

Iraqi Move Tests US-Soviet Ties Kuwait Invasion Comes as Baker, Shevardnadze Reach Accord on Regional Conflicts

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WHILE US Secretary of State James Baker III and Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze wrap up a successful meeting in Siberia, the reality of superpower cooperation is being seriously tested by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

Following Mr. Shevardnadze's return to Moscow Thursday afternoon, the Soviet Foreign Ministry issued a statement clearly condemning the Iraqi invasion. It called for the "immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwaiti territory. The sovereignty, national independence, and territorial integrity integrity of Kuwait must be fully restored and defended."

The Soviets also have joined a collective effort at the UN Security Council to end the conflict.

The Soviet stance comes despite the existence of a treaty of friendship and cooperation and the Soviet role as Iraq's main weapons supplier.

"This invasion is absolutely unacceptable," comments Viktor Kreminiyuk, a specialist

on regional conflict at the influential U.S.A.-Canada Institute, a Moscow think tank. He describes Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein as "a madman on a bicycle," adding that it is "absolutely incredible that he would attack a peaceful state."

The Iraqi invasion, he says, "is a test for the extent of Soviet-American cooperation in keeping peace. Diplomatic means, both through the United Nations and outside it, should be tried first, Kreminiyuk argues, "but if it doesn't work, something has to be done." United States military action against Iraq at that point, "would be tacitly supported" by the Soviet Union, he says.

The emergence of this new crisis in the Middle East comes just as the US and Soviet Union have made breakthroughs in forging joint positions on solving long-standing regional conflicts in Afghanistan and Cambodia. Mr. Baker and Shevardnadze, in a joint press conference yesterday after two days of talks in the Siberian city of Irkutsk, announced significant progress toward settlement of the Afghan war.

The two leaders also opened a new dialogue on the Asia-Pacific region, one which the Soviets hope will lead to broader security talks like those in Europe. The two men reported progress on a wide array of other issues, from German reunification and a new US-Soviet summit later this year to US economic assistance.

The agreement reached on Afghanistan at the Irkutsk meeting opens the door to ending the 12-year-long war in that central Asian nation. At their press conference yesterday, according to wire service reports, Baker and Shevardnadze described a formula for ending the war between the Soviet-backed government of President Najibullah and US-backed rebels. It calls for creation of an interim agency to conduct free elections under United Nations supervision.

"We both recognize the role of the United Nations and some form of monitoring and control of the elections by the United Nations," Shevardnadze said. "There is also mutual recognition of the need for free elections, and there is recognition of that by the Afghan government. There is recognition of the need to create some kind of commis-

sion or authority to conduct free and fair elections."

Both officials said there was still some negotiation ahead before this can take place. The formation of an interim authority is likely to pose the greatest challenge. The failure to find an acceptable third party to head such a government, such as the aged, exiled Afghan king, means that it will be a coalition between the Kabul regime and the rebels. The role of Najibullah in that government must still be decided.

The new agreement is a follow-up to the initial Soviet-American deal which led to the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan last year. But the Soviets have continued to supply arms to their Afghan allies in Kabul, as has the US to its rebel clients. Soviet analysts believe the agreement at Irkutsk will lead to a mutual reduction of those arms supplies. Beyond the Afghan issue, the two senior officials indicated they were on the same wavelength, following a change in the US position, on promoting a political dialogue in Cambodia.

More broadly, according to Tass, Shevardnadze said they had discussed for the first time "common problems of Asia and the Far East," including stability, security, the end of military confrontation and possibilities for bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the region. The discussion in Siberia included the situation on the Korean peninsula, where the Soviets have been playing an increasing role due to growing ties with South Korea. These developments could mark a shift in the American position, which has resisted holding arms and security talks in Asia and the Pacific. The Soviet Union and the US "do not view each other as adversaries" in Asia or elsewhere, Shevardnadze declared.

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