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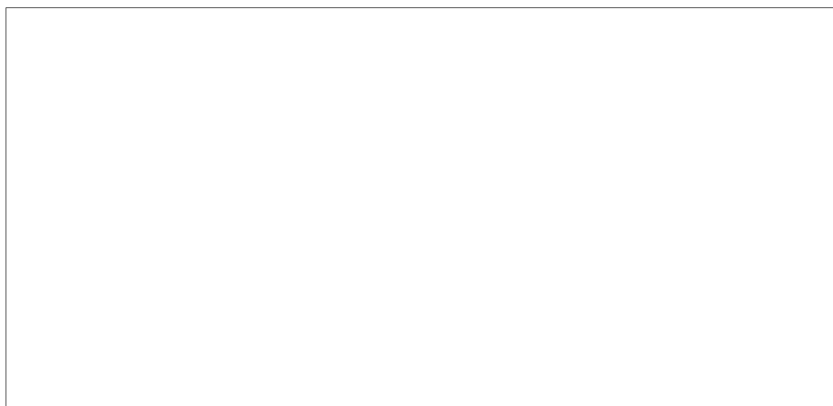
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# USSR Review: Supplement

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 EXTRA COPIES 352-371  
 RECORD CENTER 372-421  
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# USSR Review: Supplement



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July 1988

This supplement of the *USSR Review* is published  
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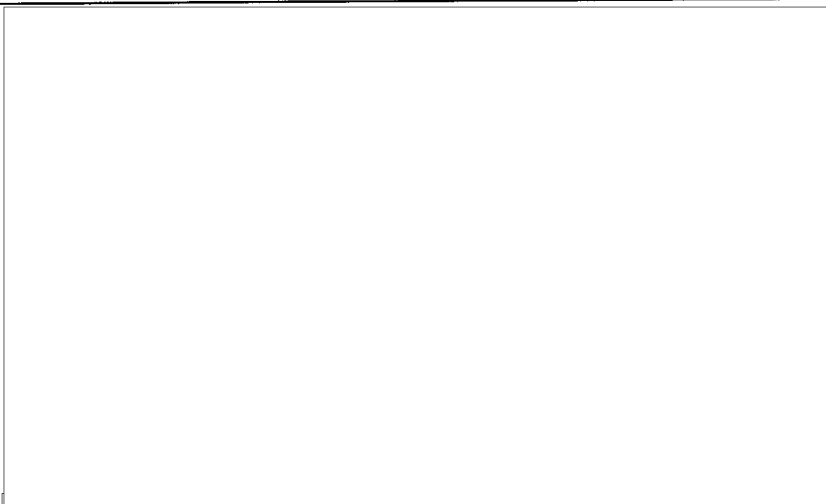




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Public criticism of the Air Defense Forces since a West German Cessna landed in Red Square in 1987 has focused on deficiencies in combat readiness, especially in the Radar Troops. The severity of the problems revealed suggests that considerable time and additional resources would be required to remedy them. 	25X1
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**Soviet-Syrian Military Relations:**

**Is the Tide Turning?** 

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Moscow may be preparing to supply Syria with new weapon systems, possibly including the SU-24 Fencer light bomber. Up to now, the Soviets have refused to supply Damascus with long-range weapons capable of striking military targets throughout Israel from bases deep inside Syria. Nonetheless, Syrian permission for Moscow to construct a naval repair and maintenance facility at Tartus and Damascus' increased willingness to turn to China and North Korea as alternative sources for weapons are providing Moscow with new incentives to liberalize its arms assistance to Syria. 

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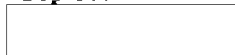
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**Soviet Air Defenses: Worries  
About Low Readiness**

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Prolonged and specific criticism in Soviet media of the performance of the Air Defense Forces (ADF) indicates a perception among the Soviet leadership that serious deficiencies exist in the ADF's combat capability. Public criticism began after the ADF failed to prevent a Cessna piloted by West German Mathias Rust from reaching Moscow in May 1987 following a series of Soviet air defense failures during peacetime.



Soviet speeches have associated the Rust fiasco with shortcomings in the ADF's readiness for war. The military press has focused on personnel, logistics, and training problems in the Radar Troops—a branch of the ADF probably most responsible for many of the recent air defense failures.

