

Saudi Arabia, Iran Sign Security Accord

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran signed a landmark security agreement on April 17, which constitutes an important step toward establishing independent regional security. The document was signed in Tehran, by Saudi Interior Minister Prince Nayef Ibn Abd al-Aziz and Iranian Interior Minister Abdolvahed Mousavi Lari.

The mere presence of the Saudi minister was significant, because it was the first time in 22 years that an interior minister had visited the Islamic Republic. Relations between the two countries had been broken in 1988, after Iranian pilgrims to Mecca clashed with Saudi police during an anti-U.S. protest, which left 400 dead. Ties were resumed in 1991, and in 1999, Iranian President Seyyed Mohammed Khatami visited Riyadh, the Saudi capital.

The security accord, which has been worked out over the past year and a half, identifies "measures to combat organized crime, forgery of state documents, economic crimes, smuggling of goods, arms, and cultural heritage, as well as exchange of information on security issues and police cooperation," according to Iranian Deputy Interior Minister Gholamhossein Bolandian. The agreement provides for cooperation in the campaign against drug trafficking, providing nationals of both countries with security, and surveillance of borders and territorial waters.

Although the agreement "has no military dimension," as Prince Nayef stated in January, it has obvious military-strategic implications. Nayef stated that the two countries have rejected the notion that Iraq poses a threat to Kuwait. This is extremely important, as the presence of U.S. and U.K. military forces in the Persian Gulf has been justified in Washington and London by the alleged Iraqi threat.

The central issue is, in fact, whether the United States, U.K., or any other non-regional force, has the right to maintain a military presence there. Iran, which has the strongest military in the region, has sought security agreements with Arab states, as an alternative to the presence of the United States and Britain. As President Khatami has stated in the past, "The idea that the big states and Arab states of the region would need others to guarantee their security is annoying and hard to digest. We can, through all-out cooperation, guarantee [the] security of the region; we are confident that our security would be possible through security of our brothers and neighbors in the region."

Iran's view was explicitly endorsed by Saudi Defense Minister Prince Sultan Ibn Abd al-Aziz, during a visit to Tehran last year. It is this convergence which has led to the signing of the pact. Iranian Minister Lari told the press on April 15, that "Tehran maintains that Iran-Saudi security cooperation is a paragon of cooperation for the whole region," and added that he hoped Iran would sign similar pacts with other Arab states.

The fact that Iran, officially still a "rogue state" in the U.S. State Department annals, and an explicit military target of the Israelis, should seal such an agreement with Saudi Arabia, will throw a monkey-wrench into the geopolitical scenarios of such as the New York Council on Foreign Relations, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, et al. That the Saudi kingdom has found grounds for security cooperation with the first Islamic republic to be established which is Shi'ite, is not without significance, in consolidating the Islamic world. Finally, that the Saudis are Arabs and the Iranians, Persians.

Benefits for Others

It is no wonder, therefore, that a spate of articles issued upon the news of the security agreement all stressed the fact that it will tend to establish unity among diversity, with benefits for others throughout the world. Thus, for example, Hassan Abutalib, a researcher at the Cairo-based Al Ahram center for strategic studies, said that close cooperation between the two Persian Gulf giants would benefit all Arab and Middle East countries. Valid Arabi, a professor of political science in Lebanon and France, stressed that, given the position of Saudi Arabia in the Persian Gulf and among the Arab states, and given Iran's position in Central Asia, any agreement between the two will benefit all Islamic and Arab countries. Syrian political writer Salih al-Seyyed said that expansion of ties between the two would help strengthen regional cooperation, while Jordanian parliamentarian Khalid al-Tarawna said that it would help establish regional security, as well as enhance economic and trade relations.

While in Iran, Prince Nayef, accompanied by a 130-person delegation, held talks with Iranian President Khatami, Majlis (parliament) Speaker Mehdi Karroubi, Chairman of the state Expediency Council Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, and other top officials.

Among the agenda items in these talks, were Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Middle East. Secretary General of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, Hojatolislam Hassan Rowhani, in talks with Prince Nayef, said that the two countries should cooperate in fighting drugs emanating from Afghanistan (whose outlaw Taliban regime is supported by Riyadh). Furthermore, regarding Iraq, Rowhani said, "We favor restoration of stability and security in Iraq through the latter's friendly ties with all regional countries and hope that all problems facing that country will be removed as soon as possible." Prince Nayef, in all his discussions, joined his Iranian guests

in denouncing the aggressive actions of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon against the Palestinians, and the actions of the Bush Administration, which, “despite the accords already made, has stood by Israel.”

