

Soviets attempt response to U.S. challenge in Gulf

by Jeffrey Steinberg

As *EIR* goes to press, a new contingent of U.S. military personnel and equipment is arriving in the Persian Gulf, placing the total American force there at 25,000 men and 40 major surface combat ships, augmented by additional U.S. supply ships, a nearby aircraft carrier group, and growing contingents of French and British naval forces. The current American commitment to take whatever military steps may be required to secure the safe passage of commercial ships through the Persian Gulf, is further reflected in the Pentagon's Aug. 20 announcement that a new Gulf Command had been established under the authority of the Central Command and the Secretary of Defense.

This streamlining action effectively places Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, the author of the present Gulf deployment and the administration's staunchest opponent of the arms-to-Khomeini/"moderate ayatollahs" policy, in a position of "hands on" control over the Reagan administration's Middle East effort.

Then, the White House confirmed—over State Department howls of protest—in early August that the administration will ask congressional approval for over \$1 billion in arms sales to Saudi Arabia as soon as Congress reconvenes after Labor Day.

Consider, from Moscow's standpoint, the full strategic ramifications of the Reagan administration's July decision to honor Kuwait's request for reflagging and securing its oil tankers, a proposition initially put forward by the Soviets themselves!

Up until the U.S. deployment, Moscow was proceeding unchallenged to establish sole superpower status with all of the major players in the Eastern Mediterranean, including with those moderate Arab Gulf states that had previously been Washington's most reliable allies in the region, Israel notwithstanding.

According to U.S. intelligence sources, Moscow had planned to parlay its recently cultivated diplomatic and military channels to Kuwait into a major regional diplomatic

coup by soliciting Kuwaiti mediation of negotiations for Soviet troop withdrawals from Afghanistan. This reported maneuver was a follow-on to Moscow's cultivation of Jordan's King Hussein to mediate a rapprochement between Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and his Syrian counterpart, Hafez al-Assad.

These and other Soviet initiatives collapsed when the American ships began steaming into the Gulf. Things were not made easier for the Kremlin when, as the ships came in, Weinberger issued statements targeting Teheran and Moscow as the West's primary enemies in the region.

Terrorism

Now, according to U.S. and European sources, the Gorbachov regime has formulated a comeback plan aimed at recapturing some of the pre-July momentum. That plan places greater emphasis on diplomatic maneuvering and terrorist forms of irregular warfare, and specifically aims at preventing a major escalation of military action in the region, action that Moscow now believes would only benefit the United States and her allies.

According to these sources, Moscow aims to:

1) Use its leverage with the Khomeini regime to assure that no precipitous actions are taken that would justify full-scale military response on the part of the United States, France, Britain, or the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states.

2) Place a newly "moderate" Syria in the American-GCC orbit as a means of both boosting Syria's position and prestige as a force in the Eastern Mediterranean and simultaneously increasing the credibility of those American and European policy factions who oppose Weinberger's Gulf policy, but currently lack the leverage to defeat him.

3) Capitalize upon the hardened Western position toward Iran by consolidating Moscow's own policy control inside Teheran.

4) Simultaneously extend Soviet influence inside Iraq by encouraging deepening ties between "moderate" Syria and

the regime in Baghdad.

Moscow is reportedly steering Libyan strongman Muammar Qaddafi into a renewed campaign of international terrorism in league with Teheran, and away from his adventure in Chad where, in any case, he continues to suffer a string of serious defeats at the hands of a U.S. and French-backed Chadian army.

This anticipated Libyan-Iranian terrorist upsurge is being coordinated with Moscow's revival of separatist tribal insurgency along the Turkish-Iranian border region with the Soviet Union, particularly the Turkish Democratic Party in Azerbaijan. This KGB effort is under the personal direction of Politburo member Geidar Aliyev. (Moscow's "diplomatic" warfare effort is being run through the Foreign Ministry under Deputy Foreign Minister and Russian nobleman Yuli Vorontsov.)

