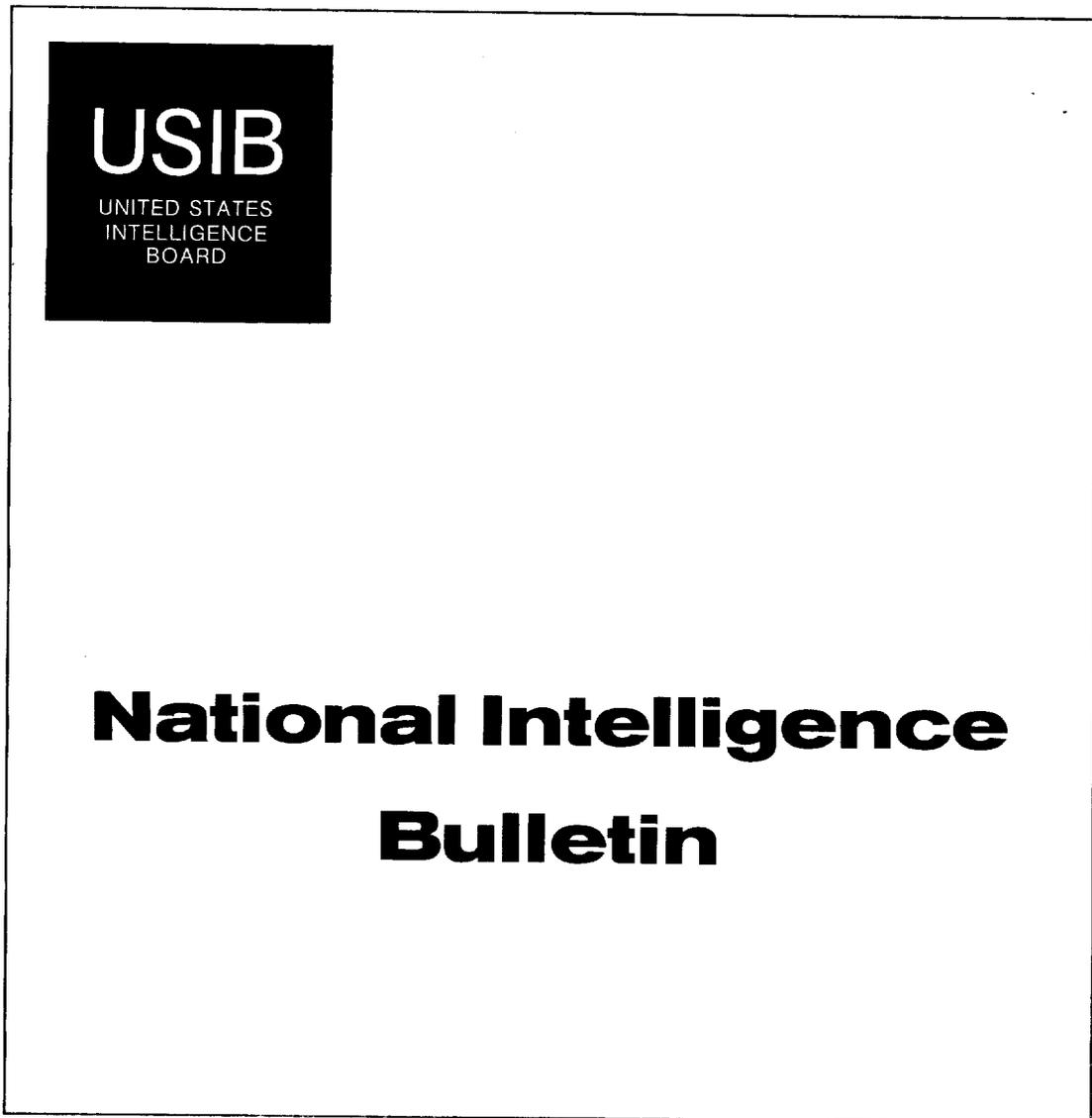


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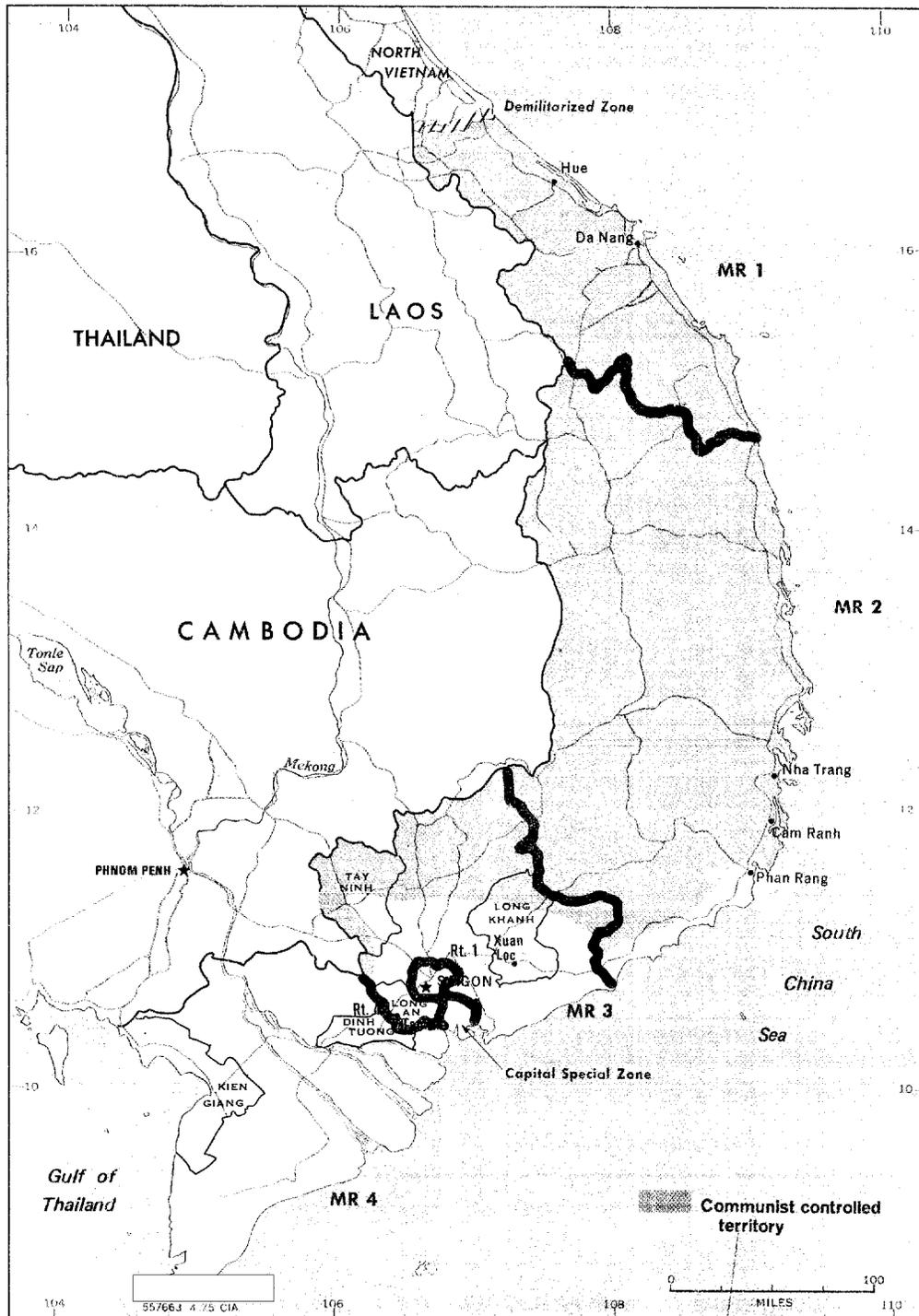
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SOUTH VIETNAM

The communists are increasing military pressure on the approaches to Saigon. Sharp attacks against two key provincial capitals to the east and southwest of the capital city yesterday may be the beginning of larger attacks nearer Saigon.

