January 5, 1982

Another Arab-Israeli Conflict, or Shift in Politics Between the Two Nuclear Superpowers?

BEGIN'S ISRAEL MOVES FURTHER AND FURTHER BACKWARD TO HIS REACTIONSARY, TERRORIST BEGINNINGS

I. Begin Revisited History

Dear Friends:

No sooner was the world preoccupied with the counter-revolution in Poland on Dec. 13, as the Polish rulers unleashed martial law against the Polish masses, focused on Solidarity, than Begin leaped out of his hospital bed into his wheelchair plus limousine. In six short hours he raced through the Knesset the approval to annex the Israeli-occupied Syrian territory -- the Golan Heights.

This is not the first time that Israel has taken advantage of the world's preoccupation with an immediate counter-revolution to carry out its counter-revolution in the Middle East. Back in 1956, when Russian tanks had driven into Hungary to destroy that revolution, the Israeli Army, with the connivance of British and French imperialism, invaded Suez. In 1981, by unilateral action, Israel battered down what had been agreed to by all, including Israel -- the UN Resolution 242.

The basis with which Begin, in 1981, embarked on his headlong aim to "legitimize" the Israeli booty from the 1967 war skipped the six days that had intervened in 1956 between Russian tanks rolling into Hungary and Israel's invasion of the Suez. On the very day that the Polish rulers imposed martial law, Begin (meaningfully hole-in-the-wall, but actually planned long ago) annexed the Syrian Golan Heights.

The violent dash against time was not a mere difference between six hours and six days. No, it was an undermining of any attempt by anyone, including
its benefactor -- U.S. imperialism -- to pressure Israel to give up any of its war booty, come April when the return of Egypt's Sinai is completed and serious talks on "self-rule" on the West Bank and Gaza Strip are to begin. The fact is that this did indeed throw everyone off balance. Thereupon the amateurish Reagan not only voted for the UN resolution which condemned Israel's unilateral action, declaring the annexation "null and void," but suspended the "historic" Memorandum of Understanding between the U.S. and Israel for Strategic Cooperation. Begin hit back by cancelling the statement altogether. Both rulers violated their own statement, (which did indeed mark an imperial, global strategy for war), which stipulated that it could be terminated by either party only after a six-month notification.

Begin's vitriolic statement against Reagan makes it altogether too tempting to dismiss it, as if it were something off the top of his head due to extreme "provocation" at Reagan's suspension of the Memorandum of Understanding. Nothing, however, could be further from the truth. The fevered rhetoric, like the hotline-skelter appearance of the rush to annex the Golan Heights, was not "provoked." Nor did it suddenly issue off the top of Begin's head. It was a calculated, premeditated, and long-age planned act. How long ago? How importantly, how far backward must Begin intend taking Israel to its pre-Israel founding?

At that time -- in the 1960s -- Begin worked, not as much against British, much less U.S. imperialism he has since followed, as against the Jewish masses, whether they were fighting for a socialist republic of Arabs and Jews, or Zionists, who were anxious to establish a homeland for the Jews in a part of Palestine. Begin's reactionary, fanatic ideology for "Erets Israel" (Land of Israel), as biblically interpreted by him, continued to terrifyize those Jews. Because that is the issue,² we must probe deeper into that Dec. 20 statement³ read to U.S. Ambassador Samuel W. Lewis.

The schornifiti and crafty statement begins with a reference to a period of six months during which the U.S. "punished Israel." This, it seems, is the third time since June 6, when the U.S. criticized Israel's bombing of the Israeli nuclear reactor, and again on July 17 when Israel bombed the heavily populated civilian neighborhood in Beirut. Begin erases a river that he
"Saved the lives of hundreds of thousands of citizens" when, in fact, the coup bombing in Lebanon killed many innocent men, women and children. Israel's latest violation of Air space over Iraq was an imperialist act, that, far from deterring nuclear explosion, has strengthened the Arab drive for an "Islamic bomb." In effect it has strengthened the position of others who come to us and voice their support of a "free" Israel that is imperialistic in nature.

