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The President's Daily Brief

September 4, 1975

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PORTUGAL

Anti-Communist army officers appear to have won an important tactical victory in their effort to prevent Vasco Goncalves' installation as armed forces chief of staff.

The army's assembly voted overwhelming against Goncalves late on Tuesday in spite of the former prime minister's personal appearance at the meeting. The assembly also voted to ask President Costa Gomes to postpone the crucial meeting of the Armed Forces General Assembly--scheduled for tomorrow--until the composition of the general assembly can be changed to make it more representative of the armed forces. If the session is held as scheduled, the army delegates may well boycott it.

The air force was to have held its assembly yesterday, but reports conflict on whether the assembly took place. The air force, which is thought to be the most anti-Communist of the three services, was expected to follow the army's lead.

[REDACTED] Mario Soares has made public his party's conditions for joining a new government. In addition to the removal of Goncalves, Soares is demanding:

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--Municipal, labor union, and national assembly elections.

--Support for the popularly elected constituent assembly.

--Implementation of a Socialist Party economic plan.

There are some signs that Portuguese rightists may try to take advantage of the current political confusion. An attempt just now by rightists to launch a strike inside Portugal would be quickly exploited by the Communists, who would link all their opponents to the popularly discredited political right. This could easily scuttle the efforts of the anti-Communist military officers to purge Goncalves and his supporters.



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LEBANON

Palestinians and Lebanese leftists called a general strike yesterday to protest the Egyptian-Israeli agreement. The strike halted commercial activity in the southern port cities of Sidon and Tyre but was only partly effective in Beirut. There is danger that the protests against the new Sinai pact could combine with the continuing clashes between Christians and Muslims to undermine the delicate calm in Beirut.

Small arms fire was heard early yesterday morning in the Beirut suburbs, and two rockets were fired at the headquarters of the right-wing Christian Phalanges Party. Government security forces moved quickly to contain the violence and to provide protection to the Egyptian embassy, which had been the scene of a demonstration by Palestinians last weekend.

The government appears gradually to be gaining the upper hand in the provincial capital of Zahlah, where clashes have occurred for the last ten days between Christians and Muslims. According to reliable press reports, at least 36 persons have been killed in the fighting there.

Palestinian forces in Beirut's refugee camps [redacted] have gone on alert in the expectation of widespread fighting soon. Militias of right- and left-wing Lebanese political parties also are preparing for a resumption of hostilities by importing large quantities of arms and accelerating their training programs.

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Complicating Lebanon's domestic difficulties, Israeli aircraft bombed fedayeen targets in southern Lebanon yesterday for the second consecutive day.

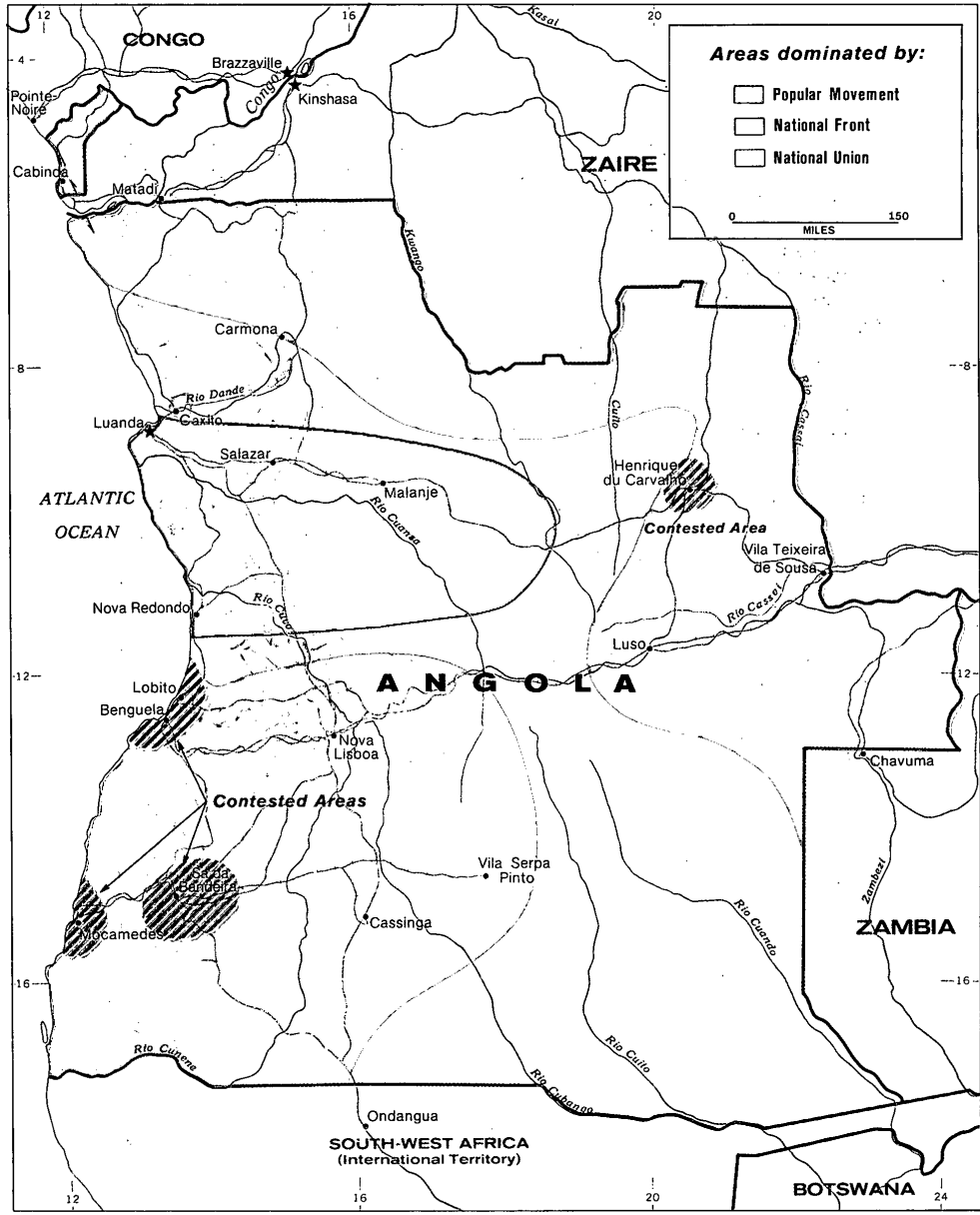
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Tel Aviv has increased its attacks on fedayeen targets during the past several weeks in retaliation for stepped up fedayeen strikes across the border, and in an attempt to preempt these terrorist attacks. Early yesterday morning, according to a military authority in Tel Aviv, Israeli aircraft struck fedayeen camp, storage, and headquarters structures some 15 miles north of the Israeli border on the Mediterranean coast. Fedayeen targets in southeastern Lebanon near Mount Hermon also were hit by Israeli aircraft and artillery in separate strikes.

