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By [initials] NARA Doc 138-54

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FM AMBASSADOR BOWLES NEW DELHI 242
TO THE WHITE HOUSE, FOR THE PRESIDENT
COPY TO SECRETARY RUSK (WHITE HOUSE)

AT THIS PARTICULARLY DECISIVE MOMENT, I AM SURE THAT YOU ARE
NOT LACKING IN SUGGESTIONS REGARDING VIETNAM. MY ONLY VALID REASON
FOR ADDING TO THIS FLOW IS THE FACT THAT THE PROPOSAL I HAVE IN MIND
MAY ENABLE YOU TO APPROACH THE SITUATION FROM A SOMEWHAT DIFFERENT
ANGLE.

BY WAY OF BACKGROUND I SHALL FIRST TOUCH BRIEFLY ON A DISCUSSION
I HAD WITH PRESIDENT TITO IN NEW DELHI A FEW WEEKS AGO, MUCH OF
WHICH DEALT WITH VIETNAM.

DURING THIS CONVERSATION I ASKED TITO WHETHER HE THOUGHT THE
SOVIET UNION WAS GENUINELY INTERESTED IN PEACE IN VIETNAM OR WOULD
PRIVATELY PREFER TO SEE THE FIGHTING CONTINUE. TITO EXPRESSED HIS
CONFIDENCE THAT THE SOVIETS ARE ANXIOUS TO FIND A WAY TO A MUTUALLY
ACCEPTABLE PEACE SETTLEMENT BUT ARE SOMEWHAT LIMITED IN THE ROLE
THEY CAN PLAY.

HE THEN TURNED THE QUESTION AROUND AND SAID "SOME PEOPLE
WONDER IF THE UNITED STATES IS STILL INTERESTED IN PEACE."

IN REPLY, I SAID I WOULD ANSWER HIS QUESTION BY ASKING HIM
TO CONSIDER THE MASSIVE STAKE WHICH THE AMERICAN PEOPLE AND GOVERN-
MENT HAVE IN AN ACCEPTABLE SETTLEMENT AT THE EARLIEST POSSIBLE DATE.
PRESIDENT JOHNSON, I SAID, HAS THREE OVERRIDING PERSONAL OBJECTIVES:

(1) TO ASSURE THE AMERICAN NEGRO THE BENEFITS OF FIRST-CLASS
CITIZENSHIP.

(2) TO REBUILD MATERIALLY AND SPIRITUALLY OUR TENSE, SLUM-RIDDEN
AMERICAN CITIES SO THAT PEOPLE OF ALL RACES AND CREDENTS CAN LIVE TO-
GETHER IN COOPERATION AND MUTUAL RESPECT, AND

(3) TO ESTABLISH A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SOVIET LEADERS
WHICH WILL ENABLE THE TWO GREAT WORLD POWERS INCREASINGLY TO CO-
OPERATE ECONOMICALLY AND POLITICALLY IN FURTHERING THE PEACE AND
STABILITY OF THE WORLD.

AS LONG AS THE VIETNAM WAR CONTINUES, I EMPHASIZED, THESE
THREE CRITICALLY IMPORTANT OBJECTIVES ARE BEYOND YOUR GRASP. HOWEVER,
IF AN ACCEPTABLE SETTLEMENT IS IN SIGHT WELL BEFORE OUR NOVEMBER
ELECTION, YOU COULD BE REELECTED BY A LANDSLIDE, CARRYING WITH YOU
A LIBERAL MAJORITY IN CONGRESS.

ON THE OTHER HAND, I SAID, IF THERE IS NO REASONABLE HOPE FOR
PEACE YOU MAY STILL WIN BUT ONLY AFTER A BITTER, DECISIVE STRUGGLE, WITH
A NARROW MAJORITY AND A CONGRESS WHICH WOULD BE BOTH CONTENTIOUS
AND CONSERVATIVE.

TITO SEEMED PERSUADED BY THESE COMMENTS, AND THE REST OF THE
CONVERSATION WAS CONCERNED WITH WHAT KIND OF SETTLEMENT MIGHT BE
POSSIBLE AND UNDER WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES.

SINCE THEN THE TET OFFENSIVE HAS CHANGED THE SITUATION IN MANY
WAYS AND SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASED OUR DIFFICULTIES. HOWEVER, IN ONE
SENSE, IT HAS HEAVILY underscored THE LIMITS OF MILITARY ESCALATION
WHICH TITO EMPHASIZED TO ME AND IN THIS SENSE HAS REDUCED OUR OPTIONS.

FOR INSTANCE, IF WE ATTEMPT TO BREAK THE PRESENT IMPASSE BY A
MASSIVE INCREASE IN AMERICAN TROOP STRENGTH OR BY AN INVASION OF
NORTH VIETNAM WE WILL BE FORCED TO TAKE ON THE FORMIDABLE RESERVE
ELEMENTS OF THE NORTH VIETNAMESE ARMY, PROBABLY SUPPLEMENTED BY
CHINESE.

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ACROSS CHINA, THEREBY FORCING THE SOVIETS AND CHINESE CLOSER TOGETHER.
THE OBLITERATION OF HANOI BY OUR AIR FORCE WOULD BE PUT DOWN
AS AN ACT OF PURE VENGEANCE.

