



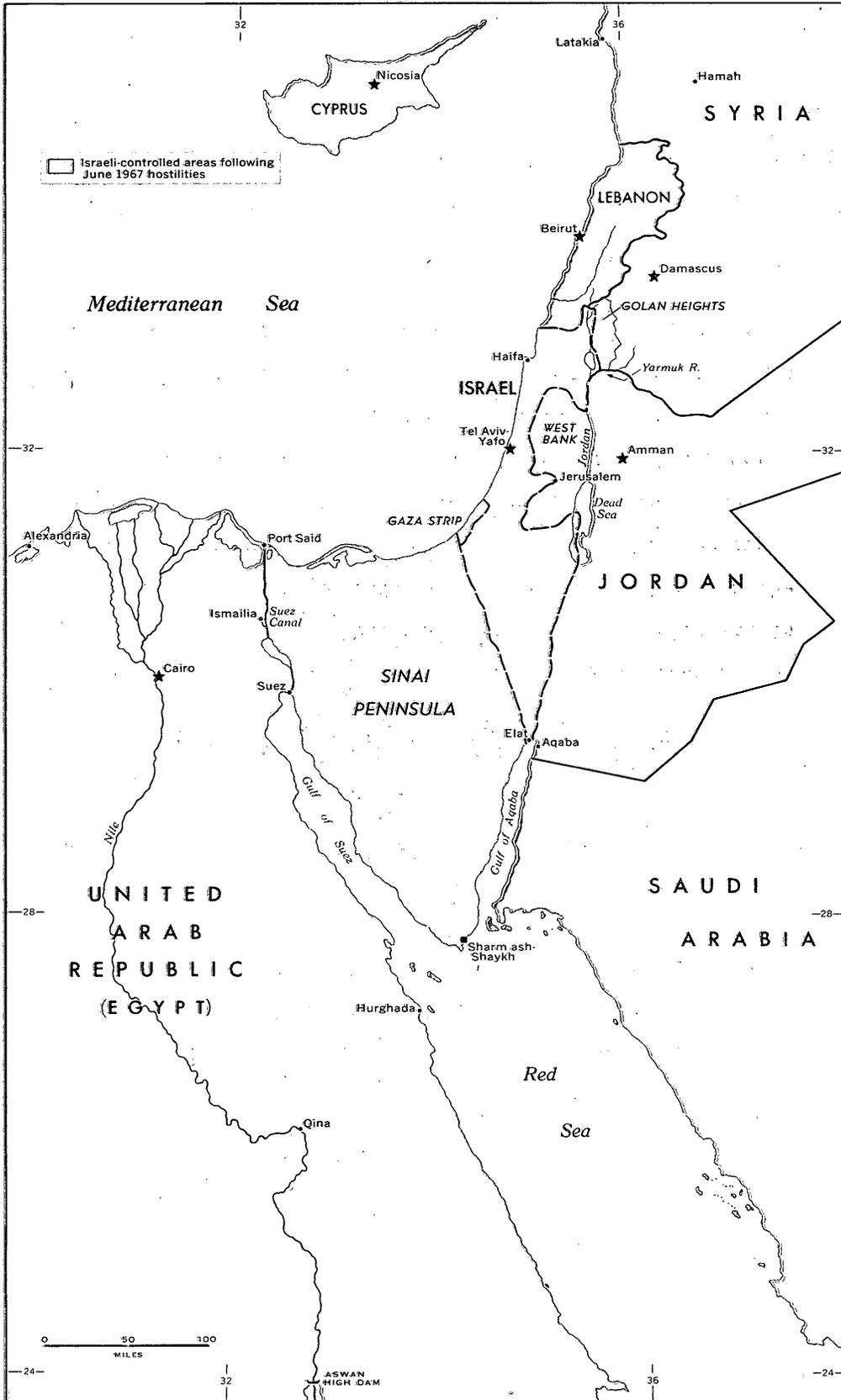
The President's Daily Brief

11 April 1969

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12 April 1969

LATE NOTES FOR THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF OF
11 APRIL 1969

I. MAJOR PROBLEMS

VIETNAM

There was continued shelling today with a second attack at Vinh Long city in the IV Corps area and hits on 25-30 other towns. Recent intercepts show that a number of enemy main force regiments in the III Corps provinces near Saigon are in the process of withdrawing to base areas and border sanctuaries. (Central Intelligence Bulletin; 50X1

MIDDLE EAST

Israeli and Jordanian troops battled for three hours today eight miles south of the Sea of Galilee, according to a Jordanian military spokesman. The Cairo newspaper, Al Ahram, claims that several senior Israeli military officers who were conferring at an advance post near the Suez Canal Thursday were injured by artillery fire. (Press)

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There is nothing significant to report on Europe or Soviet Affairs.

