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MEMORANDUM

Special Assessments on the Middle East Situation

FRANCE AND THE ARAB-ISRAELI CRISIS

APPROVED FOR RELEASE
DATE: APR 2001

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29 June 1967

No. 0668/67

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
29 June 1967

FRANCE AND THE ARAB-ISRAELI CRISIS

Arms Policy

1. On 5 June Paris publicly announced a decision made on 2 June -- before the opening of Middle East hostilities -- to place a total embargo on arms to all countries involved in the conflict. This particularly affected Israel, since its armed forces relied heavily on French armaments. On 8 June the policy was to be modified to permit the shipment of spare parts but not offensive weapons, reportedly as a result of Premier Pompidou's reminder to De Gaulle that all armaments contracts with Israel included a clause to supply spares for 10 years. The embargo is officially still in effect, but there has been a welter of conflicting information on whether it is being observed.

2. All indications are that shipment of spare parts was resumed after a short break in early June and is continuing.

3. On the matter of offensive weapons, Israel is almost certainly receiving some equipment which falls in this category.

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4. Powerful banking and business circles, such as the House of Rothschild and Marcel Dassault, have

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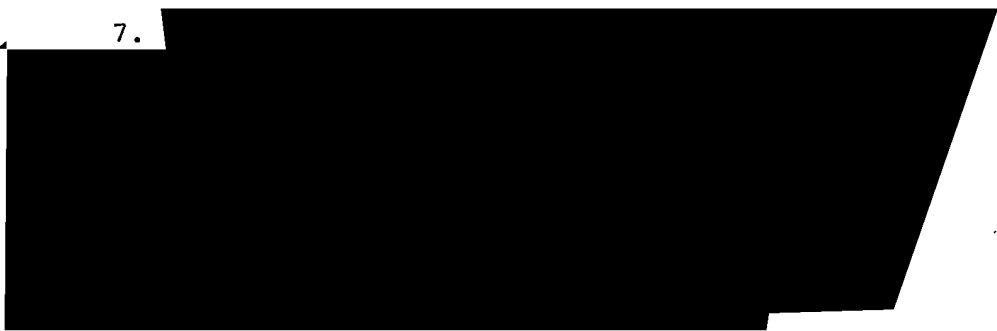
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put pressure on French officials, and particularly on Premier Pompidou (former Director General of the House of Rothschild), to lift the embargo. The Dassault firm argued that French manufacturers would lose out completely in the future as suppliers of arms to friendly nations if they were not able to resupply in time of real need.

5. It is unlikely that French military shipments to Israel could continue for long without De Gaulle's knowledge. He probably would reason that he must officially maintain the embargo for the time being to support his claim of strict neutrality. At the same time, he could have privately sanctioned Pompidou to continue limited shipments, with the understanding that the knowledge of De Gaulle's onw involvement was to be closely guarded.

6. There have been rumors that Israel cancelled its arms contracts with France. Our best judgment is that there have been discussions of cancellation but that no decision had been taken. If the Israelis are still obtaining some offensive weaponry, talk of cancellation might be a camouflage for the secret cooperation actually in effect. Shimon Peres, one of the Israelis most responsible for developing arrangements for military procurement in France, is presently in Paris on an undetermined mission. He could be seeking assurances that shipments will continue and might be trying to set up additional channels for obtaining arms or to broaden the existing ones.

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Attitudes Toward a Settlement

8. France's attitude toward any possible Middle East settlement will be conditioned by its desire to increase its influence in the area and to enhance its credentials as the major power most likely to be considered impartial by the "third world" nations. Efforts to extend French influence in the Middle East have been given a boost by careful cultivation of the Arabs during the conflict, and there have been indications that some Arab states would favor France as a mediator in the conflict. The deterioration of the US and British positions in the area opens the door even wider for the French, and Arab dissatisfaction at the USSR's role in the crisis, reduces competition from the Communist camp. France is the only major power which is not linked with either of the combatants or their big power supporters--a point which Paris unfailingly makes.

9. Paris believes that any lasting solution for the problem should be found within the framework of the four major powers, although it is aware that significant negotiations are unlikely until passions have cooled. For this reason, the French probably regard the UN as a satisfactory forum for discussions for the present. For France any UN action, however, should result from decisions of the Security Council--where the focus is on the four powers--and not the General Assembly. Although the French have yet to outline any detailed ideas for a solution, they maintain that any agreements should be of a permanent nature so that another crisis will not erupt within a few years. Moreover, France has already indicated that it will not regard Israeli territorial gains a fait accompli but will insist that a settlement should be acceptable to all parties to the conflict and "consecrated" by the international community. In addition, Paris believes that a settlement should include some solution for the Palestine refugee problem as well as freedom of navigation of both the Strait of Tiran and the Suez Canal.

