



The President's Daily Brief

10 January 1973

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THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

10 January 1973

PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

[Redacted]

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Australia's Prime Minister Whitlam has reiterated his firm support for Canberra's alliance with the United States. In defending his decision not to intervene openly in the recent boycott of US shipping, he said such action would have been both illegal and politically unrealistic in view of left-wing pressures within the Labor Party. (Page 3)

Lao Government troops have been driven from Saravane for the third time since they first retook it last October. In the north the shelling of Bouam Long has resumed. (Page 4)

The Cambodian military situation is essentially a stalemate. (Page 5)

The Soviets [Redacted] (Page 6)

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The Chinese [Redacted] (Page 6)

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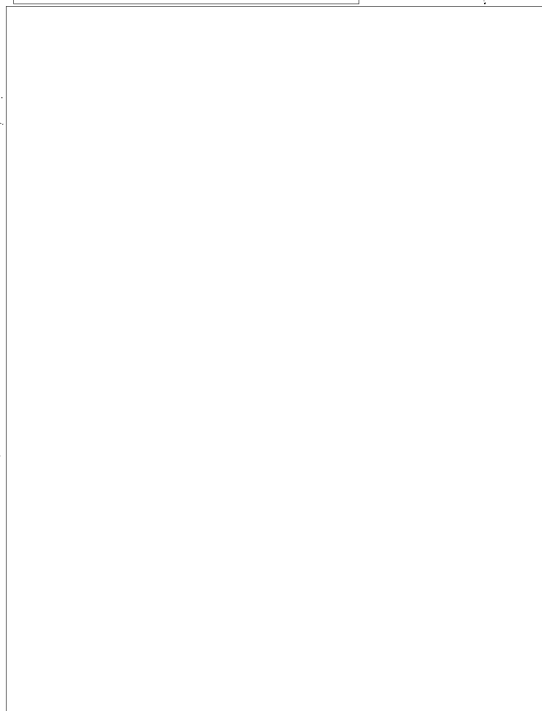
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At Annex we examine the stalemated military situation in Cambodia, the inherent instability of the Lon Nol government, and incipient divisions among the insurgents.



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CHINA

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USSR-SYRIA

Since last summer, when the Soviets began to accelerate deliveries of arms, Syria has received substantial quantities of new SAM and antiaircraft equipment.

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The air force has received at least 18 new aircraft, mostly MIG-21s. The navy has received two Osa guided missile patrol boats, and the army has acquired about 60 T-62 tanks.

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The size of the Soviet military contingent in Syria has increased. Last summer there were approximately 800 Soviet technicians and advisers in Syria. There are now about 1,100

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Some could well be instructors to train the Syrians in the use of their new equipment.

As of now, Syria does not have enough trained pilots to operate the approximately 300 fighter and bomber aircraft in its inventory. The shortage of pilots has been aggravated by recent combat losses to Israel and by a serious air crash in December in which 15 pilots are reported to have been killed. Syria, moreover, has yet to fire a SAM at an attacking aircraft, apparently because its crews are not yet proficient in using the system. We believe that considerable time and further Soviet deliveries will be required before Syria can begin to defend itself properly against the Israelis.

