



The President's Daily Brief

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11 December 1971

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

11 December 1971

PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

New Delhi has ignored Pakistan's call for a cease-fire in the East and Indian forces are pressing the attack on Dacca. (Page 1)

[redacted] Peking [redacted]
[redacted] Indochina. (Page 3)

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Another North Vietnamese Army regiment is preparing to move to South Vietnam. (Page 4)

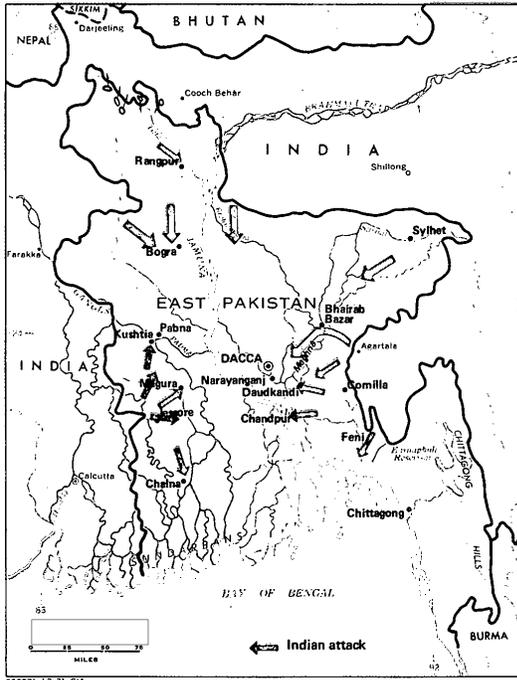
The USSR [redacted] Japan [redacted]
[redacted] (Page 4)

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The inter-German and inter-Berlin agreements are to be initialed today. (Page 4)

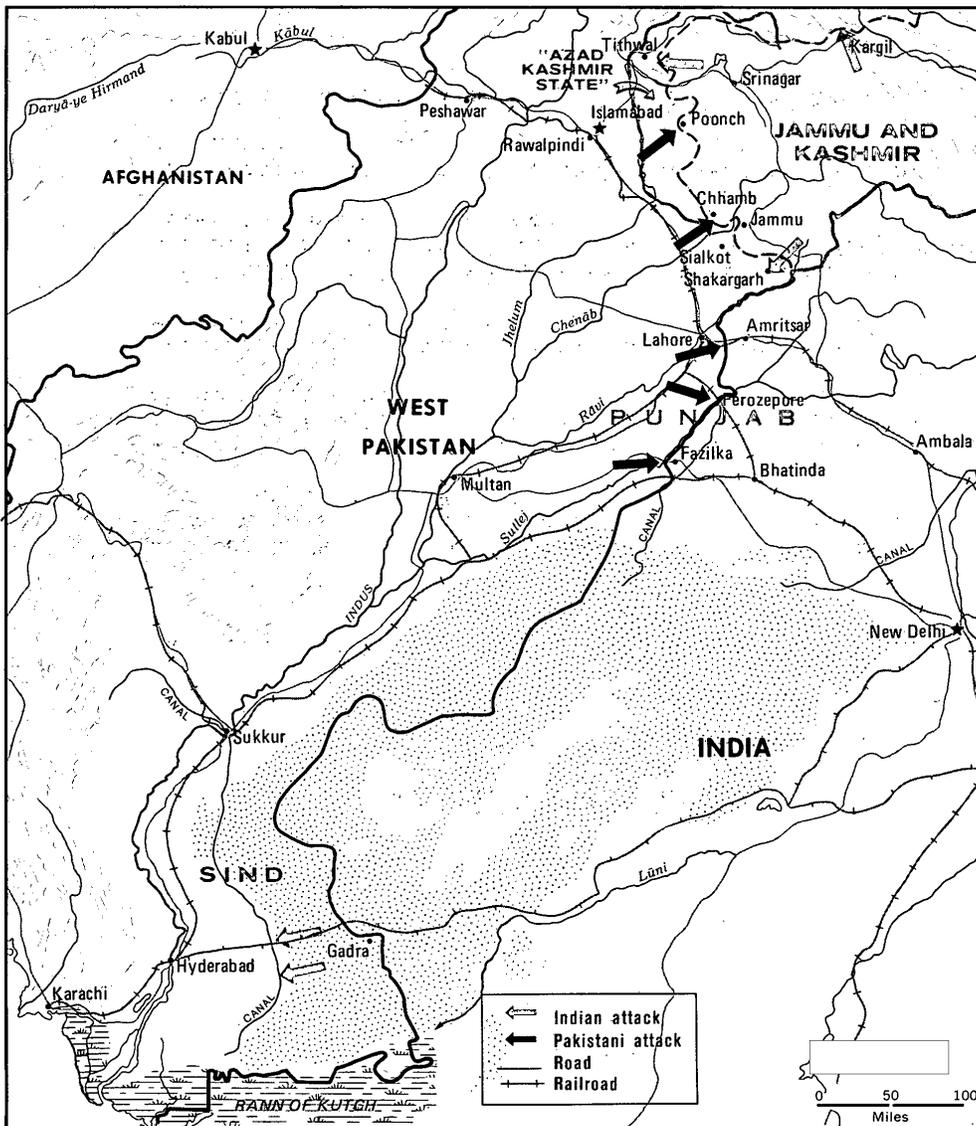
At Annex we discuss the Communist threat to Laos.