UN observers reported outbreaks of sporadic machine gun, mortar, and artillery fire last night and again early this morning. The Palestine guerrilla command announced in Beirut this morning that Israeli commandos struck guerrilla positions near the Lebanese port city of Sidon. The Israelis reportedly came ashore in five rubber boats under the cover of naval gunfire. The Israeli military command confirmed in a brief communiqué that its troops had clashed with Arab guerrillas but provided few details.

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ANGOLA

The National Front for the Liberation of Angola and the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola are reported to be building up their forces between Luanda and the Front's stronghold at Casito. Claims by the National Front that it has advanced to within ten miles of the capital cannot be confirmed, however.

The National Front is anxious to establish a military perimeter around the outskirts of Luanda, but [] does not intend to fight its way into the capital. It apparently hopes that a strong military presence so close to Luanda will be enough to convince the Portuguese and the Popular Movement that the Front must be permitted to establish a political presence in the city again. The National Front also hopes to discredit Popular Movement claims of being the territory's only effective nationalist group and to frustrate its plan to "assume total responsibility for governing Angola" on November 11.

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With slightly more than two months remaining before they are scheduled to grant independence to Angola, the Portuguese are making a last-ditch attempt to patch together a government to which it can hand over sovereignty. Admiral Leonel Cardoso, formerly in charge of naval operations in Portugal's African territories, was sworn in last week as the new high commissioner in Angola and should be arriving in Luanda soon. Cardoso will have broader executive, judicial, and defense responsibilities than those granted to his predecessor now that Lisbon has suspended the January agreement.

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NOTES

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[redacted] Egypt [redacted] the Sinai agreement would achieve virtually all Egypt's immediate military objectives, and that implementation of the plan to seize the Sinai passes is no longer necessary.

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[redacted] the Egyptian army is maintaining the program introduced in July to train units in their wartime missions. [redacted]

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Turkey announced yesterday that some of the approximately 1,500 army commandos stationed on Cyprus since July 1974 will return to Turkey this week.

The move appears related to the US arms embargo as much as to a Cyprus settlement. The Turks undoubtedly hope that the withdrawal will offset their failure to make meaningful proposals on a territorial settlement in Cyprus. This failure, combined with Turkish unwillingness thus far to follow through on commitments made during the last round of the intercommunal talks in Vienna, has left Greek Cypriots pessimistic over prospects for the round of talks scheduled to be held in New York on September 8 and 9. The mainland Turks and Turkish Cypriot leader Denktash appear caught between a tactical need to appear reasonable and forthcoming in New York--with an eye to the US House of Representatives' position on the arms embargo--and the political situation in Turkey that makes concessions difficult.

