CHAPTER IV

SOVIET DIPLOMACY DURING THE 1967 WAR

In the first week of June 1967, the Soviet leaders were confident that the immediate crisis in West Asia was over. During last days of May, the Soviet Union in an exchange of messages with Washington, Cairo and Tel Aviv had urged them to maintain peace in the area. The Soviets along with Americans had urged Nasser not to fire the first shot.  

Most of the important Soviet leaders were away from Moscow on the day preceding the outbreak of war. The news of the war took the Soviet Union by surprise. The Soviet Union could not remain indifferent to the fact that a hotbed of war had arisen in the immediate vicinity of its frontiers and that aggression had been committed against friendly Arab states. An Arab victory with

1 Soviet Union was satisfied with the status quo after the withdrawal of UNEF and blockade of Tiran to Israeli shipping. With these acts Nasser had emerged as the unrivalled leader of the Arab world and Soviet position as the ally of the Arabs was enhanced at the cost of the United States.

2 On 31 May, Party Secretary General Brezhnev and Premier Kosygin as well as Defence Minister Grechko departed on ceremonial visit to the Soviet fleet in Murmansk and Archangol that was to keep them out of the capital until the very eve of the war. The number three men, Podgorny, President of the USSR, had departed earlier on a state visit to Afghanistan, from which he returned in a leisurely fashion on 3 June, after lingering en route for two days in Soviet Central Asia.

3 International Affairs (Moscow), July 1967, p. 4.
Soviet support would have enhanced Soviet prestige in the third world, while Israeli reverses would have invited American intervention on her side and thus increased the chances of Soviet-American confrontation. Because of Arab numerical and armed strength, the Soviet Union was confident that Israelis would not be able to crush them. In case of Arab setback there was bound to be pressure for Soviet intervention on their behalf. The Soviet Union had given political as well as arms aid to Egypt and Syria with the intention of strengthening its influence in the Arab world. Arab reverses were bound to have an adverse effect on Soviet image in the third world.

The Soviet Union had therefore a vested interest in the prevention of an armed conflict in West Asia, which while of no immediate concern to it might involve it directly or indirectly. Direct Soviet military interference would have meant confrontation with the other super power over a non-vital issue. In the Soviet Union no one wanted to risk war with America on local issues. But at the same time, Russian refusal to help the Arabs would have meant a loss of face, which Russia's enemies would exploit in their propaganda. Therefore the immediate task before the Soviet Union was to bring an end to fighting and restore normalcy in West Asia.

The Soviet diplomacy thus was to avoid confrontation with the United States, save the Arabs from the crushing defeat

and emerge as the only reliable ally of the Arabs. The Soviet Union could achieve these aims by working in collaboration with the US and get the call for an immediate ceasefire passed in the UN. At the same time it could emerge as the only spokesman of the Arabs by extending unconditional support in the Security Council and demanding condemnation and unconditional withdrawal of Israeli forces from the occupied Arab territories.

**Soviet Union and the Arabs**

The Arabs were convinced that the war against Israel would be a walk-over if no outside power interfered on Israeli behalf. The Arabs were confident of winning against Israel without Soviet intervention on their side. What they wanted was a guarantee from the Soviet Union against intervention by the United States or any other Western power. The Egyptian Government expected that the Soviet Union would back the Arabs if Israel received support from West in the war. The Syrian Prime Minister, after a visit to the Soviet capital, gained the impression that a more aggressive line would meet the approval of some influential circles in Kremlin. "There had been irresponsibility, lack of judgement and foresight; perhaps at one stage or another that a group in the Kremlin had wanted to...

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6 Al Ahram (Cairo) published that Moscow had promised that it will "take a military attitude towards the dispute in keeping with the attitude of the United States or any other major Western power". See *Guardian* (Manchester), 7 June 1967.
intensify the conflict. The Egyptians did not take into account the overall inferiority of the Soviet position in the global affairs, *via-* *via* the United States. The Soviet Union had supplied large quantities of arms to Arabs and by this very act, it had committed itself to prevent intervention by any Western power on Israeli side. But it had not given any definite undertaking to Arabs about Soviet military intervention on their behalf. Soviet Union had not unilaterally committed itself to intervention on Arabs behalf against Israel and the Arabs had also never asked them to do.

The Soviet public response to Israeli attack, in contrast to its response during Suez crisis was immediate. The Soviet Government statement of 5 June 1967 said:

> The Soviet Union...declares its resolute support for the governments and peoples of the United Arab Republic, Syria, Iraq, Algeria, Jordan and other Arab states and expresses confidence in the success of their just struggle for their independence and sovereign rights. 9

But soon it was evident that the Arabs had suffered major setbacks in the first hours of war and Egypt’s airforce was virtually destroyed. The Soviet Union could not take the risk of helping Arabs militarily as it would have meant

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7 Walter Laqueur, n. 4, p. 183, mentions a report by Dr. Zuayen, the Syrian Prime Minister to the Ba’ath party about his Soviet mission.

8 Ibid., p. 161.

9 Summary of World Broadcasts, Part I/5U/2454/44/1, 7 June 1967; Soviet support to the Arabs was repeated by Moscow radio on 8 June 1967.
direct Soviet involvement in the war. The Soviet Union realized that the decisive Israeli victory had made the Arab military position virtually hopeless and that a continuation of the conflict would merely mean greater losses of territory, manpower and equipment for the Arabs. To save Arabs from further reverses, the Soviet Union suddenly agreed to President Tabor's draft resolution (S/7935), which simply called for a ceasefire and cessation of all military activity without requiring Israeli withdrawal. 10

The Soviet Union reaffirmed its support to the people and government of the Arab states threatened by Israeli aggression and promised full support to them except direct military intervention. The Arabs who were losing the battle on all the fronts now expected more than verbal support. In the past the Arabs had been satisfied with mere Soviet promises because they were convinced of their superiority over Israel in terms of men and arms. But now that the fortunes of war turned against them, they expected direct Soviet help to save them. They never "made it clear what it was that they expected, but they were bitterly disappointed not to get it." 11