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Recent Soviet statements have described a readiness improvement program under way throughout the Air Defense Forces to correct the errors uncovered by the Cessna affair. These efforts apparently concentrate on increasing individual responsibility and discipline. However, given the severity of the problems uncovered, the announced reforms probably will remain inadequate without the commitment of additional resources.

**Peacetime Air Defense Failures**

During observances of Air Defense Troops Day on 10 April 1988, senior Soviet officers admitted that problems in combat readiness and command of air defenses had allowed Mathias Rust's Cessna sports plane to fly to Moscow and land in Red Square nearly a year earlier. These official comments, moreover, acknowledged that the Air Defense Forces' deficiencies persisted. Army Gen. Ivan M. Tret'yak, who took over command of the ADF in the aftermath of the Cessna affair, called the Politburo's assessment of the failure "harsh and just," and he described an improvement program under way to remedy the problems.



The ADF's failure to stop Rust followed a history of poor reactions to unexpected events in peacetime:

- In 1978, a Korean Airlines (KAL) passenger liner strayed into Soviet airspace near Murmansk and flew for several hours before Soviet air defenses located it and forced it down.

- In 1983, another KAL plane violated the Soviet border over the Kamchatka Peninsula.

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The airliner flew across Sakhalin and was shot down, before it was positively identified.

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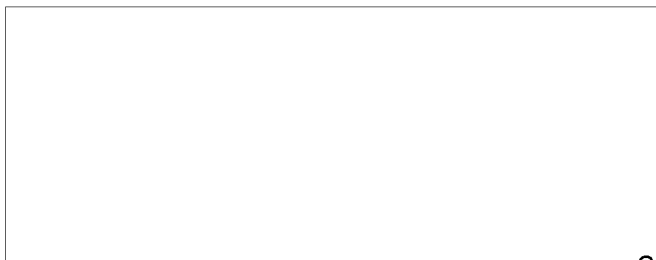


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**Implications for Wartime Effectiveness**

The Air Defense Forces' peacetime performance does not necessarily represent their potential wartime effectiveness because their alert level would be much higher during a period of hostilities, and they would face entirely different kinds of targets and situations. Our view has been, however, that the peacetime record does point to deficiencies in Soviet air defense readiness, which would have an adverse impact on wartime operations.<sup>1</sup> Although the Air Defense Forces

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would be at a higher state of alert in war, their personnel, communications, and logistic network would face additional stress because of sustained, high-intensity operations, combat attrition, and the need to deal with many targets rather than just one at a time. [redacted]

In particular, the peacetime air defense failures demonstrate that the ADF have difficulty responding to unexpected circumstances. This difficulty would hamper them as much in responding to enemy airstrikes in war as to border violations in peacetime—perhaps more so. Air raids against the Soviet Union would be planned to maximize tactical surprise and to complicate tracking. Further, Western military aircraft are equipped with radar jamming equipment and attack missiles to counter air defenses and often are capable of high speeds that also serve to enhance tactical surprise. [redacted]

The negative Soviet public characterization of the ADF since the Cessna incident suggests that Soviet authorities believe that the succession of peacetime air defense failures does reflect potential wartime deficiencies. The leadership's policy of *glasnost*, or openness, apparently has made possible some public discussion of the record and its implications for the combat readiness of Soviet air defenses. During an interview of General Tret'yak in February 1988, his interviewer stated that many believed the Rust incident represented more than a fluke. In April, the narrator of a Soviet television program about Air Defense Day mentioned the downing of KAL-007 in conjunction with the Rust affair and asked whether air defense personnel had become "too self-assured and complacent." In contrast, earlier public references to the KAL shutdown had tended to describe it as a demonstration of the effectiveness of Soviet air defenses. [redacted]

**Focus on the Radar Troops**

A series of military press articles over the last year indicates that the Soviet leadership blames many of the failures of its air defenses on the Radar Troops, the branch of the ADF responsible for target detection and tracking. Several articles that appeared in *Krasnaya Zvezda* in August 1987 describe in detail the training and maintenance problems of the Radar Troops. [redacted]

One article examines the condition of radar units in the Moscow Air Defense District—through which Rust had flown unchallenged two months earlier. The article describes several personnel deficiencies, including:

- Difficulties with late arrival of conscripts.
- Lack of Russian language ability in new recruits.
- Lack of realism in training.
- Incompetence with modern equipment.
- Excessive use of soldiers for noncombat-related duties such as construction. [redacted]

The article also describes a mismanaged and ill-functioning logistic system, which results in low readiness of radar units because of a lack of spare parts. The author visited a radar station that had been out of service for 24 hours because a warrant officer had to be sent by train to regimental headquarters for spare parts. Shocked that such a situation could exist in the "capital military district," the author describes the unit's supply problems, including:

- Inadequate stocks of spare parts.
- Slow delivery by haphazard means.
- Defective repair work.
- Excessive redtape.
- Lack of responsibility among officers.
- A redundant and ineffective command structure.

