

Shultz pulls Kremlin into Mideast deals

by Scott Thompson

Secretary of State George Shultz returned on Feb. 1 from an abortive round of shuttle diplomacy in the Middle East. There is every indication that the crisis there, which has pitted Israeli and Arab fundamentalists in violence now nearing South African levels, will only worsen. The "peace plan" Shultz brought with him, in any case, only showed that the United States is abdicating its leadership in the region, and worse. It would establish the Soviet Union as a permanent, legitimized imperial power there.

What is required in the Israeli-Arab conflict is firm U.S. insistence on the sovereign rights of all parties, in the context of an economic "Marshall Plan" for the region. Instead, Shultz went off to do more "crisis management," with no thought of a comprehensive peace settlement. The difference is that Shultz appears intent on engaging the Soviet Union in the process.

This was confirmed by a number of senior figures in the Eastern liberal establishment who were interviewed by *EIR* about the latest "peace initiative." As New York Council on Foreign Relations Mideast expert Paul Jabber put it, the timing of U.S. moves in the middle of the U.S. presidential campaign and the Israeli national elections, is "unfortunate" for any chances of success.

The U.S. administration seeks a "quick change in political conditions on the West Bank and Gaza," a senior State Department official said. It would "include such things as control by the Palestinians over their daily lives, such as land, water, and police." This is a sped-up version of Camp David: Shultz foresees a waiting period of six months (not Camp David's five years) before the final status and sovereignty of the West Bank and Gaza Strip is determined. The solution is based on the formula, "territory for peace," of U.N. Resolution 242.

By contrast, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, on a world tour before Shultz's visit, proposed that Israel give up the territories almost immediately, as the first in a series of actions toward Palestinian self-government.

Giving the Soviets an equal footing

Shultz discussed the Middle East with Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, beginning Feb. 22 in Moscow. Shortly before the Shultz-Shevardnadze meeting, Vladimir Polyakov, the head of the Soviet Foreign Ministry's

Middle East and North Africa Department, went on a tour of the region to build support for an international conference to be held under U.N. Security Council auspices. The Soviet move has gained wide support in the PLO, Jordan, and Egypt. Shultz went so far in this direction in Moscow as to offer the Soviet Union "equal footing" in an "international event" that would place its imprimatur upon a final peace settlement.

It is because of a U.S. abdication of leadership in the Middle East, that this idea, which would make the Soviet Union an "indispensable" superpower in the region, has taken hold with moderate Arab governments. Matters have reached such a point that Polyakov, for example, was able to visit Saudi Arabia, the first major visit by a Soviet official in 50 years. The Saudis are now considering renewing diplomatic relations with the Soviets once they were to withdraw from Afghanistan.

Regardless of the outcome of his mission, Shultz told Shevardnadze that the Middle East would again be on the agenda when the two meet in Washington, D.C. on March 22.

The revolt of the West Bank and Gaza is causing a process of political polarization in the Middle East. There are serious splits in the Israeli leadership, dividing the Likud/Labor Party ruling coalition. Before Shultz's arrival, Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and the Likud ministers passed a resolution that Israel would stick to the Camp David accords; however, it is unlikely that Shamir would even adhere to a Camp David solution, unless the administration is willing to put extreme pressure on Israel, such as a threatened aid cut-off.

The Likud Party right wing and its fundamentalist allies, the forces associated with Likud Party minister Gen. Ariel Sharon, are preparing to expel as many as 1.5 million Arabs from the occupied territories, so that annexation can proceed unhindered. This Nazi-like act, they call "more humane" than their shootings and beatings.

One of Sharon's close allies, General Zvi, announced Feb. 27 that he is forming a Committee for Mass Expulsion of Palestinians. The base for this group is Rabbi Meir Kahane's Kach Party and the Gush Emunim settlers cult, who have already formed vigilante squads to carry out atrocities in the occupied lands. Meanwhile, Sharon himself took to the pages of the *Wall Street Journal* Feb. 24 to warn the United States not to interfere in Israel's operations on the West Bank. He said that "continued painful friction between the two peoples" would persist until the Palestinians "mature," warning that since "there is no prospect of any American compromise holding up in practice, it would be best not to get involved."

Radical leaders of the Palestine Liberation Organization called a boycott of Shultz's trip, warning that "any Palestinian personalities inside our occupied land" would face grave consequences if they met Shultz to discuss his "Bantustan"-type approach. This kept Palestinian moderates like newspaper editor Hanna Siniora from presenting Shultz with the demands of the Palestinians in the territories.