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# The President's Daily Brief

*March 20, 1975*

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[Redacted]

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

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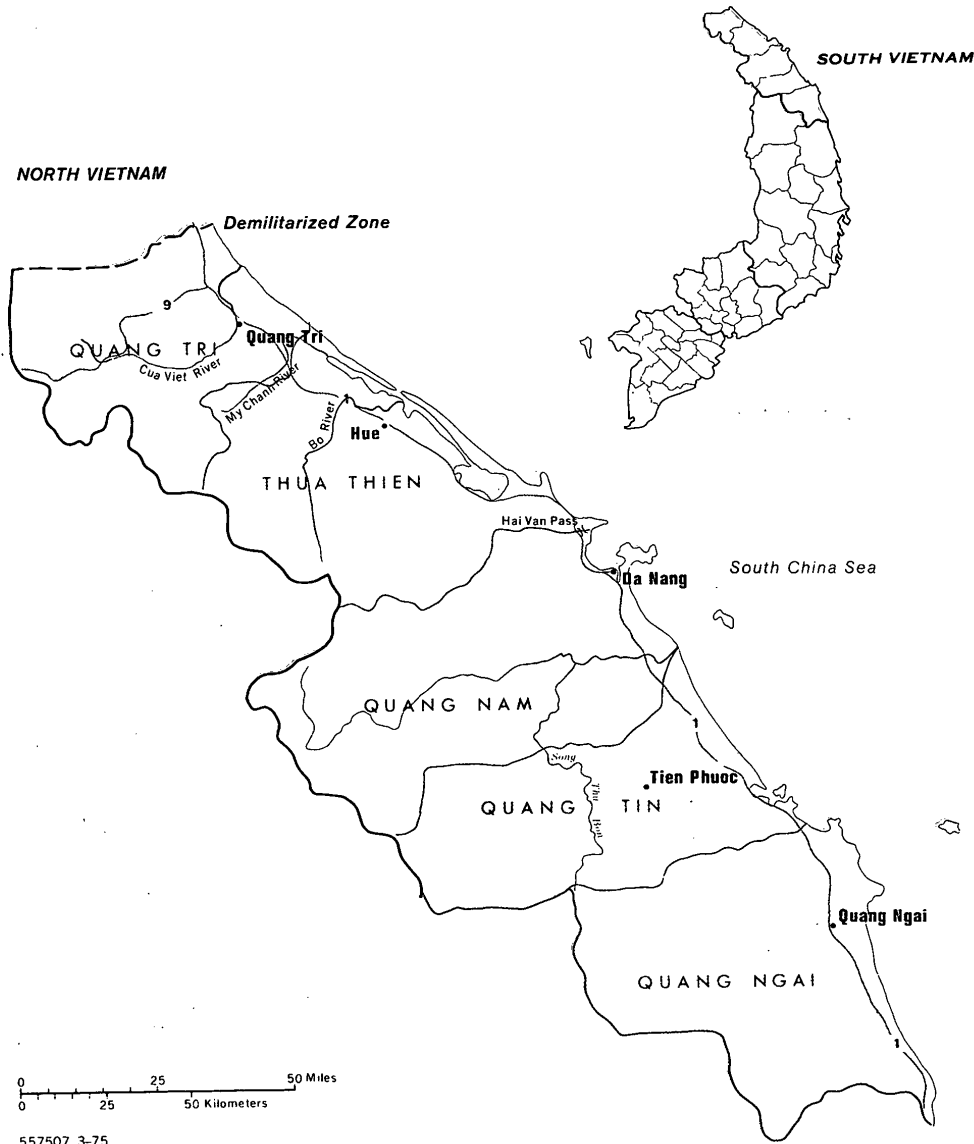
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### Military Region 1



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VIETNAM

*The government has abandoned Quang Tri Province, following a series of communist attacks.*

A large North Vietnamese force, supported by tanks, yesterday attacked government outposts along Route 1 in eastern Quang Tri Province. The region commander had pulled out most of his regulars the previous day, and South Vietnamese regional forces reportedly gave up their positions after offering only token resistance. The local commander hopes to rally his troops and make a stand at the My Chanh River, which separates Quang Tri and Thua Thien provinces. The government built extensive defenses in this area after the cease-fire in 1973.

