



The President's Daily Brief

~~Top Secret~~ 7 March 1968



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DAILY BRIEF
7 MARCH 1968

1. South Vietnam

Coup rumors are cropping up again in Saigon, and Ky is doing nothing to squelch them. Dissatisfaction among junior officers over President Thieu's performance in recent weeks is said to be at the root of the problem.

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2. Communist China

Some of Mao's more ingenious enemies have recently resorted to intentional misprints in leading Chinese newspapers to ridicule the Great Leader. One of these toasted Mao as "endlessly lifeless" instead of the standard "endlessly long-lived." This particular insult has appeared at least twice and others have occurred, necessitating hasty recalls of the papers after they had been distributed. These "misprints" were most likely coordinated at a fairly high level in the bureaucracy.

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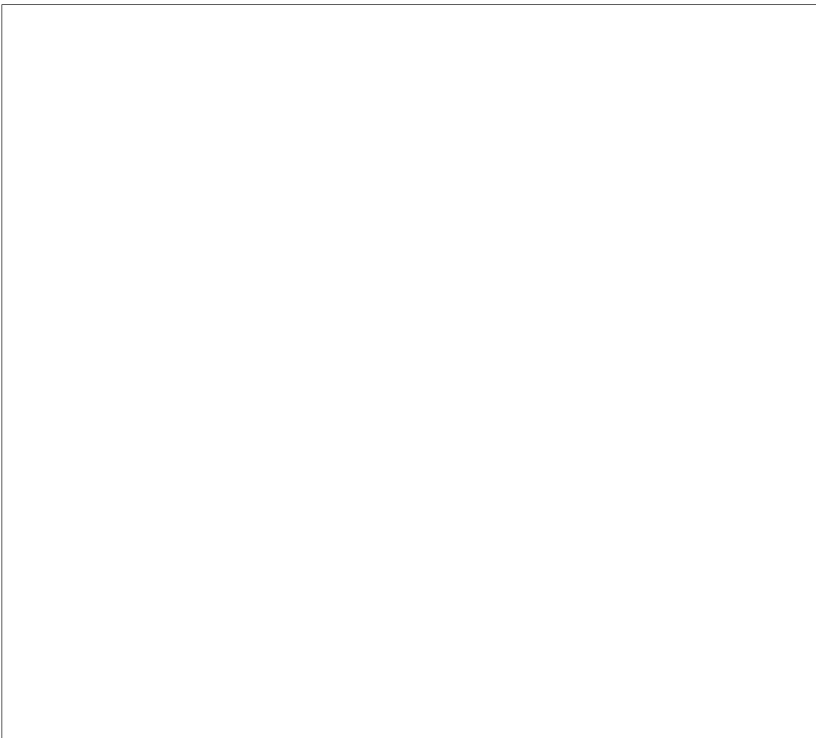
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3. Jordan

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4. Panama

The political standoff continues and tensions have not significantly eased. Vallarino's National Guard still holds the decisive cards.

5. Ecuador

This country is also a good candidate for pre-election violence. The election is not until June, but the first shots have already been exchanged between rival camps. The leading contender, former president Velasco--widely known as "el Loco"--announced that on Saturday he will return from self-imposed exile. If he does, it will be despite warnings that he may be assassinated. Even if it does not come to that, the storm signals are definitely up.

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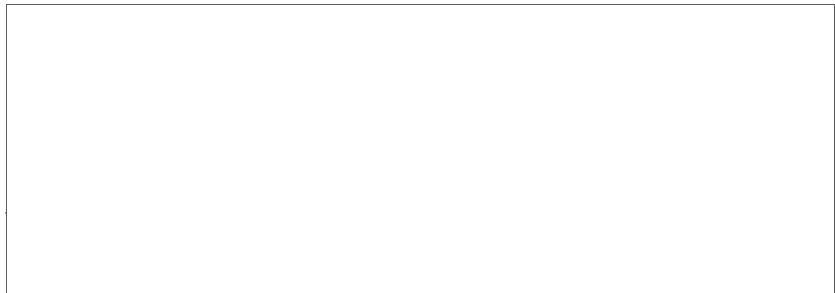
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6. Cyprus



