



The President's Daily Brief

20 May 1970

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

20 May 1970

PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

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Cambodia

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Communications of COSVN units continue to reflect considerable disarray. (Page 3)

Communist forces in Northern Laos have been holding back, but they are still a considerable threat. (Page 4)

Some highlights from Fidel Castro's latest speech are on Page 6.

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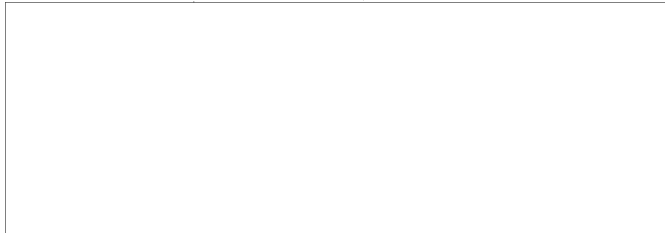
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CAMBODIA

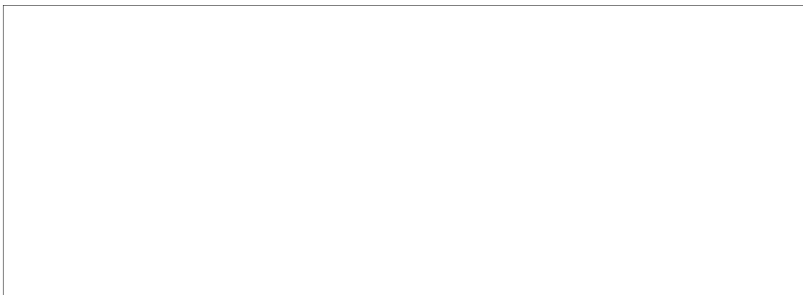
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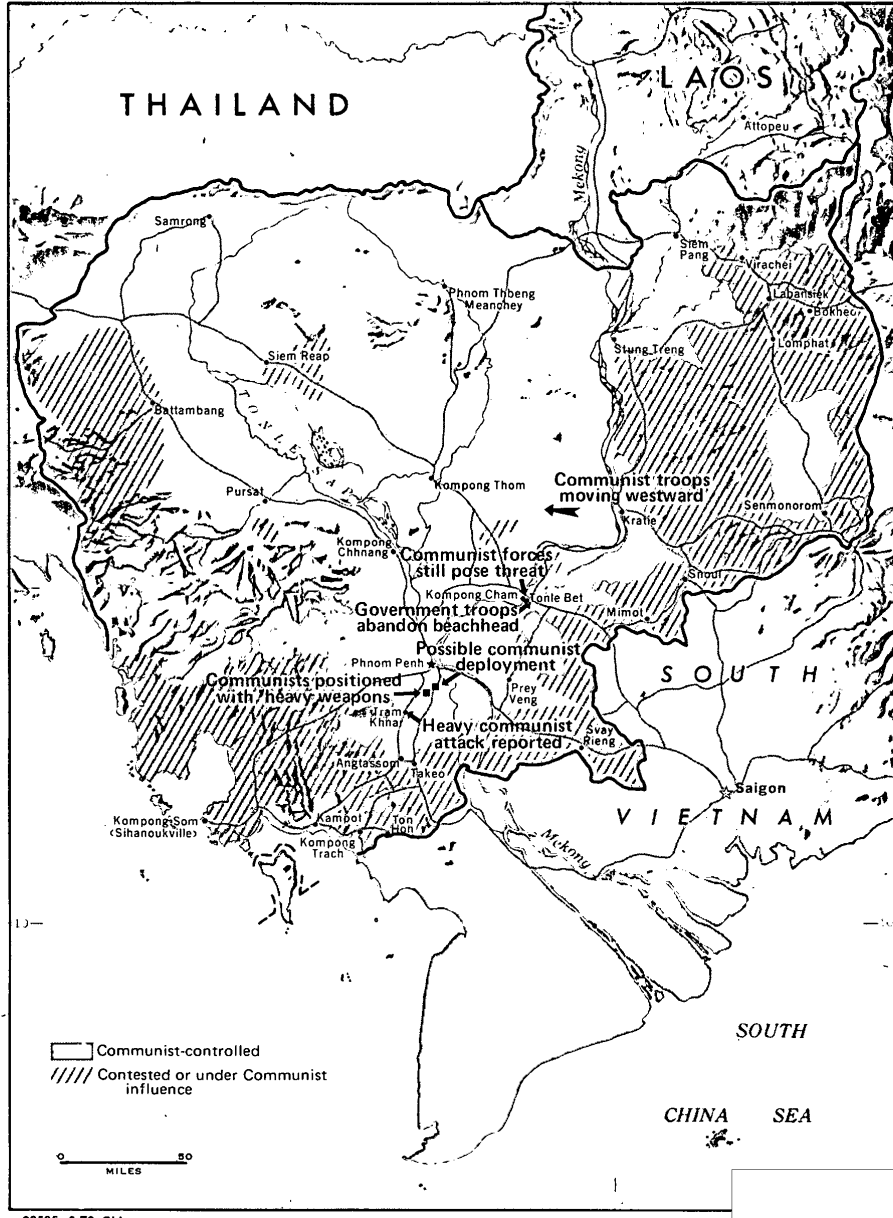


