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# THESIS

SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY  
IN THE MIDDLE EAST:  
INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL DETERMINANTS

by

John J. Sowdon

June 1987

Thesis Advisor

E. J. Laurance

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Soviet Foreign Policy  
in the Middle East:  
Internal and External Determinants

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

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## ABSTRACT

This study presents a framework for the detailed examination of Soviet Middle Eastern policy from 1967 to the present. The volatility of the current Middle Eastern situation and the inherent risk of superpower involvement lends a sense of urgency to the task of correctly interpreting Soviet interests, objectives and commitments in the Middle East. This paper uses past Soviet policy behavior to construct a model for the understanding of current and future Soviet activity by measuring the impact of *internal* and *external* inputs to the decisionmaking process. The field of study was limited to two countries, Egypt and Syria, chosen for their leading roles in the development of Soviet policy in the Middle East

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The American decision to launch a retaliatory raid on Libya in April 1986, and a situation on the Israeli-Syrian border recently described as one in which "a miscalculation by either side could ignite an armed conflict."<sup>1</sup> lends new urgency to the task of correctly assessing Soviet interests, objectives and commitments in the Middle East. Given the region's inherent political instability, the high superpower stakes, and the growing superpower force levels in the Middle East, there is a persistent risk that any local conflict could escalate uncontrollably into a full scale superpower confrontation. It is therefore essential to determine the depth of Soviet obligations to its Middle Eastern clients and the importance of these states to Moscow's global policies.

Attempting to comprehend, much less predict, Soviet foreign policy decisions is never easy. Soviet policymaking has been subjected to varied interpretation and speculation by countless Western observers and analysts. This paper represents an effort to construct a framework of analysis that will interpret past Soviet policies with an eye towards using these interpretations to explain current and predict future Soviet decisions. More specifically, this paper will seek to explain the "outputs" of Soviet foreign policy in the Middle East, which at times appears contradictory and self-defeating, by measuring the relative impact of certain critical "inputs" to the decisionmaking process.

These inputs will take two forms--internal and external. Internal debate as a determinant of Soviet foreign policymaking is a subject of much speculation and controversy. Frequently, Soviet decisionmaking, particularly in foreign policy, is depicted as 'monolithic' on the assumption that there is a rigid concurrence within the Kremlin on all Soviet foreign policy goals, and that policy making can be adequately explained in terms of the 'rational actor model.'<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Israel and Syria Believed to Face Risk of Conflict", *New York Times*, 19 May 1986, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>See Graham Allison, *The Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1971). In his book Allison defines the rational actor model as one in which "the nation or government, conceived as a rational, unitary decisionmaker is the agent. The agent has one set of unified goals, one set of perceived options, and a single estimate of consequences." p. 32. Authors who have adopted the "totalitarian" method of explaining Soviet foreign policy decisions might be said to be advocates of the rational actor approach. Among the foremost works in this

With regard to "internal inputs" this paper will attempt to measure the level of concurrence which exists within the Soviet governmental hierarchy to determine whether high-level debates on foreign policy issues have forced policy modifications. Of special interest will be any evidence of disagreements between the political apparatus (the Communist Party of the Soviet Union) and the military leadership on matters pertaining to the Soviet presence in the Middle East, the causes of those debates, and their outcomes. It is anticipated that such debates, when they can be observed, will revolve around different interpretations of the importance of Middle Eastern clients to the overall security of the Soviet Union, and the level of risk acceptable to support those clients.

"External" inputs refer specifically to the pressure a client state can exert on Soviet policy. Even in those instances where there is seemingly complete agreement within the Kremlin, Moscow must still consider the needs and demands of the client state. The problems that client relationships can present to the superpowers was explained by Stanley Hoffman:

Both the United States and the Soviet Union, out of reciprocal fear and opposed interests, try to court neutrals, to win friends and keep them, to detach the friends of rivals. This need for support from lesser powers (whether for strategic, diplomatic, or symbolic reasons) tends to make the Americans and the Russians dependent on their clients; the latter want to safeguard their independence, and exploit every possible asset in their positions, and this subverts the hierarchy.<sup>3</sup>

The competition between the superpowers results in smaller states sometimes wielding influence disproportionate to their apparent power, at least within some range of activities. The Soviet willingness to adapt and adjust policies to accommodate client requirements is an important, but poorly understood, phenomenon. Further, the ability of the Kremlin to direct the foreign and domestic policies of its clients is often grossly overestimated.

To measure the impact of internal debate and client pressure on Soviet foreign policymaking, this paper will present a focused comparison of Soviet relations with two

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field are, Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt-Brace, 1951), Carl Friedrich, *Totalitarianism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), and Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956).

<sup>3</sup>Stanley Hoffman, *Gulliver's Troubles, or the Setting of American Foreign Policy* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1968). pp. 19-20.



of its foremost Middle Eastern client states, Egypt and Syria. Egypt had much to offer as a case study.

- There is an abundance of information on Soviet-Egyptian relations. Besides the numerous interpretations of the relationship, there have been detailed studies done on the debates within the Soviet hierarchy on the proper approach to Soviet-Egyptian relations. Additionally several excellent Egyptian sources are available, most notably journalist Mohamed Heikal and President Anwar Sadat, who provide invaluable insights into Soviet policymaking from the clients perspective.
- The link with Egypt was crucial to Soviet policies in the Middle East and the rest of the Third World. For many years, Egypt was an acknowledged leader of the Arab world and the "non-aligned" movement. From 1955-1973 Egypt was the showcase of Soviet efforts in the Third World. Any break or flaw in relations promised repercussions far beyond Egypt's borders and further sensitized Moscow to the demands of its client.
- Finally, Egypt provides a "closed case." It is possible to track the relationship from beginning to end, and draw important conclusions about the potential underlying flaws in Soviet policies, the limits of Soviet ability to control a client state, and the difficulties Moscow might encounter in subsequent client relationships.

A comparable investigation of the relations between the Soviet Union and the Republic of Syria presents a far more difficult task. In contrast to the Egyptian case there is a marked lack of information on internal debates within the Kremlin, or detailed presentations of the relationship from a Syrian perspective. Despite these drawbacks, Syria was selected for this study for several reasons.

- The Republic of Syria has replaced Egypt as the "linchpin" of Soviet relations with the Arab world. This factor will make Moscow more sensitive to Syrian demands and needs.
- Syria is the foremost of the "rejectionist" or "confrontation" states dedicated to the destruction of Israel. If a major Arab-Israeli war is to break out it most likely will occur on the Syrian-Israeli border.
- Given Syria's active support of Palestinian terrorists, its activities in Lebanon, and its violent opposition to America's client state of Israel, no Middle Eastern state, with the possible exception of Libya, presents a more formidable problem to American policymakers.

The underlying premise of this paper is one which is common to most historical writings; that the foreign policy problems any country faces today are not entirely unlike those it faced in the past. An accurate interpretation of Soviet responses to past Middle East opportunities and crises should provide a means of filling the lacunae in our present knowledge. A framework of analysis which accurately explains the objectives of Soviet policy towards Egypt may help predict Soviet policies towards Syria and much of the rest of the Arab world.

## II. METHODOLOGY

Soviet foreign policy in the Middle East is, and always has been, a balancing act. The challenges confronted by Soviet decisionmakers are not uncommon in modern statecraft; the dynamics of balancing gains and risks, credibility and confrontation. However, these problems seem particularly acute when reviewing Soviet relations with their Middle Eastern clients during the timeframe in question (1967-1985). The Kremlin was repeatedly forced to assess the relative importance of maintaining credibility in the eyes of the "progressive" Arab states as opposed to pursuing the tangible benefits of detente with the West. As a result, Soviet policy adopted a dualistic nature, often attempting to endorse Arab aspirations while at the same time subtly seeking to restrain Arab policy.

### A. HYPOTHESES

In building a framework that will bring meaning and consistency to the interpretation and analysis of Soviet decisionmaking, it is first necessary to develop a series of hypotheses. This paper will begin with a purposely general hypothesis designed to serve as a focus for this study of Soviet policy in the Middle East:

- *The Soviet objective in the Middle East is to maintain a viable presence in the region while avoiding military intervention.*

This hypothesis is presented as a "straw man" of an optimum Soviet policy for the Middle East. There are several reasons why Soviet decisionmakers might be expected to adopt such a policy. Soviet political leaders are anxious to reap the economic benefits of expanded trade with Middle Eastern clients, while Soviet penetration of the politico-economic structure of Arab clients would allow Moscow to influence regional affairs. From a military viewpoint, the positioning of Soviet forces in Arab client states, particularly in the Eastern Mediterranean (Egypt, Syria), would serve as a counter to Western forces in the region, such as the U.S. Sixth fleet. At the same time, however, Moscow will seek to avoid *active* involvement in regional hostilities, specifically the Arab-Israeli conflict, because it recognizes that any form of active involvement or intervention might provoke a superpower confrontation. While this policy involves the Soviet Union in the constant pursuit of suitable Arab clients, it also forces the Soviets to carefully limit their obligations to their client states and

establish effective means to prevent their Arab clients from escalating a regional conflict to a point at which Soviet intervention becomes unavoidable.

The hypothesis will be tested by applying it to several specific events that occurred in Soviet relations with Egypt (1967-1976) and Syria (1980-1985). In each case, it will be determined whether the Soviets adhered to a policy that maximized their presence, yet minimized their risks. Internal and external inputs to the Soviet decisionmaking process will be measured to determine whether there was any effort to force Soviet policymakers to abandon this conservative stance and adopt a more active stand in support of their clients. It is anticipated that pressure to modify Soviet policy would be applied either by the Soviet military or by the respective Arab client itself. These measurements should provide an understanding of the level of concurrence within the higher levels of Soviet decisionmaking and the ability of the Soviet Union to control the actions of its client states.

## B. INTERNAL INPUTS

No foreign policy functions in a vacuum. One must consider both the international context and the domestic considerations involved in any foreign policy decision. There is evidence of disagreements within the Kremlin over the proper conduct of Soviet policy. Internal debates, when they occur, should revolve largely around the level of acceptable risks in the pursuit of Soviet policy objectives in the Middle East. This paper will focus upon disagreements that arise between the Party and the military leadership.<sup>4</sup>

"Party" is a very broad term when applied to the Soviet government. All major Soviet decisionmakers, including those in the military, are party members. For the purposes of this paper, the term party will refer to the Secretary General and his supporters within the party apparatus. The party position will be determined largely through a review of *Pravda*, the daily newspaper that serves as the chief organ of the

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<sup>4</sup>Two recent studies examine the debate between the party and the military. In *Soviet Involvement in the Middle East: Policy Formulation 1966-1973* (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1978), Ilana Kass focused on disagreements that developed between political and military interest groups over the formulation of Soviet policy towards Egypt and other Middle Eastern countries following the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. Dina Rome Spechler, in *Domestic Influences on Soviet Foreign Policy* (Washington DC: University Press of America, 1978), examined the conflicting attitudes of Soviet political, ideological and military elites over prospective Soviet responses to the 1973 October War. Both of these studies entailed an exhaustive review of Soviet press reporting and proved invaluable in the development of this paper. The military's ability to influence Soviet foreign policy decision making is also discussed by Malcolm Mackintosh in "The Soviet Military: Influence on Foreign Policy," *Problems in Communism* 22 (Sept-Oct 1973) and Vernon Aspaturian in, "The Soviet Military-Industrial Complex - Does it Exist?" *Journal of International Affairs* 26, (1972).

Party Central Committee. *Pravda* articles can be expected to reflect the policies supported by the party leaders at any given time. For example, in the late 1960s and early 1970s the party, led by then Secretary General Leonid Brezhnev, was the primary proponent of Soviet detente policy with the United States. The views expressed by *Pravda* during this period stress the necessity of finding a peaceful solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict and the avoidance of a detente-shattering superpower confrontation. When relations with the United States worsened after 1975, *Pravda* deemphasized the need for peaceful accommodations and adopted a harder line.

The military plays a special role in the Soviet Union. It is a mainstay of the regime; it is primarily through military strength that the Soviet Union retains its superpower position. As a result, it may be expected that the military will have considerable influence over foreign policy decisions that concern Soviet national security and overseas strategies. Any "dissenting" military views would be observed in *Krasnaya Zvezda* the daily newspaper published by the Defense Ministry. The Soviet military might be expected to disagree with the party on the relative importance of detente to Soviet national security and question any apparent willingness to sacrifice the interests of the progressive Arab states to improve Soviet-American relations, especially in countries such as Egypt and Syria in which the Soviet military benefited from an established presence. The relationship between the party and the military on Soviet foreign policy might be hypothesized as follows:

- *The military's interest in, and ability to influence, the course of relations with any Soviet client will vary in direct proportion with the tangible benefits (bases, presence, etc) the military derives from the relationship.*

To determine the validity of this hypothesis, the following questions will be considered when reviewing each event in the Soviet-Egyptian and Soviet-Syrian relationships.

- Was there evidence of a disagreement between the party and the military regarding the proper conduct of relations?
- Was the military successful in altering the pattern of the relationship?

The use of Soviet open source material to determine party and military attitudes towards Middle East policy necessitates the consideration of a variety of caveats. One must always consider its controlled nature and propaganda intent. Several authors have openly questioned the assumption that any Soviet press organ might be allowed to adopt dissenting viewpoints. The Scotts, in their popular volume on the Soviet Armed Forces remarked:

The belief held by some Western analysts - that there is a semi-independent military press in which generals and admirals may express their own particular views - does not correspond with the actuality of the tight Party-military control that is exercised over all military publications.<sup>5</sup>

Soviet analyst Karen Dawisha also warns of the dangers inherent in drawing inferences about the positions of top Soviet leaders from the editorial columns of selected newspapers. In a recent work she commented:

Although great differences have sometimes been gleaned by the comparison of individual articles or a study of the overall trend of editorials over time, the assumption that unsigned editorials in any newspaper represent the previously unknown views of a specific leader or faction is questionable. . . . all newspapers are published by the party committee within the ministry or public body concerned. *Krasnaya Zvezda*, for example, is formally the newspaper of the party committee within the Ministry of Defense, not a paper in which the military can express independent views.<sup>6</sup>

Dawisha, the Scotts, and others emphasize the ability of the party apparatus to control all aspects of internal Soviet decisionmaking and believe the Soviet policymaking process can be explained in 'rational actor' terms. There is, however, a body of authors who would argue that the complexity of Soviet society would defy any such attempt at complete control. For example, Roman Kolkowicz, doubts that Soviet society can avoid the development of interest groups:

The emergence of articulated interest groups, then, is concomitant of a society which is becoming internally complex and which is pledged, at home and abroad, to a grand political design which depends on an efficient technological, economical and managerial substructure.<sup>7</sup>

In her work on the influence of domestic constraints on Soviet foreign policy, Dina Rome Spechler has adopted a similar line of reasoning to defend her use of Soviet open source material as a basis for an investigation into elite opinions. Spechler observed:

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<sup>5</sup>Harriet Fast Scott and William F. Scott, *The Armed Forces of the USSR* (3 ed), (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1984), p. 288.

<sup>6</sup>Karen Dawisha, *The Kremlin and the Prague Spring* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), p. 7.

<sup>7</sup>Roman Kolkowicz, "The Military" in H. Gordon Skilling and Franklyn Griffiths, *Interest Groups in the Soviet Union* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 130.

It is no longer possible to assume that Soviet foreign affairs are operated by a single mind, operating in isolation from and without regard for the opinions of others in high positions. There is too much evidence that policymaking in the USSR involves conflict and compromise for such models of Soviet decisionmaking to have much plausibility. . . . In a highly bureaucratized society like the Soviet Union, it would be most surprising if individual decisionmakers did not often act as defenders of organizational interests and views. . . . the abundant evidence of the influence of elite groups on the making of Soviet internal policy gives us reason to suspect that such groups also have a substantial impact on the shaping of foreign policy.

Finally, Edward Warner in *The Military in Contemporary Soviet Politics: An Institutional View* questions the actual impact of the party on military literature and suggests a more balanced view that also considers the background of military authors. Warner acknowledges that the Main Political Administration (MPA) controls the content and ideological direction of all literature produced by the Military Publishing House and that the editor of *Krasnaya Zvezda* is a member of the executive bureau of the MPA. However, he notes, careful examination reveals that while the MPA was originally a network of "political commissars," there has been a significant shift in its function:

While the MPA remains true to its original task of preventing the military's blatant disregard of Party directives, it appears at the same time to have come largely to embrace the values and preferences of the professional military establishment, the very group it is supposed to control. As a matter of fact, the academic researchers and indoctrinational specialists of the MPA are among the leading articulators and most visible proponents of the institutional ideology of the Soviet military establishment.

Warner finds the source of this change in the recruitment of political officers from promising regular officers. As such they are part of the military establishment, sharing its traditions, prestige and responsibilities. Consequently, despite the institutional provision of party control over military writing, it can certainly be argued that military authors writing for a military newspaper would profess a military perspective and that such an emphasis would be unavoidable, so completely have political officers been assimilated into the military establishment.

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<sup>8</sup>Dina Rome Spechler, *Domestic Influences on Soviet Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1978), p. 6.

<sup>9</sup>Edward L. Warner III, *The Military in Contemporary Soviet Politics: An Institutional View* (New York: Praeger, 1977), pp. 73-74.

The review of *Pravda* and *Krasnaya Zvezda* will be supplemented by information gleaned from other Soviet sources, such as *Tass* pronouncements and items from *Izvestia* and *International Affairs*. In all cases an effort has been made to filter out the most obvious propaganda. Additional insights will also be found from client sources, such as Heikal<sup>10</sup> or President Sadat, who were indirectly aware of Kremlin debates on policy matters related to their countries.

### C. EXTERNAL INPUTS

The building of a foreign policy ultimately will be guided by a state's perception of its national interests. This holds as true for clients as it does for superpowers. It is often forgotten that a client in a relationship can wield influence disproportionate to its power. The term client itself is misleading (though it will be used throughout this paper for matters of convenience) because it implies a dependency relationship that may not exist. On the contrary, many Arab leaders have taken pains to assert their independence from Soviet control and to prove, as Egyptian President Nasser remarked, "There is a big difference between cooperation and subservience."<sup>11</sup> The Soviets discovered early in their Middle Eastern experience that Arab leaders had no intention of exchanging Soviet for Western domination. At times the interests of clients will dovetail with those of the Soviet Union. At other times Moscow will receive some unpleasant surprises. Most importantly, clients retain the option to alter or depart from a relationship if the Soviets fail to meet their expectations.

In turn, the Soviet Union will always place the Middle East in the context of its own national security concerns. The Soviet leadership has always believed that Western domination would threaten their national security by placing potentially hostile forces *directly* on Russia's southern border. For this reason, beginning in 1955, the Soviets have attempted to woo the Arab states by presenting themselves as a disinterested friend of the Arabs, an alternative to Western imperialism, and a source of economic aid. In return, the Soviets sought political influence and economic benefits

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<sup>10</sup>Mohamed Heikal was the editor of the leading Egyptian newspaper *Al Ahrām* and a close confidant of Nasser, serving for a time as his Information Minister. Heikal's access to Nasser makes him a particularly useful source for gaining an Egyptian perspective on the Soviet-Egyptian relationship. Heikal was vehemently "Egypt-first" in his political orientation and holds the distinction of having been savagely criticized by *Pravda* for questioning Soviet motives in Egypt and imprisoned by Sadat for his outspoken criticism of the Egyptian President's alignment with the West.

<sup>11</sup>From a speech before the Arab Socialist Union in 1968. See Alvin Z. Rubinstein, *Red Star on the Nile: The Soviet - Egyptian Relationship since the June War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 64.

in the "progressive" Arab states. Later, Moscow would attempt to gain military privileges, in the form of naval and air facilities, that would allow them to monitor US forces in the Mediterranean, secure their Southern borders, and if necessary, disrupt Western economic and military lifelines.

The Soviet Union would undoubtedly prefer to deploy its forces to the Middle East while avoiding involvement in regional conflicts. This has proven impossible and the Soviets are now deeply involved in the disputes and controversies of the area. The Soviets have maintained their foothold in the Middle East by backing the Arabs in the Arab-Israeli dispute. The ongoing nature of this dispute presents the Soviets with a constant danger that they may be required to honor commitments made to their Arab clients. This might, in extreme circumstances, entail a direct Soviet military intervention in the Middle East with its consequent potential for a superpower confrontation, an eventuality that Moscow is certainly anxious to avoid.<sup>12</sup>

The challenge for Soviet leaders is to ensure its Arab clients possess the military power to successfully oppose the Israelis, while at the same time preventing the uncontrolled escalation of an Arab-Israeli conflict, and avoiding commitments which might obligate them to intervene in a Middle East conflict at a time and place not of their own choosing. Since the Soviets have elected to substitute modern weapons for direct action in the Middle East, great care must be taken to regulate the arms flow. One mechanism used to achieve this has been imposition of a "ceiling of sophistication."<sup>13</sup> The Soviets have limited the warmaking capabilities of their Arab clients by withholding or restricting the use of, weapons that might allow their clients to pursue a military objective beyond that which Moscow is prepared to support, such as the destruction of Israel. This would include such weapons as long range bombers or fighter-bombers and surface-to-surface missiles. Further, the Soviets will try to avoid giving any one client the capability to attack Israel alone, without an alliance with at least one other Arab state. This increases Soviet opportunities to control the situation. The Soviet mechanism to restrain the Arab states can be stated as:

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<sup>12</sup>Francis Fukuyama has written two Rand Corp. reports dealing with past and potential Soviet military intervention in the Middle East. The first, *Soviet Threats to Intervene in the Middle East 1956-1973* Rand Note N-1577-FF (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1980), discusses Soviet threats to intervene in the Middle East in 1956, 1957, 1968, 1967, 1970 and 1973. In *Escalation in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf*, Rand Paper: P-7021, (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1981), Fukuyama presents scenarios in which the Soviets intervene with military units in a Syrian-Israeli conflict.

<sup>13</sup>This useful term is used by Amnon Sella in his book *Soviet Military and Political Conduct in the Middle East* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), p. 120.



- *The Soviet Union will impose a "ceiling of sophistication" on arms imports to Arab client states that will exclude offensive weapons that might give those clients the ability to initiate or escalate a regional conflict unilaterally.*

The Arab states have interests and priorities that are not always compatible with those of the Soviet Union. For example, the Arabs were adamant in their demands to regain the territory lost to Israel in the 1967 war and advocated military action to achieve this end. This ran counter to the Soviet interest in preventing the escalation of regional tensions and created a fundamental paradox for Soviet policymakers. As one Egyptian observed, "No doubt they wanted a solution to the Middle East problem, but they did not want a war."<sup>14</sup>

Soviet efforts to manage the release of arms in a way designed to limit Egyptian warmaking capabilities was a constant source of tension between the two countries. Anwar Sadat's bitter remarks decrying Soviet arms policy might have been attributed to a number of Arab leaders:

The Soviet Union had planned to provide us with just enough to meet our most immediate needs and at the same time maintain its role as our guardian and ensure its presence in the region -- a more important goal from the Soviet point of view.

Even the most frustrated client state, however, is likely to maintain its own political agenda and remain impervious to Soviet pressures to abandon policies considered vital to its national interests. Nasser refused to yield in his determination to regain the Sinai, while Syria's President Assad has ignored Soviet admonishments not to pursue his personal aspirations in Lebanon. It will be seen that the cooperativeness of a client often fluctuates with the immediacy of the threat and the availability of alternative sources of weapons. More significantly, client state leaders are often quick to recognize the pressures that they can bring to bear on their superpower sponsor to force them to accede to their needs and demands. Every client can collect a set of "bargaining chips" for use in dealing with the superpowers. These chips are derived primarily from the clients strategic location, but also can develop from a Soviet desire to preserve their military presence or protect their investments in a client. A hypothesis for the ability of a client state to pressure the Soviet Union might be as

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<sup>14</sup>Mohamed Heikal, *The Road to Ramadan* (New York: Quadrangle, 1975), p. 164.

<sup>15</sup>Anwar Sadat, *In Search of Identity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 231.

follows:

- *The greater the perceived strategic importance of a state the greater bargaining strength.*

To determine the validity of the hypotheses regarding Soviet relations with Egypt and Syria the following questions will be asked.

- Was there a conflict between the foreign policy objectives of the Soviet Union and the client state?
- Did the client receive the weapons requested or was the delivery of certain items (specifically offensive weapons) delayed or postponed?
- Did the client attempt to bring pressure to bear on the Soviet decisionmakers to alter or modify arms policies? What mechanism was used? Were they successful?
- Was the client state of strategic importance to the Soviet Union at the time of the decision?

In summary, the hypotheses to be investigated in this paper are:

- *The Soviet objective in the Middle East is to maintain a viable presence in the region while avoiding military intervention.*
- *The military's interest in, and ability to influence the course of, relations with any Soviet client will vary in direct proportion with the tangible benefits (bases, presence, etc) the military from the relationship.*
- *Soviet Union will impose a "ceiling of sophistication" on arms imports to Arab client states that will exclude offensive weapons that might give those clients the ability to initiate or escalate a regional conflict unilaterally.*
- *The greater the perceived strategic importance of a client, the greater its bargaining strength.*

#### D. CASES

This study will determine the impact of internal and external inputs on ten specific events, six involving Soviet-Egyptian relations and four involving Soviet-Syrian relations. Each event signifies a juncture at which Soviet policymakers had to make fundamental decisions regarding the course of future arms transfer policies and the management of Soviet-client relations. For Egypt the events will be:

- The Soviet decision to re-arm and train the Egyptian armed forces after the disastrous 1967 Arab-Israeli war.
- The Soviet decision to deploy combat troops to Egypt in 1970 to supplement Egyptian air defense during the "War of Attrition."
- The Soviet-Egyptian Treaty of Cooperation and Friendship, signed in March 1971.
- The expulsion of Soviet advisors from Egypt in 1972.
- Soviet decisionmaking during the 1973 Yom Kippur War.
- The final breakdown and termination of Soviet-Egyption relations in 1976.

Key events for Soviet-Syrian relations:

- The Soviet-Syrian Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, signed in 1980, and the series of crises that immediately followed the signing of the Treaty.
- Soviet support for Syria during the 1982 War in Lebanon.
- The Soviet decision to resupply Syria with modern weapons in 1982/83.
- The current state of Soviet-Syrian relations.

The case studies begin after the Arab defeat in the six day war of June 1967. However, an understanding of the foundations of Soviet-Arab ties is crucial to an accurate evaluation of the depth of the Soviet commitment to the Arab cause, and the degree of ideological affinity that exists between Soviet Marxists and Arab progressives. To discover the source of the Soviet-Arab connection this study will begin with the first substantial contacts in 1955.

### III. THE FOUNDATIONS OF SOVIET MIDDLE EASTERN POLICY: 1955-1967

#### A. INTRODUCTION

The Soviet Union cannot remain indifferent to the situation arising in the region of the Near and Middle East, since the formation of these blocs and the establishment of foreign military bases on the territories of the countries of the Near and Middle East have direct bearing on the security of the USSR.<sup>16</sup>

This statement, issued by the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 16 April 1955, ushered in a new era in Soviet Middle Eastern policy. Prompted by a desire to counter the Baghdad Pact<sup>17</sup> and prevent other Middle Eastern groupings with links to NATO members, Moscow initiated a broad offensive in the political, economic and military spheres designed to attract Arab clients and deny the West a dominant position in the region. The stunning initial success of this Soviet policy can best be attributed to what one author termed "a singularly happy concatenation of events"<sup>18</sup> in which emerging Soviet interests in the region coincided with revolutionary trends in the Arab states.

This chapter will cover the period from 1955, when the first Soviet-Egyptian arms agreement signalled the beginning of Moscow's political and military involvement in the Middle East, to 1967, when the catastrophic defeat of the Egyptian Army at the hands of the Israelis radically altered the Soviet-Egyptian relationship and forced Moscow to take on commitments previously unheard of in a non-communist country. To understand the importance of 1967 as a watershed in Soviet Middle Eastern policy, one must first discuss the transformation of Soviet policies over the course of the previous twelve years.

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<sup>16</sup>Cited in Rubinstein, *Red Star on the Nile*, p. 4.

<sup>17</sup>The Baghdad Pact was signed in 1955 by Turkey, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, and Great Britain. While the United States chose not to sign the treaty, American civil and military representatives were active on the various committees of the organization, making the United States a member in fact, if not in name, of the Baghdad Alliance. See George Lenczowski, *The Middle East in World Affairs* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 796.

<sup>18</sup>Walter Z. Laqueur, *The Soviet Union and the Middle East* (New York: Praeger, 1959), p. 161.

Three major factors combined to make 1955 a critical year for Soviet policy in the Middle East. First, the collapse of the European empires after the Second World War brought about circumstances favorable for the Soviet penetration of the Middle East. Colonial administrations were succeeded by "progressive-nationalist" states. These regimes came to power demanding an end to Western domination and exhibited, as Walter Laqueur observed "an overwhelming desire to defy the West."<sup>19</sup> Additionally, the governments of the radical Arab states espoused economic and political values and methods compatible with those of the Soviet Union, such as state controlled industrialization, state imposed central planning and single party government. This commonality of beliefs and goals made countries such as Egypt or Syria susceptible to Soviet ideas and potential allies of the Soviet Union.<sup>20</sup>

Second, the Soviets benefitted from the inability of Western policymakers to formulate a common Middle Eastern policy. The serious divisions between the British, French and Americans over the correct approach to the Middle East problem would culminate in the Suez Canal Crisis of 1956. In the early 1950's the West was unable to adjust to Arab nationalism, and its fixation on alliance systems, such as the Baghdad Pact, served only to polarize regional rivalries. Few Arabs accepted Western protestations that there was a fundamental difference between the freedom of the West and the tyranny of the Soviet Union. Having experienced Western imperialism, Arab skepticism in this regard was certainly understandable. As one Arab writer observed at the time:

The majority of Arabs, opposed as they were to Communist doctrine, were nevertheless far more concerned with their own unhappy experiences at the hands of the West. For it was the West that was exercising tyranny over Arab fortunes and inflicting grave injustice in Palestine. If the West traditionally stood for liberty and justice, in its dealings with the Arabs it had betrayed these very ideals. The East-West conflict appeared to be more of a duel between power blocs and national interests than a contest between good and evil.<sup>21</sup>

Even the United States, unable to dissociate itself from its NATO allies who were former imperial powers, remained estranged from the new Arab states despite a

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<sup>19</sup>Laqueur, p. 214.

<sup>20</sup>George Lenczowski, *Soviet Advances in the Middle East* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1972), p. 1.

<sup>21</sup>Fayez A. Sayegh, "Arab Nationalism Today," *Current History* 33 (November 1957): 285.

substantial reserve of pro-American feeling in many Arab countries, including Egypt.<sup>22</sup> One reason was that American foreign policy in the early 1950's was dominated by what has been described as "International McCarthyism"<sup>23</sup> which automatically condemned as communist inspired any effort to alter the international status-quo. Finally, Western support for Israel was universally condemned throughout the Arab world.

The third major factor was the relaxation of self-imposed restraints on Soviet foreign policy. Freed from Stalin's confining "two camp" doctrine, Soviet policy initiatives were brilliantly timed to take full advantage of the breakdown in relations between the Arab states and the West. In direct contrast with the West, the Soviet Union presented itself as sympathetic to Arab nationalism, in favor of Arab unity, and solidly anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist. However before Moscow could fully benefit from the dissolution of the status-quo in the Middle East, there had to be a fundamental reinterpretation of Marxist-Leninist ideology as it applied to the developing world.

## **B. REINTERPRETING COMMUNIST DOCTRINE**

### **1. Soviet Policies under Lenin and Stalin**

Early Soviet policy towards the Middle East must be viewed in the wider context of Soviet policy toward the Third World. Lenin viewed the underdeveloped colonial countries as "the weakest link" in the imperialist-colonialist system and credited them with substantial revolutionary potential. Liberation movements were seen as natural allies of the socialist revolution, even those led by bourgeois-nationalist elements. In 1920 the Second Comintern Congress urged all communist parties to support struggles for self-determination. However, when the Soviet state came under pressure from nationalist movements inside its own borders (Caucasus, Central Asia) these movements were brutally crushed and Moscow's interest in promoting self-determination declined accordingly. In the late 1920's and 1930's, Soviet objectives in the Third World were pursued by such tools of Soviet influence as the Comintern and lesser front organizations. Even this limited involvement was curtailed in the late 1930's when Stalin's desire for a "collective security" alliance system with the Western

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<sup>22</sup>Ivar Spector, "Soviet Foreign Policy in the Arab World," *Current History* 36 (January 1959): 17.

