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The President's Daily Brief

July 23, 1976

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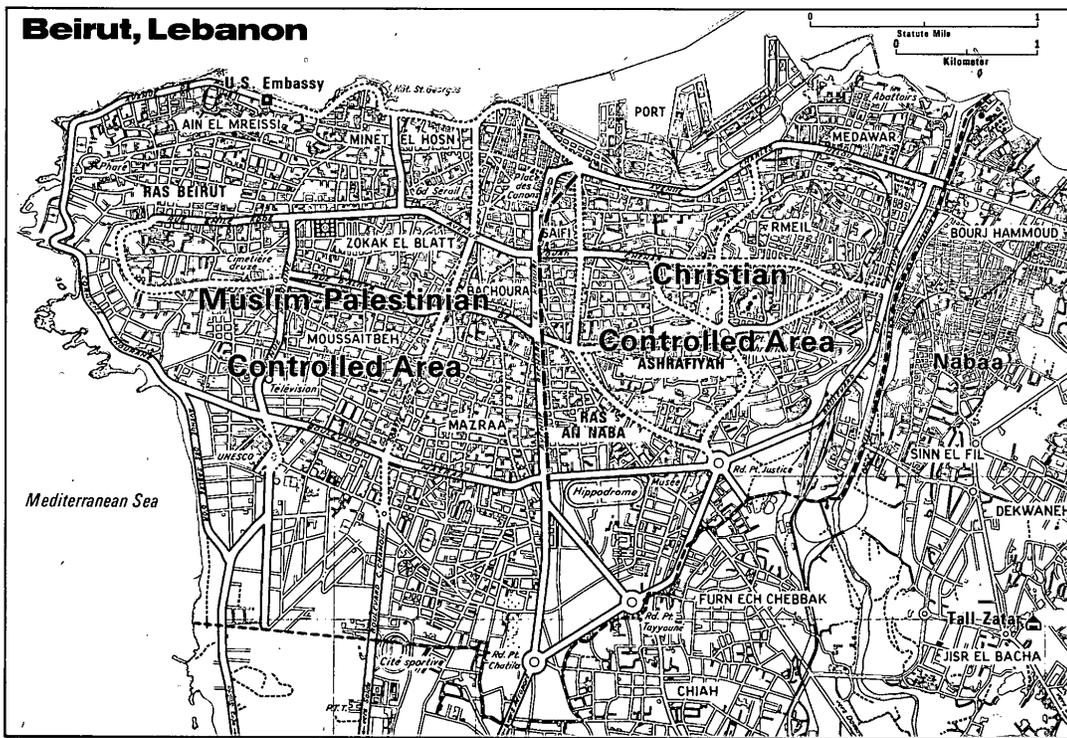
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July 23, 1976

Table of Contents

- Lebanon: Palestinian and leftist leaders reportedly do not expect much to come out of their current talks in Damascus with Syrian officials. In Beirut, the Palestinians seem convinced that by delaying a new American evacuation they can stave off an anticipated Christian-Syrian assault on west Beirut. (Page 1)
- Egypt-Iraq: There are more indications that Egypt is still transshipping Iraqi arms to Lebanon. (Page 3)
- USSR-Syria: A Soviet Foreign Ministry official has asserted that there has been no major change in Moscow's relations with Damascus. (Page 4) 25X1
- Kenya-Uganda: Nairobi's economic pressure on Uganda is having a serious impact. (Page 5) 25X1
- USSR-India: [REDACTED] 25X1
- Notes: USSR; Rhodesia; Italy; Bangladesh (Pages 9 and 10)

FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY



LEBANON: A Palestinian delegation met yesterday in Damascus with Syrian Foreign Minister Khaddam. Unconfirmed press reports claim that Palestine Liberation Organization chief Yasir Arafat has flown to Damascus to join the talks.

The delegation apparently carried a proposed agenda for eventual discussions between Arafat and President Asad which included the establishment of a cease-fire under Arab League auspices and the regulation of Palestinian activity in Lebanon under the restrictive terms of the Cairo accords.

By putting the accords on their agenda, the Palestinians may be signaling Damascus that they are approaching the possibility of negotiations seriously. In private, Palestinian leaders have long held that the accords have to be renegotiated.

The Palestinians and leftists reportedly do not expect much to come of the talks. They point to the hard line enunciated by Asad in his speech on Tuesday, continuing Syrian and Christian military pressure, the apparent acquiescence of other Arab states in Syria's strategy, and what they see as Syrian efforts to undermine Palestinian-leftist unity. Their willingness to send a delegation at all probably reflects their growing desperation.

The leftist radio is playing up the story that the US is supplying arms to the Christians via Israel--a charge that is likely to reinforce fears that the US is masterminding an anticipated Christian-Syrian attack on west Beirut.

