



The President's Daily Brief

May 5, 1975

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

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CAMBODIA

The following first-hand account of the communist occupation of Phnom Penh and the foreigners' trek to the Thai border was related to US officials in Thailand by Americans who were among some 300 foreigners deported from Cambodia over the weekend. All those in the first group of deportees have agreed not to publicize their experiences until over 200 foreigners still in communist hands have reached safety.

Young members of the communist underground apparently were the first communist personnel to surface in Phnom Penh on April 17, the day of the capital's surrender. They armed students from stocks of abandoned or surrendered Cambodian army weapons. They were relatively permissive toward foreigners, but as the day proceeded and insurgent veterans moved into the city, the communist mood became hostile.

Late on April 17, the communists ordered Westerners to leave the Hotel Phnom which the Red Cross and United Nations had declared a neutral zone. These persons joined those who had already sought refuge at the French embassy compound. Eventually some 1,200 people--including numbers of Cambodians who came in over the walls--gathered in the compound. The French consul refused entry to Cambodian army officers.

The consul won the first skirmish to maintain French sovereignty over the compound by insisting that under international law the ground was French soil and by observing that Paris had already recognized the new regime. He lost the battle later in the day, however, when communist troops returned to state that according to their theorists a revolutionary situation was not subject to international law and that the new leadership had not recognized the conventions the consul had cited. The communists later confiscated the embassy's transmitter and insisted on the return of Cambodian nationals--a demand on which the consul had to yield.

Sirik Matak, a former senior statesman, was among those Cambodians who gave themselves up; he is reported to have walked to the gate and told the

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communists, "I am ready to answer for my crimes." Although not specifically mentioned as having been in the compound, former prime minister Long Boret, former minister of information Thong Tim Huong, and Lon Non, the former president's brother, were listed as among those known to be in communist hands. According to two intercepts, the communists are still searching for former minister of interior Hou Hong and former deputy prime minister Hang Thun Hak.

For the entire period that the foreigners were detained, the Americans had high praise for the French consul and for an official from the French school in Phnom Penh who had taught one of the communists guarding the compound. The communists provided food and water for the detainees.

The communists initially had trouble restoring electricity to the city and in operating the water system.

Trek to the Border

The trip to Thailand in open trucks began early on April 30--the day officials at the border were expecting the convoy to arrive. The 250-mile journey to the town of Poipet took three days with the trucks under way for 16 to 18 hours a day. The convoy did not run out of fuel but took an extremely circuitous route. Although initial reports indicated that two persons died en route, the American who provided the most detailed account of the trip knew only that one baby had succumbed.

Local units stopped the trucks once claiming that they were looking for Americans, but the communist in charge of the convoy told them that only Frenchmen were aboard. On another occasion a communist guard told an American not to speak English, explaining that local residents were hostile.

* * *

The order for the overland evacuation came from the Khmer Communist Party Central Committee and was therefore a calculated move rather than the act of confused second-echelon officials. The more internationally attuned Prince Sihanouk--who may return to Cambodia this week--is probably dismayed at the type of diplomacy now being practiced in Phnom Penh.

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SOUTH VIETNAM

The communists announced over the weekend the formation of an 11-man "military management committee," headed by Viet Cong General Tran Van Tra, to oversee the occupation of Saigon.

The committee reportedly met yesterday with a number of senior officials of the former government all of whom were "allowed to return freely to their families."

Other steps taken by the communists intended to restore normalcy to Saigon include:

--A call for all Saigon municipal employees to return to work; 1,500 had reportedly done so on May 1.

--The publication yesterday of the first edition of the new newspaper Saigon Liberated Daily.

--Announcement of the first Viet Cong flights into Tan Son Nhut.

--Resumption of programs on Saigon television.

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--Announcement of registration procedures for former government military personnel.

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The communists continue to press for the return of US-supplied aircraft and ships used by escaping South Vietnamese. The Viet Cong have sent formal notes to Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, and the Philippines demanding the return of the equipment. Hanoi has zeroed in on the Thai, saying that a "correct attitude would constitute an important contribution to the normalization of Thai-Vietnamese relations."

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NOTES

The first round of talks in Vienna between Greek and Turkish Cypriots ended on Saturday without a breakthrough on any major issue. This round may have set the stage, however, for a narrowing of differences in later talks.

Greek Cypriot negotiator Clerides and Turkish negotiator Denktash agreed to set up a joint committee to consider the powers of the central and regional governments in a future federation. [redacted] the Turkish side would be more flexible on territorial concessions and on the return of refugees if the Greek side would accept a weak central government. The talks are scheduled to resume in Vienna on June 5.

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In West Germany yesterday, Chancellor Schmidt's coalition parties won modest victories in two state elections regarded as key tests of public attitudes toward national party leaders and their policies.

In North Rhine - Westphalia, the Social Democratic - Free Democratic coalition retains a majority in the state legislature and control of the state's five votes in the Bundesrat, the upper house of the federal parliament. In the Saarland, the race ended in a photo finish, ending the Christian Democratic control that had existed since the end of World War II. Each side now has an equal number of seats in the state legislature. The Saarland has three votes in the Bundesrat, and the Schmidt government would have a majority in that house for the first time if the coalition parties form the state government.

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