

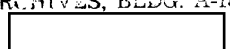
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27 Mar 75

March 27, 1975

DCI BRIEFING FOR  
27 MARCH WSAG MEETING

THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

- I. The South Vietnamese withdrawals over the past two weeks amount to a major defeat, and additional losses are certain. Nonetheless, we believe that the GVN has enough military strength in the southern part of the country to survive the current dry season, although it will probably control only the delta and the populated provinces surrounding Saigon. The government will face further communist pressure from a substantially weakened position, however, and it is likely to be defeated in <sup>early</sup> 1976.
  - A. President Thieu decided to evacuate the highlands and concentrate his forces along the populated coast and around Saigon because he felt they were overextended, faced with a greatly superior North Vietnamese force, and

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confronted with the prospects of dwindling US aid.

1. Thieu clearly hoped to surprise the communists and extract his forces intact and ready to fight before they could react. This plan failed, and the communists have moved quickly to take advantage of the situation.
  2. Thieu's own military leaders were caught by surprise. Many of them have indicated they had no prior briefing or consultation before the plan took effect.
    - a. Consequently, the government redeployments have been generally disorderly and costly in terms of supplies and manpower.
    - b. Moreover, grumbling against Thieu's leadership has grown in the wake of widespread military reverses, and pressures for his resignation or forcible removal could quickly emerge.
- B. The government has already virtually conceded all of Military Regions 1 and 2 to the commu-

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nists, and the few remaining enclaves along the north-central coast are expected to fall.

1. The disorganized withdrawal from provinces north and south of DaNang has created a massive refugee problem in that city. Civil disorder has broken out.
  - a. There are reports that upwards of a million displaced persons have crowded into DaNang awaiting evacuation to the central coast.
  - b. The scheduled sea and air evacuation of 50,000 persons per day has begun. The situation in DaNang is chaotic, however, as tens of thousands of people have shown up at the airfield seeking a way out.
  - c. Security has broken down, and a US aircraft attempting to evacuate Americans reportedly was mobbed.
  - d. Fighting is also reported outside DaNang between the police and armed deserters who had come into the city from other parts of the region.

*At last reports, the airfield was back under control, at least for the time being.*

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2. Thus far, there has been little military pressure applied on DaNang, although the communists have two fresh divisions just west of the city. There are signs that another of Hanoi's strategic reserve divisions is heading south, and may be en route to this area.

3. The South Vietnamese military forces, <sup>in the region,</sup> on the other hand, are in disarray and are no match for the communists should an attack come soon.

a. Two of the four South Vietnamese divisions in the region are scattered and being harassed by the communists as they attempt to pull back to DaNang. The bulk of these troops may not reach the city.

b. Moreover, there is a report that Saigon has ordered the region commander to move the Marine Division to the capital. If this order is carried out, DaNang probably would be lost in only a matter of days.

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- C. In Military Region 2, the government's military position also has deteriorated rapidly. Five highland provinces, and large parts of several others, have already been abandoned.
1. The South Vietnamese have only two line divisions in the region, and one of them was virtually destroyed in the fighting in Darlac Province.
  2. Seven of the ranger groups in the region are seriously understrength or in disarray.
  3. Large quantities of munitions, fuel, and equipment were left behind at Kontum and Pleiku cities.
  4. Communist attacks on the column retreating from the highlands have destroyed or damaged hundreds of pieces of equipment, and South Vietnamese troops abandoned large amounts of hardware along the road.
    - a. The government had counted on getting most of these supplies out to defend the coastal lowlands.

- b. Communist forces have followed the column onto the coast and are continuing their attacks.
5. The North Vietnamese are far stronger than the remaining government forces in the region.
- a. The communists have five full divisions, and only two of them have seen much fighting. Large numbers of replacements have arrived in the highlands from North Vietnam.
6. We think it unlikely that the South Vietnamese will be able to hold on to the several population centers along the coast.
- D. North of Saigon the fighting has eased, and the situation in the delta is relatively stable for the moment.
- 1. The government has nearly completed its withdrawal from Binh Long Province in northern Military Region 3.
  - 2. The communists have maintained heavy pressure on Tay Ninh Province, but they have thus far avoided a frontal assault on the provincial capital.

- a. Three communist divisions are pressing against government troops defending the province, and reports clearly indicate Tay Ninh City is a major communist target for this dry season.
  - b. Since the continued defense of the city is costly and most of the population has already fled, the government is giving serious consideration to abandoning the provincial capital and drawing new defense lines further south.
3. The communists also have made new gains east of Saigon, and they have cut a key road into the highlands and another leading to the coast.
  4. The relative quiet in the delta could change once the communists have finished rebuilding their units which suffered heavy losses in the fighting around the turn of the year.
    - a. Territorial losses in this region can probably be held to a minimum as long as no substantial government forces are withdrawn.



