

April 8, 1968

Secret North Vietnam Politburo Cable

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Summary:

The Vietnamese Politburo informs COSVN (the communist command in South Vietnam) of developments in the United States domestic politics which have impacted President Johnson's strategy in Vietnam. It also discusses goals for the upcoming diplomatic contacts with the US.

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To: COSVN

Follow-up to Cables Numbers [...]

1. Currently the enemy faces great difficulties on all fronts (military, political, and diplomatic) on the battlefield, inside his own country, and internationally.

a) Our early spring [Tet] victory in South Vietnam has created a new situation that has driven the enemy into a passive, defensive posture and has exacerbated the internal contradictions [divisions] within the U.S. and within the puppet camp and the contradictions between the U.S. and the puppets. You are already aware of this situation.

b) The situation in the United States during this presidential election year is becoming increasingly bleak for Johnson. The Vietnam War has had a powerful impact on the U.S. political, social, and financial scenes. Johnson is now facing tremendous difficulties in sending additional troops to Vietnam. If he decides to send a large number of additional troops, he will have to mobilize the reserves, request additional funds, and increase taxes. This would cause the cost of living to rise, especially since the currency is already in a state of inflation, the value of the dollar is experiencing a serious decline, and the "bleeding of the gold reserves" is increasing. Johnson's "guns and butter" policy is now bankrupt. Meanwhile, the opposition, and especially the candidates who are running for president, have strongly criticized Johnson's Vietnam policies. They demand an end to the bombing of North Vietnam, they demand that the U.S. talk to the NLF, they oppose increasing the U.S. troop strength in South Vietnam, and they oppose any escalation of the war. The "hawks," on the other hand, have been placed on the defensive and they are not speaking out as much as before. [Senator Eugene] McCarthy's victories in several election primaries, Robert Kennedy's entry into the presidential race, and [Richard] Nixon's criticism of Johnson's Vietnam policy have caused Johnson even more concern. The American people's movement against the Vietnam War is growing. In April, this month, there will be a big struggle [demonstration]. The black people's movement against racism was already preparing for a "hot summer" when Martin Luther King was murdered. There are currently many struggles going on in 46 different states, and Johnson was forced to postpone a trip to Honolulu to handle the violent riots of the blacks. Never before has Johnson been forced to deal with problems on so many fronts, and Johnson's "prestige" has never been lower than it is today.

c) Around the world, the U.S. has slipped into a state of virtually total isolation. Our military, political, and diplomatic attacks have exposed the true stubborn and deceitful nature of the United States. The people of the world now see clearly that the U.S. is losing and we are winning. The prestige of the [National Liberation] Front has soared and the puppet government is viewed with the greatest contempt. Of particular note is the fact that in many Western and neutral countries there has been a shift toward our side, creating tremendous pressure on the U.S. to end the bombing unconditionally in order to begin negotiations.

d) Faced with this desperate situation, Johnson had to seek every possible measure to fend off these challenges. Johnson realized that the U.S. cannot win in Vietnam and that, on the contrary, the U.S. might lose. He also saw that it will be difficult to win the presidential election, and that, again, he could lose the election. In his 31 March 1968 speech, Johnson's tone was softer and not as arrogant and deceitful. The fact that the U.S. has been forced to announce a restriction of the bombing represents a major political and military defeat for the U.S. In fact, the U.S. has been forced to unilaterally "deescalate." That is also a tremendous victory for all three of our fronts, military, political, and diplomatic, and most immediately it is a victory for the military and political struggles in South Vietnam. On the other hand, we must recognize that this is a dangerous and deceitful American scheme designed to calm public opinion

both inside the U.S. and abroad. Johnson's announcement that he will not run for reelection may only be a scheme to look noble and stand above the divisiveness while he waits for an opportunity. If he is able to resurrect his prestige he could then reenter the presidential race in a stronger position than his opponents. It is also possible that Johnson saw that he was certain to lose the election and decided to withdraw first in order to preserve his honor, because by doing so he would become famous for not being power-hungry and could become one of the most famous "peace presidents" in American history.

