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The Enigmatic General Ky

216. In a land where intrigue flourishes like rice and enigma defines the common man, Nguyen Cao Ky was distinguished as an enigmatic enigma wrapped in perpetual intrigue. Intelligent, tough, and ambitious, the Vice President cast a long shadow, his power undefined but respected. Relegated to the Vice Presidency by the shrewd pre-election maneuvers of Nguyen Van Thieu (and, perhaps, the Americans), Ky gave every impression of being unreconciled to the role of Number Two. Periodically rumors of an impending Ky-inspired coup would sweep through Saigon, but always they proved to be without foundation. The rumors, however, served a valuable purpose for Ky: they enhanced his mystique and solidified his image as the indispensable man within the Government, the man whose support was necessary as insurance against the risk of political instability. The Americans feared instability more than the Viet Cong and so they feared Nguyen Cao Ky, or at least in fashionable Saigon political circles it was assumed they did. It was said to be Ambassador Bunker's ambition to achieve a reconciliation between Thieu and Ky, to mold a working partnership which would merge the very different but mutually important resources of the two men for the inevitable political confrontation with the National Liberation Front. Unity within the leadership

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of GVN was an important American objective, but in October 1968 it appeared to be more an American problem.

217. Recognizing the importance of the Vice President's support, Ambassador Bunker had, as soon as opposition to NLF participation surfaced, instructed Berger to brief Ky on the latest developments in Paris. On October 19, while President Thieu visited Vung Tau, Berger called at the Vice President's office at the Independence Palace and explained the US negotiating position. Ky was vague and noncommittal when Berger pressed for his support of the US package. The Vice President said the refusal of the US to insist on explicit conditions for a bombing halt was not satisfactory to many GVN leaders, to which Berger replied: "If it is satisfactory to you, Mr. Vice President, and to President Thieu, it will be satisfactory to everyone else." He asked if Ky was satisfied, adding that "if you and the President are united, that is all that matters here." Ky answered that this was the problem; he and Thieu were not united. He then launched into a discourse on Thieu's unwillingness to cooperate with him. Berger led him back to the main subject and inquired whether he was going to see Thieu in support of what the US proposed. Ky replied that he was going to see the President, but he could not promise that

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he would support the US position. Berger said he regretted this very much and asked if this was what he should report to Ambassador Bunker. Ky said, "No, but you can say that I will talk to Thieu and I will see if we can come to an understanding, but I do not promise that we can."

218. On October 22, Vice President Ky asked Berger to call on him and the two men talked for about thirty minutes. Ky opened by asking if there were any new developments since their last discussion. Since Bunker had not yet briefed Thieu on the secret meeting in Paris the previous day, Berger evaded the question by saying there was no change; the US was still waiting for Hanoi to set a date for the first meeting of the expanded talks so the cessation of bombing could be announced.

219. Ky asked about the US reaction to Thieu's October 19 press conference and broadcast to the nation. Berger said that the talks with Hanoi were still being held very tight in the United States and the US Government was refraining from making any comments on the subject. The more that was said, the more difficult it would be to get talks started and the US hoped that it would not be necessary for anyone in Saigon to say anything more until a firm decision had been reached. The Vice President said it was unfortunate that Thieu had said he would not sit down with the NLF since the GVN was going to have to go into the same conference room with them and the Vietnamese people would then distrust Thieu. The President, he continued, had gone too far in some

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of his statements and this was not helpful. Berger found this solicitude for Thieu very touching, but limited himself to asking Ky why Thieu had done so. Ky threw up his hands. "I don't know. I don't know. He didn't talk to me."

220. Berger turned to the subject of the implications of the "our side/your side" formula and explained how the US and GVN could work together to overcome some of the procedural difficulties that might arise. There was an exchange of thoughts on this in which Ky appeared to accept the US position as reasonable. Berger then said that Hanoi could reply at any time fixing the date for a meeting, and it would be most unfortunate if there were any unwillingness by the GVN to join the talks or GVN efforts to raise new conditions. The US would have, however reluctantly, to go forward by itself in such a case, for Hanoi would have met the essential conditions on which the US and President Thieu had agreed. When Ky said nothing, Berger observed that if Ky supported Thieu there would be no criticism in Saigon of a GVN decision to go into the talks. Ky smiled, but said nothing.

221. Berger called to Ky's attention the rumors circulating in Saigon about coups and air force threats to bomb the Palace if Thieu joined the talks. Ky laughed and said, "I suppose they involve me." Berger said he had not heard Ky's name mentioned, but two ambassadors

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in the last two days had come to him worried by these rumors. He had assured them that such actions were out of the question. When Berger asked who was peddling these ridiculous stories, Ky said he didn't know and Berger let the matter drop. The Ambassador got up to leave and the Vice President walked him to the Central Hall. As they shook hands, Ky said he had had a long talk with Thieu that morning. Berger waited for him to expand, but it was obvious that he had no intention of doing so, and they parted.

Comment: Bunker and Berger reported to Washington that they didn't know what to make of this conversation. Ky was "the soul of friendliness, politeness, and correctness," but he said little and revealed nothing of the hand he was playing. It was their impression that Ky was trying to find out what was happening since he clearly thought that Thieu was not keeping him informed. The US team agreed that it was entirely possible that Thieu was, in fact, leaving Ky in the dark which could only add to the frustration of the Vice President and enhance the likelihood of tension within GVN.

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Hanoi Ups the Ante

222. On October 21, Harriman and Vance had met with the DRV representatives at the latter's request. Xuan Thuy opened the session by proposing that the US and North Vietnamese issue a joint communique which would state that the United States had agreed "unconditionally" to stop the bombing and "all other acts of war" against the DRV and that a preparatory "four party conference" would be convened "as soon as possible" after the cessation to work out "a correct political solution to the Vietnam problem on the basis of respect for the Vietnamese people's national rights." The North Vietnamese argued that a joint communique was necessary to avoid "misunderstandings" and to insure that the various parties would not make different interpretations of what had been agreed upon. Thuy said that this approach had been accepted by Hanoi after consultation with the NLF Central Committee and the language suggested by the DRV was consistent with the agreement reached between the US and North Vietnamese negotiators during their meetings on October 15 and 17.

223. Harriman and Vance took the position that it was not wise to attempt to draft a joint communique; actions were better than words and an attempt to agree upon the wording of a joint communique would merely consume time and delay serious talks. Harriman pointed out that the DRV draft reference to the cessation of bombing "and all other acts of war" was inconsistent with the US formulation, as he and Vance

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had carefully and consistently described the US offer as a willingness to stop "all air, naval, and artillery bombardment and all other acts involving the use of force against the territory of the DRV." Additionally, the US had never agreed to a "four-party" conference, but only to prompt and serious talks on an "our side/your side" basis. The US had said it would have the representatives of the GVN on its side and the DRV could have on its side representatives of the NLF or anyone else it wished. For the DRV to raise the issue of a four-party conference at such a late date was, in Harriman's view, "unfortunate to say the least." Finally, Harriman pointed out that the DRV had not set a fixed date on which serious negotiations would begin. The phrase "as soon as possible" was totally unacceptable.

224. Thuy stuck with determination to the requirement for a joint communique, but conceded that the language could be subject to discussion and negotiation. He was willing, for example, to accept the US wording as to "all other acts involving the use of force" if the US would agree to the DRV phrase that the cessation was "without condition." He was, however, puzzled by the unwillingness of the US to speak of a four-party conference. As for the date of the first meeting, Hanoi and the NLF had discussed the matter and the NLF had said it could make arrangements for attendance within a few weeks. But rather than saying a few weeks, they had preferred to use the phrase, "as soon as possible."

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Harriman pointed out that the US had made it clear in the previous meetings that a date certain must be set for the first meeting.

Then -- and not until then -- the bombing would be stopped two or three days before that date. Thuy said that the US insisted on a meeting within two or three days of a bombing cessation, whereas the DRV side had spoken of a few weeks. This was something that could be discussed and a compromise worked out which was acceptable to the two sides. Perhaps one week would be acceptable, although he could not commit the NLF to that.

225. Harriman rejected one week as too long and emphasized in the strongest terms that a fixed date must be agreed upon. He did not, however, reject out of hand the matter of a joint communique, although he thought it would simply add another hurdle for the parties to overcome before the bombing could be stopped. The two sides agreed to report to their Governments and to meet again as soon as either had anything new to say.

226. Ambassador Vance reported to Washington that he and Governor Harriman thought that, while there had not been any agreement, the other side had moved toward our position on several points and indicated flexibility on others. They interpreted Thuy's acceptance of our language concerning "acts of force" to mean that the DRV had given

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up on the reconnaissance issue. The rapidity with which Thuy had given ground on the amount of time required between the cessation and the convening of the first session of the expanded talks -- moving from "several weeks" to "perhaps a week" -- left the impression that Hanoi was angling for a week's delay between cessation and the first meeting. Vance thought that Thuy now expected the US to come back at the next stage with further suggestions on how to proceed toward reaching a firm agreement.

227. Washington interpreted the DRV performance at the meeting as evidence that Hanoi was playing it "hard and tough" in an effort to get the US to accept an indefinite situation that would seriously disturb the GVN and to agree to an express or implied definition of status that would build up the NLF. The fact that they were trying to get all they could might merely show tough bargaining, or it might indicate something more fundamental on the whole arrangement. Nevertheless, in Washington's view, we should act on the assumption that the North Vietnamese could be brought around to meet our basic requirements for a cessation, and their apparent ready acceptance of the "acts of force" phrase was a "mildly affirmative sign" to support that assumption. From all that had been said in Saigon, they might have very clear indications of GVN concern about the NLF status, and it would hardly be surprising if they should probe in an effort to divide the allies. It was also possible that

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Hanoi was having very real problems of its own with the NLF. Secretary Rusk, however, thought that it was likely that Thuy was "merely trying to see whether he could get a few more drops out of the turnip" and was in a position to go further than he had indicated.

228. To Ambassador Bunker it was obvious that Hanoi was playing it hard and would continue to do so every step of the way, particularly if the US seemed too eager for quick progress. In his view, Hanoi was simply following normal procedure in trying to get the maximum out of the United States and to divide the Americans and South Vietnamese.

Moscow Weighs In

229. On October 21, Secretary Rusk called in Dobrynin to bring him up-to-date on the latest meeting in Paris. He reviewed the discussion with regard to a joint communique, the problem of a "four-party conference" versus an "our side/your side" meeting, the question of timing for an initial meeting, and Hanoi's suggestion that preparatory meetings should discuss procedural matters and the agenda.

230. To Rusk's surprise, he discovered that Dobrynin had reported inaccurately their earlier conversation in which Rusk had indicated a US willingness to stop the bombing two or three days before an established date for a meeting. Rusk had said that, as an example, if a meeting were set for a Monday, the US might be able to stop

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the bombing on the preceeding Friday or Saturday. Dobrynin, however, had reported to Moscow that if the bombing were stopped on Monday there could be a meeting on Friday or Saturday. In Rusk's opinion, this misunderstanding might have been partly responsible for the retreat by Thuy to "a week" between the cessation and the first meeting. Dobrynin promised that he would immediately straighten out the misunderstanding.

231. The Secretary pointed out to Dobrynin that everyone involved in the Vietnam situation had many formal or procedural preoccupations on such questions as status, recognition, for whom individual representatives might speak, etc. Although the US had a good many formal problems, our approach had been to brush them aside in order to come to grips with the substance of making peace. Weeks or months could be spent discussing such questions without touching substance and the US was anxious to avoid this. There was no need to go through time consuming debates of the types that were all too familiar in diplomatic history. What was important was that those most directly concerned sit down under informal circumstances and talk about peace, even though each representative present might have radically different views about the formal and procedural questions.

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The time was at hand to move with dispatch to substantive talks about a settlement in Vietnam. The Secretary underlined the importance of the timing factor and told Dobrynin that Thuy had indicated that "as soon as possible" could mean a few weeks. Even a week, Rusk emphasized, was unacceptable to the United States.

232. Following the October 21 meeting between the US and DRV spokesmen, Soviet Minister Oberemko had met with the North Vietnamese for over two hours and then called Vance to request a meeting. The two men met Tuesday morning, the 22nd, and the Russian reported that he had found the North Vietnamese undecided and uncertain about the status of the talks and disappointed over what they considered the ambiguity of the US position on certain questions which they felt had already been settled. However, he felt there was goodwill on both sides and a mutual desire to move forward toward a solution.

233. Oberemko told Vance that it seemed to him that there was some misunderstanding as to the basic principles already agreed upon and, as a third party not directly involved, it was easier for the Soviet Union to have an "objective" view. He had previously tried to calm the emotions of the DRV delegates and now he wanted to try to ascertain, point by point, what had been agreed upon and what had not.

234. Oberemko said that he assumed that the principle of complete and unconditional cessation of bombardments had been agreed

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upon. Vance replied that the principle agreed was that the bombing would stop without preconditions. However, if the DRV were to show bad faith after the cessation, it would be impossible to maintain. For example, if the North Vietnamese took certain actions such as the resumption of indiscriminate attacks against the cities, it would be impossible for any President to maintain the bombing halt. Oberemko said that it still seemed to him that the principle of an unconditional cessation had been agreed upon and that what was going to follow the cessation would be talks. Vance answered that, as he had told Oberemko before, he believed the North Vietnamese would know what to do after the cessation of bombing. "Why not," Oberemko replied, "let the matter rest as it is. Let us not envisage extreme situations, but rather use a formulation within the framework already envisaged. We should not try to envisage extreme cases. In so doing doubt is cast on the general principle involved." The Vietnamese were very suspicious, he said, and if the US attempted to anticipate all possibilities it would be impossible to reach an agreement in the immediate future.

235. Vance pointed out that the US did not accept the principle of a joint communique, having taken the position that the best way to handle the situation was simply for certain actions to be taken which would speak for themselves. Oberemko said that he understood this position, but also understood that the US had told the DRV that a joint communique was a possibility. Vance acknowledged that a joint communique had been

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included among the four alternatives listed by Ambassador Harriman as open to the parties, but we had accepted only the first of those alternatives -- no statement at all. We had not accepted any of the others, although we had agreed to consider them. Oberemko said that it was not his intention to touch on the form of the agreement; the basic thing as far as he was concerned was an agreement in principle. Whether its ultimate form was that of a minute or an oral statement was up to the United States and the DRV.

236. Oberemko raised the question of a "four party conference" versus an "our side/your side" meeting. He understood the US proposal, but thought that ultimately the US would be willing to accept language that referred to the four participants by name. If the US insisted on a two-sided conference there would be great difficulties. Why not delete the idea of two sides and let the DRV delete the idea of four sides. The Soviet Union was interested in finding a possible way to avoid a collision between the two rigid formulas, and if the US insisted on its formula, the DRV would insist on its own. The Soviet Union's view was that the situation could not wait any longer. He suggested that the parties use language referring to the participation of representatives of the US, DRV, NLF, and GVN. In this way, the US would not insist on two sides nor would the DRV insist on four sides, and both could proceed on their own assumptions.

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237. Oberemko said that he would like to pose a hypothesis based on the working assumption that agreement could be reached between the US and DRV on the procedural questions in dispute. "If there is any sponsor of this proposal," the Soviet Minister explained, "let us say it is common sense." Oberemko observed that the present DRV and US positions on the question of dates were very distant, with the US saying that a date must be fixed for a meeting and then the bombing could be halted two or three days before that date and the DRV saying that the bombing must be stopped several weeks in advance of the first meeting. Assume, he said, that the order to stop the bombing were issued on the 24th or 25th of October. According to the US position that would mean that the talks would start on the 27th or 28th. The DRV insists on several weeks as opposed to two or three days. Thus the difficulty is not so much with the date for a cessation, but with that of the first meeting. The main question is how to bridge the gap between the US and DRV positions. When Oberemko attempted to elicit from the North Vietnamese an idea of the exact time envisaged by them between the cessation and the first meeting, they replied that several weeks was necessary. Theoretically several weeks was not one, so he assumed that at the minimum they were insisting on two weeks or 14 days. Why not split the difference between the US and DRV positions? Oberemko said he understood that Vance could not agree to such a proposal without consulting with his Government, but he would like to know if Vance

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saw a possibility of reaching agreement on a compromise date. Vance replied that he could not agree to anything; all he could do was report Oberemko's question to Washington.

238. Oberemko argued that it was necessary to make a maximum effort to reach agreement. He told Vance that "with goodwill on both sides, plus the modest help of the Soviet Union, perhaps an agreement could be reached today." He was very emphatic about the urgency with which the Soviet Union viewed the situation and urged Vance to report to Washington his proposal that the United States give the order to stop all bombing on October 24 or 25, with a meeting of representatives of the US, DRV, NLF, and GVN to be held in Paris on November 1 or 2.

239. Oberemko said that he planned to see the DRV representatives immediately following his meeting with Vance and would give them exactly the same proposal without any commitment whatsoever on the part of the US. He planned only to say that Vance had reported the proposal to Washington. Oberemko said that if and when the US had a reply, it should take the initiative to set up a meeting with the North Vietnamese and inform them of the dates for the cessation of bombing and the next meeting. He wanted Vance to understand, however, that if his initiative failed the US should know that the Soviet Union was trying its best. Vance expressed his appreciation for this and told Oberemko that he would report the conversation to Washington and be back in touch with him later in the day.

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240. Vance immediately passed the Soviet proposal to Washington with a recommendation, joined in by Governor Harriman, that it be accepted in principle. Harriman thought that the fact the Soviets had become so involved in the resolution of this issue meant that they would have "a big stake in seeing that the subsequent negotiations are successful."

241. Later in the afternoon, Oberemko met again with Vance and told him that it appeared that matters were moving step by step but with great difficulty. The Soviet Minister related that after his morning meeting with Vance he had met with the North Vietnamese and had presented to them the same proposal he had put to Vance. The DRV delegation said that they considered two basic provisions to be necessary to an agreement. First, the US must accept the principle of complete and unconditional cessation of the bombardment. However, while they insisted on the principle, they were willing to accept the words "without condition" in place of the word "unconditional" if the US preferred. Second, they would not agree to the use of the words "two sides" to describe the representation at the expanded talks. They were willing to abandon their insistence on the phrase "four-party talks," but would go no further than Oberemko's proposal that the four parties be listed. If there were agreement on these two provisions, the DRV would be prepared to meet with the US side immediately to work out final agreement on the date of cessation, i. e., the 24th or 25th of October, and the date of the first meeting which could be the 1st or 2nd of November.

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242. Oberemko said that he had told the DRV that in his judgment it was not necessary to have a joint communique and they had agreed to drop this demand. However, they insisted that there be a secret minute and that there be agreement on the manner in which the cessation and expanded talks would be announced to the press. At the conclusion of their meeting, the DRV spokesmen told Oberemko that they thought an agreement was possible and could be finalized that day. In Oberemko's view, the North Vietnamese were taking the matter very seriously and were ready to meet with the US at any time.

243. While making it clear that he was not accepting anything, Vance raised several points for clarification so that he might report accurately to Washington. He did not understand what the DRV meant when they said they would not insist on the word "party" if we would not insist on the phrase "two sides." We had used the phrase repeatedly and if they were insisting that we abandon it, that was of course unacceptable. Oberemko replied that he didn't believe they expected the US to abandon use of the phrase, only that neither it nor the word "party" would be included in the initial announcement. After that each side would be free to describe the talks in any way they liked. He had not raised this issue with them specifically, but that was his understanding.

244. Vance then said that he could not understand why the DRV was insisting on the mention of "without condition" or "unconditional"

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in an agreed minute, if there were to be one (which Vance refused to commit himself to.) If there were a secret minute and it simply stated that all bombardment would be stopped on a certain date and did not state any condition, there would be no implication that any conditions were being imposed. "Is not that true," Vance asked. "In logic, yes that is true," Oberemko replied; "perhaps at an earlier stage in the negotiations that might have been possible, but now I do not believe that it is."

245. Vance asked whether the North Vietnamese were serious when they said they wanted a secret minute. Oberemko said he had discussed the matter with them and they were serious about keeping it secret. Vance then said that he had received an initial response from Washington to the Soviet proposal and the US found the proposed time interval too long. Oberemko said that if the US had a counter-proposal, it should make it, but he didn't think it had any chance of being accepted if it were only two or three days. He was not sure that any counter-proposal would be accepted, but he thought that if a settlement were to turn or fall on that issue alone, a counter-proposal should be made. Vance said he didn't know when he would receive further instructions from Washington, but he would be back in touch with Oberemko as soon as possible.

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246. Because of the time difference between Paris and Washington, Secretary Rusk was able to brief the President and Secretary Clifford on the Vance-Oberemko conversations at the regularly scheduled Tuesday lunch. Following the White House session, the Secretary returned to the State Department and called in Ambassador Dobrynin to explore the implications of the proposal put forward by Oberemko. He expressed his appreciation for the effort the Soviets were making in Paris to lay the groundwork for a breakthrough and attempted to clarify the US position on some of the issues in dispute. He pointed out that the US had no intention of talking about conditions in anything we said, but for us to accept Hanoi's language would appear to cancel all of the earlier discussion about the facts of life which Hanoi must recognize if the bombing cessation were to be maintained. The difficulty with communiques or minutes was that they tended to emphasize the differences which should be brushed aside in order to grapple with the real substance. The US would have difficulty agreeing to language acceptable to Hanoi and this problem could and should be avoided.

247. The Secretary emphasized to Dobrynin the importance of the timing problem and said that a week's delay was too long. It would pose serious problems for the US both at home and abroad. The Soviet

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Ambassador gave Rusk a good argument on this point, asserting that the difference in two or three days should not be that important. He said that if this were a discussion between the Soviet Union and the United States, he did not believe Moscow would stick on such a matter, but they were dealing with "these strange people in Hanoi." Rusk suspected that Dobrynin was influenced to take this line by his error in reporting the conversation between the two men on October 17 and by the probability that the Soviets had pressed Hanoi to agree to a week. However, at the end Dobrynin made the personal suggestion that the US take the first or second of November as dates for the meeting proposed by Hanoi and count back to the twenty-eighth or twenty-ninth, whichever date we could counter-propose. To this Rusk merely stated that the sooner the matter was resolved the better and did not give him a direct reply.

Consultations in Saigon

248. In Saigon, efforts were underway to resolve the differences with the South Vietnamese Government. On Monday, October 21, Ambassadors Bunker and Berger met with Foreign Minister Thanh to discuss procedural problems relating to the status of the NLF in the substantive negotiations. Bunker was handed a memorandum setting forth stiff GVN demands on which satisfaction was necessary before Saigon could

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participate in the talks. Thanh argued that the demands went to the "heart of the war itself." Essentially, the GVN position as outlined in the memorandum was that prior agreement had to be reached with Hanoi over the status of the NLF in the talks and that status must be limited to one of individual participation by Front representatives in the DRV delegation. Thanh explained that the GVN had taken the position that the NLF was a weapon of the DRV and if it conceded anything on that issue it would enable the other side to claim that the war in the South was not international but internal and thus a war in which GVN did not have the right to call for foreign assistance. That the conflict was a "civil war" was the basis on which the DRV denounced both allied "invervention" and the bombing of the North, and to concede a separate existence to the NLF would thus remove the basis for an allied presence in South Vietnam.

249. Bunker denied that such implications were involved in NLF participation and emphasized the importance of Saigon entering the negotiations with a spirit of self-confidence. He reminded the Foreign Minister that if Hanoi accepted the US terms there would be no choice open to Washington except to stop the bombing. Thanh did not dispute this and denied that GVN questioned the "our side/your side" formula. Moreover, he did not believe that the questions he was raising need be an obstacle to a bombing cessation. However, GVN had always assumed

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that on the allied side there would be two delegations and on the other side only one, and all that was required to calm GVN apprehensions was to pin this down with Hanoi. Bunker denied that there had ever been a reasonable basis for such an assumption on Saigon's part and insisted that no such agreement could be reached with Hanoi. Our position, with which President Thieu had concurred, was that GVN would participate on our side and the DRV could have whomever it wished on their side. This was the understanding and Saigon would have to live with it.

