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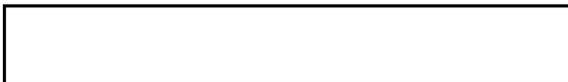
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Top Secret



November 19, 1975



National Intelligence Bulletin

November 19, 1975

CONTENTS

USSR: Winter grain areas short of soil moisture reserves 1

THAILAND-LAOS: Both sides send reinforcements to border area 2

PORTUGAL: Renewed Communist warnings of rightist coup attempt 3

CANADA: Land, air contingents in Europe to be kept at current levels 4

LEBANON: Beirut calm, despite sniper fire 5

[REDACTED]

FRANCE: Giscard stresses importance of conventional forces 7

[REDACTED]

ARGENTINA: Presidential elections scheduled earlier 9

[REDACTED]

NIGERIA: Reduction of armed forces 11

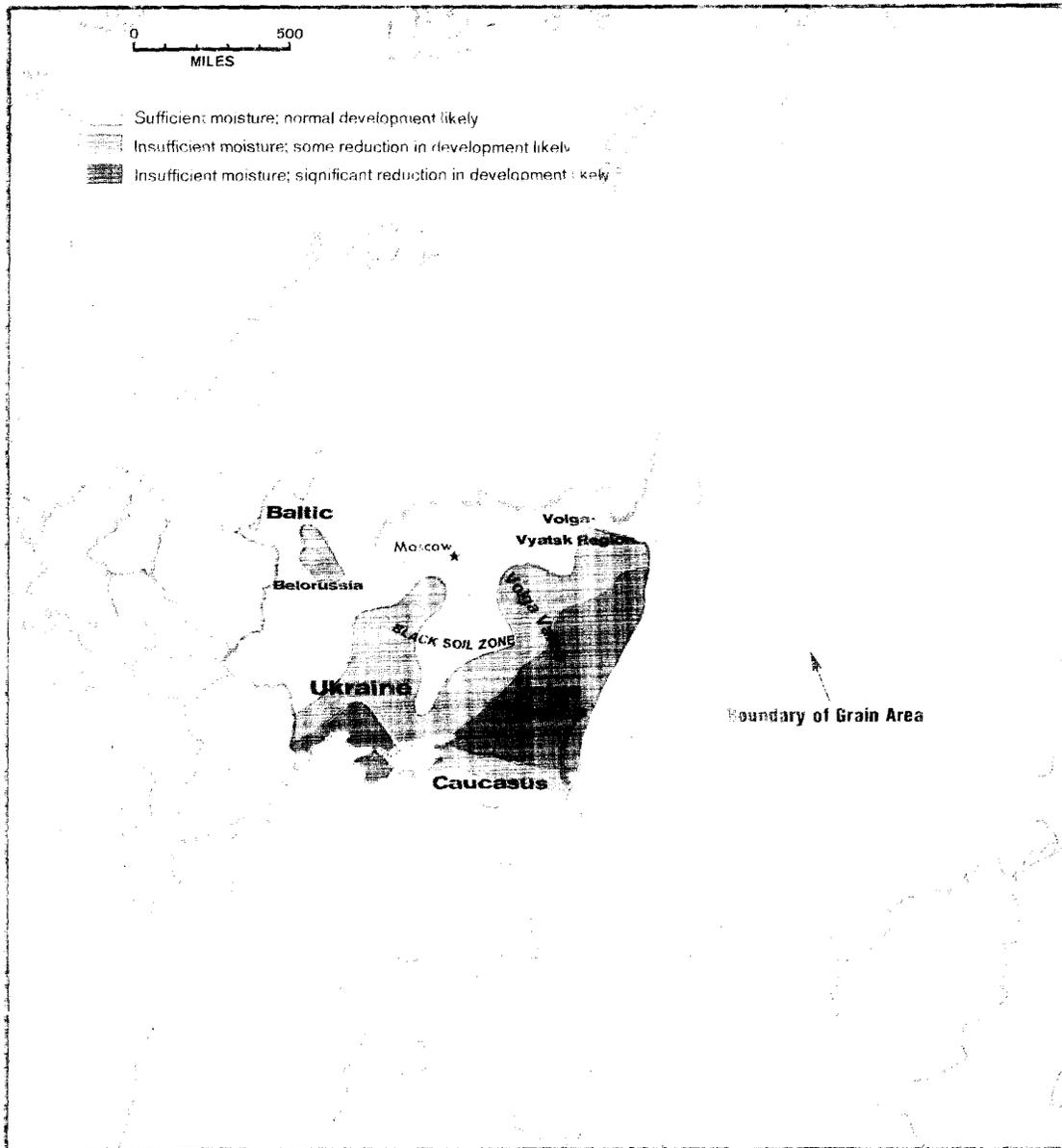
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USSR: Probable Effects of Soil Moisture on Winter Grains



National Intelligence Bulletin

November 19, 1975

USSR

This year's severe drought has left important winter grain areas far short of the soil moisture reserves required for a good crop next year.

