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The President's Daily Brief

March 12, 1975

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

March 12, 1975

Table of Contents

Portugal: The attempt of rightist officers yesterday to oust radical members of the Armed Forces Movement could lead to an abrupt shift to the left. (Page 1)

Egypt-Israel: [REDACTED]

(Page 3)

25X1
25X1

Cambodia: Flights of DC-8 aircraft into Pochentong airport were reportedly resumed this morning after being interrupted yesterday by artillery and rocket attacks. (Page 5)

South Vietnam: Communist attacks are spreading.
(Page 6)

Notes: Ethiopia; Kenya (Page 7)

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PORTUGAL

Radicals in the Armed Forces Movement and extreme leftist political groups are moving rapidly to exploit the unsuccessful coup attempt staged by rightist officers yesterday.

The abortive uprising apparently included only units from Tancos air base--some 60 miles northeast of Lisbon--and some units of the national guard. The move, led by rightist officers, was poorly organized, and the attack on the headquarters of an artillery unit near Lisbon airport failed to attract additional support.

Within three hours of the first shot, Armed Forces Movement spokesmen began announcing on Lisbon radio that the situation was under control. Some of their early statements indicated that the Movement was prepared to capitalize on the episode, saying that now the "revolution" can move ahead without impediments.

In a speech to the nation last night, President Costa Gomes denounced the coup attempt as a "reactionary adventure" and linked the plotters to economic sabotage and, by implication, to the political unrest that was manifested in the violence in Setubal last weekend.

Costa Gomes also provided a list of 26 officers, headed by conservative former president Spinola, who were allegedly involved in the attempt. General Spinola is reported to have fled to Spain and to have asked for asylum in Brazil. [redacted]

[redacted] rightist exiles there planned to cross into Portugal to support the uprising.

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Large crowds of leftist demonstrators roamed the streets of Lisbon and some of Portugal's other major cities last night in response to broadcast appeals to show their support for the Armed Forces Movement. In Lisbon and Oporto the offices of the conservative and moderate political parties were ransacked.

