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**SOVIET POLICY TOWARDS THE GULF CRISIS :
REALIST OR OPPORTUNIST?***

INTRODUCTION

In the post-Cold War era when many of the regional conflicts were being resolved through peaceful means as a result of real rapproachments between the superpowers and the whole world was waiting for the emergence of a stable, viable and cooperative world order, the outbreak of the Gulf War not only frustrated the mankind but has also created doubts and suspicions about the future of the international system. The Gulf War has already caused colossal human, material, financial and environmental damages, and is continuing without any sign of its immediate ending. The US led multinational forces are carrying out massive attacks on Iraqi and Kuwaiti positions and as a result thousands of civilian houses, industrial complexes and other establishments are being ruined. Peace initiatives for a ceasefire have beentaken from individual countries, group of coun-

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tries and organizations, but so far there seems to be no real breakthrough. Although the UN Security Council, after long delay was able to meet in a closed door session, also failed to bring any tangible results towards the end of the conflict.

Meanwhile, on the war front with continuous Iraqi missile attacks on Israeli positions the possibility of further escalation of the war has increased. At the same time, there are widespread apprehensions that Gulf War may turn into a chemical or/and nuclear war, although such possibility appears to be remote, at least at this stage. The massive oil slick has already created serious environmental hazards for the whole region.

When all these developments are taking place virtually at her own backyard, the Soviet policy towards the Gulf crisis seems to be in a dilemma. On the one hand, the Soviet Union at the age of 'Perestroika' and 'New Thinking' is obviously restructuring her foreign policy, emphasising the need for de-ideolization of international relations, recognising the interdependent nature of world politics, advocating for global peaceful international order and sincerely working towards achieving those goals by cooperating and coordinating policies with the United States. On the other hand, the US-led multinational forces by using the UN Resolution 678 which authorised the use of force against Iraq to liberate Kuwait (the Soviet Union also supported it) are causing excessive damages to civilian lives and properties in Iraq which has already created wide suspicions about the real US intentions in the Gulf War.

So the questions are being raised ; how long and to what extent the Soviet Union will support the

current US policy towards the Gulf crisis considering her close traditional relations with Iraq? Is there any viable alternative role that the Soviet Union can play in the Gulf crisis taking into consideration Iraq's occupation and annexation of Kuwait? Is the Soviet Union capable or willing to play her traditional counterbalance role in international relations at the age of 'Perestroika' and 'New Thinking' when the endemic domestic socio-political, economic, and ethnic problems are not only making the society unstable but are also challenging the very existence of the Union, and when she is overwhelmingly dependent on the West for economic and technological help? Is there any scope that the Soviet Union can play an effective mediating role in the Gulf crisis considering her traditional close relations with Iraq and new alliance with the Western countries, particularly with the United States? What might be the Soviet goals and objectives in the Gulf War? What may be the implications of current Soviet policy towards the Gulf crisis on the Soviet-US relations as well as on the Soviet -Third World relations?

This article will try to answer the above mentioned questions and to raise other related issues. The article will be divided into four parts. Part one will very briefly review the general Soviet policy towards the Gulf with special emphasis on Soviet relations with Iraq and Kuwait. Part two will deal with the Soviet responses and reactions towards the Gulf crisis since the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on August 2, 1990. Part three will discuss the Soviet attitudes and postures towards the crisis since the war broke out on January 17, 1991. And the final Part will deal with the Soviet goals, objectives and limitations towards the Gulf war and its possible implications.

I. SOVIET POLICY TOWARDS THE GULF

Historically, although the Persian Gulf area was not an arena of Soviet influence, it was always considered "as the centre of aspiration",¹ because of its geographical proximity to the Soviet Union. Instead of pursuing a policy of active involvement, the Soviet Union was trying to penetrate into the region by taking advantage of the limitations and failures of the Western powers. In the post -World War II period when the United States was engaged in building up interlocking military- security blocs in the Third World, the Soviets were mainly busy with the European affairs, particularly in consolidating the communist regimes in Eastern Europe. However, political issues and developments in the Arab World, particularly revolutions and radical movements served the Soviet interests.