250. Thanh was not satisfied and pointed out that both the President and Vice President were apprehensive about what might happen in South Vietnam if the NLF were given the appearance of a separate entity. Thanh said he would very much appreciate the help of the US in devising some procedures to avoid this possibility.

251. Bunker pointed out that GVN could make a strong and positive pronouncement rejecting any such status, and, as for disorders, he apparently had more confidence in the strength of the present government than had the Foreign Minister. "Only if it acts apprehensively," he said, "will it become weak; if it acts confidently, everyone will understand that the enemy is the only one who has been forced to make important concessions."

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252. Bunker passed the Thanh memorandum to Washington along with his personal suggestions as to concessions which the US could make to meet some of Saigon's more pressing concerns. He also raised "one flag of caution," reminding Rusk and Harriman that "under no circumstances" could the US leave Saigon with the impression that we regarded the NLF as a separate entity: it would be fatal to our effort to enlist GVN in an orderly and sensible negotiation if they got the idea that we held this view; moreover, it would rouse their suspicion and apprehensions and complicate enormously our effort to get them to cooperate in the kinds of compromises that might be called for later. "We should," the Ambassador declared, "bear in mind that we ourselves have always said the NLF was the southern branch office of Hanoi and we should maintain this view until we are well along toward a settlement where the GVN and NLF can get together to work out the remaining issues."

253. On Tuesday, Counselor Herz met with Foreign Minister Thanh and handed him a paper containing preliminary observations on the procedural problems he had raised. The ideas were based largely on the views of the US team in Paris and were submitted as tentative ideas for further discussion between the US and GVN. Thanh appeared pleased but raised a number of additional conundrums. One involved whether the US delegates would address members of the other side, particularly members of the NLF, as "Excellency." To do so would cause great difficulty in Saigon

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and the Foreign Minister preferred that an individual member of the other side be addressed simply as "monsieur." Herz replied that it would be much simpler just to refer to the other side as "other side."

254. Later in the day, Ambassadors Bunker and Berger met with President Thieu. Bunker had received a message from the President via the Foreign Minister which indicated that when Thieu had agreed to the proposed joint announcement for a cessation, "it was on the understanding that the NLF would not participate as a separate entity." Bunker and Berger devoted their meeting to trying to define what this meant and what Thieu's problem was. Bunker went over with the President the steps that the US was prepared to take to insure that the NLF did not appear as a separate entity. Thieu said this was fine, but he wasn't convinced that Hanoi wanted seriously to negotiate with the GVN. He was afraid that Hanoi would address their remarks to the US; that only the NLF would respond to GVN statements; and that Hanoi would walk out of the room when the GVN talked. Bunker assured him the US would not tolerate such behavior, but Thieu insisted on more substantive assurances. What he wanted was an understanding in advance between the US and DRV that Hanoi would talk seriously to GVN. If that assurance were obtained, he was not concerned about the NLF presence. Repeatedly he asked Bunker whether Hanoi had agreed to talk to Saigon.

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255. Bunker pointed out the danger in seeking such a formal assurance: Hanoi might well say, "of course we will talk to Saigon about A, B, and C, but we expect Saigon to talk to the NLF about X, Y, and Z." Bunker thought it would be better to leave this issue undefined so that Saigon could talk to the NLF at times and on issues of its own choosing. The Ambassador and Thieu were unable to reach agreement on the question, but Bunker thought the discussion was satisfactory, reporting to Washington that he was making good progress in getting "rid of the underbrush and defining and narrowing the issue which worries them."

256. On Wednesday, Bunker and Berger met with Thieu, Ky and Thanh to attempt to clear up, in Ky's presence, some of the points which had been raised by Thanh and Thieu. While Berger had been over most of the points with Ky, this was the first occasion where the President and Vice President discussed the issues jointly in the presence of the American team.

257. Thieu opened by noting that the GVN had a major problem and wished to work with the US in solving it. From their point of view the bombing halt was not very important; what was important was to convince the Vietnamese people that the halt would lead to an end to the war and that Hanoi would be obliged to talk with Saigon. His principal worry was that the Vietnamese people would not understand if

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the GVN sat down at the same table with the NLF. They would react with a wave of fear and despair which could result in mass desertions from the ARVN and Popular Forces, a precipitous drop in the Chieu Hoi program, and the stalling of pacification efforts, as well as turmoil in the cities: panic sales, Communist propaganda, demonstrations and counter-demonstrations by Catholics and Buddhists, and perhaps mutiny (not a coup) among some of the armed forces.

258. Bunker commented that perhaps he had misjudged the present Government of Vietnam. He had thought, and had so reported to Washington, that it had considerable strength and stability. If the President, the Vice President, and the Prime Minister exerted leadership and went before the people and explained the Paris Talks as something that had been forced upon Hanoi and as a move toward peace which the Government was making from a position of strength, it appeared to him that the people would understand. In his opinion, it should not be too difficult to explain that Hanoi, having failed to win militarily, was now obliged to talk with the GVN after having said for years that the GVN did not represent the people of South Vietnam. Berger added that it would be extremely embarrassing for the NLF, which claimed to be the sole representative of the South Vietnamese people, to be in a position where Hanoi must talk to the GVN.

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259. Thieu took the position, despite Bunker and Berger's reassurances, that the US should obtain from the DRV some understanding that Hanoi was "sincere" in wishing to talk with Saigon and some assurance that Hanoi would resort to no tricks or propaganda or jockeying to put the NLF in a special position. Additionally, it was necessary to work out the procedural problems so that the other side would not be able to claim that the allies were conferring some improved status on the NLF.

260. Bunker pointed out that while the procedural problems could be worked out between the US and GVN, there was no way to guarantee that Hanoi would not attempt every trick in the book and pull out all stops in its propaganda efforts to enhance the status of the NLF. The point to be remembered, however, was that we had outfought the enemy in Vietnam, faced him down in Paris, and were in a strong position to beat him in the negotiations.

261. Vice President Ky entered the conversation by remarking that GVN was not unwilling to accept the risk of going into the negotiations; all they were asking was for some help in explaining to their own people that they were not being forced to negotiate with the NLF. Bunker replied, "It is your leadership, Mr. Vice President, that can swing your people." Ky said the leadership was available, but they were up against a problem of deep public suspicion. It might be enough if an

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agreement could be reached with the DRV that if GVN said they were going to Paris to negotiate with North Vietnam, the DRV would not contradict them and claim that the GVN was being forced to go to Paris to talk with the NLF. What GVN really wanted, Ky admitted, was for the US to help them "save face." Bunker insisted that it was Hanoi and the NLF whose face would need saving and not the GVN. South Vietnam could correctly claim that Hanoi had been forced to come to the conference table and it would not matter if they brought along their southern branch. At this point, Thieu and Ky engaged in a long discussion in Vietnamese, at the conclusion of which the Vice President remarked that while they had to accept the risk, they still needed some "insurance." Bunker said that he could think of no better insurance than the military commitment and political support of the United States, but Ky was apparently unimpressed. He insisted that the timing was bad; people would think that they were giving in to the Communists because of the imminence of the US elections. Bunker argued that the elections had nothing to do with it. For five months the US had been trying to get the DRV to accept some deescalation and to talk with the GVN. We had made no concession; it was the other side which was accepting our conditions.

262. As the discussion drew to a close, Thieu and Ky were still insisting on some advance guarantee that Hanoi would talk seriously

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with Saigon and that the NLF would not be elevated to the status of a separate entity. Bunker pointed out that it looked as if the DRV had met the conditions for talks put forward by President Johnson and it only remained to agree on dates for a bombing halt and substantive talks; he hoped GVN understood that if the other side gave us satisfaction in the matter of dates, we would have to move to stop the bombing. Thieu indicated that he understood this, but still had serious reservations about GVN's ability to go along: "We are not afraid of competing with the Communists," he said, "but we need help in persuading our people that we have not been forced to negotiate with the NLF."

Comment: Bunker reported to Washington that this was the only occasion he had witnessed when Ky and Thieu consulted each other repeatedly and at length before formulating their positions and when Thieu acted as spokesman, Ky repeatedly stated that he agreed with the President.

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263. In response to his request, Ambassador Bunker received from Washington a three-point memorandum setting forth assurances that the US would do everything possible to protect GVN interests. Washington expressed its belief that Hanoi was acting in good faith and would follow through on any agreement reached in Paris to halt the bombing and assured Saigon that it would not tolerate DRV efforts to bypass or ignore GVN in an effort to force it to talk bilaterally with the NLF. Bunker immediately passed the memorandum to Thieu, Ky and Thanh and expressed his appreciation to Washington for its "prompt, constructive, and helpful response" to his request. In his opinion, the formulation of Washington's attitude on the questions under consideration in Saigon "should satisfy any reasonable person."

264. On October 24, Berger and Herz met with Thanh and went over the entire range of procedural problems. Agreement was quickly reached on flags, name plates, name of the conference, order of entrance, chairmanship of the delegation, opening statement, and references to the other side. Washington and Paris quickly acquiesced in these decisions with only minor modifications to be worked out in Paris with Ambassador Lam as circumstances required. Harriman, who was obviously exasperated with the GVN representative in Paris, expressed

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the hope that Lam would promptly be informed by his Government of the latest procedural understandings, particularly as they related to seating arrangements. Time was of the essence, Harriman maintained, since Lam must be headed off "before he starts building an elevated chair for himself."

265. On Friday morning Bunker and Berger met again with Thieu, Ky and Thanh. The President covered much the same ground that he had in the previous meeting, apparently unsatisfied with the assurances contained in Washington's three-point memorandum; he was still holding out for an explicit guarantee by Hanoi that the DRV would talk seriously with Saigon. The draft joint announcement was discussed and Thieu suggested that the language be modified to make explicit the understanding that Hanoi was entering into direct and serious talks with the GVN and US. Bunker agreed to recommend such a modification to Washington, but when Ky proposed that the announcement read that following the cessation a meeting would be held between representatives of the GVN, US and DRV, Bunker balked. Saigon was attempting to establish the negotiations as a three power conference which was contrary to the whole idea of the "our side/your side" formula, and that formula could not be reopened at this late date. However, he noted that President Johnson in a separate

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statement commenting on the bombing halt might make the US position on non-recognition of the NLF explicitly clear. If so, Ky interjected, why should not such a declaration be incorporated in the joint announcement? Thieu added that inclusion of such language in the joint statement would go a long way to calm popular fears that the GVN would be sending a delegation to Paris to negotiate with the NLF. Bunker replied that the GVN should trust the US and they should not act as if they doubted our repeatedly stated position, which would be reiterated yet another time, that we did not recognize the NLF but regarded it as a tool of Hanoi. Thieu said that it was not a problem of trust but a problem of dealing with popular opposition which might surface if it looked as if GVN were going to negotiate directly with the NLF. Thieu again ran through the list of woes which could be expected and Ky waxed especially eloquent on the same point, saying that "if we sit down with the NLF as equals, the whole raison d'etre of this regime is finished." Bunker made the same arguments that he had at the last meeting, though with less patience. Once again he pointed out that no recognition was involved and that GVN was a lot stronger than they seemed to think they were. However, if they insisted on a separate paragraph in the joint statement explicitly rejecting recognition of the NLF, he would submit the proposal to Washington.

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Comment: Bunker suggested to Washington that we accept the GVN proposal to modify the language of the joint announcement to include reference to direct talks between the DRV and GVN. He also suggested that serious consideration be given to adding a paragraph making it clear that neither the US nor the GVN recognized the NLF "as an independent entity, let alone a government." Washington promptly agreed to both.

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Moving Beyond Principle to Substance

266. In Washington, top policy planners were looking for a way to overcome the hurdles thrown up by the North Vietnamese at the October 21 secret meeting. On October 22, the White House quired Bunker and Abrams for their reaction to a proposal under consideration which envisaged a firm offer to Hanoi to halt the bombing later in the week if a meeting including GVN were held in Paris within three days of the cessation. The White House wanted an evaluation of the effects of such an offer on the political viability of the GVN and on the morale of ARVN and US forces. Bunker and Abrams were assured that the previously agreed upon conditions would hold: that is, the understanding that reconnaissance would continue, that North Vietnam would not violate the DMZ, that General Abrams would have standing orders to respond if such violations took place, that the cities would not be attacked, and that the US intended to respond against North Vietnam in the face of violations of the understandings.

267. Bunker reported that if we had Thieu aboard and allowed time for him to inform his leaders in advance, he and Abrams saw no serious difficulties with respect to the questions posed by the White House. Bunker pointed out that Thieu had not been concerned with the cessation itself,

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but with the reaction to NLF participation. If the nature of that participation were clearly understood and properly handled publicly, Thieu would not worry about a bombing halt. Bunker thought he was making progress resolving the NLF participation question and advised Washington that once it was settled, he could notify Thieu of the timetable which we proposed to take up with Hanoi, obtain his concurrence, and work out the times when others in Saigon would be notified. Bunker recommended that Ky be notified somewhat earlier than the others who must be alerted in advance of a cessation. Perhaps anticipating concern in Washington about leaks, the Ambassador volunteered the observation that the Prime Minister and Speakers of the Assembly were strongly pressed to reveal what Thieu had told them at the October 16 meeting and had refused; therefore he thought there was little need to be too concerned about leaks at the top.

268. On Wednesday, October 23, new instructions were sent to Harriman and Vance directing them to meet with the North Vietnamese and present a new US offer. As background for their meeting, they were instructed to bear in mind that the climax of a Presidential election was drawing near and when an agreement in principle was achieved with the DRV, the President would have to make sure that he had firm civilian and military support for the step he was prepared to take. There would be political leaders to consult and the candidates, who would be scattered

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around the country, must be informed. The State Department thought it might take as much time to go through this process as it would take the other side "to bring the NLF representatives from Tay Ninh province." Therefore, any agreement in principle must be referred back to Washington for review and consultation before it became final.

269. On Thursday, the US team met with Xuan Thuy and Colonel Lau. In accordance with his instructions, Ambassador Harriman made a detailed formal statement setting forth the US position (see full text at Tab C.) He briefly noted that the US had repeatedly spoken of military activities in the DMZ area and indiscriminate attacks against cities as affecting the President's ability to maintain a situation conducive to serious negotiations and once again he reiterated these "facts of life." He then explained that the US was willing to halt the bombing on October 30 or 31 if a meeting including GVN representatives was scheduled in Paris for November 2. When the US announced the cessation of bombing, it would also announce the date of the first meeting and the fact that representatives of GVN would be present. The North Vietnamese could make the announcement as they wished. On the question of representation, both sides knew who would be present and a simple statement of this understanding would avoid argument over "two sides" or "four parties." The US did not agree to a joint communique but preferred to let actions speak for themselves. For our part, we

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were prepared to give the assurance that no US Government statement in connection with the cessation would use such words as "conditional."

270. Following a lengthy discussion of Harriman's statement, the DRV tabled a draft joint communique and draft joint minute which contained a number of objectionable elements from the US point of view. The DRV insisted that the US agree in writing that the bombing halt was "unconditional" and demanded that the interval between the cessation and the first meeting be more than the three days envisaged by the United States. There was also disagreement -- more procedural than substantive -- over the question of participation (i.e., "two sides" vs. "four parties").

271. The North Vietnamese continued to insist upon a written document recording the concrete points agreed upon among the parties. They were willing to drop their demand for a joint communique, but insisted on at least a secret minute. Washington had anticipated this move and Harriman had been instructed to submit a draft secret minute if circumstances required. Although the US draft had been written before the meeting, Harriman and Vance asked for a recess and retreated long enough to create the impression that they were drafting a document from scratch. After an appropriate interval, they returned and presented their draft for consideration. The parties discussed this document at length and made some progress on agreeing to language. However, they were unable to reach an understanding on several fundamental points,

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particularly the timing of the cessation and the first meeting of the expanded talks. Thuy finally suggested that Hanoi might accept the 26th of October for the cessation, followed by a November 2 meeting. This was the first firm indication from the North Vietnamese that they were willing to give the US a fixed date for the first meeting, but it was clear to Harriman and Vance that the parties were still far apart on the interval which must take place between cessation and the beginning of expanded talks. Harriman suggested that the two sides consult further with their Governments and meet again at a later date in an attempt to reach final agreement.

272. Washington had emphasized in its instructions to the US team the importance of ascertaining with certainty that the DRV understood the facts of life about the military situation which must prevail if the bombing cessation was to be sustained and serious negotiations continued. Immediately following the meeting, Ambassador Vance called Washington and reported that he and Harriman had twice stated the precise nature of our essential understandings on the DMZ and the cities and the DRV did not enter objections and "did not unravel." According to Ambassador Harriman in a subsequent cable, there was not any question that the North Vietnamese "understood our position and will act accordingly." The record, however, does not support these optimistic appraisals. In reaction to the US statement on the

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DMZ and the cities, Thuy's first response was that "the US has raised the question of the DMZ and other questions which we have rejected because we consider them a demand for conditions," and at another point he told Harriman that he wished to emphasize "that the demand for unconditional and complete cessation is one which has never been relinquished by the DRV."

Comment: From the record, it is clear that in his presentation Ambassador Harriman set forth the military understandings with brevity and in only the most general terms; and although it is perhaps possible to show that Hanoi had ample opportunity to reject explicitly and unequivocally the US presentation and failed to do so, it is impossible to ignore Thuy's disclaimers. To assume, as Harriman did, that what the DRV "understood" and what it "agreed to" were identical required an act of faith at odds with the lessons learned from long experience of negotiating with the Communists.

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273. Thursday evening, Ambassador Vance met with Oberemko at the Soviet Embassy. Vance told the Soviet Minister that the morning session with the DRV had been very difficult and there was sharp disagreement centering on the time of cessation, DRV insistence on inclusion of the words "without conditions" in the proposed joint minute, and the description of participation. Oberemko said that, although there was disagreement, he believed the parties were not so far apart that it was impossible to reach a compromise. He

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thought the US should agree to the latest DRV formulation on the participation issue, i. e. , naming of four participants without reference to "two sides" or "four parties." He pointed out that the DRV had tentatively accepted a phrase in the US-proposed joint minute to the effect that the bombing cessation was reached "on the basis of our discussions." This phrase had been included at Washington's insistence in an effort to obtain some additional insurance on the "facts of life" understanding. The North Vietnamese had shown Oberemko this language and he told Vance that he understood the US position -- "You've got it there. Everyone knows what it means." For this reason, the US could afford to compromise on the issue of adding the phrase "without conditions." Within the context of the total joint minute, the phrase would be qualified by the US language and should, therefore, pose no problems for the United States.

274. Oberemko also urged the US to compromise on the issue of a date for the cessation. He noted that the previous position of the DRV had been that there must be an interval of two weeks between the cessation of bombing and the start of expanded conversations. Now it was ten days and he thought it would be possible to find a compromise which would be acceptable. Vance replied that the issue of timing was

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of utmost importance to the US and our position remained that talks must commence within two or three days of a cessation. The Soviet Minister said he thought a solution was very close at hand and he hoped that it would be possible to find a way to reach it. His Government was deeply interested in finding a solution and he was acting under the instructions of his Government in seeking to assist that effort. Vance told him that he appreciated his efforts and that he would be back in touch when he had further instructions from Washington.

275. The Harriman-Vance report of the Thursday meeting was carefully studied at the State Department and White House, and on Friday afternoon the Paris team was sent new instructions. They were to seek another meeting as soon as possible at which a strong effort was to be made to convince the DRV to give up the idea of a joint minute and, if unsuccessful, to reiterate our unwillingness to have the minute state that the cessation was unconditional. If agreement could be reached on procedural details, Harriman was authorized to inform the North Vietnamese that if a meeting were held on November 2, we would be prepared to cease the bombing at midnight Saigon time, October 30. This would constitute about a three day interval. We could not accept as "a political point" the week-long interval desired by the North Vietnamese.

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276. The instructions, drafted personally by Secretary Rusk, contained a hard-nosed evaluation of the present state of the play. According to the Secretary, our problem was that we were proceeding on the basis of three facts of life. Harriman and Vance had 'quite properly' done their best to get Hanoi to reconcile these facts with their insistence upon no reciprocity and no conditions, but while it was one thing to phrase our position in terms which it was possible for Hanoi to accept, it was quite another thing "for us to be vague among ourselves" as to what we meant. In the Secretary's opinion, "reducing the matter to its utter simplicity, the three facts of life are conditions, however one wishes to describe them." Rusk noted that the Administration had explained to key Congressional leaders and to the candidates the sensitivity of the word "conditions" but had made clear our attitude on the "facts of life." Rusk warned Harriman that we must anticipate the "real possibility" that the bombing would stop, there would be no performance by North Vietnam with respect to the DMZ and the cities, the bombing would resume and Hanoi would then produce the secret minute. If such a minute contained the phrase "without conditions," we would be subject to the charge that we "were either knaves or fools."

277. Rusk recognized that if an agreement were reached with Hanoi which resulted in a cessation of bombing, the most persistent

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questioning Administration leaders would get in private discussions with the Congressional leadership and the candidates and from the public would be on the point of what the United States received from North Vietnam in exchange. "These questions will be addressed to us on the basis of everything the President and the Secretary of State have been saying for the past two years," Rusk explained, and "unless it becomes apparent quickly, on the ground in Vietnam as well as in this country, that North Vietnam is holding its hand in some significant respect, this is a fact which could seriously undermine the morale of the United States and Allied forces and the support of the American people. We must somehow protect ourselves against a charge of trickery and this task would become formidable if a secret minute is suddenly produced with the phrase 'without conditions' or any similar phrase."

278. The Secretary was obviously growing impatient with Hanoi's foot-dragging over the dates for the cessation and first meeting. The two sides were finally agreed that a meeting was possible on November 2 and there was no remaining difficulty about whether representatives could in fact be present on that date. Any delay in the departure of NLF representatives from whatever point of origin, waiting for the cessation of bombing, was a political point and not an operational one. As far

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as Rusk was concerned, the NLF representatives "could depart today." As a political point, the US could not agree that a week's interval met the criterion indicated by the other side in such expressions as "the next day" and "as soon as possible," or, on our side, in such words as "prompt." In addition, political problems on our side mounted geometrically with any extension of the time interval. Despite this difficulty we had moved from "the next day" to "two or three days" and had thereby accepted additional burdens in what was for us "a most delicate period." Dismissing as "spurious" the North Vietnamese argument that the bombing cessation must be visible for several days for the North Vietnamese people to accept it, Secretary Rusk instructed Harriman to remind the other side "in the most forceful terms" that less than three days elapsed between our March 31 announcement of a limited bombing halt and Hanoi's announcement that they would agree to preliminary talks in Paris. In the case of a total cessation, our actions would speak "equally loudly and clearly," and Hanoi's response could be equally prompt and decisive.

The Rostow-Dobrynin Conversation

279. Shortly after the new instructions were cabled to Harriman and Vance, Walt Rostow called Ambassador Dobrynin to his home to receive

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a memorandum reflecting "what was on the President's mind" with respect to the state of the play in Paris (text at Tab D.) According to the memorandum, the President believed he was "committed before his own people" that a bombing cessation would not result in an increase in danger and casualties to US forces and those of our allies. It was for this reason that he had insisted that it was a fact of life that the bombing cessation could not be maintained if the DMZ were violated or if the South Vietnamese cities attacked. He was not sure that Hanoi really understood how fundamental it was to the maintenance of a bombing cessation that these two operational conditions be observed. If the bombing were halted, the President would issue standing instructions to General Abrams which would permit the field commander to respond instantly to violations of the DMZ, and the President and his colleagues were equally committed to respond if the cities were attacked. The President was anxious to deal with Hanoi, as with the Soviets, on a basis of respect, trust, and good faith. It was, therefore, exceedingly important that Moscow and Hanoi be quite clear about these "facts of life." If there were any doubt in the minds of the Soviet leaders on this point, it would be a matter of the utmost importance to us. There could be no outcome worse for all our efforts, the memorandum asserted, than to have a resumption of the bombing and the breakup of the talks in Paris.