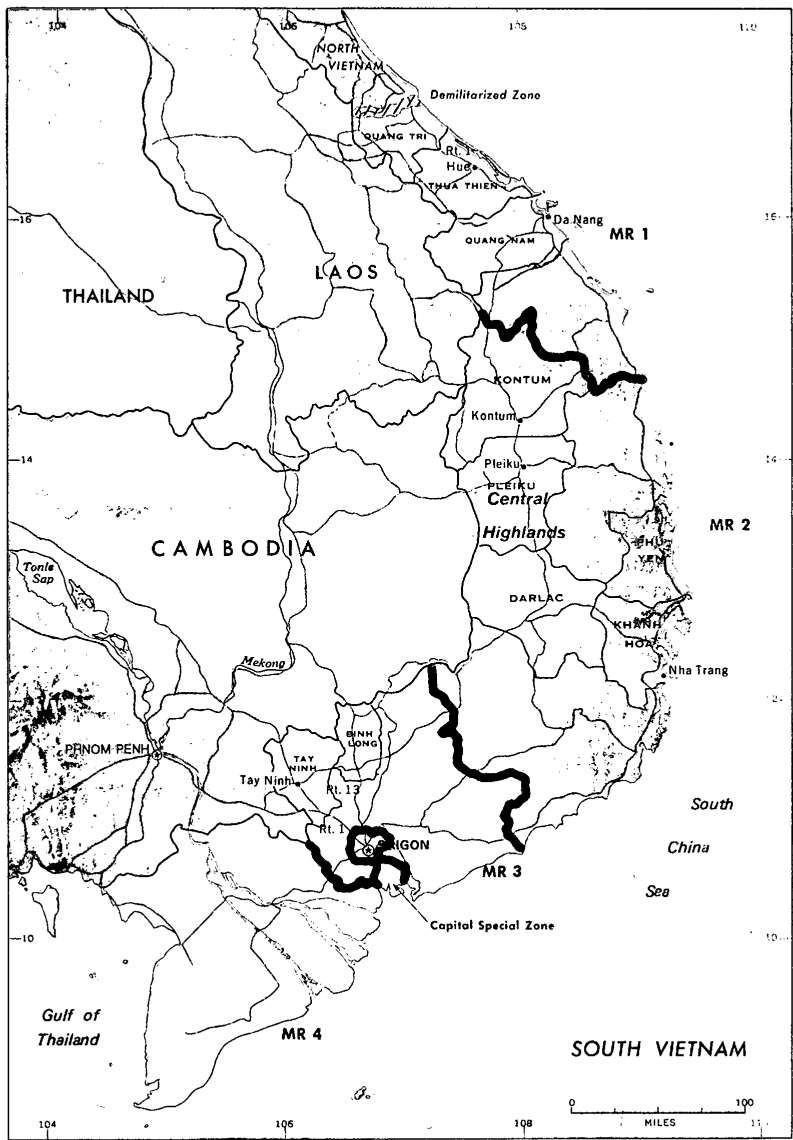
The region commander has also ordered the evacuation of civilians from the province. Except for a few thousand civilians who have relatives living in communist-held areas, the evacuation was nearly completed by Wednesday evening. Most of the refugees are going to Hue.

The government is realigning its remaining forces in Thua Thien and Quang Nam provinces. A ranger group, supported by tanks and artillery, holds positions just south of the My Chanh River. The South Vietnamese 1st Division is located on the high ground along Route 1 between the Bo River and Hai Van Pass, and the one remaining marine brigade in Thua Thien Province occupies defenses just south of Hue.

The region commander already had shifted several of his marine brigades south for the defense of Da Nang and the lowlands of eastern Quang Nam Province. Preliminary reporting indicates the South Vietnamese are now moving much of their heavy artillery and armor from Hue to Da Nang.

