

Middle East Report by Robert Dreyfuss

The U.S.-Israeli strategic accord

Sharon's aim is straightforward: to ensnare the Reagan administration and wreck U.S. influence among the Arabs.

The memorandum of understanding on military-strategic cooperation signed between Israel and the United States Nov. 30 could undermine altogether the chances of the Reagan administration's pursuing an even-handed peace initiative in the Middle East.

Although the memorandum falls far short of the all-encompassing war pact that Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon was gunning for, it constitutes Israel's first successful effort to counter its defeat on the U.S. sale of AWACS radar planes to Saudi Arabia, and to re-emerge as Washington's principal ally in the Middle East.

According to intelligence sources, the U.S.-Israeli accord is the first step in a larger operation to draw the Reagan administration, weakened as it is by the Reagagate scandals being thrown at it, into an ever-closer embrace with the extremist troika now running Israel—Prime Minister Menachem Begin, Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir, and Defense Minister Sharon—and to set the stage for a rupture in U.S.-Arab relations.

The Begin government is known to be covertly cooperating with the Soviet KGB and the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), as I have stressed. All three favor the growth of Muslim Brotherhood fundamentalism in the interest of building up Israel's image as the only stable friend of the United States in the region while wrecking

American influence among Arabs.

Specifically, the Begin government intends to build on its alliance with the United States by provoking a conflict with Syria. By attacking Syria, Israel will draw the Soviet Union deeper into the area—exactly what the KGB wants—and thereby win stronger American backing. The memorandum signed by Israel and the United States commits both to jointly take on Soviet-backed threats to the region.

To create the pretext for such an operation, the KGB and the British are cooperating to foment a Lebanon-style civil war in Syria aimed at promoting the emergence of a Muslim Brotherhood revolution against the Assad regime.

Israel is hardly hiding its intentions to use the strategic accord to draw in the United States around such an operation. After meeting with a sympathetic Alexander Haig Dec. 1 in Washington, Sharon emerged to tell a group of Israeli reporters that there "will be" secret clauses in the U.S.-Israeli memorandum of understanding. Then, turning to some American reporters, Sharon added (in English) that there "might be" secret clauses.

Sharon's extremely provocative statements led to the immediate issuance of an official Defense Department statement that it is "totally erroneous" that there is anything at all to the memo of understanding beyond the publicly announced terms of the agreement.

Nevertheless, rumors abound of an unpublished section of the accord involving the sharing of secret satellite intelligence data and other such information.

The Reagan administration is reluctant to play along with the full Israeli gameplan, as evidenced by Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger's refusal to accept all Sharon's demands around the accord. However, the administration has yet to come up with a competent and effective policy to counter the Israeli thrust.

"Israel would like to make the memo seem much larger and more effective than it really is," said one Washington intelligence source. "And they would like to drag us in. The problem in the administration is that there is no clear policy direction for the region, and without Dick Allen there to pull the pieces together there is an even less likely chance that anything coherent could emerge. Therefore, it is very possible that some sort of Israeli provocation could succeed in forcing an American move in support of Israel."

The Israel-American strategic accord has already had one effect. When U.S. special envoy Philip Harbib arrived in Syria Dec. 1 as part of a Reagan-sponsored effort to maintain the fragile ceasefire in Lebanon, he was greeted with a barrage of charges that Washington had eliminated itself as a serious and impartial mediator of the Lebanon crisis as a result of the accord with the Israelis. The Soviet press agency TASS called the agreement a "new aggressive military-strategic alliance" against the Arab world, and the PLO charged that it represented a "declaration of American-Israeli war against the Arabs."