

## NATO to militarize the Persian Gulf?

by Robert Dreyfuss

On the pretext of responding to the war between Iran and Iraq, Great Britain has stepped forward to take the lead in calling for superpower intervention in the Persian Gulf. At the core of Great Britain's intervention designs are its plans to extend the perimeter of the NATO military alliance deep into the Middle East.

The British government is not being circumspect on this matter. British Foreign Secretary Lord Carrington stated last week that "we and our allies would be foolish not to prepare ourselves for the possibility that the conflict might spread," adding that he saw "no early solution" to the Iran-Iraq war.

Echoing Carrington, British Defense Secretary Francis Pym declared: "The strategic frontiers of Europe lie far beyond the boundaries of NATO. A capacity to act outside NATO is a necessary part of our defense. We cannot leave it all to the Americans." Pym went on to announce that London was sending a pair of warships to the Gulf of Oman, just outside the Persian Gulf, to add to allied military concentrations there.

The British policy of Persian Gulf militarization reflects the leading edge of an Anglo-American strategy to polarize the entire Middle East and South Asia region, in the same fashion that Europe was divided after World War II, by marking off NATO and Soviet superpower spheres of influence. The dividing of the region between the two superpowers is aimed at destroying the influence of France and West Germany in the Middle East and

specifically at undermining their work to bring the Arab world into Phase II of the European Monetary System. The dividing of the region also sets the stage for a long cold war that, in times of crisis, could trigger an oil cutoff and erupt into a full-scale U.S.-Soviet down.

"This region is going to be the test area of the 1980s," Zbigniew Brzezinski of the National Security Council told the *Wall Street Journal* last week, "just as Europe was between 1945 and 1955." It will be a "prolonged test" until permanent "arrangements for security" can be established for the area, Brzezinski said.

The United States and the British are applying heavy pressure on the NATO allies to get involved in the project to militarize the Middle East, despite resistance from those European continental powers such as France and West Germany who oppose the polarization of the area into rival blocs controlled by the superpowers.

It is France in particular that has emerged as the main stumbling block to British militarization and polarization policy for the region. Thus, the primary target of the British is to destroy France's role in the area. Especially in regard to Iraq and Saudi Arabia, France has become a viable third force that might be able to prevent escalation of conflicts to the superpower level.

In recent years, France has become the leading Western supporter of the industrial and economic development of the Middle East, and has become a major arms supplier to Arab countries seeking to avoid becoming

client states of either the United States or the U.S.S.R. Last week, France signed an enormous \$3.4 billion deal to supply the Saudi navy with frigates, fleet oil tankers, anti-aircraft missiles and naval helicopters, and to provide training for 1,000 Saudi naval officers. At the same time, French president Giscard paid an unscheduled visit to the United Arab Emirates in the Gulf, amid reports that France might be asked to play the role of mediator in the Iran-Iraq war.

What the British fear is that the French and their West German allies may establish a firm alliance with the Arab oil-producing countries that will undercut the role of London financial circles and the Anglo-American-controlled International Monetary Fund (IMF).

### **New Yalta?**

The British and their allies in the United States are making an offer to the Soviet Union to divide the region along the following lines: Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan would be considered part of the Soviet sphere of influence, to varying degrees, while, under NATO auspices, the Camp David powers of Israel and Egypt will be delegated to control Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the Persian Gulf sheikhdoms and Oman.

At present Washington is using the ongoing Iraq-Iran fighting in an open attempt to increase its own influence in Saudi Arabia. A *New York Times* article on Oct. 11 quoted a Pentagon official as stating that the dispatch of the highly sophisticated AWACS planes and other equipment to Saudi Arabia has "demonstrated our commitment to the Saudis" and "opens the door to much more extensive military cooperation with the Saudis." Now, he said, the United States can really start thinking about "building a security framework for Southwest Asia."

According to Washington intelligence sources, the Soviet Union is putting out signals that it may be prepared to accept U.S.-NATO domination of Saudi Arabia in exchange for license to increase its own influence in Iran.

Since the start of the Iran-Iraq fighting, the U.S.S.R. has increasingly been drawn into support for the Iranian dictatorship of Ayatollah Khomeini and the Iranian clergy. Although reports on arms supply to Iran are hard to verify, there are reports that Libya, Syria, and North Korea are supplying arms to the Iranian regime despite the official Soviet policy of neutrality and despite the formal Soviet-Iraqi friendship treaty signed in 1972.

An ominous sign was the cancellation of a long-planned visit to Moscow by King Hussein of Jordan, scheduled for Oct. 14. King Hussein has strongly allied Jordan to Iraq in the fighting with Iran, and the postponement of the visit indicates at a minimum that the Soviets thought they could not afford to appear to

be aligned with Iraq and Jordan by publicly meeting with the Jordanian king.

A top official of Israeli intelligence told the *Christian Science Monitor* Oct. 15 that a "Pax Sovietica" might emerge out of the Iran-Iraq fighting, in which Moscow would gain much influence in both countries, along with its newly signed treaty of friendship with Syria. The Soviets are being invited to get more deeply involved in Iran by offers of cooperation from British intelligence-controlled circles of the Iranian clergy. *Le Figaro*, the French daily, reports that the Soviets now believe that the biggest prize in the area is Iran, not Iraq, and that Moscow no longer wants to relinquish its influence inside Iran.

According to Iranian sources, the Tudeh Communist Party of Iran is the most powerful force in many executive offices in Iran, and has support from the clergy as well. Although the Tudeh is nominally a communist party and pro-U.S.S.R., most of its leadership is drawn from the ranks of British agents. In his book *Answer to History*, the late shah of Iran remarks that the Tudeh Party was created as a joint project of British and Soviet intelligence.

At the same time, some reports indicate that the U.S.S.R. might be considering support for a coup d'état against the Iraqi government of President Saddam Hussein in order to consolidate Soviet influence in the belt running through Syria, Iraq, and Iran, should the war continue for much longer. "If the U.S.S.R. accepts the deal that Washington is offering to divide the Middle East, and some of the players like Iraq don't like it, then some of the players might have to be changed," said one State Department source.

Will the Soviets go with such an arrangement? Sources in the State Department hope so. If not, Brzezinski is making it clear that the Soviets will be bludgeoned into acquiescence. Brzezinski believes that a showdown with the Soviet Union in the Middle East may force Moscow to back down and allow the consolidation of what the *New York Times* calls "an imperial response to a colonial legacy." Having established a working alliance with Red China and having seriously destabilized Eastern Europe, Brzezinski believes that the Soviets are "encircled" and cannot risk an aggressive, outward-oriented policy.

The Soviets, however, are letting it be known that they will *not* be bludgeoned. In response to the U.S. military buildup in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Cyprus, and Turkey, Soviet president Leonid Brezhnev told President Carter last week that Moscow will not tolerate an American intervention into the Gulf. At a state dinner for Syrian president Hafez Assad earlier this month, Brezhnev accused "the imperialists" of trying to "reestablish their dominance in Iran." He added: "We resolutely tell others: hands off these unfolding events."