



Director of  
Central  
Intelligence

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# Soviet Forces and Capabilities in the Southern Theater of Military Operations

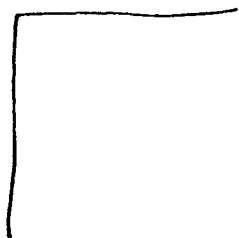
National Intelligence Estimate

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SOVIET FORCES AND CAPABILITIES  
IN THE SOUTHERN THEATER  
OF MILITARY OPERATIONS

Information available as of 19 October 1983 was  
used in the preparation of this Estimate.

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THE NATIONAL FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE BOARD CONCURS, EXCEPT AS NOTED IN THE TEXT.

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## PREFACE

This Estimate assesses the capability of the Soviet Union to conduct military operations in the Southern Theater<sup>1</sup> over the next five years. It describes the forces available, likely objectives, and possible scenarios under which the Soviets might pursue military options.

A decision by the Soviets to initiate operations in this theater would be heavily influenced by their perceptions of the likely reactions of the United States and regional countries, including the capacity of these countries to counter a Soviet move. One of the many factors that could affect both the attitudes of the states in the region toward a Soviet attack and their ability to resist is the readiness of the United States to provide assistance or to intervene. However, the options available to the United States are not a part of this analysis.

The likely attitudes of key regional states are addressed in context with assumed US support where appropriate. In addition, we examine the military capabilities of selected countries in the region and assess their capacity to resist a Soviet attack.

In assessing Soviet capabilities and likely options, we ascribe to Soviet planners the following *assumptions* concerning US policy and military capabilities:

- US policy would be to take action—including the use of military force—to protect vital US interests in the Persian Gulf area.
- The United States would have the capacity to conduct airstrikes against Soviet forces operating in Iran or elsewhere in the Persian Gulf region—either from aircraft carriers or regional land bases—commitments elsewhere notwithstanding.

This Estimate was produced under the auspices of the National Intelligence Officer for General Purpose Forces at the suggestion of the Commandant of the Marine Corps. [

<sup>1</sup> The boundaries of the Soviet Southern Theater of Military Operations (TVD) appear to extend from eastern Turkey through Iran and the Persian Gulf region, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and contiguous waters. The boundaries could extend east as far as Nepal, Burma, and the western third of China. Earlier US publications also referred to this theater as the Southeastern TVD.

## KEY JUDGMENTS

The major long-term Soviet goal in the Persian Gulf region is to move the Gulf states from a pro-Western to a pro-Soviet orientation. The Soviets seek to enhance their influence in the area to the point at which Moscow could exercise some degree of control over Persian Gulf oil, with resultant economic and political leverage over Western Europe and Japan. Since the fall of the Shah of Iran and the invasion of Afghanistan, the Soviets have developed new strategic concepts for military campaigns in the Persian Gulf region, and undertaken some modest improvements in their forces in the southern USSR.

Moscow almost certainly would prefer to achieve its objectives without resorting to arms, and will probably seek to avoid a military confrontation with the United States. The Soviets probably believe that any military move against Iran that was perceived as threatening Western access to Persian Gulf oil would provoke a US military response. We therefore do not consider a Soviet military move into Iran or elsewhere in the Gulf region likely under present circumstances.

The Soviets would consider military action if the United States introduced forces into Iran or was perceived to be preparing to intervene. In this case, the Soviets probably would limit any intervention, at least initially, to the northern provinces bordering the USSR and avoid engaging US forces:

- The Soviets also might consider military intervention if a pro-Moscow group were to seize power and "request" assistance, or if Iran were to fragment into a number of regional entities, especially if pro-Western elements gained power in provinces bordering the USSR. In this case, the Soviets might calculate that they could present the West with a *fait accompli* effectively barring any Western military counter.
- Neither of these is a likely prospect under present circumstances. In any scenario, the Soviets would expect their use of force to be met with considerable Iranian opposition.

The Soviets have sufficient ground and tactical air forces (but more limited naval forces) to conduct military campaigns of varying scope and intensity in the Southern TVD—including a full-scale invasion of Iran—without significant reinforcement from other theaters—that is, without using forces currently located opposite NATO and China:

- Ground Forces. In the absence of a major campaign against eastern Turkey, a force of 25 active motorized rifle and tank divisions from the Caucasus and Turkestan would be available. They could be augmented by several divisions from the central USSR or one or more airborne divisions. The availability of forces in Afghanistan would be contingent upon the assumption of their missions by Afghan or other Soviet forces. Units in the southern USSR are among the least well equipped in the Soviet army, but, given the nature of the opposition they would face, the Soviets probably see no compelling reason to speed up the pace of force modernization. These ground forces also are in a low state of readiness and would have to undergo large-scale mobilization and preparation before they could undertake offensive operations. The Soviets would be unlikely to bring in a large number of ground force units from outside the area: essentially Soviet planning envisions the employment of those forces stationed in the vicinity of the Southern TVD, possibly reinforced with units from the central USSR and the Central Asian Military District.
- Tactical Air Forces. Some 700 tactical aircraft and 200 helicopters located in the military districts opposite the region could provide substantial support to ground operations. The range of Soviet tactical aircraft based in the USSR and Afghanistan would constrain the ability of Soviet air forces to provide support to ground units throughout Iran until Iranian airfields had been captured.
- Naval Forces. The core of Soviet naval forces that would be likely to be involved in a Persian Gulf campaign is the 20 to 24 vessels—generally including one submarine and four or five surface combatants—of the Indian Ocean Squadron, which in peacetime routinely monitor Western naval movements in the Arabian Sea. Before the Squadron could meaningfully support a Soviet land campaign, it would require substantial augmentation. If the Soviets decided to augment the Squadron, they



probably would draw on forces deployed to the South China Sea, normally 20 to 26 vessels. Further augmentation would require a drawdown of assets in the Pacific or Black Sea Fleets that have other priority missions against NATO, China, and the United States. We believe these missions would preclude major deployments to the Indian Ocean, since the ships could not quickly return home. Moreover, the Soviets probably would consider recalling some units already deployed to the Indian Ocean and South China Sea in anticipation of wider hostilities, particularly if US carriers were not present. Even if augmented, the Squadron could not assure Soviet control of the Arabian Sea. The lack of land-based air cover in the area would seriously undercut any attempt by Soviet naval units to block the Strait of Hormuz. Also, the Soviets have only a limited capacity for amphibious operations and could not control the Gulf by seizing littoral areas even against marginal indigenous opposition. While the Soviets could mine the Strait by air or submarine, we do not believe they could control the contiguous air or sea areas sufficiently to keep the Strait closed if Western nations mounted a long-term, full-scale minesweeping operation.

If the Soviets anticipated Western military opposition to a campaign in the Southern TVD, particularly from US aircraft carriers, they probably would see a requirement for redeploying strategic and/or naval aviation assets to bases in the southern USSR and substantially increasing the number of general purpose submarines deployed to the Indian Ocean. The extent of such air and naval deployments probably would depend primarily on how the Soviets assessed the risk of escalation to a general war, because these forces are assigned priority tasks in other TVDs against NATO and China. On balance, we believe the Soviets probably would view any conflict with US forces in this region as posing significant risk of escalation and therefore would be reluctant to commit substantial strategic air or naval assets for operations in the Southern TVD.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The Director, Defense Intelligence Agency, believes that the introduction of US carrier battle groups would almost certainly cause the Soviets to augment their antiship cruise missile capability in a measured response to counter the buildup of US naval forces in the Indian Ocean.

The Iranians, given their revolutionary zeal and heightened nationalism, would almost certainly strongly resist any Soviet invasion. The reaction of other indigenous forces—particularly Turkey, Iraq, and Pakistan—to Soviet military operations in the region would depend largely upon the scenario and the degree to which their territories were threatened:

- Although regular and paramilitary Iranian forces could not, by themselves, stop a Soviet invasion, they could delay and complicate it and make any subsequent occupation costly. Iranian capabilities, however, have been degraded by attrition from the war with Iraq, and the availability of forces would be dependent upon the status of that conflict.
- Turkish ground forces in eastern Turkey could conduct a credible defense against a limited Soviet attack, but would not be strong enough to conduct significant offensive operations against Soviet forces in Iran. Turkish air forces, however, particularly if augmented by units from western Turkey, could attack the flanks of any Soviet force moving into northwest Iran, as could US air forces if they were permitted to operate from bases in Turkey.
- Pakistan's armed forces are large but neither equipped nor positioned to defend against a Soviet attack, and probably would not attack Soviet forces in Iran as long as they did not violate Pakistan's borders. While limited cross-border operations could occur, we do not believe the Soviets would invade Pakistan in conjunction with either an attack into Iran or operations in Afghanistan: they would have little to gain and probably view the risk of a US military response as high.
- The Soviets probably would see little danger of Iraqi intervention into a Soviet-Iranian conflict. In the event Soviet forces attempted to pass through Iraq to continue an offensive into Kuwait or Saudi Arabia, however, the Iraqis probably would resist. Although Iraq could not prevent a Soviet drive to the Arabian Peninsula, its forces could certainly slow it down, providing additional time for Western reaction and forcing the Soviets to commit additional forces to the campaign.

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— The armed forces of the Gulf Arab states could not—by themselves—offer significant resistance to a Soviet drive down the western littoral of the Persian Gulf, although they could delay the Soviet advance. In concert with US forces and those of other nations—particularly from the Middle East—however, they could make a useful contribution to the defense of the Arabian Peninsula.

As long as Ayatollah Khomeini is alive, Iran's clerical regime would reject US intervention on its behalf. If the United States intervened nevertheless, the only organized military threat would be likely to come from the regular army and the Revolutionary Guard, but many of those forces would have been redeployed to the north against the Soviets and have little logistic capability to quickly move south to counter US forces. Nevertheless, Iran is likely to have several divisions positioned in the oil-rich Khuzestan Province in anticipation of a superpower move to divide Iran. We are unsure of the level of opposition to the United States among the Iranian populace, but believe it could range from severe among the poorer urban population to possible support from some merchant or tribal groups. In rural areas, the sparse populace might well be indifferent to US forces.

Possible Soviet military options range from limited attacks into Iran, Pakistan, or eastern Turkey to a full-scale invasion of the Persian Gulf region, including the oil-producing countries along the western littoral.

We do not believe the Soviets are now capable of conducting or sustaining a "quick grab" of the Strait of Hormuz by airborne/airmobile assault in isolation from a larger campaign. This would be particularly so if they were to be opposed by US naval or tactical air forces. Nor do we believe that Soviet capabilities will improve to the extent that this would become a viable option in the next few years. We believe the Soviets would anticipate a US military response to such a clear challenge to vital Western interests. Although this appears to be a very high-risk option for the Soviets, it must be considered.

A quick seizure of the Khuzestan oilfields by airborne assault is not a viable Soviet option:

- Because the oilfields are dispersed over a large area, the Soviets would have to commit virtually all of their airborne divisions to attain a useful degree of control.
- Because of limited airlift, the operation would have to be conducted in stages over a period of weeks. The airborne force would be out of the range of tactical fighter support and would face a large concentration of Iranian armor and infantry.
- Until an overland linkup could be effected (a minimum of six weeks), the force would have to be supplied entirely by air. The Soviets do not have the capacity for a sustained airlift of this magnitude.

The Soviets clearly have the capacity to quickly occupy Azarbayjan in northwestern Iran, either as an independent operation or as an adjunct to campaigns in other theaters, including NATO and China. This is their most feasible option politically and militarily:

- The Soviets might feel that the United States would be less likely to respond to an attack that did not clearly threaten vital Western interests.
- Initial force requirements would be relatively small—some five to seven divisions—and the operation would be the easiest to support logistically. Although the Soviets probably could occupy the area in one to three weeks, they could not secure it completely and would have to be prepared to fight a long war of attrition as Iran shifted forces northward.
- Depending on the level of resistance, occupation of Azarbayjan could allow the Soviets secure routes to threaten Tehran and access to additional airfields. Although it would not afford them control over Iranian oil, it could well increase Soviet influence in the Gulf region if the West did not respond.
- On the other hand, a Soviet move into Azarbayjan might cause severe damage to Soviet relations not only with the Gulf nations but also with other Middle East countries.
- If the risks associated with this option are low, however, so too are the potential gains for the Soviets, except to the extent that it would posture them for subsequent operations deeper into Iran. If, however, they restricted their invasion to Azarbayjan, they

would not markedly improve their capability to execute other limited options, such as operations against the Strait of Hormuz or the Khuzestan oilfields. To attain such a capability, the Soviets would need to extend their operations well into central and eastern Iran.

Faced with only indigenous opposition, the Soviets have the capacity to conduct an overland operation via Afghanistan to seize an Iranian or Pakistani port on the Gulf of Oman or Arabian Sea. Any operation against these ports, however, would clearly threaten Western interests in the Gulf region:

- The Soviets would have to weigh the risk of engaging US forces, particularly in an area where they could regard the United States as holding the tactical advantage, against the limited gains afforded by possession of either facility. On balance, we believe this would be an unattractive option for the Soviets, either as an independent operation or as part of a broader NATO-Warsaw Pact conflict.

The Soviets could conduct a full-scale invasion of Iran. It would be an extremely difficult operation to execute—on a scale larger than any since World War II—and they would have to assume that it would lead to a military confrontation with the United States:

- An attack of this magnitude would require on the order of 20 to 25 divisions, or virtually all Soviet ground units in the theater, and perhaps a few divisions from the central USSR and the Central Asian MD as reinforcements. Substantial aviation assets also would be required. Major constraints would include unfavorable terrain, difficulties in providing logistic support, and the short combat radii of tactical fighters.
- The Soviets would require at least a month's preparation for this campaign. Against limited Iranian opposition, they probably could occupy the Khuzestan oilfields and the ports and oil facilities on the north coast of the Persian Gulf in about six weeks; against stiff resistance it could take in excess of three months. Gaining effective control of the country, however, would be a long-term proposition.
- We believe that, in the case of a full-scale Soviet invasion of Iran, the Intelligence Community would probably provide at

least 21 days' notification that the Soviets were making preparations that could lead to an invasion.

An occupation of Iran, either in conjunction with or as a prelude to a war with NATO, does not appear to offer much to the Soviets:

- If the Soviet aim were to deny Persian Gulf oil to NATO in order to degrade its capability to wage war, they could do so much more quickly and efficiently by conducting strategic air attacks against the tanker loading facilities in the Gulf ports.
- Another possible aim, as a prelude to a NATO-Warsaw Pact war, would be to divert potential US reinforcements for NATO to the Persian Gulf. We cannot, however, judge how the Soviets would assess the viability of such an option. Moreover, the Soviets could not be assured of how the United States would respond or if, in fact, any significant number of US forces would actually be diverted to this area.

In the absence of a Western response to a Soviet invasion of Iran, the Soviets probably could occupy the western littoral of the Persian Gulf—from Kuwait to Oman—with an additional 10 to 15 divisions or a total of 30 to 40 divisions for the entire campaign.

Those factors that will weigh most heavily on Moscow's future capacity to conduct military operations in the Persian Gulf region will be the status of regional conflicts and the degree to which Moscow commits resources to enhance its own force capabilities, especially those for air support and the command and control necessary for conducting rapid, continuous combined-arms operations throughout the theater:

- If the Soviet position in Afghanistan improves, some forces could be freed for operations elsewhere and Soviet lines of communication would be more secure. Similarly, a major improvement of Soviet air and logistic facilities in Afghanistan—particularly the construction of new bases in the southwest—would facilitate Soviet military operations in the Southern TVD.
- Improvements anticipated in Soviet tactical aviation by the late 1980s—particularly aerial refueling capabilities for new fighter-bombers and production of a new aerial tanker—could

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make an airfield in southwestern Afghanistan more threatening. If operated with tankers from airfields in Afghanistan, tactical aircraft could strike targets throughout most of Southwest Asia.

- An end to the war between Iran and Iraq would improve the capacity of both countries to resist a Soviet invasion—particularly in the long term, as both recovered from the war. Any postwar redeployment of Iranian units to northern Iran would make a Soviet invasion of Azarbayjan more costly.

## DISCUSSION

1. Events of the past 30 years have considerably altered political alignments in the Middle East and South Asia. The British decision in 1954 to pull out of Suez signified the end of any meaningful Western military presence in the region. Iraq's withdrawal marked the end of the Baghdad Pact organization and its replacement in 1959 by CENTO—an alliance of the United Kingdom, Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan—which languished in limbo for 20 years until it was dissolved. During the latter part of the period—especially after the Turkish invasion of Cyprus—relations between the United States and Turkey deteriorated steadily. As Western influence in the area declined, however, the dependence of Western nations on Persian Gulf oil increased. This became particularly clear during the 1973 oil embargo. Beginning with the fall of the Shah of Iran in early 1979, a series of events occurred in Southwest Asia that caused the United States and the Soviet Union to focus increased attention on the Persian Gulf region, to assess and enhance their capacity for military operations in the area, and to plan for the contingency of a Soviet-US confrontation over Persian Gulf oil. While these events have somewhat altered the strategic balance in the area, their overall effect has been more to destabilize the region than to shift the military balance sharply in favor of either superpower.

