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R 062344Z SEP 79
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEH/SECSTATE WASHDC C 5499
INFO RUMJPG/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 721
RUSBQD/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 9253
RUOMRA/AMEMBASSY JIDDA 377
RUOTC /AMEMBASSY LONDON 1792
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 1883
RUSBAE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 7346
RUFNSPS/AMEMBASSY PARIS 3251
RUQMHR/AMEMBASSY TEHRAN 452
RUFHNA/USMISSION USNATO 051
RUHQHQA/CINCPAC
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E.O. 12065:GDS 9-4-85 (FLATIN, BRUCE A.) OR-M
TAGS: PEPR, PINS, MOPS, AF, UR
SUBJECT: (C) AN ASSESSMENT OF SOVIET INFLUENCE
AND INVOLVEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

1. (S- ENTIRE TEXT.)

2. SUMMARY: AS THE AFGHAN INSURRECTION HAS PROGRESSIVELY SPREAD AND INCREASED IN INTENSITY, THE KHALQI REGIME HAS BECOME EVER MORE DEPENDENT UPON SOVIET MATERIAL, ECONOMIC, AND ADVISORY SUPPORT. WHETHER THE USSR WILL EVENTUALLY HAVE TO COMMIT COMBAT FORCES HERE IS STILL AN OPEN QUESTION. AS THE USSR HAS INCREASED ITS ANTE IN AFGHANISTAN, ITS POLITICAL LEVERAGE ON THE KHALQI LEADERSHIP HAS ALSO GROWN. FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE, THE TWO SIDES, AT THE MOMENT AT LEAST, APPEAR TO HAVE DECIDED TO RIDE OUT THE CURRENT STORM TOGETHER.
END OF SUMMARY.

3. THE SOVIET MILITARY PRESENCE IN AFGHANISTAN: AS THE KHALQI EFFORT AGAINST THE AFGHAN INSURGENCY CONTINUES TO DETERIORATE STEADILY, THE NUMBER OF SOVIET MILITARY PERSONNEL IN AFGHANISTAN CONTINUES TO RISE. THERE WERE APPROXIMATELY 500 SOVIET MILITARY ADVISERS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY WHEN THE KHALQIS SEIZED POWER ON APRIL 27-28, 1978. IF THE LARGE CONTINGENT AT BAGRAM AIR BASE IS INCLUDED, THE NUMBER COULD TODAY BE BETWEEN 3,000 AND 3,500. KHALQI AND SOVIET OFFICIALS FREQUENTLY OBSERVE THAT THIS FIGURE IS FAR BELOW THE NUMBER OF MILITARY ADVISERS THE USG HAD IN VIETNAM OR IRAN.

4. SOVIET MILITARY ADVISERS (WHOSE TOTAL OTHER THAN THOSE AT BAGRAM AIR FORCE BASE IS BELIEVED TO BE SLIGHTLY OVER 2,000) ARE BELIEVED TO BE WITH EVERY AFGHAN UNIT DOWN TO BATTALION SIZE. THEY CAN ALSO BE FOUND WITH SMALLER SPECIALIZED UNITS, SUCH AS RADAR OR COMMUNICATIONS FACILITIES. SOVIET PILOTS ASSIGNED TO AFGHAN AIR FORCE BASES ARE BELIEVED TO FLY COMBAT MISSIONS OCCASIONALLY-- ESPECIALLY THOSE INVOLVING THE SOPHISTICATED NEW MI-24 HELICOPTER GUNSHIPS. NO PROOF OF THIS (E.G., DEAD SOVIET PERSONNEL IN A CRASHED HELICOPTER) HAS BEEN NOTED THUS FAR, HOWEVER-- AND THE OCCASIONAL SLOPPY FLYING OF MI-24S NOTED BY DAO EXPERTS RECENTLY (E.G., DURING THE AUGUST 5 MUTINY AT KABUL'S BALA HISSAR) INDICATE THAT AFGHAN PILOTS WERE MOST LIKELY DOING THE FLYING.

