

## Middle East Report by Robert Dreyfuss

### A defeat for Saudi Arabia

*Will the French electoral results force Riyadh into a Middle East Treaty Organization setup?*

**T**he defeat of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing in the French presidential elections last week pulls the props from under an alliance Saudi Arabia had forged with France and West Germany for international stability. Not only has Saudi Arabia lost a crucial ally in Giscard, but the new president, François Mitterrand, promises to push the same policies Giscard and the Saudis were determined to defeat.

Nowhere is this more evident than on policy for the Middle East itself. Arab sources report that shortly after Mitterrand's victory, he declared his support for the step-by-step form of negotiations that spawned the Camp David accords between Egypt and Israel. Mitterrand also advocated bypassing the Palestine Liberation Organization in future talks. Hours before, Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin extended an invitation to Mitterrand to visit Israel, the first such invitation from an Israeli leader in recent history.

Giscard, more than any other European leader, supported the Saudi view that the PLO must be a party to some form of multilateral peace talks. Giscard has argued that nonresolution of the Palestinian refugee problem will seed perpetual instability in the Mideast. Now Saudi Arabia will come under extreme pressure to join the Israel-Egypt axis, and Mitterrand is expected to play a central role in this process.

Sources at Georgetown University report that Mitterrand's election has strengthened the hand of the European Socialist International and British Foreign Minister Lord Carrington in the next phase of the Mideast dialogue. Within the Reagan administration, they say, Secretary of State Alexander Haig and a network of Jesuit-connected right-wing Social Democrats associated with Georgetown's Center for Strategic and International Studies will support Mitterrand and Carrington.

Another well-placed Washington source estimated that "the next objective of Middle East diplomacy will be to neutralize Saudi Arabia in the way Egypt has been neutralized as a threat to Israel" through the Camp David talks. He stated that the key to persuading Saudi Arabia to make a bilateral agreement is "through Jerusalem." "The Saudis are very religious and they have a restive religious movement. If they can win back part of Jerusalem for the Muslim cause, even in some kind of bilateral accord, I think they would do it." The same source named CSIS strategists Walter Laqueur, Michael Ledeen, and Edward Luttwak as "prepared to work with the European Social Democrats" toward this objective, adding that France, being both Catholic and Social Democratic, is best positioned to aid the United States in arranging such a deal.

Underlying this strategy is a

plan to create an Israel-Egypt-Saudi military axis as the skeleton of a NATO-linked Middle East Treaty Organization.

Because of the pressure both London and the State Department have put on Riyadh to submit to such a military scheme, Saudi Arabia had turned to Giscard's government for a new military and security alliance. But with the elimination of Giscard, Saudi Arabia has no immediate option but to rely on the U.S. as its prime source of security and arms supplies. The question is what conditions Washington will place on future sales, most importantly the pending agreement for the delivery of four AWACS surveillance aircraft.

Senator Henry Jackson, the most powerful pro-Israel member of the Senate, has threatened to veto the sale unless Saudi Arabia agrees to a "regional security system" linked to NATO. Saudi Arabia refuses to make such a concession because it does not want to be perceived as a "U.S. military satellite."

Arab sources report that another facet of the pressure on Riyadh to accept the AWACS on such terms is the likelihood of a limited Israeli-Syrian war over Lebanon within the next month, a war intended by the CSIS crew to divide Lebanon between Syria and Israel.

A Lebanese source reports that such a scenario would create "permanent instability" in the Mideast, displacing thousands of Palestinians who live in southern Lebanon. "This will terrify the Saudis . . . they see Lebanon go up in smoke, then they will really clamor for the AWACS and be even more vulnerable" to the kinds of demands being floated by Jackson and Haig.