

The President's Daily Brief

15 May 1969

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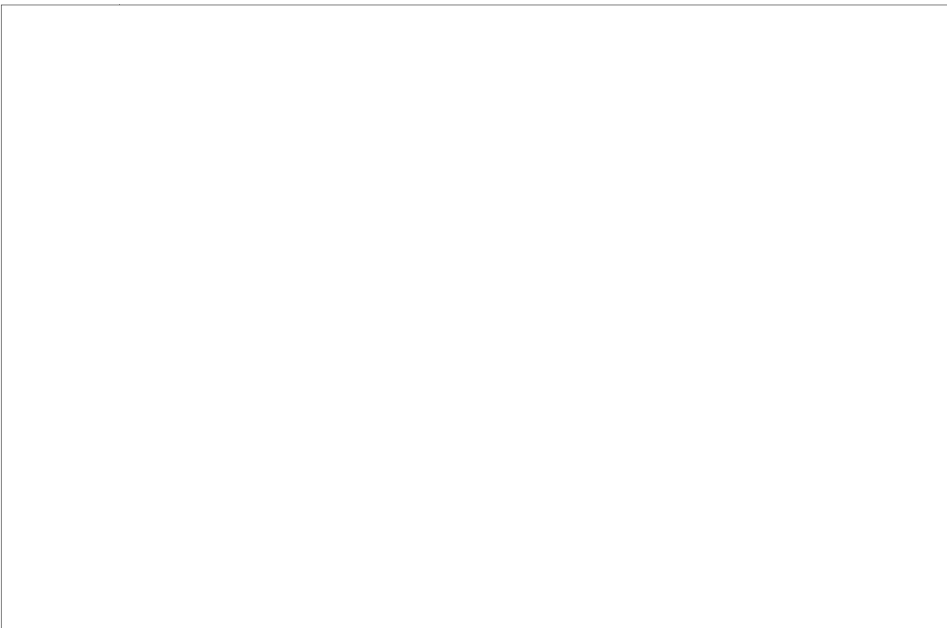
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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

I. MAJOR PROBLEMS

MIDDLE EAST

The Israeli raid late last month deep into Egyptian territory did not achieve much in terms of physical damage, but it apparently drove Nasir once again into a state of depression. He was already unhappy for a number of reasons: the duels on the Suez Canal were damaging the Egyptians far more than the Israelis, reports of Israeli nuclear developments were again surfacing in the world press, the four-power talks seemed to be making very little progress, and in Nasir's eyes at least, the policy of the new US administration did not seem all that different from its predecessor. On top of this, the Israeli raid rubbed Nasir's nose in one aspect of his country's very discouraging military situation: the vulnerability of Upper Egypt.



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What this means for Egypt's foreign policy is hard to predict.



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We still believe he is not inclined to mount any offensive action against the Israelis, since he almost certainly knows such action would be repulsed. (In this connection we note that there have been no Egyptian commando raids across the canal since the Naja Hamadi action.) He obviously is hoping that someone--the US or the four powers, for instance--will save his neck. He remains in a tight spot, however, and he shares the deep streak of fatalism common to most Arabs. A time could come when he decides that "he must do what he must do," regardless of the consequences.

EUROPE

Interim President Alain Poher's decision to run for the presidency in the 1 June election will offer a sharp challenge to Pompidou. A recent poll by the reputable Institute of Public Opinion, taken before Poher's announcement Monday, gave him 45 percent against Pompidou's 36 percent on a second runoff ballot. Nineteen percent expressed no opinion. Poher has become the front-runner, not only by rallying most of the left and center, but also by cutting into the Gaullist segment of the electorate.

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Pompidou's advisers claim that they doubt the poll's accuracy

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Not the least of the Pompidou camp's worries is that Poher is proving a difficult target to hit. He had no national following when he took over as interim president, but his careful political tactics in office have paid off in gaining him support as an acceptable alternative to Pompidou. He also represents the kind of "normalcy" for which many Frenchmen yearn after 11 years of De Gaulle.

The final list of official candidates, to be published today, will also include Socialist Defferre, Communist Duclos, and at least two other minor leftists. The campaign itself opens tomorrow.

VIETNAM

The tempo of enemy-initiated action has tapered off throughout South Vietnam, but there are new signs of impending attacks, especially in I Corps. The Communists have been moving in large quantities of arms and supplies in preparation for this effort.

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The initial reaction among officials in Saigon to President Nixon's speech was overwhelmingly favorable, according to press reports.

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SOVIET AFFAIRS

There is nothing significant to report.

II. OTHER IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS

MALAYSIA

Serious rioting by Malay and Chinese mobs continued today in Kuala Lumpur. At last report Malay youths and government troops were engaged in a pitched battle in the city's university section, according to the press. Casualties apparently are high.

The Indian component of the triparty government Alliance has implied that, unlike its Chinese counterpart, it will remain in the cabinet. The Indian group is the smallest of the three Alliance parties. Prime Minister Rahman doubtless welcomes its support, but the Indian stand is far from adequate compensation for the departure of the Chinese from the Alliance.

LAOS

Communist forces in the northeast have been the object of heavy air strikes, but there are fresh signs that the enemy is preparing to move against certain government positions there. There are only a few weeks left, however, before heavy rains begin to make ground operations difficult. It thus seems doubtful that the Communists at this late date intend to undertake major and wide-scale offensive action.

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