<sup>23</sup>Laqueur, p. 319.

powers to combat Hitler forced an abandonment of efforts to ferment trouble for the Western colonial powers.<sup>24</sup>

Despite the rapid disintegration of the colonial empires after the Second World War, the Soviet Union remained disinterested in the affairs of the developing world. Involvement was limited to support for subversive Communist organizations in such places as China, Indochina, and Malaya. A cautious attitude was adopted towards the Middle East as Stalin waited to see whether the Arab League would adopt a "reactionary" or "progressive" course of action. Stalin's eventual decision that the Arab League was a British agency and "an instrument in the struggle against the national liberation movement in the Middle East"<sup>25</sup> was indicative of his division of the post-war world into two "camps", one socialist and the other imperialist, while denying the existence of a neutral camp between the two. According to this theory, the governments of the newly formed nations, since they were generally nationalist and not truly socialist, were members of the imperialist camp. Stalin refused to believe that political emancipation could be achieved under the leadership of bourgeois nationalists. As one prominent Soviet Third World specialist pointed out, "Stalin's theory of colonial revolution proceeds from the fact that the solution of the colonial problem . . . is impossible without a proletarian revolution and the overthrow of imperialism."<sup>26</sup>

Stalin's failure to exploit the differences between the Third World nationalists and the imperial powers delayed efforts to extend Soviet influence into the developing countries for several years. In fact, this policy was in many ways dangerously counterproductive. Stalin's dogmatic sectarian approach generated a reaction in the West that increased the power of anti-communist politicians and spurred the development of the chain of anti-Soviet alliances around the periphery of the Soviet Union.<sup>27</sup> Stalin's rigid policies were not to change during his lifetime. Only after his death in 1953 were Soviet decisionmakers free to formulate policies necessary to exploit the anti-Western sentiments and Socialist sympathies of the developing world.

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<sup>24</sup>An excellent summation of Soviet policies towards the Third World can be found in Alexander R. Alexiev, *The New Soviet Strategy in the Third World*, Rand Note N-1995-AF, (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1983), pp. 3-4.

<sup>25</sup>Laqueur, p. 150.

<sup>26</sup>Prof. Ivan Potekhin, cited in Alexiev, p. 5.

<sup>27</sup>Jon D. Glassman, *Arms for the Arabs: The Soviet Union and the War in the Middle East* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), p. 178. The Baghdad Pact was one in this chain of alliances.

## 2. Changes under Khrushchev

Soviet policies and attitudes towards the Third World changed dramatically in the mid-1950's under the leadership of Nikita Khrushchev. Khrushchev liberated the Soviet Union from its self-imposed post-war isolationism and Russia emerged as an actor on the international scene. In order to promote a more active global strategy many of the more rigid doctrinal principles of the Stalin era were either dropped or radically modified to provide an ideological foundation for Khrushchev's new course. Specifically, Soviet policymakers produced a formula that justified Soviet relations with bourgeoisie nationalist governments in pre-capitalist societies.

The most important fundamental change adopted by the new Soviet leadership was the abandonment of the Stalinist precept of the inevitability of war between the two opposing social systems. In its place Khrushchev proclaimed the possibility, or perhaps necessity, of "peaceful coexistence". This theory of peaceful coexistence had two corolaries of particular relevance to Soviet relations in the developing world. The first affirmed that a peaceful road to socialism was possible, thus repudiating the Stalinist belief that socialism could only be achieved by rigidly following the Soviet model of a "proletarian revolution." The second corolary rejected the "two camp" theory and allowed Soviet policymakers to view the Third World as an independent factor, and more importantly, as a potential ally.

Khrushchev's recognition of the growing importance of the Third World, and his desire to harness its anti-Western sentiments to the Soviet cause, were evident in his report to the Central Committee during the 20th Congress of the CPSU in 1956. The First Secretary declared that the "disintegration of the imperialist colonial system has become the most significant trend of our era." He later announced that, "the new period in world history, predicted by Lenin, when the peoples of the East play an active part in deciding the destinies of the whole world . . . has arrived."<sup>28</sup> Khrushchev sought to attract this new element to the Socialist camp with his "zone of peace" theory. According to this formula, the Soviet Union and the "peace zone" of the developing world had common interests and goals and must inevitably unite in a common front against imperialist aggression.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Cited in Alexiev, p. 6.

<sup>29</sup>Alexiev p. 6.



The Soviet doctrinal shift aided Moscow's acceptance of the course of events in the developing world. Since it was accepted that independence from colonial rule could be achieved without a Soviet-style proletarian revolution, the establishment of a national-democratic state could be viewed as a positive first step towards socialism, even if it was initially based on capitalist principles. The break with imperialism achieved by the bourgeoisie nationalists was seen as a necessary prerequisite to the eventual transition to complete independence and socialism. Most significantly, this alteration of ideology defined the national bourgeoisie as a progressive force that was worthy of Soviet support. Since these "revolutionary" democrats were making a "constructive effort to build a new society,"<sup>30</sup> Kremlin policymakers could justify turning a blind eye to their non-Marxist politics. This policy also diminished the role of the proletariat and limited the importance of local Communist parties. Relations were frequently carried out at a state-to-state rather than a party-to-party level, particularly in the Arab states.

The modification of Soviet ideology was a purely political initiative. In the Middle East, for example, the change was not generated by Soviet Middle East experts or a dramatic reappraisal of Marxist-Leninist doctrine. Instead, as Walter Laqueur observed:

The Middle East experts modified their approach after, not before, the politicians did. . . . If there had been a Leninist reappraisal of the Middle Eastern situation, it was carried out by the diplomats and the Presidium rather than by the experts who followed a lead given from above.<sup>31</sup>

The downgrading of the importance of indigenous Communist parties, the promotion of state-to-state relations, and the *ex post facto* alteration of Marxist-Leninist doctrine reveals the opportunism behind Khrushchev's policies. To enlist the Third World states in the Socialist cause, Khrushchev rationalized the more unfortunate aspects of their national governments.

The Soviet push to increase their involvement in the Third World, and their willingness to equivocate on longstanding Marxist-Leninist principles, was based on a conviction that the developing nations, if given encouragement and support, would voluntarily accept the Soviet model of development. Since many of these states were

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<sup>30</sup>Soviet theorist Rostislav Ulyanovski, cited in Alexiev, p. 7.

<sup>31</sup>Laqueur, p. 156.

at a pre-industrial, pre-capitalist stage of development when they attained independence, the Soviets further adapted Communist ideology to allow certain countries to bypass the capitalist state of development and progress directly to socialism, assuming they received the active guidance of the socialist community. Substantial economic assistance was provided to help pre-capitalist countries build an industrial base and hasten the transition to socialism.<sup>32</sup> Between 1955 and 1965, five billion dollars in economic credits and grants were extended to Third World nations in addition to four billion dollars in military assistance provided to 16 developing nations during the same period.<sup>33</sup> At all times the Soviet Union presented itself as a selfless defender of the developing world against imperialist aggression, as well as a source of desperately needed financial and political support.

Moscow had good reason to be optimistic over the prospects for world socialism during the mid-1950's. The collapse of the Western imperial systems forced a major restructuring of the international balance of power that would certainly benefit the Soviet Union. Although few of these independence movements could be classified as true "proletarian revolutions," they generally advocated certain elements of socialism, such as centrally planned economies and single party systems, and were also fundamentally anti-Western. The forces of imperialism seemed exhausted, leading Khrushchev to observe that the victory of socialism was "just over the horizon."<sup>34</sup> However, when the Soviets applied their new theories to individual Arab states, they learned that what worked well in theory could be exceedingly difficult to apply in practice. Although these states were generally anti-Western, they were also profoundly anti-communist and their leaders had no intention of substituting Soviet domination for Western imperialism. The difficulty of bringing a Soviet style system to an Arab country was made abundantly clear to the Soviet Union from the very beginning of its relations with Egypt.

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<sup>32</sup>Ivar Spector, "Russia and Afro-Asian Neutralism," *Current History* 37 (November 1959): 278. In this article Professor Spector argued that the Soviet goal behind building industry in Arab states was to create an Arab "proletariat." This theory is repeated by Mohamed Heikal in comments found in the final chapter of *The Sphinx and the Commissar*.

<sup>33</sup>*The Soviet Union and the Third World: A Watershed in Great Party Policy*, Report to the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, Washington, DC, May 8, 1977. p. 25. Cited in Alexiev, p. 8.

<sup>34</sup>Cited in Alexiev, p. 9.

## C. EGYPT

### 1. Background

The transformation of Soviet Third World policy was apparent in the change in the Soviet attitude towards Egypt between 1952 to 1955. In 1952 the Egyptian revolutionary regime, headed by General Naguib and Colonel Nasser, was described in the *Soviet Encyclopedia* as a 'regime of reactionary officers linked with the USA' which had "attempted savage repression of the workers."<sup>35</sup> By 1955 the Soviet perception of the Egyptian Republic had undergone a sweeping reappraisal and Egypt soon became Moscow's pioneering adventure in political and military relations with a non-communist state.

As noted earlier, the opening of Soviet relations with the Third World did not wait for the modification of Soviet ideology. Discussions with the Egyptians were taking place as Soviet doctrine was being rethought; Soviet ideas on neutralism, peaceful co-existence and revolutionary democracy evolved to a considerable extent from their Egyptian experience.<sup>36</sup> The attraction between the Soviet Union and Egypt was based on a convergence of the emerging Soviet policy towards the Third World and the foreign and domestic policies adopted by Egypt's new President, Gamal Nasser, who was by 1955 the dominant personality in Egypt's revolutionary government. Soviet and Egyptian decisionmakers found common ground on several key issues, providing the Soviet Union with an opportunity to gain a foothold in the Middle East.

### 2. Converging Interests

In many ways Nasser's aims paralleled those of Moscow. The first major point of agreement was neutralism. Nasser was one of the Third World's foremost advocates of the non-aligned movement and had played a prominent role at the Bandung Conference in April 1955.<sup>37</sup> Nasser's neutralism dovetailed neatly with the Soviet decision to divide the world into three camps and to accept the concept of neutralism in the "peace zone" of the Third World. It was also an important element

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<sup>35</sup>Mohamed Heikal, *The Sphinx and the Commissar* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), p. 53.

<sup>36</sup>Lenczowski, *Soviet Advances in the Middle East*, p. 75.

<sup>37</sup>The Bandung Conference was held in Bandung, Indonesia 18-24 April 1955. The conference was an Indonesian initiative and was co-sponsored by Burma, Ceylon, India, and Pakistan. Primary topics of discussion included the reluctance of the West to negotiate on Asian matters, increased U.S.-Chinese tensions, and opposition to colonialism. Twenty-four Asian and African nations sent delegations to the conference.

behind Nasser's vehement opposition to the Baghdad Pact because he viewed the alliance as a "foreign" pact that drew the Arabs into an alliance with Western "imperialists" and endangered Arab solidarity. Any criticism of the Baghdad Pact was welcomed by the Soviets who had already attacked the alliance as part of an effort to place a 'cordon sanitaire' around the Soviet Union.

A second factor was anti-colonialism. Nasser rapidly became a recognized figure in the Third World's struggle for liberation. Soviet association with Nasser opened the door to liberation movements throughout Africa, the Middle East and elsewhere because Nasser provided assistance, either directly or indirectly, to nationalist revolutionaries in Algeria, Angola, Somalia, and the Congo. In all these instances there was a convergence of Soviet and Egyptian policies with Western imperialism serving as a common target for hostility. The high point of Nasser's anti-colonialism was the nationalization of the Suez Canal, an effort undertaken with the Soviet Union's full approval.

Third, Egypt's revolutionary government pursued a policy of socialist economic development. Although Arab socialism differed in several important aspects from Soviet communism, a common reliance on central planning, and the state management and ownership of the most significant elements of the economy, provided a link between the economic principles of Egypt and Russia. Egypt provided an excellent example of the "non-capitalist path of development" then receiving recognition in Soviet political theory. For its part the USSR was extremely generous in its economic aid to Egypt.

Finally, it is impossible to over-emphasize the importance of arms transfers to the development of the Soviet - Egyptian relationship. Moscow's willingness to sell arms to Cairo in 1955 laid the ground work for the entire Soviet - Egyptian rapprochement. Nasser's search for an arms source began after an Israeli army raid on an Egyptian army headquarters in the Gaza Strip<sup>38</sup> and was further prompted by rumors of major French arms deliveries to Israel.<sup>39</sup> Nasser had first turned to the United States for weapons, an indication of the goodwill Egypt still felt towards America. While the request was not rejected outright, the Americans did stipulate that

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<sup>38</sup>Lenczowski, *Soviet Advances in the Middle East*, p. 78. Lenczowski provides a summation of the issues that provided the groundwork for Soviet-Egyptian ties.

<sup>39</sup>Glassman, p. 10. French shipments to Israel were cloaked in secrecy and shipments were received at sea, rather than in port. Owing to a lack of information on the precise nature of the deliveries to Israel, the Egyptians were inclined to err on the side of caution.

an American military mission be admitted to supervise their use.<sup>40</sup> Nasser rejected the US offer and turned to the Soviet Union.

Moscow was more than willing to help Egypt, and negotiated an agreement without hesitation and with no strings attached once the Kremlin recognized how attractive such offers were to the Arabs and how much status the Soviet Union could gain in the Middle East at a relatively low price.<sup>41</sup> The Kremlin obviously decided that the political gains outweighed the risk that Nasser might misuse the arms. The initial arms deal was generous; possibly as high as \$200 million. After a second arms shipment in 1956 (total cost of the two shipments was \$336 million), the Egyptian Armed Forces possessed at least 100 tanks, 80 MiG-15 fighters, 30 IL-38 light bombers, plus a substantial quantity of armored vehicles and artillery. The arms were purchased under a twelve-year barter arrangement that exchanged Soviet weapons for Egyptian cotton and rice and allowed Egypt to purchase equipment whose value far exceeded Cairo's foreign exchange holdings.<sup>42</sup> These would be the first of many arms transfer arrangements between the Soviet Union and Egypt; by 1967 arms deliveries to Egypt would total \$1.5 billion.<sup>43</sup>

### 3. Nasser's Objectives

Any examination of Soviet-client relations must also consider the national interests of the client state. An investigation of client objectives is particularly important in the Egyptian case, given the dynamic foreign and domestic aspirations of President Nasser. Even though Nasser was almost entirely dependent on the Soviet Union for military equipment, as well as the bulk of his economic aid,<sup>44</sup> he consistently

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<sup>40</sup>Ali M. Yahya, "Egypt and the Soviet Union, 1955-1972: A Study in the Power of the Small State" (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1981), p. 85. Nasser had turned to the United States for weapons in 1953 and was told he could have all the weapons he wanted, free of charge, but "a number of American experts would have to come with the weapons and the weapons must never be used against a US ally." Since Nasser wanted the weapons for defense against Israel, the offer was rejected. See Anwar Sadat, *In Search of Identity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977) p. 127.

<sup>41</sup>The Soviets did, however, effect this transfer through the use of Czech intermediaries. Glassman attributes the Soviet desire to disguise their involvement in the deal to "fundamental Soviet temerity and the desire to avoid directly challenging the West during this period." See Glassman p. 14.

<sup>42</sup>Glassman, p. 10.

<sup>43</sup>Glassman, p. 55.

<sup>44</sup>From 1945-1965, aid to Egypt from the communist states, primarily the Soviet Union, exceeded aid from the US by about 50% (\$1.441 billion to \$943.1 million). See Lenczowski, *Soviet Advances in the Middle East*, p. 93. Soviet resources were often committed to high profile, high priority projects such as the High Aswan Dam, the Helwan Steel plant and the development of Egyptian oil resources.

viewed Soviet-Egyptian relations in terms of furthering his own aspirations. While it was true that on several key political, economic and military issues there was a convergence of Soviet and Egyptian interests, Nasser's anti-communism, radical Pan-Arabism and stubborn independence led to several bitter clashes between Moscow and Cairo.

Above all Nasser aspired to, and to a substantial degree achieved, a leadership role in the Arab world; Egyptian foreign and domestic policies were formulated accordingly. For example, it has been argued that Nasser's opposition to the Baghdad Pact was inspired at least as much by his concern about the alliance's potential impact on his leadership role in the region as it was by his concern for Arab solidarity.<sup>45</sup> Nasser's extreme sensitivity towards any possible interference with his foreign policy can be explained by his direct linkage of foreign and domestic affairs. He saw the solution to Egypt's economic woes in the pursuit of an active foreign policy.

Nasser believed that internal weakness was the primary reason that foreign powers had been able to dominate Egypt's history and considered a modernized, smoothly functioning economy as a necessary precondition for safeguarding Egyptian independence.<sup>46</sup> The first task of the revolutionary government was to correct Egypt's economic deficiencies. However, it soon became apparent that Egypt lacked the financial resources necessary for the regeneration of the Egyptian economy without extensive outside assistance. Nasser's foreign policy was therefore designed to project Egypt to a position of prominence in regional and international affairs and use this position to obtain foreign backing for his ambitious economic plans. Nasser explained his plan to convert international political influence into economic prosperity:

Without our foreign policy we would not be able to build our internal structure, . . . On the volume of our work in the international field depends our influence in international affairs. . . . Without external contacts, and without our external activities, we could not implement the development plan.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Specifically, Nasser feared that Iraq, a signer of the Baghdad Pact, would be in a position to challenge Egypt as the leader of the Arab world. Yahya, p. 39.

<sup>46</sup>Yahya, p. 39.

<sup>47</sup>Gamal Abdel Nasser, *Address by President Gamal Abdel Nasser at the Opening Meeting of the Second Session of the National Assembly, November 12, 1964* (Cairo: National Publication House, n.d.), cited in Yahya, p. 35. Yahya provides a brief explanation on the connections between Nasser's national and international policies.

Furthermore, an active foreign policy might distract the people from Egypt's ongoing financial crisis, either by focusing their attention on larger regional issues or by providing convenient non-Egyptian scapegoats for the country's economic turmoil.

After involving Egypt in international affairs, Nasser was able to exploit the competitive interests of both the United States and the Soviet Union. Nasser became adept at maintaining his bargaining position between the two superpowers and collected economic aid from both Moscow and Washington. In the period 1957-1961 Nasser secured \$772.5 million in aid from Western sources and \$482.9 million from Eastern sources (not including military credits).<sup>48</sup> Nasser's carefully constructed policy of "positive neutrality" allowed him to secure his position between the two superpowers.<sup>49</sup> He successfully limited outside interference in his domestic policy by shifting his aid requests between Washington and Moscow and skillfully playing off the rivalry between the two superpowers. In 1958 he justified Egypt's policy:

As we insisted on liberating our country from Western influence, we also insist that there should be no<sup>50</sup> foreign influence, whether Communist or non-Communist in our country.

While Moscow could accept Nasser's "positive neutrality" and his occasional flirtations with the West, a more serious source of friction between Moscow and Cairo was Nasser's anti-communism. Nasser refused to give Egypt's indigenous Communist parties a role in his 'progressive' revolution. Instead he periodically persecuted and imprisoned party members.<sup>51</sup> His dislike of Communism was made clear in an article on the Egyptian Revolution he submitted to *Foreign Affairs* in 1955:

The greatest internal enemies of the people are the Communists who serve foreign rulers, the Moslem Brotherhood which still seeks to rule by assassination in an era that has outlived such<sup>52</sup> practices, and the old time politicians who would like to reestablish exploitation.

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<sup>48</sup>Yahya, p. 75.

<sup>49</sup>Spector, "Russia and Afro-Asian Neutralism," p. 272. In a *Life* interview Nasser warned Americans that his criticism of the Soviet Union did not mean that he was aligning his country with the United States. *Life*, 20 July 1959, p. 97.

<sup>50</sup>Gamal Abdel Nasser, *President Gamal Abdel Nasser on Non-Alignment* (Cairo: Information Department, n.d.), cited in Yahya, p. 78.

<sup>51</sup>It should be noted, however, that the Egyptian Communist Party was small, fragmented, dominated by foreigners and without an audience, there being virtually no "proletariat" in Egypt at the time. Heikal, *The Sphinx and the Commissar*, p. 39.

<sup>52</sup>Gamal Abdel Nasser, "The Egyptian Revolution," *Foreign Affairs* 33 (January

Nasser had never concealed his feelings towards Communism from the Russians and had always been careful to maintain Soviet-Egyptian relations on a strictly state-to-state level. This policy was doctrinally acceptable to Moscow, given the reinterpretation of Communist ideology and the resultant diminishment of the role of local Communist parties. According to Heikal, Nasser was told that "the Soviet Union had nothing to do with local Communists; what Nasser did with his Communists was a purely domestic Egypt affair."<sup>53</sup> If Moscow had hoped that a mixture of diplomacy and financial generosity would eventually persuade Nasser to end his persecution of Egyptian Communists, these hopes were to prove unfounded. Nasser ignored Soviet suggestions that he temporize his anti-communism, instead increasing his harassment and extending it to Syria after Egypt and Syria joined to form the United Arab Republic (U.A.R) in February 1958. Despite Khrushchev's concern about the impact of Nasser's anti-Communist campaign on the very active Syrian Communist Party, the Soviet Union chose to sacrifice ideology to preserve its most promising connection in the Arab states. This was probably done out of fear that excessive pressure on Nasser to modify his anti-Communist stance risked pushing him to the West.

Khrushchev proved less willing to tolerate Nasser's reaction to the Iraqi revolution in 1958, and a short, but bitter exchange followed between Moscow and Cairo. Nasser, who backed the nationalist faction of the coalition that had toppled the pro-Western Iraqi government, became alarmed at the increasing power of the Iraqi Communist Party.<sup>54</sup> He expressed his concerns in a message delivered to Khrushchev through the Russian Ambassador to Cairo. Nasser took a very strong stand on Iraq:

We consider that the fate of Iraq affects us and we are not going to leave it under the Communists at any price. . . . You must decide whether you want to deal with the Arab people or with a few isolated Communist parties.<sup>55</sup>

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1955): 209.

<sup>53</sup>Heikal, *The Sphinx and the Commissar*, p. 60. This message was delivered by Dmitry Shepilov, editor of *Pravda*, who was sent to Cairo in 1955 to make an assessment of Nasser for the Kremlin.

<sup>54</sup>For a description of events in Iraq see Lenczowski, *Soviet Advances in the Middle East*, pp. 126-128.

<sup>55</sup>Mohamed Heikal, *The Cairo Documents* (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1973), p. 140.



The Egyptian President was seeking to force Moscow to choose once again between supporting its ideological comrades or pursuing regional ambitions. This time the Soviets refused to appease their Arab partner. Instead, Khrushchev openly criticized Nasser in a March 1959 speech in which he dismissed the President of Egypt as a "passionate and hot-headed young man" who had taken on himself "more than his stature permitted."<sup>56</sup> These comments intensified Nasser's defiance. In response to Khrushchev's remarks he denounced the subservience of local Communist parties to Moscow:

Today . . . having fought the battle with imperialism and its collaborators, we are now faced by a new battle against subservience and Communism. . . . We shall defeat Communism. . . . No power in the world will ever again place us in a sphere of influence. . . . We accept neither subservience nor imperialism. We are determined that our policy shall be an independent one.<sup>57</sup>

In April 1959 Khrushchev countered Nasser's outbursts with a long letter that clearly expressed his displeasure. First, the Soviet Premier explained Soviet arms transfer policies,<sup>58</sup> expressed "surprise" at Nasser's belittling of Soviet efforts during the Suez Crisis and criticized Nasser for his interference in the affairs of other Arab states. Khrushchev then reminded the Egyptian President of his dependence on Soviet aid and made a veiled threat to suspend economic assistance:

We are told, Mr. President, that at the meetings now held in the United Arab Republic shouts of "No rubles, no dollars" can be heard, not without encouragement on the part of the local authorities, and some politicians even express openly their doubts as to the unselfishness of Soviet aid. . . . It is well known that the Soviet Union has never imposed and does not impose its aid upon anybody, but renders it only if asked to do so. . . . If you are of the opinion that the aid which we agreed to give, at your request, to the United Arab Republic is a burden to you, if you want to get rid of rubles which we have given under existing agreements, you are free to do so. You may rest assured that this will in no way offend us and we shall willingly meet your wish. . . . We do not wish to be obtrusive in giving aid to countries which do not need it and vilify us instead of being grateful. . . . And does not the present situation, when a campaign is going on in the United Arab Republic against the Soviet Union, and consequently against the Soviet people, give rise to complications for discharging our obligations under the agreement for the construction of the Aswan Dam? . . .

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<sup>56</sup>*Middle East Affairs*, 10 (May 1959), p. 205. Cited in Yahya, p. 116.

<sup>57</sup>Royal Institute, *Documents*, pp. 299-302. Cited in Yahya, p. 117.

<sup>58</sup>Khrushchev told Nasser that he had denied Egyptian requests for "intermediate range rockets" on the grounds that "in the state of excitement largely caused by the prevailing situation you might have undertaken some undesirable action leading to war." See Heikal, *The Cairo Documents*, p. 142.

Your country also may yet need, and not only once, the Soviet Union's help and its friendly and equal cooperation. Here I should like to refer to a well-known Russian proverb: Don't spit into the well - you may need its water to drink.<sup>59</sup>

Nasser's behavior was not greatly affected by such admonishments because Soviet anger was rarely translated into action. At the height of Nasser's persecution of local Communists the Soviets fulfilled their long-term contractual obligations, and even signed new deals of considerable importance to Egypt's economy. Millions of rubles were committed to the Aswan Dam, railroad development, and industrial and agricultural projects.<sup>60</sup> Several major arms deals were also negotiated between the Soviet Union and Egypt during the time leading up to the 1967 war. These deals, with major equipment purchased, were:

- 1957 - \$150 million (170 MiG 17)
- 1959 - \$120 million (120 MiG 19)
- 1961 - \$170 million (ground equipment)
- 1963 - \$220-500 million (MiG 21, TU-16, T-54, SA-2)
- 1965 - \$310 million (no new weapons).<sup>61</sup>

This was approximately two thirds of the amount the Soviet Union spent on military grants to all developing nations outside the Communist bloc between 1955 and 1966.<sup>62</sup>

Soviet-Egyptian relations improved considerably during the early 1960's. This new atmosphere can be partially attributed to Soviet approval of Egyptian land reform and the nationalization of Egyptian industry. An increasingly important factor in Moscow's patience with its often stubborn Arab client, however, was the Soviet Union's desperate need for military facilities in Egypt, due to the introduction of the American Polaris missile to the Eastern Mediterranean. Good relations with Egypt became vitally important to Soviet national security and provided a new incentive for Soviet aid to Cairo.

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<sup>59</sup>The edited text of the letter appears in Heikal, *The Cairo Documents*, pp. 141-147.

<sup>60</sup>Yahya, p. 137.

<sup>61</sup>Glassman, pp. 24-28. In 1961 enough material was supplied to equip six Egyptian infantry and armored divisions, and the Egyptian armed forces were reorganized to imitate the Soviet model.

<sup>62</sup>Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), *Arms Trade Registers* (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T Press, 1975), pp. 154-155.

## D. SYRIA

Before discussing the military dimension of the Soviet Egyptian relationship, it is necessary to consider briefly the concurrent development of Soviet-Syrian ties. The turmoil that swept the Middle East in the 1950's also provided Moscow with an opportunity to become involved in Syria. While Egypt would remain the focus of Soviet regional attentions, Moscow's support for the "progressive" revolutionary regime in Damascus initiated a relationship which continues to the present day.

As in Egypt, Soviet success in Syria can be largely attributed to the rise of Arab nationalism throughout the Middle East in the mid-1950's and the subsequent wave of anti-Western sentiment. In 1955 an unstable alliance of nationalist and radical elements seized control of Syria.<sup>63</sup> The new rulers were anxious to emulate their Egyptian counterparts by defying the West and asserting national sovereignty. Following the Egyptian lead, the Syrians negotiated an arms agreement with the Soviet Union in January 1956, in which Syria received a number of outdated T-34 tanks in a barter arrangement for cotton.<sup>64</sup> The supply of arms led to further cooperation with Soviet and bloc governments, including naval goodwill visits, commencing in October 1957, and financial assistance for several Syrian development projects.

Several Soviet or Communist bloc aid programs were initiated in 1957. In March an agreement was reached with Czechoslovakia to build a refinery in Homs. In August Moscow promised a loan of \$140 million to Syria for economic and military aid. This was followed in October 1957 by a more specific economic agreement, calling for 19 development projects at a total cost of \$579 million.<sup>65</sup> Syria's gross national product doubled in the post war period and between 1950 and 1956 increased at an annual rate of eight percent.

There was also a degree of ideological affinity between Syria and the Soviet Union not found in Moscow's relations with any other Middle Eastern state. Syria had moved towards the Soviet Union voluntarily and there was substantial popular support for Soviet-Syrian ties. There was a strong and active Communist Party in

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<sup>63</sup>An explanation of Syrian internal politics during this period may be found in Lenczowski, *Soviet Advances in the Middle East*, pp. 102-106.

<sup>64</sup>Vivian Turnbull, "Soviet Arms Transfers and Strategic Access in the Third World" (Masters Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 1984), p. 59.

<sup>65</sup>Turnbull, p. 105.

Syria, something of a novelty for the Middle East and a source of attraction for Moscow. Further, Syrian leaders were firmly in favor of solidarity with Moscow. In 1956 President Kuwatly stated:

Our army will stand by the side of the Soviet army in defense against aggression whenever two armies are required to defend peace and freedom in the world. . . . The Soviet Union is Syria's best friend.<sup>66</sup>

The intensity of Syrian efforts to encourage ties with the Soviet Union actually proved to be something of a drawback. The substantial Soviet assistance agreements signed in 1957 had strengthened Soviet connections in Syria and increased the power of the Syrian Communist Party, but it had also alarmed the Baath (nationalist) party. To avert a feared Communist takeover, the nationalists turned to President Nasser with a proposal to unite Syria and Egypt into the United Arab Republic (U.A.R). This union was proclaimed in February 1958. One of Nasser's primary conditions before agreeing to the union was the dismantling of the Syrian party system which he viewed as an impediment to Arab unity. This entailed the dissolution of the Syrian Communist Party, a move which was opposed both by Communists in Syria and by Moscow. As noted earlier, Nasser's anti-Communist measures in Syria were a cause of considerable irritation to Khrushchev, though no tangible steps were taken to force Nasser to change his policies. Despite an active anti-Communist campaign in Syria, the Soviet Union actually increased its aid agreements with Syria.

In 1961, Syria abruptly withdrew from the U.A.R. The change in government brought about some short term benefits for the Soviet Union. However, the instability that characterized Syrian domestic politics throughout the 1960's limited Soviet involvement in Syria. The pro-Soviet regime of 1961 was replaced in 1963 by an anti-Communist nationalist government which ruled until a left-wing takeover in 1966. This last government improved the political relationship with Moscow, yet differed sharply with the Soviet desire for a peaceful resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict in the wake of the 1967 War. Finally, in 1970, power was seized by Hafez Assad, who remains as President to this day.

Several parallels may be drawn between Soviet relations with Egypt and Syria. Both were founded on Moscow's ability to manipulate anti-Western sentiments and willingness to support Arab nationalism. In each case an arms agreement opened the

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<sup>66</sup>Cited in Laquer, p. 253.

door to further Soviet involvement, including a massive infusion of Soviet developmental aid. Relations with both countries survived incidents of open anti-communism and defiance of Soviet desires. This last item is the most intriguing, for Moscow maintained, and often increased, its level of economic and military support to these countries, while turning a blind eye to the persecution of local Communists and ignoring anti-Soviet rhetoric. Since neither country had progressed significantly down the road towards socialism, or expressed any interest in modeling itself on the Soviet Union, it would be reasonable to ask why Moscow chose to continue its considerable support to its two clients. The answer is that despite setbacks in the political relationships, Moscow also recognized the military necessity of close ties with Egypt and Syria.

### E. THE MILITARY DIMENSION

The Russians have had an interest in the Middle East for centuries. This interest has taken on a variety of forms, including trade, religious expansionism, and national security. Above all, Soviet involvement in Middle Eastern affairs was justified on grounds of proximity, specifically a concern for the security of Russia's southern borders. An Egyptian observer once characterized Soviet Middle Eastern policy in this way:

From the point of view of Russia as a state the first consideration must be that of geography - of proximity. Whenever Brezhnev or any of the other Soviet leaders talks about the 'legitimate interests' of the Soviet Union in the Middle East he always begins by mentioning the word proximity.<sup>67</sup>

Moscow has always feared Western domination of the Middle East and this fear was particularly acute in 1955. Where the Soviet Union had a buffer composed of the Eastern European states to guard its western boundaries, and a friendship treaty with China to guard its Asian flank, it bordered directly on the Middle East, specifically on Turkey and Iran, both signers of the Baghdad Pact. This is why the Baghdad Pact, which placed potentially hostile states directly on Russia's borders, caused such great concern in Moscow and led to the 1955 Ministry of Foreign Affairs statement which spoke of events in the Middle East having a "direct bearing on the security of the USSR."<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>Heikal, *The Sphinx and the Commissar*, p. 35.

<sup>68</sup>Cited in Rubinstein, *Red Star on the Nile*, p. 4.

