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#57 meeting notes	sanitized 11-7-85 NLS 85-05 meeting with JCS on Vietnam Top Secret 25 p. Downgraded to Secret per NLS 85-05	10/14/68	A
#58a cable	Paris 22253 section 1 2 p. Secret sanitized 3-1-85 NLS 85-07	10/11/68	A
#58b cable	Paris 22253 section 2 2 p. Secret open 3-1-85 NLS 85-07	10/11/68	A
#59a cable	State 254364 2 p. Secret open 7-17-85 NLS 85-08	10/11/68	A
#60a cable/memo	Rostow for the President, transmitting Bunker-Abrams cable 1p. Secret open 3-27-86 NLS 85-08	10/12/68	A
#61a cable	Saigon 40117 section 1 3 p. Secret open 3-27-86 NLS 85-08	10/12/68	A
#61b cable	Saigon 40117 section 2 2 p. Secret open 3-27-86 NLS 85-08	10/12/68	A
#62a cable	Paris 22313 section 1 Secret 2 p. Exempt NLS 85-08	10/12/68	A
#62b cable	Paris 22313 section 2 Secret 2 p. Exempt NLS 85-08	10/12/68	A
#63b			
#63a cable	Saigon 40178 Secret 1 p. open 3-27-86 NLS 85-08	10/13/68	A
#63b cable	Saigon 40220 Secret 3 p. sanitized 8-26-86 NLS 85-08	10/14/68	A
#64a cable	White House to Amemb Saigon 1 p. Top Secret sanitized 6-12-85 NLS 85-02 Downgraded to Secret per NLS 85-02	10/14/68	A
#65a cable	Bunker/Abrams to Rostow Secret 3 p. sanitized 3-27-86 NLS 85-08	10/14/68	A
#66a cable	State 254715 Secret 6 p. open 3-27-86 NLS 85-08	10/17/68	A
#67a cable	Saigon 38599 Secret 4 p. sanitized 8-26-86 NLS 85-08	10 9/24/68	A

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~~TOP SECRET - SENSITIVE~~

Summary Notes of President's Meeting with the Joint Chiefs on Vietnam
October 14, 1968, 1:50 to 4:40 P. M., Cabinet Room

Attendees: The President
Defense Secretary Clifford
JCS Chairman Wheeler
Gen. Palmer (for Gen. Westmoreland who was attending
the Eisenhower ceremony at Walter Reed Hospital)
Gen. Westmoreland (from 3:15 P. M. until end of meeting)
Admiral Moorer, CNO
Gen. McConnell, Air Force Chief of Staff
Gen. Chapman, Commandant of the Marine Corps
Secretary of State Rusk (from 2:45 P. M. to end of meeting)
Senator Russell (from 2:20 P. M. to end of meeting)
George Christian
Tom Johnson
Walt Rostow
Bromley Smith

Following a ten minute presentation of revised instructions on the advance authorization for the use of nuclear weapons, the President requested Walt Rostow to bring those present up to date on developments in the Vietnam negotiations going on in Paris. He said this information was for their personal use only and should not be passed on to anyone. Developments had taken place so recently that there had been little time for discussion. He wished those present to speak frankly and give their best judgment even though they would be hearing for the first time of the new developments.

Walt Rostow: The background in the current status of the Vietnam negotiations is as follows:

1. For some weeks we have been discussing with the Russians a meeting, possibly even a meeting of the two Heads of Government to talk about a limitation on strategic weapons, the Middle East, and Vietnam.
2. The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia changed the environment so drastically that further talk of a high-level US-USSR meeting was put aside.

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By Cbm, NARA, Date 3-3-03

3. In conveying to the Soviet leaders our views on US-USSR talks, the question of Vietnam was raised. The exact language used in stating our position to the Soviet leaders was:

"Setting all political arguments aside, the simple fact is that the President could not maintain a cessation of the bombing of North Vietnam unless it were very promptly evident to him, to the American people, and to our allies, that such an action was, indeed, a step toward peace. A cessation of bombing which would be followed by abuses of the DMZ, Viet Cong and North Vietnamese attacks on cities or such populated areas as provincial capitals, or a refusal of the authorities in Hanoi to enter promptly into serious political discussions which included the elected government of the Republic of Vietnam, could simply not be sustained."

4. Secretary Rusk discussed the US-USSR meeting with Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko in New York on two occasions. He stated our three conditions, i. e., GVN participation, no abuse of DMZ, and no attacks on populated areas or cities. Mr. Gromyko replied that if the Russians told the North Vietnamese of our conditions, the leaders in Hanoi would say that the Russians were acting as U.S. agents. Secretary Rusk then asked Gromyko to talk to Hanoi only about our insistence that serious political discussions must include representatives of the Republic of Vietnam. Secretary Rusk said Gromyko did not sign a contract to do so but he was not unsympathetic.

5. Last Friday (October 11), in private talks which are taking place in Paris without public knowledge, the North Vietnamese asked whether we would stop the bombing when we had a clear answer to the question we had put to them, i. e., would North Vietnam agree that no serious negotiations could be held without our inclusion of representatives of the South Vietnamese Government.

Our negotiators made this statement:

"The simple fact is that after a cessation of all bombardment the President's ability to maintain that situation would be affected by certain elemental considerations. We do not look to them as a condition for stopping the bombing but as a description of the situation which would permit serious negotiations and thus the cessation to continue. You will understand, therefore, that the circumstances we have discussed in our various private meetings about military activity in and around the DMZ are essential to the maintenance of that situation. And, of course, you know from our various discussions that indiscriminate attacks launched against major cities would create a situation which would not permit serious talks and thus the maintenance of a cessation."

The North Vietnamese again asked whether, if they agreed to GVN participation, would we stop the bombing? Our negotiators said that they would report to Washington because only the President can decide this matter. (Additional sentences of the Paris report of the Friday session were read. A copy of the full report is attached. (TAB A) (Paris telegram 22253)

6. The report of the Paris meeting was sent to Ambassador Bunker and General Abrams along with a draft instruction which was being considered here before a decision was made to authorize Ambassadors Harriman and Vance to give it to the Hanoi representatives in Paris. Our representatives in Saigon were asked to give their views with the bark off and with the understanding that no decision had yet been made. (The President interjected that it wasn't.)

The draft instruction was read in its entirety. (Copy is attached as TAB B).

7. Ambassador Bunker and General Abrams replied that they believed the exchange between our representatives and the Hanoi representatives in Paris was a fairly clear indication that Hanoi was ready for a tactical shift from the battlefield to the conference table. They concurred in the draft instruction, adding that if Hanoi representatives accepted such a proposal, our essential recommendations for a cessation of bombing would be met. (Full text of their reply is at TAB C)

The President: Recalled that both Ambassador Bunker and General Abrams in earlier cables had said that acceptance by the North Vietnamese of South Vietnam's participation in the negotiations was the overriding consideration--more important than either a quiet DMZ or withholding attacks on South Vietnamese cities.