The Iraqi revolution of 1958 which overthrew the Hashemite monarchy and dealt a severe blow to the newly formed US sponsored Baghdad Pact was, no doubt, a net gain for the Soviet Union.² In the 1960s when the US was trying to build up relations with Iran and Saudi Arabia as a "Twin Pillar" strategy in the Middle East, the Soviet Union was trying to improve relations with Iraq and newly formed Kuwait. In the 1960s the Ba'athist revolutions in Iraq and Syria, Marxist revolutions in South Yemen and antimonarchist revolution in Libya enhanced the Soviet power and prestige in the Middle East, and gradually Moscow developed close friendly relations with a number of radical Arab countries. When the British withdrew

1. "Nazi-Soviet Relations 1934-1941", The US Department of State (Washington D.C.) 1948, p. 220.

2. Tim Niblock (ed.) *Iraq, The Contemporary State*. (London) 1983, p. 3.

from the East of Suez and three independent states—Bahrain, Qatar and UAE—emerged in 1971 the Soviet Union immediately recognized the new states and tried to improve relations with them. But as the Saudi-Soviet relations were strained Soviet relations with the conservative sheikhdoms could not be developed.³ In the 1960s and 1970s Kuwait was the only conservative Arab Gulf country having diplomatic relations with Moscow. Since mid 1980s Moscow's relations with the small conservative Gulf countries improved significantly. In early 1984 Kuwait (a member of the GCC) signed a deal worth \$300 million with the Soviet Union for purchasing sophisticated arms including surface-to-air and surface-to-surface missiles.⁴ During the last three years Kuwait extended credits and loans amounting to a sum of \$450 million to the USSR.⁵

Nonetheless, Iraq remained the main Soviet ally in the Gulf, and despite ideological and political differences Moscow developed a very close economic and military relations with Iraq. Thousands of Soviet specialists, both military and civilian, were working in Iraq and the Soviet Union was supplying almost all the arms requirements of Iraq. In 1972 about 95% of Iraqi arms imports came from the Soviet Union.⁶ In April 1972 the Soviet Union signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Iraq, the first of such treaties

3. For details about Saudi-Soviet relations see, Golam Mostafa "Saudi-Soviet Relations : Problems and Prospects" in *BIISS Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 1985.

4. *The Guardian Weekly*, 22 July 1984.

5. *Press Release* by the press information department of the USSR Embassy in Bangladesh, P.R. No. 1/20, 6 February 1991, p. 2.

6. A. Dawisha, "Iraq : The West's Opportunity", *Foreign Policy*, Number 41, Winter 1980-81, p. 138.

with any Arab country. In the late 1970s when Iraq was tilting towards the West and trying to diversify the sources of arms procurements, the Iraqi-Soviet relations suffered setbacks. But as Egypt signed the Camp David treaty with Israel with the active involvement of the US and Iraq along with Syria and South Yemen formed the anti-Egyptian "Rejectionist Front", the Soviet Union supported the Iraqi move and lauded Baghdad's initiative.⁷ Nonetheless, there were irritations and disagreements in Iraqi-Soviet relations, particularly on Baghdad's dealings with the communists and Kurds.

Some regional issues and developments had also their impacts on Iraqi-Soviet relations. The revolution in Iran opened new avenues and opportunities for Moscow in the Gulf. The Soviet Union described the Iranian revolution as the second most important event in the 20th century, first being the October Revolution, and expressed her readiness to improve relations with the new Islamic Republic. The Soviet Union also supplied intelligence information and arms to Iran through East European countries and North Korea.⁸ Iraqi criticism of Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and demand for withdrawal of troops affected Iraqi-Soviet relations. Iraq also criticised the Soviet policy in the Horn of Africa and in Yemen. The Iraqi-Soviet relations further deteriorated in 1980 when Iraq invaded Iran. The Soviet Union not only declared her neutrality in the War but also disapproved the Iraqi act and reportedly suspended arms supply to Iraq. In 1980

7. Golam Mostafa, "Arab-Egypt Relations : Prospects for Reconciliation", *BISS Journal*. Vol. 5, No. 2, 1984, p. 166.

8. Shahrar Chubin, "Gains for Soviet Policy in the Middle East", *International Security*. Vol. 6, No. 4, 1982, p. 140.

Moscow signed a Treaty of Friendship and cooperation with Syria and was trying to strengthen the Syria-Libya axis, the Arab supporters of Iran in the War.⁹ But as Iran started offensive in the war and Iraq threatened to abrogate the Friendship Treaty unilaterally, Moscow started to resume arms supply and provided Iraq with sophisticated arms including MiG-22, MiG-27, MiG-29 fighter planes and T-55, T-62 battle tanks.¹⁰

