



The President's Daily Brief

April 26, 1975

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SOUTH VIETNAM

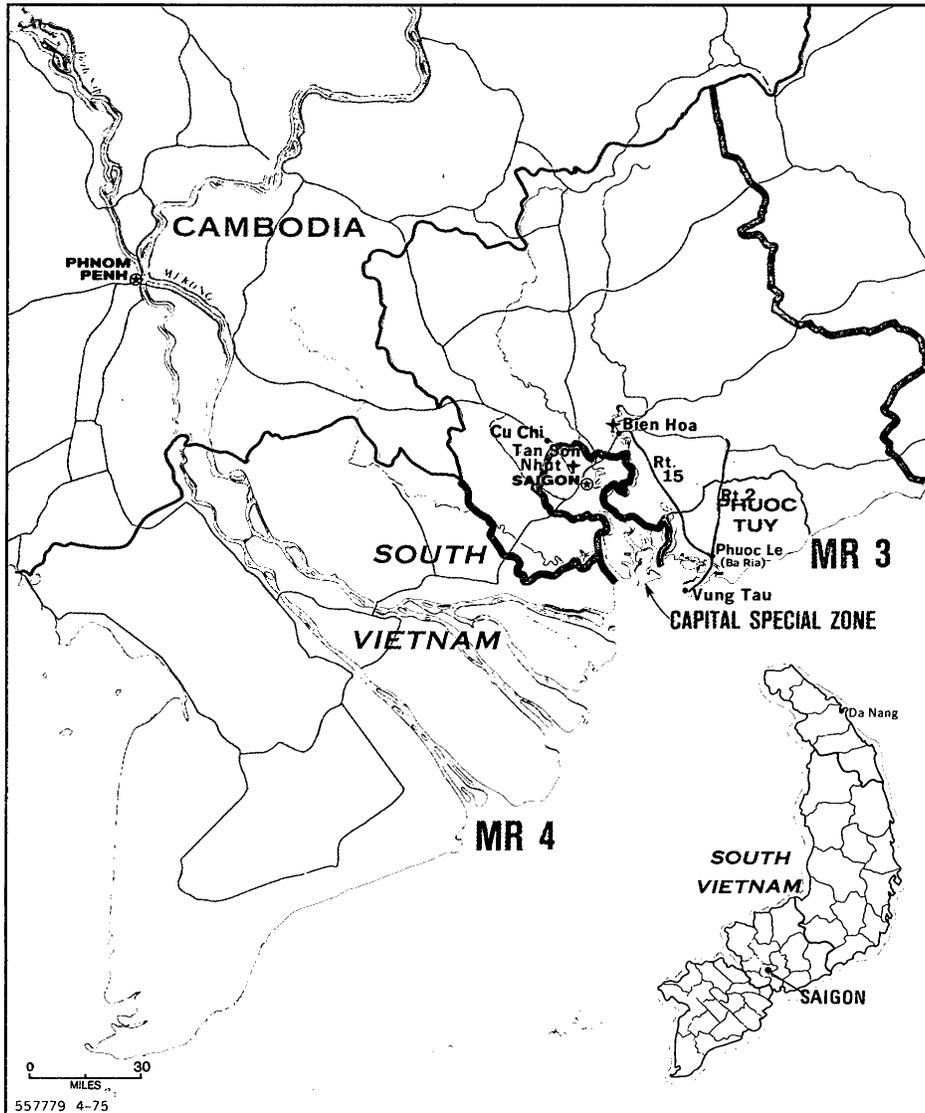
President Huong asked the National Assembly today to decide whether he should turn over power to General Duong Van "Big" Minh. He appealed to the legislators to support his own efforts toward peace, but indicated he would resign so that Minh could become president if the assembly so votes. Huong has been under heavy pressure by influential Vietnamese of all political persuasions to step down in favor of Minh, and the assembly is likely to ask him to do so.

