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Soviet Objectives in the Eastern Mediterranean

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by

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INTRODUCTION

Adm. Arthur W. Radford, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in testifying before a Congressional Committee stated:

The importance of the Middle East to the free world can hardly be overestimated militarily and economically. First, its huge oil reserves now supply most of the wants of Europe, and their loss would be disastrous. Secondly, its geographic location is astride the lines of communication between West and East, and, thirdly, it is only in this area that the Soviets have no buffer states.¹

The Eastern Mediterranean, located at the juncture of Europe, Asia, and

Africa has been the historical crossroads of invading armies for centuries. Explored by many of the Western Powers it remains one of the most strategic areas in the world today.

Russian aspirations in the Eastern Mediterranean date back to Peter the Great. Turkey, lying athwart the Straits between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, has often experienced Russian probes but has successfully resisted them with the alternating and occasionally combined support of Great Britain, France, and Germany. Russia's plea for support of her ambitions was exemplified in the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939.

Faced with a power vacuum that resulted when the British, for economic reasons, were forced to evacuate the area, the United States in 1947 countered Russian ambitions with the Truman Doctrine. Notwithstanding these efforts, the Soviets along with the United States supported the establishment of the Jewish State of Israel in 1948. This gave Russia a voice in the Middle East, ensured the departure of British authority from Palestine, and the promise of continued Arab-Israeli conflict.

More recent events that have further complicated Western interests are the Arab-Israeli War of 1967 and the British decision to withdraw forces east of Suez. The Soviets have apparently viewed the existing political environment as an opportunity to project their influence in this vital area. It would appear that Russia has nothing to gain from preservation of the status quo in the Middle East. The assistance given to Egypt and Syria today, for the same reason that Israel was supported in 1948, appears to be the one factor most likely to upset the political balance in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The most significant evolution in Soviet foreign policy since 1955 is the change from a continental to a global strategy. Nowhere has the change been more apparent than in the "gray" areas between the Soviet and Western spheres of influence--one such area being the Eastern Mediterranean.

The purpose of this paper is to make a realistic appraisal of Soviet objectives in this vital area of the Eastern Mediterranean. The geographic area of the Eastern Mediterranean is described herein as Greece, Turkey, Syria, the Levant, Egypt, and the sea area extending from the Strait of Otranto to the eastern boundary of Egypt. It is from the relatively recent penetration of this area that avenues lay open for further expansion of Soviet influence. Although the paper mainly concentrates on the area

defined above, when discussing such topics as foreign aid, projection of seapower, and military bases, reference will be made to the greater Middle East and strategic waterways therein, to further illustrate Soviet influence in the area.

I--RUSSIA'S HISTORICAL INTEREST IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

The "great northern power" that has sought so consistently since the seventeenth century to extend its power to the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf has found its way impeded . . . by human opposition. Only the Bosphorus-Dardanelles Channel, with the Sea of Marmora--in which vessels can be employed--provides an easy, natural passage way from the Black Sea into the Aegean, whence Turkey could be flanked, and on into the Mediterranean with its limitless opportunities for the application of power. But the Turkish Straits lie at the eastern door of Europe, and it is inevitable that they should have been most jealously guarded, not by the Turks alone but by the dominant powers of Western and Central Europe, as well.¹

Dr. Hoskins is one of numerous scholars who acknowledges and emphasizes the strategic significance of the Eastern Mediterranean to both the Soviet Union and Western democracies.

The Ottoman Empire of the Turks, a most formidable military power, a ruler of three continents, and the terror of the Christian world dominated the Mediterranean until the 19th century. The Ottoman Turks conquered the Arab world, gained a foothold in Eastern Europe at the expense of the Byzantine Empire, and swept around the Black Sea and turned it into an Ottoman lake.²

Although Russia appeared on the Eastern political scene in the ninth century, there was no major friction beyond limited border raids. It was not until the reign of Peter the Great that Russia exhibited any real interest in extending its boundaries. Determined to

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establish a foothold on the Black Sea and gain access to the warm water ports of the Mediterranean, Peter captured the Turkish Black Sea fortress of Azov in 1696. Russian preoccupation in the Russo-Swedish war and the alliance between Turkey and Charles XII of Sweden allowed the Turks to regain possession of Azov in 1711.³

Russian aspirations in gaining a foothold in the Mediterranean began to take form by events commencing in the 18th century. These occurrences were centered around the evolution of Western Powers, becoming world powers, the rise in Tzarist objectives of expansion, the decline of the Ottoman Empire, and the counteractions of Western power to Russia's southern expansion.

Catherine the Great continued the Kremlin's policy in the Middle East. When Russia became involved with the Poles, the Turks declared war on Russia. Catherine then dispatched the Baltic Fleet around Europe, and it annihilated the Turkish Navy at Chesme. The Russian Fleet continued "mopping up" operations in the Aegean Sea and in 1772 occupied Beirut where the Russian flag flew over the Arab population for 5 months.⁴ Although the naval effort failed to penetrate the Dardanelles, the treaty concluded in 1774, coupled with subsequent pressure on the Ottoman Empire, gained for Russia additional territory and free navigation in the Black Sea.⁵

Catherine's son Paul attempted to penetrate the Mediterranean and the Adriatic Sea by diplomatic means rather than the use of force. Through the combined efforts of Russia and the Turks, the Ionian Islands were liberated from the French. Russia had now secured an Adriatic base of operations for exercising control of the Balkans. The arrival of Napoleon in the Middle East resulted in the first defensive alliance between Russia and Turkey, in which Russia was granted free passage through the straits, and the strategic waterway

was closed to the warships of other foreign powers.

These successful Russian advances were not going unnoticed by the British but efforts to muster an immediate British response in the area were overshadowed by the spectacular rise of Napoleon. In 1798 the Napoleon expedition successfully landed at Alexandria. Although suffering a crushing naval defeat by Lord Nelson a month later, Napoleon preserved his army and made advances into Syria and Palestine. Napoleon's adventure failed to establish France in the Middle East; however, Charles Moran describes it as having the following effect:

This historical importance of the French expedition to Egypt far transcends any question presented by the conflict between revolutionary France and conservative England. Bonaparte had demonstrated that a small army of resolute men in control of the country which by its location dominated the shortest route to India could compel Great Britain to forsake the broad oceans over which her fleets roamed at will and concentrate on a restricted but intricate area. . . . The French plan was not a diversion; it was more than a mere colonial venture. It was a bold flight of major strategy. . . .

By 1812 Napoleon's Middle Eastern adventures had ceased, and Russia's southward expansion was resumed. Britain, with great commercial interests in the Mediterranean, saw the need to promote actively the integrity of the Ottoman Empire. Turkey's appeal to the great powers for regulations to operate the straits resulted in a "neutralization" policy in the Treaty of 1809. Though Russia was denied access to the Mediterranean, she was assured that no hostile fleet would attack her Black Sea possessions.⁷

In 1832 Turkey faced the invasion of an expeditionary force headed by the Egyptian, Ibrahim Pasha. The Russian Fleet came to the rescue of the Sultan. According to the Unkiar Iskelessi treaty that followed, Russia became guardian

of the Straits and the Ottoman Empire became dependent upon its powerful northern neighbor.⁸ A later war between the Ottoman Empire and Egypt resulted in the intervention of European powers principally Great Britain, who were alarmed by the Russian influence in Constantinople. The subsequent convention of the straits in 1841 once more checked Russian influence and placed the Ottoman Empire under joint European protectorate.⁹ The groundwork was being laid for the formation of an anti-Russian bloc, which was soon to challenge Russia in the Crimean War.

