



The President's Daily Brief

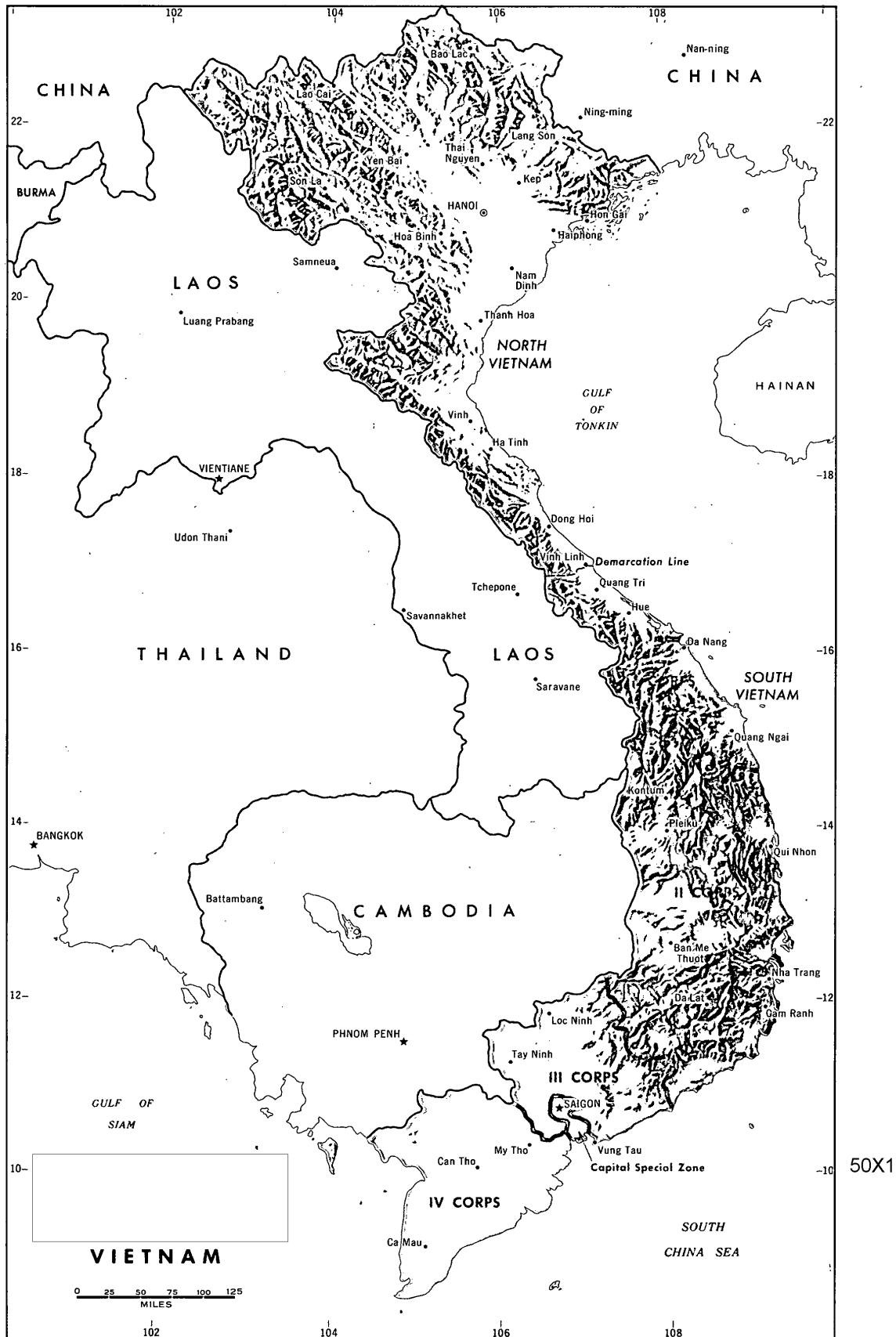
22 May 1969

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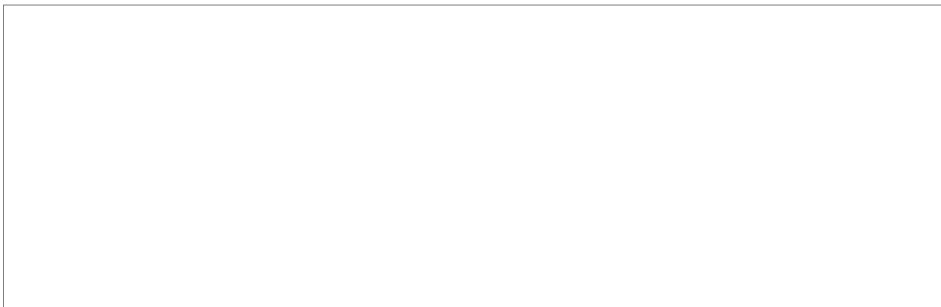
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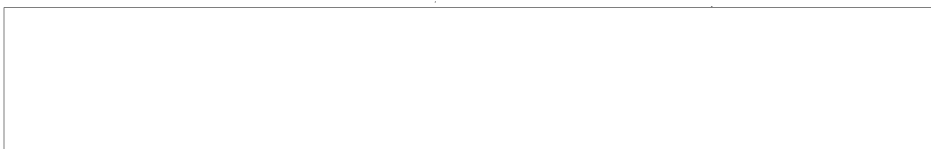
I. MAJOR PROBLEMS

VIETNAM

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In a backgrounder for the American press corps on 17 May, President Thieu put forward a flexible line on the key issue of Communist participation in elections and in the government. He ruled out any interim or coalition government prior to free national elections, but he opened the door to discussions with the Communists on the modalities of arranging such elections.

Thieu also stated publicly for the first time his willingness to abide by any decision made by the voters, even if they chose a coalition government or a pro-Communist government. He pointed out to the press corps that such a government could amend or change the constitution and follow a policy of neutrality or any other policy it might choose.

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Thieu probably calculates that by expressing a willingness to go along with a coalition or pro-Communist government he will reduce American press criticism of his attitude toward the talks. At the same time since he feels the Communists will not quickly accept any arrangements he might propose for holding elections, he probably thinks this maneuver will win him more time to prepare a political organization to compete with the Communists.

MIDDLE EAST

The Israelis used a large number of aircraft and tanks in yesterday's attack against a terrorist base in Jordan. They always use a striking force that is big enough to do the job with minimal losses, but this time they may have been especially interested in reminding the Arabs of Israeli muscle. We suspect they chose a target of only moderate importance in order to minimize the risk of escalation.

