

Prince Abdullah's Peace Plan, And the Drive for War on Iraq

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

On Feb. 17, the *New York Times* published an article by senior correspondent Thomas Friedman, who reported that Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah had spoken to him of a new peace proposal for the Middle East. According to the account, if Israel were to withdraw to the 1967 borders, the Arab governments would not only recognize Israel, but enter a process of normalization of relations.

Since the publication of the Friedman piece, up to 40 governments have supported the Saudi idea, including most Arabs, the Europeans, the United States, and Russia, and it appears that Prince Abdullah will present it at the Arab League heads of state meeting on March 28 in Beirut.

The proposal in itself is not new; former Saudi King Fahd made a similar offer in 1974, and reiterated it during the Reagan administration years. Fahd had spoken of diplomatic recognition of Israel in return for withdrawal, whereas Prince Abdullah has spoken of normalization.

Behind Abdullah's Proposal

Why was the proposal put forward now?

This question has to be considered within the broader context of ongoing preparations for a U.S. attack against Iraq. Several well-informed Arab sources reported to *EIR*, that the Saudi proposal, floated by Friedman, constituted an attempt by Prince Abdullah to thwart a threatened operation, cooked up by U.S. policymaking circles, to destabilize the kingdom. According to a high-ranking diplomatic source, pressure had been being exerted on Saudi Arabia, specifically to back a U.S. attack against Iraq. The pressure included the threat that, were the Saudis to refuse, they would be next. There was also talk of reviving old scenarios dating back decades, to fuel conflict between the Hashemite Monarchy of Jordan and the Saudi royal family. Saudi Arabia, it was said, could be destabilized, and even broken up; its oil-

rich areas brought under control of a U.S. puppet regime; while control over the holy places Mecca and Medina, could be given to the Hashemites.

Under this pressure, the report continued, the Abdullah proposal was made public, in an attempt to appease those threatening forces inside the United States, and prevent the worst from happening. Saudi Prince Bandar, Ambassador to Washington, was referenced as the person promoting the initiative, as part of a broader public relations effort to improve the image of the kingdom. This analysis was echoed in an article in the Arabic daily *Qods al Arab* on Feb. 27, which referenced reports that U.S. circles had made concrete offers to the Hashemites, in this direction. Furthermore, high-level Kuwaiti political figures leaked the information, that similar pressures have been exerted on the Kuwaiti royal family, not to balk at the anti-Iraq operation, or their oil fields could also be taken over.

No one who has followed developments since Sept. 11, can deny that an unprecedented campaign against the Saudi royal family has been mounted, by those neo-Conservative circles inside the United States associated with the Clash of Civilizations strategy to unleash religious war. The official line on the Sept. 11 attacks, was that the al-Qaeda/bin Laden group were responsible, and that the Saudis had played a leading role. Twelve out of the 19 names whom the FBI called the hijackers, were Saudis. Polls recently released in the United States show that a vast majority of the population, subjected to this media brainwashing, believe the Saudis support terrorism.

Besides the general press campaign, specific threats have been published by the same neo-Conservatives, in the *New York Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and other media outlets, to the effect that a Saudi destabilization will occur and "force" the United States to move in and take over the oil fields.



The Mideast peace initiative put forward by Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah has generated great international discussion and commentary by governments, frank and otherwise. Why is the initiative put forward now?

The Iraq Factor

That the Iraq option is on the table, is beyond reasonable doubt. Following President Bush's "axis of evil" speech, both he and other members of the administration—including the formerly moderate Secretary of State Colin Powell—made clear that U.S. government policy was for a "regime change" in Baghdad. Several among the options being discussed in Washington to effect this regime change, are based on the illusion that the "Afghan war can be repeated in the Persian Gulf," i.e., that under the cover of massive aerial bombardments, forces on the ground—the counterpart to the Northern Alliance—would move in to topple the government.