Walt Rostow: 8. Ambassador Bunker and General Abrams in a cable analyzing possible reasons for the shift in the North Vietnamese position in Paris indicated that they were comfortable about facing negotiations now in view of the improved military situation in Vietnam. They concluded that because of their many difficulties the North Vietnamese had had to seek a respite on both military and morale grounds. They do not think the North Vietnamese have a capability for sustained action during the next two or three months and will need that time to repair their supply base. They expect that the major North Vietnamese effort will now shift to the political front, having failed to achieve a military breakthrough. (Full text of Saigon assessment at TAB D).

9. In Paris on Saturday morning (October 12) Soviet Charge Oberemko asked to see Ambassador Vance and read to him two statements which were taken down verbatim.

The first reads:

"I have good reason to believe that if the U.S. stops unconditionally and completely the bombardments and other acts of war against the DRV, the delegation of North Vietnam will agree to the participation of the representative of the Saigon Government in the talks on the problem of political settlement in Vietnam. Thus these talks would be held by the representatives of the DRV, of the United States of America, of the NLF, and the Saigon Government."

The second statement reads:

"I can tell you also on good authority that if the question of the unconditional and complete cessation of bombardments and all other acts of war against North Vietnam is resolved positively and promptly, the delegation of the DRV is ready to discuss seriously and in good faith other questions relating to the political settlement in Vietnam, provided of course that the other side would also act seriously and in good faith."

The President: interjected that the phrase, "I have good reason to believe. . ." was similar to one used in a letter he had received from Chairman Kosygin earlier. Mr. Rostow said the full sentence in the Kosygin letter read:

"My colleagues and I think--and we have grounds to do so--that complete cessation by the United States of bombing and other acts of war with respect to the DRV could contribute to a breakthrough in the situation and produce prospects for a peaceful settlement."

Walt Rostow: Oberemko told Vance that he hoped what he had said would help move the talks in Paris off dead center, that now is the right time to act; that the situation is most favorable right now and this opportunity should not be lost. Ambassador Vance in reply to Oberemko's question said he doubted he could have an answer from his Government on the new North Vietnamese position by Monday (Text of cable reporting this exchange is at TAB E).

10. Ambassador Bunker and General Abrams called on President Thieu Sunday evening to go over developments of the last four days and to paraphrase the instructions being considered for our negotiators in Paris. President Thieu concurred in the draft instructions adding that if the North Vietnamese are

serious in these negotiations they will soon propose a cease fire. (Texts of preliminary report and full report are at TAB F).

11. On Monday the President sent a message to Ambassador Bunker and General Abrams informing them that one of his major concerns was to examine with utmost care the loopholes and contingencies in the deal we are considering to make sure it is as copper-plated as we can make it. He wished to examine the possibility that Hanoi is simply seeking a respite to prepare for a later offensive. He asked four questions:

"1. Taking into account the enemy's weather and supply situation and prospects and taking into account the complexity of the diplomatic problems that may lie ahead, what would be a reasonable and secure interval in which to assess whether Hanoi is seriously interested in making peace, once 'serious' negotiations start?

"For example, it took only a month to wind up the 1954 Geneva negotiation once it became serious about June 20. Would thirty days now be a reasonable interval before we seriously considered a bombing resumption? Please give us your joint assessment.

"2. Are you confident you can maintain the morale, fighting spirit, and momentum of the ARVN and our own forces once serious negotiations start?

"3. You may wish to consider on a contingency basis the standing rules of engagement you would recommend required to protect the security and morale of our forces and those of our allies in the face of minor DMZ violations, to which the field commander would have the authority to respond without recourse to Washington and the level of infraction, involving more substantial violation and retaliation, which would require and justify recourse to Washington.

"4. In view of your judgement that the enemy may move promptly after a bombing cessation for a cease fire, we trust you are designing and preparing to recommend a cease fire proposal highly advantageous to our side which we would put into negotiation if such a proposition were put to us."

(Full text of the President's message is at TAB G)

12. Bunker's and Abrams' answers to the questions asked by the President were received at 10:48 A.M. today (Monday, October 14). They said it is

(Walt Rostow continued)

impossible to say whether Hanoi wants seriously to negotiate a compromise or is using this latest move only as a means of getting the bombing stopped, knowing that it will be difficult to resume later, either by the President or his successor. They believe that Hanoi's decision to agree to the GVN entering the discussions suggests that Hanoi has abandoned all hope of a military victory or of a unilateral U.S. withdrawal by the next Administration. They believe that if this is so, Hanoi's alternatives are to try to negotiate a settlement on the basis most favorable to them or to return to protracted guerrilla warfare. They view the North Vietnamese shift to the conference table as a result of an unfavorable military situation.

For the short range, the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese can do little damage with our regular forces during the next two or three months. As for the long term, Hanoi threw everything it could into this year's offensives and failed. They do not see how the North Vietnamese can make a greater effort or even a comparable one again. They believe that 1968 has been a disaster for Hanoi.

In reply to question one, they do not think it possible to fix in advance the length of the interval that should be allowed before we decide that Hanoi is not serious and that bombing should be resumed. They think we should have a pretty clear picture of Hanoi's intentions in a month or two.

On question 2, they expressed their complete confidence that the morale, fighting spirit and momentum of the U.S. and ARVN forces can be sustained and suggested certain actions to this end.

General Abrams replied to the third question by recommending the following basic rules of engagement which would cover the contingency of enemy violation of the DMZ.

"A. Every commander will retain the inherent right and responsibility to conduct operations for the self-defense of his forces.

"B. In case of attack by fire or ground attacks by small units (up to a battalion in size) across the demarcation line, COMUSMACV should have the authority to conduct a timely and adequate response against the attacking force, to include destruction of enemy forces penetrating across the line. No U.S. ground forces would cross the line without specific orders from the highest authority. (Comment: It is envisaged that small ground probes would be counteracted by response in kind, but of decisive superiority.)

(Walt Rostow continued)

"C. Enemy artillery fire would be responded to with heavy counter-battery fire and air attack until enemy weapons are silenced. In case SAM's are fired at our aircraft we would destroy his SAM installations and immediate supporting facilities.

"D. In case of substantial or general attacks across the Demarcation Line by ground (including artillery) or air action requiring response going beyond local action, authorization of highest authority would be sought immediately for such action, including resumption of the bombardment of NVN."

(Full text of cable is at TAB H)

13. The draft instructions were also sent to our negotiators in Paris for their comment. (The operative paragraphs were read in their entirety.) As a result of a discussion with General Wheeler and Secretary Clifford this morning, the instructions will also deal with the problem of reconnaissance. Our negotiators have been told that low-level, as well as high-level and drone coverage are required.

The sentences on reconnaissance read:

"We have used the phrase that would permit reconnaissance, which they may question. We believe it important that they have a clear understanding that we will in fact continue a limited program of unarmed reconnaissance after the bombing stops . . ."