The ground attack against the provincial capital of Xuan Loc and surrounding areas was conducted by parts of both the North Vietnamese 6th Division and the newly arrived 341st Division. It was preceded by a heavy bombardment of the city. Most of the attackers were forced out of the city yesterday, but heavy fighting resumed today. Communist units nearby also hold positions overlooking Route 1 leading to Saigon. If they can effectively block this road, a large number of government forces would be cut off.

Regional commanders reacted quickly and moved units of the South Vietnamese 18th Division from outlying field positions into Xuan Loc. Armor units were moved to the new front from Tay Ninh Province and Airborne Division reinforcements were deployed from Saigon.

To the southwest of Saigon, elements of the North Vietnamese 5th Division struck the Long An Province capital of Tan An, the nearby airfield, and several stretches of vital Route 4 connecting the capital with the delta provinces. This attack was swiftly repulsed and Highway 4 is open.

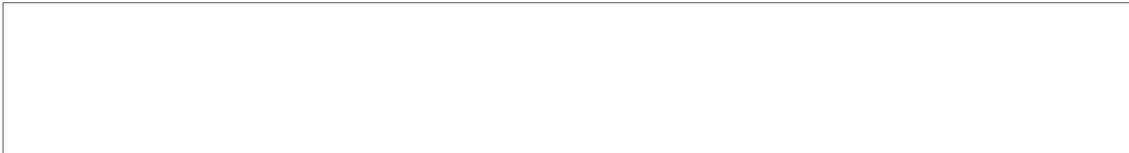
Signs are pointing to a widespread increase in communist military action throughout much of the delta. At the moment, however, the level of fighting is about the same as in the past few days, with the heaviest activity concentrated in Dinh Tuong and Kien Giang provinces.

The ultimate target for the new round of communist attacks appears to be Saigon itself. [REDACTED]

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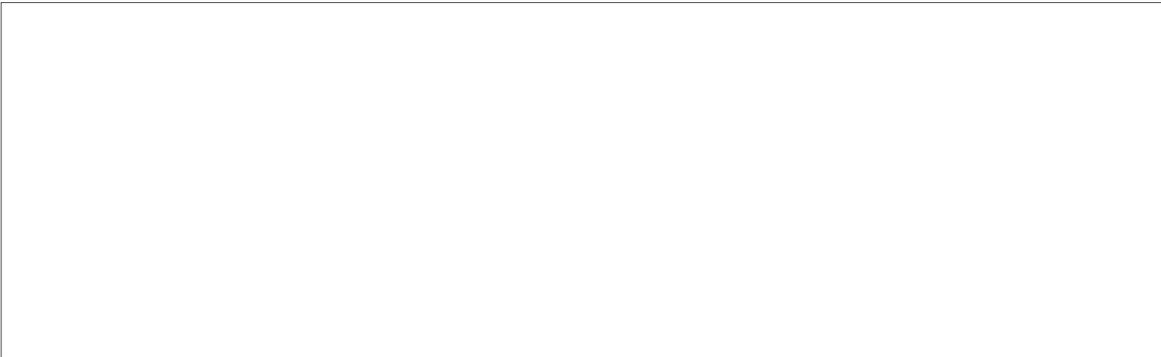
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It is doubtful that within the next week, the communists will feel strong enough in the area around Saigon for an all-out assault against the capital. They probably will wait until additional units arrive from the north before attempting such a move.



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The communists are expanding their hold over the city of Nha Trang. Their forces are now in complete control of the town and are busy collecting abandoned weapons and equipment.

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[redacted] at least half of the shops are open, Saigon's currency is still being used, and North Vietnamese flags are flying over all former government civil and military offices.

