

~~SECRET~~

25X1

The Director of Central Intelligence

Washington, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

NIC 01317-86
14 March 1986

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

FROM: Graham E. Fuller
Vice Chairman, National Intelligence Council

SUBJECT: Taking Advantage of Soviet Weaknesses in the Middle East

1. The chief Soviet weaknesses in the Middle East derive from the fact that they have little to offer except:
 - Plentiful arms at reasonable or low cost.
 - A time-tested Leninist system of regime control, enhancing the ability of rulers to stay in power longer.
 - A modest system of supporting states that can help out in times of stress: the East Bloc and Soviet clients such as Cuba, North Korea, Syria, Libya, Ethiopia, etc. They can provide weapons, advisors--sometimes even troops--and diplomatic support.
2. Soviet weaknesses are the obverse:
 - Considerable rigidity in dealing with most states.
 - Inability to provide meaningful financial aid on a regular basis.
 - Lack of ties to any international economic or cultural support system, banking system, and marketing system to benefit its clients--all of which the West can provide.
 - A distinct Soviet preference that the client state maintain its "revolutionary character"--and preserve its ties with the USSR--through limitation of corrupting ties with the moderate state systems around the world--resulting in a de facto isolation.

~~SECRET~~

25X1
ZSA1

- Among many ruling elements in the Middle East, widespread fear and suspicion of Russia's historic ambitions and Soviet subversive designs in the region.
- An often heavy-handed style and insensitivity to local culture on the part of most Soviet representatives on the personal level.
- An avowed State policy of atheism and a historical record of oppression of Russian Muslim minorities.

3. Because of its inherent weakness as a player in the region, the USSR has primarily made gains in the Middle East by exploiting Arab grievances against perceived acts of omission and commission on the part of the US or Israel. This is far and away the USSR's chief leverage in the region. There have been few fresh Soviet-inspired initiatives apart from quick extension of support to radical states.

4. Typically the Arab world perceives US acts of omission most importantly as involving:

- US unwillingness/inability to deliver arms to friendly Arab states.
- US close involvement with Israel, preventing the US from meeting Arab hope for a more balanced regional policy.

5. For starters, the US can take advantage of inherent Soviet weakness in the region by pursuing policies designed to minimize alienation of regional feelings which provide the Soviets with opportunities.

- US Arms to Arab States. Clearly if the US does not wish to allow the Soviet Union to gain a major foothold with the moderates through arms deals, training, etc., it must be able to meet the perceived needs of the moderate Arab states for weaponry. The increasing conditions imposed by Congress upon American arms sales to Arab states have now virtually rendered it impossible for the US to provide major arms to the Arab world. The USSR has already taken advantage of this opportunity in the past and will take major advantage of it down the road.
- The Palestinian Question. For a variety of reasons the US has not made progress toward a peaceful settlement of the Palestinian situation--the issue still central to the concerns of the Arab states. The Arab world in the past has largely conceded monopoly of the peace process to the US because of US unique influence with the key player, Israel. As the US over the years appears unable to work a settlement, the Arab states

are beginning to turn more to the USSR as an alternative, and will increasingly do so if they see no major changes in US Middle East policies, because:

- They believe that the US has already had its chance and not delivered.
- They will wish to register their discontent with US policy.
- They will believe that they should try the Soviet approach since nothing else has worked.
- They will wish to protect themselves from the vulnerability that close ties to the US exposes them to domestically.

6. In any case, the USSR is meanwhile likely to move more flexibly and imaginatively to deal with the Arab-Israeli problem. They may well:

- Attempt to reunite the PLO.
- Work to improve relations with the moderate Arab states.
- Reestablish relations with Israel; such a step would not be incompatible with better ties to the moderates.

7. The US must consider whether it can allow the initiative in the peace process to be ceded to the USSR. This is particularly the case if Washington decides to concede the PLO and the Palestinian cause to the sphere of Soviet influence. However cowardly, split, indecisive and feckless the Arafat leadership is, it has not lost its ability to symbolize the Palestinian cause to almost all Palestinians.

- Most Palestinians would regret seeing the Palestinian cause adopted and monopolized by the USSR. Certainly the PLO has been unable to break out of its self-imposed strait-jacket toward greater flexibility, but it is convinced that the US will not really deal with it anyway. The moderates in the PLO are hard put to make a case that closer ties with the US will bring advantages.

8. Terrorism: The US obviously moves into delicate and emotional areas as it intensifies its fight against terrorism in the Middle East. In terms of regional equities it is possible for the US to move vigorously to attack terrorists and regimes that support them. The critical element, however, is regional perception of US goals. If the US is perceived to be single-mindedly zealous only in striking back at terrorism, then it will go down very badly indeed. Most states will

SECRET

25X1

perceive the US as willing only to punish, willfully "ignoring the roots" of the terrorist problem and unwilling to work constructively to try to solve them.