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FEDAYEEN

Two fedayeen groups that have generally supported a negotiated settlement in the Middle East--the Syrian-controlled Saiqa organization and the Marxist-oriented Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine--have raised unusually forceful criticism of the new Egyptian-Israeli agreement. Unlike spokesmen for Fatah, the largest commando group, they have directly attacked Egypt and President Sadat as well as Israel and the US.

The outspokenness of the two groups reflects the rapidly growing frustration among less radical fedayeen leaders. They privately accepted last year's Egyptian and Syrian interim agreements as necessary steps toward negotiations involving the Palestinians, but now are irritated that Egypt has endorsed a second accord without explicit public guarantees that Israel ever will make concessions to or even negotiate with the Palestinians.

The Democratic Front, which for several months has been inching toward a policy line independent of Fatah, has done the most to translate its unhappiness into concrete opposition. On September 1, the group assembled representatives of Lebanon's 16 Palestinian refugee camps to demonstrate opposition to the Sinai accord at several Arab embassies in Beirut. The Democratic Front also helped organize yesterday's general strike by Palestinians in Lebanon's major cities.

Position of Yasir Arafat

These initiatives have created a major problem for Palestine Liberation Organization and Fatah chief Yasir Arafat. His relatively conciliatory policies have long been criticized by Fatah field commanders, who, despite the risk of Israeli retaliation, would like to initiate more cross-border attacks on Israel. The radical fedayeen philosophy of rejecting any settlement with Israel is making headway among these officers and among the second-level Palestinian leaders who run the so-called "popular organizations" within the PLO.

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The cynicism of these groups has grown--and Arafat's prestige has diminished--since Arafat's widely publicized appearance before the UN General Assembly late last year. At that time, Arafat raised Palestinian expectations, but he has been unable to produce anything to meet these expectations.

Despite this popular disenchantment, Arafat appears to be in little danger of being replaced as head of the PLO or Fatah. The rejectionists are still only a small minority, and none of the other less radical leaders have come up with a practical alternative to Arafat's policies.

In the past week, Arafat has begun an effort to deal with his predicament by seizing the initiative from his critics, while at the same time holding to the essentials of his policies. In particular, he is trying to obscure his continued willingness to cooperate with Egypt and Syria in a barrage of rhetoric condemning the US, threatening Israel, and calling for Arab unity.

Dependence on Syria

To offset the strain in Palestinian-Egyptian relations created by the new Sinai accord, PLO spokesmen are taking care not to offend the Syrians, and are working--at least superficially--toward implementation of President Asad's six-month-old proposal for a "joint Palestinian-Syrian political and military command." The fourth session of the working group considering ways to implement the proposal met in Damascus late last week.

Future Syrian policy toward Middle East negotiations will be the single most important factor in determining Palestinian policy. The Lebanese-based fedayeen groups and the Syrian-based Palestine Liberation Army, the PLO's conventional military force, both depend on Syrian good will for the supply and transit of arms. In addition, the PLO depends heavily on Damascus for international political support, as in its effort to expel Israel from the UN. As a result, the principal Palestinian leaders dare not deviate too far from the Syrian policy line.

So long as Damascus is reserved in its criticism of Egypt and holds out hope for progress in negotiations, Arafat will be free to pursue his preferred strategy of preserving his links to Egypt. Arafat is angered at Sadat's willingness to act without regard for Palestinian interests, but also is impressed with Cairo's demonstrated ability to make gains through negotiations.

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In addition, he is mindful of the penalties the Palestinians have paid for offering needlessly antagonistic criticism in the past, and appreciative of Egypt's potential to help offset any future Syrian attempts to exercise greater control over the fedayeen.

Terrorism as an Alternative

The Palestinians' only clear alternative to depending on Egypt and Syria is to employ unrestricted terrorism to force world attention on the Palestinian problem. There is no question that the fedayeen have the operational capability to do this, but their awareness of the political outrage that such a strategy would prompt--in the Arab world and beyond--almost certainly will deter them.

Of the less radical groups, Saiqa and the Democratic Front have seldom engaged in international terrorism, and show no sign that they are considering it now, despite their increased frustrations. Fatah's Black September Organization is still making contingency plans for international terrorist operations, but for the past year has been relatively inactive.

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Among the radical groups, the Popular Front and the General Command have engaged in international terrorism--particularly hijackings--and could do so again. Recently, however, they, like the less radical groups, have emphasized cross-border attacks on Israel out of a conviction that such incidents win greater support from the Palestinian masses and Arab governments.

Fedayeen of all stripes have already stepped up their attacks on Israel, and seem likely to continue to do so despite the increased frequency of Israeli strikes at fedayeen bases throughout Lebanon. For most fedayeen leaders, this is the only road open between acquiescing in Egypt's fait accompli and turning to counterproductive international terrorism.

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