The article concludes that these problems are characteristic not only of that district, but also of all the Air Defense Forces. [redacted]

Such negative publicity about the radar forces lent credence to unconfirmed Western press reports in February 1988 that the Radar Troops' commander, Lt. Gen. Nikolay Sechkin, had been replaced as a result of the Rust affair. Reprimand of the radar forces' commander would not be unprecedented, as circumstances surrounding Sechkin's appointment in 1984 suggest that his predecessor was dismissed for the KAL-007 failure. [redacted]

The explicitness of the 1987 *Krasnaya Zvezda* article indicates a real concern among the leadership with the combat effectiveness of the Radar Troops. Most speeches and articles shortly after the Rust incident

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***Soviet Senior Officer and Press Commentary on  
the Effectiveness of the Air Defense Forces***

*Serious shortcomings in combat readiness and control of troops contributed to the flight of an FRG sports plane over our territory with impunity in May of last year. . . . The harsh and just assessment given to the Armed Forces and Air Defense Troops by the Central Committee Politburo made all of us double and treble our efforts to perfect the air defense system. A target program, including a package of political, organizational, educational, and cadre measures. . . . has been developed and is being implemented. . . . aimed at substantially increasing combat readiness and strengthening military discipline.*

*Army Gen. Ivan M. Tret'yak,  
Commander in Chief of Air Defense  
Forces,  
Moscow Television Service,  
10 April 1988*

*"We have drawn practical conclusions from last year's incident involving the violation of the USSR state border by the West German sports aircraft. We have carried out a recertification of servicemen. . . ."* (Interviewer:) *"But, clearly, some unresolved problems remain?"* *"Yes, unfortunately. For instance, in some units and subunits the tendency to cut corners in training has still not been overcome. Providing amenities in our military settlements and ensuring that our subunits have everything they need to lead a normal life remain quite acute."*

*Col. Gen. V. Silakov,  
Chief of the Air Defense Forces Political Directorate,  
Krasnaya Zvezda,  
10 April 1988*

*Many new recruits have a poor knowledge of the Russian language. . . . This creates great difficulties in mastering specialist skills and the service in general. . . . It is bad enough that many draftees are inadequately prepared for service, but this year they are also arriving with long delays. It is bad enough that there are scarcely enough people sometimes to carry out details and combat duty, but commanders are also being forced to detach servicemen for construction work.*

*The regiment's sites do not have the necessary stock of parts. Spare equipment accessories are not restocked and are scarce . . . . The military district fails to fill orders . . . . promptly and then only partially fills them . . . . There is no documentation for the technology involved . . . . and there are no instruments or tools . . . . Because of this, equipment is not combat ready.*

*The problems of spare equipment accessories and the servicing and repair of equipment . . . . go beyond the framework of the military district . . . . There is an urgent need to concentrate the troops' logistic and technical supplies in one pair of hands . . . . Having multiple departments generates irresponsibility, red tape, and formalism . . . . These problems are also characteristic of Air Defense Forces directorates and services.*

*From a two-part article about the Moscow Air Defense District,  
Krasnaya Zvezda,  
August 1987*

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blamed that failure on the irresponsibility and bad attitudes of officers and servicemen. But, this article was unusual in going beyond vague criticism and actually addressing specific problems of the force.



Another *Krasnaya Zvezda* article published in August 1987 mentions a visit to a radar unit by a "commission of experts" and complains of the lack of effort to improve readiness once the commission had left. This reference to an inspection by experts suggests that investigations were carried out after the Rust fiasco, and that they uncovered significant problems in the radar forces.

Yet another article of February 1988 describes unrealistic training by Moscow District radar units and the resulting low state of combat readiness. The article charges that unit commanders, in order to improve performance scores, routinely give their personnel advance warning of target approach during training exercises. It also states that commanders do not make full use in training of the sophisticated radar and communications equipment or the experienced personnel at their disposal. Like the second August article, this article complains of the lack of improvement in readiness, concluding that "urgent problems" remain to be solved.

