

Zeitschrift: ASMZ : Sicherheit Schweiz : Allgemeine schweizerische Militärzeitschrift

Herausgeber: Schweizerische Offiziersgesellschaft

Band: 140 (1974)

Heft: 1

Artikel: Soviet Weapons for the Third World

Autor: Staar, Richard F.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-48751>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 11.01.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

4. Ausblick

Mit Beginn des zweiten Schuljahres sollte die zentrale Grundschule für Instruktionsunteroffiziere bereits zu einer gesicherten und geprüften Institution geworden sein, ohne sich aber immer neuen und notwendigen Änderungen zu verschließen. Eine ihrer Hauptaufgaben wird es sein, die zentrale Weiterbildung der Instr. Uof zu intensivieren. Grundlagen dazu werden innerhalb dieses Projektes geschaffen.

Die einzelnen DA werden sich frühzeitig überlegen müssen, wieweit sie ihren Absolventen der zentralen Grundschule nun eine waffengattungsspezifische Zusatzausbildung bieten wollen, die ähnlich diesem Projekt geplant werden könnte.

Sitzung des Zentralvorstandes der SOG

14. Dezember 1973

In Solothurn fand unter dem Vorsitz von Oberst R. Huber, Lausanne, eine Sitzung des Zentralvorstandes der Schweizerischen Offiziersgesellschaft statt.

Systemanalyse für die Artillerie

Eine von der SOG-Kommission für Artillerie ausgearbeitete Systemanalyse zeigt interessante und zukunftsweisende Möglichkeiten für die Entwicklung dieser Waffe. Der Zentralvorstand beschloß, diese Studie dem EMD zu unterbreiten und damit die Zusammenarbeit zwischen Verwaltung und Milizoffizieren zu fördern.

Ausbau der Panzerabwehr

Im Zusammenhang mit einer Studie der ostschweizerischen Offiziersgesellschaften vertritt der Zentralvorstand die Auffassung, daß dem beschleunigten Ausbau der Panzerabwehr hohe Priorität zukommen müsse, und er verweist dabei auch auf die jüngsten Erfahrungen im Nahostkrieg.

„Sind wir bedroht – sind wir bereit?“

In der Teilnahme an der Auseinandersetzung um die zukünftige Gestaltung unserer militärischen Wehrbereitschaft und in der Förderung des Wehrwillens sieht der Zentralvorstand eine immer wichtiger werdende Aufgabe der SOG. Es geht darum, deren Tätigkeit mehr nach außen zu orientieren und sich stärker als bisher an die Öffentlichkeit zu wenden.

Projekt „ASMZ für alle“

Die Novemberausgabe der „Allgemeinen Schweizerischen Militärzeitschrift“ wurde als Probenummer in neuer Gestaltung allen deutschsprachigen Mitgliedern der Schweizerischen Offiziersgesellschaft zugestellt. In Zukunft sollte das Abonnement für diese Zeitschrift im Mitgliederbeitrag eingeschlossen sein. Der Zentralvorstand hat von der guten Aufnahme der Probenummer bei sehr vielen Mitgliedern Kenntnis genommen. Er wird nun das Projekt am 6. April 1974 entsprechend dem Auftrag der Delegiertenversammlung vom Juni 1973 der Präsidentenkonferenz unterbreiten. Im Falle der Zustimmung würden bereits ab Juli 1974 alle deutschsprachigen Mitglieder der SOG die ASMZ regelmäßig erhalten.

E. E. J.

Soviet Weapons for the Third World

Richard F. Staar

Other than to its current or former allies in Asia and Eastern Europe, the USSR did not begin to offer any military aid outside the Sino-Soviet Bloc geographic area until a full decade after the Second World War. Since that time, the program has encompassed only approximately one-third of the ninety lesser developed countries at a total cost to date of almost 8 1/2 billion dollars and has become an important instrument of Russian foreign policy vis-a-vis the Third World. It is interesting to note that much of this military aid has gone to regimes that have jailed their own indigenous communists, like Egypt; to monarchies, such as Afghanistan; and even to countries closely aligned with the United States, like Iran and Pakistan.

The military assistance program (MAP) of the Soviet Union comprises for the most part weapons' systems that are beyond the capability of the recipient country to handle, without additional training of its armed forces' personnel. Although USSR military missions can and do perform this service on the territory of aided states, advanced and specialized instruction takes place either within the Soviet Union itself or in one of the East European countries (especially in Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and Poland).

