

Multiple 1 1964-68 Peace Efforts

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Major Diplomatic Channels to North Vietnam, 1964-1968

The Seaborn "Initiative"

Between June, 1964, and June, 1965, J. Blair Seaborn, the Canadian member of the International Control Commission in Southeast Asia, met five times with North Vietnamese officials. He carried, according to the official diplomatic history of the period, "unusually substantive and dramatic" messages.

"... The main subject stressed repeatedly by each (side) was its determination to do and endure whatever might be necessary to see the war to a conclusion satisfactory to it.

"To the extent they believed each other, the two sides were amply forewarned that a painful contest lay ahead. Even so, they were not inclined to compromise their way out."

Accordingly, nothing came of the Seaborn missions.

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Project Mayflower

In May, 1965, President Johnson ordered a pause in the bombing of North Vietnam in an effort to persuade the North Vietnamese to take some reciprocal action toward de-escalation. U.S. Ambassador Foy Kohler in Moscow was instructed to inform the North Vietnamese Ambassador there that the halt would be indefinite and could lead to "a permanent end to ... attacks on North Vietnam."

The Ambassador of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) refused to transmit the message to Hanoi and suggested it be turned over to the Soviet government. The Soviets refused to act as intermediaries and "lectured Kohler at length upon the U.S. misconception of the conflict in Vietnam."

The failure of this initiative had been anticipated by the CIA and other Administration officials but was regarded within the government as a productive gesture toward

world and domestic opinion even if it failed.

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The XYZ Channel

Mai Van Bo, head of the DRV delegation in Paris, had three contacts with the U.S. government between May, 1965, and February, 1966.

The first contact was through the French government on May 19, 1965. The French notified the U.S. that Bo believed that "favorable conditions for (a) solution" could be created if the U.S. would accept the "Four Points" of North Vietnam's announced position.

There was no reply from the Americans until August, 1965, when Edmund Gullion, a retired foreign service officer who is now at Tufts University, was sent to Paris to talk with Mai Van Bo. They met four times and their discussions, the diplomatic history says, represented "the most serious mutual effort to resolve matters of substance between the U.S. and DRV before and since."

Gullion (known as "X") and Bo ("R") discussed the possibility for reconvening the 1954 Geneva Conference on Southeast Asia and seemed to be heading toward agreements on some of the Hanoi "Four Points." Then suddenly Bo failed to show up for a scheduled meeting (Sept. 7, 1965) and the initiative ended. The diplomatic section of the Pentagon papers called the episode "as mysterious in its ending as it was fruitful and suggestive in its beginnings."

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Pinta: the Rangoon Contact

On Dec. 24, 1965, the U.S. began a 37-day bombing pause. It came after Soviet Embassy Counsellor Zinchuk in Washington told White House aide McGeorge Bundy that Hanoi was unlikely to respond, although a pause might possibly improve the atmosphere for the long run.

During the pause, the U.S. met with the North Vietnamese counsel general in Rangoon, Burma, and submitted an aide memoire. No reply came until 12 hours after the bomb-

ing was resumed. It amounted to a rebuttal of the U. S. position.

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The Ronning Missions

Retired Canadian diplomat Chester Ronning visited Hanoi in March and June of 1966. Ronning had friendly relations with the Chinese and was known to be critical of U.S. policies toward China and Vietnam, but the U.S. nevertheless gave its formal support.

During his first visit Ronning was unable to sway North Vietnamese leaders from their insistence on the previously announced "Four Points" as the only basis for settling the war. Pham Van Dong did tell him, however, that the DRV was willing to enter into some form of preliminary contact with the United States if the U.S. would cease bombing and all other acts of war against North Vietnam.

Neither the U.S. nor North Vietnam was enthusiastic about a return trip but Ronning did arrange to visit Hanoi again in June. He was not permitted to see Pham Van Dong this time, and was told by a lesser official that there would be no military reciprocity for a U.S. bombing halt.

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Marigold: The Polish Channel

Marigold was the code name for negotiating efforts that involved Janusz Lewandowski, the Polish member of the International Control Commission in Vietnam. These efforts began in June 1966 in Saigon and also involved the Italian Ambassador there.

Lewandowski made several visits to Hanoi in succeeding months, carrying with him a 10-point formulation of his own interpretation of the American attitude toward a settlement.

North Vietnam agreed to meet a U.S. representative in Warsaw, but canceled all further discussion of the matter after U.S. bombing raids on Hanoi.

The Pentagon history concluded that Marigold gave each side a glimpse of possible areas of negotiation. It added that the Poles "acted as friends of Hanoi, not neutrals" and "applied pressure in good faith by the ever-present threat of dis-

and Their Code Names

closing their version of the matter to influential world leaders or the public at large." Nothing came of the Marigold exercise and it did leak out to the world.

