
ISRAEL

Begin blowtorches the Mideast map

by Nancy Coker

Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin's sudden annexation of the occupied Golan Heights Dec. 14 could ignite the flames of conflict all over the Middle East. Intelligence analysts see a new explosion in Lebanon as the most immediate danger; and a U.S.-Soviet confrontation cannot be ruled out.

Israel seized the Golan Heights from Syria in the Six-Day War of 1967, and has occupied it ever since. Begin's decision to formally incorporate the occupied territory into Israel, a decision that flouts the Camp David accords and all Middle East peace negotiations and agreements under United Nations Resolution 242, was no security measure, but a deliberate provocation to the Reagan administration and the Arab nations, Syria in particular. Cooler heads among Israel's supporters fear that the country's national interest—and possibly its survival—have been jettisoned. It is not yet clear how Reagan will follow up his Dec. 18 suspension of the recent strategic accord with Israel.

Well-placed Arab sources report that there is growing fear in Washington that Israel's Golan grab is "only the first step" in a calculated series of provocations culminating in an Israeli refusal to return the remainder of the Sinai to Egypt. Such a move would badly destabilize the Mubarak regime, which is already under considerable internal pressure for adhering to the late Anwar Sadat's Camp David accords.

According to a U.N. source, Arabs who normally do not talk to one another are now closing ranks as a result of the Israeli move. But, he speculated, the Arabs will attempt to maintain their cool until April 1982, when the Sinai is scheduled to be returned, after which point Egypt, with the largest military in the Arab world, will move to rejoin the Arab fold. "This is precisely what Israel will attempt to sabotage," the source stated, "most likely by staging provocations in Lebanon aimed at splitting the Arab ranks."

A renewed bloodbath in Lebanon could trigger the final implementation of the Bernard Lewis Plan, the design for partition of Lebanon initiated by Henry Kis-

singer during the 1975 Lebanon civil war. Under the plan, Lebanon would be fragmented into several sectarian mini-states, and a "trade-off" arranged whereby Israel and Syria would each annex a portion of that nation.

But the consequences of Begin's land grab extend beyond the Lebanon flashpoint to the whole Middle East region. Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and every moderate Arab nation that has signaled readiness for recognition of and peace with Israel have been badly undercut by the Golan annexation, opening the door for Islamic fundamentalist radicals like Libya's Qaddafi to go on a rampage of terror. Thus, the entire region could be reduced to a condition of "permanent destabilization," ending all hopes for a peace agreement based on economic development.

Moreover, if the friendship treaty between Syria and the Soviet Union is activated to bring Russian military muscle behind Syria in a new Arab-Israeli conflict precipitated by the Golan grab, all the ingredients for an eyeball-to-eyeball superpower crisis would be present.

All this is exactly what the Dope, Inc./Permindex assassination-and-organized-crime apparatus behind the Begin government has in mind. Defense Minister Sharon in particular wants to provoke the Soviets into active participation so as to "test" whether or not the United States will agree to take on the Soviets.

The Begin regime has let it be known that its annexation of Golan is a form of revenge against the Reagan administration, in retaliation for President Reagan's continuing interest in the eight-point peace plan of Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Fahd.

Begin is doing little to hide his contempt for his U.S. "strategic ally." "No one will dictate our lives to us, not even the United States," stated Begin in explaining why he did not consult with Washington before annexing the Golan Heights. "Not only did we not want to ask any government regarding this sovereign act, but on the contrary, we consciously decided not to ask, since we had no doubt that our American friends would tell us 'no.'"

Knesset member Ronni Milo, Begin's son-in-law, explained that Begin railroaded the annexation vote through the Knesset because he "wanted to get the vote over with fast to avoid internal escalation." It was "good timing" for Israel to act, said Milo, when the United States and the rest of the world were focused on the Polish crisis.

Israeli Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir told a parliamentary committee that Israel does not intend to stop with the Golan annexation. "I think we must annex other areas," said Shamir, including the West Bank, but only after Palestinian autonomy is established there. Shamir later told Israeli radio that "as much as we want to coordinate our activities with the United States, the interests are not identical. We have to, from time to time, worry about our own interests."