

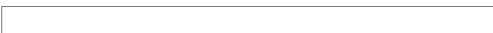


The President's Daily Brief

March 19, 1976

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SOUTH AFRICA - ANGOLA

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CUBA-AFRICA

Fidel Castro, in his speech in Conakry on Monday, touched only briefly on the situations in Rhodesia and Namibia and directed his harshest comments at the remaining South African presence in Angola.

While this criticism was couched in belligerent language, he appeared to be giving assurances that the South African interests in the Cunene dam would be protected if their troops were withdrawn.

Castro's aggressive posture in Conakry was probably due in part to his desire to maintain his reputation as one of the world's leading revolutionaries. His de-emphasis of Rhodesia and Namibia suggests he is wary of overplaying Cuba's military role in Africa and sparking local concern over the presence of Cuban troops.

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NOTES

The Egyptian cabinet resigned yesterday and President Sadat has asked Prime Minister Salim to form a new government, which may be named today.

The reorganization is aimed chiefly at the economic ministries and will essentially be a palliative aimed at giving the appearance of progress toward resolving economic grievances. Some of those to be replaced are under attack for inefficiency; others, ironically, for trying to press programs too vigorously. Salim is an able administrator and has been largely responsible for the recent modest acceleration in the government's economic program.

President Sadat is being criticized by labor leaders for stating in his speech last Sunday that Egyptians will have to face five more years of austerity. A labor union official has told the US embassy that workers had expected some commitment from Sadat on price stabilization and wage increases.

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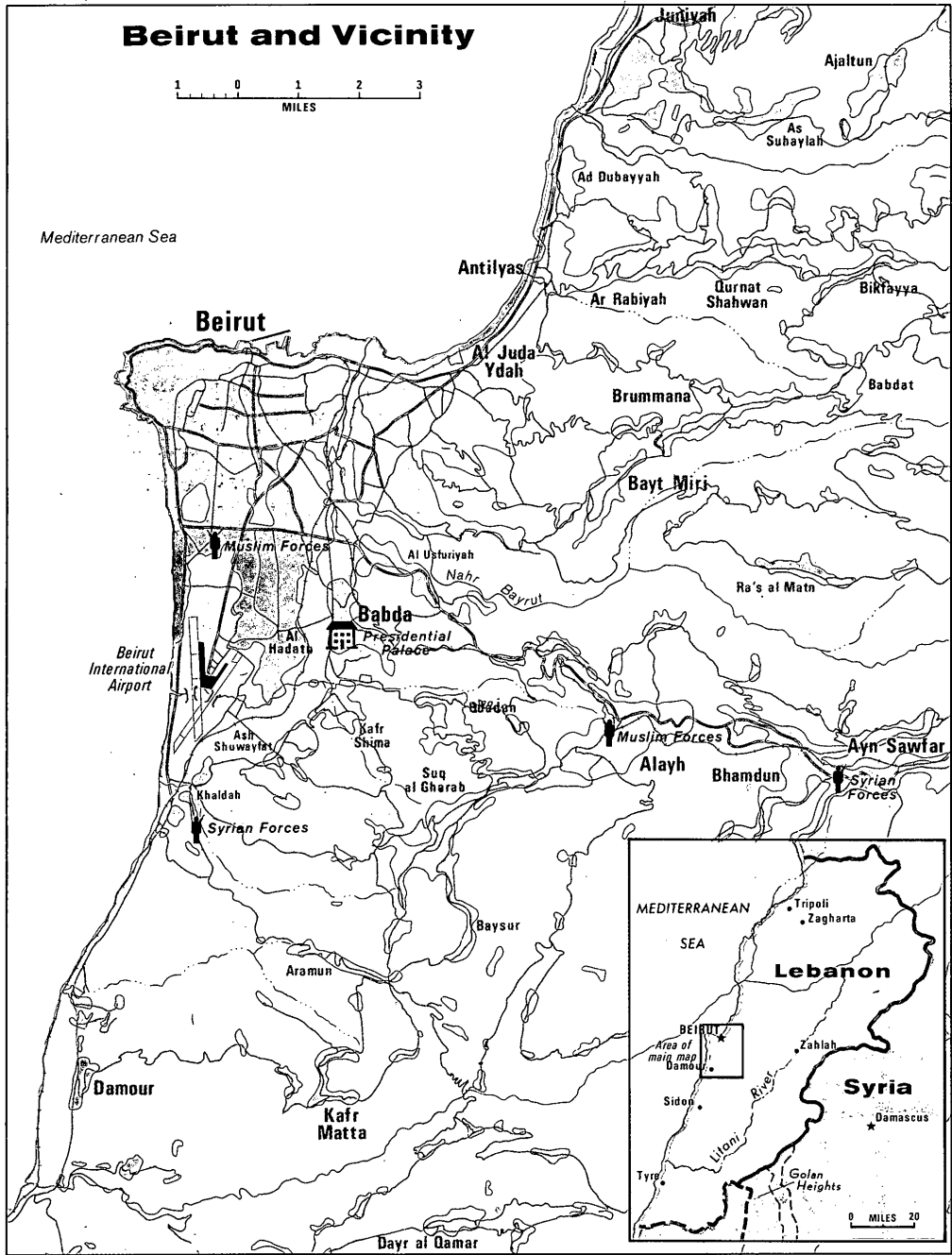
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SYRIAN INTERVENTION IN LEBANON

The limited intervention of regular Syrian military forces in central Lebanon this week is a measure of President Asad's determination to arrest the deterioration in the security situation and to force a political solution on the Lebanese.

