THE SOVIET PRESENCE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

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The Soviet Mediterranean Squadron has served, first and foremost, as an instrument of Soviet peacetime diplomacy and crisis management. The Soviet Navy's initial extended deployment to the Mediterranean sea took place in 1958 in the aftermath of the U.S. Lebanon intervention. Since this time, the 5th Eskadra has served as either a participant or close observer in every major crisis or conflict in the Mediterranean area and has become the primary symbol of the Soviet Union's regional presence. The relationship between Soviet political objectives in and around the Mediterranean and the status of the Mediterranean Squadron has been a symbiotic one. Soviet naval forces have played a key role in promoting local Soviet interests, while the cultivation of regional ties has provided the Navy with the access it has required to maintain a standing presence in the Mediterranean, far from its base of support. It is not surprising, then, that the evolution of the 5th Eskadra has closely paralleled the rise and fall of Moscow's political fortunes on the Mediterranean littoral. The present essay provides a brief overview of the history and current status of the Soviet naval presence in the Mediterranean. Attention is given to the local constraints facing Soviet planning, the style of Soviet Mediterranean operations, and the close relationship between Soviet naval access and political presence.

CONTEXT AND CONSTRAINTS

Soviet naval diplomacy, today as in the past, has been conducted with forces which, by any important measure, are inferior to those they would confront in time of war. The success or failure of past Soviet actions in the Mediterranean sea, and the objective strength of the 5th

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Eskadra are largely unrelated. While the size and configuration of the
Soviet Mediterranean force has frequently been shaped for purposes of
political signaling, it has served best not as a force to be reckoned
with but as a symbolic force in being, to win friends, influence people,
and intimidate its enemies. It has also operated over the years under a
number of notable limitations, including periodic restrictions on shore
access, problems of sustainability, extended deployment distances, the
controls over Soviet fleet movements imposed by the Montreux Treaty, and
the mercurial nature of Moscow's local allies. In an effort to counter
these constraints, the Soviet Navy has sought to diversify its points of
contact along the Mediterranean littoral, maintain a standing force of
Mediterranean auxiliaries to reduce its dependence on local bases, limit
on-station times, and augment Black Sea elements of the 5th Eskadra with
forces attached to the Northern and Baltic Sea Fleets.

The most serious Soviet constraint at sea, in the Mediterranean as
elsewhere, has been its modest ability to sustain distant operations.
The Soviets entered the postwar era with a Navy designed primarily for
the mission of coastal defense, with a limited blue water capacity. The
Soviet Navy, despite a major fleet construction program over the past
·decade and a half, is still made up predominantly of warships of limited
individual capability and endurance. In contrast to the U.S. 6th Fleet
which is capable of operating effectively far from its base of support
for extended periods of time, the 5th Eskadra remains tied to the shore
in a number of important respects. This fact is reflected in its force
structure, methods of control, logistical requirements, and its normal
operating procedures.[1] As a general rule, Soviet naval forces stay at
sea less, deploy closer to their logistic points of support, and spend a
greater amount of down time in maintenance and overhaul than their U.S.
counterparts. Any extended deployment in strength, particularly where
the Soviets have sought to establish a permanent naval presence, has
required and continues to require regular access to shore support.

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[1]See Norman Friedman, "U.S. vs. Soviet Style in Fleet Doctrine,"
Non-Standard Forms of Naval Warfare, Hudson Institute, HI-2351-RR,
October 31, 1975, pp. 64-68.

Faced with problems of sustainability and limited fleet endurance, the Soviets have traditionally limited their standing presence in the Mediterranean and have structured and sized the Squadron to be rapidly reinforced under crisis conditions from its main operating bases in the Black Sea. Such surge deployments were observed in Soviet exercises as early as 1965, and they have become a standard feature of 5th Eskadra operations since. Soviet force surges were observed during the Six-Day War (1967), the Jordan Crisis (1970), the Yom Kippur War (1973), and in the aftermath of the Israeli Invasion of Lebanon (1982).[2] More limited operations, involving the concentration of Squadron forces, Black Sea force mobilizations, but no augmentation of forces through the Turkish straits, were witnessed in the course of the Cyprus Crisis (1974), the dispute engendered by the original deployment of Syrian missiles into Lebanon (1981), and the recent series of incidents in and around Libya and the Gulf of Sidra (1985-1986). In adopting a policy of "variable presence," the Soviets have sought to avoid some of the sustainability problems associated with long out-of-area deployments, conserve their traditionally limited access to local shore-based support, while still retaining a routine naval posture and the option of crisis involvement. This policy was originally adopted as a means of overcoming the dual constraints imposed by poor fleet endurance and the absence of forward bases. While these considerations still influence deployment policy, the Soviets have since made a virtue of necessity by using variations in force size as an instrument for communicating the level and nature of their local involvement.

While this tactic has provided Soviet naval forces with a degree of flexibility in managing both routine and crisis operations, it has been circumscribed to some degree by the constraints imposed on Soviet deployments by the 1936 Montreux Convention.[3] The Montreux Convention

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[2]Of these operations, the move conducted in the aftermath of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon was by far the most limited, involving an increase of between ten and twelve warships or roughly a 25% increase in the size of the standing force. Earlier operations in 1967, 1970, and 1973 each involved roughly a two-fold increase in Squadron strength.

