

22717

6 March 1980

MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr. Fritz Ermarth
National Security Council Staff

SUBJECT: Soviet Efforts to Draw World Attention
away from Afghanistan ()

At present Moscow is playing on three major themes to divert world attention from Afghanistan's plight and to refocus that attention on issues that it hopes the rest of the world will assign a higher priority.

- suggestions concerning guaranteed access to Middle Eastern oil;
- broad attacks on the US intended to blame the deterioration of the international situation on American policies coupled with fresh expressions of interest in preserving detente; and
- statements on possible conditions for Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan.

These efforts serve Moscow's objectives of undermining US efforts to coordinate international condemnation of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and of intensifying frictions between the US and its allies. ()

On the question of access to Middle Eastern oil, on 29 February TASS published a commentary by Nikolay Portugalov which condemned alleged US efforts to find a "pretext for military action" in the Middle East and which indirectly asserted the Soviet need of and right to access to Middle Eastern oil. Portugalov, moreover, suggested that the agenda

These preliminary observations were prepared by () in consultation with other members of the () office of Political Analysis. Due to time constraints it was not coordinated elsewhere.

()
~~SECRET~~

()
DERIVATIVE COPY
CLASSIFIED ON 5Mar2000
Multiple

of an all-European conference on energy, first proposed by Brezhnev in 1975, include "problems of the security of oil communications and of equal commercial access to oil sources of the Persian Gulf region."

This has been followed up by a reference in an article in Pravda on 3 March by Georgy Arbatov, head of the Institute for the USA and Canada, to the need for "broad international cooperation" to find a solution to the world energy problem. Also, on 5 March the Polish newspaper Zilnierz Wilnosci claimed that Portugalov's idea would "make for harmonizing the interests of all buyers of oil" from the Middle East. Both the Polish newspaper and Arbatov offered their ideas as an alternative to alleged US efforts to extend its hegemony in the Middle East.

Moscow is clearly attempting to play on Western European and Japanese economic concerns in order to create the appearance of a community of interests in the Persian Gulf in contrast to imputed US aggressiveness and greed. Moscow has claimed that US policy in the Middle East may well lead to military action and has raised the specter of the destruction of the Persian Gulf oil fields as a result of this action. In entering its own claim to sharing in access to Persian Gulf oil, Moscow has attempted to mobilize the concerns of the Western European countries and Japan over their economic well being in order to obtain their sanction of this claim and, if possible, to create conflicts between them and the United States.

These commentaries also are intended to influence the conservative Arab oil producers. The Soviets hope to expand relations, particularly their commercial dealings, with these countries and to gain increased access to the energy resources of the area. Moscow's use of force in Afghanistan has heightened Arab anxiety about the projection of Soviet power and the possibility of a confrontation in the Gulf. The Portugalov article's implied threat that Soviet interests in the Gulf cannot be ignored is meant to play to Arab, as well as West European, concerns.

While the Soviets are maintaining that the expansion of a US military presence in the Gulf poses the real threat to the region's stability, their current line may instead reinforce the fears of Gulf oil producers about Moscow's designs in the region. It makes clear Moscow's intention to further insinuate itself into Gulf affairs and repeats an historical pattern--offensive to the Gulf nations--in which outside powers dictate on Gulf security matters. But Gulf

leaders who both fear Soviet encroachment and doubt US ability to help them may follow the example of Kuwait and seek an accommodation with the USSR. Last weekend the Kuwaiti oil minister offered to sell oil to the USSR should the latter ask. []

These efforts are consistent with Soviet attempts since the invasion of Afghanistan to create disagreements between the US and its allies over how to respond to the Afghan invasion. In portraying itself as willing to discuss equal rights to Middle East oil reserves, Moscow is appealing to those elements in the industrialized world who are prepared to write off Afghanistan in order to protect their access to energy sources. The Soviets probably reason that few will be taken in by this ploy, but their calculations probably also include an assumption that many West Europeans and Japanese will conclude that they cannot afford not to discuss an issue that is vital to their national interests. []

