



The President's Daily Brief

March 23, 1976

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~~Top Secret~~ 25X1



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March 23, 1976

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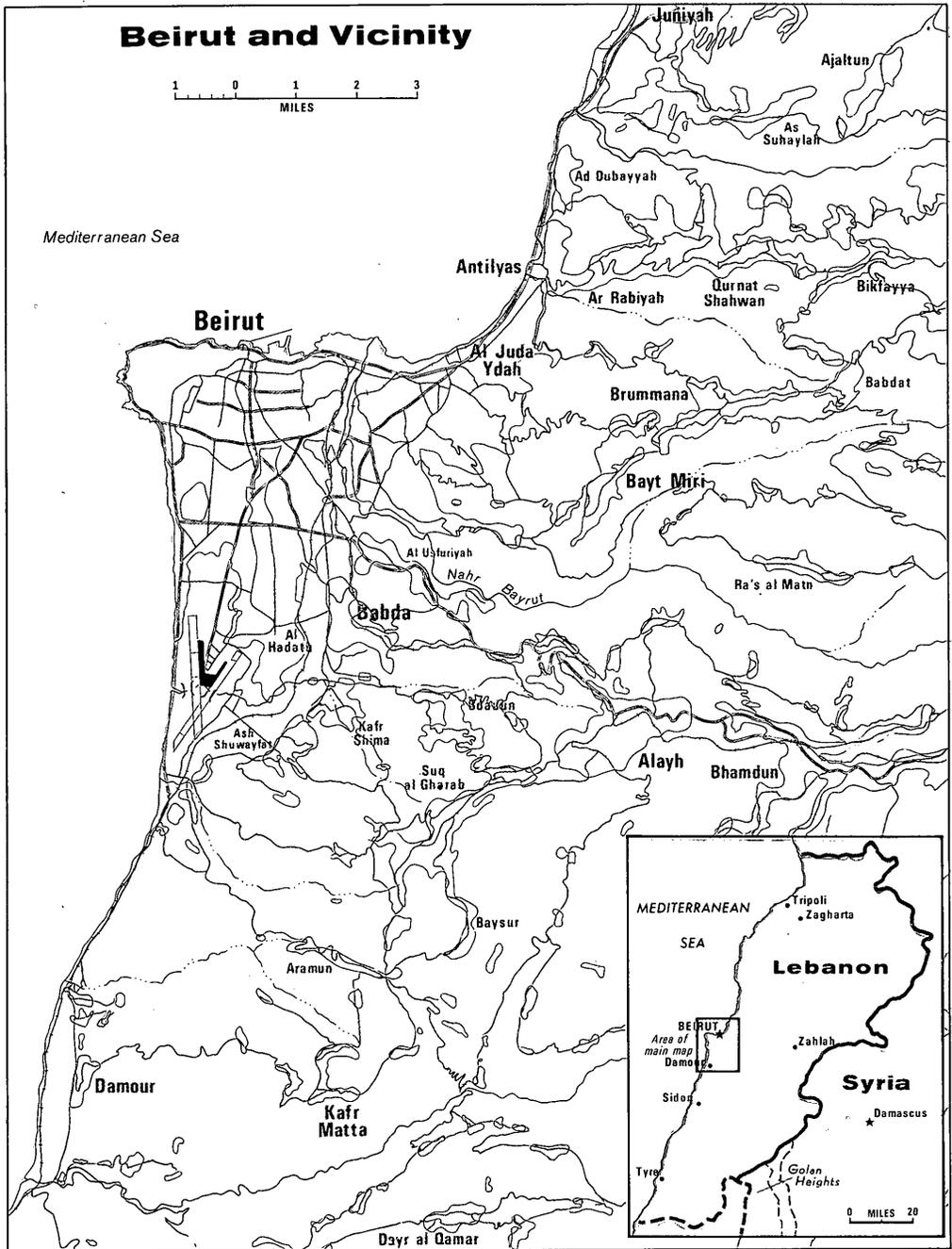
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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY



LEBANON

The Lebanese cabinet yesterday approved a constitutional amendment that could clear the way for parliament to elect a replacement for President Franjiah within a few days.

