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VII - The Search for Peace, April-December, 1968

Background:

On April 1, 1968, the United States stopped making air strikes over North Vietnam above the 20th parallel. Within a fortnight, without any announcement, it further restricted strikes to the 19th parallel. Covert 34A operations were also curtailed above the same latitude, but reconnaissance continued over all of North Vietnam and increased in frequency.

Even before the second restriction became evident, Hanoi on April 3 indicated its willingness to engage in preliminary contacts with the US even though strikes continued, and, after a long search for a mutually acceptable site in which to hold preliminary talks, discussions began in Paris on May 13. Reports about the discussions that continued over the next five months were closely held and INR, only partially informed through official sources of the substance of the talks, based its assessments in good part on public news.

Through charges and counter-charges which they traded in public, and through "second" and "third" wave Communist offensives in South Vietnam, both sides remained committed to negotiations. On October 31, 1968, President Johnson announced that the US would stop all strikes over North Vietnam and that the parties had agreed to expand the talks to

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1. Also during this period, INR's senior analyst on North Vietnam served as a member of the Department's Vietnam Planning Group under the Bureau of East Asian Affairs. Consequently, many of INR's views were incorporated into Departmental papers and cables without any separate INR record of them.

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include the NLF and GVN. (All 34A operations were suspended but reconnaissance continued as before.) Within a week an NLF delegation arrived in Paris, but Saigon had reached no decision. On November 8 the GVN announced that it would consent to lead a combined US/GVN delegation to the talks. On December 9, three weeks after Secretary Clifford had publicly threatened that the US would be prepared to enter the phase of negotiation without South Vietnamese representation, Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky arrived in Paris with a delegation headed by Ambassador Pham Dang Lam.

Summary:

During the partial halt to bombing, INR considered that the North Vietnamese moved their position only gradually toward full negotiation, and without abandoning their basic objectives. It believed that Hanoi would keep military operations at a relatively high level, consonant with its strength in the South, and pace its combat operations to support its negotiating position--limited only by a fear of provoking the US to resume retaliation. Saigon would have to accept the talks but would oppose discussion of the South, and would insist that the US sustain its military presence and pressure; Thieu would probably engage in delaying tactics and endeavor to minimize the role of the NLF. INR was uncertain about the effects talks might have on the stability of the regime. On balance, it concluded that the GVN would go along reluctantly as talks widened into negotiations.

INR and CIA agreed that the Communist forces in the South were substantially larger than MACV estimated; INR believed the Communist military build-up would lead to widespread attacks on selected urban and military targets, but at a more sustained and less intense level than at Tet.

For most of 1968, Hanoi seemed to be debating what its best course of action should be, as it repeatedly attempted military offensives and consistently refused to give ground on reciprocity. INR judged in mid-year that Hanoi finally was considering that it might agree to some restrictions regarding the DMZ and to the removal of some of its forces, in return for a total halt to bombing. By September, INR concluded that the US could expect Hanoi to comply more closely than it had done hitherto with the US government's "assumption"--formulated by the President at San Antonio in September 1967--that Hanoi would not take "advantage" of a complete halt of bombing. INR also thought, however, that Hanoi would still feel free to intensify its military effort in the South and work to block Southern representation at the Paris talks. INR noted that Hanoi might accept Saigon's presence but, if so, would try to avoid the "our-side, your-side" formula in order as much as possible to reduce the GVN's status and to upgrade that of the NLF.

As full negotiations got under way, INR reiterated its belief that the Communists would oppose an early cease-fire, which would be attractive to them only under much more adverse or much more favorable circumstances. It also concluded that the Communists would not de-escalate the war

rapidly and that they had reinforceable assets in the South which were still quite capable of sustained and effective military action.

First Moves, April-May:

Within three days of the partial halt to bombing on April 3, Hanoi issued a statement that it was prepared to meet US representatives in order to determine the "unconditional cessation" of the bombing "so that talks may start." Still, INR did not believe Hanoi would feel compelled to move rapidly toward full negotiations or to abandon its basic objectives or conditions for a settlement. In fact, Hanoi might seek to limit initial contacts and would coordinate its military operations and logistic buildup with its tactics in negotiation.

