

## Stakes get higher in U.S. Gulf deployment

by Jeffrey Steinberg

For the first time since the U.S. Marines were withdrawn in disgrace from Beirut, Lebanon, American credibility is once again on the rise within leading Arab political ranks. From Riyadh to Cairo, early anxiety about the durability of American commitment to secure the Persian Gulf shipping lanes against Iranian military threats has been replaced in recent days with a building confidence that the United States is back to stay, and that Moscow's drive to assert Russian superpower hegemony over the Middle East will no longer go unchallenged.

According to Gulf sources, the most significant message to come out of the mining of the *Bridgeton*, one of the first two Kuwaiti oil tankers to be reflagged as American vessels, was the fact that the United States has no intention of retreating from its commitment to secure the Gulf—despite the mounting threat of Iranian attack.

In a breakfast meeting with reporters at the Pentagon on Aug. 4, Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger underscored the message. In response to questions as to the duration and level of U.S. military commitment in the Gulf, Weinberger stated:

"I didn't say it was closed-ended or open-ended or anything of the kind. What I said was, that we'd do what is required to carry out the mission and we would continue to do what is required as long as there's a mission. . . . We're doing what we agreed to do and we'll continue to do it, and if conditions become such that it's no longer necessary to do it, we won't do it. It's just that simple. . . . The basic rule is that we try to commit the resources that we feel are essential to the task—and that's what we're trying to do. . . . We're going to take the tankers through when we're ready and on our own schedule, which will not be announced in advance."

Even as Weinberger was restating Reagan administration policy to the Pentagon press corp, U.S. and Saudi minesweeping ships and helicopters and American special forces personnel were joining the Gulf contingent.

### British and French join in

In a reversal of her initial rejection of an American request for assistance in the minesweeping effort, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher announced on Aug. 5 that her government was now "reconsidering" sending military support into the Gulf.

Adding to the growing chorus of support for a strong and unified Western stand against the terrorist Khomeini regime, French Prime Minister Jacques Chirac, in an Aug. 2 live television interview, attacked West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher by name for his indiscreet public meeting with Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati in Bonn on July 23, at the very moment that France was breaking off diplomatic relations with Teheran over Iran's involvement in terrorist activities inside France.

Chirac carefully differentiated between his criticisms of Genscher, who is notorious as the leading friend and protector of Sadegh Tabatabai, nephew of Khomeini and a leading figure in Iranian terrorist activities worldwide, and his overall solid relations with the West German government of Chancellor Helmut Kohl. France has now also announced plans to join with the United States and Great Britain in the Gulf mission, thus laying the basis for a unified Western intervention.

U.S. intelligence sources have emphasized to *EIR* for weeks now that the Reagan administration's Gulf policy is firmly under the control of Weinberger, who has in turn

closely coordinated his moves with the Chirac and Thatcher governments. According to these sources, even the initial British refusal to send additional minesweepers into the Gulf following the *Bridgeton* explosion, was nothing more than a tactical dispute between London and Washington over the U.S. failure to develop adequate contingency plans for assuring continued commitment to the Gulf mission. Reportedly the British had initially floated the idea of a Western blockade of belligerent Iran.

### **Mecca coup plot hardens lines**

Up until the United States began its reflagging effort last month, the Soviet Union had been making inroads with some of America's leading Gulf allies, while at the same time deepening its ties to Teheran and even opening direct diplomatic channels to Israel. In short, Moscow was increasingly cutting the figure of the "new bully" in the Middle East—with no apparent challenger in sight. Moscow's superpower/satrap game of playing all sides in the complex Middle East arena has now been significantly complicated as a result of the July 31 Mecca riots in which at least 400 pilgrims attending the annual Hajj celebration were killed.

According to preliminary reports from Riyadh, Saudi Arabian intelligence has determined that the Iranian-instigated riots were actually part of a broader Khomeini-directed plot to overthrow the Saudi royal family, through the sacking and burning of Kaaba Grand Mosque, the assassination of the Imam of the Grand Mosque, and the forcing of the religious pilgrims to declare their loyalty to Khomeini and to the Shi'ite shrine at Qom in Iran.

Swift response to the initial phase of the plot by Saudi police foiled the overall effort, but not until hundreds of mostly Iranian worshipers were killed in the stampede and possible shootings. Further reports coming out of the region suggest that top officials of the Iranian government were present in Mecca to oversee the destabilization effort.

Whether all of the details so far released prove to be accurate or not, Iran's unmistakable hand in the Mecca disturbances, and Khomeini's subsequent harsh verbal attacks against the Saudi regime, constitute a de facto declaration of war by the Iranian government against Saudi Arabia, adding to Khomeini and Parliamentary Speaker Hashemi Rafsanjani's earlier declarations of war against the United States, Britain, and Kuwait.

### **Russians bearing gifts**

It was in this context that Soviet First Deputy Foreign Minister Yuli Vorontsov arrived in Teheran on Aug. 4 for three days of high-level meetings with Iranian officials, including President Ali Khamenei, Prime Minister Hussein Moussavi, and Foreign Minister Velayati. According to a TASS release the next day, Vorontsov and his Iranian counterparts issued a joint statement condemning the "unprecedented build-up of U.S. military presence in the area."

In the same release, TASS announced new large-scale Soviet-Iranian joint economic ventures, including oil pipeline construction and railroad building.

Although Vorontsov traveled directly from Teheran to Baghdad, Moscow's siding with Teheran in the Gulf war of nerves will not go unnoticed. As long as the United States and its Western European partners live up to their military commitments and continue to treat the Khomeini regime as a belligerent, Moscow's diplomatic games will increasingly fall on deaf ears and the Gorbachov command will be increasingly forced to place its cards on the table.

High-level U.S. intelligence sources report mounting concerns that Soviet-Iranian Friendship Treaty clauses, providing for Soviet troops to be "invited" into northern Iran, will be invoked. As a result, these sources report, the United States is now negotiating possible terms for a similar friendship treaty with the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

### **A LaRouche card**

These same sources report that the recent Ankara meeting between Turkish Prime Minister Özal and Democratic Party presidential candidate Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr. is being widely read as a signal by the Turkish government that it favors a hardline stance by Washington against both the renegade Khomeini regime and the Gorbachov-Ogarkov regime in Moscow.

LaRouche is known internationally for his longstanding call for an all-out effort to crush Khomeini's fundamentalist regime and for his repeated warnings about Moscow's true intentions to consolidate a global empire under the guise of its *glasnost* and *perestroika* policies. Turkey, as the one NATO country bordering on the Soviet Union, Iran, and Syria, will necessarily play a central role in any Western response to Soviet maneuvers in and around Iran.

### **Political economy of warfare**

As the Reagan White House and the Congress continue with their suicidal horse-trading to keep the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings budget guidelines intact through the 1988 presidential election campaign, while at the same time averting a financial blowout, increasingly the administration will be confronted with a series of impossible choices, brought on by the demands of continuing resource commitments to the Gulf military mission and similar commitments elsewhere.

Sources close to Defense Secretary Weinberger confirm that it is hoped that one outcome of the U.S. assertion of its traditional role in the Gulf will be to force President Reagan to face up to the economic requirements of America's revived global commitment. In effect to introduce through a national security "back door," the kind of industrial mobilization that President Roosevelt launched in 1939 when the threat of Nazi conquest of Europe forced the United States to turn around a decade of depression collapse.