

DOCUMENT NO. 11  
NO CHANGE IN CLASS.   
 DECLASSIFIED  
CLASS. CHANGED TO: TS S C  
NEXT REVIEW DATE: \_\_\_\_\_  
AUTH: \_\_\_\_\_

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TS #141653

STAT

DATE: APR 1980 REVIEWER: 018645

4 November 1957

DRAFT  
MEMO FOR THE DCI

TURKISH AND SOVIET INTENTIONS IN SYRIAN CRISIS

I. TURKISH INTENTIONS WITH REGARD TO SYRIA

1. The Turks are genuinely alarmed by developments in Syria and are probably convinced that if the present coalition government is left undisturbed, Syria will in time come under Soviet control. Such a development would be interpreted as a direct threat to Turkish territorial integrity and independent association with the Free World. Unlike the conservative Arab states, Turkey probably holds no hope that the Syrian situation will be changed from within. Consequently, it tends to be action-minded in its search for a solution to the Syrian problem.

2. This outlook has been expressed in mobilization of Turkish forces on the Syrian border. The mobilization was probably intended to:

a. Stimulate US and NATO concern over developments in Syria and ensure a major role for Turkey in Free World reaction;

b. Impress on the conservative Arab states which oppose the Syrian coalition and on the coalition leaders themselves Turkey's powerful potential for affecting developments in the Arab world;

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c. Place Turkish military forces in a position where, if conflict did break out in the area, they would be in a position to employ their capabilities most effectively.

The mobilization may also have been aimed at:

d. Improving the Government's chances in the 29 October general election, and

e. Obtaining additional US military assistance as a result of the critical situation.

3. We believe it unlikely that the Turks would have at any point in the crisis or would now seek to invade Syria without US approval and support. They would be unlikely to risk their relations with the US and with NATO in so uncertain a venture. Furthermore, we believe for the following reasons that it is unlikely that the Turks would now invade Syria even if they were confident of the subsequent backing of the US:

a. Fear of Soviet military action against Turkey stimulated and intensified by Soviet public and official statements;

b. Indications of the unwillingness, as well as of the inability of the conservative Arab states to assist effectively in a move to re-establish a conservative government in Syria;

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c. Poor prospects for political success due to the conservative Arab states reluctance and probable inability to render necessary assistance.

4. The danger of a border clash expanding into a major armed conflict is not now great. The Syrians have armed civilians in the border areas but few troops there. The Turks can and probably will keep tight control over their forces. Moreover, world attention is focussed on the area and the UN is formally seized of the Syrian situation.

5. Danger of conflict will remain, however, as long as developments within Syria continue to cause Turkey concern. The danger may in fact increase after several months as world attention shifts to other "crisis" areas. Thus, some months hence, the Turks might, if they deemed the circumstances to be especially favorable, reopen with the US the question of action against Syria, or possibly even choose to interpret past US assurances of support in the event of aggression by Syria as authority to provoke or fabricate such an aggression.

B. Probable Soviet Reactions. in the Syrian Crisis

6. We believe that the USSR's strong stand in this matter is due to a desire to forestall a Turkish invasion of Syria. A Turkish

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invasion, by forcing the USSR either to accept the possible downfall of the Syrian regime or to respond with interventions which risked US counteraction against the USSR itself, would present a choice so painful that the USSR would almost certainly prefer not to be confronted with it.

7. The concurrence of a threatening Soviet posture towards Turkey and the demotion of Zhukov raises the possibility that Soviet policy in the Syrian crisis may be affected by his ouster or have been one of the issues involved. We think this unlikely, since domestic issues appear to be the cause of recent Kremlin developments. The proposition that Zhukov, keenly aware of US capabilities, had opposed a risky course in the Middle East may be true, but it rests entirely upon presumption, and evidence is lacking. In fact, Zhukov added his voice to the campaign of intimidating Turkey and demonstrating Soviet support for Syria at a time when the USSR's general propaganda attack had already begun to diminish. If his demotion affects Soviet policy on this matter at all, its effect might well be restraining, since Khrushchev may have felt it necessary to modify temporarily a Middle Eastern policy which was disturbing to other Soviet leaders in order to gain their support against Zhukov. This effect would not apply to a later recurrence of the crisis, in which Khrushchev's boldness, less fettered than before by his colleagues, might become an important factor.

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8. During the coming weeks, the military tension along the Turkish-Syrian border may abate and this factor, in combination with UN action and Turkish reassurances, may indicate that the chances of an invasion have lessened considerably. Indeed, recent posture of Soviet leaders suggests that the USSR will not seek to maintain an atmosphere of crisis. The Soviet leaders would probably estimate that, under these circumstances, continued Soviet charges of imminent aggression would lose their plausibility and compromise the USSR's pose as a disinterested defender of the Arab underdog. Instead, the USSR would probably allow the crisis to subside and attempt to capitalize upon this outcome by claiming that its protection had saved the Syrian regime.

Probable Soviet Reaction to Turkish Intervention.

9. The USSR's repeated warnings against Turkish intervention in Syria and declarations that it would support Syria make it extremely likely that it will feel compelled to react strongly in some form to such intervention, although it has carefully avoided openly committing itself to any particular course of action. The USSR would be reluctant to accept the loss to its prestige which would occur if a government it openly supports were overthrown. It would be even more

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concerned over the resulting setback to its newly won position in the Middle East and the corresponding strengthening of the US position in that area.

