

LBJ Bars Bombing Halt Without Red Reciprocity

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The Johnson Administration massively dismissed yesterday Sen. Robert F. Kennedy's proposal for a new pause in the bombing of North Vietnam.

President Johnson, in scorning the proposal, expressed more determinedly than ever his intention to "persist" in the attacks until Hanoi will take "equivalent action" to help end the war.

Mr. Johnson said for the first time that "we are bringing to bear on North Vietnam a burden roughly equivalent to that which the Communists are imposing through guerrilla warfare on the South . . ." Moreover, said the President, "we are doing it with far fewer civilian casualties in the North."

"I wish friend and neutral

President said adamantly, that "we shall persist with our operations" in the South and in the North, "until those who launched this aggression are prepared to move seriously to reinstall the agreements whose violation has brought the scourge of war to Southeast Asia."

Officially, there was no overt connection between the President's remarks and Sen. Kennedy's proposal. But the cause and effect relationship was separated by the thinnest of formalities.

President Johnson's statements were made in the form of a 4½-page letter addressed to Sen. Henry M. Jackson (D-Wash.). The letter was said to be in amplification of "discussions at dinner on the evening of the 18th" about the bombing, which the President said, "I wish to review for you . . ."

The letter was made public by Jackson as Kennedy began to speak on the Senate floor. Earlier in the day, at a sudden news conference, the President, who knew as others did that the Kennedy speech was due, virtually said that Americans have a simple choice in the war as he sees it.

"I think," the President told newsmen, "that the American people should know that this is a question between their President, their country, their troops, and Mr. Ho Chi Minh (President of

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North Vietnam) and the troops that he is sending in from the North. Everyone can take whatever side of the matter that he wants to."

A direct response to Kennedy's proposal finally was issued in early evening by Secretary of State Dean Rusk, who said earlier in the day that the subject of Kennedy's speech was "thoroughly covered" by Administration positions.

Rusk said last night that "proposals substantially similar" to Sen. Kennedy's "were

explored prior to, during and since" the February Lunar New Year truce in Vietnam, "all without result."

Hostile Response Cited

Bombing pauses of five days in 1965, said Rusk, 37 days in Dec-Jan., 1965-66 "and six days just two weeks ago . . . encountered only hostile actions in response."

"There is therefore no reason to believe at this time," said Rusk "that Hanoi is interested in proposals for mutual de-escalation such as those put forward by Sen. Kennedy." President Johnson repeatedly has made clear, said Rusk, that the United States stands ready "to go more than halfway to meet any equitable overture from the other side."

The Soviet newspaper, Pravda, newly charged in a front-page editorial yesterday that the United States spurned a Hanoi offer "on the possibility of folks . . . after an unconditional cessation of bombings and other aggressive actions against the country."

North Vietnam, in its broadcasts, is charging that "major war escalation" by the United States leaves "no other alternative" than military struggle.

Premier Pham Van Dong, in an interview with Jacques Moalic, Hanoi correspondent for Agence France Presse, broadcast yesterday, replied "no" when asked if he now sees a prospect for talks with the United States.

"I do not think there is any present possibility" (for talks), said the Premier, "because the United States aggressors are continuing their escalations . . ."

"It is now Washington's move," said Pham Van Dong.

Both Sides Pessimistic

The U.S. position is exactly the opposite in regard to who must move now; but both sides are now saying they see no present outlook but a rising spiral of war.

President Johnson, in his news conference and in his letter to Sen. Jackson, repeated basic arguments the Administration has been making to explain and justify its policy in Vietnam.

The President made a point of specifying that a report by Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor to

the Kennedy Administration, in 1961, said the "time may come" to declare an intention "to attack the source of guerrilla aggression in North Vietnam," to impose on it "a price . . . commensurate with the damage being inflicted on its neighbors to the South."

That is what has come to pass, said the President. In his letter to Sen. Jackson, the President said that all military men in the field and U.S. Allies there all agree that Hanoi must not be allowed "sanctuary" while it is "conducting aggression across international borders."

The President repeated Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara's estimate that the bombing of military targets in North Vietnam has "diverted about half a million men to cope with effects of our attacks."

"This figure," said the President, "approximates the total number of men we now have fighting in Southeast Asia . . ." The bombing, he said, "is an integral part of our total policy which aims not to destroy North Vietnam but to force Hanoi to end its aggression so that the people of South Vietnam can determine their own future without coercion."