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BEHIND THE HEADLINES
THE HOPE AND THE REALITY
 By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, April 17 (JTA) -- Conor Cruise O'Brien--the former deputy chief of the Irish delegation to the United Nations, a former Member of the Irish Parliament and one-time editor-in-chief of The Observer in London--has written a wonderfully readable and informative history of Zionism and Israel in "The Siege: The Saga of Israel and Zionism" (New York, Simon and Schuster, 798 pages. \$24.95).

But for this reader, who like most American Jews -- and a majority of Israelis for that matter -- hope that a solution can be found for the Arab-Israel conflict, reading the book, as well as talking to O'Brien about the book, was slightly depressing. This is because he believes the hope for a settlement is nothing more than hope and not grounded in reality.

As the title of his book suggests, O'Brien believes that Israel from its very beginnings has been under siege because of the refusal of the Arab world to accept its existence. This threat to Israel's existence continues despite what he calls the "constrained acceptance" by Egypt, and O'Brien predicts it will go on through the end of this century and beyond.

O'Brien rejects the idea that Israel can obtain peace through giving up territory, the basis of the United States-backed peace process centered on United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. It is not just the question over how much land Israel gives up, O'Brien pointed out, but of Jerusalem, which Israel will never relinquish and the Arabs will never accept as remaining under Jewish control.

Freedom And Necessity

"Israel is not free to be other than the Jewish State in Palestine, and the Jewish State, once in possession of Jerusalem, is not capable of relinquishing that city," he writes in his book. "The Muslim world is also not free to be other than what it is, and is certainly incapable of acquiescing openly, fully and voluntarily in a Jewish State in Palestine, with Arab subjects, and its capital in Jerusalem."

That is why neither President Reagan's peace initiative, or the recent unsuccessful attempts to have King Hussein of Jordan and Palestine Liberation Organization chief Yasir Arafat work out an agreement for negotiations with Israel had a chance for success, O'Brien said in an interview with the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

No Israeli party is willing to give up all of the occupied territory, O'Brien stressed. He said the most Israelis would be willing to give up is part of the territory minus areas needed for defense and minus East Jerusalem.

Hussein would "be in trouble and in danger if he were negotiating with Israel at all," O'Brien said. "But if he reached an agreement in which he recognized that Jerusalem was part of Israel, the capital of Israel, and also leaving Israel in possession of that defense strip along the Jordan, he'd be extremely unlikely to survive the conclusion of such a development. I think he knows that very well."

As for Arafat, in the unlikely event he was to agree to negotiate with Israel, O'Brien believes he would not survive long from assassination by dissidents from within his own group, the Abu

Nidal group or the Syrian-backed PLO factions, among others.

Too Much Wishful Thinking

"What astonishes me is that there is so much wishful thinking on this subject which refuses to recognize those realities," O'Brien said. He conceded that his assessment may be due to his being Irish and his belief that there is no solution ahead for the centuries-old quarrel between Catholics and Protestants in his own country.

But O'Brien does not see the situation on the West Bank as necessarily a bad thing. He would like to see a policy that has existed since 1967, except for the period during the second government of Premier Menachem Begin.

"I would hope in the future there would be a return to the policy of leaving the West Bank Arabs, as far as possible, alone and treating the area as necessary to Israel's security, but to be treated for other purposes as effectively part of Jordan," O'Brien told the JTA. "That doesn't require the signature of a treaty. It doesn't require Hussein to relinquish formally any of his claims."

While O'Brien knew something about the Arab-Israel conflict from his years at the UN, it was not until he left his editor's post at The Observer that he decided to study the situation closely, visiting the Middle East and doing research in the field.

Parallels With Irish History

O'Brien makes many parallels with the history of Ireland, although he knows this can be overdrawn. "The Irish people have also a history of being a stigmatized people," he told the JTA. "With the exception of the Jews, we are the European people that have the most experience of discrimination, persecution and oppression."

The book offers different insights into the history of Israel, both before and after it became a State, and O'Brien shows sympathy and understanding for both Jews and Arabs.

There are many interesting disclosures. One is that he believes if the U.S. had not closed its doors to immigration in 1924, aliya to Palestine would have been much less, and even the Yishuv may have disappeared and there may never have been a State of Israel.

