

The President's Daily Brief

~~Top Secret~~ 20 February 1968



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DAILY BRIEF
20 FEBRUARY 1968

1. South Vietnam

Communist military activity in South Vietnam declined in intensity yesterday and last night, though sporadic new rocket and mortar attacks were made against the Khe Sanh airfield and various other points in the country.

Enemy troops are still holding parts of two provincial capitals they attacked on Sunday. Allied forces have made only minor progress in the Hue Citadel and there are more signs that the Communists are trying to bring more troops into the Hue area.

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2. Soviet Union

Kosygin's weekend speech revealed new signs that the Soviets are worried about how the US may respond to the Communist offensive in Vietnam. The Premier's line was that now the time has come for the US to take the road toward peace, that Trinh's statements have cleared the ground for such movement, and that escalation can only end in grief for the US.

For some time now, Moscow has shown growing concern that the Tet offensive may only make the war longer, costlier, and more dangerous. The Soviets have even doctored up some Liberation Front statements before publishing them in Moscow--evidently because the statements were tougher than Moscow thought they should be.

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3. Czechoslovakia

Ferment inside the Communist party is growing. All over the country local party units are demanding liberalization. This pressure from below--most of it based on genuine grievances with the old system--will strengthen Dubcek's hand at the top of the party structure. Even the old-time party war horses are bending to the pressure and talking publicly about the need for cutting back drastically on the party's power and influence.

The next Central Committee meeting, now expected in March, will probably be the occasion for announcing some personnel and organization changes. But the Czechs are a legalistic people and the changes will be carefully studied before being implemented.

4. Singapore

Lee Kuan Yew is assured of an all-out victory for his party in the April elections. Opposition candidates will contest only seven of the country's 58 constituencies--and these seven hardy souls will most likely lose.

5. Middle East

Unless there is some progress toward an over-all settlement by 2 March when the Arab foreign ministers meet, Jordan may well be forced by internal pressures to go to the Security Council; this would mean that the Jarring mission has failed. In the Security Council, now more pro-Arab than last year, the blame for the failure of the mission will likely be placed on Israel.

6. Panama

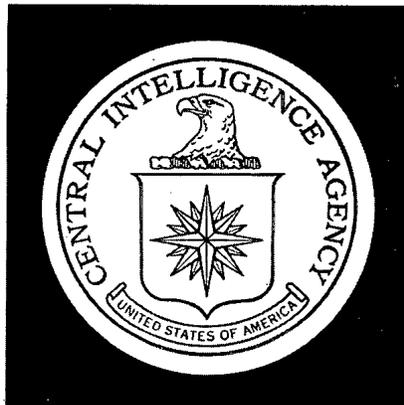
President Robles said [redacted] that he may have to postpone the 12 May presidential elections unless the current political crisis eases. The struggle between the opposing candidates for control of the electoral machinery remains unresolved. Tempers are high, and a rash move by Robles could easily set off violence.

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Arnulfo Arias has already warned that he will move to impeach Robles if there is any tampering with the election schedule. Should Robles announce a postponement, the indignation would be great. Arias might then gain just enough support in the Assembly to pull off an impeachment.

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FOR THE PRESIDENT'S EYES ONLY

Special Daily Report on North Vietnam



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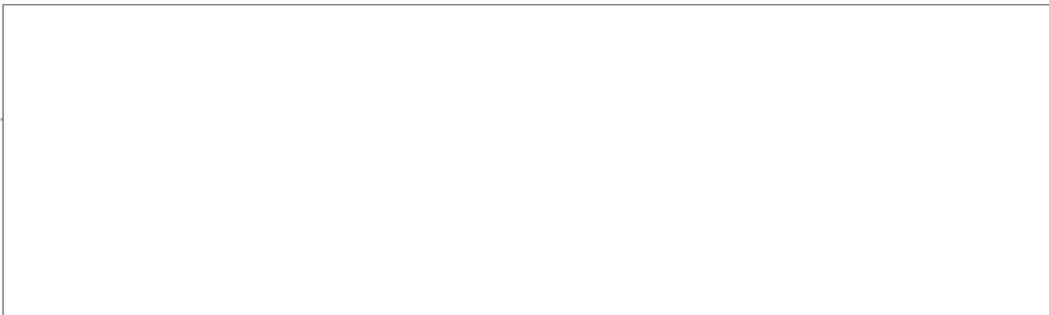
I. NOTES ON THE SITUATION

Communists Single Out Quang Tri Front: In a propaganda statement designed to buttress Communist preparations for large-scale offensive operations in the northern part of South Vietnam, the Viet Cong radio on 18 February described the "Quang Tri Front" as "a giant noose that is tightening around the necks of US troops." The commentary singles out Khe Sanh as a place where the US is worried about a "new Dien Bien Phu - type battle." It draws the most direct parallels between Dien Bien Phu and Khe Sanh yet noted in enemy propaganda, but it does not limit the Communist threat to that area. The commentary claims that Communist actions in Quang Tri Province since the opening of the Tet offensive have driven allied forces into "a state of complete encirclement" from the coastal area to the mountains around Khe Sanh.

