

# 6th Fleet Still on Alert in Mediterranean

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ABOARD THE U.S.S. JOHN F. KENNEDY, in the Eastern Mediterranean, Nov. 8 — The reinforced United States Sixth Fleet, faced by a formidable Soviet force in the Mediterranean, is still at the same degree of alert as it was at the height of the Middle East crisis.

In his first press briefing since the outbreak of the war, Vice Adm. Daniel J. Murphy, the commander of the fleet, said that "the Commander in Chief"—he did not mention President Nixon's name—might have reasons to want the naval forces in the Mediterranean at a high level of readiness.

The John F. Kennedy, to which a handful of American newsmen were flown today to meet Admiral Murphy, is one of three United States aircraft carriers now in the Mediterranean. There are about 60 vessels under Admiral Murphy's command, including two helicopter carriers with nearly 4,000 United States Marines aboard.

The Soviet naval force in the Mediterranean is made up of close to 90 ships. A few days ago it was 95 ships. In addition, some 30 Soviet merchant vessels are resupplying Egypt and Syria with military equipment.

## Soviet Ships Are Seen

A cluster of 14 Soviet vessels was sighted by newsmen during a 90-minute tour by helicopter after Admiral Murphy's briefing.

The Soviet formation was riding in a calm sea at a shallow anchorage south of the Greek island of Kythera. The ships, their red flags fluttering in a light breeze, lay at anchor just outside Greek territorial waters. The island's coast and hills were clearly visible.

The biggest Soviet unit was a cruiser of the Sverdlov class with two triple-gun turrets on the foredeck and a large figure "845" on her flanks. The formation included also a destroyer, a surface-to-air missile ship, two oil tankers and a fresh-water tanker. A high line linked one tanker with a warship in a supply operation.

Few sailors could be seen on the decks. Those that were visible stared at the green helicopter of the United States Marine Corps carrying the news-

## 60 U.S. Vessels, Facing 90 Soviet Ships, Have Edge in Firepower

men. They did not wave.

"We are not buddy-buddy with the Soviet Navy, but we have a business-like relationship," Admiral Murphy had said at the briefing.

The Sixth Fleet commander noted the "very, very close proximity" of United States and Soviet warships in the Mediterranean. He stated that there had "never been any occasion when we ran into a danger situation."

The admiral declared that the two naval forces were at times exchanging "routine signals" in keeping with the United States-Soviet accord on avoiding incidents at sea.

## Silent on Nuclear Power

"We don't want to stumble into a confrontation," the admiral said. He declined to discuss the number and operations of United States and Soviet submarines in the Mediterranean, nor would he comment on his fleet's nuclear capabilities.

American forces worldwide were placed on a precautionary "Condition 3" alert on Oct. 25 when the United States believed that Soviet forces were going to take a direct hand in the Middle East war. Condition 3, one of five of which No. 1 is "troops deployed for combat," is troops placed on standby and awaiting further orders. In less than a week, the alert was generally called off.

The Sixth Fleet commander emphasized that United States naval forces had been "nowhere near the battle area" in the Arab-Israeli war. He said that an operating zone in international waters off Crete was "the easternmost penetration of significant Sixth Fleet activity," though at one time a picket vessel near Cyprus was monitoring the airlift to Israel.

## U.S. Has Firepower Edge

Admiral Murphy said that his fleet, with fewer ships, had retained the edge in firepower over the Soviet force. He cited two factors—that 40 per cent of the Soviet fleet consisted of support ships whereas the proportion in the Sixth Fleet was only 20 per cent, and the pres-

ence of the United States aircraft carriers.

The admiral said that he had more than 180 carrier-based fighter planes under his command. The Soviet Navy now lacks air cover, but its first aircraft carrier is expected to be in active service soon.

Admiral Murphy disclosed that aircraft carriers had served as stepping stones in the airlift to resupply Israel's military forces—a United States pilot ferrying a Skyhawk fighter to Israel would land on a carrier for refueling and to rest, for instance.

Discussing a hypothetical evacuation of American citizens from Middle Eastern or North African danger spots, he said that his force could accommodate as many as 25,000 people.

## 60,000 Americans in Area

He stressed that any decision to evacuate Americans would be up to the State Department. The admiral noted that about 60,000 Americans were in the Middle East at present, 45,000 of them in Israel. Many of the latter, including persons with dual citizenship, might not want to be taken out, the commander said.

Aboard the Kennedy, seamen who had not been ashore for more than 30 days showed newsmen nursing bottles, disposable diapers and obstetrical instruments—part of the carrier's "evacuation capability."

Admiral Murphy, a lanky 51-year-old from Brooklyn, remarked that since the outbreak of the Arab-Israeli war the Sixth Fleet had shunned publicity. He told the reporters: "The very fact that you are here today is a good sign."