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The President's Daily Brief

April 20, 1974

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

April 20, 1974

PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

Heavy fighting along the Golan front increases the risk that one side or the other will undertake major offensive action. (Page 1)



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While the Soviets cannot take much comfort from President Sadat's recent speech, they may view it as an indication that Egyptian anti-Soviet rhetoric will be toned down. (Page 4)

Li Te-sheng, one of China's former vice chairmen, appears to be the latest victim in the anti-Lin, anti-Confucius campaign. (Page 5)

Prime Minister Gandhi is firmly backing better relations with Washington and does not expect this to impair India's close ties with Moscow. (Page 6)

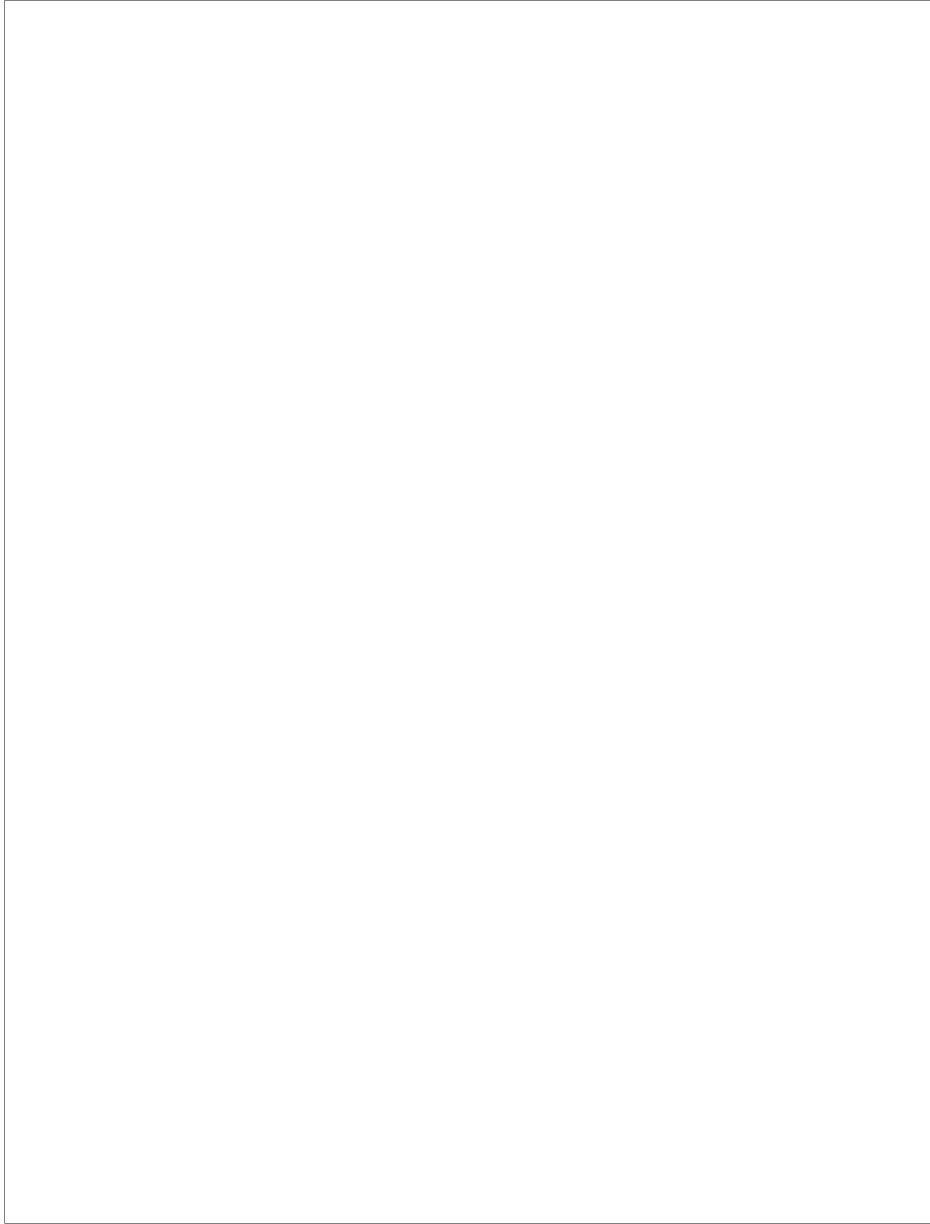
Cambodian Government forces are trying to regain the initiative on several widely separated battle fronts. (Page 8)

Sri Lanka's opposition party has called for a number of peaceful protest meetings on April 21 to protest the government's inability to deal with economic problems. (Page 9)

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ISRAEL-SYRIA

Fighting along the Golan front yesterday was marked by heavy Israeli air activity and intensive action by Syrian air defense forces. This increases the risk that one side or the other will undertake major offensive action.

