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CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM
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Economic Intelligence Memorandum

DEVELOPMENTS
IN WATERBORNE COMMODITY MOVEMENTS
BETWEEN THE CASPIAN SEA AND THE VOLGA RIVER
DURING 1960



CIA/RR EM 61-2

27 January 1961

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Office of Research and Reports

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FOREWORD

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DEVELOPMENTS IN WATERBORNE COMMODITY MOVEMENTS
BETWEEN THE CASPIAN SEA AND THE VOLGA RIVER DURING 1960*

1. Introduction

Observations by members of a US inland waterways delegation in September 1960 of river traffic on the Volga between the entrance to the Volga-Don Canal and Astrakhan' and of vessels of the Caspian Steamship Company in the port area of Astrakhan' raised a number of questions concerning developments in the movement of petroleum and dry cargoes by water between the ports of the Caspian Sea and the Volga River.

The most striking aspect of traffic, both petroleum and dry cargo, on the Volga between the entrance to the Volga-Don Canal just below Stalingrad and the port of Astrakhan' in the Volga Delta was its low density in comparison with the density of traffic on the section of the river farther north between Stalingrad and Gor'kiy. At the same time, none of the vessels (tankers of the shallow-draft Oleg Koshevoy class and cotton-timber carriers of the Inzhener Belov class) of the Caspian Steamship Company that were intended for "through sea-river" service between Caspian and Volga ports were observed.

In the port area of Astrakhan', 1 of the 16 tankers of the Oleg Koshevoy class operating on the Caspian was observed at an oil terminal either loading or discharging, and 1 of the 7 or 8 new cotton-timber carriers was observed loading logs at one of the timber harbors. No other vessels of either class were observed.

The questions that these observations raised are as follows:

a. What changes have occurred during 1960 in the two-way movement of petroleum cargoes between the Caspian and the Volga?

b. Are the tankers of the Oleg Koshevoy class that are coming to Astrakhan' being used only between Caspian ports and Astrakhan', or are they in "through sea-river" service to ports up the Volga as well?

* The estimates and conclusions in this memorandum represent the best judgment of this Office as of 1 January 1961.

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c. Are the cotton-timber carriers of the Inzhener Belov class that are coming to Astrakhan' being used only between Caspian ports and Astrakhan' or in "through sea-river" service to ports up the Volga as well?

These questions are answered in a series of articles that appeared in the Soviet press during 1960, most of them in the newspaper of the maritime and river fleets, Vodnyy transport, from September through November.

2. Waterborne Petroleum Cargoes Moving Between the Caspian and the Volga

In 1959 the major movements of petroleum cargo passing through Astrakhan' between the Caspian and the Volga included southbound movements of Tuymazy crude loaded at Kuybyshev and Chistopol'; Zhirnovsk crude loaded at Tatyana'ka below Stalingrad; and high-sulfur mazut from Kuybyshev, Ufa, and other Ural-Volga refining points and northbound movements of products of the Baku refineries, largely low-sulfur mazut. 1/* In most cases the Tuymazy crude and high-sulfur mazut arrived in Astrakhan' by self-propelled river tanker or dumb barge for transloading to vessels of the maritime fleet -- tankers of the Oleg Koshevoy class of the Caspian Steamship Company or special shallow-draft "roadstead" barges of the Caspian Roadstead Steamship Company.** Among the cargoes loaded on the barges, those bound for Makhachkala went directly by barge; those bound for more distant Caspian ports went at least 100 nautical miles by barge to the so-called "Astrakhan' Sea Roadstead" in the Caspian off the mouth of the river, where they were transloaded a second time -- from roadstead barges into deep-draft tankers. The Zhirnovsk crude was loaded directly into roadstead barges at Tatyana'ka below Stalingrad, towed to Astrakhan' by river tug, and towed from there to Makhachkala by maritime tug. 2/ Northbound products arrived in Astrakhan' either by tankers of the Oleg Koshevoy class or by roadstead barge and were transloaded in most cases to river tankers or barges.

* For serially numbered source references, see the Appendix.