The communist occupation of Cam Ranh was apparently slow, taking place some days after the retreat of South Vietnamese forces.

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FRANCE - SOUTH VIETNAM

French calls for a negotiated settlement in South Vietnam seem aimed at protecting French interests there and perhaps moving to fill any vacuum left by waning US influence.

President Giscard, after a cabinet meeting yesterday, reaffirmed France's desire for a political settlement in South Vietnam as outlined in the 1973 Paris agreements. The French have contacted representatives of the nations involved with the Vietnamese war, as well as South Vietnamese neutralists, according to a French radio report on April 8.

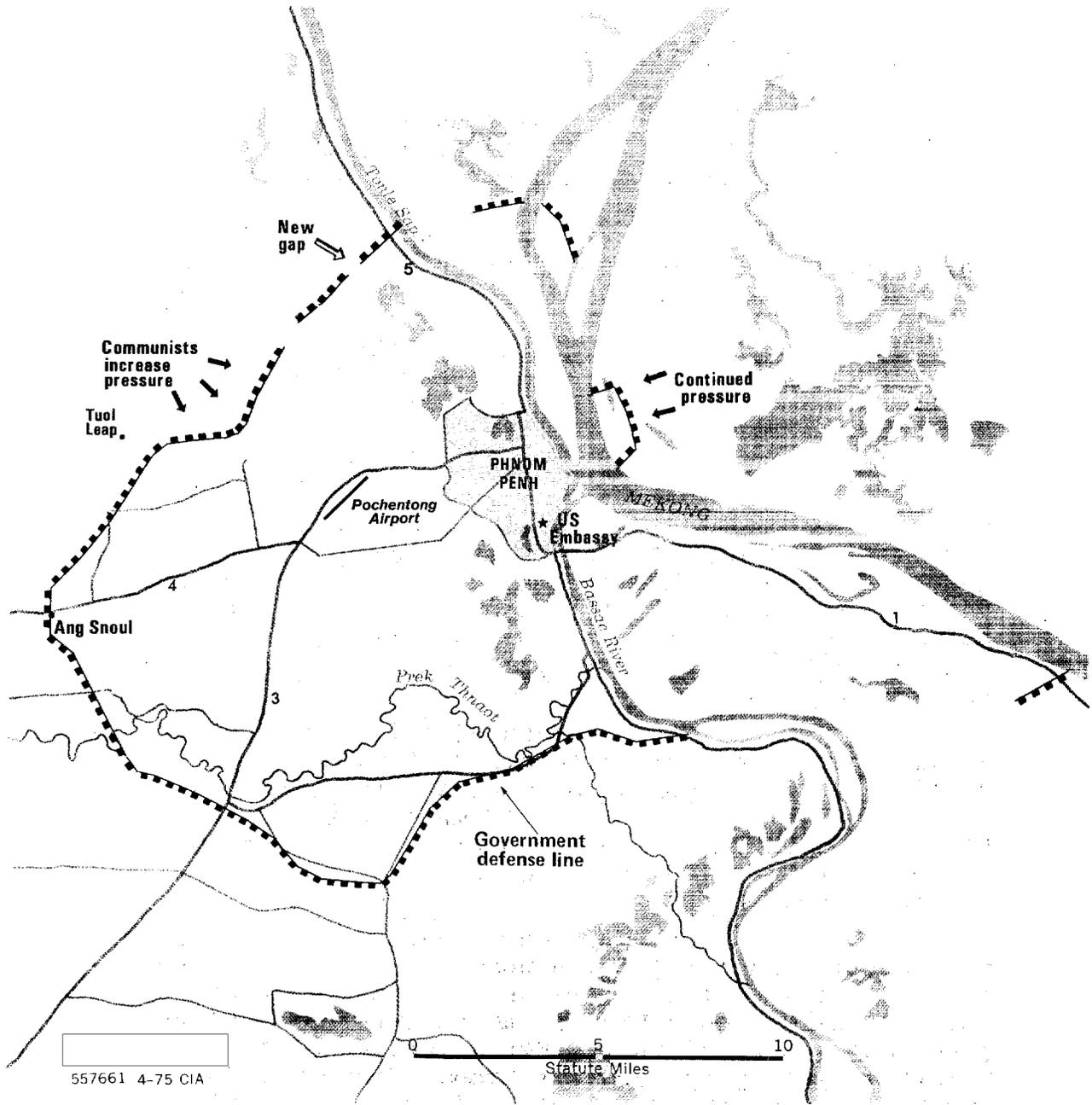
On April 8, the Quai's acting Asian director told a US embassy officer that Paris has decided to "increase the tempo of its political activity" toward South Vietnam. He cited as an example a meeting that day between a senior member of President Giscard's staff and the North Vietnamese ambassador, but claimed to have no information on the issues discussed. At a meeting of the EC Asian experts in Dublin on April 3-4, the French representative said Paris has begun a study on the possibility of recognizing the PRG.