Because these articles were published over two months after the dismissal of senior officers following the Cessna affair and did not mention Rust's flight, their purpose was probably more than justification of politically motivated personnel changes. Rather, they appear intended to express honest dismay at the persistence of the Moscow District's military shortcomings, despite investigations and any corrective measures taken in the aftermath of the Rust incident.

If the criticisms in *Krasnaya Zvezda* were accurate, then the problems uncovered in the radar forces probably are not confined to the Moscow District. We know from emigre reporting that poor logistics similar to those illustrated in the articles have long plagued remote Arctic radar units. Personnel and logistic troubles in the Moscow District—which, given its prestige and location, should be as well supplied and staffed as any other—probably indicate serious vulnerabilities in the radar force as a whole.

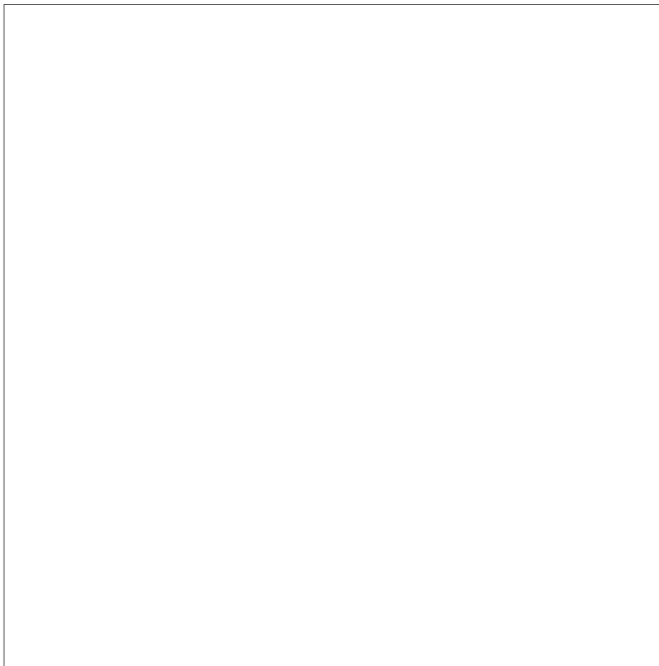
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**Improvement Program Under Way**

Frequent references in the Soviet press to the need for reform of the ADF indicate that the Soviets are working to correct these vulnerabilities. In April 1988, senior officials described an improvement program under way throughout the Soviet Air Defense Forces designed to increase both readiness for war and effectiveness during peacetime. The measures described include greater officer responsibility for troop discipline, for vigilance during alert duty, and for flexibility and realism in training. A *Krasnaya Zvezda* article indicates that, in addition, a "recertification" of servicemen is involved, probably consisting of follow-up examinations of servicemen's skills.

We are uncertain about the extent of reform because Soviet comments on the improvement program have been far less detailed than their descriptions of the problems to be solved. Several commentaries have referred to a "restructuring" program in the ADF. That term's popularity and the specific measures described indicate that this is likely to consist of attempts at greater personnel performance and discipline rather than an actual reorganization of the force.



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*Prospects*

[Redacted]

These accounts, together with the succession of peacetime failures since the late 1970s, indicate the longstanding nature of Radar Troops' problems. Soviet reforms to increase efficiency, in our view, are unlikely to solve those problems completely without the commitment of additional resources:

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- To end the apparently worsening radar personnel shortage, the Soviets would have to extend conscripted service periods to allow sufficient time for combat-related training as well as noncombat-related labor duties—or transfer new conscripts from other services. Such changes either would require longer absences of conscripts from the civilian labor force or would create personnel shortages elsewhere.
- Resuscitation of the radar forces' logistics network would probably require a large increase of investment in spare parts, repair equipment, transportation vehicles, and automated inventory management systems. The types of supply and maintenance problems reported—no spare parts available for delivery, no trucks or helicopters to deliver them—indicate that inadequate infrastructure, not just poor organization and excessive bureaucracy, is behind them.

