
USS Stark Disaster

Soviets bid for control of the Gulf

by Thierry Lalevée

The attack on the *USS Stark* frigate by two Iraqi Mirage F1c fighter jets on May 17 was the latest bold Soviet move against the United States since the beginning of May.

It follows an increasing pattern of worldwide provocations which has been heralded, in the last few weeks, by the continuous riots in West Berlin since the beginning of May, at the instigation of the West Berlin section of the East German Communist Party; the reactivation of ethnic troubles in Yugoslavia; a systematic campaign to break West Germany out of the NATO alliance; Soviet-directed efforts to overthrow the government of Alan García in Peru; and a cranking up of Moscow's pre-war economic mobilization.

The two Exocet missiles fired at the American ship, killing 37 American sailors, represented the first salvos of the Soviet bid to control the entire Gulf region. This was set into motion by the process initiated by U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz during his last visit to Moscow, in favor of "regional agreements" between the two superpowers. These negotiations, followed by lower-level talks between Soviet officials and representatives of the State Department, notably Undersecretary Richard Murphy, have made major strategic concessions to the Soviets in the Middle East. Further concessions are already under way with respect to Africa.

The late-April conference in Italy of the influential Bilderberg Group, openly spoke of "Yalta types of agreements" between Moscow and the West over southern Africa. Such concessions have only made the Soviets bolder.

The Iraqi connection

Despite attempts by Washington officials to play down the attack as an accident, a careful review of the events indicates that it could not have been a mistake. The two planes which had left their bases in Iraq, flew over Kuwaiti and Saudi territorial waters before making a sharp turn over Bahrein, reaching 5,000 feet and firing at the American frigate.

AWACS system, both pilots refused to answer repeated demands for identification made on the international radio frequency. Instead they maintained total radio silence, including among themselves.

Who wants to wreck U.S.-Iraqi talks?

One of the aims of the operation was to destroy the credibility of the architects of closer relations between Iraq and Washington, an aim in which many countries had an interest. For one, the Israelis still consider Iraq as a more dangerous enemy than Iran. Israeli sources reported how delighted Jerusalem was after hearing the news. Needless to say, there was satisfaction in Teheran, too.

However, although both Israel and Iran have longstanding and well-placed intelligence assets in Iraq, including at the highest level of the military hierarchy, intelligence sources reveal that the operation was run top-down by the Iraqi Soviet lobby. This is centered around Vice President Taha Yassin Ramadan, Iraq's intelligence services, and the leadership of the 35,000-strong elite Air Force.

By unleashing the attack on the *Stark*, the Soviet lobby has also initiated a process aimed at overthrowing President Saddam Hussein, whose removal is a *sine qua non* demanded by Teheran for settlement of the long Iran-Iraq war. Already on May 21, the financial markets were rife with rumors of a "coup in Baghdad." Although he officially apologized to the United States, Saddam Hussein refused to claim responsibility for the disaster, calling instead for a full joint investigation. For many inside Iraq, as well as in the Soviet Union, Saddam Hussein's attempts at keeping a more neutral and pro-Western policy, has to be stopped.

Moscow's gains

One of Moscow's not-insignificant gains was the exposure, once again, of American vulnerability and military impotence. Just as the Marines guarding the American compound in Beirut in October 1983 were equipped with machine guns, but with no bullets, the *USS Stark* was caught ill-prepared.

In the midst of a war zone where during the same day, at least two tankers had been attacked, the *Stark* was not in a state of alert. Most of the 37 sailors who were killed, were burned to death in their bunks. Its anti-missile phalanx system was not activated; one-third of its batteries were unmanned. This behavior probably cannot be blamed on the captain of the ship, but on his standing orders.

Having lost face, Washington is being easily maneuvered to accept Soviet policy toward the region, as outlined in late April during the visit of Vladimir Petrovsky, the Soviet deputy foreign minister. Totally absent from the Gulf less than six months ago, Moscow now has three Kuwaiti tankers which it is sailing under its own flag, and three Soviet frigates. While Washington is still hampered by its association with Iran, Moscow has emerged as the "honest broker,"

calling for an international peace settlement of the Gulf war.

