

Middle East Report by Judith Wyer

How far will U.S.-Iraq ties go?

Reagan and Weinberger want a strong Iraq, but friends of Khomeini stand in the way.

Deputy Secretary of State Kenneth Dam, during a nationwide television appearance Jan. 8, threw into question the emerging U.S. support for Iraq in its war with Iran. Dam reiterated the longstanding State Department formula of neutrality toward the antagonists.

There is reported to be a fierce fight within the administration over how far U.S. overtures to Iraq, which broke relations with Washington just after the 1967 Mideast war, should go. Iraq White House Special Mideast Envoy Donald Rumsfeld made a sudden visit to Baghdad on Dec. 19 to discuss with Iraqi President Saddam Hussein re-establishing relations. Over the past two years the Reagan White House has quietly strengthened its links to Iraq, whose trade with the United States reached a record \$1 billion in 1983.

Reagan is said to back increased French military support for Iraq to destroy Iran's economic installations, if necessary, and force Khomeini to stop the fighting.

But the State Department and other circles associated with Henry A. Kissinger want only "limited ties" with Iraq. A source at Bechtel reports that such ties could be used to "neutralize" Saddam Hussein's stated intention of using his arsenal of Super-Etendard bombers and Exocet missiles to cripple Iran's economy. These circles are working to increase Iraq's oil income by pushing Syria to reopen the pipeline to the Mediterranean that Iraq used until Syria, a close ally of Iran, closed

it shortly after the war began. The source reports that if economically strapped Iraq receives more oil income, it will refrain from using all its force to end the war out of financial desperation.

On Dec. 6, a joint State and Defense Department team headed by Major-General Edwin Tixier and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State James Placke toured the Persian Gulf states. European sources say that they made a series of proposals to end the Gulf war, including U.S. arms aid to Iraq and limited intelligence-sharing. The oil-exporting Gulf sheikhdoms would sign military pacts with the United States in defense against future Khomeini attacks, and reduce their nearly \$1 billion in aid to Syria.

The Gulf states are said to have reacted coolly to the proposals, arguing that they do not want to provoke Khomeini by overt military ties to the United States. Rather, Saudi Arabia and its neighbors demanded that all U.S. illegal shipment of arms and spare parts to Khomeini be immediately halted.

Last month the London *Daily Telegraph* reported that Britain refused to cooperate with Washington on halting arms flows to Iran.

Two days after Dam's television appearance, the *New York Times* leaked that the National Security Council had completed a study in early November on U.S. relations with Iraq. The study is reported to claim that the United States could do very

little to directly help Iraq in the war.

From all indications Khomeini is quickly moving to take advantage of U.S. backtracking on support for Iraq. Over the past month, Iran is said to have increased purchases of sophisticated arms from Sweden, Switzerland, and Italy. Some of this equipment is reportedly transhipped via Soviet overland rail routes. Imports via Iran's major route, Turkey, have recently been slowed, causing a flap between Turkey and Iran.

Khomeini is said to be building up military positions at the mouth of the Persian Gulf, the Straits of Hormuz's Larak Island. In so doing, Iran is bolstering its threat of an attack either on oil tankers moving through the straits or directly on the oil installations of the Gulf Arab oil exporters which have been financially supporting Iraq's war effort. Khomeini hopes to blackmail these relatively defenseless states, Saudi Arabia included, into cutting aid for Iraq, further weakening the Iraqi economy and President Saddam Hussein.

In late November the Baghdad government severed its 10-year link to Arab terrorist Abu Nidal, a move the United States had requested as a precondition for closer ties. The same week, Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz arrived in Moscow to strengthen relations, which have been cool. After Aziz's return Hussein declared that Baghdad-Moscow ties were improving. An interview with Aziz in the Jan. 6 edition of *Al Majallah* makes clear that Baghdad is far from convinced that the United States will break its support for Khomeini. Aziz urged that U.S. statements suggesting such a break be translated into "effective policies." He affirmed that for the time being Washington's intentions are being tested. For now Iraq intends to keep its options open with Moscow.