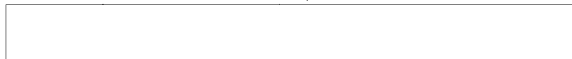




The President's Daily Brief

19 April 1971

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~~*Top Secret*~~

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

19 April 1971

PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

Lon Nol is reported ready to step down in the next few days for reasons of health. (Page 1)

In Laos, sharp fighting continues around three tactically important hilltop positions north of Long Tieng. (Page 3)

Moscow is sending military equipment to Ceylon to aid the Bandaranaike government's struggle against the insurgents. (Page 4)

On Page 5 we comment on the formation of the Union of Arab Republics.

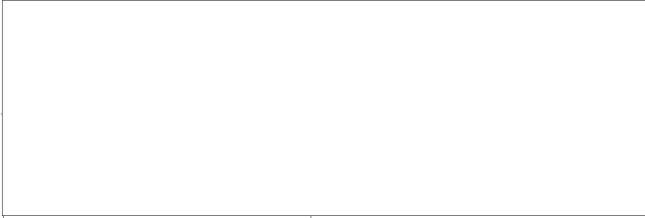
In Pakistan, government forces are pressing attacks against Bengali separatists. (Page 6)

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CAMBODIA

Chief of State Cheng Heng has told the US ambassador that he understands Lon Nol intends to resign in the next few days for reasons of health. Heng said the decision is Lon Nol's though the thrust of his remarks suggests that there is some behind the scenes pressure for the prime minister's resignation. Heng referred to "drift and inefficiency" in the present situation and implied that acting prime minister Sirik Matak and his ministers were ready to quit if changes were not made. Heng criticized Lon Nol's performance even before his stroke last February, arguing that the prime minister had relied too heavily on a small coterie of advisers. He said he personally approves of Lon Nol's stepping down and views Matak as his logical successor.



