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LEBANON

Lebanese political leaders yesterday traded accusations over the causes of the most recent fighting, while Syria continued its efforts to mediate the dispute.

Interior Minister Shamun and Phalanges Party leader Jumayyil charged yesterday that "communists" were behind the recent trouble at Sibnay, a small Muslim village southeast of Beirut where Shamun's forces clashed with Muslims allied with Socialist leader Jumblatt early in the week. Jumblatt has again called for Shamun's resignation—along with that of President Franjiah—and issued his standard demand for political and economic concessions from the Christians.

The bickering between Shamun and Jumblatt reportedly has prompted the Syrians to summon the latter back to Damascus for another round of talks. The Syrians apparently warned Jumblatt during his visit last week that he would lose the backing of Syrian-supported groups in Lebanon if he did not "shape up." He is expected to return to the Syrian capital within the next few days.

General Shihabi, Syrian army chief of staff, arrived in Beirut yesterday, presumably to inform Prime Minister Karami of Syria's mediation plans. President Asad apparently intends to delay sending Foreign Minister Khaddam to Beirut until the cease-fire becomes more effective.

Fighting diminished in most of Beirut's suburbs yesterday, but armed clashes continued in the Tripoli-Zagharta area in the far north. Lebanese security forces aided by Palestinian patrols are moving into the disputed area, and members of the Syrian-controlled Saiqa fedayeen group apparently are trying to arrange a truce between Christian and Muslim militiamen [redacted]

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SPAIN

Moves by the government to liberalize the political system are falling short of leftist expectations while stirring up strong opposition from the far right.

Leftist demonstrations in Madrid last Thursday illustrate the government's difficulty in making a convincing show of liberalization. A government spokesman reportedly had said earlier in the week that peaceful manifestations of opposition would be tolerated, and this break with the Franco tradition was confirmed when the Interior Ministry gave permission for the demonstration.

When several hundred leftists gathered in front of the Ministry of Justice, however, they were attacked by members of the extreme rightist Guerrillas of Christ the King. The attack triggered intervention by police, who by most accounts used a minimum of force to disperse the crowd. At least two wounded demonstrators were taken to the hospital.

The demonstration, like most recent leftist rallies, focused on demands for complete amnesty for all political prisoners. King Juan Carlos' pardon decree of November 25 has been widely criticized by the left on the grounds that its ambiguous wording would allow the government to favor common criminals while virtually excluding political prisoners.

In fact, of the estimated 15,000 prisoners in Spanish jails, almost a third have already been freed by the King's pardon. Only 235 of those released are considered political prisoners, but the US embassy in Madrid estimates this may constitute almost half of all political prisoners. Leftists claim, however, there are some 2,000 political prisoners, and they will doubtless continue their protests.

The new minister of justice, Antonio Garrigues, may interpret the decree more liberally than his predecessor, paving the way for further releases. The government has already taken steps to improve its image by releasing two of Spain's best known political prisoners—dissident priest Francisco Garcia Salve and Communist labor leader Marcelino Camacho. Both men were originally freed by the King's pardon and shortly thereafter rearrested for inciting demonstrations.

A few hours after the new cabinet was announced on December 11, Camacho was again released, reportedly at the command of the director of the security police acting on orders from Juan Carlos. Shortly after Thursday's demonstration, Father Garcia Salve also was set free.

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In other moves, the government has lifted previous fines levied on priests for "objectionable" sermons, and the minister of education has annulled some sanctions on students who violated academic discipline. The military also has dropped charges against three of the officers detained last summer on charges of sedition.

While the government's initial moves toward liberalization have failed to appease the left, they have stirred up opposition in the rightist-dominated parliament. Yesterday, right-wingers in parliament called on Prime Minister Arias to appear before the legislature to explain the government's "political projects."

Parliamentary critics also singled out the new foreign minister, Jose Maria de Areilza, who said on Wednesday that the exiled head of the Spanish Communist Party, Santiago Carrillo, is entitled to a passport "like any other Spaniard," and should not be discriminated against because of his ideology. Areilza went on to point out, however, that "problems of a judicial nature" might await Carrillo in Spain should he return.

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PORTUGAL-AZORES

All but one member of the six-man Regional Council—the chief Azorean governing body—reportedly threatened to resign Thursday, after learning that the Portuguese cabinet had refused to grant the Council the degree of administrative power it desired. The sixth member is likely to follow suit.

The decree, approved by the cabinet on Tuesday, in fact delegates less authority to the Regional Council than it had already assumed for itself in the absence of any guidelines. The cabinet may have believed that, with the waning of sentiment on the islands for independence, the granting of limited powers would satisfy the islanders' demands for autonomy. Clearly it does not.