5. AIR FORCE BASE BAGRAM, SOUTH OF KABUL, THEIR NUMBERS THERE WE ESTIMATE AT BETWEEN 500 AND 1,360. THIS SITUATION APPEARED TO HAVE DEVELOPED IN A FASHION REMINISCENT OF THE PATTERN OF INCREASING USG INVOLVEMENT IN VIETNAM. SOVIET PERSONNEL WERE BROUGHT TO BAGRAM TO TRAIN AFGHANS TO USE THEIR NEW AIR WEAPONS. SOVIET MAINTENANCE PERSONNEL WERE ALSO REQUIRED. BECAUSE OF THE THREAT OF NEARBY INSURGENT ACTIVITY, SOVIET FORCES HAD TO BE BROUGHT IN TO PROTECT THE TRAINING AND MAINTENANCE AREAS. THIS THEN LED TO A SOVIET ASSUMPTION OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE PERIMETER DEFENSE OF THE BASE.

6. AS WAS THE CASE DURING THE PRECEDING DAODIST ERA, SOVIET MILITARY PERSONNEL ON DUTY IN AFGHANISTAN WEAR REGULAR AFGHAN ARMY AND AIR FORCE UNIFORMS. IN SPITE OF SOME NEWSPAPER STORIES TO THE CONTRARY, MANY SOVIET ADVISERS IN AFGHANISTAN ARE FROM THE EUROPEAN NATIONALITIES OF THE USSR. ONE ONLY RARELY NOTES PERSONNEL FROM THE CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS OF THE USSR, SUCH AS UZBEKS, TURKOMEN, OR TAJIKS, ALTHOUGH SUCH MEN WOULD CLEARLY BE DIFFICULT TO IDENTIFY.

7. SOVIET MILITARY PERSONNEL ARE BEING KILLED IN AMBUSHES AND IN COMBAT ENGAGEMENTS WITH REBELS, BUT WE HAVE NO FIRM CASUALTY FIGURES. ALTHOUGH THE REBELS WILL EITHER RELEASE AFGHAN SOLDIERS WHOM THEY HAVE CAPTURED--OR MOVE THEM TO HOLDING CAMPS (SOME OF WHICH ARE IN PAKISTAN), THE REBELS ARE BELIEVED TO FOLLOW A PRACTICE OF KILLING ALL THE SOVIETS THEY SEIZE.

8. IT IS DIFFICULT TO MEASURE THE EFFECTIVENESS THUS FAR OF THE CURRENT SOVIET MILITARY PRESENCE IN AFGHANISTAN. ALTHOUGH THE FLOW OF MILITARY MATERIAL UNDOUBTEDLY OF KEY IMPORTANCE IN KEEPING THE KHALQI REGIME AFLOAT-- AND BRINGING THE TARAKI-AMIN LEADERSHIP BADLY NEEDED TIME, THE LATTER HAVE NOT YET BEEN ABLE TO HALT THE STEADY EROSION CAUSED BY THE HYDRA-HEADED INSURRECTION THEY FACE. AT SOME POINT, THE CONTINUING HEMORRHAGE OF KHALQI MILITARY MANPOWER (THROUGH DEATH, DESERTION, AND DEFECTION) MAY REQUIRE THE USSR TO MAKE SOME TOUGH DECISIONS ABOUT WHETHER TO UP ITS ANTE IN THIS STRUGGLE THROUGH THE INTRODUCTION OF SOVIET COMBAT FORCES. AT THE PRESENT TIME, FOR EXAMPLE, THERE DO NOT APPEAR TO BE ENOUGH TRAINED AFGHAN TANK CREWS TO MAN THE LARGE NUMBER OF TANKS DELIVERED BY THE USSR.

