

Begin's bid to use Jewish pressure rebounds in U.S.

By Mark Bruzonsky
in Washington

RUMOURS and some facts have begun to surface in Washington confirming the deterioration in the U.S.-Israel "special relationship."

A major campaign to pressure Israel into historic concessions has been quietly under way for some months.

White House efforts to push Israel since the U.S.-Soviet joint statement in October, and more recently since Sadat's "Sacred Mission", are the underlying reason the Israelis are desperately trying to alter the Mid-east power balance and the U.S. domestic political scene.

A rare look at how some of this pressure has been applied is offered in the April 1978 issue of the *Washington Strategic Review*, published by Georgetown University's prestigious Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

This issue of the *Review* will be publicly available this week, and journalists have been given an advance text.

According to the "Capitol Hill report" feature in the *Review*, the Carter White House has been "involved in a complex effort to pressure Israel into making greater concessions to Egypt's President Anwar Sadat."

Oil request

Specifically, the *Review* states, the Carter Administration has:

- Requested European, Latin American and Asian allies to "hold up arms purchases from Israel."

- Asked Iran "that oil supplied (to Israel) be slowed down or interrupted pending a peace agreement."

- Engaged in repeated "efforts to convince American Senators and Congressmen to use persua-

According to the *Review*, "the message from Washington was clear: The Israelis had to be reprimanded." Humphrey reportedly rejected the draft letter and his staff discussed a revised text with the Israeli embassy in Washington.

Reversal

Finally, Max M. Kampelman, a well known Washington attorney, close friend of Humphrey, and long-time supporter of Israel, drafted the letter which was sent to Begin on Thursday, the day before Humphrey's death.

Even though the original letter had been tremendously watered down, the Press still interpreted Humphrey's action as a serious criticism of Begin government position coming from one of Israel's staunchest Congressional champions.

Another long-time Senate supporter of Israel is Abraham Ribicoff. He is one of five Jewish members of the Senate. Just a week ago, in a stunning reversal of Ribicoff's former refusal to chastise Israel publicly, the Senator levelled a blast at Begin and also at the Capitol Hill "Jewish lobby." Ironically, one of Ribicoff's former aides, Morris Amitay, now heads the lobby.

"The sentiment in the Congress and in the country is overwhelmingly against Begin," Ribicoff told the *Wall Street Journal* in a little reported interview. According to the *Journal*, "the Connecticut Democrat added that he personally believes these Israeli policies (regarding the settlements and retention of the West Bank) are 'wrong' and don't deserve U.S. support."

The *Journal* story added: "Specifically citing the American-Israel public affairs committee, the key

A LOOK at two stumbling blocks to peace in the Middle East — Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, and interpretation of UN Resolution 242.

lobby with loss of weapons if the Saudi sale did not go through."

Carter, the article adds, has been firmly warning that without major Israeli concessions the entire peace process will collapse.

Even more importantly, Carter is known to be developing a substantial aversion toward Begin's Likud government and maybe to Begin himself.

Ending

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One dramatic example of Carter's appeals to members of Congress came during the final days of Senator Hubert Humphrey's tragic battle with incurable cancer.

Carter made a call to the Senator only four days before his death and, among other things, discussed the need for Humphrey to send a "personal letter" (a draft of which was sent to him from Washington according to the *Review*) to Prime Minister Menachem Begin.

The next day Secretary of State Cyrus Vance called to discuss the situation further. The president "probably called" again the next day, January 10, just two days before Humphrey died.

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The *Journal* story added: "Specifically citing the American-Israeli public affairs committee, the key pro-Israeli lobby group in the U.S. Ribicoff stated 'they do a great disservice to the U.S., to Israel and to the Jewish community'."

Collapse

Ribicoff's views may weigh substantially in the arms package debate which the Congress will begin in April when it completes action on the Panama Canal treaties. According to another pro-Israeli senator, Robert Packwood of Oregon: "Abe Ribicoff may be the most important man in the Senate on the arms package."

According to the *Washington Strategic Review* article, the original reason for the administration's package approach was "to threaten the substantial Israeli

lobby with loss of weapons if the Saudi sale did not go through."

Carter, the article adds, has been firmly warning that without major Israeli concessions the entire peace process will collapse.

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Feuding

Nothing that took place in Washington last week has altered the basic drift in U.S.-Israeli relations from a "special relationship" to an uneasy, antagonistic one.

The overall American commitment to Israel's existence and basic security remains firm, but political and strategic differences have created a confrontation far deeper and considerably more perplexing than what happened in 1956 when President Eisenhower insisted with Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion that American interests and perceptions must prevail.

Carter is responding to Begin's attempt to use the American Jewish community against his administration by fighting fire with fire. By emphasising American-Israeli feuding to the point where the "special relationship" itself is strained and in doubt, the Carter people believe Begin's support at home will begin to fracture and dissolve. It is a warning to Begin that American policy can affect Israeli politics just as Israeli policies can affect American politics.

Carter and Begin were eyeball-to-eyeball last week. But neither so far has blinked. A number of political battles will first have to be waged with each gladiator testing his strength and abilities.

Until Carter and Begin have caused each other political bloodshed it is unlikely there will be any basic change in Israel's positions or any attempt by Carter to take Begin on directly.

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