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TALKING POINTS: Soviet Reactions to Middle East Fighting

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To US Naval Movements:

The Soviet Navy is unlikely to interfere with the proposed US evacuation of civilian personnel from Lebanon.

-- Soviet ships normally conduct surveillance of US naval movements and we would expect them to trail the transit group and intensify surveillance as the US increases the number of ships in the Eastern Mediterranean.

-- In past Mid-East crises, the Soviets have limited themselves to similar nonprovocative actions.

There are 40 Soviet ships currently in the Mediterranean including eight surface combatants--five of which are at anchorages in the Eastern Mediterranean. Two destroyers and an attack submarine are making a scheduled port call in Dubrovnik, Yugoslavia and a single nuclear-powered cruise missile attack submarine is on patrol in the Central Mediterranean. A portion of these forces--probably at least one major surface combatant and several smaller ships to act as tattletales--may move to the area off the coast of Lebanon to monitor the US evacuation operation. Because of the conflict in Lebanon, the Soviets also may decide to gradually reinforce the Mediterranean Squadron as they have done during previous crises. Thus far there is no indications of Soviet ship movements in reaction to the Lebanon crisis.

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To the Present Situation:

The Soviets will try to exploit the current crisis in Lebanon to rally both radical and moderate Arabs and to isolate the US with Israel in the Middle East.

- Soviet media has reacted quickly and predictably, focusing on alleged US-Israeli collusion. Pravda today repeated a charge that Israeli incursion was "coordinated" with the US.

If the conflict remains confined to Lebanon with no major Israeli-Syrian clash, Moscow's response will not go beyond media and diplomatic condemnations of US and Israel. During previous confrontation over Lebanon, the Soviets have never given the Syrians any reason to believe that the Damascus would have direct Soviet military support in any action against the Israelis. The Soviets probably anticipate that, in any event, the situation will increase Syrian and Palestinian political and military

dependence on the USSR. THE SOVS WILL PROBABLY UNDERTAKE TO RESUMPLY THE SYR. & THE PLO THRU THE SYRIANS.

To Major Israeli-Syrian Clashes in Lebanon:

Nevertheless, a major clash between Syria and Israel in Lebanon would probably prompt the Soviets to take steps--short of direct military intervention--to demonstrate support for Syria.

In this case, the USSR is likely to:

- Mount an immediate resupply operation to Syria.
- Reposition part of the Mediterranean Squadron toward the Lebanese-Syrian coast and to augment the Squadron.
- Increase intelligence collection on the area and provide intelligence support to Syrian and PLO leaders.

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Over the past several weeks, however, the Soviets have appeared somewhat more ambiguous regarding backing for Syria.

-- A senior Soviet Middle East expert recently told our charge in Amman that the USSR cannot stand idly by if Syrian "targets" are attacked in Lebanon by Israel-- presumably a reference to Syrian SAM sites in Bekaa.

-- One report alleges USSR has promised Damascus that an Israeli attack on the SAMs would prompt Soviet personnel to assume a greater role in Syria's air defense.

This could mean that Soviet air defense units would assume some of the air defense burden around Damascus in Syria, visably demonstrating Soviet support and freeing Syrian crews to move to Lebanon. A riskier--and far less likely--option would be to introduce Soviet fighter units into Syria. <sup>SOVIET AIR DEFENSE MISSILE OR</sup> Soviet fighter units could be moved by air and be ready for operations in a minimum of three days.

At the UN:

Soviet activities in the UN will be designed to make political capital with the Arabs at US expense.

-- Soviet Ambassador to Lebanon told reporters yesterday that the USSR will take all measures available to "denounce" Israel.

-- The USSR will support any resolution calling for sanctions against Israel.

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