Doubts about Carter's knowledge

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DOES the Carter Administration realise what it is up against in Menachem Begin?

Discussions with a number of people who have been consulted by members of Carter's unofficial "Mid-east team" have raised doubts.

One Jewish leader has concluded that Carter was not at all prepared for Begin's style, was surprised by the Israeli government's recent decision to "extend services" to residents of the occupied West Bank and Gaza strip (in what is clearly a move toward ***de facto*** annexation) and was stunned by the most recent Israeli decision to establish three completely new West Bank settlements.

Intricacies

"Begin basically is a terrorist," this person confided.

"He's a polite, gentle, honest refined gentleman. But he's not a person who plays nice."

Carter also lacks an understanding of the intricacies of the American Jewish community where much of the opposition to his Mid-east approach is centred.

Soon after Begin's election, Carter hinted at a news conference that American Jewry would not support many of his policies and would help convince the new Israeli government to adopt positions more in keeping with Carter's outlook. If there had been a possibility of actually nurturing just such a situation by careful behind-the-scenes discussions with Jewish leaders, Carter's performance made such developments unlikely.

As one of these Jewish personalities indicated to me late in July: "Although Begin personally is a very inviting political figure — strong as a leader and incorruptible — there would, no doubt, have been chinks in the Jewish community's armour as his political views were not acceptable to all.

"Nevertheless, recent statements by this administration have created a unanimity in the Jewish community that may last far longer than the short present, having granted to the Jewish community a real solidarity it probably could not have achieved by itself and never had in the past."

Journalists in Israel recently who spoke with the leader of the Democratic Movement for Change, Yigal Yadin, have heard him repeatedly argue that Carter's current affair with the PLO is a serious political miscalculation sure to cause nearly all Israelis to support Begin.

Lobby

LOBBYING in Washington is not always done behind closed doors and with political pressures.

Recently seen in a Washington drug-store was F. Stephen MacArthur, newest addition to the Congressional Staff of what is often called there "the Israeli lobby" — officially it's known as the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC).

MacArthur was wearing a blue T-shirt with AIPAC letters across the front. When I inquired if he was lobbying after hours he responded that he was wearing his baseball shirt.

I asked if AIPAC plays other lobbying groups. "No," he answered. "We play Congressman and senators . . . and we let them win."