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Authority NLJ 89-110

By ry/esp, NARA, Date 10-23-91

~~TOP SECRET -- SENSITIVE~~ - *Pennsylvania*

Friday, October 6, 1967 -- 4:50 p.m.

Mr. President:

Herewith my analysis of the attached proposal which went out today.

1. "Without expression of condition." This formulation is meant to do two things. It is an important cosmetic concession to Hanoi. If they go into this it will permit them to say: We accepted their formula of an unconditional cessation of bombing. On the other hand, "without expression" means that we will reserve by silence the whole of our position as formulated by you, including, especially, the San Antonio formulation. It follows that we would simply, in the first instance, announce the fact that bombardment of North Vietnam would not take place on a certain day; and continue to announce it until we had something else to say -- stonewalling in the government and avoiding leaks.

2. "Promptly." This means that we must settle -- if possible before the cessation takes place -- the time and place when direct contacts would begin. The compromise may be that Bo would see Kissinger before the cessation actually occurred but when we had communicated the time when we were prepared to have it occur. They may make it a sticking point, however, that they not actually accept a time and place until after bombardment had stopped.

3. "Productive discussions." This is our hedge on a Panmunjom. It means that we will have to make an assessment as soon as possible on whether they are moving towards peace or merely creating a situation in which they can prosecute the war without the burden of bombing. (As I discuss below, an equally important hedge is that we use our military resources, during the cessation, to our military advantage to the maximum: in Laos and within South Vietnam.)

4. "In accordance with its proposal of August 25th." This means that we stick by the "assumption" that neither side "will take advantage" of the cessation. This is a phrase to which you will be able to point positively if we have to deal with shelling across the DMZ or other major moves which you judge to be "taking advantage."

5. "To transmit in advance... the precise date" etc. This provision gives them and us lead time for international consultation, preparation of the military, etc. (One critical aspect for us is a formulation of the whole position in Vietnam which would make the pause rational if it fails and gives us good grounds on which to proceed. I discuss this problem and a possible solution below.)

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-2-

6. "A date and a place for the commencement of discussions." The date must give us time to get Westy, Bunker, and Thieu aboard as well as our fighting allies. I lean to a time close to Thieu's inaugural so that we can gear our framework for the pause to a new phase in Vietnam, whether the pause succeeds or fails. This is discussed below. As for a place, it is clear that if and when discussions begin, it will be difficult to keep that fact secret. What we do wish to avoid is a Panmunjom atmosphere. By that I mean formal negotiations with each side coming out of a building, meeting the press, and distorting the whole exercise. I talked about this with Sec. Rusk. He leans to Moscow and says that the Russians could handle the press problem. I'm not sure the Soviet government would want Moscow; I'm sure Hanoi would ~~not~~ want Moscow; I'm not sure I want Moscow, because the final deal would have to meet their criteria as well as ours and Hanoi's and this could be a conflict. On the other hand, if there is any chance of success, Moscow might want this feather in their cap for the 50th anniversary. My first choice would be Rangoon, because there is virtually no resident press and Ne Win's government has very tight visa laws and could create a quiet -- almost private -- setting, with good communications for both sides. We would also have to decide on the negotiator. Sec. McNamara thinks that Averell Harriman is too old and sick. He leans to Kissinger whom we would have to swear in as Ambassador at Large for this purpose, if we wanted him to do it. Tommy Thompson is an attractive choice if the locale is Moscow; but he would need very strong support. There may be other candidates about whom we should be thinking.

7. "This understanding is consistent with B's statement to M on October 4 and with the proposal of the USG of August 25." This is meant to be facesaving for them and for us and reflects a fundamental principle for any subsequent negotiation which is important; namely, that each side be able to come out of the negotiation claiming that the outcome was consistent with the positions it took all along.

8. "Observations by the USG on August 25 with respect to secrecy of the fact of discussions between the DRV and the USG." In our message of August 25 we noted the difficulty of maintaining secrecy of discussions in the face of total cessation of bombing. We suggested the DRV "may prefer to consider the alternative of cutting back in the magnitude and scope of the bombing while secret discussions are in progress." They have never responded to this possibility.

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9. "The USG had taken note of a reduction of military activities in the vicinity of the DMZ. Undoubtedly, the DRV had noted the absence in recent weeks of aerial bombardment in the immediate vicinity of Hanoi." This notation does two things. It introduces the principle of reciprocity by the back door; and it underlines the importance of quiet on the DMZ during negotiations.

10. Military problems and possibilities. Sec. McNamara has told me of the plan to get Andy Goodpaster to work on the military aspects of this arrangement. We shall have to think through, of course, the kinds of military responses we would make against North Vietnam if there were various kinds of "taking advantage" of the bombing cessation. I suggested to him a supplementary task for Andy Goodpaster and his group; namely, that they examine systematically how we might use to best advantage militarily the period when North Vietnam is not being bombed. Specifically:

- the most intense and effective use of airpower, in conjunction with road watchers and the barrier, against the corridors in Laos, including the full lessons of our experience thus far.