11 Laqueur, n. 4, p. 236. Michael Bar-Zohar in Embassies in Crisis (Englewood Cliffs, 1970), pp. 217-18 writes that on 5 June, the Egyptian Ambassador to the Soviet Union, Mohamed Ghaleb who called on Kosygin with a request for assistance was assured of arms supplies to replace the losses but was refused military intervention.
Direct Soviet intervention to save Arabs meant confrontation with the United States which it could not risk. Therefore it had the only alternative of working with the United States inside and outside the UN to save Arabs from further losses. It decided not to come to the rescue of her Arab friends but teamed up with the United States to end the fighting and agreed to an unconditional ceasefire resolution on 9 June.\(^\text{12}\) The acceptance of this ceasefire resolution meant a disastrous defeat for the Arabs and also a big blow to Soviet prestige in West Asia. The resolution however did not satisfy the Arabs because it failed to call simultaneously for an evaluation of all occupied territories by Israel. The ceasefire move on the part of the Soviet Union was looked upon as a complete reversal of her position of support for her Arab friends. It showed that she was not willing to risk her security for the sake of her Arab friends by taking the risk of confrontation with the other Super Power.\(^\text{13}\)

**Arab Reaction**

Soviet acceptance of the ceasefire order came initially as a big shock to the Arabs and at first Nasser refused to accept it. But later on, as the impact of the

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\(^{12}\) Politically, however, Fedorenko blamed the US for the war. He said, "the Israeli aggression was not accidental thing, it was a carefully planted aggression to secure political changes in the Middle East in the interest of...American Imperialism" and "Israel acted as an instrument of...the U.S.". *New Times (Moscow)*, 23 June '67.

\(^{13}\) This brought forth scathing comment from Communist China which accused the Soviet Union of "collusion" with the US and British "imperialism" to betray the Arab people. *New York Times, Weekly Review*, 2 July 1967, p. 1.
military reverses had left him no alternative, he gave consent to the Security Council resolution. Soviet failure to come to the assistance of the Arabs following the outbreak of the hostilities led to an intense anti-Soviet feeling in Cairo. It became all the more pronounced when it became known that China, in the middle of 1966, had offered fullest military collaboration with the UAR including the sharing of nuclear secrets, if Nasser agreed to denounce Moscow in the ideological war, which he refused.\(^4\) The Arabs felt that the Soviet Union had let them down, firstly, by agreeing to a ceasefire which was not favourable to Arabs and, secondly, by not extending anything more than verbal support of the Arab cause.\(^5\)

On 11 June, angry demonstrators in Cairo protested against the Soviet Union and shouted "Down with the Soviet Union." The more radical Arabs had expected the Soviet Union to come to their aid by holding out a direct threat to Israel and its supporters in case of reverses in the war.\(^6\) Libyan paper

\(^4\) *Statesman* (Calcutta), 11 June 1967.

\(^5\) *Al Akhbar* (Cairo), 12 June 1967 accused the Soviet Union of failing to follow up its words of support for the Arab cause with action. The paper reported that National Assembly members expressed disappointment at friends because of their limited friendship. Quoted in *Statesman*, 14 June 1967.

\(^6\) Algerian President Boumediene on 9 June openly criticized the Soviet Union for being unwilling to take greater risks in support of the Arab cause. Later during his visit to Moscow in June 1967, he was snubbed by the Soviet leaders for his anti-Soviet view. Anti-Russian demonstrations took place in Algiers to protest against Russian "betrayal" of the Arab cause.
Ar-R'aid criticized the Soviet attitude as negative and charged that it had failed to carry out its promises and threats in practice. It further added that Arabs could not place their confidence in "any expression of Soviet support." 17

The official organs of Egypt and Syria did not react sharply against the Soviet attitude during the war. They realized that with the hostile stand of the US and West they could rely only on the Soviet Union for the recovery of their territory from Israel. They hoped to improve their military position only with the Soviet help and Soviet criticism would have meant annoying the only great power which had been the only open supporter of the Arabs during the war. They did not want to alienate the only great power which had consistently supported their case in the Security Council. Egyptian semi-official paper Al'Abram on 13 June 1967 in its editorial entitled "The Arabs and the Soviet Union" criticized the attempts by the imperialist quarters to promote a campaign against the Soviet Union. It warned that this campaign aimed to alienate the Arabs from their real enemy i.e., Anglo-American imperialism.

The Soviet Union has supported and continues to support the Arab nations legitimate demands. It has extended colossal economic and military aid to the Arabs. ... The imperialist forces certainly believe that the bitterness which now prevails in the Arab homeland can be exploited to achieve their standing aim of isolating the Arabs. 18

17 SMB, Part IV, ME/2490/A/5, 14 June 1967.

18 Ibid., ME/2491/A/1; 15 June 1967; for details of US aims and responsibility see ME/2494/A/2-6, 19 June 1967; ME/2500/A/1-3, 26 June 1967.
Damascus Radio praised the Soviet support for the Arabs during the crisis against the imperialist and Zionist plot. It regarded criticism of the Soviet Union as a part of imperialist plan to mislead the people and warned them to beware of these efforts. 19 Syrian Government's controlled newspaper Al Thawra gave a warning against "fifth column" attempts to "exploit the sentiments of the Arab people and stir them up against the Soviet Union for failing to "restrain American and British intervention" in the war with Israel. 20

**Soviet Reaction**

Anti-Soviet views came under criticism in Soviet Press. Pravda remarked that reactionaries aided and abetted by the Chinese were making dirty "accusations". 21 Pravda correspondent in despatch from Cairo wrote "All that is reactionary in Egypt is today gladly seizing on their slanderous fabrications against the Soviet Union and other socialist countries". 22

In an attempt to win Arabs and pressurize Israel to agree to the Security Council ceasefire resolutions, the Soviet Union called a meeting of the Socialist countries of

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21 *Pravda* (Moscow), 13 and 14 June 1967.
Europe in Moscow on 9 June which promised aid to the Arabs and warned Israel that the communist countries would rearms Arabs. The meeting threatened to demand application of sanctions if Israel failed to abide by the UN decisions. The statement said:

Unless the Government of Israel halts its attack and withdraws its troops behind the armistice line, the Socialist States...will do everything necessary to help the peoples of the Arab countries give a firm rebuff to the aggressor, to protect their lawful rights, to eliminate the hotbed of war in the Middle East and to restore peace in the area. 23