The loss of this firepower will make it difficult to defend Hue. The communists have more than two full divisions supported by armor, artillery, and air defense units in the area. Recent reporting clearly indicates the North Vietnamese plan to attack the city this month. They began intermittent shelling of the city late yesterday.

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In the central highlands, a government military convoy from Kontum and Pleiku cities has reached a river in Phu Yen Province, but is having difficulty crossing because a bridge is out. So far, the column has not been harassed by communist forces, but there are reports that North Vietnamese units are moving into position to attack. Remnants of the South Vietnamese 23rd Division have reached western Khanh Hoa Province, but it is not yet clear how much of the division will get out of Darlac Province. An airborne brigade, which was to have been brought in from Military Region 1, will be moved into western Khanh Hoa to hold a strategic mountain pass and prevent the communists from moving into the lowlands.

North of Saigon, government troops are proceeding with the evacuation of Binh Long Province. Several units and a dozen 105-mm. howitzers were to be flown out by today, and other units will attempt to move south on Route 13. South Vietnamese units have made little progress in their drive to push enemy troops away from Route 1 in the southern part of the province. A recent rallier has reported that communist units, including the 3rd and 5th divisions, have been ordered to capture Tay Ninh City during the current offensive. So far, the communists have not made a frontal assault on the city.

\* \* \*

Although the communists initially did not block the flight of refugees from the highlands and other areas being evacuated by government forces, they now seem to be threatening to prevent the civilian population's exodus. The Viet Cong's Liberation Radio has issued an appeal to "compatriots" in the central highlands to stay in their homelands and "build a new life." The communists regularly make such appeals to encourage defections to their side, but this is the first such broadcast since the government began withdrawing from the central highlands. Although it specifically cites only the current exodus from the central highlands, it presumably applies countrywide.

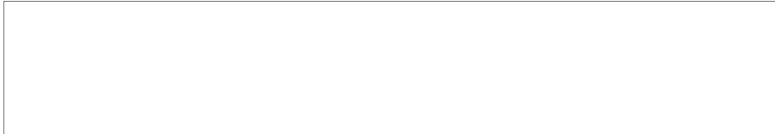
The broadcast also requested "compatriots" to coordinate their actions with members of the "people's army" to be ready to "cope with Thieu's trick of compelling people to evacuate." This means that members of the Viet Cong's political apparatus will work with North Vietnamese main-force units to try to prevent further widespread movement of people out of the new communist "liberated" areas.

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the President outlined the basic motives behind his decision and what he hoped these moves would gain.

 Thieu said the decision had been forced upon him by the drastic alteration in the military balance in the South. He maintained that since the signing of the Paris Agreements, the North Vietnamese had infiltrated such large numbers of men into South Vietnam that his forces were now outmanned in Military Regions 1 through 3. Moreover, because the US had not replaced the government's weapons losses on a one-for-one basis, as permitted by the Paris Accords, his forces are now outgunned in these three regions. Thus, he maintained, the "defense of the nation must be reorganized along new lines" and that to continue efforts to defend the entire country would result in "unavoidable and great losses of territory" and troops.

