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PROBABLE SOVIET ACTION IN VARIOUS
CONTINGENCIES AFFECTING SYRIA

CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM
RELEASE IN FULL

Submitted by the

DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of this estimate: The Central Intelligence Agency and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and The Joint Staff.

Concurred in by the

INTELLIGENCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

on 24 September 1957. Concurring were the Special Assistant, Intelligence, Department of State; the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, Department of the Army; the Director of Naval Intelligence; the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, USAF; and the Deputy Director for Intelligence, The Joint Staff. The Atomic Energy Commission Representative to the IAC, and the Assistant Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, abstained, the subject being outside of their jurisdiction.

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PROBABLE SOVIET ACTION IN VARIOUS CONTINGENCIES AFFECTING SYRIA

THE PROBLEM

To estimate the probable Soviet reaction in the event of: (a) armed intervention in Syria by Iraq alone, or together with Jordan and/or Lebanon; (b) intervention by Turkey alone or together with one or more of the above Arab states; (c) significant US/UK logistical support to the intervening powers in any of the above contingencies; and (d) US/UK intervention in support of Turkey if, following action by Turkey as in (b) above, the USSR had sent large numbers of "volunteers" to Syria.

ASSUMPTIONS

- A. That military action in the cases considered would be taken only following provocation by Syria, involving border incidents or recognizable subversive acts by Syria inside one of the neighboring states.
- B. That Israel does not intervene in the conflict.

ESTIMATE

THE GENERAL SOVIET REACTION

1. By its recent warnings against pro-Western intervention in Syria, especially its latest note to Turkey, the USSR has publicly adopted a strong position on this issue. The USSR would be reluctant to accept the loss to its prestige which would occur if a government it openly supports were overthrown. It would be even more concerned with the resulting setback to its newly won position in the Middle East and with the corresponding strengthening of the US position in that area.

2. We believe, therefore, that armed intervention by outside powers against the Syrian government would produce a major international crisis. The USSR would make great propaganda play of alleged Western instigation. It would almost certainly promote sabotage and subversive actions, send such additional technical and logistical support to Syria as it could through available channels, and make threatening military gestures. Beyond this, it could choose among three broad courses of action (not wholly mutually ex-

clusive): (1) overt military action by Soviet forces directly against the states involved; (2) such assistance to Syria as sending as many Soviet "volunteers" as feasible and flying in Soviet aircraft to operate from Syrian bases; or (3) attempts to secure immediate UN or great power action to halt the conflict or possibly to provide justification for subsequent Soviet armed intervention.

3. A key factor in the USSR's choice of countermeasures would be its estimate of the US reaction. We do not believe that the USSR would desire to let the crisis reach such proportions as to involve grave risks of general war; Zhukov and the Soviet military would probably advocate caution in this respect. But the Soviet leaders would probably believe that their own deterrent capabilities as well as other factors would also induce caution on the part of the Western powers and leave the USSR considerable maneuverability.

4. In this regard the possible role of Khrushchev deserves consideration. He has exhibited great boldness and even some impetuosity in dealing with a number of problems. However, we believe that he would be disposed toward caution on issues which he thought to involve appreciable risk of hostilities with the US. Moreover, he probably does not yet occupy so dominant a position that his personal decision alone would be controlling on issues of such importance.

5. The Soviet leaders are well aware that it would be extremely difficult for them to bring substantial Soviet forces to bear in Syria quickly without violating the frontiers of US and UK allies, and thereby incurring risks of direct conflict with US and NATO forces. We believe that the Soviets would be reluctant to take these risks unless they were confident that the US and UK would not react with armed force, and they probably could not be confident in this regard.

6. We also believe that the Soviets would be sensitive to the repercussions on their prestige, their position in the Middle East, and perhaps even more their position in Eastern Europe if they were drawn into a major test of Western-Soviet strength in the Middle East, particularly one involving Soviet forces, and then

had to back down. Finally, they would probably judge that a reverse in Syria would not be permanent, since Western chances of establishing a stable pro-Western regime would seem limited at best.

