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Chapter 39

EFFORTS TOWARD NEGOTIATION - THE TRUCE PERIODS 1966

Although the peace offensive appeared to have failed and US bombing of targets in NVN was resumed on 31 January, President Johnson persisted in his efforts to arrive at a negotiated solution in the Vietnam War. Neither side changed its position substantially during 1966, although there were constant restatements of these positions by official spokesmen. The public exchanges became weapons in a propaganda battle being fought for world opinion. Underlying the propaganda aspect, however, was a serious effort by the United States to convey to the other side the sincerity of its intentions and to convince the enemy of the desirability of negotiation. At the same time the United States had to avoid implying any prior concessions that could, if talks developed, limit its negotiating flexibility. Therefore, US officials prepared their statements with great precision to make as clear as possible the exact position of the United States on such matters as a bombing halt or withdrawal of forces. At the same time, in a continuing effort to determine the enemy's intentions, US officials weighed every official communist statement with extreme care, searching for subtleties in meaning and possible changes in emphasis that might reflect a relaxation or shift in position.

Aside from public exchanges in speeches, interviews, communiques, and published correspondence, the United States made secret efforts to establish fruitful contacts with NVN. Various initiatives sponsored by third countries continued during 1966. Occasionally these produced a slight positive reaction from the communist side, giving rise to some hope of finally bringing the problems to the conference table. More often, however, the initiatives elicited little or no evidence that the enemy intended to change his stand.

Apparently the military successes scored by US, GVN, and FWMA forces in the last quarter of 1965 caused a change in the communist strategy. At conferences in December 1965, Hanoi's leaders reportedly developed a new politico-military

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strategy for conducting the war and for dealing with its international aspects. Militarily, the strategy called for maintaining a continuous threat by VC/NVA forces in RVN, avoiding combat except under favorable conditions, and then fighting only for limited objectives. The essence of this strategy would be to support a prolonged war of attrition. The objective would be to outlast the United States, and to convince the United States that it could not win militarily and must eventually settle on terms favorable to Hanoi. As part of this strategy, the war would be conducted without a specific timetable, negotiations would be avoided unless they could be conducted from a position based on significant military successes, and an effort would be made to limit the risks of an expanded war throughout Southeast Asia.¹

Understandably, then, the President's peace offensive and the continuing efforts of the United States to achieve a reasonable political settlement of the war were ineffective throughout 1966.

The President continued his efforts, however, because of growing opposition to the war at home and abroad. At home, US policy remained under attack by political and religious leaders, by important segments of the press and other news media, and by a large variety of vociferous quasi-official and private organizations. Many of these cast the United States in the role of an aggressor in Vietnam, and contended that the United States was not serious in trying to bring about a peaceful settlement. The President was particularly sensitive to and increasingly concerned by Congressional opposition to US policy toward Vietnam. Among officials of neutral and friendly governments, the lack of real understanding and appreciation of the US motives and of the nature of the communist aggression was more and more apparent. Pronouncements on the subject of a settlement in Vietnam by President de Gaulle of France and Prime Minister Ghandi of India were generally unsympathetic to the US position and served to cloud the issues and strengthen the resolve of the enemy.

1. (TS-GP 1) OJCS SEA CABIN Study Group, "Study of the Political-Military Implications in Southeast Asia of the Cessation of Aerial Bombardment and the Initiation of Negotiations (S)," 22 Nov 67, OJCS File, Vietnam Negotiations.

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The Role of the United Nations

At the same time that he announced renewal of bombing on 31 January, the President instructed Ambassador Goldberg to request an immediate meeting of the United Nations Security Council and to present for its consideration a draft US resolution, calling for immediate discussions, without preconditions, among the "appropriate interested governments." The purpose of these discussions would be to arrange a conference aimed at the application of the Geneva Accords of 1954 and 1962 and "the establishment of a durable peace in Southeast Asia."²

On 1 February the UNSC met to consider the US draft resolution. The government of NVN announced on the same day that any resolutions passed by the UNSC would be invalid since only the Geneva Conference was competent to deal with US military actions in Vietnam. The UNSC decided to put the Vietnamese question on its agenda by a vote of 9-2, the minimum majority necessary. It was obvious that there was substantial opposition to consideration of the question even though the majority had been obtained. The United States, realizing this fact, announced on 10 February that it would not press for UNSC action, and none was taken.³

Throughout 1966, the personal initiatives of UN Secretary General U Thant were more significant than attempts to discuss Vietnam in either the UNSC or General Assembly. On 9 March, the day after particularly heavy US bombing raids, Secretary General U Thant issued a strong appeal for the cessation of bombing. He said that he was deeply concerned over the escalation of the fighting in Vietnam. He stated that any move to bring the parties closer to negotiations must include cessation of the bombing of NVN, substantial reduction of all military activities in the RVN, and the participation of the NLF in any peaceful settlement.

2. (C-GP 4) JCS Hist Div, "Analysis of Public Statements by Officials of the US Government Concerning Conditions for Terminating Hostilities in Southeast Asia," 1 Apr 67 (hereafter cited as Historical Analysis of Statements).

3. Keesing's, 1965-1966, p. 21358.

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U Thant said at a press conference on 6 April that if peace was to be achieved, all parties had to accept the concept of a unified, independent, and nonaligned country guaranteed by all the major powers. In his view the UNSC could not be involved in the Vietnamese question because, of those directly involved, only the United States was a member of the UN. Hanoi was afraid that in the UNSC the 1954 Geneva Agreements would be diluted; and Communist China believed, rightly or wrongly, that there was a usurper holding its seat. It would therefore appear as an accused before "a jury one of the members of which was inimical."

In a speech on 24 May, U Thant again affirmed the three-point peace program he had put forward on 9 March, repeating that peace could only be restored by a return to the Geneva Agreements. He said that as a preparatory measure it would be necessary to "start scaling down" military operations and to agree to discussions that included "the actual combatants."⁴

Conditions for Negotiations

The United States continued to express its willingness to negotiate and continued to attempt to persuade the GVN to accept negotiations. On 5 February, President Johnson, the Secretary of Defense, and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, met in Honolulu with GVN leaders. Ambassador Lodge, Admiral Sharp, and General Westmoreland were also present. The RVN delegation was headed by General Thieu and Air Vice Marshal Ky. Although concerned primarily with economic matters and rural construction, the conference did result in a joint statement to the effect that both governments regretted "the total absence of a present interest in peace on the part of the Government of North Vietnam. . . . They agreed upon continued diplomatic efforts for peace."

In a separate document known as the Declaration of Honolulu the United States pledged to support free elections in RVN and to give full support to social reforms.

