

The President's Daily Brief

~~Top Secret~~ 19 December 1968



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THE PRESIDENT'S
DAILY BRIEF
19 DECEMBER 1968

1. Cambodia

Press reports from Phnom Penh this morning state Sihanouk is "immediately" releasing the detained Americans. Sihanouk apparently made the announcement at a press conference.

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2. Communist China

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3. Soviet Union

Yesterday the Soviets made their fourth test of an ICBM with multiple re-entry vehicles.

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This system could be operational by late next year.

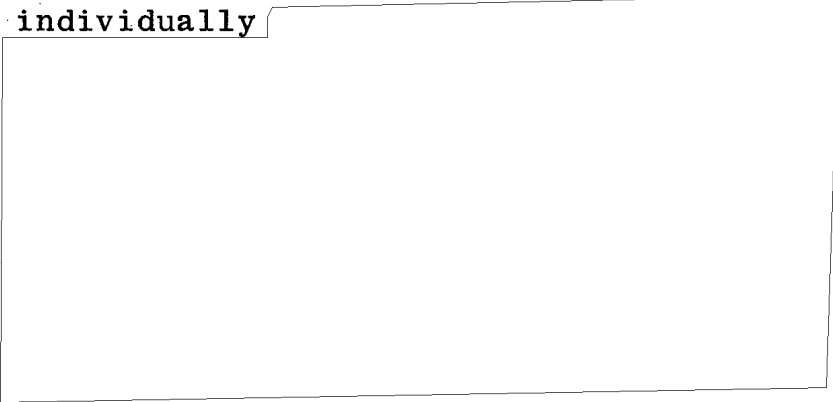
4. Soviet Union

For several years we have been watching a debate within the Soviet military over what sort of war would be fought in the 1970's and what weapons should be procured to fight it. This debate is reflected in articles written for military publications and it seems to be sharpening. We discuss the arguments today at Annex.

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5. South Korea

The army and militia are still hunting down surviving North Korean infiltrators who landed on the east coast in early November. Of the 90-120 North Koreans who landed, 76 have been killed and seven captured. The rest have broken into small bands or are moving individually



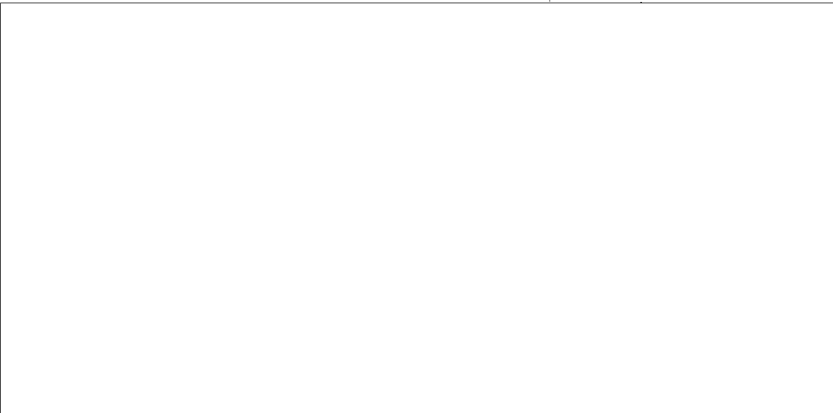
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6. Pakistan



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Right now the displeasure with Ayub's leadership does not seem to have reached dangerous proportions. We see, however, that Ayub has canceled his plans to attend the Commonwealth Conference in London.



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7. South Vietnam

The Viet Cong 9th Division is now moving toward Saigon from its base area on the Cambodian border. The 9th has played a key role in major offensive actions this year. Three prisoners from this division, captured near Saigon on Tuesday, claim the division will attack Tan Son Nhut air base.

8. Brazil

Communist terrorists seem undaunted by the government's harsh repression of recent days. The principal victims, in fact, have been non-Communist politicians and student leaders. Two terrorist bombings took place in Sao Paulo on Tuesday. If they continue, there is likely to be a violent reaction from security forces and right-wing militants.

ANNEX

Soviet Military Debates Forces for the 1970's

Soviet military leaders have been engaged for several years in a debate over strategy and force structure. The controversy has become more polemic during the past year. It focuses on questions of strategic offensive force levels, the antiballistic missile issue, and the need for more flexible conventional forces.

The debate, which is carried on in the military press, reflects the scramble between the services for resource priorities as planning for the 1970's goes forward. To a degree it may also reflect differences of views within the Ministry of Defense on the potential risks and advantages of pursuing arms limitation talks.

Except for those military leaders with clear vested interests, such as the commander of the Strategic Rocket Forces and the commander of Warsaw Pact forces, the statements of the majority of key officers in the high command have not demonstrated any clear-cut alignment of sides in the debate.

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The current round of the debate centers on the nature of modern war and its costs. Proponents of increased levels of offensive and defensive strategic forces argue from the theory that a future war would begin with a massive surprise attack by the US. They are pessimistic about the chances for advance warning and insist that the Soviet Union must strive for strategic superiority, both offensive and defensive, if it is to maintain an effective retaliatory capability.

