

SANITIZED
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By 120, NARA, Date 10-4-95

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~~TOP SECRET / SENSITIVE~~

Saturday, October 28, 1967 -- 7:00 a.m.

Mr. President:

Pres file

Before you leave for El Paso, you should know:

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(a) (4)

1. We received yesterday a reply from our first NLF contact [redacted]

2. It is now being carefully translated, but here are the elements, as I recall them without benefit of even a rough text in front of me.

- It starts with prisoners, for that was the origins of the exchange.
- It asks that one man held by the GVN be released and a list of others be "well treated."
- It then moves on to discussion of a settlement of the war.
- Almost like a Planning Council paper, it says there are, essentially, three negotiations to be envisaged: a negotiation on the political settlement within South Vietnam; a U.S.-Hanoi negotiation; and a negotiation, which is pushed some distance down the road, between the North and the South.
- It states the four points with, superficially, a softening of the critical point, because it does not demand that the NLF be the sole voice speaking for South Vietnam.
- Here is the hooker: It states vehemently that under no circumstances will they deal with Thieu-Ky and Company. They want the political negotiation to begin between the NLF and the U.S. They name Dru and a few others as the kind of South Vietnamese they are willing to work with.
- In tone it is very tough in the sense that it says we must recognize that they are winning the war.
- The intermediary, whom we released to make contact at a Viet Cong headquarters area, reports his judgment that the message was checked in Hanoi.

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Again, this is a document that was read aloud to me yesterday, which has not been carefully translated yet. We shall, of course, be studying it over the weekend.

My first reflections are:

-- It is the first piece of paper we have received from the other side which goes directly to the heart of the matter which is political settlement inside South Vietnam.

-- It comes, as we always thought a truly serious probe would come, while the war proceeds, including a full-scale bombing of North Vietnam.

-- It raises the gut issue of what we are fighting for in South Vietnam by posing the question of Thieu-Ky. (My first reaction is, for what it is worth, that we shall have to stand firmly by constitutional process in South Vietnam and find out if, when we and they have been fully tested, they are prepared to accept a role as a political party under the constitution when they lay down their arms.)

The intermediary is now being put through a polygraph test in Saigon to establish whether his story, the details of which are quite interesting, is true.

W. W. Rostow

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