INR at the outset thought that any lull would be short, and quickly came to the opinion that the Communists would "maintain a high level of overall activity," while infiltration would continue at a high rate -- basing both judgments on the assessment that Communist activities would be determined by Hanoi's estimate of military/political requirements on the ground and of what would support its negotiations, rather than by consideration of the "no advantage" formula.⁴ Nevertheless, Hanoi might

2. See VII-1: IN-240, "Hanoi Declares Readiness to Contact US on Cessation of Bombing," April 4, 1968 SECRET

3. See VII-2: MM-REA, "Hanoi's Desires and Expectations from the Impending Round of Talks," April 10, 1968, SECRET/EXDIS.

4. See VII-3: IN-275, "Communist Courses of Action in South Vietnam During Contacts," April 16, 1968, SECRET/NF

have high hopes regarding US willingness to compromise--including even the possibility of a US withdrawal in some guise--and would also wish to avoid provoking the US toward protracting the conflict. Hanoi would also look for ways in which to intensify the disruptive effects of the negotiation process on US-GVN relations.

Immediately before and after the partial halt to bombing on April 1, INR's assessments of the pace at which Hanoi might be expected to respond implied that it might be some time before actual discussions could begin. Then within days, the US further restricted strikes to the 19th parallel, and, possibly because of this second restriction, Hanoi responded faster than INR had estimated. On April 15 Hanoi announced the appointment of Xuan Thuy as Minister without Portfolio. INR concluded that Hanoi was now ready to negotiate: Xuan Thuy's rank appeared too high for mere contacts and too low for final negotiations; he thus appeared just right for the "intermediary stage" talks the US then wanted. Finally, on May 3, the US and North Vietnam agreed to hold discussions in Paris and Hanoi designated Xuan Thuy to lead the DRV delegation.

INR also explored how the South Vietnamese would probably react to the impending bilateral discussions between US and DRV. It concluded that

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5. From the paper quoted as VII-2 (note 3)
 6. See VII-4: IN-287, "Hanoi's Appointment of Xuan Thuy as Minister May Presage Role in Negotiations," April 18, 1968 SECRET

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Saigon would probably acquiesce in the holding of talks but would continue to resist a total halt of bombing, any reduction of US forces, and any expansion of subject matter in the bilateral talks to include the present or future situation in the South. Indeed, the public grace with which Saigon accepted the US initiatives masked what the Embassy had termed a well of "quiet bitterness." Initially, INR estimated, the peace moves had helped resolve differences within the GVN which centered around the persistent conflict between Thieu and Ky, and had brought the regime belatedly to realize that the US commitment did not necessarily imply continuing the war at its present intensity. Against these salutary effects, however, the onset of talks "could also contribute to an unraveling of the constitutional system, lessened restraints upon irresponsible political activity, and a general disintegration of morale...."

Moreover, INR stated, "there will undoubtedly be a progressive rise in South Vietnamese suspicions of US intentions and with it may come an increased possibility of a military takeover in Saigon." "The GVN will demand full reporting and consultation on the state of talks with North Vietnam and oppose an early widening of the talks...in the hope of delaying any decisive stage at which the GVN might, for example, have to decide whether its own participation in negotiations was worth the price of recognizing the Liberation Front as a separate entity equally competent to participate. The GVN would thus hope to delay still further a realistic confrontation with the problems implicit in arranging a political settlement, for which it presumably is still almost totally unprepared."

