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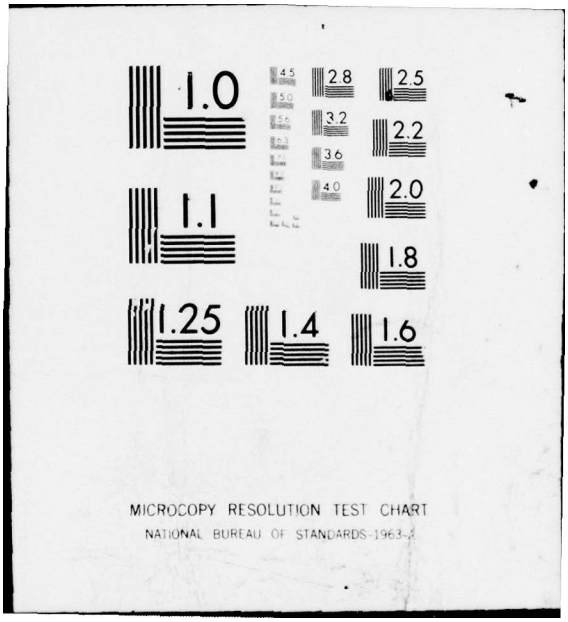
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(6) MOSCOW'S RIFT WITH SADAT: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOVIET MIDDLE EAST POLICY

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MOSCOW'S RIFT WITH SADAT: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOVIET MIDDLE EAST POLICY*

For a decade and a half after the initial Soviet penetration of the Arab world, successive armed conflicts in which Soviet-equipped Arab armies suffered calamitous defeats at the hands of Israel seemed only to strengthen dependency ties between the U.S.S.R. and its defeated clients and to expand Soviet influence in the region. By contrast, the Yom Kippur War, in which Arab armies acquitted themselves creditably even in defeat, reversed that pattern and precipitated a new "Time of Troubles" for Moscow in the Middle East, the most serious setback for Soviet policy in the region since 1955.

By triggering the activation of powerful new international political and economic factors, the Yom Kippur War diminished the preeminent role of the U.S.S.R. in several Arab countries, destroying it in Egypt, which had been the linchpin of Soviet policy since the breakthrough arms deal of the mid-1950s. It sharpened differences between Soviet and Arab clients interests and priorities, and reduced still further the area of their overlap that defines the parameters of Soviet-Arab partnership. While the October 1973 war unleashed fresh forces that brought to a head the conflict of interests between the U.S.S.R. and its erstwhile senior Arab partner, Egypt, the roots of the recent drastic deterioration in their relations can be traced back almost to the very beginning of the Soviet-Arab partnership of convenience.

Soviet and Arab partner interests have probably never been closer than in 1955, when the U.S.S.R. entered the area at Egyptian invitation

*This is a revised and updated version of the author's *Moscow's New "Time of Troubles" in the Middle East: Soviet Options for Staying in the Game*, The Rand Corporation, P-5542, November 1975, prepared for delivery at the International Symposium on Military Aspects of the Yom Kippur War, Jerusalem, October 12-17, 1975, and published in Louis Williams, editor, *Military Aspects of the Israeli-Arab Conflict*, University Publishing Projects, Tel Aviv, 1975, pp. 109-118. New material has been added (pp. 6-13) to take into account developments in Soviet-Arab relations since the fall of 1975, particularly Egypt's abrogation of its Friendship Treaty with the Soviet Union in March 1976. The present paper will appear in the summer 1976 issue of *Middle East Review*.

to disrupt the Baghdad Pact. The essentially extra-regional strategic considerations that impelled the Soviet Union to provide arms to Egypt dovetailed neatly with Nasser's pan-Arab ambitions. But what had begun as a limited Soviet "spoiling" operation against the Baghdad Pact was broadened in the years after Suez into a far-reaching effort to root out U.S. influence first from "progressive" Arab states and then from the area as a whole. Partly in pursuit of these ends and partly because circumstances drew it in, the U.S.S.R. cultivated patron-client relationships with several radical nationalist Arab states, especially Nasser's Egypt. Moscow aligned itself more and more openly on their side in the two polarizing conflicts that threatened the region's stability: (1) the inter-Arab struggle, initially within the anti-Western states of Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, but later chiefly between the latter and the Western-oriented conservative or traditional states; and (2) the Arab-Israeli conflict, in which the interests of the U.S.S.R.'s chief clients, Egypt and Syria, were deeply engaged. Of the two conflicts, the inter-Arab struggle between radicals and conservatives had the highest potential payoff for the U.S.S.R., since success for Soviet clients could be expected to produce "anti-imperialist" foreign policy reorientations as traditional states succumbed to radical nationalism. But it was the second conflict that proved the more explosive and the more prolific generator of Arab demands for Soviet military and political patronage. For the Soviet Union's own interests, support for the Arabs in the conflict with Israel was instrumental and served Soviet ends only to the extent that "anti-Zionism" could be merged with "anti-imperialism" (after Suez, essentially anti-Americanism) in the consciousness and behavior of the U.S.S.R.'s Arab partners.

