

International Affairs Reports from Quaker Workers

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THE U.S.S.R. AND PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

(Landrum Bolling was one of three members of a Quaker team which visited Moscow in April. The purpose of the visit was to learn from responsible Soviet officials and experts how the Soviets now view the Middle East and how they assess prospects for peace in the area. The team was gratified with the spirit in which they were received, the attention given to their various requests, the level of contacts arranged, and the nature of the discussions, which in general examined substantive issues in realistic, objective and non-propagandistic terms.)

At the outset, and throughout our talks, we made clear that central to the purpose of our mission was the desire to ascertain, as nearly as we could to our own satisfaction, the nature of Soviet interests in the Middle East, the nature of a peace settlement the Soviets would support, the range of Soviet calculations about the prospects for peace. We recognized among ourselves the difficulties of determining precisely Soviet policies and Soviet intentions, and the hazards of being manipulated for Soviet propaganda purposes. Nonetheless, we came to believe that the judgment that the Soviet Union is genuinely interested in a peaceful political settlement in the Middle East is a sound, realistic judgment. We base our support of that judgment on the following viewpoints which emerged from the talks.

1. The Soviets fully realize the dangers inherent in the Middle East conflict--and view that conflict as presenting potentially greater dangers of Soviet-American conflict than the war in Southeast Asia. They do not want such an ultimate confrontation in the Middle East and do not believe it necessary. They believe they have legitimate interests in the Middle East and in the Mediterranean as justified by the following arguments:
 - (a) The Soviet Union is geographically close to the Middle East and is thus vitally interested in what happens in territories that are close to its borders.
 - (b) The Soviet Union is a world maritime power and has just as much, if not more, right to have its fleet in the Mediterranean as the United

*Landrum Bolling was the editor of Search for Peace in the Middle East, a study prepared for the AFSC which is available as a Fawcett paperback.

States has to keep a fleet there.

At the same time, there was recognition that the United States has strong interests and a position in the Mediterranean and in the Middle Eastern countries. A comment was made to this effect:

"We are not going to push the Americans from the Middle East. It would not be so easy. And it is not necessary. We have a position in the Middle East and the Mediterranean. So do the Americans. We have to co-exist and compete in the area."

2. They repeatedly insisted that they accept the State of Israel and support its continued existence, that they were the first nation to extend recognition to Israel and have not changed their views on the right of Israel to exist, and that they can foresee the time when there can again be good relations between the USSR and Israel. They have told the Arabs they must accept the existence of Israel.
3. The Soviets believe that UN Resolution 242, fully implemented, offers the only road to peace in the Middle East. They voted for the resolution, they support it in all its parts, they approve of the Jarring mission and the American peace initiative.
4. They are annoyed a bit that Rogers and the Americans get all the credit for this public pressure for peace, and feel that Soviet initiatives to the same end in the Big Four talks have been down-graded and ignored.
5. They believe that Israeli stubbornness is the real barrier to peace and that if the Americans would only put sufficient pressure upon Israel, a political settlement could be reached. Some expressed skepticism about how serious American desires really are for a peaceful settlement in the Middle East.
6. They approve efforts to open the Suez Canal as a first step toward a comprehensive peace settlement within the context of implementing completely UN Resolution 242--not as a separate deal which they accuse the Israelis of trying to arrange to enable them to establish new permanent borders with permanent control of large areas of Arab land.
7. They support completely, firmly, and permanently the Arab demands that Israel withdraw to the lines of June 4, 1967. Israeli insistence on retaining Arab lands will only guarantee Arab hostility and hatred and determination to win back their lands.
8. They (or some of them) recognize Israel has genuine fears for security and bitter memories of the Hitler holocaust and of the early years of the Israeli state. They say the world has to be aware of Arab fears and bitterness and recognize the Arab concern for security. They are convinced Israel must seek security in other ways than by annexing territory.
9. The Soviets are prepared to participate in any UN approved program for security guarantees. One commentator said that the Soviet Union is prepared to participate in providing whatever guarantees may be wanted and agreed upon in the settlement. The USSR, he reported, is ready to (a) have Soviet troops participate in an international peace-keeping force in

the area, or (b) support the establishment of a UN force representing the smaller powers; (c) make commitments guaranteeing the peace agreement jointly with the other members of the Big Four; or (d) guarantee support of efforts to repel aggression by either party crossing the accepted borders. He and others insisted the Soviets are serious in offering to support whatever arrangements of guarantees will be generally acceptable. Various ones of them insisted that the Arabs need guarantees quite as much as do the Israelis--and probably more.

10. On the subject of Soviet interests in the area, they said those interests relate to: (a) Soviet national security; (b) some trade interest, but not very great so far--as to oil, they said the Soviet Union is exporting oil and is discovering rich new fields it will develop and doesn't want to get too deeply involved in Middle East oil; (c) some limited tourist interest; (d) a desire to play a proper role as a member of the Big Four in the maintenance of peace; (e) concern over the ultimate major dangers of a continuing M.E. conflict leading to a general threat of Big Power confrontation; (f) a desire, in keeping with long established Soviet policy, to aid developing and once-subject peoples "achieve their national, social and political ambitions" on an independent, and hopefully "progressive" (Socialist) basis.
11. As to relations with Americans and the West, we were given the more or less classical Soviet interpretation: the capitalist world is rotten and dying, a new socialist order is struggling to be born, and the Soviet Union, in the vanguard of history, will assist this historical process. There is tension and conflict all along the borders where the two worlds meet. However, that conflict does not have to result in war. The Soviet Union is committed to peaceful co-existence, which means peaceful competition--but there is no doubt which side will ultimately win.
12. They claim their military presence in the Middle East is not aggressive or provocative. A spokesman said: "If Soviet troops are in the area, this has certain advantages for Israel. They should understand that we are a stabilizing factor in the Middle East." Their military role in Egypt they justify as a response to Egyptian appeals for the means to repel Israeli attacks, not as a means of encouraging Egyptian attacks on Israel.
13. They, in various ways, emphasized the Soviet desire for stability in the region. They indicated opposition to unpredictable Arab leftist-adventurist revolutionaries. There was a suggestion of concern over possible growth of Chinese Communist influence if the conflict goes on. They also expressed the fear that if Egypt is "crowded into a corner" it will not be possible to predict what elements would take control in a new government.
14. The Soviets seem to have not a clue about what to do with the Palestinian guerrillas and seem to be undisposed to build any of their hopes on the Palestinian organizations.
15. Their oft-repeated declaration was to the effect that Israel can now have the kind of deal which for twenty years she said she wanted--peace and firm and final boundaries--if she will only agree to full implementation of UN Resolution 242.