

# Vance Succeeds In First Leg Of Tour: Mideast Crisis Set Up

After less than a week in the Middle East, U.S. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance has brought that region nearer to a general Arab-Israeli crisis and possible war.

At his stops in Egypt, Syria and Jordan, Vance was able to catalyze public, visible signs of conflict within the Arab world on the central Palestinian question broadly similar to the chaos provoked by Henry Kissinger's Sinai Two pact which preceded the bloody Lebanon civil war. Vance now has the capability during the last half of his tour to trigger a compensatory rush of "radical Arab unity" around the Palestinians that will provoke into motion the Israeli pre-emptive strike faction and to manufacture an escalation of the dangerous southern Lebanon crisis into a direct showdown between Israeli and Syrian armed forces.

With this chaos and crisis mood set in motion, Vance will be better placed to extort from Saudi Arabians a commitment to drop discussions with other oil-producing countries seeking monetary alternatives to the dollar by playing upon Saudi terror of regional instability and insecurity. Vance's actions are a key moment in the Carter Administration's intent to break the political will of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). The main target of this operation is Western Europe, whose will toward independent political and monetary initiatives will be drastically undermined if the Arab oil-producing partners in the European-Arab axis are crushed.

Since these latter aims, and not the setting up of a Geneva Mideast peace conference, are the primary goals of Vance's Mideast swing, he has already substantially succeeded. The surface appearance of stumbling and clumsiness evidenced in the Egypt and Syria stops have in reality been a key element in the destabilization of the Arab sector.

## *Sadat Bends Over and Gets Kicked*

During his first stopover in Egypt, Vance won from the malleable opportunist President Sadat a public commitment to sidestep the long-expected Geneva conference and the thorny and controversial question of Palestine Liberation Organization participation at future Mideast negotiations. In an August 2 press conference, Sadat revealed he had suggested in private discussions the creation of a "working group" of Arab and Israeli Foreign Ministers to meet in New York, under Carter Administration auspices, to hammer out procedural questions. The PLO would obviously be excluded from such talks and the Soviets would be invited to "confer" with the United States but not necessarily to attend the actual discussions.

Vance immediately labelled the Sadat plan an "ex-

cellent suggestion," and the next day's international press was prominently headlining "the Sadat-Vance proposal."

From all evidence currently available, it is clear that the proposal was blown up by Vance and his entourage way out of proportion to the meaning intended for it by Sadat. While the Egyptian President would *personally* love to exclude the PLO and the Soviets, he cannot actually pursue such a policy due to a number of domestic and regional constraints. In issuing the statement, Sadat had probably intended no more than to create an illusory sense of "diplomatic momentum" and to propitiate the Carter Administration.

Vance, however, cleverly made a public fait accompli of the proposal in order to set off fireworks throughout the rest of the Arab world. During the August 2 press conference, in what was an obvious set up coordinated by Vance and agent reporters in the entourage, Sadat was repeatedly questioned about his intent towards the Palestinians. According to the August 3 *Washington Post*, Sadat was "edgy" and "testy" during this questioning and sharply denied that he sold out the Palestinians.

The pressure for Sadat to resist Carter Administration demands that he break with the Palestinians has been intense this week. On August 2, Sadat received a strongly worded letter from the PLO Executive Committee insisting that the PLO participate in all general Mideast negotiations and that an independent Palestinian state on the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip territories be a minimal Arab demand.

During the two days of Vance-Sadat bilateral discussions, the Cairo press, heavily government-controlled, emphasized the priority of the Palestinian issue over other issues such as Arab-Israeli territorial disputes. *Al Ahram*, on August 2, headlined "Egypt Rejects American Proposals, Presents New Ones." In fact, during the major part of the Vance-Sadat talks, the *differences* between the two countries rather than the points of agreement took up the vast majority of the time, with Sadat rejecting an American proposal for a phased series of Israeli territorial withdrawals in return for staged Arab normalization of relations with Israel.

With Sadat fundamentally unable to fully bow down before Vance, much of what happened at the press conference was likely intended to be a "smokescreen" and "theatrics," according to France's *Le Figaro*.

Hardly had Vance left Cairo for Damascus than the Egyptian government began to backtrack from the "working group" policy's exclusion of the Palestinians. The Egyptian Foreign Ministry released a toughly worded policy document insisting on Israeli territorial

withdrawals and on full recognition of Palestinian "self-determination" and inclusion in peace talks.

The release of this document, the August 4 *London Times* reported, was "an unusual step" whose aim was to show that "Egypt was not making any private deals behind the backs of other Arab leaders or abandoning the Palestinian cause." The "surprise move," the *Times* continued, was intended to "allay Arab fears that Egypt was making separate peace moves."

