

The President's Daily Brief

~~Top Secret~~ 15 May 1968



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THE PRESIDENT'S
DAILY BRIEF
15 MAY 1968

1. Vietnam

[redacted] who de-
fected near Saigon [redacted] says
that the first reaction of enemy forces
to the Paris talks probably will be to
fight harder to achieve the most favor-
able bargaining position possible. He
claims [redacted]

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[redacted] that the rank and file
are increasingly war weary and that
their morale will probably sag if the
talks are dragged out.

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2. Czechoslovakia

Both Prague and Moscow now seem to
be trying to ease the tension. The
press and radio on the Czech side give
the impression that Dubcek has decided
to move against the extreme liberals who
have been irritating Moscow while at
the same time pushing forward his re-
form program. As for the Russians,
their activity near the Czech border
continues to taper off.

3. Panama

Both sides are still claiming vic-
tory in Sunday's elections. [redacted]

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the electoral tribunal will be unable to
certify the results before June or July,
but when it does, "Samudio will win by
about six thousand votes." [redacted]

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[redacted] Arias intends to ask the tribunal
to declare him the winner at once. If
it refuses, Arias claims, his followers
will be told "to act as they see best."
In this situation, extremists support-
ing Arias would probably try to provoke
new disorders against the government.

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4. United Kingdom

The British press generally agrees that the Wilson government may have lost its will and capacity to govern, and that the Labor Party ought to consider over the next several months whether a change of leadership might be advisable. Most papers, however, are not calling for Wilson's immediate resignation; in fact, the slashing attacks on the prime minister by the King newspaper chain seem to have united Labor supporters behind Wilson, at least for the short term.

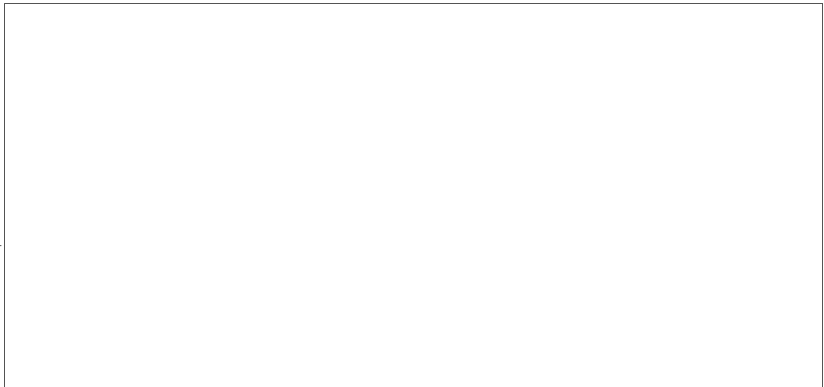
Of more importance for the long run is the view expressed by several papers that if another economic crisis intervenes, a majority of the cabinet will almost certainly consider Wilson too great a liability and will ask him to resign.

In a cable in this morning, Ambassador Bruce reaches similar conclusions. He says that any new sterling crisis would almost certainly force drastic action. He comments that "the person of the prime minister is almost the only thing left to throw out of the boat to keep sterling afloat." It would not be a question of a cabinet plot or personal ambition, but of the necessity for the prime minister to sacrifice himself to save the country.

5. Middle East

Thanks to massive Soviet military deliveries to Egypt, Iraq, and Syria since the June war, the Arab stocks of military equipment now outweigh those of Israel almost as much as they did just before the war broke out. This is discussed in greater detail in today's Annex.

6. Nepal



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ANNEX

The Status of Soviet Military Aid to the Arabs

By the end of last month, the Soviet Union had replaced about \$350 million of the estimated \$450 million worth of military equipment lost by the Arabs in the June war. There are still sizable support equipment losses to be made good, but we expect the Soviets to correct this deficiency in the coming months.

In concrete terms, the Soviet resupply effort has:

--Restored Egypt's air and ground force inventories of major combat equipment to between 80 and 90 percent of prewar holdings;

--Replaced most of Syria's losses of major military equipment;

--Continued the delivery of aircraft and other equipment to Iraq, in line with a prewar agreement, so that Iraq's holdings are now well above 1967 levels;

--Made offsetting deliveries to Algeria to compensate for the aircraft which that country turned over to Egypt during the war.

