

Middle East

Post-Carter challenge: the future of Israel's Begin and Khomeini's Iran

by Robert Dreyfuss, Middle East Editor

At the beginning of 1981, in its inauguration issue, the *Executive Intelligence Review* noted that the new Reagan administration had the opportunity to radically shift the premises of American Middle East policy from the policy of the Carter-Brzezinski era. Since 1977, that policy had been guided by the criminal concept of Zbigniew Brzezinski's arc-of-crisis doctrine, under which the Carter administration deliberately sought to foster instability throughout the region stretching from India through Iran, Turkey, and the Persian Gulf down into Africa.

To create the arc-of-crisis, Carter and Brzezinski, under the guidance of the Trilateral Commission, fostered the rise to power of two mentally unbalanced leaders: Menachem Begin of Israel, elected in 1977, and Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran, catapulted to power in 1979 by a Muslim Brotherhood secret-society coup d'état aided by the British Secret Intelligence Service.

As Reagan took office, the *EIR* reported in January, the potential for sharp changes in both Israel and Iran was evident. Within minutes of Reagan's swearing-in, Khomeini ordered the release of the American hostages held 444 days, and it seemed as if the Khomeini regime was nearing the end of its days. In Israel, a badly faltering Begin government faced the prospect of early elections, with polls showing that the more moderate opposition Labor Party would win an easy victory. The efficient removal of Begin and Khomeini would have immeasurably improved the diplomatic prospects for the Reagan administration in the Middle East.

As we enter 1982, both Begin and Khomeini are still in power. The year 1981 has provided much evidence of direct collusion between Teheran and Tel Aviv, including Begin's arms shipments to Khomeini's military forces; and the prospect is for increasing tension, and even renewed full-scale war, arising out of the combination of Begin's Israel and the activities of the Muslim Brotherhood terrorists and fundamentalists.

What happened? How did both Begin and Khomeini manage to retain power despite the change in the White House? What are the challenges that Reagan will face in the coming year as a result?

Without doubt, the principal issue facing the Rea-

gan administration during 1982 will be the nature of its relations to Israel. To be successful, the White House in fact will soon find that it has no alternative except to reach an agreement with leading world powers to "save Israel from itself," as one U.S. official put it on Dec. 22.

Israel's future

Israel is truly at a crossroads. In one direction, Israel faces the prospect of becoming a full-fledged fascist state prepared for a series of endless wars with its neighbors. In the other, Israel can decide to accommodate itself to existence within its 1967 borders, participating in and developing the social and economic life of the Middle East as an equal partner.

Despite Menachem Begin's 1981 rampages, it is beyond doubt that a substantial body of Israeli opinion is quietly coming to the sober realization that only the second course is a feasible one. The delicate task of harmonizing that growing Israeli sentiment with its own diplomatic objectives will require a special skill from the White House in 1982.

The strategic problem facing Israel in the next decade is this: Arab commitment to economic growth and industrialization, the growth of Arab population, and the continued flow of oil wealth into Arab central banks means that by the mid-1980s Israel will face an Arab world with a technological capability and a military-industrial base capable of overcoming Israel's strategic superiority. Because there is no way outside of war to restrain this development tide realistic Israeli planners know that Israel had better play the diplomatic cards it now holds to get the best deal that it can on the Palestine issue.

But another school of thinking is also evident in Israel, and it dominates the regime of Begin and Defense Minister Ariel Sharon. That school argues that Israel can simultaneously increase its own arms-production capacity while actively subverting of its neighbors'. By assisting the spread of "Islamic fundamentalism," by attempting to set up Khomeini-style states in the Arab world, by seeking to undermine Saudi Arabia and destroy the oil resources of the Arab world, by allying

with the Muslim Brotherhood in a conspiracy to set minorities against national governments in accordance with the "Bernard Lewis plan," Israeli strategists believe they can retard the movement for Arab industrialism, and secure the future of their state.

That is the thinking that underlies Israel's current alliance with Khomeini's Iran. And it is the basis of Israel domestic and regional strategy during 1981.

Internally, Menachem Begin has brought Israel closer to becoming an openly totalitarian regime. During the May-June 1981 election campaign, Begin's Likud partisans used such overtly violent and threatening tactics that spokesmen for Shimon Peres' opposition bloc denounced Begin as "fascist-like" and the *New York Times* compared Begin's Israel to Weimar Germany. Likud thugs broke up Labor Party rallies, and Begin's campaign rhetoric appealed to the basest instincts of Israel's uneducated Sephardic strata. Truckloads of weapons, supplied by Begin's Likud to the fanatical Gush Emunim settlers in the Israeli-occupied territories, set up the core of a private militia dedicated to Begin's vision of a messianic state. As mobs chanted, "Begin, Begin, King of Israel!" an angry Peres asked Labor supporters: "Do you want this Khomeinism to take over Israel with idol worship?"

