



The President's Daily Brief

18 January 1973

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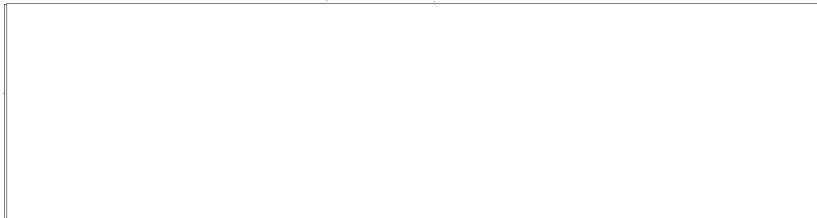


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LATE ITEM



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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

On Page 1, we note that the Vietnamese Communists are evidently moving on both political and military fronts in anticipation of a cease-fire. Indications of Communist military preparations for a cease-fire are discussed in detail at Annex.

[redacted] West Germans [redacted] French [redacted]
[redacted] British [redacted]
[redacted] (Page 2)

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In Chile [redacted] the military is increasingly frustrated over its dwindling voice in the government. (Page 3)

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VIETNAM

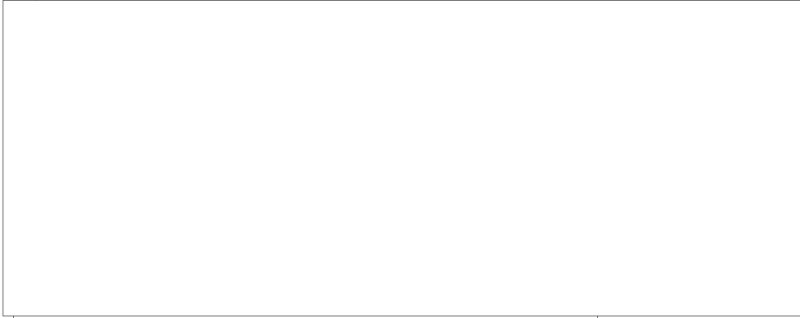
The Vietnamese Communists are evidently moving on the political as well as the military fronts in anticipation of a cease-fire. The Viet Cong's Liberation Radio reports, for instance, that the Council of Ministers of the Provisional Revolutionary Government met last week and decided that the single most important task now is to strengthen ties with non-Communist opponents of the Thieu government.

This foreshadows a greater emphasis on united front tactics in the post-cease-fire period.

We continue to receive indications from a variety of sources on Communist military preparations for a cease-fire. These are discussed in detail at Annex.

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WEST GERMANY - UK - FRANCE



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CHILE

[redacted] the military's frustration over its role in the cabinet came to a head last week when the government announced stringent new economic controls without consulting the military cabinet members. The

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Allende [redacted] spent little time trying to mollify the officers. He reminded them that they knew that his was a Marxist government when they agreed to join the cabinet in November.

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The military's dilemma over its growing identification with--but dwindling voice in--a controversial government is difficult to resolve. There is considerable sentiment in the armed forces in favor of withdrawal, but also a feeling of responsibility for guaranteeing free elections in March.

[redacted] some officers fear that if the military pulled out, its budget would suffer. [redacted]

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[redacted]

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NOTES

Cambodia: Government forces have reoccupied both banks of the Mekong River south of Neak Luong. With the waterway back under government control, regular supply convoys are resuming their run up the Mekong from South Vietnam to Phnom Penh.

Fedayeen: Yasir Arafat was re-elected last week as chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization executive committee. The newly elected ten-man committee includes at least one representative from each of the PLO member groups. Arafat's Fatah, which previously dominated the committee, lost two seats in a shuffle reflecting long-standing dissatisfaction with Arafat's policies. The more representative distribution of seats suggests a new effort by the fragmented Palestinian organizations to move toward unity, but none of the fedayeen's problems was resolved.

