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ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301



INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS

DECLASSIFIED IN PART
Authority: EO 13526
Chief, Records & Declass Div, WHS
Date: SEP 20 2019

15 JAN 1983

SYRIA

DIA 3.3(b)(1) + FOIA 5 U.S.C. § 552(b)(3); 10 U.S.C. § 424
OSD 3.3(b)(1) + FOIA 5 U.S.C. § 552(b)(3); 10 U.S.C. § 424

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
Through: Under Secretary of Defense for Policy 75

SUBJECT: SA-5 Deployment in Syria (U) — ACTION MEMORANDUM

(S) In recent weeks, it has become apparent that the Soviet Union is in the process of deploying the SA-5 surface-to-air (SAM) missile system to Syria. This is the first time this system has been deployed outside the Soviet Union. Site construction for this system has already been noted at two locations in southern Syria. Because of the advanced nature of this system, it is likely that they will be manned by the Soviets, at least initially. Unlike other SAM systems that have been provided to Syria by the Soviets, the SA-5, with a range of over 150 miles against large aircraft, is seen by Israel as a direct threat to their sovereign airspace. In addition, they feel that this system could impact on IAF ability to retain unchallenged regional air superiority for recon/intelligence, airborne early warning and, if needed, tactical operations. Its range includes nearly all of Lebanon, about half of Israel, and significant portions of Jordan as well. [redacted] the IAF can destroy the system, and thereby that the weapon only has a marginal impact on the regional military balance, there are larger political questions involved.

(S) From the Syrian point of view, the SA-5 is a defensive weapons system, deployed on Syrian soil, and it is fully within its right to emplace this system. From the Soviet point of view, they need to regain face with their Syrian allies and others after the defeat of their SAM equipment in Lebanon. The action seems to have been undertaken in the Brezhnev period, but undoubtedly reconfirmed by Andropov. It is clearly aimed at demonstrating to us that the Soviets cannot be ignored in the area. It is also probably designed to decrease regional stability. The risks are high, however; if the Israelis successfully "take out" the SA-5s the Soviets are in even a worse position with their major Middle East client state and may have to provide even more advanced military equipment.

(S) From the Israeli point of view, the SA-5 infringes on the country's limited airspace and presents a real threat to their vital airborne early warning and intelligence collection systems. The SA-5 challenges the IAF's ability to "do as it pleases" in the region, and the Begin Government may wish to take out this system to show the Syrians and Soviets that they won't stand for the introduction of these types of weapons in countries adjacent to Israel. Begin/Sharon could also use the SA-5 issue to draw public attention away from their own internal problem and could also trip up the Lebanon talks. On the other hand, striking a system inside Syria is a serious step which the Israeli cabinet may not wish to take. At the

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380-85-0023, bx 24, Syria

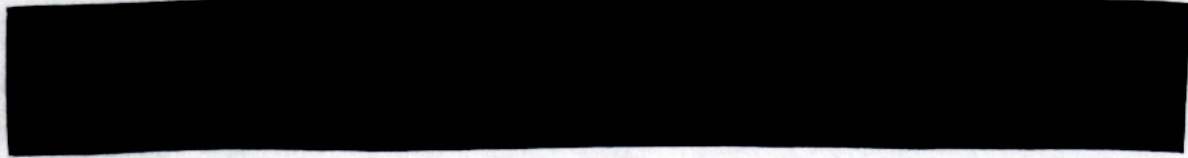
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DIA FOIA 6 U.S.C. § 552(b)(3); 10 U.S.C. § 424
OSD 3.3(b)(1)(6) + FOIA 5 U.S.C. § 552(b)(3); 10 U.S.C. § 424



From the point of view of stability, it is counterproductive for the US to have the SA-5 go into Syria at this time. The political balance as it now exists could be severely damaged with impacts on both Lebanon and the peace process, the Soviet presence in Syria expanded, and the Begin Government might be able to use it to deflect domestic criticism on the Lebanon occupation. As of January 3, the missiles and associated equipment for the sites are still at the shipping point in the Black Sea.

There are also several actions we should consider:

- A demarche to the Soviets, pointing out that the provision of these missiles is destabilizing, could lead to an Israeli/Syrian clash not in the interest of either of us, and cast considerable doubt on Soviet expressions of interest in better relations with us. While we are unlikely to change the Soviets on this, we need to make the approach for the record and our bilateral relations with the Soviets. From point of view of US-Soviet relations, however, we don't think much of this idea.

- A demarche to the Syrians. Embassy Damascus recommends against this and we doubt its value.

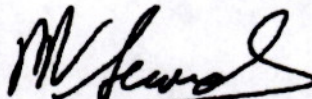
- Caution the Israelis against actions against the installations, pointing out the marginal military effects of the missiles, that any clash with the Syrians, particularly deep in Syria, contains the threat of escalation, adversely impacts on regional peace issues and gives the Soviets further opportunities in Syria.

- As there is an equal threat to Jordan, we should keep the Jordanians briefed on the threat and on our actions. The SA-5's obviously are a more significant threat to Jordan, which is without counter-capabilities, than to the Israelis.

- We should attempt Saudi persuasion with Syria not to deploy the missiles. This, however, would require Saudi willingness to cut off their financial support to Syria, and even then might not succeed.

(U) Attached are possible responses to press questions to the President this evening. We will clear them with State.

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Chief, Records & Declass Div, WNS
Date: SEP 20 2019


R. V. Secord
Major General, USAF
Deputy Assistant Secretary
of Defense
Near East South Asian Affairs

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SA-5 Missiles in Syria

Q. What is your attitude to deployment of Soviet SA-5 missiles to Syria?

A. We would deplore the introduction of a new weapons system to the area which could lead to further tensions. As in the past, we urge all concerned to exercise restraint.

Q. Are we doing anything to prevent the SA-5 deployment.

A. We will of course be discussing this development with governments concerned.

Page determined to be Unclassified
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IAW EO 13526, Section 3.5
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Office of the Secretary of Defense
Chief, RDD, ESD, WHS

Date: 20 SEP 2019 Authority: EO 13526 + 5 U.S.C. § 552

Declassify: _____ Deny in Full: _____

Declassify in Part: X

Reason: 3.3(b)(1)(v) + 5 U.S.C. § 552(b)(3); 10 U.S.C. § 424

MDR: 18 -M- 1321