During the long years of Iran-Iraq War the Soviet Union supplied arms to both the parties and was able to keep the conflict within a manageable limit in spite of her declared neutrality. In the Post-War period Moscow maintained a good friendly relations with Iraq and actively participated in Iraq's post-war reconstruction. It is true that the share of Soviet arms delivery to Iraq reduced in the 1980s, nonetheless, according to SIPRI, 53% of all sophisticated arms procured by Iraq come from the Soviet Union.¹¹

II. SOVIET POLICY TOWARDS THE IRAQI INVASION OF KUWAIT

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on August 2, 1990 came as a surprise to the Soviet Union and put her in a very complex position for various reasons. First; Iraq, a long traditional ally of the Soviet Union, invaded and annexed Kuwait at a time when Moscow was trying to develop good friendly relations with the conservative

9. Golam Mostafa, "The Gulf War: Issues Revisited", *BISS Papers*, No. 6, June 1987, p. 42.

10. *World Armaments and Disarmaments*, SIPRI Yearbooks, 1984 and 1985, pp. 240-41 and 400-1.

11. *Time*, 11 February 1991, p. 28.

Gulf countries including Kuwait. Secondly; the invasion took place at a time when the Soviet politico-economic and military doctrines were undergoing radical structural changes and modifications under the policies of "Perestroika" and "New Thinking" and when the Soviet Union recognized the interdependent character of international relations, emphasized the need for de-ideolization of international politics and was actively working with the international community for building up peaceful and cooperative post-Cold War world system. Third; The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait came at a time when the Soviet Union was gradually resigning and withdrawing from her commitments from the Third World, and was busy in building the "Common European Home" and working sincerely for improvement of relations with the United States.

So, for obvious reasons the Soviet Union could not support the Iraqi invasion which ran counter to the spirit of Soviet "New Political Thinking". The Soviet reaction to the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait was very prompt and strong. In a joint statement, issued on the 3rd of August 1990 during the visit of the US Secretary of State James Baker to Moscow, the two sides considered it important that the Security Council "immediately and resolutely condemned the flagrant, unlawful invasion of Kuwait by the armed forces of Iraq" and reaffirmed their call to Iraq "to unconditionally withdraw troops from Kuwait."¹² The Soviet Union also suspended arms delivery to Iraq. However, it was not easy for the Soviet Union to take joint stand with the US because of her good friendly rela-

12. *Press Release*, by the press information department of the USSR Embassy in Bangladesh, P.R. No. 04/97, 07 August 1990, p. 1.

tions with Iraq for decades, and the presence of 8500 Soviet specialists in Iraq.¹³

The Soviet supported the UN resolution imposing economic embargo on Iraq but did not participate to enforce it. Moscow also believed that the actions by states involved in the conflict should not go beyond UN decisions. Alexander Bovin put it in the following manner, "It is a matter of embargo, rather than a sea blockade, not the use of force to make everyone observe the embargo."¹⁴

In early September 1990 before the Helsinki Summit the former Soviet Foreign Minister Edward Shevardnadze in an interview with Soviet Journalists aboard his plane on the way from Tokyo to Moscow stated that the USSR would seek, "the US support for convening a Middle East conference over Iraq's aggression over Kuwait".⁽¹⁵⁾ It was also reported that the first task of the Conference would be, "to achieve an unconditional and immediate pull out of Iraqi troops from Kuwait", and the second and third stages could be devoted to the Palestinian issue and Lebanon respectively.¹⁶ It was also confirmed that the Soviet Union would not support the use of force against Iraq, but if more impressive steps were needed she

13. There were 8500 Soviet experts in Iraq when Iraq invaded Kuwait but the number was reduced to 3300, including 193 military experts, at the time of Helsinki Summit in September 1990. And it was reported that all Soviet experts were withdrawn from Iraq before the outbreak of the War.