7. In these circumstances we believe that the USSR would see major advantages in appearing as a peace-loving opponent of aggression by an immediate appeal to the UN. Whether or not the intervention was provoked by Syria, the USSR would label it as Western-initiated, and might expect that it would be viewed as aggression by a substantial number of UN members, particularly among the Afro-Asian nations. By acting through the UN, the USSR would avoid the risks and difficulties of extensive military countermeasures as well as the possible political disadvantages resulting from the appearance of Soviet forces in the Middle East. Soviet success in getting UN intervention would greatly enhance Soviet prestige and inevitably appear as a defeat for the US. Moreover, by itself playing a major role in UN or great power intercession, the USSR would help to achieve one of its major objectives, that of securing a recognized voice in great power action on Middle Eastern issues.

8. The duration of the crisis might significantly affect the Soviet reaction. If the initial intervention were rapidly successful, the odds against extensive Soviet military support to Syria would be increased. But if the crisis dragged on and UN action were delayed, the USSR might step up its support of Syria, especially if growing world condemnation of the intervention appeared to support this. However, the USSR's estimate of the likely Western reaction would remain the key factor in any such Soviet decision.

9. The USSR could count on the extensive capabilities of Egypt and Syria for sabotage, fomenting strikes and demonstrations, and otherwise stirring up trouble in the Middle East and it would aid and abet them in this activity. In particular Egypt and Syria could extensively disrupt Middle East oil supplies. In event of fighting in Syria, some interruption of oil movements would almost certainly

occur, and subversive activities in Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq would probably be stepped up. Moreover, the USSR might make threatening gestures outside the Middle East, as a diversionary action.

CASE A — PROBABLE SOVIET REACTION TO INTERVENTION BY IRAQ ALONE, OR TOGETHER WITH JORDAN AND/OR LEBANON

10. Unless the USSR believed that Iraqi-Lebanese-Jordanian military capabilities and political stability had been substantially improved prior to the attack, the USSR would probably think that these countries were unlikely to succeed in their designs, at least quickly. Therefore, with US/UK and Turkish forces not directly involved, it is almost certain the USSR would not intervene directly. Instead it would probably attempt by threats and intimidating military gestures to deter subsequent Turkish or US/UK support to the invaders, and to warn the states concerned that the USSR might be compelled to intervene if they did not withdraw.

11. The USSR would almost certainly press immediately for UN intervention to enforce a cease-fire. It would label the US, UK and Turkey as being the real behind-the-scenes aggressors, and pointedly invite them to support strong UN action. The USSR might threaten that unless the UN acted, it would have to intervene. Alternatively, it might call for great power intervention and mediation with Soviet participation.

12. Meanwhile, to enhance Syrian resistance, the USSR would probably urge Egypt to send troops and aircraft to Syria's support. Some degree of direct Soviet technical and logistical support to Syria would also be likely. However, the USSR probably would not risk broadening the conflict (at least initially) by sending in numerous "volunteers." The USSR would employ sea lift, if feasible, and possibly clandestine overflights over Iran and Iraq, despite their Baghdad Pact status; some overflights over SE Turkey might be undertaken, but the USSR would seek to limit the risks of Turkish reaction.

CASE B — PROBABLE SOVIET REACTION TO INTERVENTION BY TURKEY ALONE OR TOGETHER WITH THE ABOVE ARAB STATES

13. In our view the USSR would feel compelled to react much more strongly and immediately in this case, because of the increased prospects of early Syrian collapse. It would almost certainly adopt a highly threatening posture, possibly including military gestures along Turkish and perhaps Iranian frontiers.

14. But we believe that the USSR would still see great initial advantages in diplomatic and UN action for an immediate cease-fire and withdrawal. In the case of Turkish intervention alone it is unlikely that any provocation justifying the intervention would be convincing to the world. In this case the USSR could expect support from most Afro-Asian states, and many abstentions from other countries. The Soviets would probably estimate that a condemnation-withdrawal resolution could be obtained in a very few days, unless the US vigorously opposed, and that in this event the US would be very seriously embarrassed. If the Turks had been joined by one or more Arab states, the Soviet chances of a majority would be less but the USSR would still expect a large number of favorable votes.

