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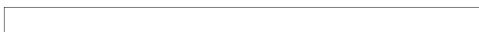


The President's Daily Brief

April 12, 1975

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~~Top Secret 25X1~~



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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

April 12, 1975

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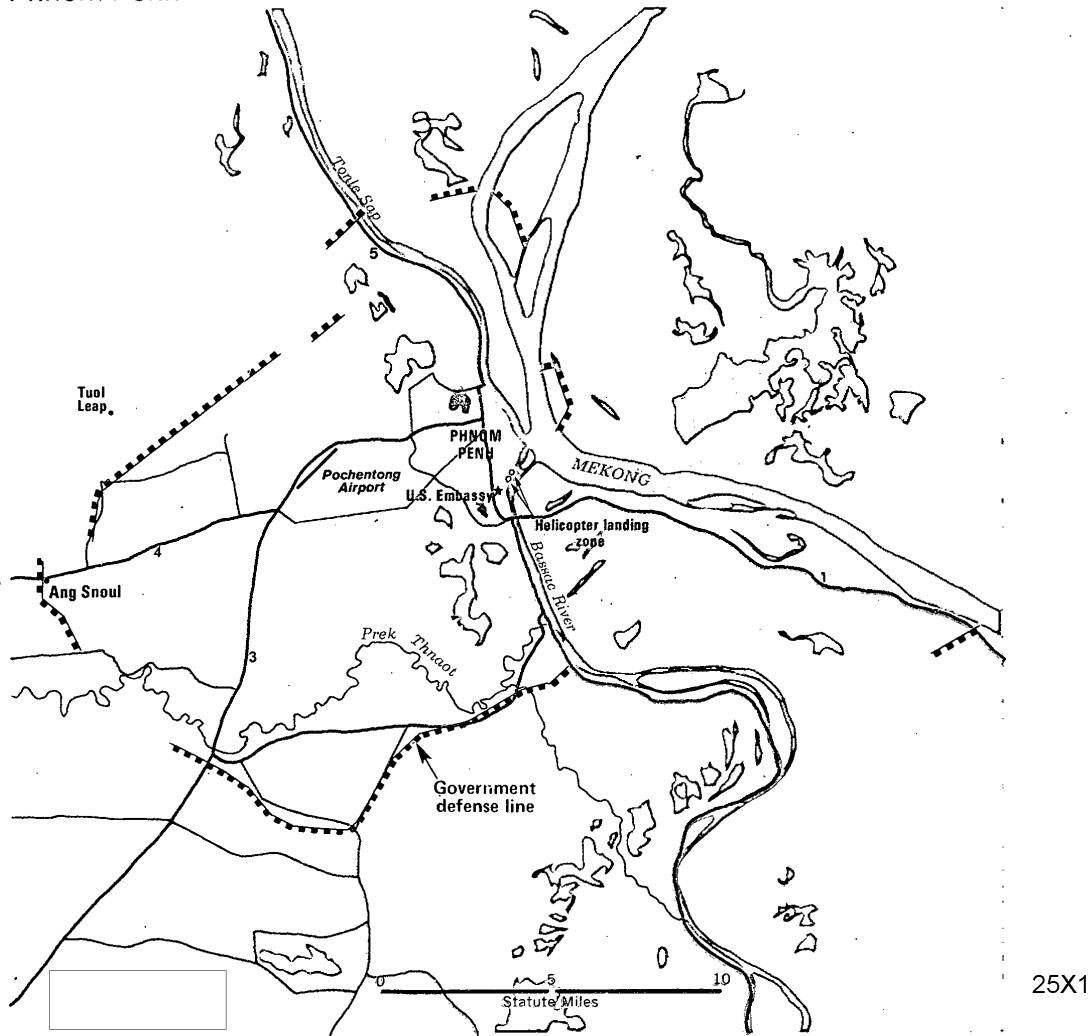
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Phnom Penh



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CAMBODIA

The evacuation of Phnom Penh went smoothly last night. The entire operation took little more than four hours. Some 260 persons were evacuated, including about 140 Americans. Several American newsmen apparently chose to remain.

