

The President's Daily Brief

~~Top Secret~~ 28 February 1968



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DAILY BRIEF
28 FEBRUARY 1968

1. South Vietnam

The Communists continue frequent artillery attacks against key installations, but there have been no recent major ground attacks. [REDACTED]

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2. Laos

No significant change has been reported, though Communist pressure continues against Attapeu in the far south and against Phou Pha Thi, the key guerrilla base [REDACTED] in the northeast.

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3. South Korea

The new defense minister is likely to have a closer working relationship with US officials than did his predecessor. The change in this post, like the reshuffling of top security officials last week, is aimed at quieting criticism and strengthening security in the wake of the raid on the presidential palace last month. The shifts do not presage policy changes.

4. North Korea

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5. Middle East

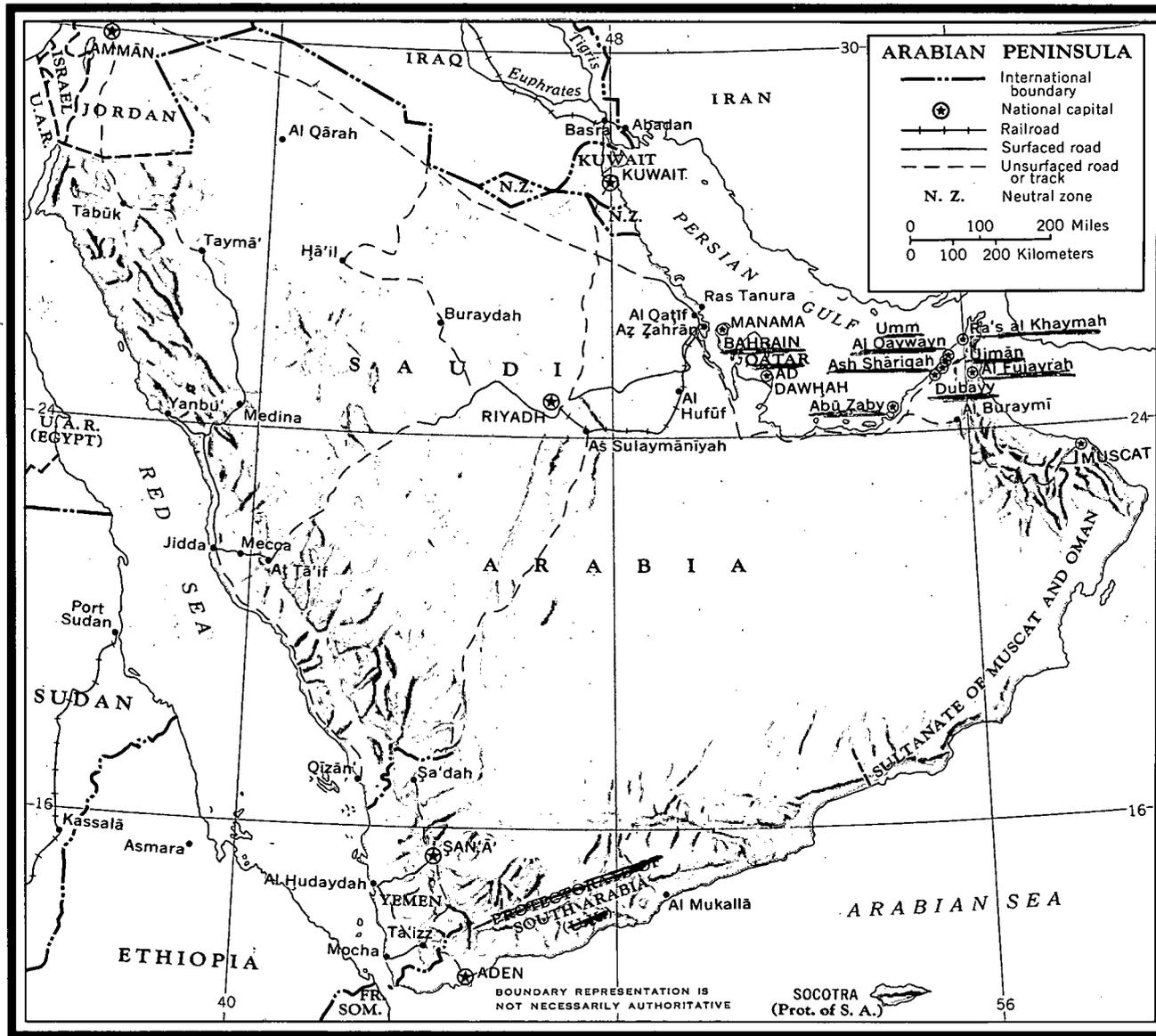
Gunnar Jarring spent yesterday with the Israelis in one last attempt to break the log jam before reporting to U Thant today. As yet, no word of any forward movement has come from the encounter. This morning's press reports seem unduly optimistic.

