

The Middle East in 1985: from mistakes to catastrophes

by Thierry Lalevée

Without a political miracle, the United States, under the leadership of President Ronald Reagan, will cease to be a power in the Middle East, as well as in a large chunk of the Mediterranean and North Africa, by the end of 1986. The replacement will primarily be the Soviet Union, but, depending on the country and its role in the region, also smaller powers with certain "understandings" with the Soviet Union, especially, Great Britain.

Three intertwined developments are at the basis of this dramatic development, which threatens to be replicated in the entire Mediterranean basin and Western Europe: the political desire of the Western "New Yalta" faction to share the region with the Soviet Union; a series of political and military blunders by the American leadership; and the shortsightedness of many leaders of the region, who fell prey to their own propaganda concerning "superpower rivalry" in the region.

As 1984 drew to a close, *EIR* warned that, despite the 1983 Soviet offensive in the region, Washington stood a good chance to reverse the process of degeneration of its influence in the Near East, especially thanks to such allies as Egypt and Jordan. For reasons of their own survival, both Cairo and Amman by late 1984 had created a new momentum for peace negotiations. This development was concretized in an agreement on Feb. 11, 1985 between Jordan's King Hussein and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat.

Given the past relationship between the two men, the agreement did not come easy. The Amman agreement, as it came to be called, represented major concessions from the side of the PLO, indicating the strength of the more pragmatic factions of the Palestinian movement. With the agreement, the PLO agreed to merge its powers of negotiation with those of Jordan, forming a single delegation. The timing for the agreement was also right; it coincided with the visits of Saudi Arabian King Fahd, Egyptian President Mubarak, and King Hussein to Washington.

And then everything went wrong. President Reagan was not impressed by the pleas of Mubarak and of Hussein, and the State Department stalled—its bureaucracy did not allow a meeting between a State Department representative, Assistant Secretary of State Richard Murphy and a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation before early July.

On June 14, the Cairo-Rome TWA Flight 847 was hi-

jackd in Athens, and began its Mediterranean journey from Athens to Beirut, then to Algiers, then back to Beirut. When the dust settled, one American, a Navy Seal, had been killed, and the momentum for peace dissipated. Murphy arrived in Amman, not in July, but in early August, arguing that he still could not meet with any PLO representatives or Palestinian delegates, even as part of a Jordanian delegation, unless the PLO first recognized Israel.

Why was there such stalling? The obvious answer lies in the Kremlin and the State Department, and what went on between. That the hijacking was aimed at derailing the peace process was obvious to everyone. What was less obvious was that it was engineered to strengthen the Western "New Yalta" faction by giving it an opportunity to show that Moscow was ready to make a deal.

A few days before the hijacking, in Geneva, under the sponsorship of the dubious Prince Agha Khan, Vice-President George Bush had signed an agreement with the Soviet Union, committing both countries to fight "against the threat and use of nuclear terrorism,"
tween the two countries on terrorism.

Though the original agreement concerned only nuclear terrorism, the TWA hijacking was intended to provide proof that Moscow could be trusted in this. The hijackers were easily branded Islamic fanatics of the Khomeini brand. Syria and the Soviet Union, which controlled the incident from the start, were credited with having brought it to an end. Syria's "last-minute intervention" was proclaimed crucial. Some even went so far as to describe the hijacking as a plot engineered by one faction of Soviet intelligence against the newly elected general secretary, Mikhail Gorbachov, in case someone observed that Syria and the Soviet Union were in a position to run it.

By late July, intelligence scenarios heralded the period when joint CIA and KGB teams would be seen fighting terrorism together, scenarios which may become concrete in 1986 as Washington and Moscow are expected to sign another agreement to "coordinate" their actions against international terrorism before the end of 1985. If events to date are any judge, this will actually mean Kremlin/State Department coordination of terrorist acts.

The State Department's diplomatic rejection of the Am-

man initiative was made easier, not merely by the increasing terrorism, but the usual inter-Arab rivalries. Saudi Arabia, always suspicious of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the royal family's to be the direct heirs of the family of the Prophet, had never supported the Jordan-PLO agreement, and, in several Arab League meetings, had also opposed proposals for the re-admission of Egypt into that organization. As a result, an ill-fated Arab Summit which took place in early August in Casablanca, Morocco, also refused to endorse the Amman agreement.

