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ARAB STATES - ISRAEL: The war continues to be bitterly contested in the Sinai and the Golan Heights, with no sign that hostilities will end soon.

Both sides have seen heavy fighting, but few successes on the Sinai front. The Israelis have mounted air strikes against Egyptian forces on the east bank, the Port Said area, at least two airfields in the interior of Egypt, and the bridges that the Egyptians keep rebuilding across the canal. This air activity, however, has failed to halt the cross-canal reinforcement and resupply of the formidable Egyptian force on the east bank. The Israelis have publicly acknowledged that they have had to withdraw from the Bar Lev defense line to positions slightly within the Sinai. The Egyptians have solidified their control of the east bank, but have not made significant advances. In naval action, the Israelis claim to have sunk three Egyptian Osa-class missile patrol boats in an engagement midway between Port Said and Alexandria.

Hard fighting continued on the Golan Heights after dark last night, with both sides attempting to gain control of the much-disputed town of Qunaytirah. Effective Israeli control of the air allowed constant air strikes with relatively few losses--an advantage not enjoyed during much of the earlier fighting. Under this cover, the Israelis stabilized their positions along lines roughly paralleling the pre-October cease-fire line. This improvement in the Israeli position, however, has come at a high cost. After four days of fighting, Israeli losses are believed to exceed 80 aircraft, 600 tanks, and 1,000 men, against Arab losses of 140 aircraft, 650 tanks, and 6,000 to 7,000 men.

Israel yesterday mounted its first air strikes against Damascus proper, seeking to destroy the Syrian Air Force Headquarters, the Defense Ministry, and General Army Headquarters. In the process, the Soviet Cultural Center was hit, giving rise to press accounts of substantial Soviet casualties. Damascus later denied that any Russians were killed.

(continued)

10 Oct 73

*Central Intelligence Bulletin*

1

~~TOP SECRET~~

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The Israeli Government is being criticized--albeit quietly--by some elements of the public for its failure to launch a pre-emptive military strike and its failure to mobilize earlier. When the relatively high casualties and materiel losses are made public, bitterness may well intensify, and pressure for deep ground strikes into Egypt and Syria might grow. The government has attempted to prepare the public for a drawn out war, acknowledging that "in the south, the struggle is becoming more intensive and decisive turns are awaited."

Algeria, Iraq, Libya, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia reportedly have contributed or are considering contributing military support to Egypt and Syria. Such support--and the motives of those offering it--is important more for its political than its military implications. Saudi Arabia, for example, is reported to have expressed its willingness to enter the battle if requested to do so by Sadat. Saudi participation would be only symbolic, but it would further enhance the conservative Faysal's growing prominence in Arab politics. Both King Husayn of Jordan and President Franjiyah of Lebanon are hard pressed to explain their inaction, and have been humiliated by Israeli violations of their territory.

The Arab press has begun to criticize the US, both for the stand taken by the US at the United Nations and for the "menacing deployment of the Sixth Fleet." According to press reports, Kuwait has called for an immediate meeting of Arab petroleum ministers to discuss how oil might be used as a weapon in the current conflict. Palestinian media, but no Arab governments, have called on the Arab states to halt the flow of oil to the West.

Yesterday's Security Council meeting on the Middle East was dominated by Arab-Israeli recriminations resulting from Israeli air attacks on the Damascus and Cairo areas. Israel apologized for causing civilian casualties, but Soviet delegate Malik, incensed by erroneous press accounts of Soviet casualties, blasted the Israelis and walked out of the session. No resolutions were tabled.)

