

May 5, 1973

MEMORANDUM FOR: Dr. Henry A. Kissinger
Assistant to the President for
National Security Affairs

SUBJECT : Middle East Military Situation

Attached is our assessment of the present military situation between the Arab states and Israel.

The pattern of Arab activity does not suggest that an outbreak of hostilities is likely before the UN debate on the Middle East in late May, and we doubt that Sadat will decide to try a major operation within the next six weeks.

The moves that the Arabs have made, taken collectively, have the objective at this time of bringing maximum psychological pressure on the US and Israel. There is danger that these moves will in the future develop some momentum of their own.

The Soviets are seriously concerned and are counseling the Arabs against precipitate military action, even though some Soviet officials have contributed to keeping a relatively high level of tension in the Middle East area.

The Israelis are watching the situation closely, and probably are more concerned than their intelligence assessments indicate. So far, these assessments still judge that Sadat will not go to war.

James R. Schlesinger
Director

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May 5, 1973

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ASSESSMENT OF INDICATIONS OF HOSTILITIES BETWEEN
THE ARAB STATES AND ISRAEL

This paper deals in the first instance with military moves made by Egypt and other Arab states during the past several weeks. Individually, these moves do not appear to have great significance. Taken collectively, however, they suggest a pattern of action that could be preparation for hostilities against Israel, but they are also part of an effort to arouse international concern and put psychological pressures on Israel and the US.

The balance of the paper is a discussion and assessment of the objectives of Egypt and the other Arab states, of the Soviet role, of possible Israeli reactions to this situation, and of the likelihood of hostilities in the near future. We conclude that whatever the Egyptian and Arab leaders intend at this stage, the pattern of their actions thus far does not provide the Arabs with a rational basis for an attack at an early date.

In recent weeks, the emphasis in Egyptian statements and activities has gradually shifted toward preparing for war.

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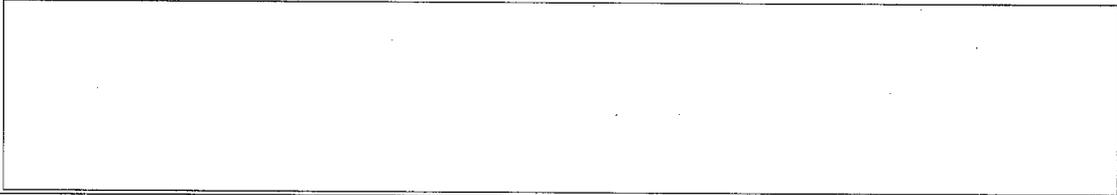
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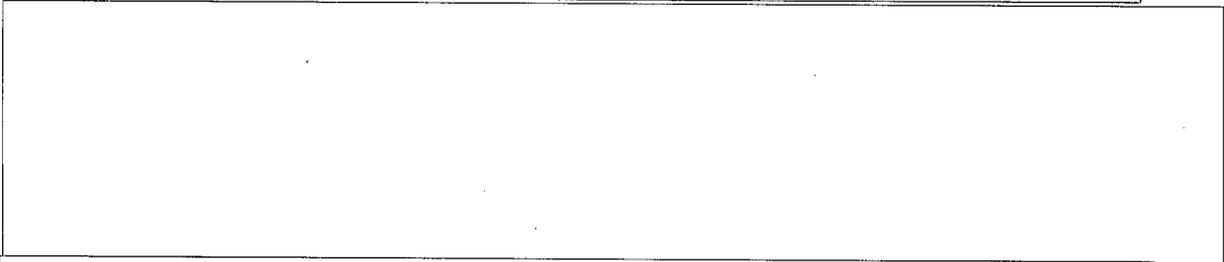


