Security for Israel a majoBu concern in peace propositive.

CAIRO, Egypt (AP) — Syrian support for a Saudi peace overture to Israel brings the Arab world closer than it has ever been to recognizing Israel's right to exist, but the process is fraught with pitfalls.

The chance for a new peace initiative comes just three weeks from now when the Arab League convenes in Beirut for its annual summit - and it could vanish just as quickly if Israel carries out its threat to prevent Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat from attending.

Syrian President Bashar Assad, whose father and predecessor once led the vanguard of hard-line opposition to Israel. has reservations but "expressed satisfaction" with the proposal aired last month by Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Crown Abdullah, Syria's state-run media said Wednesday.

It was the clearest signal yet, coming amid Assad's flurry of visits with other Arab leaders, that Syria would go along with the Saudi proposal if it is presented at the March 27-28 summit.

The Saudi proposal has also found support from the United States and from some Israeli officials. Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and Defense Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, both of the center-left Labor Party, have said it has positive elements that deserve exploration.

But despite offering the Israelis wider acceptance by the Arabs — and an alternative to dealing solely with Arafat on Palestinian issues, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and other hard-liners appear to think it offers insufficient guarantees for Israel's security.

Abdullah's plan, as sketched out so far, is a fairly simple idea that goes straight to the core issue — land for peace — but it leaves a lot of touchy details to

The proposal that Abdullah

Saudi land-for-peace plan

Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Abdullah's proposal for peace Middle East calls for Israel to withdraw from Arab lands cap. 1 in the 1967 war in exchange for "full normalization of relatins with its neighboring Arab states.



outlined in a February interview with The New York Times calls for Israel's withdrawal from the territories captured in the 1967 Mideast war — which would include Syria's Golan Heights in exchange for neighborly relations with the Arab world.

Saudi officials have said the details, including the borders of Israel and a Palestinian state and the fate of Palestinian refugees, would be left to Israeli, Palestinian, Syrian and

Lebanese negotiators.
But Abdullah's proposal was, as Syrian political analyst Imad Shoueibi told The Associated Press on Wednesday, "the first time that the Arabs say as a group, 'We are ready for peace."

Syria's state-run newspapers offered indirect support

Wednesday for the Saud tive. Tishrin highl "convergence" of Abi ideas with Syria's natio ciples, but Al-Thawra, government paper, ex reservations, especial Syria's long-standing for the Palestinian right of return to land Israel's pre-1967 bordes

Hesham Youssef, spi son for Arab League General Amr Mousse Wednesday in Cairo the support for the Saudin "important" since Syn main part of the confl

Youssef would no but he said "the gener tude is more toward su ing" the Saudi plan.

Arafat's attendanceis Palestinians Abdullah has assured will not even submit posal for discussion does not show up in Be

Israeli troops ha Arafat pinned down forth three months at his office West Bank town of Ran Sharon, Arafat's decade nemesis, recently stepped pressure with a declara war on the Palestinians

The United States w in with a rebuke of Wednesday, with Secreta State Colin Powell Sharon should reconside declaration of war.

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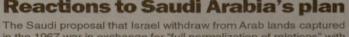
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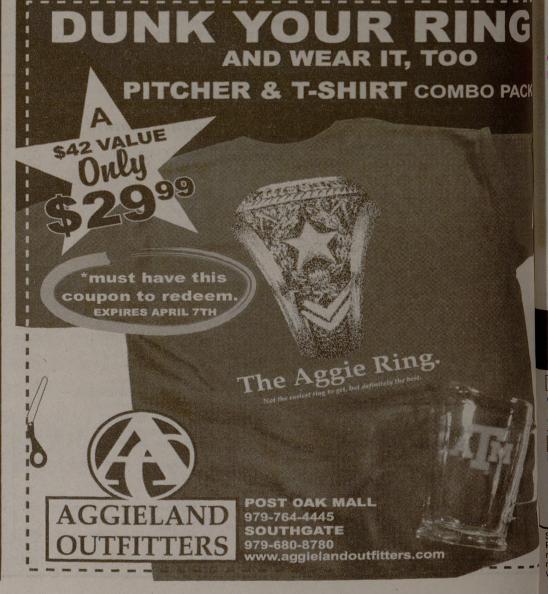


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in the 1967 war in exchange for "full normalization of relations" with its Arab neighbors has been endorsed by key countries in the region.





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