

The President's Daily Brief

9 March 1970

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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

In a backgrounder for Gus Hall, a Soviet briefer describes a number of problems. (Page 1)

In Laos, the military situation remains static, and Communist leaders are still offering political settlement only on their own terms. (Page 3)

Pravda has printed the most authoritative commentary on SALT since the talks began. (Page 4)



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USSR

According to an FBI report, Soviet party officials have told Gus Hall, the head of the US Communist Party, that political maneuvering within the Soviet leadership may cause changes "at a very high level" in the Soviet hierarchy. These changes may take place at the next party congress, which will probably be held before the end of this year.

The Soviet leaders are said to be concerned that the Soviet Union and its allies are not keeping pace with the scientific and technological revolution. They feel that unless drastic steps are taken, the USSR will not catch up with the US. Some Soviet leaders reportedly fear that if the trend is not reversed soon, the USSR's political and military influence will suffer.

According to Hall's information, Brezhnev sharply criticized party and government officials by name at a party meeting in December. Some Soviet officials believe that he will attempt to find "scapegoats at a very high level." As additional divisive issues troubling the leadership, the report also cites some unspecified ideological problems at the prestigious Institute of Marxism-Leninism and also a continuing fight between factions within the Soviet party over Stalin's role in history. Despite policy rifts within the hierarchy, the "Brezhnev group" is described as "in firm command" and determined to permit no compromise of Communist principles.

We have had other indications of trouble in the leadership, brought to a head by the USSR's disappointing economic performance last year. The treatment of Brezhnev in this report has a partisan ring to it, however, and we suspect that it came from one of his Soviet supporters whose own hopes have colored the estimate of Brezhnev's political strength. We think it very likely that Brezhnev does hope to find "scapegoats" for the problems confronting the leadership, but we are not yet confident that he will succeed. Neither Brezhnev nor his possible challengers appear to have gained the upper hand in the three months since Brezhnev's December speech before the party, and the political jockeying probably will continue.

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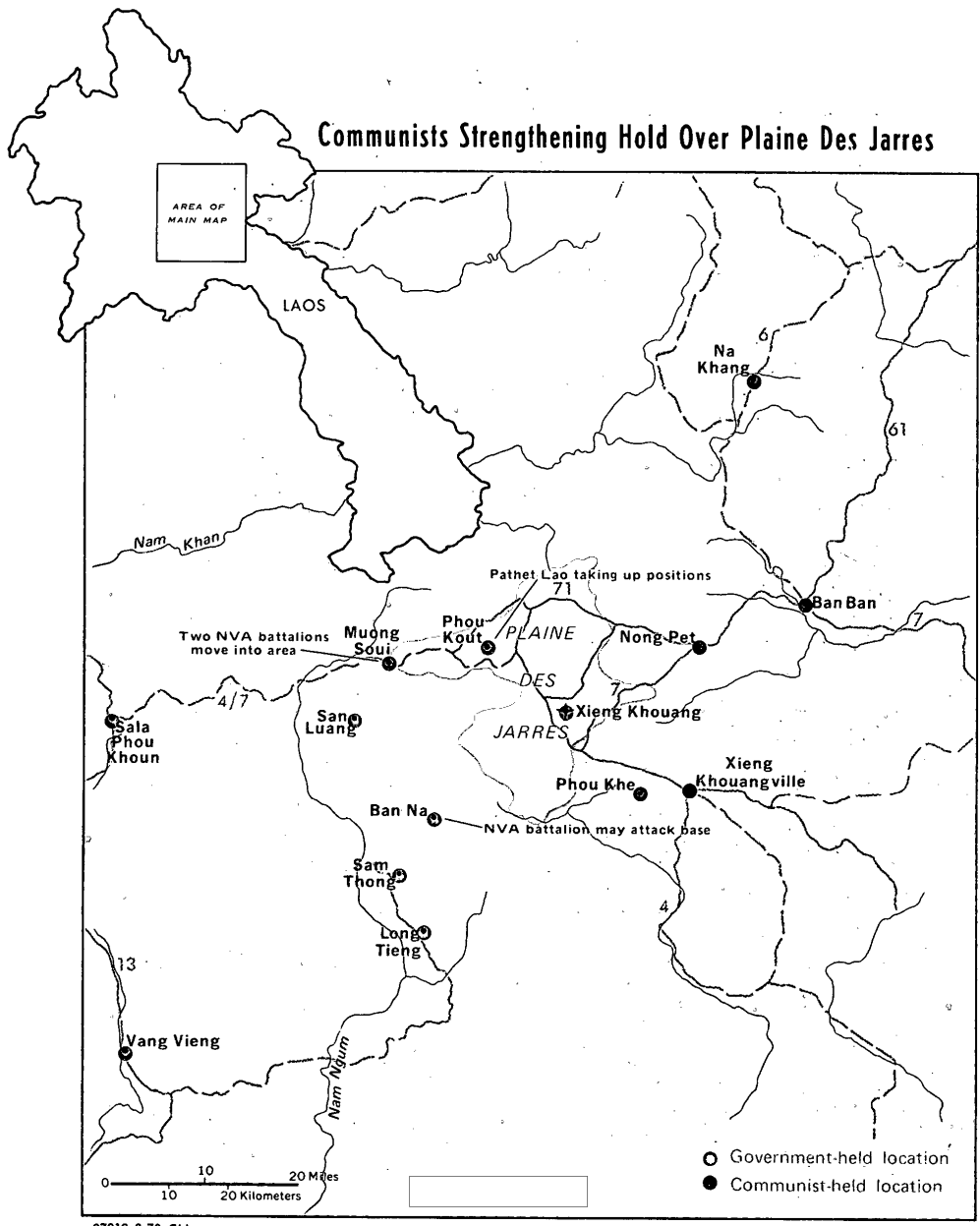
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The report also carries some remarks about foreign policy. Hall's Soviet sources claim that Soviet analysis of President Nixon's "State of the World" message has led Soviet leaders to fear a revival of US "cold war" policies. The Soviet Union is preparing for "negative relations" with the US, believing that the US will attempt to prolong negotiations with the Soviet Union while NATO becomes an armed camp. Soviet analysts believe that the US is allowing West Germany to seek detente with East Germany as a tactic to recoup influence lost in Eastern Europe with the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Soviet officials also believe that the US is trying to exploit the Sino-Soviet rift and to use Communist China against the Soviet Union, despite US assurances to the contrary.