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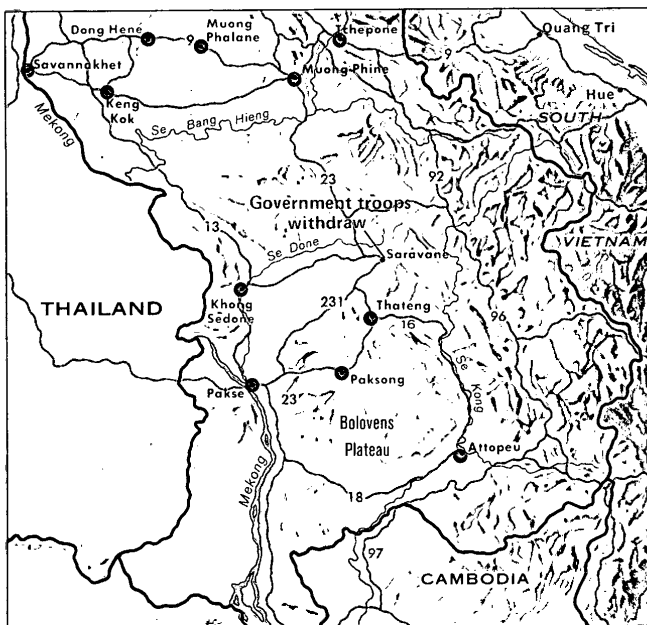
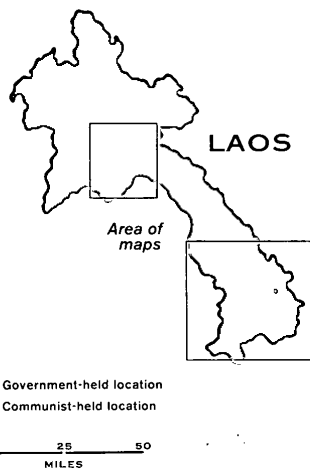
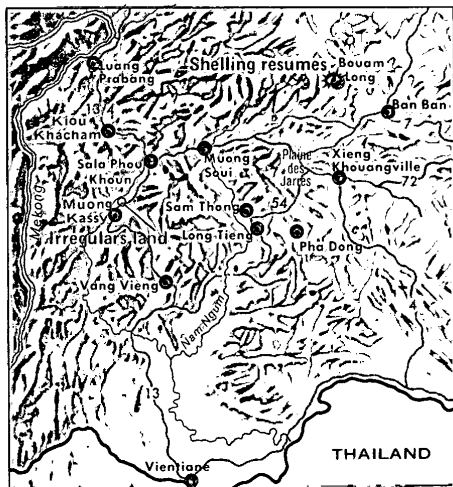
AUSTRALIA

Prime Minister Whitlam, in talking with the US ambassador on 8 January, defended his decision not to intervene openly to head off the seamen's and dockworkers' recent boycott of US shipping. He said such action would have been both illegal and politically unrealistic in view of left-wing pressures within the Labor Party.

Whitlam pointed out that Canberra's position on the boycott--instituted to protest US Vietnam policy--had been complicated by the government's own position on Vietnam. He said the new Labor government had a mandate not only to end Australia's participation in the war but to do what it could to ensure a speedy settlement. He stated that if talks should again be suspended and the war intensified, Canberra would consider initiatives in the United Nations.

There is considerable anti-war sentiment within the Labor Party, and Whitlam's remarks presumably reflect his own convictions as well as domestic political realities.

The prime minister concluded his remarks to the ambassador by stressing his firm support for Australia's alliance with the United States and specifically noting that he proposed no changes in existing defense arrangements between the two nations.



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LAOS

Government units have been forced to withdraw south and west from Saravane although one irregular battalion still holds the airstrip. These troops report that the North Vietnamese have moved anti-aircraft guns into the town.

This is the third time the irregulars have been driven from Saravane since they first retook it in October 1972. Fighting over Saravane during the past two months has been some of the most intense seen in south Laos. Both sides have taken heavy casualties, and the irregulars have been able to remain in the area only because of continued air support.

In the north the government is airlifting irregular troops onto Route 13 south of Sala Phou Khoun, a road junction which was seized by the Communists in late December.

The arrival of these troops will free others to move north again toward the junction. These forces are unlikely to retake Sala Phou Khoun without reinforcements.

The North Vietnamese resumed shelling of Bouam Long, north of the Plaine des Jarres, on 8 January, and government defenders have sighted company-sized enemy units advancing on the base from the west. Intercepted messages indicate that two more 130-mm. guns have been moved within range of Bouam Long.

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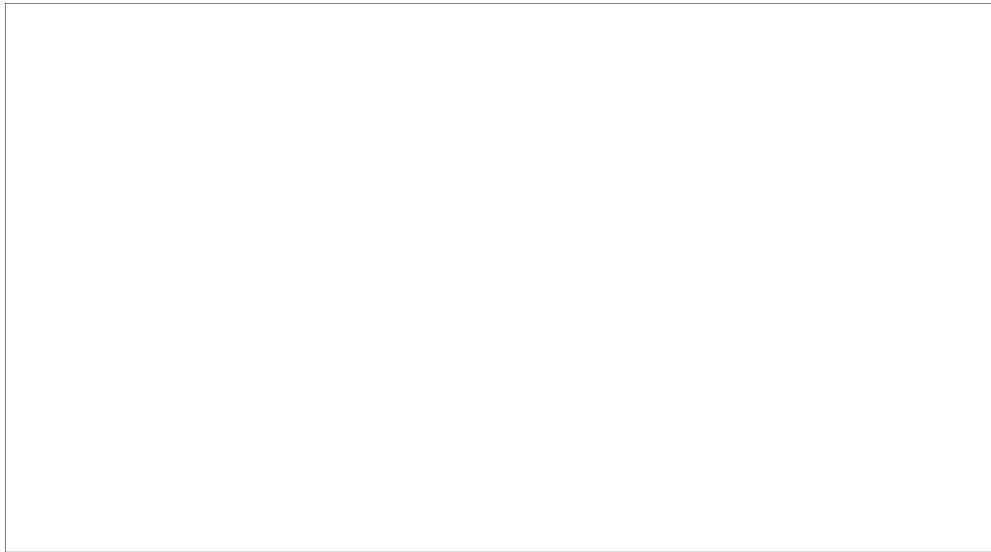
CAMBODIA

