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Pres file

MR. PRESIDENT:

This is an intelligent, tough-minded analysis
of Hanoi's attitude toward negotiations at
the present time.

In a field where none of us can confidently
claim wisdom, it is, nevertheless, worth
scanning.

W. W. R.

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

THE DIRECTOR OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH

17694

Rostow

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To : The Secretary
Through: S/S
From : INR - Thomas L. Hughes *My*Subject: Appraisal of Hanoi's Current Approach on Negotiations, and
Prospects for Timing of Future Actions

Summary. Hanoi has recently followed a very hard line on negotiations and settlement, but has kept some channels open and has not foreclosed the possibility of a political settlement. It has also tried to push the NLF more into the foreground, and has pressed hard for a US bombing halt on its own terms. These statements and actions suggest that Hanoi, while ready for direct contacts following an "unconditional halt," is not now ready to change its position on key issues, and therefore would probably not engage in meaningful negotiations if an early halt occurred. However, recalling the year-end 1966-67 bombing pauses, Hanoi may be contemplating some shifts in its position around the end of this year in order to prolong one of the pauses into a long bombing halt. In the meantime, it will attempt to change the US stand, and will try to use private contacts to determine how it may have to alter its own position this winter if it decides to do so. American negotiating tactics at the procedural and substantive levels could thus constitute a crucial element in Hanoi's probings and current decision processes.

I. HANOI ATTITUDES

Hard Line. During the past two months Hanoi has taken a very hard public line on negotiations and settlement. Pham Van Dong's August 30 speech and two later Nhan Dan commentaries, one of which replied to President Johnson's San Antonio speech, stated Hanoi's position in uncompromising terms. They asserted that there would be "no reciprocity" and reiterated Hanoi's demand for an unconditional bombing pause.

Hanoi and NLF representatives followed an even harder line with reporter David Schoenbrun, and made the road to meaningful talks seem even longer than before. Asserting that the US first had to stop the bombing of North Vietnam, they said that thereafter Hanoi would talk to us only about the modalities of a US troop withdrawal and the means for getting us "in touch" with the NLF. The NLF representative in Hanoi in turn demanded de-escalation of US military actions in the South and (in apparent contradiction) a cease-fire, as preconditions for NLF talks with the US. He said the NLF demanded US recognition as the "sole genuine representative" of the South Vietnamese people. Both Hanoi and the NLF have denied any possible GVN role in negotiations and in a settlement.

NLF Pushed Into Foreground. Hanoi is also making a concerted effort to promote the NLF as a potential negotiating partner for the US, and as a

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center of attraction for the South Vietnamese. The new NLF program is part of that effort, as are other recent Hanoi/NLF moves on the international scene. Since publication of the NLF program, Hanoi has focused its own attention on conditions for negotiations, with emphasis on a bombing halt, and has said little about its own conditions for settlement. Instead it has reasserted earlier claims that any settlement had to be discussed with the NLF.

Yet Limited Flexibility. Nevertheless, Hanoi clearly does not want to foreclose the possibility of negotiations entirely. Quite apart from an obvious interest in achieving a halt in US bombings, which have seriously hurt the North Vietnamese economy, a totally negative attitude would curtail Hanoi's tactical flexibility, reduce pressure for changes in the US position, and perhaps lessen some nations' readiness to send aid. Hanoi has therefore maintained and even reiterated the Trinh January 28 interview, in order to keep hopes for meaningful negotiations alive. Two recent stories by the AFP correspondent in Hanoi, Cabanes, struck this chord of reasonableness. Written reputedly on the basis of conversations with North Vietnamese officials, the stories did not reveal changes on substantive issues but reflected an apparent North Vietnamese attention to considerations of US prestige by noting that we would not have to pledge ourselves in advance to a permanent bombing halt. In addition, Cabanes reported that "Hanoi sources" had said that "serious and significant talks" could begin within three or four weeks of a cessation of bombing.

