



The President's Daily Brief

December 23, 1975

2

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Table of Contents

Lebanon: We cannot confirm press reports that Syrian army troops have joined in the fighting. In Beirut, clashes remain at a relatively low level one week after the latest cease-fire was proclaimed. (Page 1)

USSR:



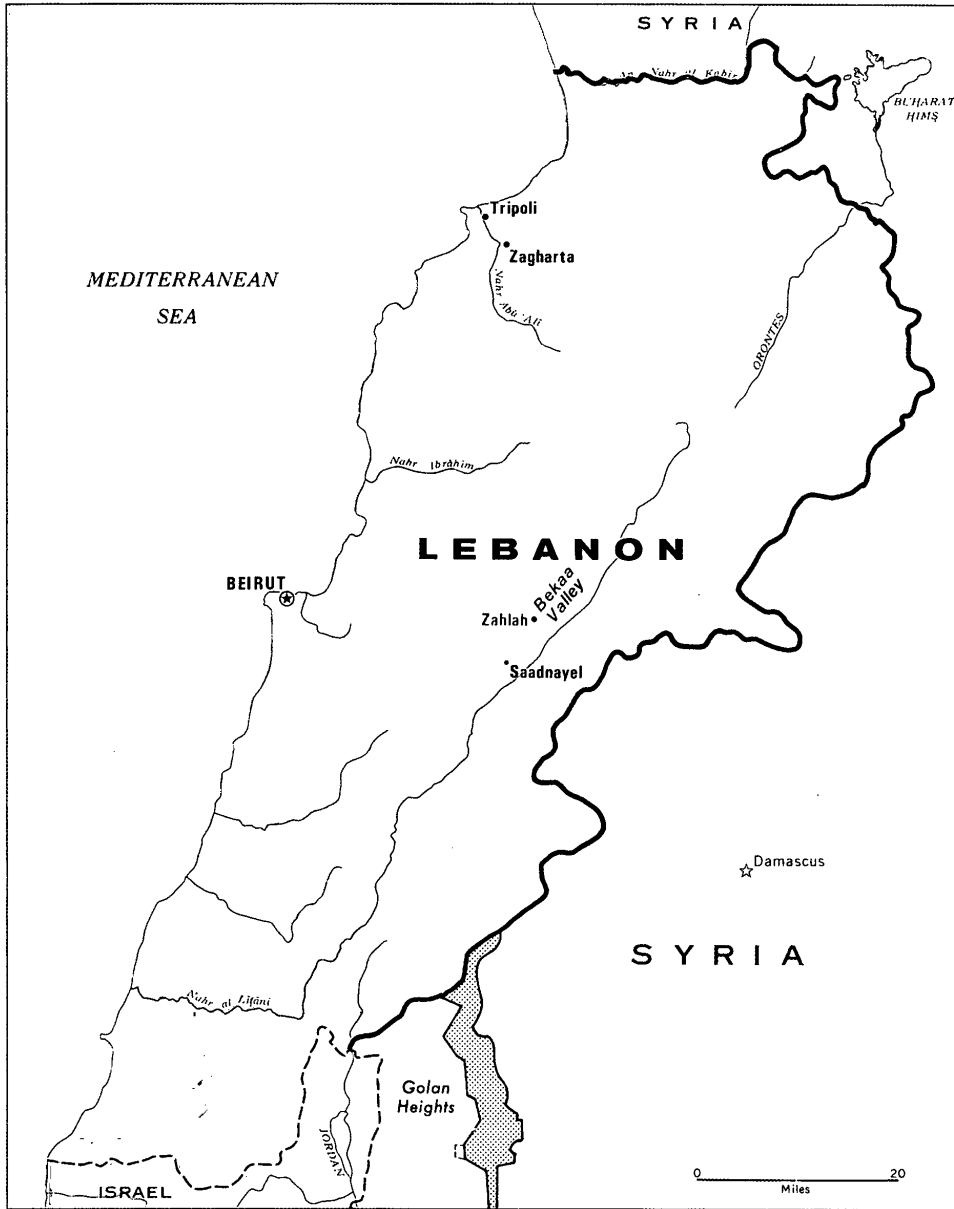
25X1

USSR-Turkey: Soviet Premier Kosygin will arrive in Turkey on Friday for a five-day visit. (Page 3)

Bangladesh-India-USSR: Strongman General Zia ur-Rahman reportedly is concerned about the threat of further trouble in the army. The USSR has also expressed its concern about the situation in Bangladesh. (Page 5)

Notes: Cuba; Austria; India; Laos-Thailand; Argentina (Pages 7, 8, and 9)

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LEBANON

We cannot confirm press reports that Syrian army troops have joined in the fighting at Zahlah, Lebanon.

