



The President's Daily Brief

23 August 1969

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VIETNAM

General Tran Thien Khiem, now deputy prime minister and interior minister, has been asked by President Thieu to take over Huong's job and form a new government, according to Saigon radio. Thieu has let it be known on several occasions recently that he would like to make Khiem prime minister. Evidently speculation on Khiem did not draw too much fire, thus Thieu was emboldened to go through with the appointment.

The two men have worked together closely for some years, and Khiem has a number of other things going for him in Thieu's eyes. He is a southerner, has the support of the military, is not a politician, and--according to Thieu--can get along with the National Assembly. This latter consideration, if true, would be particularly important because Huong's greatest problem was his growing inability to work with the Lower House.

Thieu and Huong apparently came to a final parting of the ways over inability to agree on the composition of a new cabinet or on what Huong's role would be.

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Probably more fundamental, however, was the inability of two very different individuals to work comfortably together. Huong will stay on the job only until Khiem's new cabinet is formed.

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Several scattered shellings of allied installations occurred on 22 August, but ground fighting generally remained light. Eleven Communist rockets struck the Da Nang airbase, killing one American and wounding 41. Two rockets hit the city of Hue, and another shelling took place in Tam Ky.

SOVIET AFFAIRS

During an informal luncheon on 18 August, Boris Davydov, Second Secretary of the Soviet Embassy in Washington, asked a State Department official what the United States would do if the USSR were to attack and destroy Communist China's

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nuclear installations. Such a move would eliminate the Chinese nuclear threat "for decades," Davydov said, and the US would have nothing to fear from it.

It may be that Davydov's point-blank question was self-inspired. He is uninhibited--unusually so--and often speaks unreservedly on a variety of subjects. For instance, in the same week he had two wide-ranging conversations with other US officials in which he did not raise this question. If Davydov was in fact executing an assignment to probe US reaction, we would expect the same question repeated by other and more authoritative Soviet contacts.

MIDDLE EAST

Muslim delegates at the United Nations share the anger and frustration that the al-Aqsa mosque fire has generated throughout the Muslim world. In addition to their appeal for an inquiry, they may attempt to reopen the debate on the status of Jerusalem.

Thus far no serious violence has resulted from Arab demonstrations in Jerusalem and in Arab countries, although Israeli security forces in Jerusalem had to fire warning shots into the air to break up a mob. Agitation seems to be taking an anti-US coloration, particularly in Jordan where a mob has threatened the embassy.

Prime Minister Golda Meir, on behalf of her government, has publicly expressed regret about the damage to the Muslim shrine. Muslim leaders generally have ignored her statement, however. King Faysal issued an appeal to the Muslim world

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in which he accused "wicked Zionism" of criminal aggression and called for a "jihad" to liberate "the holy places in dear Palestine."

Israeli police have captured a Christian from Australia who, they believe, is responsible for the fire. An Israeli official told the US consulate that the suspect had confessed in the presence of the Australian ambassador.

CAMBODIA

The Lon Nol government has devalued its currency. This, although only a first step, may indicate a new determination to undertake the economic reforms so sorely needed for so long. At the very least, the devaluation is evidence that the new government has Sihanouk's strong support.

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