



The President's Daily Brief

24 March 1972



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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

There is a lull in the fighting at Long Tieng.
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Despite Brezhnev's recent speech, Sino-Soviet relations show no improvement. (Page 2)

Chilean President Allende's tacit approval of illegal land seizures by peasants could lead to a showdown with aroused landowners. (Page 3)

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LAOS

After nearly a week of intense fighting, the North Vietnamese are pausing, probably to regroup and resupply before launching more attacks on Long Tieng. A key position guarding the road from Sam Thong was shelled yesterday, but no ground assault followed. North Vietnamese units remain in two positions at the center of Skyline Ridge, government forces hold five positions, and both sides have abandoned two battle sites at the western end of the ridge. There appears to be little change in the situation of Vang Pao's two task forces operating east of the Plaine des Jarres.

Despite the lull, there is no evidence that any enemy units have withdrawn from the area of Long Tieng.

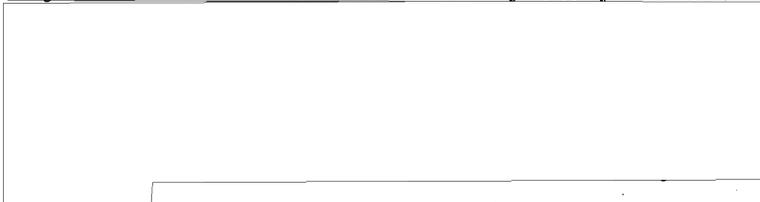
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USSR-CHINA

The timing of a Chinese announcement on 21 March that the most recent round of talks with the Soviets on navigation of border rivers had failed suggests that Peking intended it as an indirect rebuff to Brezhnev's disingenuous offer to improve bilateral relations on a broad front.

Brezhnev spoke on 20 March. On the same day the Soviets announced the return to Peking of Leonid Ilichev, their chief negotiator on delineating the Sino-USSR frontier. Ilichev's arrival presumably was timed to underscore Brezhnev's indication that Moscow was prepared to discuss further a series of proposals--tabled by Moscow over the past year--regarding non-aggression, non-use of force, and territorial settlements. Brezhnev stressed that it was up to Peking to respond. The Soviets no doubt were interested in how the Chinese would reply as an aid to assessing the consequences of President Nixon's visit to Peking.

The failure of the border river navigation talks is directly related to the lack of progress in Ilichev's negotiations on the delineation of the frontier.



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CHILE

In response to a demand by the Supreme Court, President Allende has sent Interior Minister Del Canto to southern Chile to investigate an eruption of violence in the countryside. Leftists are fomenting illegal seizures of farms by landless peasants, while established landowners are using force to preserve or regain their holdings. Still other seizures stem from efforts to settle old grudges.

The dispatch of Del Canto does not seem likely to calm matters down, primarily because Allende condones the seizures by the leftists. He views their actions, even if excessive, as part of the desirable process of grass-roots social change. The opposition Nationalist Party, for its part, fears that its supporters among the aroused landholders are heading for a showdown with the government that could be self-defeating, but feels unable to control them.

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NOTES

Lebanon-Fedayeen-Israel: The fedayeen and the Lebanese Army have established a fragile modus vivendi in southern Lebanon. The guerrillas, who are gradually returning to the area, continue to observe the army's ban on fedayeen bases in villages, and no new clashes have occurred. Villagers have asked for army protection, but allow the guerrillas to purchase supplies. Israel continues to maintain observation posts within Lebanon, and Lebanese Army commanders, despite their strong personal objections to this violation of national sovereignty, have ordered their troops not to interfere with the Israelis.

Malta-UK: As the deadline for British withdrawal draws near, Prime Minister Mintoff has abandoned or muted many of his earlier demands on the NATO allies. He now contends there are only two major obstacles to concluding an agreement with the British: receipt of assurances that US economic aid will materialize soon after the accord is reached, and delivery of a written commitment, no matter how veiled, that the US Sixth Fleet will not visit Malta. Mintoff has told the British he is prepared to go to London tomorrow to sign the document. The British, however, intend to reply that "even with the best of goodwill" they could not be ready before the middle of next week, because the cabinet must first approve the draft treaty.

Ceylon: Many Ceylonese and foreign observers believe that the threat of a new wave of insurgent terrorism has eased until perhaps next month, and that rebel leaders will wait until they think they can catch the authorities with their guard lowered. The government believes it can cope with an uprising, provided it receives promised Western arms and the rebels do not receive foreign aid. The government's popular support has seriously eroded, however, and it may no longer be able to rely on the loyalty of individual members of the police and armed forces.

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