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Nevertheless, INR concluded, "the chances still appear to be slightly better than even that the GVN...can be brought along reluctantly to accept widening of the talks into negotiations." ⁷ When Foreign Minister Tran Van Do said on May 17 that the GVN would permit the NLF to participate in future elections as an opposition group, INR observed that Do's influence was limited and that his statement could not necessarily be interpreted as a commitment of the GVN. ⁸

Meanwhile, Communist activities in the South featured the congress on April 20-21 of the new and allegedly non-Communist "Alliance of National, Democratic and Peace Forces," created after the Tet offensive. INR thought that this effort was aimed at strengthening Communist appeal among the urban elite, possibly to create a "third force" alongside the GVN and NLF for future negotiations. ⁹ Reports in April indicated that the Communists were preparing for a new offensive and were doing so on a scale sufficient to support a repeat of the Tet spectacular. INR did not believe that Communist strategy called for attacks at that level, but predicted that there would be mortar attacks on selected urban and military sites, suggesting also that "any renewed military activity could fit into the framework of

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7. See VII-5: IN-283, "South Vietnamese Reactions to US-Hanoi Talks," April 17, 1968, S/NF
 8. IN-364, "Foreign Minister Do's Views on the Front: A Slight Shift," May 17, 1968, S/NF
 9. See VII-6: IN-307, "Viet Cong Upgrade Alliance Front into National Organization," April 26, 1968, S/NF

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'fighting while negotiating.'" Shortly thereafter, Saigon and Gia Dinh received intense but restricted mortaring which coincided with the opening of the Paris talks on May 13.

INR at this time commented on the major discrepancies between MACV's estimates of enemy strength at 278-328,000 and CIA's at 390-475,000-- discrepancies that had persisted even though an intelligence conference was convened on April 10-12 to iron out just these differences. INR's own position "has consistently been that CIA's estimative methodology... is superior to MACV's, is more objectively applied, and results in a more realistic portrayal of the total enemy threat."
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Prelude in Paris

After the first week of "official talks" in Paris, INR reviewed Xuan Thuy's statements. It found there evidence that Hanoi was uncertain about the present round of talks. Xuan Thuy had raised "an astonishingly wide variety of subjects"; and, whatever his purpose, "he must also have realized that they opened up room for discussions beyond the current officially announced purpose of the talks, and that we could and would exploit his readiness to discuss them." By so doing, Hanoi ran the risk of finding itself on the horns of a difficult dilemma, for if the talks

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10. See VII-7: MM-REA-68-86, "Captured Document Statements on Upcoming Phase of Communist Offensive," May 1, 1968, SECRET
 11. See VII-8: MM-REA-68-84, "Conflicting MACV and CIA Assessments of Enemy Strength in South Vietnam," April 29, 1968, S/NF. In addition, CIA recognized other categories of irregular forces not recognized by MACV which amounted to an additional 90-140,000 for a combined total of 480-615,000. See also Special Annex I.

did not produce a total bombing cessation Hanoi might, after several months, have to accept the idea of holding substantive talks while the partial bombing continued, or move toward breaking off the talks. The first choice would have a serious effect on party morale in both the North and the South, but the second would have even more obvious and serious implications.¹² Press speculation that Hanoi might be contemplating a break-off evoked from INR the judgment that Hanoi was unlikely to take this step "in the next month or two, and probably not even beyond that." Hanoi's hopes of keeping pressures on the GVN and on US resolve--let alone its fear of resumed bombing--meant that Hanoi would be more likely to adopt less drastic measures such as to recall its chief negotiators for "consultation" while keeping a low-level liaison office¹³ in Paris.

When Hanoi appointed a member of the Politburo, Le Duc Tho, to its delegation, INR estimated that the "enormous authority" his presence would bring had been designed to improve the international impact of the delegation's propaganda and to give it greater freedom of maneuver.¹⁴ INR foresaw, however, no imminent give in Hanoi's position on the DMZ;

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12. See VII-9: IN-371, "How Does Hanoi See Things After the First Week in Paris?" May 20, 1968, SECRET
 13. See VII-10: IN-395, "Would Hanoi Break Off Paris Talks?" May 24, 1968, S/NFD/LD/CD
 14. IN-418, "Hanoi Politburo Member Le Duc Tho Off to Paris," May 31, 1968, SECRET

while it might reduce the level of military action there, Hanoi would not agree to restore the de-militarized status of the Zone, both because of its own logistic interests and because the move would be interpreted as too great a step back from reunification. ¹⁵ Again, INR believed,

there was no point in debating whether Hanoi would await the outcome of US conventions or elections before deciding on its course of action; as Hanoi saw the matter, the solution of the problem lay in Vietnam—not in the US. ¹⁶

