



The President's Daily Brief

2 May 1972

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THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

In the Vietnam fighting, the Communists are maintaining pressure on government forces in the northern provinces following the capture of their first provincial capital yesterday. Hanoi's propagandists have begun to play on the theme that the US has run out of options in Vietnam. (Page 1)

South Vietnamese President Thieu is deeply concerned over the political and psychological consequences of the fall of Quang Tri and is skeptical about the chances of organizing an effective defense line north of Hue. (Page 3)

The Chinese, in addition to canceling the traditional May Day fireworks display, failed to publish their customary May Day editorial or to issue any slogans for the occasion. (Page 4)

Soviet President Podgorny's May Day speech was brief and routine and lacked significant new statements on foreign or domestic policy. (Page 5)

The Brandt government and the opposition Christian Democrats have agreed to postpone the ratification debate in their effort to reach a common position on Bonn's Eastern treaties. (Page 6)

Israel [redacted] (Page 7)

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There are fresh indications that General Torrijos may be planning to take a softer line in the Panama Canal treaty negotiations. (Page 8)

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VIETNAM

The Communists are maintaining pressure on government forces in the northern provinces following the capture of their first provincial capital yesterday.

About 5,000 South Vietnamese are believed to have been in Quang Tri City when it fell. Some of them are attempting to withdraw southward and others are said to be completely disorganized. Intercepted Communist messages claim that 1,000 South Vietnamese troops were captured and another 500 killed during the fighting of the last two days, and there are unconfirmed reports that large numbers of government forces surrendered to the enemy.

There is evidence that the North Vietnamese already are shifting some of their forces southward into the Hue area in an effort to follow up and exploit their successes at Quang Tri City as rapidly as possible. While they may wait to consolidate their position before mounting a major assault on Hue, the Communists already have produced a state of confusion and near panic in the city as refugees and fleeing South Vietnamese troops push into it from the north. The number of refugees in the city has risen to nearly 150,000 and is expected to reach 200,000--a situation that local officials say they cannot handle.

The Communists are also planning further military and political action in the populated regions along the coast south of Hue. This action, which is to include ground and rocket attacks on Da Nang and possibly a major campaign against the provincial capital of Quang Tin, reportedly is scheduled to begin within the next few days.

In the central highlands, the North Vietnamese are continuing to prepare for an attack against Kontum City, and government forces there are trying to organize new defensive positions. South Vietnamese officials in the city fear that it cannot be held if the enemy strikes soon but believe that government units may be able to hold out if they have a few more days to organize and dig in. At Pleiku to the south, morale is bad, and there are rumors that Military Region 2 commander General Dzu is exhausted and will be replaced.

(continued)

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Sporadic fighting and shelling attacks continue around An Loc and west of Saigon, but there has been no fundamental change in the situation in this area in recent days. In southern Cambodia, heavy Communist pressure has forced the South Vietnamese to abandon their cross-border operations in the Kompong Trach area, opening still another enemy access route into South Vietnam.

* * *

In North Vietnam, Hanoi's propagandists have begun to play on the theme that the US is now an impotent adversary that has run out of options in Vietnam. The line was featured in a commentary in the North Vietnamese military newspaper broadcast on 29 April, the day after Soviet leaders Katushev and Firyubin wound up their trip to Hanoi. According to the broadcast, the US bombing of Hanoi and Hai-phong was a last-ditch ploy aimed primarily at "intimidating chicken-hearted people." Hanoi claimed the main result of the bombing would be to stir up anti-war sentiment in the US, thus further weakening Washington's ability to deal with the Vietnam situation. The commentary ruled out the chance that the US might reintroduce ground forces into Vietnam, claiming such a move was politically impossible.

There is no evidence that the new propaganda line is directly related to the Soviet - North Vietnamese consultations of last week, but the theme could well reflect the position taken by the North Vietnamese in their talks with the Soviets. Hanoi may be arguing that there is little risk in a further prosecution of the Communist offensive, contending that the US can do little in the way of effective reaction and that there is thus little reason for political compromise at this point.

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SOUTH VIETNAM

President Thieu is deeply concerned over the political and psychological consequences of the fall of Quang Tri, [redacted]

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[redacted] He is also skeptical about the chances of organizing an effective defense line north of Hue.

