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Monday, September 18, 1967
8:50 a. m.

Pres file

Mr. President:

Herewith draft remarks for possible
delivery by Sen. Dirksen.

W. W. Rostow

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DRAFT -- September 18, 1967

I see by the papers that a statesman from Arkansas, Mr. Harry S. Ashmore, has felt called upon to reveal his efforts to end the war in Viet Nam in January and February of this year.

It seems to me that his ego is larger than his information and much greater than his good sense.

It so happens that, along with a few other members of the Congressional leadership, I was pretty well informed of what the President was doing and trying to achieve in those days.

For reasons of its own, Hanoi was putting out all sorts of noises that it might under certain circumstances be willing to negotiate. There must have been a half dozen fellows like Ashmore in various parts of the world who came running to our government with similar reports. As I understand it, none of these was turned away. We told them our position and let them go back to their sources.

But we also decided to find out if there was anything solid in all this by approaching directly the North Vietnamese Embassy in Moscow. During the whole period about which Mr. Ashmore is writing -- from January 6 down to February 15 -- we were exchanging detailed messages and putting in proposals to the North Vietnamese in Moscow. They accepted these messages.

Meanwhile, in London Mr. Kosygin arrived on February 6 and stayed until February 11. Mr. Wilson and Mr. Kosygin were in touch with President Johnson and they put various proposals to Hanoi through Mr. Kosygin.

On February 13 and then again on February 15 we got our reply in the form of letters from Ho Chi Minh to the Pope and then to the President.

Those authoritative letters showed no movement whatsoever. He called for unconditional and permanent cessation of the bombing; for the withdrawal of U.S. forces; for recognition of the legitimacy of the National Liberation Front as representing the people of South Viet Nam. So far as I know, that is Hanoi's position right now; and it's no good.

Now there are some lessons here:

-- Mr. Ashmore should remember that private citizens who get involved in diplomacy have a duty to all parties to keep their mouths shut and leave their memoirs for their grandchildren. He has mistaken a bit of a sideshow for the main tent.

-- The government in Hanoi should remember that if it wants to end this war, the United States has a government to talk to, with experienced, professional men all over the world. We have ended conflicts in Berlin and Korea and Cuba by responsible talk between responsible ^{official} men. That is the way to end the war in Viet Nam.

-- Finally, the American people should remember that our first duty right now is to back our men and our allies fighting shoulder-to-shoulder in Viet Nam. That is the quickest way to peace. We'll know soon enough and surely enough when those who decided to attack South Viet Nam are ready for an honorable peace.