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INFORMATION

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Friday, November 17, 1967
5:10 p.m.

free file

Mr. President:

This is not required reading.

But, if you have time, you
might be interested in some follow-on
questions we put to Maurer on his
Hanoi trip, and his answers.

W. W. Rostow

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WWRostow:rln

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E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4(b)
White House Guidelines, Feb. 24, 1983
By rg, NARA, Date 12-4-91

November 15, 1967

Bucharest, Romania, 718

To the Secretary from Ambassador Richard H. Davis

Prime Minister Maurer received me for 2 hours on the morning of November 15. Also present were Acting Foreign Minister Macovescu and an interpreter. Maurer had before him the handwritten paper containing questions I had handed Macovescu on November 5.

Maurer read and answered questions seriatim.

Question: Did Hanoi ask for cessation of bombardment?

Answer: Yes and no. In explanation, Maurer went on to say that both in his talks with Hanoi and on other occasions, Hanoi has said that permanent and unconditional cessation of bombardment is necessary before talks can start. This is also the Rumanian viewpoint. He left Vietnam convinced that this was Hanoi's view. Hanoi more or less presented this view in the statement by their Foreign Minister in January 1966 although it was "more hazily" expressed in this statement and more linked with other things. Maurer continued that the objective of his discussions was that cessation of bombardment must lead to negotiations without interrupting armed actions in South Vietnam. Obviously, there existed the possibility of reaching a solution because essential points of the North Vietnamese position are based on the 1954 Geneva accords, just as the essential points of President Johnson's position are based on Geneva. Thus, there is a basis for discussions. Certainly there may be certain nuances how one side or the other understands provisions of the Geneva accords, but this is why talks should be held to bring all aspects to a common denominator.

Maurer said this justified his first assertion that the reply was "yes". "But why," Maurer asked, "did I also say "no"? Because during these discussions there was not one single moment when the people to whom we talked referred to this as their desire -- only a necessity resulting from respect for international norms, for sovereignty of North Vietnam and it was presented as a practical possibility to bring matters to discussion. Maurer concluded this is why his reply was made in such a "circumstantial manner, because I want my reply to be clear and definite."

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E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4

NIJ 94-480

By Clb, NARA, Date 1-17-95

Question: Did Hanoi use the words permanently or unconditionally?

Answer: Yes. Maurer said the French word "definitiverment" had been used for "permanent".

Question: Did Hanoi differentiate (as it has in the past) among contacts, talks and negotiations and which word did they use to describe the discussions that would take place after the stopping of the bombing?

Answer: Maurer replied this was not touched upon in Hanoi. He only touched upon subjects of discussions which would lead, if possible, to a cessation of war and settlement of the conflict in Vietnam. No differentiation was made between these words. The only reference was to discussions which would lead to a solution of conflict and "I did not notice any nuances" in the position of North Vietnam. The goal is political settlement based on essential points of the Vietnamese and, "as I understand it, President Johnson's viewpoint" that the right of the South Vietnamese people to determine freely and of their own accord their destiny must be recognized.

Question: Was it clear that the stopping of bombing would be followed by talks within a short time?

Answer: Maurer replied that there was a rather longer discussion on this point because North Vietnam's viewpoint was that a "certain lapse of time" should pass between cessation of bombardment and the start of discussions. He said, "We tried to show them that it was not quite necessary for this lapse of time. I should like to say in this regard that my impression is that at the end of our talks, North Vietnam adhered to their original viewpoint, i. e., a certain lapse of time should ensue. We talked quite a lot about this. Perhaps they have certain reasons better understood by them than by us."

Here Maurer said he would like to interject his own opinion. Should North Vietnam adhere to this position, nevertheless, cessation of bombing would constitute a start of friendly actions upon North Vietnam in order to make this interval as short as possible. "I think there would be many states, not only Rumania, and not only socialist countries, who would be ready to exert pressure by friendly advice on North Vietnam to follow cessation of bombing by something to shorten interval between this and the start of discussion." Maurer concluded that though this was personal reflections, he wished to emphasize that there were many socialist and other countries who could have a certain influence on North Vietnam.

Question: What indications were there of the matters that would be taken up at the talks?