A constant consideration for Soviet policymakers was the potential impact of Middle East disturbances on their own national security. This concern would provide a consistent theme in Soviet policy statements during crisis situations in the Middle East. Several examples appeared in 1967 during the weeks of tension that preceded the June War. Israel was warned that it was "playing with fire . . . in an area near the borders of the Soviet Union"<sup>69</sup> and later an attempt was made to control events by expressing Moscow's interest in "The maintenance of peace and security in the area directly adjacent to the Soviet borders touches upon the vital interest of the Soviet peoples."<sup>70</sup> As sensitive as Moscow was to Middle Eastern affairs, there was very little the Kremlin could do militarily to alter regional events. This fact became painfully obvious to the Soviets soon after Soviet - Egyptian relations commenced in 1955.

When Great Britain, France and Israel attacked Egypt during the 1956 Suez Crisis, the Soviet Union was unable to render military assistance. Mohamed Heikal, in his book *The Sphinx and the Commissar*, describes a conversation that took place between Syrian President Kuwatly, Khrushchev and Marshall Zhukov. Kuwatly, who was in Moscow at the time of the crisis, went to the Soviet leader to insist that the Soviets rescue Egypt. Zhukov's response reflected Moscow's frustration:

Zhukov produced a map of the Middle East and spread it on the table. Then, turning to Kuwatly, he said "How can we go to the aid of Egypt? Tell me! Are we supposed to send our armies through Turkey, Iran and then into Syria and Iraq and on into Israel and so eventually attack the British and French forces?"<sup>71</sup>

The Suez Crisis demonstrated that the Soviet Union, as a traditional land power, lacked the power projection capability to provide military support to an overseas client. Despite Moscow's declarations of full support in the weeks preceding the Suez Crisis, the Soviets were forced to exercise extreme caution during the most critical days of the conflict. Ironically, it was the intervention of the United States that saved Soviet prestige. Khrushchev's threats of military intervention came well after the crisis had reached its peak and the potential need for direct Soviet action had passed.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>Oral statement of the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 7 April 1967, cited in Glassman, p. 38.

<sup>70</sup>Cited in Yahya, p. 171.

<sup>71</sup>Heikal, *The Sphinx and the Commissar*, p. 71.

<sup>72</sup>Francis Fukuyama, *Soviet Threats to Intervene in the Middle East: 1956-1973*, Rand Note 1577-FF (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1980), p. 6.

The Soviet embarrassment in 1956 calls attention to the fact that, despite Moscow's political and economic inroads into Egypt, no military agreements had been negotiated and the Soviet Union had derived no practical military benefits from its relationship with the Egyptians. Somewhat surprisingly, the Soviets initially showed little or no interest in maintaining a military presence in Egypt; although Moscow had provided virtually all of Egypt's military hardware, the USSR had received no naval facilities or airfield rights in return. By the early 1960's, however, a series of events would force a major change in emphasis in Soviet policy as Kremlin decisionmakers became increasingly interested in the military advantages that might be gained from closer relations with Egypt.

In the 1950's Soviet national security interests could be served through political means: by giving Nasser the ability to resist Western influences; by supporting his desire for "non-alignment" and thereby outflanking the Baghdad Pact; and by using Egypt as a showcase to display to other Third World nations the potential benefits of improved relations with the Soviet Union. In the 1960's, the pursuit of military privileges would take precedence as the prime motivating factor of Soviet policy towards Egypt. In the interest of national security, the ideological dispute between Khrushchev and Nasser was toned down and the Soviets became increasingly responsive to Egyptian requests for economic and military aid.

The specific threat that troubled Soviet military planners was the U.S. Sixth Fleet stationed in the Mediterranean. There had always been concern about Russia's vulnerability to the fleet's attack carriers, which could launch aircraft capable of striking key Soviet targets. In the early 1960's the United States was preparing to introduce the Polaris ballistic missile submarine. The Polaris submarine greatly expanded American nuclear strike capabilities and posed a particularly ugly threat to the Soviet Union. The first units to be commissioned carried either the Polaris A-1 or A-2 missiles with ranges of 1370 and 1500 miles respectively, (later upgraded to the A-3 model with a 2500 mile range).<sup>73</sup> Operating from stations in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Polaris could easily target critical industrial areas deep inside Russian territory.

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<sup>73</sup>*Jane's Fighting Ships: 1985-1986*, (London: Jane's Publishing Co., 1986), p. 763. The Polaris program was initiated in 1958 and the first unit was commissioned in 1963. Only five submarines were equipped with the A-1 missile. These were upgraded to the A-3 variant in the mid 1960's.

The Soviet navy was completely unprepared to meet this new sub-surface threat. The breakdown of Soviet-Albanian relations had deprived the Soviets of their only naval facility on the Mediterranean, at Vlone, in May 1961. This meant that, although the Soviets recognized the need for a sizeable naval presence in the Mediterranean to act as a deterrent to the Sixth Fleet and guard the Soviet Union's southern borders, they were completely without the shore facilities needed for supply and replenishment, refueling and repairs. The Soviet navy further suffered from a severe shortage of auxiliary ships and floating drydocks. Finally, there was a requirement for airfields which could provide reconnaissance support and air cover for the fleet.<sup>74</sup> The Soviet military acted vigorously to offset these disadvantages. The acquisition of naval and air facilities on the Mediterranean, and specifically in Egypt, became an imperative of Soviet foreign policy.

Khrushchev, and after 1964 his successors Brezhnev and Kosygin, launched an effort to promote closer ties with Egypt. Economic aid was increased, there were more frequent visits by high ranking officials, and several major arms agreements were signed.<sup>75</sup> The quantity and quality of equipment sent to Egypt also improved significantly. Whereas in earlier deals the Soviets had delivered surplus tanks to Nasser (T-34) they began sending tanks currently in use with Soviet frontline units (T-54).<sup>76</sup> On the eve of the 1967 War the Egyptians possessed the following major weapons systems:

- 350 T-34 and 500 T-54 tanks.
- 30 TU-16 medium bombers.
- 40 IL-28 light bombers.
- 120-160 MiG-21 interceptors.
- 100-150 MiG15/17 fighter-bombers.
- 80 MiG-19 fighter bombers.
- 15-55 SU-7 fighter-bombers.
- Several SA-2 missile batteries.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>Amnon Sella, *Soviet Political and Military Conduct in the Middle East* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), p. 44.

<sup>75</sup>Rubinstein, *Red Star on the Nile*, p. 7.

<sup>76</sup>Glassman, p. 27.

<sup>77</sup>Glassman, p. 44.



As Moscow expanded its military and economic assistance to Egypt, an attempt was made to persuade Nasser to grant the Soviet navy "full and automatic access to Egyptian ports and permanent naval facilities."<sup>78</sup> This request was apparently timed to coincide with the deployment of a permanent Soviet Mediterranean Naval Squadron in 1964 and the delivery of TU-16 bombers and other sophisticated weapons to the Egyptians.<sup>79</sup> All available evidence suggests that Nasser refused the Soviet request. The Soviet navy would remain without facilities on the Mediterranean until 1967 when, following the Egyptian military disaster in the June War, Nasser was in no position to deny the Soviets the military privileges they desired.

## F. SUMMATION

Soviet involvement in the Middle East in the mid-1950's was made possible by the Soviet ability to take advantage of a change in the regional political environment. A fortunate series of circumstances, including the relaxation of Stalinist restraints on Soviet foreign policy, the anti-Western sentiment of the Arab nationalists, and the compatible socio-economic goals of Arab progressivism and Soviet communism, greatly facilitated Soviet penetration of the Middle East. However, the Soviets never viewed their ties with the Arab nationalists as anything more than a tactical alliance within a broader strategy. Soviet policymakers rationalized their support for the bourgeois - nationalists on the grounds that the Arab "progressives" were a necessary transitional stage on the road to socialism. In an effort to retain the loyalty of their Arab clients, Moscow tacitly accepted the persecution of local Communists and, in many cases, dedicated increasing amounts of economic and military assistance, in a belief that the victory of socialism was "just over the horizon."

The Egyptian case provides an excellent example of the difficulties Soviet policymakers faced when they tried to put their new theories into practice. Despite the best efforts of Soviet diplomacy, it proved impossible to overcome Nasser's desire for independent foreign and domestic policies and his vehement anti-communism. The Egyptian President was unwilling to sacrifice his objectives for Soviet friendship. Kremlin decisionmakers could not have been happy with the "road to socialism" chosen by Nasser, as their Egyptian client seemed determined to undermine Soviet policy objectives even as he accepted Soviet military and economic assistance.

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<sup>78</sup>Rubinstein, *Red Star on the Nile*, p. 7.

<sup>79</sup>Glassman, p. 33.

The policymakers in Moscow must have quickly lost any illusions they had about an easy victory for socialism in Egypt. Nevertheless, they continued to pour billions of rubles into the Egyptian economy and armed forces. The reason for this seemingly contradictory foreign policy was national security. Initial Soviet approaches to the Arab World were prompted by a desire to outflank the Baghdad Pact and secure Russia's southern boundaries by preventing Western domination of the Middle East. The Soviets first hoped to accomplish this objective politically, by developing client states, and eventually remolding the Middle East in the Soviet image. After this objective proved a failure their interest in the area remained, driven by the military necessity of countering the threat of the American Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean and specifically the newly deployed Polaris ballistic missile submarines. As the 1960's continued, the Soviet-Egyptian relationship became more oriented towards mutual military needs and lost its pretense of ideological affinities.

By shifting the relationship from the political to the military sphere, Moscow could not avoid becoming the guarantor of Nasser's government. Soviet military and political prestige on a global scale became entangled in the success or failure of the Egyptian armed forces. Although the Soviets were unable to achieve this objective, by gaining footholds in Egypt and Syria they had successfully outflanked the Baghdad Pact and thwarted Western domination of the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean. When the Americans introduced Polaris ballistic missile submarines to the Eastern Mediterranean in the early 1960's, Soviet-Egyptian relations took on a slightly different character. Soviet objectives in Egypt were driven by very precise national security requirements, specifically the need for access to Egyptian naval facilities. In 1967 the Soviets were to gain the naval bases they coveted, but at the cost of becoming deeply involved in the conflicts of the Middle East. Military support for the Arab side in the ongoing Arab-Israeli dispute would become the Soviet mechanism for maintaining their foothold in the Middle East and would weigh heavily in all future policy decisions.

## IV. THE EGYPTIAN CASE

### A. 1967: REARMING EGYPT

#### 1. Introduction

The Arab-Israeli War of June 1967 was an unmitigated disaster for Egypt. All the equipment and training provided by the Soviet Union proved no match for the Israelis on the battlefield. Poor planning and coordination, particularly in air defense, hastened the Egyptian defeat. In less than a week the Israelis captured the Sinai Peninsula and had advanced as far as the East Bank of the Suez Canal. The Egyptian Army was disorganized and demoralized. Material losses alone amounted to over two billion dollars.<sup>80</sup>

The Soviets were faced with some hard policy choices in the aftermath of the war. The stunning defeat of the Arab forces, largely equipped and trained by the Soviet Union, severely damaged Soviet military and political prestige and jeopardized the Soviet position throughout the Middle East. This led to speculation that Moscow might elect to withdraw from the Middle East entirely.<sup>81</sup> The Soviet choice was disengagement, at a substantial financial and political loss and the near certain collapse of the Nasser government, or increased military outlays to stabilize the Nasser regime and re-establish Soviet prestige. The Soviets chose the latter course and embarked on a massive program of military and economic assistance for Egypt. A Central Committee plenum was called to endorse the Soviet policy and to answer charges (mostly from the Chinese) that inadequate support had been provided to the Arabs.<sup>82</sup> Soviet resolve was demonstrated by the replacement of 80% of all Egyptian combat losses within six months.<sup>83</sup> By the end of 1968, the Soviets had committed over three billion dollars and 3000 advisors to the task of rebuilding the Egyptian military.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup>See Rubinstein, *Red Star on the Nile*, p. 29. For a full accounting of Egyptian material losses see Glassman, p. 46. The Egyptian Air Force took exceptionally heavy losses, mostly on the ground, in the first hours of the war.

<sup>81</sup>Rubinstein reports that several State Department analysts were surprised when the Soviets decided not to disengage from the Middle East in 1967. See *Red Star on the Nile*, p. 13 fn.

<sup>82</sup>Glassman, p. 59.

<sup>83</sup>Rubinstein, *Red Star on the Nile*, p. 29.

<sup>84</sup>Rubinstein, p. 70.

The intensification of Soviet involvement in Egypt, particularly the expansion of their military commitment, actively engaged the Soviets in the region's ongoing conflicts and disputes. The regional role of the Soviet Union, the best method of resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the appropriate level of support for Egyptian policy all became topics of discussion and debate within the ruling hierarchy of the Soviet Union.

## 2. Internal Inputs

*Was there evidence of a disagreement between the party and the military regarding the proper conduct of relations?*

A careful review of the Soviet press indicates that as the Soviet involvement in Egypt increased, so did the level of discussion over the best foreign policy to pursue in the Middle East. While no blatantly open arguments or criticisms appeared in the pages of *Pravda* or *Krasnaya Zvezda*, there was a discernible difference in the emphasis given to desires for a peaceful resolution of the Middle East conflict, and the level of risk acceptable to ensure the continued goodwill of the Egyptians.

Soviet party leaders, as represented on the pages of *Pravda*, supported a very moderate, low risk policy towards the Middle East. In particular, they advocated a political solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict and presented ideas for its accomplishment. During the first two years after the war the views of the party leaders centered on three primary themes. The first was support for the Arab cause. This was designed to reassure the Arabs, and warn the rest of the world, that the Soviet Union had not abandoned the Arab cause. Several articles expressing this theme were printed in *Pravda* shortly after the war.

- On July 21, *Pravda* warned that the Israelis were "making a serious mistake in their evaluation of the determination of the Arab states and their friends to defend the cause of peace in the Near East."<sup>85</sup>
- One month later *Pravda* was more specific in describing exactly who the "friends" of the Arab states were: "In their common struggle against the criminal aggression of Israel, the Arabs have the full understanding and resolute support of the Soviet Union, and the other Socialist countries, and the sympathy of all peace loving peoples."<sup>86</sup>

While party leaders were intent upon clarifying their position in support of the Arabs, this support was tempered by a desire to moderate the more radical elements in the Arab states. There was reluctance to be too closely identified with the more

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<sup>85</sup>*Pravda*, 21 July 1967; in: *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 21 August 1967.

<sup>86</sup>*Pravda*, 31 August 1967; in: *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 20 September 1967.

militant Arab demands. As a result, the second theme adopted in *Pravda* articles was a surprisingly evenhanded approach towards distributing the blame for the Arab-Israeli conflict. While there were constant attacks on Israeli "aggression," the more belligerent Arabs came in for their share of criticism.

- On 29 July 1967 *Pravda* blamed the continuing Middle East turmoil on "extremists" on both sides,<sup>87</sup> but specifically accused the Arabs of "seriously aggravating" the situation.
- Near the end of the year, *Pravda* criticized the inability of some Arabs to moderate their demands, "one cannot fail to note that in some Arab capitals hotheads can be found and press organs issue hasty utterances."<sup>88</sup>

Finally, party leaders sought to promote a peaceful resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The vehicle they envisioned for securing a settlement was the United Nations enforcement of Resolution 242 (adopted on 22 November 1967) and the complete withdrawal of Israel forces. This was the third theme of the *Pravda* articles and it remained a constant element of party commentaries until 1969. The articles in *Pravda* stressed the urgency of finding a political solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict which would allow the Soviets to maintain their presence in the region while avoiding the uncertainty of renewed hostilities. Some examples of *Pravda* articles discussing peaceful means to a settlement include:

- On 27 October 1967, *Pravda* suggested that the UN take active measures to bring peace to the Middle East: "There is an objective possibility for restoring peace to the Near East. The Security Council could contribute to the realization of this possibility . . . the decisive condition for liquidating the Near East crisis is the immediate withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Arab territories."<sup>89</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 242 was praised as a "first step" towards a settlement of the situation in an article published just after its UN adoption on 22 November 1967.<sup>90</sup>
- On 23 March 1968, a *Pravda* article justified Soviet support for the Arabs by placing it in the context of performing their obligations as a UN member. "the USSR . . . will aid the victims of aggression, because in so doing they are fulfilling their duty in accordance with the UN charter."<sup>91</sup>
- *Pravda* articles also took care to mention the readiness of the Arab states to achieve a settlement of the crisis in accordance with UN decisions "the Arab states are in a most positive way declaring their readiness and intention to seek a settlement on the basis of the decisions of the Security council."<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> *Pravda*, 29 July 1967; in: Kass, p. 50.

<sup>88</sup> *Pravda*, 27 November 1967; in: *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 20 December 1967.

<sup>89</sup> *Pravda*, 27 October 1967; in: *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 15 November 1967.

<sup>90</sup> *Pravda*, 27 November 1967; in: *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 20 December 1967.

<sup>91</sup> *Pravda*, 23 March 1968; in: *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 10 April 1968.

<sup>92</sup> *Pravda*, 7 November 1968; in: *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 27 November

- Finally, numerous *Pravda* articles, particularly when the Arab-Israeli crisis wore on with no settlement in sight, reflected fears of a new outburst of regional violence. On 7 November 1968 a *Pravda* article observed that it was "the duty of all peace loving states to prevent a dangerous, new explosion in this area."<sup>93</sup> Fears of a new explosion would be seen again in an article published on 25 January 1969 which mentioned the "threat of a new explosion."<sup>94</sup>

Where *Pravda* made frequent references to the requirement for a peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Soviet willingness to work towards a political solution, *Krasnaya Zvezda* made very few. In fact, quantitative analysis by Ilana Kass revealed that *Pravda* discussed a political solution to the crisis four times as often during this time period.<sup>95</sup> In contrast to *Pravda*, one *Krasnaya Zvezda* article published in early 1968 went so far as to specifically warn against pinning excessive hopes on any peace efforts because "the very idea of a political settlement is anathema to the Israeli leaders."<sup>96</sup>

Rather than discussing diplomacy the articles in *Krasnaya Zvezda* focused on improvements in the capabilities of the Egyptian military. Throughout 1969 *Krasnaya Zvezda* made frequent references to "great increases" in the military capabilities of the Arab states and expressed confidence that "a new war will not end with an Israeli victory."<sup>97</sup> Military writers also warned of the steady growth in Israeli military might, noting that "the Israeli extremists do not limit themselves to talking about the possibility of a new war . . . they are making every effort to increase their military potential."<sup>98</sup> Part of this disparity might be explained by the simple fact that as military officers, the writers were more interested in military matters. A second possibility, and one which would lend added credence to the suggestion of a disagreement in the Soviet hierarchy, is that the Soviet military was anxious to use *Krasnaya Zvezda* as a means to emphasize the close ties between the Soviets and the Egyptians as a means of consolidating Soviet military privileges in Egypt. These privileges, including long coveted naval facilities, were not inconsiderable.

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1968.

<sup>93</sup>*Pravda*, 7 November 1968; in: *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 27 November 1968.

<sup>94</sup>*Pravda*, 25 January 1969; in: *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 12 February 1969.

<sup>95</sup>Kass, p. 77.

<sup>96</sup>*Krasnaya Zvezda*, 15 April 1969; in: Kass, p. 78.

<sup>97</sup>*Krasnaya Zvezda*, 2 February 1969; in, Kass, p. 79.

<sup>98</sup>*Krasnaya Zvezda*, 10 January 1969; in, Kass, p. 79.

*Was the military successful in changing the pattern of the relationship?*

Despite the military's apparent dissension with the "party line," particularly their skepticism of diplomatic solutions and focus on the importance of maintaining Egyptian goodwill, the policy advocated in *Pravda* maintained the upper hand in the formulation of Soviet foreign policy. Ilana Kass found that "available evidence indicates that the policy advocated by *Krasnaya Zvezda* was not heeded by the decisionmakers. Official statements made public during this period followed *Pravda*'s mildness."<sup>99</sup> However, as hopes dimmed for a peaceful solution to the Arab-Israeli crisis, *Pravda* began to adopt a line that was more openly pro-Egyptian and critical of Israel. This change was observable in both press items and the public comments of government officials.

By mid-1969, articles appearing in several party-supported press organs took on a more "military" tone, dropping their insistence on a political solution in favor of more open support of the Egyptian cause. On the 15th of June, *Pravda* printed an article intended to explain the outcome of a trip to Cairo by Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko. The item defended Egyptian efforts to achieve peace in the Middle East and made a strong statement of support for Egypt.

The U.A.R. . . . announced their readiness to carry out all the provisions of the November resolution. . . . The USSR has reaffirmed its full support for the just struggle of the U.A.R. and the other Arab states for the liquidation of the consequences of aggression.<sup>100</sup>

On 2 October 1969 this position was reasserted in a *Pravda* article which stated that the Soviet Union would "do everything necessary to achieve the liquidation of the consequences of Israeli action."<sup>101</sup>

Party press organs also began to establish a justification for expanded support to Egypt. Commentary in the 27 August 1969 issue of *Pravda* praised the "profound social and economic transformation in the U.A.R.," the elimination of the "military bourgeoisie," and the widening of the "social base of transformations in the country."<sup>102</sup> Later, the November issue of *Kommunist*, the theoretical journal of the

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<sup>99</sup>Kass, p. 50.

<sup>100</sup>*Pravda*, 15 June 1969; in: *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 9 July 1969.

<sup>101</sup>*Pravda*, 2 October 1969; in: Glassman, p. 77.

<sup>102</sup>*Pravda*, 27 August 1969; in: *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 24 September 1969.

CPSU, observed that expanding Soviet-Egyptian contacts had allowed the beginnings of a true revolutionary outlook in Egypt, thus offering proof Egypt had undergone major social reform under Soviet guidance. Historian Alvin Rubinstein considers this article to have been the result of a major policy debate in the Kremlin regarding increased Soviet aid to Egypt and believes it was designed to provide justification for a major shift in policy towards the active commitment of personnel.<sup>103</sup>

If Rubinstein is correct in his assessment that there was a major Kremlin policy debate in late 1969, the decision to pursue a policy of more active support for Egypt would indicate a victory for the military position. Increased military assistance, or better yet combat personnel, would be a strong sign of Soviet-Egyptian solidarity and would help consolidate Russia's military presence in Egypt. While the inability to reach an Arab-Israeli settlement certainly contributed to the Soviet policy change, the final decision to upgrade Soviet backing for Egypt may well have been influenced by strong military desires.

### 3. External Inputs

*Was there a conflict between the foreign policy objectives of the Soviet Union and the client state?*

In the period of time immediately following the June War, Nasser was in no position to contravene the wishes of Soviet policymakers. He undoubtedly recognized both the immediacy of the threat and the acuteness of Egypt's needs. Nasser lacked an alternative arms supplier, and even had one been available the immediacy of the Israeli threat left him in no position to introduce new weapons systems into the Egyptian military. For this reason Nasser first backed the idea of a peaceful compromise solution to the Arab-Israeli crisis. It was noted above that on several occasions *Pravda* commented on the willingness of the Egyptians (and the other Arabs) to accept a UN sponsored peace initiative.

Nasser's outward compliance with Soviet policy desires probably disguised concern over the reliability of Soviet support. The Egyptian President reportedly was deeply disappointed by the support Egypt received from the Soviet Union, commenting at one point that the Russians had been "frozen into immobility by their fear of a confrontation with America."<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup>Rubinstein, *Red Star on the Nile*, pp. 103-105.

<sup>104</sup>Glassman, p. 52. The Soviets were allegedly frightened by the Sixth Fleet. Nasser had hoped to receive aircraft from the USSR, because the ground destruction of the Egyptian Air Force left many pilots available.



More importantly, it appears that Nasser viewed the pursuit of a political solution as a purely temporary expedient. Mohamed Heikal reports that soon after the 1967 war Nasser began to plan his future strategy. He saw this strategy falling into three main stages.

To begin with, Egypt and the other frontline countries would have to remain on the defensive; then they could move on to active deterrence; and finally would come the liberation of lost territories.<sup>105</sup>

During the first, "defensive" stage, Nasser would prove a very agreeable client, and would lean heavily on Soviet support, at one point asking the Soviets to handle Egypt's air defense.<sup>106</sup> Nasser realized that he needed a lull in the conflict to allow the Soviets to rebuild the Egyptian armed forces and he was willing to accept Soviet guidance at this time. By November 1967 Marshall Zakharov, head of the Russian military assistance effort, declared that, "Egypt can now stand up to anything Israel can deliver. I have no fears for the Egyptian front. The defenses are perfectly all right."<sup>107</sup> At this point, Nasser began to consider more active measures to regain the Egyptian territory lost to the Israelis.

The focus for disagreements between Soviet and Egyptian policymakers was the recovery of the occupied territories. The recovery of these lands was the overriding imperative of Egyptian foreign policy. Nasser was adamant on this fact, as was made clear in a speech he delivered on May 1, 1969:

Unless Israel withdraws we will fight . . . to the last man. Israel must withdraw from the occupied territories, or else war will continue. There is no politics on this subject. We cannot resort to political maneuvers on this subject.<sup>108</sup>

Nasser soon recognized that Soviet diplomacy would not return the Sinai, which was his primary objective. With this in mind, Nasser felt it necessary to shift his policy from a "passive defense" to an "active deterrence." He set out to apply increasing military pressure on the Israelis in the hope that significant Israeli losses would result

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<sup>105</sup>Heikal, *The Sphinx and the Commissar*, p. 191.

<sup>106</sup>Rubinstein, *Red Star on the Nile*, p. 17.

<sup>107</sup>Heikal, *The Road to Ramadan*, pp. 50-51.

<sup>108</sup>Cited in Yahya, p. 187.

in an Israeli withdrawal. The result was the "War of Attrition," a phase of the Arab-Israeli conflict that Nasser entered despite serious Soviet misgivings.

*Did the client receive the weapons requested or was the delivery of certain items (specifically offensive weapons) delayed or postponed?*

There appears to have been very little attempt on the part of the Soviet Union to place restrictions on the quality or quantity of weapons sent to Egypt immediately after the war. It must be noted that the Soviets were most generous in their supply of air defense aircraft (interceptors) and ground based anti-aircraft weapons, but slow to replace the TU-16 and IL-28 bombers destroyed during the war.<sup>109</sup> There is no evidence that Nasser was disappointed in these arms transfer arrangements or that he requested weapons that the Soviets did not deliver. All evidence indicates that Nasser was pleased with the support Egypt was receiving from Moscow. The Egyptian President remarked in 1969:

The Soviet Union is supplying us with the arms we need without exerting pressure on our current financial resources. . . . We have not yet paid a single penny. We have benefited a great deal in recent months from the Soviet experts and advisors who are with our units. . . . The Soviet Union has neither dictated any political restriction nor made a single condition. It has not made any request that could affect our national prestige.<sup>110</sup>

Nasser was obviously well aware of the importance of Soviet equipment and advisors to the survival of his government. It is unlikely that at this critical time he would have considered any move that might jeopardize his relations with Moscow.

*Did the client attempt to bring pressure to bear on the Soviet decisionmakers to alter or modify arms policies? Were they successful?*

There is no evidence that Nasser attempted to pressure the Soviets into altering their arms transfer policy. This may be attributed both to Nasser's reluctance to upset Moscow and to his general satisfaction with the pace of Soviet arms deliveries. Nasser explained to Politburo member Alexander Shelepin that the Egyptians were very grateful for Soviet assistance and commented, "You may be exasperating people to deal with, but in the end you do deliver."<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup>*The Military Balance*, (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies), 1966-67 to 1969-70.

<sup>110</sup>Cited in Rubinstein, *Red Star on the Nile*, p. 81.

<sup>111</sup>Heikal, *The Road to Ramadan*, p. 66.

It must also be observed that Nasser's strategy involved much more than the acquisition of arms. He also wanted to involve the Soviets in the Arab-Israeli dispute as a means of lifting the conflict from the regional to the international level.<sup>112</sup> While he hoped to avoid the Soviet domination of Egypt, he also made it clear that he welcomed Soviet assistance in his fight against Israel. In promoting increased Soviet involvement, Nasser insured that Moscow, in the interest of international prestige, would prevent the destruction of his government. By making the Russians see the Egyptian defeat as their defeat, Nasser guaranteed Soviet support. When Nasser gave the Soviets a stake in Egypt, he created a situation in which he could demand ever greater amounts of Soviet military equipment. Additionally, Nasser knew that the increasing Soviet presence in Egypt and the Middle East was a source of great anxiety to the United States. It was possible that the United States would pressure Israel into accepting a peaceful settlement before the Russians became too firmly entrenched.

*Was the client state of strategic importance to the Soviet Union at the time of the decision?*

The major reason that the Soviets were anxious to establish a presence in Egypt was the strategic importance of that country to the Soviet Union. As was described in the previous chapter the Soviets were very concerned about the vulnerability of their country to the U.S. Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean, particularly the Polaris submarine, and were desperate for bases on the Mediterranean. It is significant that when Soviet President Podgorny visited Egypt in late June 1967, he asked for Soviet naval facilities in Alexandria. At this juncture Nasser refused, but arrangements would soon be made to grant the Soviet navy the facilities they coveted.<sup>113</sup> The agreement for port facilities was worked out in January of 1968. The Soviets were granted jurisdictional control over repair shops and warehouses in Port Said and Alexandria. In April of that year the first Soviet TU-16s deployed to Egypt for reconnaissance missions over the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup>Heikal, p. 165.

<sup>113</sup>Heikal, *The Road to Ramadan*, pp. 47-48. Podgorny probably pressed Nasser for too much. While the subject of naval facilities was under discussion, he requested permission to raise the Red Flag over the facilities. At this Nasser exploded, "This is just imperialism."

<sup>114</sup>Rubinstein, *Red Star on the Nile*, p. 46. Officially the Soviets acquired "facilities" not "bases." This meant that there was no surrender of Egyptian sovereignty and hence no "imperialism."

The Soviets had sought these military privileges since at least 1964 and Soviet generosity in resupplying Egypt can perhaps best be explained as an effort to consolidate these gains, as can the emphasis the Soviet military seemed to place on confirming the Soviet-Egyptian relationship. This interest in Egypt's strategic position may have blinded the Soviets to a potential trap. The retention of this strategic position, as well as the maintenance of Soviet international and regional prestige now required the survival of the Nasser government. Secure in this knowledge, Nasser felt free to launch his "War of Attrition."

#### 4. Summation

- The Soviet policymakers, both party and military, seemed very interested in developing the Soviet presence in Egypt, both by maintaining Soviet bases and by taking an active role in the diplomatic process seeking a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. The emphasis on a political solution to the crisis, particularly evident on the pages of *Pravda*, points to a desire to prevent an escalation of the conflict and potential Soviet military intervention.
- There was a strong military interest in Soviet-Egyptian affairs that is traceable to a desire to retain the tangible benefits the military derived from the relationship (naval facilities, air bases). There is also evidence that the military may have been able to influence the decision to grant more active support to Egypt after hopes for a peaceful settlement dimmed in 1969.
- It is difficult to prove that the Soviets attempted to impose a "ceiling of sophistication" on arms transfers to Egypt. There is no evidence of Egyptian complaints over the types and quantities of arms transferred. It is important, however, that the Soviets did not return the Egyptian bomber force to pre-war levels, perhaps a reflection of some effort towards restraint.
- Egypt was of tremendous strategic importance to the USSR given its location on the Mediterranean and as a gateway to Africa and Asia. Nasser undoubtedly recognized his country's strategic location and used this to strengthen his bargaining position in his dealing with the Soviets.

## B. 1970: THE AIR DEFENSE COMMITMENT

### 1. Introduction

Soviet military and economic assistance proved unable to persuade Nasser to accept Soviet guidance and prevent his return to active belligerency in 1969 and Nasser launched his "War of Attrition" over Soviet protests. The "War of Attrition" was based on an assumption that Egypt could force an Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories by inflicting "significant" losses on the Israeli military. This was expected to demoralize the Israeli forces and pressure the Israeli government into accepting a compromise settlement. The plan seriously underestimated the retaliatory capability of the Israeli Defense Force.

Nasser's "War of Attrition" led to a serious escalation in the fighting on the Egyptian-Israeli front, and by January 1970 the Egyptian situation was desperate. The Israeli Air Force was striking targets close to the center of Cairo and Egyptian MiG-21s and SA-2s were unable to prevent these attacks.<sup>115</sup> The Egyptian Air Force had lost 150 pilots and serious questions were beginning to arise over the quality of Soviet training and equipment.<sup>116</sup> There was a real possibility that the Nasser government would collapse, taking with it the entire Soviet infrastructure in the Middle East. As a result, when Nasser journeyed to Moscow in January 1970, his demands for modern weapons to offset Israeli air superiority carried a sense of urgency the Soviet leaders could not ignore. The Soviet decision to deploy air defense personnel to Egypt exemplified how important Nasser's survival was to the Kremlin. The risks involved in this deployment apparently stirred substantial controversy in the Soviet hierarchy.

