

The President's Daily Brief

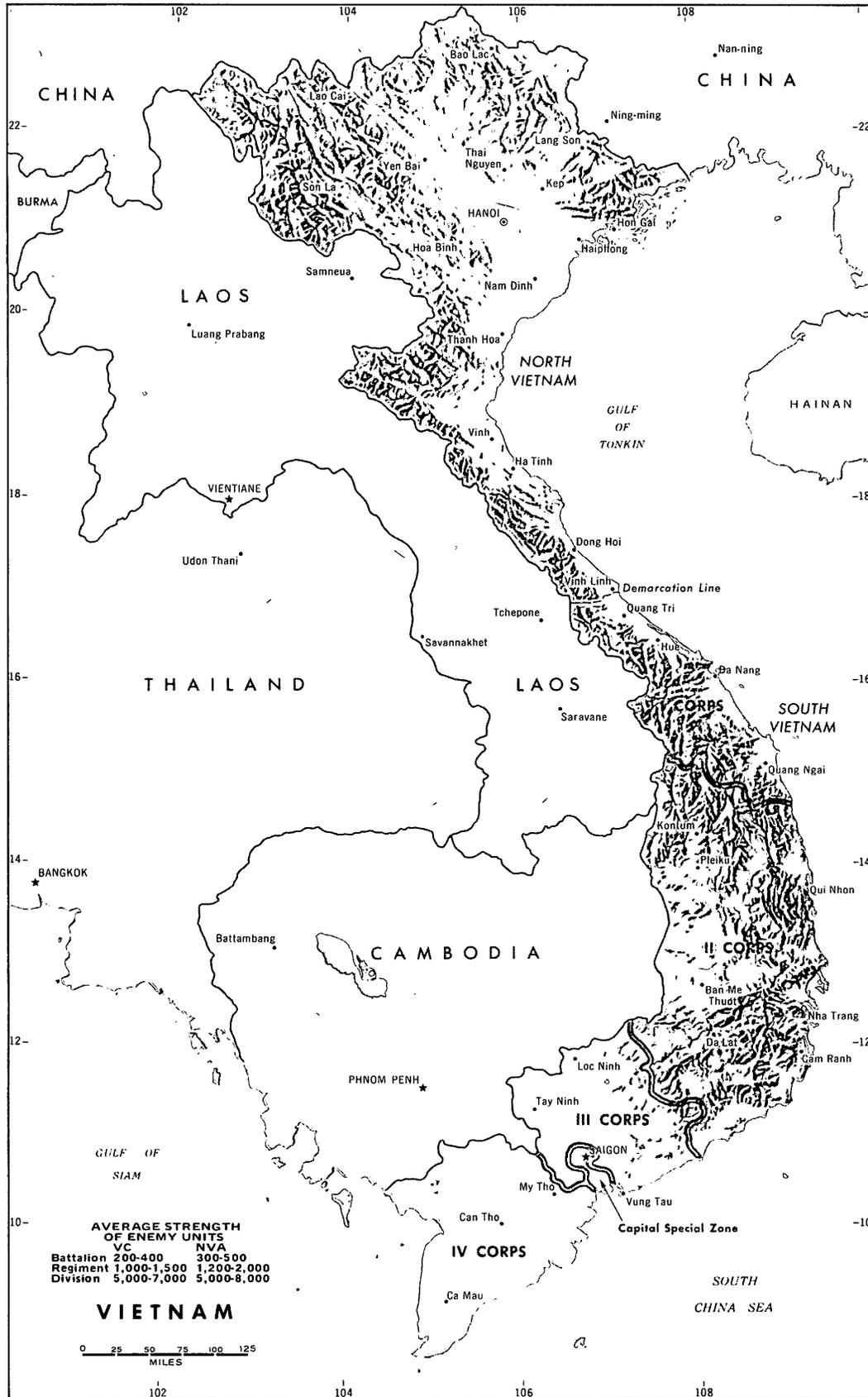
26 March 1969

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LATE NOTES FOR THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF OF
26 MARCH 1969

