

October 20, 1968 Secret North Vietnam Politburo Cable

Citation:

“Secret North Vietnam Politburo Cable,” October 20, 1968, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Archive of the Party Central Committee, Hanoi. Translated for CWIHP by Merle Pribbenow. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114326>

Summary:

The Vietnamese Politburo updates COSVN (the communist command in South Vietnam) on the progress of plans for a four-party conference with the US.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from the Leon Levy Foundation and the Henry Luce Foundation.

Original Language:

Vietnamese

Contents:

- English Translation

To: COSVN

Referencing Cable No. 320, 10 October, and Cable No. 323, 15 October.

1. The Politburo has held further discussions about the decision to pressure the U.S. to unconditionally end the bombing and all other acts of war against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and has reached the following decision:

Based on the situation as analyzed in our two previous cables and on our decision to pressure the Americans into deescalating the war by ending the bombing of North Vietnam, a move of important strategic significance, our concrete policy is as follows:

- If the U.S. agrees to unconditionally halt the bombing and all other acts of war directed against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, then a four-party conference will be convened made up of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the Front, the U.S., and the Saigon puppet government (If the Americans insist on their terminology, "all other actions involving the use of armed force," and if they refuse to accept the inclusion of reconnaissance, leaflet drops, drops of psychological warfare materials, etc., we will agree, but in the future we will continue to fight for our terms).

As for the role of the Front in the negotiations as well as the demand that the puppet government change its policies, when the four-party conference convenes we will continue to fight for those demands, but we do not consider these matters to be preconditions that the enemy must accept before the conference can be convened.

- We will agree to hold a preliminary conference attended by the four parties to prepare the way for the official conference. We are continuing to argue about the timing of this preliminary conference. If it is absolutely essential, we might agree to convene the meeting approximately seven to ten days after the Americans end the bombing (meaning that the conference might hold its first meeting before the American elections).
- Dinh Ba Thi will probably be selected to serve as the Front's representative at the preliminary conference.

2. American intentions in stopping the bombing and convening the four-party conference are as follows:

- To win the support of American voters in order to win victory for Humphrey in the elections and to extol Johnson's role in the "road to peace." To temporarily alleviate a number of U.S. internal problems.
- To strengthen and promote the puppet government in order to support the "de-Americanization" of the war and to give the puppet government a place in a political settlement in South Vietnam.
- To use every trick at their disposal to avoid powerful attacks by our forces during the dry season. After the bombing stops, they may raise the question of the demilitarized zone, they may demand that we refrain from attacking the cities, they may demand that we not exploit the end of the bombing to increase the amount of support being sent to the South, etc. We also need to be on guard against the possibility that, when the Americans fail to obtain our agreement to these points and when they are hit hard by our forces, they will resume the bombing of North Vietnam.
- To sow division in our camp, to cause additional deep disagreements between the Soviet Union and China over the Vietnam question, to win the support of world public opinion, and to bring pressure on us from all sides.

3. We must:

- Continue to work hard to win over world public opinion and to gain powerful international support for our demands, which are: That the U.S. unconditionally and permanently end the bombing and all other acts of war against North Vietnam; That the U.S. end its aggression by withdrawing all American and satellite troops from South Vietnam; That the U.S. recognize the National Liberation Front.
- Strive to deepen the divisions between the U.S. and the puppets and the divisions within the puppet camp itself, and work to support the implementation of our military and political plans aimed at winning a decisive victory.

We anticipate that this struggle period will be divided into three stages:

Stage 1: The preliminary conference (approximately 15 days).

Stage 2: From the time the official conference begins until the situation is transformed in our favor (this stage may last for some time).

Stage 3: The real effort to reach a true settlement.

The Politburo continues to discuss the content of each of the above stages and will inform you of our conclusions later.

4. Answers to a number of points raised in Cable 93 and Cable 95

- We agree with you. The Front will quickly issue a statement about its position in the current situation (it will be issued on 21 October). This is being handled up here [in North Vietnam].
- Distribution of responsibility for other tasks: Matters related to ideological guidance and the implementation of our military and political plans will be handled down there [in South Vietnam]. External relations [diplomatic/foreign relations] and international activities will be handled up here [in North Vietnam].

We are now preparing the NLF and Alliance statements that will be issued after the U.S. ends the bombing. We are also studying struggle plans and making the necessary organizational and personnel preparations for the Front delegation that will be sent to attend the official conference.

The U.S. has now agreed to unconditionally end the bombing and to convene the four-party conference after the bombing is halted. We are now simply quibbling over the date when the four-party conference will be convened. That means that the U.S. may halt the bombing in two or three days. Therefore you need to prepare a plan for political and ideological instruction for our cadre and for the Front's senior figures. At the same time, have a plan ready to monitor public opinion and monitor developments after the bombing is halted.

For the Politburo

[signed] Trinh [Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh]