

INDICATIONS OF ARAB INTENTIONS TO INITIATE
HOSTILITIES

This paper deals in the first instance with military moves made by Egypt and other Arab states during the past several weeks. Individually, these moves do not appear to have great significance. Taken collectively, however, they suggest a pattern of action that could be preparation for hostilities against Israel, but they are also part of an effort to arouse international concern and put psychological pressures on Israel and the US.

The balance of the paper is a discussion and assessment of the objectives of Egypt and the other Arab states and of the likelihood of hostilities in the near future. We conclude that whatever the Egyptian and Arab leaders intend at this stage, the pattern of their actions thus far does not provide the Arabs with a rational basis for an attack at an early date.

In recent weeks, the emphasis in Egyptian statements and activities has gradually shifted toward preparing for war. The most serious indicators to date are

-- Movement of SA-6 surface-to-air missiles to firing sites within 20 miles of the Suez Canal; a program to convert SA-2 missile systems to more advanced models has also been reported.

-- Transfer within the past month of about 30 Mirage V jet fighters, which have a ground attack capability, from Libya to Egypt. Flight operations by Egyptian pilots using these aircraft have begun. About 16 Hawker Hunter jet fighters also have arrived in Egypt from Iraq, with Iraqi pilots. About 10 Lightning jet fighters are expected from Saudi Arabia.

-- Movement of TU-16 bombers from Aswan to the Cairo area in late March. These aircraft are equipped to carry air-to-surface missiles, but we have no evidence that the missiles themselves have been moved from Aswan.

-- A high state of alert imposed on the Egyptian air force since 20 April; some air force reservists were recalled on 3 May.

-- Relocation and reactivation of various Egyptian air squadrons. Some of the shuffling was to accommodate the aircraft from Libya and Iraq.

-- Evidence suggesting that additional commando units may have moved closer to the Suez Canal since mid-March.

-- A report that the Egyptian staff has been ordered to prepare a detailed plan for an attack across the Canal and to pick optimum dates; the staff is said to have chosen two full moon nights, 19 May and 16 June. We, however, do not believe that the plan described matches up with Sadat's objectives.

-- A high-ranking Jordanian military official's statement that the Arab chiefs of staff conference in Cairo, 21-25 April, was permeated with "despair and foreboding" due to Egyptian determination to go to war regardless of the consequences. King Husayn has passed his own concern about the seriousness of the situation to the Israelis.

-- Reliable reports that the Egyptians are trying to organize an oil boycott by the Arab oil producers against the US and Western Europe in the event of hostilities with Israel. This effort is having mixed results.

These are all actions that the Egyptians could be expected to take in the fairly early stages of preparing to fight; they are also actions that are necessary as psychological gambits. If Sadat intends a serious effort to take and hold, if only for a few days, territory in Sinai and thereby provoke outside intervention, we should see evidence of further preparation by his air forces. We are not likely to see further preparations by ground forces that might be used in a small-scale attack, because many units are already in place between Cairo and the Canal.

We judge that Sadat at this time has not made a decision to attack at a specific time and in a specific manner. Despite the gloomy prognoses being assiduously disseminated from Cairo, Sadat has not exhausted his diplomatic options. His economic situation is deteriorating, but we doubt that he is under significant domestic pressure to go to war. Both Sadat and his advisers are aware that their military prospects are poor at best; a fresh disaster might well sweep away Sadat's regime rather than rescue him from his dilemma.

We think that Sadat will wait at least until he sees the outcome of the UN session on the Middle East in late May before taking a new decision. Meanwhile, strengthening Egypt's military preparedness serves to create tensions that Sadat hopes will support the urgency of his diplomacy.

Recent military moves by other Arab governments, we believe, are primarily in harmony with this purpose, although each of these moves is also motivated by the narrower interests of the government making it. The moves include

-- Shipment of a Moroccan armored contingent to Syria. Some of this unit's equipment has already been delivered by Soviet LST's which picked it up in Algeria, and some of the troops may have arrived.

-- Transfer of two squadrons of Algerian MIG-21s (about 20 aircraft) with pilots to Libya, probably to bolster Libya's air defense. We have evidence that Algeria may also have sent Mig-15s and -17s to Syria.

-- An undertaking, still in the planning stage, to send a Sudanese ground force to Syria.

These moves are part of general Arab planning to increase the pressures on Israel. The transfers of men and equipment strengthen to some degree the armed forces of Syria and Egypt, but the main effect at this stage is psychological. The major gap in the Arab lineup is the refusal of the Jordanian government to place its forces at the disposal of the Egyptian-Syrian "eastern front."

Egyptian support of the anti-American campaign by the fedayeen is designed to step up pressure on the US, and through Washington, on Israel. The ruckus between the fedayeen and the Lebanese government is an embarrassment to Egypt and the other Arabs; it distracts attention from that aspect of the Arab-Israeli confrontation that Cairo wants to emphasize even though it also contributes to the sense of tension surrounding the area.

The suddenness of the flare-up in Lebanon illustrates the danger that in the next few months the various military moves may develop a momentum that Cairo will not be able to control. The events of 1967

argue that most Arab governments are not able to resist giving the situation a shove once it has started rolling. Sadat has said so often that he is now dead serious that it will be progressively more difficult to find excuses for inaction, more especially when other Arab leaders have fulfilled their commitments to his cause.

The Soviet role in this situation is somewhat ambivalent. While they have an interest in sustaining a level of tension that underscores the seriousness of the problem and the need for US initiatives and Israeli concessions, the Soviet leaders are counseling the Arabs against precipitate military action. The Soviet position in the area would suffer if the Arabs, using Soviet weapons, were beaten again. Another war would risk an involvement that might endanger detente with the US--the centerpiece of Brezhnev's foreign policy.

Sadat's May Day speech indicated that he has felt pressure from the USSR to continue to pursue a "peaceful solution." There are also signs that Moscow is using third parties to warn Cairo of the dangers of new war.

-- "Confirmed information" from Jordan that the Soviet ambassador in Damascus had advised the Syrians "not to get involved in a war." Syrian President Asad frequently acts as a go-between with Cairo and Moscow.

-- Grechko last week asked the French chief of staff whether Paris could influence Egypt against starting a fight. The Soviets themselves no longer have a veto over Egypt's actions.

Overall, we do not believe that an outbreak of hostilities is likely before the next UN debate, and we doubt that Sadat will decide to try a major operation within the next six weeks.