

The President's Daily Brief

Sensitive
9 May 1972

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~~*Top Secret*~~

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

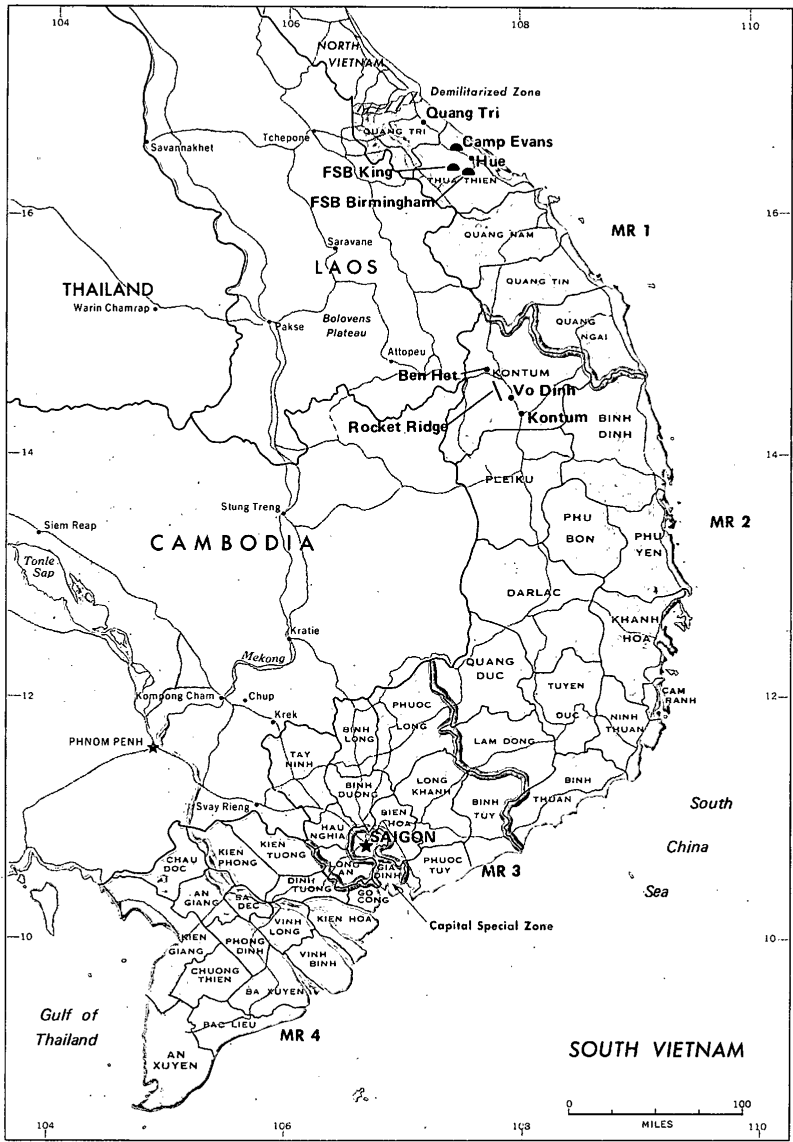
In South Vietnam, the Communists continue to move forces closer to both Hue and Kontum City, while in the North, at least one Soviet ship has reported taking casualties in the latest air attacks. *(Page 1)*

A COSVN assessment of the first two weeks of the current offensive in South Vietnam indicates satisfaction with successes so far, but cautions that hard fighting lies ahead. *(Page 3)*

South Korea's defense minister has publicly declared that Korean forces will not expand their current limited role in South Vietnam. *(Page 4)*

West German leaders are still trying to put final touches on an all-party Bundestag draft resolution, with debate on the Eastern treaties scheduled to open today. *(Page 5)*

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VIETNAM

The North Vietnamese continue to emplace heavy caliber artillery north and west of Hue and have moved their 38th Artillery Regiment into position northwest of Camp Evans, the northernmost South Vietnamese strongpoint protecting the city. Camp Evans and other government defensive positions, including Fire Support Bases King and Birmingham, have come under increasingly intense shellings.