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Israeli Defense Minister Dayan told Israeli television audiences yesterday that Tel Aviv believes there are no political limitations on its military activity and that it will feel free to undertake "territorial expansion" if Syria attempts to capture territory. On the other hand, Dayan also said that, while Tel Aviv will not fold under military pressure, it would not want to do anything to upset the negotiating process.

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Mount Hermon has been the focus of contention for both Israel and Syria. Both sides apparently are bent on establishing their domination in the area, and neither appears willing to back off. In the process, the scope of the fighting has grown from small commando actions to clashes involving larger numbers of ground units as well as large numbers of aircraft and surface-to-air missile units.

The intensity of the fighting yesterday increases the possibility either that Syria will initiate a thrust against the Israeli salient or that Israel will undertake pre-emptive action to prevent this. Syrian air strikes in the southern part of the Israeli salient for the past two days, as well as the fighting reported south of the salient yesterday, suggest that the conflict is beginning to spill over into other sectors of the front.

* * *

Israeli aircraft were active early today over the Golan Heights and northern Israel. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] This initial activity is similar to yesterday morning, when Israeli fighters were airborne at the crack of dawn.

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USSR

[redacted] the course of events in the Middle East, and especially in Egypt, has caused disagreement in the Politburo. Such friction seems highly probable and may reduce Brezhnev's freedom, at least in the short term, to pursue detente initiatives.

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Brezhnev, however, continues to have important support in the leadership. Yugoslav President Tito, who is a fairly astute observer of the Soviet scene, recently commented to Senator Kennedy that Brezhnev is in a strong personal position. Tito asserted Brezhnev had placed his men in key positions and that it seems unlikely Brezhnev would face a threat to his personal power position from any quarter in the foreseeable future.

Moreover, in our judgment, Brezhnev has proved to be adept at detecting shifting sentiments in the leadership and pulling back from exposed positions.

Gromyko, as foreign minister, is a logical target for recrimination within the Politburo in connection with the Middle East and with the course of detente in general. He would be a prime candidate if someone has to be sacrificed. His close identification with Brezhnev as a member of the latter's foreign policy "team," however, lends him greater political strength than he might otherwise have.

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USSR-EGYPT

The Soviets are not likely to take much comfort from President Sadat's speech on April 18. They would like to think that his reference to improving relations with the USSR means that, at least, he is prepared to tone down the Egyptian anti-Soviet rhetoric of the past few weeks.

Moscow will probably view Sadat's reference to the diversification of Egypt's weapons as a bluff, given the problems involved in replacing the range of Soviet weapons in the Egyptian arsenal. Moscow, nevertheless, will interpret the reference as a signal that Sadat will not switch policy in exchange for Soviet hardware.

Sadat's assertion of Egypt's neutrality and his positive references to the US will also be seen as evidence that he does not plan to abandon his efforts to achieve a more balanced foreign policy. While this comes as no surprise, the Soviets may have hoped that the Gromyko-Fahmi talks would have had a greater impact on Egyptian policy.

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CHINA

Li Te-sheng, who headed the army's General Political Department until his transfer to command the Shenyang Military Region last December, appears to be the latest victim in the anti-Lin, anti-Confucius campaign. Wall posters labeling him a follower of disgraced Defense Minister Lin Piao have appeared in several provinces as well as in military academies and possibly in Peking. The attacks represent a dramatic reversal of Li's political fortunes. He was one of five vice chairmen chosen at the party congress last August and had been politically active until the rotation of military region commanders.

Whatever the reasons for Li's fall, it is clear that attacks on a number of military men have been authorized at the highest party levels. An authoritative article in Red Flag, written under what may be a pseudonym for Mao, sharply criticized Confucius for allowing "feudal princes" to exercise "sovereign powers" in their own regions, and criticized those who would restore this system.