Persistence of drought conditions—while facilitating fall sowing—has already hampered plant growth by limiting germination and retarding the hardening process, making the crop more vulnerable to winter kill.

The winter crop, which usually accounts for one third of total Soviet grain production, is critical because grain stocks are extremely low. In an effort to recover from the failure of the 1975 harvest, the Soviets planted winter grains on 37 million hectares—the largest area sown since 1970.

At the end of October, soil moisture reserves were at a record low in parts of the Baltic republics and Belorussia, in the eastern and southern Ukraine, and in parts of the Black Soil zone, the northern Caucasus, and the Volga Valley. Conditions are particularly severe in the southern Volga region, where a year-long drought remains unbroken. The affected area normally accounts for half of all winter grain, and about a third of this is critically low of soil moisture.

The crucial period for winter grains is just beginning. Continued dry conditions, coupled with a cold winter, could destroy an above-average proportion of the crop before spring. Acreage lost to winter kill, which in the past has ranged from negligible to 30 percent of the total crop, would have to be replanted to the lower yielding and more drought vulnerable spring grains.

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National Intelligence Bulletin

November 19, 1975

THAILAND-LAOS

No further fighting has been reported, following the serious border clash on the Mekong River on November 17 and 18 between Laos and Thailand.

[redacted] Lao forces damaged one Thai naval craft, which may have strayed into Lao waters, and inflicted several casualties during a nine-hour clash on the Mekong several miles south of Vientiane. Thai troops, tanks, armored personnel carriers, and mortars have been sent to the scene, and two Thai T-28s have provided air cover. The Lao also moved in reinforcements, including tanks. Each side is blaming the other for the incident.

The Thai have recalled their ambassador in Vientiane "for consultations" and have closed the border across from the Vientiane area. Prime Minister Khukrit told the press on November 18 that he hoped there would be no more violence, and the Thai Foreign Ministry has been ordered to arrange negotiations "to resolve problems arising from the incidents." The Lao, however, have consistently refused to talk with Bangkok about reducing tensions until the Thai respond favorably to demands for the return of Lao-claimed military equipment and to demands concerning Lao refugees in Thailand.

A Lao government protest note of November 18 did not go beyond standard condemnations of alleged Thai violations of Lao sovereignty.

25X1

National Intelligence Bulletin

November 19, 1975

PORTUGAL

Increasing tension between the government and the Communists has given rise to renewed Communist warnings of a rightist coup, further discussion of a plan to move the government to the north, and, in the Azores, demonstrations protesting "anarchy" on the mainland.

Yesterday, two Communist-dominated Lisbon dailies alleged that a coup would be launched today by prominent anti-Communist officers led by Northern Military Region Commander Pires Veloso. The Communists charged that the commander, upset by the large pro-Communist demonstration on Sunday, decided on a coup to put an end to "this sort of mutiny." The Armed Forces General Staff denied the story and said legal action would be taken against the two newspapers.

Pires Veloso has been a target of the Communists since he was named to replace the pro-Communist former commander in September. Like other prominent members of the present government who have been harshly attacked, Pires Veloso has been particularly zealous in stamping out Communist influence in his command.

Although in this instance the coup rumors appear to be inspired by the Communists to serve their own ends, the possibility of a rightist attempt cannot be ruled out. Leftist strength in the Lisbon area, however, would likely give the rightists pause before undertaking action there at this time.

Discussion of a plan to move the government to Porto continued in the popularly elected constituent assembly yesterday. The plan, first broached last week when Prime Minister Azevedo was prevented from leaving his residence for two days by pro-Communist demonstrators, reportedly is favored by the center-left Popular Democrats and Socialists but is seen by the Prime Minister and others as premature. While the constituent assembly, whose job is to draft the new constitution, presumably could move its own proceedings to Porto, it has no authority to decide for the government. One government official has described the plan as "hot air."