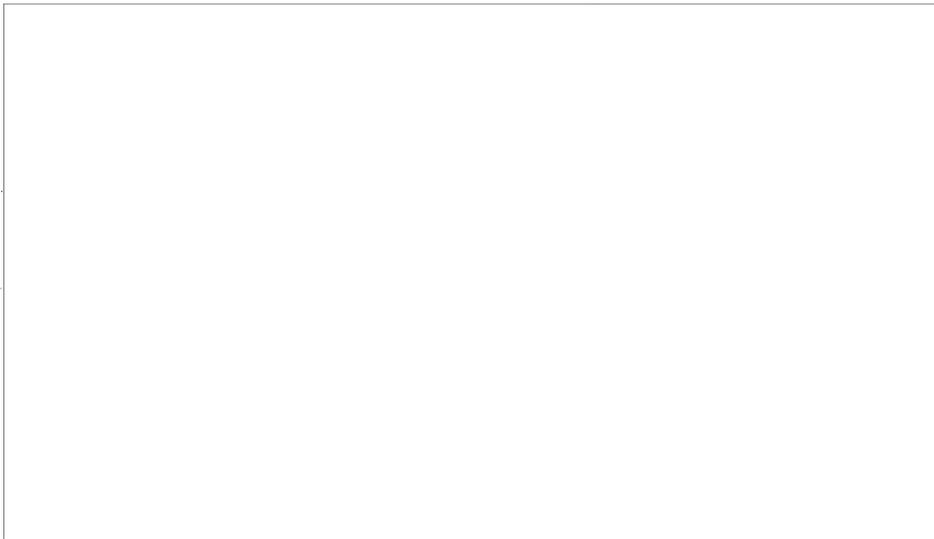
I. MAJOR PROBLEMS

VIETNAM

The Viet Cong radio today called Thieu's proposal for secret talks with the NLF a "crafty trick aimed at covering up the United States' bellicose and stubborn attitude," according to press reports from Saigon. (UPI 037A, 27 March)

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SOVIET AFFAIRS



MIDDLE EAST

There is nothing significant to report.

EUROPE

There is nothing significant to report.

II. OTHER IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS

PAKISTAN

Ambassador Oehlert saw Ayub and General Yahya this morning. Both emphasized that Ayub's decision to step

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down had been his own, and Yahya asserted that the military will be maintaining Ayub's economic and political policies until a civilian government can be established. [redacted]

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[redacted]

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The country remains generally calm, but [redacted]

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[redacted] some unrest is likely as soon as the regime's numerous opponents begin to find their footing.

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[redacted]

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PERU

[redacted]

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NIGERIA

[redacted]

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I. MAJOR PROBLEMS

VIETNAM

Once the Communists have digested Thieu's statement of willingness to talk privately with the NLF, they may well dismiss it publicly in the way they have brushed off other remarks by South Vietnamese officials. The "no comment" approach adopted by Communist representatives in Paris yesterday, however, indicates they are not going to make such a move without some consideration in Hanoi.

Regardless of what the Communists say publicly, Hanoi will take Thieu's statement, as well as President Nixon's remarks yesterday on negotiations, as signs that the US is anxious to achieve progress in the talks and to move toward negotiations. Fundamentally, progress in Hanoi's terms requires "recognition" of the National Liberation Front as the prime spokesman for the Communists on matters concerning South Vietnam.

The Communists are not likely to respond to Thieu's statement with any initiative of their own. Hanoi probably calculates that pressures on the US for progress in the talks will grow if the Communists continue to stall in Paris and are able to string out their current military effort in South Vietnam. They undoubtedly believe that this situation will produce further initiatives from the allied side.

For the time being, the Communists probably would discourage any South Vietnamese bid for private contacts

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with the Front, but without closing the door altogether. Before they accept the idea of bilateral GVN-Front talks, however, they probably want to involve the US at least in some preliminary discussions which include the Front. Perhaps they are pointing toward some kind of informal four-way contacts during the tea break at the plenary sessions in order to get the ball rolling.

* * *

The politically minded militant Buddhists and some other local observers clearly believe that the Thieu government overplayed its hand when it allowed a military court to hand down an unexpectedly harsh sentence to Thich Thien Minh. The militant Buddhists are organizing prayer meetings and are circulating protest letters accusing President Thieu, a Catholic, of trying to "annihilate" Buddhism. They have noted the warning implicit in the sentencing of Minh, however, and are proceeding with caution.

Significantly, moderate Buddhist leader Thich Tam Chau, who has been fairly close to the government, seems to agree that the government made a serious mistake.

