



The President's Daily Brief

January 8, 1976

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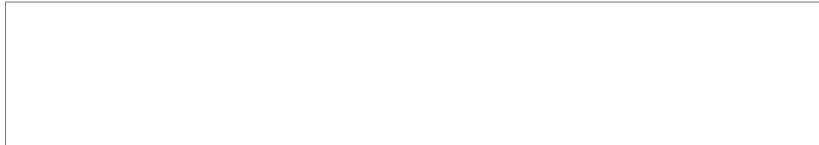
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LEBANON

Heavy fighting erupted yesterday in almost all Beirut suburbs following the collapse of negotiations to end the Christian blockade of two Palestinian refugee camps. If the Christian blockade continues, Fatah and Saiqa fedayeen units may for the first time be drawn into the fighting in force. These groups could, within days, commit as many as 5,000 troops to the fighting in Beirut. The introduction of such numbers would upset the rough balance of strength between Muslims and Christians that has prevailed over the past several months.

The Palestinian response thus far has been to shell Christian areas from the Tall Za'tar refugee camp and to attack the predominantly Christian Horsh Thabet district. Less intense clashes occurred yesterday throughout the Christian and Muslim neighborhoods on the east side of the Beirut River.

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[redacted]
Prime Minister Karami has been unable to secure Muslim backing for reforms he had promised Franjiyah, [redacted] Damascus is refusing to accept a Christian proposal that any comprehensive agreement be guaranteed by an international police force to include Saudis, Kuwaitis, and Syrians.

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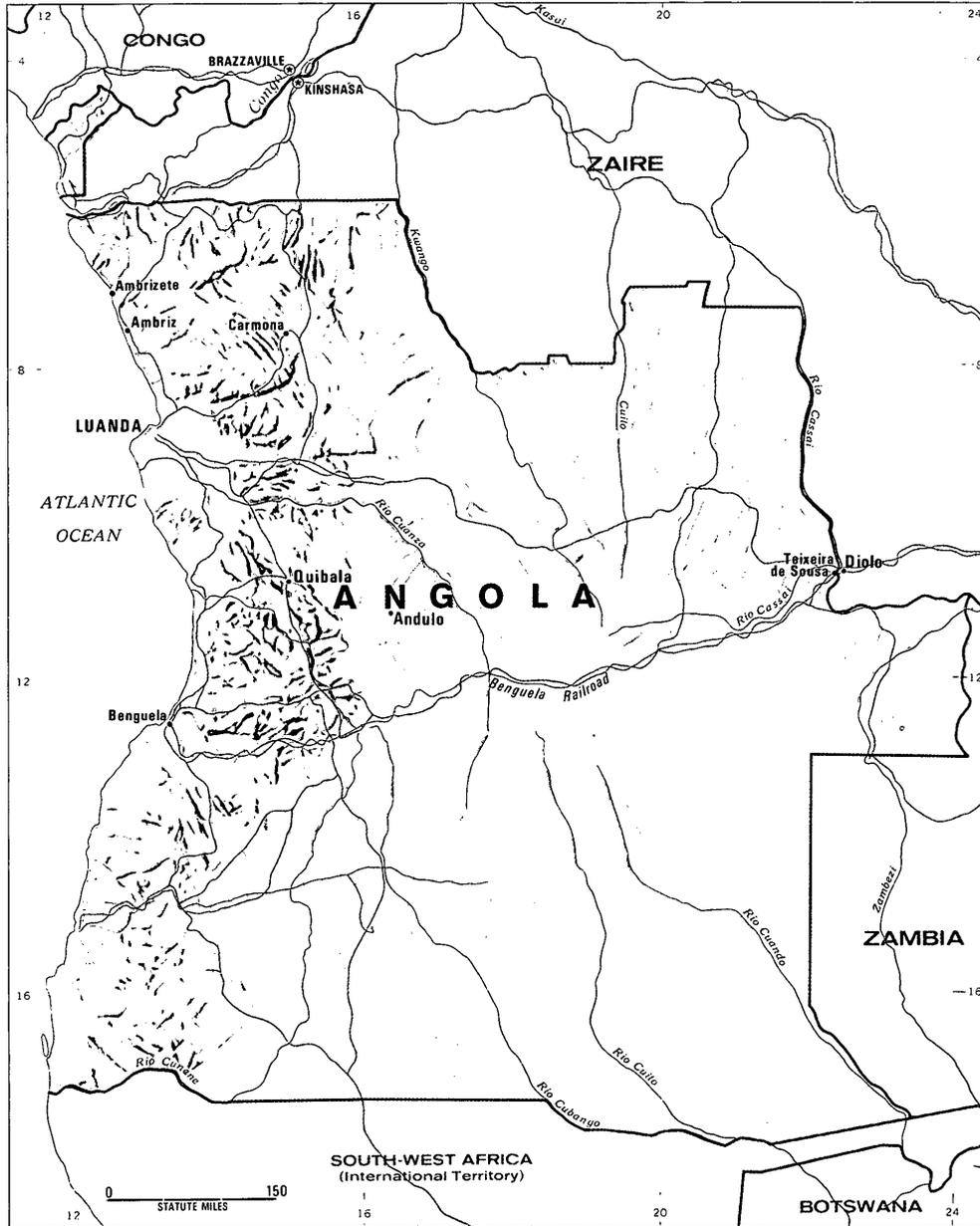
On Tuesday, Syrian Prime Minister Khaddam reacted to ultra-conservative Lebanese demands for the partition of Lebanon with the threat that Syria would annex the country if such an attempt were made.

