



The President's Daily Brief

April 16, 1975

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

April 16, 1975

Table of Contents

South Vietnam: Government forces are expanding their holdings both east and west of Xuan Loc, but may be leaving themselves dangerously vulnerable elsewhere. (Page 1)

Cambodia: Unconfirmed reports suggest that the remnants of the Cambodian government may be trying to arrange a surrender today. (Page 4) 25X1

USSR: [redacted] 25X1
[redacted] (Page 5) 25X1

Lebanon: Fighting between the fedayeen and Phalangist militia continued in Beirut yesterday. (Page 6)

Egypt-Israel: [redacted] 25X1
[redacted] 25X1
(Page 7)

Ethiopia: [redacted] 25X1
[redacted] (Page 8) 25X1

Notes: Cyprus; Romania-USSR (Page 9) 25X1

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SOUTH VIETNAM

South Vietnamese forces are expanding their holdings both east and west of Xuan Loc, but Bien Hoa airbase came under renewed communist artillery shelling early today and is apparently temporarily closed.

The government units attempting to open the road from Xuan Loc to Saigon are still meeting determined communist resistance, and their progress has been slow. Some of the civilians who fled from the city to the surrounding countryside are beginning to trickle back.

Along South Vietnam's central coast, government airborne and ranger troops defending Phan Rang airbase came under heavy North Vietnamese armored attack early today. Phan Rang city, about five miles southeast of the base, was also reported to be under heavy attack. Late press reports state that government forces have abandoned both the airbase and the city, and are being evacuated by sea.

In the delta provinces, fighting has been fairly heavy in Vinh Long Province as the communists continue to threaten Route 4 north of Can Tho. The North Vietnamese 8th Division has been redeploying in preparation for its long-expected campaign to cut Route 4 in Dinh Tuong Province. If the 8th Division coordinates its attacks on Route 4 with the North Vietnamese 5th Division farther north in Long An Province, the South Vietnamese 7th Division will be hard pressed to keep this vital link to Saigon open.

The South Vietnamese have contained the communist drives east and southwest of Saigon, but may be leaving themselves dangerously vulnerable to heavy new attacks from the north.

In an attempt to meet the communists head on and defeat them well away from the capital, the government has had to shift a large part of its reserves from Saigon to the Xuan Loc area. While the South Vietnamese stand at Xuan Loc provides a much needed morale boost, there is still danger

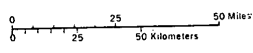
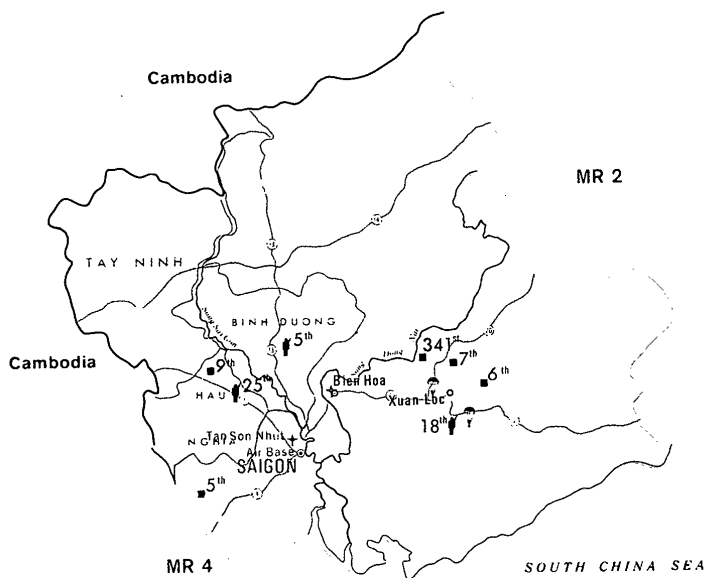
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Military Region 3

- ☪ South Vietnamese Infantry Division
- ☪ South Vietnamese Airborne Brigade
- North Vietnamese Infantry Division



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that the reinforced South Vietnamese division there will be isolated and destroyed by the communists, who have more than three full divisions in the area. Even if the battle continues to go well for Saigon, it will continue to tie down a large force and leave the South Vietnamese with relatively few main-force units to defend other approaches to the capital.

