

Moscow buying time for strategic shift

by Jeffrey Steinberg

Senior Washington intelligence sources have reported to *EIR* that Moscow's erratic on-again-off-again behavior regarding the superpower summit and the signing of an INF (Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces) treaty before the end of the year reflects an ongoing strategic-military reassessment by the Soviet military command. According to these sources, as early as August-September, when Mikhail Gorbachov performed his still unexplained two-month disappearing act, top Warsaw Pact officials were quietly informed by Moscow that all decisions on the INF deal would be delayed until after the November celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution—at which time all Pact officials would receive detailed instructions as to the “new” Soviet policy direction.

According to Washington sources, the key to the August-September decision to stall was the recognition by senior Soviet military officials, and particularly Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov, recently appointed to the reconstituted “wartime” post of Deputy Commander-in-Chief of all Soviet armed forces, that President Reagan would never trade off or even slow down the U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative. Up until that point, apparently Ogarkov and other senior Russian military planners had held onto the slim possibility, nurtured by U.S.-Soviet back-channels, that the SDI might be slowed down and eventually quashed.

A firm Reagan administration commitment to proceed at an accelerated SDI deployment schedule forced a military reassessment on the part of the Russian General Staff: If the United States, Western Europe, and Japan were to deploy a first-generation Strategic Tactical Defense System, coincident with the implementation of an INF accord withdrawing short- and intermediate-range missiles from Europe and Asia, what—if anything—would Moscow gain?

Two other factors reportedly weighed heavily in the Russian decision to reevaluate.

First, the continuing Weinberger deployment in the Per-

sian Gulf. By August-September, the U.S. and Western European reflagging effort had already reversed significant Soviet Middle East gains, achieved since the 1985 Geneva Reagan-Gorbachov summit, where the United States signaled through the “regional matters” discussions that it would concede to the Soviet Union a superpower status within the Middle East. The Weinberger-directed Gulf Policy steamrolled the State Department's crisis management approach to the Gulf and laid the basis for a revival of strong U.S. ties to the member-states of the Saudi-led Gulf Cooperation Council.

As Moscow undoubtedly knows, and probably knew as of August, Weinberger's principal goal in the reflagging effort is to lay the basis—before the end of the Reagan presidency—for a U.S.-Gulf Cooperation Council treaty establishing long-term U.S. naval and air force basing rights in the Gulf. Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Oman have been most frequently named as preferred sites for American military facilities. In return for this long-term security commitment—which no subsequent American President could reverse due to the treaty status—the United States would have a guaranteed source of off-budget funds to secure the financing—on schedule—of the SDI.

These two underlying objectives of the Gulf policy have profound long-term military implications for Moscow's war planners: When Washington abandoned the traditional crisis management approach to the volatile Gulf region, Moscow was forced to do likewise, in reaction. With the mid-October dumping of Geidar Aliyev, the Soviets' top “Muslim handler,” from the Politburo, many senior Western analysts believe that Moscow has been forced to abandon its previous policy of balancing its Iranian, Arab, and Israeli assets off against one another, and is now being forced to throw in its lot with Iran.

This, they report, is a military decision first and foremost. Soviet military planners correctly view Iran, Afghanistan,

and Pakistan as one single theater of operations. That theater is of vital importance to Moscow and cannot be subordinated to other regional considerations—when the United States is making a major policy move to reestablish strong Western military presence in the region.

While Washington's recent waffling in response to Iranian Silkworm missile attacks against Kuwaiti ports may once again throw Weinberger's Gulf initiative into jeopardy, it is unlikely that this failure to execute an instant response based on standing military rules of engagement will alter Ogarkov and company's overall reevaluation process.

According to one senior U.S. intelligence source, several of Marshal Ogarkov's leading advisers have emphasized that the continued U.S. and allied presence in the Gulf, combined with the increasingly unstable and unpredictable situation of the Khomeini regime, raises the possibility of a war breaking out in the short term—long before an INF treaty might be implemented. Therefore, these generals argue, Soviet military planning must take into consideration the shorter readiness time with respect to Europe, the U.S.A.—and China.

Under the Ogarkov Plan, the INF-spawned withdrawal of nuclear forces from Europe was to be the linchpin of a "separate peace" with both the governments of Western Europe and the P.R.C.—permitting the Soviets to carry out a first strike against the continental United States without having to survive retaliatory strikes from European and Chinese positions. Now, in response to the SDI and Weinberger's flank, Moscow has been forced into a fundamental reassessment of the viability of the Ogarkov Plan.

Western Achilles heel

The third major factor weighing in Moscow's strategic planners since the late summer is the monetary and economic collapse of the West—the great strategic vulnerability that may offset the gains achieved by the SDI and Gulf efforts.

Lyndon LaRouche, the leading Western political economist, has recently warned that Moscow is about to shift its strategic orientation in response to the financial and economic crash officially inaugurated with the Oct. 19 Wall Street crash. Drawing the analogy to the 1929-32 "Third Period," LaRouche projects an immediate escalation of violent irregular warfare on the part of Moscow's proxies—both by the Communist parties and radical Maoists of the West, and Third World surrogate states such as Libya.

Among the likely targets of short-term Soviet-inspired destabilizations are the Philippines, South Korea, the Andean region of South America, and black Africa.

By hitting hard on these flanks, while at the same time continuing to send confusing and contradictory signals of Soviet intent toward superpower summitry, the Ogarkov group hopes to recapture the strategic offensive.

So long as President Reagan and his campaign-fixated Vice President George Bush remain largely oblivious to this larger strategic picture, Moscow will press ahead—cautiously but decisively.

Shevardnadze admits Soviets have 'SDI'

The following news bulletin was dispatched by our correspondent on Oct. 30 from Washington, D.C.

Only hours after President Reagan and Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze released a joint statement here today agreeing to complete treaties on Intermediate-range Nuclear Force (INF) missiles and strategic weapons within the next nine months—based on a statement by President Reagan that the U.S. is now "flexible" on negotiating a delay in the deployment of its Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI)—the Soviet foreign minister conceded for the first time at a press conference that the Soviets have been working aggressively for 17 years on their own version of the SDI, and may be preparing to deploy a nationwide anti-ballistic missile (ABM) system.

Shevardnadze made the admission under pressure from the Washington, D.C. correspondent for *Executive Intelligence Review*, who challenged him to admit to the contents of a recently declassified CIA report on the Soviets' aggressive 17-year laser-based ABM research and development effort, which has brought them to close to the point of deploying a nationwide ABM system.

After evading the question on the first try, Shevardnadze was pressed to respond specifically to the allegation that the Soviets have been working on an ABM system for 17 years. He then replied, "I think that I am revealing no secrets when I say that we have been working on our defense for that time no more or no less than permitted under the ABM treaty."

This represented the first time a leading Soviet spokesman has conceded that the U.S.S.R. has been developing an ABM system akin to the U.S. SDI. Prior to this, the Soviets have denied working on their own SDI, stating they would only undertake such a program if the U.S. insisted on pushing ahead with its.

Earlier in the day, the *EIR* correspondent confronted President Reagan with the same issue of the Soviet SDI effort during a press conference at the White House. After Reagan stated that the United States would be "flexible" in negotiating a delayed timetable for deploying its SDI, the *EIR* correspondent asked the President, "How can you say you will be flexible in deploying our SDI when the Soviets haven't even admitted that they've been working on their own system for 17 years?"

Reagan was rendered speechless by the question, only grinning and shrugging his shoulders. Shevardnadze, at Reagan's side at the time, mimicked Reagan's shrugged shoulders, pointing at him with a big grin on his face.