

SWT



The President's Daily Brief

December 26, 1974

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

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EGYPT-SYRIA-ISRAEL

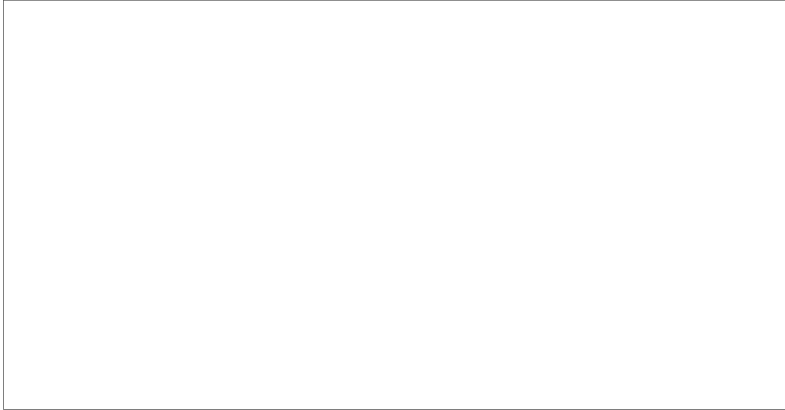


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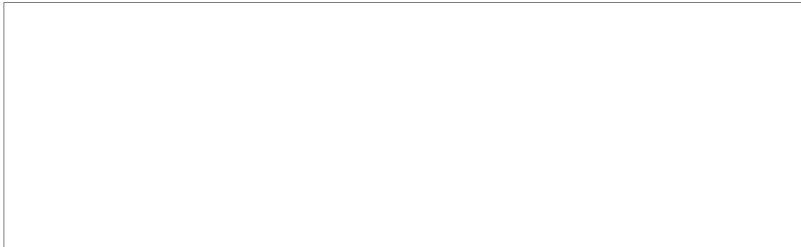


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LEBANON

Senior Lebanese army officers claim that continued Israeli strikes into Lebanon will force the government to give in to pressure from fedayeen and Arab League members for a greater Lebanese commitment to the Arab cause. The officers believe that since the Rabat conference in late October the strength of the fedayeen in Lebanon has grown to a point where the army can no longer risk a showdown.

The chief of operations of the Lebanese army told a US official on Monday that he fears recent Israeli military maneuvers in northern Israel may have been a dress rehearsal for a wide-ranging assault on Lebanon aimed at clearing out local refugee camps. The chief of operations found ominous the recent return of Israeli General Sharon, known for his hawkish views and unorthodox military exploits, to the army reserves for a "special assignment." He was also uneasy about tough talk emanating from Israeli leaders about Lebanon's culpability for fedayeen activity.

[redacted] that if the army challenged the fedayeen in the south, "all hell" would break loose in Beirut and in the north. He said the fedayeen are able to bring weapons into Lebanon at will, and illustrated his point by citing their possession of six armored personnel carriers inside a refugee camp in Beirut.

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The question of increasing the country's military strength vis-a-vis the fedayeen has engendered much debate in Lebanon. Some politicians want Soviet military aid, some want only Arab assistance, and some do not want any. This greatly complicates the task of getting legislation to authorize and finance expansion of the armed forces.

On December 18, [redacted]

[redacted] The chief of staff said that the Soviets were constantly pressing the army to accept military aid with attractive financial terms, but that the Lebanese army leadership, as opposed to some Lebanese politicians, did not want to become militarily dependent upon either the Soviets or members of the Arab League. A member of the National Defense Committee of the Lebanese Parliament later confirmed that the Soviets have been pressing Beirut to accept military aid.

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USSR

The Soviet press has expressed satisfaction with the lifting of trade barriers by the US Congress, but it has also condemned "artificially created difficulties" raised by "opponents of detente."

