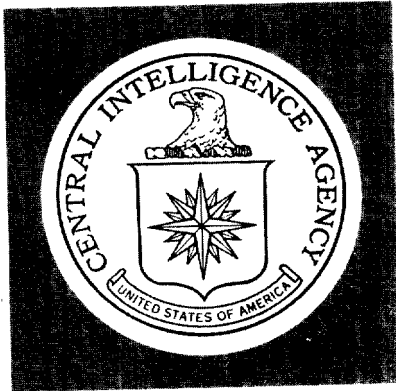


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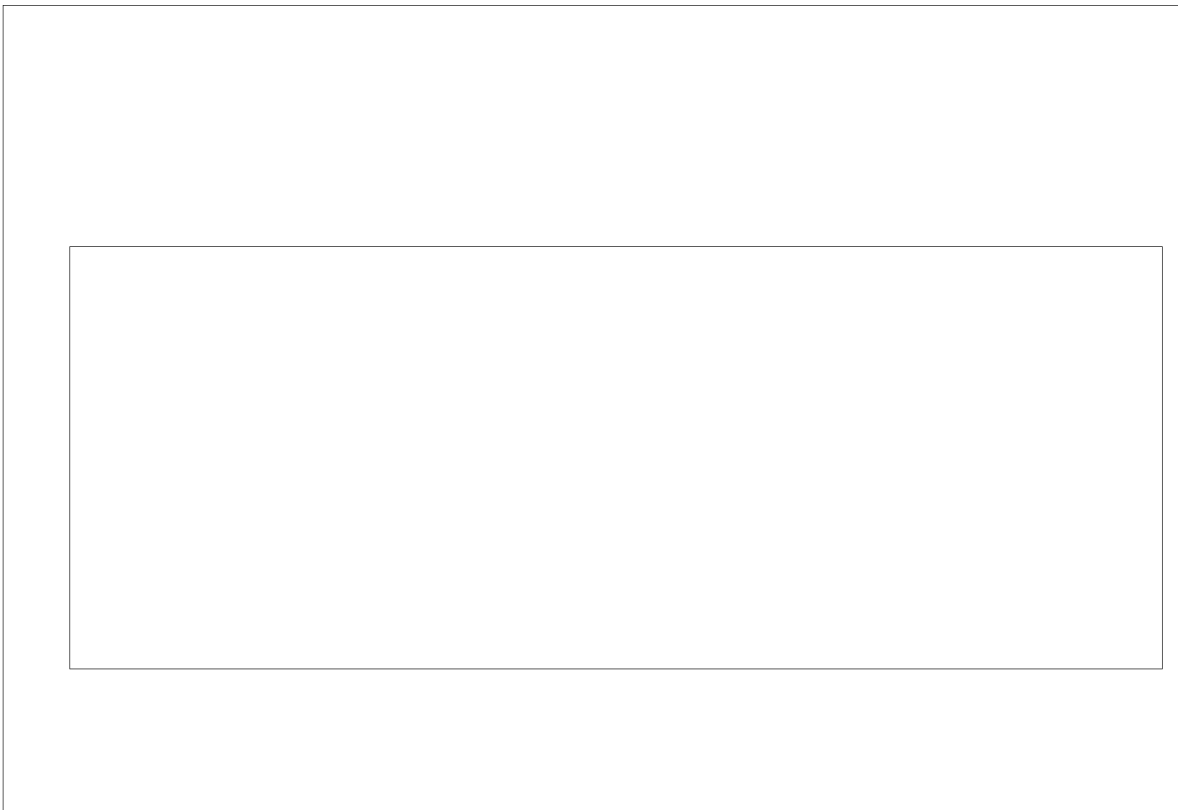
Intelligence Report

The Soviet Mediterranean Squadron

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December 1968



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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
December 1968

INTELLIGENCE REPORT

The Soviet Mediterranean Squadron

Summary

From a few surface ships and submarines in 1964, the Soviet Mediterranean squadron has grown to become the largest naval force which the Soviets have regularly deployed outside their own fleet operating areas.

On the average, the squadron now consists of four to six major combatant ships, more than half of which are missile equipped, and eight or nine minor combatants, including two or three amphibious ships. Six to nine diesel-powered torpedo attack submarines normally operate with the squadron now, as does a nuclear-powered torpedo attack or cruise missile submarine. Ten or twelve auxiliary ships provide logistic and intelligence support. The size and capabilities of the force have been increased to the point that it has become a credible threat to the US Sixth Fleet.

