

The President's Daily Brief

~~Top Secret~~ 18 March 1968



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DAILY BRIEF
18 MARCH 1968

1. South Vietnam

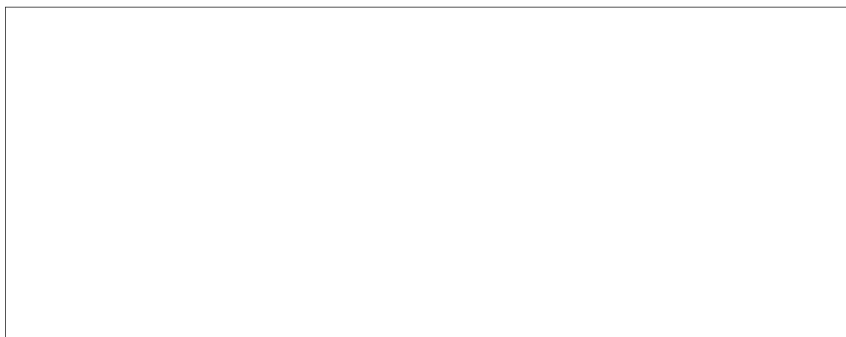
The large-scale allied operation around Saigon, besides inflicting heavy casualties on the Communists over the weekend, may have been partly responsible for the withdrawal of large enemy units from positions close to the city. Three battalions have stayed behind, however, perhaps to harass and delay allied forces.

2. Czechoslovakia

Party boss Dubcek made a major speech Saturday fully associating himself with the changes that are sweeping Czechoslovakia. However, he also staked out limits within which reforms ought to occur. He indicated, for example, that while the government must be responsive to popular opinion and should involve interest groups like the students and the farmers in decision-making, the political system must remain Communist.

With an obvious eye to the Soviets, Dubcek promised Czechoslovakia would stand "unshakably" loyal to its Communist allies, even though it would try to restore traditional links with the rest of the world.

3. Soviet Union -
Czechoslovakia



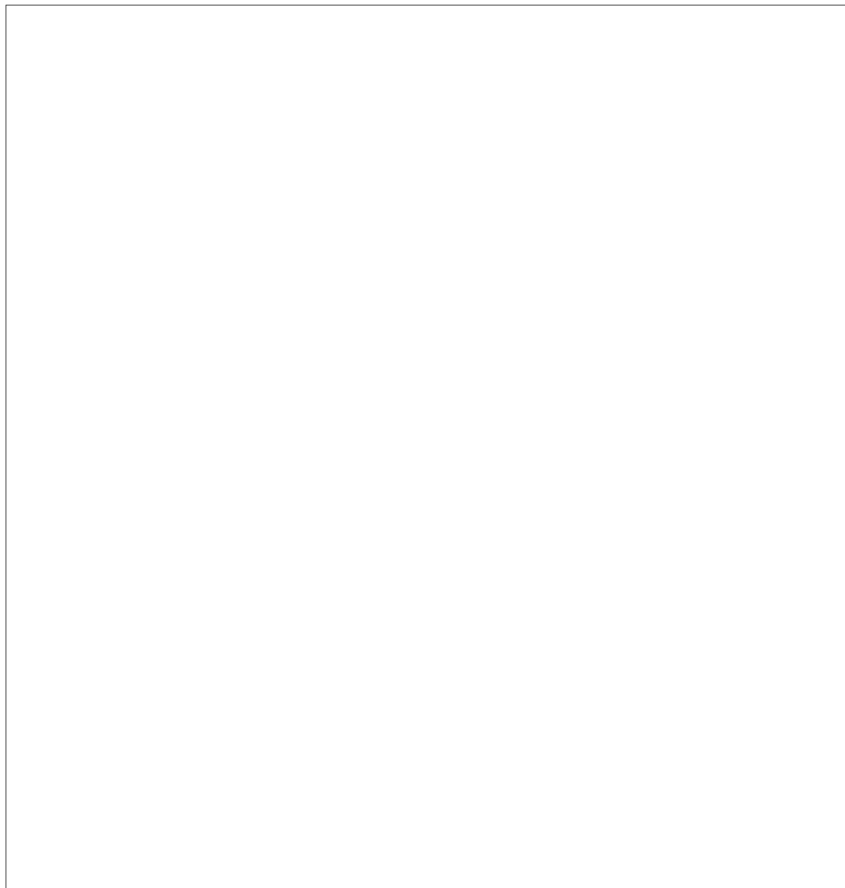
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4. Poland

