

By Lyndon B. Johnson: Many

Book Describes Regular Contact With the North

INSTALLMENT VI

Following is the sixth of 11 installments of excerpts from Lyndon Baines Johnson's memoirs of his Presidential years, which will be published by Holt, Rinehart & Winston on Nov. 1 under the title "The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969":

IN the summer of 1965 I came to the painful conclusion that an independent South Vietnam could survive only if the United States and other nations went to its aid with their own fighting forces. From then until I left the Presidency, we had three principal goals: to insure that aggression did not succeed, to make it possible for the South Vietnamese to build their country and their future in their own way and to convince Hanoi that working out a peaceful settlement was to the advantage of all concerned.

The North Vietnamese were determined to continue the war. We had to do what was necessary to resist them. In the meantime, my advisers and I kept searching for some way to bring the war to an end by diplomatic means rather than on the battlefield. Few Americans realize how intensive—and extensive—that effort was over the years. Only a handful of my closest advisers knew of all the many attempts we made to get into a dialogue with Hanoi. The fact is that from 1965 until January, 1969, we were in virtually continuous contact, either directly or through intermediaries, with leaders in Hanoi or their representatives. Hardly a month passed throughout that period in which we did not make some effort to open the gateway to peace. Until March 31, 1968, every attempt we made was ignored or rejected by the North Vietnamese.

The bombing pause in May, 1965, had been a total failure. It produced nothing, and as usual the critics shifted ground. The trouble, they insisted, was that the pause had been too short. If we had just held off a little longer, we might have obtained results.

In July Secretary McNamara suggested that, once the troop deployments he was recommending had been completed, we consider making another intensive effort to find a way to peace negotiations. He thought that our effort should

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to Hanoi

include a bombing pause of considerable length, perhaps six to eight weeks. By November, 1965, McNamara decided that we had reached the point he had anticipated. He wrote me a long and detailed memo on Nov. 7 setting forth his views. He described the situation in Vietnam as he saw it and listed the various options open to us. He pointed out that the large U.S. troop deployments of the previous months had prevented the Communists from inflicting the "serious military defeat" that had been threatened. McNamara was convinced, however, that we would never achieve our desired goals in Vietnam with the force we had there at that time (160,000 Americans in Vietnam and about 50,000 more scheduled to go), and that more men would be needed. He believed that we would also have to step up the campaign of military pressures against the North. McNamara felt strongly that before we took either of these actions we should try to find a way to peace, using a bombing halt to reinforce our diplomacy.

My first reaction to McNamara's memo was one of deep skepticism. The May pause had failed and I thought that Hanoi would probably view a new cessation in the bombing as a sign of weakness. My skepticism was shared by McGeorge Bundy and even more by Secretary of State Dean Rusk.

Rusk felt strongly however, that we should continue to try to probe Hanoi's outlook through diplomatic contacts. If the North Vietnamese gave some firm sign that they would lower the level of fighting or enter into serious negotia-

tions, he said, we then should end the bombing.

By coincidence, the same day that Secretary McNamara was writing his memo on a bombing halt Ambassador Lodge in Saigon was preparing his personal assessment of the Vietnam situation. In his report to me Lodge wrote:

"An end of bombing of the North with no other quid pro quo than the opening of negotiations would load the dice in favor of the Communists and demoralize the GVN [South Vietnam]. It would in effect leave the Communists free to devastate the South with impunity while we tie our hands in the North."

General Westmoreland; our Pacific commander, Admiral Sharp, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff all went on record in opposition to a halt in the bombing on military grounds. The remainder of November and the first weeks of December were a period of widespread diplomatic probing and of comprehensive debate and discussion at the highest levels of the Administration.

We had already agreed with our South Vietnamese allies on a 30-hour truce, including a halt in the bombing of the North, beginning on Christmas Eve, 1965. We decided to extend that suspension several days, and Ambassador Lodge won the Saigon Government's agreement. Two days after Christmas I asked Secretary Rusk to tell our embassy in Saigon that I had decided to extend the bombing pause "for several more days, possibly into the middle of next week." The South Vietnamese Government again agreed. We informed our other allies in the Pacific and several additional governments, including the Russians. We also advised U.N. Secretary General U Thant. I wanted to be sure that Hanoi knew what was happening and understood that we were hoping for some sign of reciprocal restraint in lowering the level of hostilities.

