



The President's Daily Brief

7 January 1971

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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

There are some signs that the Communists plan a new round of attacks in South Vietnam in the middle of this month, especially in the northern provinces. *(Page 1)*

In Laos, government irregulars have ended their harassing operation against Ban Ban. *(Page 2)*

The Soviets appear to have started only one SA-5 complex during 1970. *(Page 3)*

At Annex, we appraise the attitude of the Egyptian military as it affects the Sadat regime's approach to the Jarring talks.

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SOUTH VIETNAM

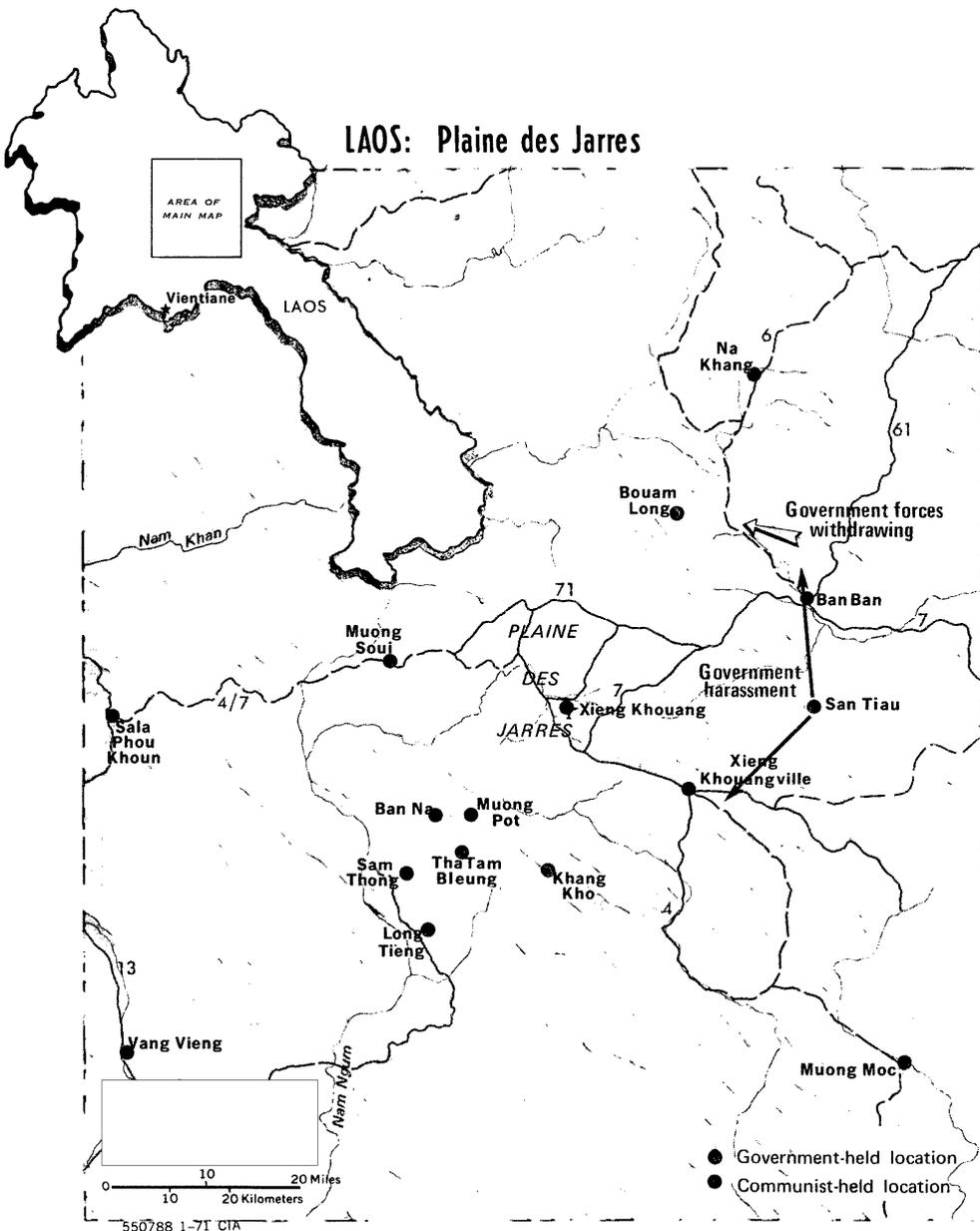
There are signs that the Communists plan a new round of attacks in mid-January, especially in the northern half of the country. Intercepts show that several North Vietnamese infantry and artillery units in the eastern DMZ area and in the northern provinces of Thua Thien and Quang Nam are either combat-ready or are preparing for tactical operations.



