

U.S.-Saudi joint Shuttle: a new approach

by Our Special Correspondent

The next United States launching of the space shuttle Discovery, in mid-June, will include for the first time a jet-pilot from Saudi Arabia, Prince Sultan Bin Salman. Along with a French astronaut, Patrick Baudry, this flight will mark the first U.S. space mission involving astronauts from three nations. It also represents a significant breakthrough for U.S.-Arab relations, despite heavy opposition from pro-Israeli forces in the United States and Israel itself.

The purposes of this mission will include the testing of pop-up mirrors to be utilized for the ground-based laser system being developed under the President's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). Another included program in this mission will be the deployment of the second ARABSAT satellite, ARABSAT 1-B, which is owned by the 22-nation Arab Telecommunications Consortium. Saudi Arabia, which has funded 26% of the project, is the leading contributor.

The first such satellite, ARABSAT 1-A, was launched by the European Space Agency's Ariane space shuttle from French Guyana on Feb. 9, and is now positioned in orbit above the Arab world. Jordan, with its new earth station completed, is among the first Arab countries to link up with ARABSAT.

On the ground, ARABSAT's earth control network has been preparing for the launches. Two telemetry, tracking, command, and monitoring (TTCM) stations will communicate with the satellites and serve as the master control terminals—one near Riyadh in Saudi Arabia, and the other near Tunis. The Riyadh station, as the primary ARABSAT tracking facility, will be monitoring the satellites during launch and while in orbit.

In the Arab world, this U.S. and European sponsored program represents one of the last remaining hopes of bringing the Arab world into the Space Age, and creates a new set of conditions for the type of cooperation needed in the Middle East—given that Lebanon has been destroyed and the chances for a lasting peace in the region otherwise appear almost nil.

The critical political importance of this joint U.S.-Saudi project is well understood by those political forces opposed to the venture. Not surprisingly, the Israeli intelligence service, the Mossad, through their U.S.-based assets, opposed the joint venture, and up until the current take-off date, had

been successful in delaying two earlier scheduled launches.

The project's development, of course, was a result of the special relationship and good will between the United States and Saudi Arabia, unique in the Arab world. Hence, the forces determined to sabotage Middle East peace are now mobilized to poison this relationship.

According to well-placed sources, the publication of the book, *The American House of Saud: The Secret Petrodollar Connection*, by Steven Emerson, represents a signal to the relevant forces in the U.S. Congress to launch an "investigation" into the U.S.-Saudi connection. Simultaneously, a new movie or TV mini-documentary series portraying the House of Saud as corrupt, venal, and dangerous is being planned for release in either the summer or fall. Emerson's backing for the project came from former presidential candidate John Anderson, who has already formed a special committee to "investigate the Saudi connection." Operating behind the scenes and looking to generate so-called "public interest" is the organized-crime-linked senator from Cleveland, Howard Metzenbaum.

Metzenbaum enjoys support from a network of State Department officials and ex-officials, including one of the key figures in promoting the line that the Saudi government is "unstable," David Long. Long, a former State Department official in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR), prepared a classified study on the stability of the Saudi Royal Family and the emergence of the Shi'ite minority. Long's report asserted the alleged fact that the Saudi regime could not last more than three to five years. His study, commissioned in 1981, was released to author Emerson as a means of bolstering the claim that there is a "need for opening an investigation into the Saudi regime."

Cui bono?

The beneficiaries of the destabilization of the Saudi government are threefold: 1) the Soviet Union; 2) a certain faction in Israel; 3) Iran. Given U.S. strategic interests in the Middle East and Persian Gulf, destabilization of the Saudi regime would end any viable U.S. presence in the region.

Presently, the operations of Khomeinist Islamic terrorist networks are reaching into the Saudi capital, Riyadh, and are aimed at weakening the legitimacy of King Fahd. At the end of May, a series of bombings took place in the capital. These operations came on the heels of a massive new destabilization in Lebanon and near genocide against the Palestinian population there by Shi'ite militias backed by the Israelis and the Syrian regime.

Given the present, systematic collapse of U.S. Middle East policy, the only viable option remaining to the United States is the immediate extension of recognition to the Palestine Liberation Organization. This would open the way for a Middle East settlement, and permit a continued development of the type of relationship with the Arab world, based upon scientific and technological cooperation, that is exemplified by the U.S.-Saudi Shuttle project.