

## The 'unpredictable' Carter adds to Middle East danger

by Konstantin George

President Carter, at the request of Saudi Arabia, dispatched four AWACS (Airborne Warning and Control Systems) radar aircraft to monitor the fighting in the Gulf. This move reignites the potential superpower flash-point dimensions of a Gulf crisis generated by the war.

The Defense Department statement announcing the U.S. action was as follows:

The U.S. Government, in response to a request from the Saudi Arabian Government, has initiated the temporary deployment of AWACS aircraft to Saudi Arabia. This deployment is purely for defensive purposes. It is designed to track aircraft and thus to provide additional warning for Saudi defenses.

The U.S. Government unequivocally reaffirms its position of neutrality. We are committed to as rapid a termination as possible of the conflict between Iran and Iraq, in accordance with U.N. resolution 479, or other peaceful initiatives. These aircraft are being deployed consistent with these peaceful objectives.

The tenor of the question and answer session that followed provided every indication that further escalations could occur. The questioning focused on whether similar U.S. moves were either underway or under discussion with Israel, Bahrain and Oman. The concern over U.S. involvement widening and deepening was evident.

A speech delivered that day in Mobile, Alabama by National Security Affairs Director Zbigniew Brzezinski, provided the clearest signal to date that the Carter administration is beginning to tilt toward a direct confrontation course: "The U.S. has all military means necessary to act in the Middle East on behalf of its self-interest. The U.S. favors the independence and sovereignty of Iran."

In earlier leaks to the *New York Times*, the Pentagon had cited two interlocking "conditions" that could, if the decision were made in Washington, dispatch RDF units to the Gulf region: "Repelling an incursion from a smaller nation, such as Iraq, into the oil producing nations around the Gulf," and "helping a friendly nation . . . at the request of that nation's government."

Questions on the theme of the U.S. moves occurring on the basis of "request of that nation's government" recurred from the press following Brzezinski's statement.

### A zig-zag pattern

The day of the Pentagon announcement, Sept. 30, also witnessed editorials in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, exhorting Carter to proceed as if a substantive basis for invoking the "second contingency"—"repelling Iraq"—existed.

The AWACS escalation, and what the move may portend, are indicative of an "escalation-pullback" pattern exhibited from the start of the Iran-Iraq war by what the Europeans call the "unpredictable" Carter regime.

The first action of the Carter administration after the war began was to openly urge Khomeini to free the hostages as a straightforward deal whereby the United States could then begin rearming Iran for its war defense against Iraq. No results were evident.

The next move was the call for an international naval task force to be assembled by the United States, Britain, France, Italy and Japan. That was shot down by the allies, who said they saw no need to force open the Straits of Hormuz when no immediate danger to international shipping existed. The only foreign head of state to accept Carter's initiatives for talks on the naval force, Premier Francesco Cossiga of Italy, found himself unseated by what most observers claim to be no coincidence the next day.

After measuring the rejection from overseas, the White House beat a retreat Sept. 26 through the following statement: "In view of the importance of minimizing the effects of the conflict on international shipping and world petroleum markets, the U.S. had indicated that it would be willing to host a meeting to review the issue if that should seem desirable. No such meeting has been set."

Next, the administration conceded repeatedly that, as Energy Secretary Duncan was forced to characterize the situation, "we should be able to maintain a high rate of stability in the international oil markets. . . . under present circumstances the situation is manageable."

However, the climate for a U.S. military intervention into the Gulf was escalated as of Oct. 3, with the visit to Israel of Defense Department Undersecretary Robert Komer, an architect of the U.S. Rapid Deployment Force. Israel has attempted to provoke Iraq into expanding its offensive against Iran, creating the preconditions for a superpower showdown. Egypt's Anwar Sadat has offered the Carter administration military bases from which to offer "protection" to the Saudi Arabians, whether they want it or not.

Since the war danger arising from prospective U.S. moves in the Gulf is by no means contained, Western Europe has concentrated on finding ways to contain a Carter lurch towards confrontation, and build a minimal framework for strategic stability. European policy-makers are, among other things, attempting to shape a second Carter administration so as to at least remove the "unpredictability" problem embodied in National Security Adviser Brzezinski, a problem that can create a world war by miscalculation in the short term.

It has been recognized that the problem is one of not individual but institutional unpredictability, centered on the institution of the National Security Council itself.

## Administration actions since the war began

**Sept. 21:** No official statement by Washington.

**Sept. 22:** Defense Department comments matter-of-factly that Iranian armed forces, including the navy, "have been shattered" since the Khomeini takeover. Secretary of State Muskie makes the blatant offer of military aid to Khomeini. "We recognize the reality of the Iranian revolution. [If the U.S. hostages are released] the U.S. is prepared to deal on a basis of mutual respect and equality with the Khomeini regime."