The Minh government's raison d'etre would be promptly to seek and accept whatever terms the communists offer. Buddhist leader Thich Tri Quang says that Minh's return to power would be only to "hoist the white flag." It is no longer possible to do more than "save the furniture."

To emphasize this point, Minh already has tentatively selected a government of surrender featuring leaders of South Vietnam's previously vocal opposition movements. Senator Nguyen Van Huyen, a moderate southern Catholic and outspoken Thieu opponent, has been chosen vice president in charge of negotiations. This selection is obviously designed to reassure Catholics and conservatives and encourage their support. Senator Vu Van Mau, representing the militant An Quang Buddhists, would serve as prime minister and foreign minister concurrently. In an obvious gesture of accommodation to the communists, Madame Ngo Ba Thanh--an American-educated lawyer and longtime leftist gadfly who has been involved for years in various antigovernment organizations--would become minister of justice.

The Viet Cong's Provisional Revolutionary Government, through its foreign minister, Madame Nguyen Thi Binh, has indicated that it would consider negotiations with a government headed by Minh. Minh's selection of individuals for his government complies with a PRG demand that the new Saigon administration must represent a clean break from the former regime and include no one who was sympathetic to former president Thieu. The communists also probably feel that Minh would accept their other demand that all US military support and personnel be withdrawn.

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In a statement on April 24, the PRG used a formulation that at least suggested the communists might allow a residual US diplomatic presence to continue in Saigon; it stated that any new government must demand the immediate withdrawal of all American "military and intelligence personnel." This appears to be a refinement of earlier statements that the communists viewed all American civilians in South Vietnam as "disguised" military advisers and that all these must also be included in the total withdrawal.

* * *

The communists are maintaining pressure on Saigon's outer defenses with small-scale attacks along the main approaches to the city. As the communists continue to secure avenues of attack toward the capital, South Vietnamese bases and outposts west of Saigon are prime targets, and the shelling of these positions is heavy. [redacted]

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[redacted] virtually all South Vietnamese artillery at two major government positions was destroyed. The Bien Hoa airbase and other targets northeast of Saigon are also being shelled regularly, and the South Vietnamese training camp on the city's outskirts has come under attack.

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Pressure is increasing on the port of Vung Tau. One regiment of the North Vietnamese 325th Division with supporting armor is moving down Route 2, just outside the Phuoc Tuy Province capital of Phuoc Le. This force could move against Phuoc Le at any time, but it will be difficult to move beyond Phuoc Le to Vung Tau--a distance of 12 miles down a narrow peninsula that has only one road. An advance section of the North Vietnamese 320th Division has shown up to the north along Route 15, the main road linking Vung Tau with Bien Hoa and Saigon. This division could act as a blocking force in its present position, or it could move to attack Bien Hoa from the south or even shift westward toward Saigon.

Despite the relatively low level of combat on the battlefronts around Saigon, there has been no letup in indications of communist planning for increased fighting, which could lead to direct assaults on Saigon itself.

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The communists reportedly were planning for a major attack against the South Vietnamese 25th Division at Cu Chi just 15 miles northwest of Saigon to begin late yesterday. Preceded by heavy shelling, the main thrust is to include armor and infantry attacks. Prisoners from the newly arrived North Vietnamese 316th Division have said that tanks and heavy artillery are being moved forward and will be used.

Communist radio messages also continue to discuss preparations for attacks on Saigon and the Tan Son Nhut airbase. One command recently requested "targeting charts" for areas close to the city so that "when we have a mission we will be able to develop it and prepare to move down into the area when conditions are right for the advance."

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CAMBODIA

More than a week has passed since Phnom Penh's surrender, and there is still no sign that the new regime has been formally established in the capital.

Intercepted messages indicate that senior communist figures have been busy directing the occupation in Phnom Penh and provincial urban centers, and this may explain the delay in the formal investiture of a new government. Several recent messages do reflect, however, the movement of "national front" figures and "guests from the outside," suggesting that the new leadership may be gathering for some sort of a formal takeover ceremony in the near future.