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The projected attacks, while of greater scope than those of the past several months, will probably be for the most part the familiar mixture of shellings, small-scale ground attacks, and terrorism. In the southern part of the country, the contemplated enemy offensive seems to be on a much more restricted scale than in the north, presumably because operations in Cambodia have forced the Communists to curtail their efforts around Saigon and in the delta.



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LAOS

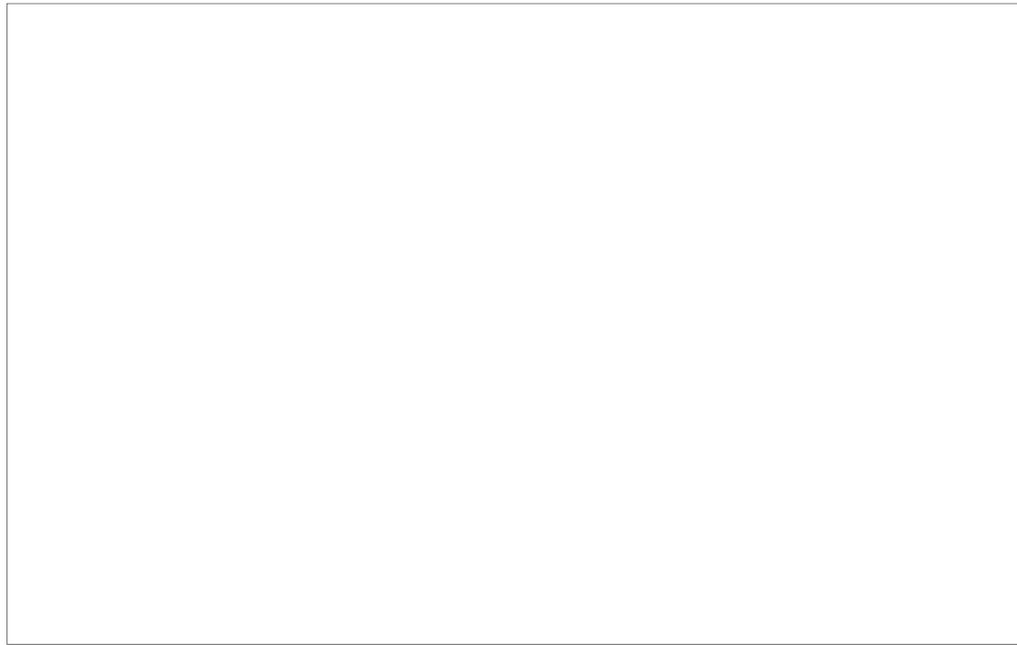
Government irregulars have terminated their six-week harassing operation against Ban Ban and have withdrawn from the immediate area. The four battalions south of Ban Ban will undertake other harassing missions, while the three to the north are now returning to the vicinity of Bouam Long.

The operation was beset by bad weather, lackluster leadership, and unavoidable delays which resulted in the loss of surprise. It failed to achieve a primary objective--penetrating the Ban Ban Valley to harass enemy logistic operations there--but did destroy small stockpiles nearby. The cost in casualties was relatively light.

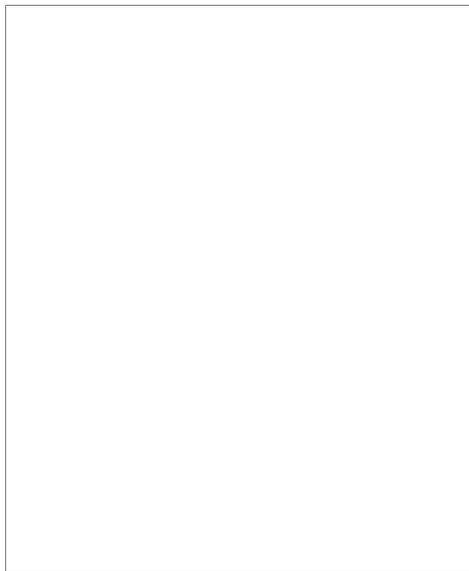
The operation, which forced the Communists to divert a North Vietnamese battalion from the western Plaine des Jarres to the defense of Ban Ban, did help to keep the North Vietnamese away from the irregular bases on the Plaine's western edge. The Communists were unable to mount any substantial offensive toward Long Tieng even though they were clearly aware of the opportunities afforded by the depletion of government strength in the region.