Soviet and other Warsaw Treaty Organization officers, thus, have and do exploit such opportunities to influence the military elites which in many cases hold power in the lesser developed states of the Third World. This influence can be manipulated by offering or withholding advanced weapons' systems. It creates the necessary preconditions for access to naval facilities, landing and overflight rights, as well as tracking stations.

Of course, the Soviet Union also has experienced failure. Examples in this category include Indonesia, Ghana, the Sudan, and most recently Egypt which will be treated subsequently. Although the USSR boasts the advantage over non-communist governments of being able to plan its foreign policy on the basis of "scientific" Marxism-Leninism, the foregoing unsuccessful cases would seem to invalidate any such claim to infallibility. A further complication faced by the Soviet Union in the Third World over the past decade has centered on the need to preempt the Chinese communists who compete with the Russians in offering arms to the Third World.

Targets of Soviet MAP

During the fifteen-year period from 1955 through the end of 1969, the USSR allocated approximately 6 billion dollars for its military assistance program to non-communist ruled states or about 400,000 dollars per annum. Over the past 3 years, however, MAP has totaled $2\frac{2}{3}$ billion dollars for an increase to 887,000 dollars per year or double the previous average. See Table 1. Intensification of this effort would seem to indicate the high value placed on this instrument of foreign policy by the decision-makers in Moscow.

Among the thirty-three military aid recipients, fewer than one-third or ten countries absorbed some 96 % of all MAP funds. Hence, they may be considered the most important Soviet politico-military targets. Chronologically of course assistance to Egypt, started in 1955, was first. The USSR apparently anticipated possible resistance from the West, because it used Czechoslovakia as a proxy for the initial arms deliveries and only later began shipments itself. However, it was not until 1970 that

Russian surface-to-air missile crews and pilots became directly involved with the air defense system of a non-allied country, namely this same Egypt.

It is clear that the Soviet Union has provided most of its military aid to the Middle East, including the non-Mediterranean parts, as well as to India and Afghanistan. In the case of Indonesia, the program was curtailed after the abortive *coup d'Etat* in the fall of 1965 and the subsequent ouster of Sukarno. As the southern flank of NATO, the Mediterranean certainly ranks high in terms of USSR politico-military priorities. See Table 2.

A combined force of Soviet missile equipped bombers, submarines and surface vessels has been in the Mediterranean since 1964, and some thirty-five to fifty ships have remained on station in this area since about 1967. Reports during the following year already indicated that the Russians had a submarine base at Alexandria as well as installations around Port Said. Other construction reportedly was nearing completion as far back as 1970 at Sollum and Mersa Matruh. With the deterioration in Soviet-Egyptian relations after July 1972, the USSR began to court Syria to the extent of establishing an air-bridge between Odessa and Damascus the following October. Russians today enjoy port facilities at both Latakia and Tartus. Technical and scientific cooperation agreements covering 1973-74 with Morocco may represent the prelude to Soviet naval facilities at Casablanca and Tangiers. The USSR reportedly has offered the Moroccans ten high speed missile-firing boats.

Table 1. Annual Soviet military aid to less developed countries (1955-1972).

Years	Millions of Dollars	Years	Millions of Dollars
1955-60	1,285	1967	515
1961	830	1968	465
1962	415	1969	330
1963	390	1970	985
1964	875	1971	1,365
1965	260	1972	310 ¹
1966	450	Total	8,475

¹ Although from the source above, this figure appears suspect, especially in view of stepped-up aid to Iraq and the People's Republic of Yemen.

Source: U.S. Department of State, "Communist States and Developing Countries: Aid and Trade in 1972" (Washington, D.C., 1973), Table 9.

Table 2. Soviet military aid to less developed countries (1955-1972).

Area and Country	Year Aid Started	Millions of Dollars
<i>Africa</i>		
Algeria	1963	400
Burundi		Negl.
Congo (Brazzaville)		15
Equatorial Guinea		Negl.
Ghana		10
Guinea		25
Libya	1970	80

Area and Country	Year Aid Started	Millions of Dollars
Mali		5
Morocco		15
Nigeria		15
Sierra Leone		Negl.
Somalia		55
Sudan		65
Tanzania		5
Uganda		10
		700
<i>East Asia</i>		
Burma		Negl.
Cambodia		10
Indonesia	1958	1,100
Laos		5 1,115
<i>Near East and South Asia</i>		
Afghanistan	1956	455
Bangladesh		n.a.
Cyprus		25
Egypt ¹	1955	2,700
India ²	1960	1,200
Iran	1967	500
Iraq	1958	1,000
Lebanon		3
Maldives		Negl.
Pakistan		40
Sri Lanka		2
Syria	1956	715
Yemen (Aden)		25
Yemen (Sana)	1956	75 6,740
Total		8,555

¹ That these figures are not necessarily reliable can be seen from An-Nahar Arab Report (2 April 1972) which states that Egypt at that time owed the USSR 7.5 billion dollars for military equipment.

