



The President's Daily Brief

28 November 1969

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

Xuan Thuy's recent comments to Western reporters do not seem to reflect a willingness to alter the inflexible approach the Communists have maintained in Paris, but he has, nonetheless, given the first sign in some time that Hanoi may not want to let the negotiations simply languish. *(Page 1)*

A statement by the Warsaw Pact powers yesterday on the Middle East was probably intended to set the stage for new Soviet pressures for a settlement. *(Page 3)*

The Romanians are being pressed by the Soviets to admit publicly that the invasion of Czechoslovakia was justified. *(Page 4)*

Some of the problems facing Venezuelan President Caldera are discussed on *Page 5*.

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NORTH VIETNAM

North Vietnam's Xuan Thuy has used Western press and radio outlets on three occasions during the past week to counter US charges that the Communists are responsible for the impasse in the Paris talks. Each time Thuy expressed willingness to hold additional private talks with US officials, but with the proviso that all issues of the war be discussed.

This unusual effort to pin the blame on the US for the failure of private talks probably is aimed chiefly at regaining the propaganda initiative. The North Vietnamese obviously have been stung by what must strike them as a concerted US effort in recent weeks to show that the talks are stalled solely because of Communist intransigence. The announcement last week of Ambassador Lodge's resignation apparently led Hanoi to conclude that it must strike back.

Thuy's references to private talks are the first time that the North Vietnamese have acknowledged these meetings in public. This unusual step probably reflects real concern in Hanoi that the US may be downgrading the talks. It also suggests that the Communists believe they can strike a responsive chord among critics of US Vietnam policy by holding out some prospect that new private talks might be productive.

In our view, there are no real indications in Thuy's comments of a willingness to alter the inflexible approach the Communists have maintained in Paris for so long. Nonetheless, he has given the first sign in some time that Hanoi may not want to let the negotiations simply languish.

(continued)

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By urging the US to discuss all issues bilaterally with North Vietnamese negotiators, Thuy in effect renewed the proposal made privately to Ambassador Lodge by Le Duc Tho last May.

Thuy apparently did not bring up Laos in his interview with CBS correspondent Peter Kalishcher on 24 November or in his press conference on 25 November. This suggests that whatever he said about Laos to Harrison Salisbury, who reported last Sunday that Thuy had raised the possibility of reconvening the signatories of the 1962 Geneva agreements, was not intended as a significant Communist initiative.

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WARSAW PACT - MIDDLE EAST

The Warsaw Pact powers yesterday issued a new statement on the Arab-Israeli dispute. The declaration contained nothing really new, repeating the now familiar attacks on Israel and its "imperialist sponsors," and reaffirming support for the Arabs. Romania, which has consistently been at odds with its allies' pro-Arab policy, was not associated with the statement.

The Soviets probably intended the declaration as a backdrop to the resumption of four-power talks, now scheduled for 2 December. Moscow has for some time appeared to be writing off the chances for progress through bilateral talks with the US. Egypt has already indicated it considers the latest US proposals unacceptable, and Moscow can be expected to follow Cairo's lead.

The Russians may accompany their talks with the US, UK, and France with renewed efforts to enlist UN support for a settlement in line with the Security Council resolution of November 1967, calling for Israeli withdrawal from occupied Arab territory. Moscow probably believes that both forums offer better opportunities for gaining an agreement favorable to the Arabs than the two-power discussions.

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USSR-ROMANIA

A Romanian official has told our embassy in Bucharest that the Soviets are putting unremitting pressure on Romania to admit publicly that the invasion of Czechoslovakia was justified. The Romanian leadership, according to the source, is meeting to consider a response to the Soviets, and will make a decision soon.

The Romanian position on this issue has clearly weakened now that Moscow has forced the Czechoslovaks to acknowledge the validity of the invasion and has persuaded Belgrade to drop the subject. Romania has been silent on Czechoslovakia since early this year but has not renounced its condemnation.

We are inclined to doubt that Bucharest would agree that the invasion was justified. To do so would imply renunciation of Romania's basic policy against interference in the affairs of other states, which could in turn open the way to additional Soviet pressure. Still, some softening of Romanian adamancy on the Czechoslovak issue is possible.

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VENEZUELA



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Discontent has been noted among junior officers as well.



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Military discontent is only one of Caldera's problems. His popular support-- never very great--has been eroded considerably because he has been unable to deliver on his promises of economic and social reform. An economic slowdown and Venezuela's first serious labor problem in years have also caused political pressures, as has a virtual breakdown of the administration of the universities.

Curiously enough, the student protest movement may provide Caldera with a lever to reduce the impact of some of his other problems. The recent use of troops to put down student riots, and the ensuing military occupation of the Central University in Caracas, helped boost military morale and also re-established some of Caldera's sagging popularity.

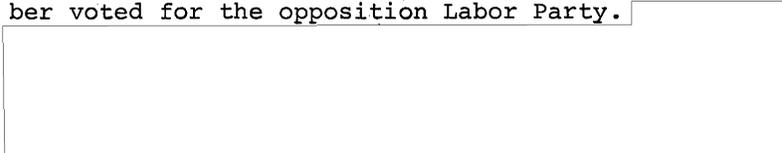
By itself, the occupation of the university will placate the public and the military for only a short time. It does seem, however, that calls for a military coup are highly premature. Most military officers are committed to support the democratically elected government, and no significant sector of the society is apt to accept, much less incite, an unconstitutional change unless the situation gets very much worse than it is.

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NOTE

Australia: The Liberal Party-Country Party coalition beat down a series of Labor Party censure motions by votes of 61-58 in the opening session of the newly elected Parliament. In the election for Speaker, the final tally showed one coalition member voted for the opposition Labor Party.

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