He also notes that the British, who broke every one of their World War I promises on the Mideast, kept the commitment to a Jewish national home in Palestine, even though George Curzon, who succeeded Lord Balfour in the Foreign Office, disliked the whole idea.

"Deep down, I suspect that there was at work a feeling that it would not be lucky to break a promise to the Jews to help them return to the Promised Land," he wrote in his book. This argument is not so far-fetched if one has ever heard American evangelicals use the same argument in talking about the need for the U.S. to support Israel.

There is much in this book that is of value not only to those who know little about Israel but also for Jewish readers. O'Brien understands the meaning of the Holocaust for Israelis and their determination that they will not allow Israel to be destroyed in a second Holocaust.

"Israel is obliged, by the nature of its predicament, to remain on its guard, and to be the judge of its own security," O'Brien writes. "And those who condemn Israel should reflect that Israel's predicament is not the creation of

Israel only, but is also the creation of all the rest of us -- those who attacked and destroyed Jews in Europe, and those in Europe and America who just quietly closed doors.

"Against that background, the statesmen of Europe might have the grace to be more sparing in their admonitions addressed to Israel, bearing in mind that so many of the people those statesmen represent did so much, over so many years, and in so many ways, to impress upon Jews the necessity of creating the Jewish State."

SOLON WARNS THAT REAGAN WOULD VETO RESOLUTION TO DISAPPROVE SALE OF ARMS TO SAUDI ARABIA

By David Friedman

WASHINGTON, April 17 (JTA) -- Although a majority of the Senate has signed a resolution to disapprove President Reagan's proposed sale of \$354 million in missiles to Saudi Arabia, a leading Senator warned Thursday that the President would veto such action.

Reagan and Secretary of State George Shultz are "absolutely firm" that the sale "is fundamental to our foreign policy," said Sen. Richard Lugar (R. Ind.), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Lugar spoke in support of the testimony before the committee by Richard Murphy, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, after all other committee members present questioned the proposed sale. Sens. Alfonse D'Amato (R. NY) and Frank Lautenberg (D. NJ), who are not committee members, testified against selling the missiles to Saudi Arabia.

Sen. Alan Cranston (D. Cal.), who initiated the resolution to reject the sale, said it has been signed by 63 Senators. The sale goes forward unless both the Senate and House pass resolutions of disapproval by May 8.

Real Battle Expected In The Senate

With the Democratic-controlled House expected certainly to reject the sale, the real battle will be in the Senate as it was over the 1981 sale of AWACS to the Saudis. But Lugar stressed that the President has said he would veto a resolution of disapproval, adding that opponents will need a "two-vote strategy." It would take 67 Senators to override a veto.

"All Senators better begin thinking about our interests," Lugar said. One such interest he pointed to was Murphy's assertion that when the Saudis recently purchased British Tornado fighters because they could not get U.S. F-15s it "cost the American economy from \$12 to \$20 billion."

The Senators opposed to the sale stressed Saudi Arabia's opposition to the Middle East peace process, its support for anti-American regimes such as Syria and Libya and its bankrolling of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Noting that the sale is being labelled a "test" of U.S. friendship for the Saudis, Cranston said, "The Saudis keep wanting us to prove our friendship. When do they prove their friendship?" D'Amato noted while the U.S. has proved its friendship for the Saudis "over and over" the Saudis "have neither the will nor the determination" to support the U.S.

But Murphy rejected "a direct linkage between our routine arms supply to Saudi Arabia and peaceful resolution of the Arab-Israeli dis-

pute. This is a narrow approach." He said rejecting the sale would help Middle East radicals who "argue that the U.S. cannot be friendly with Israel and friendly Arab states alike." Murphy argued that the Saudis have been helpful to the peace process although most of their efforts are not done publicly.

When asked for specific examples by Sen. Claiborne Pell (D. RI), he said that in 1982 the then Prince Fahd's Fez Declaration turned around the 1967 Arab declaration never to negotiate with Israel and sought ways to bring those negotiations about. He said the Saudis also supported the efforts by King Hussein of Jordan and the PLO to reach an agreement on negotiations with Israel which Hussein dropped earlier this year.

Sale Needed To Send A 'Signal'

But Murphy stressed that the sale is needed to send a "signal" to Iran that the U.S. supports Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf states against any threatened attack from the Iranians. "Saudi self-defense reduces the probability of direct U.S. military involvement" in the Gulf, Murphy stressed. He said the sale is not a reward to the Saudis since the Saudis will be protecting U.S. interests in the Gulf.

