



The President's Daily Brief

February 8, 1974

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

February 8, 1974

PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

Hanoi has held two Central Committee plenums in the past few months to decide plans and strategy in both North and South Vietnam. Although the Communists are still talking about an eventual offensive in the South, they consider their situation weak. (Page 1)

The miners' executive committee is meeting today to decide whether to accede to Prime Minister Heath's request to postpone the strike until after the election on February 28. (Page 3)

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[Redacted] Syria [Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted] (Page 4)

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Kuwait [Redacted]
[Redacted]

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(Page 5)

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A draft constitutional amendment to provide for a referendum on merger with Libya leaves the Tunisian Government ample room to postpone indefinitely the union agreement signed on January 12. (Page 6)

Notes on Libya, Laos, Vietnam, Turkey, and Nationalist China appear on Pages 7 and 8.

The succession problem in the Soviet Union is discussed at Annex.

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VIETNAM

Hanoi has apparently held two Central Committee plenums in the past few months--the first such meetings since the signing of the Paris accord. Together they provided guidance for the party rank and file on Communist plans and strategy in both North and South Vietnam.

The first of the plenums (the 21st since the last party congress in 1960) was apparently held last fall and dealt with future strategy in South Vietnam. As usual with meetings on the South, the North Vietnamese have not mentioned the plenum publicly, but extensive information on it is beginning to arrive [redacted]

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[redacted] Guidance from this plenum makes the following general points:

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--At some time the Communist side will again go on the offensive and achieve final victory in the South.

--That time is a good distance away, however, and for now the Communist side is to build up its forces, defend its territory, and try to improve its political position.

--Even though it may be years before these efforts bear fruit (one rallier says he was told to expect victory in the period 1979-84), troops and party cadre are to have faith in the party's omniscience and in the inevitability of a final victorious assault.

In contrast to the 21st plenum, the 22nd was played up immediately by North Vietnamese media. It apparently convened late last month and seems to have been concerned principally with the reconstruction of North Vietnam. It may have laid down guidelines for a five-year plan beginning in 1976, and for one-year plans in the two intervening years.

* * *

Briefers in the South are now informing party cadre of the 21st plenum's resolution on southern strategy. One such briefing [redacted] gives insight into the party's bleak assessment of the Communists' present situation in the South. [redacted] admits that the Viet Cong control few people, have lost access to the bulk of the population, cannot find recruits for their guerrilla units, and are experiencing serious economic problems. It acknowledges Saigon's

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increased influence in the countryside, noting that the Thieu regime is strong "from the central level to the village and hamlet level." Saigon is also given high marks for its "well-trained and well-equipped army," its effective internal security forces, [redacted]

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Beyond urging careful doses of increased military action, [redacted] provide little specific guidance for overcoming these problems. [redacted] note vaguely that several factors, notably in the economic sphere, are working against Saigon, and [redacted] say that Communist-controlled areas inside South Vietnam and aid from "socialist" and "independent" countries abroad are important assets.

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One of the more revealing aspects of this account is the credibility gap that apparently exists between lower level cadre and the party leadership. Local cadre are told explicitly that, despite their confusion and puzzlement, they must have confidence in their leaders and follow party guidance. Much of the early part of the resolution is an historical account of the victories of the revolution, pointing out that even in times when things looked bad, the party leadership ultimately developed a successful strategy. The message for local Viet Cong advocates of a major offensive is that only the leadership can determine both the timing and propriety of such a policy.

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UK

The miners' executive committee is meeting today to decide whether to accede to Prime Minister Heath's request to postpone the strike until after the election on February 28. The union president, a moderate, believes that the strike ought to be deferred. Some of the militants on the committee, however, are opposed. The Labor Party will probably ask the miners to delay their action, since the party is already saddled with an election manifesto that is unlikely to appeal to the electorate.

One of Heath's principal goals is to increase the Tories' parliamentary majority, which now stands at 15. If he is successful, he will consider this a mandate to continue his counterinflation program and request tougher measures to regulate industrial relations. Most late opinion polls give the opposition Labor Party a slight but hardly significant lead.

