SOVIET MIDDLE EAST POLICY: ORIGINS AND PROSPECTS

Arnold L. Horelick

February 1971

P-4539

SOVIET MIDDLE EAST POLICY: ORIGINS AND PROSPECTS

Arnold L. Horelick*

The RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, California

The high profile, deep involvement, and heavy commitment of the Soviet Union in the Middle East is unquestionable. Measured by almost any standard, the Arab Middle East is the non-Communist region with which the Soviet Union is most deeply involved. But there is real uncertainty about where Soviet policy in the area is headed, particularly with respect to the Arab-Israeli conflict: How deep is the Soviet military commitment to the UAR? Now that Soviet military forces are operationally deployed, will they engage the Israelis if fighting resumes? Under what conditions? For what purposes? What risk of confrontation with the United States does Moscow think it is running? What are the constraints and limits on Soviet policy?

The events of the past year have raised these questions in particularly acute form, but any examination must start with an effort to comprehend the forces that drive Soviet policy in the Middle East, the basic factors and considerations that govern it. What are the wellsprings of Soviet policy, and how did the USSR get where it is today in the Middle East?

Let me say at the outset where I come out on this and offer the bare bones of the argument. Soviet policy in the Middle East is a classic example of opportunistic adaptation to events in an unusually fluid policy environment. The evolution of Soviet policy in the Middle

---

*Any views expressed in this Paper are those of the author. They should not be interpreted as reflecting the views of The RAND Corporation or the official opinion or policy of any of its governmental or private research sponsors. Papers are reproduced by The RAND Corporation as a courtesy to members of its staff.

The present Paper is the edited transcript of a talk given by the author on November 21, 1970 at a conference on Soviet Policy in the Near and Middle East at Airlie House, Warrenton, Virginia. The paper draws heavily on material published earlier in A. S. Becker and A. L. Horelick, *Soviet Policy in the Middle East*, The RAND Corporation, R-504-FF, September 1970.

East has been largely derivative, arising out of pursuit of more highly valued extra-regional objectives, and reactive, or improvised, in response to opportunities that came up as a result of events over which the Soviet Union had little control, or as the unintended consequence of actions undertaken for other purposes. Some would argue that all foreign policies evolve in that manner. To those I would say, yes, but rarely more so than in the Soviet Union's Middle East policy. If this implies disagreement with those who emphasize the historical continuity of Soviet policy and harp on the age-old Russian imperial drive to warm-water ports in the south, that is what is intended.

Early Soviet Policy

Few, if any, observers of the post-World War II scene could have foreseen the pace and scope of the USSR's penetration of the Arab Middle East during the past decade and a half. To Stalin and his associates this must have seemed a most improbably susceptible and only marginally interesting target area. The Arab world, it must be emphasized, was never a high-priority region for Soviet foreign policy until the mid-1950s. Soviet Middle Eastern policy had always been fixed on the contiguous non-Arab Moslem states of Turkey and Iran. In this preoccupation, the Bolsheviks were in accord with the traditions of Tsarist foreign policy. For Tsarist Russia, the "Eastern Question" revolved around the fate of Constantinople and the Turkish Straits and the disposition of the Balkan territories of the crumbling Ottoman Empire. The Sultan's Arab domains aroused Russian interest intermittently, but only in response to opportunities for exploiting them to threaten Constantinople from the rear (e.g., the episode of Catherine's extension of military assistance to Egypt). Imperial Russia's primary objective in seeking to control the Turkish Straits was not so much to challenge the West's naval monopoly in the Mediterranean as to prevent or limit the passage of Western men-of-war from the Mediterranean into the Black Sea.

The October Revolution temporarily changed the thrust of traditional Russian Middle East policy, but not its geographical locus. Abandoning

territorial and commercial claims against its southern neighbors, the new Soviet Republic moved to cultivate good state-to-state relations with Turkey and Persia, at least to neutralize them and prevent them from falling into the camp of the British, whom the Soviets continued, until after World War II, to regard as their principal opponent to the south. It was this same anti-British impulse that led the Bolsheviks to sound the call for a general uprising throughout the Arab world, divided as it was by a variety of dependency devices between the British and the French. But the call had little effect. The Soviet Union was physically denied entreé to that part of the world during the inter-war years and the small illegal CP's in the area, composed largely of minoritarian members and operating on the basis of incredibly inept Comintern directives, remained narrowly sectarian in outlook and failed to establish vital relationships with the rising forces of Arab nationalism.

It may be asked whether this prolonged Soviet quiescence in the Arab world signified low interest or merely lack of opportunity. In foreign policy matters, interest and opportunity are too interdependent to permit a definitive answer. Without interest, opportunity will neither be perceived nor seized; interest too long denied a chance for advancement will eventually fade. This much can be said, however: Neither ideological preconceptions, cultural affinity, historical inertia, or strategic calculations impelled the Soviet Union to search for opportunities for penetrating the Arab Middle East. At the same time, the Soviet Union's lack of physical access to the Arab world and the weakness of the Communist movement there acted as barriers to the stimulation of strong interest in Arab affairs in the Politburo.

