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Every seasoned reader of the Soviet press knows that when the word slozhnost' appears in connection with some major issue in Soviet affairs, one should be prepared for a tortured policy explanation that will compromise some important Soviet interest, ideological position, or constituency. Slozhnost means "complexity," or "complication," and use of the word in Soviet political discourse is a warning signal to the initiated that harsh realities require the subordination (at least temporarily) of some valued Soviet aspiration or interest in order to protect or advance some competing goal or interest. Since June 5, 1967, Soviet discussions of the Middle Eastern situation have been liberally sprinkled with slozhnosti's and with allusions to "contradictions" (another Marxist favorite), that account for the "complexities."

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The present paper was transcribed from a talk given by the author at a colloquium on The Big Powers and the Present Crisis in the Middle East held in New York on December 6, 1967, under the joint auspices of the Institute for Mediterranean Affairs and Farleigh Dickinson University. It will be published in a forthcoming book on the colloquium to be issued by the Institute for Mediterranean Affairs.

Rather than detailing past and present Soviet policies in the Middle East, I propose in the limited time available to review some of the major issues of that region as they may presently be perceived by Soviet leaders.

The dilemmas facing the Soviet leadership reflect the fact that the USSR must play many roles simultaneously in the Middle East and cannot fully play any one of them without adversely affecting Soviet performance in others.

- o The Soviet Union is the would-be champion of "progressive" regimes in the "national liberation struggle," but it is also the partner of the United States in a limited adversary relationship to prevent the outbreak of general war.
- o The Soviet Union is the major non-Western source of aid to developing countries that have chosen the non-capitalist path, but it is also engaged in building the "material technical bases" of Communism at home and is experiencing a severe resource squeeze.
- o The Soviet Union supports the efforts of "bourgeois nationalist" regimes that are led by "revolutionary democrats," but it is also the senior member of the world Communist movement, with an obligation to promote the interests of Communist Parties that may be at odds with "bourgeois nationalist" leaders in their own homelands. Here the Soviet Union also faces strong Chinese competition for moral leadership in the world

Communist and revolutionary movement, a competition which puts constant pressure from the left on Soviet policies.

The Israeli defeat of the Soviet Union's Arab clients in June, 1967, sharpened these contradictions. It was at once a moment of great defeat and great opportunity for the USSR. It was a defeat because of the failure of massive Soviet military aid, Moscow's chief political asset in the Arab world, to prevent a disastrous military setback for Egypt and Syria; because it demonstrated Moscow's unwillingness or inability to rescue its clients by direct military intervention; and because both Soviet threats and diplomatic pressure subsequently failed to reverse the new reality created by the failure of Soviet arms in Arab hands.

Given manifest Israeli military superiority, Soviet claims to have deterred the United States from intervening are essentially irrelevant, and the credit that the USSR claims for having saved Cairo and Damascus by quick action on cease fire resolutions in the UN Security Council has dubious political value.

The irony, however, is that the Arab debacle also provides the Soviet Union with its moment of greatest opportunity in the area. While Soviet behavior in the crisis may have disappointed the expectations of some of its clients, Arab losses were so great and post-war Arab bargaining positions so weak, that their dependence on the Soviet Union is now heavier than ever before. With this dependence have come new opportunities for enlarging Soviet influence throughout the area. The key questions

now confronting the Soviet leaders are: What will it cost to exploit these opportunities to exert greater influence? And how much is this influence really worth? Soviet policy seeks some point of equilibrium between (1) the certain, high costs of maintaining and strengthening Soviet influence in the area, and (2) the highly uncertain benefits to be derived from this greater influence, benefits which may be fleeting in any case.

In new and acute form this is an expression of a perennial Soviet dilemma in dealing with non-Communist clients or allies. On the one hand, bourgeois nationalist regimes (or that portion of this class identified in current jargon as "revolutionary democratic") are welcomed as allies in the struggle against Western imperialism. On the other hand, there is a tradition, born of sad experience, of distrust for such regimes because they may betray or exploit the USSR, or simply be so incompetent or unstable that building influence with them is akin to building castles in the sand.