[redacted]
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Such warnings are intended by Syria to intimidate Lebanese Christians into making political concessions rather than as firm declarations of intent. Syria wants to avoid giving Israel a pretext for moving into southern Lebanon.

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ANGOLA



ANGOLA

The National Front is preparing for an expected Popular Front attack on a key road junction east of Ambriz.

[redacted] morale at Ambriz is plummeting and some heavy weapons have been moved to Ambrizete to keep them from falling into enemy hands.

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[redacted] the Front hopes to begin an effort to recapture Carmona, which it lost to the Popular Movement last weekend. The loss of Carmona, a district capital in the area inhabited by the Front's Bakongo tribal supporters, was a severe political as well as military setback for the Front. The Popular Movement is heralding the capture as a major blow against National Front "oppression" in the north, and it will probably play heavily on that theme at the Organization of African Unity meetings opening today in Addis Ababa.

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In central Angola, the Popular Movement has broken the National Front - National Union siege of Quibala and has begun a strong drive to the south-east. The objective of the drive is the city of Andulo, a gateway to the heavily populated central highlands, where the National Union draws its tribal support.

In the east, no territory is known to have changed hands in recent days, but fighting is taking place between Popular Movement and Zairian forces at Teixeira de Sousa. Movement forces apparently destroyed a bridge linking Teixeira de Sousa with Diolo on the Zairian side of the border in a move to forestall a possible attack from Zaire.

* * *

The Soviet guided-missile cruiser that left the Mediterranean Sunday is moving south, probably en route to Conakry, Guinea, which it could reach by the end of the week. We had earlier assumed that the ship's movement was in reaction to the Moroccan seizure of a Soviet fishing trawler. It is too early to determine whether the cruiser will remain at Conakry or join the Soviet destroyer and landing ship that are now in Angolan waters.

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Cuba may be using Georgetown, Guyana, as a secret shuttle stop for its military airlift to Angola.

A local civil air official has told our embassy in Georgetown that logs at Georgetown's Timehri airport show a total of five Cuban flights to Africa since December 21. Most if not all of the flights involved IL-18s rather than the Bristol Britannias we have been observing on other legs of the Cuban airlift. [REDACTED]

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ITALY

The resignation of the Italian government yesterday presents the country's party leaders with basic political choices. Another shuffling of cabinet portfolios would provide politicians only a temporary respite. An early parliamentary election may be the only way out.

The Socialist Party brought about Prime Minister Moro's resignation by withdrawing its support in parliament. The Socialist decision came after months of analysis led Socialist leaders to conclude that their party must take the initiative or eventually risk its survival as a separate political party.

The Socialists concluded that any new partnership with the Christian Democrats must be based on two conditions:

--That the Christian Democrats agree to programs that would appeal to the leftist voters the Socialist want to capture.