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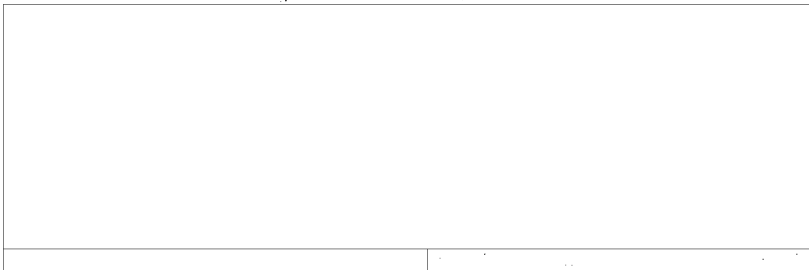
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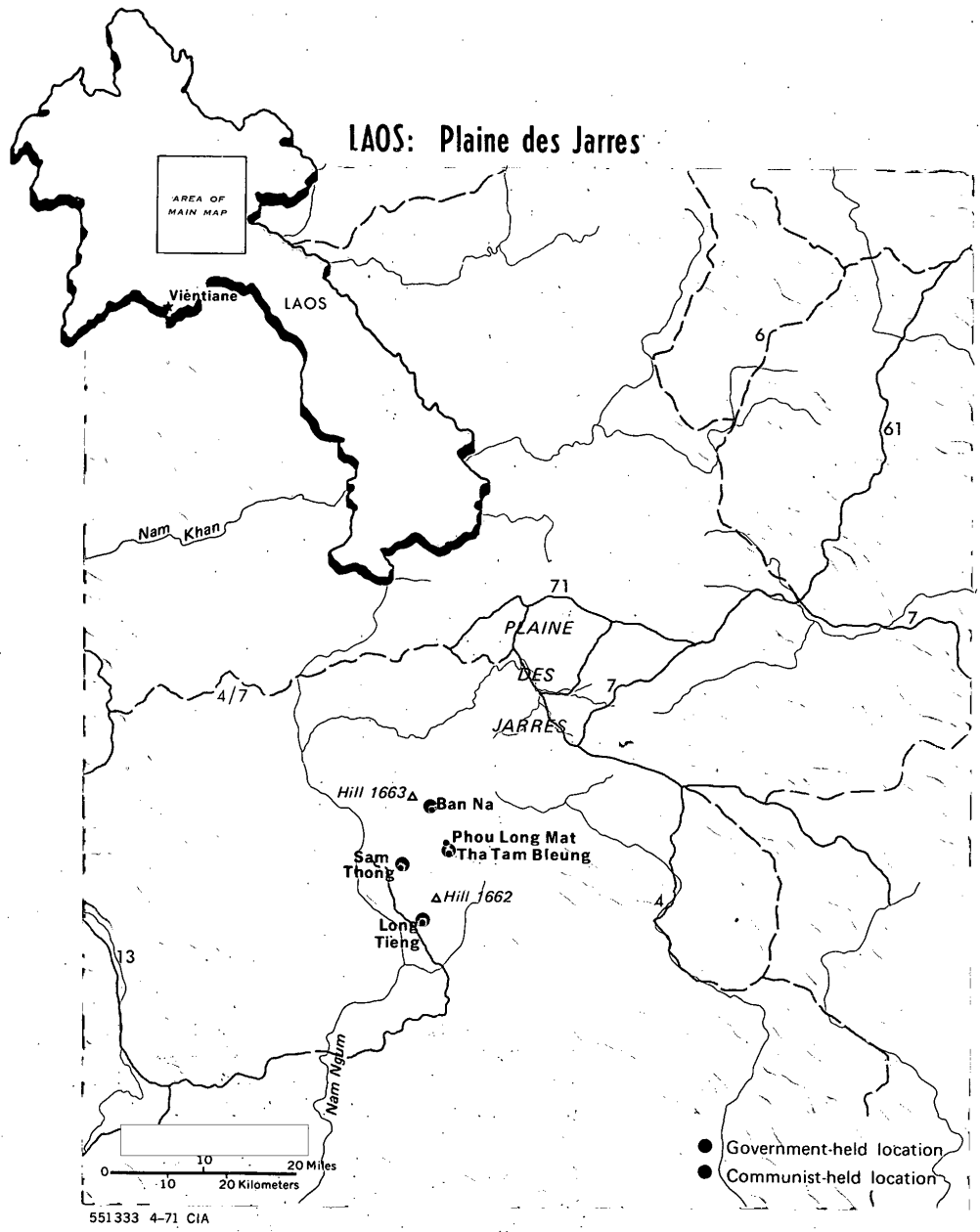
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LAOS

Sharp fighting continues around three tactically important hilltop positions north of Long Tieng, even though neither side has made significant gains for more than a week. At Hill 1663, located about three miles northwest of the former government artillery base at Ban Na, heavy enemy mortar fire is causing substantial losses among the irregular defenders; ten troops were killed and four wounded in one mortar attack on 16 April. At Phou Long Mat, a hill mass about four miles north of Tha Tam Bleung, irregular strength was augmented over the weekend by about 300 troops from Long Tieng. The government has been trying to oust a determined enemy force from an outpost the Communists occupied on 11 April, but has so far been stymied. North Vietnamese forces have also dug in at Hill 1662, located about five miles northeast of Long Tieng, and continue to resist all efforts to dislodge them.

The effort being extended by the Communists to contest these positions indicates their strong desire to keep within striking distance of Long Tieng. It is possible that the North Vietnamese, who have recently shifted the bulk of their forces into the areas north and east of Long Tieng, are preparing for a major push before heavy rains make cross-country movement difficult and place additional burdens on their supply lines. A North Vietnamese rallier stated this week that the Communists are busy prepositioning supplies for an offensive against Long Tieng in early May.

