

The President's Daily Brief

~~Top Secret~~ 16 February 1968



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DAILY BRIEF
16 FEBRUARY 1968

1. South Vietnam

The military situation did not change significantly overnight. Fighting continues in Hue and there were several sharp clashes on the outskirts of Saigon between allied sweep forces and Viet Cong units. The enemy continues menacing movements in the Quang Tri city area suggesting that another round of attacks may be forthcoming in that sector.

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2. Soviet Union

Moscow moved again yesterday to intensify frictions among the Western allies over the Berlin issue. In nearly identical letters to the US and British ambassadors, Moscow accused Bonn of trying to "undermine" the allied position in Berlin and of using Berlin "as a means of whipping up tension in Europe." The Soviet note to the French, however, merely noted that these letters had been sent and referred to the common Soviet-French interest in maintaining the status quo in Berlin.

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3. Israel-Jordan

Yesterday's fighting along the frontier was more extensive than the incidents that have been taking place almost daily for the past ten days. The Jordanians are jittery over the Israeli military build-up in the area last week. The Israelis have taken a very tough line in recent public statements. Still, there is no sign that the Israelis intend an early move across the Jordan river.

4. Greece-Turkey

It now appears that the Greek and Turkish foreign ministers really made a positive effort to bury the hatchet during their secret meeting early this month. They agreed to work toward settlement of some troublesome bilateral issues and even attacked the intractable Cyprus problem itself.

Their scheme for Cyprus involves the promotion of secret talks among the concerned parties for some form of constitutional accommodation between the island's Greek and Turkish communities. This plan is so fraught with pitfalls that it is hard to see how it can come to much. At least Athens and Ankara are now thinking positively, but Makarios has yet to be consulted.

5. Panama

Pre-election maneuvering has reached a dangerous stage, and Ambassador Adair warns that a direct confrontation between the opposing sides could come without warning. The forces of government candidate Samudio, faced with the likelihood of defeat at the polls in May, seem determined now either to lay the basis for a fraudulent vote or to cause a breakdown in the electoral system. The Arias forces are repeating their threat to fight any attempt to cheat them of victory.

6. Dominican Republic

At this point it looks as though Balaguer may have successfully faced down what could easily have become a very messy situation at the University of Santo Domingo. A massive show of military force, coupled with unusual restraint by the soldiers, seems to have brought rampaging students to heel.

The incident that set off the trouble on Wednesday came after more than a month of student unrest.



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7. Brazil

Costa e Silva is apparently not the man Brazilian military officers thought he would be when they put him where he is. Disenchantment is growing in the officer corps over the administration's clear ineptitude and over hints of corruption in high places. This reflects badly on the military as a whole, they say, and some officers are about to launch a drive for a thorough house cleaning. Among other things, they want to fire most of the cabinet and start over fresh.

The President himself is not threatened--yet, but he will have to meet the officers half way.



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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

Hanoi on Bombing Halt: Hanoi has been in touch with a number of Western governments recently to present its case and to underscore its readiness to talk if the US stops the bombings. The Italian Foreign Office announced on 14 February that North Vietnamese representatives had contacted Rome early this month with such a message.

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The Swiss Government announced yesterday that its ambassador in Peking was en route to Hanoi to offer his country's good offices for a peaceful settlement. Although press reports say this was entirely a Swiss initiative, Hanoi doubtless chose the time by giving permission for the visit.

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French Press Report from Hanoi: French Press Agency correspondents in Hanoi took note of North Vietnamese current tactics in a story on 14 February. If the story was not actually inspired by the North Vietnamese, they probably at least approved of its contents. The story says that the Communists are trying to demonstrate simultaneously their military strength and their desire for a peaceful settlement. It claims the Communists, although "very satisfied" with the results of the offensive in the South, are stressing that it is not over yet and new attacks are likely if the US fails to stop the bombing and begin negotiations.

The story stresses the moves made by Hanoi to make its position appear more forthcoming. It concludes, however, that Hanoi does not intend to compromise on its demand for an unconditional bombing halt. If Washington insists on any form of reciprocity, even the "modified" version of President Johnson's San Antonio formula, the war will continue.

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U Thant's Comments on his Contacts with North Vietnamese: Don Cook of the Los Angeles Times informed the US Embassy in Paris that one of his colleagues had managed to see U Thant in Paris yesterday. The following were said to be the secretary general's impressions:

--He could see no movement in Hanoi's position;

--Hanoi nevertheless appears very interested in getting talks started on the condition that the US stops bombing;

--U Thant thinks Hanoi would open talks within two weeks of a bombing halt;

--His conversations in Moscow forced him to the conclusion that there is no "give" in Russia's position, which continues to support Hanoi 100 percent;

--He cannot agree with Prime Minister Wilson's conclusion that differences between Hanoi and Washington are "very narrow";

--He is therefore returning to New York "not optimistic";

--A one-hour conversation with De Gaulle produced nothing of interest.

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Hanoi Denies US Sent Envoy: Another French Press Agency item broadcast by Paris yesterday says that an "informed North Vietnamese source" in Hanoi has "categorically denied" reports that the US sent a special envoy to North Vietnam to explore prospects for peace. The story notes that Canadian ICC Commissioner Dier had been in Hanoi recently, but that he was not acting for the US.