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FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5500
INFO RUMJPG/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 722
RUSBD/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 9254
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9. THE SOVIET CIVILIAN PRESENCE IN AFGHANISTAN:
IT IS BELIEVED THAT THERE ARE MANY SOVIET CIVILIAN
ADVISERS IN THE COUNTRY, SERVING AT VARIOUS DEVELOPMENT
PROJECTS AND WITH ALMOST ALL AFGHAN MINISTRIES,
ALTHOUGH EVEN A BALLPARK FIGURE IS VERY DIFFICULT
TO ESTABLISH WITH ANY ACCURACY, AS THE INSURRECTION
HAS GROWN TO PROPORTIONS WHICH DOMINATE THE PRIMARY
ATTENTION OF THE TOP AFGHAN AND SOVIET LEADERSHIP
HERE. THE ACTIVITIES OF THE CIVILIAN SOVIET
ADVISERS HAVE BECOME SOMEWHAT ECLIPSED IN RECENT
MONTHS-- PARTICULARLY IN THE ECONOMIC MINISTRIES.
FOR SECURITY REASONS, SOVIET CIVILIAN ADVISERS
HAVE HAD TO BE REMOVED FROM THE MORE DANGEROUS
REGIONS OF REBEL ACTIVITY. THE USSR IS TRYING
TO KEEP SOME PROJECTS GOING, HOWEVER, PRINCIPALLY
FOR PROPAGANDA EFFECT. THESE PROVINCIAL ECONOMIC
ASSISTANCE OPERATIONS HAVE REQUIRED HEAVY AFGHAN
MILITARY AND POLICE PROTECTION. BECAUSE MANY
MINISTRIES AT KABUL ARE ONLY MARKING TIME AS THEIR
SENIOR OFFICIALS ATTEND TO THE "DEFENSE OF THE
REVOLUTION" (SEVERAL MINISTERS AND DEPUTY OF SOVIET
ADVISERS IN THOSE MINISTRIES ARE NOT NOW AS HIGHLY
VISIBLE AS THEY WERE DURING THE PERIOD IMMEDIATELY
FOLLOWING THE REVOLUTION, ONE EXCEPTION. HOWEVER,
IS THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION & CULTURE, WHERE
SOVIET PROPAGANDA EXPERTS ARE THROWING THEIR WEIGHT
AROUND, ISSUING DIRECT ORDERS IN THE FORM OF "ADVISORY
INSTRUCTIONS"--AND REPORTEDLY OFFENDING THEIR
AFGHAN COUNTERPARTS.

10. THE SOVIET ECONOMIC INVESTMENT IN AFGHANISTAN:
SINCE THE FAMOUS BULGANIN-KHRUSHCHEV VISIT TO KABUL
IN 1955, THE USSR HAS POURED APPROXIMATELY ONE BILLION
DOLLARS INTO AFGHANISTAN, MOSTLY IN THE FORM OF
PROJECTS FINANCED BY LOW-INTEREST LOANS. REPAYMENT
HAS BEEN EXTRACTED PARTIALLY THROUGH AFGHAN COMMODITY
DELIVERIES, SUCH AS CITRUS FRUITS FROM THE SOVIET
IRRIGATION PROJECTS AT JALALABAD OR NATURAL GAS FROM
THE CIS-OXUS REGION. AFGHAN AUTHORITIES ASSERT THAT
THE USSR HAS ACCEDDED TO A KHALQI REQUEST FOR DEBT
RELIEF. THE EXACT TERMS OF THE SOVIET ACCOMMODATION
ARE, AS YET, NOT DEFINITELY KNOWN, ALTHOUGH A SOVIET
AID OFFICIAL RECENTLY TOLD EMBASSY MOSCOW (MOSCOW
00152) THAT THE USSR HAD POSTPONED REPAYMENT OF
AFGHAN ECONOMIC DEBTS FOR TEN YEARS. THE DELIVERY
OF SOVIET MILITARY HARDWARE TO AFGHANISTAN HAS INCREASED
GREATLY SINCE THE "GREAT SAUR REVOLUTION."
BUT THE TOTAL COSTS INVOLVED--AND THE NEW AFGHAN
REPAYMENT COMMITMENTS ARE STILL UNKNOWN. RECENTLY,
THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR TOLD EMBASSY OFFICERS THAT
USSR HAD "ALLOCATED" AROUND ONE AND ONE-HALF BILLION
DOLLARS TO SUPPORT THE KHALQI REGIME'S NEW FIVE-YEAR PLAN.
A LARGE PORTION OF THIS AMOUNT IS PRESUMABLY
COMPRISED OF SOVIET LINES OF CREDIT NOT EXPENDED
BY THE PREDECESSOR DAQUD REGIME. LIKE OTHER AID
DONORS HERE, THE SOVIETS FACE THE FRUSTRATION OF
LIMITED ABILITY TO ABSORB AID EFFORTS. FUNDS ALLOCATED
ARE NOT ALWAYS EXPENDED.

