



The President's Daily Brief

15 February 1971

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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

Construction is under way on a new type of ICBM silo at three missile complexes in the USSR. (Page 1)

The situation in northern Laos is discussed on Page 3.

South Vietnamese troops involved in the Laotian campaign made only sporadic contact with enemy units over the weekend. (Page 4)

Communist China has escalated its rhetoric on the Laotian operation but its statements do not commit Peking to a particular course of action. (Page 5)

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USSR

The latest satellite photography shows that construction is under way on a new type of ICBM silo at three existing missile complexes in the USSR.

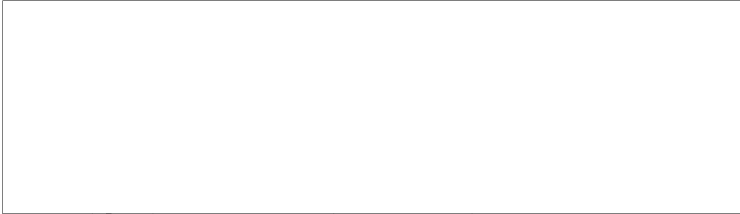
Small portions of 21 of the 24 Soviet ICBM complexes were covered in [redacted] photography [redacted]. This photography showed 10 and probably 11 new silos under construction at three operational missile complexes--the Dombarovskiy and Imeni Gastello SS-9 complexes and at Derazhnya, where both the SS-4 MRBM and the SS-11 ICBM are deployed. The new silos are unlike those seen anywhere else except at a new group of silos--designated the R group--at the Tyuratam missile test center. All of the new silos, including those in the new group at Tyuratam, have been started since August 1970; those at the two SS-9 complexes have been started since late November.

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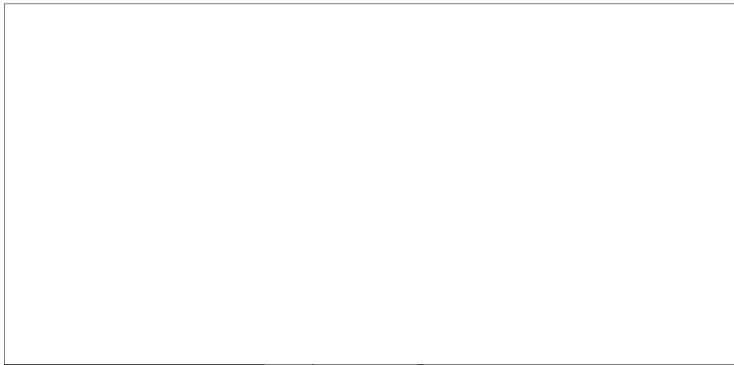
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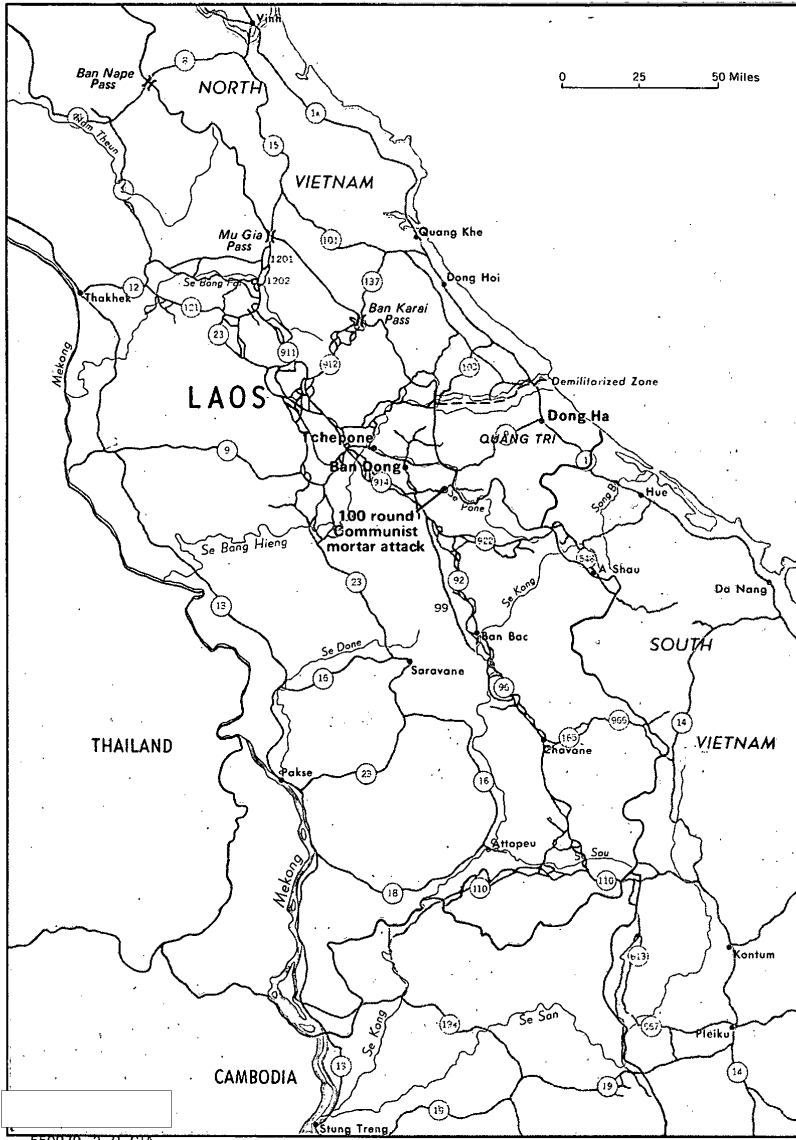
LAOS

