

## Soviet gamemasters ready to grab Middle East

by Thierry Lalevée and Scott Thompson

At the beginning of February, the United States was poised to strike a mortal blow to Soviet-backed terrorism and restore the basis for order in the Middle East. During the first week of the month, a U.S. fleet began to mobilize in the Eastern Mediterranean and Persian Gulf with a mission to free 23 hostages held in Lebanon and to check an Iranian takeover of Persian Gulf oil, should the Iraqi city of Basra fall to Iran.

By Feb. 11, all military means were assembled for the United States to run a combined operation, bombing terrorist command centers in the Bekaa Valley, and using special forces to free the 23 German, French, British, U.S., and Arab hostages held by Syrian and Iranian terrorists there.

That military capability was never used, and within days, it was dismantled.

That set the stage for Syria, the main satrap of the Soviet Union in the region, to re-occupy West Beirut on Feb. 20, and for Soviet party boss Mikhail Gorbachov to make a bid to officially take over the administration of the chaos in the Middle East, with the approval of the U.S. State Department.

### Scope of the deal

The scope of the deal cut by the State Department with the Soviets' Syrian satrapy was revealed on Feb. 22 when the State Department issued a statement saying: "The past 12 years in Lebanon provide ample proof that no external force can impose political or security arrangements in Lebanon." Two days later Secretary of State George Shultz, in congressional testimony, praised Syria's intervention into West Beirut, the foot-in-the-door for partitioning that country with Israel. Shultz told Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir,

who was visiting Washington at the time; that the State Department backed Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachov's proposal for a comprehensive East-West peace conference.

The European allies have largely shown the same vacillation. Only the West German Patriots for Germany, chaired by Helga Zepp-LaRouche, had the foresight to support U.S. military action, when the Patriots and the Schiller Institute issued a call on Feb. 11 for the United States to occupy Lebanon as President Dwight Eisenhower had done, freeing the hostages, and supplanting Syrian hegemony.

Even French Premier Jacques Chirac, who had been correct in his earlier criticism of the Reagan administration for failure to work out a strategy with the European allies against Islamic fundamentalism, appears to have advised against U.S. military action, because of the fallout from the April 1986 raid on Libya.

### Soviets hold Syria card

Behind this strange situation, where the U.S. Marines were mobilized, then vanished when they could not get a warrant to go in, lies a deal by the U.S. State Department with Hafez al-Assad in Damascus to play the "Syria card," actually an ace hidden up Mikhail Gorbachov's sleeve.

The deal, being negotiated for two years between Assistant Secretary of State Richard Murphy and his Soviet counterpart, Vladimir Polyakov, is to hand the Middle East chaos over to Moscow—rather than put an end to the chaos.

Intelligence sources reveal that Murphy struck a deal with Polyakov during his latest tour of the Mideast in January, which included an American pledge not to strike at Lebanon,

in exchange for Syria's help in releasing the hostages.

Damascus was then given the green light by Moscow, Washington, Jerusalem, and Teheran to go back into Beirut.

Moscow has emerged as the leading power broker in Lebanon. This was signaled by the visit of Karen Brutents, the deputy chairman of the Central Committee's International Department, to Tripoli and Damascus in the first week of February. Brutents warned in a Feb. 6 interview with *Al Khalij* that the Soviet Union was considering various options should the United States take military action.

On Feb. 10 Soviet leader Gorbachov, flanked by the Politburo member in charge of playing the Soviet's "Muslim card," Geidar Aliyev, condemned the United States for preparing an "open threat to punish whole nations for mad, criminal acts by a handful of extremists."

Moscow not only thinks it can now dictate how the West responds to Soviet-backed Mideast terrorism, but has orchestrated two parallel sets of international negotiations involving Damascus, Washington, Jerusalem, and Teheran. The Murphy-Polyakov meeting in Stockholm in June 1986 approved the initial Syrian occupation of Arab West Beirut, which was to have encircled Christian East Beirut by September. These efforts were then countered by stiff resistance from both the Lebanese Army forces led by Dr. Samir Geagea, and Yasser Arafat's Palestinian military forces.