Government and private estimates of the economic effects of a strike--particularly a lengthy one--may have convinced Heath that an election was necessary. Leaders of the Confederation of British Industry urged Heath this week to try to avert the strike lest it lead to the worst economic catastrophe since World War II. As many as 4 million workers could be unemployed, steel production could be cut in half within three weeks, and severe power restrictions would have to be imposed within five weeks.

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SYRIA

[redacted] 25X1
[redacted] President Asad believes Syria should attend the 25X1
Geneva peace conference, but that he is concerned
about continued opposition within the army, the
fedayeen, and a faction of the Baath Party, for
which Foreign Minister Khaddam is the principal
spokesman. [redacted]

[redacted] the Khaddam faction distrust President Sadat, 25X1
who they believe is more interested in recovering 25X1
the Sinai than in cooperating with Syria. The
group opposes further cooperation with Cairo and
favors closer ties with Iraq and the continuation
of the oil embargo.

The Baath-dominated National Progressive Front-- 25X1
an umbrella organization for all of Syria's major
political parties--is apparently also sharply di-
vided between Khaddam's supporters and those, os-
tensibly led by Prime Minister Ayyubi, who favor
disengagement talks and continued cooperation with
Egypt. [redacted] 25X1

[redacted]

Because of this discord, Asad appears to be
taking a variety of steps to try to line up mili-
tary and political support before making a final
decision on negotiations with Israel.

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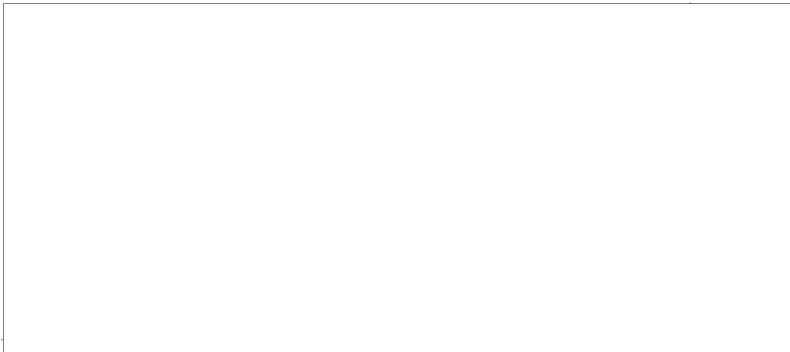
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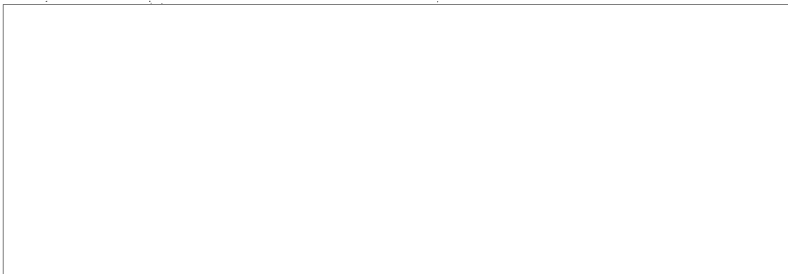
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TUNISIA

A draft constitutional amendment to provide for a referendum on merger with Libya leaves the Tunisian Government ample room to postpone indefinitely the union agreement signed on January 12. As presented to the National Assembly by Prime Minister Nourira, the amendment calls for a consultative process leading toward a treaty that would still have to be ratified by the National Assembly before a referendum could be held.

The postponement of the merger, [redacted] is having an unsettling effect on Tunisian politics. Presidential hopefuls are maneuvering for positions of strength and forming alliances in the belief that the period of transition from President Bourguiba to another leader has finally begun.

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Much will depend on how soon the 70-year-old Bourguiba returns from medical treatment and several weeks of rest in Switzerland, and whether he reconsiders his decision to run for re-election next November. Prime Minister Nourira, his deputy and party director Mohamed Sayah, and Interior Minister Belkhodja hold the key positions while Bourguiba is out of the country. All three are potential presidential timber. They joined forces to shelve the union agreement with Libya, and they were instrumental in getting Bourguiba to sack ex-foreign minister Masmoudi, still another contender for power.