At the moment, the government appears most vulnerable in the provinces north of Saigon. The South Vietnamese 25th Division is in Tay Ninh and Hau Nghia provinces, and the rest of the 5th Division is in Binh Duong Province. Those units appear to be a sufficient blocking force against existing communist units in the area, but at least six communist divisions, including four from North Vietnam, appear to be moving toward Military Region 3. Advance elements from two divisions--the 312th and the 320B--could already be in the area north of Saigon. All or most of the communist reinforcements could be in place and ready for action in a matter of weeks.

[redacted] communist plans to attack Saigon itself in the next few days. While there are no signs that any large communist force is moving into position for a direct assault, the communists do have the capability to sneak sappers into the city. Moreover, the recent shellings of Bien Hoa airbase suggest that the communists also now may be planning to shell the outskirts of Saigon and the Tan Son Nhut airbase with their heavy field guns. An offensive by newly arrived divisions north of Saigon, coupled with sapper attacks and shellings of the city itself, might lead to a rapid crumbling of the government's position.

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A sampling of South Vietnamese opinion since early April reflects a mood of deep pessimism within official circles.

The sampling was made before your address to Congress last week and the recent creditable showing by the South Vietnamese military at Xuan Loc and in the delta. It seems unlikely, however, that these developments, in themselves, have been enough to alter what appears to be a general conviction that adequate US support will not be forthcoming and a fear that the communists may prove too strong for the South Vietnamese military to hold indefinitely.

(continued)

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The most immediate concern of most South Vietnamese, especially those who have worked closely with the Americans, is "what happens if." Reassurances that they will be evacuated are much sought after.

[Redacted]

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[Redacted] believes that large-scale evacuation would be nearly impossible and that once it begins, government troops would fire on anyone trying to leave. Another [Redacted] feels that as soon as the communists begin hitting the government's defenses around Saigon, there will be wholesale panic similar to that at Da Nang and that evacuation from Tan Son Nhut airport would not be feasible because of the chaos.

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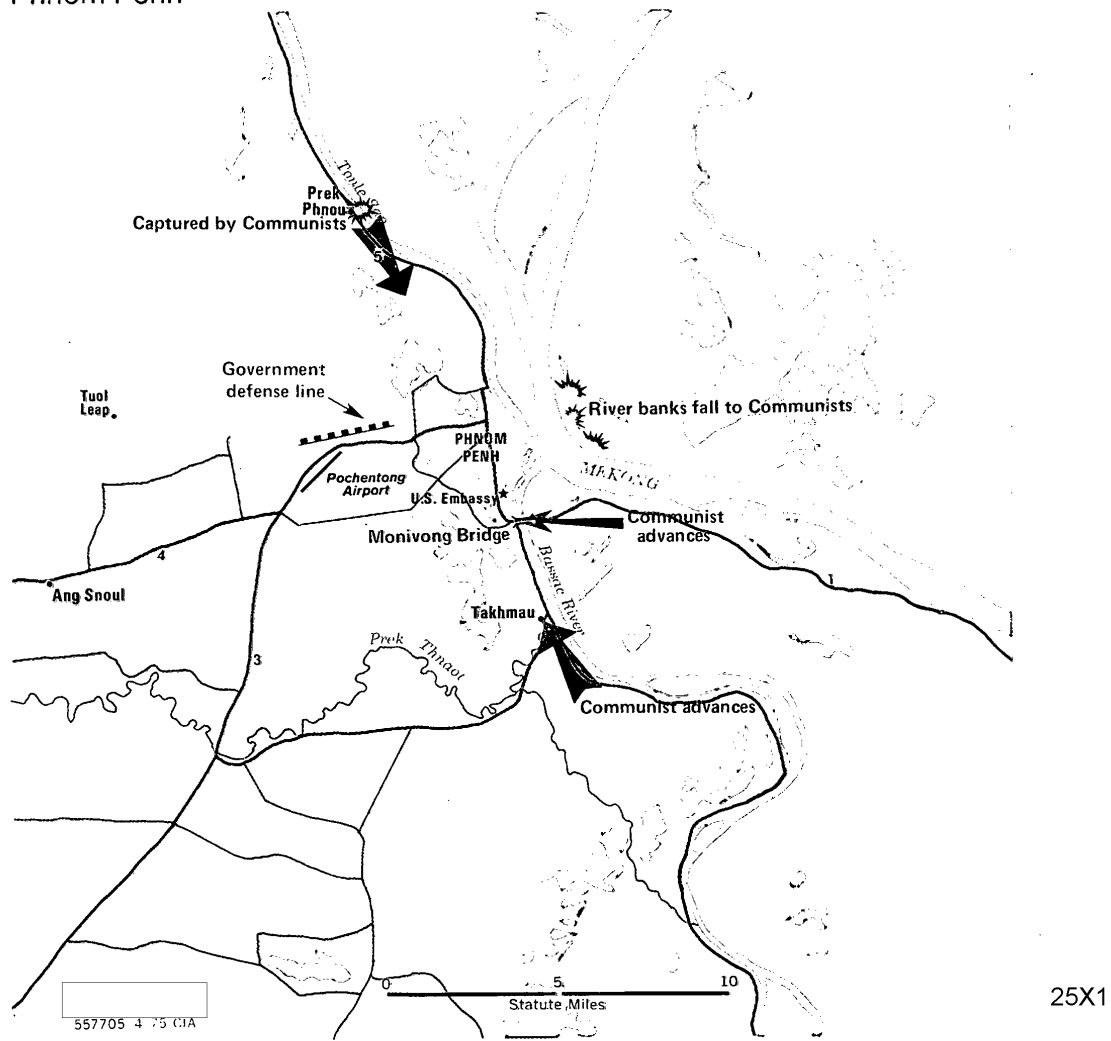
A sense of impending disaster also permeates the military.

