
The Persian Gulf

Soviet shift on Middle East policy creates possibilities for Reagan

by Rachel Douglas

On the eve of Ronald Reagan's inauguration as President of the United States, the Soviet Union began to execute a shift in its Middle East policy which could become the basis for reversing the disintegration of Soviet-American relations.

The centerpiece of Moscow's emerging policy is Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev's proposal for Persian Gulf security guarantees to be joined by the superpowers, Western Europe, Japan, and China. The clearest accompanying signal from Moscow to Reagan that the Brezhnev proposal is for real, is that the Soviets began to reject Islamic fundamentalism, previously endorsed by Soviet commentators as "progressive," thereby rejecting the destabilization operations associated with this form of radicalism.

The purveyor of Soviet attacks on the fundamentalists was a journalist speaking for Brezhnev's policy line, Alexander Bovin of the Moscow newspaper *Izvestia*, who linked Ayatollah Khomeini's Iran policies to the Muslim Brotherhood organization functioning throughout the Middle East—the British intelligence-founded Brotherhood exposed by *EIR* for launching the Iranian revolution.

In a joint interview that Bovin and Central Committee official V. Kobyshev gave to the weekly *Literaturnaya Gazeta* Jan. 1, Bovin also became the first Russian to justify Iraq's war on Iran. Here is what he said:

What is called "the Islamic renaissance" largely means an attempt to return to times when Islamic doctrine determined the character of political life. A renaissance of theocracy, if you will.

There are frequent reports on the terrorist, subversive activities of the Muslim Brotherhood. It is this organization . . . that headed the counteroffensive of Islamic orthodoxy some decades ago. . . . It is no accident that Nasser went after them dead or alive. The present Syrian regime is also fighting them. Turkish authorities, too, find they must combat Muslim extremists who oppose the

secular government.

The overthrow of the Shah of Iran and coming to power of the elite of the Shiite clergy, extremely close in their views to the Muslim Brotherhood, breathed new strength into the Islamic fundamentalist movement.

Imam Khomeini repeatedly and openly called on Iraqis, Iraqi Shiites—I'll quote—"to rise up against the infidel and treacherous regime of the Iraqi Baath [party]. . . ." And finally Baghdad responded with war. . . .

The second important feature of the Bovin-Kobyshev interview is that this groundbreaking attack on the Iranian mullahs was framed by an overture to Reagan to shed the legacy of Jimmy Carter, starting not so much with the sticky question of strategic arms talks, but with the Mideast. Kobyshev lambasted Carter:

Let me start with saying that the outgoing administration . . . is intent on bequeathing to the new government the burden of Soviet-American relations that are as spoiled as possible. . . . I don't think that Reagan and his team are too happy with this. . . . Reagan's own statements and those of his advisers show . . . that they see the normalization of Soviet-American relations as a top priority. . . . The significance of Soviet-American relations is substantially broader than the interests of just our two countries.

I would say, for instance, that were these relations in a different condition, it is possible that there would have already been success in settling the Mideast conflict or, say, dousing the fire of the senseless war between Iraq and Iran.

A Jan. 8 article by V. Matveev, Bovin's colleague on the editorial board of the daily *Izvestia*, traced Brezhnev's Persian Gulf initiative to the Soviet Union's diplomacy of the 1920s, which anchored everything else to the foundation of expanding international trade.

If Brezhnev's bid for Gulf demilitarization and maritime transit guarantees is not taken up by the Reagan administration, it could fizzle out because it has serious and powerful opposition inside the Soviet Union.

According to a well-informed Arab source, the entire Arab "left"—including Moscow-linked Arab communist parties—is frantically opposing Brezhnev's proposal. In this they are joined by Moscow's own destabilization faction, centered around the KGB and the Soviet Communist Party International Department, which has provided backing for Khomeini's Iran and the Arab leftists. This grouping does not want to see Brezhnev realign with Saddam Hussein of Iraq, whose Pan-Arab National Charter shares key points with Brezhnev's Gulf plan, or with France's efforts for Middle East peace and industrially based economic development.

The Soviet news agency TASS advertised that this confrontation fraction is waiting in the wings, when on Jan. 11 it released a dispatch critical of Reagan's attitude to Khomeini. Said TASS:

A number of U.S. officials make insulting statements in respect to Iranian leaders with an obvious intention to disunite them. . . . Reagan said in an interview with *U.S. News and World Report* that there are grounds to believe Ayatollah Khomeini is no longer regarded as the leader of Iran but is heading only one of the factions existing in the country.

In *Izvestia* of Jan. 13, Anatolii Gromyko, son of the Soviet foreign minister and head of Moscow's Institute on Africa, presented an interpretation of Brezhnev's plan from a standpoint that undercut the idea of stabilization.

He compared the initiative not to the 1920s diplomacy, but to the great-power negotiations of the cold war period—negotiations which in reality were exercises in crisis management serving only to perpetuate the cold war division of the world.

Anatolii Gromyko in effect told Persian Gulf countries not to pay attention to the Brezhnev package because security could not really be protected. The proposals, he wrote, do not mean that "pro-Western" regimes will be safe: "The people cannot give guarantees to Washington that a fate [like the Shah of Iran's] will not hit other regimes."

Whichever Soviet policy for the Gulf prevails, the one voiced by Bovin and Matveev or the Africa Institute's scenario for superpower-managed disintegration, depends largely on how and with what perspective the United States acts on Brezhnev's Persian Gulf security proposal.

Afghanistan

Openings for talks follow pressure on Zia

by Daniel Sneider

For the first time since the Soviet intervention more than a year ago, the possibility of a political settlement of the Afghanistan crisis is being seriously discussed. Hopes for a negotiated political solution have been spurred by diplomatic moves from Pakistan and Afghanistan, backed by the Soviet Union, toward holding negotiations under United Nations auspices.

The crucial break in the Afghan situation came with a signal from the Babrak Karmal regime in Kabul of their willingness to enter talks with Iran and Pakistan under United Nations auspices, without insistence on any preliminary formalities. This signal was conveyed in a message from Karmal to Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi at a Jan. 5 meeting in New Delhi between the prime minister and Afghan Education Minister Anahita Ratebzad.

The Afghan move followed a Pakistani letter from Foreign Minister Aga Shahi to U.N. Secretary General Kurt Waldheim the previous week asking for the appointment of a special U.N. representative to promote a dialogue among Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. Pakistan has dropped an earlier approach under the auspices of the Islamic Conference that called for talks involving Iran, Pakistan, and representatives of both the Afghan rebels and Kabul authorities, in their capacity as leaders of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan.

Soviet shift

While Pakistan still refused to talk with the Kabul regime as a legitimate government, the insistence on Afghan rebel presence and the involvement of the anti-Soviet Islamic Conference has been dropped.

The crucial shift, though, comes from Moscow, which had previously refused to consider any discussions which did not include a formal recognition of the legitimacy and authority of the Karmal regime.

The timing of the Soviet decision to soften their stand and that of their Afghan clients is linked to the overall Persian Gulf peace and security proposal unveiled by