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Cambodia: Current Situation



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On the military side, the Communists apparently are becoming more active again south of Phnom Penh. An army message reports that some Communist forces intend to move from Prey Veng to an area just south of the capital, where another enemy unit with heavy weapons is already installed in a Vietnamese temple. According to press reports, however, the only actual fighting south of Phnom Penh is at the crossroads town of Tram Khnar, 25 miles from the capital.

The military situation in the city of Kompong Cham is still tense. Some enemy elements apparently are threatening the city from entrenched positions on its outskirts, and yesterday all government forces pulled back across the Mekong River to Kompong Cham when Communist pressure made their beachhead at Tonle Bet untenable.

[redacted] many Vietnamese residents in the northern provinces of Kratie and Stung Treng are rallying to Communist forces.

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[redacted] a number of young Chinese from Kompong Cham and other population centers also are joining the enemy.

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The Communists apparently are becoming increasingly active on the west bank of the Mekong. Intercepted messages also indicate that some Communist troops are moving westward into Kompong Thom Province, and an army supply truck has been seized by the Communists in that province. A Cambodian battalion is moving into the area to try and block further Communist inroads.

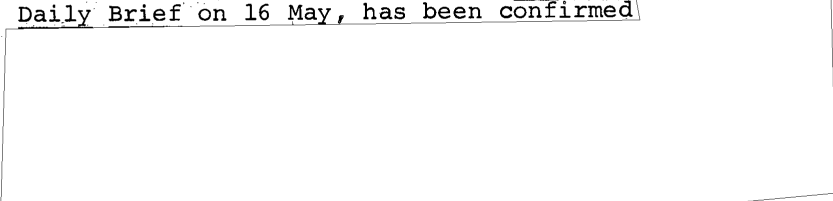
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SOUTH VIETNAM - CAMBODIA

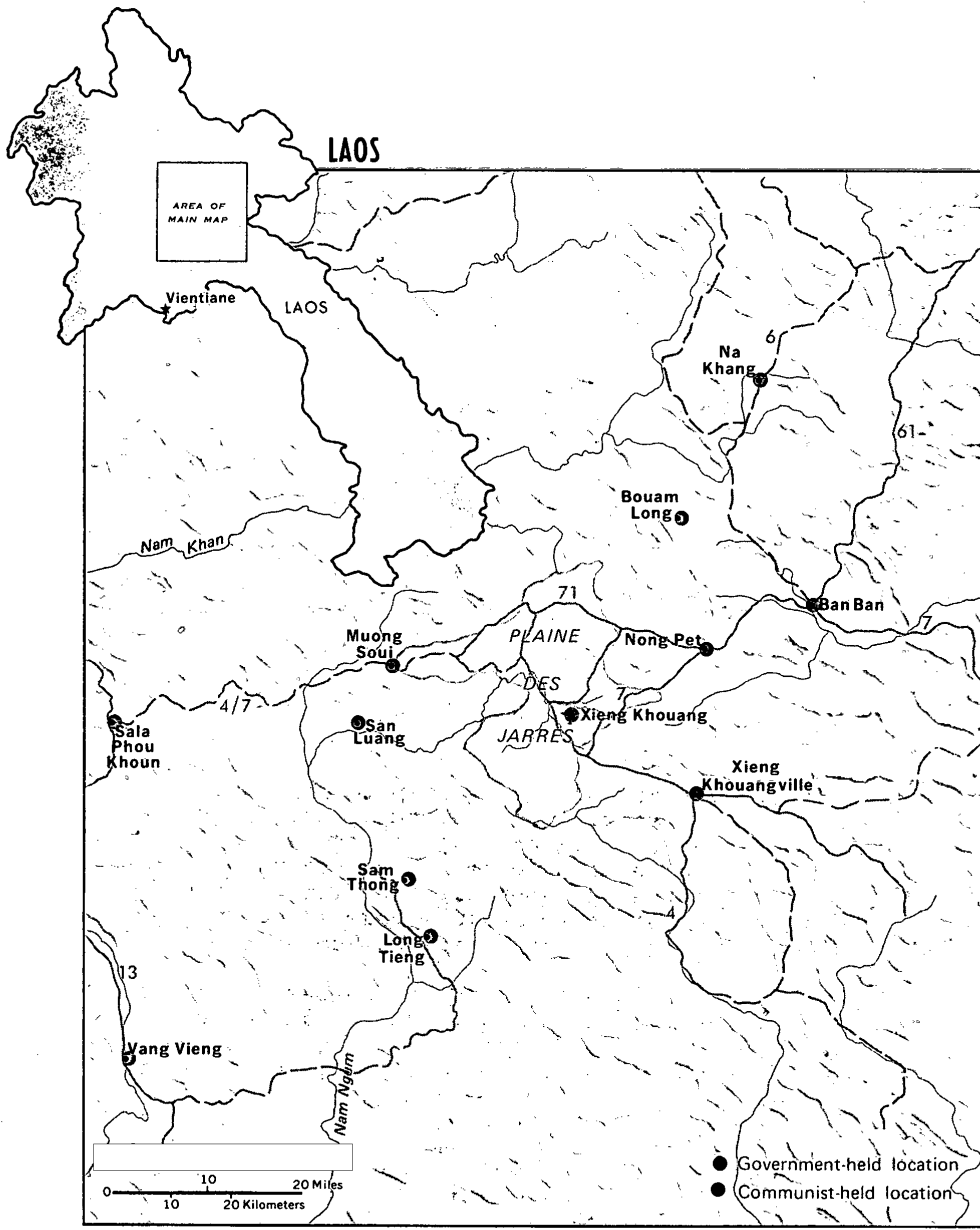
The northward movement of important elements of COSVN to a site in Cambodia about 20 miles north of the border, which we reported in The President's Daily Brief on 16 May, has been confirmed

