



The President's Daily Brief

April 17, 1975

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

April 17, 1975

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CAMBODIA

The Cambodian government surrendered this morning. A cease-fire reportedly is in effect, and the capital is described as calm.

The situation in the countryside is unclear, but the government has instructed all of its provincial commanders to lay down their arms and stop fighting.

Some 30 Westerners, including a number of US journalists, were at last report holed up in a Phnom Penh hotel. The Red Cross in Geneva declared the hotel a neutral zone yesterday. The communists have repeated their earlier orders for the safekeeping of foreign nationals in the city.

Intercepted communist messages confirm plans to evacuate large numbers of civilians from Phnom Penh. The commander of one communist administrative unit reported yesterday that he is ready to "accept responsibility" for between 400,000 and 500,000 people.

Cambodian military aircraft that escaped have begun arriving in Thailand. Three planes carrying nearly 90 officers and dependents landed at Utapao airbase yesterday and more are expected. So far, there is no word on whether any senior government officials have escaped.

On the international front, a number of governments are moving to recognize Prince Sihanouk's regime. Turkey announced its recognition yesterday. Iran, Sweden, Finland, and Australia are likely to follow soon. Canberra has pledged "substantial" postwar reconstruction aid.

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VIETNAM

Deputy Prime Minister Tran Van Don [redacted] is in contact with a spokesman for the Viet Cong's Provisional Revolutionary Government.

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[redacted] Don was reminded that the Viet Cong would never consider negotiations while Thieu remains president. Such discussions could begin only with a government headed by a "neutral" figure and composed of "third force" personalities and "leftists." This new government could include "pro-American politicians." [redacted]

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[redacted]

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[redacted] the PRG spokesman stated that communist strategy "at the moment" is to isolate Saigon. The communists allegedly do not want to attack Saigon directly, preferring to "take their time" in assuming control, meanwhile allowing evacuations to proceed in an "orderly" fashion. If communist troops should move into the city quickly, evacuations for "everyone" would be "impossible."

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[redacted] Don was informed that he should assume control of the government "within 72 hours" and call for a cease-fire. All Americans would be permitted to leave the country except for a "core" that would be needed to run the US embassy. In addition, any Vietnamese who wished to leave, including those at Hue and Da Nang, allegedly would also be given safe passage.