The leftists have reacted by moving men and military equipment into the city's coastal district, where the US embassy is located. The embassy assumes that these moves are related to widespread rumors of an imminent seaborne attack.

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The Palestinians seem to be convinced that by delaying a new American evacuation from Beirut, they will stave off the expected Christian-Syrian attack. [redacted]

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The obvious edginess of the Palestinians and the leftists who are bracing for an attack on west Beirut poses an additional hazard to US attempts to arrange an evacuation. If the talks in Damascus go badly for the Palestinians, the possibility of some kind of rash action will grow.

The 150-man Saudi Arabian contingent of the Arab League security force, which is trying to establish a buffer zone in Beirut, came under fire again yesterday. The Saudis kept their positions however.

Fighting goes on at Tall Zatar, but attention is beginning to shift to the Shia Muslim enclave of Nabaa, which has been shelled by the Christians for the past few days. Elsewhere, in the mountains east of Beirut, the Christians are continuing their offensive with some help from the Syrians.

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

The Palestinian airstrip near Nabatiyah in southern Lebanon could possibly be completed within the next week or so.

The rudimentary airstrip will be able to handle only one aircraft at a time and apparently will not have any service or refueling capabilities. It could be used by US-built C-130 transports and Soviet-built AN-12 transports. Libya has eight C-130s. Egypt has about 30 AN-12s and Iraq approximately 10. Although an AN-12 probably would have to carry less than a full load of cargo to use the airstrip, a substantial amount of arms could be flown in each day.

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[REDACTED] a small plane landed at the airstrip late last week. Neither the type of aircraft nor its cargo was identified, however.

We are still uncertain about the length of the other rudimentary strip in southern Lebanon north of Jazzin, but it may only be able to handle light aircraft. Construction could be completed within a month if there are no interruptions. This strip apparently cannot be used at this time.

EGYPT-IRAQ: We have received further indications that Egypt is continuing to transship Iraqi arms to Lebanon.

Transport aircraft, presumably carrying arms destined for Lebanese leftists and Palestinians, have been scheduled for daily flights from Baghdad to Cairo between July 19 and August 9. These flights supplement an airlift of at least 40 other transports that have gone to Cairo since early June.

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Since the Arab League has rejected Iraqi participation in the peace-keeping force, the group may be made up of Iraqi or Palestinian volunteers recruited to join leftist and Palestinian forces in Lebanon.

USSR-SYRIA: A Soviet Foreign Ministry official has given a relatively calm view of Moscow's relations with Damascus.

Yevgeny Pyrlin, the deputy head of the ministry's Near East division, told a US embassy officer yesterday that--despite strong differences over Lebanon--there had been no "spectacular" change in Soviet-Syrian ties. He stated, however, that Moscow strongly believes that the Syrians should withdraw from Lebanon. When asked about Soviet military aid to Syria, Pyrlin replied that to his knowledge "all military agreements are being fulfilled."

On Lebanon, Pyrlin gave the impression that the situation there was beyond Soviet control. He also expressed great concern over the plight of the Palestinian movement, which he blamed equally on the current crisis in Lebanon and on the divisions within the PLO.

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Pyrlin said that he saw no prospect for the revival of the Geneva talks until after the US elections and until the Palestinians get their house in order.

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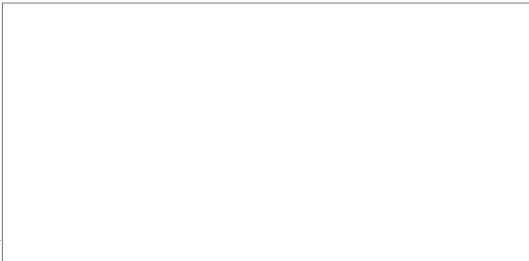
KENYA-UGANDA: Kenya's continuing restrictions on the delivery of petroleum supplies and other goods to landlocked Uganda are apparently having a serious impact.

The Ugandan government this week imposed strict fuel rationing and cut off supplies to private citizens.

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The Ugandan foreign minister met this week with Saudi and Kuwaiti leaders, presumably to

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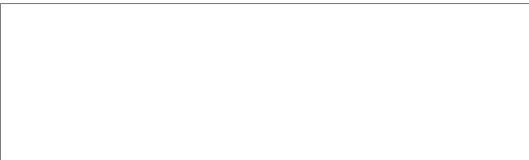


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In public, Amin has adopted a more conciliatory position. This week he has repeatedly disavowed any hostile intentions toward Kenya, most notably in a telegram to President Kenyatta.

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The Kenyans recognize that Amin's military capabilities probably have been further limited by the economic sanctions and the apparent decline in his troops' morale.