11. THE POLITICAL STAKE OF THE USSR IN AFGHANISTAN:
WHETHER MOSCOW WAS INDEED INVOLVED IN IGNITING THE SAUR REVOLUTION OR NOT--AND BOTH THE KHALQIS AND THE SOVIETS STILL INSIST THAT THERE WAS NO SUCH COORDINATION, THE USSR QUICKLY ASSUMED MAJOR SUPPORT RESPONSIBILITIES FOR THE FLEDGLING LEFTIST REGIME AFTER THAT EVENT. AS THE KHALQI LEADERSHIP HAS FOUND ITSELF INCREASINGLY PRESSED BY THE SPREADING AFGHAN INSURGENCY, IT HAS PLACED ITS TRUST COMPLETELY--AND PUBLICLY--IN THE SUPPORT AND PROTECTION OF THE USSR. FOR EXAMPLE, PRIME MINISTER HAFIZULLAH AMIN RECENTLY TOLD A NEWS CORRESPONDENT THAT IF AFGHANISTAN WERE ATTACKED MILITARILY, THE SOVIET UNION WOULD "CERTAINLY" PROVIDE "EVERY ASSISTANCE THAT IS NEEDED" (KABUL 6563). MANY LOCAL DIPLOMATIC OBSERVERS BELIEVE THAT MOSCOW HAS ALLOWED ITSELF TO BECOME THOROUGHLY AND OPENLY COMMITTED TO THIS STRUGGLE; THEREFORE, THE SOVIET UNION CANNOT AFFORD TO HAVE THE WORLD SOCIALIST CAMP SEE IT FAIL TO PRESERVE A FELLOW MARXIST PARTY, THE PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF AFGHANISTAN (PDPA), AND A "PROGRESSIVE" REVOLUTION. OF COURSE, THE NATURE OF THE SOVIET COMMITMENT PROBABLY REMAINS SOMEWHAT FLEXIBLE IN MOSCOW'S EYES.

12. IT IS ALSO POSSIBLE THAT THE SOVIETS DO NOT EVEN FEEL THEMSELVES IRREVOCABLY COMMITTED TO THE PDPA, ITSELF. LOCAL SOVIET DIPLOMATS TAKE PAINS TO MAKE CLEAR THAT THEIR GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT IS LIMITED TO "SAVING THE REVOLUTION" AND TO THE PRESERVATION OF ITS SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC GAINS (E. G., THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST ILLITERACY, THE ELIMINATION OF FEUDAL CONTROLS OVER WOMEN AND MARRIAGE, THE ABOLISHMENT OF USURY FOR AGRICULTURAL CREDITS, AND LAND REFORM). AS SOVIET OFFICIALS HAVE STATED ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS: "THE CLOCK CANNOT BE TURNED BACK." THIS FORMULATION OF SOVIET VIEWS HAS BEEN TAKEN BY SOME OBSERVERS TO MEAN THAT THE USSR COULD LIVE WITH A NON-KHALQI SUCCESSOR REGIME WHICH WOULD UNDERTAKE TO PRESERVE THESE "PROGRESSIVE" GAINS. THE SOVIETS PROBABLY REALIZE THAT ALMOST ANY TYPE OF GOVERNMENT AT KABUL WOULD BE FORCED BY GEOPOLITICAL REALITIES TO MAINTAIN A PEACEFUL, STABLE RELATIONSHIP WITH ITS GREAT, NORTHERN NEIGHBOR--BUT ADDITIONAL UNDERTAKING ON THE PART OF A NEW AFGHAN REGIME TO "PRESERVE THE FRUITS OF THE SAUR REVOLUTION" WOULD ALSO BE NECESSARY IN ORDER TO ALLOW THE USSR TO SAVE FACE SHOULD MOSCOW EVENTUALLY DECIDE THAT THE MILITARY AND POLITICAL COST OF KEEPING THE KHALQI REGIME PROPPED UP IS UNACCEPTABLY HIGH.

