



The President's Daily Brief

February 6, 1975

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

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CAMBODIA

The Khmer communists have been on the attack in the Phnom Penh area for almost five weeks now. Although the Cambodian army has done a creditable job in containing insurgent initiatives in most areas around the capital, it has been unable to gain the upper hand. The supply situation in Phnom Penh is still tolerable but will not remain so for long.

Some army units, particularly the 7th Division manning the city's northwestern defenses, are losing strength rapidly. Commanders are shoring up weak points in the outer defenses with units from less active fronts. Reinforcements will begin to run short, however, if the communists continue their attacks.

Situation on the Mekong

Three Mekong River supply convoys succeeded in reaching Phnom Penh last month. The communists used mines to destroy three tugs in a convoy returning to South Vietnam on February 3, and yesterday mines sank three more tugs in a small convoy attempting the run upriver. The rest of the convoy turned back to South Vietnamese waters. Civilian crews and ships owners may now refuse to risk the trip upriver no matter what monetary incentives are offered. Cambodian navy personnel could man civilian vessels, but getting the permission of civilian owners for them to do so could be a lengthy process.

Even if civilian owners should agree to turn their vessels over to the navy, it will be difficult to accumulate enough tugs and cargo vessels to move the necessary supplies upstream. US officials are scouring the region for more cargo barges, which are less vulnerable to shellings than ships, but it may be impossible to round up enough to carry all of Phnom Penh's supply requirements.

Our mission in Phnom Penh has informed government leaders that the US does not consider a major airlift of supplies into the capital a realistic alternative to the Mekong supply route and is urging military commanders to make a major effort to reopen the river. Army commanders are now considering using a brigade, possibly from a provincial enclave, to reinforce a beachhead along the lower Mekong, and the navy will continue to use what little mine-sweeping equipment it has to clear the shipping channel.

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So far, however, neither the presence of government troops at beachheads nor mine-sweeping operations have been effective in preventing shipping losses. A massive infusion of manpower will be needed to push the insurgents back from the river, but unless Khmer communist military pressure around Phnom Penh eases, such large numbers of troops probably will not be available.

Supply Factors

Ammunition stocks in Phnom Penh on January 31 were sufficient to sustain the current level of fighting for three weeks; the stocks continue to be supplemented by air deliveries. Enough rice is on hand to meet military and civilian needs for over five weeks at the normal distribution rate and longer with rationing. Most fuel stocks will last through the end of the month.

Unless stocks are replenished soon, however, the government will have to take drastic steps. On the civilian side this will involve closing some rice distribution centers and sharp cutbacks in civilian fuel consumption. Civilian morale will sink as such measures are implemented. The government's options for conserving its military supplies are limited. If the situation continues to deteriorate the government may have to consider abandoning holdings in the countryside in order to commit its resources to the defense of Phnom Penh and the Mekong.

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USSR - MIDDLE EAST

Foreign Minister Gromyko appears to have made little progress in bridging the differences between the USSR and Egypt during his visit to Cairo this week. His earlier stay in Damascus seemed mainly aimed at strengthening his hand for the subsequent discussions with President Sadat in Cairo. Gromyko also met with fedayeen leader Yasir Arafat, but his vague references to the formation of a Palestinian "state" do not suggest that Moscow is going to push this issue.

Although the Soviets seem resigned to the possibility of a second Egyptian-Israeli disengagement agreement, Moscow is still seeking some commitment from the Egyptians that the Soviets will be accorded a significant role in the subsequent rounds of negotiations. In an attempt to put pressure on Cairo, Gromyko and the Syrians on Monday called for a resumption of the Geneva talks within one month. The Egyptians, however, resisted this gambit and agreed only to a less specific formulation--the "immediate" resumption of the Geneva forum.

In the statement yesterday marking the end of Gromyko's Cairo visit, the Egyptians conceded that Moscow should have a role in all aspects of the Middle East settlement. Sadat, nevertheless, made plain that he intends to continue to rely on the US step-by-step approach to negotiations. Immediately after meeting with Gromyko on Tuesday, Sadat publicly stated that he continues to welcome the visit of Secretary Kissinger.

Sadat said that progress had been made on some bilateral issues, but that others would have to wait until General Secretary Brezhnev visits Egypt. Gromyko clearly was unwilling to make any firm commitment regarding a trip to Egypt by Brezhnev; the joint statement on the Gromyko visit refers only to the importance of Brezhnev-Sadat exchanges. Sadat's public remarks suggest that Cairo once again is making a Brezhnev visit an issue between it and Moscow.

