

The President's Daily Brief

~~Top Secret~~ 23 March 1968



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DAILY BRIEF
23 MARCH 1968

1. North Vietnam

New armed units are apparently being organized in North Vietnam and seem to be moving southward through the central part of the country. [redacted]

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[redacted]

It is still unclear whether the new groups are headed for South Vietnam or whether they are to stay in the country to free regular troops for duty in the South. It is also possible that they are being mobilized because of some new concern in Hanoi about an invasion from the South.

2. Korea

[redacted]

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3. Philippines

Marcos has got himself in a first-class mess. Some energetic newsmen are playing up the discovery of a secret training camp on Corregidor that was apparently training Philippine guerrillas to infiltrate Malaysian Borneo. Congress is demanding a full investigation, and Marcos is said to feel he has no choice but to agree. This won't help his already difficult relations with Congress, to say nothing of Philippine-Malaysian relations.

4. Eastern Europe

An unusually tight curtain of secrecy surrounds the East German city of Dresden as top Communist leaders from six countries gather for their weekend conclave. Even the fact that the meeting is taking place is unknown to the public.

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The meeting was clearly arranged on short notice and on an urgent basis. Events in Poland and Czechoslovakia, as well as Rumania's recent defiance of bloc solidarity, are likely to be at the heart of the discussions.

5. Rumania

The government appears to be bracing for some kind of political or economic pressure from its Warsaw Pact allies. Its fears may be justified, and could explain the efforts it has been making in recent days to strengthen ties with Yugoslavia. This may also be behind the sudden call for Ambassador Bogdan to come home from Washington for consultations.

Rumania is evidently the one pact member not represented in Dresden this weekend.

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6. Poland

Prudent police action in Warsaw yesterday has, at least for now, cooled student agitation. Tension is still high, however, and Gomulka has not yet succeeded in insulating the public from the student campaign. In fact, Warsaw's industrial workers may be warming up a bit to the student cause.

7. Panama

Hope remains that this weekend will pass without serious violence--but it is sure to be eventful. Robles' opponents remain dead set on pressing impeachment proceedings, and the Assembly is to meet for that exact purpose tomorrow. A guilty verdict could come tomorrow night or on Monday.

Most of the leading players are now trying to keep cool. Robles apparently intends to ignore the Assembly proceedings in the expectation that the Supreme Court will "rectify" the situation after 1 April. Arnulfo Arias, still scrupulous about following the constitutional path, has warned his hotheads to stay in line. Vice President Max Delvalle, an Arias man, is preparing to be sworn in as president but says he will step down if the court rules against him.

All this display of reason and moderation could evaporate quickly, however. It could happen during the big demonstrations Arias is trying to pull off tomorrow.

8. Sweden

The government clearly intends to press on with its critical line against the US. Government leaders were as abusive as ever during this week's parliamentary debate on foreign policy. Even the opposition--also with its eye on the September elections--seems to have decided to get what political mileage it can from the Vietnam issue.

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FOR THE PRESIDENT'S EYES ONLY

