

HEREWITH THE TEXT OF THE 24 SEPTEMBER 1968 MEMORANDUM

ENTITLED, "PROSPECTS IN PARIS" REFERRED TO IN HEADQUARTERS

MESSAGE NO 078.

~~SECRET~~/NODIS/HARVAN/PLUS

MEMORANDUM

DECLASSIFIED UNDER AUTHORITY OF THE
INTERAGENCY SECURITY CLASSIFICATION APPEALS PANEL,
E.O. 13526, SECTION 5.3(b)(3)

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SUBJECT PROSPECTS IN PARIS

1. AFTER SOME WEEKS OF INACTION THE PRIVATE EXCHANGES IN PARIS SEEM TO BE MOVING AGAIN. THOUGH THE SUBSTANCE OF THE NORTH VIETNAMESE POSITION, AS REVEALED THUS FAR BY LE DUC THO, HAS NOT YET CHANGED IN ANY MATERIAL RESPECT, HANOI HAS DEMONSTRATED A RENEWED RECEPTIVITY TO AMERICAN INTEREST IN PRIVATE DIALOGUE. AMONG OTHER THINGS, IT APPEARS THAT THO IS PROBING THE AMERICAN POSITION TO DETERMINE WASHINGTON'S MINIMUM TERMS FOR ENDING THE BOMBING.

2. IN OUR VIEW, THE TALKS HAVE ENTERED A GRAY AREA, SOMEWHERE BETWEEN PURE PROPAGANDA AND SERIOUS NEGOTIATIONS. AS OF 20 SEPTEMBER, THEY SEEM TO HAVE NARROWED DOWN TO TWO ISSUES: NORTH VIETNAMESE RECIPROCITY IN THE DMZ AREA AND THE ADMISSION OF THE GVN TO THE NEXT STAGE OF TALKS.

RECIPROCITY

3. IT CAN BE ARGUED THAT HANOI'S PERSISTENT INTEREST IN FINDING SOME WAY AROUND THE BOMBING ISSUES ARISES FROM A GROWING SENSE OF WEAKNESS IN ITS OVER-ALL POSITION OR, ALTERNATIVELY, FROM AN ESTIMATE THAT ITS POSITION WILL NOT GROW STRONGER OVER THE NEXT SEVERAL MONTHS. FOR EXAMPLE, HANOI COULD BE DISCOURAGED BY THE GROWING STRENGTH AND STABILITY OF THE GVN, THE MEAGER RESULTS OF ITS OWN MILITARY EFFORTS, AND AMERICAN POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS. LOOKING AHEAD TO THE FURTHER UNCERTAINTIES OF DEALING WITH A NEW AMERICAN ADMINISTRATION, HANOI COULD HAVE DECIDED TO SEEK AN EARLY SETTLEMENT, CONCEDED ON THE BOMBING ISSUE TO INITIATE SERIOUS TALKS.

4. CERTAINLY, SOME OF THESE TRENDS INFLUENCE HANOI, BUT IT IS DIFFICULT TO BELIEVE THAT HANOI REGARDS ITS POSITION AS DESPERATE OR THAT IT FEELS UNDER URGENT PRESSURES TO MAKE CONCESSIONS. AT ALMOST ANY POINT IN THE TALKS HANOI COULD HAVE LIQUIDATED THE BOMBING ISSUE. INDEED, IT HAS ALWAYS APPEARED THAT THIS MIGHT BE TO HANOI'S NET ADVANTAGE, SINCE THE SECOND ROUND OF TALKS WOULD PRESUMABLY DEAL WITH ISSUES MOST LIKELY TO UNNERVE THE GVN AND TAX THE SOLIDARITY OF SAIGON AND WASHINGTON.

5. THIS INCENTIVE IS STILL THERE. BUT THE NORTH VIETNAMESE HAVE NOT CHOSEN THIS COURSE. INSTEAD, THEY HAVE, EITHER DELIBERATELY OR THROUGH MISCALCULATION, INFLATED THE BOMBING QUESTION INTO A TEST OF WILLS. THE ENTIRE ISSUE HAS TAKEN ON A SIGNIFICANCE OF ITS OWN. THE TERMS OF ITS RESOLUTION WILL NOW BE WIDELY REGARDED AS A PORTENT OF THE SHAPE OF THE FINAL SETTLEMENT.

