



The President's Daily Brief

April 11, 1975

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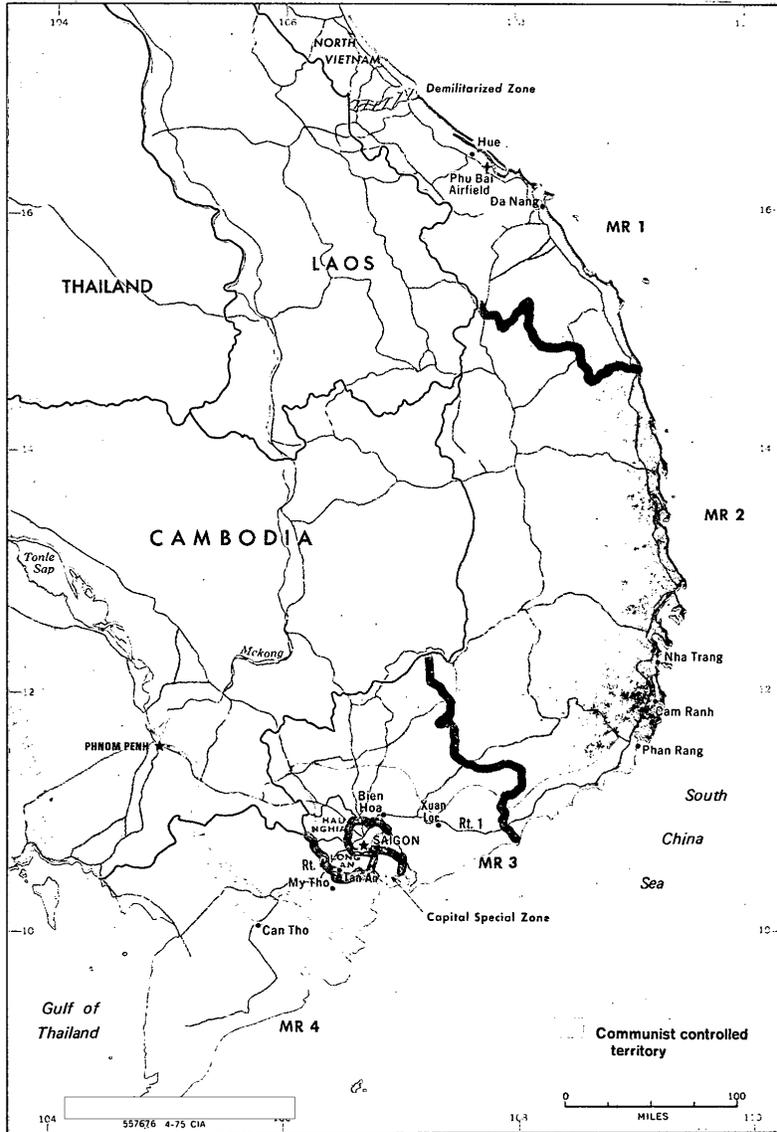
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VIETNAM

The communists evidently intend to do as much damage as possible to South Vietnamese forces without waiting for more divisions to arrive from the north.

The North Vietnamese may be trying to force the defenders of Saigon to concentrate east and west of the capital in order to weaken the defenses to the north where the communist 9th Division is deployed.

Both sides appear to regard the ongoing battle for Xuan Loc on Saigon's eastern flank as critical and are committing substantial units to this area. The city was heavily bombarded again yesterday with artillery and rockets, and the communists are expanding their holdings on the outskirts and strengthening their blockade of Route 1 leading to Saigon.

Parts of three North Vietnamese divisions--the 6th, 7th, and the 341st--have been identified in the action. If the entire 7th Division were committed to the action, the situation would become even more critical. The South Vietnamese are committing all of the 18th Division on this front. This unit has not earned much respect as a tough fighting outfit, but with the option of retreat down Route 1 at least temporarily shut off, it has incentive to stand and fight.

West and southwest of Saigon, pressure is building rapidly, and a second major battlefront may develop close to the capital. The South Vietnamese now believe that most of the North Vietnamese 5th Division and parts of the 3rd Division are moving into the western districts of both Hau Nghia and Long An provinces. Small advance units of the North Vietnamese 5th Division have been attacking near the Long An Province capital of Tan An for the past two days. The communists give a high priority to cutting Route 4 south of Saigon, and recent shifts of the North Vietnamese 8th Division suggest that it could soon be in a position to block Route 4 north of My Tho. The South Vietnamese are shifting sizable forces in reaction to the growing threat to the west.

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Recent reporting suggests North Vietnamese party boss Le Duan may now be visiting communist-controlled areas of South Vietnam to make a first hand assessment of the situation.

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Intercepted messages and aerial photography confirm that the North Vietnamese are strengthening their air defenses in South Vietnam. Photography [redacted] reveals several pieces of SA-2 missile equipment in northeastern Cambodia near the South Vietnamese border. Intercepts had earlier indicated that four SA-2 regiments were located near the Demilitarized Zone and in northern South Vietnam. The communists are likely to continue their buildup of air defenses in the newly "liberated" areas and may even move SA-2 firing units into the provinces north of Saigon.