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PAKISTAN

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INDIA-PAKISTAN

The Indians are pressing their attack on Dacca. The Indian forces closest to the capital, those approaching from the east, control most of the Pakistani territory up to the Meghna River. The Indians have crossed the Meghna at Bhairab Bazar upstream from Dacca and have advanced to within 36 miles of the city. They are apparently meeting little resistance and claim that only the many small rivers in the area are blocking their way. The retreating Pakistanis are said to have destroyed many bridges.

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So far the Pakistani Army in the Dacca area has not shown much inclination to prepare for a last-ditch stand. [REDACTED]

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Some Pakistani troops around Dacca are said to have been discarding their uniforms and donning civilian clothes. Some troops have made their way to port towns below Dacca only to find that Indian domination of the Bay of Bengal and the main river routes has closed off the possibility of escape by sea.

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Both sides continue to claim successes in the western front but neither appears to have made any important gains. In northern Kashmir, the Pakistanis say they have beaten back Indian counterattacks in the Kargil and Tithwal areas. They also claim to be gaining some ground amid heavy fighting in Indian territory near Chhamb. In the Sialkot sector the Indians are reported to have the initiative, and farther south, the Indians claim they have captured over 1,200 square miles in the sparsely populated Sind area. [REDACTED]

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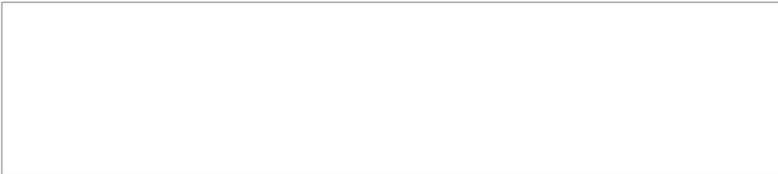
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Pakistan has withdrawn a proposal for an immediate cease-fire and the transfer of political power in East Pakistan, replacing it with another

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offer which does not provide for an immediate political settlement. The new proposal, which is being submitted to UN Secretary General Thant, calls for an immediate cease-fire in the East and guarantees for the safety of Pakistani armed forces and other non-Bengalis in the province. The message to Thant makes it clear that Pakistan is not proposing a surrender by its armed forces. According to Pakistani Foreign Secretary Sultan Khan, Islamabad would also accept a cease-fire on the western front, on the basis of the recently passed UN General Assembly resolution or under the general terms of a cease-fire and a stand-fast to be observed by UN representatives. Negotiations for settlement of the war, troop withdrawal, and "satisfaction of Bengali aspirations" would follow.

