



The President's Daily Brief

17 March 1973

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~~*Top Secret*~~

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Exempt from general
declassification schedule of E.O. 11652
exemption category 5B(1), (2), (3)
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the Director of Central Intelligence

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

17 March 1973

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LATE ITEM

Cambodia: A T-28 aircraft, piloted by a Cambodian Air Force officer, dropped two bombs within the compound of the Presidential Palace in the early afternoon of 17 March in Phnom Penh. Cambodian officials have told the US Embassy that Lon Nol and his staff were unharmed. According to Western press reports, however, there were several casualties in army barracks and munition storage areas of the compound.

Cambodian officials have moved quickly to scotch speculation that the attack was part of a wider operation planned against the Lon Nol government. They have indicated that the pilot, who had been grounded recently for disciplinary reasons, acted alone. [redacted]

[redacted] that there are no indications that an attempt to overthrow Lon Nol is under way.

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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

North Vietnam's intensified dry season transportation campaign is now focusing on moving supplies toward and into South Vietnam. *(Page 1)*

The Vietnamese Communists seem increasingly pessimistic about prospects for competing politically with Saigon. *(Page 2)*

In Laos, there has been some forward movement in the talks on implementing the peace agreement. *(Page 3)*

Sudanese President Numayri seems to be wavering on whether or not to execute the Black September terrorists. *(Page 4)*

The Turkish Parliament has again failed to elect a president. *(Page 4)*

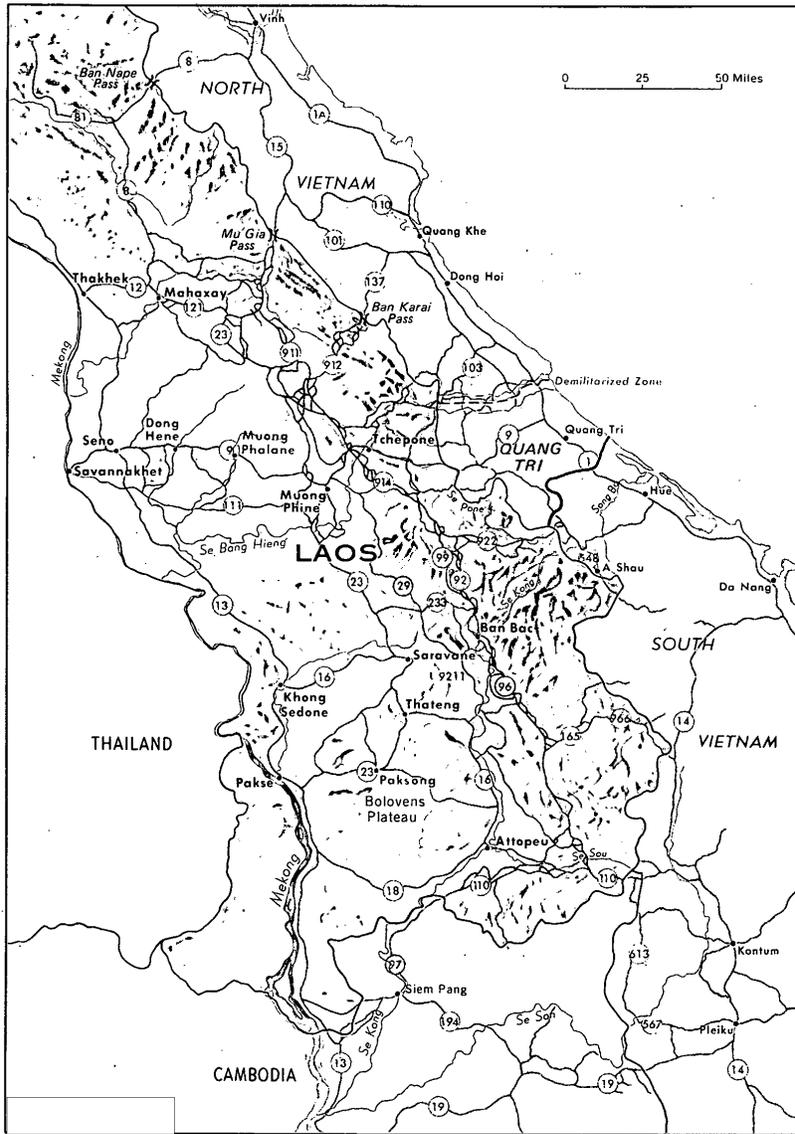
The North Koreans were unusually tough at the most recent round of talks with Seoul. *(Page 4)*

Peru's President Velasco is recovering from his recent operations more quickly than suits the military. *(Page 5)*

In the Philippines, intensified fighting between government forces and Muslim dissidents is compounding an already serious refugee problem. *(Page 5)*

Factionalism within Chile's government coalition has increased since the election. *(Page 5)*

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INDOCHINA

North Vietnam's dry season transportation campaign has entered a new phase, emphasizing movement of supplies toward and into South Vietnam.

[redacted] intercepted messages revealing Hanoi's plans for a "large transportation effort" in northern South Vietnam and southern Laos this spring. This new drive represents the third phase of the Communists' dry season effort.

