

Carter Puts Sadat On The Line

State Department sources this week revealed that the Carter Administration intends to apply intense pressure on visiting Egyptian President Anwar Sadat early next month to "work the Palestine Liberation Organization over." Another source who worked with Carter's National Security Council head Zbigniew Brzezinski on the 1975 Brookings Institution Middle East policy study which has since provided the framework for Jimmy Carter's Middle East policy, confidently told interviewers that "if the Egyptians can get a peace that is acceptable to the Egyptians and the PLO doesn't accept it, the Egyptians will break with the PLO."

For a variety of reasons, Brzezinski has determined to force the Egyptian president to accept the political analogue of the intense economic pressure that the International Monetary Fund has been applying on Egypt, at the risk of toppling his shaky regime, for the past year. As the core of his Brookings-authored scheme, Brzezinski is intent on levelling the Palestinian resistance movement, the nerve center of Arab sector opposition to the Carter Administration. More generally, Brzezinski is demanding that Arab leaders break from negotiations toward a new world monetary order to replace the bankrupt dollar.

To force the issue, Carter this week issued ultimatums and insults at the Arab leaders. In leaks intentionally conducted through the Israeli embassy, a new Carter peace plan, the fourth in two weeks was revealed. The plan, billed as a "final" diagram of U.S. policy aims in the Mideast, calls for the stationing of Israeli troops 12 to 34 miles into Arab territory, the permanent extension of eastern Israeli defense borders to the Jordan River, and the subordination of a "Palestinian homeland" to the sovereign control of the Kingdom of Jordan. According to WCBS radio March 23, Arab leaders were "furious" and the Israeli leadership "pleased" by the scheme; Brzezinski immediately issued a pro forma denial that he had suggested any such idea in order to cool down the reaction.

Behind Carter is an increasingly open Israeli threat of a preemptive strike. Israeli Premier Yitzhak Rabin suddenly told an election campaign audience this week in Israel to "expect the unexpected" in the coming weeks. Right-wing Israeli General Ariel Sharon, Rabin's opponent for the premiership, warned on Israeli television that an Arab attack against Israel could be expected by mid-summer. According to CBS March 24, the Israeli capital was "jittery" earlier this week over Israeli intelligence reports that Egyptian troops had been carrying out maneuvers similar to those carried out on the eve of the October, 1973 Arab-Israeli war.

No other source has mentioned these maneuvers, and it is likely that their reporting was geared to terrifying the Egyptians and other Arab leaders to submit to U.S.

policy or face a new war. But two factors make an actual war possible.

One, former Vice President Nelson Rockefeller arrived in Israel this week after stopovers in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Two, Carter's confusing Mideast policy statements have successfully provoked a paranoid "breakaway ally" mentality among the Israeli leadership. A pro-Israeli Capitol Hill source complained this week that Carter's statements were undercutting Israel's "trust" in the U.S. and forcing Rabin to be "inflexible" on Arab-Israeli issues. This would be especially the case in reaction to a new Carter human rights campaign aimed at Israel, he stressed.

Arabs Planning to Boycott Carter?

While informed U.S. thinktankers insisted this week that the Egyptian and Saudi Arabian leadership would treat Carter's most recent Mideast statements as an "outrage" and "the last straw," it is still unresolved at this point what concrete decisions vis-a-vis the U.S. Administration will emerge from a matrix of Arab sector strategy sessions in the coming days, especially a March 29 summit meeting involving Egypt, the PLO, Syria and Jordan.

Will Arab leaders react to the Carter policy by falling into a patterned anti-Israeli mindset, or will they encourage an international break with the dollar? Short of answering this question, leading experts this week nonetheless expected Sadat to seriously consider postponing his U.S. trip, following in the footsteps of Saudi leader Prince Fahd, who, one source noted, "sees no point" in discussing Arab-Israeli issues with Carter.

If Sadat were to publicly accept the totality of the Carter policy, it is likely his regime would not survive the internal political consequences. An informed Palestinian source just returned from the Palestine National Council meeting in Cairo reported that the pro-Palestinian layers in the Egyptian military and intelligence apparatus, whose career predates Sadat, are "much stronger than Sadat." Given Egypt's economic crisis, the source estimated, Sadat would be overthrown if he went with Carter's "Jordanian option."