2. The demise of the Shah's regime was a net gain for the Soviet Union, because it eliminated Iran's role as both a pro-Western state and a stabilizing regional force, and drastically reduced US influence in the Gulf region. Although the Soviets have had virtually no success in influencing Iranian policy under Khomeini, the situation in Iran remains unstable, and new opportunities for the Soviets could develop at any time, especially upon the Ayatollah's death.

3. The second event—the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan at the end of 1979—has had mixed results. On the one hand, Moscow has accomplished its objective of maintaining a subservient regime on its southern border. Moreover, by establishing a military presence in Afghanistan, the Soviets have improved their

posture for further operations in the Gulf region, particularly against southeast Iran and Pakistan. On the other hand, the invasion has involved political and military costs. It prompted a US announcement of a policy of opposing—if necessary with force—any Soviet move into the Gulf region that could threaten Western access to Gulf oil and the development of forces to implement this policy. The United States also has been brought back into the region indirectly through its renewed security relationship with Pakistan. In addition, Soviet aggression in Afghanistan has resulted in renewed suspicion of Soviet intentions that could make the introduction of US forces into the Gulf region more acceptable to regional powers.

4. Some 100,000 Soviet troops have been committed to a conflict in Afghanistan, which offers little prospect of near-term resolution without a substantial increase in Soviet forces. Should the Soviets succeed in consolidating their position in Afghanistan and bringing the area under firm control, however, their prospects for attaining long-term objectives in the region will be enhanced considerably.

5. The war between Iran and Iraq itself is also a complicating factor and has both positive and adverse implications for Soviet ambitions in Southwest Asia. In that it is inherently destabilizing, the war could create new opportunities for Moscow in the area. The war, however, also has created persistent difficulties in Soviet relations with both Iran and Iraq. Following its initial neutrality, Moscow lifted an embargo on arms deliveries to both countries in the spring of 1981. Subsequent deliveries to Iran were extremely modest as compared with deliveries to Iraq, primarily because of existing arms contracts with Iraq. By the spring of 1982, the Soviets—apparently convinced that relations with Iran were going nowhere and concerned that Iran might win the war—signed a new arms agreement with Iraq. Their tilt toward Baghdad became even more pronounced when Iran invaded Iraq in July 1982. Iran denounced Moscow's endorsement of a UN Security Council resolution calling for a cease-fire and withdrawal of forces, condemned Soviet provision of



lethal weapons to Iraq, and frequently charges that the United States and the USSR are coordinating their positions. Soviet-Iranian relations, thus, are unlikely to improve as long as the war continues and Moscow supplies weapons to Iraq. The Iranian crackdown on the Tudeh Communist Party in May 1983 also contributed to the freeze in Soviet-Iranian relations.

6. In sum, the events of the past four years have served to destabilize the situation in the Persian Gulf region and to underscore the geostrategic importance of the area as a principal arena for Soviet-US competition. The potential for military confrontation between the superpowers in the area has increased considerably.

#### Soviet Objectives in the Persian Gulf Region

7. The major long-term Soviet goal in the Persian Gulf region is to move the Gulf states from a pro-Western to a pro-Soviet orientation to enhance Soviet influence in the area to the point at which Moscow could exercise some degree of control over Persian Gulf oil with a resultant leverage over Western Europe and Japan. Moscow is clearly aware that the West European nations, Japan, and, to a lesser extent, the United States are dependent upon Gulf oil, and that any attempt to deny them that oil by force would be tantamount to an act of war.

8. We do not consider a Soviet military move into Iran or elsewhere in the Gulf region likely under the present circumstances. More likely, Moscow will continue to focus on ensuring Iran's continued anti-US orientation. The Soviets will strive to promote better Soviet-Iranian relations, despite their marked lack of success in this area to date. At the same time, however, Moscow will seek to reconstitute pro-Soviet leftist elements in Iran and to court moderate elements with a view to the eventual emergence of a pro-Soviet government after Khomeini. The Soviets will continue the propaganda war, dwelling on the "massive" and "aggressive" US naval deployments in the Gulf area, and on the establishment of USCENCOM. Should opportunities arise, Moscow will continue to act to exploit instability in the region to its advantage, to undermine US and Western influence, and to gain a greater voice in matters affecting the security of the Gulf region.

9. We cannot rule out the possibility of Soviet use of force in the area, especially if the situation changes dramatically. The Soviets have occupied portions of Iran twice before, in 1920 and during World War II. Moscow refuses to recognize Tehran's unilateral abrogation of that part of the 1921 Soviet-Persian Treaty that permits the Soviet Union to intervene with troops in Iran if a third party threatens the USSR from Iranian territory. More important, the Soviets have considerable ground and air forces in the border districts contiguous to Iran. Although they have not accelerated the pace of modernization of these forces, we believe they have, since 1980, developed concepts for their employment in the Gulf region.

#### Situations in Which the Soviets Might Resort to Force

10. Moscow almost certainly would prefer to achieve its objectives in Southwest Asia without resorting to arms, and will probably seek to avoid a military confrontation with the United States. However, several developments could lead to a Soviet decision to use military force to protect or further Moscow's interests in the Gulf region. The Soviets would consider military action if the United States introduced forces into Iran, or was perceived to be preparing to intervene. They might well invoke the 1921 Treaty, claiming that the United States was preparing to use Iran as a base of operations against the Soviet Union. The Soviets probably would limit any intervention, at least initially, to the northern provinces bordering the USSR and avoid engaging US forces.

11. Should a pro-Moscow group seize power in Iran—or attempt to do so—Soviet involvement and support could well extend to direct military intervention either to assist in the takeover or to shore up a new regime. In this case, the Soviets might calculate that they could present the West with a fait accompli effectively barring any Western military counter. Circumstances would have to change markedly, however, before any pro-Soviet element in Iran would be in a position to make a successful power play. In addition, given the difficulties the Soviets are having in Afghanistan, they might well be reluctant to get

involved in a similar, but potentially more volatile, situation in Iran, especially since they probably would view it as carrying a high risk of confrontation with the United States.

12. A precipitant over which they might have less control could be the fragmentation of Iran into a number of regional entities. The Soviets might move into the northern provinces either to support pro-Moscow regimes or to overturn pro-Western ones

13. We do not foresee circumstances in which the Soviets would perceive an opportunity for a quick military action that would significantly enhance their position with little risk. Moscow cannot prudently dismiss pledges of the United States to defend its interests and those of its allies in the Gulf area. In addition, we cannot visualize a situation in which the Soviets could march into Iran unopposed, regardless of the chaotic situation there. Iranian resistance might not be well organized, but it would be dedicated, fanatic, and protracted. The Soviets would have to assume it would be sufficient to prevent an easy victory, and would therefore plan for a long campaign.

14. Similarly, we do not believe a Soviet military campaign against Pakistan is likely, either in concert with a larger campaign against Iran or the Gulf states or in connection with Soviet operations in Afghanistan. Even though the Soviets have a wide range of military options against Pakistan, which fall within the limits of their capabilities, we believe they will continue to rely primarily on political pressure and subversive activities to intimidate Pakistan. If these measures fail, or if Pakistan's support to the Afghan insurgency becomes increasingly belligerent, Soviet operations across the border could occur. We believe, however, that the Soviets will avoid direct confrontation with Pakistani forces, and we consider it unlikely that they would attempt to occupy any part of Pakistan.

#### Soviet Forces in the Southern Theater of Military Operations

15. There are considerable Soviet ground and air forces in the military districts (MDs) contiguous to or near the Iranian border (see figure 1 and table 1) that

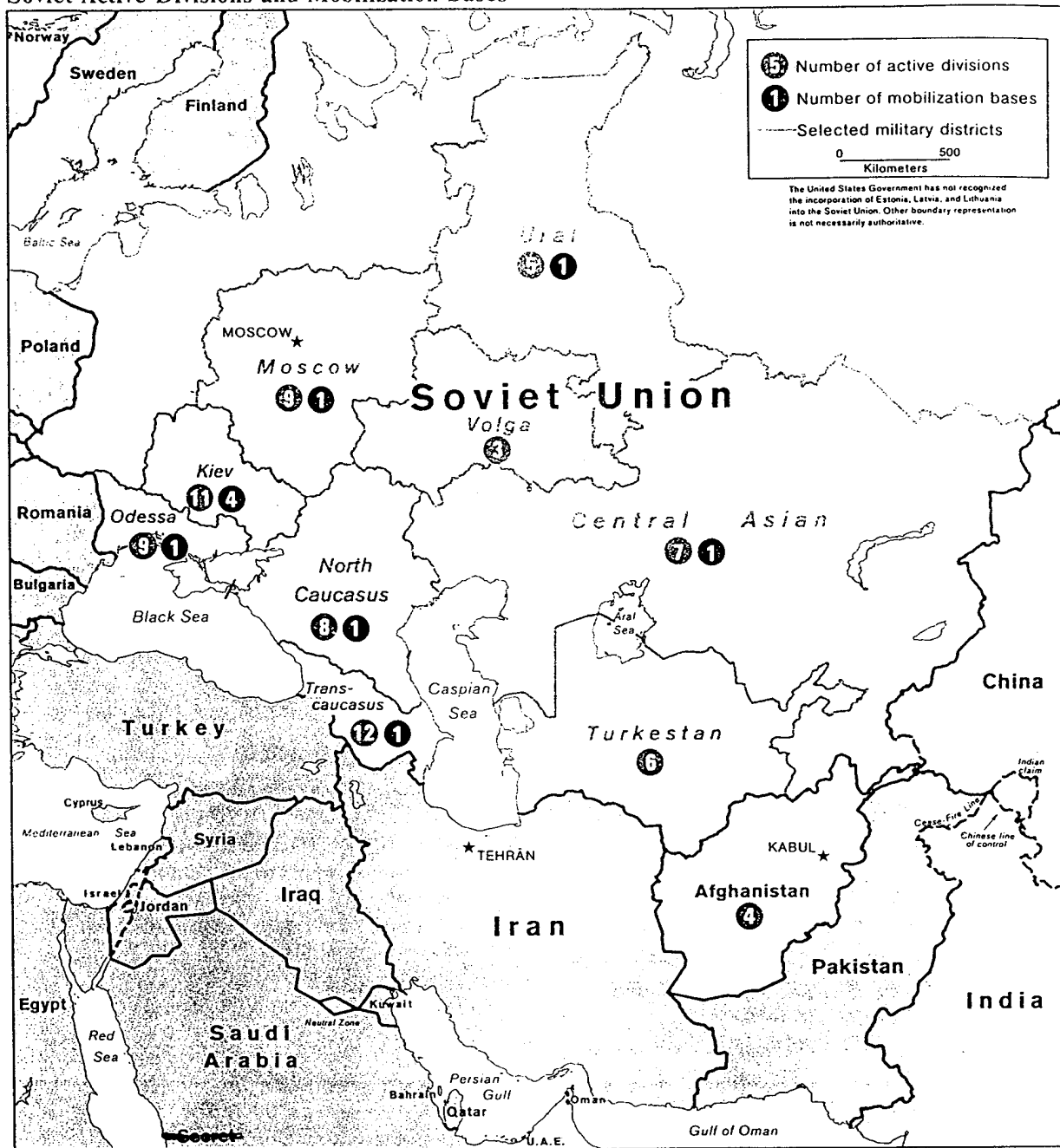
could operate in the Southern Theater of Military Operations (TVD), but only limited naval forces in the Indian Ocean. The availability of these forces for an invasion of Iran or for other operations in the Gulf area would depend largely on Soviet requirements in other theaters, particularly the Southwestern TVD opposite NATO's southern region.

#### Ground Forces

16. In the absence of a major Soviet offensive against eastern Turkey, most of the 25 Soviet active tank and motorized rifle divisions in the Transcaucasus, North Caucasus, and Turkestan MDs probably would be available for operations against Iran. The Soviets probably would want to withhold three to four of the divisions along the Turkish border. The 20 active divisions in the Kiev and Odessa MDs are primarily oriented against NATO, and the seven in Central Asia against China. Their availability for use as reinforcements in the Southern TVD area would depend on Soviet requirements in these theaters. To a lesser extent, the same holds true for the 17 divisions in the Moscow, Ural, and Volga MDs and the seven airborne divisions, which are in reserve. In the context of global war, the TVDs opposite NATO and China would have priority over the TVD opposite the Persian Gulf. If the Soviets were considering operations against the Persian Gulf, they would have to anticipate that the conflict could spread and plan for contingencies against NATO and China. The larger the Soviet campaign in Iran, the greater the need they might see to maintain forces opposite NATO and China

17. Some of the Soviet forces in Afghanistan might also be committed to an attack into either Iran or Pakistan. Their availability, however, would be contingent upon the assumption of their missions by Afghan or other Soviet forces. Given the difficulties the Soviets have had in securing convoys in Afghanistan, their problems would probably multiply if they were to greatly increase the traffic there to support a force attacking into Iran or Pakistan. Consequently, if units from Afghanistan were committed to these attacks, they would have to be replaced by other units from the Soviet Union. The Soviets might attempt to free some regular army units in Afghanistan for offensive operations elsewhere by having KGB or MVD (Ministry of Internal Affairs) troops assume a

Figure 1  
Soviet Active Divisions and Mobilization Bases



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**Table 1**  
**Soviet Aviation Assets Opposite**  
**the Persian Gulf Region<sup>a,b</sup>**

	Total	Military Districts Near Iran	Transcaucasus Military District	North Caucasus Military District	Turkistan Military District	Other Areas	Moscow Military District	Ural Military District	Volga Military District	Central Asian Military District	Odessa Military District	Kiev Military District	Afghanistan
Ground attack	550	315	195	—	120	235	45	—	—	120	45	—	25
Flogger	135	—	—	—	—	135	—	—	—	90	45	—	—
Fitter	315	255	135	—	120	60	45	—	—	—	—	—	—
Fencer	60	30	30	—	—	30	—	—	—	—	—	—	15
Frogfoot	40	30	30	—	—	10	—	—	—	30	—	—	—
Fighters <sup>c</sup>	920	405	215	—	190	515	90	—	—	—	—	—	10
Fishbed	195	45	—	—	45	150	45	—	—	150	200	45	30
Flogger	520	245	135	—	110	275	45	—	—	30	45	—	30
Flagon	130	65	30	—	35	65	—	—	—	95	90	45	—
Forbat	30	30	30	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	65	—	—
Fiddler	25	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Firebar	20	20	20	—	—	25	—	—	—	25	—	—	—
Helicopters <sup>d</sup>	670	215	165	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Hind	175	40	40	—	50	455	40	—	—	50	100	35	230
Hip	345	125	85	—	—	135	5	—	—	—	30	—	100
Hook	150	50	40	—	10	100	—	—	—	30	50	15	90
Reconnaissance	240	90	60	—	30	150	25	—	—	20	20	20	40
Brewer	85	35	20	—	15	50	15	—	—	60	50	—	15
Fishbed	45	15	15	—	—	30	—	—	—	15	20	—	—
Forbat	50	10	10	—	—	40	10	—	—	15	—	—	15
Fitter	60	30	15	—	15	30	—	—	—	15	15	—	—

<sup>a</sup> Numbers have been rounded to 5.  
<sup>b</sup> Aircraft in training units not included.  
<sup>c</sup> No aircraft in air defense districts counted.  
<sup>d</sup> Attack and transport only.

~~This table is Secret.~~

greater security role. Given the increasing effectiveness of the Afghan insurgents, however, as well as the greater opportunities additional convoys would provide them, a large-scale infusion of KGB/MVD troops would be required before they could release any meaningful number of combat troops. The KGB/MVD, moreover, could also have competing missions in the interior of the Soviet Union, as well as against NATO and China.

18. Although the bulk of Soviet ground forces for a Persian Gulf campaign would probably come from the Caucasus and Turkestan, the Soviets might bring in a few better trained and equipped divisions from other MDs in order to increase the combat potential of the force. Moreover, the Soviets might also bring in units from other areas to increase the variety of the ethnic composition of the invading force. The proportion of non-Slavs in active units in the Caucasus and Turkestan is probably about 50 percent—the same as in active ground force units in other areas of the USSR. However, if these units were mobilized and filled out with reservists from the local area, as is commonly done in the USSR, the proportion of non-Slavs would increase dramatically. Reservists from Soviet Azarbayjan and Turkestan are linked to ethnic groups in Iran, and the Soviets might question their reliability in a war against Iran. Nonetheless, we doubt that they would bring in large forces from outside the area to alter the ethnic mix of the force.