To reassure Arabs, in view of the mounting dissatisfaction with the Soviet Union in the Arab world, the Soviet Union broke diplomatic relations with Israel on 10 June. When Israel agreed to abide by ceasefire resolution on 9 June, the Soviet Union took the credit for the fact that Israel was compelled to stop because of "energetic measures taken by her alongwith governments of other Socialist countries". 24

US-British Collusion Charge

Egyptian airforce was destroyed by Israeli air raids on the morning of 5 June and Egyptian land forces were left without any air protection. Nasser found defeat staring him in his face and he could not believe that Israel alone could

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24 International Affairs, August 1967, pp. 24-25.
have struck such a deadly blow. On the second day of the war, he along with King Hussein of Jordan came out with the charge of US-British collusion with Israel. By involving the US and Britain, Nasser desperately attempted to force the Soviet Union to come to his aid. These charges were immediately denied by the United States and Britain. Israel being concerned about the chances of Soviet interference on behalf of Arabs called the British-US air-cover story as 'concocted' and a 'big lie'. Further, in reply to Arab propaganda, Israeli Foreign Ministry in a statement on 6 June 1967, described it as an attempt by Cairo rulers to show it to Arabs that defeat was not being inflicted by Israeli forces alone. It pointed out the two-fold purpose of these allegations. Firstly, it aimed at convincing the Soviet Union that Israel had been successful because of direct help from the United States and Britain. It invited Soviet interference on Arab side to save them from total collapse. Secondly, these charges were meant for internal consumption to ward off the wrath of masses who were kept in darkness about Israeli power. The Egyptian rulers refused to admit that Arab plans had proved to be based on miscalculation and ignorance of facts.

25 Washington Post, 7 June 1967, p. __
26 SWB, Part IV, MB/2485/A/12, 8 June 1967.
27 Ibid., MB/2485/A/6, 8 June 1967.
Soviet Rebuff to Nasser

The charge about British and American air-intervention was not believed by the Soviet Union. They knew the facts from their own observations. Their ships were shadowing the US and British aircraft carriers in the area. The Soviet Union from its observation of the US Sixth Fleet was convinced that the US had not participated in the air raids from Israel. Moscow saw this as a desperate Egyptian effort to embroil her in the conflict. The Soviet leaders were not happy with the Arab efforts to involve the Soviet Union in confrontation against the US and were angry at Nasser's propaganda maligning the Soviet Union. This attempt to drag them into war displeased the Russians.

The Egyptian Ambassador in Moscow was coldly received by the Soviet Government. Arab Ambassadors in Moscow were told that the story of US-British participation was complete fabrication, to which Russians did not want to be a party. The heads of Arab diplomatic missions in Moscow held a press conference where the allegations about US-British participation against Arabs were repeated and a tape-recording of the Cairo radio announcement was played to the present Soviet journalists and typescript of Radio Cairo statement were distributed. Significantly the Soviet press reported the press conference but omitted all references to Arab allegations.28 Soviet

28 Izvestia (Moscow), on 7 June 1967 reported the Arab charge that British planes were aiding Israel in the conflict but it did not mention Arab charge that American planes were also helping Israel.
Union told the Arabs that they knew better and that they did not relish the implication that Soviet planes were bound to bomb Israel in return for British and US planes alleged bombardment against Egypt and Jordan. Soviet officials told Arab leaders in no uncertain terms that, in effect, they did not approve of alibis which risked setting off World War III. 29 But on 27 July 1967 Pravda in a long article on the US role in the war wrote that Arab language specialists aboard the Liberty which was cruising 12 miles off the Sinai, were listening in on conversations between Egyptian Commanders moving in the Sinai when the war broke out on 5 June. These conversations were relayed to Israel. Pravda suggested that the attack on Liberty was staged jointly by Tel Aviv and Washington “to mask collaboration between Israel and the USA”. The Soviet warning of intervention was conveyed on the hot line by Kosygin to President Johnson on 10 June in order to save Damascus as Israeli forces were advancing towards Syrian capital. The Soviets waited until the crisis crossed the peak of danger and just then made their threats. The idea was to create without undue risk the impression that de-escalation of the crisis was the result of their move and they were prepared to take strong action if not respected. Thus they could claim to have brought about the termination of fighting and saved the Arabs from worse disaster than they suffered, without increasing any risk to themselves.

The Soviet attitude during war made it evident that it would not risk war with the other super power for the sake of the Arabs. Arabs could rely on Soviet political support and arms but they could not expect Soviet interference to save them from collapse. The Soviet Union rebuffed Nasser for his attempts to entrap Soviet Union in the war and did not appreciate Nasser and Hussein spreading the US-British collusion story. Egyptian and Syrian rulers did not react sharply to Soviet policy during the war, as for the recovery of their shattered army, they were totally dependent upon Soviet arms.

**Soviet Union and Israel**

Even though the Soviet Union wanted to keep the Arab-Israeli relations in a state of sustained aggravation, it never supported the Arab demand regarding destruction of Israel. Since the creation of Israel in 1948 till the present day, the Soviet Union had never supported the Arab demand for the liquidation of Israel. Even when the Soviet-Egyptian relations were at their peak, Khrushchev did not condemn Israel but only its links with the West.\(^{30}\) In Moscow, the news of the war broke at 10:47 a.m. Moscow time. Israeli invasion took Soviet Union by surprise as it was confident that after its messages to Tel Aviv for not being the first to open fire, Israel

\(^{30}\) *New Times*, 10 June 1967.
would not take the initiative of starting the war. Soviet Union's statement of 5 June 1967 blamed "Tel Aviv's adventurism, inspired and egged on by outside forces" for shattering all hopes of negotiated settlement. It labelled the Israeli offensive as an "aggression" that could "undermine...the foundations for the development and very existence of the state of Israel...". The Soviet statement pointed out that the Soviet Union had called upon Israel to avoid war and had warned her of the consequences of "aggression". The Soviet Union expressed "resolute support" for the Arabs and demanded an immediate and unconditional Israeli ceasefire and a withdrawal of Israeli troops beyond the 1949 truce line. It expressed the hope that the Governments of other states, "including the great powers", would seek to end the war. In the end, the statement declared: "The Soviet Government reserves the right to take all steps which may be required by the situation". Soviet Government demanded that