There was one brief but fateful exception to this general rule of low Soviet political profile in the area: the Soviet Union's active support for the partition of Palestine and the creation of the State of Israel, 1947-1948. Moscow's sudden departure from Bolshevism's traditional hostility to Zionism in 1947-1948 was no shortsighted blunder soon corrected by the Soviet leaders, nor was it a Machiavellian ploy that worked out with brilliant success. In voting for partition, recognizing Israel, and facilitating the shipment of arms from Eastern Europe to defend the new state, the Soviet Union was not provoking the anger of

tens of millions of Arabs merely to gain the goodwill of 600,000 Palestinian Jews; but neither were the Soviet leaders so clairvoyant as to foresee the incredible chain of events that would eventually make Soviet clients of Israel's bitterest enemies. The USSR's Palestine policy in 1947-1948 was governed by the same objective that had guided it since the creation of the mandate system: the quickest possible expulsion of the British, whom early Bolsheviks regarded as the wily and powerful leaders of the international anti-Soviet camp (a role not unlike that attributed to it during the nineteenth century by the Tsar's ministers).

By 1947, the militant, disciplined, and highly organized Jews of Palestine had proven to be the only effective anti-British force in the country. With Britain about to withdraw, partition seemed the best alternative to ward off a UN-sponsored trusteeship plan that would doubtless have been administered by Western military forces.

Still, I think Soviet willingness to incur the wrath of the Arab world in 1947-1948 shows how little impressed Moscow was then with the anti-imperialist potential of Arab nationalism. But then the USSR showed little enthusiasm for any of the non-Communist Afro-Asian national liberation movements in the early postwar years, and was particularly suspicious of those that achieved statehood by peaceful means. By the early 1950s it was clear that the undifferentiated "imperialist lackey" model of the new nations no longer served Soviet purposes. The determination of developing nations, such as India and Burma, to pursue independent, neutralist and passionately anti-imperialist (hence potentially anti-Western) foreign policies could no longer simply be ignored, even if Soviet ideologists could not yet satisfactorily explain it. There was a real danger of foreclosing important foreign policy options for the USSR and permitting the budding neutralists to fall into the Western camp by default. Stalin's death speeded up the reorientation of Soviet policy toward the Third World, but the absence of an authoritative single leader and the stubborn opposition of influential surviving members of the Old Guard prevented a sudden radical reorientation. The doctrinal underpinnings for the new policy were not built until the XX CPSU Congress in February 1956.

Opening to the Arab World

But the real Soviet breakthrough in the Arab Middle East had already occurred the year before. More decisive than the ongoing process of ideological revision in Moscow was the new threat and the simultaneous opportunity for undermining it that was suddenly created by formation of the Baghdad Pact. The price paid by the West for the dubious advantage of bringing a single Arab state, Iraq, into its alliance system proved exorbitant. Formation of the Baghdad Pact created a community of interests between Egypt and the Soviet Union where none had existed before and set the stage for the USSR's dramatic breakthrough into the Arab Middle East.

Moscow's predictable ire had presumably been discounted by the signatory governments, but the Baghdad Pact's searing impact on the Arab world had not been so clearly foreseen. It polarized the states of the region between Iraq and Egypt, which assumed leadership of anti-Baghdad Arab nationalist forces, and it catapulted Nasser into world prominence as leader of anti-Western Arab nationalism. Nasser now shared with the Soviet Union a set of common objectives: to prevent other Arab states from joining the Baghdad Pact; to undermine Iraq's position as potential leader of a pro-Western group of Arab states; and to eliminate remaining Western military footholds in the Arab world.

Arms from the Soviet Bloc, in unprecedented volume, not only provided Nasser with a means to circumvent Western limitations on arms deliveries without having to align himself with the West as Iraq had done; it also provided Egypt with what must have seemed excellent prospects for overcoming Israeli military superiority, again demonstrated in February 1955 by a large Israeli raid on Egyptian positions in the Gaza Strip.

For the Soviets, on the other hand, the effect of their arms deliveries to Egypt on the Arab-Israel regional military balance was a marginal consideration, perhaps even slightly embarrassing; Communist spokesmen carefully avoided connecting the arms deal with the Arab-Israel conflict, representing it exclusively as "a commercial arrangement" intended to strengthen Egypt's independence of the West. Soviet relations with Israel had long since soured and the USSR in 1954 had

begun to vote occasionally on the Arab side at the UN, but Moscow denied that the arms deal had anything to do with the Arab-Israel dispute. Moscow considered the possibility of sabotaging the Baghdad Pact more than enough reason for making the arms deal. The Soviet leaders hoped that Egypt's rejection of alliance with the West would prove contagious. If "reactionary" Arab monarchs should fall in the process, so much the better, but at this stage it was Nasser's anti-Westernism rather than the internal character of his regime that Moscow wished other Arab states to emulate. Soviet observers perceived no "socialist" tendencies in the pre-1956 Nasser regime. At best the revolution Nasser claimed to be leading could qualify in Soviet eyes as "anti-feudal" (agrarian reformist); it was expected that Egypt would rely on private capital for its industrialization and would follow an essentially capitalist path of development.

