

MERIA

THE PLO AND IRAQ IN THE TWILIGHT OF SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY

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The rethinking of Soviet politics and strategy initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985 had an important effect on Moscow's Middle East policy and on its allies in that region. Regarding the PLO, the altered Soviet line encouraged it toward negotiations with Israel. In some ways, the decline of Soviet support also forced the PLO toward concessions. The refusal of the USSR to back Iraq's invasion of Kuwait helped doom Baghdad to defeat. While Moscow was acting to improve relations with the West, it also hoped to export its new ideology to allies and thus preserve Soviet influence. For their part, the PLO and Iraq sometimes misread the situation by backing Soviet hardliners in their attempts to subvert Gorbachev's policies.

In 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in the Soviet Union, bringing with him a new way of thinking that transformed the country. The "New Thinking" in Soviet policy focused more on resolving than on exploiting regional conflicts. This approach was especially evident in the Middle East.

Two longstanding Soviet allies in the region—the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Iraq—were greatly affected, though in different ways, by the new state of affairs. The PLO responded positively to Gorbachev's prodding to re-orient its thinking toward peace with Israel. In contrast, Iraq chose to make war against Kuwait, the United States, and Israel in 1990-1991. Both situations well illustrate the core tenets and challenges of Soviet New Thinking.

In the PLO's case, the New Thinking was quite successful. Following Gorbachev's example, the PLO made a momentous decision in the late 1980s to abandon its armed struggle against Israel in favor of diplomatic efforts to achieve Palestinian statehood.

But in Iraq's case, Soviet policy was an abysmal failure and contributed to Gorbachev's fall from power. Indeed, Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein had direct connections with Gorbachev's right-wing supporters in Moscow who opposed Gorbachev's Westward tilt and found it hard

to adapt to the new environment. Misreading Moscow's intentions and directions, Iraq relied on force and set off a major international crisis. Saddam's aggression against Kuwait presented a dilemma for Gorbachev. Supporting Iraq would alienate the Arab world and the United States, which were the potential source of much-needed economic aid. Abandoning an old Soviet friend, however, would arouse the anger of entrenched conservatives at home. His options, all rooted in the program of reform, were poor.

PERESTROIKA

Throughout the years of Leonid Brezhnev's leadership and even more so after his death in 1982, Soviet leaders realized that they were losing ground vis-a-vis the West in every sphere, including the military one. Active U.S. support for anti-communist fighters from Central America to Afghanistan, plus Washington's evident determination to outspend, out-research, and ultimately out-deploy the Soviet Union militarily, convinced Moscow that it could no longer afford the military competition. "In the end," Gorbachev told his colleagues, "we found ourselves drawn into the arms race which could not but affect the country's social and economic development and international positions."(1)

As a result of the USSR's situation, leaders favored tension-reducing accommodation with the West instead of confrontation. Support for movements of national liberation, proxy wars, or superpower brinkmanship gave way to diplomacy. "The Soviet Union," wrote Alexi Izyumov and Andrei Kortunov, academicians with the Soviet Institute of the United States and Canada, "has come to the point when it is necessary to adopt a doctrine which would give the country a respite needed to restructure its economy and make the socialist path of development more attractive."(2)

Moreover, the hard line rigidity of Brezhnev's rule allowed Soviet clients to take advantage of Moscow's support, further jeopardizing Soviet interests. As former Soviet foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze later wrote, "Our allies in the [Middle East] abused our readiness to uphold their interests and all too often used us to block various peace initiatives."(3) Thus, with political and ideological rigidity came economic and social paralysis.