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Packers: The Romanian Channel

From October 1966 through February 1968 the Romanians made efforts to take a part in the negotiating picture. Acting on the suggestion of Ambassador Averell Harriman, Deputy Foreign Minister Gheorghe Macovescu went to Hanoi in December, 1967, and came to Washington early in January, 1968, to convey North Vietnam's position. In an effort to seek clarification, he returned to Hanoi in the third week of January — just before the Communist launched the Tet Offensive. His report reached Washington after Tet.

In hindsight, according to the historian of the Pentagon papers, the Romanians were "very poor reporters; they did not pick up distinctions such as talks, negotiations and settlement terms. . . It is likely that Hanoi did not take the Romanians seriously."

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Aspen: The Swedish Channel

From November, 1966, through February, 1968, the Swedish government (Aspen) played "a continuing though minor role" in attempting to bring about a settlement of the war. The Pentagon papers said "The Swedes were more active over time than any other intermediary—and produced the least amount of information."

At one point in May of 1967 Aspen went so far as to say it would "take responsibility for a position they felt convinced about" — in other words, to be a broker as well as a message carrier. But the Pentagon historian concluded that the Swedish role was dominated by that nation's domestic politics. Finally on Nov. 4, 1967, the Swedish government publicly denounced U.S. policy in Vietnam.

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Sunflower: The Wilson-Kosygin Channel

From February 7 to 13, 1967, an intensive round of talks involving British Prime Minister Harold Wil-

son and Soviet Premier Aleksei Kosygin took place in London. Through the British, "the U.S. advanced various de-escalatory proposals, none of which (were) accepted."

The key proposal was a halt in U.S. bombing of North Vietnam in return for a cessation of North Vietnamese infiltration of men and supplies to South Vietnam. A halt in the U.S. military buildup in South Vietnam also was contemplated.

At a critical moment in the proceedings, the United States changed the wording of the final version of the proposal. The effect of the change was to require North Vietnam to stop its infiltration before the bombing halt, rather than merely give assurance that infiltration would stop after the bombing halt took place. The British, as the Pentagon papers note, took "strong exception" to the change.

Hanoi had not replied to the proposal by the time Kosygin left London and a temporary U.S. bombing suspension ran out. After the bombing was resumed, Hanoi rejected the plan and broke off DRV embassy contacts with the U.S. in Moscow.

Ohio: The Norwegian Contacts

Norwegian Ambassador to Peking, Ole Algard, met six times with the North Vietnamese Ambassador to Peking, Ngo Loan, between June, 1967, and February, 1968. In early March, 1968, Algard went to Hanoi and met several times with North Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh. A final meeting between Algard and Loan in Peking took place in early April, 1968.

The State Department was especially interested in Algard's initial report that the North Vietnamese were prepared to be "very flexible" in any negotiations and a later report from Loan that reunification of the two Vietnams could be "postponed to an indefinite point of time in the future."

The Pentagon papers say that while the Norwegian role was not treated with great importance by Washington, "in retrospect the exchanges between Algard and Loan were probably the most reliable of all . . . Algard seems to have been a careful note-taker, and his messages

look like he was using Hanoi turns of phrase."

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Pennsylvania: Henry Kissinger and the Frenchmen

The Pennsylvania channel was activated in June, 1967, by Kissinger and two Frenchmen — Herbert Marcovitch and Raymond Aubrac. Aubrac had personal ties to the North Vietnamese leader, Ho Chi Minh, which enabled the two Frenchmen to visit Hanoi and set up a channel of communications in Paris.

There was hope on the American side that Hanoi might accept the terms for halting the bombing which were passed to North Vietnam through the Pennsylvania channel in August, 1967. The hope was frustrated and in October the channel was closed.

The Pentagon papers say that the exchanges "seemed to have been handled with great care and accuracy. While the two Frenchmen . . . were clearly committed to getting the U.S. to stop the bombing, there is no evidence that their reporting, or message carrying, was adversely affected. Kissinger for the U.S. handled the play with consummate skill, clarifying points and making interpretations that could lead to a continuing dialogue. Both Hanoi and Washington treated this channel as a major one and yet little was accomplished . . ."

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Killy: The Italian Channel

Giovanni d'Orlandi, an Italian diplomat, met with the DRV Ambassador to Czechoslovakia in Prague in February and March, 1968.

According to the Pentagon Papers, the North Vietnamese sought out d'Orlandi who had played a major role in "Marigold," a role respected by both sides. The history notes that d'Orlandi believed the two sides should negotiate about the future of South Vietnam—the essential issue — rather than focus solely on cessation of U.S. bombing. "Only when the future of South Vietnam could be foreseen, d'Orlandi argued, would the two sides sit down and genuinely and seriously negotiate."