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The President's Daily Brief

19 May 1971

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THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

19 May 1971

PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

Laotian Government forces have abandoned their last important site on the Bolovens Plateau. (Page 1)

The Communists have infiltrated 4,000 or more troops through the Laotian panhandle this month. (Page 2)

In South Vietnam, there is evidence that Communist forces are preparing for another period of heightened combat (Page 3)

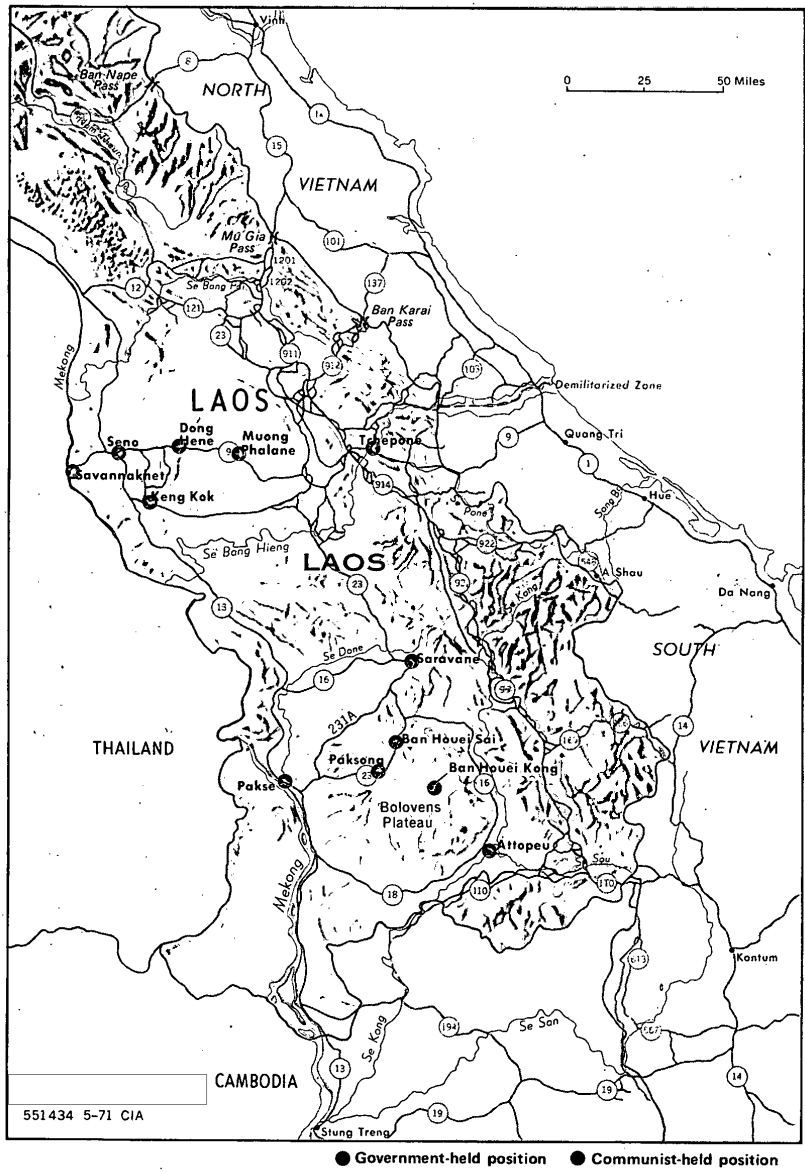
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The Soviets evidently are about to try another unmanned Mars probe. (Page 6)



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LAOS

Government forces today abandoned Ban Houei Kong, the last important site they had retained on the Bolovens Plateau, following a North Vietnamese ground attack. Elsewhere on the plateau air observers report that the Communists have been using substantial numbers of heavy machine guns; there also are numerous signs of tracked vehicles there.

We believe that total available North Vietnamese forces in and around the Bolovens now number about 5,000 men. At least some elements of the 1st Viet Cong Regiment of the 2nd NVA Division have moved into the area. (These forces participated in the counterattack on Lam Son 719 earlier this year.) An independent regiment and some six other combat battalions are also operating on the Bolovens.

The government at the same time is mounting a limited counteroffensive in the central Bolovens. Eight battalions of irregulars, whose 1,200 men constitute virtually the only organized government force left on the plateau, are securing a base area between Ban Houei Kong and Paksong.

The government has established blocking positions on Route 23 about 20 miles east of Pakse and has organized a receiving station for refugees now streaming off the plateau headed for Pakse. Nervousness in Pakse itself is also on the rise, and some prominent Lao civilians are moving their families across the Mekong. The US Embassy has evacuated all American dependents in Pakse, although it still estimates that an attack on the town is unlikely.