Those advocating expansion of conventional capabilities contend that the Soviet force ought to be more flexibly geared to meet a broader spectrum of

military contingencies. This school of thought rejects the thesis that an East-West conflict would quickly escalate into an all-out nuclear exchange. Their argument currently seems to have gained ground within the Soviet military establishment.

The question of resource allocation, the second theme, has been raised beyond the perennial one of defense versus the rest of the economy. Within the military establishment it is now debated in terms of strategic versus conventional weaponry. The allocation discussion also implies that cost effectiveness considerations may now have some weight in selecting weapon systems.

The outcome of the debate remains uncertain. Both the General Staff publication Military Thought and the press organ of the military's Main Political Administration, Communist of the Armed Forces, carry articles reflecting many sides of these issues. It is clear the debate is going on at the highest levels of the Ministry of Defense.

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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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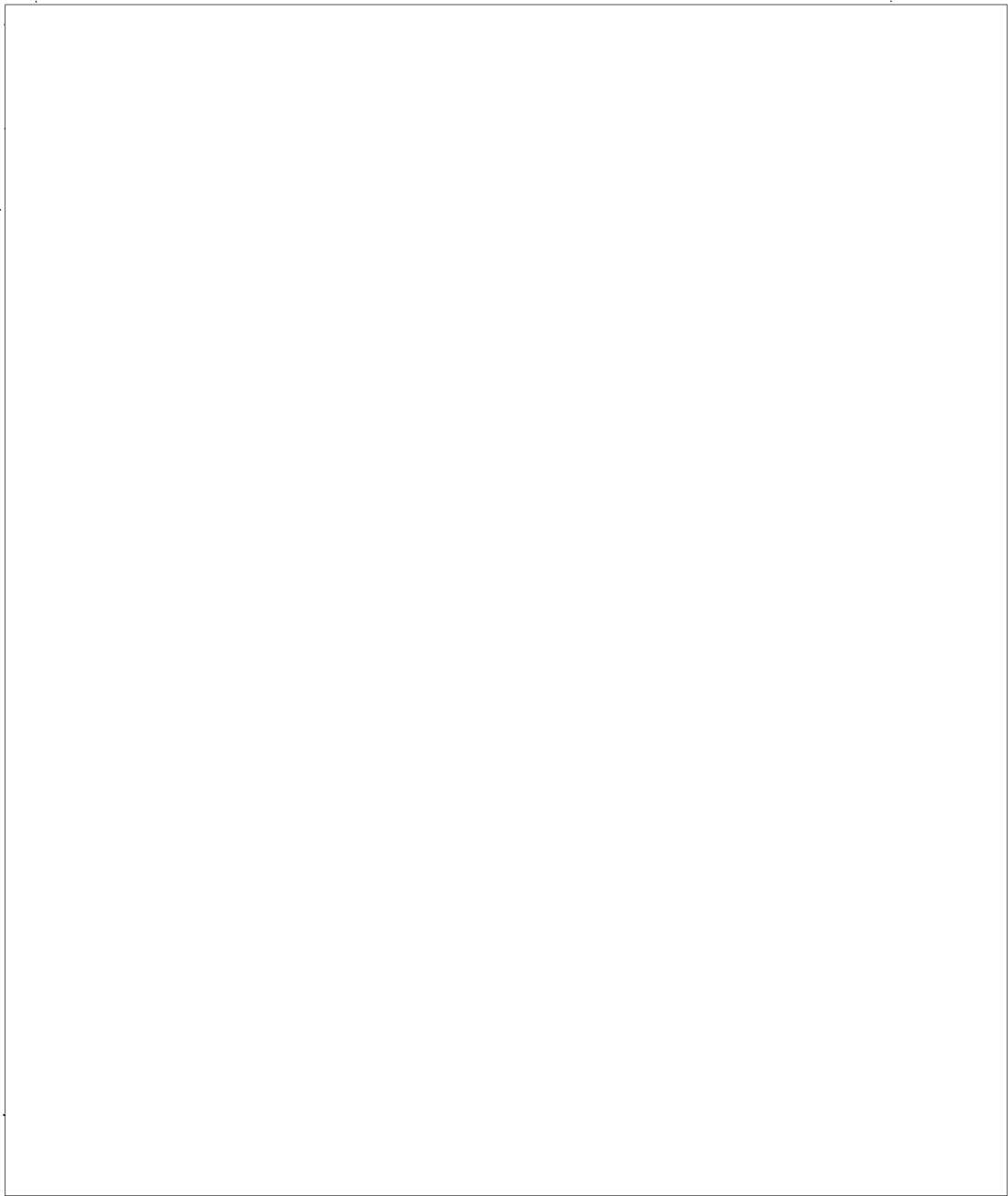
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19 December 1968

