

The President's Daily Brief

24 May 1972

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

24 May 1972

PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

In Vietnam, Communist forces continue pushing against government positions north of Hue and edging closer to Kontum City.

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[Redacted]

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On Page 3 we discuss recent efforts by both Moscow and Cairo to smooth out their prickly relationship.

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VIETNAM

North of Hue, Communist forces continue to push against government positions, although South Vietnamese marines stopped them from advancing yesterday. Intercepts suggest that the Communists are preparing new action south of Hue. Elements of a North Vietnamese division have been conducting reconnaissance around the US base at Phu Bai near Hue, and one unit reported on 22 May that "we are ready to strike at Hue and the Americans."

In the central highlands, Communist units continue to edge closer to Kontum City. [redacted]

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[redacted] To the south, government troops have made contact with North Vietnamese troops blocking Route 14, and government territorial forces have retaken a fire support base that was overrun on Monday.

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North of Saigon, the 21st Division that has been moving to relieve An Loc is about one mile south of the town. Enemy attacks yesterday kept it from making any further progress, but the government troops inside the town are reported to have expanded their perimeter on the north and the west.

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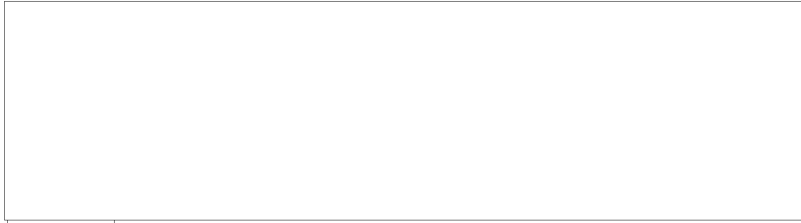
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USSR-EGYPT

The imposing military entourage that toured Egypt with Marshal Grechko last week was part of a growing Soviet effort to shore up President Sadat's international and domestic position.

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The Soviets presumably decided last month that additional measures were needed to buttress Sadat, as well as the Soviet position in Egypt. During Sadat's visit to Moscow in April, the Soviets for the first time publicly supported Arab use of "other means" (presumably military) to regain Israeli-occupied territory. The communiqué winding up the visit also stated that the two sides had "reached agreement on a further strengthening of military cooperation between them." In May, during Defense Minister Grechko's visit, the USSR and Egypt announced that they had "coordinated practical steps" to implement that agreement. The public statements, however, provide no indication as to the specifics involved.

Moscow could do very little that would significantly improve Egypt's military position against Israel. Nevertheless, several courses of action are open that would have beneficial effects on Sadat's political position and on Soviet-Egyptian relations. One such step would be the symbolic restoration of Cairo's offensive capability against Israel (e.g., several TU-16 bombers with ASM capability). Another would be Soviet help in establishing a defense industry in Egypt. The Egyptians are sensitive about their deficiencies in both these areas. Any Soviet aid of this sort would be designed primarily for its political impact rather than to change the military balance in the Middle East.

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The Soviets, in any event, have demonstrated their continued military support of Egypt. By sympathizing with Sadat's references to the need for military action against Israel and by announcing that a new arms agreement has been concluded, the Soviets put the best possible face on their ties with Cairo prior to discussions of the Middle East situation with President Nixon.

With one striking exception--noted below--Egyptian officials and media are now going along with the Soviet theme of mutual Soviet-Egyptian satisfaction with their relationship.

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The Cairo press in recent days has played up reports that the Soviet Union is intent on discussing Middle East problems "directly" as a vital area of tension between Moscow and Washington. The Egyptians have also stressed that the Soviets fully back their view that the Arab-Israeli dispute can be settled only by the withdrawal of Israeli forces from all occupied territories, even if this requires Egypt to use force.

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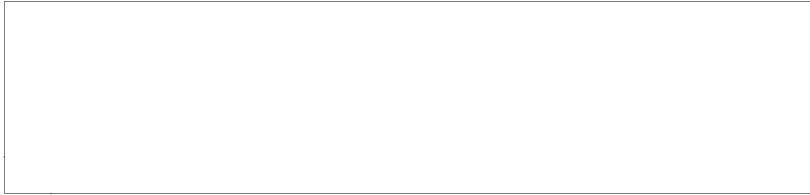
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Despite all this, the Egyptians still believe that they can expect nothing positive from the summit meetings, and they undoubtedly still have misgivings about great power dealings over their heads. The only exception to the general line of mutual confidence has been a round-table discussion among prominent Egyptian writers and Foreign Ministry officials reported in al-Ahram last week. The discussion focused on these misgivings and may have been intended to remind Moscow of its undertakings on Egypt's behalf.

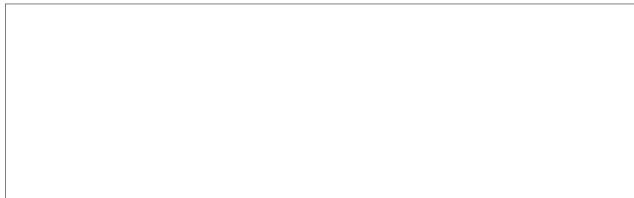
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NOTES

Poland: [redacted]

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USSR-India: In Moscow's first major arms shipment to India since the war with Pakistan, a Soviet freighter delivered seven MIG-21s, apparently the J-model, to Bombay [redacted]

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[redacted] these aircraft [redacted] have weapons-carrying capability and combat radius better than the MIG-21 India is currently manufacturing. India plans to begin making its own J-models sometime next year [redacted]

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Laos: Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma on Monday dealt the final blow to the latest challenge from rightists in the National Assembly. As a substitute for a rightist demand for the government's resignation, the Assembly approved a motion calling merely for the government to respect the constitution. Souvanna carried the day by insisting that he would not change his government even if the vote went against him and by showing that he retained the strong support of King Savang.

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