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**Soviet and Chinese Communist Strategy
and Tactics in North Africa, the Middle
East and South Asia, dated 15 July 1965**

Submitted by

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Concurred in by the

UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

As indicated overleaf
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MEMORANDUM TO HOLDERS OF SNIE 10-2-65: SOVIET AND CHINESE COMMUNIST STRATEGY AND TACTICS IN NORTH AFRICA, THE MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTH ASIA, dated 15 July 1965

NOTE

This Memorandum to Holders stems from a request for a review and updating of SNIE 10-2-65, in connection with current policy discussions. It was not undertaken, as is normally the case with a Memorandum to Holders, because of a feeling in the intelligence community that the important judgments of the original estimate required significant revision. Only those portions of SNIE 10-2-65 bearing on the Eastern Arab states and on the Cyprus question are considered.

THE ESTIMATE

1. Soviet and Chinese aims and tactics in the Middle East remain as described in SNIE 10-2-65. Political developments in the area over the last year have not given either Communist power the opportunity or incentive to alter its approach to the area in any basic way. Soviet programs of military and economic aid, political and propaganda support, and clandestine activity continue to aim at denying the area to the West, and eventually at promoting the ascendancy of political forces committed to identification and alignment with the Communist states. For the Chinese, there are not only these general Communist aims, but also pursuit of Peking's political-ideological warfare with Moscow for predominant influence among radical movements worldwide.

2. Moscow's general political line in the area currently emphasizes the necessity for "progressive" forces to join together in a common anti-imperialist front. This theme is pushed in propaganda on the Vietnam war aimed at enforcing political isolation on the US. There has been a certain improvement over the last year in the USSR's rela-

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tions with the UAR, Iraq, and Syria, but this has been due rather more to local opportunities than to Soviet political initiatives. The Chinese continue to have little impact in the area as a whole, though they are still active in Yemen and are supporting the Palestine Liberation Organization with some arms and training. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan, and the small British protected states around the fringes of the Arabian Peninsula remain cautious about relations with the Communist powers.

3. In the Eastern Arab world there have been no new recipients of Communist economic or military aid in the past year. The UAR, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen continue to receive a large share of the resources the Communists have devoted to foreign assistance. These four countries now account for about 35 percent of total Communist economic and military aid extended to all less developed countries since 1954, and in the year ending in June 1966, they received about one-fourth of new Communist economic aid commitments, while drawing about \$142 million against credits extended earlier. In the same period, Moscow also concluded agreements to supply them with military equipment worth \$203 million, representing about 55 percent of new Communist military aid extensions.¹ Pressure from recipients for ever more sophisticated equipment has led the USSR to offer such advanced items as the MIG-21 FL all-weather fighter and the SU-7 fighter-bomber, which are being provided to non-Communist countries for the first time. While the cost to the Soviets of their military aid programs may thus be rising, such progressive modernization of weaponry is probably seen by the Soviets as unavoidable if they are to maintain the position they have won through military aid.

4. The USSR has tried to exploit the resurgence of intra-Arab tensions, and has urged a close working association of the "progressive" states of Algeria, Iraq, Syria, the UAR, and Yemen, directed against the conservatives. The Soviets apparently recognize that such a bloc is not likely to emerge soon, but they continue to give material support to Arab efforts to eliminate special Western positions and interests in the area, by supporting so-called "national liberation struggles," especially Nasser's efforts in Yemen and South Arabia. On the other hand, the USSR does not wish intra-Arab quarrels or the Arab-Israeli dispute

¹There was also an arms agreement between the USSR and the UAR in late 1964, the amount of which (an estimated \$200 million) was not known when SNIE 10-2-65 was issued in mid-1965.

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to deteriorate into armed conflicts which might test their support for certain Arab states or which might entail active US intervention.

5. The UAR continues to have a broad congruence of interests with the Soviets, especially in foreign affairs. Soviet influence probably has been enhanced in the past year as Egyptian relations with the US have cooled. Premier Kosygin's visit to Cairo in May 1966 signaled no startling new developments, but it did consolidate the relationship and relieved Nasser of any concern he may have felt over the fall of Khrushchev. Though Soviet naval vessels have made several calls at Egyptian ports during the past year, and the UAR may permit Soviet port calls from time to time to take on fuel or supplies, we do not believe that Nasser has any intention of agreeing to the establishment of a military facility under Soviet control. For their part, the Soviets for political reasons would probably not wish to press for such facilities.