On Aug. 17, ABC television journalist Charles Glass, who was kidnapped and held by Hezbollah terrorists for two months, "escaped" from his captors, turned up in the lobby of a Beirut hotel, and was instantly whisked off to Damascus where he was turned over to American authorities. The Syrian government was given immediate credit for the release, prompting a new round of praise for Assad's "moderation" and "repudiation" of terrorism. The purpose of the heroic "escape" story? To avoid any embarrassing questions regarding Syria's continuing ties to the Hezbollah and other Shi'ite terrorist groups operating in Lebanon and the Damascus-Teheran collusion. U.S. intelligence sources had alerted this reporter weeks in advance of an expected hostage release, to improve Syria's "moderate" image.

The Hamburg Trust gets into the act

Complementing Moscow's direct effort to recapture its lost momentum in the Gulf region, a motley collection of predominantly Western agents of the Soviet "Trust" went into action in mid-August in an attempt to make the Gulf the subject of U.S.-Soviet "crisis management." According to the London *Daily Express* of Aug. 20, City of London tycoons Tiny Rowland and Sir Edward DuCann of the multi-billion-dollar Lonrho empire, made a secret trip to Teheran aboard a private corporate jet to make a new hostage-release proposal. Reportedly the duo proposed, in return for the release of Western hostages, to arrange for the sale to Iran of a Hamburg, West Germany oil refinery, a sale that would greatly enhance the marketing of Iranian oil and petroleum products on the European market. *EIR* European investigators have received information that a Hamburg trucking company, Kuehn and Nagel, a reported subsidiary of Lonrho, was in the middle of the effort. The company does extensive overland shipping between Hamburg and Teheran.

This Hamburg nexus also involves the German Oriental Institute, which has reportedly been advising Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher since June on his efforts to open

a "third channel" of contact between the Khomeini regime and Western governments including the United States.

Hamburg is a not-accidental point of convergence of Central European oligarchical circles doing business in Iran. Ayatollah Beheshti, one of the earliest controllers of the Khomeini movement, was a longtime resident of Hamburg and a member of that city-state's Freemasonic elite. When American spook Theodore G. Shackley initiated the original phase of the arms-for-hostages fiasco by meeting with "moderate" ayatollahs in November 1984, that meeting took place in a Hamburg hotel.

Congressmen back Soviet option

Back in Washington, congressional opposition to Weinberger's Gulf deployment has somewhat shifted away from a head-on confrontation over the issue of President Reagan's refusal to invoke the War Powers Act. On Aug. 20, fifty-two members of Congress issued a letter supporting a role in any post-Khomeini regime for the Iranian Mujaheddin. A broad collection of senators and representatives, ranging from California's Rep. Mervyn Dymally to North Carolina's Sen. Jesse Helms, signed the statement supporting a group that was born out of the "Islamic-Marxist dialogue," a Soviet project based out of the Islamic religious center in Tashkent, the center of Geidar Aliyev's efforts.

Earlier this year in congressional testimony, State Department Middle East specialist Richard Murphy had opened the door to the Mujaheddin by stating that the party should "play a role" in a post-Khomeini political transition.

U.S. and European sources were quick to point out that the sudden rush to embrace the Mujaheddin came after the dramatic public reappearance of the Young Shah in early August. The heir to the Pahlevi dynasty made a series of strong speeches and gave television and newspaper interviews in Paris, vowing on behalf of the Iranian people to restore Iran to a path of development and sovereignty.

After weeks of simply waiting out the American buildup in the Gulf, in the expectation that some policy rift would bring the troops back home with at best a short-lived diplomatic gain, Moscow has now set a wide range of operations into motion. The sum total of those efforts, however, still falls far short of the kinds of empire-satrap games that Moscow was directing before the U.S. Gulf initiative. As long as Weinberger holds sway in Washington, the American presence in the Gulf will keep up the pressure on Teheran, and will also send clear signals that the United States is not about to surrender the Eastern Mediterranean to Soviet hegemony. Moscow's efforts can then achieve only marginal success at best.

Under these circumstances, a wave of international terrorism may be Moscow's only remaining short-term option to alter a strategic situation which has dramatically changed over the course of the summer to favor the West.