In this milieu, Perestroika, or "restructuring," was born. Gorbachev developed the concept from a clear need to save the revolution from its failures or, as Izyumov and Kortunov wrote, of the high price of the Soviet Union's past mistakes. (4) Gorbachev's idea was to adapt Soviet foreign policy to meet the needs of the country's domestic economy. By changing its policies and gaining prestige and credit in the West, the Soviet leadership expected to receive foreign support and financial aid from West Germany, the United States, and especially the oil-rich Arab world. A more relaxed international environment would let the Soviets concentrate on domestic reforms. As *Business Week* put it, "Gorbachev has no other choice but to hope that his stellar reputation as a world statesman is collateral enough for Western money."(5)

Georgiy Arbatov, the director of the Institute for the Study of the U.S.A. and Canada, commented on the need to concentrate on domestic reform in the Soviet

Union in a 1989 book of interviews with Soviet supporters of Perestroika:

"There still are people here who cling to old ideas about the priority of promoting revolutions abroad-people who still think we can work miracles when foreign Marxists ask us for help. But it doesn't work. The best way to influence other countries is by reforming our own system. Perestroika involves a new way of thinking about foreign policy, which begins with seeing realities as they are, not as we want them to be."(6)

This policy's goal, then was three-fold: to save the Soviet Union itself, to restore its strength and parity with the United States, and to give Moscow a new ideological export. The last point has been far less understood than the first two as a factor in Soviet strategy. Yet Gorbachev and his advisors spoke often about that idea. According to Vladimir Zagladin, then head of the Soviet Communist party's International Department: Gorbachev's approach was "in harmony with the world imperatives....One could go even further and say that New Thinking...is increasingly becoming the new thinking for the whole world." Perestroika corresponded with the "transition from the previously assumed primacy of class interests to the primacy of universal human interests."(7) In short, this was an attempt to put Soviet foreign policy on an entirely new basis.

Yet, while these new concepts sounded good on paper, Gorbachev underestimated the extent of opposition to reform by those who feared losing their privileges and power. During a meeting in New York with President Ronald Reagan and President-Elect George Bush in December 1988, Gorbachev answered the question when he was quoted as saying: "You'll see soon enough that I'm not doing this for show....I'm doing this because there's a revolution taking place in my country. I started it. And they all applauded it in 1986 and now they don't like it so much, but it's going to be a revolution, nonetheless." (8)

Later, Gorbachev would admit in 1993, "We moved too fast. Society wasn't ready."(9) His foreign minister, Eduard

Shevardnadze, later pointed out, Gorbachev "was so single-minded that some of the domestic critics he and I have in common complained that foreign policy was getting too far out in front, cutting itself off from the home front." (10) While critics worried that Gorbachev would bring down their system at home, they also saw him as ceding Soviet power to the United States and abandoning traditional friends, especially in the Middle East.

While Gorbachev failed at home, it can be argued that on the international level--and especially in the Middle East--his efforts contributed to peace.

MIDDLE EAST DIPLOMACY

By 1988, the Soviet Union's goals in the Middle East had undergone their second great strategic shift since World War II. From 1945 until the Suez crisis of 1956, the Soviets were almost single-mindedly concerned with evicting British imperialism from the Middle East. As a consequence, Moscow saw Zionism positively as a force reducing the British presence, while much of the Arab world as being pro-British. After Suez, the Soviets reversed their policy and came to view the Middle East as rigidly divided into an American camp and a Soviet camp, with Israel was considered an agent of American imperialism. Thus, in order to weaken the U.S. position, Soviet policy became avowedly anti-Israel.

By the time Gorbachev came to power in 1985, Moscow could congratulate itself on its Middle East policy, but only up to a point. The Soviets undoubtedly had created major problems for U.S. policy in the Middle East and had created a pro-Soviet bloc there. Yet sustaining a permanent military threat to Israel and working to destabilize Western access to Middle East oil cost the Soviets even more than the West. "Soviet assistance to the developing countries," Iyuzomov and Kortunov wrote, "too often brings only fleeting results.... Suddenly, we began to realize that the image of our country began to lose attraction." (11)

