



The President's Daily Brief

29 May 1970

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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

The situation in Cambodia is discussed on *Page 1*.

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South Vietnam [Redacted]
(*Page 3*)

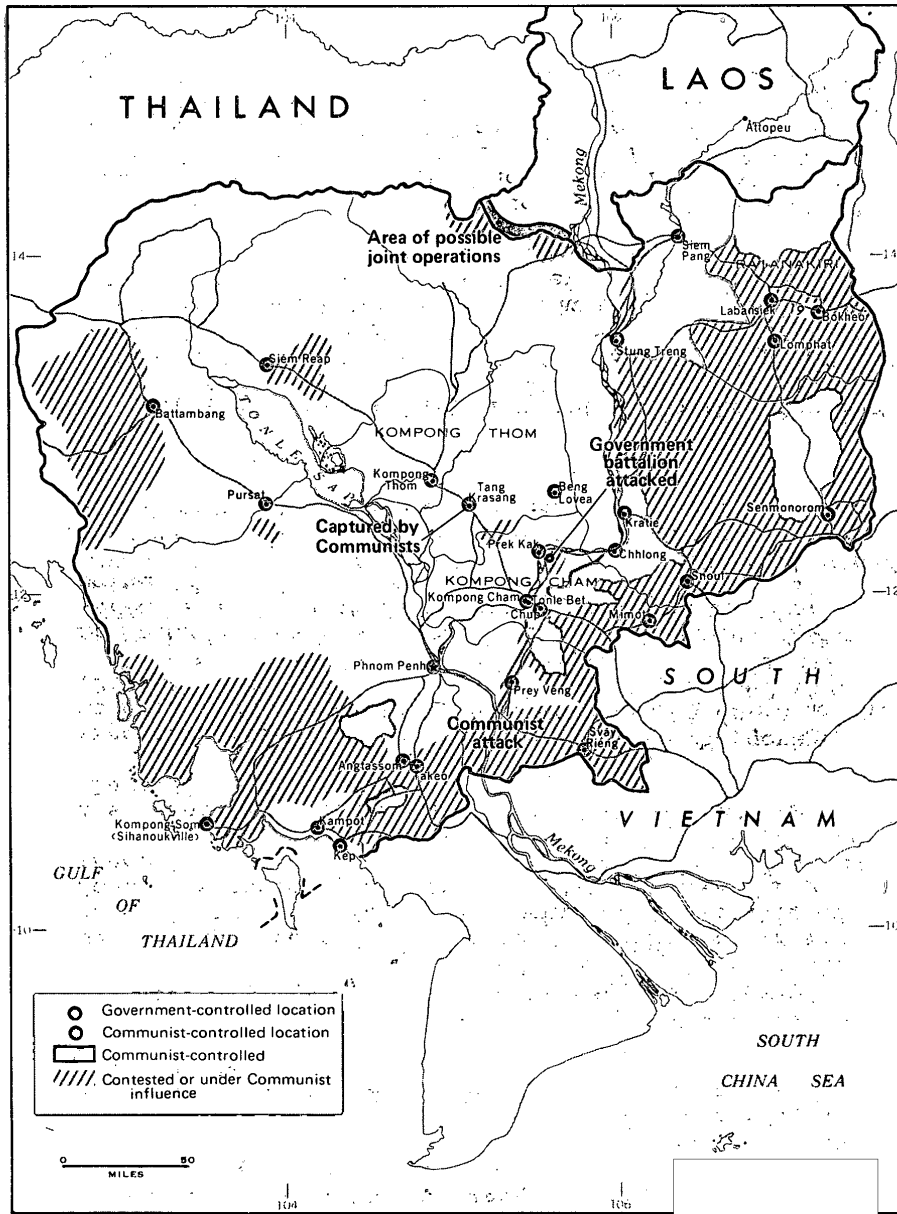
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Insurgents in Thailand are becoming more active.
(*Page 4*)

Arab countries in conflict with Israel are planning to hold a summit conference in Cairo early next month.
(*Page 5*)

At Annex we submit our views on how the Communist world is looking at the current situation in Indo-china.

Cambodia: Current Situation



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CAMBODIA

Prime Minister Lon Nol told the US Defense Attaché on 28 May that the Thais have agreed to participate in military operations along a portion of Cambodia's northern border. According to Lon Nol, Thai Deputy Prime Minister Praphat during his two-day visit to Phnom Penh agreed to help defend the area between the Thai-Lao-Cambodian border and the Mekong River. Lon Nol did not provide any operational details but did indicate that Lao forces also would participate.

Lon Nol may have been exaggerating the extent of the commitment made by the Thai delegation. In subsequent remarks to the press, Praphat indicated that Thai troops would not be sent into Cambodia, although he referred to the possibility of operations similar to those along the Malaysian border. In these, Thai troops cooperate with the Malaysian security forces but stay in Thailand.

[redacted] that the government must retain what little ground it holds in Ratanakiri Province. Although he acknowledged that Communist pressure may force the evacuation of the capital at Lomphat, he said he intended to hold the neighboring town of Labansiek at all costs. Moreover, he wanted to hold the town of Bo Kheo. His objective is to secure as much of Route 19 as possible in order to insure overland access to Pleiku in the South Vietnamese central highlands.