[3]See the discussion by Stephen S. Roberts, "The Turkish Straits and Soviet Naval Operations," *Navy International*, October 1981, pp. 581-585. For a good historical treatment, see Harry N. Howard, *Turkey, the*

was originally welcomed by the Soviet Union as a means of controlling
foreign access through the Turkish Straits and into the Black Sea. It
has since become a serious limiting factor in Soviet naval operations in
and around the Mediterranean. Several of the treaty's restrictions
deserve mention: First, the treaty requires that any warship entering
the straits give at least eight days notice before actually beginning
its passage. At this time, it must also announce its name, type, hull
number, and date of transit. Second, all travel through the straits
must be carried out in daylight, no more than nine vessels are allowed
to pass through the straits concurrently, and the total displacement of
these ships must not exceed 15,000 tons. The only warships which have
been exempted from this rule are single "capital ships", which can pass
through the straits with limited escort even if their individual size
exceeds this limit. Third, submarines are only permitted passage when
moving to or from a repair facility. They also must remain surfaced
and, like capital combatants, can only sail individually. The treaty
also stipulates that aircraft carriers may enter the waterway at the
invitation of Turkey to make local port calls, but may not pass into
either the Black Sea or the Mediterranean.[4] Finally, the convention
allows Turkey to close the straits to selective powers should it feel
threatened in a war or within the context of a local crisis.[5]

Straits, and U.S. Policy, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University
Press, 1974.

[4]The restrictions placed on aircraft carrier movements through the
straits are indirectly defined, a fact which could well provide Moscow
with an opening to challenge this protocol of the treaty in the future.
The restriction arises from the fact that 1) no warships that displace
more than 15,000 tons are permitted to transit the Turkish straits with
the explicit exception of "capital ships," and 2) aircraft carriers are
specifically defined not to be capital combatants. A possible challenge
to the convention might be based on the view that, with time, these two
aspects of the treaty have become overtaken by events, and that what is
significant in the original treaty is the exception provided for capital
ships rather than the restrictions placed on carrier transits. In 1936,
arguably, aircraft carriers were not considered to be capital warships.
Today, however, they are. As the new "capital ship," the argument would
conclude, the Soviet Navy's two carriers should henceforth be permitted
to move through the straits with the same rights of passage as the big
gun battleships of an earlier era. The relevant points of discussion in
the treaty can be found in Articles 11, 14, and supplementary Annex II.

[5]For the text and a discussion of the Montreux Convention and its
implications for Soviet naval planning, see Jesse W. Lewis, Jr., *The
Strategic Balance in the Mediterranean*, Washington, D.C.: American

The Montreux Convention has served to complicate Soviet planning in
several ways. First, because of the Treaty protocol that a warship must
wait eight days between the time it requests transit and the time it
enters the straits, the Soviets have been placed in the position of
having to declare their deployment intentions before actually carrying
them out, giving the West ample opportunity to monitor and respond to
these developments should it care to do so. Second, the Treaty places
important restrictions on the speed and, hence, potential effectiveness
with which the Soviets can carry out a surge deployment in crisis time.
This has placed a premium on fleet readiness, the accurate and timely
anticipation of crisis requirements, proper force planning, and careful
deployment scheduling, all of which appear difficult to guarantee on a
day-to-day basis. The Convention's restrictions, of course, are quite
stringent in the case of submarines, limiting the number of submarines
the Soviets can maintain in the Mediterranean on routine patrol, and
greatly circumscribing their ability to rapidly reinforce these units.
Most submarines that have operated with the Mediterranean Squadron have
been either based locally or have been detached from the Northern and
Baltic Fleets. The long transit times involved have limited the degree
to which northern-based forces are able to participate in local crises.
While the Soviets, over the years, have managed to either circumvent or
work around many of the problems imposed by the Convention, the Treaty
remains a real constraint on Soviet operations, negating many of the
advantages that might be otherwise achieved with a flexible deployment
policy.[6]

Enterprise Institute, 1976, pp. 70-72, 155-169. See also, Barry Buzan,
"The Status and Future of the Montreux Convention", *Survival,* Nov-Dec
1976, pp. 242-247.
[6]The Soviets have successfully circumvented the Treaty's protocol
on aircraft carriers thus far by declaring their four Kiev-class VTOL
ships to be cruisers, on the basis of their cruiser-like bows. One of
these is attached to the Black Sea Fleet and comes and goes through the
straits at will. The Soviets will once again have to grapple with the
protocols of the Convention with their completion of the first of two
large deck carriers currently under construction on the Black Sea. Even
if special dispensation is given to permit these carriers to exit the
Turkish Straits *once* upon completion, the treaty currently prohibits
regular transit, a fact which is likely to force the Soviets to decide
upon an alternative basing site, limiting their value to the Squadron.

Soviet postwar operations in the Mediterranean can be interpreted within the context of these and related limitations on naval planning. The Soviet navy, over the past thirty years, has been preoccupied with the goal of 'outflanking' the combined constraints imposed by geography, limited fleet endurance, and the Montreux Convention by establishing a permanent naval presence ashore. Such a presence would permit the navy to maintain a comparatively larger standing force in the Mediterranean, relieve the strain on Soviet maritime logistical assets that would be otherwise required to maintain such a force, reduce the Squadron's long standing dependence on timely reinforcement through the Turkish straits, and greatly expand the navy's local options and operating flexibility. Considered in this light, the Soviet postwar experience in Mediterranean waters can be divided into three periods, each tied to the quality and level of Soviet shore access. The first, the pre-Egyptian period, dates from the establishment of the first permanent Soviet naval presence in the Mediterranean sea in 1958 until the acquisition of the first Soviet basing rights on Egyptian soil in 1967. This was followed, between 1967 and 1973, by the rapid expansion of Egyptian access, dramatic increases in the size and strength of the Mediterranean Squadron, and the eventual collapse of the Egyptian basing structure between 1973 and 1976. This period represents the high point in the Soviet Mediterranean presence. The loss of Egyptian access posed a serious setback to the 5th Eskadra, greatly circumscribing the parameters of local Soviet operations. The post-Egyptian period has been marked by efforts to regain a permanent position ashore and broaden the Squadron's base of regional support.