The squadron serves Soviet political as well as military interests in the Mediterranean basin. The effectiveness of the squadron as an instrument of policy has grown as its combat capabilities have increased. The image of the USSR as defender of Arab

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interests is being conveyed more convincingly now than when the squadron was first established, and the increased capabilities of the squadron--particularly the anticarrier capabilities--are intended to serve as a reminder to the US and others that Soviet interests must be reckoned with in any military moves in the Middle East.

The Soviets also probably consider the squadron's anticarrier capabilities, now well advanced, to be part of their strategic defenses against a nuclear strike on their homeland. In a general war, however, the chief threat to the USSR from the Mediterranean would be from Polaris submarines. The squadron's capabilities against Polaris remain poor, but the Soviets are taking steps to improve them.

The squadron probably will not be enlarged much beyond its present size. Its capabilities will continue to be improved, however, by the regular deployment of newer and more effective ships and submarines, such as Kresta-class guided missile cruisers and Moskva-class helicopter carriers. The logistics burden of the squadron may be reduced by the expanded use of Mediterranean ports and by increasing the proportion of nuclear-powered units in the squadron's submarine force.

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I. The Mediterranean Squadron in Perspective

The situation of mutual strategic deterrence between the US and the USSR which began to emerge in the early 1960's led Soviet leaders to assign a greatly expanded role to the navy. In addition to enlarging its strategic attack mission, they decided to provide the navy with an improved capability to counter Western naval forces and an increased flexibility to respond to situations beyond the periphery of the USSR which could be turned to Soviet advantage.

In the words of Admiral Gorshkov, its commander-in-chief, the Soviet Navy was to be capable of "carrying out missions assigned to it, not only in a nuclear war, but in a war which does not make use of nuclear weapons, as well as supporting state interests at sea in peacetime." The navy, in short, was to depart from its traditional defensive role and become an instrument for projecting Soviet power and influence abroad.

In pursuit of this new policy, several new ship-building programs were initiated, and Soviet submarines and surface ships began to operate farther at sea in increasing numbers and with much greater frequency. The most direct reflection of the new policy was the deployment of several Soviet ships and submarines to the Mediterranean in the summer of 1964.

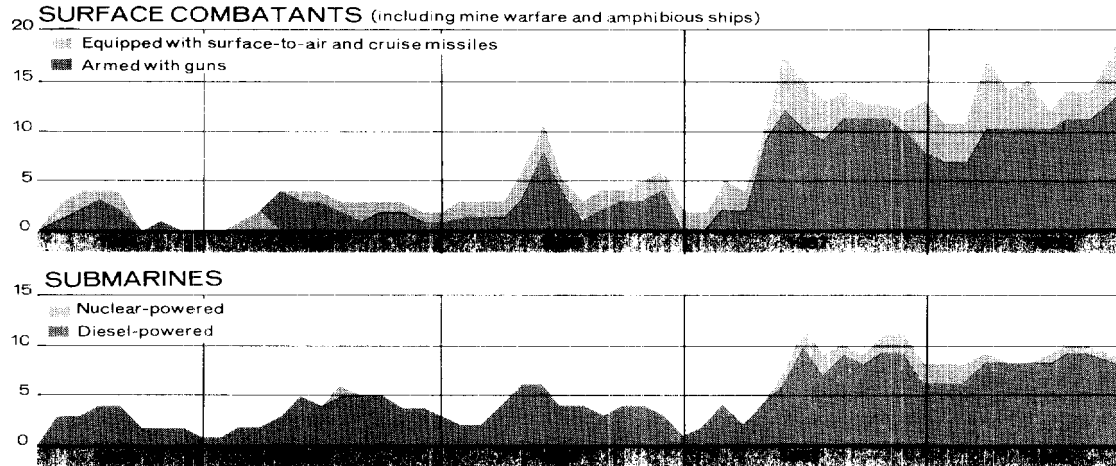
The Soviets had first attempted to establish a "permanent" naval force in the Mediterranean in 1958. That force, composed at its peak of 12 diesel-powered torpedo attack submarines, was based at Vlone Bay in Albania. Its primary purpose was to move the first line of the Soviets' Black Sea naval defenses forward from the Bosphorus to the eastern Mediterranean. This initial effort ended in 1961, when Albania shifted its allegiance from the USSR to Communist China.