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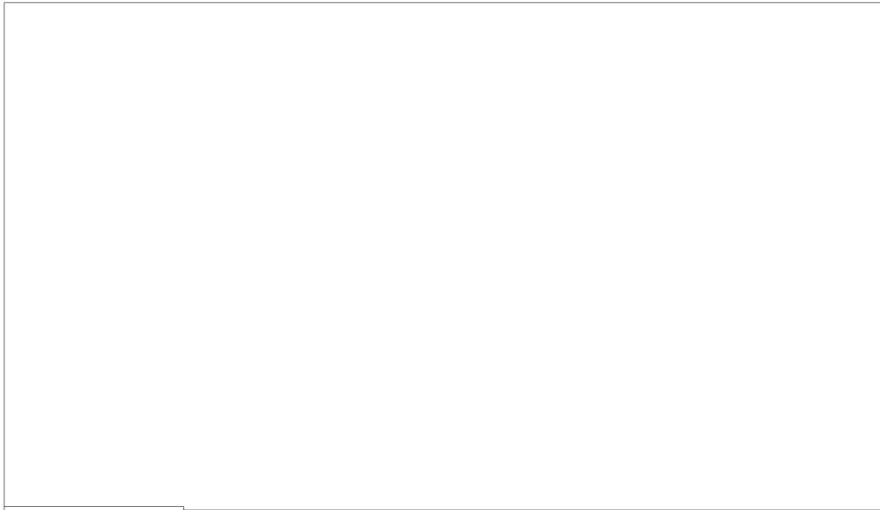
Another political bellwether, Senator Tran Van Don, has issued a statement of concern about Minh's sentence and has urged the government and the militants to compromise their differences.

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Despite considerable concern that the sentence has set back national unity, there is also widespread recognition that the militant Buddhists are trying to make political capital of it. There is no evidence thus far that the militants have been able to generate much popular indignation against the government.

MIDDLE EAST

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EUROPE

The French government has been holding firm in its decision to keep wage increases to about four percent, and so far the unions have been unable to mount an effective counter-attack. Although the recent one-day general strike drew an impressive number of participants, it did not give labor the leverage it hoped to get against the government. Privately owned industries are

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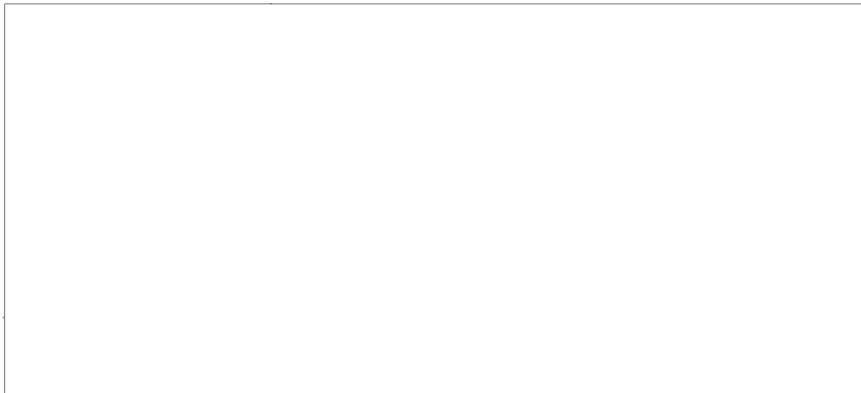
evidently moving toward negotiations--a move supported by the government and the employers' association. For the moment, at least, De Gaulle seems to have won the battle and labor is in retreat.

Nevertheless, wildcat strikes in the railway industry have served to illustrate general uneasiness in the nationalized sector, which is now the most fragile area on the French social scene. Unions representing the nationalized industries have been meeting this week to chart a course of action.

* * *

According to his chief aide, Willy Brandt wants to resume his dialogue with the Soviets in Bonn and hopes to schedule a meeting with Ambassador Tsarapkin before Easter. The West Germans do not have a clear idea of what topics to raise at the meeting, but feel the renunciation of force issue offers a point of departure.