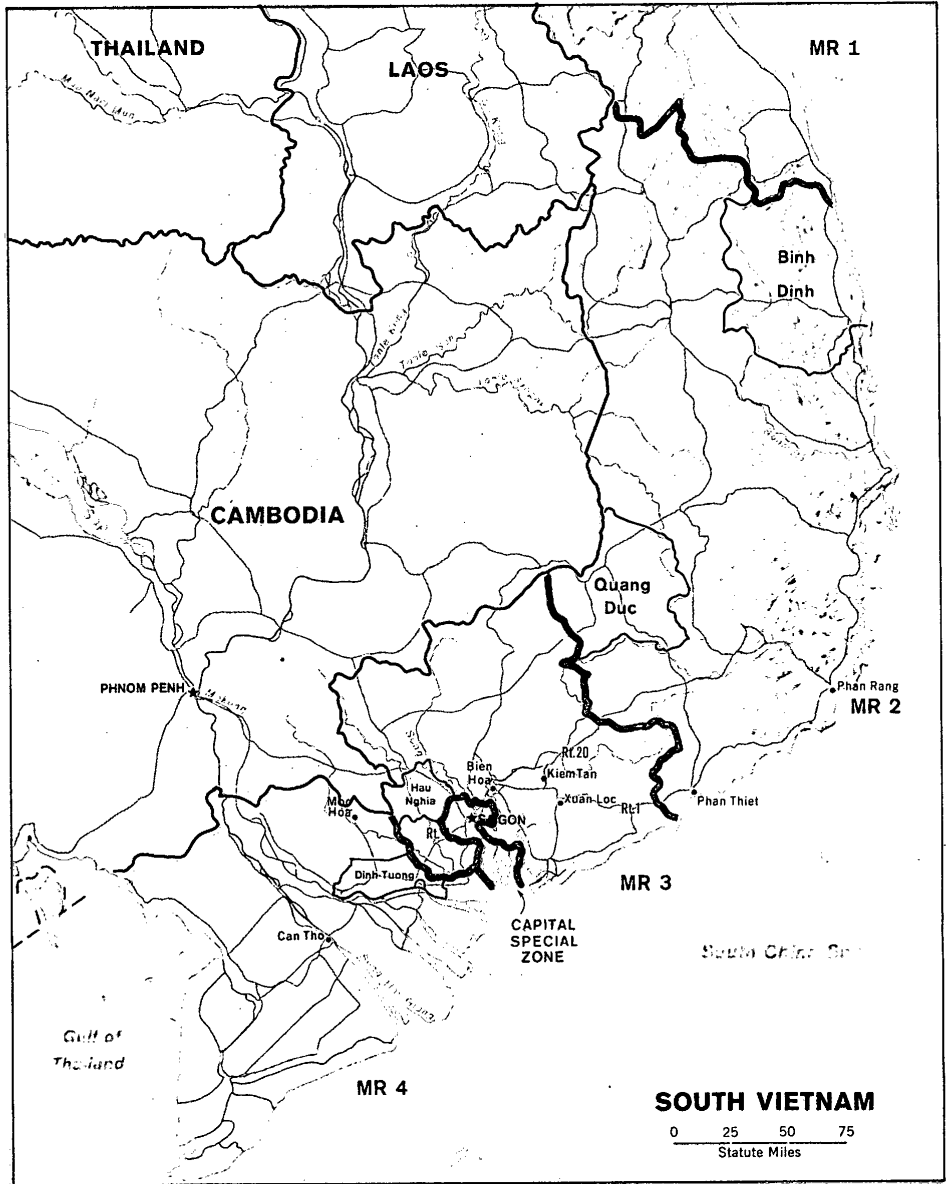
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The PRG spokesman indicated, however, that the communists might be running out of patience and that the "next week or two" would be crucial. Saigon would be safe for that period, but, if talks had not begun by then, communist forces would be "in position" to take over the city.

[redacted]

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The scenario [redacted] 25X1
 [redacted] from [redacted] PRG contact could be a communist effort 25X1
 to persuade someone in senior South Vietnamese gov-
 ernment circles that a political settlement of the
 conflict is still possible. [redacted] 25X1
 [redacted] 25X1

The warnings [redacted] 25X1
 [redacted] conform to the line passed by PRG representa- 25X1
 tives overseas [redacted] The 25X1
 latter have maintained that the communists do not
 want to attack Saigon but prefer a "political solu-
 tion," but that this is impossible with Thieu still
 in power.

* * *

The arrival of additional combat units north of Saigon, coupled with heavy government losses east of the capital, is setting the stage for strong new communist attacks within the next two weeks along the western, northern, and eastern approaches to Saigon.

[redacted] the commu- 25X1
 nists will waste little time in exploiting their
 overwhelming advantage in terms of troops and fire-
 power. [redacted] the communist 9th Divi- 25X1
 sion, which has recently moved south into Hau Nghia
 Province, will soon attack the South Vietnamese 25th
 Division guarding Route 1 and the western approaches
 to Saigon. [redacted] 25X1
 communist units, probably sappers and artillery,
 will attack the capital itself.

[redacted] 25X1
 [redacted] 25X1
 [redacted] communists have issued instructions
 calling for "final" assaults on remaining govern-
 ment positions, including Saigon. [redacted] 25X1
 [redacted] fresh combat units have arrived in the 25X1
 provinces around Saigon and [redacted] all com- 25X1
 munist resources will be used to achieve final
 victory by May 19--the anniversary of Ho Chi Minh's
 birth.