19. *Ground Forces Standards.* The structure of the Soviet ground forces in the Caucasus and Turkestan is generally consistent with their mission—to fight a lightly equipped enemy in difficult terrain. The mountainous terrain of much of eastern Turkey, Pakistan, and Iran is not conducive to armor operations and would afford an attacking force little opportunity to deploy and maneuver. Tracked vehicles would, for the most part, be roadbound, and would have to move in column. Opportunities for rapid cross-country movement would be possible only in the desert regions. In other areas, attacks on a broad front by combined-arms forces—tanks supported by mounted infantry and rapidly displacing self-propelled (SP) artillery and mobile surface-to-air missiles (SAMs)—also would be proscribed by

the terrain. Probably for these reasons, the Soviets have only one tank division in the area. The motorized rifle divisions—many with small complements of tanks and armored personnel carriers (APCs), and with light towed artillery and mortars, which provide considerable fire support at regimental level—are better suited for operations in the region. Moreover, the indigenous opposition in the area would also be lightly equipped and would not have large numbers of modern tanks.

20. Prior to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Soviet ground forces in the Transcaucasus, North Caucasus, and Turkestan MDs had primarily defensive missions. These units—along with those in the interior of the USSR—consistently brought up the rear in the Soviet force modernization effort. We had no evidence of Soviet contemplation of large-scale operations deep into eastern Turkey or Iran.

21. In spite of heightened Soviet interest in the area and the more complex roles envisioned for these forces since 1980, the rate of force modernization continues to lag. Equipment continues to be upgraded at a slow but steady pace, but units in the area still have a low priority for the newer items. For example, no new generation (T-64, 72, 80) tanks and virtually no self-propelled artillery have yet been introduced into the area. Modern SAMs are found in very limited numbers. The major improvement of the last three years was the replacement of some obsolete APCs with newer models (BTR-60, BTR-70, or BMP). This process, however, started long before Afghanistan. In fact, more new APCs were delivered to forces in the region in the early-to-mid-1970s than in the past three years. Recent improvements include the replacement of antiaircraft guns with modern SAMs in two divisions (two other divisions already had SAMs), the provision of some antitank guided missiles, and limited replacement of older 85-mm and 122-mm towed artillery with a newer towed howitzer. [

22. There have also been some changes in nondivisional units. Since 1980 the Soviets have established a corps headquarters in the Turkestan MD. A second Scud brigade (mobilization base) has been sighted in the North Caucasus MD, and a Scaleboard brigade is being formed in the Turkestan MD. An artillery brigade in Turkestan received its complement of subordinate battalions (equipped with 100-mm anti-tank guns). Finally, the front-level chemical defense unit in Turkestan was upgraded from a battalion to a brigade

23. The improvements of the past three years have had only a marginal impact on the overall capabilities of the force. The units in these three MDs are still among the least well equipped of any in the border districts of the USSR. In some respects, they even lag behind units in some of the interior military districts. It is likely that the Soviets do not perceive military requirements in the Southern TVD of the magnitude that they do elsewhere. It is also likely that the nature of the terrain has affected Soviet planning for these forces to the extent that they have been tailored specifically for the Southern TVD and differ substantially from more heavily equipped forces designed for operations in other theaters

24. The Soviets probably see no compelling reason to increase significantly the number of tanks in units in the southern USSR, to undertake extensive programs of tank modernization or SP artillery deployment, or to speed up the pace of APC modernization. The Soviets would encounter serious problems in an attack deep into Iran or Pakistan from the difficult terrain and primitive roads in the area, and from extended and vulnerable lines of communication. These problems, however, would not be solved with more or newer tanks, heavier SP artillery, or even more tracked APCs. While trucks are not armed and offer no protection, they can move faster than tracked APCs, do less damage to roads, and require less fuel and maintenance. Similarly, SP artillery would contribute to road damage and be more vulnerable to breakdown than the towed models. An increase in the number of mechanized vehicles in the invading force could actually compound the very serious logistic

#### Equipment Standards

In the *Transcaucasus Military District*, units are equipped with T-54/55 tanks, and the mobilization division also has some obsolete SU-100 self-propelled (SP) assault guns. Only the training division has an antitank battalion. Most divisions are still equipped with 57-mm antiaircraft guns rather than surface-to-air missiles (SAMs). Two divisions have SA-6/6B, and two have SA-8. Division artillery regiments in about half of the divisions have 122-mm howitzers and 160-mm mortars instead of the usual 152-mm howitzers. Regimental fire support is provided by a combination of older mortars, mountain guns, antitank guns, and towed howitzers rather than 122-mm self-propelled artillery. About 60 percent of the 32 active motorized rifle regiments (MRRs) now have newer APCs (BMP, BTR-60, or BTR-70). The remainder have a partial complement of older BTR-152s, which would have to be augmented by trucks for troop transport

Divisions in the *Transcaucasus MD*, in addition to being equipped with older items, also have organizational structures that provide for smaller tank and artillery complements as well as smaller support components. At full strength, these divisions would probably number about 10,000 men, as compared with the normal Soviet division of 12,000. Significantly, none of the divisions in this MD is undergoing the restructuring taking place in a large number of Soviet divisions elsewhere.\* Moreover, only one division in the North Caucasus and two in Turkestan are being reorganized.

The situation in the *North Caucasus MD* is similar, although MRRs there have a tank battalion (31 tanks) as opposed to a tank company (13 tanks) in the *Transcaucasus*. In addition, the tank division has T-62 tanks, while all other units have T-54/55. Other weapons are also of older vintage. Division artillery regiments have the older 122-mm M-30 and 152-mm D-1 howitzers, antitank battalions have 100-mm M-1955 antitank guns, and FROG battalions have the FROG-3/5 instead of the FROG-7. The MRR artillery battalion has 85-mm D-44 guns in lieu of 122-mm SP. As in the *Transcaucasus*, air defense units are predominantly equipped with 57-mm antiaircraft guns rather than SAMs. Over half of the 19 active MRRs have no APCs, while a quarter are equipped with the obsolete BTR-152. Only two MRRs have BMP, while three have BTR-60.

In the *Turkestan MD*, 80 percent of the tanks are T-54/55 and the remainder T-62. Most of the 14 MRRs now have newer APCs, but about one-third have a reduced complement and must supplement them with trucks. Three regiments have no APCs.

\* This restructuring increases the amount of infantry, tanks, APCs, and artillery in divisions

support problems the Soviets can be expected to encounter in Iran. More tracked vehicles would result in a greater demand for POL and other supplies, while at the same time degrading the already limited roads over which those supplies must travel. They would also create additional maintenance problems, a major consideration to an attacking force distant from its repair bases. Finally, they could also create congestion and slow movement—especially through critical choke points—making units more vulnerable to ambush.

25. The Soviets probably would not bring in large numbers of ground force units from outside the area to improve the combat potential of the force. Essentially, Soviet planning envisions the employment of those forces stationed in the vicinity of a given TVD, reinforced as necessary with reserves from the MDs in the central USSR. There is little indication that the Soviets contemplate major redeployments of high-readiness units from one theater command to another. In fact, the major variations in overall readiness and combat potential between the various TVDs—those opposite NATO, China, and the Persian Gulf—suggest that each is uniquely structured, manned, and equipped to meet contingencies peculiar to that region.

26. Moreover, the divisions in the nearby MDs (Kiev, Odessa, and Central Asia) as well as those in central USSR (Moscow, Ural, and Volga MDs) are similar to those in the Caucasus and Turkestan in manning levels and training. The four higher strength divisions in the Kiev and Central Asian MDs—along with the four like divisions in the Transcaucasus MD—could be available for deployment a few days earlier than the cadre divisions in the Caucasus and Turkestan. Much of the time advantage, however, would be lost in moving the divisions to attack positions in the Transcaucasus and Turkestan. Hence, their *availability* for an invasion of the Persian Gulf region would not be significantly greater than that of the cadre divisions in the area.

#### Air Forces

27. The Soviets' ability to conduct air operations in the Southern TVD would depend on commitments in other theaters as well as in Afghanistan. Soviet tactical air forces could provide substantial

support to an invading force, as could medium bombers and air defense interceptors. There are some 300 ground attack aircraft, 400 counterair fighters and air defense interceptors, and 200 helicopters in the Caucasus and Turkestan. These figures include the conversion since 1981 of two air defense interceptor regiments to ground attack regiments. An additional 230 ground attack aircraft, 510 fighters, and about 450 helicopters are based in nearby military districts (Moscow, Ural, Volga, Kiev, Odessa, and Central Asia) and in Afghanistan (see table 1). About 80 percent of these aircraft are either currently engaged in combat operations in Afghanistan or have primary missions against NATO or China. The remaining 20 percent are in the MDs of the central USSR and have potentially competing commitments against NATO and China.

28. The only strategic aviation forces located opposite the Southern TVD are the Bear B/C which are based in the Caucasus. Additional Bear A/B/C are based in the Central Asian MD. The use of strategic aviation in this theater would depend upon the Soviet assessment of the likelihood or extent of operations in other theaters. In a situation in which combat against NATO and China was considered unlikely, the Soviets could stage Fencers or medium bombers out of bases in the Southern TVD, but they probably would be somewhat constrained by the limited numbers of suitable airfields and the difficulties of providing adequate logistic support.

29. In the absence of opposition by Western forces, however, the Soviets probably would judge that little if any strategic aviation participation would be required to achieve their objectives. If, on the other hand, Western forces—particularly aircraft carriers—were involved, they probably would have to consider deploying some strategic aviation assets to bases in the southern USSR. The extent of deployment, however, would depend on how they assessed the risk of a conflict with NATO. On balance, we believe the Soviets probably would view any conflict with US forces in this region as posing significant risk of escalation and therefore probably would not commit substantial strategic air force assets because of the higher wartime priority assigned to other TVDs.

30. Military transport aircraft number about 330 AN-12/Cub, 210 IL-76/Candid, and 57 AN-22/Cock throughout the USSR. When pooled, they have the capacity to airlift one entire airborne division or six airborne maneuver regiments.

31. The comparatively short range of Soviet tactical aircraft limits the ability of Soviet air forces to support ground attacks deep into Iran from airbases in the Soviet Union or Afghanistan or to conduct long-range airborne operations (see figures 2 and 3):

- Our estimates of Soviet aircraft performance indicate that Soviet fighters and fighter-bombers flying most of the mission at low altitudes to avoid early detection and to limit the response times of opposing air forces—particularly from US carrier-based aircraft in the region—could not reach Persian Gulf targets, even from southwestern Afghanistan.
- The SU-24 Fencer light bomber, a longer range aircraft, could reach Persian Gulf targets but would be operating at the extreme limits of its combat radius in a mission that anticipates air defense opposition.
- Even if the Soviets presumed no opposition, and their aircraft flew at altitudes giving them the greatest range, they would still be operating at the extreme limits of their maximum combat radius.

#### Naval Forces

32. The core of Soviet naval forces that would be likely to be involved in a Persian Gulf campaign consists of the 20 to 24 vessels that routinely operate in the Indian Ocean. This force, the Indian Ocean Squadron, serves primarily as a counter to Western naval presence and as one of Moscow's principal agents in its relations with the littoral states. In recent years, its size has fluctuated: it peaked in 1980 in response to the US buildup in the region, but has declined steadily since the resolution of the Iranian hostage crisis in early 1981. During 1983, despite unusual gaps in the deployment of submarines, the Squadron has generally included one general purpose submarine, four or five surface combatants, and 16 to 18 naval auxiliaries. By contrast, the United

States maintains an average of two general purpose submarines, 15 surface combatants, and 10 auxiliaries in the region; France normally has about 18 ships there.

33. *Constraints on Reinforcements.* Before the Soviet Indian Ocean Squadron could seriously challenge Western naval forces in the area, threaten US sea lines of communication, or make a meaningful contribution to any Soviet land campaign in the Southern TVD, it would require substantial augmentation. Some augmentation could come from Soviet Pacific Fleet forces deployed to Vietnam and the South China Sea, normally two to six submarines, five to seven surface combatants, and 15 to 19 auxiliaries. More substantial augmentation, however, would require the Soviets to significantly reduce their capabilities in other areas vital to their security:

- The Pacific Fleet, which provides the bulk of forces in the Indian Ocean, has priority missions in wartime to protect the SSBN force, be prepared to conduct strategic nuclear strikes, and establish sea control in the Seas of Okhotsk and Japan and the area adjacent to the Kamchatka Peninsula and the Kuril Island chain.
- The Baltic and Black Sea Fleets, which also contribute ships to the Indian Ocean Squadron, also have high-priority missions against NATO. If the Soviets thought there were an increased chance of a NATO-Pact war—and they would have to make that assumption during a Persian Gulf conflict—they would want to have the Pacific, Baltic, and Black Sea Fleets ready for operations in home waters. This could preclude major deployments to the Indian Ocean since the ships could not quickly be called back.\* Moreover, the Soviets probably would consider recalling some units already deployed to the Indian Ocean or South China Sea in anticipation of wider hostilities, particularly if US carriers were not present.

34. *Surface Combatants.* In response to US reinforcement during a regional crisis, or to a regional

\*The Director, Defense Intelligence Agency, believes that the introduction of US carrier battle groups would almost certainly cause the Soviets to augment their antiship cruise missile capability in a measured response to counter the buildup of US naval forces in the Indian Ocean.



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Figure 2  
Air Coverage of Iran Based on MIL-C Rules

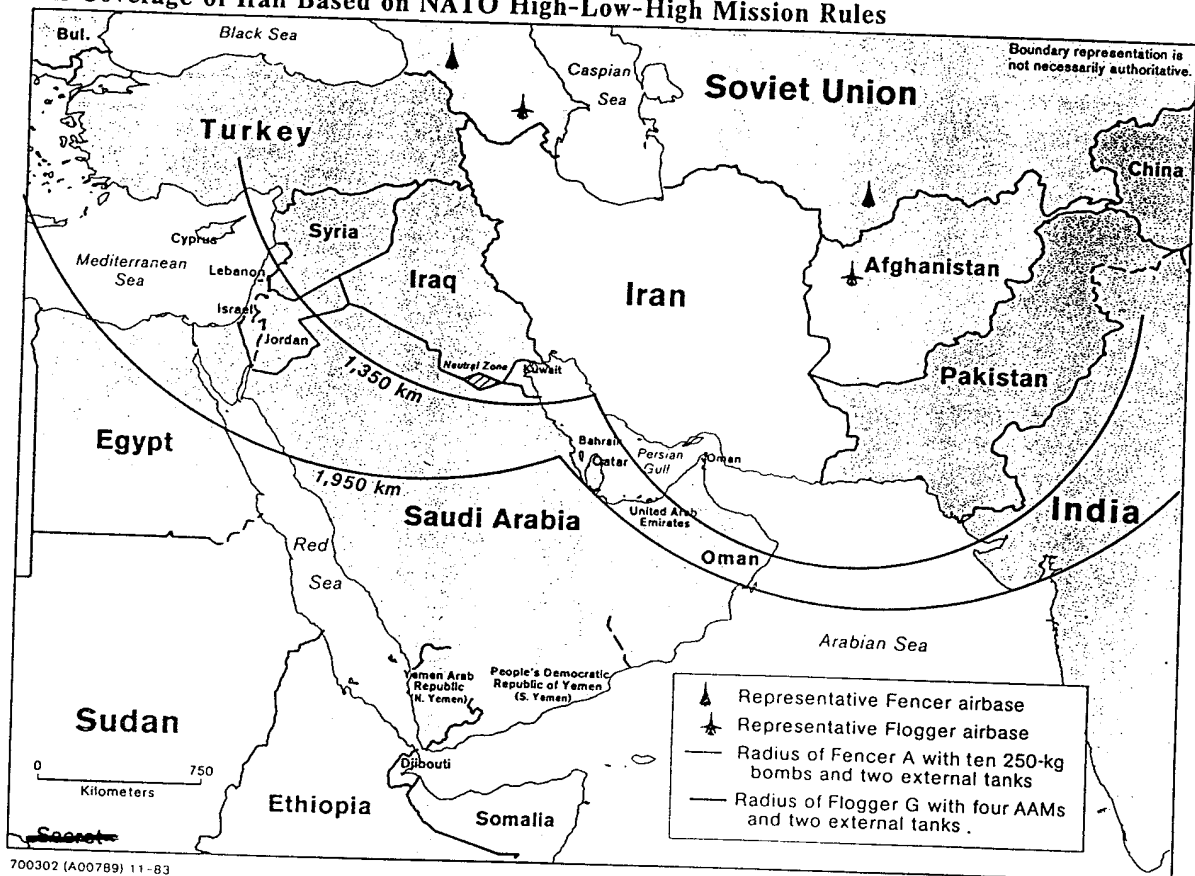


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**MIL-C and NATO Rules:** Combat radii for tactical aircraft shown in figures 2 & 3 have been calculated with two sets of assumptions concerning fuel reserves. "NATO" fuel reserves were developed by the Intelligence Community to evaluate foreign aircraft and were designed to portray maximum capability by minimizing the fuel allocated to takeoff and landing. "MIL-C" fuel reserves allocate greater amounts of fuel to these activities and are used to portray the capabilities of US aircraft. Performance data based on the MIL-C reserves are shown to allow direct comparison with published information on US aircraft. (U)

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**Figure 3**  
**Air Coverage of Iran Based on NATO High-Low-High Mission Rules**



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**MIL-C and NATO Rules:** Combat radii for tactical aircraft shown in figures 2 & 3 have been calculated with two sets of assumptions concerning fuel reserves. "NATO" fuel reserves were developed by the Intelligence Community to evaluate foreign aircraft and were designed to portray maximum capability by minimizing the fuel allocated to takeoff and landing. "MIL-C" fuel reserves allocate greater amounts of fuel to these activities and are used to portray the capabilities of US aircraft. Performance data based on the MIL-C reserves are shown to allow direct comparison with published information on US aircraft. (U)

conflict, the Soviets might commit additional surface combatants from the Pacific Fleet or the Black Sea Fleet. Some surface combatants, however, probably would be called home from the Indian Ocean at the onset of a NATO-Pact war. Those remaining would conduct operations against Western naval forces in the Arabian Sea.

