



The President's Daily Brief

April 16, 1976

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

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LEBANON: *Fighting flared up in Lebanon yesterday as Christian militiamen seized two villages in the mountainous region east of Beirut. The Christian advances apparently triggered moves by leftist forces on Christian-held territory in the capital. None of the principal combatants has formally renounced the cease-fire, however, and so far the escalation of fighting has not prompted any new advances by Syrian forces or the introduction of additional troops.*

The Christians claim they seized the towns of Bayt Shabab and Duhur ash-Shuwayr because of persistent mortar shelling from the two villages. There may be some truth, however, in charges from leftist leader Kamal Jumblatt that the Christians are trying to provoke a leftist counterattack in order to draw Syrian regular forces in central Lebanon closer to Beirut.

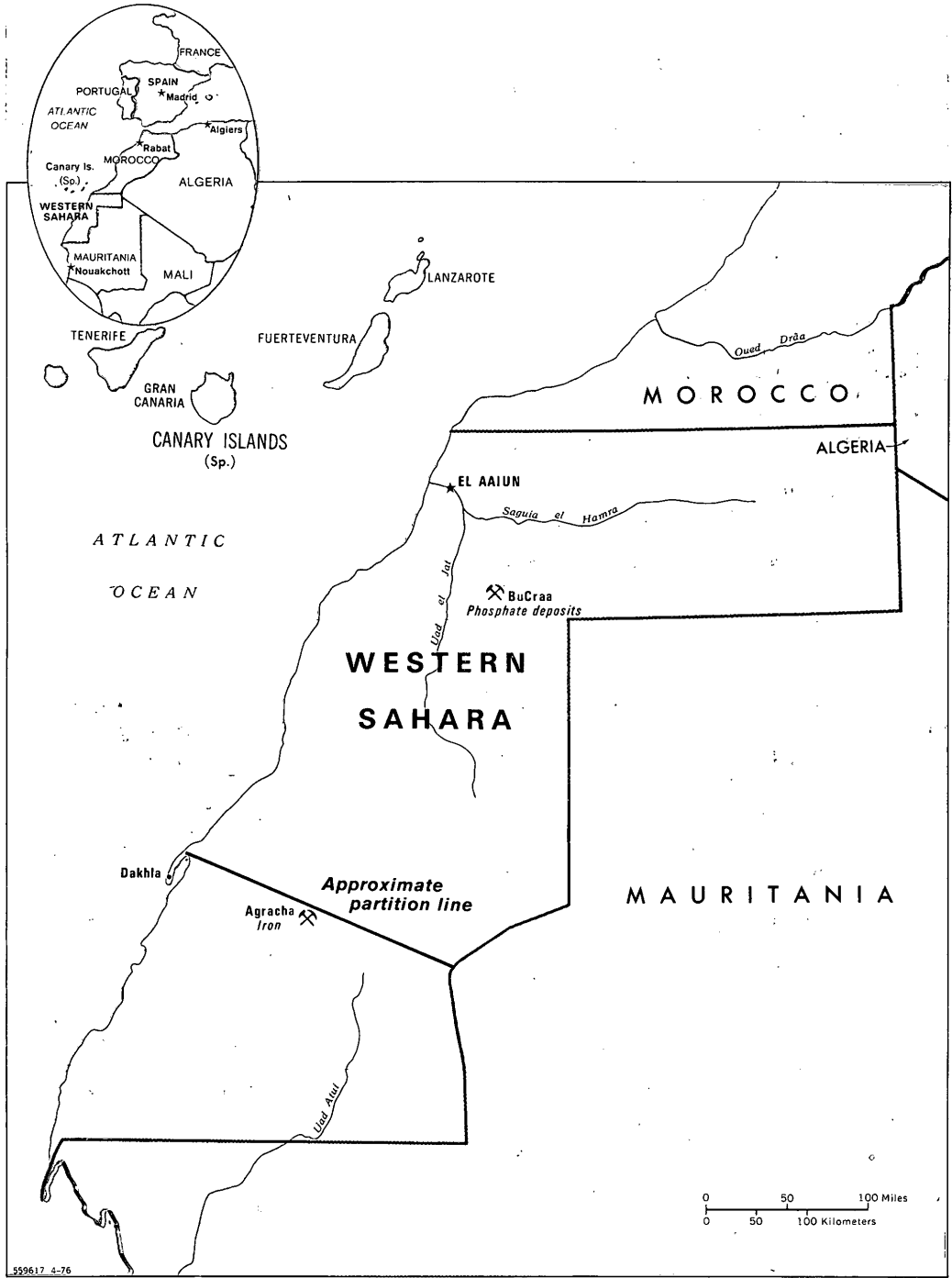
Syrian troops based in Beirut apparently have not been involved in the fighting there, which appears to be concentrated in the areas adjacent to the large Christian section of Ashrafiyah. Some Syrian forces in Tripoli, however, appear to have clashed with local leftists and elements of the renegade Muslim army.

