

Friday, October 20, 1967
6:30 p. m.

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MR. PRESIDENT:

This quite official Hanoi plant is worth careful reading.

Pres file

It is, in effect, a response to the K probe.

1. It confirms the distinction between "talks" and "negotiations."
2. It puts them in the position, if a cessation takes place, of demanding of us concessions if talks are to be "productive."
3. It protests too much on the strength of their position: I've never met a strong man that had to go around scratching the hair on his chest to prove his strength.
4. It plays on the "credibility gap" and other propaganda themes.

If we accepted this position as a basis for a cessation and talks they would judge it a sign of weakness and the talks would, in my judgment, not prosper.

W. W. R.

Attachment

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TEXT OF AP INTERNATIONAL WIRE SERVICE DISPATCH

Advance PMs Sat. Oct. 21
Burchett

EDITORS: The editor's note preceding this dispatch must be used if the dispatch is used.

EDITOR'S NOTE -- This dispatch was filed to The Associated Press by an Australian correspondent who reports for Communist newspapers from Communist countries from which most non-Communist newsmen are barred.

By WILFRED BURCHETT

HANOI, North Vietnam AP - There is no possibility of any talks or even contacts between Hanoi and the U.S. Government unless the bombardment and other acts of war against North Vietnam are definitively halted.

This is the position stated to me during conversations in the last few days with Premier Pham Van Dong, Nguyen Duy Trinh, foreign minister and deputy premier, and other high-ranking government and party leaders.

Hanoi is in no mood for concessions or bargaining and there is an absolute refusal to offer anything - except talks - for a cessation of the bombardment. The word stressed is "talks," not negotiations.

During an informal talk, however, Trinh repeated that his statement to this correspondent last Jan. 28 - that talks could start if the bombing was halted - still held good. He said there could be "meaningful" talks. Whether they would be "fruitful" or "productive" depended on the United States.

The mood of Hanoi is one of toughness and confidence. Although leaders expect Hanoi and Haiphong will probably be destroyed and that the war may last many more years, they feel the worst is behind them, that the daily bombings are absorbed into the country's organism.

Despite the air assault on Haiphong and intensified attacks on bridges along the rail link with China, traffic continues to move out of Haiphong almost normally over pontoon bridges, and the rail link with China is still functioning, although

occasionally halted for a day or two. Many tens of thousands of Chinese are working along this line and elsewhere, keeping rail and road communications open and repairing bridges.

The fact that the mile-long Paul Doumer Bridge over the Red River at Hanoi was repaired in less than six weeks after the bombers knocked out one of its huge spans is regarded as proof that anything that is destroyed is speedily repairable.

Although meat and fat rations are meager, there is no evidence of any shortage of rice. And the fact that the bridge span was knocked out and Hanoi's only road and rail link with Haiphong was temporarily cut did not affect rationing or prices in Hanoi. Traffic along the main and subsidiary highways is heavier than during my last visit six months ago.

The relatively stable situation in the North, coupled with what is officially described as "a very favorable" military situation in the South, explains the new toughness and confidence that foreign visitors note in Hanoi at present.

A member of the Politburo, highest organ of the country's ruling Lao Dong or worker's party, laughed when I asked whether he was counting on the election year looming in the United States to influence negotiation possibilities.

"It is just as useless to us to count on maneuvers on the U.S. political scene as it is for Americans to count on Moscow-Peking divergencies or China's internal political situation to help them," he replied. "We have to rely mainly on our own forces, not on the American elections of 1968 or 1972 or 1976 or any other time. It is because of the victories of our compatriots in the South, their defeat of two American dry season offensives and the resistance of the North to 2 1/2 years of air attacks that we are getting more support and assistance than ever before."

One difficulty foreign diplomats have in persuading Hanoi to make any new peace gesture is what one of the leaders referred to as a "credibility gap" between what President Johnson says and does. Because of experience in certain earlier private and secret moves which no leaders with whom I talked would precisely specify, there has been deep skepticism about any public statements or private feelers coming from Washington through diplomatic and other channels.

Such skepticism was much less in evidence during my previous visits, but today it is noted by diplomats from Socialist and other countries accredited to or visiting Hanoi.

Several times the names of Johnson, Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Walt Rostow, special assistant to Johnson, are mentioned in the most unflattering terms as men in whose word no confidence is possible.

It is impossible to find any leader who believes the sincerity of Johnson's statements that he really wants to end the war on terms that would leave the Vietnamese free to settle their own affairs or that he does not intend a permanent U. S. military presence in South Vietnam.

It is repeated at every level that total independence with complete American withdrawal from South Vietnam is the unalterable aim of the Hanoi government and the Liberation Front for South Vietnam. They are prepared to fight 10 or 20 years to achieve this, and life is being reorganized on this basis.

Hanoi denies that this means export of communism to the South and insists it agrees with the Liberation Front that the South should remain a separate entity with a neutral, non-Socialist regime as advocated in the recently published new political program of the front, having its independent entity, with reunification a very long-range, step by step process.

Talks with government, party and military leaders reflected confidence that things are moving their way on all fronts, military and political, inside Vietnam and on the international front where, Trinh said, "the United States is more isolated every day, as chief delegates' speeches in the United Nations show, while we are gaining friends every day."

Hanoi has not been in a cockier mood since the bombings started, but this mood is not based on any expectation that the bombing may be halted soon.

End.