

Crisis at the State Department

Shultz feels the heat from inside the White House, while the Middle East is put on hold again.

By Mark A. Bruzonsky
Special to the Star

WASHINGTON — Not since Henry Kissinger undermined, discredited, and eventually expelled William Rogers from the State Department more than a decade ago has a White House been so at odds with a secretary of state. The US president still appears to have confidence in George Shultz, but hardly anyone else does.

Nevertheless, since the Reagan administration cannot afford to have another secretary resign during its first term — or so it seems the president and his top advisers believe — Shultz has not been asked and probably will not be asked for his resignation.

According to last week's Newsweek magazine senior White House aides nearly panicked when Shultz hinted he might consider resigning. That "we could brand this president as a failure in foreign policy," said one senior White House official, according to Newsweek. "We could never recover from that blow."

Consequently, Shultz may linger on through next year's November election, defeated and increasingly impotent. Still, the recent avalanche of news stories describing Shultz's loss of stature and diminution in authority are totally accurate, and the pressures are building in a way that a proud man might have to find an excuse "to return to California" as Shultz is reported to have warned the president.

In the past few weeks Shultz's position has been more than harmed. It has been almost totally undermined by White House and National Security Council disparagement of his performance and abilities. And once those around the president start the process of behind-the-scenes comment and carefully orchestrated leaks, the Washington rumour-circuit comes alive sometimes creating a self-fulfilling prophecy.

From Latin American policy where he was hardly consulted, to Middle East negotiations where he has been upended, to international economic matters where no one seems in control, the Shultz state department is under a barrage of unrelenting criticism and abuse.

Under Secretary for Political Affairs Lawrence Eagleburger, the man who really handles the department's day-to-day operations, has also become the subject of scorn. "He is a burned-out



Shultz: Going back to California?



Clark: Increasing powers



known to be at odds with many of the Begin government's attitudes and policies. Still the power-grab with McFarlane attracted a great deal of attention while recent efforts to put the spotlight back on Shultz have been so blatant as to be ineffective.

In so far as the administration's Middle East policy, it is simply one of damage-limitation and "containment": Getting by the election without any disasters. Little thought is being given to anything but short term crisis management. As one senior observer who has been involved as an intermediary with the Arabs through numerous administrations recently suggested "the only way the Arabs will get Washington to pay attention is if they now start sending one shock after another."

be able to get away with during this period, and then how much Israeli might have alienated this administration if it continues into a second term.

Israel and the American-Jewish lobby here have regularly worked against reelection of a sitting president in recent times. Just how much this White House will give to Israel in an attempt — probably destined to be unsuccessful — to avoid that very outcome this time is unknown.

But there can no longer be any doubt that Israel has decided to use this pre-election period to use the lobby to discredit the government of Jordan, laying the ground-work for eventual implementation of the Israeli plot to declare Jordan "the Palestinian state".

Even in the minds of all this madness, it is interesting that Judge Clark has recently taken into the White House as assistant to the president, deputy press secretary, and a personal adviser a young man with considerable Middle East experience and with views very much at odds with those prevalent both in Israel and the United States.

Former Kissinger aide and former deputy assistant secretary of defence for international security assistance, Leslie Janka, will take over his new responsibilities on 1 September.

Janka has been known for some time as one of the most articulate and effective advocates of a much more balanced approach to American involvement in the Middle East. In a talk at the Smithsonian's Woodrow Wilson Centre last year, for instance, Janka argued strongly for "normalizing relations with Israel", by which he meant ending the special treatment of Israel by the United States. He has called for a Palestinian state, cuts in aid to Israel, an end to Israeli settlements in the West Bank, and a comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict along the lines of the 1975 Brookings report.

Even though there is a growing opinion in this country for sharply reducing or even ending military aid to Israel if the Begin government continues to take positions contrary to those advocated by the United States, it still seems highly unlikely this administration will decide to confront Israel in the foreseeable future.

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Under Secretary for Political Affairs Lawrence Eagleburger, the man who really handles the department's day-to-day operations, has also become the subject of scorn. "He is a burned-out case very sick and very defeated," noted a senior Washington analyst with very close ties to the White House and the State Department.

Eagleburger reportedly recently told confidants that "foreign policy is the management of insoluble problems." It was a fitting comment for an administration that has few real policies, little strategy, and must increasingly react to world affairs.

Robert McFarlane's appointment as special Middle East negotiator was, of course, one of the tip-offs to Shultz's precipitant decline. Disgusted at the erroneousness of nearly all State Depart-



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Regan: Will he bid farewell to Shultz?

ment predictions about Middle East affairs, National Security adviser William Clark decided to put his own man in and to push out nearly everyone reporting directly to Shultz.

In the judgement of most analysts here, little will come of McFarlane's efforts, and Clark is not capable of really taking on the Israelis — especially in a pre-election period — though he is



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"It's a great mystery how a man who managed two tremendous multinational companies and is supposed to know how to get things done could turn out to be so ineffective," another Shultz critic with considerable access to high places has concluded. Asked if Shultz feared the Israelis, especially because of his pro-Arab reputation, this insider responded: "yes, there's no doubt he has been aware that he could not afford to have the Israelis after him too."

For the next 14 months little can be expected from Washington in terms of Middle East diplomacy. The only question is how much Israel will

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Elite opinion in the United States has always been more even-handed than popular opinion in regard to the Middle East situation. For instance, in a poll of the members of the respected Foreign Policy Association, 71 per cent voted to "reduce or suspend military aid to Israel" if the United States "disapproves of Israel's actions in the future," and 43 per cent supported the "creation of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza with PLO recognition of Israel."

Simply put though, Israel may still be in a position to politically outgun the White House, and the potency of the Jewish lobby on Capitol Hill remains considerable.