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*Pres file*

Mr. President:

Wednesday, November 8, 1967 -- 3:00 p.m.

Herewith Joe Alsop's revised draft -- now cleared on a factual basis by the CIA.

His proposed scenario is in the covering letter to you.

I believe there is merit in his argument that we should use what we know about Communist thinking to sober those who believe that the object of the exercise is "negotiations" rather than peace. In terms of substance, I believe:

-- The bracketed passage on the first page is not necessary.

-- A passage like the attached (Tab B) should be included. It is from a captured notebook reflecting a high-level lecture on the Communist concept of a coalition government.

-- Most important, there should be a closing passage which says this: I am making available these facts not because we do not seek a negotiated end to the war. We wish to see the war ended by negotiation at the earliest possible date. But it is important for all of us to understand maturely what Communists have in mind when they talk of negotiations. In the end, if there is to be an honorable peace, they will have to be persuaded that the object of a negotiation is a stable peace, not a route to victory over the South Vietnamese and their allies.

-- A final question is whether you should introduce this material into the national dialogue, or should Secretary Rusk.

You may wish to seek the views of Sec. Rusk and Sec. McNamara on this whole matter.

W. W. Rostow

WWRostow:rlm

DECLASSIFIED TO BE AN ADMINISTRATIVE  
MATTER. CANCELLED FOR E.O. 11652.  
SEC. 1.3 AND ARCHIVIST'S RECORD OF  
MAR 12 1983.

BY *rg* ON *12-11-96*

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JOSEPH ALSOP

2720 Dumbarton Avenue  
Washington 7, D. C.

Telephone  
965-1770

November 8, 1967

Dear Mr. President:

The misunderstanding concerning my first draft for you has now been cleared up, and I am sending today to Walt the text which has been gone over word by word with the appropriate experts, who have approved it in full, as easy to support from the numerous documents in their possession.

Let me briefly suggest a scenario for use of this paper.

First, you should have a late afternoon press conference in order to present the paper itself. This should command the leading position in every newspaper the next morning. If the thing is rightly done, your statement should also be on television.

Second, this initiative by you will then touch off a document-hunt, to find what it is that your statement refers to. The documents themselves should then be made available the next day, marked appropriately, so that my generally rather lazy colleagues can find the relevant passages in the general wilderness of the texts. The documents will then command the lead of the following morning's papers.

Third, inevitably an argument about the meaning of the documents themselves will then ensue. If the people that everyone like Scotty will go to, Bill Bundy, Dick Helms et al, are appropriately briefed, most of the people who will most deeply dislike the new facts put before the public, will in the end be forced to admit that facts are facts, and must be taken cognizance of. If you successfully arrive at this point, you will have achieved the great change in tone in the national debate that is now so urgent.

on luck - so ? say:

Your luck is always

Good luck! Yours -

Joe Alsop

The President  
The White House  
Washington, D. C.

nsh

From many quarters -- some of them new -- your government is again being assailed with advice to order a pause in the Northern bombing in Vietnam, in the hope that this may lead to meaningful negotiations. The time may come -- I hope it does -- when a change of signals from the other side will again make a bombing pause a worthwhile experiment. But at the present time, it is more appropriate to set the record straight on this matter of pauses and negotiations.

[ I hope I shall not shock you by saying that I have known for a long time how to get negotiations immediately -- at any rate in theory. And I hope, too, that when I reach that aspect of the problem, you will heartily agree with me that negotiations on the terms set by Hanoi are not to be desired by a single decent American.

But this is a complex story, which has been mainly reconstructed with great care, and beyond persuasive challenge, from the numerous enemy documents our brave men have captured on the field of battle; and it is better to begin at the beginning. Briefly, there were two stages in Hanoi's first response to the American decision to keep our solemn pledges to South Vietnam. In the first stage, after the intervention of American troops on the ground in the summer of 1965, the central committee of the North Vietnamese Communist party considered what to do next -- the Viet Cong in the South never seem to have had any say at all in the matter. On this occasion, the Chinese Communist government pressed the Hanoi leaders to adopt a sharply revised war strategy, and the Hanoi Politburo perhaps also included some advocates of this course of action. The proposed revision of strategy (also called for in such circumstances by the North Vietnamese doctrine covering this kind of war) would have

meant fragmenting many of the big units that were already in the field in the South -- the divisions and regiments in fact -- and giving the main emphasis to small unit guerrilla warfare until a more favorable opportunity. In the upshot, the Chinese advice was rejected for reasons which are debatable. Probably the decision was strongly influenced by the morale effects of following the Chinese program, which was to fight on "for seven years," after which the Chinese said they would be ready to come to the aid of North Vietnam. That autumn, we then began to receive informal intimations from Soviet sources that the Hanoi leaders could be induced to come to the negotiating table, if only I would order a long pause in the Northern bombing. There was no formal promise or commitment, but, the intimations were very strong and very numerous. Accordingly, I ordered a pause of more than a month, beginning in the Christmas season of 1965. We now have clear evidence that the Soviets tried hard to make their intimations become realities, by urging the Hanoi leaders to go to the negotiating table without further delay. But this Soviet advice was also quite flatly rejected.