DILEMMAS OF 1967

The tension between Soviet priorities for pursuing what was at the heart of its interests in the Middle East--curtailment of U.S. influence and replacement of pro-American local regimes--and what was merely instrumental toward achieving that end--support of the Arab cause against Israel--intensified greatly after the Six-Day War in 1967. In the eyes of the U.S.S.R.'s Arab clients, Israel's stunning victory submerged all

other regional issues. No longer did hostility toward Israel simply mean preparing for the ultimate onslaught to retrieve Arab honor and to restore the rights of dispossessed Palestinian brothers. The Soviet Union had no particular interest in resolving that conflict, only in capitalizing on it by presenting itself to the Arabs as the source of international political support and of weapons to be accumulated for the eventual day of reckoning, which Moscow probably hoped could be postponed indefinitely. After June 1967, however, Arab client grievances assumed a more fundamental and much less readily postponable character: now the immediate issue was the restoration of their lost territories, an objective so basic that the stability of the defeated Arab regimes seemed to hang on its early achievement.

The Soviet position in the Middle East thus emerged from the June 1967 War tied closely to the achievement of immediate Arab goals that were intrinsically marginal to Soviet interests and apparently resistant to all but high-cost, high-risk measures. Without direct Soviet participation, a renewal of the general fighting against Israel seemed to promise only another defeat for Soviet clients and humiliation for the U.S.S.R. Unwilling to incur the risk of confronting the United States that its own overt military intervention would entail, and unable to compel Israel to accept a "political solution," the Soviet Union was obliged to adopt a two-track strategy in the Middle East. Moscow actively sought Washington's collaboration in working out and imposing on Israel a political solution that would satisfy its clients' minimum demands, while simultaneously, but within limits imposed by its temporary need to enlist U.S. collaboration, continuing to encourage the Arabs to expel the United States from the region.

This dual Soviet strategy may have appealed to lovers of the dialectic in Moscow, but it made no appreciable progress on either track. Inadvertently, it tended to confirm the judgment that was maturing in the mind of Nasser's successor, President Sadat, that the key to a political solution was in American hands, that Washington had little incentive to turn that key at Moscow's behest, and that the time had come for the Arabs, or at least Egypt, to bypass the U.S.S.R. and deal directly with the Americans. As Sadat later expressed it, a Soviet Union

that would not fight, yet could not bring about a political solution, had become a burden. Sadat evidently concluded that he was paying an insupportable price for his partnership with the U.S.S.R.: granting the Soviet Union base rights and other military privileges, under conditions which he and the Egyptian military found humiliating, benefited Egypt little and severely constrained his freedom of maneuver in dealing with the United States, where public opinion, especially on the right, increasingly viewed support for Israel as anti-Soviet in purpose.

CRUMBLING PARTNERSHIP WITH EGYPT

Sadat's expulsion of the bulk of Soviet advisors from Egypt and his seizure of most Soviet-operated military facilities in the country in the summer of 1972 were the first in a series of bold gambles designed to break out of the no-peace, no-war stalemate. But, while they may perhaps have made a renewed effort toward political settlement seem more promising in Washington, Sadat's anti-Soviet moves also appeared to diminish the probability of a new war, thus making a fresh U.S. diplomatic initiative seem less urgent, especially in an election year. Theoretically, the Soviet leaders could have responded to what they must have regarded as Sadat's monstrous display of ingratitude by cutting off his supply of arms and leaving him to twist slowly in the wind. But, despite the provocation, they were reluctant, as always, to burn their bridges to Cairo, and after a brief hiatus agreed to resume shipments of arms in return for a partial reconciliation with Egypt. Moreover, in a June 1973 Soviet-Egyptian communique, Moscow once again endorsed a pre-explusion formulation asserting that, in the absence of a political solution, the Arab had a right to employ "other means" to regain their territories. Thus, the U.S.S.R. showed its willingness to provide the material wherewithal and political backup for a new Arab armed effort in which it would not, however, directly participate and for which it probably had little enthusiasm. With the flow of Soviet arms resumed, Sadat prepared to stage a dramatic demonstration that the Middle East powder-keg had not been defused and, with the cooperation