The introduction of some 1,000 Syrian regulars, thinly disguised as additional elements of the Palestine Liberation Army and reportedly supported by some tanks, appears to have been a calculated gamble with three immediate objectives:

- to help fill the military vacuum created by the rapid collapse of the Lebanese army;
- to prevent the Muslim forces under Lieutenant Khatib from attacking the Christian forces defending President Franjiah;
- to speed Franjiah's resignation and control the selection of his successor.

Since Syria's leverage in Lebanon hinges on its potential to bring overwhelming military pressure to bear, President Asad apparently concluded that the presence of at least some Syrian regulars was necessary to reassert Syrian control. He probably felt this was the only way to prevent a slide back into civil war and to get implementation of the reform package that was achieved through Syrian mediation last month back on track.

We believe that Asad is prepared to augment, in a controlled manner, the number of Syrian regulars in central and northern Lebanon if that is required to break the political impasse in Beirut.

The Syrian Rationale

The principal Syrian aim in Lebanon is to restore stability and achieve a political accommodation acceptable to both Lebanese Christians and Muslims. The Syrians believe that Franjiah's resignation is necessary, and they want to control

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the choice of his successor; but they are not attempting to deprive the Christians of the presidency nor are they prepared now to impose a Muslim-dominated government on Lebanon.

In our view, Syria does not intend to try to annex Lebanon. On the other hand, the Syrians probably do not believe they can abandon their mediation efforts and allow the resumption of a full-scale civil war. They have said repeatedly that they will not allow the partition of Lebanon, which almost certainly would be the result of a civil war.

The Syrian decision to inject regular forces was stimulated by the rapid disintegration of the Lebanese army. The army's collapse, the revolt of Muslim army elements led by Lieutenant Khatib, and the attempted coup by Brigadier Ahdab underscored the fact that there was no Lebanese force capable of providing nationwide security and enforcing the provisions of the political reform package worked out in February.

Syrian Chief of Staff Shihabi told Ambassador Murphy last week that the Palestine Liberation Army was inadequate to provide security throughout the country. Moreover, the main Palestinian groups in Lebanon--Fatah and Saiqa--are not capable of maintaining security outside areas under their immediate control. They are often at loggerheads, and are themselves a central issue in the Lebanese dispute.

The introduction of Syrian forces was designed in part to reinforce President Asad's mediation effort. Asad apparently calculated that he could make no further progress through political suasion without applying some military pressure. He probably calculated that the Israelis would accept that his only goal was to stabilize the situation and achieve a political breakthrough.

Asad would have preferred, we believe, not to risk a hostile Israeli reaction by using Syrian regulars. He has staked considerable prestige in the achievement of a successful Syrian mediation. He hopes to preserve the enhanced stature he has gained throughout the Arab world because of his mediation efforts to date and wants to avoid criticism, especially from President Sadat. Asad also wants to

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avoid giving an opening to those in Syria who have been urging him to side more forcefully with Lebanese Muslims and leftists.

Nevertheless, Asad concluded that some form of intervention by regular forces was necessary to protect his heavy political investment in Lebanon.

Syria's Next Step

The immediate consequence of Syria's action has been to stabilize the security situation--at least temporarily. Syria probably will have to keep some regular forces in Lebanon, at least until President Franjyah resigns. It is also unlikely that Syrian forces will be withdrawn entirely until there is discernible progress in reconstituting the Lebanese army. The Syrians apparently took their action with the aim of forcing a quick breakthrough. They would not hesitate to apply additional pressure, probably in the form of more troops, if it appeared the the Lebanese were attempting to drag their feet again.

In the event of a renewed civil war, we believe the Syrians would feel compelled to intervene on a still larger scale to impose a truce.

In the absence of a renewed civil war, we do not believe the Syrians are likely to send division-size units into Lebanon or to deploy sizable Syrian units in the sensitive southern Lebanese-Israeli border area. The Syrians would, however, take such action in the event Israel attempted to occupy southern Lebanon.

We do not believe the Syrians want to become bogged down in a sustained police action in Lebanon. They probably would leave a substantial PLA contingent in place, however, until a reconstituted Lebanese army proved it was capable of maintaining adequate security. Eventually, we think Syria would withdraw the bulk of the PLA.

Israel's Reaction

Although the Israelis are showing signs of increasing nervousness over developments in Lebanon, they continue to react with restraint and appear hopeful of being able to avoid being drawn into the

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Israel also continues to conduct reconnaissance flights over Lebanon and off the Lebanese coast. The Lebanese-Israeli border is relatively quiet, with only a few minor shooting incidents. The Israelis continue to occupy several positions during daylight hours just inside Lebanon astride major fedayeen infiltration routes into Israel.

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Any decision to intervene is likely to depend largely on Israel's perception of the situation there as it might affect Israel's security. Defense Minister Peres told reporters in January that if the Syrians invaded Lebanon, Israel's reaction would depend on the security situation "along the northern border with Lebanon," suggesting that Israel would not intervene if the Syrians sent some troops in as long as they stayed out of southern Lebanon and that area remained calm.

We believe the Israelis would send their forces across the border if the Syrians intervened in Lebanon with large armored units, if the Palestine Liberation Army concentrated large numbers of troops in southern Lebanon close to the Israeli border, or if fedayeen or leftist Muslim units began shelling Israeli settlements or stepped up cross-border operations.

Any Israeli military intervention is likely to be confined to southern Lebanon. The size of Israeli forces involved, as well as the duration and depth of the intervention, would depend largely on the nature of the threat perceived by the Israelis. Thus, if the Syrians intervened on a massive scale, the Israelis would be likely to respond in kind, sending their forces as far as the Litani River and remaining as long as the Syrians.

If the objective were to counter a terrorist threat, the Israelis would limit the size of the intervention force, the depth of its penetration, and the length of its stay.

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