The Crimean War ensued after Nicholas I countered Napoleon the Third's efforts to strengthen the French influence in the Near East with a demand for protection over Orthodox Christians throughout the Ottoman Empire. Russian invasion into Turkish provinces caused England and France to declare war in 1854. The Treaty of Paris, which followed the fall of Sevastopol, excluded the Russian Fleet from the Black Sea and restricted the construction of defense installations along its shores. The defeat of Imperialist Russia by no means ended her efforts in territorial expansion as it was unrealistic to expect Russia to tolerate the harsh provisions.

In 1877 when Turkish upheavals occurred in the Balkans, the Russians once again invaded and were successful. However, from the big powers' point of view, the peace demands that were dictated at San Stefano seriously upset the balance of power in the East.¹⁰ The diplomatic defeat for Russia, at the Congress of Berlin, accompanied by British occupation of Cyprus and followed by the occupation of Egypt, restored a balance of power through the substitution of British for Ottoman power. Britain had no outstanding interest in Cyprus until the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. The vital character of the canal was obvious from the standpoint of world trade and empire affairs, and the Cyprus defense post was

occupied as part of a plan to block the advance of the Russians to the Eastern Mediterranean.¹¹ In the meantime, Great Britain feared that the Suez Canal might be closed to her in time of war. This prompted the Convention of Constantinople, in 1888, in which the big powers agreed to neutralize the canal.¹²

At the turn of the century, German influence in the Ottoman Empire was manifest, and at the outbreak of World War I Germany and Turkey concluded a secret alliance treaty. Germany's aim was that Turkey would divert some Russian and British energies from the war in Europe. Turkey's effort toward neutrality ended when Russia declared war on the Ottoman Empire after two Turkish battleships, manned by German crews, attacked the Russian Fleet in the Black Sea.¹³ The allied Russian campaign ended in failure but the overall allied victory left Turkey thoroughly humiliated.

At the Treaty of Sevres in 1920 it was agreed to internationalize the straits and to demilitarize the adjacent zones. Constantinople was to remain under Turkish control. The Ottoman Empire died and the Allies divided the spoils. It is significant to note that imperialist Russia had not penetrated the Middle East Arab world but did become a diplomatic ally of Turkey through the difficult years of the rebirth of the Turkish nation under Kemal Ataturk. Having repudiated the Treaty of Sevres and secured Soviet Assistance by a treaty of friendship signed in 1921, Ataturk concentrated on the war of independence for the new Turkish Empire. In the Treaty of Lausanne that followed, Turkey improved her position. Aside from resolving territorial demands in her favor, she had asserted her mastery of the straits by making the Turkish member president of the International Straits Commission.¹⁴

Between the year 1924, in which the Lausanne Treaty was signed, and 1936 no incident occurred to challenge either

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the naval security of the Black Sea powers or the neutrality of the straits. However, in 1936 the Italian attack on Abyssinia, coupled with the Spanish Civil War, placed the Eastern Mediterranean in danger of war and the straits at the merey of hostile attack. Turkey's request for early revision of the Treaty of Lausanne resulted in new negotiations at the Convention of Montreux.¹⁵

Most important among the provisions of the convention, Turkey was authorized to refortify the zone, and the duties of the International Straits Commission were transferred to the Turkish Government. Continued Russian demands for the revision of the provisions of the Montreux Convention have been unsuccessful.

The secret negotiations between the Germans and the Russians prior to World War II in which they attempted to define their respective spheres of influence clearly illustrated Soviet design in the Middle East. In the Hitler-Stalin Pact concluded in 1939, Russia demanded a land and naval base in the Bosphorus-Dardanelles area and claim to an indefinite area in the general direction of the Persian Gulf.¹⁶ As one author puts it, "The Nazi-Soviet Pact was a disaster for the West and a master stroke of Soviet diplomacy. It revealed what the world had to confront when it faced traditional Russian foreign policy goals overlaid with Communist ideology."¹⁷

The turn of events in World War II found Russia invaded by Germany. Although Turkey was encouraged by Russia to join the Allies and was pressured by Germany to join the Axis by playing on Soviet intentions in the Hitler-Stalin pact, she remained neutral until the final phase of the war.

The Soviets once again failed in World War II to penetrate the Eastern Mediterranean by force or pressure. However, after the war, the Soviets continued demands for bases on the straits, threatened the integrity of Tur-

key and Iran, and attempted to establish a Communist regime in Greece.¹⁸ By 1947 Britain was no longer capable of maintaining the status quo in the Eastern Mediterranean. If Greece fell into the hands of the Communists, Turkey would become vulnerable, and the Soviet Union would gain access to the Mediterranean. In the interest of maintaining American security and European stability, the United States sought to fill the vacuum through the Truman Doctrine and the commitment of \$400 million of direct aid to Greece and Turkey.

Russia's southward expansion throughout history was marked by attempts to gain complete control of the Turkish Straits. Such a victory would have meant destruction of the Ottoman Empire and freedom to project her power into the Eastern Mediterranean. History demonstrates that whenever Russia was on the verge of obtaining this ideal objective, she invariably ran into the counterattack of Britain and other European powers who, by determined effort, prevented her attainment of this goal.

Although the Truman Doctrine stemmed the tide of Soviet influence on the Eastern Mediterranean, the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 and the bitter rivalries among the Arab nations created a political environment suited to the future exploits of the Soviet Union.

The year 1955 constituted an important landmark in Soviet relations with Eastern Mediterranean countries. The Baghdad Pact no longer presented a barrier to Soviet expansionism. The Soviet Union leapfrogged the "Northern tier" and concentrated on the Arab core of the Middle East.

II-SOVIET OPPORTUNITY ARISES

The Soviet objectives in the Eastern Mediterranean have been to extend their influence by encouraging unrest among the peoples of the area and forcing

withdrawal of the West. The Soviets have used every means possible, short of direct conflict, to counter Western influence.

Arab-Israeli Conflict. In the Arab nations to the south of the northern tier, the Soviets have relied largely on diplomatic maneuver and propaganda to aggravate dissent in the Arab world. Attempts by the Soviets to retain their hold on northern Iran after World War II were not successful as was its attempt to gain influence in Turkey. Failing in this, the Soviets turned their attention to Palestine. The Jews, in seeking a state in Palestine, were breaking Britain's grip on the Middle East. Anything which contributed to the weakening of the Western position in that area was welcomed by Moscow. Although traditionally anti-Zionist, the Soviets supported the establishment of a Jewish state.¹ This provided the opportunity for Moscow to gain a voice in the Middle East affairs. By supporting the Palestine partition, the Soviets ensured the departure of the British troops and authority from Palestine and continued Arab-Jewish conflict. This offered the prospect of instability in the Middle East for an indefinite future and the creation of an atmosphere whereby Moscow could best pursue her objectives.