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280. The memorandum also reflected the anxiety of the President at the potential political implications domestically of continued delay in resolving procedural differences in Paris. With each day that haggling continued over the language of a joint minute and the length of the interval between the cessation and first meeting, election day came closer. If the bombing were stopped so close to a Presidential election, the American people would debate for years whether it had an effect on the results and a great divisive force would be let loose in the land. The President intended, however, to proceed as he had thus far proceeded on Vietnam -- "in a manner wholly free of domestic politics." He was not delaying the negotiations -- Hanoi was responsible for the delay -- and he would not expedite them on the basis of the elections. He was taking each step on its merits, but the Soviet Government should be aware of the burden imposed on him by the tactics of the other side at such a politically sensitive time.

281. The memorandum emphasized the difficulty Hanoi's insistence on the inclusion of the phrase "without conditions" gave the United States. We took a minute between ourselves and another government seriously. We had not tried to force the word "conditions" on Hanoi and we did not intend to use the word "conditions" in our official statements. But we did not want to mislead Hanoi in substance -- nor our own people -- about "the facts of life."

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282. In conclusion, the memorandum stated that "the most important point" the President wanted to convey, and on which he invited Soviet comment, was the significance of all three of the points the United States had raised in Paris: the participation of the GVN, the maintenance of the DMZ, and the absence of attacks on the cities. "There would be great danger to us all" if there were any misunderstanding on them.

283. After reading the memorandum, Ambassador Dobrynin told Rostow that he found it "disappointing." He thought we were going back to matters which had long been settled. As he understood the situation in Paris, there were three questions:

-- First, how we refer to the participation of those who would take part in the talks. On this matter, the US had raised a "new point" by wanting to get into the secret minute that participation "would not involve recognition." Everyone agreed that "recognition was not involved."

-- Second, there was the question that the bombing cessation would be "unconditional." This was not a matter, in his judgment, of great importance. It was not worth sacrificing the entire meeting on this point. Rostow interrupted to point out that his memorandum explained why we took the question of "unconditional" so seriously. Dobrynin said he now recognized that

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we attached great importance to the matter and would so report.

-- Third, there was the question of the date of cessation of the bombardment. He attached great importance to the fact that the North Vietnamese had set a date; namely, November 2. He could not understand why a few days one way or the other were so important to us when there were such great issues at stake. We have been arguing, he said, for two weeks over the question of two days.

284. Rostow demurred from Dobrynin's assessment of the timing question as unimportant. He told the Ambassador that, from our point of view, we had in good faith put in a proposal in mid-October for a meeting the "next day." We had chosen the next day because of what the other side had said about beginning serious talks the day after the bombing cessation (Dobrynin said this was a new idea to him; he had not known that Hanoi had mentioned the next day.) Having geared ourselves to a final decision on the basis of what had been previously discussed -- Rostow continued -- the North Vietnamese negotiators suddenly unleashed a great many rabbits: a four-power conference, a communique, a secret minute, several weeks "as a gap between the bombing cessation and the first meeting," no conditions, etc. It was Hanoi's behavior with respect to these matters which had deeply concerned the President, because they might reflect a lack of understanding

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of the "facts of life" and a lack of understanding of the seriousness of the problems that we faced in moving forward, especially at so sensitive a political time.

285. Rostow elaborated on the political theme, explaining some of the political pressures which circumscribed the President's maneuverability. Dobrynin indicated that while he understood better the US position, he wished to clear up one serious point: "in communicating this message to my government, should I say that the President will not proceed with the Paris negotiations until he gets a response from the Soviet government on the question raised?" Rostow replied that it was his impression that the President merely wanted to convey to the Ambassador and his government his present concerns. The question he was asking, however, was a serious diplomatic question and Rostow would seek an answer.

286. Rostow excused himself and called the President to put the question squarely to him. Johnson said that it was not his intention to delay the proceedings in Paris until he received a reply from Moscow. He did not wish to be that hard; however he did wish to know the reaction of the Soviet Government to this situation.

287. After this clarification, Dobrynin returned to the three points at issue at the Paris talks. He told Rostow that the two men could

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talk "with brutal frankness" and if he understood what Rostow was telling him, it was that on one point the US was prepared to compromise. That is, we were prepared to see the participants listed. However, on two points we intended to hold firm: on the question of inclusion of the phrase "without conditions" and on the interval between cessation and the first meeting. At this point, Rostow received a phone call from Ben Read (Special Assistant to Secretary Rusk) who told him that we would be prepared to tell the North Vietnamese in the context of the secret minute that we did not plan to use in formal statements the phrase "conditions." Rostow informed Dobrynin of this fact and said that now we were prepared to compromise on "one and a half of the three points." It was now time for Hanoi to clear the remaining underbrush away.

288. Ambassador Dobrynin said that he had been privileged to get the reports from both our side and from the Hanoi delegation. He could attest from his personal knowledge that we had "many, many times" made clear the facts of life. Rostow asked: "Are you, Ambassador Dobrynin, prepared to tell me that they understand the 'facts of life'?" He said, "I can only say that from their reports to me as well as your reports to our people in Paris, you have expressed yourselves very clearly."

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The Kosygin Message

289. As Ambassador Dobrynin was about to leave, he received a phone call from Tcherniakov, his DCM, who reported that a message to the President from Chairman Kosygin had just arrived. Rostow and the Ambassador discussed where the message should be delivered and decided to minimize the chances of a leak about their contact by having the message delivered by Tcherniakov to Rostow's home. Dobrynin dispatched his car to pick up Tcherniakov and the two men settled down to await him. (Rostow later reported to President Johnson that up to this point in their meeting, Ambassador Dobrynin -- contrary to his custom -- had not had a Scotch. He accepted, however, while awaiting Tcherniakov.)

290. Rostov took the occasion of the break to tell the Ambassador, on a strictly personal basis, that if he had any advice to give the leaders in Hanoi it would be to go very rapidly for a definitive settlement in Southeast Asia once the new phase of the talks opened, assuming we could surmount the present problems. Dobrynin asked why Rostow thought there was such urgency. He said there were two reasons:

-- First, there would be a wave of expectation and goodwill in the US in the wake of a bombing cessation, quiet at the DMZ, quiet in the cities, and GVN participation in Paris. But Dobrynin had to

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remember that this was a country which had a scar on its heart over Panmunjom. If the talks dragged on, there would be grave disappointment.

-- Second, as he could see from the polls, this country was undergoing a swing towards conservatism. This has happened before in our history, but it was clear that something like 60% of the people were for Nixon or Wallace. Rostow could not predict what would happen if there was protracted frustration in the movement towards peace, but it was his personal judgment that there would be strong pressures to apply more military power in Vietnam rather than less.

Rostow concluded by saying that in his quite objective judgement, it would be wise for the leaders of Hanoi to seize this moment and work with President Johnson towards the position he first outlined in his Johns Hopkins speech; namely, a position in which an independent North Vietnam associated itself not with China but with the other countries of Southeast Asia in constructive efforts at development. Only in this way was North Vietnam likely to maintain its independence. (According to Rostow, Ambassador Dobrynin showed "surprising interest and concentration" as he made this point.)

291. Tcherniakov arrived with the letter from Kosygin which Dobrynin informally translated for Rostow (text at Tab E.) The letter

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indicated that the Soviet leadership believed that "the beginning of an important movement" in US-Vietnamese negotiations was now at hand. The position of the two sides on the cessation of the bombing was "much closer" and the possibility of reaching final agreement "quite real." Moscow believed such an agreement could lay the basis for the "beginning of a breakthrough towards a political settlement" of the Vietnam problem. Kosygin's message focused on the DRV's agreement to allow the GVN to participate and urged that the agreement not flounder on details of "third rate importance."

292. Speaking personally, Rostow observed to Dobrynin that, as his memorandum indicated, the President felt some of the issues in dispute -- which Kosygin had described as details of third-rate importance -- were, in light of the positions taken by North Vietnam, of first importance to the United States. The question of conditions and of timing were, from our point of view, major matters. Dobrynin replied that Rostow's memorandum and their discussion had made this clear and he would so inform his government. As the two men went out to their cars, Rostow looked at his watch and said: "Anatoliy, it is now midnight in Paris. You'd better get to work to clear up these issues of third importance." Dobrynin replied that he would get busy but he didn't know what he could accomplish before the morning meeting in Paris.

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293. Returning to his office, Rostow reported to the President that a message had been received from Kosygin and briefly summarized its substance. The President instructed that, after checking with Secretary Rusk, Rostow should call Dobrynin and tell him that the President wished him to convey the following points:

"(1) The President is gratified that both the Chairman and he were thinking of the same problem at the same time.

(2) The President has tried and is trying to find answers to these problems but has been unable to persuade the other side to meet us on acceptable terms. Perhaps Chairman Kosygin can help. Perhaps he can try to move us closer.

(3) The President wants you to know that the points I made to you this afternoon are, in effect, his response to Chairman Kosygin. They represent the anxieties on the President's mind.

(4) The President agrees with Chairman Kosygin that this is a critical phase. He would welcome any assistance the Chairman can give us in getting these issues solved. The President believes that, with the passage of a few more days, this possibility for progress might move away from us."

After briefing Secretary Rusk and reporting the President's four-point message, the Secretary suggested that Rostow add the following additional

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point: "(5) Therefore, the President believes that both sides should push these issues of third importance quickly aside and get on with the real business, which is making peace." Rostow then telephoned Ambassador Dobrynin and twice repeated the five points for urgent transmission to Moscow.

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294. Early Saturday morning, Rostow cabled Vance a wrap-up of his meeting with Dobrynin and Kosygin's message to President Johnson. On the basis of the Soviet Ambassador's reaction, Rostow thought that the Soviets might regard the present instructions of the Paris team "as a fair balance and support that position." However, it was doubtful that Soviet communications were adequate for Moscow to fully exert its influence by the time of the next secret session -- only a few hours away -- but Rostow thought Moscow might have sent a parallel general communication to Hanoi. In any case, he wanted Vance to go into his morning session "with this background and in reasonably good heart."

295. At 9:30 a.m. Harriman and Vance met with the North Vietnamese representatives and once again urged Hanoi to drop its demand for a joint minute. Thuy refused and continued to insist on the inclusion of language which indicated that the US was ending the bombing unconditionally. Harriman said that the United States would agree to halt the bombing on October 30 if the DRV agreed to the convening of a meeting in Paris on November 2, but Thuy insisted that it was not possible to agree on the timing of the cessation and subsequent meeting until agreement was reached on the language of the minute. He was, however, willing to discuss timing, but only as a "supposition." The DRV, he said, had previously proposed a time interval of ten days; it was now willing to agree to only eight days. Harriman replied with the

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standard Washington line about how we had moved from 24 hours to "two or three days" to our present firm offer of three days. This was, he said, as far as we could go. After considerable discussion, Thuy made what he called a "concrete proposition." He said that if the US would stop the bombing any time on October 27, Hanoi would agree to a meeting at any time on November 2. Harriman pointed out that this proposal provided for an interval of six days, which was too long. Thuy insisted it was only five days since Hanoi did not count the day on which the bombing stopped or the day on which the meeting was held. Such sophistry notwithstanding, Harriman rejected the proposal emphatically. After further discussion in which both sides held fast to their established positions, Harriman told the North Vietnamese that he did not want to leave them with the impression that there was anything further the US could give. He expressed his disappointment at their position and the meeting adjourned.

296. In the course of the discussions over the language of the secret minute, Thuy had expressed bewilderment at the refusal of the US to agree to the inclusion of the words "unconditional" or "without conditions." The US, he insisted, had accepted that the cessation of bombing would be unconditional or without condition and yet refused to put this down in writing. Harriman's reply was that "condition" was a

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very broad term: the US had agreed to meet at a set time and the DRV had agreed to have serious talks -- "we don't consider these conditions although a number of other people might consider them so." To Thuy, the very fact that some people might consider agreement on a fixed date as conditional, although the parties did not, made it all the more important that it be put in writing so that there could be no misunderstanding. Harriman demurred, insisting that the US did not want to add to the confusion by accepting the inclusion of words whose definition was not agreed upon by the parties. Thuy replied that there would be no confusion at all because both sides had said that the cessation of bombing would be without condition. Harriman ignored this point and suggested that they move on to another item for discussion.

Comment: The interesting thing about this exchange was Harriman's choice of examples of possible "conditions." He did not refer to the "facts of life" which Rusk had pointed out quite strongly the previous day were, in fact, "conditions." Rather he cited procedural matters which, while perhaps conditions for the cessation, were not of such substantive importance as to attract the interest of skeptics who might be expected

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to raise the question, "What was their quid for our quo?" Nor did Harriman deny that the US had accepted the principle that the cessation would be "without conditions." As a matter of logic, Thuy had the better of this exchange.

Further DRV Concessions

297. Washington attributed the lack of progress at the Saturday meeting to the inability of the Soviets to weigh in following the Rostow-Dobrynin conversation. Harriman and Vance were therefore instructed to meet with their counterparts again on Sunday and to make every effort to convince the other side that "agreement on cessation and a prompt meeting thereafter with agreed participants is the essential thing, that the agreed minute approach should be dropped, and that the other points they are insisting on are 'third rate details'." Hopefully, the Soviets would have taken a similar line with Hanoi in the interim and it would finally be possible to firm up an agreement with which Washington could live.

298. Pursuant to instructions, Harriman made a strong representation at the Sunday meeting in support of abandoning an agreed minute and wrapping up an agreement based on the US proposal to stop the bombing on October 30 with the expanded talks to commence on

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November 2. Thuy said that Hanoi insisted on an agreed minute but was willing to abandon its insistence on the inclusion of the words "without condition." In explaining his reasoning for this concession, Thuy indicated that while the US had agreed not to use the word "unconditional" in any public statement on the cessation, it did not raise any objection to the DRV saying that the cessation was, in fact, unconditional. On the basis of this "oral understanding" Hanoi was willing to drop its demand for the inclusion of the words "without condition" in the interests of reaching "a quick settlement." Thuy also said that the DRV was prepared to agree to a cessation at 1:00 A.M. Paris time, or 8:00 A.M. Saigon time on October 30, rather than midnight October 30 in Saigon as the US had proposed. The US team said it would report the DRV proposals to Washington and get back in touch as soon as they had any word. Thuy said he would be willing to meet "any time of day or night."

299. Vance immediately called Washington and relayed the DRV offer. He told Ben Read that "we have now got everything we have asked for. We should accept." Secretary Rusk, however, was still not completely convinced that the US had what it needed in Paris and sought to clarify the situation by requesting that the delegation once again report on the status of the "understanding" with the DRV concerning the DMZ and the cities. Harriman and Vance replied in two lengthy cables (at Tab F) that they had raised the DMZ question in 12 secret sessions, each time in consistent terms. The question of the cities had been raised

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repeatedly in private sessions and made an issue in the plenary sessions. At no point, when the subjects were discussed, "has the other side given us any basis for believing they did not understand precisely what we are talking about and what is expected of them." Harriman and Vance stated that, in their judgment, "the DRV will carry out what we have demanded of them with respect to the DMZ and indiscriminate attacks against major cities. While we have not received direct affirmation that the DRV will abide by our demands -- we are convinced that they understand clearly what they are expected to do." This, the team felt, had been confirmed by the four discussions of the question with the Soviets in Paris. The Soviet representative had "indicated to us that the DRV understands our position."

300. The chief negotiators claimed that they had succeeded in getting "conditions accepted by not calling them conditions, but letting the other side call them what it wishes." In their opinion, the US concept had always been to avoid the problem of reciprocity "by defining actions in our own way and letting Hanoi define them in its own ways." They believed that Hanoi knew what to do and would act accordingly; however, they reiterated their recommendation that "the bombing should be resumed if our demands with respect to either the DMZ or the cities are violated."

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Slippage In Saigon

301. There had been no new developments in Siagon following the consultation meeting on Friday. On Monday, Bunker and Berger called on Thieu to discuss the latest text of the joint announcement and to express the growing annoyance of the American mission with the inspired leaks which were flourishing in the capital.

302. The Ambassador opened by saying that Washington welcomed Thieu and Ky's suggestions at the last meeting for changes in the draft joint announcement, the result of which was a much better and fuller joint announcement from every point of view. He went on to say that there was now no shadow of a doubt about the US or GVN view of the NLF, and there was no reason why Ky couldn't come out in public support of the cessation. With Thieu and Ky pulling together, GVN would have no difficulty with the public if it attended talks with the NLF.

303. Thieu read the new draft and said, "I do not see how we can ask for anything more." He indicated he would discuss it with Ky and the Prime Minister and asked if there was anything new in the talks with Hanoi. As he had been during the previous week, Bunker was vague in his reply. He indicated that there was nothing new; we had told Hanoi we would stop the bombing 2 or 3 days before the meeting, and were waiting for the North Vietnamese to give us a date. Thieu asked why Hanoi was delaying since there was agreement in

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principle had been reached almost two weeks previously. Bunker said he didn't know. "It may be that they are having trouble with the NLF," Berger interjected. "It may be that they are studying the signs of difference between you and us which have appeared here and see an opportunity to drive a wedge between us and capitalize on it." Thieu said they would certainly try to do that, and this admission against interest gave Bunker the occasion to bring up the second item on his agenda.

304. The Ambassador showed Thieu a batch of press reports and editorials from the local papers about alleged differences between Washington and Saigon: "Let us de-Americanize the Peace" (Ministry of Information); "GVN wants two-sided talks" (Prime Minister); "US pressuring GVN;" "GVN resisting US pressure, " etc. Bunker said that all this was uncalled for, unnecessary, and dangerous. While he and the President were working things out quietly and officials in Washington were saying nothing, it was most unfortunate for a stream of statements to continue in Saigon. It would only confuse the Vietnamese people and could make things more difficult for Thieu when the meetings opened in Paris. Thieu was defensive and apologetic, blaming the stories on the pressures of the press, and Bunker -- having made his point -- let the matter drop.

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305. Thieu asked if Hanoi would give Washington a date before the Presidential election. Bunker said he didn't know, but there was such a possibility, in which case the first meeting might well take place before election day. Bunker added that the US was unable to go any further in meeting the GVN needs than the draft joint announcement, and we could not meet their request for procedural meetings before the expanded talks commenced. Saigon had, therefore, to decide whether they were going to join the talks or not, and they might have to decide on short notice. He suggested a joint meeting with Ky and Foreign Minister Thanh in the afternoon to see if any issues remained. If the GVN raised new conditions and did not join the first meeting, Thieu should not underestimate the serious consequences of such a decision. The President said he was aware of that, but thought we were now pretty well in agreement.

306. Bunker cabled Washington following the meeting that he thought we were "in the clear" in Saigon, but would know for certain after the joint meeting. "I'm for digging in at this point," he said.

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307. In late afternoon, Bunker met with Thieu, Ky and Foreign Minister Thanh. The meeting was long and difficult, with Ky pushing for the US to accept the principle of a tripartite conference: the US, GVN, and DRV, with the NLF relegated to the status of junior partner on the DRV delegation. At one point, Thieu asked if Bunker had received binding instructions that the conference must not be pictured as taking place between three delegations, to which the Ambassador replied in the affirmative. He pointed out that since Hanoi wished the meetings to be four-power and Saigon wished them to be three-power, the only possible basis for talks was to be silent on the point. According to Bunker, "Ky understood this well, even while trying to squeeze us." The Vice President confessed that he understood the US problem: "You can't have a conference if Hanoi won't come, or if Saigon won't come," but he kept trying, nevertheless, to find some formulation that would have made it appear that there was only one delegation on the other side.

308. In considering the text of the draft joint announcement, the GVN officials pressed for modifications which they believed would make it easier to cope with criticism that they had agreed to meet with

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the NLF. Bunker acquiesced in several changes which were of policy insignificance from the US point of view, but which GVN thought helpful. After agreement was reached, Ky remarked, "Quite frankly, we are not satisfied, but with such material we can explain, only it will be difficult to convince the people." Echoing Thieu (or, perhaps echoing his own echo) the Vice President predicted that if the conference lasted many months, GVN's problem would be to prevent a disintegration of morale within its ranks. Having heard this refrain so often, Bunker replied, virtually from habit, with his stock pep talk, following which the indefatigable Thanh resurrected the question of conference procedure. The Foreign Minister indicated that he wished to go over the points covered during the recent discussions to draft agreed understandings so there would be a record of what had been decided with respect both to substance and procedure. Ambassador Bunker thought it significant that it was Thanh who used the word "agreement" to describe the results of their meeting, but an agreement, like the cool mist of morning, evaporates quickly in Saigon.

309. After the meeting, Ky approached the Ambassador and said he had worked hard to find a compromise. Bunker was skeptical, but admitted to Washington that perhaps he did so in the end after

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realizing that the US would not go along with the three-power idea. Recognizing the futility of this effort, the Vice President had finally admitted that it was better that Saigon "openly recognize that the NLF will be there;" and at another point he had counseled Thieu that semantic touches could not conceal the "reality that we accept the Front at the conference." But Ky was a man for all seasons; what he yielded today, he would attempt to recoup tomorrow. And Thanh's "agreement" in Ky's mind was less final than Bunker led Washington to expect.

310. Early Tuesday morning, Washington informed Bunker that the President was giving serious consideration to Hanoi's offer to meet in Paris on November 2nd if the bombing were halted on October 30. Bunker was instructed to go over the proposal thoroughly with Thieu alone and to obtain his personal concurrence. Washington emphasized that the President had not yet made a decision, but would do so within 24 hours, and it was vital that Thieu be brought on board. In order to avoid the leaks which had created so many problems prior to the October 15 meeting, Bunker was advised that Washington would consider it "most unwise and risky" for Thieu to bring even Ky, Huong, and Thanh into the picture before a decision was made in

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Washington: absolute secrecy was imperative and, based upon Bunker's report of the Monday afternoon meeting, Washington believed that it should be possible to get Thieu's concurrence without the necessity of his consulting others prior to a decision by President Johnson.

311. The Department of State provided Bunker with a series of arguments to be used on Thieu to reassure him of the wisdom of the American position and the victory it represented for both Washington and Saigon. Bunker was to tell Thieu that the Hanoi proposal represented a "major change" in the DRV position: they had "accepted without challenge" the US military proposals on restraint and had "expressly accepted" participation of the GVN under the "our side/your side" formula, to which Thieu and his top people had concurred as early as May. "We have not budged, Hanoi has," was the way Washington expressed the movement in Paris.

312. Bunker attempted to see Thieu immediately, but the President indicated that he could not receive him until late afternoon. When the Ambassador finally met with Thieu, he found that the President was unwilling to commit himself without consultation with his colleagues. He indicated that he must talk to Ky before he could reply to Washington's request for concurrence and it was obvious that

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he had grave reservations. He told Bunker that he found November 2 "too soon" and "too fast" for the first meeting. He planned to send Ky to Paris to serve as advisor to the GVN delegation and it would take several days to pull the delegation together and give them instructions. He asked why the meeting could not be put off a few days, but when Bunker asked how long a delay he felt necessary, Thieu declined to say, indicating that he wished to consult with Ky. The President also asked why it was necessary to announce the cessation as early as Wednesday morning. Bunker replied that we had been working for six months to get serious negotiations going and Hanoi had now agreed to such negotiations and had set a firm date for their commencement; there was no reason why we should delay any further. Thieu was noncommittal, but indicated that he was not concerned if the lapsed time was "two or three days, or several days more." This suggested to Bunker that agreement was still possible, and he advised Washington that he thought he could get Thieu and Ky to agree to cessation and announcement either Wednesday or soon thereafter, with the first meeting to be held after November 4. In a subsequent cable, Bunker urged giving GVN even more time

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and requested authorization to say that the bombing would be halted on October 31 with the first meeting to occur on November 7, or one or two days later. Bunker argued that if the US had to stop the bombing unilaterally, it would be wise to allow GVN a reasonable time between the announcement and the first meeting; such flexibility would strengthen our position with the TCC allies and put pressure on Saigon to climb aboard or look totally unreasonable, the US having done everything possible to meet their requirements.