I wrote personal letters to many heads of state and government leaders describing our position and underlining our desire for peace. Vice President Humphrey, who attended the inauguration of the new President of the Philippines and later went to the funeral of India's Prime Minister, Shastri, conveyed our stand to a number of government leaders, including Soviet Chairman Kosygin, who also attended Shastri's funeral. Secretary Rusk talked with numerous Ambassadors and foreign ministers, both in Washington and in foreign capitals. Ambassador Averell Harriman visited Warsaw, Belgrade and many other capitals to describe our views. Amb-

sador Goldberg did the same in Rome, Paris and London, as well as at the United Nations. G. Mennen Williams, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, discussed the matter with African leaders. Tom Mann, then our top man on Latin-American affairs, conveyed our position to governments to the south. Our basic message, transmitted through these various channels, was to call attention to the halt in the bombing of the North and to make clear that similar restraint by Hanoi would be welcome and would influence our future

actions.

This was one of the most widespread diplomatic campaigns of my Presidency, and it was criticized for that very reason—because it was so extensive and so well publicized.

During this period of intense and open diplomatic activity, we did not abandon the channels of "quiet diplomacy." On Dec. 28 we sent a message to our Ambassador in Burma, Henry A. Byroade, instructing him to contact the North Vietnamese Ambassador in Rangoon immediately and through him, to inform the North Vietnamese directly of the bombing halt. In the middle of January we delivered the same message to the North Vietnamese Embassy in Moscow.

We also urged Hanoi to enter into private and direct talks with us so that together we could find a way to work out a peaceful settlement. Hanoi's only immediate answer was to say that we had no right to bomb North Vietnam in the first place. Once again, the North Vietnamese insisted that we accept their four-point plan—including withdrawal of all American forces—as the only basis for peace. One week later the same message came back to us through the North Vietnamese Embassy in Burma.

In my State of the Union Message on Jan. 12, 1966, I devoted a great deal of time to the problem of Vietnam. I explained why we were there, and why we were determined to find a reasonable settlement that would let the South Vietnamese decide their own future and govern themselves in freedom.

On Jan. 28 Radio Hanoi broadcast the text of a letter that Ho Chi Minh had sent to a number of heads of government and others "interested in the Vietnam situation." In it, the North Vietnamese leader denounced our "so-called search for peace." He accused us of being "deceitful" and "hypocritical." He insisted that we pull all our troops out of Vietnam and that we accept the Communist-run National Liberation Front as "the sole genuine representative of the people of South Vietnam." The choice was either peace on North Vietnam's terms or no peace at all.

A world about the bombing is in order here. First, in spite of reports that gave the opposite impression, the vast majority of our airmen made strenuous efforts to avoid civilian casualties. They were not totally successful, it is true, and that was a constant source of sorrow to me. But they tried, and their orders were clear. Our attacks were made against military and industrial targets which increased the enemy's ability to carry the war south. Second, I was always convinced that bombing was less important to a successful outcome in Vietnam than what was done militarily on the ground in the South.

P RIME MINISTER KY, in a "state of the nation" report to the Armed Forces Congress on Jan. 15, set three primary goals for his country and for the Government: to defeat the enemy and to pacify and rebuild the country-

side, to stabilize the economy and to build a democracy. He advanced specific programs to help achieve each objective. In the political field he pledged to develop a constitution for popular approval in the fall and to hold elections for a new national government in 1967.

As I read the Prime Minister's report, I felt encouraged. I wondered, of course, whether the South Vietnamese were not trying to do too much in a short time. We Americans had required a good many years after our revolution to build the institutions of government. This young Asian country was trying to develop democratic forms, to build an economy and to fight a war for survival all at the same time. I did not know whether the South Vietnamese could do it.

