

U.S. Gulf deployment a blow to New Yalta deal

by Jeffrey Steinberg

On the very day that American flags were raised above the decks of two Kuwaiti oil tankers, thus activating a U.S. commitment to militarily secure free transit through the war-torn Persian Gulf, Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger published a letter to the editors of the *New York Times*, rebuking those who insist that the United States pursue a superpower New Yalta-type solution to the Middle East regional crisis.

Answering a July 19 *Times* op-ed by George Ball, Weinberger wrote on July 22: “. . . there is a deeper problem, and it involves Mr. Ball’s understanding of Soviet intentions in the Persian Gulf. Mr. Ball restates the shopworn criticism that United States policy in the Persian Gulf is driven by ‘the bellicose idiom of the East-West struggle.’ Mr. Ball contends that by not recognizing that Moscow and Washington ‘share a common objective in the Persian Gulf,’ the Reagan administration is passing up the chance for a historic East-West agreement on that region’s future. The popular academic theory of the 1970s, which went by the name ‘convergence,’ is given full rein in Mr. Ball’s thinking. He sees a United States-Soviet deal on the Persian Gulf as the prelude to further agreements on Afghanistan and the Arab-Israeli struggle.

“Moreover, Mr. Ball argues that the Russians have been reassuring about our benign intentions in the region and are ‘desperately’ trying to ‘extricate’ themselves from the ‘Afghan inbroglio.’ Forgotten here is Russia’s historic pursuit of influence in this region, the massing of Soviet military power on the Iranian border, Soviet arming of the warring factions in Ethiopia and Yemen, and Soviet attacks on American policy that can hardly be interpreted as reassuring. . . .

“Mr. Ball also ignores that we are talking with the Russians and the entire United Nations Security Council about

our initiative to obtain a cease-fire in the Iran-Iraq war and sanctions against parties that do not comply. Here we have a limited and probably short-term parallel interest with the Kremlin, and we are acting on it. Success will require, however, that the Russians and their allies stop sending arms to Iran, the intransigent party in this conflict.”

Ending with a statement of American support for the sovereign rights of the nations of the Gulf, Secretary Weinberger concluded, “Far from living in the ‘idiom of the East-West struggle,’ the United States recognizes that the future of the Persian Gulf lies in the hands of the Persian Gulf states, not in pronouncements from the most powerful nations. We can and must secure our own interests and those of our friends and allies. We can urge a cease-fire, negotiations and peace, but we cannot, alone, or with the Soviet Union, determine the future of the Persian Gulf.”

This policy formulation, combined with the impressive U.S. and European commitment of naval force to challenge the Khomeini regime’s bullyboy tactics in the Gulf, represents a potential first step toward a dramatic shift in U.S. strategic orientation, a shift that one well-placed American intelligence source described as “a reversal of seven to eight years of disastrous failures in American Middle East policy.”

Countervailing policy signals, such as those advanced by Trilateral Commission ideologue and Khomeini-backer George Ball, have left some of America’s allies with the unsettling impression that the Reagan administration, fresh from the Iran-Contra scandal, still lacks a center of power and is proceeding along a schizophrenic course, simultaneously pursuing a Weinberger-centered policy of confronting the Khomeini regime and the Soviets in the Gulf, and a State Department-centered policy orienting toward a New Yalta

deal, surrendering Gulf hegemony to Moscow. These fears, while not unjustified, ignore the long-term implications of a direct American military response to the increasingly Soviet-linked Iranian regime.

Several high-level U.S. sources have told *EIR* that one outcome of an aggressive U.S. execution of the declared policy of securing the Gulf by military force, will be the establishment of permanent basing for the U.S. Central Command in the Persian Gulf, either in Saudi Arabia or in one of the other member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Such a permanent land basing would go a long way toward returning the United States to a balanced Middle East policy, placing the moderate, anti-Soviet Arab states on a parallel footing with Israel, and defining Islamic fundamentalism and Soviet aggression as the principal threats to the security and sovereignty of the states of the region.

