

6 November 1973

MEMORANDUM

Aviation Week Article of 5 November
 Entitled "Soviet Poise Three-Front Global Drive"

1. Cecil Brownlow endeavors to demonstrate that the Soviets are moving on three major fronts--the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Cuba--to gain strategic political advantages over the US. Brownlow states that the Soviets apparently believe that the US would be hard pressed to respond militarily to all three threats at the same time and that they believe that the Nixon Administration is in such a weak condition politically that it is incapable of responding to the threats. Although the article is based on some facts, it contains a number of errors and Brownlow offers little evidence to support his thesis that the Soviets are engaging coordinated power moves in three disparate areas of the world. In essence, Brownlow appears to have taken the Middle East crisis and from there extrapolated a scenario linking that crisis with other areas of tension where the Soviets have long been involved.

Middle East

2. In our judgment, Soviet conduct prior to the Middle East was was mainly reactive to events and Moscow had little or no control over the Arabs' decision to go to war. There is no good evidence to support Brownlow's apparent belief that the Soviets encouraged Egypt and Syria to begin the war. The Soviets have sought advantages for themselves from the war, however, and have shown clearly that they are not ready to let their interest in detente totally override their objectives in the Middle East.

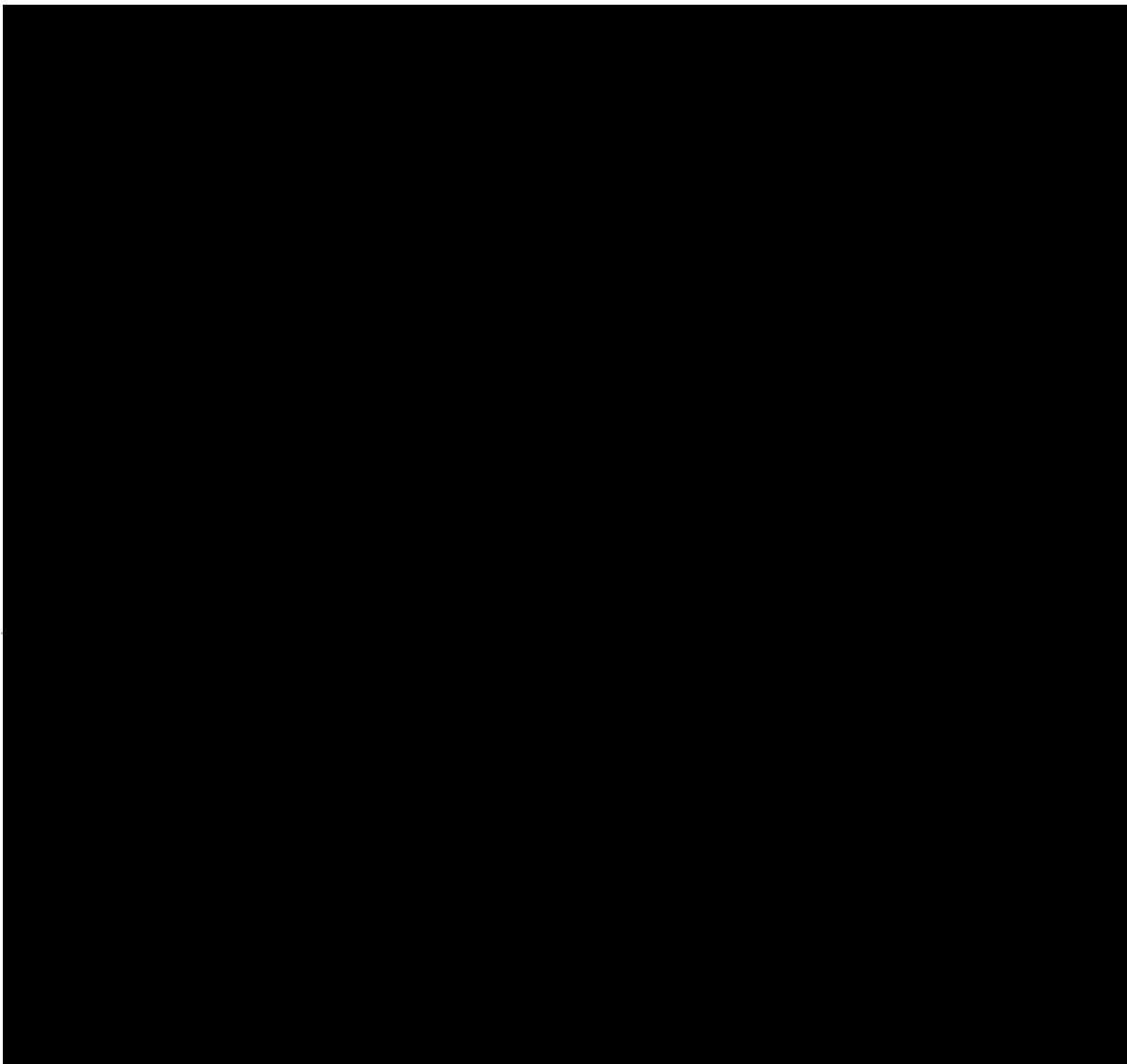
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Furthermore, the Kremlin's behavior suggests that its motivation is no longer merely an effort to maintain its influence and physical presence in the Middle East. Rather, the Soviet leadership probably sees the crisis as a key test of the credibility of its world-wide image of a superpower equal to that of the US.