There has been no hard evidence that the military will abandon its traditionally apolitical role during this period of transition. Younger officers who, like their civilian counterparts, saw prospects for money and promotion in the merger, were disappointed when it was shelved, but they do not appear to be actively opposing the government decision. The Interior Minister is nonetheless concerned about the possibility of subversion from the military; surveillance of officers has been increased and a civilian watchdog over the military has been appointed. These moves could provoke far greater resentment among the military than the government's retreat from the merger.

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NOTES

Libya: Libyan Prime Minister Jallud has left on a visit to Warsaw, Moscow, and possibly Prague. Jallud last visited the USSR about two years ago. He will probably discuss arms purchases, since Moscow and Prague have been the primary suppliers of military equipment to the Libyan Army. The Prime Minister is also seeking technological cooperation from all three countries.

Laos: Prime Minister Souvanna has defused potentially troublesome student discontent in Laos, at least for the moment. On February 5, he convinced leaders of the Vientiane-based Lao Student Federation, which has organized and supported recent student demonstrations in the central and southern provinces, that they should hold off on protests in Vientiane for the time being. He told them that demonstrations could disrupt his efforts to form a new coalition government. Students in Savannakhet have apparently also agreed to suspend demonstrations. The students had earlier occupied the USAID compound and the Thai-owned radio station in Savannakhet, but they did no damage to either installation. No anti-US overtones were apparent in the students' activities.

Vietnam: The Thieu government is organizing a nationwide campaign to drum up popular support for its position on the Paracel Islands dispute. The government probably hopes to head off criticism of its military setback and of its unsuccessful diplomatic efforts to get international support. The campaign is unlikely to increase positive support for the government, but the appeals to patriotism may temporarily divert some attention from domestic problems.

Turkey: Prime Minister Ecevit's coalition cabinet received a narrow vote of confidence yesterday from the National Assembly. The vote completes the formal process of installing a new government following elections last October. Ecevit has indicated that he will soon seek talks with the US to reconsider the two-and-a-half-year ban on opium-poppy cultivation. He reiterated in parliament, however, his pledge to consider "humanitarian concerns" while ending the "unfair treatment" of poppy farmers.