## 2. Internal Inputs

*Was there evidence of a disagreement between the party and the military regarding the proper conduct of relations?*

The rapidity with which the Soviet leadership reached its initial decision to commit combat forces to Egypt suggests that such a contingency had already been considered. The party leadership was apparently shifting towards a more active policy in support of their Arab client. This policy shift culminated in a speech delivered by Kosygin on 10 December 1969 in honor of a visit by Nasser's personal emissary Anwar Sadat. In his remarks, Kosygin pledged all-round Soviet support for the "just struggle" of the Arab peoples and strongly hinted that this support might entail something more than political backing:

As for the Soviet Union, it will continue to support the rightful cause of the Arab countries . . . and will maintain the struggle, inside the United Nations and outside it, for a political settlement in the Near East. We will combine this struggle . . . with active measures to strengthen the defense capability of the U.A.R and the other Arab states.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup>The MiG-21 and the SA-2 both have serious limitations operating at low altitudes. The Israelis exploited this fact by penetrating at low altitudes.

<sup>116</sup>Kass, p. 155.

<sup>117</sup>*Pravda*, 11 December 1969; in: *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 13 January 1970.

This strong statement of support was followed two days later by a *Pravda* article that promised "urgent and constructive steps aimed at eliminating the consequences of Israeli aggression." Clearly, Soviet policymakers were ready to initiate more active measures to defend Egypt, though the actual extent of these measures may not yet have been worked out.<sup>118</sup>

Soon after Nasser's emergency visit to Moscow in January 1970, commentaries appeared in *Pravda* which must have pleased even the most belligerent in the military. An article published on 27 January 1970 indicated that the Soviet leadership was adopting a new line towards the Middle East. Specifically it noted that a political solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict might be expedited by eliminating Israel's military advantages. The commentary also observed that it was "necessary to rule out territorial concessions to the aggressor," a statement certain to find favor in Cairo.<sup>119</sup>

In mid-February, an Israeli attack on a metallurgical plant near Cairo was seized by the Soviets as an opportunity to justify their heightened involvement in the Egyptian air defense. A *Tass* statement strongly condemned the attack and warned that "the Soviet Union will extend the necessary support to the Arab states in strengthening their ability to defend their security and their rightful interests."<sup>120</sup> In this and subsequent articles describing Israeli air operations there was no mention of the ongoing, and Egyptian initiated, "War of Attrition." Rather Israeli raids were commonly referred to as "provocative attacks."<sup>121</sup>

Up to this point there was an apparent concurrence between the Soviet party and military elites over the objectives and methods of Soviet policy. However, an internal debate probably began about the time the first Soviet troops arrived in Egypt in March 1970. This debate concerned the proper role of the Soviet troops in Egypt: that is where they should be stationed and whether Soviet pilots should fly combat missions.

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<sup>118</sup>*Pravda*, 13 December 1969; in: *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 13 January 1970.

<sup>119</sup>*Pravda*, 27 January 1970; in: *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 24 February 1970.

<sup>120</sup>*Tass*, 17 February 1970; in: *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 17 March 1970.

<sup>121</sup>For example, see *Pravda*, 13 February 1970; in: *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 17 March 1970, or *Pravda*, 1 May 1970; in: *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 2 June 1970.

The military asserted its position first in an article published 14 March 1970 in *Krasnaya Zvezda*. This piece implied that the Soviet Union had a duty to become actively involved in Egyptian defense:

In order to be worthy of the lofty title of internationalist . . . practical steps are necessary along with active participation in the struggle of other nations for freedom and independence.<sup>122</sup>

The next day *Krasnaya Zvezda*, focused directly on the Egyptian situation with an article that described Egyptian airspace as unprotected and Egyptian civilians as exposed to "barbarous attacks." It also mentioned the insufficient number of Egyptian pilots and claimed that the Israeli Air Force was relying heavily on Western (primarily American) mercenaries.<sup>123</sup> In these two articles the Soviet military seemed to be building a justification for increased Soviet participation in Egyptian air defense, and specifically the use of Soviet combat pilots.

Soviet reporting on a speech delivered by Anwar Sadat on 20 March 1970 offers a valuable opportunity to compare and contrast the growing difference between the party and the military on the USSR's "internationalist duty." *Krasnaya Zvezda's* commentary, printed the next day, highlighted Sadat's contention that a real and immediate danger to Soviet-Egyptian interests existed in the form of a US-Israeli plot to seize Egyptian air bases to replace American bases recently lost in Libya. There was also special attention given to Sadat's passage on "the noble stand of the Soviet Union and the many sided aid it grants Egypt in the struggle against imperialism and aggression." In contrast, *Pravda* downplayed the immediacy of the threat to Egypt. The author of the *Pravda* article reminded his readers that imperialist plots were a permanent thing and that in any event "it is up to the Egyptian armed forces to defend their motherland." *Pravda* also made no reference to Sadat's praise for the "noble stand" of the Soviet Union.<sup>124</sup> It appears that those responsible for *Pravda* articles were far from anxious to rationalize heightened Soviet involvement in Egypt.

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<sup>122</sup>*Krasnaya Zvezda*, 14 March 1970; in: Kass, p. 157.

<sup>123</sup>*Krasnaya Zvezda*, 15 March 1970; in: Kass, p. 157.

<sup>124</sup>*Krasnaya Zvezda*, 21 March 1970 and *Pravda* 21 March 1970; in: Kass, p. 159.

On 24 March 1970, *Krasnaya Zvezda* printed a commentary that explicitly linked Soviet interests with events in the Middle East. The article first observed that "The Middle East has become an arena in which the forces of socialism and progress confront the forces of imperialism and reaction." The article then repeated a common theme frequently used to justify Soviet interest in the Middle East "the Middle East borders immediately on the southern boundaries of the Socialist Commonwealth."<sup>125</sup> In her study, Ilana Kass suggests this commentary "may have been an attempt to exert pressure on the decisionmakers in order to secure increased commitment to the region in which the direct confrontation with the chief enemy threatening the Soviet periphery was taking place."<sup>126</sup> At the very least, the statement is a reflection of the military's concern for the impact of Middle Eastern affairs on Soviet national security and suggests an attempt on the part of the military to remind Kremlin decisionmakers of this fact.

One final clash between the party and the military arose in mid-April. In a speech delivered in Kharkov, Brezhnev ignored the issue of Israeli raids and spoke of the need for a "political settlement" that will bring peace and security to all nations of the region."<sup>127</sup> A *Krasnaya Zvezda* commentary published the next day countered this conciliatory stance by warning that "the Mediterranean has been prepared (by NATO) as a springboard against the socialist states and the Arab East." Once again, the military leaders seemed committed to asserting the importance of the Middle East and the Mediterranean area to Russian security. Soviet influence in both areas depended upon the maintenance of Soviet-Egyptian relations, and Soviet naval facilities on Egyptian soil.

*Was the military successful in altering the pattern of the relationship?*

The military was apparently successful in its push for more active Soviet involvement in Egyptian air defense. On 29 April 1970, Israel reported that Soviet pilots were flying operational missions for Egypt.<sup>128</sup> Soviet pilots eventually would fly combat missions along the Suez Canal. During May and June Soviet-manned SA-3 missile batteries were added to the air defenses along the Suez Canal, a significant

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<sup>125</sup>*Krasnaya Zvezda*, 24 March 1970; in: Kass, p. 160.

<sup>126</sup>Kass, p. 160.

<sup>127</sup>From a speech given by Brezhnev on 15 April 1970; in: Kass, p. 162.

<sup>128</sup>American sources confirmed these reports the next day. *New York Times*, 30 April 1970.



departure from the original Soviet intention to restrict the use of Soviet personnel to the defense of high-value targets in the Egyptian interior. Moscow apparently decided that the risks entailed in the forward deployment of Soviet troops were worth the opportunity of significantly curtailing the Israeli air operation. Overall, the Soviet decision to follow the military's advice and participate actively in Egyptian air defense ended Israel's deep penetration attacks and substantially reduced Israeli Air Force effectiveness along the Suez Canal.<sup>129</sup>

### 3. External Inputs

*Was there a conflict between the foreign policy objectives of the Soviet Union and the client state?*

The "War of Attrition" itself was a source of conflict between the Soviet Union and the Egyptians. The Soviets disapproved of active fighting along the Arab-Israeli front because of the dangers of escalation. Once the Egyptians were deeply involved in this policy of "active deterrence," the Soviets were remarkably forthcoming with their support, including the deployment of combat personnel. This was a clear indication of how seriously the Soviets took their overseas credibility and the importance they attached to maintaining their position in Egypt and the Middle East.

It is also clear that even as Nasser was using Soviet aid to pursue his policy of "active deterrence" he was also planning to pursue an independent foreign policy. Egyptian thinking was outlined in a "thinking aloud memorandum" prepared for Nasser by a group of senior Egyptian officials before his trip to Moscow in June 1970. This memorandum shows that the Egyptians were considering policy options that would increase their leverage with Moscow by making approaches to Washington. Major points in the memorandum included:

- The Soviet presence in the U.A.R. the real prospect of its increase and the consequent increase of Soviet influence in the Middle East, has become a fresh source of anxiety in the West and faces the Americans with a situation that may oblige them to initiate a direct dialogue with us.
- The increasing Soviet presence gives us a favorable bargaining position vis-a-vis the U.S., which could lead to some pressure being exerted by the U.S. on Israel, with the aim of securing a settlement before the Soviet presence has reached irreversible proportions.
- In this case the effect of Soviet aid to Egypt would have been solely to act as a means of exerting pressure on the U.S.
- What would then be the situation should a settlement be reached? The U.S. would emerge as the power which, by its pressure on Israel, had achieved a settlement. This it would have done without spending a dollar, while the other superpower, which had initiated the process, and in doing so spent its treasure

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<sup>129</sup>Glassman, pp. 77-79.

and even its blood, would be left on the sidelines.<sup>130</sup>

Nasser apparently believed he could use contacts with the Americans to gain leverage over the Soviets and ensure their support for future policy initiatives lest they be "left on the sidelines." This support would be of great importance if the Egyptians were to receive the weapons necessary to go beyond "active deterrence" and pursue a "war of liberation."

*Did the client receive the weapons requested or was the delivery of certain items (specifically offensive weapons) delayed or postponed?*

The only weapon specifically requested by the Egyptians to deal with air defense crisis was the SA-3. This was perhaps the most sophisticated surface-to-air missile in the Soviet arsenal and was designed to intercept low altitude targets. The SA-3 had not yet been delivered outside the Warsaw Pact, when the Soviets agreed to deliver the missile as a result of Nasser's request of January 1970. SA-3 batteries, with crews, began arriving in Egypt by March 1970.<sup>131</sup>

*Did the client attempt to bring pressure to bear on the Soviet decisionmakers to alter or modify arms policies? Were they successful?*

When Nasser arrived in Moscow on 22 January 1970, his primary intention was to secure delivery of the SA-3 missile. His meeting with Brezhnev was blunt, straightforward, and clearly demonstrated Nasser's ability to influence Soviet decisionmaking. Nasser's confidant, Mohamed Heikal, was in Moscow for the discussions and has provided a very detailed account of the proceedings.<sup>132</sup>

Nasser opened the discussions with the observation that the SA-2s in Egypt provided inadequate defense against low-flying aircraft. After some debate, Brezhnev agreed the SA-3 would fulfill Egyptian needs, commenting "our friend Nasser always gets what he wants." Although the Soviets were willing to deliver the system, Egypt lacked sufficient crews to man the necessary batteries. To avoid a prolonged gap in air defense coverage while the Egyptian crews got their required training, Nasser suggested that the Soviets provide interim crews to man the batteries. Brezhnev saw the problem as greater than just sending crews and argued that aircraft were also needed. Nasser's response was, "All right, send the planes, too."

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<sup>130</sup>Heikal, *The Sphinx and the Commissar*, pp. 198-201.

<sup>131</sup>Heikal, *The Road to Ramadan*, p. 85.

<sup>132</sup>Heikal's account of Nasser's visit to Egypt can be found in, *The Road to Ramadan*, pp. 84-88.

At this point the Russian leader began to express concern about the possible international implications of Soviet intervention and the potential for a crisis with the U.S. Brezhnev explained his fears to Nasser:

We are not scared of anybody. We are the strongest power on earth. But you must understand that this will involve a considerable risk. We must weigh up our position.

In response to this Soviet delaying tactic, Nasser delivered the following ultimatum:

If we do not get what I am asking for everyone will assume the only solution is in the hands of the Americans. We have never seen the Americans backward in helping the Israelis . . . if Egypt falls to American-Israeli force the whole Arab world will fall. . . . I shall go back to Egypt and tell the people the truth. I shall tell them that the time has come to step down and hand over to a pro-American President. . . . This is my final word.

Nasser's threat stunned Brezhnev. He asked for time to call a Politburo meeting, but Nasser said he required an immediate answer. The Soviets quickly rounded up all available Politburo members, together with twelve military marshalls and, after a hasty meeting, granted Nasser's request. The Russians viewed this as a "decision fraught with grave consequences" that would require restraint on the part of the Egyptians. Brezhnev's final request was that the deployment be kept a secret to avoid an adverse US/Israeli reaction.

Nasser successfully pressured the Soviets into providing air defense assistance for Egypt. The Soviets sent SA-3s, 15-20,000 combat troops and 80 aircraft and pilots to defend the skies over Egypt.<sup>133</sup> In July Nasser revealed to his people the secret agreement he had reached with Moscow, "the Soviet leaders declared that they would throw all their weight behind us to defend our homeland. . . . The Soviet leaders honored their promise."<sup>134</sup>

*Was the client state of strategic importance to the Soviet Union at the time of the decision?*

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<sup>133</sup>Heikal, *The Road to Ramadan*, p. 80.

<sup>134</sup>Cited in Kass, pp. 155-156.

The Soviets already regarded Egypt as a location of strategic importance. As a result of the deployments in 1970 their position in Egypt was significantly enhanced. In return for the commitment of Soviet personnel, Nasser gave the Soviets exclusive jurisdiction over six Egyptian airfields and a free hand in the deployment of personnel and pilots.<sup>135</sup> These air bases provided the Soviets with a military infrastructure in the Eastern Mediterranean and allowed military strategists to entertain thoughts of linking the Black Sea and Pacific Fleets by means of a protected Suez Canal.<sup>136</sup> Since the Soviet deployments did not generate a dangerous American/Israeli response, the Soviets enhanced their strategic position at a minimal cost.

#### 4. Summation

- The Soviet party and military hierarchy were both intent upon maintaining the Soviet presence in Egypt. There was agreement in the need to prop up Nasser's threatened regime. However, this required the direct involvement of Soviet combat forces, something the Soviets probably hoped to avoid. Client pressure prompted direct Soviet involvement, though a shift towards a more active policy in support of Egypt was clearly evident at least one month earlier.
- There was a strong military interest in Soviet-Egyptian affairs, as evidenced in the tone and substance of *Krasnaya Zvezda* articles written at this time. The military wished to retain the privileges it gained in 1967 and those received later as a result of the agreement to deploy Soviet personnel. Military desires may well have been a decisive factor in the decision to advance Soviet manned SA-3 batteries to the canal and allow Soviet pilots to fly combat missions. The military's ability to influence Soviet decisionmaking seems clear in this instance.
- There is no evidence to suggest that the Soviets attempted to impose a "ceiling of sophistication." In fact, given Egypt's desperate situation in January 1970, the Soviets authorized the delivery of a particularly sophisticated piece of equipment, the SA-3, to fill Egypt's immediate needs.
- The audacity of Nasser's demands in January 1970 shows that he recognized the bargaining strength he possessed. The importance of Egypt to Soviet security made the Kremlin more susceptible to Nasser's demands and more willing to consider high risk policies, such as intervention.

### C. 1971: THE TREATY OF FRIENDSHIP AND COOPERATION

#### 1. Introduction

Gamal Nasser died 27 September 1970 and was replaced by his Vice President Anwar Sadat. Sadat had a much different personality from Nasser and had a different opinion of the Russians. Whereas Nasser was frequently skeptical, but generally appreciative of Soviet efforts to support Egypt, Sadat made increasing demands and at times became hostile when his demands were not met. Sadat's reluctant tolerance of his Soviet sponsors was typified in his remark "I would bring in the devil himself if he

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<sup>135</sup>Rubinstein, *Red Star on the Nile*, p. 108.

<sup>136</sup>Sella, p. 44.

could defend me."<sup>137</sup> Before Soviet-Egyptian relations came under the serious strains that culminated in the expulsion of Soviet advisors in 1972, there was one brief moment of Soviet-Egyptian collaboration, the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation.

## 2. Internal Inputs

*Was there evidence of a disagreement between the party and the military regarding the proper conduct of relations?*

The Soviet-Egyptian Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation was signed on very short notice and was not subject to debate in the Soviet press. The lingering disparity between party and military interpretations of the objective of Soviet commitments to the Egyptians was noticeable in coverage of the Treaty signing. The Egyptian leadership made it clear that they had signed the treaty with the understanding that "The Soviet Union will help us to liberate the land." These pronouncements were repeated by *Krasnaya Zvezda* but were completely ignored by *Pravda*. The military press also stressed that the treaty was directed against Israel and, indirectly, the United States, suggesting an effort on the part of the military leadership to state unequivocal backing for the Egyptians at a time when Soviet-Egyptian relations were under considerable strain.<sup>138</sup> In contrast, *Pravda* would go no further than to quote Soviet President Podgorny that the treaty "reinforces and cements"<sup>139</sup> Soviet-Egyptian relations, indicating that the party viewed the treaty in terms of codifying and institutionalizing existing relations rather than creating new commitments.

*Was the military successful in altering the pattern of the relationship?*

Since the treaty was signed on short notice it is unlikely the military leadership could have influenced the negotiations. The clauses of the treaty carried no explicit understanding of any new military commitments. The treaty, which served as a model for "Friendship and Cooperation" agreements with other Third World nations, including Syria, was phrased in such a vague manner that it could be used to justify various forms of future Soviet action. There is no evidence, however, that the Soviet leadership intended to use the treaty to rationalize expanded Soviet involvement in Egypt.

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<sup>137</sup>Heikal, *The Road to Ramadan*, p. 119.

<sup>138</sup>A discussion on the Treaty appears in Kass, pp. 207-208.

<sup>139</sup>*Pravda*, 29 May 1971; in: *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 29 June 1971.

### 3. External Inputs

*Was there a conflict between the foreign policy objectives of the Soviet Union and the client state?*

The Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation was negotiated during a particularly troubled time in Soviet-Egyptian relations. On 2 May 1970 Anwar Sadat had dismissed his Vice President, Ali Sabri, for a coup attempt. Sabri was openly pro-Soviet, and despite Sadat's assurances Moscow could not be convinced that the Sabri dismissal (and later arrest) was not "anti-Soviet" rather than domestic in nature. In turn, Sadat was afraid the Sabri coup attempt was Soviet-inspired. Both nations desired a clarification of their relationship, which had "operated on an ad hoc, but continuing basis"<sup>140</sup> since 1955. The Soviets undoubtedly sought guarantees of their status in Egypt in the aftermath of the Sabri scandal; Sadat hoped to lend an air of legitimacy and security to his new and recently threatened government. Interestingly, there is some controversy over who initiated the treaty negotiations. Rubinstein and Glassman believe the treaty was a Soviet idea, prompted by the Sabri controversy.<sup>141</sup> In contrast, Mohamed Heikal insists that the Egyptians approached the Soviets with a treaty proposal well before the Sabri affair.<sup>142</sup> In any event, both sides were amenable to the idea of a treaty, and the agreement was signed on 27 May 1970, just two days after the arrival of the Soviet delegation.

Whether the Treaty expanded Soviet influence over Egyptian foreign and domestic affairs is open to interpretation. The articles of the treaty seem to imply very close cooperation between the two countries and an Egyptian acceptance of Soviet guidance and assistance. However, on closer examination, it is doubtful whether the treaty would have any impact on Soviet-Egyptian relations. For example:

- Article 2 dealt with Egypt's "aim of reconstructing society along socialist lines" and pledged Egypt and the Soviet Union to "cooperate closely and in all fields in ensuring conditions for preserving and furthering the social and economic gains of their peoples." This required no concrete Egyptian programs, and certainly no greater reforms than the Egyptians had already adopted.
- Article 4 called on both parties to work towards a "lasting and fair peace in the Middle East." Again, Sadat was committed to nothing new. He was actively seeking a negotiated settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict, if on his own terms.

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<sup>140</sup>Rubinstein, *Red Star on the Nile*, p. 146.

<sup>141</sup>See Rubinstein, *Red Star on the Nile*, p. 149, Glassman, p. 89. Rubinstein is particularly adamant that Moscow originated the treaty, stating, "the treaty obviously resulted from a Soviet and not an Egyptian initiative." He points to the sudden arrival in Cairo of a large Soviet delegation in late May, headed by President Podgorny, and the apparent benefits Moscow derived from the treaty.

<sup>142</sup>Heikal, *The Sphinx and the Commissar*, p. 227.

- Article 7 specified that the two countries would "regularly consult each other at different levels on all important questions affecting the interests of both states" if there should occur "a danger to peace or a violation of peace." In such situations the two nations would "contact each other without delay, in order to concert their positions with a view to removing the threat." This article committed Sadat to little more than maintaining frequent contact with Moscow, something, given Egypt's reliance on Soviet support, he was likely to do anyway.
- Article 8 discussed Soviet military support to Egypt. The article pledged the Soviets to "provide specifically for assistance in the training of the U.A.R.'s military personnel in mastering the armaments and equipment supplied to the U.A.R. with the view of strengthening its capacity to eliminate the consequences of aggression." The Soviets had made comparable promises to Egypt since at least December 1969 and this article did not imply Soviet intervention on the Egyptian side in the event of a war.
- Article 9 concluded the treaty by prohibiting either country from entering into "an alliance directed against the other." The Soviets probably included this stipulation to prevent a possible Egyptian alliance with the U.S., a highly unlikely prospect at the time.<sup>143</sup>

The treaty was an effort by the Soviets to institutionalize the Soviet-Egyptian relationship, to have something "in writing" that would guarantee their position in Egypt. The vague wording of the articles might allow a manipulation of their meaning at a later date, if Moscow found this necessary. For the moment they legitimized and stabilized Sadat's regime. Both countries had reason to be satisfied with the treaty.

*Did the client receive the weapons requested or was the delivery of certain items (specifically offensive weapons) delayed or postponed?*

Weapons were not a consideration in the negotiation process. Article 8 did, however, reaffirm the flow of Soviet weapons and advisors to Egypt, a pledge certain to appeal to Sadat and the Soviet military.

*Did the client attempt to bring pressure to bear on the Soviet decisionmakers to alter or modify arms policies? Were they successful?*

All reporting indicates that both the Soviet Union and Egypt were interested in reaching an agreement even if for their own reasons. Egypt did not pressure the Soviets into signing the treaty, which may well have been a Soviet initiative in the first place.

*Was the client state of strategic importance to the Soviet Union at the time of the decision?*

The continued strategic importance of Egypt to the Soviet Union was evident in Moscow's interest in institutionalizing Soviet-Egyptian ties. Above all, the Soviets did not want the Sabri coup attempt to be used as a pretext for a disruption in the Soviet-Egyptian relationship that would jeopardize Soviet air and naval facilities. The

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<sup>143</sup>An excellent review of the Treaty appears in Yahya, pp. 220-224.

treaty, however vague in its wording, placed the objectives of the relationship "on paper" to serve as a guarantee for Soviet military privileges in Egypt.

#### 4. Summation

- The Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation was drafted in a manner that allowed the Soviet Union to consolidate and institutionalize its presence in Egypt, while making no commitment to intervene on the Egyptian side in the event of an Arab-Israeli war. It did not expand Soviet commitments in Egypt.
- The military had no apparent direct impact on the drafting or negotiating of the treaty. Still, they must have been pleased by the treaty's clauses which seemed to guarantee Soviet presence in Egypt and generally solidify the sometimes shaky Soviet-Egyptian alliance. The format of the treaty suggests that while the military may not have made direct inputs, military interests were considered in the treaty's formulation.
- The Soviet "ceiling of sophistication" was not considered in the treaty process, as no specific weapons systems were discussed.
- The terms of the treaty placed no further commitments on the Soviet Union, but they also did not bind Egypt's President Sadat to any new policy. The Soviet decision not to push Sadat into making major concessions may testify to a Soviet recognition of Egypt's bargaining strength.

### D. 1972: THE SOVIET EXPULSION

#### 1. Introduction

The Soviet-Egyptian Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation provided only temporary relief from the fundamental stresses afflicting the relationship. The primary source of friction was Sadat's determination to decide when and how to conduct a war to liberate the occupied territories. This policy frequently conflicted with Moscow's efforts to control events by exercising a monopoly over arms supplies as a means to prevent, postpone, or at least prevent the uncontrolled escalation of any future Arab-Israeli conflict. Sadat was embarrassed by his inability to fulfill a promise to make 1971 the "year of decision" in the Middle East due in large part to inadequate Soviet support.<sup>144</sup> As Soviet reluctance to support an Egyptian war effort became progressively apparent Sadat decided to alter the Soviet-Egyptian relationship by expelling the majority of the Soviet personnel from Egypt. This move marked a low point in Soviet-Egyptian affairs, but was apparently not completely unexpected in Moscow. The initial Soviet response was described as one of "shock, but not surprise."<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup>See Heikal, *The Road to Ramadan*, p. 155.

<sup>145</sup>Heikal, p. 175.



## 2. Internal Inputs

*Was there evidence of a disagreement between the party and the military regarding the proper conduct of relations?*

Since the expulsion of the Soviet personnel was an Egyptian action, done without warning, no debate between the party and military elite over Soviet-Egyptian relations appeared on the pages of the Soviet press. *Pravda* articles that appeared in the weeks just prior to the Soviet expulsion carried no hint of the impending breakdown in relations. Sadat's visit to Moscow in April 1972 was described as "comradely and cordial."<sup>146</sup> When Soviet Defense Minister Grechko journeyed to Cairo in mid-May, *Pravda* noted simply that military cooperation was "developing successfully."<sup>147</sup> One month later when General Sadek, the Egyptian Minister of War and War Production, visited Moscow *Izvestia* quoted him praising Soviet-Egyptian relations as "extremely important and successful." The article also mentioned that the Soviet Union would continue to render aid to Egypt.<sup>148</sup>

The Soviet press response to the expulsion was exceedingly restrained. On 20 July a *Tass* communique observed that: "In accordance with the request of the leaders of the Arab Republic of Egypt" there had been a "temporary stationing of a certain number of Soviet military personnel in the country . . . for a number of years." These troops had deployed to help the Egyptian armed forces "master the Soviet war material." These Soviet advisors "have now fulfilled their mission" and would be returning to Russia. Their departure would "in no way affect the basic principles of Egyptian-Soviet friendship."<sup>149</sup> Two days later *Pravda* stressed the "positive" aspects of the Soviet exodus by reporting "festive sendoffs for Soviet troops" as a way of thanking them for their "sincere efforts and critically important services."<sup>150</sup>

The moderation of the *Pravda* reporting may have disguised a major debate raging in the Kremlin over the appropriate response to the expulsion. Mohamed Heikal speculates that certain elements in the Soviet Union may have argued that "the policy of dependence on the bourgeoisie had proved a failure," and suggested a reversion to older policies:

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<sup>146</sup>*Pravda*, 30 April 1972; in: *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 24 May 1972.

<sup>147</sup>*Pravda*, 19 May 1972; in: *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 14 June 1972.

<sup>148</sup>*Izvestia*, 15 June 1972; in: *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 12 July 1972.

<sup>149</sup>*Pravda*, 20 July 1972; in: *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 16 August 1972.

<sup>150</sup>*Pravda*, 22 July 1972; in: *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 16 August 1972.

As a revolutionary power no doubt the wisest course of action would have been to minimize the significance of the debacle over the experts, to assert that they had been stabbed in the back by ungrateful Arab governments, and to adopt the easy alternative which presented itself - that is to say, switching to support of local Communist parties.

This viewpoint clashed with that held by many others in the leadership, especially in the military, who were "much less concerned with ideology than with the Soviet Union's responsibilities as a superpower." It was argued that the Soviet Union could not abandon its position in the Middle East, given its importance to Soviet political prestige and its military significance for Soviet national security. The latter argument prevailed, and the Soviet Union took great pains to preserve what remained of the Soviet-Egyptian relationship.<sup>151</sup>

*Was the military successful in altering the pattern of the relationship?*

Heikal reported that "the military, in particular Marshall Grechko, argued repeatedly in the Politburo that there was no easy way out, and that the flow of military aid to the Arabs must be stepped up."<sup>152</sup> Shipments of military hardware were increased significantly soon after the expulsion, leading Sadat to remark, "they are drowning me in new arms."<sup>153</sup> Between December 1972 and June 1973 the Egyptians received more arms from the Soviets than they had in the previous two years.<sup>154</sup> These shipments included many of the advanced weapons, such as the SA-6, T-62 tank, and Scud-B surface-to-surface missile, that the Egyptians would use to great effect in the 1973 war. Since Sadat had expelled *only* the Soviet air defense contingent, between 1500 and 2000 advisors remained in Egypt. Soviet access to Egyptian naval facilities was not affected, allowing Moscow to retain its foothold in Egypt despite Sadat's actions. The military was unwilling to jeopardize what remained of its position by cutting off arms deliveries. The arguments apparently carried the day and military shipments were increased substantially soon after the expulsion.

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<sup>151</sup>Heikal, *The Sphinx and the Commissar*, p. 253. It is sometimes difficult to determine how much of Heikal's account is fact and how much is pure speculation. In Heikal's defense, he was a consummate journalist who had excellent sources in the Egyptian government and access to the best political rumors. It also seems reasonable that certain Soviet ideologues, still uncomfortable with the 1956 reinterpretation of Marxist-Leninist doctrine as applied to the developing world, would seize this opportunity to disengage the Soviet Union from the suspect "bourgeois-nationalist" states.

<sup>152</sup>Heikal, p. 253.

<sup>153</sup>Heikal, *The Road to Ramadan*, p. 181.

<sup>154</sup>Heikal, p. 181.

### 3. External Inputs

*Was there a conflict between the foreign policy objectives of the Soviet Union and the client state?*

Sadat's decision to expel the Russians can be traced to a fundamental difference between the Egyptian and Soviet foreign policies. Quite simply, Sadat wanted the capability for independent action in the Middle East: to be able to fight a war with Israel at a time and place of his own choosing, and without reliance on Soviet guidance or Soviet intervention. This required a special commitment from the Russians, as Sadat explained to them on his visit to Moscow in February 1972:

What I want this time is a strategic decision that you will give us the opportunity to be equal to Israel. We do not want supremacy, but equality. This is a strategic decision. After it has been made, any request we make or any additions you give our forces are strictly a matter of detail.<sup>155</sup>

The Soviets had no intention of giving Sadat military parity with Israel. The joint communique issued after Sadat's visit said only that "the sides again considered measures to secure the lawful rights and interests of the Arab peoples" and gave no indication of any change in the Soviet arms supply commitment.<sup>156</sup> Sadat needed a modern military machine to confront the Israelis, but the Soviets were refusing to give any Arab country the ability to confront Israel unilaterally. Barring a major diplomatic breakthrough, Sadat would either have to find a means of altering the Soviet-Egyptian relationship or abandon his hopes of regaining the occupied territories. Sadat knew that he had to take the Sinai back. This was as much a political imperative for him as it had been for Nasser. He probably believed that he would never be able to recover Egypt's lost prestige while Soviet troops were in Egypt, and particularly not while Soviet troops manned the SA-3 batteries along the Suez Canal. The removal of these troops might ease the transition to active warfare.

A second major concern was the SALT I 'interim agreement' signed by the United States and the Soviet Union on 29 May 1972. The 'Basic Principles of Relations' section of this agreement stated that the two nations would "do everything in their power so that conflicts or situations will not arise which would serve to increase international tensions." On a global scale this detente related accord was a

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<sup>155</sup>Quoted in Rubinstein, *Red Star on the Nile*, p. 171.

<sup>156</sup>Rubinstein, p. 172.

major success for the Soviet Union, since it placed it on an equal footing with the United States. For Sadat it was almost a personal affront. Just one month earlier he had convinced Moscow to release the following statement:

The Arab states had - in addition to their efforts for a peaceful settlement - every right to use other means to restore the Arab territories usurped by Israel. All the peace loving peoples will accept with full understanding the use of these means.<sup>157</sup>

The terms of the interim agreement seem to contradict this apparent Soviet sanctioning of Egyptian war plans. Sadat could not help but wonder whether Egypt would be abandoned in the interest of Soviet-American detente.

Finally, Sadat found the Soviet presence an economic burden. He disliked the requirement to pay for the Soviet air defense network with hard currency.<sup>158</sup> Soviet advisors were often rude and abusive and were not popular with the Egyptian military.<sup>159</sup> Since the dangerous period of the "War of Attrition" had long since ended these advisors had little to do and Sadat could do without the expense and inconvenience of a large Soviet contingent in his country.