6. Nasser's suspicion of the US is currently reinforced by his belief that the US is supporting Saudi King Faisal's sponsorship of the Yemeni royalists and efforts to establish an Islamic pact. Nasser is now probably more sceptical than ever of the prospects for establishing any profitable association with the US. Even though the Egyptian economy is in serious trouble and is chronically short of foreign exchange—particularly in view of the need to purchase food—Nasser has publicly written off the prospects for an early resumption of PL-480 aid from the US. The possibility of moving toward greater dependence on the USSR is thus posed. It is unclear for the present whether the replacement of the Muhyi al-Din government signifies a move in this direction. Although Nasser almost certainly remains wary of too close an embrace by the Soviets, economic pressures may force him into a greater involvement with the USSR. With respect to food, however, the Soviets are probably unwilling to make supplies available regularly and in quantity, and for this reason have apparently advised Nasser not to worsen his relations with the US irretrievably.

7. Nasser's policy toward the UAR's domestic Communists continues unchanged. The Communists are not allowed organized activity, but a number of individual Communists are prominent in the Arab Socialist Union (ASU), which during the last year has gained increased importance under the leadership of former Prime Minister Ali Sabri. The role of the Communists does not appear to be a matter

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of contention with the Soviets at present. The USSR apparently believes that at the present stage its aims will be better served by influences exercised on the state-to-state level and by individual Communists than by organized Communist Party activity.

8. In February 1966, the extremist wing of the Baath party in *Syria* seized power and sought Soviet support. The new Syrian regime has taken a number of steps favorable to the Soviets. Damascus has recognized Hanoi and Pyongyang. It has echoed the Soviet call for closer cooperation among the progressive Arab states, but it has done little itself to promote such cooperation. For its part, the USSR has given political support, offered to negotiate further arms sales, and agreed to provide a \$133 million credit for a Euphrates River Dam. Altogether, the atmosphere of relations between Moscow and Damascus is very cordial at present, though the Syrians are far from adopting a subservient attitude.

9. At least one Communist and several others who may be close to the Communists have been included in the Syrian cabinet, and some Communists have been given second-echelon government positions. Soviet officials have advised Syrian Communists to support the regime. The Syrian Communist Party has not been given legal status, though the party leader, Khalid Bakdash, has been permitted to return.

10. The Soviets probably will continue to show some caution in developing their relations with the radical Baathist junta. They are conscious of its precarious hold on power and aware that its pro-Soviet posture stems in considerable measure from its need for Soviet support. The present government in Damascus is the result of the most recent of numerous military coups over the past two decades. It has little popular support, and is opposed even by many members of the Baath party. There are almost certainly officers—Baathist and non-Baathist—plotting its overthrow. There is a better than even chance that over a period of time one of these efforts will succeed. In view of the increasingly radical tone of Syrian politics in recent years, any successor regime is likely also to be radical and hence favorable to Soviet interests.

11. In *Iraq*, neither the internal political changes of the past year nor the conclusion of a new Soviet arms deal point to any change in the judgments of SNIE 10-2-65. Iraq and the USSR retain good state-to-state relations, especially since the Kurdish cease-fire, but Moscow has

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not been able to end the suppression of the Iraq Communist Party. Nonetheless, the Soviets, through their recently concluded \$178 million military aid agreement, remain virtually the sole arms supplier and retain a substantial presence. In the short term, the USSR is likely to attempt to use its limited leverage to ensure that the recent Iraqi-Kurdish truce will remain in effect.

12. In *the Arabian Peninsula*, the Soviets and Chinese are carrying on significant activity only in Yemen. Here both are engaged in economic assistance programs, and rivalry with the Chinese seems to be impelling some increase in the USSR's direct economic aid. Communist countries remain unrepresented, and hence do not exercise overt political influence in either Saudi Arabia or in the British protected states of South Arabia or the Persian Gulf.² Subversive activities through small Communist groups and front organizations carry a potential for the growth of Communist influence. Withdrawal of the British from South Arabia will undoubtedly offer additional opportunities for Soviet and perhaps Chinese entry into this area. The USSR has been making some efforts to increase its presence in the Persian Gulf through its representation in Kuwait, but Moscow is unlikely to exercise a major influence there for the foreseeable future.

13. The *Cyprus* controversy itself has changed little in the past year or so. Moscow has continued to follow an even-handed line as between the Greek and Turkish interest, unlike its support of the Greek Cypriots in the early phase of the crisis, and has in consequence been able to sustain improved relations with Turkey. This, as well as Moscow's opposition to *enosis*, has caused some political difficulties within the large Cyprus Communist Party, which draws its membership exclusively from the Greek community. Moscow seems content to draw profit from the strains within NATO caused by the present Cyprus stalemate; it is not encouraging Cyprus President Archbishop Makarios to step up the level of confrontation. If the Turkish-Greek talks now under way should fail, the Soviets would undoubtedly seek to exploit the resulting increase in tension and to turn both Greece and Turkey against the US. However, the USSR would probably take pains to avoid moves which would entail the need to choose one country over the other.

²A more detailed treatment of South Arabia appears in NIE 30-1-66, "The Outlook for South Arabia," dated 8 September 1966.

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