

*Pres file*70
Wednesday, February 14, 1968 -- 8:50 a.m.

Mr. President:

I have informed Sec. Rusk, who will be working on the lines of the proposed backgrounder to take the initiative away from U Thant.

Here are my initial thoughts which I shall make available to Sec. Rusk.

1. As you know, since last summer we have been ~~exploring~~, through various intermediaries, the terms under which peace might be negotiated in Vietnam. In particular, an effort was made to see if the so-called Trinh formula was consistent with the President's San Antonio formula.

2. Those efforts have yielded no constructive result.

3. In particular, Hanoi apparently is not prepared to accept our assumption that, if bombing of the north should stop, no advantage would be taken of that situation.

4. In this connection, we must take fully into account what has gone on since the attack on the cities during Tet and what is happening right now. The Communists, exploiting the Tet holiday, sought to overthrow the government in the cities and towns and to disintegrate the armed forces of Vietnam. They tried to kill the military commanders, hoping that their forces, somewhat depleted by Tet leave, would melt away. They hoped that the people in the cities would join in a general uprising against the government. None of these things happened: the people did not join the VC; the government behaved with unity and vigor; the attack on the cities was turned back mainly by the efforts of the armed forces of Vietnam, who took two-thirds of the casualties and fought exceedingly well.

5. Meanwhile, Hanoi has been assembling, day after day, very large forces south of the demilitarized zone, for what Ho Chi Minh calls the Route 9 offensive. Its objective is clearly to take and hold the northern part of South Vietnam. We are not going to let this happen. These forces are not South Vietnamese; they are North Vietnamese. They are not guerrilla or Popular Forces-seeking ~~reform~~. They are regular army troops under Hanoi's direct control.

6. Any proposals for negotiation at the present time must take fully into account the illegal infiltration of forces going on through Laos and the flagrant violation of the demilitarized zone as well as the clear intent of Hanoi in the DMZ area as well as elsewhere along the borders of South Vietnam.

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W. W. Rostow