

The President's Daily Brief

December 22, 1976

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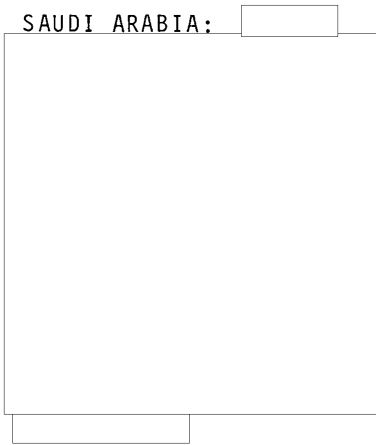
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EGYPT-SYRIA: *The plans revealed yesterday for eventual unity between Egypt and Syria probably will never come to fruition, but the announcement underscores, primarily for the benefit of the US and Israel, the two countries' determination to be united on Middle East peace negotiating tactics.*

Egypt and Syria probably do not intend to work toward a full merger. Their joint declaration on the subject and subsequent remarks by the Syrian and Egyptian foreign ministers mentioned "relations of unity" rather than "union." A separate communique issued by the presidents of the two countries made only scant reference to the unified political command to be established to lay the basis for "unity."

Syrian President Asad and Egyptian President Sadat, who probably still harbor private suspicions about each other, no doubt view the unified political command as a useful mechanism for keeping each other in line.

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This is particularly true of Asad, who undoubtedly fears that Sadat, despite his disclaimers, could again adopt an independent negotiating policy, as he did last year in pursuit of the second Sinai agreement. Asad probably looks on the joint command as a means of better ensuring that Sadat will coordinate policy and of preventing Sadat from again moving too far ahead of Syria and the other Arab countries.

Sadat, for his part, has become increasingly concerned over the last year about Asad's rising stature in the Arab world and particularly about Syria's efforts to gain control over the Palestine Liberation Organization. He probably sees the joint command as a way of maintaining some Egyptian influence over both the Palestinian movement and Syrian negotiating policies.

SYRIA-JORDAN: *President Asad's desire to strengthen Syrian-Egyptian relations in preparation for the next round of Middle East peace negotiations has lead him to mute further talk of federation with Jordan.*

The Syrians are reluctant to move toward more formal ties at present because of their desire to work out a common Middle East negotiating strategy with Saudi Arabia as well as Egypt.

Asad knows that President Sadat and the Saudis are already deeply suspicious of growing political cooperation between Syria and Jordan and would probably oppose a federation. The Saudis balked over financing the Jordanian Hawk missile deal with the US earlier this year partly because of their mistrust of Husayn's ties with Syria.

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Asad is likely to continue to foster closer relations with Husayn, taking special care to allay Jordanian fears of Syrian domination. Whether these ties take the form of a formal arrangement probably matters little to Asad.

The Syrians at present regard Husayn primarily as a useful channel both for gaining a sympathetic hearing for their views in Washington and for exploring ideas with the US for avoiding a negotiating impasse.

Asad clearly hopes that closer military cooperation will ensure Jordanian support in disputes with Iraq, or any future war with Israel.

Husayn believes close relations with Syria are essential to prevent Jordan from becoming isolated in the Arab world and to enable it to strengthen its position against the Palestine Liberation Organization. Husayn is in direct competition with the PLO for the loyalty of the Palestinians, particularly those within Jordan, where more than half the population is Palestinian.

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USSR-JAPAN: The USSR has apparently decided to resume normal relations with Japan in the aftermath of the MIG-25 incident.

Late last week, the Soviets informed the Japanese that they were ready to schedule two economic meetings they had threatened to postpone because of Japan's handling of the MIG-25 incident. They also promised the Japanese an early meeting to work out the problems for Japan that result from the USSR's recent imposition of a 200-nautical-mile exclusive fisheries zone.

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The USSR issued a great deal of propaganda on Japan's handling of the MIG-25 incident, but the only concrete retaliation seems to have been the seizure of an abnormally large number of Japanese fishing boats in September and October for alleged violations of Soviet territorial waters.

The Soviets were reluctant to carry out their threats to retaliate in other economic areas because Soviet-Japanese economic cooperation benefits the USSR as much as it does Japan. The USSR, moreover, did not want to give China an advantage with Japan's new leaders by prolonged remonstrances over the MIG-25 affair.

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NOTES

South Yemen has released the surviving pilot of the Iranian reconnaissance plane shot down last month.

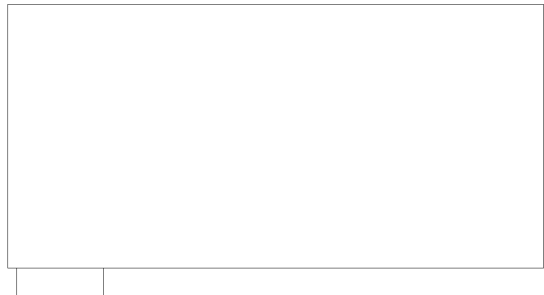
Progress has also been made on the more difficult issue of recovering the aircraft--an F-4--which crashed off the South Yemeni coast.

Iran has been concerned lest a communist government gain access to the plane in the course of salvage operations. According to an official statement from Saudi Arabia, which has acted as intermediary in negotiations, Saudi "experts" will participate in the salvage operations and the aircraft will be returned to Iran.

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The quadripartite committee charged with overseeing the truce in Lebanon--composed of representatives of Syria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait--is unable to agree on a course of action for collecting heavy weapons from the combatants.

All the parties have been caching their weapons since the cease-fire, and there is little likelihood that any will hand them over voluntarily. Camille Shamun's National Liberal Party has taken a step toward turning in heavy arms, but a spokesman has made it clear that the party will turn no arms over to the Lebanese government until the quadripartite committee has adopted a 25X1 definitive plan.



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For the second time in little over a month, Soviet and East European diplomats have walked out of a Chinese state banquet.

Chinese Vice Premier Li Hsien-nien had sharply criticized the USSR during a reception for the visiting South Yemeni head of state, charging that Moscow will be the "main source" of a new war and lambasting Soviet "expansion" in the Arab countries.

Li's accusations are the first high-level Chinese comment on Soviet activities since the Sino-Soviet border talks reopened in Peking earlier this month.

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