In July, when the Paris talks had been under way for two months, INR discussed the tactics Hanoi might adopt for the remainder of the summer and fall of 1968. Basically, Hanoi still thought that the overall political, military and diplomatic situation in the South was favorable for its objectives and unfavorable to those of the US. It was assured of continued Soviet and Chinese aid, and the US could not significantly escalate the war in the South. Moreover, Hanoi would assume that the US would not soon be likely to resume bombing above the 20th parallel—let alone go beyond the limits it had observed before the partial halt—so that the implicit threat of resumed bombing would not of itself soon force the North Vietnamese to make changes in important policies. On the other hand, Hanoi did have growing problems in the pursuit of the war,

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15. IN-413, "Prospects for Hanoi's De-escalation in the DMZ," May 31, 1968, S/NFD/LD
 16. See MM-REA-68-106, "Hanoi's Attitudes on the US Elections," June 19, 1968, S/NFD

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and INR, seeing clearer evidence of the strain, came around to the view that the pressure would lead Hanoi "to seek some kind of agreement with the US by the end of the year, or possibly not later than mid-1969." If they could not thus reach a satisfactory settlement, "the Communists will be prepared to continue the war, though probably at a lower level."

Hanoi would like to discuss matters related to the future of the South, but not while the bombing continued. If the US were to continue demanding reciprocity for a complete halt, Hanoi would want to find some way around the impasse, but not by giving assurances that would inhibit it in a future large-scale offensive in the South; more likely, it would begin to touch on South Vietnamese issues without mentioning the bombing, or it might explore tacit mutual de-escalation. Finally, Hanoi would not contemplate withdrawing any of its forces from the South before US forces began to leave.

Meanwhile, the review continued, the Communists could be expected to maintain about the same patterns of military operations and infiltration, and would go on adjusting the levels of each to meet the needs of their tactical situation and their interests in the negotiation. Any increase of infiltration in the future might thus indicate that they were preparing to trade off a reduction for some US concession. If it should want to apply pressure, Hanoi would be most likely to choose the device of recessing the talks or temporarily withdrawing its key negotiators. Should all else fail, the Communists might become more

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17. Especially in the testimony of a number of recent Spanish refugees from North Vietnam.

interested in arrangements leading to a coalition government in the South; however, INR concluded, "We believe it unlikely...that they would retreat this far before the end of the year."¹⁸

Soon after this review, when Hanoi brought up in discussion elements of the Geneva Accords pertaining to the political solution-- but pointedly omitted reference to those elements that dealt with military affairs--INR interpreted this more as a reflection of Hanoi's continuing desire to reach an understanding on a future political settlement before discussing a cease-fire and withdrawal. At the same time, INR pointed to a number of Communist statements that omitted reference to Hanoi's position on reunification and the NLF program; it suggested that these statements could reflect Communist interest in accommodation. Alternatively, Hanoi might be preparing to make more use of the Alliance.¹⁹ The Communists could use the Alliance more flexibly than the NLF in their effort to get the US to negotiate with South Vietnamese Communist elements and eventually obtain formation of a new GVN under Communist influence. Hanoi's problem would be to avoid too close an identification with the Alliance and to prevent dissension among the NLF/VC in the process of these maneuvers. The NLF leaders and cadre, INR estimated, "probably never expected to attain independent

18. See VII-11: MM-REA-68-115, "Possible Hanoi Tactics Through the Summer and Fall of 1968," July 12, 1968, S/LD

19. IN-571, "Hanoi Focuses Selectively on Geneva Accords...", July 19, 1968, SECRET, and REA-27, "Some Unofficial Reports of the Current Hanoi Position," July 17, 1968, S/NFD

power in the South, since they saw themselves as Hanoi's instruments,
but they may have hoped for rank, position, and other rewards."²⁰

