

Alert Is Phased Out
With the Exception
Of U.S. 6th Fleet

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The Pentagon yesterday ended the world-wide military alert for American forces that was put into effect a week ago amid signs that the Soviet Union might unilaterally intervene in the Middle East to enforce a cease-fire there.

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The alert had been gradually phased out as the big-power confrontation in the area cooled in recent days.

Yesterday, Pentagon spokesman Jerry W. Friedheim said the remaining 350,000 soldiers, sailors and airmen of the Atlantic and European commands had now been taken off standby alert and were returning to more normal peacetime conditions.

The Pentagon had linked its alert to reported signs that the Soviet Union had alerted some 50,000 paratroopers for possible movement to the Middle East. Yesterday, Friedheim said there was "probably some return to normal" for the Soviet troops, but said such evidence is hard to confirm.

Friedheim said the U.S. 6th Fleet in the Mediterranean in effect remains on alert, but that fleet normally maintains "a higher state of vigilance" anyway.

The 6th Fleet has been reinforced since right after the start of the latest Middle East war on Oct. 6, and now numbers about 60 ships and more than 30,000 men. The Soviet Union has built up its Mediterranean fleet to more than 90 vessels.

Military sources yesterday also confirmed reports that the Israelis had captured a Russian-built SA-6 surface-to-air missile battery during their drive across the Suez Canal.

The SA-6 is a new missile, which took a heavy toll of Israeli jets and which the United States was most anxious to learn about so that it could develop counter-measures for U.S. pilots who might someday run up against it.

The Israelis are believed to have captured about four

missiles and some—though not all—of the electronic equipment that is used to guide them to the target.

Capture of the SA-6 is viewed as a major prize for U.S. and Israeli defense planners, and some missiles and associated equipment are reported en route to the United States.

Even without some of the radar, U.S. specialists believe a great deal can be learned about how the missile works and how it can be countered. Some new Soviet anti-tank missiles are also believed to have been captured as well as smaller SA-7 missiles.

Calling off the last remnants of the alert brings to a close the most dramatic public aspect of the U.S.-Soviet confrontation over the Arab-Israeli war.

From what is known at this point, it appears that the alert served to give the Soviet Union pause if it were in fact planning to intervene and to create a cease-fire supervisory force without U.S. or Soviet troops.

But the President has met with some criticism for making the alert worldwide, thereby involving U.S. nuclear forces as well even though there have been no public statements indicating the Soviet Union had its nuclear forces on alert.

Some military planners also doubt that the Soviet Union could have moved anywhere near seven divisions totalling 50,000 troops into the Middle East in a few weeks.

Officials believe the Soviet airlift capacity is so even a division would take at least a week, and that it would have taken at least three fully equipped divisions to make much difference militarily.

In the U.S. view, however, even the movement of a small force into the area could have created a volatile situation.