

The President's Daily Brief

3 October 1969

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WEST GERMANY

The speed with which the Socialists concluded an agreement with the Free Democrats means that the Federal Republic may soon have its first left-of-center government. The Christian Democrats appeared ready for drawn-out negotiations, but not for this contingency, and their last-minute offers were too late. Many Christian Democrats already appear resigned to an opposition role for their party.

Assuming no last-minute hitches develop between the negotiating parties, a vote on Brandt's candidacy for chancellor could be taken as early as 20 October, when the newly elected Bundestag convenes. For election, however, Brandt must obtain an absolute parliamentary majority, or 249 votes. With a total coalition strength of only 254, the absence or defection of only six deputies would mean his defeat.

Such a narrowly based coalition would be unstable and possibly short-lived. Many basic differences over economic and labor policy have probably been papered over and will crop out again when the parties get down to serious lawmaking.

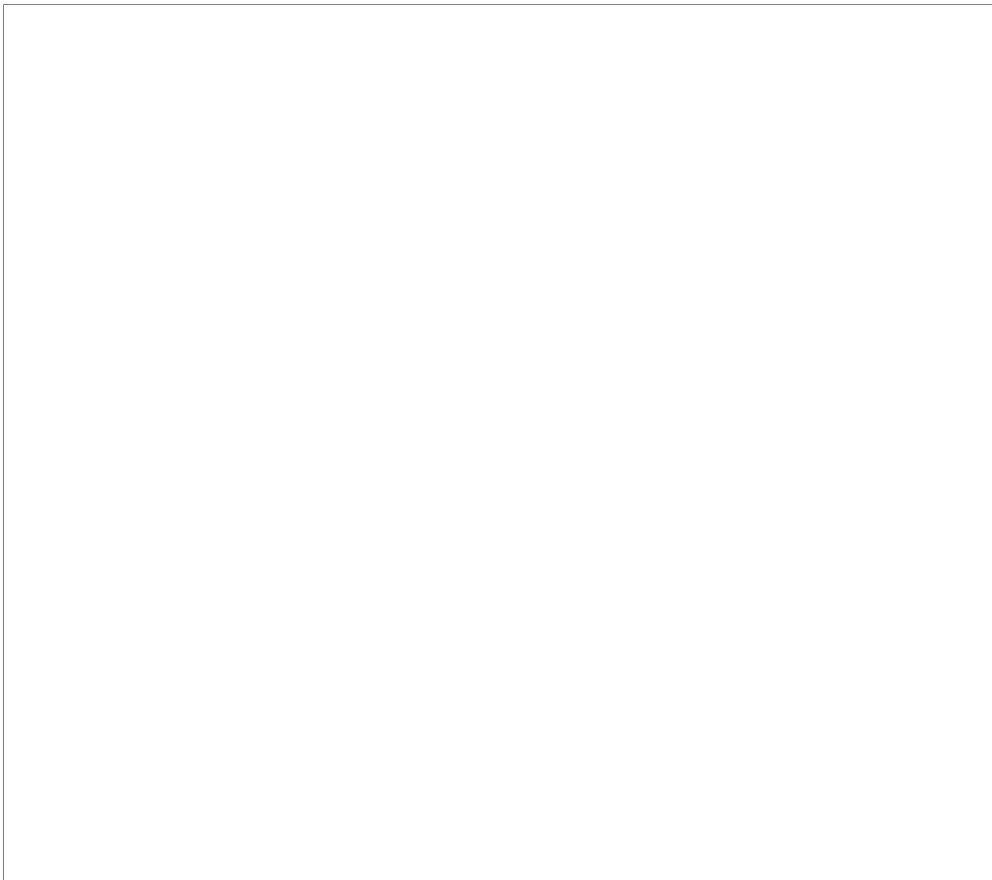
If by some mischance the Socialist - Free Democrat coalition fails to achieve election in the Bundestag, it will be difficult to put together another. The stability of any other coalition, even a resumption of the grand coalition, would be shaky and there would be a good chance of new elections in a year or two.

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There has been no official comment from Moscow on the election or the formation of a coalition. Soviet press reporting and commentaries have been sparse, cautious, and non-committal, although there is a continuing tendency to play up the Socialists' foreign policies as relatively "realistic." Moscow is keeping its options open, however. One of the recurrent themes being played in public is that no major policy changes are likely in West Germany regardless of whatever coalition government is formed.

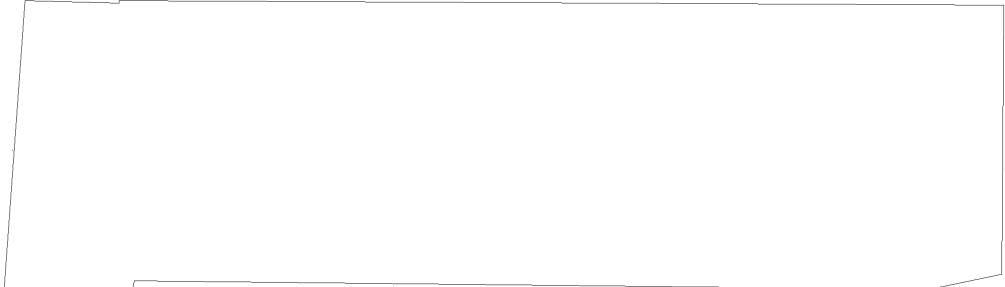
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USSR - MIDDLE EAST

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Moscow may very well have changed its stance toward the fedayeen, and for good tactical reasons. The irregulars are becoming increasingly popular and politically more effective. By jumping on this bandwagon, the Soviets would again demonstrate support for the Arab cause and gather whatever glimmering credit there may be for fedayeen successes.