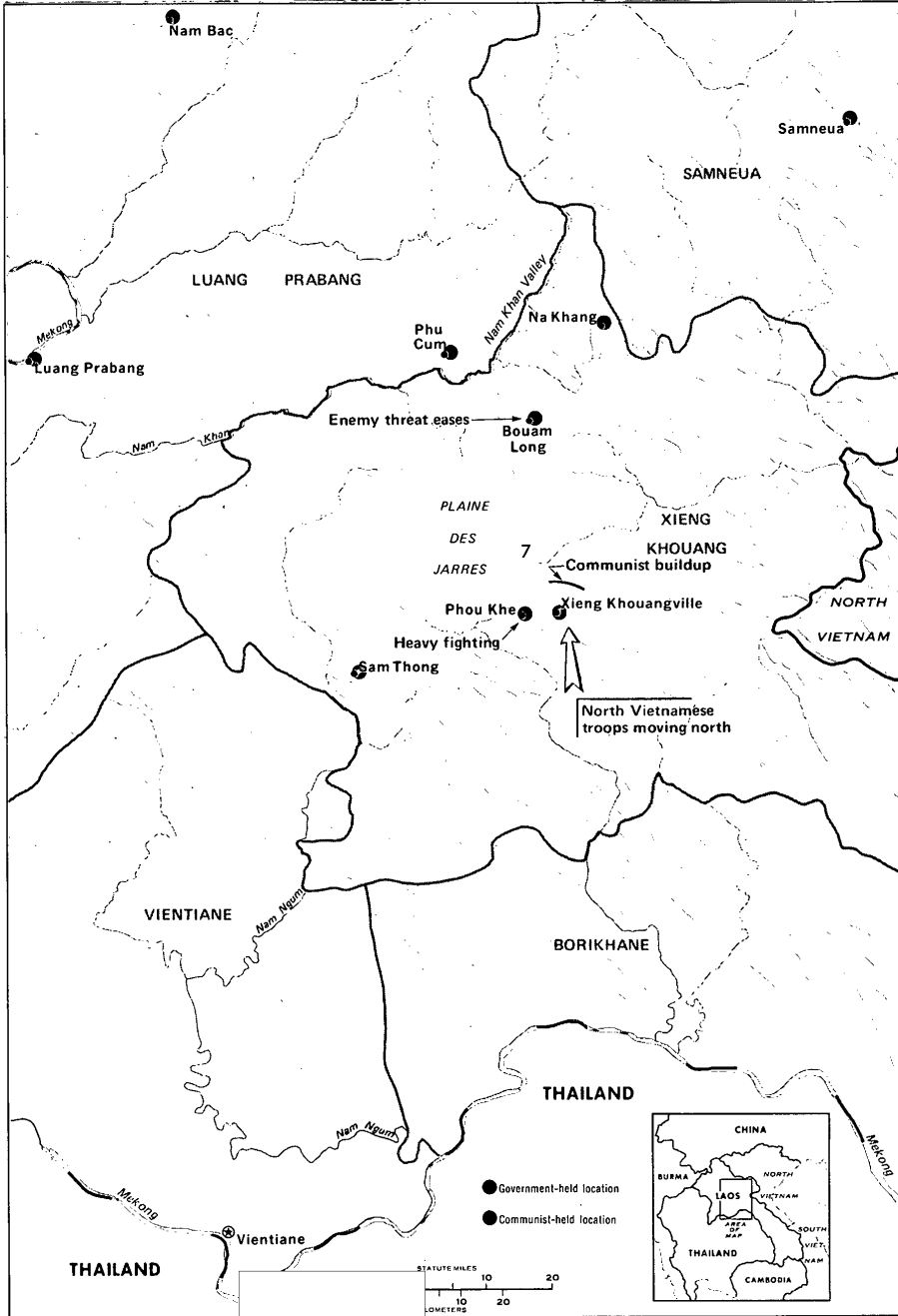
The Israelis have shown a willingness in recent weeks to engage in harsher reprisals, and further serious clashes are sure to occur.

SOVIET AFFAIRS

Late yesterday the Soviets conducted their third extended-range flight test of an SS-9 ICBM carrying multiple re-entry vehicles. As in the two previous tests in April, three re-entry vehicles were carried by the ICBM some 5,100 miles from Tyuratam to a Pacific impact area. Four Soviet

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Laos: Government Counteroffensive Blunted South of Plaine des Jarres



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missile range instrumentation ships, which we noted earlier were moving to the impact area, monitored the re-entry phase of the test.

EUROPE

There is nothing significant to report.

II. OTHER IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS

LAOS

The Communists seem to have begun a major effort to regain positions south of the Plaine des Jarres lost during the government's current counteroffensive. North Vietnamese troops have overrun a number of positions on Phou Khe, a highpoint overlooking the Xieng Khouangville area captured by government guerrillas in April. Two North Vietnamese battalions were recently deployed into the Phou Khe - Xieng Khouangville vicinity, and villagers report that additional reinforcements have moved in from the north. The Communists apparently hope to redress their situation before monsoon rains make the going more difficult.

The Communist threat may force Meo leader Vang Pao to curtail his ambitious plans to capture the southern half of the Plaine des Jarres. Government guerrillas last week captured a number of Communist positions along the southern edge of the Plaine and almost 1,000 troops are to be moved into position to harass Communist logistic movements along Route 7.

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North of the Plaine, the threat against a number of government guerrilla outposts appears to have eased in recent days.

PERU

The government is now likely to speed up moves already under way to strengthen military ties with West European countries. A high-level military mission left a few days ago for France and other European countries. This visit was scheduled before the public disclosure of the suspension of US military sales to Peru.

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TURKEY

As we suspected it would, the Turkish Senate yesterday yielded to the army's bluster. The constitutional amendment which would have restored political rights to certain politicians who were anathema to the military has now been shelved indefinitely.

NORTH KOREA

Satellite photography [Redacted] shows that the Pueblo is probably no longer at Najin, near the Soviet border, where it has been since shortly after capture and at least until early this month. The North Koreans may either have moved the Pueblo to a port or naval base elsewhere on the east coast or--less likely--turned the ship over to the Soviet Union.

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