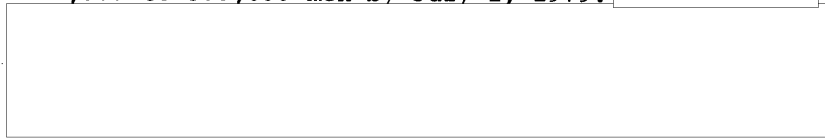
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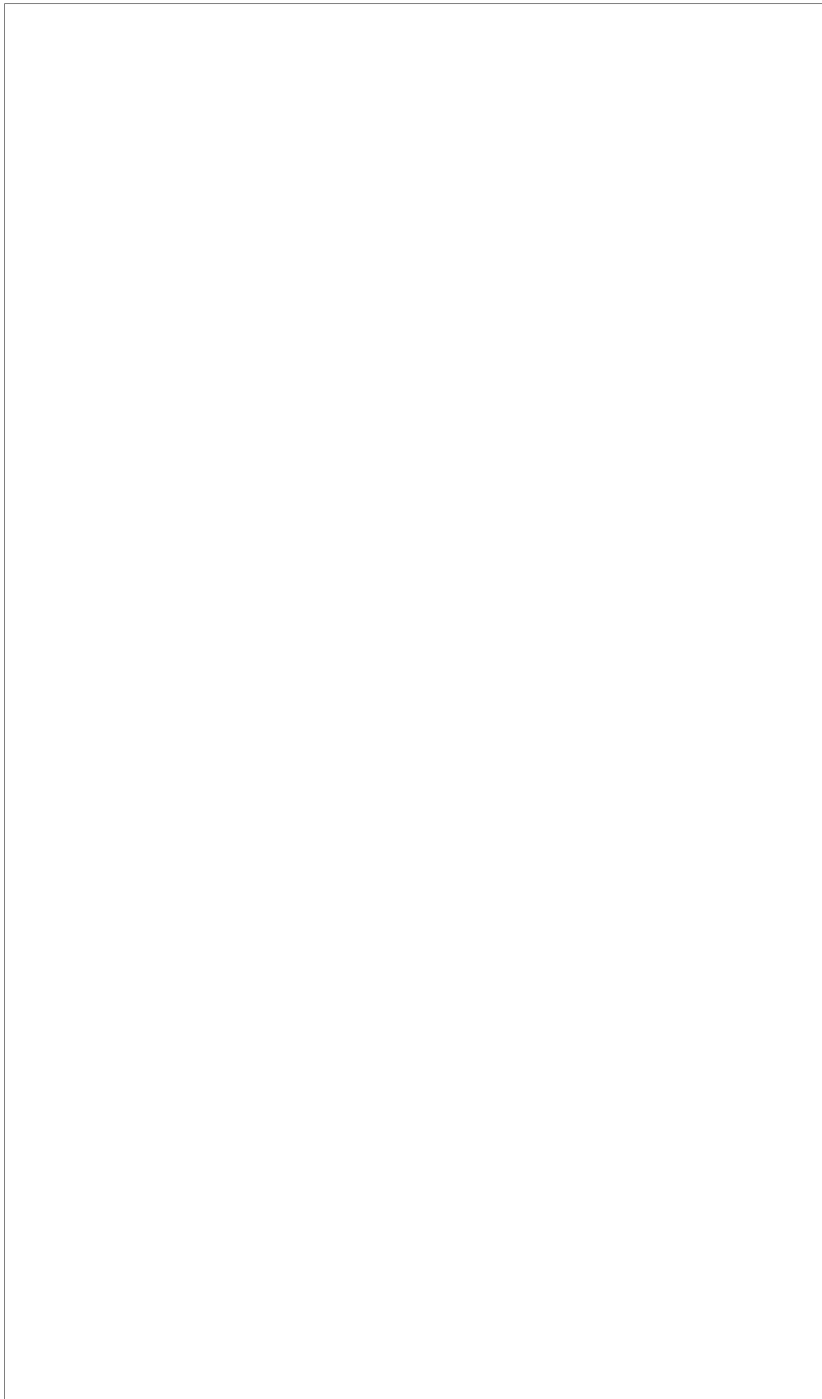
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Nationalist China: Premier Chiang Ching-kuo has approved a plan to reduce the armed forces from 560,000 to 500,000 men by July 1, 1979. [redacted]

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*FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY***SUCCESSION IN THE SOVIET UNION**

The succession problem for the Soviet leadership is complicated by the fact that Brezhnev and his contemporaries are a clique of older men, held together by balance of power and self-interest. As a group, they have been a great stabilizing factor in leadership politics. Men in their late 60s and early 70s (see chart) hold the party's top position (Brezhnev); two unofficial party positions as "second" secretary (Suslov and Kirilenko), the premiership (Kosygin), and the presidency (Podgorny), as well as lesser offices represented on the Politburo. Power balance and self-interest have restrained Brezhnev in his attempts at self-aggrandizement, on the one hand, and, on the other, have inhibited challenges to his position which would threaten the top leadership as a whole.

Brezhnev is, in fact, the youngest member of the senior group of leaders, and this may encourage him to hope that he can survive a generational turnover within the group. If he considers such a turnover highly likely in the near future, he could build alliances with younger leaders and perhaps join them in an effort to ease out some of his senior colleagues. In the process, he might even be able to add to his own titles either Podgorny's presidency or Kosygin's premiership, a frequently rumored ambition. This course would be risky, and it would go against Brezhnev's conservative nature and style. It also would require repairing some personal and organizational relationships with the younger leaders.

The other senior leaders seem generally to have little ambition beyond preserving their own status. Kirilenko, who is the same age as Brezhnev, is probably the only one who entertains even a flicker of hope of becoming general secretary. This kind of defensive outlook on the part of the senior leaders means that they probably are not eager to break ranks and, in collaboration with junior colleagues, to initiate a shake-up.