35. *Submarines.* Most submarines serving regularly in the Indian Ocean Squadron come from the Pacific Fleet. Because of competing missions in home waters and the northern Pacific, however, few if any additional Pacific Fleet general purpose submarines probably would be available for wartime operations in the Indian Ocean. Some Pacific Fleet submarines already operating in the South China Sea, however, could be sent into the Indian Ocean.

36. *Naval Aircraft.* Soviet plans to counter enemy surface forces rely heavily on coordinated attacks by submarines and land-based strike aircraft, such as Backfire and Badger. We do not believe the Soviets would redeploy naval strike aircraft to Indian Ocean bases in the event of an escalating Persian Gulf crisis. Rather, any air attacks on Western surface forces in the Indian Ocean would more likely be staged from the southern USSR. However, the Soviets probably would be reluctant to commit large numbers of naval or air force strike aircraft to this area because of inadequate numbers and competing requirements in the NATO-Pact theater. The antisubmarine warfare (ASW) patrol aircraft (IL-38 May) that deploy regularly to South Yemen and Ethiopia are insufficient to conduct effective ASW operations. Deployment of more than a few additional Mays or other ASW aircraft is unlikely because of their small numbers and higher priority wartime tasks elsewhere.

37. *Transit Times.* The distances from the Soviet fleet areas to the northwest Indian Ocean (see figure 4) and the transit times required to move there (see table 2) constrain the Soviet capability to reinforce the Indian Ocean Squadron. Under peacetime conditions, it probably would take the Soviets about two to three weeks to make any substantial redeployments to the Indian Ocean from home fleets, and the movements would be easy to detect. Combatants operating in the South China Sea could move to the Arabian Sea more quickly, but would be less combat ready than those coming from home fleet areas.

**Table 2**  
**Days Required for Transit**  
**to the Strait of Hormuz \***

From	Distance (nm)	Average Speed <sup>b</sup>		
		6 knots	10 knots	14 knots
Vladivostok	6,400	44 days	27 days	19 days
Sevastopol <sup>c</sup>	3,900		17	13
Port Said	2,800		13	9

\* Transit times from the Black Sea and the Mediterranean allow an additional day for travel through the Suez Canal, which is done in convoy, at low speeds.

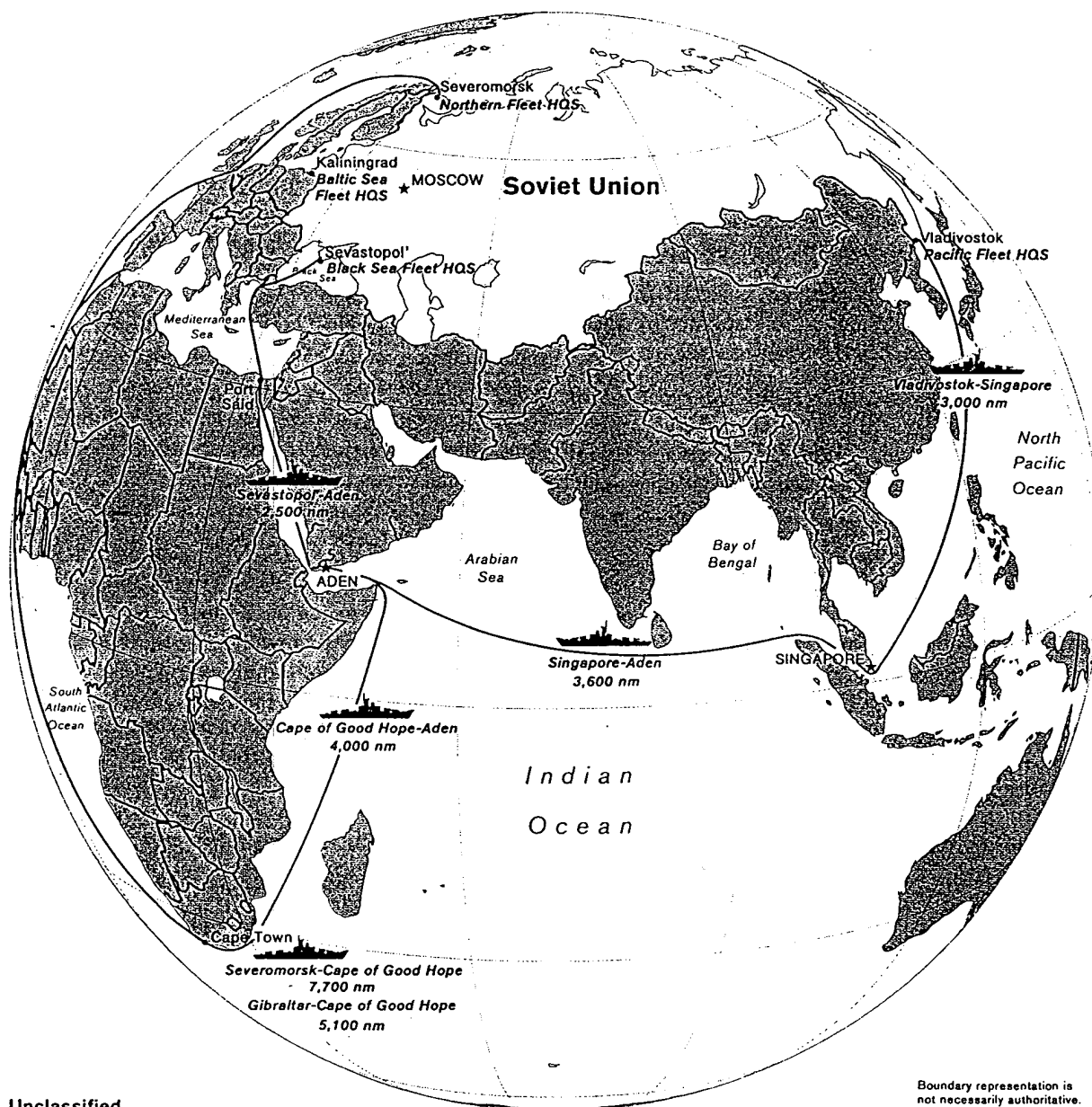
<sup>b</sup> Six knots is a practical speed for diesel submarines. Ten knots has been used for nuclear submarines, amphibious ships, and auxiliaries. Fourteen knots has been used for major surface combatants, although the Soviet surface combatants that surged during the 1971 Indo-Pakistani war showed average transit speeds closer to 10 knots.

~~This table is Secret.~~

38. *Operational Capabilities.* Even an augmented Indian Ocean Squadron would have operational limitations that would affect its ability to support a land campaign in the Persian Gulf region. The Soviets would not be able to match the kind of naval force the United States and its Allies, particularly France, have there or could bring into the region. They have neither the types of ships nor the sea-based aircraft that comprise a carrier task force. Nor do they have land-based strike air forces in the region. In the absence of such forces, the Squadron's surface ships would be highly vulnerable to air attack not only by US forces, but even by regional air forces.

39. Substantial augmentation would strain the logistic system of the Squadron. It relies primarily on afloat support using naval auxiliaries or naval-associated merchant ships, which often comprise as much as two-thirds of its strength. The Squadron uses ports in South Yemen and Ethiopia, but they do not provide for major repairs, refueling, or resupply of munitions or missiles. Moreover, these facilities are highly vulnerable to air attack. Access to an Iranian or Pakistani port would facilitate the logistic support of Soviet naval forces in the Persian Gulf, but these could only be captured by an overland attack or an airborne assault, both of which would be difficult in view of the limited

Figure 4  
Distance From Soviet Fleet Areas to Northwest Indian Ocean Region



Unclassified  
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Boundary representation is  
not necessarily authoritative.

capabilities of Soviet air and naval forces in the Gulf region.

40. The Squadron—even if augmented—would not be able to deny the Arabian Sea to Western naval forces:

- Soviet submarines would pose a threat to carriers in the area, but could be hampered by the strong ASW capabilities of Western navies.
- While the Soviets could mine the Strait by air or submarine, we do not believe they could control the contiguous air or sea area sufficiently to keep the Strait closed if Western nations mounted a long-term, full-scale minesweeping operation.
- The lack of land-based air cover in the area would seriously undercut any attempt by Soviet naval units to block the Strait of Hormuz.
- The Soviets have only a limited capacity for amphibious operations in noncontiguous areas and could not control the Gulf by seizing littoral areas even against the marginal indigenous opposition.

#### Force Readiness

41. *Ground Forces.* With the exception of the units in Afghanistan, Soviet ground forces opposite Iran are in a low state of readiness and would have to undergo large-scale mobilization and preparation before they could undertake offensive operations. Most units in the Caucasus and Turkestan—as well as those in nearby military districts—are manned at less than one-third of war authorized strength. Other than those actions related to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, there have been only minor changes in the size or manning of units in the area in the last several years. In mid-1979, one division in the Transcaucasus MD apparently was raised from cadre level manning (about 15 percent of war authorized strength) to about 60 percent and has remained at that level. In 1982, one mobilization division in the North Caucasus MD was activated at cadre strength, while in 1983 another cadre division was formed in the Turkestan MD.

42. The low level of peacetime manning of units in the Caucasus and Turkestan restricts routine training to the company and battalion level. Regimental and division training is rare. There apparently was some

increased callup of reservists for field training in late 1979 and in 1980. These reservists have long since been released, however, and training conducted three years ago would have little impact on the current proficiency of the force. Moreover, field training has since reverted to its prior low levels.

43. The Soviets could mobilize their ground force divisions with the necessary personnel and equipment in fairly rapid fashion: one and a half to four days for the higher strength divisions, up to six days for cadre divisions, and nine days for mobilization bases.<sup>4</sup> Total preparation time, however, would be longer—taking into account the need for at least some postmobilization training—and would vary according to the size of force and campaign envisioned. In a minimum of about two weeks, the Soviets probably could complete essential preparations for a limited attack into north-west Iran to seize Azarbayjan. Although this would only permit enough time to accomplish minimal post-mobilization training, the Soviets might view this as acceptable depending on their assessment of the likely Iranian opposition. At least a month would be required for them to prepare for a full-scale invasion.

44. *Air Forces.* Unlike the ground forces, tactical air forces in the region have modern equipment and are at roughly the same readiness posture as are units elsewhere. They would require only limited mobilization and preparation before engaging in offensive operations. Were Soviet tactical air preparations to include the redeployment of additional units from other areas of the USSR—particularly for a full-scale invasion of Iran, as would be likely—total preparation time for the air forces could require seven or eight days, still well within the time required by the ground forces.

45. *Naval Forces.* Soviet naval forces in the Indian Ocean are essentially combat ready. They receive routine upkeep throughout their deployment and limit wear and tear by remaining largely inactive. Nonetheless, combatants nearing the end of their deployments probably have accumulated a backlog of unresolved maintenance problems that could impact upon their combat capabilities.

<sup>4</sup> See NI IIM 82-10012, *The Readiness of Soviet Ground Forces*, November 1982.

**Table 3**  
**Iranian and Persian Gulf Regional Forces**

	Iran	Iraq	Kuwait	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Oman
<b>Ground Forces</b>						
Manpower (thousands)*	485	700	10	35	40	12
Divisions (total)	8	22	0	0	0	0
Infantry	4	14	0	0	0	0
Mechanized infantry	0	2	0	0	0	0
Armored	4	6	0	0	0	0
Brigades (total)	32	138	3	6	5	2
Infantry	19	99	0	3	3	2
Mechanized infantry	0	12	1	1	1	0
Armored	13	27	2	2	1	0
<b>Air and Air Defense Forces</b>						
Manpower (thousands)	50	30	2	17	3	2
Combat aircraft (total)	360	635	83	172	53	41
Fighters and bombers	210	405	42	90	39	27
Combat-capable trainers	30	95	17	82	2	14
Reconnaissance	20	10	0	0	0	0
Attack helicopters	100	125	24	0	12	0

\* These numbers include 250,000 armed irregulars in Iran and at least 100,000 in Iraq.

~~This table is Secret.~~

### Potential Opposing Forces

46. The level of indigenous opposition (see table 3) the Soviets might encounter if they were to invade the Persian Gulf region would depend largely on the scenario. Opposition by Turkish, Iraqi, and Pakistani forces, for instance, would probably hinge on whether or not the security of these countries was directly threatened. The Gulf Arab countries probably would intervene only if their territory were invaded. The Iranians, given their revolutionary zeal and heightened nationalism, would almost certainly fiercely resist any Soviet invasion of Iran.

### Iranian Reactions to US Presence

47. As long as Ayatollah Khomeini is alive, Iran's clerical regime would reject US intervention on its behalf. The regime probably would see US and Soviet actions as a "superpower plot" to divide Iran into spheres of influence and, therefore, would oppose the

forces of each. The leadership in Tehran would mobilize the country using the media and the nationwide network of mosques and revolutionary organizations. Foreign military troops in many areas of Iran would face contingents of poorly trained, ill-equipped militia willing to sacrifice their lives fighting against the foreign invaders.

48. The only organized military threat would come from the regular army and the Revolutionary Guard, but many of those forces would have been redeployed to the north to counter the Soviet invasion, and they have little logistic capability to move quickly to the south to counter the United States. Nevertheless, Iran is likely to have several divisions positioned in the oil-rich Khuzestan province in anticipation of a superpower move to divide Iran. Most pro-US elements within military staffs have been purged in the last four years, and an organized, broad-based revolt of Westernized regular military officers could not be expected. The strongest resistance to a US presence probably

would come from the lower classes in the larger cities. Although they still represent the regime's main base of support and have been propagandized by the regime into believing the United States wants to subjugate and exploit Iran, recent urban demonstrations suggest growing discontent with some of the regime's policies. (S NF)

49. The data on which to assess the reaction of other Iranians are poor, but we believe opposition to the United States would not be total, particularly if central authority had broken down as a result of the Soviets' having overrun Tehran. There are regular military officers who are unhappy with the regime and might offer individual support to US forces operating in Iran. Merchant classes who disagree with the regime's economic policies and who would fear a Soviet takeover more than a US presence might not be actively hostile to the United States. Elements of some tribal groups who have been oppressed by the regime also would not actively counter and could even aid US forces. Moreover, in most of the sparsely populated countryside—where the central government's control traditionally has been tenuous, most people are apolitical, and few means are available to resist outsiders—US forces probably would be received with a benign indifference regardless of the regime's instructions to resist.

#### Iran

50. Although regular and paramilitary Iranian forces could not—by themselves—stop a Soviet invasion of their country, they could delay and complicate it, and make any subsequent occupation costly. The regular army consists of some eight divisions and seven independent brigades equipped with about 900 tanks, 1,000 APCs, and about 750 artillery pieces. The air force has about 350 combat aircraft including helicopters, of which about one-third are currently operational. The navy numbers about 21 major and 23 minor combatants. The Iranian armed forces have extensive combat experience because of the war with Iraq. While not able to mount a successful offensive into Iraq, the Iranians skillfully defended their territory and essentially were able to restore their prewar boundaries. Arms and equipment are generally in a poor state of repair. Maintenance problems are aggravated by both a critical shortage of trained technicians and a lack of spare parts. Rebuilding these forces will pose a major challenge to Iran.

51. The Iranian capability to defend against a Soviet attack would be facilitated by an end to the war with Iraq, to which the great majority of forces are now committed. Even if the war had not ended, however, Iran would redeploy at least several of its divisions to counter an invasion. However, given its problems in command and control and logistics—which have been evident during the fighting with Iraq—as well as a shortage of vehicles, Iran would have difficulty quickly transferring large forces from one front to another. In addition, Iran would have difficulty sustaining high-intensity combat against the Soviets until a new source of arms, ammunition, equipment, and spare parts were found. (Iran currently receives most of its arms and equipment from the Soviet Union and its allies—including North Korea, Libya, and the East European countries.)