of his new ally, King Feisal, that the oil weapon was now at the disposal of the Arab cause against Israel under international oil market conditions that radically differed from 1956 and 1967.

How closely the outcome of the 1973 war corresponded to Egypt's maximum objectives is unclear,* but it surely did trigger the desired activation of U.S. diplomacy. Having been supplied by massive Soviet arms deliveries and rescued by joint superpower political intervention from what in the final days of the war was turning into a military catastrophe, Egypt and, for the first time, though more tentatively, Syria, turned to the United States to deliver the political settlement and restored diplomatic relations with Washington. Moreover, the successful unleashing of the oil weapon--whose efficacy was essentially independent of Soviet support--served to reinforce the Arab threat of still another resort to arms if an acceptable political solution could not be achieved.

The Syrians reached the virtual limits of what they could expect to gain from interim measures in the initial troop disengagement agreement brokered by Henry Kissinger, but the step-by-step approach still left Egypt with prospects for recovering valuable real estate. In defiance of Soviet calls for moving negotiations directly to Geneva under Soviet co-chairmanship, Sadat went on to conclude under American auspices the second interim agreement with Israel, initialed in September 1975, capping it with an attack on the Soviet Union for "seditious" obstructionism.

Despite Sadat's provocation, the Soviet leaders chose not to repay him in kind publicly, desisted from any personal criticism of the Egyptian president, and maintained a facade of normal relations with Egypt. Denouncing Sadat as a renegade for concluding the Sinai Agreement would perhaps have soothed temporarily Moscow's damaged *amour-propre*, but it would have represented precisely the kind of profitless petit-bourgeois "yielding to provocation" that Soviet leaders have always

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*Sadat recently affirmed that Egypt's military objective in the October War was to drive Israeli forces out of the Mitla and Giddi passes, a goal eventually achieved by political rather than military means in the second interim agreement with Israel.

prided themselves on being able to resist. While they clearly were unwilling to let Sadat have his cake (American backing at Soviet expense) and eat it, too (Soviet arms and debt relief), the Soviet leaders evidently preferred to preserve some semblance of "correct" relations and to keep intact the Soviet-Egyptian Friendship Treaty as the framework for renewed partnership, as occurred after the July 1972 rift.

Although keeping alive the possibility of reconciliation appeared to serve Egyptian interests as well, the two parties failed in the months that followed to find a *modus vivendi* for managing or containing their antagonisms. While Soviet arms and spare part deliveries and debt rescheduling terms were the concrete issues on which the strained relationship ultimately blew up, the fundamental contradiction resided in the radically divergent interests of the two parties in the one change that could heal the breach between them: failure of Egypt's "American strategy." Sadat had tied himself so closely and so conspicuously to that strategy that its fortunes and his own political survival no longer seemed separable.

Whether triggered by the fresh wound to his dignity inflicted by the U.S.S.R.'s veto of Indian assistance for maintaining Egypt's MIG aircraft, or by a calculation that it was time for yet another strong signal to the Americans, Sadat's unilateral abrogation of the Soviet-Egyptian Friendship Treaty was an affront so profound that it could not be suffered in silence by the Soviet leaders; there was no way that Moscow could describe it, as it did the expulsion of Soviet military advisors in 1972, as the product of a joint decision. From the Soviet point of view, Sadat had deliberately burned whatever precarious bridges still linked him to Moscow.

