



*The President's Daily Brief*

*27 December 1971*

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*Top Secret*



*FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY*

THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

27 December 1971

PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

The morale of irregular troops in Laos is faltering, and a serious gap has opened in the government's line defending Long Tieng. (Page 1)

The formation of a cabinet in Pakistan, and Indian efforts to establish order in Bangla Desh are discussed on Page 3.

[Redacted] Panamanian canal

[Redacted]

(Page 4)

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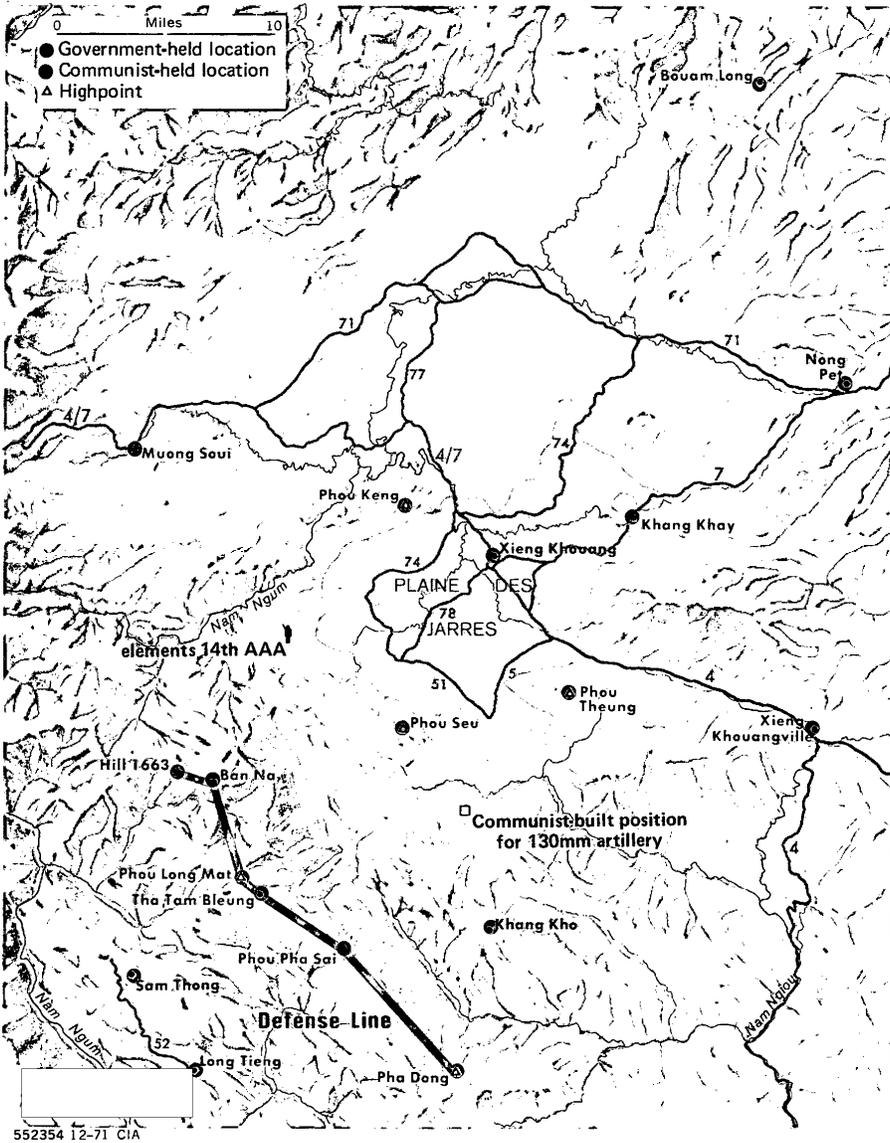
The Soviets [Redacted]

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### LAOS: PLAINE DES JARRES AREA



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## LAOS

A serious gap has been left in the government's defensive line southwest of the Plaine des Jarres. On Christmas day about 800 troops abandoned the base at Ban Na without a fight. Some of these men are filtering southward toward Phou Long Mat and Tha Tam Bleung and are being harassed by the enemy, while others are moving unopposed toward Sam Thong.