According to a *Washington Times* report of Feb. 28, a large conference is planned at the end of March in or around Washington, at a military site, bringing together the political and *military* forces required to overthrow the Saddam Hussein regime. The gathering is to include some 200 military and security officials, emphatically not limited to the Iraqi National Congress (INC) opposition umbrella, which is a joke. Among the military expected to attend is former Brig. Gen. Najib Salih, once chief of staff of Iraq's Republican Guard. The meeting had been discussed last month with Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Marc Grossman.

The March/April 2002 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, the journal of the New York Council on Foreign Relations, included a prominent article by Kenneth Pollack, the Council's Deputy Director for National Security Studies, headlined, "Next Stop Baghdad?" which bluntly declared, "The United States should invade Iraq, eliminate the present regime, and pave the way for a successor prepared to abide by its international commitments and live in peace with its neighbors."

The Pollack article was of particular significance for two reasons. First, given his position with the CFR, the article had

the character of a policy endorsement on the part of the Wall Street Establishment for a full-scale invasion of Iraq. Pollack called for the deployment of up to 400,000 American troops to assure success. Second, Pollack, a former Clinton Administration National Security Council director of Persian Gulf policy, had been a co-author of a January/February 1999 *Foreign Affairs* article, "Can Saddam Be Toppled?" which argued that any effort to overthrow the Iraqi government would result in a Bay of Pigs-type fiasco, and pressed for a continuation of the sanctions/containment policies of Clinton.

The thinking in Washington, among those planning the regime change, is that it requires the acquiescence, if not support, of the Arab world. In order to achieve this, a carrot must be offered, in the form of promises that the Middle East conflict can be resolved. On Feb. 21, Richard Haass, the State Department director of Policy and Planning, arrived in Israel and went on to Cairo. Haass, who had had nothing to do with the peace process, is a veteran of the first Bush administration, and in 1991 played a key role in building the coalition against Iraq. Following his meetings with Palestinian and Israeli officials, it was announced that the Palestinians had arrested three suspects in the murder of Israeli minister Rehavam Ze'evi. This was the condition set by Sharon's part, for the release of Palestinian Chairman Arafat from house arrest. Sharon ordered a partial release.

Following Haass, Vice President Dick Cheney is to tour the region later this month, visiting all the Arab leaders (except Arafat), as well as Israel and Turkey. His mission is to prepare the anti-Iraq coalition. In this context, it is expected that the United States will attempt to establish an aura of peacemaking, using the Abdullah proposal, and activities organized to support it, as a means of cajoling Arab leaders into supporting a regime change in Baghdad.

Iraq Is Not Afghanistan II

It must be stressed, that no matter what elaborate plans are being made to overthrow Saddam Hussein, it will not be as easy as the planners believe. First, on the diplomatic level, no matter what carrots and sticks are used, most Arab leaders will not agree to any military action against Iraq. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, as well as Prince Abdullah himself, in an interview with *Time* magazine, have made clear their opposition, as have other Arab leaders. Secondly, if the United States were to go ahead regardless, with the support of perhaps Britain, there is no guarantee that the operation would succeed. Iraq is not Afghanistan, as several political figures have stressed, among them former Russian Prime Minister Yevgeni Primakov, in an interview with the Saudi *Asharq al-Awsat* on Feb. 25. Primakov pointed out that there is nothing in Iraq (or in exile groups) which approximates the experience and capabilities of the Northern Alliance. Furthermore, "inside Iraq, Saddam Hussein has several strong security agencies which can eliminate every effective opposition movement inside the country." Primakov added, "I do not think Kuwait itself will cooperate," and concluded that "a U.S. military attack will trigger a process that could quickly spin out of control. This could lead to instability in the entire region. We might end up in a third world war."

One aspect of the regional effects would be Iran's response. As sources inside Iran have indicated, if Iraq is attacked, Iran will not remain neutral, but will defend its neighbor. The situation is utterly different from that of 1990-1991; this time Iran would respond, in perhaps unpredictable ways, because it knows that after Iraq, it would be next.

