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NIO # 730-74

12 April 1974

DDI-1111-74

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable James R. Schlesinger
Secretary of Defense

SUBJECT : Outcomes of Hypothetical US-Soviet
Naval Engagements During the 1973
Middle East Crisis

1. The attached study was prepared in response to your request for an assessment of the probable outcomes of a US-Soviet naval battle during the recent Middle East crisis, had such a battle occurred.

2. My colleagues' analysis is perforce hypothetical. It is constrained by certain clearly stated assumptions, e.g., that any such engagement would have remained localized, would have stayed non-nuclear, and would not have been part of or allowed to precipitate a wider general war. Such assumptions are necessary to create a manageable analytical problem, since without them it would have been virtually impossible to consider a Mediterranean naval conflict in the abstract and not as but one component of a much larger and more complex struggle, with many of the larger war's aspects having a material bearing on that Mediterranean naval struggle's outcome. These conceptual constraints, though necessary to keep the problem manageable, are patently arbitrary and, in my opinion, quite artificial. I find it difficult to envisage even three days of intense US-USSR naval combat (even non-nuclear combat) in the Mediterranean not being part of a general war or precipitating a general war, hence I find it hard to envisage any extensive set-to between the US Sixth Fleet and the Soviet Mediterranean Squadron as being a kind of floating Fashoda (remembering that the impact and consequences of Fashoda would have been quite different had any shots actually been fired).

3. The attached study (per your wishes) was prepared quietly within the Agency and not coordinated with anyone else. Indeed, to my knowledge, no one outside the Agency is aware that we have done it. It is for your eyes alone and we plan no further distribution.

[Redacted Signature]

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George A. Carver, Jr.
Deputy for National Intelligence Officers

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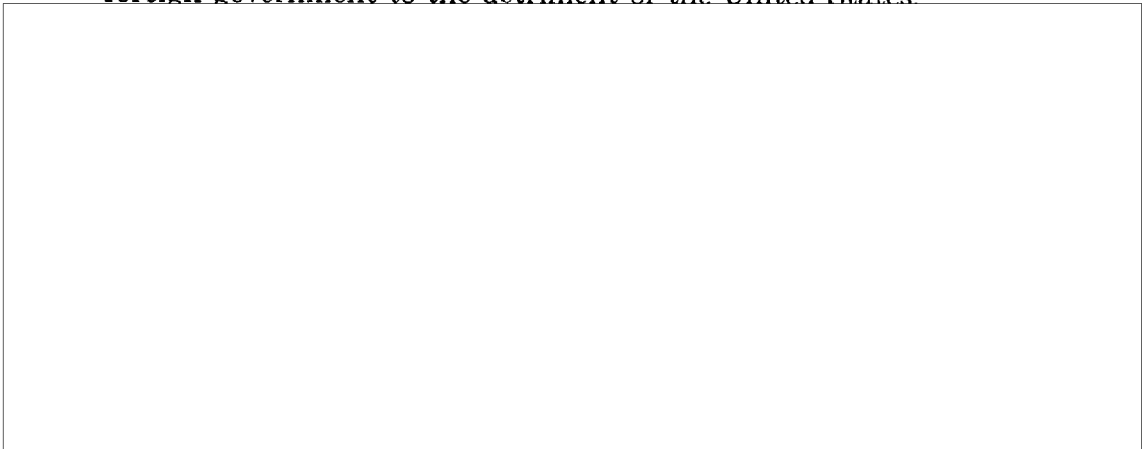
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MEMORANDUM FOR: The Secretary of Defense

SUBJECT : Outcomes of Hypothetical US-Soviet
Naval Engagements During the 1973
Middle East Crisis

The attached study was prepared in response to your request for an evaluation of the probable outcome of a US-Soviet naval battle during the recent Middle East crisis.