6. IT IS FOR THIS REASON THAT WE BELIEVE HANOI'S POSITION CANNOT BE PARED DOWN MUCH FURTHER. EVEN IF HANOI FELT OBLIGED TO MAKE A CONCESSION IT WOULD PROBABLY BE RESERVED FOR THE NEXT AMERICAN ADMINISTRATION. FOR THE PRESENT HANOI SEEMS ONLY PREPARED TO SEE IF THE US CAN BE SATISFIED WITH VERBAL AMBIGUITIES RATHER THAN FORMAL COMMITMENTS. WE BELIEVE THAT BETWEEN NOW AND THE US ELECTIONS, HANOI IS UNLIKELY TO GO FURTHER THAN TO ELABORATE AT SOME LENGTH--IN PARIS AND THROUGH INTERMEDIARIES--WHAT HAS ALREADY BEEN HINTED: THAT HANOI IN FACT WILL "KNOW WHAT TO DO" SHOULD THE BOMBING END, AND THAT THE US MUST TRUST ITS "GOOD WILL," AS EXPRESSED BY LE DUC THO. TO REINFORCE THIS LINE, HANOI MIGHT MAKE SOME UNILATERAL GESTURE, SUCH AS RELEASING PRISONERS. HANOI PROBABLY ESTIMATES THAT THERE IS AT BEST AN OUTSIDE CHANCE THAT THE US WILL END THE BOMBING ON THIS BASIS.

POST-BOMBING ACTION

7. OF EQUAL IMPORTANCE, AS AN INTELLIGENCE QUESTION, IS WHETHER HANOI WOULD IN FACT TAKE SOME ACTIONS TO REDUCE THE LEVEL OF COMBAT, ESPECIALLY IN THE DMZ, IF THE BOMBING STOPPED.

8. HANOI OBVIOUSLY UNDERSTANDS THAT ONCE THE BOMBING ENDS, IT WILL BE ON NOTICE: ANY MAJOR MILITARY ACTION ACROSS THE DMZ BY THE COMMUNIST FORCES WOULD GRAVELY JEOPARDIZE ANY PROSPECTS FOR AN EARLY SETTLEMENT AND PROBABLY WOULD PRECIPITATE A RESUMPTION OF THE BOMBING. HANOI MUST ALSO UNDERSTAND THAT THE US, IN EXPLAINING ANY FULL CESSATION OF BOMBING, WOULD STRESS ITS "ASSUMPTION" THAT HANOI WOULD NOT IN FACT TAKE MILITARY ADVANTAGE OF THE US MOVE. IN THIS CONTEXT, WE BELIEVE HANOI WOULD BE FULLY AWARE OF THE RISKS INVOLVED IN ANY MOVE TO INTENSIFY THE PRESSURES ON US AND GVN FORCES IN THE GENERAL AREA OF THE DMZ. HANOI WOULD RECOGNIZE THAT NO DECISIVE MILITARY ACTION COULD BE MOUNTED ACROSS THE DMZ AND, THEREFORE, IT IS UNLIKELY TO DRAMATICALLY INCREASE ITS FORCE OR ACTIVITY LEVEL IN THIS AREA.

9. THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT HANOI WOULD RESPOND WITH DEESCALATORY MOVES. RATHER IT SEEMS MORE LIKELY THAT ALONG THE DMZ THERE WOULD BE SOME REDUCTION OF COMBAT. HANOI'S MOVES IN THIS DIRECTION WOULD BE MINIMAL AND MAINLY DESIGNED TO ENSURE THE CONTINUATION OF THE BOMBING MORATORIUM. IN PARIS, HOWEVER, THE SECOND PHASE WOULD THEN PROCEED AND A PROLONGED DEBATE WOULD BEGIN. IT SEEMS ALMOST CERTAIN THAT THIS PHASE WOULD EXTEND INTO THE LIFE OF A NEW AMERICAN ADMINISTRATION AND COULD POSE A SEVERE TEST OF NERVES IN SAIGON.