The Council members reportedly believe that their threat to resign, which is being conveyed to Lisbon by Azorean military governor Maghalaes, who is sympathetic to the drive for autonomy, will be enough to make Lisbon reconsider.

The new decree does seem out of phase with a draft autonomy statute that the Portuguese government has been reviewing, and it may not be Lisbon's final decision in the matter. After the cabinet has time to examine the draft statute more fully, and is made aware of the adverse reaction on the islands to its latest decree, additional concessions may well be made.

If not, there are likely to be renewed calls for independence in the islands.

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ARGENTINA

The air force revolt is still not completely settled. Press reports state that the service commanders have asked for the resignation of President Peron as the only solution to the crisis.

Military leaders seem unsure of whether to oust the air force rebel officer group or let the government stamp out the revolt. Peron has apparently been placed in the untenable position of either ordering the army to put down the revolt or stepping down as chief executive. Army commander General Videla has urged all of his units to remain "aloof" from the rebellion and has indirectly called for the President to resign.

In press statements yesterday, the President refused to resign. Opposition Senate leaders later called on her to request a leave of absence, implying that this was the only way to avoid a military takeover.

The military will reportedly make no move until the government takes a stand. A likely solution would be for Peron to step down and allow Senate President Luder to assume the presidency under the constitutional succession law. This would allow the much-desired change in government to transpire as well as obviate the necessity for a military government.

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OAU

The Organization of African Unity announced yesterday that a majority of its 46 member states have agreed to hold an emergency summit meeting on Angola from January 10 to 12 in Addis Ababa.

The summit—the OAU’s first extraordinary gathering of chiefs of state since the inception of the organization 12 years ago—will be preceded by a two-day meeting of foreign ministers. The ministerial session will debate various approaches for dealing with the Angola situation and set the agenda for the summit.

OAU members are badly divided over the Angola problem, and the summit—which could turn out to be acrimonious—may contribute little toward an African solution to the conflict. Most OAU states still cling to an outwardly neutral position, but South Africa’s much-publicized role in support of the National Union is causing many governments to waver. South Africa’s intervention is considered a more immediate threat to the integrity of Angola and to African interests than is either Soviet or Cuban involvement.

At the summit, supporters of the Popular Movement will try to get the conferees to abandon the OAU’s present stance of neutrality and to recognize the Movement as the sole legitimate government of Angola. They will argue that South African intervention on behalf of the Popular Movement’s rivals has made it impossible to work toward the OAU’s previous goal of a government of national unity. They probably will push for a resolution that condemns South Africa and asks OAU members to aid the Popular Movement.

The few African governments that privately support the National Front and the National Union—none has officially recognized their regime—want to keep the OAU officially neutral. These countries and National Union leader Jonas Savimbi hope in the short time left before the summit opens to promote a backlash against Soviet and Cuban assistance to the Popular Movement. Support will be sought at the summit for a blanket condemnation of all outside involvement in Angola, including the US, and for a cease-fire and a government of national unity.

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VIETNAM

The South Vietnamese communists will convene a conference this weekend in Saigon of representatives from "all walks of life," ostensibly to discuss the procedures for formal reunification. In reality, the conference will merely rubber-stamp the decisions announced last month in Saigon following a joint conference of senior government and party officials from both North and South.

Last month's conference announced plans for a census to determine the number of South Vietnamese representatives needed for a new joint National Assembly. Following the census, a nationwide election for the new assembly will be held.

There are conflicting accounts concerning the progress of the census. [redacted]

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The communists have officially announced that the reunification process will be completed by the "first half of 1976." They may intend formal reunification to coincide with three important anniversaries in the spring: April 30, the first anniversary of the collapse of South Vietnam; May 15, the first anniversary of formal celebrations commemorating the communist victory; May 19, the birthday of the "father of the country," Ho Chi Minh. [redacted]

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CAMBODIA-LAOS

Cambodia has for the first time supported Laos and Vietnam in their demand that the Thai expel the remaining US military presence from Thailand.

The joint communique issued yesterday following the visit to Phnom Penh by Lao Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Phoun Sipaseut stated that both countries face a threat to "peace and security" as long as US military bases and Lao and Cambodian "traitors" remain in Thailand. This is the first official Lao visit to Cambodia since the communist take-over there and reciprocates the visit of Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister Ieng Sary to Laos in October.

Endorsement of Hanoi's position on the US presence in Thailand reflects Phnom Penh's concern that it keep more or less in line with its communist neighbors in Indochina. The Cambodians, however, have not joined Hanoi and Vientiane in insisting that Bangkok return all aircraft and military equipment taken into Thailand during the last stages of the war as a precondition for normalizing relations. Phnom Penh's continued silence on this issue may reflect its interest in improving relations with Thailand and the Cambodian leadership's apparent determination to maintain a basically independent stance in Indochina. [REDACTED]

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SOUTH KOREA

The removal of Prime Minister Kim Chong-pil in a cabinet shuffle yesterday eliminates a major political figure whom President Pak may regard as a potential rival.