THE EARLY YEARS

Soviet Union's first deployments to the Mediterranean in the decade following World War II were infrequent and of limited duration. Most of these involved periodic ship transfers between the Black Sea and Baltic Fleets and were not designed to establish a standing Mediterranean presence. Societ yearly ship days in the Mediterranean sea amounted to little more than the annual accumulation of time logged in transiting from Gibralter to the Turkish straits. This changed in early 1958, with the Soviet-Albanian agreement to build a permanent operating base at

Valona to service Soviet diesel submarines (SSK).[7] By August, four
W-class SSKs and a submarine tender were on station in the Adriatic,
permitting the Soviets to begin regular forays into the central and
eastern Mediterranean. Within two years, this force had expanded to
three auxiliaries and up to twelve submarines. These units were joined
periodically by Soviet Black Sea forces and ships in transit to and from
the Baltic, Northern, or Pacific Fleets. The Soviet Navy's first major
exercise in the Mediterranean was staged out of Valona Bay in 1960, and
involved the local submarine squadron, elements detached from the Black
Sea Fleet, and Albanian surface forces. As indicated in Table 1, Soviet
ship days in the Mediterranean increased significantly in 1958, 1959,
and again in 1960. This growth was a direct result of Soviet access to
Albanian facilities.

Soviet operations in the Mediterranean suffered a major setback in
1961 when, as a direct result of the Sino-Soviet split, the Albanians
closed the Soviet base at Valona. Denied shore access, the Black Sea
Fleet could no longer sustain a permanent presence in the Mediterranean
and local Soviet operating patterns quickly returned to those observed
in earlier years. By the end of 1961, the annual number of Soviet ship
days spent in the Mediterranean had fallen from a high of 5,600, logged
in 1960, to approximately 2,300, most of which were accumulated early in
the year, when the navy still had ready access to Albanian facilities.
The real impact of the Albanian decision was not to be felt until the
following year, when Soviet forces were only able to spend 800 days on
patrol or in transit. This figure fell to 600 days by the end of 1963.
Between 1962 and 1963, the Soviet naval presence in the Mediterranean
averaged between one and two ships per day, its lowest level since the
mid-1950s. Even this was not maintained on a continual basis. Soviet
patrolling was spotty, despite the navy's tendency to characterize its
local presence in glowing terms. What two writers have said of Soviet
press reporting of the early 1950s, was also true of Soviet operations

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[7]Early Soviet operations in the Mediterranean are well discussed by
Bruce W. Watson, *Red Navy at Sea: Soviet Naval Operations on the High
Seas, 1956-1980*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1982, pp. 73-83. As Watson
notes, the Soviets during this period were also involved in an
unsuccessful bid to gain basing or access rights to Egyptian naval
facilities.

Table 1

SOVIET NAVAL PRESENCE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN 1957-1986

Year	Annual Ship Days	Average Daily Strength	Year	Annual Ship Days	Average Daily Strength
1957	600	1	1972	17,700	48
1958	1,000	3	1973	20,600	56
1959	4,100	11	1974	20,200	55
1960	5,600	15	1975	20,000	55
1961	2,300	6	1976	18,600	51
1962	800	2	1977	16,300	45
1963	600	1	1978	16,600	45
1964	1,800	5	1979	16,600	45
1965	3,700	10	1980	16,600	45
1966	5,400	15	1981	16,700	46
1967	8,800	24	1982	16,100	44
1968	11,700	32	1983	17,500	48
1969	15,400	42	1984	14,600	40
1970	17,400	48	1985	16,400	45
1971	18,700	51	1986	16,400	45

Sources: Robert G. Weinland, "Land Support for Naval Forces: Egypt and the Soviet Eskadra, 1962-1976," *Survival*, March-April 1978; Bruce Watson, *Red Navy at Sea* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1987), p. 183; U.S. Department of Defense, *Soviet Military Power* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1985, 1986, 1987); and *The Military Balance*, 1983-84.

in the aftermath of their expulsion from Valona: each sortie into the Mediterranean was heralded as an exploit of audacious seamanship. The reality of the Soviet Navy's position was somewhat less spectacular.[8]

This continued until the summer of 1964, when the Soviet Navy first began to experiment with the use of off-shore bases or fleet anchorages as a partial substitute for the use of shore-based replenishment and repair works. In the parlance of the Soviet fleet, such anchorages are known as a "floating rear", and have come to feature a repair ship, a

[8]Philipe Masson and J. Labayle Couhat, "The Soviet Presence in the Mediterranean: A Short History," *Naval War College Review*, p. 63.

destroyer or submarine tender, often a barracks ship, a supply barge,
and occasionally even an expedient dry dock. While the concept of the
off-shore base was still under development in 1964, auxiliary anchorages
were nevertheless able to provide the navy with sufficient access to
fuel, water, dry stores, spare parts, and minor maintenance services to
permit the Black Sea Fleet to once again establish a permanent regional
presence. The available data on Soviet naval activities bear this out.
Over the next three years, the Soviet Navy experimented with anchorages
in the areas of Hammamet off the Tunisian coast, the Hurd Bank east of
Malta, and the island of Kithira at the western end of Crete. In the
first year of these operations, between 1963 and the end of 1964, the
Soviet presence in the eastern Mediterranean rose from 600 to 1,800 ship
days, an increase of 200%. Within the next two years, still operating
primarily from sea-based anchorages, this figure had again grown by a
factor of three to an annual rate of 5,400 patrol days and an average
daily strength of 15 warships and auxiliaries.

The first crisis surge of the Soviet 5th Eskadra was carried out
during the Six-Day War. During the course of the crisis, Soviet forces
in the Mediterranean were expanded from their pre-crisis level of some
·12 warships and support vessels, to an estimated post-crisis strength of
27 combatants and auxiliaries, more than double their original number.[9]
The increase in major Soviet surface combatants was even more dramatic,
from 2 to 10 cruisers and destroyers in a period of under three weeks.
As in earlier exercises, and other later crisis operations, additional
forces were mobilized but withheld in reserve in the Black Sea. While
the Soviet crisis deployment during the Six-Day War was limited by the
standards of later operations, many of the actions taken by the Soviets
established a pattern of behavior that would be observed in subsequent
naval confrontations, in the Mediterranean and elsewhere.[10] One of the

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[9]Uncertainty over the size of the 5th Eskadra during the war was
the result of indefinite estimates of local Soviet submarine strength.