The current American scheme is to try to do whatever they can to prevent us from launching large attacks in South Vietnam and to try to keep the situation in South Vietnam from collapsing (especially to keep the puppet government from disintegrating), and then to seek an "honorable" settlement. However, the fundamental American plan has still not changed, and they are continuing to try to hang onto South Vietnam. They still refuse to end the bombing unconditionally, they are still bombing the area from the 17 to the 19 or 20 Parallels, and they continue to carry out other acts of war in the area where they announced they were halting the bombing.

2. The Politburo has reached a policy decision and has developed a plan to increase our international activities and to continue our political attacks against the enemy with the goal of supporting our powerful attacks on the battlefield aimed at securing a major victory. Specifically, during this period our goals are to:

□Win world public support for our powerful attacks and support for our good will, while at the same time isolating the enemy to the greatest extent possible.

□Further exacerbate internal divisions inside the United States, especially during this election year, in order to cause the Americans greater problems and make them more hesitant.

□Contribute to the effort to cause the rapid disintegration of the puppet army and the puppet government.

□Create favorable conditions for follow-up steps in the diplomatic struggle.

Johnson's 31 March 1968 speech has created an excellent opportunity for us to attack the enemy in a sharper, more effective, and a more focused manner. Our government has already issued a statement (on 3 April 1968). Generally speaking, public opinion is heated on this subject and is favorable to our side. We should especially take note of the fact that we attained the element of surprise and drove the enemy back into an even more difficult situation. Our public statement also had a large influence on the U.S. financial and economic communities. The press says that never in the past 170

years has there been the kind of situation as has been experienced over the past several days. The stocks of companies in the civilian industrial sector have risen sharply, while the stocks of companies involved in war industries have declined. This is something that we must study in order to better understand the trend in the thinking of U.S. capitalist circles about the Vietnam War and to work out a strategy of our own in response. The attitudes of the socialist countries, except for China and Albania, which have not yet made any public comment, has generally been favorable, and they have applauded our statement. The Western countries have all acknowledged that we have demonstrated good faith.

However, there are also some incorrect trends, even in a number of the socialist countries, toward the belief that peace is at hand, and this could easily result in a tendency to neglect the need to support and assist us and a desire to push us into negotiations to reach a quick settlement.

The Politburo has set the following objectives for us in the current stage of the diplomatic struggle between North Vietnam and the U.S.:

□ To demonstrate to the public our good-faith attitude in order to stimulate the growth of the world peoples movement opposed to the war of aggression in Vietnam, and most immediately to encourage demands that the U.S. unconditionally end the bombing and all other acts of war throughout the territory of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

□ To support our battlefield requirements by causing additional difficulties for the enemy and by creating contradictions [divisions] and confusion among the enemy's ranks; To affect the morale of the enemy's troops, especially puppet troops (The Politburo considers this requirement to be very important).

Applying our Party's independent, sovereign policies, we shall continue to implement Central Committee Resolution 13 by following a policy of conducting political attacks against the enemy in close and timely coordination with our attacks on the battlefield.

This struggle period will be divided into two stages:

a) The contact stage, involving contacts between our representative and an American representative. These contacts will be at the ambassadorial level.

b) The official talks stage, involving meetings between representatives of the two governments of the two sides. These representatives will be of ministerial rank.

□ The site that will be selected for the contact stage, the meetings between the two ambassadorial-rank representatives, may be Phnom Penh or Warsaw (the enemy has suggested Geneva).

During this stage we will resolve the following issues with the Americans:

□The date when the official talks will begin.

□The location of the official talks.

□The rank of the representatives who will conduct the official talks.

At the same time we will denounce the United States for refusing to completely halt the bombing throughout the territory of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, for refusing to end other acts of war, etc.

The contact stage will be short.

□The principal aim of the official talks stage, held between representatives of ministerial rank, will be the achievement of our demand that the U.S. totally end the bombing and other acts of war. After this primary subject is settled, we might also discuss a few other subjects, depending on necessity.

The struggle during both stages will probably be difficult and ferocious, so we need to have struggle plans for use both inside and outside the meetings.

There are several possible scenarios:

□The U.S. will agree to totally end the bombing in order to begin discussions with us.

□The U.S. will move the bombing line down another parallel of longitude from its current location and demand that we talk to them.