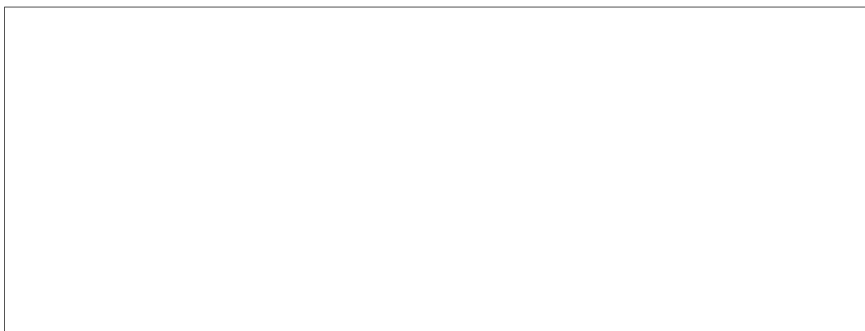
The focus of the crisis is shifting from the streets to inner-party circles. A major effort to purge Jewish and liberal elements from the party-state apparatus seems to be under way. It may reach the party hierarchy before the end of the year when the party congress is scheduled to meet.

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5. Bulgaria -
Soviet Union

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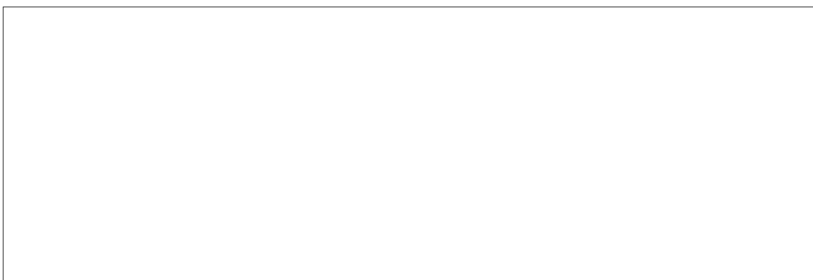


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6. Panama

Robles is trying to get a public statement out of National Guard Commandant Vallarino and his top aides denouncing the impeachment proceedings and giving him the guard's full support. Vallarino, temporizing as usual, is not expected to give his answer until some time this week--if then.

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7. West Germany

Bonn seems to be edging closer toward approval of the draft nuclear non-proliferation treaty, even though strong opposition within the government still remains. One of the harbingers of possible forward movement on the issue was Finance Minister Strauss' recent promise that acceptance of the treaty would not lead to a break in the government coalition.

8. Egypt

Nasir

Thursday, seemed in no hurry to move the Arab-Israeli impasse off dead center. He indicated he would prefer to live with things as they are for two or three years rather than resume hostilities or attempt serious negotiations. Nasir claimed the internal situation in the "Arab World" (Egypt is what he meant) makes any kind of talks impossible at this time.

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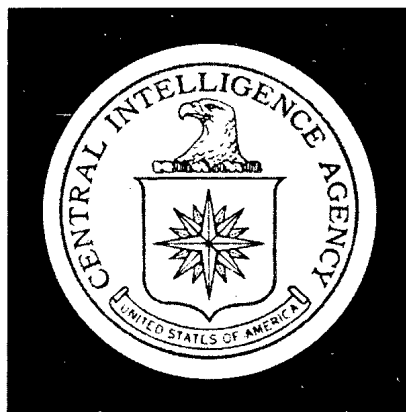
9. Cyprus

After a characteristic bit of last-minute brinkmanship, President Makarios has apparently decided to lift the ban Wednesday on ambassadorial contact with Turkish Cypriots. His sudden switch came only after Ambassador Belcher and his colleagues made it clear that they intended to keep an appointment to see the Turkish Cypriot vice president this Thursday, ban or no ban.

