



The President's Daily Brief

March 5, 1975

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

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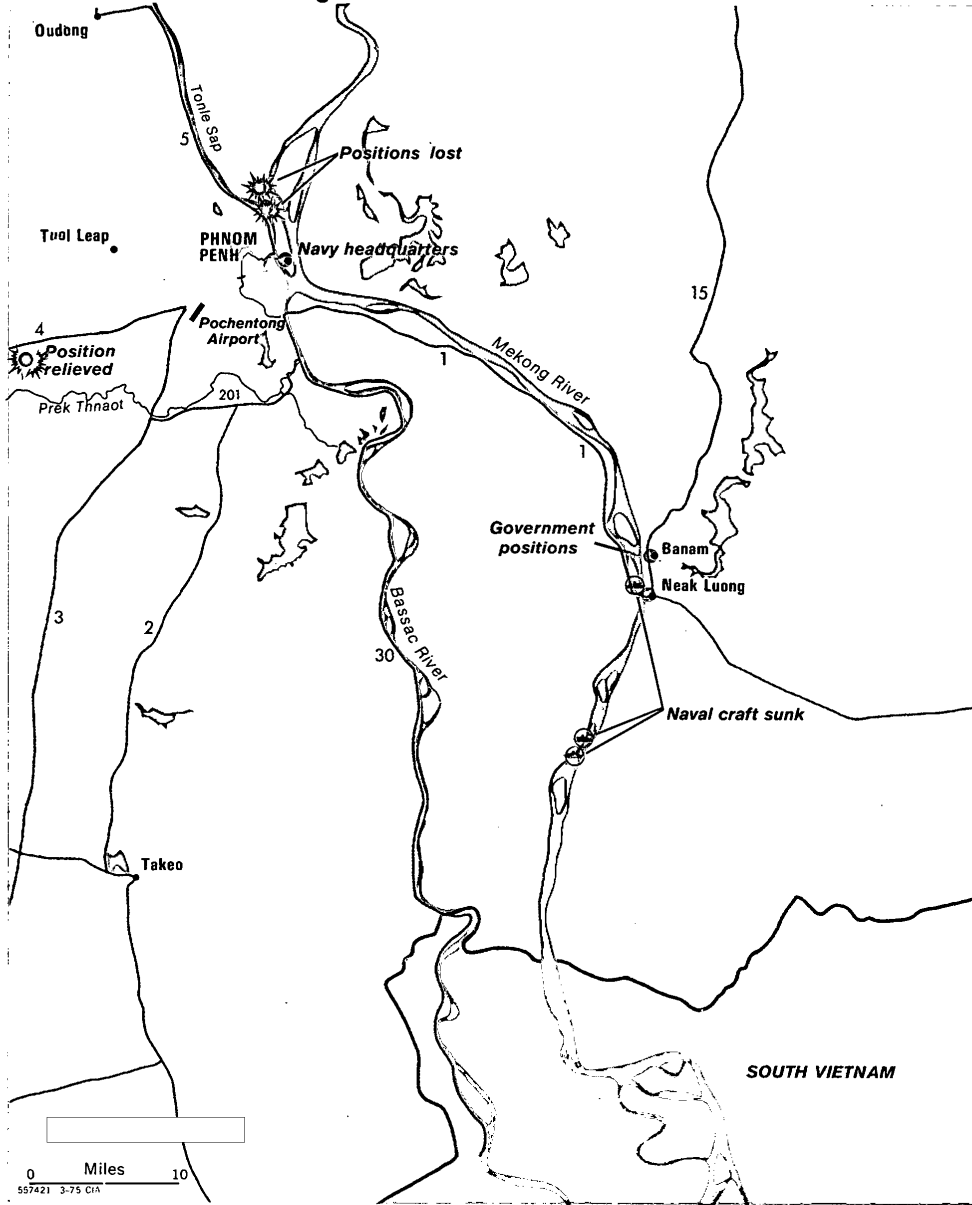
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CAMBODIA

Government troops continue to give ground northeast of Phnom Penh, but relief forces have broken the communist encirclement near Route 4 and are assisting in an operation to retake the town of Tuol Leap.

Two government positions on the west bank of the Mekong have fallen so far this week, and the communists have begun to mortar the Cambodian navy's headquarters from newly won territory on the east bank. Farther south on the Mekong, the communists are keeping steady pressure on the navy's base at Neak Luong and have kept it cut off from the nearby town of Banam. The government lost two landing craft yesterday, and a patrol boat was sunk near Neak Luong.