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In their most significant attack in the past two weeks, Communist troops, preceded by an artillery barrage, moved into Prey Veng city on the night of 27-28 May. The city, which is 35 miles east of Phnom Penh, has been under steady Communist harassment recently, and such an attack was expected. At last report the town was back under government control.

The Communists also struck hard in Kompong Thom Province on 27 May, capturing the town of Tang Krasang, 15 miles southeast of the provincial capital. They also overran several smaller government positions just east of Tang Krasang. This activity probably is a prelude to an enemy attack on Kompong Thom city.

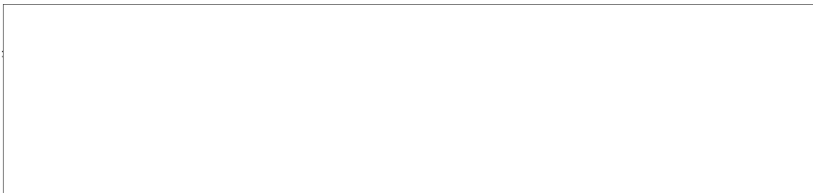
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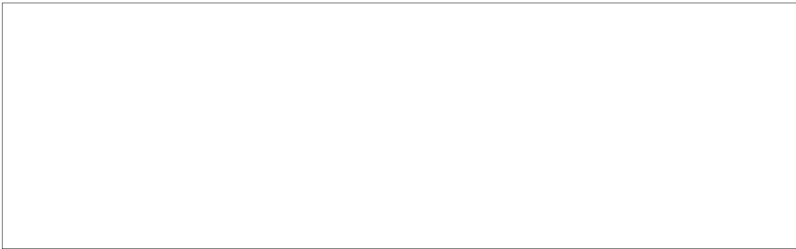
At Annex we submit our views on how the Communist world is looking at the current situation in Indochina.

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SOUTH VIETNAM

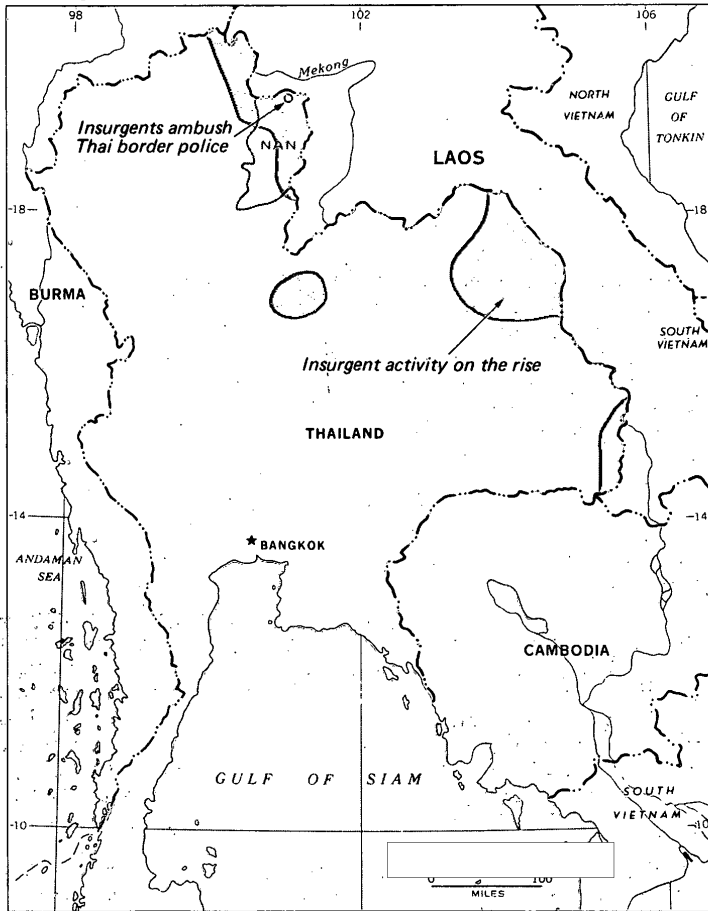


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Insurgent Activity Increases in Thailand



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Area of insurgent activity

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THAILAND

Government forces are being hit hard by tribal insurgents in the north. The insurgents ambushed a road construction crew operating in Nan Province near the Lao border on 22 May, killing five workers as well as five members of a border police platoon providing security for the operation. The action occurred in the general area where the government suffered sizable casualties during an unsuccessful sweep operation in early April.

The insurgents also are having greater operational success in the northeast, where the Communists appear to be strengthening their village support base. Assassinations, armed propaganda meetings, and other indicators of insurgent activity rose substantially last month in the northeast.

The insurgents' strong resistance to government efforts to re-establish a presence in these areas demonstrates the high value the Communists place on holding this "liberated" border territory. The Thais have not met this challenge directly and continue to underestimate Communist strength. Bangkok appears to be preoccupied with fighting the Communists on the Lao side of the border in joint operations with the Lao Army and is reluctant to commit the necessary resources to cope with the trouble spots on its own side of the border.