In the Dong Hene area, government forces attempting to withdraw along Route 9 were ambushed and forced to abandon their artillery, two tanks, and two armored cars. In addition, their commander was wounded.

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NORTH VIETNAM

Intercepts from Communist way-stations located in the Laos panhandle reflect the southward movement of more than 20 infiltration groups through the area since the beginning of May. Ten of these groups, totaling about 4,000 troops, are infantry headed for southern Laos or northern South Vietnam. The rest of the groups total fewer than 300 persons and apparently consist of specialists in military or civilian tasks. Gaps in the numbering suggest that several thousand additional troops are either now en route or about to depart.

Some of the infantrymen now in the system could serve as replacements for Communist losses earlier this spring in South Vietnam's central highlands or in the current fighting in southern Laos. The Communists' intent may be to go beyond replacement of losses and provide enough reinforcement to increase their capability in these areas later in the year. We do not, however, look for large groups of infiltrators to make the long trek to southern South Vietnam and Cambodia until the rainy season draws to a close next fall.

There continue to be indications that the Communists will keep the bulk of their logistic forces in the Laos panhandle over the current rainy season. In addition to claiming some success for their May "transportation offensive" through the panhandle, the Communists are moving trucks along their main road link between Laos and northern Cambodia. During the dry season, they built or upgraded some 200 miles of new roads and motorable trails in northern Cambodia.

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SOUTH VIETNAM

There is evidence that Communist forces are set for another period of heightened combat. Intercepts from units in the DMZ area and elsewhere during the past few weeks have reflected preparations for another "offensive." Captured documents and other reports indicate that allied installations and roads will come under attack in the central coastal region and that militia and territorial security forces will be among the main targets farther south.

Although the coming round is pegged by some sources to Ho Chi Minh's birthday today, we think it more likely that most of the action will occur during the dark of the moon later this month. The activity will again consist mostly of shellings and light ground probes, with an occasional heavy attack against a remote outpost or refugee center. This provides the Communists with a relatively cheap means of weakening the government's position in the countryside, at least for a time. In those provinces where the Communists focused their greatest effort earlier this year, government control of the population registered a subsequent decline.

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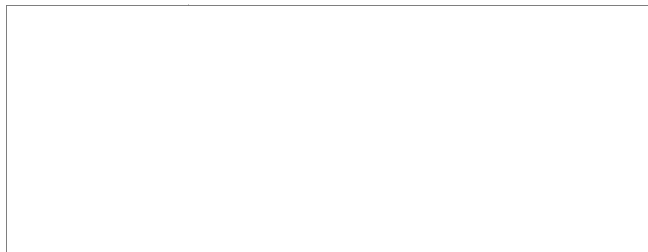
SOUTH VIETNAM