However, Sen. Joseph Biden (D. Del.) argued that Teheran knows that if Iran attacks Saudi Arabia it would bring in both the U.S. and Israel. When it was suggested that the Iranian air force is not a major threat with most of its planes outdated, Murphy replied that it would be a "serious mistake to underestimate the sting that remains in the Iranian air force or the Iranian military establishment."

Both Murphy and Richard Armitage, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, said that the missiles the U.S. wants to sell the Saudis would replace its existing weapons which would be depleted by 1991 when delivery is expected to be completed.

Several Senators also expressed concern about providing the Saudis with Stinger shoulder-fired missiles since they fear they could fall into the hands of terrorists. Armitage said the Saudis have taken "stringent" security measures on all missiles. He noted the Stinger system is six-feet long and weighs about 50 pounds. "The real terrorist weapon in the Middle East is the (Soviet) SA7," Armitage said. He said it can be carried like a suitcase.

TORONTO (JTA) -- Two Jewish members of the Manitoba legislature won re-election last month. Marty Dolin of the majority New Democratic Party was returned by the voters in Kildonan, a heavily Jewish-populated suburb of Winnipeg. Abe Kovnats of the opposition Progressive Conservative Party was the choice of voters in Niakwa which has very few Jews. A third Jewish member, Brian Cornin, did not run for re-election.

VIENNA (JTA) -- Isai and Grigory Goldstein of Tbilisi and their families left the Soviet Union Thursday and arrived here en route to Israel. Their departure from the USSR ended a more than 14-year struggle for the right to emigrate.

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

date March 17, 1986
to Area Directors and Executive Assistants
from George E. Gruen, Director, Israel & Middle East Affairs
subject Proposed U.S. Arms Sales to Saudi Arabia

The basic points in this background memorandum were approved by the Steering Committee of the International Relations Commission this morning and by the Board of Governors at its meeting this afternoon. It was decided not to issue a formal public statement at this time, but to authorize the officers to issue a statement expressing our disapproval of the proposed arms sales to Saudi Arabia at their discretion, dependent upon the outcome of present efforts to reach a compromise between the Administration and Congressional opponents of the arms package.

The following points may be helpful to you in case you receive inquiries as to the issues we believe need to be considered in regard to the current proposal:

The American Jewish Committee shares the concern of the United States Government to maintain the free flow of oil from the Arabian Peninsula and Persian Gulf, to support the security and stability of the pro-Western Gulf states, to oppose radical forces in the area and the expansion of Soviet influence into the region. We have serious questions, however, about the wisdom and efficacy of certain planned Administration actions intended to achieve these strategic goals.

The Reagan Administration notified Congress on March 11 that it proposes to sell Saudi Arabia \$354 million worth of additional sophisticated air-to-air, air-to-sea, and ground-to-air missiles in the belief that such action would advance these interests and that the sale was made urgent by the recent successes of the Iranian forces against Iraq and the potential threat this poses to neighboring Kuwait and eventually to Saudi Arabia. The Administration contends that failure to meet the Saudi requests at this time would harm bilateral Saudi-American relations and hurt the credibility of the United States with the rest of the Gulf Arabs.

The Administration further contends that these arms are needed for Saudi defense, can be absorbed within the Saudi military, and "do not represent a threat to Israel," since "this sale will not threaten Israel's qualitative military edge nor change the balance of power in the Middle East." The number of missiles being offered for sale, the Administration argues, are only one-third of the number originally requested by the Saudis.

The American Jewish Committee believes that this sale should not be seen in isolation, but within the context of Saudi Arabia's overall program of acquisition of large quantities of the most advanced aircraft and missiles. We believe that before deciding whether or not to approve the present Saudi arms request, the Congress should carefully examine whether these additional missiles are in fact needed in view of the large stockpile already present in Saudi Arabia. Indeed, the current Saudi ratio of missiles per plane greatly exceeds that of the U.S. and Israeli air forces. In any case, their delivery should be made contingent on the depletion of existing supplies as they are expended in training and through attrition.

