

Reagan and King Fahd: green light to peace plan

by Linda de Hoyos

The events surrounding the visit to the United States of Saudi Arabia's King Fahd Feb. 10-15 have created the first serious opportunity for Mideast peace in many decades. In a background briefing of Feb. 8, a senior administration official reported that the Saudis see the current confluence of factors as a "historic moment," a unique opportunity for peace, given the mandate awarded President Ronald Reagan in the November elections.

But there are two other key reasons why there is a new potential for peace in the Mideast. First, Henry Kissinger and the U.S. State Department are not in control of U.S. policy toward the region. On the eve of the Saudi King's arrival, Kissinger advised on national television that the United States stay out of the Mideast altogether (leaving it to the Soviet Union). This and the State Department's drive to play a "Syrian card" (eschewing America's Arab allies) and concentrate on the Lebanon maelstrom, however, are not determining White House policy. Instead, the President himself and Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger are leading the U.S.-Arab coordinated initiative. If Kissinger and his friends, the faction that has contrived every war in the Mideast since 1967, are kept out of the picture, there is no telling how fast things might fall into place.

Second, as reported in *Newsweek* magazine and subsequently corroborated by informed Washington sources, Saudi King Fahd brought with him a \$30-40 billion plan for development of the entire Mideast region, including Israel. The development fund would be financed by the United States, Western Europe, and the oil-producing states of the Mideast itself. As American statesman Lyndon LaRouche has pointed out since 1975, the only guarantee for peace in the area is a coordinated regional division of labor for the "greening of the deserts" and industrialization.

These two factors have brought the potentials for peace

to their highest point since President Dwight Eisenhower's Atoms for Peace plan of 1959.

King Fahd arrived in Washington on Feb. 10 to call upon the United States to take a major role in securing peace in the region, a request that the administration take serious action to realize the Reagan plan of September 1982. Under that plan, Jordan and the Palestine Liberation Organization would be treated as one negotiating party and negotiations would be based on U.N. Resolution 242, which calls for self-determination for the Palestinians and Arab recognition of Israel.

Exactly a year ago, within a week of the pull-out of U.S. Marines from Lebanon, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and King Hussein of Jordan had come to Washington with the same request, stating that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was the root cause of instability in the region, including the crisis in Lebanon. Their appeal fell upon deaf ears, as U.S. policy was then firmly in the grip of the State Department.

This time, King Fahd's trip culminated a series of careful negotiations coordinated not by the State Department but by Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, a process set into motion during Weinberger's fall trip to Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Israel.

As King Fahd and President Reagan were preparing to meet in the United States, Jordanian King Hussein and PLO chief Yasser Arafat emerged from two days of discussions with an "Amman agreement" to pursue a joint course toward resolution of the Mideast conflict. Although the detailed contents of the agreement have not yet been made public, reports are that Arafat, who has defeated a year-long effort by the Soviet-Syrian-backed terrorist wing of the PLO to oust him, has agreed to King Hussein's November 1984 proposal for PLO recognition of Israel, a Palestinian-Jordanian confederation, and Jordan as the Palestinians' representative in negotiations.

Documentation

'Now the U.S. has someone to talk to'

The following are excerpts of the background briefing by a senior administration official delivered on Feb. 8. The contents of the briefing were totally blacked out by the U.S. press. The briefing, however, is conclusive evidence of the degree to which the White House is coordinating its efforts with the moderate Arab leadership.

Senior Administration Official: This will be the first state visit of the President's second term. King Fahd will be the first Middle Eastern head of state to visit this year. He's going to be followed, of course, by a series of Middle Eastern visitors: Egyptian Foreign Minister Abd al-Baqi is already here to prepare for President Mubarak's visit in March and that will be followed by others later on, but Fahd is the first.

This will also be the first official visit by a reigning Saudi monarch since King Faisal visited in 1971. . . .

Fahd is coming not only as King of Saudi Arabia, and as the main architect of U.S.-Saudi relations and the close relationship that Saudi Arabia has maintained to the United States, but also, in this instance, as a primary Arab statesman who has sent a series of emissaries around the Arab world in the last few weeks. So we think he's going to be able to articulate not only his own point of view, but a point of view that reflects a general set of understandings among modern Arab leadership.

The timing of the visit was dictated, I think, by nothing more complicated than the President's reelection. Fahd wants to come here at this point, I think, reflecting a widely held view in the Arab world, particularly among the more moderate Arab leadership, that this is the moment to urge the United States to reinvigorate the peace process and move ahead on that issue in light of the political mandate that the President has just secured. . . .

There are a number of other things in the region that contribute to this feeling that this is a moment for activity. A new Israeli government, which has displayed evidence of greater flexibility on peace issues than its predecessor, a new activism by King Hussein in his negotiations with Arafat to seek a mandate to go into peace negotiations. . . .

Q: What are you prepared to say to the King if he says to you, we think the U.S. should open a dialogue with the PLO, as the Egyptians seem to be urging?

Senior Administration Official: Well, a dialogue with the PLO we don't think is really going to move matters ahead.

Egyptian President Mubarak's special adviser, Osama al-Baz, who was present at the talks between King Hussein and Arafat, reported that "for the first time, the PLO has unequivocally and irrevocably accepted the premise of a peaceful settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict. . . . What counts is that there has been a decision by the Jordanians and the Palestinians to take a risk. Entry into negotiations involves a risk." He called on the United States to respond to Arafat's "courageous step" by demonstrating "a willingness and the ability to come to terms with a joint Arab move."

Immediately, King Hussein flew to Algeria to inform Algerian President Chadli of the agreement, and Arafat went to Tunis to face a stormy meeting of the Fatah Revolutionary Committee. Both Hussein and Arafat will be in Cairo a few days before President Mubarak departs for Washington on March 12.

