



The President's Daily Brief

2 April 1970

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THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

France has called for an Indochina peace conference (Page 1) and at Annex we assess the reactions of the countries most affected.

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Cambodian anti-Communist fervor is cooling. (Page 2)

The Communists in South Vietnam displayed their strength Tuesday night (Page 3)

(Pages 3 and 4)

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The Sudanese Government forces scored a victory over the Ansar insurrectionists, but the conflict is far from settled. (Page 5)

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FRANCE-INDOCHINA

France has called for an international peace conference on Indochina.

Since the opening of the Paris peace talks in 1968, the French have refrained from publicly pressing their long-held view that the Vietnamese war is only one part of a broader crisis that requires a regional solution. Because of the recent deterioration of both the Cambodian and Laotian situation, as well as the continued stalemate in the Paris talks, the French apparently are convinced that a reassertion of their position now has a good chance of being well-received by all parties concerned.

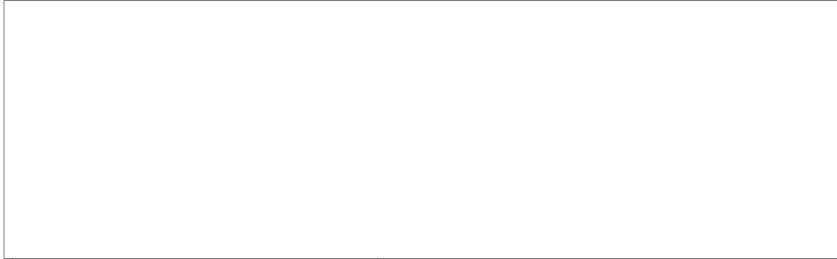
Our preliminary thoughts on the reactions of the interested parties are outlined at Annex.

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CAMBODIA



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On 1 April, the government issued a communiqué protesting recent South Vietnamese cross-border forays against Communist troops. This further reflects the government's efforts to persuade Hanoi that Phnom Penh wants to talk.

Phnom Penh's initiatives are in marked contrast to the tough line taken toward the Vietnamese Communists since the sacking of their embassies last month. They may stem from a more sober assessment of the difficult position the government's anti-Vietnamese gyrations have put it in. The government probably is greatly concerned about prospects for increased Communist military and subversive pressures against it.

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SOUTH VIETNAM

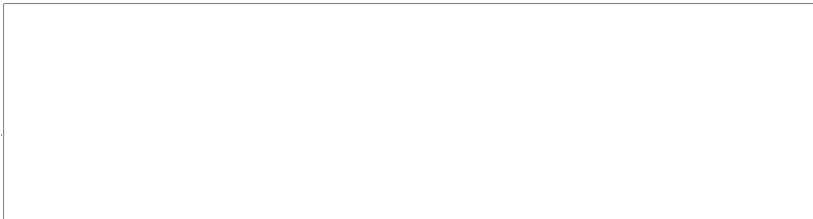
As more reports become available, it seems apparent that the Communist attacks on the night of 31 March - 1 April were the heaviest of the past six months. They were roughly comparable to the flare-ups that occurred almost monthly in 1969. The Communists have been trying to mount a "high point" for more than a month, although until a few days ago most indications suggested something less than a country-wide effort.

Hanoi may have concluded only recently that a show of strength would be useful. It might have seen this as a way to back up its tough stance on Cambodia, dampen Saigon's ardor for cross-border attacks on Communist forces, and contribute to apprehension in the US about recent developments in Southeast Asia.

The effort highlights both the strengths and weaknesses of the Communists' present position. Such widespread, coordinated action demonstrates once again the viability of the Communist apparatus, the continued effectiveness of its command and control mechanisms, and its ability to increase allied casualties sharply. On the other hand, unless the offensive action is sustained for some time, which seems unlikely, it probably will not inflict any permanent damage on the allied position or even set back significantly such programs as pacification. At this stage in the war, the Communists seem unwilling to pay the price in manpower that serious pursuit of these objectives would require.

