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ISRAEL

Israeli Prime Minister Begin and Defense Minister Weizman have temporarily papered over their sharp split in the recent Cabinet debate on policy toward the occupied West Bank, apparently at the strong urging of other leaders of the ruling coalition who fear an open break might precipitate a Cabinet crisis. The personal enmity and sharp divergence of views between Begin and Weizman over negotiating strategy, however, are unlikely to remain under wraps for long.

Weizman's frustration with Begin and Foreign Minister Dayan for being unwilling to take greater political risks in negotiations with Egyptian President Sadat flared up again last week when the Cabinet supported Begin's vaguely worded statement on the future of the West Bank. The Defense Minister's intemperate criticism of Begin and Dayan was immediately replayed in the Israeli press, provoking a storm in some quarters of the coalition's dominant Likud grouping and a call for Weizman's resignation from a Cabinet member who is a close supporter of Dayan.

To mend his fences within Likud, Weizman reiterated his support for



Defense Minister Weizman

Begin's West Bank autonomy plan at a meeting this week of the grouping's parliamentary deputies attended by the Prime Minister. He even praised Begin—but at the same time forcefully defended his own view that a separate peace with Egypt is still possible if Israel can devise a statement on the future of the West Bank that Sadat could use to justify a resumption of negotiations.

Weizman's efforts to reduce tensions with Begin probably were also designed to win points with other important coalition figures, especially leaders of the Liberal faction of Likud and of the National Religious Party. Leaders of the Religious Party had warned Begin that they might withdraw from the government if a move was made to remove Weizman.

The situation is complicated

and the ongoing jockeying for position in the succession sweepstakes. Finance Minister Ehrlich has cautiously sought to improve his prospects and Dayan's followers are urging him to take steps to establish a formal political base.

Opposition Labor Party leader Peres, hoping to capitalize on the divisions within the government, has stressed the line that Labor would have less difficulty making peace with Sadat and could have prevent-

ed the serious erosion in US-Israeli relations. Public opinion polls, however, indicate that the Labor Party has not been able to win back a significant percentage of the voters it lost in last year's national election.

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