

Middle East Report by Robert Dreyfuss

A new peril for Lebanon

Israel wants a new war over Lebanon. The purpose: to wreck the Saudi peace plan.

Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon is preparing Israel's armed forces for a blitzkrieg sweep into Southern Lebanon, striking as far north as the strategic Beirut-Damascus highway, as a countermove against the Reagan administration's growing openness to Saudi Crown Prince Fahd's eight-point peace plan.

"If Saudi Arabia succeeds in forging an Arab consensus at the Nov. 25 Arab summit in Morocco in support of the Fahd plan, then I think it is safe to say that Israel will take action in Lebanon," a Pentagon official stated. "The last thing Israel ever wants to see is Arab unity, and the Israelis know that a move into Lebanon will further catalyze the radical Arab Rejection Front and divide the Arab world against Saudi Arabia."

The timing of the attack, according to U.S. and Arab intelligence sources, is before mid-December, with several sources focusing on the weekend of Dec. 5.

"Things are very tense," said one source. "We are very near a new Israeli move into Lebanon. Israel must move before the return of Philip Habib." Habib, President Reagan's special envoy to the region, is scheduled to resume his diplomatic shuttle some time after Thanksgiving.

The pretext for the Israeli attack, according to highly placed Palestinians, is likely to be a bombing or an assassination of an Israeli leader by "Palestinian terrorists."

Such an event could easily be arranged by Israel's Mossad secret service.

Israel's essential motive for a war against Lebanon and Syria is to disrupt the growing consensus around the Saudi peace plan. Israel is joined in its efforts by Great Britain and the Soviet KGB. According to U.S. intelligence information, the KGB has indicated to Israel that Moscow will not stand in the way of an Israeli thrust into Lebanon as long as the real target of the attack is Saudi Arabia.

Both London and Moscow are committed to preventing the consolidation of U.S.-Arab relations around the Fahd plan.

"The Soviets are playing a clever game," said one source. "They would not be unhappy if Israel attacked Lebanon in the midst of the U.S.-U.S.S.R. arms talks, because that would embarrass the Reagan administration."

According to Israeli intelligence sources, Israel plans to strike far deeper into Lebanon than it did in the last full-scale invasion in 1978, this time going as far north as the Zahrani River, about 25 miles north of the Litani River, the old Israeli "Red Line."

Operation Zahrani would target Palestinian installations in the coastal town of Tyre and nearby Rashidiya, coupled with air strikes on the Syrian anti-aircraft missiles in the Bekaa Valley, midway between Beirut and Damascus. An air offensive followed by an Israeli

sweep of armored columns into the Bekaa Valley would push the Syrians out of Lebanon and cut off the Palestinians in Beirut from Syrian logistical support. The prime objective would be to push the Palestinians in Lebanon further north, with the ultimate aim of forcing them into Syria, while expanding Israel's stranglehold over more territory in southern Lebanon.

The indispensable political backup for the planned attack is coming from a group of American Zionist figures led by Detroit's Max Fisher.

On Nov. 19, Fisher led two dozen Jewish Republican Caucus members into a meeting with Reagan, during which the President was informed of the "consequences" of continued U.S. gestures of support for the Fahd plan: the unleashing of Israel into Lebanon, and a withdrawal of U.S. Jewish support for the Republican Party. The President politely refused to reverse his earlier praise of the Fahd plan.

EIR Founding Editor Lyndon H. LaRouche, leader of the National Democratic Policy Committee, has called on Reagan to dispatch a contingent of U.S. troops, at the Lebanese government's invitation, to Lebanon's border with Israel, and to station the U.S. Sixth Fleet off the Lebanese and Israeli coast. Only such a strong display of firepower, LaRouche believes, can prevent Israel from risking the sort of all-out confrontation with the United States that it seems prepared for.

The LaRouche proposal is known to be receiving widespread consideration by the relevant governments, including that of Lebanon.