313. Following his discussion with Ambassador Bunker, Thieu called a meeting of the National Security Council to discuss with his colleagues the US proposal. After an hour of what was obviously heated discussion, he met again with Bunker but insisted that Vice President Ky be present. The Ambassador minced no words, emphasizing that President Johnson felt he must move on Wednesday since Hanoi had accepted our terms. He gave Thieu and Ky copies of a personal message from President Johnson which told them "directly" what was on the President's "mind and heart." The message appealed to the pride and patriotism of the GVN leadership and offered full assurances that the US would continue to maintain "every bit of military pressure we can summon within South Vietnam and in Laos" while the

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negotiations were in progress in Paris. In the President's mind, this was "a time for more military pressure on the enemy, not less." He reiterated his pledge that the US would not be privy to any attempt to impose a coalition government and expressed confidence that the allies would work together in Paris "in the same spirit of brotherhood in which we have stood side by side in the battle." He had full confidence in GVN's ability to rally all South Vietnamese nationalists toward "that political unity that will be necessary if we are to consolidate the victory our fighting men have brought within our grasp and make worth while the suffering of the people of Vietnam and the sacrifices of their allies."

314. Thieu and Ky, if not unmoved, were at least unconvinced. Both argued that they needed more time to prepare for the first meeting, mentioning a week or ten days delay in order to prepare their delegation, their leadership, and their people. Bunker replied that this was impossible, but they continued to express all the old fears about their delegation being insulted at the first meeting, called puppets, confronted with two delegations on the other side. Bunker argued at length that President Johnson wanted to go together with them, was their best friend, and had stood by them for years even at a heavy cost to himself

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at home and abroad. The President felt he had to proceed and wanted their cooperation. The urgencies were such that he might have to announce the cessation unilaterally on Wednesday. Thieu and Ky said they realized the urgencies, but wished to consult further with the National Security Council. Bunker told Thieu that he would have to have an answer Tuesday night, and the President agreed to call the Ambassador as soon as the council finished its deliberations.

315. Bunker was disappointed, but not discouraged. He advised Washington that he thought the problem was simply that the GVN leadership was not organized in spite of our urgings over a long period of time. He thought we had put Thieu under such constraints of secrecy, which he had observed, that he now felt he needed more time to bring his colleagues along. Bunker was convinced that the GVN leadership could be brought around to a joint announcement on Wednesday or Thursday, if we could offer them a short postponement of the meeting date.

Saigon Ups The Ante

316. It was not until after Midnight that Ambassador Bunker was called to the Palace to receive Thieu's reply. Upon his arrival, he was greeted by Foreign Minister Thanh who indicated that the

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President had gone to bed and wished him to brief the Ambassador. Thanh said that the President had conferred with the Presidents of the two houses of the Assembly until shortly before 1:00 a.m. and it was their opinion that in the light of Article 39 of the Constitution the President must consult also with the leaders of parliamentary groups and with the Bureaus of the two houses. It might be possible that they would determine that a plenary session was necessary to give the government authority to enter into peace negotiations.

317. Thanh also said that President Thieu had received a disturbing telegram from Ambassador Lam to the effect that Harriman had said that "the US is not opposed to a delegation from the NLF district from Hanoi" and that "the US cannot force Hanoi to give advance assurances that they will negotiate directly with the GVN." This seemed at variance with the three-point memorandum the US mission in Saigon had given the GVN and with the joint announcement that had been agreed to at the Monday meeting. For these reasons, and for the reasons that had been stated by the President and the Vice President, the GVN needed "materially more time" to settle these matters and to prepare a delegation before they could agree to a date for the bombing halt and inception of negotiations.

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318. Bunker replied that the US had never been informed that there was any question about the government needing authorization from the National Assembly to negotiate. We had made certain demands upon Hanoi with the approval of President Thieu and Hanoi had not accepted them. Bunker had outlined these matters to the President as early as October 13 and we had kept the TCC heads of government appropriately informed. We had acted in good faith and had never left the GVN in doubt that we did not believe it possible to tell Hanoi how it could constitute its side of the negotiations. He did not know whether Harriman had said what Ambassador Lam was reporting, but it was clear that Washington had instructed him to give certain assurances to the GVN which had been conveyed, explained, and accepted and obviously we stood by them.

319. Bunker said that he needed a response from GVN — yes or no — whether they would go along with President Johnson's proposal. It would be necessary for the President to go ahead in any case, but we had to know now whether we would have the cooperation of GVN. This was a time for decision, and Bunker needed to know whether Thanh wished him to report that GVN did not agree to go ahead on the basis that had previously been agreed upon.

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320. Thanh claimed that our agreement on the joint announcement had become beclouded by remarks made by Harriman to Lam. Bunker once again took Thanh carefully through the implications of the "our side/your side" formula and gained the impression that Thanh was sparring for time. Bunker emphasized that the US stood by its commitments. If the other side pretended that the NLF was a separate delegation, the US would support the GVN in its opposition to any separate status. Our position on this was clear and had been set forth in our three-point memorandum. These matters were not new; we had been over them again and again. Bunker said the question was whether the GVN would cooperate, and he needed an answer now.

321. Finally Thanh said that the President wished to cooperate but he needed more time. He was very anxious to be helpful, but he had to take into consideration the National Assembly, the Constitution, and the hyper-sensitivity of the issue of the status of the NLF. He would like to have it mentioned to President Johnson that if GVN went into the talks without proper preparation there would be a progressive disintegration in South Vietnam. Thanh said that Thieu didn't know if these concerns had been reported to

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Washington. Bunker replied that they indeed had been reported and Washington had gone to great lengths to meet them.

322. Bunker again pressed Thanh to say whether he should report that the GVN was not going to cooperate with President Johnson's request, and the Foreign Minister again said that it was only a matter of time and clarification. Bunker asked if GVN had a proposal to make, but Thanh merely replied that his government did not say No to President Johnson. New instructions would be sent to Ambassador Diem in Washington and Ambassador Lam would be recalled from Paris since Thieu was "very shaken up" by his report on the conversation with Harriman. Bunker noted that recalling Lam would not settle anything since there was already agreement on the points to which Lam referred in his telegram. Sensing that agreement was not possible at this point, Bunker advised Thanh that he regretted very much that he would have to report that the GVN was not prepared to cooperate with us in ending the bombing and scheduling negotiations on the basis of what Washington had proposed.

323. In reporting to Washington, Bunker noted that it was very important not to leave matters in such a state of indecision,

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but to put the burden on GVN to tell us when they were willing to move. Accordingly, he requested instructions to tell Thieu that we were prepared to wait another 24 hours before making a bombing halt announcement and that we proposed to give GVN a little more time to pull themselves together by scheduling the first meeting on November 4 instead of on November 2. Thieu would understand that we could not wait indefinitely, but Bunker thought we should give him an opportunity to agree to these dates or to give us an alternate proposition for the first meeting.

Final Agreement in Paris

324. The DRV delegation in Paris was showing increased anxiety over the failure of the US to respond to its offer of October 27. On the 29th, Colonel Lau called Vance and requested a meeting at 5:00 p.m. to discuss the reasons for the delay. On instructions from Washington, Vance postponed the meeting until 8:00 p.m. and, as directed by Secretary Rusk, he opened the discussion with a statement that he had not yet received instructions and the most he could tell Lau was that there were complexities to be dealt with in terms of consultations and differences in time and the US was working intensely on the problem in Paris and elsewhere. As soon as he received instructions from his government, he would let Lau know.

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325. Lau asked Vance to explain what our problems were. Was it, he inquired, the shift of time (from 1600 GMT to 0001 GMT) that had caused us difficulties. If so, Lau said, let him know and the DRV would take it into consideration. If the US could not accept the secret minute we should also let him know that fact. He understood that we had complexities but the US should let him know what its problems were. When it became obvious that Vance was not authorized to answer his questions, Lau concluded the meeting with the request that if the US were not going to stop the bombing that evening at the time proposed by the DRV, it was "only fair" that Vance should let him know before midnight Paris time.

326. Vance advised Ben Read by phone immediately following the meeting with Colonel Lau that if the US did not intend to order cessation that evening we should indeed let Lau know by midnight. Vance thought the DRV might be prepared to drop its demand for a secret minute if we insisted, particularly if we were able to indicate to them that we were prepared to stop the bombing at 1600 GMT Wednesday (30th) as we had originally proposed.

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327. Following the meeting with Lau, Vance met with a member of the Soviet legation in Paris who indicated that he was under great pressure from Moscow to report on the Paris talks. He indicated that Kosygin was waiting to hear what the status of the situation was and Vance gave him a "skeleton" report of his earlier conversation with Colonel Lau, in which he had reported that the US would not be stopping the bombing at 0001 GMT October 30. The Soviet envoy asked whether the US would be stopping the bombing at 1600 GMT as in our initial proposal. Vance replied that he had no instructions on that point and the Russian concluded the conversation by noting that his government had a great interest in seeing the matter "satisfactorily resolved."

328. The Soviets were not alone in their bewilderment at the failure of the US to set a definite time for the cessation. During the tea break at the October 30 plenary session, Harriman and Habib met with Xuan Thuy and Colonel Lau for more than 30 minutes during which time the frustration of the DRV negotiators became obvious. Harriman reported that he had just called Vance who reported that he had not yet received word from Washington. Harriman assured the DRV delegation, however, that as soon as word was received, he would be in contact with them. He added that he had nothing further to say beyond that which Vance had said at his meeting with Lau the previous day.

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329. Thuy replied that, for the DRV's part, he would like to remark that the US had been holding talks with an attitude which was not serious and not correct. "The United States," he said, "says things in one way and does them in another. When the DRV promises something, it carries them out." The DRV envoy repeated the substance of what Lau had said previously to Vance regarding the requirement for a minute and said it had been raised to see if the US would keep its word. "A straightforward man acts like he speaks," Thuy intoned, "but the US has acted otherwise, speaking one way and acting in yet another" (an obvious reference to the US offer of October 26 to stop the bombing on October 30 if Hanoi agreed to a meeting on November 2). Thuy said there was nothing further he could say except that "The US wants a peaceful settlement, so does the DRV; but if the US wants to continue the war, the DRV will continue the war." Harriman replied that if there were any truth in Thuy's remarks, he would answer them, but at the moment he preferred not to comment. The remainder of the tea break conversation dealt with non-substantive matters, and when the parties returned to the conference room, the public session was promptly adjourned.

330. Subsequent to the plenary conference, Ambassador Lam arrived at the American legation to seek further clarification from Ambassador Harriman on the procedural problems that were bothering

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Saigon. Lam was received by Habib who was informed that under instructions from his government Lam was to put certain questions to Ambassador Harriman, the answers to which were requested in writing. The questions submitted orally were:

"(1) Place of the NLF. Will there be a single delegation on the other side or will there be a single communist delegation with two delegations on our side?

"(2) (a) Can we give assurances that Hanoi will accept negotiating directly with the GVN? And what guarantee can we have if Hanoi gave such a promise?

(b) Is it true that it is not possible to make additional demands in advance of Hanoi, so as to assure that they will negotiate seriously?

(c) What assurances do we have that Hanoi will de-escalate the war -- what guarantees do we have?

"(3) GVN asks that the rules of procedure first be determined between the US and the GVN and then negotiated (by the US) with the DRV in advance of the first plenary session."

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331. After submitting his questions to Habib, Lam met briefly with Harriman. With more than a trace of impatience, Harriman told him that most serious issues were involved and he did not think it useful or advantageous to anyone if attempts were made to create differences between him and Ambassador Bunker. "The fact is," he said, "that Ambassador Bunker and I speak as one." Following this brief session, the Ambassador read Lam's questions and proceeded to draft a response. His note, which was promptly dispatched to the Saigon representative, read: "The questions which Ambassador Lam has submitted to Ambassador Harriman have been carefully studied. Ambassador Harriman finds that they all have been discussed by Ambassador Bunker with the appropriate GVN officials in Saigon. Ambassador Harriman has been advised of these discussions and fully confirms the statements made by Ambassador Bunker." Soon thereafter Lam departed for Saigon.

332. Later in the afternoon Vance and Habib met for twenty minutes with Lau and Vy. Pursuant to instructions from Washington, Vance told Lau that, as he had said the previous day, we were working on the matter extensively and we hoped it would be possible to work things out in a manner satisfactory to both sides. The US needed a little more time, however, and would be back in touch with the DRV delegation as soon as possible. Lau replied that he and Thuy would be

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available from 7:00 p.m. Paris time to meet with the American team. Vy commented that the time for the cessation of the bombing proposed by the DRV had already passed, as had the time proposed by the US. Vance replied that he had no instructions that the bombing would be stopped and repeated that the US needed a little more time.

333. Lau took note of what Vance had said and indicated that he would report it to Thuy. He was not, however, in a position to comment on Vance's statement; the DRV side, he said, must await the final US communication before commenting. He noted that the previous day he had expressed some views to Vance and those views had been reiterated by Thuy to Harriman during the tea break that afternoon. Whether or not the agreement between the two parties was recorded in a minute was not very important, Lau explained; the problem was to come to an agreement. The reason the DRV had raised the question of a minute was to see whether the words of the US conformed to its actions. If the US were to change the contents of the minute from the way it was worded at the meeting on the 27th, Xuan Thuy could not agree; however it was now Thuy's view that "we do not need a minute any longer so that you do not use the minute as a pretext for delaying the cessation of bombing." Lau pointed out that the parties were in

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agreement on all the essential points raised in recent negotiations and all that remained was for the US to fix the time for the cessation. During the course of the private meetings on October 29 and 30 the DRV "had once again shown its good will" and, on the basis of what the DRV side had expressed, the US had no reason to further delay the bombing cessation.

334. Xuan Thuy and Colonel Lau were no more anxious for Washington to set the time for the cessation of the bombing than were Ambassadors Harriman and Vance. They were concerned that the deal they had wrapped up was going to become unraveled as a result of GVN duplicity. Shortly after the regular Wednesday ~~plenary~~ session, Vance had called Secretary Bundy and urged that the US respond to the DRV by 0500 Paris time (11:00 a.m. EST). The Paris team were agreed that the cessation and announcement should be 0800 Saigon time on the 31st (7:00 p.m. EST) with the first meeting set for November 4th "or later as the President sees fit." Bundy had advised Vance that his recommendation of a response in Paris by 11:00 a.m. Washington time (in less than 4 1/2 hours) made things extremely difficult if Bunker had not been heard from by then, and had suggested that Vance make his recommendation in cable form with supporting reasons so the President "could weigh it with all factors." "We should also," Bundy had urged, "put our minds on whether there was any partial response that would ease things but not commit us till we knew where we stood in Saigon."

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335. Washington quite reasonably decided that it was impossible to move as rapidly as Vance had suggested, and thus Vance had been instructed to undertake a holding action at his late afternoon meeting with Lau and Vy. However, following that session Vance called State to seek authorization to tell Thuy prior to 2300 Paris time (5:00 p.m. EST), "or earlier if possible," that the US would have a definite answer for them by 0500 Paris time October 31 (11:00 p.m. EST, October 30). Harriman and Vance wanted the green light to assure the DRV that the deal was on and they wanted it as soon as possible.

336. At 5:00 p.m. EST, Secretary Rusk called Vance and instructed him to meet with the DRV delegation at once to convey the message that the US was going to issue orders early in the evening of October 31 (7 or 8:00 p.m. EST) to stop all air, naval and artillery bombardment and all other acts involving the use of force against the territory of the DRV. The orders would be fully effective 12 hours later, with the action being announced at approximately the time the orders were issued. Vance was directed to emphasize to the DRV the importance of secrecy on their part -- if there were leaks from Hanoi no one could tell what would happen. A meeting of the type agreed upon

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would not be held before November 6 and the US expected to be able to inform the DRV shortly of the exact time of such a meeting. The US expected all understandings previously reached to continue to apply and was proceeding on the basis of no secret minute.

337. The American team lost no time in completing their assignment. Shortly before midnight, Vance reported by phone that "the mission had been accomplished -- complete agreement on all points had been reached."

Comment: In agreeing to the U.S. proposal, Xuan Thuy commented that, "The DRV side understands the bombing cessation will be unconditional. The U.S. side has also said that in substance this is cessation of bombing without any conditions or reciprocity and in the statements of the U.S. Government there will be no mention of the word conditional." (See full text at TAB G). The DRV had a perfect track record: not once did they miss the opportunity to put in the record their "understanding" that the cessation was "unconditional" and no "reciprocity" was involved.

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338. Vance noted in his phone conversation that the Soviets in Paris had been pressing to see him to discuss the progress of the talks. Rostow was informed of this problem and counseled against seeing the Soviet representatives. Vance was so informed and the Soviet mission in Paris was kept in the dark (at least from the US end) about the fact that a final agreement had been reached.

"No Go" In Saigon

339. Ambassador Bunker was having trouble in Saigon. Having reported the results of his meeting with Thanh early on October 30, he awaited instructions from Washington. They were not long in coming. In a Flash cable drafted at the White House, Bunker was instructed to see Thieu at the earliest possible time Wednesday morning to convey an oral message from President Johnson. Bunker was advised that if Thieu attempted to make himself unavailable (as he had the habit of doing), the Ambassador was to insist that the message was of the utmost gravity and that President Johnson "could not understand any reluctance on the part of Thieu" to see Bunker at once.

340. The President's message (see text at TAB H) was a combination of exhortation and threat. Implicit throughout was the assumption that Thieu -- or some of his close advisors -- were attempting

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to influence the course of the American presidential elections by GVN's refusal to cooperate with the Administration in its efforts to reach agreement with the DRV. The President expressed sympathy with Thieu's domestic problems and indicated a willingness to move the time of the bombing halt forward for 24 hours and to set the date of the first meeting for November 4th in an effort to alleviate those problems, but the GVN should understand in no uncertain terms that the US had to go ahead with the cessation regardless of what Saigon chose to do.

341. State followed up the Flash instructions with a supplemental cable in which it discussed possible ways to side-step the problem of Article 39 of the GVN Constitution. To the extent that Thanh's interpretation of the requirement of that provision was correct, Bunker was told that several alternatives were available to overcome the roadblock, not the least of which was a distinction between "formal" and "informal" negotiations, with only the former being prohibited without the consent of the Assembly, while only the latter were contemplated in Paris during the initial stages of the post-bombing talks.

342. Early in the afternoon of the 30th, President Thieu received Bunker and Berger. Pursuant to instructions, Bunker delivered the oral

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message from President Johnson. Thieu reacted emotionally and disjointedly:

"You are powerful. You can say to small nations what you want. We understand America's sacrifice for Vietnam. All Vietnamese know our life depends on US support, but you cannot force us to do anything against our interest. This negotiation is not a life or death matter for the US but it is for Vietnam. I intend to make a speech to my people and I will express my gratitude, and that of my government and my people, for what President Johnson has done for us."

He added, however, that the difficulties that stood in the way of US-GVN agreement were not secondary but crucial. He referred to the alleged differences in what was said in Saigon and Paris and then defined the two issues which were crucial:

- (1) The US must get from Hanoi an agreement in advance that they will negotiate directly with the GVN; and
- (2) The US must get Hanoi's agreement that the NLF is not a separate delegation.

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343. The two points that Thieu regarded as "crucial" were the long contested procedural problems and Bunker once again pointed out that there was no difference in what was said in Paris and Saigon. Harriman and he had each pointed out that it was impossible to obtain such assurances from Hanoi and that our strategy and tactics were designed precisely to overcome these difficulties. He went over the whole ground of the US position on the two points, noting the inability of the US or the GVN to control the other side but their ability to defend their own side and views. He also pointed out once again the strong public stand the US was taking and would continue to take in support of the GVN.

344. Thieu kept circling around the problem, and finally Bunker told him point blank that since the US could not get the assurances Thieu demanded, if he insisted on making his agreement conditional on such assurances, the US and GVN would have to go their separate ways. He warned the President of the consequences if he forced the US into such a position and asked him if he was or was not prepared to go with President Johnson on the two dates.

345. Thieu said he needed a week between the joint cessation announcement and the first meeting, but the important thing was agreement on the assurances he needed from Hanoi, which would permit him to join in the cessation announcement. Bunker repeated that it was impossible for

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the US to get the assurances he had asked for. He inquired whether Thieu was prepared to go along with the October 31 and November 4 dates. The President replied that the November 4 date was unreasonable and he would need a week from the time the two governments agreed on cessation. If it was up to him he could say yes to a cessation on the 31st with a meeting in Paris a week later, but he had to consult with his colleagues. He had to convince them and bring them along, not only Ky but the others, or he would be vilified and isolated. Bunker replied that he saw no great difficulty in bringing these people along; the US had given assurances of its support and cooperation and had made pledges and statements of the strongest kind on the question of the NLF and we would act if Hanoi tried any ruses and devices to avoid dealing with the GVN. If all this were known to his colleagues, it should be convincing.

346. Thieu indicated that he would confer with his colleagues and would inform Bunker as soon as possible of his decision. He said that he would also give the Ambassador a letter to President Johnson setting out his position. He asked if he could have a copy of the President's message which the Ambassador had read, but Bunker replied that his only instructions were to give him the message orally.

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347. Bunker advised Washington that he did not know what we might get by way of an answer. He thought, however, that the GVN might "take us right to the brink, and they may refuse to go with us tomorrow at 0800 local." In that event, Bunker thought we should say to them that we were prepared to seek a week's delay for the first meeting, but we could not delay the cessation announcement beyond 2400 Saigon time on October 31 and would put out the order and statement unilaterally at that time if they were unable to go with us.

348. In Washington's instructions to convey President Johnson's message orally to Thieu, it had been suggested that perhaps General Goodpaster should talk to General Vien, Chief of the Joint General Staff, and brief him on the seriousness of the threatened breach in US-GVN relations. Quite obviously, the implication was that the ARVN high command, thus forewarned of the possible military consequences of the GVN balking on the cessation question, would apply pressure on Thieu, Ky, et. al. for prompt acquiescence in Washington's request. Bunker declined to follow this suggestion, explaining to Washington that Vien carried no weight in such matters and was not the kind of person to involve himself in issues of this sort. Bunker was, however, firmly of the view that however difficult Vice President Ky might be, it would be

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constructive from our point of view to have him in Paris. "There are few people around here," Bunker explained, "who are willing to make decisions and take stands. He is one who is, and he is also one with whom one can reason and argue. I would much rather have a strong man in Paris as a background advisor than a timorous delegation which is afraid to move on any point or issue."

349. Bunker dispatched his Political Counselor, Martin Herz, to see Foreign Minister Thanh to clear up the misunderstanding regarding what Ambassador Harriman had allegedly told Ambassador Lam and to convey our strong conviction that it would be "disastrous and prejudicial" if Lam were recalled at this juncture. Herz read for Thanh's benefit key passages from the detailed record of the Harriman-Lam conversation and the Foreign Minister appeared to be impressed by what he heard and agreed that it was very different from what Lam had reported. He indicated that instructions recalling Lam had already been issued, but perhaps Lam could be headed off since there wasn't a plane every day from Paris to Saigon. He left the impression with Herz that GVN would at least reconsider the decision to recall him. As it turned out, however, Lam departed Paris, signaling a marked difference of opinion between the US and GVN representatives in Paris.

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350. At 10:30 p.m. on the 30th, Bunker and Berger met with Thanh and Presidential Assistant Duc at the Palace. Thanh reported that President Thieu had convened the Security Council and conferred with the heads of the two houses of the Assembly. The conclusion was reached that whereas the US and the GVN "did not recognize the NLF, it was a contradiction for us to accept the NLF into a conference." For the GVN to agree to such a situation would subject the government to heavy criticism from every sector of the community, including the army, parliament, and all religious groups. If North Vietnam would give assurances that there would be no separate delegation from the NLF, the GVN would join the US in a cessation announcement and a meeting. If there were not such an assurance, however, the GVN would not participate.

351. The Foreign Minister said that he would like to give Bunker a copy of a letter from Thieu to President Johnson, the original of which would be sent in formal style. Bunker read the letter and found it repetitive of the arguments they had been through the last few days and, in Bunker's judgment, "unfortunate in every respect." Indeed, one paragraph sought to convey the impression that by dealing with the NLF the US would be forcing Saigon to move toward a coalition government which was unacceptable to them.

