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8

Friday, September 22, 1967
8:30 a.m.

Mr. President:

Pres file

Herewith Chet Bowles volunteers
a formula for trying to put the Russians,
Indians, and others over a barrel on
bombing cessation and negotiations.

I have forwarded it to Sec. Rusk
for his views.

W. W. Rostow

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DECLASSIFIED

E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4

NU 93-243

By WJW, NARA, Date 7/21/94

WWRostow:rin

1.3(a)(5) Text of cable from Ambassador Bowles (New Delhi 025 - [redacted])

I am keenly aware of the efforts that you, Secretary Rusk and others are making to end the Vietnam war in a way that assures the freedom and independence of South Vietnam. I also know that the ground has been so fully covered that I hesitate to offer further suggestions from distance of ten thousand miles, yet I would like to take advantage of your comment in Washington that I should never be reluctant to forward ideas.

Thoughtful people in India believe that while prospects for direct U.S. agreement with Hanoi are not promising there is much to be gained by an attempt by the United States Government to find common ground with USSR and to persuade Soviets to make a more determined effort to promote a satisfactory and realistic solution.

To explore this ground I visualize highly private dialogue with USSR along following lines:

A. U.S.: We are keenly aware of ever present danger that Vietnam war may erupt into much bigger conflict. It is our sole desire to see war brought to an end as soon as possible and to establish political structure that will permit withdrawal of U.S. forces leaving behind stable, independent and, if people so wish, neutral government. However, under present circumstances we are frankly discouraged about prospects for agreement with Hanoi government on basis that would be acceptable not only to United States Government, but to major segment of American people and to Congress. What more can be done to achieve this objective?

USSR: First step is to stop bombing North Vietnam. Once you do this we are confident negotiations can begin which will protect interests of both sides.

B. U.S.: Have you concrete evidence that if we take this step, which will be sharply criticized by important segments of U.S. opinion, Hanoi will not only negotiate with us on serious basis but take complementary action to reduce scale of fighting? In Korea we started negotiations with North Koreans and Chinese in July 1950 and shooting continued for two more years at heavy cost.

USSR: We cannot give you tangible evidence that we can persuade Hanoi Government to offer quid pro quo concession. But we know these people well and are confident that response following cessation of the bombing with no public timetable will be affirmative.

~~SANITIZED~~

E.O. 12856, Sec. 3.4

M.J. 93-244

By fw, MARA, Date 28-94~~SECRET~~

C. U.S.: If you are not repeat not successful in persuading Hanoi to take reciprocal action as a prelude to negotiations what will the USSR do? In other words, will your own policies vis-a-vis Vietnam be modified? If you cannot control Hanoi government response, can you at least tell us what USSR will do under these new circumstances?

On several occasions in recent months I have tested this approach in unofficial, personal talks with Indian officials. While naturally refraining from commitment in response to a hypothetical question, it is their view that if the United States stops bombing and if Hanoi Government fails to respond affirmatively with corresponding reduction of military action, the Government of India will publicly applaud the U.S. effort and focus pressure on Hanoi.

When I ask if they believed that USSR would likewise be expected to shift public and private pressures from Washington to Hanoi, it was general consensus that they would so respond. Moreover, they stressed that while we should place no public time limit on duration of bombing halt, it must be assumed that we would privately inform the USSR that we will not repeat not hold off indefinitely if Hanoi response is negative. This afternoon Defense Minister Swaran Singh, who will head Indian delegation to the United Nations, again expressed the view that even if Hanoi fails to respond to such an action, we would gain enormously in public support and understanding throughout the world.

I wonder if it would not be worth our while to pose this question not only in Moscow, but in Tokyo, Warsaw, Belgrade and other key capitals. Either way such an approach will enable us to improve our position. If the Soviets et al, having been challenged to produce results, persuade Hanoi to respond favorably, the situation will move to a more useful phase. Even if they fail, our move (i. e., stopping of the bombing) will be welcome as proof of U.S. sincerity by USSR, Canada, Japan, India, U Thant, the Pope, etc. that have been pressing us to take this step and we could expect a significant switch in world opinion in our favor.

May I add that I am frankly concerned about assumption of some of our Chinese experts that China is so heavily burdened with internal problems that it will be unable to participate effectively in Vietnam war no matter what we do. Although this may be true, it is extremely dangerous to assume it. We have as an example the Korean war. In 1950 when Mao Government was only recently established in Peking, after 30 years of turmoil and civil war, and China itself was in an advanced state of confusion, Mao boldly entered the war.

Later the Chinese freely admitted that in sending half-million "volunteers" into Korea they acted not simply to support North Korea but to unify their own divided country against the foreign enemy. It is entirely possible and under certain circumstances even probable, that China may ultimately react in the same way in Vietnam.

Another factor we should not ignore is possibility of Soviet-Chinese rapprochement following the death or elimination of Mao. If and when a new government succeeds present Mao regime, Soviet Government will almost certainly make a major effort to establish working relationship with it. The most dramatic primary objective of such a detente on which they may find a common ground would be joint resistance to U.S. efforts in Vietnam. If this should occur, we could be faced with an extremely grave choice: military retreat or major war.

For these reasons I believe we must be prepared to take calculated risks towards a settlement now while China and the USSR are still at odds and the Chinese are handicapped by their own internal disturbances. I realize that there is no safe path. Our task is to select a policy which is least dangerous and most likely to move us a step closer to peace, or if that is impossible, to clarify our position beyond all shadow of doubt both at home and abroad.