4. Keessing's, 1965-1966, pp. 21360 and 21767.

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The U.S. Government and the Government of Vietnam will continue in the future, as they have in the past, to press the quest for a peaceful settlement in every forum The peace offensive of the U.S. Government and the Government of South Vietnam will continue until peace is secured.

In a press conference in Honolulu, however, Thieu and Ky declared that they could not negotiate with or recognize the NLF and showed little enthusiasm for negotiations with NVN.⁵

Communist leaders had begun mentioning in rather insistent terms in late 1965 that the price the United States would have to pay for Hanoi's agreement even to talk about ways of ending the fighting was a complete halt in the bombing of NVN. On 24 January 1966 Ho Chi Minh sent letters to the governments of various nations, including Great Britain, France, Canada, and the communist countries, in which he laid down Hanoi's conditions for peace. He reiterated the four-point program he had first enunciated in April 1965, emphasizing especially that before negotiations could begin, the United States must withdraw all its troops from RVN, agree to negotiate with the NLF, and unconditionally end the bombing of NVN.⁶

Ending the bombing became the central theme of efforts to bring about some kind of talks between the United States/GVN and the enemy side. It was proposed with increasing frequency, especially by UN Secretary General U Thant. Even US officials came to speak of the bombing as a negotiable matter, under certain conditions. The Joint Chiefs of Staff opposed halting the bombing of NVN merely to secure agreement from the other side that it would negotiate. Throughout 1966 they continued to insist that the United States should rely more on forcing the communists to cease their aggression, rather than trying to persuade them to talk about it.

5. Keesing's, 1965-1966, p. 21359. (S) "Record of Conclusions and Decisions for Further Action, Honolulu Meeting, 23 Feb 66," Encl to (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/783, 28 Feb 66, JMF 9155.3 25 Feb 66.

6. Keesing's, 1965-1966, p. 21356.

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The Chairman told a Senate Committee in late January that it would be both a military and political mistake to agree to end the bombing as a condition for peace talks. Militarily, it would allow the enemy to bring more pressure than ever to bear on the GVN. Politically, it would relieve the pressure on NVN to negotiate. He said that the United States held three military "blue chips" with regard to negotiation. These were the bombing of NVN, the deployment of US-FWMAF, and the withdrawal, under appropriate circumstances, of these forces. "If you permanently stop bombing North Vietnam," General Wheeler told the Committee, "in effect you throw one of your blue chips for negotiation over your shoulder."7

The US position on Hanoi's four conditions for peace was delineated by the Secretary of State before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 18 February. On the first point, elimination of the US military presence in RVN, the Secretary stated that the United States was prepared to withdraw its troops and dismantle its bases "once there is compliance with the Geneva accords by all parties." The United States could also agree with Hanoi's second point, relating to the clauses covering alliances and bases of the Geneva Agreements, under the same conditions. The fourth point specified by Hanoi provided that peaceful reunification be settled by the Vietnamese people without foreign intervention. The Secretary of State observed that the United States found this acceptable if it were "clearly understood that conditions must first be created both in the North and South that will make it possible for truly free elections to be held." It was on Hanoi's third point, however, that the "core of the Communist position" was disclosed. This point provided that "the internal affairs of South Viet-Nam must be settled by the South Vietnamese people themselves in accordance with the program of the National Liberation Front." This really meant that before the communists would "even condescend" to negotiate, the GVN must be overthrown; the NLF, "the creature and agent of Hanoi," must become the sole bargaining representative for the South Vietnamese people; and the RVN must be put under the control of a coalition government formed by the communists and from which the GVN would be excluded. Since these conditions were clearly

7. (U) Transcript of CJCS testimony before Senate Committee on Armed Services, 31 Jan 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 66.

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opposed to the principles behind the US commitment to RVN, the implication was clear in the Secretary's testimony that the United States must reject them. Secretary Rusk did not address the matter of a bombing halt.⁸

Development of Public Opinion

The Secretary of State had spoken on the last day of special hearings on the war in Vietnam by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Senator Fulbright, Chairman of the Committee, was already becoming critical of US policy in Vietnam. While not yet positive the Administration's course was wrong, Fulbright recorded grave reservations.- After these hearings--and possibly because of them--the trend of Congressional speeches and public opinion polls decidedly favored moderation and negotiation. On 19 February, Senator Robert Kennedy undertook what the New York Times termed a "dramatic policy break" with the Administration by suggesting that participation by the NLF in the GVN lay "at the heart" of any negotiated settlement. Ten days later, Senator Wayne Morse introduced a resolution to annul the Tonkin Gulf resolution. It was defeated by a vote of 92-5. During the debate, however, Senator Fulbright strongly pleaded for "accommodation" rather than expanded military action, and proposed an agreement with China for the neutralization of Southeast Asia as a solution to the conflict.⁹

The findings of a Stanford University poll, published in mid-March, indicated considerable public sympathy for the Kennedy-Fulbright suggestions. The sample supported negotiation with the NLF 88 percent to 8 percent, and favored VC participation in the GVN by 52 percent to 36 percent. Unilateral withdrawal was disapproved by 81 percent vs 15 percent, as was gradual disengagement by a margin of 56 percent vs 32 percent. Concerning possible escalations, 38 percent supported and 55 percent opposed any bombardment of North Vietnam's population centers; 45 percent would approve and 46 percent oppose the commitment of 500,000

8. (U) Statement, SecState to Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 18 Feb 66, quoted in Dept of State Bulletin, LIV (7 Mar 66), p. 354.

9. NY Times, 20 Feb 66, 2 Mar 66.

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troops. The survey's sponsors discerned in these results a pattern quite close to the position expounded by former Ambassador George Kennan, rejecting unilateral withdrawal but favoring the adoption of more flexible negotiating positions.¹⁰

The Buddhist rebellion against the GVN brought forth another burst of calls for reappraisal. James Reston believed the moral aspects of US actions had become paramount: "Our arms were provided to fight the aggressors and not to start a civil war. Our promise was to help South Vietnam not to destroy it." Senator Fulbright now judged that "we are . . . intervening in a civil war and our announced objectives are unattainable." Lecturing at Johns Hopkins, the Senator declared America was succumbing to "the arrogance of power" and detected "signs of that fatal presumption . . . which brought ruin to Ancient Athens, to Napoleonic France and to Nazi Germany." Senator Joseph Clark said the current unrest offered an opportunity "to get out with decency;" Senator Richard Russell spurned the domino theory and counselled withdrawal if a majority of Americans so indicated in an opinion poll.¹¹