On the day we decided to resume bombing of the North, a member of my staff sent me a memo suggesting that a meeting be held in Honolulu with the South Vietnamese leaders, with special emphasis given to the political and economic future of their country. I had been heartened by the South Vietnamese Government's new action program, and I thought that the idea of a Honolulu conference had merit. I asked McGeorge Bundy to consult with Secretary Rusk and to make the necessary arrangements

if all concerned thought it would be constructive. They agreed, and we invited the South Vietnamese leaders to a conference in Hawaii on Feb. 7-8.

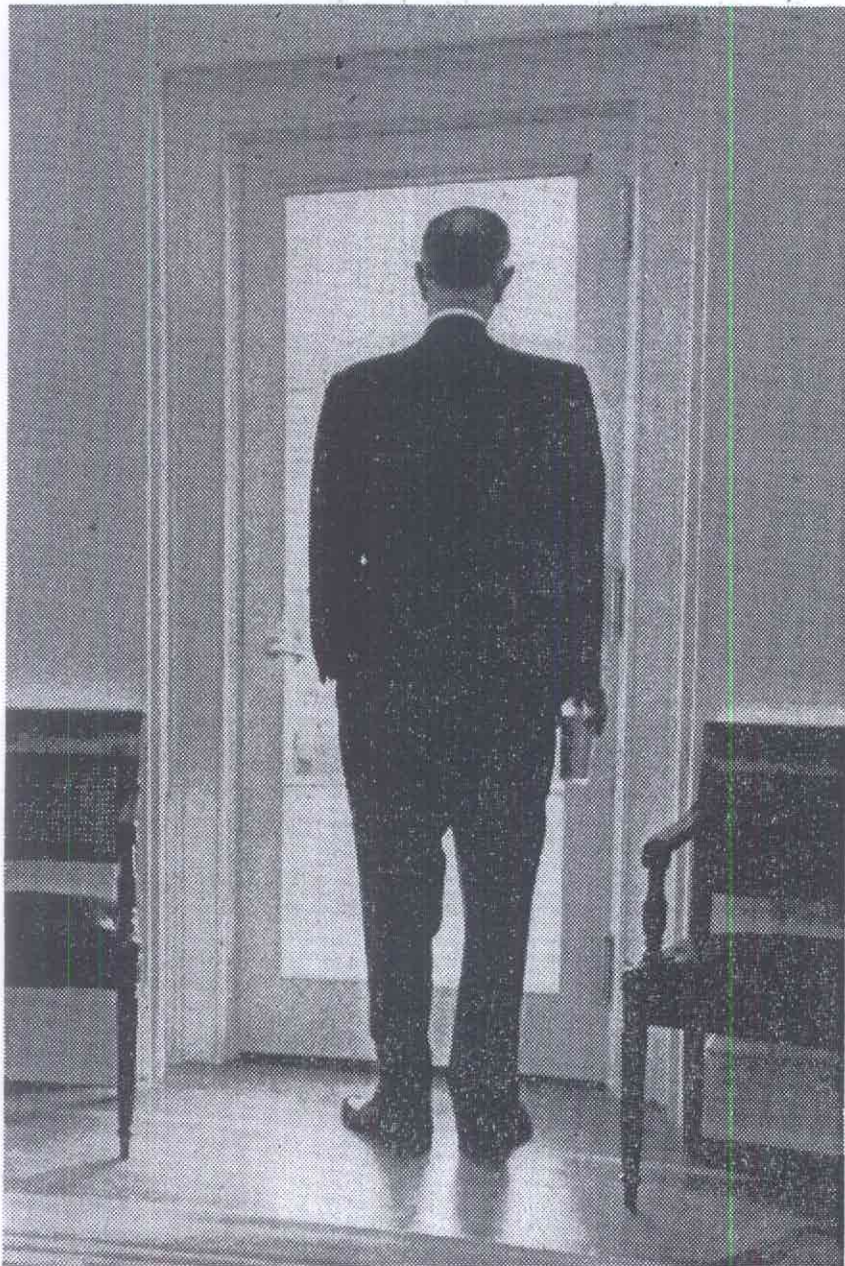
Against the background of increased effort by the allies and the South Vietnamese—as well as the expanded activities of the North Vietnamese and Vietcong—I approved an increase in the American effort. The plan worked out by McNamara, the Joint Chiefs and General Westmoreland called for raising the total level of our forces in all services to about 383,500 by the end of 1966 and to 425,000 by the middle of 1967. With that force, General Westmoreland was confident that the allies could not only meet the increasing threat from the North Vietnamese and Vietcong; they could also increasingly move to the offensive.