SOVIET AFFAIRS

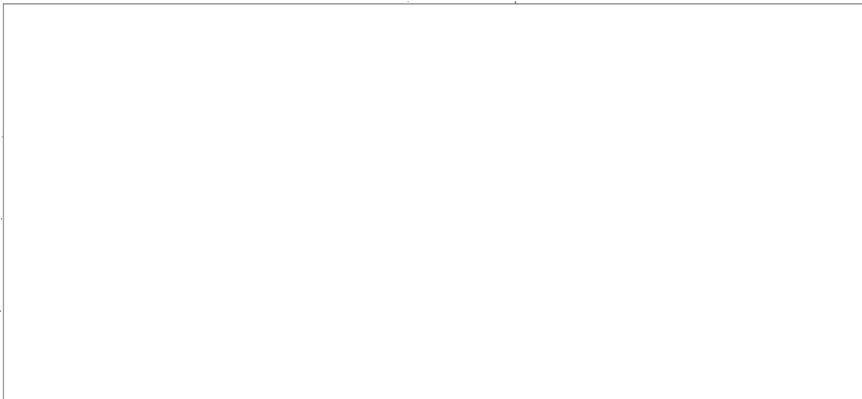


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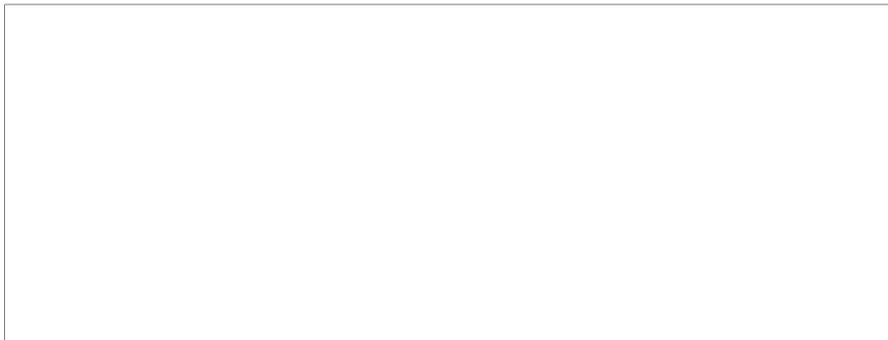
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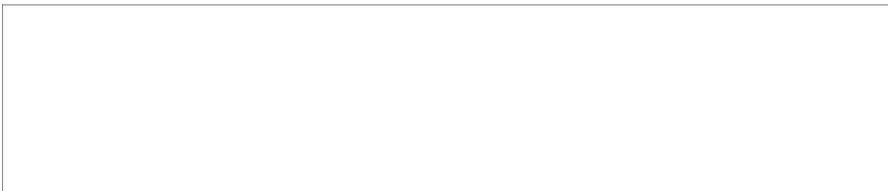
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II. OTHER IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS

PAKISTAN

The transition to martial law in Pakistan seems to be going smoothly so far. Army rule is being greeted with considerable relief in much of West Pakistan, and available evidence (not much of the countryside has been heard from) suggests the East Pakistanis are at least acquiescent. The military in the east is trying not to offend the populace. It is still not at all certain that the lid can be kept on there, particularly if East Pakistani leftists decide to provoke a clash with the military.

NIGERIA

Radio Biafra has now announced Ojukwu's willingness to receive Prime Minister Wilson during the latter's visit to Nigeria. This is a more forthcoming attitude than the Biafrans have taken up to now.

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[Redacted]

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[Redacted]

We still do not believe that either Biafra or the federal government is willing to modify its basic war aims, however.

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[Redacted]

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[Redacted]

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Intercepts indicate that the Biafrans are about to retake Owerri, an important road junction and the closest point of federal approach to Ojukwu's capital at Umuahia.

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NATIONALIST CHINA - SOVIET UNION

Chiang Kai-shek has shown growing interest over the past year in developing contacts with the Soviet Union. His initial overture toward Moscow was a directive to tone down Taiwan's propaganda attacks against the USSR. There have been subsequent meetings between representatives of the two countries, and Chiang has recently instructed one of his most trusted diplomats to develop contacts with Soviet officials in Europe.

Chiang apparently is seeking to exploit Soviet hostility toward Maoist China, and Moscow's consequent willingness

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to engage in at least semi-official contacts with the Nationalists, to dramatize Peking's isolation and to enhance the Nationalists' international position. Taipei presumably hopes a display of Soviet interest in such contacts will discourage non-Communist governments from seeking diplomatic relations with Peking.

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