To gain the trust of the Arab world as well as to convince the West of the sincerity of New Thinking, the Soviets needed to prove their commitment to Arab-Israeli peacemaking in more than theory. Yet this also could risk losing radical Soviet allies in the region. A. Vasilyev, writing in Pravda on Soviet-Arab relations in February 1989, asserted: "Let's be frank: The new ideas in Soviet foreign policy have confused some of our traditional close friends--the representatives of revolutionary democrats, communists, and other left forces." Yet, Vasilyev declared: "We need one another economically. The geographical proximity and continental scale of both the USSR and the Arab world condemns us to mutually beneficial cooperation." (12) In the same vein, Foreign Minister Shevardnadze declared a week later in a well-publicized speech in Cairo: "Upheavals in the Near East always affect us very strongly. The Soviet people are especially sensitive to anything that happens here, because tension in this region costs us dearly, in all respects, including materially." (13)

As sensitive to the region as Shevardnadze asserted the Soviets were, they set their sights on two goals relating to Israel: reforming the PLO's intention of destroying Israel and re-establishing diplomatic relations with Israel. These steps could persuade the United States to accept the USSR as a legitimate partner in Middle East diplomacy, while establishing the Soviet Union's central role by making it a co-sponsor of the diplomatic process.

An editorial on Radio Moscow explained this approach succinctly: "As for our relations with Arab countries in the new era, we give explicit priority to economic ties with them. The fact that both [the Soviet Union and the Arab world] are the world's most important oil exporters provides another opportunity for cooperation." (14) A strategy of economic cooperation with the Arab states, combined with a more forthcoming attitude toward the West, was intended to demonstrate the indispensability of the Soviet Union in the international system. Developing better

relations with Israel, according to Shevardnadze, could help improve trade and other relations with the United States, which had made improved ties dependent on an improved Soviet record regarding human rights and Jewish emigration. At the same time, Gorbachev lifted emigration restrictions.(15)

Gorbachev also took steps to change the PLO's stance toward Israel, beginning on April 11, 1988, when he received Arafat in Moscow. The ostensible purpose of the meeting was to review Soviet-PLO relations, but Gorbachev's real aim quickly emerged: he wanted the PLO to recognize Israel. He asked the to use UN Resolutions 242 and 338 as a basis for this fundamental strategic reversal. Gorbachev told Arafat that recognition of Israel was the "necessary element for the establishment of peace and good neighborliness in the region."(16) The news of Gorbachev's policy change was purposely leaked and widely reported by the Western media. The aim was to pressure the PLO, and Israel, too, for that matter to solve their dispute. Arafat, wanting to avoid comment on the initiative, nevertheless had to acknowledge Gorbachev's request.

Following this meeting, the Soviets moved quickly to add to the pressure on the PLO. On June 8, 1988, Foreign Minister Shevardnadze met with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir. The meeting focused on the visit of an Israeli consular team to Moscow whose primary mission would be to facilitate emigration.(17) That team arrived in Moscow at the end of July. At about the same time, Vladimir Terrasov, deputy head of the Soviet Foreign Ministry's Middle East department, told Nimrod Novick, an advisor to Prime Minister Shimon Peres, that the Soviet Union was playing a "significant role" in developments within the PLO concerning a declaration of Palestinian statehood. The Soviets wanted the Israelis to know that Moscow could be helpful in providing early warnings of important developments, which equally suggested the USSR could help ensure these changes could be to Israel's benefit.(18)

THE SOVIET DIPLOMATIC OFFENSIVE

At a November 15, 1988, meeting of the Nineteenth Extraordinary Session of the Palestinian National Council (PNC, the PLO's legislative arm) in Algiers, Arafat proclaimed Palestinian independence. While the Soviets recognized this declaration, Igor Kudrin of Moscow Television's "The World Today," reminded viewers: "Of course, comrades, you and I realize that the act of proclaiming the new state is of a symbolic nature, as yet."(19)

