

# Security for Israel a major concern in peace proposals

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 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 be addressed later.

The proposal that Abdullah

## Saudi land-for-peace plan

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



SOURCES: Associated Press; Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs; ESRI

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 Saudi initiative. Tishrin highlighted "convergence" of Abdullah's ideas with Syria's national principles, but Al-Thawra, a government paper, expressed reservations, especially Syria's long-standing demand for the Palestinian right of return to land in Israel's pre-1967 borders.

Hesham Youssef, spokesman for Arab League Secretary General Amr Moussa, said Wednesday in Cairo that support for the Saudi plan was "important" since Syria is a main part of the conflict.

Youssef would not elaborate on the summit's details but he said "the general attitude is more toward supporting" the Saudi plan.

Arafat's attendance is crucial. The Palestinians' Abdullah has assured they will not even submit a proposal for discussion if Arafat does not show up in Beirut.

Israeli troops have been Arafat pinned down for the three months at his offices in West Bank town of Ramat Shimon, Arafat's decade-long nemesis, recently stepped up pressure with a declaration of war on the Palestinians after months of violence.

The United States reacted with a rebuke of Arafat Wednesday, with Secretary of State Colin Powell saying Sharon should reconsider a declaration of war.

## Reactions to Saudi Arabia's plan

The Saudi proposal that Israel withdraw from Arab lands captured in the 1967 war in exchange for "full normalization of relations" with its Arab neighbors has been endorsed by key countries in the region.



NOTE: Iran, Syria and Lebanon want the right of return for Palestinian refugees to be included.

SOURCES: Associated Press; ESRI

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