There has been no Indian response as yet, but at this juncture, with the Indians so close to a complete victory in the East, they are unlikely to accept a proposition that does not include a surrender and an immediate turnover of power to the Bengalis.



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Moscow, in an authoritative article in Pravda yesterday, expressed discomfiture about the results of the UN General Assembly debate and concern about the fact that the crisis has brought Peking and Washington together on a major international issue. The author attributed the defeat of the Soviet General Assembly resolution to the fact that some countries--i.e., China and the US--hope to gain from the conflict while others were merely duped.

Secretary General Thant has agreed to an Indian demand that the UN withdraw all of its personnel from East Pakistan and close its operations there. Assistant UN Secretary General Henry in Dacca believes that India made this demand in order to force the UN to deal with Bangla Desh authorities by breaking UN ties with Islamabad's officials in the province.

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COMMUNIST CHINA - INDOCHINA

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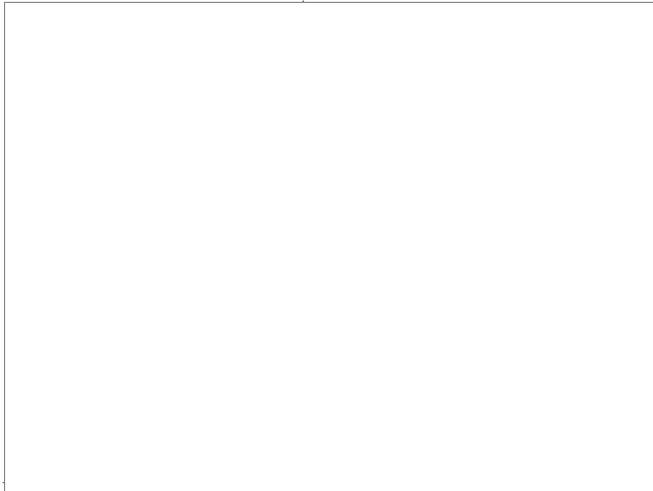
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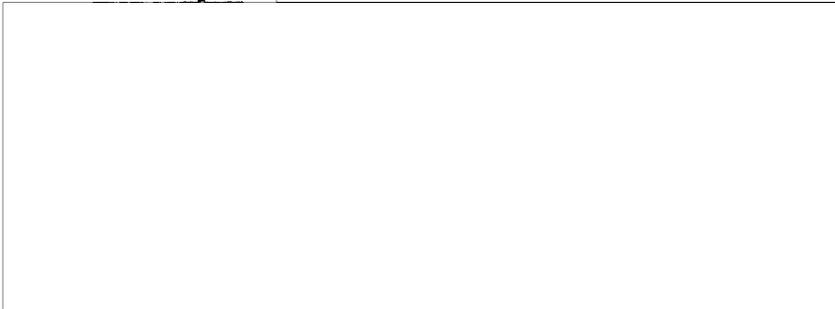
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NOTES

North Vietnam: Intercepts indicate that the North Vietnamese 304th Division is sending one of its regiments, the 24th, across the DMZ into Quang Tri Province. Small teams from the regiment have already conducted reconnaissance below the DMZ, and the regiment's main elements are scheduled to move south by next Thursday. We have no evidence that the rest of the division plans to move at this time. The 304th frequently rotates its three regiments in and out of Quang Tri to maintain pressure in this area, usually in the winter months. This movement would be in addition to the indications reported in The President's Daily Brief of 9 December that the 320th and possibly the 324B divisions are going south.

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USSR-Japan:



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West Germany - East Germany: According to both West and East German officials, the way has now been cleared for initialing the inter-German and inter-Berlin agreements today. The deadlock in the inter-Berlin talks concerning visits by West Berliners to East Berlin and East Germany was resolved yesterday.

