



The President's Daily Brief

19 March 1973

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THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

A supplement to an earlier COSVN directive on Communist tactics in the cease-fire period indicates that there is to be heavier military action in South Vietnam after 28 March when all US prisoners will have been released. (Page 1)



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(Page 3)

In Laos, Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma has reportedly requested a meeting with Lao Communist leader Souphanouvong or his personal envoy to work out arrangements for forming a new government. The Pathet Lao have repeated their accusation that "US-Vientiane aircraft" have violated the peace agreement by conducting "reconnaissance and bombing" missions. (Page 4)

Phnom Penh is calm following the bombing of the presidential palace and brief student disorders on Saturday. (Page 5)

The nine EC members have agreed to withhold recognition from Hanoi for the time being because of reports of North Vietnamese cease-fire violations. (Page 6)



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SOUTH VIETNAM

COSVN has issued a supplement to an earlier directive on Communist tactics in the cease-fire period [redacted] The supplement states that:

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--after 28 March when all US prisoners will have been released, "temporary deadlocks" may develop in the negotiations, and Saigon's forces may "encroach on our areas";

--equipment and troops from North Vietnam will enable the Communists to "stop" their opponents and "maintain the limits of the cease-fire agreement";

--South Vietnamese operations will give the Communists "many good opportunities to initiate an offensive to tilt the balance of strength and move civilians into our areas";

--this next "offensive" will be aimed at capturing hamlets and villages rather than larger areas, and, whenever they can do so, the Communists intend to make it appear that they acted defensively.

The supplement emphasizes that the earlier directive, which proclaimed a new era of political struggle, remains in effect. The latest directive indicates that military operations are still secondary, but it is clearly saying that they are an important part of the struggle and that there is to be heavier military action once the prisoner exchange is completed.

* * *

Communist troops launched strong attacks during the weekend against a government outpost at Rach Bap and a base camp at Lai Khe in Binh Duong Province, but these attacks have now eased. Farther north, the Communists are applying heavy military pressure against a Ranger camp at Tonle Cham in Tay Ninh Province. The Rangers still control

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the camp, but they have been unable to get supplies or to evacuate their wounded because of heavy Communist ground fire. Communist delegates on the Four Power Joint Military Commission so far have prevented any investigation of the fighting by the Commission, according to the US Embassy.

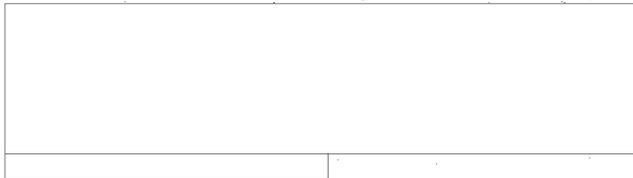
Northwest of Hue, Communist units increased their ground and artillery attacks along the Song Bo River corridor. South Vietnamese control of this area has hindered Communist infiltration and resupply from their mountain bases.

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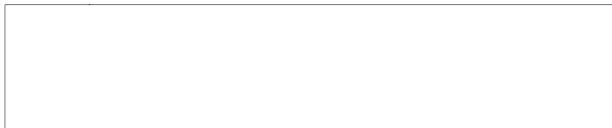
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LAOS

Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma [redacted] Lao Communist leader Souphanouvong asking that he [redacted] meet directly with Souvanna as soon as possible to work out arrangements for forming a new government.

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Talks on political arrangements have remained deadlocked, but the two sides have agreed to exchange draft protocols covering such military matters as prisoner exchange and the withdrawal of foreign troops.

Preliminary agreement may be reached on some arrangements. The Communists probably will withhold acceptance of a military protocol, however, until political issues are resolved.

* * *

In an official statement broadcast on 17 March, the Pathet Lao claimed that "US-Vientiane aircraft" have conducted numerous "reconnaissance and bombing" missions in violation of the peace agreement. The statement warned that the US and Vientiane would have to bear "full responsibility for all consequences" if cease-fire "violations" did not cease. This is the second official reaction in ten days to US reconnaissance overflights.

* * *

Fighting continued in the south on 17 March as Communist ground attacks forced government units to pull back from positions near Paksong and Saravane. In the central panhandle, [redacted] skirmishing near Thakhek and Dong Hene. Lao Air Force T-28s flew bombing missions in both the central and southern regions.

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CAMBODIA

Phnom Penh is calm following the bombing of the presidential palace and brief student disorders on Saturday. The state of emergency declared by President Lon Nol on 17 March remains in effect, as does a dusk-to-dawn curfew. The city's security forces are on maximum alert.

There is confusion over the identity and motives of the Cambodian Air Force officer responsible for the bombing of the presidential palace. He was recently expelled from flight training for disciplinary reasons, but there is no evidence linking him and the insurgents. The government claims the pilot is the husband of one of Sihanouk's daughters, although the US Embassy cannot confirm this. Several relatives of Sihanouk have been arrested and a number of other members of the royal family have been removed from their military positions.

The attack on the palace was preceded by violence that broke out during a mass meeting of students and teachers. The meeting had been called to decide whether to continue protesting the government's economic policies. Following a scuffle between students and soldiers, several grenades exploded, killing at least two students and injuring many others. Reaction to both the bombing and the student deaths so far has been mild.

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NOTE

Western Europe - North Vietnam: The nine EC members have agreed to withhold recognition from Hanoi for the time being because of reports of North Vietnamese cease-fire violations. The delay in some instances, at least, is likely to be a brief one. A Dutch official has said The Hague will postpone an announcement for only a few days. Italy, and perhaps Belgium, may also grant early recognition. The UK and West Germany are less eager to move.

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