II. OTHER IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS

CAMBODIA

Phnom Penh radio today carried a statement by Sihanouk that he has received a letter from President Nixon saying that the US will recognize Cambodian frontiers next Wednesday and that he is preparing his diplomats for a renewal of relations with the US. (FBIS 09, 12 Apr)

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I. MAJOR PROBLEMS

MIDDLE EAST

The embassy in Amman reports that the fedayeen may be getting ready for a major show of strength. Signs pointing in this direction had started to appear even before Tuesday's rocket attack on Elat, and they have multiplied since then. The Jordanian Government apparently is working itself up to an attempt to curb the terrorists, but the embassy doubts that it will do anything until Husayn returns. The government lost a good bit of prestige--and hence saw its leverage with the terrorists reduced--by its inept handling of the rocket incident.

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Fedayeen confidence and inflexibility were apparent in what an official of the Palestine Liberation Organization in Beirut told a US Embassy officer. In the last 18 months, he claimed, the fedayeen have grown strong enough to keep any Arab government from reaching a separate settlement with Israel. He also made it clear that Husayn was not empowered to speak for the fedayeen during his current visit to Washington, and that the PLO rejected both the Security Council resolution of 22 November 1967 and the current four-power talks.

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VIETNAM

The current refusal of the Vietnamese Communists to meet privately with representatives of the government of South Vietnam may well represent a firm decision by the Politburo in Hanoi to procrastinate until the US agrees to four-way private talks on the political future of South Vietnam. There are signs, however, that the lack of action or reaction on the part of the Communists in Paris reflects continuing debate within the Politburo over what course to take.

We suspect, that the Vietnamese Politburo has been in extended session over how to proceed both in Paris and on the battlefield in South Vietnam. We note in particular that Le Duc Tho has been back in Hanoi for almost two months now. This, his longest absence from Paris, may be a result of the Politburo's inability to reach agreement over what to do next.

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We believe that the North Vietnamese leadership has long been split over how to fight the war, and that strong differences are continually surfacing now over how to proceed in the negotiations. There probably are some who advocate a policy of ending the fighting soon and attempting to carry on the struggle in the South largely through political methods. These people, who perhaps include Truong Chinh and Pham Van Dong, might be willing to make a deal with the current government

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in Saigon and accept a temporary settlement which accorded the Liberation Front a legal political role in South Vietnam. Those who advocate this path, of course, also favor use of illegal and paramilitary action whenever and wherever it can be used effectively to aid their cause. Others in the Politburo, such as Le Duan, remain unalterably opposed to reliance on a so-called "parliamentary road" to power and to the fundamental political compromises this would require on the part of the Communists.

The Chinese Communists undoubtedly would back the views of Hanoi's hard liners. Peking obviously has been worried for a long time that Hanoi was going to compromise significantly in the course of the negotiations. Since last autumn there have been many items in Chinese media which could be read as strong hints of concern that the Vietnamese Communists are going to choose a "parliamentary road."

Truong Chinh's magnum opus of last summer, which laid out the path the Politburo wanted to take in South Vietnam, was very defensive on the question of whether the party advocated the "road of peaceful transition." Truong Chinh flatly ruled out any such illusion as a means of "seizing power," but he was very vague on the courses which might become necessary if the party was unable to seize power by force. He noted, in fact, that in Vietnam either the "political or the armed struggle will play the principal role in accordance with the actual situation." He went on to state that "when not able to seize

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power, we should cleverly coordinate illegal activities with legal or semilegal ones," thus leaving open the possibility of some sort of participation in the legal government or political life of South Vietnam.

We believe, in fact, that some time last summer the North Vietnamese made some basic strategy decisions. One of these probably was to try to force a negotiated settlement of the war which would ensure eventual withdrawal of all US forces. The Politburo probably also recognized that achieving such a settlement would require fundamental Communist political concessions in South Vietnam.

It is likely that these were the decisions reflected in Truong Chinh's report and more specifically in Hanoi's agreement in October to accept the present South Vietnamese Government as one of the principal parties in the negotiations. This, in itself, was certainly a grim compromise for the hard liners. They probably have been trying whenever possible to forestall further steps along this road. In our view, however, the decisions made last summer have not been reversed and whatever debate may now be going on in Hanoi involves the tactics for carrying out the new strategic course.

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Recent deployments by Communist main force units and the level of enemy activity over the past few weeks have combined to create a mixed picture of Hanoi's intentions in the military sphere. The disengagement of a number

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of enemy main force units from combat areas, coupled with a sharp downturn in the number of infiltration groups entering the pipeline, suggests that the enemy intends to close down his latest offensive and lie low for a while.

