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September 5, 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR Bromley Smith

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Over the past year, the USG has gone through a series of studies of the Communist position in the Middle East. Last fall, the IRG/NEA reviewed Communist activities country by country. Since, we have the Holmes study, the Rockwell paper, several intelligence estimates and numerous critiques of all.

Now that the debate stimulated by these papers is moving to higher levels, it seems worthwhile to stop analyzing the Middle East for a moment and to try to isolate the issues which these studies pose. The attached is a rough cut in that direction. It is a purely personal effort, which I want to share with you as such.

A lot of us in the next days will be engaged in trying to shape top-level discussion of these issues in such a way as to capitalize on all the good work done over the past year and to enable our senior policy-makers to provide guidance for further meaningful thought. For whatever value it may have as part of that general effort, I pass this along.

Hal

Harold H. Saunders

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E.O. 12958, Sec. 3.5

NSC Memo, 1/30/95, State Dept. Guidelines

By jc, NARA, Date 12-16-02

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THE US AND USSR IN THE MIDDLE EAST

SUMMARY

The past year's debate on this subject has surfaced two broad sets of issues:

1. What is the nature of the Soviet threat? No one argues that the USSR hasn't markedly improved its position since 1955. But there are two schools of thought on the significance of its gains. One sees them as significant steps to ultimate control and as part of a grand design to "outflank" NATO and undermine the Atlantic Alliance. The other sees them more as gains to be expected as the era of Western imperialism ended--gains that are already slowing in the face of local nationalism. How we resolve this issue is one determinant of how active we must be in the Middle East.

2. What is the nature of US interests? No one argues that the Middle East is unimportant. But one school believes we must recognize that it is not vital to us--because recognizing that fact permits us a more realistic freedom of action and inaction. Another school argues that it is vital and therefore requires major US involvement. The fact that Congress does not appear ready to support such involvement, they say, must not obscure its desirability.

It's hard to say where this debate has come out. But judging from what we have actually done in the Middle East, one might judge that the USG, rightly or wrongly, leans toward the more detached of these two views. The question before the house is: Are we right?

Regardless of the answers suggested by the various papers before us, at this stage in our debate we need a series of judgments at a high political level.

Having done our best there to judge these issues, we turn to the future. The studies we have to date prescribe actions for the next year or two. But we need to build on them a picture of what the Mid-East of the 1970's will be, what our resources and tools will be and what we must do now to prepare. Many questions are still unanswered. Laying down the guidelines for this further work should be one important objective of the high-level discussions that are about to begin.

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By Q NARA, Date 1/17/03

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