² India reportedly received 1.87 billion dollars, 1961-71. "New York Times" (3 October 1973).

Sources: U.S. Department of State, "Communist States and Developing Countries: Aid and trade in 1972" (Washington, D.C., 1972), Table 10; Hoover Institution, "Communist Military Assistance to Non-Communist Developing Countries" (Stanford, Ca., 1973), p. 18.

Table 3. Soviet military personnel in developing states.

Country	Number	Country	Number
Afghanistan	200	Sudan	100
Algeria	1,000	Syria	1,100
Egypt ¹	5,500	Yemen (Aden)	200
India	200	Yemen (Sana)	100
Iraq	500	Other	150
Somalia	400	Total	9,450

¹ Status after July 1972 withdrawal from Egypt of some 7,500 Soviet personnel assigned to military operational units plus advisers and technicians.

Source: U.S. Department of State, "Communist States and Developing Countries: Aid and Trade in 1972" (Washington, D.C., 1973), p. 13.

An arc drawn from Egypt to the Indian Ocean would cross Iraq which signed a fifteen-year friendship and cooperation treaty in April 1972 with the USSR. The Port of Umm Qasr on the Persian Gulf may become a Soviet naval facility. The same pattern emerged after 1962 and the revolution in Yemen. (Reports indicate that the Russians currently are committed to supply Iraq and Yemen with about 1 billion dollars worth of military aid. Twelve TU 22 supersonic bombers were delivered to Iraq in October 1973.) The next year, Soviet MAP included construction of a modern airfield at Rawadha. After withdrawal of Egyptian troops in 1967, Russian pilots allegedly fought in the Yemeni civil war. South Yemen even denied a report in September 1970 that the USSR was building a base on the island of Socotra.

However, just a few days earlier on 29 August, Soviet naval infantry had made an amphibious landing on Socotra. This island remains of great strategic value, since it dominates approaches to the Red Sea from the south and could offer excellent logistic support for the USSR fleet. Arms agreements with countries at both ends of the Suez Canal apparently have as their objective establishment of strong influence by the Soviet Union, should that waterway be cleared and once again opened to international maritime traffic.

Russian medium-range jets operate over the Gulf of Aden from the Somalia air base at Berbera which was being expanded in the spring of 1973. USSR warships visited this port on twenty occasions during the preceding year. A development loan of 35 million dollars back in 1961 paved the way for the currently extensive Russian military involvement with Somalia's defense system. The official Soviet communist party daily newspaper, however, recently denied American news agency reports that the USSR would establish bases there or in any other parts of sub-Saharan Africa ("Pravda", 10 July 1973).

Apart from its strategic importance, the Middle East continues to supply approximately half of the petroleum used by Western Europe. Should the Soviet Union ever be in a position to control either the oil production or the delivery routes, it could affect adversely the defense posture of NATO. With an energy crisis also facing the USSR and Eastern Europe well before the end of the century, long range Warsaw Pact politico-military plans most probably include exploitation of alternate sources of petroleum from the Middle East. (For the calendar year 1972 already, Soviet imports of crude oil included 4.1 million tons from Iraq, some 1.9 from Libya, about 1.8 from Egypt and Algeria combined, which totaled 7.8 million tons.) That the U.S. Government must be aware of these possible objectives can be seen from reports during the end of May 1973 about large American military assistance to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Iran. United States experts anticipate that by 1980 approximately one-fourth of domestic petroleum requirements will come from this part of the world.

