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5 October 1972

MEMORANDUM

Recent Soviet Activity in Syria

1. The highly publicized Soviet military airlift and subsequent naval visits to Syrian ports are designed to underscore Moscow's support for the Arab cause and to deter Israeli military action against the Syrians. The Soviets appear to welcome the opportunity to upgrade their position in Damascus, and regain lost ground in the Middle East. The recent upsurge in military deliveries to Syria, however, appears to be under aid agreements that predate the Soviet expulsion from Egypt, and there is no evidence of significant new political commitments from either side. Damascus apparently still has not acquiesced to Moscow's long-standing desire for a friendship treaty.

2. In the wake of the uncertainties in Egypt, the Soviets presumably would like increased access to Syrian port facilities, and have welcomed the opportunity to demonstrate that the presence of Soviet naval combatants could benefit them both. Reports of the Soviets seeking to acquire new base facilities in Syria, however, have not been confirmed.

Background

3. Moscow has committed over \$580 million of military aid to Syria since it initiated its program in 1956. The level of military aid, more than half of which has been delivered since the Arab-Israeli War of June 1967, makes Syria the fourth ranking recipient of Soviet arms aid.

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4. Negotiation of new arms agreement appears to have begun during the February 1972 Damascus trip of Deputy Premier Mazurov. The communique issued at the end of the visit indicated that a technical and economic cooperation agreement had been signed and "steps for promoting" Syrian defense capability were discussed. The new military agreement, finalized during Soviet Defense Minister Grechko's May 1972 visit to Damascus, is believed to have provided for improving Syria's air defenses and upgrading its ground forces equipment.

SA-3 Deliveries

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The addition of the SA-3s to the existing SA-2 system will provide Syria with an improved capability for defense against low and medium-level air attacks.

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Shipments this year have included as many as 30 MIG-21 jet fighters, SA-3 missile equipment, 100 T-62 medium tanks, and a wide range of ground forces and support equipment [REDACTED] Damascus received its first delivery of T-62 tanks [REDACTED] making Syria the second Middle Eastern country after Egypt to receive this tank, a more advanced model than the T-54/55 that comprises the main force of its armored corps.

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[REDACTED]

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Soviet Military Technicians

9. In mid-1972, the Soviets had about 800 military advisors and technicians stationed in Syria, some assigned to key positions in the Syria command structure. The number has probably increased somewhat since the SA-3 missile system was introduced [redacted]. In general, the Syrians have been satisfied with the Soviets involvement in training and maintenance functions, [redacted]

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Soviet Fleet Activity

10. Soviet naval vessels have used the Syrian ports of Latakia and Tartus for a number of years for port calls and for minor repair work aboard ship. [redacted]

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Economic Assistance

11. No new extensions of Soviet economic aid have been made to Syria during the past 18 months, nor has there been any noticeable acceleration of activity on projects already underway. Implementation of the program continues under the \$233 million of commitments made in 1957 and 1966. The most important of these is the Latakia-Oamishli Railroad being built under the 1957 agreement and the Euphrates Dam under the latter accord. Agreements to provide additional assistance were signed in 1969 and 1970 but the allocation of credits was made contingent on the results of surveys to be undertaken.

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