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# The Soviet Scenario for War

The U.S. government—or at any rate its leaders—believe there is a serious chance of renewed war in the Mideast. The Israeli government agrees. The more important men in the U.S. government further believe that if the Arabs go to war again, intervention by Soviet troops will become downright probable. The Israelis are not so sure.

Such is the horrifying position as these words are written, shortly after Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger took off for his Middle Eastern tour. Pray God he can begin to better matters before these words see print. Meanwhile, the position is made somewhat more risky by a measure of American-Israeli disagreement about immediate steps, particularly concerning the ways to handle the controversial ceasefire lines of Oct. 22, and the Egyptian 3d army, which was trapped after Oct. 22.

Quite possibly, the foregoing summary will be strenuously denied in Jerusalem as well as Washington; yet it is based on facts that are unchallengeable. The main facts to note concern the recent behavior of the Soviets. This appears all too brutally purposeful.

For example, it is unheard-of for tanks to be driven aboard ships with their fuel tanks and ammunition chambers already full. But just this has been happening at the South Russian port of Nikolayev, which is one of the main sources of sea-borne supplies for Syria and Egypt. This singular method of loading rather plainly suggest that the tanks were (or are) expected to be needed in action soon after being off-loaded.

The scope of the total Soviet effort is far more disturbing, however, than such ugly details that suggest the thrust of the effort. Of sea-borne cargo, all destined for Egypt or Syria and undoubtedly all military, no less than 215,000 tons had passed through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles between Oct. 7 and last Saturday!

The huge Soviet airlift of the most urgent military supplies for Egypt and Syria, has been common talk since shortly after the Yom Kippur war began. But it has not been common talk that this airlift, plus the seaborne shipments, have required a volume of rail movement without precedent since World War II. The movement is from Eastern Europe to airports in Hungary and seaports in South Russia.

The rail movement can only mean that the Soviets have been stripping their Warsaw Pact forces of tanks and all sorts of other valuable hardware, in order to put the Arab humpty-dumpty back on the military wall again with maximum speed. What has been happening, in short, is totally different from the Soviet resupply of Egypt and Syria after their defeat in 1967.

In that supply movement, the first stage was only completed after six months' time. Moreover, the crucially important advanced weapons for the Yom Kippur war were only delivered to the Arab countries within the last two years.

In the present case, in contrast, usually reliable analysts forecast that the Arab armies will be built up again to their vast pre-Yom Kippur numerical superiority in many forms of military equipment, within the remarkably short period of 10 days from the present. For it must be understood that the huge and urgent seaborne and air-borne supply movements did not stop

last Saturday. That is merely the last date for which a seaborne tonnage figure is now available.

As to the Arabs, they have always historically found it irresistible to have another crack at Israel, if their seeming-lead in weapons had reached a level of something like four-to-one. As to the Soviets, the sources of the apprehension felt here in Washington are less easy to locate—although there is nothing questionable about the belief in probable Soviet intervention if the Mideast war begins again.

One source of apprehension, it appears, is the tone the Kremlin has been taking with the U.S. government. Another source—and one by no means to be underrated—is the way the Soviet press has begun to talk about the Watergate horror as crippling to the President. This must be a main argument for gambling high at this moment, among all the more bloody-minded Soviet planners and policy-

makers. The new turn taken by the Soviet press obviously means that in the Kremlin, the bloody-minded viewpoint has lately gained much ground.

Finally, there is information, not absolutely proved but widely regarded as reliable in the inner circle here, that the Soviets are already making conditional preparations to intervene with their own troops. In Egypt, for example, there is considerable evidence for the new presence of Soviet-made Scuds. The Scud is a ground-to-ground missile with a range of more than 150 miles. No Egyptians have been trained to use it.

The presence of Scuds therefore implies the presence of Russian soldiers to fire Scuds. More data of the same sort might be cited. In sum, those people including this reporter who have thought peace might be breaking out all over, have been sadly wrong, at least to date.

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