

The President's Daily Brief

~~Top Secret~~ 23 May 1968



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THE PRESIDENT'S
DAILY BRIEF
23 MAY 1968

1. France

Acceptance by union leaders of Pompidou's offer to open a "dialogue" with labor could be the first step toward a negotiated settlement. The obstacles are impressive, however. For one thing, there is no assurance that the rebellious workers can be brought back under control of the union leaders. For another, the powerful organization of French employers says it will oppose any government-union agreement calling for higher wages.

Moreover, a new outbreak of student demonstrations in Paris early this morning has further complicated the picture.

Defeat of the opposition's censure motion yesterday does strengthen the government's hand, but even in the easiest of circumstances France will never be quite the same again. A leading Gaullist deputy confided to a US Embassy officer this week that the General will be obliged to make important modifications in his social and economic programs--and even his foreign policies--in order to reunite the people behind him.

De Gaulle will do his utmost to preserve intact his force de frappe program--but this, too, may have to suffer.

2. Soviet Union -
Czechoslovakia

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3. Italy

Communist gains in this week's election came in the face of relative economic prosperity and despite developments on the international Communist scene which had seemed to undercut the Italian party's propaganda position. Many Italians evidently wanted simply to oppose the government; the Communists--the only major opposition party--got the votes. Communist strength went up 11 seats for a total of 177 in the 630-man parliament.

Premier Moro, whose Christian Democrats won 266 seats, is the leading candidate to head a new center-left coalition government. The demoralization of his Socialist coalition partners, however, will make that party more difficult to deal with. They had hoped to win back some of the seats taken earlier by a Moscow-oriented splinter party, but actually they met with an over-all loss, winning only 91 seats.

4. Panama

Postelection tension rose several more notches last night after a pitched battle in the capital between gangs supporting the rival presidential contenders. Several were injured before the National Guard restored order.

The official vote count is moving ahead slowly, with Arnulfo Arias in the lead. Some administration officials continue casting about for ways to head off an Arias victory.

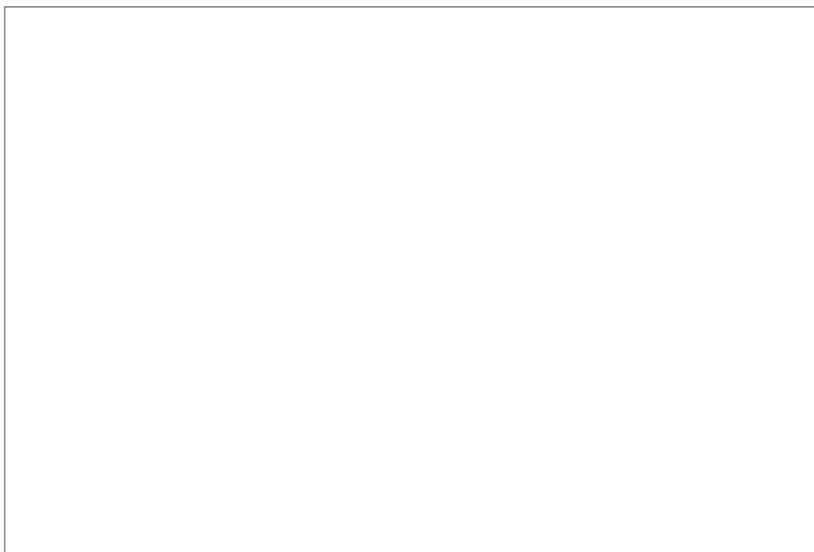
5. India

The Congress Party has made some progress in recent state and local elections. It still has a long way to go before it recovers from the disaster of last year's general elections, but Mrs. Gandhi must feel encouraged.

