

the area. The Chief of Staff is assisted also by civilians, most of whom are members of the United Nations Secretariat.⁹

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DEA/50134-40

*Note du chef de la Direction européenne
pour le sous-secrétaire d'État par intérim aux Affaires extérieures*

*Memorandum from Head, European Division,
to Acting Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs*

CONFIDENTIAL

[Ottawa], May 4, 1956

SOVIET MOTIVES IN THE MIDDLE EAST

While reading some of the speculations about Soviet motives in making the Molotov Declaration¹⁰ on the Middle East and in suggesting to the British that they would be prepared to seek a solution of Middle East problems, a point occurred to me which does not seem to have been touched on in any of the commentaries I have seen. I was wondering if one of the considerations in the Russians' minds may not have been the fear that the situation could get out of hand in the Middle East and that the Russians would not be able to prevent it from leading to a general war which everyone seems to think the Russians now wish to avoid.

2. You will recall that the Swedish Ambassador reported a conversation with Khrushchev at the New Year's Reception in Moscow (this reached us through French sources). The Ambassador mentioned to Khrushchev that the Soviet entry into the Middle East seemed to have increased the risks of war and that this seemed inconsistent with the previous statements of Khrushchev that war must be avoided.

3. Khrushchev was quoted as replying "Bah, ne vous faites pas de souci. Si les Arabes s'enflamment trop, les Anglais sont là pour les calmer".

4. Since that time, however, the position of the British in the Middle East has deteriorated rapidly. The Russians must be as aware of it as we are. It could well be possible that Khrushchev has changed his opinion in these four months and now believes that the British are not in a position to prevent the Arabs from making war and that, therefore, the situation is more inflammable than seemed possible last fall. It, therefore, follows that the Russians would wish to hint to the Arabs that they could not rely entirely on Soviet help in the event of an attack on Israel. Prior to the present Soviet statement there was a real danger, which the Russians certainly must have recognized, that the Arab states, armed with Soviet guns and assuming automatic Soviet support, would precipitate a war which the Russians have come to realize could not be prevented from involving the big powers.

5. Apart from this big step forward, the Russians have put themselves in the position of disillusioning the Arabs, if only partially. This also is an advantage for the West, and one which I hope we will push. I think the Russians would only have endangered the advantage they had with the Arabs for big stakes — control of the inflammable situation in the Middle East, and not primarily, as the United Kingdom has suggested, because they want

⁹ Le 3 mai 1956, le Cabinet a consenti à l'envoi des cinq observateurs additionnels demandés par le Secrétaire général.

On May 3, 1956, Cabinet agreed to send the five additional observers requested by the Secretary-General.

¹⁰ Voir/See *Documents on International Affairs, 1956*, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs - Oxford University Press, 1959, pp. 59-61.