*Did the client receive the weapons requested or was the delivery of certain items (specifically offensive weapons) delayed or postponed?*

Sadat's disenchantment with the Russians was not over a Soviet reluctance to deliver arms in quantity. As Table 1 shows, the Soviets were certainly generous in supplying weapons. However, there can be little doubt that the Soviets exploited their position as sole supplier to control the release of certain weapons to the Egyptian army, either to prevent Sadat from launching a war or to force Sadat to limit his objectives. Some examples will illustrate the Soviet efforts to delay or restrict arms deliveries to Egypt.

- The Soviets were very hesitant to provide the Egyptians with a bomber that would give them a strategic capability. They never fulfilled promises to deliver the TU-22 Blinder supersonic bomber and offered the TU-16 Badger medium bomber on condition that it be used only with Soviet permission. Sadat rejected this offer in February 1972 as a violation of Egyptian sovereignty. The Soviets later relented and provided Egypt with a limited number of TU-16s.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>157</sup>Sella, pp. 72-73, provides a discussion of this seemingly contradictory Soviet policy.

<sup>158</sup>Heikal, *The Road to Ramadan*, p. 167.

<sup>159</sup>Heikal, p. 179.

<sup>160</sup>Sadat, p. 220 and Efraim Karsh, *Soviet Arms Transfers to the Middle East in the 1970's* (Jerusalem: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 1983), p. 9.

TABLE 1  
MAJOR WEAPONS SYSTEMS USED BY THE EGYPTIAN ARMED  
FORCES

TYPE	Quantity		Increase (%)
	Oct. '70	Oct. '73	
Tanks	1300	1900	46
APCs and other			
Armored Vehicles	900	2000	122
Artillery Pieces	1500	1700	13
Surface-to-Air			
Missile Batteries	35	125	260
Combat Aircraft	315	420	33
Helicopters	70	190	170

Source: Efraim Karsh, *Soviet Arms Transfers to the Middle East in the 1970's* (Jerusalem: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 1983), p.8.

- Deliveries of the MiG-23 Flogger were withheld. At one point the Soviets even attempted to substitute advanced MiG-21s for an agreed upon delivery of the newer jet.<sup>161</sup>
- The Soviets made arms deals with no specified delivery date. Sadat believed that this was because they wanted to set the delivery time by their own criteria and so secure control of the situation.<sup>162</sup>
- The release of less advanced weapons was never a smooth process. Delays and obstacles forced frequent postponements and alterations to the Egyptian operational timetable.<sup>163</sup>
- Moscow prevented nations producing Soviet arms under license from supplying those arms to Egypt. For example, Moscow blocked an Egyptian effort to purchase military material (mostly spare parts) from India in 1971.<sup>164</sup>

<sup>161</sup>Heikal, *The Road to Ramadan*, p. 160.

<sup>162</sup>Sadat, p. 173.

<sup>163</sup>Karsh, p. 9.

<sup>164</sup>Karsh, p. 9.

In Moscow's defense it should be noted that Egypt's constantly changing war plans resulted in frequent modifications to Egypt's weapons requirements. Even Heikal admitted that Egyptian demands were "sometimes excessive" and blamed them in part on "an exaggerated idea of the productive capacity of the superpowers."<sup>165</sup> The Egyptians assumed that slow Soviet deliveries were due to a Soviet reluctance to support their cause and not the fact that some weapons simply could not be produced in the desired quantity (particularly newer weapons like the MiG-23). Still, the Soviets undoubtedly knew that Egyptian war objectives would ultimately be determined by weapons supply. While the Soviets may have trained the Egyptians to fight like the Soviet army, they never provided the weapons required to follow classical Soviet warfighting doctrine.<sup>166</sup> If Sadat insisted on a war, it would have to be fought for limited objectives.

*Did the client attempt to bring pressure to bear on the Soviet decisionmakers to alter or modify arms policies? Were they successful?*

Sadat's expulsion order was an effort to pressure the Soviets into improving their support to Egypt. It was not an attempt to end Soviet involvement in Egypt. Most importantly, not *all* the Soviet "advisors" in Egypt were expelled. All advisors who had arrived in Egypt prior to 1970 were allowed to stay. Soviet naval facilities were not affected. The expulsion also exempted instructors under contract with the Egyptian army. Only the large air defense contingent deployed to Egypt in 1970 was sent home. This amounted to all but 1,500-2,000 of the 15,000-20,000 Soviets in Egypt, but still left the Soviets with a secure position in Egypt.<sup>167</sup> Since the air defense forces had outlived their usefulness with the end of the "War of Attrition," Sadat could send Moscow a very clear message without jeopardizing Egyptian security.

Sadat sent this message to Moscow to force a change in Soviet-Egyptian relations. He explained later that he ordered the expulsion because "otherwise things would continue as they are now for twenty years."<sup>168</sup> Sadat gambled that a dramatic gesture would break up the logjam in Soviet arms shipments. Subsequent events were to prove that Sadat was correct in his assumption.

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<sup>165</sup>Heikal, *The Road to Ramadan*, p. 167.

<sup>166</sup>Sella, p. 85.

<sup>167</sup>Sella, pp. 76-77.

<sup>168</sup>Sadat made this statement during a confidential brief to Cairo editors immediately following the expulsion. See Heikal, *The Road to Ramadan*, p. 173.

*Was the client state of strategic importance to the Soviet Union at the time of the decision?*

The Soviet decision not to contest the expulsion order and the rapid return to friendly relations, both testify to the continued strategic importance of Egypt to the Soviet Union. Under strong military pressure to preserve the remaining Soviet military privileges (the naval facilities) and with Soviet political prestige on the line, the Soviet government stepped up its efforts to improve Soviet-Egyptian ties. It should be noted, however, that as a hedge against future difficulties the Soviets sought to improve relations with Syria. Just before the expulsion order a reported \$700 million arms deal was negotiated with Damascus. Soviet TU-16 reconnaissance aircraft were transferred to Syrian bases and the Soviets moved to guarantee access to Syrian ports.<sup>169</sup>

#### 4. Summation

- Sadat's expulsion order was viewed as a serious threat to continued Soviet presence in the Middle East. In order to maintain their presence the Soviets significantly expanded their military assistance to Cairo, thereby increasing the chances of a new round of Arab-Israeli fighting. In this instance, the Soviet leadership apparently believed that continued presence in Egypt was worth the risk of an escalation in Middle East tensions and the inherent possibility of the need for Soviet intervention.
- The military was determined not to lose their military privileges in Egypt and there is evidence that they fought hard to continue Soviet-Egyptian ties in the face of pressure to cut-off relations after the Egyptian "stab-in-the-back." The military may have influenced the final decision to patch up relations, though it must also be noted that Brezhnev and other party leaders were also anxious to maintain relations for reasons of political prestige.
- The Soviets clearly attempted to impose a "ceiling of sophistication" over weapons deliveries to Egypt. The Soviets avoided sending Sadat weapons that would give him a true offensive capability, including bombers, surface-to-surface missiles, and modern tanks and fighters. They also worked to preserve their monopoly as arms supplier by shutting off non-Soviet arms sources, and regulated arms flows in a way probably designed to prevent Egypt from seriously considering a war with Israel. These restraints were relaxed after the expulsion of the Soviet advisors as Soviet leaders sacrificed control over the situation for the continued goodwill of Sadat.
- Sadat would not have contemplated expelling the Soviets had he not felt secure in his bargaining position. The obvious strategic importance of Egypt to the Soviet Union gave Sadat the confidence he needed to expel the Soviet personnel, (while carefully retaining those vital to Egyptian national security) and imposing a new reality upon Soviet-Egyptian relations.

## E. 1973: THE OCTOBER WAR

### 1. Introduction

By 1973 the Egyptian government was under heavy domestic pressure to go to war with Israel. The costs of maintaining the country on a constant war footing had placed an intolerable strain on the Egyptian economy and required tremendous

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<sup>169</sup>Glassman, p. 97.

sacrifices from the Egyptian people. President Sadat was also confronted by a restless military anxious to retrieve its lost honor, and sometimes violent public demands for action.<sup>170</sup> Sadat realized that Egypt could no longer tolerate the "no peace, no war" status that had prevailed since 1967. He also believed the Egyptian military was at peak proficiency and feared the effects of a continued delay. With no diplomatic solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict in sight, Sadat began the final planning for his "war of liberation."

## 2. Internal Inputs

*Was there evidence of a disagreement between the party and the military regarding the proper conduct of relations?*

The 1973 October War presented the ultimate test of Soviet-Egyptian relations and brought to the forefront many of the simmering controversies over the depth of Soviet commitment to its Egyptian client. A review of Soviet press reporting during the war reveals a familiar pattern. The party leadership, as represented on the pages of *Pravda*, looked for ways to control the conflict and limit the Soviet role. The military's mouthpiece, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, focused its concern upon the maintenance of a strong Soviet position in the Middle East and hinted at a need for a more active Soviet role in the fighting. The articles in these two papers suggest that there was a significant degree of disagreement on what policies the Soviets should follow during the war.

*Pravda* had three primary themes during the war. The first was the importance of detente. In her study *Domestic Influences on Soviet Foreign Policy*, Dina Rome Spechler points out that critics of detente, in the military and elsewhere, seized upon the conflict as an opportunity to question the Soviet relationship with the United States. The pages of *Pravda* devoted considerable space to the defense of detente and examples of how detente had served Soviet interests by moderating American policy. The paper was also surprisingly positive in its reporting of American activity. For example, *Pravda* avoided reprinting Arab condemnations of the United States, and made no assertions that Israel was an American puppet. Apparently Brezhnev and the other party leaders sought to reassure the United States that the USSR had not discarded detente. As Spechler observes "whatever the other results of the fighting may be, *Pravda* wants to make sure that it leaves detente intact."<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>170</sup>Heikal provides an account of the Egyptian situation in 1973 in, *The Road to Ramadan*, p. 204.

<sup>171</sup>Spechler, p. 19. Spechler's discussion on *Pravda's* approach to the war appears on pages 17-25.



The second major concern voiced in *Pravda* was for the maintenance of the Soviet foothold in the Middle East. Another crushing Israeli victory might topple the "progressive" governments of Egypt and Syria with installation of anti-Soviet, pro-Western regimes in their place. This would completely undermine Soviet Middle Eastern strategies. A prolonged war, even one ending in an Arab military victory, might cause such severe economic dislocations that the friendly Arab regimes in Cairo and Damascus might collapse. It was imperative to prevent this from happening.

Most importantly, the Party leaders feared the potential broadening of the conflict and the increasing possibility of a U.S.-Soviet confrontation the longer the fighting continued. *Pravda* articles reflected a desire to avoid Soviet intervention and the potential for a superpower clash. Spechler observed a "very great eagerness to limit Soviet involvement in the war. Whatever might reduce the need for Soviet participation this paper enthusiastically endorses."<sup>172</sup> Overall, the articles in *Pravda* reflected an interest on the part of Brezhnev and other members of the party hierarchy to maintain the Soviet presence in the Middle East at the least possible cost. The eagerness for an early settlement to the war flowed from twin desires to avoid a superpower confrontation and prevent an Arab defeat. This would require tremendous flexibility and innovation - not only on the pages of *Pravda* but also in Soviet Middle Eastern policy.

*Krasnaya Zvezda* took positions that contrasted with those found in *Pravda*. This paper's handling of the crisis demonstrated a desire to project a strong Soviet image and preserve Moscow's more tangible benefits in the Middle East. *Krasnaya Zvezda* made infrequent references to detente policies. While detente was not openly criticized, it was also clear that the military writers did not evaluate the Arab-Israeli conflict in terms of its ability to promote or jeopardize Soviet-American relations. Instead the paper argues that there are essential preconditions for the success of detente, notably Soviet military strength and activism.

With this in mind the military daily was "less concerned about the dangers of escalation than about the possible consequences of Soviet restraint."<sup>173</sup> In some instances it appears that the paper supported a more direct Soviet role in the fighting as the Arab attack faltered and Soviet interests were jeopardized. When Israeli air

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<sup>172</sup>Spechler, p. 20.

<sup>173</sup>Spechler, p. 34. Spechler's discussion of the *Krasnaya Zvezda* response to the war appears on pages, 32-41.

raids caused Soviet casualties *Krasnaya Zvezda* declared that the "aggressors" had "gone too far." It suggested that the Israelis heed the Soviet Union's "serious warning" or risk "serious consequences for Israel itself."<sup>174</sup> It was never made clear, however, what those consequences might be.

Finally, there were no calls for a peaceful settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict. *Krasnaya Zvezda* showed no interest in diplomatic matters, preferring to give detailed accounts of Arab military successes, and encourage the Arab war effort. The paper seemed particularly interested in erasing any remaining doubts about the capabilities of Soviet weapons. An article that appeared in mid-October announced that the war "in no way resembles the six-day war," and went on to claim that Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir attributed her country's losses to the "high quality of Soviet weapons."<sup>175</sup>

*Was the military successful in altering the pattern of the relationship?*

It is exceptionally difficult to measure the possible military influence on Soviet policy during the war because in many ways military and party goals were similar. While the Party leaders may have been more moderate in their viewpoint, and more concerned about the survival of detente, both *Pravda* and *Krasnaya Zvezda* reflected a desire to avoid an Arab defeat and preserve the friendly Arab governments. While the military airlift and the Soviet "threat" to intervene in the closing stages of the war seem to indicate a strong military influence, they are also compatible with a more general desire to preserve the status quo ante bellum. It cannot be proven that the Soviet military was successful in altering Soviet policy. On the other hand military leaders probably approved of many of the measures taken.

### 3. External Inputs

*Was there a conflict between the foreign policy objectives of the Soviet Union and the client state?*

The volume of Soviet weapons deliveries to Egypt between December 1972 and June 1973 strongly suggests that Moscow supported Sadat's decision to regain the lost territories by force of arms. Despite the deliveries, the Soviets were skeptical of the Arabs' ability to defeat Israel and looked to retain some influence over the course of the upcoming conflict, assuming they could not prevent it. Soviet actions

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<sup>174</sup>Spechler, p. 34.

<sup>175</sup>*Krasnaya Zvezda*, 20 October 1973; in: *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 14 November 1973. *Krasnaya Zvezda* seemed most proud of the fact that the war had destroyed the "myth" of Israeli invincibility.

immediately before and during the October War demonstrates a Soviet desire to restrain the Egyptians and prevent the escalation of the war, even as they supplied the Egyptian war effort.

The Soviets knew that Sadat planned an offensive, but did not know exactly when it would occur. Sadat had informed the Soviets in very vague terms because he was uncertain of the depth of detente and feared that a Soviet warning to the U.S. or Israel might force a postponement of the Egyptian assault.<sup>176</sup> Unable or unwilling to prevent the Egyptian attack, the Soviets agreed to back the Egyptian plan but requested that they be allowed to evacuate Soviet civilian personnel from Cairo. This evacuation, carried out just days before the Egyptian attack, may have been a subtle attempt to warn the Israelis and the Americans that hostilities were imminent without openly betraying Soviet-Egyptian friendship.<sup>177</sup>

Next the Soviets called for a ceasefire just six hours after the opening of hostilities. This action shocked the Egyptians, who were having substantial success along the Suez Canal. Moscow insisted this plea was made at Syria's request, but the Syrians denied this. A quick end to the hostilities had obvious benefits for Moscow. It would preserve the initial Arab gains, save Russia the expense of underwriting a long, expensive war, avoid the possible destabilization of pro-Soviet Arab governments if the Arabs began to lose, and eliminate the risks of a Soviet-American confrontation. The belligerents refused to accept the ceasefire and the fighting continued.<sup>178</sup>

As the fighting dragged on, Soviet Premier Kosygin arrived in Cairo on 15 October to again advocate a ceasefire backed by promises that the Soviets would ensure Israeli compliance. Kosygin warned that the tide of battle was turning (an Israeli armored column had counterattacked across the Canal) and suggested that the Egyptians would be wise to accept a standstill ceasefire before the situation deteriorated further. While assuring Sadat that Egypt had full Soviet backing, he also noted that the USSR had "an obligation to world peace" and a commitment to "search for a just and durable solution to the Middle East problem." This served to remind Sadat that the USSR had interests beyond Egypt.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>176</sup>The "Interim Agreement" signed by the U.S. and the Soviet Union in May 1972 would have obliged the Soviets to warn Washington.

<sup>177</sup>Heikal, *The Road to Ramadan*, gives an account of Egyptian pre-war activities on pp. 24-27.

<sup>178</sup>William Quandt, *Soviet Policy in the 1973 War*, Rand Report R-1864-ISA, (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1976). Also Rubinstein, *Red Star on the Nile*, p. 263.

Soviet efforts to lessen the international impact of the Arab-Israeli confrontation did not prevent them from beginning a massive air and sea resupply effort to Egypt and Syria soon after the war started (8 October). This apparent contradiction with the Soviet pleas for a ceasefire was, in fact, consistent with broader Soviet policies. The Soviets could not allow the defeat of their primary Arab client, nor were they prepared to jeopardize future Soviet-Egyptian relations by appearing to withhold arms during the conflict. In addition, the deliveries gave them the leverage needed to pressure Sadat to accept a ceasefire.

Soviet behavior immediately before and during the 1973 October War was consistent with Soviet, but not Egyptian interests. It is very likely the Soviets attempted to indirectly spoil Sadat's offensive by evacuating their civilian personnel from Cairo. Moscow next called for a ceasefire in the midst of impressive early Arab successes and actively promoted a ceasefire throughout the conflict. At the same time, Moscow was generous in its support of the Egyptian war effort. Soviet diplomacy displayed a keen grasp of Middle Eastern realities and impressive crisis management skills, allowing Moscow to exercise some control over the situation without alienating the Egyptians.

*Did the client receive the weapons requested or was the delivery of certain items (specifically offensive weapons) delayed or postponed?*

The flood of Soviet arms to Egypt in the months preceding the October War did not contain all the weapons the Egyptians desired. The MiG-23 fighter and the TU-22 supersonic bomber were not delivered. Advanced weapons that did arrive were primarily for air defense (SA-6, SA-7) and the ground forces (T-62, large numbers of Sagger anti-tank missiles).<sup>180</sup> It may well be that Soviet deliveries represented overdue deliveries finally reaching the Egyptians, combined with some new weapons. Given Sadat's near total dependence on Soviet armaments, the Russians were still in a position to control the arms flow without risking Soviet-Egyptian ties. The Soviets did not give Egypt the ability to attack Israel alone. All Egyptian operational plans were closely coordinated with Syria to ensure that Israel would be faced with a two-front war.

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<sup>179</sup>Heikal, *The Road to Ramadan*, p. 245 and Quandt, pp. 28-30.

<sup>180</sup>Glassman, p. 105.

One notable exception to the Soviet restriction on long-range offensive weapons was the Scud-B, a guided missile with a range of 150 miles. This weapon, and the threat of its use, played a significant role in the war. On 16 October, after a series of Arab setbacks, Sadat warned that if Israel attacked Egypt in depth he had the means to retaliate against Tel Aviv.<sup>181</sup> Several Scuds were launched against Israeli troops on 22 October as a demonstration of Egyptian capabilities. The firing of the Scud-Bs signified that Egypt possessed a deterrent that could prevent Israeli deep penetration strikes. The Scuds were apparently under Egyptian control but at least partially Soviet-manned. This implies a certain level of Soviet cooperation in the launch of the missiles, marking the first time Soviet personnel were involved in an *offensive* attack against Israel.<sup>182</sup>

*Did the client attempt to bring pressure to bear on the Soviet decisionmakers to alter or modify arms policies? Were they successful?*

Publicly, Sadat was pleased with Soviet support for his war effort, particularly the resupply effort. Soon after the ceasefire went into effect the semi-official Egyptian newspaper *Al Ahram* reported that "the USSR has done everything necessary to ensure the success of the Arab countries struggle."<sup>183</sup> This is not to say that Sadat was completely pleased with Soviet behavior; he had been alarmed by the Soviet request to evacuate their citizens<sup>184</sup> and disturbed by the Soviet pleas for an early ceasefire.<sup>185</sup> He may also have noted that Soviet deliveries required hard currency, in particular a \$200 million dollar donation from Algerian President Boumedienne.<sup>186</sup> On balance, however, it must be remembered that Sadat could not afford to offend his Soviet sponsor and was in no position to be anything but cooperative.

*Was the client state of strategic importance to the Soviet Union at the time of the decision?*

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<sup>181</sup>Sella, p. 107.

<sup>182</sup>Glassman, pp. 136-138.

<sup>183</sup>Quoted in *Pravda*, 31 October 1973; in: *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 28 November 1973.

<sup>184</sup>Heikal, *The Road to Ramadan*, p. 34.

<sup>185</sup>Rubinstein, *Red Star on the Nile*, p. 263.

<sup>186</sup>Sadat, p. 264. Sadat would write later in his autobiography that Boumedienne was convinced the Soviets were "a hundred times more eager" to see an Egyptian defeat than the Americans or the Israelis.

Egypt was still the focal point for Soviet interests in the Middle East at the time of the Yom Kippur War. The size of the Soviet resupply effort, and Kosygin's guarantee that the Soviet Union would ensure Israeli adherence to a ceasefire were signs of how seriously the Soviets took their position in Egypt. There was even an implied Soviet threat to intervene in the fighting when Brezhnev wrote to President Nixon on 24 October that if the United States refused to join the USSR in a joint intervention to force Israeli adherence to the ceasefire "we should be forced to consider the necessity urgently to consider the question of taking appropriate steps unilaterally."<sup>187</sup> Although this threat was vaguely worded and issued after the peak of the crisis had passed, it does symbolize the risk Moscow was willing to take to ensure the survival of a pro-Soviet government in Egypt.

#### 4. Summation

- The Soviets took great pains to ensure their continued presence in the Middle East. The Soviets provided full support to the Egyptian war effort and even an implied threat of military intervention. Moscow's frequent pleas for a ceasefire were the result of a desire to prevent an uncontrolled escalation of the conflict and preserve initial Arab gains. Above all, the Soviet leadership hoped to avoid a superpower confrontation.
- The military had a distinct interest in the outcome of the 1973 War, but the moderation of Soviet policies indicates that the military made limited inputs to the Soviet decisionmaking process. Still, the Soviet military elite was probably not entirely displeased by Soviet policy during the war. It is also to be expected that in a crisis of such magnitude and immediacy the party would maintain the final authority.
- Despite Soviet reservations over the Egyptian war plan, they did provide Sadat with sufficient weapons to launch his cross-canal offensive. The flow of arms to Egypt in early 1973 did not give Sadat the ability to attack Israel unilaterally (they required joint Syrian operations) or escalate the regional conflict without Soviet backing. Also, with the notable exception of the Scud-B, the Soviets managed to restrict the delivery of offensive weapons to Egypt.
- Sadat would not have launched his attack had he not been certain of Soviet support. The Soviet willingness to back Egypt up to the point of possible military intervention, indicates that Sadat still retained significant bargaining strength derived from Egypt's strategic location.

## F. 1976: THE COLLAPSE OF SOVIET-EGYPTIAN RELATIONS

### 1. Introduction

In spite of the extensive Soviet military and political support of the Egyptian war effort in 1973, Soviet-Egyptian relations began to deteriorate soon after the fighting ended. This gradual collapse culminated on 14 March 1976 with Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's unilateral decision to abrogate the Soviet-Egyptian Treaty of

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<sup>187</sup>Fukoyama, *Soviet Threats to Intervene in the Middle East: 1956-1973*, p. 15.

Friendship and Cooperation. Sadat cited several reasons for his decision, including the apparent Soviet opposition to the "trend toward peace" in the Middle East, the improvement of Egyptian-American relations, Moscow's refusal to place a moratorium on Egyptian repayment of Soviet military and developmental loans, and difficulties over military shipments and spare parts.<sup>188</sup> Nevertheless, it is doubtful that Sadat's action was a response to specific Soviet acts, but rather part of a fundamental shift in Egyptian foreign and domestic policy.

## 2. Internal Inputs

*Was there a disagreement between the party and the military regarding the proper conduct of relations?*

Several articles that appeared in *Pravda* during the months preceding the termination of the Soviet-Egyptian treaty indicated that the Soviet leadership was aware of the deterioration in relations. The *Pravda* items emphasized the positive aspects of the Soviets-Egyptian relationship and reminded the Egyptians of their indebtedness to Soviet assistance. An article printed on 25 July 1975 criticized Egyptian policymaking and noted that "it was the Soviet anti-aircraft installations that protected the cities of the Nile Valley in the spring of 1970."<sup>189</sup> A second *Pravda* article, published three months later, listed the accomplishments of Soviet-Egyptian cooperation and added that President Nasser had once observed, "if it were not for the support of the Soviet Union, Egypt would have been unable to accomplish a single complicated task; either economic or political."<sup>190</sup>

While the Soviet leadership apparently recognized, and was disturbed by, the disintegration of Soviet-Egyptian relations, there is no evidence of any internal debate over the conduct of Soviet-Egyptian relations. Soviet policies were never blamed for the frictions between Moscow and Cairo. When the treaty was abrogated, Soviet reaction to the Egyptian decision was a terse four paragraph statement that described the act as the latest "manifestation of a policy unfriendly to the Soviet Union," and declared that "all responsibility . . . rests with the Egyptian side."<sup>191</sup> Finally, the Soviets had no prior notification of the impending Egyptian action. A lack of internal debate

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<sup>188</sup>Rubinstein, *Red Star on the Nile*, p. 325.

<sup>189</sup>*Pravda* 25 July 1975; in: *Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 6 August 1975.

<sup>190</sup>*Pravda*, 25 October 1975; in: *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 19 November 1975.

<sup>191</sup>*Tass* statement appearing in *Pravda*, 16 March 1976; in: *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 7 April 1976.

between the political and military elites is therefore not surprising.

*Was the military successful in changing the pattern of the relationship?*

There are no indications that the military attempted to influence the conduct of Soviet-Egyptian relations during the months preceding the abrogation of the treaty. This relative silence may be attributed to the suddenness of the Egyptian move, the improvement in Soviet relations with Syria and the shift of naval assets to that country that began in 1972, and possibly a leadership vacuum in the Defense Ministry (Marshall Gretchko died in April 1976). In any event, the Soviet military leadership obviously elected not to make an issue out of the end of Soviet military presence in Egypt.

### 3. External Inputs

*Was there a conflict between the foreign policy objectives of the Soviet Union and the client state?*

The period following the end of the 1973 October War was marked by a pronounced change in Egyptian foreign policy. Cairo's relative success in its persecution of the war effectively changed the prevailing Middle Eastern "status quo" and allowed Anwar Sadat to pursue a wider range of policy options. Egypt no longer needed to prove itself on the battlefield, its efforts in 1973 had expunged the memory of the 1967 fiasco and allowed Sadat to consider peaceful methods of regaining Egypt's lost territories.

The Egyptian President also had to address pressing internal concerns. Egypt's internal economic crisis had been exacerbated by excessive military spending. Soon after the war ended, military expenditures, which had been rising steadily since 1967, began to drop. The shift in Egyptian spending appears even more pronounced when viewed in terms of arms imports as a percentage of total imports. For example, in 1970 and 1973, 82% of Egypt's total arms imports were arms related. In 1974 that percentage decreased to 7%, in 1976 to 4%.<sup>192</sup>

The reduction of military requirements lessened Egyptian dependence on the Soviet Union and gave Sadat greater flexibility in his pursuit of economic assistance. Sadat was as aware of the leverage provided by Egypt's strategic position as was his predecessor, Gamal Nasser, and had proven adept at using these advantages to force concessions from the Soviet Union. However, after the war, Sadat was less inclined to

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<sup>192</sup>U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, *World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers, 1967-1976* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1978), p. 179.



TABLE 2  
EGYPTIAN MILITARY EXPENDITURES (CONSTANT 1975 DOLLARS)

Year	Military Expenditures	Arms Imports	Arms as % of Total Imports
1967	462	323	26%
68	609	176	17
69	718	162	18
70	1020	888	82
71	1060	458	39
72	1290	691	63
73	1360	883	82
74	1360	170	07
75	1060	357	10
76	1050	131	04

Source: U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, *World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers: 1967-1976* (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1978), p. 42, 179.

consider Moscow as a source of aid for two major reasons. First, Sadat had a strong personal dislike for the Soviets. Ever since the Ali Sabri affair in 1972, Sadat had been suspicious of Soviet motives in Egypt. He was particularly annoyed by Soviet efforts to hinder any improvement in Egyptian relations with the United States. Sadat complained frequently of the inconsistency of a Soviet policy that promoted detente between the superpowers, but rejected the notion of improved relations between Washington and Cairo.<sup>193</sup>

Second, Sadat saw many practical advantages to dealing with the United States. The first was economic. Mohammed Heikal reported that the Egyptian President had for many years believed "that what Egypt really needed was its own

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<sup>193</sup>Rubinstein, *Red Star on the Nile*, p. 321.

Marshall Plan, the sort of program of economic recovery which only America could finance and organize."<sup>194</sup> Rebuilding Egypt's economy required Western assistance, as well as funds from conservative states such as Saudi Arabia. To get these funds Sadat would be required to reduce the Soviet presence in his country.<sup>195</sup> From a diplomatic standpoint, Sadat recognized that it was the Americans and not the Soviets who could pressure the Israelis into accepting a peace settlement and returning the Sinai. Henry Kissinger impressed this point on Sadat soon after the war; "the USSR can give you arms, but the U.S. can give you back your territories."<sup>196</sup>

The Soviets were understandably disappointed by the post-war shift in Egyptian foreign policy and made clear that they opposed improved Egyptian-American relations. Moscow had no diplomatic relations with Israel, a fact which severely limited its potential role as a negotiator in the Middle East peace process. Any enhancement of the U.S. role in achieving a peace settlement threatened to consign the Soviets to the sidelines, despite years of active and expensive involvement in Middle Eastern affairs. The conflicts between Egypt and Russia were further intensified by a general change in the Soviet approach to economic assistance to the Third World. After losing enormous sums providing economic aid to unstable clients during the 1960's, Moscow had reassessed the political utility of economic assistance and was more concerned with the "profitability" of its economic aid.<sup>197</sup> Soviet aid disbursements to the developing world decreased steadily throughout the 1970's, and what aid was given was carefully targeted to achieve maximum gain for the Soviet Union. This reappraisal of Soviet economic assistance policy in the Third World helps explain Moscow's reluctance to grant Egypt a debt moratorium or reschedule Cairo's outstanding loans. Moscow's policy inevitably conflicted with Sadat's efforts to improve Egypt's domestic situation through massive economic programs.

In sum, Soviet-Egyptian relations had always been based on convergent interests. Once free from the overriding need for Soviet arms, Sadat explored new means of improving Egypt's international and domestic standing. The Soviets, who

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<sup>194</sup>Mohamed Heikal, *Autumn of Fury* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1983), p. 43. It is also interesting to observe that a *Pravda* article that appeared on 10 March 1976 commented on US Treasury Secretary William Simon's offer of a "Marshall Plan" to Egypt. *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 7 April 1976.

<sup>195</sup>Rubinstein, *Red Star on the Nile*, p. 289.

<sup>196</sup>Rubinstein, p. 289.

<sup>197</sup>The modification of Soviet aid policy is addressed in Alexiev, pp. 33-37.

had proved a willing and trustworthy supplier of arms to Egypt's military, proved unable, or unwilling to address Egypt's more pressing economic concerns. The Soviet reputation as an arms dealer, and little else, left Moscow with little influence over Cairo after 1973. In March 1976 Sadat abrogated the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, effectively ending the client-superpower relationship which had existed since 1955.

*Did the client receive the weapons requested or was the delivery of certain items (specifically offensive weapons) delayed or postponed?*

The conflict between Egypt and the Soviet Union also extended to arms transfers. Following the war the Soviet Union continued to supply Egypt's military requirements at a more than adequate level. As Table 3 shows, the Soviets quickly replaced all Egyptian war losses. By 1974 the arms in the Egyptian inventory were quantitatively equal, and qualitatively superior, to pre-war levels. Once this loss compensation was completed, however, a one year freeze on arms shipments went into effect. A final arms deal was reached in 1974, that included a limited number of the coveted MiG-23, SU-20s and "several hundred" armored vehicles. Following the delivery of this equipment in 1975 there were no further Soviet shipments of major weapons systems to Egypt.<sup>198</sup>

The slowdown in Soviet arms deliveries did not jeopardize Egyptian military capabilities, and significant shortages appeared only in the numbers of frontline combat aircraft. Nevertheless, Sadat was quick to reproach the Soviets for their failure to provide Egypt with sufficient weapons. On several occasions he openly questioned Soviet support for Egypt. On 14 August 1974 he remarked that "I have not had any (arms) in nine months, and there are no signs that they will send me anything." Later, in January 1975 he complained, "they refused to replace the material that we lost during the October war, or to deliver to us the sophisticated late model arms that they have furnished without difficulty to Syria."<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>198</sup>Karsh, p. 9.