Despite the disruption and confusion by the Buddhists, the South Vietnamese Government stuck to its promises and moved forward on the political track it had promised to follow.

In October I flew across the Pacific once more for a meeting with the South Vietnamese leaders. President Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines had invited them and the heads of governments whose troops were fighting in Vietnam to meet in Manila for a review of the war and of nonmilitary programs of development, and for a broader purpose—to consider the future of Asia.

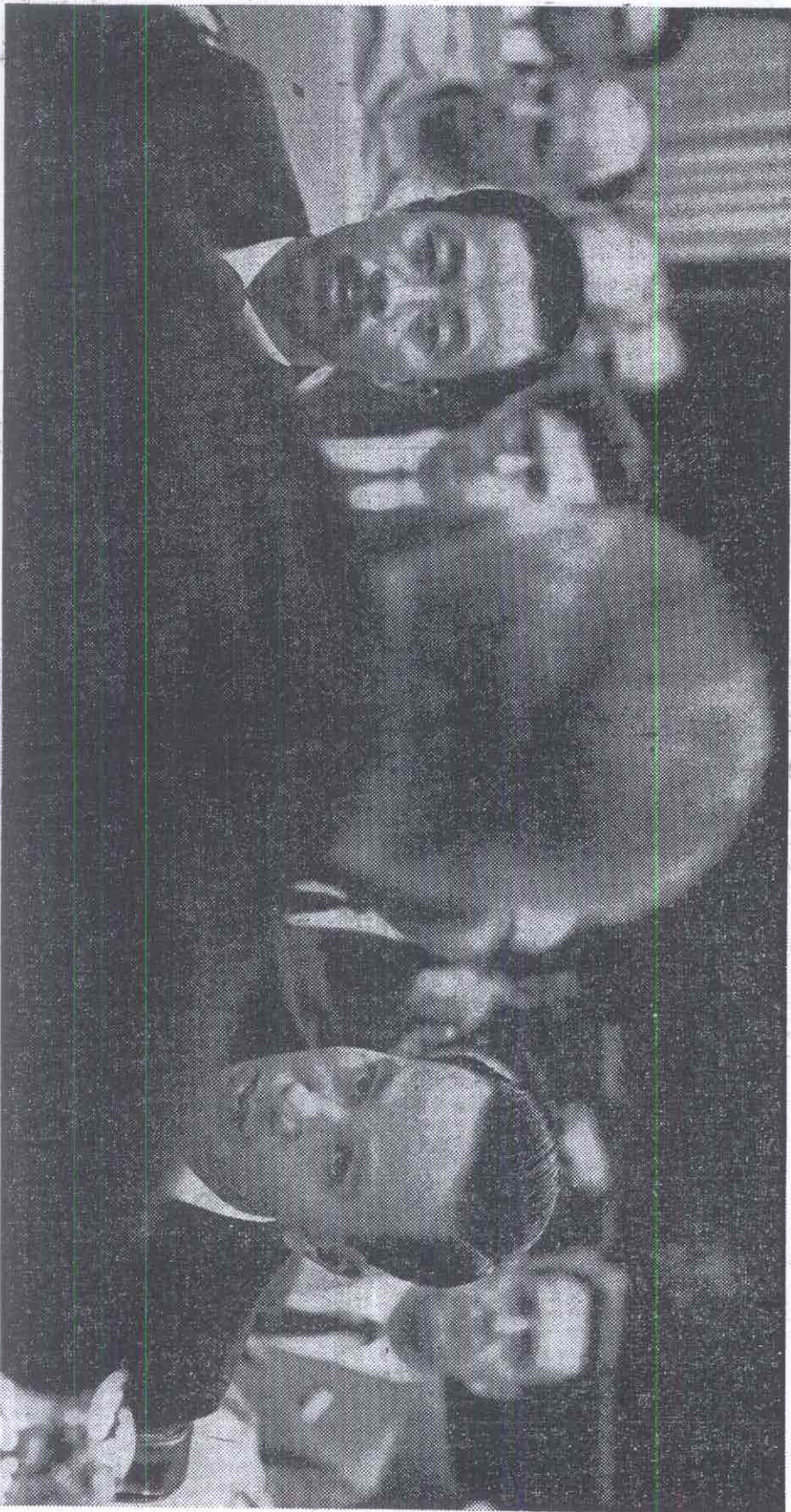
The United States and the other nations which had troops in Vietnam declared that "allied forces are in the Republic of Vietnam because that country is the object of aggression." We added:

"They shall be withdrawn, after close consultation, as the other side with-



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The President considering the bombing pause during May, 1961.
"It produced nothing, and as usual the critics shifted ground."



President Johnson met with Ngyuen Cao Ky, Premier, and Ngyuen Van Thieu, Chief of State of South Vietnam, in Honolulu on Feb. 7, 1966

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draws its forces to the North, ceases infiltration and the level of violence thus subsides. Those forces will be withdrawn as soon as possible and not later than six months after the above conditions have been fulfilled."

The decision to make this specific statement on troop withdrawals stemmed mainly from a talk I had had with Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko two weeks earlier. He had called on me at the White House on Oct. 10, and we had discussed a number of problems, including Vietnam. During that talk Gromyko noted that our previous statements had been "very general" on the matter of withdrawals, and he thought a more specific statement would be useful.

It was also important, I believed, for these seven members of the Asian and Pacific family to look ahead to the future of the region as a whole and to what it could become if we all worked together. This was the reason for the Declaration of Peace and Progress in Asia and the Pacific. I mention this statement because it contained the principal elements of the foreign policy of my Administration. If there was a Johnson Doctrine, these were its cornerstones: opposition to aggression; war against poverty, illiteracy and disease; economic social and cultural cooperation on a regional basis; searching for reconciliation and peace.

IN the summer of 1966 Ambassador Lodge was approached in Saigon by Janusz Lewandowski, the Polish member of the International Control Commission, who had just visited Hanoi. Talks began. Those exchanges, reported in secret cables under the code name Marigold, continued for six months. In the course of these talks Lodge gave Lewandowski a full description of our position regarding a peaceful settlement. After still another trip to Hanoi, the Polish diplomat gave our Ambassador a draft of 10 points which he said covered his understanding of the United States position. He said that a representative of the North Vietnamese would meet with a United States official in Warsaw, where we could "confirm" the 10 points.

We asked Ambassador Lodge whether he covered with Lewandowski our willingness to halt all bombing after we had come to an agreement with Hanoi on the steps each side then would take to de-escalate the fighting. After receiving assurance from Lodge on this point, we authorized him to tell the Polish representative on Dec. 3 that we were ready to meet with the North Vietnamese in Warsaw on Dec. 6, using the Lewandowski draft as the basis for discussion. We pointed out, however, that the Polish formulation of our position was subject to "important differences of interpretation." We began to have serious hopes that the Marigold exchanges might lead to private meetings with the North Vietnamese, but this prospect soon evaporated. The Poles told us finally that the North Vietnamese wanted no meetings with us, secret or otherwise.

Early in 1967 I decided that perhaps the only way to find a path to peace

was through direct contact with Ho Chi Minh. I wrote to him in February, suggesting that our representatives meet in secret to try to find a peaceful solution acceptable to both sides. I noted his repeated insistence on a unilateral and unconditional cessation of the bombing, but I told the North Vietnamese President I was concerned that his army might use a bombing halt to improve its military position. I said I was ready to stop all the bombing and would go further and freeze the level of American forces in Vietnam as soon as I was assured, secretly or in the open, that he had stopped sending troops and supplies into the South. I noted that we had tried for several years, and through many channels, to make clear our desire for a peaceful settlement. It could be, I wrote, that his thoughts and ours, his attitudes and ours, had been distorted or misinterpreted as they went through those various channels.

