



The President's Daily Brief

April 8, 1975

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

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Table of Contents

South Vietnam: The attempted bombing of the presidential palace this morning does not seem to have been part of a major conspiracy against President Thieu, but it will surely heighten tensions. (Page 1)

Cambodia: Khmer communist ground attacks have forced further government withdrawals in the area north of Pochentong airport. (Page 3)

USSR: The Soviets are patrolling the Pacific Ocean area where the Glomar Explorer raised part of their submarine. (Page 5)

25X1

Saudi Arabia:

25X1

(Page 6)

25X1

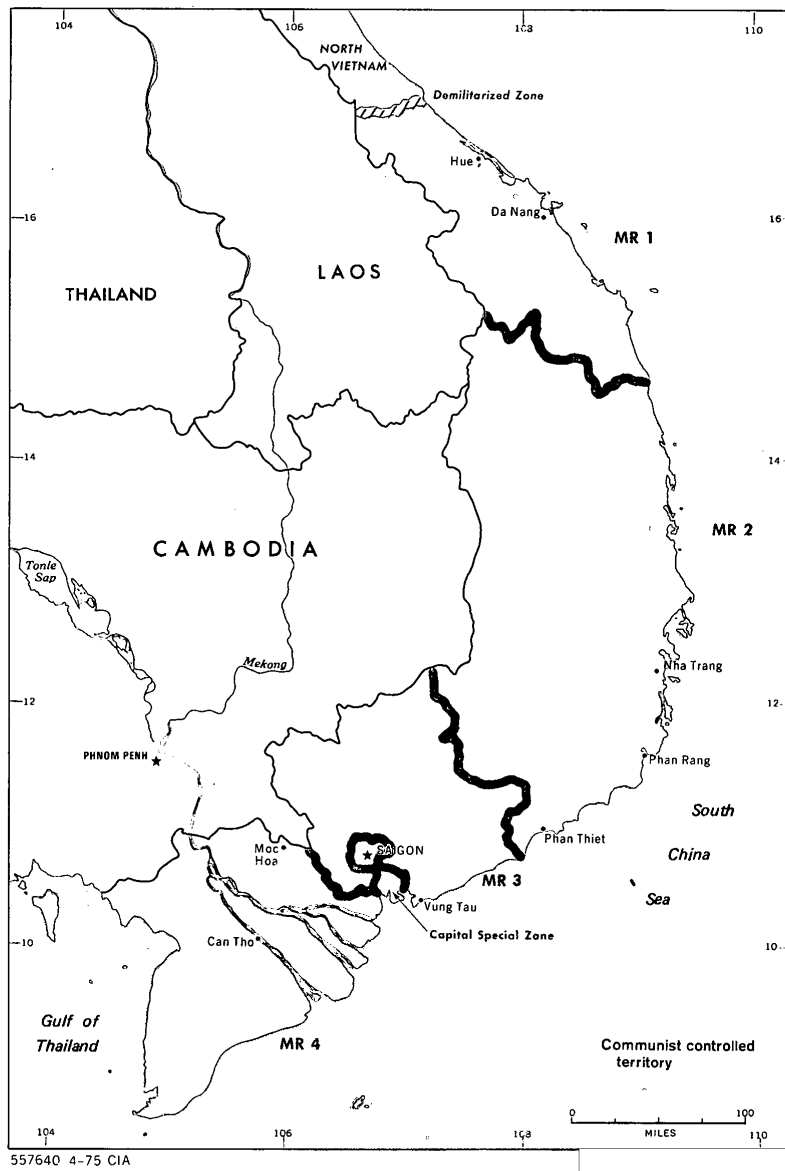
Egypt: Yasir Arafat is in Cairo attempting to repair strained relations with Egypt. (Page 7)

Syria: The Syrian Baath Party congress is expected to elect a new party executive group that will be more responsive to President Asad. (Page 8)

CSCE: Another troublesome issue may soon be resolved. (Page 9)

Note: USSR (Page 10)

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25X1

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SOUTH VIETNAM

The attempted bombing of the presidential palace this morning does not appear to have been part of a major conspiracy against President Thieu. Even so, it will be sure to heighten tensions among South Vietnamese military leaders.

[redacted] Thieu suspects his old rival, General Nguyen Cao Ky, of responsibility for the attempt. This seems borne out by Thieu's subsequent public statement blaming the bombing on a "group or faction" that had been unable to generate sufficient support to oust him and had thus turned to an assassination attempt.