Two Chinese Boeing 707s flew into Phnom Penh on Wednesday and Thursday, but so far there is no sign that Prince Sihanouk was aboard either aircraft.

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Phnom Penh radio has been broadcasting special programs as part of an official three-day "victory celebration," but has made no mention of Sihanouk's arrival or the presence of any other notables. The broadcasts earlier in the week by Deputy Prime Minister Khieu Samphan and Information Minister Hu Nimm were recorded.

Sihanouk has said he is delaying his departure from Peking to be at the bedside of his ailing mother, Queen Kossamak. The Khmer communists may be deliberately keeping the Prince waiting both to prevent his stealing the "victory" show and to allow time for the communist administrative apparatus to become firmly entrenched.

Although a recent communist message mentioned "deporting foreigners," a number of Westerners apparently are still in the French embassy compound in Phnom Penh. A message from the embassy on Tuesday disclosed that French personnel from a hospital in the capital also have taken refuge at the compound. The French have reportedly been given food and water, but they are still seeking permission for an aircraft to fly into Phnom Penh with supplies.

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GREECE-NATO

The Greek delegate to NATO has outlined Athens' views on the future of the military relationship between Greece and NATO. A paper he presented yesterday to a private meeting of select NATO representatives is tentative and sketchy, but it indicates a flexibility on the Greek military role that Athens has previously not shown.

The paper states that, as a general rule, Greek forces will be under national command, but that in the case of a "clear threat" of aggression such forces as will be mutually agreed upon can be considered NATO reserve forces. In the event of imminent or actual aggression these forces would be assigned to NATO.

In order to facilitate the cooperation of Greek forces in NATO, the paper proposes that Greece participate in those NATO activities in peacetime that are "essential to the fulfillment of its agreed NATO mission." The paper does not define the nature and scope of this participation. The Greek delegate asked for an informal dialogue with the NATO representatives on the paper and for their suggestions on points that need to be clarified.

Issues such as the extent of peacetime cooperation are bound to be sticky. The Greek representative appeared most forthcoming on this point, but the Karamanlis government will have to move carefully in reestablishing open military cooperation with NATO if it wishes to avoid provoking strong parliamentary opposition. The NATO representatives are scheduled to discuss the paper again on May 12.

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THAILAND

We present below the principal conclusions of an Interagency Intelligence Memorandum on Thai Foreign Policy in the Post-Vietnam Period.

--The speed of the communist takeover of Indochina has deeply shocked the Thai and accelerated trends away from reliance on the US security commitment.

--Events are still moving too fast for the Thai to have come to any firm conclusions on long-term adjustments of their foreign policy, but we believe that they will clearly move toward a neutral position.

-This is likely to be the case whatever government is in power.

--The special Thai-US rapport has ended.

-The Thai will probably attempt to keep a relatively close relationship with the US; in particular they will continue to look to the US as an important economic partner and for military assistance.

-Even so, we believe the Thai government will stick to its demand that US forces be withdrawn within 12 months.

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--Other US security interests in Thailand will probably survive for two or three years if the US provides substantial military assistance to Thailand.

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--As the Thai put more distance between themselves and the US, they will move toward improved relations with Hanoi, Peking, and Moscow.

-Diplomatic relations with Hanoi seem probable; but not before US forces are withdrawn.

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-Although there is general agreement on the need to improve relations with China, pressure from the military to go slow and problems over the status of Chinese aliens make it unlikely that formal ties can be established before the end of the year.

-The Thai are probably prepared now to make some gestures in the direction of closer relations with the Soviet Union, primarily as a means of enhancing Thailand's neutralist credentials in the eyes of competing communist powers.

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NOTE

Unofficial but nearly complete returns from Portugal's election yesterday show the combined votes of the three moderate parties at about 70 percent. The Communist Party and its close ally, the Portuguese Democratic Movement, have a combined total of about 17 percent.

Over 90 percent of registered voters went to the polls, only about 8 percent of them casting blank ballots. A carnival-like atmosphere prevailed in Lisbon, and only a few incidents of violence were reported.

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