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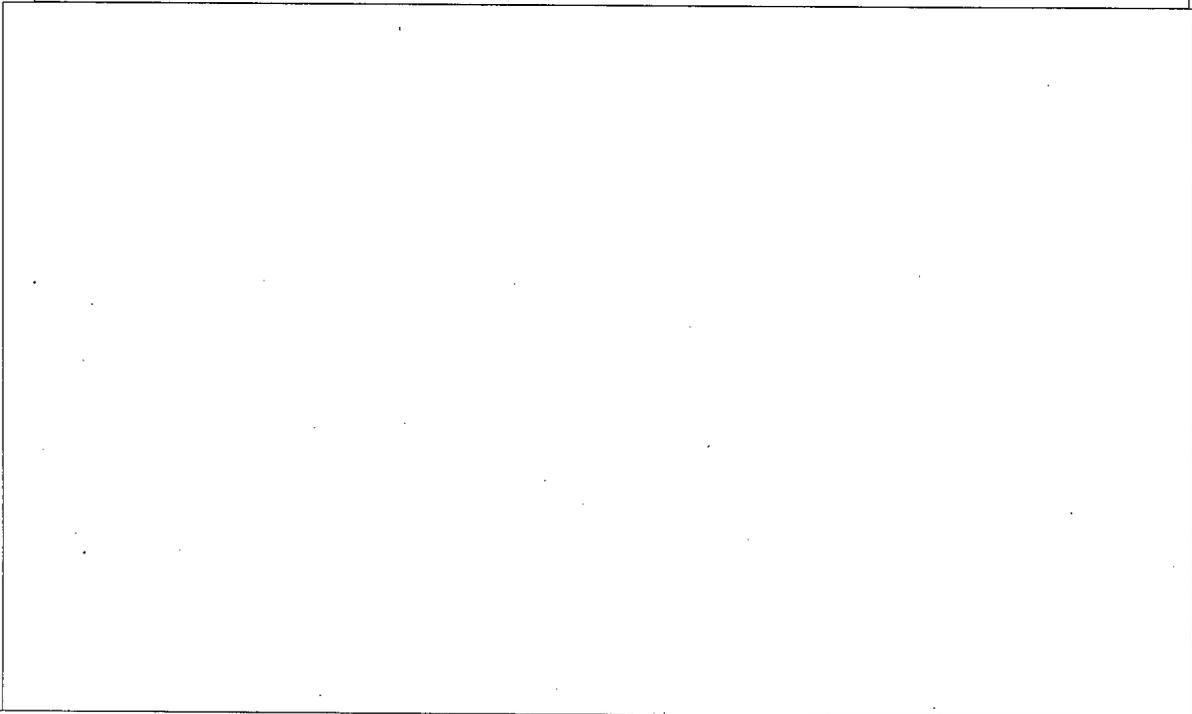


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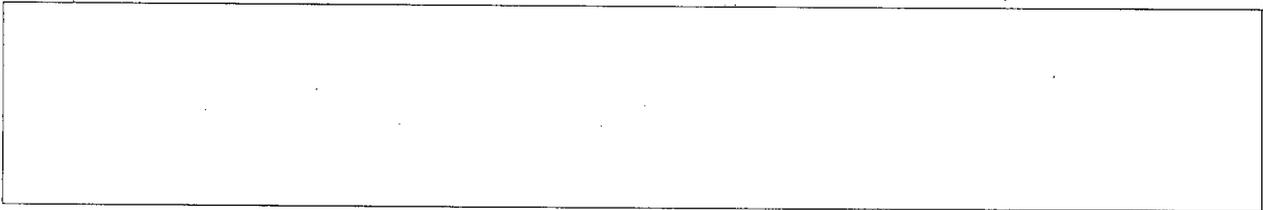
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We judge that Sadat at this time has not made a decision to attack at a specific time and in a specific manner. Despite the gloomy prognoses being assiduously disseminated from Cairo, Sadat has not exhausted his diplomatic options. His economic situation is deteriorating, but we doubt that he is under significant domestic pressure to go to war. Both Sadat and his advisers are aware that their military prospects are poor at best; a fresh disaster might well sweep away Sadat's regime rather than rescue him from his dilemma.

We think that Sadat will wait at least until he sees the outcome of the UN session on the Middle East in late May before taking a new decision. Meanwhile, strengthening Egypt's military preparedness serves to create tensions that Sadat hopes will support the urgency of his diplomacy.

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These moves are part of general Arab planning to increase the pressures on Israel. The transfers of men and equipment strengthen to some degree the armed forces of Syria and Egypt, but the main effect at this stage is psychological. The major gap in the Arab lineup is the refusal of the Jordanian government to place its forces at the disposal of the Egyptian-Syrian "eastern front."

Egyptian support of the anti-American campaign by the fedayeen is designed to step up pressure on the US, and through Washington, on Israel. The ruckus between the fedayeen and the Lebanese government is an embarrassment to Egypt and the other Arabs; it distracts attention from that aspect of the Arab-Israeli confrontation that Cairo wants to emphasize even though it also contributes to the sense of tension surrounding the area.

