

The Fahd plan depends on a superpower thaw

by Robert Dreyfuss, Middle East Editor

The failure of the Nov. 25 Arab summit in Fez, Morocco, is a serious setback to the prospect of a peace agreement in the Middle East, and it leaves the Reagan administration facing a dangerous and complex situation between now and the scheduled April 1982 final Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Sinai peninsula. The expected endorsement by the Arab bloc of Saudi Crown Prince Fahd's eight-point peace plan, the principal agenda item at Fez, never materialized—thus eliminating what might have been a powerful diplomatic asset in the administration's otherwise aimless Middle East policy.

But the major conclusion to be drawn from the Arab summit is still a hopeful one. The reality of the Fez meeting is that Fahd plan came far closer to actual success than seemed possible earlier this year. In the coming months, careful diplomacy might yet succeed in bringing the Fahd plan to its intended result: a general Arab willingness to make peace with Israel in exchange for a Palestinian state on the occupied West Bank and Gaza territories.

What the summit postponement signifies, however—especially by the boycott of the Fez meeting by Syrian President Hafez Assad—is that a final decision on the Fahd plan will probably have to await an improved environment of U.S.-Soviet rapprochement. Judging from the outcome of the Nov. 22-25 meeting between Soviet President L.I. Brezhnev and Chancellor Helmut Schmidt of West Germany, it is now possible that Brezhnev and President Reagan may begin to grope toward an accord that would subsume the Middle East crisis. Chancellor Schmidt already has committed himself to try to mediate relations between Washington and Moscow.

Thus, Prince Fahd's peace plan has not been defeated,

merely shelved for a period of time. Whether it is acted upon will be determined by the diplomacy of the next two months, and the extent to which Washington and Moscow can move toward a strategic accord on the Middle East. If Reagan, emulating the Eisenhower of 1956, can get tough with and force reality on the Israelis and if the U.S.S.R. agrees to end its opportunistic support for Libya's terrorist Col. Muammar Qaddafi, then it is possible that the two big powers can replicate something like the October 1977 Joint Statement on the Middle East.

Danger of polarization

The immediate danger, however, is that with the postponement of the Arab summit the enemies of the Fahd plan will join together to escalate tensions in the region and polarize the Middle East between the United States and Soviet Union. Those enemies include the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS); the Soviet KGB and the ideologues in Moscow around Boris Ponomarev and Mikhail Suslov; and, finally, Israel's Mossad.

It was these forces which combined to cause the assassination of Egypt's Anwar Sadat on Oct. 6, and which are committed to joint efforts to undermine the influence of the United States in the Middle East. It is the combination of British, Soviet, and Israeli secret services who control the Muslim Brotherhood and other extremist elements in the Arab world.

Quick visits to the United States by Israel's Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir and then Defense Minister Ariel Sharon last week have reportedly set the stage for Israel to increase military pressure along the Lebanese, Jordanian, and Syrian frontiers. In turn, according to

reliable sources, such actions by Israel are intended to provoke increased Soviet involvement in Syria and the Arab world, meanwhile drawing America into support for Israel's position (see page 44).

Britain's Lord Carrington, who lobbied mightily in a vain effort to block the sale of AWACS radar planes to Saudi Arabia, has redoubled his efforts to destroy the Fahd plan. The British gameplan, sources report, is to lock the United States into a narrow position in support of the Camp David powers, Egypt and Israel, while manipulating the Soviet Union into a similarly narrow alliance with the Steadfastness Front of radical Arab states, led by Syria and Libya. London would then have a relatively free hand with the majority of Arab moderate states, led by Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Jordan. And Carrington will put London in the position of brokering Soviet-American relations in the Middle East.

The crucial importance of the Fahd plan is that it carries with it the possibility of uniting Syria and Egypt—not to mention the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)—behind a unified approach to the region's problems. On the eve of the summit, there were hints and signals that both Reagan and Brezhnev might both consider Fahd's eight points as a starting place for real Middle East talks. But American ambivalence about the Fahd plan and high-level divisions in the Soviet leadership combined to neutralize the potential represented by the Saudi initiative. In the end, the still dominant U.S.-Soviet rivalry caused Syria's Assad to stay away from Fez altogether, thus effectively destroying any chance that the Fahd plan might succeed.

Assad's balancing act

From the beginning, it was known that the success of the Fahd plan would rise or fall on the question of whether Syria would support Saudi Arabia. Intensive diplomacy by Saudi leaders and up to \$15 billion in offers of financial aid finally failed to convince the Syrian president—adept at the game of political survival in the Middle East's most coup-prone nation—to gamble on attending the summit.

Instead, Assad flew to Tripoli, Libya, to powwow with Qaddafi rather than fly to Morocco. To equate Assad with the insane Libyan, however, would be an error. Qaddafi is completely a creation of the Anglo-Venetian banking interests and the old Mussolini-era Italian families who controlled Libya during the early part of this century, and who today mediate their relationship to Qaddafi—and to the Soviet KGB—via such figures as Occidental Petroleum's Armand Hammer. But the mortgage on Hafez Assad is held by a number of conflicting interests.

According to Arab sources, on the eve of the Fez summit Assad was very close to supporting the Fahd

plan. Pragmatically, it would be of great benefit to Syria; and politically Assad—having already accepted U.N. Resolution 242 of 1967—was on record as having accepted every point of the Saudi plan.

Yet Assad refused: for Syria to have joined the Saudis in Fez would have meant an open break with Moscow, chief military supplier to Syria, and it is very likely that the Soviet leadership warned Assad not to attend the Fez meeting. In addition, British and Israeli pressures—overt and covert—would have been brought to bear on Assad to avoid Morocco. Ultimately, because of the results of these pressures on Syria's delicate internal balance, Assad decided not to attend.

But there are extremely dangerous signs that, in the wake of the Fez breakdown, Syria is about to explode. Only two days after the abrupt end to the Morocco summit, a huge bomb exploded in a Damascus residential district, killing upwards of 150 people. The underground terrorist Muslim Brotherhood claimed responsibility for the blast in a statement issued in Bonn, West Germany. According to Arab sources, the British SIS is actively supporting the Muslim Brotherhood against Assad—and a Dec. 1 article in the London *Times* on the Syrian Ikhwan would support that view. The article, by Robert Fisk, cites the activities of the Muslim Brotherhood and even goes so far as to print the bank account number in London where sympathizers can send funds to support the terrorist organization!

Equally significantly, Arab intelligence sources report, the Soviet KGB has begun to withdraw some of its security screen around Assad, possibly in reaction to Assad's flirting with the Saudi plan. Among some Arab circles, it is considered possible that the SIS and KGB may cooperate to destabilize Syria—even to the point of turning it into another Lebanon or Iran. "A Khomeini-style Muslim Brotherhood regime in Syria is not at all impossible," said one source.

A public signal of tensions between Syria and the KGB was the feud between Assad and the Communist party of Syria, led by Khaled Bagdash. Three weeks ago, Assad expelled the Communists from the regime by rigging a parliamentary election against them, and since then sharp tensions have erupted into open conflict.

Despite evident Soviet-Syrian strains, however, it is very unlikely that Assad could risk a complete break with Moscow under any circumstances. For that reason, the eventual success of the Fahd plan will depend on Assad getting a green light from Brezhnev to pursue the Saudi initiative. Should relations between Washington and Moscow improve significantly, then Brezhnev would be amenable to supporting Syria in the direction of the Fahd plan—even if it means that Brezhnev would have to override factions in the Soviet leadership ideologically opposed to such a policy.