China-Guyana:

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VIETNAM: PREPARING FOR A CEASE-FIRE

A variety of intelligence sources show the Communists continue to keep their forces in a position of readiness for a military push on the eve of a possible cease-fire announcement. They apparently anticipate a period of uncertainty and confusion accompanying the cease-fire among both the populace and some government military forces, and hope to take advantage of it. If a cease-fire occurred in the period of the lengthy Tet festivities in early February, the Communists might expect the government's guard to be further lowered. The Communists' motive, of course, would be to strengthen their territorial position in advance of an in-place stand-down by the military units of both sides. It is evident that the Communists will be trying to tie any operations very closely to the actual implementation of a cease-fire, hoping thereby to block government efforts to retake lost ground after a truce goes into effect.

Communist preparations are evident [redacted] and in the deployment of enemy military forces. [redacted] enemy troops are being told by higher headquarters to maintain themselves at combat readiness in order to take the offensive immediately after the order is given. Intercepted messages of the past few days contain orders for the preparation of munitions, for reconnaissance, and for other support activities usually undertaken prior to offensive operations. Intercepts indicate that in MR-3, and possibly in other areas, additional enemy units have been moved into South Vietnam from Cambodia.

The North Vietnamese continue to move tanks, artillery, and supplies toward South Vietnam. Much of this materiel is needed to replace stocks lost in the course of the Communist offensive in 1972. It could be intended to increase the level of equipment and supplies before inventories are frozen in connection with a cease-fire. Even so, the materiel, along with this dry season's infiltrators, will substantially bolster the Communists' ability to mount and sustain major operations over the near term. In the absence of heavy combat activity throughout much of the country during the past several months, many enemy main force units have been actively engaged in resupply and refitting. The main forces

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have also attempted throughout most areas of the country to stay near populated areas which provide lucrative targets, rather than pull back into deep base areas or into winter quarters in Cambodia or Laos.

In northern South Vietnam, the combat potential of Communist forces just south of the DMZ is probably higher than at any time since early last summer. In the central highlands, the Communists have recently carried out limited offensive operations and, after achieving some of their objectives, we doubt that they are ready to mount a high level of operations any time soon. Along the central coast, Communist main force units are likely to have recovered somewhat from their losses in offensive operations late last summer and could undertake a fairly high level of operation. In MR-3, Communist forces are probably, on the whole, no stronger than they were at the time of the October offensive. In the delta, enemy forces have been attempting to refit, although there has not been much evidence of concentration for offensive operations.

[redacted] inconsistent as to just how strong an offensive the Communists might attempt in conjunction with announcement of a cease-fire. Some reports describe general orders for an all-out assault including most of those main forces that were not involved in the abortive and understrength enemy cease-fire offensive last October. Other reports, particularly from the area of MR-3, indicate that the Communists plan only fairly limited offensive action--about on a par with the level of last October. The latter reports usually give heavy stress to the substantial losses the enemy has suffered in some areas since October in attempting to maintain his forces close to populated areas. It seems most likely, based on the physical evidence of their military preparations, that the Communists hope to launch countrywide attacks on a level well above last October's, but short of an all-out effort. The enemy realizes that he must preserve much of his strength for the post-cease-fire period, or risk being gradually overcome by the government.

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Although we doubt that the Communists could overrun any major population centers, some district capitals and a number of villages and hamlets near Communist strongholds are vulnerable to enemy penetration. Rather than trying direct, heavy assaults

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on the pattern of the 1972 offensive, the Communists might attempt to break down some of the North Vietnamese main force units into small elements for use with the Viet Cong in local attacks. Small-scale but widespread assaults, backed by artillery, against lightly defended population centers and government installations could complicate the government's defensive response. In their premature October offensive, the Communists were unable to retain overrun areas for longer than a few days whenever heavily challenged by government forces. An offensive timed to a cease-fire, however, would be calculated to relieve them of the need to hold off prolonged counterattacks.

For their part, government forces now appear to be in a stronger combat position than in October. The army has replaced most of the manpower losses it sustained during the Communists' 1972 offensive and has gone over to relatively aggressive combat operations in several sectors of the country. The most important government gains have come in the far north where, despite the enemy's rebuilding effort, Saigon's forces have pushed the Communists back from some of the positions which provided access to the populated lowlands. These operations have kept the enemy on the defensive.

The South Vietnamese are well aware that the Communists may try a cease-fire offensive, and they have deployed their forces with considerable care to deal with the possibility. Nevertheless, the Communists are in a position to cause substantial trouble for the government if they do attempt a major series of cease-fire attacks.

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