



The President's Daily Brief

26 May 1970

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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

A review of the situation in Cambodia appears on Page 1.

Israel plans to continue sending patrols across the Lebanese border against Arab terrorists. (Page 4)

The first enemy infiltration groups in nearly six weeks are beginning to move down the Laotian panhandle. (Page 5)

Laos may make a formal request for Thai military assistance to defend its southern provinces. (Page 6)

[redacted] Egypt [redacted] USSR [redacted] (Page 7)

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Secretary General Thant is indignant over Egyptian harassment of UN observer posts along the Suez Canal. (Page 8)

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[redacted] Germans [redacted] (Page 9)

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CAMBODIA

The first round in the struggle for Cambodia is over. The Lon Nol government has weathered a stormy first two months. Whatever hopes the Communists may have had of forcing it to seek a new accommodation or, failing that, to bring the government down, have been thwarted by US and South Vietnamese operations. Before US and South Vietnamese troops crossed into Cambodia, the Communists had made considerable progress in efforts to expand their border bases, to develop new infiltration routes from the Gulf of Siam, and to cut Phnom Penh's access to the south and east. Most of these gains have now been lost.

In the south, South Vietnamese forces have cleared the Communists from the towns they had either captured or were threatening. The enemy is now confined to a narrow belt of territory between the South Vietnamese and the Cambodians.

Two of the major roads leading south from Phnom Penh are still not completely free of enemy harassment, but the road to Kompong Som (Sihanoukville) is open. Harassed from the rear and facing a number of the better Cambodian units, as well as one well-trained Khmer Krom battalion, it seems unlikely that the Communists can at this time develop a threat to Phnom Penh from this direction.

To the east of Phnom Penh, Route 1 is open to the South Vietnamese border and the threat to the Svay Rieng and Prey Veng provincial capitals has been substantially reduced. The Communists have been driven from Kompong Cham city and what is left of the Chup rubber plantation. The road to the border has been opened by the South Vietnamese.

Only in the sparsely populated and rugged northeast have the Communists had their own way. Almost all of the major population centers are in their hands, as is the Sekong-Mekong waterway. The Communists undoubtedly hope to develop this area into a redoubt serviced by an extension of the Laotian infiltration corridor.

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Although the military outlook for the Lon Nol government has greatly improved, the Cambodians are a long way from being able to deal with the Communists on their own. If South Vietnamese troops are withdrawn, it is highly unlikely that the Cambodians could at any early date effectively take their place. US and South Vietnamese troops have given Phnom Penh a much needed respite, and have created havoc with Communist plans, but the situation will still regress if the Cambodians do not continue to get outside support.

The political struggle is also most difficult for Lon Nol and Sirik Matak. The war, with all of its mistakes and brutalities, is now coursing through Cambodian villages and towns. The Lon Nol government came into power on a wave of anti-Sihanouk and anti-Vietnamese feeling. Sihanouk is gone, but in addition to the 20,000-30,000 Vietnamese Communist troops on its territory, Phnom Penh now has some 30,000 South Vietnamese troops to cope with. The Cambodians despise the Vietnamese and the ARVN's depredations in the Cambodian countryside have done nothing to heal old wounds.

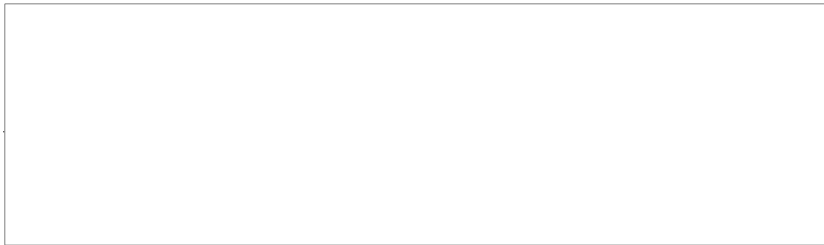
Lon Nol has worked himself into a tight box and he knows it. He and Matak evidently are still convinced that the US will keep Cambodia from going under--even if this means only acting as a restraining influence on Saigon. In their eyes, the alternative to faith in the US is a Cambodia fought over and divided up by the Vietnamese and the Thai. This is an old Cambodian nightmare which could become reality in short order.

The magnitude of the problems facing Cambodia apparently are only now beginning to sink in, and the support which Lon Nol and Matak enjoy in Phnom Penh and elsewhere has not yet been seriously eroded. The grumbling that has already appeared in Phnom Penh, however, will probably get louder as the country begins to realize how deep is its involvement with the war and the Vietnamese.

