

The President's Daily Brief

~~Top Secret~~ 22 February 1968



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DAILY BRIEF
22 FEBRUARY 1968

1. South Vietnam

Sharp fighting continues around Saigon. Elsewhere, there have been no significant changes in the military situation during the night.

In Hue, some progress is being made toward repairing the city's disrupted facilities. Our station in Saigon, however, believes that re-establishment of civil government in Hue will be difficult.

Few of the city's significant public officials have even tried to return to work, while others have surrendered to the Viet Cong. Those officials who are on the job show little initiative and do not control their subordinates. The Saigon government has not yet weighed in with enough authority to re-establish confidence and public support.

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2. Geneva
Conference

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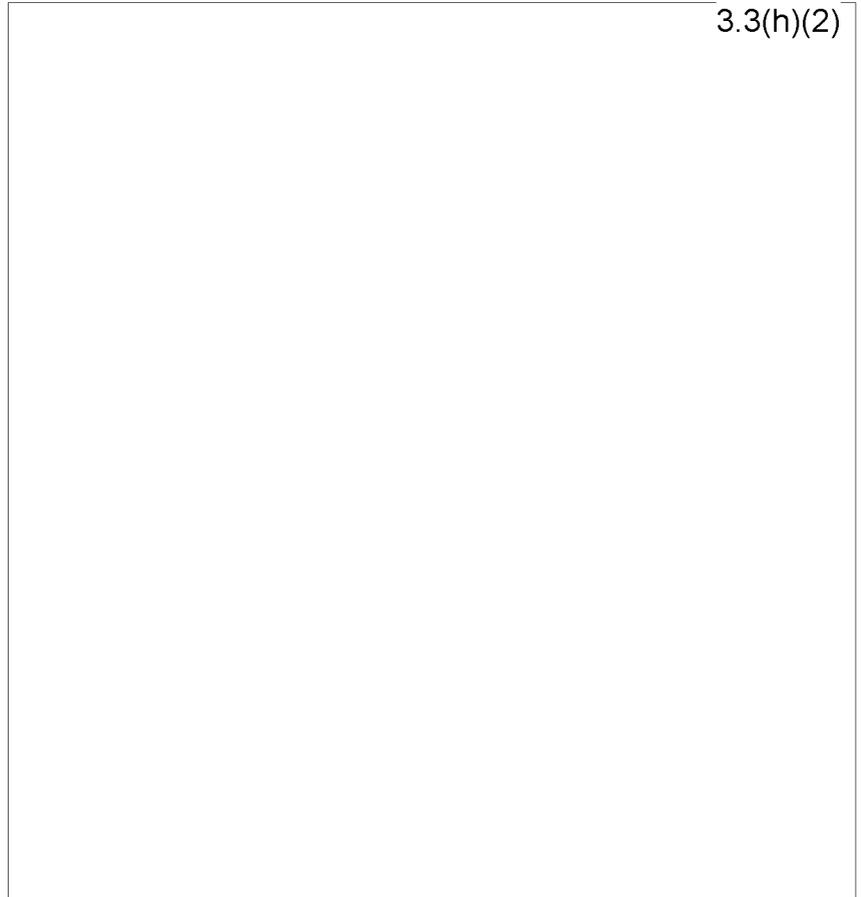
3. Japan

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4. Laos

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5. Panama

Robles has further inflamed the bitter struggle for control of the electoral machinery by engineering the suspension of two pro-Arias electoral judges. If the judges are in fact dismissed, Arias might carry out his threat to impeach Robles or call a massive march on Panama City.

Robles has assured Ambassador Adair that he will maintain public order and respect democratic processes. The National Guard, which feels caught in the middle, was put on full alert Tuesday and probably could keep order in the short run.

6. Communist China

Posters attacking one Chi Pen-yu have recently been seen in Peking. This personage was a charter member of the radical Cultural Revolution group set up in 1966 and one of its chief spokesmen throughout last year. He was also one of the last of the group to be publicly active, most of the rest having faded from sight back in September.

These attacks on Chi, apparently officially inspired, strengthen our belief that the radical elements in the leadership continue to lose ground.

7. Soviet Union

On 12 February the Soviets made the first test flight of a new launch vehicle, probably intended for a weapons system. [REDACTED]

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ANNEX

Interrogation of North Vietnamese Captain

Preliminary interrogation of a North Vietnamese Army [REDACTED] captured in Danang [REDACTED] is providing a large volume of information on enemy strategy and future intentions. Much of what the prisoner says appears to reflect at least general familiarity with Communist plans for the current military campaign.

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The prisoner's comments indicate the Communists see their current effort as one which will extend over several months and eventually conclude with a political settlement on their terms. He also makes clear that major new attacks against urban centers are likely and he suggests that the build-up at Khe Sanh is basically intended to divert US resources and attention to that area while Communist forces make headway elsewhere.

The prisoner says that the current offensive is part of a three-phase strategy in which the Communists would first launch a general offensive against the cities. If this failed, they were to regroup in rural areas to besiege the cities and at the same time lure US forces into the Khe Sanh area where they would be "wiped out." Finally, "decisive" battles would be fought in the Western Highlands or near Saigon and, as a result of sustained pressure on the allies, a coalition government would be established. In support of this, the Communists were stepping up activities in southern Laos to permit large-scale infiltration of regular North Vietnamese forces to tie down more US troops.

