

Andropov plays a Middle East card in bid to secure arms control

by Judith Wyrer

The communiqué issued Jan. 14 following talks between Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) chief Yasser Arafat and Soviet leader Yuri Andropov registered a first, cautious Soviet nod of approval for a scheme of confederation between a future Palestinian state and Jordan. Despite the inclusion of the usual anti-American rhetoric, the positive reference to confederation as a means to solve the Palestinian problem was read in Washington as a sign that Moscow may be prepared to make certain strategic concessions to the U.S.A., beginning in the Middle East, as a trade off for resuming arms talks.

The clause in the communiqué which caused such a stir in western diplomatic circles read: "Yasser Arafat also noted that the PLO comes out for the establishment of relations of confederation on a voluntary basis between the independent Palestinian state after its creation and Jordan. The Soviet side showed an attitude of understanding to this position of the PLO leadership."

Less than one month before Jordan's King Hussein had held talks with President Ronald Reagan in Washington, the subject of a confederated Palestinian-Jordanian state was a top agenda item. George Shultz's State Department is currently looking for a diplomatic means to simultaneously create an independent Palestinian state, presumably satisfying the Arab world, and confederating it to Jordan, side-stepping the persistent Israeli refusal to negotiate an independent Palestinian state.

Until Andropov's meeting with Arafat, Moscow had taken a firm public stance against Palestinian confederation with Jordan, damning it as part of Washington's Camp David framework.

Linkage again?

The sudden Soviet signal on confederation strongly suggests that the geopolitical game of "linking" certain strategic issues and hotspots to arms negotiation is again in fashion.

This is nothing new. Historically, the Middle East has been a bargaining chip in arms talks. Henry Kissinger, Shultz's closest foreign policy adviser, began this process in the early

1970s. Through Kissinger's manipulation, Moscow was induced to give up its alliance with Egypt in order to secure an arms treaty. Immediately thereafter, Kissinger sealed the first phase of the Egypt-Israel agreements which were to evolve into the Camp David Accords.

Making the gesture of another concession in the Middle East, Moscow helped Shultz to "deliver" President Reagan on arms negotiations.

A colleague of Shultz predicted recently that in the "process of arriving at a new arms limitation treaty, an array of global settlements" would be achieved. The source insisted that Shultz sees a series of tradeoffs between the superpowers coming both in the Middle East and Southwest Asia, adding up to what David Rockefeller in 1978 referred to as a "New Yalta" plan. The Mideast would in effect, be carved up between the big powers as were the Balkans and Southern Europe after world War II.

The doublecross factor

While George Shultz, Henry Kissinger, and their game-masters in London may think that they can once again play the linkage game with Moscow, Andropov may be prepared to turn the tables and gain much more than just a new arms limitation treaty.

Shortly after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June 1982, *EIR* warned that the Soviets were preparing to replace the U.S.A. as the dominant superpower in the Middle East, unless the United States began to act like a superpower and contain both Israel and Khomeini's Iran. The U.S.A. could become completely discredited in the Arab world by further Washington failure to restrain the expansionist Begin regime in Lebanon, and on the occupied West Bank, which Israel is, in effect, annexing.

While Moscow is making its conciliatory gestures in the Middle East, it has quietly begun to pursue contacts with a number of strong U.S.-Arab allies, including Egypt and certain Gulf states. More significantly, Moscow has established covert ties to the Begin regime, going back to the 1981 meeting between Israeli Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir

and his Soviet counterpart Andrei Gromyko at the United Nations. Israel's open defiance of Washington has become Moscow's greatest asset as it quietly establishes the basis for future relations with America's closest Arab allies.

Britain has offered Moscow an alliance, in its own bid to push U.S. influence out of the Mideast. London has not hidden this objective since the rift between Washington and London developed in early 1982, with the spy scandal in which Geoffrey Arthur Prime was accused of leaking sensitive NATO intelligence to the KGB.

Last month, the London-based *Middle East* magazine boasted of "British intelligence coups in the Middle East" at the expense of the United States and affirmed that London is reasserting its old colonial mandate, beginning in Jordan.