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

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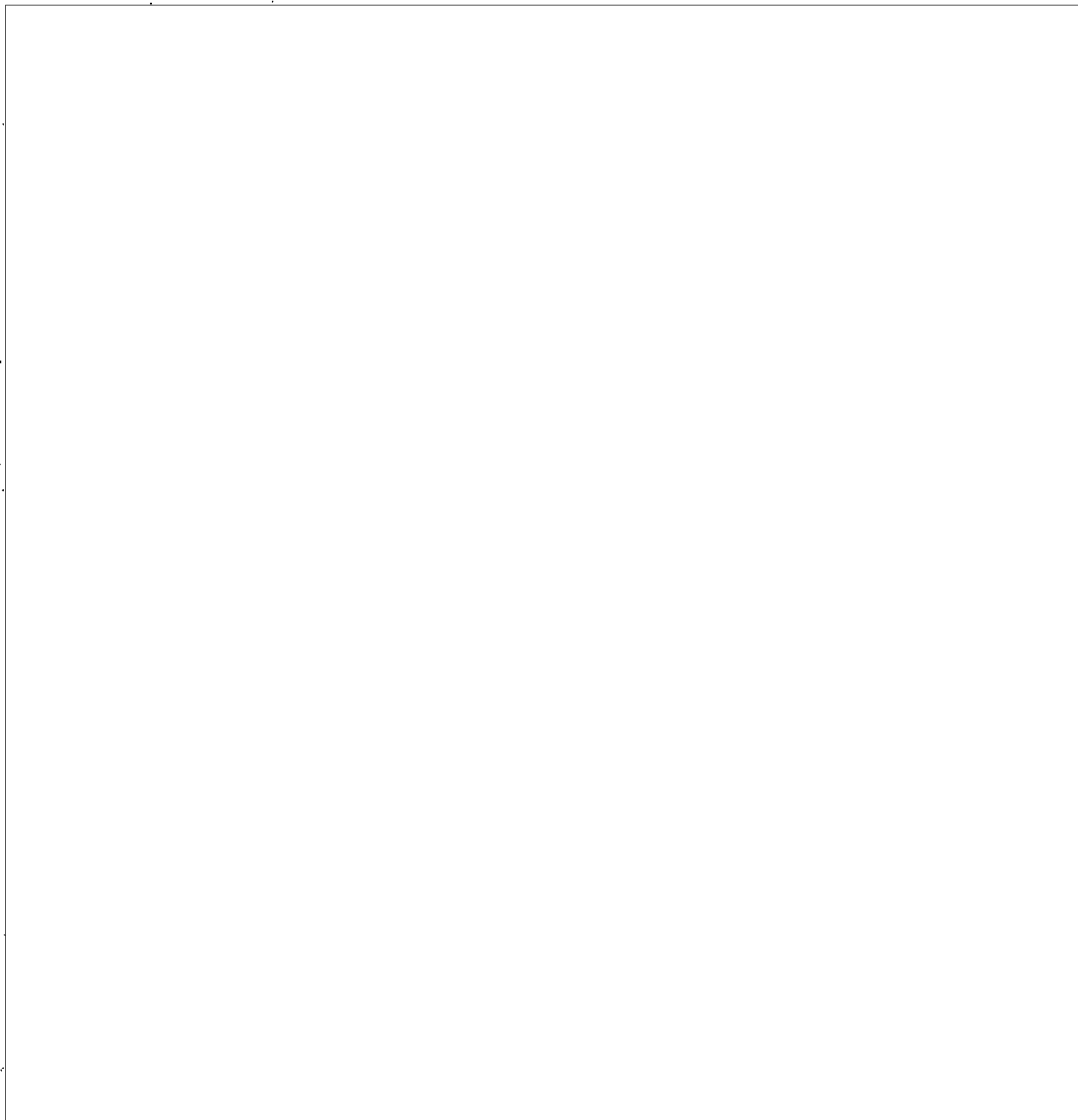
I. NOTES ON THE SITUATION



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Hanoi on Delays in Paris: Communist propaganda over allied "delaying tactics" in Paris is being stepped up. A "Commentator" article in the party daily Nhan Dan on 18 December pins full blame for the current impasse on Washington and warns that if the US wants to move "toward an honorable peace" it must stop delaying the talks and end its "war of aggression." The article is a straightforward presentation of the standard Communist line on developments of the past six weeks and contains no new emphasis or new language. It may signal, however, a

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greater effort by the Communists to exploit coordination problems and procedural differences on the allied side. Up until now, Hanoi's approach, while always couched in usual propaganda terms, has suggested that the Communists did not want the procedural hassle to be prolonged.

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Hanoi Comments on Nixon Cabinet: North Vietnam's first public reaction to the Nixon administration's cabinet is bland and noncommittal. In a brief domestic service broadcast on the 16th, Radio Hanoi reported the names of the three top cabinet officers and then claimed that the composition of the cabinet was contrary to the president-elect's campaign promise that he would form a "coalition government" which included Democrats, women, and Negroes.

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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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