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DCI MAHON BRIEFING 3/17/67

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16 March 1967

DRAFT DCI CURRENT INTELLIGENCE  
BRIEFING FOR MAHON SUBCOMMITTEE,  
17 March 1967

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NORTH VIETNAM

- I. The position of the North Vietnamese government on the possibility of peace talks remains the same--that Hanoi will talk with us only when we have permanently stopped the air strikes, and what they call "all other acts of war against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam."
  - A. The North Vietnamese officially keep referring to this offer, made by their Foreign Minister in an interview of January 28, as their current position on negotiations.
- II. They are, however, leaving themselves room for maneuver in both directions.
  - A. On the one hand, their propaganda still contains enough references to the so-called "Four Points" of April, 1965, to enable them to toss these demands on the table as soon as talks start, or even appear imminent.
  - B. On the other hand, one of their favorite stalking horses, the Communist Australian

reporter Wilfred Burchett, has indicated that a new bombing pause, followed by a request to Hanoi for a reciprocal gesture, might be enough to get the talks started, without any guarantee of unconditional and permanent cessation.

1. The trouble with giving any weight to Burchett's remarks is that he sometimes mixes his own ideas with what he has been told in Hanoi. Also, the North Vietnamese can use him for unofficial trial balloons which do not commit them in any way.

C. The difference between the Four Points and the January 28 interview, of course, is that in the new approach, the only precondition for talks is an end to all attacks on North Vietnam, while the earlier position required the United States to recognize the Four Points as a "basis for settlement" before negotiations begin.

III. Perhaps the most interesting Hanoi statement in recent weeks was made by Premier Pham Van Dong on March 1. When a French reporter asked him

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whether Hanoi proposes that the United States should negotiate simultaneously but separately with Hanoi and with the National Liberation Front, the North Vietnamese Premier answered that this was "up to the United States."

A. The answer was non-committal, but conveyed the impression that Hanoi was not insisting that the U.S. talk directly with the Liberation Front--at least at the outset.

1. Hanoi might be prepared to open bilateral talks with U.S. representatives in order to stop the air strikes, but would then possibly insist that we have to deal with the Liberation Front on anything concerning South Vietnam.

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SOUTH VIETNAM--MILITARY

- I. In the South, the Communists have recently introduced a number of rockets to supplement their mortar attacks on U.S. positions.
  - A. The significance is that some of these rockets have a range greater than the radius of the security perimeters we have been maintaining around our installations.
  - B. Soviet-designed 140-millimeter barrage rockets have been used twice against Da Nang air base, first on February 27, and again on March 15.
- II. These rockets can be fired from a simple tube fastened to a board.
  - A. The Communists used such improvised launchers from firing positions about four miles southwest of the base.
    1. The Russians designed the weapon to be fired from multiple launchers either mounted on trucks, or towed on a light trailer.

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B. The rocket itself is three feet long, 5-1/2 inches in diameter, and can carry a load of about 28 pounds of high explosive a maximum of 9,750 yards. That's more than five and a quarter miles.

III. A captured porter has described the preparations for the first attack.

A. Porters carried the 134 rockets from storage caves down to a river, where waiting boat crews took the porters and their loads to a point near the firing position.

1. The rockets weigh 70 pounds each--almost 100 pounds with the warhead. Each one was carried slung from a pole between two porters.

2. At the scene of the action, individual holes had been scraped in the ground to give the launching tubes the proper elevation.

B. Actually, only 51 rockets hit the Da Nang base. Others hit a nearby village, killing 32 civilians and destroying or damaging 200 homes.

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1. Rockets which failed to fire were dumped in the river. We recovered some of these, and found they had both Chinese and Russian markings.
- C. The first attack cost us 11 killed, 27 wounded, and 18 aircraft damaged. The second resulted in 18 Americans injured, a fuel pipeline fire, serious damage to one aircraft, and light damage to six others.
- IV. The rockets come in faster than mortar shells, and this complicates the problem of effective return fire.
- A. The initial field reports on the second attack, however, indicate that the Marines were delivering counterbattery fire after the Communists had launched only 20 rockets.