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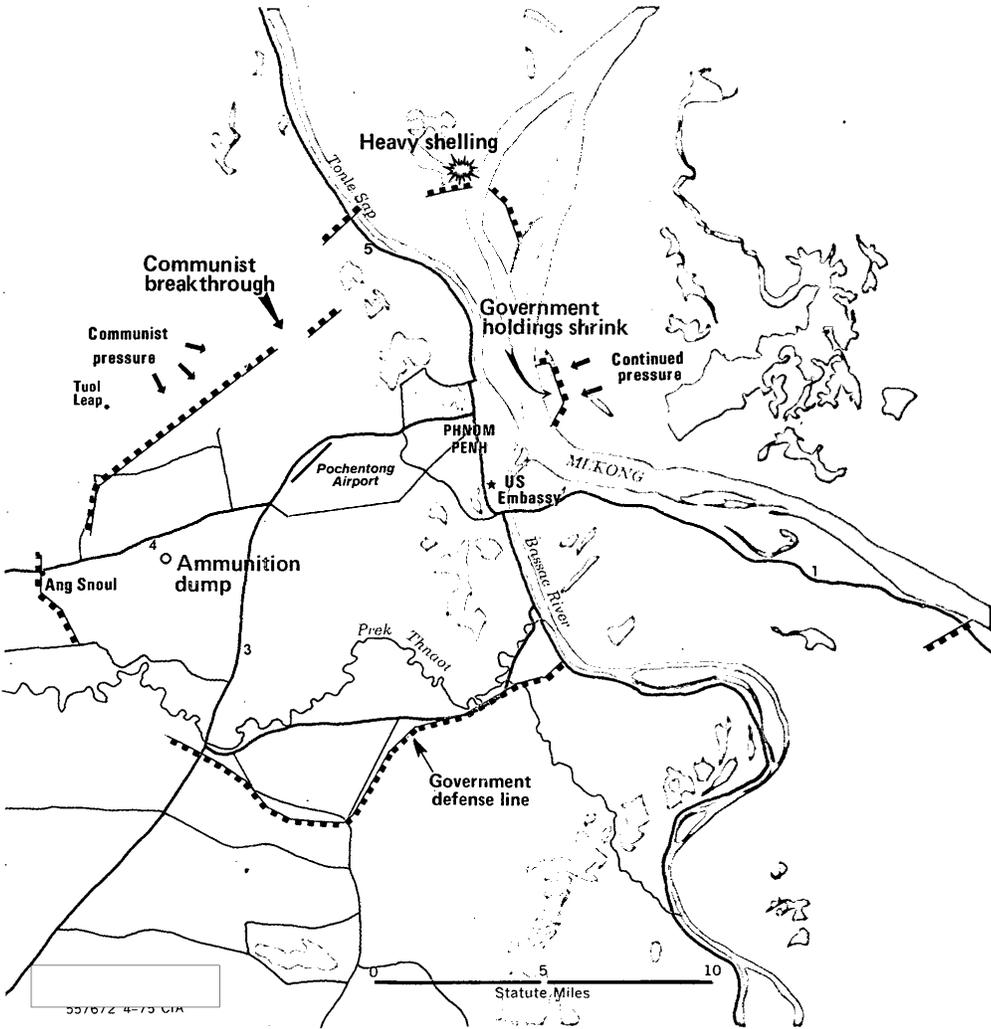
Preliminary information on Prime Minister Nguyen Ba Can's new cabinet suggests that it will do little to breathe new life into the anti-communist resistance. Several appointees are holdovers from the Khiem cabinet. The new faces are technicians or political associates of Can with little national prominence. They all are solidly pro-government. Several of the most important portfolios--foreign affairs, defense, interior--have yet to be announced, possibly because Thieu and Can have not yet agreed on individuals who are willing to serve.

[redacted]
[redacted] the full cabinet will be selected by April 11 and sworn in the next day. The first working session is scheduled for the 13th, a date which seems optimistic, since several positions are still vacant.

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Phnom Penh



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CAMBODIA

Phnom Penh's outer defenses appear to be collapsing. Khmer communist forces yesterday moved through gaps in the defense line north of Pochentong airport and attacked government forces from the rear. Cambodian army commanders are trying to organize a counterattack, but US defense attachés do not believe that enough troops are available to push back the insurgents.

Heavy combat is also continuing northwest of Pochentong airport where government units have lost another position within four miles of the airport. To the west, seesaw fighting persists near Route 4 and the army's main ammunition dump. The communists have not yet begun to hit airport facilities with recoilless rifle or mortar fire, but rocket and artillery attacks have increased.

