though it may foster rather serious domestic political repercussions with both Congress and the American Jewish community.

Jacob Javits's stinging criticism of the Senate floor on June 27 was definitely meant as a warning. Sen. Cranston's endorsement of only right fellow senators willing to give Carter qualified support can hardly be reassuring.

Jewish leaders, meanwhile, have already begun mobilizing for a campaign to reverse or to block the Administration's efforts. In many ways, the present situation can be compared to that of 1968-1970 when the outline for a settlement known as the "Rogers plan," in honor of Secretary of State William Rogers, was short-circuited, partly through the mobilization of public opinion against it.

And so the Begin-Carter discussions will be a *homer* confrontation. Of course, though, what takes place privately behind closed doors at the White House will surely not be reflected in the cordiality of the public theater.

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

Early in June, Shmuel (Shmuel in Hebrew) Katz came to the United States. Personal envoy of the expected prime minister was his colleague upon arrival. Within a short time Katz was forced to register as a foreign agent, much to the displeasure of the Israeli Embassy which protested this action — one attributed mainly to National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski. Brzezinski, in fact, is the increasingly visible "bad guy" as far as Israel's supporters are concerned.

Katz is one of the ideological giants in the expansionist "Land of Israel Movement" which is closely associated with religious-nationalist Gush Emunim, prominent for its settlement activities on the West Bank. Like Begin, Katz was a member of the high command of the underground Irgun during pre-state days. His American support was primarily as envoy to the anxious and bewildered American Jewish community. But he had a second function as well — 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 next to impossible. On June 22, a few days before returning to Israel, Katz told a Jewish audience in New York: "For us, the West Bank is not an occupied territory. For us it is a liberated land, and part and parcel with the rest of the country."

The ultimate outcome of our battle (with the US) will depend on the extent to which American Jewry will mobilize public opinion on behalf of Israel," Katz added. In effect, the United States has been put on notice that 18 years of political exchange



Illustration by David Sussman

# Can an Israeli hawk find comfort in the nest of an American eagle?

with the Labor party are now history — it's a new ball game, a "battle."

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

A Jerusalem Post correspondent, describing a meeting Katz held with Israeli journalists in Washington, gave this description of his behavior: "On several occasions he lost his cool. He would jump up from his seat, literally shouting that the Likud approach was without doubt the best from the standpoint of Israel's long-term security interests. Introspective of the damage it might do for Israel in US public opinion."

That this man should be slated to become head of Israel's overseas information programs must be considered further, fair notice of Begin's intent to intensely challenge Carter Administration policies — ruthlessly if necessary.

Katz practically gave Carter an explicit warning when he told a convention of Orthodox Jews: "We are confident that the Jewish community in America will stand out courageously and challenge its government if it becomes necessary."

Third, the column shows Katz by members of Carter's Modest team and the unprecedented requirement that he register with the Justice Department may be signs of White House determination to carry on with its Modest scenario. Brzezinski at first refused even to meet with Katz. Only

after pressures from the Jewish community did he acquiesce, and only then to hear Katz out, not to engage in any real exchange.

Carter has been "chosen by the Lord to lead the Modest to peace and to accomplish a prophetic vision without dividing the Holy Land into two," was the view expressed by Israel's chief rabbi, Maj. Gen. Shlomo Goren, on June 15.

After a 40-minute meeting with Carter, from which they emerged with Bibles in hand, Goren insisted that Carter has "never suggested Israel had to return to the June 1967 lines" and "definitely, definitely" opposes any Palestinian state.

This caused a minor flap as the press anxiously queried the White House. Apparently not wanting to upset Goren or to raise more eyebrows in Israel, Jody Powell, presidential spokesman, quietly told Arab journalists, "The President made no statement at the meeting (with Goren) other than what he has said publicly."