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SOUTH VIETNAM--POLITICAL

- I. The Constituent Assembly in South Vietnam is ostensibly engaged in putting the finishing touches on the new draft constitution before submitting it formally to the military regime to meet the March 27 deadline.
  - A. Behind the scenes, assembly and government leaders are engaged in hard bargaining over some of the controversial issues, trying to avoid a formal public dispute later on.
- II. The Ky regime is unhappy with the balance between executive and legislative power, but the main point of contention centers on who does what, from now until national elections are held.
  - A. The assembly, which was popularly elected last September, wants to assume the constitutional legislative powers until a national assembly is elected in six months or so. This would give the present assembly a strong voice in regulating and conducting these elections.

B. The military leaders, on the other hand, want to retain both the legislative and executive authority they now hold, perhaps allowing some assemblymen an advisory role until elections.

1. A private compromise is possible, and would be another helpful step toward eliminating the mistrust between civilians and the military, which has been a chronic cause of past political instability.
2. Otherwise, government leaders may later formally veto the provisions to which they object. The assembly in turn can override the veto by a two-thirds majority vote.

III. The assembly must present its draft constitution to the government by March 27. The government in turn must promulgate the constitution by early May.

- A. There is a general consensus that the election of a president will be held in about six months, probably in September.
- B. National assembly elections may be held about a month later.

IV. The constitution itself provides for a popularly elected president, who may be re-elected once, and for a national legislature with an upper and lower house.

A. A judiciary headed by an indirectly selected supreme court forms the third branch of the government.

B. By and large, legislative and executive powers are fairly well balanced, and generally follow our own system.

C. The constitution also recognizes the principle of elected province chiefs, although they will continue to be appointed during the next four years.

D. On the local scene, elections of hamlet chiefs and village councils will start next month and continue thru June.

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INDIA

- I. In India, Mrs. Gandhi's new government has been cut back to a thin majority in the national parliament, and lost control of eight of the 17 states. The recent elections handed the ruling Congress Party a severe setback, and it still faces the same problems: food shortages, inflation, economic stagnation, Kashmir, and China.
  - A. Since independence, Congress had never held less than 70 percent of the seats in the lower house of parliament. It controlled 16 state governments, with the 17th--Kerala-- under direct federal rule.
    1. Now it is down to 55 percent in the lower house, and opposition coalitions have excluded the Congress Party from six state governments.
    2. Election casualties included the able Minister of Agriculture, Subramaniam; Party President Kamaraj; and the party bosses in Bombay and Calcutta.

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3. Mrs. Gandhi may be able to bring Subramaniam back into the government on the powerful Planning Commission, or as Ambassador to the United States.

II. Mrs. Gandhi has brought her one-time rival for the premiership, Morarji Desai, into the cabinet as Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister. This will strengthen the cabinet if he and Mrs. Gandhi are able to work together.

A. Y. B. Chavan is still Home Minister. He faces new headaches in dealing with opposition state governments on such matters as food collection and distribution, finances, and economic development.

B. The opposition is fragmented at the national level, and the Communists remain somewhat hobbled by the split into separate Moscow and Peking parties. At the state level, however, the opposition parties are successfully ganging up on the Congress Party.

C. A Communist-dominated coalition is firmly in control in Kerala, and non-Communist coalitions have put together solid majorities in two other major states. Three states have shaky opposition coalitions.

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D. In a seventh state, Congress is trying to pick up enough independents to form a government. In an eighth, Congress put such a coalition together briefly, but it was toppled by protest demonstrations, and the state has been put under direct New Delhi rule.

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FRANCE

- I. The Gaullist majority in the French National Assembly was reduced to one in the March 12 election, but this reverse is unlikely to cause any great changes in De Gaulle's foreign and domestic policies.
  - A. The government probably will pick up additional support from unaffiliated conservative deputies, several of whom owe their election to Gaullist withdrawals after the first round.
  - B. This majority probably will not be as responsive to De Gaulle as the previous one, however, because the number of hard-line Gaullists has been reduced by about 40.
    1. The government may thus have to do a little more bargaining in its own camp.
- II. The most spectacular gains were registered by the Communist Party.
  - A. The Communists have 73 seats, which amounts to a 75 percent increase in representation.

