

Can Arabs Stop Cheney's Drive for World War III?

by Jeffrey Steinberg

On Nov. 26, 2006, appearing on ABC television from his palace in Amman, Jordan, King Abdullah II warned about the “strong potential of three civil wars in the region, whether it’s the Palestinians, that of Lebanon, or of Iraq. . . . And therefore, it is time that we really take a strong step forward as part of the international community and make sure we avert the Middle East from a tremendous crisis that I fear, and I see could possibly happen in 2007.”

Unfortunately, by the time the King appeared on ABC-TV, any hopes that he might have had, of winning support from the Bush Administration for a concerted effort to prevent the eruption of a permanent war in the region, had already been dashed—whether the Jordanian monarch was fully aware of it or not. The day before Abdullah’s TV interview with George Stephanopoulos, Vice President Dick Cheney had made his now-infamous secret one-day trip to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, to explicitly promote a confrontation, pitting Sunni Arab states of the Persian Gulf plus Egypt and Jordan, against Shi’ite Iran.

Cheney was promoting a permanent religious war in the region between Sunni and Shi’ite Muslims at the very moment that the Jordanian King was calling for a concert of efforts to stop the outbreak of civil wars. Within a month of the Cheney secret diplomacy, a second American aircraft carrier group would be dispatched to the Persian Gulf, greatly increasing the probability of a new “Gulf of Tonkin” incident, to justify American bombing attacks against scores of sites inside Iran.

As Lyndon LaRouche warned at the time of the Cheney Riyadh gambit, the stakes in the Persian Gulf are not regional, but global. The Cheney faction inside the Bush Administration, in concert with controlling elements in London, are go-

ing for World War III, at precisely the moment that the global financial and monetary system is crashing. And the British “Limps”—Liberal Imperialists—with their 150-year track record of imperial games in the Persian Gulf and the extended Southwest Asian region, have ample assets on the ground inside Iran, to provide precisely the provocation that Cheney and company are seeking, to get their “lovely little permanent war.”

Russian President Vladimir Putin is reportedly furious at the Iranian leadership for failing to see the global dimensions of the provocations coming out of the War Party inside the Bush Administration, which, while wounded, is still very much in a position to wreak havoc. As Putin well understands, Cheney’s antics are not about a showdown between Washington and Tehran. The real targets are Russia, China, and India, the three Eurasian powers that LaRouche has identified as the natural allies of a United States freed from the Bush-Cheney insanity, and back on a Franklin Roosevelt global policy course.

Stopping the Three Civil Wars

It is against this backdrop that the concert of actions by Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Russia, Iran, Egypt, Syria, and other countries of the extended region, aimed at reversing the momentum towards war, must be judged.

Since early this year, the Saudi King has played host to two major diplomatic initiatives—aimed precisely at averting civil war in Lebanon, Palestine, and Iraq. Through dozens of interviews, *EIR* has compiled the following picture of those efforts, and the events preceeding and following them.

On Feb. 7, 2007, Saudi Arabia’s King Abdullah hosted a meeting in Mecca between Palestinian Authority (PA) Presi-

dent Mahmoud Abbas and Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal. The meeting produced what came to be known as the “Mecca Accords,” a series of documents establishing the basis for a national unity government for the Palestinian Authority, with power-sharing among Hamas, Fatah, and a group of technocrats. Although the Egyptian government has been consumed for months with the fight over who will succeed an aging and infirm President Hosni Mubarak as head of state, the Mecca documents were careful to praise the pivotal role played by Egypt in securing a peaceful settlement of the internal Palestinian conflict.

According to Egyptian and American sources, the Mecca Accords were driven by the eruption of violence in the Gaza Strip in late January 2007, which was bordering on civil war between armed factions of Hamas and Fatah. Reportedly, in the course of the combat, Hamas fighters got their hands on documents, showing that some Fatah military commanders, including Mohammed Dahlan, had drawn up hit-lists of Hamas parliamentarians. Other documents reportedly pointed to the involvement of U.S. National Security Council official and rabid neo-con Elliott Abrams, in the efforts to provoke Fatah-Hamas bloody conflict. When the confiscated documents were presented to PA President Abbas, he was reportedly furious.

At that point Saudi King Abdullah summoned Hamas leader Mashaal to Riyadh, to press for a face-to-face meeting with Abbas. Syria reportedly played a critical role in pressing the Hamas chief to accede to the King’s demands. Saudi Arabia, according to Egyptian and American sources, pledged \$1 billion in aid to the PA and spread around large amounts of cash to secure the meeting—which resulted in a unity government, formally announced on March 15.

On March 3, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad made an unprecedented visit to Riyadh, to meet with King Abdullah. The King greeted the Iranian leader at the airport with a red-carpet reception, and the two leaders held three hours of talks at the Royal Palace. According to a wide range of sources, the meeting forged a unity government deal for Lebanon which, while still under negotiation, would greatly reduce the sectarian conflicts in that Mediterranean nation-state, which endured 15 years of devastating civil war, beginning in 1975—a civil war orchestrated by self-professed British agent Henry A. Kissinger.