Radio direction finding of April 16 confirms that the headquarters of both the North Vietnamese 1st Corps and its subordinate 312th Division are rapidly approaching Military Region 3. The corps

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headquarters is now in northwestern Quang Duc Province, while the 312th headquarters is along the Cambodian border just north of the region. These units left North Vietnam less than two weeks ago. Three other subordinate divisions are on the move south.

The communists also are moving divisions into the region from farther north in South Vietnam. Documents captured near Xuan Loc indicate that elements of the North Vietnamese 325th Division have arrived in that area. Two other divisions in the southern highlands--the 10th and the 316th--have shown signs of shifting into Military Region 3.

South Vietnamese forces are still holding Xuan Loc, but government positions around the city and the roads west of the town are rapidly becoming indefensible.

The North Vietnamese launched strong new attacks on the airborne brigade just outside of Xuan Loc yesterday. Since other government units defending the perimeter of the city were not attacked, regional officials believe the communists have deliberately struck the strongest unit, hoping to inflict a major loss and thereby sap the resolve of the remaining forces.

The communists have also been putting heavy pressure on the junction of routes 1 and 20 west of Xuan Loc and now control the intersection and much of the surrounding terrain. A series of sharp attacks yesterday on a South Vietnamese regiment forced the unit to destroy its artillery and disperse.

With the recent fall of Kiem Tan district town on Route 20 and the rout of the South Vietnamese regiment, the communists now have complete control of this highway and can bring additional combat units directly to the battlefield from the southern highlands. The communists may decide to leave the city isolated and move much of their force west toward Bien Hoa and Saigon.

Communist forces also routed government defenders at Phan Rang yesterday. Some remnants of a recently rebuilt 2nd Division regiment were apparently evacuated by sea. The few survivors of the airborne and ranger units assigned there are believed to be trying to withdraw overland toward Phan Thiet, which may be the communists' next target.

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Some regional officials are blaming President Thieu for the defeat at Phan Rang because he personally ordered the deployment of the now-shattered forces to that exposed northern enclave.

In the delta, at least two additional North Vietnamese regiments have moved into Dinh Tuong Province from the Moc Hoa - Cambodian border area,

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[redacted] the North Vietnamese could have as many as nine infantry regiments concentrated in the province, and Saigon could soon lose control of Route 4, its lifeline to the delta.

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The commander of the delta region realigned some of his forces yesterday to counter this new communist buildup. He has assigned both the South Vietnamese 7th and 9th divisions to the most threatened areas in the northeast of the region.

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USSR

A Soviet party Central Committee meeting in Moscow yesterday signaled the beginning of preparations for the next party congress. The removal of trade union chief Aleksandr Shelepin from the Politburo by the central committee eliminates one of the potential runners in the long-term race to succeed General Secretary Brezhnev, but otherwise does little to clarify the succession picture.

Brezhnev was clearly in charge at the plenum. He delivered a report on plans for the congress, which is now set to open on February 24, 1976. Foreign Minister Gromyko delivered a report on foreign affairs. This report is usually given by Brezhnev, and the change continues the trend toward greater collectivity in the leadership that has been apparent since the General Secretary's illness this winter.

The decision setting the date for the party congress came earlier and more smoothly than it did for the 24th congress in 1971. This suggests satisfaction on the part of the leaders with present political conditions and confidence in their ability to set the course of the Soviet Union over the next five years.

The announcement of the opening date for the congress is likely to trigger a cycle of party meetings beginning at the lower levels in the fall and continuing up through successively more important party organizations, ending by late January or early February. Personnel shifts will probably be occurring from now on at all levels within the party, and the outcome of these shifts will determine the relative political strengths of the various Soviet leaders for the next several years.

Shelepin has long been regarded warily by some of his colleagues as a man with a dangerous combination of ability and ambition, and his departure from the Kremlin removes a potential element of instability in the leadership. Ever since he mounted a serious but unsuccessful challenge to Brezhnev's leadership in 1965, his career has been on a precipitous slide. In 1967 he was removed from the party Secretariat and given the trade union post--traditionally a powerless figurehead position.

