

The President's Daily Brief

17 November 1972

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

17 November 1972

PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

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Libya

[Redacted]

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(Page 1)

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Several contacts of the US Interests Section in Cairo have reported a recent incident that may have been a coup attempt by some air force officers against the Sadat government. (Page 3)

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Soviet

[Redacted]

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Egypt

(Page 4)

25X1

The Argentine Government has imposed tight security precautions for the scheduled return of Juan Peron this morning, but his arrival could trigger some incidents. (Page 5)

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Chilean President Allende has told his Socialist colleagues that military participation in his government is necessary to consolidate the policy changes of the past two years. (Page 6)

At Annex, we give a retrospective examination of the rainy season's military activity in Laos.

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LIBYA-ISRAEL

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LAOS

The continuing peace talks and the prospect of an end to the fighting have clearly become uppermost in the thoughts and actions of the contending military forces. As the new dry season begins in Laos, we can expect a series of attacks and maneuvers in anticipation of some form of in-place cease-fire.

The recent rainy season leaves the Communist side in a relatively good military position. At Annex, we give a retrospective examination of the season's military activity.

FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY**EGYPT**

Several contacts of the US Interests Section in Cairo have reported an incident that may have been a coup attempt by a group of air force officers at an airbase south of Cairo within the past few days. Details are sketchy, but as many as 20 arrests may have been made. According to one account, a senior officer of army intelligence was dismissed following the incident.

The activities of Egypt's two leading military figures provide an indication of official concern. War Minister Ahmad Ismail Ali, who had been scheduled to attend the meeting of Arab foreign and defense ministers in Kuwait beginning on 15 November, apparently delayed his departure by one day. During that day he visited the troops and renewed his exhortations to "maintain discipline," and to focus on strictly military matters in preparation for "the battle against Israel." Chief of Staff Shazli did go to Kuwait, but returned after one day.

We have noted a number of other recent manifestations of malaise in Egyptian society, including the public denunciation of the Sadat regime by a small number of army personnel in Cairo early last month and some instances of student restiveness. So far the disaffected elements in the military and elsewhere in Egyptian society remain disorganized, and Sadat presumably is taking greater security precautions. As discontent with the regime's lack of direction increases, however, so does the danger to his position.

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USSR-EGYPT

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ARGENTINA

The Lanusse government has imposed tight security precautions for the scheduled return of Juan Peron at 9 this morning, Washington time. Troops have cordoned off the airport 21 miles from downtown Buenos Aires and have occupied radio and TV stations to prevent take-overs. The government has pre-empted plans for strikes by declaring a public holiday.

Peron's presence in Argentina, even for a week or less, will nevertheless provide dissidents of the right and left with the best chance they are likely to get to sabotage the elections scheduled for next March. Overreaction to any incidents by Peronists or by the security forces could set off a chain reaction of violence.

President Lanusse is out of the capital until tomorrow. We have some indications that he and Peron have reached an understanding on the conduct of the elections, and they may get together to provide the finishing touches.

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CHILE

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President Allende's explanation to a recent Socialist Party plenum of why he brought senior military officers into his government. The plenum was called last week to challenge his course of action. His statements on this issue and on his plans for his coming trip abroad included:

--The armed forces are in the government to stay as an essential element at all levels.

--He had promised that he will not interfere in the military chain of command and that his government will comply with judicial decisions.

--The military presence is vital to re-establishing an image of a peaceful and productive Chile deserving foreign assistance.

--His coming trip abroad is necessary to refurbish Chile's reputation, badly damaged by his coalition's record.

--In Moscow he will ask for a \$500-million loan to be made available immediately, challenging the Soviets to demonstrate that they believe in the Popular Unity government. Until now the switch to friendship with Socialist countries has been fruitless.

--In his address to the UN General Assembly he will attack multinational corporations, but he will also seek signs during his stay that the US desires frank discussions of US-Chilean differences.

Allende has evidently decided that the armed forces are the key to consolidating the many social and economic changes his government has set in motion. Although the Socialist leaders appear to have concluded that they must go along with him for the time being in view of the disorganized state of their party, the extremist allies of party chief Altamirano are unlikely to change their view that the military should be removed from the cabinet.

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LAOS: THE RAINY SEASON IN RETROSPECT

As the new dry season begins in Laos, the Communists must view the results of their military activities during the rainy season with some satisfaction. In the north, they managed to turn back all of Vang Pao's efforts to repeat last year's recapture of the Plaine des Jarres. In the south, they succeeded in keeping government forces well away from the Ho Chi Minh supply corridor to South Vietnam and Cambodia.

