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14 October 1973

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Reactions to Resupply of Israel by the US

Most of the Arab states are already committed, by public and private statements, to action hostile to US interests if the US undertakes to resupply Israel. The Arab oil producers in particular consider themselves committed to some form of "coordinated" action against US interests. This probably means each producer doing what its special circumstances and interests make possible or desirable, but doing it at the same time. The Arab oil producers are currently discussing this possibility. In view of the difficulty of enforcing an embargo against the US alone, Arab oil producing states would probably take action against US concessions.

The intensity of the reactions could vary, depending on the visibility and magnitude of the resupply process, and on what kind of equipment is involved. The F-4 Phantom specifically has become in Arab eyes a symbol of the technological superiority of the Israeli military; visible resupply of this aircraft would produce a maximum reaction. However, resupply of other major equipment, such as tanks, would produce a substantial if lesser reaction. The most significant difference would be that the former would produce an immediate reaction, whereas in the latter case the reaction would swell somewhat more gradually. Even a lower level of resupply, such as ammunition, would not diminish the Arabs' reaction. They would react to the airlift, not to its contents.

The major single factor affecting the intensity of the Arab reaction will be the military situation on the ground. If the Arabs are scoring a "success," the reaction will be temporarily damaging. If the Arabs meet disaster, especially in Sinai, the reaction will be more serious and longer lasting.

Prediction in detail of reactions by individual governments is risky; local leaders do not give their opportunities and dangers the same weights as observers at a distance. The following is nonetheless an attempt to forecast some of the possibilities, country by country, beginning

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with the direct belligerents, then peripheral states involved on the Arab side, and finally those Middle Eastern and Western European governments who host US facilities that might be used in resupply.

Egypt's reaction at this stage is complicated by a desire to maintain a channel to the US that can be used--at the appropriate moment--to make political gains from the military situation. The Egyptians therefore would call upon others --especially Saudi Arabia--to do their reacting. They would also launch a major propaganda campaign, summoning Arab trade unions and other organizations to strike at US interests in general. In addition, they would call upon the "non-aligned" to put psychological and diplomatic pressure on the US, in the hope of at least restricting the volume of US resupply. These campaigns would become more vitriolic if the Egyptian military situation began to deteriorate, and in extremis the Egyptians could well take direct action against American aircraft.

Syria, despite its limited capability, even more and sooner than Egypt would be apt to try to attack American aircraft as its situation deteriorates. Initially, the Syrians would also unleash fedayeen operations controlled by its creature, Saiga. The capabilities of Saiga have not been tested except--and this is a major exception--it appears that Saiga was responsible for the Austrian operation, the greatest single fedayeen political success so far. Oil exports from Syrian terminals to Western Europe have been shut down already by the hostilities.

Iraq broadcasts strong rhetoric, but there is little left for the Iraqis to do except to send the US interests section packing and to suspend for the duration--and possibly then some--the commercial contacts with US firms that had been developing over recent months. US resupply would not affect Iraq's military moves, which are limited primarily by the Kurdish problem.

In Jordan King Husayn's existing difficulties are so serious that US resupply would not be a significant additional political burden. He would be more strongly impelled to have his forces actually engage the Israelis, but not to the extent of launching an attack from Jordan itself.

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Saudi Arabia has already made it clear that a cutback in oil production from 9 to 7 million barrels per day would follow evidence of a resupply operation. This reduction, on top of the closure of the Mediterranean terminals, would have serious effects if sustained for more than a few weeks. If the resupply operation were perceived by the Saudis to have occurred at a particularly critical juncture in the military situation, the Saudis might feel compelled to break formal relations, although the propaganda value they would derive from action on the oil front would ease the pressure for this kind of gesture. In any event, US resupply of Israel will be viewed by the Saudis as a decisive indicator of US attitudes and will lead the Saudis to enter into more important and longer term military and commercial relations with Western Europe than they have hitherto done.

The fedayeen generally would find that the restrictions reportedly put on their actions by Arab governments at present were lifted or could be safely ignored. US targets would become even fairer game than at present, and the climate for conducting successful operations against US personnel or facilities in the Middle East, and to some extent abroad, would improve.

Libya would cast about for whatever means were within its capabilities to strike directly at the resupply effort. This might well include an attempt to shoot down US aircraft if they were reachable; if a Libyan aircraft were shot down in such an incident, this would exacerbate the Arab reaction elsewhere. The Libyans would certainly support any fedayeen operations that gave promise of results, by sabotage at European airports for example. A formal break in relations would be certain, and it is even conceivable that the Libyans might hold US personnel hostage on trumped up charges of espionage on behalf of Israel. Libyan reactions on the oil front would be closely calculated to see what could be of real effect; these might not therefore follow immediately.