". . . if the North Vietnamese then specifically raise the question of unarmed reconnaissance, you would state that both sides would be expected to take necessary measures to verify the state of affairs, and that in practice we could not possibly be satisfied that we knew the facts unless we conducted limited and discreet unarmed reconnaissance." "(FYI SecDef and JCS will require some low-level flights. END FYI)"

"Such reconnaissance clearly does not involve the use of force, and in the circumstances it could not possibly be regarded as an act of war. Hence, we would expect that it would continue." (Full text at TAB I)

The President: On September 17, Ambassador Harriman was in Washington at a time when many rumors were about that we were getting ready to stop the bombing. Mr. Harriman was told, in effect, that if the North Vietnamese agreed to the participation of the GVN in serious discussions and if the North

(The President, continued)

Vietnamese were ready to proceed with serious discussions, if they understood that there was to be no abuse of the DMZ or attacks on South Vietnamese cities, then we could go forward. We were responding to the statement that we were prepared to halt the bombing if the North Vietnamese would do "almost anything." Ambassador Harriman was told that the discussions would break up if there were North Vietnamese attacks into or against the DMZ or if there were attacks on South Vietnamese cities. Ambassador Vance returned to Washington on October 3 and he was told the same thing.

(At 2:20 P. M. Senator Russell joined the meeting)

Both Ambassadors Harriman and Vance were told that we must have GVN participation in serious discussions and that the bombing halt could be continued during the discussions only if there were no attack on the DMZ or shelling of the cities. If there was anything comparable to the Tet offensive, bombing would be resumed.

Meanwhile, a strong statement had been conveyed to the leaders of the Soviet Union concerning discussions which would include Vietnam as well as the limitation of the strategic arms, and the Middle East. The invasion of Czechoslovakia made US-USSR talks impossible.

Secretary Rusk met with Foreign Minister Gromyko and spelled out our three conditions governing a bombing halt. He told Mr. Gromyko that a violation of the military conditions by North Vietnam would result in almost instant retaliation. Gromyko pointed out that Soviet influence in Hanoi was limited but he conveyed to Secretary Rusk the impression that the Soviets would make clear to Hanoi that we would enter serious discussions only if the South Vietnamese representatives participated. Secretary Rusk indicated that we would make clear to Hanoi's representatives that during the discussions there can be no abuse of the DMZ or shelling of South Vietnamese cities.

I don't think the North Vietnamese will accept our conditions but almost everybody agrees that they won't walk out of a meeting if South Vietnamese representatives walk in.

Secretary Clifford and General Wheeler were brought up to date this morning on developments that took place while they were in Europe. Secretary Clifford gave a clear summary of the pros and cons of the proposition and will repeat it in a moment.

The President then related his three most recent public statements on the Vietnamese negotiations to the proposal that is now being considered:

(The President, continued)

1. In the San Antonio speech we talked about productive discussions and no advantage to be taken of a bombing halt. The new proposal defines productive talks as including GVN representatives and spells out our insistence on a quiet DMZ and no shelling of cities.

2. The Detroit speech reads: "This Administration does not intend to move further until it has good reason to believe that the other side intends seriously to join us in de-escalating the war and moving seriously toward peace." The North Vietnamese would meet our definition of serious if they accepted our requirement for GVN participation in the talks.

3. The New Orleans speech reads: ". . . the bombing will not stop until we are confident that it will not lead to an increase in American casualties." The military situation is quite different from that of last August. The weather has changed and heavy rains are falling in the area of the DMZ. Large numbers of North Vietnamese troops are moving back to North Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. If the North Vietnamese agree to a quiet DMZ, a bombing halt will not lead to increased casualties.

In mid-September, the language we used with the Soviet leaders was very clear. (The sentences given to the Soviet leaders were read. These are the same sentences cited earlier in these notes.)

Secretary Clifford: To understand the present situation, we must look at it in the simplest terms. For five months the North Vietnamese have been saying to us that if you stop the bombing, we will talk peace. In reply, we have presented conditions. They have refused our conditions on the ground that our bombing of North Vietnam is illegal and they are therefore under no obligation to agree to anything to get us to stop it. Thus, the talks in Paris are on dead center.

The North Vietnamese have said in the past that they would not sit down with the South Vietnamese Government representatives. We have said that the South Vietnamese representatives must participate in the negotiations.

Something has occurred to weaken the resolve of the North Vietnamese. It could be that they can't get their third offensive off the ground. They may recognize that their military situation is deteriorating badly. In any event, they now indicate that they may change the position they have held since the talks began.

We are considering a shift in our position. We would halt the bombing if the North Vietnamese would agree to sit down with the South Vietnamese and with

(Secretary Clifford, continued)

us in serious discussions. The talks would continue only so long as the DMZ is quiet and no cities are attacked. We have a condition precedent; i. e., agreement of GVN participation; and conditions subsequent; i. e., a quiet DMZ and no attack on the cities. We have reached the point where we have to test their good faith.

Recommended that the President stop the bombing to test the good faith of the North Vietnamese. If they are ready to act in good faith, there will be no attacks in the DMZ or on the cities. If they violate the agreement, we will know that they are not acting in good faith, and we resume bombing without the limitation announced on March 31. This recommended course of action gives us protection. We could easily resume bombing if the North Vietnamese are not serious. There would be widespread support for our testing them now. In addition, there would be no let-up in our military activity in South Vietnam--a most important factor in bringing the North Vietnamese around.

Our bombing in Laos would also continue and probably be increased in intensity. The monsoon season is now on in North Vietnam and our bombing is greatly limited by bad weather. However, the weather is clear in Laos so we could shift our attacks from North Vietnam to Laos, thus taking advantage of the difference in weather.

The phrase, "all acts of war" does not include aerial reconnaissance. We must have an understanding with the North Vietnamese on this point because we cannot trust their information. We must have high, low and drone coverage in order to insure that we know the North Vietnamese are not taking advantage of the bombing halt to mass their forces just across the partition line.

Concern has been expressed that a bombing halt would lead to a buildup of forces by the North Vietnamese in the DMZ. If this occurs during a bombing halt and while talks are going on, we would have to destroy the buildup.

The strategic and propitious time has come to shift our position. The North Vietnamese have made a substantial concession in that if they accept our terms, they will have recognized the Saigon government as the Government of South Vietnam and they will have recognized the partition of Vietnam. The effect on the Viet Cong of the recognition of the Saigon government will be very great.

(Secretary Rusk entered at 2:45 P. M.)

The President is now in the position where, by taking a minor risk, he can find out if the North Vietnamese are ready to end the war. The level of combat

(Secretary Clifford, continued)

may drop. Everyone clearly understands that if the North Vietnamese violate the terms, we will go back to bombing. We should move as rapidly as possible to tell Hanoi of our new proposal.

Chairman Kosygin should also be told of our position so that he can help push the North Vietnamese to accept. Our proposal can be handled apart from the election. Some will say that the proposal is a political ploy, but by far the majority will support the proposal because it could move us toward an end to the war. No serious domestic political problem is involved. Prompt action is strongly recommended.

