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The President's Daily Brief

October 20, 1975

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

October 20, 1975

Table of Contents

Lebanon: Sniper fire and kidnapings continued in Beirut over the weekend, and fighting intensified last night. (Page 1)

Syria: The Syrians may be attempting to stimulate apprehension about their military intentions. (Page 2)

Egypt: President Sadat's speech to the opening session of the Egyptian People's Assembly Saturday night was unique among his recent public pronouncements for its lack of polemics. (Page 4)

USSR-France: Both the French and the Soviets made determined attempts to present an appearance of cordiality and accomplishment at the end of President Giscard's visit to the USSR, but they could not entirely dispel a sense of strain. (Page 5)

West Germany:

[Redacted] (Page 6)

25X1

Portugal: One of the most militant and most heavily armed leftist groups has announced that it will ignore the government's order for all armed militias to turn in their weapons. (Page 7)

Japan-US: The Japanese are widely interpreting the Emperor's recent visit to the US as opening an era of "good feelings" in US-Japanese relations. (Page 8)

Note: Spain (Page 9)

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LEBANON

Sniper fire and kidnapings continued in Beirut over the weekend, and fighting intensified last night.

The US embassy reports that the increase in violence had not seriously dampened the economic resurgence in the capital that began late last week. Most shops and banks were open on Saturday and most roads were passable.

The meeting of the political reform subcommittee of the national dialogue committee on Saturday reportedly was marred by deep differences between leftist leader Kamal Jumblatt and Phalangist leader Pierre Jumayyil. Jumayyil is continuing to insist that security must be restored before reform can be discussed. The subcommittee is scheduled to meet again today.

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SYRIA

The Syrians may be attempting to stimulate apprehension about their military intentions.

On Friday, a local news service correspondent in Damascus told a US embassy official that Israeli allegations that Syria is evacuating civilians from the Golan Heights were accurate. The correspondent also reported that Syria intends to conduct a 48-hour operation to occupy a piece of Israeli-controlled territory so that Secretary Kissinger will have to return to Damascus to negotiate a comprehensive settlement.

The possibility of a limited Syrian military action cannot be discounted. Ambassador Murphy comments that a quick thrust into the Golan may be an option under consideration by the Syrian government. It is also possible that the story was planted as part of a Syrian effort to increase pressure on the US and Israel to refocus a diplomatic effort on the Golan front.

Meanwhile, President Asad has continued his verbal assault on the second Sinai disengagement agreement in a lengthy interview published on Saturday in a Kuwaiti newspaper. Reiterating his opposition to further peace negotiations about the Golan Heights unless the Palestine Liberation Organization takes part, the Syrian leader said he had been offered an opportunity to engage in talks similar to those in which Egyptian President Sadat had participated. Asad said he had refused because the talks were aimed at isolating the Palestinian problem.

Asad criticized Egypt's anti-Soviet stance as an attempt to obscure the Palestinian issue by offering Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf states the choice between Egypt and communism. He denied that Syria and the Palestinians were "chessmen in the hands of the Soviets" and said Syria had rejected Moscow's offer of a treaty of peace and friendship.

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Asad did not reveal Syrian intentions regarding the renewal of the mandate of the UN force on the Golan Heights, which expires on November 30. He noted, however, that the existence of the observer force was no barrier to Syrian military action. Recalling that Syria had insisted that the force be called an observer rather than an emergency force like the one in the Sinai, Asad declared that, "when we decide to wage war, these observers will not be an obstacle."



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EGYPT

President Sadat's speech to the opening session of the Egyptian People's Assembly Saturday night was unique among his recent public pronouncements for its lack of polemics.

In a relatively short address devoted chiefly to domestic affairs, Sadat avoided any mention of Syria, spoke matter-of-factly of what Egypt has done and will continue to do for the Palestinians, and made only oblique references to the Soviets. All had come in for heavy criticism in Sadat's recent speeches.

Sadat briefly mentioned his objection to an escalation of US arms deliveries to Israel, "especially with regard to the type of weapon," an apparent reference to the Pershing missile. The Egyptian leader warned that escalation on one side is incompatible with the role currently being played by the US in the Middle East and will be met by escalation on Egypt's side. These remarks were made as much to please his Arab audience as to signal the US that he will seek arms for Egypt when he visits Washington next week.

