

Soviet objections to Gulf war signal end of condominium

by Konstantin George

Whatever the outcome of the Sept. 9 Helsinki summit between U.S. President Bush and Soviet President Gorbachov, the Anglo-American-Soviet condominium—the superpower arrangements to jointly rule the world—has ended. The condominium came to an end through the decision of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and the Bush administration to permanently station U.S. forces in the Persian Gulf, establishing Anglo-American military control over the world's largest oil reservoirs, and the Anglo-American commitment to wage war against Iraq, which threatens to trigger a chain reaction of wars erupting in the entire region. By this process, the Anglo-American Establishment is igniting the fuse leading toward a "Thirty Years War" horror in the developing sector and the risk of war between the superpowers during the 1990s.

With the Anglo-Americans initiating wars in the developing sector, beginning in a region close to Soviet borders, the world has entered an unstable pre-war period. The arrogant U.S. deployment, staged under the pretense that "we are the only power," threatens Soviet strategic interests. Whether the Establishment realizes it or not, the first casualty of their "flight forward" in the Gulf has been the Anglo-American-Soviet condominium.

Soviet policy is now centered on developing in Europe and the Far East, the means for war avoidance; or, should those means fail, winning the ensuing war.

Neither Bush nor Thatcher see the reality of present Soviet policy; the arrogant are blind. Throughout 1990, Moscow has moved to outflank the Anglo-American bloc by speeding up German unification. Moscow has anchored its foreign, economic, and political policy on extensive economic and political cooperation with united Germany, France, Italy, and other continental European countries. Initiatives toward cooperation with Japan and South Korea in the Far East are also under way, with Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze visiting Japan Sept. 5-7.

Since the onset of the Gulf crisis in mid-July, Moscow

has accelerated its Europe-centered war avoidance policy. The Gorbachov and Chancellor Helmut Kohl joint declaration in the North Caucasus on July 16 finalized German unity and Soviet-German treaties of economic and political cooperation for December. Following the U.S. move in the Gulf, this date moved to October, and now, on the eve of the Helsinki summit, the 20-year Soviet-German Treaty of Economic Cooperation was signed in Bonn on Sept. 6, a month before German unity is formalized on Oct. 3.

Moscow is treating its relations with France and the European Community (EC) similarly. The late-August Moscow talks between Gorbachov and French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas, resulted in agreement to hold a Franco-Soviet summit in Paris in November where economic cooperation agreements are expected to be signed. Moscow then proposed on Aug. 31 a Soviet-EC joint declaration on the Gulf, presenting this to Italian Foreign Minister Gianni De Michelis. The declaration will be on the agenda of the Sept. 7 EC foreign ministers' meeting in Rome.

The Gulf through Russian eyes

The Soviet's opposition to war, as Gorbachov stated Aug. 31 that "a military solution is unacceptable," is not propaganda. Russian state interests are at stake.

Let us begin with oil. An alarm was first publicly sounded in the Soviet government newspaper *Izvestia* on June 16, 1989, that barring massive Western input to develop new Soviet oilfields, the Soviet Union, under current depletion of its main oil reservoirs, will become a major net importer of oil by as early as the mid-1990s. That means foreign dependency, and that means the Gulf. Moscow's future source of foreign oil is now under American military occupation. Even if no war occurs in the Mideast in the near future, the Anglo-American occupation of the Gulf oil fields has primed a fuse for war in this decade. To view this through Soviet eyes, imagine if a Soviet Rapid Deployment Force had just been deployed for the permanent occupation of the

oilfields of Mexico and Venezuela.

Developments in the Soviet Union could move up an oil nightmare to this autumn. Oil workers in the Siberian Tyumen region, Russia's main oil-producing area, threatened Sept. 4 to stage a general strike for as early as Sept. 10, one day after the summit.

Soviet alarm over the U.S. deployment in the Gulf is also based on military considerations. In Soviet eyes, the posture of American forward-based forces capable of striking at Soviet territory has expanded overnight from a "one-front" (Central Europe), to a "two-front" capability (Central Europe and the Mideast). The new objective threat is the hundreds of nuclear-capable U.S. fighter-bombers and bombers now based as close as 250 kilometers to the Soviet border. The F-111B fighter-bombers, now based at Incirlik in eastern Turkey, are capable of delivering nuclear bombs on targets up to 5,000 kilometers inside Soviet territory, and are now minutes flying time from the Soviet border. The same holds true for the B-52 bombers, now forward-based in the Gulf and Indian Ocean region.

