

# Carter Offers Rabin 'Eight-Year Plan' For Mideast Settlement

One day after the departure of Israel's Premier Yitzhak Rabin from the United States, President Jimmy Carter went to unusual lengths to up-end the Arab states' negotiating position to derail recent momentum toward an overall Arab-Israeli peace accord. Carter announced to reporters at his March 9 press conference that he foresaw a "step-by-step process" of negotiations that could take as long as eight years! As the final settlement took shape, Carter insisted, "defense lines may or may not conform...to legal borders," and there "may be extensions of Israeli defense capability beyond the permanent and recognized borders." This was Carter's unsubtle re-statement of the so-called Allon Plan proposed by Israel's current Foreign Minister, under which Israel's defense forces would control the West Bank even after it had passed under Jordanian legal control. Carter never once mentioned any impending U.S. initiative on the volatile Palestinian question.

While reporters at the conference remarked that the President seemed unfocused and curiously rambling in his Mideast remarks, his statements nonetheless conformed to a definite Administration policy turn backing up intransigent Israeli demands and slapping down matter-of-factly the Arab states' diplomatic offensive of the past four months. On March 7, with Rabin at his side, Carter publicly endorsed the right of Israel to have "defensible borders," a formulation heretofore used only by Israeli leaders. Although the State Department hurriedly issued disclaimers that U.S. policy had changed in any way, Carter's statement, the *Baltimore Sun's* Washington bureau stressed, backed up the "assumption in Washington that the 1967 borders never will be restored, despite Arab insistence that they must be."

Carter's mouthings have been accompanied by ominous signs from Washington that the Administration has backed off from earlier pro forma statements of support for a solution to the question of Palestinian Arab self-determination. According to *Daily News* reporter Joseph Fried March 10, the Carter Administration has "dropped its initial sympathy for the concept of an independent Palestinian state and adopted Kissinger's rejection of it." Fried — and other sources close to the Administration — report that National Security Council head Zbigniew Brzezinski and Secretary of State Cyrus Vance have, in "private conversations," supported Israel's call for a Jordan-West Bank federation minus the Palestine Liberation Organization. The head of the American Jewish Congress, Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg, has informed interviewers that the growing sentiment in official Washington circles is to "get the PLO off our

backs" and to "bring the era of the PLO to an end."

## *Rabin Caves In To Hard-Liners' Pressure*

Carter's ramblings in themselves would likely be sufficient to alienate pro-U.S. Arab regimes like Egypt and Saudi Arabia, perhaps triggering a dramatic reversal of Rockefeller family fortunes in the Middle East, but in the meantime increasing Arab-Israeli tensions. Matters have been made far worse by Rabin's capitulation to the Carter camp and Israeli warhawk factions during his trip to the U.S.

Last month, Rabin narrowly squeaked by Defense Minister Shimon Peres and captured the ruling Labour Party's nomination for the premiership. His victory was widely regarded by the majority of mainstream Israelis as a rejection of the confrontation policies of Peres and as a mandate for a Rabin peace offensive. This was viewed as Rabin's sole hope of building an independent power base within the sorely divided and scandal-battered Labour Party. Nonetheless, on his U.S. trip, Rabin spouted the hardest possible line.

The Israeli Premier explicitly rejected any role for the PLO at a reconvened Geneva peace conference. Additionally, he claimed that Israel's desired final boundaries "do not coincide in any way with the kind of boundaries which existed before the (June, 1967) war," thereby curtly rebuffing Arab insistence that Israel make major territorial concessions during the coming months. Rabin also labelled Arab peace demands as "fake solutions" and identified the "hopeful signs" in the Mideast as growing Israeli military strength and U.S. presence in the Mideast, declining Soviet influence, and the deepening "burdens" of Arab states. It need hardly be said what effect such statements are calculated to have on the Arabs, Soviets, and Europe.

The Washington Post March 9 noted that Rabin was "more than happy" with his official reception in Washington and the "greater-than-expected warmth and support" he received from Carter.

While the Carter Administration has been dishing out the smiles, since the Labour Party convention Rabin has come under heavy pressure from Peres backers in Israel to give them a fifty-fifty share in appointments to Administration posts and in all major policy decisions. This campaign has secured the 100 percent involvement of erstwhile dove Abba Eban and a coterie of like-minded peaceniks who have campaigned under the Peres banner in order to gain "strong leadership" for Israel.

