



PRESS AND INFORMATION OFFICE

DIRECTION DE PRESSE ET INFORMATION

680 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10019 Telephone JUdson 6-2400

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PRESS OPINION IN CANADA

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The following editorials have been chosen among many, in order to give a cross-section of opinion in Canadian newspapers. They are for your background information and reflect solely the opinion of the individual papers quoted.

Montreal Gazette, January 4, 1966

Russia And Viet Nam

President Johnson's current attempt to begin negotiations with North Viet Nam depends to a great extent on the attitude of Russia; on the amount of influence which the Soviet Union has with the North Vietnamese government, and on the extent to which it will use that influence to urge negotiations.

So far, Russia's policy on the Vietnamese war has been quite restrained. It has made numerous formal statements of support for North Viet Nam. And it has supplied certain military equipment, notably anti-aircraft rockets for the defence of the Hanoi area. But there has been no attempt to revive the cold war with the United States and the Western world, by creating diversions at Berlin or elsewhere.

If the Soviet Union's influence in Hanoi were strong, it is quite possible that this would be used to urge caution and to recommend the beginning of negotiations. But there is little reason to believe that Russia's influence is strong enough for any such attempt to succeed. North Viet Nam has supported China, not Russia, in the dispute between those two countries. It has very good reason to listen to China rather than Russia; because of its geographical position it cannot help but be more dependent on China.

Unless North Viet Nam is itself willing to negotiate, or unless China is willing to have North Viet Nam enter negotiations, it is doubtful if President Johnson's "peace offensive" can succeed. In particular, it is doubtful if Russia has sufficient influence to force an unwilling Hanoi to go to the conference table.

Toronto Daily Star, January 4, 1966

Communist Intentions Are On Trial Now

The spectacular American peace offensive is being scorned as a hoax by Peking, Moscow and Hanoi, and is viewed with scepticism even in some friendly Western European capitals.

It's suspected that the sudden descent of high U.S. emissaries on foreign capitals is an elaborate propaganda ploy intended--if the Communists fail to respond--to justify a further stepping-up of the American war effort in Viet Nam.

We doubt that all this mistrust is warranted, even though the U.S. pursuit of a Viet Nam peace has been erratic in the past, and even though some counsellors of the Johnson administration are known to believe that non-Communist elements in South Viet Nam are too feeble politically to survive peace now.

It seems more likely that we are witnessing a genuine campaign by the Johnson administration to pull out of a military morass and reach the conference table.

The sceptics say that if the U.S. meant business, it would meet Hanoi's demand that the National Liberation Front, the political arm of the Viet Cong, be assured a voice in the political future of South Viet Nam.

But why should Washington and Saigon concede this vital point before the bargaining begins, especially when Hanoi (on the official, public record at least) offers no compromises at all?

What the Americans are proposing would make a meaty first course for negotiators--if negotiation is what the Communists really want.

The U.S. position consists of 14 points, including acceptance of the 1954 and 1962 Geneva agreements as a basis for negotiation. These accords provided for withdrawal of foreign troops from both North and South Viet Nam, and for free elections leading to reunification of the country. The U.S. says it is willing to discuss North Viet Nam's four-point program, which includes the demand that South Viet Nam's affairs be settled "in accordance with" the National Liberation Front's own policies. The U.S. explicitly supports the idea of free elections, agrees that Southeast Asian countries can be neutral if they so choose, and offers representation for the Viet Cong's views at a peace conference once the fighting has stopped.

Not one of the American 14 points is of a tone or substance that should discourage their opponents from entering discussions; taken together, they appear to offer a tempting opportunity to test U.S. good faith on the question of self-determination for the Vietnamese people.

At the very least, the Communists now have a clear chance to bring the U.S. to the conference table and to get continued relief from the bombing of North Viet Nam while negotiations are going on.

If Hanoi is interested in peace on any terms short of outright conquest, and if it is free enough of Chinese influence to act, it will seize that chance. It would be helpful if world opinion, so suspicious of American motives, would now shift some of its pressure to the side which is really reluctant to negotiate--the Communist side.

The Toronto Telegram, January 4, 1966

Ordeal In Patience

The patient pursuit of peace in Southeast Asia--initiated by the United States--has been punctuated by the sound of war gongs struck by the Communist leaders in Hanoi and Peking.

