



The President's Daily Brief

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*Noted by DCI
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February 22, 1974

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THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

February 22, 1974

PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

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In Ethiopia, civil disturbances have broken out.
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Prime Minister Meir is going ahead with her attempt to form a minority cabinet. (Page 4)

Unusual weather is threatening the Soviet winter grain crop. (Page 5)

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Laotian Prime Minister Souvanna is still confident that almost all obstacles to the formation of a new coalition government have been overcome. (Page 7)

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[Redacted] French [Redacted]
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Notes on the USSR, Yugoslavia, the UK, and Gromyko and Jobert to Cairo appear on Page 10.

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

FRANCE

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

ETHIOPIA

Civil disturbances stemming from long-standing economic and social grievances broke out in several parts of the country on February 19. The chief participants are students who are venting frustration over government policies and are supporting a nationwide teachers' strike. Public transportation has stopped because of attacks on buses, and taxi drivers are on strike to protest the rising cost of living. Diplomatic cars, including some US vehicles, have been among the targets of the demonstrators. Disturbances in one town had distinctly anti-US overtones.

Police reaction to the demonstrations has varied from extreme severity to apparent sympathy. So far, nine students are reported killed.

The Council of Ministers yesterday ordered security forces to crack down on all demonstrations. The ministers refused to compromise with the teachers or to reduce gasoline prices as demanded by taxi and truck drivers. Military units have been deployed to protect fuel supplies, the airport, and other key installations.

A strong show of force will probably result in an escalation of demonstrations and violence. Senior officials and much of the urban public doubt that the government of Prime Minister Aklilu can cope with the country's problems, and Emperor Haile Selassie may be forced to appoint a new government more committed to reform. The 81-year-old Emperor normally does not make important decisions quickly, but the seriousness of the situation may prod him to make an early move.

JORDAN

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

ISRAEL

Prime Minister Meir is going ahead with the formation of a minority cabinet. She is continuing discussions with the National Religious Party to attempt to get that party to join the cabinet, but negotiating sessions yesterday appeared to be fruitless. According to some reports received by the US Embassy in Tel Aviv, there is no chance that the National Religious Party will change its stand at this time.

Mrs. Meir met again with Defense Minister Dayan. Although Dayan to all appearances still strongly supports Meir, he apparently is balking at rejoining her cabinet. Press reports claim he is holding out for new elections or for a national unity government that would include the rightist Likud. A likelier explanation is that, before agreeing to serve again, he wants strong and unequivocal backing from other Alignment leaders, some of whom, he feels, have criticized his handling of the October war.

The opposition Likud yesterday attacked Mrs. Meir's decision to form a minority government. Calling the decision an act of political bankruptcy, the Likud executive committee announced its intention to push in the Knesset for the formation of a national unity government.

FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

Soviet Winter Grain



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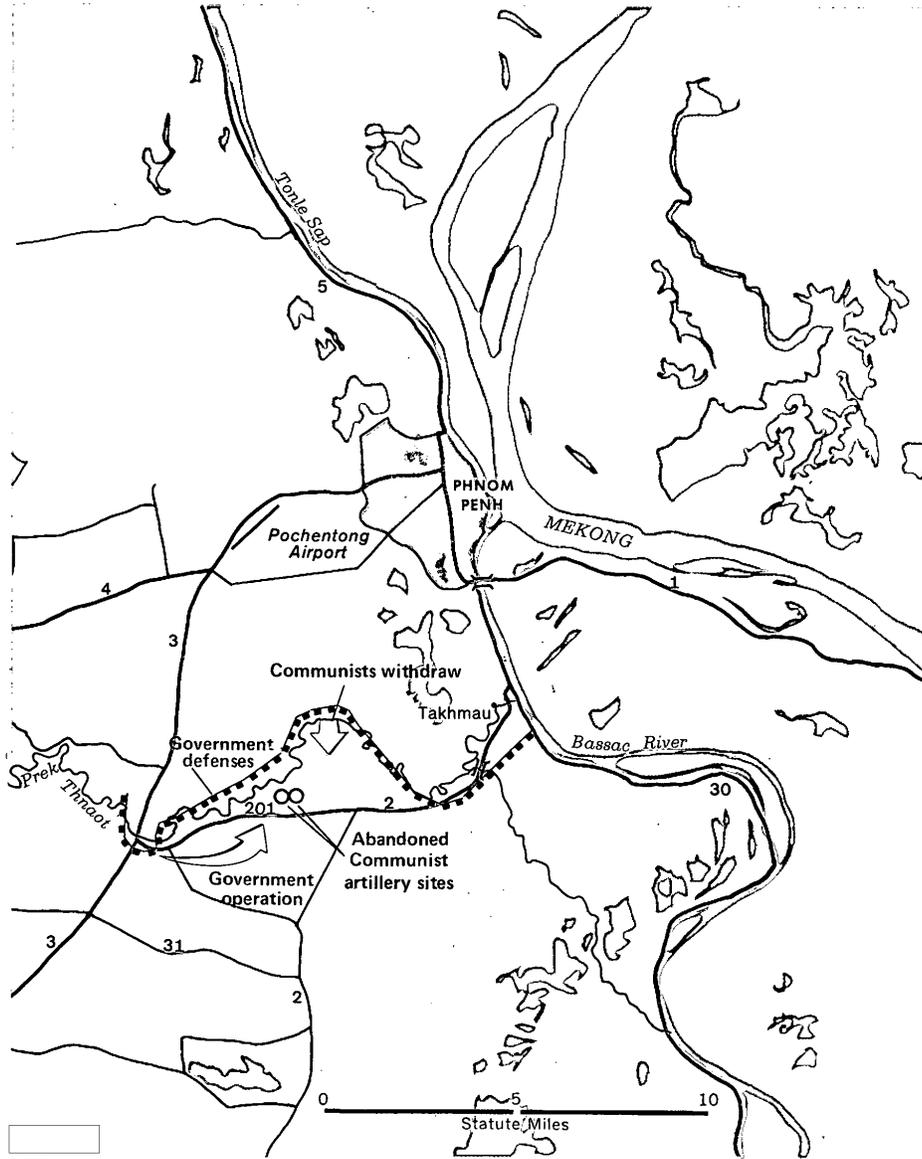
USSR