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One of the unresolved issues Sadat undoubtedly has in mind is his demand for new Soviet agreements on arms. Although the Soviets have said they will deliver arms ordered prior to the October 1973 war-- and apparently did deliver some MIG-23s on the eve of Gromyko's arrival--they have refused to make new commitments.

The issue of Egyptian payment of its arms debt also appears to remain unsettled. A Soviet official has indicated that the debt will be the subject of discussions in Moscow later this month.

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ETHIOPIA

We present below the text of an Intelligence Alert Memorandum: Possible Coup in Ethiopia.

There are indications that opponents of the ruling military council in the Ethiopian army may be planning to attempt a coup within the next few days. They want to take advantage of the recent transfer of troops from Addis Ababa to fight insurgents in Eritrea province.

The plan may involve cooperation between General Tamrat Tessema, the commander of the Fourth Division in Addis Ababa, and Colonel Gebre-Yesus, a brigade commander. Last month Gebre-Yesus was reported to be planning a coup. [redacted] Tamrat has ordered troops under the command of Gebre-Yesus to move into Addis Ababa from positions north and south of the city.

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[redacted] The troops are due to depart for the city today. They should reach Addis Ababa within two days.

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It is possible that Tamrat is unaware of Gebre-Yesus' coup plans and is reinforcing Addis Ababa because of the departure of other troops for Eritrea. The arrival of additional troops, however, will give Gebre-Yesus the edge over troops that are likely to remain loyal to the council. Gebre-Yesus commands key units already stationed in Addis Ababa, including some of the units that protect the ruling council's headquarters. Many units that might have opposed Gebre-Yesus have been sent to Eritrea. These include air force and airborne elements and troops from the First Division. We believe Gebre-Yesus would have a good chance of succeeding if he attempts to take over the government.

A direct attack on the council's headquarters would place Haile Selassie's life in jeopardy along with some 130 other officials of the former regime who are imprisoned within the council's compound. The council might arbitrarily execute the prisoners, as it executed 59 other officials last November when it felt threatened by a coup.

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The military units in Eritrea probably would not interfere with a move against the council. Some would support Gebre-Yesus; others might have reservations, but they probably would remain in Eritrea because of the current threat posed by the insurgents.

The policies of a military government led by Gebre-Yesus and those who support him probably would be somewhat more moderate than the line being taken by the present leadership. Gebre-Yesus is believed to oppose the council's increasingly radical policies, including its adoption of socialism. He also apparently opposes the willingness of some important council members to jeopardize relations with the West in favor of closer ties to communist countries.

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TURKEY-CYPRUS

Turkish Cypriot negotiator Rauf Denktash says he is ready to form an independent state on Cyprus if Ankara agrees.

Denktash said in a press conference yesterday that the Turkish-controlled northern part of Cyprus should become a separate state until a federated Cypriot republic is formed. He said that a continuation of his negotiations with the Greek Cypriots depends on Ankara's wishes.

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Denktash's statements [redacted] suggest that preparations to form an independent state may already be under way. If this is the case, some limited military operations are probably in the offing to readjust the cease-fire lines to provide more secure borders. Such Turkish moves probably would provoke a violent Greek Cypriot reaction, most likely directed at US and UK targets.

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Turkish officials, meanwhile, are still discussing their response to the cutoff of US military assistance. [redacted] the most likely retaliatory move would be to begin charging us rent for the use of Turkish facilities. Some Turkish officers are arguing for a break with NATO while others suggest proposing a non-aggression pact with the Soviets as a ploy to ensure a flow of military equipment from other NATO countries.

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Public statements of Turkish officials yesterday reflected indecision on just what Turkey's response would be, although they continued to indicate that there was no intention to withdraw from NATO. President Koruturk held meetings throughout the day with political party leaders to coordinate the government's position. Press reports in Ankara indicated that measures under consideration included summoning an emergency meeting of the NATO Defense Committee and banning the US Sixth Fleet from Turkish ports.

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PERU

The violence that rocked Lima yesterday has died down, but sporadic shooting continues despite the curfew. The Peruvian capital remains tense and more turmoil is possible.

The violence began when the army used tanks and bazookas to dislodge police from their headquarters in downtown Lima. Students, including a number of anti-government leftists, soon assembled. Their subsequent acts were anti-military in character. A number of people were killed or injured, and several buildings and cars were burned.

Agitators also stoned the US embassy, but troops prevented serious damage.

President Velasco has increasingly tended to react vehemently to dissent of any kind. For the time being, the military probably will remain united behind Velasco. If further violence erupts, the armed forces will take the steps necessary to remain in power. Military leaders who already oppose Velasco's policies, however, will become even more critical. The violence thus may ultimately weaken Velasco's power within the military.

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