The Soviet Complication

In this crisis, Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, in a major Soviet policy address last weekend, offered no assistance. Brezhnev neglected mention of the PLO and held back from any programmatic statement for the Mideast that would provide a basis for thawing the crisis and delivering a counterweight to Carter. State Department sources confidently assessed that Brezhnev was eagerly trying to be "flexible" prior to a visit to Moscow by U.S. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance. But Arab leaders and journalists responded with enraged surprise.

“Egypt Will Break With PLO”

The following is an interview with a participant in the 1975 Brookings Institution study on the Mideast in which Zbigniew Brzezinski and NSC Mideast advisor William Quandt participated:

Q: How do you think the Arabs are responding to the Carter policy statement on the Middle East?

A: Well, the Egyptians, Saudis and Syrians probably find it troubling. The quality of the peace and the lengthy time of eight years.

Q: Do you think the Egyptians will continue to back the PLO under any circumstances?

A: If the Egyptians can get peace that is acceptable to them and the PLO doesn't accept it, yes, they will break with the PLO. The nature of the link to Jordan is important. The confederation idea has to be looked at in its nature of modalities. Will the PLO be inhibited in its foreign or military stance? This remains to be worked out in discussions. The Saudis and the Syrians would cooperate in this type of agreement. But these issues won't come up now. Sadat will play it soft at the beginning as a lead to the Geneva peace conference. The Egyptians are interested in what they can get out of this.

Q: If there were a break with the PLO, wouldn't this be dangerous consequence?

A: Yes, there would be trouble with Libya and Iraq. There would be fighting and trouble.

Q: What would be the outcome if the Palestinian demands were met?

A: Do you see what is going on in Lebanon today? Arafat wants to make a deal. He won't come out directly and demand a Palestinian state. He would lose on that score. But if we offer him a Palestinian state, that's different. He'll go for it. If the PLO doesn't accept, there is Iraq and Libya. But what can they offer them. Only money, nothing else.

Q: What about the Soviet Union?

A: The Soviets are in weakened position in the Mideast. They have lost a lot of credibility because of Syria and Lebanon. No problem.

Q: What will make Sadat make a deal? Is there any economic deal in the making?

A: No. That has nothing to do with it immediately. The Egyptians will be happy to solve the military angle which is bleeding the country. The economic issue is not a part of the settlement. It is a consequence of it.

Egyptians, Saudis “Angry, Outraged” at Carter

The following is an interview with a leading American analyst on U.S.-Arab relations:

Q: Sadat is reportedly under strong pressure by the Carter Administration to break with the PLO. What is your

assessment of the situation.?

A: I don't think they can move Sadat on the PLO. That is really the last straw. On financial matters, the U.S. has Sadat up against the wall. Politically, the U.S. is doing nothing to help Sadat. The Arabs are outraged by Carter's latest statements. If anything, Sadat may move away from the U.S., but that remains to be seen.

The key is what the Saudis will do over the next six months. The Saudis are angry. If the Carter Administration continues to pursue its current policy, the Saudis will get even angrier. They know the implications of Carter's policy: no Geneva, no peace settlement, no substantial aid to Egypt. The Saudis will be left standing with an egg on their face. Believe me, the Saudis won't tolerate that.

It's not accidental that a whole group of Saudis are here now, running around this country. They are very uneasy about the Arab boycott; they know of the dangers that the U.S. Congress will pass the legislation. Unless the Carter Administration stops playing around politically, the Saudis can move in several directions. It is unlikely that they'll go along with Carter; they may go along with the IMF on certain issues here and there, but overall it's my guess that at some crucial point—which I think is going to come soon — the Saudis will do something very drastic to solve the financial questions facing them and the rest of the Arab world.

Sadat's Only Hope

Following is an assessment by a leading Arab Middle East expert of Carter's recent statements on the Middle East:

All the talk about Palestinians being an obstacle to a Middle East settlement is not true. The real obstacle, the most devastating obstacle, are Carter's recent statements on the defensible borders (for Israel) and the “Palestinian homeland.” His statements are a bombshell and have seriously set back prospects for a settlement...I seriously doubt whether Sadat or the other Arab leaders will come to Washington now as a result of Carter's statements.

Just on the basis of Carter's statements over the past two days, it is my estimation that Sadat won't go along with Carter. The real meaning of Carter's strategy has been made very clear in the past two or three days — he is out to start a war. If Sadat is smart, he'll know that if he goes along with it, he'll face civil disturbances, and possibly be overthrown. I think that Sadat will change gears. I cannot give you any hard evidence, but I think he will turn to the Soviets and cut with the U.S. I think he knows that is his only hope.