7 GVN REPRESENTATION

10. IT IS POSSIBLE TO CONCEIVE OF A TACIT UNDERSTANDING SHAPING UP ON THE SECOND MAJOR ISSUE: THE ADMISSION OF THE GVN TO THE NEXT ROUND OF TALKS. HANOI CLEARLY AIMS TO CONSIGN THIS QUESTION TO THE SECOND ROUND. NEVERTHELESS, THE NORTH VIETNAMESE NEGOTIATORS HAVE DISPLAYED SOME AMBIVALENCE ON THIS ISSUE, IN CONTRAST TO THE CLEAR PUBLIC DISMISSAL OF ANY DEALING WITH SAIGON. THIS COULD REFLECT SOME SURPRISE AND UNCERTAINTY OVER THE GROWING AMERICAN INSISTENCE ON GVN PARTICIPATION. LE DUC THO AND XUAN THUY ARE CLEARLY ATTEMPTING TO DISCOVER WHETHER GVN REPRESENTATION IS THE ONLY "CONDITION" FOR ENDING THE BOMBING.

11. IN ANY CASE, WE BELIEVE THAT HANOI HAS LITTLE ROOM FOR MANEUVER ON THIS QUESTION AT THIS STAGE. PRIOR AGREEMENT THAT THE GVN COULD ENTER THE TALKS AFTER THE BOMBING CEASED WOULD SMACK OF A DEAL, WHICH HANOI IS ALMOST CERTAIN TO AVOID. MOREOVER, A MAJOR TACTICAL OBJECTIVE IS TO EXCLUDE THE GVN FOR AS LONG AS POSSIBLE TO FEED SOUTH VIETNAMESE SUSPICIONS THAT HANOI AND WASHINGTON WILL PRIVATELY SETTLE ITS FATE BEHIND SAIGON'S BACK. AT THE SAME TIME, WE BELIEVE HANOI RECOGNIZES IT IS NOT STRONG ENOUGH TO INSIST ON THE PERMANENT EXCLUSION OF SAIGON FROM THE TALKS AND WILL BE PREPARED TO GIVE GROUND ON THIS ISSUE. SUCH A MOVE MAY BE HINTED AT, BUT NO COMMITMENT IS LIKELY UNTIL THE BOMBING HAS STOPPED AND THE PROLONGED HAGGLING OVER AGENDA IS WELL ALONG. HANOI'S ACTUAL PLAY OF ITS HAND WILL BE DETERMINED BY ITS ESTIMATE OF HOW FIRM IT THINKS THE US IS PREPARED TO BE AND ITS ESTIMATE OF THE TOTAL SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM.

12. IF THE BOMBING ISSUE IS CIRCUMVENTED, THE AGENDA MATTER IS LIKELY TO PROVE THE TALKS' NEXT MAJOR HURDLE. IN THE 15 SEPTEMBER SESSION, THO AND XUAN THUY CAREFULLY SET THE STAGE FOR A SCENARIO IN WHICH, AFTER THE BOMBING STOPS, THE TWO SIDES WILL MEET TO TABLE THE TOPICS EACH SIDE WISHES TO DISCUSS AND AGREE ON THE ORDER IN WHICH THESE TOPICS WILL BE TAKEN UP. THE GROUND IS THUS PREPARED FOR AN AGENDA HASSLE WHICH CAN LAST AS LONG AS HANOI WANTS IT TO LAST. HANOI MAY JUST BE PREPARING A GOOD BARGAINING POSITION, BUT HANOI IS CERTAINLY AWARE OF THE ADVERSE POLITICAL EFFECT IN SAIGON THAT WOULD BE ENGENDERED IF THE US EXECUTED WHAT APPEARED TO THE WORLD TO BE A UNILATERAL BOMBING HALT AND THEN CONTINUED DISCUSSIONS IN PARIS FROM WHICH GVN REPRESENTATIVES WERE EXCLUDED.

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