--That any new government consult more openly and formally with the Communists so that they cannot use their opposition status so effectively in electoral competition with the Socialists.

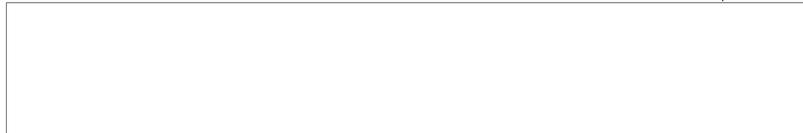
The latter condition--aimed as much against the Christian Democrats as the Communists--is likely to be the major stumbling block to any new agreement. Had the Socialists waited until after the Christian Democratic congress is held in March, the latter might have found a way to compromise on the issue.

As of now, however, the Christian Democrats are deeply divided over the wisdom of openly qualifying their opposition to the Communists. A majority of Christian Democrats appear to feel that dealing with the Communists more openly runs the risk of sliding into broader and irreversible collaboration with them.

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For their part, the Communists do not relish the prospect of a free-for-all at this time among the governing parties. The Communists saw their interests served best by Moro's continuation in office. That gave them the opportunity to work discreetly in parliament to further Communist leader Berlinguer's aim of an eventual rapprochement with the Christian Democrats, while maintaining Communist credentials as an opposition party.

President Leone has the option of refusing to accept Moro's resignation or of insisting on a parliamentary debate followed by a vote of confidence. The President refused to accept former prime minister Rumor's resignation in 1974, because Leone thought the political and economic situation too precarious to permit a government collapse. Rumor eventually succeeded in patching up the feud. Leone has a similar view of the current situation, but he will probably conclude that the differences that led the Socialists to abandon the government are deeper in this instance.



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All of the parties are publicly opposed to an early election, although some Socialists and Christian Democrats are privately urging their parties to push the situation in that direction.

NOTES

The Soviet Union seems to be trying to end speculation that an unsigned commentary published in Pravda on January 3 signaled a major change in Moscow's policy toward Angola.

A front-page editorial that appeared in *Izvestia* on Tuesday reiterated Moscow's view that there is no contradiction between Soviet support for the Popular Movement and detente. The editorial states that detente and the "struggle against racism and apartheid"--an obvious reference to South African involvement in Angola--are compatible. *Izvestia* described the National Front and National Union as "tools of imperialism," and reasserted the "right" of the USSR--and, by implication, Cuba--to intervene in Angola. Although the editorial does not exclude the possibility of an eventual coalition regime in Angola or the cessation of Soviet (and Cuban) intervention, it offers no encouragement along these lines.

* * *

The Soviet fishing ship now being held in Agadir, Morocco, is likely to be released in the next few days.

The Moroccans have satisfied themselves that the trawler carried neither arms nor Algerian officers as Rabat had publicly claimed. A Soviet press statement yesterday, refuting reports that the trawler carried arms or Algerians, included no belligerent language. This suggests that the USSR is ready to write off the incident, if the vessel is released.

