

~~SECRET~~

October 7, 1977

## MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Peace Negotiations and Israeli Coalition Politics

We believe Prime Minister Begin remains very much in charge, despite some reported grumbling within the Israeli cabinet over accepting a united Arab delegation at Geneva. So long as he is convinced that Foreign Minister Dayan is not playing a lone hand or is not going further than Begin himself would approve in demonstrating tactical flexibility, the prime minister's preeminent authority will enable him to override any objections from hardliners in the cabinet.

Begin and Dayan, moreover, should have little difficulty in parrying criticism from Labor Party leaders for showing "moderation." Public opinion, rightly or wrongly, has always viewed Begin's tough public position on peace issues as a bargaining tactic and is likely to support his readiness to make concessions on essentially a procedural matter. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Most of the Israeli cabinet has played a passive role thus far in shaping the government's approach to peace negotiations. Begin has relied, like his predecessors, on a small inner circle of foreign affairs and security advisers: Dayan, Defense Minister Weizman and Agriculture Minister Sharon, who is in charge of settlement activity in the occupied territories. Were Begin suddenly to die or become incapacitated, Finance Minister Ehrlich (the leader of the Liberal faction of Likud) could conceivably emerge as a compromise choice to succeed Begin. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Of Begin's chief advisers, Dayan--by virtue of his [REDACTED] knowledge of the Arabs and international diplomacy [REDACTED] [REDACTED] has been the most influential. He and Begin have largely set the tone and fashioned the strategy and tactics employed in dealing with the US.

The ease with which they have dominated the cabinet in this sphere is attributable to three factors:

[REDACTED]  
-SECRET-

~~SECRET~~

--Begin's strong, unquestioned authority within Likud.

--The broad consensus that exists within the coalition on basic substantive issues; there are virtually no discernible differences between hardliners and those who might be characterized as more flexible in their opposition to negotiating with the PLO and in particular, to the creation of an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank.

--A clear recognition among even the most hardline elements that the government must of tactical necessity demonstrate some flexibility to accommodate the US.

As a result, latent differences over specific issues [redacted] among potential successors to Begin--Dayan, Weizman, Sharon and Finance Minister Ehrlich-- have remained largely submerged.

There are a few genuine moderates within Likud and the other coalition parties. Unlike the ideologues in Herut (Begin's faction of Likud) and the militant members of the youth faction of the National Religious Party, some Liberals, NRP conservatives, and the religious Aguda Israel party would be willing under certain conditions to support a withdrawal from the West Bank in exchange for real peace. [redacted]

Within the cabinet and Begin's inner circle, Dayan is the most flexible. Dayan is anxious to avoid an open break with the US and is prepared to urge tactical retreats to forestall such a confrontation. Thus, despite his deep commitment to the retention of the West Bank, he has been willing to make some cosmetic concessions on the Palestinian representation issue and to urge Begin to limit settlement activity on the West Bank to appease the US.

Weizman also favors such tactics and pressed Begin to adopt a less intransigent position on peace issues during the last election campaign. [redacted]

[redacted] there has been some grumbling among Weizman's supporters that Dayan has unfairly eclipsed the defense minister in the cabinet and monopolized Begin's attention. [redacted]

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

Even Sharon and Minister of Education Hammer, who represents the NRP youth faction in the cabinet, have grudgingly acknowledged the need to accommodate the US on peace issues.

Despite the near identity of views within the cabinet on substantive matters, there is therefore some potential for friction among Begin's key lieutenants over negotiating strategy and tactics. It is worth noting that Sharon alone voted against Begin's recommendation that the cabinet approve the US proposal for a unified Arab delegation at Geneva with Palestinian participation. In a real showdown, Sharon might be able to count on broader support both within and outside of the cabinet from the youth faction of the NRP and its Gush Emunim allies and possibly among some of the hardliners in Likud.

Much will ultimately depend on Begin.

In-  
deed, his Labor Party opponents are now accusing him and Dayan of being "too flexible." Nevertheless, there are strong political as well as ideological constraints on his willingness to go much further. These are:

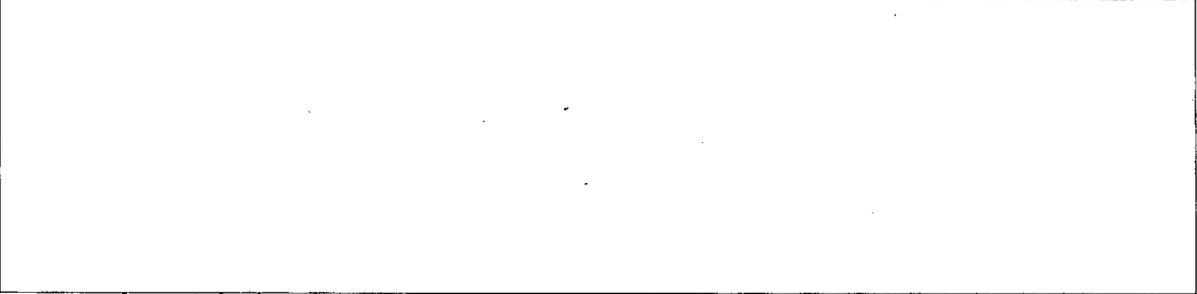
--the disruptive potential of Sharon and the NRP youth faction on which Begin's narrowly based coalition is dependent.

Begin does have the option, theoretically, of still seeking the inclusion of the Democratic Movement for Change in his coalition to off set Sharon and other hardliners, but Begin probably does not consider this a very attractive alternative. Chances are he would be more receptive to this after a confrontation with the US developed and only then as a means of demonstrating national solidarity rather than greater flexibility in the face of US pressure.

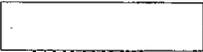
SECRET

~~SECRET~~

As for Davan, 



Dayan's ability to withstand any buffeting at home and to continue to exercise a strong influence within the government will depend largely on whether he retains the confidence and support of Begin.

  
~~SECRET~~