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NATO SECRET
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To: Permanent Representatives

From: Secretary General

THE SITUATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AREA

It will be recalled that in paragraph 8 of the Final Communiqué of the Ministerial Meeting in Reykjavik, Ministers requested the Secretary General "to co-ordinate the exchange of information among members of the Council and to keep the Council closely advised on the Situation in the Mediterranean".

2. Accordingly, I circulate herewith for the information of Ministers - as I did prior to the general discussion of Permanent Representatives on 16th October, 1968 on the situation in the Mediterranean - a survey of some of the facts and developments which have occurred in the area since the Ministerial Meeting of June 1968. I would stress that this factual survey is not exhaustive; it is limited to the principal events. Moreover, some of the information is, as yet, unconfirmed or uncertain in its implications. Even so, the attached paper may, I trust, be of some assistance to Ministers for their discussion under Item II of the Council's Agenda.

(Signed) Manlio BROSIO

NATO SECRET

SURVEY OF MAIN DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AREA
SINCE THE MINISTERIAL MEETING OF REYKJAVIK

I. GENERAL

1. One of the main characteristics of the situation since Reykjavik is undoubtedly the increasing concentration of Soviet naval units in the Mediterranean. In fact, towards the end of October Soviet combat ships amounted to 26 units, including 1 helicopter carrier, 1 cruiser, 10 destroyer-escorts, 3 small landing ships, 3 mine sweepers and 8 submarines (including 1 missile type submarine)(1). The appearance in the Mediterranean of the new MOSKVA helicopter carrier escorted by 2 KASHIN-class guided missile destroyers was, of course, of particular interest. The MOSKVA, which can carry quite a large number of helicopters, has been observed conducting anti-submarine exercises and is estimated to have a troop-carrying capability. Mention should also be made of reports that the 6 destroyers with surface-to-air missiles in the Mediterranean at the present time have had their missiles modified to give them a surface-to-surface capability. If this is correct, it would give the Soviets an added anti-ship capability. On the other hand, the amphibious or assault capability of the Russians in the Mediterranean remains slight and a major amphibious assault is at present not possible.

2. In the general context of Soviet military power in the Mediterranean, mention should be made of an as yet unconfirmed report to the effect that Soviet technicians have constructed, in Southern Egypt, near the Sudan, a new airfield with bomb storage sites which can be utilised by heavy bomber aircraft. If this is confirmed (but this is as yet not the case), it is significant that this base might be used by BADGER aircraft already in the UAR which thus could be positioned out of reach of Israeli aircraft.

3. There have also been reports that while the Russians do not use the base of Mers el Kebir, the number of Russian technicians working in the base, on the re-installation of electrical equipment, may have been slightly increased.

4. As regards the degree of Soviet political influence in the area, the fact may be cited that certain Arab countries adopted a particularly prudent attitude towards the Soviet aggression against Czechoslovakia, which they have not condemned. The geographical extension of Soviet influence is illustrated by the fact that Soviet ships arrived in Casablanca for a five-day visit on 15th October, 1968. This was the first Soviet naval visit to a Moroccan port.

(1) However, some surface combat units, including the helicopter carrier MOSKVA, have been declared to re-enter the Black Sea as from 26th October.

5. The Foreign Minister of Spain was recently in Washington to negotiate a five-year extension of the Base Agreement between the United States and Spain which was due to expire on 26th September, 1968. These negotiations were unsuccessful and, on 26th September, Spain formally invoked Article V of the Defence Agreement between the United States and Spain of 1953. This Article calls for a six-month consultation period and provides that if no agreement is reached during that time, that is by 26th March, 1969, the Base Agreement will terminate one year later. Discussions are continuing, including contacts at the Ministerial level.