Although Soviet submarines operated in the Mediterranean from time to time each year thereafter, no Soviet surface combatant ships did so until the establishment of the mixed force of ships and submarines in 1964. This second Soviet venture into

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USSR. Strength of Mediterranean Squadron, June '64 - October '68



Note: The figures plotted reflect peak totals for each month, with these exceptions:

- (1) Ships in the Mediterranean for five days or less are not included.
- (2) A ship and its relief are counted as only one unit.

the Mediterranean became the Soviets' only year-round deployment of a mixed naval force beyond home waters. Like the first venture, it was intended to extend the Soviets' defense perimeter. Its major function, however, was and continues to be the support of Soviet political interests in the Mediterranean area.

As the force grew in size and capability, its importance was reflected in its designation as an independent command operationally subordinate to naval headquarters, Moscow, rather than to the nearest fleet headquarters. It soon grew to be the largest force of ships the Soviets had ever deployed outside their own waters for purposes other than a major exercise.

II. Evolution of the Squadron

A. Surface Combatant Ships

In 1964-65, the first two years of its existence, no more than four surface combatant ships were deployed with the Mediterranean squadron at any one time. The largest number was deployed in the summer, the smallest in winter. The winter of 1965-66 was the first in which at least one surface combatant ship was present each month.

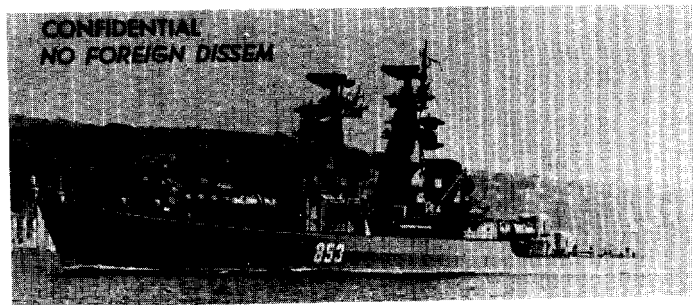
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Until the Arab-Israeli war in June 1967, slow growth with distinct seasonal variations characterized the squadron's development (see chart on opposite page). Surface ship deployments increased by about ten per year. Each ship usually operated with the squadron less than two months. Most of the ships came from the Black Sea Fleet. About one-third of the surface combatants were equipped with guided missiles.

Although the annual growth pattern prior to the June War indicated that the squadron would reach a new high in the summer of 1967, the war almost certainly caused the Soviets to deploy more ships than they had originally planned. Had previous patterns prevailed, about a dozen surface combatants probably would have operated with the squadron that summer. Ten were already there by mid-May. One of these was missile equipped.

As international tension rose just prior to the outbreak of hostilities, the Soviets sent four additional combatant ships to join the force, three of them equipped with guided missiles. The augmented squadron then divided into three groups to monitor the activity of the two US and one British attack carriers then operating in the Mediterranean. In late June, the gun-armed cruiser Slava was re-



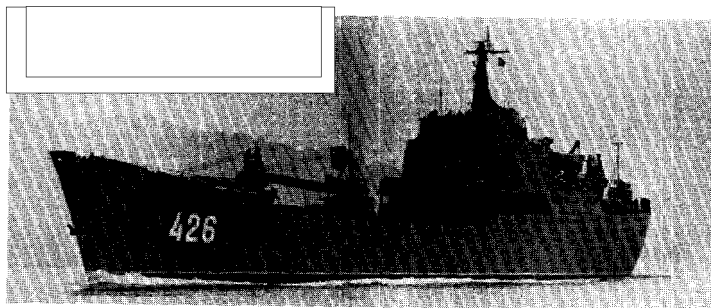
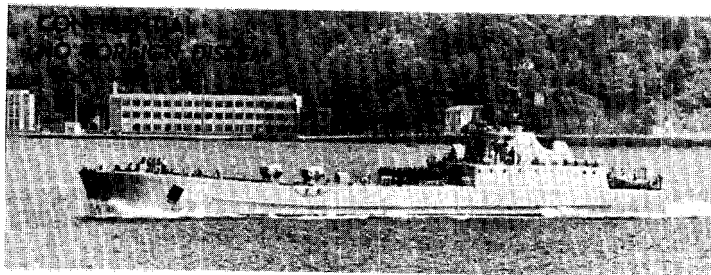
Kynda-class guided-missile cruisers like the one shown here in the Bosphorus have served as command ships of the Mediterranean squadron. Ships of this class have a multiple role in the squadron, being equipped with antiaircraft and 250-nm-range antiship missiles as well as antisubmarine weapons.

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placed by a Sverdlov-class guided missile cruiser and two other ships, bringing the total strength to more than quadruple the original size of the surface combatant force.