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From October through January, Hanoi gave priority to moving supplies through the North Vietnam panhandle. By February the emphasis had shifted to corridors leading into Laos. A message intercepted on 12 March, for example, revealed that over 2,300 vehicles moved south through the Ban Karai Pass between 1 February and 9 March, about half of them since 23 February. Vehicle activity west of the DMZ into Laos added to the stocks there.

The level of activity on the main road corridors into southern Laos now appears to be subsiding, as the Communists concentrate on moving supplies closer to South Vietnam.

This pattern is typical of past years, when the locus of Communist supply activity moved progressively south during the dry season.

Recently intercepted communications from northeastern Quang Tri Province also reflect record levels of vehicle activity, and probably supply flow, across the DMZ. One logistic unit reported on 15 March that it had "handled" 2,450 vehicles between 8 and 14 March. Some 615 of the vehicles moved south and they could have carried more than 2,000 tons of supplies.

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SOUTH VIETNAM

Vietnamese Communists appear to be growing more pessimistic about prospects for competing politically with Saigon. Current reporting suggests that the Communists are giving more serious consideration to the use of military force after US forces have withdrawn than they were a few weeks ago.

At a meeting last month in Tay Ninh Province, for example, Communist officials [redacted] expressed concern over the "desultory" attitude of many political cadre. They noted "little progress" in developing Viet Cong political assets and criticized cadre for not adjusting to the "new situation" and for remaining distant from the masses. The officials concluded that the political struggle would not be completed quickly, and that it would be necessary "at times" to attack with main forces.

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LAOS

A government spokesman told the press in Vientiane yesterday that both sides in the joint political group agreed to form a new government by 23 March as required by the agreement. The joint military group reportedly also made some headway.

Despite these stirrings, no decisions appear to have been made on basic issues, such as who gets which portfolios. These will require negotiations between Prime Minister Souvanna and senior Lao Communist envoys. Souvanna will also have to negotiate basic issues with leaders of the Lao right wing who will object strongly to any attempt to give major portfolios to the Communists.

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NOTES

Sudan: President Numayri seems to be wavering on whether or not to execute the Black September terrorists. Although Sudanese officials continue to insist that he will deal with the group severely, they will not say when the eight men will be brought to trial. Officials close to Numayri are apparently giving him conflicting advice. The Sudanese President himself has said nothing since his initial hard-line speech on the murders. There are some tenuous signs of a softening in his attitude, however, and the longer he vacillates the more likely he is to spare the terrorists' lives.

Turkey: Parliament has again failed to elect a president. Two more inconclusive ballots--the fifth and sixth since the presidential election began on 13 March--were cast yesterday. Voting will resume early next week. Justice Party candidate Tekin Ariburun increased his commanding lead over former general staff chief Faruk Gurler, the military's candidate, in yesterday's voting. Nevertheless, the military may be able to prevent Ariburun from getting the majority needed to win. The search continues for a compromise candidate acceptable to both the politicians and the generals. Serious consideration is apparently also being given to a proposal to amend the constitution in order to extend the term of incumbent President Cevdet Sunay.

Korea: The latest round of North-South talks ended in a stalemate when Pyongyang demanded--and Seoul refused to agree to--a peace treaty and a mutual reduction in arms as prerequisites for progress in negotiations. Although these issues have been part of North Korean propaganda for some time, they have never been central to the negotiations. Their introduction underscores the importance Pyongyang attaches to the withdrawal of US and UN forces from the South and to curbing the expansion and modernization of the South Korean military. The North Koreans are not prepared to see the talks break down. They may be willing, however, to lengthen the interval between sessions and to escalate tensions in an effort to increase pressure on Seoul.

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Peru: President Velasco has recovered enough from his recent operations to sign a decree terminating, as of 31 March, Prime Minister Mercado's mandate for limited executive powers. If his health continues to improve at the present rate, Velasco could soon attempt a temporary return to duty. If he tries to return permanently, military officers, who feel he should retire gracefully because of his health problems, will probably oppose him.

Philippines: Intensified fighting between government forces and Muslim dissidents, particularly in agricultural areas around Cotabato City, is compounding an already sizable refugee problem. Whenever violence occurs in the south, numbers of Muslims flee to Malaysian Borneo while Christians crowd into government-controlled urban areas. The Philippine Government estimates that current fighting has displaced some 300,000 to 500,000 persons throughout the Mindanao-Sulu area. The military also reports that local food stocks are being depleted and that military operations are hampered by refugee-clogged roads. Although the reports, and particularly the figures, are probably exaggerated, the problem is significant and the government will be hard pressed to provide adequate assistance.

Chile: Bitter fighting within the government coalition is overshadowing its good election showing. The basic struggle is between Socialist Party leaders, who are increasingly determined to radicalize the Chilean revolution, and the more cautious Communists, who want to root out this extremism as dangerous to their own interests. President Allende is playing both sides, although he leans toward the Communist course as the safer one. He hopes to displace the radicals in the Socialist Party leadership with men of his own persuasion. Competition is now focused on factionalism in a coalition mini-party which was nearly extinguished in the elections. Its respective factions are manipulated by Communists and Socialists who are using this arena to force all government supporters to take a stand on the problem.

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