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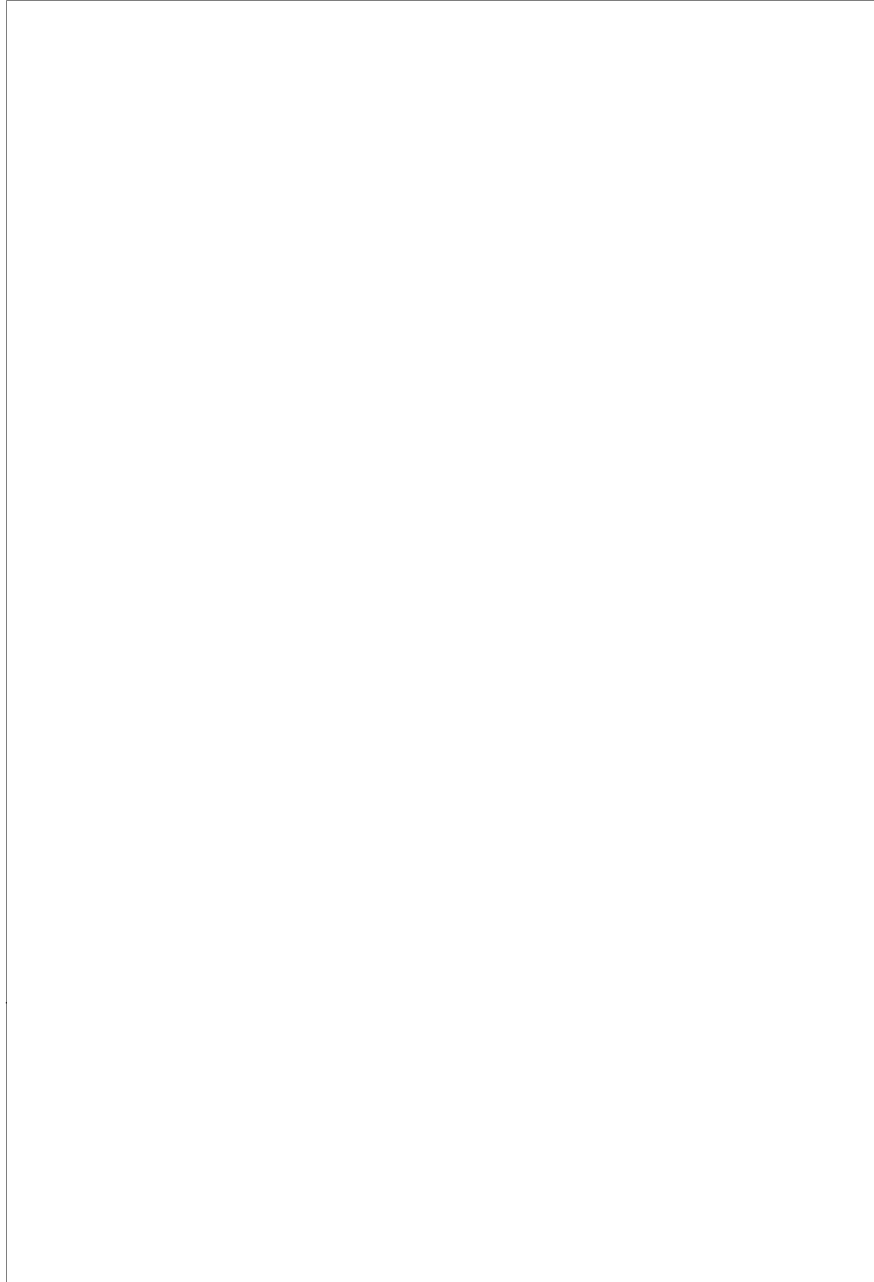
Large crowds also conducted orderly demonstrations in front of the US embassy in Lisbon where, after some early uncertainty, security forces provided adequate protection.

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A sharp turn to the left by the government could become evident soon. The rightist attempt to dislodge radical leaders might also be used to justify postponement of the election scheduled for April 12.

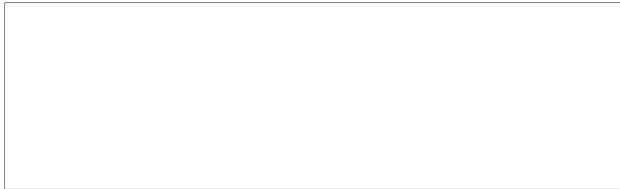
In any event, moderate officers and civilian politicians who were beginning to reassert themselves are likely now to draw back from any criticism of the Movement's leadership for fear of being attacked as reactionaries.