Adding to the heightened concern in Saigon, local newspapers there are interpreting the reopening of the Paris peace talks and Dr. Kissinger's trip to Moscow as indicating that a big power settlement of the war is about to be arranged. Rumors of a cease-fire are being spread by followers of Big Minh [redacted] Minh's camp is claiming that a coalition government, which should be headed by Minh, will soon be formed.

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Thieu has directed Deputy (ex-general) Tran Van Don to go to Paris this week to contact French Government officials and, hopefully, members of the North Vietnamese delegation [redacted]

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Thieu apparently is himself becoming concerned that the South Vietnamese may be bypassed in the Paris negotiations and may be moving to take some initiative of his own. Don has good contacts in French Government circles and in the Vietnamese community in Paris.

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CHINA

The Chinese, in addition to canceling the traditional May Day fireworks display [redacted]

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[redacted] failed to publish their customary May Day editorial or to issue any slogans for the occasion.

These developments, especially the absence of a stocktaking editorial, point to political trouble of some kind in Peking. There are several important differences, however, between the current situation and that surrounding the Lin Piao affair last fall. There are no current reports of top-level leadership meetings in Peking, and all of the active politburo figures have appeared regularly in recent weeks. The only exception is Mao, who frequently remains out of public view for prolonged periods of time. Also, New China News Agency has reported that Mao's picture appeared on the front pages of Chinese papers on 1 May and that Chou En-lai and several other top leaders greeted passersby informally in Peking's parks yesterday. In a later account of May Day activities the news agency went out of its way to note that Mao's wife, Chiang Ching, had attended ceremonies in the south China city of Canton.

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[redacted] some kind of major political difficulties have arisen in Peking, but so far it does not appear that an upheaval of the magnitude of the Lin affair is under way.

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USSR

President Podgorny's May Day speech in Moscow yesterday was brief and routine and, as is customary on this ceremonial occasion, lacked significant new statements on foreign or domestic policy. Podgorny reaffirmed solidarity with the "patriots" of Indochina and specifically noted that they were fighting against "US aggression."

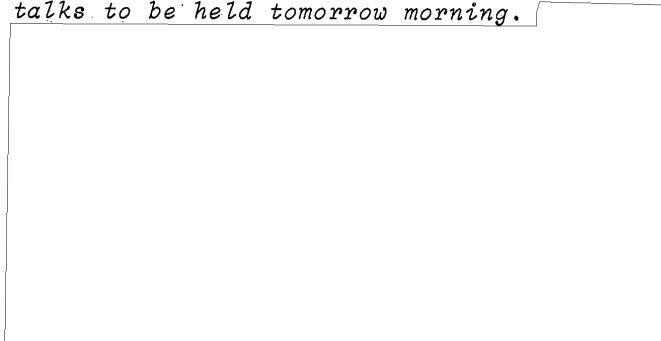
Although such references to Indochina are not unusual, party chief Brezhnev had avoided any mention of the US when he delivered the last three May Day speeches. The May Day parade, however, contained even fewer anti-American slogans than last year.

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WEST GERMANY

The government and the Christian Democratic opposition have agreed to postpone the ratification debate in their effort to reach a common position on the Eastern treaties. The CDU parliamentary group is now considering a draft prepared by coalition leaders over the weekend of an all-party Bundestag declaration interpreting the treaties. Although the CDU did not participate in the drafting, its leaders provided material summarizing their position.

A decision by the Christian Democrats is not likely before the next inter-party talks to be held tomorrow morning.



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Brandt and Barzel, in their joint announcement on the treaty debate postponement following a private meeting yesterday, did not specify when the debate would begin.



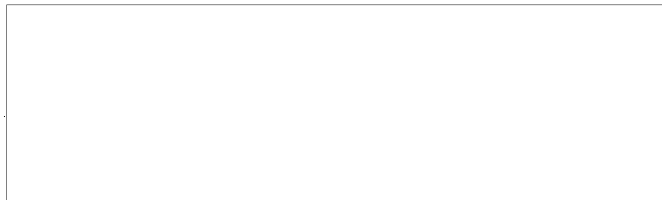
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ISRAEL