Early yesterday morning an estimated 50 to 100 Communist troops approached Long Tieng from the west, overran a 105mm. artillery position about a mile from the center of the base, and from high ground on the southwest edge of the Long Tieng Valley fired rockets and mortars into the base's residential area. Most of the fire was directed at US installations. Bombing by Lao- and Meo-operated T-28's soon forced the Communists from their position, however.

An initial damage assessment reveals destruction of the main rice and food warehouse, the Air America hostel, the diesel fuel depot, the electric power station, and one of the headquarters compounds. There was no damage to the airstrip, the main gasoline and ammunition depots, and the T-28 parking area and runway. At least 11 Meo soldiers or civilians are believed to have been killed. Enemy losses appear to have been light.

Vang Pao appears to be coping adequately with the immediate threat. Yesterday some 200 fresh irregular troops were moved into the base, as well as a 380-man neutralist battalion from Vang Vieng north of Vientiane. These forces will be placed on the high ground from which the enemy mortar attack was directed. The Communists nevertheless retain the capability of mounting new and even heavier attacks at any time.

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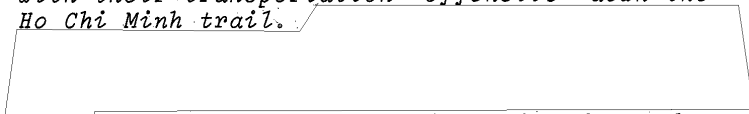
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LAOS-VIETNAM

South Vietnamese troops involved in the Laotian campaign made only sporadic contact over the weekend with enemy units. The most significant enemy action was a series of shellings, including a 25-round rocket bombardment of Dong Ha in northeastern Quang Tri Province in South Vietnam and a 100-round mortar barrage against a South Vietnamese field position inside Laos. Damage from these attacks was light.

The North Vietnamese continue to press ahead with their transportation "offensive" down the Ho Chi Minh trail.



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Vehicles are apparently moving day and night [redacted] the North Vietnamese are taking more elaborate air defense measures along the pipeline.

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There is mounting evidence, however, that allied pressure is causing the enemy difficulties. On 13 February, for example, a way station near Tchepone said its convoys were moving out "strongly" but acknowledged that supply activity was "hindered by the enemy," the first such admission detected since the "crash program" began on 7 February. B-52 strikes have destroyed a Communist storage area near Ban Dong and [redacted] several enemy anti-aircraft units and a river transportation battalion have been hampered by allied air attacks. [redacted] anti-aircraft [redacted] vehicles were not able to cross the Se Ban Hiang River and another anti-aircraft unit was forced to withdraw from its positions and leave vehicles behind because of "damage" from an air strike.

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COMMUNIST CHINA - LAOS

On Friday a government statement called the South Vietnamese incursion into Laos a "menace to China." Yesterday a mammoth rally was held in Peking to condemn allied actions in Laos, and a People's Daily editorial responded to a US explanation that the actions do not threaten China by insisting that, on the contrary, "the new war venture definitely poses a grave threat to China." The editorial added that the Chinese people would "adopt all effective measures to extend powerful support to the people of the three Indochinese countries."

The claim that the operations in Laos threaten China itself is an escalation of Chinese rhetoric regarding the war. The Chinese had avoided this formulation in their propaganda for several years, including during the time of the allied incursions into Cambodia last spring.

Nevertheless, this language does not commit Peking to any particular course of action. Indeed, the editorial makes clear that Peking expects the "people of the three Indochinese countries" to continue to bear the brunt of the actual fighting.

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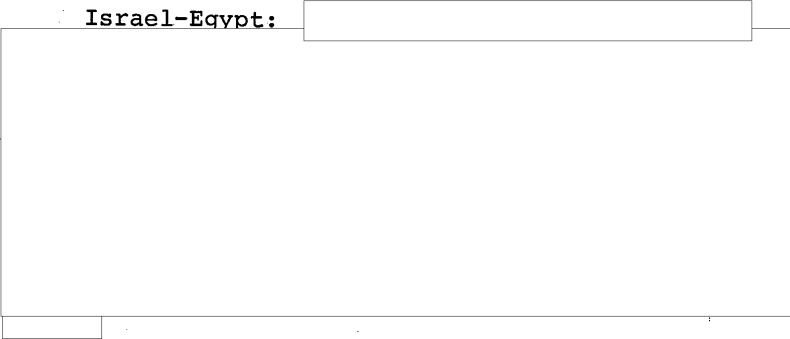
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