

The President's Daily Brief

27 October 1969

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

President Hilu continues his search for a way out of his difficulties with the fedayeen. There is still sporadic shooting in Tripoli and elsewhere in Lebanon. *(Page 1)*

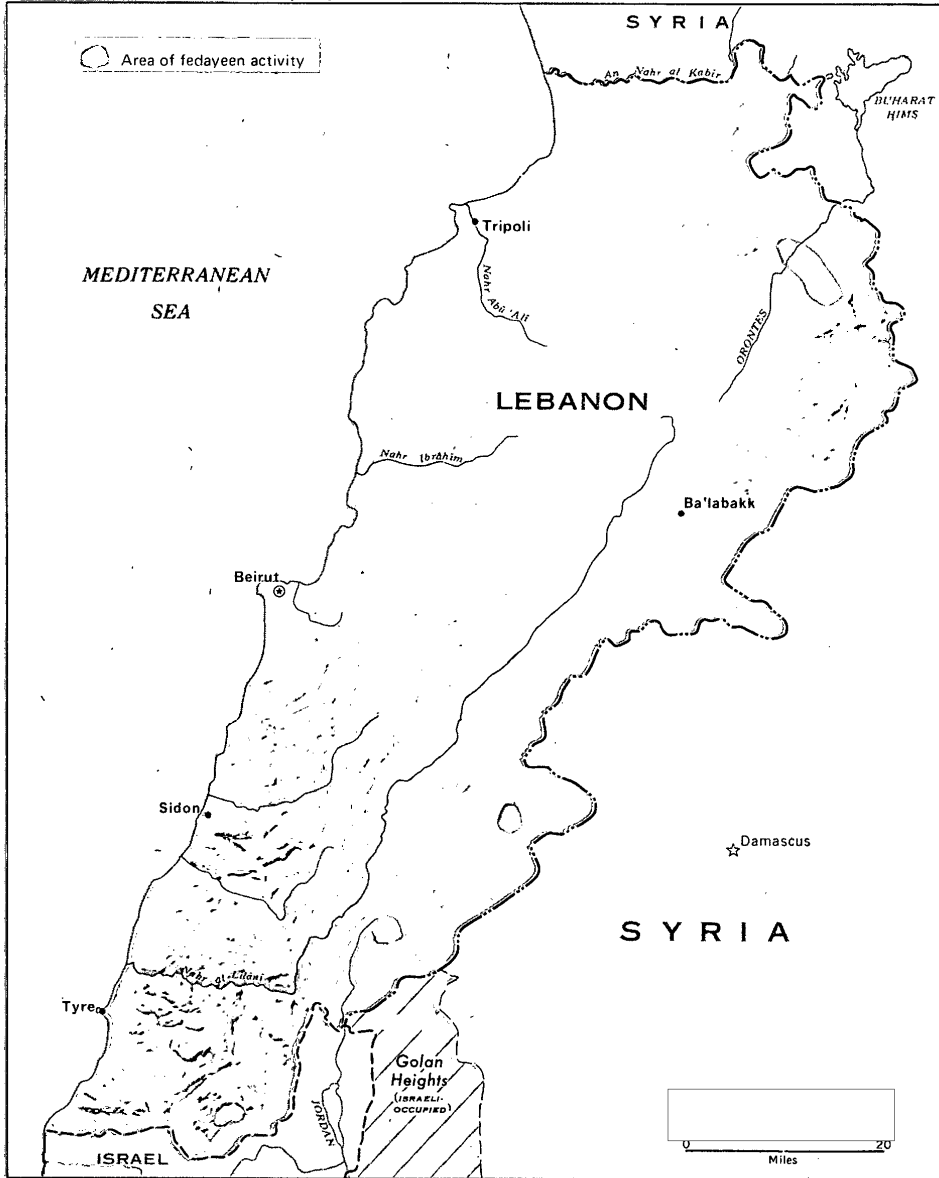
Chou En-lai's speech at a recent banquet for Pham Van Dong offers additional evidence that Peking is moving to soften its position on the Paris talks and to restore closer relations with Hanoi. *(Page 3)*

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LEBANON: Crisis With Fedayeen Continues



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LEBANON

Fedayeen elements and their supporters still control parts of Tripoli. A "revolutionary" government led by a prominent Lebanese supporter of Syria's ruling Baath Party is said to have been formed in Tripoli, but its status is still unclear.

Sporadic shooting continues in Tripoli as well as in other parts of Lebanon. Some Syrian forces are reported to have been involved in the actions along the eastern Lebanese border. Beirut has been fairly quiet, but tensions are high, with numerous roadblocks manned by armed civilians.

Army morale seems to be holding up well.

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Reports of Syrian support for the insurrectionists probably also helped unify the Lebanese Army in support of the government.

The army, however, is small and might have trouble handling simultaneously widespread disturbances and serious clashes with the fedayeen.