The security arrangement, as mentioned above, has been in negotiation for two years, as an important feature of Khattami’s foreign policy. However, certain disturbing developments, occurring as the pact was finalized, raise questions as to whether other forces, inside Iran and Saudi Arabia, may be seeking to manipulate the alliance in a different direction. These include Iran’s Scud missile attacks on April 18 against positions in Iraq of the Mujaheddin e Khalq (MKO), an Iraqi-based anti-Iranian terrorist organization; and the report that Prince Nayev met with the leader of the Iranian-based anti-Iraqi terrorist organization Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq. SCIRI had just announced its intention to work with the Bush Administration and use U.S. funds to fight the Iraqi government.

‘St. Augustine Links Islam and the West’

by Mark Burdman

The Algerian government is promoting the great Christian writer and theologian, St. Augustine, as the basis for a “dialogue of civilizations” between the Islamic and Christian worlds, and as the key to fighting “theocracy” and “fundamentalism,” inside Algeria, and elsewhere.

On April 1-6, there was a conference on the subject of Augustine’s “Africanness and Universality,” reported in an article by Henri Tincq in *Le Monde* of April 18. The conference was held in the two Algerian cities of Algiers and Annaba. There were some 100 historians, archaeologists, and European and Arab theologians, in attendance.

The featured speaker was Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who said that he wanted to make Augustine the symbol of a “new Algeria.” This “new Algeria” would seek to bring an end, simultaneously, to the “demonization” of the West, and to the “devaluing of the cultural heritage of the peoples who were colonized.” He stressed, that returning Augustine to Algeria, would be the basis for a “new ethic of relations between Islam and the West.” The specialists gathered at the conference agreed with him, that to do this would be, more than anything else, “an act of justice.”

While *EIR* does not yet have full details of the April 1-6 colloquium, it seems, from preliminary accounts, to have been very much in the direction of the famous 1985 Schiller

Institute Rome conference to celebrate the 1600th anniversary of St. Augustine’s conversion, which put forward Augustine the African, as the figure around whom various forces in the world could be rallied, for a cultural and political renaissance.

The April 1-6 event is all the more poignant, and a positive cultural shock, because, over the past years, Algeria has been the scene of civil war conditions, because of the assault of violently irrational Islamic fundamentalist forces, particularly the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), which has significant support bases outside Algeria, particularly Great Britain. In that extremely bloody conflict, tens of thousands of people have been killed, often in horrible massacres.

A Weapon Against Fundamentalism

Le Monde begins its report on the event, by quoting André Mandouze, who declares the conference initiative to be a “cultural revolution.” *Le Monde*’s religious-affairs writer Henri Tincq then adds the comment: “That this country recognizes, as one of its sons, the great St. Augustine, is a strong signal addressed to international opinion, which is constantly worried about the fate of Algeria.”

He notes, quoting one speaker, that there was a rich Christian tradition in what is now Algeria, before the coming of Islam, and that Christianity was critical in fighting “paganism,” so the revival of Augustine is particularly important.

Tincq later writes, that Christian writer St. Thomas Aquinas, as well as various Muslim writers, such as Avicenna (Ibn Sina) saw in Augustine’s writings, “the alliance between faith, intelligence, and liberty.” “This is a potent weapon against ‘fundamentalism,’ because, as one speaker at the colloquium stressed, Augustine’s belief that ‘the light of God’ brings about ‘the aspiration of faith to intelligence,’ is a real ecumenical idea, for both Christians and Muslims.”

Furthermore, according to the *Le Monde* account, the Archbishop of Algiers, Msgr. Henri Teissier, argued at the colloquium against the “Augustinian legend,” that Augustine had insisted on the superiority of the spiritual order over the temporal, the which legend has been used to reinforce “caesaro-papism” and “holy wars,” throughout history. Nothing is more false, insisted Archbishop Teissier, than to make of Augustine, the advocate of an “ecclesiastical theocracy.” Rather, citing the work of the jurist Mawardi, who died in Baghdad in 1058, he said that both this Islamic jurist and Augustine believed that there must be freedom, for “the work of God” to be “in the heart of men.” This is necessary, rather than to substitute a religious law for the free temporal power of human beings. Tincq comments: “Who could deny, that this ultimate lesson of Augustine is useful, as much in the West as in the Islamic world?”

Tincq ends his account, by quoting André Mandouze: “We have won, against fundamentalism. The assassins will be able to do nothing against the Algerian philosopher.”