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This memorandum was prepared in the Office of Strategic Research. Comments and queries may be addressed to [redacted] Code [redacted]

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8 April 1974

Outcomes of Hypothetical US-Soviet
Naval Engagements During the 1973 Middle East Crisis

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Contents

	<u>Page</u>
Introduction	1
Summary of Key Judgments	1
Possible Origins of a Mediterranean Naval Conflict	3
Political and Doctrinal Constraints.	3
Soviet Strategy in a Mediterranean War.	3
US Counter-Strategy	5
A Hypothetical Engagement on 1 November.	5
The Balance of Naval Forces	6
Land-Based Aircraft	9
The Initial Exchange.	11
After the First Blow.	12
Annex: Outcome of a US-Soviet Naval Conflict at the Height of the Middle East Crisis-- 26 October 1973.	14

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Introduction

This paper examines the likely results of hypothetical engagements between US and Soviet naval forces in the Mediterranean during the Middle East Crisis of 1973. The body of the paper describes the buildup of the opposing forces through the end of October when the concentration of Soviet naval units was greatest and assesses the probable outcome of an engagement on 1 November. This interaction is examined against a background of the political and doctrinal considerations that constrained the military actions of both sides. The Annex to this paper describes a more likely exchange--one occurring on 26 October 1973 at the peak period of tension following the threatened Soviet Middle East intervention and the US military alert.

The conclusions of the study are general--a consequence of the various assumptions necessary to reduce a complex, hypothetical conflict to a workable model. The paper's supporting judgments are not based on an elaborate war game, but on an assessment of the major strengths and weaknesses of the opposing forces.

For the purposes of this paper, the "winning" naval force is loosely defined as that which has the preponderant offensive capability upon termination of the conflict.

Summary of Key Judgments

In a hypothetical engagement between conventionally armed US and Soviet naval forces in the Mediterranean Sea on 1 November 1973, the balance of offensive naval weapons systems would have been so close that the side which initiated a carefully pre-planned and coordinated conflict would probably have won the initial exchange (pages 11 and 12).

If the Soviets had deployed land-based strike aircraft to the Middle East, and used them in the initial pre-emptive strike, it is likely that all three US carriers could have been put out of action (page 12).

If the Soviets had not had land-based aircraft available, it is likely that at least one US carrier would have continued flight operations. The balance of offensive power would again have been roughly even and the final outcome would have depended on the luck and skill of the opposing commanders (pages 11-13).

The presence of Soviet land-based aircraft, however, probably would not have altered the outcome of an engagement begun spontaneously or with a US pre-emptive strike. In both of these cases the Sixth Fleet probably would have won (pages 11-12).

It is unlikely that US land-based strike aircraft could have been introduced until after the initial exchange when the outcome of the conflict would already have been decided (page 10).

Had the conflict taken place on 26 October--a more likely date--the Sixth Fleet would probably have won regardless of who struck first (Annex--pages 14-17).

Whichever side had "won", both the Soviet Mediterranean Squadron and the Sixth Fleet would have been fully committed to self-defense and would not have been able to play an active role in a wider Middle East or European conflict (page 13).

The approximate 1973 replacement cost of the US naval units considered in this 1 November engagement was nearly \$7 billion--of which about \$3 billion represented the three carriers and their aircraft complements. The cost of the Soviet force present was about \$4 billion. If the conflict had occurred at the lower force levels of 26 October, these costs would have been slightly less, but the basic relationship would have remained about the same (pages 9, 16).

-2-

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Possible Origins of a
Mediterranean Naval Conflict

A US-Soviet naval conflict in the Mediterranean could conceivably have begun in any of several ways. A series of escalatory military moves--possibly beginning with the introduction of Soviet airborne troops into the Middle East--could possibly have led to a naval battle initiated by either side. A misperception by one side as to the military intentions of the other, or unauthorized action by a military commander might have caused a spasmodic conflict to erupt.

Political and Doctrinal Constraints

However a naval engagement might have begun, both sides would have been constrained by political considerations from acting as they would in a general war. It is unlikely that either side's allies would have joined the battle in time to influence the outcome. It is also unlikely that either side would have used nuclear weapons unless the conflict had shown signs of widening into a NATO-Warsaw Pact war. The following analyses of US and Soviet strategies in a Mediterranean war are intended to establish realistic doctrinal and political bounds for a hypothetical conflict.

Soviet Strategy in a Mediterranean War

If naval hostilities had begun both the Soviets and the US probably would have attempted to prevent them from evolving into a broader European or intercontinental conflict. The Kremlin almost certainly would not have permitted the use of nuclear weapons at the outset, although the potential for escalation would have been high.

Soviet naval strategy stresses the importance of the "battle for the first salvo" and the Soviet Mediterranean force would probably have committed

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most of its conventionally armed cruise missiles to an initial anticarrier strike. They probably would not have expended all of their conventional missiles in the initial attack, however, since this would have left no alternative but escalation to nuclear warfare in the event of an extended conflict. This would have been particularly important in a conflict such as the one postulated in this paper in which a major Soviet goal would have been to achieve an acceptable settlement without risking a wider war. We believe that about half of the available missiles would have been used in the initial attack. Of those missiles not used, half would have been nuclear and half conventional.