15. We believe the attractions of this course would be such that the Soviets would almost certainly make it their initial move. Should they do so, they might continue to make threatening gestures, as being likely to promote rapid UN action rather than the reverse. However, the Soviets would probably limit their military help to Syria, at least during this initial period of UN consideration, to technical and logistical support. The Soviets would also encourage active Egyptian support of Syria, as well as sabotage, disruption and subversion in any Arab states joining with Turkey.

16. If a UN resolution brought a halt to the Turkish action, the USSR would move to participate as actively as possible in the settlement and to insure a pro-Soviet government.

If, on the other hand, the Turks persisted notwithstanding the UN resolution and, as is probable, appeared likely to overthrow the present Syrian government and occupy Damascus, the USSR would be confronted with the choice between major military action and acceptance of this result.

17. If the Soviet leaders considered that the prevailing climate of opinion would sharply inhibit Western countermoves, and that Syria could be effectively assisted, they might risk sending "volunteers"; they might even risk some overflights of SE Turkey where Turkish air defenses are weak and the chances of a clash limited. In fact, the USSR might estimate that such actions would influence the Western powers to accept a cease-fire. However, we believe that the USSR would be reluctant to try to oppose Turkish forces by large scale use of Soviet forces in Syria. The Soviet leaders would probably regard such intervention as difficult to carry out on a scale large enough to be effective against the Turks without entailing substantial risks of US-UK countermeasures. Finally, if a UN resolution were in existence, large scale Soviet intervention would be an inappropriate response unless specifically authorized by the resolution.

18. As to direct military action against Turkey itself, we believe that such action would be highly unlikely, though we cannot exclude it altogether. We believe that, in the absence of contrary indications, the USSR would probably believe that a Soviet attack on Turkey would be taken by the US as invoking NATO obligations, and hence would create grave risk of general war. Even if the Soviet action were under a UN resolution, the Soviets would probably regard the risk as substantial. Moreover, in deciding whether to accept this risk, the Soviets might calculate that the Turkish success would be short-lived. Even if Turkey had been joined by one or more Arab states, the USSR would expect a widespread popular Arab reaction against Turkey (and against the US as Turkey's apparent sponsor), which could subsequently be turned to major Soviet advantage in the Middle East.

19. While the above reasoning seems to us to weigh heavily against any Soviet resort to

direct military action, we repeat that we cannot exclude such action wholly, having in mind particularly the possible Soviet belief that the US would not in the last analysis resort to general war.

CASE C — PROBABLE SOVIET REACTION IN THE ABOVE CONTINGENCIES IF THE US AND UK GAVE SIGNIFICANT LOGISTICAL SUPPORT

20. Since the USSR would regard any intervention in Syria as being US/UK instigated and supported, we believe that it would expect further significant US/UK aid to Turkey and/or its Arab partners once the intervention had begun. Assuming that such aid was demonstrable, the USSR would use it to back up its diplomatic and propaganda efforts to label the Western powers as the real aggressors and to secure UN intercession.

21. The USSR might also regard such overt US/UK aid as permitting the USSR to justify publicly such open assistance to Syria as sending "volunteers," or Soviet aircraft and crews to operate from Syrian bases, thus intensifying the crisis. On the other hand the fact of such US/UK support would be additional evidence of their determination and might reinforce Soviet caution. On balance we consider that the USSR probably would remain unwilling to take the risks of extensive military counteraction for the reasons given in Case B above.