<sup>199</sup>Quoted in Rubinstein, *Red Star on the Nile*, p. 300. Sadat's view was not shared by all in the Egyptian government and his constant criticism of the Soviet Union was a source of serious dissension among Egypt's leadership. There were many in Cairo who agreed with one high official who said, "the United States gave Israel more than the USSR gave Egypt, but the USSR nonetheless gave Egypt enough weapons to do what had to be done. President Sadat's criticisms of the Soviet Union are unjustified," p. 291.

TABLE 3  
EGYPTIAN MILITARY STRENGTH BEFORE AND AFTER THE  
OCTOBER WAR

Weapons Systems	Pre-War	Losses	Early 1974
Tanks	1900	900	2000
APCs and other			
Armored Vehicles	2000	900	2000
Artillery Pieces	1700	Unknown	1700
Surface-to-Air			
Missile Batteries	125	20-30	130
Combat Aircraft	390	180-200	400

Source: Efraim Karsh, *Soviet Arms Transfers to the Middle East in the 1970's*, (Jerusalem: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 1983), p.10.

This final point was one Sadat found particularly disturbing. Syria had been quickly reequipped after the war, with no haggling over the repayment terms. In contrast, Egyptian requests were frequently postponed as "under study." When Sadat requested a ten year debt moratorium from the Soviets he was refused, but a similar request was granted to the Syrian's in the spring of 1974. Sadat was especially enraged by Soviet demands for payments on debts incurred during the 1973 war. He was quick to point out that the Russians had made only one installment on their lend lease debt following WW II, and could not understand why the Soviets would not extend him the same consideration.<sup>200</sup>

When the Soviets refused to overhaul Egyptian aircraft and further forbade India, which manufactured MiG-21 engines under license, from doing so, Sadat had had enough. Sadat would say later that "the question with India . . . was really the main cause for ending the treaty."<sup>201</sup> He accused the Soviets of failing to uphold Article 8 of the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, (to build up and strengthen

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<sup>200</sup>Rubinstein, p. 322.

<sup>201</sup>Rubinstein, p. 325.

Egypt's military potential) and elected to abrogate the 1971 agreement in March 1976. A Soviet reluctance to supply Egypt with the arms it wanted can thus be pointed to as a major cause for the breakdown in Soviet-Egyptian relations. But given Sadat's new Western orientation, Soviet hesitancy is certainly understandable. As Alvin Rubinstein points out:

Moscow had kept the Arabs supplied during the war. However, given Sadat's changed policy orientation after the fighting stopped, it did not feel obligated to give the Egyptians any bonuses.<sup>202</sup>

*Did the client attempt to bring pressure to bear on the Soviet decisionmakers to alter or modify arms policies? Were they successful?*

Sadat's outward hostility towards the Soviet Union was designed to alter, not end, the Soviet-Egyptian relationship. His refusal to remain silent over the issue of arms was undoubtedly an attempt to force the Soviets to increase their military and economic aid. By publicly embarrassing the Soviet Union and questioning its support for the Egyptian and Arab cause he hoped to improve his bargaining position. Sadat's first effort at pressuring the Soviets, the 1972 expulsion of the Soviet advisors, had been a resounding success and led to expanded Soviet arms shipments. Sadat probably believed that, given Moscow's enormous investment in Egypt, the Soviets would take whatever steps were necessary to preserve their position. If so he guessed wrong, and the Krenlin leadership refused to alter its policies to conform with the desires of its client.

*Was the client state of strategic importance to the Soviet Union at the time of the decision?*

The Soviet refusal to alter its arms transfer and economic policies towards Egypt, thereby jeopardizing its position in that country, indicates that by 1976 Egypt did not have its former strategic importance for Soviet planners. The Soviet decision to grant a debt moratorium to Syria and not Egypt is convincing proof that the Krenlin leadership viewed Damascus as a more reliable longterm ally than Cairo. While the naval facilities available to the Soviets in Syria could not compare with those lost in Egypt, changes in Soviet and American force structures allowed the Soviet military to view Syria as a viable alternative to Egypt. The long-range Backfire bomber, an aircraft well-suited for maritime strike missions entered service in 1974. In

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<sup>202</sup>Rubinstein, p. 297.

1976 the Soviet launched their first *Kiev* class VTOL carrier.<sup>203</sup> Additionally, improvements in the range of U.S. submarine launched missiles made it possible for American SSBN's to leave the vulnerable Eastern Mediterranean and patrol in the safer waters of the western Mediterranean and Indian Ocean.<sup>204</sup> All these factors combined to make the Soviets less dependent on Egyptian facilities and allowed the Kremlin leaders to take a harder line towards Egypt's demands.

Further, Moscow was becoming increasingly aware of Israel's nuclear capability and the subsequent potential for nuclear confrontation in the Middle East. A Soviet government statement on the Middle East released on 28 April 1976 expressed alarm at reports that "Israel is creating or has already created its own nuclear weapons. It is not difficult to see what a potential danger to peace is posed by this."<sup>205</sup> A nuclear exchange in a Middle East conflict would create strong pressures for the intervention of the superpowers, with unpredictable results. Under these circumstances the Kremlin leadership may well have decided that it would be wise to place some distance between themselves and any potential combatants in a Middle Eastern confrontation.

#### 4. Summation

- Sadat's unilateral abrogation of the Soviet-Egyptian Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, and his later (4 April 1976) cancellation of Soviet naval facilities, effectively ended the Soviet presence in Egypt. Moscow's failure to take measures to improve Soviet-Egyptian relations, such as a debt moratorium of a type already granted to Syria, suggests a reappraisal of Cairo's reliability as an ally, and a reassessment of importance of the Egyptian facilities to overall Soviet national security. Given Sadat's rapprochement with the West and growing hostility towards Moscow, the changing Soviet and American force structures in the Eastern Mediterranean, the availability of adequate alternative facilities in Syria, and the introduction of nuclear weapons into the Middle East scenario, it is not surprising that the Kremlin leadership found its desire for a continued presence in Egypt outweighed by the risk of an unwanted Soviet intervention into a Middle Eastern crisis.
- The Soviet military, though undoubtedly dismayed by the loss of the Egyptian facilities, apparently had little impact on the Soviet decisionmaking process. There was no evidence of disagreement between the Soviet military and political elites. The introduction of the Backfire bomber and Kiev-class VTOL carrier, coupled with the increased Soviet presence in Syria, substantially decreased the

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<sup>203</sup>The 37,000 ton *Kiev* VTOL (Vertical Take-Off and Landing) carrier has a complement of 12 Forger fighter-bombers. ( an aircraft capable of performing both air-air and air-surface missions) and 16 Hormone or Helix ASW helicopters. It is officially described by the Soviets as a "tactical aircraft-carrying cruiser. *Jane's Fighting Ships, 1986-1987* (London, Jane's Publishing Co., 1986) p. 556.

<sup>204</sup>By 1976 31 Polaris submarines had been upgraded to carry the Poseiden C-3 missile (10 MIRV's missile, 3000 mile range). The 10 remaining US SSBN's had been upgraded to the Polaris A-3. Also, by 1976 the United States Navy was building its first Trident submarines. The Trident missile had a 4000 mile range. *Jane's Fighting Ships, 1975-1976* (London: Jane's Publishing Co., 1976), p. 783.

<sup>205</sup>Quoted in Sella, p. 157.

need for the Egyptian facilities and would have lessened the military's interest in, and ability to alter, Soviet handling of Egyptian relations.

- After replacing most Egyptian war losses, the Soviets again began to restrict arms shipments to Egypt. A long lull in Soviet arms shipments during 1974, persistent shortages in spare parts, and the Soviet blocking of an Indian offer to service Egyptian aircraft, points to a continued Soviet effort to limit Egyptian war-making capabilities and restrict Egyptian policies. The Soviets did raise the "ceiling of sophistication" in 1975 when they delivered a limited number of new MiG-23s. This delivery, however, did not mark a Soviet commitment to Egypt's military parity with Israel, and with the reorientation of Egyptian priorities was too late to salvage Soviet-Egyptian relations.
- Sadat's unreliability and the shift in Western force deployments had lessened Egypt's strategic importance to the Soviet Union. As Moscow and Cairo shifted their policy priorities, the relationship was no longer of primary importance to their national security. Without this common need, the relationship was doomed.

## V. THE SYRIAN CASE: 1980-1985

### A. BACKGROUND: 1967-1980

This chapter begins its detailed examination of Soviet-Syrian relations with the signing of a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation by the two nations in October 1980. This was not, however, the opening of close relations between Moscow and Damascus. While Egypt had been the focus of Soviet Middle Eastern relations, Moscow never lost sight of the advantages of close ties with Syria. The 'progressive' government in Syria had much to offer the Soviet Union. The Syrians promoted radical, secular political aims, professed a bitter opposition to Israel, maintained close ties with Egypt, and had an active pro-Moscow Communist Party. Further, Syria was located in a strategically important position in the Eastern Mediterranean and therefore presented a promising alternative to Egypt if Soviet-Egyptian relations foundered. A brief review of Soviet-Syrian relations prior to 1980 is needed to understand subsequent events.

Syria negotiated her first arms agreement with the Soviet Union in 1956. By the time of the June War Syria was almost totally dependent on Soviet arms. Syria was not defeated as thoroughly as the Egyptians in 1967, but still suffered crushing equipment losses, including 60 aircraft (almost two-thirds of the active air force inventory). A major Soviet resupply effort over the course of the next year equipped the Syrians with 120 modern aircraft and 400 tanks; the deliveries were reportedly valued at \$300 million. Along with the equipment over 1000 advisors were dispatched to Syria to train forces, modernize tactics and assist in the operation of the new hardware. By the middle of 1970 there would be 2-3000 advisors in Syria.<sup>206</sup>

Major Soviet weapons deliveries to Syria continued during the period preceding the 1973 October War. Between 1968 and 1970 the Soviets provided late model MiG-21s, tanks, SA-2s and naval vessels. The expulsion of Soviet advisors from Egypt in 1972 intensified Soviet interest in Syria. The delivery of several major items to Syria took place at this time including additional aircraft, T-62 tanks, and SA-3 air defense missiles. In all, Soviet equipment deliveries totaled \$150 million in 1972 and \$185 million in the first six months of 1973.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>206</sup>Roger F. Pajak, "Soviet Military Aid to Iraq and Syria," *Strategic Review* 4 (Winter 1976): 55.

<sup>207</sup>Pajak, pp. 55-56.



Despite these Soviet deliveries, Syria suffered a catastrophic defeat in the October War. Losses reportedly included 222 aircraft (65% of the Syrian inventory), 1100 tanks (50%) and 17-20 SAM batteries (50%). Once again the Soviets launched a major resupply effort and by 1974 all Syrian losses had been replaced with more modern weapons. New equipment delivered during this time included the MiG-23 (export variant), SA-7, and the SCUD surface-to-surface missile.<sup>208</sup>

In March 1976, President Sadat of Egypt unilaterally abrogated his country's Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the Soviet Union, thereby terminating the Soviet presence in Egypt. To offset this blow to regional prestige, the USSR increased arms shipments to Syria and sought to strengthen ties with the Damascus government. In all, Soviet arms deliveries during the 1970's (exclusive of war loss compensation) amounted to nearly 3000 tanks, 1000 armored personnel carriers, 800 artillery pieces, and 100 aircraft.<sup>209</sup> Syria became the focus of Soviet efforts to secure a position in the Middle East and establish its role as the indispensable ally of those Arab states that rejected the Camp David peace process.

Soviet generosity in supplying arms and other forms of military assistance to Syria was not enough to prevent several disagreements that strained relations between the two nations. These difficulties, while never leading to a break in relations, served to show the circumstances under which Soviet and Syrian relations diverged before 1980 and form a backdrop for more recent disputes. Three of these disagreements deserve special attention, given their impact on later relations. First, in the years following the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, Syria refused to join the Soviet Union and work towards a peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Instead the Syrians pushed for a military solution and espoused the total defeat of Israel. Moscow reportedly responded to this act of defiance by threatening to withhold arms shipments. Syria, in turn, opened arms negotiations with the French in 1968 and the Chinese in 1969. Although no agreements were reached with either country, the Syrian ploy succeeded in forcing the Soviets to offer new arms contracts.<sup>210</sup> A second disagreement arose in 1972 when the Soviets offered Syria the opportunity to follow the Egyptian and Iraqi examples and sign a friendship treaty. The Syrians rejected this and several subsequent Soviet offers to conclude a treaty, preferring to preserve the appearance of non-

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<sup>208</sup>Pajak, pp. 56-57.

<sup>209</sup>Karsh, p. 15.

<sup>210</sup>Pajak, p. 56.

alignment despite the highly visible Soviet presence in their country. Finally relations, were shaken in 1976 when the Syrians intervened in Lebanon in support of Christian forces and against the Soviet supported PLO and the Lebanese left. The Soviets suspended arms shipments as a sign of dissatisfaction, but following a visit by Syria's President Assad to Moscow in early 1977 deliveries were resumed.<sup>211</sup>

Policy differences will continue as long as Moscow must deal with Syrian President Hafez Assad and his conception of Syrian national interests. Assad became a key member of the Syrian government in February 1966 and took full control of the country in November 1970. He has dominated Syrian affairs ever since and his leadership has provided Syria with stability as well as economic and social progress. In his foreign policy, Assad's "tenacious dream of a Greater Syria"<sup>212</sup> had led to an aggressive pursuit of Syrian interests in neighboring states. Of special note are Syria's substantial economic interests in Lebanon, which were a prime motivation for Syria's intervention in that country in 1976 and later.<sup>213</sup> Such Syrian adventurism has been a major source of conflict with the USSR. Additionally, Assad's deserved reputation for pragmatism and independence has hampered Soviet-Syrian relations. He has been largely responsible for Syrian efforts to diversify arms suppliers and has occasionally hinted that he might accept a resolution of the Syrian-Israeli conflict that is not co-sponsored by Moscow.<sup>214</sup>

Arms deliveries to Syria have resulted in some tangible benefits for the Soviet Union. In return for their assistance after the 1967 war, the Soviets were allowed to use Syrian airfields for long-range TU-16 reconnaissance missions and begin construction of naval facilities at the Syrian ports of Tartus and Latakia. These arrangements were comparable to, though not as favorable as, arrangements reached with Egypt at about the same time. After the Soviet expulsion from Egypt in 1972, Moscow negotiated an agreement to expand the facilities at Tartus and Latakia as a potential alternative to its Egyptian bases.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>211</sup>Alvin Z. Rubinstein, "The Soviet Presence in the Arab World," *Current History* 80 (October 1981): 314.

<sup>212</sup>John F. Devlin, "Syria: Consistency at Home and Abroad," *Current History* 85 (February 1986): 70. Quote from James H. Scheuer, "How to Stop Syria," *The New Times*, 15 March 1984.

<sup>213</sup>Robert Olson, "Syria in the Maelstrom," *Current History* 83 (January 1984): 25-28.

<sup>214</sup>Devlin, p. 85.

<sup>215</sup>Pajak, pp. 55-56.

With only limited usage rights at Syrian ports and airbases, the Soviets had arguably received a poor return on their investment of billions of rubles in the Syrian military and economy. However, the most important Soviet gains were not easily quantified. Soviet aid to Syria maintained Russia's entree into the Arab-Israeli dispute after 1976 and, despite periodic Syrian recalcitrance, assured a more or less permanent Soviet foothold in the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean. In 1980, this Soviet foothold was institutionalized through the Soviet-Syrian Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation.

## **B. 1980: THE TREATY OF FRIENDSHIP AND COOPERATION**

### **1. Introduction**

The Soviet-Syrian Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, signed in Moscow on October 8, 1980, marked a major change in the relations between the two countries. The treaty was an important victory for Soviet policy in the Middle East and the success of the treaty negotiations came at an especially critical time for Soviet regional relations. The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan had seriously damaged the Soviet position in the Arab world, and Moscow was also anxious to counter recent American successes in the region such as the Camp David peace process. For the Syrians, the treaty was an opportunity to lend legitimacy to a regime shaken by domestic violence and isolated by Egypt's abandonment of the Arab-Israeli struggle.

### **2. Internal Inputs**

*Was there evidence of a disagreement between the party and the military regarding the proper conduct of relations?*

Unlike the Soviet-Egyptian treaty the Soviet-Syrian accord was the culmination of several years of effort. Still there is no evidence of disagreement between the party and the military over the objectives and purposes of the treaty either before or after the signing. *Krasnaya Zvezda* reporting on the topic was straightforward and unremarkable. Soviet Party leader Leonid Brezhnev, in a speech following the signing of the treaty, made it very clear that the treaty entailed only limited commitments for the Soviet Union. Brezhnev praised the agreement as a "graphic example of such cooperation between socialism and the forces of national liberation" that "raises (relations) to a new, higher level," but carefully added that the treaty was "not directed against any third country . . . it is a treaty for peace, not war." It seems apparent that the Soviet leadership was intent on highlighting the fact that the

treaty was designed solely to improve Soviet-Syrian relations, and not to imply a direct Soviet linkage to ongoing Middle Eastern disputes. This reporting of the treaty provides an interesting counterpoint to articles that appeared following the signing of the Soviet-Egyptian treaty in 1971. In that case the military press stressed that the treaty was directed against a third party, Israel, and indirectly against the United States, while the party press organ, *Pravda*, made no mention of this.<sup>216</sup>

*Was the military successful in altering the pattern of the relationship?*

The negotiation of the Soviet-Syrian friendship treaty appears to have been a wholly political process. The treaty carried no explicit discussion of military relations beyond a pledge "to steadily develop friendship and cooperation between the two states in the . . . military . . . field."<sup>217</sup> There has been some speculation that Article 10 of the treaty, which states that the countries "will continue to develop cooperation in the military field on the basis of *appropriate agreements* concluded between them in the interest of expanding their defense capacity," was an indication of secret security appendices attached to the treaty that spelled out a true "defensive alliance."<sup>218</sup> The Soviets have categorically denied the existence of such appendices and insisted that such speculation "could not be further from reality."<sup>219</sup> More importantly, no Soviet actions since the signing of the treaty have given any indication that such appendices exist.

Additionally, the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation resulted in no increase in the size, or change in the character, of the Soviet military presence in Syria. While many in the West feared that the treaty was designed to allow the Soviet Union to intervene in the Middle East in emergency situations, no identifiable improvements were made to enhance the Soviet intervention capability. There was no increase in the number of military advisors in the country, no airfields, ports, or other facilities turned over to the Soviets for their use and there were no joint exercises of any

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<sup>216</sup>A commentary on the treaty and Brezhnev's remarks appeared in *Izvestia* on October 1980. See *Izvestia*, 15 October 1980; in: *Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS)*, (USSR) 16 October 1980. It seems evident the party leadership wanted no such controversy over the meaning and objectives of the Soviet-Syrian treaty.

<sup>217</sup>*Pravda*, 9 October 1980; in: *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 12 November 1980.

<sup>218</sup>Amiram Nir, *The Soviet-Syrian Friendship and Cooperation Treaty: Unfulfilled Expectations* (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 1983), p. 12. Nir's paper proved an invaluable source of information on the impact of the Friendship Treaty on Soviet-Syrian relations.

<sup>219</sup>*Tass*, 25 November 1980; in: *FBIS (USSR)*, 26 November 1980.

consequence.<sup>220</sup> There was no noticeable alteration in the pattern of Soviet arms shipments.<sup>221</sup> In all, the Soviet-Syrian military relationship appeared unaffected by the signing of the treaty, and it is doubtful that the military attempted to influence the pattern of the overall Soviet-Syrian relationship.

### 3. External Inputs

*Was there a conflict between the foreign policy objectives of the Soviet Union and the client state?*

Both the Soviet Union and Syria viewed the agreement as a means of furthering its own national interests. The disparity in these interests resulted in conflicting interpretations of the commitments implicit in the treaty. This is understandable given the different needs and intentions of the two governments. As the decade progressed, the varied interpretations of the treaty would become increasingly evident.

As late as 1979 President Assad of Syria had rejected Soviet offers of a Friendship treaty. There were several reasons for his reluctance. Assad undoubtedly feared that any treaty arrangement with the Soviet Union would damage Syrian standing in the Arab world, interrupt the flow of funds to Syria from conservative Arab oil countries, and possibly generate unrest among religious fundamentalist and nationalist groups within Syria. Two sets of factors apparently caused Assad to reverse his earlier decision and seek closer ties with Moscow.

First, Assad's change of heart was probably connected to a spell of serious domestic violence that shook Syria throughout 1980. The failure of the Syrian armed forces to control the situation may have caused Assad to fear that the Soviets might shift support to some stronger candidate. Assad would have seen the treaty as a means of formally tying the Soviet Union to his regime to ensure its continued existence. In using the treaty to legitimize his rule, Assad's actions seem remarkably similar to Sadat's in 1971.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>220</sup>A joint Soviet-Syrian amphibious exercise was held on 6 July 1981 during which the Soviets 'landed' 300-400 troops on a Syrian beach. This operation was supported by about half of the 53 ship Soviet Mediterranean Squadron. Both U.S. and Israeli analysts concluded that the maneuvers were intended for political, rather than military purposes and were designed to highlight Soviet intervention capabilities to the Arab states. The exercise was not of a scale that would have allowed the Soviets to resolve the physical and logistical problems inherent in any major landing operation. See Nir, pp. 26-28.

<sup>221</sup>Nir, pp. 24-31.

<sup>222</sup>Nir, p. 5.

Assad also had foreign policy considerations when he signed his agreement with the Russians. Of immediate concern was a need to prevent the Israelis from taking advantage of Syrian internal unrest to seize the military initiative. Second, Assad probably planned to use the new agreement as a deterrent cover for Syrian initiatives in Lebanon. New Syrian interventions in Lebanon would certainly meet with strong Israeli opposition and it would have been prudent of Assad to seek some assurance of Soviet support for his actions. Finally, the treaty offered a means of ending Syria's regional isolation. When Egypt withdrew from the Arab-Israeli conflict, Syria was left virtually alone to face a growing Israeli threat. Backing from other Arab states was limited at best: Saudi Arabia was expanding its ties with the United States, Libya was pursuing an adventurous policy in Africa, Iran and Iraq were planning to go to war against each other, and Jordan was supporting opposition groups within Syria. For Syria to redress the regional strategic balance, she would have to ally herself closely with one of the superpowers. Assad was apparently unconcerned by possible restrictions the treaty would place on his freedom of action; Arab criticisms could be parried with the argument that the treaty was a necessary means of preventing Israeli regional military superiority and opposing the Camp David Accords.<sup>223</sup>

Above all, Assad wanted a strong treaty that would explicitly commit the Soviet Union to support Syrian policy initiatives. The Syrians viewed the agreement in terms of a "defense treaty" or "strategic alliance." Two days after the treaty was signed, the Syrian press described it as a "strategic alliance" and observed that "the Soviet commitment to the Arab struggle . . . was confirmed under all conditions that have faced and are facing the Arab struggle."<sup>224</sup> Circumstances soon demonstrated that a blanket support for Syrian policies was not the Soviets' intention.

The Soviets had their own reasons for seeking a friendship treaty with the Syrian government. In general, the Soviets have always placed great value on the traditional benefits of written relationships with other nations, particularly nations in the Third World. As one analyst observed, "Moscow perceives such agreements as providing it with prestigious achievements in regions where political prestige has a cumulative significance."<sup>225</sup> In 1980 there were several additional reasons for the

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<sup>223</sup>Nir, p. 6.

<sup>224</sup>*Damascus Domestic Service*, 10 October 1980; in: *FBIS*, (MEA), 10 October 1980.

<sup>225</sup>Nir, p. 7.

Soviets to seek the prestige of a written agreement with the leading Arab confrontation state.

On the state-state level, the Soviets were anxious to maintain the status quo in Syria. Moscow harbored great reservations towards the potential alternative to Assad, the Muslim Brotherhood, which was an anti-Soviet, Islamic extremist group. A takeover by such a group would certainly jeopardize Russia's sizeable Syrian investment. Assuming the Syrian domestic crisis was resolved and Assad survived, the treaty would serve as a signal to Assad that the Soviet Union could be counted on as a reliable ally, thereby forestalling any possible Syrian shift to the West.

Regionally, the treaty offered the Soviets an opportunity to recover a measure of the Arab support they lost due to their invasion of Afghanistan. Close cooperation with Syria placed a pro-Soviet voice in inter-Arab forums and might nullify some of the negative effects of the Afghan invasion. Finally, at the superpower level, the Soviet leadership recognized that the American position in the Middle East, both militarily and politically, had improved significantly in the late 1970's. The treaty was an effective response to US activities in that it promised a Soviet input to Middle Eastern peace talks and also provided a possible justification for a future Soviet intervention in Syria if this was ever deemed necessary.<sup>226</sup>

The treaty also entailed certain risks for the Soviet Union. By closely identifying themselves with the Assad regime, the Soviets endangered their position in Syria in the event Assad was overthrown. Further, it was possible the treaty would compel the Soviet Union to support Assad in regional initiatives that were not necessarily in the best interests of the Soviet Union. Moscow's willingness to offer the treaty to Assad despite these possible reservations indicates that the Kremlin leadership believed the Soviet investment in Syria had passed the 'point of no return' and that they were confident the treaty contained only a limited obligation to support the Syrians.

As written, the treaty supported the Soviet perception of limited commitments. There were no articles that explicitly bound the Soviets to support Syrian policy initiatives, nor did the treaty guarantee maximum Soviet backing in any situation. The vague and ambiguous wording of the agreement offered several advantages to Soviet foreign policymakers; allowing them to 'institutionalize' the Soviet-Syrian relationship, recoup a measure of their regional prestige, and establish a potential justification for

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<sup>226</sup>Nir, pp. 7-8.

intervention in the region, either to defend Syria from an Israeli attack, or to prop up the Assad government. These benefits were gained at minimal cost. By avoiding a true "defense treaty," the Soviets retained control over the circumstances of their possible intervention in the Middle East. Additionally, the less definitive terms of a "friendship treaty" avoided the potential impact that a "defense treaty" might have had on other regional relationships, such as a strengthening of US ties with Israel and the conservative Arab states.<sup>227</sup>

The text of the treaty bore several similarities to earlier treaties signed between the Soviet Union and other third world nations, including Egypt, suggesting that Moscow had a standardized format for friendship treaties. Selected articles from the treaty will demonstrate the general nature of the treaty and the fact that it imposed no new commitments on either Moscow or Damascus:

- Article 1 pledged the "high contracting parties" to "declare their determination to steadily develop and strengthen friendship and cooperation between the two states and peoples in the political, economic, military, scientific-technical, cultural and other fields". This article can be seen as a guarantee of a continued Soviet presence in Syria. At the same time it commits both nations to "noninterference in each others internal affairs," a restriction which may apply more to the Soviet Union than Syria.
- Article 4 states that "the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics will respect the non-alignment pursued by the Syrian Arab Republic," a pledge which demonstrates a certain Soviet acceptance of an independent Syrian foreign policy. It also calls into question any speculation about "defensive alliances."
- Article 6 states that whenever "a situation arises that threatens the peace or *security* of one of the parties . . . the high contracting parties will immediately contact each other with a view to coordinating their positions and cooperating in eliminating the threat that has arisen and restoring the peace." The use of the term "security" is unique to the Soviet-Syrian Treaty and may broaden the bounds of coordination beyond an external threat to Syria to include internal threats. Also of interest in this article of the treaty is the use of the term "cooperating." This term is also unique to third world treaties and may have been a partial concession to a Syrian desire for a stronger security arrangement. In any event, given Assad's reliance on Soviet support, he was certain to maintain close contacts with Moscow.
- Article 11 prohibited either country from entering into "an alliance or taking part in any grouping of states or in actions or measures directed against the other high contracting party." As in the Egyptian case, the Soviets probably added this stipulation to prevent a future US-Syrian agreement, however unlikely.

The treaty was also remarkable for certain items not included. Syria was not pledged to develop a Socialist state, though Article 7 did note that the countries would "ensure conditions for the preservation and development of the social and economic developments of their people." There was no call for a negotiated settlement to the

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<sup>227</sup>Nir, pp. 10-11.



Arab-Israeli conflict. Finally, there was no explicit pledge of Soviet military support to Syria comparable to that found in Article 8 of the Soviet-Egyptian Treaty.<sup>228</sup>

Most importantly, there was no practical change in Soviet-Syrian relations following the consummation of the agreement. Each partner interpreted its obligations under the terms of the treaty in a way designed to fulfill its national interests. While it is admittedly impossible to track every potential incidence of Soviet-Syrian coordination after the treaty was signed (including telephone conversations, telegrams, and other informal means of communication), based on an assessment of Soviet reactions to Syrian foreign policy activity it seems clear that there was little or no coordination between Moscow and Damascus on Syrian policy initiatives despite the provisions of Article 6 of the treaty. Three crises which occurred soon after the treaty was negotiated demonstrate the limited impact of the agreement on Soviet-Syrian relations.

Less than two months after the treaty was signed, a crisis erupted on the Syrian-Jordanian border. Syria moved troops to the border area and for a time it appeared that an open conflict was imminent. There were no indications that the Syrians consulted with the Soviets before moving their troops and it is doubtful that Moscow would have approved of an action which threatened to involve them in an inter-Arab dispute. It also came at a time of increasing difficulties in Afghanistan and high tensions in Poland. The Kremlin leadership ignored the situation publicly and the crisis received no mention in the Soviet press. On the diplomatic front, Moscow dispatched Vice President Kuznetsov to Damascus to neutralize tensions. About a week later Syrian forces withdrew from the border. The crisis demonstrated that, despite the friendship treaty, Moscow could not be certain that it would be consulted before Syrian foreign policy initiatives. The Syrians learned not to assume automatic Soviet support for their decisions.<sup>229</sup>

The second crisis was the Syrian decision to deploy SA-6 surface-to-air missiles in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley on 29-30 April 1981, after Israeli fighters downed two Syrian helicopters operating over central Lebanon. Once again, there is no evidence of Soviet-Syrian coordination prior to the Syrian action. The Soviets, somewhat belatedly, voiced support for the Syrian move. A commentary in *Pravda* on

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<sup>228</sup>The text of the treaty appeared in *Pravda* on 9 October 1981. See *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 12 November 1980. For critical analysis of the treaty's meaning, see Nir, pp. 10-12.

<sup>229</sup>Nir, pp. 14-15.

17 May was typical. It described the movement of the missiles as a "strictly defensive measure" and observed that the missiles could "only be used for defensive purposes." The article then criticized the United States for its inability to control "Israeli aggressiveness."<sup>230</sup>

Despite Moscow's verbal support, the Soviets made it clear that although they recognized Syria's right to move into Lebanon they had no intention of becoming involved themselves. As one analyst reported:

While Damascus was declaring that Soviet military aid to Syria would be forthcoming in the event of a conflagration, the Soviet media maintained absolute silence on the matter. Indeed a report carried by Israeli radio to the effect that the Soviet ambassador in Beirut had called the (Bekaa) a Syrian security zone, and that the USSR would back Syria militarily if Israel were to attack Syrian forces there - was swiftly and vehemently denied in Soviet radio commentary.<sup>231</sup>

The Soviets also probably moved to prevent the escalation of the crisis. Deputy Foreign Minister Korniyenko was dispatched to Damascus on 6 May for what were later described as "useful" talks with Assad.<sup>232</sup> The handling of the Lebanese crisis demonstrated once again that despite the pledges made in the friendship treaty there was no guarantee that the Soviets would have a say in Syrian foreign policies or that the Syrians could rely on the Soviets to support their initiatives.

The final crisis was caused by the Israeli annexation of the Golan Heights in December 1981. The annexation occurred against a backdrop of increasing Syrian pressure for an expansion of the pact into a true "strategic alliance" comparable to the memorandum on strategic cooperation reached earlier by the United States and Israel. The Soviets balked at the idea of changing the agreement and linking themselves more closely with the Assad government and, while the Soviets condemned the Israeli annexation as an "illegal act" and linked the move directly to the US-Israeli agreement,<sup>233</sup> they refused to use US-Israeli "strategic cooperation" as an excuse for developing a similar relationship with Syria and continued their refusal even in the face of the provocative Golan Heights annexation.

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<sup>230</sup> *Pravda*, 17 May 1981; in: *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 17 June 1981.

<sup>231</sup> Nir, p. 17.

<sup>232</sup> *Tass*, 8 May 1981; in: *FBIS*, (USSR), 11 May 1981.

<sup>233</sup> *Pravda*, 19 December 1981; in: *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 19 January 1982.