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According to a press item from Hanoi, Sihanouk arrived in the North Vietnamese capital yesterday. This trip had been scheduled but its purposes are not known. Both sides will use the occasion for propaganda and possibly will discuss concrete measures for supporting Sihanouk's program to overthrow the Lon Nol regime.

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ISRAEL-LEBANON

Israeli forces made three shallow penetrations into Lebanese territory yesterday and plan to continue this type of activity until Arab terrorists are driven back from the border. The largest Israeli patrol in yesterday's action included four tanks and 30 infantrymen. Gideon Rafael, director general of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, told Ambassador Barbour yesterday that the Israeli patrols will continue until Lebanese authorities are able to protect Israel's border settlements from fedayeen attacks.

Meanwhile, yesterday's action probably has added to the estimated 25,000 Lebanese citizens who had evacuated their villages in southern Lebanon. These refugees are demanding protection from Beirut and their leaders are proposing a general strike to expose the government's failure to provide adequate defense.

Recent events and the general disenchantment with the Lebanese Army has encouraged greater freedom of movement among the fedayeen. They are now moving into villages vacated by the refugees and many of these areas are adjacent to Lebanese military installations. As the Israelis continue to seek out fedayeen strongholds, this proximity will increase the chance of a clash between the Israeli and Lebanese armies, a confrontation that Beirut has been at some pains to avoid.

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NORTH VIETNAM

An intercepted message of 23 May indicates that five groups will be moving into the infiltration system between 25 May and 1 June. Three are of battalion size; the other two are small and probably contain special purpose personnel.

The numerical designator of one of the smaller groups indicates that it is headed for COSVN. Recent intercepts show that all COSVN-bound groups have been halted in the Laotian panhandle, but Hanoi may reason that some small movement toward the area is still possible.

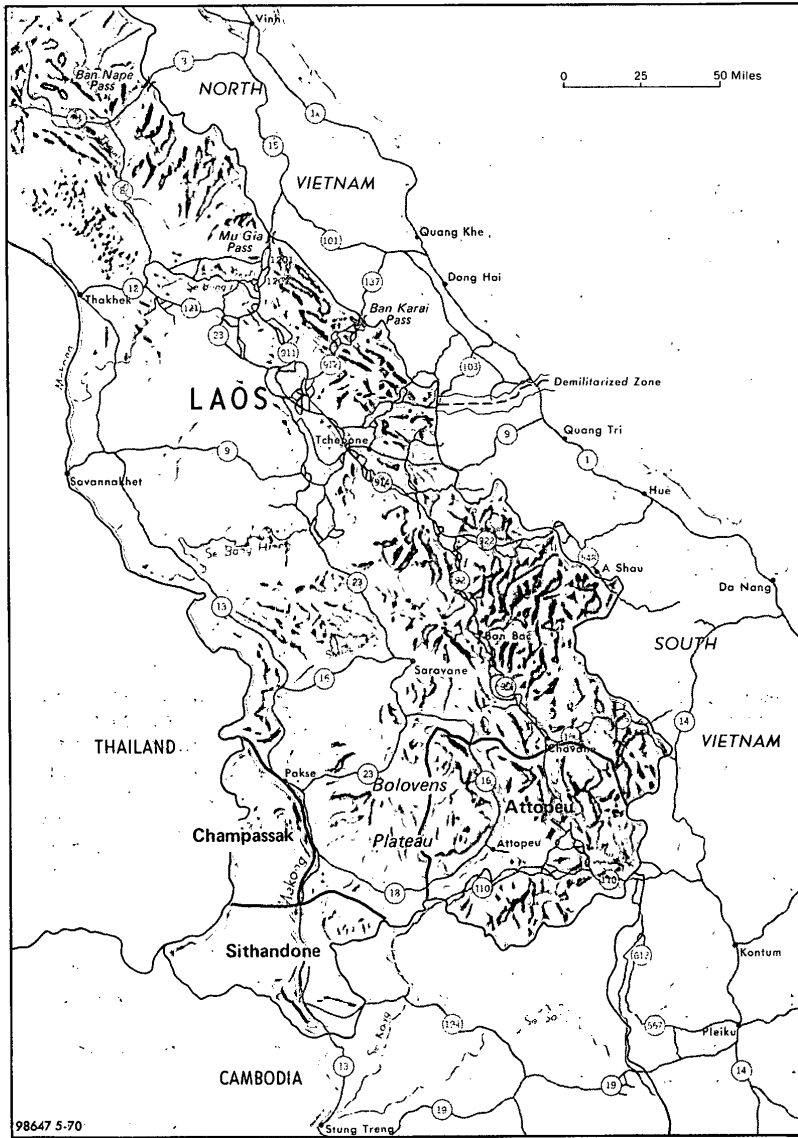
One of the battalion-sized groups has a designator suggesting assignment to southern Laos. This destination is seldom seen, and it is not known whether this group is a combat or support unit. Several recent messages disclose that infiltration stations in the panhandle have been ordered to take precautions against a large-scale ground attack, presumably from US and ARVN forces; this new battalion may have been dispatched with such a contingency in mind.