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ARAB STATES

King Husayn has informed Chargé Odell that an Arab summit conference of states involved in the conflict with Israel has been proposed for 5 June in Cairo.

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The conference was originally scheduled for August, but apparently the UAR wants to move it up to coincide with the third anniversary of the war. The sudden change in the timing of the conference may be related to Nasir's campaign to deter the US from promising further military aid to Israel. Husayn does not like the new scheduling and has already requested a different date. Husayn wants to be in Amman during the anniversary activities, which could be touchy because of the participation of various fedayeen organizations.

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THE COMMUNISTS AND INDOCHINA

The Communist world has clearly been in turmoil about Indochina, but what this signifies--particularly in terms of specific Communist intentions on the ground in Southeast Asia--is hard to discern. We do know that the Soviets are upset and the Chinese Communists are elated, and that Le Duan had a long and unproductive stay in Moscow and a short, pleasant one in Peking.

We also know that Hanoi has been putting out a tough propaganda line and has redirected some of its military assets to Cambodia. The bulk of Hanoi's forces there, however, are still operating in support of the main war effort in Vietnam. Moreover, on the eve of Sihanouk's visit to North Vietnam, Radio Hanoi was emphasizing that the "liberation" of each country is primarily a job for the people of that country.

At the same time, activity on the Ho Chi Minh trail is resuming after a two-week partial standdown that was clearly caused by allied actions in Cambodia, and there have been some new inputs to the infiltration pipeline after we thought the rainy season pause had begun.

No radical change of policy is apparent in these bits and pieces. Leaving aside the propaganda atmospherics, we are actually struck by how little has changed in the Communist attitude. Hanoi does seem to have closed off the option of negotiations for the time being, and this by itself may go a long way toward explaining Moscow's unhappiness. But with this major exception, Hanoi's tactics and priorities seem to be about what they have been for the last year or so: the Communists are still avoiding the commitment of most of their troops; they are still sending substantial but not massive numbers of North Vietnamese soldiers south; and they still attach the highest priority to making up their losses in Cambodia and protecting, consolidating, and gradually building up their assets in South Vietnam. Under present circumstances this inevitably involves more activity in both Cambodia and southern Laos than the Communists had planned on, but all this activity is almost certainly geared to the long-term war in South Vietnam.

The Communists probably will try to retain control of much larger areas of Cambodia than they had before, particularly in the northeast, and we believe they are fairly confident they can cope with whatever allied forces remain in Cambodia after 30 June. It is doubtful, however, that the North Vietnamese Army intends

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to try to take over Cambodia as the US moves out. Although we do not accept the idea that the North Vietnamese are at the end of their tether and that their leadership is on the verge of a split, they appear to be stretched fairly thin and therefore will be reluctant to divert many more of their resources to Cambodia. Because of the risks and political liabilities of such a course, the Communists will probably rely on the long haul insurgency route against Lon Nol and Sirik Matak.

The prospect of an increase, albeit circumscribed, in Hanoi's efforts in Cambodia may help explain Moscow's gloom and Peking's pleasure. Another reason on the Soviet side probably can be found in Moscow's low estimate of Vietnamese Communist capabilities, coupled with a fear that an uncompromising line in Hanoi will require another increase in Soviet support.

In the final analysis, however, recent developments in Indochina are important for both the Soviets and the Chinese, primarily because of their larger implications. The depth of the USSR's concern can best be explained in terms of the effect of recent events on its position vis-a-vis the other great powers. We suspect that the Soviets may have spent much of Le Duan's visit arguing that Hanoi was underestimating US combativeness, and they may have considered this gloomy view vindicated by US action in Cambodia. The same developments, of course, also left them holding an empty negotiations bag and enhanced Communist China's posture at their expense. For their part, the Chinese found the North Vietnamese moving closer to their own views on the war, and this, coupled with Sihanouk's availability in Peking, gave them their strongest hand in years in Indochina.

The turmoil thus seems to reflect the changes in Moscow's and Peking's relationships with each other (and with the US) that resulted from the events in Cambodia. We therefore can expect more: the Chinese will keep trying to score points against both the Soviets and the US, and the Soviets will remain on the defensive. At the same time, Hanoi will probably continue to make clear that its views are now closer to those of Peking than to Moscow's, but it certainly will not cut itself off from the Soviets and will do its utmost to keep the dispute between its two patrons from interfering with the war.

As for the war itself, we do not anticipate radically new developments. Peking seems as reluctant as ever to involve itself directly in the conflict, and its aim essentially is still to keep the war going rather

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than to step it up. The North Vietnamese show every sign of determination to cope with the new dangers allied operations in Cambodia have posed to their long-term effort in South Vietnam. What this requires will depend on Hanoi's estimate of the damage that has been done up to now, as well as its view of how much more the South Vietnamese Army will be doing. In general, however, we see no indication that the Communists are thinking of compromise or giving up the struggle, but at this stage neither do we see them preparing to alter their priorities or greatly to enlarge the war.

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