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7. Yemen



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8. Rhodesia

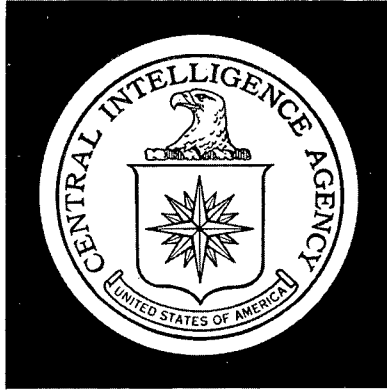
A definite split emerged in the cabinet during its six-hour meeting just prior to the decision to execute the three Africans in defiance of the Queen's reprieve. A few moderates in the judiciary have resigned in protest or are threatening to do so, but clearly the right wing is in the ascendancy. Whatever slim chance remained of an accommodation with Britain now seems gone.

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FOR THE PRESIDENT'S EYES ONLY

Special Daily Report on North Vietnam



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Special Daily Report on North Vietnam
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I. NOTES ON THE SITUATION

Hanoi on the San Antonio Formula: Hanoi's weekly, Vietnam Courier, of 26 February carries a detailed rejection of President Johnson's San Antonio formula, and all interpretations of it, as a basis for starting negotiations. The article breaks no new ground, but it is one of the most thorough restatements of the regime's long-held position that the bombings must be stopped unconditionally before any talks can take place.

The Courier quotes the key passage from the President's San Antonio address and seems to accept as reasonable the call for prompt and productive discussions after a bombing cessation. North Vietnamese spokesmen have addressed these points repeatedly in the past two months in an effort to put Hanoi's position in the best possible light. The Courier boggles, however, at the "no advantage" sentence, saying that this is only a "more cunning" way of asking for North Vietnamese reciprocity. It concedes that the President used the "mildest" terms possible ("We would assume..."), but claims that this still asks a price for ending the "criminal bombing," and implies there should be "restrictions on the normal activities of a sovereign people."

The Courier says the US is aware that the San Antonio formula puts "the aggressor and his victim on the same footing," and therefore has made it "subject to bargaining." At one time, said the article, the formula was presented as a demand that infiltration be stopped, while later it was a call for "freezing of military operations in the South" or keeping them at their present levels. The Courier said that Secretary Clifford's statement that supplies sent south could be kept at an "ordinary level" was portrayed by the US as a "major concession."

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The Courier rejected all interpretations of the formula because Hanoi "will not negotiate under the threat of bombs." It cited three key policy statements since last December by North Vietnamese spokesmen as having "cut the ground from under Washington's feet." The US, says the article, is left with only the "worn-out" theme of reciprocity as an argument against a bombing halt. The standard Communist formula is repeated: if the US really wants peace in Vietnam, first of all, the bombing and all other acts of war against the North must be stopped unconditionally. The article holds out no hope of this happening soon, because the US is bent on going "deeper into the tunnel" by insisting on a military victory and by refusing any political settlement based on the "Vietnamese people's national rights."

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Debriefing of French Correspondent: The former French Press Agency correspondent in Hanoi, Bernard-Joseph Cabanes, claims that Premier Pham Van Dong made a special effort before Cabanes left North Vietnam to emphasize Hanoi's determination and ability to continue the fighting. In a farewell interview on 19 February, the premier stressed that present levels of fighting did not put a strain on Hanoi's resources. He said North Vietnam would not only continue the present pace of the war, but could step it up. North Vietnam has yet to "bring to bear the full capacity of its military force," the premier said.