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352. Bunker told Thanh that he thought the decision taken by the GVN was tragic, the letter unfortunate, and the particular paragraph unacceptable since our position on a coalition was well known and this was a gross misrepresentation. He said that President Thieu was free to write what he wished, but he might seriously reconsider whether he wished such a statement to be made. The Foreign Minister took the letter back and said he would discuss the matter with Thieu.

Comment: President Thieu's letter was delivered
to Bunker later in the evening and transmitted
immediately to Washington. (Text at TAB I)

353. Thanh told Bunker that the GVN could make no more concessions "without jeopardizing the regime." Furthermore, any decision to halt the bombing would need to allow a seven day interval before the meeting could be held. Bunker said that he had spoken to Thieu at length on these matters so he was fully aware of our position that we could not organize the other side in the post-cessation meetings and was also aware that we were facing a situation of "utmost gravity" in our relations. He asked if President Thieu would be available during the night and tomorrow. He could not anticipate what decision President Johnson would make to this decision and reply of President Thieu and his

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government, but the President must be aware from what Bunker had said to him that President Johnson might decide unilaterally to stop the bombing and that President Thieu might be so informed within a matter of hours.

354. The Foreign Minister was visibly shaken and asked if that decision would mean we would also go forward with meetings without the GVN. Bunker replied that he assumed that we would continue in our quest for a peaceful settlement and the GVN would be free to join or not as they chose. Personally, the Ambassador regarded the decision of the GVN not to go forward with the US as "sad and tragic."

355. Bunker advised Washington that the GVN "must be aware that the President will almost certainly elect to move unilaterally, with the most devastating consequences to our relationship and to themselves." But, he added, "they may be gambling that we will not, or that we will delay for several days or weeks."

356. In a subsequent telephone conversation between Ambassador Bunker and Secretary Rusk, it was agreed that Washington would give the Ambassador the additional time he deemed necessary to bring Saigon around, and thus the cessation would not take effect until 2400 Saigon time

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on Thursday, October 31, if Ambassador Bunker thought there was a 50-50 chance of improving the situation with the additional time and if Thieu could be kept from "blowing the situation" with the speech he was taping on Thursday evening or in some other manner.^a Otherwise the President was prepared to order cessation of bombing at an earlier time. Bunker was instructed to assure Thieu that: (1) the secret minute requirement had been abandoned;^b (2) we would give him the extra time he needed by setting the first expanded meeting in Paris for November 6; (3) we would make clear publicly that our view of the NLF was the same as Saigon's; (4) we would give GVN the leading role in all matters which came up in Paris involving SVN internal affairs; and (5) we would work with the DRV on procedural matters for the November 6 meeting in advance of that meeting. At the same time, Bunker was to make clear to Thieu that "if he breaks with us, we are finished. . . The American people will not take this."

^a Bunker reported that Thieu's plans for a televised speech on the 30th had been scrubbed after the Ambassador had sent a note to the Palace pointing out that it would be tragic if he said something which would prevent us from moving to an agreement. Bunker warned, however, that in his National Day speech Thieu could be expected to make reference to the Paris talks and bring out in some fashion points he had made in his letter to President Johnson.

^b Bunker had never mentioned the possibility of a minute to Thieu, and thus he advised Washington he would simply tell Thieu the DRV requested a minute and we refused.

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357. In a follow-up cable, Bunker was given more detailed instructions for his next meeting with President Thieu. The President had decided to issue the order to stop the bombing at approximately 0900 Saigon time on November 1st (2000 EST October 31) with the order to take effect 12 hours later. While the President hoped that Thieu would join with him in a joint announcement, he was determined to make the announcement unilaterally if necessary. In explaining Johnson's decision, Bunker was instructed to review "with the utmost force" the factors in the oral message he delivered the previous day. While the US would regret not being able to act in concert with Saigon, "the long history of consultation and agreement on this matter made it impossible for the President to withdraw or make further modification in the proposal to which his negotiators had "step by step, virtually committed themselves."

358. Additional arguments and assurances that Bunker was authorized to convey to Thieu included the fact that we had given GVN a week to prepare for the first meeting, we were prepared to give additional assurances regarding the manner in which we would treat the other side at the conference table, and we were prepared to talk directly with the DRV about procedures prior to the first meeting in an attempt to put GVN fears to rest. In addition, the President would, in his televised announcement to the American people, make the statement, "I emphasize the NLF attendance in no way involves recognition of the NLF in any form."

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359. In conveying this message to Thieu, Bunker was to make clear that President Johnson had read the Ambassador's reports on his meetings with Thieu and Thanh and had read Thieu's letter with great care. The President regretted to find in these discussions and in the letter nothing but a repetition of points that had long been gone over and agreed by Thieu himself during the course of our consultations. In the absence of any change in the situation whatever, the President simply could not accept these arguments as valid reasons for not going ahead with the arrangement that had by this time been virtually reached.

360. Finally, in whatever way Bunker deemed effective, he was to seek in the strongest terms to dissuade Thieu from any speech or other utterance or GVN leaks that could prejudice the success of the whole undertaking. The headline in the early edition of the Washington Star on the 30th was, "Thieu Agrees To Bombing Halt," while the final edition proclaimed that "Thieu Says End of War Near." Whether Thieu actually joined in the announcement, Washington assumed that the GVN would be put in the position where it would virtually have to participate, and Thieu had to be made to realize that any US-GVN apparent friction would do nothing but grievous harm to his own cause and make it impossible for Americans to continue to support it. These views were shared by the

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President, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of the JCS, and leading Vietnam supporters in the Congress, and President Thieu needed to be made aware of the significance of this solid body of opinion.

361. In yet another message flashed to Saigon, Bunker was advised of several additional points he could employ "as additional oral messages from the President," based on his having read and noted Bunker's report of his previous talks with Thieu. The President had gone over the question of getting advance assurances from Hanoi that it would talk direct to the GVN and that the NLF was not a separate delegation. Such assurances had never been included in the formula we had worked out with Thieu and Ky as far back as May and June and were out of the question. Hanoi would answer the first by demanding that both of us talk direct to the NLF, and the second by throwing over the whole arrangement. If Thieu wished to reject the arrangement he should have done so much earlier in the game.

362. At the same time, the President had always been deeply conscious of Thieu's problems. On Hanoi talking direct to the GVN, "the President meant the Honolulu Communique literally -- that he expects the GVN delegation to take the lead on all matters in which GVN interests are primary, and our delegation will be so instructed." With the GVN

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thus playing a leading role, Hanoi would have to talk to the GVN in practice, as we were sure they already understood. In addition, the President would instruct the US delegation to treat whoever was on the other side of the table as representatives of Hanoi's side in general, and thus in practice as a single delegation. Our delegation would coordinate with the GVN delegation on this, and any differences could be referred to the two Presidents.

363. As if Bunker were as yet inadequately armed for his next meeting, the White House flashed to Saigon two messages from President Johnson, one for President Thieu and the other for Vice President Ky. (See texts at TAB J). Whereas the oral messages had been heavy with the overtone of the stick, these messages were the very model of the proverbial carrot. Appealing to their patriotism and recalling the difficult times Johnson and the Vietnamese leaders had shared together, the messages constituted a long-distance application of the famous LBJ "treatment" -- but the distance must have made the difference, for they failed in their purpose, although LBJ threw in a kicker by offering to meet with Thieu in the Pacific following the first meeting in Paris at which GVN was present.

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364. Thursday, October 31, was a busy day for Ambassador Bunker. Early in the morning he met with President Thieu for forty minutes. Thieu reported that he was calling a meeting in the afternoon of the National Security Council and the two heads of the Assembly. Bunker cautioned him on the absolute importance of secrecy all day, warning that if there were a leak out of Saigon President Johnson would make the announcement in advance of 2000 hours Washington time. Thieu said that press reports about what he had said the previous day were both untrue and distorted, and he had closed one paper, the Saigon Daily News, as a result. During the last five minutes of the meeting, Vice President Ky joined the discussion, but both men had to leave for a national memorial service and it was agreed that upon Thieu's return the conversation would resume. In the meantime, the President asked Bunker to meet with Thanh to explain in greater detail our position on the three points contained in the Ambassador's latest instructions: (1) GVN to take the lead on matters concerning it; (2) US to have private meetings with Hanoi before the first meeting; and (3) "the question of the other side." In reporting on this meeting, Bunker confessed that he was unable to say what Thieu's decision would be. "He was obviously rocked," the Ambassador noted, "but there was no time for him to give his considered view of what he intends to do."

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365. At 11:00, Bunker and Berger met with Foreign Minister Thanh and the Ambassador went over the three points using almost verbatim the language in his instructions. Thanh asked to have this in writing and Bunker agreed to provide him with a memorandum. Thanh asked for an explanation of what we meant when we spoke about GVN taking the lead on matters of primary interest to it. Did we imply, he inquired, that there are matters which are not of primary interest to GVN? He termed this a "delicate question" in view of the fact that the subject matter of our meetings was war and peace in South Vietnam. Bunker replied that this must be worked out between the delegations, but there might well be points where the GVN would wish us to take the lead. Berger added that the subject of withdrawal of US forces, for instance, was clearly of primary interest to us. Thanh asked if we could establish general guidelines for our respective delegations in this matter and Bunker agreed to do so.

366. Thanh also wanted to know how the US would expect to deal with internal South Vietnamese matters at the conference in view of the expressed GVN position that they would refuse to discuss such matters at an international conference. Bunker replied, as he had in his discussion with the Foreign Minister on October 25, that this was clearly a matter of

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primary interest to the GVN. Thanh asked if this meant that we would not speak on such matters at all if the GVN did not do so. Bunker replied that this seemed obvious and Berger pointed out that, on the other hand, we could not prevent the other side from talking about such matters since our position all along had been that they could raise anything they wanted. However, if the GVN refused to discuss them, there would be no discussion. Thanh made it clear that he was referring to such matters as GVN laws, elections, and constitution.

367. In response to Thanh's question whether the US would discuss procedural points bilaterally with the DRV before the direct talks began, Bunker replied affirmatively and pointed out that he had offered to do so in response to a specific request from the GVN. Thanh said we had already agreed on certain procedural matters and asked if we intended to discuss only those or also other matters. It emerged that he was probing to see if there were any "give" with respect to getting the other side to agree that they would be only one delegation. Bunker made it clear, yet another time, that since the Paris talks began we had been taking the position, with full GVN knowledge and approval, that we could not prescribe to the other side how they would organize themselves.

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368. After the Foreign Minister had exhausted his string of questions, Bunker went over the time schedule with him placing stress on our hope to have GVN with us but our determination to go ahead without them if necessary. The Ambassador also emphasized the imperative need for tight security and the possibility that we would have to advance the time of announcement if there were press leaks. Thanh, who appeared to know little more than that there was a National Security Council meeting scheduled for the afternoon, said he would use the information Bunker had given him at that meeting.

369. Following his meeting with the Foreign Minister, Bunker called upon Vice President Ky and reviewed the situation with him as he had previously done with Thieu. The Vice President indicated that he recognized that we were at a decisive and difficult moment and realized what was at stake. He recalled his first meeting with President Johnson which was at the beginning of the mass involvement of the US in Vietnam. It was, Ky noted, this involvement that had saved Vietnam and the Vietnamese owed a great debt to the American President. He recognized that if the GVN agreed to talk with Hanoi, the NLF would have to be present and that there would have to be concessions. He was willing to go to Paris if Thieu wanted him to go and he would use his influence in the National Security Council

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meeting to try to persuade the NSC of the necessity for moving together with the United States. It was essential, he told Bunker, that there be unity between him and President Thieu, and he would do his best. He added, however, that he would need two or three days to assure his supporters and followers of the wisdom of going forward.

370. Bunker reported that Ky's presentation was "statesmanlike" and unless he was "engaged in double-dealing" and would take a different view at the NSC meeting, Bunker thought there was a better than 50-50 chance that the GVN would go along. As he had done with Thieu and Thanh, Bunker emphasized to Ky the importance of a blackout on all news, but in his report to Washington, he cautioned the State Department "that if by any chance there is a leak here we should act with restraint and not move precipitously."

371. At 4:00 p.m. Saigon time (0300 EST), the National Security Council convened. For seven hours the top GVN leadership discussed the terms and conditions for the bombing cessation and the additional assurances that Ambassador Bunker had conveyed at the direction of President Johnson. It was after 11:00 p.m. in Saigon when Bunker finally met with Thieu to learn of his decision and the Ambassador was no doubt distressed to learn that GVN's assent to the cessation (which was to be announced in Washington in less than eight hours) was conditioned upon two changes in the text of the joint announcement.

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372. The first change was in paragraph 3, which, as proposed by Thieu, would have read: "President Thieu and President Johnson have reached this common decision because President Johnson has assured President Thieu that North Viet-Nam intends to deescalate the war and enter into direct and serious talks with the Government of the Republic of Viet-Nam and the United States Government on the substance of a settlement for an honorable and secure peace." The purpose of the change (which substituted "President Johnson" has assured "President Thieu" for "they have good reason to believe") was to convey the impression that the US had extracted conditions from Hanoi. Bunker argued against the change for this reason (we had, in Paris, agreed that we would not state or imply that the cessation had been conditional) but Thieu refused to agree to the original language although "have good reason to believe" was a phrase that President Johnson had often used as an indicator of the type of evidence he required to justify a cessation of the bombing.

373. The second change was in paragraph 4, the first sentence of which was to read: "The first meeting of the direct talks will be convened in Paris at an early date after preliminary agreement on the basic ground rules of the talks." The significance of this sentence was

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that the GVN thought that it afforded them an opportunity (1) to discuss with us procedural arrangements, (2) to join our talks with Hanoi on procedures, and (3) to make an effort to "bargain with Hanoi about a statement that the other side had only one delegation." Bunker argued "ad nauseam" that the idea they could bargain on the question of a single delegation on the other side was hopeless and, in any event, as far as the US was concerned there was, for all practical purposes, only one Communist delegation. He warned Thieu that if the GVN joined the preliminary talks, Hanoi would want to bring the NLF in, and Thieu, not unexpectedly, acknowledged that this would be unacceptable. In Bunker's opinion, Thieu would not press this point since he knew that Hanoi would, in fact, insist upon NLF participation in any "preliminary" talks in which the GVN participated and this would merely aggravate Thieu's problem.

374. Bunker attempted to get Thieu to agree to a wording of paragraph 4 which would add after "Paris," "upon completion of arrangements for these talks but not later than (8 or 10) days." Thieu balked at this and said it would require another NSC meeting, a fact which Bunker thought might or might not be true. Thieu asked Bunker to submit the GVN proposals to Washington and requested a 24 hour or more delay if possible while they worked out their differences.

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375. The meeting was, Bunker reported, "painful, repetitious of old arguments, and punctuated by fits of anger at being rushed and put under the gun." If we could not give them 24 hours, Bunker inquired of State, "could we give them twelve; this would give them a full day here and would help to ease the sense of pressure and the hurt feelings as well as 'face'."

Comment: It was obvious to Bunker that the GVN concern was not with stylistic revisions of the joint announcement but with the substantive terms of the cessation agreement. While the GVN had no objections to the military restraint aspects, it did have grave reservations about the nature of GVN participation in the expanded talks and the prospect of being compelled to deal with the NLF as equals. The changes proposed by the GVN were designed to strengthen its position vis-a-vis the NLF and, while inconsistent with the terms negotiated with the DRV in Paris, were not unreasonable when viewed from the perspective of the Saigon government. The unfortunate reality of the situation was that Thieu, honoring

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the US request early in the negotiations not to disclose to his colleagues the state of the play in Paris, found himself at the moment of decision without the support necessary before he could agree to the terms that the US thought the best that possibly could be achieved under the circumstances. While the GVN fears were no doubt exaggerated, they were, nevertheless, genuine.

376. It was too late in the game to extend the hours of play. The changes proposed by President Thieu were unacceptable to Washington, but Washington was willing to consider possible modifications and thought that at least one additional effort should be made to bring Thieu around. Bunker met with the President early on the morning of November 1st for a last ditch effort to get him aboard. The session lasted for two hours, and at 7:00 p.m. EST Bunker reported to Ben Read by phone that Thieu still insisted on two changes in the text of the proposed announcement:

- (1) In the third paragraph delete the words in parenthesis and add the words underscored:

"... President Johnson has assured President Thieu

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that he has good reason to believe that (this action will bring about a deescalation of the war and that North Viet-Nam will enter into) North Viet-Nam intends to join them in deescalating the war and to enter into direct and serious, talks, etc. . . ."

- (2) Insert as a first sentence in the fourth paragraph the following: "The date of the first meeting of the direct talks will be announced on agreement on the arrangements in preliminary talks."

377. Ambassador Bunker thought we should accept the first change but he regarded the second change as unacceptable because the GVN was insisting on it in order (1) to be in a position to try to persuade Hanoi to give assurances that it would act as one delegation on its side and (2) to be in the position to make clear to its own people that direct and serious talks would not begin until the arrangements for the first meeting were completed in preliminary talks. Bunker said he had suggested an alternative first opening sentence in the fourth paragraph: "The date of the first meeting of the direct talks will be announced upon completion of the preliminary arrangements," but Thieu rejected this.

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378. Secretary Rusk got on the phone and told Ambassador Bunker these changes were unacceptable and we would have to give up the idea of a joint announcement; President Johnson would be making his individual statement to the nation within the hour. The clock had run out.

379. Following his conversation with Secretary Rusk, Bunker returned to the Palace to report the decision of his government. The Vice President, Foreign Minister, and Presidential Assistant Duc were with the President. Bunker told Thieu that President Johnson would not make the announcement as originally planned for 0900 hours Saigon time, but would make a nation-wide speech. The President had decided that he must go ahead and he had already informed the three Presidential candidates, all of whom enthusiastically endorsed his decision. "The President asked me to say to you," Bunker told Thieu, "that you should not be disheartened or discouraged. He would say some very fine things about Vietnam in his speech and he wants me to assure you that we intend to continue our firm support of your country and your government. We intend to continue to work together with you to achieve what we set out to do. We are all sorry that we could not be together on this."

380. Thieu asked if the TCC countries had been informed of the decision and Bunker replied that they were being informed. Thieu's further remarks, Bunker reported to Washington, were "somewhat disjointed"

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but, as given to him, were:

- (1) "I cannot guess whether we will achieve the result we hoped for. Our firm purpose is to have serious talks directly with Hanoi to achieve peace and progress. The most legal right of our government is not to accept serious talks with Hanoi with the NLF as an independent entity.
- (2) "I never doubted the sincerity of President Johnson and the U. S. Government not to recognize the NLF and its promise to support us in the talks. We have our own problems here. If we had gone into these talks with the NLF it would have meant the disintegration of the nation. The state must have stability, not trouble, not instability; that is our gravest concern.
- (3) "I am sorry I cannot join the joint announcement. I look forward to the speech of President Johnson before I make any speech to the nation. Please assure President Johnson that I will continue to have the greatest gratitude to him and the U.S. Government. I think we have to await developments now of the situation after we see how we could proceed to find the way to peace with Hanoi."

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381. Bunker replied that he hoped we would find a way out of the situation. The reason the US had proposed the "our side/your side" formula was because it was a fact of life. The NLF was not recognized by the GVN or the US and our whole purpose was to find a way around this problem so as to get on with serious peace talks. That was, he assured the President, what we would do in the period that lay ahead.

382. Thieu asked the Vice President if he had anything to say. Ky shook his head.

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A

(TRANSLATION)

Delivered by Amb Dobrynin
to Secretary Rusk June 5,
1968.LS NO. 2450
T-103/R-XVII
Russian

Dear Mr. President:

There is hardly any need to discuss in detail how crucially important the present moment is, when official direct contacts between representatives of the USA and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam have at last been established. It is our firm opinion that the official talks which have begun in Paris between highly placed representatives of the USA and the DRV present a real opportunity to find a way out of the situation which has been created in Vietnam, with the goal of ending the bloody war which has been fought there for many years. I think you will agree that the peoples of the entire world expect positive results from the American-Vietnamese meetings in Paris, since, in many respects, not only does the restoration of peace in the area of Indochina depend upon the outcome of these talks, but also a lessening of international tensions as a whole.

The information we receive from the representatives of the DRV, as well as from the representatives of the USA, indicates that so far the negotiations in Paris have not resulted in any progress. Indeed, could one seriously expect such progress in a situation where the USA continues to bomb a considerable part of the territory of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. We have repeatedly stated our view to you personally and to your representatives that complete and unconditional discontinuance by the United States of the bombing and of other acts of war against the DRV can clear the way to a peaceful settlement in Vietnam. And if the Government of the DRV consented to enter into official talks with representatives of the USA before complete cessation of the bombing of the territory of the DRV, this does not by any means imply that further progress in the negotiations could be hoped for without such cessation. These bombings and other acts of war

by the USA against the DRV are now the principal obstacle to headway at the meetings in Paris.

My colleagues and I think - and we have grounds to do so - that complete cessation by the United States of bombing and other acts of war with respect to the DRV could contribute to a breakthrough in the situation and produce prospects for a peaceful settlement. Such a step cannot result in any kind of negative consequences for the USA, either in the sense of damaging the interests of its security or even in the sense of damaging its prestige. For a great world power the positive end-result of any action by far exceeds all other considerations, to which excessively exaggerated importance is sometimes attached. We have decided, Mr. President, to state these considerations to you frankly, in view of the great importance of a peaceful resolution of the Vietnamese problem and of a halt to the bloodshed. We should like to hope that the present opportunities will not be missed.

I want to express one more thought: Mr. A. Harriman expressed the wish that some assistance be rendered on our part to initiate unofficial contacts as well between the delegations of the USA and the DRV in Paris, and that the Vietnamese representative be informed of this point of view. I take this opportunity to let you know that we have informed our Vietnamese friends to this effect, since for our part we think that all forms of contact between the parties should be utilized. What is important is that this contribute to the success of the negotiations. But surely, Mr. President, you cannot fail to agree that forms of contact in themselves do not resolve anything. Of decisive importance is the substance of the positions taken by one side or the other.

Respectfully,

A. KOSYGIN

CERTIFICATION OF TRANSLATION

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B

~~SECRET - NO DIS~~

June 11, 1963

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I was very glad to receive your letter of June 6 and have given it the most careful study. I think you and I agree as to the great importance of a peaceful resolution of the Vietnamese problem and of a halt to the bloodshed. I think you and I would also agree that the Soviet Union and the United States have a very special responsibility with respect to the reduction of tensions and the stabilization of peace in the world.

We are prepared to end the bombardment of the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam if we know it will lead to the de-escalation of the war. In this connection, I have given special attention to your statement that a cessation of bombing and other acts of war against the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam cannot result in any kind of negative consequences for the United States in the sense of damaging the interests of its security.

Does this statement apply to the security interests of the United States with respect to our own and allied forces in Viet-Nam? Obviously, the military capability of the DRV would be further enhanced by the total cessation of bombing. A decision must be made by the DRV not to take advantage of this cessation; we and Hanoi must be clear on this point. Such a decision need not be made public. You will understand that I must be concerned about the position of our troops and allied forces in South Viet-Nam and the safety of the civilian population which depends upon them for security. Any light which you can throw upon this vital point would be appreciated.

As a result of my unilateral action, Hanoi and its civilian population are now free from military attack. At the same time

His Excellency

Alexei N. Kosygin,

Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the
Union of Soviet Socialist Republics,
Moscow.

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- 2 -

Saigon and its civilian population have been subjected to the most vicious and indiscriminate attacks, attacks which continue even as I write this letter. I would be less than candid with you if I did not tell you that this is a situation which could easily become intolerable.

We shall make every effort to discuss these matters constructively with the representatives of the DRV in Paris. We are prepared to stop the bombing of North Viet-Nam as a further step toward peace. But we do need to know the steps the DRV will take toward further de-escalation of the violence.

