

Russia Made In Mideast

LONDON — Back in July there was a naval standoff in the Mediterranean Sea that went largely unnoticed because of the lightning hot war in Palestine. But the Russians deployed 47 warships into the Mediterranean where the U.S. 6th Fleet normally consists of 50 warships.

The Soviets had about 10 submarines and several guided missile cruisers, causing American Navy officials to recall some shuffling of units. Soviet operations in the Mediterranean during the first six months of 1967 had increased some 400 times during the presidency of Lyndon Johnson. And roughly since John Kennedy's death, Soviet ships have increased their operational days in the Mediterranean by 4,000 per cent.

Although 23 ships were exchanged, the Soviet fleet greatly improved its strategic position. It now has the run of Egyptian ports whereas the U.S. 6th Fleet is barred by diplomatic fractures from many ports it customarily visited along the Mediterranean's southern shores.

THE BRAZEN CANARD that accused our carriers of launching attacks in support of Israel seems to have become ingrained legend in some of the Arab states, and this has had almost the effect of a last battle.

By way of indicating what it would mean if the power situation in the Mediterranean were reversed, here is a well-considered excerpt that recently appeared in an Italian publication. By reexamining the name of the fleet, it is not difficult to see what the difference would be. The article says:

"If we live quietly in our homes, if we accept our governments with the democratic weapon of free elections, this is mostly due to the 6th Fleet in our seas. But, despite its importance, the fleet does not disturb anybody, does not impose a thing on anybody and acts only in exceptional circumstances."

THE MAN MOST duty-bound with the 6th Fleet's prestige and activities is its operational commander, Adm. John B. McCain Jr., London-based, Iowa-born, one of the most accomplished men in the service.

When McCain, a wiry, energetic one-line administrator, was Navy chief of information in Washington, he often lectured the press with warnings about Russia's oceanward push. He spoke at length about the need for doing on water what the NATO ground forces have done down the middle of Europe. He forecast the Soviet landing movement which materialized in July and which backs up the one large geopolitical gain by the Russians in the Johnson presidency.

"Since I'm forward bound, in a few days, to the Middle East, as a guest-honorary of Lebanon and Iran, I called on McCain since responsibilities as U.S. Commander in chief, Europe, cover Navy units from Greenland as far southward as the Indian Ocean. He is the No. 2 diplomat in London, second only to the ambassador, and like all diplomats these days, is cautious with newsmen."

FROM THE NAVY VIEWPOINT, McCain will consider the plusus quo back in balance when the 6th Fleet ships can climb on a slighter fewer Russian vessels in what was once Allied waters and can resume normal port calls in the best of friendly relations.

But it may be longer than we like before we know the lasting consequences of the summer war in the Middle East.

The British, who are bystanders but who previously took their jumps in Egypt, do not regard the collapse of the Arab forces as a Western victory. Far from that, British officers tell McCain that Russia came out all too well in the loss of \$2 billion of military equipment.

That is not a large price to pay for the continuously increased hostilities of the United Arab Republic in the Communist bloc. For that price, the Soviets made it more than ever difficult for the United States to maintain the posture of a peacekeeper and a friend to all contestants, such as we prefer that reputation.

THE WORD "GEOLOGICAL," out of use for some years, is inevitably employable. The territorial gains made by Israel and not relinquished are no gains for us. And the losses by the Arab forces in land, then and yesterday, have done us much harm and no good whatever.

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