



# The President's Daily Brief

*April 25, 1975*

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*FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY*

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Table of Contents

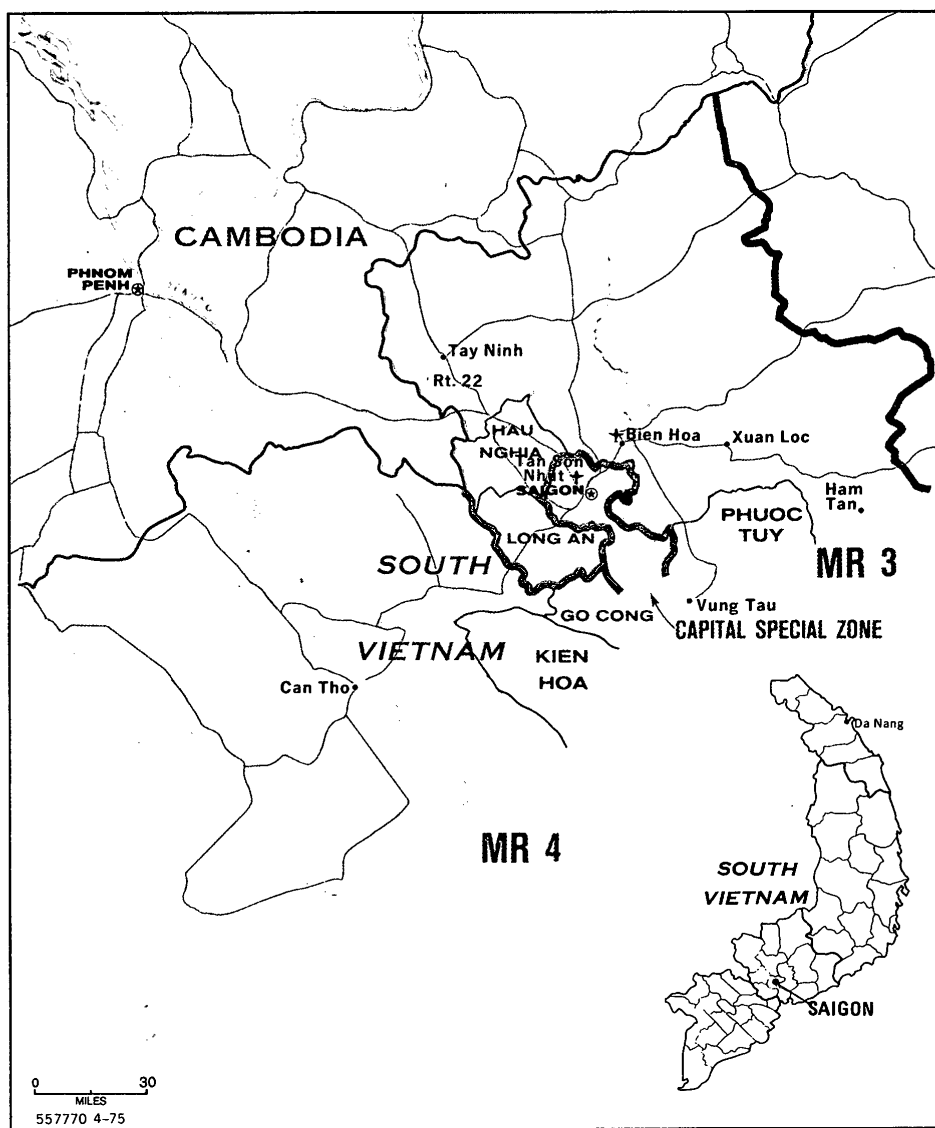
South Vietnam: Most communist combat initiatives remain concentrated on the western and south-western approaches to Saigon. (Page 1)

USSR-Somalia: A new airfield is under construction in Somalia within two miles of the Soviet missile storage and handling facility at Berbera. (Page 4)

Ethiopia: The ruling military council has arrested some of its members for allegedly plotting a coup. (Page 5)

Notes: Philippines; South Korea; USSR-Cambodia; Portugal; World Grain; West Germany (Pages 6, 7, and 8)

*FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY*



FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

SOUTH VIETNAM

*Most communist combat initiatives remain concentrated on the western and southwestern approaches to Saigon.*

Communist units yesterday captured several government outposts in Hau Nghia Province. To the south, in Long An Province, the North Vietnamese 8th Division continued driving north, overrunning a number of government positions. These forces could reach the outskirts of Saigon within a few days if they maintain their present rate of advance.