At this point, Hanoi seemed to be coming to grips with the difficult problem of reciprocity. There were hints early in August at a connection between a lull in the fighting and a total bombing halt; INR noted that these hints had been presented in a context which suggested a de facto reciprocity but also an implicit threat of a "third wave" offensive. INR concluded, on balance, that the matter was
"probably still under review."²¹

As even more confusing signals proliferated from Hanoi, INR considered that they reflected a time of decision-making. Hanoi in turn would be watching US reactions and proposals closely during this time in order to determine the minimum concession possible.²² When the Paris delegation delivered its first personal attacks on President Johnson on August 28, INR recognized the possibility that Hanoi had concluded it could no longer deal with the present administration; but INR also believed—partly on the ambiguous evidence that Le Duc Tho had been absent from the Paris meeting—that the attacks could possibly be intended to mask an impending concession.²³

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20. IN-612, "Hanoi's Plans for the 'Alliance,'" August 2, 1968, S/NFD/CD
21. See VII-12: IN-626, "North Vietnamese Links Between the Lull in the South and the Bombing of the North," August 8, 1968, S/NFD/CD
22. IN-635, "Considerations in Hanoi's Recent and Future Tactics," August 13, 1968, S/NFD/CD/LD
23. See VII-13: IN-688, "Hanoi Attacks President Johnson," August 30, 1968

Meanwhile, MACV read recently captured documents to mean that the Viet Cong expected 1968 to be the year of victory and that a "third wave" offensive was imminent in late summer. INR disagreed with this analysis; it thought other documents showed that the Communists did not look upon 1968 as necessarily a decisive period, and Communist intentions regarding another major offensive were not clear. ²⁴ Of the possible military courses open to the Communists, INR believed that a continuation of the prevailing moderate level was one course "the Communists are unlikely to pursue for very much longer." Although this course offered the advantage of confusing the issue of reciprocity, it would also imperil the Communists' political position if it continued much longer. Another offensive of Tet proportions, on the other hand, would be both risky and unnecessary for Communist purposes. Therefore, the Communists' most likely immediate military tactics would be a combination of high impact attacks on a selected major urban area and intensified small-scale operations elsewhere. In this next round, moreover, "the Communists will seek to mount a campaign of some duration, striving not so much for shock effect as for opportunities to whipsaw our forces, frustrate our response, and intensify impressions of allied impotence in the United States and South Vietnam." ²⁵ A mixed offensive

24. Memo to Secretary, August 29, 1968

25. See VII-14: IN-636, "Possible Communist Military Moves in South Vietnam," August 13, 1968, S/NF

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of just this kind began exactly four days later. The perennial question of Cambodian involvement was once again raised when MACV claimed that Cambodia was now the Communists' primary logistic net for the II, III, and IV Corps areas. An INR representative participated in an investigating team which concluded that--while arms supply and Cambodian complicity had undoubtedly increased--Cambodia remained secondary to the over-
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land route as a factor in the equation of infiltration.

Setting the Stage

On September 6, INR reported that Hanoi had made an important shift when Prime Minister Pham Van Dong omitted the usual Four Points formula in his National Day speech, and for the first time listed certain US acts which would be "in conformity" with Hanoi's demands. While he insisted on US recognition of and negotiation with the NLF, he spoke also of "US strength." This speech, INR speculated, might reflect the first preparations
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for a modification of Hanoi's position.

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26. See VII-15: IN-683, "The Current Communist Offensive in South Vietnam," August 29, 1968, S/NF
 27. "USIB Team Report," March 1968.
 28. IN-708, "North Vietnamese Premier Speaks on National Day," September 6, 1968, S/NFD/LD

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The next two weeks brought less hopeful signs, as Hanoi narrowed the range of topics it had originally raised, and failed to follow up other hints of change in its position. However, INR believed that the Paris talks remained an important element in Hanoi's overall mix of military-political-diplomatic endeavors, and that it would be reluctant to break them off.