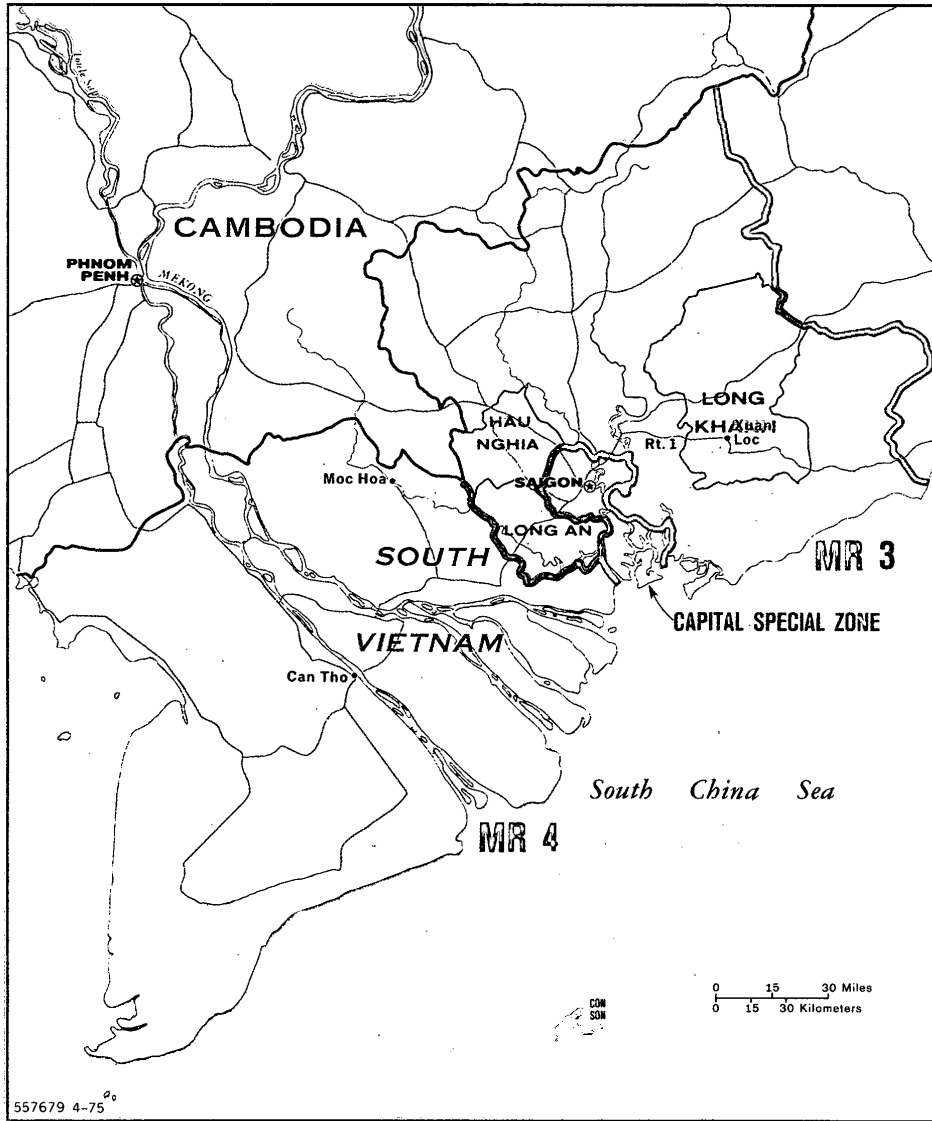
There was no panic in the city. The last helicopter was fired on; no Americans were hit, but one Cambodian was killed and seven were wounded.

Ambassador Dean, in a telephone conversation with Saigon just before he left, reported that a number of Cambodian officials had placed their families aboard the helicopters but that most of the cabinet members elected to stay. Republic Party strongman Sirik Matak--who ranks high on the list of "traitors" the communists say they will execute--was the only high ranking official specifically mentioned as staying. Acting president Saukham Koy was one of the few officials who left. Ambassador Dean reported that the cabinet was meeting to decide its next course of action.

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According to the last reports of the US defense attachés in Phnom Penh, communist forces have widened the gap in government defenses north of Pochentong airport, but so far have made no effort to push closer to the airfield. Inconclusive ground fighting occurred on other battlefronts around the capital. Intercepted messages indicate that the communists are nearly ready to launch heavier attacks, including shelling of the city from the east bank of the Mekong River.

Artillery and rocket fire on Pochentong airport intensified yesterday, forcing cancellation of the last two DC-8 flights from Saigon. As of yesterday, Phnom Penh had an 11-day supply of ammunition, 10 days of rice, and 13 days of fuel.



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SOUTH VIETNAM

Heavy fighting is continuing in the Xuan Loc area, and the government reports this morning that it has pushed the North Vietnamese out of the town for the third consecutive day.