General Wheeler: After 6 1/2 months of stonewalling, the North Vietnamese have made a movement of considerable significance, if they now accept participation of the GVN in the talks, and the understanding that the talks and the bombing halt continue only so long as the DMZ is quiet and there are no attacks on South Vietnamese cities. Other Points:

- a. General Abrams has sent in a highly favorable military assessment. The Chiefs agree with his assessment. In effect, the military war has been won.
- b. President Thieu has told us that he readily agrees with the new proposal. This fact acquires additional importance when it is realized how cautious a man the South Vietnamese President is.
- c. Aerial reconnaissance during a bombing halt is necessary.
- d. If the North Vietnamese violate the understanding, we will go back to offensive operations with no limits such as now exist on our bombing.

"I am in full accord with the approach and recommend it."

Secretary Rusk: We are all aware that we can't say that the North Vietnamese are on board, but we have strong indications from them and from the Soviets. Thus, we must find out whether they are by putting a specific proposition to them in Paris.

If the North Vietnamese agree, they are acknowledging that the consent of the South Vietnamese Government is necessary for a Vietnam peace settlement. The effect of this concession on the Viet Cong will be very great.

(Secretary Rusk, continued)

Following a gap of two or three days, we can press in Paris for a flat commitment on all three of our conditions. The North Vietnamese have said they would agree to nothing unless the bombing halted. Once the bombing is halted, we can then press for implicit conditions covering the continuance of the talks. If they violate the understanding, we will certainly resume bombing.

With the bombing halted, the situation is fundamentally changed for the Soviets. They have said they cannot do anything as long as their fellow socialists in Hanoi are being bombed by an imperialist power. If there is no bombing, the Soviets can no longer oppose our request that they push Hanoi into a peace settlement. Russian leverage on Hanoi is enormously increased because their Communist brothers are no longer under attack.

All should recognize that if the proposal is made and accepted, this is only a beginning--the negotiations will be long, difficult and troublesome. We must insist that Laos, Thailand and South Vietnam come out intact at the end of the negotiations.

Both Ambassador Bunker and General Abrams feel that the North Vietnamese have made a far-reaching concession. It is in our interest to proceed now that we have advance assurances that the Government of Vietnam will participate in the talks.

The President: asked Secretary Rusk to summarize Ambassador Bunker's and General Abrams' talk with President Thieu.

Secretary Rusk: President Thieu is entirely in favor of our proposal. He is fully aware that the acceptance of his government's representatives in the talks is a fundamental step-up in the status of the Saigon government in the eyes of the North Vietnamese. Previously, the North Vietnamese have referred to the Saigon government as mere puppets. President Thieu shares General Abrams' favorable view of the military situation. His attitude toward the war is very positive. He has favorably received our suggestion for a stepped-up program of pacification, Chieu Hoi, and an intensified attack on the Viet Cong infrastructure.

In response to the President's request, Mr. Rostow read the cable reporting on the Thieu-Bunker-Abrams talk. (The text of this cable, referred to earlier in the meeting, is at TAB F.) It is clear that the Thieu objective is to end the war, not merely to end the bombing.

Mr. Rostow then summarized a long report from Ambassador Bunker and General Abrams, which they had ready to send prior to hearing of the new developments in Paris. They were drafting a cable because they thought that Hanoi would make an early move to shift the main effort from the battlefield to the conference table. (The text of this cable referred to earlier in the meeting is at TAB D.)

Secretary Rusk: The Soviets have been told in clearest terms of our three conditions and they have told Hanoi. The Russians understand perfectly what we have in mind.

(General Westmoreland entered at 3:15 P. M.)

The President: Said he wanted to explain how he rationalized the U. S. proposal. Read again the San Antonio formula and analyzed each point--productive discussions, taking advantage, DMZ, shelling cities. If the North Vietnamese really accept GVN participation, our proposal is no break-away from our previous positions--they qualify if the GVN comes in.

Secretary Rusk: Agrees. The North Vietnamese have made a major step in accepting GVN participation. Cy Vance thought they never would. As to the two other points, both are self-enforcing.

The President: Quoting Secretary Clifford's argument, asked what the difference is between prior agreements and finding out if, under an assumption, the North Vietnamese don't hit the DMZ or the cities. He referred to a condition precedent and conditions subsequent.

At the President's request, Mr. Rostow re-read the draft instructions sent to our negotiators in Paris for comment.

The President: Read a paragraph from the Saigon cable of September 24 giving General Abrams' view that participation of the GVN in the talks is more important than obtaining any promise of North Vietnamese restraint along the DMZ.

"General Abrams, who has seen this message concurs, has asked me to add the following additional observation from the purely military viewpoint. He considers that as between restraints in the DMZ and giving the GVN a place in the negotiations from the beginning, the latter is more important. He has commented separately on the military risks

(The President, continued)

and costs of a bombing halt based on 'assumptions' about enemy behavior in the DMZ and feels that if necessary he can cope with these risks and cost even though we have to pay a price; but if the GVN does not, repeat not, have a role in the negotiations from the time they start, this would strike at something that is basic to our whole military effort here, namely, the cooperative relationship between the U.S. and South Vietnamese military leaders and forces. If this is shaken, it could have not only the serious political consequences which I mentioned above, but could jeopardize the very basis of our military effort here. I wish to associate myself with this assessment."

(Full text of message is at TAB J)

All of us have only limited background on the latest developments in Paris. There has been very little time for consideration. General Westmoreland has been at Walter Reed Hospital attending the ceremony for President Eisenhower, but General Palmer can fill him in. On Friday, the Vietnamese asked us what we could do. When a decision is made, if one is made, we would like to have all the views we can possibly get. The time is short, and it is doubtful whether we will be able to hold further meetings before a decision has to be reached. We would like to have the views of each Chief of Staff.

General McConnell: Asked whether a bombing halt was to be unconditional. If it were, it would be contrary to our capability to resume.

The President: It is clear to all of us that if our position becomes untenable during the talks, we resume bombing--unlimited bombing.

Secretary Rusk: Agreement would be premised on their playing the game. They make a move and we respond--like peeling a banana.

General McConnell: If we are to stop the bombing, the time is now. In two weeks, weather will severely limit bombing in the Panhandle. Other points:

a. We need pay little attention to attacks on the cities. Neither the North Vietnamese nor the Viet Cong have the capability of attacking them.

b. We can concentrate our bombing in Laos. We are not really giving up very much to stop the bombing in the Panhandle of North Vietnam. The

(General McConnell, continued)

only danger is the possibility that the North Vietnamese will move and hide large amounts of supplies just above the DMZ. If we have an understanding on reconnaissance, and the capability to carry it out during this rainy season, we will know whether the North Vietnamese are moving large quantities of supplies.

Recommends go-ahead.

Admiral Moorer: Agrees with General Wheeler and General McConnell. Continued aerial reconnaissance is most important. Other Points:

- a. What is a "build-up"? How much is a breach of faith?
- b. There is a possibility that in III Corps the Viet Cong on their own may act against the cities, believing that the North Vietnamese have deserted them. Could we tell who was responsible for such attacks?

Recommends we proceed.