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Reviewing Communist maneuvers during 1968 up to late September, INR concluded that Hanoi's "vast and costly efforts have not to date produced decisive or even uniformly favorable results." Hanoi seemed to have held in July and August a reappraisal of its situation, and INR estimated that the leadership might have discerned the following advantages: success in achieving a partial bombing halt, undiminished ability to disrupt allied programs in the South, a US position generally more accommodating than it was two years before, and the likelihood that domestic opposition to the war would continue in the US. Hanoi would not have failed to derive a sense of accomplishment from President Johnson's withdrawal from the 1968 elections. Yet the leadership would still see formidable obstacles, including persistent problems of food, manpower, and morale in both North and South, improvement in the image of the GVN since the Huong Cabinet was installed, and the fact that no major US presidential candidates offered hope for an early settlement on Hanoi's terms.

29. IN-738, "Review of Hanoi's Tactics and Positions in Paris,"
September 18, 1968, SECRET

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Moreover, Hanoi remained committed to progress in the talks, and may have decided that a total bombing halt would be worth securing before it confronted a new and unknown American administration. In order to obtain a halt, "Hanoi may be willing to resolve the reciprocity issue." Since neither military pressure nor the gambit of a "lull" had worked, Hanoi might now be willing to make some limited gesture of tacit reciprocity. Indeed, "Hanoi's position may even have advanced to the point where it is prepared to be somewhat more explicit than before about the connection between an American bombing halt and the steps it is prepared to take." However, INR did not believe that Hanoi was prepared to issue a categorical assurance: "Instead, it may give us a slightly better basis for an 'assumption,' hoping that we will accept this under the framework of the San Antonio formula." But any such concession would "almost certainly" be accompanied by military and political pressure in South Vietnam. Should such a concession produce a full bombing halt, Hanoi "will not feel any urgency to yield its stiff position on the next matter to be discussed: the roles of the GVN and the NLF." Rather, "it will certainly exert maximum pressures for direct US-NLF conversations before being prepared to review its position on that issue."

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When Hanoi proceeded along precisely this line in respect to discussions between US and NLF, the US in late September proposed a formula

30. See VII-16: IN-744, "Where Does Hanoi Go From Here?" September 20, 1968, S/NFD/CD

31. As INR assumes from public sources, not having access to the official record.

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for dealing in terms of "your side-our side," by means of which the US and Hanoi could each, to the extent it chose, ignore the status of the NLF and the GVN. INR believed that North Vietnam would reject the formula: "we can expect Hanoi to demand direct US-NLF talks for quite some time." In addition to this gambit, Hanoi might also adopt one or more supplementary tactics, such as trying to include the NLF in the continuing bilateral talks with the US; accepting the "your side-our side" formula and then absenting itself from discussion about the South; or, as a fallback position, attempting to conduct bilateral talks with the US at the same time that GVN and NLF held bilateral discussions. ³²

In mid-October, Le Duc Tho left Paris for Hanoi amidst rumors of US proposals designed to pave the way for a full bombing halt. In analyzing Hanoi's likely response, INR had to work from the general nature of the proposals as reported in the press; accordingly it assumed that the proposals covered a) the DMZ, b) some form of restraint elsewhere in the South, and c) representation at the talks for the GVN.

Looking at Hanoi's broader objectives, apart from minor tactical maneuvering, INR judged that the DRV wished to end "the current stage of intense military conflict." INR reiterated its judgment that Hanoi would probably be prepared to defuse--but not to restore--the DMZ. It also estimated that Hanoi would be likely "to exercise some restraint for some time" in the South, but not immediately to accept GVN

32. REA-MM, "Your Side-Our Side, - What Next?" September 23, 1968

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representation at Paris. However, if it did accept representation, Hanoi would then try to reduce the status of the GVN and get it to talk directly with the NLF.

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During the following two weeks, the air was filled with public rumor and speculation until, on October 31, President Johnson announced a total bombing halt and an agreement to expand the talks to include the GVN and NLF. A few days later, a Pentagon backgrounder said that some reciprocity was involved: it spoke of an "understanding" that VC/NVA violations of the DMZ and attacks on the centers of South Vietnamese cities could provoke US retaliation.

