

## Middle East Report by Robert Dreyfuss

### No Amman is an island

*Begin and Sadat were debating the overthrow of Jordan's King Hussein at their Alexandria summit.*

Almost unnoticed amid the pomp of the Alexandria, Egypt summit between Menachem Begin and Anwar Sadat Aug. 25-26, a top-level shakeup in Jordan's military command might have more to do with the real content of the Begin-Sadat meeting than all the rhetoric in their final press conference.

The reason: the Begin regime in Israel, and especially Defense Minister Ariel Sharon, are giving careful consideration to a project to overthrow Jordan's King Hussein.

In Jordan, General Abdulhadi Majalli, the Jordanian chief of staff, along with three other top generals, was ousted and replaced by Gen. Fathi Abu Taleb. Both Arab and Israeli intelligence sources report that General Majalli, who reportedly will be sent to Washington as Jordan's ambassador, was organizing a clientele among the Jordanian Bedouin population in an effort aimed at toppling the Amman monarch.

Hussein, who is the longest-ruling head of state in the world, has been clever enough to survive many past efforts to oust him. But this time, the combined resources of the Israeli and the Egyptian intelligence services, in coordination with Arab radical forces based in Syria, may prove too much for him.

King Hussein, according to a source close to Israel's Mossad, "has always been the key to Camp David."

According to the source, in the

period of the Black September civil war in Jordan, Sharon and some others in the Israeli armed forces were prepared to let Hussein be toppled by the Palestinians. "The United States saved Hussein, but Sharon was ready to get rid of him then," he said. "Now a lot of unrest is breeding again in Jordan, especially because of the signs that Jordan is considering a major arms deal with the U.S.S.R.

"General Majalli and his Bedouin friends don't like that," this source said. "And they don't like the Jordanian tilt toward Iraq either."

But, he added, the key to the operation is that King Hussein's brother, Crown Prince Hassan, is prepared to cooperate with Sharon on the Palestinian issue. Hassan, who is notoriously pro-British, is reportedly prepared to abandon the West Bank to its fate.

The warning to Hussein found its way into the *New York Times* on Aug. 27, in a column from Egypt by the pro-Begin William Safire. "Ultimately," said Safire, "the resolute Palestinian Arabs will have their own state," but in Jordan. Safire cited Sharon's reported willingness to topple Hussein state, and concluded that in his future calculations Hussein "will have to think about a future Israeli willingness to let him fall."

And the *Jerusalem Post*, referring recently to Sharon's new "ideas" for the occupied areas,

quoted one source in Jerusalem: "We're not in any hurry. In any case, several Arabs in the area regard Jordan as the Palestinian state. Nobody challenged Foreign Minister Shamir, Defense Minister Sharon, or U.N. Ambassador Blum when they referred to Jordan as the Palestinian state."

"It will make no difference," continued the *Post*, "what sort of regime exists in the 'Palestinian state' east of the Jordan River."

Such crude blackmail is aimed at getting King Hussein to back the resumption of the Palestinian autonomy talks, now scheduled to start again Sept. 23 in New York.

Sadat and Begin, meeting for the first time in Egypt in a year, reached an agreement to restart the bogged-down talks—despite an Egyptian assertion by Foreign Minister Ali that the talks would not begin until after President Reagan had consulted with Begin and Saudi Prince Fahd.

Egypt's willingness to reverse position and hold the talks means a partial victory for Begin. Because Jordan has enormous influence on the West Bank among Palestinians there, the decision to negotiate the future of the West Bank between Israel and Egypt is a direct challenge to the Jordanian-PLO alliance, which although shaky at best, has survived severe political storms the past two years.

A month ago, it appeared as if no one would dare start the old Camp David talks again. Now, it appears that Jordan, the PLO and Saudi Arabia are being given a stark choice: cooperate, or King Hussein will be removed from the chessboard. And if Hussein goes, can King Khaled and Prince Fahd be far behind?