General Chapman: The DRV is hurting badly. They need to get the pressure off. They will enter the new negotiations, protract the talks and build up their forces for a future attack. Other points:

- a. It is crucial we go all out in South Vietnam against the Viet Cong as well as build up the South Vietnamese forces.
- b. We must inform our troops and the U.S. public. They must understand why we are stopping the bombing.

Supports the proposal.

Secretary Rusk: It may be two or more days after the bombing halt before GVN participation in the talks becomes evident. Several days will pass before we have said anything about the North Vietnamese agreement not to attack the DMZ or the cities. At the beginning of the halt, we could not say anything about resuming the bombing, in the event the agreement was violated, but the word will get around.

General McConnell: If we resume the bombing we must have authority for unrestricted bombing.

General Palmer: Time is running against the enemy. The question is, when did they recognize this. There must have been a growing realization that they did not have the strength to continue their military effort. The Czech invasion was a turning point. The DRV realized it did not have first priority call on Soviet assistance. Other points:

a. We should worry about their proposing a cease-fire. Such a proposal would be very difficult for us to handle.

b. It will be difficult to resume unless the Vietnamese violate the military parts of the proposal.

Goes along with the proposal.

The President: Everyone understands it will be difficult to resume the bombing. That is why we are getting everybody aboard now so that we will not be debating at length a decision to resume. Everyone has the distinct understanding that if the North Vietnamese violate their word, we will resume bombing.

Secretary Rusk: We have already prepositioned rules of engagement in the field. Commanders will have authority to respond immediately to violations occurring in their areas of authority.

General McConnell: Asked Secretary Rusk about the approach to the Russians as soon as North Vietnam is no longer under air attack.

Secretary Rusk: The Soviet Ambassador said that if the bombing of North Vietnam ceases, even the Laos Accords could be looked at. If we halt the bombing, the Soviets owe us a great deal. We can put maximum pressure on the Russians to get cracking with Hanoi. The limiting factor on the Russians is that they do not want to throw Hanoi into the arms of Peking.

A cease-fire-in-place is not involved. We must insure that South Vietnamese authority runs to every part of South Vietnam. They must have free access to every part of their country. We would link any cease-fire proposal to a withdrawal of forces. No simple cease-fire can be accepted in Paris. This does not rule out cease-fires by commanders in the field in particular situations.

General Westmoreland:

- a. Acceptance by the South Vietnamese Government of the proposal is most important. Without it, there would be chaos in South Vietnam.
- b. The North Vietnamese do not have the capability of attacking the cities but they can shell them as harassment.
- c. The safety of our troops and the morale of South Vietnam can be preserved under this proposal.
- d. Weather for bombing in North Vietnam is now very poor, while the Laos weather is improving. Our bombing of Laos can continue and we have the capability of increasing it because planes striking North Vietnamese targets will become available for use in Laos.
- e. General Abrams will have early warning of any massing of troops north of the DMZ. Weather permits several hours of reconnaissance each day. SIGINT also gives him information. However, during periods of "cratchin" weather, the fog hangs so close that nothing flies. This type of weather was used to cover the investment of Khe Sanh. It starts in January and continues on through February and March. If we start a build-up of U.S. forces now, we can react at once if attacked.
- f. The GVN is given an opportunity to wage a major psychological campaign to bring about defections. Such a campaign will ultimately produce substantial results among North Vietnam troops.

Concurs with the proposition.

Senator Russell: Responded to the President's question that he was not capable of dealing with the proposal without additional information on the North Vietnamese military situation. They might attack by using terror rather than military force. We can't issue an ultimatum to the North Vietnamese but we could tell the Soviets that we will not accept dilatory tactics by the North Vietnamese.

Mr. Rostow: Read the following opening paragraph of the President's message to Ambassador Bunker and General Abrams:

(Mr. Rostow, continued)

"You should know that one of the major concerns of the President at the moment is that we examine with utmost care the loopholes and contingencies in the deal we are considering, to make sure it is as copperplated as we can make it. For example, he wishes you to examine the possibility that Hanoi is simply seeking a respite to prepare for a later offensive, creating ad interim an atmosphere of hopeful expectations and euphoria which would make it difficult for us to resume bombing of the North and otherwise maintain the remarkable momentum on the ground you have achieved and which explains so much of what may now be hopeful in the ground situation." (Full text of President's message referred to earlier in the meeting at TAB G)

Asked whether 30 days would be a reasonable interval in which to assess whether Hanoi is seriously interested in making peace once serious negotiations start.

Secretary Rusk: We will know what they are doing on the ground. The full acceptance of the terms can take more time--four to six weeks, approximately.

Secretary Clifford: It would be a mistake to set a time limit as long as they do not take advantage of the bombing halt. We should watch and go on talking. The Soviets might even tell Hanoi that they are cutting down on their arms assistance.

Senator Russell: From a domestic political, and world opinion viewpoint, it would be very difficult to resume the bombing. If we tell the Russians how long we are prepared to stand by, that might help.

Mr. Rostow: Responded to the President's question by saying that we did not give the Russians any idea of the length of the interval. The following paragraph from the Bunker-Abrams message of October 14 was read:

"We do not think it possible to fix in advance, even in rough terms, the length of the interval that should be allowed before we know whether Hanoi is serious or whether a bombing resumption is called for. We think we should have a pretty clear picture of Hanoi's intentions in a month or two.... By the end of the year, we should also have a pretty good idea of the morale of the VC/NVA forces, as well as our ability to move into and establish ourselves in the contested area."

Senator Russell: Asked whether the Soviets had been told of our intention to resume bombing if the North Vietnamese accepted the proposal and did not carry it out. Secretary replied in the affirmative.

Said he was not qualified to pass on the proposal. He had come along to listen and did not expect that he would be asked to pass judgment. He felt he must say that he had no confidence in the Paris talks--that the North Vietnamese had used the time since the talks began to build up their forces. He hoped they were in as desperate straits as described this afternoon. He feared that we would be drawn along into a position where we couldn't resume the bombing.

General McConnell: The President said he would resume the bombing if the North Vietnamese violated the agreement. It is only on this condition that the proposal is acceptable.

Senator Russell: It would take a man with a great deal of courage to resume the bombing. A resumption would lead to attacks on the seriousness of the proposal.

Secretary Rusk: If the North Vietnamese resume military action in the DMZ, the decision to resume bombing would be easy. To resume would be more difficult if all we had to base the action on would be no progress in the talks in Paris.

Secretary Clifford: The proposal is a good trade. If they hold to the agreement, even though the talks are going slowly in Paris, we still win because we will be fighting in South Vietnam. We will have received value for our restraint.

Senator Russell: I could agree if I knew more of the background on the North Vietnamese supply problems, and military condition and morale of their troops.

The President: The implication of the North Vietnamese remarks is that if we halt the bombing, they will meet with South Vietnamese representatives and with us. If they don't meet, the bombing resumes after two, three, or four days.

Senator Russell: That is only if we have enough fortitude to resume the bombing. This resumption decision is a most agonizing experience which the President and the Secretary of State have gone through several times.