Flooding, melting snow, and ice crusts are threatening key Soviet grain areas, according to a front-page Izvestia article this week. Although stating "no special grounds for alarm and concern," the article ordered farmers to drain flooded fields immediately and prepare for the possibility that severe frosts could kill crops deprived of protective snow cover.

Unusual weather has already created problems. A rainy autumn delayed some sowing, and an early cold spell slowed the development and reduced the hardness of the grain in most of the European USSR. A thaw in late December, followed by a sudden cold spell in mid-January, damaged sowings in the north-eastern Ukraine, the Central Black Earth Region, and the Lower Volga. The snow cover needed to insulate the plants from killing air temperatures was thin or absent over most of the area through January. Now, above-normal temperatures for February have completely melted the snow cover in key areas. Standing water and ice crusts can suffocate seedlings in some places, but even more threatening to all regions is the warm weather which reduces plant resistance to extreme cold, still likely to occur.

Although the winter grain area lost to winterkill could exceed the long-run average of 20 percent, a large planting last fall and the reseeded of damaged areas with spring grain could still produce a normal or above normal 1974 grain crop. Reseeding is usually done with feed grains, however, so that winterkill tends to reduce the breadgrain harvest.

Phnom Penh



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CAMBODIA

Cambodian Army operations south of Phnom Penh apparently have forced the Khmer Communists to pull their artillery in this sector out of range of the capital. Advancing government troops yesterday discovered two abandoned artillery positions and over 400 expended 105-mm. howitzer casings near Route 201 some seven miles from the city. Communist units at the center of the southern defense line have withdrawn to the south bank of the Prek Thnaot River, leaving behind significant quantities of ammunition.

Government gains on the southern front follow closely successful government operations northwest of Phnom Penh, which resulted in heavy Communist losses in men and materiel. These setbacks may cause Communist leaders to delay a series of coordinated moves against the capital that were to begin around February 25. An intercept of February 19 indicated that the timetable for Communist attacks along Route 1 southeast of the capital has already slipped, apparently because of logistics problems unrelated to the fighting on other fronts.

FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

LAOS

Despite his failure to form a new coalition government by February 21--the first anniversary of the Laos peace agreement--Prime Minister Souvanna is still confident that virtually all of the obstacles have been overcome.

Souvanna has been busy meeting with his Council of Ministers and with chief Pathet Lao negotiator Phoun Sipraseuth on the list of candidates for the coalition cabinet and the Joint National Political Council. He hopes to announce their membership within the next few days.

Souvanna's efforts have received a welcome boost from his chief political opponents on the right, the Vientiane-based Sananikone family. In a press conference on February 20, family spokesmen endorsed "without reservation" the Prime Minister's efforts to achieve national reconciliation. They also indicated that they expected the government would be directly invested by the King without prior ratification by the assembly--precisely the scheme that Souvanna has been lobbying for.

JAPAN-CHINA

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NOTES

USSR: The Soviets are rotating some of their warships in the Indian Ocean. A Sverdlov-class command cruiser and a frigate are leaving, and a Kresta II class guided-missile cruiser is en route by way of the Cape of Good Hope. The Kresta II, which has an admiral aboard, probably will make several port calls in the littoral countries and may remain in the Indian Ocean from two to five months. The rotation will reduce the number of Soviet surface warships in the Indian Ocean to seven.

Yugoslavia: After canceling his trip to Hungary last week for unspecified reasons, Tito yesterday failed to attend ceremonies proclaiming Yugoslavia's new constitution. Yugoslav sources have confirmed to Western journalists that Tito is ill, but claim that he has only a cold which is "not serious."

UK: The government probably will announce a \$1-billion trade deficit for January, Britain's worst monthly deficit ever, just three days before national elections on February 28. Britain's record deficit was caused by an almost two-fold increase in crude oil prices and by the impact of the three-day workweek and other energy-related restrictions. Government officials expect a record current account deficit for 1974 and will try to fill the gap with loans from foreign capital markets and international financial organizations.

USSR-France-Egypt: An Egyptian official told Ambassador Eilts yesterday that Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko will visit Cairo on March 1, a day after Secretary Kissinger's stopover there. The official also disclosed that French Foreign Minister Jobert will arrive in Cairo on March 6.

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