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MEMORANDUM FOR: All NIOs, D/OSK, D/OPA & D/OER

Herewith Harry Cochran's comments on this month's warning meetings. I plan to distribute these regularly for your use in any way that seems appropriate. I'm making no dissemination except to NIOs and Office Directors.

Richard Lehman
NIO for Warning

Attachment

Date 2 July 1979

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29 June 1979

MEMORANDUM FOR: NIO for Warning
SUBJECT : June NIO Warning Meetings

With the exception of a brief discussion in the NESAs session about heightened chances of a Syrian-Israeli air clash (which promptly materialized) the June meetings did not identify new possibilities that might call for formal warning action. There are four items which, in my view, deserve more detailed warning analysis than is usually possible in these rather casual and unstructured meetings: Nicaragua, Afghanistan, Syria-Israel, and Iraq-Iran. All four contain elements of potential surprise which have not received adequate attention in current publications.

Nicaragua

The Latin American analysts were absorbed in current developments and short-term possibilities. They briefly examined alternative outcomes, reaching a kind of negative consensus that neither the National Guard nor the Liberal Party will have a role in any conceivable succession arrangements. They anticipated a sweeping demolition of the status quo but their examination of the complexion of a successor regime was inconclusive.

As for foreign intervention, the meeting discussed possible actions on Somoza's behalf by Guatemala, El Salvador, or Honduras. Only Honduras was seen as a plausible candidate for intervention. The analysts reviewed current reports of increased Cuban logistics and advisory support to the FSIN, but curiously did not address the possibility of more direct and conspicuous Cuban intervention on the Sandinistas' behalf.

None of the participants raised the hypothesis that Castro might perceive strong incentives and promising opportunities to "be in on the kill." The key

question of Cuban intentions was not addressed at all. A "detached" observer could not help wondering if this prime candidate for warning judgment was excluded from analysts' vision by the assessment of Cuba's policies in Central and South America in the recently completed NIE on Cuba (that the Cubans will ~~continue~~ their low profile posture and concentrate on long-term gains while avoiding short-term provocations which might compromise their ambitions to capture leadership of the nonaligned movement).

I am frankly puzzled by this seemingly complacent evaluation of Cuban intentions and possible initiatives. The assumption seems to be that since Castro's assistance to the FSLN in the past has been discreet and limited, this state of affairs will continue into the final showdown phase. The IIM on the "Military Situation in Nicaragua" (27 June) noted that the establishment of an FSLN "liberated zone" in the Rivas area could be followed by "quick foreign recognition of the provisional government and a massive influx of materiel and even foreign troops," but the memo did not offer even a guarded conjecture that Cubans might be among those foreign troops.

It seems to me that more careful consideration should be given to the possible warning implications of repeated current intelligence judgments that FSLN leaders are preoccupied with what they perceive to be a genuine danger of US military intervention. For example, the NID of 26 June said the FSLN "seems to be particularly anxious to begin a push in the southwest to preempt any US intervention." Sandinista leaders, in discussing the situation last weekend, expressed concern about the slow pace of their offensive toward Rivas and noted the possibility of US intervention. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Humberto Ortega (Terciario faction) expressed concern over possible US intervention or covert assistance to Somoza.

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Despite the "humiliating defeat" of the US resolution in the OAS, he said, the US retained "great capacity for maneuver." Havana's unusual statement on 19 June charging that the US was plotting "direct intervention" suggests FSLN apprehensions are shared by the Cubans.

We may be dealing here with the familiar problem of conflicting perspectives and perceptions. Our analysts assume there is virtually no chance of direct US military intervention, even if pro-Cuban elements in the FSLN seem to be on the verge of seizing supreme power. But do the embattled FSLN leaders and their Cuban backers share this assumption?

We now have a broad range of information—events, pronouncements, and intelligence reports—which could be interpreted to support a warning judgment that the Cubans may be contemplating and/or preparing a military intervention on behalf of, and at the request of, the FSLN provisional government. If such a warning is not issued, and the Cubans do undertake more conspicuous actions which could be described as "intervention," it would be awkward to explain why this contingency was not foreseen in the information available before the event.

