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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

12 December 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable Henry Kissinger
SUBJECT : Enemy Strength in Vietnam

1. The "official" figures on Communist troop strength in South Vietnam are as follows:

Combat Forces

Viet Cong/North Vietnamese Army Main & Local Forces

North Vietnamese Army	97,809 - 100,809
Viet Cong	<u>37,450 - 40,450</u>

TOTAL MAIN FORCE	138,259
Administrative Services	35,225
Guerrillas	<u>77,971</u>
TOTAL	251,455

2. We have not included them on the chart because they are under intensive review by DIA, MACV, and ourselves at the present time. So far, all we have agreed is that North Vietnamese Army strength in the South is in the range of 130,000 - 140,000, considerably higher than the 97,809 - 100,809 previously estimated. The CIA position is that the other figures in the table above should be raised similarly. This difference is now under negotiation between Washington and Saigon.

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PER RAC REVIEW 1/16/2009

By JLS NARA, Date 2/16/2012

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3. If you use any of these figures and they were to leak out, you would inevitably be faced with yet another controversy over the Vietnamese numbers game. I recommend strongly that instead you speak in terms of Communist regiments. There are 60 Communist regiments in the South; the usual figure used for these regiments is between 2,000 - 3,000.

/s/ R. J. Smith

R. J. SMITH
Deputy Director for Intelligence

P. S. I would be happy to discuss this matter with you over the phone if you want more background.

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[pp. 2 of 2]

LSE

Cabinet Briefing
Dec 12 HAK

Introduction

- I want to discuss with you today several foreign affairs problems that will be facing the new administration in the years to come.
- I want to divide these problems in terms of their immediacy:
 1. Long range -- the strategic balance
Soviet-US relations
 2. Middle range -- the Middle East
 3. Immediate -- Vietnam
Biafra

II. Soviet-US Relations

Introduction

- Soviet attitudes in the years to come will be affected by disparate fears, desires and pre-conceptions.
- Pressures for conciliation with the West will come from a rising tide of desire for consumer goods, from the fear of war, and perhaps from those who hope for a relaxation in police-state controls.
- Pressures for continued confrontation with the US will come from Communist ideology, suspiciousness of leaders, and the Party apparatus, which sees itself as the principal bulwark against the outside world. They will come, as well, from the military, and from those who fear that any relaxation of tensions can only encourage the satellites to try, once again, to loosen the Moscow apron string.
- Moscow's foreign policy since the August invasion of Czechoslovakia has focussed on two issues:
 1. Czechoslovakia itself, and the effects of the invasion on the rest of the Communist world;
 2. How to cut losses elsewhere--especially how to hold down damage to US-Soviet relations.
- As the invasion showed, the security of the Soviet position in Eastern Europe, and the preservation of the status quo there count for much more than the good opinion of the outside world.
- But it's also clear that Moscow believes its interests would be seriously damaged by a rupture of East-West relations, or if the possibility of a dialogue with the US on certain issues were lost.

- For now, the Soviet aim is to ensure and re-enforce its authority in Eastern Europe, while keeping lines to the West as open as possible.
- In terms of the US, the Soviets seem particularly anxious to keep open the possibility of talks on strategic arms limitations.

Soviet Purposes in Negotiating with the US

- A real desire to lessen tensions?
- As a tactical device to gain respectability.
- As a device to split the Alliance and isolate the US and/or the FRG.

Why the Soviets Want Strategic Arms Talks

- Continued escalation can become an extremely expensive proposition for them.
- It may be that they believe a reasonably stable relationship between Soviet and US capabilities to be inevitable and have therefore decided to try for agreement to hold at the present level.
- Or, it could be that they are on the verge of a technical breakthrough, and want to keep us where we are while they see what they can do to develop the breakthrough.
- But it is more likely that they think we will make a technical breakthrough if we continue to test and build, and want to avoid this.
- Finally, talks with us now would demonstrate that they need pay no permanent price for Czechoslovakia, and that they are still respectable people.