Moreover, in view of the limited number of serviceable planes available to the Iranian air force, there is considerable doubt as to how much of a realistic challenge they pose to Saudi Arabia, which already has numerous planes and missiles, as well as the effective advance warning and electronic support provided by the four U.S. Air Force AWACS currently stationed in the country. The recent Iranian successes against Iraq have been achieved through massive infantry attacks and not through airpower. The missiles are also no barrier to the propaganda and subversion campaigns being mounted by Iran against its conservative neighbors.

Finally, Congress should weigh the Administration's request in the context of the Congressionally mandated requirement that the Saudis must provide "substantial assistance" to the United States in promoting peace in the region. We note with deep concern that Saudi Arabia continues to furnish financial assistance to Syria and the Palestine Liberation Organization to enable them to carry on what it calls the "armed struggle" against "the Zionist enemy." Moreover, the Saudis have in recent months proclaimed their "categorical solidarity" with Libya -- including a pledge to replace losses resulting from American economic sanctions. At the United Nations last December and at the Islamic Conference Organization meeting this past January the Saudis sponsored resolutions calling on all states to sever their ties with Israel and laying the groundwork for expelling the Jewish state from the United Nations.

Congress should also keep in mind the potential danger that until Saudi Arabia stops supporting the enemies of Israel, any weapons -- and particularly such ideal terrorist weapons as the Stinger handheld anti-aircraft missiles -- may at some point be diverted to use against Israeli or American aircraft by radical forces such as the PLO, the Syrians or the Libyans.

cc: Board of Governors
Steering Committee
International Relations Commission

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THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

date March 14, 1986
to See Below
from David A. Harris
subject Meeting with Michael Armacost, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs, Department of State, March 11, 1986

Participants

Howard Friedman
David Gordis
David Harris
Leo Nevas
Roscoe Suddarth, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs
Marc Tanenbaum
Philip Wilcox, Jr., Director, Office of Israel and Arab-Israeli Affairs, Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs

The meeting, which took place in Secretary Armacost's office, began at 10:35 a.m. and concluded at 11:30 a.m.

The principal points discussed were:

1. Proposed U.S. Arms Sale to Saudi Arabia: Undersecretary Armacost explained that the proposed sale of Harpoon, Sidewinder and Stinger missiles reflects a State Department analysis of the defense needs of Saudi Arabia, particularly in light of recent developments in the Iran-Iraq War which pose a threat to the Persian Gulf states. The basic U.S. assumptions underpinning the proposed sale are: (a) Saudi Arabia and the U.S. are long-standing allies, (b) the weapons will be used in the Gulf region and not against Israel, (c) assurances exist that the weapons will not be transferred to front-line anti-Israel third parties, (d) the U.S. remains committed to maintaining Israel's qualitative superiority vis a vis her Arab neighbors, and (e) Israel's best interests are served when the U.S. maintains ties with "what we call moderate Arab countries," thus permitting the U.S. to serve as an "honest broker."

In response to a question about the degree to which the Saudis have actually supported U.S. interests, he noted: (a) Saudi support for the Afghan resistance movement; (b) Saudi help vis a vis the recent violence in South Yemen, and (c) Saudi financial assistance to such moderate Arab

countries as Morocco and Tunisia (though he acknowledged that financial assistance was also going to less moderate countries). On the other hand, added the Undersecretary, "we have been disappointed with the Saudis on issues of interest to you. Still, if we are not responsive to their needs, they will simply go elsewhere and we lose whatever influence on them we might otherwise have had." Undersecretary Armacost continued: "The Saudis also want from us a modernization of their F-15s and other military requests, but we are holding these in abeyance. We recognize that we have a fight on our hands on the Hill in gaining passage of the current package, and we look to you for your understanding and possible support. If it fails, we will be sending the wrong message to countries like Iran about our willingness to support our friends."

Howard Friedman responded by saying: "We will take our own hard look at the proposed package and not necessarily follow the lead of other organizations, but it is important to note that, in our view, the Saudis have not always been helpful to U.S. interests."

Undersecretary Armacost noted that the position of the Israeli Government on the arms package will of course be a key factor in determining the chances for Congressional passage.

Leo Nevas asked the Undersecretary about the Saudi position on the Hussein-PLO rift. The Undersecretary responded that the Saudis have "laid low." They support financially the Hussein regime and also give \$90 million per annum to the Arafat/Fatah wing of the Palestinians, as part of the Baghdad Pact. The Saudis were also present for and supportive of the February 11th agreement reached between Hussein and Arafat.