A moderate upsurge in insurgent offensive activity began about 1 January. According to an intercepted Khmer Communist message, it is to continue for at least another week. Most of the activity has been along the roads south of Phnom Penh and on the western and northeastern edges of the capital's defense perimeter. The Cambodian Army has taken some fairly heavy casualties in a few engagements, but it does not appear in immediate danger of losing any important positions.

The military situation has become essentially a stalemate. We see little likelihood of any significant change until Hanoi has had time to assess its position following a cease-fire in South Vietnam. Even then the prospects for an end to the fighting will still be clouded by a number of factors, including the inherent instability of the Lon Nol government and incipient divisions among the insurgents. These factors are examined in greater detail at Annex.



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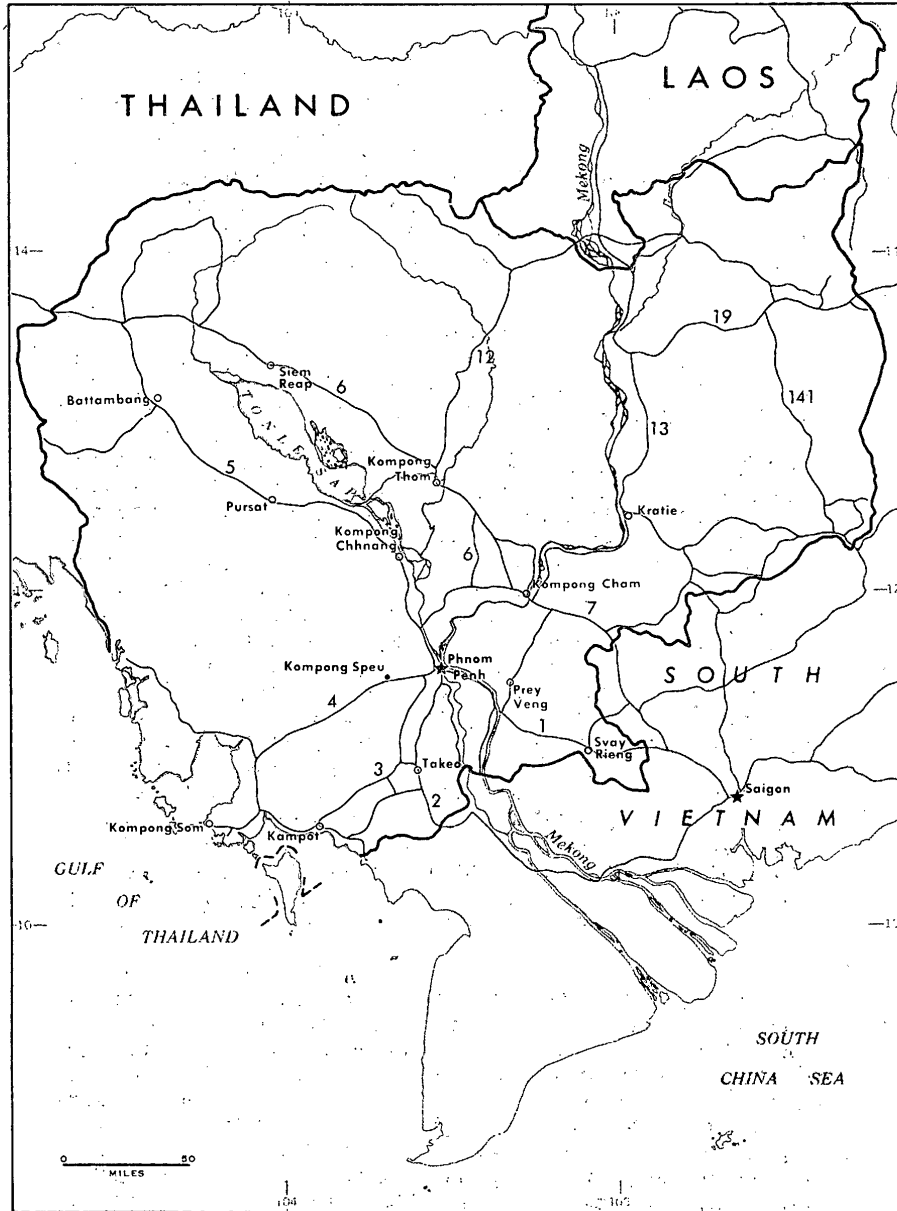
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CAMBODIA