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Al-though some press reports suggest the fedayeen want to cool things down, the latest terms offered by fedayeen leader Yasir Arafat were too rigid for Lebanon to accept.

Hilu will have to bow to some fedayeen demands, but he is still hopeful of avoiding complete capitulation. He is maintaining pressure on the insurgents in order to negotiate from a position of some strength.

(continued)

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The unofficial "warning" carried by TASS on Saturday has been accompanied by Soviet press and radio suggestions that the US is looking for a chance to intervene. Pravda, with a touch of what may be genuine concern, has tried to link the current NATO maneuvers in the Mediterranean with this thesis. The Soviets have also taken note of Israeli Deputy Premier Allon's statement last week that his country could not ignore the events in Lebanon, which Moscow calls a direct threat of intervention.

Most of these Soviet statements also serve to convey the message to the Arabs that their interests would be best served if they settled Lebanon's troubles among themselves without further violence. The Soviets probably believe that they stand to gain little, other than propaganda advantage out of the present situation, which they fear could lead to a larger conflict.

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COMMUNIST CHINA - VIETNAM

Peking may be moving to soften its position on the Paris talks and to restore closer relations with Hanoi. The thrust of China's new approach was suggested in Chou En-lai's speech at a banquet on 23 October for visiting North Vietnamese Premier Pham Van Dong. Chou limited his comments on the outcome of the war to an expression of belief that the Vietnamese would overcome "all difficulties" along their "road of advance"--a vague formulation that could sanction a wide range of North Vietnamese political and military options. Chou on this occasion also omitted the standard Chinese call for Hanoi to persevere in protracted struggle until final victory is won, although this phrase was preserved in a Chinese communiqué on talks between Chou and Dong issued the next day.

Other indications of Chinese flexibility surfaced earlier this month during the extended stay in Peking of a high-ranking NLF-PRG delegation. By re-broadcasting in their entirety statements by the Vietnamese delegates, Peking for the first time acknowledged the existence of the NLF-PRG ten-point peace plan. A reference to this plan was also embedded in the communiqué of 24 October. This is in marked contrast to the earlier Chinese propaganda policy of editing out all unpalatable portions of Vietnamese Communist statements mentioning the Paris talks and a possible settlement of the war.

This shift in approach appears to represent an attempt by China to relieve its isolation and assume a more normal and active diplomatic role in Asia. Peking's frosty treatment of Hanoi after the start of the Paris talks in mid-1968 severely strained Sino-Vietnamese relations and left China alone in its implacable and heavy-handed opposition to a negotiated settlement. By moving away from this unproductive line, the Chinese in effect appear to be assuming a new role as champion of Hanoi's maximum demands at Paris, a position that promises them greater opportunity to influence North Vietnamese policy and to participate in an eventual settlement of the war, should they decide to do so.

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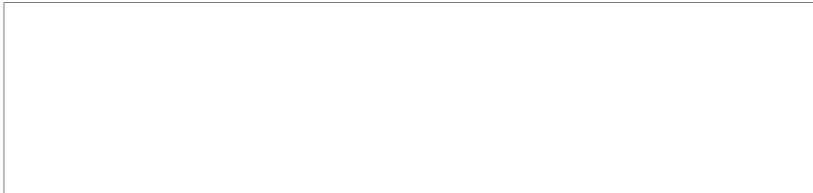
At the same time, the Chinese may be using their ideological justification for the current Sino-Soviet border talks as a means of preparing for adjustments on a number of long-standing foreign policy issues, including a rationalization of their more accommodating line on Vietnam. A recent Chinese broadcast stated that Peking's "dual revolutionary tactics" of negotiating while resisting Soviet aggression can be applied "by all revolutionary people"--a suggestion that China finally may be ready to endorse Hanoi's fight-and-talk strategy.

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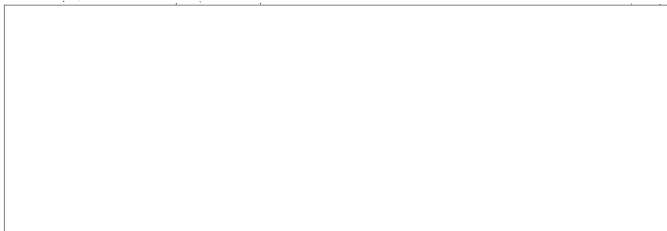
VIETNAM



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NOTE

Somali-USSR: A small Soviet naval force has gathered off the coast of Somalia. Included in the force are two missile-equipped antisubmarine warfare ships, an amphibious landing ship, and four ships associated with Soviet space events. The appearance of the miniature fleet may be a precautionary response to the recent coup in Somalia, where about 150 military advisers and more than 150 other Soviet technicians are employed. The US Embassy in Mogadiscio reports that the consensus among foreign diplomats in the capital is that the USSR was not involved in the coup. The embassy also notes reports that the Supreme Council has asked Soviet advisers to "keep their distance."

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