The Israelis, under prodding from the US and others, had reformulated their public position on the UN Security Council resolution of last November. Though the most recent of these statements seemed more forthcoming, the Egyptians and Jordanians still say that it does not yet constitute Israeli acceptance of the resolution. Nothing can happen, they insist, until this acceptance comes. For their part, the Israelis want prior assurance that once this issue is settled, the Arabs will enter into substantive discussions.

If this obstacle is overcome or by-passed, the next big issue will be the "face-to-face talks" the Israelis insist on but which the Arabs consider an abomination. It is just possible that both sides may eventually agree on some sort of compromise, perhaps with the parties sitting in separate rooms and talking through an intermediary like Jarring.

6. India

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7. Rumania

Bucharest has asked for direct talks with the US this week on the non-proliferation treaty. This request is puzzling. We do know that the Soviets have tried and failed to satisfy Rumanian misgivings about the draft treaty and that the Rumanians have been pressing hard for guarantees against nuclear blackmail. It is hard to see how the Rumanians think the US could help them on this.

On balance, this looks like an attempt to bolster the world image of an independent Rumania. It may also involve a little game of psychological warfare against the Soviets. Finally, there is an outside chance that Bucharest wants to use the treaty issue to screen talks with the US on some other topic, such as Vietnam.

8. Persian Gulf

The nine British protectorates on the Gulf have announced their federation and the decision to assume responsibility for their own defense and foreign affairs (see map). The agreement, announced yesterday after a meeting of the nine rulers, is to take effect on 30 March. The federation will probably seek membership in the Cairo-backed Arab League.

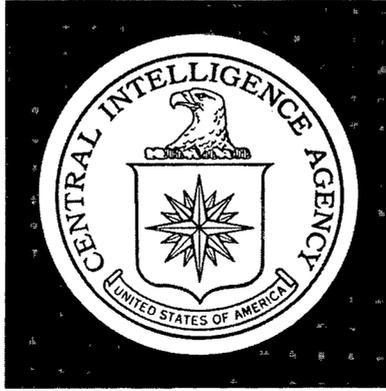
Cairo radio is already crowing about the impending "birth of a new Arab state, the 15th member of the Arab League." If the federation holds up, the British will have a good excuse to get out of the area well ahead of their 1971 deadline, perhaps even this year. The Shah of Iran, of course, would be mightily upset by Arab unity in the Gulf, particularly if it brings an infusion of Egyptian influence there.

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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



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Release Sought for Captured West German Doctors: Monsignor George Hussler, an official of the West German office of the Catholic charitable organization Caritas, has contacted North Vietnamese officials in East Berlin regarding the release of five West German doctors who disappeared from Hue during the Tet offensive and may have been taken prisoner by the Viet Cong. Hussler, who visited Hanoi in late 1966, is presently organizing a shipment of eight tons of medical supplies to North Vietnam and feels that this may facilitate his gaining the release of the doctors. (The West Germans are preparing a similar shipment for South Vietnam.) North Vietnamese officials in East Berlin told Hussler that his request would be forwarded to appropriate authorities.

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The last US newsman to travel to Hanoi was David Schoenbrun, who went principally as an academician and not as a reporter.

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The Budapest Conference: Although the North Vietnamese are unwilling to participate in the current meeting of Communist parties in Budapest because of its Sino-Soviet overtones, Ho Chi Minh, according to several press reports, has sent a letter to the conference requesting a pledge of support. Hanoi propaganda, however, has as yet avoided giving the conference any publicity.

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

Hanoi Quotes Western Press on Westmoreland:
In its English language broadcast on Monday, Hanoi radio rounded up several critical articles in the Western press on General Westmoreland. It reported that the General has admitted that the Tet offensive had placed his forces on the defensive, but ridiculed his claim that the US still maintained the initiative in its sweep operations. Quoting an Associated Press source, the radio said that US strategy in the war had failed, and that many US officers were unhappy with Westmoreland's strategy. The error he has fallen into, according to Hanoi, is that he is permitting the enemy to choose the conditions for battle. Summing up, the Hanoi statement pointed out that Westmoreland had few reserves to insure a stronger defense of Saigon or Khe Sanh and warned that the recent dispatch of 10,000 additional troops falls far short of what is really needed to hold out against new enemy thrusts, "let alone to make any gains."

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