

Gulf trap closing on the United States

by Thierry Lalevée

As the NATO foreign ministers meeting concluded May 31 in Washington, it became obvious that the United States is turning the Gulf crisis into its own monkey-trap. Under the psychological stress of the Lebanese disaster and the upcoming presidential election, President Reagan has simply decided to pray to the stars that nothing will happen, and has committed the last remaining months of his administration to maintaining the monstrous inheritance of Jimmy Carter, the Khomeini regime.

The *London Times* wrote bluntly May 30: "The administration is still hoping that intervention in the Gulf will come after rather than before the November Presidential elections." Investigations reveal that treachery is going a long way to ensure the status quo up to November. Under the pressures of the crowd around Henry Kissinger, the White House has sought an agreement with the Soviets that neither superpower become involved in the Gulf. This was negotiated between the two embassies in Washington and Moscow, but secretly too during the high-level delegation in mid-May led by top Moscow "U.S. handler" Georgii Arbatov and the director of Moscow's Oriental Institute Yevgenii Primakov—the same man who, together with Politburo member Gaidar Aliyev, controls 12,000 Soviet-trained mullahs and agents inside Iran.

Moscow's bid for control

Though Washington seems to have gone far to appease the Soviets, Moscow's response is not known. A hint is given by the high intensity of talks between Moscow and its main Middle East ally, Hafez al Assad's Syria. Hafez's brother, Col. Rifaat al Assad, flew on May 28 to Moscow, where he gave Prime Minister Tikhonov and Politburo member Kuznetsov a "first-hand, eye-witness report on the Gulf crisis," while denouncing "America's aggressive designs toward the Gulf," wire reports say. Rifaat's first-hand report was based on the May 24-26 visits to Iran and Saudi Arabia of Syrian Vice President Khaddam and Foreign Minister Al Shara.

In Teheran, the Syrian mediators presented a Soviet message to the Iranian leaders promising Moscow's increased neutrality in the conflict and its desire to restore good relations between Iran and Iraq. Armed with a similar Soviet "good will" message in Riyadh, Khaddam made an astonishing proposal detailed in the May 28 issue of *Tishrin*: "Only

the Syrian armed forces can guarantee the security and sovereignty of the Gulf countries." Clearly agreeing, Saudi King Fahd let it be known that on May 28 he had sent a message to Iraq's President Saddam Hussein, urging if not ordering him to stop attacking the Iranian oil installations and passing tankers. Desperate for help, the Iraqi ambassador to the United Nations announced that the "Soviets will deliver the new equipment to us" enabling Iraq to "destroy the Kharg Island terminal," and spread the rumor, which the Soviets were careful not to deny, that such new weapons would be middle range SS-21 missiles.

America's unofficial involvement

The Gulf crisis will soon look like a horrible nightmare for Washington. Attempts by the United States to get the Saudis to defend themselves and to avoid direct American involvement have already started backfiring. The 400 Stinger missiles, generously sold for some \$40 million, will require an increased American presence of some 40 instructors. If Iran wants to test the missiles' effectiveness by attacking tankers near the Saudi coasts, they will quickly prove useless with their 4.5 km range. Afraid of confronting the Iranian air force, the Saudis have rejected Kuwaiti demands to provide air cover to the tankers.

Creating embarrassment in Washington, Kuwait then publicly asked for U.S. Stinger missiles, too. The *London Times* of May 30 revealed that the American destroyers based in Bahrein, the USS John Rodgers and Boone, were already involved in protecting convoys of tankers. "This unofficial and unacknowledged protection is given no publicity in Washington . . . but it exists nonetheless," wrote the *Times*, leaving open the question of what would happen should a tanker be hit while "unofficially protected" by an American destroyer.

Indeed, Washington is again falling into the trap of not doing enough out of fear of doing too much—a trap used by the British to increase their own standing and political stature within the alliance. The same *Times* noted that Washington is pressing ahead for greater French and British participation in the hope that "it might allow Mr. Reagan to 'stand tall' again." This has a price, which a British team discussed for a week in Washington before British Foreign Secretary Sir Geoffrey Howe arrived. Howe, obviously not satisfied with what could be gained in a more public foreign ministers' conference, arrived in Washington 48 hours early to meet Shultz, Weinberger, and Reagan alone. No wonder that the NATO foreign ministers' meeting concluded with empty rhetoric.

As Iraq relaunched a new wave of attacks against tankers on May 31, on the eve of an expected Iranian ground offensive against Baghdad, there is little basis for hope of limiting the crisis. The only way out is for the Reagan administration to blow up the game itself, and take immediate and decisive action against the dark ages regime of Iran.