IN THIS REGARD I MUST REPEAT MY DEEP CONVICTION IN REGARD TO CHINA, WHICH I HAVE MENTIONED IN EARLIER LETTERS AND CABLES AND WHICH WAS underscored by President Tito: ALTHOUGH SOME OF OUR "CHINA WATCHERS" INSIST THAT CHINA IS IMMOBILIZED BY ITS INNER CONFLICTS, I BELIEVE THIS IS A DANGEROUS ASSUMPTION ON WHICH TO BASE OUR POLICIES IN THIS NUCLEAR AGE. AS ONE WHO HAS KNOWN ASIA OVER A SPAN OF MANY YEARS, I DO NOT BELIEVE THAT CHINA, UNDER ANY FORESEEABLE CIRCUMSTANCES, WILL PERMIT A UNITED STATES "VICTORY" IN SOUTH VIETNAM. IF NECESSARY IT WILL INTERVENE TO PREVENT SUCH A VICTORY; IT MAY EVEN INTERVENE TO PREVENT A SETTLEMENT ACCEPTABLE TO US AND HANOI, UNLESS THAT SETTLEMENT IS FIRMLY BACKED BY THE USSR AND A LARGE FRACTION OF WORLD OPINION.

IF CHINA SHOULD BECOME INVOLVED AND THE WAR BEGINS TO SPREAD, THE SOVIET UNION WILL HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO PUT ASIDE FOR THE TIME BEING ITS DIFFERENCES WITH PEKING AND ADD ITS OWN SUPPORT IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER.

THE PRIMARY QUESTION IS HOW TO BREAK THE PRESENT IMPASSE IN A WAY THAT ENABLES YOU TO GO TO THE POLLS WITH A VIETNAM SETTLEMENT (OR REASONABLE PROSPECT OF SUCH A SETTLEMENT) WHICH CAN REASONABLY BE EXPECTED TO PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF THOSE PEOPLE WHO HAVE RELIED ON US.

IT SEEMS CLEAR, FOR THE PRESENT AT LEAST, THAT WE PROBABLY CANNOT NEGOTIATE IN A MEANINGFUL WAY DIRECTLY WITH THE HANOI GOVERNMENT; NOR IS THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT IN A POSITION TO NEGOTIATE DIRECTLY WITH THE NLF.

I SUGGEST THEREFORE THAT WE APPROACH THE PROBLEM FROM A TOTALLY DIFFERENT ANGLE. I HAVE IN MIND THE FOLLOWING STEPS:

A. THROUGH DIPLOMATIC CHANNELS YOU APPROACH THE SOVIET UNION, JAPAN, THE UNITED KINGDOM, INDIA, FRANCE, THE VATICAN, THE UN SECRETARIAT, ETC. WITH THE PROPOSAL THAT YOU ARE PREPARED TO ACCEPT THEIR RECOMMENDATION THAT WE STOP THE BOMBING OF NORTH VIETNAM PROVIDED REPEAT PROVIDED (1) THEY WILL FROM THAT MOMENT ON TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR BRINGING ABOUT MEANINGFUL NEGOTIATIONS;

B. ONCE A SATISFACTORY SETTLEMENT IS NEGOTIATED, THEY WILL JOIN WITH UNITED STATES IN SUPPORTING A POSTWAR ECONOMIC RECONSTRUCTION PROGRAM FOR SOUTHEAST ASIA THAT WILL (1) ASSURE RAPID DEVELOPMENT OF THE AREA AND (2) HELP CREATE A POLITICAL-ECONOMIC STRUCTURE OR SYSTEM THAT WILL ASSURE THAT THE PEACE SETTLEMENT WILL BE DURABLE.

IN PROPOSING SOME SUCH CONSORTIUM-SUPPORTED DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FOR PEACE, YOU COULD REFER TO YOUR EXCELLENT JOHNS HOPKINS SPEECH OF APRIL, 1965. IN ORDER TO COUNTER THE CHARGE THAT YOUR PROPOSAL IS A DEVICE TO ASSURE U.S. ECONOMIC HEGEMONY IN SEA YOU COULD PROPOSE THAT THE PROGRAM BE ADMINISTERED BY THE ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK IN COOPERATION WITH ECAFE.

THE PROGRAM COULD FOLLOW THE LINES OF THE MARSHALL PLAN PROPOSAL BY CALLING ON THE NATIONS THAT ARE DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY INVOLVED TO PROCEED IN THEIR OWN WAY AND AT THEIR OWN PACE STEP BY STEP TO ESTABLISH A COMMON MARKET COVERING THE 100 MILLION PEOPLE OF THIS AREA AND TO DEVELOP THE MEKONG AND RED RIVERS POWER AND IRRIGATION POTENTIAL. A FURTHER POSSIBILITY IS COMBINED POWER GRID THAT WOULD PROMOTE ECONOMIC INTEGRATION AND THUS ACT AS A DETERRENT TO RENEWED FIGHTING.

IN EFFECT, WHAT I AM SUGGESTING IS THAT WE SUPPLEMENT OUR EFFORTS QUIETLY TO TALK HANOI INTO A SETTLEMENT BY CHALLENGING KEY NATIONS WHICH HAVE BEEN PRESSING US TO STOP THE BOMBING TO ASSUME THEIR OWN FULL SHARE OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR BRINGING ABOUT A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT AND THEN IN HELPING TO ADMINISTER AND TO GUARANTEE THAT SETTLEMENT.

AT BEST THIS APPROACH MIGHT ENABLE YOU TO LAY THE GROUNDWORK FOR A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT BETWEEN NOW AND SEPTEMBER, AN ACCOMPLISHMENT WHICH SHOULD ASSURE YOU A MASSIVE MAJORITY IN NOVEMBER, A COOPERATIVE LIBERAL CONGRESS AND FOUR FULL YEARS TO ACHIEVE THE THREE OBJECTIVES WHICH I ASSURED TITO ARE CLOSEST TO YOUR HEART.