The important port of Vung Tau at the mouth of the Saigon River, which has been considered an evacuation site, could fall within the next one or two days. The newly arrived North Vietnamese 325th Division, which helped capture Ham Tan several days ago, has moved west and is fast approaching the port city. Another division may be converging on the city from the north. The government has shifted the Airborne brigade and a regiment from the 18th Division extracted from Xuan Loc into Phuoc Tuy Province in an attempt to block North Vietnamese forces moving against the city, but these units and the forces closer to Vung Tau are no match for the communists.

Refugees have poured into Vung Tau each day this week--as many as 65,000 reportedly arrived in one day. Government officials are transferring many refugees by ship to the delta to relieve the crowded conditions and to prevent another panic situation such as developed at Da Nang.

Despite these actions, large numbers of people are likely to continue to head for Vung Tau in the belief that this is their best hope of escape. At last report, the road from Saigon was still open and civilian and military traffic was heavy.

The level of fighting is low in the delta. With the movement of some communist forces closer to Saigon, the balance of forces is now more in favor of the government in the delta, but some military officials now admit that the fate of the delta will be decided in Saigon. The defeatist attitude

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*FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY*

prevalent in the military hierarchy at Saigon and Bien Hoa is now spreading to Can Tho, where the main topic of conversation among the military staff members is what to do when the communists win.

Air Support

The North Vietnamese may be trying to use several types of US-built aircraft captured from the government in recent weeks. One intercept noted that North Vietnamese pilots would be engaged in "training exercises" in which they would fly from a number of airfields in southern North Vietnam beginning April 23. The next day, "five A-37s" were noted "firing their cannons" and "dropping explosives." [redacted]

25X1

the communists would use their aircraft as well as captured aircraft in the final assault on Saigon, although no MIGs have been detected flying into bases in South Vietnam.

The South Vietnamese are now able to fly about two thirds of their 1,500 aircraft, mostly from Bien Hoa, Tan Son Nhut, and Can Tho. Official estimates conclude that at the current rate of usage, there is enough ordnance remaining for 15 to 20 days.

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Negotiations between General "Big" Minh and President Huong to organize a new government have hit at least a temporary snag. [redacted]

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[redacted] Huong is unwilling to relinquish the presidency to Minh but instead wants him to serve as prime minister with "full civil and military powers." Minh, in turning down the offer, argues that the communists will continue to refuse to negotiate while Huong remains as president.

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Minh apparently has picked up some powerful support from among former members of the Thieu government. In a conversation with an American official yesterday, Minh said that Joint General Staff chief Vien agreed that Huong should resign. Former prime minister Khiem will also support Minh's bid and try to persuade Huong to step down. Khiem feels that with his and Vien's support, the military can be persuaded to accept Minh as president.

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A Viet Cong commentary broadcast over Liberation Radio today hardened earlier communist demands for a new government and appeared to support Minh's argument that he is the only South Vietnamese nationalist of prominence with whom the communists might agree to negotiate. The commentary stated that any new government in Saigon must "not consist of those who have closely associated with Thieu." Such a government must demand that the Americans immediately withdraw personnel and support and remove "all US warships and Marines." The commentary also reiterated earlier communist concern about the US evacuations of South Vietnamese and implied that some action might be taken to stop them. It warned that the US would "be held fully responsible for all consequences" if it insisted on continuing its "present policy."

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USSR-SOMALIA

[redacted]  
*a new airfield under construction at Berbera, Somalia, within two miles of the Soviet missile storage and handling facility. The runway will apparently be long enough to accommodate modern Soviet aircraft.*

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[redacted] a gravel-like base material is being spread at one end of the runway. If the Soviets move ahead vigorously with the project, aircraft could use the field within a year. The Soviets, however, have taken two years to build an airfield for the Somali air force near Mogadiscio.