Of course, Mr. Chairman, we would be glad to pursue these matters directly with the government of the Soviet Union. If you are in a position to tell us privately and with precision that there would be no adverse military consequences to our own and allied forces as a result of a bombing cessation, we would be prepared to accept your statement and would issue the necessary orders.

We appreciate the fact that you have informed the leaders of the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam of our interest in unofficial contacts between our respective delegations in Paris, as well as the fact that you believe that all forms of contact between the parties should be utilized. Our delegation in Paris is ready for such contacts and we would hope very much that the delegation of the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam would be responsive.

I do believe it important that we keep in close touch with each other on this matter.

Sincerely yours,

Lyndon B. Johnson

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AMBASSADOR HARRIMAN'S OPENING STATEMENT
AT THE OCTOBER 24 SECRET SESSION

You have heard us say many times that we want these negotiations to be productive and you know what we have said many times about the President's desire for constructive negotiations and the maintenance of circumstances which would permit serious negotiations. In this connection, we have spoken of the subject of military activities in the DMZ area and the question of indiscriminate attacks against cities as affecting the President's ability to maintain that situation.

I am instructed by my government to inform you that we are prepared to stop all air, naval and artillery bombardment and all other acts involving the use of force against the territory of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam on the basis of the discussions we have held. Your side has constantly emphasized that after a bombing cessation, talks would be promptly held. You have even mentioned "the next day." We still think that a substantive meeting including representatives of the Republic of Vietnam should be held the next day. However, in a maximum effort to reach agreement, we have indicated

there might be a two-three day interval between the cessation of bombing and a first meeting.

Let us consider the suggestion that November 2 could be the date for the first meeting after the bombing cessation. In that case, we would be prepared to stop bombing two, or at the most three, days before. This would require us to issue the order one or two days before the date of cessation.

When we announce the cessation of bombardment, we expect to announce the date of the first meeting and the fact that representatives of the Republic of Vietnam will be present at it. You can make the announcement as you wish.

On the question of representation at the meetings, we agree on the substance. Representatives of the Republic of Vietnam will be with us, and we understand that you will have representatives of the National Liberation Front with you. This statement avoids an argument over "two sides" or "four parties." We look at it one way, and you look at it another way. We all know who will be there, and the question is one of participation, not recognition.

We do not agree to a joint communique. We must agree on what will happen, and when and then action "will speak louder than words." We are prepared to agree to the essential concrete points which I have stated above, namely: that on the basis of our discussions the United States on a fixed date, for example October 30 or 31, will stop all air, naval and artillery bombardment and all other acts involving the use of force against the territory of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and that meetings on the substance of a peaceful settlement will begin in Paris on a fixed date, November 2. At these meetings we will have with us representatives of the Republic of Vietnam and you will have with you representatives of the National Liberation Front.

Either side will be free to make announcements or statements as it sees fit. For our part, we give you the assurance that no US Government statement in connection with the cessation of bombardment will use such words as "conditional."

We hope we can reach agreement on these matters today. If you agree to the proposals I have made, I will report them to my Government for final authorization and will then inform you at once.

D

ROSTOW MEMORANDUM

October 25, 1968

The President wished me to review with you personally the situation in which we now find ourselves with respect to the Vietnam negotiation in Paris.

I recall that Sec. Rusk told Foreign Minister Gromyko that we would concentrate on certain aspects of the negotiation and that it would be helpful if you could concentrate on the problem of GVN participation. But on this occasion the President wished me to review all the issues with you and to solicit your reaction and that of your government.

Here are the things that are most on the President's mind.

1. The situation is made very difficult by reports to the press apparently or allegedly from Soviet diplomatic sources, stating that we are very close to an agreement. These reports have the effect not only of generating an optimism which may not prove justified. They also create in those groups which are most strongly anti-Communist in our country, a sense that we are being led into some kind of trap. It would be extremely helpful at this delicate moment if Soviet diplomatic sources would not encourage the press in any particular direction and, in fact, if possible, not comment at all on the negotiation and its prospects.

2. Even more serious is this. The President is committed before his own people that a bombing cessation would not result in an increase in danger and casualties to US forces and those of our allies. It is for

that reason that he has insisted that it is a fact of life that the bombing cessation could not be maintained if the DMZ were violated or the South Vietnamese cities attacked. We are not sure that Hanoi really understands how fundamental it is to the maintenance of a bombing cessation that these two operational conditions be observed. If we come to agreement in Paris, the President will issue standing instructions to General Abrams which would permit him to respond instantly to violations of the DMZ. The President and his colleagues are mutually committed to respond if the cities are attacked.

You know, Mr. Ambassador, that it has been and remains the President's intent to deal with the Soviet Union on the basis of respect and trust and good faith.

He would like to be able to deal with Hanoi on the same basis; because making a stable peace in Southeast Asia is a most serious matter for all the nations of the area, including North Vietnam. It is, therefore, exceedingly important that the Soviet Government and the Government in Hanoi be quite clear that all three of the points we have made -- including the facts of life about the DMZ and the cities -- are firmly understood. If there is any doubt in the minds of the Soviet leaders on this point, it would be a matter of the utmost importance to us.

There could be no outcome worse for all our efforts than to have a resumption of the bombing and the break up of what we have tried to achieve since March 31.

3. The Ambassador should be aware of the cost imposed on us by Hanoi's delay over minor matters such as a secret minute; its exact language; the form in which those participating in the conference will be mentioned. We tried to anticipate these problems by the your side-our side formula which, we believe, had advantages for everyone concerned. We tried to arrange it so that we moved very promptly from a bombing cessation into the substance of the search for peace. Now they move from a gap of the next day to a week. We have avoided in our conversations with North Vietnam the use of the word "conditions" by talking about "the facts of life." Now we are losing day after day and coming closer to the election in the United States. If the bombing is stopped this close to a Presidential election, our people will debate for years whether it had an effect or no effect. A great divisive force will be let loose in this country. The President intends to proceed as he has thus far proceeded on Vietnam in a manner wholly free of domestic politics. He is not delaying the negotiation at the present time: Hanoi is delaying it by this haggle over words. The President has not expedited the negotiation nor will he expedite it on the basis of the election. He is taking each step on the merits. But you, Mr. Ambassador, should be aware of the burden imposed on the President by the tactics of the other side at this time.

4. So far as the substance is concerned, the phrase "without conditions" gives us grave difficulty. We take a minute between ourselves

and another government seriously. We have not tried to force the word "conditions" on Hanoi. We do not intend to use the word "conditions" in governmental statements. But we do not wish to mislead Hanoi in substance -- nor our own people -- about the "facts of life."

5. But the most important point the President wishes to leave with you, on which he invites your comment and that of your government, is the significance of all three of the points we have raised:

- the participation of the GVN;
- the maintenance of the DMZ;
- and the absence of attacks on the cities.

There would be great danger to us all if there is any misunderstanding on these three points, if the negotiators in Paris should succeed in the days ahead in finding a formula.

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

~~SECRET/HARVAN DOUBLE PLUS~~*Secretary R...*

Friday, October 25, 1968 -- 9:00 p.m.

Mr. President:

I received Amb. Dobrynin at my house at 5:00 p.m. today, October 25. After brief amenities, I told him that the President wished me to review with him, on the same basis that we had earlier met, his concerns about the present situation with respect to the Vietnam negotiations. I explained that the document I was about to give him was a personal oral communication reflecting what was on the President's mind.

He read the document carefully (Tab A).

With respect to para. 1, he said that only he, Dobrynin, knows fully about the Paris negotiations and communications between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Tcherniakov, his DMC, knows half the story. No one ^{else} in the Embassy has the knowledge to speak with any authority on what is happening about Vietnam. When I pointed out to him that we had stories alleged to be from diplomatic sources in London, he said he could not assume responsibility for the Embassy in London. I said that I had no doubt about the correctness of his own behavior in this matter but we were confronted with a fact; namely, that stories were appearing, allegedly from Soviet sources; and we were confronted with a second fact; namely, that almost every newspaper man who came into my office told me that his favorite Soviet contact was telling him hopeful things about the negotiations and how peace was about to break out due to the role of the Soviet Union. He said that he had issued instructions to everyone in his Embassy not to talk about Vietnam. We ended by my underlining ~~that~~ what the memorandum said; namely, that this was a problem for the President for the reasons indicated.

Dobrynin then turned to substance. He said that he found the memorandum very 'disappointing.' He thought we were going back to matters which had long since been settled. As he understood the situation in Paris, there were three questions:

-- First, how we refer to the participation of those who would take part in the talks. On this matter we had raised a "new point" by wanting to get into the secret minute that participation "would not involve recognition." Everyone agreed that "recognition" was not involved.

-- Second, there was the question that the bombing cessation would be "unconditional." He said this was not a matter, in his judgment, of great importance. It was not worth sacrificing the whole meeting on this matter. I interrupted to point out that my memorandum to him explained fully why we took the question of "unconditional" so seriously. Dobrynin said he recognized that we attached great importance to the matter and would so report.

-- Third, there was the question of the date of cessation of the bombardment. He attached great importance to the fact that the North Vietnamese had set a date; namely, November 2. He could not understand why a few days one way or the other ^{was} so important to us when there were such great issues at stake. We have been arguing, he said, for two weeks over the question of 2 days.

I said to him it was not quite so simple. From our point of view, we had in good faith put in a proposal in mid-October. We had chosen "the next day" because of what they had said about beginning serious talks the day after the bombing cessation. (Dobrynin said this was a new idea to him. He had not known that they had mentioned the next day.) I went on to say that having geared ourselves to a final decision on the basis of what had been exchanged, Hanoi negotiators had then unleashed a great many "rabbits": a four-power conference; a communique; a secret minute; several weeks "as a gap between the bombing cessation and the first meeting"; no conditions; etc. It was Hanoi's behavior with respect to these matters which had deeply concerned the President, because they might reflect a lack of understanding of the "facts of life" and a lack of understanding of the seriousness of the problems that we faced in moving forward, especially at so sensitive a political time.

Dyn
After some elaboration of the kinds of pressures represented by recent items on the ticker in our political life, Dobrynin said: "I now understand better. I thought that this message would take us back very far to where we began some months ago; but I should like to clear up one serious point: in communicating this message to my government, should I say that the President will not proceed with the Paris negotiations until he gets a response from the Soviet government on the question raised?" I said that it was my impression that the President had merely asked me to convey to Ambassador Dobrynin and his government his present concerns. The question he was asking, however, was a serious diplomatic question and I would seek an answer.

I then called the President and put the issue to him. The President said, no. I do not wish to be that hard. I do not wish to commit myself to holding up the Paris negotiations. I would wish to know the reaction of the Soviet government to this situation.

After this clarification, Dobrynin returned to the three points at stake in the Paris talks. He said: You and I can talk with brutal frankness and if I understand what you are telling me, it is that on one point you are prepared to compromise. That is, you are prepared to see the participants listed. But on two points you intend to hold firm; that is, on "without conditions" and time. At about this point I received a telephone call from Ben Read who told me that we would be prepared to tell the North Vietnamese in the context of the secret minute that we did not plan to use in formal statements the phrase "conditions."

I informed Ambassador Dobrynin of this fact and said that now we were prepared to compromise on one and a half of the three points. It was time for them to clear this underbrush away.

At this point Dobrynin volunteered the following. He had been privileged to get the reports from both our side and from the Hanoi delegation. He could attest from his personal knowledge that we had "many, many times" made clear the "facts of life." I asked: "Are you, Ambassador Dobrynin, prepared to tell me that they understand the 'facts of life'?" He said, "I can only say that from their reports to me as well as your reports to our people in Paris, you have expressed yourselves very clearly."

At almost exactly 6:00 p.m., as Ambassador Dobrynin was about to leave, he received at my home a telephone call from Tcherniakov, his DCM. Tcherniakov reported that a message to the President from Kosygin had just arrived, on Vietnam. We consulted together as to where the message should be delivered. We decided to minimize the chances of a leak about our contact and Tcherniakov would deliver the message to my house. Dobrynin then dispatched his car to pick up Tcherniakov, and we settled down to await him. (Up to this point, contrary to his custom, Dobrynin did not have a Scotch. He accepted, while awaiting Tcherniakov.)

During the interval, Dobrynin raised with me the question of missile talks. Where do we stand? I said that while the matter was still on the President's mind, he was much concentrated on the question of Vietnam.. I then asked: "Was it true that the Warsaw Pact forces are moving out of Czechoslovakia?" He hastened to tell me that Bulgarian, ^{Rumanian} ~~Rumanian~~, and Polish as well as some Soviet forces were moving out of Czechoslovakia. He added, gratuitously, that there never had been any German forces in Czechoslovakia -- which, I take it, will be the Soviet mythology in the face of protests of the other occupying powers of Germany.

He indicated his view that it would be a good thing if we could get on with the missile talks.

I took the occasion of the break to say that, on a strictly personal basis, if I had any advice to give the leaders in Hanoi, it would be to go very rapidly for a definitive settlement in Southeast Asia once the new phase of talks opened, assuming we could surmount present problems. I recalled that it only took a month's hard work in Geneva in 1954. He asked me why I thought there was urgency. I said there were two reasons:

-- First, there would be a wave of expectation and goodwill in the U.S. in the wake of a bombing cessation, quiet at the DMZ, quiet in the cities, and GVN participation in Paris. But he had to remember that this was a country

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which had a scar on its head over Panmunjom. If the talks dragged on, there would be grave disappointment.

-- Second, as he could see from the polls, this country was undergoing a swing towards conservatism. This has happened before in our history, but it was clear that something like 60% of the people were for Nixon or Wallace. I could not predict what would happen if there was protracted frustration in the movement towards peace. It was my personal judgment, however, that there would be strong pressures to apply more military power in Vietnam rather than less.

I concluded by saying that in my quite objective judgment, it would be wise for the leaders of Hanoi to seize this moment and work with President Johnson towards the position he first outlined in his Johns Hopkins speech; namely, a position in which an independent North Vietnam associated itself not with China but with the other countries of Southeast Asia in constructive efforts at development. Only in this way was North Vietnam likely to maintain its independence. (Dobrynin showed surprising interest and concentration as I made this point.)

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Tcherniakov then came in with the attached letter to the President from Kosygin (Tab B).

Dobrynin then gave me the following informal translation.

"Mr. President:

"Information we are receiving from official representatives of the United States as well as from the representatives of the DRV, shows that there is now beginning a very important movement in the U.S. - Vietnamese negotiations in Paris.

"Judging from this information, the position of the two sides on the cessation of bombardment, etc., is much closer. And the possibility of reaching an agreement on this question is quite real.

"By such an agreement we could lay the basis for a beginning of a breakthrough towards a political settlement of the Vietnam problem.

"If this possibility which now exists is missed -- the development of events could go in a different direction.

"We are convinced that it is necessary that both sides show understanding and responsibility at this moment.

"In this connection, we should like to tell you quite frankly, Mr. President, that we are not completely convinced that the American side's actions in Paris have proceeded from this particular understanding of the situation.

"We are concerned that the achievement of an agreement in Paris on the cessation of the bombing of the DRV and the beginning of subsequent political talks with participation of the DRV, NLF, U.S. and the Saigon administration could be torpedoed because of details of third importance which, in reality, do not have any significance.

"We would like to hope that the government of the United States would understand its responsibility in connection with the present negotiations in Paris and would not let these negotiations ~~to~~ break but would use them to open the way to a peaceful settlement of the Vietnam problem, based on the respect of the legitimate rights and hopes of the Vietnamese people which correspond with the interest of the people of the United States and the peoples of the whole world."

On a wholly personal basis, I made the following observations to Dobrynin on this letter.

First, I would, of course, promptly communicate it to the President and to Secretary Rusk. Second, I found it good that on both sides there was an impulse to communicate when a matter of concern arose affecting the peace. Third, as my communication to him revealed, the President felt concerns of first importance in the light of the positions taken by North Vietnam, which Chairman Kosygin had described as third importance. The question of conditions and of timing were, from our point of view, major matters.

He said that the communication, which I had given him, and our discussion had made this clear and he would so inform his government.

As we went out to our respective cars, I looked at my watch and said: "Anatoliy, it is now midnight in Paris. You'd better get to work to clear up these issues of third importance." He said he would get busy but he didn't know what he could accomplish before the morning meeting in Paris.

Upon returning to my office, I then reported to the President that we had received the message from Kosygin and briefly summarized its substance.

The President instructed me that, after checking with Sec. Rusk, I should make the following points to Dobrynin.

"I have informed the President of Chairman Kosygin's message and he wished me to convey to you immediately the following points:

1. The President is gratified that both the Chairman and he were thinking of same problem at the same time.
2. The President has tried and is trying to find answers to these problems but has been unable to persuade the other side to meet us on acceptable terms. Perhaps Chairman Kosygin can help. Perhaps he can try to help move us closer.
3. The President wishes you to know that the points I made to you this afternoon are, in effect, his response to Chairman Kosygin. They represent the anxieties on the President's mind.
4. The President agrees with Chairman Kosygin that this is a critical phase. He would welcome any assistance the Chairman can give us in getting these issues solved. The President believes that, with the passage of a few more days, this possibility for progress might move away from us. "

After briefing Sec. Rusk and reporting the President's four-point message, he suggested that I add the following additional point.

5. Therefore, the President believes that both sides should push these issues of third importance quickly aside and get on with the real business, which is making peace.

I then telephoned Ambassador Dobrynin and twice repeated these five points for urgent transmission to Moscow.

W. W. Rostow

LETTER FROM CHAIRMAN KOSYGIN TO PRESIDENT JOHNSON~~SECRET/NODIS~~

Received 10/25/68

OFFICIAL TRANSLATION

Dear Mr. President:

The information which we keep on receiving from US officials and also from the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam states that presently a moment of very great responsibility has arrived in the US-Vietnamese talks in Paris.

Judging by this information, the positions of both sides on the cessation of bombing by the United States and of other military actions against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam have presently come closer together, and it appears quite realistic to be able to reach an agreement on this question. By doing so, one would make a beginning of a turn towards a political settlement of the Vietnam problem. If, however, this presently existing opportunity will be missed, the turn of events may follow a different direction.

We are convinced that it is necessary for both sides to show understanding of the responsibility the present moment brings with it. In this connection we would like to tell you frankly, Mr. President, that we are not fully convinced that the American side acts in Paris in accordance with such an understanding of the situation. We fear that

~~SECRET/NODIS~~

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~~SECRET/NODIS~~

-2-

the reaching of an agreement in Paris on the cessation of bombing of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and on the beginning of the subsequent political talks with the participation of the representatives of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the National Liberation Front may be caused to fail by the USA and the Saigon administration over third-rate details which in reality have no meaning at all.

One would like to hope that the US Government, realizing the responsibility for the outcome of the current talks in Paris, will take the necessary steps not to allow a breakdown of these talks but to open a path to a peaceful settlement in Vietnam based on the respect for the legal rights and aspirations of the Vietnamese people which would be in the interest of the people of USA and all people of the world.

A. Kosygin

~~SECRET/NODIS~~

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Department of State

TAB F

TELEGRAM

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~~SECRET~~ SECTION 1 OF 2 PARIS 22997

NODIS/HARVAN/DOUBLE PLUS

DELTO 886

EYES ONLY - PERSONAL FOR THE SECRETARY FROM HARRIMAN AND VANCE.

1. THE DEBATE OVER "CONDITIONS" FOR THE CESSATION OF BOMBING HAS BEEN GOING ON WITH THE NORTH VIETNAMESE SINCE THE FIRST SECRET TALKS. YOU WILL RECALL THAT WE DEVELOPED PHASE 1 - PHASE 2 PROPOSAL EARLY IN THESE TALKS AS A MEANS OF GETTING AROUND THIS PROBLEM. THE IDEA THEN WAS THAT BECAUSE THE ACTIONS ON THEIR PART WOULD BE TAKEN IN PHASE 2, EVEN THOUGH WE HAD AN UNDERSTANDING ON THEM, THEY WOULD NOT BE LOOKED UPON AS RECIPROCITY.

2. AS THESE DISCUSSIONS EVOLVED AWAY FROM PHASE 1 - PHASE 2 AND TOWARD THE CONCEPT OF PRIOR UNDERSTANDINGS, THIS SAME THEOLOGICAL PROBLEM KEPT ARISING. THE NORTH VIETNAMESE KEPT INSISTING ON THE UNCONDITIONAL CESSATION AND WE KEPT INSISTING THAT OUR PROPOSALS WERE NOT CONDITIONS. AT VARIOUS TIMES WE DESCRIBED THEM AS DEFINITIONS OF SERIOUS TALKS, ACTIONS WHICH WOULD GIVE US "REASON TO BELIEVE," AND AS DESCRIPTIONS OF A SITUATION WHICH WOULD PERMIT SERIOUS NEGOTIATIONS AND THUS THE CESSATION OF BOMBING TO CONTINUE.

3. AT OUR OCTOBER 24 MEETING WE SAID, FOR EXAMPLE, "WE WILL MAKE NO REFERENCE TO CONDITIONS. WE DO NOT LOOK ON THESE AS CONDITIONS BUT AS DESCRIPTION OF THE SITUATION WHICH WOULD PERMIT SERIOUS NEGOTIATIONS AND THUS THE CESSATION OF BOMBING TO CONTINUE. THERE SHOULD BE PROMPT DISCUSSION AND ACTIONS SHOULD BE TAKEN AS WE HAVE MENTIONED WHEN WE WERE DISCUSSING PHASE 2." IN THE SAME MEETING WE TOLD THUY: "WE HAVE SAID MANY TIMES THAT WE DO NOT CONSIDER ANY OF THE MATTERS WE HAD DISCUSSED CONDITIONS, BUT WE HAVE DISCUSSED IN MANY DIFFERENT WAYS THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH WOULD BE NECESSARY TO PERMIT SERIOUS TALKS TO CONTINUE." SHORTLY AFTER THIS STATEMENT, WE SAID: "ON THIS MATTER AND OTHERS WE HAVE INDICATED THAT WE WILL SAY WHAT WE BELIEVE IS APPROPRIATE, AND THE DRV SIDE WILL SAY WHAT IT CONSIDERS APPROPRIATE."

~~SECRET~~

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4. WE HAVE STUCK TO THE POSITION THAT WHAT WE HAVE BEEN DEMANDING IN TERMS OF THE DMZ, THE CITIES, PROMPT MEETINGS AND GVN PARTICIPATION IS NOT A DEMAND FOR RECIPROCITY BUT CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH WOULD PERMIT PROMPT, SERIOUS TALKS AND CONTINUATION OF CESSATION OF BOMBING. WE HAVE NOT ACCEPTED THEIR DEFINITION OF RECIPROCITY. WE BELIEVE THAT THIS HAS BEEN DONE WITH THE UNDERSTANDING AND AUTHORITY OF WASHINGTON. IN ADDITION WE BELIEVE THAT IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE UNDERSTANDING THAT EACH SIDE WOULD DEFINE ITS ACTIONS AS IT WISHES AND WOULD BE FREE TO MAKE ITS ANNOUNCEMENTS AND STATEMENTS AS IT SEES FIT.

act 22
5. FOR EXAMPLE, THE DEPARTMENT'S 259261 REJECTING THE IDEA OF A JOINT COMMUNIQUE, SAID: "FURTHER I DO NOT SEE HOW WE CAN VERY WELL EXPECT TO NEGOTIATE WHAT THE VARIOUS PARTIES WILL SAY ABOUT IT. EACH HAS ITS OWN PROBLEMS AND POINTS OF VIEW AND REQUIREMENTS IN MANAGING HIS OWN SITUATION. SUCH AGREEMENTS WOULD, IN ANY EVENT, BREAK DOWN PROMPTLY BECAUSE THERE WOULD BE NO CONTROL OVER WHAT IS SAID".

act 23
IN STATE 260480, THE DEPARTMENT SAID IN THE CONTEXT OF THE QUESTION OF "CONDITIONS": "AS THE EVENTS TAKE PLACE EITHER SIDE WILL BE FREE TO MAKE ANNOUNCEMENTS OR STATEMENTS AS IT SEES FIT. IF THESE SHOULD BE AT VARIANCE WITH WHAT HAS, IN FACT, BEEN AGREED, THEY CAN BE REFUTED BOTH BY WORDS AND BY FACTS AS THEY UNFOLD IN COMPLIANCE WITH THE REAL UNDERSTANDINGS. THE ONLY ASSURANCE WE WILL GIVE IS THAT NO UNITED STATES OFFICIAL STATEMENT WILL USE THE WORD 'CONDITIONAL.'"