The ambiguous wording of the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation allowed liberal interpretations of the treaty's objectives by both Moscow and Damascus. The Syrians did not feel compelled to discuss potentially dangerous foreign policy measures with the Soviets, despite the provision of Article 6. The Syrian actions in Lebanon and on the Jordanian border indicate that they would proceed with foreign policy initiatives with or without Soviet approval. For their part, the Soviets showed no signs that they planned to support or endorse Syrian actions; no units were placed on alert, there were no threats of possible intervention, and weapons deliveries to Syria were not increased. In fact, Moscow seemed most concerned with defusing the crises by restraining the Syrians. It was obvious that the treaty *in practice* was designed solely to *institutionalize* the Soviet-Syrian relationship. Neither of the partners wanted a pact that restricted their foreign policy options or entangled them in commitments they would not or could not fulfill.

*Did the client receive the weapons requested or was the delivery of certain items (specifically offensive weapons) delayed or postponed?*

The treaty did not deal with any specific weapons and there is no indication that weapons deliveries were a factor in the negotiation process. Article 10 pledged continued cooperation in military matters based on "appropriate agreements" designed to enhance their "defense capability." If this is in reference to a Soviet intention to maintain their military support of the Assad regime, it is certainly very vague.

*Did the client attempt to bring pressure to bear on the Soviet decisionmakers to alter or modify arms policies? Were they successful?*

Both the Soviets and the Syrians desired a friendship treaty, though admittedly for different reasons. The Syrians certainly did not need to pressure the Soviets into signing an agreement that Moscow had wanted for several years. As was mentioned earlier, the Syrians may have forced the Soviets into certain concessions in the wording of the document, but subsequent actions demonstrated that the Soviets kept their commitments limited.

*Was the client state of strategic importance to the Soviet Union at the time of the decision?*

The importance of Syria to the Soviet Union was greatly enhanced when Egypt abrogated its friendship treaty with the USSR in 1976. When the Soviets were evicted from the Egyptian ports in April 1976 they were allowed to shift some of their naval support operations to the Syrian ports of Tartus and Latakia. Although these

ports could not provide the conveniences once provided by Egypt, being small and overcrowded, they were critical to the support of Soviet diesel-powered submarines in the Mediterranean. In 1981 four Soviet TU-16 Badger reconnaissance aircraft and four IL-38 May ASW aircraft arrived in Syria to take part in a joint Soviet-Syrian naval exercise. This was the first deployment of Soviet aircraft to a country on the Mediterranean since the Soviet expulsion from Egypt in 1972.<sup>234</sup> In terms of national security and superpower prestige the maintenance of good relations with Syria was crucial to Soviet national interests. The longstanding Soviet quest for a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Syria testifies to the Soviet recognition of the importance of Syria as a cornerstone of their Middle Eastern policies.

#### 4. Summation

- The Soviet-Syrian Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation was designed to institutionalize and formalize relations between the two nations, and guarantee continued Soviet presence in Syria. It did not commit the Soviet Union to intervene on Syria's behalf in Middle East crises, nor did it place restraints on Syria's foreign policy.
- There is no evidence of military influence during the negotiation of the treaty. The military aspects of the Soviet-Syrian relationship were unaffected by the treaty; there was no increase in the number of Soviet advisors in Syria, no alteration of arms delivery schedules, and no additional naval or air facilities were turned over to Soviet use. Still, the desire to preserve the Soviet military presence in Syria undoubtedly played a part in Moscow's desire to formalize its relations with Damascus.
- As in the case of the Soviet-Egyptian treaty, there was no discussion of specific weapons systems during the treaty negotiation process. There is no evidence of a Soviet effort to impose a ceiling of sophistication.
- The apparent Soviet acceptance of certain textual alterations attests to the Soviet recognition of Assad's bargaining strength. Good relations with Syria were essential for continued Soviet presence in the Middle East. While the Soviets proved adept at limiting the depth of their commitment to Syria, Soviet national interests and superpower prestige in the Middle East became dependent on the preservation of the Assad government.

### C. THE 1982 WAR IN LEBANON

#### 1. Introduction

The Soviet response or, more accurately, lack of response to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June 1982, has been cause for much comment. Soviet foreign affairs specialist Karen Dawisha observed:

Soviet inaction in the Lebanon crisis cast serious doubt on the capability of the USSR to influence events in Lebanon and in the Middle East as a whole. The USSR was reduced to a series of near-empty and peripheral efforts during the crisis - including the exchange of letters with President Reagan, support for the Arabs in a United Nations paralyzed by the conflict, and a telegram to Yasir

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<sup>234</sup>Turnbull, pp. 72-74.

Arafat in besieged Beirut assuring the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) Chief that Moscow was behind him the proverbial "one thousand percent."<sup>235</sup>

The inability or unwillingness of the Soviet Union to respond to the situation in Lebanon with active measures greatly upset the Syrians, who anticipated substantial assistance under the terms of Article 6 of the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation and had benefited from the Soviet air and sea lift of military supplies during the 1973 war. In 1982 Soviet activity was limited to symbolic gestures, such as placing certain units in Southern Russia under alert, moving elements of the Mediterranean Squadron to positions off the Lebanese Coast, and initiating a very limited airlift after 10 days of fighting.<sup>236</sup>

## 2. Internal Inputs

*Was there evidence of a disagreement between the party and the military regarding the proper conduct of relations?*

The Israeli intervention in Lebanon could not have come as a complete surprise to the Soviet leadership. The Soviet press had warned of an impending crisis at least six months prior to the outbreak of hostilities. Yet there was no effort made by the Soviet military elite to pursue a more aggressive stance in support of Syria, nor was there any attempt to strengthen Soviet-Syrian military ties. Instead the military seemed content to follow the lead of the political leadership and adopt a low-key attitude towards the Israeli-Syrian conflict.

During the actual fighting, both *Pravda* and *Krasnaya Zvezda* were very restrained in their reporting. In *Pravda* there were the obligatory attacks on Israeli aggression, coupled with accusations of American complicity and encouragement, but there was never any mention of the Soviet-Syrian Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation and possible Soviet obligations under that agreement. Instead *Pravda* commentaries drew attention to the inactivity of the other Arab states and implied that it was unreasonable to expect Soviet involvement in the crisis if the Arabs themselves remained silent.<sup>237</sup> *Krasnaya Zvezda*, if anything, seemed even less intent on promoting more active Soviet involvement in the conflict. The Soviet military daily virtually

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<sup>235</sup>Karen Dawisha, "The USSR in the Middle East: Superpower in Eclipse?" *Foreign Affairs* 61 (Winter, 1982,83): 438.

<sup>236</sup>Dawisha, p. 439.

<sup>237</sup>For example, see *Pravda*, 18 July 1982; in: *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 18 August 1982.

ignored the fighting between the Syrians and the Israelis, focusing instead on the Israeli attacks upon the Palestinians and Lebanese. In all, a review of the press revealed no apparent disagreement between the political and military leadership over the proper handling of the Syrian-Israeli conflict.

*Was the military successful in altering the pattern of the relationship?*

There is no evidence that the Soviet military made any effort to alter the Soviet-Syrian relationship either before or during the outbreak of hostilities in June 1982. The 1980 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation had not resulted in an increase in the Soviet military presence in Syria. During the fighting the highest ranking Soviet military official to visit Syria was the deputy commander of Soviet air defense forces, whose primary mission was apparently to determine the reasons behind the failure of the SA-6's in the Bekaa Valley.<sup>238</sup> Practical considerations also mitigated against Soviet military involvement in Lebanon. The insertion of a token force might result in a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Israelis, while a major effort threatened a superpower confrontation. Since the military privileges the Soviet military had been granted in Syria were limited, and certainly not equal to those previously held in Egypt, it is understandable that the Soviet military was less willing to accept the inherent risks of an aggressive policy in the Syrian case.

### 3. External Inputs

*Was there a conflict between the foreign policy objectives of the Soviet Union and the client state?*

Both the Syrians and the Soviets were aware of the rising tensions in Lebanon and the potential for an open conflict between Israel and Syria. Yet, in the weeks that preceded the fighting there were apparently no discussions between high-level Soviet and Syrian officials on military or political issues, nor were emergency consultations initiated once the fighting began. As a result Soviet and Syrian policies were uncoordinated and unable to pursue a common goal.

The Syrians viewed the Israeli attack as a pretext for raising the friendship treaty to the level of a "strategic alliance."<sup>239</sup> In contrast, Soviet actions both before and during the 1982 conflict demonstrated a pronounced desire to prevent the expansion of the conflict and to limit Soviet involvement. There were several possible reasons for Soviet hesitancy to become entangled in the Lebanon dispute and as many

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<sup>238</sup>Nir, p. 38.

<sup>239</sup>*Damascus Domestic Service*, 20 June 1982; in: *FBIS*, (MEA), 21 June 1982.

explanations for Moscow's inactivity. Some of the more important include:

- The Soviets were unwilling to become involved in hostilities outside of Syrian borders, a policy established by their response to the Lebanese missile crisis in May 1981. The Soviets had no legitimate pretext for military intervention in Lebanon; they had no agreements with the Lebanese government and could not easily justify intervention on behalf of the Syrians or the Palestinians.
- The Soviets were under no obligation to aid the PLO and offered them virtually no assistance, causing one Palestinian leader to lament that "Soviet pressure to prevent the carnage has had limited influence."<sup>240</sup>
- Domestic considerations and other foreign policy concerns ruled against Soviet military action. Afghanistan and Poland had not yet been resolved, arms talks with the US were being reinitiated and there was an impending succession crisis in the Soviet leadership.<sup>241</sup>
- Above all, the Soviets wanted to prevent a general Israeli-Syrian war with its inherent potential for a superpower confrontation. This was reflected by Moscow's downplaying of the war in the press and the general lack of encouragement given to Damascus during the fighting. Moscow's first priority throughout the crisis was to prevent its escalation and avoid involvement in a Middle East conflict at a time and place not of their own choosing. This policy served Soviet interests, but also may have damaged Moscow's credibility in the Arab world.

*Did the client receive the weapons requested or was the delivery of certain items (specifically offensive weapons) delayed or postponed?*

There was no apparent change in the size or content of weapons deliveries to the Syrians in the months preceding the 1982 conflict. It must be remembered that unlike the Egyptians, the Syrians were not planning an offensive to regain lost territory and were probably less specific in their demands for equipment. There is no evidence of Syrian disappointment over Soviet refusal to provide certain weapons and the Syrian military was well equipped when the hostilities began (late model T-72 tanks, fighters and fighter-bombers, sophisticated air defense missiles).<sup>242</sup> The Syrians lacked long-range bombers or surface-to-surface missiles of the type frequently requested by Egypt before the 1973 war, but there is no evidence that the Syrians ever requested weapons of this variety.

*Did the client attempt to bring pressure to bear on the Soviet decisionmakers to alter or modify arms policies? What method was used? Were they successful?*

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<sup>240</sup>DFLP leader Nayif Hawatimah made this remark in an interview to the French newspaper *Le Matin*, on 15 July 1982. See *FBIS (MEA)*, 16 July 1982. The Soviet Union has never been forthcoming with significant aid for the PLO, offering them no assistance in their conflict with Jordan in 1970 or Syria in 1976.

<sup>241</sup>Nir, p. 44.

<sup>242</sup>See *The Military Balance*, (London, International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1982) p. 57 for Syrian military holdings.

Although the Syrians were disappointed by the Soviet inactivity during their fight with Israel, they made no effort to pressure the Soviets into taking a more active role. Like Sadat in 1973, Assad took care not to offend his Soviet sponsor and jeopardize future Soviet assistance. Syrian press articles and public statements during this period generally praised relations with the Soviet Union and if anything called for stronger ties with Moscow, preferably a "strategic alliance."<sup>243</sup> There was no criticism of Soviet equipment in the Syrian press.

*Was the client state of strategic importance to the Soviet Union at the time of the decision?*

Syria was the last remaining bastion of Soviet presence in the Eastern Mediterranean. The maintenance of a pro-Soviet government in Syria is undoubtedly vital to Russian national security interests. Whatever Soviet commitment to Syria existed, however, it obviously did not extend beyond Syrian borders. Moscow's slow response to Syria's plight clearly demonstrated that the Kremlin had no intention of risking a major war over Syrian interests in Lebanon. The war was perceived as a *Lebanese* crisis and the Soviet Union had no reason or excuse for intervention in that country. Still, if the Soviets were reluctant to become actively involved in the Lebanese hostilities, the perceived importance of maintaining Soviet presence in strategically important Syria would become evident in the size of the Soviet effort to resupply the Syrian armed forces.

#### 4. Summation

- The Soviet response to the 1982 conflict in Lebanon was consistent with their desire to maintain their presence in Syria while avoiding their own military intervention. The first priority was to prevent the uncontrolled escalation of the conflict. While Moscow offered verbal support to the Syrians there was no evidence, in words or gestures, that the Soviets were prepared to consider military intervention, particularly in reaction to a crisis that did not directly threaten the Syrian government.
- The military's approach to the conflict was exceptionally restrained. There were no appeals for a more aggressive policy, in fact the fighting between Syria and Israel was virtually ignored by the military newspaper, *Krasnaya Zvezda*. This is understandable given the rather limited nature of Soviet military privileges in Syria and the serious difficulties inherent in any type of military intervention. The low-key Soviet policy therefore would have appealed to the Soviet military elite.
- There was no apparent Soviet effort to place a "ceiling of sophistication" on arms deliveries to Syria before the 1982 conflict. There was a notable lack of long-range delivery systems in the Syrian inventory (bombers, surface-to-surface missiles), but there is no evidence that Syrian requests for such weapons had

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<sup>243</sup>A statement to this effect by Syrian Information Minister Ahmad was reported in the *Damascus Domestic Service* on 20 June 1982. See, *FBIS*, (MEA), 21 June 1982.



been denied. Further, unlike the Egyptians in 1972/3 the Syrians were not developing an offensive war plan and may well have been more conservative in their weapons requests.

- Syria's importance to the Soviet Union as an entree into the Arab-Israeli conflict, coupled with the military privileges the Soviets retained in Syria, gave Syrian President Assad a certain degree of bargaining strength when dealing with the Russians. While Moscow was unwilling to risk a superpower confrontation to back the Syrian position in Lebanon, the Russians would undertake a massive postwar military resupply effort to ensure continued good relations with their foremost Middle East client.

## D. 1982/83: THE SOVIET RESUPPLY EFFORT

### 1. Introduction

The Syrian armed forces did not perform well in the 1982 fighting in Lebanon. This was particularly true of the Syrian air and air defense forces. Israeli pilots downed over 80 Syrian jets in air-to-air combat while incurring no losses, and completely destroyed the Syrian surface-to-air missile installations in the Bekaa Valley, again with no losses.<sup>244</sup> There is no doubt that the failure of Soviet weaponry to perform adequately was a serious blow to Russian regional prestige and credibility as a supplier of quality military equipment. As a result the Soviet effort to resupply the Syrian military after the 1982 conflict featured the delivery of highly sophisticated equipment, some of which had never before been seen outside the USSR. The Soviet decision to give such advanced weaponry to a Middle Eastern client was seen by many Western analysts as a significant departure from past Soviet arms transfer policy.

### 2. Internal Inputs

*Was there evidence of a disagreement between the party and the military regarding the proper conduct of relations?*

Commentary on the Syrian-Israeli conflict that appeared in *Pravda* and *Krasnaya Zvezda* after the Lebanese fighting revealed no evidence of a debate between military and party leaders over the proper conduct of relations with Syria. Once the fighting ended both the political and the military leadership seemed most concerned with restoring Soviet prestige as a superpower sponsor and denying charges of the inferiority of Soviet weapons systems. *Pravda* and *Krasnaya Zvezda* questioned Israeli claims of success, published Syrian "testimonials" on the quality of Russian equipment, and sought to shift blame for the disaster to the inadequacies of the Syrian military system.

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<sup>244</sup>An excellent discussion of the Israeli success in Lebanon can be found in Cynthia A. Roberts, "Soviet Arms Transfer Policy and the Decision to Upgrade Syrian Air Defenses," *Survival* 25 (July-August 1983): 154-164.

Most of the articles in *Pravda* that dealt with the Lebanese situation condemned the Israeli presence in that country and charged active collusion between American and Israeli imperialist intentions. Others presented a uniquely Soviet interpretation of the results of the June confrontation. In an article published one month after the fighting ended, the Soviets contended that the combat success claimed by the Israelis was an elaborate hoax and that the invaders had actually suffered very serious losses including 67 aircraft, many of which were F-15s and F-16s.<sup>245</sup> A later *Pravda* report asserted that the Syrians had destroyed 400 Israeli tanks and armored personnel carriers (APCs).<sup>246</sup>

*Krasnaya Zvezda* seemed intent on clearing Soviet equipment of any responsibility for the Syrian downfall. "Testimonials" were published, in which Syrian authorities attested to the quality of Soviet weapons. For example, Syrian President Assad reportedly told one military correspondent after the war, "I can say that the Soviet T-72 is the best tank in the world."<sup>247</sup> A Syrian officer related a story of how after a battle "the soldiers climbed out of their tanks and . . . hugged their tanks in an outburst of gratitude."<sup>248</sup> The military writers also blamed the Syrian military system for the outcome in Lebanon. In January 1983 an article appeared in *Krasnaya Zvezda* entitled "Meetings on Syrian Soil." In this look at Syrian army life the Soviet author questioned the education level of the average Syrian soldier:

Despite the perceptible increase in literacy in the country, the Army still receives people who have not gone to school. The young servicemen must be taught to read and write before they can begin to master weapons and hardware.<sup>249</sup>

This statement implies that Syrian losses resulted from a Syrian inability to properly employ advanced weapons, not from the weapons' inferior quality. A message was also undoubtedly intended for the Soviet soldiers who read *Krasnaya Zvezda*: Do not be alarmed by the Syrian failure. Soviet arms when properly used are second to none.

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<sup>245</sup>*Pravda*, 16 July 1982; in: *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 11 August 1982.

<sup>246</sup>*Pravda*, 21 July 1982; in: *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 18 August 1982.

<sup>247</sup>*Krasnaya Zvezda*, 29 January 1983; in: *FBIS (USSR)*, 4 February 1983.

<sup>248</sup>*Krasnaya Zvezda*, 31 August 1982; in: *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 6 October 1982.

<sup>249</sup>*Krasnaya Zvezda* 29 January 1983; in: *FBIS (USSR)*, 4 February 1983.

Both the military and the party leaders, as reflected in the pages of *Pravda* and *Krasnaya Zvezda*, adopted a restrained approach to the post-war situation. The newspapers contained typical condemnations of American and Israeli aggression and some imaginative explanations and rationalizations for Syria's military defeat. There were, however, no calls for an aggressive policy in support of Syria. There was no debate over the proper Soviet role in backing the Syrian government comparable to those that arose between the party and the military over the appropriate level of support for Egypt in the months following the 1967 June War.

*Was the military successful in altering the pattern of the relationship?*

It does not appear that the military made any effort to alter the pattern of the Soviet-Syrian relationship in the wake of the 1982 conflict. Articles that appeared in *Krasnaya Zvezda* indicated that the military's primary concern was the recovery of Soviet military prestige. The military did not engage in a campaign through the press to promote a more active role in support of Syria (as they seemed to have done in the Egyptian case in 1967) with an eye towards preserving their military privileges in that country. The Soviet military leaders seemed content to follow the restrained policy of the party leaders.

The military may, however, have had an input into the decision to send the SA-5 missile to Syria. The SA-5, with its long slant range and high altitude capability would be an extremely effective weapon against the type of threat the Soviet military saw originating from the Israeli Air Force. A Soviet study of the air conflict over Lebanon highlighted the role of airborne surveillance systems, such as the E-2C, in the Israeli success. According to a later Rand report, the Soviet study concluded:

that without E-2C support, the IAF would have been unable to achieve its air combat results. This may say something about the rationale for subsequently providing Syria with the SA-5, whose extended range will allow it to engage targets like the E-2C and 707 even in overwater orbits or deep in Israeli airspace.<sup>250</sup>

The military may well have suggested that the SA-5 could provide the air defense deterrent required by Syria and in that way influenced the Soviet decision to send that missile system, and other advanced weapons, to their Middle Eastern client. This is

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<sup>250</sup> Benjamin S. Lambeth, *Moscow's Lessons from the 1982 Lebanon Air War*, Rand Report R-3000, (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1984), p. 20. The study cited by Lambeth was written by Colonel Dubrov, one of the Soviet Air Force's leading authorities on combat tactics.

not to suggest that there was no political rationale for the deployment of the SA-5, which as fixed-site, defensive weapon was compatible with both Soviet and Syrian interests.

### 3. External Inputs

*Was there a conflict between the foreign policy objectives of the Soviet Union and the client state?*

In the aftermath of the 1982 Lebanon conflict, Syrian President Assad showed few outward signs of disagreement with Soviet policy decisions. Assad's compliance was based on two factors. First, Assad was in a position similar to the one Egyptian President Nasser found himself in after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. He faced an immediate threat and lacked an alternative to his Soviet arms source. Assad surely realized that only the Soviet Union could rebuild his shattered air force and provide air defense equipment that would meet Syria's pressing needs. While Assad was disappointed by Moscow's inactivity during the war, he could not afford to offend his Soviet sponsors at a time when he faced a serious Israeli threat.

More importantly, the policies adopted by the Soviet Union after the war served Syrian interests. Soviet policymakers had two primary objectives after the war. The first was to regain their regional and international credibility as a supplier of quality weapons systems to their clients. To this end the Soviets supplied the Syrians with some of the most sophisticated weaponry in the Soviet arsenal, including the SA-5, Flogger B G, and SS-21 surface-to-surface missile. The delivery of this advanced equipment also furthered Moscow's second objective; to provide Damascus with a credible deterrent capable of preventing an Israeli attack on Syria itself. In providing the Syrians with a modern, integrated air defense system that was initially operated by Russian crews, the Soviets would force the Israelis to think twice before attacking Syria. The deterrent effect of this missile system was of great importance to the Soviets, who realized that the next Syrian-Israeli battle would probably be fought on Syrian soil and might leave the Soviets with no option but to intervene.

At the same time the air defense missiles were being deployed, a variety of Soviet sources were sending clear signals that if Israel attacked Syria the Soviet Union would honor its commitments and render military assistance. Soviet warnings that they would intervene were seen in the following instances:

- In February 1983, the leader of a Soviet delegation to Beirut (Karen Brutents, Head of the External Affairs Desk of the Central Committee of the CPSU)

stated that the USSR would honor its commitment to Damascus "in a most serious manner." He added, "what this entails will become clear later."<sup>251</sup>

- In early March a Soviet radio broadcast to the Arab world announced that Syria was "not alone" and that the USSR<sup>252</sup> was loyal to its commitments under the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation.
- In mid-March a Lebanese radio station reported that the Soviet Ambassador to Lebanon had informed Lebanese President Gemayal that the Soviets would intervene directly in a war between Syria and Israel. The intervention would be sizeable.<sup>253</sup>
- A Soviet broadcast to the Arab world in late April warned Israel that the Syrians "are not alone."<sup>254</sup> This was in reference to what the Soviets saw as an impending Israeli attack.

These statements were all made against a backdrop of high tension along the Israeli-Syrian border and amidst fears that the Israelis might launch a pre-emptive strike against the Syrian air defense system and trigger a Syrian-Israeli war. The Soviet commitment to defend Syria, with troops if necessary, gave Assad many of the practical benefits of a "strategic alliance" with the Soviet Union despite the Soviet reluctance to sign a true defense treaty. It can further be argued that Soviet weapons, backed by a Soviet treaty, allowed Assad to continue his pursuit of a forward policy in Lebanon secure in the knowledge that Moscow would protect him from Israeli retaliation if that retaliation extended to attacks on Syrian territory. Assad's adventurism in Lebanon, which was not condoned by the Kremlin, can be seen as an unintentional byproduct of Soviet generosity in meeting Syrian defensive needs.

*Did the client receive the weapons requested or was the delivery of certain items (specifically offensive weapons) delayed or postponed?*

There is no information available regarding the exact nature of Syrian weapon requests following the 1982 conflict, so it cannot be determined whether Damascus requested offensive weapons such as medium bombers or fighter-bombers. The equipment delivered to Syria was designed for air defense, and the quantity and quality of the weapons apparently met with Syrian approval. Soviet deliveries of the advanced weapons began within 6 months of the fighting, suggesting that there was no attempt to delay or postpone deliveries.

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<sup>251</sup>"Beirut Monday Morning," 7-13 February 1983; in: *FBIS (USSR)*, 17 February 1983.

<sup>252</sup>Moscow Radio for Peace and Progress in Arabic to the Arabic World, 2 March 1983; in: *FBIS (USSR)*, 4 March 1983.

<sup>253</sup>Marj Uyon Voice of Hope, 17 March 1983; in: *FBIS (USSR)*, 17 March 1983.

<sup>254</sup>Moscow Radio for Peace and Progress in Arabic for the Arab World, 28 April 1983; in: *FBIS (USSR)*, 25 April 1983.

*Did the client attempt to bring pressure to bear on the Soviet decisionmakers to alter or modify arms policies? Were they successful?*

There is no conclusive evidence that the Syrians threatened to alter the Soviet-Syrian relationship if they did not receive the weapons they desired. However, diplomatic sources have speculated that President Assad paid a secret visit to Moscow in early July 1982.<sup>255</sup> If so, the context of this visit would have been remarkably similar to the emergency trip to Moscow made by Egyptian President Nasser in January 1970 when Egypt was losing the "War of Attrition." In that instance Nasser warned the Soviet leadership that if he did not receive adequate support from Russia he would "hand over to a pro-American President."<sup>256</sup> Not surprisingly the Soviets elected to provide Nasser with the air defense support he demanded, including the deployment of Soviet air defense troops to Egypt, rather than jeopardize their strongest link to the Arab world.

A similar visit by Assad may have had similar results, but as noted earlier there were several reasons why the Soviets would have upgraded Syrian air defense capabilities, regardless of Syrian demands. If the Soviet decision was the result of Syrian demands, it was certainly a low-risk means to reassure their client. The SA-5 was a fixed-site air defense weapon and its introduction could easily be justified by the Soviets and the Syrians as a strictly defensive measure. As one *Pravda* article asked, "Is it not the right of a sovereign country to take care to defend against air attacks on its own country?"<sup>257</sup> The deployment of the missiles was also defended in the context of Syria's "legitimate right to self-defense."<sup>258</sup> Israeli protests over the missiles were dismissed as "provocative ballyhoo"<sup>259</sup> designed to provide an excuse for new aggression against Syria.

*Was the client state of strategic importance to the Soviet Union at the time of the decision?*

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<sup>255</sup>Dawisha, *Foreign Affairs*, p. 440.

<sup>256</sup>Heikal, *The Road to Ramadan*, pp. 84-90.

<sup>257</sup>*Pravda*, 1 February 1983; in: *FBIS (USSR)*, 2 February 1983.

<sup>258</sup>*Tass*, 25 March 1983; in: *FBIS (USSR)*, 25 March 1983.

<sup>259</sup>Syrian Information Minister Ahmad, quoted in *Izvestia*, 8 March 1983; in: *FBIS, (USSR)* 10 March 1983.

The size of the Soviet resupply effort and the Soviet threats to intervene in defense of Syrian sovereignty testified to the continued strategic importance of Syria to the Soviet Union. This importance extended beyond the somewhat limited Soviet military presence in Syria. Only by aiding Syria could Moscow retain its position as the foremost ally of the Arab confrontation states. The importance of maintaining a political presence in the Middle East, if only for the purpose of denying Western domination of the region, had not diminished in importance since the initial Soviet involvement in the region in 1955.

#### 4. Summation

- The Soviet resupply effort following the 1982 Lebanese conflict clearly reflected the Soviet desire to maintain their presence in the region while avoiding intervention. The advanced equipment sent to Syria enhanced the Soviet image as a supplier of quality military assistance and also provided Syria with a credible deterrent to future Israeli attacks. The combination of weapons deliveries and warnings indicates that the Soviets hoped to avoid a situation in which their military intervention would become necessary to avoid the collapse of the pro-Soviet Syrian government and the end of Soviet presence in that country.
- There was little in the way of military privileges in Syria that the military would have felt compelled to defend. For this reason it is doubtful that the military would have sought to influence decisions regarding the resupply effort, except perhaps to offer suggestions regarding the proper weapons to meet Syrian needs and Soviet interests.
- The Soviets were extremely generous in the quantity and quality of weapons delivered to Syria. The "ceiling of sophistication" appears to have been raised with regard to air defense weapons (surface-to-air missiles and interceptors). Still, the Syrians received only limited numbers of long-range delivery systems, such as fighter-bombers and surface-to-surface missiles, suggesting that Moscow seeks to limit the Syrian ability to initiate hostilities with Israel.
- The quantity and quality of the Soviet resupply effort attests to Syria's continued bargaining strength as a major player in the Arab-Israeli equation. As a shrewd politician, Assad certainly understood the importance of Syria as Moscow's entree into the Middle East and Moscow's desire to preserve his government. Syria's later adventurism in Lebanon attests to Assad's confidence in the continuance of Soviet support.

### E. CURRENT SOVIET-SYRIAN RELATIONS

#### 1. Introduction

Moscow soon discovered that generous arms shipments could not be translated into Syrian subservience to Soviet foreign policy interests. President Assad has pursued his own foreign agenda in recent years, and in so doing has frequently clashed with his Soviet suppliers. Despite several quarrels in recent years, primarily over Syrian activity in Lebanon, the Soviet-Syrian "marriage of convenience" continues to survive, and there is no prospect of a serious disruption of Soviet-Syrian affairs in the near future.

## 2. Internal Inputs

*Was there evidence of a disagreement between the party and the military regarding the proper conduct of relations?*

There has been no evidence of disagreement between the military and political elites over the conduct of Syrian-Soviet relations in recent years. Articles in both *Pravda* and *Krasnaya Zvezda* have generally supported Syrian policies and criticized real or perceived American or Israeli initiatives in the area. This indicates that there is agreement within the Kremlin on the conduct of Soviet-Syrian affairs. At this time the advantages of ties between Moscow and Damascus seem primarily political in nature; the guarantee of a Soviet voice in the Middle East peace process and the prevention of Western domination of the region. The continuation of this situation would satisfy the goals of both the military and the political leadership.

*Was the military successful in altering the pattern of the relationship?*

There is no evidence that the Soviet military establishment has attempted to alter the conduct of the Soviet-Syrian relations. It is possible, particularly in light of the Egyptian example, that the military has promoted the continued supply of sophisticated weaponry to the Syrians as a means of solidifying ties between the two countries.

## 3. External Inputs

*Was there a conflict between the foreign policy objectives of the Soviet Union and the client state?*

Several disagreements between Moscow and Damascus have developed in recent years, in most cases as a result of Syrian adventurism in Lebanon. The most serious of these occurred in September 1983 when Syria backed efforts to overthrow Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat. In fighting around Tripoli, Lebanon, Soviet-armed Syrian troops battled Soviet-armed PLO forces, causing Moscow considerable discomfort and further destabilizing the Lebanese situation. The Soviets were also alarmed by Syria's confrontations with the United States over Lebanon in late 1983, and reportedly counselled restraint for fear that Syrian activity in Lebanon might escalate into a superpower confrontation.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>260</sup>Larry L Fabian, "The Middle East: War Dangers and Receding Peace Prospects," *Foreign Affairs* 62 (America and the World 1983): 635.



There were also signs of disagreement between Moscow and Damascus during Assad's visits to the Soviet capital in 1984 and 1985. In October 1984 Assad traveled to Moscow for what was termed a "friendly working visit." The joint communique issued at the meeting's close stated that there was "a broad coincidence in the two side positions."<sup>261</sup> However, other sources reported that Assad had expressed extreme displeasure over Soviet discussions with two of Syria's enemies, Jordan and Iraq.<sup>262</sup>

While there is less information available concerning President Assad's June 1985 visit to the Soviet capital, the terminology used in the joint communique points to substantial disagreement between Moscow and Damascus. Apparently the talks centered on the Palestinian question, a persistent cause of conflict between the Soviets and Syrians. The Soviets placed special emphasis on the preservation of PLO unity, perhaps in reference to Syrian efforts to oust Arafat. The communique issued by the Soviet press announced that the talks were held in "an atmosphere of mutual trust and frankness" (emphasis added) a term of diplomatic doubletalk usually reserved for instances where serious differences in opinion occur.<sup>263</sup> The Syrian press later found it necessary to refute rumors of a disagreement between Moscow and Damascus, calling such reports an example of psychological warfare "perpetrated by the Israelis and the Americans."<sup>264</sup>

The future of Soviet-Syrian relations is open to speculation. Assad could elect to follow Sadat's lead and seek a separate peace with Israel. There can be no question that the upkeep of Syria's military is placing an enormous burden on that country's limited financial resources. Approximately 50% of Syria's 1985 budget was earmarked for defense and the 400,000 men assigned to the armed forces represent one sixth of the Syrian work force.<sup>265</sup> In recent years arms have accounted for over 40% of all Syrian imports. (See Table 4).<sup>266</sup> Domestic unrest rising from a Syrian economic

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<sup>261</sup>*Pravda*, 19 October 1984; in: *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 14 November 1984.