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*FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY***CAMBODIA MARKS TIME**

Cambodia, the last of the Indochinese states to become directly involved in the war, faces immense problems in resolving its share of the conflict. As things now stand, a wide political gulf separates the Lon Nol government and the Khmer Communists and efforts to bridge it will be difficult. The Cambodian Army, while capable of containing the insurgent military threat, does not appear ready or able to regain the initiative on the battlefield and recover the large amount of countryside lost during the past two years. Strong external pressure may eventually be required to break the stalemate and force the two sides into serious political negotiations. In the meantime, the shape of things to come is clouded by the inherent instability and disunity of the Phnom Penh regime and by the complicated but obscure relationships and objectives on the insurgent side.

Military Stalemate

With the return of most Vietnamese Communist units to South Vietnam during the past year, the struggle in Cambodia has become much more a civil war--a development which in itself makes a settlement more difficult to reach. In the past, Lon Nol has consistently taken the view that most Khmer insurgents are misguided patriots who can be expected to rally to Phnom Penh once Vietnamese Communist forces have been withdrawn. Events may be forcing Lon Nol to back away from this dubious assessment. With the president's apparently reluctant approval, the government is now attempting for the first time to open a high-level dialogue with the insurgents. So far there has been no evidence that the insurgents are ready to respond positively to such probing. Their propaganda continues to oppose any compromise with the Lon Nol government regardless of the nature of settlement prospects in Vietnam and Laos. This attitude has been adopted in large part to accommodate the North Vietnamese, who would prefer to see continued fighting in Cambodia until their own interests in South Vietnam are nailed down.

The insurgents' hard line is also based on their favorable position in the Cambodian countryside. They dominate most of the territory east of the Mekong and north of the Tonle Sap and know that the Cambodian Army cannot readily force them out of most areas they choose to defend. Moreover, the insurgents have begun to demonstrate that they no longer need rely on the Vietnamese Communists to do

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their fighting. Over the past few months their forces have shown a growing ability to organize and coordinate tactical operations over large areas. Insurgent troops have been largely responsible for the road interdiction campaigns that continue to threaten the supply system to the Cambodian capital. In most cases, these actions are now carried out with only a minimum of assistance from elements of the few Vietnamese Communist units remaining in the country, but the insurgents continue to rely on Peking and Hanoi for most of their military supplies and equipment.

The gradual growth in insurgent military capability is alarming when compared with the government's own uninspired combat performance. Although increasingly better armed and trained than it was in March 1970, the Cambodian Army has lost the enthusiasm and dedication it demonstrated during the early days of the war. One of the few bright spots in the present picture is the effort of Major General Sosthene Fernandez, the recently appointed chief of staff, to do something about the poor leadership, corruption and lack of discipline that plague the army. Any fundamental turnaround in the army's morale and effectiveness, however, will be slow in coming. Since the disastrous collapse a year ago of the large-scale "Chenla II" operation to open Route 6--Phnom Penh's worst defeat of the war--the government has made few vigorous attempts to regain lost ground. If past performance is any indication, the army will remain indefinitely in a defensive posture with the bulk of its forces deployed around population centers and major communication lines.

