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(Copy to Gen S, Secy,
LSE for Secy,
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of Rodman)

Sonnenfeldt & Saunders
(outside system)

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Soviet Nuclear Weapons in Egypt?

[redacted] confirmation of Scud-associated equipment at two different locations in Egypt adds seriousness to the evidence that Moscow introduced nuclear weapons into the Middle East. The Scud equipment, [redacted] includes a transporter-erector-launcher unique to the Scud missile in an area near the Tura caves some 10 miles south of Cairo, and two resupply vehicles at Cairo international airport, one of which is carrying a probable canvas-covered missile.

The Scud is a surface-to-surface missile with a range of 160 nautical miles and a capability to carry either conventional or nuclear warheads. Its accuracy is such that it would have little value against military targets with a 2,000 pound conventional warhead, although it would have value as a terror weapon or threat against cities. There is some evidence, moreover, that the Soviets have shipped nuclear weapons to Egypt--possibly for use with the Scud.

Possible Introduction of Soviet Nuclear Weapons Into the Middle East

On 22 October, [redacted] the Soviet merchant ship Mezhdurechensk as it passed through the Turkish straits from the Black Sea into the Mediterranean. [redacted] The Mezhdurechensk reached Alexandria on 24 October and departed on 27 October. It was monitored on its return to the Black Sea on 29 October [redacted] While the evidence is far from conclusive, there is therefore, at least the possibility

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that the Soviets have introduced nuclear weapons into the Middle East. Below we review the evidence that they have done so, the military significance of such a move, and possible Soviet motivations.

The Evidence

The ship itself has no past record as a nuclear weapons carrier. The Mezhdurechensk is a large-hatch cargo ship built in 1965 with a total capacity of over 10,000 tons. It has no unusual characteristics which would associate it with nuclear weapons [redacted]

[redacted] The ship delivered a cargo of military equipment to Alexandria on 15 October and was scheduled to reload cargo in the Black Sea on 20 October.

The Mezhdurechensk declared its port of origin as Oktyabrskoye, a secondary port near the major military shipment port of Nikolayev. It apparently left on 21 October after a very rapid turn around from its earlier trip to Alexandria, passed through the Soporous on 22 October and was photographed in Alexandria on 25 October. [redacted]

[redacted] and there is no [redacted]

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evidence that it had a Soviet naval escort. Time and distance factors make it unlikely that it could have transferred cargo at sea to units of the Soviet Mediterranean Squadron during its transit to Alexandria.

The Possibilities if Nuclear Weapons are Involved

If the Mezhdurechensk did deliver nuclear weapons to Alexandria, they could be intended for use with delivery systems already in Egypt, or they could be for the Soviet Mediterranean Squadron. There are several weapons systems with nuclear or conventional capability now in Egypt. In addition to the Scud, these include the FROG 7, a tactical surface-to-surface missile that can deliver a three to nine kiloton warhead to a distance of 43 miles; two fighter-bombers, the SU-7 and SU-17; the IL-28 light bomber; and the TU-16 medium bomber. The last could carry either nuclear free-fall bombs or air-to-surface missiles with nuclear warheads.

It is also possible that the Mezhdurechensk carried nuclear weapons to Egypt for use by the Soviet naval forces. Several of the Soviet warships currently deployed in the Mediterranean carry nuclear weapons. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] it is possible that some Soviet naval units were short of nuclear armament. An analogous situation occurred at the time of the Arab-Israeli war in 1967 when a merchant ship from the Black Sea delivered additional non-nuclear ammunition to a Soviet cruiser.

If nuclear weapons were shipped for use by the Soviet navy, they could be transferred to naval units in Alexandria or to a depot ashore. There are three naval repair and supply ships in Alexandria that could be used as floating weapons depots, and there are several secure storage facilities ashore that were developed by the Soviets prior to the expulsion of their forces in July 1972.