Israeli government should — as the first urgent step to end the military conflict — stop immediately and unconditionally its military operations against the United Arab Republic, Syria, Jordan and other Arab countries and pull back its troops behind the truce line. 31

Pravda wrote, "The treacherous attack by Israel's armed forces on the Arab countries constitutes absolutely unjustified aggression of a predatory, bandit-like nature."32

31 Ibid., 14 June 1967; SUB, Part I, SU/2494/M4/1, 7 June 1967.

All day, after the momentous announcement, the Soviet Radio and news agencies accused Israel of aggression against the UAR. On the first day of the war, the Soviet Union condemned the Israeli aggression and charged "that the insensate and adventurist policy pursued by the Israeli leaders can do more than anything else to undermine the very foundations of Israel's development, indeed the very existence of the state of Israel". Soviet Government's statement on war denounced Israel's "war of aggression", pledged "resolute support" for the Arabs and demanded that Israel "stop immediately and unconditionally its military action...and pull back its troops beyond the truce line".

Tass News Agency on 6 June blamed the US of incitement of Israel for the war. Israel was encouraged due to "threatening and provocative manoeuvres of the Sixth Fleet off western shores for this". It claimed that behind their stand, the US and other Western countries "hide colonialist interests, primarily oil interests". It blamed these imperialist circles of giving Israel the inspiration for this new and dangerous military venture against Egypt. It warned:

The people of the Arab states are not alone in their righteous struggle against imperialist

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33 Pravda, 7 June 1967. On 6 June Brezhnev remarked that the essence of the crisis consisted in the "antagonism between the forces of imperialism and the forces of national independence, democracy and social progress".

aggression for, as was announced in the last declaration, those who plan aggression will be forced into conflict, not only with the united forces of the Arab states but also with the violent opposition of the Soviet Union and all peace loving nations.

Moscow Radio in a broadcast on 6 June 1967 condemned Israeli aggression and demanded that—

The Israeli authorities should, as a first urgent measure, cease military operations, stop hostilities against the Arab countries without delay and without reservation and withdraw their troops behind the armistice line.

It further warned Israel that "the Soviet Government reserves the right to take all necessary measures required by the situation." 36

In spite of the Egyptian and Syrian reluctance to accept the ceasefire, the Soviets were disappointed by the Israeli failure to halt military operations. The Soviets had apparently hoped that Israeli acceptance of UN resolution will save the Arabs from humiliation of accepting it of their own. To save Arabs from further humiliation, the Soviet Government on 7 June delivered a written statement to the Israeli Embassy in Moscow which warned that "unless Israel immediately halts its military action, the Soviet Union will adopt sanctions against Israel with all its consequences following therefrom." The note said:

35 Pravda, 7 June 1967.  
The Government of the Soviet Union expresses its decisive condemnation of the traitorous attack by Israel upon a neighbouring Arab state -- the U.A.R. ... This venture constitutes a direct and open violation of the United Nations Charter and the principles contained therein. This attack has conclusively proved the nature of the policies implemented by ruling circles in Israel. 37

Soviet Ambassador in Tel Aviv, Chuvakhin, handed a note from Soviet Prime Minister Kosygin to Israeli Prime Minister Eshkol wherein Soviet Union requested Israel to stop fighting and evacuate the territories it had occupied. It labelled the Israeli aggression as “treacherous” and an “adventurous act” and warned that Israel would “bear the responsibility for the outbreak of war and for all its possible results” if it did not cease-fire. 38 In an effort to acquaint Soviet leaders with the serious developments in West Asia, Israeli Government handed a note to Soviet Ambassador in Israel, calling upon Soviet Union to join in the efforts aimed at establishing respect for the independence and territorial integrity of all states in the area, as advocated by Soviet Government.

On 7 June, Soviet Government issued a statement, addressed to Israel, which declared that Israel was not adhering to the UN ceasefire resolution. If the Israeli Government does not act now, and “immediately fulfill the common

38 S.M.B., Part IV, ME/2465/A/3, 8 June 1967.
demand of states for an immediate cease-fire,... the Soviet Government will revise its attitude to Israel and adopt a decision concerning the further maintenance of diplomatic relations with Israel, which by its actions is placing itself in opposition to all peace-loving states." 39 The threat to break diplomatic relations was not really aimed at Israel but its immediate aim was to show solidarity with the Arab states that had just broken diplomatic relations with the US.

On 8 June the Soviet delegate in the Security Council, Fedorenko, lashed out at Israel and remarked:

The extremists in Tel Aviv are obviously inebriated by their temporary successes. They are even laying down conditions for peace....Israel shoulders the whole responsibility for the crisis committed. It must, he said, be severely punished. 40

Apart from the implied threat to the existence of Israel, the initial Soviet public reaction made no concrete suggestion to any specific Soviet actions against Israel nor were any UN collective sanctions proposed. The reserved nature of Soviet threats suggested that Moscow had been caught unawares by the Israeli attack. This also showed that no previously decided Soviet position existed. In a bid to pressurize Israel to agree to Security Council ceasefire resolutions and boost its own image in the Arab world, the Soviet Union called a meeting of the Heads of the Socialist

nations of Europe on 9 June which issued a joint statement warning Israel that it would be resolutely rebuffed if it did not cease aggression forthwith and pull back its forces to armistice line. It warned Israel that it must be clear about the stand of the peace-loving Socialist states. "The aggressor should not forget that they will not evade responsibility for the violation of peace and encroachment of the sovereign rights of the people. The socialist countries will not allow the imperialist forces to have their own way." 41

Moscow's anxiety over the failure to halt the Israelis became increasingly clear. On 10 June, the Soviet Foreign Ministry handed a note to Israeli Ambassador in Moscow which called on Israel to stop military activities in Syria or face dire consequences. It also informed Israel of its decision to break diplomatic relations with Tel Aviv. The Soviet Union through this note wanted to convey to the Israelis that it could take more serious moves if fighting did not immediately cease. It also warned Israel of unified front sanctions if it continued its aggression in West Asia. It called on Israel to immediately halt all military actions to avoid other sanctions from peace-loving states. The note warned the Government of Israel that:

> It bears the whole burden of responsibility for its perfidy and its blatant violation of the Security Council's resolution. If Israel does not halt hostilities immediately, the Soviet Union jointly with other peace-loving states, will take sanctions against Israel with all the consequences that flow therefrom. 42

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41 International Affairs, July 1967, p. 5; SBU, SU/2488/A4/1, 12 June 1967.