The prisoner gave very detailed and probably accurate information on Communist plans and organization in the Danang area. He had served off and on there [REDACTED] and he obviously was familiar with this subject. His comments that major enemy ground attacks can be expected in the northern coastal provinces are in accord with [REDACTED] intelligence.

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Beyond the area in which he himself served, the prisoner's knowledgeability is more questionable. His description of the basic outline of enemy strategy probably is correct, but we doubt that he can speak with authority about such specific subjects as where the "decisive" battles will be fought. Moreover, on broad political topics, such as his allegation that the Chinese have offered two million combat troops to North Vietnam and will enter the conflict if the United States increases its military strength in the South, he is unlikely to have had access to first-hand information.

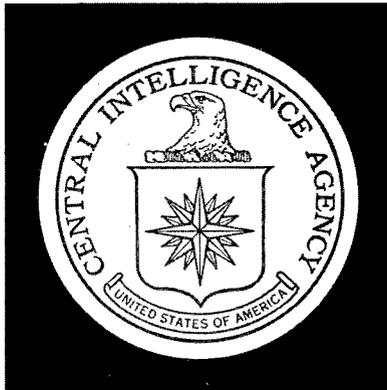
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FOR THE PRESIDENT'S EYES ONLY

Special Daily Report on North Vietnam



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Special Daily Report on North Vietnam
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22 February 1968

I. NOTES ON THE SITUATION

North Vietnam Claims Civilian Casualties: Hanoi's claim on 10 February that 800 civilians were killed or wounded by US air strikes around Hanoi, Haiphong, and Vinh Linh during the last three months of 1967 is comparable with periodic claims made during the first nine months of last year. The February claim increased Hanoi's reported total of civilian casualties for 1967 to about 5,000. [REDACTED]

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Hanoi Atmospherics: [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] comments on life in Hanoi at the end of last month:

--Some efforts were made during Tet to brighten up the state store. More goods were on display for those fortunate enough to obtain permission to shop there. Prices were very high, however, with the cheapest, smallest transistor radio selling for three times the average worker's monthly wage and a bicycle selling for ten times his monthly wage.

--Every major government building is being equipped with its own massive bomb shelter. The embassies of the Communist nations are following suit, but the non-Communist representatives continue to live unprotected.

--New Year's Day (29 January) brought out large and happy crowds of people who enjoyed themselves for 24 hours but not, [REDACTED] The temper of the masses as it was displayed during Tet does not suggest war weariness so severe as to be a critical factor in the situation.

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Hanoi Promotes a General with Experience in South Vietnam: A North Vietnamese broadcast indicates that a major general with a long background in South Vietnamese military affairs has been promoted into a defense ministry job in Hanoi, presumably after giving up his former responsibilities in the South.

The broadcast says that Major General Nguyen Don, identified as vice minister of national defense and an alternate member of the party committee, is in Moscow heading up a delegation to the celebrations of Soviet army day. Don has been identified for years by prisoners and captured documents as a leading figure in the Viet Cong military command structure in South Vietnam. In the early 1960s he became commander of Viet Cong Military Region Five, which covers most of the northern half of South Vietnam. One prisoner captured a year ago claimed that he had been demoted to deputy commander of the region in mid-1966, but there is no other evidence of this. There has been no hint of Don's activities over the past year or so.

General Don's move to the defense ministry may be a routine personnel shift for a man with many years of active duty in the South. His trip to Moscow and his new position indicate he is still in good standing, and it seems likely that in his new job he will continue to play an important military role. It is even possible that he was shifted to the defense ministry in order to provide the Hanoi high command with the benefit of his specialized knowledge of the situation in the northern half of South Vietnam, where the Communists now seem to be focusing their attention.

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Swedish Ambassador in Peking Travels to Hanoi Today: The Swedish ambassador to China, Leonart Petri, is scheduled to travel to Hanoi on 22 February, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] This will be Petri's second trip to North Vietnam. It also is the latest step in Hanoi's current campaign to present its position on settling the war to representatives of Western and neutralist governments. [REDACTED]

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the Swiss ambassador to Peking, who has been in Hanoi for the past three days, was scheduled to return to China on the evening of the 21st. In part, the ambassador's visit was apparently to establish some form of diplomatic relations with North Vietnam. According to a 21 February announcement of the Swiss foreign minister, the ambassador has been named official "representative" to North Vietnam--a position involving "purely technical contacts" with the North Vietnamese, but not to be construed as full diplomatic recognition. France is the only other non-Communist European country with which Hanoi currently has diplomatic relations.

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

Hanoi Praises US Writers Who Oppose the War: In its English language broadcast of 21 February, Hanoi included a message from several Liberation Front writers' organizations to a group of 448 American writers and editors who have refused to pay a "war tax" and who are opposed to "Johnson's war policy." The message predicted that the American people would oppose more strongly "the Johnson administration's immoral war policy" and would demand that the US settle the war on Communist terms.

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