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Top Secret

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DIRECTORATE OF  
INTELLIGENCE

## *Developments in Indochina*

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25X1

30 March 1973

25X1

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25X1

30 March 1973

DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA

*(Information as of 1500)*

Page

SOUTH VIETNAM

1

The Communists have increased pressure against Tonle Cham.

25X1

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they will probably hold the fighting to modest levels at least through the fall, while they improve their military position and concentrate on the political struggle.

25X1

LAOS

5

The Acting Defense Minister publicizes government concern about possible Communist attacks near the Plaine des Jarres. There is some skirmishing in the central panhandle. Souvanna has met with the second ranking Communist negotiator who has just returned from Sam Neua and is optimistic that a new government can be formed in the next two weeks.

i

Page

25X1

CAMBODIA

6

25X1

[REDACTED] Government forces  
opened Route 4 from Phnom Penh to  
Kompong Som.

25X1

25X1

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

8

The Soviets are being especially  
attentive to Madame Binh.

SOUTH VIETNAMThe Military Situation

Military action remains generally light throughout the country except in northern Tay Ninh Province. There, the Communists increased pressure against the ranger camp at Tonle Cham on 29 March by firing over 1,500 rounds of mortar and artillery shells at the position. An infantry assault was also launched, but it was repulsed with only light government casualties. General Minh, the government's senior commander for the area, said on 29 March that he is worried about conditions at Tonle Cham, but is also determined not to let it fall into enemy hands.

The Outlook for the Future

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1 [redacted] at least until the next dry season starts in the fall the Communists are likely to concentrate on "political struggle" and on improving their overall military position. Political struggle, however, will be punctuated by heavy fighting, most of it on a modest scale but some at a multi-regimental level.

1 [redacted] both sides have violated the agreement and will continue doing so, with the Communists trying to expand their control in the countryside and the South Vietnamese trying to limit or reduce it.

1 [redacted] since each side is acutely aware of the threat from the other, there is a danger that misjudgments could escalate the fighting into major hostilities. [redacted]

30 March 1973

25X1

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**Next 2 Page(s) In Document Exempt**

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LAOSVientiane Worried About Communist Attacks

At a press conference on 30 March, acting Defense Minister Sisouk na Champassak expressed concern over possible Communist military activity in the north. Sisouk said the recent deployment of the North Vietnamese 335th Regiment to the Tha Viang area and the movement of some Communist units toward Sala Phou Khoun were signs that the Communists are planning to bring military pressure to bear on the negotiations on the formation of a new coalition government.


25X1

25X1

The Military Situation

Government field commanders in the Tha Viang sector where the government fears a Communist push reported only one isolated shelling incident on 29 March. Government units on an operation south of Thakhek in the central panhandle clashed with Communist units several times on 29 March. Fighting probably will continue in this area as government troops move to secure the remaining villages between Thakhek and the Se Bangfai River. Lao T-28s bombed Communist positions near Tha Viang and south of Thakhek.