On August 4, Sadat held three hours worth of discussions with PLO chairman Yasser Arafat. According to *New York Times* Cairo reporter Marvin Howe, Sadat "emphasized to the Palestinian leader that his government had not reneged on its commitment that the PLO must take part in any Mideast peace negotiations" and insisted that the "working group" was "in no way a substitute" for a Geneva peace conference.

#### *Vance in Damascus: The Rejection*

Predictably, Syrian leader Hafez Assad strongly rejected the Sadat "working group" policy, declaring his insistence on PLO involvement in peace talks and on the creation of an independent Palestinian state. According to informed Washington sources, Assad's thoroughly negative attitude grew out of being "enraged" at Sadat's stumbling attempts to weed the PLO out of the negotiating process.

Assad's reception of Vance was built on the foundations of a "new strategic political accord" between the Syrian government and the PLO, London's *Financial Times* reported August 4. Several days ago, Assad and Arafat held a seven-hour intensive working session to formulate joint policy toward the U.S. moves in the Mideast.

As things now stand, the Syria-PLO position itself is fitting into the pattern needed by Vance for his Saudi Arabia stop. Lacking substantive Arab sector assertion

of a regional-national interest policy by breaking with the U.S. dollar, it will likely trigger a volte-face in Egypt, and thereby a "militant" Arab position facing Israel — activating an Israeli pre-emptive strike — or it will intersect with the ongoing Syria-Israel "proxy war" in Lebanon and be used by the U.S. and Israelis to detonate a full-scale Syria-Israel shooting war.

These dangers are exacerbated by the developing situation in Israel. Over the past few days, there has been a steady stream of suspicious terrorist incidents in several Israeli cities and townships, which the Israeli media on August 5 began calling a "terror wave." In one noteworthy incident, several "terrorist infiltrators" were caught after having entered Israel, amidst a great deal of national publicity.

The "anti-terrorist" hysteria in Israel can be expected to feed cries for a show of force against the Arabs, and the situation in southern Lebanon continues to be very hot. As of August 5, fighting was very heavy in the strategically key city of Marjayoun, close to the Israeli border. Earlier in the week, fighting between Israeli-supported fascists and Palestinian forces had extended as far north as Nabatiyeh, while Israeli jets made their first flights over the southern port city of Sidon in many months. At that moment, Syrian forces were attempting to arrange a recently arranged delicate ceasefire accord in Sidon.

Israeli hysteria is likely to be exacerbated by a policy announced by President Carter in *Time* magazine. In an interview, Carter incredibly stated that he would appeal "over the head of Premier Begin to the Israeli population" as well as to U.S. Jews, the European Common Market, and the Arab states, if Israel refused to be forthcoming to U.S. diplomatic moves. Carter's words are intentionally abetting the pre-emptive strike military faction centered around current Israeli Cabinet members, Generals Ariel Sharon and Moshe Dayan.

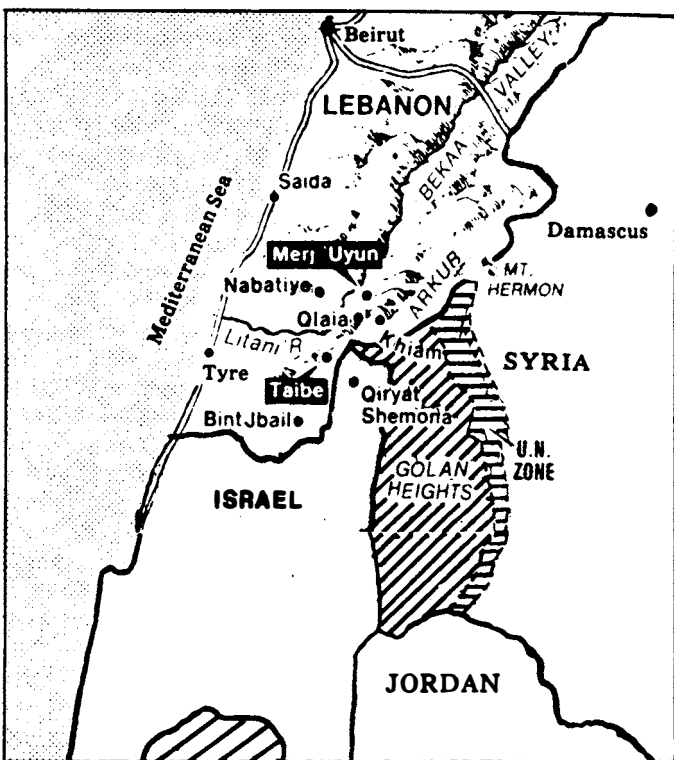
#### *European and Soviet Moves in the Making*

If the Arab states perceive even a glimmer of the reality of what Vance is trying to do with his trip, an array of alternative diplomatic forces is waiting to pick up the pieces of what will then be a shattered Carter Administration provocation.