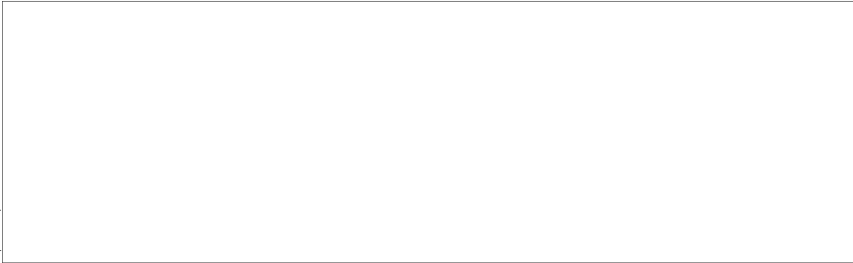
Peking does not now seem overly concerned if wall posters are seen by foreigners. They are easily visible to anyone traveling by rail, and [redacted] their Chinese guides will-
ingly translated some that attacked Li. Li Hsien-nien, a Politburo member and one of Chou En-lai's principal lieutenants, jokingly told a Western delegation leaving for a provincial tour that they would see "many big character posters, but none attacking you." There have been reports of scattered factional violence, but the campaign generally remains under the control of national and provincial party organizations.

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INDIA

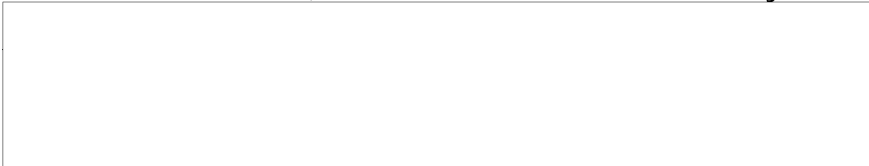
Prime Minister Gandhi is firmly backing better relations with Washington and does not expect this to impair India's close ties with Moscow.



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While New Delhi has shown interest in improved relations since late 1972, only in recent months has Mrs. Gandhi's attitude toward the US been so positive. In large part this reflects India's need for all the economic assistance it can get to offset soaring petroleum prices and food and fertilizer shortages. The Indians have recently made approaches to Washington for assistance "to keep our chins above water," in Foreign Minister Swaran Singh's words.

Next to economic matters, New Delhi's attention is focused on ways to forestall a naval buildup in the Indian Ocean. India has asked both Washington and Moscow to consider an agreement of mutual restraint. New Delhi feels its chances of bringing this about would be enhanced by better relations with Washington.



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Despite her more favorable attitude toward the US, Mrs. Gandhi has told [redacted] that India has the best possible relationship with Moscow, and she appears fully confident of its continuing support. She gives no sign, however, of acceding to Moscow's long-standing request for special naval facilities at Indian ports.

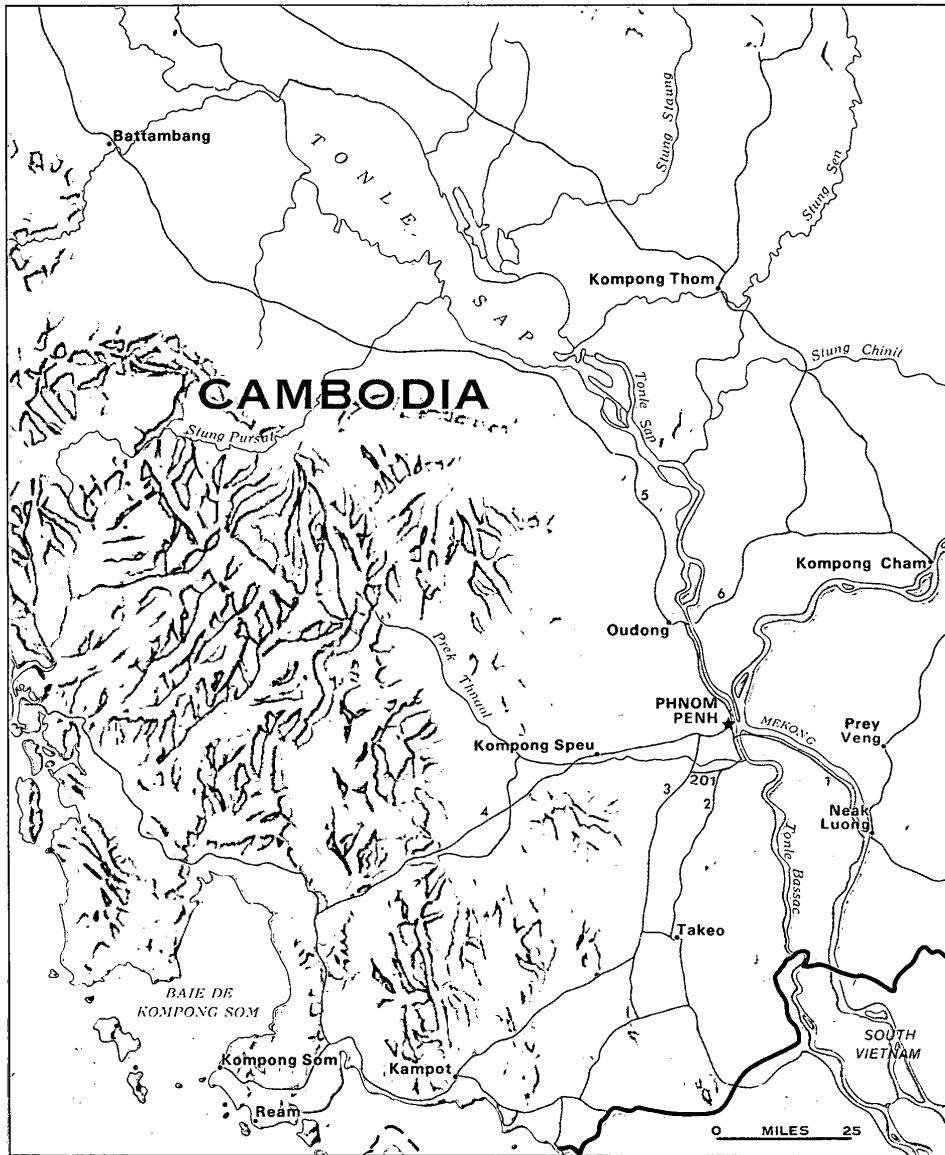
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In sum, New Delhi appears to have decided that its interests are best served by a more balanced foreign policy. [redacted]