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[redacted] government security forces are now deployed around the homes of various political opponents of Thieu--including Ky's--but no arrests have been made. Thieu has also ordered the Military Region 3 commander, General Toan, to assume direct control of Bien Hoa air base and to exercise strict control over air force operations.

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The bombing occurred at about 8:30 a.m. Saigon time, shortly after two South Vietnamese air force F-5s took off from Bien Hoa air base north of Saigon for a bombing run near Phan Thiet City. One of the planes veered over Saigon and dropped two bombs, the closest of which landed about 30 yards from the palace. US officials in Saigon report that there were no fatalities.

There was no appreciable public disorder after the incident, but Saigon has been placed under curfew and Tan Son Nhut Airport temporarily closed.

* * *

Most military action is still focused on the delta. The communists began their assault on the Moc Hoa front early yesterday against a government position less than eight miles from that provincial capital. Communist-initiated activity is also growing in other parts of the delta, particularly in Dinh Tuong Province. The North Vietnamese 4th Division is exerting pressure on Can Tho City defenses, but has made no appreciable gains. The communists also have not had much success with their increased sabotage operations against the major delta highways.

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General Toan, commander of the provinces around Saigon and now responsible for the few remaining government enclaves in the central coastal provinces, made an inspection tour of these areas last weekend and has taken steps to shore up the government's positions. He has established a forward command headquarters at Phan Rang, in Ninh Thuan Province. Toan found that most of the government's territorial forces were still in place around the Phan Rang area.

General Toan [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] is checking the situation north of Phan Rang and may consider moving forces there if he can reorganize his troops rapidly enough--and if the communists do not move first. Some government naval units have moved into the Nha Trang area and are reported to be holding positions at the port and at the airfield.

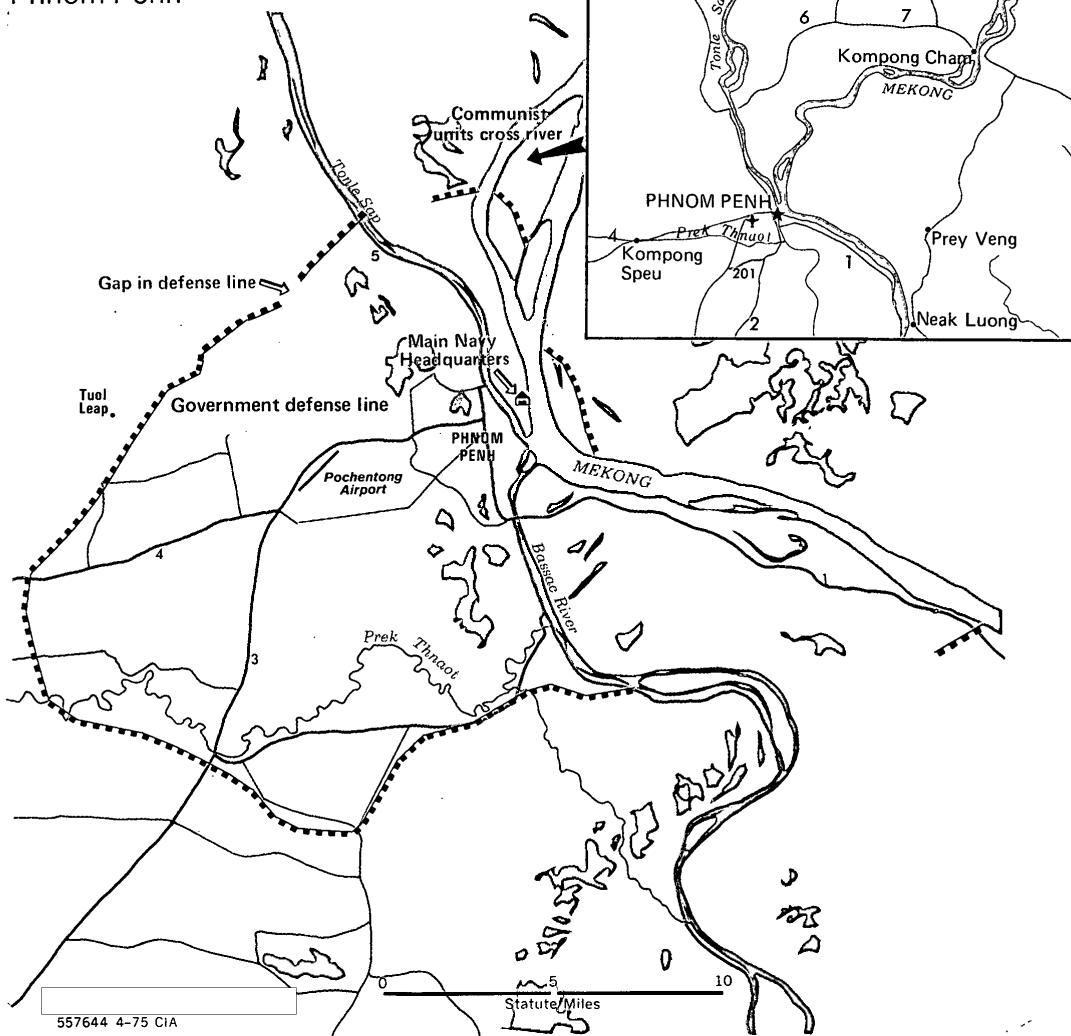
General Toan claims he is satisfied that all returning government units and stragglers at several locations east of Saigon are under control, and that progress is being made reorganizing them into usable military units. In addition to the Marines and 2nd Division troops that are being regrouped, over 7,000 officers and men of the South Vietnamese 22nd Division--perhaps a half of that unit's former strength--have reached the Vung Tau area.