6. Afghanistan

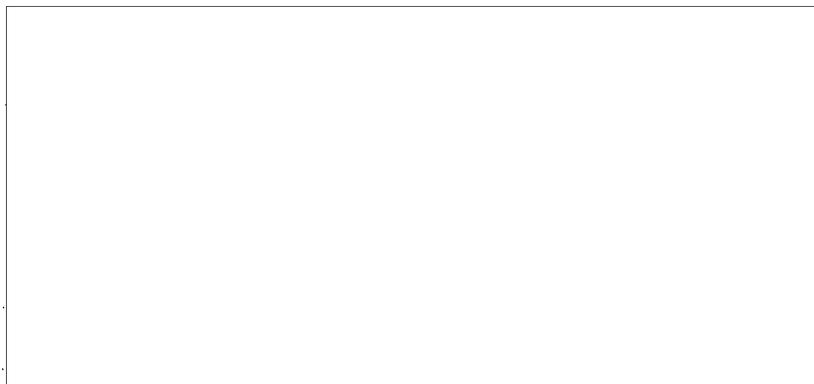
The old way of doing things is coming under attack even in this outpost of traditionalism. Students and workers have been leading demonstrations and strikes in recent weeks and even parliament is showing unaccustomed aggressiveness in its criticism of the conservative prime minister. So far, the King has stayed in the background, but the old establishment is now pressing for an end to the careful "experiment in democracy" he launched a few years ago.

7. Communist China



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8. Central African Republic



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[Redacted]

[Redacted]

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The Soviet Leadership's Reaction to the
Czechoslovak Situation in Early May

We have pieced together [Redacted]
[Redacted] a chronology of [Redacted] early May when
the Soviet leadership made and implemented its de-
cision to step up the pressure on Czechoslovakia. We
think we can discern a "make-haste-deliberately" atti-
tude within a well coordinated team of three. Brezh-
nev clearly assumed the lead. We also believe the
record shows that the Soviets took a measured approach
to the use of power and avoided sharp reflex actions,
much as they did in the Middle East crisis last summer.

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[Redacted]

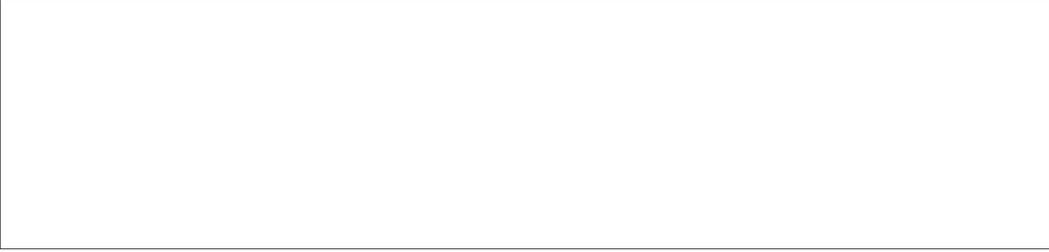
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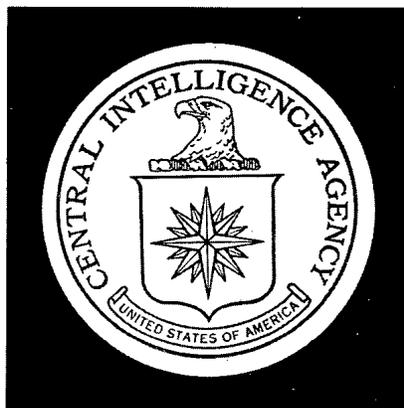


We think we can see in all this activity an approach strongly reminiscent of the Soviet modus operandi in last summer's Middle East crisis. Brezhnev played the key role, but apparently only after getting the general agreement of Kosygin and Podgorny. Once the three had decided to act, they moved quickly to get the proper stamp of approval from their colleagues. Avoiding rash actions, they took a line which permitted the gradual application of political, military, and economic pressure. This "gradualist" approach has come to be a hallmark of the leadership's approach to many problems, foreign and domestic.

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FOR THE PRESIDENT'S EYES ONLY

- 1.) Special Daily Report on North Vietnam

- 2.) North Vietnamese Reflections of U S
Political Attitudes



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Special Daily Report on North Vietnam
for the President's Eyes Only

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I. NOTES ON THE SITUATION



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More from Hanoi on "Friction" in Saigon: Hanoi propaganda continues to play up the government reorganization in Saigon as another sign of friction between Thieu and Ky, and as an unraveling of the South Vietnamese political fabric. A Hanoi international

service broadcast in English on 22 May claimed that the friction between the two South Vietnamese leaders had been smoldering a long time and was now erupting into the open. The broadcast also emphasized other alleged signs of disintegration in Saigon, such as the debate of government policies in the National Assembly. It concluded that no reshuffling of the cabinet would be able to "shore up the tottering Saigon regime."