14. Alexander Bovin, "Kuwait Test", *Feature*, 26 August 1990, p. 2.

15. *Press Release*, by the press information department of the USSR Embassy in Bangladesh, P.R. No. 05/108, 09 September 1990, p. 1.

16. *Ibid.* p. 2.

would suggest to reactivate "the UN Military Staff Committee".¹⁷

On the other hand, the US agenda in the Helsinki Summit was to involve Soviet ground forces in the Gulf conflict and to ensure Soviet commitment to withdraw its military specialists from Iraq immediately.¹⁸ But as it appeared from the Joint Statement the Soviet Union failed to convince the US in holding an international conference on the Middle East. Rather without mentioning the Palestinian issue, both the sides recognised that "It is essential to work actively to resolve all remaining conflicts in the Middle East and Persian Gulf"⁽¹⁹⁾ as soon as the objectives mandated by the UN Security Council Resolutions had been achieved. Although the Soviet Union was all along against the use of force, in the Helsinki Summit she agreed "to consider additional ones (steps) consistent with the UN Charter". As it appeared, in the Helsinki Summit the Soviet Union failed to convince the US to accept the Soviet position, rather she had to accept the American position. The Soviet Union was, however, satisfied with the outcome of the Summit because it was a victory for "New Political Thinking"²⁰ and reaffirmed the Soviet status as "an equal partner" not as "a second rate nation".²¹

17. *Ibid.* p. 1.

18. *Press Release* by the press information department of the USSR Embassy in Bangladesh, P.R. No. 09/102, 27 August 1990, p. 2.

19. "Soviet-US Joint Statement in Helsinki", *Press Release*, by the press information department of the USSR Embassy in Bangladesh, P.R. No. 07/110, 11 September 1990, p. 2.

20. Leonid Laakso, "A Victory for New Political Thinking", *Feature*, 12 September 1990.

21. Vladimir Radyuhin, "US-Soviet Cooperation in the Gulf Crisis : "A Second Front Against Iraq", *Feature*, 16 September 1990, p. 2.

In the field of economic cooperation the two leaders discussed "the possibility of implementing projects for a more rational utilization of natural resources". The US President promised "to lift all obstacles to the realization of a project for joint production of a new type of civilian aircraft"²² It was also agreed that the US "will facilitate not hamper" more fruitful cooperation between the USSR and other countries. It was also decided that Secretary of State James Baker along with a group of American businessmen would visit Moscow in three days for detailed discussion on economic cooperation between the two countries. So it appears that the Soviet support to the US position in the Helsinki Summit brought good dividends for Moscow.

However, inspite of Soviet support to all the UN resolutions regarding the Gulf crisis, Moscow always considered the conflict as an Arab issue, preferred an "Arab solution" and wanted a peaceful resolution of the conflict. One Soviet author compared the US and Soviet positions in the Gulf crisis in the following manner: The Americans were palying "the role of an angry policeman ready to club down a defiant law breaker and the Soviets acting the part of a patient lawyer persuading the culprit to comply and avoid being beaten up".²³ But as the subsequent developments showed the Soviets failed to play the role of a successful lawyer. They not only failed to persuade the culprit but also cooperated with the 'angry policeman' in beating him up.

22. "Soviet-US Joint Statement in Helsinki", op. cit. p. 3.

23. Vladimir Radyuhin, "Yevgeny Primakov : Soviet Peace-Maker in the Gulf?", *Feature*. 04 November 1990, p. 2.

The Soviet Union also took mediation efforts to end the Gulf crisis and sent Yevgeny Primakov, one of the veteran Soviet diplomats and reknowned Middle East experts who is personally known to President Saddam Hossain for the last 20 years, to Baghdad at the end of October 1990. Primakov seemed to be conciliatory and proposed to give Iraq—Bybiyan and Warbah—two islands and a slice of Kuwaiti oil fields, but the US rejected Primakov's proposal.²⁴ The GCC members also rejected Primakov's idea and described his mission "as fiasco".²⁵ As the Western countries and the GCC members were accusing that Iraq was using Primakov's mission to split the anti-Iraqi alliance, he Soviet Union abandoned the mission and reaffirmed her demands for an immedate and unconditional withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwait.