In North Africa west of Libya, Tunisia will find it difficult to retain formal relations with the US. Indeed, the war generally will accelerate the already evident tendencies of Tunisian policy to draw away from the US.

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Algeria will suspend commercial relations, and possibly send out the US interests section until after hostilities; the Algerians might well also encourage other African states to act in some way against US interests. How far the Algerians would get in such an effort is problematical. We do not see the Algerians engaging in direct action against the US, unless some serious provocation occurred.

Morocco would be forced to close down the Kenitra facility, possibly even break relations with the US on the ground that we had taken hostile action against Moroccan military forces on the Syrian front. This may occur in any event, however, if the Arabs are defeated.

Lebanon might finally be compelled to break relations. There would be serious danger to US citizens, and the Lebanese security forces would be reluctant to endanger themselves on behalf of Americans. A ban on transit by US commercial aircraft is one of the few "weapons" Lebanon would have to offer; whether the Lebanese took this step would depend on the visibility and nature of the resupply effort--it would be more likely if it became known that the US was using commercial rather than military aircraft.

The Persian Gulf states generally would be compelled to break formal relations, though not perhaps immediately in all cases. They would participate in oil action with others. Bahrain would more likely claim to have put a cordon sanitaire around the US naval facility there rather than expel Americans from it.

Yemen (Sana) would face a bitter dilemma; some gesture would be required, and a suspension of relations might do the trick for the Yemenis. Yemen (Aden) would very possibly harass US shipping or civil aircraft, if such were within range. There is some evidence that a move is underway to "close" the straits of Bab el Mandeb to the Israelis; such action could easily be extended to include the US.

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forces, including the Libyan air force. In Iran, not only the Shah's personal outlook and relations with Israel but the fact that the Muslim population is non-orthodox helps our position.

The Muslim factor also would have some bearing in Turkey, a country which is host to facilities we might wish to use. Fortunately, the Turkish elections occur today (14 October), so the issue will not come up in this context. Recent gains by right-wing conservatives pandering to religious emotion, however, will further strengthen the Turkish government's normally extreme reluctance to see US facilities in Turkey used in a resupply effort. The Turks have already stated that these facilities will not be used.

Reactions in Western Europe generally could have a very direct bearing on a resupply effort. The Europeans will be sensitive to the threat of an Arab oil embargo affecting them; this in turn will affect their attitudes on overflights and UN votes.

Spain has already issued a statement that its facilities cannot be used for resupply, and the statement implies resupply of any kind. Spanish diplomacy at this time is strongly wooing the Arabs.

Portugal, however, would not object to the use of the US facilities in the Azores. However, the Portuguese would subsequently try to use this instance as a card in their negotiations for renewal of our base rights.

Austria would be especially sensitive to US overflights carrying materiel from Europe to Israel. Austrian officials recall what they consider a violation of Austrian neutrality by the US during the Lebanese crisis of 1958.

Italy, despite a policy of appeasing and wooing the Arabs, would do what we ask, if our request for facilities made it clear that a prime US interest was at stake. West Germany will be reluctant, but probably would accept the US action "if the thing were done quickly" and before threats of an oil cutoff to Western Europe could be brought to bear. [REDACTED] and the French much less accommodating.

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An argument that the US was merely replying to the massive Soviet resupply lift to the Arabs would have good effect in Western Europe, although it probably would not move the Spanish. Such an argument would have virtually no immediate effect on the Arab states, although it probably would be a factor in helping to restore our position in the post-hostilities period, when basically friendly governments could use it to help justify resumptons of relations with us.

An attempt to reduce the visibility of the resupply effort by using civil rather than military aircraft would have only a temporary effect at best. The effort would become known very quickly. It would have no positive value and might even have the negative effect of being caught in deception.

The only serious prospect for mitigating the reactions from the Arabs and associated governments is to accompany the resupply with a diplomatic initiative, or at least the promise of one, that would demonstrate that the US is interested in a settlement that is not entirely on Israeli terms. No other rationalizations--including pointing to the magnitude of the Soviet operation--are likely to have any significant short-range effect.

One further point. The Arab reaction, however, damaging to the US, will not redound in a comparable way to the benefit of the Soviets. The Arab view of this war is and will be that "we did it ourselves." They will blame the US for Israel's successes; they may possibly come to blame the Soviets for Arab failures; they will not credit the Soviets in any significant or lasting way for Arab successes.

This paper is addressed principally to short range reactions. In a longer view, US resupply to Israel will reinforce the concern of Arab leaders that the US position has evolved to a point where support for Israel has become more than a humanitarian or political interest--it is a US strategic objective that has greater weight than our interests with the Arabs. This perception, reinforced now, will have the most serious long term consequences for the US in our energy negotiations and for our overall strategic position in the Middle East. Reactions of this kind will be intensified or moderated depending on whether military operations produce a fresh disaster for the Arabs.

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