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FOR THE PRESIDENT'S EYES ONLY

Special Daily Report on North Vietnam



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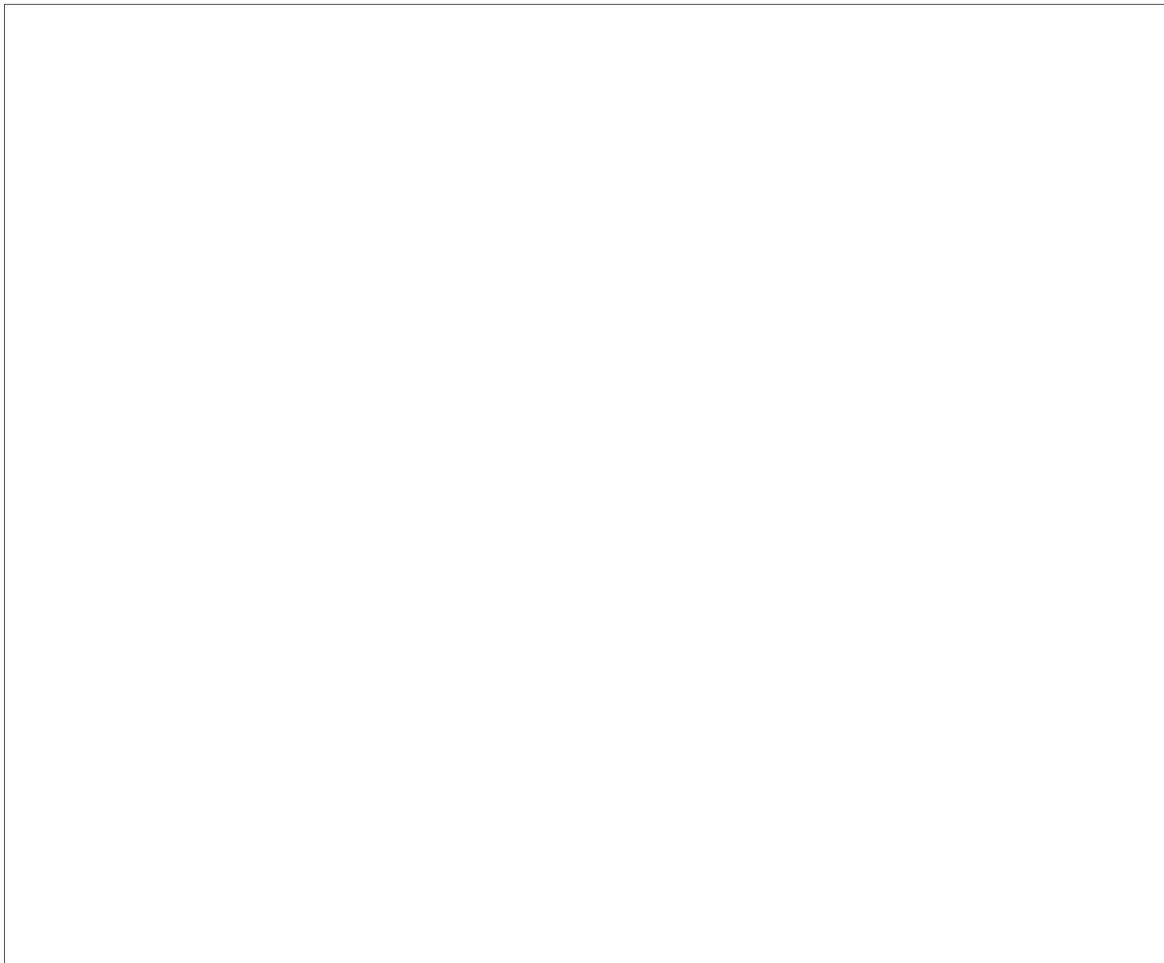
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I. NOTES ON THE SITUATION



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ICC Plane Delayed: The International Control Commission (ICC) plane scheduled to fly from Vientiane to Hanoi on Friday was cancelled due to a communications failure. Scheduled to make the flight were US writer Mary McCarthy and Franz Schurmann, a California professor. The three North Vietnamese naval prisoners, whom Hanoi has agreed to allow to be returned to North Vietnam via the ICC flight, might also have been aboard the cancelled flight.