Through diplomatic cunning and sheer military brutality, it pulled off an agreement in recent weeks with a longstanding demand of the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, for Syria to become neutral in the conflict. This was preliminarily achieved in the first week of May after Syrian President Hafez al-Assad's visit to Moscow, which was immediately followed by an Iraqi-Syrian summit.

Washington officials have refused to even question the May 17 events. Instead, President Reagan announced on May 19 that the "villain is really Iran." True in general, but not when it comes to a direct Soviet operation. On the contrary, the American denunciation of Iran now only strengthens Moscow's bid. The same day, the United States introduced at the U.N. Security Council a motion calling for a full economic embargo against Iran. The motion was vetoed by both the French and the British, but had Soviet support. By doing that, Washington is falling with both feet into the Soviet trap.

Soviet military move in Iran?

Intelligence sources do not rule out that one of Moscow's next steps in the region may be a simple military intervention against Iran. Moscow is carefully building its case by daily accusing Teheran of trying to destabilize Soviet Central Asia. The Americans can do little; they have blinded themselves to the internal situation of the country by breaking with most of the secular opposition, leaving the field open to Soviet agents. The present state of American-Turkish relations precludes any chance of using the American bases in Turkey to intervene against such a Soviet thrust.

No doubt the Soviets will be also clever enough to present such a move as made in coordination with the Americans; some Washington officials may actually believe it. After all, didn't Kissinger advocate in the early 1980s that Iran be shared between East and West? These are the policies followed nowadays by the State Department. However, Moscow alone will reap the fruits.

If such an intervention takes place, it will be the last blow against American credibility and power, not merely in the Middle East, but worldwide. The NATO alliance, which depends on Gulf oil, won't survive such a move, and Moscow knows it. The Red Army doesn't need to fully occupy the country to achieve such results; a thrust from northern Iran to its southern Baluchistan region, linking up with Afghanistan, will be enough.

As underlined by Lyndon H. LaRouche, in a statement issued May 19, the "time to turn tough is right now, before this deterioration of the strategic situation becomes much more dangerous than it is already." The United States has to make a show of strength in the region, quickly. It also has to launch a series of political and military initiatives and gestures aimed at consolidating such allied countries as Turkey and especially Saudi Arabia.

The 'zero option' runs into obstacles

by Konstantin George

On May 14, Mikhail Gorbachov returned to Moscow from his tour of the Soviet rocket-launch site at Baikonur. On the same day, French Premier Jacques Chirac arrived in Moscow. Also on the same day, the NATO defense ministers assembled in Stavanger, Norway, for a meeting of the Nuclear Planning Group (NPG). Both the Chirac visit and the NATO meeting provided some unpleasant surprises for the Kremlin.

The tone for the NPG meeting was set one week earlier, on May 7, when U.S. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger issued a statement "endorsing" the proposed zero-option agreement on condition that it be a "global zero option." Moscow must dismantle not only its European-based missiles, but also its Asia-Pacific SS-20s, a threat to Japan.

Weinberger was engaged in a flanking attack on the zero option. His formal "endorsement" of the proposal, which would commence selling out Europe to the Soviets, attached a condition totally unacceptable to Moscow.

A flanking, rather than frontal, attack was necessitated by the fact that President Reagan has foolishly backed Secretary of State George Shultz's commitment to reaching a disastrous agreement with Moscow on intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF).

Weinberger's "global zero option" was approved by the NATO defense ministers in Norway. Britain's George Younger announced that Great Britain was now giving "conditional approval" to the zero option, provided that it be global; that French and British nuclear forces be excluded; and that West Germany keep its Pershing-1A nuclear-capable missiles (warheads are under American custody). Moscow has been insisting that any zero-option agreement be confined to Europe, and, that the Bundeswehr's Pershing-1A missiles be scrapped along with the American Pershing-II and cruise missiles.

Moscow responded furiously, denouncing NATO for "putting obstacles in the path" of the zero option by "adding conditions" that "constitute a deviation from the positions agreed to at Reykjavik."

Since that initial Kremlin response, Soviet attacks on the