The Soviet note now made no demand for Israeli withdrawal from occupied territory as it gave top priority to saving fall of Damascus. The dropping of this demand reflected the degree of urgency which the Soviets attached to a halt of Israeli advances.

Israeli press on 11 June criticized Soviet Union and recalled that Soviet Union was among Israel's first supporters in early days of her independence.\textsuperscript{43} Israel denounced the Soviet Union for being pro-Arab and anti-Israeli and accused the Russians for aiding and abetting the Arabs in their endeavours to destroy Israel. It blamed Soviet weapons and political support to the Arabs which Israel claimed, had helped Arabs threaten war on her. It said that without Soviet backing Arabs would have been more willing to come to negotiation table. She charged the Russians with distorting the facts of the West Asian situation, backing the anti-Israeli militants in the Arab world and mistreating the Jews in the Soviet Union. Israel wondered whether the Soviet Union would have been so anxious for ceasefire and withdrawal resolutions, had the Arabs been victorious. They insisted that Russia would have them move "backward to belligerency" rather than "forward to peace" and that they could not be expected to withdraw their forces until the Arabs were ready to assure Israel's peace and security - and this be done "only" through a

\textsuperscript{43} For details of Press comments see, SMB, Part IV, MS/2499/A-15-16, 13 June 1967.
peace settlement by direct negotiations. Israel radio on 11 June said that most probably Soviet Union was threatening to break off diplomatic relations with Israel because of prestige considerations rather than because of its real political line. Israel charged that the Soviet Union "bore a major responsibility for the catastrophe" which Arab countries have now suffered. In an interview Eban considered Moscow largely responsible for the war. "If the Soviet Union had accepted a more balanced attitude, there would probably not have been a crisis and there would certainly not have been an explosion."

Soviet Union which had condemned Israeli aggression, demanded Israel to stop fighting immediately. Once the war ended, Soviet diplomacy was geared to maximize political pressure on Israel to withdraw from occupied Arab territories and to isolate the US as the sole great power supporter of Israel. It charged that Israel had attacked the Arabs with the support of imperialist powers which during and after the Security Council discussion of the issue in no way condemned the aggression. This the Soviet Union claimed offered a "cogent proof of collusion between Israel and the imperialists."

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44 S/FV/1348, 6 June 1967, pp. 71 ff; 3 June 1967, pp. 42 ff;
Israel Digest (Jerusalem), 16 June 1967, p. 7; 30 June 1967, p. 3.


The Soviet stand in the Security Council and notes sent to Israel caused considerable apprehensions in Israel. But in contrast to the aftermath of Suez crisis of 1956, when Soviet Union had been largely instrumental in obtaining an Israeli withdrawal, this time Israel decided to ignore them. The Russian threats proved to be hollow. The Israelis sensed that Soviet Union was not in a position to do anything without risking confrontation with the United States which Soviet Union was not prepared to risk. Thus Israeli ignored these threats and continued to consolidate the gains of the war and occupied more territory of UAR, Jordan and Syria, on all war fronts. At the same time there had been warnings from Washington about the possibility of Soviet intervention. The increasing vehemence of the Russian threats caused the United States and other Security Council members to press Israel to halt her advances before the Russians felt it necessary to intervene. As Israel had to a large extent destroyed the military power of the Arabs and secured safe frontiers alongwith large Arab territories, it agreed to halt all hostilities on 11 June.

The Israeli victory in June 1967 war had come as a surprise to Moscow. The Soviet leaders had under-rated Israel because they were convinced that "Jews do not fight". Israel was thought to be ruled by reactionary, anti-popular government and in a state of permanent crisis. The official explanation

was that Israel had intended by means of a surprise attack to overthrow the progressive regimes in the Arab world, but this had failed owing to resolute stand taken by the Soviet Union. Soviet Union was the only great power which demanded condemnation of Israel and its immediate withdrawal from the occupied Arab territory. It branded Israel as an agent of the US and Western imperialists and kept up continuous pressure on Israel to agree to UN ceasefire resolutions.

Soviet Diplomacy at the United Nations

Up to the very outbreak of war, the line pursued by Fedorenko, the Soviet delegate at the UN was that there was no particular urgency of Security Council actions on the situation in West Asia. He claimed that Israel and its supporters were creating an atmosphere of artificial hysteria and that no emergency meeting or specific action was needed. His attitude did not change during the first two days of war. The Soviet Union believed that if Arabs would not be able to crush Israel, they would at least give good resistance to it. Soviet Union throughout the armed hostilities demanded that Security Council should condemn Israeli aggression and it showed no disposition to withdraw their demand. The insistence on condemnation tremeled the movement of negotiation toward a consensus, since the Soviet Union could veto any resolution.

which did not meet its minimum requirements. The Soviet Union insisted that any call for a halt to military activities be coupled with a demand that opposing forces should withdraw to the positions held prior to war. It backed the Arabs in the Security Council and accused Israel of being the aggressor and pressed the Security Council to order an Israeli withdrawal. The Soviet delegate demanded that the "Security Council should condemn Israel's aggression." The Soviet Government asked that "the UN must discharge its direct duty, condemn Israeli action and promptly take steps to restore peace in the Middle East." Tass statement of 5 June, on the US opposition to UN adopting a resolution said: "The position taken by the American delegation confirms the "hypocritical nature of the call made by the White House for an immediate ceasefire." It thus appeared that though the Soviet Union was not prepared immediately to offer the Arabs military support, Moscow was ready to back fully the Arabs political position, notwithstanding the risk of prolonging the war.

