

phere” now existing in the Soviet Union under *glasnost* to “undermine the system.”

“Special forces [agents] are coordinating this activity, using mass information media, sending emissaries into our country. . . . These special forces and subversive ideological centers, seeking to sabotage the *perestroika*, are trying to encourage in our country the organizing of illegal, semi-legal, and even legal groupings which would operate at their command. To achieve their aims, they seek out hostile elements in our society . . . giving them moral and material support, and practically instigating them on a course of outright confrontation with the Soviet government and social system.”

Chebrikov thus made it clear not only that Moscow was blaming the West for the unrest in the Russian Empire, but that, “among the intelligence services, the Cold War is on in full force.”

The timing of the Chebrikov interview was also striking. Every year, in mid-September, the Soviet Union dutifully celebrates the birthday of Felix Dzhherzhinsky, founder and head of the KGB’s predecessor, the Cheka, immediately after the Bolshevik takeover. The occasion is marked by a major address given by the current KGB chief, i.e., Chebrikov, which is dutifully printed in the newspapers. Here is striking proof of not only how grave the crisis in the Russian Empire is, but also of the speed with which Moscow wishes to begin constructing the case to justify outward expansion to eliminate those Western “centers” allegedly causing the unrest. Chebrikov could not wait even two weeks to get the message out.

The offensive blaming the West for the unrest reached its first peak in *Pravda* Sept. 6, where the West was blamed for the Polish crisis. “Imperialist forces, with the U.S.A. at the head, are seeking to exploit the strikes in Poland . . . to build up their assets.” The strikes were “chosen by anti-socialist forces as a tool to undermine Poland’s economic foundations.” Then followed a commentary, linking past and present “imperialist” operations against the Soviet Empire:

“What have we observed in recent weeks? The 20th anniversary of the Czechoslovakia events of 1968 neared and a veritable anti-socialist Black Sabbath is organized. Strikes broke out in Poland and a furious commotion is raised about this episode as well. As is well known, imperialism has already tried more than once to use the internal problems of socialist countries to prod the forces of counterrevolution into action. . . . Their efforts failed [in the past]. But the enemies of socialism are not stopping their destructive schemes,” and here, the strike wave in Poland is cited as a key example.

Pravda’s conclusion, “The activities of the Western intelligence services have inflicted damage on the political, military, and economic interests of the Soviet Union.”

These articles are the first warning signs of the mounting danger of military thrusts outward by Moscow to solve its deepening internal crisis.

Soviet base in Syria new offensive in the

by Selim al Khodr

A political fight is about to erupt in Western military and political circles over what should be the response to Moscow’s latest challenge in the Mediterranean. According to an Aug. 27 *New York Times*, U.S. Rear Adm. William O. Studeman, director of the National Security Agency, and Norman Polmar, a U.S. Navy specialist on Soviet military affairs, warned in early August that the Soviet Union is engaged in extensive construction work at the Syrian port of Tartus, building the first major Soviet naval base of its kind in the Mediterranean since the late 1940s.

In the short term, the base will enhance Soviet naval military deployment worldwide, by allowing the Soviet fleet to bypass the Black Sea and the Dardanelles. Instead, the Soviet fleet in the Baltic could be sent through the North Sea and the Atlantic into the Mediterranean, having at their disposal major military facilities on a permanent basis. Middle Eastern military observers report that Tartus is expected to become the Cam Ranh Bay of the Mediterranean, throwing a major military challenge to the whole NATO naval deployment in the region. Not by coincidence, it comes at a time that the presence of the U.S. Sixth Fleet in the region is being questioned, and that the United States is under threat of expulsion from Greece. Actually, except for Naples in Italy, the United States has no permanent naval base which could be compared to what the Soviets are getting in Tartus.

Why the U.S. silence?

Questions have been raised as to why the *New York Times* publicized the matter, and not the U.S. government. An indication was given in Norman Polmar’s statement that he had advised congressional members that the “U.S. should protest to Syria.” The remark underlines the fact that Washington has, to date, not done so. On the contrary, State Department officials have been quoted saying that the new U.S. ambassador to Damascus, Edward Djerejian, has been asked to quietly raise the issue with the Syrian leadership, but has so far received “no answer.”