The report does not treat these as views on issues over which the Soviet leadership is divided. Nevertheless, we believe that they belong in that category along with the scientific-technological gap, "ideological problems," and Stalin's role in history. Given the pro-Brezhnev bias in the earlier part of the report, we suspect that these are Brezhnev's views, which are not necessarily shared by all the other Soviet leaders. In the past, both "ideological" discussions at the Institute of Marxism-Leninism and quarrels over Stalin's role in history have had important implications for Soviet foreign policy. We are confident that this is true today as well.

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LAOS

In the north, Communist forces are continuing to consolidate their hold over the Plaine des Jarres. The North Vietnamese are placing antiaircraft artillery atop mountains surrounding the Plaine, according to intercepted messages. The enemy also is looking for locations north of the Plaine to emplace two of the 122-mm. field guns recently introduced from North Vietnam. The positioning of these artillery pieces in this relatively remote area suggests that at least some of these guns are meant to play a defensive rather than offensive role.

On the western side of the Plaine, the Pathet Lao are taking up positions on Phou Kout, the dominant terrain feature in this area. According to enemy communications, this will permit the North Vietnamese troops currently on the mountain to proceed farther west to Muong Soui.

As a result of the movement of as many as two North Vietnamese battalions into the Muong Soui area in recent days, the small number of government troops nearby have pulled back to the more strongly defended government outpost at San Luang.

[redacted]

[redacted] To the east, intercepts indicate that a North Vietnamese battalion may soon attack the government base at Ban Na.

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On the political front, Communist reaction to President Nixon's statement on Laos has followed a standard line. Hanoi has emphasized those portions of the statement dealing with US activities in Laos. In addition, as a basis for a settlement, Hanoi cited the Lao Communists' statement of 6 March, which set forth their terms for ending the war. North Vietnam did not directly comment on President Nixon's statement regarding consultation among the signers of the 1962 Geneva accords on Laos. There has been no official Soviet reaction to President Nixon's statement, nor any public mention of his plea to the USSR to help restore peace in Laos. The unofficial commentary thus far available has, however, been negative.

Early this morning, the clandestine Pathet Lao News Agency released the text of a letter Prince Souphanouvong sent to Souvanna Phouma on Sunday suggesting an exchange of views between the Laotian leaders. Souphanouvong seems to intend an exchange of letters rather than a meeting, and, like Hanoi's spokesman, he wants to base a move toward peace on the Lao Communists' statement.

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USSR-SALT

A Pravda editorial of 7 March marked the most authoritative Soviet commentary on SALT since the talks began on 17 November. It was designed, in part at least, to build a case against the US if the talks should fail or become bogged down. It warned, for example, that the US should not revive its old concept of negotiating from a "position of strength," and stated that neither side should use the talks as a screen to cover up a new round in the arms race. However, the editorial concludes on a note of optimism, claiming an agreement can be reached in spite of difficulties if both sides conduct "honest" negotiations.

