

The President's Daily Brief

31 March 1973

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THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

31 March 1973

PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

Despite President Sadat's insistence to an American journalist that Egypt's military preparations should be taken seriously, there are no indications that Cairo has begun to prepare in earnest for a military venture against Israel. (Page 1)

The head of the Viet Cong delegation in Paris judges that the Communists will not be ready for elections in the South for two years. (Page 2)

[redacted] extensive construction activity in the eastern USSR at three SS-11 ICBM complexes. (Page 3)

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Lao Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma is optimistic that a new government can be formed by mid-April. (Page 4)

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EGYPT

For the benefit of the US and his Arab audience, President Sadat emphasized to an American journalist Thursday that Egypt's military preparations should be taken seriously.

In an interview that will be published in Newsweek, Sadat said he had "run out of ideas" and that there was nothing to do but fight. He declared that Egypt would be prepared to negotiate directly with Israel but only after the battle had begun.

Sadat stated that US "calculations" on prospects for a Middle East settlement are incorrect and warned that US interests in the area would suffer from Washington's actions and policies. He rejected alleged US demands that Cairo openly declare its recognition of Israel's rights and that Egypt make other concessions to Tel Aviv.

Sadat's militant tone reflects Cairo's pessimism about prospects for a diplomatic settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Current talk of "all-out confrontation" is in large part intended to raise apprehension in Washington and other Western capitals in the hope of stimulating greater diplomatic efforts. Egyptian officials are disappointed that no concrete US initiative has emerged. Reports that the US has promised Israel additional hardware have deepened Egyptian unhappiness and have put Sadat on the defensive.

Egypt's rhetoric, however, is traditionally more militant than its actions. Despite such gestures as Sadat's assumption of the post of military governor general, there are no indications that Egypt has begun seriously to prepare for a military venture against Israel.

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VIETNAM

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The [redacted] Viet Cong [redacted]
[redacted] will not be ready for elec-
tions in the South for two years. [redacted]

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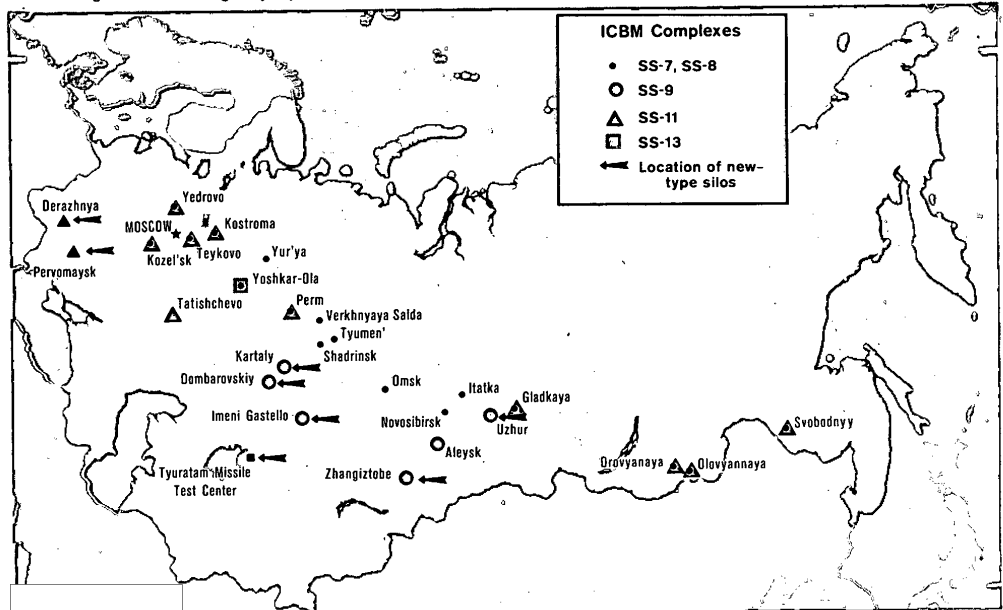
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North Vietnamese officials in Paris have also been saying that the Viet Cong will have to be given more public attention, with emphasis on Viet Cong "autonomy." They have implied that Viet Cong representatives will engage in more international contacts without the North Vietnamese holding their hands.

These comments jibe with other recent indications that the Communists are well aware that their political position in the South is weak and no match for President Thieu's political machine. Moreover, the Communists probably have strong doubts as to whether they and Saigon will ever be able to agree to mutually acceptable terms on holding elections. While they will strive to improve their political position in the South, [redacted] they also are building up their military option and are saying that this may eventually be the only way to power.

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Soviets Begin Modernizing Deployed SS-11 Force



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USSR

[redacted] extensive construction activity in the eastern USSR at three SS-11 ICBM complexes--Svobodnyy, Drovyanaya, and Olovyanaya. The work began in January. Digging can be seen at 22 launch sites, [redacted]

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[redacted] similar activity at other SS-11 complexes. There are no signs that the silos themselves have been altered yet.

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At this point, it appears that the Soviets intend either:

--to replace the old SS-11 Mod 1 with the new triple-warhead Mod 3 at these silos, or

--to convert the silos to a new and harder configuration, like the new small ones at Tyuratam. In this case, either the Mod 3 or the SS-X-17--a new missile in the SS-11 class--could be deployed.

This activity is probably part of a wider effort by the Soviets to improve the quality of their ICBMs during the term of the SALT Interim Agreement. These improvements will include new missiles, better guidance systems, harder silos, and probably MIRVs. Evidence of MIRV development is still lacking, however.

The Soviets have fired ten SS-11 missiles from Svobodnyy and six from Drovyanaya during the past four months, apparently in preparation for the modernization program.

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NOTE

Laos: Following his recent meeting with Pathet Lao negotiator Phoune Sipraseuth, Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma is optimistic that a new government can be formed by mid-April. Phoune, who recently returned from a short visit to the Communist headquarters near Sam Neua, brought with him a lengthy draft agreement on political matters and a letter from Communist leader Souphanouvong empowering Phoune to negotiate the formation of a new government. The two sides began discussions yesterday, but much hard bargaining probably will be necessary to reach agreement on the division of cabinet portfolios.

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