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10 Oct 73

Central Intelligence Bulletin

2

~~TOP SECRET~~

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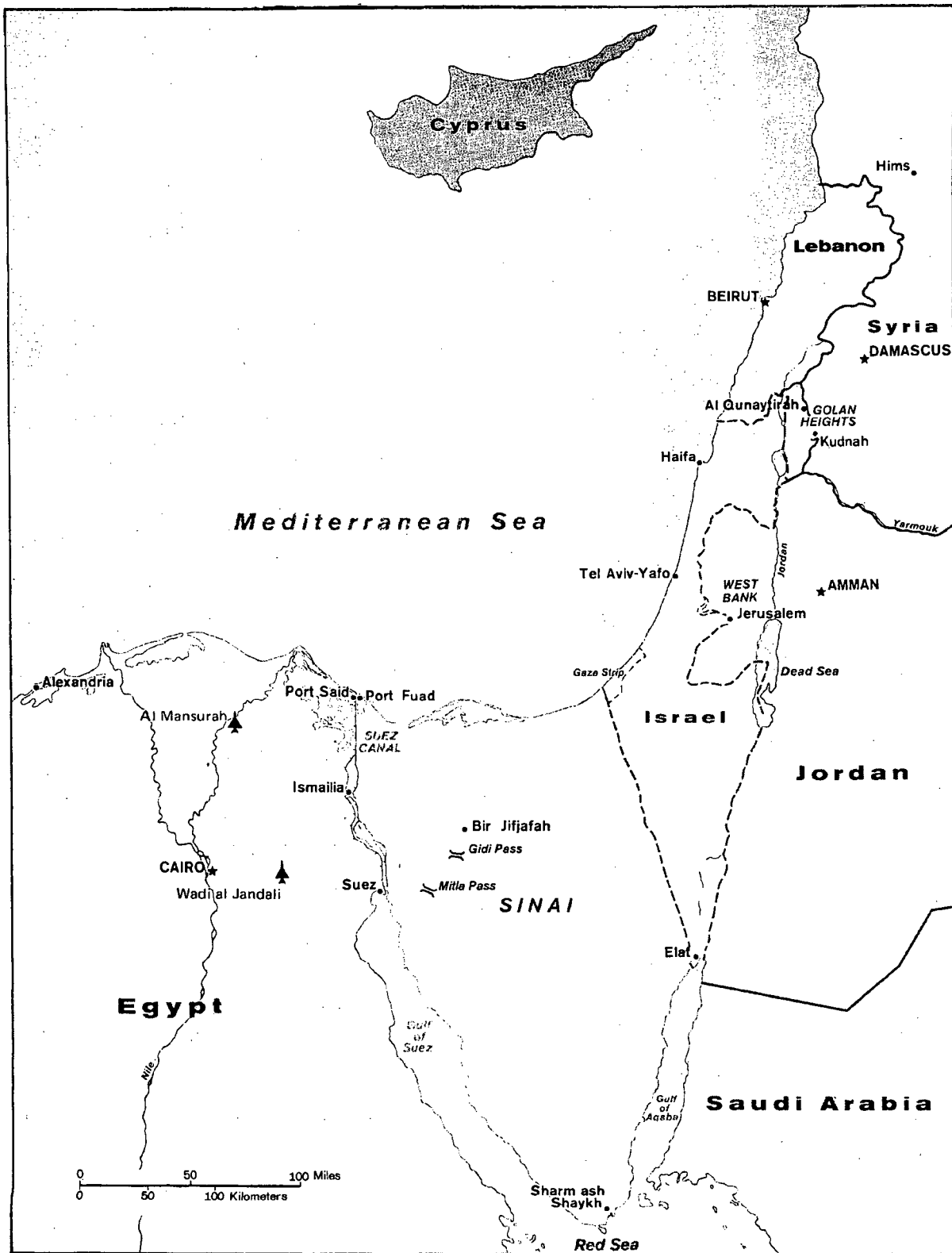
At home, the Soviets appear to be playing down the Middle East conflict. Premier Kosygin mentioned the fighting only briefly in his speech yesterday at a luncheon for visiting Japanese Prime Minister Tanaka. In Arab capitals, however, Soviet diplomats have been active. In Cairo, Ambassador Vinogradov had his fourth meeting in as many days with President Sadat, and top Soviet officials have met with Palestinian leaders and government officials in Algeria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Yemen (Sana). The thrust of the Soviet message is that Moscow is on the Arabs' side, but that it is up to other Arab states to provide Egypt and Syria with "the greatest possible aid and support."

10 Oct 73

*Central Intelligence Bulletin*

3

~~TOP SECRET~~



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~~TOP SECRET~~