

Britain reshuffles Middle East deck

by Criton Zoakos

Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's five-day visit to the Middle East, billed as a "first" for a British prime minister, is the crowning of a protracted, quiet British intelligence and diplomatic orchestration which, having gone on for many months, aims at "revolutionizing" across the board all power relations in the region. The British effort's objective can be summarized as follows: first, displace every remnant of U.S. friendships and influence in the area either by toppling pro-U.S. political factions or by supplanting the few remaining areas of Arab-U.S. cooperation with Arab-British cooperation; second, employ the newly won British advantages toward a protracted bargaining session between Britain (perhaps under the guise of a "European initiative") and the Soviet Union over the future political and strategic status of the region for years to come.

Mrs. Thatcher's visit to Egypt and Jordan, which began Sept. 16, was preceded by the following notable events. The so-called "Israel lobby" and its friends in Congress, especially the Armed Services and Foreign Relations Committees in the Senate, sent final word to the administration that they intended to prevent any weapons sales to Arab countries, especially to Saudi Arabia and Jordan. Confronted with hardly a choice in the matter, President Reagan and Defense Secretary Weinberger nodded their agreement to Saudi Defense Minister Prince Faisal's fallback option of purchasing his needed weapons from Britain. The British strings attached to the \$4 billion deal were to allow greater latitude for action for Prince Abdullah's brand of foreign policy, namely a certain subtle "tilting" away from the United States and toward the Soviet Union and Soviet surrogate Syria.

While the British-Saudi arms deal was being nailed down, based on congressional treachery in Washington, Prince Abdullah was visiting Presidents Assad of Syria and Saddam Hussein of Iraq, proposing an Abdullah-centered reconciliation between the two Arab rivals. Prince Abdullah is half-Syrian and close to Syria's Assad.

Two days after the announcement of the \$4 billion Saudi-British arms agreement, Margaret Thatcher arrived in Cairo and the Syrian and Iraqi prime ministers were starting their reconciliation talks in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Thatcher in Cairo launched into an effort of lavishing praise for the so-called Jordanian-Palestinian, or, more accurately, the Hus-

sein-Arafat initiative for peace negotiations with Israel. Hitherto, the most prominent supporters of this initiative were President Reagan and Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger. With both of them out of the picture due to congressional opposition, Mrs. Thatcher took up the standard, more for the purpose of coopting the Arabs' pro-Western sympathies, than out of any real desire for a Middle East settlement.

Two days later, in Amman, Jordan, Mrs. Thatcher repeated her performance with the announcement of another, \$360-million arms deal with Jordan, and an ostentatious visit to a Palestinian refugee camp. Her public statements of admiration and support for King Hussein of Jordan, stood in stark contrast to her earlier attitude toward President Mubarak of Egypt. In fact, Cairene sources report that Mrs. Thatcher, while in Cairo, spent more time, and established closer rapport with newly named Prime Minister Lutfi and Vice President Abu Ghazala, both the leading domestic rivals of President Mubarak. Lutfi is preparing to launch a new, unprecedented wave of IMF-ordered domestic economic austerity, and Abu Ghazala is publicly advocating the establishment of a domestic police state—his own—over Mubarak's mild domestic approach, which would complement the IMF-ordered austerity measures.

Israeli-Syrian war plans

The context of Thatcher's intervention in the Middle East is what is happening in Israel and Syria. The quality of political transformations in Israel, termed "fascist" by many worried Israelis, is best identified with the spread of Rabbi Meir Kahane's appeal among the youth both in schools and in the Armed Forces, and with Ariel Sharon's secret political deal with Meir Kahane. In the Sharon-Kahane deal are involved Armand Hammer, Max Fisher (who orchestrated part of the congressional side of this affair), Meshulam Riklis, and Edgar Bronfman, who was in Moscow during the time of these events, from Sept. 9 to 14. The four financiers are brokering Ariel Sharon's plan in two aspects. They are carrying out a secret negotiation with Moscow intended to result in large-scale Jewish immigration to Israel and establishment of Soviet-Israeli diplomatic relations. They are also engaged in a large purchase of West Bank real estate at Sharon's suggestion, in order to buttress his arguments favoring Israeli annexation of the West Bank.

Such annexation, Israeli sources contend, would be attempted in the aftermath of a pre-arranged, "limited" war between Israel and Syria whose purpose would be to formalize Syria's status of dominion over Lebanon, and resolve the status of the Golan Heights to Israel's and Syria's mutual satisfaction. Included in the aims of such war, which observers expect in the next six months, would be the replacement of the present Israeli government by Sharon-Kahane, and the destabilization of Egypt. In its aftermath, Britain would have all the ingredients for calling for an international peace conference with the Russians under the guise of a "European peace initiative."