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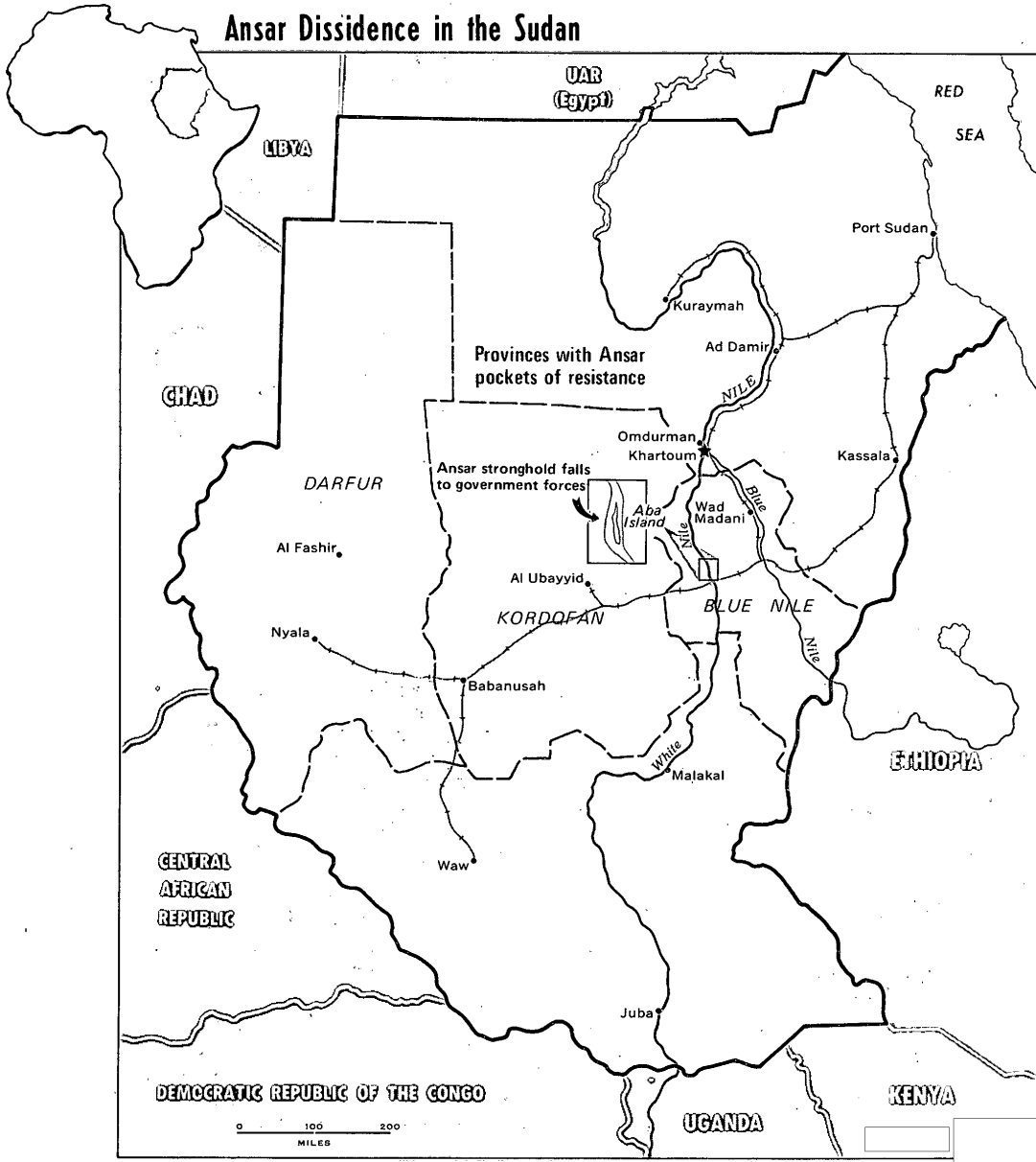
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Ansar Dissidence in the Sudan



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SUDAN

Aba Island, softened by shelling and air attacks, fell to government forces on 31 March. [redacted] the Ansar defenders put up a tough fight and [redacted] casualties were heavy on both sides.

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Although the Numayri regime has won the first round, Ansars throughout the rest of the country (they number about three million) may be stimulated to greater resistance by the fall of Aba. [redacted]

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[redacted] an undetermined number of Ansar tribesmen in the western province of Kordofan were already moving toward Khartoum.

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[redacted]

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If armed resistance by the Ansars grows, Khartoum may renew the request it made to Egypt during the siege of Aba Island for military assistance, including TU-16s.

[redacted]

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NOTES

Fedayeen - North Vietnam: Fatah leader Yasir Arafat, eager to tap all available sources for military aid to his guerrillas, wound up a week in Peking and is now in Hanoi. We assume he is seeking weapons, propaganda support, and some kind of official status for the fedayeen.

[Redacted]

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Argentina:

[Redacted]

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Israel-Syria: A large buildup of Israeli forces has been noted in the Golan Heights area of occupied Syria. It is too early to deduce Israeli intentions, but some kind of action against Syria is not unlikely.

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XPOSSIBLE REACTIONS TO THE FRENCH PROPOSAL
ON INDOCHINA

All the potential participants in any conference will find it very hard to turn the new French proposal down cold. This would even be true for the North Vietnamese, who have historically taken the position that Indochina's inhabitants do not need such a forum--or indeed any outside interference at all--to work out their problems. Hanoi may in fact discern some advantage in being relatively forthcoming in its reply. The Communists may think, for instance, that in keeping the idea of talks alive they would be encouraging friction between the US and the South Vietnamese, and they may also see the proposal as a way of encouraging antiwar sentiment in the US. Beyond this they may believe there is a chance of bringing pressure to bear for a bombing halt in Laos and for recognition of their present advantageous position on the ground there. They could also see a conference as a way of putting Sihanouk to better use than they can while he is in Peking.

On the other hand, Hanoi must reckon with the possibility that US withdrawals from South Vietnam would be delayed if a conference was in the offing, as well as the danger that the Saigon government might be able to consolidate its position while the talks dragged on. Moreover, they must view with some apprehension the prospect of going to the negotiating table with their Soviet and Chinese backers at odds.

Unless they actually inspired the French initiative, the Communists probably will take some time hammering out their response while they wait for reactions from other countries. If they do feel constrained to reply, the best guess is that they will combine an acceptance of the basic idea with some fairly steep preconditions, such as a demand for an end to US bombing in Laos or of B-52 raids in South Vietnam.

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The Saigon government almost certainly sees the French proposal as a Pandora's box of new challenges to its legitimacy and to its desire to carry on the war against the Communists. Its response, however, is likely to be tempered to avoid any outright rejection of a conference or any appearance of serious discord with the US.

Moscow will almost certainly take its cue from Hanoi. The Soviets apparently have not been deeply involved in recent developments and they have shown no signs of interest in such a move lately. [redacted]

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[redacted] Moscow would probably prefer, however, to see the Indochina problem switched to the diplomatic arena.

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Peking is probably unhappy over the French initiative because for some years it has opposed any move toward a negotiated end to the war. Nevertheless, if Hanoi approves of such a conference, Peking almost certainly would attend.

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