



The President's Daily Brief

21 April 1969
(Morning)

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

I. MAJOR PROBLEMS

VIETNAM

Ambassador Lam, South Vietnam's chief delegate to the Paris talks, says he has reason to believe that he could get the Liberation Front to respond positively to a bid for private contacts. In a talk with Mr. Habib in Paris late last week, Lam did not specify what "signs" he had from the other side. He claimed, however, that he had received "direct assurance" that contacts could be set up. Lam plans to seek detailed instructions about how to proceed when he sees President Thieu during a trip back to Saigon toward the end of the month.

Lam may be reacting to advice from enthusiastic intermediaries (like the French or a Vietnamese exile) instead of to a real feeler from the Communists. But even if there is substance to what he says, Lam obviously is in no hurry to follow up, despite Habib's urgings that he do so. Lam's desire for detailed instructions from Thieu may reflect only his usual caution, but it could be based on instructions to check with Saigon before setting up any kind of contact.

Lam's source may have also told him that the Communists would insist on seeing more of the GVN's political package. Soviet Ambassador Zorin made this point very strongly on 11 April, when he told Ambassador Lodge that the allies would have to come up with new proposals if we wanted the DRV and the Front to engage in private talks.

Route 1036 in North Vietnam at the Laotian Border (Facing South)



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The North Vietnamese are working hard to expand their logistical network along the western edge of the Demilitarized Zone. They are extending two roads into the Laos panhandle which will connect with already completed roads coming up from the south. The Communists are also improving trails and waterways just west of the Demilitarized Zone. When completed, this expanded network will give the enemy a much more direct and less vulnerable means of moving supplies into key base areas supporting his forces in South Vietnam. (For some idea of the terrain the North Vietnamese must work in, see the photo on the reverse page.)

SOVIET AFFAIRS

Czechoslovak students apparently are planning nonviolent demonstrations against First Secretary Husak's central committee speech last week. This flies in the teeth of Husak's warning that no demonstrations will be permitted and that police action would be justified to end "illegal" public dissidence. The workers, who sympathize with the students, have said they will call a general strike if the regime takes harsh measures against nonviolent demonstrations.

We have nothing to confirm press reports that Husak will be going to Moscow in the next day or two.

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EUROPE

Although most Gaullists are still predicting victory in next Sunday's referendum, signs of uncertainty are beginning to crop up in the Gaullist camp. André Malraux told Counselor Blake on Friday that a poll taken the day before had showed that 44 percent of the populace was still undecided or planning to abstain.



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A high abstention rate would be worrisome, both because it might cut disastrously into De Gaulle's traditional rural majority and because it would undermine the credibility of the referendum even if the Gaullists won. We have later reports, however, that the indicated abstention rate is down to a little over 30 percent. This is a higher figure than De Gaulle would like, but we think it is one he could live with. He will probably try to reduce abstentions still further with his usual television appeal on the eve of the referendum.

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We also assume that some of the gloom being dispensed by French leaders is aimed at stimulating the Gaullist rank-and-file, whose prosecution of the referendum campaign has not been as vigorous as De Gaulle might wish.

MIDDLE EAST

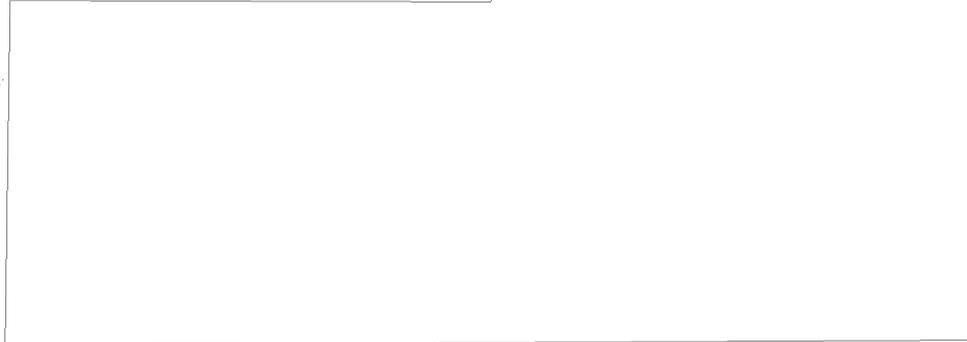
There is nothing significant to report.

II. OTHER IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS

KOREA

North Korea has made some defensive moves against the possibility of US retaliation.

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There still has been no authoritative comment from either Peking or Moscow on the incident. The North Koreans, in fact, have received full support from only three countries: East Germany, North Vietnam, and Cuba. Perhaps because they realize they are not getting much backing for their claims, they have not made much propaganda use of the incident so far.

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ARGENTINA-FRANCE

The Argentines contracted last November to buy 14 Mirage aircraft from France [redacted]

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ganía has not yet signed the contract, but air force officers are pressing him to do so. This purchase, coming after Peru's acquisition of Mirages last year, will make other South American countries--notably Brazil--even more eager to obtain supersonic aircraft.

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