Torpedo attack submarines would also have joined in the initial attack, but many of these units would have been assigned other tasks--for example, reconnaissance, interdiction of support forces, and ASW. The tasks probably would have included searching for Polaris submarines as a hedge against escalation.

Surface forces not equipped with antiship missiles would have provided anti-air and antisubmarine defense and some might also have conducted anti-Polaris searches. A few ships with SAMs capable of being fired in a surface-to-surface mode might have taken part in anticarrier attacks.

The participation of land-based naval strike aircraft would have been desirable from the point of view of the Soviet naval commander. If Syrian or Egyptian airfields had been available, regimental size air strikes could have been staged. If the Soviets had been forced to keep their naval aircraft at Soviet airfields, air strikes probably would have been withheld for as long as the Soviets desired to contain the conflict in the Mediterranean, because violation of Greek or Turkish airspace could have broadened the conflict into a NATO-Warsaw Pact war.

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We cannot be certain what their strategy would have been following the initial exchange. Their forces probably would have regrouped and continued to carry out conventional attacks until their ammunition was exhausted or until the conflict either ceased or escalated to a nuclear level.

US Counter-Strategy

As tensions mounted, the Sixth Fleet would probably have brought its forces to full alert and initiated counter-surveillance against Soviet naval forces, concentrating on antiship missile units. These would have been shadowed by attack aircraft, by surface combatants or by the Mediterranean submarine task force, which was composed entirely of nuclear powered units. US forces probably would have attempted to blunt a Soviet attack by engaging firing units upon clear indication that hostilities had commenced. Alternatively, they could, if ordered, have executed a pre-emptive strike against Soviet forces.

Concurrently with the initial strike or counter-strike against Soviet forces, defensive actions would have been undertaken against incoming missiles or attacking submarines. These would have included electronic countermeasures as well as fighter and missile air defense and antisubmarine attacks.

After an initial exchange, US naval forces would have regrouped, rearmed, and carried out repeated attacks until either the end of hostilities or the point of escalation was reached.

A Hypothetical Engagement on 1 November

A 1 November date was chosen to present a "worst case" analysis of a naval conflict begun at a time when the strength of the Soviet Mediterranean Squadron was at its peak and the augmentation of the US Sixth Fleet was incomplete. As events actually occurred, however, the Middle East war

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was winding down in early November. Tensions between the US and USSR had eased considerably by this time and the possibility of a conflict was slight.

The Balance of Naval Forces

Assuming a 1 November date for an initial exchange between US and Soviet naval forces and assuming that all surface combatants and submarines of both sides were concentrated in the eastern Mediterranean, the following units and major seaborne weapons systems could have been available during the first phase of hostilities:

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Composition of the US Sixth Fleet and Soviet Mediterranean Squadron, 31 October 1973

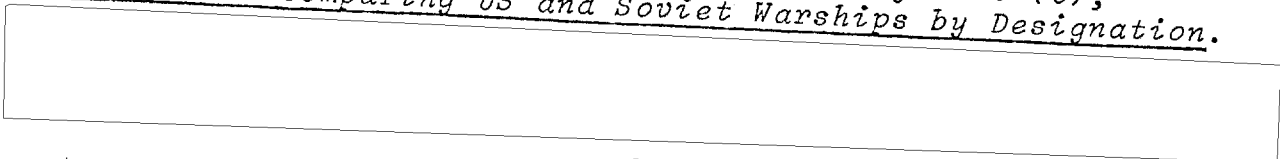
Ship Type*

	<u>US</u>	<u>Soviet</u>
1. <u>Surface Warships--</u>		
a. Major Surface Combatants--		<u>42</u>
Attack Carriers**		<u>26</u>
Cruisers		0
Missile Frigates		2
Missile Destroyers and Escorts		3
Gun-Armed Destroyers and Escorts		11
b. Minor Surface Combatants--		10
Minesweepers		<u>7</u>
Patrol Boats		4
c. Amphibious Ships--		3
2. <u>Submarines--</u>		<u>9</u>
Nuclear-Powered Cruise Missile		<u>23</u>
Diesel-Powered Cruise Missile		4
Nuclear-Powered Attack		2
Diesel-Powered Attack		0
3. <u>Support Ships--</u>		17
		<u>31</u>
<u>TOTAL--</u>		<u>96</u>

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* These ships are categorized so as to reflect comparable size and capabilities. See SR RP 73-2, July 1973 (C), Problems in Comparing US and Soviet Warships by Designation.