The longer term consequences of the Ban Ban operation are less clear. Its principal effect may have been to delay an anticipated enemy push toward Long Tieng. The withdrawal from the Plaine last summer of the North Vietnamese 312th Division and the opening of preliminary talks between the Lao Communists and the government may have meant that Hanoi preferred to defer a major offensive in north Laos this year. There are indications, however, that the 312th may now be returning, possibly even in reaction to the Ban Ban operation. Its return would increase the possibility of a repetition of last year's Communist offensive against Long Tieng.

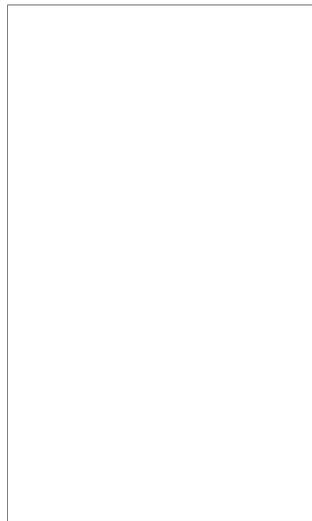
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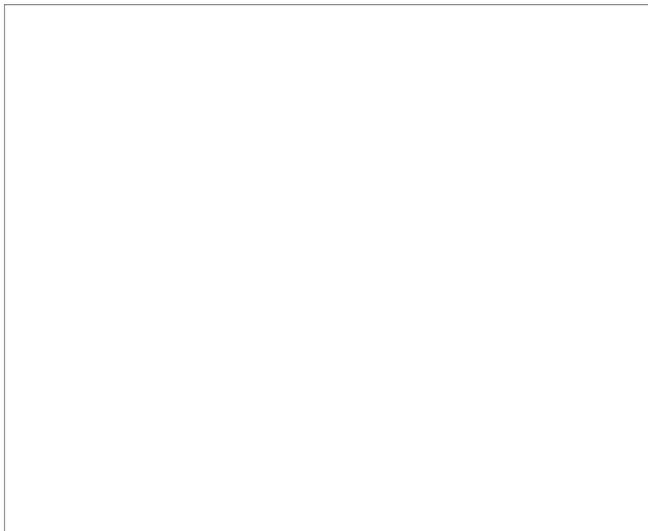


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USSR

Satellite photography of most of the areas where additional SA-5 (long-range surface-to-air missile at one time known as the "Tallinn system") site construction had been expected shows only one new complex started during 1970.



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EGYPT AND THE JARRING TALKS

The reactivation of the mission of UN negotiator Jarring provides another breathing space in the dead-locked situation in the Middle East but does not significantly ameliorate the immediate problems confronting the Egyptian regime. In facing these problems, the Sadat regime will be influenced to a great degree by the attitudes of the military, since the military virtually alone possess the means to force change in the country's leadership.

A precise reading of the attitudes of the various segments of Egyptian society toward the struggle with Israel and the cease-fire is difficult. The problem is compounded when attempting to assess the mood of the armed forces because of the isolation of military personnel from Western observers.

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Thus, it is likely that Egyptian policy over the next few months will be influenced by the more militant attitudes within the armed forces, or at least by anxiety among Sadat and his immediate advisers that elements

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in the military might use any "blunder" in the negotiations to undercut the regime. Additionally, Sadat may feel compelled to prove he is as militant as Nasir was in opposition to Israel. This will tend to make Egyptian policy less than forthcoming and add to the already formidable problems facing Jarring.

To arm itself psychologically on both the diplomatic and the domestic fronts, the Sadat regime is devoting a large volume of rhetoric to the "battle" with Israel. Echoing some of Nasir's pronouncements, Sadat recently has been stressing the need for military and civilian preparedness.

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Sadat has also attempted privately to convince us that he is serious when he declares publicly that Egypt will not agree to extend the cease-fire unless "there is a definite timetable for withdrawal" of Israeli forces.

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There is, nonetheless, little sign at this point that Sadat and company are becoming prisoners of their own posturing in the way that Nasir did before the 1967 war. At the moment, the sound and fury amounts largely to pressure tactics. Without something it can sell as "progress," however, the Egyptian leadership is still capable of trapping itself into a situation where any action, regardless of how obviously disastrous its ultimate result might be, would seem preferable to impotent passivity in the face of an unyielding Israel.

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