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Authority E.O. 12958

By AB NARA Date 8/26/03

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PCDEPARTMENT OF STATE
Operations CenterMIDDLE EAST TASK FORCE
Situation Report # 43Situation Report in the Middle East as of 0600 EDT, Oct. 19, 1973Military Situation

The Syrian front has remained quiet as Israeli forces have moved to concentrate their efforts along the Canal. Though Israeli claims of having broken the back of the Syrian Army are probably exaggerated, they clearly have done enough damage to make the Syrians welcome this respite to reorganize and re-equip their forces. The Israelis report that 200 to 300 new tanks have been unloaded in Syrian ports but they do not seem very concerned. The Israelis are content for now to limit their Syrian operations to keeping the Syrian forces off balance while improving present IDF positions.

The tank battle which raged on both banks of the Canal during October 18 continued into the night and is still inconclusive. Israeli forces, however, have managed to enlarge their bridgehead on the west bank of the Canal. The IDF now has about 200 tanks across the Canal and claims it has every intention of keeping them there if possible. The Israeli presence, if it can be maintained, is a major political counter to Egyptian forces on the east bank and a stepping stone for a major Israeli offensive.

The IDF claims that in addition to using the west bank task force for knocking out SAM sites, it now has the option of using this force to cut off Egyptian troops on the east bank or to drive toward Cairo. An IDF spokesman has stressed that the latter option is less desirable, but Israeli military planners may well decide that by pushing toward Cairo, this will force Egypt to withdraw units from the integrated defensive system it maintains along the Canal. This would make Israel's declared objective of destroying Egypt's army more easily obtainable. The

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Israelis feel they have now turned the corner in the war and that the initiative on both fronts is now in Israel's hands. The smell of victory will not make Israel welcome a ceasefire.

The IDF reports there has been substantial fedayeen activity in the north which apparently originates from Lebanon. The Israelis have directed artillery fire into Lebanon but are not likely to waste their armed strength on pacifying the fedayeen at this time. However, Israel will probably not forget this irritant when its forces can be spared.

Soviet Union

Kosygin has left Cairo after an apparently inconclusive three-day visit. The Soviets appear to be hewing to their public position of full support for the Arabs but there is a hint in the Moscow press of concern over the war's impact on detente and Western news agencies speculate that Premier Kosygin had been urging a rapid ceasefire and settlement in Cairo. Gromyko has told the French Ambassador in Moscow that the core of Soviet Middle East policy is total Israeli withdrawal, but since neither the U.S. nor Israel are prepared for this, the prospects for ceasefire are dim. The French convey the impression, allegedly received from the Algerians after Boumediene's visit, that if the war led to a U.S.-USSR confrontation, the Soviets would blink first.

E and F

Cairo reports that the mood there is becoming increasingly anti-American. If the Israelis have indeed turned the corner, and particularly if they drive toward Cairo, we can expect the mood to turn ugly in several Arab countries. The chartered Greek ship arrived this morning in Alexandria to evacuate over 350 American tourists from Egypt.

Attack on Bank of America

The terrorists holding more than 20 hostages in the Bank of America offices in Beirut have been tentatively identified as being a gang of Lebanese criminals without any political affiliation rather than Palestinian fedayeen as was first thought. Press agencies report that several bombs have gone off in the Bank and that the blasts were

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followed by exchange of fire between the terrorists and police. Some police have apparently moved into the building but it is not clear if they have stormed the upper floors where the terrorists are holding out.

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