Hanoi, meanwhile, is sending one of its last three reserve divisions to South Vietnam. The headquarters of the 312th Division was detected yesterday in the panhandle near the South Vietnamese border. This division belongs to the North Vietnamese 1st Corps and is the third division of that command to move south in recent weeks.

The 1st Corps and its divisions may well be headed for the Saigon area. Most of these troops could reach the provinces north of Saigon in about a month. They have been training in conventional tactics for about two years, and are considered good units. The arrival of this force in southern South Vietnam would sharply tilt the military balance in favor of the communists.

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Phnom Penh



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CAMBODIA

Khmer communist ground attacks have forced further government withdrawals in the area north of Pochentong airport. Our defense attachés, who visited the area yesterday, reported that Cambodian officers have expressed their belief that "the end is near."

Government troops located on the Mekong River northeast of the capital claim that insurgent forces are crossing the river. This may portend a major communist ground push south toward the main navy headquarters. Southeast of the capital, government reinforcements are moving into blocking positions on Route 1 in anticipation of increased attacks by communist forces moving up the highway from the Neak Luong - Banam area.

In the countryside, the southwestern provincial capital of Kompong Speu and the southeastern provincial capital of Prey Veng are seriously threatened. The army high command stripped Kompong Speu of its best units several weeks ago to reinforce Phnom Penh's defense, and the communists have been making steady gains against the territorial units that are defending the town. Insurgent units briefly penetrated the town's market place on Sunday before being pushed back. At Prey Veng, communist attacks have forced government troops to abandon positions north of the town, and some fighting has occurred along the city's outskirts. A recent intercepted message indicates that government troops at the northern provincial capital of Kompong Cham have contacted local communist forces to discuss the possibility of surrender.

* * *

Thai Foreign Minister Chatchai's claim yesterday that Cambodian "negotiations" would be held soon in Bangkok is probably unfounded. Prince Sihanouk's son, Prince Yuvaneath, was scheduled to arrive in Bangkok yesterday at Thai government invitation. Chatchai may have arranged a meeting between Yuvaneath and Cambodian Prime Minister Long

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Boret, who also arrived in Bangkok yesterday on his way back to Phnom Penh.

Even if Chatchai manages to bring the two Cambodians together, it is highly unlikely that any substantive discussions will take place. Prince Yuvaneath [redacted] would be unlikely to have any real authority to speak for his father, let alone the Khmer communists. In discussions with the US charge last week, Chatchai himself admitted that the chances for any breakthrough are "slight." At best, Yuvaneath might relay some message from Boret to his father. Under present conditions, however, Boret would appear to have little to offer the other side except surrender.

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USSR

The Soviets are patrolling the Pacific Ocean area where the Glomar Explorer raised part of their submarine and are again patrolling the site in the Atlantic Ocean where one of their submarines sank in 1970.

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The Soviets still have made no public mention of the Glomar Explorer story, and it is becoming clearer that they want to avoid the subject if possible.

Last week, the Soviet delegate to the Law of the Sea conference in Geneva told his US counterpart that the Soviets "do not want to say anything" about the Glomar Explorer. He was pleased when the US official said we did not intend to bring the subject up at the conference.