The problem for the younger leaders of today is not, as it was for Brezhnev and company in 1964, combining to topple the party leader. The best they can hope for in the short run is simply to begin to pick away at the phalanx of aging superiors. Given Brezhnev's predominant position, the most realistic

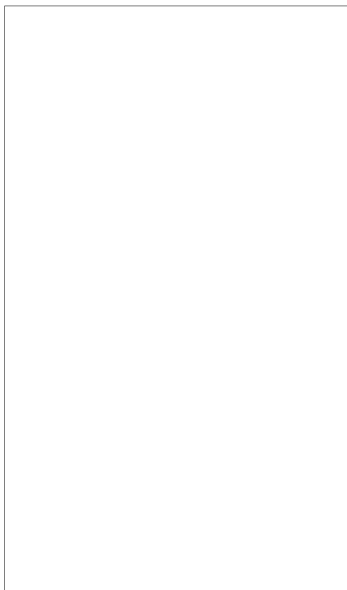
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and logical course would be an alliance of the younger officials with him against some of the older leaders. Political divisions among the younger men and various ties with the seniors, however, would be complicating factors.

Illness or death, however, may help to break up the logjam at the top of the Soviet hierarchy. Should Brezhnev die or be incapacitated in the not-too-distant future, Party Secretary Kirilenko would be the best bet to succeed him. Kirilenko's prospects will diminish with each additional year that Brezhnev remains on the scene, and those of First Deputy Premier Mazurov, Moscow party boss Grishin, KGB Chairman Andropov, and--to a lesser extent-- Minister of Agriculture Polyansky and Trade Union chief Shelepin are likely to improve if Brezhnev remains in office for another two years or so.



For the moment, however, Kirilenko remains the odds-on choice to replace Brezhnev. As a successor to the General Secretary, Kirilenko would stand as a fairly orthodox Marxist-Leninist, and, at least initially, he would be more cautious about dealing with the West. Kirilenko's public support of detente is infrequent and often conditional, and he has been in the forefront of those who champion the "Brezhnev Doctrine" of limited sovereignty. He was widely reported to have urged the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, despite doubts expressed by Suslov and others.

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In his public statements, Kirilenko has come as close as any other top Soviet leader to advocating explicitly a vigorous foreign policy. He has termed aid to the Vietnamese and Arabs not only a "revolutionary duty," but also a requirement of Soviet security. He has strongly criticized the Communist Chinese leadership and has defended the Soviet policy of attacking Peking's political and ideological positions, but he has not shut the door on an eventual reconciliation with China.

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Kirilenko's relative militancy in foreign policy statements has its corollary in domestic policies, especially in the cultural and social spheres. Although in recent years he apparently has accepted the rationale behind increased consumer-goods production, he has argued against major increases in the allocation of resources to agriculture and housing, and he puts greater emphasis on exhortation and persuasion than on material incentives for improving labor productivity. Kirilenko has revealed something of a pragmatic attitude toward economic management, however; his speeches on this theme have consistently promoted less dogmatic solutions to managerial problems.

Little is known of Kirilenko's real views on defense and strategic questions. His only public statement to date on SALT was a strictly pro forma assertion in April 1970 that the talks can produce results "if the United States makes an honest attempt to solve the problem at hand and does not try to achieve one-sided gains." This cautious remark was consistent with Kirilenko's generally wary attitude toward the US. These views no doubt underlie Kirilenko's repeatedly expressed opinion that a "dangerous international situation makes it necessary to increase the USSR's defense capabilities."

Against this background, Kirilenko, as general secretary, would probably be somewhat more imaginative in the field of domestic affairs than Brezhnev has been. In foreign affairs, Kirilenko's regime probably would not undertake any sharp departures from the course that has been followed under Brezhnev. Whatever his personal views on policy, as a compromise candidate he could not move any further than his Politburo colleagues would allow. Any gradual shift in foreign policy under his leadership would probably be away from detente rather than toward it.

Kirilenko's style of leadership would probably be less colorful and exuberant than Brezhnev's. Kirilenko gives the appearance of a modest, efficient administrator, not a politician who enjoys being on the hustings. Such a change in style would be in step with a probable return to a more collective leadership following a change at the top.

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