52. Although Iran's regular forces would be no match for the Soviets, the Army, Revolutionary Guard, and other paramilitary forces with a combined strength of nearly half a million could significantly delay a Soviet advance by occupying blocking positions in the rugged terrain and in the cities, and by interdicting lines of communication (LOC). Most of the paramilitary and security forces are only lightly equipped, but they could be very effective in harassing and interdicting Soviet troop and resupply convoys. Moreover, the mountainous terrain along most invasion routes would favor the defender, serving as a force multiplier for the Iranians. The Soviets would be forced to devote considerable resources to secure their LOCs and rear echelon forces.

53. The Iranian Government also would be likely to provide arms to Iranian citizens who have had combat experience and some training. For example, some 250,000 of them who served during the war against Iraq and have been demobilized would be available in addition to those on active duty. By so doing, Iran would force the Soviets to fight in every city on their route of advance. The Iranian forces—especially the Revolutionary Guard and other volunteers—have demonstrated a willingness for combat and a fanatical devotion to the regime. They are not likely to be deterred by heavy casualties as long as they are inflicting losses on the Soviets. In contrast to the ground forces, neither Iran's Air Force nor its Navy could make a significant contribution to a delaying operation.

## Turkey

54. Turkey is the only NATO nation that shares a border with Iran and Iraq. As such, it would be a major complicating factor in any Soviet move toward the Persian Gulf. Most Turkish forces are in the western part of the country, opposite Greece and Bulgaria. There are, however, four divisions, 14 regular Army brigades, and three Jandarma brigades, as well as five squadrons of combat aircraft, in eastern Turkey.

55. Turkish Army units—much like the Soviet units in the area—have old or obsolescent equipment, mostly of US manufacture and Korean war vintage. The tank force is largely M-48A1, but these are gradually being upgraded to A3 and A5 with US and West German assistance. Turkish forces, both land and air, also suffer chronic problems of shortages of POL and spare parts, which severely limit the scope and frequency of unit training and adversely impact on operational readiness.\* Despite these problems, Army units in eastern Turkey are on a par—both in equipment and combat potential—with Soviet units in the Caucasus, although they are heavily outnumbered. Their ability to attack Soviet units moving into Iran would be severely restricted by their size and lack of mobility and an adequate battlefield air defense, which makes them vulnerable to attack by Soviet fighters. They could, however, put up a credible defense against a limited Soviet attack into eastern Turkey by judiciously using the terrain, which would act in their favor. Moreover, the Turks have a reputation as fierce fighters and are highly respected by the Soviets.

56. If the Soviets were to attack into Iran in the absence of hostilities in other theaters, they would probably make a distinct effort to stay clear of the Turkish border to preclude an encounter with Turkish forces and to avoid a transfer of combat aircraft from western to eastern Turkey. If the Soviet attack were in conjunction with, or in anticipation of, operations against NATO, Soviet units would be likely to conduct a limited attack into eastern Turkey to hold Turkish forces there. In any event, in planning an attack into Iran, the Soviets would have to consider the possibility of engaging Turkish units, and to maintain forces along

\* For more detail see NI IIM 82-10016, *NATO Modernization: The Turkish Armed Forces*, December 1982.

the border for such a contingency, reducing the size of their force available for operations in the Gulf region.

57. There are also a number of airbases in eastern Turkey that are favorably positioned to support interdiction of Soviet units attacking into northwestern Iran. Some of these bases are to be modernized under the terms of a 1982 US-Turkey agreement. Although Turkish air forces in the eastern part of the country are not sufficient to pose a serious threat to a Soviet invasion of Iran, additional aircraft could be transferred there from western Turkey in the absence of general hostilities between the Warsaw Pact and NATO. Moreover, the Soviets would have to consider the possibility that these facilities would be made available to US air forces. This is by no means certain, because Turkey currently does not permit the United States to use its facilities there for operations outside the NATO area. Moreover, Turkey is demonstrating increased reluctance to involve itself in any regional dispute in which its national interests are not directly threatened. This should provide the Soviets with additional incentive to avoid provoking Turkey by threatening its territory, since US air forces operating out of eastern Turkey would pose serious problems for Soviet forces in Iran. In addition, the Soviets probably would warn Turkey that any Turkish facilities made available to the United States would be attacked. In a NATO-Pact war, however, the Soviets would have to anticipate that any forces invading Iran would be subject to attack by US air forces based in Turkey, and to provide for their protection. They might also have to undertake larger operations into eastern Turkey to capture the airfields, reducing even further the size of the force they could commit to operations against the Persian Gulf.

## Pakistan

58. In planning either a limited attack into Iranian Baluchistan or an occupation of all of Iran, the Soviets would have to consider the possibility of reaction by Pakistani forces, as well as the pros and cons of conducting supporting attacks into Pakistan. Pakistan's armed forces do not pose a major obstacle to a Soviet invasion of Iran. Although the army is large, numbering some 19 divisions and 450,000 men, and well trained relative to other regional armies, it is neither equipped nor positioned to defend against a Soviet attack. Much of the equipment is old and difficult to maintain. Shortages of modern tanks, APCs, and self-propelled artillery restrict



mobility and firepower. [

] the Frontier Corps, a paramilitary organization, provides border security. [

] Lightly armed and equipped, they would be no match for regular Soviet units, but they could harass Soviet lines of communication.

59. Pakistan has a small air force of [ ] combat aircraft. It is composed largely of aging Chinese-built MIG-19 short-range fighters, as well as some modern French Mirage fighters and B-57 bombers. [

] Since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Pakistanis have transferred some small caliber antiaircraft guns to their western border and have rebased an additional fighter squadron opposite Afghanistan. Most ground-based air defense weapons, however, are old antiaircraft guns. Neither they nor most of Pakistan's interceptors would be effective against modern Soviet aircraft

60. Islamabad is trying to improve its military capability with the purchase of tanks and artillery, as well as the F-16s from the United States and the A-5s and additional tanks from China. In addition, Pakistan has been negotiating with several West European countries for new frigates, submarines, and air defense systems. Even with the acquisition of more modern arms, however, Pakistan's forces will still be hampered by deficiencies in command and control, coordination of interservice operations, and logistics.

61. Pakistani forces probably would not attack Soviet forces in Iran, as long as they did not violate Pakistan's borders. Nor would the Soviets be likely to

invade Pakistan in conjunction with an attack into Iran. They would have little to gain by such a move, and might well force Pakistan to make its airfields available to US air forces. The 1959 Executive Agreement between the United States and Pakistan provides for US aid (including military forces) to Pakistan if it is threatened with Communist aggression. US air forces operating out of Pakistan—in conjunction with carrier-based aircraft—would be a serious threat to Soviet ground forces in southern Iran.

62. Soviet military activities in Afghanistan pose a range of threats to Pakistan. If the USSR should determine that its continuing inability to cope with insurgency in Afghanistan required dealing with Pakistan—then the USSR could be expected to employ a variety of military, paramilitary, subversive, and political measures. Soviet moves against Pakistan, such as under hot-pursuit circumstances, or a limited Soviet effort to wipe up insurgent forces within Pakistan's borders would lead to strong protests from Pakistan but would not necessarily entail Pakistan military response against Soviet forces.

63. A major invasion of Pakistan—unlikely during the period of this Estimate—would require a military effort much greater than that demanded by current or even significantly expanded Soviet operations in Afghanistan. Beyond that, there would be substantial damage to Soviet interests elsewhere in the world and a significantly heightened risk of a Soviet-US military confrontation

#### Iraq

64. The Soviets probably would see little danger of confronting Iraqi forces as long as they confined their actions to within the borders of Iran. Baghdad would consider a Soviet move against Iran as a threat to its own independence but probably would not take any steps to assist Iran. In the absence of a Soviet incursion into its territory, Iraq would probably remain neutral, but undoubtedly would condemn the Soviet action. We see little possibility that Iraq, under the present regime, would reach an accommodation allowing Soviet troops to cross over Iraqi territory unopposed.

65. Iraq's Army is one of the largest and best equipped in the region. It consists of 22 combat divisions and 138 independent brigades totaling 600,000 men. Despite its large size and good equipment, however, the Iraqi Army has demonstrated little capacity for offensive operations in the war with Iran. Its operations have been marred by poor leadership, lack of coordination, and poor training. Recently, however, the Army has exhibited improved defensive capabilities

66. The Iraqi Air Force has a large number of modern aircraft. Like the ground forces, however, it suffers problems of leadership. In addition, the Air Force rarely engages in close air support of troops in contact. Thus, while Iraqi air units could harrass Soviet supply lines and rear echelon units, they would have difficulty providing close air support to ground forces.

67. Although Iraq could not prevent a Soviet drive to the Arabian Peninsula, it could certainly slow it down, providing additional time for Western reaction. An Iraqi defense would also force the Soviets to commit additional forces to the campaign

#### The Gulf Arab States



75. *Other Forces.* In addition to the states along the Persian Gulf, three nearby powers—Egypt, Jordan, and Israel—have the capability to bring forces to bear against a Soviet invasion of the Arabian Peninsula. All three states would view a Soviet invasion along the Gulf, particularly into Saudi Arabia, as a direct threat to their security. Whether they would respond would depend on their willingness to temporarily set aside fundamental political differences related to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Egypt could begin moving lead elements of its airborne and commando brigades into Saudi Arabia within a few days of alert using Egyptian, Saudi, and possibly Jordanian aircraft. Egypt could also deploy several squadrons of fighter aircraft to Gulf airfields. Cairo might be willing to move some of its divisions, as well as independent brigades, to the Gulf but would be constrained by distances and limited lift capability. Egyptian deployments also would be constrained by the need to guard against possible threats from Libya. Jordan could move one of its four armored and mechanized divisions directly into Saudi Arabia or Iraq within a week, as well as provide air support. The large and highly capable Israeli Air Force represents a potent challenge to the Soviets. Israeli F-15s, using conformal fuel tanks, could fly combat missions from their home bases as far as Tehran or the Strait of Hormuz, and Israeli tanker aircraft could refuel other fighters en route. However, it is very unlikely that the Saudi and Jordanian Governments would permit the redeployment of Israeli forces through Jordan to Saudi Arabia, even in the face of a direct threat from Moscow.

#### Considerations of Climate and Terrain

76. In planning an invasion of all or part of the Persian Gulf region, the Soviets would have to take into account the special geographic and climatic conditions of the area. There are at most only three major north-south routes through the mountainous areas of northwestern and southwestern Iran, and the opportunities for offroad maneuver through the passes is either very limited or

nonexistent. Over 75 percent of the area is unfavorable for cross-country movement. Armor operations would, for the most part, be limited to parts of eastern and southern Iran, where they would be difficult to support logistically, and the force would be vulnerable to attack by US aircraft operating from nearby waters. In most other areas, advancing units would have little chance to deploy or maneuver. They would be mostly road bound, with only the lead elements able to engage defending forces. Soviet troops would have to dismount to maneuver, sacrificing their protection and heavy armament. Under these conditions, even a limited and disorganized defending force could severely delay a Soviet advance through the mountains by blowing up bridges and tunnels and defending the narrow passes. The resulting traffic jams and bottlenecks would be prime targets for air attack.

77. Iranian resistance in urban areas would create similar problems, since many cities and towns in Iran would be difficult to bypass. Moreover, if the resistance in built-up areas were sufficiently strong, the Soviets would be forced to fight in every town or city, greatly compounding their problems and slowing their advance.

78. The terrain also presents difficulties for the use of airborne and airmobile forces, as well as for the conduct of air operations. In important areas of Azarbaijan and Kurdistan, only the scattered plains and airfields near the larger towns offer suitable drop zones and helicopter landing areas. Air operations in the mountainous regions would be hampered by high altitudes, air temperature and turbulence, and limited visibility resulting from frequent cloud cover.

79. Even if the key passes, bridges, tunnels, and urban areas in northwestern and western Iran were secured, the terrain and transportation system in the area would hamper logistic support operations. In many areas, the road network is sparse and of low capacity, and could not sustain heavy traffic. Moreover, Soviet and Iranian railroads use different track widths, which would create choke points at the transloading areas, assuming the rail system were available. Limitations in the road and rail networks would place a premium on air assets—both fixed wing and helicopter—for logistic support.

80. In Iraq, the extensive waterways, marshes, and periodically flooded lands along the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers and the Shatt al Arab would be major obstacles to a Soviet advance to the Arabian Peninsula.

81. Weather would also influence the timing of a Soviet invasion. An invasion of Azarbayjan in winter, for example, would face significant problems. Passes at higher elevations would be snow covered, inhibiting the movement of ground forces. Atmospheric conditions, specifically low cloud ceilings, winds, rain, and icing, would severely limit any low-altitude air support operations. Weather conditions do not begin to improve significantly before late March or early April. Even then, occasional heavy spring rains continue through mid-May, reducing offroad trafficability and producing local flooding

82. In the desert areas of eastern Iran and the Arabian Peninsula, heat, dust, and limited sources of water also would hamper operations. The scarcity of water could be a particularly severe problem for Soviet forces moving from Turkestan or Afghanistan toward the shore of the Gulf of Oman at either Chah Bahar or Bandar-e Abbas. This was a substantial problem for the relatively small Soviet forces initially introduced into Afghanistan. Also, while there currently are ample water sources along the Persian Gulf littoral in Saudi Arabia, these sources (primarily desalination plants and deep wells) would be susceptible to wartime damage or destruction.

#### Soviet Military Options and Capabilities

83. Concomitant with the US decision, following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, to establish a force capable of rapid deployment to Southwest Asia, we believe that the Soviets began to develop and test concepts for the employment of forces in the Persian Gulf area. They apparently are considering contingency plans for the seizure of the entire Persian Gulf littoral and have envisaged the possibility of encountering US ground forces in the region.

84. The Soviets have the capacity to conduct a variety of military operations in the Southern TVD. These range from small cross-border forays into Iran or Pakistan in conjunction with operations in Afghanistan, to large-scale attacks to the Persian Gulf. Our analysis will be confined to those military operations intended to seize and hold territory. Several scenarios (see figure 5)

are broadly representative of the range of available Soviet options for military operations in the region. They are:

- A limited attack into northwest Iran to seize Azarbayjan.
- A limited attack to seize a port in southeast Iran or Pakistan.
- A full-scale invasion and occupation of Iran.
- A subsequent advance against the oil-producing nations on the southern littoral of the Persian Gulf.

In the context of these scenarios, attendant operations, which would facilitate the prosecution of a Persian Gulf campaign, include possible attacks into eastern Turkey and Pakistan and an advance through Iraq. Operations against Israel are outside the scope of this Estimate. More detailed, illustrative examples of how the Soviets might conduct these selected campaigns are provided at annex A

85. We do not address a Soviet airborne assault to seize the Khuzestan oilfields. We do not consider such an operation practicable, nor do we have evidence that the Soviets have considered it. The main concentration of oilfields extends over a region about 500 kilometers long and 150 kilometers wide, an area that approximates three-fourths of East Germany. Within that area is concentrated the bulk of Iranian regular Army units, including three armored divisions, two infantry divisions, and a number of armored and infantry brigades. There are also large Iraqi forces close by. Even if there were no significant opposition in the region, it would take a very large force to occupy and control the oilfields, because of the vast area over which they are dispersed. To assure any degree of control, the Soviets would have to commit on the order of five or six airborne divisions, or virtually their entire airborne force. The entire VTA aircraft inventory would be required to lift one complete airborne division. A multidivision operation, however, would have to be conducted in stages—over a period of weeks—leaving the force on the ground vulnerable to attack. In addition, each lift would risk being destroyed in the air, since the transports would be flying beyond the range of Soviet tactical fighters and would be vulnerable to attack by both Iranian and US

**Figure 5**  
**Representative Soviet Options**

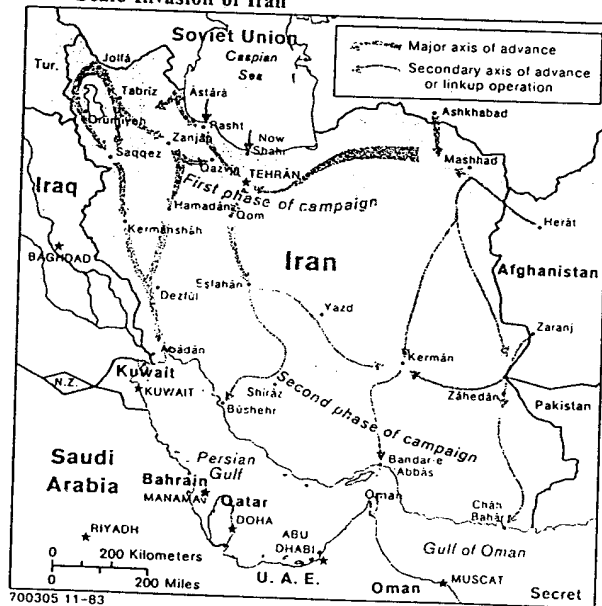
**Limited Invasion To Seize Āzərbayjān**



**Limited Invasion To Seize the Port of Chah Bahar in Baluchistan**



**Full-Scale Invasion of Iran**



**Invasion of the Persian Gulf Littoral**



aircraft. It would take the Soviets at least six weeks to move forces overland from the Soviet Union to link up with airborne units in the Khuzestan area. During that time, the airborne forces would have to be resupplied solely by air, and by transport aircraft operating without the benefit of air cover—a virtually impossible task. We do not, therefore, believe that the Soviets would consider an airborne assault against the Khuzestan oilfields a viable option, or that they have the capacity to occupy and control the oilfields solely with airborne forces.

