

Middle East Report by Robert Dreyfuss

How much longer for Begin?

Israel's prime minister is in serious trouble domestically and internationally.

While fending off an internal crisis, Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin is becoming increasingly concerned that his government might run afoul of the Reagan administration.

The hurried dispatch to the United States this week of David Kimche, the director general of the Israeli foreign ministry, signals Begin's desperation. According to Israeli intelligence sources, Kimche is trying frantically to make contact with the inner circles of the Reagan camp in an effort to position the Begin government on an inside track with the new administration during the transition.

If Kimche does not succeed, Begin may not only find himself out in the cold, but also out of a job. The problem confronting the Begin regime is that within the Reagan apparatus there is only one faction that remains loyal to Begin—and unless that faction prevails, Begin is certain to go.

The strongest Begin advocate and the leader of the pro-Begin faction in the Reagan entourage is Richard Allen, one of Reagan's closest advisers, who is expected to assume the post of national security adviser. Other Begin stalwarts in the Reagan camp include Bill Casey, Reagan's campaign chairman, Bill Simon, former secretary of the treasury, and Bill Brock, Republican National Committee chairman. They are working in close coordination with a pro-Begin faction of think-tankers tied to Edward Lutt-

wak at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, former Air Force Mideast intelligence director Joseph Churba, and Sen. Henry Jackson.

One Reagan adviser who is tied into this faction brazenly stated last week that a Reagan administration will back Begin all the way, and at the same time lay it on the line to the Arabs, and in particular, Jordan. "In the Reagan administration," the adviser stated, "the Arabs won't be asked what they would like; they will be *told* what they want."

Last week, when Begin was in New York, Allen met twice with him. It was at these meetings that Allen reportedly tried to set up a tripartite summit among Begin, President Carter, and Reagan. The suggestion was vigorously countered and defeated by another close Reagan adviser, George Shultz, who opposes any attempts to track the former California governor onto a Camp David course.

Not surprisingly, it is the Richard Allen faction toward which Kimche is directing his efforts to secure favor for Begin.

The deployment of Kimche to Washington was well calculated. Through his brother John, the editor of the *Afro-Asian Review*, David Kimche is linked to Robert Moss, a board member of the Heritage Foundation in Washington, D.C., and a long-time operative in British and Israeli intelligence circles. According to one insider, the Heritage Foundation, an outgrowth of Brit-

ish intelligence, is being pulled into playing a central role in policy formulation for Ronald Reagan's administration.

A second faction that Kimche may try to approach is the one around Nixon's Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. However, Kissinger is known to favor not Begin but Begin's main adversary Labour Party leader Shimon Peres.

Two days after Reagan's victory, Peres made known his Kissinger connection. Peres welcomed the election of Reagan on the condition that Kissinger be appointed secretary of state.

Both Kissinger and Peres believe that the longer Begin stays in power, the more difficult it will be to prevent Saudi Arabia and Jordan from falling into the European, and, in particular, France's camp. Kissinger is known to blame Begin for the Saudi-French rapprochement that has led to France's gradual replacement in the role the United States once played in the kingdom.

While the policy style of the Kissinger-Peres configuration may differ from that of Begin, the policy content is not so different. At a Madrid meeting last week of the Second International, Peres, Willy Brandt, Bruno Kreisky, and Boutros-Ghali of Egypt called upon the rest of the Arab world to follow in Sadat's Camp David footsteps.

The opposition's challenge to Begin escalated last week when the Labour Party blocked with other opposition parties to table a vote of no-confidence against the Begin regime. Begin narrowly escaped being voted out of power, and now faces a fresh attempt by opposition leaders to topple his government and bring about early elections.