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THE COMMUNIST THREAT TO LAOS

The Communist dry season offensive in Laos is getting under way. We believe that the North Vietnamese effort will be stronger this year, particularly in north Laos, where irregular forces under Vang Pao appear to be confronting a larger and stronger enemy force than ever before. In the south, enemy forces seem likely again to overrun the Bolovens Plateau, but we expect them to stop short of major attacks on the principal Mekong River towns.

Plans for the Plaine des Jarres

The North Vietnamese this year have deployed the largest force they have ever committed to the Plaine. In the past two months, Hanoi has sent at least 5,000, and perhaps as many as 10,000, new troops into north Laos. With the addition of these troops, we estimate that the enemy now has between 18,000 and 23,000 men near the Plaine des Jarres. Enemy combat strength around the Plaine now appears to include two divisions--the 312th and 316th--plus at least two independent infantry regiments. The North Vietnamese also have made a major supply push into north Laos, and they are improving and expanding their road network east of the Plaine.

In addition, there has been a significant increase in the enemy's firepower. Intercepted messages indicate that sixteen 130-mm. field guns were to be sent to north Laos in November. This weapon has not been used in the north before, and its 17-mile range outdistances the government's largest piece by some eight miles. The new weapon will be vulnerable to allied air attack, but the North Vietnamese are also increasing their antiaircraft strength.

The North Vietnamese build-up stems at least in part from a recognition that Vang Pao's forces are larger and better deployed and supported than they were two years ago, when the North Vietnamese drove them from the Plaine. The irregulars number some 6,800 men, including 2,800 Thais who are deployed in and around a network of fire support bases. The irregular positions have been carefully prepared with an eye to preventing the over-extension of supply lines and the wide dispersal of forces that contributed to an easy North Vietnamese victory over the irregulars in 1970. New artillery bases provide strong interlocking fire support to the mobile irregular units, another factor that was lacking in 1970.

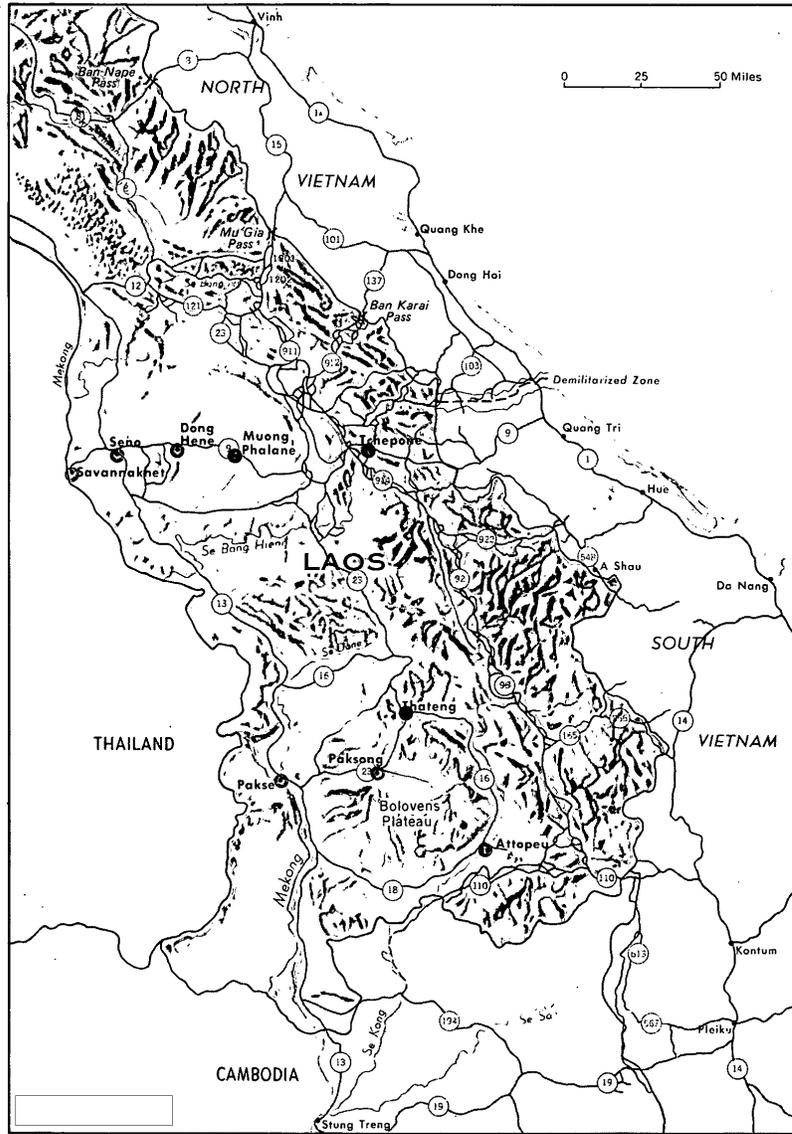
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Most government leaders doubt that all of the Plaine can be held, and in consequence a secondary line of defense has been prepared. In addition, there is a third line--the defensive strongpoints laid out in an arc around Long Tieng that blunted the Communist offensive last year.

