

Middle East Report by Robert Dreyfuss

Abba Eban goes to London

The old-boy Arabists maneuver to cash in on hoped-for Reagan blunders.

Last week, an important Israeli visitor to London went almost unnoticed except for a small item in the *Jerusalem Post*. Abba Eban, the former Israeli foreign minister and the man expected to take up that post again should Labour Party leader Shimon Peres win next year's elections, spent a day meeting with a prestigious group of London's so-called "Arabists," led by Sir Harold Beeley.

It was, in a sense, a quiet reunion of an "old boys network." Back during World War II, when Eban was a captain in the British army with close ties to British and Zionist intelligence, he was a close collaborator of the old British Arabist mafia. In fact, Eban describes himself as the godfather of the Middle East Center for Arabic Studies (ME-CAS), which was founded in 1944 by the Royal Institute for International Affairs as the headquarters of the British intelligence service in the Middle East.

At that time, Harold Beeley was the private secretary of Queen Elizabeth. Since then he has served as British ambassador in Cairo, and today he chairs the World Festival of Islam Trust, along with United Arab Emirates Ambassador Mohammed al-Tajir in London.

What were Eban and Beeley talking about?

According to London sources, the Eban-Beeley reunion was part of a broader British attempt to cap-

italize on the mistakes London hopes the incoming Reagan administration will make in the Middle East.

The British strategy is to present London's Middle East policy as more accommodating to the Arab position than is that of the United States. In a recent letter to Parliament, British Foreign Secretary Lord Carrington stated his agreement with the positions laid out in the report of British Liberal Party leader David Steele, who recommended, after a tour of the Middle East, that only the Palestine Liberation Organization could represent the Palestinians.

The British position is duplicitous, since during a recent series of meetings of the European Community, the British have consistently sabotaged French efforts to present more forthright positions opposing the Camp David strategy sponsored by Washington.

Meanwhile, as Eban was meeting with Beeley and Ian Gilmour of the Foreign Office, Ambassador John Graham of the Foreign Office was in Beirut meeting with Yasser Arafat of the PLO.

The policy implications of the crisscrossing Middle East diplomacy ought to be clear.

Eban, who represents the most anglophile of the Israeli leadership, and Beeley, Graham, and the old Oxford-Cambridge Arabist establishment whose patron is Sir John

Bagot Glubb Pasha are seeking to make an under-the-table deal with the network of the old Muslim Brotherhood in the Arab world.

By approaching Arafat, the London Arabists are providing a bit of protective coloration to themselves. Their real objective is to isolate Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, Crown Prince Fahd of Saudi Arabia, and their allies in the Arab world. Saddam Hussein and Fahd, collaborating closely, have forged an axis in the Arab world committed to a long-term policy of industrialization and economic development. Both Britain and many Israelis are fiercely opposed to this strategy on the part of Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

Eban and his British Secret Intelligence Service colleagues are consolidating their links to the Muslim Brotherhood network from this standpoint. In Saudi Arabia, their chief contact is Prince Abdullah ibn Abdal Aziz. Prince Abdullah is commander of the Saudi National Guard, and a bitter opponent of Prince Fahd's modernization policies.

Tactically, Eban and the British hope to make an offer to Jordan's King Hussein that will break him away from his current alliance with Fahd and Iraq's Saddam Hussein, by bringing him into a "gentleman's agreement" with Israel—under a new Labour Party government whose foreign minister will be Abba Eban.

In other words, the British and their Israeli allies, like Eban, will offer to settle the Palestinian question—but at the price of eliminating the Arab world's pro-modernization faction and strengthening the hegemony of the Islamic reactionary tradition embodied by Saudi Prince Abdullah.