

29
SECRET/EXDIS

Pres. file

Wednesday, August 9, 1967 -- 10:55 a.m.

Mr. President:

Herewith an able State Department analysis of Kissinger's report of conversations with the two Frenchmen who went to Hanoi, plus the report itself.

I conclude the conversations fit the pattern of recent months in which various North Vietnamese are talking with third parties:

- to suggest a marginal increase in flexibility;
- to smoke out U.S. positions and intentions.

If and when they are ready to settle, we will -- in my judgment -- hear much more directly and without all this ambiguity.

Nevertheless, a file worth reading.

W. W. Rostow

DECLASSIFIED
E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4
NLJ 94-140
By Cl, NARA, Date 4-3-95

WWRostow:rln

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292

August 3, 1967

S/AH - Mr. Chester L. Cooper

DECLASSIFIED

E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4

NIJ 94-191

INR/REA - Fred Greene

By as, NARA, Date 9-12-94

Dr. Kissinger's Report on Conversations in Hanoi, July 24, and 25, 1967

Much of what Pham Van Dong and Ho Chi Minh said to Marcovich and Aubrac is already part of the established Hanoi position. Dong reiterated the four points and the Trinh interview; he recited the customary Hanoi version of recent South Vietnamese history; he also reaffirmed that unconditional and permanent cessation of the bombing as well as a US withdrawal were part of a final settlement, but that there was no hurry about reunification and that the NLF would be ready to participate in a coalition government including members of recent South Vietnamese governments. Ho demanded condemnation of the US as an aggressor. All this is standard.

Beyond that, however, the interview confirmed earlier indications that Hanoi has moved somewhat from the terms of the original January 28 Trinh interview (as further explained by Mai Van Bo and others) to a position somewhat more accurately expressed in Trinh's July 2 interview with Volkestimme. Dong indicated (without spelling out) a Hanoi readiness to negotiate fairly soon after the bombing is stopped; he indicated that the bombing stop need not be permanent; he also said that there need not be any formal declaration that we are stopping the bombing: a "de facto" stop will do.

Dong's remarks also contained two potentially interesting statements which could indicate Hanoi willingness in time to move on two other issues:

- 1) Dong said that the NLF would have to be "present" when South Vietnamese matters are discussed -- but did not say that we would have to deal exclusively with the NLF on those matters or recognize the NLF as sole genuine spokesman for the South Vietnamese people. This statement may indicate that Hanoi might be prepared someday (but not now) to move closer to our position on NLF participation in talks.
- 2) Dong recognized that US troops would "have to stay" until the end of a political settlement in South Vietnam. Hanoi has never clearly indicated its position on the timing of a US troop withdrawal, but Dong's remarks at least suggest that they would not insist on such a withdrawal prior to South Vietnamese elections.

However, Dong's remarks also contained some very hard elements. He did not hint at any possible change in Hanoi's position on reciprocity; in fact, his demand for an unconditional bombing halt suggests that Hanoi is still not

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- 2 -

prepared to offer a military concession for a bombing halt. He did not even hint that the Kissinger formula might be acceptable, although he must have recognized (as Thach did) that it represented a significant departure from the established American position. Dong also appeared highly negative on the control question. He rejected a suggestion for aerial surveillance of the North Vietnamese infiltration routes, and his general attitude on the control issue (he had been "wondering when that issue would be raised") did not reveal any enthusiasm for the subject or any desire to come up with new ideas. He also said nothing about withdrawal of Northern troops from South Vietnam. But this had not been raised.

Thus, in summary, the conversations do not take us any further than some of the other material which has been available out of Hanoi and elsewhere, but they do offer potentially useful lines for further consideration and possible exploration. Pham's firm bombing half-negotiations link and ambiguity on the NLF consolidate positions taken by others earlier in July.

