



The President's Daily Brief

~~Top Secret~~ 13 December 1968



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THE PRESIDENT'S
DAILY BRIEF
13 DECEMBER 1968

1. South Vietnam

Desertions from the South Vietnamese regular armed forces hit a two-year high in September. Combat forces, moreover, are being affected at a rate considerably higher than other units. If the trend continues among combat units, they will have lost about one-third of their personnel in this manner during the year ending in March 1969.

As a result of the growing desertion problem and a decline in the number of available new recruits, the government may soon find it difficult to keep the strength of its regular forces at about 428,000 men.

2. Laos

The government is apprehensive about the fate of Attopeu, the provincial capital in the southeast part of the Bolovens plateau.

Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese troops had surrounded the town and have been shelling it and the airstrip which serves as its supply point. Souvanna ordered the evacuation of women, children, and other non-essential residents. This could further weaken the resolve of the defenders.

The Communists, however, have been in position to take Attopeu for years. Whether they do so or not is basically a political decision.

3. Communist China

[Redacted]

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4. Iraq

Baghdad is still seething with
dissidence.

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There are unconfirmed reports that the ruling Baathists put down another attempt on 11 December. If they prove correct, this will have been the second try in about a month at toppling the group which seized power in July.

5. Israel-Jordan

A new round of military incidents began on 11 December along the Israeli-Jordanian border. The Israelis are responding more quickly than in the past to attacks from Jordan. If skirmishing continues, they ultimately might move across the Jordan River and seize the heights.

In conversations with Governor Scranton, Israeli leaders for the first time were remarkably frank about the "Allon Plan," their complicated proposal for annexation and colonization of a 15-kilometer buffer strip in the Jordan Valley. This openness with Governor Scranton leads us to believe that the plan, which was long unofficial, now has official status and may be put into effect one of these days.

6. South Korea

The parliament pulled itself together quickly, for a change, and gave bipartisan support to a \$3.6 million increase in the internal security budget. These funds are earmarked for improving home defense forces, which are playing a major role in rounding up armed infiltrators from the North.

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7. Czechoslovakia

Initial reports from the meeting of the Czechoslovak party central committee, which began yesterday, suggest that the Dubcek leadership is taking another verbal beating from conservatives. The Soviets are adding to the pressure by demanding that the central committee increase the authority of "reliable" Communists.

Whether or not such attacks lead to immediate changes among the party's key personnel, they surely will have a dampening effect on proposed economic reforms and government reorganizations, which are the main items on the agenda.

8. West Berlin

A Soviet diplomat has warned that there might be more stringent requirements on travel to West Berlin or new limitations on the Western allies' entry into East Berlin if the West Germans hold their Federal Assembly, which elects the next president, in the city. In telling this to the French, the Soviets seem to be hoping that Paris will help them to get Bonn to hold the election somewhere else. As of now, however, it looks as if Bonn is determined to go ahead early next year.

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FOR THE PRESIDENT'S EYES ONLY

- 1.) Special Daily Report on North Vietnam

- 2.) North Vietnamese Reflections of US
Political Attitudes



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I. NOTES ON THE SITUATION

Appeals for Action in the South: The Communists have recently broadcast two strong appeals for support from key elements of South Vietnam's populace. On 12 December, Liberation Radio called on troops, police, and government workers to mutiny, conduct uprisings, or desert. Three days earlier, a Front broadcast strongly urged political activists, students, laborers, and intellectuals in the South's urban centers, particularly the Saigon-Cholon area, to gain control of wards and streets in the cities.

The Front has issued similar appeals periodically in the past, but these take on special significance because of the many signs that a sizable Communist military offensive may unfold soon in the III Corps area--perhaps even near Saigon--and probably elsewhere. Communist offensives are often accompanied by intensive efforts to undermine the morale of government forces and recruit new followers for the Communists. At present the Communists have the additional incentive of the Paris talks, where Communist negotiators need all the ammunition they can get to boost the prestige and status of the Front and denigrate the Saigon government.

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Military Developments in North Vietnam: Recognizing the poor living standards of many military dependents in North Vietnam, Hanoi has tightened the regulations governing administration of dependents' benefits. Previous regulations authorized subsidies and preferential employment for military dependents but left to local units responsibility for providing assistance. Local control was probably necessary during the years of bombing because of transport and communications disruptions. A Council of Ministers' notice of 4 September pointed out, however, that local authorities and cooperatives were delinquent in

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this task, and that the needs of many dependent families were not met. These problems almost certainly have affected the morale of North Vietnamese soldiers.

The new regulations, which went into effect on 1 December, establish more central control over a nationwide subsidy system, thereby helping assure minimum living standards for military dependents. Specific financial allowances for wives, children, and other dependents are to replace previous provisions for "preferential treatment," jobs are to be found for employable dependents, and an education system for dependents is to be established. The Ministry of Internal Affairs is to enforce the subsidy program and oversee the living standards of servicemen's families, while the General Trade Union is to aid in providing jobs and educational benefits.

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

There is nothing of significance to report today.

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