In addition, the Soviets sent amphibious ships to the Mediterranean for the first time in the summer of 1967. Although the first of these deployments probably was not directly related to the Middle East crisis, the Soviets probably hoped that the assignment of two more amphibious ships there would convey the impression of willingness to send troops ashore should the need arise.



Since July 1967 the Soviet Mediterranean squadron has included landing craft of the Polnochny (top photo) and Alligator classes like those shown here transiting the Bosphorus. This is the first time such ships have been deployed outside Soviet coastal waters for extensive periods.

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The number of ships in the Mediterranean declined in the winter of 1967-68, but the monthly average remained higher than in any previous year, summer or winter. In April 1968 the Soviets deployed almost as many ships to the Mediterranean as they had the previous June, apparently to carry out their first major exercise there. In September the new helicopter carrier Moskva was deployed to the Mediterranean for the first time and in October the number of ships in the squadron rose to a new high.

B. Submarines

The growth in Soviet submarine strength in the Mediterranean generally paralleled that of the surface forces. (See chart on page 4.) Until the Arab-Israeli war no more than six submarines operated there at any one time. The normal pattern was two or three submarines in winter and three or four in summer. All but three of the submarines which operated there before the June War were diesel attack boats. One nuclear-powered attack submarine deployed to the Mediterranean in August 1965, and one or two diesel-powered cruise missile submarines operated there in the fall of 1966.

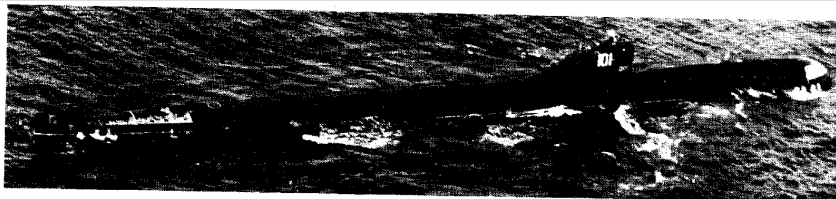
In obvious reaction to rising tension in the Middle East in May 1967, two nuclear-powered submarines--one a torpedo attack type and the other a cruise missile unit--were either diverted from missions in the North Atlantic or deployed especially for assignment to the Mediterranean. The deployment of the cruise missile unit to the Mediterranean raised the number of launchers in the squadron from three to eleven and significantly increased the Soviets' anticarrier capability.

At least one nuclear-powered submarine, either a torpedo attack type or cruise missile equipped, now operates with the squadron on a regular basis. Since the nuclear submarines usually attempt to complete their patrols without being detected, their role within the squadron is apparently more of a military than a political one.

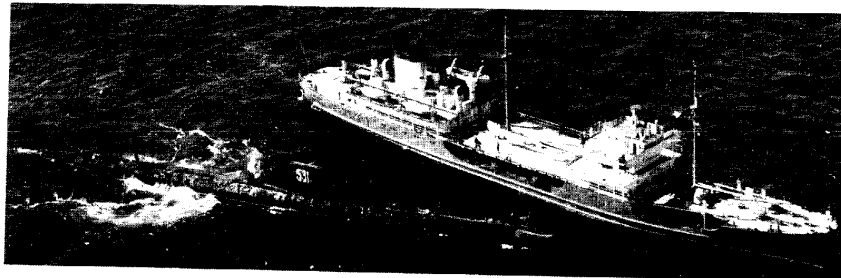
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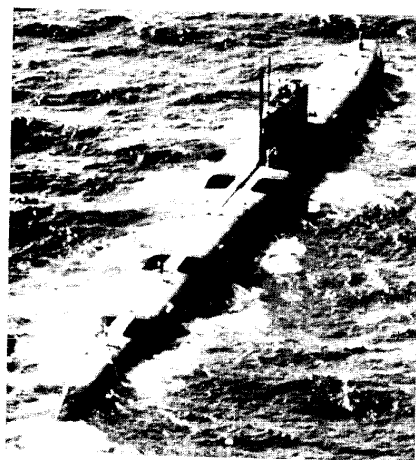
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N-class nuclear attack submarine in the eastern Mediterranean, August 1967.



F-class diesel attack submarine coming alongside Soviet oiler for fuel and other supplies in the Gulf of Hammamet off Tunisia, January 1967.



E-II-class nuclear submarine in the Gulf of Sirte off the Libyan coast, August 1968. These submarines are equipped with 250-nm-range cruise missiles.