Another target area for the USSR is the Indian Ocean, where a substantial Russian naval presence became noticeable back in 1968, about 8 years after the first MAP agreement with India. This Soviet Navy squadron, with both ASW and SLBM capabilities, apparently is directed against American nuclear-powered submarines and the Mainland Chinese as well. If the USSR objective is to obtain access to warm water ports in this region, it has not been successful at least officially, although one report specifies Vishakhapatnam on the Bay of Bengal as headquarters

for Russian military advisors. The goal, however, may be to establish a Soviet naval deployment along an arc that extends from the Black Sea to the Pacific Ocean. A key role in this arc would have been played by Indonesia, which received more than 1 billion dollars under the Soviet Union's MAP between 1958 and 1965. The abortive communist attempt to seize power toward the end of the latter year led to suspension of this program.

A Foothold in Africa

Unable to penetrate the open seas via Western Europe due to NATO defense positions, which control both Skaggerak/Kattegatt as well as the Iceland/Greenland and Iceland/Norway gaps, the USSR attempted to establish what it probably hoped would become a base in West Africa. Here too, Czechoslovakia appeared in the role of a proxy, as it had done in Egypt 3 years earlier, with its November 1958 offer of arms to Guinea after that newly independent country had refused to join the French monetary union. The first Soviet military aid agreement was not signed until 1960. Under this program, the extended runway at Conakry could take heavy transport aircraft. However, President Sekou Touré of Guinea refused a request by the USSR for landing and refueling facilities during the October 1962 Cuban missile crisis.

Perhaps the government at Conakry remembered only too well an attempt by the first Russian ambassador, Daniel Solod, to organize Guinean teachers in a conspiracy directed against the incumbent regime. Sekou Touré had adopted a standard security precaution by installing electronic devices at the Soviet embassy during its construction. Declared *persona non grata*, Solod left the country and the Politburo's trouble-shooter Anastas Mikoyan visited Conakry to mollify Touré. Guinean leaders have continued to impose Soviet-type development patterns on their country, and relations between the two states have improved substantially over the past decade.

Another example of Soviet failure in West Africa occurred following the ouster of Kwame Nkrumah by a military *coup d'Etat* in Ghana, while that man was visiting Mainland China. The new government subsequently discovered a center for subversion directed against other African states and operated by the Soviet KGB together with members of the East German secret police. The official printing office in Accra released a 215-page report, preceded by mass expulsion in 1966 of USSR and East European "diplomatic" representatives.

More recently, during the latter part of July 1971, communists of the Sudan joined in backing a successful *coup d'Etat* which temporarily overthrew the government. Leaders of the *coup* were executed, and Soviet head-of-state Nikolai Podgorny appealed to the Sudanese government for leniency toward the local communists. Nevertheless, both ranking diplomats from the USSR and Bulgaria were expelled from Khartoum on charges of complicity in the plot. Most of the Soviet military advisors also had to leave the country.

No such fiasco has taken place as yet in Mali which is located on the route between Algeria and Guinea. Russian MAP for this country may be predicated on the assumption that it could play the reverse role of Dakar during World War Two, i.e., as an entry point for USSR arms and supplies flowing in the opposite direction. Disruption of Western shipping around the Cape of Good Hope also might be effected from here.

A longer-range proposition involves Russian support for the Mozambique People's Liberation Front or Frelimo, whose delegation was promised increasing military assistance against the

Portuguese on 13 June 1973 at the Kremlin by Boris Ponomarev, candidate Politburo member and Party secretary. The following day, *Radio Moscow* assured the South West Africa People's Organization of continuing Soviet support in its struggle against "colonial oppression" by the Republic of South Africa.

Motivation of Recipients

To many of the Arab states in North Africa and throughout the Middle East, the mere existence of Israel represents sufficient rationale for accepting military assistance from the Soviet Union. For some of them, as well as for the African countries mentioned above, replacement of troops and/or officers from the former metropole with indigenous personnel is additional reason to seek aid from the USSR. (Note, for example, the agreement in late May 1973 on withdrawal of 4,000 French troops from the Malagasy Republic, formerly Madagascar, and that country's decision to leave the franc zone.) In either case, the need for equipment and training would become apparent.

Territorial disputes and the problem of maintaining internal security can be seen as yet other reasons. The civil war in Yemen, antagonism between Syria and Turkey, the problem of Kurds in Iraq (not to mention Iraqi claims against Kuwait and Iran), the Algerian-Moroccan conflict are examples in this category. The Kashmir dispute between Pakistan and India as well as the Mainland Chinese attack on the latter have both been exploited by the Soviet Union. It was probably the potential threat of a China armed with nuclear weapons that led India to sign a twenty-year friendship and cooperation agreement with the USSR in August 1970.