<sup>262</sup>Radio Monte Carlo, 19 October 1984; in: FBIS (MEA), 22 October 1984.

<sup>263</sup>The full text of the joint communique appeared in *Pravda*, 20 June 1985; in: *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 17 July 1985.

<sup>264</sup>Damascus Domestic News Service, 24 June 1985; in: FBIS (MEA), 27 June 1985.

<sup>265</sup>Devlin, "Syria: Consistency at Home and Abroad," p. 69.

<sup>266</sup>U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, *World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1985), p. 125.

crisis could conceivably pressure Assad into reaching an accommodation with the Israelis that would allow him to address his most pressing internal problems. Several factors rule against such a change in Assad's policies. An agreement with Israel would almost certainly require a Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon and the subsequent loss of substantial revenues generated by Syrian interests in that country.<sup>267</sup> Additionally, Syria's abandonment of its role as the primary confrontation state in the Arab-Israeli conflict would jeopardize the flow of financial assistance from the rich, oil producing Arab states that is crucial for Syria's economic well-being. Finally Assad must carefully weigh the potential domestic repercussions, since much of Syria's internal cohesion can be attributed to a persistent external threat.

It is also possible that Assad will go to the opposite extreme and initiate a war with Israel.<sup>268</sup> Such a move is frequently dismissed on the grounds that Syria would certainly lose such a war. However, as *The Economist* points out "most people did not expect an Egyptian attack in 1973 because they thought Mr. Sadat's army would take a beating."<sup>269</sup> While Sadat could not defeat Israel in 1973, the initial success of the Egyptian assault across the Suez Canal altered the political status quo in the Middle East and dramatically increased his policy options. Assad may feel he could also gain by renewing hostilities with the Israelis. Since Moscow would almost certainly disapprove of the reopening of Syrian-Israeli hostilities, it is ironic that the recent shipments of sophisticated Soviet arms to Syria make such a war a possibility.

*Did the client receive the weapons requested or was the delivery of certain items (specifically offensive weapons) delayed or postponed?*

Since there is no information available on precisely what weapons systems the Syrians requested from the Soviets, or the quantities desired, it is impossible to accurately determine Syrian satisfaction with the pace of Soviet deliveries. A look at the Syrian inventory, however, reveals that Syria has not been provided with the weapons necessary to launch a successful unilateral assault on Israel, because the large quantities of military equipment sent to Syria since 1982 have not appreciably improved Syrian offensive capabilities. Instead Soviet deliveries have enhanced Syrian

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<sup>267</sup>For a discussion on Syrian economic interests in Lebanon see Olson, pp. 26-28.

<sup>268</sup>This possibility has been discussed recently in the press. For example see "The Wispy Clouds of War over the Golan Heights," *The Economist*, 12 April 1986, and "Israel and Syria Believed to Face Risk of Conflict," *New York Times*, 19 May 1986.

<sup>269</sup>*The Economist*, 12 April 1986, p. 37.

TABLE 4  
SYRIAN MILITARY EXPENDITURES (CONSTANT 1982 DOLLARS)

Year	Military Expenditures	Arms Imports	Arms as % of Total Imports
1973	927	2549	212.0%
74	988	1488	67.2
75	1544	628	22.5
76	1537	978	26.2
77	1472	960	24.3
78	1626	1238	36.5
79	1855	2664	63.0
80	2163	3144	65.4
81	2203	2237	41.6
82	2371	1900	47.3
83	2051	1630	43.7

Source: U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, *World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers: 1985* (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1985), P. 83, 125.

defensive and deterrent forces. For example:

- In general, aircraft delivered to Syria since 1982 have been optimized for air defense. The large numbers of MiG-21's and even the late model MiG-23's are optimized for air defense and possess a limited ground attack capability.<sup>270</sup>
- The SS-21, a highly accurate, short range surface-to-surface missile delivered to the Syrians in 1983, reportedly can be used only for self-defense under terms of a Soviet-Syrian agreement. Even then it requires prior Soviet approval.<sup>271</sup>

<sup>270</sup> Figures for major Syrian military holdings are taken from *The Military Balance* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1967, 68 through 1985, 86).

<sup>271</sup> *Al Majallah* (London: 29 October-4 November 1983); in: *FBIS (MEA)*, 31 October 1983. Scud-B missiles launched by the Egyptians during the 1973 October War were apparently Egyptian controlled but partially Soviet-manned. In that instance it is believed that some level of Soviet cooperation was necessary to launch

- The Soviets have not sold the Syrians a weapon with a true deep-strike capability. The Syrians have no bombers of any type and ground attack aircraft (FITTER A and J, FLOGGER F) have been provided in very limited quantities when compared with air defense aircraft. All surface-to-surface missiles in the Syrian inventory are of limited range and accuracy or Soviet controlled.

In sum, the Syrians possess a defensive capability sufficient to deter an Israeli attack, but at the same time they lack the offensive weapons needed to attack Israel. This carefully contrived balance serves Soviet interests in the Middle East. As long as Syria remains dependent on the USSR for defensive armaments, Moscow will exercise a degree of influence in Damascus. By restricting the flow of offensive weapons, Moscow can minimize the risk of the outbreak of a Middle Eastern war that might necessitate intervention.

*Did the client attempt to bring pressure to bear on the Soviet decisionmakers to alter or modify arms policies? Were they successful?*

There is no evidence available to suggest that Syria has pressured the Soviet leadership to alter their arms delivery policies. Syria probably has reached the absorptive capacity of its manpower and technological resources. There are no indications that the Syrians have seriously attempted to diversify their sources of arms in recent months. Finally, with Soviet prestige and credibility in the Middle East becoming increasingly reliant upon the performance of the Syrian armed forces, it is in Moscow's interest to provide Damascus with the weapons it needs.

*Was the client state of strategic importance to the Soviet Union at the time of the decision?*

Syria is the linchpin of Soviet involvement in the Middle East. Soviet determination to prevent the Western domination of the region remains unchanged. While the Soviet Union has taken steps to prevent the creation of a situation in which Soviet intervention in a Syrian-Israeli conflict would become necessary, Soviet public statements continued to warn that an attack on Syria would provoke a Soviet military intervention and indicated that certain preparations had been made.

- In September 1983, an Israeli official in Moscow to discuss the resumption of diplomatic relations was informed that if Israel attacked Syria, the USSR would intervene with 52,000 troops in twelve hours to "teach Israel a lesson that it will never forget."<sup>272</sup>

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the missiles. Glassman, pp. 136-138.

- In April 1984, Karen Brutents warned Israel that "an adventure would not be easy and without cost" and that Syria could secure help from "friends and allies."<sup>272</sup>
- In an interview with a Spanish newspaper in May 1984, Syrian Defense Minister Talas reported that plans had been drawn up to allow two Soviet divisions to be transported to Damascus in twelve hours. He also stated that Syria had no need for Soviet forces unless the United States aligned with Israel to attack Syria.<sup>274</sup>

Moscow's apparent preparations to intervene militarily, if necessary, to preserve a pro-Soviet government in Syria is a clear demonstration of the importance the Kremlin attaches to the maintenance of a Soviet foothold in the Middle East. The collapse of the Assad government, and its replacement by a ruling body hostile to the Soviet Union would seriously jeopardize the security of Russia's southern borders, a condition that could not be tolerated.

#### 4. Summation

- The Soviets are determined to maintain a presence in the Middle East, as a means of insuring a Soviet voice in Middle Eastern affairs and to secure the southern borders of the USSR. If Soviet statements are to be believed the Soviets are prepared to intervene militarily to assist the pro-Soviet government in Damascus if the existence of that government is threatened. This does not mean, however, that the Soviets are anxious to enter a Mideast conflict. The Soviets have combined open political signals and defensive hardware in an effort to make an attack on Syria a very unattractive proposition. At the same time, they have not provided Syria with the offensive weapons needed to launch an attack on Israel. Moscow is seeking to maintain a delicate balance in which its presence is required, but its commitments are never fully tested.
- The Soviets have not appreciably enhanced their military presence in Syria in recent years. Consequently, the Soviet military establishment would not be expected to have a significant impact on Soviet-Syrian relations. With no substantial military facilities in Syria, the Soviet military will focus its attention on the strategic benefits of maintaining the Soviet-Syrian relationship, specifically the security of Russia's southern border. Overall, the current state of Soviet-Syrian relations seems more than adequate to fulfill these goals.
- The Soviets have apparently decided to raise the "ceiling of sophistication" in defensive weapons and are willing to supply Damascus with their latest hardware. Deliveries of offensive, particularly deep-strike, weapons remains virtually non-existent or rigidly controlled.
- Soviet willingness to supply Syria with late model weaponry, and Moscow's apparent consideration of military intervention in Syria, attests to the strategic importance of Syria to the Soviet Union. Syria's President Assad has felt free to pursue adventurist policies in Lebanon, and to disregard Soviet desires concerning the PLO, secure in the knowledge that it will continue to be in Moscow's best interest to preserve his government.

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<sup>272</sup> *Kuwait Al-Anba*, 20 September 1983; in: *FBIS (USSR)*, 22 September 1983.

<sup>273</sup> *Kuwait Kuna*, 6 April 1984; in: *FBIS (MEA)*, 6 April 1984.

<sup>274</sup> Interview in *El Pais* (Madrid), 19 May 1984; in: *FBIS (MEA)*, 21 May 1984.

## VI. CONCLUSION

### A. INTRODUCTION

This study was designed to develop a framework for the detailed investigation of Soviet Middle Eastern policy from the end of the Six Day War in 1967 to the present. The volatility of the current Mideast situation, and the active involvement of the superpowers in the region, lends a sense of urgency to the task of interpreting Soviet interests, objectives and commitments in the Middle East. The objective of this paper was to examine carefully past Soviet policy behavior in the Middle East as a means of constructing a methodological tool for the understanding of current and future Soviet policies.

The primary goal of this paper was to explain the *outputs* of Soviet Middle Eastern policy, actions which frequently seem contradictory and self-defeating, by measuring the impact of critical *inputs* to the decisionmaking process. The inputs examined were classified as either *internal* or *external*. The investigation of internal inputs sought to measure the level of policy concurrence within the Kremlin, more specifically the level of agreement between the party (CPSU) and the military. External inputs refers specifically to the pressure that a state can exert on Soviet policy makers. The Soviet willingness to adapt and adjust policies to accommodate client demands is a poorly understood, but extremely important, determinant in Soviet behavior in the Middle East.

A *case study* methodology was chosen as the best means of determining the consistency of Soviet policy during the period of time in question. A focused comparison approach was used, in which a series of events, chosen for their importance to the conduct of Soviet politico-military relations with their Arab clients, were analyzed through the examination of a common set of variables. In each instance a standardized set of questions was asked, thereby enforcing a discipline within the study and enhancing the legitimacy of the paper's conclusions.

The field of study was limited to two countries, Egypt and Syria, which have played leading roles in the formulation of Soviet Middle Eastern policy. Egypt was chosen because of its former importance as Moscow's most important Arab and Third World client, the wealth of information available on Soviet-Egyptian relations, and the

opportunity it presented to follow a Soviet-client relationship from its inception (1955) to its collapse (1976). Syria was chosen due to its current status as the "linchpin" of Soviet relations with the Arab world, its leadership of the "rejectionist" states, and its constant confrontation with the United States and the West. The study was based on a premise that a framework of analysis which explained Soviet policy towards Egypt would be a useful tool in interpreting current and future Soviet policy towards Syria.

Four hypotheses were introduced at the beginning of this paper. They were:

- *The Soviet objective in the Middle East is to maintain a presence in the region while avoiding military intervention.*
- *The military's interest in, and ability to, influence the course of relations with any Soviet client will vary in direct proportion with the tangible benefits (bases, presence, etc.) the military derives from the relationship.*
- *The Soviet Union will impose a "ceiling of sophistication" on arms exports to Arab client states that will exclude offensive weapons that might allow a client to initiate or escalate a regional conflict unilaterally.*
- *The greater the perceived strategic importance of a client, the greater its bargaining strength.*

This conclusion will be in three parts. The first will be a review of the standardized questions asked in Chapters IV and V. Each individual question will be examined again, but this time across the full series of events, both Egyptian and Syrian. In this manner consistency in Soviet behavior will become evident and deviations from established patterns will be highlighted. Next the hypotheses will be reintroduced to determine whether they have been proven correct. Finally, some general statements on future Soviet Middle Eastern policy will be made, based on the results of this study.

## **B. CASE STUDY REVIEW**

### **1. Internal Inputs**

*Was there evidence of a conflict between the party and the military regarding the proper conduct of relations?*

A survey of the Soviet press, focusing on *Pravda* and *Krasnaya Zvezda*, indicated that a limited degree of discussion and debate sometimes occurs between the party and military elites over the proper conduct of Soviet-client relations. While it is important not to exaggerate the severity of these apparent disagreements, they do shed light on the different perceptions of client relationships and Soviet national security requirements that arise within the supposedly monolithic Kremlin decisionmaking process. Importantly, these debates were observed only in the Egyptian and not the Syrian case. This allows some contrasts to be observed between the objectives and interests of the party and the military over different timeframes and circumstances.

Both party and military objectives in the Middle East are guided by a concern for Soviet national security. This gives them a common goal when formulating regional policy; to prevent the Western domination of the Middle East because of the threat that would pose to Russia's southern boundaries. The Soviet penetration of the Middle East in the 1950's was prompted by a need to counter the Baghdad Pact and prevent the formation of anti-Soviet alliances. A constant goal of Soviet policy towards the Middle East, from 1955 to the present, has been the maintenance of a presence and influence in selected client states in the Arab world to ensure a Soviet voice in Middle Eastern affairs. This "denial" objective is the critical element in Soviet Middle Eastern policy formulation.

The disagreements between the party and the military over client relations arose when a new factor was introduced to the national security equation. This was the need for overseas bases to counter a very specific military threat, the U.S. ballistic missile submarine fleet stationed in the Eastern Mediterranean. The military, which had played a limited role in the initial stage of Soviet-Egyptian policy, became increasingly interested in gaining access to Egyptian naval and air facilities. Once access was granted, the military proved extremely sensitive to policy decisions that might jeopardize their overseas presence. Commentaries in *Krasnaya Zvezda* were notably pro-Egyptian as part of an apparent effort to secure the Soviet position in Egypt. The military was first to consider extraordinary measures to prop up the Egyptian government, including indirect suggestions of Soviet involvement in that country's air defense. In contrast, *Pravda* commentaries at the same time indicate that party leaders believed a peaceful solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict best served Soviet interests, by avoiding a renewal of hostilities with their unforeseeable consequences.

This explanation of the party-military debate is supported by the drop in military interest in Egyptian facilities when the perceived Western threat from the Eastern Mediterranean diminished in the mid-1970's. There was no protest in *Krasnaya Zvezda* over the loss of Soviet naval access in Egypt in 1976, due in part to the decreased threat and also to the availability of adequate alternative facilities in Syria. There has been no evidence of disagreement over the conduct of Soviet-Syrian relations, probably because the relationship has not centered on Soviet access to Syrian facilities. Rather, the Soviet-Syrian relationship has been more political in nature. By backing the foremost Arab confrontation state, Moscow ensures a Soviet voice in Middle Eastern affairs. This fulfills the denial objective of Soviet policy, the common goal of the party and the military.



A final possible explanation for party-military disagreement was detente. Party-military disagreements intensified with the improvement in Soviet-American relations, which were based on differing opinions of the relative importance of detente to overall Soviet policy. The Soviet military was skeptical of detente and perhaps feared that Soviet overseas initiatives and privileges would be sacrificed to improve relations with the United States. As a result, the military leadership probably found it necessary to take a more active role in the policy developments process to protect special military interests. As Soviet-American relations worsened in the mid-1970's there was a clear decrease in the incidence of party-military debate.

*Was the military successful in altering the pattern of the relationship?*

In those instances when military members chose to question the party's pursuit of foreign policy, they undoubtedly did so with the intention of forcing a change in that policy. It is often difficult to determine exactly how successful the military has been at influencing a policy decision. However, two events stand out in which the military played a major role in the formulation of an important policy decision.

The first was the decision to have Soviet troops take an active role in Egyptian air defense. A debate between the party and the military apparently arose in March 1970 when the first troops arrived in Egypt. These discussions centered on whether these troops should be stationed in active combat zones and whether Soviet pilots should fly combat missions. The military strongly believed in an active Soviet role, ostensibly to fulfill Russia's "internationalist duty," but also to preserve the Soviet presence in Egypt and counter the American threat from the Eastern Mediterranean. The party was far less anxious to risk Soviet involvement in a Middle Eastern conflict, and consistently downplayed the Soviet military role in the area. The eventual use of Soviet pilots in operational missions, and the deployment of Soviet manned SA-3 batteries to the Suez Canal, suggests that the military successfully promoted a more active Soviet involvement in Egyptian air defense.

The second instance occurred after the expulsion of the Soviet technicians from Egypt in July 1973. The Egyptian action reportedly ignited a major debate in the Kremlin between those who saw the expulsion as an excuse to sever ties with Egypt, and those determined to preserve Soviet-Egyptian ties at any cost. The military, foremost proponents of the latter course, argued for an *increased* flow of arms to Egypt to prove Soviet support for the Arab cause. Military shipments to Egypt were

increased substantially soon after the expulsion, a clear indication that the military had successfully argued its case.

It must also be observed that no major decision on Soviet Middle Eastern policy can be made without consulting the military. Since Soviet relations with their clients rely so heavily on arms deliveries, the Soviet military will necessarily play an important role as the source of the arms, training and support vitally necessary to the conduct of Soviet relations. While the military does not always determine the course of Soviet policy, military objectives, desires, and advice must be carefully weighed before making policy decisions. The fact that the military has infrequently played a major role in shaping policy decisions is due primarily to the fundamental commonality of party and military objectives with regard to Soviet national security requirements. The military carefully limits its opposition to policy initiatives and argues only to preserve hard won overseas privileges they perceived as crucial to Soviet security.

## 2. External Inputs

*Was there a conflict between the foreign policy objectives of the Soviet Union and the client state?*

In each event examined there was evidence of some level of conflict between the foreign policy of the Soviet Union and that of the client state; in no instance was there evidence of full agreement or coordination. These conflicts were at varied levels of intensity, ranging from Nasser's determination to pursue a low-grade war with Israel (War of Attrition) despite Soviet calls for a peaceful solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, to Sadat's rapprochement with the West after the October War, to Assad's continued presence in Lebanon and the ongoing confrontations between Syria and the Soviet-backed PLO. Moscow endured recurrent problems with its often recalcitrant clients in Cairo and Damascus, despite frequent high-level consultations and carefully negotiated Treaties of Friendship and Cooperation. The persistent differences of opinion were the result of two frequently underestimated aspects of Soviet foreign policy.

First, clients invariably have their own foreign policy agendas which are not always compatible with Soviet interests. Every state has a unique perception of its own national interests and security requirements. The Soviet Union found that the cooperativeness of a client state often varied with the immediacy of the threat and the availability of alternative sources of military and economic aid. Neither Egypt nor Syria was hesitant to pursue policy objectives over Soviet objections. More often than not, they ignored Soviet counsel and jealously guarded their independence.

Second, it would be a mistake to overestimate the Soviet Union's ability to manipulate or influence the policies of a client state, and it would also be wrong to assume automatic Soviet backing for every client initiative. This study has shown a remarkable lack of coordination between the Soviet Union and its Egyptian and Syrian clients on even the most fundamental foreign policy decisions. In the majority of the events studied the Soviet Union found itself *responding* to unexpected client initiatives and attempting after the fact to regain some control over the situation.

*Did the client receive the weapons requested or was the delivery of certain items (specifically offensive weapons) delayed or postponed?*

A frequent source of friction between the Soviet Union and its clients was the pace of Soviet weapons deliveries. The Soviet leadership, aware of its inability to dictate client policies, seeks instead to limit a client's policy options by carefully regulating the number and type of weapons delivered. In the Egyptian and Syrian cases some clearly identifiable patterns developed in Soviet deliveries.

- The Soviets will always provide their clients with a certain minimum level of military hardware. After every Arab-Israeli War (1967, 1973, 1983) the Soviet swiftly resupplied their Egyptian and Syrian clients, replenishing their inventories to slightly above, pre-war levels.
- The Soviets are hesitant to supply their clients beyond this established level and further requests are carefully considered and frequently put off or ignored. Moscow has no intention of giving any Arab client the capability to attack Israel unilaterally and under no circumstances will the Soviets give a client weapons parity with Israel because that would invite a reopening of Arab-Israeli hostilities, with its unavoidable risk of a superpower confrontation.
- In general, the Soviet Union is generous with defensive weapons, such as surface-to-air missiles and interceptors, but very hesitant to supply any type of weapon capable of striking deep inside Israel, such as bombers or surface-to-surface missiles. Moscow evidently fears the possible Israeli response (to include nuclear retaliation) and the subsequent danger of the conflict escalating to the superpower level.

It has been Soviet policy to restrict arms deliveries within these general guidelines. By providing its clients with an adequate level of self-defense, but limited offensive capabilities, the Soviets have been generally successful in using their arms transaction policy to prevent a situation in which they might be forced to intervene in a Middle Eastern crisis. The Soviet Union has adhered to this policy despite the friction it creates in client relations, and is likely to continue with it in the future.

*Did the client attempt to bring pressure to bear on Soviet decisionmakers to alter or modify arms policies? Were they successful?*

The study found that Soviet policymakers are at times extremely susceptible to pressures applied by client states. Threats by Egypt to terminate or change its

relationship with the Soviet Union were generally successful in altering Soviet policy to a course more compatible with Egyptian interests. The Soviet Union is particularly susceptible to such pressure when good relations with a given client are viewed as essential to Soviet national security interests. Two examples from the Egyptian case stand out:

- In January 1970 Egyptian President Nasser traveled to Moscow to request the immediate delivery of SA-3 air defense missiles to counter Israeli deep penetration raids. He warned that he would feel obliged to turn Egypt over to a pro-American president if the Soviets could not meet his demands. Nasser's threats achieved the desired result. Within two months Moscow began the deployment of 15-20,000 air defense troops and 80 combat aircraft to Egypt. It is unlikely that the Kremlin would have adopted such a risky policy in the absence of Egyptian pressure.
- In January 1972 President Sadat expelled the bulk of the Soviet advisors from Egypt to express his displeasure with what he saw as unwarranted delays in Soviet weapon deliveries. The expulsion order applied only to the sizeable, and by 1972 largely unnecessary, air defense contingent and not to those advisors needed to train the Egyptian military. By sharply reducing the Soviet presence in his country, Sadat sent a clear message to Moscow that further postponements in weapons deliveries could end the Soviet-Egyptian relationship. Sadat's gamble proved a success and the logjam in Soviet shipments to Egypt was broken. The new weapons were instrumental in Sadat's planning for the 1973 October War. This consent to supply Sadat's war plan represented a major change in Soviet policy.

In each of these instances the Soviets altered their policies to satisfy client demands. In this timeframe, however, the Soviets were determined to maintain their presence in Egypt and consequently were far more susceptible to client demands. By 1976, when Sadat again attempted to pressure the Soviets into increasing their economic and military aid to his country, the situation had changed dramatically. Annoyed with Sadat's constant maligning of Soviet support for the Arab cause and disturbed by his expanded ties with the West, the Soviets took no action to rescue the faltering relationship. Moscow could refuse to meet Egyptian demands because its national security requirements had changed by 1976. The withdrawal of the U.S. submarine force from the Eastern Mediterranean, the introduction of VTOL carriers and the Backfire bomber to the Soviet inventory, and the availability of adequate alternative facilities in Syria combined to make the Soviet presence in Egypt far less integral to Soviet national security.

Finally, this study uncovered little evidence of Syrian attempts to pressure Soviet policymaking. As Moscow's foremost Arab client, Syria could be expected to have substantial leverage in any negotiations, and Soviet arms deliveries to Syria have certainly been generous. Still, it is impossible to say whether Soviet policy is generated by Syrian threats, Soviet interests, or possibly lessons learned from the Egyptian experience.

*Was the Soviet decision determined by the perceived strategic importance of the client?*

All Soviet Middle Eastern policy decisions are ultimately determined by Soviet national security requirements. The client can serve Soviet security needs in one of two ways; either by allowing the Soviet Union to simply *deny* that country (or region) to the potentially hostile West, or by granting the Soviets access to military facilities needed to counter a specific threat. The strategic importance of a country is defined by its ability to fill these two roles.

The first Soviet contacts with the Arab world were prompted by the denial objective. Egypt, as a leader of the Arab nations, was particularly important in this regard. Later, after the U.S. deployment of Polaris submarines to the Eastern Mediterranean added a military dimension to Soviet Middle Eastern policy, access to Egyptian naval and air facilities greatly enhanced that country's strategic importance to the USSR. The preservation of good relations with Egypt became the driving force in Soviet policy for several years.

In time, with the withdrawal of the American submarines, the Soviet requirement for Egyptian bases was greatly reduced. Additionally, Sadat's growing involvement with the West undermined Egypt's ability to play a "denial" role in the Middle East. Egypt, in effect, had lost its strategic importance for the Soviet Union and Moscow felt free to transfer its attentions to the more reliable Syrians. At this time Syria, as the leader of the Arab confrontation states, best fulfills a "denial" role for the Soviet Union. Coupled with Soviet access to Syrian naval and air facilities, this ensured that Syria will remain of strategic importance to Moscow for the foreseeable future, and will make Moscow very anxious to retain good relations with Damascus.

The tables below are a graphic presentation of the results of this study. Listed horizontally are the years in which important decisions were reached in either Soviet-Syrian or Soviet-Egyptian relations. The categories listed vertically refer to the standardized questions investigated in Chapters IV and V. All questions were designed to elicit a "yes" or "no" response.

TABLE 5  
EGYPTIAN-SOVIET RELATIONS

	1967	1970	1971	1972	1973	1976
Int. Debate	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
Mil. Influence	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N
Foreign Policy	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Deliveries	Y	Y	N/A	N	Y	N
Pressure	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y
Strat. Imp.	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

TABLE 6  
SOVIET-SYRIAN RELATIONS

	1980	1982	1983	1984
Internal Debate	N	N	N	N
Military Influence	N	N	N	N
Foreign Policy	Y	Y	Y	Y
Deliveries	N	N	N	N
Pressure	N	N	N	N
Strategic Importance	Y	Y	Y	Y

### C. HYPOTHESES

Having reviewed the results of the case studies, it is now possible to determine whether the hypotheses introduced at the beginning of the paper were proven correct.

*The Soviet objective in the Middle East is to maintain a presence in the region while avoiding military intervention.*

This hypothesis was proven correct. Since 1955 the Soviet Union has sought to ensure its presence in the Middle East, either by influencing selected states and thereby denying control of the region to the West, or by maintaining an actual physical presence at overseas facilities. The need to preserve a Soviet voice in Middle Eastern affairs is seen as crucial to Soviet national security, and Moscow has been willing to pay a high price in terms of military and economic aid to maintain its position of influence in the Middle East.

Yet, as the Egyptian and Syrian cases both demonstrate, the Soviets do not want Soviet troops to become directly involved in a Middle East conflict and Soviet policies have been designed to prevent this from happening. Weapons deliveries to Egypt and Syria were carefully regulated to maximize defensive, but minimize offensive, capabilities. They have refused to sign a "strategic alliance" with Syria. Soviet threats to intervene in support of their clients have either been as warnings to forestall a potential crisis, or have been issued well after the crisis has peaked and the opportunity for intervention has passed. The lone exception to this policy of non-intervention, the deployment of air defense forces to Egypt in 1970, was not a Soviet initiative and was only carried out due to Egyptian pressure. Overall the Soviets have successfully maintained their presence in the Middle East while avoiding commitments that might force them into a conflict at a time and place not of their own choosing.

*The military's interest in, and ability to influence the course of, relations will vary in direct proportion with the tangible benefits (bases, presence, etc.) the military derives from the relationship.*

The military's interest in client relations, determined by a review of *Krasnaya Zvezda*, does vary according to the military privileges, such as strategic access, that the Soviet Union retains in the client states. The military was most involved in policy formulation when the Soviets had naval and air facilities in Egypt, particularly when access to those facilities was seen as vital to Soviet national security. When the possession of military privileges loses its importance, in Egypt after 1975 or in Syria today, the military is less apt to promote its special interests or challenge party policy makers. This is not to imply that the military ever loses interest or influence over Middle Eastern policy. Since that policy has a direct impact on Soviet national security the military will always be consulted and their advice will be carefully weighed.

However, in the absence of tangible benefits, the military seems far more content to follow the policy chosen by party leadership.

*The Soviet Union will impose a "ceiling of sophistication" on arms imports to client states that will exclude weapons that might allow a client to initiate or escalate a regional conflict unilaterally.*

The Soviets were apparently less concerned with the sophistication of the weapons transferred to Egypt and Syria than they were with the capabilities of those weapons. The Soviets delivered large quantities of late-model *defensive* weapons to Cairo and Damascus, such as surface-to-air missiles and interceptors. A "ceiling" was imposed on *offensive* weapons, particularly those with an ability to strike deep into Israel, such as bombers and surface-to-surface missiles. Even older weapons with these capabilities rarely found their way into Arab inventories. This policy is clearly designed to ensure the Soviet objective of avoiding the intervention of Soviet troops in the Middle East. By providing their clients with a strong self-defense capability, the Soviets minimize the chance of a client calling on them for military assistance. By limiting a client's offensive capability Moscow minimizes the chance of a client starting a war it cannot finish without Soviet intervention. Under no circumstances will the Soviet Union allow a client to attain military parity with Israel, to do so would seriously undermine the Soviet ability to control events in the Middle East.

*The greater the perceived strategic importance of a client, the greater its bargaining strength.*

Soviet foreign policy decisions are driven by concerns for Soviet national security. When good relations with a client state becomes a strategic imperative for the Soviet Union, that country can exercise enormous leverage in its dealings with Moscow. For several years Egypt demonstrated substantial bargaining strengths, as evidenced by the Soviet decision to send combat troops to man Egyptian air defense in 1970 and the increase in arms deliveries *after* the Soviet expulsion from Egypt in 1972. It is possible that Syria, as Moscow's foremost Middle Eastern client, now has a comparable level of bargaining strength. The Egyptian case also showed that a client's bargaining strength is derived almost exclusively from its strategic importance. Changing circumstances can dramatically alter a client's relative worth to the Soviet Union, and end its ability to alter Soviet policies successfully.



#### D. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

This study has identified the general pattern of past and present Soviet policies in the Middle East, and has defined the prevalent Soviet goals and objectives in the conduct of relations with its clients in that region. Having outlined past trends in Soviet policy, using Egypt and Syria as examples, it is also possible to make some general predictions regarding future Soviet behavior in the Middle East.

First, the preservation of Soviet-Syrian ties will be a high priority objective for Soviet policymakers. Ties with Syria give Moscow an entree into Middle Eastern affairs, ensures a Soviet voice in Arab-Israeli negotiations, and are instrumental in allowing the Soviets to "deny" the region to the West. Additionally, access to Syrian naval and air facilities is important to Soviet Mediterranean strategy. At this time the Soviets lack an alternative to Syria as the cornerstone for their Middle East policy, so they must be prepared to pay a high price for Syrian loyalty. If a break in Soviet-Syrian relations does occur, it almost certainly will not be Soviet initiated.

Second, the Soviet military will continue to play a minor role in Soviet-Syrian relations, and will not be inclined to question policies designed by the party. It would not be surprising, however to see a noticeable military interest in acquiring access to overseas facilities closer to the current perceived American threat, possibly in India and South Yemen (Indian Ocean) or Libya (Western Mediterranean).

Third, the Soviets will continue the transfer of highly sophisticated, *defensive* weapons to its favored clients. A Soviet delivery of the MiG-29 Fulcrum, the Soviet Union's latest fighter, but one optimized for air defense, would be consistent with this policy. Deliveries of late-model surface-to-air missiles (SA-11, SA-14) can also be expected. In contrast, the Soviets will continue to withhold most *offensive* weapons. The delivery of such a weapon system, for example the Fencer medium bomber, would mark a significant change in Soviet arms transfer policy.

Finally, the Soviets will be very cautious in its approach to Middle Eastern affairs. A renewal of Arab-Israeli hostilities would be detrimental to Soviet interests and could force the Soviets into a military intervention to rescue a faltering client. To prevent such an occurrence the Soviets will be slow to support adventurist policies and will counsel restraint in dealings with Israel and the West, as they have already done in the Syrian case. This will not, however, prevent Moscow from seizing every opportunity to undermine the American position in the Middle East.

These predictions assume that Soviet policymakers will adhere to the general guidelines observable in past Soviet policy behavior. This study has also shown that very little in the Middle East is predictable, and that the Soviet Union, despite its size and power cannot always dictate its own policy, but instead must respond to unforeseen, rapidly changing developments and the needs and demands of its client states.

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