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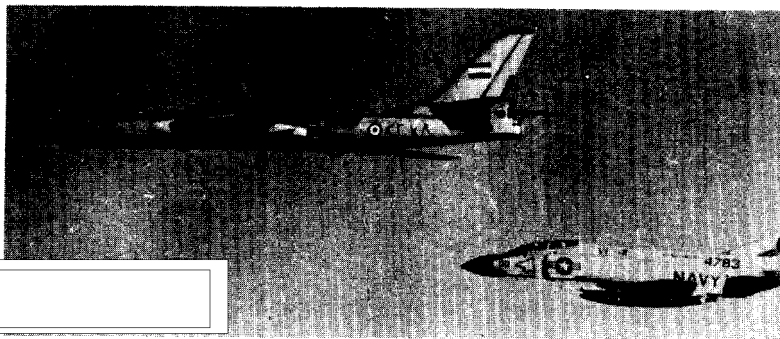
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The number of submarines deployed to the Mediterranean in 1967 was more than twice that of 1966. Most of the 25 F-class torpedo attack submarines in the Soviet Northern Fleet had to be used to maintain the high level of deployments, and Baltic Fleet submarines were assigned to operate with the squadron for the first time. In addition, patrols by nuclear-powered cruise missile submarines in the Atlantic were curtailed.

The high level of submarine activity continued into 1968 but was sustained with fewer submarines. The level was maintained, in part, by extending the duration of patrols, which in turn was facilitated by more frequent calls in Mediterranean ports. The longest patrol to date was that conducted by three F-class diesel attack submarines which remained in the Mediterranean from mid-March to mid-September 1968 and spent about 25 percent of their time in port.

C. Air Support

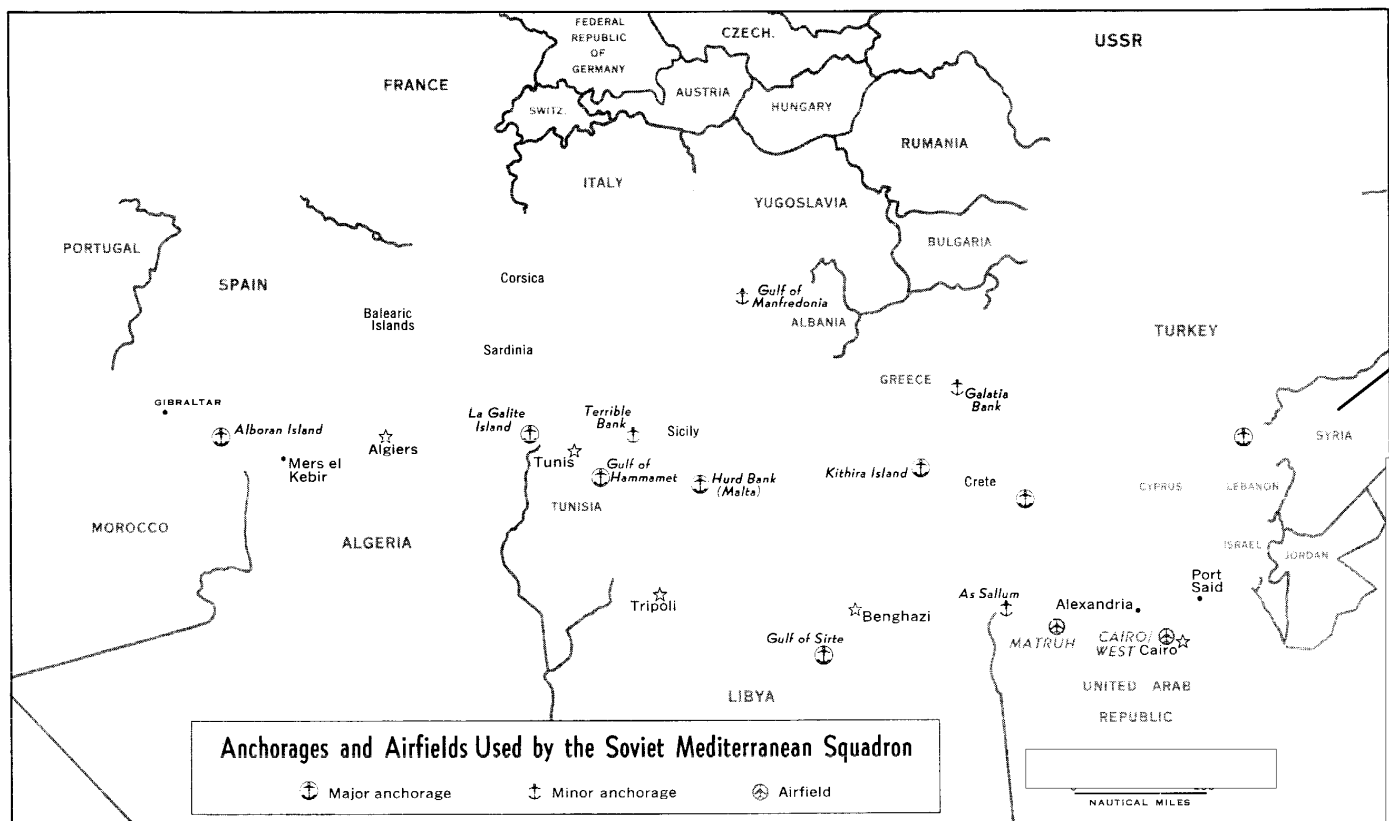
In April 1968 six Soviet TU-16 Badger medium bombers were flown to Egypt from the Soviet Union to provide the squadron with an aerial reconnaissance capability. Four months later the TU-16's were



