

The Islamic world: A tilt toward Moscow and Paris

by Robert Dreyfuss

To the naive observer, and to readers of *The New York Times*, *Newsweek*, the *Washington Post*, the apparent effect of the Soviet Union's move into Afghanistan and of the so-called Carter "Doctrine" concerning the defense of the Persian Gulf has been to increase the credibility of the United States in the Muslim world. A Jan. 29 communique from the Islamabad, Pakistan, conference of 34 Islamic nations' foreign ministers said that the conference, indeed, "condemns the Soviet military aggression against the Afghan people and denounces and deplores it as a flagrant violation of international laws, covenants, and norms." It warned the U.S.S.R. to "refrain from acts of oppression and tyranny against the Afghan people."

And a *New York Times* editorial the following day, entitled "Better News from Islam," proclaimed: "The Islamabad declaration heralds at least a community of interests between the United States and the Moslem nations in their mutual desire to shield the Persian Gulf from Soviet attack or subversion."

But does it?

The *Executive Intelligence Review* has concluded that, in fact, precisely the opposite has occurred. Not only was the Islamabad conference a total failure in its immediate purpose, but most of the nations of the Muslim world—particularly the conservative kingdoms and sheikhdoms of the Arabian Gulf—are quietly executing a "tilt" in the direction of Paris and Moscow. That is the direct consequence of President Carter's State of the Union threat to use military force in the Persian Gulf and to ally with "Islamic fundamentalism."

Many of the Arab governments and others were horrified by the prospect of the United States placing itself in support of the wave of Islamic radicalism and the

terrorist Muslim Brotherhood that now dominates Iran and Pakistan and which has threatened Syria, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Tunisia, and other countries in the area.

Thus, within a few days of the Carter State of the Union message, the Arab world loudly and unanimously rejected the U.S. offer to send forces to protect the oil wells—including Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

Let us consider the situation in the Middle East and southwest Asia point by point.

1. The Carter alliance with Khomeini

"We have no basic quarrel with the nation, the people, and the revolution of Iran," said President Carter Jan. 23, on the eve of his State of the Union address. "We are prepared to work with the government of Iran to develop a new and mutually beneficial relationship." With these words, the Carter administration officially began its quest for a political-military pact with the dictatorship of the Ayatollah Khomeini and Iran's President Abolhassan Bani-Sadr, elected Jan. 25. According to informed U.S. sources, the administration has quietly shelved plans to impose economic sanctions against Iran, and it may step up supplies to the ayatollah's regime even before American hostages are released.

For the year since Khomeini seized power, the U.S. and Great Britain have, covertly, been training Iranian officers, pilots, and naval personnel, shipping arms and ammunition to Iran, and cooperating closely in matters of security and intelligence. In addition, for years the Carter administration, and particularly National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, has viewed "Muslim fundamentalism" as a potential ally in the Islamic world.

On the surface, Carter and Brzezinski justify the proposed alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood, the

conspiratorial cult that controls both the Khomeini dictatorship and that of General Ziaul Haq in Pakistan, as necessary to halt the southward expansion of the Soviet Union after the invasion of Afghanistan. *The New York Times* even reported that the U.S. is considering arms aid to Iran. "Because of the Afghan crisis, the Carter administration has made a policy decision to offer military and economic cooperation to Iran if the American hostages there are released unharmed," said the *Times* on Jan. 23, quoting White House sources.

But Carter is taking two major risks in that policy-reversal.

First, internationally, the Khomeini regime is regarded as not only reprehensible, but a typical example of a nation ruled by literal insanity. For the Soviet Union, the prospect of a U.S. pact with Khomeini, Bani-Sadr, and Co. would be taken as a hostile act. This would probably raise the danger of deliberate Soviet subversion and eventual takeover of Iran—like Afghanistan—by armed might. Furthermore, the West Europeans are decidedly not pleased with the idea of allying with Khomeini.