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Nairobi is still concerned about reports that Libya has sent Mirages and troops to Uganda. We cannot as yet confirm these reports, but a Libyan official told journalists in Kuwait last Sunday that Tripoli has provided "war planes" to Kampala and "will not stand silent" if Uganda is attacked.

Libya, meanwhile, has announced that it will provide Uganda with petroleum products, but the supply route remains unclear.

Amin apparently has asked neighboring Tanzania for access through the port of Dar es Salaam. President Nyerere, long one of Amin's favorite targets, will be reluctant to agree to such an arrangement.

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USSR-INDIA:

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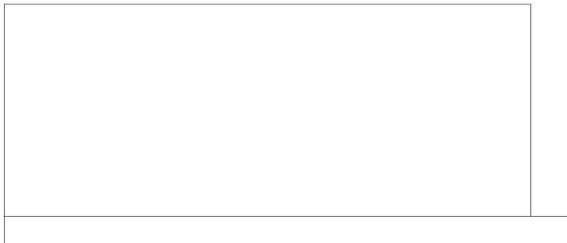
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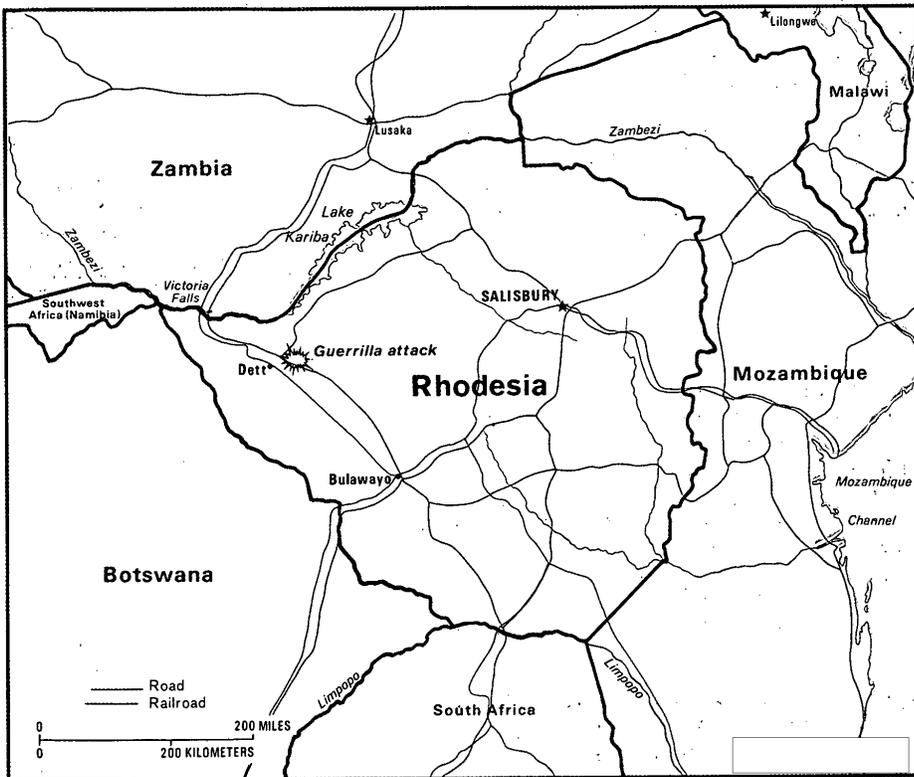


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NOTES

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Rhodesian guerrillas
*have for the first time
carried out an attack
along the main highway
in western Rhodesia.*

Press reports indicate the incident took place some 130 kilometers (80 miles) southeast of Victoria Falls. The incident may signal more extensive guerrilla activities in northwestern Rhodesia, as threatened recently by Zambian President Kaunda. There have been several reports of guerrillas infiltrating into northwestern Rhodesia from Zambia. The guerrillas have already begun small-scale activity along the Botswanan border.

If guerrilla attacks continue on the Victoria Falls highway they could force the Rhodesians to begin a defense convoy system like that already in use on the main highways in the southeast. This would further stretch the manpower of Rhodesia's security forces.

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

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The Italian Socialist Party leadership meets today to formulate an official position on the proposed government program that prime minister - designate Andreotti discussed with the party yesterday.

A Socialist spokesman has hinted that the party would agree to abstain in a parliamentary vote of confidence, which could enable Andreotti to form a temporary Christian Democratic minority government. The Socialists have insisted that they would not cooperate with the Christian Democrats unless the Communists also are involved in some way with the government.

The Communists have been refusing to take a position until Andreotti settles on a specific government formula. In putting together his economic program, Andreotti appears to have made a serious effort to secure a benevolent Communist attitude toward a new government.

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