Khrushchev and his colleagues could hardly have expected that provision of Soviet Bloc arms to Egypt would make of Nasser an ally or even a steady client. They could not yet have had much confidence in Nasser's reliability; the West was still actively courting him, particularly with the Aswan High Dam offer. Nor was Soviet strategic power great enough to lend effective support to a distant ally who might come under armed attack, and who could not readily be disciplined to avert military confrontations. Locally, the Soviet Union had no military presence at all, lacking both reliable access to the region and instruments for projecting its military power.

It would be a mistake to infer from the prominent role that the Soviet Mediterranean Squadron came to play in the USSR's Middle Eastern policy a decade later that the 1955 "breakthrough" reflected revived Soviet aspirations in the Mediterranean. On the contrary, only the year before, Soviet naval policy had entered a decidedly anti-high seas phase, from which it did not change until the next decade. Precisely when the USSR was activating its Middle Eastern policy, Khrushchev dismissed Navy Minister Admiral Kuznetsov, a long-time proponent of a large blue-water Soviet fleet (including aircraft carriers and overseas naval bases), and announced his intention to scrap virtually the entire Soviet cruiser force, downgrade surface

ships, and concentrate naval investment on submarines. Achievement of the Soviet Union's limited "spoiling" objective in the Middle East did not require an actual Soviet military presence in the area; moreover, given the great disparity between U.S. and Soviet forces globally as well as regionally, a Soviet effort to establish a Middle East military foothold in the 1950s would probably have been rejected as "adventurist" as well as unnecessary.

Suez and Its Aftermath

The year that followed Nasser's announcement of the arms deal in September 1955 was crucial for the evolution of Soviet policy. The Suez crisis transformed the politics of the Middle East in ways that neither the Russians nor the Egyptians could have foreseen, opening broad new fields of action in the region for both. The Soviet leaders displayed for the first time during that period what have since emerged as recurrent traits of Soviet Middle East crisis behavior. Moscow's decision to provide arms to Nasser had deeply exacerbated Egypt's relations with the West and had helped to escalate the Arab-Israeli conflict as well. The first of these developments suited Moscow's interests, and the second was compatible with them, provided actual hostilities that might wipe out the center of Arab anti-Westernism could be averted. Once the catalytic effects of the arms deal began to make themselves felt, however, Moscow's control over events, including the behavior of its new friend, proved to be limited.

Bulganin was probably telling the truth when he wrote to Anthony Eden and Guy Mollet that "we learned about the nationalization of the Canal only from the radio." But if Moscow was not consulted or even informed in advance about the Suez nationalization, the Soviet leaders nonetheless enthusiastically endorsed the Egyptian President's provocative act of defiance and opposed all efforts to defuse the crisis by creating an international regime for the management of the Canal. The Soviet Union egged Nasser on, warned the British and French against using force to impose their will, and failed to take any initiative to avert a military conflict even when war clouds gathered ominously over the Mediterranean in mid-October.

When it became clear that the United States would insist upon British, French, and Israeli withdrawal, the Soviet leaders warned

Israel that its very existence was threatened by participation in the attack on Egypt and even issued vague hints of a Soviet rocket attack against Britain and France. While these Soviet threats -- Moscow's first tentative exercise in ballistic blackmail -- evidently did not play a decisive role in the decision of the Western powers to liquidate the enterprise, they did gain for the Soviet Union politically valuable credit in the Arab world for achieving that outcome. These threats, though essentially empty, probably seemed reinforced by bold Soviet words during the 1957 and 1958 "crises" in Syria and Iraq and may also have aroused mistaken expectations in some Arab quarters about Soviet willingness to use force on behalf of Arab clients.

Instead of toppling Nasser and wiping out Russia's newly acquired foothold, the ill-fated Anglo-French-Israeli adventure at Suez enhanced still further the rising prestige of the Egyptian President and his Soviet supporters who took credit for securing the withdrawal. It succeeded only in turning the retraction of British power and influence from the Eastern Mediterranean into a headlong rout. Britain's expulsion, completed two years later by the overthrow of the Hashemites and Nuri as Said in Baghdad, left the Soviet Union face to face in the Middle East with the United States, which moved quickly to replace Great Britain as guardian of Western interests in the area.

The Suez War also increased the salience of the Arab-Israeli conflict, both in the local politics of the region and in Soviet Middle Eastern policy. After Suez, the Soviet leaders no longer had to pretend that their military support of Egypt and of other Arab states which they began to supply was unrelated to the Arab-Israel dispute. On the contrary, that festering conflict became the centerpiece of Soviet policy, which increasingly linked it with the broader struggle between "imperialism" (headed by the United States, which used Israel as its tool) and the "Arab national liberation movement" (headed by the Soviet-supported "progressive" Arab regimes).

During the two years that were bracketed by the Suez War of 1956 and the Baghdad coup of 1958, the limited objectives that had originally brought the Soviet Union into the Arab Middle East were essentially realized. Not only was the West's attempt to incorporate the Arab states

of the Eastern Mediterranean into an anti-Soviet military alliance paralyzed, but the original Baghdad Pact system was itself crippled by the defection of Iraq.