The Contest for the Plaine

As the rainy season began in April in north Laos, the Communists were still maintaining pressure against Long Tieng. Their siege of Vang Pao's headquarters quickly ended, however, when the early arrival of rainy weather washed out their supply route and the 312th North Vietnamese Division was sent to South Vietnam. When the Communists abandoned positions overlooking Long Tieng, they shifted the bulk of their forces to a line of hills southwest of the Plaine to check possible government offensives. With the departure of the 312th, the North Vietnamese were left with four regiments--the same number they had during the 1971 rainy season when they did not make any real attempt to defend the Plaine.

The North Vietnamese pullback allowed government forces to recapture Sam Thong, a former refugee center just north of Long Tieng, and several nearby hills. The irregulars tried unsuccessfully to breach the Communist defensive line southwest of the Plaine in June and July, but relatively few irregular units were involved because most of Vang Pao's tribal forces had returned to rear areas for badly needed rest and refitting. By mid-August, Vang Pao was able to commit nearly all of his 6,000 retrained tribal troops, plus some 4,000 troops from other areas, to a major offensive against the Plaine. The military objective was to push the Communists far enough back to limit the effectiveness of any enemy drive on Long Tieng the following dry season. The political aim was to regain as much territory as possible to strengthen Prime Minister Souvanna's hand in any possible peace negotiations with the Communists.

For the next two and a half months, irregular task forces tried to move onto the Plaine from the north, west, and south. The North Vietnamese used one of their crack regiments to hold the defensive

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line southwest of the Plaine, while their other three regiments--despite heavy air strikes--maneuvered from one sector of the Plaine to another to inflict a series of defeats on the irregulars.

As the rains began to taper off in mid-October, Vang Pao concentrated over 5,000 men--including some of the government's best troops--in a single task force on the southern tip of the Plaine. After making some limited progress, these troops lost just enough momentum to allow the Communists to concentrate the bulk of three regiments--around 3,000 men--against them. On 26 October Communist ground forces, tanks and artillery routed the government troops, killing over 100, wounding 200, and capturing many more. Vang Pao is currently attempting to regroup the remaining elements in the hills a few miles south of the Plaine, but they are still under heavy enemy pressure.

Fighting in the South

In south Laos, the North Vietnamese objective was little different from previous years--keep the government at arm's length from the Ho Chi Minh trail complex. The North Vietnamese were, however, a bit more aggressive. Communist pre-emptive moves began in mid-May, when a North Vietnamese regiment for the first time occupied Khong Sedone, a provincial capital north of Pakse. Although government troops managed to recapture Khong Sedone in early June, it took them another two months to drive the North Vietnamese well away from the surrounding area. The fighting at Khong Sedone had resulted in some heavy casualties on both sides, and the irregulars had to have several weeks of rest and retraining before they could be committed to regaining lost ground.

At the same time that the North Vietnamese moved into Khong Sedone, other Communists were launching attacks farther south against government defensive positions just 15 miles from Pakse. Elements of one North Vietnamese regiment kept up these attacks throughout the summer, successfully tying down government troops east of that important town. The combined pressure in the Khong Sedone and Pakse sectors prevented the government from organizing any sizable offensive operations in the south until mid-October. Since then eight irregular battalions succeeded in driving Communist troops temporarily from Saravane--a provincial capital north of the Bolovens Plateau--while other government units have moved into the village of Ban Lao Ngam, which is on an important Communist supply route. The Communists

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attempted to forestall this government offensive by once again attacking Khong Sedone and the frontline east of Pakse, but they failed. With the irregulars blocking their supply routes, the North Vietnamese shifted units to counter government moves north of the Bolovens and, on 15 November, the Communists again attacked and reoccupied Saravane.

Looking Ahead

The government's failure to redress the losses sustained in the previous dry season leaves the Communists in a good military position. The prospect of an imminent settlement in Vietnam and a cease-fire in Laos, however, adds political dimensions to the military situation. An end to the fighting is now obviously uppermost in the thoughts and actions of both sides, and the dry season seems likely to bring a series of attacks and maneuvers in anticipation of some form of in-place cease-fire.

In some areas this seems well under way. Early this month, the Communists staged their strongest attacks in over a year to drive dispirited irregular battalions back to within ten miles of the royal capital of Luang Prabang and have recently attacked the airfield there with rockets. Enemy units made an unprecedented attack on Keng Kok, southeast of Savannakhet, and broke a long-standing informal local arrangement by attacking Thakhek, a provincial capital on the Mekong and several other positions to the north near Route 13. The timing of these unusual attacks suggests that they were aimed in part at making limited territorial gains in light of the peace talks now under way in Vientiane. At a minimum they serve to remind the government that military pressure can be increased if the negotiations become stalled.