Miscellaneous

Beyond the substance of the North Vietnamese remarks, some other elements in the Kissinger report are also worth considering:

- 1) Pham Van Dong's Position and Authority: This is not the first time that Pham Van Dong has met with Westerners and, while maintaining a generally hard position, has managed to convey an impression of sincere desire for peace. Also not the first time that he has appeared to open new possibilities for settlement. In the past, however, he has on occasion been whistled back, and we therefore do not really know how authoritative and final his remarks to Marcovich and Aubrac can be considered. They may not represent a Politburo consensus. It is noteworthy that, despite Ho Chi Minh's remarks concerning Dong's power to handle negotiations, Dong did not have any sort of reply to make on the Kissinger proposal for maintenance of infiltration at an even level during a bombing halt. He did not even indicate that Hanoi would study it.
- 2) Ho Chi Minh's Health and Modus Operandi: The description of Ho matches that revealed in Felix Greene's recent films of North Vietnam. Ho is obviously in poor physical shape, but his eyes are still very clear and he does not appear to have lost his mental faculties. We would not assume that he must be senile because he turns over the burden of negotiations to Dong. He has done this sort of thing in the past, giving one of his lieutenants a responsibility while retaining power to overrule him or dissociate himself if expedient. He thus retains his traditional freedom of movement.

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-3-

3) Possible Hanoi Confusion. Pham Van Dong's expositulation "que veulent les Americains" (what do the Americans want) and his statement that negotiations should be conducted by persons "authorized by both parties" may reflect some genuine Hanoi confusion as to US goals and intentions. This confusion is not alleviated by the despatch of "unofficial" emissaries who confine their description of US demands to some general remarks about our desire for an honorable settlement and who are completely ignorant about such things as the January 28 interview. Dong's performance during the second meeting reflected some confusion as to whether he was expected to present a negotiations brief or engage in an informal chat. Though Hanoi is largely responsible for this situation by its insistence that it will not talk to us while the bombing continues, Hanoi might still be receptive to some highly secret approach which could be intended to give the North Vietnamese a clearer idea as to exactly what we want. They will not like some parts of it, of course, and may initially react in a very negative manner, but at least they will know what they are up against and can start serious re-thinking.

4) Who is Watching Whom? There is some interesting if inconclusive room for speculation about why Marcevich and Aubrac were given a false schedule of activities.

5) Hanoi Concern about Greater US Effort. Dong's remarks about the dikes and about fighting on North Vietnamese soil reinforce our earlier impression that Hanoi really expects us to bomb the dikes during the summer high water on the Red River, and also may expect a land invasion.

6) Were Hard-Line Nhan Dan Articles Related to Visit? By July 19 and 20, when Aubrac and Marcovich were in Phnom Penh, Hanoi must have realized that they had come to talk about a possible settlement. The tough July 20 and particularly July 21 Nhan Dan editorials may have been intended for their ears. It would not be the first time that Hanoi had accompanied secret talks with public reiteration of harsh demands. In this case, however, we think the editorials were probably more likely related to Economics Minister Le Thanh Nghi's visit to Peking.

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*Wait for you in eyes only.
Follow up on this lead.
Keep in touch if developments
allow. I will keep you informed of developments.
Dewell*

296

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of
AMBASSADOR AT LARGE

~~SECRET/EYES~~

August 2, 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR THE NEGOTIATIONS COMMITTEE

EYES ONLY PARTICIPANTS

FROM: S/AH - Chester L. Cooper

DECLASSIFIED

E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4

NEJ 94-191

By lsg, NARA, Date 9-12-94

SUBJECT: Visit to Hanoi by Two Unofficial
French Representatives

Early in June a small group of Pugwash participants met in Paris to discuss the situation in the Middle East and Vietnam. Representatives of the group came from the Soviet Union, the UK, France and the US. The American participants were Kissinger, Doty (Harvard), and Feld (MIT). As an outgrowth of this discussion, one of the French participants, Marcovich of the Pasteur Institute, and Kissinger (with the knowledge and endorsement of the Soviet participant) agreed that it would be useful for Marcovich to proceed to Hanoi for the purpose of sounding out the North Vietnamese on their views toward negotiations, and to present unofficially the Phase A - Phase B formula which had been discussed in general terms at the Pugwash session. Marcovich was to be joined by a M. Aubrac, an official of FAO who knew Ho Chi Minh personally (Ho had stayed in Aubrac's home during the 1946 negotiations with the French). De Gaulle was made aware of the trip and interposed no objection on the condition that the two Frenchmen were acting "unofficially".

Marcovich and Aubrac arrived in Hanoi by way of Phnom Penh on July 21. They left Hanoi on July 26 and returned to Paris via Phnom Penh. Kissinger saw them "within hours of their return to Paris".