LOW PROFILE SINCE OCTOBER WAR

How does this severe setback in Soviet relations with the country that has for so long been the key to its Middle East policies affect Moscow's perception of its options? Thus far, the overall Soviet posture since the October 1973 War has been restrained and low-keyed in the face of repeated reverses, as the United States moved in to monopolize

the settlement process and to mend political fences broken in the Arab world since 1967. Not that Moscow has simply been a passive or acquiescent bystander: The U.S.S.R.'s effort to broaden the base of its Middle East policy, evident for more than a year before the war (notably in Iraq and the PDRY) was intensified--most strikingly in the development of an arms supply relationship with Libya's Qaddafi, in offers to provide an air defense system to King Hussein, in the U.S.S.R.'s post-Yom Kippur embrace of the PLO, and in generous arms shipments to Syria. These attempts to broaden the Soviet political base in the region served the function, both of securing alternatives in the event the rift with Egypt developed into a final rupture and as leverage against Sadat to prevent him from moving even further toward the United States.

On the plane of grand diplomacy, the Soviet Union made a brief effort to revive the Geneva forum in the spring of 1975, after suspension of Secretary Kissinger's initial effort to bring about a second-state Israeli-Egyptian agreement, but its resounding failure dampened Soviet ardor for a quick return to Geneva. A year later, after the Soviet-Egyptian Treaty abrogation, Moscow renewed its call to reconvene the Geneva conference after "careful preparation," modifying its proposal to include a procedural phase before negotiations on substance; but by insisting on PLO participation during both phases, the new Soviet proposal merely perpetuated the long-standing deadlock on Palestinian representation.*

On the whole, Soviet post-October Middle East policy has not been distinguished by bold initiatives or fresh departures. It is not that Soviet leaders have felt comfortable in a low-profile posture or that it has seemed so brilliantly promising; no superior alternative has been

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*The Soviet leaders have been eager to associate themselves with any common Arab position that would move the settlement process to the Geneva track, but they probably realize that it must include a formula that can at least be made to *appear* compatible with Palestinian recognition of a sovereign Israeli state. Privately, Soviet Middle Eastern specialists have claimed that the U.S.S.R. is gradually moving the Palestinians in that direction. The Soviet leadership has almost certainly been dismayed and frustrated by the unwillingness of the PLO to pay what in Soviet eyes probably appears to be the trivial price of a mere verbal concession without binding substantive significance.

available while persisting along familiar lines has left the Soviet Union in a position to exploit any new opportunities arising out of changed circumstances.

Egypt's abrogation of its Friendship Treaty with the U.S.S.R. has not fundamentally changed the picture for the Soviet Union, but it has rendered even more improbable the prospect of reconciliation with Sadat that Soviet leaders may already have believed moribund, and may have altered somewhat the near-term Soviet outlook on settlement diplomacy.

EGYPT REMAINS THE KEY

Prior to Egypt's treaty abrogation, the Soviet leaders may have hoped, not unreasonably, that a combination of a Soviet arms squeeze, intra-Arab pressures, and Sadat's own impatience with the small slices of territory recovered would cause him sooner or later to abandon the "American strategy" and return, chastened, to the fold. They now probably regard the Egyptian president as too deeply identified with an anti-Soviet stance, both domestically and in the Arab world, to accept the humiliation of a return to Moscow even if the settlement process remains stalled, at least during the life of the Sinai Agreement.

Barring a radical discontinuity in the Middle East, such as a new general war in which Egypt participated, Moscow has probably concluded that a major improvement in Soviet-Egyptian relations is highly unlikely while Sadat is at the helm in Cairo. From Moscow's point of view, restoration of Soviet patronage in Egypt depends on the collapse of policies on which Sadat has staked his political life, driving Egypt, under new leadership, back to the Soviet embrace. With such a receptive leadership, Moscow has indicated that it would again be prepared to work.

No matter how bleak the prospects for reconciliation with Sadat may seem to the Soviet leaders, it is doubtful that after twenty years of persistent, costly, and, at times, risky effort, they have simply written off Egypt as an irretrievably lost cause, or that they could afford to do so without also abandoning their larger aspirations in the Arab world. It is around Egypt, the most populous and powerful Arab state, that the Soviet Union has built its Middle East strategy since 1955 on the assumption that only Cairo had the potential for radicalizing and mobilizing

the Arab world to expel the West from the Middle East. Precisely how Soviet influence was to supplant that of the retreating Western powers may not have been clearly foreseen in Moscow; presumably Soviet leaders saw the U.S.S.R. in the role of patron of a radicalized Arab world and eventually perhaps as leader of a bloc of Communist-ruled Arab states; in any event, inflicting such a grave defeat on the West would have been reward enough for Soviet exertions. It is true that Egypt's value to the Soviet Union declined after the 1967 defeat, which dealt a heavy blow to Nasser's prospects for achieving pan-Arab hegemony, and again in 1970, when death removed Nassar, no longer the eagle he once was, but still the most potent political force in the Arab world. But the U.S.S.R.'s dogged support of Egypt, at its most receptive hardly an easy partner, even when its fortunes were at their lowest ebb, reflected the Soviet leaders' conviction that Egypt was the only realistic candidate for the anti-Western pan-Arab leadership role.