[10]Since the June war, the Soviets have begun to use "contingency
declarations" of transit through the straits to permit them to more
rapidly reinforce the Mediterranean Squadron should the need arise.
Contingency declarations, which are continually reissued in times of
regional tension, have helped the Soviets work around the stipulated
eight-day delay between the time a transit declaration is issued and the
time naval units are actually allowed to pass through the straits. They
have been used to "buy up the option" of timely passage. Whether a
deployment actually takes place will depend on local requirements.

first actions was to replace local AGIs shadowing U.S. and British CBGs
with individual destroyers or frigates, capable both of monitoring the
movements of these forces as well as keeping up with them in the event
they made a dash for the war zone.[11] During several high points in the
crisis, Soviet warships surrounded allied naval units, in a move aimed
at giving them the option of launching a preemptive strike in the event
the crisis deteriorated into an open superpower exchange at sea. It is
evident in retrospect that the risk of such a confrontation was rather
low. Soviet actions, however, gave pause for caution, and successfully
communicated their interest and stake in the final outcome of the war.[12]

EGYPT AND THE SOVIET NAVY

Moscow's support for the Arabs during the 1967 War resulted in the
first Soviet access to Egyptian and Syrian port facilities, a move which
once again led to an immediate increase in the level of the local Soviet
presence. Within two years, Soviet naval units were operating regularly
out of the Egyptian ports of Alexandria, Mersa Matruh, and Port Said,
and the Syrian port of Latakia. At the center of these activities was
the Soviet naval complex at Alexandria which, by late 1970, featured a
command center, extensive ship repair works, storage facilities, and a
permanent Soviet presence ashore. Many of these facilities were brought
under the direct control of the Soviet Navy and were restricted from
Egyptian personnel.[13] The importance of Egyptian and Syrian access is

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[11]This is precisely what happened to Soviet AGI trailing U.S. CBGs
during the Gulf of Sidra operation in April 1986. The second Gulf of
Sidra operation, which was launched in the immediate aftermath of the
Libyan sponsored terrorist attack in Berlin, gave the Soviet Navy no
opportunity to replace local AGI with fast surface vessels. On April
13, the night before the Libyan raid, U.S. carriers went on EMCON and
under cover of darkness escaped their Soviet escorts toward the Libyan
coast.

[12]Paul Jabber and Roman Kolkowicz, "The Arab-Israeli Wars of 1967
and 1973," in Stephen S. Kaplan (ed.), *Diplomacy of Power: Soviet Armed
Forces as a Political Instrument*, Washington D.C.: The Brookings
Institution, 1981, pp. 412-467.

[13]The initial Soviet-Egyptian basing agreement of 1968 which laid
out the terms of Soviet access was careful to preserve at least the
outward appearance of Egyptian sovereignty over those facilities turned
over to Moscow. Under the terms of this agreement, Soviet vessels were
required to request formal authority before entering Egyptian ports, all
facilities were to remain under Egyptian control, the Soviets could not
modify or expand any facility without prior Egyptian authority, and

reflected once again in the operational statistics of the Mediterranean
Squadron. The Soviet naval presence in the Mediterranean between 1966
and 1971 again expanded by over 300%, as a direct result of its renewed
access to shore-based support. By the end of 1971, the Soviet Navy had
logged an all time annual high of 18,700 ship days in the Mediterranean
and maintained an average daily strength of between 50-54 combatants and
support ships.[14]

Largely as a result of their support during the 1969-1971 "War of
Attrition" the Soviets had also managed to significantly expand their
ability to operate from Egyptian airfields. At the high point of these
operations, in late 1971, the Soviet military presence on Egyptian
territory had grown to between 15,000 and 20,000 ground personnel, most
of whom were assigned to the Soviet air defense establishment based in
and around the Nile Valley, and approximately 200 pilots, involved in
both air defense operations and independent maritime patrol operations
in support of the 5th Eskadra. The Soviets, during this period, were
reported to have established virtual control over as many as seven
Egyptian airfields, which serviced forces detached from Soviet Naval
Aviation, PVO, and Frontal Aviation. Soviet air strength in Egypt in
late 1971 and early 1972 was estimated at 150 fighters, a small number
of both Tu-16 recce and maritime strike aircraft, several Be-12 and
Il-38 maritime patrol planes, and a small number of An-12 electronic
surveillance aircraft. While most of these forces were involved in the
campaign to stop Israeli deep penetration raids across the canal, some
percentage were involved in regular operations over the Mediterranean.

Soviet military aircraft were denied regular overflight or access rights
to Egyptian territory. From the outset, however, this agreement placed
few real limits on the character of Soviet operations. By 1971, many of
the naval and air facilities used by 5th Eskadra had been effectively
turned into extra-territorial enclaves, used, managed, and policed by
and for the Soviet Navy. See Richard B. Remnek, "The Politics of Soviet
Access to Naval Support Facilities in the Mediterranean," in Bradford
Dismukes and James McConnell (ed.), *Soviet Naval Diplomacy*, Pergamon
(New York, 1979), p. 372.

[14]See the discussion by Robert G. Weinland, "Land Support for Naval
Forces: Egypt and the Soviet Eskadra, 1962-1976, *Survival*, March-April
1978, pp. 73-79; and Milan Vego, "Soviet Naval Presence in the
Mediterranean Since 1973," *Navy International*, July 1983, pp. 424-432.

