

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

~~TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE~~

Wednesday, October 18, 1967
9:30 a. m.

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: Strategy on Negotiations and a Pause

As I see it, we have three alternatives:

1. To take the latest Paris message as a flat negative and move into a posture of you-call-me, resuming our full bombing program in the north, including Hanoi.
2. Close out the Paris channel, resume bombing, including Hanoi, for an interval; and then find a fit occasion for a pause.
3. Build a scenario on the Paris channel which would lead us into a pause at or very close to the time of Thieu's inaugural, October 31. (Since drafting this, the attached cable from Bunker came in suggesting as one option a pause timed to Thieu's inaugural (Tab A).

This memorandum explores the third option.

Its basic disadvantage is, it would put off for perhaps 5 or 6 weeks a resumed attack on Hanoi. (I do not share the view that we should be at all sensitive concerning an attack on Phuc Yen, which is a narrow military target and would be understood as such.)

The virtues of building on the Paris channel into a pause on or about October 31 are threefold:

- It would avoid a big debate on whether we had correctly interpreted the Paris exchanges and lost the opportunity for a serious negotiation.
- It would cover the possibility -- small as it may be -- that Hanoi is, in fact, groping its way uncertainly towards a serious negotiation.
- It would permit us to orchestrate three elements into quite a dramatic scenario which might, if well handled, leave us both with a clean record for LIFE magazine, the more moderate doves like Senator Brooke, etc.; and leave us with a more united political and international base for the conduct of the war over the next year.

The three elements that would have to be orchestrated are these:

- The Paris channel itself;

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-- ~~Diplomatic approaches~~ to the Russians, British, U Thant, and others who have urged a bombing cessation, to put up or shut up in getting Hanoi to perform;

-- ~~Political consultations and actions at home~~ to unite the nation during and after the pause.

But other factors would have to be dealt with in a full scenario which might look something like this:

1. ~~An early attack on Phuc Yen~~ (see TabB on recent aircraft losses due to MIG's). This ~~assumes, of course, that we would be bombing heavily in the North--especially in the Haiphong area--until the pause.~~ There may be other military actions we would wish to undertake in this interval; e.g., planting a maximum number of Mark 36 destructors.

2. ~~An early instruction to Bunker to approach Thieu and tell him we have come to the conclusion we will probably have to have a pause in bombing;~~ we think that it would be wise to make the test soon rather than late; that his inaugural speech might have maximum effectiveness if accompanied by the opening of a bombing pause which fitted his campaign talk; that his speech should state that he has asked the U.S. to cease bombing to "test Hanoi's good intentions"; it should appeal to the NLF to accept the Constitution (and the rules for changing the Constitution) and shift from violence to politics. (It would, of course, also contain his own positive program, plus the commitment to continue the struggle inside South Viet Nam.)

3. We would send Kissinger back to Paris at this time with a message to M and A that would, by asking certain clarifying questions, keep the channel going for another round, planning, however, at a certain point to tell Bo that, as of a certain date, we shall stop bombardment of the North to test the meaning of the shift in language from talks "could take place" to "can take place", but letting them know also that our three criteria ~~still hold.~~

-- "Prompt"

-- "Productive"

-- "No taking advantage"

4. Shortly before the cessation actually begins (or at the time) we would tell the USSR, the UK, the Indians, Indonesians, Japanese, Canadians, U Thant, etc., about the Paris channel and inform them that

~~here is their chance to test the hypothesis which they have urged upon us,~~
~~by bringing maximum pressure to bear against Hanoi.~~ We would emphasize that those who give international advice assume responsibilities. We would have to make clear that while we would not formally state conditions, that in fact the San Antonio formula would govern our subsequent action and, in particular, we could not accept ~~shelling or other major action~~ across the DMZ during the cessation.

5. A maximum effort would have to be made at about the same time to unite the leadership of this country for the effort, building our argument for hawks on the fact that Thieu's campaign commitment and other circumstances made a pause inevitable at some time and there were advantages in facing it soon rather than late, in the light of the Paris channel, among other factors. For the more reasonable doves, we would say: Here is what you wanted. Now your job is to send a signal through public statements to Hanoi that if they do not move now we will have to join those in the U.S. who believe that intensified military action is the only possible route to ending the war.

W. W. F. Rostow

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By 8, NARA, Date 12-23-94

Saigon 8854, October 18, 1967, from AMB. BUNKER

1. During my call on Thieu with Habib and Jorden, President-Elect discussed plans for an approach to Hanoi. He is frankly skeptical a move now will produce a favorable response from Ho. Nonetheless, he feels obligated to follow up on his campaign promise.
2. His present intention is to cover the peace theme in a general way in his inaugural address. He will stress that his government wants to "open the door to peace -- and keep it open." Desire for peace will be balanced by expression of South Vietnamese determination to continue to fight against aggression from the North and for Southern independence.
3. Thieu plans to follow inaugural with a direct message to Ho Chi Minh. He sees two possible approaches:
 - a. An expression of desire for peaceful settlement and for direct discussions to achieve that end. If this produced a favorable response, Thieu would ask us to halt bombing. We would assume that reciprocal action would be forthcoming from the other side.
 - b. A halt in bombing to be followed immediately by a message to Ho proposing immediate talks.
4. Thieu is aware of the desirability of avoiding the kind of message that would be read in Hanoi and elsewhere as an ultimatum. He seems anxious to avoid the appearance of adopting a propaganda gimmick. Even so, he fully expects Ho to reject any initiative from Saigon at this time. "But at some time he may respond -- in two months, or six months, or a year."
5. I told Thieu I would report his views immediately and would come back to him with our reactions. We agreed that close and full consultation between us on this matter was necessary.
6. Comment: The first of Thieu's proposed alternatives seems to me clearly preferable. A simple, straightforward message from Thieu to Ho expressing a desire for peace and a willingness to talk would, when surfaced, put the new Saigon regime in a favorable light internationally and at home. If rejected, as we must assume it would be, the offer would highlight the contrast between Hanoi's intransigence and Saigon's reasonableness. This approach would, of course, leave room for the critics to charge that an offer to talk without an end to bombing was meaningless. Saigon's answer to that would be: We are interested in ending the war, not half of it, and attacks from the North and infiltration has not ended.

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7. Thieu's second course, a bombing halt followed by a message to Ho, would require far more elaborate preparation and coordination. In undertaking a bombing stoppage, we would want to maximize chances for a favorable response and it is questionable that a proposal from Saigon would achieve that end.

8. Would appreciate soonest Department's reaction to above. If we come down on side of first alternative, it may be desirable to go back to Thieu with suggested language for at least the key portion of any message to Ho.

BUNKER

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