During their stay in Hanoi Marcovich and Aubrac had two conversations with Pham Van Dong and one with Ho Chi Minh. They were also shown a hospital, some damaged dikes and other evidence of American "aggression". They were given a bamboo surgical kit (which they said was developed to meet the

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2

shortage of steel surgical instruments), a propaganda film on American bombing and some pellets from "anit-personnel bombs". (Arrangements are being made to get these to us.)

Attached are Kissinger's notes describing the sessions between the two Frenchmen and the Vietnamese officials. The material preceding the notes of the conversations (pages 1 - 11 of Kissinger's notes) is a lengthy background discussion and a chronology of the trip.

Several interesting points emerge from the conversation with Pham Van Dong.

1. Dong's reiteration of the offer to negotiate soon after a bombing cessation and, in particular, his statement that the cessation need only be a "de facto" one. (pp 12 and 16)
2. Dong's statement to the effect that they would be prepared to negotiate secretly with the U.S. on matters directly affecting North Vietnam and that the NLF need not be present. (p 17). In subsequent sessions in which the political problems of South Vietnam were to be discussed the NLF would have to be present. (p.13).
3. Dong's recognition that, "some U.S. forces would have to stay until the end of the process of political settlement". (p. 16).
4. Dong's statement that the NLF envisaged a "broad coalition government" which would include members of the present GVN. (p. 17)
5. Dong's statement that Hanoi would not "push things toward unification" until after there was a political settlement. (p. 17)
6. Dong's sense of optimism about the eventual outcome. (p.15)

The conversation with Ho is more interesting in terms of color and mood than in terms of substance.

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An analysis of these conversations and some possible follow-up actions will be the principal matter for discussion on Thursday, August 3, in Governor Harriman's office. It is hoped that participants will have an opportunity to read the attached before the meeting.

ATTACHMENT: As stated

CS
Chester L. Cooper

cc: Mr. Rostow
Gov. Harriman
Mr. Sisco
Mr. Warnke
Mr. Habib
Mr. Read

- 12 -

III. CONVERSATIONS WITH PHAM VAN DONG AND HO

- A. Meeting with Pham Van Dong, July 24, 9 a.m.
- B. Meeting with President Ho, Afternoon, July 24.
- C. Second Meeting with Pham Van Dong.

NOTE: These conversations are drawn from reports by Aubrac and Marcovich within hours of their return to Paris. Quotations are direct quotes as they appeared in Aubrac's notes made during the meeting. The conversations are reported in the order in which they occurred.

- A. Meeting with Pham Van Dong, July 24, 9 a.m. Present Aubrac, Marcovich, Pham Van Dong, Tach (Minister of Health), note-taker.

Pham Van Dong opened the meeting by saying that he was happy to see Aubrac and Marcovich. The visas had been given on the basis of Aubrac's reputation, therefore, it was up to Aubrac to present his ideas. Aubrac then described the background of the trip to Hanoi as sketched in Part I. He said that he would report to me and I would report to the U.S. government. Marcovich continued by outlining as a private idea the two-part proposal: 1) an end to U.S. bombing, 2) coupled with an assurance by North Vietnam that "le taux des approvisionnement ne serait pas accru a la faveur de cette arrête." Aubrac interrupted to say that the control problem would have to be solved and Hanoi should make proposals. Pham Van Dong replied that he had been wondering when that issue would be raised. Marcovich said that part of the control might be through overflights for reconnaissance purposes. Pham Van Dong said: "This is our country. We cannot discuss the problem in this manner." Pham Van Dong added: "We want an unconditional end of bombing and if that happens, there will be no further obstacle to negotiations." Aubrac asked what he meant by unconditional. Pham Van Dong replied that North Vietnam could not negotiate while being bombed. Aubrac asked whether Pham Van Dong wanted an official declaration that the bombing had stopped, or would he be satisfied with a de facto end of bombing. Pham Van Dong replied that a de facto cessation would be acceptable. Aubrac asked whether there should be some delay between the end of bombing and the beginning of negotiations.

* "the rate of supplies will not be increased to anyone's advantage during the stoppage". ~~SECRET - EX DIS~~

Pham Van Dong replied: "This is not a problem." Aubrac asked what channels should be used. Pham Van Dong replied: "This is not a problem but it should be someone authorized by both parties." He then went on to say initial negotiations could be on those matters affecting the U.S. and North Vietnam as principals. When issues affecting South Vietnam were raised, the NLF would have to be present. Aubrac and Marcovich had the impression that the scenario envisaged by Pham Van Dong involved an end of U.S. bombing to be followed within a matter of days by the opening of negotiations under acceptable auspices.