In appealing to the economic self interest of these countries Moscow has attempted to convince them that the United States is attempting to return the world to the worst days of the Cold War. Soviet propaganda has raised the prospect of World War III resulting from US actions and [] the Soviets have told the [] that the US is "throwing overboard" all the areas of cooperation which detente had opened up. Moscow, moreover, has strongly warned Bonn not to follow the US lead in boycotting the Olympic games and Gromyko has [] accused the West Germans, by siding with the US, of endangering detente. []

In addition, Moscow has placed considerable emphasis on the need to preserve detente in Europe. This has been a major propaganda theme in recent weeks and Moscow has acted to press the Europeans to maintain as much of their economic relations as possible with the East. Moscow has also publicly stated its interest in the Madrid follow-on meeting of CSCE signatories as well as its interest in a conference on military detente in Europe. At the end of February, TASS announced a further withdrawal of Soviet troops from East Germany in fulfillment of Brezhnev's pledge on 6 October. []

Meanwhile the Soviets have attacked American policy on a worldwide basis and have blamed the United States for the current increase in international tensions. In its statements the Soviet Union has sought to demonstrate that the United States has consciously attempted to undermine detente since the mid-1970s, that the US is attempting to regain superiority over the Soviet Union, and that the US intends to use its enhanced military strength to extend its domination over broad areas of the world. []

In its efforts to undermine confidence in the US, the Soviet Union has broadly attacked the President, calling him a "hypocrite pure and simple" and claiming that his policy is that of "antagonism and confrontation." Clearly referring to the President, moreover, Soviet propagandists have condemned "certain unbalanced politicians in Washington." In claiming that the President's "adventurist" foreign policy is directed at "undermining detente," moreover, the Soviets have attempted to demonstrate that the US is bent on dragging the rest of the world into an era of confrontation and heightened tensions. This policy, in turn, is attributed to the President's determination to be reelected [redacted]

Another element in the Soviet effort to cloud the Afghan issue has been the manipulation of the question of the conditions of a Soviet withdrawal. In mid-February, the Soviet ambassador to [redacted] asked what the [redacted] US reaction would be to a Soviet withdrawal in return for a promise by all parties not to interfere in Afghanistan. On 27 February the shadowy Victor Louis had an article published in the London Evening News implying Soviet acceptance of British Foreign Minister Lord Carrington's neutralization proposal. [redacted]

Authoritative Soviet statements, however, suggest that Moscow is not yet prepared to entertain concrete proposals on this matter and that it seeks broad and binding "guarantees" from the US before it will even begin to withdraw. Soviet propaganda has rejected the notion of neutralization pointing out that it would mean the end of the "April revolution" in Afghanistan. Also, while in India, Gromyko refused to respond to Indira Ghandi's efforts to raise the issue of withdrawal and neutralization. [redacted]

At this time, at least, there are no formal Soviet proposals on this issue and there is nothing on the public record to suggest that Moscow is seriously seeking to negotiate its withdrawal from Afghanistan and the neutralization of that country. Rather, it appears that for the present Moscow is content to allow speculation to continue concerning its willingness to accept a neutral Afghanistan as part of its broader effort to distract the world from its invasion and to weaken support for US sanctions against the Soviet Union. [redacted]

Many of these themes were developed or at least touched on by Brezhnev in his 13 January Pravda interview and in his 22 February election speech. The latter in particular represented a Soviet effort to put as good a face as possible on the invasion of Afghanistan and to return to the offensive against the US by playing on international hopes for a formula for Soviet withdrawal and by attempting to blame the United States for the downturn of detente. Brezhnev's speech also contained a reference to US concerns over oil supply routes and provided the basis for Portugalov's subsequent suggestion concerning a conference to deal with the question of access to Persian Gulf oil.

These themes appear to represent the beginnings of a broad Soviet effort to neutralize US policies and to regain the diplomatic initiative. Moscow appears to have miscalculated the depth of the international reaction which would follow its invasion of Afghanistan and did not engage in a broad propaganda campaign in advance to justify its actions. The USSR is now attempting to make up lost ground and appears to calculate that it will be able to uncover and exploit US vulnerabilities in the coming weeks.