The amendment provides for election of a new president any time within six months of the expiration of a six-year presidential term. Franjiah's term expires in September.

The proposed amendment must be approved by parliament and signed by the president. Legislative approval seems certain, as a large majority of parliament last week signed a petition calling on Franjiah to resign. Franjiah presumably will sign the measure, since he proposed it himself. He could change his mind, however, if fighting intensifies or if leaders of the large Christian political parties raise new objections.

The cabinet reportedly expects Franjiah to resign by May 9, but he has commented publicly that a newly elected president would need a long period to prepare himself "before he assumes his office."

Publicly, the Syrians are refusing to take sides in the presidential selection and are concentrating instead on restoring civil order in Lebanon. Damascus shows every sign of determination to use its influence to ensure that whoever is chosen as the new president is installed with at least a facade of legality.

Fighting was heavy in the Beirut area yesterday, as Phalangist and leftist militias battled for control of the hotel district. The Christians seized almost the entire area early in the day, aided by unprecedented heavy shelling of western Beirut with 155-mm. howitzers located in Bayt Miri. They were later pushed back in several locations.

Christian army units loyal to Franjiah apparently are also in the Bayt Miri area from which they are shelling the Druze village of Alayh.

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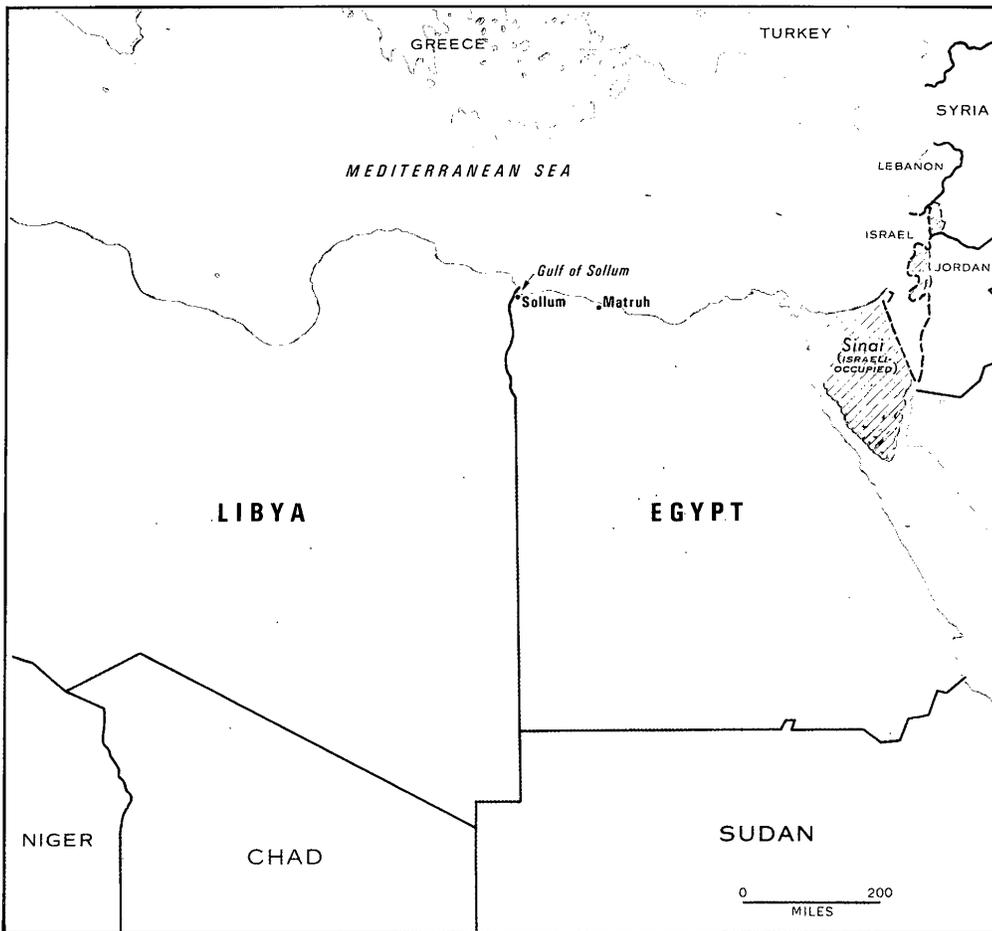
Alayh is held by followers of Socialist leader Kamal Jumblatt who have been threatening to attack the nearby presidential palace.

