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SECRET 5710



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20350

IN REPLY REFER TO

OP-00: rwo
OP-00 Memo 502-73
10 December 1973

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Subj: Suez Canal and the Indian Ocean Military Balance

Ref: (a) My Memorandum Serial 00457-73 of 15 NOV 1973

1. (U) I recently provided you my views on the impact the Canal's reopening on U.S. interests (reference (a)) I subsequently noted some remarks in Secretary Kissinger's press conference of 21 November pertinent to the same subject.

2. (U) In response to a question concerning the advantage the Soviets would derive from reopening of the Canal, Dr. Kissinger observed:

Soviet influence in the Indian Ocean will not depend primarily on the number of ships it can deploy into the Indian Ocean. And I am confident that to the degree that power becomes the principal factor in the Indian Ocean, that we will be able to generate a fleet of sufficient size in that area so that we could counter-balance anything that the Soviet Union might put into the Indian Ocean, as the recent visit of the HANCOCK in that area has demonstrated.

3. (U) Press reports subsequent to Secretary Kissinger's remarks suggested that the U.S. had warned the Soviets that if they try to take advantage of easier access to the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf to build up their naval forces in those areas, the U.S. is prepared to match them.

4. (S) While I recognize that Dr. Kissinger's press conference remarks may have been intended primarily as a signal to the Soviets, their tenor nevertheless suggests to me the possibility that he may not fully appreciate the paucity of assets we have to respond in such situations, and the impact of such response on our ability to support commitments in other key areas.

a. As you know, the continuous deployment of a carrier

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task group to the Indian Ocean has placed a great strain on our support forces and taxed our carrier force to the limit. Reductions in programmed force levels will compound the difficulties in the deployment of significant forces into the Indian Ocean without a corresponding reduction of U.S. presence and capabilities in other areas of great interest to the United States.

b. In this regard, I am becoming increasingly concerned about the possibility that some communist states may perceive an opportunity to achieve important goals by confronting us with crises simultaneously in several areas. This need not require coordination among the several states, but could take the form of opportunistic exploitation by, e.g., North Korea and North Vietnam, of a situation in the Mediterranean or Persian Gulf which tied down significant portions of our mobile, multipurpose forces. I think it particularly important that we do everything possible not to let such perceptions develop.

5. (S) In view of Dr. Kissinger's comments, you may wish to highlight to him the growing capabilities the Soviets have for sustained operations in the Indian Ocean (and worldwide), and the relative difficulties the U.S. would face in counterbalancing Soviet military activity in the area while maintaining intact our commitments elsewhere. In essence, we are facing a situation in which Soviet capabilities are rising and ours are declining, while the geographic span of requirements for U.S. forces continues to increase.

6. (U) I would be happy to develop these thoughts further, if you think it would be useful.

Copy to;
CJCS

E. R. Zumwalt, Jr.
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