

Middle East Report by Robert Dreyfuss

The fuse is lit

Israel's hit on Iraq has set off a chain reaction that could engulf the entire region

Israel's June 7 raid on the Iraqi nuclear research facilities has touched off a potentially catastrophic chain reaction in Arab politics and throughout the Middle East—one that could have incalculable consequences for American interests in the region.

But the Reagan administration, still preoccupied with its budget and tax squabbles, is not paying sufficient attention to the growing crisis. Despite sharp evidence of Israeli violation of American law in bombing Iraq's reactor, Washington has acted as if the violation will simply go away.

By violating the most sacrosanct principle of international law—namely, that of national sovereignty—Israel has forced Iraq into an extremely difficult and dangerous position.

Despite the U.S.-Iraqi mise at the United Nations Security Council debate last week, the Iraqi government is still intent on seeking justice for what Israel did. That, the Iraqi government believes, can only come when President Reagan declares that Israel has indeed violated American law and takes appropriate steps in response. "We insist that Israel be punished for its acts," said an Iraqi official.

But, because Reagan has indicated that he is willing to accept the advice of Secretary of State Alexander Haig and National Security Adviser Richard Allen in justifying Israel's attack, and because of Rea-

gan's seeming apology in his press conference for the Israeli raid, Iraqi officials are already hinting of a coming storm in U.S.-Iraqi U.S.-Arab

At a June 22 Arab conference, Iraq's speaker of the parliament, Naim Haddad, issued the strongest statement yet by an Iraqi official, warning that the Arabs should consider an oil embargo and financial warfare against the United States because of the Israeli bombing raid on Osirak.

Then, on June 23, President Saddam Hussein issued a startling call for the developed countries to "assist the Arabs in one way or another to obtain the nuclear bomb in order to confront Israel's existing bombs."

He said that "what terrified Begin was our scientific, cultural, human, political, economic, social, and educational development, and our sound concern with knowledge."

Moreover, he said, the attack on Iraq on June 7 signifies that Israel "would interfere even with roads someplace in Saudi Arabia and ask that their direction be changed under the pretext that they pose a threat to the Zionist entity" and "will ask the Arabs to cancel the study of chemistry, physics, mathematics, or astronomy . . . because they give the Arabs knowledge in the military sphere."

One Iraqi source declared that the Reagan administration is in-

formed by Iraq of how seriously Baghdad takes the implication of the Israeli raid. And, he added, "We know that Menachem Begin was trying to disrupt U.S.-Arab and to push us into alliance with the Soviet Union, but perhaps we have no other choice."

Two days ago, Deputy Prime Minister Taha Yassin Ramadan of Iraq paid a visit to Moscow. Now, according to reliable reports, a high-ranking Syrian delegation will soon visit Baghdad for talks on reconciliation following the June 24 visit to Iraq by Libya's Maj. Abdel-Salam Jalloud. The Iraqi press has now ceased attacking Syria and Libya, concentrating its propaganda on Khomeini's Iran and Begin.

"We will play our Soviet card," said one Iraqi source. "And the Saudis will go along—or we will force them to go along. It is a fact that we cannot accept what Israel has done, and we will never accept it. President Reagan must understand that, or he will find that Iraq will destroy America's interests in the Middle East."

According to U.S. congressional sources, there is no prospect for an immediate U.S. response to the Israeli raid. To cover up for its lack of decisiveness, the Reagan administration has sought to delay its official finding on the Israeli raid, hoping that the problem will go away.

But it will not.

"When Reagan came in," said an Arab diplomat, "we had hopes that he would be different than Carter. Unfortunately, our hopes seem to have proved wrong."

"It appears that the Trilateral Commission and the Zionist lobby have a controlling influence still, even over Reagan."