In both capitals, the peace overtures carried to the principal capitals of the world by America's envoys have been apparently rejected in advance by the men who would rule the destinies of Asia's millions and carry their brand of revolutionary Communism beyond the limits of that continent.

Nevertheless, the pursuit goes on, quietly, patiently and thoughtfully.

It is apparent that, while there remains the slightest chance of bringing the Vietnam crisis to the conference table, Washington and its allies will use every corridor that gives promise of leading to that goal.

The course is tortuous. It is hazardous.

But President Johnson is clearly determined that, if the war in Vietnam should increase in intensity and scope, it will not be because of any lack of vigor on the part of his government.

Twofold Risk

The risks taken by the U.S. in its peace offensive are twofold:

1. While it reins back its bombers from the supply channels and centres in North Vietnam, nourishing the battalions supporting the Viet Cong, the chances of a strong Viet Cong buildup increase.

2. The longer the U.S. limits its operations in that theatre, the more inclined Hanoi and Peking may be to interpret the restraint as a symptom of weakness. If the Communists should calculate that the peace moves by the U.S. stem from substantial opposition to its policy at home and in allied nations, the less inclined they will be to go to the conference room.

This ordeal of patience, while borne by the American leaders, is borne even more agonizingly by the men and their commanders in the field. Fighting a messy war-- a war virtually without rules--is difficult enough. To do so knowing that the enemy supply lines are not being interdicted is a cruel exercise in endurance.

All these factors were weighed by President Johnson and his advisors before the peace missions were dispatched.

Peking has charged that America's search for peace is a smoke screen designed to obscure a desire to widen the war. Patently, it is not.

Awful Alternative

The U.S. has conducted its diplomatic operations without any fanfare; in the beginning it embarked secretly on its multi-pronged mission so that there might be the greatest chance of its prospering.

But Peking is probably alerting the people of Southeast Asia to the consequences of its intransigence. For, if the peace advances by the U.S. are rejected, the price of that stubbornness will come high.

If peace cannot be obtained by diplomatic and political means, then there is no course toward settlement other than that of war.

The U.S. has offered to treat with the Viet Cong and their allies, anytime, anywhere, with no advance conditions. The U.S. has offered to negotiate any subject relating to the crisis, for as long as anyone desires.

But, failing that, it is bound to seek a military solution with all the resources of its arsenal--except nuclear weapons.

It will not only be justified in doing so; it will be duty bound to do so. For if the U.S. deserted a country to which it had pledged its support against aggression, all the treaties which bind the free nations of the world together--and of which the U.S. is the keystone--would be perilously weakened.

Time is running out. The world is watching patiently, anxiously; but not with the painful patience of the men who are defending the purlieus of a militant Red empire.

So long as there remains a chance for a peaceful solution, the world's hopes must be with the emissaries of peace and the men whose lives depend on its success.

The Montreal Star, January 3, 1966

The Peace Moves

The peace manoeuvres of the United States are reaching almost the pace of escalation that we had become used to in more negative days. This in itself is heartening, of course: to find diplomatic envoys instead of generals assuming the initiative. If there is any weakness to the current Viet Nam offensive, it is in the main fact that no new terms or peace offers seem to have been drafted. From all indications the presidential messengers to the Vatican, Poland, Yugoslavia, India, France, Canada and other countries appear only to be repeating that Mr. Johnson is prepared to enter "unconditional discussions"--a pledge he first announced last April. The key difference now, however, is that the offer is being made during a halt in the bombing of North Viet Nam.

It is a highly significant difference, noteworthy especially in terms of the experimental lull last May. At that time the halt in bombing of North Viet Nam was accompanied by what amounted to an ultimatum; speedy resumption of air attack was threatened unless Hanoi complied with certain U.S. stipulations. Not unexpectedly, Hanoi, if impelled only by self-respect, rejected the United States message, thus facing renewed and intensified bombing in less than a week. Today the circumstances are not the same, and one can feel with confidence that Washington is sincerely out to create an atmosphere conducive to negotiations. The bombing of North Viet Nam stopped for Christmas, and there is no sign of any ultimatum. This is precisely the kind of atmosphere long advocated both by Western and Communist statesmen who argued that no people could be expected to consider negotiations under duress.