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<u>Seaborne Weapons Systems</u>	<u>US</u>	<u>Soviet</u>
Fighter Aircraft*		0
Attack Aircraft*		0
Antiship Missile Launchers**		72
Antiair Missile Launchers***		46

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[Redacted]

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** On the Soviet side, eight launchers aboard a Kresta II class guided missile frigate were not included [Redacted]

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[Redacted] In addition, four launchers aboard an Osa class guided missile patrol boat were not counted because the patrol boat was being delivered to Syria at the time and probably did not have missiles on board.

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*** Some US and all Soviet surface-to-air missiles have a limited surface-to-surface capability. [Redacted]

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The US forces--ships, missiles and aircraft-- would have had an estimated replacement cost (in 1973 dollar terms) of about six and a half to seven billion dollars. About three billion dollars of this represents the costs of the US carriers including their aircraft. The dollar valuation of the replacement cost of the Soviet force would probably have been about four billion dollars.

This dollar value of the US forces represents to the degree possible--i.e., given the information immediately available--the actual costs, adjusted to a 1973 price base, to procure each ship in the force, and fit it out with a full load of aircraft and missiles. Ships which have undergone major conversions since being built have the costs of those conversions included in the total valuation. The dollar valuation of the Soviet force represents agreed CIA estimates of what it would cost to reproduce the Soviet ships, missiles, and shipborne aircraft in the US. No estimates of operating costs, land-based support costs, or nuclear weapon or other ordnance costs have been included in the totals for either side. In calculating the costs we sought to produce dollar valuations of the two fleets in as comparable terms as possible, so that any biases that might be present would work in the same direction for both the US and USSR. Thus, while the specific cost figures are fairly gross approximations, the relative values--in index terms--are more meaningful and more reliable.

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Land-Based Aircraft

The Soviets had 86 Naval Aviation Badger and Blinder medium bombers and 22 Long Range Aviation (LRA) heavy bombers in the southwestern USSR capable of executing antiship strikes but they did not deploy any of these strike aircraft to Middle East airfields during the 1973 crisis. To have done so, they would have had to obtain Egyptian or Syrian permission and would have risked becoming actively involved in the Arab-Israeli war zone. If the Soviets had been willing to take the risk, they could have deployed about a regiment (30) of TU-16 Badger medium bombers to either

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Egypt or Syria. Egyptian airfields, which have hangarettes for Badger size aircraft, would have been the more desirable locations.

It is unlikely that the Soviets would have launched direct strikes from their own airfields. Had they done so, they would have increased the warning time available to the Sixth Fleet, risked interception by US land-based fighter aircraft and possibly sparked a NATO-Warsaw Pact conflict.

US land-based strike aircraft assets included

[Redacted]

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[Redacted] Redeployment of these aircraft prior to overt hostilities would have been unlikely because of resistance from our European allies. Hence it is unlikely that they would have had a significant impact on the initial phase of a naval conflict. If they had been introduced after the initial exchange they would have improved the Sixth Fleet's defense against a second Soviet cruise missile strike but would not have markedly altered the outcome of the conflict.

[Redacted]

[Redacted] Consequently, it is estimated that determined Soviet submarine commanders could still have pressed through some successful attacks.

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The Initial Exchange

The balance of offensive naval weapons systems on 1 November would have been so close that the outcome of the initial exchange probably would have been decided by which side initiated the engagement.

If the Soviets had struck first they probably would have committed about 36 submarine and surface-launched missiles out of the total of 72 tubes available. These would have been targeted principally against the three carriers and their major supporting units. Considering attrition from US counter-strikes and air defenses it is likely that about 2 to 3 missiles would have reached each carrier. In addition, a few Soviet SAMs might also have been launched in a surface-to-surface mode.

The poor mobility of diesel submarines would have limited their effectiveness in actively searching for US combatants but the US carriers probably would have been grouped in a limited area and two to three torpedo attack submarines could have succeeded eventually in attacking each carrier. The result could have been three to six torpedo hits on each carrier.

Altogether, the total weight of Soviet ordnance would probably have been adequate to disable two aircraft carriers and to cause at least moderate damage to the other. It is unlikely that any would have been sunk.

