

Middle East Report by Judith Wyer

The fruits of an alliance

Is Washington sacrificing the Middle East to Moscow through its support for the Ayatollah Khomeini?

Just as Washington is losing its influence in Latin America to the U.S.S.R. as a result of its support for Britain in the Malvinas war, so too is Washington turning the Middle East over to Moscow as a result of its aid and comfort to Iran's Khomeini regime.

Saudi Arabia and its conservative Arab neighbors, long the allies of the United States, have recently initiated contacts with the U.S.S.R. through the Soviet embassy in Kuwait. Although they do not yet maintain diplomatic relations with Moscow, the Gulf states have begun to look to the Soviets to do what they have repeatedly urged the Americans to do, to no avail: contain the spread of Khomeini's fascist Islamic fundamentalism.

On May 31, Radio Moscow broadcast a warning that first appeared in the Communist Party daily *Pravda* instructing Iran to keep its forces out of Iraq or face a wider war in the Persian Gulf and Middle East. The Soviet warning was timed to coincide with a meeting of the Gulf Cooperation Council, a six-nation Gulf alliance comprised of Saudi Arabia and its neighbors, to discuss Iran's recent victories over Iraq.

The effect of the *Pravda* statement was no doubt heightened by the fact that it followed by less than 72 hours Alexander Haig's refusal to censure Iran in his speech on Middle East policy. Earlier, Haig's State Department and Israel's Min-

ister of Defense Ariel Sharon had publicly admitted that the United States and Israel were coordinating arms shipments to Iran.

Pravda urged both Iran and Iraq to "agree to a just peace." But the Khomeini regime has almost daily declared its unwillingness to negotiate with Iraq until President Saddam Hussein is ousted.

By stepping into the Gulf crisis, Moscow, in cooperation with its ally Syria, is opportunistically taking advantage of Washington's abdication of responsibility in the region, and sending a message to Europe and Japan that Moscow will increasingly become the arbiter of their oil-supply stability.

Despite their stern words toward Iran, the Soviets are not necessarily opposed to the idea that Saddam Hussein must go. According to intelligence sources, the Soviets have activated a scheme to replace Hussein with their own man, a move that could lead to shake-ups in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, bringing to power in the Saudi kingdom Syria's—as well as Moscow's—ally, Second Crown Prince Abdullah.

At Moscow's prodding, Syria is now advocating that Saddam Hussein be replaced by the exiled Iraqi dissident Gen. Hassan Mustafa Naqib, the leader of a motley coalition of radical Shiite Muslims, the Iraqi Communist Party, and Kurdish militants, all of whom have been implicated in earlier ef-

forts to overthrow or assassinate Hussein. Presumably, Khomeini would be willing to negotiate with the new leadership.

Within the inner circles of Iran's ruling Islamic Republican Party, a debate is now raging as to when and how to invade Iraq. Khomeini has repeatedly declared that he will push into Iraq in order to catalyze Saddam Hussein's overthrow.

Whether it is Iran or the Soviet Union that succeeds in removing Saddam Hussein from power, the Iraqi President's fall will provoke a level of regional chaos, beginning with Iraq's disintegration, which neither the Soviets nor any other power will be able to control.

Speaking to the Iranian Parliament in late May, Ayatollah Rafsanjani declared that it "will soon become necessary to invade Iraq." He rebuffed offers of war reparations made by the Gulf states on behalf of Iraq and ranted that the overthrow of Hussein will not be the end of the Gulf war. Rafsanjani pledged that Iran will only be satisfied when "tyranny" in the region is brought to an end—a not-so-subtle allusion to Iran's plans to topple the monarchies of Saudi Arabia and its neighbors.

On June 1, Lebanese Foreign Minister Fuad Butros assailed Washington's Middle East policy as "unrealistic" and "makeshift." Also on June 1, the Israeli consulate in New York issued a release noting that in "the minds of all Arab leaders, there is the growing image of the U.S.S.R. as if it is in a uniquely superior position to meet many of the security concerns of these regional leaders." Increasingly, the release notes, moderate Arab leaders are rejecting Haig's Middle East "strategic consensus."