Begin next rolls history back nearly 4,000 years. "The people of Israel have lived 3,700 years without a demonstrable understanding with America and will continue to live without it another 3,700 years." Not satisfied yet with situating his act, in general, back 3,700 years, i.e. at the beginning of Jewish history, Begin creates still another analogy. He raises the imperialist annexation of the Golan Heights to the atrocity and level of "not rescinding faith" during the Inquisition, while labelling any opposition to his policies as the anti-Semitism prevalent during the Inquisition. "There are those who say we must rescind the Golan Heights law that was passed in the Knesset. To rescind is a concept from the days of the Inquisition. Our forefathers were burned at the stake and would not rescind, their faith." Clearly, Begin has no intention whatsoever of parting with any of the war booty once he has returned the Sinai to Egypt. "Better a scar on the face of God than the Golan Heights in the hands of the enemy." If anyone thought that the identification of the Knesset vote for annexing the Golan Heights with burning at the stake rather than "rescinding the faith" was stratospheric enough, that reactionary ideologue — Menachem Begin — is bent on not leaving it at any biblical stage. Evidently that is no longer concerned, higher still is his specific ideology of the 1940s. There the rewriting of history was clearly not so much against U.S. or British imperialism, as against the Jewish people who escaped the Holocaust. The diversity of the views of those names, ranging from wanting a secular state to a socialist republic, and including the various tendencies within the Zionists, so that a leader like Ben Gurion did want and did establish a theocratic state, were focused at the time on one thing, and one thing only — the UN Resolution that would recognize a part of Palestine as the State of Israel.

When the UN was debating the right for the establishment of Israel, all the Jews in Palestine were for the acceptance of the territory designated for
the State of Israel: "Henceupen that reactionary underground terrorist, Menachen Begin," as head of the Irgun, together with the Stern Gang; bodied the King David Hotel without any regard as to which Jews would be killed, and with but one aim, and that was to undermine this move...Ben-Gurion and the other leaders of the movemen worked hard to not only disassociate themselves from these gangs but finally to convince the UN that indeed a majority of Jews would accept the UN recognition of the territory they would assign to Israel.

The story is well known, and this is as it were. Instead, they spoke of it as if it were impossible. The story is well known, and this is as it were. Instead, they spoke of it as if it were impossible. The story is well known, and this is as it were. Instead, they spoke of it as if it were impossible.

I was in Paris and London in 1947 when I not quite a few German Jews who had escaped the Holocaust; were happy to reach Palestine, only to find conditions there -- both the hostility of Arabs and religious Zionists -- unbearable. The story is well known, and this is as it were. Instead, they spoke of it as if it were impossible. The story is well known, and this is as it were. Instead, they spoke of it as if it were impossible. The story is well known, and this is as it were. Instead, they spoke of it as if it were impossible.

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In the Dec. 20 statement, he was thinking about the debate over AWACS. He was anxious to stress the "ugly-anti-Semitic campaign" during the debate on the sales of the AWACS to Saudi Arabia. This came to a climax at the moment when Reagan said that the Pahl plan offered a basis for discussion. From the inexcusability of the response of Begin, that under no circumstances would he do anything but reject outright any idea of discussion, it has been clear that Begin would do everything in his power to see that not only the Pahl plan does not become a basis for discussion, but any attempt by any power to do anything about any part of the territory occupied since the 1967 war.

Even now it must be stressed that Begin does not represent the majority of the Israelis. His party is a minority, and the unholy alliance with the religious groups, which gives it a majority in the Parliament, does not make it a majority... quite the contrary. But only are there a great diversity of Jewish views in Israel, and a peace move movement, but even Zionists are emigrating from Israel as they find the religious fanaticism unbearable. As Saecen Schoeken put it in his article (see footnote 9), "The hostility of the Chief Rabbinate toward the conservative and liberal denominations in Israel shows how a religious establishment operates when in control."

II. Focus: Counter-revolution/Revolution

No doubt what Begin saw in the AWACS role was so great a hit towards Saudi Arabia that it assumed the form of a global shift in U.S. policy. That had an element of truth in it was clear from the fact that U.S. imperialism had indeed higher interests in the Middle East than defense of Israel "in and for itself." That is pivotal for U.S. imperialism is, first, the struggle with Russia for single monopoly control of the world and, above that, anti-revolution. 6

Heretofore, Israel had no doubt that because it was the most industrialized, militarized nation in the Middle East and was anti-Russian besides, U.S. imperialism considered it the strategic kingpin in the Middle East, with the AWACS solo, the Pahl plan, and possible secret courting of the PLO,
Begin's Israel considered U.S. imperialism as arrogant and conceited as to think it could carry on a war against Russia in the Middle East so long as it had oil, and they say how entertained illusions that Saudi Arabia was not only as good as Israel for U.S. bases, but they would have the advantage of someone more pliant than Begin.

