

## Middle East Report by Robert Dreyfuss

### Fahd's peace plan: a new element

*The Saudi proposal for an Arab-Israeli settlement has provoked a mad scramble in Israel.*

**D**ays after Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin slapped the Saudis in the face by loudly denouncing as "unacceptable" Crown Prince Fahd's eight-point Middle East peace plan, Israeli politicians are tripping over themselves to signal their new-found willingness to "talk" to the Saudis, going so far as to schedule a cabinet debate on the issue for Aug. 16.

The reason for their sudden interest in the Saudi plan? Simply that they could not ignore it any longer, no matter how much they might have wanted to.

Fahd's Aug. 8 plan, which offers Arab recognition of Israel's right to "live in peace" in exchange for the creation of a Palestinian state, marks the first time that the Saudis have made such concessions officially. If the Reagan administration took it as a starting point, the Saudi proposal could form the basis of a comprehensive Middle East settlement.

The British, working together with Israel, Egypt, France, and their hangers-on in the United States, may beat Reagan to it. The British are counting on using the Saudi proposal as an entrée, not for securing an overall settlement but for roping Riyadh into joining a widened Camp David-style peace process constructed around Alexander Haig's anti-Soviet "strategic consensus." Hence the sudden Israeli "interest" in the Fahd plan.

To manipulate the Saudis into

compliance, a deal of sorts is being dangled before them: the lifting of the U.S. embargo on F-16 and F-15 fighter plane deliveries to Israel, in exchange for Israeli agreement not to oppose the sale of U.S. AWACS radar surveillance planes to Saudi Arabia.

Whether or not Begin, who is still blustering about the Fahd proposal, will cooperate with such an arrangement is questionable.

What is important, however, is the deal behind the deal: getting Saudi Arabia to integrate itself into the Anglo-American peace process and effectively relinquish some of its national sovereignty in the interest of "securing the region against the Soviets."

A first step in that direction was taken several weeks ago when the United States deployed one of the AWACS now on loan to the Saudis to Egypt to protect President Anwar Sadat on a trip to Sudan from a possible Libyan attack. The operation exemplified the kind of regional strategic cooperation that Haig in particular wants to shove down the Saudis' throats.

To help ensure Saudi acquiescence, French President François Mitterrand will visit Saudi Arabia next month. French efforts to ingratiate themselves with the Saudis are further reflected in Foreign Minister Claude Cheysson's public welcome for Fahd's peace plan.

So far, the United States has officially ignored the ground-

breaking Saudi plan, which is the most extensive proposal ever issued by Saudi Arabia for an overall settlement of the Arab-Israeli crisis. The Fahd plan calls upon the United States to abandon the Camp David framework of the Carter administration and urges the adoption of the Saudi proposal to conduct general negotiations through the United Nations.

In his peace proposal, Fahd makes no mention of the Palestine Liberation Organization. "Perhaps the omission is to make it easier for the U.S. administration to support the sort of U.N. resolution he is suggesting," commented one diplomatic source.

The adverse effects of Anglo-American Middle East policy on the moderate faction around Fahd have already begun to undermine the Crown Prince's position and drive a wedge between Washington and the Saudi royal family. A leading Saudi newspaper has reported that Fahd will cancel his planned October visit to the United States unless there are "radical" changes in U.S. policy toward the Middle East.

Kuwait and Libya are working to widen the gap between the Saudis and the United States. The Kuwait defense minister has announced that Kuwait will reject U.S. offers to sell Kuwait defensive Hawk missiles and instead will send a team of military experts to Moscow to buy advanced weaponry. At the same time, Libya's foreign minister visited Kuwait.

A Kuwaiti official who heads up the recently formed Gulf Cooperation Council said that he fully expects increased contacts between Moscow and the Persian Gulf states, including Saudi Arabia.