*Ban Na was to have been the northern anchor of the defensive line, and its abandonment indicates that Vang Pao is in jeopardy of losing control over the Meo forces driven from the Plaine last week. The apparent collapse of the morale of the troops from Ban Na may have been precipitated by the flight of almost 30,000 Meo dependents from the Long Tieng valley several days ago.*

*Ban Na's loss means that the battle for Long Tieng will be joined at close quarters sooner than the government expected. Intercepts indicated that elements of the North Vietnamese 316th Division were headed toward Ban Na prior to its abandonment, and one unit of the 14th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion now appears to be north of the area. Because Ban Na commands the infiltration routes into the Sam Thong and Long Tieng areas, it has figured prominently in the Communists' two previous campaigns.*

*Once again the struggle for Long Tieng will revolve around whether the government can reconstitute and reinforce its forces in time to counter the Communists, whose ability to move in troops and supplies quickly will be hampered by the rugged terrain southwest of the Plaine. Since the enemy launched its offensive, Vang Pao's force has been increased by 3,000 irregulars. Weighed against the effect of these reinforcements, however, are the loss of Meo morale and the recent withdrawal from Long Tieng of 1,400 troops for a brief period of rest.*

Increasing numbers of small enemy units are appearing in the valleys north and east of Long Tieng, but the Communists do not yet appear to be west of the Plaine in great strength. Enemy forces

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appear to have been sufficient, however, to have pressured the irregulars out of Khang Kho this weekend. Khang Kho is not far from an area where intercepts indicate the Communists are constructing positions for 130-mm. guns.

*The guns could not reach Long Tieng from this area, but they would be capable of attacking irregular defenses east of the main base.*

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PAKISTAN - INDIA - BANGLA DESH

The majority of the ten-man cabinet announced in Islamabad on 24 December is drawn from the left wing of Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party. Several ministers somewhat to the left of Bhutto seem to have been chosen because of their personal loyalty to him, rather than because of their ideology. Bhutto holds the most important portfolios himself.

Mohammad Rashid, the party's leading radical and Bhutto's main rival within the People's Party, heads the Social Welfare Ministry, but this may well be one area in which Bhutto had planned a somewhat radical program in any case. Bhutto also may have wanted to keep Rashid from the post of chief minister of the Punjab--Pakistan's most important province. For this position Bhutto favors a relatively conservative politician who has been one of his consistent supporters.

\* \* \*

[redacted] In-  
dian forces are confiscating weapons and in several parts of Bangla Desh are arresting those engaged in violence. Orders have been issued to collect Biharis--the non-Bengali minority--in separate colonies for their own protection.

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In addition to establishing order, the Indians want to get machinery started for the repatriation of the nearly 10 million Bengalis who took refuge in India. Although the repatriation is not scheduled to begin until 1 January, the Indians estimate that 250,000 people have already returned to Bangla Desh.

[redacted] some refugees who had repatriated themselves have been attempting to re-enter India. Indian forces were ordered to prevent this.

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PANAMA

The Panamanian canal

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The Panamanians are still being sticky on some jurisdictional issues. Agreement has not been reached, for example, on duration, compensation, and the amount of land which would be returned to Panama. Both Torrijos and his foreign minister have been devotees of a tough negotiating stance, and there are no indications that either regards the negotiations as having moved from a bargaining phase to a compromising stage. Nevertheless, the concessions thus far offered to Panama meet most of the Panamanian negotiating objectives and could be presented to the Panamanian people as a victory. The key to the decision is whether Torrijos believes that the US has been pushed to its ultimate position and that no further concessions will be forthcoming.

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Arab Confederation: Meetings of the chiefs of state of the Confederation of Arab Republics (Egypt, Syria, and Libya) in Cairo last week resulted in the naming of a confederal prime minister and cabinet, and the establishment of other bodies designed to strengthen economic and political ties among the three countries. President Sadat had been previously named chief of state of the confederation. At this meeting a Syrian was named premier, and a confederal parliamentary body was scheduled to convene in March. It will be a long time, if ever, before the confederation can become a truly effective political unit.

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