The orthodox Communist position, which is skeptical about such alliances, sees them as essentially parasitic relationships: Soviet influence is great as long as the client is greatly dependent; feeding that dependency may be terribly expensive; and since ideological bonds are weak or non-existent, the influence can be exercised only as long as the expensive dependency continues. Bourgeois-nationalist regimes take what they can get from the Soviet Union, but when more attractive alternatives present themselves, they are likely to desert the USSR and even turn on the Communists. Moreover, even if the probability of treachery can be minimized by getting "progressive" regimes

to burn their bridges to the non-Communist world, these regimes are so inherently unstable, and their leaderships so insecure, that sudden radical reversals of political orientation are always possible (cf. Indonesia). These are the classic dangers of so-called rightist-opportunist policies.

The opposing argument is that the goal of Soviet assistance and influence is to aid selected bourgeois nationalist regimes to surmount economic crisis and reduce political instability, in the process inducing them to adopt "progressive" social-political forms that will create the basis for alliance in a deeper "socialist" sense.

But there are some Soviet leaders who must wonder whether the gains would be commensurate with the costs even if "progressive" Arab regimes could be kept in power. Some original Soviet objectives in the Middle East have become somewhat outdated in any case. The 1955 anti-Baghdad Pact motivation is hardly a factor any longer. Overseas U.S. military bases in the area have steadily declined in strategic significance due to the rapid development of intercontinental range weaponry, U.S. air- and sea-lift capabilities, and the American capacity to sustain a massive off-shore presence in the Mediterranean. Oil denial policies have been seen as having ambivalent effects. Closure of the Suez canal does damage some Western economic interests, but it hurts Egypt even more (and the Soviet Union, also, with respect to its assistance to North Vietnam). If Arab facilities and resources are going to be denied to traditional Western consumers,

revenue lost as a result will have to be obtained elsewhere. From the Soviet Union?

One lesson the Soviet leaders may have learned from the June war is the danger of deepening the Soviet commitment to Middle Eastern clients without corresponding gains in political control. While the Soviet evidently did play some role in Nasser's decision to move his forces into the Sinai, it seems unlikely that they approved in advance his decision to close the Straits of Tiran, and it is virtually certain that they did not wish actual hostilities to commence. The Soviet problem always has been how to exercise control without alienating de facto clients jealous of their independence. Soviet leverage now is probably greater than ever before, and the Soviets may now be in a position to exercise tighter controls over the use of their military hardware; but great uncertainties remain.

This is the source of another important slozhnost-another complication. The Soviet leaders do not want a new round of war in the Middle East. Their interest in the Arab-Israeli conflict is manipulative; they have no pressing interest of their own in the restoration of an Arab Palestine. Yet for many radical Arab groups, the Arab-Israeli conflict is the central reason for close ties with the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union is the source of weapons and the guarantor against Western intervention. However, the Soviets do not wish to be tested by another Arab defeat, which would create pressures for Soviet intervention on behalf of their clients. Nor can they relish the prospect -- though it may at this

point seem terribly remote -- of an Arab military success that might conceivably embroil the United States. Soviet influence has therefore been thrown heavily on the side of those in the Arab world who stress the "moderate" or "political" approach to liquidating the consequences of the Israeli victory. This enlarges the distance between the Soviet Union and Arab radicals, creates openings for local Fidelista types, and lends credence to the Chinese Communist line.

As for a settlement, the Soviets probably have no a priori interest of their own in the location of permanent boundaries, or in the question of Israeli access to the Suez Canal. They are presumably interested in any settlement that would keep the Arab states indebted to the Soviet Union. However, prolonged Soviet failure to secure a settlement acceptable to the USSR's Arab clients increases the risk that the latter may eventually turn to the United States on the assumption that America is the only power capable of compelling Israeli acceptance of a settlement tolerable to the Arab states.

Suppose, however, that "progressive" Arab regimes can be kept in power with generous Soviet assistance, and can even be launched on the "socialist path" of development. Suppose even that in one or more of these countries effective vanguard revolutionary parties are formed whose leaders declare themselves to be (or always to have been) Marxist-Leninists, and that they apply for admission to the world socialist system. This, after, all, is supposed to be the culmination of Soviet ambitions for the countries of the third world. Would a rapid transition to socialism by one or more Arab states be

an unmixed blessing from the Soviet point of view? Anthony Carthew has recently argued that the Soviet Union is now ardently attempting rapid "satellization" of Egypt.* I think this is a dubious proposition. There is no doubt but that Soviet leaders seek to exercise greater control over Egyptian policies that are supported by Soviet aid, but there are very strong arguments from the Soviet point of view against a quick Communist take-over, even supposing that were feasible.

