

Pending approval by the Palestinian National Council, the 450-member governing body of the PLO, Arafat could use any one of these high-profile speaking engagements to make a dramatic announcement of the formation of a "provisional government."

Such a move would be almost certainly coupled with a formal declaration by the PNC, recognizing the state of Israel and dropping some traditional Palestinian demands, including, some sources say, the demand of the immediate return to the pre-1967 borders and the withdrawal by Israel of any claims over Jerusalem.

According to one well-placed Palestinian source, Arafat would like to announce the PNC recognition of Israel before the Israeli elections occur later this autumn.

While Likud candidate and current Prime Minister Shamir has been stirring up the already deeply polarized climate inside Israel with bellicose campaign rhetoric denouncing the Palestinian demonstrators and the PLO, reports have also come out of Israel indicating that the Likud bloc has been involved in back-channel discussions with PLO representatives for six months. And Shamir, as distinct from outright crazies like Ariel Sharon and Rabbi Meir Kahane, has reportedly been shaken up by the recent American warnings against mass deportations and an annexation of the West Bank and Gaza.

One key factor that must be taken into account by Arafat as he charts the PLO through the most opportune, albeit dangerous period of its existence, is the continuing danger that the Palestinian cause may be sold out in some superpower New Yalta condominium. Were Arafat to take some significant initiative prior to Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze's scheduled early-autumn trip to Cairo, that would clearly go a long way toward undercutting any Washington-Moscow deals.

Moscow's recent decision to drastically expand its naval facility at Tartus, Syria in the eastern Mediterranean, certainly underscores the Russians' intention to move in a major way into the region, and may be suggestive of a Russian-American *quid pro quo* to jointly box in an Israeli state that is armed to the teeth with nuclear weapons. If the recent American moves against Israel are part of a superpower deal, then Arafat is in a position to judo those arrangements.

If the Arafat initiative gains steam, the PLO chief will be confronted with another grave obstacle: the prospect of a Syrian-Israeli joint effort to sabotage the independence process through either a serious assassination try against Arafat or an orchestrated "limited war"—during which the Israelis might "justify" the mass deportation of the Palestinians.

With Gov. Michael Dukakis already committed to an "Israel can do no wrong" foreign policy if he is elected in November, it is becoming more and more likely that the fate of the Palestinian people and the entire eastern Mediterranean will be determined by events compressed into a very short period of time—between now and November.

Soviets back IRA in war on Britain

by Mark Burdman

Days before the Irish Republican Army launched its August offensive against Great Britain, the Soviet magazine *New Times* published an unusually blunt statement of support for the IRA, in its July 1988 edition. Britain is being especially targeted for Soviet-backed irregular warfare because of its traditional close ties to the United States within the NATO alliance, and because of the Thatcher government's opposition to "New Yalta" superpower condominium arrangements for Europe, southern Africa, and other regions in the world.

Vladimir Zhitomirsky, described as Moscow's Belfast special correspondent of *New Times*, wrote the article entitled, "People and Bullets," which went way beyond a critique of British policy toward Ireland, into a diatribe against British "terror" against Northern Ireland. Zhitomirsky dated the crisis to "eight centuries ago," when "the Anglo-Norman regular devastating raids on Ireland began," and when "Ireland was turned into the first English colony," with an "apartheid policy" used against the Irish.

Zhitomirsky traced the "present crisis" to the end of the 1960s: precisely the moment that the moribund IRA was revived as an organization by the Soviet intelligence services.

"In 1969, the British government sent its troops across the Irish Sea," he went on, claiming that the British used "as a pretext," the extremist actions of both the "so-called Provisional IRA, which had broken away from the main IRA in 1970," and the ultra-Protestants. The *New Times* author charged that, from 1972 on, "London, in effect, raised the terror against [the people of Northern Ireland] to a new level." He concluded by attacking the Tory government of the U.K., for having refused to implement social projects to help the Irish: "London has no funds for such things. Clearly, maintaining a British military contingent in Ulster costs too much."

'The IRA war'

Since the morning of Aug. 1, with its bombing of an army barracks near British Prime Minister Thatcher's home election district of Finchley, the IRA has been waging an offensive bloodier than any since the 1970s. On the night of Aug. 27-28 alone, British security forces in Northern Ireland reported almost 200 violent events in Belfast and Londonderry, including 27 incidents of shooting at police, 17 bombings, and over 50 hijackings of vehicles whose owners were then forced to drive their vehicles loaded with explosives to se-

lected targets. On Aug. 30, a highly placed IRA source was quoted by France's *Le Monde* daily: "The struggle is entering its final phase. The next 18 months to two years will be crucial, because the IRA possesses the necessary resources to win the war."

