

The President's Daily Brief

10 January 1972

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

North Vietnamese troops are maintaining pressure on Long Tieng; in the south, government forces have evacuated Ban Gnik at the edge of the Bolovens Plateau. (Page 1)

In Bangladesh, leftists and militant students have pledged to cooperate for the time being with Sheik Mujibur Rahman, who arrived in Dacca this morning. (Page 2)

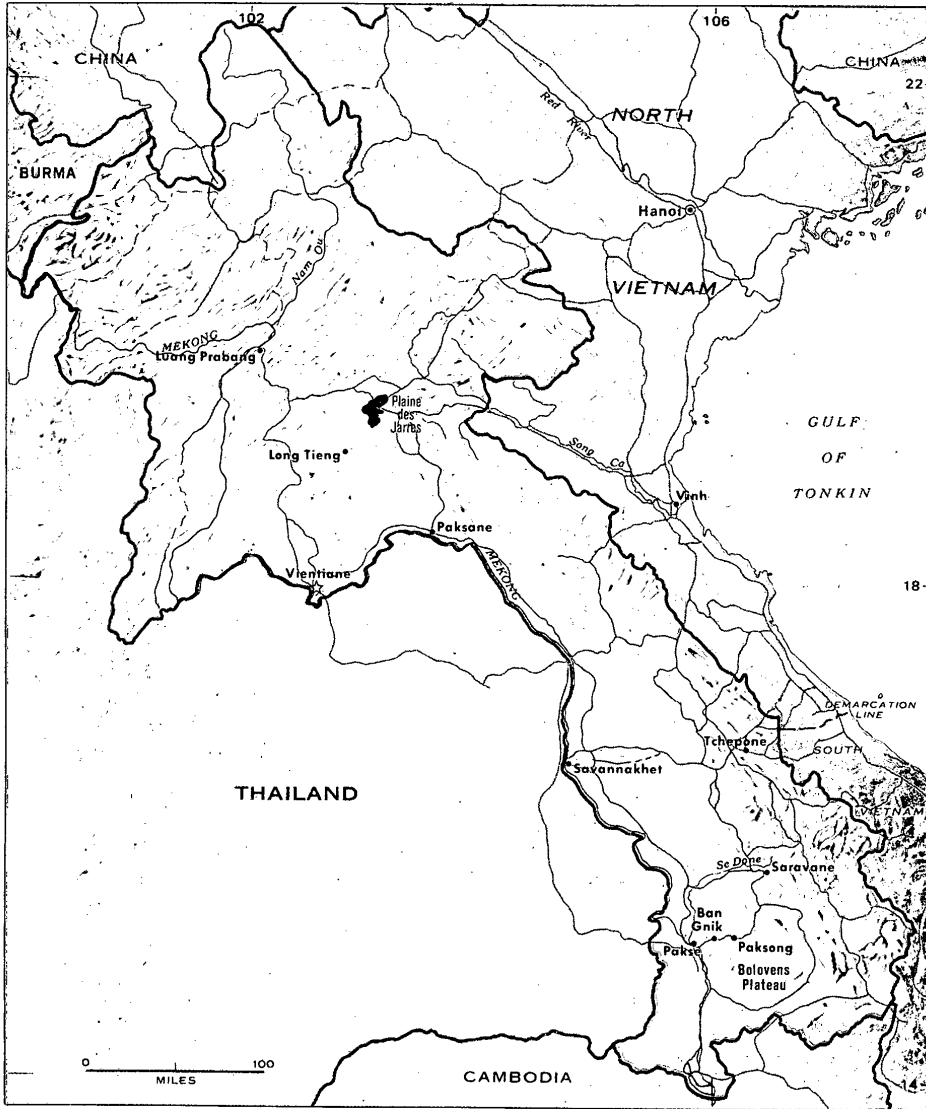
Malta's Prime Minister Mintoff might scale down his financial demands on the British, but London seems unmoved by efforts to raise the NATO package offer. (Page 3)

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The Italian Government may resign in the next few days. (Page 4)

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LAOS

Irregulars at the remaining government positions north of the Long Tieng valley continue to undergo frequent shelling and ground probes by North Vietnamese troops in the area. Communist raiding parties have also been entering the valley in the past two days. One such group early yesterday attacked Vang Pao's headquarters in the center of Long Tieng before being driven off.

