

Question from the WEU Assembly to the Council on Soviet influence in the Middle East [undated]

Caption: The Assembly of Western European Union (WEU) puts a series of questions to the Council on Soviet penetration in the Middle East and the Mediterranean, and asks the Council whether these forces represent a threat to the Member States of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).

Source: Council of the Western European Union. The Middle East. Question III, 1 1p. Archives nationales de Luxembourg (ANLux). <http://www.anlux.lu>. Western European Union Archives. Secretariat-General/Council's Archives. 1954-1987. Organs of the Western European Union. Year: 1970, 01/06/1970-30/10/1970. File 202.32.11. Volume 1/2.

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The Middle East

Question III, 1

What is the Council's view of the nature and importance of Soviet influence in the Middle East?

How does it assess the strength of Soviet forces in the Mediterranean and the Middle East?

Are those forces and this influence liable to be a serious threat to the NATO countries?

Council reply

The Arab-Israeli dispute of which there is no hopeful sign of a settlement has helped the Soviet Union to penetrate several countries in the area. When the greater part of the U.A.R.'s military potential was destroyed by the war in June 1967, the Soviet Union started to rebuild Egypt's armed forces so that they could match Israel's military strength; at the same time, the Russians have thought it necessary to strengthen their presence in the United Arab Republic, particularly in the Suez Canal Zone, where SA 3 missile systems have been introduced.

The expansion of the Soviet presence in the United Arab Republic, which was accompanied by a similar but less extensive penetration of other Arab countries, such as Syria and Iraq, was followed by the reinforcement of the Soviet fleet in the Mediterranean, made possible by the granting of port facilities by a number of countries in the eastern Mediterranean. The Soviet Union has not so far succeeded in establishing other footholds along the North African Coast, particularly at Mers-el-Kebir and Algiers, because of the reserved attitude maintained by the Algerian and Libyan leaders and the pro-western attitude of other Maghreb countries.

Nevertheless, in so far as this expansion of Soviet influence in the Middle East has been made possible by the Arab-Israeli conflict, it is all the more necessary to arrive at a political settlement.

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