After the Algiers meeting, Gorbachev's men very publicly began to lavish praise upon the PLO for its "brave" moves. In this spirit, A. Kiselev wrote in the Red Army newspaper, *Krasnaya Zvezda*: "There is no doubt that the constructive decisions of the recent PNC [Palestinian National Council] session show that the Palestinian leadership has grasped the principles of the new political thinking and is acting in accordance with them."(20) The Soviet diplomatic offensive continued in the following weeks, urging the PLO and Israel to "take advantage of the unique chance" to advance the peace process.(21)

Comparing PLO actions to New Thinking, the Soviets transferred their own reassessment in explaining the PLO's stance. They described in glowing terms how the PLO's decisions were, "The result of the manifestation of realism in policy, of new thinking of the PLO leadership." Soviet commentators approvingly noted how Moscow insisted "that all the parties involved in the Middle East conflict should consider the realities of the situation in the region to ensure freedom of choice, agree on guarantees for mutual security, respect the views and stands of others, be tolerant, and [foster] peace and mutual understanding."(22) One commentator concluded: "[Israel] cannot afford to disregard the growth of the prestige of the PLO in the world."(23)

The Soviets were doing more than offering free advice on the Middle East. They were trying to export Gorbachev's principles to their client and ally, the PLO, just as previous Soviet leaders had done with their foreign clients and allies. Moscow's

policymakers were also acting in the Middle East with the West's reactions foremost in their mind. Arbatov wrote: "Of course, we are not imposing our perestroika on others. But I do think that the very fact of perestroika in our country, while giving others an example, also introduces a palpable element of normalization into the international situation."(24) Genrikh A. Borovik, president of the Soviet Peace Committee and long-time Soviet commentator suggested: "We advise our friends, but this does not mean they have to listen to us."(25)

THE PLO AS STAR PUPIL

Gorbachev's policy did help the PLO and was also in accord with the PLO's own evolution and strategic situation. While PLO groups were engaged in hot debate over their own organization's policies, they were able to agree on expressing appreciation for Moscow's initiative. For example, Muhammad 'Abbas, head of the Palestinian National Front and mastermind of the Achille Lauro hijacking, aligned his statements with the New Thinking. He announced in 1989, "Many of the PLO's achievements in the international arena recently have been determined to a considerable extent by the results of the meeting between Y. Arafat and M. S. Gorbachev a year ago."(26)

The PLO, a Soviet foreign ministry spokesman concluded, had "imparted a powerful impulse to the peace efforts, upgraded contacts between the concerned parties, and resulted in the beginning of an official dialogue" with the United States."(27) Ironically, Soviet commentators even compared the Palestinians' accomplishments and spread of their ideals with popular uprisings then underway against communist rule in Eastern Europe. The Palestinian struggle, Moscow's International Service announced in Arabic, has attracted great respect. "It is not accidental that the peoples in East Europe, the GDR [East Germany], Czechoslovakia, and Romania went on to the streets repeating the word intifada. That means that this Palestinian uprising and the

movements of the masses in East Europe are one for democracy and freedom."(28)

As the PLO's initiatives and prestige spread, so did its ability to employ the lessons of the New Thinking to its advantage. The PLO in fact became Gorbachev's prize pupil. When Iranian leader 'Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani urged the indiscriminate murder of Westerners in retaliation for Palestinian deaths incurred during the intifada, Arafat and Moscow rejected this call. The latter explained: "Who can guarantee that among the Palestinians there will not be a few hotheads who are unaware of politics and who will take Tehran's remarks seriously? Thus, a serious blow will be inflicted on the policy that the PLO has now adopted and that is slowly and patiently trying to build up peace in the Near East." (29) Moscow also pointed out that many in the West would be "overjoyed to find a pretext on which to accuse the PLO of terrorism to stop the Palestinians' peaceful offensive." (30)

But, of course, words were not enough. Moscow sought concrete results in the Middle East, which involved a trade-off for Israel: diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, leading immediately to open emigration, in exchange for and negotiations with the PLO including Soviet sponsorship of talks. This phase of Gorbachev's gambit in the Middle East began in earnest early in 1989.

DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL

On February 23, 1989, Israeli foreign minister Moshe Arens and Soviet foreign minister Shevardnadze agreed to upgrade Soviet-Israeli relations to consular status, allowing them to focus on the chief issue between the two states-emigration. Soon after, articles began to appear in the Soviet press advocating the reestablishment of full diplomatic relations with Israel. Even Communist party officials urged the resumption of ties. Karen Brutents, a Central Committee official responsible for Middle Eastern affairs, commented: "We consider having diplomatic relations with Israel as normal, beneficial, and necessary. We want to

renew diplomatic relations, but [Israel] must prove that you desire this as well. This cannot be done without solving the Middle East conflict once and for all. Today, the chances of achieving a solution are better than they have ever been." (31) The Soviets established consular relations with Israel on March 14, 1989, less than three weeks after they upgraded the PLO mission in Moscow to the level of an embassy.

In a revealing comment on the logic of the new diplomacy, Radomir Bagdanov of the Soviet Committee for the Defense of Peace observed: "We have supported only one side while our foreign policy rival, the United States, has managed to maintain relations with almost all parties to the conflict, which incidentally, has been of inestimable benefit to the United States' ally in the Near East--Israel." (32)

Israel benefited from the new relations in the form of immigration. In September 1989, 3,500 Jews left the Soviet Union. Two months later, that number nearly quadrupled. In December 1990, the number jumped to 35,000. By the end of 1991, over 325,000 Soviet Jews had emigrated to Israel.(33)

From the Arab point of view, however, this step in the Perestroika policy appeared as a disaster. Arafat's critics blamed the PLO for going along with a massive strengthening of Israel. "Just as we have predicted," proclaimed a Syrian-backed clandestine Palestinian radio station, "the Soviet Jews are still streaming in, while their excellencies of the PLO look on."(34) The PLO, of course, was clearly not pleased about the increase in Jewish emigration to Israel. Its ambassador to the Soviet Union, Nabil 'Amr, said publicly "several 'clouds' have appeared in Soviet-Arab relations. Both sides must find ways to overcome these disagreements."(35)

Other Palestinian leaders were more explicit in condemning what they saw as a failure. Faysal al-Husayni, noted acerbically: "I personally believe that the Soviet Union is attempting to find a cure for its situation created by the Perestroika policy through unsuccessful medicines which it believes are successful. However, regrettably, these

medicines also have harmful side effects. We the Palestinians have felt the harmful side effects through the issues of emigration and open doors to travel without any restrictions." Husayni, however, declined to attack the USSR: "I also do not believe that the Soviet Union is a partner in an international deal--whose substance is Jewish emigration--without denying that other powers have exploited and benefited from this reality against the interests of the Palestinians and the Soviet Union."(36)

IRAQ, THE PLO, AND DISAGREEMENTS AMONG FRIENDS

While the Palestinians went along with much of the Soviet New Thinking, Iraq was about to create a major headache for the Soviet leaders. In the early morning of August 2, 1990, Iraq's army occupied Kuwait and immediately declared it Iraq's nineteenth province. If the Iraqis expected Soviet support or even neutrality, their expectation would soon be corrected.

Describing Saddam as a "hangover" on the morning after the celebration of the Cold War's end, The Economist's editors correctly judged the likely Soviet position on the invasion: "Much as President Gorbachev would like a higher price for Soviet oil, he is sensibly looking Mr. Hussein's gift-horse in the mouth. Backing an Arab dictator against the capitalist world whose help he so badly needs would undo everything he has aimed for in five years of smooth diplomacy."(37)

Indeed, Saddam's armed invasion of a smaller neighbor violated the spirit and intentions of New Thinking. "What kind of adversary is it whose total force, including police, are fewer than 20,000, whose territory is 25 times smaller than Iraq's and whose population is less than half of Baghdad's?" asked Vladimir Mkhailov in the Communist Party publication, Rabochaya Tribuna.(38)

Condemning the invasion of Kuwait was not intended merely to call attention to the breach of the new international spirit of cooperation. In the atmosphere of openness, historical comparisons soon began to appear pointing out the malevolent nature of

