



The President's Daily Brief

1 March 1971

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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

[redacted] Laos [redacted] Vietnam [redacted] (Page 1) 50X1

Both sides have sustained fairly heavy losses in weekend actions in Cambodia. (Page 2)

A Soviet demarche records Moscow's concern over allied activity in Laos and possible action against North Vietnam. (Page 3)

Jordan [redacted] (Page 4) 50X1

The Africans have reacted calmly to Britain's decision to sell helicopters to South Africa. (Page 5)

[redacted] Soviet [redacted] Cuba [redacted] (Page 6) 50X1

Operation LAM SON 719 Situation Map

← General location of ARVN forces



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VIETNAM-LAOS

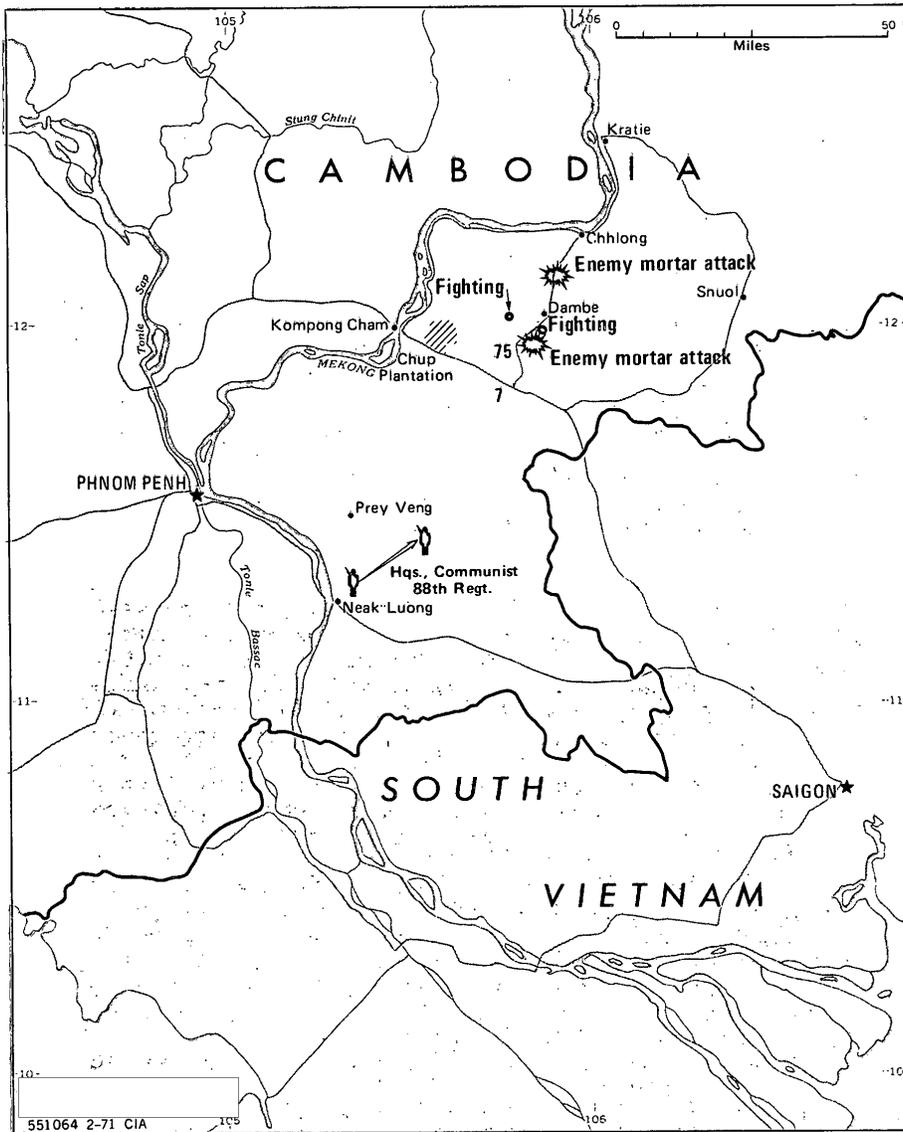
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The main tactical goal of a major North Vietnamese counterattack is control of the crossroads at Ban Dong, where Routes 9 and 92 intersect. Intercepts of the past few days continue to reflect enemy plans to launch assaults against the crossroads and nearby hills that command the two routes. On 27 February, for example, an intercepted North Vietnamese message reported that Communist forces were in the process of encircling the area. The message included orders, said to be straight from Hanoi, that the main ARVN force at Ban Dong was to be cut off, surrounded, and destroyed.



Fighting has slackened in the high ground north of Route 9, where ARVN airborne and ranger positions have borne the brunt of the enemy thrust. The situation is fluid, however, and control of Hill 31 is uncertain. Losses are heavy on both sides. Enemy tanks have been spotted around Hill 30 and a Communist regiment is not far from another strongpoint farther east.

South toward Muong Nong, Communist resistance continues to ebb and flow, although it generally has stiffened over the past few weeks, and there are signs that sharp fighting may break out soon. Intercepts of the last several days suggest that North Vietnamese infantry and artillery are maneuvering to step up pressure on South Vietnamese field positions; one unit radioed on 27 February that it had encircled an ARVN strongpoint some ten miles northeast of Muong Nong.