86. The Soviets might conduct an airborne assault against a more limited objective after they had occupied part of northern Iran, displaced tactical aircraft forward to captured airbases in range of the Gulf, and had ground forces in position to conduct a linkup in three to five days. We have addressed the possibility of such an operation in our scenario for a full-scale invasion of Iran.

87. We also do not address a "quick grab" of the Hormuz area with the objective of establishing a foothold there. We do not believe that the Soviets are presently capable of quickly seizing the Hormuz area by an airborne/airmobile assault, in isolation of a larger operation.

88. There are very practical considerations that militate against this type of operation. The Soviets would probably anticipate a US military response to such a clear challenge to US vital interests. Moreover, given current Soviet capabilities and dispositions, a heliborne attack would be extremely difficult for the Soviets to execute and sustain, but relatively easy for the United States to counter if aircraft carriers were present from the outset.\* The Soviets do not have any logistic or maintenance facilities in southwest Afghanistan to support a heliborne assault of Hormuz. Even if they were to establish temporary facilities there, current helicopters probably would not be able to reach Bandar-e Abbas, because terrain and climatic conditions would degrade their range capabilities.

89. An airborne assault would probably be somewhat more practicable. Because of range limitations of tactical aircraft, however, it is doubtful whether Soviet air forces could support either an airborne or airmobile operation in the Hormuz area from either the Soviet Union or bases in Afghanistan. The transport

aircraft would be vulnerable to air attack. Even if the Soviets were to construct an airbase in southwest Afghanistan—and this in itself would be a major undertaking—they would still have serious problems countering aircraft in the Hormuz area. Flying a profile that anticipates opposition (low altitude to avoid radar detection), Soviet fighter aircraft currently would not have the combat radius to reach Hormuz and remain on station there.<sup>†</sup> The Soviets might still attempt an airborne assault against Hormuz, hoping to take it by surprise or at least before the United States could effectively react. Even if they succeeded in such an endeavor, however, they would be hard pressed to consolidate their position in the face of US air attacks. In sum, a Soviet "quick grab" of Hormuz—as an end itself—is not feasible at this time, and probably will not become a viable option in the next few years. Nonetheless, because the potential gains are so high, this possibility must be considered

90. *A Limited Attack To Seize Azarbayjan.* The Soviets clearly have the capacity to quickly occupy Azarbayjan in northwestern Iran, either as an independent operation or as an adjunct to campaigns in other theaters, including NATO and China. This is the most feasible option from both a political and military point of view. Since the area borders the Soviet Union, Moscow could probably find some pretext to intervene, such as the need to defend its borders or to respond to a call for assistance from a -pro-Soviet faction in northwest Iran.

91. Militarily, this would be the easiest option to execute. Force requirements, at least initially, would be relatively small—about five to seven divisions—as the Soviets could avoid most Iranian Army units. In addition, the attacking force would be within range of tactical air forces in the Soviet Union. This operation would be the easiest to support logistically, since LOCs would be comparatively short and easy to secure. Moreover, this attack could be both undertaken and completed quicker than the others, minimizing both the potential for Iranian opposition and the US chance to respond: the Soviet forces would require a minimum of two weeks of preparation and could occupy Azarbayjan in one to three weeks, depending on the effectiveness of Iranian opposition.

\* The Soviets probably would have to prepare contingency plans to engage US carriers in the Arabian Sea (see paragraph 98)

<sup>†</sup> See paragraph 31.

92. The Soviets might feel that the United States would be less likely to respond to an attack that did not clearly threaten Western vital interests and would recognize US difficulties in countering a Soviet move into Azarbayjan. In addition, an attack limited to Azarbayjan would not be an immediate threat to Pakistan or the oil-producing nations south of the Persian Gulf. There would also be no need to traverse Iraq and risk a confrontation there. The Soviets would, however, have to consider and be prepared for a possible reaction from Turkey, although it is highly unlikely that the Turks would attack.

93. Although the risks associated with this scenario are relatively low, compared to other options, so are the immediate gains. Depending on the level of resistance, occupation of Azarbayjan could allow the Soviets to secure routes through the Elburz Mountains, redeploy tactical aviation, directly threaten Tehran, and gauge Western and regional reactions. While it would not afford the Soviets any control over Iranian oil, it could well lead to increased Soviet influence in the Gulf region, particularly if Western nations did not respond. On the contrary, however, a Soviet move into Azarbayjan might severely damage Soviet relations with not only the Persian Gulf countries but also with other nations in the Middle East. In addition, although the Soviets could probably occupy the area in about one to three weeks, they could not secure it completely, and would have to be prepared to fight a long war of attrition as Iran shifted forces northward.

94. The Soviets might wish to occupy Azarbayjan as the initial phase of a longer term approach to taking over all of Iran. After Azarbayjan had been secured, the Soviets might attempt to expand their presence in northern Iran and develop air and logistic bases there for use in subsequent military operations or for political leverage southward. The development of such bases over an extended period of time would project the reach of Soviet tactical aviation over Iranian territory and could shorten the amount of time it would take the Soviets to eventually capture the remainder of the country. If, however, they restricted their invasion to Azarbayjan they would not markedly improve their capability to execute other limited options, such as operations against the Strait of Hormuz or the Khuzestan oilfields. Most importantly, they still would not be able to provide effective fighter coverage over the Gulf. In order to attain such a capability, the Soviets would need to extend their operations well into central and eastern Iran.

95. *A Limited Attack To Seize a Port in Southeastern Iran or Western Pakistan.* Faced with only indigenous opposition, the Soviets have the capacity to conduct a limited objective attack to seize a port on the Gulf of Oman or on the Arabian Sea. This capability would be enhanced if the Iranian or Pakistani Governments had weakened and there was turmoil in Baluchistan. By attacking a port such as Chah Bahar in southeastern Iran, the Soviets could avoid major indigenous opposition and limit the attack to as few as three divisions. Alternatively, they could seize the harbor of Gwadar in Pakistan, but they would encounter heavier opposition and would require about five or six divisions. In addition, this harbor would need extensive development to turn it into a usable port facility. In either case, preparations would require about six weeks, including moving units into attack positions in Afghanistan. It probably would take about 10 days to capture Chah Bahar and at least four weeks to seize Gwadar along routes through Pakistan.

96. Given the great distance from the USSR to the coast, either operation would be difficult to execute and support logistically. The operation would have to be launched from Afghanistan and traverse extremely difficult terrain with very poor roads. Moreover, the LOCs would extend from the USSR through Afghanistan to the coast, a distance of almost 2,000 kilometers, and would be vulnerable to interdiction by both the Afghan resistance and Iranian or Pakistani forces. Initially, all tactical air support for the operation would have to come from bases in Afghanistan.

97. To undertake operations in southeast Iran or western Pakistan, the Soviets would have to at least maintain, and probably increase, their forces in Afghanistan to ensure adequate security for the large number of convoys required to move troops and supplies to the border. An attack in this region would also threaten the oil-producing countries on the southern littoral of the Persian Gulf. It would, therefore, entail greater risks in political and military terms than an attack into Azarbayjan.

98. Any operation against Chah Bahar or Gwadar clearly would threaten Western interests in the Gulf region. The Soviets probably would assume that their forces would be subject to attack by US forces, particularly carrier aircraft. They undoubtedly realize that it would be easier for the United States to counter rapidly an attack in this area than one in Azarbayjan and that it would be extremely difficult to take or hold either port.

if Soviet ground units and LOCs were subject to interdiction by US forces. The Soviets, therefore, would probably have to prepare a contingency plan to engage US aircraft carriers in the Arabian Sea as part of any military move against these ports. This would require deploying additional submarines to the Indian Ocean and moving large numbers of Soviet naval and/or air army missile-equipped strike aircraft to bases in the southern USSR. The Soviets would have to weigh the risk of engaging US forces, particularly in an area where they could regard the United States as holding an air and naval advantage, against the limited short-term gains afforded by possession of either facility. On balance, we believe this would be an unattractive option for the Soviets, either as an independent operation or as part of a broader NATO-Warsaw Pact conflict.

99. *A Full-Scale Invasion and Occupation of Iran.* The Soviets have sufficient ground and tactical air forces to conduct a general offensive into Iran with the objective of advancing to the Persian Gulf and occupying the country. In the event of Western opposition, the Soviets probably would see a requirement for rebasing strategic aviation assets to bases in the southern USSR and for augmenting their naval forces normally deployed in the Indian Ocean.

100. This general offensive would be an extremely difficult operation for the Soviets to execute. Major constraints would include the highly constricted terrain, difficulties in providing logistic support for both ground and air forces, and the short combat radii of Soviet tactical fighter aircraft.

101. In scope and complexity, an invasion of Iran would far surpass anything the Soviets have attempted since World War II. If they were to succeed, they would be in a position to control the oil-rich Persian Gulf. They would probably assume, however, that such an act would lead to a military confrontation with the United States, and could very well spread to a NATO-Pact war. Given that assumption, this option—as an end in itself—probably does not have much appeal to Soviet policymakers.

102. The ground force requirement would be on the order of 20 to 25 divisions. The campaign would require at least a month of preparation, and its execution would be very time consuming, as the forces moved through difficult terrain with extended LOCs

and with little room to deploy or maneuver. Depending on the degree of Iranian resistance, it could well take the Soviets six to 12 weeks to occupy the Khuzestan oilfields and seize key oil facilities on the Gulf.

103. An occupation of Iran, either in conjunction with or as a prelude to a war with NATO, does not appear to offer much to the Soviets. If the objective were to deny Persian Gulf oil to the NATO nations in order to degrade their capacity to wage war, they could accomplish this much quicker and more efficiently by conducting strategic air attacks against the tanker loading facilities in the Gulf ports. Denial of Persian Gulf oil, however, would not have an immediate effect on NATO's fighting ability, as NATO has about 100 days of crude oil reserves. Also, NATO's wartime military requirements are only a fraction of peacetime civilian consumption that could be diverted to military use.

104. The Soviets could conduct a major invasion of Iran with in-place forces in conjunction with operations against NATO. Although unlikely, another option, however, would be to invade Iran prior to attacking Western Europe in hope of diverting potential US reinforcements for NATO to the Persian Gulf. We cannot judge how the Soviets would assess the viability of such an option. Nonetheless, Soviet planners might calculate that they could exchange 10 to 15 of their poorly equipped and trained divisions from the Caucasus—which have only peripheral missions against NATO—for some of the best the United States has to offer, and divert US strategic lift assets away from NATO.

105. The Soviets know that the United States is concerned that a diversion to the Persian Gulf of US forces could have serious implications for the collective defense of Western Europe. They are also aware that—despite pressures from the United States—the European NATO nations have taken no meaningful steps to compensate for such a diversion by improving their own forces. Soviet planners almost certainly would calculate that the logistic problems they would face in such an attack would not be as great as those the United States would face in moving troops to the Persian Gulf, or later in simultaneously supporting operations in the Gulf area and reinforcing Western Europe. Also in this scenario, the Soviets might elect to allow time for the United States to deploy its forces, land them in the area, and move inland. Once the US forces were firmly committed, the Soviets might well accept a stalemate in Iran, shifting as much of their air assets as possible toward NATO.



106. This option also would entail costs that the Soviets might not be able to calculate confidently. In the first place, the Soviets could not be assured of how the United States would respond or if, in fact, any significant number of US forces would actually be diverted to this area. Moreover, if the international situation were such that the Soviets believed war with NATO were desirable or inevitable, the Soviets would have to assume that a major invasion of Iran would trigger NATO mobilization and the heightened readiness of NATO forces. In this case, the advantages of any diversion of US forces might be offset by the reduced possibility that the Warsaw Pact could achieve any degree of surprise with regard to its attack on NATO. Other Soviet uncertainties would involve the degree to which air assets committed to the feint could suffer attrition, reducing their availability for operations against NATO; the degree to which regional states, such as Pakistan, might be drawn into the conflict; and the degree to which they actually would be able to effect a "stalemate" and to draw critical US assets away from the NATO campaign.

107. *An Invasion of the Western and Southern Littoral of the Persian Gulf.* Subsequent to an invasion of Iran, the Soviets could decide to continue their advance southward with the goal of occupying those oil-producing nations that compose the western and southern littoral of the Persian Gulf. Such a decision would be heavily influenced by the Soviet experience in invading Iran, and even more so by the Western reaction to it, particularly that of the United States.

108. If the United States had not countered the Soviet move into Iran, Soviet policymakers might well be encouraged to continue the attack. The Arabian Peninsula states, by themselves, could offer little more than token resistance to a Soviet invasion, but Iraq could delay considerably an advance through its territory. Lacking a determined Western response and assuming Iraqi opposition, the Soviets could probably occupy the western and southern littoral—from Kuwait to Oman—with 10 to 15 divisions (in addition to those in Iran). Although the Soviets would have to commit some 30 to 40 divisions to the entire campaign, the end result probably would be total control of Persian Gulf oil and the immediate waters through which it passed.

109. We believe that, in the case of a full-scale Soviet invasion of Iran, the Intelligence Community would probably provide at least 21 days' notification that the Soviets were making preparations that could lead to an invasion.

#### Factors Influencing Future Soviet Capabilities in the Gulf Region

110. The Soviet position in Afghanistan will weigh heavily on Moscow's future capacity to conduct military operations in the Persian Gulf region. If their position improves—whether the result of declining resistance to Soviet occupation or improved capabilities of the Afghan Army—Moscow's capacity to conduct operations in the Gulf region will be enhanced. Some regular Soviet forces tied up in counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan would be freed for operations elsewhere, and Soviet land LOCs would be more secure. Similarly, a major improvement of Soviet air and logistic facilities in Afghanistan—particularly the construction of new bases in the southwest part of the country—would facilitate Soviet military operations in the Southern TVD, particularly in southern Iran and Pakistan. Improvements anticipated in Soviet tactical aviation by the late 1980s could make an airfield in southwestern Afghanistan more threatening. We expect that by the end of the decade the Soviets will have begun deploying new tactical fighter-bombers that may have aerial refueling capabilities. We also expect them to begin production of a new aerial tanker by the mid-to-late 1980s. If operated together from airfields in Afghanistan, tankers and tactical aircraft could strike targets throughout most of Southwest Asia.

111. The basing of Backfire bombers at airbases in Afghanistan would significantly improve the Soviets' ability to attack a US carrier task force in the Indian Ocean and the US base on Diego Garcia. The Soviets would not require bases in Afghanistan for the Backfire bombers to be within range of the Arabian Sea because they could be based in the USSR. We believe the Soviets would need to lengthen the runways at airbases in Afghanistan to support Backfire bomber operations in the Indian Ocean.

112. An end to the Iran-Iraq war would improve the capacity of both countries to resist a Soviet invasion—particularly in the longer term as both

Iraqi and Iranian forces recovered from the war. Any postwar redeployment of Iranian units to northern Iran would also make a Soviet invasion of Azarbayjan more costly, although the Iranians, by themselves, could not prevent the Soviets from occupying Azarbayjan.

113. A change in the Iranian Government could also impact on Soviet capabilities in the area—favorably if it became pro-Soviet; adversely if it became pro-West.

114. Soviet ground forces in the area will continue to undergo gradual improvement, but a crash program to modernize them is not anticipated nor do we believe they would deem one necessary. Most limitations on Soviet ground forces operating in the Persian Gulf region derive from the geography of the area, and would not be greatly alleviated by the fielding of new equipment. However, the mobility of the force could be significantly improved by increases in motor transport. Expected increases in transport aircraft and heavy lift helicopters will probably result in a modest

improvement in Soviet capabilities to sustain forces at greater ranges.

115. The size of the Indian Ocean Squadron will depend largely on the size of US naval forces in the area. No major upgrading of its capabilities is considered likely, although Soviet naval forces in the Indian Ocean will undergo the same general improvements common to the fleets as a whole

116. The Soviets also are developing new operational concepts to maximize equipment potential and lessen the time needed to conduct successive frontal operations. They are seeking improvements in troop control procedures, staff concepts, logistics, automation, and computerization. They have apparently developed contingency plans for this area. While the Soviets will not be able to fully develop the capabilities to support these concepts during the period of this Estimate, they should make progress in their effort to increase the tempo of their operations

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## ANNEX A

### ILLUSTRATIVE SOVIET CAMPAIGNS

1. The Soviets could conduct a variety of military campaigns in the Persian Gulf region. The forces that might be allocated to a particular campaign, the manner in which the campaign were conducted, and the preparations that would precede it would largely depend on Soviet objectives and the risks they were willing to take. Generally speaking, the Soviets tend to leave little to risk. They are conservative in assessing force requirements and thorough in planning and preparing for military operations. The following examples illustrate how the Soviets might undertake various campaigns. A "quick grab" of Hormuz might be attempted in conjunction with one of these operations. Other scenarios are possible, but would be largely variations of the illustrative campaigns.