Secretary Rusk: We have told Gromyko of the conditions on which we will resume the bombing. Thus, the President can't mislead the Russians by not resuming if the North Vietnamese do not carry out their agreement. (The language given the Russians, already referred to, was read again.)

Senator Russell: It's all right. You asked me and I am sorry you did. I came to listen. The U. S. public won't agree to holding troops there very long with no fighting going on.

The President: There is no one who has more experience in this business of bombing halts. One time it was 37 days. The Soviets told us that 12 to 20 days would be long enough to produce results from Hanoi. Then we began dragging our feet on resuming, even though the halt had lasted 20 days. General Wheeler agreed to extend it from 20 to 30 days. And then we stretched it seven days more before we agreed to resume.

We did this in the middle of a presidential term; we are not just getting brave at the end of the term. We would not hesitate to resume bombing if the North Vietnamese took advantage. Secretary Rusk and Secretary Clifford fully agree.

Secretary Clifford: This cessation would be different from other pauses because negotiations would be going on with GVN participation and the DMZ would be quiet and the cities would not be attacked. It is a real test of Hanoi this time. Under this proposal, it is easier to stop and easier to start.

Secretary Rusk: Without appearing to intrude on the role of the Commander in Chief, would Generals Westmoreland and Palmer comment on the effect of our proposal on the morale of our troops which has been so magnificent.

General Westmoreland: The morale of U. S. troops is a great asset and must be nurtured. We have had experience with pauses which the Communists have violated. The fear is that the North Vietnamese will erode the agreement by

(General Westmoreland, continued)

minor actions along the DMZ. If this happens, we will have morale problems with our troops. How far will we let the North Vietnamese go? If erosion takes place, General Abrams will have a major problem of dealing with troops being fired on from the DMZ and unable to return the fire.

The President: We are proud of how magnificently the military has kept morale up among our forces in South Vietnam and we are ashamed that we have not been able to keep the same magnificent morale at home.

Read the following paragraphs from the Bunker-Abrams cable:

"Maintaining the morale, fighting spirit and momentum of U.S. and ARVN forces is absolutely essential. Directives have gone out on the U.S. and GVN side to intensify our offensive operations against infrastructure guerrillas and local forces in order to extend Government control, at the same time maintaining unrelenting pressure against his main forces. It is an offensive against the enemy 'system'.

"We are planning now the form and shape of a message to the troops if an announcement is made. This message will be critically important to establishing a positive atmosphere. It will be tied to the results of our operations so far and the offensive described above. We will disseminate it in a massive effort."

"We are completely confident that the morale, fighting spirit and momentum can be sustained."

General Westmoreland: Both actions suggested by General Abrams are good; i. e., to launch an offensive and to explain the action to the forces in the field. There is no problem in going ahead with the proposal if the rules of engagement suggested by General Abrams are approved.

The President: We are now waiting for the reaction from our negotiators in Paris. There should be no talking about this to anyone. We are thinking about it and when we hear back from Paris, we may want to go out to the troop-contributing countries to inform them. President Thieu needs time to consult his colleagues.

Would it be possible to get a reaction from some Senators without their talking to the press?

Senator Russell: I haven't ever been able to do that in all my years in the Congress. The reaction in the country will be along political lines. It will be hailed by the press, such as the New York Times, the Washington Post, and the St. Louis Post Dispatch.

It will be charged that the new proposition is a purely political trick. However, most people will support it, because they want to get this infernal war over. The people's reaction to this war is worse than it was to the Korean War. The people's feeling will be such as to override the politically motivated objections.

Secretary Rusk: The chronology of our actions on Vietnam since March 31 shows conclusively that no action has been taken for domestic political reasons.

Senator Russell: You don't have to tell me that. I am convinced that you are men of sincerity but it will be difficult to overcome the impression that this proposal is being put forward now for political reasons.

Admiral Moorer: We must make it crystal clear that the bombing will be resumed if the North Vietnamese fail to carry out their part of the agreement.

Senator Russell: The Senate wants to get out of this war but Senators differ as to how. They range all the way from those who believe we should bomb the country into submission to those who think we ought to quit and bring our troops home. I guess that the majority of my Committee (Armed Services) would be willing to give this proposal a chance. I personally am suspicious of the North Vietnamese. If everyone is convinced that something can come of this, I guess I am one who still does not have much belief in North Vietnamese intentions. If the North Vietnamese carry on the war after the bombing halt, you will be severely criticized.

George Christian: The immediate reaction in the media will be good even though charges will be made that the action was taken to help Vice President Humphrey. It is not as bad as an unconditional halt. It will not produce a disaster in Saigon. There will be criticism but we will get by.

Secretary Clifford: The public can be educated gradually to two factors:

(Secretary Clifford, continued)

- a. North Vietnam is not doing very well in the war, and
- b. The North Vietnamese are trying to move while this Administration is in office and not wait until January 20.

Secretary Rusk: One reaction will be a demand that the 200 American fliers be released from the prisons in North Vietnam. We will also be getting pressure very soon to move to the next point on the agenda, such as the withdrawal of troops.

The President: We are going to be charged with moving now for political reasons. We will be asked why we did not move earlier. The Republicans will be very disappointed, and say that the move was calculated to hurt them. They will criticize intensely. The doves will ask why didn't we move further. We will be getting hell from both the Right and the Left.

However, it would be on my conscience if our negotiators were put in a position to say that the President had held them back and kept them from reaching agreement. The President will be blamed. One can figure out what the condition of this country would be like if the critics were to say that we didn't try, that therefore additional casualties were our fault. If this isn't the way to stop it, I don't have any way to end it.

The Vietnamese probably won't take the proposal. If they do, they won't live up to it. The Russians probably won't help. One cannot have confidence in the Russians in the light of what Gromyko did during the Cuban missile crisis and what Kosygin told me he would do but didn't do after the Glassboro meeting.

We should agree now on a time limit. If we stop the bombing, we should be prepared to resume it immediately without debate. If there is an attack on the cities, we must be agreed in advance to move back into North Vietnam at once.

General Westmoreland: The enemy is militarily bankrupt. He realized this last March. Suppose the North Vietnamese honor the agreement on the DMZ and the cities but drag their heels on accepting GVN participation in the talks? Can you resume bombing on the basis of North Vietnamese failure to keep with a political commitment? A military act by Hanoi would make it easy to resume, but a failure to carry out a political commitment would make it difficult to return to bombing.

Secretary Rusk: All bets are off if the North Vietnamese refuse to let the South Vietnamese participate in the talks.

The President: What General Westmoreland means is that the American people won't go along with a resumption of the bombing merely because the North Vietnamese have failed to live up to the political condition.

Senator Russell: The public will take the attitude of "wait and see".

Secretary Clifford: The present proposal is not the result of an initiative by the President. Our basic offer has been standing for five months. The North Vietnamese have decided to move. We can't keep them from doing so merely because we are on the eve of an election. Stopping the bombing now is not losing very much. The weather is bad in North Vietnam and we will be continuing and increasing our bombing in Laos. In effect, it is not a cessation but a transference of air strength to another area.

