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Mandatory Review
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18 October 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable Walt W. Rostow ✓
Special Assistant to the President

The Honorable Dean Rusk
Secretary of State

SUBJECT: Reactions of the GVN and Vice President Ky
Concerning the Proposed Bombing Halt

EO 12958 3.4(b)(1)-25Yrs
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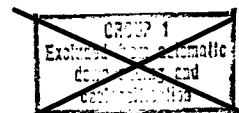
1. 

a. Ambassador Bunker had informed Thieu that the DRV had offered, in exchange for an American bombing halt, to respect the DMZ, to launch no attacks against major cities in SVN, and to accept a GVN presence at the Paris talks. The DRV had insisted, however, that these concessions remain secret and Ambassador Bunker had pressed this requirement on Thieu.

b. At a meeting called by Thieu of key GVN officials including Ky, Foreign Minister Thanh "seemed concerned only with getting his delegation off to Paris" while Thieu appeared worried and uncertain. Ky called the first two DRV offers concessions of very limited military value since the DRV was already unable to cause much trouble in these areas. The third point, Ky said, was really no concession at all unless the DRV would also agree to exclude the NLF from the talks. He asked Thieu if he were willing to talk with NLF representatives in Paris. When Thieu answered no, Ky advised him to agree to the bombing halt only if the NLF were excluded from the Paris

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talks. It was, Ky argued, necessary to extract whatever concessions Thieu deemed essential now, since his leverage after the bombing stopped would obviously be less. Ky also questioned whether Thieu could agree politically to the bombing halt without being able to state publicly that the DRV had offered some concessions in return. Thieu said he would ask Ambassador Bunker to return and would raise the NLF issue with him.

c. For the past two days Ky has sought to find a policy which will preserve the "Vietnamese identity" without jeopardizing the GVN's vital ties to the U. S. or giving comfort to the DRV. Ky is uncertain over what has motivated President Johnson's latest initiative. Is he trying to carve his niche in history at the expense of the GVN? Is he trying to pull off the near-miracle which, according to reports Ky gets from Washington, will be needed to stave off defeat for Mr. Humphrey and the Democrats in November? Or is President Johnson genuinely searching for an honorable peace? Given political realities, Ky wonders whether this is not a bad time to tie oneself too closely to the present Washington leadership.

d. Ky also believes that the timing of a bombing halt so close on the heels of the spurious coup attempt is unfortunate. Many people believe that the Americans floated the coup rumors to divide the GVN and point up to Thieu how dependent he is on American support so that Thieu could not effectively oppose the new American initiative. Ky believes that the rumors now circulating have caused near panic among many of the Vietnamese elite.

e. Ky hopes to see Thieu again and offer other suggestions which he has not yet firmed up. Ky believes that this is the time for him and Thieu to join hands in a true government of national reconciliation. Both should appear on TV together, Thieu to announce the halt and Ky to say that the DRV offered a significant quid pro quo. If he cannot say this, the government will be in trouble, with many believing that it is selling out to the Americans.

f. Ky is ready to stand by Thieu if Thieu wants a genuine reconciliation, but Ky has some doubts that he does. Ky is considering what unilateral steps he might take if Thieu does not meet him halfway, but emphasized that he will do nothing to endanger chances for peace or strain relations with the GVN's allies. One possibility he is considering, if the U.S. stops the bombing without the GVN's agreement, is the issuance of a GVN statement reserving the right to bomb or take any other actions against North Vietnam which is deemed in the GVN national interest.

g. Ky would like to have a chance to discuss these important issues alone with Ambassador Bunker or Ambassador Berger.

2. This report was given to and discussed with Ambassador Bunker and Berger. They agreed the report should be sent [REDACTED] to the White House and the Secretary of State.

3. [REDACTED]

4. [REDACTED]

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