Finally, when UN Security Council Resolution 678 authorising the use of force was adopted the Soviet Union supported the move, although Govbachev earlier held the view that "a military solution was fraught with unpredictable consequences".²⁶ By supporting the UN Resolution 678 the Soviet Union explained that she had no other option than to support the use of force because all possible means for peaceful settlement of the conflict failed. As News-week reported, for the approval of the UN resolution of using force against Iraq the Chinese got assurance of getting generous World Bank loans and the Soviets secured huge loan gurantees from the oil rich Gulf countries

24. *Newsweek*, 29 October 1990, p. 20.

25. *The Economist*, 03 November 1990, p. 45.

26. Vladimir Radyuhin, "US-Soviet Cooperation in the Gulf Crisis", op. cit. p.2.

and trade and other economic benefits from the United States.²⁷

The above review shows therefore, that the Soviet policy towards the Gulf crisis was more opportunistic than realistic, and instead of pursuing the long term interests of the Soviet state the leadership stood shoulder by shoulder with the United States and tried to get maximum economic and other benefits from the Western and oil rich Arab countries.

III. SOVIET UNION AND THE OUTBREAK OF THE GULF WAR

When the War broke out in the Gulf on January 17, 1991 the Soviet Union was not surprised but, for obvious reasons, was very concerned. In a statement on January 17, Mr. Gorbachev said, "The tragic turn of events was provoked by the Iraqi leadership's refusal to comply with demands by the world community and pull out its forces from Kuwait".²⁸ He appealed to the leaders of France, China, Britain, Germany, Italy and India, and most Arab states, "to take joint and parallel steps to localise the conflict and to prevent its dangerous spread".²⁹ At the same time he assured the Soviet people that "the national leadership will adopt every measure towards an early end to the war and restoration of peace in cooperation with other countries and the United Nations".³⁰ The Soviet Union

27. *Newsweek*, 17 December 1990, p. 25.

28. "USSR President's Statement of Gulf War", Moscow, 17 January 1991, p. 1.

29. *Ibid.*

30. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

was concerned about the danger of further escalation of the War and warned against any attempt to disintegrate Iraq. The Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Belonogov in an interview with the Novosti Press warned that, "The results of this war shall not be used to redistribute territories, Iraq must keep within its current frontiers minus Kuwait".³¹

As the possibility of further escalation of the War was increasing and the allied forces led by the United States were bombing on Iraqi and Kuwaiti positions indiscriminately causing heavy civilian casualties, mounting pressures were coming on Moscow for playing more active role to end the War in the Gulf. The new Soviet Foreign Minister Alexander Bessmertnykh during his visit to Washington at the end of January 1991 expressed the Soviet concerns over a possible escalation and intensification of the hostilities, 'unjustified human losses and destruction,' and advised the US side not to confine efforts to liberate Kuwait by military methods only. The two sides also believed that, "a cessation would be possible if Iraq made an unequivocal commitment to withdraw from Kuwait", and "such a commitment must be backed by immediate, concrete steps leading to full compliance with the Security Council resolutions"³² At the same time, in Moscow President Gorbachev's spokesman Vitaly Ignatenko said that the Soviet Union was about to take a very serious decision for the resolution of the Gulf crisis. He also disclosed that the Soviet President had

31. *Press Release* by the press information department of the USSR Embassy in Bangladesh, P.R. No. 9, 20 January 1991, p. 1.

32. "Joint Soviet-US Statement on Gulf Adopted in Washington", 29 January 1991.

exchanged letters with a number of leaders including the US with a set of proposals regarding the situation in the Gulf.³³

Meanwhile, it was reported that the Soviet Union supplied valuable information to the US about Iraqi intelligence and military strength which enabled the allied forces to counter Iraqi air defence by adjusting electronic counter-measures on the aircrafts.³⁴

As the War continued and civilian casualties increased, the Soviet policy towards the Gulf War appeared to be more vocal and active. In a statement in early February 1991 it was stated that "The USSR stands for preventing the multinational forces from causing unjustified civilian casualties, for precluding intentions for destroying Iraq. It is very important that the war should not do irremediable damage to the moral values in the name of which the world community would agree to use the armed force".³⁵ The Soviet Union also sent special envoys to Tehran and Baghdad and invited Tariq Aziz, the Iraqi Foreign Minister to Moscow to find out a negotiated settlement of the Gulf conflict. It appeared that the Soviet Union was able to convince Saddam Hossain to accept the UN resolution and to withdraw from Kuwait. But as Iraq tied the withdrawal process with certain conditions, particularly the simultaneous withdrawal of all foreign troops from the Gulf and to deal with the Palestinian issue, the Iraqi proposals were rejected by the allied forces. And there are lot of doubts and suspicions about the

33. *The Bangladesh Times*, 30 January 1991 .

