



The President's Daily Brief

26 January 1973

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

In South Vietnam Communist offensive activity still consists chiefly of light shellings, but indications persist that heavier fighting is planned before the cease-fire becomes effective. The South Vietnamese cabinet is discussing plans to counter the Communists after the cease-fire by strengthening Saigon's image as an economically and politically viable government. *(Page 1)*

Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma believes that an end to the fighting in Laos could be arranged by 12 February. He intends to go to India tomorrow where he will request greater Indian cooperation in settling the conflict and in supervising the eventual cease-fire. *(Page 3)*

New Soviet regulations, which require emigrants to reimburse the state for their education, apparently are in effect. *(Page 5)*

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SOUTH VIETNAM

Communist offensive activity as of 0530 EST-- including that directed against Bien Hoa and Da Nang air bases--still consists chiefly of light shellings, but indications persist that heavier fighting is planned before the cease-fire becomes effective.

Some Communist combat units may be waiting until nearer the time of the cease-fire to launch their attacks. This strategy apparently would be designed to drive people into Communist-controlled areas and reduce the time available to the South Vietnamese for counteraction.

There are additional indications of moves by Communist main force units which bring them closer to major population centers.

Although these movements may be a prelude to a last-minute enemy push, they could be simply the Communists' final effort to have their troops in a favorable location when the fighting stops.

* * *

On Tuesday, immediately after President Thieu had briefed his cabinet on the cease-fire agreement, its members met under Prime Minister Khiem to discuss plans to counter the Communists by strengthening Saigon's image as an economically and politically viable government.

When Khiem directed the ministers to complete their plans within the next two weeks. Programs to be emphasized include the resettlement of refugees, the building of new hamlets, and the reconstruction of schools and roads. Khiem noted that these plans will be the basis for President Thieu's request for continuing US economic aid "during a forthcoming trip to Washington."

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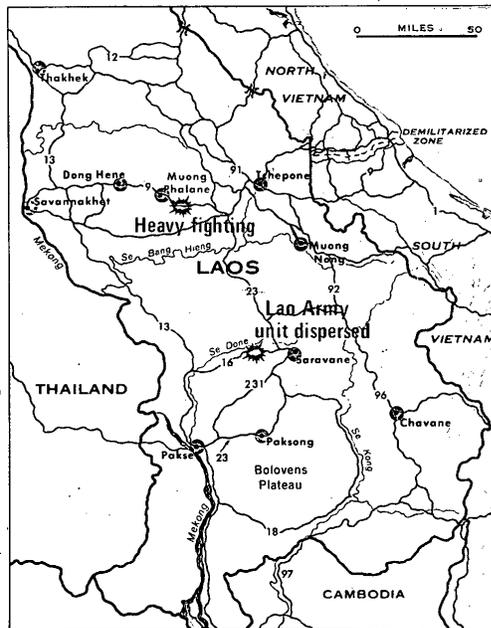
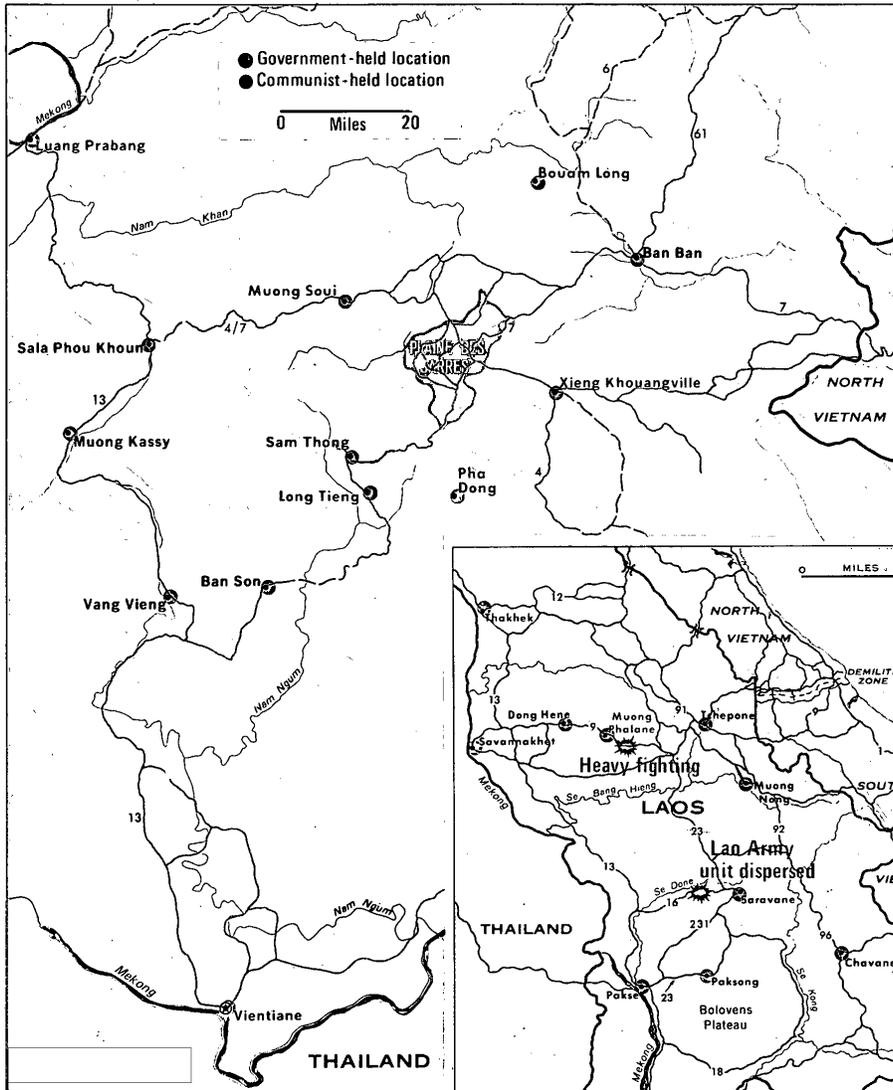
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The prime minister asserted that the army must be diligent in protecting areas under government control, but that no attempt should be made to go into Communist-controlled areas.