It was not until the night of 6 June that Moscow realized the magnitude of the Arab defeat and instructions were given to the Soviet delegation in the UN to work for an

51 Lall, n. 23, p. 50.
52 SCOR, yr 22, mtg. 1347, pp. 27-30.
53 Pravda, 7 June 1967.
immediate ceasefire and unconditional Israeli withdrawal. Since the fortunes of war were going in favour of Israel, it had profound effect on the nature of deliberations of the Council. The Soviet Union realized that the decisive Israeli air victory had made the Arab military position hopeless. It also became clear that if the Council wished to stop the war, it would have to concentrate its attention solely on a ceasefire. In order to save Arabs from total collapse the Soviet delegate, on 6 June, agreed to President Tabor's draft resolution (S/7935) which simply called for a ceasefire and cessation of all military activity without requiring Israeli withdrawal.\textsuperscript{55} At the same time, Ambassador Fedorenko stated that "the Soviet delegation decisively condemns the aggression of Israel, considers it to be the bounden duty of the Security Council to adopt a decision concerning the immediately and unconditional withdrawal of the forces of the aggressor beyond the armistice lines".\textsuperscript{56} The USSR, at this stage did not ask specifically for Council condemnation of Israel. Seeing Arab reverses on all fronts, the Soviet delegate brought to the question of withdrawal, a concentrated sense of great urgency even at the cost of Arab disappointment.

In spite of the adoption of ceasefire resolution on 6 June, the war did not stop. The Arab forces were being thrown farther and farther back with great loss of equipment and life.

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{UN Doc. S/RES. 235, 6 June 1967.}

\textsuperscript{56} \textit{SCOR, yr 22, mtg. 1348, p. 27.}
In order to save Arabs from further losses and humiliation, the Soviet Union took the initiative in calling the Security Council to meet on 7 June. Fedorenko took the floor to reiterate his country's condemnation of Israeli aggression. The US evidently was not unhappy with Israel's violation of the Security Council ceasefire resolution and was not likely to favour Israeli withdrawal. In order to avoid any clash with the US position, the Soviet Ambassador Fedorenko, while demanding immediate cessation of military activity, did not raise the issue of withdrawal of Israeli forces. He demanded that belligerents "should as a first step discontinue all military action". He introduced a draft resolution calling for cessation of conflict - along the lines of one adopted on 6 June - with the addition of a time limit for compliance of the warring states - 7 June at 20:00 hours GMT. He insisted on an immediate vote on his draft resolution. It seemed that the Soviet Government was being pressed by its Arab friends to ensure that the ceasefire should become effective immediately. Further delay could have political consequences for Egyptian and Syrian Governments. Thus, Soviet Union decided to strive to save the political foundations of friendly Arab governments.

As any delay in the passing of a ceasefire resolution in face of continuing Israeli military successes could have
been disastrous for the Arabs, Ambassador Fedorenko did not make any substantial rebuttal of Goldberg’s remark that the Soviet Union and Arabs had delayed Security Council action in the past. He sarcastically referred to Goldberg’s charge as “quotation of one’s own speeches, whatever pleasure they might afford the author”.

The Soviet draft resolution failed to make any reference to UN measures to obtain compliance of the resolution. Pointing out this lacuna, the Canadian delegate on 7 June introduced a brief draft resolution requesting the Security Council with the assistance of the Secretary-General, “to take the necessary measures to bring about full and effective compliance with these resolutions”. But this could not muster requisite support of the Security Council. The Soviet delegate did not support UAR’s interpretation that the Security Council resolution should demand Israeli withdrawal behind the armistice demarcation lines. He also did not support the Israeli view that Arabs cease their military activity and welcome the Security Council resolutions. On 7 June the Security Council unanimously approved the Soviet resolution calling for ceasefire.

The Soviet initiative brought greater urgency to the Security Council’s plea for an immediate cease fire. The “call” to

59 SCOR, yr 22, mtg. 1349, pp. 21-25.
60 Ibid., mtg. 1350, p. 6.
61 UN Doc. S/RES.234, 7 June 1967.
the governments made in resolution 233 had now become a demand and a deadline only a few hours hence was given to them for compliance. Finally, this was the first resolution on the conflict to be adopted on the initiative of an individual Council member, and tactically the Soviet Union could claim that they were meeting their responsibilities towards their Arab friends.

At the insistence of both the US and the Soviet Union, the Council reconvened on 8 June. The meeting showed the persisting basic divergences of position between the US and Soviet position. Against the US position that all the warring states accept Security Council resolutions calling for ceasefire, Soviet representative Fedorenko stated that "the Arab countries...must at present take defensive action against Israel as long as Israel refuses to end its military activities...and as long as Israel has not withdrawn its forces from the conquered areas". While Soviet stand was contradictory to earlier Security Council resolutions which were passed with her consent, it was consistent with Soviet policy extending support to Arabs. After the Secretary General informed the Council of UN's decision to accept ceasefire call on condition that Israel also did so, the Soviet delegate demanded "it is essential to condemn the aggressor - this is our principal task". The Soviet Union did not reject the US proposal, so

62 SCOR, yr 22, mtgs. 1351, pp. 22-25.
63 Ibid., pp. 18-20.
that chances of negotiations with US delegate on the formulation of a mutually acceptable text remained open. Fedorenko introduced a draft resolution condemning Israel for aggressive activities and violation of Security Council resolutions. It demanded that Israel should stop hostilities against neighbouring Arab states immediately and withdraw its forces from occupied Arab territories beyond armistice lines.\textsuperscript{64} As the super powers took divergent stands on actions to be taken by the Council, it adjourned the same day without passing another resolution.

After UAR and Jordan conveyed acceptance of the Security Council resolution on 8 June, hostilities between UAR-Israel and Jordan-Israel ceased. On 9 June, Syria also conveyed its acceptance of the Security Council's call on the condition that Israel also did so. But both charged each other with massive truce violations. Ambassador Tabor, after obtaining the agreement of the Security Council members to a resolution directed toward the situation between Israel and Syria, presented it in the Council and got the Council's unanimous approval on 9 June.\textsuperscript{65} The resolution noted the mutual acceptance by Syria and Israel of its demands for ceasefire. In accordance with the wishes of the Council, the Secretary General reported at 4 p.m. that both the parties were ready to stop their military operations immediately.\textsuperscript{66} Again the accent

\textsuperscript{64} ibid., p. 26.
\textsuperscript{65} UN Doc. S/RES 235, 9 June 1967.
\textsuperscript{66} SCOR, yr 22, mtg. 1352, p. 41.
of speech made by Fedorenko was on the withdrawal of forces of Israel and condemnation of Israel. He demanded that Israel "must also immediately and unconditionally withdraw its troops from their (Arab) territories...we cannot allow the forces of aggression to remain on the territory seized by them. This situation brooks no delay."  

