



Middle East policy at eye of storm

Leonid Brezhnev's trip to India in early December became the takeoff point for a possible fundamental shift in Soviet Middle East policy when the Soviet president, speaking to the Indian parliament, proposed an international agreement to secure sea transit through the Persian Gulf. It was an immediate, practical topic for negotiation with the new American administration. It also meant that Moscow was looking for a broader Middle East policy than its web of alliances with radical states like Libya and Syria.

Then came the souring of Soviet relations with the Khomeini regime in Iran. Before thousands of television viewers, *Izvestia's* senior columnist Alexander Bovin, known for his personal connections to Brezhnev, said that Iran had no revolution today but only a "cultural revolution," like China's, that was destroying education. In another appearance, Bovin went on to contradict the main Moscow line on the Iran-Iraq war by suggesting that Iran drove Iraq to launch it. TASS issued a biting protest against Afghan exile demonstrations permitted in front of the Soviet embassy in Teheran.

In the southern Soviet republic of Azerbaijan, bordering Iran, security officials began to criticize Islamic fundamentalist subversion of the Soviet Union being launched from Afghanistan and Iran. These warnings, voiced by the Azerbaijani KGB chief Gen. Ziya Yusif-

Zade and Azerbaijan's party boss G. A. Aliyev, a former KGB official, marked a spillover of the Moscow faction fight into the KGB itself, since it was the KGB Middle East networks linked to Gen. Kim Philby that shaped Soviet backing for the Islamic fundamentalist destabilization of Iran.

The excerpted television debate between Bovin and Yevgenii Primakov draws the main line of dispute. "Nobody will succeed in establishing a social status quo and stabilizing the situation" in Asia, proclaims Primakov. Says Bovin, "one must not forget the possibility of a change in the situation."

Yevgenii Primakov, a deputy director of IMEMO for many years, now heads the Institute of Oriental Studies, one of the few Soviet think tanks not spawned from IMEMO. When Bobodzhan Gafurov, a respected Soviet orientologist who had headed the institute since 1963, died two years ago, Primakov and IMEMO took it over.

Alexander Bovin was one of the last Soviet writers to say in 1979 that the Iranian mullahs were taking Iran back to the Middle Ages, before the party line was laid down that Islam was "the determining factor of the process of change," as one IMEMO enthusiast put it. In October 1980, Bovin inched toward renewing his criticism when he publicly regretted Iranian President Bani-Sadr's remark that the Iraq-Iran war would not end until Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was overthrown.

Last summer, Bovin made waves with an article on principles of Soviet foreign policy which reflected fac-

Brezhnev with Prime Minister Gandhi on Dec. 10, 1980.

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tional friction over the viability of Brezhnev's war-avoidance initiatives. Bovin used the history of Lenin's diplomacy in the 1920s to denounce what he called the "ultimate" approach that rules out accommodation with the West.

A 'left' option?

The question of where the Bovin, and Brezhnev, line will lead if it prevails is not yet answered. The door has been opened for the U.S.S.R. to come to terms with the United States, with France and with its erstwhile ally Iraq on a stabilization plan for the Persian Gulf. Whether the Reagan administration helps hold the door open, by taking up the Persian Gulf proposals, and whether Moscow walks through it are other questions.

The next tack to be expected from the "Philby" faction of the KGB is reorientation to a "left" alternative in Iran, staking Soviet power on the communists of the Tudeh Party as Iran sinks into civil war after Khomeini. Since the Tudeh is as much controlled by British intelligence as are the mullahs, this would hardly end the destabilization, yet it is not explicitly excluded

by Bovin in his commentary.

Soviet relations with France will be a sensitive indicator of which way the Soviet decision goes. Brezhnev's war avoidance has leaned heavily on Giscard d'Estaing's leadership of continental West European rejection of the Carter administration. But Moscow's commitment to Libya's Colonel Qaddafi and his rampages in northern Africa put the Soviets and the French at odds in a strategic region adjacent to the Middle East.

When Boris Ponomarev of the Soviet Central Committee International Department was in Paris in December, he reportedly threatened to seek French communist support for Giscard's socialist opponent in the French presidential election this year unless France made its foreign policy less "Atlanticist," or pro-American. Yet on Dec. 28 a member of Ponomarev's delegation, *Izvestia's* editor P. Alekseev (who is also a Central Committee member), published a warm endorsement of French foreign policy. "The attempts to force upon France an alien will from across the Atlantic did not succeed," concluded Alekseev.

The public clash

The dialogue below is from the unusually open argument on Soviet television between Moscow analysts Alexander Bovin of Izvestia and Yevgenii Primakov, director of the Institute of Oriental Studies. The broadcast, on the Dec. 27 edition of the panel talk show "Studio Nine," was monitored and translated by the Foreign Broadcast Information Service.

Zorin [moderator]: How do you evaluate the present stage of the Iranian revolution?

Bovin: To tell you the truth, Valentin Sergeevich, I do not have the heart to speak about the development of the revolutionary process in Iran. Iran is now living through a period of what I would call a slump and a retreat from revolution.

Recently Imam Khomeini addressed a group of students. The universities are closed there now and a cultural revolution is in progress. That is, they expel all teachers who, as they say, are not quite in the spirit of Islam. . . . This is what Khomeini said: It is the universities which submitted Iran to the authorities of

the superpowers. Do you want to reopen the universities now so that they can again become a bastion of communists who would not let the faithful work and learn? This is Ayatollah Khomeini's reasoning. I consider it difficult to call it a development of the revolutionary process. Maybe the ban on chess can be seen in this light, but I think not.

Primakov: There is an objective side to this. One cannot talk only of the subjective features connected to any words said by the leader.

Bovin: This was not a subjective feature.

Primakov: Yes, when the universities were closed, it happened in a definite situation when the Western agencies operated in these universities. . . . I would just like to introduce a certain correction, because an objective situation exists. This objective situation has not lost its very strong anti-imperialist charge. I think this must be mentioned.

Bovin: Excuse me, Yevgenii Maksimovich, you are a specialist and you should know. But one must not nurture any soothing illusions either. Of course, it is naturally an anti-American course when you call it anti-imperialist. You know very well that the thunder and lightning raging against the United States are immediately accompanied by thunder and lightning raging against the Soviet Union.