**Sept. 23:** Carter issues his first "neutrality" declaration. "We are not taking a position in support of either Iran or Iraq. . . . There is only minimum involvement at this time . . . of ground forces." Muskie apparently has a different intelligence reading: "The United States has no intelligence on war developments, and has not been in touch with either Iran or Iraq."

**Sept. 24:** Carter, campaigning in Portland, Oregon, reiterates, "We will not become involved in the combat and we are urging and insisting that the Soviet Union and other nations not intervene in this very dangerous situation in the Persian Gulf area. . . . We do have military forces in the area, but we don't anticipate at all any use of American forces." The same day, Carter contradicts his own professions of "neutrality" by repeating Muskie's offer of arms to Khomeini for a deal on the hostages: "Iran needs to be a part of the international community . . . they need to get spare parts for their weapons, and so forth, and this could induce them to release the hostages."

Central Intelligence Agency Director Stansfield Turner warns of "danger" in Iraqi victory, in an appearance before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee: "Iraqi air superiority will mean a defeat for Iran and be dangerous for Iran's stability." Muskie gives the first faint signal of possible future military involvement: "We have a special stake in the area."

**Sept. 25:** Carter discloses the international naval task

force initiative: "We're consulting other nations about what ought to be done to keep the Straits of Hormuz open." This escalation, despite no apparent danger to the straits, is joined by Carter's official admission of U.S.-Iranian arms negotiations, albeit "indirectly." "We've consulted through other means with Iran . . . but that particular point [release of hostages in exchange for military spare parts] would perhaps be better for me not to single out among the others."

**Sept. 26:** Administration suspends the sale of six remaining General Electric ship turbine engines to the Iraqi navy. Muskie declares that the crisis inherently carries with it the danger of nuclear war: "The Middle East is such an unstable area, so potentially explosive, that when hostilities erupt, it could escalate to the point where the ultimate unthinkable hostilities could take place."

**Sept. 27:** The White House announces that it is still willing to convene a meeting of America's major allies to "discuss ways of keeping oil moving . . . if ship traffic is threatened." The statement followed European and Japanese flat rejections of the international naval task force proposal. It also followed direct Carter administration admissions that even with a worst case indefinite interruption of Iran and Iraq's oil supplies there was no danger of any oil shortages in the world's consuming nations.

**Sept. 28:** Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger is quoted claiming that "events over the past 48 hours show that Iran is the only effective bulwark against the Soviet Union in the Middle East."

**Sept. 29:** The administration leaks that Deputy Secretary of Defense William Graham Claytor, Jr. had ordered the services to submit proposals for improving the Rapid Deployment Forces before the war, so as to bring the forces to readiness.

**Sept. 30:** Pentagon announces that Carter has ordered the dispatch of four AWACS radar aircraft to Saudi Arabia. Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert Komer is in Egypt for talks with Egypt's leaders, discussing RDF "forward-basing"—out of Egypt—contingency plans.

**Oct. 1:** Komer leaves Egypt for Israel. Pentagon announces that the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Jones, will arrive later in the week in Cairo for more talks with Egyptians. The talks are to center on "the use of Egypt as a forward-basing area into any Arab nation that requests it."

## CARTER CAMPAIGN

# The strategy and the new setbacks

by Kathleen Murphy

With less than a month before the U.S. presidential elections, apprehension continues that Jimmy Carter might resort to a provoked foreign policy crisis.

"We expect Carter to try to pull off some kind of foreign policy grandstanding within the next two weeks," one Washington source says. "He wasn't able to get the hostages out of Iran, so he may try some kind of military intervention, especially if the Iran-Iraq conflict drags on."

Enhancing this possibility is the fact that Carter, despite one of the dirtiest campaigns on record, has managed to fall behind Ronald Reagan, with no prospect of reversing the trend through normal means.

The latest *New York Times*-CBS poll, taken shortly after the League of Women Voters-sponsored debate Sept. 21, shows Reagan moving from four points behind Carter to a five-point lead. The *Times*-CBS poll also revealed that Reagan is winning the competition for independent voters who have deserted John Anderson, contrary to earlier expectations that Anderson's decline would benefit Mr. Carter.

Carter is encountering unprecedented hostility from traditional Democratic Party constituencies as well. Many Jewish voters bitterly oppose Carter for what they perceive to be his anti-Israel stand. The two leaders of the newly formed national Democrats for Reagan, former Watergate prosecutor Leon Jaworski and Hershey Gold, are both prominent figures on the Zionist political circuit. Carter would be badly hurt in key states like New York and Florida if enough Jewish voters decided to simply sit out the election.

Carter's weakest flank is the economy. Despite administration claims that an economic recovery is just around the corner, few blue-collar workers, supermarket shoppers, businessmen, or farmers have been persuaded by Carter's predictions of an upturn. Unable to deal with the underlying causes of the country's economic disasters, Carter instead is turning to politically selective "quick fix" transfusions of federal funds.

Carter's newly released steel recovery program is a case in point. Release of the program was clearly targeted