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The President's Daily Brief

May 10, 1976

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~~Top Secret~~ 25X1

Exempt from general
declassification schedule of E.O. 11652
exemption category 58(1)(2)(3)
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LEBANON: *Ilyas Sarkis' near unanimous endorsement as president on Saturday was a major political setback for leftist leader Kamal Jumblatt, who attempted to impede the vote.*

Fierce fighting in Beirut on Saturday near Sarkis' hotel and parliament's temporary headquarters has died down. Our embassy in Beirut has expressed concern, however, that Jumblatt is becoming increasingly irrational in his campaign to thwart Syrian influence in Lebanon and may be prepared to press his fight.

Sarkis' victory, on the other hand, has given a much-needed boost to Syrian policy in Lebanon and should strengthen Damascus' hand in dealing with Jumblatt. The Syrians recently have become frustrated by the elusiveness of a political settlement. The success of the election should ease their frustration and give fresh momentum to their recent efforts to isolate Jumblatt politically.

There are tentative indications that at least a battalion of Syrian regular troops began moving toward Beirut yesterday. It is not clear whether these forces crossed into Lebanon over the weekend or are a contingent from the Syrian force that has been based in eastern Lebanon since April 9.

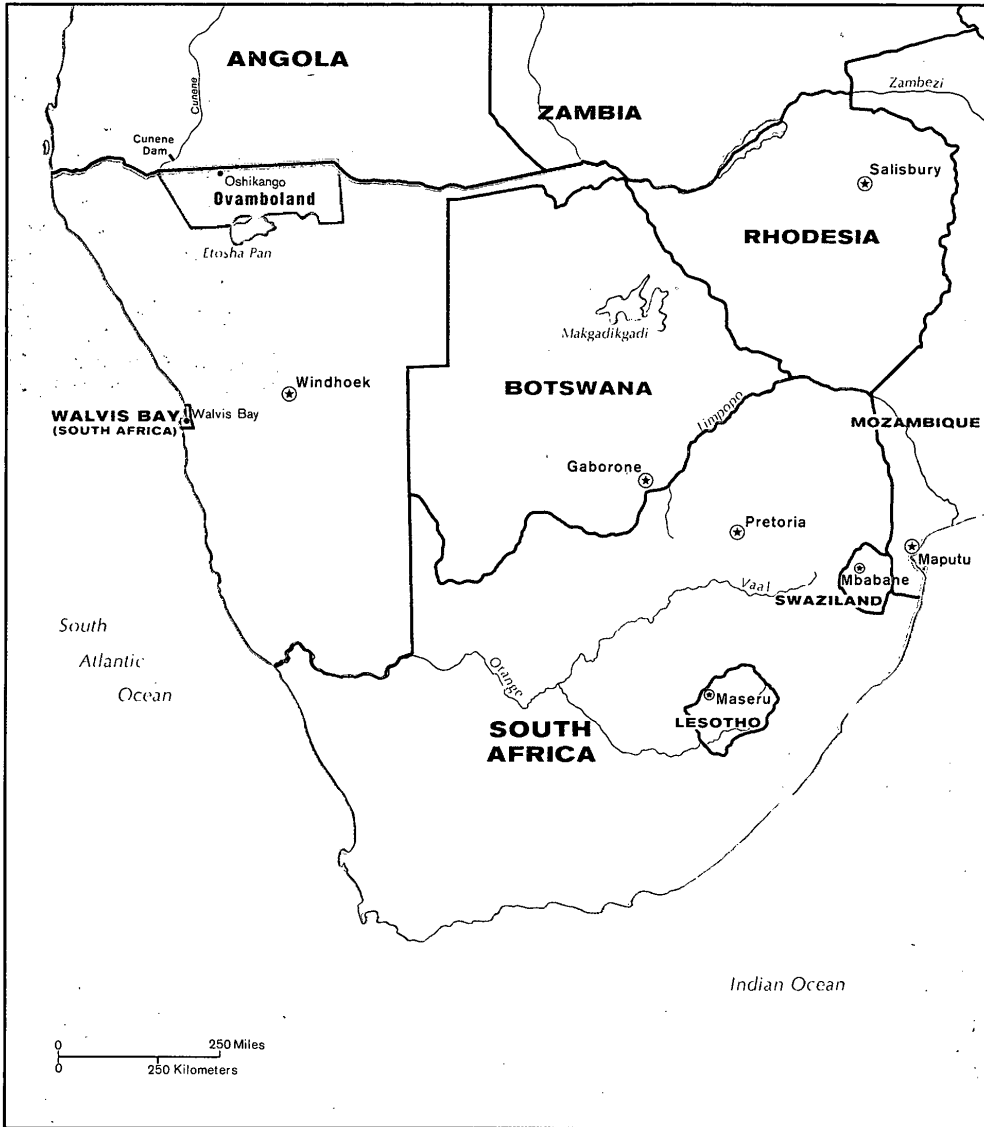
The Syrian battalion reportedly has taken a southerly route through Mashgharah and Jazzin rather than the Beirut-Damascus highway. Although the Syrians generally have avoided using the southern access to Beirut in order not to raise Israeli suspicions, they have decided to take the risk this time to avoid fighting in the mountains between Christian and leftist forces.

The Syrians have been reluctant to use their regular forces in a blatant way that would increase

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NAMIBIA (SOUTH-WEST AFRICA)



animosity toward their presence in Lebanon. Damascus may now feel, however, that an open show of force is necessary not only to ensure Sarkis' installation in office but also to intimidate Jumblatt's forces.

If Sarkis is able to assume office without the cease-fire collapsing, his leadership could provide significant new impetus to a political solution. He is respected in broader Christian circles, and unlike most Lebanese politicians, he has few enemies within either the Christian or Muslim establishments.

Sarkis also has had frequent personal contact with Jumblatt over the past several weeks and apparently is trying to arrange further dialogue. His understanding of Jumblatt's position and willingness to deal with him directly could be important ingredients for future reconciliation.

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NAMIBIA: South Africa has announced that it is establishing a security buffer zone along the Namibia-Angola border. The buffer zone will be one kilometer wide and is intended to prevent guerrilla incursions by the South-West African People's Organization that operates out of Angola.

According to Pretoria, all tribesmen living in the buffer zone will be resettled. Border crossings from Namibia to Angola will be restricted to Oshikango and two other locations for personnel working on the Cunene River project.

South Africa reportedly first considered establishing the security zone last fall but decided against it. Since September, however, there have been a series of small scale attacks in northern Namibia that South Africa blames on intruders from Angola.

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ITALY: Party leaders are beginning to plot campaign strategy following the collapse of the Moro government and President Leone's decision to hold an election on June 20-21.

The Christian Democrats are divided and disoriented on the eve of the campaign. They continue to disagree among themselves on the question that will be at the center of campaign debate: the future role of the Communist Party. In addition, the Lockheed scandal has become a problem of major proportions for the party.

The campaigns of the Communists and Socialists, by contrast, have already begun to take shape. While they will be competing with each other, both are likely to emphasize that the Christian Democrats are worn out, corrupt, and unresponsive to the country's needs after 30 years in power.

Three of the smaller parties--the Social Democratic, Republican, and Liberal--have taken tentative steps toward presenting joint lists of candidates. Fundamental differences between them, however, will make maintaining a united front through the campaign difficult.

The campaign is almost certain to produce further politically motivated violence by left and right extremists who operate outside the regular political parties.

The Communists, who seem to be viewed by an increasing number of Italians as the only party capable of restoring order, appear best positioned to benefit politically from an upsurge of violence during the campaign.

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