The editorial is consistent with recent Soviet statements [redacted] which imply that Moscow's position in Vienna will be influenced by US actions between the talks. A major part of the Soviet propaganda effort has been a heavy dose of commentary inveighing against US plans for expanded deployment of an ABM system. This editorial is another yardstick by which to measure Moscow's concern about ABM plans in the US. It is also an attempt to refute US justification for an antimissile system.

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FRANCE

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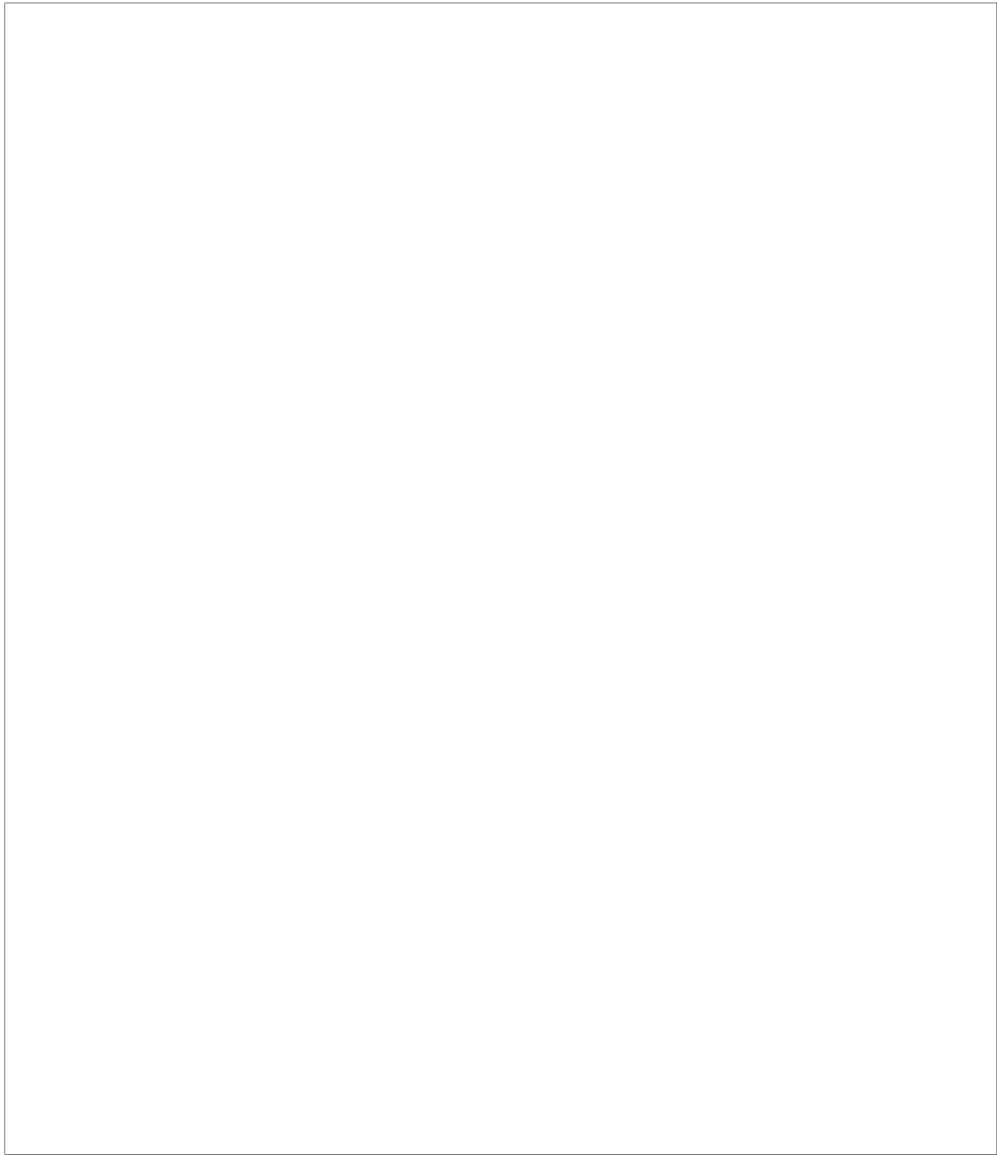
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NOTES

Egypt-Israel: [redacted]

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USSR: [redacted]

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Cyprus: Security forces continue to round up suspects connected with the attempted assassination of President Makarios. The ultraconservative, pro-Enosis national front will come under suspicion because of its terrorist acts over the past several months, but any of several other extremist Greek-Cypriot groups could have been responsible. There appears to be no link with the Turkish-Cypriot community. Makarios may now be prompted to revive the energetic antiterrorist campaign that was begun last January by acting president Clerides while Makarios was away on an African tour.

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