



DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
BRIEFING MEMORANDUM

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To : The Secretary  
From: NEA - Harold H. Saunders  
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Analysis of Arab-Israeli Developments  
No. 494, June 30, 1978

Relations between Dayan and Weizman have reached a new low in recent days, following Weizman's charge earlier during the debate on the US questions that Dayan was leading the Cabinet around by the nose and his allegation that Dayan and Begin were leading the country toward another war. On a more fundamental level, the problem between the two men derives from longstanding differences in policy perspectives, the continuing competition for the succession to Begin, and intensified personal antagonism in the wake of Weizman's harsh remarks two weeks ago.

Strong criticism within Herut over Weizman's attack on the Prime Minister has abated, at least temporarily, due to Begin's apparent decision to paper over the rift. There can be little doubt, however, that Begin is very unhappy with Weizman, because of the latter's frequent displays of dissatisfaction with Begin's policy and his implicit questioning of Begin's leadership. Begin's antagonism is aggravated by his perception that Weizman is a potential challenger.

Weizman's behavior is unusual in Israeli politics. Though traditionally free-wheeling and outspoken, Israeli Ministers have been reluctant openly to confront a Prime Minister, especially over sensitive foreign policy issues. Israeli commentators have begun to compare the performance of the principal Likud ministers unfavorably with that of the Rabin-Peres-Allon triumvirate.

TOP SECRET

Begin's decision to dampen the dispute in the Cabinet, rather than remove or discipline Weizman, is out of character. Begin's restraint is attributable to:

- the favorable opinion of Weizman held by Sadat and many in the US, and the desire not to send a negative signal which could disrupt the peace process;
- Weizman's popularity in Israel and the concern that dismissing him could provoke a major political crisis.

The internal political factor has received increasing attention in recent days. Press reports suggest that the NRP warned Begin against dismissing Weizman. NRP leaders allegedly threatened to withdraw from the coalition if Weizman were removed.

While somewhat overstated, the substance of these accounts might be correct. It is in line with other hints of intense activity by the NRP to prevent a rupture of the coalition and breakdown of the peace process.

Signs of a new moderation and activism by NRP Minister Hammer abound. He is the party's most astute politician and its most important figure. While there is no evidence that Hammer has altered his longstanding opposition to territorial retrocessions in the West Bank, there are indications that he would defer -- indefinitely if necessary -- the extension of Israeli sovereignty to this area. Hammer has stressed the importance of peace in recent months, in contrast to his traditional emphasis on Israel's religio-historical ties with the West Bank.

The Liberal Ministers also have played a mediatory role between Begin and Dayan, on the one hand, and Weizman, on the other. While Ehrlich and his colleagues support Begin on matters he regards as important, even when they might doubt the wisdom of a particular action, they have also supported Weizman's right to disagree and to struggle against Begin's positions. The Liberals also continue to act as a counterweight against Sharon and other extremist elements in Herut.

TOP SECRET

In this atmosphere, the Israeli press is rife with speculation about possible coalition crises and "new political deployments." While there is a good deal of discontent with Begin within the coalition and continuing contacts between coalition members and the opposition, the effervescence within the media is not matched by the same degree of ferment within the coalition.

There is no conclusive evidence that Begin cannot contain these political fluidities, assuming that his health holds up. The coalition partners have a vested interest in the perpetuation of the status quo and are disinclined to take the political risks inherent in a coalition breakdown.

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