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1. The actual Communist vote in the run-off was 21.4 percent, almost exactly the same showing they made in the 1962 elections.
  2. The increase in Communist seats resulted from a deal with the non-Communist Federation of the Left to concentrate on the strongest candidate of the left in each district in the run-off.
- B. The Communists and the Federation will find it difficult to continue this electoral unity in the Assembly.
1. Even if they do cooperate, they will have difficulty challenging the government effectively.
  2. There are virtually no major issues on which the center, the Federation, and the Communists could reach sufficient agreement to censure the government or to defeat a government bill.
- III. A cabinet reshuffle is not likely to occur before the opening of parliament on April third.

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- III. There will probably be a cabinet reshuffle, but it will not occur before the opening of parliament on 3 April.

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- A. De Gaulle might decide to replace or reassign those ministers who failed to win Assembly seats, such as Foreign Minister Maurice Couve de Murville or Armed Forces Minister Pierre Messmer.
- B. Under the French constitution, however, a minister is not obliged to win a seat in Parliament.

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NIGERIA

- I. In Nigeria, deep tribal and regional antagonism has ripped apart an artificial federation of four regions and 250 tribes.
  - A. Unless a modus vivendi can be achieved in the next few weeks between the Northern-dominated federal government and the Eastern region, stronghold of the Ibo tribe, the fragmentation of Nigeria--probably accompanied by civil war--now seems unavoidable.
    1. Eastern governor Ojukwu is basically unwilling to depart from his advocacy of a loose confederal structure, but negotiations are still possible if Lt. Col. Gowon, head of the federal military government, will agree to implement agreements reached in January by the ruling Supreme Military Council. Gowon is reluctant because these agreements in fact assure a weak central government and considerable regional autonomy.

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2. Gowon is planning economic sanctions against Ojukwu, and is determined to prevent Eastern secession, by force if necessary. An easy military victory over the East, however, is not likely, as the East has improved its military capabilities.

B. In Nigeria's Western region, the Yoruba tribe is growing increasingly restive under Northern "occupation." Western leaders have apparently reached an understanding with Ojukwu to make common cause against the North.

C. Any incident could touch off renewed tribal violence.

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VENEZUELA

- I. In Venezuela, pro-Castro guerrillas have intensified insurgency in the countryside, and terrorism in the capital.
  - A. There is no immediate threat to government stability, but if the guerrillas are not controlled, the long-term danger cannot be discounted.
  
- II. The Venezuelan government holds Fidel Castro responsible, and is considering protests in the United Nations and the Organization of American States against Cuban encouragement of subversion in Venezuela.
  - A. Cuba has been helping insurgents in Venezuela with propaganda, funds, and training.
    1. In 1966, Cuba helped the Venezuelan insurgents to infiltrate at least one band of about 40 heavily-armed guerrillas from Cuba into Venezuela.
  - B. Communist terrorists recently kidnaped and murdered the brother of the Venezuelan Foreign Minister.

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1. Venezuelan revolutionaries in Havana then announced that the murder was an act of "revolutionary justice."

C. This incident was the immediate cause for the re-imposition of emergency controls in Venezuela, and the consideration of complaints against Castro in international forums.

1. The government is also concerned, however, over the rural insurgency, which in the past six months has reached the highest levels since 1963.

2. There have been eight guerrilla attacks in the past three weeks, including one attack on a company of regular army troops.

a. In the west, guerrillas are active in the states of Falcon, Lara, Yaracuy, and Portuguesa.

b. In the east, they operate in the Bachiller Mountains southeast of Caracas.

3. Army operations have achieved some success in these two areas, but the guerrilla attacks continue to increase in size and frequency.

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III. Castro in his March 13 speech denied any responsibility for the murder of the Venezuelan foreign minister's brother, and called it a tactical error by the revolutionaries, but at the same time he praised the guerrillas and implied he would continue to back them.

A. Castro seems to have turned his back on his agreement with Moscow to work only through orthodox Communist parties in Latin America.

1. He called the regular Communists in Venezuela "cowards" and "opportunists," and praised the militants of the FALN and the Movement of the Revolutionary Left--the M.I.R.--who are following insurgent leader Douglas Bravo.
2. Castro also took an unmistakable swipe at the Kremlin by criticizing those nations which, as he put it, seek to develop or maintain good diplomatic and commercial relations with "the oligarchic governments" of Latin America. He specifically cited a Soviet delegation now in Colombia.

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