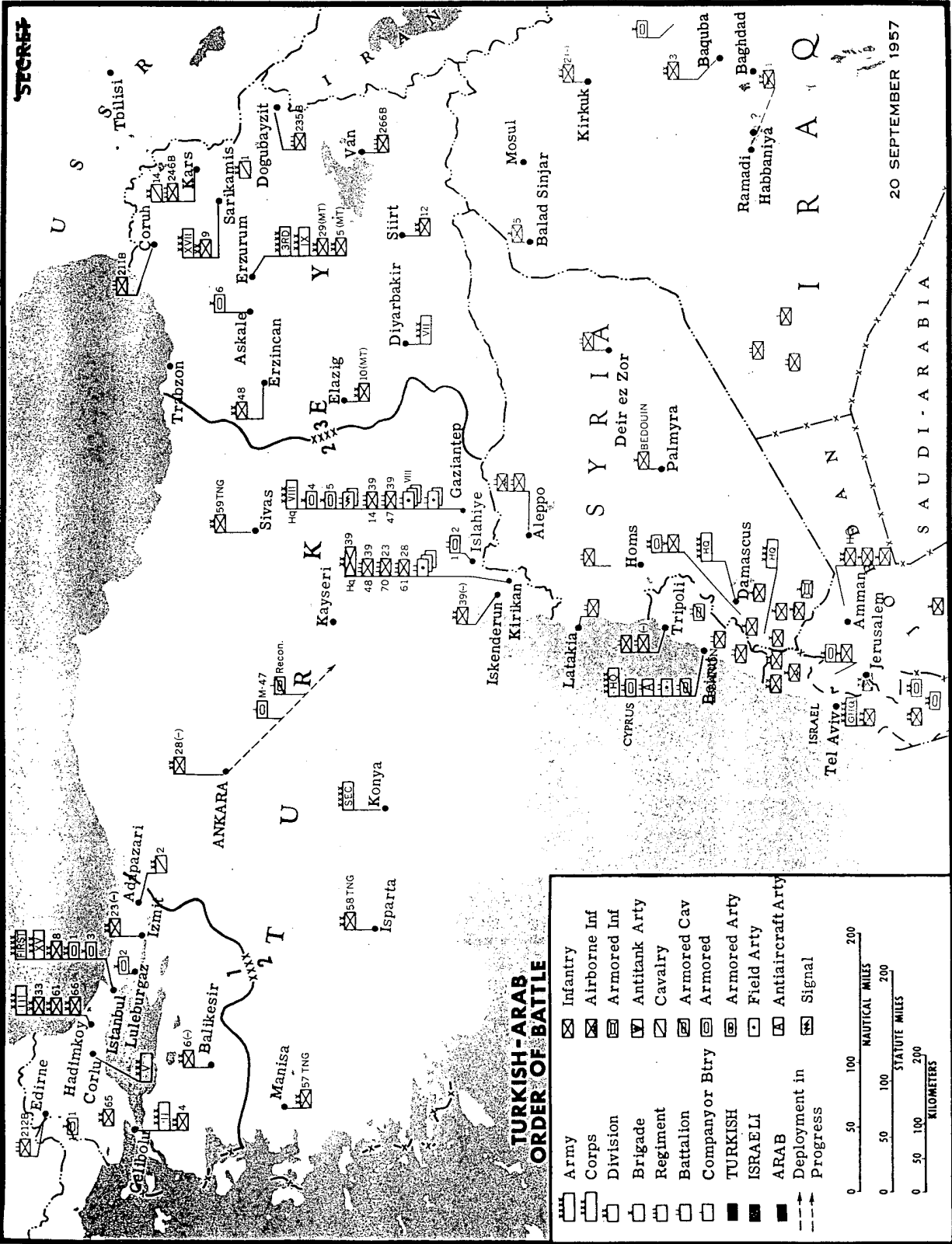
CASE D — PROBABLE SOVIET REACTION IF LARGE SCALE SOVIET EMPLOYMENT OF VOLUNTEERS, FOLLOWING TURKISH INTERVENTION IN SYRIA, LED TO US/UK OR POSSIBLY NATO INTERVENTION IN SUPPORT OF TURKEY

22. By this time the crisis would already have resulted in a direct confrontation of Soviet and Western forces involving grave risk of miscalculation leading to general war. The immediate issues in Syria would be overshadowed by great power maneuvering on a broader scale. The momentum of the crisis, and the commitment of Soviet "volunteers,"

would have carried the USSR to a point where backing down would be very difficult. But by this time, unless other factors emerged to affect their estimate, we believe the Soviet leaders would see grave risks of general war in the light of demonstrated US/UK or NATO unwillingness to retreat. Three broad alternatives would be open to the USSR: (a) to increase the scope of the local conflict; (b) to initiate general war; or (c) to seek a negotiated solution.

23. We believe that if the USSR had not become engaged to a greater extent than a large scale volunteer force and some overflights, it would seek to avoid general war and the risks of general war involved in intensifying the local conflict. Despite a possible loss to its prestige if it appeared to back down by seeking negotiations, the USSR might even see considerable advantages in being the power which proposed a peaceful solution to the conflict.