10. We believe, therefore, that armed Turkish intervention against the Syrian government would produce a major international crisis. The USSR would adopt a highly threatening posture, probably including threatening military gestures along the Turkish frontiers and in the Black Sea. It would continue to make great propaganda play of alleged Western instigation. In addition, it would almost certainly promote sabotage and subversive actions, and send such additional technical and logistical support to Syria as it could through available channels. Beyond this, it could choose among three broad courses of action (not wholly mutually exclusive): (1) overt military action by Soviet forces directly against Turkey; (2) such assistance to Syria as sending Bloc "volunteers" and/or air attacks on Turkish forces in Syria, perhaps by Soviet aircraft and pilots flown in to operate from Syrian bases; or (3) attempts to secure immediate UN or great power action to halt the conflict or possibly to provide justification for subsequent Soviet armed intervention.

11. A key factor in the USSR's choice of countermoves would be its estimate of the US reaction. We do not believe that the USSR would

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desire to let the crisis reach such proportions as to involve grave risks of general war. But the Soviet leaders would probably believe that their own deterrent capabilities as well as other factors would also induce caution on the part of the Western powers and leave the USSR considerable maneuverability. However, the Soviet leaders are also well aware that it would be extremely difficult for them to bring substantial Soviet forces to bear in Syria quickly without violating the frontiers of US and UK allies, and thereby incurring risks of direct conflict with US and NATO forces. We believe that the Soviets would be reluctant to take these risks unless they were confident that the US and UK would not react with armed force, and they probably would not be confident in this regard. While the Soviet leaders may regard their recent announced launching of ICBM test vehicles and an earth satellite, together with their belligerent statements, as reinforcing the inhibitions on Western military counteraction, we believe that they are also impressed with the announced US determination to support Turkey. We do not believe that they would estimate that their successes have significantly changed US intentions in event of a Soviet attack on Turkey.

12. In these circumstances we believe that the USSR would see major advantages in appearing as a peace-loving opponent of aggression by an immediate appeal to the UN. In urging Syria to bring the threat

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of Turkish attack before the UN, the USSR has already shown its readiness to use the UN on the Syrian issue. Whether or not the intervention was provoked by Syria, the USSR would label it as Western-initiated, and would expect that it would be viewed as aggression by a substantial number of UN members particularly among the Afro-Asian nations. By acting through the UN, the USSR would avoid the risks and difficulties of extensive military countermoves as well as the possible political disadvantages resulting from the appearance of Soviet forces in the Middle East. Soviet success in getting UN intervention would greatly enhance Soviet prestige and inevitably appear as a defeat for the US; the USSR would consider that the US could not oppose UN action without very serious embarrassment. Moreover, by itself playing a major role in UN or great power intercession, the USSR would help to achieve one of its major objectives, that of securing a recognized voice in great power action on Middle Eastern issues.

13. We believe the attractions of this course would be such that the Soviets would almost certainly make it their initial move. Should they do so, they would almost certainly continue to make threatening gestures, as being likely to promote rapid UN action rather than the reverse. However, the Soviets would probably limit their military help to Syria, at least during this initial period of UN consideration,

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to technical and logistical support. The Soviets would also encourage active Egyptian support of Syria, as well as sabotage, disruption and subversion in any Arab States joining with Turkey.

14. If a UN resolution brought a halt to the Turkish action, the USSR would move to participate as actively as possible in the settlement and to insure a pro-Soviet government. If, on the other hand, there were no UN resolution or if the Turks persisted notwithstanding a UN resolution and, as is probable, appeared likely to overthrow the present Syrian government and to occupy Damascus, the USSR would be confronted with the choice between major military action and acceptance of this result.

15. Especially if the Soviet leaders considered that the prevailing climate of opinion would inhibit Western countermoves, they might send a token force of "volunteers;" they might risk some overflights of Iran and Iraq, or even of Southeast Turkey, where Turkish air defenses are weak and the chances of a clash limited. They might also undertake air attacks against Turkish forces in Syria. In fact, the USSR might estimate that such actions would influence the Western powers to accept a cease fire. However, we believe that the USSR would be unlikely to try to oppose Turkish forces by large scale use of Soviet aircraft or ground forces -- volunteer or regular -- in Syria. The Soviet leaders would probably regard such intervention as difficult to carry

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out on a scale large enough to be effective against the Turks without entailing substantial risks of US countermeasures. Finally, if a UN resolution were in existence, large scale Soviet intervention would be an inappropriate response unless specifically authorized by the resolution. ~~(They might however, send a number of volunteers, in a small enough to avoid provoking Western counter-action, believing that such token assistance, even if ineffective, would be preferable to the loss of prestige attendant upon sending none at all in the face of imminent Syrian defeat.)~~

16. As to direct military action against Turkey itself, we believe that such action would be unlikely, though we cannot exclude it altogether. We believe that, given the explicit US warnings in this regard, the USSR would probably believe that a Soviet attack on Turkey would be taken by the US as involving NATO obligations, and hence would create US counter-action against the USSR itself, with the attendant risk of grave risk of general war. Moreover, in evaluating the alternatives to accepting this risk, the USSR would expect a widespread popular Arab reaction against Turkey (and against the US as Turkey's apparent sponsor), which could subsequently be turned to major Soviet advantage in the Middle East.

17. While the above reasoning seems to us to make unlikely any Soviet resort to direct military action against Turkey itself, or the large scale commitment of forces within Syria, we cannot wholly exclude

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the possibility of such action, having in mind the possible Soviet belief that the US would not in the last analysis accept grave risk of general war. Moreover, even if the Soviets neither attacked Turkey nor sent forces on a large scale to Syria, it is possible that they would take a series of actions with respect to Syria, and on the borders of Turkey, which would nevertheless involve risk of miscalculations leading to broadening of the conflict.

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