Special Daily Report on North Vietnam



Top Secret 50X1

16

23 March 1968

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I. NOTES ON THE SITUATION

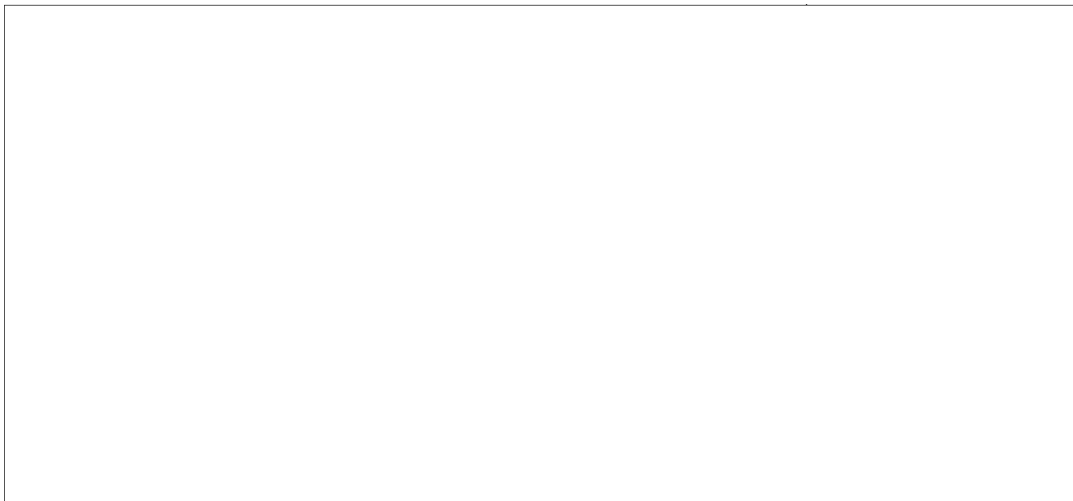
Contacts with Switzerland: The North Vietnamese apparently received less than the full establishment of diplomatic relations which they were seeking from Switzerland. Less formal "contacts" have been set up. The recent talks with the Swiss have nevertheless again served Hanoi's purpose of publicizing its position on the war by putting the Communist case before a wider Western audience.

A communiqué was issued by the Swiss Government on 22 March at the end of a four-day visit by Mai Van Bo, Hanoi's representative in Paris. It says that Bo expressed a desire for an exchange of ambassadors, but the Swiss claimed the time was not yet ripe for such a move. The day before, Mai Van Bo was quoted as saying that Swiss "recognition" of North Vietnam would take place in a few days.

The communiqué also notes that Switzerland remains ready to make available its good offices to help end the war, and that during the visit Bo repeated Hanoi's standard line of being ready to negotiate any time the US unconditionally halts the bombing.

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Hanoi's New Sedition Law: Hanoi has just publicized a new decree on "crimes against the state" which was put into effect last November. A broadcast of the new law on 21 March, and an accompanying Nhan Dan editorial on the same day, claim that the new law is a formal codification and updating of existing regulations. This explanation appears reasonable. The law was passed at a time when the Hanoi regime was instituting a general tightening up of internal security procedures throughout the country.

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The need for new security procedures does not appear to come from any significant increase in dissidence. New procedures were necessitated in part by the evacuation of large segments of the population from urban areas and a breakdown in traditional security procedures.

An unusual admission in the newspaper editorial of 21 March, however, is the reference to security problems in the North Vietnamese Army and to antiwar sentiment among the population at large. Hanoi does not usually publicly admit the existence of such problems. The editorial specifically included "army elements who did not want to transform themselves"--a possible reference to resistance to the draft or to a reluctance to accept combat assignments. The editorial also listed "the prevention of the Northern people's support for the liberation war in the South" as one of the crimes of counterrevolution.

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The new law also includes certain "counterrevolutionary crimes" which have a distinct foreign flavor-- as though it were aimed at aliens fostering subversion of North Vietnam from outside its borders. Captured US pilots, for example, could be accused of some of the crimes listed in the new law. Other crimes would seem to apply specifically to the operation of US naval forces off the North Vietnamese coast. Such crimes could have been included in an effort to lay the legal groundwork for Hanoi's handling of captured American prisoners.

Most of the crimes included in the new law, however, have been crimes for years and would be crimes against the state in any society. Furthermore, both the law and the editorial stress the fact that the regime will not treat the accused harshly or abusively.

The punishments threatened range from a two-year prison term to capital punishment, but the accused are promised leniency if they can demonstrate that they were "forced, misled, or enticed." The emphasis on leniency and the routine nature of the new law tend to reinforce the belief that the regime's concern about security does not represent extreme anxiety, but is rather the usual and periodic type of warning which Hanoi frequently gives to recalcitrants, malingerers, and grumblers in an effort to keep them in line.

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

There is nothing of significance to report.

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