Such is the needed background for an understanding of the decisions of the meeting of the central committee of the North Vietnamese Communist party that occurred at some time in the winter of 1965, and passed what was called "Resolution Twelve". We have no precise text of Resolution Twelve, but we now know many very important elements of its contents, from voluminous captured documents on at least the level, say, of messages from Secretary McNamara to General Westmoreland. To begin with, Resolution Twelve

confirmed the summer decision to go forward with the big unit war -- the war of regiments and divisions, already at that time mainly sustained by North Vietnamese regular troops covertly invading South Vietnam. It further confirmed the decision not to negotiate, at least until "victory" had been won. But this "victory" that was stated to be the absolutely essential prelude to talks, was defined in peculiar way. It was to be -- and I quote from the documents -- "the annihilation of a brigade, or at least a battalion of American troops". In other words, what was sought was a sort of Dienbienphu, which the Hanoi leaders evidently expected to create a favorable negotiating climate. Thank God, no such "victory" has yet been won. But I would have you note, very carefully indeed, that the Hanoi leaders long ago concluded that they would not negotiate before such a "victory" -- before this hoped-for annihilation of a whole American unit, which they believed, following analogies from their own past, would paralyze the United States with fear and dismay. I think the Hanoi leaders misread the American character; for if we ever have a serious reverse on the field of battle -- and pray God we do not -- I believe the response will be altogether different. But it must also be noted that to put it in mildest terms, the Hanoi leaders' prior requirement for going to the negotiating table, as decided by them, was pretty cold-blooded. And finally, I would have you note that if you had a government mad, cruel and authoritarian enough to have plotted to meet Hanoi's requirement by sacrificing a U. S. unit, we might by now have been at the negotiating table for many months.

Nor does the story end there; for in that winter of 1965, the Hanoi leaders looked even further ahead, to the new phase that they hoped would open when they had won their "victory," and had

therefore begun to negotiate. This phase was characterized -- and again I quote from the documents -- as "fighting while negotiating." The documents make it abundantly clear that a great deal more importance was attached to the fighting than to the negotiating. Indeed, "negotiating" was described, <sup>the documents</sup> in this, as a "tactic" to exploit the prior "victory". And the documents also make it clear that the phase of "fighting while negotiating" was therefore expected to lead to "complete victory," meaning the subjugation of South Vietnam.

Such then was the enemy's actual policy formally adopted by the North Vietnamese Communist Party, concerning the right timing of negotiations, and the right way to proceed if and when negotiations should be opened. As soon as the policy had been communicated to the Southern headquarters, known as Central Office South Vietnam, it was obediently accepted there. We know that this whole policy, as above outlined, was again reviewed, and we infer that it was confirmed, at another meeting of the central committee of the North Vietnamese Communist party which took place at some time last winter. This meeting passed "Resolution Thirteen." Concerning Resolution Thirteen our evidence is more skimpy. But it is enough to indicate that doubts were already rising about North Vietnam's ability to sustain the kind of war that they were still trying to fight at that time. For example, according to one document, it was decided that the whole matter was to be reconsidered at once in the event of the U. S. troop commitment reaching 600,000 men. But there is not a hint, in any of the evidence, that there was any change of negotiating policy.

We are beginning to suspect, finally, that those rising doubts in Hanoi may have led to a decision this summer to change the long-standing pattern of the war. There is evidence~~in~~ fragmentary as yet, that there has been still another Central Committee meeting, which passed a Resolution 14. We must wait and see what the new pattern may be---although we may be confident that any change made will reflect North Vietnam's increasing difficulty in carrying the burden in the South on the old basis. We still have not a particle of evidence, meanwhile, of any change whatever in the distinctly grim but formally adopted negotiating policy I have already outlined.

To this I would add two further points. In the hope of promoting negotiations, and on the basis of all sorts of intimations from UN and other sources, I have at different times since Christmas, 1965, ordered five additional bombing pauses of varying durations. None has had any result. Until the signals from the other side change a bit, I see no reason to repeat an experiment which has proved useless six times in a row. Nor can I ignore the central fact that "fighting while negotiating" is the enemy's own description of the phase that is to begin when and if we ever go to the table together. If negotiations are to be a mere "tactic", solely intended to give the other side a fighting advantage, I cannot in good conscience and with due regard for our men in the field go forward on that basis. Precisely because the enemy purpose is "fighting while negotiating", your government has always insisted that any really prolonged suspension of bombing would have to be paralleled or reciprocated by a comparable step taken by Hanoi, such as the stoppage of the flow of Northern regular troops into South Vietnam. I am sorry that this statement has been so long. The facts are complex, and although almost all of them have been declassified long ago, they still need to be set forth in detail because no one seems to be aware of them.

I shall now be glad to answer questions

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In the process of this general uprising there may be a coalition government. The U. S. troops must withdraw. The coalition government may include a non-revolutionary element as president. But he must follow the essential line of action as stipulated by the Front... If a coalition government is formed and the chairman is not a comrade of ours what will be the consequences?... The Front will be the core element but we are not strong enough now to deal them a lethal blow. A coalition government opens the way to attaining our revolutionary goals... To all appearances, it is a coalition government but its real powers lie in our hands. And the government must be on the side of the Front's stand and follow the lines of the revolution's policy. We must take risks and form a coalition government without having to wait until the Americans have completely pulled out.

Extract from Saigon 544, November 8, 1967

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By iss, NARS, Date 1-18-84

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