But Begin cynically succeeded in using external events to manipulate the Israeli voters into renewing his mandate. First, the outbreak of a crisis in Lebanon, pitting Israel against Syria, caused the nation to rally around the Begin regime; and the addition of the Syrian missiles to Lebanon in May—along with Begin's bluster threats to bomb them—created tensions that aided Begin still further. Then, the pre-election bombing of Iraq's Osirak nuclear facility in Baghdad, which was universally condemned, won Begin accolades from a deluded Israeli population.

By bombing Iraq, Begin had signaled to the Arab world that Israel would not allow Arabs to develop advanced technologies. "Perhaps Israel next will bomb our universities in Saudi Arabia because they produce scientists," said Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal.

Begin, meanwhile, accelerated the activities that led to a series of confrontations with Washington. The aerial bombing of Beirut that left 300 civilians dead in June marked the first low-point in Israeli-American relations, and crystallized the embargo on U.S. arms deliveries to Israel that lasted until just before Begin's September arrival in Washington. The September lull in Begin's rampage ended with General Sharon's provocations on the occupied West Bank, where a new civilian governor used tactics that caused riots and strikes, and with the redoubled Israeli pressures on Lebanon and Syria—culminating in the illegal annexation of the Syrian Golan Heights.

What gave Begin the maneuvering room he needed

to get himself re-elected was the idiotic doctrine of Alexander Haig's "strategic consensus," pursued despite a tour of the Middle East in the spring that resulted in complete fiasco—not a single Arab state even hinted at support for the nonsensical idea of a U.S.-sponsored anti-Soviet Arab-Israeli alliance. To the President, Haig represented Begin's lunacy as somehow useful in the anti-Soviet crusade he envisioned for the region. Those who opposed the idea, like U.S. Ambassador Bob Neumann in Saudi Arabia, were unceremoniously fired by Haig.

Throughout 1981, it was General Haig who consistently undermined the President's Middle East policy. Most egregiously, it was Haig who, beginning in the spring with the April decision to sell AWACS radar planes to Saudi Arabia, opposed that decision and almost succeeded in sabotaging the sale itself.

To the extent that the President could even be said to have a Middle East policy, it centered on the notion that the leading American interest in the area was in Saudi Arabia. The October AWACS decision, a landmark vote that narrowly averted a catastrophe for the United States in the Arab world and managed to secure the U.S.-Saudi relationship for a time, was in fact the major foreign-policy success of the Reagan administration in 1981. Coming only weeks after the assassination of Anwar Sadat and in the midst of new Iranian efforts to destabilize the Persian Gulf, an AWACS failure would have pushed the entire region over the brink into the Muslim Brotherhood's chaotic Dark Ages.

Oil and geopolitics

The AWACS policy and the Reagan commitment to U.S.-Saudi ties in fact led to one vitally important, yet almost unnoticed, victory in 1981. For the first time since 1971, the price of oil on the world market actually dropped, and in constant-dollar terms, declined dramatically. At the start of the year, it had appeared that oil prices might soar out of sight once again, as OPEC hawks demanded more than \$40 per barrel and Saudi Arabia was deemed unable to hold the line. But the administration's support for Saudi Arabia led Oil Minister Zaki Yamani to proclaim Saudi intent to force oil prices lower. "We engineered the glut," said Yamani, noting that Saudi production of almost 11 million barrels a day forced other OPEC states to lower their price. By year's end, the \$40 price existed no more, and OPEC had agreed upon a consolidated \$34-per-barrel fixed price, to be held at that level throughout 1982.

That, alone, was a major defeat for London and the Anglo-Swiss financial and oil interests seeking to push oil prices into the \$70-80 per barrel range.

But Haig's advocacy of the strategic consensus mumbo-jumbo merely served to alienate sections of the Arab world and push the Arabs in the direction of a

London-engineered consensus of a different sort. The April defeat of French President Giscard and the election of the Socialist François Mitterrand deprived Reagan of a crucial ally on Middle East policy, and isolated Chancellor Schmidt of West Germany in his Middle East stability policy. Together, the French and British sought to assemble a European Third Force independent of Washington and NATO, and they viewed the Arab world as the "natural partner" of such an independent Europe. By locking Reagan into a linear U.S.-Israel alliance, London and Paris sought to undermine American influence in the Middle East and eventually to replace it—in the process, appropriating to themselves the vast petrodollar and oil resources of the Gulf.