These were supported by additional patrols conducted by aircraft under
Egyptian markings but known to be manned by Soviet aircrews.[15]

Major naval operations during this period were conducted in the
Jordan Crisis and the 1973 October War. Both episodes involved large
surge deployments from the Black Sea, a small increase in forces from
the Baltic and Northern Fleets, and an aggressive style of operations.
The most important of these operations occurred during the Arab-Israeli
War. During the course of the crisis, the Soviet naval presence in the
the Mediterranean expanded from a low force level of less than 55 ships
prior to the conflict, to a post crisis high of between 94-98 warships
and auxiliaries. These figures include an increase of almost 20 major
surface combatants and as many as 8-10 submarines. More significant
than even these numbers was the manner in which these forces were used.
The October War was the first unambiguous case in which Soviet forces
engaged in active anti-carrier simulations against U.S. forces involved
in crisis operations. Other actions, which in other circumstances may
have been easily misconstrued, included training guns on U.S. warships,
firing flares in the proximity of U.S. aircraft, shining searchlights
and directing fire-control radar at nearby ships, and carrying out a
range of pre-combat maneuvers against U.S. surface units.[16] Apart from
those actions directed against American forces, the navy carried out a
series of other operations more immediately related to the war. These
included the withdrawal of Soviet personnel and equipment from Syria and
Egypt, defense of the sea-borne resupply effort, controlling the Soviet
airlift, and ensuring that Soviet naval and amphibious forces were fully
prepared to intervene on behalf of the Egyptians in the possible event
they were called upon to do so. Soviet naval operations in the October
War were the largest ever conducted by the 5th Eskadra. Throughout the
crisis, Soviet forces were managed with skill and determination, clearly
demonstrating how far the Squadron had evolved since the early 1960s.

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[15]Alvin Z. Rubinstein, "Air Support in the Arab East," S. Kaplan,
pp. 468-518. See also Paul Berman, *Soviet Air Power: Trends and
Implications*, Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1977, pp.
62-55; and B. Dismukes, "Large Scale Intervention Ashore: Soviet Air
Defense Forces in Egypt," Dismukes and McConnell, pp. 221-239.

[16]The most detailed account of these proceedings is provided by
Stephen S. Roberts, "The October 1973 Arab-Israeli War," in Dismukes and
McConnell, pp. 192-210. See also Elmo R. Zumwalt Jr., *On Watch: A
Memoir*, New York: Quadrangle, New York Times Book Company, Inc., 1976.

The years between 1968 and 1973 represent the zenith of the Soviet naval presence in the Mediterranean. Such prosperity, however, was not to last. By 1972, Soviet operations in and around Egypt were already well beyond Cairo's day-to-day control. They had also become openly abusive of Egyptian national sensitivities. The tensions generated by the Soviet presence climaxed during the summer of 1972, when President Sadat and a visiting Libyan delegation headed by Muammar Qaddafi were denied entry to the Soviet naval facility at Mersa Mertuh by the local base commander. In July 1972, Sadat moved to begin to return Soviet facilities to Egyptian control and issued the first of several eviction notices to Soviet military and military support elements stationed on Egyptian soil. These were issued in stages between 1972 and 1976, when Soviet access privileges were finally revoked altogether. The first to go were Soviet basing rights ashore, the right to enter Egyptian waters at will, and access to most Egyptian airfields. This was followed in 1974 and 1975 by the loss of Mersa Mertuh, Sollum, Port Said, and still further restrictions on Soviet naval access. Soviet-Egyptian relations continued to deteriorate into early 1976, when they finally broke down altogether over Moscow's refusal to permit India to overhaul Egyptian aircraft, many of which were no longer flyable after the withdrawal of Soviet technicians. In response to this development, Sadat revoked the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed with the Soviets in 1971 and gave the Mediterranean Squadron one month to clear out of the last of its facilities at Alexandria. So ended 5th Squadron access to Egypt.

DEVELOPMENTS AND TRENDS

The gradual withdrawal from Egypt prompted the Soviets to find new facilities that would permit the 5th Eskadra to maintain a standing presence in the Mediterranean at or near the level established between 1972 and 1973. To this day, the Soviet Navy has only been partially successful in meeting this goal. In the aftermath of the first 1972 Egyptian decision to restrict Soviet access, the navy sought to move some of its operations to the Syrian facilities at Tartus and Latakia, which it had hitherto used only intermittently. Soviet access to Syrian ports became continuous after 1973, when the navy transferred a small

number of auxiliaries from Egypt to the harbor facility at Tartus and
established the first permanent naval presence in Syrian waters. As the
Egyptians tightened the noose, Soviet reliance on Syrian ports expanded
accordingly. By 1976, when the last Soviet naval forces were finally
withdrawn from Egypt, the Soviet Navy's locus of operations had already
been relocated to Syria. In the end, however, Syrian bases proved to be
a poor substitute for the loss of Egyptian facilities. Syrian ports, in
contrast to the comparatively spacious and well developed harbors of
Alexandria and Mersa Metruh, were small, congested, and poorly equipped.
The Syrians, perhaps aware of the liberties taken by the Soviets in
Egypt, were also clearly reluctant to allow the Soviet Navy to establish
a permanent presence ashore. While the Squadron was permitted to
service its needs with harbor-based auxiliaries, it was not allowed to
develop Soviet-controlled command, storage, or repair assets on Syrian
soil. Soviet access, as one observer has put it, "ended at the water's
edge."[17]

The years between 1973 and 1976 also saw an increase in Soviet Navy
visits to Algeria, Libya, and Yugoslavia. Soviet operations in Algeria
centered around the ports of Oran, Algiers, and Annaba. Despite many
reported requests over the years, the Algerians have resisted Soviet
efforts to establish a presence at the ex-French naval complex at Mers
el-Kebir. In 1975, the Soviets also signed an agreement with Libya that
permitted the 5th Eskadra to make use of the harbor facilities at Tobruk
and Bardia as well as the former American and British air force bases at
Wheelus and El Adem.[18] Soviet interest in and access to Libyan coastal
facilities gradually increased with the deterioration in Libyan-Egyptian
relations (1976-1977) and growing Libyan involvement in the rebellion in
northern Chad (1978-1979). These arrangements, and a number of less
formal agreements established with Morocco and Tunisia, gave the Soviet
Navy its first shore-based access to the western Mediterranean. To
sustain this presence, however, now even further afield from the 5th

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[17]Remnek, pp. 377-382.