(The point was made that our bombing in Laos to date has never been acknowledged publicly. Secretary Clifford replied that it soon will be publicly known).

General McConnell: We should not use the weather argument.

The President: We have to give thought to the public reaction if I give a no decision in response to such things as the statement made by the Russians to Vance in Paris.

Read extensive quotations from Ambassador Vance's report of his conversation with Soviet Charge Oberemko; such as:

"There were factions with different views in Hanoi and that if positive action was not taken now, it would be a major setback for those that wanted peace and that it would then be a very long time before peace could be reached. . . . We (the Russians) consider now is the right time to act. The situation is most favorable right now and this opportunity should not be lost." (Full text is at TAB E)

(The President, continued)

We can explain being duped by the Russians, but we cannot explain away this Russian's statement by saying that we will wait three weeks for fear of being accused of taking a political action. The North Vietnamese are hurting badly. Possibly we could get a better offer in three weeks because they would be hurting more then. But we do not know what is being debated in Hanoi. For example, Mac Bundy's speech. We asked him not to make it at that particular delicate moment but he went ahead anyway. This may have messed up the discussion in Hanoi and could possibly lead them to believe that if they wait they will get a better offer from us. We have just learned that the ranking North Vietnamese in Paris has just left for home. This may mean that the entire deal is off.

However, we couldn't survive if all of this became public and it became known that we had done nothing about it.

Senator Russell: You might try a counterattack. The Soviets would be very happy to get the focus of world opinion away from the Czech situation.

The President: We have already done a bit of this with the Soviet leaders, suggesting that we talk about strategic arms limitation, the Middle East, as well as Vietnam. You will remember that Gromyko led us to believe that they would talk to the North Vietnamese about GVN participation while we pushed on the North Vietnamese to accept a commitment to a quiet DMZ and no attack on the cities. So far this has had little result.

Senator Russell: I guess it's worth a try.

Brouley Smith





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DELTO 817

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FROM HARRIMAN AND VANCE

SUBJ: OCT 11 PRIVATE MEETING WITH LE DUC THO AND XUAN THUY

1. WE MET WITH LE DU THO AND XUAN THUY FOR ONE HOUR AND THREE-QUARTERS MORNING OCT 11 [REDACTED] IN SUBURB OF SCEAUX. THO AND THUY WERE ACCOMPANIED BY AN INTERPRETER AND TWO NOTETAKERS. LAU WAS NOT PRESENT. DAVIDSON AND NEGROPONTE ACCOMPANIED US. FORMAL DISCUSSION LASTED ONE HOUR.

2. THUY OPENED MEETING BY ASKING VANCE TO REPEAT AGAIN WHAT HE HAD SAID AT WEDNESDAY'S TEABREAK ON GVN REPRESENTATION. WE DID SO USING SAME LANGUAGE AS AT TEA BREAK.

THO THEN SAID HE WANTED TO RAISE TWO QUESTIONS. FIRST, WHETHER WE WOULD STOP THE BOMBING WHEN WE HAD A CLEAR ANSWER TO THE QUESTION OF GVN PARTICIPATION AS A PARTY IN THE NEGOTIATIONS THAT WOULD FOLLOW A CESSATION. SECOND, WHETHER AFTER A CLEAR ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION HAS BEEN GIVEN WE WILL CONSIDER THE ANSWER TO BE A CONDITION OR RECIPROCITY FOR STOPPING OF BOMBING.

3. WE ANSWERED THE SECOND QUESTION FIRST, SAYING IT WAS

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NOT A DEMAND FOR RECIPROCITY OR A CONDITION BUT, AS WE HAD SAID MANY TIMES, WAS OUR DEFINITION OF SERIOUS TALKS. WE SAID THAT AS WE HAD STATED, WE DO NOT BELIEVE THERE COULD BE SERIOUS NEGOTIATIONS WITHOUT INCLUSION OF REPRESENTATIVES OF GVN ON OUR SIDE.

4. TURNING TO THE FIRST QUESTION, WE SAID THAT WE COULD NOT ANSWER THE QUESTION AND THAT IT WOULD HAVE TO BE ANSWERED IN WASHINGTON, WE THEN MADE THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT: "IN RESPONDING TO YOUR QUESTION, IT IS VERY IMPORTANT THAT THERE BE NO MISUNDERSTANDING BETWEEN US. IT IS IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND THAT WE ARE NOT TALKING ABOUT RECIPROCITY OR CONDITIONS BUT THE SIMPLE FACT THAT AFTER A CESSATION OF ALL BOMBARDMENT THE PRESIDENT'S ABILITY TO MAINTAIN THAT SITUATION WOULD BE AFFECTED BY CERTAIN ELEMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS.

Insert B
5. [WE DO NOT LOCK ON THEM AS A CONDITION FOR STOPPING THE BOMBING BUT AS A DESCRIPTION OF THE SITUATION WHICH WOULD PERMIT SERIOUS NEGOTIATIONS AND THUS THE CESSATION TO CONTINUE. YOU WILL UNDERSTAND, THEREFORE, THAT THE CIRCUMSTANCES WE HAVE DISCUSSED IN OUR VARIOUS PRIVATE MEETINGS ABOUT MILITARY ACTIVITY IN AND AROUND THE DMZ ARE ESSENTIAL TO THE MAINTENANCE OF THAT SITUATION. AND, OF COURSE, YOU KNOW FROM OUR VARIOUS DISCUSSIONS THAT INDISCRIMINATE ATTACKS LAUNCHED AGAINST MAJOR CITIES WOULD CREATE A SITUATION WHICH WOULD NOT PERMIT SERIOUS TALKS AND THUS THE MAINTENANCE OF A CESSATION. WE SAID THAT WE HAD SAID THIS BEFORE, AND THAT IT WAS SPECIFICALLY CONFIRMED WHEN VANCE WAS IN WASHINGTON.

6. LE DUC THO ASKED WHETHER WE HAD FINISHED. HE THEN SAID THAT THEY TOOK NOTE OF OUR STATEMENT THAT CESSATION OF BOMBING AND ALL OTHER ACTS OF WAR WOULD BE UNCONDITIONAL. THO CONTINUED, BUT SUPPOSE THAT THE DRV AGREES TO PARTICIPATION OF GVN AT NEGOTIATIONS AFTER THE BOMBING CEASES. YOU CANNOT YET ASSERT THAT BOMBING WILL BE STOPPED. YOU HAVE TO REPORT TO WASHINGTON. WE CONFIRMED THAT THIS DECISION COULD ONLY BE MADE BY THE PRESIDENT AND ASKED HIM WHY HE COULD NOT INDICATE HIS OWN ANSWER NOW.

