

October 15, 1968

Secret North Vietnam Politburo Cable No. 323

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Summary:

The Vietnamese Politburo informs COSVN (the communist command in South Vietnam) that as a result of US demands, the South Vietnamese government would be allowed to participate in the upcoming four-party conference on the Vietnam War. This was a reverse of the Politburo's earlier position that South Vietnam should not be involved in the talks.

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Vietnamese

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To: COSVN

I. In Paris, in parallel with the public struggle we have also conducted backstage [private] probes with the Americans. As its condition for ending the bombing of North Vietnam, the U.S. demands that the Saigon government be allowed to participate in the conference to settle the Vietnam problem.

Our entire policy on the diplomatic struggle against the Americans, both for the current stage and for the next stage, remains as described in our previous cables. We continue to demand that the U.S. talk to the NLF and that the puppet government must change its policies. However, in order to effectively employ our stratagem to pressure the U.S. into deescalating the war another step by ending the bombing of North Vietnam, in the immediate future we may agree to convene the four-party conference with each side having a position of equality, the NLF attending at the invitation of our government and the Saigon puppet government attending at the invitation of the U.S.

Even if the conference does begin soon, the four-party conference will not yet be a forum that will be truly aimed at reaching a solution to the problem, because we must first obtain other elements and there must first be changes in the movement and in the balance of forces. The representative of the NLF will maintain a lofty attitude in the conference. He will demand that the U.S. must talk to the Front and that the Saigon puppet government must change its policies. Only when the situation is advantageous to our side and when our requirements are met to an acceptable level will the four-party conference truly begin to move ahead and to address the substance of the problem.

Before the four-party conference begins and during the course of its meetings, our struggle against the enemy must be conducted in a very urgent and ferocious manner. In South Vietnam, in parallel with stepping up our military operations, strengthening the political struggle, widening the divisions between the Americans and the puppets and the internal divisions inside the puppet camp, and striving to bring about the rapid disintegration of the puppet army, you must simultaneously carry out truly effective ideological work among our cadre, party members, armed forces, and the civilian population.

II. It is possible that the two parties will soon reach an agreement to convene the four-party conference. For that reason, the Politburo recommends that you take the following steps:

1. Hold immediate discussions about the issues that have already arisen or that will arise after the Americans stop the bombing of North Vietnam and send your thoughts to the Politburo.

2. Properly carry out the tasks that the Politburo suggested in Cable No. 323 [...] In particular, during the next stage, after the U.S. has ended the bombing of North Vietnam, even though the enemy will concentrate his forces and equipment to conduct intensified bombing in South Vietnam and against the transportation corridors, the enemy will spread propaganda claims that he has demonstrated "good faith." The American claims may deceive a portion of the public, and for that reason you should immediately prepare to increase the propaganda and international activities of the National Liberation Front, because the voice of the Front will be very important. You must also study appropriate ways that the Alliance could join the Front in a coordinated struggle alongside North Vietnam.

3. Immediately send cadre to North Vietnam so we can make urgent preparations for the struggle over the four-party conference. If [Tran Buu] Kiem is going to be the

diplomatic representative of the National Liberation Front, you should also send him up here immediately so that he can participate in our studies, gain a good understanding of the situation and of our policies, and familiarize himself with the content of each of our struggle plans, etc.

In addition, when the four-party conference convenes, some members of the Alliance [Alliance of National, Democratic, and Peace Forces] may wonder why we agreed to such a conference. We recommend that you talk to our friends in the Alliance to make them understand that during this stage we will be struggling for our demands that the U.S. end its aggression against South Vietnam and that it withdraw its troops from South Vietnam, so the participation of the Front is both sufficient and required because the Front is the leader and the organizer of the battle against American aggression. In addition, explain that if both the Front and the Alliance were to sit together, next to the puppet government, at the four-party conference, it would look like a concession and would not be beneficial to us from a political standpoint. However, once we move on to the next stage, when a consultative conference is convened for the South Vietnamese parties to discuss and decide on questions regarding the government and the other fundamental issues in South Vietnam, the Alliance will certainly be included as a participant in that conference. You need to do a good job in explaining this so that it makes sense to them and so that we continue to maintain excellent relations with the members of the Alliance.

[signed] The Politburo