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16 May 1968

MEMORANDUM TO HOLDERS
NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE

NUMBER 11-6-67

**Soviet Strategy and Intentions in the
Mediterranean Basin**

and

SPECIAL NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE

NUMBER 11-9-68

Soviet Interests and Activities in Arab States

Submitted by

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Concurred in by the

UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

As indicated overleaf

16 May 1968

Authenticated:

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EXECUTIVE SECRETARY, USIB

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The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of this estimate:

The Central Intelligence Agency and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State and Defense, and the NSA.

Concurring:

Vice Adm. Rufus Taylor, Deputy Director, Central Intelligence
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Abstaining:

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NOTE

NIE 11-6-67, "Soviet Strategy and Intentions in the Mediterranean Basin," dated 1 June 1967, SECRET/CONTROLLED DISSEM, estimated long-term Soviet plans and intentions in the Mediterranean and Red Sea basins. The estimate was issued on the eve of the Arab-Israeli war, and therefore did not deal with the immediate tactical considerations underlying Soviet policy during the crisis itself. SNIE 11-9-68, "Soviet Interests and Activities in Arab States," dated 18 January 1968, SECRET, assessed Soviet policy toward the Middle East in the period following the June war, and estimated Soviet intentions, particularly with respect to the UAR, Yemen, and Jordan.

This Memorandum brings up to date the information bearing on the main judgments expressed in NIE 11-6-67 and SNIE 11-9-68, especially with respect to the growth of the Soviet naval squadron in the Mediterranean and the threat it poses to US naval forces. We believe that the basic judgments in both estimates remain valid.

DISCUSSION

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

1. During the past year the political and even more the military presence of the USSR in the Mediterranean area has increased. Since the Arab-Israeli war, in particular, the composition of the Soviet Mediterranean squadron has normally included 10-14 surface combatants, 6-9 submarines, and 10-12 auxiliary/support ships. The squadron reached its highest level in April 1968 when it numbered some 9 or 10 submarines and 34 surface ships, 11 of which are classified as major combatant vessels. Soviet ships have paid long, frequent, and conspicuous calls in UAR ports, and have also visited Syria, Yugoslavia, and Algeria. Since last July, the Soviets have maintained a repair ship and diving tender in Alexandria to perform occasional maintenance or minor repairs on surface vessels and submarines. The USSR has acquired fuel storage facilities at Port Said. Elements of the Soviet squadron have engaged in tactical exercises in the Eastern Mediterranean on a gradually increasing scale. And there have been recent instances of surveillance of a Sixth Fleet carrier by TU-16 aircraft with UAR markings.

2. Besides these manifestations, Soviet military advisers and technicians for much of the period since the June war have numbered as high as some 2,000 in the

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UAR (although the number is now probably somewhat less) and 1,000 in Syria, thus more than doubling their numbers since before the war; the influence of these advisers has probably increased; and they now appear to be operating at lower as well as higher echelons of the UAR's and Syria's military establishments. Soviet strategic aircraft have made several visits to Arab states, an occurrence unprecedented before the June war. Soviet Defense Minister Grechko recently visited Syria, Iraq, and the UAR, and the USSR recently concluded an arms agreement with the Sudan.

3. Meanwhile, US influence among the Arabs has diminished because of what the latter consider US-Israeli collusion during and since the war. Contacts between the US and those Arab states most closely involved in the conflict with Israel have been markedly unfruitful; the UAR and Syria have become increasingly dependent upon Soviet military and political assistance; and even Jordan was for a time hard pressed to avoid recourse to the Soviet source of supply. France has virtually terminated its previous supply of arms to Israel (although there is a chance that Israel will eventually get the 50 Mirage-5 aircraft for which it has contracted), and has adopted a sympathetic attitude toward the Arab cause; but its activities are not likely to forward the interests of the US. Meanwhile it has withdrawn from its naval base at Mers-el-Kebir in Algeria. And the rapid disappearance of British influence has been accelerated by withdrawal from Aden, partial withdrawal from Libya and Malta, and the announcement of departure from the Persian Gulf by the end of 1971.

4. On the other hand, the forces of nationalism and conservatism in the area remain strong obstacles to the extension of Soviet influence. The UAR, Syria, and Algeria are friends and to a degree clients of the USSR, but they are still jealous of their independence and are resentful of Soviet restraints on their ambitions. The Governments of Iran, Turkey, and Morocco have increased and extended their relationships with the Soviets, but their sympathies continue to be more with the West than with the USSR. The policies of Saudi Arabia and Ethiopia are basically unchanged and will probably remain so as long as their present leaders retain power.

SOVIET INTENTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

5. The immediate purpose of the heightened Soviet naval activity has probably been to lend a show of support to the Arab side in the diplomatic fencing which has followed the June war. In this respect it complemented the rapid Soviet military resupply of Arab states, and helped to restore the Soviet prestige which was at least temporarily tarnished during the conflict itself. On a broader scale, Soviet naval activities are intended to impress both the Arab states and Israel with Soviet military strength and flexibility and to inform the world at large, and the US in particular, that the Mediterranean can no longer be accounted an American lake.

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6. The Soviets are helping the UAR, Syria, and Yemen to develop ports and air bases. These are used at present by the USSR to some degree, though we do not know what Soviet rights would be in periods of high tension. We still do not believe that the Soviets intend to establish military bases of their own in the area—in the sense, for example, that Yokosuka in Japan is an American naval base. In our view, they would consider such an act politically disadvantageous and militarily unnecessary. To support their naval operations they will probably continue to rely principally on auxiliary ships, much as the US does in the Mediterranean.

7. Assuming that there is no major crisis in the Middle East, the Soviets are not likely in the next two or three years to increase the size of their Mediterranean squadron much above the high levels of the recent past. They will probably continue to improve its capabilities by assigning newer and more effective ships on a regular basis: cruise missile and nuclear attack submarines, including new classes with improved antisubmarine warfare capabilities; and the Moskva-class helicopter carrier. In the event of hostilities against the US, the primary mission of this force would be to neutralize the US strategic attack capabilities.

8. Nevertheless, the main function of the Soviet Mediterranean squadron is political and is likely to remain so for at least some years to come. This raises the broad question of the USSR's intentions with respect to the application of its conventional military power in support of its foreign policy objectives. In the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern area, this is largely a matter of establishing a substantial military presence to make a display, to demonstrate the existence of a Soviet interest, and to be able to support such an interest without actually having to fight. It may be noted that if the Suez Canal were open, the Soviets could use elements of the Mediterranean squadron to establish at least an intermittent naval presence in support of Soviet interests in the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf.

9. Projected improvements in Soviet air and sealift capabilities over the next several years will give the Soviets greater capabilities to support their Arab clients during periods of regional tension. The Soviets may, in fact, be increasingly inclined to deploy their ships specifically in support of friendly states; some of their Egyptian port calls in the period following the June war were almost certainly in response to Cairo's desire to deter possible Israeli attacks. Moreover, the almost constant presence of Soviet landing ships in the Mediterranean since the June war suggests that Moscow wishes to indicate that it might land troops in the area. Yet such landing forces as the Soviets are likely to maintain in the Mediterranean will probably be insufficient for operations on any large or extended scale, or against more than token opposition.

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