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CAMBODIA

The government is trying to regain the initiative on widely separated battle fronts. Cambodian Army troops at Kampot in the past few days have slightly expanded their northern and southeastern perimeters, but have been unable to reopen the waterway from the south. The Communists apparently are trying to move reinforcements to the area.

Along Route 5 some ten miles north of Phnom Penh, army units have easily retaken several outposts lost late last week. Government forces, however, are meeting stiff opposition southeast of the capital, where Communist rocket sites may be located.

The army high command is sending troops to the provincial capital of Prey Veng in anticipation of attacks there late this month or early in May. According to an intercepted message, over four Communist regiments are scheduled to participate. More than 3,000 government troops are now in Prey Veng, and the high command is planning operations to disrupt the Communist preparations.

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SRI LANKA

The opposition United National Party (UNP) has called for 150 "peaceful protest" meetings on April 21 to protest the inability of Mrs. Bandaranaike's government to deal effectively with economic problems. Rally leaders reportedly will demand her resignation and call for new elections.

Mrs. Bandaranaike, aware of popular dissatisfaction over food scarcities, has placed the armed forces on alert. She has also pushed through a law providing harsh punishment for anyone making statements "likely to cause public alarm or public disorders." A cabinet decision banning the UNP meetings is expected.

Any attempts by the government to suppress the gatherings would increase the chances of violence and reinforce the UNP's resolve to begin a civil disobedience campaign on May 1. Moreover, the police and army would be hard pressed to enforce the ban in many scattered locations. The army commander has in the past expressed concern over the ability of the security forces to contain widespread antigovernment outbursts.

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NOTES

USSR: The Soviets are increasing the capability of their tactical air units to conduct nuclear warfare. [redacted] seven more storage sites for nuclear weapons have been completed or are under construction at tactical airfields in the western USSR. In all, 21 storage sites have now been identified at airfields in the USSR and in Eastern Europe. Most of this construction has occurred since 1970, and it has coincided with the widespread introduction into Soviet tactical aviation of aircraft that are assigned nuclear-strike missions. Not all of the airfields that now have storage sites are equipped with newer aircraft suitable for delivering nuclear weapons.

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Iraq: The Kurds have announced the formation of their own administration in northern Iraq, according to a Beirut newspaper. The administration is said to be led by an eight-man "executive council" composed of Kurdish ministers who have resigned from the Baghdad government and provincial governors who abandoned their posts to join Kurdish separatist leader Barzani. [redacted]

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[redacted] the Kurds [redacted] well organized and apparently willing to continue their fight. Kurdish forces are well-equipped with modern small arms and antiaircraft weapons [redacted]

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Their main vulnerabilities are poor radio communications between units and a lack of hospital facilities.

Niger: The new military government appears basically moderate and likely to focus on the country's domestic problems while continuing ousted President Diiori's pro-Western foreign policy. Paris has reacted calmly to the coup and appears ready to accept at face value junta leader Kountche's statement that he does not intend to change Niger's close relations with France. Libyan Prime Minister Jallud visited Niger on April 18-19, probably to discuss the mutual defense pact Diiori's government had signed with Libya. Kountche has not clarified his attitude toward the pact.

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