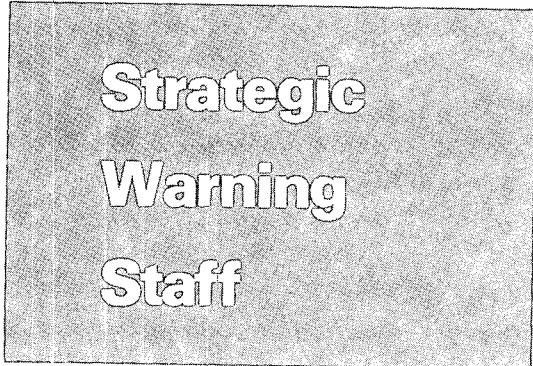


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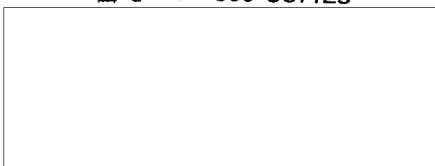
A Scenario For Possible Soviet Military Intervention In Israeli/Syrian Conflict



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FORWARD

It is the function of the Strategic Warning Staff to provide a thorough airing of serious alternative explanations to key intelligence issues with strategic warning implications. Most assessments of Soviet capabilities and intentions in the event of another major conflict between Syria and Israel seem to focus on a situation in which the Soviets would not be granted overflight rights different from those which they have been granted in the past. This Research Report examines an alternative hypothesis which holds that potentially the Soviets might be able to win unprecedented overflight rights in a new crisis because of changed political circumstances in the region, especially because of the assumption of power in Iran by a radical anti-Israel regime.

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This research report is the product of the Strategic Warning Staff and has not been coordinated with the rest of the intelligence community. Comments were solicited and incorporated at the discretion of the Strategic Warning Staff. Questions or comments on this report should be addressed to the Director, Strategic Warning Staff, Ext. 695-0031, Pentagon.

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CONCLUSIONS

The Soviet response to an Israeli-Syrian conflict may no longer be constrained by refusal of neighboring states to grant needed overflight authorization. There is as yet no evidence that the Soviets plan to do so, but the USSR could quickly deploy a division of advanced fighter aircraft to Syria via Iran and Iraq to support President Asad once overflight permission were obtained. In this way, the Soviet Union would demonstrate its willingness to stand by an embattled ally while bolstering its claim to be an involved party in the Mideast conflict, whose interests must be taken into account. Past presumptions of Turkish and Iranian denial of the overflight permission necessary to rapidly deploy a combat force to the Middle East may no longer apply. Though Turkey remains unlikely to grant more than limited overflight authorization, the Khomeini regime in Iran might now be willing to support Syria in this regard. Iran and Iraq, along with Saudi Arabia, would have serious misgivings about a Soviet combat presence in Syria, but they would be reluctant to face accusations of cowardice and betrayal in what could be called an hour of supreme need in the struggle against Israel.

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1. A new major conflict between Israel and Syria would put the Soviets to a crucial test. While the USSR still appears reluctant to become directly involved in a new round of fighting, failure to aid the Syrians substantially--especially in the face of dramatic Israeli success on the battlefield--would jeopardize Soviet diplomatic and strategic interests throughout the Middle East. [REDACTED]

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2. In past instances, the brevity and one-sidedness of Arab-Israeli military engagements virtually rendered moot the question of a Soviet decision to bring its own power to bear on the conflict. In any case, neither Turkey nor Iran under the Shah appeared likely to grant expanded overflight rights that would enable the Soviets to insert their forces in a timely way. Movement by sea, including loading and unloading times, would have taken far too long to affect the conflict. [REDACTED]

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3. If a new round of fighting with Israel were to impel Syrian President Asad to request direct Soviet military assistance under the friendship treaty concluded late last year, Moscow would face a hard choice. If the USSR failed to support

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Syria's needs adequately, Damascus and its supporters might begin to view the Soviets as unreliable and might even conclude that the time had come to join the US-backed negotiating process with Israel. The Soviets would be aware that direct intervention, on the other hand, would carry significant risks of a wider war and greatly expanded US involvement. [REDACTED]