Kim, who had been prime minister since 1971, is one of the few politicians left in South Korea with substantial independent stature and popularity. He cited poor health as his reason for stepping down, but the move was obviously ordered by Pak. Although Kim was the chief architect of the coup that put Pak in power in 1961 and has been a faithful executor of Pak's policies, he apparently regarded himself as a logical presidential successor.

Kim was replaced by Choe Kyu-ha, who has been Pak's special assistant for foreign affairs. Unlike Kim, Choe has no independent stature. Nine other cabinet ministers, including the foreign minister, were replaced. Most of the new ministers, with the exception of the unimpressive Choe, appear to be technically proficient. More important, none is a political figure in his own right.

The cabinet changes mean a further personalization of Pak's control over the government ministries, not a change in policy. In addition to Choe, two other senior presidential assistants and several loyal assemblymen were moved into the cabinet. The cabinet shuffle apparently had been under consideration by Pak for some time, and the timing of the move suggests he wanted to take advantage of the quiet period following the end of the National Assembly's session on Thursday.

Kim's removal may be followed by moves against others who could emerge as rivals to Pak. Chong Il-kwon, for example, could be removed as speaker of the National Assembly when Pak reappoints some National Assembly members in March. [redacted]

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AUSTRALIA

The cabinet announced by Prime Minister Fraser on Thursday suggests a pragmatic approach by his new administration.

The appointment of Anthony Street, from the center of the Liberal spectrum, as labor minister will help reduce fears in the trade union movement that the new government is about to take harsh measures against the unions. Robert Hawke, president of the Australian Council of Trade Unions, is known to have a high personal regard for Street, and his appointment will help reduce the likelihood of widespread union strife.

One of the more liberal members of the Liberal Party, Andrew Peacock, has been confirmed as minister for foreign affairs. There had been some speculation Peacock would be dropped from this key ministry, which he held in Fraser's caretaker cabinet. Fraser sees Peacock as a potential rival but apparently retained him in deference to Peacock's strong support in the Liberal Party.

Although the Liberal Party's overwhelming election sweep would make it technically feasible to form a government without assistance from the National-Country Party, Fraser is clearly intent on keeping the coalition strong because the Liberals are likely to need the Country Party over the longer haul. These political considerations and Fraser's strong conservative bent seem to explain why the Country Party was awarded 6 of the 24 cabinet positions despite the party's current weak bargaining position.

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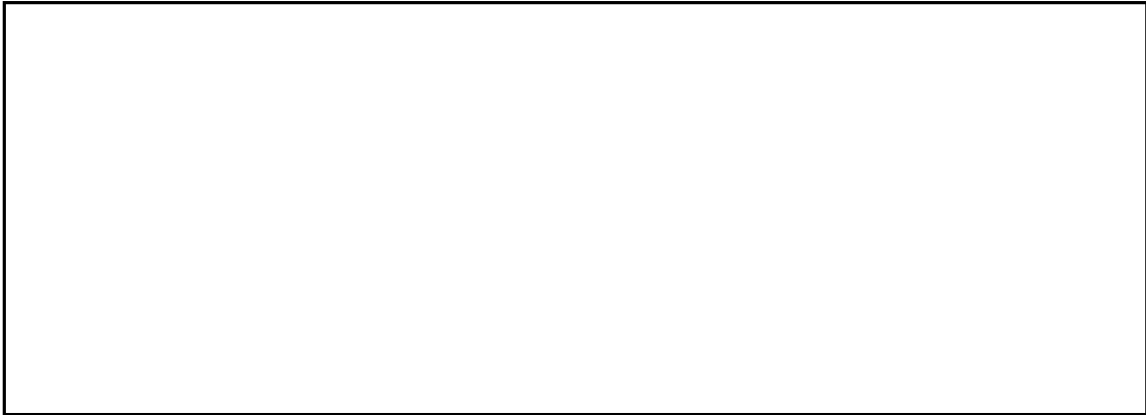
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FOR THE RECORD



MOZAMBIQUE: Forces loyal to the government appear firmly in control in Lourenco Marques. The authorities are rounding up the dissident members of the army and police who clashed with loyal troops on Wednesday and Thursday. Tensions have diminished, and businesses are open in the capital. The US embassy reports that the press accounts of widespread disorders have been highly exaggerated. Very few of the dissidents were active within the city itself; their main effort apparently was directed against army facilities in the outskirts.

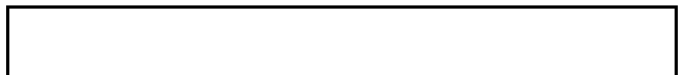


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