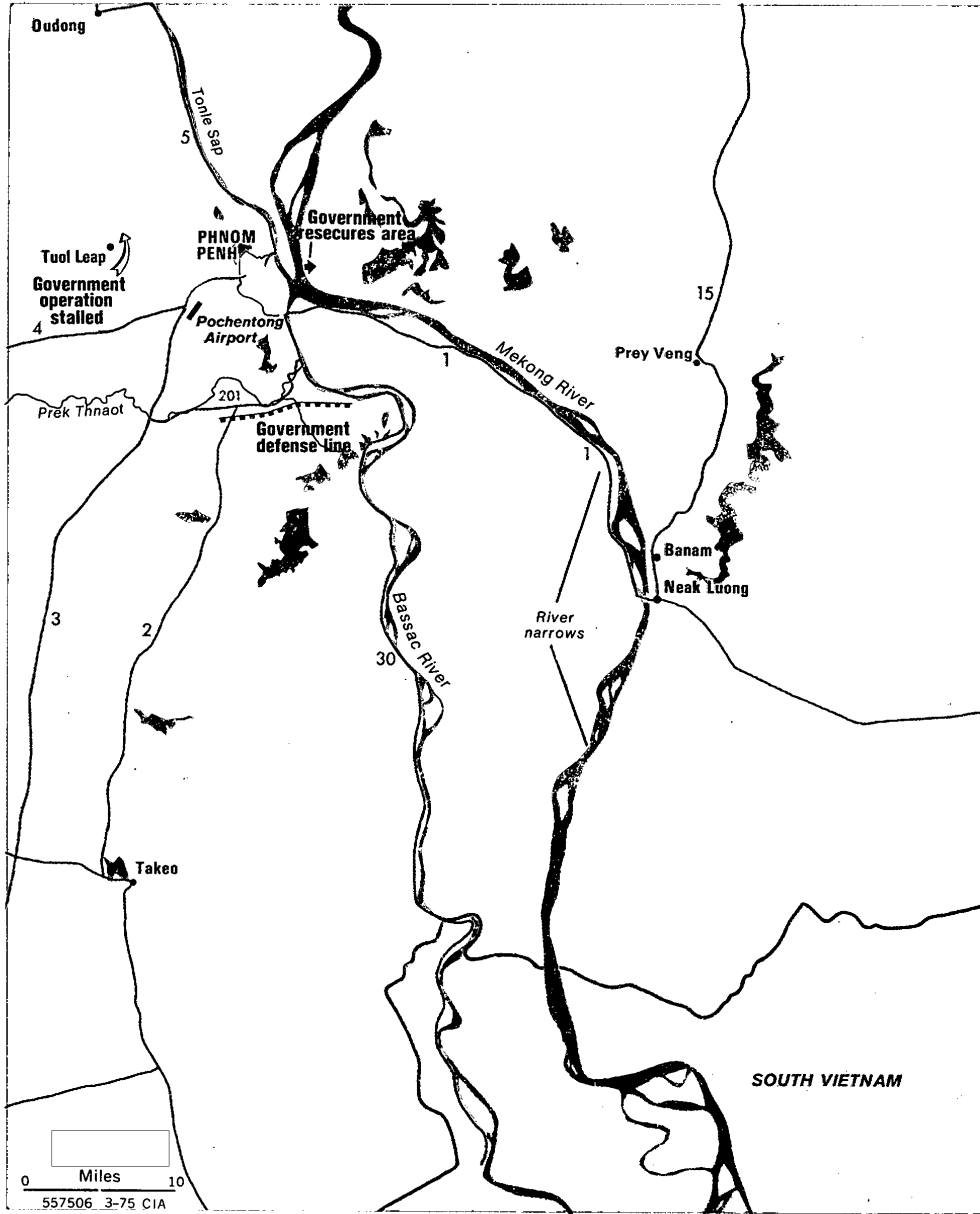
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In an apparent effort to justify his actions and give hope to his supporters, Thieu argued that in 1976 the US would have "an elected president with resulting prestige" and that this would make it "possible for aid to be increased." Thieu said he did not expect a "miracle" during the next two years of the present administration and he believes that his reorganization scheme will trade ground for time.

Thieu also talked about the possibility that the North Vietnamese would be willing to enter into "real peace talks" after they had captured several provinces. He assumed that they would probably try to demand the establishment of a coalition government and that the US might try to pressure him to accept such an arrangement. He indicated that such US pressure was applied on him during the preliminary negotiations in 1972 on the Paris Accords, but that as long as he is president he will "let arms and legs be cut off" but he would never accept the "suicidal solution" of a coalition government.



### Cambodia: Lower Mekong



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CAMBODIA

*Neak Luong continues under heavy pressure, but ground action around Phnom Penh remains inconclusive.*

Khmer communist gunners continue to pound the neighboring Mekong River towns of Neak Luong and Banam with artillery, mortar, and recoilless rifle fire. An ammunition dump at Neak Luong was hit and exploded yesterday. The navy now plans to withdraw all vessels from Neak Luong as soon as the barricade across the river to the northeast can be destroyed. The navy's departure could be a major blow to the morale of government defenders at both towns.