Answer: "None. I avoided discussing such subjects and I continue to do so. I am not mandatory of either North Vietnam or the U. S. In doing what I did, I did not defend either the U.S. (which doesn't need it) or North Vietnam (though I wish to defend it): What made us go to Hanoi? Our friendly relations with Hanoi are quite obvious and our friendship grows greater so long as those events go on and on. So we decided to go to Hanoi to discuss these events as I described to you last time. We agreed we should meet from time to time to consult each other. Moreover, I had the advantage of talks with President Johnson and Secretary Rusk. I thought I noted something very positive in these discussions which led me to the following absurd conclusion."

Maurer continued, "Here are two people who are in 75 percent agreement and yet are fighting to the death on a question on which they are actually in agreement. I told myself when there is such a wide basis for discussion, it is better to think of Talus rather than rely on weapons to remove things which they are not yet in agreement upon. I presented the American position as described to me by President Johnson and Secretary Rusk and I showed this accorded essentially with the 1954 Geneva agreements, i. e., to insure for the South Vietnamese people the right to decide absolutely freely their destiny. I know the North Vietnamese stand was exactly the same and thought this provided a wide basis for discussions. Certainly there are nuances of difference -- the way Americans think South Vietnam should decide their own destiny and the way North Vietnam thinks. But discussions are really meant to clear up these nuances. Existence of such a wide basis for discussions entitles one to think more of a political solution than a military solution".

Continuing, Maurer said, "I argued with myself that 'certainly one can say the Americans are lying and would not actually act as they say'. I argued with myself: 'This may be so, though there is no reason to believe so. On the contrary, I may have reasons that are otherwise, i. e., to give credit to the leader of such a great state as the U. S.' But again, reasoning absurdly: 'Americans may have lied to me, but what is the best way to check whether it is true or untrue? This way is to begin discussions.'"

Question: What was Hanoi's reaction to Maurer's request that it "categorically" declare its readiness to begin talks after the stopping of the bombing? (Usual Democratic Republic of Vietnam formulation is that talk "could" follow bombing halt.)

Answer: Maurer replied that their discussions on this topic were rather long and they ended with a North Vietnamese statement that it seemed to them a "Rumanian point of view as presented was a logical one and they would think about it and how it could be practically implemented". Maurer also said they had not been so punctilious about certain words, but his idea as presented to Hanoi was that it should state clearly that if bombing ceases, then talks would start. "Since it and North Vietnam said 'your stand is a logical one', I can only understand that such a statement must be made from North Vietnam's own words. I did not think of formulation for such a declaration because of the nature of our discussions. Moreover, there was no evidence that North Vietnam had thought of formulation. We discussed certain ideas and the result is that North Vietnam understood the necessity of assertion of a clear stand in regard to negotiations."

Question: Is the expectation that fighting will continue in South Vietnam concurrently with negotiations Rumanian or North Vietnamese and, if North Vietnamese, what is the reasoning behind their expectation?

Answer: Maurer asserted he did not discuss reasoning for common acceptance of this expectation but remarked that North Vietnam's standpoint might have some different nuances as compared with his own. His own viewpoint is that while it is easy for the U.S. to mobilize or disband great military force in Vietnam, on the side of the North Vietnamese, this is completely different. They need more than 48 hours to mobilize or disband their forces. This was no secret. This was not the first time 'strategy' of popular war is being discussed. Maurer asserted that it was quite logical that military actions would be ended only when discussions created for both sides certainty of mutually acceptable conditions. "This is reason why I believe military actions and political discussions will continue in parallel."

Question: Is North Vietnam agreed with Rumania that the basic provisions of the 1954 Geneva Accords provided real basis for discussions? If so, can Maurer provide any specific indication of how the North Vietnamese view basic provisions?

Answer: Maurer stated that North Vietnam has always asserted that the 1954 Geneva Accords provide real basis for negotiations. This is something which constantly appears in statements issued by leaders of North Vietnam and the National Liberation Front. "Deliberately we did not discuss any subject which might be the subject of negotiations between the two sides. This is for the Vietnamese and Americans."

Question: What did Hanoi indicate as its conception of conditions under which South Vietnamese people could decide their own destiny?

Answer: Maurer said he did not ask, as he did not ask President Johnson, about U. S. conceptions. (Comment: Here for the first and last time he mentioned the name of North Vietnamese Prime Minister Phan Van Dong as a participant in talks.)

Question: What "special ties" between South Vietnam and the U. S. did North Vietnam see as possibly emerging as a result of talks ending conflict?