Both Andropov and British Foreign Minister Francis Pym are now voicing an identical criticism of U.S. Mideast policy, namely that it is calculated to divide the Arab world.

Britain, like Israel, is an obstacle to the confederation scheme. The Thatcher government has refused to receive an Arab League delegation as long as a representative of the PLO is included. Britain is one of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, which has been delegated by the September Arab League summit at Fez, Morocco to participate in future Middle East talks.

Britain's refusal to receive the Arab delegation came after it had already visited the other four permanent members, including the United States, *with* the PLO representative along. The British have thus dealt a setback to the Fez plan, the first peace plan which virtually eliminated the entire Arab leadership, yet is compatible with the Jordanian-Palestinian confederation scheme.

It is no surprise that London was informed of Andropov's concessionary nod to confederation well before Arafat's visit. The lead story in the London *Economist Foreign Report* of Jan. 6 anticipated this move when it reported that Jordan's King Hussein had informed the White House during a December visit that the "Soviet Union might not object to a Palestinian entity, associated with Jordan, in the West Bank and Gaza—if it were to be nonaligned in any superpower strife."

Filling the vacuum of power

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak issued a statement Jan. 17 charging that continued White House refusal to pressure Israel to withdraw from Lebanon is making it "awkward" for Arab governments like his which are strong U.S. allies. Mubarak's declaration is not unusual. Both Saudi Arabia and Lebanon's new government of President Amin Gemayel have sent similar warnings to the White House.

Nonetheless, the executive branch has taken no meaningful action to discipline the Begin regime. The Congressional vote to increase aid to Israel last month only worsened the image of the United States in the Arab world.

For the time being Moscow and London appear to be

working together. Jordan's King Hussein has taken on a critical role in this Anglo-Soviet cooperation.

Britain has developed to a fine art the manipulation of King Hussein, whose Hashemite Dynasty was a British creation. Britain has pledged to the Jordanian monarch that his payoff for going along with the British will be the Haijazi province of Saudi Arabia, the so-called dynastic claim of the Hashemites—and with it the holiest of all Islamic shrines at Mecca.

During the past six weeks, a coalition of ultra-leftists and Muslim extremists calling itself the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Arabian Peninsula (PFLAP) has mobilized to stage an upsurge in Mecca and challenge Saudi rule to the Holy City. Both the KGB and British intelligence share control of the PFLAP, which is being armed by Khomeini's Iran and Qaddafi's Libya.

The Soviet press departed from its usual silence on Saudi Arabia earlier this month when Moscow's Arab-language Radio Peace and Progress relayed its backing for the PFLAP's Human Rights Committee on Saudi Arabia. Only days before, the Iranian press had supported the Human Rights Committee on its charge of Saudi "repression" against the pilgrims in Mecca. The next day the same program broadcast a statement by a leader of the Khomeini-allied Bahrain Liberation Front (BLF), a challenger to the monarchy of Saudi Arabia's neighbor Bahrain. The BLF was created by the British Special Air Services Units, which still dominate certain Gulf states like Oman.

When the Arab League delegation visited Moscow in September, Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al Faisal was included, making him the first official Saudi visitor to Moscow in decades. Saud held a private meeting with his Soviet counterpart Gromyko, and *Pravda* prominently featured photos of the Saudi with Gromyko. Since then the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) a small "Marxist Leninist" satrapy in the Arabian Peninsula, has begun a new round of talks towards normalization of relations with its neighbor and rival, Oman, a tiny oil sheikdom run as a virtual British colony.

During his meeting with the Arab League delegation, Andropov noted the similarities of the Fez summit peace plan and the Soviet Middle East peace plan. Since then, Moscow has stepped up propaganda into the Arab world. On June 15, Moscow radio in Arabic issued a strong call for Soviet involvement in the Middle East peace process. The broadcast took special note of the fact that, "Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jabir as-Sabah, the Kuwaiti foreign minister, frankly stated recently that the comprehensive and just settlement of the Palestinian question is impossible without the participation of the Soviet Union."

Eventually, Moscow could establish official relations with all the Arab Gulf states. Already, in early January, Anatoly Gromyko, the son of the Soviet Foreign Minister, visited Egypt to probe prospects for renewed relations.