These enemy units represent the first inputs into the infiltration system detected in nearly six weeks, but their movement does not necessarily mean that Hanoi intends to renew a heavier troop flow to the south. The May count for infiltration now stands at about 2,000, which equates with the level last year for this period.

* * *

Recent heavy rains and bombings meanwhile are complicating Communist logistic efforts in the Laotian panhandle. Barring unusually severe weather, however, the Communists probably will be able to keep some routes open, at least for a while. They are giving special attention to the central panhandle. At least one AAA, two transportation, and five engineering battalions have been moved there from the northern part of the panhandle.

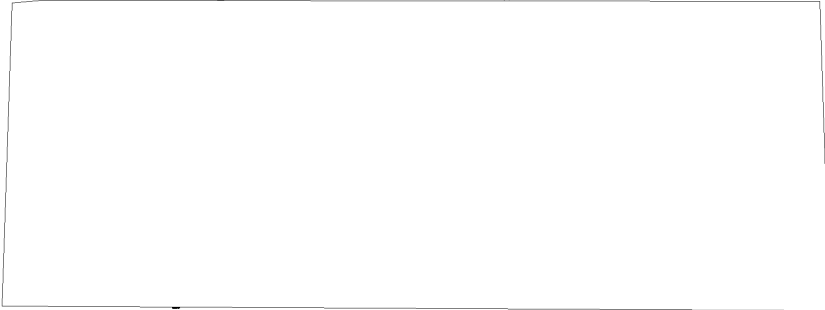
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LAOS

The government evidently intends to request Thai military assistance to help defend south Laos.



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A Laotian request for Thai troops would come at a time when Bangkok is preoccupied with the situation in Cambodia, and is considering the possibility of sending advisers or medical teams to help the Lon Nol government. The Thai Army is spread thin, and it would be hard put to send troops into Laos in the near future without drawing on the full division now serving in South Vietnam.

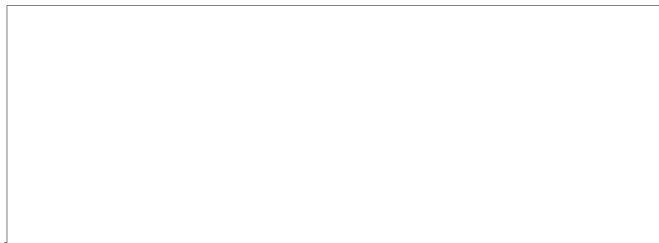
Although the Thai have long had some interest in taking a direct role in the defense of Laos, it is not likely that they will act without some guarantee of US logistic and political support.