Opinion surveys demonstrated a sharp decline in the degree of public support accorded to the Administration's policies. A mid-May Gallup poll reported that approval of the President's conduct of the war had for the first time fallen below 50 percent; 47 percent approved, 35 percent disapproved and 18 percent were without opinion. Concurrently, the Louis Harris survey reported that the "good-to-excellent" rating given the President's overall performance stood at 55 percent, down twelve points from January.¹²

Proposals and Counterproposals--March-June

In the spring of 1966, mainly as a result of secret efforts by Canadian officials, Washington and Hanoi seemed for a time to be coming closer to an understanding. On 1 March, in a ceremony marking the fifth anniversary of the

10. NY Times, 15 Mar 66.

11. NY Times, 18 May 66, 5 Apr 66, 22 Apr 66, 29 Apr 66, 4 Jun 66, 26 Apr 66.

12. NY Times, 22 May 66.

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Peace Corps, President Johnson strongly urged renewed efforts to negotiate, and repeated the offer he had first made in April 1965 to include NVN in a "massive effort of reconstruction and development" in Southeast Asia.¹³

A special representative of the Canadian Government visited Hanoi in March to obtain an authoritative clarification of Hanoi's conditions for a negotiated settlement. He reported to the US Department of State that he had found NVN officials "all equally hard and uncompromising" in insisting that the United States accede to the four points and accept the NLF as the sole representative of the people of RVN. However, the Canadian official had detected a slight softening in Hanoi's position when he had talked with Pham Van Dong, Prime Minister of NVN. The Prime Minister had told the Canadian that Hanoi would be prepared to talk with the United States if the latter declared an unconditional and permanent halt to the bombing of NVN. Dong had asked that the Government of Canada convey to the United States the offer on the bombing halt. He had not linked the four points to the bombing halt nor had he discussed the role of the NLF in negotiations. Although he at first had agreed to furnish the Canadian official with an aide-memoire on talks following a permanent halt in bombing, he had later declined to do so, saying there had been a misunderstanding.¹⁴

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On 12 April Secretary of State Rusk stated publicly that the United States "would be ready" to suspend its bombing of NVN as a step toward peace. A few days later Senator Mansfield proposed "a direct confrontation across a peace table." The meeting would include the United States, NVN, Communist China, and "essential elements from the RVN." Presumably, these essential elements would include both the GVN and the NLF. The US Ambassador to the United Nations noted publicly that President Johnson welcomed Mansfield's suggestion. On 22 April, however, Hanoi rejected the proposal, saying that "The hasty approval . . . by the Johnson government" was a "new peace trick" intended to "mislead world opinion, which condemns aggression, and to divert its attention from the intensification of the bombing of the Democratic

13. Dept of State Bulletin, LIV (21 Mar 66), pp. 441-43.

14. (S) Memo of Conversation, Ronning, Bundy et al., 20 Mar 66, Dept of State, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 66.

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Republic of Vietnam." On 26 April Ho Chi Minh, addressing the North Vietnamese National Assembly, repeated his demands for a bombing halt and withdrawal of US/FWMAF.¹⁵

The United States did not consider an unconditional bombing halt. Since there did appear to be some hope for peace talks, however, in March and April the question of just what the United States would accept in return for a cessation of the bombing of the North came under intensive examination and discussion. On 4 May Assistant Secretary of State William Bundy said the issue had always been "whether we would trade a cessation of bombing in the North for some degree of reduction or elimination of Viet Cong and now North Vietnamese activity in the South, or a cessation of infiltration from the North or a combination of both."¹⁶

General Maxwell D. Taylor, now Special Consultant to the President, advised President Johnson on 27 April that because of "all the public discussion of our desire for negotiations," the US public would expect that hostilities would cease as soon as talks began. He cited the Korean negotiations that had dragged on for over two years, during which time the United States stayed on the "passive defensive" to avoid casualties while the enemy attacked at will. He believed that the United States and its allies had received more casualties than they would have had they retained the military initiative.

In Korea, the adversary had had no incentive to come to a prompt settlement. General Taylor believed this pitfall must be avoided in Vietnam. The enemy must be forced to the negotiation table convinced of the need for a prompt settlement, and military pressure must be kept on him until it was reached. He pointed to the danger that Hanoi might suddenly agree to negotiate, provided the United States permanently stopped its bombing of NVN. The US Government would be under great pressure at home and abroad to accept this precondition even though it would seriously prejudice the success of any negotiations.

¹⁵. Keessing's 1965-1966, p. 21766.

¹⁶. (S) Memo, AsstSecState for FE Affairs to SecState, 4 May 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 66.

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General Taylor argued for combining cessation of the bombing and of GVN/US offensive military operations in the RVN as a trade for the complete cessation of VC-NVA incidents and military operations in the South. He would then trade cessation of infiltration from the North for no further increases in US forces. Thereafter, negotiations could move to reciprocal withdrawals of forces. The last problem would be absorbing the remaining VC into the RVN under some sort of amnesty program.¹⁷

In a memorandum to the Secretary of State, Mr. Bundy stated that, although General Taylor's solution would be simple and easily verifiable, it would permit the enemy to set up "enclaves" in RVN and reinforce them so that they might become major bargaining counters for an explicit NLF role in the GVN. Mr. Bundy wanted the asking price for a bombing halt to include a declared cessation of infiltration into South Vietnam. He agreed with General Taylor that the United States should not cease bombing merely in return for enemy willingness to talk. Mr. Bundy recognized the pressures in this direction and suggested that US officials refrain from additional public statements which might highlight the issue and bring about the very pressures "we seek to avoid." There must be something tangible done by the other side in response to a US bombing halt and the United States should not consider another "pause" under existing circumstances. This was generally the line that was followed during the remainder of 1966.¹⁸

Meanwhile the feelers continued. On 27 May, after a visit to Hanoi, the Vice-Premier of Rumania informed the US Ambassador that NVN might accept cessation of bombing as a precondition for negotiations instead of insisting also on immediate withdrawal of US forces from the RVN. On 5 June Ambassador Goldberg summarized US peace negotiation proposals. "There should be a mutual cessation of all types of hostilities on all sides of the conflict; an end both to bombing and to infiltration" He called for a reconvening of the Geneva Conference to reaffirm the Geneva Accords and to

17. (S) Memo, GEN Taylor to Pres, "Assessment and Use of Negotiation Blue Chips," 27 Apr 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 66.

18. (S) Memo, AsstSecState for FE Affairs to SecState, 4 May 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 66.