- Even if the "root causes of terrorism," i.e., the Palestinian issues, can be somewhat alleviated, some terrorism will still not go away--indeed it could even be enhanced as the extremists see negotiations moving toward possible fruition. The majority of Arab people and governments, however, could more or less live with a vigorous prosecution of an anti-terrorist policy if we are perceived to be equally zealous, firm, and bold in bringing all the critical parties to the table.
- Moderate Arab governments basically seek a domestically justifiable rationale for close association with the US and for cracking down on local terrorism--especially when it is Palestinian. As long as "the roots of the Palestinian problem" have not been dealt with seriously in the eyes of these governments and populations, no regional state can afford to justify or assist US action against terrorist elements.
- Indeed, if US Middle East policy is dominated by an anti-terrorist policy, or if anti-terrorism becomes the chief vehicle of US Middle East policy, it will play into Soviet hands.

9. Security Assistance: The Gulf war has in many ways been a boon to US interests in that it has resurrected interest in US security assistance from the Gulf states--making them realize that they have few options other than Washington when the crunch comes. The Soviets conversely have been dismayed in watching the formation of the GCC and its US orientation, heightening the highly negative impact of the war on Soviet interests.

- The Gulf war has especially been useful in demonstrating to everyone in the region--including Israel--that threats to our Arab friends and to stability in the Middle East can come from quarters other than the Arab-Israeli issue and that US arms to Arab states can serve ends not directly threatening to Israel.

10. Our ability to continue to meet the needs of these states in the Gulf will be an important indicator of US interests and resolve.

- The Arab states are particularly stung by the suggestion that US interests in the region spring primarily from oil. Oil is obviously important and the Gulf's central role will fluctuate with the oil market. The strategic importance of the Gulf and the Middle East, simply as turf, will remain. If Arab friends

SECRET

are prickly and annoying to deal with under the best of circumstances, Libya demonstrates what a truly hostile Arab state can be like.

-- Saudi Arabia has all the earmarks of a potentially nasty customer if either radical nationalists or fundamentalists were to come to power. Saudi Arabia's size, oil reserves, military equipment, vast land and sea borders with over a dozen different states--many of them undemarcated and disputed--its possession of the Holy Places, and a basic xenophobia--all would prove powerful grist for another potential Qadhafi.

-- US security ties to Pakistan help demonstrate US commitment to Islamic states.

11. Sharing the Responsibility: The US--because of our permanent strong ties with Israel--will always operate at some disadvantage in the Arab world. A major goal--denying the area to the USSR--can be assisted through the use of surrogate US presences in the region: Western European states, China, Japan, and Latin America can help support in general terms the kind of moderate Arab states that we wish to support.

-- Many of these states have their own agenda, can be trade rivals, and will often be annoying in pursuing diplomatic initiatives out of synch with our own. Nonetheless, the overall affect of an active presence and role--politically, commercially, militarily--will be of major importance in encouraging Arab states to maintain basically moderate directions. If US motivations are occasionally suspect to Arabs, urgings from the Japanese, Chinese, or Brazilians cannot be rationalized away as representing a pro-Israeli tilt. The US can do much to encourage these presences despite the minor annoyances they might bring.

12. Dealing with Islam: The USSR fears all Islam. No facet of Islam can mean anything but trouble to the USSR in Central Asia.

-- The USSR even seems unwilling to play with Islamic fire in order to hurt US interests in the moderate states. However fruitful it might be for the Soviets to covertly encourage Islamic fundamentalism in Egypt or Saudi Arabia in order to deny those countries to us, we see no sign of this--suggesting abiding Soviet anxieties about Islam.

13. The US, to the contrary, can live with almost all forms of Islam--except the rabid fundamentalist variety. This extremist group

SECRET

25X1

sees Western culture as ultimately more corrosive to Islam than Communism--because of the West's power of attraction and seduction of its lifestyle. Communism usually makes gains over Islam only at gunpoint.

- The US may wish to think out some kind of strategy which combats any notion that the US is inherently antipathetic to Islam. This is perhaps best undertaken in the cultural/academic area. It would need considerable publicity to be really useful, but could be valuable in overcoming what the Arabs see as fundamental anti-Arab bias in US culture.

14. This paper is not meant to be an apology for the Arab cause or the Arab view. But our efforts to weaken or diminish the Soviet role will depend mostly on how we behave within the context of a prickly, often xenophobic, Islamic culture. The emotions run deep. They are a reality.

- It is a major tribute to our strength that US policy still remains the major determinant for what success the Soviets are able to achieve in the region.

Graham E. Fuller
Graham E. Fuller

SECRET

25X1

NIC 01317-86
14 March 1986

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT: Taking Advantage of Soviet Weaknesses in the Middle East

NIC/VC/NIC:GEFuller:jcn 14 March 86

25X1

Distribution:

- 1 - DCI
- 1 - DDCI
- 1 - ER
- 1 - C/NIC
- 1 - VC/NIC (HF)
- ~~1~~ - VC/NIC Chrono (GEF)
- 1 - SRP
- 1 - DDI Registry

SECRET