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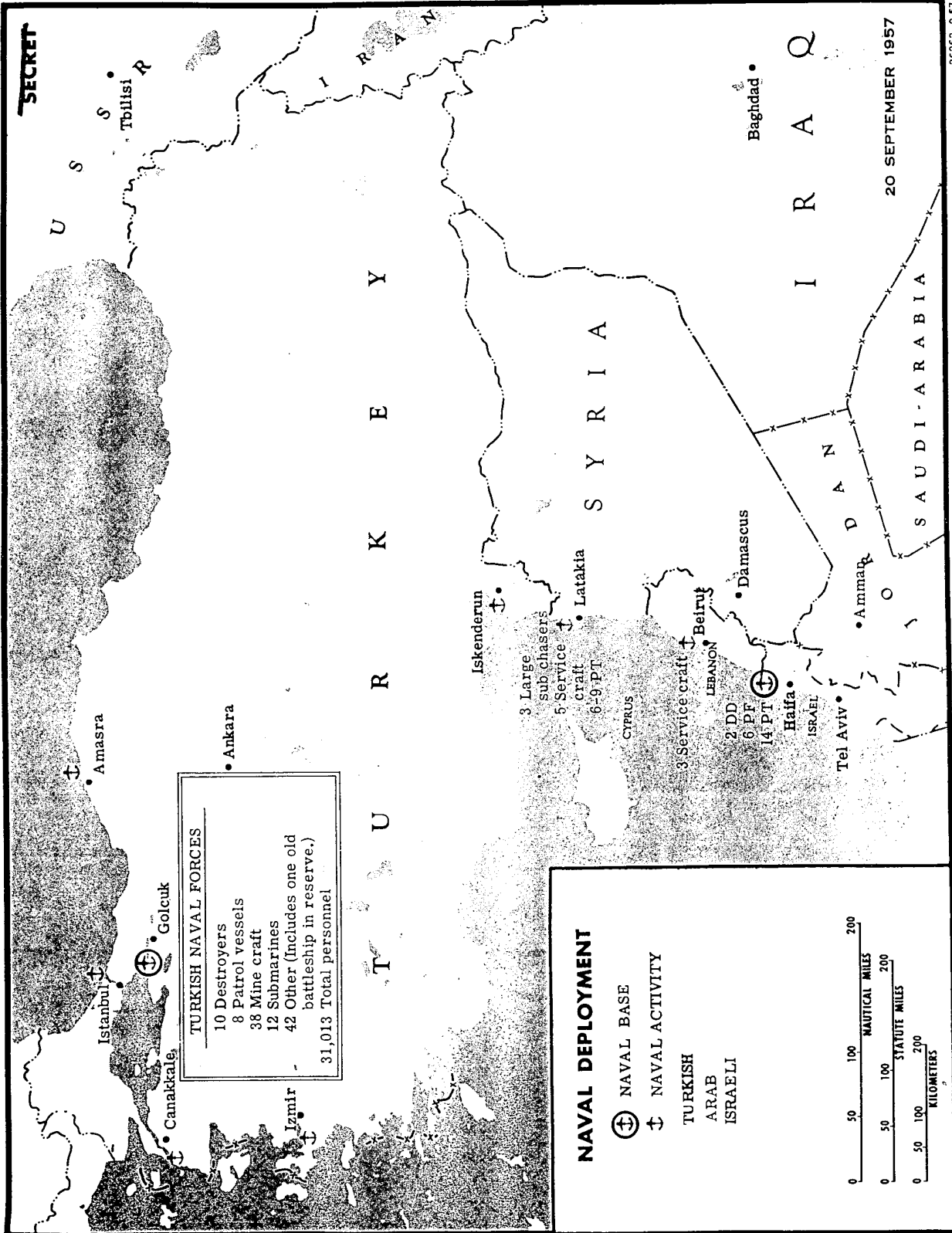
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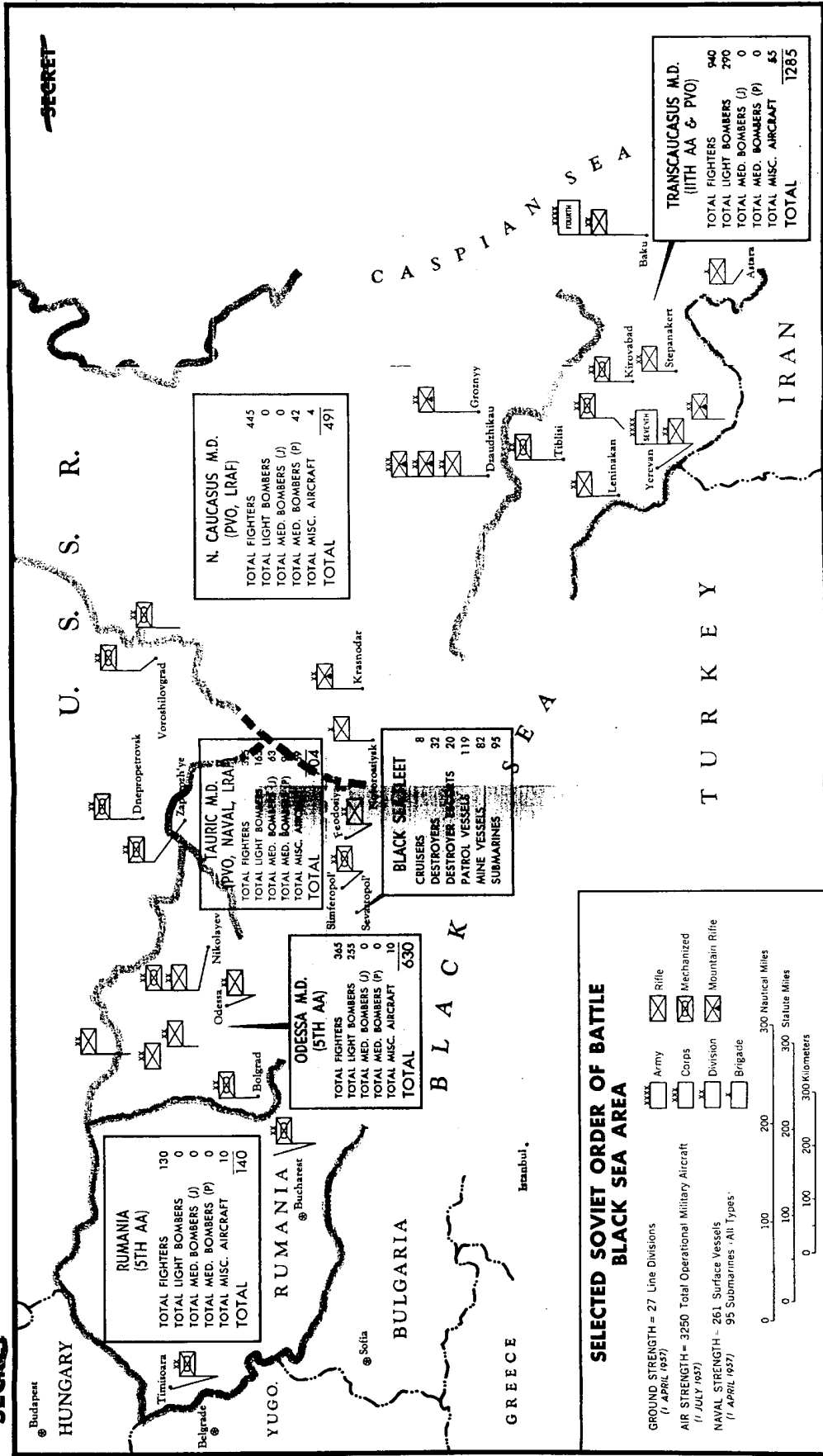


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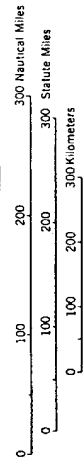
**SELECTED SOVIET ORDER OF BATTLE
BLACK SEA AREA**

GROUND STRENGTH = 27 Line Divisions
(1 APRIL 1957)

AIR STRENGTH = 3250 Total Operational Military Aircraft
(1 JULY 1957)

NAVAL STRENGTH - 261 Surface Vessels
95 Submarines - All Types

- XXXX Army
- XXX Corps
- XX Division
- X Brigade
- X Rifle
- X Mechanized
- X Mountain Rifle



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