Intelligence sources report that the State Department was embarrassed by the *New York Times* article. Following a stormy session on Aug. 5 between State Department Middle

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East specialist Richard Murphy and Syrian President Hafez al Assad, over the issue of the Lebanese presidential elections, Foggy Bottom has been eager to play down any hint of a crisis.

But NATO intelligence sources in the region indicate that the real embarrassment comes from the fact that many within the State Department consider that, as part of the ongoing superpower negotiations on global power-sharing agreements, Moscow is entitled to have a base at Tartus, hence a foot in the Mediterranean. Unofficially, the same diplomatic circles are arguing that, given that the U.S. Sixth Fleet has been increasingly relying on Haifa, Israel, as a port of call and for maintenance, it is "fair" to allow the Soviets the same freedom in Syria. In the same vein, it is pointed out that Washington's coordination with the Soviet naval deployment in the Persian Gulf played a positive role in speeding the process of a settlement of the Gulf War.

A recently published report from the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies gives the political guidelines behind this policy. Titled "Meeting the Maverick: The Regional Challenges Facing the Next President," and written by staffers Andrew Goldberg and Debra Van Opstal, the report warns that Washington is to be confronted by "well-armed and assertive Third World States . . . the growth of Japanese and European economic, military and political influence and the modernization of China." The authors observe that the "old paradigm," according to which U.S. defense policy had the "single-minded focus of deterring the Soviet Union, is decreasingly relevant." The report concludes that Washington has to accept the reality of a "condominium of interests in which the Soviet Union and the United States together would seek to contain other power centers and regional states." Though the report has had only a limited circulation so far, it has already generated disbelief and anger among U.S. allies abroad.

The Soviet build-up in Syria

These developments have not occurred overnight, but are the result of several years of Soviet military build-up in Syria since the 1980 signing of a friendship and cooperation treaty

between the two countries. Since approximately the mid-1980s, the Soviet Union has been allowed to use both the ports of Latakia and Tartus as ports of call, as well as for minor repairs of their Mediterranean fleet. Intelligence observers note that last October's visit of Admiral Grishin, first deputy commander of the Soviet Naval Forces, paved the way for an extension of the Soviet naval commitment to Syria. It was followed by the January 1988 visit to Tartus of Adm. Vladimir Chernavin, commander in chief of the Soviet Naval Forces, who also laid the groundwork for the extension of a nearby air base.

Since then, there has been a steady stream of high Soviet military officials visiting Syria, from Gen. Vladimir Pikalov, chief of the Chemical Warfare Department of the Army in March, Marshal of Aviation and Chief of the Soviet Air Force Anatoly Yefimov in April, and Admiral of the Fleet A.I. Sorokin, first deputy chief of the Main Political Directorate of the Soviet Army and Navy, in May. Each was accompanied by a large military delegation of experts, many of whom have remained in Syria.

The issues for Western intelligence

How far the construction work in Tartus has proceeded, remains a military secret. However, intelligence sources report that the Soviets are involved in top-secret work on the nearby island of Arwad. Though too small to harbor a full-fledged naval base, its deep water and its remoteness make the small island perfectly suitable to receive some of Moscow's most advanced submarines. As a cover, Syria has just received three new Kilo-class Soviet submarines.

To build a military base in Syria represents a major commitment to that country and its leadership, which has been most welcome by President Assad. Especially in the recent period, Assad had grown wary of the possibility of a confrontation with Iraq, following the end of the Gulf War. The Soviet moves also clarify Syria's intended role in the region. Intelligence analysts are pointing to two issues. First, the Soviet build-up in Syria is occurring at a time when Moscow is said to be cutting down on its deployment in the Third World; hence, its commitment to Syria underlines that, as far as Soviet strategists are concerned, Syria and the Near East are not "Third World," but are a militarily integrated part of the Soviet European and Mediterranean war theater. Second, the construction of the base clarifies the question of Soviet-Syrian relations at a time when, since May 1987, there have been rumors of tension between the two countries. Then, General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachov had called on Syria to join a peace initiative in the Middle East, which Assad refused.

The recent developments underscore that Syria's military importance for Moscow overshadows political divergences. And, notwithstanding the wheelings and dealings of the State Department, this has all of Syria's neighbors extremely worried.