Primakov's warnings are not a bit exaggerated. The intensifying diplomatic efforts undertaken by Russia, and especially by UN General Secretary Kofi Annan, who is to receive Iraqi Foreign Minister Naji al-Hadithi Sabri on March 7, are the expression of their well-founded concern that, if a diplomatic solution is not found to settle outstanding matters with the UN, then catastrophe is certain.

LaRouche Weighs In

Primakov's warnings mirror the broad denunciation of this folly by Democratic Party Presidential pre-candidate Lyndon LaRouche. LaRouche emphasized that the war drive against Saddam Hussein is, in reality, the cutting edge of the Bernard Lewis-Brzezinski-Huntington drive for a Clash of Civilizations global war.

LaRouche also cautioned against any polyanna hopes that the peace initiative of Crown Prince Abdullah, however well-intended, could possibly succeed in the climate defined by the Anglo-American policy of provoking that global war with an invasion of Iraq, now probably scheduled for the late Summer or early Autumn of 2002.

The number-one issue for American patriots, and leading policymakers in Russia, Europe, the Arab world, and other world capitals, is to stop this Iraq war scheme immediately. Were the Bush Administration pulled back from the brink of

provoking a dark age of continuous religious warfare—which the Iraqi military operation would spark—prospects of a genuine Mideast peace initiative, like the Abdullah Plan, could proceed. But nothing short of a total defeat of the present war-drive emanating from Washington and London, is even worth considering.

A Double-Edged Sword

If it is true that the Abdullah peace proposal reflects a Saudi attempt to avert catastrophe, it is also true that the proposal, if aggressively pushed, could effectively lead to much-desired change in the region. The merit of the proposal is that it has restated the actual reasons for the conflict: the Israeli occupation of lands in the 1967 war. Its demand that Israel withdraw completely is a restatement of the terms of the relevant UN resolutions, firmly based in international law. The Saudi Ambassador to the UN, Fawzi Shobokshi, stressed in a session on the Mideast on Feb. 27, that Israel has consistently refused to comply with international law. "Israel claims that it wants peace and is looking for a safe, secure, and peaceful neighborhood, and claims that it is the Arabs who are rejecting peace and work towards its destruction," he said. "Now the world is sure that the Arabs are calling for peace, for good neighborly relations. That's why the crown prince's initiative has been met with overwhelming international support which strengthens this strategic choice. . . . Israel has no desire for peace, no desire to settle the Middle East problem or to implement resolutions, and thus it drags the international community into a vicious circle of security considerations, to prevent it from considering the very essence and substance of the Middle East which lies in Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands. Is this security an exclusive right for Israel? We ask, where is security for the Palestinians?"

He went on to say that "the objective of Israel was and remains to expel the Arab people from Palestine and to occupy even more Palestinian territory in order to set up an exclusive state."

Whether or not the protestations of support for the Abdullah idea are merely cosmetic, depends on momentum generated politically to *force* Israel to comply.

The proposal has, as indicated above, already provoked various responses inside Israel. Among the broad Israeli public, which does not want war, optimistic reactions have been voiced. Most importantly, the situation of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has become desperate. A growing movement inside the military is challenging the Sharon-Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) drive for general war, while the collapse of the economy is creating widespread dissatisfaction with the government.

Never before has Sharon's war policy against the Palestinians come under such ferocious attack, by Israelis. The most straightforward attack to date, came on Feb. 27, by *Ha'aretz* senior commentator Gideon Samet, in a commentary entitled, "It's Him or Us." Samet wrote: "It's time to start saying that the Sharon government is irresponsibly cooperating in the slaughter of its citizens. True, no statement can be more damn-

ing. But for some time now, the prime minister has practically been inviting it. His guilt for not preventing more casualties reached a new climax this week. The Palestinians, of course, bear their own share of the blame. But the Israeli leader makes their despicable work all that much easier.”