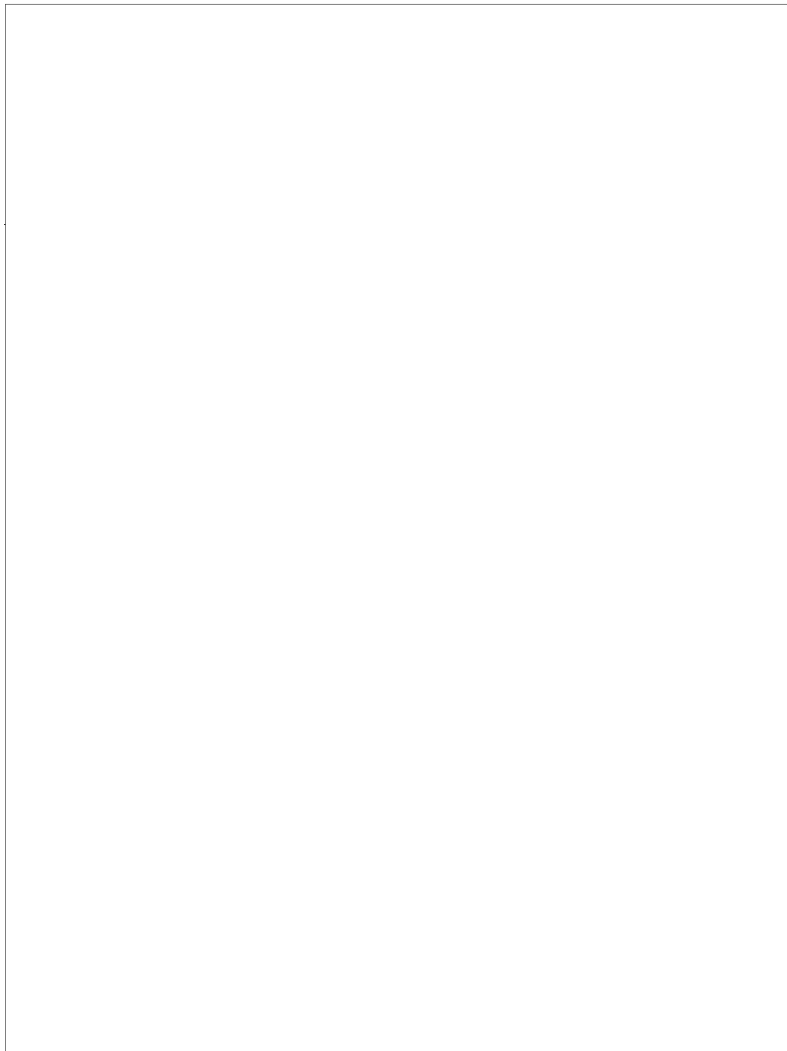
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EGYPT-ISRAEL



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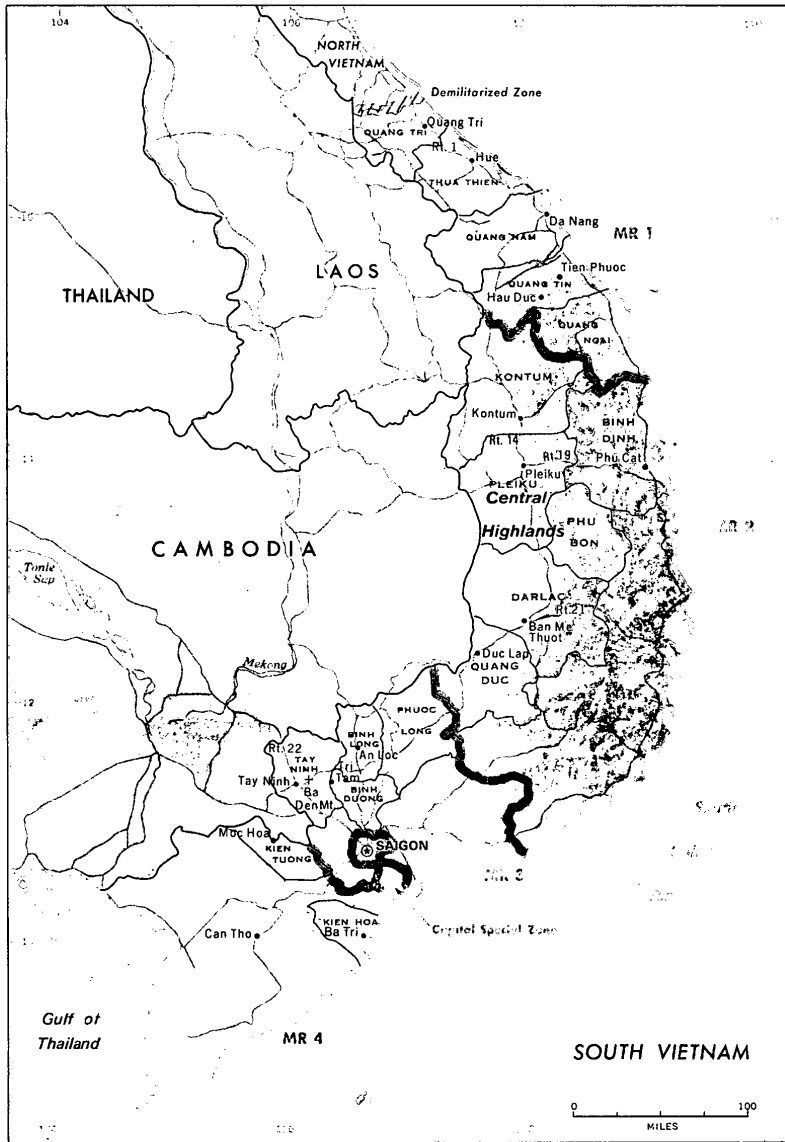
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CAMBODIA

