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USSR - SYRIA

KIRILENKO VISIT REFLECTS TENSIONS IN SOVIET-ARAB RELATIONS

The first opportunity for high-level Soviet-Arab consultations since Brezhnev's U.S. visit came with the 3-9 July visit to Syria by a Soviet party-government delegation, headed by Kirilenko, which attended ceremonies on the first stage of the Euphrates hydropower project. Concern to counter Arab skepticism over U.S.-Soviet detente and its implications for the Arab-Israeli conflict was again indicated by Kirilenko's assurances of Moscow's unwavering support for the Arabs and his reiteration of the Soviet stand on full Israeli withdrawal and regard for Palestinian "rights." At the same time, taking the Euphrates diversion as a symbol, Moscow has suggested that the Arabs should not focus on a military "rebuff" to their enemies but would do better to concentrate on developing themselves economically and socially and improving Arab cooperation.

The absence thus far of the customary communique on Kirilenko's visit* would seem to indicate that he was less than successful in convincing the Syrians of the steadfastness of Soviet support. Kirilenko was apparently not invited to address the Euphrates dam ceremony on 5 July, and Damascus radio, while giving the visit adequate coverage, failed to report some of his activities and remarks at various functions. Damascus may have been miffed that Kosygin did not lead the Soviet delegation.** His attendance at the Euphrates ceremony would seem to have been a balance to his presence in Iraq in April 1972 for the commissioning of the Northern ar-Rumaylah oilfield. But on the other hand, the primary purpose of that visit was the signing of the Soviet-Iraqi friendship and cooperation treaty; Syria has reportedly resisted Soviet approaches for a similar treaty.

Moscow began preparing a buildup for the Euphrates diversion as far back as mid-May, when broadcasts in Arabic began inviting

* At least once in the past there was an unusual and unexplained delay in the release of a Soviet-Syrian communique: The statement on the 20-26 January 1967 visit of a Ba'ath delegation led by Salah Jadid to Moscow was not released until 11 February.

** There were Beirut press rumors to this effect in mid-June, despite the fact that Vienna media had already noted that Kosygin would be visiting Austria in early July.

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listeners to participate in a forthcoming radio "symposium" on the event. Such a program, however, has still not been monitored. Propaganda in June, like that accompanying the delegation's visit, extolled the future benefits to Syria of the Euphrates hydropower complex--described as "the twin of Aswan"--and praised it as an example of Soviet-Arab friendship and cooperation.

KIRILENKO REMARKS In his major speech during the visit, at a Damascus banquet on 3 July, Kirilenko reaffirmed the "consistent and unshakable" Soviet attitude toward the Arab-Israeli conflict, "firmly demanding" Israeli withdrawal and the insuring of the "rights and legitimate interests" of the Arab peoples, including the Palestinians. Without specifically mentioning the U.S.-Soviet summit talks, he underscored the "important positive developments" in the international situation opening the way toward detente. According to TASS, he did touch on Moscow's stance in the summit talks in a Damascus television address on the 8th; he reportedly said that in discussing the Middle East problem at the talks in the United States, the Soviet side expressed "firm and invariable support for the just struggle" of the Arabs for liberation of their lands. And he called it "of considerable importance" that the U.S.-Soviet communique "placed on the record" the desire for a Middle East settlement insuring the rights and interests of the Palestinians.

Kirilenko concluded, TASS said, by noting that forces pretending to be friends of the Arabs would like to isolate them from the USSR and that they spread "concoctions and lies" about the Soviet policy.* In a speech at a 5 July dinner in Aleppo Kirilenko also had called for vigilance against enemies of the Arab peoples trying to undermine Soviet-Arab friendship.

RADIO COMMENT Moscow propaganda pegged to the Kirilenko visit, as well as other comment broadcast in Arabic since the Brezhnev visit, has attempted to shore up the USSR's image in Arab eyes. In the first of a series of talks, Soviet

* Moscow radio gave considerable publicity to the television address in foreign-language broadcasts. But Damascus radio, while reporting Kirilenko's remarks to Syrian journalists at the radio-television premises, made no mention of a television address and did not include his reference to "lies" about Soviet policy.

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Journalist Makal'mov on the 10th began analyzing for Arab states the effect of the improvement in U.S.-Soviet relations on the USSR's Middle East policy. He divided the Arabs into three groups--those who approve the process of improving big-power relations, those who are "misled" and fear it, and those who think they can profit from big-power contradictions. In the weekly Moscow domestic service observers' roundtable on the 8th, Belyayev asserted that Moscow's actions in connection with further improvement of U.S.-Soviet relations can--"as representatives of Arab states believe"--help settle the Middle East crisis. Belyayev also viewed the Euphrates project and Kirilenko's affirmation of Soviet support for the Arabs as "the best answer to all those doubts which occasionally appear in the Arab press."