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"revitalize" them as a basis for peace in Southeast Asia. A State Department spokesman, commenting on the Ambassador's speech, made it clear that the United States did not envisage that a ceasefire should precede negotiations.¹⁹

In response to an intensification of the ground war in Vietnam, at a White House news conference on 18 June, President Johnson underscored US determination to persist "in our present policy. That policy is to bring to bear the ground, naval, and air strength required to achieve our objective. I must observe that this does not mean that we shall not increase our forces or our operations." He pointed to the great losses of the enemy in relation to US/GVN losses and the cost to NVN of air attacks by the United States. Referring to the recent domestic troubles of the GVN with the Buddhists, he warned that the United States would not let political differences with the GVN or domestic differences on policy affect its resolve, but would do whatever was necessary to insure RVN's freedom. The whole statement seemed to be a warning to the enemy not to count on US surrender in RVN.²⁰

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On 21 June Mr. William Bundy met with Canadian officials to assess the results of a US initiative implemented the week before by the Canadian Government on behalf of the United States. This time the Canadian emissary had been given an "oral message" by the US Government to deliver to the government of North Vietnam. The statement had rejected any unilateral cessation of bombing by the United States without some tangible action by the enemy. It had been purposely vague, however, on the role of the NLF, and had not specified what action NVN must take with regard to the military

19. Keessing's, 1965-1966, p. 21767. Commenting on Goldberg's speech, Amb Lodge told SecState that he questioned the wisdom of a conference of the Geneva powers "except a pro forma one," and that he believed the US should avoid discussion of reunification elections as contemplated in the Geneva Agreements without first discussing the matter with the GVN. Amb Lodge also raised the general question of US major policy speeches that might be inconsistent with US commitments and suggested he be consulted before they were delivered. (S-GP 3) Msg, Saigon 5351 to State, 7 Jun 66, JCS IN 25598.

20. Statement by Pres Johnson, 18 Jun 66, Dept of State Bulletin, LV (11)(Jul 66), pp. 42-43.

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activity in the South. In this respect it was more flexible than the US public position. The Canadian official found absolutely no "give" in the Hanoi position already stated; the DRV rejected as impossible any suggestion that it pay a price for a halt in US bombing of NVN. It was generally admitted that the mission had ended in failure, although NVN officials had expressed the wish that the Canadian channel be kept open for further communications.

The Canadian emissary also reported that the North Vietnamese were expecting the United States to bomb Hanoi and Haiphong. Canadian officials generally expressed concern that "any US action that tended to throw the North Vietnamese into the arms" of the CHICOMs would be disastrous. Mr. Bundy stated that the United States had no intention of bombing Hanoi or Haiphong or of mining Haiphong harbor.²¹

Interlude--July-September

Despite Mr. Bundy's statement to the Canadian officials, the United States had already decided on an escalation in the bombing that could be interpreted as bombing Hanoi and Haiphong. In reality, the new bombing that started on 29 June was confined to POL facilities on the outskirts of two cities. Nevertheless, a great wave of protest followed, including charges that the bombing had been directly aimed at NVN's most heavily populated areas and that heavy civilian casualties had been deliberately inflicted. These protests came from many quarters and created increased pressure on the United States to declare a bombing halt. One result was that any serious possibility of talks on negotiations was ended for the time being.

On 26 June the Secretary of State, speaking in Australia, said he saw no prospect for an early peace in Vietnam. On 30 June, in Omaha and Des Moines, the President again warned that attacks on military targets in NVN "will continue to impose a growing burden and a high price on those who wage war against the freedom of their neighbors." Once again, he called for peace talks.²²

21. (S) Dept of State Memo of Conversation, "Visit of Amb Ronning to Hanoi, June 14-17, 1966," 21 Jun 66; (S) Memo for Record, AsstSecState for FE Affairs, "Dinner Meeting with Paul Martin and Other Canadian Officials, June 21, 1966," 22 Jun 66; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 66.

22. Dept of State Bulletin, LV (25 Jul 66), p. 114.

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UN Secretary General U Thant expressed "deep regret" over the US bombing of the POL storage in the "heavily populated areas of Haiphong and Hanoi." He repeated his view that the first step in the search for peace should be an end to the bombing of NVN.

Replying to the Secretary General, Ambassador Goldberg defended the raids in a letter on 30 June. He stated that "repeated and increased efforts" by the US and other governments to bring about negotiations had been answered by NVN with an "increased tempo" in their military buildup and operations against RVN. US pilots, said the Ambassador, had taken great care to hit only military targets, but no such care was being taken by the Viet Cong in their terrorism and assassination of civilians in South Vietnam. He denied that a halt in the bombing of NVN would end the war, and declared that a peaceful solution could be found through the reconvening of the Geneva Conference.²³

In Washington, Senator Fulbright criticized the bombings sharply. It was significant, he said, that none of the NATO allies of the United States had supported the raids. He suggested that the raids appeared to mean that "the only solution we contemplate is the surrender of North Vietnam as the result of a complete military victory." Acting Secretary of State George Ball replied by stating that if Hanoi had responded in any encouraging way to Canada's diplomatic overtures the United States would have altered its pattern of military operations. He expressed the opinion that new pressures on NVN would "speed the move to the conference table."²⁴

In the House of Representatives, the escalation of the bombing prompted 16 Democrats to attack this "profoundly dangerous policy of brinkmanship" and to urge that the Administration return to "a policy of restraint." In the Senate, Mansfield and Robert Kennedy predicted the attacks would harden the enemy's will and delay peace efforts. Among Republicans, Senator Javits of New York pronounced himself "very unhappy" over the bombings; Vermont's Aiken darkly surmised that "some of the people advising the President want to get China into the war" Editorially, the

23. Keessing's, 1965-1966, p. 21768.

24. Ibid.

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New York Times declared that the United States had apparently committed itself to a quest for military victory: "But win what? A destroyed nation and a shattered people?" In the eyes of some, the "credibility gap" had grown to a yawning chasm. Recalling recent official explanations of why the scope of ROLLING THUNDER should not be expanded, James Reston remarked that the Administration "will probably never regain the confidence it has lost in its judgment and veracity." Having done everything he said he would not do, the President "has misled not merely his enemies, but his friends."²⁵

The Soviet Union charged that the bombings showed that US expressions of a desire for peaceful settlement were nothing but "empty words." The Soviet Government warned that it would aid NVN with "political and economic assistance and means of defense on the scale necessary" A hardening of the Soviet position was more evident in August. In early August, Belgian sources reported that the Soviet Military Attache in Belgium had stated, evidently intending the information to be passed to the United States, that the Soviet Government had studied President Johnson's statement of 18 June with great care and interest. The Soviet Union had decided that the United States position was that no negotiated settlement was possible in Vietnam. The Soviet Government intended, therefore, to greatly increase its support of NVN. This support would include shipment of more recent models of SAMs into NVN. The Soviet Attache warned that within two or three weeks the United States would be losing 20 aircraft a day over NVN.²⁶

The remainder of the summer produced few public statements or proposals on peace negotiations. As the summer progressed, however, the idea of an Asian conference to explore the restoration of peace in Vietnam gathered momentum. Early in June the Premier of Ceylon had asked the United States whether he could play a "useful role" in the Vietnamese situation. In reply, the State Department had asked the US Embassies in Saigon, Colombo, and Bangkok for comments on a proposal that the US suggest to the Ceylonese Premier that he call a meeting of Southeast Asian nations "to explore the restoration of peace in VN on the basis of the 1954 and 1962 Geneva Accords."