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Bomb Damage in Haiphong: Bomb damage in the port is limited to certain sections of the city and is less serious than has been generally assumed, according to Robert Eaton, a member of the crew of the yacht Phoenix which was in Haiphong during late January. Eaton, who gave his views to a French correspondent in Hong Kong, also claimed that much of the city was deserted and that on a tour of the port he was shown civilian areas which had been damaged. Eaton claimed bombing effects were not evident in most sections, and that life was being conducted in a normal fashion in many areas.

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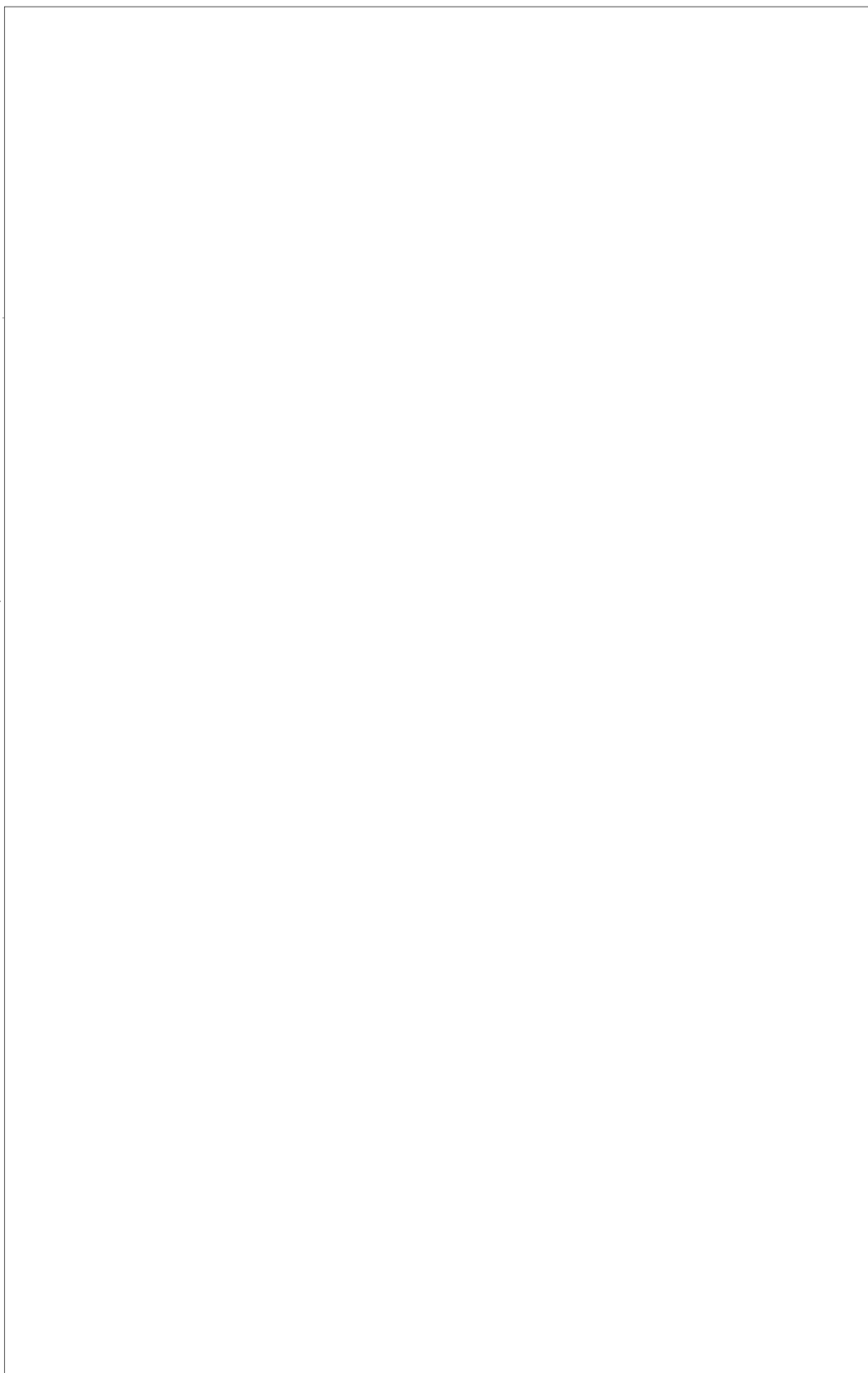
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II. NORTH VIETNAMESE REFLECTIONS OF US POLITICAL ATTITUDES ON THE WAR

Hanoi Propaganda: Yesterday's English language broadcast by radio Hanoi contained a section devoted to quotes from recent statements on Vietnam by several members of the US Congress.

Senator Robert Kennedy's speech of 8 February came in for some more attention. He was quoted as saying that the Vietnam war could lead the US to national tragedy. Senator Mike Mansfield is quoted as saying last Sunday that the recent Viet Cong offensive had demonstrated that the Saigon political structure is no stronger today than it was three years ago. "Indeed," Mansfield is quoted, "its very survival appears more dependent on US military power than at any time in the past."

Senator Thruston Morton is quoted by Hanoi as saying that the tragedy of the US commitment in Vietnam is that most of the people of South Vietnam couldn't care less. Morton, Hanoi claimed, "again accused the Johnson administration of hoodwinking the American people about the war." Representative Margaret Heckler of Massachusetts is said by Hanoi to have accused General Westmoreland of "deluding" members of Congress.

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