These raids notwithstanding, [redacted] North Vietnamese regiments massing in the area are apparently taking their time and making sure that their tactical and logistic preparations are completed before launching any major assault on Long Tieng. They may also hope that their gradually increasing pressure on Long Tieng and its forward defenses will encourage defections in government ranks.

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In southern Laos, the government force defending Ban Gnik on Route 23 was withdrawn this morning.

The troops at Ban Gnik, the last naturally defensive position on the western edge of the Bolovens Plateau some 12 miles west of Paksong, had been virtually surrounded, and supporting aircraft received heavy ground fire. The attacking force consisted of possibly two battalions with artillery support.

No effective government force remains between the Bolovens and Pakse. We doubt, however, that the North Vietnamese will press their advantage and move further west along Route 23 at this time. The Communists' objective in this region has been to control the Bolovens to permit an unimpeded flow of supplies to their forces further south.

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BANGLADESH

Sheik Mujibur Rahman arrived in Dacca this morning after a short stop in New Delhi on his flight from London. The small leftist parties as well as the militant Awami League student organization have pledged to cooperate with him for the time being. The student group says it intends to judge the government by its early performance.

It will not be long before Mujib, essentially a moderate, personally faces the kind of pressures that have already been exerted on the Awami League government. The government has successfully resisted pressure from the leftist parties to be included in the cabinet, but the appointment of their leaders to a central board for a national militia shows they cannot be ignored. Even within the Awami League, leftist elements have appeared ascendant.

Irritants regarding the status of the Indian troops may also increase. Some Bengalis are beginning to have doubts about the lack of any definite time for the troops' departure. A joint communiqué issued yesterday said only that Indian forces will be withdrawn when Dacca requests it. Although the population as a whole still appears favorably disposed toward the Indians, the army's attempts to disarm various guerrilla groups have caused Awami League student leaders to threaten armed resistance.

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MALTA-UK

Prime Minister Mintoff

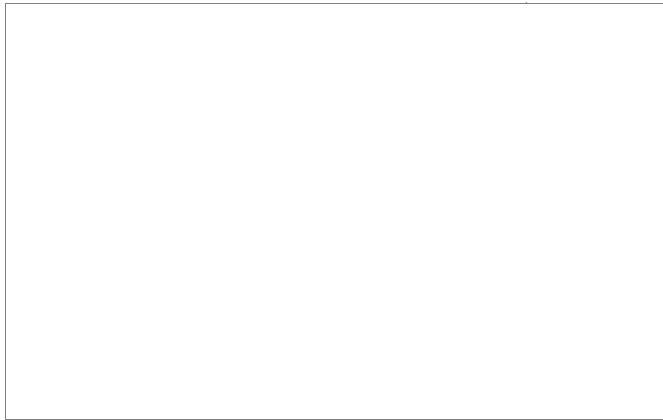
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would be willing to come down from his figure of \$46.8 million annually to retain the British presence.

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Mintoff might accept less than his current demand.

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London so far seems unmoved by the willingness of some of its NATO partners to increase the present NATO package offer of \$26 million annually by raising their contributions. In the North Atlantic Council meeting tomorrow, the British are likely to stick to the position that the present offer is fair and reasonable, and may argue that the costs to them of either withdrawing or staying make an additional British contribution unwarranted. London, however, probably would not oppose a larger offer from its partners if it is made outside the formal NATO package.

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ITALY

Christian Democratic Party secretary Arnaldo Forlani told American Embassy officials on Saturday that the Colombo government would resign within the "next few days" because the small Republican Party had decided to withdraw from the governing majority and the Social Democrats refused to remain without them. Colombo had previously planned to ask for a full debate on the government's program and on its continuation in office when Parliament reconvenes on 18 January. Forlani contends that debate could exacerbate the situation and make inter-party negotiations more difficult.

A cabinet crisis almost certainly could not be resolved by 25 January, the proposed date of Colombo's visit to Washington. Colombo would remain as a caretaker prime minister through this period, however, and might decide to meet the Washington date in this capacity.

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NOTE

USSR-Cuba: The two Soviet built Osa-class guided missile patrol boats being towed across the Atlantic should arrive in Cuba early this week. They probably are going to Cabanas, a naval base west of Havana. The Osa is armed with four missiles with a range of about 20 miles. The Cubans may scrap some of their 18 older and smaller Komar patrol boats that carry only two missiles.

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