25. NY Times, 29 Jun 66 and 1 Jul 66.

26. Keessing's, 1965-1966, p. 21771. (S-NOFORN) USM-183-66 to CJCS, 10 Aug 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 66.

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Noting the Premier's "generally friendly disposition to the Free World cause in Vietnam, and his concern about Communist inroads in Southeast Asia," the State Department believed that the Premier might be persuaded to propose a meeting including the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia, in addition to the Buddhist states of Ceylon, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and North and South Vietnam. This would take the question out of the context of a Buddhist meeting, which the United States wished to avoid, and make it a regional effort.²⁷

Ambassador Lodge in Saigon did not favor the idea. He concluded, "Unless there is prior indication that Hanoi is prepared to abandon its aggression in favor of an acceptable negotiated solution, it might be better to leave our exploration of possible routes to negotiations in quieter channels." In the general pessimism that came in June about the possibility of negotiations, the idea was dropped for the time being.²⁸

It was revived early in August by the Foreign Minister of Thailand. At the closing session of the Ministerial Conference of the Association of Southeast Asian States (ASA), composed of Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines, he proposed that the Asian nations take the lead in establishing negotiations for a peaceful settlement in Vietnam and called for an all-Asia conference. There was a generally disappointing reaction to the Thai initiative; only Japan expressed enthusiasm for the idea. On 18 August NVN denounced the proposed conference as "shop-worn merchandise" from President Johnson's "clique." On 24 August President Johnson publicly endorsed the proposal, but cautioned that "we do not want to make it appear that we are trying to direct it or force it."²⁹

27. (S-GP 3) Msg, State 3774 to Saigon (562 to Colombo, 2272 to Bangkok), 6 Jun 66, JCS IN 25360.

28. (S-GP 3) Msg, Saigon 5371 to State, 8 Jun 66, JCS IN 26909.

29. "Background Information Relating to Southeast Asia and Vietnam," S.Com on Foreign Relations, Mar 68, 90th Cong, 2nd Sess (1968), pp. 31-32 (hereafter cited as "Background Information Relating to SE Asia and Vietnam," S.Com on Foreign Relations, Mar 68).

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The idea of an Asian conference did not get off the ground, but US officials recognized that the general theory of an Asian-sponsored settlement had substance and enjoyed considerable philosophical and emotional support. The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, recognized that, in the event a peace conference materialized, the US Government would need a position on control mechanisms to insure observance of the agreement. Therefore, on 11 August 1966 he directed a Joint Staff study of the following issues:

1. The mission of an Asian Control Commission.
2. The membership desired.
3. A comparative analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed commission and the existing ICC.
4. Organization, manning, equipment, deployment, employment of an Asian commission.
5. Special problems posed by Japanese membership, especially Japanese constitutional questions and the impact on Japan's role in Asian security.³⁰

On 10 October the study was sent to the Secretary of Defense, along with a memorandum from the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommending an interdepartmental study group to develop principles and guidelines for an effective inspection and verification system. The Secretary of Defense forwarded the JCS views to the Secretary of State on 11 November 1966. Mr. Rusk replied on 30 November, saying that the JCS recommendation was "timely and sound." He

³⁰. (S-GP 3) CM-1672-66 to D/JS, 11 Aug 66, Encl to JCS 2339/230, 15 Aug 66, JMF 9150 (3 Aug 66).

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offered to appoint a Chairman for such a group and to designate several representatives to serve as members.³¹

New Peace Overtures

President Charles de Gaulle of France visited Cambodia from 30 August to 2 September. During his visit he talked with NVN representatives, and on 1 September delivered a major speech on Vietnam in which he castigated US policy and called for the United States to pledge withdrawal of US forces from Vietnam within a fixed period of time as a prelude to genuine international negotiations. In a joint communique with Prince Sihanouk, he also called for an end to the war in Vietnam, the withdrawal of all foreign troops, and the cessation of "all intervention."³²

The US reply to de Gaulle's statements marked the beginning of a new "peace offensive." In a speech on 5 September, President Johnson said that US troops would "come home" and their bases would be turned over for constructive peacetime purposes as soon as the "vicious aggression" stopped.

To all whom it may concern: If anyone will show me the time schedule when aggression and infiltration and might-makes-right will be halted, then I, as President of this country, will lay on the table the schedule for the withdrawal of all of our forces from Viet-Nam.

31. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-648-66 to SecDef, 10 Oct 66 (derived from JCS 2339/230-1); (S-GP 1) Ltr, SecDef to SecState, 11 Nov 66; (TS-GP 3) Ltr, SecState to SecDef, 30 Nov 66, Att to JCS 2339/230-3; JMF 9150 (3 Aug 66). When subsequently formed, this group included representatives from the Departments of State and Defense and ACDA, under the chairmanship of the Department of State. In September 1967 the group produced and circulated a study, "International Supervision of A Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in Vietnam." (TS-GP 1) Dept of State Policy Planning Council, "International Supervision of a Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in Vietnam," Att to JCS 2472/161, 29 Sep 67, JMF 911/305 (29 Sep 67).

32. Keesing's 1965-1966, p. 21636.

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On the same day Ambassador Goldberg stated:

We will go to Geneva, to Southeast Asia, or anywhere else where an honorable settlement can be negotiated. Our sole aim is to help secure for the people of South Viet-Nam the right to determine their own future free of external interference. When that one aim is accomplished, we are prepared to withdraw our troops.³³

In a speech at the United Nations on 22 September, Ambassador Goldberg also stated that the United States remained ready to negotiate without prior conditions.

We are prepared to discuss Hanoi's four points, together with any points which other parties may wish to raise. We are ready to negotiate a settlement based on a strict observance of the 1954 and 1962 Geneva agreements. . . . We will support a reconvening of the Geneva Conference or an Asian conference, or any other generally acceptable forum.