What happens now? How much room is there for diplomatic movement? On the face of it, there is practically no ground, since Hanoi continues to lay down four conditions for negotiations. These include the prompt withdrawal of U.S. forces from South Viet Nam, and the provision to let Vietnamese settle their own internal affairs themselves. There is some ambiguity in the four points, but the main stumbling block--even if it is not spelled out in the United States' own fourteen points--is the chronic American and South Vietnamese fear that an election in South Viet Nam would be loaded in favor of Communists if the U.S. pulls out too quickly. Essentially, then, the central question revolves around the role Hanoi demands for the National Liberation Front, the political branch of the Viet Cong, in the future life of South Viet Nam, and how large the United States agrees this role might be.

Should the present American efforts continue as they are, with obvious good intention, and should they fail in time, then the onus for the consequences clearly will rest on Hanoi. One dreads to imagine these consequences, but surely they will make the previous military build-up look puny by horrible comparison. Just as surely, any further military escalation will spill out on Communist China, with incalculable results for the whole world. The operative word at the moment is "time". We can take encouragement from the halt in bombing, and pray it will continue at least long enough for the sight of a conference table.

Toronto Globe and Mail, December 31, 1965

The Massive Viet Nam Peace Offensive

The long-awaited peace offensive by the United States has begun--or, to those who all along have insisted that the United States has been trying to wage peace as well as war in Viet Nam--the move toward a negotiated settlement has been seen to have begun.

It is always difficult to find a starting point for any development in the Vietnamese war. Official announcements and military action have seldom coincided. The decision to bomb North Viet Nam was made public months before the first air strikes were made. Conciliatory statements on the diplomatic front frequently have been accompanied by an escalation of the military effort.

But if a starting point for the present U.S. initiative is to be chosen, then December 9 is the most logical date. On that day President Lyndon Johnson promised to exhaust every peace effort "before other hard steps are taken". This was followed by the Christmas ceasefire and the suspension of bombing against North Viet Nam.

Now, for the first time, the United States is pursuing a policy both militarily and diplomatically aimed at bringing the war to the conference table.

The pause in the bombing of the North has entered its eighth day. On the ground, the 30-hour Christmas ceasefire failed to hold as the Viet Cong renewed the offensive. The Communists, however, have offered to observe a four-day ceasefire over the Vietnamese lunar New Year, which is celebrated January 20-23. There is every indication that the air war against the North will not be resumed as long as the diplomatic offensive shows any chance of succeeding.

This offensive is taking many forms, more perhaps than have been made public. On Wednesday, Ambassador-at-Large W. Averell Harriman, considered the most likely candidate to represent the United States at a Viet Nam peace conference, flew to Warsaw for talks with Premier Wladyslaw Gomulka and Foreign Minister Adam Rapacki. Poland, along with Canada and India, is a member of the International Truce Supervisory Commission in Indo-China. Today, Mr. Harriman meets President Tito of Yugoslavia, one of the countries which has been trying to arrange peace talks. This weekend, he goes on to Paris to confer with Foreign Minister Maurice Couve de Murville.

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At the same time that Mr. Harriman was visiting Warsaw, Mr. Arthur Goldberg, the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, was in Rome for an audience with Pope Paul, whose concern and anxiety about the war has prompted him to issue several appeals for peace.

Also on Wednesday, Mr. McGeorge Bundy, President Johnson's special assistant for national security affairs, met Prime Minister Lester Pearson in Ottawa. Yesterday, Mr. Pearson and Mr. Johnson discussed the Vietnamese situation over the telephone.

The Soviet Union has been very much involved in the diplomatic activity, although there is as yet no sign that the Russians are willing to intervene directly with any peace move. In Moscow, U.S. Ambassador Foy D. Kohler had talks with Soviet President Nikolai Podgorny and Deputy Foreign Minister Vasily V. Kuznetsov; and the Soviet Union also disclosed that Mr. Alexander Shelepin, the number two man in the Communist Party, is to visit Hanoi.

None of this means that Hanoi is ready to negotiate. If we are to judge by President Ho Chi Minh's message to the Pope on Tuesday, North Vietnam is as adamant as ever that acceptance of its unacceptable "four points" is the only road to peace. To President Ho, the offer of "unconditional negotiations" was merely an American smoke screen for intensification of the war.