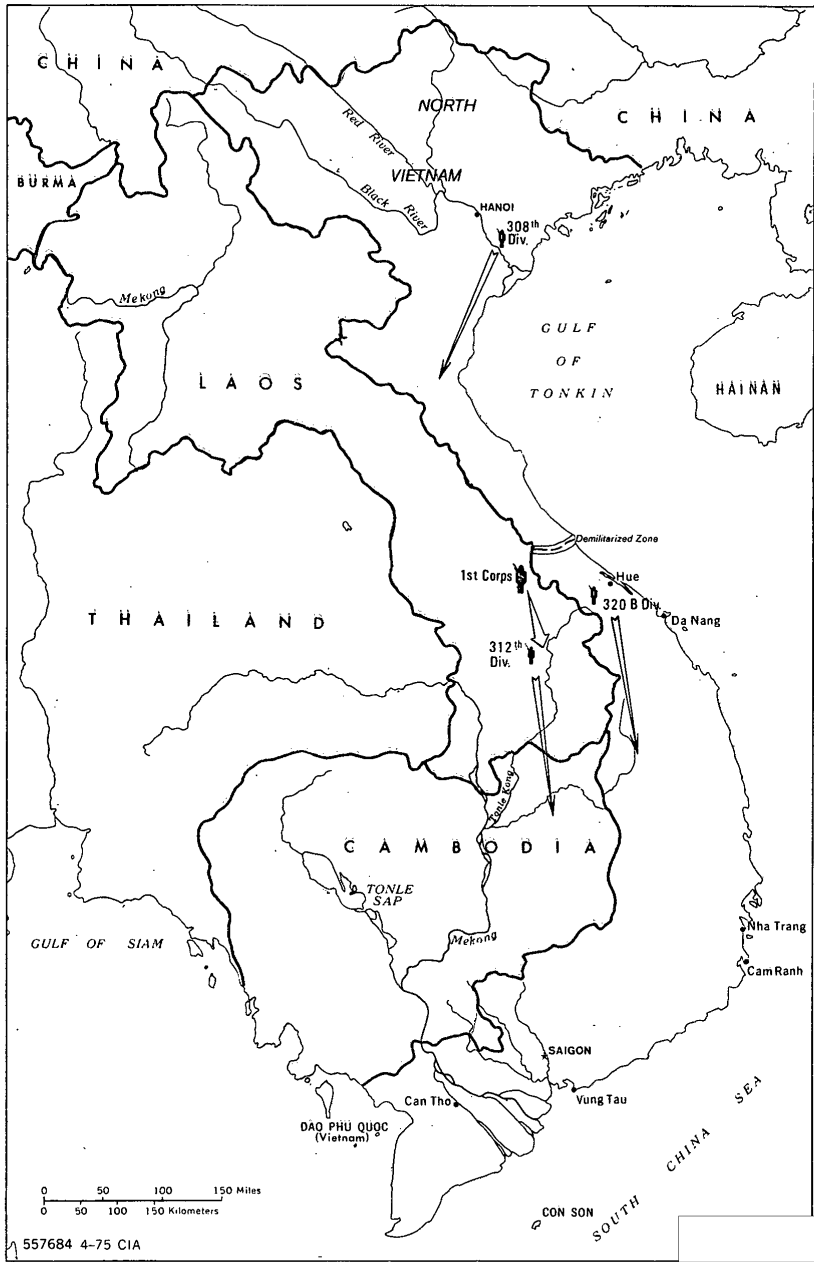
South Vietnamese airborne troops arrived in Xuan Loc yesterday, and a relief column is also fighting its way eastward along Route 1 toward the town. The reinforcements will give the government the equivalent of about two divisions at Xuan Loc, and the region commander plans to launch a major counterattack today against the three communist divisions there.

Communist attacks have declined in the northern delta, and the government appears to have the initiative. South Vietnamese troops overran a communist base area near the Cambodia border, killing several dozen communists and capturing a substantial amount of supplies. This probably will temporarily disrupt communist plans for attacks in Hau Nghia and Long An provinces. Farther south, the communists early today continued to probe government defenses around Can Tho, and also attacked two district towns along Route 4.

* * *

The North Vietnamese army 1st Corps and 312th Division are making rapid progress in their moves south. Radio direction finding placed the corps headquarters in the Laos panhandle on April 9 and the 312th headquarters farther south near the Bolovens Plateau on April 10. Both were near the Demilitarized Zone a few days ago. The movement through eastern Laos indicates that the 1st Corps and its subordinate divisions are going to the Saigon area. The 312th could arrive in the next two weeks, and other units of the corps could reach the provinces north of Saigon even sooner. The 320B Division, the lead unit of which crossed into northern South Vietnam in late March, has not been spotted since then. Some of its units could now be approaching the southern part of South Vietnam.

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Hanoi has bluntly rejected your request for a cease-fire. It charged that you are asking the South Vietnamese people to deprive themselves "of their legitimate right to punish the enemy," (presumably the Saigon government) in order to protect the Paris Agreement.

South Vietnamese reaction to your address to Congress appears to be one of limited encouragement, coupled with disappointment that the speech did not go further. [redacted]

[redacted] to play down as much as possible "or even ignore" references to the evacuation of Americans and South Vietnamese.