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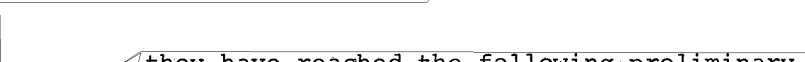
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The plenum also issued a resolution expressing satisfaction with the fruits of Moscow's four-year "peace program" and endorsing the continuation of detente. The resolution attributed the success of Soviet foreign policy to Soviet economic and military strength, while noting that "forces of war and reaction" are still alive.

The resolution approved further progress in the force reduction talks and strategic arms negotiations by holding that political detente must be accompanied by military detente, including arms reductions. It also noted the continuing importance of bilateral and multilateral summitry.

It made no mention of China or Vietnam. The omission of the former may reflect a decision to avoid the appearance of polemics with Peking when the Soviet Union is trying to pave the way for an international conference of communist parties. In leaving out Vietnam, the Soviets could be showing some sensitivity to the implications for detente of communist gains there.

The plenum's emphasis on foreign policy jibes with reports that Moscow has begun a broad assessment of Soviet relations with the West in preparation for the party congress.



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they have reached the following preliminary conclusions:

--World developments since the last party congress in 1971 have demonstrated the correctness of detente, and the policy should be continued.

--The capitalist powers retain great strength and resilience, and will rebound from their current economic crisis.

--The economic rewards of detente, especially the increased import of Western technology, will not in themselves obviate the need for changes in the Soviet political and economic structure if the USSR is to close the technological gap with the West.

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NATO

All NATO members have now agreed in principle to hold a summit-level meeting at the end of May, but some have reservations about its usefulness. The French, among the more skeptical, may be represented by someone other than President Giscard. West Germany, Great Britain, Norway, and Belgium definitely favor holding the meeting.

The Canadians and Dutch in particular fear that the NATO summit will affect adversely Western chances for obtaining meaningful results from the European security conference in Geneva. They reason that the Soviets might view the summit as evidence of a Western desire to wind up the conference quickly, and that Moscow will therefore refuse to offer any compromises on outstanding issues.

France recognizes the importance of your reaffirming the US commitment to the Alliance even though, according to the French ambassador to NATO, it has "difficulty" in seeing the value of a summit. France therefore will contribute to preparing a communiqué and will assist in the public relations aspects of the meeting. Paris may send Premier Chirac or Foreign Minister Sauvagnargues to the conference. Portuguese representation may also be at a level lower than head of government.

All NATO representatives seem to agree that the agenda for the meeting should be broad, and the communiqué short but substantive. They appear to be moving toward a consensus that the foreign ministers should do the preparatory work on May 29 and that the heads of government should meet formally only on May 30.

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ARGENTINA

Leftist guerrilla groups are planning an escalation of terrorism over the next several days to protest the coming visit of Secretary Kissinger.

[redacted] massive security precautions are being arranged [redacted]

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During the past few days terrorists have struck several military installations throughout the country and tried, for the second time, to kill the chief of the Federal Police. These particular attacks probably are a result of the growing concern among terrorist leaders over the threat posed by right-wing death squads. [redacted]

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The Peron government has scored some successes against the well-organized extremists, but a turning point in the struggle is not yet in sight. As many as 300 people may have been killed in political violence this year. Until the security services achieve a significant intelligence breakthrough--and are able to follow up on it--the running battle in the streets between right and left will continue.

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LEBANON

Palestinian commandos and Phalanges Party leaders yesterday agreed to a cease-fire in Beirut. The accord is to be enforced by the Lebanese internal security services, rather than the army which has managed to stay out of the fighting.

President Franjiyah and other Christian leaders apparently persuaded Phalanges Party leaders that prolonged fighting would draw in major fedayeen units that could quickly overwhelm the Phalangists. The radical Palestinian groups presumably agreed to the cease-fire when they realized that the larger fedayeen organizations, Fatah and Saiqa, did not plan to enter the fighting in force.