Marc Tanenbaum noted that "it is hard to interpret the Saudis as helpful when they appear to be the financiers of terrorist movements."

Undersecretary Armacost responded that "the Saudis have not been courageous, it is true, and their principal asset has been money, but there have been ways in which they have been helpful, for example, in the creation of the Gulf Council and in combatting the Iranian threat to the Gulf."

Howard Friedman referred to the forthcoming certification requirements (May 1986) for the AWACS planes sold by the U.S. to Saudi Arabia in 1981.

Undersecretary Armacost affirmed that the U.S. Government was obligated under the terms of the agreement to insure that Saudi Arabia was in compliance with the conditions of the sale, including a contribution to the search for Arab-Israeli peace.

"Will you feel comfortable making a positive recommendation in this regard?," asked Mr. Friedman.

"Yes," replied Undersecretary Armacost. He proceeded to cite four useful roles played by the Saudis: (a) Fahd's Fez Plan represented the first time the Arab states had actually recognized Israel's right to exist. (b) The Saudis played a key role in the since-broken Lebanese cease-fire. (c) The Saudis have tried on several occasions to work out a cease-fire agreement between Iran and Iraq. (d) The Saudis oppose terrorism. Though they support the PLO, they oppose its terrorist activities.

2. Arab-Israeli Peace Process: David Gordis asked the Undersecretary about the state of the peace process and whether the U.S. now would engage in a lengthy "period of reflection."

Undersecretary Armacost replied it would be foolhardy to make "bold predictions." He noted the profound disappointment to the chance for peace reflected by the murder of Nablus Mayor Al-Masri. Still, he added that "it is important to keep the process going." He cited four areas of encouragement: (a) The progress with respect to Taba is in and of itself positive and may also augur an improvement in Egyptian-Israeli relations. (b) The Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon has also had a salutary effect. (c) Israeli efforts to address the "quality of life" issues on the West Bank are especially important to Secretary Shultz. (d) Egyptian re-integration into the Arab world is, on balance, helpful, though he added that President Mubarak may necessarily pursue an even more cautious line after recent troubling events.

But, the Secretary was asked, in light of the Hussein-PLO rift, the murder of Mayor Al-Masri, and Hussein's unwillingness to come forward, is there today a realistic chance of reviving the peace process?

"We want to remain hopeful," replied Undersecretary Armacost.

"Will resolution of the Taba dispute lead to the return of the Egyptian ambassador to Israel?" asked Mr. Friedman.

"I hesitate to be too hopeful, but the issue has been a staple of every conversation we have with the Egyptians," he replied.

"Since the November Summit meeting between President Reagan and General Secretary Gorbachev, have the Soviets pressed for a role in the Middle East peace process?" asked Dr. Tanenbaum.

Undersecretary Armacost noted that agreement was reached at the Summit to regularize bilateral discussions on the Middle East and to do so at the level of foreign minister to give the talks more "oomph."

3. Soviet Jewry: Howard Friedman expressed gratitude to the U.S. Government for effecting the release of Anatoly Shcharansky and asked Undersecretary Armacost whether this step might augur a liberalization of Soviet policy on emigration.

The Undersecretary responded that there was only an imperceptible increase in emigration from 1984 to 1985 and it was clear that the Soviets use the Soviet Jewry issue for their own ends. He did note a recent Soviet trend to begin handling some of the more visible cases, including several long-term refuseniks. He also pointed out that the Soviets have now resolved 33 outstanding bilateral cases -- divided families and dual nationals -- since the pre-Summit days, reflecting 18% of the total number of such cases.

Howard Friedman briefed the Undersecretary on the forthcoming Joint Colloquium on Minority Rights Under International Law, to be held in Bonn, West Germany from March 19 to 21. The Undersecretary appeared interested in the plans for the conference.

4. Ethiopia: David Harris acknowledged the vital role played by the U.S. in bringing Ethiopian Jews to Israel and the support of such individuals as Assistant Secretary of State Chester Crocker, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Princeton Lyman, and David Korn and Joe O'Neill at the U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa. He then asked what prospects existed for an improvement in U.S.-Ethiopian relations.