The French have announced officially that they are sending humanitarian aid to areas of South Vietnam controlled by the Saigon government and the Viet Cong. Medicine, food, medical and paramedical personnel were to be flown in beginning on April 9. The Viet Cong reportedly have agreed to allow the French planes to land in areas they control.

The French hope to preserve their role as the primary Western cultural influence in Indochina and to increase their political influence there. They would prefer control of South Vietnam to pass to the coalition government outlined in the Paris accords rather than a military victory by the Viet Cong. Since the former seems unlikely now, Paris may believe that if it were to call for Thieu's ouster it could both enhance its position with the communists and gain international credit for a gesture of statesmanship.

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Phnom Penh



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CAMBODIA

The erosion of Phnom Penh's outer defenses has reached a point where a major Khmer communist penetration or a general collapse of government units, or a combination of the two could occur at anytime.

Although only rocket and artillery rounds landed near Pochentong airport yesterday, steady communist advances have brought them within recoilless rifle range of the airfield in the northwest. US defense attachés report that government forces in this area may wilt rapidly in the face of continued insurgent attacks.

The communists also opened a new gap in the defense line six miles north of the airfield, following the unauthorized withdrawal of a government unit.

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The communists are also maintaining heavy pressure on government units on the east bank of the Mekong River near the capital. Government holdings in the area have now been reduced to a relatively small enclave directly opposite the city and a few other isolated positions. Recoilless rifle or mortar fire from the east bank has begun to hit near Phnom Penh's waterfront, and communist gunners are also within range of the heavily populated sections of the city, including the US embassy.

Communist forces along Route 4 west of Phnom Penh do not yet pose a direct threat to Pochentong airport or to the city itself. Fighting along the highway yesterday remained at a high level, however, and another outlying government position was abandoned. Any additional government withdrawals in this sector will further endanger the army's main ammunition dump just south of the highway.