The truncated assortment of "progressive" Arab states and movements with which the U.S.S.R. now finds itself aligned falls far short of providing Moscow with a suitable substitute for the broken Egyptian connection. None of the remaining "progressive" forces can aspire to the kind of far-reaching regional authority that Egypt, under a leadership that shows its Arabist face, can command. The deep regional antagonisms dividing the "progressives" and their distracting internal preoccupations preclude their mounting a united front on anything other than hatred of Israel (not to be confused with a united front for *fighting* Israel, militarily or diplomatically).

Thus, Moscow must bank on a reversion of Egypt to a "progressive" posture and to a renewal of Soviet patronage in Egyptian affairs if it still hopes ultimately to profit from the kind of broad anti-Western regional transformation it has so long promoted. It is unlikely that the Soviet leadership, in its present globally bullish frame of mind, has forsaken aspirations that fueled Soviet Middle Eastern policy when the U.S.S.R. first began to emerge as a global actor. But if Egypt remains the key, then Soviet prospects depend critically upon the collapse of Sadat's "American strategy."

DOING IN SADAT: BY EXPLOSION OR EROSION?

There are broadly two paths to undermining the present strategy pursued by Egypt under Sadat: by explosion or by erosion. A new war, provoked by Syria and backed by the U.S.S.R., might generate irresistible pressure on Egypt, compelling it to join in, though unprepared and unwilling. But even if successful in achieving its proximate objective, provoking a new war would, for the Soviet Union, as always, be a tremendously risky strategem, raising once again the danger of possible military confrontation with the United States, or, at the very least, placing unwelcome new pressures on the already shaky structure of détente. Moreover, there could be no assurance that a Soviet-backed, Syrian-provoked war would in fact bring Egypt in, particularly if Israel could win a quick victory and compel an early ceasefire. Sadat has already openly warned Syria against attempting to launch a catalytic war. Finally, of course, a military initiative by Syria is not a *Soviet* option. If the Syrians decided for reasons of their own on such a desperate act, they would presumably seek Soviet backing; but Syria cannot be propelled into war at Soviet bidding.

By contrast, Soviet reliance on a process of erosion assumes that what Moscow believes to be Sadat's unalterable demands cannot in the end be satisfied by his play of the American card. From the present perspective, this is hardly a long-shot bet. But even so, its consequences for Egypt's future relations with the Soviet Union are uncertain. The time dimension might be crucial. Economic payoffs from Egypt's "opening to the West" if substantial, could relieve many of Sadat's internal pressures and make him more willing and able to endure a prolonged stalemate. Deepened and protracted Egyptian conflict with Syria and a rift with the PLO, should it continue to fall under Syrian tutelage, could eventually increase the attractiveness to Egypt of the generous terms Israel is almost certainly prepared to offer for a separate peace agreement. The Soviet Union might then find itself alone with clients that had missed the boat and been rendered inconsequential in the larger scheme of things.

While banking on erosion is not a sure bet, for the Soviet Union, it is almost certainly preferable to the highly risky path of explosion. And the odds still are that Egypt's continued tilt toward the United States would not survive an indefinitely postponed settlement.

ALTERED SOVIET PERSPECTIVES ON SETTLEMENT

Between the last two Arab-Israeli wars, Soviet attitudes toward promotion of a negotiated settlement of the conflict were strained by a fundamental ambivalence that never had to be fully resolved because the settlement issue never really became operational. Soviet leaders had to weigh their interest in defusing the danger of a military conflict in which they might have to choose between a humiliating defeat of their clients or an incalculably risky military confrontation with the United States, against their concern that greatly reduced tension in the area might radically devalue their primary, if not only, effective instruments of influence in the Arab world: provision of arms and political support for the Arab side in the festering conflict with Israel. On balance, between 1967 and 1973, the Soviet leadership seems to have preferred a political solution, probably on the quite realistic assumption that no obtainable settlement could so pacify the region as to dry up Arab demands for continued Soviet military assistance and political backup; in any case, indefinite pursuit of a political solution during which Soviet arms and backing would be essential was surely preferable to armed conflict.