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proper as asserted by Brownlow. The Soviets, as Mr. Brownlow notes, have augmented their Soviet Mediterranean Squadron since the Middle East crisis began (began) but the number of Soviet naval units in the Mediterranean is expected to decline over the next several days.

Southeast Asia

6. Brownlow's comments on the North Vietnamese threat to South Vietnam contain both fact and fiction. The Communists have improved their military position in South Vietnam since the January ceasefire, particularly in Military Regions 1 and 3. Hanoi has the capability to launch a major military campaign with little additional preparation, but only a moderate increase in fighting is expected in the coming weeks, primary North Vietnamese activity directed at securing the rice harvest.

7. Brownlow's figure for the number of North Vietnamese that have infiltrated into the South since the January cease-fire (194,000) is grossly inflated. CIA estimates that only about 90,000 North Vietnamese have moved into Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam since January. Brownlow's estimates on the number of tanks in the south also appear high. The North Vietnamese are believed to have infiltrated about 400 tanks and armored personnel carriers since the cease-fire into the South, rather than the 750 stated in the article. The Communists have built or refurbished airfields in Communist-controlled areas of South Vietnam, but no MIGs are stationed at these fields, nor is there any hard evidence that the Communists have utilized any of the strips. One heavily defended strip in northern Quany Tri Province could, however, be used by North Vietnamese fighters.

8. Brownlow appears to be the farthest off base in his assertion that the Soviets are calling the shots in Hanoi. If an offensive does come, the

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-3-

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decision to do so will be made in Hanoi, not Moscow. Most of the Soviet military equipment that has recently been moved into South Vietnam arrived in the north before the cease-fire. There is substantial evidence to indicate that the Soviets have restricted the flow of military supplies to North Vietnam over the past several months. The two countries have not signed a military aid agreement for 1974 and concluded an economic agreement only after great difficulty.

Cuba

9. Brownlow's assertion that a "distinct possibility" now exists of a Cuban attack on the US base at Guantanamo and the US Atlantic Fleet appears premature at best. New artillery positions are being built near the base, raising the question of Cuban intentions toward the installation. This and other Cuban military developments, however, do not provide any specific indications that Castro is attempting to capitalize on US preoccupation with the Middle East conflict. The artillery positions have been under construction at least since last July, and contrary to Brownlow's assertion, no artillery has been emplaced. No military equipment, moreover, has been detected and no Cuban build-up has been observed at military installations near the base.

10. The 25 October alert of Cuban military forces was in response to the general US military alert and was terminated on the night of 31 October. The Cuban Navy includes 4 Osa and 18 Komar guided-missile patrol boats, a force that presents no substantial threat to the US Atlantic Fleet. We have no evidence that the Soviets have significantly increased or are planning to increase the Cuban inventory of these patrol boats.

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-4-

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