Some government units on the east bank of the Mekong River opposite Phnom Penh broke yesterday, following another day of steady ground attacks. The Khmer navy has picked up a number of troops forced into the river, including the acting commander of one of the two government brigades on the east bank. The communists are firing recoilless rifles at Phnom Penh's waterfront from newly won positions on the river. Along the river to the northeast, government positions upstream from the main navy headquarters were the targets of intense shellings early yesterday.

A recent intercepted message reveals that the communists have already begun planning for the occupation of Phnom Penh. Orders have gone out that public facilities--which will become the property of the "People's Revolutionary Government"--are to be protected and those who "ravage" will be punished. The communists are clearly worried that wholesale chaos will follow the collapse of the government in Phnom Penh, and the message mentioned the possibility of evacuating civilians from the city "in order to stabilize the situation." The message also gave

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strict orders for the safekeeping of "foreign nationals, such as Frenchmen and various embassy personnel," saying that they would be "kept to be used to carry out foreign affairs matters in the future."

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Acting Cambodian president Saukham Koy yesterday called an emergency session of the cabinet. Just before the meeting, Koy indicated to Ambassador Dean that he would ask Prime Minister Long Boret to step down. Koy planned to ask Chau Sau--the leader of the Democratic Party--to form a new government and arrange immediately a "humanitarian solution" to the conflict. All of this could come to naught given the rapidly deteriorating military situation and the possibility that key government leaders may soon leave aboard US evacuation aircraft. At this point, 148 US citizens and 449 Cambodians and third-country nationals remain on the US mission's evacuation list.

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EGYPT-PLO

Egypt's President Sadat conceded little to Palestine Liberation Organization chairman Yasir Arafat in Cairo this week.

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[redacted] the president promised only that Egypt would continue its efforts to "guarantee" PLO participation at Geneva.

The two also agreed to work toward an early meeting of the "confrontation forces"--Egypt, Syria, and the PLO--to coordinate their strategies. Such a meeting is likely before the Arab summit in June.

Arafat may have given more in Cairo than he received. [redacted] the PLO must attend the Geneva conference if the substance of the Palestinian problem was to be discussed.

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[redacted] the military secretariat of the 20-member Arab League could speak on behalf of the Palestinians if the conference considered only another round of military disengagement agreements.

If this is true, Arafat has shifted significantly toward the position held by Sadat, who suggested recently that the Arab League could represent the Palestinians at Geneva. Sadat considers this a possible way around Israel's objections to negotiating with the PLO.

Arafat's reported conciliatory stance may have resulted from a harsh dressing down delivered by Sadat, first to Arafat's deputy Salah Khalaf and later to Arafat himself at King Faysal's funeral in Riyadh late last month.

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Sadat derided Arafat's weakness within the PLO and declared he would refuse to receive any Palestinian official in Cairo. Only after the intercession of Algeria's President Boumediene did Sadat agree to meet Arafat in Cairo.

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Sadat has long been dissatisfied with Arafat's inability to make hard decisions on behalf of the entire PLO or to force compromises on the organization's leadership. Sadat finally lost patience with Arafat and the PLO early this year when they began openly attacking Egypt's reliance on US mediation.

Despite claims of a healing in the Egypt-PLO rift, Sadat probably is not confident that he has won lasting concessions from Arafat. The continued strain is reflected in the treatment of the Sadat-Arafat meeting in the Cairo press, which said that complete harmony on strategy and tactics is always "a difficult matter" even among those with common objectives.

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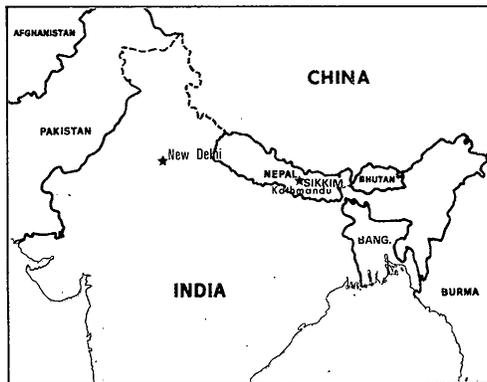
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NOTES

The Indians this week, responding to demands from the dominant political groups in Sikkim, moved to tighten their grip on the tiny kingdom.

On Wednesday, Indian troops stationed in Sikkim disarmed and disbanded the 400-man palace guard loyal to the hereditary ruler. The Sikkimese legislature yesterday voted to abolish the figurehead monarchy and seek to become an Indian state. The legislature, controlled by antiroyalists who won a landslide victory in elections a year ago, now plans to hold some form of referendum, reportedly next week, to obtain popular endorsement of its latest actions. China, which sharply criticized India's moves in Sikkim last year, is likely to be even more critical of the Indians for their role in the latest developments. The developments in Sikkim will also worry the Nepalese who are uneasy about India's intentions toward them.

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The Turkish National Assembly has completed its debate on Prime Minister Demirel's new government program and has scheduled a vote of confidence for Saturday.

Demirel's chances now appear no better than even. There have been transfers and defections among the political parties supporting his right-wing Nationalist Front, and additional party shifts could change the picture again before the vote is taken.

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