The United States, in order to remove any obstacles to the beginning of negotiations, was prepared to order a cessation of all bombing the moment it was assured, privately or otherwise, that a bombing halt would be answered promptly "by a corresponding and appropriate deescalation on the other side." The United States stood ready to withdraw its forces "as others withdraw theirs" under effective supervision. As to the place of the Viet Cong in any negotiations, Ambassador Goldberg said that the President had made clear that this was not an "insurmountable problem." He concluded by saying that the US position was not inflexible. In the next month both he and President Johnson followed this same line in several other major speeches. On 24 September, however, both NVN and Communist China categorically rejected the US proposals.³⁴

Other efforts to bring about talks included an experimental cessation of the military activities that had been authorized in the DMZ since July 1966. On 27 September, in

33. (C-GP 4) Historical Analysis of Statements, p. 23.

34. Dept of State Bulletin, LV (10 Oct 66), pp. 518-21. "Background Information Relating to SE Asia and Vietnam," S. Com on Foreign Relations, Mar 68, p. 32.

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response to an ICC request of 19 August, GVN and US forces suspended all military activities in the eastern half of the DMZ. The United States had agreed to the cessation as a first step "in reciprocal actions leading toward effective supervision and verified cessation of all military activity throughout the DMZ." The ICC reestablished its own controls in the eastern portion of the southern half of the DMZ on 28 September, but repeated efforts to enter the northern sector were rebuffed by NVN. The US position on the suspension was "not just to permit ICC patrols in our areas, but more importantly to test NVN willingness to cease its own activities and infiltration." There was no evidence that NVN intended to cooperate with the ICC, so on 13 October the United States and the GVN resumed military activity in the DMZ.³⁵

On 6 October the British Foreign Secretary, Mr. George Brown, also put forward new proposals for peace. He announced that Great Britain, as co-chairman (with the Soviet Union) of the Geneva Conference, was ready to reconvene the Conference at any time. He said that he saw no reason why the NLF could not be represented at the Conference, since the United States had said that the question of the NLF was not "an insurmountable problem." He proposed that if the principle of holding a conference was accepted by both sides, the United States should stop bombing NVN, and both sides should cease sending men and supplies into RVN. As soon as practicable both sides would halt aggressive action in the South. He proposed a political settlement based on the Geneva Accords of 1954, involving free elections, a general amnesty, neutralization of RVN and NVN, simultaneous withdrawal of outside forces from RVN, and a strengthening of the ICC.

Both the GVN and NVN rejected Brown's proposals. Saigon objected to separate NLF representation, although a GVN spokesman said his government would not object to the NLF being represented as part of a NVN delegation. Hanoi stated that Brown was mistaken in believing that a new Geneva Conference was urgent. "What is urgent is for the people of the whole world to demand that the United States should end its aggression."

35. (C-GP 3) Jt State-Def Msg 50755 to Saigon, 20 Sep 66, JCS IN 23550. (C) Msg, State 60469 to Saigon, 6 Oct 66, JCS IN 50296. (S-GP 3) Jt State-Def Msg 60493 to Saigon, 6 Oct 66, JCS IN 50154. (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 5233 to CINCPAC, 13 Oct 66.

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The Soviet Union commented that Brown's plan was unacceptable because "it puts the aggressor and the victim on an equal footing." The British Foreign Secretary met with Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko in New York on 8 and 11 October and subsequently flew to Moscow for further discussions with Mr. Gromyko and Premier Kosygin in mid-November, but in the end nothing came of the UK initiative.³⁶

The Manila Conference

The suggestion of an Asian conference to deal with the problem in Vietnam, first proposed in the summer, culminated in October in an Asian "summit conference" cosponsored by the Philippines, South Korea, and Thailand. President Johnson accepted an invitation to attend on 27 September, and went to the conference on 24-25 October in Manila. The leaders of seven nations participated in the talks: South Korea, Thailand, the Philippines, South Vietnam, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States--all nations fighting as allies in South Vietnam. The purpose of the conference, as stated by President Marcos of the Philippines, was to review the military situation in the RVN, and to "stress the non-military, economic, and political situation and programmes being carried forward by the South Vietnamese Government, together with a review of the prospects for a peaceful settlement of the conflict."³⁷

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It will be recalled that in a draft memorandum for the President, the Secretary of Defense, ten days prior to the Manila Conference, had expressed certain views on ROLLING THUNDER to which the Joint Chiefs of Staff had objected. In this same draft memorandum the Secretary apparently intended to advise the President that a bombing halt could be used as a "carrot to induce negotiations." The Joint Chiefs of Staff did not agree that this was so and had informed the Secretary on 14 October.

Our experiences with pauses in bombing and resumption have not been happy ones. Additionally, the Joint Chiefs of Staff believe that the likelihood of the war

36. Keesing's, 1965-1966, p. 21774.

37. Keesing's, 1965-1966, p. 21719.

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being settled by negotiations, is small; and that, far from inducing negotiations, another bombing pause will be regarded by North Vietnamese leaders, and our Allies, as renewed evidence of lack of US determination to press the war to a successful conclusion. The bombing campaign is one of the two trump cards in the hands of the President (the other being the presence of US troops in SVN). It should not be given up without an end to the NVN aggression in SVN. As to maintaining contacts with NVN and the USSR in order to find ways to end the war, the Joint Chiefs of Staff agree; however, they advocate that US personnel involved should reflect a quiet determination to prosecute the war until communist aggression against SVN ceases.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that the military situation in South Vietnam had improved considerably over the past year, owing in no small measure to the success of ROLLING THUNDER operations. "The demands of communist leaders and leftist sympathizers for cessation of bombing give strong indications of the impact the bombing is having on the North Vietnamese." They continued:

The Joint Chiefs of Staff also agree that the enemy strategy appears to be to wait it out; in other words, communist leaders in both North and South Vietnam expect to win this war in Washington, just as they won the war with France in Paris. In this regard, the Joint Chiefs of Staff consider that there is reason for such expectations on the part of the communist leadership.

They concluded by saying that they believed the war was at the stage where decisions over the next 60 days might determine the outcome. Therefore they would give their "unequivocal" views on the search for peace:

The frequent, broadly-based public offers made by the President to settle the war by peaceful means on a generous basis, which would take from NVN nothing it now has, have been admirable. Certainly, no one--American or foreign--except those who are determined not to be convinced, can doubt the sincerity, the generosity, the altruism of US actions and objectives. In the opinion of the Joint Chiefs of Staff the time has come when further overt actions and offers on our part are not only nonproductive, they are counter-productive. A logical case can be made that the American people, our Allies, and our enemies alike are increasingly uncertain as to our resolution to pursue the war

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to a successful conclusion. The Joint Chiefs of Staff advocate the following:

- (1) A statement by the President during the Manila Conference of his unswerving determination to carry on the war until NVN aggression against SVN shall cease;
- (2) Continued covert exploration of all avenues leading to a peaceful settlement of the war; and
- (3) Continued alertness to detect and react appropriately to withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops from SVN and cessation of support to the VC.³⁸

The Manila Conference ended with the publication of a joint communique on South Vietnam, a "Declaration on Peace and Progress in Asia and the Pacific," and a "Declaration on Goals of Freedom." In the joint communique, the United States joined its six allies in pledging to continue the fight as long as necessary and with enough power to meet any communist challenge, while at the same time seeking a "just peace" through negotiations or reciprocal actions by each side to reduce the violence. They declared that allied forces would be withdrawn from RVN "after close consultation, as the other side withdraws its forces to the north, ceases infiltration, and the level of violence thus subsides. Those forces will be withdrawn as soon as possible and not later than six months after the above conditions have been fulfilled."

