



The President's Daily Brief

April 5, 1976

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LEBANON

Beirut remains relatively quiet, and fighting east of the city has subsided since the leftists captured the Christian villages of Aynturah and Al Mutayn on Saturday. Lebanese politicians have yet to make any progress toward carrying out the objectives of the 10-day truce.

With only seven days left before the truce expires, the politicians are wrangling over the precise wording of a constitutional amendment that is to pave the way for President Franjiah's resignation and the election of his successor. They are also squabbling over where parliament should meet and what forces will provide security.

The bickering reflects the inability of the Lebanese and the Syrians to settle on a successor to Franjiah. Syrian President Asad reportedly still objects to Raymond Edde, the candidate of the leftists and Yasir Arafat. Leftist leader Jumblatt, who wants the new president to be obligated to him rather than to Damascus, remains adamantly opposed to Ilyas Sarkis--favored by the Syrians and the Christian Phalanges Party.

In its efforts to prevent a breakdown in the cease-fire, Damascus is putting pressure on Jumblatt and Arafat not to resume fighting even if negotiations over Franjiah's successor should drag on beyond the expiration date of the truce.

A Syrian naval blockade of the port of Tripoli was in effect on Friday and Saturday, apparently in an attempt to stem the flow of supplies to warring factions in northern Lebanon.

Saiqa forces reportedly have entered Sidon to prevent arms from reaching other Palestinians and leftist Lebanese in that area.

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LEBANON

Radical Muslim and leftist groups are emerging from the prolonged fighting in Lebanon with increased popular support, military strength, and political resolve. They have proved that they can virtually silence old-line Muslim leaders and, with support from independent fedayeen groups, especially Yasir Arafat's Fatah, can defeat the major Christian militias. It is conceivable that, in the coming weeks and months, the leftists will gain the upper hand.

The extreme left is a collection of fringe groups with no dominant leader or faction--a fact that greatly complicates the task of controlling or even negotiating with it. Kamal Jumblatt comes closest to being the leader of the leftist-Muslim coalition. His record of speaking out against the Christian and older Muslim establishments and his agitation for minority rights and for economic and social change have gained him stature among younger Muslim radicals in many parts of the country. Most other leftist leaders are locally based and urban.

The rapid ascendancy of the Lebanese left has triggered intense competition among outsiders for influence over individual leftist groups. Syria, its Palestinian client Saiqa, and Fatah have been the chief patrons of the left. Rivalry between Syria and Fatah as well as efforts by Libya and Iraq to supply small arms and money to certain groups have given major leftist leaders a measure of independence from any one outside sponsor.

The Egyptians do not have much influence, but they are trying to thwart Syria. Now that Muslim leftists have emerged as the principal obstacle to Syrian mediation, Egypt is increasing its efforts to assist them.

The leftists are not in a position to dictate a political settlement in Lebanon, but they will not accept a refurbished version of the Syrian-backed reform package worked out in February. They

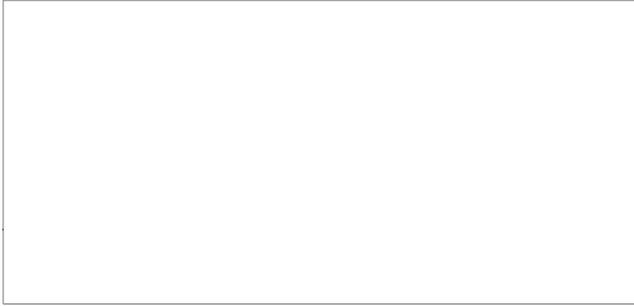
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will insist on concessions, and their strength will ensure continued de facto partition and will complicate efforts to reconstitute an effective national security authority.

The Palestinians and Muslim leftists together now control about two thirds of Lebanon and have reduced Christian control in Beirut itself. This means that any new government in Beirut will continue to be weak and, in effect, will be operating within a confederation framework.

USSR



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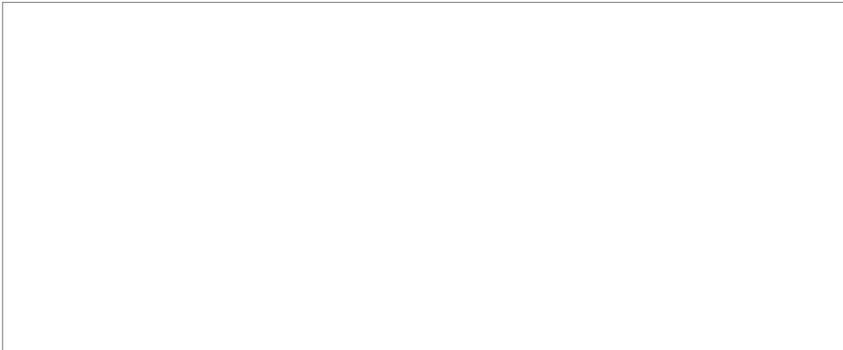


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NOTE

Thai Prime Minister Khukrit Pramot lost his seat in the national assembly in yesterday's election, presumably because of the military's dissatisfaction with the way he handled negotiations on the presence of US forces.

The process of forming a successor government may be prolonged. A center-right coalition led by the Democrat Party, which made a strong showing in the election, appears to have the best chance. The leader of the party is Seni Pramot, Khukrit's older brother, who is backed by influential retired army commander Krit Siwara.

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