Aug. 20. An IRA team using Czech-manufactured and Libyan-supplied Semtex plastic explosives blew up a bus carrying British soldiers returning from leave, on a main highway in Northern Ireland: 8 killed, over 20 wounded.

Aug. 23. The IRA placed a 400-pound car-bomb in the commercial heart of Belfast, which was blown up in a controlled explosion by the police: over \$6 million in damage. The next day, the IRA issued a communiqué announcing a strategy of car bombings aimed at blowing up offices and commercial premises in Northern Ireland, a strategy last used in the 1970s. The communiqué stated that, in the future, such car bombings would be signaled by a small smoke grenade going off, so civilians could leave the area. However, it went on, when the smoke grenade would go off, a microswitch would "sensitize" the vehicle, to prevent bomb-disposal efforts.

Aug. 24. During the night, the British government went on the counterattack. Mrs. Thatcher held an emergency session with Northern Ireland Secretary Tom King to work out a secret package of special measures against the IRA. Experts speculated that the following options were being considered: increasing security cooperation with Dublin; tightening security along the border with the Irish Republic; stepping up covert action and intelligence-gathering activities by the elite SAS (Special Air Services); tightening security for off-duty service personnel; interning terrorist suspects without trial; cracking down on sources of IRA funding, which may be seized and confiscated like the cash of drug traffickers; and banning Sinn Fein, the IRA's political wing.

Aug. 30: Three IRA men evidently in the middle of a planned terrorist action were ambushed and killed in Drumakilly near Omagh in Northern Ireland. According to the Sept. 1 *Daily Telegraph* of London, the ambush was carried out by an Army undercover unit, the Intelligence and Security Group, who had been trained by the SAS. An IRA statement said the three men were "on active service," and were "committed Republicans." The men were carrying two AK-47 rifles and a .38 Webley pistol. One of the men, Michael Harte, has been known to the police since 1983 "as an active terrorist organizing attacks against the security forces," according to the *Telegraph*.

Sept. 1. In an exclusive interview with the *Daily Express*, Mrs. Thatcher commented on such operations: "You obviously set certain criteria and let the people operate within them. Things happen quickly on the ground, but that is what responsibility means." She said, "I think there are people in the IRA and maybe in Sinn Fein, maybe elsewhere as well, who think that if they step up terrorism it will weaken our resolve to stay in the province. Quite the reverse is true.

Terrorism will not win."

She stressed: "When you are faced with terrorists you obviously do not let the terrorists know precisely what steps you are taking to counter their terrorism. Nor shall we. But my message to them is this: *Do not doubt our resolve to defeat terrorism.*"

Target: NATO

On Aug. 31, West German customs police arrest two IRA men who had come into the Federal Republic from Holland. The two are believed to have been involved in bombings, during May-July 1988, of pubs frequented by British soldiers in Holland near the West German border, and of the British military facility near Duisburg, West Germany. German officials had been tipped off by British intelligence officials about the duo's entrance into the Federal Republic. The British wanted the interception to take place in the F.R.G., because of the notoriously soft policy of the Dutch toward the IRA.

These arrests underscore that the IRA is an arm against NATO as a whole, deployed against the British military component of NATO.

On Aug. 31, the Danish paper *BT* reported, citing Danish military sources, that there would be increased security at all the Danish military compounds during the "Bold Grouse" maneuvers in Denmark Sept. 12-16, because IRA terror actions against the British troops participating in the exercises are anticipated. British secret service agents, the paper reported, had already arrived in Denmark, and the terror threat was described by high-level sources as "serious and substantiated."

On Aug. 30, a member of the British Parliament from the Ulster Unionist Party, Gregory Campbell, charged that official maps of the British army bases in West Germany had been abandoned on a garbage ship in Northern Ireland. The maps were officially categorized as "restricted."

On the same day, British Army officials discovered 25 pounds of the Czech-made explosive Semtex, and four mortar tubes, of the type used in numerous serious incidents in Northern Ireland in recent weeks, during a routine check of a bus near the border near Londonderry. Up to now, the British response to the Semtex provocations has been to appeal to the Czech government to crack down on distribution of the explosives, and to focus international attention on Libya as the source of Semtex supply. Given the increasingly angry mood in London, that approach could be transformed into a more overt focus on the Russian origins of IRA terrorism.

U.S. intelligence reports that 27 IRA terrorists have been trained in Syria, should also draw attention in London, especially in light of reports of the Soviets' building a naval base in the Syrian port of Tartus, and given past years' diplomatic brawls between Britain and Syria over Syrian support for international terrorism.