The other important points in the communique concerned actions to be taken by the GVN: 1) to provide a substantial share of the forces needed for a clear-and-hold action to regain territory from the Viet Cong and the loyalty of the population of such territory; 2) to continue fighting inflation, to begin planning for a postwar economy, and especially to prepare for the conversion of military bases to civilian use; 3) to finish writing a new constitution before March 1967, and to hold village and hamlet elections early in that year and elections for a "representative" national government before September 1967; and 4) to expand social welfare programs and to provide more electricity and water, better schools and health facilities, and more training for refugees, as well as essential agricultural reforms.

The "Declaration on Goals of Freedom" stated the objectives of the conferees.

38. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-672-66 to SecDef, 14 Oct 66 (derived from draft circulated by CJCS), JMF 9155.3 (14 Oct 66).

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We, the seven nations gathered in Manila, declare our unity, our resolve, and our purpose in seeking together the goals of freedom in Vietnam and in the Asian and the Pacific areas.

1. To be free from aggression.
2. To conquer hunger, illiteracy, and disease.
3. To build a region of security, order, and progress.
4. To seek reconciliation and peace throughout Asia and the Pacific.

These goals were spelled out in more detail in the third document of the conference, the "Declaration on Peace and Progress in Asia and the Pacific."³⁹

North Vietnam and Communist China immediately denounced the "so-called proposal for the removal of forces" from Vietnam as "out-and-out blackmail and shameless humbug," adding that the Manila proposals were aimed at "asking the Vietnamese people to surrender to the U.S. aggressors outright."⁴⁰

In October and November US officials frequently repeated the US conditions for peace in Vietnam. Before going to Manila the President had said:

Again and again and again I have said: we are ready to stop the bombing of North Viet-Nam; we are ready to produce a schedule for the withdrawal of our troops--whenever the other side tells us what it is prepared to do to move toward peace in Viet-Nam and to reciprocate the actions and the decisions that we take.

. . . And we do not seek the unconditional surrender of those who oppose us in Viet-Nam,

39. Dept of State Bulletin, LV (14 Nov 66), pp. 730-735.

40. Keessing's, 1965-1966, p. 21722.

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nor to destroy or change any system of government, nor to deprive any people of what is rightfully theirs. When a decision is made by the other side to seek its goals through peaceful means--not through terror, not through violence--we shall be the first to meet at the conference table.

The point that was made constantly was that the United States was more than willing to take steps toward peace, specifically by ending the bombing of NVN, but only if the enemy showed some willingness to give something in return. The condition for a cessation of the bombing was not specified, but it was generally understood to be a cessation or diminution of infiltration from the North, or some other tangible reduction in the violence of the ground war in South Vietnam. The United States, said Ambassador Goldberg on 25 October, "is willing to take the first step toward deescalation of the war by ordering a prior end to all bombing of North Viet-Nam the moment we are assured that there would be a response toward peace from North Viet-Nam."

On his return from Asia on 4 November, President Johnson said at a White House news conference: "If they want us to stop bombing, we ought to see what they are willing to stop. We will be glad to carefully consider anyone's proposals that represent two-way streets. We don't want to talk about just half of it, though."

By mid-November the public statements of US officials on the subject of peace negotiations reflected pessimism about the willingness of the communists to negotiate. Secretary Rusk said on 18 November in response to a question about prospects for a Christmas truce in Vietnam:

We have not been able to get indications from the other side as to what would happen if the bombing were stopped. We have tried almost literally every week since last January to get an answer to that question. And so I would not want to hold out the expectation that a prolonged pause in the bombing might occur.⁴¹

⁴¹. (U) JCS Hist Div Study, "Statements on US Cessation of Bombing," n.d.

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Thus, by November, the positions of both sides were clear. The United States would cease its bombing of NVN as a condition for peace negotiations if NVN would take some reciprocal action. Hanoi wanted an unconditional end to the bombing. The positions had remained unchanged for some time, and there did not seem to be much hope for accommodation in the near future.

Public opinion, both at home and abroad, had undoubtedly influenced the US Government to make almost constant efforts to bring about negotiations in 1966. Support for the President's policy in Vietnam had fallen significantly as the year progressed. War weariness and increasing impatience at home seemed to be among Mr. Johnson's chief problems. Although divided as to means, "hawks" and "doves" were agreed upon the end--a quick and satisfactory solution to the war. "Hawks" were apparently in the ascendancy; most Congressmen newly elected in 1966 declared themselves in favor of the escalations required to "win." However, public opinion polls also recorded substantial support for any action--either escalation or the reverse--that promised to be decisive. For example, the Harris poll indicated that public confidence in the Administration's war policies rose to 49 percent in October, following the Manila Conference; by December, this had declined to 42 percent. The President's problem, then, was plain; he must either gain an acceptable peace in the near future or face a further erosion of public confidence and support.⁴²

The Christmas and New Year Truce Periods--1966-1967

As the end of the year approached, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, mindful of their experience at the end of 1965, took such actions as they could to reduce the probable ill effects of the expected curtailment of military operations during the coming Christmas, New Year, and Tet seasons. Although they opposed holiday curtailments in principle, the Joint Chiefs of Staff expected that higher authority would direct a reduction in military actions during these periods. Therefore, they began in late November efforts to influence arrangements for the duration and nature of these periods of truce. General Wheeler, on 18 November, informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Pressures for a stand-down of military operations in Vietnam during

⁴². NY Times, 6 Dec 66 and 7 Dec 66.