Private Channels Remain Open. As an additional sign of interest in keeping the negotiations option alive, Hanoi has also kept a few private channels open, if in some cases dormant. Hanoi has not to our knowledge made any substantive concessions through those channels and in our judgment is not likely to do so at present. Nonetheless, these channels serve Hanoi in several ways: by offering a chance to press for US concessions, by providing established contacts in case of sudden need, and by keeping alive in the minds of third parties Hanoi's image as reasonable and open to compromise. Perhaps most significantly, the private dialogue can prove useful for Hanoi to get an accurate picture of what changes are necessary in its own position if it wants to achieve a compromise settlement.

II. A POSSIBLE SEQUENCE OF DEVELOPMENTS

Would Not Now Conduct Meaningful Talks for Bombing Halt. On the basis of Hanoi's past behavior and these recent statements and actions, we do not believe that North Vietnam is prepared at present to engage in meaningful negotiations and to make substantive concessions on its conditions for settlement, even if the bombing were to be halted without reciprocity. Despite its demand for a bombing halt and its inferred commitment to negotiate, Hanoi probably has not yet decided upon the concessions it should or must make in any serious bargaining process. Hanoi's initial position in

any contacts after a halt would likely be a reiteration of its hard line that the only issue of direct concern to both the US and North Vietnam which needs to be negotiated is "cessation of all US acts of aggression" against the North, and that the situation in South Vietnam is a separate matter on which the US must approach the NLF directly. Seeking to avoid meaningful talks while welcoming the military respite which a bombing halt would bring, it would desire to spend several months during the respite appraising political developments in South Vietnam and evaluating the course of the war. It would estimate that it could get around the difficulties which this obdurate diplomatic position might cause by a barrage of propaganda exploiting its readiness to talk at all as evidence that it was the reasonable party. It might even make minor concessions, such as a slight shift in its line on reunification and on the modalities (manner and timing) of US recognition of the Front, and it would try to use these to keep talks going and to forestall a resumption of bombings. This effort would be coupled with a demand for intensive support by its allies, to the extent of having them join in an orchestrated effort to press for American concessions.

May Try for Christmas-Tet Bombing Halt. Hanoi probably assumes that there will be bombing pauses during this season, as in the past, and may not yet have decided what its own tactics will be in relation to these pauses. Hanoi's understanding of the US position on reciprocity will become increasingly crucial with the approach of the Christmas-New Years-Tet season. Hanoi may believe that it would be easier to prolong a seasonal pause into a complete bombing halt without yielding on reciprocity than it would be to gain a bombing cessation without reciprocity during a period of intense fighting such as now. Even if it should decide that it must reciprocate in some manner for a bombing cessation, it probably calculates that it would not have to pay as high a price during the Christmas-Tet season as it would now, because of greater pressure on the US during that season.

In the months before Christmas, Hanoi will probably want to explore our position on various issues, mostly in order to obtain concessions from us but also in order to gain a clear understanding of the concessions we would require for a bombing halt. Hanoi probably estimates that the issues in which we are primarily interested are (1) reciprocity and mutual de-escalation; (2) GVN and NLF roles in talks and settlement; (3) how soon negotiations could begin after a bombing halt; and (4) the scope of possible negotiations. Hanoi knows that we have already shifted our position on several of those issues, and that we require some change in its stand.

If the above exploration indicates that Hanoi must change its stand to stretch a bombing pause into a halt, and if Hanoi then decides to revise its position to accomplish this purpose, it will still try to make what it considers to be the minimum change required and will do it as late as possible, so as to obtain the most from us. It is quite possible that in

attempting to yield as little as possible Hanoi will fall short of our minimum requirements to stop the bombing. It would then try to use its act of concession to produce enough international and domestic pressure to force us to halt. If a bombing halt does occur, we cannot now predict whether Hanoi would use it as a first step toward meaningful negotiations or as a tactical device to weaken the US position.

US Attitude Can Influence Hanoi. Before Hanoi decides to take any action during the Christmas-Tet season, it will probably want to have as clear an understanding as possible of US attitudes. Private exploration could thus have a major influence on any Hanoi decision to change its position during the Christmas-Tet season. American negotiating tactics can supply a crucial element in Hanoi's decision process by making it clear what Hanoi must do in order to obtain concessions from us.