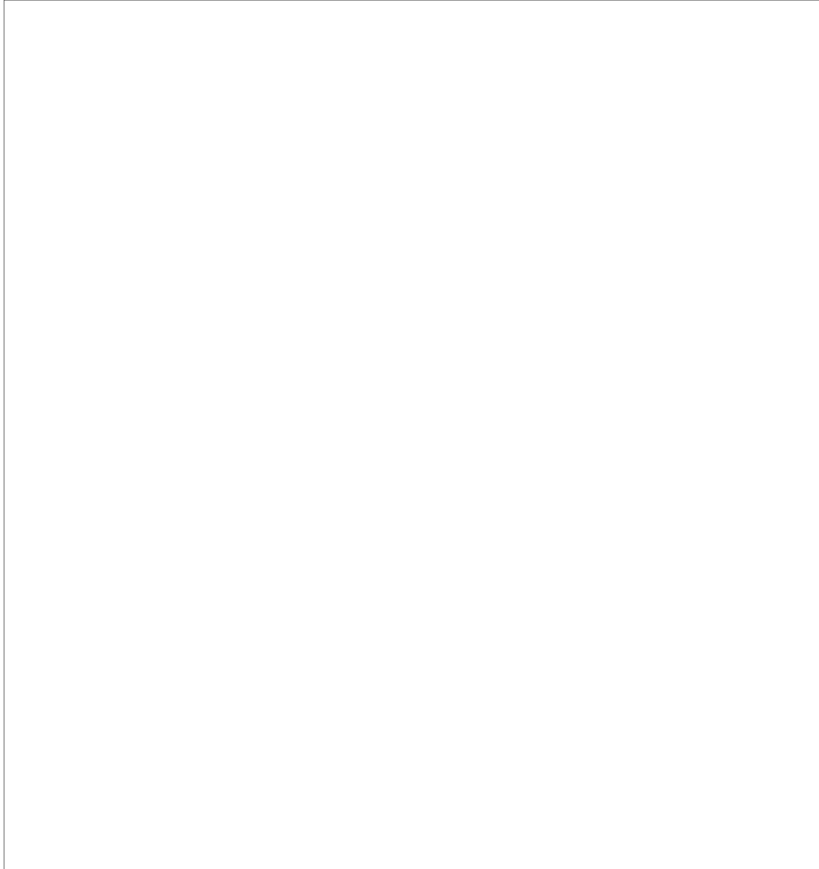
Press commentary has been concentrated primarily on the more politically sensitive trade act, with heavy play given to the Tass statement and the Gromyko letter on the emigration issue. Legislation limiting the amount of credits available to the Soviets could, however, have much greater economic significance than the trade act.

The mood among Soviet Jews hoping to emigrate is mixed. Some activists see Moscow's action as chiefly a face-saving exercise. Others interpret it as signaling a general hardening of the Soviet position on emigration. There is also speculation among Jewish activists that the Soviets have been acting with an eye to Arab sensibilities prior to Brezhnev's trip to Egypt.

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ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia's military rulers may be about to go on the offensive against the rebel Eritrean Liberation Front, which last weekend initiated violence in Asmara, the capital of Eritrea Province.

On Monday, Ethiopian army authorities in Asmara announced that their "patience" has run out and that they will take "all measures necessary" to end the insurgency. The military council in Addis Ababa had sent reinforcements to Eritrea earlier this month.

The trouble in Asmara began when rebels attacked with small arms and grenades. The army responded immediately. Large-scale arrests were made and many civilians were beaten. The harsh army response is likely to increase the Front's popular support and deepen the disaffection among the predominantly Eritrean paramilitary police.

There has been only limited contact between the guerrillas and government forces since February, when the army's growing involvement in politics curtailed its antiguerrilla sweeps in the countryside. The Front controls most of the Eritrean countryside, but it does not appear to be capable of driving the army out of the province.

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NOTES

USSR: Late last night the Soviets launched a Salyut space station. They probably will monitor conditions aboard the space station for a few days before sending up two cosmonauts in a Soyuz spacecraft to board it. The crew is expected to remain aboard for a period of one to two months. [redacted]

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Italy-Iran: President Leone during his recent visit to Iran confirmed some \$5-6 billion in commercial deals that had already been under negotiation. [redacted]

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South Korea: There were no political prisoners among the approximately 3,000 South Koreans given a Christmas amnesty by the government, but, significantly, two Japanese citizens arrested earlier this year for alleged anti-Pak plotting were freed. The release of the Japanese was probably prompted by statements from officials of the new Miki government indicating an interest in repairing the badly strained ties with South Korea. President Pak is reported to have deferred releasing political prisoners because opposition activity has not, in his judgment, quieted sufficiently. The major opposition party, in fact, recently launched an anti-Pak campaign in leading provincial cities.

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