

Iran crisis: 'Reichstag fire' and blackmail of Europe

by Robert Dreyfuss

The Carter administration has begun a headlong drive toward a "Cuban missile crisis"-style thermonuclear confrontation with the Soviet Union over Iran and the Persian Gulf, timed to erupt between late April and May 11, for the purposes of blackmailing Western Europe and Japan into submitting to Anglo-American political and economic dictates.

In official statements, American government figures have made it clear that the issue between the United States and Europe has little, if anything, to do with Iran, but is instead a test of the cohesion of the NATO alliance. Despite repeated warnings from the Soviet Union that Moscow would not tolerate American military intervention into the Persian Gulf, Washington told the Europeans—both privately and in blunt, undiplomatic televised interviews—that Europe's refusal to mimic U.S. political and economic sanctions against Iran would result in a decision by Washington in favor of "unilateral action," i.e., the use of military force against Iran.

That action, the Europeans were told, would result in a forced shutdown of the oil production of the Persian Gulf, with disastrous effects on West Europe's industrial economy.

According to sources in Paris and Bonn, Western Europe pointed out that any unilateral military action in the Gulf would not only result in a strategic disaster, but probably would lead to Soviet intervention in Iran. Zbigniew Brzezinski, the president's national security adviser, replied that "it is now up to Europe to prevent the outbreak of World War III," reported the West German Frankfurter Rundschau.

Soviet warnings

The Soviet Union's *Pravda* warned April 11 that President Carter's threats to invade the Persian Gulf are

a "risky bluff," and that Washington was "brandishing a torch near a powder keg."

The Soviet statement, which was hardly noticed in the U.S. press, is tantamount to placement of a Soviet military umbrella over the Persian Gulf and Iran. "Washington is aiming not only at aggravating its conflict with Teheran," said *Pravda*. "Judging from everything, it is venturing a risky bluff: blackmailing Iran, as well as America's allies who depend on oil deliveries from the Persian Gulf, with the threat of direct military intervention."

That American strategy, warned *Pravda*, "puts Western Europe and Japan in the position of being forced participants in a game which is designed to strengthen the shaken position of American imperialism in the Near and Middle East." Among our allies, said *Pravda*, "the prospect of being deprived of Iranian oil doesn't provoke any enthusiasm, especially not in Tokyo, Bonn, or Paris."

A commentary from the Soviet news agency Tass, issued the same day, declared that in Moscow's opinion the United States is using the crisis in Iran merely as a pretext for carrying out an invasion of the Persian Gulf. Washington, said Tass, is seeking to give the impression that it has exhausted all peaceful means and that only recourse to force remains. "But they must be ready to see this policy turn against themselves," concluded Tass.

Threat of confrontation

Undeterred by the Soviet warnings, the Carter regime refused to change course and, if anything, escalated its threat of using force in the region.

Top administration officials even acknowledged that the Soviet Union had built up enormous, mobile force immediately north of the Iranian border. Speaking in a

televised interview, Brzezinski asserted that "there are reports, credible reports, of a Soviet buildup in the Transcaucasian Military District" north of Iran that, he said, were "in some patterns reminiscent of the Soviet buildup north of Afghanistan" last December, before the Soviet intervention there.

Yet, according to Washington analysts, the United States has set a May 11 deadline for European compliance with U.S. demands for sanctions and breaking diplomatic relations with Iran. Otherwise, reports the Boston Globe, Carter is ready to order a naval blockade of Iran, halting vessels coming from or going to Iranian ports in the Arabian Sea. Such action would be ordered despite the urgent danger that the Soviet Union would attempt to break the cordon sanitaire by sailing a cargo ship toward Iran.

At the same time, American officials began an unending stream of invective and rough language concerning Europe's alleged refusal to live up to its commitments as part of the Atlantic Alliance. President Carter, speaking to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, issued a virtual ultimatum to Europe and Japan: "I expect them to comply with the political and economic sanctions against Iran," said Carter, adding that otherwise the U.S. response "may well involve military means."

The following day, Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher announced on the ABC-TV "Issues and Answers" that regarding Europe, "Washington is looking for action, not words." Also on April 13, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Frank Church attacked Europe for what he called its "policy of appeasement."

In Europe, Undersecretary of Defense Robert W. Komer, the administrator of the Phoenix Project during the Vietnam War, met with the NATO Military Committee in Brussels to present a brutal set of demands. He requested the immediate acceleration of nuclear and conventional weapons "modernization," the buildup of military reserves, war materiel stockpiling, and NATO rights to requisition the capacity of West European commercial airlines for military airlifts in the Middle East.

The Soviet Union responded with some pressure of its own on Europe. On April 15, President Brezhnev issued an urgent personal invitation to Chancellor Helmut Schmidt of West Germany to visit Moscow, an offer that was merely taken under consideration "depending on the climate of East-West relations." The same day, the Soviet Ambassador to Paris Stepan V. Chervonenko, speaking to the Diplomatic Academy in Paris, broke tradition and delivered a harsh speech in Russian, charging that the "brutal hardening" of American policy had collapsed the basis for arms limitation talks in Europe.

And on April 22, Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko

arrives in Paris. According to Helmut Sonnenfeldt, Trilateral Commission member and Kissinger protege, the Soviet Union has placed a "precondition" over talks with Western Europe to stabilize the Gulf situation: "The Europeans have to lobby in Washington to get the Americans not to escalate militarily in the region."

But the consecutive visits of Egypt's Anwar Sadat and then Israel's Menachem Begin to Washington underscored the American commitment to make matters worse. Both Israel and Egypt are viewed as the cornerstones of a new, NATO-style Middle East pact that would have as its first task the implanting of a permanent U.S. military presence in the area. Sadat, just before he left, told an interviewer that he would be happy to offer the U.S. facilities for direct intervention into the Gulf. The small Gulf states like Kuwait and Bahrain, along with Saudi Arabia, "are shaking," said Sadat. As he spoke, the commander of the U.S. Air Force General Lew Allen was reviewing facilities in Egypt on a tour of the Middle East.

West Germany pressured to join in war policy

by Rachel Douglas

The Carter administration and the supranational institutions that control it are sparing no effort to press West Germany into line with their policies. The immediate issue is whether Chancellor Helmut Schmidt's government will join Carter in economic sanctions against Iran; but what is at stake is the survival of the Franco-German alliance for economic recovery and preserving peace.

Despite the fact that West Germany's leaders know, and have said, that the world is now on the very brink of World War III, thanks to the Carter administration's conduct of foreign policy, they appear to be yielding to the extreme pressure. Despite the fact that the Germans were shocked and outraged at Carter's latest ultimatum to them on boycotting Iran, delivered this past weekend through the undiplomatic channel of a TV interview, leaders of Schmidt's own party are reportedly calling German participation in the sanctions "inevitable."

Two days ago Handelsblatt newspaper, the mouthpiece of German industry, leveled an unprecedentedly blunt editorial attack on Washington's failure of leadership and declared that the Bonn government will not growl on command like a dog at an obedience school.