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The President's Daily Brief

April 17, 1976

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~~*Top Secret*~~

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April 17, 1976

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Lebanon: Fatah chief Arafat returned from Damascus yesterday having made no apparent progress in bridging the impasse between Syria and Lebanese leftist leader Jumblatt over the issue of Syrian intervention. (Page 1) 25X1

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LEBANON: Fatah chief Yasir Arafat, who has been trying to mediate the quarrel between Syria and Lebanese leftist leader Kamal Jumblatt over Syrian intervention, returned from Syria yesterday having made no apparent progress.

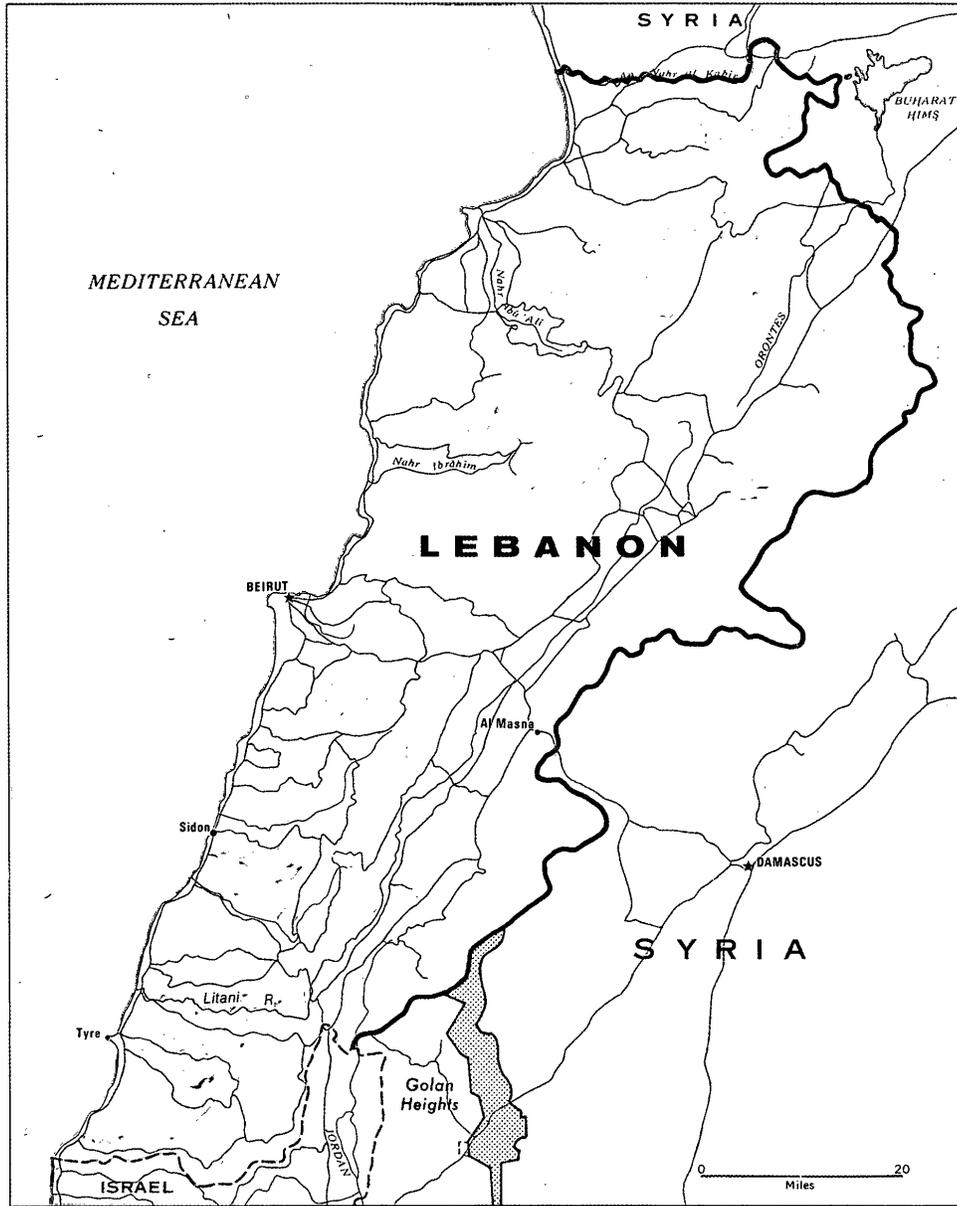
Although there appears to be a serious impasse, Damascus may be more flexible on some issues than it is willing to admit publicly and may have given some ground during private talks with Arafat. The Syrian press says Damascus has agreed to revive the joint Lebanese-Syrian-Palestinian truce committee as Jumblatt wished, but only until a new president is elected. This qualification almost certainly reflects Syrian President Asad's hope that Lebanon's next president will ask Syrian troops to remain as a peace-keeping force. Jumblatt has been insisting the troops withdraw immediately.

Asad was able to get a public commitment from Arafat and his delegation of independent fedayeen officials that they support the current truce and favor a continuation of Syrian mediation. This endorsement of Syria's role from Arafat--who has been playing both sides of the dispute--puts Jumblatt on notice that he now stands alone in his defiance of Damascus. In any event, Jumblatt has little choice but to continue with the Palestinian mediation effort and reportedly is prepared to do so.

The urgings by the Syrians and Arafat that all parties respect the cease-fire have had no significant effect on the warring factions, although the fighting appears to have slackened in the north and in the mountains east of Beirut. There have been no signs of significant advances by Syrian troops in Lebanon nor evidence that additional forces have crossed the border.

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The US assistant defense attaché in Tel Aviv reports that Israel has taken some military precautions in light of the Lebanese crisis, despite the military's generally relaxed posture for the Passover holidays.

The attaché believes that the Israelis have moved an additional armored battalion--about 36 tanks--to the Golan Heights, although he has not yet been able to verify the move. The battalion apparently is a regular unit, and not one that was recently mobilized.

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[redacted]
the Israeli armored corps has halted field training exercises and is now concentrating on getting its equipment in good working order.

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SYRIA-LEBANON: [redacted]

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USSR-LEBANON: *The Soviet Union, although uncomfortable with Syria's role in Lebanon, apparently regards it as the best way out of the crisis. Moscow continues to endorse Syrian mediation efforts, but in increasingly lukewarm terms.*

Two Soviet scholar-journalists who tend to be quasi-official trouble-shooters arrived in Beirut late this week; they have been meeting with Lebanese politicians, presumably to see whether there is any opening for Soviet moves. The Soviets have been asked by Lebanese leftist leader Jumblatt and Fatah chief Arafat to press Syria to end its intervention in Lebanon.

A Soviet official has commented on the disarray in fedayeen ranks caused by Syrian actions. The USSR is concerned that if Syria comes to dominate Lebanon, Arafat's leadership position could be challenged by a pro-Syrian faction. Moscow has its problems with Arafat, but thinks his leadership of an independent Palestinian movement best serves long-term Soviet interests.

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Moscow also fears the results of tacit US-Syrian cooperation over Lebanon. Some Soviet officials have speculated that the US has "accepted" Syria's actions in Lebanon in return for a promise by Syrian President Asad to negotiate on the Golan Heights.

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