If the US had struck first, the weight of the Soviet strike probably would have been reduced to about 16 submarine and surface-launched missiles. The number of submarine torpedo attacks would have been reduced as well--probably to about one salvo per carrier. In this variant there would have been a good chance that no US carriers would have been put out of action although all probably would have suffered moderate damage.

If the initial engagement had consisted of sporadic, uncoordinated attacks, the Soviets probably would have been unable to concentrate their forces

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sufficiently to fully disable any one carrier, although they probably could have caused moderate damage to all. The US force with its carrier-based aircraft would have had greater flexibility, shorter reaction times and thus a better opportunity to have damaged Soviet surface combatants.

If the Soviets had had a regiment of land-based strike aircraft available in the Middle East, they probably would have committed about 20 of them-- carrying a total of about 30 missiles--to an initial pre-emptive strike. The addition of these ten missiles per carrier probably would have saturated the Sixth Fleet's air defenses and resulted in several more hits on each carrier. Under these circumstances, all three carriers would almost certainly have been put out of action. If the US had struck first, however, or if the conflict had begun spontaneously, the Soviets probably would have been unable to coordinate their land and sea-based missile attacks sufficiently to disrupt Sixth Fleet defenses. Under these conditions the availability of Soviet land-based air probably would not have altered the outcome.

After the First Blow

At this point the interaction would have become extremely complex and the outcome would have depended on tactical decisions and on the combat readiness of the units which survived the initial attack. The best judgment that can be made is that after the initial exchange, sea-based air, reinforcement and support capabilities would have been critical. If none of the US carriers could have continued flight operations the Sixth Fleet would have had essentially no offensive capability. The Soviets, on the other hand, would probably have retained a number of anti-ship missiles.

If one US carrier had been able to continue flight operations after the initial Soviet strike-- which would have been likely if Soviet land-based air had not been used, the forces would have again

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been fairly evenly balanced and the final outcome would have been determined by unpredictable factors like luck and the skill of the commanders.

If the US had initiated the battle, and preserved most of its sea-based air assets, it probably could have eliminated most of the Soviet surface combatants. There would have been a continuing threat from Soviet submarines and land-based air, but these probably could have been reduced to manageable proportions. As the conflict wore on the Sixth Fleet's superior logistics capabilities and its reinforcement by [redacted] on 4 November would have contributed to an almost certain US victory.

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However the conflict might have evolved, it probably would have been short. The Soviet force had a limited resupply capability and probably would have exhausted its combat supplies in a few days. In addition, attempts would probably have been made by the leaders of both sides to halt the conflict, under favorable conditions if possible. The entire conflict probably would not have lasted more than three days.

No matter who had "won" the conflict, most of the Sixth Fleet's resources and energy would have been expended in self-defense. Thus US options for active employment of the fleet in support of other policy objectives would have been severely constrained. Soviet options, however, would also have been limited by the same constraints.

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Annex

Outcome of a US-Soviet Naval Conflict at the Height of the Middle East Crisis--26 October 1973

A more likely interaction of US and Soviet naval forces than that hypothesized above can be conceived for 26 October, when US-Soviet tensions were at their height following the threatened Soviet Middle East intervention and the US military alert. US aircraft carrier and amphibious forces were concentrating in the eastern Mediterranean in the vicinity of Soviet antiship strike forces, and a force of two Soviet amphibious ships and seven surface combatants were moving toward waters about 100 nm north of Port Said. During this period when the potential for conflict was relatively high, the following US and Soviet naval ships were present in the Mediterranean.

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Composition of the US Sixth Fleet
 and Soviet Mediterranean Squadron
 26 October 1973

Ship Type*	<u>US</u>	<u>Soviet</u>	
1. <u>Surface Warships--</u>		<u>32</u>	
a. Major Surface Combatants--		<u>21</u>	
Attack Carriers		0	
Cruisers		2	
Missile Frigates		1	
Missile Destroyers/Escorts		9	
Gun Armed Destroyers/Escorts		9	
b. Minor Surface Combatants--		<u>4</u>	
Minesweepers		4	
Patrol Boats		0	
c. Amphibious Ships--		<u>7</u>	
2. <u>Submarines--</u>			<u>18</u>
Nuclear-Powered Cruise Missile			3
Diesel-Powered Cruise Missile			2
Nuclear-Powered Attack			0
Diesel-Powered Attack		13	
3. <u>Support Ships--</u>		<u>33</u>	
<u>TOTAL--</u>		<u>83</u>	

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* These ships are categorized so as to reflect comparable size and capabilities.

