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By ris, NARS, Date 6-22-84

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Pres file

Saturday, July 22, 1967 -- 4:30 p.m.

Mr. President:

It may be useful if I set down for you some thoughts on the possibility of relative early negotiations to end the war in Viet Nam. I start, of course, on the assumption that this is a long shot; and, even more important, the only way to maximize the chance of an early end of the war is to proceed on the assumption that the war will last a long time.

Having said that, here are my thoughts.

1. The most important element that may be operating is the one on which we have least evidence; namely, the possibility that Hanoi now estimates that the U.S. election of November 1968 will not prove to be the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. On the basis of U.S. public opinion polls and the position of various Republican politicians -- perhaps underlined for them by the Russians -- they may now judge that, if the Republicans win, the military pressure on them will not decrease and might even increase. In that sense, Gen. Eisenhower's reported statement this morning and other hawkish Republican statements work our way. It is possible also that positions taken by certain dovish Senators who indicated that they are not prepared to accept Hanoi's terms, may also be helpful; for example, Senator Pell's talk in Paris with Mai Van Bo.

2. If this hypothesis is correct, they must rationally estimate the consequences of certain trends in the war not over an 18-month period, but over a period up to, perhaps, 5-1/2 years. Here are the trends they must then confront.

-- The slow decline of the Viet Cong manpower pool -- which has yielded stagnation or reduction in the size and effective strength of Viet Cong main force units and impairment of the Viet Cong infrastructure;

-- As a result of the Viet Cong manpower situation, the need to insert into South Viet Nam increased North Vietnamese regular forces to keep the total Communist war effort in the south from collapsing under the weight of U.S. and Allied forces;

-- The increase in effectiveness of our bombing operations in North Viet Nam, notably against electric power and the transport system into and out of Hanoi and Haiphong, accompanied by a decline in the effectiveness of their air defenses and a marked reduction in our loss rates in aircraft and pilots;

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-- A rising requirement for foreign aid to Hanoi to compensate for the losses suffered through bombing -- a trend which is increasing the leverage of the USSR and the Eastern European countries in Hanoi;

-- Increasing anxiety about the difficulties inside Communist China and some lapping over into the Chinese population of North Viet Nam of the Red Guard movement.

3. I have spent some time reading literally hundreds of particular intelligence reports on the situation in the various provinces of South Viet Nam. They show, in different degrees, strain on Viet Cong morale and manpower; a weakening of military effectiveness; increased concentration on finding food and recruits rather than actual military operations; but no definitive break in the resilient Viet Cong structure.

4. Similarly, as nearly as I can assess, it, the bombing of North Viet Nam is hurting them, but not to the point of necessitating an early decision.

5. As recent public statements indicate (see, for example, attached) there is clearly a hard-line group in Hanoi prepared to persist; but the group may be growing, who believe that time is no longer their friend.

6. Therefore:

1. We should make every effort to increase the pressure on them: in the South and in the North.

2. Do not discourage the view that the Republicans may be even tougher: perhaps there are ways of quietly spreading this line in places it might get picked up -- Paris, Moscow, etc.

3. Be prepared if they should approach us soon rather than late; but not be surprised if an approach is delayed, because governments tend to operate on urgent situations rather than projected trends -- and they may have some time in hand before the situation becomes acute.

W. W. Rostow

FBIS 56 -- Denial of Lord Brockway Report
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