

THE WHITE HOUSE DECLASSIFIED

WASHINGTON

E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4

NJ 91-87

By *inf* NARA. Date 3-2-92Monday, May 6, 1968 -- 8:45 a.m. *see file*

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Mr. President:

My memorandum to you on negotiating problems is set out in the way most people believe negotiations will run.

This memorandum states what I believe is the optimum way they should run in our interest; and it states the reasons why I do not rule it out as wholly impossible that Hanoi may agree.

1. The southern settlement: the heart of the matter. The war is about the future of power and politics in South Vietnam. The quickest way to end the war is to get an agreement on that subject. Then all the other matters could fall quickly and naturally into place. The reason Hanoi starts with a cessation of bombing -- and then, quite possibly, a cease-fire in place -- is to improve its bargaining position on the question of power and politics in South Vietnam.

From our point of view, therefore, I believe it would be wise for Harriman to seek an early quiet talk with the North Vietnamese negotiator in Paris -- or, perhaps, Cy Vance could have a quiet, informal talk with Mai Van Bo. He should suggest that if we want peace soon, the way to do it is to get the GVN in touch with "a member" of the NLF and let them go to work on the southern settlement. Perhaps they could best do it in South Vietnam while the formal negotiations go forward in Paris. It would be hard in Paris to keep such a conversation from becoming known, given the intensity of scrutiny and gossip that will surround the negotiations.

We could then press Thieu to offer a one-man one-vote solution which would permit the NLF, disguised as a popular front party, to run if -- repeat if -- it accepts the constitution as the basis for political life.

2. Would Hanoi accept such a procedure? The conventional wisdom is that they would refuse. And that may be correct. But it is not certain that they would refuse, for these reasons:

-- Under pressures that we may not wholly understand, they appear to be in something of a hurry.

-- They are now bringing down the probable peak number of infiltrators. It is probably a peak in infiltration because they cannot afford 30,000 per month indefinitely and because they know we cannot stop the bombing if infiltration continues at 30,000 a month. Therefore, they may calculate that in the weeks ahead they may be at maximum strength inside of South Vietnam and with the passage of time we again shall impose heavy attrition on their

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forces and weaken their bargaining position on the ground. They have reports that in VC villages the children are being taught to chant the following: "Blood will flow in May; there will be peace in June." If they are stirring these kinds of hopes, it must mean, technically, that they are thinking about a quick, rather than a protracted, negotiation.

3. I repeat, all the conventional pre-negotiating indications are that they will go slowly and try via a bombing standdown and perhaps a cease-fire to increase their leverage and diminish ours; but I believe our negotiators should make a serious try to go promptly for the gut issue: a negotiation by South Vietnam for a political settlement, preferably to be conducted in secret in South Vietnam.

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INFORMATION

Authority NLS-CBS 20

By us, NARS, Date 6-25-84

Franklin

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