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FROM HARRIMAN AND VANCE

DELTO 817

SUBJECT: OCT. 11 PRIVATE MEETING WITH LE DUC THO AND XUAN THUY

7. THO SAID SUPPOSE THE DRV AGREES TO PARTICIPATION OF THE SAIGON GOVERNMENT. THE DRV DOES NOT KNOW THAT THE US WILL STOP BOMBING, SO HOW COULD THE DRV AGREE TO GVN PARTICIPATION. THO SAID HE AGREED THAT THERE WOULD BE NO RECIPROCITY FOR CESSATION OF BOMBING AND ALSO AGREED THAT THE US WANTED TO HAVE REASON TO BELIEVE, BUT WHAT, HE ASKED, IS THE CONDITION RAISED BY THE US. IS IT AGREEMENT ON THE REPRESENTATION OF THE SAIGON GOVERNMENT? IF SO, THO WAS PREPARED TO DISCUSS THE ISSUE, BUT FIRST THEY HAD TO KNOW IF US WOULD STOP THE BOMBING IF THE DRV THEY RESPONDED AFFIRMATIVELY.

8. WE ASKED WHETHER IF WE GAVE AN AFFIRMATIVE ANSWER THEY WOULD AGREE TO GVN PARTICIPATION. THO TURNED THE QUESTION AROUND, SAYING THAT HE WONDERED WHETHER IF THEY AGREED WE WOULD STOP THE BOMBING. WE REPLIED WE WERE NOT AUTHORIZED TO ANSWER THAT QUESTION. THUY SAID HE AGREED WITH WHAT LE DUC THO HAD SAID AND WANTED TO ADD THE FOLLOWING THOUGHT: IF THE DRV GIVES US THEIR ANSWER FIRST AND WE REPORTED THAT TO WASHINGTON, THE US MIGHT MERELY NOTE THAT RESPONSE, RAISE OTHER FACTORS AND MAKE PROPAGANDA OF THE NORTH VIETNAMESE ACCEPTANCE. WE SAID WE WOULD NOT MAKE PROPAGANDA IF THEY ANSWERED. WE ASKED THO AND THUY WHETHER WE WOULD BE MISTAKEN IF WE REPORTED TO OUR GOVERNMENT THAT ON THE BASIS OF OUR DISCUSSIONS WE BELIEVED THE NORTH VIETNAMESE ANSWER WOULD BE FAVORABLE. THO REPLIED THAT HE SUGGESTED WE REPORT AS FOLLOWS: IF NORTH VIETNAM ACCEPTED THE PARTICIPATION OF THE SAIGON GOVERNMENT, WOULD THE PRESIDENT IMMEDIATELY STOP THE BOMBING?

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Page 2 Paris 22253 Section 2 of 2 Oct. 11, 1968

9. WE SAID WE WOULD PREFER THEM TO TELL US NOW THAT THEY WOULD ACCEPT PARTICIPATION OF THE SAIGON GOVERNMENT IF WE STOPPED THE BOMBING. LE DUC THO REPLIED, "IT IS THE SAME THING." (AS WHAT HE HAD SAID.) WE ASKED WHAT HIS STATEMENT MEANT AND THO REPLIED, "THE SUBSTANCE IS THE SAME."

10. THO SAID HE WOULD LIKE TO REPEAT ONCE AGAIN THAT REGARDING A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT, NORTH VIET-NAM HAD A SERIOUS INTENT AND THAT HE HOPED WE ALSO HAD A SERIOUS INTENT. HE SAID NORTH VIET-NAM KNOWS HOW TO LOOK AT THE PROBLEM REALISTICALLY AND SO SHOULD WE. AND ONLY IN THIS WAY COULD THE MATTER BE SETTLED PEACEFULLY. HE SAID, "SUPPOSE WE FORMALLY ANSWER WHAT YOU ARE NOW REQUIRING AND YOU DON'T STOP THE BOMBING-- THEN YOU WOULD HAVE NO GOODWILL AND WOULD NOT HAVE LOOKED REALISTICALLY AT THE MATTER."

11. THO SAID HE WAS CONVINCED THAT IF WE BOTH HAD SERIOUS INTENT AND GOODWILL, A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT CAN BE REACHED. WE SAID THAT NOTHING WOULD BE WORSE THAN TO HAVE THE TALKS START AND THEN BREAK DOWN AND THAT THAT WAS THE REASON WHY WE HAVE BEEN COMPLETELY FRANK WITH THEM.

12. THO SAID WHEN YOU GIVE US AN ANSWER WE WILL EXPRESS OUR VIEW. HE SAID "WE SHOULD BE POSITIVE AND YOU SHOULD BE POSITIVE. IF WE ARE POSITIVE AND YOU ARE NOT, OR VICE-VERSA, THEN NO PROGRESS WILL BE MADE."

13. WE SAID WE WOULD COMMUNICATE WITH WASHINGTON THE SUBSTANCE OF TODAY'S CONVERSATION AND WOULD MEET WITH THEM ON MONDAY IF WE HAD AN ANSWER. IF WE HAD NO ANSWER, WE WOULD LET THEM KNOW.

14. THIS CONCLUDED OUR FORMAL TALK. OVER TEA, LE DUC THO AND THUY BOTH SAID THAT THEY BELIEVED THAT RAPID PROGRESS COULD BE MADE IF WE WERE REALLY DETERMINED TO MOVE TOWARD PEACE.

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HARVAN/DOUBLE PLUS

October 11, 1968

We are sending you Paris DELTO 817 which we are handling on a specially restricted basis in Washington (as NODIS HARVAN/DOUBLE PLUS). In Saigon you should confine knowledge of that report and this cable to yourself and to General Abrams. Abrams should communicate only through you.

We would like to have your comments on following instruction we are considering for Harriman and Vance to transmit to Hanoi:

"We are prepared to set an early date for the total cessation of armed attacks on North Vietnam if you are prepared to agree:

"1. That serious talks would begin within 24 hours of the cessation of armed attacks and that representatives of the government of Vietnam shall participate in those serious talks.

"2. That you understand the simple fact that the United States cannot maintain a cessation of armed attacks on North Vietnam if military activity in and around the DMZ continues; specifically, artillery, rocket or mortar fire from across or within the DMZ; movement of armed forces across the DMZ; or the massing of forces proximate to the DMZ. These conditions would, of course, be observed by both sides.

"3. That you understand the simple fact that the United States cannot maintain a cessation of armed attacks on North Vietnam if

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attacks are launched against major cities in South Vietnam. (If the phrase armed attacks is picked, we would explain that some unarmed reconnaissance of North Vietnam will have to continue.)"

You may tell General Abrams that he will be furnished with rules of engagement which will permit him to respond promptly to limited violations of the DMZ and that the President will regard any gross violations of the DMZ understanding as "most serious." We are by no means certain that Le Duc Tho will accept our interpretation of the exchange on Friday but that the hard proposition we intend to put to Le Duc Tho is the most favorable possible proposition that we are likely to get. It is consonant with Thieu's public statements and President Johnson's. It is consonant with our deep commitment to him that the GVN be a central participant in a negotiated settlement. It is a public acknowledgment by Hanoi of the necessity for GVN's consent to any settlement.

We shall, of course, consult Thieu and the chiefs of government of other key allies but, before doing so, we want your completely frank reactions and those of Gen. Abrams with the bark off. -

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