34. *The Bangladesh Observer*, 29 January 1991.

35. *Press Release* by the press information department of the USSR Embassy in Bangladesh, P.R. No. 1/20, 06 February 1991, p.1.

Soviet capability to find out a negotiated settlement of the crisis, although so far it has been able to keep the channel of communications open.

In fact, the Soviet Union has very little room to manoeuvre in the Gulf crisis. On the one hand, she is committed to the UN resolutions and is working closely with the United States to find out a solution of the crisis. On the other hand, the naked Iraqi invasion and annexation of Kuwait ran counter to the spirit of Soviet "New Thinking", and the Soviet Union has very little or no option other than to stick to the UN resolutions. As a result it is hard to expect that any Soviet peace proposal would be able to end the War or to keep it within the manageable limit.

IV. IMPLICATIONS

So the obvious questions are; Is the Soviet Union capable or willing to play her traditional counter-balance role in the Gulf in the age of "Perestroika" when she is overwhelmingly dependent on Western aid? Is there any scope for the Soviets to play an independent role? What might be the broad Soviet goals and objectives in the Gulf? Finally, what will be the implications of the Gulf War on the Soviet Union?

Taking her geo-political, strategic and military position the Soviet Union is still, at least theoretically, able to play an active independent role in the Gulf crisis. But considering the very complex domestic socio-political, economic and ethnic situations, the overwhelming dependence on Western aid and the very nature of the conflict and objectives of the parties, the Soviet Union may not be interested to be

involved actively into the conflict, atleast at this stage simply because of the cost-benefit consideration.

Conventionally, the Soviet Union might have three broad goals and objectives in the Gulf War.

First; to achieve maximum economic, political and diplomatic gains out of the conflict. There are wide ranging reports that for the support of the US led multinational forces and cooperation with the US on the Gulf crisis, the Soviet Union is getting a good amount of economic aid and political benefits from the West and from the oil rich Gulf countries. But at the same time the Soviet Union is also paying high prices for the crisis. The Iraqi occupation of Kuwait deprived the Soviet Union a gainful market in Kuwait, and during the period of August -December 1990 she lost about \$80 million. The termination of Soviet-Kuwaiti financial-economic cooperation cost Moscow \$450 million dollars. By introducing economic sanctions against Iraq the Soviet Union lost more than \$1 billion dollars, and she was also deprived of Iraqi oil which she re-exported to India, Bulgaria, Romania and Yugoslavia.³⁶

Second; under the cover of "peaceful coexistence" between the two superpowers, the Soviet Union might have an objective to discredit, undermine or humiliate the United States before the Arab and Third World peoples, and then to reemerge as a strong power broker or successful mediator to the conflict. But this strategy may not work well this time because of the

36. *Ibid.* p. 2.

37. Col. Vladimir Chernyshev, "The Nuclear Aspect of the Gulf Crisis", *Feature*, 21 January 1991, p. 2.

changing international situation and the very explosive and unpredictable nature of the conflict.

Third; by supporting the US positions on the Gulf war the Soviet Union might have an objective to neutralise the US on the domestic developments of the country. But this strategy appears to be not working well. The US has already strongly criticised Gorbachev's handling of the Baltic affairs and cancelled the Superpower Summit in protest. And if the event goes out of control in the Baltic, the United States, inspite of her alliance with the Soviet Union on the Gulf War, will take full advantage of the situation.

No matter how it ends, the Gulf War will have serious implications for the Soviet Union.