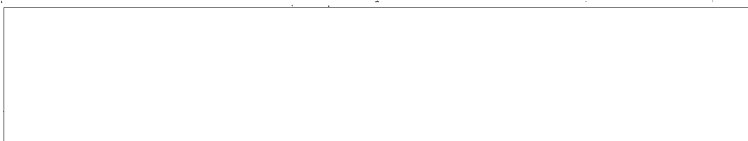
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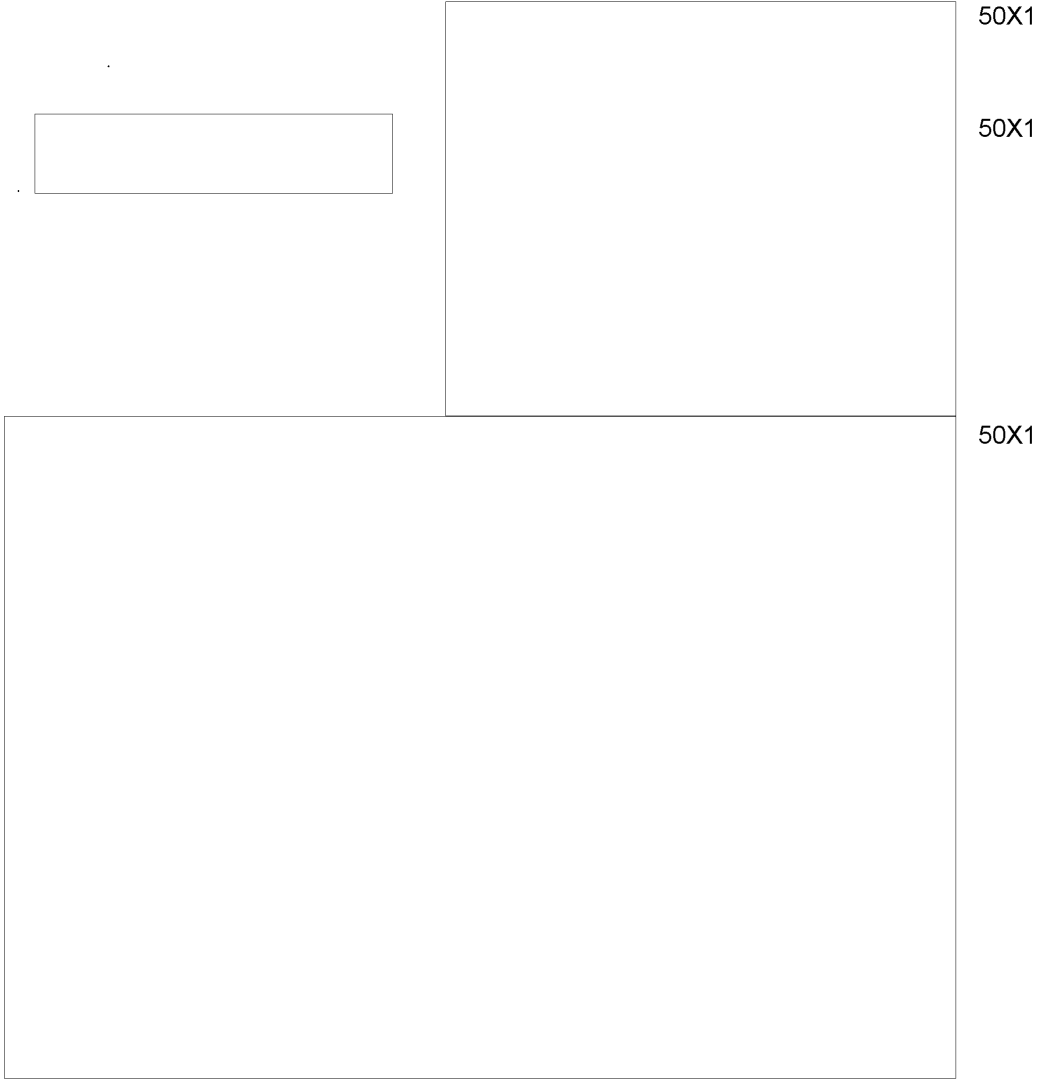
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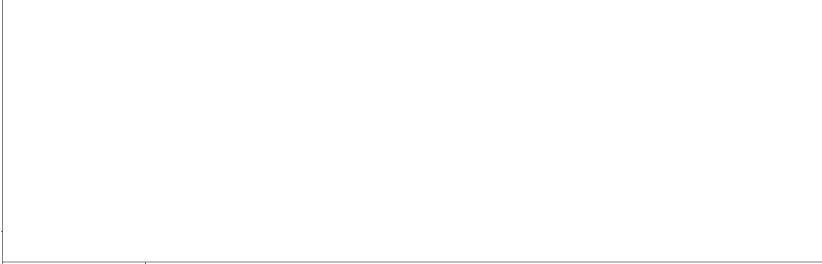


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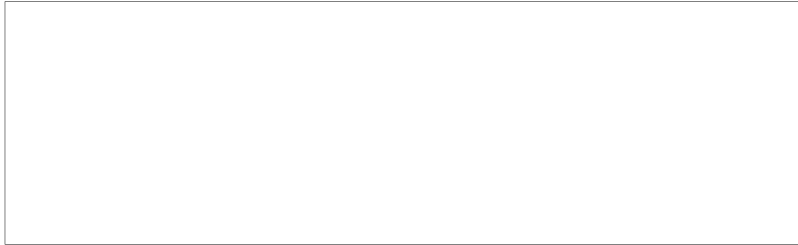
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NOTES

USSR:

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[Redacted] the Soviets will soon try again to launch an unmanned Mars probe. The three ships which participated in the unsuccessful launch of 10 May are at or near their support positions. Once again the Soviets are using an SL-12 booster, the type which failed to put the probe of 10 May into a suitable parking orbit and which has an exceptionally bad record.

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India-Pakistan:

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Panama: President Lakas appears once again to be in a mood to resign because of his unhappiness with the policies of General Torrijos. Lakas told Ambassador Sayre he is upset about last month's cabinet shakeup that brought back several extreme leftists and over the Foreign Ministry's hardening position on canal treaty negotiations. Lakas is also inclined to disbelieve the National Guard's charges that US soldiers last week tried to kidnap three US servicemen being held by the Guard. Two are soldiers who escaped from the stockade in the Zone and the other an airman under investigation for larceny. Lakas believes Panama's handling of the incident undercuts its argument that it can responsibly handle jurisdiction in the Canal Zone.

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