

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 Snider

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

Soviet President Brezhnev during his visit to India in early December. That proposal clearly indicated a willingness to resolve the Afghan question in the context of a general agreement of all powers and states in the region to stabilize and neutralize the West Asian region.

The Afghan signal is directed in part at the incoming Reagan administration, as part of the Persian Gulf proposition, including a neutralization of the Iran situation. According to well-informed observers in New Delhi, the move is also aimed at the upcoming nonaligned foreign ministers' meeting which takes place in early February in New Delhi. Moscow and Kabul—with concerned support from the Indian government—are eager to avoid a confrontation over the Afghan issue at that meeting, where the subject is sure to come up.

The Indian role

The Indian role in opening up the possibility of serious political talks and in encouraging Moscow to pursue this path is quite significant. India's position in favor of a peaceful settlement and eventual withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan was reiterated, and obviously discussed, during the Brezhnev visit. The first response came in a statement by Karmal at the end of December, warmly praising Mrs. Gandhi as a "valiant, patriotic, and enlightened stateswoman of the world." The Ratabzad visit immediately followed; it is not insignificant that she is also Karmal's "girlfriend," and that New Delhi and Mrs. Gandhi were chosen as the avenues for delivering the Afghan offer.

The Indian government responded with the dispatching of Indian Foreign Secretary R. D. Sathé to Kabul on Jan. 7 for three days of talks with Afghan officials. The talks related to the upcoming Nonaligned meeting, but also involved an elucidation of the Afghan negotiating position.

Sathé returned, according to Indian press reports, "with a clear indication from the Afghan leaders, including President Babrak Karmal, that they wanted to hold early negotiations with Islamabad and Teheran without standing on formalities."

Questions outstanding

By no means are the obstacles to the convening of such talks, much less their successful conclusion, overcome. Moscow's opening is very thin and tentative and the slightest provocative behavior from Pakistan, particularly on the issue of the authority of the Kabul government, could close that opening. Pakistani sources in New York say that the Soviets are calling privately for bilateral talks between Kabul and Islamabad (and between Kabul and Teheran), with U.N. involvement to come at a second stage. Nor has Waldheim chosen a U.N. representative yet.

More importantly, the commitment of the Pakistani regime of General Ziaul Haq to serious talks is far from clear. Up till now the military dictatorship in Pakistan has shown little willingness to seek a negotiated solution and has backed the efforts of Afghan rebels operating from bases within Pakistani territory. Indian sources have noted, however, that the military situation within Afghanistan is significantly stabilized, and that as a result the Zia regime's ability to get a favorable deal with Moscow is lessening day by day. There is also the question of the more than one million Afghan refugees camping in Pakistan, creating not only a burden on the economy but a source of tension among Pakistanis opposed to their continued presence.

The Zia regime has been able to use the Afghan issue as a means to prop up an unpopular and unstable regime. They have leveraged the crisis to procure significant economic and military assistance from the United States, from China, and recently from the International Monetary Fund, which gave Pakistan \$1.7 billion, the biggest loan ever granted a developing country.

How long the Zia dictatorship can continue to exploit the Afghan situation is doubtful. One question mark is the response from the Reagan administration; despite obvious hopes in Islamabad that Washington will adopt a "pro-Pakistan tilt" (and implicitly an anti-Indian stance), there is as yet no evidence to support such expectations. Pakistani Foreign Minister Shahi met with Vice-President George Bush shortly after the election, and Pakistan sources at the United Nations suggest that he got little in the way of concrete assurances, an outcome that encouraged the regime to hedge its bets with Moscow.

The other crucial factor for Pakistan is Arab support, both politically and economically. The Saudis and others are major bankrollers of the regime. General Zia embarked on a week-long tour of the Middle East on Jan. 11, taking him to Turkey, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Oman. Sources suggest he was taking soundings on the Afghan overture prior to the Islamic heads of state summit which starts in Saudi Arabia in late January. The Iraqis and others have indicated support for the Brezhnev Persian Gulf approach, and if the Saudis join in, as recent reports indicate they will, that could influence Pakistani willingness to seriously pursue the Afghan talks.

Meanwhile, Moscow knows perfectly well that the Afghan crisis has been Zia's prop, and they want to remove it. For its own reasons, New Delhi wants to remove Afghanistan as a source of tensions. Zia, who would have to abandon his backing for the Afghan rebels to reach any final deal on the crisis, may be forced to take up the opportunity at hand or risk losing everything.