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Access to an airfield in Berbera will significantly improve the support capabilities of this port for Soviet naval forces in the Indian Ocean area. In addition to providing a capability for rapid resupply from the USSR, the new airfield adds to the growing complex of facilities at Berbera that support Soviet naval units.

The Soviet aircraft that flew reconnaissance missions over the Indian Ocean during the recent worldwide Soviet naval exercise operated out of an airfield at Hargeisa, some 100 miles inland from Berbera. When the new airfield is completed, the USSR's capability to conduct naval air operations over the Indian Ocean area will be improved.



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ETHIOPIA

*The ruling military council has arrested some of its members for allegedly plotting a coup. The number in custody is not positively known*

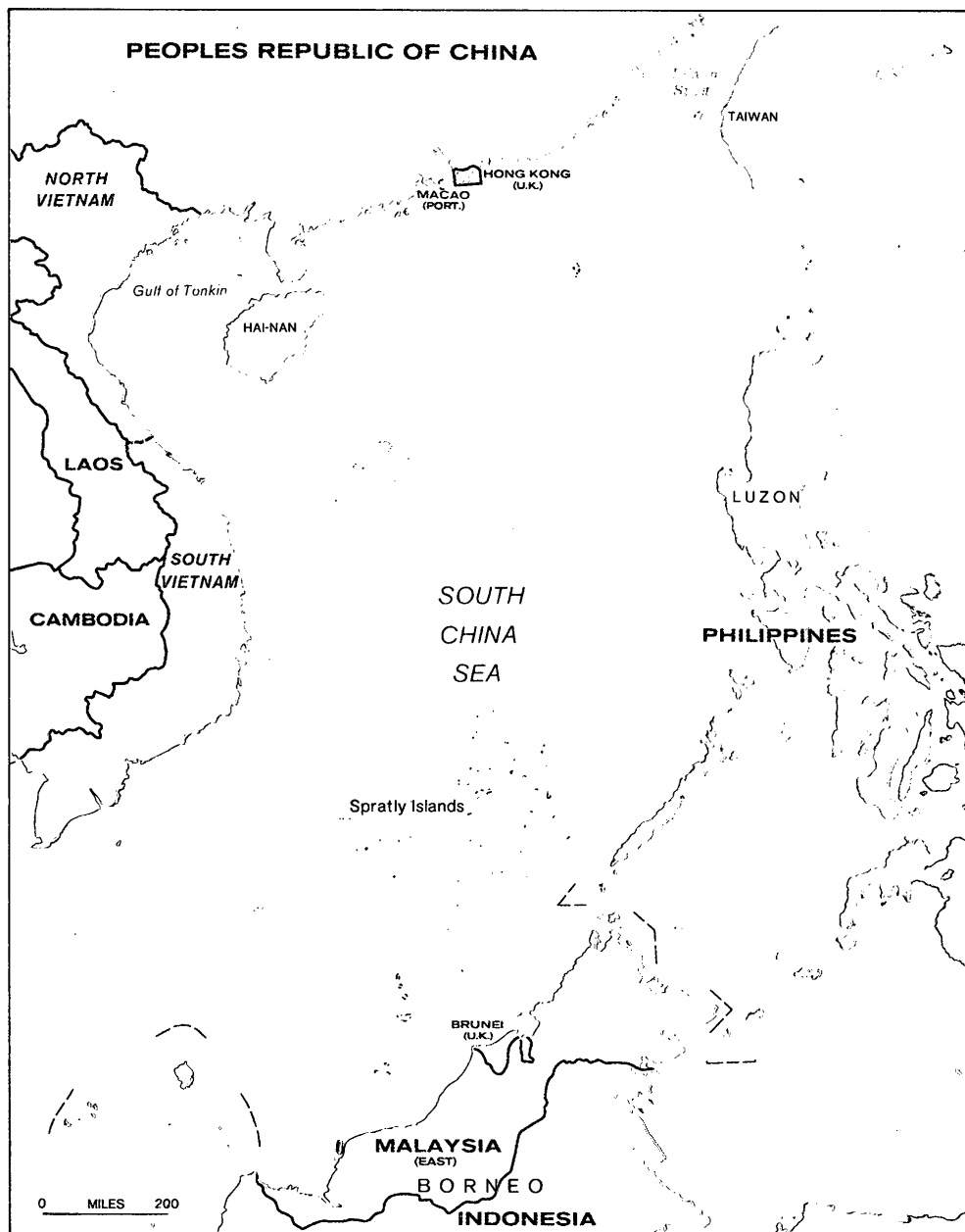
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The plotters apparently believed that a coup effort would be supported by most of the armed forces. The council in recent weeks has encountered increasing discontent in the military ranks, mainly because it has resisted repeated demands that the military be exempt from the revolutionary land reform decree. At least two of the army's four divisions have strongly protested the ban on private ownership of land, which would deprive military personnel of the land grants promised them under the Haile Selassie regime in lieu of retirement pensions.