During a reception in Moscow last Friday, Premier Kosygin greeted Ambassador Stoessel with what the ambassador called "ostentatious cordiality." Within earshot of many Soviet and East European bigwigs, Kosygin assured the ambassador of the Soviet Union's desire to continue on the path of detente despite "those" who try to drive a wedge between the two countries. Kosygin expressed pleasure that Governor Harriman, an "old friend," is coming to the USSR for V-E Day. He said he is looking forward to economic talks this week with Secretary Simon and asked that his and General Secretary Brezhnev's warmest wishes be passed to you and Secretary Kissinger.

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SAUDI ARABIA

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EGYPT

Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasir Arafat is in Cairo attempting to repair strained relations with Egypt. In meetings with President Sadat, Arafat almost certainly is arguing against Egyptian participation in another round of step-by-step negotiations and seeking assurances that Egypt will insist on a role for the PLO if the Geneva talks resume.

Arafat conferred briefly with Sadat at the funeral of King Faysal late last month and may have received some indications that Cairo would now be more receptive to Palestinian desires.

Sadat, who within a few months must face an Arab summit and the prospect of a Geneva conference, wants to reduce the level of Palestinian opposition to his negotiating tactics, but this will not prompt him to make major concessions to the PLO. Sadat will probably seek Arafat's agreement that the other Arabs should be allowed to negotiate the terms and timing of the Palestinians' attendance at Geneva. Sadat is likely to refuse to defend actively the Palestinians' preference for an independent PLO delegation. The Egyptians will probably repeat--at least for bargaining purposes--their earlier suggestion that the Palestinians could be represented by the 20-member Arab League.

Arafat and other PLO leaders most likely would not agree to be represented by the Arab League, or to the incorporation of Palestinian representatives into the delegation of a single Arab state. The relatively moderate leaders of the PLO would, however, probably be willing to endure the wrath of their radical colleagues by accepting a formula that designates the PLO as one of several members of a single, joint Arab delegation.

The two parties are unlikely to settle the representation issue--or much else--during Arafat's visit. The visit, however, probably will reduce some of the friction in Egyptian-Palestinian relations, thereby relieving Arafat of the need to rely so heavily on Syria for political support.

Arafat's aim, during the current period of diplomatic uncertainty, is to get on good terms with all of his traditional backers. He has visited six Arab states in the past week, and reportedly plans an early trip to the USSR.

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SYRIA

The Syrian Baath Party congress, which opened last Saturday, is expected to elect a new party executive group that will be more responsive to President Asad than was the outgoing executive.

The congress will also debate and probably endorse whatever approach Asad now decides to take on Middle East peace negotiations.

The President and his supporters have taken a number of measures over the past few weeks to ensure that the congress is stacked in their favor. It now seems likely that the charges of conspiring with Iraq lodged against some 250-300 party members in mid-March were, at least in some cases, part of this political maneuvering.

The arrests have generated an undercurrent of uneasiness in Damascus and produced a bumper crop of coup and counter-coup rumors.

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CSCE

Another troublesome issue at the European Security Conference in Geneva may soon be resolved. The Western allies and neutral delegates are ready to accept in principle a Soviet proposal that would end the deadlock over one of the major military-related "confidence-building measures."

In mid-March, Soviet representatives hinted that Moscow could accept the Western idea of providing advance notice about national and multinational maneuvers to all conference participants, providing such notification is given on a voluntary basis. They also suggested that Moscow would make some concessions concerning the size and site of maneuvers to be affected by the agreement reached in Geneva.

Last week, most of the NATO allies agreed that they should hint to the Soviet delegates that the West would accept the idea of voluntary notification if the Soviets are forthcoming concerning the issues of size and area of maneuvers.

Resolution of this issue would increase the optimism of both Eastern and Western delegations. The Soviets have recently shown some signs of flexibility on other outstanding issues and seem anxious to finish this stage of the conference in time for a final summit-level meeting on June 30. The increasingly weary Western delegations also are anxious to conclude the conference. They are now discussing the possibility of completing this stage by the end of May or mid-June.

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NOTE

The approximately 875 Jews who emigrated from the Soviet Union in March were the fewest to leave in one month in more than three years.

The number of emigrants has been dropping steadily this year; the first quarter total of just over 3,000 was nearly 50 percent below the comparable figure for 1974. Soviet officials are reducing the flow by discouraging applications, rather than by increasing outright refusals. At the same time they are cutting back the number of emigrants, the Soviets are applying the carrot and the stick to Jewish activists. Recently, several have been allowed to emigrate, for example, but two others have been exiled to Siberia because they took part in a brief Moscow street demonstration. Moscow's policy may be to get rid of the most articulate Jewish activists, particularly those who are well known in the West, and to intimidate the others.

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