The essence of the deal struck between Ahmadinejad and King Abdullah was the following: The current governing coalition, led by Prime Minister Fouad Siniora, would retain 19 Cabinet posts. The Hezbollah coalition would get ten posts, and the one remaining post would go to an “independent” figure closely allied with Hezbollah. The so-called “19+10+1” deal had been a stumbling block for months, because a minority faction in the Cabinet with one-third of the votes can block any government action. The big fear was that Hezbollah would veto the approval of an international tribunal to probe the assassination of former Prime Minister

Rafiq Hariri.

Reportedly, as the result of the Saudi-Iranian mediation, Hezbollah indicated that it would okay the tribunal, with certain modifications. The day after the Ahmadinejad-Abdullah meeting, the Belgian judge heading the tribunal arrived in Riyadh for negotiations on modified rules.

The question yet to be answered in the still-pending 19+10+1 arrangement is: Will the Syrian government be double-crossed in the bargain, or will the Saudis, who have been in conflict with Damascus for the past several years, honestly represent the interests of Syrian President Bashar Assad at the negotiating table?

One extremely well-informed Egyptian source, asked about the “Syria factor” in the Lebanon deal, shrugged. “In the Middle East,” he said, “double-crosses occur all the time. They are a way of life, a cost of doing business.”

The Iran Factor

A number of sources elaborated on another critical aspect of the regional situation: Iran’s involvement in Iraq and the Iranian nuclear program. A grid of source reports and publicly reported events suggests the following developments since the middle of February.

First, on the Iranian nuclear program: Sources report that, under enormous pressure from Russia and other international players, including some Western European states, Iran made a decision to postpone the activation of a second, larger enrichment facility at Natanz. International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) chief Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei had been pressing for months for a “freeze” in the confrontation between Iran and the U.S. over allegations that Iran was building a nuclear bomb. ElBaradei proposed that the Iranians halt any further advances in their nuclear enrichment efforts, and in return, the United Nations Security Council would stall on the imposition of new, harsher sanctions on Iran.

A mid-February meeting in Moscow between President Putin and former Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati was, reportedly, a crucial event in the process, with the Russian leader reading the Iranian emissary the riot act, and threatening to halt the activation of the Russian-made Iranian nuclear reactor at Bushehr.

Other factors also reportedly squeezed the Iranians to make the first behind-the-scenes concession. These factors included a threat by Interpol to issue an international arrest warrant against former Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani, who remains a powerful figure among the clerics who ultimately run Iran. Both Rafsanjani and Velayati were among the Iranian officials who were accused of ordering the 1994 bombing of a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Iran in Iraq

The third, and by far, the most advanced of the three civil wars cited by Jordan’s King Abdullah II last November, is

Iraq. In a recent interview on CNN, the Iraqi chief of national security told Wolf Blitzer that Iran was no longer involved in arming and training Shi'ite rebels in Iraq. Washington, D.C. sources confirmed the statement and explained this decision to *EIR*.

The Shi'ite insurgency, one source explained, is engaging in "strategic defense" in Iraq, avoiding direct engagements with American and allied forces, and waiting for the withdrawal of foreign troops, to consolidate control over the majority of the country. Firebrand cleric Moktadr al-Sadr, according to several sources, has been ordered to stand down his Mahdi Army, and wait out the American "surge." Sadr has recently been in Iran, but is now reportedly staying in a remote area of Shi'ite-dominated southern Iraq, where there are no British troops patrolling, and not even any presence of Iraqi Army forces.

All of these arrangements amount to an across-the-board effort to cool out Sunni versus Shi'ite, sectarian, and secular-versus-fundamentalist conflicts in all three countries on the verge or already in the throes of civil war.

The efforts clearly mark a decision by Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah to distance the Kingdom from the Bush-Cheney White House, and to pursue a regional diplomacy that is distinctly in contrast to the intentions of Cheney, Abrams, and many inside the Israeli government and right wing. Abrams, in particular, is reportedly livid over what he clearly sees as an Arab double-cross.

However, King Abdullah has been taking advantage of the close ties that his national security advisor and former long-time Saudi Ambassador to Washington, Prince Bandar bin-Sultan, still maintains with the Bush family and the Office of the Vice President, to convey to the White House that the Saudis are actually pursuing Administration-stated policies.

Furthermore, just 24 hours after the completion of the Mecca talks, breaking the Palestinian deadlock, Frances Townsend, President Bush's White House homeland security and counter-terrorism aide, was in Riyadh for a personal briefing from the King on the results of the talks. The Saudis have gone out of their way—even while distancing themselves from Washington's war schemes for the region—to stay in Washington's good graces.

Such fancy diplomatic footwork may slow down, or even temporarily reverse the drive towards horrific regional conflict. But Dick Cheney and, above all, his fanatical Fabian Society "liberal imperialist" backers in London, will not be denied their global showdown by such limited, albeit admirable efforts.

As Lyndon LaRouche has repeatedly emphasized since the Summer of 2002, nothing short of the removal of Dick Cheney from government, and the ouster of the entire neo-con swamp in his Office, guarantees that war—permanent war—can be avoided.