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## THE NEAR EAST

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# Israel's Begin lays claim to Jordan

by Nancy Coker

Citing the old British mandate for "Palestine," which encompassed Israel, the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza, and the Kingdom of Jordan, on May 3 Menachem Begin announced his intention to annex not only the West Bank and Gaza, but eventually the country of Jordan as well.

The West Bank, Gaza, and Israel, raved the Prime Minister to the Knesset, comprise "Western Eretz Israel," or the Western Land of Israel. "The autonomy agreements are a guarantee that under no condition will a Palestinian state be established in Western Eretz Israel," Begin said.

Begin's use of this long-dormant term was a deliberate revival on his part of the old land-grabbing notion of the terrorist Irgun underground—to which he belonged in the pre-1948 period—that the eastern bank of the Jordan River, that is, the country of Jordan, is "Eastern Eretz Israel."

Begin went on to pledge to "expand, strengthen, and consolidate" illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank, Gaza, and Golan Heights.

Begin's declarations were by far the strongest and clearest indication to date of the policies his government intends to pursue in the post-withdrawal period. On Israeli independence day, April 28, at the inaugural ceremony of a new, government-backed West Bank settlement, Begin's supporters sang "Two Banks Has the Jordan," the anthem of the Irgun.

The reconstitution of the fascist spirit and policies of the Irgun cult as government policy in Israel was explained as follows by one Israeli source: "Begin wants to go down in history as the man who made peace with Egypt and at the same time restored the Land of Israel to its historic Biblical borders. This has been his life-long obsession."

### Setbacks for Begin

Despite support for his policies from the majority of the Israeli population, Begin has been hit with a series of domestic political setbacks.

Following Israel's withdrawal from the Sinai, Begin announced that he intended to submit to parliament a law that would prevent the dismantling of all Israeli settlements in the occupied territories in the event of a

nonaggression treaty with an Arab state. That law would have barred any remaining possibility of peace with the rest of the Arab world. After a meeting between Begin and Labour Party leader Shimon Peres, the Labour opposition flatly refused to back Begin's proposal in the Knesset.

A few days later, the Israeli cabinet itself declined to back Begin on this issue, with only Defense Minister Ariel Sharon and Education Minister Zevulun Hammer supporting Begin, who then announced that he would not submit the bill to the Knesset as he had originally planned.

Begin's political grip has also been weakened somewhat by the resignation of cabinet minister Aharon Abuhatzeira after conviction on a bribery scandal.

Begin faces dissension among the religious parties in the ruling Likud-led coalition, and is moving to regain their support. Capitulating to the demands of the fundamentalist Agudat Yisrael Party, Begin banned El Al Airline flights on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, ignoring charges by the Labour Party and secular Jews that the action could bankrupt El Al and destroy Israel's commerce.

According to Israeli intelligence sources, Begin had been thinking of buying the cooperation of Agudat Yisrael to the tune of \$30 to \$40 million, the same amount that El Al is expected to lose if Saturday operations are cut. "Begin decided to take the loss—in either case he's out the same amount—and maybe reap the support of religious American Jews who side with Agudat Yisrael on the El Al issue," said one Israeli source.

### Sharon under fire

Defense Minister Ariel Sharon meanwhile continues to work with British intelligence to set the stage for British recolonization of the Persian Gulf. Sharon is known to favor going beyond Begin's Jordan scenario by hitting Saudi Arabian oil fields and seizing the Gulf. The Labour Party has been leading the attack on Sharon, demanding from Begin that Sharon be fired as the price for Labour's joining a national unity government, a proposal that Begin has reportedly been entertaining.

Inside Begin's and Sharon's own Herut Party, and in the cabinet, opposition is building to Sharon, reportedly sanctioned by Begin himself. A coalition of anti-Sharon Herut leaders have banded together in a "Stop Sharon" movement, with "Begin's okay," the *Jerusalem Post* writes.

Many Israelis consider Sharon far more dangerous than Begin. In a recent interview, Arye Naor, a former spokesman for the Israeli cabinet, said: "If ever, God forbid, he [Sharon] reaches the supreme position, I wonder what the fate of Israeli democracy would be."