



1950-1951

Soviet Goals and Expectations in the Global Power Arena

National Intelligence Estimate

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85. Although the desire to regain ideological legitimacy and attractive force imparts a stimulus to Soviet foreign policy in the Third World, that policy is shaped increasingly by the specific and highly varied conditions of regions and countries. The Middle East is clearly the part of the Third World of greatest concern to the Soviet Union. Soviet determination to play a major role in this region, and the fact that Israel's fate, as well as access to oil, anchor US interests firmly in the area, continue to make it a potential arena for US-Soviet confrontation on the Soviet doorstep. It is also the region where the Soviets have since the early 1970s endured a succession of severe setbacks, most notably their humiliating expulsion from Egypt. The Soviets' gains in Libya and Yemen (Aden) and in patronage over the Palestine Liberation Organization are poor compensation for their losses.

86. Over the last few years, Soviet influence and freedom of action in the Middle East have been constricted by three converging developments. The first and most important of these has been the enormous rise in influence of the conservative oil-producing states, led by Saudi Arabia and Iran, working against Soviet interests. Second, the value of a military-political connection to the Soviet Union has been eroded by Soviet inability to secure the satisfaction of Arab aspirations in the conflict with Israel. Third, the Soviet position has been further weakened by the growing orientation of the economies even of radical Arab countries toward the capitalist industrial states.

87. In the ongoing effort to combat these trends, Moscow seeks to preserve its ties with the radical elements of the region as the strongest available evidence that the USSR retains a disruptive potential sufficiently great to prevent its exclusion from attempts to reach a Middle East settlement. The importance of the USSR's ties to these elements has been increased by the dramatic opening of direct negotiations between the two principal actors in the Arab-Israeli conflict, Egypt and Israel, both of which wish to minimize the role of the Soviet Union.

86. Apart from the Middle East, India has long been the most important object of Soviet attention in the Third World, both to help contain China and as a cornerstone of

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still somewhat favorable, Soviet forecast assumes continued strong antagonism, but with more fluidity in the relationship as both sides seek to improve the shape of the triangular relationship with the United States, which is now seen as skewed in Washington's favor.

114. Unabated hostility from the present Chinese leadership or its successors is probably still regarded by Soviet leaders as more likely than not. How severe a threat an unremittingly hostile China could pose to Soviet security and foreign policy interests a decade from now is probably seen by Soviet forecasters as depending mainly on factors external to China. While the Soviets do anticipate that China's economic and military power, especially under stable, pragmatic rulers, will grow steadily in the years ahead and are concerned about the costs that countervailing Soviet efforts would impose, they are probably relatively confident that China cannot by its own devices cause the Sino-Soviet power relationship to shift seriously to Soviet disadvantage. However, a deeply hostile China whose military capabilities grew rapidly with the aid of large-scale economic, technical, and particularly military assistance from the West would confront the USSR with a two-front version of the worst period of the Cold War. Soviet capacity to influence US behavior provides an important measure of relief, but the Soviets are aware that if they cannot alter China's stance toward the Soviet Union they may have to accept constraints on their own policy toward the United States so as to avoid raising US incentives for higher levels of security cooperation with China.

115. In the Middle East, the Soviets believe the prospects for arresting or reversing the sharp downturn in their fortunes would be improved by the failure of direct Israeli-Egyptian negotiations and by the demise of Sadat which they hope such a collapse would precipitate. They are probably skeptical about the possibility of achieving an enduring Arab-Israeli settlement and will try to obstruct attainment of any agreement from which they are excluded. A reversion of the region to its previous polarity would provide the USSR with a more congenial policy environment than the present one, although it would pose again the same uncomfortable risk of a new war threatening Soviet confrontation with the United States. To reduce this risk the USSR would probably favor a Soviet-American jointly engineered Middle East agreement in which the weight of the Soviet

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Union would be seen as resting unmistakably on the Arab side. Almost any agreement the two sides could be persuaded to accept would be likely to lessen tensions and reduce the risk of war for a time. Yet the Soviets probably remain confident that no attainable agreement could so thoroughly pacify the region as to make Soviet arms and support irrelevant to its politics.

116. In the rest of the Third World, the Soviets probably expect continued confusion and political volatility, as in Africa at present and presumably elsewhere in the future. They are likely to draw at least some encouragement about their prospects elsewhere in Africa from their successful intervention in Ethiopia. But although they would forecast an overall decline in US influence in the Third World, they would be uncertain of the pace of decline and would not be confident that durable Soviet influence would necessarily replace that of the US. They would expect more cases in which their heavy political and material investments are rewarded by perfidy and expulsion, but, overall, a strengthening of the Soviet position in the Third World and perhaps, as a bonus, the acquisition of a few stable and relatively hospitable partners on the model of Cuba.

D. Discontinuities and Alternative Soviet Forecasts

117. Some Soviet leaders may be more prone to systematic pessimism than this projection depicts. They may see the possibility of a combination of external and internal developments that would significantly worsen the Soviet Union's international position in the coming decade. The secular decline in the growth rate of the Soviet economy, for example, together with severe energy shortages, could provide grounds for forecasts of political instability in Eastern Europe and of serious economic pressures for reductions in the growth rate of military spending, which over time could constrict Soviet military options.

118. Coincident with political and economic difficulties in their own sphere, a pessimistic forecast might anticipate that a more assertive US Government, economic health in the West, and increased general reluctance to accommodate Soviet interests in East-West relations could

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