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Communications of [redacted] COSVN units continue to reflect considerable disarray caused by allied cross-border operations. Messages exchanged between intelligence units, for example, have alluded to "insurmountable problems" and orders to "set up adequate defenses" and "conserve food stocks." Some units have been directed to avoid contact with allied forces.

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LAOS

In recent weeks General Vang Pao's guerrillas have secured Long Tieng Valley from all but minor enemy harassment, and substantial numbers of civilians have begun returning to the area. For the most part, North Vietnamese troops have been reacting to ground actions rather than initiating them. Intercepted enemy messages have shown that casualties have been heavy in some North Vietnamese units. The Communists' extended supply lines into the Long Tieng area are vulnerable to ground harassment, and heavy rains are only a few weeks away.

The redeployment of several front-line units of the North Vietnamese 316th Division back onto the Plaine des Jarres suggests the Communists are already shifting to a defensive posture. These deployments and the continuing presence of the 312th Division suggest that the Communists are hoping to avoid a repetition of last year's debacle, when Vang Pao's offensive took the Plaine des Jarres almost without a fight.

Vang Pao still faces a considerable threat. Recently the Communists seized several government positions within rocket range of Long Tieng--demonstrating that they still retain an offensive capability. Some 1,500 men have been sent to southern Laos to meet the upsurge in Communist military activity there, and Vang Pao's positions remain vulnerable to sapper attacks.

If Vang Pao succeeds in clearing the area south of the Plaine, he can sit tight, consolidate his hold around Long Tieng, and give his troops a much needed respite. This strategy might include an effort to recapture bases north of the Plaine and some harassment of the enemy's rear areas, but it would avoid a major wet season offensive. Such a course could conceivably return the fighting in the north to the pre-1969 ground rules, when the Plaine was more or less a Communist sanctuary and the Communists refrained from driving toward Long Tieng and the Meo heartland.

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This course runs the risk of allowing the Communists to maintain forward positions on the Plaine from which they could mount a fresh offensive toward Long Tieng in the fall. An offensive to push the Communists from the Plaine once again or to interdict Route 7 might set back Communist plans, but it would probably be more costly than last year's effort.

Either way, it seems doubtful that the Meo guerrillas can extricate themselves from the war of attrition in which they have been locked with the Communists for the past decade.

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CUBA

In a two-hour speech last night, Fidel Castro ranged over a great variety of topics. Some of the highlights:

--A blast at the British because Cuban exile groups use the Bahamas. "Cuba is not going to adopt a policy of standing by with folded arms."

--An admission that the sugar harvest will be less than the goal of ten million tons. "This is something hard to take."

--A statement that Cuba "should withdraw from the Swiss Embassy its status as representative of the United States' interests in Cuba."

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