

The President's Daily Brief

8 January 1970

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THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

Relatively few new North Vietnamese troops have entered the infiltration pipeline during the past week. Meanwhile, the heavy fighting currently under way throughout much of South Vietnam probably foreshadows the kind of tactics the enemy will emphasize over the short term. (Page 1)

The one-day general strike held in Saigon does not appear to have caused any serious disruption. (Page 3)

The French Foreign Ministry claims that any eventual arms contract with Libya will provide for a long lead-time on the delivery of military supplies and strict controls on their use. (Page 4)

Cambodian chief of state Sihanouk has left for an extended stay in France, turning his back on a mounting political challenge from opposition elements in the government. (Page 5)

Sudan. (Page 6)

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VIETNAM

Relatively few new North Vietnamese troops have entered the infiltration pipeline during the past week. Seven new groups have been detected on the move in North Vietnam. Only one group was of the usual battalion strength; the rest were small, with less than 100 in each group. Altogether the input over the week amounted to about 1,000 troops.

Several more battalion-sized infiltration groups, and a variety of very small groups containing fewer than ten people, have been noted in Laos. At least some of the larger units are assumed to have started south in November.

The small groups do not add substantially to infiltration estimates, but their size may belie their importance to the Communists. [redacted] captured documents have indicated that small groups often contain specialists such as sappers, rocketeers, doctors, political action teams, and other key additions to the Communist apparatus in the South.

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The infiltration estimate since late October, when the flow began to quicken, is now fairly firm at roughly 21,000 men.

This figure is only half that noted during the same period in 1968, but the difference becomes less important when the destinations of the infiltrators are considered. For example, infiltration figures for November and December 1968 included over 10,000 men believed to be in regular North Vietnamese units that moved into the Demilitarized Zone area but were not committed to action for several more months. Only about 4,000 men in this category have been noted in the past two and a half months. During the 1968 period, about 14,000 enemy personnel earmarked for the Saigon area entered the infiltration pipeline. This is only slightly larger than the number of troops dispatched over the past two months to the same area--some 12,000. Some of these replacements probably will be used to strengthen North Vietnamese regiments that recently moved farther south into IV Corps, as well as to replace in part the losses sustained during the period in 1969 when infiltration reached unusually low levels.

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Heavy fighting continues throughout much of South Vietnam as the second phase of the Communists' winter-spring campaign, which apparently got under way on 3-4 January, gathers momentum.

The latest actions probably foreshadow the kind of tactics that the Communists will emphasize over the near term. The enemy has relied on small groups of sappers or commandos to carry out some of the heaviest assaults in recent days, inflicting significant casualties on allied forces. Enemy harassing fire has been most effective against remote outposts and towns. There have been reports of heavier action planned for later in the campaign, including the commitment of more main force units.

The Communists continue to augment their forces in the delta provinces of IV Corps with North Vietnamese regulars. There is fresh evidence in intercepts that the North Vietnamese 95th Regiment has relocated from III Corps.

Other Communist main force units that recently moved to the delta include the 273rd, 18B, and 101D regiments. The addition of the 95th Regiment would raise enemy main force strength in the delta almost to the equivalent of two regular divisions.

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SOUTH VIETNAM

The one-day general strike held in Saigon yesterday does not appear to have caused any serious disruption. The strike had been called by local elements of the Vietnamese Confederation of Labor after they had been unable to persuade the government to get the city's bus company back in operation after several months' idleness. Although the local leadership had voted to extend the strike, the confederation's national chairman, Tran Quoc Buu, got them to call it off and resume parleys with the government.


The decision by local leaders to order a strike is a further sign of widespread disgruntlement with the recent rise in the cost of living. The confederation under Buu has provided important political support to President Thieu, and this open challenge to the government by the Saigon local union may create strains in the relations between the government and the confederations. In view of Buu's action to limit the strike, however, it could prove to be a relatively isolated and transitory event.

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FRANCE-LIBYA

The French Foreign Ministry is clarifying its intentions regarding arms negotiations with Tripoli. In a recent conversation with Ambassador Shriver, Foreign Minister Schumann stressed that when an arms contract with Libya is signed, a long lead-time on deliveries will be an important part of the deal. Schumann also said there would be strict and precise clauses in the contract forbidding the transfer of the weapons to other powers, or their use in "other theaters of operation." He reiterated previous French denials that France planned to occupy bases evacuated by the US and UK, but said that it was possible that a "few" French technicians and instructors might be sent to these installations. Another high Foreign Ministry official said that France intended to maintain the option of suspending delivery of the equipment under certain circumstances--such as Libya coming under the control of the UAR.

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 *it appears that the Foreign Minister, by stringing out delivery time tables, hopes to vitiate the impact of the deal on the Middle East military balance of power. Schumann regards the next year as a critical period for successful peace efforts in the Middle East.*

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CAMBODIA

Prince Sihanouk abruptly departed for France on 6 January, turning his back on a mounting political challenge from opposition elements in the government. The Cambodian chief of state is expected to be gone for two or three months on a medical retreat.

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Sihanouk's inability to bring his determined opponents to heel during the recent National Congress in Phnom Penh also influenced his decision to go abroad at this time. Prime Minister Lon Nol's post-congress acceptance of the resignations of four pro-Sihanouk cabinet members has added to the Prince's political battle fatigue. His extended absence should give the government the opportunity it has long been seeking to manage its own affairs, free from Sihanouk's obstructive interference. Nevertheless it is unlikely to take any strikingly new initiatives while he is away. As has been the case in the past, Sihanouk probably will return to Cambodia revitalized and ready to make fresh efforts to reassert his political supremacy.

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