First; if the Soviet Union fails to play an active role in bringing a settlement to the crisis and silently observe the destruction of Iraq, an old ally, her power, prestige and influence in the Third World will be undermined. The Soviet Union was always considered as a friend and supporter of the Third World and particularly Arab because of her active role in the decolonization process, and support to various national liberation movements, including the Palestinians. The resignations and withdrawals of Soviet commitments from the Third World are already being viewed as a defeat of a superpower, and if she continues her current policy to wards the Gulf War indefinitely, she may be even accused of being a 'sold out' superpower to the West.

Second; the War is being fought at a very dangerous proximity of Soviet borders, and in case of

its further escalation or the use of chemical or nuclear weapons the Soviet Union will be affected directly. According to experts a single nuclear device in the region would lead to large-scale radioactive contamination, which would spread into other continents, and the implications would be much more damaging than the Chernobyl tragedy. Moreover any dangerous developments in the Gulf war, particularly the disintegration of Iraq will have serious implications for the Soviet Central Asian and Caucasian Republics.

Third; the Gulf crisis will also have serious strategic and security implications for the Soviet Union. Although both the superpowers have similar views and are coordinating their policies, their strategic interests in the region are, obviously, not identical. The US policy is mainly motivated by her strategic interests in the region, dependence on the Middle Eastern oil, commitment to Israel and Western alliance and design to build up a US designed and dominated post-Cold War international system. Already there are reports that the US is interested to build up a NATO-type security arrangement in the post-War Gulf by involving Israel and other friendly countries in the region. On the other hand, the Soviets are interested "to take a practical part in establishing guaranteed peace and security", to turn the region into "a nuclear and chemical arms free zone" and "to adopt confidence building measures" in the region.³⁸

Finally, the War may have serious environmental and ecological implications for the whole region inclu-

38. *Press Release* by the press information department of the USSR Embassy in Bangladesh, P.R. No. 09, 20 January 1991, p. 2.

ding the Soviet Union. Already the oil slick has created serious environmental hazards for the region, and, according to experts, the continuous burning of oil fields will pollute earth's atmosphere which will produce a "nuclear winter effect".³⁹

CONCLUSIONS

So far we have observed that the Soviet Union has its own problems and limitations in pursuing an effective policy towards the Gulf crisis. She has to maintain a very delicate balance between the traditional allies in the Third World and the newly embraced and prospective allies in the West and in the Arab world. The following factors appear to be critical in shaping the Soviet Gulf policy in the foreseeable future.

First; Iraq was a traditional close ally of the Soviet Union, and if Moscow fails to play an effective mediative role to end the crisis and accepts the destruction of Iraq, the Soviet power, prestige and position will be seriously undermined and at the same time the leadership will face mounting pressures from domestic sources, particularly from the army.

Second; the Arabs always considered the Soviet Union as a friend and true ally because of her consistent and unequivocal support to the Palestinian cause. But the recent massive Soviet Jews immigration into Israel and their settlements in the occupied territories have created doubts and suspicions in the Arab minds about the real Soviet intentions in the Middle East.

Third; the anti-American sentiments are rising high throughout the Third World, particularly in the

39. Col. Vladidimir Chernyshev, *op. cit.* p. 2.

Arab World, and if the Soviet Union continues to stand by the US on the Gulf crisis, her independent role and peace making capability will be questioned and seriously undermined.

Fourth; in the post-Cold War era the peace activists and various peace movements throughout the world are very active and vocal against any war, and naturally they hope for more active and effective Soviet mediative role in the Gulf conflict.

It is true that Gorbachev virtually became a hero by presiding over the dissolution of communism in Eastern Europe, but the context and situation in the Gulf are totally different, and if the Soviet Union tends to pursue similar policy in the Gulf the price might be too high for Moscow. "Perestroika" is being tested in the battle grounds of the Persian Gulf and the Soviet Union will have to balance between their old and new policies. Although the Soviet Union believes in an era of peace and progress and expects that the super-powers will act in cooperation with the international community without claiming any special role, the reality seems to be quite different where the growing tendency is to create a unipolar world designed and dictated by the US leaving no or very insignificant role for the Soviet Union in the new system. The Soviet policy in the Third World had ups and downs, suffered occasional setbacks and often the economic costs were too high in proportion to political gains. But if Moscow now wants to compensate and intends to get maximum economic benefits without considering the political loss, ultimately the political and diplomatic set-backs may prove to be too high compared to economic gains.