

Gulf States Brace For Mideast War

Amid a deteriorating situation in the Middle East last week — marked by Israeli threats of armed strikes against “distant” Arab states, Israeli military incursions into Lebanon, and Arab confirmation that United States National Security Council chief Zbigniew Brzezinski was responsible for last month’s suspicious Saudi oil pipeline fire — the Persian Gulf Arab states have begun joint defensive preparations in case of war.

The government of Iraq announced last week that it was establishing a special defense perimeter and day and night cover around its oil fields in order to protect them against developing plans by the Israeli military for a long-range preemptive attack. Iraq cited recent warnings by Israeli Chief of Staff General Mordechai Gur that Israel is prepared to attack “distant Arab states” beyond the immediate confrontation states of Syria, Egypt, and Jordan if the need arose.

Reflecting Arab concern that such an Israeli move would occur as part of a larger U.S. National Security Council strategy to cripple independent Arab oil production to abet Jimmy Carter’s energy-reduction program, the Iraqis extended their defense cover to other states in the Persian Gulf, the London *Financial Times* reported June 1. This security offer undoubtedly extends to neighboring Kuwait and likely to Saudi Arabia as well, and implies the development of broader regional joint security moves. Significantly, informed Arab sources in London reported last week that well-placed Saudi officials have independently confirmed U.S. Labor Party assessments that the recent fires in Saudi Arabian oil fields were set by operatives working under the direction of NSC head Brzezinski.

In Israel, since the May 17 elections, the rightist Likud bloc, pressured by the NSC is catalyzing the formation of what amounts to a “war cabinet” featuring, prominently, former Defense Minister Moshe Dayan, former Air Force commander Ezer Weizman, and extremist General Ariel Sharon. The coalescence of such a coalition — committed to retaining Arab territory occupied during the 1967 war — is being aided by the crisis situations in Lebanon and the Red Sea area, and by the rapidly accelerating deterioration of the Israeli economy.

In Lebanon earlier this week, 1000 Israeli soldiers made incursion raids against several Palestinian-held strongholds in the south of the country, leaving upwards of thirty dead and abducting numbers of Lebanese citizens back to Israel. Refugees fleeing to the southern port city of Sidon have reported joint Israeli and Christian fascist shelling of Lebanese villages five kilo-

meters from the Israeli borders.

According to the June 1 *Pravda*, newspaper of the Soviet Communist Party, the Palestine Liberation Organization declared a special meeting this week to discuss the worsening southern Lebanese situation. PLO chairman Yasser Arafat announced the formation of new PLO military units to combat both Israeli and Christian extremist forces.

Arafat last weekend warned that the Israelis would launch a preemptive strike into Lebanon and elsewhere in order to divert domestic attention from the crumbling Israeli internal situation. Lebanese moderate leader Raymond Edde has also warned that he expects Lebanon to blow up in the coming days under the impact of joint Israeli and Lebanese rightist provocations, very likely triggering a broader, region-wide conflict.

Preparing for such eventualities, Iraq last week issued an appeal for all Arab chiefs of staff to meet in emergency session to prepare joint regional defense preparations. Iraq also offered to station Soviet-supplied Mig jet fighters on Egyptian territory and to supply Egypt with badly needed spare parts to the Egyptian military.

The implied Warsaw Pact back-up for these moves received greater credibility with the presence of Czechoslovak President and Communist Party Chairman Gustav Husak in Iraq throughout the week. A Soviet military delegation is now traveling throughout the Mideast.

The U.S. Rockefeller forces may try to channel Arab moves into a familiar pattern of managed escalation, as occurred in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, using high-level Syrian government officials as key agents in the operation. According to the June 3 *Christian Science Monitor*, high-level Syrian Foreign Ministry officials are insisting that Syria “does not exclude the possibility of an outburst in the Middle East” within “three or four months.”

Efforts by Saudi Arabia to prevent such a 1967-style Syria-Israel staged conflict are suggested by France’s *Le Figaro* June 2, which reported that the Saudis are substantially reducing their aid to the Assad regime in protest against Assad’s plans to form — with the aid of the Carter Administration — a “Greater Syria” federation of Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and the Palestinians.

But further Saudi efforts to defuse the war tension would minimally have to include finding mechanisms outside of U.S. control for taking the immediate economic pressure off Israel. This is especially the case with this week’s announcement by the Bank of Israel of drastic austerity measures, which will only feed into the national hysteria manufactured by Dayan, Sharon, and company.