With the disintegration of the Baghdad Pact system, the Soviet Union ceased to regard its position in the Arab Middle East exclusively in instrumental terms as contributing to the realization of essentially extra-regional strategic goals; Moscow began to concern itself more directly with political objectives in the Middle East *per se*. For several years the Soviet leaders had evidently been prepared to trade their new position of special advantage as arms supplier to Egypt and Syria for Western agreement to desist from efforts to organize an anti-Soviet bloc in the Middle East. After the 1958 Iraq coup the Soviet leaders no longer advanced such proposals, evidently believing they now had more to gain from supplying arms to the radical Arab states than from curtailing U.S. military ties with the "Northern Tier" states, ties which were weakening in any case. By the end of the 1950s it was also already clear that the imminent advent of intercontinental missiles would greatly reduce the strategic significance of the Middle East in the overall U.S.-Soviet military balance.

Once Moscow determined that its presence in the Middle East was to be more than a transient, extra-regionally driven one, longer-term Soviet policy tied itself to exploiting the two central conflicts that were polarizing the political/military forces of the region. First, the inter-Arab struggle, initially within the ranks of the anti-Western states of Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, but later chiefly between the radical Arab states and the Western-oriented conservative or traditional states, including the oil-rich Gulf states; and second, the Arab-Israel conflict, which, on the Arab side, had greatest salience for Egypt and Syria, the USSR's chief clients, and Jordan, an American protegé.

With respect to the first conflict -- the one with the highest potential pay-off for the Soviet Union -- Soviet policy found itself seriously hampered by chronic disputes among radical Arab clients, conflicts that compelled Moscow to make painful choices between disputants, and that weakened the effectiveness of the radical nationalist effort to subvert traditionalist pro-Western regimes elsewhere in the

Middle East. Moreover, Nasser's refusal to reach a *modus vivendi* with his own Communists was a continuing source of embarrassment to the Soviet Union, particularly after 1960 when pressure against Moscow from leftist forces inside the world Communist movement began to grow. But while Khrushchev went so far as to make public criticisms of Nasser's harsh treatment of Communists in the UAR and showered favors on Kassem in Iraq, the USSR was careful not to permit state-to-state relations with Cairo to deteriorate. Substantial financial and technical assistance for Egypt's economic development continued despite tensions during 1959-1961. Moscow seems to have made a clear determination that Egypt was indeed the pivotal state for Soviet policy in the region and stuck doggedly to that decision.

Events soon proved the wisdom of Soviet restraint in dealing with Nasser during the tense years of their relationship. The alternatives, both Syrian and Iraqi, turned sour. Moreover, the Soviet view of Nasser improved considerably. By 1964, before Khrushchev's ouster, a *modus vivendi* between Nasser and his Communists was worked out and Egypt's internal course after 1961 took a progressively more leftist course, with wholesale expropriation and nationalization creating a large public sector in the economy.

The Six Day War

The June 1967 War was the third major turning point in the evolution of Soviet Middle East policy. It has already had profound effects on the depth of Soviet involvement, the scope of Soviet policy, and on the balance in Soviet political deliberations between regional and global factors. It set in motion a train of events and created a new set of circumstances that have placed Soviet policy on a new plane, with new branch points of decision which could have fateful consequences for the future of the region as well as for broader global questions involving U.S.-Soviet relations.

The conduct of the Soviet leaders in the pre-crisis period, during the war and its immediate aftermath have been variously interpreted: (1) Some observers concluded that the Soviet Union had deliberately

encouraged a rise in tension, willingly accepting its war-provoking potential; (2) to others, the same behavior suggested not so much (mis)calculated deliberation as gross irresponsibility, reflecting a radical underestimation of the volatile forces at work in the crisis. There is something to both of these perceptions.

The events of 1967 are still close enough to us in time so that the evidence bearing on the Soviet Union's role is probably still fairly fresh in your minds: Moscow's warnings to Egypt about an impending Israeli attack on Syria; public Soviet approval of the dispatch of Egyptian troops and armor into the Sinai and the USSR's endorsement of Nasser's demand for the removal of UNEF forces from Egyptian territory, though not for the blockade of the Tiran Straits; Moscow's obstructionist tactics in the UN against efforts to lift the blockade of the Tiran Straits through negotiations; and her failure to correct publicly or privately Egyptian interpretations of Soviet promises of support that went far beyond anything that Moscow had theretofore asserted or subsequently stated it was prepared to endorse at the time. This evidence permits a range of interpretations regarding the extent of Soviet instigation and leaves unclear the point at which events slipped beyond Moscow's ability to influence them decisively. Certainly, however, Soviet miscalculations contributed in no small measure to the outbreak of the June 1967 War.