The dispute and the arrests may bring to a head several other contentious issues between the council and armed forces units. These include grievances over pay and allowances, the living conditions in some garrisons, and the council's failure to consult the units on important decisions.

The US embassy reports signs of rising tensions in Addis Ababa. Guard forces at key buildings have been increased this week and additional checkpoints established on major roads.



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NOTES

Philippine President Marcos is seeking reaffirmation of US security commitments to the Philippines because of recent reports alleging a North Vietnamese attack on one of the Spratly Islands.

The Spratlys, located in the South China Sea, are claimed by several countries including the Philippines. Manila has stationed troops on some of the islands, while Saigon and Taipei have garrisons on others. Peking also claims the islands. Although it is still not clear what really happened in the area recently, Marcos hopes that he can use this occasion to elicit from the US a clarification of the scope of existing security agreements with the Philippines. The Philippine President is also miffed because recent public statements in Washington designed to reassure US allies have not specifically cited Manila.

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South Korean President Pak Chong-hui, in the wake of developments in Indochina and Kim Il-song's visit to Peking, is concerned that the North Koreans may soon attempt a test of US military intentions in Korea.

A recent conversation with Ambassador Sneider was essentially a plea that the US do nothing at this time that might lead Kim Il-song to miscalculate the firmness of US reactions to such intrusions. Specifically, Pak requested indefinite postponement of a longstanding joint plan to deactivate the command under which US generals have directly controlled a major portion of South Korea's combat forces. Pak also requested additional military equipment.

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Soviet

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Cambodia

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*The Portuguese government has pledged to respond quickly and forcefully to any attempt to disrupt the constituent assembly election today.*

The left-wing fringe parties have made clear their distaste for this exercise in "bourgeois democracy" and may try to cause trouble at the polls. Public opinion samples, meanwhile, showed that even late in the campaign a large percentage of the electorate had not yet made up its mind. Should a significant proportion of the ballots be blank, the Armed Forces Movement will be encouraged in its claim that Portugal is not ready for democracy. Official election results are not likely to be released for several days.

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*Tentative government and private forecasts of the 1975/76 world grain situation point to only a slight easing of the tight supply/demand balance that has prevailed for the past two years.*

World production of grain (excluding rice) is now projected at a new high of 997 million tons, up 9.7 percent. Total grain consumption is expected to increase to a record 972 million tons. While this is 43 million tons more than the low level of the current 1974/75 year, when cutbacks in grain feeding of livestock in the US were significant, it is only 5 million tons more than the previous peak year of 1973/74. Bumper harvests are predicted for the US, the USSR, and Canada, but weather remains a key factor in any grain production forecast made this early in the crop year.

\* \* \*

*Chancellor Schmidt probably enhanced his domestic political stock by the way he handled the terrorist attack on the West German embassy in Stockholm yesterday.*

His tough stand against giving in to the terrorist demands has countered accusations that his government is unable or unwilling to preserve order and safeguard public security. He broadened responsibility for his decision by consulting with leaders of the four major political parties.

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