

A Peace Bid That Failed in 1965 Disclosed by Ex-U.S. Officials

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—North Vietnam considered, and then set aside, secret United States peace offers in 1965, well placed informants have now disclosed.

The apparently unbridgeable gap was then—and is now—who would control South Vietnam after the withdrawal of all American forces.

In 1965-66, according to former United States officials, Hanoi's negotiators demanded total control of all Vietnam, or of its government, as the price for negotiating a settlement with the United States.

President Nixon's recent disclosures of 12 abortive meetings in the Paris area over the last year between Henry A. Kissinger, his national security adviser, and representatives of North Vietnam have brought to light a continuing deadlock on this issue over the last seven years.

Details Come to Light

Details of secret peace feelers extended by the Administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson starting in the summer of 1965 have recently been disclosed. These feelers began within days of President Johnson's announcement on July 28, 1965, that he was planning to increase American combat forces in South Vietnam by 44 battalions, or 65,000 troops. This was a doubling of the American troop strength there at the time.

William P. Bundy, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian Affairs in the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations, cited the so-called "X Y Z" negotiations in an article in Newsweek magazine Dec. 7. The name came from a code used by John Adams's emissaries in Paris in 1797 and 1798.

Mr. Bundy cited George W. Ball, former Undersecretary of State, as the originator of the Johnson Administration's peace project. Mr. Bundy also disclosed that a "private American of skill and dedication" had traveled between Washington and Paris as a "truly secret emissary."

In recent interviews Mr. Ball and Mr. Bundy said that the secret negotiator was Edmund A. Gullion, now dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University.

Gullion Was Career Diplomat

Before becoming dean in 1964, Mr. Gullion had been a Foreign Service officer with extensive experience in Indochina. His last post before retiring was as Ambassador to the Congo. He is fluent in French.

The interviews with Mr. Ball and Mr. Bundy disclosed how the project began, how it appeared to attract preliminary North Vietnamese interest and then how — even after a coded

message had been addressed to Hanoi by Secretary of State Dean Rusk during a television show in New York — Hanoi abruptly lost interest.

The details were tightly held at the time by eight men: President Johnson, Secretary Rusk, Under Secretary Ball, Assistant Secretary Bundy, Deputy Assistant Secretary George S. Springsteen Jr., Benjamin H. Read, head of the Department of State's secretariat, Mr. Gullion, and Charles E. Bohlen, then Ambassador to Paris. Henry Cabot Lodge, then Ambassador to Saigon, was not informed.

As recounted by Mr. Ball, he persuaded President Johnson that even as the North Vietnamese appeared to be winning military ascendancy in Vietnam and as the United States was responding by doubling its troop strength, there should be a search for peace.

Peace Feelers at U.N.

Mr. Johnson had halted the American bombing of North Vietnam for five days in May. Various peace feelers had been circulating at the time, many of them in the United Nations. There had been non-United States intermediaries, including Canadian and French nations. The Soviet Union was asked, but showed little interest in becoming a "broker" for the United States.

Several amateur negotiators had offered—or had interjected their services. None seemed to the United States sufficiently disinterested or discreet.

"I feared that we were losing control in Vietnam," Mr. Ball recalled. "I felt we should cut our losses and get out. I was in a minority, but President Johnson authorized me to start a secret peace feeler provided it was disavowable if anything leaked out."

Mr. Ball said he chose Mr. Gullion for the task partly because he was known to the North Vietnamese leaders as an advocate of Vietnamese independence—both from French and from Communist rule—and also because he was a "superb reporter who would obey his tightly written instructions to the letter."

Gullion Comes to Capital

In late July, 1965, Mr. Bundy said, Dean Gullion came to Washington during his summer holiday from the Fletcher School—when he was free to travel unnoticed.

In two days of discussions Mr. Ball, his colleagues and Mr. Gullion drafted instructions that Mr. Gullion memorized. Essentially, they accepted the "four-point" program for peace that Hanoi had published on April 8. However, the Gullion instructions "neutralized" the only point that the United States felt it could not accept, Point 3, which in essence would have committed the United

States to withdraw and abandon the South Vietnamese Government as the price for peace.

Mr. Gullion was authorized to offer instead a formula under which the United States and North Vietnam would agree that the South Vietnamese would "determine their own future without outside interference."

On Aug. 1, Mr. Gullion flew to Paris and got in touch with Mai Van Bo, the "commercial representative" of North Vietnam and the effective representative of Hanoi in France. Mr. Bo had been receiving a variety of Americans, including journalists, in previous months.

Mr. Gullion contacted Mr. Bo's office as a "private American who has been in touch with his Government and has something interesting to report." He was given an appointment the following day.

Mr. Gullion repeated the instructions he had received. Mr. Bo took detailed notes. On his next appointment a few days later Mr. Gullion was received "coldly." Presumably, Mr. Bundy said recently, Hanoi had not yet fully weighed the American offer.

On Mr. Gullion's third visit a few days later, Mr. Bo seemed more interested. Mr. Gullion then flew back to Washington to report his findings to Under Secretary Ball and his staff.

Next, with President Johnson's approval, it was decided to give Mr. Gullion greater credence with Hanoi. On Aug. 24 Mr. Rusk, McGeorge Bundy and Arthur J. Goldberg, then chief delegate to the United Nations, appeared on a television program to discuss the chances for peace in Vietnam. Mr. Rusk read carefully—from a typed card—two sentences taken verbatim from the instructions given to Mr. Gullion and recited by him in Paris. It was read this way by Mr. Rusk in the hope that Hanoi would note the "coded message."

No continuation