Soviet decisionmakers seriously underestimated the volatility of the festering Arab-Israel conflict. They displayed a poor understanding of the built-in escalatory pressures operating on the leaderships of both sides. Just as Moscow failed to appreciate before the May 1967 crisis how provocative Syrian-based terrorist activities were to Israel, the Soviet leaders overestimated the Israeli Government's willingness or ability to tolerate indefinitely the blockade of Eilat and the Egyptian mobilization in the Sinai. This may have reflected the Soviet leaders' underestimation of Israel's capacity for independent action. Moscow's strategy of promoting radical Arab unity on a militantly anti-Israel basis revealed a startling ignorance of the powerful association in the Arab national consciousness between unity and revenge against Israel. Finally, the Soviets evidently miscalculated the

regional military balance, assuming considerably greater military capacities for their clients than they were to demonstrate.

Once Israel struck, the Soviet Union made clear by its reactions the rank order of its priority objectives in the Middle East at that time. Moscow's immediate resort to the hot line dramatically demonstrated its overarching interest in avoiding a military confrontation with the United States. For the USSR's clients, this meant there could be no direct Soviet intervention to prevent a calamitous rout at Israel's hands.

Faced with one of the great debacles of its foreign policy, the Soviet Union might conceivably have chosen after June to disengage itself from the radical Arab cause, gradually if not all at once. Perhaps such an alternative was considered in Moscow in the aftermath of the June War; there is some evidence of division in the leadership at that time. If so, a decision was nonetheless taken quickly to keep all options open on the Arab side by instituting massive arms deliveries and extending full diplomatic and political support. This decision hardened into Soviet policy in the months and years that followed.

Nothing demonstrates more vividly than the evolving pattern of diplomacy with respect to the Middle East crisis -- beginning with the UN debates, Kosygin's meeting with President Johnson at Glassboro, and later the Four Power and especially the Two Power consultations -- how firmly established the Soviet Union has become since June 1967, despite the humiliating defeat of its clients, as one of the two Big Powers in the region. After what appeared to be a near fatal setback to the Soviet position in the region, the role and presence of the USSR continued to grow in several dimensions at once until in 1970 foreign observers were beginning to wonder whether the Soviet Union had not already supplanted the United States as the biggest of the biggest two external powers operating in the region.

o First, the scope of Soviet policy in the Middle East was greatly enlarged after the June War. The creation of the People's Republic of South Yemen in November 1967 and Leftist coups in the Sudan and Libya in 1969, augmented the ranks of the "progressive" Arab states and created a still broader field for the growth of

Soviet influence. However, while the Soviet Union's support was welcomed in the new radical states, patron-client ties were not firmly established. As for the radical Arab states of prewar vintage, while their overall dependence on the Soviet Union for arms and political support increased even more, the USSR did not succeed in achieving a high degree of political control in any client state. Only with the UAR did the USSR appear to have an intimate political relationship, but clearly not one in which Egypt was a mere satellite.

o Soviet lines of communication throughout the area generally and from the Middle East into East Africa have spread rapidly in the past several years. However, maritime expansion has been severely constrained by the closure of the Suez Canal, which makes the Persian Gulf less accessible to the Soviet Union's Mediterranean Squadron than to its Pacific Fleet.

o In the wake of the June War the Soviet Union has entered a small opening wedge into Arab oil resources. In addition to assisting Syria in the development of its small oil fields, the USSR has acquired a contract from Iraq to explore new oil fields and is to be paid for its services in crude oil, a practice that is becoming common in Soviet technical deals with nationalized oil companies.

o Since the June War, the Soviet Union has delivered arms to some ten states in the region, six of which (UAR, Syria, Iraq, Algeria, the Yemen, PRSY) have military establishments that are essentially Soviet-equipped and dependent almost exclusively upon the Soviet Union for spare parts and replacements.

o At least until the spring of 1970 the most dramatic manifestation of the USSR's enhanced presence was the Soviet Mediterranean Squadron, which has grown substantially in size and capabilities since the June War. The initial impetus for the creation of the Squadron around 1964 seems to have come from a requirement to cover the U.S. seaborne nuclear deterrent force in the Mediterranean, particularly the Polaris submarine force. The Soviet Mediterranean Squadron still appears to be configured primarily for anti-carrier attack force and anti-submarine missions. A desire to improve the Soviet Union's capability to project military

power into remote areas was probably also a factor in the decision to deploy the Mediterranean Squadron. In any case this factor grew in significance as Soviet interests in the area came under military threat and opportunities grew for the Soviet Union to exercise its naval force in the Mediterranean. Even with its relatively modest present capabilities, the Soviet Mediterranean Squadron has already had a significant psycho-political effect in the region and has created some new military options for the USSR.

1. The West's naval monopoly in the Mediterranean has been broken. For the first time in its history, Russia has established a permanent naval presence there, giving it the advantage of visibility in both southern Europe and the Moslem littoral states.

2. By some unknown degree, the Soviet Mediterranean Squadron has degraded the strategic offensive capabilities of the U.S. Sixth Fleet and of Polaris submarines stationed in the Mediterranean.

3. Some measure of deterrent support for the Soviet Union's Arab clients is probably provided by the presence of Soviet ships from the squadron in Arab ports.

4. Although the principal constraint on the use of the Sixth Fleet in the Middle East is the dearth of Arab states that would welcome it, the presence of the Soviet Mediterranean Squadron has probably also contributed in some measure to U.S. perceptions of reduced freedom of military action in the region.