25X1

Souvanna Optimistic on Talks

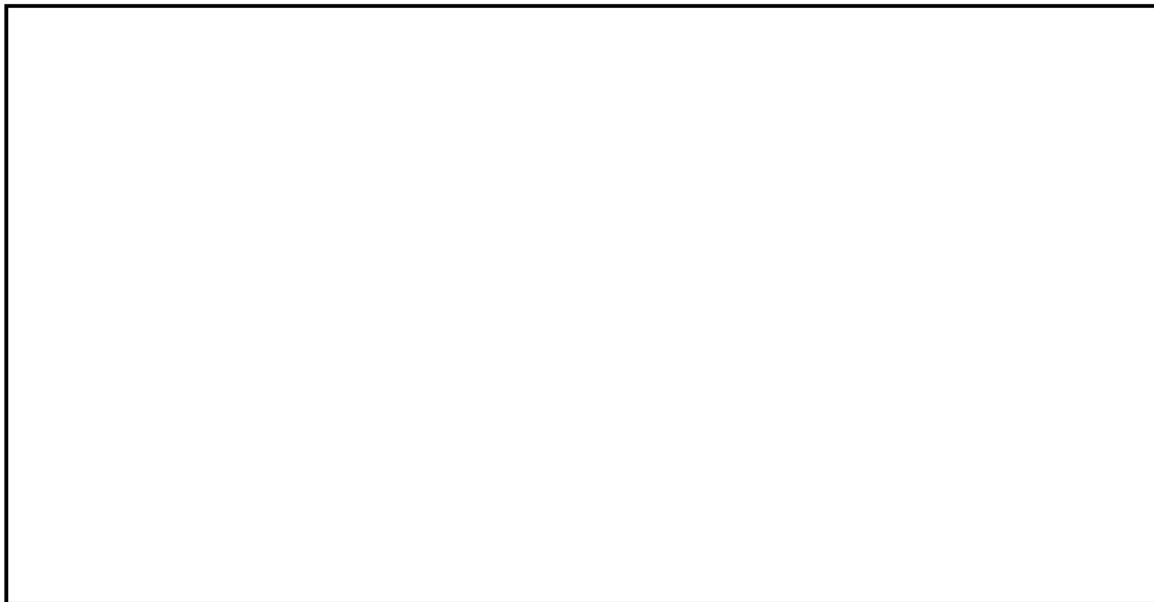
Prime Minister Souvanna is optimistic that a new government can be formed by mid-April. Pathet Lao negotiator Phoune Sipraseuth, who has just returned from a short visit to the Communist headquarters near Sam Neua, brought Souvanna a friendly letter from Communist leader Souphanouvong and told the Prime Minister that he was empowered to negotiate the formation of the new coalition government. Phoune in the past, has not been authorized to enter into any meaningful discussions with government leaders, despite his public claims to carry full negotiating powers. Several more meetings probably will be required to see if he is now authorized to negotiate on vital issues.

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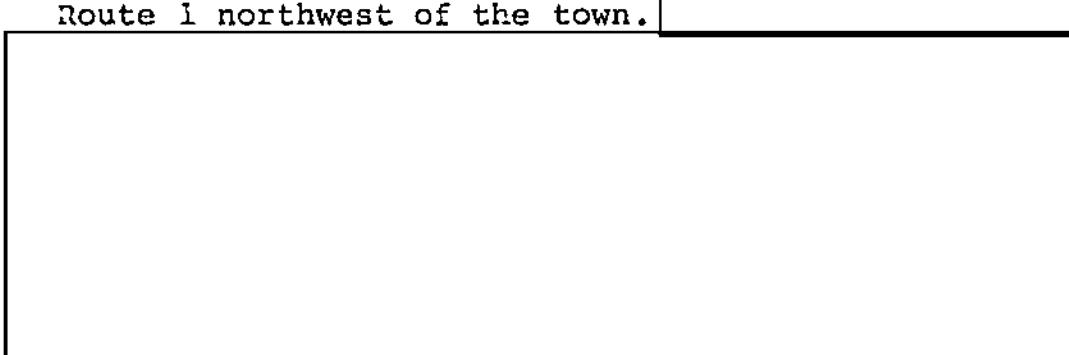
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CAMBODIA

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The Military Situation

Government troops, reinforced by armored vehicles, met no resistance on 29 March when they cleared a section of Route 4 north of the port of Kompong Som. The highway once again is open to Phnom Penh. Insurgent troops continue to harass government positions along the Mekong River near Neak Luong and still hold a 15-mile section of Route 1 northwest of the town.



25X1

25X1

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25X1

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INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTSSoviet Support for Viet Cong

Moscow has used the latest visit to the USSR of South Vietnamese Communist "Foreign Minister" Mme. Binh to stress Soviet support for the PRG. Mme. Binh has been in and out of the USSR more than a dozen times in the past few years, and this is the first time one of her trips has been labeled "an official state visit." Moreover, Podgorny, in his capacity as President of the USSR, on 28 March awarded her the Soviet order of "friendship of the peoples."

The Vietnamese will no doubt be pleased with these Soviet gestures even though they fall short of what the Vietnamese want. The Vietnamese would have preferred a strong condemnation of Saigon for its cease-fire violations; instead they had to settle for a passing Soviet reference to them. The Vietnamese were probably also disappointed that the Soviets stopped short of crediting the PRG with an exclusive role in South Vietnam, referring to it only as the "legitimate spokesmen for the interests of the entire South Vietnamese people." [redacted]

25X1

25X1

30 March 1973

-8-

25X1