"There is one good way to overcome this problem and to move forward in the search for a peaceful settlement," I wrote. "That is for us to arrange for direct talks between trusted representatives in a secure setting and away from the glare of publicity. Such talks . . . should be a serious effort to find a workable and mutually acceptable solution."

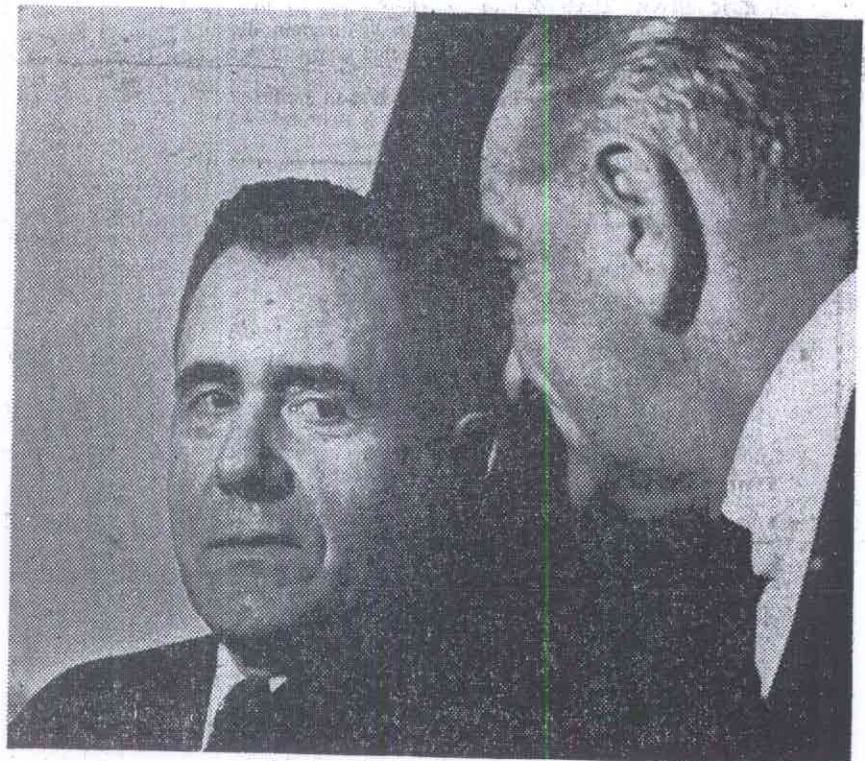
My letter to Ho Chi Minh was deliv-

my disappointment with his earlier negative response. I reaffirmed our earlier offers — to talk first about a settlement and then stop fighting, or to undertake steps of mutual de-escalation that might make negotiation of a settlement easier. We were ready for either approach, and the talks could take place in Moscow, Rangoon or elsewhere.

We delivered the letter to the North Vietnamese Embassy in Moscow. Later the same day the North Vietnamese returned it to our embassy. The letter had been opened, and we learned later through intelligence channels that Hanoi had the text. But it was never acknowledged and never answered.

WHEN I met with Chairman Kossygin in the small town of Glassboro, N. J., on June 23, 1967, the Soviet leader told me that just an hour earlier he had received a message from the authorities in Hanoi stating that if the bombing of the North was stopped, Hanoi's representatives would talk with us. Kossygin said it was his understanding that those talks could start a day or two after the bombing ended. They could take place in Hanoi or New York, in Moscow, Paris, Geneva, or elsewhere. Kossygin's words made it clear that he was simply passing Hanoi's message on, nothing more.

I studied Hanoi's message carefully.



Mr. Johnson and Andrei A. Gromyko, Soviet Foreign Minister, discussed Vietnam, among other things, on Oct. 10, 1966, at White House.

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I discussed it at length with Secretaries Rusk and McNamara. When I met Kosygin again on Sunday, June 25, my answer was ready. Tell Hanoi, I said, that the United States is ready to stop the bombing of North Vietnam. I told that those private talks could take place "in Geneva, Moscow, Vientiane or any other suitable location."

