

southeastern Turkey near the Iran border.

Although confident of their military superiority over Iran, Iraqi diplomats at the United Nations last week stressed their fear of superpower involvement in the Iraq-Iran conflict. If the conflict is not internationalized, there is little question that the Khomeini regime is doomed and that Iraq will emerge as the pivotal power in the region and the connection point between Europe and the Arabs.

U.S. maneuvers for Middle East buildup

by Judith Wyrer

Following a meeting last week with U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert Komer, Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin became Israel's first head of state to call for a mutual defense pact and to agree to joint military maneuvers with the U.S. At the same time, Begin offered the U.S. base rights at its Etzion airbase on the Sinai.

Begin made his unprecedented offer to Komer to strengthen the U.S.-Israel military alliance at the same time that the Israeli air force allegedly bombed Iraq's nuclear training facility under the guise of an Iranian air raid. Days later, Iraqi Defense Minister Adnan Khairallah declared that Iraq had proof that it was an Israeli and not an Iranian Phantom jet that hit the facility.

Historically, Israel has been the strongest ally of the faction of Anglo-American elites Komer represents, which envisions a provocative military buildup in the Mideast to challenge the Soviet Union on its southern borders. When Komer arrived in Japan on the first leg of his trip last month, he declared that it was his intention to build a NATO-allied international military presence in the Mideast and the Indian Ocean.

Komer, who was personally appointed to the post of Deputy Defense Secretary for Policy by Harold Brown, is the architect of the controversial Rapid Deployment Force (RDF) for the Persian Gulf. Israel, which already has a small arsenal of nuclear weapons, is the prime regional component of the RDF.

A *New York Times* lead editorial on Oct. 9 laid out the need for militarizing the strategic Persian Gulf along the lines of the "strike force" doctrine of Komer. It calls for the United States and its NATO partners to enact an "imperial response" to a colonial legacy, referring to the domination of the Gulf and the Indian Ocean Britain once enjoyed.

That display [of American warships] has begun with the naval armada now on station near the Gulf. It is to be gradually augmented by the mobile land forces, supplied from assorted bases in the region. Egypt and Israel will become discreet partners and the scare of this war may finally persuade the Saudis to permit a more conspicuous American operation on their soil. The buildup has to continue.

Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, like Begin, gave Komer a warm reception. Shortly after his departure from Egypt, Sadat for the first time publicly stated that Egypt would make available to Europe the same base facilities it has already opened up to the U.S.

The role of General Jones

Komer's tour of the Middle East was followed in less than a week by an American military delegation led by Chief of Staff General David Jones. While Komer discussed the policy of military buildup with various Middle Eastern leaders, Jones consolidated a series of agreements aimed at realizing the policy. During his visit to Egypt, Jones won Sadat's permission to deploy 1,400 American troops to Egypt next month. Egyptian vice-president Hosni Mubarak discussed with Jones plans to expand and upgrade the facilities at the Egyptian base Ras Banas to accommodate future American military deployments to Egypt.

Jones is reported to be personally preparing American maneuvers from Egyptian soil, where the 1,400 American troops will be airlifted to rendezvous with the RDF "under warlike conditions." It is expected that as a result of the Jones-Komer visits to Egypt, the U.S. will send new combat planes to Egypt. Jones also worked out a plan to produce American-designed M-113 tanks in Egypt, according to Egyptian armaments minister Gamal Sayed, who stated that Egypt was negotiating production of other American-designed artillery.

According to well informed U.S. military sources, it was Jones personally who pressured Saudi Arabia into accepting the deployment of four AWACS radar planes shortly after the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war. These same sources report that certain leading members of the Saudi royal family were opposed to accepting the U.S. equipment for fear that it would invite a super-conflict in the Gulf. Twice in the last two weeks, Saudi foreign minister Saud al-Faisal repeated his concern that the Iran-Iraq conflict could expand to include the super-powers. In an interview with the *Washington Post* Sept. 28, Faisal condemned Carter's bid to create an international naval force for the Persian Gulf and criticized the "logic" which prompted the administration to create the RDF. He termed Washington's headlong rush to

militarize the Mideast "overreaction."

