

Israel In Crisis:

Rabin Pursues Peace Policy; Carter Forces Back Hawks

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Dec. 8 (NSIPS) — A behind-the-scenes fight within the ruling circles of the Israeli Labour Party (Mapai) and its government coalition partners is raging over the necessity for Israel to decide whether to formulate a real strategy for peace — or prepare for war.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, a general and a former ambassador to the U.S., is caught in the middle of the storm. According to reliable reports, Rabin himself is committed to pursue a policy of peace, and in so doing is supported by the traditional center of Mapai and the leftist-leaning Mapam party. One experienced Israeli, a former Knesset member, commented on Rabin, "He is a dove of doves. Just before he became prime minister, I heard him say that he would even be willing to enter East Jerusalem on a visa, and give back all the territories for peace." But Rabin is a weak personality, and his ability and will to resist the warhawks is not unlimited.

In recent weeks, the Israeli government has undertaken a series of political initiatives of a sort designed to counter, at least on the level of propaganda, an Arab peace campaign led by Egypt's President Anwar Sadat. Although Rabin has generally been the source of this effort, the substance of Israel's moves thus far have been defensive. Observers believe that Rabin is seeking to create an atmosphere within Israel that would favor a real peace campaign by the Israeli government, and they state that Rabin is planning — in the near future — to call for early elections to win a mandate from the voters on achieving peace at a reconvened Geneva conference. The key indicator of the delicate nature of the Israeli internal fight is the fact that Rabin and his allies have so far managed to avoid even a hint of a concession on the explosive issue of Israeli recognition of Yasser Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization.

The elements of the fight in the Labour Part emerge around the proposed platform drawn up for the February 1977 conference of Mapai. The crucial section of the platform calls for the withdrawal of the Israeli occupying forces from the West Bank and its return to the Arabs in exchange for a peace agreement. The plank was authored by Abba Eban, the former foreign minister who is the leader of the Mapai peace faction. Golda Meir, the ex-prime minister, has announced her opposition to the plank, and the top extremist warhawk, former Defense Minister Moshe Dayan, has threatened to pull out of the Mapai with his supporters in the Rafi faction if the plank is adopted, according to Time magazine.

For Israel, the determining question is whether Rabin can succeed in holding together the government, now

under assault from the Dayan forces who have identified their interests with the election of Jimmy Carter as U.S. president. The tactic of these forces is to create and sustain enough centrifugal motion in Israeli politics, led by a cluster of "new" parties each headed by right-wing generals and so forth, that Rabin backs down from his position of seeking early elections for fear that the fanatic opposition Likud bloc, supported by the splinter parties, could seize power.

Carter's Israel Connection

The Carter forces are explicitly lending their support to the madmen of Likud and Moshe Dayan.

Defense Minister Shimon Peres, an ally of Dayan in the Labour Party's Rafi faction, is in the U.S. this week for a round of meetings with "all of the top Carter people," according to one source. The Jerusalem Post reports that Peres will meet with Secretary of State nominee Cyrus Vance and with Carter advisor James Schlesinger, the extremist former Defense Secretary. According to a source at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the purpose of the Peres talks with Carter's backers is to decide on a common strategy "for pulling the plug on Rabin." The source stated flatly that Peres and Dayan were considering the withdrawal of Rafi from the Labour-led Alignment, possibly for an alliance with Likud.

The extent of Carter's involvement with the Israeli extremist fringe is revealed by the fact that Paul Austin, a top Carter backer since 1974 and the chairman of Coca Cola, provided major financial backing in 1975 to Moshe Dayan's Israeli newspaper Hayom Haze; although Hayom Haze closed down two weeks ago and may appear soon as a weekly instead of a daily. The Carter forces have other links to the Dayanists and the Israeli right. A reliable Israeli source revealed that Carter is "very close" to General Ariel Sharon, a fascist military officer who recently founded a new political movement in Israel.

In addition, Carter's top controller, Zbigniew Brzezinski, has developed close links with the leader of the ultra-Zionist Likud opposition, Menachem Begin, a former terrorist. Twice in the last two months, Brzezinski met with Begin, once in Israel in October — when Brzezinski stayed at Begin's home, according to Ma'ariv, the Israeli daily — and once three weeks ago in the U.S. According to L'Aurore, the French newspaper, Begin said that Brzezinski told him that a Carter Administration would be inalterably opposed to an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank, which Brzezinski reportedly described as "an annex of Soviet