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The potential impact on the Radar Troops of the announced program to increase readiness is difficult to evaluate, because our knowledge of its elements is limited to Soviet public discussions. Our analysis of the severity and persistence of personnel and maintenance deficiencies—which is based on emigre reporting and the long history of peacetime failures, in addition to the recent press criticisms—suggests that measures to improve training, discipline, and responsibility alone will not be sufficient. An increase in resources devoted to air defense—perhaps a major one—would be necessary. [Redacted]

Emigre reporting confirms that problems similar to those of the Moscow District as described in the press have plagued radar units of other districts for some time. In a radar unit near the Barents Sea during the late 1970s, according to an emigre [Redacted], lack of sufficient transportation and personnel delayed delivery and installation of new radars for over two years. Training of new personnel also was delayed, because troops were required for construction and snow-clearing, resulting in a severe shortage of experienced radar and communications personnel. These conditions existed despite the region's primary importance for air defense against strategic bombers from North America. [Redacted]

These requirements for increased labor commitment and equipment expenditures come at a bad time for the Soviet leadership, which appears to be seeking savings in the military sector to support a drive for economic growth. Yet, the leadership's open criticism of the ADF puts pressure on the Air Defense Forces and their commander, General Tret'yak, somehow to solve the force's shortcomings. Tret'yak has been the most vocal opponent of reductions in the Soviet defense effort—probably reflecting a calculation on his part that the desired level of readiness in the ADF cannot be achieved without substantial increases in outlays, much less with reductions. [Redacted]

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[Redacted] these problems worsened after the 1970s. Personnel shortages were so serious in a radar battalion in the Black Sea area during the mid-1980s, according to an emigre, that radar operators were forced to stay at their scopes for six hours at a time, even though regulations specified a two-hour maximum. One conscript alone operated radar equipment, which usually would require a crew of six or seven, and had to live inside the radar's van for a year to perform his duties. [Redacted]

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**Soviet-Syrian Military Relations:  
Is the Tide Turning?** [Redacted]

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There are some, as yet, inconclusive indications that Moscow is preparing to supply Syria with new weapon systems, possibly including the SU-24 Fencer light bomber. Up to now, the Soviets have refused to supply Damascus with long-range weapons capable of striking military targets throughout Israel from bases deep inside Syria, and they have been reluctant, since 1985, to provide new weapon systems to Syria. At the same time, Syria's ability to absorb new systems has declined during this period [Redacted]



Figure 1. SU-24 Fencer [Redacted]

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Nonetheless, Moscow has a number of new incentives to supply arms to Syria more liberally. Syria has permitted the Soviet Union to construct a naval repair and maintenance facility at Tartus. Moreover, Syria has shown increased willingness to turn to China and North Korea as alternative sources for weapons. Indications that new deals for advanced arms may be in the works belie the image of moderation toward the Arab-Israeli conflict that Soviet General Secretary Gorbachev has sought to cultivate. [Redacted]

[Redacted] Provision of the SU-24 would mark a clear escalation in the weapon systems Moscow is willing to supply to Syria. The SU-24 is a two-seat strike aircraft with terrain-avoidance radar, and it has about twice the operational radius of any fighter-bomber previously exported by the Soviet Union. It is the only Soviet tactical aircraft capable of day-night, all-weather, medium-to-low altitude penetrations of enemy territory. The SU-24 would, in theory, allow Syria to attack military targets throughout Israel from bases deep inside Syrian territory. [Redacted]

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***The SU-24: An Offensive Weapon for Syria?***

[Redacted]

Moscow up to now has refused to provide weapons with this capability. The Soviets consistently have denied Syrian requests for the SS-23 ballistic missile, claiming that the system's range (400 kilometers) and accuracy are beyond Syria's defensive needs. Although they have supplied the 300-km range Scud missile system to Syria, the Soviets apparently regard it as primarily a deterrent in the Arab-Israeli theater, because its relative inaccuracy makes it ill-suited to strike hard military targets. The Soviets have also supplied the more accurate SS-21 missile system to Damascus, but its short range (70 km) limits its use to tactical operations. Moscow may believe that the SU-24 would not prove to be as destabilizing in the region as would the SS-23 ballistic missile, because the aircraft would have greater difficulty penetrating Israel's strong air defenses. [Redacted]

