

**EXCLUSIVE**

# Saudis Focus Arab Unity Moves, Push For Geneva

Over the past week, the Saudi Arabian government has thrown its substantial weight behind a policy of rapid stabilization of the Middle East situation through the convening of a Geneva peace conference on the Mideast with adequate representation for the Palestine Liberation Organization.

This Saudi attitude has held the Arabs — possibly including the Egyptian government — firm against any new-Kissingerian “step-by-step” moves in the Middle East and has raised hopes of a unified Arab position on Geneva emerging out of the crucial Arab Foreign Ministers meeting in Geneva Nov. 12.

The most noteworthy recent indication of the Saudis’ attitude was a statement made by Foreign Minister Prince Saud in an interview with Beirut’s *An Nahar* newspaper that “we are not among those Arab states who believe that the U.S. holds all the cards” to a settlement in the Mideast. This decisive slap in the face to Egypt’s President Sadat — who has constantly expounded the notion — has shocked U.S. policy-making circles hoping to win Saudi support for a separate Egypt-Israel peace.

Saud’s statement earlier this month was followed by his announcement that he was convening a first-ever meeting of the Saudis’ ambassadors to western Europe to reappraise Saudi Arabian policy toward Western Europe — likely to initiate a Mideast peace offensive in Europe and to commit Saudi financial and energy wealth to the defense of financially beleaguered European governments.

The urgency behind this initiative was stressed by Saud during a Nov. 8 meeting in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, with Belgian Foreign Minister Henri Simonet. If Israel maintains its diplomatic intransigence and Geneva momentum is not maintained, Saud warned, then war could become “inevitable.”

The Saudis’ intent in these diplomatic moves is to maintain climate in the Middle East that will allow them to organize for a very low oil price rise at the Organization of Petroleum-Exporting Countries (OPEC) meeting in late December; hence the desire to have Geneva reconvened by then. Oil price stability is for the Saudis the crux of supporting the dollar and avoiding an early collapse of the entire international financial system because of the unmanageability of the Third World debt situation.

The Saudis are receiving important international back-up from primarily the French and West Germans in Western Europe, from the Soviets — who this week deployed top Mideast diplomat Sytenko throughout the Mideast to keep the Geneva process rolling — and from the U.S. “Harriman” faction intent on developing a relationship of detente with the Soviets. In the Arab world, the French- and the Soviet-backed Syrians are a mainstay of a unified Arab position for a Geneva conference.

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## “The Saudis Have Thrown Down The Gauntlet”

*A Senate Foreign Relations aide has these comments on the questions about Egyptian and Saudi policy posed by a recent Jerusalem Post.*

I can tell you with absolute certainty that the Saudis have told Egypt: No separate deals with Israel. They’re threatening to cut Sadat off from aid if he goes that route. They’ve thrown down the gauntlet. The State Department has been considering the possibility of reverting to some form of step-by-step until the Saudi Foreign Minister arrived in Washington last month. He really laid down a tough line, and that has been the Saudi position ever since. To put it simply: a separate Egypt-Israel deal is out of the picture.

The Saudis are not prepared to go to Geneva without the PLO being there. You can safely report that the Saudis are in the Syrian camp on this question.

So the Egyptians aren’t the major factor in diplomacy at this point — Sadat has to go with Saudi Arabia, and the Saudis aren’t prepared to endorse any Kissinger-type deals.

The Saudis and Egyptians, you see, have different objectives. Basically, the Saudis have broader aims in mind, they have certain global type interests and some regional concerns that are paramount such as the return of Jerusalem to the Arabs. All in all, they have no interest in a separate deal, unlike Sadat who just wants territories back, has more limited objectives. But Sadat can’t move toward a separate deal under these circumstances.

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*In a recent interview a State Department analyst concurred that Saudi pressure was increasingly making any Egyptian “separate deal” with Israel an impossibility.*

Sadat has lately been implying a willingness to got it alone with Israel. At least, he is *threatening* to go it alone to force the other Arab states into line with his negotiating positions. But I really have strong doubts that he can go it alone, since the Saudis would probably cut off aid to Egypt if he did.

The Saudis are against an Egypt-Israel separate accord, that creates too many problems for them. They want the Arab-Israeli crisis in its entirety settled, and if Sadat went the separate route that would just destabilize the moderate regimes that the Saudis want to keep intact in Syria and Jordan. So a separate deal might help Sadat, but not motion toward an overall settlement.