Political Question Marks on the Government Side

The government's lackluster direction of the war has been paralleled by its disappointing political performance. The increasingly isolated Lon Nol has been unable to sustain the broad confidence and respect he enjoyed during the first year of his rule--a fact demonstrated by his narrow victory in last year's presidential election. His reluctance to share authority or modify his arbitrary style has sent former backers like Sirik Matak to the political sidelines and dashed hopes for a unified, broadly based government. At the moment, the machinations of Lon Nol's younger brother, Brigadier General Lon Non, are adding to the political malaise in Phnom Penh. Since Lon Non acquired a cabinet position when the present government was formed last October, he has tried to extend his control over

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governmental affairs--with the apparent approval of Lon Nol. His efforts to undercut the positions of two key government figures, First Minister Hang Thun Hak and General Fernandez, have already impaired their effectiveness.

Despite the rising level of political discontent, Lon Nol's would-be rivals remain disunited and lack an effective base of political or military support. In these circumstances, the president's health, rather than political opposition, may be the key to the current government's life expectancy.



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There are still no logical inheritors of Lon Nol's mantle in sight.

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And for the Opposition

Phnom Penh's political problems and uncertainties may be dwarfed by those existing in the insurgent camp. In any strict sense, the term "Khmer Communist" does not accurately describe the indigenous forces operating under the banner of Sihanouk's Peking-based "Royal Government of National Union." The insurgent movement includes the "Khmer Rumdoh"--non-Communist Cambodians who opposed Sihanouk's ouster in March 1970--and "Khmer Rouge"--left-wing but nationalist-oriented elements who were in opposition to Sihanouk before his removal. The third, and now probably most important faction, is made up of members and followers of the shadowy Cambodian Communist Party. This group is largely made up of those Cambodians who took up residence in North Vietnam at the time of the 1954 Geneva settlement and who have been returning over the past two years to assume prominent positions in the expanding insurgent infrastructure. The insurgent forces allegedly are commanded by three "ministers" of Sihanouk's rump government, Khieu Samphan, Hu Nim, and Hou Youn--all of whom were in political opposition to Sihanouk until the late 1960s, when they disappeared. At that time, they were widely believed to have been executed by Sihanouk.

[redacted] a basic nationalist-Communist cleavage within the insurgent movement. This is best reflected in Peking where Sihanouk and his small royalist entourage maintain

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what appear to be difficult and uncomfortable relations with the Khmer Communist members of the exile government. The apparent leader of the latter group is Ieng Sary, who has a history of leftist activity in Phnom Penh in the 1960s. He then dropped out of sight for several years and finally surfaced in Peking in 1971 as "special envoy from the interior." The treatment and publicity he has received indicate that the Communists expect him eventually to play an important political role in Cambodia.

Sihanouk's future undoubtedly poses the major political problem for the insurgent movement. From all accounts, Sihanouk definitely expects to return to his homeland and serve as chief of state presiding over a coalition regime which includes the Communists. Although the Khmer Communists must appreciate his skills as a propagandist, his ability to attract diplomatic support, and his residual following among the Cambodian peasantry, they must harbor considerable reservation about allowing him to return to Cambodia in any position of real or potential power. Such a reservation is one point of possible common ground between the insurgents and the Lon Nol government, which is adamantly opposed to any solution that would bring Sihanouk back to Cambodia. A political comeback for Sihanouk would be further complicated by the murky status of his relationships with widely divergent Communist movements--the Khmers, the Vietnamese, and the Chinese. (Moscow, through its continuing but superficial support for the Lon Nol government, stands to be the odd man out on the Communist side in any serious deliberations over Cambodia's future.)

Peking has supported and probably will continue to back Sihanouk because of his unswerving regard for the Chinese as Cambodia's chief benefactor and protector and because Sihanouk would represent a hedge against undue North Vietnamese influence over Cambodia. Hanoi is probably less enthusiastic. The Vietnamese Communists have been primarily responsible for training the Khmer insurgent forces, and until recently they have borne the brunt of the fighting. The triumphant return of a Sihanouk openly pointing to his relationship to Peking as a guarantee against Vietnamese encroachment would offer Hanoi little return on this substantial investment.

During the past year, the situation in Cambodia has increasingly taken on the overtones of

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stalemate. Consequently, all parties concerned may now consider that an end to the Cambodian conflict will eventually require some form of compromise between the existing regime in Phnom Penh and a Communist-dominated insurgency. Until the key question of Sihanouk's role in a political settlement can be thrashed out within the insurgent camp and in Phnom Penh, Hanoi, and Peking, however, it may be easier to go on fighting.

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