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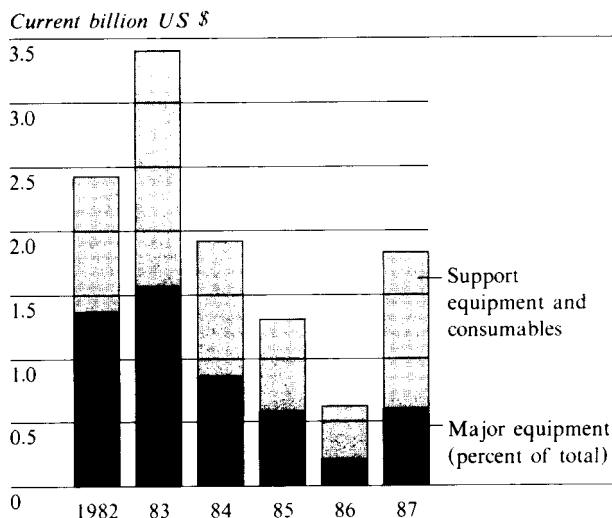
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**Other Arms Deals**

In addition to indications of SU-24 exports, a number of other indicators suggest the Soviet-Syrian military relationship may be on the upswing. The value of Soviet arms deliveries to Syria more than doubled last year after three years of decline. The delivery of a squadron of MIG-29 fighter aircraft—the only new system delivered—was the highlight of Soviet shipments, accounting for about 26 percent of the total value of Soviet deliveries in 1987. Moscow also provided Syria with self-propelled artillery for the first time since 1982.

**Figure 2  
Composition of Soviet Arms Deliveries to Syria, 1982-87**



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Since March 1988, five high-level Soviet officials have visited Syria, intensifying an already high exchange of official visits between the two countries (see inset). The unusual number of visits would seem to indicate that new arms agreements are in the works, although the emphasis of the visits appears to be on Syrian training and utilization of equipment.

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the Soviets are proscribing the provision of "offensive" weapons to Damascus, and they believe the Syrian military still has not adequately mastered many weapons already in the Syrian inventory.

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Moscow had refused as of late April to supply Syria with "new generation" weapons and was urging Syria to master fully existing systems.

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Indications that new deals may be in the works call into question the moderation Gorbachev sought to display when Syrian President Assad visited Moscow last spring. In a speech during the visit, Gorbachev claimed that a military solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict had been "completely discredited." He added that the Soviet Union would help Syria maintain her "defense capacity at the proper level." At the time, it appeared Gorbachev was putting Assad on notice that Syria should not expect Soviet military support to match that of previous years.

the Soviets would be imposing a "needs test" on Syrian arms requests as of 1 July 1988. Future Syrian arms requests would have to meet certain criteria concerning Syria's defensive needs as defined by Moscow. Although the Soviets have informally applied such criteria in the

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**Counterindications**

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**Chronology of High-Level Visits**

November 1987 *Admiral Chernavin, Commander in Chief of the Soviet Navy, to Syria, according to press reports.*

[Redacted]

February 1988 *Lt. General Khuli, Deputy Commander of the Syrian Air Force, to Moscow.*

March 1988 *General Pikalov, Commander in Chief of Soviet Chemical Troops, to Damascus, according to press reports.*

*Lt. General Turkmani, Syrian Armed Forces Chief of Staff for Training, to Moscow.*

April 1988 *Marshal Yefimov, Commander in Chief of Soviet Air Forces, to Syria, according to press reports.*

*General Kobets, Chief of Main Directorate for Signal Troops, Soviet General Staff, to Syria.*

*General Titov, Senior Soviet Cosmonaut, visits Syria, according to press reports.*

May 1988 *Admiral Sorokin, First Deputy Chief of the Defense Ministry's Main Political Directorate, to Syria, according to press reports.*

[Redacted]

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past, this would mark the first time, as far as we know, that the Soviets have formally spelled out such an approach to Syria. [Redacted]

[Redacted] the high number of military visits may simply be an effort by Moscow to reassure Syria of its importance to the Soviet Union and to check the status of Syrian training on Soviet equipment already in the Syrian inventory. [Redacted]

[Redacted] Marshal Yefimov, Commander in Chief of Soviet Air Forces, told the Syrians

that shipment of a second MIG-29 squadron would be delayed until after the Syrians have fully integrated the first squadron. General Pikalov, the Commander in Chief of Soviet Chemical Forces, informed the Syrians during his visit in March that they must use their current chemical defense equipment more effectively before they will be supplied with new equipment. [Redacted]

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Meanwhile [Redacted] Syria is increasingly unhappy with Soviet refusals of its requests for new arms. [Redacted]