Issues

- If this is truly to be a period of negotiation, not confrontation, we must look carefully at what is the most effective way for us to negotiate. We must have clearly fixed in our own minds exactly what issues we want to negotiate about.
- Our past policy has often been one of "confidence building" for its own sake, in the belief that as confidence grows tensions will lessen.
- But if one takes the view that tensions arise as a result of differences over concrete issues, then perhaps the real way to approach the problem is to begin working on those differences.
- There is also a widely held view that we must make a choice between a policy of "detente" and a policy of support for a strong Western Alliance.
- But this is a false choice. Certainly the Soviets are prepared to use "detente" as a tool to weaken the Alliance. Our task is to coordinate our East and West European policies, being careful not to sacrifice basic US interests for what may well be illusory and often temporary gains.

The following is a breakdown of Soviet leaders into hard and soft line camps:

Liberals

1. Kosygin
2. Polyansky
3. Mazurov

Conservatives

1. Brezhnev
2. Podgorny
3. Shelest
4. Kirilenko

Swing Group*

1. Suslov
2. Shelepin

*Both these men apparently opposed the Czech invasion.

I. The Arab-Israeli Situation

-- If nothing changes in the present state of conditions in the Middle East, it seems reasonably certain that the Arabs and Israelis will once again go to war some time during the new Administration's tenure in office.

-- Soviet interests and involvement in the area have expanded to the point that, should there be another war, there will be a strong likelihood of some form of direct Soviet intervention.

-- Despite our own efforts, and despite UN mediator Jarring's efforts to get the two sides together, there has been no real progress since the June 1967 war.

Israel

-- In this atmosphere, the Israelis have been unwilling to give up at all on what they consider to be their principal bargaining card--occupation of some 25,000 square miles of Arab territory (Sinai, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank of the Jordan, and Syria's Golan Heights).

(Note: The land seized by Israel during the June war is equivalent to a 300% increase in its territory.)

-- Israel has said it will withdraw from Arab territories to "secure and recognized borders" in exchange for a solid Arab commitment to peace, arrived at through direct negotiation and agreement. "Secure and recognized borders" has never been defined.

-- While Israel has accepted indirect talks through Jarring as a first step, it insists that the final settlement must be directly negotiated.

-- Israel's hesitancy to give any ground on the occupied territories issue is understandable. Obtaining recognized borders--which is what they say they want as a final settlement--really only gets them to the point where most other nations start. In fact, it is only because they now hold extensive enemy territory that they have any guarantee for their security.

-- Recent indications are that Israel's territorial aims are much more than "minor modifications" It now appears that they want to hold on to a long defensive strip along Jordan's West Bank, as well as the Golan Heights in Syria and all of the city of Jerusalem. They also are intent on keeping the Gaza Strip out of Egyptian hands, and insist that they must have free transit rights through

the Suez Canal, and permanent control of a defensive area at Sharm-el-Sheik (to guarantee them access to the Gulf of Aqaba).

-- We can expect the Israelis to be very tough bargainers. They have no faith in the UN, have resisted any suggestion that the Jarring Mission be expanded to a mediatory role and have rejected any proposals for an imposed settlement.

-- Israel's ability to compromise is further limited by Eshkol's political weakness. The conflicting views and aims of the governing coalition make it extremely difficult for the Government to stand against Israeli extremists.

The Borders

Tensions have risen over all borders during the past few months. Frontier fire fights, ambushes, artillery duels, mining incidents and terrorists' bombings in urban Israeli areas have occurred with regularity.

-- This constant harassment has led to a new and tougher Israeli line. There have been retaliatory raids, and talk of more to come.

-- Since the end of the June war 233 Israelis have been killed in terrorists' attacks, and 873 have been wounded. This would be about the equivalent in comparable US terms of 17,475 killed and 65,475 wounded.

Military Strengths

Israeli military superiority, in quality if not quantity, continues.

Israeli pilots and maintenance of equipment are vastly superior to the Arabs. The interceptor strength was reduced by losses during the War, so they now are trying to buy 50 F-4's from us.

