

Middle East Report by Robert Dreyfuss

Haig caught sabotaging AWACS

The secretary of state is playing Kissingerian roulette with U.S. interests in the Arab world.

Secretary of State Alexander Haig's latest round of treachery is not going unnoticed in Washington intelligence circles.

According to high-level Senate sources, Haig is secretly working to prevent President Reagan from winning congressional approval of the sale of AWACS radar planes to Saudi Arabia.

"The Reagan administration already has the Senate votes it needs for the sale to go through," revealed one well-placed source, "but Haig is deliberately obscuring that fact in order to be able to turn to the Saudis and ask for their acceptance of a modified deal entailing joint U.S.-Saudi command of the AWACS beyond the originally agreed-upon training period ending in 1989.

"In response," the source continued, "the Saudis will have to reject such a deal and will withdraw their request for the planes, thus canceling the proposed sale in its entirety. After all, who ever heard of buying planes and having another country control them for you? Haig will then blame the collapsed deal on the Saudis for not accepting the compromise."

Should Haig succeed in his sabotage efforts, the consequences for U.S. policy and credibility in the Middle East will be, by all assessments, catastrophic.

What is at stake is not merely the AWACS sale but the future of

U.S.-Saudi and U.S.-Arab relations. This was underscored by President Reagan Sept. 25 when he described the AWACS sale and the maintenance of U.S.-Saudi ties as critical to "our ability to bring peace to the Middle East."

Failure by the Reagan administration to secure congressional approval of the deal will alienate the Saudis, undermine the moderate Prince Fahd and bring to the fore a more radical, anti-American faction tied to British and Soviet Philbyite intelligence networks who will favor oil production cutbacks and eventual withdrawal of assets from the United States.

In addition, the collapse of the AWACS sale would completely destabilize Egyptian President Sadat, whose political (and economic) fortunes are very much tied to Saudi Arabia. Sadat is currently the target of a British-sponsored operation to topple him from power, a plot linked to a parallel operation to weaken Prince Fahd.

This is precisely the crisis scenario that Haig and his anti-American British sponsors are gunning for.

The "compromise deal" involving permanent U.S.-Saudi joint control of the AWACS as favored by Sen. John Glenn and the U.S. Israel lobby has been rejected by the Saudis on the grounds that such an arrangement impinges on Saudi national sovereignty.

Intelligence sources in Wash-

ington report that the Saudi refusal to accept the compromise was to be expected, and that the unacceptable compromise was quietly backed by Haig. "It is unrealistic to think that the Saudis can afford to be seen as compromising their sovereignty," said one source.

According to most estimates, prospects for congressional approval of the AWACS sale, as is, are a grim 70-30 against its passage. What could boost the President's efforts to swing the Senate into line before the scheduled vote at the end of October are the conclusions of a just-released Senate Foreign Relations study, which states that failure to sell the AWACS to Saudi Arabia would severely damage U.S. interests in the region. The study also asserts that the sale would not pose a military threat to Israel. With the odds stacked against the sale's approval, Britain and France are scrambling to replace the United States in the Middle East. On a trip to the Persian Gulf last week, British Prime Minister Thatcher eagerly reiterated an earlier offer to sell Saudi Arabia a British AWACS equivalent. Similarly, French President Mitterrand traveled to Saudi Arabia to ingratiate himself with the Saudi royal family.

A Reagan victory on the AWACS issue, although a long shot, is nevertheless still possible and would constitute a dramatic and welcome development for all parties concerned. However, AWACS or no, it is shortsighted of Reagan to think that the Middle East can be stabilized by arms sales alone. To the extent that Saudi Arabia and Egypt are to be made into useful allies, they have to be built up economically and their political stability thereby ensured.