In Washington, President Reagan and King Fahd together assessed the Amman agreement as positive. On Feb. 14, the President declared to reporters the step was "constructive" in "finally getting us out of the stalemate since 1982."

The enemy line-up

The moderate Arab leadership and the Reagan administration already face challenges coming from those quarters which have a great stake in continuing the imperial crisis-management game over a region in perpetual instability.

No sooner had the Fahd-Reagan and Arafat-Hussein agreements been made than the State Department announced that it had "set the date" for agreed-upon discussions with the Soviet Union, to be held in Vienna. The talks, not designed to come to any agreement but to exchange views and clear up "misunderstandings," will be held on Feb. 19. Representing the U.S. side will be "Syria-card-pusher" Undersecretary of State Richard Murphy.

Meanwhile, Moscow's surrogates in the Arab world, Syria and the rejectionists, excoriated the Amman agreement as a "surrender to American imperialism." On Jan. 17, in expectation of the breakthroughs occurring around King Fahd's trip, the foreign ministers of Libya, Syria, and Iran met, deciding upon a policy of terror escalation against the moderate Arabs and Israel. On orders, the Shi'ite Muslim leaders in Lebanon on Feb. 15 declared a new *jihad* against Israel. The Shi'ite "Islamic Resistance Movement" then called upon Palestinians on the West Bank to escalate terror actions.

This terror war is designed to propel former Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon back into power in Israel, ensuring that the Arab leadership of Jordan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia has no one to negotiate with on the Israeli side. There is also an assassination threat coming against Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres from the extremist Israeli circles of the Terror Against Terror apparatus backed by Kissinger-ally Sharon (see p. 46), who functions as the combined asset of Moscow and the British faction that has cut its deal the Kremlin.

In our view, what's important is for the Arab side of the equation to give support to King Hussein's efforts to get an Arab mandate to produce an Arab interlocutor. That's what's been missing continually in the peace process—no one on the Arab side to negotiate with.

Quite clearly, King Hussein wants to be that interlocutor. Quite clearly, he doesn't believe that he can be effective and legitimate in that role unless he has a mandate from the Arab side, which includes principally the Palestinians. And that, at the moment, is what he and Arafat are talking about.

And where we see the next steps coming is in a successful conclusion of the Arafat-Hussein dialogue. And we believe Saudi Arabia, as well as other moderate states, including

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certainly Egypt, need to support that process and give Hussein what he is trying to obtain in the way of a mandate.

Q: Well, what makes you think, after so many years where we've been disappointed in the Saudi activism in terms of pushing the peace process, that now, suddenly, they're going to start pushing the Palestinians to negotiate, either directly or through Hussein?

Senior Administration Official: I can't predict, of course, what they're going to do. But our impression is that the Saudis do see this as a, to be trite, historic moment. Perhaps it is, but whether or not it turns out to be historic and really be significant, I think, depends on their own sense of commitment and what they're prepared to put into the effort to get peace talks started.

Q: Can you talk a little more about why we have the impression that the Saudis see this as a historic moment and they're going to act more decisively than they have in the past?

Senior Administration Official: Well, for the reasons that I attempted to outline earlier. They see the President with a massive new political mandate. They see the President as the first American President who is likely to complete a second term since Eisenhower. They see him in a position not being able to succeed himself as being relatively free in

terms of our own political environment to take a more aggressive posture.

That's all well and good, but the key to it is to have someone to talk to on the Arab side. And I think we will be able to assure the Saudis that we will be active and play the kind of role they would like to see us play but only in the context of a commitment from the Arab side to direct negotiations with Israel.

Q: Sir, if there is an Arab interlocutor who's emerging . . . do you feel confident that the Israeli government will be ready to negotiate?

Senior Administration Official: Well, let me differ with you on one part of your statement, and that is the position of the present Israeli government. I don't think that it has taken the same position as its predecessor toward the Reagan Initiative. Prime Minister Peres, I think, has left that question open as to what the government's attitude toward the September 1 Initiative is.

It was rejected by the previous Israeli government. I think there's less certainty about that, and certainly in the present situation. It's going to present Israel with some very significant choices. And it's going to challenge Israel to respond to an offer, a genuine offer, from an Arab negotiator. They've never had to do that before. The Arabs have never produced a negotiator until now. What the Israeli response will be, I can't predict. But it seems to me unlikely, and I hope unthinkable, that such an opportunity would be allowed to escape.

. . . The September 1 Initiative was announced in 1982. It's still on the table. It still represents the definitive American position. But it's not presently under negotiation. How do you get from this to negotiations? And, perhaps, the Saudi view is that this is really up to the United States to define and do something about. And I think our view is you can't do anything about it until you've got a party to negotiate with.

Q: The Saudis did come forth with one thing, or at least they helped to put it through, the Fez Plan, if you'll recall. Has that gone by the boards or how does the U.S. government feel about this Fez Plan or Declaration?

Senior Administration Official: It's up to the Arabs to decide, in the same way as we have to, to decide how to proceed on the basis of the September 1 Initiative, how they plan to play the Fez Communiqué or the Fez Plan. That could be, and at the moment is, the closest thing that the Arabs have to an Arab negotiating position.

There are two remarkable things about that, while the subject's come up. One is that they were able to get an Arab consensus, which even in this case included Syria explicitly, that is a major accomplishment.

The second is, if you look at what Fez is a departure from, it comes quite a long way. The preceding Arab position, going all the way back to 1967, was the Three No's: No recognition, no negotiations, and no conciliation. That's very different from where they are in Fez, which is a position that accepts the necessity to make peace, rather—So the question now is how do you do it, rather than whether you should do.