The establishment of Israel during the initial Arab-Israeli conflict in 1947-49 had several far-reaching effects on the political balance in the area. It was a major factor in unifying the Arab nations to the point they are today; it punctuated the decline of United States, British, and French influence in the Middle East; and it invited further Russian influence and expansion into the Middle East.²

In the early 1950's Israel leaned more on the West. Moreover, Israel could not overlook the fact that Jews of the Soviet Union were forbidden to emigrate to Israel. After the Arab-Israeli

war the Soviets were convinced that they could not use Israel as a lever for improving their position in the Middle East.³ As Israel swayed more to the West, Soviet-Israeli relations deteriorated. In late December 1955 the new Soviet attitude in Arab-Israeli relations was expressed by Communist Party Secretary Nikita S. Khrushchev who stated, "from the first day of its existence the State of Israel has been taking a hostile, threatening position toward its neighbors. Imperialists are behind Israel, trying to exploit it against Arabs for their own benefit."⁴

It would appear that Russia has little to gain from the preservation of the status quo in the Middle East. The assistance given to Egypt and Syria today, for the very same reason that Israel was supported in 1948, appears to be the one factor most likely to upset the political balance in the Eastern Mediterranean.

It has been asserted that the Soviets knew in advance of the Arab-Israeli conflict in June 1967, that the Arabs would be defeated, and by sacrificing the arms and equipment previously given to the Arabs, the Arabs would be totally dependent on the Soviet Union. Others say that the Soviet Union could not have planned such a defeat.⁵

In 1957 Walter Laqueur wrote:

Russia has no vested interest in a victory of Egypt in a possible war despite the assistance rendered; one can imagine, on the contrary, that the conditions for the growth of Communism in a defeated Egypt or Syria would be better than an Israel which has lost a war... if Egypt should prevail in the arms race against Israel... Soviet prestige will increase enormously. If Egypt should be defeated for a second time, Communism (and thus indirectly the Soviet Union) will again be the main beneficiary. It is—heads I win, tails you lose.⁶

Another writer, Christopher Emmet, gave credence to this theory after the Arab-Israeli conflict in June 1967. It

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was assumed that Nasser, not the Soviet Government, was in the driver's seat in building up the recent Arab-Israeli crises, and that the Soviet objective was to defeat or weaken Israel and change the Middle Eastern military balance of power. But what if the Soviet objective was not the defeat of Israel but control of the oil through the weakening or overthrow of conservative Arab Governments and through an increasing Arab dependence on Soviet support? In this case, Israel was a vital bone of contention which divided the Arabs from the West.

This Soviet purpose would be served either by the intensification of the Israeli-Arab cold war, through increased guerrilla activity and renewed blockade of the Gulf of Aqaba, or by a hot war. Either would drain Israel's economy, cut off or reduce the flow of oil to the west, threaten the fragile British economy by temporary loss of oil revenues and the probable hlockade of Suez, force the United States to the expense of oil deliveries from the Western Hemisphere for Europe and for the war in Vietnam. True there has been Arab criticism of the lack of Soviet intervention and a temporary loss of Soviet prestige, but the Arabs are more bitter, weaker, and more dependent on the Soviet than ever.⁷

The Soviet Union appears satisfied to encourage movements of a national character in which the hatred of imperialism and Western domination can be exploited. Moscow hoped to take advantage of Anglo-American disagreement over the Palestine issue. Withdrawal of the British presence without any increase of American influence would result in a power vacuum which the Soviet Union might exploit. Once it was clear that the United States was replacing Britain in Israel and the leaders of Israel were looking to the United States for protection, the Soviet Union had to reappraise its policy.

Neo-colonialism. The Arabs strongly desired to reaffirm their independence after World War II. The continued pre-

sence of allied forces on their land added to their existing discontent and frustration. This resulted in a powerful struggle for Arab nationalism. Thereafter, the Arabs resented any type of client-patron relationship with the West. These emotions are common for new states gaining full independence as expressed by Navy Secretary Paul H. Nitze in speaking to the Naval Academy in 1965, he stated, "whatever their shortcomings, their tendency is to blame someone else. The greater their weakness, the more compelling the need to find others to blame. Rue for inadequacy generates protest against inequality . . . every lack is laid to experience of colonial status. The result is the aspiration of getting even."⁸

Arab nationalism, encouraged by resentment of former colonial rule, constitutes a strong sentiment among the Arab nations. They all appear to desire a change, but disagree on the kind of change and the method initiating the change. This turmoil has even created friction in the relations among the Arab states. Unable to advance militarily and economically on their own, some of them have looked to the Soviet Union for support. One reason may be the Soviet model of economic development. On the other hand, Western efforts to establish a Middle East Command, the Baghdad Pact, and the Eisenhower Doctrine were highly resented by some Arab states. They maintained that the remnants of West-European Colonialism were more a threat than the Soviet Union. The relationship which involved military cooperation was viewed as a form of neo-colonialism.⁹ In this respect the Soviets held the advantage since they have never appeared in the Middle East as a colonial power. Accordingly, the Soviets have taken full advantage of this opportunity in the form of anti-neo-colonial propaganda.

Arab Nationalism and Communism. It has frequently been asserted that the

two ideological movements of communism and Arab nationalism would join forces in order to reach a common goal: the destruction of the status quo in the Mediterranean. Although cooperation between the Soviet Union, Egypt, and Syria is evident, one writer doubts that Soviet control can be decisive.

Arab nationalism seeking to escape from authority of the West and Russian communism seeking to weaken the strategic position of Great Britain and the United States, but there is no natural compatibility between Moslem and Communist goals. No political party in the Arab World, except a small Communist group proposes more than a temporary threat combination; to go further would merely exchange one alien authority for another. . . . If communism effectively penetrates the Middle East it will be on the heels of a Soviet expansion by arms. All other signs of its presence are significant only in the concept of an Arab-Moslem struggle against Western imperialism.¹⁰

This evaluation assumes rationality on the part of the Arab leaders and masses. However, continued Israeli victories contribute to a response of hatred and possible loss of rationality.

After 1955 the Kremlin recognized the national bourgeoisie as revolutionary in its struggle against colonialism and imperialism even though it was not socialist in its objectives. The immediate objective was to remove Western influence and gain Soviet prestige. The concept envisioned was the greater the internal instability and the weaker the bourgeoisie leadership, the greater the Soviet chances to exploit a socialist revolution.¹¹

By disguising themselves as Arab Nationalists the Communists carried out the instructions given them by Lenin in 1920. "All the Communist parties must assist the bourgeoisie democracy in colonial and backward countries, but must not merge with it."

The support of the national liberation movement in return for Arab support of Soviet policies was not in accord

with the true Communist ideology. Although the Soviets outwardly encouraged Arab unity, the Arabs seemed more divided than ever. Unable to advance progressively in this environment the Soviets turned their attention to the progressive countries in the Arab world. Logically the center of attention was Egypt, with the strongest leader and the best potential for developing some sort of socialist state.¹²

In the year 1956 the Soviets gained prestige in the Middle East when the West attacked the Suez. Since 1951 they had proclaimed the falsehood of Western insistence on the necessity for defense of the Middle East against Russian attack. Although alarmed by the attack, they were not hesitant on pressing home that the Soviets were the defenders of the Middle East.

