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FBI'S TRENDS
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MIDDLE EAST

MOSCOW AVOIDS TAKING SIDES IN REPORTAGE ON LEBANON FIGHTING

Sparse, cautious Soviet coverage of the armed conflict between the Lebanese army and the Palestinian fedayeen which erupted on 2 May has avoided placing blame on either side. Moscow did seem to hint at army responsibility, however, when it twice credited government leaders with prevailing on the military to cease their fire. Moscow has cited Lebanese sources for reports on actions by "subversive elements," and TASS on the 19th linked these elements with alleged attempts by "foreign intelligence services" to complicate army-fedayeen relations. Pointing to "instigatory pronouncements" by the Israeli chief of staff, TASS blamed "imperialist and Zionist circles" for provoking the clashes.

Successive dispatches in PRAVDA since the 4th have recounted actions by both sides while underscoring appeals by Lebanese "progressive forces" for vigilance and an end to the conflict. PRAVDA on the 7th called for a "clearcut formula" regulating relations between the Lebanese authorities and the Palestinian resistance movement and emphasized the negative effect of such clashes--a theme also played in Radio Moscow's only Arabic-language commentary on the conflict thus far, broadcast on the 4th.

Moscow has played down Syrian-Lebanese recriminations: TASS on the 8th reported the official Syrian statement declaring that Syrian efforts to help restore tranquility were thwarted because of the "stand assumed by the Lebanese authorities." But TASS did not mention the statement's assertion that the Beirut authorities were involved in a "foreign plot" against the Lebanese and Palestinian people, nor has Moscow reported the subsequent Lebanese military statement in rejoinder to Syria. Coverage of developments has noted mediatory activities by various Arab states, pointing to their "constructive contribution."

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