On the other hand, the spate of shelling incidents today, several intercepts referring to other upcoming attacks, and the current move [redacted] 50X1 [redacted] into the Laos corridor west of Khe Sanh all point 50X1 toward an intent to continue the offensive.

These seemingly contradictory moves could reflect indecision among the party leadership on how to proceed at present. A more likely explanation, however, is that the Communist high command has decided to alter somewhat the character of its military effort while retaining its basic purpose. The primary aim of the offensive which began on 22 February probably was to demonstrate that Communist forces remain in the field and that there is no likelihood of an early end to the fighting apart from a negotiated settlement of the war. The Communists may now believe that they can continue to make that point by staging only occasional large-scale shelling incidents, such as the one today. By pulling some of their main force units back into base areas they may hope to reduce their casualties and thus also the number of replacements needed from North Vietnam.

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They may also believe that by keeping other units near certain key allied installations and urban centers [redacted]

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they can maintain a sufficient threat to tie down significant numbers of allied units in largely defensive positions. At the same time they can give some main force units a respite from the fighting.

The enemy high command must also be considering ways of countering any US plan for unilateral withdrawal of US forces from South Vietnam. Hanoi wants US troops out, but it wants to extract political concessions from the US as the price for lowering the level of the military threat sufficiently to allow such a withdrawal. The North Vietnamese believe their only hope of getting adequate political and military concessions from the US lies in domestic pressure on the US administration. They further believe that any unilateral US troop withdrawal may lower the level of domestic pressure and thus lessen the likelihood of such concessions.

Thus, Hanoi's planners probably will design their military operations in such a way as to make significant US troop withdrawal appear a serious threat to the ability of the GVN to contain the Communists. If this is the case, over the next few months we may find the enemy launching more of his attacks against ARVN units and areas primarily defended by government forces. During the latest offensive, the Communists appear to have been trying primarily to drive up the level of US casualties, presumably on the assumption that the higher the level of US casualties, the more domestic pressure on the US Government to make concessions in Paris.

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SOVIET AFFAIRS

The Soviets are continuing to press the leadership in Prague prior to the opening of a Czechoslovak party plenum next week. Soviet Defense Minister Grechko returned to Prague today from East Germany, where he met with Ulbricht and Polish party chief Gomulka. In Moscow, the Czech ambassador was called in yesterday for a "friendly" talk with Brezhnev.

The return of Grechko, as well as the continued presence of Deputy Foreign Minister Semenov, emphasizes that the Soviets are unwilling to tolerate Dubcek's delays in carrying out their demands. They probably are prodding Dubcek and his colleagues to make sure the central committee endorses to the letter Moscow's revised prospectus for "normalization." The plenum will probably go along after prolonged and painful debate.

Moscow seems also to be playing a role behind the scenes in Prague's precautionary measures to avert threatened strikes over several issues. Semenov met with trade union chief Polacek today, probably to sound out the hitherto liberal unions on their attitude toward new "normalization" measures. If the workers stage a general strike over expected price hikes, the students and other sectors of the population might join them. Consequently, one of Grechko's objectives may be to coordinate security measures with the Czechs and among his commanders in case the situation should necessitate action by Soviet occupation forces.

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Meanwhile, the Dubcek leadership apparently has worked out a compromise to head off a strike threatened by students over press censorship. The students announced that they will hold only a relatively harmless one-day "teach-in"--a solution that may be acceptable to the Russians.

There is widespread speculation that some top party leaders, including Dubcek and the popular presidium member Josef Smrkovsky, will be ousted at the forthcoming plenum. The Russians allegedly are pressing for Smrkovsky's removal, even though they are aware that this action, as well as other retrogressive measures, could bring the Czechs into the streets.

EUROPE

[redacted] the West German Foreign Office thinks that De Gaulle is playing old-fashioned intra-European power politics in order to establish French primacy. [redacted] said De Gaulle recognizes that he cannot hold out forever against UK entry into the European Communities. His current tactic is therefore to propose a kind of French-UK-West German-Italian consortium for directing Europe, with France playing the leading role.

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[redacted] noted the wide gulf between De Gaulle's ideas on Europe and those of other Western European governments who support integration.

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[redacted] seemed to betray some anxiety that De Gaulle might be able to obtain US and UK acquiescence in his efforts. He alluded to the concern felt in Bonn prior to the President's European tour that the President would endorse De Gaulle's ideas on Europe in the interest of improving US-French relations.

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Finally, [redacted] made clear that Bonn does not favor a British-French dialogue as originally proposed by De Gaulle, thus contradicting Lord Chalfont's assertion that the Germans have been encouraging London to undertake talks.

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II. OTHER IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS

There is nothing significant to report.

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