5. The Soviet Union now has a capability to make at least small unopposed amphibious landings from waterways of the Middle East. This creates the possibility for future Soviet *faits accomplis* in remote unprotected areas where even small-scale operations might have large political consequences.

6. The Soviet Mediterranean Squadron also provides the Soviet Union with a possible force for use on request to help maintain internally threatened Arab clients.

7. Creation of the Soviet Squadron provides the basis for a possible future extension of Soviet naval operations into the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, and the Indian Ocean, but this depends heavily on reopening of the Suez Canal.

o The physical presence of the Soviet Union on the ground in the Middle East has grown substantially since the June War and most dramatically in the past year. Soviet military advisers and technicians attached to the UAR and Syrian armed forces, estimated around the end of 1969 at 3000 for UAR and 1000 in Syria, are believed to have trebled or quadrupled in strength during 1970 as the result of large infusions into Egypt. Soviet officers are reported to be not only with UAR training units in the rear but also with operational units along the Suez front. Elements of the Mediterranean Squadron are present a good deal of the time in Egyptian and Syrian ports, and toward the end of 1967 Soviet bomber squadrons made occasional publicized visits to Arab military airfields. During 1968 it became known that Soviet crews in TU-16 aircraft with UAR markings were providing land-based reconnaissance support for the Soviet naval forces in the Mediterranean.

Last spring there was a sudden and alarming increase in the Soviet on-site military presence in Egypt. Apparently implementing an agreement reached with Nasser during his January 1970 visit to Moscow, the Soviet Union began to emplace at key points in the Nile Delta highly advanced SAM-3 surface-to-air missiles, reportedly manned by Soviet personnel. In mid-April, Israel charged that Soviet pilots were flying "combat sorties" in the Nile Delta region; Washington confirmed that Soviet pilots had taken to the air in Egyptian MIG-21s, evidently to protect the new SAM-3 installations. During the first half of the year, the network of Soviet-supplied air defense missile weapons was moved forward into the Suez Canal Zone where the attempted deployment encountered heavy Israeli air attacks. At the end of July, just before the standstill cease-fire was agreed to by the UAR and Egypt, Soviet-piloted MIG-21-Js and Israeli aircraft clashed in the first reported direct combat between Soviet and Israeli military personnel. I shall comment further on the implications of these events in my concluding remarks.

New Opportunities, New Dangers

The enlarged Soviet role and presence in the Middle East since the June War means in the first instance that there are now powerful vested interests in Soviet Middle East policy operating at various levels in the Soviet policymaking structure. With 10,000-14,000 "instructor" and "adviser" personnel on the ground, 40 to 60 ships at sea nearby, Soviet pilots flying regular reconnaissance missions from Egyptian bases, others ready to scramble in MIG-21-J jets from UAR airfields, units manning SAM-3 missile sites, a huge (by Soviet standards) foreign aid program, etc., it is clear that there has been an expansion and proliferation of key bureaucracies whose fortunes are directly connected with course and outcome of Soviet policy in that area.

Unfortunately we know too little about the character of bureaucratic politics in the post-Khrushchev Soviet Union and about the weights and influences of competing groups to be able to predict policy outcomes with any confidence. We can employ logic to identify the agencies involved, but we can rarely make high confidence guesses about the positions they would take on given policy issues. For example, in the Soviet military, the interests of the Navy, the PVO (anti-air defense), tactical air and the Soviet version of our MAG are deeply involved. The Navy may argue against heavy ground involvement, the Air Force may stress the Navy's vulnerability to air attack since it lacks organic air defense, PVO might be straining for liberalized rules of engagement that would enable its units to try their hand against the Israeli Air Force. The Soviet MAG, if U.S. experience is any precedent at all, is probably reporting that the UAR army is making great progress and will soon be able to operate on its own if only an additional increment of advisers and extension of programs is authorized: "Egyptianization" is around the corner. The KGB doubtless is concerned about institutionalizing the Soviet presence through its own distinctive means. Somewhere in the Central Committee apparat, people worry about political and social conditions in Egypt, if not for ideological reasons, then for the practical one of protecting the heavy Soviet investment.

For large policy questions, what this means is that the range of operational objectives for which interested groups can now make plausible arguments in the Politburo has been greatly extended. Opportunities for Soviet policy have become more varied and far-reaching, and better instruments are now available for policy implementation. I would suspect that the Politburo has heard cases made for some, if not all of these, fairly ambitious Soviet policy goals in region:

1. Further restriction of American influence in the Arab world and of American access to its resources and people; eventually, expulsion of the United States and achievement of unchallenged Soviet predominance at the crossroads of the European, Asian, and African continents.

2. Replacement of British influence in the Gulf area as Britain liquidates its military presence east of Suez; at a minimum, frustration of any U.S. effort to fill the void.

3. Radicalization of politics in the currently moderate and traditionalist parts of the Arab world through support and encouragement of the undermining activities of the radical Arab states or of local insurgent movements.

4. Increased access to Arab oil, as well as attainment of some capacity to influence the terms on which the West receives Arab oil.