The suddenness of the flare-up in Lebanon illustrates the danger that in the next few months the various military moves may develop a momentum that Cairo will not be able to control. The events of 1967 argue that most Arab governments are not able to resist giving the situation a shove once it has started rolling. Sadat has said so often that he is now dead serious that it will be progressively more difficult to find excuses for inaction, more especially when other Arab leaders have fulfilled their commitments to his cause.

The Soviet role in this situation is somewhat ambivalent. While they have an interest in sustaining a level of tension that underscores the seriousness of the problem and the need for US initiatives and Israeli concessions, the Soviet leaders are counseling the Arabs against precipitate military action. The Soviet position in the area would suffer if the Arabs, using Soviet weapons, were beaten again. Another war would risk an involvement that might endanger detente with the US--the centerpiece of Brezhnev's foreign policy.

Sadat's May Day speech indicated that he has felt pressure from the USSR to continue to pursue a "peaceful solution." There are also signs that Moscow is using third parties to warn Cairo of the dangers of new war.

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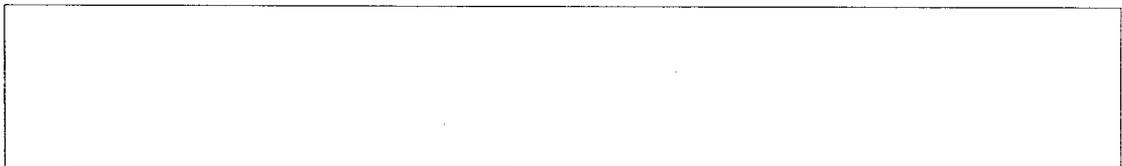
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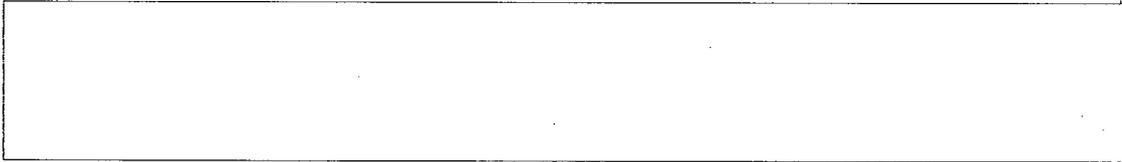
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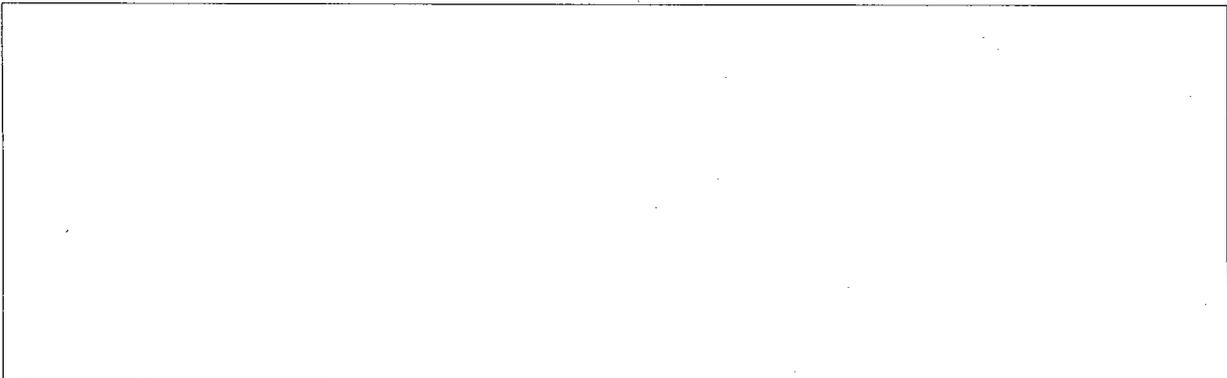
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The Israelis will be watching most particularly for any signs that the Egyptians or other Arabs are developing a serious capability to bomb Israel itself. Such a development would lead the Israelis to consider a pre-emptive strike. The timing and the atmospheric considerations for such a strike would be influenced by diplomatic considerations, particularly the impact on the US. We have seen no sign that the Israelis are close to this point yet; the risk of losses would be higher and the rewards probably lower than in 1967.

The Israelis have also signalled that they intend to pursue their calculated campaign against the fedayeen, hitting the terrorist leadership whenever possible. They will probably not be deterred by the international complications another Beirut-style raid might cause; such action will contribute further to the tensions in the period ahead.

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Overall, we do not believe that an outbreak of hostilities is likely before the next UN debate, and we doubt that Sadat will decide to try a major operation within the next six weeks.

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