The Curtain Rises

The total cessation of the bombing raised the curtain on a new phase in the negotiations. After the newly arrived representative of the NLF, Mme. Nguyen Thi Binh, uttered her first lines in Paris on November 5, INR found that she had adhered closely to the script. The statement by the NLF, INR believed, "suggests reasonably clearly that the Communists are unlikely to respond favorably to a cease-fire proposal, much less make one themselves, in the near future.... It seems likely that a cease-fire will not become attractive to the Communists until they become either much more encouraged or much more discouraged over their overall prospects than they have reason to be at the moment." Moreover, even

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33. See VII-17: IN-825, "What Will Hanoi Do Now?" October 19, 1968, S/NFD/LD

34. See VII-18: IN-860, "Possible Communist Attitudes Toward a Cease-Fire," November 6, 1968, SECRET

though Hanoi had been forced to accept the presence of the GVN at the conference table, it would hope that conflicts between US and GVN in the coming negotiations would fatally weaken the regime; recalling that "the last public altercation" between the two governments had led to the fall of Diem, Hanoi would make every effort to exploit the opportunity again. ³⁵

At the same time, INR cautioned against the conclusion that because of increasing morale problems Communist military de-escalation might proceed faster than had previously appeared possible. Much of the evidence for that conclusion stemmed from captured documents and closely resembled the reports which, a year ago, had immediately preceded the Tet offensive. "We do not have the impression that deficiencies in enemy morale have reached serious proportions"; ³⁶ the Communists were still "determined, disciplined and aggressive."

It became apparent, however, that, regardless of the President's announcement on October 31, the GVN was not yet ready to appear on stage. Indeed, INR considered that the GVN might believe its role required even further delay. Despite reports that Thieu could be expected soon to find a face-saving device through which to participate in the talks, "we should probably expect that over the next several weeks at least he will tend to pursue two major objectives. He will try to block or impede any discussion on substantive issues and minimize the role of the NLF as a

35. See VII-19: IN-879, "Hanoi Propaganda Reflects Desire to Exploit and Exacerbate US-South Vietnamese Differences," November 13, 1968

36. See VII-20: MM-REA-68-156, "Evans-Novak Story on Vietnamese Communist Morale," November 15, 1968

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separate political entity." In fact, "Thieu and his generals may believe that they are not now under any great pressure to accept significant compromises and indeed that in the weeks ahead they will be able to improve their bargaining position" through delaying tactics. ³⁷

On November 12, the Embassy in Saigon estimated that the Communists could be expected quite early to demand a cease-fire, and to make the necessary concessions for withdrawal of their own troops in order to effect an early US withdrawal. The Embassy foresaw no long haggling by Hanoi in the preliminary negotiations over procedures: rather it felt that the Communists, looking for rapid progress, would be disposed to make concessions if faced with US resistance.

INR forecast a somewhat different behavior. Hanoi could be expected "to lead with very advanced demands...[and] will probably be rather sticky on procedural matters." It would continue "to negotiate slowly and carefully." Indeed, "Even though it can be forced over time to yield on its extreme demands and to work out a negotiated solution on less than ideal terms, it will not move quickly in that direction. It may 'take note' of our demands, but will not accede to them soon." Rather than adhere to the general agreement over the level of violence permissible in the South, Hanoi "will in effect try to whittle away at the price it had to pay for a bombing halt." Again, "Hanoi will probably

37. See VII-21: IN-863, "President Thieu May Pursue a Delaying Strategy," November 7, 1968

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not now or in the near future attempt to negotiate a supervised and
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controlled cease-fire without a general settlement."

With the arrival of the GVN delegation in Paris on December 9, 1968,
all main protagonists were on hand to embark on a new phase of the con-
test in Vietnam.

38. See VII-22: Deptel to Saigon, subject: "Hanoi's Future Strategy,"
November 25, 1968

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