Undersecretary Armacost responded that there has been no change despite the massive humanitarian support extended by the U.S. to Ethiopia and the slight rupture in Ethiopian relations with Moscow over South Yemen. The U.S. remains watchful but does not expect any short-term Ethiopian shift in policy.

Marc Tanenbaum asked whether the fall of President Numeiry effectively shut off the Sudan as a factor in the Ethiopian Jewish exodus. The Undersecretary responded affirmatively. He then added, though, that in the view of Assistant Secretary Crocker there are "pretty good prospects" for fair Sudanese elections in April and the election of an "authoritative, pro-Western government."

Howard Friedman added gratitude for the helpful briefings to the AJC delegation to South Africa by Assistant Secretary of State Crocker.

5. Romania: David Harris asked how the State Department viewed the forthcoming question of renewal of most-favored-nation trade status for Romania, scheduled for Congressional consideration in June, in light of growing opposition to its extension. Undersecretary Armacost indicated that he did not know the answer as Edward Derwinski, Counselor of the State Department, was responsible for the issue. He promised us a written response.

Note: Roscoe (Rocky) Suddarth, who participated in the discussion, has recently assumed his current post after serving three years as the Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NEW YORK, June 12.....The American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress and the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith today urged the Administration and Congress to maintain the strategic petroleum reserve supply level at 186,000 barrels per day. The Administration has proposed that the fill rate be reduced from the current 186,000 to 145,000 barrels per day.

In a joint statement, the groups declared it essential for the U.S. "to develop a clearly defined and equitable policy concerning use of the strategic petroleum reserve in the event of a possible emergency," adding that the reserve "is only one element in a necessary coordinated international effort to cope with possible disruption of oil supply."

The statement was signed by Howard I. Friedman, President of the American Jewish Committee; Theodore R. Mann, President of the American Jewish Congress, and Kenneth J. Bialkin, National Chairman of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith.

They asserted: "The current warnings about an oil cut-off as a result of the Iran-Iraq War underscore the need for the U.S. to be adequately prepared. Therefore we urge the U.S. and its industrial allies, who are far more dependent on Persian Gulf oil than is the U.S., to intensify their deliberations to produce agreement on a timely and effective contingency plan."

In order to stem any spiraling of oil prices caused by a possible oil supply shortage, the three spokesmen suggested that "the U.S. should be prepared to make early and aggressive use of the strategic petroleum reserve," mentioning the sale of options on domestic reserves as one means to get oil into the market.

In addition, they recommended that a test draw-down auction of the SPR be tried as soon as possible.

The heads of the three national Jewish organizations urged Congress also to pass provisions offering financial assistance for the elderly poor and for low-income families in the event of higher oil prices.

A package of amendments to the Emergency Preparedness Act of 1984 that call for the maintenance of present levels of strategic reserves, the establishment of options selling and financial assistance for the poor has been introduced in the Senate by Bill Bradley (D.-N.J.) and is now being considered by the Senate's Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. This package of amendments was referred to in the joint statement.

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NEWS

FROM THE

COMMITTEE



THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE Institute of Human Relations, 165 E. 56 St., New York, N.Y. 10022, (212) 751-4000

The American Jewish Committee, founded in 1906, is the pioneer human-relations agency in the United States. It protects the civil and religious rights of Jews here and abroad, and advances the cause of improved human relations for all people.

MORTON YARMON, Director of Public Relations

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NEW YORK, June 20...Posing the question: Can Saudi Arabia defend itself?, an authority on the Middle East has concluded that the answer depends largely on whether or not the Saudi armed forces remain loyal to the House of Saud.

In a special report prepared for the International Relations Department of the American Jewish Committee, titled "Can Saudi Arabia Defend Itself?," Prof. Mordechai Abir, professor of Middle Eastern Studies at Hebrew University, expresses the view that the regime's "wide power-base is still the strongest guarantee for its stability in the near future."

Yet, he adds, "it would be wrong not to observe that events in the kingdom, in the Arab camp and in OPEC are likely to erode this power base."

In his assessment of Saudi defense capabilities, Professor Abir states that the overall effectiveness of the armed forces has been impaired by a number of factors:

- * the limited pool of Saudi manpower of unquestionable loyalty to the regime available to serve in the armed forces;
- * the Saudi decision to diversify its sources of military supplies among the U.S. and several West European nations;
- * the thousands of foreigners in the kingdom who work in some capacity with the armed forces;
- * the diverse military training philosophies employed in individual services;
- * the historical rivalry within the royal family between the army and the National Guard, which reflects the rivalry within the royal family between the western-oriented Sudairi brothers (including King Fahd and Prince Sultan, the minister of defense) and the conservatives led by Crown Prince Abdallah, who also commands the National Guard.