Fighting in Beirut remains at a relatively low level one week after the latest cease-fire was proclaimed. More serious clashes continue in the Tripoli-Zagharta area and in villages south and east of the capital.

There were heavy clashes and artillery exchanges between Zahlah and the neighboring village of Saadnayel on Sunday and Monday. These involved primarily Christian and Muslim private militias and the Lebanese army, which for several months has tried to restore calm in the area.

Elements of the Syrian-controlled Saiqa fedayeen organization probably have also been involved in the clashes. There are approximately 3,000 Saiqa troops in Lebanon; at least 500 of these are in the immediate Bekaa Valley area.

The reports of foreign intervention may have come from Ilyas Harawi, who is a member of parliament from Zahlah and a Maronite Christian ally of Interior Minister Shamun. Harawi has tended to exaggerate the ferocity of the fighting in his home area, and may have misrepresented Saiqa forces as Syrian regulars to discredit Lebanese Muslims and leftists by suggesting that they must depend on outside support.

President Franjyah is convinced that increased numbers of Palestinian and Syrian troops have recently infiltrated Lebanon from Syria.

25X1

Prime Minister Karami was in Damascus yesterday to continue his talks with Syrian leaders.

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USSR-TURKEY

Soviet Premier Kosygin will arrive in Turkey on Friday for a five-day visit. The inauguration of the Iskenderun steel plant, which is being constructed largely with Soviet aid, is the ostensible reason for the visit. Kosygin will use the occasion, however, to continue Moscow's low-key efforts to exploit US-Turkish friction and to improve Soviet relations with Ankara.

In conversations with Turkish Prime Minister Demirel, Kosygin will probably urge continued economic cooperation and may indicate that the USSR is willing to sell Turkey military equipment.

Kosygin may also raise the subject of extradition of two Soviet air hijackers who fled to Turkey in 1970.

25X1

Whatever the immediate outcome, the incident has prompted the Soviets to propose to Ankara that an agreement be worked out on air piracy.

25X1

In discussions on Cyprus, Kosygin will restate the formal Soviet position favoring a unitary Cyprus, but he will not press the issue. He may point out that Moscow has followed a policy of benign neutrality toward the Turkish occupation.

The Turks in general will continue their efforts to improve relations with their Communist neighbors, without, of course, altering relations with the West. These efforts have accelerated since Turkey's difficulties with the US over the arms embargo, and the Turks no doubt view Kosygin's visit as a useful signal to the West that Turkey cannot be taken for granted.

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The Iskenderun project that Kosgyin will dedicate is one of Moscow's largest aid projects, involving \$420 million in Soviet credits. Construction began in 1970; the first stage, now being opened, will be able to produce 1.1 million tons of steel annually.

Moscow and Ankara signed an economic and technical cooperation agreement last July that may provide credits up to \$600-700 million for several projects. Expansion of Iskenderun to an annual capacity of 4 million tons is envisioned in this accord.

BANGLADESH-INDIA-USSR

Bangladesh strongman General Zia ur-Rahman reportedly is concerned about the threat of further trouble in the army.

Enlisted men from two army units in Dacca are said to be refusing the transfer of their units to outlying posts. They are demanding the return to Bangladesh of two of their former officers who were exiled last month

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The commander of New Delhi's forces in eastern India seemed convinced, when speaking with the US consul general in Calcutta on Sunday, that General Zia's position is weakening. The commander forecast another period of disorder in Bangladesh, but continued to maintain that his troops are not preparing for intervention.

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The USSR has once again expressed its concern over the situation in Bangladesh. In a conversation with Ambassador Stoessel a few days ago, Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Firyubin repeatedly stressed the importance Moscow attaches to the preservation of stability in South Asia.

