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19 October 1973

MEMORANDUM

Soviet Capabilities for Direct Military
Intervention in the Middle East

Potential Soviet direct intervention in the Middle East can be envisioned as taking one of three forms: (1) introduction of a large blocking force of Soviet ground forces to effectively stop Israeli thrusts, (2) introduction of a token military force, such as an airborne regiment, or (3) introduction of Soviet manned tactical air and tactical air defense units in an attempt to overcome Israeli air superiority.

This memorandum discusses Soviet capabilities for direct military intervention in the Middle East. It examines the air and sea transport requirements for moving selected forces into the Middle East and for supporting them logistically. And, it describes the likely intelligence warning indicators associated with various Soviet intervention options.

Soviet Ground Forces

If political factors alone did not weigh heavily against Soviet commitment of significant ground combat forces in the Middle East--logistic and transportation requirements for such an action virtually preclude it, at least in the short run.

Soviet ground forces most immediately available for commitment to the Damascus or Suez area are the seven airborne divisions scattered throughout the USSR. Movement by air of even one of these divisions--some

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7,400 men, 1,000 large weapons, and essential motor transport elements--would require at least 350 AN-12 flights. An additional 270 flights by AN-12s would be needed if all the division's supporting equipment is moved as well. Table 1 lists the equipment holdings of a typical Soviet airborne division and the transports required to lift them.

The military impact of one or two Soviet airborne divisions in the present situation would be negligible. An airborne division, equipped primarily with light artillery and antitank guns, would not have the firepower or maneuverability to effectively combat Israeli armored or mechanized forces of the size they would be likely to encounter.

The Soviets have one or two naval infantry regiments--up to 4,000 men--in the Black Sea Fleet. Three of the four Alligator class LSTs and eight of the 14 Polnochny class LSMs assigned to the Black Sea Fleet are currently engaged in shipping arms to Syria and would have to be returned in order to sealift the naval infantry to the Middle East. The need for an amphibious landing appears remote, however, and this small force would have little impact.

To have a significant capability against Israeli forces now operating in either Syria or the Sinai, the Soviets probably would require at least a complete tank or motorized rifle division (9,000 to 12,000 men) supported by up to 100 Soviet manned tactical aircraft. The time required to insert such a force in Syria or along the Suez would be measured in weeks and would require a combined air and sealift operation unprecedented for the Soviets. Soviet capabilities to lift division sized military forces to the Middle East are discussed in detail at annex, beginning on page .

[redacted] that the Soviets have shipped Scud missiles to Egypt, although there is no other evidence to confirm this. Nor is there any evidence that Egyptians have been trained to operate the Scud system. On balance, the Soviets probably would not

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The Soviet Airborne Division:
Composition and Lift Requirements

THE DIVISION:

Personnel	7400
Small arms	6000 rifles 1000 pistols
Larger weapons	600 machineguns and antitank grenade launchers 145 towed artillery, antitank and AA guns 155 recoilless antitank guns and rocket launchers 45 self-propelled (tracked) antitank/assault guns 55 antitank guided missile sets 20 scout cars <u>1020</u> Total
Ammunition	275 tons
Communications	700 radio sets
Motor Transport	8 large trucks 534 medium trucks 135 small trucks 189 1 axle trailers 85 ambulances and motorcycles <u>951</u> Total

LIFT REQUIREMENTS (FLIGHTS):

Personnel and small arms	80 AN-12
Larger weapons and ammunition	150 AN-12, 6 AN-22
Communications and all motor transport except medium trucks	120 AN-12
Total	<u>350</u> AN-12, 6 AN-22
Medium trucks	270 AN-12
Grand Total	<u>620</u> AN-12, 6 AN-22

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Table 2

Soviet Scud Brigade:
Composition and Airlift Requirements

	<u>Number of Items</u>	<u>Lift Requirements (flights)</u>
Scud transporter-launchers	9	5 AN-22
Support trucks, vans, ambulances, tractors	266	190 AN-12 18 AN-22
Bulldozers, lowboys, miscellaneous trailers and transporters	70	35 AN-12 9 AN-22
Radars and Radio sets	113	5 AN-12
Total	458	232 AN-12 32 AN-22
Personnel (small arms)	1100 (1500)	15 AN-12
Grand Total		245 AN-12 32 AN-22

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consider that the introduction of Scud missiles into the Middle East conflict could have any real effect on the military outcome of the war. With its relatively poor CEP (1/3 nm), and using conventional high-explosive warheads, the Scud system would have little military utility in the Middle East except, perhaps, as a terror weapon against Israeli cities.

The common organizational unit for the Scud system in the Soviet army is the brigade, which consists of 1100 men, nine Scud transporter launchers, and 340 supporting motor vehicles. About 245 AN-12 and 30 AN-22 flights would be needed to airlift a unit of this type to Egypt--a sizable investment of airlift resources for such a small increase in firepower. (See Table 2)

Soviet Tactical Air and Air Defense Units

In 1970, the Soviets set a precedent by committing five tactical air squadrons (about 60 aircraft) and some 40 Soviet-manned SA-3 battalions to support Egyptian air defenses. This action did, in fact, inhibit Israeli operations in Egyptian air space. In the current situation, major Israeli successes could invite a similar Soviet effort to neutralize Israeli air capabilities. There is evidence that Soviet "advisors" are already performing key command or maintenance functions for Arab SAM forces. Introduction of full Soviet fighter or SAM units could be the next step.

Movement to the Theater

Introduction of Soviet air defense units to Egypt in 1970 was drawn out over many weeks--most of the surface-to-air elements were sealifted. In the current situation, however, the Soviets could be expected to move more quickly because:

- the need is more immediate
- the SAM equipment which probably would be employed (SA-4 and SA-6 battalions) is more easily airlifted than that used in 1970

--there are more large capacity AN-22 transports available than in 1970

Soviet fighters such as the MIG-21 do not have sufficient range to be ferried to the Middle East along the flight routes currently being used for the Soviet military airlift to the Middle East, nor are they equipped for aerial refueling. These fighters would have to be disassembled and transported aboard cargo aircraft or ships.

Allowing time to prepare the fighters for shipment, a complete Soviet regiment of 40 MIG-21s could be transported from the USSR to Syria or Egypt within a three to four day period. Another three to four days probably would be needed to assemble the aircraft and otherwise ready the unit for combat. It is assumed here that aviation fuel, ordnance, and some ground support equipment would be available at local airfields. Lift requirements for a Soviet tactical air regiment are shown in Table 3.

A complete Soviet SA-6 surface-to-air missile battalion, consisting of four launch batteries (16 transporter-launchers each with three missiles), 400 men and 85 items of supporting equipment could be airlifted into Syria or Egypt by about 65 AN-12 and 10 AN-22 flights. An airlifted SA-6 could be committed to combat within hours after arriving in the Middle East.

Although 1-2 days could be required to ready the full battalion for combat, some combat capability could be attained within several hours after the first elements were landed. Equipment holdings and airlift requirements for an SA-6 battalion are shown in Table 4.

Political Considerations

The political and military risk of introducing Soviet tactical air and air defense elements in the Middle East might be considered acceptable by the Soviets.

Table 3

The Soviet MIG-21 Fighter Regiment:
Composition and Lift Requirements

Soviet Tactical Air Regiment

The air regiment:

Combat aircraft	40
Personnel required for operations	500
Major items of support equipment required for operations	65

Lift requirements (flights):

Fighter aircraft	40 AN-12
Personnel and support equipment	15 AN-12
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	55 AN-12