An all-out drive would be a switch in tactics for the Communists, who so far have avoided frontal assaults by large units in favor of attacks by mortar fire to wear down government forces. The Communists have taken heavy losses in the three-month Long Tieng campaign, and they are now outnumbered by government defenders who also enjoy the advantage of air support. The irregular troops, however, are also feeling the strain of protracted fighting and, even if the Communists do not pull out all the stops, there is the danger that--as in the case of Ban Na--government units will cave in under the continuing pressure.

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USSR-CEYLON

Moscow is sending at least two KA-26 helicopters--a six-passenger utility craft--to aid the Bandaranaike government's struggle against the insurgents. It has apparently also offered Ceylon five MIG-17s [redacted] Department cable, armored personnel carriers. [redacted]

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[redacted] The Soviets are also reported to be sending an advisory team--perhaps as many as 60 men--to train the Ceylonese in operation and maintenance of the equipment.

Moscow's limited comment on the Ceylonese situation has been clearly slanted in favor of the government, branding the insurgents as criminals "organized by reactionary forces." The USSR supports Ceylon's united front government, which includes the Ceylonese Communist Party/Moscow. Another possible factor in the decision to extend aid may have been concern in the Kremlin that it was vulnerable to charges of complicity with the insurgents because some of the "Che Guevarist" leaders had studied in Moscow. The extension of military aid no doubt also is intended to ensure that the West not get sole credit for supporting the Bandaranaike government.

Mrs. Bandaranaike will probably welcome Soviet equipment as helpful in maintaining Ceylon's image as a nonaligned country. Internally, acceptance of Soviet aid may increase the influence of leftists within the cabinet.

Meanwhile, security forces are in control of the main towns, but a high-ranking Ceylonese Army officer claims that there are eight major pockets of resistance which the army cannot get to because of lack of personnel, and that there are other small clusters of insurgents all over the island as well.

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ARAB STATES

The formation on Saturday of the Union of Arab Republics under one president and a federal government meets the varying requirements of its members.

Libya's Prime Minister Qadhafi sees the proposed union as the first step toward building an "Arab nation," a goal to which he is firmly committed. President Sadat views Cairo's participation as an earnest of Egypt's desire to be the cornerstone of Arab unity. He no doubt hopes to deflect Arab criticism, particularly that of the Libyans, of Egyptian tactics in the Middle East negotiations and to put pressure on Tel Aviv to be more flexible about a settlement. President Asad may view Syrian participation as demonstrating his intention to break away from the previous regime's isolation in the Arab world. Perhaps the overriding consideration for both Sadat and Asad is that closer cooperation with Libya will provide easier access to Tripoli's oil-rich treasury.

The conspicuous absence of Sudan, which had joined with Egypt and Libya to form an "alliance" in December 1969, is symptomatic of the divisions in the Arab world that preclude comprehensive political unification. President Numayri's regime is already somewhat shaky, and he was apparently unwilling to exacerbate Sudanese fears of Egyptian hegemony by joining the union. The Benghazi declaration did, however, leave the door open for Sudan's accession.

The late scheduling--1 September--of a referendum on the question in the three countries suggests that the leaders anticipate problems in agreeing on the specifics of a federal constitution. The failure of the union of Egypt and Syria, established in 1958 and disbanded in 1961, is well remembered, and there is likely to be a protracted timetable for structuring a political entity.

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NOTES

USSR: The Soviets orbited an unmanned spacecraft from the Tyuratam space center last night using the SL-12, their largest operational space booster. TASS announced the vehicle as "Salyut" and described it as an orbital scientific station designed to conduct research and experiments in space. Launch of a manned Soyuz spacecraft is expected within the next few days and the Soviets probably will attempt to rendezvous and dock the two vehicles.

Pakistan: The government has demonstrated its ability to move into almost any part of East Pakistan, and Bengali separatists have yet to hold a position against a determined army attack. Army control, however, will still be limited to major towns because there are not enough troops to occupy the countryside and exert direct control over 75 million people. Resistance forces apparently are fading into the villages and could sustain a guerrilla war through the monsoon season, which does not end until October.

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