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unrest and inflation. Currently, some 200,000 workers—nearly 20 percent of the civilian labor force—are either on strike, threatening to strike, or participating in work slowdowns.

The general public appears deeply troubled about continuing high inflation; last year, consumer prices rose 38 percent and average wages 35 percent. In a recent public opinion survey, concern about the economy far outdistanced worry over security and political matters. Personal consumption has not increased much since before the 1973 war. Given the current Arab peace offensive, it will be increasingly difficult to convince the consumer that restraint is necessary because of the security situation. [redacted]

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The Soviet military presence in Syria is steadily declining. There are no indications at present, however, that an abrupt curtailment of relations between Syria and the USSR is in the offing, as has occurred between Egypt and the USSR.

Syria appears to be phasing out Soviet advisers attached to the Syrian military.

[redacted] the Soviet military mission probably has been reduced by at least one third from its peak immediately after the October 1973 Middle East war.

At that time, the number of Soviet military advisory personnel in Syria probably totaled about 3,000. In addition, some 500 Soviet personnel were manning an SA-6 missile brigade near Damascus; they have since returned home. [redacted]

[redacted] Soviet strength in Syria

[redacted] may now be down to about 1,800.

Syrian President Asad wants to reduce his country's overall dependence on the Soviets and thereby weaken Soviet

political leverage in situations—such as occurred in Lebanon—where interests conflict. Syria is not out to sever its ties with the USSR, however, and is proceeding cautiously to avoid being cut off from vital Soviet supplies.

The decision to cut back on the number of Soviet advisers also reflects the Syrian military's general dislike and distrust of the Soviets and its dissatisfaction with the quality of Soviet equipment and training. A post-mortem by the Syrians on their performance during the 1973 war showed serious deficiencies in the performance of officers trained by the Soviets, compared with those trained in the West. The Syrians reportedly no longer send officers to the USSR for professional schooling, although some are still receiving technical training there.

In Egypt, meanwhile, the last 23 Soviet military advisers are scheduled to leave in April or May. [redacted]

[redacted] Their departure will mark the end of a Soviet military presence that at its peak in late 1970 totaled some 15,000 men. [redacted]

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