When Nasser was asked by Mr. William Attwood in an interview published by *Look* magazine, 25 June 1957, whether he was still of the opinion expressed in 1954 when he said that he thought Communist methods and tactics in all Arab countries "are directed to stirring up disorder and hate," he replied in the affirmative: "I think their objectives are dangerous and that is why the Communist Party is illegal in Egypt."¹³ Nasser confirmed this when in 1956 the government continued to send Communists to prison while receiving Russian arms.

In a recent interview with Mr. Attwood, Nasser stated, "we certainly feel more friendly with the Russians than with the West, but we are still unaligned. There is no coordination of policy . . . the Russians support us economically and in the United Nations. We appreciate this help, but we don't feel it limits our freedom at all."¹⁴ This can be interpreted that Egypt still has the same suspicious attitude regarding communism.

Possibly Nasser has observed the Turkish precedent which demonstrated the results of a national revolution

directed against the West. John C. Campbell, a Middle East expert, showed in 1957 that the Turks went through their nationalist revolution a generation ago. It was directed largely against the West, and Soviet help was welcomed as a means of winning the fight. Turkey then went through a period of neutrality while it consolidated its independence, and finally turned to the West when it perceived the full implications of the Soviet threat.

Analogous to this was the Kremlin support to General Peron until his overthrow in 1955. Peron was endorsed by the Kremlin because he was anti-British and anti-American. Furthermore, Mossadegh of Iran was supported by Moscow until his downfall in 1953, despite his anticommunism because he endeavored to deny the United States and Britain any form of influence.¹⁵

In December 1958, Nasser declared that, "We shall smite down anybody who is opposed to Arab nationalism; the Communist party in Syria working against our unity and against Arab nationalism." This was one of the first attacks made publicly against Communist activity. The feeling of the Arabs themselves is expressed in the Arab meaning of communism as shown by Sharahi in 1966, "Communism, shuyu'iyah, is a 'bad' name in Arabic; it generates mistrust rather than fear. For the masses, Communism constitutes an alien movement with an unintelligible philosophy: for the nationalists, it is an antinationalist doctrine and is therefore opposed."¹⁶

The Arab movement toward unity will probably be supported as long as it can be used as a weapon against the West and Israel. Despite Arab nationalism and a conflict in ideological beliefs, the Soviets have established a foothold in the Middle East. Since the end of the June 1967 war, Russia has advised Egypt that she would be resupplied with military equipment only if she stopped the "milk and water" socialism. How-

ever, Nasser stalled and the arms kept coming, and now about 90 percent have been replaced.¹⁷ To what extent the Soviets will go to meet their objectives is an open ended question.

Aswan Dam Project. The year 1955 marks the period when Russia became firmly established in the Middle East.¹⁸ In that year a kind of bargaining took place which was focused on the supply of arms to Egypt and the financing of the Aswan High Dam. The Egyptian economy has steadily drifted toward Russia ever since the Czech arms deal. Russia repeatedly offered to finance the High Dam project for repayment in cotton and rice over a 30-year period. Nasser was more willing to accept Russian foreign aid as the anxiety for the building of the dam increased. Egypt used her neutrality and the Russian financial offer as a lever in negotiating with the Western Powers.

In December 1955 the United States and British Governments assured their support in the High Aswan Dam project. However, United States long-term aid commitment for the dam was linked as a source of Arab-Israeli tensions and a possible future threat to U.S. cotton exports if Egyptian irrigated land was to be used to grow cotton.¹⁹ Nasser's hesitance on accepting the offer, coupled with his anti-Western actions, resulted in United States withdrawal of the aid offer.

The Soviets were in no hurry to grant aid for the dam for fear of losing prestige should the rift with the United States be only temporary. Assured of a Soviet triumph, the Soviets agreed to finance the dam in 1958. As the need for the dam grew more pressing, Nasser negotiated in terms that he would have never been willing to grant to the Western Power. One writer states that, "history will record that Anglo-American policies not only transferred the achievement to Russia, with all that meant as an example to the under-

developed regions of Africa and Asia, but forced Nasser to accept terms tying him to the commitment."²⁰

The extensive development program is being paid for by Egyptian cotton, the most important agricultural foreign exchange earner, bringing in about \$150 million a year. The Soviet bloc has provided the market for cotton and other agricultural commodities for which Egypt cannot find sufficient customers in Western markets.²¹ Another writer states:

It should have been realized at the time that the Dam was no mere grandiose whim of Nasser's. It was an absolute must for Egypt. The Government of the United Arab Republic has no sympathy with Communism as a way of life--indeed, it is dangerous to be a Communist in the United Arab Republic--but it had to get money and help for the dam from whomsoever it could. The Russians were waiting and willing. The opportunity to win friends and influence Africa was handed to them, one might say, on a plate.²²

On the other hand, Nasser gave little evidence of seeking to improve his diplomatic position with the West. He continued to purchase arms from Eastern Europe and took a hard line against the Baghdad Pact. He recognized the People's Republic of China contrary to an agreement made with the American Ambassador which required prior notice of such a decision. He was instrumental in supporting terrorist raids into Israel; in promoting inflammatory broadcasts of Cairo radio to East Africa; in stalling for financial terms for the High Dam and pronouncing false reports that the Soviet Union had offered a loan on better terms; these actions, if avoided, might have assured Western aid to Egypt.²³

In the meantime the Soviets observed an opportunity and responded. In the case of the dam the Soviets have advanced about 30 percent of the \$1 billion cost. This has paid for equipment and technicians, which at one time numbered 2,000. Ibrahim Zaki, deputy

director of the government's Aswan High Dam Authority, said, "For the Egyptians this is our prize, it makes up for sacrifices, frustrations and defeats elsewhere."²⁴

Practical versus Ideological Factors. It is evident that practical rather than ideological factors have determined Soviet policies in the Middle East. The Communists have no quarrel with Arab nationalism as long as the Arabs concentrate their efforts against the West. While the Soviets have supported the Arab states, they have never supported unity for the Arab world. The apparent strategy is to reduce the influence and prestige by suitable available means even though local Communists may have to ride out events behind prison doors. The Soviets have taken every advantage of the Arab resentment of British and French rule and the Zionist invasion of the Arab world.

It is quite apparent that Moscow is not inclined to pursue a major military attack to obtain its objectives in the area. The fact that they have made impressive gains without resorting to the use of armed force is all the more reason to believe that direct attack is improbable. As John C. Campbell stated in 1961, "one of the great perils of the coming year may be the gradual advance of Soviet power in such areas as the Middle East without the resort to anything that international law or world opinion would call an act of overt aggression."²⁵

III-SOVIET FOREIGN AID AND ASSISTANCE

During the past dozen years, economic and military aid to less developed countries of the Eastern Mediterranean has become a key instrument in the Soviet effort to project its presence. The Soviets needed only to present themselves as an additional source of political and economic support to find a number of willing recipients. The Soviets give

high priority to the establishment of policies in these countries which would enhance their influence and eliminate the influence of the West. As one writer puts it, "the national liberation of colonial peoples and their ultimate amalgamation with world communism have always been accorded high priority in Communist strategic thinking."¹ The purpose of this chapter is to discuss various means of Soviet economic penetration in the Middle East and to some extent a comparison with other areas. (Unless otherwise indicated, the economic data contained in this chapter is taken from the Congressional Joint Economic Committee Report of 1966.²)

Economic Aid Program. The year 1955 marked the initial major penetration of Soviet aid in the Middle East. Since that time the Soviet Foreign Aid Program can generally be broken down into four periods. In the first stage, 1955-57, both economic and military aid served as the initial entree into the Middle East, and the Russians seemed to offer aid indiscriminately. In the second stage, 1958-61, the Soviet aid program was more selective in nature. The political aspects of the Soviet aid program were shown by the preference given to Egypt and Syria.³ The two countries received \$760 million in credit. This was three times as much as that given to India as during this period nearly 30 percent of the total Soviet aid went to the Middle East.