Pham Van Dong then said that he thought that the next escalatory step would be a bombing of the dikes. All preparations had been made to mitigate the consequences, but the human suffering would be severe. He asked Marcovich and Aubrac to help influence world opinion against such a step. Aubrac replied that their usefulness depended on not joining any propaganda effort. However, they might talk to the papal mission in Paris about the problem.

Pham Van Dong then closed the meeting with a little speech: "You see, dear friends, that the problem is very complicated. You may think your travels are useless. In fact you have given us much to think about. I will see you again and we will talk again."

Aubrac and Marcovich were struck by Pham Van Dong's insistence on the complexity of the problem, as well as by the fact that in neither conversation did he mention Communist China.

Tach remained behind. He joined Aubrac and Marcovich at lunch and told them that the two-step bombing proposal should be discussed officially rather than informally.

B. Meeting with President Ho, Afternoon, July 24.
Present: Ho, Aubrac, Pham Van Dong, Tach and note-taker.

Aubrac said that what struck him immediately was how old Ho had become. He was dressed in a Chinese gown and walked with the aid of a cane. However, his intelligence was unimpaired; his eyes still had their

old sparkle. He seemed to enjoy playing the role of a grandfather-figure, not concerned with details. Aubrac had brought as a gift a little colored stone egg. Ho gave three presents in return: silk for Aubrac's daughter, some books and a ring made of metal from the 2000th U.S. plane claimed to have been shot down over Vietnam. He remembered the first names of all of Aubrac's three children. After speaking about Aubrac's family for about 15 minutes, Aubrac said: "Mr. President do you know why I have come?" Ho answered "Yes." Aubrac asked whether he had any comments. Ho replied by saying that he did not like the phrase "peace in Vietnam." It gave an impression of moral equivalence between the United States and North Vietnam; in fact the U.S. is the aggressor and must be condemned. Ho praised De Gaulle for understanding this distinction. Moreover the details of negotiations were in the hands of Pham Van Dong. Ho then added: "Remember, many people have tried to fool me and have failed. I know you don't want to fool me." He then turned the conversation back to family matters. He expressed regret that Aubrac had sold the house where he had stayed twenty-one years ago. "Where shall I live when I next come to Paris?" He then asked whether he would be welcome in Paris, but avoided the question of whether he wanted an invitation.

He terminated the conversation after fifty minutes and was escorted from the room by Tach. Pham Van Dong walked with Aubrac to his car. He said that "we try to spare President Ho as many details as we can. He is an old man; we want him to live to see his country unified." He told Aubrac that he was thinking about their conversation of the morning. He moved up the next day's appointment by an hour to allow more time before Aubrac's and Marcovich's departure in the evening.

C. Second Meeting with Pham Van Dong. Present: Aubrac, Marcovich, Pham Van Dong, Tach, note-taker.

The meeting consisted of a talk by Pham Van Dong speaking from notes. Aubrac reported that the talk went something like this: "Dear friends. Our conversation yesterday was very useful. If you want to understand the problem in Vietnam, I advise you to read the book by Morris West called The Ambassador. Neither Aubrac

nor Marcovich knew of the existence of this book.⁷ We are facing a problem which is at the same time very simple, very complex and of great importance for the world. It is simple because it concerns the freedom of a people. It is complex because many considerations are involved. It is of great importance because it has involved so many peoples. We have come to the opinion that the U.S. government is trying to solve the problem within its present limits. Aubrac and Marcovich took this to mean that Pham Van Dong was convinced that the U.S. was not in Vietnam as a prelude to an attack on China.⁷ We also think that the U.S. government is trying to get a clear picture of the present position. Our view is this: U.S. power is enormous and the U.S. government wants to win the war. President Johnson is suffering from a pain and this pain is called South Vietnam. We agree that the situation on the battlefield is decisive; the game is being played in South Vietnam. From the newspapers we see that some people want to confine the war to the South. However, the White House and Pentagon seem determined to continue the war against the North. Therefore we think that attacks on the North are likely to increase. We have made provisions for attacks on our dikes; we are ready to accept war on our soil. Our military potential is growing because of aid from the USSR and other Socialist countries. Aubrac and Marcovich pointed out that this was the only time a Communist country was mentioned by name in the two conversations extending over five hours. Aubrac and Marcovich also felt that Pham Van Dong was eager to give the impression that the situation was under control.⁷

As for the situation on the battlefield, it is improving all the time. The dry season was good and the wet season will be better. The Marines are in difficulty. The United States is forced to replace its well-trained troops by ever-younger soldiers. We fight only when we choose; we economize on our resources; we fight only for political purposes.