The Soviets probably hope that their support would give them a limited measure of control over the fedayeen, and also would tend to overcome Chinese influence among the guerrilla bands. Moscow may also see this step as a way of activating the Arab Communist parties in conjunction with the fedayeen.

It is doubtful that Moscow's methods of supplying arms will change significantly. Heretofore, the Soviets have consigned arms to the guerrillas through an Arab government. The direct supply of arms to the fedayeen would cause political complications for Moscow with various Arab governments already concerned over the independence of the guerrilla organizations, even though these governments themselves have been compelled in recent months to take a more tolerant stance toward the fedayeen. Should Moscow decide to send arms directly to the fedayeen, it almost certainly will be with the consent of the involved Arab governments.

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If the Soviets go through with this change in policy, it would mark a tactical, rather than a strategic shift. Moscow probably does not view this as inconsistent with its role in the talks toward a political settlement in the Middle East, and we expect it will continue working along these lines.

LEBANON-USSR

The Soviets are embarrassed by the exposure of their plot to steal a Mirage aircraft from Lebanon. They vigorously protested the violation of their diplomat's immunity

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they worked hard to have their people expelled from Lebanon without being formally declared persona non grata. One has already been deported. The other will depart as soon as his condition permits.

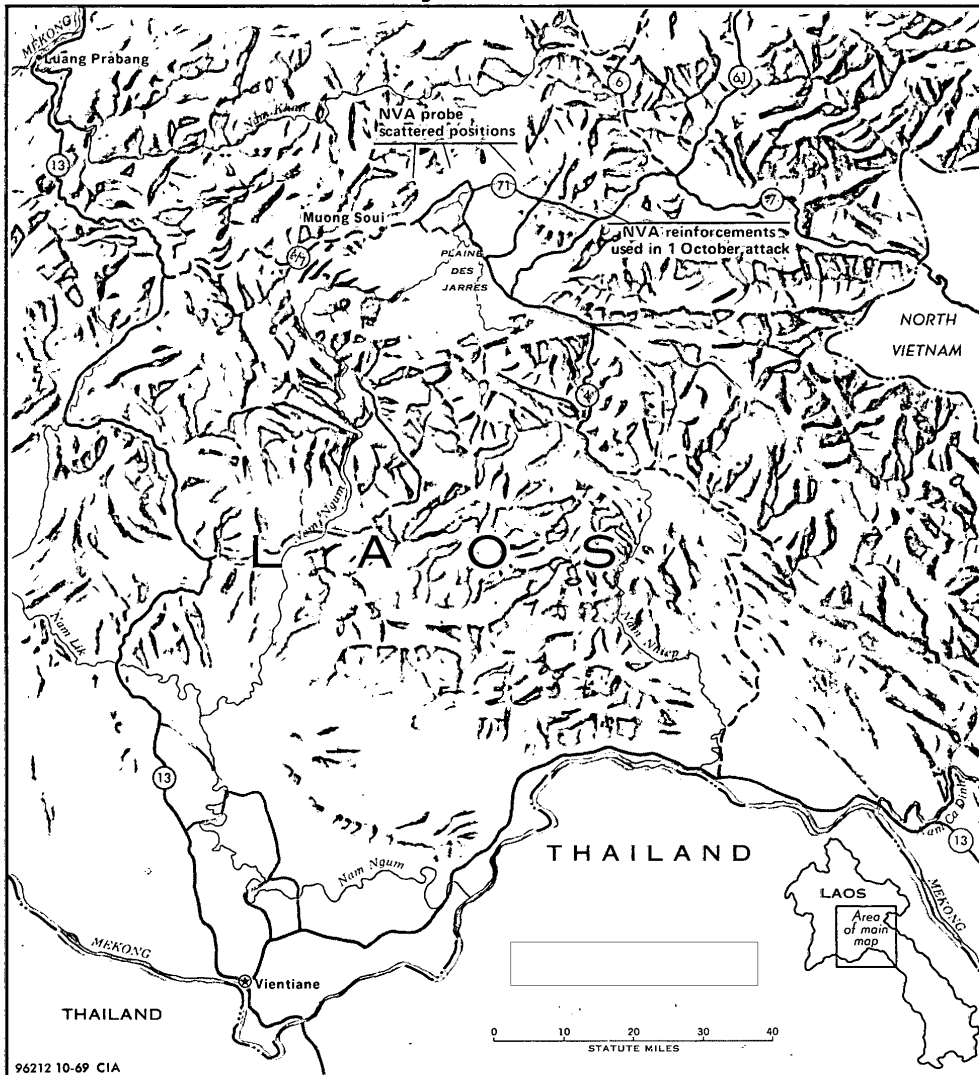
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North Vietnamese Reinforcements Begin to Move Into Action



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LAOS

Fresh North Vietnamese reinforcements attacked government positions on the Plaine des Jarres on 1 October, but were beaten off. At the same time, North Vietnamese also hit scattered positions on the northern fringes of the Plaine. These probes seem to comprise a coordinated effort to put Vang Pao's forces on a defensive footing while major elements of the North Vietnamese forces are still en route to Laos.

Whether this flurry of activity marks the opening round in the anticipated North Vietnamese counteroffensive has yet to be determined. At the least, it indicates the North Vietnamese intend to clear the pathway for forces arriving from the east and prepare to turn the tables on Vang Pao as soon as their logistic problems are sorted out.

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