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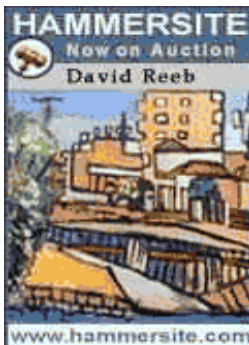
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Why Peace Scares Riyadh

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Abstract (Document Summary)

Traditionally, Saudi Arabia always chose to follow rather than set the Arab consensus. The Gulf War could have brought change, for Riyadh is now beholden to Washington. But the regime fears taking any moves that the opposition could seize on as anti-Islamic, and has only budged when Washington has applied heavy pressure. That's why Saudi Arabia pushed Syria to attend the Madrid peace conference in October 1991, and why it participated in the donors' conference held in Washington soon after the signing of the Israel-PLO Declaration of Principles. But in the multilateral talks following Madrid, the Saudis have obstructed progress, most recently at the May arms control and regional security talks in Doha, Qatar.

When Israel complained to Washington, it pressured the Saudis to cancel the secondary boycott of Israel. The result was the October 1 announcement that Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf Cooperation Council countries supported a "review" of the secondary and tertiary boycott of Israel. This noncommittal language led to banner headlines in the Israeli press. In fact, the GCC countries asserted that they have left it to the confrontation states (Syria, Lebanon and the PLO theoretically, but most probably Jordan) to propose the "review" in the Arab League. In other words, Saudi Arabia will not go out on a limb on this crucial issue.

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