In the Phnom Penh area yesterday, government clearing operations northeast of Tuol Leap lost momentum. Nine rockets landed at Pochentong airport--three struck Cambodian air force facilities, damaging one aircraft. The fighting is inconclusive on most other fronts around the city, except along the Mekong where some government units forced the insurgents to withdraw from an area directly opposite the Phnom Penh waterfront.

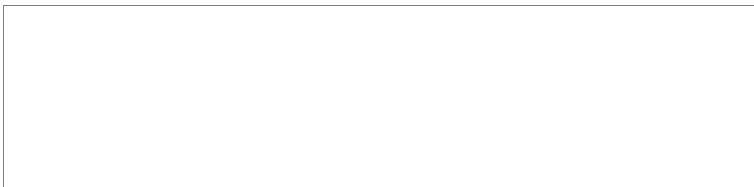
Several recent intercepted messages indicate that the communists are shifting units from the Mekong front to Phnom Penh's southeastern defenses. The communists presumably hope to force the government to withdraw troops from the more active battlefronts in the north in order to reinforce the southeastern approaches to the city.

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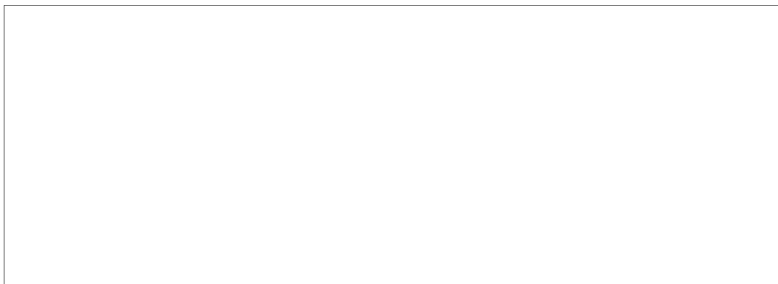
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CHINA - NATIONALIST CHINA

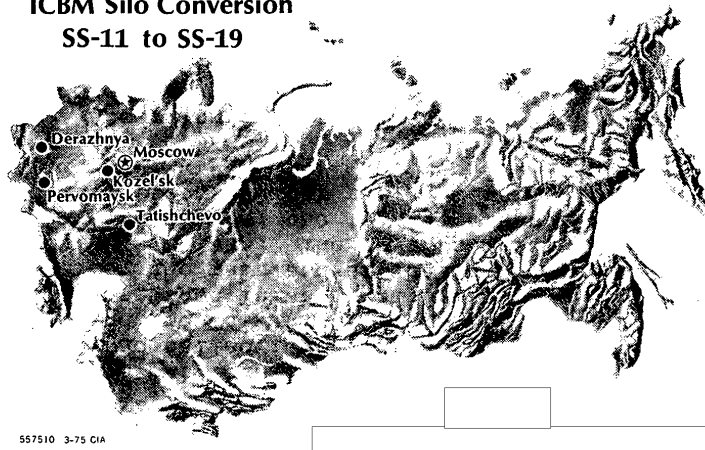
*China announced yesterday that it would grant amnesty to nearly 300 Nationalist "war criminals" currently in custody. The move seems clearly designed to emphasize Peking's plans for Taiwan's peaceful reunification with the mainland. The announcement was probably also intended to underscore to the US China's desire for a negotiated settlement of the Taiwan matter.*

The Chinese have been emphasizing their conciliatory policy toward the bulk of Taiwan's population for some time. At ceremonies last month commemorating the anniversary of the 1947 uprising on Taiwan, the principal speaker noted that on Taiwan "the patriots are many and the traitors are few," and called for increased contact between the mainland and Taiwan. For the past few years, Peking has urged Taiwan residents to visit relatives on the mainland and has guaranteed their safe return to Taiwan. The obvious message is that, with a few exceptions, the mainlanders now on Taiwan will be well treated after the "liberation" of the island.