If he sticks to this view, peace talks will be impossible and both Hanoi and Peking must be aware of the consequences. Sympathy for their cause almost certainly would be weakened, particularly among the Afro-Asian nations. The United States likely would escalate the conflict by bombing the industrial centres of Hanoi and Haiphong. Pressure would increase for direct Chinese intervention, which Hanoi apparently does not want, and for an American air strike against China, which China does not want.

These are the grim alternatives to the conference table.

The Montreal Gazette, December 31, 1965

U.S. Peace Pressure

The United States government is currently making a fresh attempt to reach a negotiated settlement of the Vietnamese war.

It is unfortunate that this attempt to follow up the Christmas truce with negotiations has become so public. As on earlier occasions, the publicity has drawn forth the usual denials and denunciations from Hanoi. No one knows whether these refusals to negotiate are seriously meant; in order to keep the Chinese government happy, North Viet Nam must spurn all offers in its public statements.

China apparently wants the war to continue. At no cost to itself, it can sit back and watch the United States become bogged down in an Asian war which is requiring an ever-growing commitment of American resources. The American forces are certainly exacting a heavy price from their enemy. But it is the North Vietnamese, not the Chinese, who are paying the price. Hence China is prepared to treat all American efforts to negotiate as "a plot of peaceful negotiations."

It is unlikely that China will ever encourage Hanoi to negotiate. Encouragement must come from other Communist countries, and principally from Russia. President Johnson is obviously trying to build up pressure for negotiations from many directions. As added inducement, the United States has not yet resumed bombing of North Viet Nam.

North Viet Nam should, in its own interest accept this attempt to get negotiations started. It may never again have as favorable an opportunity.

The Ottawa Journal, December 30, 1965

A Risk for Peace

It is now clear that the suspension of U.S. bombing of North Viet Nam is a carefully calculated gesture to demonstrate American interest in peace negotiations to the Viet Cong and the world.

The pause is too long to be explained away - as last May's six-day lull was

at the beginning - as merely an operational decision made for "technical reasons."

This decision, obviously, was made in Washington and by President Johnson.

Mr. W. Averell Harriman's unexpected mission to Warsaw and Ambassador Goldberg's to the Vatican are confirming evidence that a serious U.S. peace offensive is under way. But perhaps the most significant sign of all is the sudden discreet silence in Washington on Viet Nam. For once there have been no "leaks" or accompanying public statements. When diplomacy becomes serious, it must be private.

The continuing ground war in Viet Nam and the landing of additional American troops should be a warning against hasty conclusions by Hanoi and any wishful thinkers that the United States is ready to sound retreat. It would be a grave miscalculation of U.S. resolve for the Communists to spurn peace talks under the delusion that complete victory was in their grasp.

Despite the peace-marchers and the draft-card burners, the prevailing mood in the United States is to see a dirty job through if an honorable settlement cannot be reached.

Mr. Johnson's delicate task is to continue to exert enough military pressure to show that the U.S. will not renege on its commitments, but not so much as to make negotiations impossible. A risk for peace is worth taking.

The Christmas truce, short and imperfect as it was, the bombing pause and the Viet Cong offer of a four-day ceasefire over the Vietnamese lunar New Year all indicate that both sides are worrying about where the increasing level of violence is leading.

But these respites will be only cruel and cynical posturing if they are not accompanied by real efforts to reach a lasting truce. If the initiatives fail, a war will go on from which it will become increasingly difficult for either side to extricate itself short of total victory or ignominious defeat.

Negotiations and peace will not come easily. The experience of the long-drawn out ending of the Korean War show how almost haphazardly a settlement was reached. Simply because no neat ending is in sight should be no reason to despair of peace.

Toronto Daily Star, December 29, 1965

A Pause As The World Holds Its Breath

Like a pair of street fighters, American troops and the Viet Cong are warily circling each other in Viet Nam, throwing an occasional punch then pulling back a step to see what the other will do.

First there was the Christmas truce--broken by the Viet Cong; the Americans resumed their pounding of North Vietnamese troops in the South but no bombs were dropped on the north. The Hanoi troops stepped up mortar attacks and then proposed a four-day truce during the lunar New Year next month.

