

of so-called Non-Governmental Organizations.

Documents seized by the Philippine Army in a raid on an NPA hideout revealed the massive international support apparatus. One document, "Report on International Solidarity Work—January 1986 to November 1987," details the network including numbers of "exposurists" or visitors to the NPA and their front groups, from 31 countries including Japan, United States, Western and Eastern Europe, totaling 1,753 individuals. No fewer than 69 organizations, ranging from left-oriented charities to the Japanese Communist Party, are listed as having funneled money into the NPA's coffers—among them, the Philippine Action Group and the World Council of Churches.

The same cache revealed that the NPA maintains a network of foreign bank accounts and shipping and forwarding companies in Singapore, Hong Kong, and elsewhere, where money from support groups, plus "protection" money from foreign multinational companies operating in the Philippines, is deposited. It is believed, but not confirmed, that one account is held at the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation. Estimated at several million dollars, it is used to buy weapons and ammunition. Shipments are handled by the shipping and forwarding companies. It is even believed that many of the so-called "fisheries" projects financed by Western aid agencies are actually supplying boats to ship weapons.

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## Assad weighs options for Syria's crisis

by Selim al Khodr

The silence coming from Damascus is deafening, it has been noted by intelligence observers. Indeed, who can cite any major statements from Syria's President Hafez al Assad or the numerous vice presidents, from Abdel Halim Khaddam to Rifaat al Assad, since Iran's decision to accept U.N. Resolution 598 in July?

In less than a month, Hafez al Assad, who likes to think of himself as a spider sitting in a middle of a web covering the entire Middle Eastern region, has seen many of his strings cut. He was not consulted by his Iranian allies on their decision to abruptly end the Gulf War, and was as taken aback as anyone. He was even less informed prior to Jordan's King Hussein's dramatic decision to renounce all claims to the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Assad's pride may have been hurt, and badly, but this matters little in comparison to the full implications for Syria of these two moves. In a matter of a few weeks, close to eight years of an elaborately worked-out strategy whereby Damascus had established its position as the regional power-broker, will have come to nothing.

### Twist in relations with Teheran

Of decisive importance is the end of the Gulf War. Though this does not put, at least not immediately, an end to the "strategic relationship" between Damascus and Teheran, it means the isolation of Syria. The relationship had a value when Iran was threatening the Gulf countries which, in turn, had to go to Damascus to convey their messages to Teheran. To play such a role, Syria has received no less than 4 million tons of oil from Iran since 1981, at a value of \$2 billion, much less than the market price, and more than five times less than the amount in blackmail money paid by the Gulf countries under the cover of "financial help to the steadfastness countries."

The Syrians did not miss the fact that one of Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati's first gestures when he reached the U.N. headquarters in New York last month, was to meet with all the Arab ambassadors with which Iran does not have diplomatic relations. Velayati's message was simple: Iran has taken the "strategic initiative" of choosing peace, and is ready to establish a direct dialogue with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)—no more intermediaries.

Though it is unknown whether the Gulf countries have already shifted their policy toward Syria, Iran has become cooler.

On Aug. 12, Velayati transmitted a message to Assad from Iranian President Ali Khamenei, in which he asked if Assad would be kind enough to finally pay the \$2 billion. Iran at peace needs money for reconstruction and does not need to use Syria to threaten Iraq with a western front.

Concretely, this leaves Syria in a lonely but open confrontation with an Iraqi regime, which as yet shows no sign of being destabilized by the ongoing peace talks. Confident of Iraq's present position, on Aug. 15, Iraqi Vice President Taha Yassin Ramadan denounced Assad as a "traitor to the Arab Nation," whose country should be "expelled from the Arab League." Indeed, the principle is that if neither Iraq and Iran won or lost the war, their allies and proxies did.