However, the widening rift between Egypt and the U.S.S.R. provoked by negotiation of the Sinai Agreement probably altered this Soviet perspective. Egypt's parting from the Soviet Union at a comparatively early stage in the settlement process, while Cairo's demands remained only marginally satisfied, must have confirmed some of the worst fears on the Soviet side about the deleterious effects on the sources of Soviet influence with Arab clients of even small but tangible steps toward reduced tensions. The comparative advantage of the United States and the Western world generally in offering trade, technology, investment (and, under competitive conditions, perhaps arms as well) to Arab states, "progressive" as well as conservative and moderate, has been driven home forcefully to Moscow since the October War. Within the framework of

present Soviet-Egyptian and Egyptian-American relations, any further progress toward settlement would only tend to confirm for Sadat the correctness of his "American strategy." It goes without saying that the Soviet Union will oppose and attempt to discredit further bilateral Egyptian-Israeli agreements under American auspices, though its capacity to obstruct them is now quite limited. But so long as the most powerful Arab party in the dispute rejects Soviet patronage and relies on the United States for satisfaction, even multilateral movement toward settlement will be perceived by Moscow as perpetuating its freeze-out in Cairo and as threatening to undermine its influence with remaining clients. Given the dominant role the United States now plays in the settlement process by virtue of its exclusive access to both Cairo and Jerusalem, even in the context of multilateral negotiations in Geneva, movement toward settlement would imply, if not the displacement of Soviet by American influence in Syria, and eventually perhaps in the PLO, then certainly a sharing of influence, probably without compensation for the Soviet Union in Egypt. The drastic deterioration of Soviet relations with Egypt has therefore weakened still further Soviet incentives to promote or cooperate in movement toward settlement in favor of priority for subverting Sadat's "American strategy," which means short-circuiting, if possible, any movement that threatens to bring it success.

If Soviet interest in an early political solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict has been diminished by Sadat's rejection of Soviet patronage, it has at the same time also reduced some of the dangers that prolonged stalemate has posed for the U.S.S.R. since 1967. So long as Egypt and the United States continue their courtship, a new large-scale war in the Middle East will remain unlikely. Egypt's incentives to launch a new attack have been reduced by partial satisfaction of its demands and by anticipation of more to come, and its capacity to sustain a major military effort has been diminished by the termination of Soviet arms deliveries, for which even successful Egyptian diversification efforts can hardly be expected to compensate. Syria's incentives may be rather different, but without assurance of Egypt's participation or of more direct Soviet support than Moscow has been willing to provide.

Syria lacks a credible military option. To the extent that the risks of military escalation of the unresolved Arab-Israel conflict have been diminished, the U.S.S.R. may see less danger for itself in the persistence of the conflict. Moreover, with responsibility for advancing the settlement process now universally seen as resting primarily on the United States, failure to make progress will stress the American position far more heavily than that of the Soviet Union. While stalemate before the October War exposed Soviet political helplessness and raised doubts among Arab clients about the utility of Soviet patronage, American monopolization of the settlement process has, for the time being, lifted most of the responsibility from Soviet shoulders.

AN EARLY "FULL PACKAGE" SHOWDOWN?

For the Soviet Union the chief danger of relying on erosion to wear down Sadat's "American strategy" is the possibility that it might sooner wear down Syrian and Palestinian militancy, leading them to adopt "American strategies" of their own, and raising the chances for success of an American-brokered overall settlement from which the U.S.S.R. would be virtually excluded. To the extent the Soviet leaders fear such a development, they may prefer to promote an early reconvening of the Geneva Conference in order to get themselves back into the action and to confront the United States and Israel with the full range of settlement issues, including both the most vexing Palestinian and Jerusalem questions, as well as the Golan Heights. With respect to the goal of actually negotiating a full settlement, an early return to the Geneva forum that was not preceeded by major adjustments in the positions of the principal parties would almost certainly be futile. But for the Soviet Union, the intended purpose would be to demonstrate dramatically to all of the Arab parties that the upper limit of what the Americans can do for their cause falls far short of what would be required to satisfy even their rock-bottom objectives. The trouble is that the U.S.S.R. can try to demonstrate to the Arabs the ultimate hopelessness of an "American strategy" only at the cost of revealing once again its inability independently to compel *any movement at all* toward the goal of Israeli withdrawals. Sadat could brush off such a Soviet position as yet another mischievous exercise in

"oneupmanship" and other Arab parties might well ask: "So what else is new?" Moreover, so long as the U.S.S.R. and the Arab parties persist in demanding full PLO participation without requiring a prior change in the PLO's position on Israel's right to exist, Moscow's calls for a return to Geneva will continue to bear an empty ritualistic rather than a serious substantive character.

