

Wednesday, Oct. 18, 1967
5:45 p. m.

MR. PRESIDENT:

Not having time to draft myself, I asked Bob Ginsburgh to do for me a memorandum justifying a you-call-me negotiating posture. It contains, incidentally, for the first time a collection of all of the evidence on how the weight of the war has shifted to I Corps where, of course, our bombing across the DMZ is of critical importance.

W. W. R.

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NY 94-452

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

By lap, NARA, Date 7-17-95

SUBJECT: Vietnam War and Peace Strategy

This memorandum explores the option of adopting a you-call-me posture, resuming our full bombing program in the north, including Hanoi.

The disadvantages are these:

- Most importantly, it might eliminate the possibility -- small as it may be -- that Hanoi is interested in serious negotiations.

- It might "blow" the Paris channel leading to accusations that once again we had escalated at the very moment when serious negotiations were imminent.

- It would fail to gain us the support of those more moderate doves who could be brought back on board with a bombing pause.

On the other hand, following up on the Paris channel with a bombing pause at the present time does not seem especially attractive because:

- there has been very little movement via the Paris channel considering that we have been at it for two months;

- if we believe Hanoi's public posture, Hanoi is only prepared to negotiate their victory;

- we would be giving up in advance what Max Taylor calls our biggest blue chip;

- although Hanoi is losing, they have not yet lost; if their current strategy is to sweat out the war, hoping for a change forced by U. S. public opinion, a pause would (1) make it easier for them to last the course militarily and (2) lend added weight to the view that the U. S. will weaken;

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- if Hanoi is not serious, we would lose in a few weeks' time most of the military advantages which have accrued from our sustained interdiction of the last six months (Bunker and Westy have persuasively argued the serious military disadvantages of any pause lasting more than 24 to 72 hours.);

- despite Hanoi's insistence on a cessation of bombing as a precondition for talks, classic communist doctrine exhorts them to exploit weakness and to retire in the face of strength in order to live to fight another day. In Korea, the communists finally accepted terms which they were offered two years earlier -- at a time when we were increasing our military pressure and threatening to use more;

- on the basis of past experience, we would find it politically difficult to resume the bombing until long after we were privately convinced that a continuation of a pause was unfruitful.

Hopefully, we are on the threshold of a greater awareness that we are making progress in this war. Within government, there is a growing appreciation that very extensive consequences flow from our bombing of the north even though we cannot reduce capacity so they can't get men and supplies through to the south. Recent articles (such as those by Baldwin and Max Taylor and forthcoming articles by Roscoe Drummond) should lead to greater public appreciation of progress in the south, plus the relationship of bombing to the over-all effort.

A bombing pause would reverse this trend.

A you-call-me posture would (1) clarify this trend, (2) clear up the confusion in the public mind -- and in Hanoi -- caused by making peace overtures while fighting, and (3) lead to a greater awareness that negotiations are not an end in themselves.

In recent months, the ground war in the south has become almost two separate campaigns -- the battles in I Corps and the campaign in the rest of South Vietnam. We are making major progress in II, III, and IV Corps -- which has been obscured by the intense battles around the DMZ.

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In the last two years, in I Corps as compared to all of South Vietnam:

- small unit actions have increased from 35% to 65%;
- incidents have gone up from 20% to 35%;
- enemy killed in action from 25% to 50%;
- South Vietnamese casualties have mounted from about 20% to 40%;
- ARVN weapon losses from 20% to 30% and VC/NVA weapon losses from a low of 15% in June 1966 to 35%.
- enemy defections have decreased from 12% to 8%.

These factors argue for a continuation of the bombing, which is most directly relevant to the area of the most severe fighting.

Adoption of a you-call-me posture would require:

- informing Hanoi through the Paris channel that we were adopting such a posture;
- informing Thieu of this posture and urging him to speak accordingly in his inaugural -- simply expressing a desire for peaceful settlement and for direct discussions to achieve that end -- but no request for us to halt the bombing unless this produces a favorable response;
- a Presidential statement stating our posture;
- a decision as to whether we should take the initiative in "blowing" the Paris channel -- the tactics of such an initiative -- or the contingency defensive tactics if we wait for others to blow the channel.

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