



The President's Daily Brief

May 20, 1975

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LAOS

Communist Deputy Prime Minister Phoumi Vongvichit seems to be advocating a "go-slow" approach to the communist-inspired protest demonstrations that have been sweeping Vientiane and other major non-communist urban areas.

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[redacted] Phoumi [redacted] is generally acknowledged to be relatively moderate and more a nationalist than doctrinaire communist-- [redacted] the May 9 demonstration against the US embassy "went too far." Actions such as ripping down the American flag, [redacted] "alienate people."

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[redacted] the protest movement must not set off mass panic and "counterprotests."

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On the issue of the American presence in Laos, [redacted] the US embassy to continue to exercise the usual diplomatic functions, but its role in Lao affairs must be reduced to that played by "other missions."

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[redacted] the Lao communists "could not afford" to have US economic and military assistance terminated until Laos was "self-sufficient" because aid from other sources is inadequate. In the interim, all assistance agreements "with conditions" would have to be abrogated.

Phoumi [redacted] intends to renegotiate the 1951 aid agreement with the US as soon as possible and, while negotiations are under way, students and other activist groups should resume demonstrations to "soften up the opposition."

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[redacted] the situation in the coalition administration in the wake of the recent rightist resignations [redacted]

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[redacted] would be "imprudent" to demand the ouster of too many bureaucrats now because the communists do not have enough trained personnel to replace them. [redacted]

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[redacted] the "tasks" ahead include the establishment of a new national assembly, a new permanent cabinet, and a possible expansion of the Joint National Political Council.

(continued)



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Sanan Soutichak, a member of the Lao communist central committee, has been urging stronger and more violent action by demonstrators against non-communists of all stripes and, particularly, against the US. He has reportedly decided that the communists must move quickly to establish total political control or risk losing valuable momentum. His views may well reflect those of Lao communist leaders in Sam Neua.

* * *

Lao communist troops may be planning to follow yesterday's occupation of Pakse with similar moves against other former rightist strongholds in southern and central Laos. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] communist forces are moving toward Savannakhet, and have already arrived in several smaller towns in the Lao panhandle. A recent intercepted message indicates that, at least in south Laos, the North Vietnamese are prepared to provide the necessary logistic support for whatever military moves the Lao communists have planned.

In northern Laos, communist and pro-communist neutralist forces have apparently occupied a number of positions in the Long Tieng area which were formerly defended by General Vang Pao and his Meo tribesmen. The communists have also closed the only overland route out of Long Tieng, apparently in an effort to block a major migration by the Meo southward to the Thai border.

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[REDACTED] at Savannakhet [REDACTED] demonstrators had seized two of the 12 Americans previously held under loose house arrest. US chargé Chapman has informed senior Lao officials in Vientiane of the development and is hopeful that Interior Minister Pheng Phongsavan and his deputy will travel to Savannakhet today to negotiate with the demonstrators.

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NORTH KOREA

Pyongyang has apparently reopened its campaign to secure direct talks with the US on Korean military issues.

In two very unusual contacts last week, North Korean officials asked American diplomats at the UN and in Kinshasa bold questions about US plans for the post-Vietnam era in Asia and made the standard demand for withdrawal of US troops from South Korea.

There was a round of similar "diplomatic" approaches last fall. North Korea had earlier tried to engage the US government in bilateral dealings by sending letters addressed to the US Congress, one in 1973 and another in 1974--both delivered via the Romanians. Pyongyang has also taken occasional soundings of Romanian and Indonesian willingness to act as intermediaries in secret talks.

North Korea is probably desires to probe US willingness to go over the heads of the South Koreans in dealing with the North. Direct Pyongyang-Washington talks, under most foreseeable circumstances, would be a psychological blow to a South Korea already shaken by events in Indochina.

Pyongyang probably also reasons that contact with the US--or even publicized attempts at contact--would enhance its carefully cultivated image of reasonableness prior to consideration of the Korean issue in the UN General Assembly this fall.

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LEBANON

Lebanese President Franjyah and Palestine Liberation Organization chairman Arafat on May 14 reached agreement on measures to reduce the likelihood of clashes between the fedayeen and militia of the right-wing Christian political parties.

This accord is designed to supplement the April 16 cease-fire that ended four days of fighting in Beirut. Reportedly reached in an "atmosphere of understanding," it will reinforce the recent inclination of the Lebanese army and the major fedayeen groups to stay out of disputes started by the Christian militia and radical fedayeen. The agreement will not, however, effectively restrain the parties primarily responsible for the disturbances last month. Franjyah has only limited control over the Phalangists; Arafat still less over the fedayeen "rejectionists."