### **Gorbachov diplomatic maneuvers**

Nearly a year later, the new Syrian military occupation has occurred as part of an agreement to pursue Gorbachov's proposal for an international peace conference on the Middle East. European sources confirm that one of the back-channels through which this final agreement was negotiated, was the Feb. 1-8 visit by Henry Kissinger to Moscow with a delegation from the Council on Foreign Relations.

It was when he was serving as U.S. Secretary of State in 1976, that Henry Kissinger first proposed a treasonous plan for the partitioning of Lebanon between a Greater Syria and Greater Israel. That plan is nearly accomplished. In private talks with Gorbachov, the CFR delegation began negotiating the terms of a new superpower summit.

On Feb. 20, the day the Syrians entered Beirut, Gorbachov used the unusual channel of the European Community to announce his latest peace initiative. In a letter to the Belgian chairman of the EC, Leo Tindemans—the first political initiative ever from Moscow to the EC as an independent body—Gorbachov announced he would shortly be "calling for the holding of an international peace conference," and requested European approval. On Feb. 23 the foreign ministers said yes, underlining that "because of Irangate," Europe has "to rethink its role in the region." Tindemans rushed to the Soviet embassy in Brussels to transmit the answer.

Few have any illusions that such a conference can be pulled together, or that a new peace initiative can be successful in this period. Many countries or politicians have referred

to such a conference, with different meanings and different goals. But the exchanges between Foggy Bottom, Moscow, and Brussels are signals for broader negotiations along the lines of a New Yalta accord to redivide the world.

### **On the ground**

Syria's move into Lebanon has the approval of Moscow, Teheran, and Jerusalem. None of the powers in those capitals really care about their "allies" on the ground in Lebanon, but see the warring forces in the country as expendable pawns.

Soviet Muslim-handler Karen Brutents arrived on Feb. 2 in Damascus to meet with the secretary-general of the ruling Ba'ath Party. Then he spent a week at the congress of the Lebanese Communist Party, before meeting President Assad on Feb. 8. Brutents gave Assad a letter from Gorbachov which obviously had been transmitted to the Soviet Embassy after his arrival.

While in Lebanon, he met with all of the militia leaders, especially Druse warlord Walid Jumblatt, and then gave token support to the Palestinians besieged by the Soviet tanks given to Nabih Berri's Amal, the Lebanese Shi'ite militia. Intelligence sources suspect that Brutents, with Gen. Ghazi Kana'an of Syrian military intelligence, gave orders to Jumblatt to begin attacking the Amal militia. That created the pretext for Syria to re-enter the city and separate the fighters.

By Feb. 19, a mauled Berri, Jumblatt, and the Syrian leadership conferred in Damascus. The next day some 7,000 Syrian soldiers moved into West Beirut under Kana'an, who warned that all armed men would be shot on sight. Arguing that his "friendship to Syria is above everything else," Jumblatt ordered his troops to withdraw to their Shouf headquarters.

This didn't cost Jumblatt much, since the Druse consider West Beirut only an "advanced defense line" for retaining their control over the Shouf mountains.

The Iranians believe that the strengthening of Syria may be good business right now, despite some degree of competition over whether Lebanon becomes part of Greater Syria or a Teheran-led "Islamic Republic," through an accommodation with Lebanese Sunni forces. (The Sunnis are the majority branch of the Muslim religion, while the Shi'ites are the minority branch, which dominates in Iran's theocracy.) Thus, the Iranians have agreed that a few of the Western hostages held by the Hezbollahi, the Iranian Shi'ite militia in Lebanon, may be put in a situation "where Syria will be able to release them." Iran is also concentrating its efforts on the creation of a "Shi'ite belt," to be centered in Iran and Iraq.

As for its Damascus "ace," sources suspect that with Moscow's support Syria will once again seek to annex East Beirut, even if indirectly through its militias, thereby controlling Lebanon. In coming weeks, Damascus is expected to reactivate the pro-Syrian Christian forces of Elie Hobeika and to use them for an assault against Lebanese President Amin Gemayel's loyal military leader, Samir Geagea.