

Middle East Report by Leo F. Scanlon

Iran-Iraq war moves to decisive phase

U.S. military planners are asking whether recent Warsaw Pact maneuvers in Eastern Europe were a dry run for an invasion of Iran.

The war between Iran and Iraq is building to a final crisis. The immediate question is: Who will control Iran? The resolution of this issue will have far-reaching strategic implications for an area stretching from Western Europe to the Indian subcontinent.

As the recent military maneuvers conducted by NATO and Soviet forces illustrate, both superpowers are projecting some form of confrontation to occur when the the Teheran regime finally collapses.

High-ranking U.S. intelligence sources have indicated that contingency plans are now being drawn up for a variety of possible military moves in the region. NATO's recently ended HILEX 84 maneuvers were built around a scenario projecting a large-scale Soviet military move into northern Iran.

The Soviets likewise have recently concluded a very large maneuver in Eastern Europe which was carried out on terrain reportedly chosen for its likeness to that of northern Iran. One feature of the maneuvers which startled analysts was the unusually large number of Russian troops deployed within Eastern Europe. U.S. intelligence sources believe those troops are now battle ready for deployment in Iran.

In Iran itself, the situation facing the regime of Ayatollah Khomeini is desperate. The Nazi-like military policies followed by the Teheran regime in the war have created turmoil within the Iranian population and military. As one exile pointed out, the popula-

tion is "tired . . . tired of war, tired of killing, tired of executions, tired of bloodshed, tired of the mullahs, tired of everything."

This mood is being carefully cultivated by the Soviet KGB through its extensive networks in the rural areas of Iran. Through a variety of development aid projects, the Soviets have steadily built up political capital within the population. As the Teheran regime disintegrates, these networks could be mobilized by separatist groupings to back uprisings of the various provinces against the central government. Once one such autonomous state is recognized by the Soviet Union, the others would follow fast.

Azerbaijan is one likely area for such an occurrence, and U.S. military intelligence sources believe that the 1921 treaties with the Soviet Union, invoked during the Soviet invasion of Azerbaijan at the end of World War II, would provide the cover for the Soviet forces to move into Iran.

The Soviets also possess formidable "in-country" capabilities centered on the large number of Soviet construction workers in Iran. These workers are generally believed to be a cover for spetsnaz (special purpose commando forces) deployments. The Soviets have reportedly placed 2,000 of their 7,000 advisers in strategic areas along the Gulf coast.

Moscow's moves in Iran have gotten a boost from the "KGB Caucus" in the U.S. Congress, which is supporting the pro-communist Mujheddin of Iran, an Islamic grouping which is re-

ceiving upwards of \$65 million in financial aid. In the first week of June, Gary Hart circulated to Congress a memorial letter addressed to the pro-Moscow Iranian Speaker of the House, Ayatollah Rafsanjani. The letter, calling for support for a Washington demonstration against Khomeini, was reportedly initiated by the student wing of the Mujheddin. On June 15, Sen. William Proxmire (D-Wisc.) spoke on the Senate floor in support of the Mujheddin.

Meanwhile in Pakistan, the regime of Zia ul-Haq is also under heavy separatist pressure, from the Baluchi tribe, which straddles both Pakistan and Iran. Sardar Shabaz Marawi, a Baluchi tribal leader, in a *Washington Times* interview on July 10, attacked the Zia regime for its support of the Afghan rebels—thereby condoning Moscow's tactics to his supporters.

Soviet subversion capabilities in the region are backed by approximately 56 divisions—double the number of several months ago—stationed along the Soviet-Iran-Afghan border. Military intelligence sources say these troops are not needed in Afghanistan, and are ready to go "any hour."

This multi-layered Soviet deployment is the central problem facing U.S. strategic planners, who, according to high-ranking sources, are prepared to consider an invasion of the southern oil fields as a response to the anticipated Soviet moves in the northern provinces.

It would be difficult for the United States to wage a prolonged conventional war in the Gulf without full logistical support from the European allies, which is not expected to be forthcoming, given the pressures on Western Europe from the Warsaw Pact. Without this support, the United States might consider the early use of tactical nuclear weapons against the Soviet moves.