Just as Iraq is about to sacrifice the Iranian Mujahideen and the Iranian Kurds, Iran will get rid of its ill-fated Badr 9 units made of Iraqi Shi'ites, and its Iraqi Kurds. Intelligence sources say a tacit agreement between Baghdad and Teheran is that fighting and skirmishes may be allowed to go on in the coming weeks, for each other's proxies to massacre each other, hence saving both capitals a major embarrassment. Likewise, when it has to choose between the GCC and Syria, Iran will choose the former.

## Controlling the Palestinians

Assad is all too aware of these calculations. And this has been aggravated by his total failure to control the Palestinian movement, which he considered Syria's trump card in the Middle East conflict with Israel. The Jordanian decision to renounce claims to the West Bank and Gaza occupied by the Israelis, is expected to lead the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to create a government-in-exile which, to add insult to injury, might even be headquartered in Baghdad or in Cairo.

There will not be any room for Syria's pet Palestinians of the stamp of Abu Musa and others. Already sensing the change, pro-Syrian groups like the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) of George Habbash have declared themselves favorable to such a move; no one wants to miss the chance of a portfolio, even an exiled one. Doubtless, Habbash's move may also have been inspired by the desire of the Syrians to be able to subvert from within rather than without. There is nonetheless the concrete danger that Habbash will then use whatever role he has in such a government, as leverage to gain more independence from the Syrians. This may leave Damascus with the only card it is good at, deploying international terrorists against key Palestinian figures.

According to intelligence sources, this series of events has put President Assad into a state of cold fury. One of the first victims of Assad's temper was State Department envoy Richard Murphy, when they met in Damascus on Aug. 5. Murphy had come to assess Assad's reactions to King Hus-

sein's move, as well as to present the latest list prepared by the State Department for the Lebanese presidential elections. Murphy's list contained five names. Breaking with his pattern of never displaying emotion in diplomatic negotiations, Assad went into a fit of rage and asked Murphy whether there were any American troops in Beirut. He then threw the list into the garbage, saying that Syria had already made its choice for Lebanon.

Intelligence sources report that, as of that time, this was actually not the case. However, Assad then decided to throw all caution to the winds and granted his support for the candidacy of former President Suleyman Franjeh, in full knowledge that the candidacy could not be accepted by the mainstream of the Christian community, which recalls how he had called on Syria to intervene in 1976.

Only a few weeks earlier, Assad had felt confident enough to consider a compromise candidate for Lebanon. When Franjeh had first requested his backing, Assad had gone into a flattering tirade on how Franjeh was "too important" to be encumbered by the mere post of Lebanon's President. Franjeh returned home, his hopes doused.

This rapid change of mood indicates that Syria is committed to consolidating its power in Lebanon as rapidly as possible, regardless of the blood price to be paid. Lebanon is Syria's last card for the time being. It needs a stooge as President to implement rapid political and constitutional reforms. Syria's sudden shift has also been prompted by the fact that Iraq, since the lull in the Gulf war fighting started, began investing arms and money in Lebanon. Samir Geagea's Lebanese Forces as well as the PLO have been the recipients of this explicitly anti-Syrian military aid.

Lastly, Lebanon is important because that is where the hostages are located. After his row with Murphy, Assad sent a request that U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Vernon Walters come to Damascus. This has nothing to do with the Lebanese elections, obviously. Syria wants to impress on Washington that ongoing negotiations between the United States and Iran will be fruitless, unless Syria's role is recognized. The same message prompted the visit of Velayati to Damascus, with Iran calling on Syria to "help." That is at least a card that Assad can play right now.

While he is not expected to hamper Iran's promises to West Germany for a rapid release of the one West German hostage, some delay may occur as far as the American, and especially the British, hostages are concerned. Assad is also furious at the fact that while London is taking the fast lane to reestablishing full relations with Iran, the country which ordered the kidnaping of the hostages, there is no change in Anglo-Syrian relations. London is still adamant that Syria has not displayed enough willingness to break with terrorism. This has become a major problem in the relations between Syria and the European Community as a whole.

Hence, Syria's political silence bodes no good, but contains the seeds of Hafez al Assad's usual bloody tricks.