



The President's Daily Brief

March 18, 1976

2

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Table of Contents

<u>Lebanon:</u> After a telephone conversation with Syrian President Asad, Brigadier Ahdab yesterday publicly withdrew his threat to force President Franjiyah's resignation. (Page 1)	25X1
<u>China:</u> [Redacted]	25X1
[Redacted] (Page 2)	25X1
<u>USSR-Somalia:</u> President Siad, who has been in Moscow since the party congress, appears to be lobbying hard for increased Soviet support for his policies in the Horn of Africa. (Page 4)	
<u>Notes:</u> Yugoslavia-Panama; Thailand (Page 5)	

FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

LEBANON

Brigadier Ahdab yesterday publicly withdrew his threat to force President Franjiyah's resignation.

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Ahdab announced that his National Reformist Movement will await the outcome of the Syrian-sponsored political negotiations.

Most of the Lebanese and Palestinian leaders who went to Damascus early this week returned to Beirut yesterday cautiously optimistic that a political settlement can be worked out. Only Socialist leader Kamal Jumblatt, who condemned Syria's military and political intervention and refused to join the talks in Damascus, continues to call for a military showdown.

All parties to the Damascus negotiations apparently agreed that President Franjiyah must resign. They reportedly are now considering a proposal that the President be replaced by a caretaker government that would oversee the election of a new civilian president. Franjiyah might agree to such an arrangement; a precedent was set in 1952.

Damascus radio last night broadcast a statement by Asad affirming that the Syrian mediation effort will continue. Asad called on all sides "to maintain their self-control" during the negotiations. This close and public identification of Asad with the negotiations suggests that Damascus sees some signs of progress in the talks.

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CHINA

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USSR-SOMALIA

Somali President Siad, who has been in Moscow since the Soviet party congress, appears to be lobbying hard for increased Soviet diplomatic, military, and economic support for his policies in the Horn of Africa. He may be encountering difficulty, however, in gaining Moscow's open backing for his ultimate goal--annexation of the French Territory of the Afars and Issas.

Pravda's bland account of Siad's meeting with President Podgorny last week suggested that Moscow's commitment to Mogadiscio continues, but that the two leaders differ on the specifics of support. No mention was made of the FTAI dispute, suggesting that Moscow is reluctant to identify itself with Siad's position. The Soviet armed forces newspaper *Red Star* also failed to mention the FTAI in its front-page coverage of Siad's discussions with Defense Minister Grechko.

Moscow has said little publicly on the FTAI problem and privately has cautioned Siad to rely on political pressure and subversion to achieve his ends in the territory. The Soviets evidently do not want Siad to precipitate a war with Ethiopia that would compel them to come to his assistance to the detriment of their relations with Addis Ababa.

Moscow would also like the French to bow out of the situation with a minimum of disruption to Franco-Soviet relations. Tass, for example, applauded French Foreign Minister Sauvagnargues' recent statement that Paris intends to grant independence to the FTAI after "broad consultations" with all political parties and a referendum attended by "international observers."

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NOTES

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Yugoslav President Tito [redacted]
[redacted] *on the canal issue during his talks in*
Panama earlier this week [redacted]
[redacted]

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[redacted] The Yugoslav President bal-
anced his "full support" for Panama on the canal
question with the observation that successful ne-
gotiations are in the interest of both states.
Panamanian news coverage avoided anti-US themes
during the visit, presumably on orders from the
Torrijos government.

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Thai security forces are preparing for the
possibility of leftist-inspired anti-US demonstra-
tions in Bangkok this Saturday--the deadline im-
posed by the government last year for the with-
drawal of all foreign military forces from Thai-
land.

The size and nature of the demonstrations will
depend in part on the outcome of current Thai-US
negotiations over a residual US military presence.
There is also a danger that groups in the military
may try to exploit the situation this weekend. If
student and labor groups stage violent demonstra-
tions, the army might declare martial law. All com-
bat forces in the Bangkok area were put on full alert
early today.

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