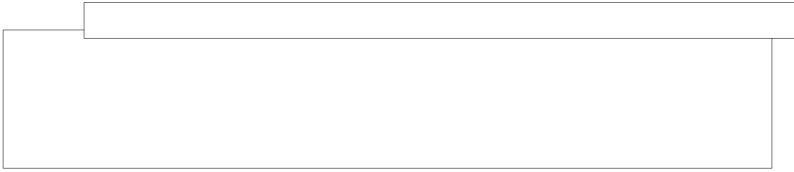
The Soviets believe the turmoil in Bangladesh is a direct result of outside interference. Moscow persists in seeing China's hand in the allegedly anti-Soviet activities of extremist groups in Bangladesh. The planned establishment of a Chinese diplomatic mission in Dacca has heightened Moscow's concern.

In an effort to reduce Soviet suspicions, a special envoy from Bangladesh, Tabarak Husain, visited Moscow for three days last week. Husain probably sought to assure the Soviets that Dacca would continue its policy of nonalignment and would do its best to put down disturbances in the countryside.

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5

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25X1

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NOTES

The reorganization of Cuba's Communist Party at its first party congress indicates that Cuban policies are now more closely aligned with Moscow's than ever before.

The "re-election" of Fidel and Raul Castro was announced yesterday by Fabio Grobart, probably the only surviving member of the group that formed the first Cuban Communist Party in August 1925. The selection of the Polish-born, 70-year-old Grobart--long suspected of being a Soviet agent--to make the announcement, and the lengthy praise he gave Fidel, were probably intended to signify the total unity of views of the Cuban communist leadership. The elevation of Grobart and two other pre-revolutionary communists to the Political Bureau gives three of the 13 seats to "old" communists, who previously had no representation.

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Austria's Chancellor Bruno Kreisky is defending his handling of the OPEC terrorist incident in the face of strong criticism at home and abroad.

Several Arab countries have criticized Austria for failing to provide adequate security measures for the OPEC meeting, while Israel and some of Kreisky's domestic political opponents have scored him for giving in so easily. The Chancellor said he rejected long, drawn-out negotiations because there already had been casualties, and the safety of the hostages would have been further jeopardized if the government delayed granting the concessions.

The main opposition party, the Austrian People's Party, may try to exploit the security issue by pointing out the deficiencies that have left the government virtually helpless on two occasions. The other occasion was in 1973 when Kreisky ordered the closure of a Jewish transit camp to save the lives of four hostages held at the Vienna airport by two Arabs. The Austrian government will be especially anxious to improve security because of its hopes to turn Vienna into another "UN city."

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India's newly named Minister of Defense Bansi Lal is a close ally of Prime Minister Gandhi's increasingly influential son, Sanjay.

Lal, a former chief minister of Haryana state, entered the cabinet for the first time only a month ago as a minister without portfolio. He is considered a tough and efficient administrator whose views are compatible with Sanjay's conservative orientation. He replaces long-time cabinet member Swaran Singh, whom Gandhi ousted last month; in the intervening period, the Prime Minister held the defense portfolio herself. Sanjay reportedly is the driving force behind a move to replace older cabinet members, such as the 68-year-old Singh, with younger, presumably more vigorous figures.

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Vientiane is seeking help from non-communist diplomatic missions to persuade Bangkok to reopen the Thai-Lao border.

The Lao deputy foreign minister yesterday summoned the US, British, Malaysian, and Indonesian charges to his office, admitted that the economic situation in Vientiane was bad, and attributed it to Bangkok's closing the border following the mid-November clash along the Mekong. The official said that the Lao would not meet the Thai demand for negotiations on border problems, but indicated that his government would be willing to exchange views on an agenda for talks after Bangkok reopened the border. He asked all four governments to intervene with Bangkok.

Vientiane has been unable to circumvent the border closure by obtaining sufficient supplies through Vietnam. Yesterday, Thai officials did give the Soviets permission to begin airlifting Soviet aid that had been stranded in Thailand.

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Rebellious Argentine air force officers came to terms yesterday with their superiors, ending the insurrection they began last Thursday.

No air bases remain in rebel hands. The rebels' only success, achieved early in the uprising, was the replacement of their commander in chief. The underlying problem--the status of President Peron--remains unresolved.

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