Yet another White House source confirmed the Goren statement to Israeli reporters even while inquiring Arab Embassies were being assured the story was inaccurate. In an attempt to please everyone, it appears that the ambiguities of language were used to make Israel's supporters think one thing and Arab supporters another.

This was actually symbolized when spokesman Powell broke off a conversation with Arab journalists as an Israeli newsmen approached. At one point, on the day after Goren's

comments, Brzezinski's own press spokesman had a backlog of 120 calls, many on this matter, and many which went unanswered.

The lesson here is two-fold: First, the Palestinian issue has become so super-sensitive that any whisper gets amplified out of all proportion. Second, for the time being, Carter prefers the confusion of his "Palestinian homeland" formulation.

Twice during the campaign, Carter spoke of Palestinian national rights. First at a November 1975 foreign policy 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."

Two months later, when speaking before 75 Jewish leaders, he indicated, "I think eventually the Palestinian people have to be recognized — their legitimate need, ultimately recognized as a nation with territory assigned to them on the East Bank or the West Bank of the Jordan."

Carter knows he will not be able to avoid spelling out again these views — his real views which Brzezinski has nurtured — for much longer. It appears he is simply waiting for the right moment.

Chosen to woo Israel's worried supporters, Vice President Mondale delivered the Administration's most important statement on Mideast 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. The Jewish lobby's weekly newsletter termed the speech "disappointing" and insisted it "further undermined Israel's negotiating position."

But it was an excellent discussion of the problems involved in bringing the parties to a resumed Geneva Conference. The text was so carefully drafted and redrafted — by the White House, the National Security Council and the State Department — that one Mondale aid moaned, "The English language was almost exhausted."

With his long 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 a pledge (which may be difficult to always maintain) that "We do not intend to use our military aid as pressure on Israel."

But it was the specifics, wisely included by the Administration first Israel be meted, which caused the negative reactions: "Return to approximately the borders that existed prior to the war of 1967," "A Palestinian homeland or entity," and the need for the United States to "outline" a "framework for an enduring peace" — code words for a still emerging American peace plan.

Sen. Javits's attack on this emerging plan, with the active cooperation of the Jewish-Israeli lobby and the support of a number of other Republican senators, is seen in Washington as but the

beginning of the assault designed to undermine Executive Branch efforts.

"Presidential aides perceive in this criticism... a possible effort to break down confidence in Carter's credibility as Mideast peacemaker," reported columnist Evans and Novak in late June. It's the same old Washington game when it comes to Mideast policy formulation.

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 Mideast, 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 stated just a few weeks ago that "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 forthcoming than past Israeli governments, if not absolutely unyielding" the generally pro-Israeli New Republic editorialized in late May. "The elevation of Begin to national leadership severely cripples Israel's position on any political test. His position on the West Bank is simply uncomprehensible."

Yet such an attitude by a left-leaning, intellectual journal — no matter how pro-Israeli — will carry little weight with Begin and Likud. Anyone who has read Begin's "The Revolt" or his heretofore, Ezer Weizman's "On Eagles' Wings," knows that these men are true believers, stubborn fighters and if need be, desperate 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 and with the American Jews, but he has to learn that he cannot bulldoze us."

Serious American-Israeli fraying is definitely ahead — the exact nature of the battles, strategies, and "weapons" are the remaining questions. The New Republic was on the mark when further commenting that "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."

With this being said by Israel's friends, no wonder George Ball and followers have stepped up their campaign for an imposed solution.

But this confrontation between friends will not in itself be the "disaster" Carter fears and even predicts. Real warfare between a cornered Israel and a frustrated Arab world, with the United States in the middle, carries with it these potentially devastating implications.

"The Middle East... is now full of the summing-up of war and threat regions, one of the more moderate Arab Ambassadors at the United Nations recently told this journalist "Nowhere is war more certain."

This re-emerging contemporary wisdom may seem optimistic, or at least premature. But as fears replace hope and emotions transcend reason, a new, more destructive and immensely more dangerous road of fighting may not be too far off.