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# The President's Daily Brief

March 22, 1975

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~~Top Secret 25X1~~

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

March 22, 1975

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CAMBODIA

*President Lon Nol has decided to leave Phnom Penh "in the near future,"*

*Lon Nol reached the decision following discussions with Prime Minister Long Boret on Wednesday and Thursday when Boret revealed that the Japanese government had offered to invite Lon Nol to Japan. Lon Nol apparently intends to accept the offer, but he will not depart until he receives a formal letter of invitation.*

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Lon Nol does not intend to resign, but presidential functions will be taken over by a close confidant, Saukam Koy. As president of the Senate, Saukam Koy is constitutionally empowered to assume executive responsibility in the president's absence.

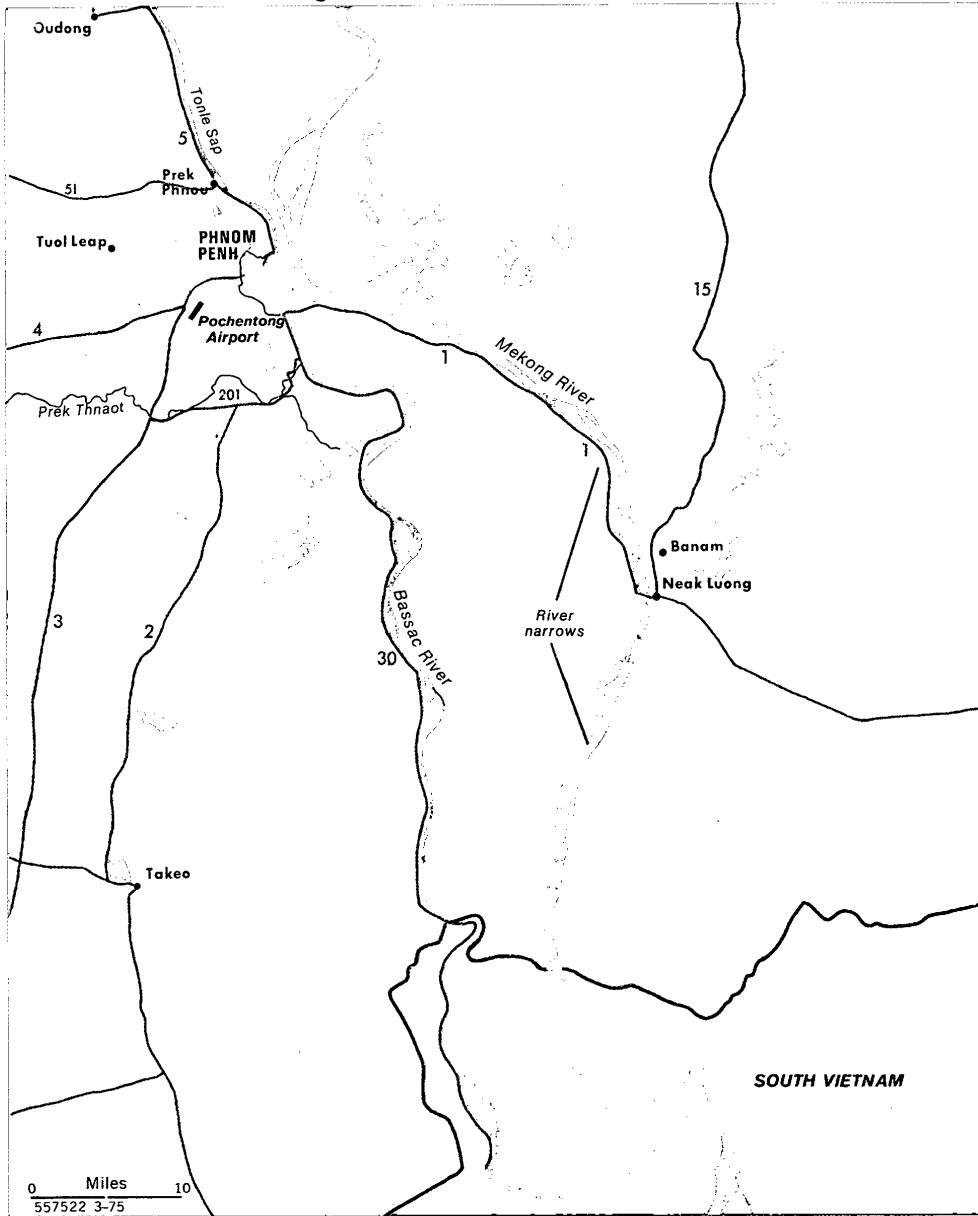
The government yesterday announced the completion of the cabinet shuffle. The only major change was the naming of Armed Forces Chief of Staff Sak Sutsakhan as defense minister. Widely respected as an elder statesman, General Sutsakhan was also named deputy prime minister. This move is apparently designed to emphasize both his civilian role and the government's increased control over the military establishment. Other new cabinet appointments are significant only in that several ministers close to Lon Nol have been replaced by individuals aligned more with Long Boret.