Furthermore, Samet wrote, since becoming prime minister, Sharon “has done everything in his power, over and over again—and with determination—to miss every opportunity to calm the situation.” As for the Saudi peace initiative, “Sharon has nothing but contempt for any chance for an agreement, but he’s no fool, heaven forbid. He’s a clever fox. Someone who isn’t ready to exploit any chance for calm can not be suspected of readiness to genuinely discuss a much more far-reaching initiative. He’ll kill it with politeness. The blood will flow in the streets and the prime minister will go on accompanied by his entourage of sycophants from the Labor Party.”

This may very well be the tactic that Sharon will take. However, as the peace movement grows inside the country, and if international support for the Abdullah proposal grows, Sharon will be driven into a corner, forced either to agree, or resign, as called for in a recent editorial in the London *Guardian*, which described his utter failure as prime minister.

There are forces inside Israel who will lobby for the Ab-

dullah proposal to go through. However, what is decisive, as *Ha’aretz* senior commentator Akiva Elder stressed on Feb. 26, is U.S. action. Elder’s commentary on the peace initiative by Prince Abdullah, was based on an interview with Henry Siegman, of the New York Council on Foreign Relations, who, himself, recently called Sharon the key obstacle to peace. Siegman told Elder, “If Bush doesn’t come out in favor of the initiative, nothing will come of it.” He said Bush faced the dilemma, of having to prove serious intentions for Palestinian-Israeli peace, in order to gain Arab consent to an attack against Iraq, while facing domestic U.S. political pressures in an election year. Siegman reported that his meeting with Foreign Minister Shimon Peres convinced him that the Labour Party was *not* prepared to fight for the peace proposal, and that the government was not responsive.

The Abdullah proposal, whatever its origins, can be wielded to effectively call the bluff on the Israelis—and also on those in the United States who are promising Middle East peace, as a cover for war against Iraq. The only way that the proposal can be implemented, is through the exertion of overwhelming pressure from abroad, especially from Washington. If this is not forthcoming, it will lay bare the fraud of peacemaking rhetoric generated by the Saudi move.

Primakov Warns of World War Over Iraq

The London-based Arabic paper *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* on Feb. 25 published an interview, done in Paris by Amir Taheri, with former Russian Prime Minister Yevgeni Primakov, in which Primakov spoke very bluntly about matters in the Middle East, the region of his professional expertise.

On the threat to Iraq, implicit in President George Bush’s “axis of evil” formulation, Primakov said he did not think the United States was preparing military action against Iran or North Korea, “but the case of Iraq is completely different,” and the Americans “are not interested in any change in the regime’s conduct, but they are interested in changing the regime itself.”

Primakov debunked the notion that the Afghanistan campaign could be a model for actions in Iraq: “I have no idea about what the Americans are planning for, but I know that Iraq is not Afghanistan. The Americans have succeeded in Afghanistan for several reasons, including the fact that many countries, especially Russia and Iran, assisted them to a great extent. This will not be the case concerning Iraq.”

Primakov continued, “Arab countries are not expected

to cooperate with the United States on trying to topple Saddam Hussein. I do not think Kuwait itself will cooperate. Therefore, a U.S. military attack will trigger a process that could quickly spin out of control. This could lead to instability in the entire region. We might end up in a third world war.”

Asked if he were exaggerating, Primakov replied, “When the issue has to do with war and peace, exaggerating is much better than downplaying the magnitude of risks.”

Primakov also welcomed the consultations between the foreign ministers of France and Russia, “who are now working together on a plan to convince Washington to accept Saddam Hussein as a reality and include him in the search for a solution to Iraq’s problems. . . . The best way is to lift the sanctions on Iraq and allow it to restore its situation to normal. This will allow the outside world to be present in Iraq and influence developments directly.”

Primakov welcomed the current Saudi initiative as “a courageous step based on the land-for-peace principle,” but said it could only succeed after some time, because Ariel Sharon “is not interested in the land-for-peace principle.” But, added Primakov, “Sharon has led Israel to a dead end. Apparently, he cannot stay in his post as prime minister. Once he is gone, there will be new prospects for peace. The Saudi initiative indicates that the Arabs are ready for peace. It is now Israel’s turn to be ready for peace.”—*Rachel Douglas*