Note to Editors: For a copy of "Can Saudi Arabia Defend Itself?," write to Morton Yarmon, American Jewish Committee, 165 East 56th Street, New York, N.Y. 10022.

more....

Howard I. Friedman, President; Theodore Ellenoff, Chairman, Board of Governors; Alfred H. Moses, Chairman, National Executive Council; Robert S. Jacobs, Chairman, Board of Trustees; William S. Trosten, Acting Director

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CSAE 1707

In his introduction to Professor Abir's report, Dr. George E. Gruen, Director of the Middle East Division of AJC's International Relations Department, states:

"During the past decade Saudi Arabia has pursued an ambitious program to expand and modernize its armed forces. The United States, concerned about the security of the oil installations as well as the visibility of the Al Saud regime, has been the primary supplier of arms and training to the Saudi armed forces."

Dr. Gruen adds: "While the internal situation in Saudi Arabia is in many ways different from that of Iran under the Shah, there is an important lesson from the Iranian experience. Massive supplies of the most sophisticated military equipment cannot assure the survival of a regime, once it has lost popular support."

Dr. Gruen also points out that Saudi leaders are apprehensive about the loyalty to the regime of their armed forces.

"Among the domestic factors which could have negative impact on the cohesiveness of Saudi society," he says, "are the generational gap between the older princes and the younger western educated princes, the attraction of some Saudis to pan-Arab and Islamic fundamentalist ideologies, the recruitment into the armed forces of Saudis from tribes traditionally unfriendly to the Al Saud, the subversive influence of the Shi'ite Islamic regime in Iran upon the country's Shi'i minority, and the evolving position of women in Saudi society, who constitute half of the kingdom's population but are still largely excluded from the work force."

Professor Abir notes that while the oil wealth of Saudi Arabia and its neighboring Arab Sheikdoms is immense, yet "all lack most of the components necessary for the development of diversified economies. Their population is so small that to modernize or industrialize, they are forced to import a vast foreign work force, which in many cases outnumbers the indigenous one."

In the weak, disunited Arab camp of the early 1980's, Professor Abir points out, Saudi Arabia remained secure in the leadership as long as it did not deviate too far from the Arab consensus. But, he says, events in Lebanon and the growth of Iranian power and influence in the Gulf region may undermine the relative stability it has been enjoying.

"While the struggle for power within the ruling class could accelerate the process," Dr. Abir asserts, "the house of Saud has tended in the past to close its ranks whenever its monopoly of power in Saudi Arabia was at stake. The future stability of the kingdom, if not its security from external threats, will depend largely on the loyalty and strength of the Saudi armed forces."

Three successful military coups in Libya, Sudan and Somalia and two abortive coups by officers of the Saudi airforce in 1969 shook the Saudi royal family, Professor Abir recalls, "and King Faysal became more determined to proceed with the modernization and expansion of his armed forces."

The kingdom's immense territory, long coastlines, sparse and traditional population, and oil wealth were key factors in Saudi defense planning, Professor Abir notes, adding:

"American military experts assumed that while Saudi Arabia would remain chronically short of manpower, it would not lack funds. They persuaded the Saudis to focus on the development of a powerful airforce and air defense system rather than waste their meager human resources on a large army and navy. The Saudi Airforce, therefore, is both capital and technology-intensive and is most suitable to defend the country's oil fields and vast territories."

In his comments, Dr. Gruen expresses the opinion that "whether the Saudis can effectively defend themselves probably will not be definitely answered unless their armed forces engage in a major battle. Nevertheless, Dr. Abir closely shows that simply acceding to every Saudi request for the latest weapons will not necessarily solve Saudi Arabia's security problems. Indeed, additional arms may have a destabilizing effect within the country."

Saudi Arabia's long-term viability, Dr. Gruen feels, will depend to a large extent on the capacity of its leadership to adopt policies that broaden their popular base of support among the younger generation "and their ability to steer a course between the opposing currents of rapid modernization and the calls for return to Islamic conservatism."

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