Meanwhile, the continuing political uncertainty in Lisbon prompted demonstrations in the Azores on Monday. They were in support of a tough statement issued last weekend by the islands' governing junta decrying what it described as a state of anarchy on the mainland.

The demonstrations Monday were denounced by the Socialists, who have sought to divorce themselves from separatist sentiment in the Azores. There was considerable clamor for independence during the demonstrations, which were well attended on almost all of the islands in an unprecedented show of solidarity.

National Intelligence Bulletin

November 19, 1975

These demonstrations are a clear signal to Lisbon of the widespread concern in the conservative islands over recent events on the mainland which, if not checked, could advance the independence cause of the Azorean Liberation Front.



CANADA

The cabinet's powerful committee on priorities has decided to maintain Canada's land and air contingents in Europe at their current levels,



The cabinet committee's decision, made on November 12, is tantamount to full cabinet approval, inasmuch as the committee is chaired by Prime Minister Trudeau and includes key ministers such as Finance Minister Macdonald and External Affairs Minister MacEachen.

In addition, the committee reportedly gave conditional approval for the purchase of long-range patrol aircraft to fulfill Canada's commitment to NATO's North Atlantic defense forces. Serious consideration was also given to replacing the European land contingent's obsolete Centurion tanks with the German Mark I Leopard. Final selection of the long-range patrol aircraft and the new tanks will be decided later.

Replacement of the air contingent's obsolescent CF-104 fighters is likely to be postponed. The US embassy reports rumors in Ottawa defense circles that CF-5 aircraft now stored in Canada would be assigned to Europe as a stop-gap measure.

These reported defense decisions appear to be the only way out of Ottawa's dilemma: trying to cut government spending—in order to win popular support for its economic control program—while meeting its commitments to US and NATO leaders regarding Canadian support for the Alliance. The government apparently believes that those conflicting demands can best be satisfied by maintaining its land and air forces in Europe at their current strength while stretching out the modernization of these forces.



National Intelligence Bulletin

November 19, 1975

LEBANON

Snipers killed passers-by in several suburbs of Beirut yesterday. The apparently random attacks almost certainly were carried out by extremists hoping to upset the two-week-old cease-fire and halt the little progress that has been made in political negotiations.

Despite the killings, central Beirut remained relatively calm, and the large private militias did not allow themselves to be drawn into sustained clashes. The deputy commander of the national gendarmerie, Fuad Kiwan, announced that he had been named to head the new 300-man security force, and that the unit would be in the streets in force today.

Splinter groups on the far left probably were responsible for yesterday's attacks. At least ten such organizations have been involved in the recent fighting; they are now feeling especially belligerent as a result of Prime Minister Karami's offer last weekend to reach a political compromise with the country's Christian leaders.

Representatives of most Palestinian and Lebanese leftist groups met last night to "review their support" for Karami, according to press reports from Beirut. Kamal Jumblatt, head of the Progressive Socialist Party and spokesman for the leftist coalition, demanded earlier in the day that Karami spell out the details of the reforms he is proposing.

In a speech to parliament, however, Karami avoided a direct response to Jumblatt. The Prime Minister for the past week has limited himself to lengthy but obscure statements designed to convince Muslims that reforms are coming, while at the same time assuring Christians that they will involve "reinterpretations" rather than amendments to the constitution.

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National Intelligence Bulletin

November 19, 1975



FRANCE

In recent interviews, President Valery Giscard d'Estaing has emphasized the need to maintain a strong French conventional military force.

Although he reaffirmed the prominence of the nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine in France's strategic nuclear program, Giscard said that there must be a balance between nuclear and conventional aspects of defense, and that it is unrealistic to think only in terms of large-scale conflicts.

The President stressed the need for increasing the mobility and flexibility of conventional forces to ensure protection of France's borders and in the event of "some crisis in France's exterior environment." He may have had in mind the example of Corsica, where the potential for trouble still exists.

During the National Assembly's debate earlier this month on the 1976 defense budget, questions were raised about the readiness of the country's armed forces. Pay increases, which were enacted in response to growing discontent among enlisted personnel, forced cuts in both capital expenditures and training funds. Giscard's statements, though probably reflecting his own feelings on the subject, could also have been an attempt to reassure those who believe that the conventional forces are being downgraded.