The new cabinet, however, is still dominated by Lon Nol's Socio-Republican Party. The Democrats and Republicans--the two minority parties--refused to participate, although Republican Party strongman Sirik Matak apparently remains as a member of the executive council, the top policy-making body. With the resignation of Sosthene Fernandez, now en route to France, Matak, Boret, and Lon Nol are the three active government leaders with whom the communists have refused any dealings whatsoever.

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*FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY*

### Cambodia : Lower Mekong



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\* \* \*

The US airlift was suspended late yesterday after communist rockets seriously damaged two US cargo planes at Pochentong airport. Preliminary reports indicate that the crews escaped without injury. An attempt was made to resume the airlift a few hours later, but another rocket hit the airport, wounding a number of persons.

Along the Mekong River, government forces have responded well to renewed communist pressure at Neak Luong. Government troops have repulsed attacking insurgent forces east of the town, reportedly killing 50 communists. Intercepted messages indicate that the insurgents are planning to shift additional forces from the west bank of the Mekong to participate in attacks against Neak Luong.

Insurgent activity near Prek Phnou, north of Phnom Penh, currently is the most serious threat to the capital. Government operations in that area are making little progress.

East of Phnom Penh, the insurgents continue to infiltrate government defenses at night, forcing the Cambodians to conduct clearing operations the next day. This activity is gradually depleting government forces in the area even though both sides are holding their ground.

*FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY*

USSR

*The Soviets have reacted to news stories regarding US efforts to salvage a Soviet submarine in the Pacific by overflying the area where they believe the submarine sank in 1968.*

The overflight yesterday [redacted] clearly was in reaction to the press reports because Soviet [redacted] flights over the Pacific normally cover transit lanes for US aircraft carriers. We expect further flights of this nature.

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[redacted]

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ARAB STATES - ISRAEL

*Military exercises and training activity in Israel and Egypt during the past week are intended to bolster each side's negotiating position and enhance its ability to launch or withstand an attack if negotiations fail. Syrian forces too are likely to have increased their readiness.*

The Israelis apparently conducted a large-scale exercise in the northern Sinai from March 16 to 19.

[Redacted]

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[Redacted] Thursday that he saw no overt signs that Israeli military forces had increased their readiness or that any reservists had been mobilized. He did say, however, that the British defense attaché had reported some indications that at least some selective call-ups were under way.

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Egyptian navy and commando forces have been participating in an exercise for the past several days and some reservists may have been recalled to duty. The air force also has taken precautions-- perhaps in reaction to Israeli activity. [Redacted]

[Redacted]

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[Redacted]

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(continued)



*FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY*

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[Redacted]

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We have no information [Redacted] to confirm the movement of Syrian forces closer to the front. We believe, however, that the Syrian forces have increased their readiness, but not to the point that would invite an Israeli preemptive attack.

