



The President's Daily Brief

20 December 1971

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

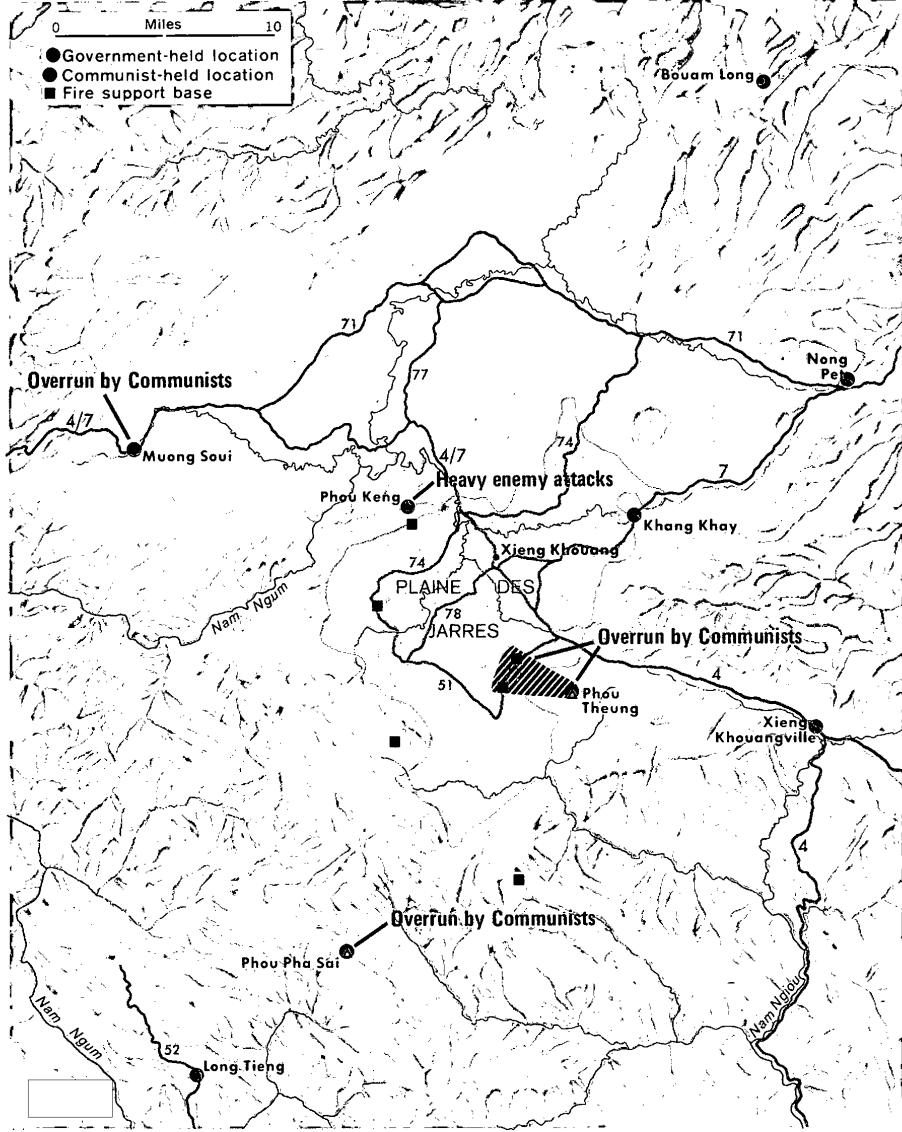
The North Vietnamese are making an all-out effort to sweep the Plaine des Jarres in northern Laos as quickly as possible. *(Page 1)*

Ali Bhutto has been named Pakistan's new president. *(Page 3)*

The Chinese have again made a large wheat purchase from the Canadians. *(Page 5)*

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LAOS: PLAINE DES JARRES AREA



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LAOS

On 18 December North Vietnamese units, supported by tanks and highly accurate artillery fire, launched simultaneous attacks on all irregular positions and fire support bases on the northern and eastern edges of the Plaine des Jarres. Seven Meo battalions, providing an infantry screen for the northern group of fire support bases, were dispersed and are attempting to reform on the western part of the Plaine.