According to the Chinese announcement, the pardoned "war criminals" are chiefly Nationalist military men, but also include Nationalist government officials and "secret agents." Peking has not released any names, but has said that the "war criminals" would be presented at a banquet, presumably soon. Peking also announced that those pardoned would be given the choice of remaining in China with full citizenship rights or returning to Taiwan.

There is little likelihood that Nationalist China will respond to Peking's action.

### ICBM Silo Conversion SS-11 to SS-19



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USSR

[redacted]  
[redacted] the Soviets are moving ahead with their SS-19 ICBM program. Conversion of SS-11 silos to house the SS-19 has started at the Kozelsk missile complex--the third complex at which conversion for this missile has been undertaken.

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The SS-19, which carries six MIRVs, became operational late last year with the completion of the first launch group of ten silos at Derazhnya. Since then, the Soviets have completed at least two other groups at the Derazhnya and Pervomaysk missile complexes and have installed missiles in them. A fourth group probably has been completed,

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Silo conversion is now in progress at five launch groups at the three complexes, and the Soviets are expected to start converting silos for the SS-19 at the Tatishchevo complex soon.

At the four complexes there are in all 410 silos that may eventually house the SS-19. Included in this total are 60 new SS-19 silos started before the signing of the SALT Interim Agreement and completed in early 1974. An improved variant of the SS-11 is installed in these silos.

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THAILAND

*Khukrit Pramot's coalition government, which won a vote of confidence in the National Assembly yesterday, is likely to be unstable.*

The new government is conservative and most of its members, including Prime Minister Khukrit, are basically sympathetic to maintaining close ties with the US. Foreign Minister Chatchai may, however, be an irritant in Thai-US relations because of his own political ambitions.

Khukrit recently stated that he favored a one-year timetable for withdrawal of US forces, but this was a tactical move to meet pressures from members of the National Assembly and the press. He has also stated that it would be difficult, given the political climate in Thailand, to undo a recent cabinet decision revoking the tin mining concession of a joint US-Dutch firm. The decision was made by his brother's interim government last week to placate the political left.

Khukrit is reported to believe that his government may not last more than six months. The government depends on the cooperation of seven political parties, most of which are politically more conservative than Khukrit. The conservatives offered Khukrit the prime ministership--even though they do not entirely trust him--in order to attract parliamentary support from the political center and left.

Khukrit's cabinet is representative of Thailand's vested interests. It is composed largely of businessmen and retired police and military officials. The conservatism of most of the cabinet is clearly out of step with Khukrit's more liberal views. Strains are likely to be aggravated by Khukrit's arrogant manner. Cabinet members such as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Praman, who owns much of Thailand's textile industry, may prove less responsive than was the Sanya caretaker government to demands for social, economic, and political reforms. The new government could, therefore, become an early target of attack by student activists, intellectuals, and the press.

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FRANCE-NATO

France reportedly is looking for ways to increase cooperation with NATO. [redacted] President Giscard has approved "limited, but important," collaboration with the Alliance's integrated military command, which France left in 1966.

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Giscard has authorized [redacted] talks in an effort to determine the wartime role French forces would have in Germany within the framework of the NATO integrated command. [redacted]

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Giscard is known to have a more open attitude toward cooperation with NATO than his predecessors, but he clearly is not prepared to move toward actual re-entry of French forces into the Alliance's integrated command. Giscard's government, however, has lately been showing interest in several NATO activities. [redacted]

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[redacted] Paris is studying ways of tying its communications system into the NATO network. The French NATO representative has said that he wants to participate in SHAPEX 75, an Alliance exercise on organizational problems.



*FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY*

NOTE

*Turkish President Koruturk yesterday designated Justice Party leader Suleyman Demirel to try to form a government.*

Demirel's center-right Nationalist Front, which consists of four parties, is just six votes short of a majority in Parliament, and Demirel may be able to pick up additional support from dissident members of the Democratic Party. Koruturk had been reluctant to name Demirel, in part because he believes that the inclusion of two irresponsible, extreme rightist parties would soon lead to a breakdown of the government. The presence of these parties in the government might also arouse leftists to violence. This would in turn create more uneasiness among the military, who ousted Demirel in 1971 and have remained strongly opposed to him.

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