Afghanistan

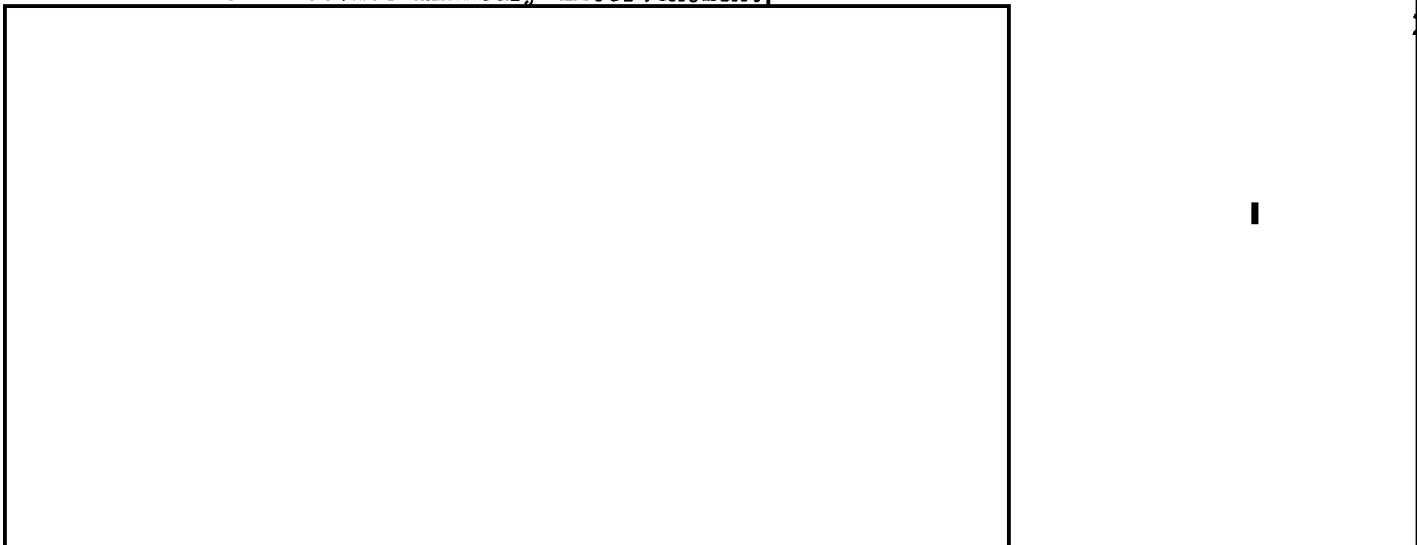
NESA analysts devoted over half of their meeting to this subject. Several voiced uneasiness with what they felt was the Soviet specialists' overly complacent view of the possibility of some form of Soviet military intervention to prevent the collapse and defeat of the Taraki regime. The NESA meeting explored alternatives to the present Kabul government and concluded that, apart from the present defense minister and a few Parcham exiles in Eastern Europe, Soviet prospects for installing a more effective leadership are not promising.

The USSR/EE session seemed to discount the factor of Soviet commitments to support the "popular revolution" in Afghanistan. Both the NIO and analysts

saw the extent of Pakistani involvement on behalf of the insurgents as the critical variable. They concluded that the Soviets would react only if there is a significant increase in Pakistani intervention. An OPA analyst expressed the view that in the absence of conspicuous Pakistani involvement, the Soviets will allow the Taraki-Amin regime to collapse without major political or military moves to save it.

It seems to me there is some danger that Soviet specialists' are edging toward a premature hardening of assumptions about Soviet interests and intentions in Afghanistan. The familiar assumption that Moscow's equities in SALT II, detente, trade and credits, etc. will deter audacious actions around the world, including Afghanistan, seems to have been a major influence in shaping analysts' views. They seem to have become more confident in this relaxed assessment of Soviet intentions as a result of the decline in Soviet allegations of foreign meddling which was apparent prior to and during the Vienna summit meeting. TASS commentator Kornilov, however, returned to the charge on 27 June, claiming the Pakistanis, aided by the Chinese, CIA, and other unnamed "reactionary regimes of the region" (Iran) are providing sanctuary and training for the rebels.

Current publications, in my view, have gone too far in seeming to minimize the chances of Soviet military intervention.