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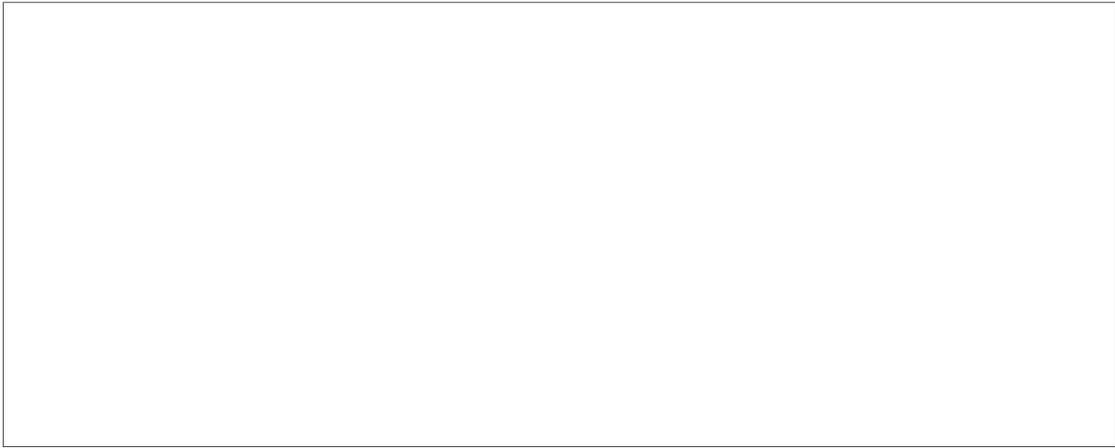
The Genesis of the Tet Offensive: The Viet Cong [redacted] who rallied to the government in April claims that the Communists began to revise their basic strategy for the takeover of South Vietnam last spring. He claims that their decision to take a new look at the war in the South was triggered both by US Operation Junction City and by conflicting advice and pressures from the Chinese and the Soviets on how to conduct the war. This rethinking eventually evolved into a new policy calling for a "general offensive and general uprising" later in the year.

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The defector claims he received this information from his superior. Although his reporting in the past has frequently drawn on intraparty gossip and speculation, he is probably generally correct on the timing of Hanoi's policy reconsideration. He may also have put his finger on some of the factors which necessitated such a revision--a combination of US military pressure and less than satisfactory cooperation and support from the two senior Communist allies.

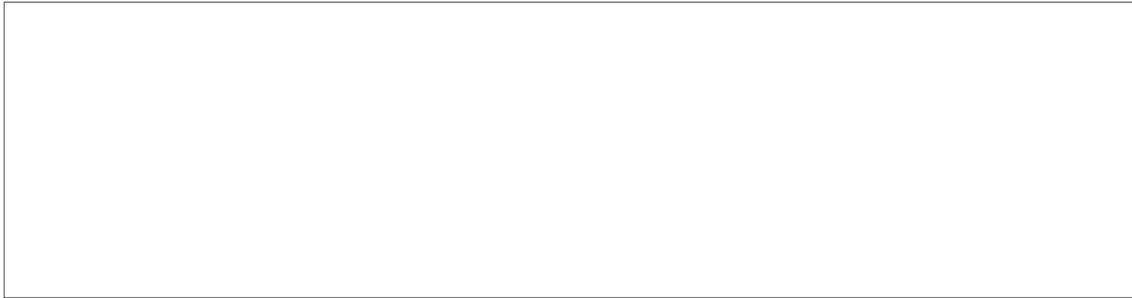
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II. NORTH VIETNAMESE REFLECTIONS OF US POLITICAL ATTITUDES ON THE WAR

Antiwar Rally in US: Hanoi Radio on 22 May publicized an antiwar rally held on 19 May in Madison Square Garden in New York. The Hanoi broadcast claimed that the rally was attended by artists and writers who demanded that the US stop its war in Vietnam.

This same rally apparently was also referred to by Xuan Thuy in his prepared statement of 22 May, when he said that nearly 20,000 Americans had organized a meeting in New York to demand a change in the US attitude in Paris. The meeting, he added, was an example of "progressive opinion in the US" which opposed the administration's policy on Vietnam.

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