The third stage, 1961-63, showed a decrease in the Soviet aid program. The major recipients, having recently been granted large aid extensions, were in the initial phases of their 5-year development programs. By this time the Soviets had also negotiated aid agreements with a number of African countries. The fourth phase commenced with Soviet aid reaching a new high of \$1 billion in 1964. The United Arab Republic and India received about two-thirds of the total aid program for use in their forth-

coming 5-year plan. Subsequent Soviet aid commitments seemed to be project oriented in contrast to umbrella-type lines of credit frequently extended in the past.

The Soviets have repeatedly strived to dismantle the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) and with this objective allocated nearly 85 percent of all aid in 1965 to Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey, all members of the pact. Some of the member nations have already begun to question the usefulness of CENTO and have tended to stress the economic rather than the military nature of the pact.⁴ Iran has accepted extensive economic aid from the Soviet Union since the United States discontinued the aid mission which has been in operation for 16 years. The main project is the Iranian natural gas line, which the Soviets are helping finance for a 12-year pledge of gas delivery.⁵

Technical Assistance. The less developed countries desire for rapid economic expansion requires substantial technical and professional skills. The Soviets fully realize that technical assistance and academic training must go hand in hand with foreign aid to these countries.

In the 10-year period from 1955 to 1965, about 50,000 Soviet economic technicians have been employed in less developed countries. In the same period the Soviets have provided more than 20,000 personnel with technical training in the Soviet Union. Over one-third of all Soviet economic technicians have been employed in the Middle East. As early as 1951 it was reported that Russian diplomats, technicians, and civilian employees were streaming into the Middle East.

The administrative experience of officials in recipient countries has caused problems in the rapid construction of Soviet prestige projects and has prolonged the employment period of Soviet technicians. The reluctance of

the Soviet Union to assume complete administrative responsibility for an aid project has brought about costly work stoppage and delays. However, an effort to curtail delays was exemplified in the recent dispatch of Soviet specialists to study the Indian steel plants to ensure more efficient production. One Western official remarked, "It's a new kind of aid, you build a plant, then you guarantee that you will keep it working to capacity."⁶ Economic advisers and Soviet experts are frequently employed to ensure completion of a project on time as was done in planning the oil field development in Syria.⁷

One of the major technical assistance objectives is to supply the local population with technical skills needed to ensure successful completion of the aid projects. Accordingly, assistance takes the form of technical training programs in the Soviet Union for persons who will be employed as supervisors, foremen, and skilled technicians on Soviet-aided projects being constructed in the recipient country. This type of training generally consists of 6 to 12-month programs except for some of the highly specialized training which may run for as long as 3 years. It was estimated that by the end of 1965 the Soviet Union had provided technical training for about 7,000 trainees from less developed countries. About 85 percent of all trainees have been from countries in Asia and the Middle East.

Among other technical training techniques employed by the Soviet Union is the construction of technical institutes and vocational training centers in the less developed countries. These centers offer training in most industrial and agricultural skills required below the supervisory level. In the United Arab Republic, 20 training centers which can train about 4,000 workers during one training session have been constructed under the \$175 million credit extended by the Soviet Union in 1958. The most important way of transferring simple

technical skills to large numbers of workers is through on-the-job training programs. The usual practice is to have a worker assigned to each Soviet technician employed on a construction project. This aid technique has the advantage of leaving the feeling of having participated in the construction of the project.

Academic Training. An important program for establishing and maintaining contact with the emerging elite in many less developed countries is the provision of scholarships for academic study in the Soviet Union. The costs of this training generally are borne by the Soviet Union in the form of scholarship aid. In the peak year of 1962, more than 3,400 students enrolled in academic programs. The number of new enrollees in subsequent years has declined with an estimated 1,300 students entering the Soviet Union in 1965. The decline may be attributed to a more stringent selection process or the growing volume of reported dissatisfaction by Soviet nationals with the presence of these students. Another factor may be the increasing student discontent with the conditions under which academic programs must be pursued; for example, inadequate facilities and financial assistance, racial discrimination, and political indoctrination.

Military Aid Program. Perhaps the most dynamic aspect of the Soviet aid effort in the less developed countries has been the military assistance program. Since the inception of the military aid program in 1955, the Soviet Union has provided about \$4 billion worth of military assistance. The major recipients have been the United Arab Republic and Indonesia, each having obtained more than \$1 billion worth of military equipment. Soviet military assistance to the less developed countries has been the primary vehicle for achieving a position of influence in some regions vital to Western interests

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and has had an immediate impact on the regional balance of power.

Military assistance to countries has often provided the basis for expanding other political and economic ties. Accordingly, Soviet credits for economic development have followed soon after the signing of an arms agreement. The recipient finds that involvement takes on a snowballing effect and before he is able to counter this trend, he finds his political survival is dependent upon Soviet assistance. Nowhere is this more exemplified than in Egypt.⁸

The manpower base in many countries is not able to command, operate, and maintain the modern military equipment. The dispatch of large numbers of Soviet military technicians to less developed countries has proved to be necessary. The Soviets have planted advisers deep in the ranks of the Egyptian armed forces. Nasser claims about 1,000 Soviet advisers are present in Egypt.⁹

A large part of the Soviet military technical assistance program consists of training military personnel at military installations in the Soviet Union. It is estimated that 18,000 personnel had been trained by the end of 1965. Indonesia and the United Arab Republic have accounted for the bulk of this training.

By offering technical and academic training programs and the use of its technical personnel, the Soviets have established close relationship with individuals who will hold important positions in their countries. The Soviets have placed emphasis on the student exchange program with one objective being to convert a selected few to their way of thinking and indoctrinating them to serve as missionaries for spreading the party line. However, in this endeavor the Soviets have had little success as the Arab leadership has remained quite independent.

Although the Soviets have a wide range of aid programs, it would seem

most likely that the greatest aid commitment will be concentrated in the Middle East in an effort to outflank NATO and eliminate CENTO. Illustrative of this is Turkey who has signed an agreement with the Soviets for the supply of equipment, materials, and technical services for seven major industrial projects.¹⁰

According to V. F. Garbuzov, the Soviet Union Minister of Finance, the Foreign Economic Relations Plan for 1968 envisages an increase in the foreign trade turnover of 7.4 percent and the 5-year period about 33 percent. This will mean broader trade ties and economic and technical assistance to the United Arab Republic, Syria, Algeria, India, and Pakistan and also with countries bordering the Soviet Union--Afghanistan, Turkey, and Iran.¹¹

IV--EXPANDING SOVIET NAVAL PRESENCE

We have thus far considered the successful projection of Soviet influence into the Middle East and have examined the role that foreign aid, trade, and technical assistance played. Let us turn our attention now to the potential problem of Soviet naval presence in the Eastern Mediterranean, with a view toward assessing future Soviet objectives in that area.