What happened to "inspiration," Reagan-Haig-Weinberger's new outlook on the Middle East — that they could well do without Begin who never did follow the Reagan prooccupation with Russia as Enemy No. 1 — led to a rather cold flirtation with the Arab lands, especially with Saudi Arabia and Pahd's plan. The truth, however, is that neither the Arab lands, nor Israel, are as preoccupied with Russia as they are with each other. The slight tilt towards "the moderate Arab lands" was based on the alleged fact that the Pahd plan included a recognition of Israel's right to exist. Though there was no such expression in the plan, the Reagan-Haig-Weinberger triumvirate felt that they could both make others believe that's what it meant, and thus turn foreign policy around even as they had initiated reagressionism at home, and continue that policy for their "sphere of influence." — the propping up of El Salvador's genocidal war against its own people.

No doubt, there will be some modification of Begin's statement and a much greater retreat on the part of Reagan so that once again some deal or double cross can be worked out as to Israel's preoccupation in the Middle East. But that is hardly the question for Marxist-Humanists. What is the issue in that, on one side, with the 1979 revolution in Iran, the whole Middle Eastern question turned from one totally immersed in the Arab-Israeli conflict and, of course, OIL, to that of revolution. With the current counter-revolutionary turn in Iran, however, what is not arising everywhere is national fanaticism instead of national liberation, and that so-called "fundamentalism" was further tainted with religious bigotry. Whether it's Khomeni's Shi'ite religion, or Begin's wholly alliance with the Rabbinists (not to mention his praise of Falwell and by Falwell), whether it's Reagan locating on Falwell's Jewish Majority, or the Catholic Church in Poland — all of these manifestations of the sudden "rebirth" of religion are signs of the degeneracy of the capitalist imperialist nuclear stage of world development. It is putting a question mark over the
very survival of civilization as we have known it.

Take the question of the Iranian Revolution at its present counter-revolutionary turn. The 1979 Revolution which first appeared as the breath of fresh air was so not only because it threw out the exploitative, corrupt Shah without separating U.S. Imperialism from his totalitarian rule. It also meant, and that above all, that a totally new phenomenon was born in the Middle East. Where it had hitherto been first, Oil, and then Arab-Israeli conflict, and once again, Oil, it was now revolutionizing not only for Iran but the whole of the Middle East.

In 1979 the revolution was the determinant (and women's Libération was integral to it). The imperialists were totally shaken up in the Arab kingdom as well, especially when the Mosque in Mecca was occupied. Clearly, because the Shi'ites were the underprivileged, the poor, the masses, religion itself was mistakenly disregarded by the Left, as if it were simply a subordinate matter that would soon be overcome by the revolutionary drive itself.

Instead, it was religion in its most retrogressive, fundamentalist form, with the Imam, the Ayatollah Khomini, at the head, who conquered total power, turned to destroying the revolution, and, far from becoming a beacon light for the whole Middle East, has become one more prop in the U.S.-Russia rivalry for single world domination.*

* * *

Ever since Egypt's nationalization of the Suez Canal, we have focused on the contradictions in nationalism. Thus, though in 1948 we were for the establishment of Israel and have continued to be for its right to exist, we

* At the moment when all eyes are on Russia's counter-revolutionary pressures in Poland which brought on martial law, Russia is gaining a foothold in Iran. KGB agents who speak perfect Farsi are training revolutionaries, including former adherents of the Shah's hated SAVAK, for Khomini's secret police. The Russian advisers have installed their training center in Salamanbad, outside Tehran, in the former headquarters of SAVAK. See TIME, Nov. 23, 1981.
most sharply opposed Israel's invasion of the Suen. As Nurn & Letters ex-
pressed it in its lead article, Jan. 8, 1957, "Preparation for War?, we
stressed that the struggle now must be not only against the major imperial-
ists, but that "not much more can be said for the Israeli government. In-
ternally, despite all the publicised democratic institutions, the prominence
of union leaders in the government, the social reforms and the overpublicised
social experiments in collectives, Israel is a sick society. It is sick not
primarily because of outside factors, but its basic economy is established
on the capitalist principle of growth demanding ever more sweat and produc-
tion from its workers in return for less."