6. IT HAS BEEN OUR UNDERSTANDING THAT WE HAD NOT INTENTION OF TALKING ABOUT CONDITIONS. WE HAVE BELIEVED THAT WAS CONSISTENT WITH YOUR CONVERSATIONS WITH

DOBRYNIN.

HARRIMAN

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~~SECRET~~ SECTION 2 OF 2 PARIS 22997

NODIS/HARVAN/DOUBLE PLUS

DELTO 886

EYES ONLY - PERSONAL FOR THE SECRETARY FROM HARRIMAN AND VANCE.

7. WE AND THE DEPARTMENT HAVE ALWAYS RECOGNIZED THAT HANOI WOULD CALL THE CESSATION "UNCONDITIONAL." IN THE DEPARTMENT'S INSTRUCTION ON PRESS HANDLING (STATE 259838) THE DEPARTMENT SAID: "WE MUST RECOGNIZE THAT HANOI WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY ANNOUNCE THAT THE CESSATION HAS BEEN UNCONDITIONAL."

8. WE HAVE ALWAYS DISTINGUISHED BETWEEN WHAT HANOI CALLS CONDITIONS AND WHAT WE CALL CONDITIONS. THE FACT THAT WE HAVE REFUSED TO ADD THE WORDS "WITHOUT CONDITIONS" TO AN AGREED MINUTE HAS MADE CLEAR TO HANOI THAT THERE IS A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ACTIONS EXPECTED OF THEM AND THE CESSATION OF BOMBING, ALTHOUGH WE WERE NOT GOING TO SAY SO. WE RECOGNIZED THIS IN OUR VERBAL ASSURANCES TO THEM THAT WE WOULD NOT USE THE WORD "CONDITIONAL" IN OUR OFFICIAL STATEMENT.

9. IT APPEARS TO US THAT AMBASSADOR BUNKER WAS OPERATING ON THE SAME GENERAL ASSUMPTION. FOR EXAMPLE, IN SAIGON'S 40532, IN A DISCUSSION OF THE JOINT US-GVN COMMUNIQUE, HE TOLD THIEU: "THE DRAFT HE (THIEU) HAD GIVEN US HAS TOO MANY THINGS IN IT THAT LOOK LIKE DEMANDS OR CONDITIONS. THIS IS NOT THE PLACE TO BRING UP THE QUESTION OF RECOGNITION... NOR THE WAY TO TIP OFF HANOI'S HAND WITH RESPECT TO THE THINGS THEY WILL NOT DO. WE HAVE INDEED GOOD REASON TO KNOW WHAT THEY WILL NOT DO, BUT IF WE INSIST THERE IS RECIPROCITY, IT WOULD TORPEDO THE WHOLE EXERCISE BEFORE WE EVEN GET STARTED."

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10. WHEN TRIEU SAID THAT THE PUBLIC MUST HAVE SOME INDICATION OF WHAT IT CAN EXPECT IF THE BOMBING STOPS, BUNKER REPLIED: "THE WHOLE IDEA IS THAT HANOI CAN SAY ANTHING IT LIKES BUT THE GVN WILL BE THERE AND CAN REPLY." IN SUM, WE BELIEVE THAT OUR CONCEPT FOR GETTING AROUND THE PROBLEM OF RECIPROCITY HAS ALWAYS BEEN TO AVOID IT BY DEFINING ACTIONS IN OUR OWN WAY AND LETTING HANOI DEFINE THEM IN ITS WAY.

11. THIS STRATEGY HAS BEEN SUCCESSFUL. WE HAVE MANAGED TO GET CONDITIONS ACCEPTED BY NOT CALLING THEM CONDITIONS BUT LETTING THE OTHER SIDE CALL THEM WHAT IT WISHES.

HARRIMAN

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Department of State

TELEGRAM

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NODIS/HARVAN/DOUBLE PLUS

EYES ONLY FOR THE SECRETARY FROM HARRIMAN AND VANCE

DELTO 885

PURSUANT TO TELCON WITH SECRETARY, THERE FOLLOWS THE ANSWER TO THE THREE QUESTIONS HE RAISED.

1. (A) WE HAVE RAISED THE ISSUES OF THE DMZ AND INDISCRIMINATE ATTACKS AGAINST THE MAJOR CITIES AND WHAT WE EXPECT ON THE PART OF THE DRV IN RESPECT TO THESE TWO MATTERS IN 12 SECRET MEETINGS WITH THE DRV. OFTEN THESE SUBJECTS WERE RAISED MORE THAN ONCE IN THOSE MEETINGS. IN MOST CASES BOTH SUBJECTS WERE RAISED; IN A FEW CASES ONLY ONE WAS RAISED. THE DISCUSSION OF THESE MATTERS BEGAN IN JUNE AND HAVE CONTINUED UNTIL THE PRESENT DAY, SO THAT WE HAVE BEEN CONSISTENTLY PRESENTING OUR POSITION IN THIS REGARD TO THE OTHER SIDE.

oct 14 (B) OUR DEMAND WITH RESPECT TO THE DMZ HAS BEEN: THERE WILL BE NO FIRING OF ARTILLERY, ROCKETS OR MORTARS FROM ACROSS AND WITHIN THE DMZ; THERE WILL BE NO MOVEMENT OF TROOPS FROM, ACROSS AND WITHIN THE DMZ; AND THERE WILL BE NO MASSING OR MOVEMENT OF TROOPS NEAR THE DMZ IN A MANNER THREATENING TO THE OTHER SIDE. OUR DEMAND WITH RESPECT TO THE CITIES HAS BEEN THAT THERE WILL BE NO INDISCRIMINATE ATTACKS AGAINST MAJOR CITIES. THESE FORMULATIONS ARE PRECISELY IN ACCORDANCE WITH OUR INSTRUCTIONS, AS MOST RECENTLY EXPRESSED IN STATE 254715. WITH RESPECT TO THE DMZ, HA VAN LAU HAS SAID THAT WE SHOULD STOP ARTILLERY FIRE "AND THE DRV WILL KNOW WHAT TO DO". LAU ALSO SAID THAT IF THE UNITED STATES STOPS THE BOMBING AND ARTILLERY FIRE ACROSS THE DMZ, "YOU WILL SEE WHAT WILL HAPPEN BECAUSE OUR GOVERNMENT HAS CONSISTENTLY RESPECTED THE DMZ. REALITY WILL GIVE YOU THE REPLY." THIS, LAU SAID, WOULD CREATE THE FAVORABLE CONDITIONS FOR A SETTLEMENT. (WHAT LAU IS SAYING WHEN HE SPEAKS IN THIS WAY IS THAT WHILE HE WILL NEVER ADMIT TO PAST VIOLATIONS OF DMZ, HE UNDERSTANDS WHAT WILL BE NECESSARY IN THE FUTURE.)

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(C) WITH RESPECT TO THE INDISCRIMINATE ATTACKS AGAINST MAJOR CITIES, WE HAVE NOT ONLY RAISED THIS ISSUE REPEATEDLY IN PRIVATE SESSIONS, BUT MADE IT AN ISSUE IN PLENARY MEETINGS. IN FACT, WITH A FEW EXCEPTIONS, THERE HAVE BEEN NONE FOR SEVERAL MONTHS.

(D) THROUGHOUT OUR MEETINGS WHEN THESE SUBJECTS HAVE BEEN DISCUSSED, AT NO POINT HAS THE OTHER SIDE GIVEN US ANY BASIS FOR BELIEVING THAT THEY DID NOT UNDERSTAND PRECISELY WHAT WE ARE TALKING ABOUT AND WHAT IS EXPECTED OF THEM.

Oct 9 (E) ON OCTOBER 11, PURSUANT TO INSTRUCTIONS (STATE 252815) AND IN ACCORDANCE WITH VANCE'S DISCUSSIONS WITH THE SECRETARY, WE SAID, "IN RESPONDING TO YOUR QUESTION, IT IS VERY IMPORTANT THERE BE NO MISUNDERSTANDING BETWEEN US. IT IS VERY IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND THAT WE ARE NOT TALKING ABOUT RECIPROCITY OR CONDITIONS BUT SIMPLY A FACT THAT AFTER CESSATION OF ALL BOMBARDMENT THE PRESIDENT'S ABILITY TO MAINTAIN THAT SITUATION WOULD BE AFFECTED BY CERTAIN ELEMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS.

"WE DO NOT LOOK ON THEM AS A CONDITION FOR STOPPING THE BOMBING BUT AS A DESCRIPTION OF THE SITUATION WHICH WOULD PERMIT SERIOUS NEGOTIATIONS AND THUS THE CESSATION TO CONTINUE. YOU WILL UNDERSTAND, THEREFORE, THAT THE CIRCUMSTANCES WE HAVE DISCUSSED IN OUR VARIOUS PRIVATE MEETINGS ABOUT MILITARY ACTIVITY IN AND AROUND THE DMZ ARE ESSENTIAL TO THE MAINTENANCE OF THAT SITUATION. AND, OF COURSE, YOU KNOW FROM OUR VARIOUS DISCUSSIONS THAT INDISCRIMINATE ATTACKS LAUNCHED AGAINST MAJOR CITIES WOULD CREATE A SITUATION WHICH WOULD NOT PERMIT SERIOUS TALKS AND THUS THE MAINTENANCE OF A CESSATION." WE HAVE REPEATED THIS IN EQUALLY CLEAR TERMS ON SUBSEQUENT OCCASIONS.

(F) IN ADDITION, IN FOUR MEETINGS WITH THE SOVIET REPRESENTATIVE IN PARIS, WE HAVE RAISED THE SUBJECT OF THE DMZ AND ATTACKS ON THE MAJOR CITIES AND HAVE TOLD THEM THAT A BOMBING CESSATION COULD NOT BE MAINTAINED IF THE DRV ACTED IN BAD FAITH WITH RESPECT TO THESE MATTERS. HE HAS BEEN IN REGULAR AND FREQUENT CONTACT WITH THE DRV DELEGATION. HE HAS INDICATED TO US THAT THE DRV UNDERSTANDS OUR POSITION. WE FURTHER UNDERSTAND THAT THE SECRETARY HAS ALSO RAISED THESE SUBJECTS WITH THE RUSSIANS AND HAS MADE OUR POSITION CLEAR.

(G) FINALLY, OUR CONTINUED REFUSAL TO INCLUDE THE WORDS "WITHOUT CONDITION" IN AN AGREED MINUTE MAKES IT CRYSTAL CLEAR THAT ALTHOUGH THERE ARE NO "PRE-CONDITIONS" THERE ARE CIRCUMSTANCES OR WHAT SOME PEOPLE MIGHT CALL "CONDITIONS SUBSEQUENT," THE OCCURRENCE OF WHICH WOULD CAUSE US TO RESUME THE BOMBING.

HARRIMAN

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NUN 10-96/9651:2-141 of 162



Department of State

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TELEGRAM

2

***** ZZ RUENC
DE RUFNCR 22996/2 3021050
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
Z 281025Z OCT 68
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC FLASH 7508
STATE GRNC
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1968 OCT 28 AM 6:09

~~SECRET~~ SECTION 2 OF 2 PARIS 22996

NODIS/HARVAN/DOUBLE PLUS

EYES ONLY FOR THE SECRETARY FROM HARRIMAN AND VANCE

DELTO 885

2. IN OUR JUDGEMENT, THE DRV WILL CARRY OUT WHAT WE HAVE DEMANDED OF THEM WITH RESPECT TO THE DMZ AND INDISCRIMINATE ATTACKS AGAINST MAJOR CITIES. WHILE WE HAVE NOT RECEIVED DIRECT AFFIRMATION THAT THE DRV WILL ABIDE BY OUR DEMAND--WE ARE CONVINCED THEY UNDERSTAND CLEARLY WHAT THEY ARE EXPECTED TO DO. AS INDICATED ABOVE, THIS IS CONFIRMED BY OUR DISCUSSIONS WITH SOVIETS. IN ADDITION, THE DRV UNDERSTANDS THE CONSEQUENCES IF THEY FAIL TO LIVE UP TO THEIR PART OF THE UNDERSTANDING, I.E., THE BOMBING WILL BE RESUMED. IT IS ALWAYS POSSIBLE THAT THERE WILL BE SOME MINOR VIOLATIONS SUCH AS MOVING SMALL NUMBERS OF MEN AND SUPPLIES THROUGH THE DMZ. THESE CAN BE JUDGED ON THE BASIS OF THE TOTAL CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH THEY OCCUR.

3. AS WE HAVE PREVIOUSLY STATED ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS, THE BOMBING SHOULD BE RESUMED IF OUR DEMANDS WITH RESPECT TO EITHER THE DMZ OR THE CITIES ARE VIOLATED.

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Department of State

TELEGRAM

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3

*****ZZ RUEHC

DE RUFNCR 23202/1 3050510

ZNY SSSSS ZZH

Z 310452Z OCT 68

FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC FLASH 7643

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~~SECRET~~ PARIS 23202 SECTION 968 OCT 31 AM 12 23

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NODIS/HARVAN/DOUBLE PLUS

OCT. 31, 1968
12:23 A.M.

DEL TO 903

FROM HARRIMAN AND VANCE

1. WE MET WITH XUAN THUY AND LAU FROM 1:30 TO 3 A.M. LOCAL TIME OCTOBER 31 AT A NEW LOCATION OF THEIRS IN CHOISY-LE-ROI.

2. WE OPENED BY READING THE FOLLOWING PREPARED STATEMENT:

"YOUR EXCELLENCY, THIS AFTERNOON AMBASSADOR LAU SAID THAT YOU WERE PREPARED TO DISPENSE WITH AN AGREED SECRET MINUTE. IS THAT CORRECT? (AT THIS POINT THUY ASKED THAT WE COMPLETE OUR STATEMENT BEFORE HIS COMMENTS. WE SAID THAT WHAT WE WERE GOING TO SAY WOULD BE BASED ON HIS ANSWER AND CONTINGENT UPON AGREEMENT TO DISPENSE WITH A MINUTE.)

"IN THAT CASE, I AM AUTHORIZED TO INFORM YOU THAT THE PRESIDENT IS GOING TO ISSUE ORDERS IN THE EARLY EVENING OF OCTOBER 31, NAMELY SEVEN OR EIGHT O'CLOCK WASHINGTON TIME WHICH IS 2400 GMT OCTOBER 31 OR 0100 GMT NOVEMBER 1 TO STOP ALL AIR, NAVAL, AND ARTILLERY BOMBARDMENT AND ALL OTHER ACTS INVOLVING THE USE OF FORCE AGAINST THE ENTIRE TERRITORY OF THE DRV. THOSE ORDERS WILL BE FULLY EFFECTIVE TWELVE HOURS LATER. THE PRESIDENT WILL MAKE AN ANNOUNCEMENT OF THIS ACTION AT ABOUT THE TIME THE ORDERS ARE ISSUED. IN THIS CONNECTION, I MUST OF COURSE, EMPHASIZE THE NECESSITY FOR ABSOLUTE SECRECY UNTIL HE MAKES THE ANNOUNCEMENT.

SECRET

NLN 10-910/9051 0143 OF 162

"THE MEETING OF THE TYPE AGREED UPON WILL NOT BE HELD BEFORE NOVEMBER 6. WE WILL BE IN TOUCH WITH YOU ON THE EXACT TIME OF SUCH A MEETING BUT IT WILL NOT BE BEFORE NEXT WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 6.

"THIS ACTION IS BEING TAKEN ON THE BASIS OF ALL THE CONVERSATIONS WE HAVE HAD, TAKING INTO ACCOUNT WHAT YOU HAVE SAID AND WHAT WE HAVE SAID.

"CAN I REPORT TO MY GOVERNMENT THAT YOU AGREE TO THE FOREGOING?"

3. THUY ASKED THAT WE REPEAT OUR STATEMENT IN ITS ENTIRETY FOR CLARITY. WE REPEATED THE STATEMENT.

4. THUY THEN ASKED FOR A RECESS TO CONSULT WITH LAU AND VY.

5. AFTER A 30 MINUTE BREAK, THUY RETURNED AND SAID HE WOULD LIKE TO EXPRESS SOME VIEWS. HE SAID THAT FOR NEARLY SIX MONTHS OF CONVERSATIONS IN PARIS, THE DRV HAS BEEN DEMANDING THAT THE UNITED STATES UNCONDITIONALLY CEASE THE BOMBING AND ALL OTHER ACTS OF WAR AGAINST THE ENTIRE TERRITORY OF THE DRV. THIS EVENING AS ON OUR PREVIOUS MEETINGS, THE UNITED STATES SIDE SAID THAT IT WAS PREPARED TO STOP ALL AIR, NAVAL, AND ARTILLERY BOMBARDMENT AND ALL OTHER ACTS INVOLVING THE USE OF FORCE AGAINST THE ENTIRE TERRITORY OF THE DRV. THE DRV SIDE UNDERSTANDS THE BOMBING CESSATION WILL BE UNCONDITIONAL. THE US SIDE HAS ALSO SAID THAT IN SUBSTANCE THIS IS CESSATION OF BOMBING WITHOUT ANY CONDITION OF RECIPROCITY AND IN THE STATEMENTS OF THE US GOVERNMENT THERE WILL BE NO MENTION OF THE WORD CONDITIONAL.

6. IN REGARD TO THE MEETING TO FIND A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT OF THE VIET-NAM PROBLEM, THE US HAS SAID THAT THE REPUBLIC OF VIET-NAM WILL BE PRESENT AND THE DRV HAS SAID THAT THE NLF WILL BE PRESENT AND

ACCORDINGLY THE MEETING WILL INCLUDE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE DRV, SVN-NLF, THE RVN AND THE US. THIS POINT THUY SAID HAS BEEN AGREED BETWEEN US.

7. REGARDING THE QUESTION OF PUTTING THIS INTO A MINUTE, THUY SAID THAT HE HAD PROPOSED A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT VIEWS, BUT THE US HAD OBJECTED. AS THUY HAD SAID TO HARRIMAN AT WEDNESDAY'S TEA BREAK AND AS LAU HAD TOLD VANCE ON OCTOBER 29, THE REASON FOR RAISING THE QUESTION OF A MINUTE WAS TO SEE WHETHER THE WORDS AND ACTIONS OF THE UNITED STATES CONFORMED TO EACH OTHER. THE DRV SIDE FEELS THAT THESE WORDS AND ACTIONS ARE NOT IN HARMONY AND, KNOWING THIS, THUY SAID, HE DID NOT INSIST ON THE WRITING OF A



Department of State

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1968 OCT 31 AM 12 27

FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC FLASH 7644

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~~SECRET~~ FINAL SECTION OF TWO PARIS 23202

NODIS/HARVAN/DOUBLE PLUS

MINUTE. HE THEREFORE REAFFIRMED WHAT LAU HAD SAID ON OCTOBER 29 AND WHAT THUY HAD SAID IN WEDNESDAY'S TEA BREAK-THAT HE WAS DROPPING THE REQUEST FOR A MINUTE.

8. REGARDING THE DATE OF THE CESSATION OF BOMBING AND THE DATE OF A MEETING, THUY SAID THAT PREVIOUSLY WE HAD SUGGESTED OCTOBER 30 FOR THE BOMBING CESSATION AND NOVEMBER 2 FOR THE MEETING. NOW WE WERE SUGGESTING THAT THE BOMBING STOP ON OCTOBER 31 AND THE MEETING BE HELD NOT BEFORE NOVEMBER 6. THUY SAID THE IMPORTANT MATTER WAS THE INTERVAL BETWEEN THE CESSATION AND THE MEETING ALLOWED SUFFICIENT TIME FOR THE NLF REPRESENTATIVES TO COME TO PARIS. NOW, THUY SAID, THE DATE OF CESSATION IS POSTPONED AND THE DATE OF A MEETING IS POSTPONED BUT THE INTERVAL IS SUFFICIENT TO ALLOW TIME FOR THE FRONT TO COME AND THEREFORE THE DRV AGREES.

9. THUY SAID THE US ALSO REQUESTS THAT THE DRV KEEP THIS MATTER SECRET UNTIL THE ORDER HAS BEEN ANNOUNCED BY THE PRESIDENT. HE SAID THE DRV IS PREPARED TO KEEP IT SECRET. THIS MEANS THE DRV WILL NOT MAKE ANY BROADCASTS, WILL NOT PUBLISH IN ANY NEWSPAPERS AND WILL NOT MAKE ANY OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS BEFORE THE ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT. FOR HIS PART, HERE IN PARIS, THUY WOULD NOT SAY ANYTHING. IF ANYONE ASKS HE WILL SIMPLY REPLY "THERE IS NOTHING NEW." ON THIS POINT, WE REPLIED THAT WE WOULD DO THE SAME.

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10. IN BRIEF, THUY SAID , HE AGREED WITH OUR PROPOSAL TODAY, BUT HE WANTED TO SAY THAT PREVIOUSLY THERE HAD BEEN POINTS AGREED UPON AND THEREAFTER THE US HAD CHANGED. FROM NOW ON, BOTH SIDES SHOULD CARRY OUT THEIR AGREEMENTS CORRECTLY. THUY REMARKED THAT NO DOUBT WE HAD REALIZED THROUGHOUT OUR PRIVATE TALKS THAT THE DRV HAS SHOWN GOODWILL AND SERIOUS INTENT. THE DRV ALSO WANTS TO PUT ASIDE ALL DIFFERENCES SO THAT WE CAN COME TO AN AGREEMENT. NO DOUBT, THUY SAID, THE US REALIZES THAT THE DRV HAS COME WITH A REAL DESIRE TO FIND A SETTLEMENT BUT THIS INVOLVES TWO SIDES. THE US SHOULD SHOW GOODWILL JUST AS THE DRV SIDE HAS, AND THEN OUR FUTURE WORK WILL BE DEALT WITH SMOOTHLY.

11. WE SAID WE HAD NO COMMENT ON WHAT THUY HAD SAID. HE HAD MENTIONED SOME OF THE THINGS THAT HE HAD SAID IN THE PAST AS WELL AS SOME OF OUR PAST REMARKS. SINCE HE HAD GONE INTO THIS DETAIL WE THOUGHT WE SHOULD RAISE SOME OF THE THINGS WE HAVE SAID ABOUT SERIOUS AND PRODUCTIVE TALKS. WE WERE SURE THAT THEY HAVE IN MIND THE THINGS WHICH WE HAVE POINTED OUT TO THEM WHICH WOULD AFFECT THE MAINTENANCE OF SERIOUS TALKS. WE WERE SURE THEY KNEW WHAT THEY WERE. SO, WE ACCEPTED THEIR STATEMENT THAT THEY WANT SERIOUS TALKS.

12. WE ADDED, FOR THE SAKE OF CLARITY, AND IN LIGHT OF WHAT THEY HAD SAID ABOUT OCTOBER 31 ORDER TO STOP THE BOMBING WILL BE ISSUED AT SEVEN OR EIGHT P.M. WASHINGTON TIME OCTOBER 31 WHICH IS 2400 GMT OCTOBER 31 OR 0100 GMT NOVEMBER 1. IT WILL TAKE 12 HOURS BEFORE THE ORDER BECOMES FULLY EFFECTIVE SO THAT MEANS IT WILL BE EFFECTIVE NOVEMBER 1. WE WERE SURE THAT AMBASSADOR LAU AS A MILITARY MAN KNEW THAT SOME MILITARY UNITS COULD NOT RECEIVE AND THEREFORE CARRY OUT THESE ORDERS IMMEDIATELY BECAUSE THEY WERE NOT IN DIRECT CONTACT WITH HIGHER HEADQUARTERS. THUS IT WOULD BE 12 HOURS BEFORE THE ORDER WOULD BE COMPLETELY EFFECTIVE. LAU NODDED ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.