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If these forces had been concentrated in the eastern Mediterranean the following weapons systems could have been available:

	<u>US</u>	<u>Soviet</u>
Fighter Aircraft*		0
Attack Aircraft*		0
Antiship Missile Launchers		44
Antiair Missile Launchers**		28

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*** Some US and all Soviet surface-to-air missiles have a limited surface-to-surface capability.*

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The Soviets had no land-based aircraft in the Middle East on 26 October and they probably would not have launched strikes from Soviet airfields.

The US forces would have had an estimated 1973 replacement cost of about six and a half billion dollars, of which about three billion dollars represents the cost of the carriers and their aircraft. The cost of the Soviet force probably would have been about three billion dollars.

The Initial Exchange

If the Soviets had struck first, they probably would have committed about 22 submarine and surface-launched missiles out of the total of 44 tubes available. It is unlikely, however, that more than one or two of these missiles would have reached each carrier. Torpedo attacks would have resulted only from random encounters and it is unlikely that each carrier would have sustained more than one hit.

The net effect of these Soviet attacks might have been adequate to disable one US aircraft carrier but it is unlikely that any would have been sunk.

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If the US had pre-empted, damage to US carriers from the initial Soviet blow would probably have been negligible.

If the initial engagement had consisted of sporadic, uncoordinated attacks, the Soviets probably would have been unable to destroy any one major target, although they might have caused some damage to all.

Subsequent Engagements

If the naval war had continued at a non-nuclear level beyond an initial exchange on 26 October, the US Sixth Fleet would probably have destroyed the offensive capability of the Soviet Mediterranean Squadron. The Soviets would not have been able to launch more than a few conventionally-armed cruise missiles, an insufficient number to seriously disable a carrier. US carrier aircraft probably would have destroyed most of the Soviet surface combatants, and US ASW operations should have been able to reduce the Soviet submarine threat to manageable proportions. As the conflict wore on, the more efficient and less vulnerable US logistics support system would have continued to favor the Sixth Fleet during this final phase of the hostilities.

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MEMORANDUM FOR: Messrs. Proctor/Walsh

EMP
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L. Le Mio base

This memo from the NIOs (drafted by OSR) was prepared only for the Secretary of Defense (at his request). You may want to look at the "conclusions" at paper clip.

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15 Apr 74
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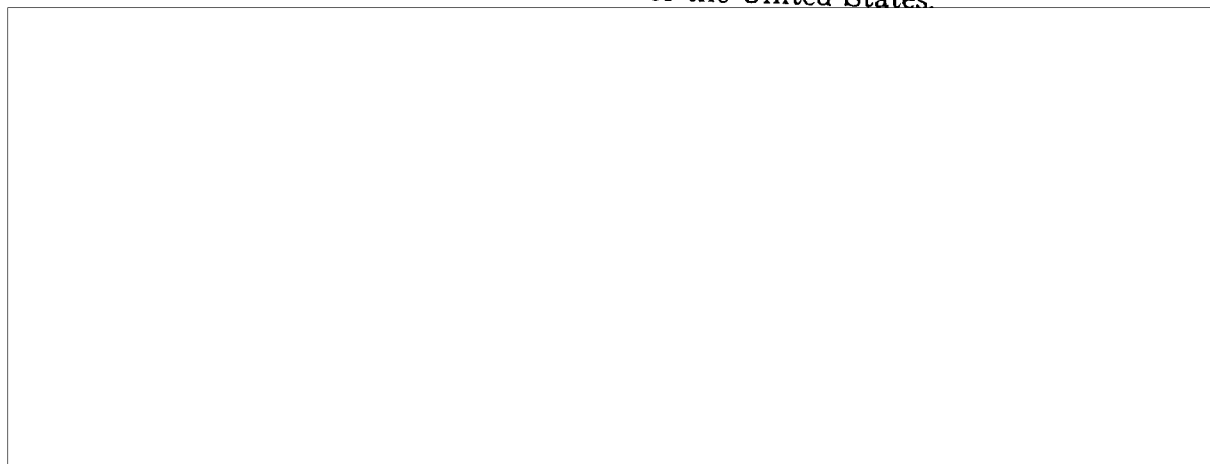
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