

The President's Daily Brief

24 August 1972



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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

24 August 1972

PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

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In Laos, Vang Pao is committing additional troops to his offensive in the north. (Page 2)

The Cambodian Government evidently intends to go ahead with legislative elections next month as scheduled. (Page 3)

The Chinese have officially informed the Thai Government that they would conduct substantive talks with a senior official who will accompany a Thai table tennis team to Peking this weekend. (Page 4)

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[Redacted] Peking. (Page 5)

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Israeli Defense Minister Dayan outlines his views on Middle East peace prospects in the light of the Soviet withdrawal from Egypt. (Page 6)



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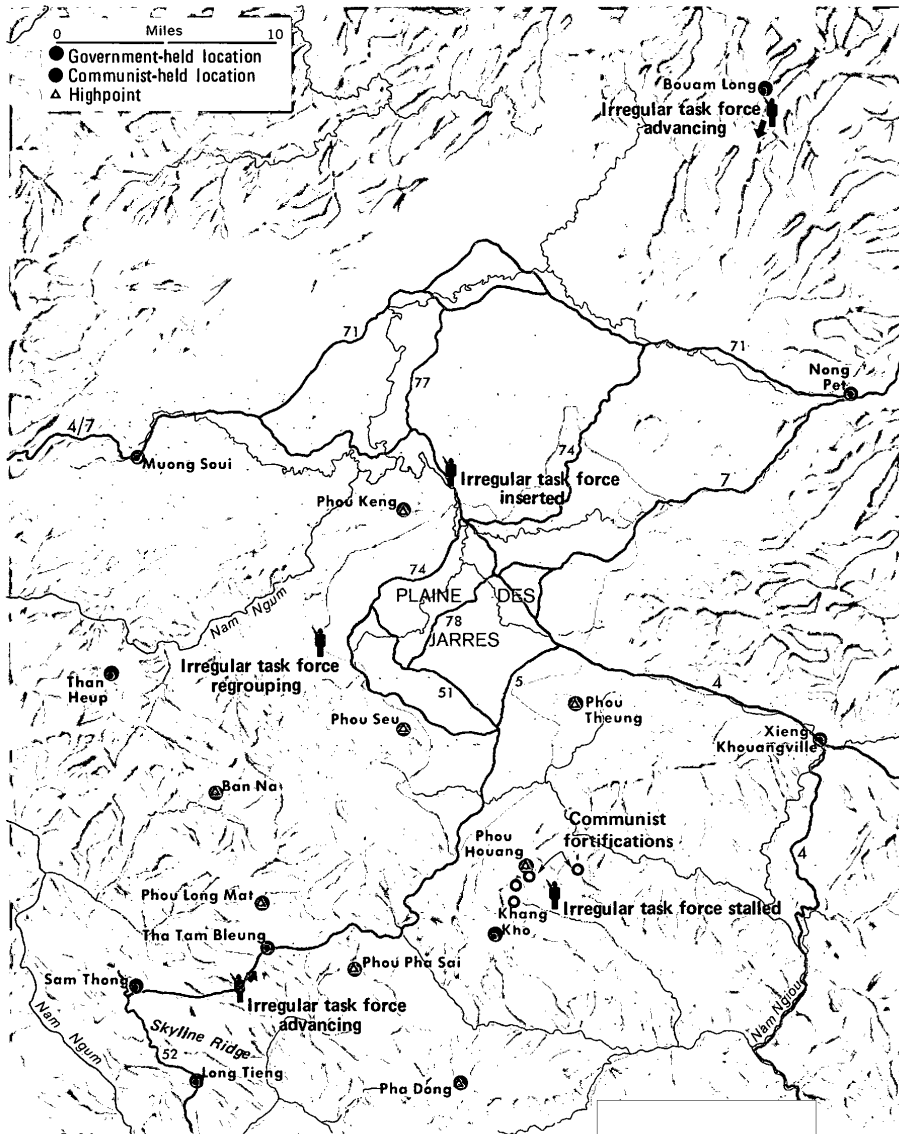
SOUTH VIETNAM

The government's counteroffensive in coastal Quang Nam Province has met stiffened Communist resistance. Heavy fighting has broken out a few miles east of enemy-held Que Son town following two days of relatively light Communist opposition to the cautious government advance. The enemy has again shelled the government's staging area at Fire Support Base Baldy as well as the nearby district town of Thang Binh in adjacent Quang Tin Province. Prisoners and captured documents indicate that in this region North Vietnamese main force troops have the mission of attacking populated areas and interdicting Route 1 while local Viet Cong forces are tying down counterattacking government troops.

Meanwhile, Communist shelling of South Vietnamese Marines in the Quang Tri City area continues at a high level. A small marine contingent reached the northeastern corner of the citadel on 22 August, but was driven back by intense artillery and mortar fire. Sharp skirmishes were reported elsewhere inside the city. To the south, enemy pressure lessened against government airborne positions, but radio direction-finding shows that a freshly refitted regiment from the North Vietnamese 304th Division has moved into position on the airborne's western flank.

South of Hue, government troops clashed with enemy sapper elements near Phu Bai and were struck by some 750 rounds of mortar fire. The detection of another North Vietnamese regiment in this area suggests an increase soon in enemy pressure against the southern approaches to Hue.

LAOS: PLAINE DES JARRES AREA



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LAOS

Vang Pao is committing additional troops to his offensive in the north. On 22 August, advance elements of a multibattalion task force began moving toward the Plaine des Jarres from Bouam Long, an isolated government stronghold north of the Communists' major supply lines to the Plaine. Its mission is to divert North Vietnamese troops from the Plaine to protect these vital routes. Several other irregular battalions have been airlifted to a landing zone near Phou Keng, a strategic hill overlooking the northwest Plaine.