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4. Especially if the next Syrian military engagement against Israel turned out disastrously, the Soviets might contemplate the option of an actual projection of their own military forces, with the aim of deterring further Israeli actions and halting the conflict on terms less damaging to Damascus. In reaching such a decision, Moscow might reckon that Israel would be pursuing only limited goals in combat with Syria, and might additionally expect the US to put strong unilateral pressure on Tel Aviv to cease offensive operations at the earliest possible time. A lull following a major Israeli military move, accompanied by an intense round of diplomatic activity, might well facilitate deployment of Soviet military elements. [REDACTED]

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5. In specific terms, the USSR might consider the deployment to Syria of a major tactical air combat presence, with accompanying air defense, logistical, and security components. At this point in a reignited Mideast conflict, the Soviets might also conclude that a new approach to the Khomeini regime in Iran, as well as to Iraq, might bring about the granting of the expanded overflight rights vital to such an undertaking. Both governments are on record as ready to join Syria in opposing any new "US-Zionist" aggression. Moreover, Iranian-Syrian relations have been exceptionally close since the start of the Iran-Iraq war. With an actual Syrian invitation for such a move in hand, Soviet diplomats could seek the cooperation of both Iran and Iraq in granting liberal overflight rights, citing the emergency at the front as a reason for unusual speed of decision. [REDACTED]

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6. This is not to suggest that major obstacles to such a Soviet move would vanish once the fighting between Israel and Syria escalated. Already at war, both Iran and Iraq would greet such a Soviet initiative with deep misgivings. Saudi Arabia as well could use its claim to be Syria's main source of outside financial support to weigh in against a summoning of Soviet combat forces into the region. If the new round of fighting were to show any substantial sign of subsiding with Syria doing no worse than a stalemate, the Saudis might prevail on Damascus to restrict the Soviet military role to resupply. The Syrians themselves would be extremely reluctant to sacrifice their independence to an outside military presence, and no party to the

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conflict--including the Soviets--would be able to overlook the possibility of further miscalculation leading to a superpower confrontation or general war following the arrival of Soviet forces. Yet the Arab-Israeli conflict continues to exert a seemingly unique mobilizing power throughout the Middle East, and no leader in the area now wants to join Egypt in facing bitter accusations of cowardice and betrayal at an hour of supreme need. If Syria and her neighbors conclude that only an unprecedented resort to the "Soviet card" would deter further Israeli adventures and lead to US pressure to curb Tel Aviv's actions, they might decide not to block the passage of a "limited contingent" of Soviet combat aircraft as well as the transport aircraft necessary to move the supporting equipment and personnel. [REDACTED]

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7. Should the Soviets decide to provide a military force and the problem of overflight permission were solved, a FLOGGER-equipped Frontal Aviation fighter division from the nearby Transcaucasus Military District could be flown directly to Syria. With no Israeli air opposition, Soviet fighter aircraft could fly into Syrian airfields (if allowed through Iranian or Turkish airspace) that support similar type aircraft, refuel, and be ready to conduct a combat sortie on the same day. With two external tanks and armed with 2 APEX and 4 APHID air-to-air missiles, the FLOGGER has an estimated optimum low altitude intercept range of more than 1100 nautical miles, a range well beyond the 500 to 800 miles to various Syrian airbases. [REDACTED]

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8. Aside from the political advantage of establishing a Soviet presence, the deployment of a FLOGGER-equipped division could accomplish several objectives. If current Syrian and Israeli inventories remained intact the added Soviet aircraft would change the balance of air superiority type of aircraft from the current Syrian advantage of 1.5:1 to a ratio better than 2:1 [REDACTED] in the Syrian-Soviet favor. Historically, the Syrian numerical advantage has consistently been overcome both by superior Israeli pilots and by superior technical capability of the Israelis' Western-produced aircraft and missile systems. In the past the Soviets basically provided only the short range ATOLL series of air-to-air missiles and only very recently has there been evidence the Syrian Air Force has begun receiving more advanced missile systems. These systems likely will be gradually introduced; therefore, they will not immediately erode Israeli technical superiority. [REDACTED]