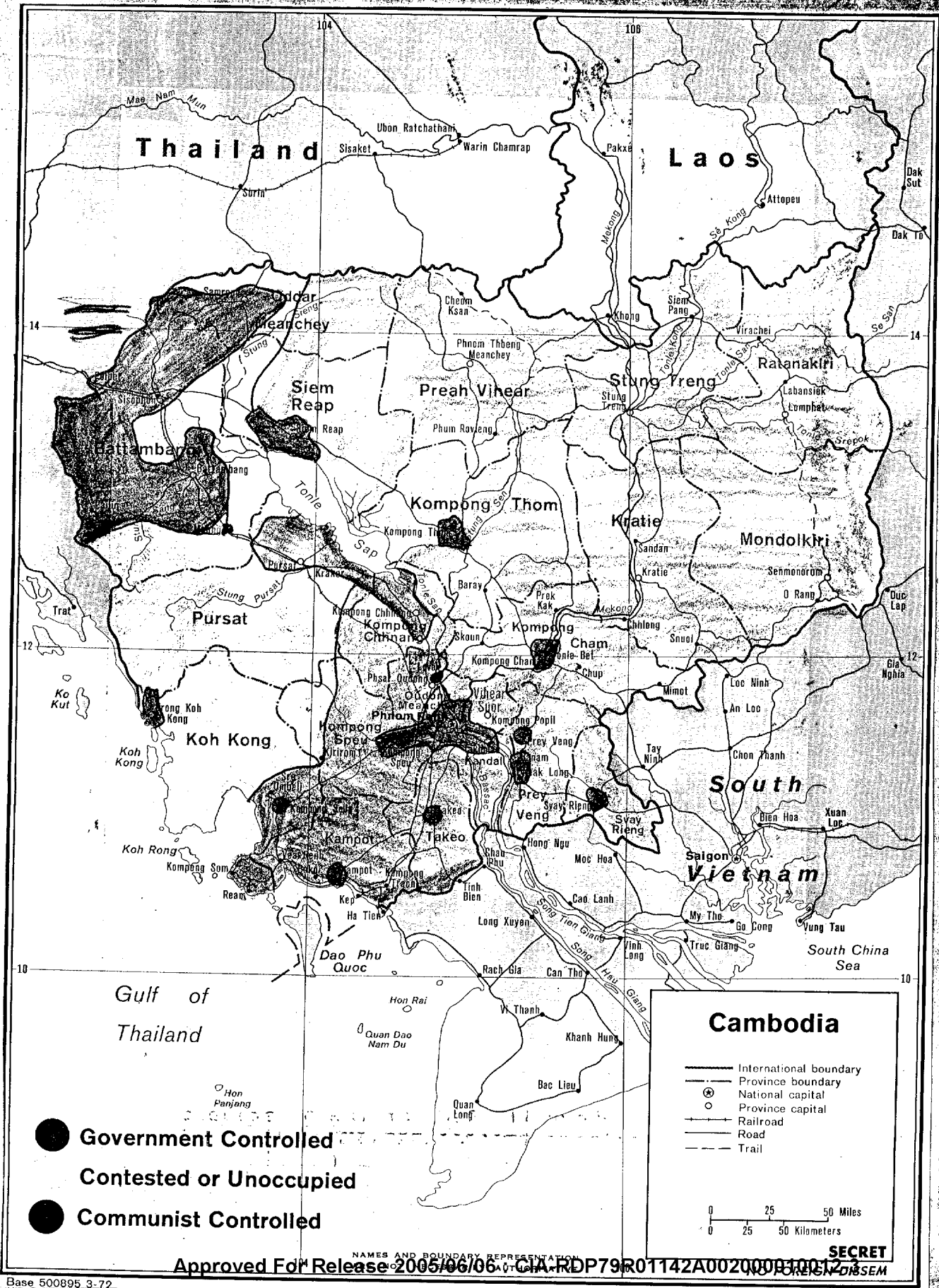
E. Apart from the reverses in South Vietnam, there are external factors which could further undermine the GVN.

1. The collapse of Cambodia would bring added psychological pressure on Saigon.
2. The continuing debate in the US on the question of aid to South Vietnam is also an unsettling factor.
3. Thieu probably assumes that he will have to rely on what he already has; but a general belief in South Vietnam that the US will not respond with ~~additional~~ assistance to meet the new situation would fuel defeatism.

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CAMBODIA

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27 March 1975

BACKUP FOR  
27 March WSAG MEETING

THE SITUATION IN CAMBODIA

- I. In Cambodia, President Lon Nol has apparently accepted an invitation to visit Indonesia, and may leave Phnom Penh <sup>at</sup> any moment.
  - A. Although a number of officials in Phnom Penh have recently restated their willingness for unconditional talks with the Communists, there is still no evidence of any concrete steps in this direction.
  - B. We still believe that the Communists will read Lon Nol's departure only as a sign of political weakness and push even harder for a surrender by the government.
    1. According to press reports, Sihanouk has added 21 new names to the original list of government leaders with whom the Communists will have no dealings whatsoever.

II. On the military front, Communist forces are again within artillery range of Pochentong airport following their recapture of Tuol Leap earlier this week.

A. Artillery fire coupled with the now daily rocket attacks could at any time damage facilities and aircraft so much that the airlift operations will become impossible.

B. On the east bank of the Mekong, government forces have lost more ground and the Communists continue to hit downtown Phnom Penh with rocket barrages each day.

C. Southeast of the capital, Communist units last weekend overran a government position along the Bassac River. Pressure on this front is likely to increase.

D. The situation at Neak Luong and Banam -- the remaining government enclave on the lower Mekong -- is still critical.

1. The Communists have been shelling both towns intensely and have tried to cut the enclave in half with ground attacks.

2. 

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