The army is well-equipped and in a high state of readiness. Its navy is small, but good.

Israel's Advanced Weapons Program

-- A french firm has already designed and tested for Israel a 270-mile range ballistic missile capable of carrying a nuclear warhead.

-- Israel already has two of these missiles and is expecting five more.

-- Domestically produced missiles may be possible by mid-1969.

Egypt

-- Nasser continues to face increasing domestic problems but no clear contender for his position has emerged.

-- The military apparently is increasingly discontented and there have been numerous purges over the past year. For example, about a month after the June war the entire army and air force high command was cashiered. A number were sentenced to prison terms for negligence.

-- Civilian unrest is widespread. Intellectuals and students are unhappy with the regime and the course of Nasser's "revolution".

-- The most recent examples of this unrest were student riots last month in Alexandria and Mansur. These riots were deeply disturbing to the regime, but there is little it can offer to placate this disaffected group. More trouble may be in the offing.

There are, however, formidable obstacles to any sudden move against Nasser.

His efficient intelligence network is still hard at work; there are still many military units loyal to him; opposition is diffused and disorganized.

Nasser's problems are exacerbated by a slow deterioration in his health. He is diabetic, and this condition continues to worsen.

But, barring unpredictables, he is not likely to retire on purely medical grounds in the next year or two.

All in all, Nasser's pre-eminence in the Arab world may have shrunk, but he remains the most respected (or feared) Arab leader.

Arab Position on a Settlement

-- The basic Arab dilemma is that the governments are probably too weak to make a settlement on their own, though they might be able to accept a settlement imposed on them from outside.

UAR. UAR continues to insist that Israel pledge to withdraw from occupied territory as the first step to a settlement.

Israeli transit of the Suez Canal is tied to a settlement of the long-standing refugee problem.

Nasser is willing to allow a UN presence at the Strait of Tiran, and to work out some arrangement on Gaza so long as it is not ceded to Israel.

He has also indicated a willingness to allow Jordan to work out its own settlement with Israel. But King Husayn doesn't feel he can get too far out in front of Nasser.

Jordan. Husayn is fighting for his life. His efforts to prevent Palestinian terrorist organizations from becoming the major political force in Jordan have led to a number of recent bloody clashes between terrorists and the army.

Further violence is likely, as is increased public pressure on Husayn to let the terrorists have a free hand.

So long as Husayn can maintain his Bedouin support and keep the terrorists in line, he can probably hold out. But a major crackdown on the terrorists would make his chances slim indeed.

Husayn, of course, wants the West Bank returned, but would probably agree to some minor border rectifications. In any event, political pressures on him at home will make it extremely difficult for him to go very far to compromise his differences with Israel.

Arab Rearmament

The USSR has nearly restored Arab arms inventories to their pre-June 1967 levels.

Soviet technical assistance to the Arab armed forces has been greatly increased.

In the next year or so, Soviet deliveries will probably bring Arab weapons inventories (especially aircraft) somewhat above pre-War levels.

The Soviet Position in the Middle East

There has been both a qualitative and quantitative increase in the Soviet presence in the Mediterranean since the June War. This is true both militarily and politically.

Their Mediterranean naval squadron has been significantly strengthened (at times they have had more than 50 ships in the squadron).

Currently their strength is 34 ships, including a helicopter carrier, escort vessels, and some submarines. This falls far short of the Sixth Fleet's strength.

The Egyptians are providing bases for Soviet reconnaissance flights over the Sixth Fleet. Some of these planes probably use Egyptian markings.

The Russians now have some 3,500 military advisers-- down to Bn. level) in the area (against 1,000 before 1967).

While the Soviets continue to advise against seeking a military solution to the Arab-Israel conflict, they have not put any pressure on their clients to settle.

The "no-war, no-peace" situation permits them to expand their military and political presence. They would probably like to see this situation continue.

Issues Facing the US

The Middle East could become the Balkans of a new international crisis. Intense local rivalries far overshadow local concerns for the maintenance of peace between the great powers.