Saudis See “No Reason” To Discuss With Carter

Following are excerpts from an interview with Mr. E. Garlich, an oil analyst at the Washington Forum:

Carter could have been more forthcoming in the Middle East. You see the whole issue is very complicated

beginning back with the Lebanese civil war which did not pan out. The war did not pull the Palestinians into line. If it had, it would have been fairly easy to put pressure on Israel to get negotiations going. But now with the PNC (Palestinian National Council) not amending its charter, things look much worse. The Palestinian militants are just refusing to budge on that issue of changing the charter (to recognize Israel —ed.). Therefore the Arab-Israeli front has not moved toward peace. I think that the

Saudis feel at this time there is no reason to discuss the matter with Carter, given this situation...

Also the assassination of Jumblatt really jolted the Saudis. There is a list of other prominent Middle Eastern leaders named for assassination like Arafat and Camille Chamoun...

I cannot tell you (who is putting this list out), but I will say that it is one of my contacts in the Middle East who told me in September that Jumblatt would soon have an accident!

Palestine National Council: Political Consolidation — But No Direction

The dilemma of the Palestinian movement emerged in its sharpest form at the meeting of the Palestine National Council, which ended last week in Cairo.

On the one hand, the meeting of the PNC resulted in a new political and military unity among the various factions of guerrillas and "independents," on the basis of the 15-point political program issued at the end of the meeting. On the other hand, however, the results of the PNC meeting, the first such gathering in almost three years, did not include the emergence of any realistic strategy for Middle East peace.

The conference, which did not take any decision to recognize Israel, did authorize the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Chairman Yasser Arafat to take up contacts for the purpose of negotiating possible attendance by the PLO of "any international conference or gathering which treats the Palestine question."

Arafat who was reelected as chairman, was also named as commander of a unified military force that places the armed units of the guerrilla groups and of the regular Palestine Liberation Army under his direct control.

According to reports from Cairo, the leftist Palestinian "Rejection Front," largely supported by Iraq and Libya, did not oppose the political program presented by PLO Political Department director Farouq Kaddoumi, and although the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) refused to join the PLO Executive Committee over certain disagreements with the PLO program, the pro-Iraqi Arab Liberation Front and other leftist Palestinians reached an overall accord with the main body of the PLO, represented by Arafat's Fatah.

However, the militant tone of the meeting and the hardline resolutions largely fail to address the real issues that were on the minds of every participant, especially after 18 months of civil war in Lebanon that decimated the PLO. The hollow reaffirmation of "armed struggle" against Israel did not cover the complete lack of a political program dealing with the international issues that lie at the core of the conflict in the Middle East and which make the Palestine issue so explosive.

"We are fighting for our survival," said one participant at the Cairo meeting, "and we therefore cannot be

expected to take up broader issues of international scope."

Shadow of Carter over PNC

Throughout the meeting, the shadow of the Carter Administration hovered over the gathering. In fact, for the Carter regime, the decision by the PNC not to change its covenant — which calls for the destruction of Israel and its replacement with a "democratic, secular state" — was a desired goal. Sources in Washington have reported that the Carter forces intend to confront and crush the PLO in coming months, and thus sought in the weeks preceding the conference, and in the days of the conference itself, to ensure that the PLO would not be able to adopt a more "moderate" position.

Since last fall, the Palestinians, backed by Egypt, have sought to elicit a quid pro quo from Washington that would indicate that the U.S. was considering making concessions to the PLO, beginning with an invitation to attend the Geneva conference. But the stone wall presented to the PLO by Carter since January ensured that the organization would not ease its hard line.

For instance, the statement by Carter only days before the convening of the PNC that Israel must have "defensible borders" — code words for annexation of occupied Arab land — fortified the hardliners at the PNC and completely "undercut the position of those few who said that perhaps the PLO must expect something positive from Washington."

"Then they sent us the message of terror," said a PNC member, referring to the assassination of Lebanese leftist Kamal Jumblatt, the chief ally of the PLO during the Lebanese civil war. The Jumblatt murder, he said, convinced any doubters that the U.S. was seeking a confrontation with the PLO, not a conciliation.

A key indication of the intention of Carter and the Israelis was the decision by Israel not to allow a group of West Bank Palestinians to attend the Cairo meeting. Since the group of West Bankers was considered relatively moderate, and could conceivably have influenced the direction of the PNC vote on crucial issues, the Israeli action can only mean that Israel was actively seeking to block a possible shift in tone by the PLO. According to reports from Israel, the Israeli Government was "satis-