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'Frightening Facts'

The world we live in is no longer what it seems. Or at least, it is no longer what it seems to a large majority of thinking Americans. This is probably the most dangerous single feature of our current situation; and it was wonderfully vividly proven last week.

To begin with, a group of seven eminent Cambridge-based economists secured some enjoyable publicity by announcing that the Arab oil boycott ought to be countered with U.S. sanctions. Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger in fact hopes to use diplomatic pressures to move the Arab oil producers; prior to the coming negotiations for an Arab-Israeli settlement. But the seven economists were thinking of more direct sanctions, like the cessation of food deliveries.

Now this kind of direct sanctions, as even Cambridge-based economists ought to know, must ultimately depend on military power. Without military power, there is nothing whatever the United States can do to make the Arab oil states either hungry or otherwise uncomfortable—which is why the Arabs are so cocky.

By a splendid stroke of irony, the U.S. Navy's lonely little task force in the Indian Ocean turned tail and steamed for home on almost the same day the Cambridge economists issued their statement. This task force, headed by the aircraft carrier Hancock, had been sent from the Pacific to the Indian Ocean at the time of President Nixon's world-wide military alert.

The Hancock is so ancient that it was about to be decommissioned and handed over to the ship-breakers when the order came to show the flag. By the time the Hancock and its few supporting vessels were called home from the Indian Ocean last week, the task force was also quite literally surrounded by Soviet guided missile cruisers of the most modern type, vastly more powerful and dangerous than the Hancock.

During the Yom Kippur war, the U.S. Navy also lost its parody of a naval base in the region of the Arabian peninsula—the slender facilities formerly available on the island of Bahrein in the Persian Gulf. Meanwhile, the Soviet Navy has a highly significant new naval base, UMM Qasr at the head of the Persian Gulf, plus a most important naval base with large supporting jet airfields in Somaliland, plus other useful facilities in the Indian Ocean.

These bases and other facilities permit the Soviet Navy to keep a permanent force of five important warships and 15 supporting vessels in the Indian Ocean, Red Sea and/or Persian Gulf, as the ships' orders may require. This is done, moreover, at the end of a supply line 11,000 miles long.

The reasons for this costly and difficult Soviet naval effort, finally, is quite certainly Soviet awareness of the overwhelming, even terrifying strategic importance of the Arab oil states. Hence one has to reach one of two conclusions about the Cambridge-based economists. Either they did not trouble to find out the foregoing unpleasant facts. Or else, perhaps, they are not quite in their right minds.

Even Cambridge economists, after all, if both sane and fully aware of the hard facts, could not really have believed the navally enfeebled United

States would get away with direct sanctions against the oil states in the Arabian peninsula. The Soviets, with their hard-bought naval superiority, would simply not stand for it.

Whether because of ignorance or self-delusion, in short, these extremely able men have demonstrably ceased to live in the real world. They are not alone, however. This reporter will bet 5-to-1 that just about all who have bothered to read this far will be both shocked and shaken by the following facts.

When the Soviets threatened military intervention in the Mideast, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were, of course, notified. The President warned the Soviets off, by putting part of SAC in the air and ordering his general alert. If the Soviets had ignored the President's warning, the U.S. Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean would have been the first to feel the cruel shock. Thus the

U.S. Navy's general staff was duty bound to notify the President—and did so notify him—that the Sixth Fleet's marked inferiority would lead to rapid defeat in case of a fight.

The grim, unpublished episode speaks volumes, both about President Nixon's courage in a serious crisis, but also about the deterioration of the American situation, all around the world. It speaks volumes about changing Soviet attitudes, too, that the Soviets actually sent nuclear warheads to Egypt for a brief period at the same height of peril in the Mideast. The chances are that the warheads have since been taken away again; but it is fully confirmed that the warheads were actually sent.

These are frightening facts, from that real world in which most Americans have ceased to live. Further reports on it will follow, if a lull between more pressing horrors should permit.

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