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Soviet Comeback as Power in Middle East Causes Rising Concern in West

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Jan. 14—As the aircraft carrier America steamed through the Mediterranean southeast of Crete last summer, a Navy officer squinted in the sun as he explained the political impact of the United States Sixth Fleet in the Middle East.

"Anybody who makes a move on the rim of the Mediterranean has to figure on us," he said. "We run interference for the State Department." Gesturing toward rows of white Navy F-4 Phantom fighter-bombers lashed to the gently rolling flight deck, he added: "With those we can hit anything in this area in a matter of minutes."

It was common last summer for Westerners to assert that the Soviet Union had suffered a severe setback and loss of prestige as a result of Israel's quick and convincing victory over the Arab armies that Moscow had equipped, trained and politically supported.

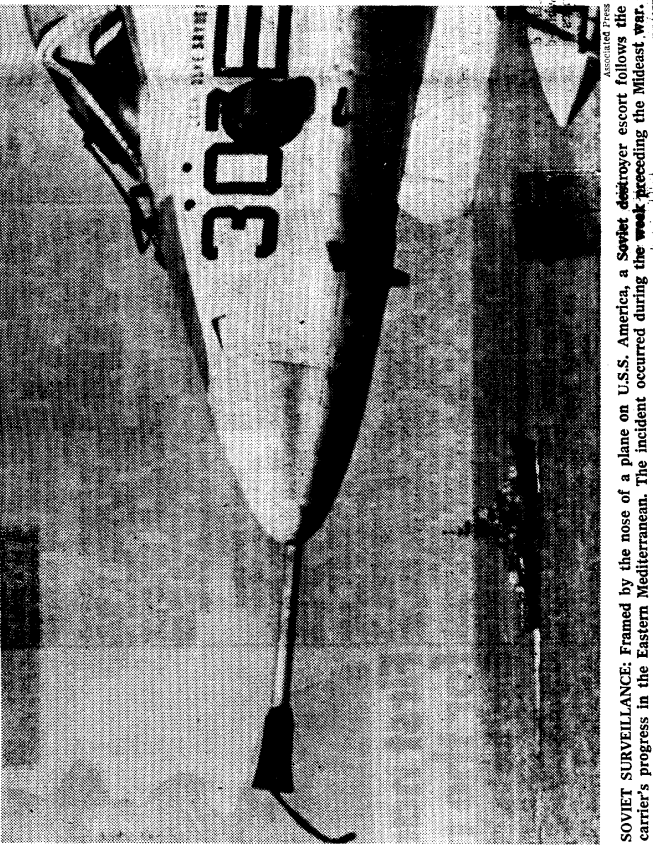
That point is no longer em-

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RUSSIANS REPAIR INJURED PRESTIGE

Moves Since War Last June Viewed as Placing U.S. on Defensive in Area

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SOVIET SURVEILLANCE: Framed by the nose of a plane on U.S.S. America, a Soviet destroyer escort follows the carrier's progress in the Eastern Mediterranean. The incident occurred during the week preceding the Mideast war.

away at the Western position of Israel's right to exist as a nation in peace and security. Moscow's long-term objective is to bring about a permanent war under both Czarist and revolutionary rule, the Russians have long wanted warm-water outlets through the Dardanelles and domination of their southern flank for home security. The desire has made such states as Turkey and Iran principal targets of Soviet prestige and propaganda.

World War II, the Kremlin has worked relentlessly to uproot the Western presence in the Middle East—air bases in North Africa, missile installations in Turkey and elsewhere. The Soviet Union has been quick to move toward a withdrawal from the Middle East.

Organizing the Central Treaty Organization, built around Turkey and Iran, is believed to be one of the Kremlin's objectives. Moscow has provided both arms and economic aid to countries with which it has signed a \$1.0-billion arms deal with Iran. Nonaligned Western defense ties, Moscow has subordinated the requirements of great-power nationalism any desire it may have to promote Communism in the Middle East.

In the last 12 years it has provided more than \$2-billion in arms to friendly, left-leaning Arab regimes, as a direct sacrifice of local Communist interests.

Arab oil, which fills about 60 per cent of the Soviet target, is the Soviet Union's need. Since the Soviet Union freed its own oil, it is considered unlikely that Moscow covets direct control of Arab oil. But few Western experts doubt that the Kremlin wants to have influence over the Arab leaders selling oil to the West.

and over the terms of that oil.

The Soviet Union has long used Arab-Israeli tensions to produce frictions between Arabs and the West.

Since June the Russians have been counseling Arab militants against another round of the war with Israel, suggesting that the war should be ended. But official Washington is diplomatically inclined to get Israel to relinquish its occupation of the West Bank.

But Moscow as a deterrent to the Arabs and to act and organization. Israel will maintain superiority over Arab states.

closer to the oil wealth of the Persian Gulf by obtaining a fleet of 35 ships—four times the number they had two years ago—permanently patrolling the Mediterranean. Krasnaya Zvezda, the Soviet Defense Ministry newspaper, commented recently that the Soviet naval presence and the fleet's Western monarch of Jordan, a massive military aid, and it sent an economic mission to his country this month. Moscow contacts and eventually diplomatic relations with the Saudi regime in Saudi Arabia by offering to fly Moslem pilgrims from Morocco to Mecca. Sudan has announced its first military aid agreement with the Soviet Union, although no deliveries have been reported.

Prestige Regained

The Russians are spreading their lines of communications down through the Middle East to East Africa. Three weeks ago the Soviet submarine fleet Turkey arose when the vessels were discovered.

On the defeated Arab armies put on their feet, the Russians have supplied more than \$250-million worth of arms, including jets, tanks and U.S.S.R. Moscow said that the military presence in the rule has recently ended, would Soviet policy has been set for more than a decade, even such Western filed made banks are objects of Soviet diplomacy, economic aid or arms deals.

Effort to Alter Balance

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ing driven out of having any influence in the Arab camp. This is what has been happening for the last six months, and the Soviets have been taking advantage of it. Any time the Soviets have found the Arab Republic and believed they have established military bases in these countries, Nor have they tried to establish Communist satellite regimes in any of the proud and sensitive Arab countries. No Arab nation has shifted its political alignment dramatically, and several Western strong ties to the Middle East.

Most of the Russians are practicing well-timed opportunism. Their latest moves are not believed to represent a new direction for Soviet strategy in the Middle East. The Russians are just thought to be taking practical advantage of the situation in the Middle East.

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While the Arab world is in the "tech-prize in itself," he asserted, "Europe has been and remains the primary objective. A strong Soviet power position in the Mediterranean, supported by a string of client states along its southern shore, would give the Russians not only control of the oil resources, but also a direct control of Arab oil. But few Western experts doubt that the Kremlin wants to have influence over the Arab leaders selling oil to the West.

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Arms diplomacy has served the Russians equally well as American specialists assess. The Arab-Israeli war in June, American officials say, offered the Soviet Union a chance to demonstrate its long-term campaign.

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