

Saudis Forging Arab Unity

Working with Europe for Geneva and pushing U.S. for a peace commitment

Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Fahd arrived in Cairo July 31 for unexpected talks with Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, the first talks between the two leaders since Sadat's trip to Israel last winter. Fahd is now conducting a tour of the Mideast which includes Syria, Jordan, and Iraq to organize an Arab "reconciliation" in preparation for a Geneva peace conference.

Fahd's arrival in Egypt coincides with Sadat's decision to terminate direct peace negotiations with Israel as a result of Israeli intransigence, a move that was prompted by the Saudis, according to Arab sources.

With the full support of the French and West Germans, the Saudis have pressured the U.S. State Department to announce its support of Lebanese President Elias Sarkis's attempts to bring southern Lebanon under national control. By supporting the effort of the Lebanese Army to take control of the south from the outlaw Israeli-backed Falangists, the State Department has delivered a badly needed slap in the face to the Israelis.

According to informed sources, Riyadh has also encouraged its allies within the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to open talks with the Israelis in preparation for Geneva. The PLO has reportedly begun a dialogue with the Mapam Party of the Israeli Labor Alignment last week in Paris, the first talks ever between the PLO and a major Zionist party.

Development the Key

Sadat's refusal to continue futile bilateral talks with Israel follows by days a dramatic reconciliation of feuding Arab leaders at the Belgrade summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, where an undisclosed peace plan for the Mideast was drawn up. According to Persian Gulf press sources, Jordan's King Hussein met with Saudi King Khalid just prior to the summit to discuss the status of the West Bank after a settlement with Israel.

But Saudi diplomatic deployment this week to both the Arab world and Europe indicates that Arab leaders are well aware that there can be no lasting peace in the region without international cooperation for a development package for the entire Mideast. While Saudi Foreign Minister Saud was in Bonn, Egyptian Vice-President Murabak was in France—West Germany's partner in the Grand Design accords formulated at Bremen July 7. Murabak also traveled to Morocco, whose King Hassan has been a key intermediary between Israel and the Arabs and has issued calls for European leadership in Mediterranean development.

In Jordan, King Hussein's brother Prince Hassan last

month called on the Arab-Europe dialogue to use his financial expertise to facilitate monetary cooperation for Mideast development. Recently, Hassan chaired a meeting in Amman, Jordan, to establish a development fund that would complement the European Monetary Fund. The Arab fund could aid the development of the West Bank, the site of a future Palestinian state.

Senate Zionists Mobilize

The Carter Administration's failure to pressure the Israeli government into making real concessions still remains a major roadblock to peace. The vacillation of the Administration has further given the U.S. Zionist Lobby maneuvering room against Carter and the Saudis.

The Israel Lobby supporters on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee have gone into high gear. On Aug. 1, Senators Frank Church (D-Id.), Jake Javits (R-N.Y.), Clifford Case (R-N.J.), and Richard Stone (D-Fla.) grilled Secretary of State Cyrus Vance on his Mideast policy in closed hearings and extracted a pledge from Vance that he would not take a U.S. peace plan to the Mideast next week. These same Senators, who intend to submit a sense of the Senate resolution condemning Saudi Arabia for breaking off the peace talks, have tried to intimidate the Saudis into negotiations by alleging that last spring's arms pact was linked to separate peace negotiations.

Before the Senators, Vance officially registered his department's disappointment that Sadat would not further negotiate with Israel, a response that will not find favor with either Egyptian President Sadat or the Saudis. Egyptian sources revealed, following the Sadat-Fahd talks, that Saudi Arabia intends to maximize its influence on Washington to break its "balanced" diplomacy between the Arabs and the Israelis.

On Aug. 1 Sadat seemed to indicate his displeasure with the U.S. Administration's policy by refusing to give a press conference with U.S. Ambassador-at-Large Alfred Atherton, who had futilely attempted to revive the bilateral Egyptian-Israeli talks.

Sadat instead privately told the press that the last round of direct talks at Leeds, England last month was "a step backwards" and "pushed the Mideast problem to a climax," as a result of Israeli intransigence.

Following his talks with Atherton, Sadat stressed that the U.S. must become a "full partner" and bring forward a peace plan to break the stalemate and not just act as a mediator.

—Judy Wyer