Recent intercepted messages have reflected communist efforts to get into position so that they can fire artillery against Pochentong airport.

The communists are expecting fresh arms deliveries from Hanoi, and fragmentary intercepted messages suggest that the materiel should have already arrived. Prince Sihanouk claimed in a press interview last week that Hanoi had agreed to increase its deliveries in response to our airlift to Phnom Penh.

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PALESTINIANS-EGYPT

Leaders of the Palestine Liberation Organization have been chastened by President Sadat's uncharacteristically strong reaction to the PLO policy statement of February 26 condemning step-by-step negotiations and are now moving cautiously to repair the damage to Palestinian-Egyptian relations.

The head of the PLO political department, Faruq Qaddumi, is soon to lead a Palestinian delegation to Cairo to meet with Egyptian Foreign Minister Fahmi. The group can be expected to minimize the importance of the offending PLO statement and argue that the Palestinians were condemning the US rather than Egypt.



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On Monday, a Palestinian radio broadcast from Cairo claimed both sides had agreed to "contain the crisis for the sake of Arab unity." Second-level Palestinian leaders have publicly called for a return to normal relations with Egypt. The Palestinians nevertheless continue to oppose another agreement between Egypt and Israel and are also continuing quiet efforts to marshal Arab support for their position.

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There is no indication that President Sadat, who will probably be meeting with Secretary Kissinger in Aswan when the Palestinians arrive, will meet with the delegation. Sadat has given no sign that he has backed down from his demands that the PLO either withdraw its policy statement or send the entire PLO executive committee to Egypt to iron out Palestinian-Egyptian differences. The Qaddumi visit, however, could clear the way for a subsequent meeting between Sadat and PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat, who has yet made no public comment on the contretemps.

Should the Egyptian efforts ultimately produce nothing for the Palestinians, and should the Palestinians be excluded from the negotiating process, Arafat would quickly revert to more militant tactics and endorse further fedayeen terrorism. The US embassy in Beirut considers that Arafat is keeping this option very much open.

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ETHIOPIA

The land reform program announced yesterday by the ruling military council will almost certainly lead to widespread rural unrest.

Powerful landowners, especially those already in armed opposition to the military regime, will oppose the land use edict, which restricts holdings to about 25 acres. In the northern provinces they may be joined by small farmers and peasants unwilling to see an end to communal ownership of tribal lands.

In the southern provinces, where the land tenure system has been characterized by absentee ownership and ownership of large estates by aristocrats, the government seems to be banking on peasant support to neutralize landowners who are political opponents of the council. Tribal differences between landowners and tenants in the south have long been the cause of animosity and hostility in that region.

The council yesterday also announced a major reshuffle in the civilian cabinet, apparently in an effort to improve administrative effectiveness. The changes removed several ministers who were appointed to serve under executed former prime minister Endalkatchew. Mikael Imru, another former prime minister who was serving as information minister, has now become political adviser to the chairman of the council.

In Eritrea Province, government forces and rebels have engaged in numerous firefights during the past three days.

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NOTES

The rightist Likud bloc is planning protest demonstrations in Israel during the Secretary's visit to the Middle East.

These protests--directed primarily against any further Israeli concessions without getting a formal peace agreement from Egypt--are likely to marshal substantial public support. The bloc's criticisms of US policy parallel broader popular concern that the Rabin government may be forced to concede "something for nothing" to Egypt. Prime Minister Rabin's immediate problem, however, is not Likud, but the conservatives within his cabinet, principally Defense Minister Peres. According to the latest embassy assessment, Peres is sticking to a hardline position and even casting doubt on the worth of any Egyptian non-belligerency declaration that might be attained in return for Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai oilfields and passes.

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Turkish prime minister - designate Sadi Irmak's announced intention to form a "national coalition" of the country's two largest political parties appears to have been dashed.

Justice Party leader Suleyman Demirel said yesterday that his party will not participate in the coalition. Irmak will probably continue to negotiate with other parties in the hope that he can form a coalition including former prime minister Ecevit's Republican Peoples Party, the Democratic Party, and a few independents. Should Irmak fail to break the political impasse, he could continue as caretaker for the time being. President Koruturk's prestige is clearly on the line, however, and there are rumors that if a new government is not formed by March 6, he might resign.

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