Rabin's position is also being undermined by the two key opposition parties, the fanatical Likud and the proto-fascist Democratic Movement for Change, led by

mystical archaeologist Gen. Yigal Yadin and a group of former Israeli intelligence chiefs. Likud leader Menachem Begin warned Rabin before the Premier's departure that "you have no authority to make any promises regarding the future of Israel." In the U.S. Yadin and company have been insisting that they be included at the top levels of the new government formed after the May 17 elections, and have been getting significant percentages in recently released polls used to throw Rabin on the defensive. New expansionist settlement moves into the West Bank by the Gush Emunim religious group have added to his trouble.

Rabin has dealt weakly with all these destabilizations.

He has yet to make a final decision about removing Peres from the Defense Ministry, despite early rumors to that effect. He has, according to this week's *Newsweek*, countermanded subordinates' demands that he go on the offensive against Yadin. Nor has he ordered the forceful removal of the Gush group from their illegal Kaddoum encampment in the West Bank.

Not surprisingly, Rabin was greeted upon arrival in the U.S. by extended features in the *Washington Post* and the *Baltimore Sun* stressing that he could not make a peace initiative because his internal situation was too "unstable."

## The Arab Reaction To Carter

A determining question over the next days will be how the Arab states react to the Carter provocation. The pattern of Arab reaction will determine whether the Mideast will be plunged toward early war or whether the Arabs will become a prime motivating force for a definitive break with the dollar.

*Saudi Arabia* is apparently committed to giving the Carter Administration another month before definitively deciding on a potential policy change (see International Report).

According to the March 10 *Washington Post*, *Egyptian* officials are "disturbed" by Carter's statements, labelling them "naive," "impetuous," and "troublesome." One cited official charged that "it sounds as if he has swallowed at least some aspects of the old Allon plan." The Egyptians in Washington have as well demanded clarification from Vance on Carter's support of Israeli "defensible borders" and have joined the rest of the Arab ambassadorial pool in requesting a special meeting with Vance to insist on clarification of the Carter statements.

The pro-U.S. Arab regimes are under intensive pressure on the Carter-Rabin issue from the Palestinians and the Arab left. *Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO)* spokesman Abu Maizer, in Cairo March 9, attacked Carter's "peace plan" as an "Israeli idea in U.S. language," especially since Carter totally ignored the Palestinians' national rights in his press conference. Abu Maizer summed up Carter's pronouncements as an "unjust policy."

In Lebanon, the *Lebanese Communist Party* paper *An-Nida* March 10 attacked Carter for opposing Israeli territorial withdrawals and for attempting to destroy Arab unity.

A series of meetings in the Arab sector over the coming days will reveal more profoundly the overall Arab response. On March 12, the Palestinian "parliament," the *Palestine National Council*, will meet in Cairo, and observers expect that the PNC will not make any shifts in its national covenant that does not recognize Israel's right to exist. This adamant stand on the PNC's part is widely attributed to the ultra-hard-line emanating out of Tel Aviv and Washington towards the Palestinians. The

PNC is likely, however, to vote in favor of the formation of a government-in-exile, and further coordination on policy with the neighboring Arab states has been presaged by the meeting earlier this week in Cairo between PLO chief Yasser Arafat and Jordan's King Hussein, bitter enemies since the September, 1970 massacre of Palestinians by Jordanian armed forces.

This weekend a summit meeting will be held of the Arab heads of state, following closely on the heels of the recently concluded Afro-Arab summit in Cairo. Next month, in Damascus the leaders of the Arab states neighboring Israel and the PLO will meet to discuss coordination of strategy.

The dangers of instability in the region are twofold from the Arab perspective. Regimes like Egypt's have taken the profound gamble of aligning with the U.S. in order to win political and economic advantages, especially in the confrontation with Israel. In Egypt, high-level army factions are known to be giving Egyptian President Anwar Sadat a very short time period to demonstrate that he has not been "had" by the Americans. If, in the next 1-2 months, they become convinced that this is in fact the case, Sadat is likely finished as Egypt's ruler. The devastating economic situations in Egypt, Syria and the Sudan makes this instability factor an inherent, not incidental, one.

Second, it is increasingly possible that Rockefeller intelligence networks will set loose a terrorist wave, attributed to "Palestinian extremists" angered at Arafat's "sell-out" to the Americans. This wave could target Arafat and any number of other Arab leaders for assassination attempts, thereby plunging the Middle East region into a dangerously chaotic state.

### *The Israel Breakaway*

Finally, Carter's statements are also bound to trigger an intense reaction from the Israeli rightwing factions, angered by Carter's public support for eventual Israeli withdrawals from Arab territories. Already the Likud is calling Rabin's trip a "failure" and is calling for a parliamentary censure motion to be brought against him upon his return. This faction is the classic "breakaway" group that will use "U.S. pressure" as a pretext to bring Israel into an open war policy.