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THAILAND-USSR

Army commander Krit Siwara, who has been a strong supporter of the US role in Southeast Asia, [redacted]

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[redacted] has reluctantly concluded that Thailand must seek closer links with the Soviet Union. [redacted] this is necessary to balance Chinese and North Vietnamese influence in the area. Krit's views on the subject, however, are not likely to become official Thai policy soon.

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[redacted] Thailand must seek a solution similar to that adopted by India, which has turned to the Soviet Union as a means of offsetting Chinese influence. [redacted] moving closer to the Soviet Union would be a delicate task and that the Thai should make only such accommodations as are necessary to balance the activities of China and North Vietnam. [redacted] move was a "sad alternative" but a necessary one since it was clear that Thailand cannot depend on the US to keep its commitments in the future.

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There does not appear to be any strong endorsement within the Thai foreign ministry for Krit's views on the need for a counterweight to China. Indeed, [redacted] the foreign ministry is moving to improve relations with Peking and Hanoi in response to events in Indochina. The foreign ministry probably estimates that better relations with the Soviet Union--should Bangkok choose to proceed in that direction--could at some point enhance Thailand's "neutralist" credentials, but that rapprochement with China is of greater importance at this time. Should Thailand eventually decide to alter its relationship with the US by moving toward the Soviets, Krit's support would be crucial.

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CHINA

Peking reportedly plans a significant reduction in military manpower in 1975 in order to reduce military expenditures.

[redacted] a decision to demobilize one million men in 1975 was announced at a recent military conference presided over by Politburo member and veteran military leader Chu Te. We cannot precisely estimate the size of any net reduction of China's military forces. Our estimates of China's routine annual recruitment and demobilization range from 500,000 to 1,000,000 men; to what extent the one million [redacted] includes this usual turnover is unclear. [redacted] reference to reduced spending suggests that, in contrast with previous years, some of the troops demobilized in 1975 would not be replaced.

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China's military forces are currently estimated at well over four million men. The army alone has over 3.5 million men; the deepest cut obviously would have to come there.

If a large-scale reduction occurs, it would suggest that the Chinese believe there is a reduced threat of imminent hostilities from both the USSR and the US. Although they almost certainly would continue to maintain large numbers of troops in the four northern military regions, the Chinese would have fewer troops immediately available as reinforcements.

Peking did not call up additional recruits following the Sino-Soviet border incidents of 1969, but it postponed demobilization of all the troops then under arms. This action served to swell the ranks of the army, and the reported demobilization this year might be designed in part to offset that increase. In recent years, demobilization of men whose terms of service were completed and induction of replacements appear to have taken place in normal fashion.

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During the past several years, Peking has made strong efforts to return the military to the barracks and to reduce its role in political life. Peking may have determined that it now has more troops than can be economically and effectively used.

A significant reduction of forces probably would not be without incident. Many soldiers probably see the army as a stepping stone to employment in the country's major population centers. They would naturally resent being sent to farm jobs in rural areas. In fact, there have been numerous incidents lately involving demobilized servicemen demonstrating over the leadership's failure to give them the benefits they expect.

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PORTUGAL

The major political parties yesterday signed an agreement presented to them by the ruling Armed Forces Movement, formally giving up the opportunity for civilian control of the Portuguese government for at least three years.

The signing of the pact means that the election on April 25 will not have a significant impact on the substance of the new constitution, which will be approved by the assembly but prepared under guidelines dictated by the Armed Forces Movement. The election nevertheless should be an important indication of the political sympathies of the Portuguese people.

The Popular Democrats and the Socialists, for instance, hope their showing will influence the Movement to look upon them more favorably and to turn away from the communists. Three embassy sources have reported, however, that enemies of the moderate left parties may move to prevent them from collecting a large portion of the vote. They indicate that the committee of inquiry into the March 11 coup has reached preliminary conclusions that may implicate these parties. The committee's report will probably be published a few days before the election, and even unsupported charges could hurt the Popular Democrats and the Socialists at the polls.

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NOTES

The Soviet failure last weekend in their attempt to orbit two cosmonauts in a Soyuz spacecraft has once again raised some serious questions about the overall reliability of Soviet systems and the safety of US astronauts in the Apollo-Soyuz test project.

The Soviets have assured the US that the problem was unique to an "older" booster and will have no effect on the "newer" booster to be used for the test project launch. While it is true that some modifications have been made, we have no evidence to indicate that the booster has been changed or improved significantly.

* * *

Syria's ground forces have intensified combat training over the past few months and have begun to integrate defensive operations into their battlefield training plans.

The ground forces are already well ahead of the training cycle of previous years. They have been practicing such tactics as the controlled withdrawal from an area while under fire, preparation of ambushes, avoidance of enemy strongpoints, and the resupply of armored units under combat conditions. This last was a particularly serious problem for Syrian forces during the 1973 war, when many Syrian tanks were abandoned on the battlefield.

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Belgian

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