Iranian terrorist response

On July 24, as the re-flagged Kuwaiti supertanker *Bridgeton* was proceeding under escort through a section of the Gulf that had been recently patrolled by Iranian Pasdaran (Revolutionary Guard) gun boats, it struck a mine, sustaining costly damages. Within hours of the incident, President Reagan convened a meeting of the National Security Planning Group at the White House. Reportedly the administration determined to refrain from an immediate retaliatory action, in order to sow further factional strife within the Khomeini regime.

The prevailing estimate in Washington and in other Western capitals, is that the Khomeini regime will resort to an increase in international terrorism, a move that began with the hijacking of an Air Afrique flight by an Islamic terrorist on July 24. The incident ended in Geneva, with one passenger killed before the terrorist was overpowered by crew members and police commandos.

Signaling a full-scale terrorist activation, 20,000 Lebanese Shi'ite fanatics demonstrated in Baalbek on July 22. Khomeini protégé and Hezbollah leader Sheikh Mohammed Yazbek told the rally, "France, U.S.A, and Great Britain are the enemy of God. . . . Terrorism is the only solution. . . . We are awaiting the *fatwa* (religious edict) from Imam Khomeini to fight 'til victory or martyrdom." Breaking months of public silence, Khomeini himself responded several days later, in a televised address to Shi'ite fanatics in Teheran, by repeating his 1982 declaration that "the word of God" commands Iran to crush the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein.

The Teheran regime is virtually guaranteed to strike directly at American or Western European ships in the Gulf in the near future. Iran has announced major sea maneuvers involving the Navy, Air Force, and Pasdaran in early August. Between now and the end of the summer, the "moment of truth" will come, and at that point, the United States must respond with a "hot pursuit" military assault—devoid of State Department "crisis managers."

Moscow gets into the act

Far from happy with U.S. actions in the Gulf, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachov took two initiatives during the week of July 20-26, both aimed at tilting President Reagan back in the direction of the maleable New Yalta partner he met with at Reykjavik last October. First, Gorbachov sent a letter to Reagan offering to adopt any forum for joint efforts at solving the Gulf crisis, along the lines of the State Department's "regional matters" discussions, so long as the United States refrains from going forward with the re-flagging program. *Pravda* and the Soviet news agency TASS denounced Washington for pushing the confrontation button in the Gulf.

The following day, Gorbachov gave an interview to an Indonesian newspaper offering a major "concession" in the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force (INF) talks in Geneva, by agreeing to the U.S. demand that the "zero-zero option" agreements include the Asian theater. Amidst a flurry of Western media praise for "peacemaker" Gorbachov, the Reagan administration as of this writing has responded coolly, awaiting the formal proposal at Geneva. White House spokesmen, including National Security Adviser Frank Carlucci, have warned about previous Soviet "breakthrough" offers that were loaded with fine-print conditions unacceptable to Washington and the European allies.

In her visit to Washington a week before the Gorbachov INF offer, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher had cautioned President Reagan against rushing into any zero-option agreement without first considering carefully all of the implications for the security of Europe. Thatcher's "go slow" warning coincided with similar urgings by Secretary Weinberger and other Cabinet officials. Weinberger is coordinating his activities closely with both Thatcher and French Prime Minister Jacques Chirac. Chirac, in turn, has established close bilateral collaboration with West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl. Within hours of returning to London from her Washington junket, Mrs. Thatcher announced that two Kuwaiti tankers would soon be flying British flags and would be accompanied by British Navy vessels.

Pearl Harbor factor

For the United States, the policy crisis goes deeper than the choice between the Weinberger military policy and the New Yalta "Great Powers" deal. The deeper crisis involves the implication for America's collapsing industrial base of a sustained commitment to project military power in the Gulf. To carry that mission forward and broaden it into a new overall foreign policy, requires a revival of industrial capacities, impossible under the regime of "Reaganomics." Perhaps a decisive military response to the Khomeini challenge will spark a "Pearl Harbor" reaction in the American public. Under those conditions, perhaps President Reagan could be convinced to abandon his "post-industrial" and "free enterprise" delusions, and crank up America's greatest military resource, its industrial mobilization capacity.