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EGYPT-USSR



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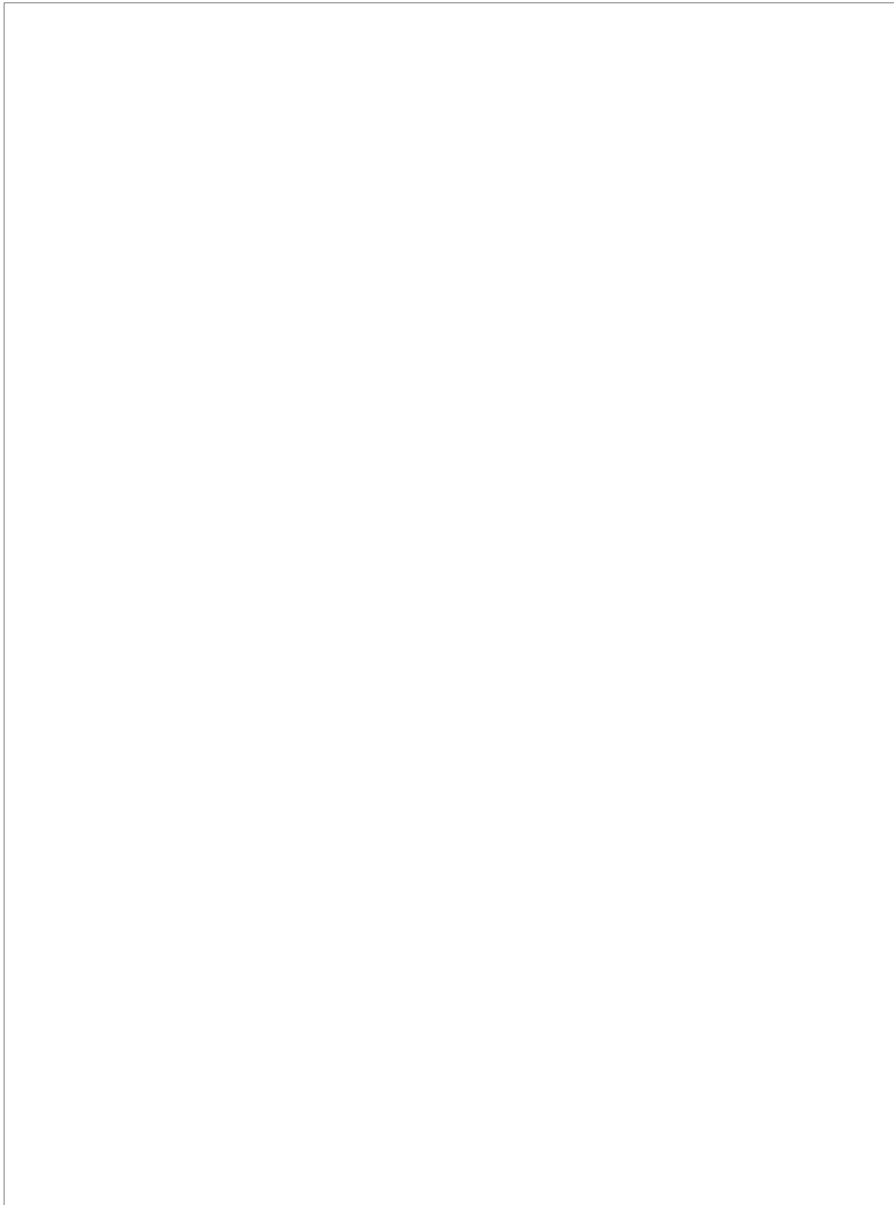


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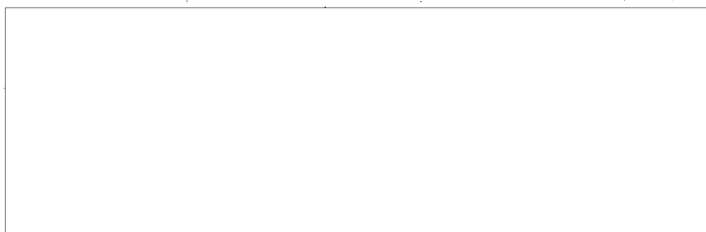
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UN-SUEZ

Egyptian air and artillery harassment of remaining UN observer posts along the Suez prompted Secretary General Thant last week to send a sharply worded protest note to Cairo. He warned that if these attacks persisted, he would have to close the affected posts. The American consulate in Jerusalem has learned that one has already been shut down--the seventh of the 18 posts along the canal to be closed in the past year.



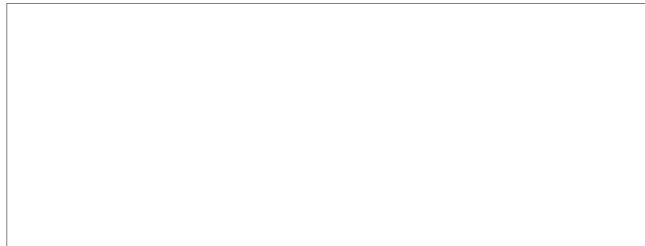
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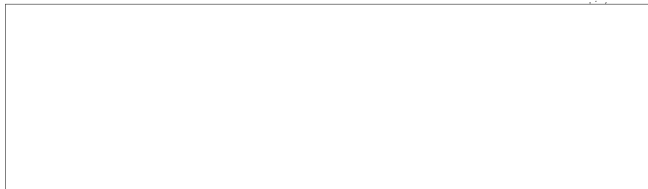
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