Saddam's actions as violating universal human rights. "President Saddam's coming to power," wrote a commentator in the Soviet daily *Sovietskya Rossiya*, "was accompanied by an unprecedented campaign to physically annihilate any dissidence, let alone any potential opposition."(39)

Others went further. "The blackmail to which Saddam Husayn is resorting is comparable to the actions of the barbarians or the internecine strife during the dark days of the Middle Ages. Even Hitlerite Germany during the last war did not permit itself such an unceremonious flouting of diplomatic immunity."(40) To be compared with Hitler was the extreme insult of Soviet propaganda and had been, previously reserved for only the most hostile of enemies of the Soviet Union (usually the United States).

Near the end of its broadcast on August 30, 1990, a Radio Moscow domestic service, commentator condemning the invasion worried, "What might ensue if Baghdad actually had the atomic bomb in its possession right now?" (41)

While the Soviet reaction was in line with that of the United States, Gorbachev could not completely shake the Soviet past. Grumbling inside the USSR came largely from the military about the severity of his and Shevardnadze's reaction. There were also over 5,000 Soviet non-military specialists and 150 military specialists scattered all over Iraq who had to be protected from war or Iraqi reprisals. Consequently, Gorbachev's decided in late August to send Yevgeniy Primakov to Baghdad as his personal representative to calm the situation.(42) He reasoned that the Soviet military's reaction had to be balanced not only with the dictates of New Thinking, but also with Soviet public opinion. According to a September poll in *The Moscow News*, 15 percent of respondents believed that the USSR was responsible for Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and 38 percent believed it was responsible to "some extent."(43)

Primakov, a veteran Soviet Arabist, was also an advocate of strong ties between the USSR and radical Arab states. He knew

Saddam well, and said that he understood the Iraqi leader's "psychology." He wrote, "My relationship with Saddam Hussein was obviously taken into consideration when President Gorbachev instructed me ...to leave for Baghdad."(44)

At about the same time, Saddam gave a speech promising to seek a peaceful solution to the Kuwait crisis in conjunction with a solution to the Palestinian problem and a Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon. Clearly designed to garner domestic and Arab support, Saddam had claimed the role of the Palestinians' protector at the expense of Kuwait. "I must be blunt," Primakov wrote explaining Palestinian sympathy for this ploy, "and say that among the Arab masses the occupation of Kuwait could be seen as a justifiable price to pay for resolving the Palestinian problem."(45)

Palestinians already agitated at the Jewish immigration brought about by the USSR's New Thinking were willing to accept this linkage. They worried that Moscow was not supportive enough of either the PLO or Iraq. "[W]hat do you see when you sit in front of the television in Moscow?," asked Nabil Amr, the Palestinian Ambassador to the Soviet Union. "Events in the Gulf have totally overshadowed the course of the intifada." He continued: "The Intifada can in no way be separated from the events taking place in the Gulf, just as the problems of Palestine cannot be separated from the problems of Lebanon, for instance, because all this is taking place in the same region."(46)

But Gorbachev could not back the Palestinians without alienating the rest of the Arab world and especially the West. Instead he used the linkage to advance the notion of convening an international conference. In a speech in Vladivostok on September 4, 1990, Shevardnadze asserted this point when he said: "Presumably, Israel's agreement to [a conference's] convocation could exert a positive influence on the overall situation in the Middle East and on efforts to defuse the crisis in the Persian Gulf."(47) Soviet policymakers hoped that by advocating the notion that only Israel would benefit from

Iraq's aggression, they would foil Saddam's attempt to gain Arab sympathy by linking the invasion to the Palestinian problem.