If our Soviet specialists remain reluctant to consider an Alert Memo raising the possibility of Soviet military intervention, an alternative might be to cast a memo in terms of Soviet contingency planning for various forms of increased military assistance and presence, including an eventual introduction of combat forces. I believe there is sufficient evidence to support a judgment of contingency preparations, including the sensitive material last month on Politburo-level discussions and preparation of a document for Brezhnev.

To repeat: I sense some danger that Soviet analysts are becoming locked into predispositions and preconceptions about Soviet intentions and views of the stakes in Afghanistan—a mindset which may result in a jarring surprise unless the tide now flowing against the Kabul regime is reversed in the near future. I don't quarrel with the assumption that the Soviets will be reluctant to undertake a military intervention and will search for alternatives to this course of action as long as possible. However, there are uncomfortable parallels between the analysts' present views about the constraints operating against Soviet intervention and analytical judgments which preceded forceful Soviet actions in the past. (Recall, for example, the reasons against a Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia that were adduced in summer 1968). Afghanistan certainly is not another Czechoslovakia in terms of Soviet imperatives, but I would suggest that the Soviets see their geopolitical interests in Afghanistan as quite similar to their security requirements in non-Warsaw Pact contiguous states such as Finland and Mongolia. Would the Soviets acquiesce in the takeover of Finland or Mongolia by a political/military force perceived to be hostile to Soviet security needs and under the control or influence of Soviet adversaries?

In warning analysis, more attention should be given to a government's

perceptions of interests and stakes in any given situation and less to constraints and inhibitions on assertive actions to defend these interests. Preoccupation with factors and reasons that argued against action, rather than a hard-eyed examination of a regime's perceptions (and/or misperceptions) of its interests, led analysts last fall to underestimate Vietnam's intentions in Cambodia and, later, China's reactions to Hanoi's offensive. This same phenomenon also underlay the misjudgments of Egyptian and **Syrian** intentions in October 1973.

Syria-Israel.

Although NESAs analysts correctly foresaw the growing danger of an air clash, they did not take the next step by examining the clearly related question of a change in Syrian policy and calculation of risks.

The potential warning significance of the air clash on 27 June obviously requires close attention. The shootdown of at least five Syrian fighters will take on heavy symbolic significance in Arab minds because it will conjure up memories of the repercussions of the major air battle in April 1967—one of the factors that impelled Nasir to take his fateful gamble in May-June '67.

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We now need a warning assessment that tackles the vital question of

Syrian and Israeli motives and objectives in much greater depth and detail. For example, is it plausible that Assad is willing to accept the high (and potentially catastrophic) risks of engaging Israeli aircraft simply to pursue a dubious effort to oblige the Israelis to halt air attacks on Palestinian positions in Lebanon? Or is he after much higher and broader objectives

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[Redacted]

(to discredit Sadat's policy, derail Israeli-Egyptian negotiations, force a confrontation with the purpose of alarming the US into applying unprecedented pressures on Israel to negotiate a return of the Golan before Israeli annexation becomes irreversible).

In addition to these political objectives, a warning assessment should address the motivating influence of the internal challenge to Alawite predominance.

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Current publications are lagging behind events.

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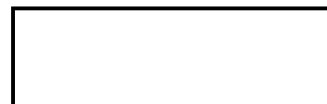
In sum, military escalation seems certain unless Assad backs down. Will he

or can he? Begin is determined to call Assad's bluff. If Syrian-Israeli escalation occurs, how will Sadat react? Can he afford to proceed with implementing the peace treaty and the autonomy talks as if nothing has happened to affect his "peace process?" Or will he be obliged to adjust to such an abrupt change in the Arab-Israeli equation by disengaging from the talks and suspending the treaty scenario?

Iraq-Iran

NESA analysts agreed there are growing risks of military confrontation, but they did not examine Iraqi or Iranian motives and policies in any detail. The internal situation in Iran was touched on only tangentially.

The implications of volatile conditions on the border need no further emphasis. A rapid and perhaps uncontrollable escalation could be triggered by a seemingly trivial incident. The consequences in terms of US interests (disruption of Khuzestan oil production and a display of aggressive Iraqi irredentism in the Gulf) could be very serious. Perhaps it is time to begin preliminary preparations for an Alert Memo.



H. C. Cochran

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