Second, Carter is adopting a major political risk in trying—in an election year—to convince the United States electorate that sending arms to Khomeini is good politics. Although Senator Edward Kennedy has supported Carter's decision to ease pressure on Khomeini, Carter's other Democratic rival, Lyndon H. LaRouche, has made a major campaign issue of Carter's policy toward Iran.

Nevertheless, in his Jan. 24 State of the Union address, the president listed among his goals, "to persuade the Iranian leaders that the real danger to their nation lies to the north from Soviet troops in Afghanistan." Toward that end, the administration is counting on newly elected Iranian President Bani-Sadr to swing Iran into alignment with the proposed package deal that U.N. Secretary General Kurt Waldheim is working on, namely, to exchange the U.S. hostages for a U.N.-sponsored commission that would carry out an investigation into alleged "crimes" of the Shah.

Such an investigation might serve as a pretext to return the Shah to Iran for trial in a kangaroo court run by Khomeini's justice ministry. Reportedly, Panama is considering Iran's official request for the Shah's extradition, provided Iran releases the U.S. hostages.

2. The Arabs reject the "Carter Doctrine"

Virtually every Arab nation—with the exception of Egypt and Oman—has totally rejected the idea of the Carter Doctrine. Most important was the firm rejection delivered to the Carter administration by Crown Prince

Fahd of Saudi Arabia and the Saudi leadership.

"We will object to the presence of foreign bases on the soil of any Arab country," declared Fahd emphatically in a Jan. 24 interview with the official Saudi News Agency. His statement virtually ensured that not a single Arab country, including the British fiefdom, Oman, will accept the presence of U.S. forces or base facilities on their territory because of their dependence on Saudi Arabia. In a second interview, Fahd was even more explicit. "No one can use us as a tool," Fahd asserted in the *Al-Bayraq* newspaper. "In the circumstances we cannot but admit that the U.S.S.R. is a major power and we want no problem with it. A frequent error is to highlight Saudi Arabia as the only state that can resist the Soviet Union and fight it everywhere. This is a mistake, and we do not want to nominate ourselves to a role we cannot attain."

Fahd further warned that the U.S.-Soviet tensions in the Gulf arena could be a "prelude to a new world war," and he insisted that the region's security problem can be "tackled by the Arab nation itself without interference from other countries."

Throughout the rest of the Gulf, a similar reaction evolved. The defense ministry of Kuwait issued a communique warning that the Kuwaitis would "consider any U.S. military intervention in the Gulf to be a hostile act that would be resisted by military means." Kuwait's foreign minister declared that "the people of this region are perfectly capable of preserving their own security and stability." And a leading Kuwaiti daily accused Carter of trying to "play the role of the savior of Islam" in order to justify a military takeover of the oil fields of the Gulf. In an official declaration Jan. 25, the United Arab Emirates scoffed at the Carter Doctrine and declared that the U.S. was using the Afghanistan crisis as a "pretext to expand its own military presence in the area."

In a series of interviews last week and the week before, Fahd said quite clearly that Saudi Arabia does not view the Soviet Union as a threat, and instead sees Israeli occupation of Arab territory as a graver danger to Saudi security than the activities of the U.S.S.R. In one case, Fahd warned that his country "can easily replace" the United States with the Soviet Union, and he said that Saudi Arabia would maintain close trading relationships with the U.S.S.R. despite the American call for an embargo.

On Jan. 27, Fahd met with visiting Syrian President Hafez Assad, who paid a quick visit before returning to Damascus for talks with Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko. The Gromyko visit to Syria, little noticed in the international press, was widely acknowledged in the Arab world as a response to the Carter Doctrine. During

their talks, both Assad and Gromyko accused Carter of "cynical manipulation" of the region's Muslim ferment in an attempt to gain marginal advantage. But even more important was Gromyko's assertion that the Soviet Union is prepared to defend Syria in case of Israeli attack.

