

1st War file
(Oct 73)

RCI-2997

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BRIEFING MEMORANDUM

9/30/73

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TO : The Secretary
FROM: INR - Ray S. Cline

Syrian Military Intentions

There are reports that Syria is preparing for an attack on Israel, but conclusive evidence is lacking. In our view, the political climate in the Arab states argues against a major Syrian military move against Israel at this time. The possibility of a more limited Syrian strike -- perhaps one designed to retaliate for the pounding the Syrian Air Force took from the Israelis on September 13 -- cannot, of course, be excluded.

On September 26, during a visit to Israeli positions on the Golan Heights, Defense Minister Dayan stated, according to a Jerusalem broadcast, that Syria had massed hundreds of tanks and artillery pieces just beyond the Israeli lines in the area.

[Redacted]

Syrian units are expected to be in position by the end of September for an attack on Israel that has been in preparation since May. Missiles and anti-aircraft units are deployed close to the front lines, and Damascus is taking civil defense precautions.

[Redacted]

King Hussein, [Redacted] was seriously concerned about the plan, and the Jordanians had agreed to receive on September 30 the chief of Syrian intelligence, who was bringing a message from the Syrian

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Chief of Staff. (Of possible relevance in this connection, the Jordanian Premier was to carry a message from the King to Syrian President Asad on September 29 and one to Egyptian President Sadat on October 1 [redacted])

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[redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted] there had been "strange activity" by the Syrian military in the past two days and that all civilian cargo vehicles had been commandeered. [redacted]

Our capacity to obtain evidence on Syrian ground preparations is extremely limited, but apart from [redacted] Dayan's allegation we have as yet no information to indicate that Syria is preparing for military action against Israel. If Syria were already in an advanced state of military preparation, the Israelis almost certainly would have approached us with considerable alarm through liaison channels. There is no evidence to connect the increased readiness of Egyptian air and air defense units, which went into effect on September 26, with any Syrian military moves.

In our view, Syrian military activity at this time would more probably be part of a contingency plan for defense than the final steps before offensive action. When the Syrian plan was under discussion in May, Syria and Egypt were talking about resuming hostilities. This alarmed King Faisal, who tried to dampen their zeal for fighting and to make clear to the US that he expected some shift in US policy toward Israel if Saudi oil were to flow in the requisite amounts. The indications have been that Syria and Egypt accepted Faisal's strategy and were downplaying the military option for the moment. Also arguing against a Syrian military adventure at present are the current Syrian efforts to consolidate the fedayeen movement under Saïqa and Syria's desire for assurance of Jordanian cooperation in meeting an Israeli counterthrust before launching action of its own.

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