[18]For a discussion of early Soviet military relations with Libya
see Yossef Bodansky, "Soviet Military Presence in Libya," *Armed Forces
Journal International*, November 1980, pp. 89-93. See also Pedro Ramet,
"Soviet-Libyan Relations Under Qaddafi," *Survey*, Spring 1985, p. 96.

Squadron's main operating bases, required the use of a modern ship
maintenance facility. This was achieved through an agreement with the
Yugoslavs, who in 1974 opened the Tivat shipworks on a commercial basis
to Soviet naval vessels. Access to the Tivat ship works, one of two
Yugoslav naval yards capable of carrying out major repairs on Soviet
warships, was an important boost to the 5th Eskadra after its loss of
Alexandria and the huge naval maintenance facility at Al-Gabbari. While
the Yugoslavs placed certain restrictions on Soviet usage, access to
Tivat permitted the Soviets to regularly maintain elements of the 5th
Eskadra in place, without having to continually make the transit home to
Black Sea ports.[19] Limited commercial arrangements were also made with
Greece, for auxiliary repair, and Malta, for fuel oil storage.

The navy also moved to expand its use of off-shore anchorages. A
fourth and fifth major anchorage was established east of Crete and off
the Chela Bank near the straits of Gibralter, and a number of secondary
sites were setup at Banc le Sec, off the Tunisian coast; the island of
Limnos, in the northern Aegean; Cape Passero, near Sicily; and outside
Egyptian territorial waters at the port of Sollum.[20] These developments
were taking place during the course of the pull out from Egypt, a fact
which permitted the Soviet Navy to gradually wean itself away from its
prior dependency on Egyptian bases without immediately affecting its
operating tempo. The Soviet presence in the Mediterranean actually rose
between 1972 and 1973, and dipped only slightly between 1973 and 1975.
The Soviets did not actually experience the full impact of the loss of
Egyptian facilities until 1977, when the 5th Eskadra's average daily
strength fell from a 1973 high of 56 ships, to an eight year low of 45
warships and auxiliaries.

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[19]Remnek, pp. 382-386; and Milan N. Vego, "The Yugoslavian Navy,"
The Naval Institute Proceedings, September 1978, pp. 127-133.
    [20] An earlier anchorage at Sollum was established within Egyptian
territorial waters. This was moved to just beyond the territorial limit
with the Soviet withdrawal from Egypt. For a good discussion of some of
the measures taken by the Mediterranean Squadron in the wake of Egypt's
closure of Soviet bases, see Robert E. Harkavy, *Great Power Competition
for Overseas Bases: The Geopolitics of Access Diplomacy*, Pergamon Press,
New York, 1982. See, in particular, the discussion on pages 175-204.

The loss of Egyptian bases had and has continued to have a notable impact on Soviet Mediterranean options, significantly circumscribing the flexibility and sustainable deployment strength of the 5th Eskadra. It also effectively eliminated the key support provided by land-based naval aviation. However, while this has arguably had a serious effect on the Squadron's future combat effectiveness, it has not obviously reduced its value as an instrument and symbol of Soviet interests and presence. As indicated earlier, expanded access to Syrian, Libyan, and Maghreb ports, access to Tivat, and the creation of additional off-shore anchorages, permitted the Soviets to maintain a large standing naval force in the Mediterranean even after their final withdrawal from Egypt. In 1978, Soviet regional operations stabilized at around 16,600 ship days per year. They have remained at or near this level of effort ever since. At the present time, the size of the 5th Eskadra generally stands at between 40 and 50 ships, including 1-2 cruisers, 3-8 destroyers and frigates, and between 6-8 submarines. These forces are supported by a continual stream of auxiliaries -- oilers, replenishment ships, water tankers, ammunition ships, repair vessels, and tenders, which shuttle between the Mediterranean and home bases along the Black Sea. At any ·time, there is generally a 2:1 ratio between auxiliaries and warships. This is a much higher ratio than the 6th Fleet and is a reflection of the 5th Eskadra's continuing problems of endurance and sustainability. For similar reasons, Squadron combatants spend as much as a third of their deployment either at anchor or in mid-deployment maintenance and repair. While such requirements certainly affect the Squadron's daily or even reinforced military preparedness, they have little impact on its day-to-day presence mission which under normal circumstances can often be prosecuted very well while tied up to the dock. As a *political* force the 5th Eskadra has remained an important Mediterranean player.

Given the present political constellation in the Middle East, any hope the Soviets have of once again building a meaningful and permanent *military* presence along the Mediterranean littoral rests with Syria and Libya. The continuing importance of this objective is manifest in the Soviet military assistance program, which Moscow has attempted to use as a lever to gain greater access ashore. This has been most evident in

Syria, which has been one of the major importers of Soviet weapons and
other forms of military assistance for thirty years, much of it provided
either free of charge, or under well subsidized credit terms. Soviet
assistance and advisers have rebuilt the Syrian armed forces on three
separate occasions, prior to the 1967 War, after the 1967 War, and in
the aftermath of the Syrian defeat in 1973. Large elements of Syria's
ground and air forces were also reconstructed and qualitatively improved
in the wake of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Between 1973
and today, Syria has been the largest importer of Soviet-made weapons in
the Middle East, accounting for an estimated 30% of total sales and
transfers.[21] Included in these transfers were a number of Third World
"firsts", notably the SA-5 long-range SAM, never before deployed outside
the Soviet Union; and the SS-21 tactical ballistic missile, found
previously only in the Soviet Union and East Germany. Over the years,
Soviet material assistance has also paved the way for what, until very
recently, was a growing Soviet advisory presence on the ground. At the
high point of this involvement, 1983-1984, between 6,000-8,000 Soviet
personnel were believed to be operating with the Syrian army and air
force.[22] This figure is rivaled only by the level of Soviet activity in
the Egyptian-Israeli "War of Attrition" (1969-1971). Although the
number of Soviet personnel operating in Syria was reduced in 1985 to
between 2,500 and 3,000 men, it is still the highest concentration of
Soviet forces anywhere in the Arab World.