The Russians have had a policy of territorial expansion since the days of Peter the Great, and they have long been interested in developing their naval power. However, their geographical location and lack of open ports have greatly hampered the development of both a navy and a merchant marine. They are fully aware of the part that seapower has played in the United States ability to influence events around the world, particularly in the Eastern Mediterranean. Parenthetically, the effect of these actions should not be overlooked in explaining the Soviet naval buildup there.

The Growing Concern. In SECNAV Notice 5720, the Secretary of the Navy gave credence to the projection of Soviet seapower when he stated, "Events daily continue to indicate that the Soviet Navy, long known to be increasing in numbers and quality of fighting ships, now also is embarked on a plan to break out of the confines of adjacent sea areas."¹ Several prominent authorities have recently shown concern when they stated:

Soviet presence in the Mediterranean had all the earmarks of a concerted effort to alter the strategic balance . . . a strong Soviet power position in the Mediterranean, supported by a string of client states along its southern shore, would give the Russians not only control of key resources essential to the European economy, but positions to menace the flow of shipping on which that economy's survival depends.²

The Soviet is now permanently established in the Mediterranean and is astride the northern exit of the Suez Canal. They have, as predicted been offered a base in Aden, which gives them an opportunity, which should they wish to do so, to interfere with the only other trade route to Europe round the shores of southern Africa.³

The shift of the Soviet Union to a maritime strategy is certainly one of the most startling strategic developments of this decade. Indeed it may be one of the major strategic changes in the twentieth century. The failure of ambitions nations to appreciate seapower often has led to their defeat.⁴

The recent Soviet buildup in the Eastern Mediterranean is not surprising in an area that has historically been a source of conflict among the big powers. The withdrawal of Britain from east of Suez has caused a power vacuum in the Eastern Mediterranean area.

Soviet Navy Post-World War II Development. It was evident to the Soviets that the new world alignment after World War II indicated an ever-increasing need for naval power. Although the atomic bomb had changed

the nature of war, Stalin nevertheless approved a naval shipbuilding program consisting of a huge fleet of submarines, a large fleet of destroyers, and a fleet of cruisers. In 1948-1949 the *Sverdlor* class of 20,000 ton "light cruisers" and the *Skorry* class destroyers along with the first postwar, long-range submarines were planned for construction.

At the time of Stalin's death in 1953, much of the construction program was laid down or completed. However the aircraft carrier program had not commenced. The strides made in the missile and nuclear technology fields caused reevaluation in Soviet military strategy, and the decision was made to forego plans for aircraft carrier construction. Accordingly, about 1954 it was decided to cease further construction of light and heavy cruisers, since they would require carrier support for high seas operations.

The New Fleet. The mid-1950's marked a change in Soviet naval thinking. In consonance with the nuclear age the Russian naval strategists decided to concentrate on a fleet of small, missile-armed ships and a nuclear-powered submarine force armed with missiles.⁵ Between 1955 and 1958 the Soviet shipbuilding program shifted from conventional submarines, destroyers, and escort construction to submarines capable of launching ballistic missiles and destroyers equipped with surface-to-surface missiles. The construction program included missile destroyers of the *Kashin* and *Kynda* class coupled with the *Komar* and *Osa* class patrol boats. (A *Komar* class patrol boat fired the missile that sank the Israel destroyer *Elath* in October 1967.⁶) Although the submarine fleet was reduced to about 400 in number, 300 are capable of long-range cruising, and 40 to 50 are now nuclear-powered.

Along with this buildup, the Soviet merchant marine increased from a 3.6 million deadweight tons in 1949 to 9

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million today, with a fleet of 20 million tons planned by 1980.⁷ Adm. John S. McCain, Jr., as Commander in Chief of U.S. Naval Forces Europe, pointed out that the "Soviet Union has one of the most modern merchant fleets in the world, and it is rapidly growing. They have over 1,200 merchant ships today . . . in five years' time, they could have the world's largest and most modern merchant marine."⁸

Carriers Mark Shift in Soviet Policy.

In the late fifties the Soviets apparently depended on guided-missile destroyers and Badger bombers to counter carrier strike forces. In the early sixties a reversal in Soviet naval strategy was indicated when Fleet Adm. Segie Gorshkov stated:

In the past our ships and naval aircraft have operated primarily near our coasts . . . concerned mainly with operations and tactical coordination with ground troops. Now we must be prepared through broad offensive operations to deliver crushing strikes against sea and ground targets of the imperialists on any point of the world ocean and adjacent territories.⁹

The reason for the decision to begin carrier construction is not known. However, the U.S. ability to project sea-power to the troubled spots throughout the world, as during the Cuban missile crisis, certainly has not gone unnoticed.

Following the announcement of Soviet carrier construction, Vice Adm. William E. Ellis, Chief of Staff of the Supreme Allied Command, Atlantic, stated, "they never before felt the need for carriers as contrasted to the United States or Britain because they didn't have many overseas commitments. Apparently their thinking is changing."¹⁰ Although the present carriers are designed for launching helicopters rather than jets, Adm. Ephraim P. Holmes, Commander in Chief of the U.S. Atlantic Fleet, stated that, "with their growing awareness of NATO strategy, it wouldn't surprise me a bit if

they decided to have carriers for high performance aircraft."¹¹ Most likely the present carriers are designed for the dual role of antisubmarine warfare and helicopter assault.

The New Era. According to Harland Cleveland, U.S. Ambassador to NATO, in July 1967 a total of 46 Soviet ships were operating in the Mediterranean, including some of the latest guided-missile cruisers and about 10 submarines, together with numerous support ships.¹² More revealing statistics were presented by Adm. Charles D. Griffin, Commander in Chief, Allied Forces, Southern Europe, when he stated that the Soviet Navy ship days in the Mediterranean have increased over 600 percent in the past 3 years. The monthly average of Soviet combatant ships in the Mediterranean has increased nearly 1,000 percent during the same period.¹³

Senator Spong from Virginia, citing the *Times Dispatch*, Richmond, Va., asserting that in recent months the Soviet strength in the Mediterranean has caused increasing concern both within the United States and in NATO Alliance, said, "that shortly after the Middle East war in June of 1967, Soviet ships in the Mediterranean came close to matching United States vessels in number if not in strength."¹⁴ Representative Keith from Massachusetts noted the rapid growth of the Soviet merchant fleet, "increasing at the rate of 100 new ships a year."¹⁵ There have been indications that the Soviets are trying to develop a Polaris type submarine for operations in the Atlantic and Pacific Fleets.¹⁶

In the past the global mobility of U.S. amphibious forces has proven an effective military counterweight to Soviet political mobility in the limited warfare situation. Hitherto the Soviet Navy has lacked any organized amphibious element. However, the relatively recent naval construction program gives

the Soviet Navy a possible new capability of projecting power ashore by use of vertical envelopment backed by surface-to-surface and surface-to-air missile equipped fleet which might well restrict Western actions in "crisis management" situations.