Gorbachev wanted to maintain Soviet prominence in the region by striking a delicate balance, resurrecting what remained of the old Soviet-Iraqi friendship to avoid war while bringing peace to the region vis-a-vis the Palestinians, twin goals of New Thinking. "[I]t may be said, that if we want to find a political solution to the conflict in the Gulf region," declared Vladimir Kavalev on Radio Moscow International's Arabic Service, "it is important to maintain contacts with Baghdad. Evidence of the necessity of this step is seen in the practice of resolving all international crises."(48) The Palestinians' support for Iraq was a complicating factor. If the Soviets could mitigate the losses in the PLO's drift from moderation and bring Iraq back from the brink, New Thinking would have another success and Gorbachev could legitimately claim the merits of his approach abroad for his deft diplomacy. The economic and political rewards he would gain would surely counter the hardliners.

Gorbachev decided to send Primakov on a second trip to Baghdad in early October to secure the release of Soviet technicians in Iraq (something the United States also wanted so they would not help Iraq's war effort) and to assess Saddam's state of mind. Primakov later wrote that Saddam made his position quite obvious when he confirmed that he had developed a "Masada complex" about Kuwait. (49) One bright spot for the Soviets was U.S. and Western recognition that they were the last diplomatic lifeline to Baghdad. Concern spread, however, that Primakov was "blurring the bottom line" with Saddam,(50) and indeed, it was reported that Primakov offered Iraq a small slice of Kuwait were it to withdraw from the rest of the country,(51) though Primakov denied acting against the spirit of agreements with the United States.(52)

Shevardnadze, who resigned as Gorbachev's foreign minister in December 1990, later wrote: "[A]s I see it, the special emissaries who traveled to Baghdad during

the crisis to try to talk to Saddam Hussein actually did harm, since they reinforced the illusion that there were options whereby Iraq could gain some kind of advantage from its aggression."(53)

In January 1991, with time running out for Gorbachev's opportunity to defuse Gulf tensions, Lithuanian protesters attacked a television station in Vilnius. Soviet troops fired into the crowd, killing over a dozen and wounding scores more, drawing world condemnation. Cheered by hard liners, over 100,000 people took to the streets in Moscow to support the troops. Sending a message to Gorbachev, the conservatives' support for repression at home was linked to support for Iraq against the United States. Gorbachev had to walk a very thin line. He could not use force in the Baltic republics without attracting international criticism and possibly sanctions. But if he continued to take the West's side against Iraq, his position in Moscow would be threatened. Ultimately, he chose the latter option and suffered the political consequences at home. Prominent Politburo members, many picked by Gorbachev himself, came out forcefully against him.

After the Allied attack on Iraq began, Vitaly Korotich, the editor of *Ogonoyok*, complained: "Gorbachev and Shevardnadze caused this [attack through their support of the United States]. We support the civilized world. It is kind of our repentance for the Afghanistans and other things we have done."(54)

THE CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE

Observing Gorbachev's diplomatic failure to forestall the attack on Iraq, use the crisis to advance the Palestinian cause, and his domestic troubles, the PLO abandoned Gorbachev. It faulted him for allowing mass Soviet emigration to Israel and for not backing Iraq against the West, despite the fact that he had brought the PLO to new heights of international acceptance. Throwing his weight behind Saddam, Arafat once again found himself on the losing side of a Middle East war. When hard liners launched an ill-fated coup in Moscow in August 1991, the PLO

rejoiced. "Perestroika has fallen in the USSR," exulted the official PLO Voice of Palestine radio. "Perestroika was an anomaly and the military leaders who seized power in the USSR understood the lessons of the Gulf War."(55)

Regardless of this criticism, Soviet plans for the Middle East continued. To ensure its own participation in the forthcoming international conference on the Middle East in Madrid, the near-defunct Soviet Union reestablished full diplomatic relations with Israel. On October 24, 1991, the Soviets announced the re-opening of the Israeli embassy in Moscow. Just six days later, the Madrid conference, co-sponsored by the Soviet Union and the United States, began.

Within two months, however, the Soviet Union collapsed and was replaced by Russia, led by Boris Yeltsin. Though he favored the PLO, Yeltsin was far less supportive than Gorbachev. In addition, he paid much less attention to foreign policy in general, focusing on guiding Russia through the birth pangs of democracy.