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The next ICC flight to Hanoi is on 19 March. According to the US Embassy in Vientiane, Miss McCarthy and Professor Schurmann hope to take it. The embassy is also hopeful that the bureaucratic difficulties with the ICC over the return of the three POWs will be cleared up so that they may take the flight on the 19th also.

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Danish Ambassador to Visit Hanoi: The Danish ambassador accredited to Peking is to be the next in the string of Western ambassadors to visit Hanoi at the latter's invitation. One Copenhagen newspaper, commenting on the Danish Government's announcement of the impending visit, said the ambassador is to seek Hanoi's reaction to "the proposed Danish-Dutch initiative for a solution of the war." This, presumably, is a reference to the Dutch scheme for getting various West European governments to join it in an appeal to Hanoi to name the date and place for peace talks to begin.

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North Vietnamese Diplomat Travels to Finland: Finland appears also to be on the list of selected Western governments with which Hanoi is attempting to establish contact. According to the US Embassy in Moscow, the North Vietnamese ambassador there, who recently spent several days in Sweden, is now planning to visit Helsinki. Hanoi's purpose appears to be twofold. Initially, it hopes to outline its position on the war and to receive official or popular support in the countries visited. Secondly, Hanoi has also been probing the countries concerned about possible diplomatic recognition. Feelers in this regard have already been put out in Switzerland, Sweden, and Austria.

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Hanoi Fetes Visiting French Communist Delegation:
Hanoi turned out an impressive gathering of party leaders headed by Party First Secretary Le Duan to fete a French Communist Party delegation which recently visited North Vietnam. In several speeches, Le Duan stressed the close relationship between the French and Vietnamese parties and voiced the determination of the Vietnamese people to fight "perseveringly and vigorously" for a long period to achieve peace. He tied the war in Vietnam to the struggle of the world revolutionary movement and claimed that the war was in defense of the socialist camp. Le Duan also took note of the broad support for Vietnam developing in France and singled out as an example the current collection of goods and funds for a shipment of supplies to North Vietnam.

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Hanoi Foreign Trade Official in Poland: The Polish press has reported that North Vietnamese Minister of Foreign Trade Phan Anh has left Poland after three days of talks with Polish economic officials. No details were given on the discussions nor any indication of new trade or aid agreements stemming from the talks. Prior to arriving in Poland, Anh spent several days in East Germany attending the Leipzig Fair. He will probably make stops in other East European countries, including the Soviet Union, to discuss aid matters before returning to Hanoi.

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

Hanoi Still Silent on New Hampshire Primary: At last check, Hanoi had not yet reported factually or commented on the New Hampshire primary or on the presidential hopes of Robert Kennedy.

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Hanoi Reports Alleged Insubordination of US Troops: In its English language broadcast on 16 March, Hanoi listed what it claimed were several incidents of insubordination among US forces in the past several weeks. It reported that one US battalion had refused to board helicopters to rescue "American and puppet troops" under fire in Saigon. Several alleged antiwar actions by US servicemen at bases in South Vietnam, as well as individual cases of desertion, were reported also.

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Antiwar Activity: War protest activity in the US continues to be regularly reported in the Hanoi news media. In Hanoi radio's English language broadcast on 16 March, student and faculty protests at Columbia University were recounted. A statement by three New York men who recently turned in their draft cards at the Brooklyn Recruitment Center was also reported in the same broadcast. The men stated, according to Hanoi, that the US must be held responsible for the destruction and massacre of the Vietnamese people.

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