Exploiting Naval Presence Short of Base Rights. The Soviet Fleet seems capable of extended periods of operations at sea and can call at Algerian, Syrian, or Egyptian ports to relax, replenish, and refuel. To seek actual Soviet logistic bases on Arab territory would be a radical departure from the Kremlin's policy of maintaining no bases or troops on foreign soil, drawing maximum public relations advantage from this procedure.¹⁷

The Soviets have upheld this policy since the withdrawal from their former submarine base at Vohra, Albania, in 1961. They have consistently made the liquidation of foreign military bases a strong point in nearly all their proposals for disarmament and as a vehicle for propaganda attack. The Soviets consider the neutrality of a country as a first step in disengaging the Western Powers from ties with foreign countries. In this regard they are aware that a country is not neutral when it is granting base rights to a third party.¹⁸

As an argument for withdrawal from overseas bases the Soviet Union has used the Cuban missile crisis. "The problem of military bases maintained . . . close to the borders of third parties is a sign of the instability of international relations and provocation throughout the world. They are an inherent danger against the country which they are spearheaded and the countries in which they are located."¹⁹ Some Soviet writers espouse that, "Military bases and troops on foreign territory are utilized in efforts to suppress the national liberation movement, to trample on the sovereign rights of states and interfere in their home and foreign policy."²⁰

Admiral McCain has contended that "seapower can be deployed over nearly three-quarters of the earth's surface without the need for negotiations for base rights and overflights rights." Seapower is capable of providing aircraft facilities, repair facilities, communication facilities, hospitals, barracks, stores, fuel, and ammunition. The mobile base is further capable of launching ballistic missiles and air strikes coupled with the ability to place military troops ashore.²¹

By copying the U.S. Navy's supply ship or "fleet" train system the Soviets have reduced the requirement for the need of naval bases. The Soviet view on naval base rights was vividly expressed by Leonid Brezhnev at the conference of Communist and Worker's Parties of Europe held at Karlovy Vary, Czechoslovakia in April 1967:

There is no justification whatever for the constant presence of the U.S. Fleet in waters washing the shores of Southern Europe. One would like to ask: What are the grounds, twenty years after the end of World War II, for the U.S. Sixth Fleet to cruise the Mediterranean and to use military bases, ports, and supply bases in a number of Mediterranean countries? This poses a serious threat to the independence of all coastal countries. The time has come to demand the complete withdrawal of the U.S. Sixth Fleet from the Mediterranean.²²

To cope with the nonavailability of naval bases in the Mediterranean, the Soviets have been successful in acquiring visitation rights similar to the U.S. procedure in Hong Kong. Agreement has been made between the United Arab Republic and Soviet Union that the Alexandrian Naval Arsenal will maintain and repair Soviet fishing boats in the Mediterranean. The Soviet Union will provide the necessary equipment and parts.²³ The Soviets will probably seek this method of ship repair rather than contend with the ramifications of formal base rights involving a fenced perimeter, excluding foreign nationals.

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On the other hand, indications are that the Soviet Union is negotiating to take over the naval base at Mers-el-Kehir, Algeria, when the French move out.²⁴ Possible efforts toward establishing a naval base on Egyptian territory prompted Dr. el-Zayyat, head of Egyptian Information Organization to state, "we are against giving bases to anyone and certainly against giving bases to the Soviet Union or the United States or any country." However, the possibility of a naval refueling station or other facilities was not ruled out.²⁵ Since the Soviet Union has outfitted the Egyptian Navy, Soviet ships visiting Egyptian ports have available large stocks of spare parts and Soviet naval technicians are on hand.²⁶ Further indication of Soviet interest in naval facilities was evidenced by Admiral Gorshkov's trip to India in February 1968 when it was reported that he was trying to line up a world system of ports of call and bases.²⁷ This move was followed by the announcement of the impending visit of Soviet warships to Indian ports where they could refuel and perform repairs.²⁸

People to People Program. The U.S. Public Affairs regulations draw attention to the importance of international community relations. "Ships visits to overseas ports are one of the main instruments for promoting international good will and favorable community relations."²⁹ The Soviet Navy, long confined to its borders, now is reaping more rewards than Western Powers from Mediterranean port visits due to their political advantage in the area. One writer states that "Russian culture follows the Red flag," citing that in Alexandria young girls are quitting belly dance classes and attending Russian ballet classes. Soviet folk dance groups tour the major Arab cities.³⁰

In Admiral Griffin's discussion of Soviet seapower he points out that the Arab people are the objects of flattery, attention, state visits, gifts, special

favours, and advice.³¹ Further credence was given to the effect of Soviet influence on the littoral Mediterranean states port visits by a Jordanian writer discussing United States and NATO concern for Soviet presence in the Mediterranean and asserting that "the danger lies not in the presence of the Soviet fleet, but the cordial reception of that fleet in ports from Latakia to Mers-el-Kehir to the Atlantic."³²

NATO's Southern Flank. NATO's outstanding success in achieving its goal of blocking Soviet expansion in Europe has made predictable the direction of Soviet efforts elsewhere. Prior to World War II, northern Africa and the Levant were under the umbrella of European powers. Now they are independent nations subjected to Soviet influence.

To the north lies the long coastlines of Greece and Turkey exposed to uncertainties of naval action. The possibility of a renewed Cyprus confrontation involving two NATO allies fighting in the presence of the Soviet Fleet obviously is of concern to NATO.

NATO authorities have discussed the feasibility of a multinational naval force to counter the growing Soviet Fleet in the Mediterranean. The concept envisions the naval support of Italy, Greece, Turkey, and the United States.³³ Such a fleet may offer a means of resolving the difference of Greece and Turkey over the Cyprus problem, and their active military cooperation might divert their attention to the common threat from the Soviet Union.

Soviet construction of a first aircraft carrier confirms Russia's interest in maintaining a military force capable of intervening outside Russian borders. The large-scale buildup of naval forces in the Mediterranean demonstrates the Soviet desire to play an influential politico-military role in the area. Although the power equation in the Mediterranean has shifted, the Soviet naval

arm is not yet of a dimension to counter the U.S. Sixth Fleet. However, psychologically, even small forces can be used to influence regional conflicts and inspire Communist elements ashore. Soviet naval power is magnified by the extent to which they are able to gain political favor in countries rimming the Mediterranean such as Syria, Egypt, and Algeria.

As one writer puts it, "The Mediterranean's strategic importance . . . involves something much bigger than the flow of Middle Eastern oil westward. Whoever controls this waterway holds enormous military, political, economic, and diplomatic leverage on the countries around it, inevitably affecting a sizeable hinterland in Africa, the Middle East and Europe as well."³⁴ Seapower has given the Soviets an important voice in steering the course of events in the Mediterranean, with further capability of extension through the Suez, to the Indian Ocean and the coasts of southern Africa.

V--POSSIBLE FUTURE SOVIET OBJECTIVES

The Eastern Mediterranean has become, during the period 1967-68, one of the main storm centers of world politics. It appears to have become, as far as the Soviet Union is concerned, the most promising area in the world for the extension of its influence. Thus, events concerning Soviet movements in that area are now followed by the United States with a far greater measure of attention than previously. It appears that current Soviet policy seeks to prevent an agreement between the Arab countries and the West and peace between Israel and the Arab states.