Two other task forces participating in the drive continue to encounter only sporadic resistance. One force is regrouping on the western edge of the Plaine while awaiting orders from Vang Pao. Three battalions attempting to move from the southeast have been held up by bad weather that has limited air support.

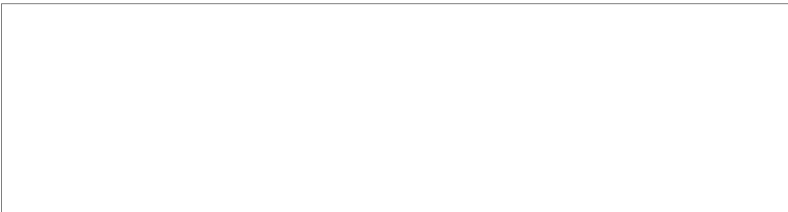
Vang Pao has now committed about 6,000-7,000 men to the current campaign. In addition, elements from the 4,200-man force that since May has been screening Long Tieng from positions east of Sam Thong have begun to test North Vietnamese defenses in the hills near Tha Tam Bleung. The Communists have kept five infantry regiments and a number of independent battalions, numbering more than 10,000 men, in this area and appear determined to hold it.

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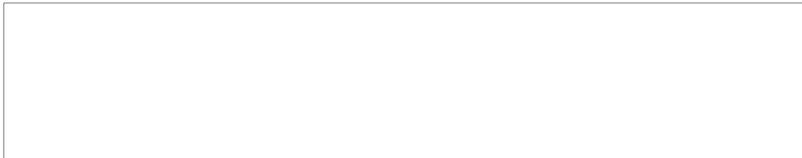
CAMBODIA

There is evidence that the government intends to go ahead with legislative elections next month as scheduled. Candidate lists have been published, and the government has sent messages to the provinces ordering local officials to take the customary security preparations.

Early this month, President Lon Nol had indicated that he might call off the elections because of concern that his Socio-Republican Party might not win a sweeping victory. He has shown no further interest in doing so, however, even though the leading opposition parties--Sirik Matak's Republicans and In Tam's Democrats--have withdrawn. This reduces the election to a sham contest, but Lon Nol could, nevertheless, complete the process of returning to ostensible constitutional rule.



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CHINA-THAILAND

The Chinese have officially informed the Thai Government that they would conduct substantive political talks with Prasit Kanchanawat, a senior Thai official, who will accompany a Thai table tennis team to Peking this weekend.

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY**ISRAEL-EGYPT**

During a conversation with Chargé Zurhellen on 20 August, Defense Minister Dayan outlined his views on Middle East peace prospects in the light of the Soviet withdrawal from Egypt. Noting that he does not believe either Egypt or Israel is yet ready for a final settlement, Dayan said that in his view President Sadat's best course would be to work toward an interim Suez Canal agreement. The key, Dayan said, is in Sadat's hands, but no progress can be achieved if Egypt continues to insist on making an interim agreement contingent on a later complete Israeli withdrawal. If Sadat would give up this demand, Dayan would recommend to his government that Israel in turn drop all of its previous positions--such as opposition to stationing Egyptian troops on the east side of the canal, and insistence that Israeli withdrawal into the Sinai be minimal--and start again from the beginning.

Dayan said that Israel could not consider withdrawing to the pre-June 1967 borders, but it would be prepared to avoid mention of a final frontier and would make it clear that withdrawal under an interim agreement did not constitute a final withdrawal. Dayan noted that an agreement might also--in response to Sadat's fear that an interim line would become the final line--carry definite conditions designed specifically to prevent this.

Dayan pointed to other positive elements in the Egyptian attitude, in addition to the expulsion of the Soviets, which he implied made progress toward an interim settlement more likely. He cited reports that Egypt plans to demobilize between 50,000 and 100,000 men and noted that this was a welcome signal.

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Implying that Israel might respond in kind, he said the government has under consideration a plan to reduce the 36-month Israeli conscription period by three months, and indicated that he is prepared to make a public announcement to this effect as soon as possible after final approval is obtained.

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Although the Egyptians have indicated on several occasions in recent months that they might be willing to give up their demand that Egyptian troops must be allowed to cross the canal, this is the first indication from the Israeli side that a

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troop crossing might be acceptable. In previous negotiations on an interim agreement, Israel has refused to consider any Egyptian military presence east of the canal.

As defense minister, Dayan would of course have a considerable voice in establishing any security arrangements under an interim agreement. He is, however, only one minister--and a rather more forthcoming one than many of his colleagues--and it is questionable whether Prime Minister Meir or the cabinet as a whole would be willing to go as far as Dayan does. Another serious impediment to Dayan's proposal lies in his condition that Egypt drop its insistence on a commitment to total withdrawal by Israel; Sadat's fear that a partial withdrawal under an interim agreement would eventually become frozen is a real one, and there has been no indication that Egypt is ready to move on this issue.

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NOTES

Libya-Syria-USSR:

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Morocco:

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India-Pakistan: Indian and Pakistani delegations will meet in New Delhi tomorrow to try to halt erosion of the fragile understanding that was achieved at Simla last July. Prime Minister Gandhi requested the meeting, according to a Pakistani Foreign Ministry official. She wants the two sides to discuss Bhutto's refusal to allow repatriation of Hindu Pakistani citizens who crossed into India during the war last December, the establishment of a "line of demarcation" in Kashmir, and Pakistan's recognition of Bangladesh. According to the Pakistani official, Bhutto has assured Mrs. Gandhi that he intends to make progress on all three points, but that he would be more forthcoming if Bangladesh would cease using the prisoner-of-war issue as a "lever to force recognition."

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