A commentary broadcast in Arabic on the 10th, citing Kirilenko's Damascus TV remarks, stressed the "vital necessity" of the alliance of world socialism and the national liberation movement. And an Arabic-language commentary on the 5th, responding to Arab press emphasis on self-reliance in the wake of the summit, criticized "certain quarters in Arab countries" for advocating the "formula of so-called self-dependence" spread by "imperialist quarters." This commentary in effect cautioned the Arabs against the notion they could defeat Israeli militarily, arguing that there had been instances in the past "when military supremacy could not always achieve the desired victory over the enemy when this victory is subject to political and economic influence." It called the USSR's military assistance to the Arabs an important factor, but pointed out that the Soviet Union was also providing substantial assistance in the "decisive fields" of social and economic construction.

SOVIET-SYRIAN TALKS Kirilenko's program included a meeting with President al-Asad on the 7th--which lasted seven hours, according to Damascus radio--at which he presented a letter from Brezhnev and had what TASS called a "frank exchange of views" on further development of Soviet-Syrian relations and on topical international issues, with "special attention" to the Middle East situation. Kirilenko may also have discussed Syrian-Lebanese tensions in the wake of the Lebanese-Palestinian clashes in May, since he followed up the Syrian visit with one to Lebanon made, according to a Beirut press report, at his request. Al-Asad had had talks in Moscow at the time the conflict in Lebanon erupted, when he paid a "secret visit" reported a week later by Cairo and Beirut papers.

Kirilenko also had talks with Ba'th Party Regional Command Assistant

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Secretary Bajbaj, who hosted the welcoming dinner for the delegation on the 3d, and met for "friendly" talks with the prime minister and foreign minister. He discussed CPSU-Ba'th relations with Ba'th Party officials and held a meeting with leaders of the quarreling Syrian Communist Party to discuss its activities and "the strengthening of its organizational and ideological unity." The only mention of any economic discussions during the visit came in a MIDDLE EAST NEWS AGENCY dispatch from Damascus which reported the opening on the 7th of "preliminary talks" to prepare for a "series of talks" on Soviet-Syrian economic and trade relations. President al-Asad, speaking at the Euphrates ceremony, praised the USSR for "meeting its obligations in all matters" connected with the project and called the Euphrates dam a symbol of what relations between states should be.

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NOTES

USSR MILITARY STRENGTH: Col. Gen. Nikolay Ogarkov, first deputy chief of the Soviet General Staff, has refuted recent Western allegations about increases in Soviet and Warsaw Pact military strength. In an interview published in the 10 July RED STAR--available to date only in summaries carried by TASS and Moscow radio--Ogarkov termed these allegations, attributed in particular to NATO commander-in-chief Goodpastor, an attempt to obstruct the forthcoming European force reduction talks. Ogarkov, earlier a high-ranking member of the Soviet SALT delegation, has commented only sparingly in the Soviet press in recent years.

In recent months Western charges of a buildup in Warsaw Pact strength have been routinely rejected by Soviet commentators, but with the force reduction talks scheduled to open in October Moscow may have felt a more authoritative response was in order. Ogarkov specifically refuted charges of a rising Soviet military budget and an expanding naval posture. He also reiterated Brezhnev's 1971 suggestion that Moscow is "prepared to solve," on the basis of equality, issues arising from the extended naval cruises of the great powers at great distances from their own shores. Brezhnev's statement has been reiterated in Soviet journals during the last two years.

EGYPTIAN ADVISER IN MOSCOW: TASS has only briefly announced the 11 July arrival in Moscow of Egyptian President as-Sadat's adviser for national security affairs, Hafiz Isma'il, who had paid a similar visit in February. Isma'il was reported by Cairo radio as saying on his departure that he was responding to a Soviet Government invitation "extended to any Egyptian official to introduce to him" the outcome of the U.S.-Soviet summit. First announcing the visit, Cairo radio had said on the 7th that it came in the framework of continuous Soviet-Egyptian consultations and was preceded by bilateral contacts in which Cairo was informed of the outcome of Brezhnev's talks in the United States, France and West Germany. AL-AHRAM on the 11th, according to the Cairo press review, viewed Isma'il's visit as confirmation of Egypt's interest in preserving its friendly relations with the Soviet Union, but went on to say that the Arabs found it difficult to believe that consolidation of the atmosphere of detente would realize their hopes for progress and liberation.