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The President's Daily Brief

March 5, 1974

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

March 5, 1974

PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

Syria

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Prime Minister Meir told President Katzir she will keep trying to form a government until tomorrow, when the extension of the mandate granted by Katzir last week expires. (Page 3)

West German Minister Bahr is having tough sledding in Moscow over the question of Bonn's attempt to open a federal environmental office in West Berlin. (Page 4)

Guatemala

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SYRIA-ISRAEL

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* * *

There have been no Soviet political or military activities indicating concern over a possible renewal of Middle East hostilities.

Foreign Minister Gromyko is completing a four-day visit in Egypt [Redacted]

[Redacted]

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he left Syria last Friday, Gromyko announced that he would return after his Cairo visit to complete his discussions. There has been no hint in Gromyko's public statements of concern over an imminent Syrian attack in the Golan Heights.

Soviet military activities related to the Middle East appear normal. [redacted]

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[redacted] Two Soviet destroyers departed the Mediterranean for the Black Sea over the weekend. There are now fewer combatants in the Mediterranean Squadron than at this time last year. Most Soviet ships are at anchorage or in port after having concluded a short anti-submarine warfare exercise on March 1.

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ISRAEL

Prime Minister Meir told President Katzir yesterday that she would keep trying to form a government until tomorrow when the extension of the mandate granted by Katzir last week expires. Mrs. Meir yielded to the entreaties of other Alignment leaders. She will now insist that it is up to them to come around to her way of thinking; she is, in all probability, quite prepared to step down should they refuse.

If Mrs. Meir steps down, the possibility is quite strong that new elections will have to be called. Another possibility, although less likely, is that a government of national unity with the right-wing Likud will emerge. Pressures for a unity government appear to be growing within the Alignment, primarily from Defense Minister Dayan's Rafi faction. A move toward a unity government could split the party; the left-wing Mapam faction, for instance, has threatened to bolt the Alignment rather than acquiesce in a government of national unity.

With the exception of Dayan, Alignment leaders do not favor new elections. This option, however, may become more attractive should the impasse continue. Prior to any election, Mrs. Meir would continue to head the present caretaker majority coalition which includes Dayan and the National Religious Party. This would give the Alignment more time to address the domestic political issues that divide it, and to strengthen its position at the polls. Moreover, the government could continue the disengagement negotiations with the Syrians confident that its views on this subject are shared by a majority of the Knesset.

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WEST GERMANY - USSR

West German Minister Bahr, who is in Moscow trying to arrange a visit by Chancellor Brandt, is not making much progress over Berlin. Soviet leaders are adamant that Bonn's attempt to open a federal environmental office in West Berlin is a violation of the 1971 Quadripartite Agreement and that the office would be a wedge for a greater federal presence in the city.

Bahr's initial talks with General Secretary Brezhnev and Deputy Foreign Minister Kuznetsov were frank, and neither side gave any ground. The Soviets are hinting that a face-saving compromise might be arranged, but the West Germans believe that no real progress can be made until Foreign Minister Gromyko returns from his trip to the Middle East. Bahr intends to stay in the USSR until then.

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GUATEMALA

Despite the government's release last night of partial voting returns showing its candidate ahead in last Sunday's presidential election, President Arana told close advisers yesterday afternoon it was obvious that opposition candidate General Efraim Rios Montt had really won. Arana is faced with a thorny dilemma: accepting a Rios victory would be anathema to conservative military and civilian officials, and nullifying the elections or manipulating the final vote count to name the government's man the winner could spark serious violence or split the army. Minor clashes between supporters of the top two presidential rivals have already occurred in the capital, and further wide discrepancies between the official and opposition versions of the vote tallies could lead to more trouble.

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