Through justifying Begin's fascist excesses, Haig almost—but not quite—managed to sabotage the entire Reagan strategy for the region, acting as an agent of influence for Britain's Lord Carrington and the Anglo-French axis in Europe.

Islamic fundamentalism

By the same token, during 1981 Haig continually supported the British SIS project to spread Islamic fundamentalism and the Muslim Brotherhood in the area. That Haig could so brazenly back the Muslim Brotherhood in 1981 was remarkable because the *EIR* had established itself during the previous period as one of the world's leading authorities on Islamic fundamentalism and its connections to the British SIS and the Malthusian "Club of Rome." *EIR* exposés on the Muslim Brotherhood secret society won worldwide recognition during 1980, and early in 1981 the release of the book *Hostage to Khomeini* by *EIR* Middle East editor Robert Dreyfuss effectively unraveled a century of British intelligence activity among Muslim mullahs and imams. At the end of 1981, an international campaign conducted by the *EIR* to expose the Muslim Brotherhood conference at the Rothko Chapel in Houston severely damaged London's SIS capabilities in the Middle East and drew sharp attacks from SIS spokesmen charging that the *EIR* had managed to undermine their patiently built influence in Middle East affairs (see *EIR*, Dec. 1, 1981: "London Places *EIR* at Center of Mideast Strategic Storm").

Concerning Iran, it has been Haig who secured Reagan's grudging toleration for the regime of Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran. Only days before the inauguration, Reagan startled the media and the Iranian mullahs by terming Khomeini and his thugs "barbarians." His statement marked a sharp contrast to Carter's fawning praise of Khomeini, and it led many observers to expect a sharp change in American policy toward Iran.

Yet that change never came. After some initial contrary indications, the White House gave its full backing to the January 1981 U.S.-Iranian hostage deal,

a deal which most legal specialists considered illegal and unconstitutional, and which indeed represented a treasonous sell-out of American national sovereignty. Reagan's decision not to renege on the hostage deal—since the hostages themselves were already home and the deal was clearly extorted under duress by assassins—had far-reaching repercussions: it meant that the administration would not directly challenge Iran's madmen.

Thus, the expectations of many Iranian exiles that the new American administration would assist, or at least not hinder, efforts to topple Khomeini were not fulfilled. After the inauguration, Reagan no longer used the word "barbarians" in relation to Iran, nor did he challenge State Department arguments that the mullahs were the only political force capable of resisting Soviet expansionism. It was exactly this ludicrous argument that had led Dr. Brzezinski to call "Islamic fundamentalism" a "bulwark against communism."

Nor did Reagan act to prevent the regular flow of American weapons to Iran through third parties, black-market operations, and possibly some CIA channels. In particular, a reported steady flow of American-made weapons from Israel to Iran went unchallenged.

Most significantly, Reagan did not protest the overtly and systematically genocidal policies of the Pol Pot-like regime in Teheran. Tens of thousands of mass executions, some involving school children; hideous depopulation programs for Iran's cities; the elimination of all of Iran's industrial base; all this drew no criticism from the administration, which seemed to hope that Iran would just "go away."

The result—amid continued statements from Haig praising Muslim fundamentalism—was that during 1981 Iran drifted slowly into a position allowing the U.S.S.R. controlling influence over many of Iran's institutions. The death of several dozen top Iranian leaders in bombings, such as Ayatollah Beheshti, President Rajai, Prime Minister Bahonar, and dozens of top officials of the Islamic Republican Party (IRP), had the effect of strengthening the radical currents inside the IRP and creating new openings for Soviet influence. Yet, ever behind the scenes, the British SIS was suspected of organizing the tilt toward Moscow, as part of British diplomatic efforts to strike a separate anti-American deal with elements of the Soviet leadership.

The Reagan administration's toleration for the Muslim Brotherhood's activities finally led to the Oct. 6 assassination of President Anwar Sadat of Egypt. That murder, which eliminated the staunchest American ally in the region, was the work of British, Soviet and Israeli intelligence cooperation through the Russian and Coptic churches. Its purpose was to destabilize the entire region, especially Saudi Arabia, and prevent the successful organizing effort around Saudi Crown Prince Fahd's eight-point peace plan.