For many Muslim countries, Gromyko's quiet pledge to back up Syria against the Zionists was more convincing than Carter's rhetorical promise to send American troops into the Middle East. Most analysts, especially conservative Americans, have already noted that the U.S. has little if anything militarily with which to back up the "Carter Doctrine" against Soviet armed action.

Syria has taken the lead in denouncing the U.S. manipulation of Islamic fundamentalism, especially naming Brzezinski as the man behind the strategy. Noting that Brzezinski had recently admitted publicly that he intended to exploit Muslim fundamentalism against the Soviets, one Syrian paper commented: "The Brzezinski confessions, which have shed new light on the role and crimes of the Muslim Brotherhood gang in the conspiracy against Syria and the Arabs, as well as the Islamic world, should alert every Arab to the U.S. conspiracy."

"Brzezinski was quite clear when he announced that his country should employ the new religious feelings in the Middle East and Far East in the service of its interests," the paper concluded.

On Jan. 19 *Al Thawra*, the Syrian daily, warned that "Brzezinski's frank admission that the U.S. is practicing the game of igniting sectarian strife in Arab and Islamic countries cannot be disassociated from the other military means ... to place the Middle East and western Asia under direct U.S. hegemony."

The nation that has benefited most from the Arab shift, however, is France. Quietly, Paris is building up enormous assets throughout the Middle East and especially in the oil-rich Persian Gulf. Most visible, this week, was the Jan. 28 trip to Paris by Syrian Foreign Minister Abdol Halim Khaddam, immediately following his talks with Gromyko. But there were also the following developments:

- French Minister of Economic Cooperation Deniau just completed a highly successful tour through the countries of the Arabian Gulf.

- Deputy Minister of Economic Cooperation Stirn paid a Jan. 29 visit to Iraq where he reportedly worked out a deal amounting to over \$1.5 billion in military sales and technology.

- In March, President Giscard of France will tour the Gulf where, it is reported, he will among other things

conclude a deal to construct an \$8 billion arms industry in the Gulf, a project that may include the construction of Mirage jet fighters in Kuwait.

- The French weekly *Le Point* reported that during November and December, when Muslim Brotherhood fanatics had seized the Grand Mosque in Mecca, Saudi Arabia's Interior Minister Prince Nayef called in the French secret services to take command of the operation that recaptured the Mosque. In addition, the French SEDEC has reportedly created a special unit, GIGN, which is trained in a capability to recapture a hijacked supertanker from pirates or terrorists. Such developments are seen as part of a strengthening of the French military and security influence in the Gulf region.

3. The Islamabad fiasco

In this environment, it should come as no surprise that the strongly worded anti-Soviet rhetoric expressed during the Islamabad conference hardly reflects the real, underlying sentiments of the Muslim world.

For instance, although the Islamabad conference did urge that Soviet troops be withdrawn from Afghanistan and condemned the initial military action by the U.S.S.R., the conference could not agree on even a single action to take collectively to respond to it. Even the most symbolic of actions, the proposed boycott of the Moscow 1980 Olympics, was not agreed upon and was therefore left to the individual discretion of the member states. Again, the Islamic Conference refused to give aid to the Afghan rebels, because of the obvious, very practical implications. Even Pakistan's General Zia called such action "dangerous" and warned against it.

At the same time, Algeria, Libya, and the Palestine Liberation Organization attended the conference under protest—having already demanded that its location be shifted to Saudi Arabia—and spent their diplomatic efforts trying to swing the conference away from an attack on the U.S.S.R. and toward a greater focus on the question of Palestine.

In fact, the single concrete action that the conference took was to call for a complete economic boycott of Egypt because of its alliance with Israel.

The West German *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung's* Harold Vocke wrote Jan. 28 that the conference was a "miserable failure." He cited the fact that Pakistan, which, under the Carter Doctrine, is supposed to get massive military aid, was, at the conference, a leader of the anti-American faction! He also complained that Saudi Arabia had flatly rejected sanctions against the U.S.S.R., and he said that "only Somalia" was prepared to go all the way with anti-U.S.S.R. actions—but found no takers.