



*The President's Daily Brief*

*12 December 1969*



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*FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY*

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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

Thieu's political opponents are likely to exploit the alerting of certain South Vietnamese military units following coup rumors yesterday. (Page 1)

Mrs. Meir's new coalition government includes a larger number of proponents of a militant anti-Arab policy. (Page 3)

The Libyan Government may try to implicate the US in the recent coup plotting. (Page 4)

South Korea is reacting in low key to the hijacking of its airliner. (Page 4)

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SOUTH VIETNAM

South Vietnamese Air Force units at the Tan Son Nhut headquarters complex were put on alert yesterday and the National Police guard force there was doubled. These steps were taken as a result of new coup rumors in Saigon.

*We have no evidence to substantiate these rumors, and top leaders in Saigon do not appear unduly concerned. Even these limited precautionary measures, however, will undercut government efforts to develop an image of stability, confidence, and constitutionality. Opponents of the government almost certainly will seek to exploit this nervousness; considerable behind-the-scenes political maneuvering is likely.*

*The coup rumors, and any plotting which may have occurred, seem to be an outgrowth of the bitter reaction against the government following the tax and price hike in late October. This reaction has been particularly strong within government and military circles.*

*For most of the past year, key military leaders apparently have recognized that the overthrow of the constitutional government would entail a serious risk of losing US support for the war effort. The recent flurry of rumors, however, suggests that some military officers again think that a coup might be a practical possibility. Those opposition elements who fear Vietnamization is a prelude to a deal with the Communists, rather than a way to continue the fight in the absence of progress on negotiations, may also be persuaded to think in terms of a coup.*

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*The government's failure to keep opposition elements convinced of its stability is caused in part by Thieu's growing suspiciousness and his consequent tendency to isolate himself from all but a small circle of advisers.*



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*Thieu's handling of the austerity tax, his public position on the My Lai affair, and his recent remarks about beheading some National Assemblymen, all point to an insensitivity to the political situation.*

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ISRAEL

Every major party is represented in Mrs. Meir's new coalition government. More than half of the ministerial offices went to members of Mrs. Meir's Labor-Mapam Alignment, including the key portfolios of defense, foreign affairs, and finance. The rightist Gahal party made the biggest gain in the 24-member cabinet, getting six posts compared to its previous two.

*Mrs. Meir could have formed a smaller coalition government but preferred to project an image of national unity. As a result, the Gahal party has obtained considerable leverage to promote its militant anti-Arab policy. By broadening the representation in her government, Mrs. Meir has sacrificed flexibility. It seems certain that Israel will remain uncompromising in its attitude toward a peace settlement.*

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NOTES

Libya: The military junta may attempt to implicate the US in the coup plotting that led to the recent arrest of two cabinet members. Speaking over Libyan television yesterday, junta leader Qaddafi noted that the plot coincided with the beginning of negotiations on US withdrawal from Wheelus Air Base. He alleged that the plotters had "income or support from the base." Qaddafi also alluded to former minister of defense Hawwaz's recent dealings with two US firms that have been having problems with the Libyan Government. Moreover, the only other person singled out as a conspirator by Qaddafi was an unnamed major said to have returned to Libya from the US shortly after the September revolution. Qaddafi's speech suggests that the Libyans will probably be extremely uncompromising in next week's negotiations.

South Korea - North Korea: South Korea intends to use normal diplomatic machinery to negotiate the return of its hijacked airliner from North Korea. The Seoul government has indicated to US officials that it will seek the release of the passengers, crew, and plane through the International Red Cross and the Korean Military Armistice Commission. In an earlier hijacking case in 1958, this low key approach resulted in the release of the crew and passengers within a month. The plane was never returned.

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