- acceleration of the barrier;

- the transfer of forces from protecting the DMZ to applying strength against the VC units in I Corps and, in general, an intensification of pacification activities in I Corps;

- ^{further} ~~future~~ measures to limit infiltration through the mountainous western end of the DMZ on the South Vietnamese side of the line or through the Ashau Valley.

- intensification of COMPATRIOT;

- contingency measures for full protection of the DMZ if the talks break down; massive pressure on the DMZ is resumed; and we resume bombing;

- plans for intensified pressure against North Vietnam if the talks break down, including targets, raids, or patrols across the DMZ to the north, etc.

I told Bob that to the extent we can get our military engaged in ways of exploiting positively a stand down to our advantage, we will diminish pressure on you to break off the talks prematurely.

~~TOP SECRET--SENSITIVE~~

-4-

11. A new perspective on Vietnam and a possible pause. I have been designing the kind of speech that I believe you should make, in any case, in the wake of Thieu's inaugural. It should, in my view, give our people a fresh view of the war; one that we can live with over the whole next year, if necessary; provide the basis for a new information policy strategy in Saigon and in Washington. The essence of it is this:

-- Hanoi has already failed in its purpose in South Vietnam and in Free Asia.

-- In South Vietnam self-determination has asserted itself and a program has emerged for building a new nation based on constitutionality, social justice, and economic progress. This has been permitted by substantial progress in the war. The task now is to protect this new constitutional government and the nation which created it; if possible, to persuade the Viet Cong to join this nation under the protection and responsibilities of the constitution; and bring peace; if persuasion is impossible to press on with the progress already under way in bringing security to the countryside.

-- With respect to Free Asia, we can see the domino theory in reverse. Because of what has happened in Vietnam, the Asians have turned their back on communism and committed their future to freedom and to regional cooperation. They have decided that we shall see it through; that we shall see the aggression defeated; and they have staked their lives and the lives of their nations on that proposition. They have made great constructive progress since 1965. Our job is to help them continue and to achieve their own purposes.

-- The North Vietnamese military units have been driven towards the north and they can no longer conduct major operations from within South Vietnam. That is why in recent months they have pressed across the DMZ. Our hope now is that we can persuade them with dignity to make peace and to encourage their friends in South Vietnam to make peace. That is the purpose of the bombing cessation. It is the result for which we pray. If the negotiations do not succeed, however, we must continue to drive the North Vietnamese out of South Vietnam and keep them out. That is why, in the past, we have conducted the bombardment of North Vietnam. That is why we are building the barrier. That is why it was necessary to hold at Con Thien. That is what we shall have to continue to do if negotiations fail.

But right now is the time for peace to be made: among the South Vietnamese themselves and between North Vietnam and ourselves. Now is the time to restore and make effective the international framework of the Geneva Accords of 1954 and 1962. Now is the time for Hanoi to join in the constructive development of Southeast Asia.

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-5-

We have clearly turned the corner in this struggle for Vietnam and the future of Southeast Asia. We hope that through negotiations we are very nearly the end. But, if negotiations do not succeed, we can be confident that we are already well on the road to success and to peace.

W. W. Rostow

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15

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The following message from Kissinger should be delivered to M:

M should tell B that K would be authorized to deliver to B in writing the following message whenever B is prepared to meet with him officially or unofficially:

"The USG understands the position of the DRV to be as follows: That upon the cessation by the United States of all forms of bombardment of the DRV, the DRV would enter promptly into productive discussions with the United States. The purpose of these discussions would be to resolve the issues between the United States and the DRV.

"Assuming the correctness of this understanding of the position of the DRV, the USG is prepared, in accordance with its proposal of August 25th, to transmit in advance to the DRV the precise date upon which bombardment of the DRV would cease and to suggest a date and a place for the commencement of discussions."

In addition, M should convey to B the following oral points from Kissinger:

1. K believes that this understanding is consistent with B's statement to M on October 4 and with the proposal of the USG of August 25.
2. When B meets with K, K would also be prepared to state the precise date on which cessation would occur and to give the suggestions of the United States with respect to the date and site of the discussions following cessation of bombardment, and K would be authorized to receive the views of the DRV with respect to these and other modalities.
3. K noted that the DRV had not commented on observations by the USG on August 25 with respect to secrecy of the fact of discussions between the DRV and the USG.
4. K observed that officials of the USG had taken note of a reduction of military activities in the vicinity of the DMZ. Undoubtedly, the DRV had noted the absence in recent weeks of aerial bombardment in the immediate vicinity of Hanoi.

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