II. THE ADRIATIC

6. Following the Soviet aggression against Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia made no secret of its fear of being attacked in its turn. In various speeches President Tito reiterated his country's determination to fight if invaded and to oppose any encroachment of its sovereignty. Yugoslavia made considerable military preparations to repel an attack; and frequent diplomatic contacts have been reported between Belgrade and Western countries. The United States Under Secretary of State, Mr. Katzenbach, visited Belgrade on 17th October, 1968. While Yugoslavia's determination to stand firm continues, her military precautionary measures seem to have eased in the last few weeks. Finally, mention should be made of reports to the effect that the USSR did not withdraw its technicians employed with the Yugoslavian armed forces; and the delivery of two Soviet built fast patrol boats within the scope of contracts for military supplies previously negotiated between Moscow and Belgrade, has continued.

7. Like Yugoslavia, Albania fears some Soviet action against her. Tirana seems to think, however, that such an action is more likely to come by sea or by air rather than by land. Accordingly, there has been a recent strengthening of sea coast defences. There have also been reports concerning an easing of tension in the relations between Yugoslavia and Albania and the intention of Albanian leaders to seek an improvement in their relations with some Allied countries. At the same time, Tirana continues its association with Communist China; there have been reports on Chinese deliveries of war material and military talks between the two countries have taken place. Albania's withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact, announced on 12th September, 1968, is, of course, of nominal significance only.

III. BULGARIA AND THE AEGEAN SEA

8. In a related context, mention should be made of repeated rumours with regard to Soviet forces being present in Bulgaria. These have never been confirmed, but taken in conjunction with the Soviet naval presence in the Mediterranean, they would be particularly relevant to the strategic position of Greece and Turkey. Possible naval threats to lines of supply and reinforcement to these countries have been stressed.

IV. THE CONFLICT IN THE MIDDLE EAST

9. The Israel/Arab conflict remains primarily the responsibility of the United Nations. Nevertheless, in so far as developments in this field may, in certain eventualities, significantly affect the general situation in the Mediterranean, the following points may be of interest.

10. In the last few months the conflict between the opposing parties has not been brought nearer to a solution. Israel remains in possession of captured Arab territory; the Arab States refuse to concede that their defeat in the June war obliges them to go beyond seeking a settlement on their own terms. Mention should be made of a distinct intensification in Arab guerilla activities in the occupied territories and in Israel as well as an increase in the number of frequently serious incidents and clashes between the armed forces of Israel and the Arab States. After his visit to the Soviet Union at the beginning of July, the implications of which are as yet unclear, President Nasser, in his speech of 16th September, emphasised that Egypt was now in a military phase of counteraction which would be followed by that of liberation. The meeting of Arab League Foreign Ministers in Cairo in the beginning of September urged Arab Governments to help Jordan strengthen its defences against Israel and to give further support to Arab guerillas. The various Resolutions of the Security Council have not brought about a reduction of tension. The successful coup d'état in Iraq does not constitute a change in that country's position on the Israel/Arab conflict. On the other hand, it should be noted that the Tunisian Delegation left the Arab League Foreign Ministers' meeting for reasons which, it was reported, were related to its criticism of Arab attitudes towards Israel.

11. In the beginning of July limited United States arms shipments to Jordan were reported. There have been unconfirmed press reports about further Soviet massive deliveries of war material to certain Arab States. In early October President Johnson authorised Mr. Rusk to open negotiations with Israel for the supply of 50 Phantom supersonic aircraft.

12. With the approach of the opening of the United Nations General Assembly, diplomatic activity in and around the Israel/Arab conflict increased appreciably. On 25th September, Moscow addressed a warning to the Israeli Government, stressing the serious consequences of its alleged provocations against its Arab neighbours. At the same time, it became known in Washington that the Soviet Union had proposed to the United States a new plan for peace in the Middle East.

13. It was reported that while the reaction of the United States was cool, that of Israel was quite negative. The new formulation of the Israeli position which the Israeli Foreign Minister, Mr. Eban, brought with him to the General Assembly of the United Nations was followed by unconfirmed rumours of Israeli/Jordanian contacts. However, the serious artillery duel between Israel and Egypt along 70 miles of the Suez Canal on 25th October, 1968, during which the Suez oil refinery was set alight, the widespread Arab demonstrations in the occupied territories, and, finally, the armed clashes in Jordan between the regular army and guerilla units, illustrate the difficulties which surround the prospects for a settlement of the Israel/Arab conflict.