The broadcast also takes note of one of the principal elements of enemy strategy in saying that main force units are being used to disperse and tie down allied troops while local and guerrilla forces intensify their activities throughout the provinces. It claims that this action so far has created favorable conditions for dealing the US "new decisive blows." It concludes by praising Communist forces and says their activities will be the forerunner of "a new Dien Bien Phu-type of heavy defeat for the enemy."

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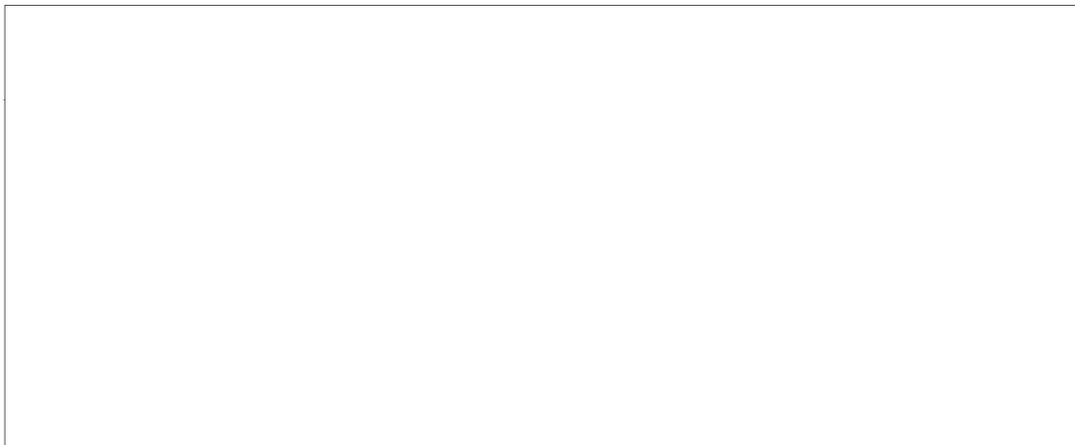
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Peking Views: The Chinese have once again reiterated their opposition to third-party efforts to obtain a negotiated settlement in Vietnam. A Peking broadcast yesterday asserted that U Thant's recent overseas trip and Prime Minister Wilson's trip to the US and the Soviet Union were part of Washington's effort to intensify the "peace talks fraud" in "collusion" with the Soviets. The broadcast did not mention the widely publicized North Vietnamese contacts with Thant, but it predicted that the Vietnamese would not be fooled by the "trick" and would continue fighting until the US was defeated.

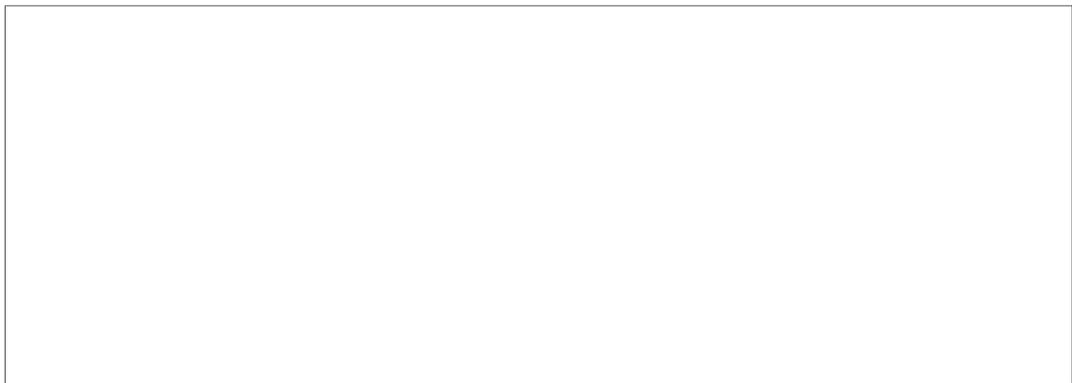
The broadcast is part of Peking's increased propaganda commentary on Vietnam, which rose in volume last week to the highest level in three years. The bulk of the propaganda is devoted to hailing Communist "victories" in Vietnam, and there has been no significant departure from previous Peking pronouncements.

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Comment on San Antonio Formula: The Hanoi party daily issued one of the Communists' most direct and lengthy rejections of the San Antonio formula on 18 February. Calling the formula a "double-dealing trick," the commentary promised that Hanoi would reject any "other US moves for reciprocity."

The article also went back to earlier tough language that the US must stop the bombings "definitively and unconditionally." North Vietnam has omitted the word "definitively" in important policy statements in recent months and has used it only infrequently in more routine propaganda commentary. Its reappearance in this article does not appear to represent a stiffening of Hanoi's demands for a cessation of bombings. On more authoritative levels and through diplomatic channels Hanoi continues to use the formulation "unconditionally."

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II. NORTH VIETNAMESE REFLECTIONS OF US POLITICAL ATTITUDES ON THE WAR

Nothing of significance to report.

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