5. Establishment of the first substantial Soviet sphere of influence in a non-contiguous area.

6. Eventually, perhaps communization of the region or parts of it -- probably the remotest goal in the list.

The expanded Soviet role and presence in the Middle East also opens broader perspectives for the Soviet Union with respect to related extra-regional objectives.

1. While "turning NATO's southern flank" in the traditional military sense implies a level of war so high as to make such a maneuver extraneous even if technically feasible, the Soviet military presence in the Mediterranean, particularly if it were augmented and provided with air cover, could be exploited politically in peacetime to strengthen neutralist trends in the Mediterranean NATO states.

2. Creation of a base for future Soviet operations in East Africa (particularly through Egypt and the Sudan).

3. Establishment of a maritime communications base for a deepened Soviet strategic relationship with India, which may have become a long-term Soviet security objective in the light of deteriorating Sino-Soviet relations.

If opportunities to extend Soviet objectives in the Middle East have grown in the aftermath of the June 1967 War, so too have the dangers confronting Soviet policy in the region. The dangers are chronic and stem from the political instability, economic backwardness, and social dis-cohesiveness of the radical regimes that provide the USSR with its political base in the Middle East. These fundamental flaws and deficiencies were exacerbated by the traumatic shock of the Six Day War, which also revealed that in the absence of fundamental change in the Arab social order, even lavish supplies of advanced Soviet armaments could not make Arab armies perform like modern military forces.

In a sense, the increase of Soviet influence in client states after the June War is not so much a tribute to the diplomatic skill and persuasive powers of the Soviet leaders as a mark of the further weakening of their protégés, which only deepened their dependency on the patron. From Moscow's point of view, this weakness may appear so profound that it debases the political value of the dependency relationship that arises from it. A political base is built so that it can be used to achieve some political end. But the Soviet Union's extensive political base in the Middle East has seemed so insecure that shoring it up has become the major Soviet policy preoccupation in the region. Preserving that base has increasingly required Moscow to make as its own, causes that seem essential to its clients' survival but are themselves of little or no intrinsic value to the USSR. Currently such a cause is "liquidation of the traces of the Israeli aggression," above all the withdrawal or eviction of Israeli military forces from Arab territories occupied during the June War. Pursuit of that cause by the necessary means could entail costs and risks that the Soviet Union is unwilling to assume on its client's behalf; failure

to achieve that objective, however, could bring down those shaky clients upon whom the entire Soviet Middle Eastern position has been built.

Soviet policymakers are thus exposed in the Middle East to a set of risks and dangers that are a function of their clients' weakness and their enemies' strength and resolve. Those in Soviet policy circles impressed with the larger interests jeopardized by a high commitment-Soviet policy in the Middle East, or who are concerned with the opportunity costs of the present policy, or who are ideologically predisposed against close collaboration with bourgeois-nationalist regimes of the radical Arab type, have probably been making these kinds of arguments:

1. Client regimes may be toppled for any one of a variety of reasons which the Soviet Union cannot control or can control only at great cost and risk: if the clients seek a "military solution" and are again defeated by Israel; if they agree to a "political solution" that unleashed violent domestic reaction; if they make neither full-scale war nor peace and their "attrition" campaign fails to dislodge the Israelis; or if, through preoccupation with the struggle against Israel, they fail to make minimal economic, social, and political gains at home.

2. The Soviet Union faces the risk of military confrontation with the United States if it participates directly in an Arab war against Israel (Soviet estimates of this risk may be changing, however), but it faces humiliation for itself and perhaps fatal defeat for its clients if they should launch a new war without active Soviet support.

3. The danger of betrayal has always haunted Soviet relations with bourgeois-nationalist allies. To the extent that Arab clients of the USSR come to perceive the United States as the only power capable of dislodging Israel -- even if they are convinced of Washington's disinclination to do so -- this danger will persist in Soviet eyes.

4. A real settlement of the Arab-Israel dispute, on the other hand, or limited agreements that drastically reduced its salience, including arms control agreements, or even habituation to a new status quo, would reduce critical Arab dependence on the Soviet Union for

weapons and for political support in the Arab-Israel dispute. Dependence based on the need for foreign economic and technical assistance could readily be transferred to a Western donor.

5. Finally, even if all of these dangers can be averted and Soviet clients preserved, the question will still remain whether the costs and risks of maintaining and increasing Soviet influence in the Arab world will be justified by the benefits received. Maintenance and extension of the Soviet position is almost certain to grow in economic cost. The present clients of the USSR are all economically weak and have few resources needed by the USSR. Those that have some oil resources desperately need for development purposes the revenue they can earn from selling it. Their political instability makes the risk component of any Soviet investment in their future high and in that sense raises the cost of such an investment. Finally, increased Soviet political and economic investment in a growing number of "progressive" Arab states will almost certainly generate demands for a beefed-up and costly Soviet military presence in the region.

Because the Soviet position in the Middle East presents Moscow with such a mixed bag of opportunities and risks and because evidence bearing on how Soviet leaders weigh these factors and combine them in policy packages is so sparse, there is considerable disagreement in the foreign policy community about what the Soviet Union really is after, particularly with respect to the Arab-Israel conflict. In my view it is not very productive to think about these questions in sharply demarcated either/or terms:

Do the Russians want a peaceful settlement *or*

Do they want to maintain indefinitely a state of high but controlled tension?

