

November 2, 1967

**Report from the Hungarian Embassy in Moscow on
Soviet foreign policy on the crisis in the Middle East
in 1967**

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Summary:

This report by the Hungarian embassy in Moscow states that neither the Soviet Union nor the United States wants to escalate tensions over the crisis in the Middle East and may be able to find a resolution.

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EMBASSY OF THE HUNGARIAN PEOPLES'S REPUBLIC

Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, B u d a p e s t

Moscow, 2 November 1967

Sz.T./1967
Subject : The Middle Eastern crisis and
the policy of the Soviet Union

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Presenters: József Oláh
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Since the June war our embassy devoted a lot of attention to the Middle Eastern situation in its foreign affairs and information work. Using our contacts in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party we prepared a series of reports on the different aspects of the Middle Eastern policy of the Soviet Union and on how the Soviet Union evaluated the entire Middle Eastern situation and the foreign and domestic policy of each country. So, recently we addressed – among other things – the internal and international situation of the United Arab Republic, King Hussein's visit, the Soviet evaluation of the Iraqi and the Algerian situation, the developments in Yemen, etc. The present report is not intended to repeat the data and facts that were contained in our earlier reports.

Also, we believe it is not our task to attempt to give a deep historical analysis of the present Middle Eastern crisis in any way because in our view this does not belong to the duties of our embassy. However, we would like to address some of the current tasks involved in the foreign policy of the Soviet Union and the European socialist countries regarding the Middle East and explore, on this basis, some of the problems that are involved in the further possible developments of the Middle Eastern crisis from the point of view of the entire international situation.

[...]

... as far as the second danger is concerned, the United States– ultimately – would probably agree with the Soviet Union that breaking out a new war conflict with the danger of resulting in a world war is against its national interests.

By the nature of the issue, however, “ultimately agree” means that the two superpowers will only regard the renewal of warlike actions in the region as dangerous if both of them see roughly the same risk in a newly sparked conflict not remaining a local war. And as it is obvious that the danger of any new aggressive action may come from Israel, the United States must make sure that another attack on the Arab countries does not stay within the framework of the June war because the Soviet Union will not be able or will not want to keep such an event within this framework. This issue, however, does not emerge independently from place and time. As far as the place is concerned, because of its geographical proximity to Europe and the Soviet Union, the Middle East is obviously strategically an important region for the security of the Soviet Union. For this reason, The Soviet Union should or would take the explosion of any warlike conflict in this region than for instance in Vietnam or

Cuba. As far as time is concerned: can the United States be sure that the Soviet Union will not test what military, economic and political burdens the United States can cope with in addition to Vietnam?

For various reasons, the Soviet Union – as has often been stressed to our colleagues in the negotiations with the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs – is interested in keeping the international situation relatively relaxed and avoiding, if possible, any new sources of tension or the intensification of existing military conflicts. These reasons include /without going into a detailed analysis/: the China problem, the primary importance of raising the standard of living in domestic policy and economic reforms /not only in regard to the Soviet Union/

The Soviet comrades have the impression that even if, in view of the war in Vietnam, it cannot be claimed that the United States is also striving for international détente, it can be safely said that today the US is unlikely to intend to intensify tension in the international situation beyond certain limits. It is precisely because of Vietnam that it wants to avoid the intensification of tension because it does not want to multiply the military, economic domestic and foreign political difficulties that the war in Vietnam alone entails. The American government is obviously trying to increase cooperation and improve relations with the Soviet Union, or at least declares to do so, and to take steps in the international scene which demonstrate their intention to ease tension (the Outer Space Treaty, the Non-Proliferation Treaty, etc.).

As for the Middle Eastern conflict, if the crisis continues and turns into another warlike conflict, it would jeopardize the current relations between the Soviet Union and the United States. Even if direct military conflict between the two superpowers is envisaged as a last resort, the problem that the leaders of the United States should address is whether it is in the interest of the United States to put the Soviet Union into a situation in which – despite its obvious intentions – it has to modify its tactical approach which is used to accomplish the general strategic goal of peaceful coexistence.

What would such a modification involve?

1./ Obviously, under certain circumstances the Soviet Union might revise its current position regarding the support of national liberation movements. So far it has rejected the idea of demanding “two, three or even more Vietnams” but despite all the dangers involved in such a demand, will the Soviet Union not believe that such a change in its policy – let’s say today – would be more dangerous and detrimental to the United States than to the Soviet Union?

2./ It is possible that the Soviet Union will change its aid provided for Vietnam, more precisely, its policy of providing aid for Vietnam, turning it into more effective military aid.

3./ It is also quite possible that the Soviet Union decides to establish an alliance with some con-aligned countries, for example with some countries in the Middle East. This would mean that the Soviet Union might attempt to change the slow progress that is beneficial to the socialist countries today in terms of international status quo by means of a more comprehensive attack on the status quo that prevails in the world today.

In order to avoid any misunderstanding we would like to repeat that today it is obvious that the Soviet Union has no intention to modify its tactical policy in this way because it sees such a change way too risky and believes that the right thing to do is to ensure the security of the Soviet Union on more sound bases and its progress in communist development. However: the United States must take into account that under certain circumstances the Soviet leaders may feel that this basic tactical standpoint should be changed and therefore, when they make a decision on their position regarding the developments in the Middle East, the American politicians must take into consideration that the Soviet Union might be forced to draw such general conclusions if the USA boycotts progress that is being made towards an acceptable political resolution of the conflict.

In sum: the general intensification of tension in the international situation, due to the prolongation or intensification of the Middle Eastern crisis – or to any other reason – is not in the interest of the socialist countries. However, since it is roughly equally not in the interest of the West either, there is a theoretical possibility for making progress towards the resolution of this crisis. However, it is the United States that has to take steps in this direction because they can decide whether they are willing to engage in a policy laden with the intensification of tension or not, since they have the means to influence the aggressor and prevent Israel from breaking out a general warlike conflict.

Obviously, the above considerations can hardly lead to any swift, radical solution in the Middle East, even if the American leaders are willing to consider these circumstance even as early as the next few days when Johnson has to reply Kosygin's message. There are various reasons for this but one of the most important ones is that the United States and Israel still believe there is a possibility to overthrow the progressive Arab regimes, or at least some of them, without [...]