

Middle East Report by Robert Dreyfuss

Menachem Begin's gameplan

Israel is beginning to resemble the German Weimar Republic in more than one way.

At a closed-door meeting between Menachem Begin's Likud bloc and the National Religious Party immediately after Israel's June 30 election results were known, the prime minister declared that Israel would adopt extreme measures to accomplish "our objectives" within one year. Those objectives, according to U.S. intelligence sources, include the consolidation of Israeli power in the occupied West Bank and in southern Lebanon.

Begin is said to believe that he will either die or leave the political scene within 12 months.

But to succeed in that period, Begin and his supporters reportedly plan a campaign of terror and intimidation along Israel's northern and eastern frontier. Indeed, some Israeli strategists are talking in ominous terms of a "final solution" to the Palestinian problem.

On the West Bank, truckloads of weapons are reportedly being supplied to the fanatic militia of the Gush Emunim, the settlers movement there. And Begin—who is expected to name extremist Gen. Ariel Sharon as his defense minister—is also said to be planning a new assault on Lebanon's south.

As a result of the elections, and in the wake of the June 7 Israeli attack on Iraq's nuclear facilities in Baghdad, it is no longer considered fanciful that Israel might launch a strike aimed at destroying the oil fields of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states. A prominent congressional

expert on Middle East matters noted that Begin would feel immense pressure as the April 1982 deadline for the final withdrawal from the Egyptian Sinai peninsula approaches—and that he might consider ordering an attack on the Gulf, as part of a larger military conflict.

According to several sources, including intelligence experts versed in Israeli thinking, Begin might plan such an attack by September or October of this year.

That timing would coincide, the sources said, with a decision by certain Anglo-American circles, especially David Rockefeller's Trilateral Commission, to subvert democratic authority and to impose "rule by emergency decree" within the next 12 months.

The destruction of the Saudi oil fields, and the ensuing world energy chaos, would provide the necessary rationale for invoking existing emergency measures on energy and the U.S. economy, including the near-dictatorial power of the Federal Emergency Management Act.

That such scenarios could even be contemplated reflects the impact of Begin's re-election on the political life of Israel.

The June 30 results show that Begin's 1977 election was not a fluke, but something else: that a burgeoning, literally fascist mass movement is developing behind the Likud bloc. Spearheaded by the semi-official militia of the Gush

Emunim, Begin supporters have become almost a replica of the pre-Nazi Hitler movement. The appeal of the demagogic Begin to Israel's uneducated poor, especially Jews from Arab countries, has created a monster.

The opposition Labour Party is dismayed, even gloomy. While Labour stalwarts often complain now about Shimon Peres's lackluster campaign, they have been sobered by Begin's re-election. "It could mean the end of Israel," said one. Labour loyalists have openly denounced Begin as a fascist, with full awareness of the heavy irony that the term carries.

Writing in the *New York Times*, columnist Flora Lewis cited a top Israeli analyst who wondered, "Is Israel becoming another Republic of Weimar?"

Reeling under its defeat, the Labour Party, resigned again to the opposition benches, is in deep trouble. General Yitzhak Rabin—who spent the last six months in almost open sabotage of the Peres effort—joined Peres at the last moment, and he is now trying to claim the credit for the Labour Party's gains over 1977! And Peres partisans, who realize Rabin's role in helping re-elect Begin, are nevertheless unhappy with Peres's performance and that of his campaign strategists.

In the weeks ahead, Israel's economy is likely to collapse all of a sudden, accelerating the descent into fascist rule. To win votes, Begin's finance minister had cut taxes and raised subsidies on goods in a pre-election ploy. That little game is now expected to explode in a round of inflation that will make Israel's current 150 percent seem innocuous.