During the night of 19 December, Communist troops, again supported by artillery, mortar fire, and tanks, overran irregular positions and the two [redacted] support bases near Phou Theung. It is expected that the enemy will continue to attack irregulars retreating from this area and launch major ground assaults from the east on the remaining artillery positions on the Plaine. These have been under heavy attack, and one battery is no longer functioning.

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The accuracy and intensity of enemy ground fire have severely limited resupply and medical evacuation operations on the Plaine. Moreover, five USAF F-4s have been downed over north Laos since 17 December. One of these planes was shot down by a MIG-21. Also two Lao Air Force T-28s were brought down by anti-aircraft fire over the Plaine on 18 December. Air observers have spotted five heavy guns emplaced on the northwest part of the Plaine. These are thought to be some of the 130-mm. fieldpieces, and air strikes have been called in on them.

The Communists also overran Phou Pha Sai, the principal high point between the Plaine and the government base at Long Tieng. Elements of at least two North Vietnamese regiments have been noted in this area in the past few days. The Communists, however, may not have sufficient forces in the area to hold Phou Pha Sai if the irregulars are able to mount a determined counterattack.

The North Vietnamese are clearly making an all-out effort to sweep the Plaine clear of government forces as quickly as possible. If they succeed, they will probably undertake operations toward the Long Tieng complex. The fact that they have already moved some troops into Phou Pha Sai suggests that they hope to push on quickly.

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Of serious concern is the state of morale of Vang Pao's Meo irregulars. The Meos now constitute about half of the total irregular force.

Vang Pao has frequently said that his troops are wearing thin and that the supply of Meos is nearly exhausted. Should Meo morale collapse--which could happen if their withdrawal from the Plaine becomes a rout or if they suffer heavy casualties--the defense of the Long Tieng complex would be in considerable jeopardy.

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INDIA-PAKISTAN

The official Pakistani radio network announced today that West Pakistan's leading politician, the 43-year-old leftist Z. A. Bhutto, has become president and chief martial law administrator. Yesterday it had been announced that Yahya would step down and that Bhutto was returning from the US to take part in forming the new government.

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[redacted] Pakistani Air Force Commander Abdur Rahim Khan and Chief of the Army General Staff Gul Hassan [redacted] were planning to form a triumvirate with Bhutto.

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Bhutto has some enemies in the military, however, and he could have difficulty in maintaining his position at the top. Certainly the military will be closely watching Bhutto's performance and will remain the arbiter of political power.

The mood in West Pakistan is one of frustration and anger. There have been demonstrations, editorial criticism, and denunciations by both political and military figures against the Yahya government, as well as attempts by some prominent figures to indicate their availability for a national political role.

In Bangla Dosh, little progress has been made toward the establishment of a functioning government. Top Bangla Dosh leaders have yet to arrive in Dacca from Calcutta, reportedly because of internal squabbling. The Indian Army has succeeded in restoring a surface calm in most of the city, but some Bengali reprisals against collaborators are still occurring and tension is high--especially in the section of the city where some 200 Bengali intellectuals and professional people were rounded up and massacred by the Razakars, or pro-Pakistan local militia, last week.

The US consul general assesses that the only chance for promptly establishing stable conditions appears to lie in the visible presence of a functioning government under Bengali leader Mujibur Rahman, who is still incarcerated in West Pakistan.

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No significant breaches of the cease-fire appear to have occurred since it went into effect along the western front last Friday. Each country has charged the other with minor violations, most of which involved artillery and small arms fire.

In New Delhi yesterday, the Indian defense minister called for bilateral talks to determine the disposition of territory captured on the western front. He indicated that India would oppose attempts to resolve the question of captured territory through third-party mediation.

India might demand the release of Mujibur Rahman in exchange for the return of Pakistani territory or war prisoners.

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NOTE

Communist China - Canada: Peking has bought just over three million tons of Canadian wheat worth about \$200 million for delivery in 1972. This single contract nearly matches total Chinese grain imports this year and apparently was placed as a further reward to Ottawa for diplomatic recognition. By importing all its grain in 1971 from Canada, Peking also penalized Australia, previously a major supplier, for withholding recognition. Because of the impact of poor weather conditions on this fall's rice harvest, China is likely to import more grain in 1972 than it did this year.

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