One advantage exercised by the Soviet Union and already mentioned is the use of proxies. Often, the initial approach is made by Czechoslovakia. This happened in Israel (1948), Egypt (1955), Syria and Afghanistan (1956), Guinea (1959), and most recently in Cyprus (1972). In this last case, a Greek ultimatum forced surrender of the clandestine weapons to the United Nations' force on that island. Military trainees from the Third World have been sent to Poland for the navy and Czechoslovakia for the air force. Intensive training, however, took place within Egypt during the late 1950's by instructors from both of these countries and from the USSR.

Eastern Europe has cooperated also in purely economic aid programs to the Third World which totaled just over four billion dollars, compared with not quite 8.2 billion dollars from the Soviet Union from 1954 through the end of the 1972 calendar year. The East Germans have been more active than other Bloc states in this region, such bilateral efforts having been intensified over the past several years. Ties with Arab civil services, individual government departments, political parties, and trade unions provide the opening wedge for subsequent military aid agreements. These East German contacts have included recently South Yemen, Egypt, Algeria, Syria, and Iraq in the Middle East.

Soviet Military Abroad

In most cases, recipient countries have been reluctant to accept the stationing on their territory of USSR armed forces. However, at the end of 1972, there were some 9,450 Russian military instructors outside the Bloc. See Table 3. Individual military missions at the time numbered from about 100 to some 5,500 persons. The majority of those in Egypt were withdrawn after the July 1972 expulsion order by President Anwar Sadat, who had acted because of the Soviet refusal to deliver improved MiG 23 fighter

bombers as well as the Scaleboard surface-to-surface missile. Both of these advanced weapons' systems could have provided the Egyptians with a degree of superiority over the Israelis.

These numbers of Soviet military personnel, especially after the withdrawal of Russian operational troops from Egypt, remain relatively insignificant. However, delivery of modern jet aircraft and in some cases naval vessels has been accompanied by development of necessary military facilities that may become useful to the Soviet Union in the future. Even Aeroflot, the USSR national airline, has entered into agreements for regular flight schedules to aid-recipient countries, where establishment of commercial service is neither profitable nor advantageous. Mauritius represents such an example, although replacement crews for Soviet fishing vessels are flown there. The only other rationale would appear to be the possibility of future military use, which probably is the case with the Moscow-Athens-Cairo-Aden airline inaugurated on 2 June 1973.

Possible USSR Evaluation

If an official Soviet government or communist party commission were to evaluate MAP, criteria applied might be related to objectives. A general assessment should conclude that the program comprises an important component of foreign and defense policy, because it has amounted to almost 900,000 dollars per year since 1970, when averaged out.

A significant characteristic of Russian MAP is that it has been concentrated on a few select countries. Egypt alone received at least 1.25 billion dollars between 1957 and 1965. A minimum of 1 billion dollars annually has gone to that one country since 1967 in combined economic and military assistance. These amounts probably imply anticipation of a high return in the future on investments of such a magnitude. Although most Soviet advisers departed after July 1972, Egyptian ports and airfields appear to remain accessible for the USSR navy and air force. (Note that a fifteen-year Soviet-Egyptian treaty of friendship and cooperation had been signed in May 1971 and still remains in force today.)

These facilities plus others along the Mediterranean, throughout the Middle East, and into the Indian Ocean have extended the Soviet military reach substantially on the one hand as well as placed constraints upon the United States and its NATO as well as SEATO allies on the other. Much of the success can be attributed to the USSR military assistance program which, in the case of India (1.87 billion dollars from 1961 through 1971), contributed materially to the 1971 defeat of Pakistan and establishment of Bangladesh. This success should have made India less dependent upon Soviet military aid, because the former Pakistan threat no longer exists. However, late August 1973 reports indicated that defense minister Jagjivan Ram's visit to Moscow may have involved Russian commitments to modernize India's navy and air force.

Recipients may also play off one potential donor against another or even accept assistance from both. Political instability throughout part of the Third World, nonetheless, tends to upset even the most carefully laid plans. In conclusion it can be postulated that, despite relaxation of tensions, the Soviet Union will continue to operate its military assistance programs. With geopolitical thrusts toward the Indian Ocean and through South Asia as well as into West Africa, the Middle East and the Maghreb may be considered as respective and contiguous bridgeheads for this policy of expanding Russian influence among the lesser developed countries of Afro-Asia.