#### A Limited Attack Into Northwest Iran To Seize Azarbayjan

2. In planning an attack into Azarbayjan, the Soviets would probably assume that the initial opposition would consist of one or two Iranian Army divisions plus an assortment of Revolutionary Guards, other paramilitary units, and armed civilians. They could be fairly certain that—barring a radical change in the government in Tehran—Iran would neither request nor welcome US assistance to repel a Soviet invasion. On the contrary, Iran would almost certainly oppose with arms any introduction of US troops onto its soil, making it difficult—if not impossible—for the United States to counter an attack on the ground in northwest Iran. Given the limited initial opposition they would encounter, the Soviets could undertake an operation to seize Azarbayjan with a force of five to seven divisions, supported by a tactical air division, several helicopter regiments, and perhaps some airborne, air assault, and amphibious units. An invasion force of this size could be assembled entirely from forces in the Transcaucasus MD, while still leaving several divisions there available for possible operations against Turkey. Units

in the North Caucasus would also probably be mobilized and alerted for possible employment, either as reinforcements or for contingency operations against Turkey.

3. *Preparations.* An invasion of Azarbayjan would entail preparations on a scale greater than those that preceded the Soviet move into Afghanistan. In preparing for an attack into Azarbayjan, the Soviets would have the benefit of their experiences in Afghanistan. Owing to the limited nature of the operation and the proximity of the objective area, there would be no need for a large-scale redeployment of ground or air units, or for an extensive logistic buildup. Preparations would be confined largely to those steps essential to mobilize and ready the force for combat.

4. The Soviet Navy would play a minor role—limited largely to possible amphibious operations along the Caspian Sea coast—in an Azarbayjan campaign, and the air forces would require only minor preparations. Ground force preparations, however, would be extensive. They would include calling up reservists to fill out understrength units (virtually all units in the area) and assembling the transport to move them to their attack positions.

5. *Communications.* The Soviets would also have to establish communications for the command and control of units in Iran. This would be a relatively simple task in this scenario, since they have already introduced improved communications equipment into the area.

6. *Logistics.* There are substantial stocks of ammunition and POL in the Caucasus—in excess of 330,000 metric tons of ammunition, 3.9 million metric tons of military POL, and 3 million metric tons of civilian POL, about one-third of which is diesel. These stocks would be sufficient to sustain a force of five to seven

divisions in low-intensity combat—the type the Soviets would experience in Azarbayjan—for an indefinite period. All ground force units—both divisional and nondivisional—would require additional trucks to move troops, equipment, and supplies. The road and rail networks in the southern USSR are adequate to support a movement of supplies to the border area. The main logistic problems the Soviets would be likely to face would be in resupplying units as they advanced into Iran.

7. *Preparation Time.* The Soviets could probably complete essential preparations for an attack into Azarbayjan in about two weeks, although this would not permit them enough time to accomplish more than minimal postmobilization training. The Soviets might, however, view this as acceptable, depending on their assessment of the likely Iranian opposition.

8. *Campaign Concept.* The ground forces probably would advance over three routes; two divisions along the coast from Astara to Rasht, two divisions from Jolfa through Tabriz to Zanjan, and one division from Jolfa through Orumiyeh to Saqqez (see figure A-1). At least one division would initially screen the border with Turkey and Iraq, with two divisions performing this mission in the later stages.

9. The coastal drive could be supported by naval units in the Caspian Sea that might attempt a small amphibious operation in the vicinity of Rasht. Elsewhere, the Caspian Sea coast is generally unsuited for amphibious operations. Moreover, amphibious forces would be of limited utility once landed, because of the difficulty they would experience moving inland.

10. The Soviets probably would conduct airborne and airmobile operations to support the ground attack, particularly on the two western axes. Air forces based in the Soviet Union would support the ground units and conduct airstrikes in Azarbayjan.

11. *Rate of Advance.* The Soviets would attempt to occupy Azarbayjan as quickly as possible to deny Iran the opportunity to prepare a coordinated defense, and to minimize the chances of a US response. Their rate of movement would depend largely on the ability of the Iranians to delay the advance through skillful use of the terrain, and by forcing the Soviets to fight in the cities. On the coastal axis there are three bridges between Astara and Rasht, ranging from 110 to 210

meters long, which the Iranians could destroy. On the Jolfa-Zanjan route there are several landslide areas and a tunnel, which could impose serious delays on Soviet forces. There are also some landslide areas on the westernmost axis. If the Iranians could control these and other choke points and force the Soviets to dismount, deploy, and fight, they could impose delays of several days at each point. Similarly, the Iranians could be expected to put up a determined resistance in Tabriz, a city of 600,000 people.

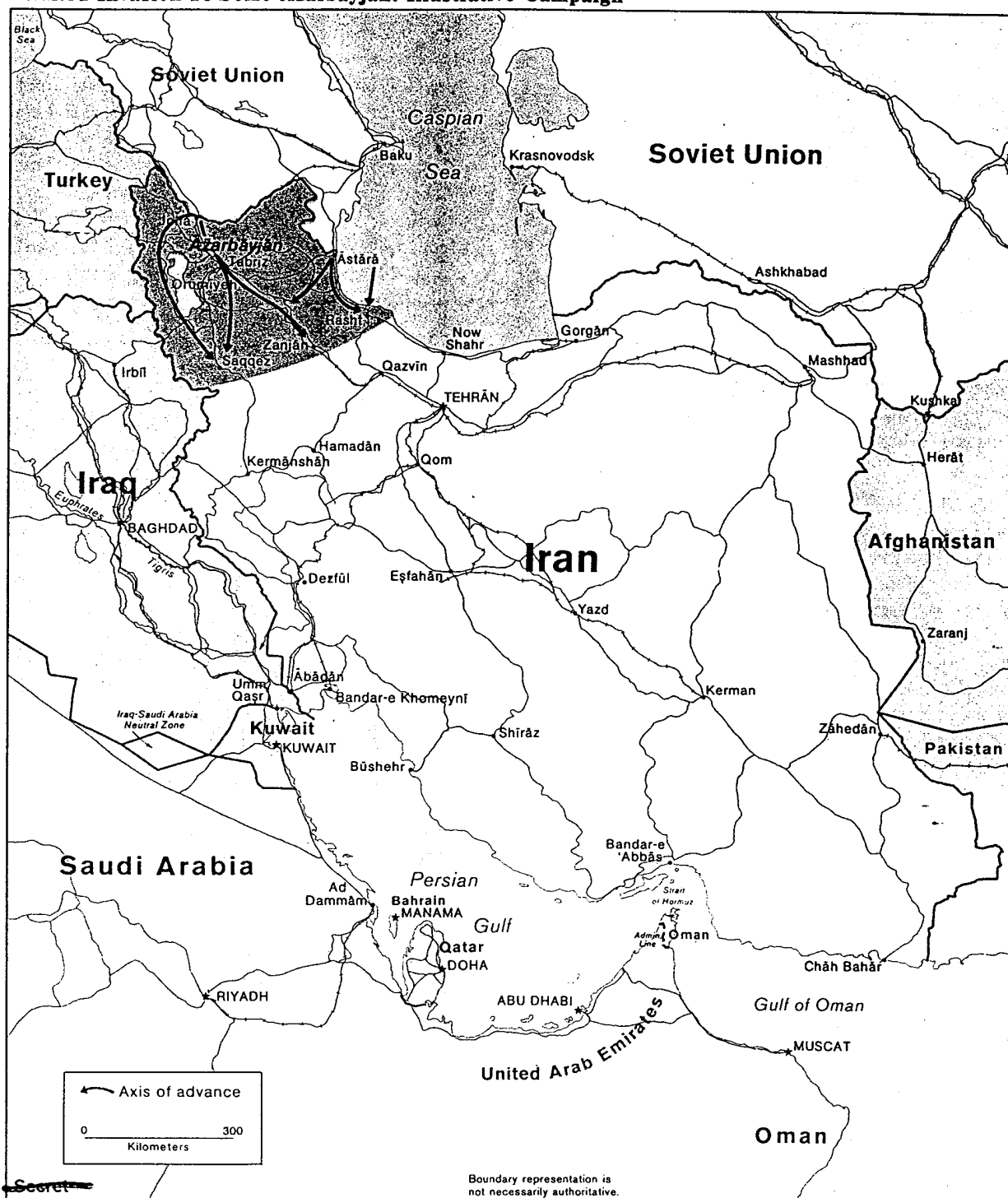
12. The Soviets probably would attempt to take some of the critical choke points and airfields with airmobile or airborne forces in order to speed up the advance. Depending on the effectiveness of the Iranian resistance, it probably would take the Soviets between one to three weeks to occupy Azarbayjan. At this stage, however, they would by no means control the entire area. Consolidating their position, eliminating resistance, and effectively securing the area would be a long process and probably would require additional troops. The Soviets would probably experience far more problems subsequent to the invasion as the Iranians shifted more forces into the area.

#### A Limited Attack To Seize a Port in Southeast Iran

13. A major consideration of Soviet planners preparing for an attack into Iranian Baluchistan to seize the port of Chah Bahar would be the likelihood of engaging US forces. They probably would assume that their forces would be subject to attacks by US carrier-based aircraft. In order to counter this threat, the Soviets would have to consider engaging any US aircraft carriers present in the region concurrent to the initiation of land operations. This would entail deploying additional submarines to the Indian Ocean—at least three or four for every US carrier present—and moving Soviet naval aviation and air army missile-equipped strike aircraft—at least two regiments for each US carrier—to bases in the southern USSR. Once US carrier aircraft launched strikes on Soviet land forces, the carriers probably would be subjected to coordinated submarine and air strikes. In addition, the possibility of encountering US forces on the ground—especially in the latter stages of the operation—would have to be considered. On the other hand, they could

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Figure A-1  
Limited Invasion To Seize Āzarbāyjān: Illustrative Campaign



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anticipate very little initial opposition from regular Iranian forces.

14. Assuming only local ground opposition, the Soviets could probably initiate an attack into southeast Iran from Afghanistan with about three to four divisions (one of which would probably be an airborne division) and several helicopter regiments. These units could be drawn from the Turkestan and Central Asian MDs. Some units currently in Afghanistan might also be included, provided that their missions were assumed by someone else. In any event, the Soviets would want to have substantial reserves available in the event the United States attempted to land troops in southern Iran, as well as for possible operations against Pakistan. Air support initially would be from bases in Afghanistan. The Soviet Navy could also play a role in an attack into Baluchistan, by conducting mining operations and attacking US ships attempting to land troops in southern Iran.

15. The Soviets would probably mobilize all forces in the Turkestan MD as well as some units in the Central Asian, North Caucasus, and Transcaucasus MDs. Routine force preparations—the alerting and mobilization of units and transport—would be roughly on the same scale as those for an invasion of Azarbayjan, as would the preparations necessary to establish a command and control communications system. Unlike an attack into northwest Iran, however, an invasion of southeast Iran would entail a major redeployment of ground and air units as well as a substantial logistic buildup in Afghanistan. Following mobilization and preparation for combat, ground units would have to be moved into attack positions in southwest Afghanistan in the vicinity of Zaranj—a distance of over 1,000 kilometers for all but one division in Turkestan, and several thousand kilometers for most other units.

16. The Soviets could not provide tactical air support to ground forces in southeast Iran from bases in the Soviet Union. Nor do they have sufficient air forces in Afghanistan to support ground operations in southeast Iran, or to counter US aircraft. Moreover, there are no air facilities in southwest Afghanistan from which to conduct air operations, to support them logistically, or to perform routine maintenance. Before undertaking an operation in Baluchistan, therefore, the Soviets would probably construct airfields and supply depots in southwest Afghanistan. This would be a major undertaking, however, because of the inaccessibility of the region.

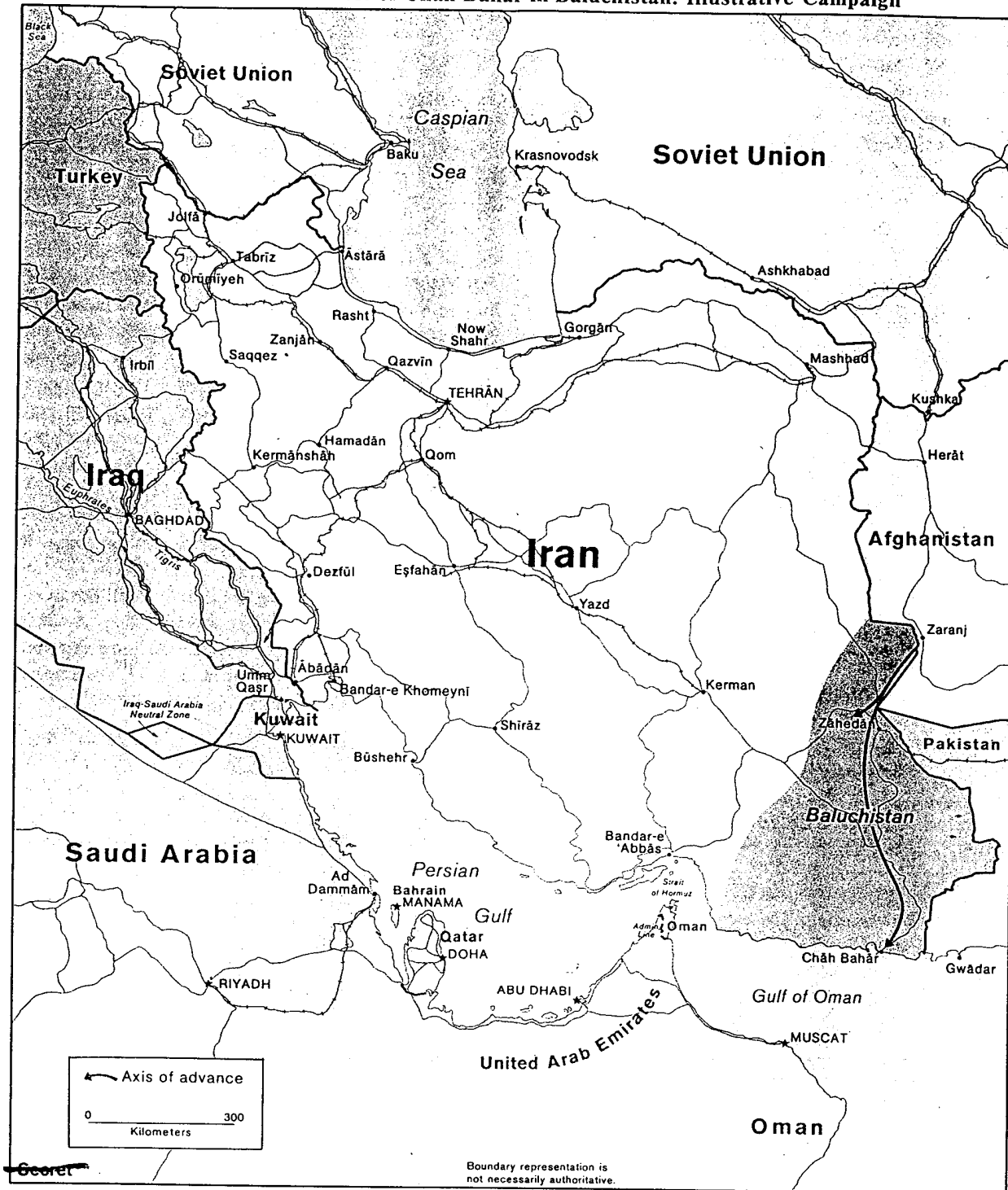
They would first have to build a road capable of supporting heavy vehicles and equipment to move building materials to the area. As an alternative to constructing a new airfield, the Soviets might move additional aircraft—including MIG-23 fighters—to existing bases in Afghanistan, particularly, Shindand and Qandahar. These bases, however, have only a limited capacity for maintenance and logistics, and at times have been unable to adequately support the units already there. A large-scale increase in aircraft without an accompanying expansion of support facilities would only aggravate the logistic problems the Soviets already have in Afghanistan.

17. *Logistics.* Logistic support of operations in Baluchistan would be much more complex than for operations in Azarbayjan. It would require extensive planning and preparation, and would be very difficult to execute. There are about 48,000 metric tons of ammunition stored in the Turkestan MD, as well as 1.2 million metric tons of military POL and 1.7 million metric tons of civilian POL. These stocks could be supplemented from stores in Afghanistan and nearby MDs, including Central Asia. The main logistic problem facing the Soviets would be in transporting ammunition, supplies, and fuel through Afghanistan to the Iranian border, securing them en route, and delivering them to units during the attack and the subsequent occupation. The Soviets would undoubtedly want to build up their stocks in Afghanistan—as close as possible to the Iranian border—prior to initiating an attack into Baluchistan. Otherwise, the attacking force would be dependent for supplies on an LOC that would extend almost 2,000 kilometers through hostile territory, part of which is already extensively used to supply Soviet units operating in Afghanistan.

