

Superpower deals: the coming threat of 'peace'

by Thierry Lalevée and Konstantin George

From the New York negotiations over Southern Africa to the just-concluded talks in Indonesia for a settlement of the Kampuchean crisis, and the ongoing negotiations at the United Nations for a cease-fire in the eight-year-long Persian Gulf war, it has become fashionable to speak about a worldwide "breakout of peace" as *Newsweek* vaunted on its cover.

No one can argue that the intensity of those negotiations over several major regional conflicts, is indeed the result of especially the last two summits in Washington and Moscow between Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachov. It goes further than merely settling regional conflicts primarily located in the developing sector.

Americans and other Western politicians speak of "a new era of peaceful cooperation" and of détente between East and West. Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze confirms this, and adds that détente is "not another form of class struggle." And Western Europe is to follow suit by announcing the onset of a new quality of political and economic negotiations between the European Community and the Comecon, the economic organization of the Eastern European satellites under Soviet domination.

Regional deals

Yet, do these negotiations actually mean peace? Behind the headlines, there is still a long way to go before this "outbreak of peace" is actually concretized. The negotiations over Kampuchea which were held on July 25-28 in Indonesia and represented the third meeting between the warring parties, broke down once again, setting another date for next October. The negotiations over southern Africa involving the potential withdrawal of Cuban forces against a potential withdrawal of South African forces from Namibia, leave

unsolved the question of Jonas Savimbi's UNITA resistance movement and his control over an estimated one-quarter of Angolan territory.

The same is even truer for the Gulf war, where despite Iran's acceptance July 18 of U.N. Resolution 598, no cease-fire has yet been agreed upon. Since the Iranian decision, fighting has been as violent as ever between the two countries. It has also been made clear that even if the two countries do accept a cease-fire, war will be fought by proxies; Iraq deploying the Mujahedeen of Massoud Rajavi, and Iran arming the anti-Iraqi Kurds.

Above all, the cynical map-redrawing efforts of U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz and his Soviet counterparts will not ameliorate, but rather worsen, the conditions of economic looting, oppression, and genocide which cause war—while the Western alliance is systematically dismantling its ability to fight such a war.

The superpower deal

An Orwellian lexicon is needed to translate the meaning of these words and negotiations, into reality. By "peace" is meant the idea that East and West could potentially share the political, economic, and raw materials resources of those regions.

As much as the contents of these negotiations, their timing is important. It is no coincidence that they occur in the last few months before the American presidential elections. Over the last three years, Ronald Reagan has made it clear that he wanted to "leave in glory." Likewise, any success of his foreign policy could allow his would-be heir George Bush to be elected, by pushing aside as a minor issue the economic devastation which has beset the United States. The Soviets

have agreed to that game, in the confidence that even if Michael Dukakis is elected, these policy-trends are unlikely to be reversed.

Though the negotiations initiated over southern Africa or Kampuchea are seen as important successes, the major efforts have been deployed toward the Persian Gulf. Indeed, far more important than ending the Gulf war has been the need for Washington to be able to obtain the release of its hostages, prior to November. The realization that this could not be obtained by any other means than better official relations between Teheran and Washington, has led to the conclusion that an end to the war was hence needed. And billions of dollars are soon expected to find their way to the coffers of the Iranian central bank, obviously not as direct ransom for the hostages, but nicely packaged as "war compensation" or "unfreezing of Iranian assets."

As in the case of Angola—when Soviet Chief of the General Staff Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev flew directly from the United States to Cuba at the beginning of July to convince Cuba's Fidel Castro of the need to play the game of negotiations—Moscow did its part toward Iran. By the beginning of June, only a few days after the end of the Moscow summit, Moscow warned Iran that unless it agreed to a cease-fire, all of the East bloc countries would stop their weapons deliveries. By then, Iran agreed.

The rest was for public consumption, both internally, as well as for Moscow and Washington to build the right kind of international tension before displaying their breakthrough.

