

The President's Daily Brief

~~Top Secret~~ 4 March 1968



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LATE ITEM

Panama

Word this morning from Panama City is that National Guard Commander General Vallarino has worked out a compromise. The General has warned both sides that if the agreement falls through, he "will be forced to settle the problem."

DAILY BRIEF
4 MARCH 1968

1. South Vietnam

Renewed offensive operations by allied forces in several sections of South Vietnam have resulted in sharp clashes with the enemy.

Major actions initiated by enemy forces yesterday were confined to a rocket attack on several sections of the Da Nang military complex. Reports from Khe Sanh show that Communist forces are continuing to tunnel and test perimeter defenses under cover of artillery fire.

2. Panama

The special session of the National Assembly is still scheduled to convene later in the day.

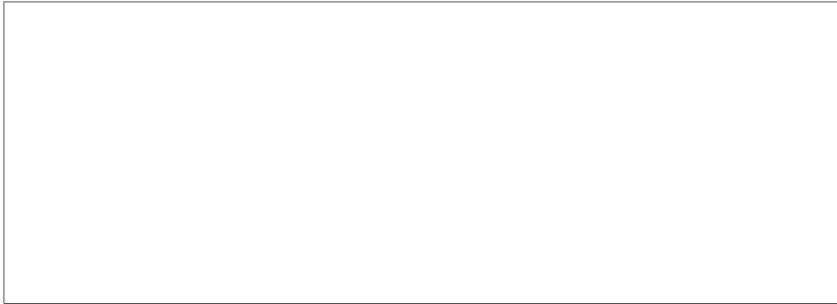
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Although a last-minute compromise is still possible, neither side is backing away from a test in the streets. Both sides in fact are urging their followers to gather outside the assembly building before the legislature meets. The likelihood that large numbers of Arias supporters will come in from the countryside greatly increases the chances for trouble. At last report, it was unclear what action, if any, the National Guard commander intends to take.

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3. Czechoslovakia



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[redacted] Communist aid to North Vietnam and on the Czech internal scene:

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--The Russians continue to provide the overwhelming share--about 80 percent--of the increasing amounts of military aid to North Vietnam; they are willing to sustain this at present or even higher levels.

--There is no quantitative limit to the types of assistance Moscow will provide with the possible exception of offensive weapons that could result in a confrontation with the US.

--The Soviets have not been able to use their aid programs to influence Hanoi's conduct of the war. The Chinese have a greater influence.

On internal Czech matters [redacted]

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--The political situation in Prague is still fluid. Novotny indeed has been trying to incite the workers against the party liberals under Dubcek, the new party secretary.

--The plans of the liberals are altogether unacceptable to Moscow. If Soviet political pressure fails to slow Czech liberalization, the Russians may well apply economic sanctions [redacted]

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4. West Berlin

The West Berlin Bundestag today begins a series of committee meetings in West Berlin, which have been held there periodically. Soviet Ambassador Tsarapkin, talking with Chancellor Kiesinger on Friday, warned that the meetings would create "a serious situation," but as yet there has been no harassment of the deputies who have been arriving in West Berlin over the weekend.

5. Soviet Union

The Soviets launched an unmanned spacecraft on Saturday; it continues to orbit the earth. Deployment of recovery aircraft means that the payload will be brought down inside the Soviet Union, probably to test a re-entry system for manned lunar flights.

A primary purpose of the flight undoubtedly is to check out the launch vehicle.

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6. Laos

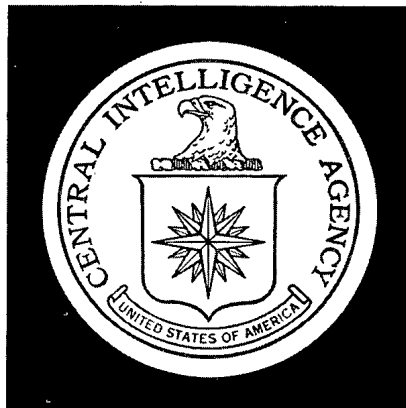
Although Communist forces have made no major gains in a week of heavy fighting, a significant threat to Lao government forces persists in widely separated areas of the country. Government forces at Saravane and Attopeu are virtually encircled, and a new wave of attacks can be expected in the near future. They probably could not hold out against a concerted enemy thrust.

The offensive of the North Vietnamese in the panhandle is closely related to their effort in South Vietnam. It has already resulted in an expansion and consolidation of their defenses and control of the infiltration corridor and has succeeded in tying down a substantial number of government troops to static defense.

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FOR THE PRESIDENT'S EYES ONLY

Special Daily Report on North Vietnam



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I. NOTES ON THE SITUATION

Conditions in Hanoi: A [redacted] traveler who left Hanoi [redacted] says there was no evidence that the people of the capital lacked food. Workers were fed at mobile kitchens set up along the streets of the city. Workers in a given block received food at that block's kitchen. The traveler [redacted] had experienced no serious shortage of electricity. Even during the hot season, there was sufficient power to run the air conditioners [redacted].

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[redacted] the North Vietnamese Government takes advantage of the suspension of US air operations in the Hanoi area during arrival and departure of the International Control Commission flights to move heavy transport in and out of the city. [redacted]

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[redacted] He had observed that traffic was always much heavier in the city during the periods encompassing the arrival and departure of the ICC flights.