Though both Israel and Syria had accepted the Security Council resolution of 9 June, the fighting continued as each side accused the other of ceasefire violations. The Council again met the same evening on Syrian and Israeli complaint of escalation of the conflict. Fedorenko immediately repeated charges of US instigation and asked for condemnation of Israel to comply with the Council's decisions. He, for the first time, demanded that Israel be warned "that the Security Council will be compelled to use the powers which are invested in it by the charter of the U.N. to deal with such situation". adopting an extremely vicious rhetoric, Fedorenko asserted that the Israelis "take their arguments from the garbage heap of history and from the arsenal of the most famous criminals in history. They follow the bloody footsteps of Hitler's executioners who always accused the victims of their own aggression".  

He also supported Syrian request for investigation by the Security Council of border violations by Israel. He read out the

67 Ibid.
68 Ibid., mtg. 1353, p. 13.
communication issued by seven East European governments on that very day from Moscow in support of Arabs. The Council adjourned after hearing the complaints and authorized the Secretary-General to confirm the ceasefire violations from UN observers stationed in the area.

The Security Council reconvened on 10 June on an urgent request by Syria that Israel had occupied Kuneitra and was pressing forward towards Damascus. Fedorenko held that Israeli forces were already some way into Syrian territory, were bombing the Syrian capital, and were continuing the fight despite Security Council ceasefire resolutions. He claimed that Israel Ambassador Rafel had "openly misled the Council and tried to divert the attention of the Security Council" and played for time for "the annexionalist purposes of the Israeli hordes". He demanded that "The criminal bandit activity against Syria must be condemned immediately and unreservedly". Secretary General in his report from General Bull also confirmed that Damascus was being air attacked. On hearing this Fedorenko triumphantly taunted US representative to express his views and remarked: "The circle is complete. The perpetration of the crime is proved...we are compelled to note the inexplicable position adopted by...especially the representative of the United States".

69 Ibid., mtg. 1354, p. 17.
70 Ibid., p. 21.
71 Ibid., mtg. 1355, p. 6.
As the fighting in the region of Kuneitra and Israeli bombardment of Damascus continued, the Soviet representative on 11 June requested for another meeting of the Security Council. The Secretary General also confirmed these reports but reported that now the fighting was sporadic rather than along the whole frontier. The Soviet Union along with Bulgaria asked for condemnation of Israel. Bulgaria's representative Tarabanov added that "the occupation troops (must) be withdrawn from the territory they have usurped, and this immediately." The Soviet Union posing as the main supporter of Arab cause, accused Israel of violating the Security Council resolutions and reiterated the charge that Western powers were protecting Israel. Fedorenko accused Israel of aggression and insisted that the US draft resolution was aiding the Israeli aggressor in legitimizing the occupation of Arab territory. He insisted that a resolution lumping together all violations of the ceasefire was not fair. He rejected the US resolution which he described as a "manoeuvre aimed only at helping Israel by legalizing its aggression and occupation of Arab territories" and demanded Security Council to condemn Israeli aggression.

On US representative's insistence that the question before the Council was a ceasefire order and not condemnation, Soviet Ambassador Fedorenko directed a question to his counterpart, as to whether US would condemn bombing of Damascus and other

72 Ibid., mtg. 1356, pp. 33-40.
73 Ibid., p. 46; US draft Resolution S/7971, 10 June 1967.
military activities of Israel. He insisted that US draft aided the Israeli aggressor. But the Council adjourned for the day without taking any decision. Late that evening, the Council was reconvened to discuss Syria's complaint against the alleged advance of the Israeli forces in the Rafid area towards the headwaters of the Yarmuk river. Fedorenko charged Israel with defiance of the UN and Security Council and remarked:

We hear insults...General Moshe Dayan...says that the map of the Middle East will be rearranged and that Israeli state will have new frontiers. Moshe Dayan has stated: "I certainly cannot recall that any problem was ever settled by diplomacy or through the United Nations."

Soviet Union which had consistently demanded condemnation of Israel wanted Security Council to take "decisive and immediate measures to ensure the implementation by Israel of the resolutions adopted by the Security Council". Fedorenko rounded up his discussion by referring to the Soviet draft resolution (S/7951) which demanded condemnation of Israel and immediate and unconditional withdrawal of its forces. But sensing the mood of the majority of members he did not press a vote on his draft.

As the fighting continued on Israeli-Syrian borders, the Council met on 12 June when Fedorenko demanded that Israel

74 Ibid., p. 61.
75 Ibid., pp. 22-25.
be warned "that the Security Council will be compelled to use the powers which are invested in it by the Charter of the UN to deal with such a situation."

The President of the Council, Ambassador Tabor with the consent of most members of the Council introduced a draft resolution condemning all violations of the ceasefire, requesting the Secretary General to continue his investigations and to report on the situation as soon as possible. It also called for prompt return to ceasefire positions of any troops. This draft resolution like the three preceding ones on the ceasefire was adopted unanimously. This resolution did not constitute a discernible new step. Soviet Union voted for this resolution even though it fell short of the Soviet demand for specific condemnation of Israel and withdrawal of forces to the armistice lines. By including condemnation in general it went somewhat in the direction for which the Soviet Union had been pressing ever since the outbreak of hostilities on 5 June. However it was firm and clear on Soviet demand for observance of the ceasefire. The Soviet Union maintained that resolution 236 of 12 June in fact condemned Israel because Israel alone had been defying the decisions of the Security Council.