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the Christmas and TET holidays are already beginning, and I am convinced that some sort of cease fire during this period is inevitable." He suggested that the Joint Chiefs of Staff take the initiative by proposing to the Secretaries of State and Defense arrangements that would have the least adverse impact upon US military activities.⁴³

During the next few days the Joint Chiefs of Staff discussed the provision that should be included in any truce arrangements to avoid a repetition of the military disadvantages that US/FWMAF/RVNAF forces had experienced during the 1965/1966 truce periods. These provisions included restricting the length of any stand-down to 48 hours duration, continuation during the stand-down of all air activities in Laos, and a stipulation that CINCPAC could strike any unusually large or lucrative or threatening military targets in NVN which might develop as a result of the stand-down. In order to enhance the friendly military position both before and after any stand-down, the Joint Chiefs of Staff also wanted a sharp increase in the intensity, and if possible, the scope of ROLLING THUNDER both prior to and immediately after the truce periods. All of these provisions were included in their recommendations to the Secretary of Defense. A position paper intended to be sent to the President by the Secretaries of State and Defense on the matter of a possible Christmas stand-down was prepared by the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA). This paper included all of the JCS recommendations except those which would authorize CINCPAC to strike certain targets in NVN and which would provide for a sharp increase in ROLLING THUNDER before and after the truce.⁴⁴

General Wheeler told Assistant Secretary McNaughton that the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not consider their proposal for increased intensity of ROLLING THUNDER to be of major importance but that they were convinced that CINCPAC should be allowed to strike targets in NVN which were especially lucrative or threatened his forces. An example of such a target would be a SAM missile unit moving south toward the DMZ. The

43. (TS-GP 3) Draft CM-1928-66 to SecDef (Rev), Att to (TS-GP 3) CM-1940-66 to CNO et al., 21 Nov 66, O CJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 66.

44. (TS-GP 3) CM-1940-66 to CNO et al., 21 Nov 66, O CJCS Vile 091 Vietnam Nov 66. (S) Ltr, CJCS to ASD(ISA), 22 Nov 66, same file.

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Chairman asked that Mr. McNaughton modify the proposed letter to the President to that extent at least.⁴⁵

As it had in the previous year, the NLF on 25 November forced the US hand by announcing that its forces would observe a 48-hour truce from 0700 24 December to 0700 26 December for Christmas and from 0700 31 December to 0700 2 January for the New Year. The Secretary of State immediately instructed Ambassador Lodge to talk with Prime Minister Ky and officials of the other nations involved and reach an agreed position on truce arrangements. It was obvious from the content of his instructions that US authorities had accepted the JCS views. Ambassador Lodge was informed that current plans called for not stopping air activities in Laos, and that "we are considering emergency waiver authority to strike any targets in NVN which pose immediate and direct threat to our forces." If the GVN could be induced to agree, the truce periods should be no longer than 48 hours. Mr. Rusk assured Ambassador Lodge that he did not foresee any extensions of the bombing pause, such as had taken place in the previous holiday periods, in the absence of "the same clear indications of timely and appropriate reciprocal action by Hanoi on which we have insisted publicly and privately throughout the last ten months." Nor would there be any extension of truce in RVN. Secretary Rusk stated that the United States intended to take the same general position with respect to the Tet holiday. The Secretary of State suggested that the GVN incorporate all three holidays in its announcement, which would become the official announcement of the Allied position.⁴⁶

Ambassador Lodge notified the Department of State on 29 November that the GVN had agreed to the US views on the holiday periods and would announce on 30 November that it, and the associated nations would take no offensive military actions at Christmas, from 0700 24 December 1966 to 0700 26 December 1966; at New Years from 0700 31 December 1966 to 0700 2 January 1967; and at the Lunar New Year (Tet) from 0600 8 February 1967 to 0600 12 February 1967.⁴⁷

⁴⁵. (S) Ltr, CJCS to ASD(ISA), 22 Nov 66, same file.

⁴⁶. (S) Jt State-Def Msg 91750 to Saigon, 26 Nov 66, JCS IN 54500.

⁴⁷. (S) Msg, Saigon 12006 to State, 29 Nov 66, JCS IN 57743.

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On 4 December the Joint Chiefs of Staff gave CINCPAC his instructions for the Christmas stand-down, using as a basis the policy set forth in the State-Defense message of 26 November. Military operations in RVN and NVN would be curtailed during the period specified in the GVN announcement, but units would not break contact in RVN and would respond if "enemy initiatives" placed them in danger. No offensive air operations would be mounted in RVN except as necessary to protect friendly forces, in which case the use of naval and ARC LIGHT forces might be authorized. MARKET TIME and GAME WARDEN would continue. All armed reconnaissance, air strikes, and NGF would be suspended in NVN during this period, although CINCPAC was authorized to order strikes against NVN targets that posed an immediate and direct major threat to US forces, specifically SAMs moving southward toward the DMZ. Operations in Laos would continue as normal. Whenever US commanders believed their forces to be in danger they could resume any or all military actions. CINCPAC was also informed that instructions for New Years and Tet would follow separately.⁴⁸

It thus appeared that the Joint Chiefs of Staff, by taking an early initiative in the matter, had managed to have written into the instructions for the holiday periods of 1966-1967 safeguards that had not been present in those of 1965-1966.

During the Christmas stand-down, the enemy violated the truce in RVN on 101 separate occasions, killing 3 US soldiers and wounding 27 others. The RVNAF suffered 27 killed and 27 wounded. The enemy lost 26 killed.⁴⁹

NVN made maximum use of this relaxation of pressures to resupply its forces. Sightings of waterborne logistic craft, including large, steel-hulled cargo carriers in the SEA DRAGON area, during the 48-hour period equalled those for the first two months of SEA DRAGON operations.⁵⁰ General Westmoreland, noting the enemy's major effort to move

48. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9510 to CINCPAC, 4 Dec 66.

49. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) CINCPAC Command History, 1966, pp. 487-488.

50. Ibid.

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supplies and men southward, called for authority to thwart any such effort during the New Year truce period. He said that

unless directed otherwise, we intend to react (using VNAF aircraft if practicable) to such overt re-supply activities which fulfill the following criteria: A) The activity is taking place in a known, well-established enemy base area. B) Supplies are being unloaded in sufficient quantities to indicate major re-supply operations. C) The re-supply is taking place in enemy base areas in close proximity to friendly units and/or installations, and hence, constitute a future threat to friendly forces.

He was strongly backed by CINCPAC.⁵¹

The execute message for the New Year ceasefire had already been dispatched along the same lines as earlier instructions for Christmas. Nevertheless, after receiving the agreement of the State and Defense Departments, the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized COMUSMACV to take actions against enemy resupply activities as he had proposed, but specified that these activities must constitute a "direct," not a "future" threat to friendly forces.⁵²

51. Ibid. (TS) Ltr ASD(ISA) to Chmn, Dept of State Policy Planning Council, 30 Dec 66; (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 290647Z Dec 66, JCS IN 18976, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Dec 66.

52. Ibid. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 2481 to CINCPAC, 30 Dec 66.

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