Now lacking a superpower sponsor, among other factors, Arafat reached the Oslo agreement with Israel On September 13, 1993, Arafat and Israel's Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin signed the accord on the White House lawn. On one hand, the ceremony's location in Washington, D.C., signaled the primary U.S. role in the process. But Russia was also present in an honored role as a sponsor, showing the continued involvement of Moscow in this issue. While the PLO had been motivated by its own evolution and situation, Soviet-inspired New Thinking had played a role--both through support and opposition--in leading it to that result.

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For other MERIA Journal articles of interest regarding Russia's Middle East policy, see Robert O. Freedman, "Russia and the Middle

East: The Primakov Era, MJ Vol. 2 No. 2 (May 1998) and Robert O. Freedman, "Russian-Iranian Relations in the 1990s" MJ Vol. 4 No. 2 (June 2000).

NOTES

1) Vadim Zagladin, "An Arduous But Necessary Path," *International Affairs* (September 1988, No.9), p. 35.

2) Alexi Izyumov and Andrei Kortunov, "The Soviet Union in a Changing World," *International Affairs*, No. 8 (August 1988), p. 55.

3) Eduard Shevardnadze, *The Future Belongs to Freedom*, Translated by Catherine A. Fitzpatrick, (New York: The Free Press, 1991), p. 109.

4) *Ibid*

5) Igor Reichlin, Rose Brady, David Greising, and Amy Borrus, "Brother, Would you Lend Moscow a Dime?," *Business Week*, December 10, 1990.

6) Stephen F. Cohen and Katrina van den Heuvel, *Voices of Glasnost: Interviews with Gorbachev's Reformers* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1989), p. 315.

7) *Ibid*, p. 33.

8) Cited in Dan Oberdorfer, "Reagan and the Russians: Revising History's First Draft," *The Washington Post*, September 29, 1991, p. C5.

9) Mikhail Gorbachev Discussion before the National Republican Senatorial Committee, Washington, D.C., 5 November 1993.

10) Shevardnadze, p. xviii.

11) "The Soviet Union in a Changing World," pp. 52, 46.

12) *Pravda*, (Moscow) February 18, 1989. Unless otherwise stated, all foreign language references derive from the Foreign Broadcast Information Service.

13) *Izvestiya* (Moscow), Text of the Speech of Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze in Cairo, February 24, 1989.

14) "Peace and Progress," *Moscow Radio*, Nov. 28, 1989. According to a report of the USSR Academy of Sciences Institute for World Economic and Political Research cited by *Oil & Gas Journal* (December 10, 1990), projections for Soviet oil exports in 1991 showed the lowest level since the early 1970s.

- 15) Shevardnadze, p. 109.
- 16) Cited by Mark Train, "U.S. Unmoved by Soviets' PLO Bid," *The Guardian*, Apr. 12, 1988.
- 17) *The New York Times*, June 10, 1988.
- 18) *The Guardian*, Aug. 3, 1988.
- 19) Moscow Television Service, Nov. 15, 1988. Obviously, the Soviet pressure was not the only cause of the PLO's 1988 decision. For a discussion of the issues involved, see Barry Rubin, *Revolution Until Victory?: The Politics and History of the PLO*, (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1994).
- 20) *Krasnaya Zvezda* (Moscow), Nov. 29, 1988
- 21) TASS International Service (Moscow), Dec. 14, 1988.
- 22) *Ibid.*, Jan. 10, 1989.
- 23) *Ibid.*
- 24) Georgiy Arbatov, "Perestroika, Glasnost and Soviet-American Relations," a paper delivered at the "Miami - Moscow Dialogue," Miami, Florida, May 27, 1990.
- 25) Interview with Genrikh A. Borovik, Miami, Fla., May 27, 1990.
- 26) *Izvestiya* (Moscow), Apr. 30, 1989.
- 27) TASS, Nov. 15, 1989.
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