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Phnom Penh



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CAMBODIA

[REDACTED]

the remnants of the Cambodian government may be trying to arrange a surrender today, apparently on the condition that the insurgents agree not to enter Phnom Penh.

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Khmer Communist units yesterday reportedly reached the eastern end of the Monivong bridge leading into Phnom Penh and also entered the southern suburb of Takhmau. Khmer navy officers reported by telephone that government forces have abandoned all positions on the east bank of the Mekong River opposite the city's waterfront.

[REDACTED]

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On the opposite side of the city, battle lines are running roughly along a railway embankment about a mile north of Pochentong airport.

On Route 5, the Communists have apparently destroyed or captured the military fuel depot at Prek Phnou.

Although communications between Phnom Penh and the outside are beginning to break down, the domestic radio station in the capital remained on the air yesterday. Government officials were issuing periodic reports on the military situation. Some military commanders have also been issuing orders to their units via radio broadcasts.

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USSR

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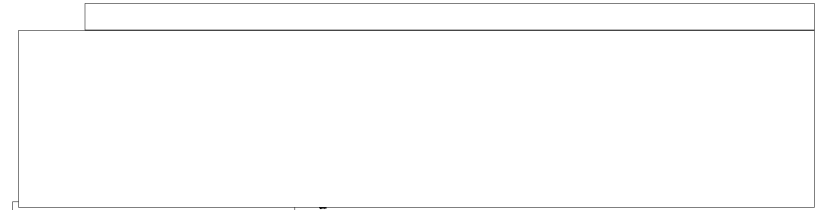


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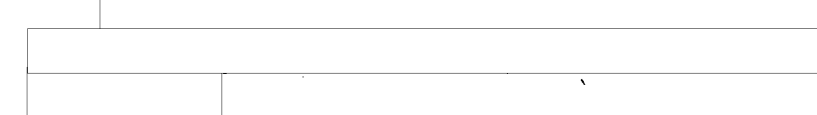


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LEBANON

Fighting between the fedayeen and Phalanges Party militia continued in Beirut yesterday, leaving at least 100 dead. Shooting also occurred in Sidon and Tripoli, while a general strike went into effect in all major cities.

President Franjiah met personally yesterday with Pierre Jumayyil, head of the Phalanges Party, almost certainly to appeal to Jumayyil to help halt the fighting. The President's initiative is good evidence that the country's Christian leadership feels seriously threatened by the continuing violence. Lebanon's delicate constitutional system has operated, in effect, to give the Christians control of the government. Franjiah is in the hospital recovering from major surgery; even when in good health he has usually refused to become involved in disputes involving the country's political parties and the Palestinians.