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PALESTINIANS

*Yasir Arafat and other moderate leaders of the Palestine Liberation Organization appear to be moving cautiously toward a public acceptance of Israel. By using second-level spokesmen and vague language, they are attempting to make the minimum concessions necessary to win the Palestinians a role in negotiations without alienating their many skeptical and more militant colleagues.*

This week the PLO representative in London, Said Hammami, wrote in a news magazine that some form of "mutually acceptable coexistence" might in time be developed between Israel and a Palestinian state. Hammami suggested that if current efforts toward a settlement should result in the establishment of some kind of Palestinian entity, the PLO could then pursue its "dream" of a secular (i.e., non-Zionist) Palestine by evolutionary means.

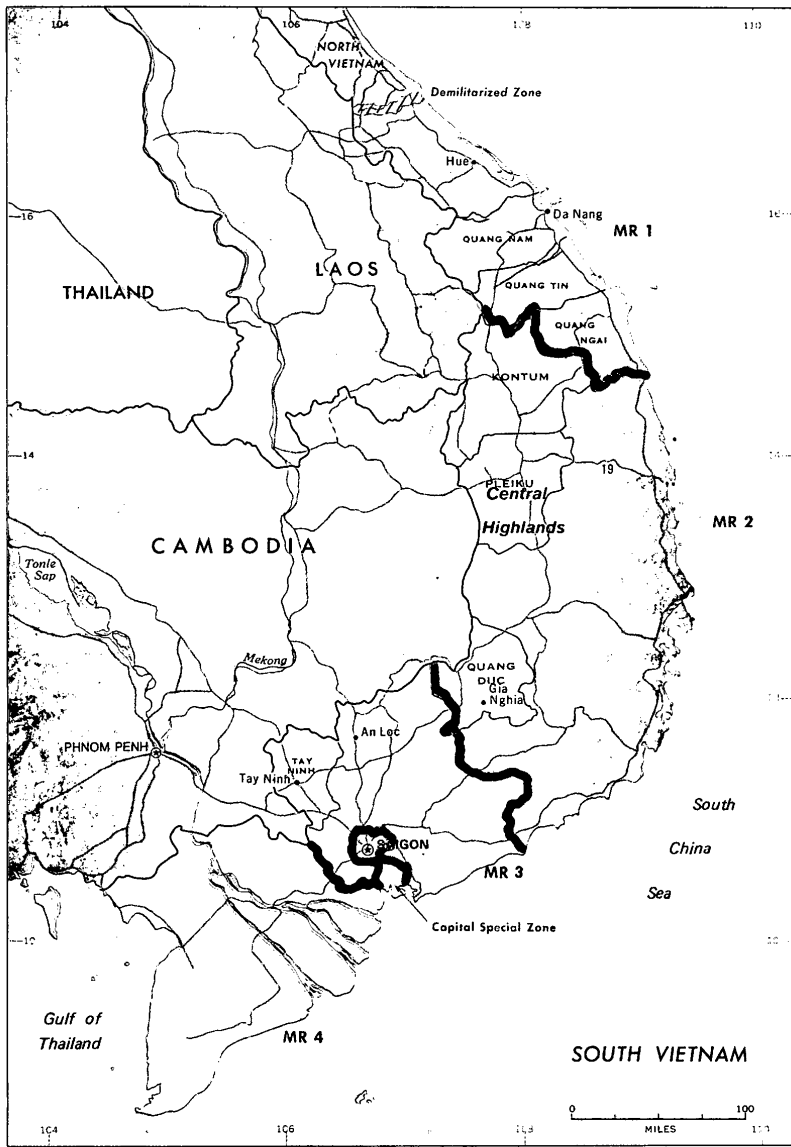
The Palestinians' willingness to recognize formally and to live peacefully with Israel is still only implicit in Hammami's statement. The Israelis will be unmoved by it, and will refuse to negotiate with the Palestinians until they explicitly recognize Israel's right to exist and forswear terrorist attacks on Israel.

