

The President's Daily Brief

May 11, 1976

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

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LEBANON: *Christian forces continue to press their offensive in the mountains east of Beirut, apparently hoping to recapture a number of villages and improve their bargaining position in future peace talks.*

With neither side willing or able to stop the fighting, it could spread, jeopardizing the Christians' political victory over Muslim leftists in the presidential election last weekend. The greatest danger in the current situation is that Fatah commandos based at Aynturah will be drawn into the battle.

President-elect Ilyas Sarkis is reportedly working with the tripartite truce committee and Yasir Arafat to arrange a new cease-fire in the mountain area. Sarkis will meet with Christian leaders today or tomorrow; his ability to persuade them to accept a new truce will be the first major test of his leadership.

Leftist leader Kamal Jumblatt issued a statement yesterday in which he toned down his earlier sharp warnings about the consequences of electing Sarkis. Sarkis' efforts to arrange a meeting with him have been unsuccessful. Jumblatt probably will wait until he can more accurately determine the political repercussions of the fighting before deciding on a meeting with Sarkis.

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We have no further information on the movement of an unidentified battalion of Syrian troops toward Beirut that we reported on yesterday. According to an intercepted message, Damascus has sent additional troops to the Tripoli area, where Iraqi-sponsored fedayeen apparently have sparked new fighting. Syria has had a large contingent of regular forces in Tripoli since March.

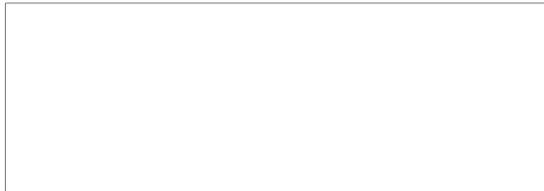
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SYRIA: *Syria has not yet indicated what it intends to do about the mandate of the UN observer force on the Golan Heights, but tentative indications are that Damascus does not plan to provoke a confrontation with Israel by letting the mandate, which expires May 30, lapse.*

The Syrians, absorbed in the Lebanese crisis, almost certainly are still working on their strategy for handling the mandate issue. They probably will resort to their usual last-minute bargaining tactics and insist on some kind of quid pro quo to justify another extension. This time Damascus evidently wants the renewal linked to Security Council action on Palestinian rights. The Palestine committee's report is due sometime this month.

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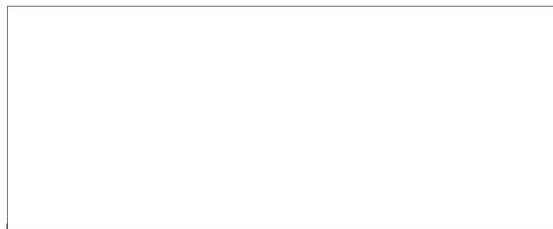


An Egyptian weekly magazine has asserted that the Syrians have already decided to renew the mandate, but there has been no reporting that would confirm the claim.

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VIETNAM-CHINA: *Relations between Hanoi and Peking appear to have declined further.*



Rumors of trouble along the border have circulated in the past, but neither Hanoi nor Peking has publicized border problems.

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difficulties have developed over the extent of Chinese economic aid to Vietnam. Hanoi previously has expressed dissatisfaction with the level of Chinese assistance and has complained that the Chinese are applying economic pressure to alter Hanoi's pro-Soviet policy positions. An additional long-standing conflict is the dispute over the Paracel and Spratly islands.

Underlying these disagreements are the more fundamental competition between the two states for influence in Southeast Asia and Hanoi's increasingly warm relations with Moscow.

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USSR: Relations between Soviet party secretary Ponomarev and Foreign Minister Gromyko have improved markedly in recent months

[redacted] because of Ponomarev's acceptance of Gromyko's larger role in foreign policy. The slower pace of US-Soviet relations has probably also contributed to a lessening of strains.

Ponomarev, who handles relations with non-ruling Communist parties and third-world movements, reportedly is no longer openly clashing with Gromyko. Perhaps as a consequence, Ponomarev's international department in the Central Committee is described as working more congenially with the Foreign Ministry. 25X1

Ponomarev may be finding less to criticize in the conduct of foreign policy and could be preoccupied with international Communist affairs. In addition, the lost momentum in the policy of "detente," which is associated with Gromyko, may have made him feel somewhat vulnerable. Gromyko may be trying to avoid disagreements with colleagues in the Politburo. 25X1

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ISRAEL: *The Israeli cabinet's decision on Sunday barring the establishment of a permanent Jewish settlement in Samaria on the West Bank leaves unresolved the explosive issue of finding an alternative government-approved site for the settlers.*

The extremist religious group which sponsors these settlers yesterday launched what may be the first of a series of mass demonstrations protesting the cabinet's decision and demanding that the government support the right of Jews to settle anywhere on the West Bank.

The ruling coalition's left-wing Mapam Party is likely to organize counter-demonstrations. It favors limiting settlements to strategically important locations in order to leave open the option of territorial compromise in peace negotiations with the Arabs.

NOTES

Soviet Jewish emigration declined in April to its lowest monthly rate for 1976, although the average for the first four months is still slightly ahead of last year's pace.

The downturn in April suggests that the modest increase in exit permits in February and March was intended to reduce the risk of embarrassment during the 25th party congress rather than to signal a more liberal emigration policy.

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Egyptian Prime Minister Salim and Syrian Prime Minister Ayyubi will meet in Riyadh next week under Saudi and Kuwaiti auspices in an attempt to ease the severe strain that has characterized Syrian-Egyptian relations since the signing of the second Sinai agreement last September.

This will be the first high-level Syrian-Egyptian contact since last summer. The meeting could help ease tensions, but it will take more than a single meeting by two essentially powerless prime ministers to resolve the deep-seated differences between Damascus and Cairo.

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