Once the ceasefire had gone into effect on all fronts Soviet Union again concentrated her efforts in the Security

77 Ibid., stg. 1358, p. 27.
79 SCOR, yr 22, stg. 1358, p. 21.
Council on bringing about a condemnation of Israel and withdrawal of her forces to behind the armistice lines. As 12 June
resolution had least reflected the Soviet position so the
Council met again on 13 June on Soviet request. Fedorenko's
strong but persuasive speech brought into the open some of
Soviet Union’s main concerns. Because of close proximity of
the Middle East, his country saw the Israeli action as an
attempt to change “the so-called balance of power in the near
East to the detriment of the national liberation movement of
the Arab people.” It alleged that the overall objective was
to secure advantages for imperialism, “particularly for the
US imperialism.” 80 He introduced a revised text of the Soviet
resolution (3/7931/Rev.2, 13 June 1967) calling for condemnation
of Israel and demanding immediate and unconditional withdrawal
of its forces to the armistice lines. It demanded that Israel
be labelled an aggressor and compelled to withdraw and pay
damages under threat of UN sanction. Soviet Union insisted
that the Council vote on its resolution and remarked that in
case of Security Council failure to act and discharge its
duties, the Soviet Union would “seek other ways and means to
see to it that the UN does its duty under the Charter”. 81
Quoting Goldberg’s statement of 24 May in the Security Council
that US was “firmly committed to the support of political
independence and territorial integrity of all nations in the
area”, Fedorenko called upon him “to reaffirm” that US was

80 Ibid., p. 11.
81 Ibid., p. 27.
"against the territorial claims of Israel". He wanted the US to acknowledge that Israeli occupation of Arab soil was "illegal, criminal, and contrary to UN Charter and the elementary principles of International Law". Goldberg termed the Soviet proposal as "a prescription for renewed hostilities" and asked the Council to concert its efforts to avoid the fourth round of Arab-Israeli conflict. Israeli representative, Reginald Kidron, regarded the Soviet draft as destructive which aimed at restoring conditions prevailing prior to war.

When put to vote on 14 June, the Soviet draft was supported by only four member states - Bulgaria, India, Mali and Soviet Union while eleven members abstained. The Soviet proposal did not come near adoption. The Soviet proposal was defeated largely because of the US led opposition within the Council. On the US proposal (S/7952/Rev.2), Fedorenko announced that if put to vote Soviet Union would veto it. In spite of its failure to get its resolution passed, the Soviet Union indicated the excessive confidence with which it tended to predict the direction and effect of "world opinion". He expressed his Government's "conviction that all peace loving and progressive forces" would join together to work together for the "cause of freedom and independence of people".

83 Ibid., p. 52.
84 Ibid., p. 113.
85 Ibid., mtg. 1360, pp. 84 ff.
86 Ibid., pp. 91-92.
Concluding Observations

Soviet Union was the only great power in the Security Council which supported the Arabs throughout the crisis. Soviet Union consistently demanded condemnation of Israeli action and wanted unconditional withdrawal of Israeli forces to the pre-war zone. It used the Security Council as a platform to win Arabs and attack US as the chief culprit. But it failed to get its resolution passed in the Security Council as the other superpower i.e. the United States was opposed to Soviet stand on the crisis and without their support it was not possible to get a resolution passed on Soviet line.

With the outbreak of war, the Soviets were confronted with the contradictory urges to end the war promptly, in order to avoid a clash with the West and to support the Arab clients political objectives. The Soviets, because of their desire to avoid a clash with the United States, declined to offer immediate military assistance to the Arabs and limited themselves to political support. They became the champions of Arab cause at the UN, clamoured for condemnation of Israel and withdrawal of its forces from Arab territories. In deference to Arab wishes, they did not seek an immediate end to hostilities, until the Arabs felt compelled to cease hostilities. Once the Arabs had indicated their desire to terminate hostilities, the Soviet Union pressed for an immediate ceasefire resolution through the United Nations. Further to enhance its prestige, it launched propaganda attack on the United States. Soviet Union
exploited to the maximum the bitter anti-American and anti-British feelings which had developed in the wake of Arab defeat.

Nasser made every effort to involve Moscow militarily in the war by levelling charges of US-British participation on Israeli side. But the Soviet Union apart from issuing statements of Soviet solidarity and friendship, refused to rush to the rescue of the Arabs for fear of confrontation with the US. During the war, the Soviet Union restricted its military role to the deterrence of American intervention which was an unlikely development in the light of Israeli military success. Israel's advance towards Damascus on 9 June posed a fundamental challenge to the entire Soviet political position in the region. The Soviet Union at this point even threatened direct involvement on Arabs behalf. To avoid confrontation with the United States on West Asian issue, it established mutual contacts with the United States which further helped in the smooth adoption of ceasefire resolution in the Security Council. All the Security Council resolutions were passed unanimously during the war.

The war gave the Kremlin its worst setback in the eyes of third world countries. The Soviet prestige had undergone shattering blows throughout the Arab world. The Israeli surprise attack caught Soviet Union off guard and it failed to take any effective step to save Arabs from humiliating defeat. There was growing discontent among extremist Arabs,
i.e., Algeria, Libya etc., because of Soviet failure to help the Arabs militarily during the war. The extremist Arab circles felt that the Soviet Union had let the Arabs down firstly, by not coming to their aid and secondly, by agreeing to a ceasefire which was not favourable to them.

In spite of Soviet non-intervention to save Arabs, its position in the affected Arab countries was greatly strengthened because of their total dependability on Soviets for arms aid. The Arab debacle provided the Soviet Union with its moment of greatest opportunity in the area as during the war it was the only great power to have identified itself as a friend of the Arabs. Egyptian and Syrian governments were now totally dependent on the Soviet Union in order to overcome their losses and rebuild their armies. As the help from Western world could not be expected by them, the Soviet Union could dictate them terms. With this dependence came new opportunities for enlarging Soviet influence throughout the area.

The Soviet diplomacy was confronted with the following urgent tasks in the immediate post-war period in West Asia. The first task was to repair the tremendous damage done to Moscow's prestige among the Arabs who were feeling disastrously let down. It was to reestablish its position in West Asian affairs. Secondly, its task was to rescue the Arab countries particularly Egypt, Syria and Iraq from a political disaster. The third important task faced by the Soviet diplomacy was of
controlling the clients in future if warlike situation again developed. The Arabs had taken the warlike decisions without taking the Soviet Union into confidence. The Soviet Union had underrated the irrational in the behaviour of its clients. It had not anticipated that once the fight had escalated, it would not be able to control it even with the help of United States. The conviction that it would be able to control events in case of major crisis went wrong.

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