Gorbachov's Aug. 31 warning to the U.S. emerged after a two-day session of the U.S.S.R. Presidential Council, which includes Defense Minister Dmitri Yazov and which discussed the Soviet domestic crisis and the Gulf crisis, and a warning by the Soviet military leadership, given in an Aug. 30 TASS interview by Army Gen. Vladimir Lobov, Chief of Staff of the Warsaw Pact.

Lobov denounced the American deployment for aggravating instabilities and revolts in the predominantly Islamic non-Russian republics and posing a "threat to the southern flank." He warned the U.S.A. not to seek a permanent military presence in the region and not to "occupy" Iraq, for this would create an unacceptable, de facto extension of the NATO "arc," from Turkey through Iraq into Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states.

Western observers missed the importance of Lobov's emphasis on preventing this "arc" from forming. Lobov was not speaking in static geographical terms. In Soviet eyes, the "arc" identified is a "corridor" through which the five U.S. Army divisions (three already in the Gulf and two others under way) and U.S. Air Force capability in the Gulf, can move to become a forward-based offensive force in Turkey, directly opposite the Soviet Union.

The five U.S. Army divisions had been among those U.S.-based divisions slated for deployment to Germany in a military emergency. These divisions have two sets of equipment and war-fighting supply stores, one in the U.S., which has now been shipped to the Gulf, and the other pre-positioned in Germany. The Soviet military, again looking at objective capability, cannot rule out that this newly forward-based U.S. Army could readily be airlifted from the Mideast to Central Europe, "hooking up" with its pre-positioned equipment and supplies, however unlikely such a scenario seems for the near future.

The internal dimensions

Internally, the Soviet leadership has taken steps on the eve of the Helsinki summit. A new Soviet Defense Council, chaired by Gorbachov, began regular sessions on Sept. 1. Right after the first session ended, the Helsinki summit was announced.

Perhaps flowing from decisions reached by the Defense Council, a Gorbachov decree of Sept. 4 created the core of a nascent emergency government, based around leading figures of the U.S.S.R. military-industrial complex. This apparatus would take over should the existing economic chaos go out of control. Gorbachov appointed three "working groups" whose heads will have full powers to oversee implementation of the new economic program, expected to pass by Oct. 1. Gorbachov appointed First Deputy Prime Minister Lev Voronin to head the commission on "questions of harvesting and supplies," i.e., food distribution and rationing, which most observers see coming. First Deputy Prime Minister and Presidential Council member Yuri Maslyukov was named to head the commission assigned to remove all "obstacles in realizing economic contracts." This commission has powers to stop any avoidance or sabotage of contractual deliveries of materials, goods, raw materials, energy, and so on, among the U.S.S.R.'s enterprises and republics. The third commission is to ensure the "means to guarantee public order and resolve legal questions between the republics and the Center," and is headed by Gorbachov crony Aleksandr Yakovlev, the Presidential Council member who oversees the security forces. The strongest built-in promoter of economic chaos in the new economic program is the lack of clear-cut agreement where the economic powers and jurisdiction of the republics end and those of the Center in Moscow begin. The commissions represent the nascent solution of brute decree to prevent chaos.

This is the backdrop to the Helsinki "summit," a term, parenthetically, which Moscow refuses to use to dignify the occasion. In a reminder of how angry Moscow is over the American occupation of the Gulf, the Soviets have termed the meeting "not a summit," but a "working meeting." The question of any Soviet-American "deals" resulting from the Helsinki meeting must be located in the following parameters which define Gorbachov's maneuvering room.

From the Soviet military standpoint, "deals" are permissible only if they accord with Russian state interests. A Radio Moscow commentary on Sept. 5, said that Gorbachov will exert "pressure" on Washington to "speed up the disarmament process in Europe," and any "agreement" which accelerates the departure of American forces from Central Europe will readily be adopted.

Any attempt by Gorbachov to strike a deal against Russian state interests, unlikely given Gorbachov's out-front role in the Soviet policy turn centered on cooperation with united Germany, would initiate his downfall. Either way, the condominium comes to an end.