Despite the fact that at that moment Eisenhower was opposing British
imperialism, we pointed to the fact that this was not for any purposes of
national liberation for the newly liberated state, but for the U.S.'s own
imperialist interests, and along with it, against all proletarian revolu-
tions. We therefore ended the lead by saying that "at this particular stage
it [U.S.] has much to gain from Russian's brutal suppression of the Hungarian
Revolution." 6

The same thing is true all over again today with the focal point being
in Jaruzelski's Poland, on the one hand, and Begin's Israel on the other. It
is all the more disturbing to see Fred Halliday, who is certainly a knowl-
dgeable revolutionary, yet is so incorrigible in geopolitics instead of philo-
osophy of revolution that he sinks into their ground for argument. I am re-
ferring to what Bresnick has called the "Arc of Crisis." 9 It is in this
which Reagan-Brezhnev are trying to execute in the Gulf region which they hold
an armistice from Turkey to Afghanistan, and including the whole of the
Arab world. 10

Halliday very nearly forgets the revolution, and certainly Menen's
Liberation, and thereby limits himself to exposing how degrading is U.S. and
Western imperialism. This only results in Halliday holding the year 1978,
or rather, Cullen and Soviet help to Ethiopia, as the turning point in world
politics instead of 1979 and the Iranian Revolution.

If we were only on the ground of geopolitics, and of course wish to expose
imperialism's global reach and how crucial the Middle East is, we could prove it in 1947 with the Truman Doctrine, and stretch the Middle East to Greece; and then in 1957 with Eisenhowar, who looked practically "revolutionary" as he stopped the British-French-Israeli attack on the Suez Canal --- and nearly forget what was going on then in Hungary, and what Reagan is doing now in Poland; letting them hang.

No, the world changed in 1979. The Iranian Revolution did that, though it itself is now in the grip of counter-revolution, initiating the retrogressive movement from within. Indubitably, the greatest enemy is at home, always at home. That is why the class struggle is so decisive. Extended, that is what revolution is. Because that is hardly the goal of world imperialism, beginning and ending with the two nuclear titans -- the U.S. and Russia -- it is trying to make the unthinkable -- nuclear war -- thinkable. There can be no resolution to any of these conflicts other than by a total social revolution.

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Notes:

1From the start -- the Camp David agreement -- we pointed to the fact that Carter was so "flexible" on "self-rule" that he found it even "under Israeli guns" in the "continued military occupation" both of the West Bank of Jordan (which Begin persisted in calling Judea and Samaria) and the Egyptian Gaza Strip. See "Shifting Alliances in the Middle East," News & Lottery, January-February 1979.

2The whole "Jewish question" changed radically with the Nazi conquest of power. On the one hand, such terrorists as Begin emerged. On the other side there were such great revolutionary forces as Trotsky. As he himself expressed it, "The Jewish question has never occupied the center of my attention. But what does not mean that I have the right to be blind to the Jewish problem which exists and demands a solution...Declining capitalism has everywhere swung over to an exacerbated nationalism, and part of which is anti-Semitism..." He opposed Zionism but not national liberation.

3The statement was published with a Dec. 20 dateline from Jerusalem in the New York Times, Dec. 21, 1981.
1. See the special issue of The Nation, Dec. 5, 1981, devoted to the Middle East. See also Noam Chomsky (whose Peace in the Middle East: Reflections on Justice and Nationalism would also be consulted) who quotes a 1937 view of Zionism which held that it was necessary "to avoid a narrow, limited national- ity, which would go no further than itself" (Abraham Cohen, Israel and the Arab World).

2. "Revisiting Zionism" by Gershon Schocken, in New York Review of Books, May 28, 1981. In it, Schocken, Editor of the Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz, does a valuable job in tracing the changes in the Zionist ideology, from its founding by Herzl during the anti-Semitic pogroms in Russia and East Europe in the 1880s, to what it is in the present theocratic state of Israel. That has a direct relationship to our focus presently is his view that Israel pays a very high price for the accommodation with the religious groups -- in money as well as in other values. And the price to Israel of the unholy combination of religious extremism and nationalistic fanaticism which doesn't really figure in any Zionist doctrine, cannot yet be assessed.

3. This is soon even more starkly in the current attitude to Poland. See the lead article on "Poland, Revolution and Counter-Revolution" in Harevot & Leiters, January-February 1992.


The special tenth anniversary issue of ISIS Reports, October-December 1981, carries two particularly important articles. One is the "Are of Crisis and the New Cold War" by Fred Halliday, and the other is a review of Edward W. Said's The Question of Palestine, by Benjamin Doremus, titled "Contesting Nation: Two Views of Said's Question of Palestine."

10. See The Arab World and Israel by Ahad El Konay and Eli Lobel, and The Arabo by Katrina Robinson. See also The Arab Left by Ezra Y. Israel.