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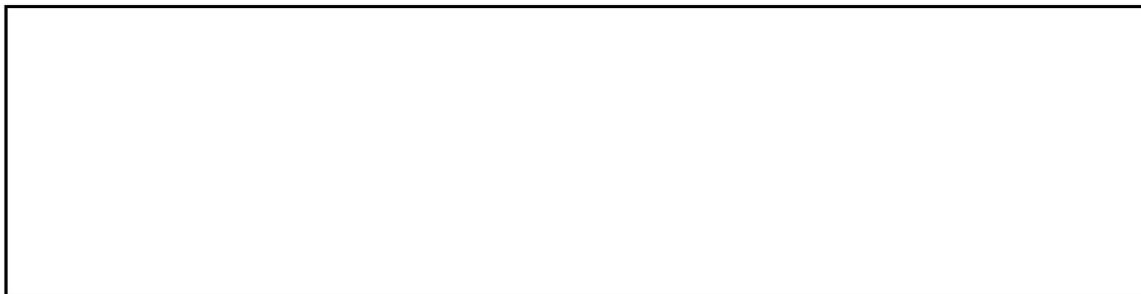
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National Intelligence Bulletin

November 19, 1975

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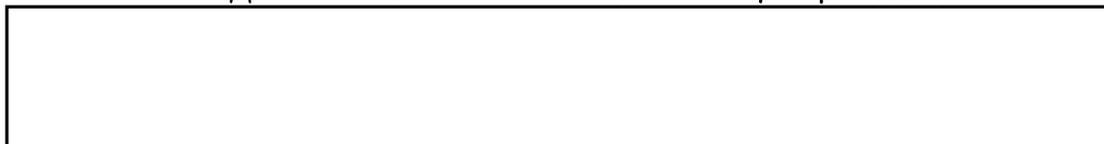
ARGENTINA

The government's decision to advance presidential elections from 1977 to late next year could lessen pressure for President Peron to resign.

The move was probably urged on Peron by top government officials anxious to avoid a military take-over that would scuttle their own chances of competing for the presidency. It may constitute a concession to Peron's critics and signal her willingness, at least for the moment, to be responsive to them. They, in turn, may be disarmed. National attention would quickly focus on preparations for the election.

The decision could, however, be a ploy designed to ease strains temporarily while Peron or one of her intimates contemplates some other surprising move to throw her opponents off balance. There is ample precedent for this.

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National Intelligence Bulletin

November 19, 1975

NIGERIA

The new military government has begun to implement a selective purge of the some 250,000-man armed forces. This could, in time, aggravate the economic, political, and social problems which already exist.

The Nigerian armed forces numbered only 9,000 at the outset of the civil war in 1967. By 1971 the figure had risen to about 280,000, and now the armed forces reportedly are the largest in Black Africa.

The extent of the contemplated reductions is unclear, but the dismissals are said to be designed to rid the services of "dead wood" and of those mobilized during the civil war. In addition, many will probably be relieved of duty prior to the completion of their 15-year tenure and will receive reduced pensions. Full benefits as well as a rehabilitation plan, however, will be granted those dismissed because of age or poor health.

The new military government is already facing potential opposition from victims of last fall's purge of several hundred bureaucrats and some senior army officers. A large number of unemployed former servicemen will add to the potential for unrest in the country.

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National Intelligence Bulletin

November 19, 1975

FOR THE RECORD

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WARSAW PACT: [redacted] the meeting of Warsaw Pact defense ministers under way in Prague is "routine and of no special significance." The two-day session, expected to end today, is probably considering past and future training exercises. The most recent such meeting was held in Moscow in January. The defense ministers have usually timed their annual sessions for the winter months, when Pact exercise activity slackens.

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THAILAND-CAMBODIA: At a meeting at the Cambodian border town of Poipet on November 17, Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister Ieng Sary and Thai Foreign Minister Chatchai apparently agreed on procedures for establishing new liaison offices and for trade on a government-to-government basis. Ieng Sary announced that a joint liaison committee will be located in Poipet and at a nearby Thai town to maintain communications and to deal with any problems between the two countries. Trade will begin with Cambodian purchases of fuel oil and salt to assist Cambodian efforts to achieve economic stability. Agreement to hold this border meeting had been reached during Ieng Sary's visit to Bangkok earlier this month. The continued participation of ranking leaders on both sides in such talks underscores the high priority they give to improving relations.

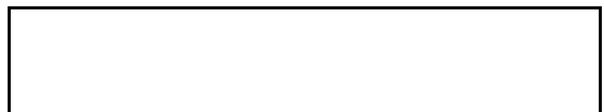
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