-- Can we in some way separate the Arab-Israeli conflict from US-Soviet rivalries?

-- Given the traditional interests both powers have in the area, and its strategic importance, it is almost certain that US and Soviet interests will clash.

-- The Soviets certainly like the fact that a Middle East crisis presents the US with very serious problems,

but at the same time it is probable that they are as interested as we in avoiding a great power confrontation not of their choosing.

-- If this is true, a first task of the new Administration must be to examine strategies for separating the Arab-Israeli confrontation from a US-Soviet confrontation. One possible strategy would be to include the Middle East in US-Soviet negotiations on outstanding issues.

Is there any step, or series of steps, we can take that might make it easier for the Arabs and Israelis to reach a settlement?

It would appear that we have little leverage over either side, but we ought to make our own study of the tools we may have.

One thing is clear. The Arabs are convinced that we have it in our power to force Israel to settle. We must make them understand that this is simply not the case.

What are the costs and dividends to a resumption
of diplomatic relations with the Arab States?

A new Administration can more easily move toward normal diplomatic ties with Cairo, Baghdad, etc. We ought to look at the pros and cons of this possibility.

(Mauritania)

IV. Vietnam

Introduction

- The present state, and future course, or our negotiations is too complicated and sensitive for detailed discussion here.
- What is important is that we understand that this war is substantially different from any other we have fought. Our success depends in large measure to our ability to interrelate our economic, political and military policies into a coherent whole.
- Also, the Paris negotiations themselves are an important factor, since they have such an impact on the expectations of the Vietnamese populace.

First Challenge to the NSC Structure

- This administration proposes to make Vietnam the first test of the new NSC structure. Very early on we will, after full consultation with the Secretaries of State and Defense, and other senior Presidential advisors, present the full range of options to the NSC for consideration.
- The NSC task will be to make a rational whole of all our programs, and to end the tendency to make policy by answering cables from Saigon and Paris.

V. BIAFRA

The Situation

- This may be the first major foreign crisis facing the new Administration.
- The 18 month old Nigerian Civil War has already caused the death by starvation of many thousands of Biafrans.
- But most recent reports indicate that, unless some way is found to get thousands of tons of food and medicines into Biafra, some 3 to 4 million people will die within the next few months.
- The heavy increase in the death rate is now expected to begin in February.

What is Needed

- If mass starvation is to be avoided, there must be a ceasefire, establishment of a land corridor into Biafra, and a massive international relief operation (perhaps 40,000 tons per month; costs--perhaps \$20 million per month).
- The outlook right now is that it will be extremely difficult to get the parties to agree to a ceasefire or a land corridor. While the Biafrans are slowly losing the war, it now appears that they can hold out for many more months.
- The question we may soon have to face is just how deeply we want to involve ourselves in forcing some compromise on the parties.
- Too deep an involvement (so far we have let H. Selassie take the lead in proposing solutions; we have supported him) could lead to an extreme African reaction, with charges of colonialism, etc.
- Whatever more we decide to do, it should be done in conjunction with as many other nations as possible.

Background

- This is basically a tribal conflict. The Ibos (Biafra) are the "doers"--the doctors, engineers,

etc.,--in the society. They were the victims of large-scale riots several years ago. This, in turn, led to the move to secede.

- With few exceptions, other African states support the central government. They know that if tribal separatism succeeds in Nigeria it may easily spread through all of Africa.
- The Nigerian Government has cooperated reasonably well with the International Red Cross Biafran relief effort. This international airlift of food and medicine, though it has already cost some \$30 million (about 65% from public and private U.S. sources), has only scratched the surface of the problem.
- The Biafrans have been far less cooperative. They have permitted relief flights only at night (and used them as cover for arms flights), and have steadfastly refused to permit a land corridor relief operation.
- They have refused to cooperate because they hope to use starvation as a means of generating international support for independence, and because they fear that Central Government will move troops in through the land corridor should it be set up.