The moderate Palestinians refused to involve their organizations almost certainly because they believed that a major encounter with the Lebanese army would play into the hands of Arab "rejectionists" and further reduce the likelihood that the PLO would be invited to the Geneva talks.

Action taken by the head of the Syrian-controlled Saiqa organization to keep his followers out of the dispute also suggests that the Syrian government counseled restraint.

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THAILAND

Foreign Minister Chatchai is encountering problems in his efforts to hasten establishment of formal ties with China. He now considers it unlikely that relations can be normalized before the end of the year.

One of the most formidable difficulties confronting Bangkok concerns the legal status of Thailand's 800,000 overseas Chinese. Many of these people have kept their citizenship with the Nationalist government on Taiwan. They would seem to have the alternatives of either switching their citizenship to Peking once Bangkok severed its ties with Taiwan or applying for Thai citizenship. The offer of Thai citizenship to this group, whose political loyalties have long been suspect, is a highly controversial issue within the government. The Thai foreign ministry reportedly intends to consult Malaysian officials as to how Kuala Lumpur dealt with this problem when it recognized Peking.

Chatchai is under pressure from military and police officials to move slowly in normalizing relations lest a Chinese embassy in Bangkok serve as a center for espionage and subversion. He will also have to take into consideration the views of the politically powerful Chinese businessmen, many of whom have extensive commercial dealings with Taiwan.

Chatchai is encountering opposition from within his own ministry. A recent meeting of the China policy committee overruled his plans for a self-initiated trip to Peking.

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NOTES

China's first original comment on the South Vietnam refugee situation, a People's Daily "commentator" article on April 13, continues the low-key, moderately worded coverage that has characterized Chinese treatment of recent developments in South Vietnam.

In language similar to that employed in earlier press coverage of the US role in Vietnam, the article warns the US that it will have failed to "learn the lessons of history" if it continues to "intervene" in the south. The article also refers to the "futility" of US expenditures in Vietnam, reflecting Peking's recent stress on US "misuse" of its resources in Indochina when the areas of primary concern in Peking's eyes should be Europe and the Middle East. Recent Chinese propaganda has suggested that the US would be better served if it dedicated its resources to areas where the Soviet "threat" is greater.

* * *

The fifth round of the Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions talks in Vienna ends today. There has been no progress in resolving basic differences, and the talks remain stalemated. They will resume in mid-May.

Both East and West marked time during this round. Neither side has shown signs that it is overly disturbed by the lack of progress. The Soviets have never appeared to be under time pressure, and various Soviet officials have implied that there would be no movement in Vienna until the European security conference in Geneva concludes in a satisfactory manner. Moreover, there is some evidence that the Soviets are aware that the US is considering making an offer to withdraw from Europe some nuclear warheads and delivery systems. They apparently are content to await such an initiative. The West Europeans, who have expressed some concern about the stalemate in the past, apparently are also willing to wait for a formal US proposal along this line.

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Libya has again signaled an interest in improving relations with the US. This time it has asked for US approval of an ambassadorial nominee and has lifted the numerical ceiling on US embassy personnel it imposed in 1972.

The Libyan foreign ministry official who informed our chargé early this week of the latest move said the decision had been made by President Qadhafi and the Revolutionary Command Council. The official--probably under directions from his superiors--did not directly link the move with Tripoli's interest in improving ties with Washington, but did offer his "personal" hope that the gesture would "keep the ball rolling." As in the case of Libya's decision in January to lift its oil embargo against the US, this latest move will not be publicized nor will a formal notification be issued. Qadhafi's willingness to engage in a dialogue with the US will have limits, and probably he will continue to avoid any discussion of his policy toward Israel.

* * *

The Portuguese cabinet yesterday announced measures to nationalize more basic industries, control prices, and begin agrarian reform.

As in the nationalization of banks and insurance companies last month, foreign businesses are largely unaffected by the latest measures. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Gonclaves has tried to raise tensions by warning that Portugal should prepare itself for a possible international "economic boycott" designed to obstruct the revolution.

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