



The President's Daily Brief

~~Top Secret~~ 8 February 1968



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DAILY BRIEF
8 FEBRUARY 1968

1. Vietnam
(as of 5:30 AM
EST)

The combat base at Khe Sanh was struck again this morning with a heavy barrage of artillery, rocket, and mortar fire, but casualties and damage were light. No major new attacks have occurred elsewhere in South Vietnam, but Communist pressure remains serious in several urban areas--notably in Saigon, Hue, and Dalat.

At last word, the three North Vietnamese IL-28 light bombers that came down from China on Tuesday were still at Phuc Yen airfield. It is now evident that three more of these planes were flown to a Chinese airfield closer to the border on Tuesday, suggesting that these too are destined soon to return to North Vietnam.

An idea of what the Communists hoped to accomplish in the current offensive is now beginning to emerge from interrogations of captured Viet Cong. They were banking on an upsurge of popular support in the cities, and some claim they were told to organize new front groups composed of dissident South Vietnamese. The end result was to be a coalition of these new groups with the National Liberation Front which would then form a new government capable of challenging the present leaders in Saigon.

This scheme fits with the Communist propaganda about new opposition "fronts" springing up in South Vietnam. Although the Communists did not achieve all they had hoped initially, it is unlikely that these plans have been abandoned.

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2. Korea

The government and press in Seoul are moderating somewhat their earlier strenuous protestations over US handling of the Pueblo case. Perhaps they feel that the lack of progress in Panmunjom reduces the chances of a compromise undercutting South Korean status.

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3. United Kingdom

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4. Soviet Union

The attempted lunar probe yesterday morning failed early in flight. It was intended either to go in orbit around the moon or to softland a payload on the surface. The Soviets have tried only one other lunar operation in the past 13 months, and that also was a flop.

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5. Denmark

The new government has set out, as its first order of business, to obtain assurances that the US accepts Denmark's policy banning nuclear weapons from Greenland and its airspace. The foreign minister informed Ambassador White yesterday that this does not have to mean renegotiation of the 1951 base treaty; a less formal exchange of notes would do.

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6. Belgium

The collapse of the government yesterday climaxed a bitter dispute between French and Dutch speaking Belgians. Foreign policy is not an issue in the crisis. It will be very difficult to put together a new government on the basis of the present Parliament and new elections may be in store.

7. Czechoslovakia

All signs suggest that Dubcek returned from his quick trip to Moscow last week pumped up with confidence in his plans to put the country on a new course and to broaden his base of political support. He evidently got at least tacit acceptance in Moscow, though Soviet leaders almost surely remain apprehensive about the liberalizing experiments he has in mind.

Dubcek's program is to be unveiled at the party Central Committee meeting scheduled for late this month.

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8. Jordan

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FOR THE PRESIDENT'S EYES ONLY

Special Daily Report on North Vietnam

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I. NOTES ON THE SITUATION

Propaganda on the Current Offensive: Vietnamese Communist propaganda is still stressing that the military offensive will not be a short-term effort, and that more difficult days are ahead. Earlier appeals frequently characterized the fighting as "urgent" and stressed the immediate objectives, whereas Front and Hanoi statements in recent days have predicted that the fighting would become fiercer and fiercer, but that greater victories are yet to come. The French Press Agency correspondent in Hanoi, whose material is censored and sometimes inspired by the North Vietnamese, reports he was told that the present fighting is only the beginning of a "new phase" of the struggle and that there will be a "second phase" to prevent the allies from recovering from the first blow.

In the absence of any genuine popular uprising, the Communists have probably found it necessary to bolster Viet Cong morale by stressing that the fighting must continue in order to nail down the successes achieved in the initial Tet thrust. Such propaganda is also designed to encourage greater uncertainty and fear among the already shaken populace and to magnify and prolong the Communist threat.

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Flight to Hanoi Still Stranded: The International Control Commission (ICC) aircraft scheduled to bring out the three US prisoners from Hanoi is still stranded in Saigon because of fighting near the city. Flights from Saigon to Hanoi via Phnom Penh and Vientiane were cancelled on 2 and 6 February and one scheduled for the 9th has also been scrubbed.

The two Americans who are to receive the three flyers have been stranded in Vientiane since 2 February. The US Embassy in Laos reports that the two Americans approached the Chinese Communists in an

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effort to arrange a flight through China, but were refused. (The Chinese control the only other regularly scheduled air route to North Vietnam.) The North Vietnamese Embassy in Vientiane was informed of the Chinese refusal and suggested the ICC initiate a flight from either Phnom Penh or Vientiane using another aircraft to make the flight on 9 February. The North Vietnamese guaranteed that they would provide the same security for the flight as that given the regular ICC aircraft. The US Embassy in Vientiane made a similar proposal to ICC officials in Laos and South Vietnam, and this is now being explored.

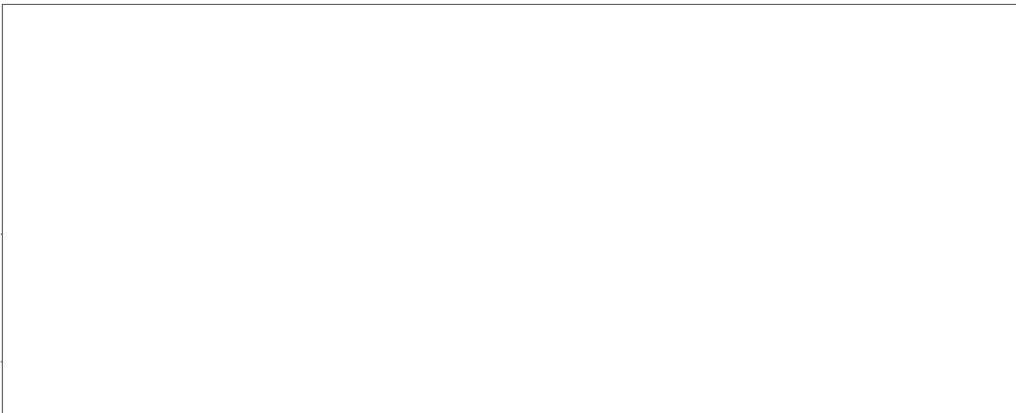
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Front Spokesmen in Cairo: Vietnamese Communist spokesmen continue to underscore their contention that any moves to end the war must start with the United States.

The head of the Liberation Front mission in Cairo held a press conference on 6 February to make this point and to present the Front's line on the current Communist offensive. This was the approach taken by his colleague in Moscow on the same day. Both rejected a coalition government or negotiations with the Thieu-Ky government, and both expressed determination to continue the struggle as long as necessary to achieve a settlement on Communist terms. The Front spokesman in Cairo sidestepped a question about volunteers if the US "doubled" its strength in Vietnam by saying there are plenty of Vietnamese, both North and South, and they will "always be able to defeat" whatever forces the US sends.

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Vietnamese Praise North Korean Support: In what seems to have been a deliberate attempt to link the Pueblo incident with the Vietnam conflict, a rally was held in Pyongyang at which Vietnamese Communist representatives praised the North Koreans for their support.

Although their Korean comrades apparently eschewed any specific claim of capturing the Pueblo in order to support the Communists in Vietnam, a Liberation Front speaker described the action as an "effective contribution to the struggle of the South Vietnamese people." The North Vietnamese ambassador was not so explicit, and only claimed that Vietnamese Communist successes would be "un-thinkable" without the support tendered by the North Koreans. Earlier Communist propaganda seemed to avoid making any direct connection between the Pueblo and events in Vietnam.

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

Nothing significant to report at this time.

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