

INFORMATION

~~TOP SECRET~~Monday, March 25, 1968 -- 2:25 p.m.
Pres file

Mr. President:

As you can see, Sec. Rusk was already rolling when Harry McPherson's suggestion arrived.

I had earlier this morning transmitted your desire for a positive proposal.

As background to this proposal, you should be aware that the enemy forces are maneuvering into position for simultaneous attacks in the western highlands, Hue, Quang Tri, as well as Khe Sanh. Moreover, there is very heavy movement of men and materiel on the infiltration trails.

If the offer came before they had launched their attacks, you would, in effect, be giving them a chance to draw back. If, as we suspect, they do not draw back, we would be in a position to fight the unsought battle against the major North Vietnamese units, flat out.

The next natural moment for initiative would come, as I have suggested, in May.

W. W. Rostow

WWRostow:rln

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Authority NSC Ltr. 3-31-80
By leg/rg, NARA, Date 4/1/92~~TOP SECRET~~

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7. The "areas which are integrally related to the battlefield" would presumably be at least as far north as Vinh. Bombing below that area should be intensive and without wraps.

S:DRusk:ml
3/25/68

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COMMENTS ON THE ATTACHED DRAFT

1. For the next month or so the weather in the Hanoi-Haiphong area would mean that the proposal would not make a major difference from a military point of view.
2. Full bombing would be resumed if there were a major attack on Khe Sanh or a second round of attacks on the cities.
3. We would not send Ambassadors rushing all over the world to convert the bombing action into negotiations but would simply sit back and wait for Hanoi to respond.
4. We should notify Prime Minister Wilson in advance in order that he can test the Soviet Union about the convening of the two Co-Chairmen (and perhaps the three members of the ICC) to be available to talk to any interested parties about the possibilities of a peaceful settlement.
5. It would shift away from theological debates about words and put the problem on the de facto level of action. If Hanoi took no corresponding military action, the bombing would be resumed.
6. It would be very important for us not to embroider the statement with all sorts of "conditions" or "assumptions." Just take the action and see whether anybody is able to make anything out of it.
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After consultation with our allies, I have directed that U.S. bombing attacks on North Viet-Nam be limited to those areas which are directly related to the support of their forces invading South Viet-Nam. No reasonable person could expect us to fail to provide maximum support to our men in combat.

Whether this step I have taken can be a step toward peace is for Hanoi to determine. We shall watch the situation carefully.

S:DRusk:ml
3/25/68

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THE SECRETARY OF STATE
WASHINGTON

March 25, 1968

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

My own mind is running very close to that of Harry McPherson about a possible peace move. The attached papers contain the essence of the suggestion I wanted to discuss with the "wise men." In detail, I have the following observations on Harry's very interesting suggestion:

1. Rather than our sending representatives to Geneva and Rangoon, I would prefer putting the monkey on the back of the two co-chairmen to get in touch with both sides to see what is possible.
2. A simple condition for stopping the bombing all together might be the withdrawal back into North Viet-Nam of all North Vietnamese forces in the two northernmost provinces of South Viet-Nam and the demilitarization of the DMZ.
3. Otherwise, the McPherson suggestion is a very constructive one. It would require careful coordination with Bunker who would need to get the South Vietnamese on board.

Dean Rusk

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Authority, State/la 3/13/79

By ep/ky, NARA, Date 4/16/82