The Soviet Union, during a week-long visit by First Deputy Foreign Minister Yuli Vorontsov, shuttling between Teheran and Baghdad, played the decisive role in getting Iran to agree to a U.N.-sponsored cease-fire.

There is nothing altruistic in Moscow's moves to end the Iran-Iraq War. The Vorontsov visit, which featured remarkably high profile, laudatory coverage of Vorontsov and the Soviet Union on Iranian television (while during the same timespan, daily regime-sponsored mass demonstrations, shouting "Death to America" were being held in all Iranian cities), exemplified the emergence of a post-Khomeini Soviet-Iran axis, which is being built by Moscow as the cornerstone for its Middle East policy.

The aim of that policy is to use Iran as the wedge for Russia to reach its long-cherished goal of having its sphere of influence reach the Indian Ocean and the Gulf.

The predictable next step is for the United States to significantly withdraw from the Gulf, "as soon as tension decreases" *dixit* Frank Carlucci, to meet the longstanding Soviet demand. Likewise, Carlucci had already announced on July 28 that if the United Nations proposed the integration of the Soviet Union in a U.N.-sponsored peacekeeping force in the Gulf, "We will not oppose it." Rather than being hypothetical, the declaration is a statement of intent, demonstrating how Washington and Moscow want to use the United Nations, and decisions of the Security Council, to cover for their already agreed-upon decisions.

New Yalta agreements?

Inasmuch as such regional negotiations are far from having actually imposed "peace" over decades-long conflicts, the strategic loopholes and the combined weakness of the United States are ensuring that the "sharing" will be limited. While Moscow, like the West, is disengaging from Africa for economic reasons as well as because of the AIDS pandemic, it has set its sights on making a deal with South Africa. In exchange for Moscow reining in the insurgencies of SWAPO, the "liberation group" of Namibia, and the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa, the South African regime would agree to combine its strategic raw materials with those of the Soviet Union.

Given the U.S. policy toward South Africa—especially if Dukakis were to be elected—the Pretoria government may not have any second thoughts about accepting such a deal.

As for Iran, a point not to miss is that while most Western-financed projects have been halted, the Soviet Union has been sending a steady stream of its own technicians into Iran in the last two years, putting it in a privileged position in a postwar reconstruction plan. This allows Moscow to reap political benefits from its own projects—financed by Western Europe. Meanwhile, it means that new areas of competition and of tension are bound to emerge.

Soviet Islamic card

Likewise, Moscow's ongoing Islamic game, as exemplified by its decision in favor of Azerbaijan and against the demands of the Armenians, is paving the way for a new kind of relationship between the Soviet Union and Iran.

On July 18 the Soviets decided to suppress the Armenian mass protest movement, and to keep the Armenian-inhabited region of Nagorno-Karabakh a part of the Soviet Turkic-speaking and Muslim Republic of Azerbaijan. Moscow apparently views an Armenian insurrection as containable, whereas any decision that could spark troubles in Azerbaijan, could have unpredictable consequences, by touching off mass unrest throughout the Muslim areas of the Caucasus and Central Asia, all of which are, like Azerbaijan, Turkic.

The restructuring of Soviet military forces within the Southern Theater Command since March, using the crisis in the Transcaucasus as a pretext, underscores the shift in Soviet expansionist policy along the southern belt, from using Afghanistan as a springboard, to employing the axis with Iran. Since late May, the Soviet Commander of the Transcaucasian Military District (embracing Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan), facing Iran and Turkey, has been Lt. Gen. Igor Nikolayevich Rodionov, a former commander of Soviet forces in Afghanistan.

It is a fact that Rodionov, after the massive influx of troops that poured into Armenia and Azerbaijan during June and July, now has under his command about *three times* as many soldiers as he had in the Afghan War. There are now well over 300,000 Soviet troops in the Transcaucasian Military District, including 200,000 in Armenia alone.