On the subject of Lebanon, Sadat said that a catastrophe there now could be even worse than the "Palestine catastrophe in 1948." Although he did not elaborate, Sadat seemed to be saying that continued strife in Lebanon could ultimately impact on broader Arab-Israeli issues and result in the loss of all the Arabs have gained in recent years. In a reference that could have been directed equally at Arabs, Israelis, and the superpowers, he urged that all outside powers keep hands off Lebanon.

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USSR-FRANCE

Both the French and the Soviets made determined attempts to present an appearance of cordiality and accomplishment at the end of President Giscard's visit to the USSR, but they could not entirely dispel a sense of strain.

The two leaders signed a brief formal communiqué and a longer declaration of friendship. They stressed the importance of summit meetings and agreed to hold them on a "periodic basis," which may go a short distance toward formalizing the annual exchange that now exists. The French endorsed the Soviet proposal to convene a world disarmament conference, which they probably regarded as a painless gesture. The declaration, however, makes no mention of the European force reduction talks, which the French have refused to join.

Some mystery remains about the abrupt change in Giscard's schedule, in which the Soviets postponed his scheduled talks with Brezhnev and related ministerial meetings from Wednesday to Friday and substituted tourist activities that had been planned for Friday. A short and probably nonsubstantive meeting between the two leaders that was supposed to have taken place on Saturday was canceled.

Brezhnev told newsmen that he had a cold that necessitated the scheduling switch. At the airport sendoff for Giscard

the Soviet leader's overall mood was jovial. On Friday night, French Foreign Minister Sauvagnargues was anxious to put to rest rumors of "blow-ups" or "snubs" and attributed the postponement entirely to Brezhnev's cold.

25X1

Despite these denials, some hints of disagreement remain. At a news conference, Giscard said that there was a "difference" but not a "contradiction" between the two leaders' positions. Such differences are genuine but long-standing, and it is unlikely that the two leaders would have permitted them to disrupt a relationship in which much depends on appearances.

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PORTUGAL

One of the most militant and most heavily armed groups on the extreme left has announced that it will ignore the government's directive of last Friday giving all armed militias eight days to turn in their weapons.

The spokesman for the group--the Revolutionary Party of the Proletariat - Revolutionary Brigades--said the government lacks the strength to enforce its directive and that if there is a showdown the government will lose. The leader of the group, Isobel do Carmo, reportedly has close ties with security forces chief Otelo de Carvalho.

So far, this is the only public reaction to the government's new directive. Other leftist groups, including those supported by the Communist Party, are likely to resist the directive. This, of course, will be one more serious challenge to a government already beset with continuing military indiscipline and a deteriorating economy.

Conservatives, meanwhile, staged a successful mass rally in Porto on Saturday. Leaders of the Social Democratic Center told a crowd of some 15,000 that they are ready to support the present government if it can maintain public order and restore military discipline.

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JAPAN-US

The Japanese are widely interpreting the Emperor's recently concluded visit to the US as opening an era of "good feelings" in US-Japanese relations. The visit contributed significantly to popular support for continued cooperation with the US and reconfirmed at the highest level the fundamental strength of the bilateral relationship.

Prior to the visit, many Japanese had grave doubts about the image the Emperor would project and about how well he would be received. The reception and US media coverage, however, greatly exceeded even the most optimistic Japanese expectations. As far as most Japanese are concerned, the visit removed any lingering doubts that Americans still harbor hostile feelings toward Japan as a result of World War II.

The timing of the imperial visit contributed to its success. The present absence of major problems between the two countries, Secretary Kissinger's widely publicized speech on the importance of US-Japanese relations, and Secretary Schlesinger's well-received visit have served to focus Japanese public attention on the strength of the bilateral relationship.

In addition, recent efforts by Japan's opposition parties, except for the Communists, to open avenues of communications with the US have received broad coverage in the Japanese media. The Japan Socialist Party, the major opposition party, recently sent a delegation to the US to exchange views with US officials--the first such visit in 18 years.

Some of the present euphoria will eventually subside.




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