Military sources reveal that Jones threatened the Saudis that the outlaw regime of Iran might wage a bombing campaign against Saudi oilfields, something the regime of Ayatollah Khomeini has more than once threatened to do. Shortly after Riyadh agreed to AWACS, the Defense Department announced that the United States would deploy ground radar systems to Saudi Arabia. The decision by the Saudis to increase U.S. surveillance technology came after reports of the bombing of Iraq's nuclear facilities, widely attributed to Israel.

The Defense Department this week revealed that the American military has full control over the sophisticated radar apparatus, with one of the U.S. military's top air defense authorities, Maj. Gen. John L. Piotrowski, and full staff manning the equipment. The deployment of a top-flight team of U.S. military officers to Saudi Arabia represents a major foot in the door for Washington's bid to militarize the Persian Gulf. And Undersecretary of State Warren Christopher this week formally offered American aid to the Arab emirates on the Persian Gulf if the Iran-Iraq conflict expands (see page 37).

Washington has quietly made similar offers to the Gulf states since the outbreak of the war. On Oct. 4, U.S. Ambassador to Bahrain Peter Sutherland and a U.S. military mission held talks with Bahrain's defense minister, Hamad Bin Issa Al Khalifa. The same day, sources in Kuwait announced that the United States had delivered antiaircraft missiles to Oman to enable that country to protect the Straits of Hormuz at the mouth of the Persian Gulf. Just after the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war last month, Britain sent 500 Special Air Services troops to Oman to "guard the Straits."

A Gulf NATO

The same week the Iran-Iraq war began, the *London Times* cited unnamed sources as asserting that a Persian Gulf military alliance should be established to ensure future security. Lenore Martin, a professor at Boston's Emmanuel College, two weeks later made the same proposal in an editorial for the *New York Times*. Entitled "For a Gulf 'NATO,'" Martin suggests that:

... the United States not only needs to base forces in the Gulf area, it must also develop a regional defense alliance along the lines of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Ground forces based in the region would not only be able to respond to crises faster than a Rapid Deployment Force, they would also provide a more tangible demonstration of America's commitment to the security of the Gulf nations.

Doubtless the idea of a Gulf States Defense Organization would at first encounter skepticism

in a region wary of great-power intervention. However, it might be palatable to Gulf nations because of the threat to their survival posed by the region's revolutionary powers. . . . Moreover, such a defense organization might include Egypt, which in the past has sent forces into the area, and other Western nations recently mentioned as members of a possible international naval force to keep open the Straits of Hormuz, through which about 60 percent of the world's oil trade passed before the war.

Soviet-Syria treaty a net loss for U.S.S.R.

by Robert Dreyfuss

The treaty slated to be signed between the Soviet Union and Syria during President Hafez Assad's Oct. 8 visit to Moscow does not represent a net gain for the U.S.S.R. in the Middle East. In fact, according to highly informed Syrian sources, it represents a dramatic blunder by the Soviet leadership.

At the same time, Soviet influence in Egypt—where Moscow once reigned supreme—is virtually nil, and despite the existence of a Soviet-Iraqi treaty, relations between Baghdad and Moscow are chilly at best.

But the decline of Soviet influence in the Middle East is not occurring to the advantage of the United States. The real beneficiaries of the simultaneous collapse of American and Soviet presence in the area are primarily Great Britain, and, in a subsidiary sense, Israel.

The Syrian regime with which the Soviet Union is presently establishing a formal alliance is already on a policy track that will soon collapse its authority.

Internally, President Assad is following an almost suicidal course of action. The Assad regime, based originally on a rather narrow section of Syria's population, the minority Alawite sect, has recently narrowed its base even further to the point where it has become a *sectarian regime*. Other than the Alawite sectarian clique that includes Assad, his immediate family, and such figures as Muhammad Haider of the ruling Baath Party's foreign relations department, no one else in Syria has a share of power.

Syrian intelligence, according to informed sources, actually encourages terrorist violence by such movements as the anti-Alawite Muslim Brotherhood secret society. In so doing, Assad believes that he can at once strengthen the cohesiveness of the inner circle of Alawites