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Syrian Defense Minister Talas believes that Gorbachev can be expected only to supply Syria with military equipment and spare parts covered under existing agreements; he also thinks that, if Syria fails to provide the political support required by the Soviets, defense cooperation between the two would suffer significantly. [Redacted]

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Moreover, despite the increase in arms deliveries in 1987, the composition of those deliveries suggests Moscow continued to emphasize more effective use of existing Syrian equipment rather than large increases of new Soviet arms. The one weapon system delivered last year that was new to Syria's arsenal, the MIG-29, had probably been promised to Syria several years earlier, and it was delivered to Syria several months after it was supplied to Iraq. Soviet deliveries also have included fewer pieces of major equipment, with support equipment and consumables making up a growing proportion of arms shipments. [Redacted]

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**Why Gorbachev Might Liberalize Arms Assistance to Syria**

Gorbachev's past reluctance to supply Syria with new weapon systems may have arisen from Syria's inability to pay for arms. He also may have believed his freedom to risk Syrian unhappiness over Soviet arms policies stemmed from Syria's lack of alternative suppliers. Two new developments in the Soviet-Syrian relationship—increased naval access and a growing Syrian willingness to look elsewhere for weapons—may provide incentives for Gorbachev to liberalize Soviet arms policies, however. [Redacted]

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*New Naval Access.* By permitting the Soviets to construct a naval repair and maintenance facility at Tartus, Syria may have offered Moscow one of its few means of repayment. [Redacted]

the Soviets will cancel \$500 million of Syria's debt and will supply Syria with coastal defense weapons—including patrol boats and at least one submarine—in exchange for a facility at Tartus. [Redacted]

The complete scope and size of the facility is not yet known. [Redacted] the facility will be for exclusive Soviet use, but the land will remain Syrian. [Redacted]

[Redacted]

*Syrian Diversification.* The Syrians have looked to North Korea in an attempt to solve their recurring military spare parts shortages. A Syrian military delegation headed by Chief of Staff Hikmat Shihabi visited North Korea in January 1988. [Redacted]

[Redacted] the purpose of the visit was twofold: to inspect North Korean industrial plants that have the capability of milling and reproducing small repair parts for military equipment, and to negotiate arrangements for North Korean assistance in establishing similar facilities in Syria [Redacted]

Syria is also attempting to cultivate a military relationship with China. Damascus is probably particularly interested in procuring China's M-9 missile system. The M-9 would give Syria a ballistic missile of greater range (600 km) than the Soviets have been willing to supply. [Redacted]

[Redacted]

It remains unclear how Moscow will respond to Syria's efforts to diversify its arms suppliers. Damascus's success in consummating other arms deals might

well prod Moscow to boost the quality of its military assistance. The Soviets would almost certainly view the Chinese supply of M-9 missiles, or other weapons, to Syria with discomfort, both because of the implications such a sale would have for increased Chinese influence in Syria and because the Soviets would lack leverage over Syria's decision to use the weapons.

According to the US Embassy in Beijing, the Soviet Charge there revealed to US officials that Moscow had formally raised the issue of M-9 sales with both China and Syria. [Redacted]

***Consequences of the SU-24 Decision***

A decision by Gorbachev to supply the SU-24 to Syria could have important consequences. Perhaps most significant is the damage such a deal might inflict on Moscow's carefully honed image as a "responsible actor" in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Under Gorbachev, the Soviet Union has moved to secure a meaningful role in the Arab-Israeli peace process, expanding contacts with Israel and touting a "peaceful" approach to settling regional conflicts. [Redacted]

Delivery of the aircraft would go far to soothe Syrian irritation over past Soviet refusals of its arms requests. Moscow may promote the aircraft as a substitute for the SS-23, claiming that the INF Treaty has now slated this missile system for destruction. It is unlikely that Moscow would be able to derail a Syrian-Chinese M-9 deal, however. Syria would prefer a longer range missile to the SU-24, realizing that the missile has a better chance of penetrating Israel's air defenses than does a Syrian-piloted aircraft, even one with the capabilities of the SU-24. [Redacted]

Conversely, Moscow would almost certainly provoke Syrian anger if it provided the Fencer to Iraq and refused to supply Syria with the aircraft, particularly in the wake of the US sale of F-16Ds to Israel. Such an affront could damage Syria's regional prestige. In addition, Moscow could jeopardize any new naval access to Tartus that it might have received. [Redacted]

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