13. THE OUTLOOK FOR THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE: ALTHOUGH IT WAS CLEAR IN RECENT WEEKS THAT THE SOVIETS WOULD HAVE PREFERRED SOME TYPE OF POLITICAL ACCOMMODATION WHICH WOULD HAVE REDUCED THE WIDESPREAD DOMESTIC OPPOSITION TO THE KHALQI REGIME, THERE NO LONGER APPEAR TO BE ANY IMMEDIATE PROSPECTS FOR SUCCESS IN THAT AREA. A "BROADENING OF THE POLITICAL BASE" OF THE AFGHAN REGIME IS NOT POSSIBLE AS LONG AS THE KHALQIS PERSIST IN PURGING EVERY POSSIBLE ELEMENT OF COMPETITION--EVEN DISSIDENT KHALQI FACTIONS. AT ANY RATE, A RESHUFFLING OF CABINET PORTFOLIOS AMONG THE SAME, OLD, FAMILIAR "GODLESS," "PRO-RUSSIAN," MARXIST-LENINISTS DOWN IN KABUL IS NOT LIKELY TO IMPRESS THE THOUSANDS OF MUJAHEDDIN ("HOLY WARRIORS") UP IN THE HILLS WHO HAVE BEEN FIGHTING FOR MONTHS TO RESTORE AN ISLAMIC, NATIONALISTIC IDENTITY TO AFGHANISTAN.

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14. THE SOVIETS NOW APPEAR RESIGNED TO CONTINUING THEIR SUPPORT OF THE TARAKI-AMIN LEADERSHIP, BUT ON THEIR OWN TERMS. THE KHALQIS HAVE EVIDENTLY BEEN INSTRUCTED BY THE RUSSIANS TO TONE DOWN THOSE ASPECTS OF THEIR REVOLUTION WHICH AROUSE OPPOSITION. MARXIST-LENINIST RHETORIC HAS BECOME MERE MUTED. THE CONTROVERSIAL LAND-REFORM PROGRAM HAS BEEN DECLARED "COMPLETED." KHALQI LEADERS HAVE STRESSED THEIR IDENTIFICATION WITH ISLAM. THE SOVIETS AND THE KHALQIS ARE TRYING DESPERATELY TO BY TIME. IN A COUNTRY WHERE THE LIFE EXPECTANCY IS ONLY 40, THE COMMUNISTS KNOW THAT THE OLDER OPPOSITION ELEMENTS WILL EVENTUALLY DISAPPEAR FROM THE STAGE. THEY ARE PLACING THEIR HOPES ON THE YOUTH. THROUGH EXPERT, SOVIET-GUIDED INDOCTRINATION THROUGH THE MEDIA NAD IN THE SCHOOLS, WE NOTE THAT KHALQISM MAY BE ACHIEVING SOME AFGAN YOUNG PEOPLE. ADDITIONALLY, AFGHAN HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES ARE BEING SENT TO THE SOVIET UNION AND OTHER COMMUNIST COUNTRIES FOR ADVANCED EDUCATION AND POLITICAL TRAINING (E.G., 1,500 RECENTLY LEFT FOR THE SOVIET UNION). MANY WILL RETURN AS INDOCTRINATED, VALUABLE CADRE--AND A FEW MIGHT RETURN AS EMBITTERED ANTI-SOVIETS.