A more subtle and, if feasible, more effective stratagem for precipitating an early "full package" showdown might become available if the Soviet leaders could persuade Arafat to endorse an appropriately ambiguous formula implying PLO acknowledgement of Israel's right to exist as a sovereign state within yet undefined borders. Such a formula would have to be sufficiently vague to make it acceptable to other Arab parties and therefore unacceptable to any Israeli government. Most Western European governments, not to speak of the Third World, would regard it as a PLO concession sufficiently weighty to justify seating Arafat at Geneva and it might compel the United States to bite the hardest bullet of them all early, rather than late, as is the American preference. By making the Palestinian question *seem* more negotiable, the U.S.S.R. could place crippling constraints on the U.S.-managed settlement process, causing it to break down altogether or precipitating a crisis in Israeli-American relations that might have the same consequences.* Alternatively, in the unlikely event that an equivocal formulation by Arafat led somehow to the seating of a PLO delegation, the U.S.S.R., by bringing the Palestinian question into a forum where it could freely exercise its capacity to outbid the United States, might hope to regain some of the diplomatic leverage it has lost in the Arab world since the October 1973 War.

However, both the achievement of the necessary initial step and its long-run consequences for Soviet policy, even if successful, are

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*A clear Israeli statement, coordinated with the United States, of the conditions under which it would agree to negotiate with a Palestinian delegation at Geneva, would preempt such a tactic. It would, of course, commit the Government of Israel to negotiate with the PLO if it met those conditions, but a PLO leadership able and willing to meet them would have transformed itself into a rather different potential negotiating partner than it has been. On the other hand, PLO rejection of Israeli conditions, which the U.S. Government regarded as reasonable and justified, would strengthen American support for Israel's refusal to permit the PLO to be seated on Arab terms.

problematic. Moscow's ability to persuade Arafat to utter the magic words is constrained by its inability to help him very much to control the intra-Palestinian risks he would face. Moreover, while Arafat needs Soviet support so long as he is an "outsider," once in, it is to the United States that he, too, might feel obliged to turn, a consideration that would argue strongly against his remaining tied too closely to the Soviet Union.

RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL?

For the U.S.S.R. perhaps the most worrisome near-term development in settlement diplomacy would be a renewal of momentum for the U.S.-managed step-by-step approach that would bring Syria into interim negotiations with Israel under American auspices. While prospects for such a development at the present writing seem all but dead, and have been publicly written off by all of the principals, tacit U.S.-Syrian-Israeli cooperation in the Lebanese crisis, partially at the expense of Soviet-favored Lebanese Moslem Leftists, suggests that possibility should not be entirely discounted. If the step-by-step approach gained a new lease on life, the U.S.S.R. could, as an alternative to futile obstruction from the outside, seek to gain some control over the process from the inside by injecting itself into the bilateral negotiations. To support a claim that Moscow, too, has good offices to place at the disposal of the disputants, the U.S.S.R. could end its self-imposed diplomatic isolation from Israel by restoring relations severed in June 1967.

But what might have been swallowed by the U.S.S.R.'s Arab friends had it been done when Egypt and Syria resumed diplomatic relations with the United States shortly after the October War, would under present circumstances entail high risks for the U.S.S.R. in exchange for dubious benefits. A restoration of Soviet-Israeli relations might seriously constrain Soviet possibilities for falling back on alignment with a rejectionist front if other alternatives failed; if it came before an announcement of PLO readiness to accept the existence of an Israeli state, it would surely discredit the U.S.S.R. in the eyes of the Palestinian movement; and, paradoxically, by reinforcing radical Arab

perceptions of essential *similarities* in the interests and policies of the region's superpower competitors, it might increase their willingness to accept American good offices, or to adopt a "plague on both your houses" posture which, objectively, would serve both U.S. and Israeli interests.