Cabanes reported at length on Hanoi's attitude toward a negotiated settlement. He believes that Hanoi genuinely wants negotiations but will not accept the "no advantage" aspect of the San Antonio formula. This condition, however, is the only issue still dividing Hanoi and Washington on the terms for beginning negotiations, according to Cabanes. Neither the bellicose language of Communist propaganda--which Cabanes said is intended for home consumption--nor the increased tempo of the fighting in the South should be interpreted as unwillingness to negotiate. Hanoi is simultaneously pushing military and diplomatic actions in hopes that either one or both will obtain Communist objectives.

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The French journalist had two conversations about negotiations with Foreign Minister Trinh in February just before he left. The foreign minister implied that the North Vietnamese "four points" were intended to be a "basis for discussions" rather than final terms for a settlement, and that the language employed was purposefully vague.

Hanoi unquestionably would prefer to talk directly with the US alone, Cabanes reports. The North Vietnamese leadership would turn to an international conference only on two conditions--to obtain international endorsement of an agreement worked out between Hanoi and Washington, or as a last resort in case "US-Vietnamese talks fail to produce a settlement." The North Vietnamese consider U Thant an important Asian statesman who should be treated with respect, but they are unequivocally opposed to any role for the UN in a negotiated settlement.

In terms of his understanding of Hanoi's negotiating position, Cabanes appears to have developed good contacts and used them well. He had ready access to French diplomatic sources, speaking acquaintance with other Western and Communist members of the diplomatic corps, almost daily contact with the press office of the North Vietnamese Foreign Ministry, and occasional contact with important North Vietnamese leaders.

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Civil Defense: The North Vietnamese continue to dig in for a long war, [REDACTED]

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More on Swiss - North Vietnamese Relations:
Following the visit to Hanoi last month by the Swiss ambassador to Peking, the Swiss Government has announced that a representative of the North Vietnamese Foreign Ministry will in turn make a visit to

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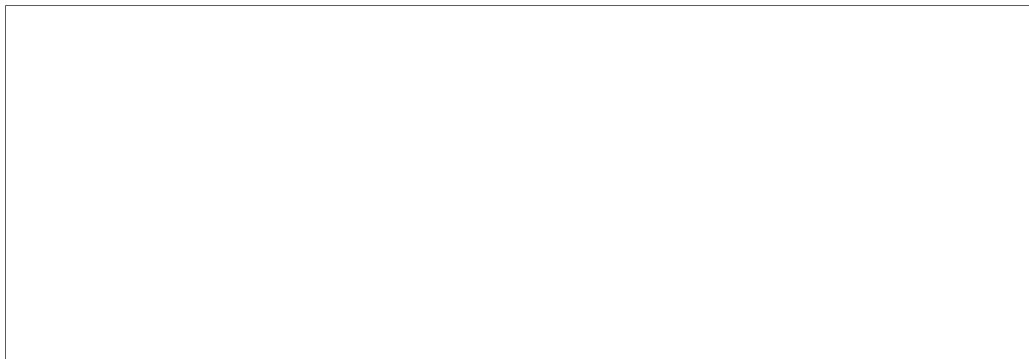
Switzerland. The visit to Hanoi resulted in the establishment of semi-official diplomatic relations with the North Vietnamese, and the next step may be to set up some kind of North Vietnamese representation in the Swiss capital. The Swiss announcement said cryptically that "a means of contact that may be used at any moment has been established."

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Major Bridge Repaired: Haiphong's only permanent rail and highway bridge, destroyed in September bombings, may now be reopened to traffic. Mid-January photography of a rail yard near Haiphong showed enough 90-foot truss-type bridge spans to fill the dropped portion of the Haiphong rail and highway bridge. Preparatory repairs to the bridge had been observed in earlier photography and the dropped section could be replaced and rails laid within hours. Photography during January indicated that rail traffic has been moving out of Haiphong, probably using a rail pontoon bridge near the destroyed one. In addition to rail crossings, there are 11 other by-passes--highway pontoon bridges and ferries--over which supplies leave Haiphong.

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

Nothing of significance to report today.

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