15. THE MOST IMMEDIATE QUESTION IN THIS TIME-BUYING STRATEGY IS: HOW LONG CAN THE KHALQI REGIME HOLD OUT AGAINST A CONTINUOUS HEMORRHAGE OF ITS MANPOWER? MANY AFGHAN TROOPS ARE BEING LOST EVERY MONTH THROUGH BATTLEFIELD CASUALTIES, DESERTIONS, AND DEFECTION. THE LATTER CATEGORY INCLUDES UNITS OF UP TO BRIGADE STRENGTH WHICH HAVE CROSSED OVER TO THE REBEL SIDE WITH THEIR SOVIET-SUPPLIED WEAPONS--AND THE PROFESSIONAL SKILLS FOR USING THEM. AS NOTED EARLIER, THE USSR HAS

BEEN SUPPLYING A GENEROUS STREAM OF MILITARY HARDWARE--BUT THE MANPOWER SHORTAGE HAS NOW BECOME SO CRITICAL THAT THERE ARE NOT ENOUGH TRAINED SOLDIERS TO MAN THIS EQUIPMENT. CREWLESS TANKS ARE PARKED THROUGHOUT AFGHANISTAN.

16. AT SOME POINT, IT IS CONCEIVABLE THAT THE TARAKI-AMIN LEADERSHIP MIGHT FEEL FORCED TO ASK FOR THE ASSISTANCE OF SOVIET COMBAT TROOPS IN ORDER TO SURVIVE. THE AFGHAN LEADERS WOULD PRESUMABLY CITE ARTICLE 4 OF THE NEW SOVIET-AFGHAN FRIENDSHIP TREATY OF DECEMBER 5, 1978. IT IS OUR BELIEF, HOWEVER, THAT THAT ARTICLE, OBVIOUSLY DRAFTED BY CLEVER SOVIET LAWYERS, DOES NOT AUTOMATICALLY COMMIT THE USSR TO ARMED INTERVENTION, SHOULD MOSCOW ELECT TO STALL. (ON THE OTHER HAND, IT ALSO APPEARS TO AUTHORIZE SOVIET INTERVENTION, EVEN IN TIME OF PEACE.) MANY LOCAL DIPLOMATIC OBSERVERS THINK THAT THE SOVIETS WOULD WANT TO AVOID SUCH INVOLVEMENT AS LONG AS ANY LESSER COURSE OF ACTION WAS STILL VIABLE--BUT DO NOT RULE OUT THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE USSR MIGHT FEEL ITSELF FORCED TO DECIDE THAT IT WAS REQUIRED TO SEND IN TROOPS " TO SAVE THE REVOLUTION" AND A "FRATERNAL PARTY". IN SUCH A CASE, THE INITIAL SOVIET INVOLVEMENT COULD BE LIMITED: E.G., SPECIAL AIRBORNE FORCES " TO PROTECT INSTALLATIONS HOUSING SOVIET CITIZENS." EVENTUALLY, HOWEVER, THE SOVIET COMMITMENT WOULD PROBABLY EXPAND.

17. OTHER LOCAL DIPLOMATIC OBSERVERS THINK THE SOVIETS WOULD, IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS, WITHHOLD COMBAT SUPPORT FROM THE KHALQI REGIME, JUDGING THAT THE ODDS FAVORED MOSCOW'S CHANCES OF BEING ABLE TO DO BUSINESS WITH ALMOST ANY TYPE OF SUCCESSOR REGIME. MOSCOW HAS PROBABLY NOTED THE STATEMENTS OF AFGHAN REBEL LEADERS AT PESHAWAR, SUCH AS SYED AHMAD GAILANI, THAT THE LATTER ARE READY TO BE "PRactical" ABOUT A FUTURE RELATIONSHIP WITH MOSCOW. THE SOVIETS MIGHT FEEL THAT THEY WOULD POSSESS THE LEVERAGE TO FORCE A SUCCESSOR REGIME TO HONOR THE "PROGRESSIVE ADVANCES" OF THE SAUR REVOLUTION, AND, IN THIS WAY, ALLOW SOME SAVING OF FACE.

18. IN THE JUDGMENT OF THIS EMPASSY, THE TIME HAS NOT YET ARRIVED FOR A KHALQI PLEA FOR HELP--NOR IS THERE YET ANY SOLID EVIDENCE THAT THE USSR IS POISONING ITSELF FOR ARMED INTERVENTION IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE. UNDOUBTEDLY, HOWEVER, THE USSR HAS PROBABLY BEEN MAKING GUNTING PLANS AND PREPARATIONS.

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