18. *Preparation Time.* Assuming the Soviets were willing to undertake an invasion without constructing additional facilities, they could probably launch an attack into southeast Iran with about six weeks' preparation, including moving units into attack positions in Afghanistan.

19. *Campaign Concept.* The success of the Baluchistan operation would depend largely upon the ability of ground units to capture Iranian airfields and make them available to Soviet air forces. The main axes of advance of the ground forces would be from Zaranj through Zahedan to Chah Bahar (see figure A-2).

**Figure A-2**  
**Limited Invasion To Seize the Port of Chāh Bahār in Baluchistan: Illustrative Campaign**



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The Soviets would attempt to capture the airfield at Zahedan as quickly as possible in order that they could use it to support an airborne assault on Chah Bahar on the Gulf of Oman. They would want to seize Chah Bahar quickly—both to prevent the United States from occupying it and to make use of its air facilities. As soon as the airfield at Chah Bahar were secure, the Soviets would probably begin landing troops and supplies to build up the force there and improve its chances of successfully defending itself until the main body arrived overland.

20. *Rate of Advance.* The Soviets would want to conduct the linkup between the advancing units and the force holding Chah Bahar as quickly as possible. The main body, however, would have to move about 1,000 kilometers over a single road, traversing both mountains and desert. The only north-south road along the eastern border of Iran is in poor condition, and can support two-way traffic only in certain areas. From Zahedan to Chah Bahar the road is especially bad, with passes at 6,000 feet elevation. A large part of unit resupply would have to be carried out by helicopter—a task that would be difficult owing to the lack of support facilities in the area and the vulnerability of helicopters to attack by US aircraft. Under the most ideal conditions—limited Iranian resistance and no interdiction by US aircraft—the Soviets could probably take the port at Chah Bahar in about 10 days. However, they would face increasing resistance as Iranian forces were shifted into the area.

#### A Limited Attack To Seize Gwadar in Western Pakistan

21. As an alternative to an attack into southeast Iran, the Soviets might invade western Pakistan to seize the harbor at Gwadar, with the intention of constructing port facilities there. We consider this unlikely for both political and military reasons. Pakistan would be much more likely to seek US assistance in repelling a Soviet attack than would Iran. Moreover, a Soviet move into Pakistan could alarm India. In addition, the Soviets would have to fight their way through the Pakistani forces (two divisions plus a brigade) near the Afghan border at Quetta, and traverse over 2,000 km of extremely difficult terrain on the most direct route through Pakistan to Gwadar. Developing port facilities at Gwadar would be a major

undertaking. Moreover, the Soviets would have to upgrade about 600 km of narrow loose-surface road in Pakistan to serve Gwadar.

22. For an overland assault against Gwadar on the Qandahar-Quetta axis, the Soviets would have to make roughly the same preparation as for the Baluchistan invasion. They would require a larger force—some five to six divisions with associated air support—since they would encounter Pakistani forces as soon as they crossed the Afghan border. If Pakistani units near Quetta conducted a determined defense, additional Soviet units might be needed. As with the invasion of Iranian Baluchistan, the Soviet force would have to be pre-positioned in Afghanistan and supplies built up there. Securing LOCs would be a major problem. Troops would have to be resupplied across the mountainous frontier, a route even more rugged and constricted than those used by Soviet units in Afghanistan. The Soviets probably would assume that Pakistan would request US assistance in repelling the attack, and would make its airfields available to US air forces. This would require a buildup of Soviet air forces in Afghanistan at least as large as for the move into Iranian Baluchistan, taxing the limited facilities available there. Facing only Pakistani opposition, it would take the Soviets at least four weeks to seize Gwadar, probably longer if the two plus Pakistani divisions near Quetta put up a strong resistance.

23. On the other hand, Gwadar is just 75 km inside the Pakistani border and only 180 km east of Chah Bahar. If the Soviets were willing to take the risks associated with violating Pakistan's border, they might expand an invasion of Iranian Baluchistan into Pakistan by conducting an airborne assault against Gwadar, once the airfield at Chah Bahar had been occupied. They would, however, have to be prepared to commit several divisions as reinforcements in the event Pakistan began to shift forces from the Indian border to repel the attack. It would be difficult for the Soviets to reinforce Gwadar from Chah Bahar, however, as there are no east-west roads in the area.

#### A Full-Scale Invasion and Occupation of Iran

24. A general offensive into Iran would confront the Soviets with major logistic problems. To ensure continuous logistic and air support, the invasion probably would have to be conducted in phases. During the



initial phase, ground units—supported by tactical air forces operating out of bases in the Soviet Union and Afghanistan—would attack to seize northwestern, central, and northeastern Iran, including Tehran (see figure A-3). The Soviets would consolidate their position, resupply units, build up logistic stocks in Iran, and redeploy tactical aircraft to captured airfields. After these intermediate preparations had been completed, they could initiate the second phase of the campaign—a drive to the Persian Gulf to seize the Khuzestan oilfields and the Strait of Hormuz. The second phase might include an early “grab” of the Strait by heliborne or airborne forces.

25. The Soviets could not prudently plan a general offensive to the Persian Gulf without anticipating and preparing for a US response. Consequently, the forces required would be quite large—on the order of one or more fronts with six ground armies of 20 to 25 divisions with associated tactical air support. They also would have to consider deploying additional submarines to the Indian Ocean and moving missile-equipped strike aircraft to bases in the southern USSR.

26. *Preparations.* In preparing for a general offensive into Iran, the Soviets would probably mobilize all units in the Transcaucasus, North Caucasus, and Turkestan MDs. The required mobilization would entail the callup of several hundred thousand reservists and thousands of civilian trucks. In addition, to ensure adequate reinforcements, a partial mobilization probably would be conducted in the Central Asian MD and in the MDs in the central USSR. Some mobilization opposite NATO or China also might occur as a precaution, but the extent would depend on the circumstances surrounding the Soviet attack.

27. The logistic structure of the Southern TVD would have to be considerably expanded to support frontal operations. Trucks would have to be requisitioned from the civilian economy, forward field storage sites established for fronts and armies, stocks built up at airfields, and pipeline construction units readied and moved forward. The logistic buildup for the initial phase would be facilitated by the rather extensive air and rail facilities in the southern USSR. In the Transcaucasus MD, within 200 nautical miles of the Iranian border, there are 25 airfields with asphalt or concrete

runways 1,900 meters long or greater. All but four of these airfields have direct rail connections. In the Turkestan MD, there are 15 airfields of similar capacity within 200 nautical miles of the border, all of which are served by rail. The logistic buildup for units attacking from or based in Afghanistan would be much more difficult, owing to the limited air and storage facilities there and the long and vulnerable land LOCs.

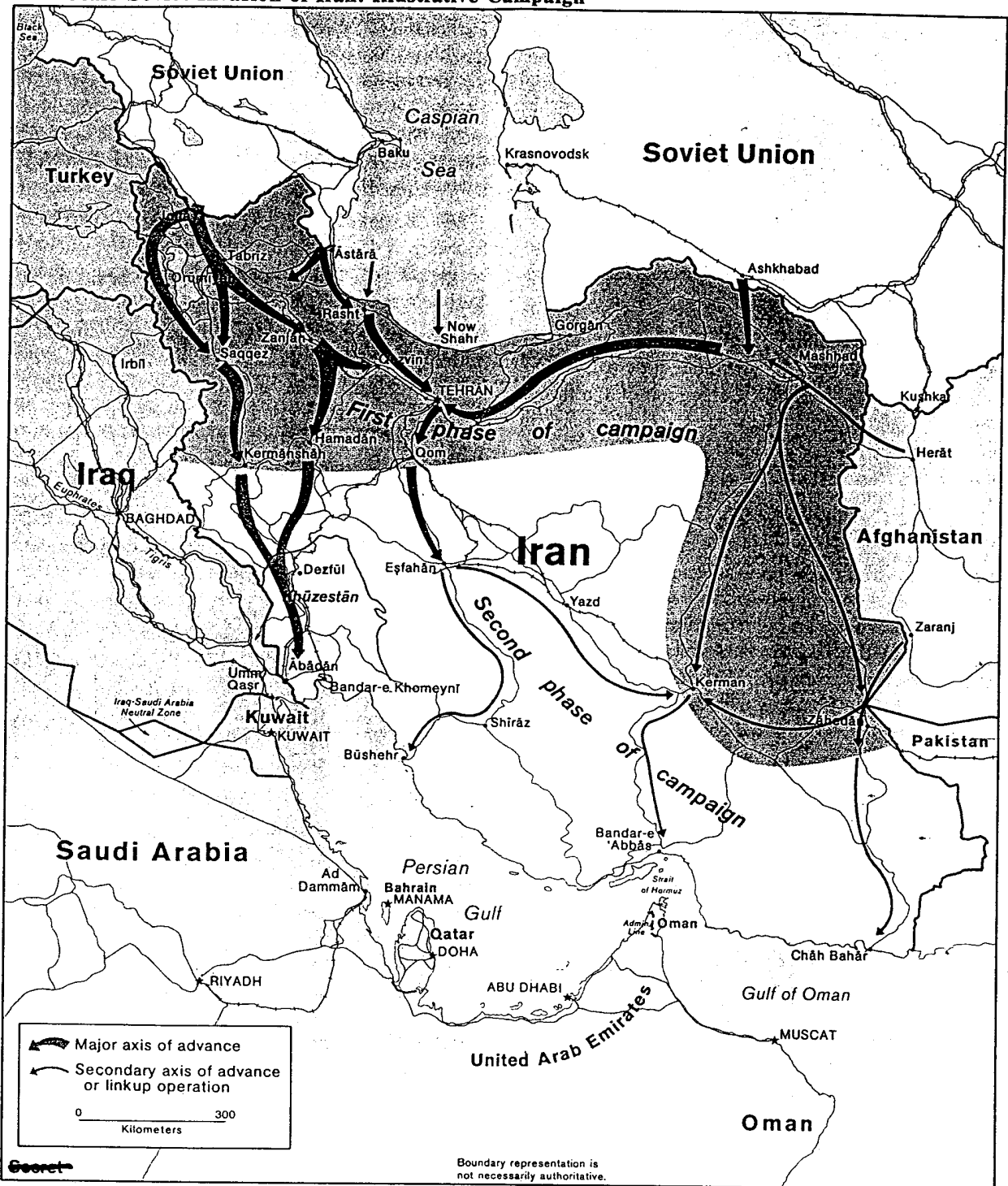
28. *Communications.* Communications nets in the Southern TVD would have to be greatly expanded before the Soviets could undertake a general offensive to the Persian Gulf. Redundant, high-capacity, secure communications would have to be established at front and army levels, with considerable reliance on multi-channel radio-relay, comsat, and tropospheric scatter equipment. Augmentation would be essential and would be accomplished largely through the mobilization of mobile signal units, some of which would probably be drawn from the Ural and Volga MDs.

29. *Preparation Time.* It would take the Soviets at least a month to make the necessary preparations for a general offensive into Iran.

30. *Campaign Concept.* Prior to initiation of the ground attack, the Soviets would probably conduct a large-scale air operation to destroy Iranian aircraft and ground units. They could support the initial ground assault with over 400 combat aircraft and 200 helicopters. Several hundred additional aircraft could be available as reinforcements. The ground campaign probably would be conducted in two phases.

31. *Phase I.* Because of the limited maneuver room, the initial attack into northwest Iran would be made by about 10 divisions, probably organized into two armies. The main axis of advance would probably be Jolfa-Tabriz-Zanjan, with secondary attacks on the coastal Astara-Rasht axis and the mountainous Jolfa-Orumiye-Saqquez axis. These attacks would be supported by airborne and airmobile operations to seize important airfields and strategic mountain passes, as well as to isolate defending Iranian units. Small-scale amphibious landings along Iran's Caspian Sea coast also could be conducted to assist the drive on the Astara-Rasht axis. Once sufficient maneuver room was available, the Soviets would commit additional divisions to seize the key road and rail lines essential to continue the advance.

**Figure A-3**  
**Full-Scale Soviet Invasion of Iran: Illustrative Campaign**



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32. Another four or five divisions would attack northeastern and eastern Iran from Turkestan and Afghanistan moving on two axes—one westward toward Tehran and one southward toward the ports of Bandar-e Abbas and Chah Bahar. These forces would want to seize quickly the airfields at Zahedan and Kerman so that they could be used to support air operations during the subsequent advance to the Persian Gulf.

33. *Phase II.* After the Soviets had consolidated their position in northern Iran and completed their buildup of air and logistic assets, they could continue the attack to seize the Khuzestan oilfields and ports on the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. As part of this phase of the operation, they might conduct an airborne assault to seize certain key oil facilities in the Gulf region. If the Soviets wanted to capture these facilities, however, they would be confronted with a dilemma. On the one hand, they would have great difficulty taking and holding any facilities in southern Iran in phase I, because they would not yet be in position to provide air cover to airborne forces. Moreover, there are considerable Iranian armored forces in the Khuzestan region, and Soviet airborne forces probably could not long sustain an airhead there. On the other hand, if the Soviets delayed the airborne assault until phase II—when they would be in position to support the assault from captured airfields and to conduct a quick linkup overland—they might give the United States time to capture the pumping and storage facilities or the Iranians the opportunity to destroy them.

34. *Rate of Advance.* In phase I, the force making the main effort in northwest Iran would be moving over the same routes as a force making a limited attack into Azarbayjan, and would face the same problems of terrain described in the Azarbayjan scenario. In a full-scale invasion, however, the problems would be magnified since the force would be larger and would be moving deeper into Iranian territory, passing through more choke points and further extending its LOCs. Owing to the limited road and rail network in Iran, the Soviets would have major difficulties in supplying a large invasion force overland, and, until airfields had been captured in Iran, resupply by air would be limited to that which could be accomplished by helicopter. The Soviets would undoubtedly use the

Caspian Sea ports to the maximum extent possible, but would still be confronted with the problem of moving supplies inland from the coast.

35. Assuming only limited Iranian opposition, it would probably take the Soviets three or four weeks to complete phase I and to make preparations for phase II. They would then require at least two more weeks to reach objectives in the Khuzestan region and on the northern coasts of the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. Against stiff Iranian resistance, it could take the Soviets in excess of three months to reach the Gulf.

#### An Advance Along the Southern Littoral of the Persian Gulf

36. A Soviet invasion of the oil-producing nations south of the Persian Gulf would only be feasible as a subsequent operation to a successful invasion and occupation of Iran. This implies that there would have been no meaningful Western opposition to the Soviet move into Iran, and that the war had not spread to other theaters

37. *Preparations.* Before the Soviets could continue their advance south of the Persian Gulf, they would have to consolidate their position in Iran, conduct a logistic buildup there, and move the ground forces making the attack into position in southwest Iran. Assuming that the ground units were moved into Iran during the latter stages of the Iranian campaign, and that much of the logistic buildup were accomplished by air, the Soviets could probably make these preparations in about two weeks.

38. *Campaign Concept.* The Gulf Arab countries could do little more than delay a Soviet advance along the coast. Unless they were able to achieve an accommodation with Iraq, which we believe unlikely, the Soviets still would have to assume that they would need to fight their way through Iraq to reach Kuwait. Assuming Iraqi opposition, the Soviets would want to have about 10 to 15 divisions available in southwest Iran to break through Iraqi defenses, occupy blocking positions in Iraq, and advance along the Gulf coast.

39. The Soviets probably would not occupy any more of Iraq than necessary to allow passage of their forces and security for their LOCs. The axis of advance of the attacking force would probably parallel the Arab shore of the Gulf (see figure A-4). Soviet



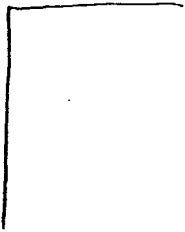
forces probably would not move inland except to secure oilfields along their route of march. They would advance along a line through Kuwait, the UAE, and up to the Strait of Hormuz and Muscat.

40. *Rate of Advance.* After traversing Iraq, the main problem confronting the Soviets would be resupplying units as they advanced. Scarcity of water would also be a problem if the retreating Arab forces destroyed desalinization and pumping facilities. Against

opposition from Iraq and the Arab Gulf countries, the Soviets could probably occupy the southern littoral—from Kuwait to Oman—in about four weeks. Faced with Western opposition, there is little likelihood that the Soviets would attempt an invasion of the Gulf Arab countries. The force requirements for such a campaign would exceed those that they could prudently allocate and still be prepared to fight NATO and China

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ANNEX B  
INTELLIGENCE GAPS



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