

**WASHINGTON
REPORT**
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White House aide quits Plane sales plan brings split out into the open

TENSIONS are finally surfacing within the Carter Administration over Middle East policy. Last Wednesday, Mark Siegel, Deputy Assistant to the President, refused to continue his duties as chief administration contact with the U.S. Jewish community. Next day he resigned from the White House staff.

Although Siegel at first refused to discuss his resignation, both Washington newspap-

ers immediately interpreted his action as an expression of serious dissent from the basic direction of Carter Administration policy.

It has since been learned that Siegel was specially upset by the recently announced plane package sale to Saudi Arabia and Egypt as well as Israel.

The *Washington Post* reported that Siegel "harboured a deep distrust of Zbigniew Brzezinski" for his Middle East views.

The *Washington Star* headlined the Siegel resignation story: "Disturbed by Middle East policy." The *New York Times* singled out the Jewish community's intense opposition to the plane sales proposal as the main reason for Siegel's abrupt departure.

At first it was thought Siegel would remain on the White House staff with other duties.

This was apparently Siegel's hope. But after initial confusion, White House officials decided Siegel must go.

As one indicated: "There was simply no way that Mark could continue at the White House when his opposition to the President's Middle East policy was so well known."

Disagreed

Some Washington political analysts believe Siegel was simply unable to continue acting as point man for the administration with Jewish groups. More and more Siegel has had to defend policies and attitudes with which he disagreed.

Only two weeks ago Siegel was booed, hissed and laughed at when he spoke on behalf of the United Jewish Appeal.

Visibly shaken, Siegel rose at the end of a panel discussion and told the gathering: "Let me take off one hat and put on another.... I not only travel into the Jewish community, I am part of the Jewish community.... I appear before you right now not only as a member of this administration who works for the President of the U.S. I'm here before you as an American Jew and a very, very fervent Zionist."

It is also said in Washington that the possibility the White House is planning to come out with its own Middle East peace formula — one

that will be closer to the Egyptian view than to the Israeli — convinced Siegel to take his leave.

Both Senator Richard Stone, Democrat, Florida, chairman of the Near East sub-committee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and Rabbi Alexander Schindler, chairman of the most important caucus of U.S. Jewish organisations, have publicly warned that Carter might attempt to capitalise on Israel's declining public support and come forward with a major U.S. peace initiative.

Whichever of these speculations prove correct, Siegel's bailing out must be taken as one indication of the intensity of the debate within the administration over just how far to go in pressuring Israel.

After the visit of Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan this week and the conclusion of the Senate's Panama Canal debate soon, the administration may face a showdown with "the Jewish lobby" on the jet fighter deal.

That may be the time when Carter will finally have to decide whether or not to publicly challenge the Begin government's increasingly unacceptable position with a U.S. proposal to break the new Middle East stalemate.

Unsuccessful

Assistant Secretary of State Alfred Atherton, who has returned to Washington from his unsuccessful Middle East shuttling, is said to have told Egyptian officials that if Begin's visit fails to lead to a declaration of principles both sides can accept, the U.S. will offer its own language.

But to do so, it is widely felt, could spark a knockdown fight with Israel as occurred in October over the joint Soviet-American statement. At that time the administration panicked at the unexpected protests and reversed itself.

But this time could be different. Even the influential, Israel-oriented *New Republic* magazine headlined last week's article: "The long-awaited crisis in American-Israeli relations may be at hand."