



The President's Daily Brief

February 15, 1975

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

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CAMBODIA

All surface lines of communication to Phnom Penh are now closed, leaving flights into Pochentong airfield as the government's only reliable means of re-supply. Pochentong has been the target of daily communist shellings--mostly rocket fire--since the beginning of the year, and increased attacks against the field are likely as airlift operations expand.

An estimated 13,000 to 15,000 communist troops are located within a 15-mile radius of Pochentong. The recent shift of three communist regiments to the area northwest of Phnom Penh and the movement of elements of a communist division toward Pochentong from the southwest are ominous developments. Previous attacks on the airfield have been mounted from these areas.

Communist forces have the capability to:

- Intensify 107-mm. rocket attacks and possibly initiate 105-mm. howitzer fire against Pochentong.
- Launch coordinated ground attacks against the airfield.
- Conduct sapper attacks against the airfield.
- Employ automatic weapons against arriving and departing aircraft.

The Cambodian army has between 10,000 and 12,000 combat troops within a 15-mile radius of Pochentong. The army's best unit, the 3rd Division, is near Route 4 west of the airfield. The 7th Division is northwest of the airfield, but it has suffered serious losses and would be particularly vulnerable to any strong communist action. If Pochentong becomes seriously threatened, the government could also withdraw units from provincial enclaves to help in its defense.

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ETHIOPIA

The ruling military council remains confident that government forces will win the struggle against the insurgents in Eritrea, but neither the government nor the rebels seem capable of a clear-cut military victory.

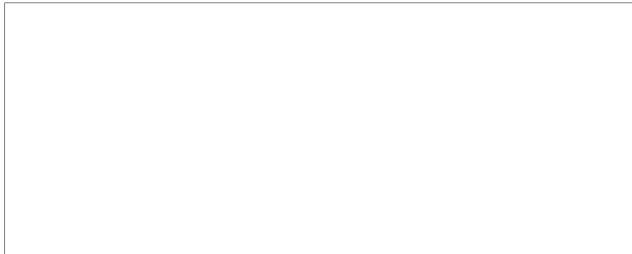
The council overrates the military's capabilities, and planned organizational and leadership changes will probably not do much to improve the effectiveness of the armed forces.

The size of the government force and its artillery and air support give it a decided advantage in regular combat situations. The military is, however, ill-trained and ill-equipped to conduct counterinsurgency operations. As a result, the government's position in major cities is reasonably secure, but it faces real problems if it attempts to operate in the countryside against the guerrilla forces.

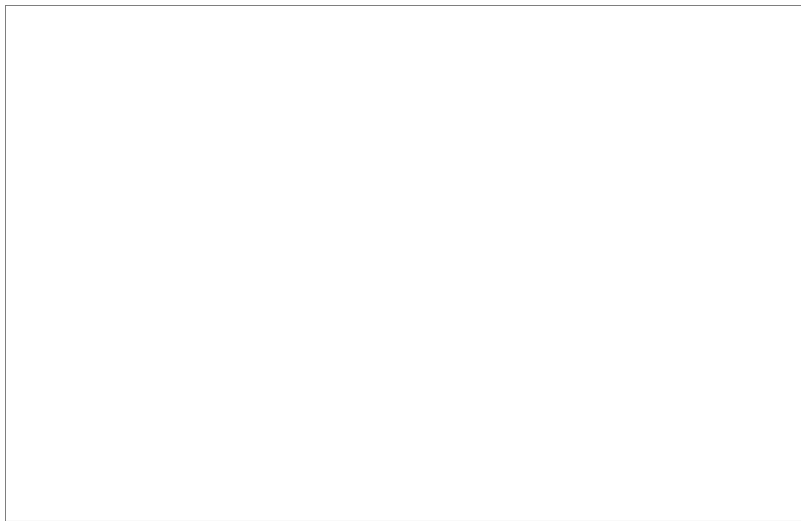
The government's position in Asmara could deteriorate seriously if the military does not show greater success in clearing rebel roadblocks. The airlift now under way is vulnerable to rebel attacks on the airplanes and on the Asmara airport. In the long run, reliance on resupply by air could prove almost prohibitively costly for the government.

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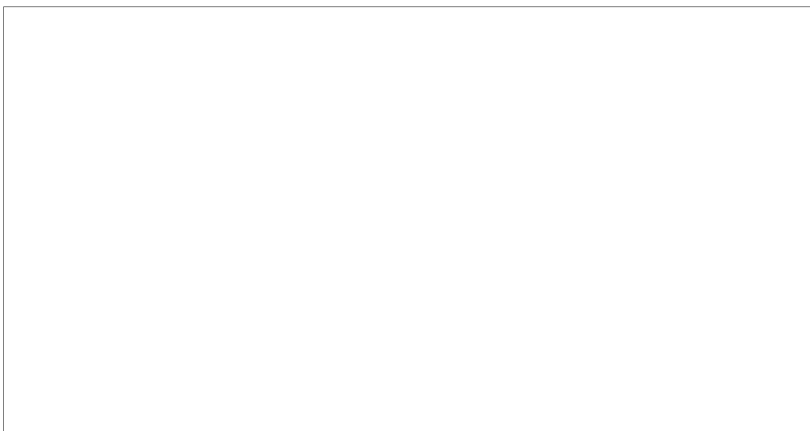
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NOTES

The Canadian ambassador in Moscow was told some two weeks ago that General Secretary Brezhnev would make a public appearance on February 13 but that he would never fully recover from his illness nor resume a full work schedule.

The ambassador, who has been in Moscow longer than any other chief of mission, said he had received the information from someone he "normally trusts." He thinks Brezhnev's public appearance with British Prime Minister Wilson on the 13th gives some credence to one part of the story. Brezhnev continued in the Moscow spotlight yesterday with a speech praising the "positive changes" in Soviet relations with the West. He stressed the determination of Soviet leaders to make detente irreversible and pledged to seek long-term cooperation with non-communist states.

* * *

Turkey has sent an additional artillery battalion to Cyprus within the past few days.

[redacted] some 850 troops in combat gear were loaded on a transport ship in the Turkish port of Mersin on February 13. The US defense attaché in Nicosia has confirmed the arrival of artillery equipment at Famagusta on February 11.

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Colombia apparently is pressing on toward renewing relations with Cuba.

Foreign Minister Lievano recently announced publicly that he would have important news regarding Cuba "soon." [redacted]

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[redacted] The opposition Conservative Party has launched a campaign in the Colombian press aimed at sabotaging or at least slowing the approach to Cuba. President Lopez is unlikely to be deterred, however, and his party's control of congress precludes legislative roadblocks.

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