More than a week has passed since Quang Tri City fell, but the Communists may need additional time before they feel themselves ready to begin another major offensive in this area.

[redacted] the Communists apparently are not yet concentrating their troops in forward positions where they could be even more vulnerable to observation and air attack. They are likely to order their forces to close on the government's defensive positions only after subjecting these to sustained artillery barrages.

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In the central highlands, regiments from the enemy [redacted] continue to move closer to Kontum City. Although they have let almost two weeks pass since they collapsed the government's defensive perimeters at Rocket Ridge and Vo Dinh, the Communists appear to be trying to clear their flanks of government outposts they have bypassed before making a direct assault on Kontum itself. Polei Kleng, west of the city, fell this morning, and Ben Het to the northwest has received a number of enemy ground probes.

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Several Soviet ships in the Haiphong area have passed messages reporting on the air attacks and the dropping of mines over the port today. At least one ship, the tanker Pevek, reported that it has been fired on by aircraft and claimed that four crew members were wounded. [redacted]

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[redacted]

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SOUTH VIETNAM

[redacted] COSVN in mid-April issued an assessment of the recent fighting that claimed great victories had been won over the South Vietnamese regular army, affording Viet Cong local forces an opportunity to make a resurgence in the populated countryside. COSVN asserted that Communist forces can ultimately win a total military victory.

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The COSVN assessment was not entirely optimistic, however. In particular, it took to task the Viet Cong forces in urban areas for not acting with enough vigor. While attacks against the government's pacification program [redacted] have made big gains in some areas, in others--such as the Mekong Delta--the offensive was not moving fast enough.

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One main theme of the COSVN report was that even though many South Vietnamese Army units have been driven out of their "outer defense rings," they have pulled back to in-depth defenses around major bases and cities; these will be difficult to penetrate. Another theme was that the Communists had not yet committed all of their available forces and that they could continue to fight throughout 1972, and beyond, if the allies should refuse to make political concessions.

The assessment is in part intended to raise morale, but it is notable because COSVN does not routinely pass out much praise. In general, the assessment reinforces a considerable body of evidence that the Communists are relying heavily on regular units as the decisive force in the current phase of the war. While it calls on local forces, guerrillas, and cadre in the cities to exploit the openings created by the main forces, the directive leaves the strong impression that military victories over the regular South Vietnamese Army must come first. COSVN appears to believe that main force actions will create the kind of unsettled conditions in which guerrillas and political cadre can once again build up their strength and consolidate Communist gains.

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SOUTH KOREA - VIETNAM

South Korean Defense Minister Yu Chae-hung stated publicly on 6 May that the current mission of Korean troops in Vietnam would remain unchanged despite US and South Vietnamese efforts to widen it. He added that there had been no change in Seoul's decision eventually to withdraw its troops from Vietnam and termed the possibility of sending additional troops as "totally out of the question."

Yu's statements reflect the growing concern of South Korean leaders over the repercussions of a continued Korean military presence in Vietnam. They increasingly view this role as an international political liability. President Pak, moreover, is worried over the domestic impact of an increase in Korean casualty rates and wants to keep losses to a minimum.

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WEST GERMANY

Chancellor Brandt and opposition leader Barzel were unable, in a four-hour meeting last night, to agree on the finishing touches of a draft all-party Bundestag resolution on the controversial Eastern treaties. They have scheduled further deliberations for this morning. Barring a last-minute delay to permit further negotiations, Bundestag debate on the treaties is scheduled to begin today, with the vote to come tomorrow.

Earlier yesterday, Barzel told the US Embassy that he was having great difficulties with the conservatives in his party, most of whom want to reject the resolution in keeping with the party's attitude toward the treaties over the past 30 months. Barzel said he favors accepting the resolution--with certain "improvements"--and, provided there is an acceptable Soviet response, permitting ratification of the treaties.

The disagreement among opposition deputies in recent days over the utility of a resolution suggests that they may not adopt a unified approach toward the treaties. Regardless of whether their party adopts the resolution, it appears that at least four opposition deputies are now prepared to support the treaties. This may well be enough to offset defections from Brandt's coalition and to give the treaties a simple majority.

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