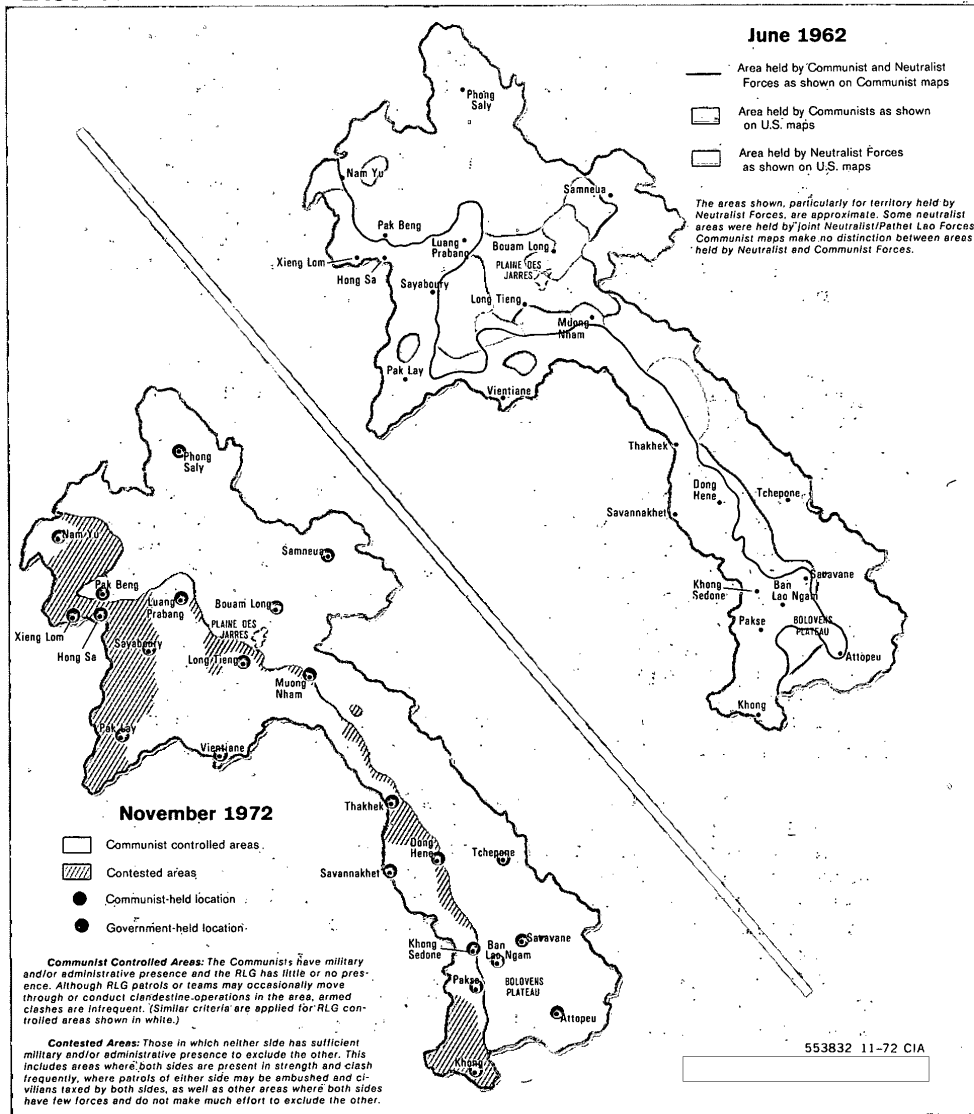
In the north, the course of future fighting seems less clear. It is not at all certain that the North Vietnamese will mount a major attack on Long Tieng once they have chased Vang Pao's remnants away from the Plaine. Any full-scale attack on the defenses around Long Tieng would require a buildup of new troops and supplies from North Vietnam. Some troops to fill out the ranks of units already in place have been detected moving toward the Plaine, but no significant amounts of supplies have been shipped.

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LAOS: Communist Controlled Areas



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If a cease-fire is arranged in the next several weeks, the Communists will control more than half of Laos, more territory than they held at the time of the 1962 cease-fire. An exact comparison between 1962 and 1972, however, is not possible because no effort was made ten years ago to draw an agreed upon cease-fire line or to pinpoint troop locations.

If North Vietnamese forces are eventually withdrawn, and the government accedes to Communist demands that irregular units be disbanded, the opposing military forces would consist of the Royal Lao Army and the Pathet Lao. Vientiane's regular army stands at some 48,000 men--including some nominally "neutralist" units--while the Lao Communists have approximately 35,000 to 45,000 combat and support troops spread throughout the country. Over the years these indigenous Lao forces of both sides have not been particularly aggressive or effective. Without foreign prodding they would presumably be generally willing, if not eager, to comply with the terms of any cease-fire.

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