If the North Vietnamese follow past practice, their offensive should begin next month. We do not believe that there is any current prospect of Lao peace talks that might delay it. The Communists have turned down all recent Lao Government initiatives to discuss a bombing halt and a cease-fire on the Plaine in preparation for neutralizing the area.

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If the North Vietnamese succeed in driving Vang Pao off the Plaine, we would expect them to undertake offensive operations to the southwest toward Long Tieng. In past thrusts toward that bastion, however, they have encountered difficulties in supplying their forces. The Communist drive in early 1970 ran out of steam on the threshold of Long Tieng, and during the last dry season they did not come as close. The magnitude of the North Vietnamese build-up for the coming campaign suggests that this season they may be willing to pay a higher price to take Long Tieng.

The War in South Laos

In south Laos the Communists' principal interest still is to protect and expand their lines of communication to South Vietnam and Cambodia. In past years their offensive efforts have been aimed largely at establishing buffer zones to keep government forces well away from the infiltration corridors.

As the need for more diverse routes to the south has grown, the Communists have pushed these buffer zones farther west. During the last dry season they made major gains in the Lao panhandle. In the central panhandle they made use of the forces they had deployed to counter the South Vietnamese Lam Son 719 operation to make a subsequent drive westward along Route 9 as far as the town of Dong Hene. The government regained some of this territory in the rainy season, but was stopped just west of Muong Phalane and has since been forced back almost to Dong Hene. Communist intercepts suggest that the enemy intends at the least to push through Dong Hene this year, and may attack Seno and the nearby training bases for irregular troops.

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Farther south, the North Vietnamese during the last dry season waged a determined and ultimately successful campaign to wrest control of the Bolovens Plateau from the government. In July, however, government forces managed to regain some portions of the western Bolovens and were later able to reopen Route 23 between the towns of Paksong and Pakse. This fall, irregular units have conducted operations aimed at disrupting the enemy's rear support areas just north of the Plateau. Fighting in these areas is now picking up, and there are indications that the North Vietnamese are reinforcing their units for a new campaign to regain the Plateau.

The government's gains during the past rainy season can largely be attributed to the fighting abilities and excellent materiel and advisory support of irregular units

These units will be spread thin if, as we expect, the Communists undertake offensives both along Route 9 and on the Bolovens. The North Vietnamese fought hard last year to capture the Plateau, and we expect an equally strong effort this year. They are likely to succeed, although government artillery and tactical air support will probably make the offensive costly. We do not believe, however, that the North Vietnamese have changed their basic objectives in south Laos to include wider territorial ambitions. Thus, the enemy is not likely to assume the risks involved in trying to take the major population centers along the Mekong such as Savannakhet or Pakse, although these areas are likely to be targets of harassing attacks.

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