Similar developments can be seen in the case of Libya. Over the
past ten years, Libya has grown to become the largest hard currency
importer and third largest recipient of Soviet arms in the Arab World.
The first major Soviet-Libyan arms deal was registered in 1974 and was
reputed to be worth $2.3 billion, almost $1 billion higher than the
total value of all military purchases made by the Tripoli regime since
1969.[23] Among the items included in the deal were several squadrons of

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[21]Pedro Ramet, "The Soviet Syrian Relationship," *Problems of
Communism*, September-October 1986, pp. 35-46.

[22]For an excellent discussion of these developments, see Cynthia A.
Roberts, "Soviet Arms-Transfer Policy and the Decision to Upgrade Syrian
Air Defenses," *Survival*, July-August 1983, pp. 154-164.

[23]Lisa Anderson, "Qaddafi and the Kremlin", *Problems of Communism*,
September-October 1985, p. 34.

Mig-23s, Tu-22 medium range bombers, short range Scud SSMs, the first
T-62 main battle tanks, and the first SA-2/-3/ and -6 SAMs. This was
followed by the arrival of the first set of almost 200 Soviet military
advisors and technicians to oversee and maintain the arms shipment and
help the Libyan Army absorb what it had purchased. The Libyans signed a
second major purchase order in 1975, larger than the first, believed to
be worth in the neighborhood of $3 billion. The 1975 purchase gave the
Libyan armed forces some 600-800 tanks, scores of additional aircraft,
several missile patrol boats, and its first consignment of submarines.
In the intervening years, Libyan purchases and Soviet-bloc involvement
in Libyan military affairs have gradually grown. By 1982, Libya was
estimated to have purchased, in cash or trade, well over $12 billion
worth of Soviet equipment, an extraordinary figure for a nation of two
million people that fields an army of between 55-60,000 men. At this
time, there are believed to be almost 2,000 Soviet military advisers
with the Libyan armed forces, supported by between 750-1,500 personnel
from Eastern Europe, Cuba, and North Korea. These advisors play a key
role in training, maintenance and logistics, and supporting virtually
every technical requirement of the Libyan armed forces.[24]

Soviet interest in reinforcing their presence in the Middle East
was responsible for pulling them onto the edge of conflict during the
1982 Lebanon war. As in the past, the catalyst for Soviet involvement
was generated by the military defeat of a local client, in this case
Syria's decisive defeat in the air campaign conducted between June and
September. In the course of the campaign, the Syrian air force lost an
estimated 85-90 aircraft as well as its entire air defense network in
the Beka'a valley, at the price of having shot down a single Israeli
(IAF) F-4. Moscow's response to the first strike against the Beka'a
valley was quick in coming, with the immediate provision of attrition
fillers to make up for Syrian aircraft and SAMs lost to the IAF. This
was followed in July by a major rearmament program designed to fully
rebuild Syrian air defenses. Apart from additional Mig-21s and -23s,

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[24]Roger F. Pajak, "Arms and Oil: The Soviet-Libyan Arms Supply
Relationship," *Middle East Review*, Winter 1980-81; Ronald Bruce St.
John, "The Soviet Penetration of Libya," *The World Today*, April 1982,
pp. 131-139; and Anderson, pp. 29-44.

the Soviets provided the Syrians with three new air defense systems, the
SA-8, SA-9, and the aforementioned SA-5. Some 2,000 Soviet air defense
troops accompanied the arrival of these systems. The Soviets backed-
up these moves with a build-up of naval forces off the Lebanon coast,
the first efforts to use active jamming and other ECM against Israeli
surveillance efforts, and the eventual provision of the first SS-21s.
From at least August on, the Soviets played an active role in building
up Syrian self confidence and restraining Israeli planning.[25] This role
increased dramatically with the completion of the new missile defense
system, which was initially run exclusively by Soviet personnel.[26]

The Soviets were also involved indirectly in supporting Libya in
1985-1986 against U.S. naval and air operations in the Gulf of Sidra.
The first clear demonstration of Soviet support came in the wake of the
1985 attack against the Rome and Vienna airports, which many believed
would elicit some kind of U.S. response. Anticipating a possible U.S.
strike against the Tripoli regime, Soviet naval forces took up position
in the vicinity of U.S. carriers operating off Libyan waters to receive
timely warning of any U.S. attack. It is widely acknowledged that data
on U.S. operations during this period was being relayed to Soviet shore
facilities and passed on to Libyan authorities as the situated merited.
Work during this period was also accelerated on Libya's first SA-5 site
located at Sirte. A second site was subsequently located at Benghazi.
As in Syria, these were set up and initially manned by Soviet advisers.
The Soviets also appear to have been cautiously involved in providing

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[25]Soviet personnel evidently did not manage to come through the
conflict unscathed. According to several reports, between 11 and 200
Soviet personnel with a combat evaluation team examining the wreckage of
the F-4 shot down over the Beka'a valley were killed in a follow-on
Israeli attack aimed at preventing the plane's ECM aids from falling
into the wrong hands. See, for example, "200 Soviets Died in Israeli
Raid, Magazine Says" *Philadelphia Inquirer,* December 7, 1983.