Soviet TU-16 Badgers with Egyptian markings and based at Egyptian airfields are used to reconnoiter US Sixth Fleet formations in the Mediterranean. Here a US Navy Phantom fighter escorts one of the Soviet-piloted Badgers.

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joined by three BE-12 Mail antisubmarine patrol planes. Since their arrival in Egypt, the TU-16's and BE-12's have been flying reconnaissance and antisubmarine patrol missions in support of the squadron.

D. Auxiliary Ships and Logistic Support

The Mediterranean squadron has placed unprecedented demands on the Soviet naval logistics force. The Soviets have a number of ships which were designed to support submarines on extended patrol, but auxiliaries for support of surface ships are in short supply. There are no naval refrigerator ships, ammunition ships, or dry stores ships, and naval oilers are small, slow, and few in number. Some of the Soviets' older warships apparently are not self-sufficient in fresh water and boiler feed water and must be resupplied by water carriers.

Prior to the June 1967 buildup, the logistic requirements of the squadron were not too burdensome. Ships were normally deployed with the squadron for less than two months and spent about half this time at anchorages. Most of the ships carried enough ammunition, spare parts, dry stores, and other provisions for their entire deployment. Auxiliary ships from the Black Sea Fleet provided fuel oil and water.

Longer deployments, and the increased number of ships after June 1967, forced the adoption of various logistic improvisations. Naval oilers from the Baltic and Northern Fleets and merchant tankers began to resupply the squadron regularly. In addition, the Soviets began to make greater use of Mediterranean ports. The USSR has been granted the use of an oil storage facility in Port Said, has assigned a repair ship to Alexandria on a continuing basis, and has assumed managerial control of a ship construction and repair facility at Alexandria. These arrangements have not, however, provided a logistics capability adequate to support the squadron in the event of extended hostilities.

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III. Mission and Capabilities of the Squadron

Although the Mediterranean Squadron is the most powerful force of ships which the Soviets have ever deployed beyond their own home waters for purposes other than a major exercise, the squadron probably is more important to the Soviets from a political than from a military point of view. The squadron has helped bolster the image of the USSR as defender of Arab interests and lends weight to Soviet diplomatic and propaganda attacks on Western interests in the Middle East and North Africa.

The effectiveness of the squadron as an instrument of policy has risen as its combat capabilities have improved. In this connection, the increased anticarrier capabilities of the squadron are particularly relevant. The aircraft carriers of the US Sixth Fleet have in the past provided the defensive shield for US military moves in the Middle East, and the Soviets almost certainly have come to regard US attack carriers as more of an instrument of local or limited warfare than as a strategic threat. They probably believe that the presence of a credible anticarrier force in the Mediterranean would cause the US to pause before intervening militarily in future crises in the area, and might, in turn, enable the Soviets to intervene in some fashion themselves should the need arise.

Prior to the June War the anticarrier capability of the squadron was low. There were few cruise missile launchers in the force, and the squadron as a whole was too small to pose a convincing threat to the US Sixth Fleet. Although intelligence collection ships were available, air reconnaissance was lacking. Many of the ships in the squadron were older vessels suitable for operating under cover of land-based fighter aircraft but ill equipped for long-range, long-duration operations.

