

Report from Bonn by Rainer Apel

Gulf war also a proxy East-West war

Moscow is pursuing military as well as diplomatic objectives in the U.S.-Iraq war.

Why haven't the Soviets committed troops to the multinational Gulf expedition? Is it simply the much-referenced "Afghanistan syndrome"? Or is there more to it?

This is a question that has been posed by Arabists and Sovietologists in Germany whom *EIR* talked to in the early phase of the Gulf crisis late last summer and again after the outbreak of the war. Back in October and November 1990, several of these experts warned of the potentially "grave strategic miscalculation of the Americans."

"Bush believes that his accords with Gorbachov are stable enough to allow him to act unrestricted in the Gulf, but he tends to overlook that the Soviet interests in that region are different from the American interests," warned one Arabist.

A retired senior German military man, formerly assigned to NATO operations, warned in mid-November that Gorbachov was pursuing a policy of watching the Americans move into a quagmire from which they would escape only at the cost of profound humiliation—as in Vietnam.

This expert said the strength of the Iraqi military was underrated by the Americans, who would be faced with a bloody war of attrition. "Iraq is not in the position compared to the United States, that Poland was in compared to Germany in 1939. Air raids alone won't suffice, as the Americans should know, having tried it at Dresden" in February 1945. "Gorbachov is watching what Bush is doing, and what is going to happen to the U.S. expedition force—after all, that's half of the total firepower the Americans

have down there, leaving aside the nuclear arsenals, naturally," he said.

"Gorbachov knows he is presiding over a bankrupt country, and Bush may not know yet what his country will look like after a Gulf war. The U.S. can't even pay the costs of their expedition corps down there now, before the war has even erupted—some quarter-million dollars per day. Real combat will drive the costs sky-high. The war will ruin the Americans. Why should Gorbachov do anything to prevent that? It will bring his main adversary down, so he's giving verbal support to Bush, but doesn't do anything beyond that, otherwise."

This was said in November. It is interesting to report what German experts think about that crisis, now that a shooting war has broken out.

"The Soviet military is keeping its ties with Iraq, and maybe more than that," a senior Sovietologist told *EIR* one week after the first U.S. bombs had been dropped on Baghdad. The interest of the Soviets is not to get directly involved in the Gulf war, but to analyze the performance of the most modern U.S. military technology, with emphasis on the air-war potentials, under live combat conditions, the source said.

The Gulf war provides the Soviet military with a unique opportunity to document for Moscow why there has to be increased funding of research projects in air and missile defense, and where exactly the improvements of Soviet air defense would have to occur, the source pointed out.

Another Sovietologist with some insight into Soviet operations in the

Mideast, said it could not be ruled out that Moscow encouraged Saddam Hussein to walk into this war, giving him guarantees of military supplies. The interest of the Soviets was to supply the Iraqis with the matériel and intelligence required to cause ultimate damage to the American forces in a way that would fit Soviet strategic interests. In any case, the Americans were using up their expensive, modern weapons systems in a showdown with relatively outmoded, less costly Iraqi systems. This source mooted that Iraq was serving as a "guinea pig" for the Soviets to test out what kind of primitive weapons could neutralize the highly developed U.S. war potentials in future conflicts.

Two recent statements from Moscow reported on German media seem to corroborate that evaluation.

Elfie Siegl, a German newspaper correspondent in Moscow, reported Jan. 22 that "Soviet military view the Iraq war as a proxy war: the multinational troops fighting with the most modern Western arms against the predominantly Soviet military technology of Iraq." She added that there was a strong pro-Iraqi lobby in the Soviet military-industrial complex.

On Jan. 27, German media quoted Soviet general of the artillery Vladimir Mikhalkin as saying that "Iraq has a sufficient supply of missiles to carry out this war also over an extended period." Mikhalkin confessed that the Soviets had supplied Iraq with "many missiles in the 1970s," and that these missiles, the Scud-Bs, had been much improved by Western technicians in the 1980s so that their range had been doubled or almost tripled.

Mikhalkin omitted any mention of U.S. firms like Hewlett-Packard, which had, during the thaw in American-Soviet relations, supplied Iraq's missile industries with modern computer and electronic components.