Concerning the effects of US bombing, the traveler believed that the bombing as now conducted is not too disruptive of civilian life. Any aircraft over the city results in an alarm being sounded, with everyone seeking shelter regardless of whether bombs are dropped. The alerts are usually of short duration, however, and as shelters are close to places of work, the workers lose little time from their jobs.

The traveler received the impression that the people of Hanoi have become inured to the present hardships and accept their difficult existence with little complaint. He said that almost all children and many women have been evacuated; men greatly outnumbered women in the city.

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Chinese Statement: Peking's statement of 1 March on Vietnam, the first official government pronouncement since last November, was largely a reiteration of China's standard propaganda line. Again, Peking refrained from any specific commitment to Hanoi offering only the "all-out support" of the "Chinese Government and the 700 million Chinese people."

The statement emphasized the Chinese contention that Hanoi and the Viet Cong can achieve final victory if they will only persevere in the fighting. The results of the Communist spring offensive were cited as proof that "complete defeat" for the US "is not far off." The statement warned, however, that out of desperation the US would further escalate the fighting while it engages in "peace-talk plots" in collaboration with the Soviet Union.

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French Doctor Visits Hanoi: A French doctor, the head of the Communist-front Franco-Vietnamese Medical Association, is back in Paris after a trip to Hanoi. He has told US officials that the bombing of Hanoi has damaged the city's water supply system and that all water must be boiled. Wells have been dug to supplement the system. The city is not threatened by epidemic, however. The doctor says he saw no indication that stepped-up bombing would break the North Vietnamese will to resist.

The doctor found the North Vietnamese interested in increased medical exchange with France, and he thinks more French doctors will go to North Vietnam for short visits. He says Hanoi no longer needs malaria suppressants or antibiotics, which are largely manufactured locally. It does need surgical equipment and laboratory testing equipment.

The Frenchman had some contact with political officials in Hanoi, but got nothing but the standard line on negotiations.

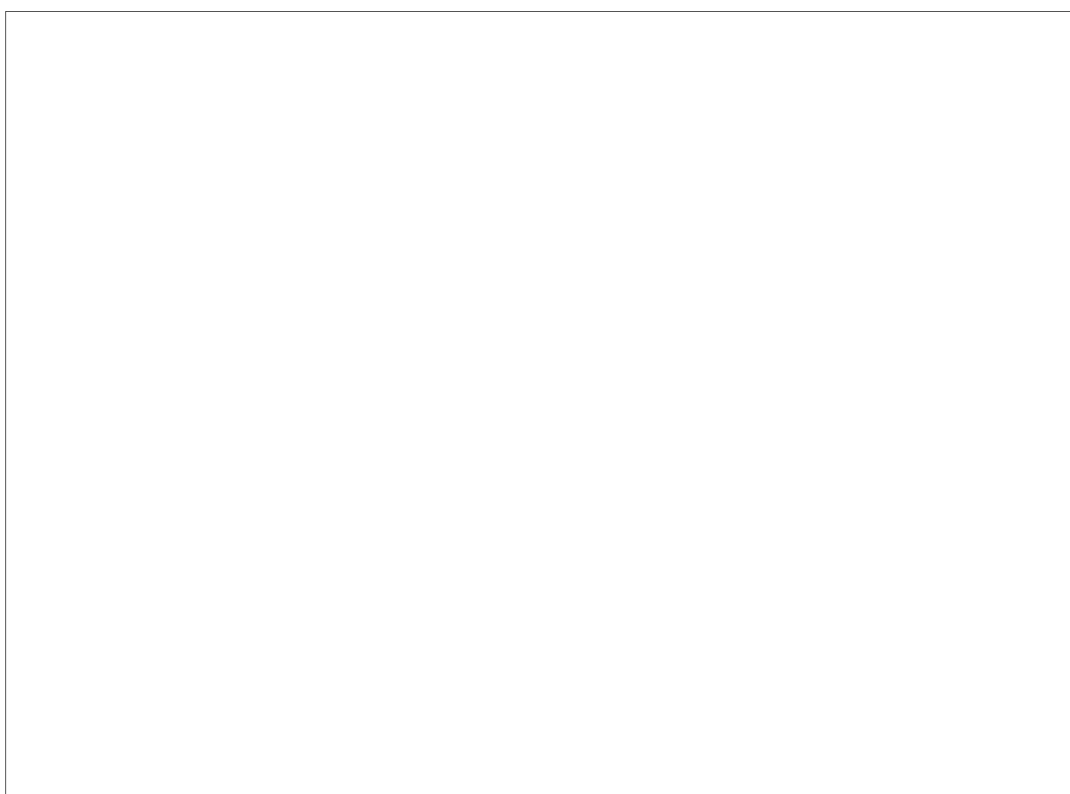
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Czechs Provide Diesel Generators: Czechoslovakia will supply Hanoi with a 5,600-kilowatt diesel electric power station, the largest single diesel electric power station North Vietnam has imported since the bombing began. This is in addition to 14 diesel generators, with a combined capacity of 5,600 kw, which the Czechs said they could deliver late in 1968.

Since early 1965, Hanoi has imported about 3,000 diesel generating plants from Communist countries with a combined capacity of about 50,000 kw. These plants can produce about 100 million to 120 million kilowatt hours of electricity annually, about one-fifth of prebombing production. The new generators will increase Hanoi's capacity, already sufficient to meet the demands of essential consumers, by 20 percent.

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II. NORTH VIETNAMESE REFLECTIONS OF US POLITICAL ATTITUDES ON THE WAR

There is nothing of significance to report.

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