The world hardly dares whisper the word "de-escalation" in such precarious circumstances. And yet the orders for the bombing pause came directly from President Johnson in what must be a diplomatic move because such an interlude, as one U.S. officer said in Saigon, makes no "military sense".

Washington is speculating on two possible reasons for the pause: Significant peace feelers may be out from Hanoi, or the President may simply wish to indicate to America's allies who have been urging an end to the bombing, that he is doing everything possible to promote negotiations.

As far as the North Viet Nam government is concerned, there is no doubt it is risking severe censure from its chiefly in Peking for suggesting any cutbacks in the fighting. The Chinese, who stand to gain the most from the Viet Nam war, have been doing everything in their power to keep North and South Viet Nam at each other's throats as fiercely as possible.

In the midst of this possible peace offensive, a stumbling block is reported to have arisen in Saigon in the person of Premier Nguyen Cao Ky. Premier Ky is said to have warned the United States that any sort of peace conference was out of the question at this time because of the effect it would have on the Saigon government.

The premier obviously fears that his military dictatorship would be overthrown by hard-core anti-Communist militarists if the way to the conference table were opened before the Viet Cong were decisively beaten.

Such a stand is, of course, in direct contradiction to American policy. President Johnson declared in a speech in Baltimore on April 7 that a peace conference or "unconditional discussions" was the U.S. goal in Viet Nam.

If the report of Premier Ky's position is correct, Washington should lose no time in setting the premier straight. The narrow aim of U.S. policy in Viet Nam is to bring to an end Communist insurrection in the south and to ensure a free and independent state there.

In the larger sense, Washington is concerned with containing Chinese expansion in south-east Asia.

Neither of these goals envisions the destruction of North Viet Nam nor the total defeat of the Viet Cong--even if that were possible.

There will not be a victory in Viet Nam for either side; it is not that kind of a war. But America's aims as well as those of Saigon can be achieved at the conference table where President Johnson is pledged ultimately to seek them.

The Montreal Star, December 28, 1965

A Social Time Bomb

The saddest casualty of the Viet Nam war, outside the immediate physical victims of it, may be President Johnson's Great Society. A year ago the form of that Society was laid out in glowing terms in the State of the Union message. Twelve months of magnificent legislative achievement in Congress laid the foundations for it. Now, as the cost of Viet Nam edgest towards \$20 million a day, the pressure is on to reduce domestic commitments. If that happens the Viet Cong will have scored a sizeable victory, for the reforms proposed by the war on poverty are not something

to add gloss to the American scene. They are needed. To postpone them, as Carol Rowan noted in a recent column from Washington, "in the interests of pursuing more vigorously this wretched conflict in Southeast Asia is to leave a dangerous social time bomb ticking in our midst". Nor is it only a problem which affects the American people. The good health of the American nation is essentially the guarantee of the good health of all the West.

The effect of the Los Angeles riots is not felt only in the United States. It ripples across the face of all Western society. The price is paid directly in America and indirectly by all of us. So, too, if the richest nation in the world cannot escape from its confinement in "blighted cities and bleak suburbs" and must live "stunted by a poverty of learning and an emptiness of leisure", then there is little hope for any of us. The search for a harmony between men and society which would allow, in the words of President Johnson, "each of us to enlarge the meaning of his life and all of us to elevate the quality of our civilization", is in the long run the most worthy aim of our times.

The United States is not the only country which has waited too long to give serious attention to the unemployed and under-educated products of its cities to the pockets of poverty and delinquency in the midst of abundance to the aged and the ill. We are all guilty.

Martin Luther King has already said that if it is a choice between guns and butter he is not prepared to give up butter. This is not a choice between comfort and national security. It is a calculated decision as to what constitutes the greatest and most important priority for modern society.

The American people will not know until President Johnson brings down his new State of the Union what has happened to "the final goal of the American dream".

The budget when it is made public will probably tell them even more clearly. It might be possible to have both guns and butter if the taxes which were taken off with such a flourish were to be restored. But politics being what they are, it is much more likely that the easy way will be found, and a 'post-poned' tag placed on the Great Society.

It does not make much sense.