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10. Paris' official position remains one of neutrality, although the handling of the government's statement of 21 June on the crisis seems to have distorted De Gaulle's intentions. Wide segments of the press and the diplomatic community interpreted that part of the statement condemning the opening of hostilities by Israel as abandonment of France's neutral posture. It probably is the government's judgment that Israel launched hostilities, but the minister of information told a journalist that the statement would never have been issued had he and the foreign minister been in Paris. The press twisted the import of the release by concentrating attention on the condemnation of Israel without noting that the declaration also censured the "threat to destroy it which its neighbors had made." The fact that the government took several unusual steps to clarify the statement indicates that the declaration was not intended to deviate from the neutral position previously established. Finally, Couve de Murville's General Assembly speech on the following day was rewritten to avoid the appearance of siding with either camp.

11. Before the press communiqué contretemps, there had been considerable comment that the government's policy and conduct in the crisis were widely unpopular, not only in opposition circles but among Gaullists as well. A recent poll did indeed reveal that 58 percent of those questioned were sympathetic to Israel, but 59 percent, however, approved De Gaulle's "neutral" position--a clear indication that at least some of those with pro-Israeli leanings recognized the political and economic advantages of neutrality to France. The opposition in France has been sharply split on the issue, with the French Communist Party echoing the Soviet line and the non-Communist Federation of the Left taking a pro-Israeli stance. Recent indications that the split will prevent or at least delay development of a common political program by the two groups can only be pleasing to De Gaulle. Although Gaullists both within and without the government have also been disenchanted with the General's stance, the limits of possible dissidence are firmly set by their awareness that the government majority in the National

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Assembly is a slender one and by their recognition that the neutral posture might yet permit France to play a crucial role in the negotiations.

12. At this point, De Gaulle appears to have been successful in his efforts to induce Moscow to give consideration to Paris and to prevent the "super powers" from negotiating without France. The French President initially was discouraged by Moscow's unreceptive attitude to his proposal for quadripartite talks. De Gaulle, however, probably interprets Premier Kosygin's stop-over in Paris before the Soviet leader's meeting with President Johnson and his planned visit on 1 July as de facto big power consultations, and thus a vindication of his neutral position.

Possible Future Developments in France's Arms Policy

13. When the embargo was instituted, De Gaulle doubtless did not wish to see Israel defeated, not only because this would have put France in an extremely awkward position due to its earlier commitments to Israel but also--and more importantly--because he did not wish to see the USSR greatly improve its position in the Middle East. Moreover, the French president probably estimated that the Israelis could hold their own militarily and that they would have sufficient equipment to see them through the hostilities, which would not be prolonged. Therefore, De Gaulle probably concluded he could afford to embargo arms, leaving open the question of what policy France would pursue in the future.

14. For the present, so long as the Middle East conflict has center stage in the international arena, De Gaulle probably will maintain the embargo officially but continue to close his eyes to the secret but limited flow of offensive weapons to Israel. De Gaulle might still hope that a threat to cut off even the present supply of arms and spare parts would give him some leverage on Israel which could be used to lead it to moderate its demands for a settlement.

15. Over the longer run, France might under certain circumstances lift its embargo. If the crisis drags on and Paris is getting nowhere with its hopes

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of direct mediation or four-power negotiations, then De Gaulle might conclude that an appearance of strict neutrality was not paying off and thus let the embargo drop. While France might take this decision quite independently of what the other major powers do, it seems certain that Paris would resume arms sales if these powers were themselves making major deliveries to countries involved in the conflict. De Gaulle could plausibly argue that France's neutral status was not impaired by indicating that any French arms sales would be strictly on a commercial basis and open to Arabs and Israelis alike.

16. De Gaulle probably believes there is only a small chance that the major powers could agree on any meaningful system of limiting arms to the Middle East. Nonetheless, he would probably agree to French participation under certain conditions: 1) participation by all four major powers--the US, the USSR, the UK and France; 2) effective inspection, which would necessitate Arab and Israeli cooperation; 3) a reasonable balance in armed strength of the two sides. Even should the US and USSR make an agreement on arms limitation without including the French in the negotiating stage, which seems unlikely, France probably would tacitly go along by simply continuing the present embargo. In this way, De Gaulle would not have to assent openly to an agreement negotiated over his head by the super powers but at the same time could conform to the substance of it.

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