While the Israeli government has clearly indicated that it would welcome restoration of relations with the Soviet Union, it is most unlikely that Jerusalem would alter any fundamental elements of its stance on a settlement just to achieve it. Moreover, Israeli distrust of the Soviet Union is now so deep that the presence of a Soviet ambassador would not in itself increase Soviet influence on Israeli policy, nor would Soviet offers to guarantee a post-settlement Israel be any more attractive than they are now.

For the time being, and so long as the Geneva Conference is not reconvened, Soviet interests are probably best served by reminders that restoration of relations with Israel is a live option--an inevitable step along any of the possible paths to "full settlement" and one of the very few whose timing is directly under Soviet control.

WITHDRAWAL FROM SETTLEMENT PROCESS?

A radical alternative for the Soviet Union, if the Americans should succeed in initiating negotiations on an interim agreement between Syria and Israel that denied any significant role to the U.S.S.R., could be for the Soviets to threaten or actually to withdraw temporarily from the settlement process until such time as the Arab parties could concert a common policy with which the U.S.S.R. could associate itself. The objective for the U.S.S.R. would be to arrest the progressive erosion of Soviet prestige in the Middle East by divesting itself of responsibility for a process that threatened to reduce the Soviet Union to the role of a largely irrelevant actor. This is a less costly and more readily reversible variant of the "cutting of losses" option that has theoretically been available, but resolutely rejected, at each critical point in the past when Soviet fortunes seemed to be at low ebb. Tactically, it would have the advantage of placing the onus for failure to roll back Israel on the inability of the Arabs to agree on a set of

common objectives and a common strategy that the U.S.S.R. could support, and particularly on the Egyptians, for sacrificing the interests of brother Arabs in order to secure partial satisfaction through American intercession. Such a "pause" in Soviet-Arab relations need not terminate Soviet arms deliveries, which could be continued selectively on more or less strictly commercial terms.

The risks of such a move are obvious, i.e., it might push the Syrians and even the Palestinians into the American camp by default and lay the U.S.S.R. open to the charge that it had abandoned the Arab cause for unworthy egotistical reasons. The most important potential benefit is that, if the settlement process broke down and circumstances compelled the Soviet Union's erstwhile clients to turn once again to the U.S.S.R., Moscow's bargaining position would be far stronger than if it had continued to engage its prestige to erratic, unresponsive, and even hostile clients and "friends."

STAYING IN THE GAME

The common denominator of these and similar alternatives as well as of the present Soviet course is that they leave an upturn in Soviet fortunes dependent almost entirely on the behavior of parties over which the U.S.S.R. can exercise little control. Despite its great military power, its role as the arsenal of the states most directly involved on the Arab side of the conflict with Israel and of a half-dozen others, and its heavy investment in treasure and political capital, the Soviet Union can do very little independently to improve its position: frustrating as would-be Soviet security managers may find it, the ball *is* now in the American court. But the American game, too, is dependent on forces over which the United States exercises far less than full control. If the Soviet position is precarious so, too, is the stability of the present interim Sinai Agreement that epitomizes the eclipse of Soviet influence. The Soviet leaders have not yet been confronted with a credible scenario that describes the process whereby the present mini-*pax Americana* can be enlarged and transformed into the long-awaited "full settlement." The situation remains volatile and

unpredictable, and there is no reason why the Soviet leaders should make any rash departures in order to preempt what neither they nor we can foresee. The Egyptian president might be deposed, assassinated, or otherwise removed from the scene. Egypt's policy could be turned around by intra-Arab pressures, or its satisfaction with the slices of the Sinai that have been returned could be short-lived. Rationing of Soviet weapons to Egypt might in time so reduce Egypt's diplomatic leverage as to compel a rapprochement with the U.S.S.R. Despite the grave risks, Syrian frustration might explode into a desperate renewal of warfare to compel Egypt to join in and the U.S.S.R. might then have to be called back to rescue Cairo as well as Damascus. A new oil crisis, associated either with a renewal of warfare or with a fresh round of large price increases could transform the entire picture and cause the carefully built U.S. position to collapse.

Precisely because the future is so uncertain and the currently available alternatives so risky or unattractive, the present Soviet policy of hanging on and staying in the game, even if in the wings rather than at the center of the stage, appears to win by default. Given the huge uncertainties and the manifest pitfalls in the path of an American-brokered political solution, the present comparatively low-profile Soviet posture is therefore neither surprising nor entirely without prospects.