The price to be paid was all too obvious; Damascus, the premier Soviet proxy, was recognized as the only power capable of action in the region.

The first ground for agreement between Moscow and the State Department was their opposition to the Amman agreement. The great fear of the State Department, after all, was that the Amman agreement would mean PLO recognition of Israel—the fear that the PLO would meet the State Department's demands! That would mean a peace process in the region, instead of a process of giving the region to the Soviet empire.

Something had to be done about Arafat. Something was.

From this understanding, the remaining events of the year have flowed all too logically. The isolation of the PLO, strengthening of Syria's Palestinian radicals, and splitting the PLO itself, led to widespread terrorist actions in Europe and in the Middle East. In turn it led to the Oct. 1 Israeli raid against the PLO headquarters in Tunisia, which led to the hijacking of the Italian cruiser *Achille Lauro*, and some more recent plane hijackings. Peacemakers didn't stand a chance.

None of these actions can be credited to a single group or even country; all of them, whether Palestinian or Israeli, received the approval, silent or not, of the Soviet Union, its regional allies, the Israeli intelligence factions around Sharon and "Dirty Rafi" Eytan, and the New Yalta faction in the United States and Europe.

The actions of the United States in response to these acts apparently flowed from the principle that the terrorism of enemy states, allies of the Soviet Union like Iran, Libya, and Syria, is to be conciliated or condoned, while allies accused, not of terrorism, but of "harboring terrorism," are to be attacked without hesitation. Syrian, and thus, Russian, terrorist attacks were met with requests for negotiation, Israel's attack on pro-American Tunisia was condoned by President Reagan, and a Egypt's airliner was intercepted and grounded. Any regard for America's national interest has been singularly absent from U.S. policy against terrorism.

North Africa

Its power eroded in the Middle East, Washington lost the confidence of those Northern African states with which it was building
dent Chadli Benjedid and Tunisian President Habib Bour-

guiba had visited Washington heralding a new era, and thereby provoked anger from the former colonial power, socialist France. But by mid-October, France had regained much of its lost influence: Isolated when it was confronted with outright aggression from Libya during an August/September crisis that *EIR* covered on the spot, Tunisia could not accept American behavior in response to the Israeli raid. Indeed, who could accept the United States condoning a deliberate act of aggression committed against another sovereign nation's territory. Israel's message was simple: We are the superpower of the region. And the result? No one was angry at Israel for its action; the anger was directed at that which made it possible, the United States.

Israel: Soviet ally

No American official would have considered the Israeli raid and subsequent events in their interests. *Cui bono?* Obviously, the Kremlin. Neither Tunisia, nor Egypt, nor Sudan were actively involved in secret negotiations with the Soviet Union in this period, but Israel was. And Israel set the United States up.

As the espionage case, of Johathan Jay Pollard case revealed, Israeli-Soviet negotiations have been ongoing for a very long period. The American military secrets stolen by the Pollards were of interest to Israel only because they were of interest to Moscow. Begun by Sharon and Rafi Eytan, these negotiations have been upgraded, thanks to Armand Hammer and Edgar Bronfman. If 400,000 Soviet Jews have not yet been given the authorization to leave the Soviet Union and if there was no such spectacular announcement at the Geneva Summit, it is not because of lack of Israeli determination.

Instead, Gorbachov decided that, with Israel ready to make a deal, he could stall, to strengthen his own power over the Arab world.

The visit of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein to Moscow on Dec. 16, showed that Gorbachov's calculation was correct. Against the background of a Syrian-Jordanian reconciliation, and the establishment of diplomatic relations with Gulf countries like Oman and the Emirates, Moscow can add Iraq to its Middle East jigsaw puzzle. To officially support Iran is of little immediate importance to Moscow. It controls Iran. With Khomeini slowly dying, an Iraqi military victory will plunge Iran into a civil war, and Moscow has enough assets among the Mullahs to win that battle. And Washington has nothing with which to oppose such plans.

By early 1986, most Middle Eastern leaders, from Egypt to Algeria, will have followed Saddam Hussein to Moscow. By the spring of 1986, diplomatic relations between Israel and the Soviet Union will be established. Leaders of the region, who have foolishly sought to play off the superpowers for 30 years, will now discover that their fate is to bow to Soviet imperial suzerainty.