The sudden increase in fighting--although clearly a threat to the truce--is largely an extension of the intense political maneuvering. Both the Christians and the leftists want to improve their positions on the ground before the final round of bargaining over President Franjiah's successor. Moreover, the controversy over Syrian intervention and the stability of the cease-fire are now key issues in the presidential contest.

Ilyas Sarkis, the preferred candidate of the Syrians and Maronite Christians, is believed to favor a major peace-keeping role for Syria, while Jumblatt's choice, Raymond Edde, totally rejects that idea. Despite Edde's and Jumblatt's strong objections, Muslim support for Syria's continued presence appears to be growing.

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The Israelis may [redacted] be nearing the limits of their tolerance of Syrian military moves in Lebanon. If the Syrians build up their forces in Sidon and especially Tyre, which is south of the Litani River, there is a strong possibility that the Israelis will initiate a limited intervention into southern Lebanon to signal the Syrians to confine their actions to a peace-keeping role. Israel would probably seek to avoid a direct military confrontation with any Syrian or other Arab forces already in the south.

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WESTERN SAHARA: *Morocco and Mauritania have made another move to establish formal sovereignty over Western Sahara by announcing on Wednesday a final agreement to partition the territory.*

The text of the agreement indicates Morocco will acquire the northern two thirds of the territory. Morocco thus will acquire the rich phosphate reserves at Bu Craa, while Mauritania will gain control of the lucrative fishing industry at Dakhla and the unexploited iron ore at Agracha.

Algeria is certain to condemn the partition as illegal. It still holds Spain accountable as Western

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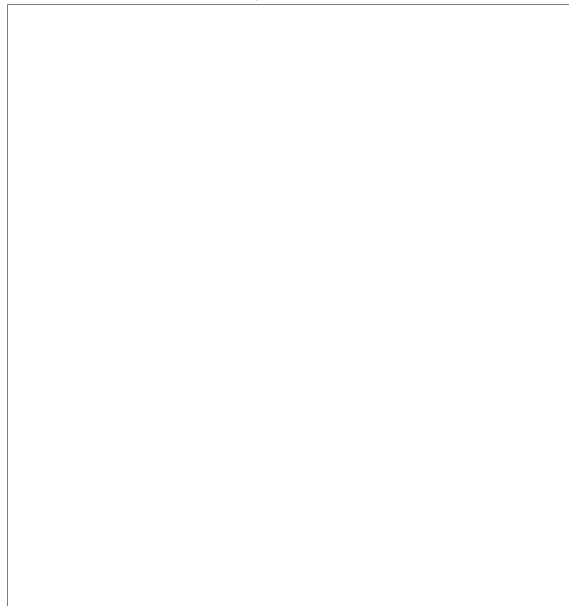
Sahara's administering state and continues to support Polisario Front guerrillas seeking independence for the territory. The Algerians also hope to keep the UN involved in the dispute by exploiting a forthcoming report by a UN envoy who was not allowed to stop in Morocco and Mauritania because he met with Polisario Front representatives in Algeria.

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Last year's harvest failure in the USSR is causing localized food shortages.

Some severe shortages are occurring in rural areas, although supplies of most foods remain adequate in the central areas of major cities. A foreign observer

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claimed he had "never seen the food situation so bad as now" in the Moscow suburbs. Some shortages will ease as the new crop becomes available. Moscow also might be able to bolster the low meat supplies by importing. Since the beginning of the year there have been rumors of contracts with New Zealand, Australia, and France.

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