Since the June War, however, the anticarrier capability of the squadron has increased substantially. Most of the time at least two cruise missile ships

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and a nuclear-powered cruise missile submarine--totaling about 12 cruise missile launchers--operate with the squadron. Reconnaissance aircraft are available, and the squadron's air defense capabilities have been improved by the deployment of more SAM-equipped ships. The new types of ships now being assigned to the squadron are better equipped for long-range operations, and the size and readiness of the force have been increased to the point that it has become a credible threat to the Sixth Fleet.

In addition, frequent and extended calls in Arab ports--most notably in Egypt--have heightened the diplomatic value of the squadron, and the assignment of a few amphibious ships to the squadron conveys the impression to others that the Soviets might be willing to commit a token force of some 400 to 600 troops on the side of client states in the event of renewed hostilities.

In the event of general nuclear war, the chief threat to the Soviets from the Mediterranean would be from Polaris submarines. Aircraft carriers of the Sixth Fleet still have a strategic potential, however, and one of the Soviets' first tasks in the Mediterranean in the event of general war would be to attempt to reduce US naval forces there to a level more comparable to their own by eliminating the Sixth Fleet carriers.

Although the anticarrier potential of the squadron is now considerably greater than before the June War, Soviet capabilities against the more serious Polaris threat remain poor. Those capabilities are being improved, however. Prior to the six-week deployment of the helicopter carrier Moskva to the Mediterranean last fall, the antisubmarine capabilities of the squadron were limited to defense against submarines which might approach ships of the force. Now that the Moskva is available for deployment to the Mediterranean and antisubmarine patrol planes are stationed in Egypt,

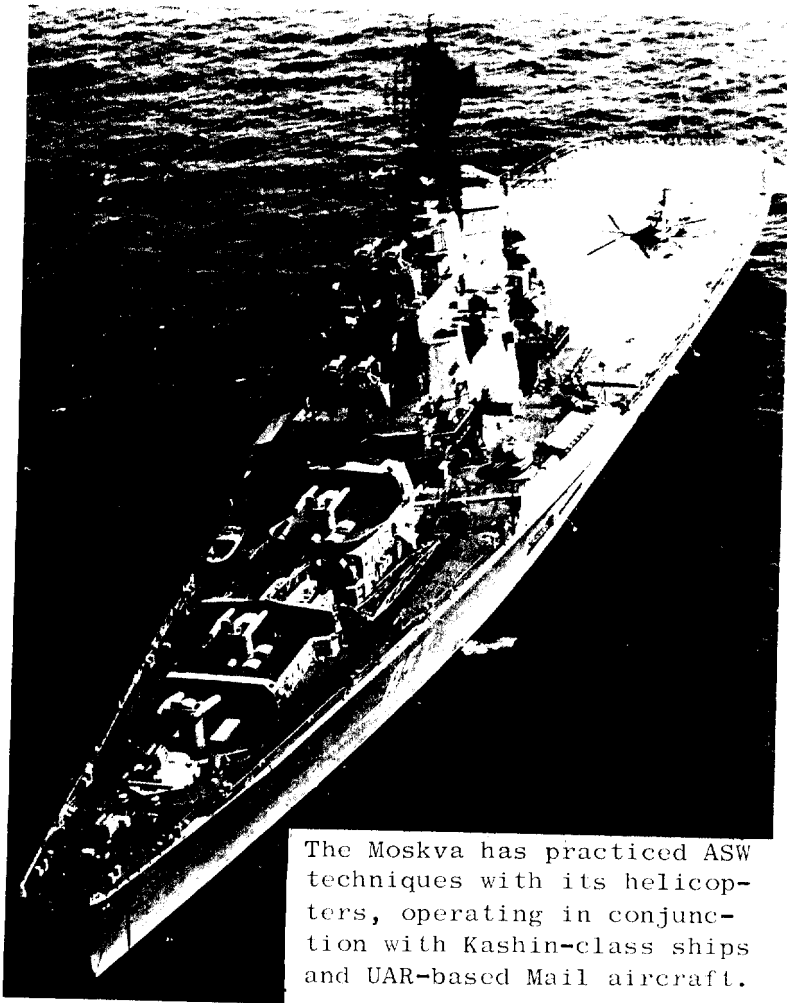
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SOVIET MEDITERRANEAN SQUADRON UNITS WITH ANTISUBMARINE MISSION

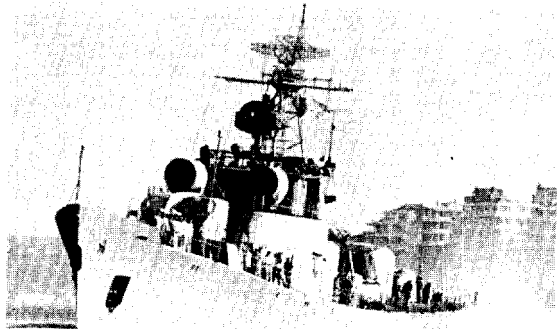
Antisubmarine warfare (ASW) is a principal mission of the Soviet Mediterranean squadron assigned to the units shown here as well as to other destroyer-type ships and submarines.