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CAMBODIA

Fairly heavy losses were sustained by both sides in weekend actions in central Kompong Cham Province. Most of the fighting occurred in the vicinity of the village of Dambe on Route 75. The main encounter involved a clash between a South Vietnamese ranger battalion and a battalion of enemy troops just south of the village on 26 February. The rangers claimed 250 enemy killed, primarily as a result of air strikes. On the same day, two heavy enemy mortar barrages near Dambe killed several South Vietnamese soldiers, wounded 123, and destroyed seven vehicles. There were several actions around Dambe again on 27 February but casualties on both sides were lighter.

To the east, Communist harassing attacks were reported against South Vietnamese positions near Snuol, in southern Kratie Province, but casualties were light. A possible Communist threat to the South Vietnamese base at Neak Luong, southeast of Phnom Penh, apparently has eased. Direction finding shows that the headquarters of the Communist 88th Regiment, which was located near the base on 25 February, has returned to its normal area of operations east of Prey Veng city.

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USSR-US-INDOCHINA

Deputy Foreign Minister Kuznetsov has presented Ambassador Beam with an oral demarche on the allied incursion into Laos. Kuznetsov underscored the seriousness with which the USSR views allied activity in Laos, and warned against any action aimed directly at North Vietnam. In addition, Kuznetsov raised the specter of Chinese intervention by noting that "other members" of the socialist commonwealth "would not remain indifferent."

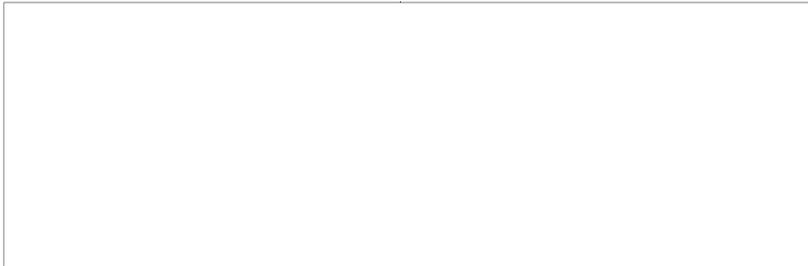
The manner in which the demarche was made suggests that Moscow does not really expect the US to support an allied incursion into North Vietnam. Press speculation about such a possibility and the incursions into Laos and Cambodia, however, have raised some doubts in the Soviet Union and Moscow wants to be firmly on record against such a move.

Kuznetsov also expressed his government's doubts about carrying on negotiations with Washington in the face of US activities in Indochina.

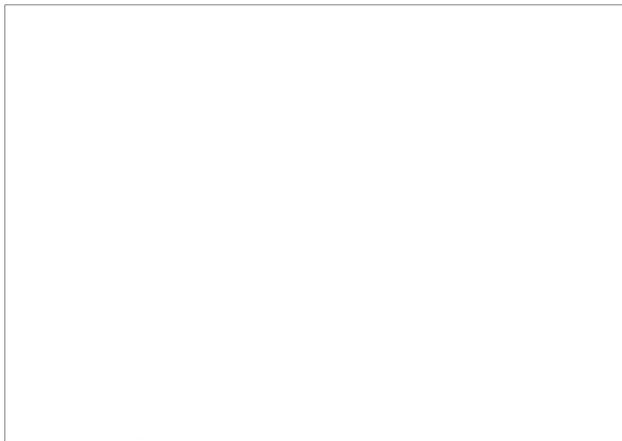
The Russians made similar statements last year in the wake of the US incursion into Cambodia and again in December after the US increased the bombing of North Vietnam. There have been no indications thus far, however, that the Soviets actually intend to use current US activity in Indochina as an excuse to stall any ongoing negotiations with the US.

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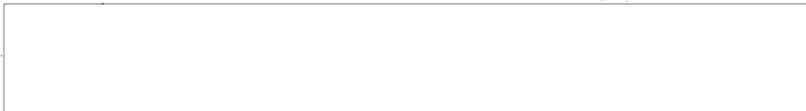
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UK-AFRICA

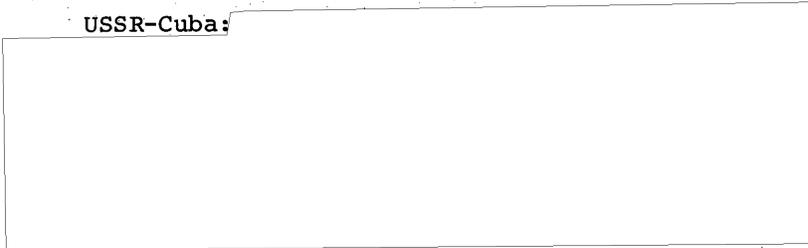
African reaction to the Heath government's announcement that it will sell helicopters to South Africa has been muted. Even Tanzania and Zambia, which led the opposition to such sales, have decided not to react strongly at this time. They recognize that they cannot bring much leverage to bear on the British, and that precipitate action would exhaust what little influence they have. The Organization of African Unity foreign ministers meeting now in Addis Ababa can be expected to issue a strongly worded denunciation, but most black African Commonwealth states are waiting to see if there will be further sales.

The British argue that they are obliged to sell seven Wasp antisubmarine helicopters and spare parts under a 1955 agreement that provides for joint British - South African defense of the sea lanes around the Cape of Good Hope. London also views the sale of maritime arms to South Africa as a way of offsetting a growing Soviet presence in the Indian Ocean. Nevertheless, the British will probably gauge the wind carefully before deciding whether to sell Pretoria more naval equipment.

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