

Officials Say Soviet Note and Alerting of Kissinger Says Action Is Expression of Policy

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 25 — An alert of airborne troops within the Soviet Union combined with a Soviet threat to send forces into the Middle East was cited by military officials today as the reason the United States placed its forces on a worldwide alert.

The alerting of the American forces today was described by the Defense Department as a "precautionary" move. At a news conference some 12 hours after the alert was ordered, Secretary of State Kissinger made it clear that the purpose of the Pentagon's move was to underscore American opposition to introduction of Soviet troops into the Middle East.

The alert order was dispatched from the Pentagon's National Military Command Center shortly after midnight and signed by Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, acting under instructions from Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger. The effect was to place the forces on a stand-by alert.

Effect of Soviet Moves

Preceding that order, according to Administration officials, were Soviet diplomatic and military moves that led American policy makers, meeting throughout most of the night at the White House, the Defense and State Departments, to conclude that the Russians were preparing to send forces into the Middle East over American opposition.

The crisis atmosphere began to set in at the White House yesterday afternoon. Until that time, Mr. Kissinger said, at his news conference, "we had every reason to believe that the basic direction had been established" and that "all parties" were moving in the direction of putting into effect the cease-fire in place that the United Nations Security Council had called for.

But then, in the view of the Administration, a disturbing new element was introduced. President Anwar el-Sadat of Egypt proposed yesterday afternoon that the United States and Soviet Union contribute troops to a joint peace-keeping force.

The immediate White House reaction had been to reject the Sadat proposal, but in a low-keyed way, through a statement by a Presidential spokesman.

But then the Soviet Union took up the proposal and reportedly sent a note to the United States late yesterday afternoon or evening. From the comments of various Administration officials and certain members of Congress, it appears that the Soviet Union threatened in the note to send troops to the Middle East itself if the United States would not agree to a joint peace-making force.



United Press International

A member of the 82d Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, N. C., carrying his barracks bag and trailing a mascot after yesterday's alert was put into effect.

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Airborne Troops Brought U.S. Response

Ambiguity and Action

At his noontime news conference, Mr. Kissinger said that it was the ambiguity of some of the Soviet "actions and communications and certain readiness measures that were observed that caused the President at a special meeting of the National Security Council last night at 3 A.M. to order certain precautionary measures to be taken by the United States."

Among the "readiness measures" observed, Administration officials said, was an alert order to some 40,000 Soviet airborne troops that had been moved in the past week to potential staging areas in the southern Soviet Union. The inference drawn by Administration officials was that these troops were being alerted for movement by planes to Egypt.

Just how the United States learned of the alert order was not disclosed, but there were hints by officials that the Soviet Union deliberately let it be known that the airborne troops had been alerted for movement.

Troop Airlift Suspected

On top of this information came word that an unusually large number of Soviet AN-22 transports were landing at Egyptian airports. The AN-22 comparable in size with the United States Air Force's C-5A is a huge turboprop plane capable of carrying more than 175 men.

The immediate suspicion was that the Soviet planes were carrying airborne troops, a suspicion compounded by the fact that in the last five days, the Soviet airlift of supplies to Egypt had tapered off as the Soviet Union apparently shifted to ships to get military equipment to the Egyptian forces.

One line of speculation, officials said, was that Moscow had taken the large transports off the matériel airlift and sent them back to the Soviet Union to carry the several airborne divisions that had been alerted.

As it turned out, the Soviet planes were carrying supplies, not troops. This point was confirmed indirectly by Mr. Kissinger, who said at his news conference that the United States was not aware that any Soviet forces had already been introduced into Egypt.

In the early morning hours, however, when the Soviet intentions were being assessed here at the emergency meeting throughout the Government, it was not yet known what the

Soviet transports were carrying. Complicating the assessment was the time difference between Cairo and Washington.

Most of the Russian planes were observed coming into Egypt shortly after dawn this morning in Cairo; Cairo is six hours ahead of Washington. Thus, in Washington, information on the Soviet flights was being received around midnight and afterward—or at the same time the National Security Council, which had been meeting in periodic emergency sessions throughout the day, was recommending that a general alert be issued to United States forces.

Officials said that the Administration's assessment of Soviet intentions was greatly influenced by the diplomatic note from the Soviet Union.

The nature of the Soviet note and how it was delivered have still not been completely made known. At his news conference, Mr. Kissinger refused to discuss the note.

Jackson Calls Note 'Brutal'

Senator Henry M. Jackson, Democrat of Washington, said at a breakfast meeting with reporters that he had been told about but had not seen the note, which he characterized as "brutal, rough" in tone. Basically, he said, the Soviet Union informed the United States that "if we didn't do something, they were going in."

The Administration was concerned, according to officials, about the possibility that the Soviet Union might move in some of its "naval infantry"—the equivalent of the United States Marines—from ships stationed in the Mediterranean. The Soviet Union is believed to have about 6,000 naval infantrymen there and there were indications that some ships were already in Syrian ports.

The general alert to the American forces was described by Administration officials as more a psychological than a military action, designed to emphasize American opposition to any unilateral move of troops into the Middle East. But in its initial secrecy about the alert, officials acknowledged privately, the Administration may have contributed more to an atmosphere of crisis than had been intended.

As a psychological move, officials suggested that the alert might have achieved its purpose. This afternoon at the United Nations, the Soviet Union supported a proposal calling for a peace-keeping force that would exclude the United States, the Soviet Union and other permanent members of the Security Council.

At the same time, Administration officials conceded that the Soviet Union might have achieved part of its objective in threatening to send forces into the Middle East. At least in part, as analyzed by United States officials, the Soviet objective was to emphasize Egyptian and Russian concern over the plight of the Egyptian II Corps' encircled on the eastern bank of the Suez Canal by Israeli forces since the ceasefire was first proclaimed Monday.