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9. Rapid movement and positioning of a Soviet fighter division in Syria would present the Israelis with a qualitatively new threat environment. They would be facing air intercept radars with increased acquisition ranges and aircraft capable of all-aspect attack. The Israelis would be facing a new tactical environment with significantly increased probability of sustaining losses should they attempt to conduct operations in Syrian airspace. Arrival and purpose of Soviet air forces could be announced publicly as soon as their initial operational capability had been established. The Soviet fighters could establish barrier patrols which would force any Israeli air action against Syria to become a direct attack against Soviet forces. [REDACTED]

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10. Although the net political advantages of a Soviet military presence in Syria might justify that course of action, in a military sense there may be as many drawbacks as there are advantages. As discussed above, Soviet fighter aviation forces would offer a greater capability than the Syrian. The Soviets might face considerable difficulty if they had to engage in prolonged operations. It is not possible for those units to deploy without the majority of their maintenance and combat support activities. The Syrians would be unable to support a large influx of Soviet fighter units, because of the scale and type of support necessary. The export versions of FLOGGER which the Syrians have received do not have the same advanced avionics as the Soviet domestic versions. Therefore maintenance personnel and automated test vans of regimental maintenance establishment are a must. The armament and munitions maintenance personnel are also necessary since Syria may only now be receiving the APEX and APHID missiles with which the Soviet FLOGGER's are armed. Evidence of initial export of these advanced systems (FLOGGER-B) to Syria has [REDACTED] been detected. [REDACTED]

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11. There do not appear to be sufficient facilities at either Syrian FLOGGER base to support a large Soviet deployment. Sayqal, the main FLOGGER base, already supports over sixty-five aircraft with little ramp space. An Nasiriyah presently has less than thirty FLOGGER's but even fewer facilities than Sayqal. Both airfields are in southwest Syria within 85 nautical miles of Israeli airspace and vulnerable to Israeli air strikes. Because the Soviets would have to move extensive supporting personnel and material anyway, it appears that it would be to their advantage to deploy their FLOGGER's to other Syrian operational airfields more removed from the Israeli airspace. Deployment to an operational Syrian military airbase would provide the obvious advantage of not having to move such oversized cargo as POL trucks. Deploying to a base other than one

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of the FLOGGER bases would likely make it necessary to move nearly the entire strength of each of the three regiments of a fighter aviation division. The exact number of personnel to be moved under these conditions is uncertain, but it would probably be about 4000. This would probably include:

- Regimental and division staffs
- Squadron maintenance
- Regimental planning and control elements
- Maintenance specialists
- Missile maintenance facility personnel
- Some portion of the supporting air technical
and signal battalions.

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12. It is likely that Soviet planning would include provisions for an increase in airfield defenses at the receiving bases, probably the deployment of an airfield security force equipped with additional air defense weapons. These could be provided by the movement of some airborne troops with augmenting SAM units from locations in the Transcaucasus Military District. Since Israeli aircraft with tanker support can operate anywhere within Syrian airspace, the Soviets might find it advantageous to create their airhead at one of the northern or northeastern Syrian bases. Introduction of their own defenses would be consistent with past Soviet practice.

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13. Based on US calculations, transportation of some 5000 men, support vehicles and initial supplies probably would require about 65 IL-76 CANDID sorties. Another 10 to 15 AN-22 COCK flights would be needed to move large pieces of radar equipment if the Soviets chose to establish their own ground controlled intercept capability.

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16. The deployment of a Soviet fighter division to Syria would be a risky and potentially costly venture. The possibilities of a confrontation with the US or excessive combat losses to the Israelis would be serious considerations for the Kremlin. The Soviets, however, might view the opportunity to influence developments in the Middle East as worth the risk and the price. [redacted]

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