Jumblatt still refuses to cooperate with the Syrian peace initiative. Yesterday he again appealed to Syria to back his call for Franjiyah's immediate and unconditional resignation on grounds that it reflected the "true interests of Syria and Arabs."

The US defense attaché in Damascus believes that Syrian forces are now in a very high state of alert because of events in Lebanon. He observed Syrian surface-to-air missile units and conventional antiaircraft artillery units along the front with Israel in a high state of readiness.

The attaché also saw unusual armor movements near Al Kiswah--the home garrison of the 1st Armored Division--as well as some unusual activity by Syrian military personnel in other areas. Other US personnel reported unusual Syrian military activity along the Golan Heights over the weekend. This activity may be related to Syrian maneuvers reportedly being held in the area.

The heightened alert by Syrian air defense units along the Golan may indicate that the Syrians plan to take additional measures in Lebanon and that they are concerned about how Israel might react.

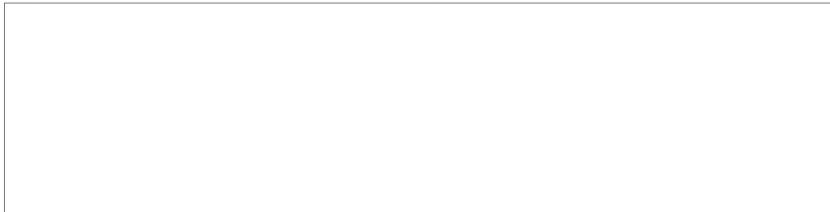


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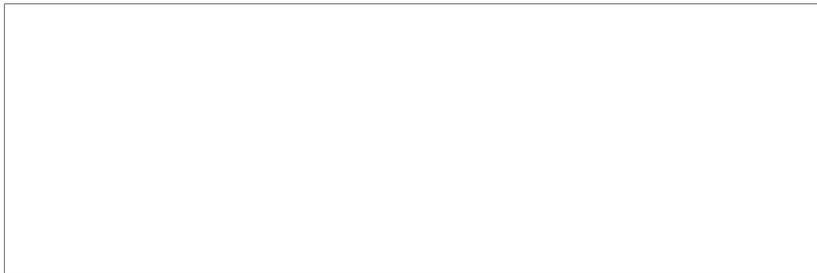
Egypt is increasing its military readiness along its border with Libya presumably as the result of a further deterioration in relations between presidents Sadat and Qadhafi.



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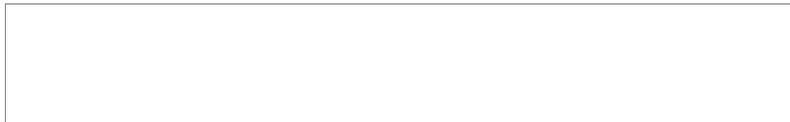
Egyptian authorities have arrested 27 Libyans, supposedly members of sabotage teams, following an attempt early this month to kill or kidnap two former Libyan officials living in Cairo. Libya has retaliated by expelling some 26,000 Egyptians working in Libya.

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. It is highly unlikely, however, that Cuba's first nuclear power station can become operational before 1981. Moreover, there are no indications that Havana has plans for a nuclear weapons program.

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