Khiem directed the Ministries of Education and Interior to involve students in the government's programs to help ensure that they are not used by the Viet Cong. Khiem also pointed out that harsh measures to control street demonstrations and other civil disturbances would not benefit the government; order must be maintained without repression, he said.

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LAOS



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LAOS

Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma repeated to a [redacted] session of the National Assembly yesterday his publicly expressed belief that an end to fighting in Laos could be arranged by 12 February. He said that within 90 days of a cease-fire a national election should be held, but cautioned that this deadline might slip and that everything depended on the attitude of the Lao Communist peace negotiators.

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Souvanna also told the deputies that he still intends to leave on 27 January for his scheduled trip to India, where he plans to ask Mrs. Gandhi for greater Indian cooperation on the International Control Commission. [redacted]

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[redacted]

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Souvanna apparently attaches a good deal of importance to this trip, which, with a stop in Thailand, will take a week. In the meantime, the Communist negotiators will return from their headquarters at Sam Neua on Sunday, and the next session of the peace talks--the first since the announcement of the Vietnam cease-fire--will take place next Tuesday.

Souvanna is also going away at a time when there is evidence that North Vietnamese units in southern Laos are moving into positions for renewed offensive operations. One and possibly two North Vietnamese regiments have reinforced a third in the central panhandle. Some of the fresh troops have been engaged in the recent heavy fighting near Muong Phalane. Farther south, a large enemy force is still defending Saravane, and has driven Lao troops from positions west of the city. At least one Communist regiment has moved onto the Bolovens Plateau near the government-held town of Paksong.

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Skirmishing continues east of Thakhek, a provincial capital on the Mekong, but there is no evidence at this time that the enemy intends to move on the town in force. In the north, Communist shelling and ground attacks are still going on against government positions in and around Bouam Long, but no change has occurred.

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USSR

In late December, the Soviet Government published in its official record the decree requiring emigrants to reimburse the state for the cost of their educations. The fee scale was published early this month.

[Redacted]

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[Redacted] men over 60, women over 55, and invalids are fully exempt from the reimbursement tax, and that a scale had been set excusing emigrants from refunding portions of their educational costs based on the number of years that they had been employed.

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[Redacted]

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Publication of the decree and the fee schedule is a strong indication that this is as far as the Soviets intend to go in mollifying Western critics of Soviet emigration policies. Under the new softened emigration procedures, the number of Jewish emigrants for the first three weeks of January (1,672) is comparable to last year's January rate. The educational level of recent emigrants, however, is considerably lower.

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