For example, news from Saigon suggests that Ky is considering moving his capital because it is no longer safe. This is true. We could easily step up our actions inside the city. But we take only those actions which have political meaning and which economize human lives.

"Now I shall talk to you about negotiations and solutions. We have been fighting for our independence for four thousand years. We have defeated the Mongols three times. The United States Army, strong as it is, is not as terrifying as Genghis Khan. We fight to have peace at home; we have no wider aims. We have made clear our position in our four points and in the interview of January 28, 1967. Pham Van Dong did not explain what this interview was; Aubrac and Marcovich did not know, nor do I. We are ready to talk at any time provided that actions against the North are unconditionally ended. I want to repeat what I said yesterday: we are willing to settle for a de facto stoppage." Marcovich interrupted to ask whether he correctly understood that no public acknowledgment of an end of bombing was needed. Pham Van Dong replied that he would prefer a public statement, but would settle for a de facto cessation. There was disagreement between Aubrac and Marcovich about the meaning of de facto cessation. Aubrac thought that a bombing pause could be followed within a few days by an invitation to negotiate; Marcovich was of the view that Hanoi might want a more formal--though secret--assurance.

Pham Van Dong resumed. "Ending the war for us has two meanings: 1) An end of bombing which is permanent and unconditional; 2) A withdrawal of United States forces. We like the formula of President de Gaulle." Marcovich interrupted to say that it was not realistic. Pham Van Dong agreed and said that he realized that some U.S. troops would have to stay until the end of the process of political settlement. He added: "We do not want to humiliate the U.S. Lenin did not like war but fought when necessary. As Lenin we are Communists."

"Now let me speak of U.S. policy and the NLF. We should have had unification in 1956. The period 1956-59 was a political fight. It saw the mutual assistance pact between the U.S. and Saigon and the introduction of U.S. staffs. This led to the formation of the NLF. The second period, 1960-64, saw a disintegration of the U.S. position to which the U.S. responded by 'special' war. I suppose he meant "special forces" war. In 1965, the United States started a 'limited' war which lasts until today. At the same time the NLF has expanded its activities from the country into the cities and from inside Vietnam to the outside. Our position is: North

Vietnam is socialist and wants to remain so. As for the South, our goals are national independence, democracy, peace and neutrality. Some people think we want to impose Socialism on the South. We are convinced that the NLF will not make such an error. The NLF envisages a broad coalition government, including all significant groups and religions without consideration of past activities including members du gouvernement fantoche et cadres d'armée fantoche. [He repeated the underlined words.] The essential thing is to forget the past.

"As for unification, we recognize that the important first step is a political settlement of the South. We agree not to push things toward unification. Once the war in the South is settled, we shall discuss with the South and find the best means. Our people are magnificent.

"Peace would have been easy for the U.S. three years ago. But with every year the political situation worsens. We do not like secret negotiations, but we recognize their necessity in this situation. As long as the issues do not concern South Vietnam, the NLF need not participate. However, we do not believe that the United States is ready for a settlement." Then turning to Aubrac he asked: "Que veulent les Americains?"

Aubrac answered that he had been convinced by me that the U.S. wanted an honorable settlement and that an end to bombing could be envisaged provided it was not used as a breathing space to step up the war in the South. This led to a discussion of the meaning of the term reinforcement. Pham Van Dong again stressed that an end of bombing would lead to negotiations. Marcovich said that if negotiations go on any length of time, the problem of reinforcement is serious. Pham Van Dong replied: "If the Americans stop bombing and we understand that they are willing to talk there is no question of delay."

Pham Van Dong then told Aubrac and Marcovich that they could communicate with him through Bo or Sung in Paris. Aubrac and Marcovich said that they would inform him of the U.S. reaction.