

## Middle East Report by Robert Dreyfuss

### Menachem Begin's calculations

*Israel's Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, is playing with fire in new brinkmanship over the Sinai, over Syria, and over Iraq.*

Israeli cult leader Menachem Begin, having already succeeded in alienating almost all of Israel's friends and incensing all of her enemies, is now playing with a new holocaust in his policy on the occupied Sinai peninsula and toward his eastern neighbors. The stakes are high.

As one experienced Israeli politician told *EIR*, "If Begin refuses to give up the Sinai in April, it could very well be the end of Israel."

The unstable Begin, already beset by coalition difficulties and pressures from General Ariel Sharon and Dr. Yuval Neeman's extremist Tehiya Party, is entirely capable of ignoring world reality and plunging ahead on a course that could eventually trigger World War III.

According to both Arab and American intelligence sources, Begin is planning to escalate the situation in the region toward a "limited war" on the occupied Syrian Golan Heights.

The war, sources say, could become a means to strengthen Syrian President Hafez Assad's influence in the Arab world and, at the same time, provide Syria with a pretext to come to the bargaining table with Israel.

But such a war could easily lurch out of control, setting off an unpredictable chain of events leading to a much wider conflict.

The architect of Israel's war strategy is Defense Minister Shar-

on.

In a document entitled "Israel's Strategic Problems in the '80s," Sharon writes that in the coming decade Israel will find itself with a "sphere of strategic and security interests" extending from Pakistan, Iran, and Turkey down into East Africa.

Along with setting up itself as a gendarme for the "arc of crisis," Israel also intends, according to Sharon, to act to prevent Arab states from acquiring nuclear energy in any form, including for peaceful purposes.

Concluded Sharon, the strategist who pushed the now-defunct *U.S.-Israeli Strategic Memorandum of Understanding*, Israel would become a "surrogate rapid deployment force."

In the last days of 1981, Israel put that idea into practice, sending its air force into the skies of Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq. In Iraq, the Israelis penetrated some 40 miles into Iraqi territory before being driven off by Iraqi jet fighters. Israel's actions reflect the feeling in the Israeli command since the June 1981 bombing of Baghdad's nuclear reactor that Israel has the right to utilize its air superiority in any manner it deems fit.

In addition to heating tensions along the eastern front, the Israelis are giving out signals that they do not intend to withdraw on scheduled from what remains of the occupied Egyptian Sinai by the April

1982 deadline.

A leading British aristocrat and supporter of Israel flatly told a reporter in the first week in January, "Israel will not pull out of Sinai."

General Sharon is leading the effort to wreck Camp David in that manner.

Some Israelis believe that ultimately Israel will be forced to withdraw from Sinai by the overwhelming force of world opinion and that Sharon is merely making a grandstand political gesture by supporting extremist settlers there; but a very real danger exists that Begin will be unable to avoid using force to remove the settlers.

In such a scenario of potential civil war, Begin might resign or be toppled, with Sharon coming on top. Already, a handful of Israeli Cabinet ministers, including Transport Minister Mordechai Zippori, have bitterly accused Sharon of trying to sabotage Israeli policy on Sinai.

Meanwhile, allies of Sharon and Begin in the radical Gush Emunim settlers' movement are sending personnel and arms to Yamit, the chief Sinai settlement. A hard core of settlers there, manipulated by government circles, has been mobilized to prevent the ultimate withdrawal.

On Jan. 7, the Israeli Cabinet decided to grant about \$300 million in aid to the Sinai settlers to compensate them for abandoning their homes and settlements. That decision may, in fact, ease some of the anger in Yamit and help facilitate the withdrawal.

But, as one Israeli put it, "The choice facing Begin is clear. Either he will be remembered in history as a terrorist, or as a man of peace, depending on what he does in the next few weeks."