

AMERICA's two resigning Mid-east experts pose a credibility threat to Carter

The smouldering touchpaper of an explosive political firework

WASHINGTON is a gossipy town — all the more so when the White House has become more a symbol of impotence than power.

And the word is oozing out that two resigning members of the American Mid-east team — two who have closely watched and sometimes participated in the goals and mistakes of Carter-style diplomacy — are getting ready to split the beans from academic sanctuaries.

National Security Council man, William Quandt has at least five valid reasons for departing the tottering Carter White House. First among them, he's saving his own reputation and integrity. As a known partisan of the "comprehensive settlement" plus "Palestinian homeland" approach, Quandt's entire vision of what could have and should have been done has been upended.

Almost as important, as an insider Quandt knows that the President has largely thrown in the towel on further Mid-east progress — unless he should be re-elected. Carter's energies and attentions are elsewhere. The appointment of novice, Robert Straus, as Carter's personal Mid-east troubleshooter — strongly opposed by Quandt and most Mid-east professionals in Washington — was the final straw.

Straus' mandate is to be more a "fireman" than a "builder" — at least through the 1980 election. His job, one for which he is well-qualified, will be to extinguish or at least contain any political fireworks that threaten to

unravel the tenuous Egyptian-Israeli accord.

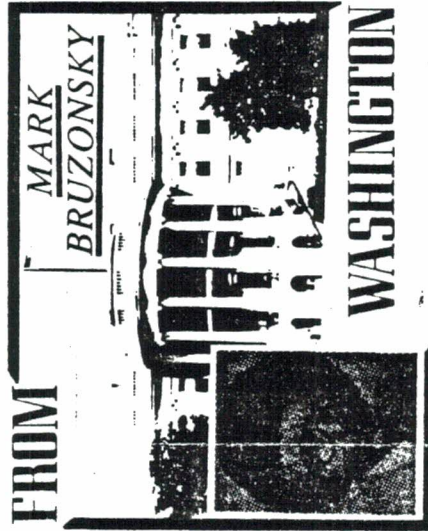
Carter simply can't afford to have one of his few "triumphs" come apart. And he has largely acquiesced in the assumption that there's little short-term chance of making substantial progress beyond the "separate peace." In essence, Mid-east diplomacy has been transformed from an active to a waiting game up to November, 1980. Knowing this, the Israelis are back to creating as many West Bank facts as they can — Sadat be damned if necessary.

In addition, Quandt is known to be deeply troubled by Carter's complete failure to make good his in-house assurances that he would eventually "force" the Israelis into a moratorium on West Bank settlements.

At the time of the Camp David extravaganza, Carter prematurely announced a "moratorium" on such settlements "for the period of the negotiations." A letter exchange was to take place within days confirming this.

But after a few weeks of bitter feud-ing between the Israeli and American governments — in which Carter insisted the moratorium was to be in effect during the entire period of autonomy negotiations while Begin held firm to his view that only the three-month period of negotiations between Egypt and Israel was involved — the matter was simply buried from the public.

But Carter assured top members of his Mid-east team that the moratorium



would be resurrected if a Egyptian-Israeli treaty could be sculptured — for without it the West Bank autonomy scheme would have hardly any credibility. And indeed, the moratorium's "disappearance" has greatly discredited Israeli intentions as Begin appears to be using the treaty as licence for de facto West Bank annexation. Quandt knows all this, and his faith in Jimmy Carter has been irrevocably shaken.

Quandt's final two reasons for abandoning ship are less policy-oriented and more personal. His timing — in this period between treaty euphoria and autonomy feuding — enables him to claim he's doing no such thing as jumping onboard, just moving on at an appropriate time.

Yet, of course, with Quandt's academic qualifications and record of scholarly writing about prior periods of U.S.-Mid-east diplomacy, everyone naturally expects him to do more of the same from his new perch at the Brookings Institution.

Now "Bill" Quandt isn't second James Fallows — the President's former chief speech writer who resigned and revealed the guts of the Carter operation in two issues of Atlantic magazine — but he surely does intend to distance himself from the politics and tactics of an administration he has concluded just won't be doing what's

needed. The Washington grapevine further reveals that Ellis intends to use his

time at Boston University reconstructing what has gone wrong with U.S. Arab-Israeli diplomacy over the years and what serious dangers lie ahead. In doing so, Ellis will be telling, in part, the story of how Jimmy Carter rode into Washington on the White Horse of the Brookings Report — insisting on an overall settlement with Palestinian self-determination and the participation of all the parties at Geneva. But he got himself entangled in a power struggle with Begin and American Jewry for which Carter was ill-prepared.

Ellis is also said to be ready to softly criticise his intimate friend Anwar Sadat.

One ranking colleague of Ellis' describes him as bedeviled with a "Germanic guilt complex" about having over-convincing Sadat to take a leap of faith and follow Jimmy Carter. Apparently Ellis feels he may have done his too well or possibly he himself has lost faith in Carter as has Quandt.

Ellis has already hinted at this view by publicly stating that Carter's "personal relationship made it possible for him to get Sadat to make some compromises which otherwise Sadat would never have made." Though Ellis didn't reveal what compromises he had in mind, both Egyptian and American officials have confirmed that the most

officials have confirmed that the most serious, diplomatic relationship was the one between Sadat and Jimmy Carter. It has been working under unusual circumstances — from the start, standing together in Cairo since 1973, pressures exacted by the stringent security precautions he and his family have been under for the past few years.

But those who know Ellis closest, detect a large measure of disenchantment in his stepping down. "I personally believe that unless the United States continues to play a major role the negotiations are not likely to go very far," Ellis recently admitted to the Los Angeles Times.

In private, he's even more straightforward. When I questioned him last month about the widely-shared view that the U.S. would have less leverage over Israel in the post-treaty period than before, he pondered, stared at me, and simply stated, "You know, many people would agree with you."

The Washington grapevine further doubts about Sadat understanding of the Israelis.



Carter — threatened

Ellis has gone even further and shown a willingness to discuss Sadat the mortal man in a candid and critical manner. In the Los Angeles Times interview Ellis described Sadat as sometimes "brooding, moody." "As he sees himself more and more as an international statesman," Ellis added, "there is a greater tendency on his part to make emotional, visceral decisions."

Quandt and Ellis have both put themselves in history-writing positions, though the candidness of their tales may be partly determined by two upcoming events: Whether the autonomy negotiations go anywhere at all and whether Jimmy Carter is returned to the White House in 17 months.

Assuming two "No" answers, Quandt and Ellis will probably have manuscripts ready to go, explaining what went wrong this time with American Mid-east diplomacy. And great deal of the blame will be squarely placed on Jimmy Carter's shoulders.