□The U.S. will refuse to reduce the bombing from its current level and will demand that we talk to them.

No matter which of these scenarios comes to pass, when we sit down to talk the enemy will demand that we “deescalate” our actions in South Vietnam and that we move quickly toward convening a conference that will resolve the entire problem in a “package” settlement.

It is unlikely that they will break off the contacts between the two ambassadors, or break off the official talks, and resume the bombing, because such a move would be difficult for them. However, the possibility does exist, especially when we launch powerful attacks in South Vietnam.

□For the immediate future at least, the course of the diplomatic struggle between North Vietnam and the United States is dependent on and tightly linked to our battlefield requirements. We need to calculate each step carefully so that each step is tightly coordinated with the struggle on the battlefield.

4. The Politburo has decided that we must step up the pace of South Vietnam’s international activities and that the time has come for South Vietnam to take the offensive in the diplomatic attack against the enemy. After several discussions and after studying your recent suggestions, the Politburo has the following thoughts:

a) The National Liberation Front’s statement on a political solution to the problem of South Vietnam does not need to be issued immediately, as we had originally intended. However, everything must be prepared and ready so that, when necessary, the statement can be released immediately.

b) The announcement that the NLF is ready to talk to the U.S. should not be released at the same time as the Front’s statement on the political solution. When the statement on the political solution is released, the last section of the statement should discuss the determination and resolve of the South Vietnamese people to fight to achieve this solution. We will decide later when the statement of the Front that it is prepared to meet with the U.S. should be released.

c) We need to form the second front (meaning the National Committee of the Alliance of National, Democratic, and Peace Forces). This will complicate our work, but this is a stratagem that could be very effective and that we should implement. The proclamation of the inaugural meeting of the Alliance of National, Democratic, and Peace Forces should be issued as soon as preparations are completed. At this time, this action does not to be linked with the timing of the National Liberation Front statement on a political solution. Later, depending on the situation and if it becomes necessary, we will consider issuing another new statement from the Alliance.

In summary, you should go ahead with the formation of the second Front. Put the announcement out as soon as preparations are completed, but you must inform us up here [in North Vietnam] ahead of time so that we can prepare plans to introduce the Alliance and spread propaganda about it, both within our country and abroad.

As for the question of the government (the National, Democratic Government), Brother Ba [Le Duan] has discussed this subject with Brother Ba Long.[\[1\]](#)

5. The diplomatic struggle is intensifying and becoming more complex, so the Politburo would like to stress the need for ideological guidance. We must pay attention to this subject both at home in our country and abroad.

Domestically, we must be on guard against and overcome mistaken or misguided thinking - illusions of peace, negligence and lack of vigilance, slacking off in battle, etc. - that will affect our effort to accomplish our strategic resolve [plan]. In the current environment in South Vietnam, ideological guidance must be even tighter to ensure that our entire Party, our entire army, and our entire population advance forward eagerly and enthusiastically. When the National Liberation Front issues its statement on a political solution for the problem of South Vietnam, and when it makes the announcement about its readiness to talk to the U.S., you must have very detailed ideological guidance plans ready for use at those times.

Abroad, at present public opinion in general is favorable toward us, but we need to continue to denounce the U.S. for stubbornly refusing to fully and seriously respond to the just demands of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, for their continued criminal bombing of an important segment of North Vietnam, for their continued increases in their troop strength and expenditures in South Vietnam, and for their continued intensification of the war in South Vietnam. We need to provide clear explanations so that our friends are not overly hasty in expressing satisfaction with this step backward by the Americans, so that our friends clearly understand the insidious American schemes, so that they continue to struggle even more resolutely against the Americans, and so that they increase their support for us on all fronts in order for us to completely defeat the American aggressors.

6. We have noted your ideas about the contents of the National Liberation Front statement on a political solution for South Vietnam. After we finish drafting the statement we will cable it to you so you can provide any further comments you may have before it is released.

For the Politburo

[Signed] Nguyen Duy Trinh

[\[1\]](#) Translator's Note: "Ba Long" is an alias used by General Le Trong Tan, who was at that time the Deputy Commander of communist military forces in South Vietnam.