[26]The best open discussion of this period is found in Benjamin S.
Lambeth, *Moscow's Lessons from the 1982 Lebanon Air War,* R-3000-AF, The
RAND Corporation, September 1984. Also see Francis Fukuyama, *Moscow's
Post-Brezhnev Reassessment of the Third World,* R-3337-USDP, The RAND
Corporation, February 1986, for a good discussion of Soviet risk-
calculations in Lebanon, pp. 62-69; and Galia Golan, "The Soviet Union
and the Israeli Action in Lebanon," *International Affairs,* Winter
1982-1983, pp. 7-16.

early warning of U.S. operations against Libya in March and April 1986.
Prior to each U.S. attack, Soviet warships and intelligence collectors
established a picket line between the Libyan coast and U.S. forces to
monitor the approach and determine the vector of any attacking American
aircraft. Other units shadowed U.S. forces directly, gradually picking
up each U.S. carrier as it approached Libyan operating areas. While the
Soviets were clearly not going to assume any inordinate risks to back
Qaddafi, neither did they abandon him in his time of need. Moscow was
and remains quite willing to provide the Libyans with whatever support
they require to defend themselves. They have also shown that they are
willing to become involved in these efforts where their assistance can
be plausibly denied and carried out with a minimal degree of exposure.[27]

In the end, however, despite the size of their investment, Soviet
influence over Syrian and certainly Libyan affairs is quite limited.
Soviet military assistance, while generally a reliable instrument for
securing short term favors, has certainly not proven to be a guarantee
of policy control. Soviet ties with both Syria and Libya are based on
common, parallel, and limited sets of interests, rather than on some
larger institutional or ideological bond. Soviet influence has tended
to be issue specific, based more on the principles of the market place
than the principles of command. The consequences of this relationship
have not always been completely satisfactory from the Soviet point of
view. Nowhere is this more obvious than on the issue of basing rights.
While the Soviets have established a routine presence in both Syria and
Libya they have not managed to secure permanent and independent access
to facilities ashore, despite many attempts to do so in recent years.[28]
Syrian and Libyan port facilities, despite their obvious importance to

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[27]For a discussion of the March and April operations see David M.
North, "Merits of U.S.-Soviet Weapons Explored in Libyan Conflict,"
Aviation Week and Space Technology, March 31, 1986, pp. 20-21; W. Hays
Parks, "Crossing the Line," *The Proceedings*, November 1986, pp. 40-52;
and Christopher Dickey, "Envoys Speculate on Likelihood of Soviet
Losses," *The Washington Post*, March 27, 1986.

[28]In the immediate aftermath of the U.S. air attack against Libya
in April 1986, Major Abdel-Salam Jalloud, the second in command in the
Libyan government, indicated that the regime was "reviewing" its early
decision not to grant the Soviet Navy a permanent base on Libyan soil.
While Soviet-Libyan military contacts over the past year appear to have
grown, there is as yet no indication of a change in Libyan policy. It
is worth noting, however, that any Soviet basing arrangement made with

Soviet regional operations, still remain under clear national control.
This remains a stumbling block in Soviet relations with both Syria and
Libya and an important constraint on Soviet regional military options.

CONCLUSIONS

Until the 5th Squadron manages to once again establish a main base
of operations along the Mediterranean, its regional position will remain
vulnerable to any further limits that might be imposed on the quality or
extent of its shore-based access. Although the Squadron is still able
to maintain a large Mediterranean presence, it has lost the operational
flexibility once provided by Egyptian bases. This has almost certainly
had an important impact on its ability to operate effectively in time of
war, and has probably also negatively affected its ability to operate in
strength and for extended periods under conditions of crisis. Our view
of the Mediterranean Squadron today is shaped largely by its exploits of
an earlier period, most notably its conduct during the 1973 October War.
Soviet operations in 1973, however, were carried out with certain local
advantages that are not now enjoyed. While the Soviet Navy, writ large,
is unquestionably a more capable force today than it was fourteen years
ago, the same need not be said of the 5th Eskadra, which operates under
local basing constraints that it did not have to confront in 1973. It
is at least arguable that the Soviet Navy today could not again conduct
an operation similar to that carried out in 1973 without expanded access
to facilities ashore. Time will tell whether recent improvements in the
capability and endurance of individual Soviet combatants will compensate
for what has been a significant reduction in local shore-based support.

Libya would carry with it certain risks. Any permanent Soviet presence
ashore would increase the risk that Soviet forces would be drawn into
some future confrontation between Qaddafi and the Western powers. The
Soviets, under these circumstances, could be faced with the choice of
either directly assisting the Libyans or risking the loss of their newly
acquired basing structure. It is also reasonable to assume that Qaddafi
would attempt to actively use such a presence to deter Western military
sanctions and widen his parameters of action, increasing Soviet risks
still further. The uncertain character of any such arrangement could
well reduce the net value of Soviet naval basing rights on Libyan soil.

In the meantime, we can expect to see the Soviet Navy continue its efforts to establish a permanent presence on the Mediterranean littoral, to expand current options and hedge against the unexpected. The absence of a permanent naval facility ashore remains an important constraint on Soviet regional operations. It has worked to constrain the size of the Soviet Union's routine naval presence, placed high demands on its local support structure, and has notably restricted its operating flexibility. Solving these problems and ensuring that the Navy will have ready access to the Mediterranean in the future will require the Soviets to continue their search for shore-based support. This quest will remain unaffected by any reassessment of Soviet Third World policy that may now be under way in Moscow. The Soviets have enduring interests in the Mediterranean area. They have also worked steadily over the years to build the means to assume a major voice in local affairs. This has been achieved, in no small measure, through the work of the 5th Eskadra, which has served as an active symbol of Soviet regional interests. This role alone, quite apart from the wartime functions of the Squadron, has made maintaining a strong naval presence in the Mediterranean an important goal in itself.

THE SOVIET PRESENCE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

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