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Venezuela

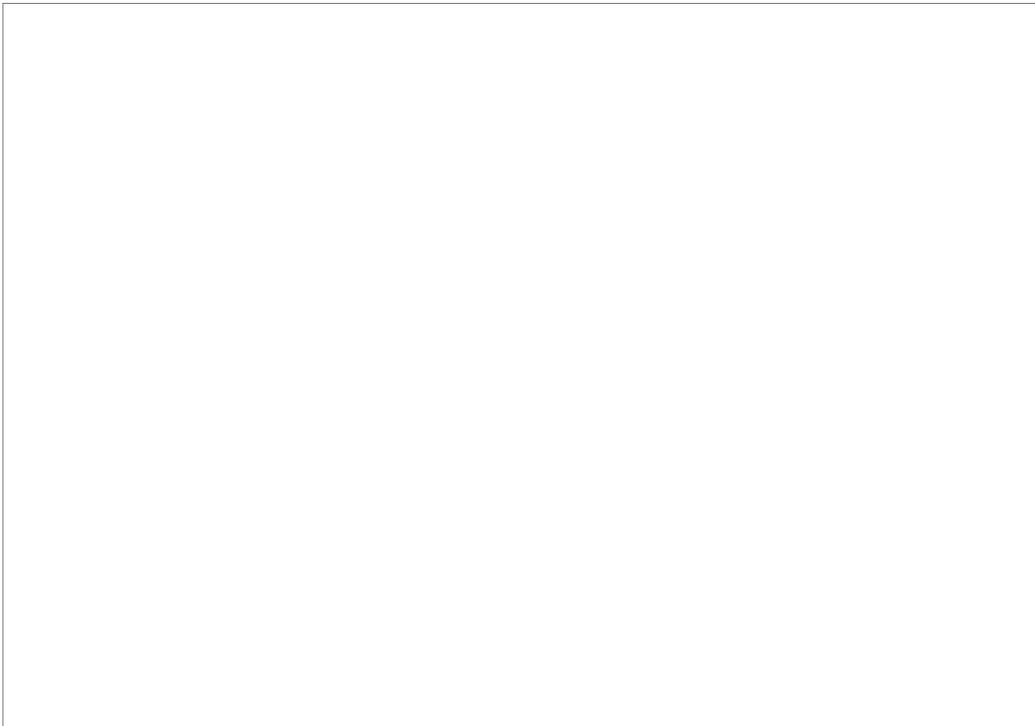
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