Timing of Soviet Decisions

[redacted] the Scud missiles were shipped as early as last July. However, Scud-associated equipment was noted on the loading docks at Nikolavev [redacted]

[redacted] essentially without change. A course to train Egyptian officers on a surface-to-surface missile with a range similar to that of Scud was set up in mid-August.

[redacted] a battalion had been equipped with missiles prior to mid-September. The decision to send this weapons system to Egypt could, therefore, have been taken by early summer. On the other hand, [redacted] no Scud equipment as late as 14 October. [redacted]

The decision to ship nuclear weapons to Egypt, if such a decision were made at all, is more difficult to pin down. We do not know if the Mezhdurechensk was the only means of transporting warheads that the Soviets used. If it was, the decision could have been made as late as 19 October. That would have placed it prior to the first ceasefire which was announced on 22 October, although Moscow apparently went ahead with the voyage of the Mezhdurechensk after the ceasefire.

Three references are pertinent to this timing. On 16 October, Egyptian President Sadat noted that his country had an "Egyptian built" missile capable of striking Israel. He referred to it as the "Zafir", the name given a surface-to-surface missile that Egypt experimented with in the early sixties, but apparently gave up on after the 1967 war. Soviet Premier Kosygin, who arrived in Cairo on the 16th, was said to be very unhappy about Sadat's reference to a missile because he thought the American's might realize its provenance. On 23 October, in the context of continued ceasefire violations, the Soviet government issued a statement threatening the "gravest consequences" if Israel did not observe that ceasefire. In his speech to the World Peace Congress on 26 October, Brezhnev noted that Soviet "representatives" had already been sent to Egypt. He called on the US to do the same, but also offered the vague remark that "we are considering other possible measures that the situation may call for."

Soviet Motivations

There are strong arguments against the Soviets shipping nuclear weapons to Egypt for their own forces or for use in the Arab-Israeli context. Moscow has always exercised closest control over its nuclear weapons, and even the East European Warsaw Pact members are denied access to these weapons. The only previous instance in which nuclear weapons were shipped to a country outside the Warsaw Pact occurred in 1962, when there was evidence that they were sent to Cuba. In this case, however, the Soviet move was part of an attempt to alter the US-Soviet strategic balance--a far higher stakes game than is involved in the Middle East. If the weapons were for use with delivery systems already in Egypt, the Soviets would have to expect the gravest strains in their relations with the US. They could not count on the presence of the weapons to deter Israel in a very tense military situation and they would have to expect countervailing US nuclear guarantees. Even the means of delivery--a merchant ship sailing under maritime control and with no naval escort in a war zone where Soviet ships had already been damaged and sunk--is uncharacteristically risky. Nuclear weapons could have been flown in during the massive air resupply operation with much greater safety and speed.

If, despite these arguments, the Soviets did send nuclear weapons to Egypt, they might have felt that a nuclear capability under their own control but on the scene might be necessary to keep Israel from a massive military victory. By 19 and 20 October, when the Mezhdurechensk was loading its cargo, the Israelis had been across the canal for three days and the war was turning against the Arabs. The Israeli salient across the Suez canal was growing rapidly, and Moscow could not be certain of Israeli intentions. The prospect of intervention by conventional Soviet forces might not have been deemed a sufficient deterrent. A threat to use nuclear weapons based on Soviet soil against Israel might have been too easily offset by a US counter threat. The "tactical" nature of the weapons in Egypt might, in Soviet minds, have deterred Israel without leading to the direct involvement of strategic forces in the US and the Soviet Union. The Soviets could also reason that the presence of nuclear weapons in Egypt could balance the possibility that an Israeli nuclear capability might be brought into play, either psychologically or in actual use.

~~TOP SECRET~~ Conclusion

The evidence should not yet be regarded as though it creates a strong presumptive case that the Soviets dispatched nuclear weapons to Egypt. If so, and if the weapons are still there, it seems certain that they remain under Soviet control; the Scuds, however, are probably under Egyptian control. Thus the USSR would retain an option for future contingencies.