Jordan, of course, has not received Soviet military aid. Even so, the stocks of Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and Jordan relative to those of Israel are impressive.

--These Arab states now have a 4 to 1 advantage over Israel in high performance (MACH 2) jet fighters;

--A 2 to 1 advantage in tanks and self-propelled guns; and

--A 4 to 1 superiority in total artillery pieces.

The Arab superiority in military hardware is likely to grow--particularly if Israel fails in its current effort to get new high performance jet fighters.

The galling thing about all this to the Soviets, however, is that the Israeli soldier remains far out in front of his Arab counterpart in motivation, training, and leadership. Nothing the Soviets can do will close this all-important gap in the foreseeable future.

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FOR THE PRESIDENT'S EYES ONLY

- 1.) Special Daily Report on North Vietnam

- 2.) North Vietnamese Reflections of U S
Political Attitudes



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Special Daily Report on North Vietnam
for the President's Eyes Only

15 May 1968

I. NOTES ON THE SITUATION

The North Vietnamese in Paris: Hanoi diplomats in Paris are getting excellent marks in press and public relations. They are projecting an image of firm confidence mixed with reasonableness, even under the pressure of persistent and sometimes irritating press questioning. Nguyen Van Le's press conference on 13 May was apparently typical. As reported by the French news agency, the North Vietnamese spokesman simply and deftly turned aside questions that he did not care to discuss in detail. Le was questioned on what North Vietnam would do if the US refused to stop the bombing. He neatly sidestepped the question. When pressed harder, he dismissed the journalist by telling him that the "reply" probably suited the question. He said it with a smile, however.

Some of the flexibility is also evident in Xuan Thuy's opening remarks. These, while faithful in all significant respects to well established Communist positions, appeared deliberately to avoid polemics. Xuan Thuy used little of the harsh language which Hanoi frequently employs in propaganda forums. On the issue of the bombing, for example, instead of demanding a complete and immediate cessation as a sort of ultimatum--as Hanoi has done in the past--Thuy said only that the North Vietnamese Government wanted a clear and positive answer to the demand that the bombing be stopped. He made no threat to break off the talks, and his closing sentence avoided any sense of urgency. He implied only that he wanted an answer sometime during the course of "these official conversations."

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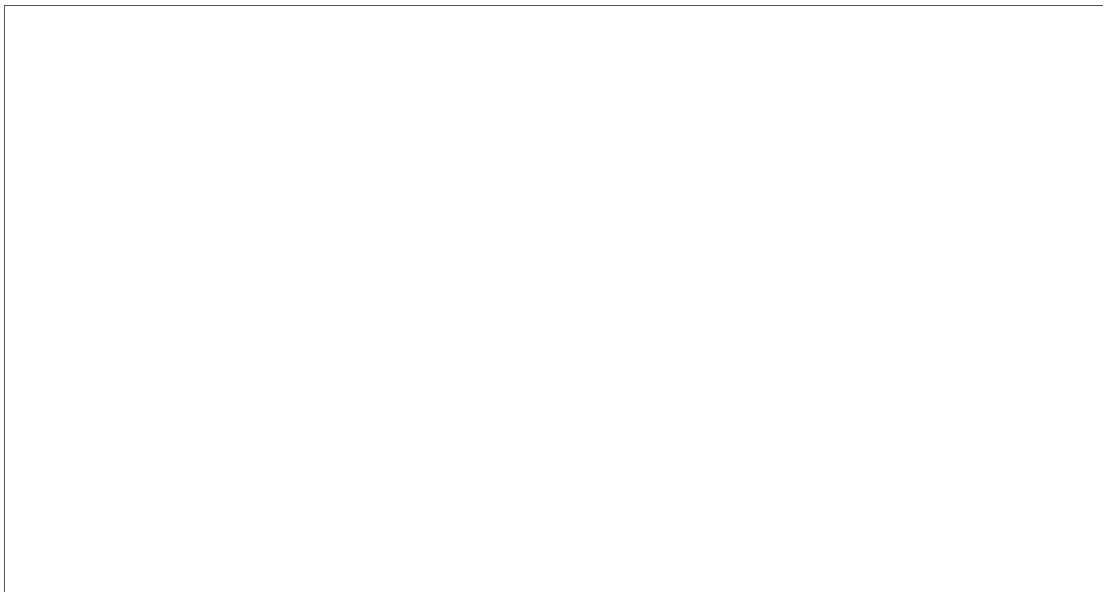
Hanoi Press on Paris Talks: Yesterday morning's newspapers in Hanoi gave heavy play to the Paris talks, according to the French news agency man in the North Vietnamese capital. Most of the coverage was