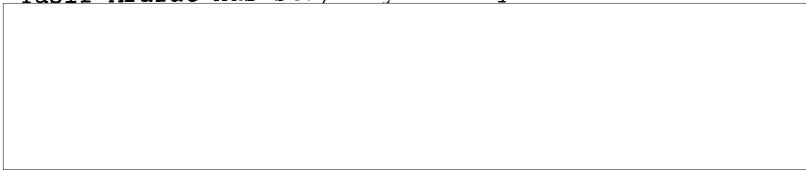
The Lebanese cabinet has authorized Prime Minister Sulh to call on the country's 19,000-man army to put down the dispute, if necessary. For the moment, however, the Prime Minister is pursuing talks with political leaders in hope of negotiating an end to the fighting.



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A small number of commandos from the less radical groups--Fatah, Saiga, and the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine--have already entered the fray, although the bulk of the fighting has been carried by fedayeen from the smaller, more radical groups.

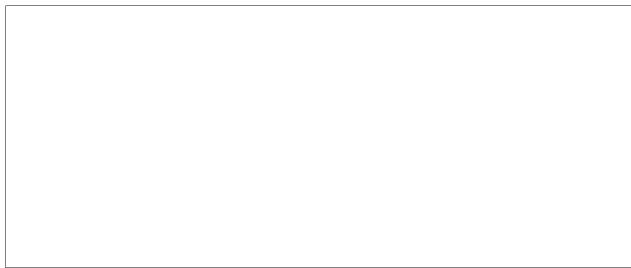
Palestine Liberation Organization chairman Yasir Arafat has stayed generally aloof thus far.



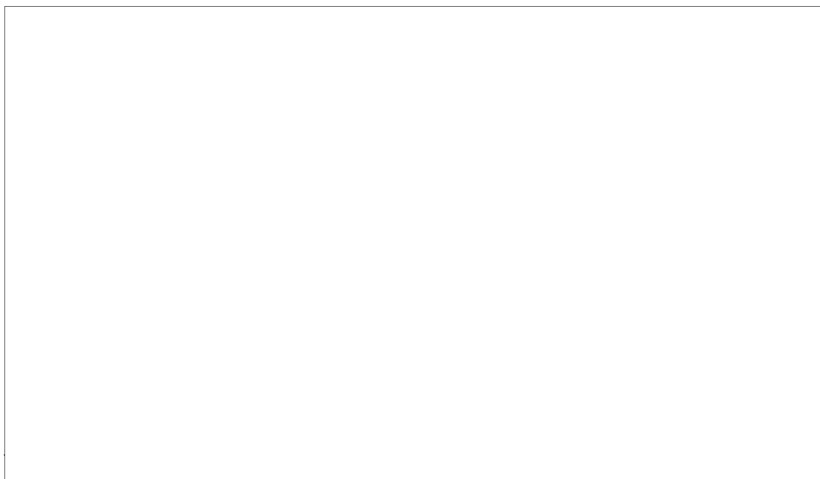
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EGYPT--ISRAEL



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ETHIOPIA

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NOTES

Prospects for resuming the Cyprus negotiations in Vienna on April 28 still are clouded by the uncertain status of Greek Cypriot negotiator Glafkos Clerides.

Clerides [redacted] intends to turn in his resignation within two days and [redacted] give up his position as president of the House of Deputies. Clerides has argued for a realistic strategy that accepts the Turkish Cypriot demand for a bi-regional federation in return for Turkish Cypriot concessions on other issues. Makarios claims that such a major concession should be made only after a period of long, hard bargaining. Clerides' latest threat to resign is probably designed to produce stronger expressions of support from Greek Prime Minister Karamanlis and Makarios. In the event such expressions are not made, Clerides may well follow through and step down from his position as negotiator.

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Tensions in Romanian-Soviet relations have recently increased.

A Romanian diplomat in Moscow says that in addition to differences over the European security talks, CEMA policies, and the proposed pan-European communist party conference, Bucharest is now resisting Soviet efforts to expand the political coordinating role of the Warsaw Pact. The Soviets are reported to be pushing for the establishment of a permanent Pact committee of foreign ministers. Moscow apparently wants to set up a secretariat--similar to NATO's political organization--that would be headed by a Soviet secretary general. The Romanian diplomat speculates that once the European security conference is over, Moscow will increase its stress on ideological orthodoxy within the Pact--a move clearly intended to force Romania to identify more closely with Soviet policies and pronouncements.

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