Most significant, Italian Premier Giulio Andreotti arrives in Saudi Arabia on August 6, the same day that Vance arrives. According to reliable Italian sources, the two themes of Andreotti's visit will be "reform of the international monetary system" and "support for PLO participation at a Geneva conference." This combination will pose for the Saudis in the most sensuous way the European alternative to sticking with the U.S. Dollar Empire crowd.

In a parallel move, the French government is planning to push for a revision of the controversial United Nations Resolution 242 in order to alter its characterization of the Palestinians as "refugees" and to instead locate the Palestinian problem as one of national sovereignty. According to the August 5 *Christian Science Monitor*, the French will seek to coordinate this move with their European partners in the European Economic Community. If carried through, the French move would thoroughly undercut Carter and Co.

—Mark Burdman



At the same time, the Soviets are reinforcing their presence in the Arab world in expectation of a Vance diplomatic embarrassment. Soviet pressure was in large part responsible for the accords worked out between the PLO and Syria, and, in the wake of Vance's departure from Egypt, top level Soviet representatives held meetings with Egyptian Foreign Minister Ismail Fahmy in Cairo, possibly preparing for a previously arranged August trip to Cairo by Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko.

Throughout this week, Soviet and other East Bloc media have been sharply critical of Sadat's "working group," labelling it a "departure from the 1974 Rabat Accords" recognizing the PLO as the legitimate representatives of the Palestinians.

One source close to the Carter Administration commented, after Vance's Damascus arrival, that, "I hope Vance has gotten prior Soviet agreements on what he's now doing. If not, there's a good chance the Arabs are going to just turn around and call in the Soviets and then we're in big trouble."

Whether this emerging array of European-Soviet countermoves could include U.S.-backed Israel is now a moot question. Notably, this week, Israel's Energy Minister, Yitzhak Moday, for the first time threatened that if the United States continued to refuse to authorize the sale of nuclear reactors to Israel, then the Israeli government would look towards Europe as an alternative. Israel is well known to possess nuclear weapons; it is nuclear energy in the service of peace and economic development which the Carter Administration is determined to deny its "strongest Mideast ally."

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## Sadat On The Ropes

Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's unfortunante endorsement this week of the chimerical plan worked out with Secretary of State Cyrus Vance to convene a "working group" of Arab and Israeli foreign ministers in Washington may be the straw that breaks the camel's back.

According to Arab diplomatic sources, the internal opposition inside Egypt to Sadat and his corrupt circle of military chiefs — especially in the wake of the aborted Egyptian invasion of Libya last week — is growing to critical mass. In the evaluation of experienced U.S. analysts, unless there is a significant breakthrough toward a Middle East peace settlement, Sadat's chances

of surviving as president of Egypt past October are nil. Sadat's four-year tightrope act is coming to an end.

The growing domestic crisis in Egypt, fed by a spiralling economic collapse, threatens to push Sadat again into renewed confrontation with Libya. Libya's Prime Minister Abdessalam Jalloud charged at a press conference this week in Tripoli that Egypt was massing troops on the Libyan border following a ceasefire after the four-day border war, and that nearly the entire Egyptian air force has been stationed in bases in western Egypt poised to attack Libya. Jalloud also said that Libya had obtained documentary evidence to prove that the U.S. instigated the start of the Egypt-Libya war.

Within Egypt, civilian and military opposition to Sadat is receiving the quiet backing of Libya. The Libyan government of Muammar Qaddafi — a regime which Sadat has pledged to overthrow by force — has begun making contacts with former Egyptian officials who now oppose Sadat. These officials, sources say, are in contact with rebellious circles in the army, especially among middle-level officers.

Since the attack on Libya, the Egyptian army has been hit by a number of mutinies and rebellions, a situation that forced Sadat to issue a threatening communique commanding his army personnel to remain loyal. So afraid was Sadat of the possibility that his officers would refuse to carry out orders to move against Libya that even field commanders were not told of the impending action until two hours before the war!

The opposition to Sadat is of two forms, both leftist — including the Egyptian communists and Nasserists — and rightist, such as the Muslim Brotherhood. Although the latter are divided into several competing Muslim factions, each with an allegiance to a different outside backer, there is evidence that some of the rightist Muslim groups are secretly cooperating with the left to overthrow Sadat.

The driving force behind the Egyptian crisis is the worsening economic disaster. A foreign debt of between \$12 and \$18 billion has thrown the entire economy into a tailspin despite occasional handouts from Saudi Arabia, and there has been a near total lack of capital investment since the 1973 war. Infrastructure — communications, transport, and the like — have collapsed in disorder, and Egypt's agriculture is suffering from an absence of fertilizer and pesticide. According to *Pravda*, the Soviet daily, most of this year's cotton crop will be lost to an infestation, wiping out the chief Egyptian export commodity.