Answer: Maurer said that if South Vietnam decided to remain a separate state, this would mean it could establish not only diplomatic but economic, cultural, etc., ties with many states of its own choosing, including the U. S.

Question: What is the basis for Maurer's distinction between the North Vietnamese leaders who use their own brains and those who make judgments under Chinese influence? What underlies his judgment that Chinese influence on North Vietnam "from war viewpoint" is diminishing? What "elasticity" in the position of the U. S. Government does Maurer suggest would strengthen independent elements in North Vietnam?

Answer: Replying, Maurer said, "I am basing myself on 65 years' experience of life." He continued that there was complete unity of North Vietnamese leadership concerning securing for the South Vietnamese people the right to decide their own destiny, but he thought it logical there would be nuances in their way of thinking which would be determined by the fact that "some of them have wider liberty in their thinking while others have a more influenced pattern of thinking."

Here, Maurer paused and said he would like to say something very important, though he was aware of the risk in imparting to us his views: "My firm impression is that at present in North Vietnam there are men in the leadership holding the most responsible positions who enjoy great liberty in their thinking." At this juncture, Maurer, with a somewhat wry smile, remarked "What would Chou En Lai say if he knew what I told you? What would the North Vietnamese leadership say? What would happen to relations between Rumania, China, and North Vietnam if they knew?"

As regards what underlies Maurer's judgment that Chinese influence on North Vietnam "from war viewpoint" is diminishing, Maurer said he would prefer not to answer; there was great risk for Rumanian Government policy here and exclaimed "Think what would happen if China or North Vietnam knew I admitted this affirmation. But I said this and I stick to it. Why did I tell you this?

Because I think this is a 'commanding' thing on the part of he who wishes to obtain certain results. For this reason I said it was logical that the U. S. should heed this fact; that policy should be flexible enough in order to allow free thinking people to develop willingness to adhere to such ways of thinking."

To the question of what "elasticity" in the position of the U. S. Government does Maurer suggest would strengthen independent elements in North Vietnam, Maurer replied that cessation of bombing is cried out everywhere. It would constitute an act of great political wisdom. Maurer said also he was not taking the liberty of trying to give lessons to leaders of the U. S., but he thought it was good to say what he had told us frankly and openly. He believed leaders of the U. S. have wisdom and insight to see what in his thinking might contribute to peace and interests of the U. S. itself.

Question: What further information can Maurer provide as to North Vietnam's views on reunification of Vietnam?

Answer: Maurer simply replied he had nothing to add to what he had already said on this subject.

Question: To what extent did North Vietnam leaders authorize Maurer to give report to the U. S. Government?

Answer: "Absolutely none", Maurer replied. "It was my own exclusive responsibility." Maurer then explained at some length why he had done this. Essentially, because he believed there exist conditions which can lead to political solution. Existence of conflict, troubles, many important things in which Rumania is interested. Especially after New York and Washington discussions, Maurer was confident the U. S. Government was interested in a solution.

He went to Hanoi to explain that a common basis existed for discussions to end hostilities. He was far from thinking in Hanoi that he would inform the U. S. Government of his discussions there, but in the end and upon further reflection, he thought it important to move this unhappy situation toward a more reasonable solution. He was not pushed by North Vietnam but acted solely on his own initiative. It might be that North Vietnam would reproach him greatly for this, but objectively, he believes a reasonable solution is near.

Maurer stated that subsequent to his visit in Hanoi, the Rumanian Government has not received any indication of Hanoi's reaction to the President's September 29 San Antonio formulation. In answer to my question, he stated flatly that Rumanians had not participated in discussions on Vietnam during their recent visit to Moscow.

Maurer wished to thank the President for the information given him. As regards figure of 50,000 regular soldiers of the North Vietnamese Army in South Vietnam, he remarked somewhat humorously that he appreciated objectivity of this information and now at least he knows they were ten times less in numbers than Americans in South Vietnam. He added that perhaps there are some North Vietnamese regular troops, maybe 50,000, 150,000, or over.

At the conclusion, Maurer spoke again at some length about the risk taken in imparting this information to the U. S. Government. With particular reference to the forthcoming Harriman talks, he said if conversations were not in complete sincerity, then their value would be diminished. He conceded that these conversations could be publicly defended but nevertheless, there was a risk that they could be used against Rumania. He was not concerned particularly with his own personal standing.

Note: I did not pose the query of what further role Maurer anticipates for Rumania as I thought this might best be discussed during Harriman visit.