No response to our proposal ever came back, either directly or through Moscow. Despite many subsequent exchanges with the Soviets on Vietnam, they never gave us an answer. Nor did anything ever come from Hanoi.

In March I decided that the time had come for another thorough review of Vietnam developments similar to the discussions we had held the previous year in Honolulu and Manila. I invited the South Vietnamese leaders to join me, members of my staff and members of our mission in Saigon at Guam.

One of the high points of the Guam conference came at the outset. On March 20, at our first meeting, General Thieu and Prime Minister Ky presented me with a copy of the new Vietnamese Constitution, which had been approved only hours before, following a night-long session of debate and compromise between Government leaders and members of the Constituent Assembly. I congratulated the Vietnamese on their Constitution. I confessed that one year before, when they had outlined their political plans, I had doubted their chances for success. I knew of no nation in history trying, to say nothing of succeeding in, what they had set out to do—to

ered to the North Vietnamese Embassy in Moscow on Feb. 8, 1967. That same day I again ordered a halt to all bombing of North Vietnam as part of a general truce surrounding the Tet holiday. We did not have to wait long for Hanoi's reaction. In the first 30 hours our aerial and naval reconnaissance spotted nearly one thousand sampans and other vessels moving southward along the coast, carrying enough supplies and equipment to support large-scale military operations for a long period. Roads in the Panhandle of North Vietnam were crowded with trucks dashing southward. One of our pilots reported that the roads, jammed with southbound traffic, looked "like the New Jersey Turnpike."

During this same period, early in February, Soviet Chairman Kosygin was visiting Prime Minister Wilson in London. Vietnam was one of the many matters they discussed. Wilson seemed to feel that he and the Soviet leader could serve as mediators and bring about a settlement of the war. I doubted this strongly. But I was willing for our British friends to try.

The morning Kosygin returned to Moscow, Radio Hanoi broadcast Ho Chi Minh's harsh and uncompromising answer to Pope Paul's appeal for peace.

Again Hanoi had closed the door. We extended the bombing pause until Kosygin was safely back in Moscow, but on the afternoon of Feb. 13 we resumed bombing targets in North Vietnam. Two days later I received Ho's answer to my letter. As we had assumed, his reply was almost identical to the one he had sent to the Pope. Not only would the North Vietnamese leader do nothing himself to reduce the war; he would not even talk about peace until all bombing ended unconditionally.

In spite of the unyielding tone of this reply, I knew that if there was going to be any shift in Hanoi's position, Ho Chi Minh was the only person with the power to make it. So on April 6, 1967, I wrote to him again. I expressed

develop a constitutional system in the midst of a savage war. But they had done it, even though the roots of democracy remained fairly shallow and stern tests of survival lay ahead. Before the end of July Prime Minister Ky announced that Vietnamese forces would be increased by 65,000 men. In addition, the South Vietnamese were considering lowering their draft age to 18. Meanwhile, the Thai volunteer regiment had begun to arrive in Vietnam and was scheduled to be in position in September. At a news conference on Aug. 3, I announced that I had approved the deployment of an additional 45,000 to 50,000 men and that the new ceiling would be 525,000 men in all services for the year ahead.

While the war continued, and even increased in ferocity, the South Vietnamese Government and political groups went ahead with their plans to hold national elections under the Constitution. The Constituent Assembly, the only popularly elected group with a national mandate, took responsibility for writing an election law. The most frustrating problem during the early electoral preparations was the continuing rivalry between Thieu and Ky. They both wanted to run for President, but in the end, both men lived up to the pledge they had made at Guam—that neither would do anything to endanger the unity of their country's armed forces. At the end of June they took their differences to the Armed Forces Council for resolution. After long debate, Prime Minister Ky said that he would withdraw from the presidential race and run with Thieu as candidate for Vice President. This was an act of statesmanship for which Ky never received the credit I thought he deserved.

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Tomorrow: The six-day Arab-Israeli conflict in 1967