US charter airlines flying DC-8 aircraft halted flights to Pochentong airport at mid-afternoon yesterday, following intensified communist artillery and rocket attacks. According to press reports, the flights resumed this morning.

Airlift operations by the smaller C-130 aircraft--which have been delivering all ammunition and some fuel--apparently had not been interrupted.

The operation to retake the town of Tuol Leap and push the communists out of rocket and artillery range of the airport made little progress yesterday for the sixth straight day. Ambassador Dean met with President Lon Nol yesterday and received promises that increased efforts would be made to retake Tuol Leap. It may be several days, however, before any new plans materialize.



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SOUTH VIETNAM

The communists' dry-season campaign is beginning to spread southward. Strong pressure continues on government positions in the central highlands and northern provinces.

Tri Tam, a town in western Binh Duong Province, has been hit by infantry, armor, and artillery and is reported in communist hands early this morning. Sporadic fighting around Tay Ninh City is expected to become more intense. Communist military activity in the delta increased substantially yesterday, and heavy attacks are expected there soon. In addition to widespread shellings, a number of ground attacks have occurred, particularly around the provincial capital of Moc Hoa and near Ba Tri in Kien Hoa Province.

Fighting continues at Ban Me Thuot in the central highlands. Three South Vietnamese ranger battalions have reinforced the defenders, but the situation is precarious. The major land routes into the city are still cut, and both airfields are now in communist hands. South Vietnamese officers believe that units from the North Vietnamese 10th and 320th divisions, as well as an independent regiment, are involved, and that Ban Me Thuot is the main communist target in Military Region 2.

Communist forces control some high ground along Route 14 leading into Kontum. Local commanders are not expecting strong attacks against the city, but many civilian residents are leaving for the relative safety of Pleiku City.

The heaviest fighting in the northern provinces is taking place to the west and south of Hue. In Quang Tri Province, where two district capitals were lost on Monday, government forces are regrouping in anticipation of further attacks.

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NOTES

Ethiopian government forces and rebels continue to engage in scattered clashes.

A sizable government force is continuing sweep operations about ten miles north of Asmara, and fighting, with air support for government troops, has been reported in western Eritrea. In Shoa Province, where Addis Ababa is located, dissidents from the Galla tribe reportedly staged raids recently along each of the three main roads leading west and north from the capital. The Sudanese seem confident that the government and the Eritreans will eventually accept President Numayri's proposal for peace talks. A Sudanese foreign ministry official told the US ambassador yesterday that both sides had shown some interest in exploring Numayri's offer.

* * *

The murder of J. M. Kariuki, an outspoken critic of Kenya's President Jomo Kenyatta, will sharply increase political tension, already high because of a series of still-unresolved bombings in Nairobi that resulted in 27 deaths.

Kariuki was a leading figure among the Nyeri clan of the Kikuyu tribe. The Nyeri resent the fact that Kenyatta's Kiambu clan has received greater benefits from the political system. Kariuki's murder may lead to disorder and violence, because members of other tribes considered him a champion of the ordinary Kenyan.

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