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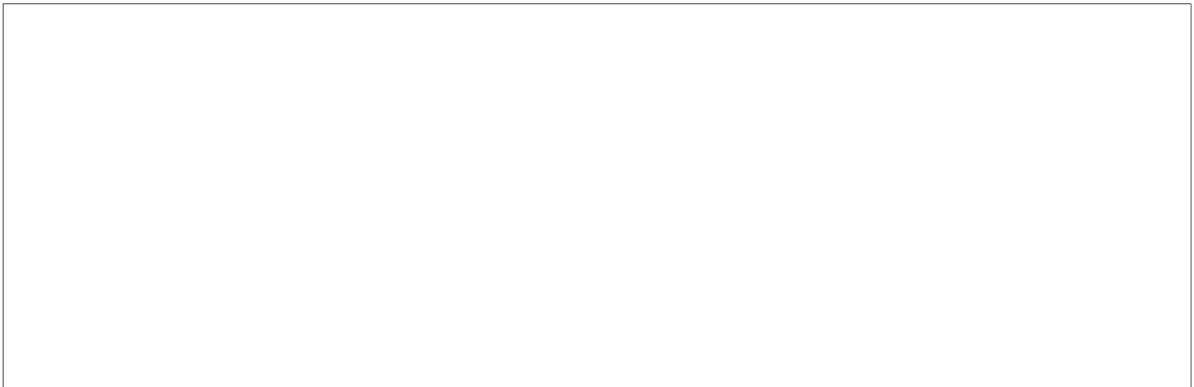
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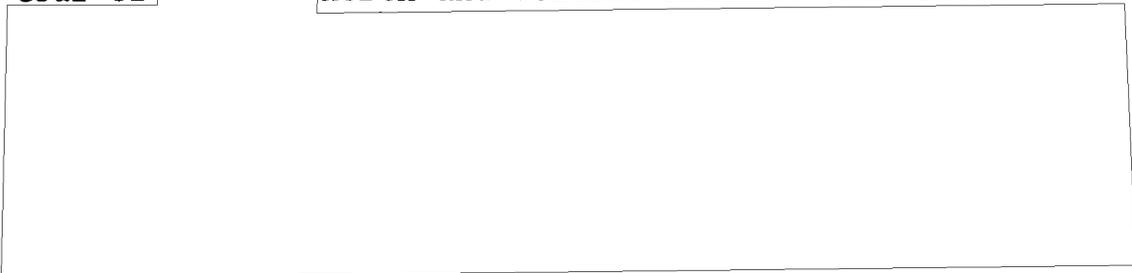


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USSR

The USSR's AN-26 Curl, a short-haul multipurpose transport aircraft, recently completed a promotional tour of [redacted] north and central African countries.

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The Curl was first exhibited at the 1969 Paris Air Show and demonstrated in several Middle Eastern countries in the early 1970s. As with the earlier, passenger-carrying AN-24, potential non-communist buyers have shown little interest in substantial purchases of Soviet-built aircraft. Although the twin-turboprop AN-26 has airdrop capability and a rear-door exit, it is intended primarily as a cargo carrier; it can be adapted as a passenger carrier. The cargo configuration lifts some five tons, the passenger version carries 32 people plus a crew of three.

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BRAZIL

President Geisel, displeased by internal divisions and lack of dynamism within the government party, is seeking to revitalize it.

Geisel is pursuing what the US embassy calls a "two-track strategy." On the one hand, he wants to give the party more of an edge on the opposition by initiating close consultation with party leaders to keep them better informed on administration plans and policies. The President also sought to lend prestige to a recent party meeting by giving a personal address.

At the same time, Geisel has asked his advisers to devise alternative strategies. One idea is to create a pro-government third party designed to attract and combine the energies of the most dynamic members of the government and opposition parties. Another would abolish the present parties and create three or four entirely new ones. The deliberate leaking of such contingency planning to the press may well have been intended to impress on the government party the urgent need to strengthen itself.

Geisel is concerned not only because of the opposition's electoral gains last fall, but also because of the effect a repetition of the government's losses would have on conservative opponents of his liberalization program. Moreover, the embassy believes that some within the military simply could not tolerate an eventual opposition majority in congress, which, under current legislation, nominally "elects" the president.

The President is not likely to change the present two-party system--a creation of the military governments--since the result would be disconcertingly similar to the system the military replaced a decade ago. Even if he were so disposed, there is little indication that the opposition would readily cooperate with any plan for a drastic restructuring of the present system. The likelihood is, therefore, that Geisel, for the time being

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at least, will bend every effort to rebuild the government party's position within the current framework. The President's next overt move probably will be to replace the party leadership.

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FOR THE RECORD

Chile: The cabinet shake-up under way in Chile reflects an attempt by the military government to deal more effectively with economic problems.

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President Pinochet seems to have decided to intensify current austerity measures despite their unpopularity with most Chileans, including many officers in the armed forces.

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