Do they want to act in concert with the U.S., using Washington's influence with Israel to help bring about a settlement, *or*

Do they want to back the U.S. into a corner in the Middle East, isolating it by encouraging its exclusive identification as Israel's champion?

In introducing Soviet forces into the region, does Moscow want to provide the UAR with a military capacity to drive Israel out of occupied territories by force, e to gain the upper hand in a general war, *or*

Do the Soviets merely wish to strengthen Egypt's bargaining position in talks over settlement?

These questions cannot be answered with confidence because the Soviet Union is not pursuing a one-track policy in the Middle East. Soviet policy since at least the end of 1968 has been multi-tracked. It is a policy in which several options are being kept open while a variety of inter-related, partly overlapping and partly competing objectives are being pursued simultaneously, with events the chief determinant of which track is the inside track at any moment.

A Soviet *preferred* outcome is easier to describe than the one Moscow may ultimately prove willing to accept. The preferred outcome would be a *political solution* to the June War that restores the territorial status quo at the lowest cost in political concessions to Soviet clients and that gains for the Soviet Union credit in the Arab world for compelling Israeli withdrawal and condemnation of the U.S. for championing -- unsuccessfully thanks to the Soviet Union -- the Israeli cause. The Soviets have no serious reason to fear that any political solution acceptable to their Arab clients would so thoroughly pacify the region as to make external military assistance a dead issue; and they have every reason to be confident that they could continue to outbid even the most "evenhanded" U.S. administration for Arab favor in the arms transfer field.

Working to achieve this preferred outcome, in greater or lesser degree, requires a mixture of diplomatic activity and military and political pressure against Israel, of rivalry with the United States and cooperation with it, of military support for clients, but also the use of political leverage in dealing with them.

Growing Soviet Interventionist Propensities

What has been thrown into question during the past year, introducing a new and dangerous element in the equation, is the stability of the assumption formerly strongly held in the United States as well as in Israel, and apparently in the UAR as well, about the strength of the USSR's disinclination to involve itself directly in military operations in the region. The cease-fire has provided a temporary breather, but Soviet forces are now so positioned that were the cease-fire to break down that key assumption might have to be tested in the most acute fashion.

I must say that since the beginning of this year I have revised my own estimates about Soviet willingness to have their own military forces become engaged in the Middle East conflict. The Soviet involvement and commitment have deepened in a more rapidly accelerated manner than I anticipated. Why this has happened may have a bearing on how far the process will go. Clearly the tactics chosen by the Israelis in responding to Nasser's unilateral denunciation of the cease-fire in the spring of 1969 had a great deal to do with it. The deep penetration raids forced the issue, prematurely if not unnecessarily. The key Soviet decision was taken during Nasser's secret January trip when it may have seemed to the Soviet leaders that nothing short of a Soviet-built, directed and partially manned integrated air defense system could save their man in Cairo. The deployment of SAM-3s and initiation of operational flights by Soviet pilots in April had an immediate and profound effect. Not only did the Israelis cease operations in the Delta region promptly, but the American reaction expressed more anxiety than it did resolve to stop the Soviet involvement, not to speak of undoing it. At least this is the way I think Moscow saw it.

The notion that the Soviet-built and partially manned air defense system would stop well short of the canal combat zone was, so far as I know, an Israeli and U.S. assumption, more the product of wishful thinking than of any formal Soviet undertaking.

The cease-fire made it possible for the Egyptians and Russians to complete under favorable conditions what they had already started

and what they probably thought they could rush in had the Israelis, as expected, taken a longer time to make up their minds about accepting the U.S. initiative.

But in any case, Soviet willingness to cooperate with the Egyptians in violating the standstill agreement suggests confidence that for both military and political reasons the Israelis would not break off the cease-fire and that the Americans would be so preoccupied with getting the talks started that they would not permit the violations to stand in the way. While the U.S. reaction may have been stronger than Moscow expected, that analysis was not far from the mark.

I want to close by posing for the group's consideration two worrisome questions that the toughening of Soviet military policy in the Middle East in 1970 have raised. The first has to do with the future military balance in the Middle East; the second concerns the larger question of the future political role of military power in U.S.-Soviet relations generally.

First, if the cease-fire breaks down, given the apparent willingness of the Soviet Union to inject its own military personnel into the equation, can the U.S. continue to make good its undertaking to prevent the military balance from tipping against Israel *merely* by supplying equipment, even in larger amounts and on good credit terms? If not, what are the alternatives?

Second, is this unexpectedly direct Soviet military involvement in the Middle East to be explained primarily by unique circumstances that obtain there, or does it portend a greater willingness generally by the Soviet leaders, now that their strategic forces have acquired rough parity with the U.S., to exploit conventional military strength for political purposes even in areas where expressed U.S. interests in the past placed such regions out of bounds to Soviet military forces?

Finally, if the latter is true, what are the alternatives for the U.S.?