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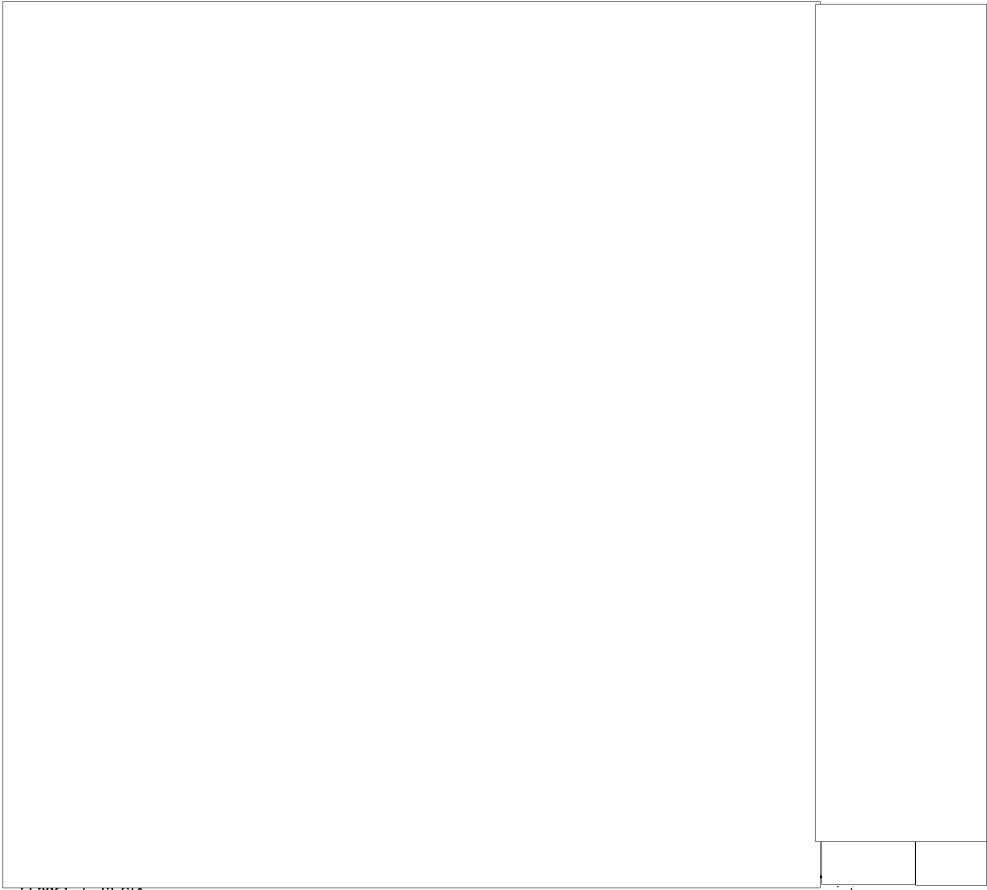
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PANAMA

General Torrijos may be planning to take a softer line in canal treaty negotiations if he decides that pressing for better terms is unrealistic. In a long conversation last week with visitors from the US National War College, he floated the notion of giving a preliminary nod to the best of the US offers to date, but leaving the acceptance of the treaty up to a plebiscite.

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Torrijos may hope to convince the public that the treaty positions already negotiated are an important step forward. In any case, a plebiscite would protect him in the event the public mood is hostile to a treaty on the present terms.



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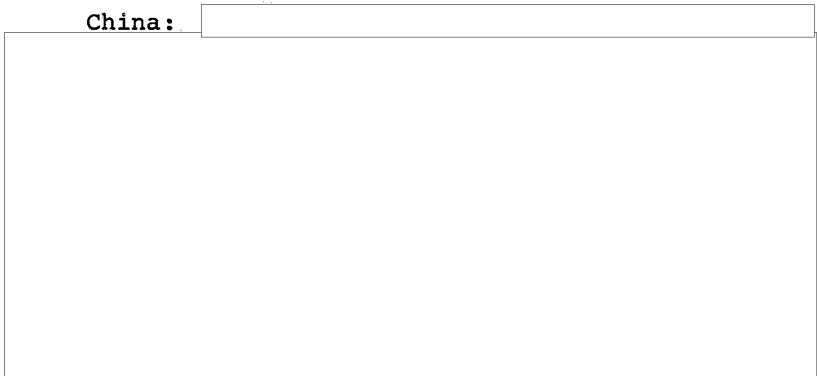
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