** The Caspian Roadstead Steamship Company, which is responsible for dry cargo shipments in the northern Caspian Sea (as well as roadstead tugs and tank barges operating on the Volga-Caspian Channel between the Astrakhan' Sea Roadstead and the river port of Astrakhan') was slated for absorption into the larger Caspian Steamship Company as of the end of 1960. The administration of the Caspian Roadstead Steamship Company (with headquarters in Astrakhan') would, under this arrangement, become a regional directorate of the Caspian Steamship Company, the headquarters of which is in Baku.

The pattern in 1960 was different in a number of ways. The southbound movement of high-sulfur mazut appears to have diminished, whereas the southbound movement of Zhirnovsk crude rose either supplementing or partially displacing the Tuymazy crude that moves in large quantities to Makhachkala as an input for the Groznyy Refinery. ^{3/} The possible decreases in the southbound movements of high-sulfur mazut and Tuymazy crude would account in part at least for the relatively low density of petroleum traffic on the Volga between the entrance to the Volga-Don Canal and Astrakhan'. At the same time, an increased output of low-sulfur mazut in Baku led to a limited increase in the northbound movement of that commodity. The USSR planned in 1960 to carry 44 percent of the petroleum cargoes moving between Astrakhan' and ports on the Caspian in through shipments by tankers of the Oleg Koshevoy class and, on the route to Makhachkala, by roadstead barges. ^{4/} The remaining 56 percent of the shipments was to involve transloading in the "Astrakhan' Sea Roadstead" between deep-draft tankers and roadstead barges.

3. "Through Sea-River" Shipments by Tankers of the "Oleg Koshevoy" Class

As in 1959, none of the tankers of the Oleg Koshevoy class was used upriver from Astrakhan' in "through sea-river" service, which would have eliminated both the roadstead transloading and the river-sea transloading in Astrakhan'. It is possible that the temporary use of two tankers of this class for coastal shipments on the Black Sea is a factor behind the postponement of their use in "through sea-river" service to points up the Volga. ^{5/} During 1960 the only "through sea-river" shipments of petroleum cargoes were those made by roadstead barges operating between Tatyana'ka and Makhachkala with changes of tugs at Astrakhan'.

4. "Through Sea-River" Shipments by Cotton-Timber Carriers of the "Inzhener Belov" Class

The impression that the new cotton-timber carriers currently being delivered to the Caspian fleet are being used only between Caspian ports and Astrakhan' and not in "through sea-river" service to points up the Volga and its tributaries* as planned has been borne out by reports in the Soviet press. These articles complain not only that these vessels are not being used in the service for which they were intended but that some of them have had to be tied up for lack of work. The reasons behind the failure to use these vessels for the purposes intended involve

* These vessels were designed mainly for use in the following service: carrying cotton from the Central Asiatic Republics loaded at Krasnovodsk to textile enterprises along the Volga and returning to the Caspian with timber for various ports loaded at points along the upper and middle Volga.

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reductions in two important dry cargo movements between the Volga and the Caspian that partly account for the low volume of dry cargo traffic observed on the Volga above Astrakhan'. One reason given is the failure of the Ashkhabad Railroad to deliver cotton at the port of Krasnovodsk. Another is the preference for rail by shippers of wood from the upper Volga in the movement of cargoes to the Transcaucasus. The reason given for this preference is the poor equipment in ports such as Baku, Bekdash, and Astrakhan' for handling cargoes from vessels as large as the cotton-timber carriers. 6/ Such equipment would increase cargo handling charges and delivery time. Unless measures are taken to alleviate these conditions, the situation should become worse in 1961, when the fleet of cotton-timber carriers is expected to increase to 13 vessels. 7/

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APPENDIX

SOURCE REFERENCES

1. Vodnyy transport, 13 May 58. U.
2. Ibid., 11 Aug 59. U.
3. Ibid., 22 Sep 60. U.
4. Ibid., 14 Jul 60. U.
5. Ibid., 29 Oct 60. U.
6. Ibid., 10 Sep 60. U.
7. Ibid., 26 Nov 60. U.

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