[redacted] a comprehensive Middle East settlement is impossible without a settlement of the Palestinian problem. This consideration, however, has not been enough to prompt Israel to modify its conditions for dealing with the PLO. [redacted] the PLO must do more than "inform us through foreign newsmen that it recognizes the existence of Israel."

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Although Arafat reportedly approved Hammami's statement, he is unlikely to defend it publicly or make any more explicit concessions unless he receives something substantial from Israel in return. The PLO's governing executive committee looks on the Hammami statement and those like it made by PLO officials in Beirut as trial balloons to which the organization's prestige should not be attached.



FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

SOUTH VIETNAM

*The control of territory in various parts of South Vietnam continues to change hands.*

Quang Duc has been added to the growing list of provinces ceded to the communists. Government forces have withdrawn from the provincial capital of Gia Nghia, reportedly without obtaining approval from higher authority. This gives the North Vietnamese control of all the provinces north of Tay Ninh that border on Cambodia.

Regional commanders in the central provinces now believe that the South Vietnamese 23rd Division no longer exists as a fighting unit and at least a year will be required to rebuild it. Thus far, few of the stragglers from the highland provinces have been regrouped into viable fighting units. The 22nd Division continues to be an effective force, but it has stopped trying to open Route 19. A sizable number of people who have fled Kontum and Pleiku provinces are trapped along this road.

The military situation remains grave in the northern provinces, but the South Vietnamese have had some successes there in the past few days. Government units have cleared some lowland areas in Quang Nam, Quang Tin, and Quang Ngai provinces in an attempt to push the communists back from highways being used for refugee evacuation.

Closer to Saigon, the evacuation of South Vietnamese forces from An Loc is nearly completed. There has been virtually no communist reaction to this move. The commander of the provinces ringing the capital is continuing to maneuver his forces to counter the increasing number of communist initiatives in the region.

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TURKEY

Ankara [redacted] will delay for at least another month any retaliation for the halt in US military assistance, but pressures are growing for at least a token gesture against the US.

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As a result of Secretary Kissinger's visit to Ankara in mid-March, Foreign Minister Esenbel reportedly is hopeful that some steps will be taken to restore the aid program by the end of April.

[redacted]

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Undoubtedly intending to impress the US with the gravity of the situation and to exert pressure for a restoration of aid, Esenbel took a similar line in a conversation with Ambassador Macomber on March 19. Esenbel said he was deeply disturbed by the postponement of congressional legislation to restore US military assistance to Turkey. He tried to correct what he said was a false impression that Turkey was being "softened up" and that the danger of retaliation against the US was passing. The foreign minister emphasized that the only reason retaliation had not been taken in recent days was the confidence the Turkish leadership had in US assurances that the cutoff legislation would be reversed.

Esenbel said that former prime minister Ecevit had warned that Washington was becoming too complacent and recommended choosing a US installation. Esenbel said that he had resisted the suggestion, but he is convinced that the forces favoring such retaliation cannot be held off much longer.

The Turkish General Staff, although concerned and angered by the arms embargo, has decided against shutting down US bases as a response. The senior officers--and President Koruturk--[redacted] remain fundamentally opposed to closing the US bases or withdrawing Turkey from NATO. The General Staff is aware that its short-term problems of acquiring critical spare parts and its longer term plans for modernization of the Turkish armed forces cannot be met by any other source except the US. Even though West German military aid is about to be restored, it is viewed as insufficient.

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[redacted] the Turkish government will act on the basis of the decisions of the Turkish General Staff and the President, not on the public statements of either the foreign minister or the prime minister, both of whom have hinted at retaliation.

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NOTE

*The Revolutionary Council in Portugal announced after a meeting that ended early this morning that it would expand its membership to include four leading moderates.*

The Council also voted to allow any of its members to be expelled by a vote of the 200-man assembly of the Armed Forces Movement. This could allow the more moderate mainstream of the military to gain greater influence. These actions may be largely cosmetic, but they may presage a less leftist cabinet than some moderates in Portugal have feared. A new cabinet is expected to be named next week.

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