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13. THUY ASKED IF WE INTENDED TO INFORM THE HOST GOVERNMENT, FRANCE, BEFORE THE ACTUAL ANNOUNCEMENT. WE SAID WE HAD NO SUCH PLAN. THEREFORE, THUY SAID, WE WOULD INFORM THE FRENCH AFTER BOMBING CESSATION. WE NOTED, IN THIS CONNECTION THERE WAS THE PROBLEM OF SECRECY AND AVOIDING LEAKS WHICH WE CONSIDER VERY IMPORTANT.

14. THUY SAID THAT IF WE TELL THE FRENCH IN ADVANCE, IT WOULD LEAK AND ADDED THAT THE HOUSE IN WHICH WE WERE MEETING BELONGED TO THE VIETNAMESE THEMSELVES AND NOTHING WOULD LEAK OUT OF IT.

15. FINALLY, WE SAID THAT THE UNITED STATES IS GOOD FOR ITS WORD AND WILL CARRY IT OUT. WE HAVE MADE A STATEMENT TODAY WHICH THE US INTENDS TO CARRY OUT. WE THEN ADJOURNED FOR SOME TEA. AT THAT TIME IT WAS AGREED THAT VANCE AND LAU WOULD MEET ON SATURDAY TO GO OVER THE ARRANGEMENTS RELATED TO THE CONVENING OF OUR FIRST MEETING. HARRIMAN
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17

OUTGOING TELEGRAM Department of State

INDICATE: ☐ COLLECT
☐ CHARGE TO

~~SECRET~~
Classification

30 OCT 68 02 32z

Origin

ACTION: Amembassy SAIGON ~~XXX~~ FLASH

Info

INFO: Amembassy PARIS IMMEDIATE

NODIS/HARVAN/DOUBLE PLUS

STATE: TODEL 1408

i. You should see Thieu at the earliest possible time Wednesday

morning to convey the following as an oral message from the President.

If Thieu attempts to make himself unavailable, you should insist that

the message is of the utmost gravity and that our President could not

understand any reluctance on the part of Thieu to see you at once. Message

is:

a. The President is convinced that we have obtained from the other side the essential elements in our requirements at this stage of the war and on negotiations. At every step of the way the President has consulted closely with President Thieu and has proceeded on the basis of the agreement between the two.

b. On the basis of commitments made by Thieu and Ky, the constitutional leaders of the GVN, President Johnson has gone forward in making engagements to others. He cannot now withdraw from those engagements.

all of which are known to Thieu.

c. The American people have joined in a great battle in Southeast Asia, for more than 5 years, in which we have accepted great sacrifices in men and material. The purpose of this effort was to obtain a chance to talk about peace on a reasonable basis. Now that we have reached that point, we must not let it get away from us.

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NLN 10-96/9651:2.148 DE 1167

d. The President is deeply concerned that President Thieu does not sufficiently understand the American people and their government. If President Thieu makes himself responsible for preventing the very peace talks which have cost so much to obtain, the people of this country would never forget the man responsible. No American leader could rescue the position of such a person with the American people. If President Thieu keeps us from moving at this moment of opportunity, God help South Vietnam, because no President could maintain the support of the American people.

e. President Thieu should also understand that the Government of the United States includes the United States Congress and that the leaders of the U.S. Congress and most of its membership will be the same in January as in the past few years. The President and the Secretary of State must be, under our Constitution, completely candid with our Congressional leaders as to how this situation developed and who was responsible for frustrating it. The President wants President Thieu to know that the Congress would take charge of this situation and would completely undermine and would withdraw the support of the United States from the effort in Vietnam.

f. The President also wants President Thieu to understand that the attitude of the American military leadership is of crucial importance to his own country. Our top military men are unanimous that the understandings reached in Paris provide a substantial military benefit to U.S. and allied forces in the field. These men, who have been responsible for the conduct of the battle, will respond with disgust to a rejection of this present

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opportunity for petty and trivial reasons. Obviously, the elections will have no effect upon our military leadership since they are professional and non-political in character under our Constitution.

g. President Thieu should understand that President Johnson is faced with the gravest possible problems. The first is a judgment as to whether there can exist a relationship of confidence between the Presidents of the United States and of South Vietnam. The second is a judgment which the President must make as to his obligations to the United States, to the American people, and to American national interests. This raises the serious possibility of proceeding alone. We cannot force South Vietnam to do something which it does not wish to do; South Vietnam cannot force us to do something which we consider contrary to our interests. No one can levy upon us a necessity to give the lives of our men and our planes for the bombing of North Vietnam or for the defense of South Vietnam unless the U.S. considers it in our national interest to make that sacrifice. Does President Thieu want President Johnson to go alone? If so, can President Thieu himself go alone?

h. Surely President Thieu understands full well that President Johnson will be President of the United States, with all the responsibilities of that office, until January 20, 1969. The President will make the decisions for the United States while he holds that office; the decisions which are required in the next three months could be vital to the future of South Vietnam.

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1. The President can understand if there might be individuals in the South Vietnamese government who may be speculating about the internal politics of the United States. He wishes President Thieu to understand that decisions based upon such speculation carry the gravest danger because the American people would react in fury if they should discover that lives were being lost because people of other countries were trying to intrude their own judgments into the judgments of the American people about our future leadership. The President removed himself from the internal politics of the United States on March 31st in order to deal with questions of war and peace on their merits; it would be intolerable if those with whom he is working should fail to adopt the same attitude.

2. The President has considered carefully the points raised by Foreign Minister Thanh with Ambassador Bunker. He observes that the constitutional point has been raised only at this last moment, following weeks of closest consultation and agreement between our two governments. He cannot accept responsibility for Ambassador Lam's reporting supposed conversations with Ambassador Harriman because he knows that the position of the United States Government has been stated clearly by Ambassador Bunker to President Thieu himself on these matters. Questions of procedure are potentially troublesome but the informal precedents which have already been followed in Paris would meet most of South Vietnam's

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concern; in any event, it would be for the delegations in Paris to work out these tertiary points.

The President has taken into account the desire of President Thieu and Vice President Ky to have somewhat more time. He observes that their problems are not related to the cessation of the bombing but are related to the timing of a following meeting and the problems of producing an effective South Vietnamese delegation. The President believes, therefore, that it should meet President Thieu's problem if the date of the cessation of bombing were moved forward for 24 hours and the first meeting should be scheduled in Paris on Monday, November 5. We cannot guarantee that the other side will accept this, but we will be ready to find out.

3. Finally, the President is completely unable to understand why, after all the consultation which has occurred between the United States, the GVN, and the TCC's, considerations of secondary importance should be raised at the last minute as an obstacle to a previously agreed procedure. The United States has engaged aspects of its own good faith in pressing these matters upon the other side. And we must maintain our traditional reputation of good faith. But the good faith of the Government of South Vietnam is also at stake. For that to be surrendered for reasons such as those which have been thus far advanced would be profligate in the extreme and would leave the Government of South Vietnam with little

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NLN 10-9679051:2-152 of 1102

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-6-

credence or credit before the world in the conduct of its own affairs and in its attempt to establish its independence and national survival.

4. Please, therefore, underline with every personal resource you can, the utter gravity of this moment in the relations between the Government of the United States and the Republic of Vietnam.

5. If you and General Goodpaster think it more desirable, you should authorize him to use any elements of this message for a very frank, direct talk with General Vien, Chief of the Joint General Staff.

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Department of State

TELEGRAM

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TAB I

***** ZZ RUEHC RUFNCR
DE RUMJIR 41543/1 3041530
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
Z 301500Z OCT 68 ZFF-6
FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC FLASH 3536
INFO RUFNCR/AMEMBASSY PARIS FLASH 2644
STATE GRNC
BT
~~SECRET~~ SECTION 1 OF 3 SAIGON 51543

1 0 0 1 8 Q
OCT 30, 1968
11:15AM

NODIS/HARVAN/DOUBLE PLUS

REF: SAIGON 41542

FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF LETTER FROM PRESIDENT THIEU TO PRESIDENT JOHNSON REFERRED TO IN MY PREVIOUS MESSAGE. WE HAVE INSERTED PARA NUMBER FOR EACH CROSS REFERENCE. PARAS 13 AND 14 ARE REWRITES OF PARA WE FOUND OFFENSIVE IN ORIGINAL VERSION (SEE PARA 3 REFTEL). THEY HAVE BEEN SOMEWHAT MODIFIED TO REDUCE THE IMPRESSION THAT WE ARE FORCING COALITION ON THEM.

BEGIN TEXT:

DEAR MR. PRESIDENT:

1. IN REPLY TO YOUR LETTER OF OCTOBER 29TH, I COMPLETELY SHARE YOUR VIEW THAT WE HAVE GONE FAR IN GATHERING STRENGTH SINCE THE COMMUNIST TET ATTACKS. THIS IS DUE TO OUR COMMON EFFORTS AND IN PARTICULAR TO YOUR HELP. I ALSO FULLY AGREE THAT WE MUST FULLY MAINTAIN ALL MILITARY PRESSURE WHICH WE CAN SUMMON AGAINST COMMUNIST AGGRESSIVE FORCES, CONCURRENTLY WITH A MAJOR POLITICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFORT IN THE DAYS AND MONTHS AHEAD.
2. WITH RELATION TO OUR CURRENT EFFORTS FOR AN HONORABLE AND SECURE PEACE, I WISH TO ASSURE YOU THAT I AM VERY ANXIOUS TO COOPERATE WITH YOU TO THE FULLEST EXTENT POSSIBLE, IN THE SPIRIT OF THE RECENT HONOLULU CONFERENCE.
3. ON THIS IMPORTANT PROBLEM, TO DISPEL MISUNDERSTANDINGS, I WOULD LIKE TO BRING TO YOUR ATTENTION THESE FOLLOWING MAJOR POINTS:

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4. FIRST, YOUR POSITION AND OURS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN THAT NORTH VIET-NAM SHOULD TAKE RECIPROCAL ACTIONS IN ANSWER TO OUR DEESCALATORY MEASURES, AND IN PARTICULAR TO THE CESSATION OF BOMBING OF NORTH VIET-NAM. ALTHOUGH WE UNDERSTAND YOUR WISH NOT TO MENTION PUBLICLY THE CONDITIONS ACCEPTED BY HANOI TO HELP IT TO SAVE, WE DEEM IT INDISPENSABLE THAT THE CONDITIONS ACCEPTED BY HANOI BE MADE CLEAR BY UNEQUIVOCAL ASSURANCES BY HANOI AT LEAST IN PRIVATE. ONLY FIRM ASSURANCES BY HANOI COULD CONSTITUTE SOLID GROUNDS FOR SERIOUS TALKS.

5. IN THIS MATTER, WE FEEL IT NECESSARY TO HAVE A CLAR-CUT AGREEMENT WITH HANOI ON THE BASIC GROND RULES FOR THE FORTH-COMING EXPANDED CONFERENCE BEFORE THE CONFERENCE STARTS, SO THAT IF HANOI LATER VIOLATES THESE RULES, IT WILL BE CLEAR TO EVERYONE AS TO WHO WILL HAVE TO BEAR RESPONSIBILITIES FOR THE FAILURE OF THE CONFERENCE.

6. SECOND, AMONG THE CONDITIONS TO BE EXPLICITLY ACCEPTED BY HANOI PRIOR TO THE HOLDING OF THE NEXT CONFERENCE, IS THE UNEQUIVOCAL ACCEPTANCE BY HANOI TO HOLD DIRECT AND SERIOUS TALKS WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF VIET-NAM.

7. WITH REGARD TO SUCH TALKS, YOU KNOW THAT WE DO NOT RECOGNIZE THE HANOI COMMUNIST REGIME AND THAT THE REPUBLIC OF VIET-NAM HAS FOR MANY YEARS REFUSED TO HOLD TALKS WITH THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE HANOI DICTATORSHIP, AND TURNED DOWN THE HANOI REGIME'S REPEATED DEMANDS FOR CONSULTATIONS BETWEEN THE AUTHORITIES OF THE TWO ZONES NORTH AND SOUTH OF THE 17TH PARALLEL.

8. RECENTLY, IN THE INTEREST OF PEACE, WE HAVE MADE A CONCESSION AND MADE IT KNOWN THAT WE ARE WILLING TO MEET WITH THE REPRESENTATIVES OF HANOI TO DISCUSS THE RESTORATION OF PEACE AND THE PENDING PROBLEMS BETWEEN THE TWO ZONES NORTH AND SOUTH OF THE DEMARCATION LINE CREATED BY THE 1954 GENEVA AGREEMENT.

9. UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, AN ACCEPTANCE BY HANOI TO CONDUCT DIRECT TALKS WITH THE REPUBLIC OF VIET-NAM CANNOT BE CONSIDERED AS A CONCESSION BY HANOI TO US, WHICH SHOULD JUSTIFY FURTHER CONCESSIONS FROM THE REPUBLIC OF VIET-NAM, QUITE THE CONTRARY.

10. THIRD, THE POSITION OF THE REPUBLIC OF VIET-NAM ON THE SO-CALLED NLF IS WELL KNOWN, AND HAS BEEN STRONGLY STATED MANY TIMES: THE NLF IS SIMPLY THE CREATION AND A TOOL OF THE NORTH VIETNAMESE COMMUNIST AGGRESSORS. THIS VIEW IS SHARED BY YOUR GOVERNMENT WHICH HAS PRESENTED AMPLE AND INCONTROVERTIBLE EVIDENCE TO THAT EFFECT. BUNKER
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ACTION COPY

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DE RUMJIR 41543/2 3341530
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
Z 331500Z OCT 68 ZFF-6
FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC FLASH 3537
INFO RUFNCR/AMEMBASSY PARIS FLASH 2645
STATE GRNC
BT

100210

Oct 30, 1968

11:27AM

~~SECRET~~ SECTION 2 OF 3 SAIGON 41543

MODIS/HARVAN/DOUBLE PLUS

11. HANOI CREATED THE SO-CALLED "NLF" WITH THE HOPE OF USING IT AS A TROJAN HORSE FOR A COMMUNIST TAKE-OVER OF SOUTH VIET-NAM, WHEN AND IF THE REPUBLIC OF VIET-NAM IS FORCED TO ACCEPT THE FORMUL OF A COLATION GOVERNMENT WITH ITS PARTICIPATION.

12. THROUGH TRAGIC EXPERIENCES OF THE PAST, THE VIETNAMESE PEOPLE ARE SO COMPLETELY CONVINCED OF THESE FACTS THAT ANY PROSPECT OF RECOGNITION OF THE "NLF", EXPLICIT OR IMPLICIT, IS CONSIDERED AS A SURE SIGN OF SURRENDER TO THE COMMUNISTS. THIS WILL PROMPTLY AND INEVITABLY CREATE THE DEMORALIZATION OF THE WHOLE NATION, AND THE COLLAPSE OF OUR ENTIRE DEFENSE EFFORTS. THE REGULAR ARMED FORCES, THE REGIONAL AND POPULAR FORCES, THE RURAL DEVELOPMENT CADRES, THE CIVIL SERVANTS AND OTHERS, WILL CONSIDER IT TO BE UTTER FUTILE TO MAKE FURTHER EFFORTS AND SACRIFICES FOR A GOAL DOOMED IN ADVANCE. CONVERSELY, THE MORALE OF ENEMY TROOPS AND CADRES WILL IMMEDIATELY RAISE, PUTTING AN END TO THE PRESENT UPWARD TREND OF COMMUNIST RETURNEES WHO LEFT IN GROWING NUMBERS THE COMMUNIST RANKS TO JOIN US. STREET DEMONSTRATIONS WILL IMMEDIATELY RESUME IN SAIGON AND OTHER CITIES, MORE VIOLENT THAN EVER, LEADING TO THE MOST CHAOTIC POLITICAL UNSTABILITY.

13. A PROCESS OF DESINTEGRATION, UNDOING OUR IMMENSE EFFORTS IN THE RECENT YEARS, WILL START AS SOON AS THERE IS A SIGN THAT THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF VIET-NAM HAS TO ACCEPT THE COALITION FORMULA WITH THE COMMUNISTS.

14. IF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF VIET-NAM IS TO ACCEPT TO SIT AT THE NEGOTIATING TABLE IN AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE WITH THE NLF AS A SEPARATE DELEGATION FROM NORTH VIET-NAM, AND ON AN EQUAL BASIS WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF VIET-NAM, THIS

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Department of State

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ZZ RUEHC RUENOR
DE RUMJIR 41543/3 3041543
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
Z 301500Z OCT 68 ZFF-G
FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATEWASHDC FLASH 3538
INFO RUENOR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1)- 2643
STATE GRNC
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Oct 30, 1968

11:30AM

~~SECRET~~ SECTION 3 OF 3 SAIGON 41543

NODIS/HARVAN/PLUS

19. IN CONCLUDING, MR. PRESIDENT, MAY I SAY THAT, THANKS TO THE NOBLE HELP AND SOLIDARITY OF THE UNITED STATES, WE ARE GROWING STRONGER WHILE THE ENEMY IS BECOMING WEAKER EVERY DAY. BUT WE HAVE NOT BECOME STRONG TO THE POINT WHERE WE

AN TAKE CONSIDERABLE

RISKS ON BASIC ISSUES.

20. AS YOU HAVE POINTED OUT, THE ENEMY HAS SUFFERED ONE TACTICAL DEFEAT AFTER ANOTHER, AND OUR FIGHTING MEN HAVE BROUGHT VICTORY WITHIN OUR GRASP.

21. WE NOW BEGIN TO SEE THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL. I AM NOW MORE CONVINCED THAN EVER THAT, BY MAINTAINING OUR CLOSE AND CONFIDENT COOPERATION, OUR DETERMINATION AND OUR VIGILANCE, WE ARE BRINGING NEARER EVERY DAY THE PROSPECTS OF PEACE IN FREEDOM FOR SOUTHEAST ASIA AND LONG LASTING STABILITY TO THE WORLD.

22. IN THESE PERSPECTIVES, MR. PRESIDENT, HISTORY WILL RECORDS THAT THANKS TO YOUR STATEMANSHIP AND DETERMINATION, THE ALLIED NATIONS HAVE GLORIOUSLY MET A MOMENTOUS COMMUNIST CHALLENGE IN VIETNAM, AND ASSURED FREEDOM FOR MANY GENERATIONS TO COME. SINCERELY,

DUNKER

BT

~~SECRET~~

WILL SURELY INTERPRETED AS THE FIRST STEP TOWARD AN UNAVOIDABLE COALITION FORMULA.

15. THAT IS WHY WE HAVE STATED SO FREQUENTLY THAT THE "NLF" CAN AT MOST BE INCLUDED IN THE DELEGATION OF NORTH VIET-NAM AT THE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS. ANYTHING MORE THAN THAT WILL INVOLVE CONSIDERABLE RISKS FOR OUR CAUSE, WITH DASTROUS RESULTS.

16. FOURTH, IN THE CONTEXT OF THESE ABOVE CONSIDERATIONS, THE QUESTION OF PROCEDURES RELATING TO THE POSSIBLE PRESENCE OF THE "NLF" TO THE CONFERENCE IS OF PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE. IT WILL NOT BE SUFFICIENT FOR US TO CONSIDER IT AS A PART OF THE DELEGATION OF NORTH VIET-NAM. IT IS INDISPENSABLE THAT IT DOES NOT HAVE THE APPEARANCE OF A SEPARATE ENTITY AT THE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS.

17. GIVEN THE COMMUNIST PROPENSITY TO RUSLS AND STRATAGEMS, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS PROBLEM, WE STRONGLY BELIEVE THAT NO PRECAUTIONS ARE SUPERFLUOUS IN THIS REGARD, AND THAT IT IS INDISPENSABLE THAT THESE PRECAUTIONS BE TAKEN AND THE RULES OF PROCEDURE BE ESTABLISHED BEFORE THE CONFERENCE ITSELF IS FORMALLY ACCEPTED AND ANNOUNCED, BECAUSE THEY RELATE INTIMATELY TO A MATTER OF SUBSTANCE OF VERY GREAT IMPORTANCE.

18. FIFTH, THE BASIC PROBLEM, OF COURSE, IS THE RESOTRATION OF PEACE IN FREEDOM, THE CONVENING OF A PEACE CONFERENCE IS ONLY A MODALITY TOWARD THAT END. THEREFORE, WE DEEM IT VERY IMPORTANT TO SECURE IN ADVANCE THE CONDITIONS WHICH CAN PROVIDE REASONABLE CHANCES FOR A SUCCESSFUL ESTABLISHMENT OF A JUST AND HONORABLE PEACE. OTHERWISE, THE CONFERENCE WILL SIMPLY CREATE HIGH EXPECTATIONS AMONG PEACE-LOVING PEOPLE, BUT FINALLY WILL ENGENDER ONLY FRUSTRATIONS, OR ADVERSE RESULTS.

BUNKER
BT

~~SECRET~~

3

OUTGOING TELEGRAM Department of State

INDICATE: ☐ COLLECT
☐ CHARGE TO

~~SECRET~~

Classification

Origin

ACTION: Amembassy XXX SAIGON FLASH

Info:

STATE

NODIS/HARVAN/DOUBLE PLUS

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Jr. The President wishes you to hold, deliver, or modify these communications. You are quite free to use one without the other. The President is simply putting ammunition into your hands: if you think it is helpful.

Message from President Johnson to President Thieu:

XXXX QUOTE I have read Ambassador Bunker's preliminary report on his conversation with you.

There is little to add to what Ambassador Bunker has told you. But the hour is too late for division among us. The future would be ~~xxx~~ bleak if that were so.

I have thought since early October that we would sit in Paris as one, determined to maintain freedom in South Viet-Nam and to stop the killing.

We ~~just~~ must not throw away in Paris what we have won in

~~SAIGON~~ South Viet-Nam.

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B.H.R.

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Nor must either of our countries go it alone. I am committed to the course outlined to you by Ambassador Bunker. As you know, I went down this road this far only because I felt that you were beside me at every step--as I believe you were.

I so much hope that you are not leaving me in this critical hour.

I need your wisdom, patriotism, and courage in the ~~next~~ critical days ahead.

You should know that I should be delighted to meet with you and the other chiefs of the contributing countries in the Pacific shortly after the first Paris session when the GVN is present, be it in Honolulu or at any other point in the Pacific convenient for us all. UNQUOTE.

Sincerely,

Lyndon B. Johnson

OUTGOING TELEGRAM Department of State

INDICATE: ☐ COLLECT
☐ CHARGE TO

~~SECRET~~

Classification

Origin

ACTION: Amembassy SAIGON FLASH

Info

STATE 264437

NODIS/HARVAN/DOUBLE PLUS

The President wishes you to hold, deliver, or modify these communications. You are quite free to use one without the other. The President is simply putting ammunition into your hands if you think it is helpful.

Message from President Johnson to Vice President Ky.

QUOTE: Dear Vice President Ky:

I have read Ambassador Bunker's ^{preliminary} ~~preliminary~~ report on these earnest most/~~earnest~~ and ~~if~~ difficult discussions and decisions. I want loyal you to know that I welcome the ~~loyal~~ and forceful way you expressed yourself to Ambassador Bunker.

Throughout the years your constancy and your willingness to put the freedom and liberty of your country above personal partisan, political gain has given me strength.

In this critical hour, it is essential that we remain together united as one, determined to consolidate/in Paris what our

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men have done in the field.

We are entering another stage--hopefully one of progress and victory. It will challenge the best in us and in all our countries.

I am hopeful that you and your colleagues will be able to reach a unified decision in Saigon and that your knowledge, decisiveness and national spirit will be available to ~~xx~~ your country and to us in Paris in the peace deliberations.

We will never lose in Paris what we have won in South ~~xx~~ Viet-Nam. But after what you and I have been through together over these years, know this is no time to haggle among ourselves. UNQUOTE.

Sincerely,

Lyndon B. Johnson

RUSK