

ROUTING

~~Top Secret~~

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NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE DAILY CABLE

Thursday 29 June 1978

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[Redacted box]

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ISRAEL: Begin-Weizman Enmity

[] Israeli Prime Minister Begin and Defense Minister Weizman have temporarily papered over their dispute, apparently at the strong urging of some coalition party leaders who fear an open break might precipitate a cabinet crisis. The enmity and sharp divergence of views between Begin and Weizman over negotiating strategy, however, are unlikely to remain under wraps for long. Indeed, Weizman, encouraged by his ability to weather his latest clash with Begin, may press his views more vigorously within the cabinet--although he may mask his differences with Begin by attacking Foreign Minister Dayan.

[] Weizman has become increasingly disillusioned with Begin's and Dayan's handling of negotiations with Egypt, and he fears that both have given up hope of reaching an accord with President Sadat. Weizman's frustration flared last week after the cabinet voted to approve Begin's vaguely worded response to US questions concerning the future of the West Bank. His sharp, intemperate criticism of Begin and Dayan was immediately replayed in the Israeli press, provoking a storm in some quarters of Likud and a call for his resignation from Minister of Commerce Hurwitz, a close supporter of Dayan.

[] To mend his fences within the Herut faction of Likud, Weizman reiterated his support for Begin's West Bank autonomy plan at a meeting this week of Likud's parliamentary deputies attended by the Prime Minister. He even praised Begin while forcefully defending his view that a separate peace with Egypt is still possible if Israel can devise a statement on the future of the West Bank that would give Sadat a "fig leaf."

[] Weizman apparently has shrewdly decided to mute his differences with Begin and focus his criticism on the more vulnerable Dayan, who lacks an independent political base and is suspect in the eyes of many Herut hard-liners.

[] Weizman's efforts to reduce tensions with Begin probably were also designed to win points with other coalition leaders, especially the Liberals and the leaders of the National Religious Party. The National Religious Party had warned Begin that it might withdraw from the government if a move was made to remove Weizman.

[redacted] The situation is complicated by the uncertain state of Begin's health. Despite the denials of his doctor that he is seriously ill, both coalition and Labor Party leaders are already 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.

[redacted] Labor Party leader Peres, in turn, hopes to capitalize on the divisions within the government to represent his party as a credible alternative to Begin. Peres has been claiming increasingly that Labor would have less difficulty making peace with Sadat and could have prevented 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 the last election. [redacted]