The Soviets have learned many times over that a leadership headed by men who call themselves Communists is not necessarily a pliable leadership in the classical satellite sense. Soviet reluctance to accept Castro into the socialist camp before the Bay of Pigs crisis was an expression of the ambivalence felt by Soviet leaders about welcoming young vulnerable, underdeveloped countries into the official socialist fold. Discipline in the world Communist movement is not what it once was, and foreign Communist parties ruling in non-contiguous countries are increasingly less likely to be mere puppets of the Kremlin. Yet the degree of Soviet commitment goes up enormously once a non-Communist client is converted into a socialist ally, and the cost of the commitment can be tremendous, as witness the Cuban case. It is therefore likely that Soviet leaders would prefer a fairly prolonged period of "revolutionary democracy" in "progressive" developing countries during which the USSR

*New York Times Magazine, December 3, 1967, pp. 45-47, 141-153.

can keep its options open and its costs down. "Premature" transition to Soviet-style socialism would probably cause sources of non-Soviet foreign assistance to be cut off and in some cases could ultimately provoke U.S. intervention, thus threatening to embroil the USSR in hostilities.

This leads me to the realm of global Soviet policy and to the last contradiction: that between the requirements of "peaceful coexistence," on the one hand, and support for the "national liberation struggle," on the other. This contradiction has been a critical issue in the Sino-Soviet dispute, and it has been pointed to once more by Arab radicals, in connection with the June war. A great deal of nonsense has been written and uttered here and abroad about the connection between the war in Vietnam and the war in the Middle East, the former allegedly providing inspiration for the latter. However, there is one sense in which the two may indeed be related. The Arab defeat in June, added to the deep U.S. military involvement in Southeast Asia, particularly the sustained bombing campaign against North Vietnam, has made it even more difficult for the Soviets to argue convincingly that a policy of "peaceful coexistence" is compatible with support for the "national liberation struggle."

For the "national liberation struggle," according to Moscow, the attractiveness of the Soviet Union's "peaceful coexistence" policy is its alleged role in preventing "imperialist" interventions. But to critics of Soviet policy inside the Communist and revolutionary movements, active U.S. intervention in Southeast Asia, contrasted with Soviet non-intervention both there and

in the Middle East, indicates that "peaceful coexistence" is today a one-sided proposition: The United States intervenes in order to redress an unfavorable local balance of forces; where the local balance is favorable to U.S. interests, the Americans do not intervene, and prevent the USSR from doing so. The Soviet Union never intervenes, even where the local balance of forces is adverse or where the U.S. actively throws its weight on the side of the "reactionaries." To militant critics of Soviet policy on the left, this may look less like "peaceful coexistence" and more like U.S. superiority. The point has been made repeatedly by the Chinese, the Cubans, the Algerians, and more softly, with understanding and sympathy by Nasser's confidant, Muhammad Haykal.*

How Soviet policy elects to deal with this contradiction may have fateful consequences for the world. There is some evidence that the USSR is moving in the direction of strengthening its capacity to conduct mobile military operations in remote areas. Rumors that the Soviet Union has sought base rights in Egypt are connected with the expectation that the USSR will seek to create such a remote warfare capability. If the Soviet Union does move in this direction, it could open an entirely new phase in its foreign policy. The cost would probably be far greater than any that might be incurred for marginal improvements in Soviet general war capabilities. And the risk of superpower conflict would rise sharply.

*"Arab-Soviet Friendship," Cairo Radio, August 25, 1967, in Survival, Vol. IX, No. 11 (November 1967), pp. 358-362.

In many ways, therefore, the most fundamental questions of Soviet foreign and defense policy are at issue as the Soviet leaders survey the scene in the Middle East. For the time being the USSR is seeking to keep open as many alternatives as possible. As long as events do not compel the Soviet leaders to make radical policy choices, they will probably continue to pursue the kind of "mini-max" strategy that is appropriate for coping with the "complexities" and "contradictions" of the Middle East.