devoted to Xuan Thuy's initial statement in Paris on Hanoi's position; Governor Harriman's statement was summarized in some 15 lines. The French report did not say which portions of Harriman's statement were included in the brief summary.

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Hanoi Continues to Boast: An authoritative article by "Victor" in the Hanoi army daily, broadcast on 13 May in English on the international service, stressed that the recent series of attacks had successfully combined popular uprisings with effective strikes at the heart of allied military positions in the urban areas. This "continuous revolutionary struggle," it claimed, has clearly shifted the balance of forces to the Communists and altered the political situation in their favor as well. "Victor" points to the "growing prestige" of the Liberation Front and the establishment of the National Alliance as evidence of the increased isolation of the Saigon government. The recent attacks, the article concludes, will be a major factor in forcing the US to accept complete defeat.

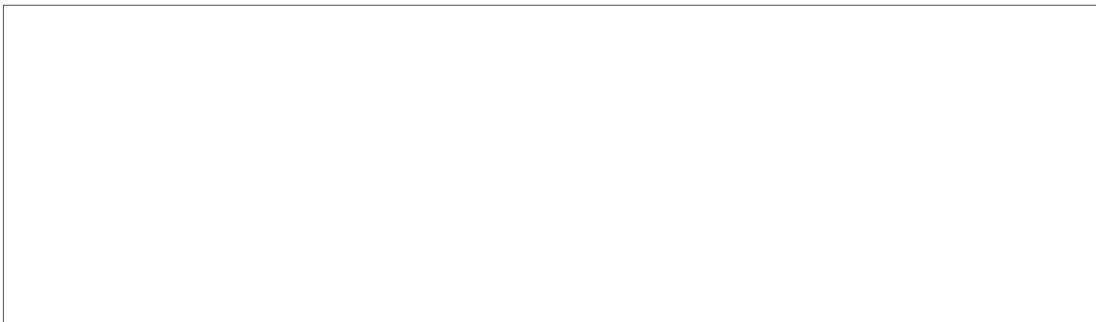
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Front Responds to Ho Letter: The Liberation Front has responded to Ho Chi Minh's letter of 8 May praising the renewed Communist offensive in the South by pledging to score greater military successes, especially while preparing to celebrate Ho's birthday on 19 May. In a letter broadcast by Liberation radio in Vietnamese on 14 May, Front leader Nguyen Huu Tho rehashed Communist claims of victory in the past several years and voiced the Front's determination to press on with the struggle until the South is liberated and the unity of Vietnam assured. The statement made no mention of the US "peace hoax" which was referred to in Ho's letter. So far, the Liberation Front has made no public reference to Hanoi's offer to meet with the US in Paris nor to the subsequent opening of talks. A Hanoi broadcast, however, claimed in general terms that the Front's news agency had endorsed Hanoi's move.

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Moscow Treatment of Paris Talks: The Soviet press and radio gave a straightforward account of the mechanics of Monday's meeting, but presented only Hanoi's side of the dialogue. Scattered comment continued to reiterate that the US must stop the bombing, etc., before the talks can progress to a "serious stage."

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Results of 8 May Photographic Mission: A high altitude photographic mission of 8 May brought back some good pictures of several airfields in the Hanoi-Haiphong area. No significant change is discernible in the air order of battle, but the pictures do show one badly damaged IL-28 bomber off the main runway at Phuc Yen. This is the one that recently crashed while trying to land.

The mission provided the most comprehensive coverage since January of priority industrial targets. Five of the principal power plants in the national network are in partial operation, and

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construction at three of these is continuing.

The pictures show about 170 rail cars in the environs of Haiphong--one of the highest levels ever observed there.

The Doumer bridge at Hanoi is still unserviceable.

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[Redacted]

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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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