There is no question in regard to the extensive gains that the Soviets have made in the Eastern Mediterranean in recent years. Their growing seapower, the willingness to support Arab nationalism, and the continued extensive economic and military aid all point to

further Soviet efforts to counter Western influence in the area. In 1966 King Hussein of Jordan described Soviet objective in the Arab world as follows:

... to destroy everything really Arab every connection that an Arab has with his past and to destroy his confidence and the possibility for him to make progress. . . . The Arab world was always a Russian target, even during the days before Communist threat ever existed. At the present time this area is of particular importance to the Soviets because they have suffered so many setbacks in the rest of the world in Africa, in Asia. They also have a great deal invested here. I believe there is a new Soviet policy and that this policy aims at the control of this area. I think the Soviets are prepared to go very far in this matter--almost to the point of a confrontation with the Free World.¹

Mediterranean Steppingstones. The Soviets can be expected to stir animosities between the Turks and the Greeks over the island of Cyprus in order to weaken NATO's southern flank and thereby reduce Western influence in the Eastern Mediterranean. Soviet control of this strategic position would provide a jumpoff point for further subversion in the area.

It seems logical that the Soviets will exploit the vacuum left by British disengagement from Malta unless prompt Western action is initiated. It is ironic that one of Britain's greatest naval heroes, Lord Nelson, back in 1799 wrote: "The Russians are anxious to get to Malta and they care for nothing else."² In 1899 Alfred T. Mahan compared the strategic position of Malta with that of Puerto Rico, "there is for us the necessity to hold and strengthen the one [Puerto Rico] . . . and its immediate surroundings, that there is for Great Britain to hold the other [Malta] for the security of her position in Egypt, . . . use of the Suez, and for the control of the route to India."³

Soviet Aid Program. In an effort to preserve political prestige and the advantages acquired in its struggle for influ-

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ence in the Middle East, the Soviet aid program can be expected to continue. The drive to expand economic ties on a commercial basis with Lebanon is a striking example.⁴ The Soviets most probably will continue to make long-term aid commitments and be willing to accept commodities in repayment. In consonance with this the Egyptians are making long-term payments of cotton and other agricultural exports for the arms supplied by the Soviets since the June 1967 war.⁵ Although Russia has suffered losses in billions of dollars of military aid in the Middle East, as in Indonesia, her Communist ideology and support of nationalism will cause her to continue to probe soft spots with the intent of increasing her influence in areas around her borders. An expert on the Middle East gives this view, "Where doors are open Russia will walk in. . . . There are many doors open in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, and you'll find Russia walking in."⁶

Most likely the Soviets will emphasize military aid because of the immediate political effect of such aid and the greater degree of dependence it generates. However, arms aid to the Arab world could backfire if used in conflicts contrary to Soviet purposes as in an inter-Arab war. Still the Soviets have a standing offer of arms to the Arab countries. As yet the Jordanians have not accepted this offer. However, as Hussein of Jordan is pressured by Arab critics inside and outside the country for refusing to accept Russian arms, it is possible that Jordan might be forced to reverse its position. Other countries as Sudan and Yemen have not hesitated to accept Soviet military support.⁷

Middle East Oil. Much of the Middle East area is capable of oil production. Control of the oil flow would provide a bargaining power over the European countries. Since the Soviet Union exports its own oil, it is unlikely that Moscow desires direct control of Arab

oil. Undoubtedly they will strive for a voice in selling oil to the West and over the terms of that oil trade. In Syria the Soviets have achieved a breakthrough in Middle Eastern oil by a recent agreement signed with Iraq.⁸ One writer sees the Soviet strategy as:

. . . elimination of Western powers and influence. Arming the Syrians and Egyptians and helping the Yemen republicans were part of the plan to undermine the conservative and more pro-western states. Eventually, according to this plan the revolutionaries would inherit in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, and the western hold on Arab oil would disappear. Russians would control the Arab crossroads and the movements and cost of Arab oil in Europe.⁹

It seems likely that any Soviet economic move to control the Middle East oil industry could cause a conflict of interests among the Arab states. A restriction on the oil flow from the Middle East would cause the previous recipients to search for other sources and consequently deprive the Arab world of its primary survival product. In the face of strong Arab nationalism, the Soviets would most likely move cautiously in such a venture.

Aircraft Carrier Construction. As the British phase out their aircraft carriers, the Soviets have made the decision to construct that versatile warship. The extent to which the Soviets intend to pursue this construction program is questionable. However, the Soviets have long shadowed U.S. carrier operations in the China Sea and in so doing have gained an appreciation of their capability. The present carriers appear to be designed for helicopter assault which provides an effective means for projecting power ashore and can be influential as a politico-military device in turning the tide in local conflicts such as Lebanon. The embarked helicopters undoubtedly possess antisubmarine detection systems which would serve to enhance Soviet antisubmarine capability.

One reason why the Soviets have not yet commenced the construction of a CVA type aircraft carrier bears on the premise that their shore-based naval air arm will support surface forces operating within tactical range of these aircraft. For surface forces operating outside the range of shore-based tactical aircraft, the Soviet strategy may be to rely on surface forces equipped with surface-to-air and surface-to-surface missiles for offensive and defensive operations in lieu of carriers capable of operating high performance aircraft. However, the future capability of the present Soviet carriers to operate high performance vertical takeoff and landing (VTOL) aircraft should not be ruled out.

* * * * *

In summary, the Soviets will undoubtedly continue to support the Arab cause against Israel. Full use will be made of the United Nations forum, hoping to find favorable support for her cause. Since Russia is apparently against Arab unity it appears she will follow a policy based on relations with individual states like the present policy with the northern tier countries. Arab nationalism will be supported as long as it will enhance her position in relation to the West. Having established a firm foothold in the radical Arab states, it is expected that a determined effort will be made to gain influence in the conservative states. Russia's recent experience with the Warsaw Pact nations will further restrain her from making satellite states in the Arab world.

The danger lies not only in the Soviet foothold in the Eastern Mediterranean but in the extension of that political and naval power eastward toward Malta and Gibraltar and southward through the Suez and the Red Sea into the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean, thereby being in a better position to influence "third world" events. They are expected to avoid seeking formal

base rights, which involves undesirable political overtones. Their main objective seems primarily political. They will endeavor to raise their own prestige and influence by control of the Arab military establishment and create a military presence that is disadvantageous to the West. Although Moscow does not visibly support the exportation of revolution, as her military capability for projecting power overseas increases, this concept may come under critical review.

While Moscow has experienced occasional setbacks in the Middle East, the overall balance sheet displays a definite credit accumulation, and the potential for further Soviet influence in the Arab world appears ever more promising. However, the yet superior Sixth Fleet, strong Arab nationalism and even Arab overtures of preferring Western support are all obstacles to Soviet objectives of seeking warm water ports; mastering of sea lines of communications; and the

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influential voice in the distribution of Arab resources. It seems safe to predict that the Soviet Union will avoid a direct confrontation with the United States in the Middle East unless she holds a

superior power position. The 1967 Middle East crisis was a striking example of this. Anything less is an open ended question which depends primarily on the actions of the West.

FOOTNOTES

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