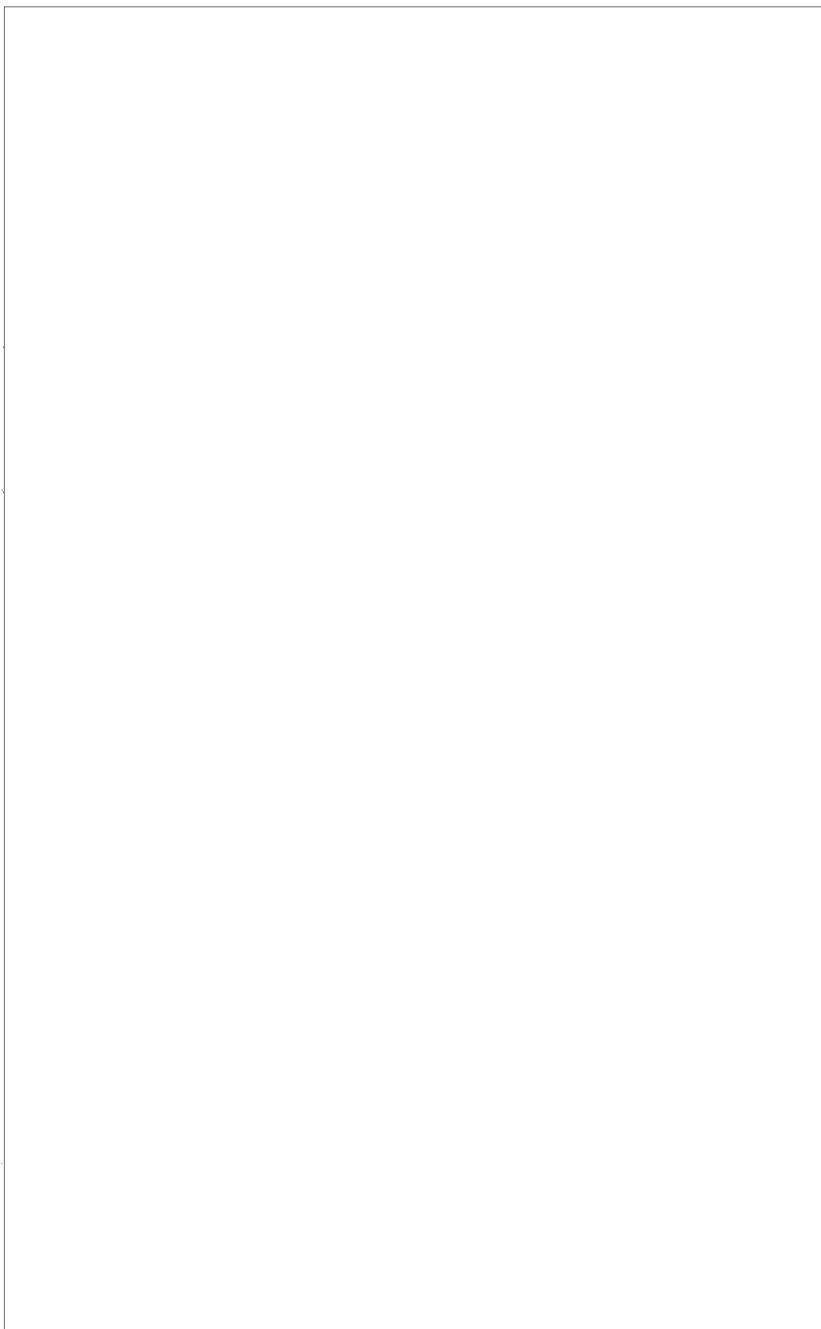
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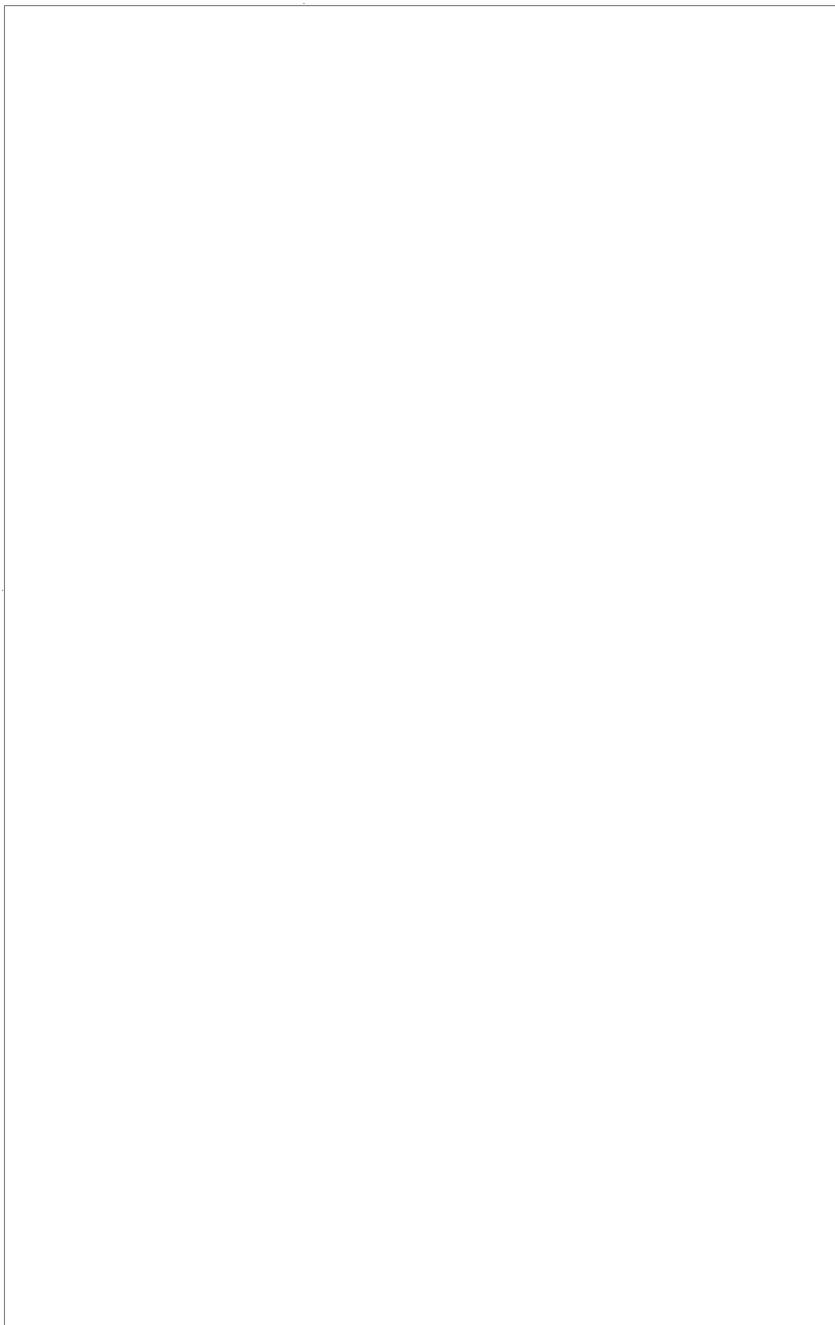
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