MOSKVA-CLASS HELICOPTER CARRIER



The Moskva has practiced ASW techniques with its helicopters, operating in conjunction with Kashin-class ships and UAR-based Mail aircraft.

PETYA-CLASS ASW ESCORT

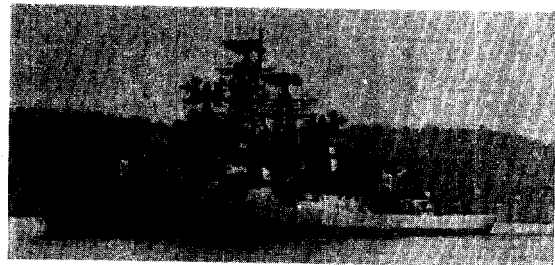


The squadron usually includes two or three ASW escorts like the Petya-class ship above, equipped with ASW rockets and torpedoes.

BE-12 MAIL ASW AIRCRAFT



SAM-EQUIPPED KASHIN-CLASS ASW SHIP



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the Soviets have a limited capability to seek out submarines in the Mediterranean rather than wait for their approach. That capability probably will be enhanced in the near future by the deployment of new antisubmarine submarines to those waters.

By developing a more advanced antisubmarine capability there, the Soviets probably hope to make the Mediterranean a much less favorable environment for Polaris submarine operations and may eventually try to achieve through military means what their diplomatic offensives have so far failed to accomplish--an end to Polaris submarine patrols in the Mediterranean.

IV. Future Structure and Capabilities

The size and structure of the Mediterranean Squadron probably will change in response to new developments in the Mediterranean area, but assuming no major crisis there, the Soviets are not likely to increase the size of the squadron much above recent levels.

Logistic limitations will militate against further significant increases in size. Rather than deploy more ships, the Soviets probably will try to upgrade the capabilities of the squadron by assigning newer and more effective ships on a regular basis.

The second of the Soviets' two helicopter carriers probably will be operational next year, and the Soviets most likely will deploy these ships to the Mediterranean on a rotating basis to improve their antisubmarine capabilities there. At least one of the two new classes of nuclear-powered attack submarines now under construction in the USSR almost certainly is intended for antisubmarine work, and deployment of the first antisubmarine units to the Mediterranean could take place in the next year or so. In addition, more ASW patrol planes may be deployed to Egypt and perhaps even to Algeria.

Air defense capabilities probably will be increased by the deployment of a greater proportion of SAM-equipped ships, including newly converted Kotlin- and Krupnyy-class destroyers. Units of the new Kresta-class guided missile ship probably will be deployed there as well.

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Deployment of the Kresta class, which is equipped with both SAM's and cruise missiles, would also enhance the squadron's anticarrier capabilities. Cruise missile submarines probably will be the mainstay of the squadron's anticarrier forces, however, and probably will be assigned to the Mediterranean on a continuing basis.

Since nuclear-powered submarines require less support than diesel-powered boats, the logistic burden of the squadron may be reduced by the deployment of a larger proportion of nuclear submarines. In addition, new types of surface support ships may be built, though they probably would not be available until after 1970.

The Soviets probably do not want to become over-committed by formally establishing military bases of their own in the Mediterranean, but they may try to duplicate the arrangements which they now have in Egypt for support of the squadron. Even so, they probably will continue to rely principally on auxiliary ships to support the squadron. At the same time, however, they almost certainly will try to expand their current pattern of port calls and may in the future seek to make use of port facilities at such places as Mers el Kebir. An expanded program of calls could provide additional political as well as logistic dividends.

Although the Soviets will continue to use the squadron to gain as much political leverage as they can in the Mediterranean area, they almost certainly will seek to avoid becoming directly involved in military conflicts there. The Soviets have not increased the number of amphibious ships in the squadron above the level reached just after the June War, and during the conflict itself no Soviet warship was placed in a position that would run the risk of involvement with Israeli forces.

Nevertheless, in the covert deployment of a nuclear-powered cruise missile submarine to the Mediterranean at the time of the June War and the frequent deployment of such units since then, the Soviets have indicated that they intend to be prepared for a variety of purely military contingencies in the area.

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