Although there have been no significant violations of the cease-fire, the situation is tense and violence could recur at any time. The government security forces--never strong--are now impotent as a result of Prime Minister Sulh's embittered resignation late last week. In his resignation speech, Sulh blamed the Phalangists for the recent fighting and called for an expanded Muslim role in government, a dilution of the power of the army's predominantly Christian officer corps, and full Lebanese support of the Palestinians, whatever the consequences.

Sulh's endorsement of these long-time Muslim and leftist goals increases the chances for renewed fighting between Christians and Muslims. His demands will not prompt Franjyah to make any basic changes in Lebanon's delicately balanced system of government, but will make it more difficult for the president to find an able prime minister.

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USSR



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[redacted] nine variable-sweep wing Backfire bombers at Poltava, an operational Long Range Aviation base in the southwestern USSR. The plane is now in series production, and more than half of those to be produced--an estimated 400 aircraft by 1985--will go to air force units. The balance will be assigned to naval aviation.

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The aircraft is the first new Soviet bomber in more than a decade. [redacted]

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[redacted] Depending on armament and flight profile, the Backfire has an estimated combat radius of over 3,000 miles. From Poltava, it could strike anywhere in Europe or the Middle East.

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The Backfire can carry bombs, air-to-surface missiles, or both. Its improved capability for low-altitude penetration gives it a better chance of delivering these weapons than the older TU-16 and TU-22 intermediate range bombers, some of which it is expected to replace. During a bombing exercise last week over East Germany, the aircraft flew under 1,000 feet during a tactical run.

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GREECE-TURKEY

The Greek and Turkish foreign ministers concluded three days of talks in Rome yesterday with a noncommittal communiqué stating that "in an atmosphere of good will" they had made a first study of the text to be submitted to the International Court of Justice on their conflicting claims to mineral resources in the Aegean.

The Turkish foreign minister later announced that a summit meeting had been arranged between Greek Prime Minister Karamanlis and Turkish Prime Minister Demirel, which will take place during the NATO meetings in Brussels at the end of the month.

The initial stages of the talks did not go well. Greek Deputy Foreign Minister Stavropoulos told the US embassy that the Turks staked out their maximum bargaining position on both Cyprus and the Aegean. The Greeks could not tell if this was a negotiating tactic to be followed by concessions or whether the Turks planned to hold closely to their opening position in the belief that they were negotiating from strength, and had the alternative of military action to attain their objectives if bilateral negotiations broke down.

Despite the overall lack of progress at the talks, the Turks argued for an optimistic "flamboyant" communiqué. The Greeks believe this was an attempt to influence the debate then underway in the US Senate on the Turkish military aid cutoff.

*Second Stage of CSS-X-4
At Wu-chai Launch Site*

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NOTES

The Chinese may soon be able to launch their 7,000-nautical-mile CSS-X-4 ICBM from a silo.

[redacted] the recently completed developmental silo at Wu-chai was in the final phases of facility check-out. A test from the Wu-chai silo in the near future would involve some risk. The CSS-X-4 apparently has failed in all but the first of its six test flights from the surface launch site at Shuang-cheng-tzu. As a space launch vehicle, the CSS-X-4 could place about 5,000 pounds into a near-earth orbit.

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The Chinese have resumed preparations for nuclear testing at the Lop Nor atmospheric test site and the nearby underground test area in northwest China.

[redacted] preparation of the atmospheric test site apparently in the mid-to-late stages of construction. The Chinese should be ready to conduct a test by midyear. This test will be of a low-yield device emplaced in a building, thus giving more precise performance data than is possible in an air drop test. Preparations for the underground test are under way at the tunnel where the Chinese conducted their only underground test in 1969. The next test probably will not occur before late this year.

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The Portuguese Armed Forces Movement's 240-man general assembly met yesterday to consider proposals that would preclude political parties from playing any meaningful role. The proposals call for establishing "direct links between the military and the people."

One report presented to the assembly discounted the result of the constituent assembly election and warned that the election increased dissension and jeopardized the "alliance of the people and the Armed Forces Movement." It suggests these ties can be renewed through residents' and workers' committees. The report apparently focuses its criticism on the Socialist Party. Socialist Party leaders Soares and Zinha drove to the assembly meeting last night and demanded to speak with members of the Revolutionary Council.

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