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~~Top Secret~~**USSR-SYRIA: Foreign Ministers' Meeting**

*Soviet and Syrian media coverage of the meetings in Moscow between Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko and Syrian Foreign Minister Khaddam, which ended yesterday, suggests frank discussion of Syria's pressure on PLO leader Arafat and continuing concern by both sides about US military intentions in Lebanon.* [ ]

TASS noted that the two men reviewed the situation in Tripoli, Lebanon, where Arafat's forces are under siege by Syrian-backed PLO rebels. Gromyko in a speech yesterday described as "urgent" the need to end strife within the Palestinian movement and called for greater Arab unity. [ ]

The Soviet Foreign Minister also accused the US and Israel of planning "aggressive intrigues" against Lebanon and repeated the warning against armed interference there that Moscow first issued in an official TASS statement on 4 November. He added that pressure is also being exerted on Syria. [ ]

Syrian media coverage of the talks yesterday omitted the Soviet call for Arab solidarity. [ ]

**Comment:** The remarks by Gromyko suggest that, while the Soviets have made clear their displeasure with Syria's attempt to defeat Arafat, they nonetheless do not want the issue to harm bilateral ties. Gromyko is the first Soviet leader to repeat the earlier TASS warning against US military action in Lebanon, although he made it less direct by not specifically mentioning Washington. [ ]

The Soviet Foreign Minister did not claim that the US plans military action against the Syrians or their forces in Lebanon. In addition, he did not express support for Syria or say what the USSR's reaction would be to a US military move. Moscow's reluctance to offer explicit public backing for Damascus reflects its concern that an outbreak of fighting would lead to Syrian pressure for direct Soviet military assistance, which the USSR still appears reluctant to provide. [ ]

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